# Cultural Memory and Literature: Re-imagining Australia's Past

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This Thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts

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# Abstract

This thesis sets out to demonstrate that literature that uses dialogic and syncretic methods to describe a collectively shared experience contributes to cultural memory by recalling the absent and the forgotten and by proposing alternative ways to access and represent the past. I further argue that the intertextual nature and memory work of the texts I evaluate as memorial novels build a complementary and reciprocal relationship with each other and with other texts that respond to Australia's past to allow for the growth and dispersal of meaning. Understanding how literature contributes to cultural memory has significance for contemporary understandings of Australian culture.

As literature is involved in a continuous looping back to establish and reinforce cultural memory I argue that it takes a particular type of literature to challenge the common opinion and to insert into cultural memory alternative voices and stories, rather than reinforce official culture that insists on fixed or hierarchical forms and adheres to strict boundaries between genres. Following shifts in historical consciousness and theoretical debates about memory in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, there was a corresponding shift in Australian novels that respond to our past, particularly our violent past. The result was a number of what I call memorial novels, novels that articulate the interplay of history, trauma and memory in an effort to move beyond the familiar and the universal, to step outside official history, language and modes of storytelling, and through a process of reimagining the past recognise and expose narrative and linguistic frames of remembrance, and sometimes propose new ways of remembering.

I use Renate Lachmann's theory of cultural memory and intertextuality to trace the way the mechanisms of forgetting and remembering in literature construct cultural memory and how literature as a memory medium recalls previously silenced knowledge, restores outdated knowledge and reintegrates knowledge that was once considered unofficial, such as oral history and family memories as well as those aspects of the past that had been silenced, forgotten or misunderstood. The narratives are pluralist, ambivalent, heterogeneous and unresolved as narrators

and characters re-imagine the past to transgress the traditional boundaries of form and content. Memorial novels rely less on the common polarities of good and evil, left and right, and black and white and recognise that Australian culture has "layers of identity" that can exist in a "pluralist and united world" (Pearson, "White Guilt" 245). History, trauma and memory come together in narratives that use hybrid storytelling modes to re-imagine the past, celebrate survival and offer hope for the future.

To support my thesis I present a new evaluation of some well known Australian texts and evaluate some more recent texts against my definition of the memorial novel.

# Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and affirms that to the best of the candidate's knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed: Date:

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# Introduction

> The duty of memory is not restricted to preserving the material trace … but [that it] maintains the feeling of being obligated with respect to these others … not that they are no more, but that they were. (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 89)

> There's nothing you could really get hold of if you were trying to write a proper historical account of it all … No wonder they have to erect rather artificial structures of one sort or another in its place. No wonder it is those artists who recreate life rather than try to recapture it who, in one way, prove the good historians in the end. (RAF flyer Robert Kee qtd. in Fussell 311)

Literature that uses dialogic and syncretic methods to describe a collectively shared experience contributes to cultural memory by recalling the absent and the forgotten and by proposing alternative ways to access and represent the past. Following Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory in which he argues that an individual's memories are socially constructed (*On Collective Memory*), cultural memory comprises the shared memories or remembrances of groups that range from small social groups through to nations and is produced by public and mediated representations of the past (Rigney, "Plenitude" 16); that is, like individual memory, cultural memory is socially constructed and is in a process of perpetual motion, continually being made and changed. Individuals remember, but social groups determine what is memorable for their culture and the selection of memories for inclusion in cultural memory is indicated by a group's specific values, interests and political needs in the present (Meyer 177; Assmann and Czaplicka 130; Assmann 113).

In Australia throughout the nineteen-eighties and nineties there was a shift in historical consciousness brought about by a combination of the bicentennial celebrations in 1988 and the international debates about memory. As a result there has been a gradual shift in literature that responds to the violence of contact

between Aborigines and settler Australians from portraying Aborigines as victims and doomed to extinction to celebrating the survival and growth of Aboriginal people and their culture and offering hope for the future. The novels that I evaluate in my thesis were all published after 1988 and are concerned with the history of violent contact as I consider this to be the most contentious element of the nation's past that continues to impact on the present. Literature is important to cultural memory and reconciliation for two reasons. Firstly it gives voice to those who may otherwise be silenced and forgotten, assigned the role of victim or as belonging to a dying race. And secondly literature encourages imaginative engagement with characters who are different from ourselves, and promotes the possibility that there are other voices and other worlds. Memorial novels belong to what Kim Scott describes as a "recovery narrative which is to do with healing for all of us" (K. Scott, "Indigenous Author Wins Miles Franklin Award").

Understanding the past is important, but understanding how we respond to and represent the past underpins that understanding and the continuing impact of the past on the present. Readers and listeners can only receive the contents of new or changed historical material if they are ready and willing to absorb the changes. Dialogic and syncretic texts create moments of "undecidability" replacing our earlier certainty with regard to our nation's history, which gives rise to "differences of meaning" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 31). The intertextual nature of memorial novels provokes readers to re-evaluate other material that responds to the past as they foreground the ambivalent and multi-voiced nature of Australian culture and cultural memory.

Jan Assman defines cultural memory as what survives when the eyewitnesses are dead and society relies on stories and other reminders of the past (qtd. in Rigney, "Plenitude" 14) and he argues that institutions are required to preserve and transmit these memories (111) and these include museums, memorials, memorial rituals and celebrations, historiography, art, and literature. However, Renate Lachmann argues that literature is memory *par excellence*, that it is literature that underpins and stores cultural memory ("Cultural Memory"). Literature acts as a

medium of remembrance, an object of remembrance and as a means for observing the way cultural memory is produced (Erll and Rigney, "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory" 112); literature stores the information required for cultural survival, bears witness to the past and is the bearer of memory. “Not only do we need convincing that a particular absence in collective memory warrants attention, we also should be persuaded that locating such absence in books rather than monuments, or, in films rather than parades makes sense” (Irwin-Zarecka 122). Nevertheless, not all books are able to convince us of absences in cultural memory. I argue in this thesis that memorial novels as syncretic and hybrid forms of literature allow for new ways of representing the past that reflect a broad range of values, interests and political needs that go beyond official narratives and not only show the gaps in our cultural memory, but begin the process of re-imaging the past.

Memory discourse began to emerge internationally in the nineteen-sixties following decolonisation and the search for “revisionist histories” (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 12). By the nineteen-eighties in Australia there had also been a shift in the theoretical methods used to think and talk about the past as a consequence of the international debates around memory: the role of memory in history, memory as witnessing, and how memory is constructed and transmitted. Much of the theoretical debate around memory in the nineteen-eighties focussed on the individual and was concentrated on Holocaust memory. The debates around collective memory and cultural memory gathered momentum a little later, towards the end of the nineteen-nineties (Olick, "Collective Memory" 25) and cultural memory has now been taken up by many groups of people as the “principal mode of interpreting the past” (Hamilton, “Memory Studies” 83).

The field of memory studies has since expanded across almost every academic discipline, although internationally the study of literary representations of cultural memory is a relatively new field (Rigney, “The Dynamics of Remembrance”) and in Australia, theories of cultural memory are more usually applied to historiography than to literature. In this thesis I evaluate literature as a cultural memory medium; traditional historical fiction, and testimony and trauma literature as contributing to

official culture; and several Australian novels that I call memorial novels that challenge official culture.

**Memorial Novels**

Memorial novels are dialogic, syncretic texts that articulate the interplay between history, trauma and memory in an effort to move beyond the familiar and the universal, to step outside official history, language and modes of storytelling. They foreground the process of creating and maintaining cultural memory and seek to make our cultural memory more inclusive by extending the meaning and boundaries of official cultural memory that insists on fixed or hierarchical forms and adheres to strict boundaries between genres. Through a process of reimagining the past they recognise narrative and linguistic "frames of remembrance" (Irwin-Zarecka) and propose the possibility of remembering the past in new ways. Each of the novels that I describe as memorial novels has a different emphasis and taken individually they may exhibit weaknesses in their ability to shape cultural memory; however, their intertextual nature and memory work build a complementary and reciprocal relationship with each other and with other texts that respond to Australia's past to allow for "ramifying growth" and "dispersal of meaning" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* xxi).

Particular features of memorial novels are their openness to questioning, and a drawing back from seeking closure, providing answers or a definitive version of the past. Although memorial novels respond to the political and social context at the time of their production, they remain open to later re-reading by entering into a dialogue with other representations of the past, both fiction and non-fiction. As a memory medium memorial novels recall into cultural memory previously silenced knowledge, restore outdated knowledge and reintegrate knowledge that was once considered unofficial (Lachmann, "Cultural Memory" 173). Memorial novels seek to preserve the memory of the dead, to celebrate and honour their lives, and to maintain "the feeling of being obligated with respect to these others" rather than to simply preserve the material trace of the past (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 83).

Memorial novels do not stand in opposition to or act as a replacement for historiography, but defy genre boundaries. Whereas historiography is largely restricted by the archive and facts, memorial novels are free to mix the known and the imagined, and draw on other texts and voices to create an ambivalent meaning, a space where uncertainty and different views can exist, in contrast to official versions of the past that depend on at least a degree of certainty, and which are often a single homogeneous interpretation in service of a single homogeneous group. Memorial novels do not seek to overturn other texts, either fictional or non-fictional, that respond to the past, but instead they enter into a dialogue with those texts. In this thesis I seek to understand the nature of the intertextuality employed within my selection of memorial novels and how they contribute to cultural memory. I argue that reading the narratives of memorial novels as the interplay between historiography and fiction rather than as traditional historical fiction throws up the possibility of there being multiple meanings and multiple ways to respond to the past, challenging the notion that there is a singular, official history. It is important that we are aware of the language we use to talk about the past, regardless of the medium, that we do not cling to outdated ways of speaking, but constantly review and question our understanding of the past and how it is represented.

Memorial novels shift the focus from the history to the narrative and the role that narrative plays in producing cultural memory resulting in texts that re-tell stories about the past and at the same time bring awareness to the constructedness of such stories, to the language that we use to talk about the past and to those who have a voice or are silenced with regards to the past. This puts memorial novels in opposition to traditional historical fiction and foundational narratives that seek to reinforce and perpetuate official history. I also investigate other literary forms for recalling and recording the past to identify their limited capacity to extend cultural memory beyond the official. This official history is not necessarily limited to historiography produced by professional and academic historians, but extends to the popular history of traditional historical fiction and foundational myths. Although the novels I describe as memorial novels and use as

evidence of my argument respond to or represent past events and interweave history and fiction, I argue that they operate more effectively as memorial novels than as traditional historical novels and that as memory work they are significant to a contemporary understanding of Australian culture.

**Methodology**

The philosophical framework for my thesis is provided by Renate Lachmann's theory of cultural memory, intertextuality, and the role of literature in recording and contributing to cultural memory. Lachmann's theory draws on Bakhtinian theory, which I sometimes refer to directly. I have adopted Lachmann's theory with few exceptions or reservations. I believe that using Lachmann's theory (she is a German theorist who specialises in Russian literature) brings a fresh approach to the study of Australian literature to provide a more rewarding way to read Australian literature that responds to our violent past because it is positive and inclusive, reflective of a desire for healing and reconciliation.

Lachmann's theory employs a number of terms that are useful for a new reading of Australian texts that respond to the past, which I outline in detail below. These terms include syncretism as the reconciliation of different belief systems, intertextuality and dialogism. Lachmann argues that culture depends on and proceeds from literature and that the literary text is a repository for cultural memory. Culture does not exist as such, but is a complex communicative process, which for Mikhail Bakhtin is the "interplay of matter and sign" and the resulting cultural artefacts become an ideological or cultural reality that has its own language and methods of communication (Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival" 136). The choice of literary communication between the epic, traditional historical fiction, classical literature, the carnivalesque, Menippean satire, or memorial literature will affect the reception and meaning of the signs they contain.

Jan Assmann splits collective memory into communicative memory that is information about the past that is maintained through daily communication, and cultural memory that is conserved in symbolic forms such as monuments, museums

and literature (111). Oral communities rely on communicative memory and literate communities rely on monuments and written records for preserving the past. Communicative memory depends on personal interaction and shared memories and is inclusive of individual biographies in contrast to cultural memory which tends to be exclusive, relying on institutions to carry memories that are common to the group. Anthropologist Jan Vansina has observed that in oral societies there is an understanding of the recent past that extends back no more than three generations, or about eighty years, and the remote past that is concerned with the origins of the world; the intermediate time is a "floating gap" that moves with each generation (qtd. in Assmann 113). This floating gap exists in the living memory of both oral and literate societies, with literate societies drawing on school texts and monuments for evidence of the intermediate past (ibid). Syncretic texts break down the boundary between cultural and communicative memory by combining individual biographies and institutional memory, and giving each equal importance.

Throughout the thesis I draw connections between fiction and history as I make the claim that literature and historiography influence and are in turn influenced by cultural memory. Historiography and literature are two of a number of means by which cultural memory is transmitted and there is a clear link between fiction that responds to the past and historiography. One striking example of this intertextuality between history and fiction is the new reading of Thea Astley's 1996 *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* prompted by the publication of Chloe Hooper's *The Tall Man* in 2009. I make no claim that literature stands in for historiography or that it is a better means of transmitting stories of the past, I do make the claim that literature contributes to cultural memory as part of a complex web of texts that includes historiography.

Lachmann's theory of cultural memory and intertextuality traces the way the mechanisms of forgetting and remembering in literature construct cultural memory by presenting images of how we may conceptualise the past (*Memory and Literature* 5). She posits the idea of memory as more than an act of storage; memory is instead "a structuring schema" (23) that both forms and represents

culture. Her theory provides the means to understand novels that respond to Australia's past, particularly violent aspects of our past, free from the historian's constraint to represent the past as close as possible to what really was and free from any "obligation to perpetuate monologic univocality" (39) that persists in official narratives. The dominant culture in Australia is literate which means that the oral culture of Aborigines needs to be accommodated within written texts in order to be included in the nation's cultural memory. This process requires Aborigines to adopt written forms of cultural memory that preserve the integrity of their oral culture while at the same time reaching as many mainstream readers as possible. I argue that readers within the dominant culture must also adapt their reading expectations to accommodate new styles of writing and be willing to include other ways of representing the past in cultural memory. Approaching the past as a collectively shared experience and representations of the past as a means of recalling the absent and the forgotten rather than the material trace contribute to cultural memory and helps us to find a new language to talk about the past that although initially unfamiliar will, to use Richard Rorty's words, "strike the next generation as inevitable" (29).

**Key Terms**

Some of the key terms that I use throughout the thesis warrant some definition. I frequently use the word "official" in connection with history, historiography, culture and foundational narratives. In many ways the term official is equal to the terms "dominant" or "privileged" as a description for a particular perspective of the past that tends to preclude the perspectives of the other or of minority groups. The term "official culture" comes from the writing of Mikhail Bakhtin and is described by Lachmann as writing that takes "the fixed form of an archive and [which] insists on a hierarchical arrangement of forms and strict boundaries between them" (*Memory and Literature* 179). I extend the idea of official culture to include official historiography and official narratives about history that also insist on an hierarchical arrangement and strict boundaries. When I refer to trauma I have in mind Sigmund Freud's description of trauma as "any excitations from outside which are powerful

enough to break through the protective shield … [and are] bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale … and set in motion every possible defensive measure" ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 301). I define as violent any action that causes physical and emotional harm as well as dislocation, disruption and destruction, usually on a large scale. I use the term historiography to describe the writing of history to differentiate written texts about the past from history as past time. I also use a number of terms such as "half-caste," "full blood," "doomed race," "breed out the colour" and "Aboriginal problem" as they have occurred in historical documents and previous contexts. I do not always use inverted commas for these terms throughout the thesis; however, it should be understood that these are not my terms.

While the terms Aboriginal and Aborigine are problematic, I have decided to follow the Australian Bureau of Statistics and use these terms to refer to people from the Australian mainland and Tasmania as well as Fraser Island, Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands and the Torres Strait Islands ("Population Clock"). I also use the ABS definition of an Aboriginal person as someone who is a descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as an Aboriginal or is recognised as Aboriginal by members of the community in which she or he lives. Where texts refer to Aboriginal people by other names, I use that term. I use the term "British settlers," "non-Aboriginal," "settler Australians," "white Australians" or "mainstream Australians" and sometimes European to refer to other Australians who are not Aboriginal, depending on the context.

**Chapter Outline**

To support my thesis that memorial novels describe a collectively shared experience, contribute to broadening cultural memory by recalling the absent and the forgotten, and open up the means to access the past in new ways, I put forward a new evaluation of some well known texts including: David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, Thea Astley's *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*, Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, Kim Scott's *Benang*: *from the heart,* and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*. I

also evaluate two more recent texts including Grenville's *The Lieutenant* and Scott's *That Deadman Dance*.

I begin by explaining in detail the various facets of Lachmann's theory of memory and literature and how it relates to Australian literature. Then, as I argue that there is a clear link between the literature that I evaluate in this thesis and politics I provide a brief overview of several novels published between 1929 and 1987 tracing the link between literature, the official national narrative, and Aboriginal politics from assimilation, through integration and self-determination to reconciliation. Next I evaluate Sally Morgan's *My Place* and Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* as Stolen Generations narratives as I investigate the problems associated with Stolen Generations narratives and their links with testimonies, biographies and life stories, and trauma studies, and whether or not these links may impede the texts' inclusion within cultural memory.

I then examine particular elements of Lachmann's theory in relation to several novels. *Remembering Babylon* and *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* are two early memorial novels that begin the process of exposing the ways that the Australian official national narrative was created. *Remembering Babylon* examines how language and naming defines our reality and resulted in Aborigines being excluded from the national narrative as well as allowing the concept of *terra nullius* to take hold. I then explore the process of intertextuality by examining the relationship between *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* and Chloe Hooper's *The Tall Man* and the report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. This chapter demonstrates the open ended nature of memorial novels that allows them to be re-read against later texts, even as they continue to represent past time and the time of their production. Astley's novel explores the multiple ways we remember and forget, and the limitations of fiction to challenge official memory. I read the historical novels *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* as traditional historical fiction. I explain Lachmann's concept of classical or canonical literature and how it corresponds with Australian traditional historical fiction, its relationship to myths and epics, and how it reinforces and perpetuates long held

understandings of the past, even as it attempts to expose past events and come to terms with the past.

The final two chapters are concerned with three memorial novels that make use of a number of Lachmann's theoretical concepts: syncretism, dialogism, polyphony, carnivalesque and Menippean satire. *Benang: from the heart, That Deadman Dance* and *Carpentaria* incorporate Aboriginal storytelling methods within the novel form, are intertextual, dialogic and syncretic. The carnivalesque and Menippean satire, a sub-genre of carnival, act as counter traditions to the epic and to traditional historical fiction, and polyphonic texts admit alternative voices to cultural memory. *That Deadman Dance* is a polyphonic novel, *Benang, from the heart* uses Menippean satire and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* is a carnivalesque text that suggests the possibility of other worlds and other stories.

# *1. Memory and Literature*

Lachmann's theory of memory and literature rests on intertextuality which she describes as "the contact between texts literary and non-literary" ("Cultural Memory" 173), which produces a "semantic interchange," builds relationships between texts to open up new meanings, encourages multiple voices, and promotes "a text's inexhaustible potential" (*Memory and Literature* 36). Intertextuality operates as externalised memory, mirroring neurological memory where the brain links fragments of images to create a memory. Memorial novels link fragments from other texts and sources – literary, non-literary and oral – use reference signals that allow the reader to identify the referent text and in the process create a dialogue that enriches all the texts with new meaning (ibid). In other words, meaning is not located in the text by itself, but in the intersection and interplay of texts, which indicates that there can be no fixed interpretation of the past as meaning is in a process of constant change – as each new text is produced the semantic interchange between it and all previous texts creates a new interpretation of the past.

**Intertextuality**

Intertextuality, the interweaving of fragments from other texts or the contact between texts, forms the text's memory and is the way that meaning is constructed in literature and provides the "critical potential" to question "the previously accepted concepts of literature" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 29). Intertextuality is concerned with "how meaning is constituted" (37) within the understanding that all texts are restrained by culture and language (39). My use of intertextuality is as both a deliberate literary function as well as the "anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*" form of intertextuality that Roland Barthes speaks of (160 italics in original). I further extend my application of intertextuality by using Julia Kristeva's reading of Bakhtin's dialogism as intertextuality in which writing is not only associated with the narrator, but also allows communication

between the narrator and the other within the text, and between the text and history and culture (68).

Lachmann describes three modes of intertextuality: participation or assimilation, troping or transposing, and transformation (*Memory and Literature* 17), and each mode of intertextuality has a different intention. The first mode of intertextuality is participation as the sharing of a culture's written texts, where the resulting texts tend to be conservative (34). This form of intertextuality is concerned with repeating and remembering previous written texts through imitation and those who do not have a written culture are excluded, which in the Australian context means the oral traditions of Aborigines are excluded. There are a number of examples of Australian historical novels that imitate past texts to some degree or faithfully reproduce historical documents within the text, particularly those produced prior to 1988. Participation intertextuality shares some similarities with Australia's assimilation policies where the desired outcome was an homogeneous, white community with a unified and singular history.

The second model of intertextuality is troping or transposing which turns away from precursor texts in an attempt to re-present the past. These texts are "authoritarian and usurpatory" in nature (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 34) as their authors attempt to "surpass, defend against, and eradicate traces of a precursor's text" (17). In this form of intertextuality there is a struggle between texts in a bid for control over a particular narrative of the past to break the authority of one representation over another. The report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, *Bringing Them Home: "The Stolen Children"* in 1997, and the High Court's decision in the Mabo case that replaced the doctrine of *terra nullius* with the legal doctrine of native title (High Court of Australia) are examples of textual troping in that the authors of the reports have attempted to re-present the past in radically new ways as they turn away from existing texts that respond to the history of contact between Aborigines and mainstream Australians. Chris Healy considers that the Royal Commission report, *Bringing Them Home* and the Mabo and Wik decisions undermined the central foundations of the nation. In their attempts to address silences and omissions in

the official historical narrative, they seek to eradicate precursor texts and to introduce new narratives into historiography (*Forgetting Aborigines)*. Stolen Generations texts take up the narrative that was begun in particular by *Bringing Them Home* to expose an aspect of Australia's past that had previously been largely ignored by official historiography. They are examples of troping intertextuality as they attempt to defend against official historical representations of the past that were silent on the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. However, Stolen Generations texts also risk becoming authoritarian in their own right by restricting and regulating dialogic interaction between texts and elevating Stolen Generations texts to the status of singular and official representations.

Transformation, the third mode of intertextuality is in contrast to troping and results in dialogical texts (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 34). Transformation is when the author attempts to transform other texts through a process of playing with, mixing and hiding precursor texts within their own (17). Memorial novels are predominantly transformational intertexts; they are participating in the historiographical narrative of the nation, often by including excerpts from historiography and archival material, which they sometimes acknowledge in authors' notes, but they seek to transform these texts into memory sites; they are less concerned with exhibiting and preserving the material trace and more concerned with remembering. Transformational texts tend toward being esoteric, cryptic, playful and syncretistic (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 17). The carnivalesque and Menippean satire are the embodiment of transformational intertextuality, which Alexis Wright and Kim Scott use in their memorial novels.

Although Lachmann describes three distinct modes of intertextuality, the boundaries between them – participation, troping and transformation – are not clearly defined and texts will often display elements of each as all texts "participate, repeat, and constitute acts of memory" (17). Scott's *Benang: from the heart* is on the one hand a particularly good example of participation intertextuality in that he has faithfully reproduced historical documents within the novel, but on the other hand the meaning of the documents is transformed within the narrative through a

process of playing, mixing and hiding, thus making the text's intertextuality transformational.

**Double-coded signs, syncretism and dialogism**

In her theory of memory and literature, Lachmann makes a strong connection between intertextuality and dialogism. Drawing on Bakhtin's theory in which he argues that texts are in "a dialogic relationship" with other texts, Lachmann argues that this relationship results in "semantic friction" (*Memory and Literature* 38). The process of dialogism is an exchange of positions "correcting one another, intensifying one another, even radicalizing one another" (180) and no text can have the final word on any idea or event (102). Bakhtin's notion of the novel is a place where boundaries are crossed and many voices are represented, where ambivalent meanings are produced in a dialogue potentially without end. He argues that language is dialogic in nature and the struggle among "socio-linguistic points of view" is played out in language ("Discourse in the Novel" 273). Bakhtin further argues that the novel is a social phenomenon that acts as a rejoinder in an ongoing dialogue that challenges dominant languages or voices. He cautions, however, that novels are produced within an "already uttered" and "already known" environment and the novel's discourse will tend towards the "common opinion" ("Discourse in the Novel" 288). Literature is involved in a continuous looping back to establish and reinforce cultural memory; therefore, it takes a particular type of literature to challenge the common opinion and to insert into cultural memory alternative voices and stories, rather than reinforce official culture.

Kristeva divides narrative types into dialogical and monological, distinguishing monological discourses as descriptive, represented by the epic and traditional historical fiction in which "the subject both assumes and submits" to rules, and dialogical discourse which "transgresses prohibition" (77). Dialogical discourse appears in memorial novels as the carnivalesque, Menippean satire and polyphony, which also makes them ambivalent texts as they work toward rupturing the official culture while at the same time seeking harmony between official and unofficial culture (ibid). The "ambivalence of writing" that is created in memorial novels by

the use of dialogism "implies the insertion of history … into a text and subsequently of this text into history" (Kristeva 68).

The dialogic text acts as a social interaction that allows a plurality of cultures and voices without privileging one over the other, standing in opposition to monologic texts that take an authoritative or official stance. Historian Mark McKenna argues that it is history's "incompleteness and ambiguity" which give it life ("Writing the Past" 108). I argue that memorial literature recognises the incomplete and ambiguous nature of the past and our understanding of it, standing in opposition to those texts that take a moral stance with regard to the difficult to accept parts of our past in search of some form of closure or final position. The dialogic and self-reflexive nature of memorial texts produces an interaction between narrator, character and reader, and with other texts and their authors to highlight the arbitrary nature of memory and challenge the common opinion while allowing the past to live again within the pages of the text.

Lachmann uses the term syncretism to describe a particular method of intertextuality used in novels that challenge previously accepted concepts, which is brought about by the process of amalgamating and remodelling texts (*Memory and Literature* 29). Syncretism is the reconciliation of different linguistic or belief systems and brings together "further elements of intertextual work" (xxiii). Syncretic texts blend different genres and periods, mix archival material with imagination, and myth with history, transgress boundaries, combine styles, and break rules. Again, the carnivalesque and Menippean satire are good models of syncretic texts; however, elements of syncretism are clearly discernible in other memorial texts that rely on less extreme literary styles.

Syncretic texts incorporate "foreign" references without erasing them – that is, the foreign reference retains its original meaning with its "arbitrary nature intact" (215), and they suspend "the classical concept of style" (xxiii). This foreignness in the literature that I evaluate as memorial novels includes proposing alternative means of accessing and representing the past, and incorporating Aboriginal languages, voices and rhythms, and storytelling methods, which result in

heterogeneous texts rather than homogeneous ones, representing a network of cultures, beliefs and voices. This is particularly apposite for novels that respond to contentious aspects of the past, because no single text or voice can adequately represent that which it recalls. Literary syncretism can also be seen as an analogy for the vision of a multicultural or multiethnic Australia. The syncretic project of memorial novels seeks to reconcile different belief systems and voices which also reflects the project of political reconciliation between Aborigines and mainstream Australians: as Aden Ridgeway argues "the art of storytelling is at the centre of reconciliation" (13).

The terms hybrid and syncretism are also used in post-colonial theory and sometimes refer to the post-colonial experience (Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and Tiffin 40) or to the "source of literary and cultural redefinition" that speaks of the appropriation of writing (77). I argue that writing as such does not belong to a particular group – indicated by Aboriginal writers adopting writing to complement their oral culture. It is more the use to which writing is put that is changed by writers such as Scott and Wright in particular in recognition that an oral society that exists within a dominant written culture needs to use writing to pass on its stories to the wider community, but that such use does not require strict adherence to any rules associated with previously understood ways of writing.

Bonita Parry and other critics reject syncretism as nothing more than a "new hegemonic totality" (qtd. in Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and Tiffin 177). In post-colonial theory, rather than viewing syncretism as the process of an equal amalgamation of belief systems, syncretism is seen as "the condition within which post-colonial societies operate" as the dominant culture subsumes minority cultures (Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and Tiffin 178). The resulting culture then perpetuates "the continuing neo-colonial hegemonic formation of the day-to-day experience of those societies" (178). This stance assumes an unequal amalgamation of cultures evident in official narratives, but which is repudiated by memorial novels where the author steps outside the official culture rather than writing from within it.

Wilson Harris uses the term hybridity to describe a present that "is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry and which valued the 'pure' over its threatening opposite, the 'composite'" (qtd. in Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and Tiffin 34). Harris considers the use of the term hybrid is linked to the past of racial purity and eugenics where the half-caste was unnatural and a threat to the dominant white race, when the hybrid was something to be eradicated. I use the term in Lachmann's sense to describe a process of hybridisation resulting from the intersection of contexts to produce new meaning (*Memory and Literature* 116). The Menippean satire and the carnivalesque allow for hybrid characters who represent the joining together of "differing though mutually corresponding cultural acts" (126), where the hybrid is celebrated rather than despised.

A text's dialogue with culture, or the introduction of past texts into new textual contexts, is achieved in three ways. Firstly the past texts appear as both manifest and latent content, or secondly it is concealed within the text, or thirdly it is double-coded. A double-coded text is not a passive container, but one which can be read as an "uninterrupted account" while containing fragments from another text (Lotman, Leo, and Mandelker 383). The more the meaning of the fragments of introduced texts diverge from the meaning of the surrounding text, the more untranslatable these fragments become when read alongside the new account, the more perceptible is the new meaning given to both texts. In Scott's novel *Benang*, the historical documents he includes in the text that are in support of eugenics diverge in meaning from the surrounding text to such a degree that the original documents become almost unbelievable, less history than fiction, while at the same time they make the novel's fictional narrative all the more poignant and believable.

Double-coding means that meaning-making is not available exclusively within a text, but additionally by and through its reference to other texts. Double coded texts do not seek closure, but instead leave the reader with questions allowing a move away from the persistent perception of Aborigines as either belonging to a doomed race or as perpetual victims, towards belief in survival, change and hope for the future. As double-coded texts memorial novels contain other narratives

within their narratives, either by overtly responding to real places, people and events by inserting citations or references, or by echoing other texts that have recorded or responded to Australia's past, creating an exchange of meaning and carrying within the text an accumulation of experience and a continuation of the process of re-presentation.

Memorial novels could also be considered double-coded in that they can be read in two ways: firstly for the surface story that can exist without the need to reference other texts, as traditional historical novels; and secondly as an intertext that requires the reader to make the link between the novel and the referent text. Read in the second way, memorial novels can provoke the reader to question the referent text, in most cases historiographical or archival material as well as the official foundational narrative, and thus disturb the idea of a fixed meaning in the referent text without the need to resort to didactic or moralising modes of discourse. The result of double-coding is a reading of the memorial novel that cannot be satisfied with a single meaning either for the novel, the historiographical texts it refers to, or the official historical narrative (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 41).

**Language and Voice**

Polyphony is the incorporation of multiple languages and voices within a single text and is a central strategy of syncretism (*Memory and Literature* 131). Along with the production of new meaning memorial novels break down the idea of a single "truth" or of agreement about representations of the past, which is then replaced with a "reconciliatory dimension" that is associated with the Bakhtinian idea of polyphony (307). Yury Lotman also argues that texts are richer in meaning when "languages interact … [and] interfere with one another" (378). In other words, without the sounds of others the project of syncretism or reconciliation, of bringing together different belief systems, fails. However, incorporating multiple languages and voices is not a straightforward process and there is both a political and cultural dimension to the problem. Mick Dodson, in his Foreword to the 2008 *Macquarie Pen Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*, argues that "literature and its creation are

so important to the lives of everyone. It can be and is used as a powerful political tool by Aboriginal people in a political system which renders us mostly voiceless" (xiii). The editors of the same anthology also refer to the "nexus between the literary and the political" in Aboriginal literature (Heiss and Minter 2).

In the early part of the twentieth century Australian literature tended to be either realistic or romantic (Dorothy Jones qtd. in Daniel 48). Stories were written by white Australians, focalised through British settlers and Aborigines were noble savages who were a threat to the lives and property of the settlers. The desire for a more acceptable past and the belief that Aborigines were a dying race permeated fiction of this time, even as novels began to appear in support of Aborigines. Since the nineteen-eighties, changes to historiography and the growth of Aboriginal literature have brought about a change in the representation of Aborigines in modern historical novels. However, although there is no question that Aborigines and settler Australians have a shared history, how the Aboriginal voice is represented in literature and who speaks is still problematic, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers.

The problem of representing a network of voices in novels presents on two levels: one is at the level of language and the other is at the level of who speaks. For non-Aboriginal writers there is the risk that the "dominant ideology of language" may stifle the voice of the other in their text (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 177). For Aboriginal writers writing in English there is the problem associated with using the language of colonialism rather than their own languages, and there is the potential to lose the sounds and meanings of words from their Aboriginal languages, particularly when narratives from an oral tradition are turned into a written tradition in another language.

In order to reach a wide audience in Australia, writers and publishers have no choice but to use English. However, writing in English does not need to preclude other speech rhythms, styles, accents or inserting Aboriginal words into the English text, nor does it need to stifle or silence the voice of the other; the novel genre does have the capacity to represent multiple voices and meanings by including

Aboriginal voices, as the sounds and rhythms of Aboriginal languages within narratives in English. A number of the memorial novels I evaluate reproduce fragments of Aboriginal languages and incorporate Aboriginal speech rhythms into their syncretic project as a means of creating awareness of the stories' original languages. Multiple voices are brought together and in the process meaning is produced, "decentered, pluralized, and decomposed" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 116).

Alexis Wright deliberately uses Aboriginal speech rhythms and storytelling styles in *Carpentaria* to good effect, despite the risk that English speaking readers may have rejected the novel as too difficult to understand. Grenville, Scott and Astley have all inserted Aboriginal words into their texts; however, for varying purposes and with varying results. Language and voice are integral to the strategies used by Malouf, Scott, Astley and Wright, whereas Grenville deliberately drew back from giving voice to her Aboriginal characters, so despite her novels being about contact between early settlers and Aborigines they are strangely lacking in an Aboriginal perspective or sound.

Malouf on the other hand was criticised for failing to give voice to Aboriginal characters in *Remembering Babylon* even though the silence of the Aborigines in his novel is integral to a story that seeks to understand the way settlers employed language to name and therefore own the land and to exclude Aborigines both physically and linguistically from the new nation being created. Although *The Lieutenant* is about language and communication, Grenville has relied on material contained in the two surviving notebooks of Lieutenant Dawes to provide the linguistic interaction between Rooke and Tagaran. Grenville's justification for not giving Aborigines a voice is that she did not want "to step into the heads of any of the Aboriginal characters" ("Interview"); like many others she considers that when the characters of white writers speak from the perspective of Aborigine it is appropriation of the indigenous voice and a continuation of colonisation.

The issue of appropriation and perpetuating colonisation by speaking *for* Aboriginal characters is problematic for non-Aboriginal authors in the Australian

post-colonial culture. When writing about the early history of Australia white authors must include Aboriginal characters and the history of contact between Aboriginal and mainstream Australians, while at the same time avoiding speaking through them. It is as Nadia Wheatly argues, a "no-win situation for white writers" (qtd. in Heiss 200), although Aboriginal academics make a distinction between history and fiction, giving historians the task of educating about contact, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal political relations, particularly when the work covers the role of white Australians and their treatment of Aborigines. Historians have less choice with regards to voice; either they write in their own voice or directly quote from their sources, albeit sources that are usually written by white Australians, making their representations of Aborigines less problematic.

Who has the right to tell the victim's story, and the role of testimony and trauma literature in the national narrative is also problematic and adds a further complication. Tom Keneally argues that "it is the Aboriginal people themselves who own that tale (of Koori grief) and have bitterly earned their right to it" ("Behind the Scenes" 9). But does showing another point of view or stepping into the heads of others constitute appropriation? Di Morrissey argues that "Australian writers … have a moral responsibility to do the right thing by our native culture" (qtd. in Heiss 200) which does not mean excluding Aboriginal characters from fiction, but that characters should be treated in a culturally sensitive manner.

However, there are some who argue that non-Aboriginal fiction writers should avoid writing not only from the voice of Aboriginal characters but also generally about Aborigines. Anita Heiss cites the "history of negative representation of Aboriginal people in literature" (198) as the primary reason for non-Aboriginal writers to avoid writing about Aborigines. However, while negative representation has often been the case, such avoidance suggests that there can be no possibility of positive representation. As historical fiction is very much in demand in Australia such a position leaves white authors with two choices: either exclude the Aboriginal voice or not write about the history of contact, both of which would limit access to the past to historiography.

These sorts of restrictions limit the imagination and narrative perspective and how are we to imagine the pain of others if we have no access to that pain through imagination? The marginalisation of the Aboriginal voice in *Remembering Babylon* and *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* demonstrates the power of language to exclude Aborigines from the official history of Australia. Grenville may also have had good reasons for not focalising her historical novels through any Aboriginal characters, by marginalising Aboriginal characters to the degree that she has locked them out of the narratives. It has been a long and often difficult struggle to change Australian historiography to include Aborigines, to now exclude them from the historical novel seems to be a contradiction. And as the author Salmon Rushdie argues "literature is not in the business of copyrighting certain themes for certain groups" (qtd. in Whitehead 10).

There is also a good case for including the Aboriginal perspective in historical novels, even when written by a white writer. If "we restrict our efforts towards understanding only to those people we guess to be approximately of our own kind" (Clendinnen, "The History Question" 20) and if we write only from a known perspective we would be limited to writing only autobiographical works in the manner of trauma literature. E. M. Forster argues in *Aspects of the Novel* that: "We cannot understand each other [in reality] … [b]ut in the novel we can know people perfectly. In this direction fiction is truer than history" (69); and "It is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source" (56). Tzvetan Todorov also questions whose "view of a group is more perceptive" (*The Morals of History* 3) and considers the "first phase of understanding [as] consist[ing] of assimilating the other to oneself" (*The Morals of History* 14). What is it that is appropriated by giving voice to the other? One should not speak *for* another, but in the pages of a fictional text the opportunity is there to give the other a voice that may not be supported by documentary evidence, that may not appear in historiography.

Patricia Mamajun Torres believes that the depiction of Aborigines "with a strong sense of identity" using "positive information" is a means of remedying past false impressions, as well as helping to balance the long history of "cultural theft and misappropriation of intellectual property"(25). She hopes that an "informed and

cooperative" approach will result in a "more appropriate literature" that is borne out of a "mutual respect and regard for each other as humans with a common purpose" (30). Similarly Jackie Huggins argues that the best books about Aborigines are written in consultation with Aborigines and with respect for Aboriginal culture, history and social issues and that this approach will help to halt the perpetuation of incorrect stereotypes ("Respect"). Both attitudes are reflected in syncretic texts that draw on multiple belief systems and modes of representation. I make no differentiation between Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal writers, focussing instead on the style of writing that each writer produces.

**Naming and Memory Places**

Drawing on the concept of naming in the Simonides legend, Lachmann describes the act of remembering as a second naming. The legend of the invention of mnemotechnics by the Greek poet Simonides Melicus has been passed down to us by Cicero and Quintilian as the legitimisation of the art of memory (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 5). Simonides was the only survivor of a group of banqueters killed when the building in which they sat collapsed and the banqueters were mutilated, making it impossible to recognise and therefore name them. Simonides as witness imagined and reconstructed the seating arrangement of the banquet space to restore order and reattach names to the dead (Lachmann, "Cultural Memory" 166-7). Both Cicero and Quintilian in their retelling of the legend of Simonides define mnemonics as imagination, "the invention of images" as representative of things and names to be remembered (167).

The art of memory is a technique that uses the concepts of place and image to aid in recollection and to establish and preserve cultural memory (166). Equating images and imagination with memory is not specific to Cicero and Quintilian; there is a long philosophical tradition that "considers memory the province of the imagination" in which memory is represented by an image that is "either quasi visual or auditory" (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 5). Frances Yates associates the art of memory with rhetoric and Cicero in particular refers to "the memorization of texts" and to speech as that which must be "conceptualized and

remembered" (Lachmann, "Cultural Memory" 167). Bringing together fragments of images to create a text requires imagination to re-order those fragments and to re-name those others we are obligated to remember. To interpret or conceptualise the past requires imagination, and from this Lachmann concludes that literature is a mnemonic medium. The association of memory with imagination, however, is problematic with regards to historiography in which history and myth, and facts and imagination are kept separate, or at least that is the ideal. In historiography historical facts are ordered and presented as linear and chronological, bounded by single concepts, for example by particular periods, events or individuals and certain "types of historiography tend to institutionalize cultural memory" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 170) by their adherence to hierarchies and boundaries.

In the Australian experience naming originally promoted the forgetting of Aborigines as the people and their places were re-named or excluded from memory by remaining nameless in the developing national narrative. In memorial novels another re-naming or recalling of old names helps to bring these forgotten people and places back into memory. Only after those who have lost their names are once again linked with their names through an act of memory can they "become identifiable" and re-gain their place in memory (8). A text is a memory space in which, through an act of naming which is itself a memory act, those who were nameless are now linked to their place, making them once again identifiable. All the memorial novels I evaluate are concerned with naming and giving back names to Aboriginal people to recognise them as belonging to Australian cultural memory.

I further extend the idea of memory as a link between names and those who have lost their names, to the linking of land to those who have lost their place in the land. I argue that the link between people and the land is important to Australians and the process of naming alone is not enough for identification and a place in cultural memory: memory work in Australia also relies on links with the land. Kim Scott speaks in his book *Kayang & Me* that he wrote with his elder Hazel Brown of how "the land ignited their [his people's] memories, and how language and culture and place went together" (248). *Terra nullius* began as a legal concept, but over time, along with land and landscape, the concept has acquired "a fictive

dimension" that enables physical spaces to become memory spaces (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 19). Land is both a palimpsest of Australian memory and a symbol which has lost its "concrete reference" (21). Scott writes of pastoralists using the language of Aborigines in regard to their "timeless link to the land;" he argues that such people may want to "really belong," but that they are "only beginning to understand what that might mean" (K. Scott and H. Brown 200). Whether non-Aboriginal people have a timeless link to the land or are only just beginning to understand their connection to the land, whether the connection is economic or spiritual, or whether the degree of importance can even be measured, land is still important to non-Aboriginal Australians as well as Aboriginal Australians.

Lachmann establishes literature as a memory space, but she also uses the term "cultural memory places" and she argues that these places help a culture "ensure its own survival" (*Memory and Literature* 4). Lachmann's term is similar to Pierre Nora's use of *lieux de mémoire* which are "fundamentally remains" that define the boundary between past and present. Because memory is not "spontaneous," *lieux de mémoire* in the form of archives, anniversaries and monuments are needed to keep alive particular memories ("Les Lieux De Mémoire" 12). Land is clearly of great importance to the process of reconciliation in Australia, but as *lieux de mémoire* land operates both as a boundary and as a fixed monument to the past and in itself cannot repair past damage; there is also the need for reconciliation within Australia's cultural memory, a process that relies on other memory spaces such as literature.

There are those who argue that "trying to repair past damage and acknowledge collective community guilt by free grants of land" is not the way for Aborigines to achieve social and economic development (Crowley 307) because it does not acknowledge that there are problems that cannot be repaired by grants of land. Others argue that land rights "offer both symbolic and economic compensation" (Rowley, *A Matter of Justice* 9). Too great a reliance on land as the location of memory, however, is to neglect other "events that astonish and surprise" (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 66), events that may exist independently of such

places and be equally important to cultural memory, such as the events that Scott writes about in *That Deadman Dance*. In a similar manner that Aboriginal life-writing became inextricably linked with trauma theory, thus restricting the effectiveness of such writing to challenge official narratives, placing too great an emphasis on land as the primary means of achieving reconciliation has the potential to blind us to alternative or coexistent memory processes that may also contribute to reconciliation. Land and re-linking memory with the land has become a central paradigm for stories about Australia; all the novels I analyse in this thesis are concerned to some degree with land and naming, but as memorial novels they are also concerned with other events that may "astonish and surprise" the reader (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 66).

**Classical literature, historical fiction, myths and epics**

To explicate her theory of memory and literature, Lachmann concentrates on fantasy, parody, science fiction as "anticipatory memory," and the carnivalesque as the most effective forms of literature for challenging official culture and history, in opposition to what she calls classical literature, which includes historiography, historical fiction, myth and epics ("Cultural Memory" 175). Lachmann uses the term classic in the sense of setting a standard or of being representative of something on an official or national level; I use the term traditional historical fiction to describe literature that acts as classical literature by participating in Australia's celebratory foundational tradition. Classical genres record and narrate the past and are connected to commemorative rituals, the veneration of graveyards and war monuments and institutions such as museums and libraries (170). Although writing history "remains an essential component of the power of memory discourse itself" (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 5) and is a component of Lachmann's classical literature genre, I am concerned only with fictional representations of the past in this thesis and will not take into consideration representations of the past in historiography except as they relate to the novels under discussion.

Lachmann describes fantasy as literature that creates alternative worlds and seeks to compensate for what has been lost due to "cultural constraints" ("Cultural

Memory" 173). Fantasy shares many of the features of memory such as the representation of "absent objects with images that are ambiguous, both true and false" (172) and the world of the fantastic threatens to erase everyday reality (174). I argue that in the Australian context the novels that I describe as memorial novels do the work of challenging official culture and history and of recalling the forgotten, but they stop short of the potential of fantasy texts to erase the officially accepted memory images of a culture or the images of everyday reality. In memorial novels that "which had been silenced regains its voice, that which was made invisible recaptures its shape and that which was buried is disinterred," and this is achieved without seeking to obliterate "accumulated, transmitted knowledge"(173). All responses to the past are an attempt to understand and come to terms with the past in some measure, but in memorial novels the forgotten, the silenced and the unofficial reappear, by displacing, rather than affirming or erasing the familiar and official.

Lachmann describes myths, epics, sagas and historical fiction as classical literature and there are a number of common elements between the genres that allow her to do this. Myths, epics and sagas are narrative forms that tell of the adventures of national heroes, they are the stories that communities tell about themselves as a collective and are "a key element in the formation of collective memory" (Le Goff 264). Myths are variously described as serving to reconcile the living with the mysteries of the world by providing an image of that world, which helps to enforce a moral order on the world (J. Campbell, *Masks of God* 4) and as having "the quality of fancy which informs the creative or configurative powers of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity" (Okpewho 69). Myths come about through a process of selection as stories are handed down from generation to generation and they help humankind make the unfamiliar familiar (Blumenberg 5). Myths contain a "hidden system of meaning" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 286) and are linked with the need to name those things that confront us so that we can control our fear of the unknown (Blumenberg; Lachmann, *Memory and Literature*). Freud argues that myths are most likely the "distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations" ("Creative Writers" 140) and as myths often

remain tied to specific nations and official narratives, they may clash with the memory efforts of minority groups (Huyssen, *Present Pasts*).

In many Aboriginal cultures the distinction between history and myth is often obscured (Bird-Rose 46) and facts as understood by historians in the Western historical tradition may be distorted within Aboriginal narratives. Mudrooroo argues that the actual or the real is less important to Aboriginal storytelling than the myth and the archetype (*Writing from the Fringe*) and that making stories about the past is more important to Aboriginal culture than Western ideas of historiography that rely on evidence, usually in written form. In contrast to the Western tradition, Aboriginal texts are produced by custodians rather than authors and subjects are repeated as traditions rather than as original material (Muecke, *Textual Spaces* 104). However, myth remains a fixed form for relating stories about the past as it is strongly associated with cultural traditions, which limits the scope to challenge official narratives or offer alternative representations of the past. Andreas Huyssen believes that it is not always possible to draw a line between the "mythic past and [the] real" past, which allows myth to exert a reality effect that is equal to the real (*Present Pasts* 15).

The epic is concerned with the national past or tradition that is associated with founders and beginnings, a past that is sometimes inaccessible as a result of a lack of records, is from "the reverent point of view of a descendent," and is separate from contemporary reality (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 13). In Australia "Pioneers, settlers and national heroes were the creation of poets and writers" (Hirst 176), poetic in the sense of being human creations. The epic celebrates a hero and has an "absolute point of view which coincides with the wholeness of a … community" (Kristeva 77), the national narrative or national identity and the hero takes an ideological position that is "meaningful for the whole community" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 334) – although the whole community often means only the dominant cultural group. However, the ideological process is, according to Ricoeur, hidden, unacknowledged and complex, characterised by the manipulation of reality, the legitimation of power systems, and the integration of

cultural symbols that support and guard a culture's identity (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 82).

Epics are bound up with a stable identity, and reflect a perceived cultural unity, and any novel that contains ideological arguments "tends towards an epic" (Kristeva 87). The heroes of epics are kept distant from the present, untouchable and protected by national tradition and the epic narrative is idealised, complete in meaning and value with an "official air" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 20). The only way to disrupt the "epic and tragic wholeness of the world," to "make a breach in the stable, normal … course of human affairs and events" is to introduce the scandalous and eccentric (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 117). Whereas Bakhtin's theory separates the novel from the epic genre, I argue that traditional historical fiction, although belonging to the novel genre, is in the style of the epic because of the link between such fiction and foundational narratives and the treatment of national heroes as reverent within the texts. There is also a strong link between traditional historical fiction and ideology.

I am using Lachmann's theory of memory and literature to understand contemporary Australian texts that are linked to the founding of the nation in a similar manner to the texts associated with the long tradition of Russian literature that her theory is grounded in, or the literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans, but are nevertheless distinct from either of these traditions. Therefore, I will use traditional in place of classical to describe the historical fiction I evaluate in order to avoid any confusion with more usual understandings of the term classical and to make the theory more relevant to the Australian context. Traditional literature adheres to commonly accepted understandings of the past as it seeks a place in the developing canon of Australian texts while also contributing to the process of canonisation by repeating texts that are considered authoritative or belong to the archive. Traditional historical fiction attempts to make the official cultural narrative stable by repeatedly restating particular ideas and is often associated with rituals that are repeated every year.

For example, the ANZAC tradition of parades and memorial celebrations has become a fixed narrative because the links between the rituals, memorials, heroes and heroic stories and history are so strong that to insert an alternative aspect into this narrative is now almost impossible unless it exactly coincides with the established official narrative. Australian culture and identity are so tightly bound up with the epic myths of the ANZAC tradition that there would need to be an almost catastrophic shift in memory to insert any new stories that challenge the ANZAC tradition; only those stories that are aligned to the official ANZAC tradition are included. Because the tradition has so many associated rituals and heroic stories and many of the negative aspects of the tradition have been transformed or removed, it is easy to assimilate into cultural memory. Some attempts have been made to create a similar tradition with regard to the history of contact, but as Scott argues, there is little to be gained by forcing Aborigines "into the mould of failed warriors as some sort of warped adjunct of the Gallipoli myth" because it does not do justice to either the people or their situation (*Kayang & Me*, 188).

Together, historiography, the archive and the literary canon create an official framework within which the official national narrative of the past is produced. When a culture relies on the canon or traditional literature as its singular literary interpretation of the past, however, there is a tendency "towards closure and homogenization of its system" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 179). Although some may question whether we can learn from history, we still seek out narratives about the past, and although canonical history has been "delegitimized," the archive retains its attraction (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 5). Unlike traditional historical fiction, myths and epics, memorial novels are not concerned with re-telling long accepted historical tales about a national past, or even offering an alternative version of an historical event, but are concerned with the point of contact between people and with challenging the accepted and official national narrative, providing new interpretations of culture and history, and are acts of memory as they both record and commemorate the past.

**Trauma literature**

Along with historical fiction, myths and epics, a further genre that responds to the past is trauma literature. Literature that responds to trauma is important for coming to terms with or understanding the past; as public memory discourse it allows communities and individuals to "break out of traumatic repetitions" (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 9). However, there is the problem that the closer fiction comes to any "truth claim" with regard to a violent or traumatic past the less freedom a writer has (LaCapra, *Writing History*). We assume that writers of fiction are free to write what they like, and in the case of historical fiction, provided the well known and accepted facts are not distorted too much, are free to use historical figures and events as they see fit. However, when those historical figures are individuals who have suffered trauma, particularly trauma at the hands of the state, authorial freedom is severely curtailed. Some of the restrictions come from those who have suffered the trauma claiming ownership of their stories, and in the Australian context, some non-Aboriginal writers do not want to be seen to be continuing the process of colonisation by appropriating the stories of the colonised and traumatised. Sometimes the restriction on who can tell particular stories and in what style is due to particular stories being co-opted as political tools, such as the Stolen Generations stories. The result has been a tendency to confine representations of trauma to testimonies, life stories, biographies or auto-biographies because they are considered to be more truthful representations than fiction.

However, literature, rather than testimony or biographies may "provide a more expansive space ... for exploring modalities of responding to trauma" (LaCapra, *Writing History* 185). Martha Nussbaum argues that to be good citizens we need to feel compassion for others, which involves being able to recognise injustice and have a sense of our own vulnerability to misfortune, and that both require imagination and the ability to critically examine ourselves, our culture and our traditions (*Cultivating Humanity)*. Invoking compassion is an important means of trying to draw "social, political and economic resources in one's direction" (Spelman 88) and to achieve both compassion, itself one of those resources, for

others and to critically examine ourselves, our culture and traditions requires the arts, and in particular, literature, with its ability to represent the circumstances and problems of others as well as develop the imagination. The more "poetic" a narrative is "the stronger is its content of intellectual play and thus its availability for exploring larger cultural or existential (as against experiential) issues" (Okpewho 69). Cathy Caruth positions literature as the intersection between psychoanalytic theory and trauma theory claiming that literature is able to go beyond the limits of historiography to explore the psychological aspects of trauma ("Unclaimed Experience").

> What makes literature into the privileged, but not the only, site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its sensible and representational character, because of its figurative language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text or, to use Felman's and Dori Laub's term, in order to be witnessed. (Ramadanovic, "Introduction: Trauma and Crisis" npn)

Narrative imagination allows readers to put themselves in the place of another, to be able to imagine another's pain and suffering and to feel compassion for the other. This leads Nussbaum to be critical of identity politics and the notion that only those within a particular group can write about that group, arguing that both block imaginative identification with others (*Cultivating Humanity)*. However, LaCapra warns of the need to "put oneself in the other's position without taking the place of – or speaking for – the other or becoming a surrogate victim who appropriates the victim's voice or suffering" (*History in Transit* 135). He draws a distinction between writing trauma and writing about trauma, arguing that writing *about* trauma is historiography and writing trauma is the process of acting out a traumatic experience through writing (*Writing History*). However, the facts may be known about an event but that does not mean that the traumatising effects of the event have been acknowledged (Santner) even as they appear in writing. How the reader responds to trauma literature is problematic and Roseanne Kennedy is concerned

with how to break down the barriers that prevent people from responding to the testimonies of the Stolen Generations ("The Affective Work").

Shoshana Felman and Hayden White have each argued separately that modernist literary techniques that oppose realism by disrupting chronology, using multiple points of view, and playing with language, offer a better way to respond to traumatic memories which cannot be told in a linear or referential testimony (*Testimony*; "Historical Emplotment"). However, LaCapra doubts if modernist texts are appropriate for the experiences of traumatised victims (*Writing History*) and Kennedy likewise does not agree with the idea that the modernist novel is a better way for Aborigines to respond to traumatic memories on the grounds that the modernist novel is a European cultural tradition, arguing that "vernacular testimonies" would be passed over by critics as they do not fit into the category of "high-culture" texts (Bennett and Kennedy 125). Memorial novels, particularly those by Scott and Wright, make extensive use of modernist techniques to represent trauma and vernacular testimonies in such a way as to allow readers to question the official narratives and to create imaginative identification with others without becoming a surrogate victim or appropriating the voice of others. Given that all three texts have won multiple literary awards they could also be considered to belong to "high-culture."

As trauma literature, the less literary the texts are the better, because literariness is considered to reduce the authenticity of the texts. Kim Scott's *Benang* will never be included in this closed system of trauma literature, despite its depiction of the trauma of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, because the text's literariness makes it less authentic as trauma literature. The autobiography is viewed as a genre imposed by the dominant white culture on Aboriginal writers, whereas testimony, particularly oral testimony, is more in keeping with the Aboriginal oral tradition. English and the novel are considered Western and to insist that the victims of colonisation use those forms to transmit their experiences is seen by many as a continuation of colonial dominance. Novels such as *Benang*, *That Deadman Dance* and *Carpentaria* are testament to the fact

that this is not necessarily the case, although it may be for earlier texts produced within the confines of white publishing and white editorial standards. Editors, usually white, wielded enormous influence on the process of turning Aboriginal manuscripts into publishable texts and they paid a "political price" in the process (Jones).

Similarly, although those who testified for *Bringing Them Home* were free to tell their stories in their own way, the historian or interviewer cannot help but intrude on oral testimonies; the interviewer selects the speakers, decides on the questions and directs the testimony (Portelli). And in some cases the historian or interviewer also selects which testimonies will be included in the document. In this way the historian is drawn into the narrative and the testimony becomes part of the larger story the historian is telling; in effect the testimony is appropriated for the purpose of the research or the project which is often linked to official culture. Aboriginal people who were the victims of the policy to remove Aboriginal children from their families were encouraged to provide to the Human Rights Commission a particular form of testimony that was associated with trauma and that acted as witness to the past, to "bear the truth about history" (Attwood, "Learning About the Truth" 203) and only those who were victims or witnesses were considered appropriate to testify, echoing Eli Wiesel's dictum that "only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions, can never do so" (*Kingdom of Memory* 166).

Even more important than the right of victims to tell their stories is the influence survivors can have on social and political structures if they retain control over their trauma; if the "dominant culture appropriates the trauma nothing changes" (Tal 7). Although the intention of *Bringing Them Home* was to return control of the narrative and the trauma to survivors of the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families, repositioning texts that respond to the past as belonging only to the Stolen Generations narrative has taken control away from the survivors and given it to those who control the record of the testimonies.

**Conclusion**

Cultural memory comprises the community's shared memories, but the selection of memories is indicated by the group's needs in the present. Hayden White argues that it is the "need or impulse to rank events with respect to their significance for the culture or group that is writing its own history that makes a narrative representation of real events possible" (*Content of the Form* 10). A group fixes on particular events or people in the past that are significant to the group, these then become symbols or myths relating to the group's memory, often eliding much of the difference between history and myth.

Cultural memory, together with the knowledge a group has about itself, defines a group's identity and in order to belong to a particular group, members need to remember the group's memories. Ernest Renan argues that national identity results from "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories" (19). The tendency is, therefore, for groups to remember events that contribute to a desired identity and events that detract from this are forgotten, marginalised or manipulated to fit with the collective vision of the group's identity and the assimilation of one group into another usually depends on the assimilated group forgetting those memories connected with their original identity (Assmann 114).

> Texts will be written or spoken not only when something worth telling about happens, but in response to broader institutional or cultural demands for the event to be recorded, not necessarily for posterity, but also for the achievement of current socio-political ends. (Muecke, "Discourse, History, Fiction" 72)

The problem in Australia is that the rich legacy of memories shared by the dominant culture stem from violent founding events that have been legitimised by the state and which have different meanings for different groups: "glory for some, humiliation for others" (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 82). Hostility between memory and historiography arises when a treasured historical narrative owned by the dominant group is either questioned or proven erroneous by reconstructions of

the past that rely on memory (Lachmann, "Cultural Memory"). The so-called history wars in Australia between the proponents of the extremes of black armband and white blindfold representations of the past attest to the hostility that arises when particular versions of the past that contribute to a desired identity are contested. The version of the Australian past as heroic, while not necessarily lost, does need to be "radically reinterpreted" to include less heroic stories and other heroes (171).

The intertextuality of memorial novels, with their dialogism and double coding and their rejection of a single, official voice stands in opposition to monologism and homogeneous national narratives. Memorial novels make use of historiographical sources and archival material, are based on real people, events or landscapes to varying degrees; however, the material is not presented as a re-presentation of history. They suggest instead that we do not have to accept the existing archival records as the definitive representation of the past, but can instead draw multiple meanings from the archive and in doing so unsettle accepted interpretations of history, challenge the official narrative and question previously accepted understandings of the past. Each new text, with its complex and complicating consequences and ramifying growth of meanings, also affects the referent text, which means that each of these memory texts affects the way readers understand the earlier intertexts and history (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature*).

If the novels are read as memory texts the reader and writer are both freed from the historian's constraint to at least attempt to describe the past as it really was. On one level they are concerned with historical events and their intertextuality is of the conventional type where historical texts and national stories are reproduced, but of more importance is their second level intertextuality, which is concerned with the space where two peoples meet, sometimes with violence and a lack of understanding, but sometimes with a glimpse of understanding and a point of "semantic interchange" that is a memory space. Memorial novels attempt to give voice to and make visible the events and the people who have been silenced and forgotten as a result of an official perception of reality (Lachmann, "Cultural Memory" 173).

Each of the novels I evaluate could be read as conventional historical fiction; however, their effectiveness as cultural memory lies in their challenge to official historical narratives together with their concern for the representation of Australian culture as a double culture, a culture that comprises an official and an unofficial narrative. The narratives are pluralist, ambivalent, heterogeneous and unresolved as narrators and characters re-imagine the past to transgress boundaries and challenge "official" narrative and linguistic frames of remembrance. But they are "the starting point for an exchange, rather than the end point of the discussion" (Rigney, *Imperfect Histories* 2), as they contribute to a dialogic process that helps to build "bonds of remembrance" between groups (Irwin-Zarecka 49).

# 2. The Australian Experience

In what follows I provide a brief evaluation of a number of novels published between the nineteen-twenties and the nineteen-eighties as a survey of the link between literature and the official national narrative mapped against Aboriginal policy as it has moved from assimilation in the period from the nineteen-thirties to the sixties, to integration from the nineteen-sixties to the seventies, to self-determination throughout the nineteen-eighties and nineties, to reconciliation in the present. As the novels that I evaluate in support of my thesis are all concerned with history, directly or indirectly, and my thesis is concerned with cultural memory and intertextuality, I consider it useful to have some understanding of the interconnections between history, literature, historiography and politics and between past and contemporary representations of history in literature. The novels that I refer to in this chapter were published prior to 1988 and all respond to the ill treatment of Aborigines, either in the past or the present of the text, and are sympathetic to Aborigines; however, they are all influenced by the prevailing political and anthropological understandings of their time and often fail to challenge the underlying cultural attitudes either towards Aborigines or towards the contemporary understanding of Australia's past.

Modern cultural practices are produced and performed within a socially constructed, cultural memory framework and with each generation heroic stories, historiography and celebrations have reinforced and stabilised the official Australian narrative. The process of stabilisation rests in part on "fixed binaries" (Hall 397) that provide a degree of stability and certainty to the nation. In the late nineteenth century settler Australians began to think of Australia as a modern nation that was "uniform" and "unified by a homogeneous culture, a dominant language, [and] a standardised history" (Haebich, *Broken Circles* 156). And by Federation settler Australians sought a narrative that defined their sense of unity and identity as a new nation that expressed that new nation only in a positive light. This narrative drew on the knowledge contained within an earlier narrative that had grown up since the arrival of the British in 1788; however, those aspects of the

story that detracted from the desired positive narrative were discarded, silenced or forgotten.

The Australian foundational narrative is based on notions of the shared suffering and past glory of settler Australians, and is characterised by celebratory stories about the efforts of mainly pioneers, explorers and pastoralists. The First World War is considered by many to be the first real unifying event that gave Australia a claim to nationhood and a place in the international community; it also provided a new type of hero: the soldier. Over time Australian cultural memory has come to incorporate other heroes, most notably sporting heroes, including Aboriginal sporting heroes, as well as women; however, despite a continued presence in the national narrative, until recently Aboriginal experiences were liminal, they were without an active role in the national narrative and without a place in mainstream cultural memory.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the desire for an acceptable past resulted in historians writing out of Australian historiography those people and events that detracted from the desired positive image, creating W. E. H. Stanner's well known term, the "great Australian silence." The exclusion of the violence of contact between settler Australians and Aborigines was considered possible because the Aboriginal people who were integral to this history were thought to be a dying race. When this was proven to be erroneous and it was no longer possible to remain silent there grew up the new dilemma of how to incorporate the history of contact into the national story without disturbing the positive and heroic image of Australia. Susannah Radstone and Katherine Hodgkin argue that our "understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences" in the present and that in order to move on we are "obliged to accommodate the past" (1); however, this is an imperative for mainly white or mainstream Australians and early attempts at accommodating the past have not always succeeded.

Efforts by mainstream Australians to come to terms with the past has sometimes resulted in Aborigines being portrayed as marginalised or mythologised, as victims who were unable to adapt to change, pointing to current reports of dysfunction in

some Aboriginal communities as proof. There was growing recognition of the violence of contact between Aborigines and mainstream Australians that resulted from colonisation and subsequent policies designed to deal with the Aboriginal problem; nevertheless, the portrayal of the Aboriginal experience as positive and hopeful remained liminal in historiography, literature and film, and the Australian national narrative contained few "bonds of remembrance" (Irwin-Zarecka 49) that could bring mainstream Australians and Aborigines together. In terms of intertextuality the early twentieth century novels that respond to Australia's past repeat and imitate previous texts, particularly the work of anthropologists.

**Nineteen-twenties and thirties**

From the latter part of the nineteenth century the theories of eugenics and Social Darwinism played an important role in the formulation of laws pertaining to Australian Aborigines. The theory of eugenics grew out of the Enlightenment idea of progress following a "natural developmental sequence" and it was believed at the time that Aborigines lacked the capacity to advance and they were therefore doomed to extinction (McGregor, *Imagined Destines* 2). Despite a lack of empirical evidence to support the theory it was accepted as scientific fact that there was a hierarchy of human beings and the "process of struggle and extinction" that was evolution was a part of nature (Reynolds, *Nowhere People* 80). Aborigines, particularly the full-blood Aborigines, were considered to be on the bottom rung of this hierarchy, unable to adapt, and were therefore facing imminent extinction (McGregor, "Doomed Race" 14) and the best that could be done for them was to ease their passing. But a new problem was beginning to appear.

By the nineteen-twenties and thirties the growing half-caste population was considered a "perennial economic and social problem" (Reynolds, *Nowhere People* 162) in Australia, which prompted state governments to formally adopt policies of absorption whereby full-blood Aborigines were to be segregated and allowed to die out, and half-castes were to be absorbed by the white population through a program to breed out the colour. In 1937 at the initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities it was concluded that "the destiny

of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth" and that "all efforts [should] be directed to that end" (L. F. Johnston 2). The Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, Dr Cecil Cook, like A. O. Neville in Western Australia, was committed to the White Australia policy and thought it was possible to absorb half-castes into the white race by careful control of breeding between half-caste women and white men, and by preventing miscegenation between Aborigines and Asiatics or Malays, thus allowing the black race to disappear (L. F. Johnston). The program required marriage or at least sexual relations between Aborigines and Europeans, which went against the other prevailing attitude towards race at the time: that of racial purity.

Historiography and anthropology supported the view of Aborigines as a dying race and the program to breed out the colour which had its roots in the theories of eugenics and Social Darwinism. These concepts formed Katherine Susannah Prichard's and Xavier Herbert's "pre-understanding" (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 1*) of Aborigines and of the relationship between Aborigines and white Australians, which in turn informs Prichard's *Coonardoo* and Herbert's *Capricornia*. Although both novels represent the policies relating to Aborigines as racist and inhumane and make an attempt to change the attitude of Australians towards Aborigines, in many ways they support the policies by portraying European culture as superior to other cultures and by perpetuating the stereotype of Aborigines as unable to adapt to the changes brought by Europeans. However, as Henry Reynolds points out, it is difficult from this distance to fully comprehend the all-pervasive nature of these ideas – "the incessant, prevailing winds of contempt" for people of "mixed blood" (*Nowhere People* 4). In these two novels the inability of the races to successfully mix is symbolic of the struggle that the Australian nation was undergoing in the first half of the twentieth century to create a distinctive cultural identity while ignoring the reality that the emerging Australian culture was in fact a hybrid culture in the same manner as the half-caste who was so much despised at the time.

Prichard's *Coonardoo*, first published in 1929 and in continuous print since, is contextualised by the political imperative to solve the Aboriginal problem by careful breeding between half-caste women and white men. Prichard collected much of the material used in *Coonardoo* when she lived among the Aborigines on Turee, a cattle station in the north-west of Western Australia. Her ideas are also heavily influenced by people such as the anthropologist Herbert Basedow who argued that "the Australian aboriginal stands somewhere near the bottom rung of the great evolutional ladder we have ascended" and Ernest Mitchell the then Chief Inspector of Aborigines in Western Australia and considered an expert after working with Aborigines for thirty years (Prichard ix).

The novel was considered controversial when it was first published for even suggesting that there could be a sexual relationship between a white man and a black woman (Prichard). Daisy Bates is thought to epitomise the view of many at the time in that she "abominated the very idea of sexual relations between Europeans and Aborigines" despising their progeny (qtd. in Reynolds, *Nowhere People* 8). Despite being a champion of the Aborigines, Bates's view was that the "only good half-caste is a dead one" (ibid). Although *Coonardoo* seeks to present a critical view of the effect of European contact on Aborigines, it fails to engage with the Aboriginal experience because it is framed by the belief that Aborigines were a dying race. Anne Brewster argues that the personal and private focus of the novel tends to deny the broader political reality for Aborigines at the time ("Aboriginal Life Writing" 3) in a similar manner that aspects of the contemporary reality for Aborigines were glossed over in Nene Gare's *The Fringe Dwellers*.

Focalising part of the narrative through an Aboriginal woman was a considerable break with convention at the time and together with Prichard's mention of "some controversy" as to whether the novel is "altogether a work of the romantic imagination" (xiii), shapes the reader's understanding of Aborigines, although this is a limited understanding. Authorial narration elides the attitudes of author and narrator and in this novel the narrator is clearly white and Aborigines and their culture are filtered through white sensibilities. Aboriginal characters in the novel

are not fully developed and remain on a level with children, animals and nature: "They're better than I am. Simpler, more honest and kindly (216); in her dying moments Coonardoo thinks of "herself as if she were a child" (230); Aboriginal workers are referred to as "boys" and Aborigines in general as "blacks" and Coonardoo returns to her home with the "instinct of an animal" (216). Even when the narration is focalised through Coonardoo her perceptions are limited by the understanding of the white narrator. The strong white narrator and the almost all white characters, except for minor, voiceless Aboriginal characters, have the effect of relativising Coonardoo who is dominated and overwhelmed, represented as powerless, aligned with the natural world and by implication subjected to the forces of natural selection.

In Australia, alongside the myths of Aborigines as a dying race and peaceful settlement there is the myth of Aborigines as the victims of British colonialism, at the mercy of the European institutions of education, justice and religion, unable to adapt and therefore doomed to extinction. This myth was, by the nineteen-thirties, embedded in the national narrative, perhaps as the wishful fantasy of some who would prefer that the Aboriginal problem simply disappeared. Herbert's *Capricornia* was first published in 1938 and covers a fifty year period beginning in the late nineteenth century, overlapping with the time period of *Coonardoo*, and it also responds to Australia's race relations and the problem of a growing half-caste population through the interlocking themes of the exploitation of Aboriginal women by white men and the difficulties faced by the half-caste children of these sexual encounters, and the ways that racial prejudice operates through the institutions of education, employment, the justice system and religion. Keeping the races apart is not the issue for this novel as it is for *Coonardoo*, but preserving Aboriginal culture is not a priority either.

*Capricornia* is a mixture of melodrama and saga (Pierce, "Capricornia" 1) in the style of an epic that records "events from the heroic past" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 170). The novel has a colourful cast of characters and tells the story of fictitious Capricornia, its settlers and their descendents using exaggerated emotions and stereotypical characters amid interpersonal conflicts. Vincent Buckley's review

of *Capricornia* in 1960 claims that the novel is as much about cosmic injustice as it is about social injustice against Aborigines (13). Similarly, Mudrooroo's foreword to the 1990 edition of the novel argues that the theme of social injustice is weakened by the counter-theme of fate (xiii). Indeed, much of the novel's cruelty, fate and injustice are blamed on a higher order that regulates the lives of "men," following the romantic myth that understanding man's current condition comes via a mode of "cosmic understanding" (Baldick 217) or reflecting the tendency of historians of the time to lay the responsibility for cruelties against the Aborigines at the feet of those outside civilised society. Blaming a higher order aligns the novel with the notion of a natural order that pre-ordains the fate of Aborigines and supports the doomed race theory. Herbert was aware of a framework that already existed of a white Australia focussed on economic progress at whatever the cost as his novel attempts to highlight the social problems Aborigines faced as a result of both European settlement and the pursuit of progress, but by using the epic genre Herbert firmly places the novel in the style of a classic nation building text.

The hero of a novel differs from the hero of an epic by the "ideological position of the epic hero [which] is meaningful for the whole community" not just to the text in which he, and less frequently she, appears (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 334). As well as the infrequency of female heroes, an epic hero is unlikely to be drawn from a minority group within the community; the only way that Aborigines can fit within the epic structure is to place them in the mythological past, which calls for their death. The novel suggests that the place of Aborigines in the new Australian nation can only be as a new race, the result of a blend of Aborigines and Europeans; the time of the full-blood now belongs to the mythical past as they are overtaken by progress.

This may be the pessimistic view that Herbert has drawn from contemporary attitudes and although he argues against this view, overall the novel does little to counter it. Within the text, there is an acceptance that the full-blood Aborigines are well on the path to extinction and the time has passed when anything can be done for them, but the half-caste, with a European education and within European

culture, can become a full citizen of the white race, or failing that a third race that is a blend of the two. While the novel seeks to expose the "very real and terrifically important thing" (82) of a growing half-caste population and to contribute to the transformation of the Australian foundational tradition so that it includes Aborigines, ultimately the scale of the attempt means that the novel's more successful exposure of ingrained racism is overshadowed by the reinforcement of the already established foundational myth, complete with heroes, rogues and stereotypes.

Kim Scott treats the history associated with breeding out the colour in a very different way to Prichard and Herbert. One of the major differences of course is that the program was still in force when Prichard and Herbert were writing, whereas the policies that supported the program had been officially abandoned for some decades before the publication of *Benang*. Australians are also now generally more aware of the history of violence between Aborigines and white Australians, unlike in the nineteen-twenties and thirties when writers still thought it necessary to educate their readers about the living conditions of Aborigines. Although letters to the editors of newspapers would suggest that even then it was not that Australians were unaware, but that they were waiting for the problem to disappear via the extinction of the Aboriginal race – Scott reproduces a letter to the *West Australian* in 1933 in which the writer suggests that the problem of the half-caste is "merely a passing phase" (*Benang* 5). Scott's novels are memorial novels that seek to enter into a dialogue with texts from the period, whereas *Coonardoo* and *Capricornia* seek to provide a closed account, confident of their moral certainty.

**Nineteen-forties**

Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land*, originally published in 1941, covers the first five years of Australian settlement from the beginning of 1788 to the end of 1792 and offers an alternative account of the period to that given by the historians Ernest Scott and Walter Murdoch, whose works were also published in the nineteen-forties. Both of their texts make only passing references to either Aborigines or the history of contact between Aborigines and settler Australians (E.

Scott; Murdoch). Dark challenges the concept of *terra nullius* and the belief that Aborigines had neither a history of their own nor a place in the history of the modern Australian nation. However, like *Coonardoo* and *Capricornia*, despite championing the Aboriginal cause and displaying obvious sympathy for Aborigines, the novel is illustrative of participation intertextuality in that it repeats the belief that Aborigines were a dying race that also informs the historiography of Scott and Murdoch.

Dark, like Pritchard and Herbert, had firsthand experience of Aboriginal culture; however, she too relied on the work of anthropologists and other Europeans working in the field of Aboriginal affairs. Although Dark attempts to elicit empathy from the reader in response to the ill treatment of Aborigines, her effort is undermined by the language and structure of the novel, which remain tied to "a specific cultural horizon" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 31). She writes in the preface to her novel that the "Australian Aboriginal had great virtues," but that the race is "nearly gone" (9). Although Dark attempts to give Aborigines a voice by focalising much of the narrative through the Aboriginal character Bennelong, the language and attitudes in the novel are clearly European, the white narrator speaks from a superior position and speaks *for* the Aboriginal characters. Rather than challenging the official narrative, the novel repeats the contemporary beliefs at the time of the novel's publication that Aborigines were a dying race.

**Nineteen-fifties**

Prior to the Second World War the exclusion of Aborigines from the national narrative was justified by the theories of eugenics and Social Darwinism. Following the war these theories had fallen out of favour around the world and there was a new recognition of the oppression of minorities that prompted a shifting awareness and understanding of the past and a move away from using "tribal culture as a frame of reference" (Daniel 50). Randolph Stow's novel *To the Islands* was first published in 1958 and was one of a number of novels published in the nineteen-fifties that were concerned with Aborigines and the attempt by society to come to terms with a past that had largely been ignored by mainstream Australians to this

point (J. J. Healy). The novel is also concerned with the role of the missions in Australia's history of contact. Stow had spent some time working at the Forrest River Mission and was impressed by what he saw there, admitting in the preface to the original edition of the novel to writing "propaganda" on behalf of the missions (ix); Adam Shoemaker charges Stow with being an apologist for the missions despite their many failings (*Black Words, White Page)*. In the years between the first and second edition of the novel the commitment of white Australians to improving the lot of Aborigines had waned and the missions had begun to relinquish administrative control of Aboriginal communities (Sutton 17). Stow believed "the cause was lost long ago" (ix) and revised the novel in 1981, removing some passages that suggested that the white characters were committed to the mission as integral to helping Aborigines.

*To the Islands* follows the structure of a fairytale quest where the protagonist Stephen Heriot, the modern day hero, seeks atonement for his sins and also hopes to guide the white community to "cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding" (J. Campbell, *Thousand Faces* 391). Fairytale myths serve to explain the mysteries of the world and to enforce a moral order (J. Campbell, *Masks of God* 4), and in the case of *To the Islands* the moral order belongs to white Australia. Stow describes the novel as an "historical-sociological document" (ix); however, *To the Islands* is about white Australians' desire and failure to expiate the sins of the past rather than a desire for reconciliation: "But in all my – expiations, there's never been a reconciliation" (108). Despite the shift towards recognising the damage that colonisation and government policies had had, and were continuing to have, on Aborigines, it would be the nineteen-sixties before Aboriginal writers began to challenge the privileged view of Australia's past as having only a white perspective.

**Nineteen-sixties**

Many early twentieth century novels are generally sympathetic to Aborigines and their history since 1788; however, very often Aborigines are depicted in these novels as exotic specimens, noble savages, or later as victims, either on the verge of

extinction or on the path to self-destruction. The past is open to continuous re-telling; nevertheless, when the overarching official cultural memory framework is put in place and maintained by one section of the community without input from others, particularly as that section of the community is usually the dominant one with a large degree of control over cultural input, challenges to the official culture result in minimal changes to our overall view of the past or to the official narrative. To bring about change requires a sustained effort across all sectors of the community – "One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature … but one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it" (Wittgenstein 41). It was not until the nineteen-sixties that a concerted effort was made to improve the lot of Aborigines through political change.

State governments had begun to pass laws as early as 1901 that gave the states wide-ranging power and control over the lives of Aborigines. By the nineteen-thirties the Director or Chief Protector of Aborigines in each state had become the legal guardian of all children of Aboriginal descent under the age of twenty-one (Broome, *Aboriginal Australians* 166). All aspects of the lives of Aborigines were controlled by the government including employment and income, travel and residence, property ownership, education, marriage and parenting, and the use of alcohol (ibid). Throughout the nineteen-sixties legislative changes sought to change the paternalistic role of government towards Aborigines and Aborigines were given full citizenship and in theory equal rights.

Assimilation was the new policy based on the view that there is fundamentally no difference between races. That is it was understood that Australian Aborigines had the capacity to live as Europeans; equality between races was understood at the time to depend on the absorption of the minority group into the majority group. The issues relating to assimilation and the new urban fringe Aborigines are explored in Nene Gare's *The Fringe Dwellers* (1961) and Colin Johnson's W*ild Cat Falling* (1965). (Later editions of the novel are published under the name of Mudrooroo). When *Wild Cat Falling* appeared, Colin Johnson became the first Aborigine to have a novel published. Along with Oodgeroo (Kath Walker) and Kevin

Gilbert, he has been credited with defining “the boundaries of new black literature” in the nineteen-sixties, paving the way for younger writers to be published (S. Watson 595).

Both novels are framed by the new policy of assimilation that put pressure on Aborigines to adapt to the dominant white culture, and detail the effect of the policy on Aborigines. Unlike the majority of novels prior to the nineteen-sixties with Aboriginal characters both Gare and Johnson write about the experiences of urban Aborigines. The new policy of assimilation was to be achieved through dispersal of Aborigines into urban communities as they were forced to leave the missions and reserves to make way for the post-war mining boom. The result was a growing numbers of Aborigines in urban areas where the people, both black and white, and the infrastructure were ill equipped to bring about the desired assimilation.

The novels confront the problems of alcohol, gambling, crime, the lack of land rights and adequate housing, the inability to be part of the mainstream economy and education system, the clash between Aboriginal and European cultures and the effect these problems were having on individual Aborigines and their communities. However, these novels remain tied to and repeat the official political narrative that Aborigines were unable to adapt to modern Western ways. Although Australians were beginning to recognise that Aborigines had been excluded from history, and had been subjected to discrimination and violence, the existing official cultural memory did not allow for the stories of Aborigines to exist alongside those of mainstream Australians outside the stereotypical Aborigine as defined by white Australians.

*The Fringe Dwellers* shares some similarities with *Coonardoo.* Both novels are in the realist mode and are focalised through young Aboriginal women who are trying to make sense of the world they live in and both authors draw on their experience of living closely with Aborigines. Both novels seek to expose racist and inhumane treatment of Aborigines and the limited opportunities open to them and despite a distance of thirty years and a number of political changes both reach a similar conclusion: ultimately it is Aborigines who are unable to adapt to the changing

conditions brought about by European settlement. Gare was criticised for *The Fringe Dwellers* by some reviewers because they saw it as perpetuating the stereotype of the feckless Aborigine caught between two cultures. Kay Ferres describes the novel as "a chronicle of defeat" (54), and Anna Haebich claims the novel has "significant misrepresentations and omissions" because the Comeaway family is largely free of interference by welfare department officials and police in their daily lives (*Spinning the Dream* 364). Once again, the inability of Aborigines to adapt to white Western ways dominates the narrative.

*Wild Cat Falling* is a first person narrative that places a young disenfranchised Aboriginal man at the centre of the story rather than acting as part of an exotic landscape, while white characters act as a foil to the protagonist or are entirely absent. The story is set during the period dominated by the policy of assimilation and is concerned with the difficulties faced by a young half-caste Aborigine caught between two cultures. Along with Aboriginal political activity in the nineteen-sixties Aboriginal writing had begun to develop as the "product of assimilation revolting against assimilation" (Mudrooroo, *Writing from the Fringe* 13). The novel begins with the unnamed protagonist leaving prison and returning to the fringes of white society. Being nameless defines him as an alienated outsider, "one of the permanent unemployed unemployables" (39); however, the first person narrative invites the reader to believe his story and to identify with his plight. He remains un-named throughout the novel until late in the narrative when he is identified as "Jessie Duggan's boy" by his Aboriginal uncle (121), which defines him by his Aboriginality and finally gives him a sense of belonging. After leaving prison, with no job and few prospects he soon returns to crime, is charged with attempted murder and is returned to prison, indicating the pattern of failure that urbanised Aborigines faced.

Like *The Fringe Dwellers*, the novel highlights that the special measures being offered to Aborigines were failing: "You think it can all be settled just movin into a house, buyin a coupla beds?" (Gare 69); the protagonist of *Wild Cat* had "learnt the art of being completely unexploitable and of sabotaging every make-believe effort

to improve the native's lot" (*Wild Cat Falling* 41). The novels expose the impact of assimilation on individuals and the breakdown of family and group cohesion under the policy as government rhetoric began to move further away from Aboriginal reality while a lack of hope for Aborigines begins to appear. The protagonist of *Wild Cat* says: "I have accepted hopelessness and futility" and while others still have their hopes and some "even make resolutions … they will fail and fall" (3).

Although the doomed race theory was gone, there was still a strong belief among mainstream Australians that, if not Aborigines as a race, then Aboriginal culture was doomed, because there was a belief that a contradiction existed between Aboriginal culture and the mainstream economy. There was, however, a growing collective consciousness and a sense of belonging among Aborigines at the time; mainstream Australians were also beginning to understand Aborigines as a collective – the term "Aboriginality" was first used in 1968. Nevertheless, although the fight for equality had brought some gains, there was still much to fight for and for some the fight was becoming too much. "Phyllix sighed. 'You might get tired of fighting, Trilby. And even places like the Berrings [a fringe camp] look good when ya tired" (256). But *Wild Cat Falling* ends with a "hint of humanity" from the arresting policeman now when he has "done the worst thing" in his life (131), when he had tried to kill off any hope he had for himself, but it "wouldn't die" (130) – this novel has a small glimmer of hope for Aborigines and the future.

**Nineteen-seventies**

The nineteen-seventies in Australia were a time of change and a time of extremes. On the one hand there were significant advancements for the rights of women, Aborigines and other minorities and a general freeing up in attitudes to sexuality, censorship and multiculturalism. On the other hand there was the continuation of the Vietnam War and escalating protests against Australia's involvement in the conflict, increasing unemployment, and rising inflation. There was also growing friction between nationalism and efforts to encourage patriotism in a "desire to catch up with the rest of the world, and a desire on the part of Australians to run things for themselves, with new confidence and new standards"

(Crowley 265). There was also growing recognition of a shameful past and an uncertain move by mainstream Australians towards seeing a connection between the past and the present beyond the framework of shared suffering, past glory and heroes.

In the nineteen-seventies literature, like the re-writing of historiography, began to respond to the past in ways that reflected the new political environment, the changes in contemporary attitudes and the desire for a new history to match those new attitudes. The focus of literature and historiography, particularly since the nineteen-seventies, has been on breaking the silence around the violence of contact between Aborigines and settler Australians. By the nineteen-seventies discriminatory and patronising laws governing Australian Aborigines had been repealed and Aborigines' right to full citizenship had finally been recognised. Aborigines had gained some political power and a few political successes, particularly in the area of land rights, but while Aborigines continued to achieve political successes, other measures indicated that living conditions for some Aborigines were worsening.

In 1970 there was a major reduction in the infant mortality rate and Aboriginal life expectancy and home ownership had been gradually increasing; however, since then in a number of areas there has been a steady decline or a relative worsening of the situation for some Aboriginal communities (Sutton 206). There has been little or no progress in those areas that are most important for a healthy and functioning community and the image of Aborigines as victims and Aboriginal communities as dysfunctional has become entrenched. While there had been positive changes in Aboriginal policies and increased awareness of the needs of Aborigines prior to the nineteen-seventies, novels of this period reflect a prevailing pessimism towards the likelihood of any improvement in race relations or the lives of Aborigines.

Thomas Keneally's novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* was published in 1972 and by this time there was national and international interest in Aboriginal affairs, the Aboriginal protest movement was gaining strength and the effect of changes in the nineteen-sixties were beginning to be profoundly felt particularly in politics. No

longer able to ignore the past following increasing historical and political awareness of the violence of contact between Aborigines and settler and mainstream Australians, the dilemma for mainstream Australians was how to incorporate this newly recognised history into the modern Australian narrative. Australians, as Patrick White argues, "grow resentful on being forced to recognise themselves" and often fail to see a connection between the past and the present (104).

Keneally claims that he set out to "tell a parable about the present by using the past" ("Doing Research for Historical Novels" 27) and the novel has generally been received in that light. However, a close reading of the novel reveals embedded racism that reinforces the concern with mixed blood Aborigines and actually offers an alternative to accepting responsibility for the past or changing present day attitudes to the oppression of Aborigines, by continuing the negative stereotype of the half-caste as an inferior race.

The novel is a fictionalised version of the 1901 murders of nine people by Jimmy Governor, his brother Joe and Jacky Underwood (Keneally, *Jimmie Blacksmith*). The novel was a bestseller and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, well received by most critics and continues to be taught in schools and universities. In 1978 Fred Schepisi used the novel as the basis for the film of the same name and Keneally collaborated closely with Schepisi on the film and played a minor role as the cook. The film was a commercial failure, most likely due to the confronting violence (Reynolds, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*), but is nevertheless considered by many to be an important Australian film.

The episodic structure, simple binaries, and the reliance on action and plot to carry the narrative of the novel means that the reader is not given any opportunities to understand what it was that drove Blacksmith to commit such terrible crimes; the use of external focalisation limits access to Blacksmith's humiliation and motives. In some passages the narrator seems to be embedded in the time of the narrative, using the language of that time whereas at others the narrator seems more like a mouthpiece for Keneally. The authorial narrator in this novel is similar to Prichard's narrator in *Coonardoo*, where both subsume the voice

of the Aboriginal character. The kidnapped schoolteacher McCreadie in particular seems to speak for the author and the nineteen-seventies; he has the most sympathy for the plight of Aborigines and is aware of the outcome of racism and violence: “And here the history of men death and lust for booze and acquiescence to the white phallus, gun, and sequestration and all the malaise of black squalor, here it was, legible in the fracture lines of soft stones” (150). But he also tells Jimmie that he is “buggered” because he is too “Christian,” unlike his brother Mort who is “an aborigine” (151). Isabelle Benigno argues that Keneally creates a “binary opposition between ‘full-bloods’ and ‘mixed-bloods’” (114), further perpetuating the idea that persisted throughout the nineteen-seventies that half-castes displayed the worst traits of both races.

There is a strong desire in the novel to portray both the past it refers to and the time of its publication as racist and to give some understanding of the effect that this had and continues to have on Aborigines, but rather than force Australians to recognise themselves in the racism, it perpetuates the polarisation of black and white and the perception that the half-caste is undesirable and not a true Aborigine. Terry Sturm wrote in 1973 that Keneally was arguing in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* for a change in “white attitudes and institutions” that were continuing the oppression of Aborigines, but that he was not hopeful for such a change (274). The novel describes the history that had previously been suppressed as a result of the desire to promote Australia as a modern nation of “unity and progress” (Sturm 263), but it does little to promote taking responsibility for that past. Although Roger Stitson believes the novel thrusts “a mirror in the face of contemporary white Australia and its willing forgetfulness of a racist past and those attitudes, fears and suspicions towards black Australia that continue to dog us” (“Blacksmith” npn), it presents those racist attitudes as embedded in the national psyche and therefore unable to be changed (ibid). In 1990 Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra argued that Keneally’s “half-breed” is redolent of “popular racism” that maintained the idea of an “abstract form of pure Aboriginality” (61). While the novel may have acted as a mirror to the present in the nineteen-seventies and

eighties to expose racism, it did nothing to challenge what it reflected of the official narrative at the time.

**Nineteen-eighties**

In the nineteen-eighties in Australia, our understanding of the past began to undergo significant changes and Australians' confidence in the official version of the past that rested on fixed binaries and the notion of peaceful settlement and white heroes with Aborigines as other had been irrevocably altered. Some of the changes concern such fundamental ideas as how we refer to Aborigines and our understanding of Aborigines as an homogeneous group. In 1987 Bob Reece argued that the term "Aborigines" was "both an invention and a product of European colonisation of Australia" ("Inventing Aborigines" 14), which served to homogenise a diverse group of peoples and in part allowed Europeans to dispossess and institutionalise them, which some historians contend continues into the present (Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*). While Stanner considered that indigenous Australians were excluded from history, Reece believed that their inclusion *in* history became part of the invention ("Inventing Aborigines"), in much the same way that Chris Healy argues that Aboriginal culture still serves white Australian needs (*Forgetting Aborigines)*. Forty years after Stanner, Healy agues along similar lines to Reece that we should forget "Aborigines," suggesting that "Aborigines" are "anachronisms belonging to the past" (*Forgetting Aborigines* 214). But as Stanner reflected in 1968: "One of our most difficult problems is to overcome our folklore about them" ("After the Dreaming" 206).

The other aspect of our confidence that was undermined in the nineteen-eighties was the challenge to how to go about solving the problems some Aborigines faced. It was once thought that knowledge about Aborigines would solve the social problems facing many Aboriginal communities (Stanner, "After the Dreaming" 204) as a result of the dispossession of Aboriginal land and the dislocation and destruction of Aboriginal cultures and languages; however, this has not proven to be the case. Mainstream knowledge of Aboriginal culture and the social and economic difficulties faced by some Aboriginal communities is not

enough in itself to bring about change. Despite a great deal of knowledge about the history of contact between Aborigines and settlers and the history of the policies and practices surrounding the Stolen Generations some Aboriginal communities face arguably more profound problems than ever before.

The bicentennial celebrations and the related Aboriginal protest movement focussed the nation on its past, and the publication of Henry Reynolds's history books in which he challenges the idea of peaceful settlement and passive Aborigines, proposed a radically new version of history in opposition to the official version. Reynolds's first history book, *Aborigines and Settlers: The Australian Experience, 1788-1939*, published in 1972 is a collection of documents illustrating the relationship between Aborigines and white settlers in which Aborigines both challenge and accommodate the British. Reynolds argues in that book that there was now a "growing awareness of our own racial traditions" in which black resistance to white "invasion" was recognised (*Aborigines and Settlers* xi). *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia* published in 1981 and its sequel *Frontier; Aborigines, Settlers and Land* published in 1987 further challenge received understanding of Australian history. *The Other Side of the Frontier* is written from the perspective of Aborigines and does not rely on traditional written records, but uses sources previously considered worthless by historians: oral records, government and missionary reports and anthropological writing. Its sequel deals mainly with the attitude of white settlers towards Aborigines. While these books may not always contain sufficient analysis of the data or take into account regional differences, the impact on Aborigines of disease, the introduction of European food and the loss of land following British settlement, the books did instigate a new discussion about Australian historiography and the history of contact.

Two novels published in the nineteen-eighties by Aboriginal writers seek to include Aboriginal heroes in Australian cultural memory and to show Aboriginal agency. Eric Willmot's novel, *Pemulwuy, the Rainbow Warrior*, first published in 1987, tells the story of Aboriginal resistance to British settlement led by Pemulwuy

over a twelve year period from 1790 to his death in 1802. Although Willmot seeks a place in the Australian narrative for Pemulwuy as a hero he uses participation intertextuality to repeat the official narrative. He includes historical maps in the text and makes references to other documents and records from the official historical archive. The narrative uses Standard English and diction and British military terms; Pemulwuy is described in terms associated with English generals and compared with Hannibal (Willmot 82). Instead of challenging the official history to make way for an Aboriginal hero, Willmot loses the Aboriginal voice within the archive material and reproduces and perpetuates the official narrative. The archive of mainstream Australia is taken as the definitive representation of the past with a single meaning and rather than provide a new interpretation of the past or insert an alternative narrative, Willmot has sought to fit the Aboriginal character within the official narrative without changing it, which ultimately fails.

Mudrooroo's *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* published in 1983 is an attempt to challenge the official understanding of George Arthur Robinson as a friend of the Tasmanian Aborigines as much as it is the portrayal of Wooreddy as a hero. Mudrooroo represents Robinson as patronising and pompous, absurd and a little silly, an immoral man who can barely control his lust for Trugernanna (*Dr Wooreddy*). Although Mudrooroo uses non-standard English and attempts to challenge the official narrative, it is a traditional historical novel that once again draws on the archive for its material in an attempt to assimilate Aboriginal heroes into the official national narrative in much the same way as Willmot.

Adam Shoemaker argues that the historical theme is important for contemporary Aboriginal literature and that using the techniques of the Aboriginal oral tradition to reinterpret Australia's "interracial history" is part of a larger ideal to "foster a sense of … pride in leaders and heroes of the Black Australian past" (*Black Words, White Page* Ch. 6). However, the hero lives and "acts to redeem society" (J. Campbell and Moyers xv) and instead of saving their people the protagonists of both novels are hero-victims who are confronted by opponents they are unable to overcome (Bal 92). The novels are embedded in the official narrative

and use participation intertextuality to repeat and imitate previous written texts that describe the impact of settlement on Aborigines as wholly negative and in which Aborigines were victims, unable to resist or adapt to British settlement.

**Nineteen-nineties**

In the nineteen-nineties, at the same time as mainstream Australians were making tentative steps towards recognising Aborigines and their stories as belonging to the broader Australian cultural memory, Aborigines continued to be defined as victims. As the land rights campaign progressed and public awareness of the Stolen Generations brought calls for compensation, history began to increase in importance for Aborigines as a means to support claims for land and reparations for past injustice. There was also an enormous amount of contestation around notions of Aboriginal authenticity (Kurtzer). With the rise of identity politics in the nineteen-nineties in which the aim is to emphasise difference, and highlight marginalisation and oppression as a means of gaining self-determination, there was a growing need for victims. Aboriginal politics began to increasingly portray Aborigines as helpless victims and a culture of victimhood also developed with regards to relations between Aboriginal Australians and mainstream Australians using the language of identity politics that positions Aborigines as victims and non-Aborigines as perpetrators with few possibilities for other roles (Pearson, "White Guilt").

Early Aboriginal activists had adopted the politics of the black American struggle to liberate the victims of racial segregation, and Aborigines began to identify themselves as a group with a shared history and experience (Attwood and Markus 275). One of the problems with this group identity is that prior to British settlement there were as many as five hundred different language groups or tribes ranging across the Australian continent with nothing that bound them together as a single nation. Even in their resistance to colonisation, the settlers were able to deploy Aborigines from one tribe against Aborigines from other tribes, most notably as police trackers who were "the subordinate allies of white police and involved in bloodcurdling killing sprees" (Hooper 153). The single unifying aspect of Australia's

past that allowed Aborigines to be identified as a group was their place in history as the victims of either colonialism or efforts to solve the Aboriginal problem.

Further to the rise of identity politics and the promotion of Aboriginal victimhood, three documents were published in the nineteen-nineties which were to have an important and ongoing effect on Aboriginal politics and the representation of Aborigines: the report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991); *Bringing Them Home: The "Stolen Children"* (1997); and the High Court's decision in the Mabo case (1992). *Bringing Them Home* in particular "provided a considerable emotional power for the politics of memory in contemporary Australia" (Hamilton, "Memory Studies" 90). The nineteen-nineties "seemed to be haunted by trauma" (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 8) and in Australia the issue of memory and forgetting animated the debate around the Stolen Generations (15). There was a sharp increase in testimonial fiction and autobiographies by Aboriginal writers, particularly those of the Stolen Generations, and following the report's publication representations of Aborigines that included the removal of children from their families would be re-positioned as belonging to Stolen Generations narratives and read against the report, which had become the official document regarding the Stolen Generations.

Texts by Aborigines considered as belonging to the Stolen Generations that had previously been told orally and locally or read in a number of other ways, including as biographies, were now being re-read. With the growth of what Bain Attwood calls "narrative accrual" stories such as those by Sally Morgan and Doris Pilkington were removed from the local sphere into the national sphere; no longer belonging to the individual authors, but now read as testimonies and part of the Stolen Generations ("Learning About the Truth" 196) and symbolic of the political issues of reconciliation and compensation.

Njabulo Ndebele, a South African writer, argues that the oppressed in South Africa have been "reduced to the status of being mere bearers of witness," although fiction has dealt with the theme of apartheid it has been to document and describe rather than to explain (160). Ndebele claims that the result of this is to

promote an image of black South Africans as destroyed, passive and in need of sympathy rather than writing fiction from a position of strength, showing how the people have survived, and to celebrate life. A similar pattern has emerged in Australia where Aborigines must emphasise difference and highlight marginalisation and oppression as a means of gaining self-determination, and mainstream Australians are forced to accept the position of guilty responsibility, shame or denial. However, as Noel Pearson argues, the simple dichotomy of victim and perpetrator is limiting and "debilitating" ("White Guilt" 30), and "nothing good will ever come from our people viewing ourselves as victims and making our case to the wider community on the basis of our status as victims" (*Up from the Mission* 382). The result of the promotion of Aboriginal victimhood, according to Marcia Langton, is that now it "seems almost axiomatic to most Australians that Aborigines should be marginalised: poor, sick, and forever on the verge of extinction. At the heart of this idea is a belief in the inevitability of our incapability – the acceptance of our 'descent into hell'" ("Trapped in the Aboriginal Reality Show" 6).

**Conclusion**

In the pursuit of equal rights and to further the Aboriginal political agenda it was necessary to educate mainstream Australians about frontier violence and racism and the ongoing impact of the past on Aborigines; to remind Australians of the violence that had been disregarded, forgotten and removed from history. Prior to the nineteen-seventies, Australian historiography largely excluded Aborigines, except in brief references to their certain extinction. Aboriginal politics brought about an interest in pre-settlement history and the place of Aborigines in history since settlement and from the late seventies historiography began to recognise the violence of settlement, but this recognition also brought the politics of victimhood.

In the decade of the nineteen-eighties mainstream Australians experienced a loss of continuity and security in the past – previous confidence in the nation and its history was replaced with uncertainty. The bicentennial of the founding of modern Australia in 1988 and the attendant celebrations and protests brought about a shift in political and historical consciousness. Chris Healy argues that the bicentenary and

the indigenous boycott of the celebrations prompted Australians to question the legitimacy of the nation and its history and that this then "fuelled a crisis of heritage" (*Forgetting Aborigines* 99) and brought about change that Paula Hamilton argues has been "deeply unsettling to those who want to cling to a celebrated concept of nation" ("Memory Studies" 85).

As a result of the shift in theoretical approaches to the past, the debates about memory and the growing uncertainty about our understanding of the past, Australian authors began in the nineteen-nineties to produce memorial novels. There was a movement away from realist novels that attempt to faithfully represent or demonstrate the past towards novels that are self-consciously aware of their fictionality, literariness and arbitrariness, and that offer an "alternative line" by rejecting traditional plots and heroes (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 181) and by refusing Aboriginal victimhood.

The debate has moved away from the "extravagant claims" that rely on the common polarities of good and evil, left and right, and black and white that often passes for debate with regard to Aboriginal politics and the problems facing some Aborigines (Morton 12) towards recognising that Australian culture has "layers of identity" that can exist in a "pluralist and united world" (Pearson, "White Guilt" 245). Perhaps as Lachmann argues we needed as a culture to experience a sense of loss for the past before we could transform our knowledge of the past into a new order (*Memory and Literature* 21).

# 3. Memory, Testimony and Trauma

In Australia we no longer have a culture of silence and forgetting with regard to the physical and emotional harm that Aborigines have suffered since the colonisation of Australia. However, while we now recognise our obligation to remember the past, remembrance is not a straightforward process and testifying to a traumatic past does not guarantee that the testimony will be heard or understood outside those with an interest in hearing the testimony for whatever reason. The form of remembrance can be as important as the content for deciding whether we remember the material trace, perpetuate legends or myths, or whether we seek to remember both the events that shaped our culture and those who came before us in a variety of methods and from a range of perspectives, and whether we incorporate those recalled events and people into cultural memory.

There are a number of ways to collectively remember the past including museums, memorials, memorial rituals and celebrations, historiography, art and literature. The traditional literary genres for recalling and remembering the past include those genres that Lachmann describes as classical literature such as historical fiction, myths and epics. Testimony and trauma literature are particular memory genres considered separate to other forms of remembering, but in many respects they are similar to Lachmann's notion of classical literature and what I describe as traditional historical fiction. Each genre supports a particular cultural position or cultural identity, and the selection process for inclusion in the genre is linked to politics, ideology and power structures (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*).

Following the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families and the subsequent publication of the report *Bringing Them Home, "The stolen children"* in 1997, there emerged a new narrative genre in Australia: Stolen Generations narratives. The creation of this new genre was to serve the political and ideological purpose of making all Australians aware of the policies relating to the separation of Aboriginal children from their families and

the physical and emotional cruelty of those policies and their ongoing effect. However, I argue that reading the biographies or life stories of Aborigines exclusively as testimonies or Stolen Generations narratives may lead to either a narrow response that defines and understands the texts and the people associated with the narratives only in terms of Aboriginal trauma and victimhood, or to a patronising response from mainstream Australians, including from those who are sympathetic to Aborigines and their narratives, who may consider themselves non-racist simply because they have read such texts and believe that they now understand Aboriginality, when instead the texts perpetuate white ideas of Aboriginality (Huggins, "Always Was Always Will Be" 460).

Insisting that narratives associated with violent or traumatic events from the past be only from those who are the victims of trauma also denies that the past was a collectively shared experience, which risks keeping the experiences of victims out of Australian cultural memory in the broader sense by confining the narratives to the victim group and ignoring the perpetrators and bystanders and anything that does not fit within the narrow confines of the trauma narrative genre. In this chapter I consider the dual problems of positioning biographies and life stories as Stolen Generations narratives or testimonies that are now inextricably aligned with *Bringing Them Home*, and of using trauma as the primary concept for understanding the personal experiences of Aborigines and the place of such experience in cultural memory (Traverso and Broderick). I use Sally Morgan's *My Place* and Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* as examples of texts that have been re-positioned as Stolen Generations narratives. I am not evaluating the comparative worth of particular genres, but seek to understand the likelihood of a text being incorporated into cultural memory if it is considered exclusively as Stolen Generations literature.

***Bringing Them Home***

*Bringing Them Home* is essentially a collection of memories and testimonies of victims with no evidence from other witnesses or people who were involved in the process of removing or caring for these children. All those interviewed for the

report testify to violence and atrocity and the impression is given that there is only one type of story to be told from one perspective. The failure to provide a more complete picture limits the possibility of understanding the past; as well there is the risk that relying on Stolen Generations narrative as the single representation of the past will overshadow other aspects of the past (Attwood, "Learning About the Truth" 211). Although the testimonies are used to support an historical claim, Noel Pearson argues that the report is not a rigorous or defensible history (*Up from the Mission* 383); at the time of the enquiry there had been little historical work done around the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. The report is less concerned with presenting historical evidence of the past as it is with providing a psychological tool to those suffering from the effects of the past and assumes a single traumatic past:

> For individuals, their removal as children and the abuse they experienced at the hands of the authorities or their delegates have permanently scarred their lives. The harm continues in later generations, affecting their children and grandchildren. In no sense has the inquiry been 'raking over the past for its own sake.' The truth is that the past is very much with us today in the continuing devastation of the lives of indigenous Australians. (Lavarch 3)

As well as a psychological tool for the victims of child removal the report has also been used as a psychological tool for white Australians who are suffering "perpetrator trauma" and who are seeking "to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices" (LaCapra, *Writing History* 79). *Bringing Them Home* and Stolen Generations narratives have provided a "much needed focal point for the nebulous sense of shame" felt by many settler Australians with regard to the part their ancestors may have played in Aboriginal dispossession (Attwood, "Learning About the Truth" 208). Roseanne Kennedy argues for the testimonies of the Stolen Generations to be considered as contributing to historiography, neither as evidence, nor as a means of evoking empathy but as a means of forcing the white Australian listener or reader to examine their role in racism ("The Affective Work").

The report has made an enormous impression on the consciousness of Australians resulting in sorry days, sorry books, plays, novels, memoirs, films, music and a call for a formal apology from the Federal government which was finally given in 2008. While this has been an important process for those people affected by the terrible practice of child removal, we need to be mindful that the narratives of the Stolen Generations risk being "shaped by their knowledge of what their audience expects to hear," confined to a single type of narrator, stolen children, and reduced to a particular narrative style, oral history or testimony (Attwood, "Age of Testimony" 88). The Stolen Generations narrative has become "central to Australian historical consciousness as it assumed the form of a myth" (ibid) in the same sense that there exists a myth of peaceful settlement in Australia dominated by white heroes. Each narrative is allowed to remain singular and unquestioned as a group attempts to control representations of the past.

The report changed the way Australians understand a particular part of the past and has also provided much of the rhetoric for Stolen Generations narratives. The title, *Bringing Them Home*, has become synonymous with stolen children, as though the report was instrumental in returning children to their families. The report also helped to politicise the issue, an essential aspect of bringing the practice and its consequences to the Australian people; however, the same politicising process has erected barriers around the debate and defined and limited the terms of reference for the debate. The authors of the report subscribed to the belief of the nineteen-nineties that as assimilationist policies faded and understanding of history and Aboriginal culture increased, interest in Aborigines would grow and attitudes would become more tolerant of difference (Broome, "Historians" 63). But as important as the document is to Aboriginal politics, it remains peripheral to mainstream politics and cultural memory; the Stolen Generations narrative is about and for Aboriginal people, except where it is used to point out white guilt.

### ***My Place* and *Rabbit-proof Fence***

Sally Morgan's *My Place* was first published in 1987, became an instant bestseller and is now considered an essential Australian text. Doris Pilkington's

*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* was published in 1996. Editions published since the release of the film adaptation of the novel use the same title as the film: *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and in this chapter I refer to the text by that title. The film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* appeared in 2001, most likely in response to *Bringing Them Home* and the "demand for personal stories" from filmmakers and filmgoers alike (Attwood, "Age of Testimony" 84). Both texts make reference to the removal of Aboriginal children from their families by white authorities, but both were initially approached as biographies rather than as testimonies. *My Place* was published at a time when there had been a shift in attitudes towards history brought about by the bicentennial of 1988, which coincided with a worldwide interest in memory and testimony and the stories of individuals, particularly those who belonged to marginalised or oppressed groups.

*My Place* is sometimes credited with bringing the history of the practice of Aboriginal child removal into public consciousness ten years before the 1997 publication of *Bringing Them Home*, that it uncovers "a history of oppression" and thus "challenges official history" (Kennedy, "The Narrator as Witness" 236). However, prior to the publication of *Bringing Them Home* and *My Place*, Aborigines were passing on stolen children narratives within their own communities as well as in the public domain, and in fact these narratives contributed to the eventual commissioning of the report (Attwood, "Learning About the Truth"). For example, Margaret Tucker's autobiography, *If Everyone Cared*, was first published in 1977, and was the earliest published description of the experience of child removal available to mainstream Australian readers in auto-biographical form (Read, *A Rape of the Soul* 49), but the practice had also been mentioned in earlier fiction.

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* is about the removal of Pilkington's mother and aunts, rather than her own, similar to Morgan's *My Place*. The testimonial stories of Gladys, Daisy and Arthur in *My Place,* and Molly, Gracie and Daisy in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* are also framed by a search for identity. *My Place* was initially read as Sally's search for identity, and other aspects of the narratives were "subordinated" to that search (Kennedy, "The Affective Work"). Mudrooroo Narogin, writing in 1990 believed that

Morgan did not see herself as an activist seeking to expose past practices, but as searching for her own identity and seeking equal opportunities for Aborigines (Narogin, *Writing from the Fringe*). Both texts raise the question of Aboriginal authenticity and how Aboriginality is defined, of what constitutes authentic Aboriginality and who decides. Initially *My Place* drew criticism from black and white reviewers, mainly with regard to the question of Aboriginal authenticity and the construction of Aboriginality (Attwood, "Portrait"; Huggins, "Always Was Always Will Be"; Michaels). The creation of Stolen Generations narratives and the re-reading of *My Place* and *Rabbit-Proof Fence* grew out of an emerging interest in testimony and trauma literature and any questions regarding Aboriginal identity and authenticity were pushed aside.

*My Place* has been read as part autobiography and part testimony, and occasionally as a novel. In an effort to position *My Place* as belonging to the Stolen Generations narrative the text has had to conform to certain preconceived ideas of what such a narrative should be. Patricia Crawford argues that the text "uses the literary device of a quest for personal identity" and at the same time it is a history, but one "freed from the constraints of academic history" (Gare and Crawford npn). This is a case of wanting fiction to stand in for history, but for it to be freed from the constraints of having to support the proposed history with evidence. However, when a text relates history, biography, memory and imagination with little of the rigour expected of historians to differentiate between them, there is a disturbance of the accepted idea that a narrative that purports to tell a history should attempt to remain faithful to the facts and to be able to provide evidence of those facts.

While it is not always possible to have a clear division between history and fiction, historians and literary critics are uncomfortable with the idea of there being too little to distinguish between the two (H. White, *Tropics of Discourse*). Historians are supposed to be able to provide proof in support of their narratives and proof for historians in the Western tradition is usually in the form of documentation that "functions as a trace left by the past" (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 3* 129). In Australia, such documentation is often either not available to Aborigines or when it is, it is written by and for white Australians in support of their own narrative,

although historians and fiction writers are increasingly demonstrating that a re-reading of available documentation from a new perspective combined with oral history can provide traces of the past that do include the stories of Aborigines. Crawford argues that Morgan "deliberately chose to avoid a social historical frame of reference and to write in a different historical tradition, that of Aboriginal storytelling" (Gare and Crawford). However, Morgan has used the traditional Western form of the novel, the quest genre, and biography, and for the most part Standard English and writes to her white audience.

Eric Michaels criticised Morgan for using the biography genre, questioning whether "the conventions of modern European autobiography are an appropriate way" for Aborigines to tell their life stories (173). Kennedy likewise argues against reading the text as biography, but for different reasons. She argues that it is a "collective text" comprising Morgan's autobiography and the "oral testimonies" of her mother, her grandmother and her great uncle ("The Narrator as Witness" 235). Stephen Muecke also regards the novel as a collective text, describing it as polyphonic ("Literature and Politics" 415) because it has the stories of Sally and three of her relatives. However, the narratives of Arthur, Gladys and Daisy are so heavily edited and framed by Sally's story that the text fails as a polyphonic text because their voices are filtered through Sally in the same way that Aboriginal voices were filtered through white characters in earlier novels, which allows Sonja Kurtzer to argue that *My Place* is "non-threatening" to the white perception of Aborigines and meets the requirements of white audiences rather than the political needs of Aborigines.

Doris Pilkington's introduction to *Rabbit-Proof Fence* makes the claim that the journey of Molly, Daisy and Gracie was an "historical event" (xi), but that in reconstructing the journey she needed to have "a vivid imagination" (xi) and to allow for the "dimmed memories and sketchy reflections" of her mother and aunt who provided her with much of her material (xii). Time also presented her with problems as Aboriginal concepts and ways of recording and referring to time do not

correspond to Western ways of speaking about time (xiii); the seasons and other natural cycles are used to measure time rather than clocks or numbers.

The narrative traces the arrival of the first European settlers to West Australia in June 1829; it is focalised through the Aboriginal characters, beginning in the style of a novel, narrated by an omniscient, external narrator. The narrative is focalised initially through Kundilla, who the reader understands to be an elder of his group from the description of him as a man with "grey hair and thick white beard" whose "dignified appearance … power and strength … commanded respect" (2). He and his group seem to live an idyllic existence in a "tranquil environment" that is about to be devastated and desolated as they were "driven off their land" by the whalers, sealers and settlers who had come to the place they called King George Sound (2).

The narrative then abruptly switches to the voice of the author who refers directly to historiography, specifically Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore* (12), then shifts back to the omniscient narrator once more focalised through an Aboriginal character Bidgup. The novel continues to shift between the two styles of narration, which causes some confusion as to what is history and what is imagination. The novel may be an example of Aboriginal writing that does not follow the conventions of Western biography or history by relying on chronological ordering, the clear separation of fact and imagination, or attempt to keep the styles of historiography and fiction separate, which would not be important if the text was considered fiction, but is problematic as history. As a novel the text is released from the insistence on there being "one truth" (Lachmann 39); however, as historiography the text is expected to offer verifiable evidence in support of its claims.

As a testimony *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is confined within understandings of the Stolen Generations that have been defined by *Bringing Them Home* and to meet the needs of the "sorry industry" that the report has given rise to. It must stand outside Western textual and cultural influences, which of course it does not, and it must refuse other interpretations or representations of the past that do not reinforce and cohere with the perspective of Stolen Generations narratives and particular notions of Aboriginality and Aboriginal storytelling. This leaves the novel

as a confused representation of the past that fails as testimony or history, but is refused as fiction.

Morgan also suggests that Arthur's story in *My Place* is history: "I'm part of history [says Arthur], that's how I look on it. Some people read history, don't they?" (213). Critical analysis of the text as historical has often excused gaps in the evidence to support the claims made by Morgan by positioning the text as drawing on Aboriginal storytelling methods, but others have criticised her for relying too heavily on Western literary modes. Morgan makes the claim in *My Place* that she transcribed the story that Arthur had recorded, that all she did was put "his story together" (172). Ostensibly she has simply transcribed the oral testimony of her relatives. However, the stories are clearly heavily edited and adjusted to white Western ways of reading biographies. Arthur's story is chronological and is remarkably detailed and politically informed for a man who needed to take his "papers to someone who's educated to get through" (213).

*My Place* is in contrast to Aboriginal storytelling methods that combine spirituality and the everyday, where time plays a minor role in the structure, and "narrators are only ever the partial holders of traditions and are required to defer to the others who hold the rest of the sequence if they are available" (Muecke, *Textual Spaces* 132). The Aboriginal autobiography is a representation of the stories of all those who underwent similar experiences and by reviving an oral story the Aboriginal biographer "makes a specific political move" within "documentary history" (Muecke, "Literature and Politics" 115). The binaries of black and white, Western and Aboriginal, oral and written underscore much of the critical response to Morgan's text. By positioning *My Place* as a biography and testimony Morgan has had to choose between identifying as Aboriginal or as a white Australian and the text must be read as either a Western literary form or as an Aboriginal form. Morgan has both an Aboriginal and European heritage, but in order to identify as an Aborigine it is somehow thought essential to deny her European heritage. In the same light it is thought that in order to break down the "past assumptions and …

prejudices" (Newman 73) of white readers the text has to be understood as true rather than a representation of the past.

Despite their reliance on memory, testimonies and biographies from members of the Stolen Generations are considered by many Australian historians and those interested in the study of trauma to be factual, a true representation of events and therefore not open to literary criticism or other analysis beyond using trauma as the key reference point. Kurtzer typifies the response when she suggests that autobiographical texts "are seen to represent the truth" (7). However, as stories, and therefore at least as partially imaginative representations, autobiographical texts are not necessarily any more truthful than other representations of the past and need to be as open to criticism of both content and form in the same way as other texts, including historiography. In *Telling the Truth About History* the authors argue that there is now a "pervasive lack of confidence in the ability to find the truth or even establish that there is such a thing as the truth," but they also believe that it is possible to find "truths about the past" that while not "absolute" are nevertheless worth searching for (Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 7). On the other hand, Gillian Cowlishaw argues that to "close down the past by telling the truth once and for all is a seriously alarming prospect" ("Arbiters of the Past" 212).

In whatever way we define truth or even whether we accept that there is such a thing, it is understood that the only way to find truth or an approximation of it is to continually search for it. Donald Davidson argues that in the search for truth the "best we can do is test, experiment, compare and keep an open mind" (1227), which would support an open system of talking about and representing the past, using multiple perspectives, voices and genres, and being critical of all representations of the past.

The term "truth" and what it means for history and testimony is problematic, which is a truism, but issues of authenticity and truth cannot be expunged from an analysis of testimony. Although those working with survivors of trauma do not judge testimonies by their accuracy to historical fact, but by their ability to "allow a reader to glimpse a trauma" (Bernard-Donals 1303) and to represent the "essence"

of an event (Felman and Laub), testimonies are still considered by many to be evidence, to act as witnessing. In law testimony is regarded as bearing witness to an event as evidence; however, testimonies are considered by some historians to be unreliable because they are "laden with pathos … and so dependent on individual memory" (Young 163). Andrew Gross and Michael Hoffman writing about the way that survivor testimony has come to be privileged over historiography also argue that testimonies are "questionable sources of historical evidence" but concede that they are nevertheless essential "vehicles of identification" (43). As interest in testimony has grown internationally as well as in Australia and as those who testify "have come to be regarded as the most authentic bearers of truth about the past" (Attwood, "Age of Testimony" 75), testimonies have increasingly been accepted without question.

**Testimony and biography**

In the last two decades of the twentieth century international interest in biographical writing, testimonies and trauma expanded initially with regard to Holocaust survivors but interest quickly spread to other groups who could claim a traumatic past (LaCapra, *Writing History* 86). Robert Eaglestone goes so far as to argue that: "Literary, historical, and philosophical writing since 1945 is involved in a new genre, testimony, with its own form, its own generic rules, its own presuppositions" and that texts written before 1945 can "perhaps be reread or reimagined or recriticized as works of testimony, and new similarities and differences can be analysed" (*The Holocaust and the Postmodern* 6). Testimonies are usually a response to trauma, which Freud defines as resulting from an outside excitation that provokes a disturbance that sets in motion a defensive measure ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle"). For the modern psychologist trauma can be experienced or witnessed, may involve "actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity" where the victim is not able to either resist or escape and to which the person may respond with "intense fear, helplessness, or horror" (Robinett 293). Michael Bernard-Donals writes on the relationship between memory and ethics and argues that it is possible to testify to

an event without actually being present and that the effect is similar; the testimony still shows something "horrible" and still reveals a "trace of the traumatic event" (1311).

Biography and autobiography are literary genres and do not seek justice in the legal sense as testimonies sometimes do, but instead they offer an alternative view of history with a personal insight that draws a link between the public and the private. Leigh Gilmore argues that the autobiography offers an alternative to testimony and is in a sense "inadmissible as testimony" (*The Limits of Autobiography* 146), but because autobiographies are considered to sit at the boundary between testimony and literature, they may "disrupt the narrative of history" (Bernard-Donals 1311) without standing in for history. The same narrative viewed as an autobiography rather than a testimony serves a different purpose and although both are generally expected to adhere as closely as possible to what actually happened, autobiographies are not usually read as evidence and testimonies are not normally considered a literary genre. Biographies or life stories as they are often called are considered by many to be "particularly useful in understanding the significance of trauma in people's lives" because they allow for "contradiction, a holistic richness, and complexity" (Rogers et al. 12). However, they are also considered to be "culturally specific" and require a "particularly sensitive" type of reading as well as analysis that is sensitive to the effects of trauma (14).

The psychoanalytic nature of testimony is given primacy by Dori Laub who argues that it is through testimony that the narrator as survivor "reclaims his position as a witness" and thus reclaims his life story (70). Along similar lines, Kennedy argues that testimonies have "played a vital role in educating Australians about the history and experiences of the Stolen Generations;" offering to white readers an "insight into the history, effects, and legacies of colonization in Australia," and that they are more than "simple representation of a past event" as they "intervene in a present social context" ("The Affective Work" 49). Laub argues that listening to trauma causes the listener to participate and become a "co-owner of the traumatic event" (Felman and Laub 57), which Shoshana Felman claims

allows the reader to identify with the traumatic experience on a physical level (108).

However, this may not always be desirable as readers may not empathise with the testifier, but instead feel guilt, shame and a sense of responsibility that they are uncertain how to deal with (Kennedy and Wilson 126). The psychoanalytic approach to Stolen Generations testimonies is further limited because of the vernacular nature of the testimonies. The risk of reproducing exclusions calls for a form of narrative therapy which questions power relationships and is a social process (ibid). Kennedy and Wilson emphasise allowing Aborigines to relate their experiences within testimonies in ways that they want, not dictated to by white Australian norms. However, Stolen Generations testimonies are produced within a framework developed and promoted by European understandings of trauma and psychoanalytical therapy, and uses the Western written genre of testimony in contrast to the local communicative process of oral testimonies.

Testimonies are often regarded as more than a text, variously considered to be political, ethical, social or educational documents and sometimes all four. Kimberly Nance claims that the testimony is "not only a text" but is also a social justice project "in which text is an instrument" (19) while Dominick LaCapra defines testimonies as serving to "bring theoretical concerns in sustained contact with the experience of people who lived through events and suffered often devastating losses" (*Writing History* xiv). As political documents they are an "*appeal* to a community" (Felman and Laub 204) to listen and to act. Nonetheless, the politicisation of literature through positioning particular stories as trauma literature may limit the scope of literature to memorialise those from the past, inhibiting our ability to regard the pain of others (Sontag) or to act to redress past wrongs. Kennedy and Wilson are also concerned with how a text addresses the reader and the "political, historical and social implications" of that address for Stolen Generations testimonies (127).

For testimonies to challenge official history and to contribute to cultural memory they rely on being read in a particular way by white Australians, that is white

readers are "potential collaborators … to the conspiracy of silence and denial that made removal … possible" (Kennedy and Wilson 129). Kennedy's and Wilson's approach does not necessitate white Australians taking responsibility for actual removals, but for allowing the circumstances for the removals to arise and persist, which nevertheless still positions contemporary white Australians as at least partially responsible for past events. This may force white Australians to question *their* position within the past rather than asking how Aboriginals fit within white accounts of the past (Kennedy and Wilson 129); however, if readers respond negatively or with uncertainty, the appeal to listen and to act is potentially lost.

A reader familiar with the Western literary tradition will usually approach a testimony in a different way to a work of fiction, even a work of fiction that is promoted as biography or based on a true story. However, testimony has moved from being a declaration by a witness as proof of an act or event, as the truth in a legal sense, to having a purpose more aligned with psychoanalysis for individuals and groups, and biographies have been re-read, re-imagined or re-criticised as testimonies in line with Eaglestone's argument as mentioned above. With regard to Stolen Generations narratives, any imaginative processes used in the telling of a biography or autobiography are sidelined by the assumption that the text is the truth or represents the past as it really happened.

Positioning Stolen Generations narratives as true and insisting they be read as testimony, may risk keeping these narratives out of cultural memory or even actively alienating some readers. Although *My Place* and *Rabbit-proof Fence* are described variously as biographies or testimonies, the authors draw on their own and others' experiences and memories as well as historical material in a similar manner to authors of historical fiction and the memorial novels evaluated in this thesis, and they employ imagination to fill in the gaps. So although they are generally described as testimonies and biographies they could just as well be described as fiction.

A further complication of biography and testimony is the issue of criticism. Applying literary criticism to either a biography or a testimony risks being seen as a

criticism of the person rather than the text, because autobiographical novels that make "strong claims to the truth make the work of the critic difficult" (Muecke, *Textual Spaces* 114). Eric Michaels also suggests that politically such texts are "difficult to approach" because the criticism is seen as personal rather than literary (166). In the current political climate it is not acceptable to criticise Aboriginal biographical writing or Stolen Generations narratives as they are considered testimony rather than literature and therefore beyond scrutiny by either black or white critics. Jackie Huggins has suggested that even "when Blacks publicly analyse and criticise each other it is perceived as infighting" and asks why "the area of intra-racial Aboriginal debate [became] such a sacred site" ("Always Was Always Will Be" 464). Nevertheless, "[c]riticism may be telling and entail the need for basic change, but it may also reinvigorate or validate an argument able to withstand it" (LaCapra, *Writing History* 61). Those texts that are able to withstand critical scrutiny may challenge official historical narratives and lead to a new understanding of the past (LaCapra, *History in Transit* 2). However, testimonies are read as though the act of narrating is proof in itself and along with this notion came the conviction that "Aborigines do not forget, do not lie, do not selectively interpret their memories, and so their stories are true" (Michaels 167).

With the rise of new ways of writing about the past that incorporate Aboriginal writing styles and the voices of Aborigines into Western forms using English, maybe we also need a new way to critically analyse such texts that is also an amalgamation of Western and Aboriginal styles. Kennedy uses what she describes as a dialogic approach to Stolen Generations narratives whereby testimonies are studied for the way they "address audiences" and the ways that listeners respond because she believes this approach "draws out the listener's ethical obligation to respond" ("The Affective Work" 50). However, this approach still insists on Stolen Generations narratives as testimonies.

**Trauma**

Parallel with the shift to positioning particular texts as Stolen Generations literature or testimonies was the move to using trauma as the primary concept for

understanding particular narratives. Aboriginal writing began to be dominated by the stories of the victims of the Stolen Generations following the publication of *Bringing Them Home* and a number of theorists and scholars began to read the stories of Aborigines who were removed from their families as testimonies, and to critically evaluate these texts within trauma studies. Trauma has become the principal idea for understanding history, culture and politics (Traverso and Broderick) and is not limited to understanding and comprehending trauma in historiography or testimony, but is also extended to analysing fictional responses to traumatic events.

Felicity Collins and Therese Davis in their book *Australian Cinema after Mabo* argue that it is the role of the critic to use trauma theory to identify the signs of trauma in a text. For them the concept of trauma "is crucial" to understanding the "politics of victimhood and blame" (146). This can be problematic as Trauma Studies is less concerned with the study of literature and art than it is with the study of politics and society, or specific groups within society and their relationship to politics and the past, as separate from one another rather than as a syncretic whole. This not only paves the way for texts to be understood in terms of politics and ideology rather than literary merit, but also ensures the continuation of the politics of victimhood and blame.

The rise of trauma literature and trauma studies has not only created an environment conducive to the production of testimonies, in many ways it has also limited the usefulness of this literature by confining it within the boundaries of a theory that relies on victimhood and is closely connected to the Holocaust. Although trauma theory had its beginnings in Holocaust representation Geoffrey Hartman believes that the theory is still able to throw "a light on figurative or poetic language and perhaps symbolic process in general, as something other than an enhanced imaging or vicarious repetition of a prior (non) experience" ("On Traumatic Knowledge" 540). As trauma became "the central category in addressing the larger memory discourse" there was a parallel denial of human agency as all memory was defined in terms of the personal and traumatic, locking people into perpetual repetition (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 8). This is not to say that the focus on

trauma is not legitimate, particularly with regard to those who have been the victims of successive government policies designed “to fragment Aboriginal families” through the forced removal of children (Haebich, *Broken Circles* 13), but “the function of public memory discourses” is to “allow individuals to break out of traumatic repetitions” and “approaching history as trauma” fails to help us understand the “political layers of memory discourse" (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 9).

Using trauma as the “explanatory apparatus through which to apprehend and analyse the past” (Radstone and Hodgkin 6) may confine Stolen Generations narratives to a narrow means of responding to the past that requires a “a fidelity to trauma and its victims” that may create a “bond with the dead” which may in fact prevent any “narrative closure” (LaCapra, *Writing History* 22-23). As Huyssen argues when trauma is made “the central category in addressing the larger memory discourse” it marks our memory “too inclusively in terms of pain, suffering, and loss” (*Present Pasts* 8). On the other hand trauma theory may have given fiction writers new ways of understanding trauma that changes the focus from what is remembered to how and why survivors remember, that combines the postmodern and the postcolonial and brings fiction closer to politics, ethics and aesthetics (Whitehead), to help connect with the real world in ways that have “ethical [and] cultural … implications” (Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge" 544).

Stef Craps and Gert Buelens argue that the textualism of the nineteen-seventies and early nineteen-eighties did not engage with real world issues such as history, politics and ethics and that trauma theory is “textualism” that has been reinvented in “an ethical guise” (2). However, they also argue that trauma studies is “almost exclusively concerned with traumatic experiences of white Westerners and solely employ[s] critical methodologies emanating from a Euro-American context and is not useful for understanding the experiences of marginalised and non-European people” (ibid). A theory and a system of study that is so closely aligned to politics and ideology have the potential to divide responses to the past rather than unite.

**The Holocaust**

A further problem associated with trauma studies and trauma theory is the link between notions of trauma and the Holocaust, which places limitations on the representation of violence and trauma in terms of language, genre and voice and often results in direct comparisons between the literature under study and Holocaust literature or with the Holocaust directly. For example, Paula Hamilton believes that the Holocaust has been useful for her analysis of Stolen Generations narratives ("Sale of the Century?"). And Heidi Grunebaum and Yazir Henri use Holocaust survivor testimony as a "methodological resource" for "thinking through the multiplicity of contesting memory narratives" emerging from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (103). Historians, victims and others use the language of the Holocaust or make reference to it when speaking of any collective violence. Reference to the Holocaust is explicit in *Bringing Them Home*, recommending that an oral history archive be established and that it should be modelled on the Shoah Foundation's archive; reference is made to "our" Holocaust, and the word genocide is used to describe the removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

The term Stolen Generations also echoes the Holocaust; it is usually written with capital letters and has become a shorthand way of referring to a collective tragedy, which may be useful as a political tool, but reduces complex and multiple experiences to a single event. Using the Holocaust as a yardstick requires uniformity of experience which is not the case for Stolen Generations experiences and it also requires a uniform response to the violence by victims; although using the Holocaust analogy draws attention to atrocity it can also be a distraction and obscure other arguments (Power).

Although James Young argues that it is inevitable that other violent events will be compared with the Holocaust, many argue that the Holocaust is unique and therefore cannot be used as a point of comparison and that such comparisons result in a hierarchy of suffering, which is not only offensive but also unproductive (Moses, "Conceptual Blockages"). Some see a relationship between the Holocaust,

colonialism and genocide and historians have produced a large body of work comparing the details of genocides with each other and the Holocaust. While the concept of trauma may be a useful tool for analysing Holocaust literature, and may provide the means to analyse and measure other violent events, not all large-scale violence and the resulting trauma can be defined in the same terms. Violent events from Australia's past may share some aspects with the Holocaust, although this is highly contested, but both frontier violence and that of the Stolen Generations are located within different time frames and circumstances and would need to be treated separately.

An event such as the Stolen Generations, if indeed it can be described as an "event," does not fit easily into trauma studies as it was not sudden and unexpected trauma but treatment that Maria P. P. Root describes as "insidious trauma" (qtd. in L. Brown 128). The problematic nature of the representation of the Holocaust underscores trauma studies, encompassing the idea of the Holocaust as being unrepresentable in language; that only the victims have the right to tell their stories, and the only ethical representation of the Holocaust is through literal language and figural representations must be condemned (Lang, *Post-Holocaust*). Kennedy and Bennett question the value of trauma studies as a means to understand the Stolen Generations given that the Holocaust is "paradigmatic within trauma studies" (4). They suggest that there be an engagement between postcolonial studies and trauma studies as a way of moving beyond the paradigm of the Holocaust and to take into account the global context within which Australian history sits.

**Genocide**

Coincidental with the problematic nature of using trauma as a key concept and the inevitable comparison with the Holocaust is the use of the term genocide in relation to Australia's past. Berel Lang argues that the word genocide has become a metaphor for atrocities in general ("The Evil in Genocide"); however, Inga Clendinnen tends to connect the word genocide with the Holocaust and argues that genocide must entail deliberate murder, which she argues the removal of children

from their families did not (“First Contact”). The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody makes reference to genocide and in *Bringing Them Home* the word genocide is used to describe the policy of “the forcible removal of children from Indigenous Australians to other groups for the purpose of raising them separately from and ignorant of their culture and people” (239). However, the desire for a singular narrative in the report resulted in the failure to “distinguish clearly between removals in the age of eugenics, biological absorption and racial engineering, and removals in the age of social and cultural assimilation” which also weakened the argument for genocide (Manne, "In Denial" 30).

The question of genocide in Australian is usually split between two periods: the first beginning in 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleet which included shooting, poisoning, displacement, the introduction of disease, malnutrition and the effects of alcohol (Tatz, *Genocide in Australia*); and the second is the forced removal of part-Aboriginal children from their families by the states between approximately 1910 and 1970 (Lavarch). Colin Tatz adds two further instances: the silence of the colonial authorities with regard to the killing of Aborigines, and the failure of Australia to protect Aborigines from serious bodily or mental harm (*Genocide in Australia)*. The two events, frontier violence and the Stolen Generations, are generally seen as unrelated to one another and it is a challenge to historians, politicians and the public to recognise the relationship between the two events (Barta, "Decent Disposal"). If the relationship between the two sites of violence is recognised the case for genocide becomes extremely complicated with a multiplicity of instances that support both sides of the argument.

Dirk Moses argues that the colonisation of Australia “was objectively and inherently ethnocidal … and potentially genocidal” (“An Antipodean Genocide?” 92), but because the term genocide has become “synonymous with the Holocaust” and any possible genocide is compared with the Holocaust, using the term has “helped to block Australian recognition of genocide closer to home” (Barta, "Decent Disposal" 302). Clendinnen argues that the use of the word genocide in *Bringing Them Home* “was a political disaster” because nothing was gained by its use and a “great deal” was lost (“First Contact” npn). When *Bringing Them Home* was first

published the debate around the use of the word genocide and its relevance or otherwise to the Australian situation played out in newspapers and on radio as well as among historians and in part drew attention away from the inhumane treatment of Aborigines described in the report. In Attwood's opinion the term genocide "is neither a necessary nor a useful concept for the task of understanding the nature of the white colonisation" in Australia (*Telling the Truth* 92).

It has long been held that Tasmania is the site of the only true genocide; however, some historians argue that due to the ongoing survival of Tasmanian Aborigines that this is a myth (Ryan). Henry Reynolds is ambivalent about the use of the term genocide in connection with early settlement, arguing that there is no evidence of the colonial government's intention to cause the Tasmanian Aborigines' extinction, seeing a difference between warfare and killing to destroy. He argues that there were "genocidal moments" in Australia rather than an overall policy of genocide (*An Indelible Stain?*). Given the complete inability of coming to any agreement over the question of genocide in Australia and the emotional response to the use of the word, as well as the references that are inevitably made to the Holocaust, the genocide debate seems unlikely to add to any understanding of Australia's past.

**Victimhood**

A further argument against using the Holocaust as a yardstick for other atrocities and in particular the Stolen Generations is that the Holocaust has become associated with victim-envy and a culture of victimhood in which "the victim's anguish comes to be seen as a valuable possession" (Maier, *The Unmasterable Past* 137). In such an environment collective memories "tend to focus not on the long history of an ethnic people but on their most painful incidents of victimization" (144). Many argue that the "victim trope" has became a "central feature of our time" (Bartov, "Defining Enemies" 811) and a mark of distinction in our age of identity politics (Peter Novick qtd. in Gross and Hoffman). However, others argue that we are not becoming a "civilization where everybody sees oneself as a victim,"

although there is such a thing as “memory envy” whereby one adopts the traumatic experiences of another (Hartman and Ballengee).

When “memories recall acts of violence against individuals or entire groups … they are emblems of a victimized identity” (Antze and Lambek vii), suggesting that it is inevitable to focus on victimisation when recalling violent acts; however, victimhood removes both responsibility and agency. Therefore, when recalling the violence of contact in Australia it is essential that we look for other ways to recall and represent violent acts that do not focus on Aboriginal victimhood. The concept of trauma with its links to the Holocaust and the contention surrounding the use of the term genocide together with the tendency to foreground victimhood, make trauma literature a limiting means to represent violent acts and make trauma a limiting way to study narratives that represent violent aspects of Australia’s past, both of which may ultimately limit understanding.

The definition of the Stolen Generations, the number of children and families who were subjected to the policies of removal as well as the underlying political, ideological and social reasons for the policies have all been hotly and emotionally debated in Australia. Despite this debate, or indeed because of it, the idea of the Stolen Generations has gained political and emotional support from a section of the community that Attwood describes as the “sorry people” who “actively identified themselves” with the victims of separation which led to a refusal to identify with the perpetrators, bystanders and collaborators (“Age of Testimony” 88). The result of this refusal is that the perpetrators, bystanders and collaborators are locked out of the narrative and there have been very few attempts to understand the reasoning behind the separations; therefore, there could be no possibility of settler Australians’ working through this past (93-4). The texts can only be read in one way and the wider history of the Stolen Generations as it relates to Australian history is pushed to the margins, as are stories of successful Aborigines and those who were not removed from their families.

The concepts of trauma and victimhood also define how Aborigines will be perceived in the future, as they form part of the struggle to control the

representations of Aborigines. Aborigines continue to be defined as the victims of either colonisation or the policies relating to the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. While Stolen Generations texts attempt to challenge official history and to insert alternative ways of telling stories about the past, using the term Stolen Generations, taking *Bringing Them Home* as the official record of the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families, and making testimonies and life stories the definitive mode for telling stories about that practice and by using trauma as the primary critical approach to the texts is to create a monologic, homogeneous official narrative.

Rather than describing a collectively shared experience, Stolen Generations texts in the form of testimonies and trauma literature are set apart from the common experience, belonging exclusively to the victims or the victim's group and even more exclusively to the Stolen Generations, a term that is as arbitrary and invented as the term Aborigines. Both Aboriginal and mainstream Australians are struggling to control representations of the Stolen Generations in ways that corresponded to their function in the present. One to support the sorry industry as a focal point for the vague sense of shame that mainstream Australians feel towards the past, and the other in support of the politics of recognition and compensation. Both risk locking Aborigines into victimhood.

**Intertextuality**

Stolen Generations narratives are a form of transposing intertextuality as a result of their alignment with *Bringing Them Home* and their attempt to usurp and eradicate all trace of precursor texts. That is Stolen Generations narratives attempt to re-write history, which is necessary and inevitable in light of the previous silencing of this history; however, they also seek to eradicate and replace precursor texts, which is less desirable. Precursor texts remain a part of the record of Australia's past, and they need to be continually re-read and re-presented, but never eradicated or replaced. The report has been an important document in Australian Aboriginal politics contributing to the process of struggling against precursor texts that belong to the official narrative in an attempt to take control of

representations of the past. However, Stolen Generations texts also employ transposing intertextuality by trying to stand outside of all other textual and cultural influences, to refuse all history, all other interpretations or representations of the past except for those that reinforce and cohere with a particular point of view.

Possible intertexts for Stolen Generations narratives have been narrowed to a single text, *Bringing Them Home*; the only way that the novels can be understood is by reading them against the report and as belonging to the Stolen Generations narrative, which is limiting in terms of both genre and voice, excludes wider representations of the past, and resists input by those who are not members of the Stolen Generations or part of the Stolen Generations industry. Any criticism of texts considered Stolen Generations testimonies is seen as politically motivated. By isolating and protecting these texts, instead of opening up meaning and understanding, meaning is restricted to a prescribed narrative and understanding is limited.

Stolen Generations texts seek to expose the gaps in and to take back control of the official historical narrative, to break the authority of one representation over another; however, Stolen Generations texts also risk becoming authoritarian in their own right. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith claim that *Bringing Them Home* "bestowed legitimacy and official recognition to the stories" of the, mainly women, who wrote their life stories following the report's publication (104-5). To suggest that there must be an official position on the past before stories about the past can be considered legitimate is problematic and goes against the ongoing process of opening up the official narrative to include stories of those who have previously been locked out of it. Forming such strict boundaries around particular texts limits their intertextuality to only those texts that relate to the Stolen Generations narrative, excises them from wider historical and cultural narratives, enshrining *Bringing Them Home* as the definitive and final word on the Stolen Generations.

The publication of *Bringing Them Home* did necessitate a re-reading of texts such as *My Place* and *Rabbit-Proof Fence* as well as historiographical representations

relating to the Stolen Generations in light of new understandings of the past, but it does not require a repositioning of the texts from fiction or biography to testimony or confining them within the Stolen Generations genre. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith argue that cultural memory may be "understood at the juncture where the individual and the social come together" and that what is important is that the individual's story is heard and that it does not matter how their stories are told, that being heard is what "serves as a challenge and a counter memory to official hegemonic history" (7). However, what is heard is influenced by the form of the story; how a story is told is crucial to the reception and understanding of the text, the history and the people.

**Conclusion**

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *My Place* share the same problematic of whether they are novels, biographies or testimonies. To accept that they are the truth is to accept that there is a particular truth to be told rather than multiple perspectives on the past and to ignore the literary imagination that is evident in both texts, as well as to ignore the obvious editing of the stories of Morgan's and Pilkington's relatives. The claim that *My Place* and *Rabbit-Proof Fence* are testimonies and that they and *Bringing Them Home* contain a singular truth about the history of the Stolen Generations depends upon the texts remaining unchanged and protected from criticism, kept isolated from anything external that does not support the official Stolen Generations narrative. The texts remain tied to a specific cultural sphere (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 31), withdrawn from the literary pool and sacralised. *My Place* in particular has become an "an exclusively 'holy' text about Aboriginal life in Australia" (Huggins, "Always Was Always Will Be" 460).

Describing a text as a testimony or as trauma literature is to participate in a hierarchy of styles, because testimonies are considered to have more worth than fiction, because they can make more claims to the truth, are less likely to be questioned with regard to the veracity of those claims and they take a political stance in line with the closed system of the Stolen Generations. A particular problem with trauma studies and the narrative therapy approach to reading

testimonies is that both are restricted to particular types of reading and to those who already have an interest in Stolen Generations narratives. In addition, the victim is central to testimonies and, as Bain Attwood argues there is a risk that anything that does not "fit with the image of unhappy victims" ("Learning About the Truth" 208) may be omitted from Stolen Generations narratives. The genre does not make known the history of removal in all its complexity from multiple perspectives, or help to promote understanding within the wider community of readers.

*Bringing Them Home* has become official history and the testimonies of the victims of Aboriginal child removal are similar to other forms of official literature that respect boundaries, support a particular cultural heritage – in the case of the Stolen Generations this is a heritage of trauma and victimhood – and support a group's single identity, where a single story is repeated in support of the political, ideological and power structures of a group and heroes remain unchallenged. Rather than attempt a reconciliation of belief systems, there is an attempt to foreground a single system that all Australians must subscribe to, making no allowance for alternate viewpoints or debate on any aspect of the narrative. Readers are presented with a limited way of conceptualising the past which seeks to create a singular official history and to fix meaning, restricting and regulating dialogic interaction.

In contrast, even though memorial novels are still a European genre – which testimony and biographies also remain – the writer has within the novel form much greater freedom of voice, language and style. While this may preclude the many stories of individuals who have suffered trauma as a result of racist and violent policies, in reality we do not need to hear each individual's story, but instead to hear or read stories or accounts that are representative of individual stories across as broad a range of experiences as possible and to promote dialogic interaction. I argue that like other aspects of the past there should be no boundaries in terms of genre and voice as to how these stories can be told and instead of accepting as self evident that testimonies are the truth, that they represent the past as it really was,

it is important that testimonies, as well as biographies, are open to analysis and scrutiny in the same way as other representations of the past.

A single voice for Aborigines was an essential element in the struggle for recognition of Aboriginal political and human rights; however, to retain a single voice is to maintain an attitude in contradiction to the dual ideas of the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and the need for stories about the past from multiple voices and perspectives that challenge official culture. Both the mainstream historical narrative and Stolen Generations narratives, along with other stories of Aborigines, must move towards an inclusive, collectively shared narrative – even if we were to limit our view to Aborigines as victims and settler Australians as bystanders and perpetrators, we still share the same past. Literature can be seen as a transformation of previous meaning, rather than "the confirmation or repetition of prefabricated meaning" that trauma literature and testimony are (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 41). Literature's aims include the desire "to attain an even greater expressive capacity through proliferation, supplementation, and deviation" (41), rather than to restrict narratives to a single voice or perspective, particularly when that restriction has the potential to further particular binaries and stereotypes.

# 4. Naming and Memory Places:
# *Remembering Babylon*

Mikhail Bakhtin argues that language is dialogic in nature and the struggle among "socio-linguistic points of view" is played out in language ("Discourse in the Novel" 273). He also argues that the novel is dialogic in nature, a "social phenomenon" that acts as a rejoinder in an ongoing dialogue to challenge the official language or dominant voices within a community, and what plays out in the novel is the struggle for dominance of particular linguistic, social and cultural points of view (ibid). The dominant culture centralises meaning in an official language and the place of literature is to break down meaning in language that has become set, splitting open the language to allow for an infinite dialogue (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 111). However, literature also helps to establish and reinforce cultural memory, it is produced within an "already uttered" and "already known" environment and the novel's discourse will tend towards the "common opinion" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 288). Therefore literature will incline towards either reinforcing the established cultural position or towards challenging it.

In *Remembering Babylon* David Malouf does not take for granted an official position, or seek to "provide authorial guarantees for a single truth" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 118). Instead the novel seeks to expose and undermine the official narrative of early Australian history, to reveal the work that language does to initially create and define a community and then to continue to bind members of the community together. The narrative also exposes how the process of defining and binding has a tendency to exclude those outside the dominant language group. Bakhtin argues that a "particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for social significance" ("Discourse in the Novel" 334). Therefore, even though Malouf challenges the official historical narrative and "attempts to distance himself from colonial ways of interpreting the world … he cannot avoid reinscribing them to some extent" (Neilsen 201) because of the position from which he writes. Nevertheless, Malouf's novel demonstrates the

"paradox that language can be both powerful and limiting" (Neilsen 207). *Remembering Babylon* does not posit a centralised, fixed truth about the past or support the notion of a dominant language; rather it pays attention to the danger of accepting such a centralised, fixed view of language and warns of the need to be vigilant in our use of language if we are to avoid marginalising or silencing the other.

*Remembering Babylon* was first published in 1993 and although it won a number of Australian and international awards, including being short-listed for the Miles Franklin Award and the Man Booker Prize, early reviews of the novel were polarised. Germaine Greer's review describes the novel as a "supremacist fantasy" and the protagonist Gemmy as a "fake black" ("Objectionable Whitewash"), while Peter Pierce argues that the novel is a revisionist account "of the early settlement of Australia and European experiences of exile" ("Provisional Maps" 183). Justin D'Ath claims in his review that the reader is only given "limited access" through the white Gemmy to the world of the Aborigines (39). Suvendrini Perera also argues that the novel is contextualised as historical fiction of the Australian settler type and that Malouf misappropriates the indigenous body, making Gemmy a "forerunner" of a hybrid Australian identity consistent with the current understanding of "theoretical formulations [of] hybridity" that was more concerned with the identities of settler and migrant populations than indigenous peoples (19). Perera argues that this hybridity is an "easy answer" to the problem of identity for settler nations because it "erases the complexities of the process [of colonisation] for its indigenous subjects" (ibid). Each of these reviews is critical of Malouf for either misrepresenting or failing to represent Aborigines in the novel.

However, other commentators argue that the novel is about the difficulties of representing Aborigines in language. Lee Spinks argues that the novel does not resolve the problem of speaking for the other, although the narrative does enact both the "recognisable and unfamiliar at the same time" which makes it a "meditation upon colonial discourse" (170-71), while Marc Delrez and Paulette Michel-Michot suggest that the novel declares its own "cultural *limits*" and the limits of its ability to represent Aborigines (161). Don Randall contends that the

novel represents the difficulties associated with cultural and racial difference and Gemmy represents the struggle to "register conflict and contradiction" (152). Veronica Brady argues that the novel supports the High Court in the Mabo case when the court ruled that the doctrine of *terra nullius* "has no standing," and reflects the anxiety among Australians that the ruling provoked. She believes that the novel moves beyond the social, political and economic to offer "new possibilities within an apparently monolithic culture" (94). Neilsen's view is that *Remembering Babylon* reveals "an awareness that politics and history frame and define us inescapably through language" (201) and that "the primacy of language as both a constructive and restrictive agent" is evident in the novel (200).

Postcolonial theorists argue that "[o]ne of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language" (Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and Tiffin 7), and it is the use of language to oppress and control that Malouf explores in *Remembering Babylon*. Regardless of whether the novel was received as a positive or a negative contribution to Australian literature, reviewers are consistent in their description of the novel as being about the power and use of language. In this chapter I evaluate *Remembering Babylon* as an early memorial novel that is less concerned with giving voice to Aboriginal characters than with exposing the ways that language and naming in English denied Aborigines a place in the new settlement and allowed the myth of *terra nullius* to originate and persist. *Remembering Babylon* is self consciously aware of language as it demonstrates how language shapes our perception of reality and therefore cultural production and how language is inextricably linked to cultural memory participation.

Language is "ideologically saturated," neither apolitical nor neutral (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 271) and as *Remembering Babylon* was first published at a significant juncture in Aboriginal politics it could not avoid political judgement. 1993 was the Year for Indigenous Peoples and one year after the High Court handed down its ruling in the Mabo case, declaring that the Mer Islands did not belong to the Crown and that the Meriam people were entitled to the land (High Court of Australia); thus replacing the doctrine of *terra nullius* with the legal doctrine of

native title. *Terra nullius* began as a legal concept in Australia, but over time, along with land and landscape, the concept has acquired "a fictive dimension" that enables physical spaces to become memory spaces (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 19).

The reconciliation debate was also widespread at the time of the novel's publication; the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation had been formed in 1991. The initial aims of the Council were to improve employment and education prospects for Aborigines, reduce discrimination against Aborigines, and improve relations between Aborigines and mainstream Australians. Increased public awareness of the problems facing Aborigines was essential to achieve these aims and for achieving reconciliation in general. *Remembering Babylon* with its concern for language and land reflected the political and social importance of land rights and land ownership for its contemporary readers as it opens up and lays out for the reader the ways in which language was used by the early settlers to shape and control the community and the landscape.

The novel has an omniscient external narrator and is focalised through several characters, but the primary focus is through Gemmy, Lachlan Beattie and Janet McIvor. The story begins with the appearance of Gemmy, a "mangy, half-starved" man from the bush beyond the boundary of a settlement on the edges of colonial Queensland into the make-believe game of Lachlan, Janet and Meg, "three barefooted farm children" (*Remembering Babylon* 1). Sixteen years earlier Gemmy had fallen ill on board ship and had been put ashore to die; however, he was rescued by a group of Aborigines who found him dying on the beach and with whom he lived for the intervening years before wandering into the settlement. Although the children initially think he is a black given he has come from outside the settlement, as soon as he speaks a few words of English he is immediately re-positioned as a white man, although "there was no way you could have known it from his look" (3).

Despite being an outsider to the settlement, Gemmy's ability to speak English initially makes him a member of the group; he is defined by his language. To begin

with Gemmy is taken in by the McIvor family and through his contact with the community he gradually recalls more of his original language and the skills he had learned on board ship; he slowly reverts to being a white man. There is a great deal of curiosity about Gemmy and Mr Frazer the minister, and George Abbot the school teacher, elicit a brief biography from him, which Abbot transcribes. Although Gemmy appears to be a white man and he can speak English, his links with the Aborigines cause fear and distrust among the settlers and his presence causes tension within the settlement. After Gemmy is visited by a group of Aborigines the fear and distrust increase among the settlers and there follows a number of disturbing incidents that culminate in the beating and near drowning of Gemmy. Jock at first resists the pressure to send Gemmy away, but he finally relents and sends him to live with Mrs Hutchinson, who is an outsider to the settlement both physically and socially.

Gemmy is increasingly unhappy and finally disappears from the settlement and the narrative after retrieving what he understands to be the written record of his life that he believes is responsible for sapping his strength. There is a suggestion that he returns to live with a group of Aborigines and was subsequently killed as part of a "dispersal" or massacre (178), but there is nothing on record to support the suggestion. The temporal setting for most of the narrative is the middle of the nineteenth century; however, the last chapter acts as an epilogue, set sometime during the First World War, almost fifty years after Gemmy first appeared out of the bush. By the final chapter all the other characters have disappeared from the narrative except Lachlan and Janet who recall the moment when Gemmy first appeared and the continued effect he has had on their lives.

*Remembering Babylon* looks back on a period in Australia's past in order to understand how we have come to be who we are today and in doing so joins the accumulated texts about modern Australia's formation which "participate, repeat, and constitute acts of memory" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 17). The novel is not about the representation of Aborigines, but about the way that the settlers used language to define each group, settler and Aborigine, how this helped to

shape the early relationship between the groups, which continues to affect the contemporary relationship. The novel also gives some insights into the strategies adopted by early settlers through language and naming in an effort to adapt to their new home and to create a familiar world within an alien and hostile landscape.

The novel does not provide the reader with new information; instead it is an observation of the way that cultural memory is produced through language with the aim of provoking within the reader an awareness of the social and political uses of language. Nor does it seek to redress the silencing and marginalisation of Aborigines that defines much of Australia's early history, because it seeks to elucidate how from the beginning of settlement Aborigines were excluded from the emerging nation through language and silence. We can only become interested in the other when we engage in dialogue, which is absent between settlers and Aborigines in the novel, thus underscoring the effectiveness of speaking the other out of the community and of naming the other out of the landscape. *Remembering Babylon* is concerned with language and the way that it defines the settler group and the emerging Australian culture that marginalises Aborigines "since the world as we know it is in the last resort the words through which we imagine and name it" (Malouf, "The Only Speaker of His Tongue" 385).

The way the world is understood is associated with how we recover its elements in language, which Lachmann separates into two parts: the first is knowledge, which is contained in "systems," and the second part comprises representations of the past which are contained in "models" (*Memory and Literature* 7). Systems are associated with spatial representations such as buildings and landscape, and models are built using the imaginative processes of interpretation and conceptualisation. In Australia a system of knowledge is contained in the landscape; land for Australians has become what Pierre Nora describes as *lieux de mémoire* which is "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (*Realms of Memory* xvii).

Australian cultural memory is embedded in the landscape, which is a symbol of memory that has lost its "concrete reference" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 21) to become a palimpsest that bears the imprint of the past. Grenville also recognises Australian land as a palimpsest for history in *The Secret River* with the rock carving of a fish that remains bright even though it is covered by Thornhill's house (*The Secret River* 316). Although the struggle for land rights is on the one hand for the right of Aborigines to own or occupy traditional land, the land rights struggle is also a political struggle in which land is a symbolic goal as much as it is a physical goal. Land in Australia is "the supreme memory place" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 20) that bears the scars of history and the stories of both ancient and modern Australia. The "literary techniques of reading historically, intertextually, constructively, and deconstructively at the same time" can be merged with our understanding of the landscape that has shaped our collective imagination (Huyssen, *Present Pasts* 7). The traditional stories of Australian land refer to the bush or the desert, but increasingly the cities are also becoming memory places.

The importance of land can be physical in terms of Aboriginal land rights, or in terms of ownership as understood within a European legal sense, or within a cultural understanding of land and landscape in which land becomes equated with memory space. Aborigines also have a spiritual and cultural connection to the land or country, land is the basic concept of The Dreaming, and land is also seen by many as the basis for Aboriginal economic survival (Tripcony). According to Elizabeth Mackinlay the process of "naming, knowing and remembering country" affirms the Aborigines' "relationships to country" (86). And Kim Scott talks of how "the land ignited their [his people's] memories, and how language and culture and place went together" (Kayang & Me 248).

Settler Australians also developed a connection to the land that continues into the present; the link between people and the land is important to all Australians. Initially the land was alien to the British settlers, but through a process of naming and taming the land settler Australians were able to draw boundaries and to make the unfamiliar familiar, and to create memory places or *lieu de mémoire* that are

still relevant to contemporary mainstream Australians. In *Remembering Babylon* the settlers ring bark trees and erect fences, build houses and sheds and populate the land with foreign animals, in contrast to the Aborigines who move lightly across the land. Integral to this process of familiarisation by the settlers was naming. In the novel, the town had what could be described as a street, but it was not named, therefore was not yet officially a street. The "nearest named place" was Bowen (5) and as a named place it was connected to the Crown's representative who had named it and therefore it belonged to the Crown. Through the process of naming ownership of the land was transferred from the Aborigines to the British. The changes to the landscape brought about by settler Australians also sought to "deny the truth of its own history" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 20) by overwriting the land with new names and altering the landscape in an attempt to make it their own as though the Aborigines had never occupied the land.

Defining the land with English names also had the effect of denying Aborigines a place in that land because it no longer belonged to them on the terms understood by the settlers. Australia was considered *terra nullius* by the British because they did not recognise Aboriginal understandings of land ownership or use and so the land appeared to them to be unnamed and unassigned. In the novel, Sir George, the Governor of Brisbane, had been commissioned to "call into existence" a new state in a place that was "unpeopled," and having brought the new state into existence through the "names he [Sir George] has bestowed on a nameless part of the empire" (153), history may then occur. The process of domesticating the land was not only physical, but also included giving names to features and places in a familiar language. It is "an act of language that brought a living space into being and rendered it habitable, a place that could be communicated, a place where communication could occur" (Carter 144), and was the beginning of the historical narrative of the new settlement.

Along with domesticating the land, to protect their civilisation it was necessary for settler groups to either destroy or domesticate the "uncivilised" Aborigines whose lands they appropriated. The settlers in *Remembering Babylon* are divided into those who believe that the "only way of dealing with blacks" is to round them

up and shoot them, and those who want to draw them in "as labourers, or house-servants" as part of their dream of a future styled on the model of Southern American slavery (56). Aborigines were often re-named with generic or childish names that indicated their exclusion from the community or their place as servants or inferior beings. To manage their fear of the unknown landscape and the natives who "were forever encroaching on boundaries," "every vestige of the native" must be removed to make the country "just a bit like home" (9). This is achieved by overwriting the land with familiar names in conjunction with the physical removal or linguistic neutralisation of the Aborigines.

Boori Pryor writes in his autobiography *Maybe Tomorrow* that "[s]ome people were given a different name every time they were moved. This confused their identity" (56-7). The term Aborigines is also "both an invention and a product of European colonisation," which homogenised a diverse group of peoples and facilitated the process of dispossession (Reece, "Inventing Aborigines" 14). That which is unnamed also remains unnoticed, as when Gemmy and Mr Frazer go "*botanising"* and Gemmy chooses only to "cast the light … in patches … leaving the rest undisclosed" (61) and therefore unseen by Mr Frazer. And perhaps it is better not to name some things; the killing of the geese in the novel was made all the more terrible by the fact that they had names.

Mr Frazer is the only character in the novel who is interested in the Aboriginal names for things, and he is also an exception to either of the two types of settlers who sought to either domesticate or annihilate the Aborigines. Lachlan later attempts to bridge the gap between settler Australians and Aborigines by learning a "few words of their language," but it is "poorly learned" and ultimately fails (178). Noel Pearson argues that "we will have true reconciliation when millions of Australians speak our Australian languages from coast to coast" ("Speaking One's Mother Tongue"). But Gemmy knew that to understand the place and the Aborigines required more than language, that you had to link "up all the various parts of it" to make the place part of you, to make a whole (58). Although Mr Frazer was a man who had "a gift of understanding" that made Gemmy trust him (59), he

missed much of "the play of light and shadow" (61) and misunderstood the more subtle aspects of the social and political aspects of Aboriginal culture; because "classical Aboriginal concepts are very hard to translate into European languages" (Pearson, "A People's Survival").

Mr Frazer is also unable to communicate to the people in Brisbane his limited understanding of Gemmy, the Aborigines, or his vision for the new nation. He finds that he is an "intruder here among people who have been too long shut up together, have already said everything they can bear to say to one another and are speaking in code" (157). The men in government, who have "already said everything they can," are unwilling to hear what Mr Frazer has to say, which results in a complete breakdown in communication. Such is Mr Frazer's confusion that he is unsure if the situation he has encountered is a joke, cynicism or indifference (159). Mr Frazer's vision of the possibilities for the new nation in partnership with the Aborigines, the landscape, and the native flora and fauna receded as the town of Brisbane was overtaken by picket fences, strawberries and asparagus.

Land belongs to the system of the spatial conception of knowledge which is in contrast to the interpretation and conceptualisation of the past in language that is contained within historiography and literature. A concrete memory space such as landscape can be experienced by the senses, but a representation of the past is an image or a text and is only a concept or a representation of the past that is contained in models or written accounts. Although not a concrete space, representations of the past are equally as powerful. Stuart Hall argues that "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (394). Those who remember the past, who create the concept or image of the past, manipulate that image for particular ends (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 7) and assign to the actors in that past roles and meanings in the context of the official history of the nation, and in the process create identities for themselves and others.

The novel warns us to be sceptical of representations of the past because their reality or truth is slippery, not necessarily because those who remember

deliberately falsify their accounts of the past, but because each representation of the past is in a language and against a background specific to those who recall the past, which tends towards creating a memory that is familiar to already existing representations of the past, reflecting the metaphor of the palimpsest where previous images of the past remain and cannot be erased. The British settlers could not have a clean slate on which to write a history of their new nation, and nor can we ignore the past or previous representation of the past. All we can do is add to the accumulation of representations.

On the opening page of *Remembering Babylon* Malouf labours the point of making a "scrap of make-believe," and the commitment one must make to this make-believe for it to be realised. The make-believe refers to the fictional narrative of the novel and the historical narrative the novel refers to. The boy, Lachlan had "to exert all his gift for fantasy, his will too" to keep his cousins in the game (1). Even the dog that was "young and easily distracted" needed to be part of the make-believe and although it struggled to get a sense of the foreign idea of the wolf, every now and then it understood and reacted with delight (1-2). Lachlan is completely captivated by his fantasy to the point where, despite the Queensland heat, he actually felt snow underfoot.

The narrator is telling the reader that the world of the novel is a make believe, a fantasy created by language, but nevertheless a fantasy that becomes reality if you have enough faith in it, or until it is disrupted by the intrusion of an outsider. *Remembering Babylon* is a metaphor for the colonisation of Australia and the way that the colonisers created a fantasy world that excluded Aborigines by treating them as outsiders or intruders in the colonisers' world. The novel also suggests that that fantasy world must inevitably be challenged by those who have been excluded. Gemmy intrudes into the imagined space defined by Western understandings of landscape: he caused the snow to melt under Lachlan's feet, bringing him back to reality where "the intense heat … made everything … warp and glare" (2).

Language is "as much a product of culture as it is a tool for people to shape culture" (Echterhoff 263) and is important for "its ability to create cultural and

personal connections" (Pons 131). Although Australia does not have a legal official language, English is so well established as the common language that it is "de facto the official language as well as the national language" (Lo Bianco). It is the English language that has helped to define the culture of the modern Australian nation and the connections between Aborigines and mainstream Australians. Around the time of Federation one of the unifying features of the new Australian nation was English, and "the adoption of the English language" was considered essential for inclusion in the nation (Jupp 22). The White Australia policy was enforced through language: the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 authorised immigration officials to apply a dictation test to new arrivals and in the case of "undesirable" immigrants the test could be applied in a language unknown to the applicant to ensure their failure (Jupp 8). With regard to Aboriginal languages, there has been a failure to recognise the importance of Aboriginal languages and as the novel highlights, although a number of individuals have made an effort to learn an Aboriginal language, more often than not it has been as a service to the settlers rather than in an effort to understand Aboriginal culture. Pearson goes so far as to suggest that the recognition of Aboriginal languages is the "missing piece" in Australians' commitment to "closing the gap" between Aborigines and mainstream Australians ("Conservatism").

*Remembering Babylon* exposes some of the processes that early settler Australians adopted in order to define and then nurture a new culture in a foreign land "when the need for positive self-definition asserts itself" (H. White, *Tropics of Discourse* 151). When there is no obvious standard on which to base a new culture it is words that give shape to the nation and naming that quells anxiety about belonging. The settlers define themselves as being not like the Aborigines who live beyond the boundary of their settlement, a boundary that is defined by physical fences as well as the barrier of fear. Gemmy's acquisition of Aboriginal languages therefore sets him apart from the other settlers and defines him as belonging to the Aboriginal group he has lived with rather than with the settler group. He is the only white person in the novel who learns the languages of the Aborigines and therefore has some understanding of their culture, but he cannot belong to both groups.

Early settlers in Australia were unsure about their place in such an alien and hostile landscape or of the shape that their new community would take, and as an emerging culture they asserted their identity by what they were not. The principal quality that binds the settlers and differentiates them from the Aborigines is their language: "It is language which enables us to draw boundaries, to pick some things out in contrast to others" (Charles Taylor 258).

The character of Gemmy as a white man turned wild who spoke Aboriginal languages and who had lived with Aborigines for several years works more powerfully to elucidate the fears of the settlers than if he had been an Aboriginal man who intrudes on white settlement to upset the delicate balance that existed in the emerging culture of Australia. Gemmy is a manifestation of the myth of the Wild Man who is black (Gemmy appeared black at first), uncivilised, suffers from "linguistic confusion" or is "incoherent or mute," and whose physical attributes are evidence of his evil nature (H. White, *Tropics of Discourse* 162). For centuries, the Wild Man in myths was associated with the wilderness rather than civilisation, and Gemmy appears from "beyond the no-man's-land" (2); that part of Australia that had "not yet been domesticated" (H. White, *Tropics of Discourse* 153) by the settlers. The "psychic anxiety" that had originally led to the development of the Wild Man myth continues to exist in communities, but over time the nature of the anxiety has altered. By the nineteenth century the anxiety that had once been projected onto the Wild Man and his link to the wilderness had been interiorised and the Wild Man had become the incarnation of cultural anxiety (153-6).

The settlers who live on the edges of civilisation in *Remembering Babylon* carry a double anxiety, both that which was interiorised and that which existed towards the wilderness beyond the physical boundaries of their settlement. The appearance of Gemmy breached both these boundaries. He "upset the reassuring binary between the divisions of white and black, civilised and savage, constituting an anomalous category in between" and is "an ambiguous and destabilising" figure (Neilsen 205). The members of a community trust each other to construct a reality consistent with the group's "presupposed world views, including prevalent cultural

stereotypes" and the process of constructing the group's reality and identity may "fuel conflict with out-groups" (Echterhoff 273). When Gemmy appears the settlement is balanced on the edges of colonial civilisation and is still largely a collection of disparate people who have yet to come together as an homogenised group, so he easily causes a division among them.

Gemmy, the Wild Man disrupts the developing trust among the settlers and the comfort they draw from the boundaries that separate them from the unknown and the uncivilised. Therefore, the relationship with "the accursed thing was unambiguous … it was to be exiled, isolated and avoided at all costs" (H. White, *Tropics of Discourse* 162). The settlers "wish to remove him [Gemmy the Wild Man] from their presence altogether and from the humble history which they are making" (190), because he heightens the cultural anxiety the settlers feel as a result of their lack of certainty regarding their new community. He is not only a threat to the settlers in the present, but he also threatens the viability of the emerging community and the nature of the history the settlers want for their new nation.

The settlers' fear of the unknown beyond the boundaries of their settlement extends to a fear of unknown languages. After Gemmy's initial words in English, he could find no more and he babbled away in a language that Lachlan could not understand, and as an unknown language it is described derogatorily as a "whining blackfeller's lingo" (3). In addition, the "idea of a language he did not know scared him" and in order to retain power Lachlan must silence that unknown language. To do this Lachlan speaks for the first time in the novel, and the reader "hears" Lachlan rather than the narrator. His words are: "Just steik yur mooth" (3); an accent that is striking to contemporary Australians as not typically Australian, but it does pass for English. The settlers are unable to communicate with Gemmy, not because he cannot speak English, he can, but because they do not want to hear what he has to say to them, they do not want to hear what he has learned about "existing in this land" from the Aborigines; as they "shouted at him in one language … he clenched his teeth in another" (59). Gemmy's acquisition of Aboriginal languages made him an alien object, not to be trusted by the settler group because the settlers do not believe it is possible to be a member of both groups.

Language is the code for inclusion in a group, but it can also define one as an outsider or traitor to the group. Later in the novel after the First World War has broken out, there is a recurrence of the fear of the alien when the Germans in Australia must be expelled because they represent a threat, not a physical threat, but rather a threat to Australia's unity. Janet's letters to the German Father Elsheimer became a "dangerous mystery" in "the language of an international conspiracy" making her a potential traitor (172). One way of defining meaning in our own lives, is to "deny meaning to anything radically different from it" (H. White, *Tropics of Discourse* 151) and as each "language speaks the world in its own ways" (Steiner 56-7), belonging to more than one group is problematic for the settlers who have defined themselves as monolingual English speakers living in a world that is defined by English.

Language defines groups, and defines the other, and Gemmy, who speaks five Aboriginal languages as well as English, therefore, belongs to multiple groups. Gemmy's appearance on the fence, his linguistic confusion and his existence on the boundary between black and white, contribute to the anxiety that already existed among the settlers. Because the identity of the new community is defined by what is familiar, the settlers refuse to consider alternative ways of speaking about the land, because alternative ways of speaking would undermine the fragile identity and cohesion of the group. Although by the First World War Australia had developed into a nation, fear of the outsider and his or her ability to disrupt the nation's unity remained.

The fear the settlers have of Gemmy and the Aborigines exists in language and is also created by language. It is words that shape reality: "The words were what mattered most to the boy. By changing the stick he held into what his gesture had claimed for it" (6). Although there had been "many false alarms" of raids by "blacks" there had been no attacks on the settlement by Aborigines (2), but this did nothing to assuage the settlers' fear of the Aborigines whom they cannot see, who exist in the wilderness beyond the boundaries of their settlement and who speak a language the settlers cannot understand. As long as the Aborigines remained

beyond the boundaries of their settlement, the settlers were able to contain their fear of "all that belonged to Absolute Dark" (2); however, with the emergence of Gemmy the Wild Man, their "vulnerability to the world," and the "dread" by which it was measured, was evoked (96). Gemmy is balanced between the civilised world and the darkness beyond the settlement as well as between the languages and cultures of the settlers and Aborigines and is thus an object of fear.

After Gemmy is visited by two Aboriginal men it is the words of Andy McKillop that articulate the fear which then precipitates the violence against Gemmy. Andy has little control over his mouth and once the words are out he is scared of what he has unleashed. Jock's reaction to Andy's account of the visit and his invention of the stone that the Aborigines had given to Gemmy also provoke words from Jock that he at once regrets. Both men understand that once the words had been spoken they had "assumed substance, took shape" (71) and have a life of their own that the settlers can no longer control. The settlers' fear of Gemmy manifests itself in words to begin with, but eventually turns into physical violence. When someone "plastered the place with shit" to form a word that came from "some old darkness out of the depth of things" (106) Jock was terrified that the word would get inside his head, which would threaten him with madness. The words that were formed to define the new Australia have "assumed substance" as part of the nation's cultural memory and there is the risk of physical violence and emotional disturbance if those words are used to perpetuate negative stereotypes.

Spoken language is not the only language expressed in the novel: body language, unspoken agreements, silences, silent acknowledgement, silent appeal and long-drawn silences permeate the novel. At first Gemmy was unable to understand the "wooden expressions, and the even more wooden gestures" of the settlers and it was only "after long watching" that he was able to discern the "small signs" that allowed him to understand what they were thinking (57). Australian historiography and foundational narratives are similarly permeated by gaps and silences that are as important to the story of contact between settler Australians and Aboriginal Australians as the articulated stories. Gemmy's conversation with his Aboriginal visitors was "of another kind" of communication, a silent, but inclusive conversation

that brought back to Gemmy "names and the stories that contained their spirit" in the language (107). Language and silence have the potential for harm as well as for good; sometimes settler Australians need to be silent in order to hear the voice of the other. The Aboriginal character Justin in Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* complains that the white man always wants to have the last word and is not able to be silent in order to hear the voice of others. Reiterated by Kim Scott in his advice to politicians with regard to Indigenous policy: "Get yourself in a bit of silence sometimes and listen" ("Indigenous Author Wins Miles Franklin Award"). The repetition of words related to the breath in the novel suggests that language is integral to existence and that language and life are delicately balanced, somehow bound up with belonging to civilisation.

Language is associated with something fundamental to one's being and is even believed to change the physical attributes of the speaker: "over the years [his jaw] had adapted itself to the new sounds it had to make" (36). The settlers worried that the loss of language also meant the loss of something essential to one's being: "Could you lose it? Not just language, but *it. It"* (36). Beyond individual identity, the community also relies on language to bind it together. A community and its "cultural knowledge" are formed through a shared reality that is experienced and created through language (Echterhoff 273). Civilisation in *Remembering Babylon* is defined by speech and language and any disruption of language threatened the very being of the individual settlers, as well as the delicate balance of the new settlement as a group within the new nation.

Once the settlement is defined by spoken language, it is the written word that bears witness to the past and is the bearer of cultural memory. However, over time it is the record of the past that is remembered, rather than the reality it once referred to. Gemmy distrusts the written word, fearing that recording his life in writing has reduced his reality. The process of remembering, of turning a reality into images and words, also involves a process of manipulation and distortion and carries the risk of forgetting. The simulacrum, the image of the past which is both a representation of the past and its substitute "refers to something and cancels that

reference" at the same time (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 10). The narrator makes it clear very early in the novel that the story he tells is only one possible representation of events when Janet observes that no one in the settlement was interested in her version of Gemmy's sudden appearance because Lachlan had made the story his own (6) and as the creator of the fantasy Lachlan grew in stature and wanted to own the story. For Lachlan having Gemmy recognise his stick for the imagined gun was to make it so, and "as long as he kept talking" (6) the fantasy would remain a reality. No-one was interested in Janet's interpretation of events and she was surprised that Lachlan was allowed to get away with his story.

As well as the possibility of multiple versions of the novel's narrative, there are also multiple versions of Gemmy's biography, reflecting the multiple versions and perspectives of Australian history. One version emerges from his interview with Mr Frazer shortly after his appearance, but because the details are unclear and there are "so many gaps of memory" Frazer and Abbot introduce their own details to complete the story (14). A further version is recorded when Abbot makes small alterations to the biography as he transcribes the oral version. And the reader learns later that Gemmy has omitted from his story the fact that he murdered the man he worked for in England as a child, which led to him being press-ganged. The circumstances surrounding Gemmy's death towards the end of the novel are also unclear; there are rumours "though there was no certainty" as to the details (178). Despite the multiple versions of stories they all have so many "elements in common with others" that they had become "all one story" (179), and despite the uncertainty as to the details, these stories are "inextricably joined" to those who are "still living" (180); the novel is calling for a syncretic approach to recalling and recording Australia's past.

The "vitality of any culture hinges upon its power to convince the majority of its devotees that it is the sole possible way to satisfy their needs and to realize their aspirations" (H. White, *Tropics of Discourse* 153). Jock and Janet McIvor, together with George Abbot and Mr Frazer, have the strongest links to "home," that is Britain, and through these characters the strangeness of the new land and the difficulties faced by settler Australians are highlighted. They are somewhat

reluctant settlers, ambivalent about their new environment, as they cling to remembered aspects of home. Abbot continues to read in French because it "represented escape" from the humiliations and meanness of his existence (74) and as a child Lachlan prefaces his sentences with "At hame in Scotland" (50), while he and Mrs McIvor cling to their Scottish diction. The settlers hang on to what is familiar through language, and they give form and meaning to their new community and to the emerging nation through language. This process also requires defining those outside the group by their not having the same language; although Gemmy can speak English, his ability to speak five Aboriginal languages puts him outside the mono-lingual settler group.

Although there is a need to "undercut" the "desire for a singular language, genre or mode of reading" (Sharrad 52) that desire is strongly bound up with identity and security. Until Gemmy appeared, Jock McIvor had only viewed his new world in Australia from the point of view as a member of a group, rather than as an individual. Jock's situation parallels Gemmy's in a number of ways. Balancing on the edge between one world and another, the only way Jock had to communicate the changes and his new awareness was words, but Jock's new awareness was outside "what was common" for the new settlement and there did not exist the words to communicate what he "had begun to be aware of" (98). As the anxiety provoked by Gemmy's appearance increases, Jock finds himself "estranged from familiar male company" as well as from "the secure, unquestioned reckoning of things that this encouraged" (Pierce, "Provisional Maps" 188). As the group changed a new language was required and Jock finds his friends "on one side and himself on the other" (67) and the withdrawal of their friendship is a "disturbing confirmation of change" (96).

Lachlan is also balanced between his friendship with Gemmy and the expectations of his peers (143); to be accepted by the group of older boys he must renounce his friendship with Gemmy. Similarly Gemmy must find the word that will allow him to return to his life with the Aborigines (164). Jock's relationship with Gemmy forced him to question his own and the group's values and he discovers

that there are other ways of being, but he is unable to enact these on his own, in the same way the Mr Frazer was powerless to put his dream into place without the support of those in Brisbane. The group's need to maintain its vitality drives the majority of its members to fear Gemmy, and Jock as he becomes too close to Gemmy, because they are different. Gemmy has direct links to the Aborigines, making him a threat to the culture and the aspirations of the settlers' new community. The history that the settlers would write is to be their history alone and must exclude the Aborigines and those who associate with them.

The understanding of Australia as a monolingual country has persisted since Federation, despite the years of multicultural policies since the nineteen-seventies. For many people the idea of a unified humanity rests on the idea of a single homogenised group speaking a single language. For many Australians the notion of reconciliation between Aborigines and mainstream Australians rests on the idea that Aborigines must become Australian in the sense defined by mainstream Australians, unaware or refusing to accept that multiple ways of being and speaking are possible without resulting in the fracturing of the nation's identity. This is not to suggest that Australia necessarily needs to be multilingual, but rather that there needs to be an acceptance of other languages that define the world differently and that multiple languages can exist in Australia without threatening the unity of the nation. Pearson's vision of vision of Cape York Peninsula is a place where the children are "able to orbit between two worlds and have the best of both" ("A People's Survival") reflecting the argument in *Remembering Babylon* that it is possible to successfully belong to more than one language group.

None of this is without difficulties and the novel attempts to highlight the complications and obstacles associated with seeing and hearing the world of the other. Gemmy "offers himself as a vehicle of a new myth, one of reconciliation" (Bliss 730), as proof that it is possible to have a balance between two cultures and to belong to two cultures. However, the settlers were unable to allow a separate culture to exist, because they felt it threatened the culture they were trying to develop. Additionally, a balance between two cultures requires an understanding of the languages that underpin them. Malouf uses the analogy of bees: Janet is

attracted to bees and their "communally single" mind (128); however, this communally single mind means working together rather than being homogenised. Janet learns that there are ways to communicate and that to understand the other "you had to submit yourself to their side of things" (128). Most of the settlers in *Remembering Babylon* are unable to see "their side of things" through fear and anxiety. Additionally without the language to represent them, some things remain invisible and misunderstandings and cultural misrepresentation are the result. Watkin Tench records some of the earliest misunderstandings between Aborigines and settlers: "How easily people, unused to speak the same language, mistake each other" (Tench 195).

"I remain convinced that indigenous rights must be reconciled with a united, undifferentiated public citizenship of the commonwealth of Australia" (Pearson, "A People's Survival"). However, language – "like the living concrete environment in which the artist lives – is never unitary" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 288) and language is inextricably linked to cultural memory production and participation; it is the key to belonging. Language, both written and oral, frames our understanding of ourselves, our group and our relationship with others, language is a community activity (Charles Taylor 240). Mr Frazer, Gemmy, Jock, Lachlan and Janet all come to the same conclusion: that there was little they could do to bridge the gap between the two groups, Aborigines and settlers, because the inclusion of the Aborigines in the emerging community was contrary to the cultural and linguistic framework that had begun to form around the new nation that had defined Aborigines as outside the group and the group did not have the confidence or the stability to allow other ways of speaking.

When Gemmy appeared out of the wilderness, the nation, like the settlement into which he intruded, was still balanced between "home" and the new country. The settlers were often in Australia to escape an unhappy set of circumstances or had discovered on their arrival that Australia was substantially different to what they were used to or to what they expected. Finding themselves in a hostile and alien landscape, most of the settlers felt some homesickness for the family, place

and language that they had left behind so they clung to the familiar and often the only thing that was familiar was their language. Mrs Frazer is so "hungry" for the books and papers her daughters send her that she tore open the parcels at the wharf (124). Paul Carter argues that the settlement of Australia was a process of "teaching the country to speak" (136); it was also a process of familiarisation, which involved destroying that which could not be made over into something familiar.

The monological authoritative voice of the narrative exposes the process of homogenising and silencing that was part of colonising the land. The reader is invited to imagine how this recognisable "fantasy" came to be, how it was structured out of language and naming. The novel disperses the meaning of the "scrap of make-believe" that is our official narrative, while challenging the binary oppositions of black and white, and good and evil by refusing to take a moral stance. Malouf achieves his purpose by exposing the cultural and linguistic layers of the new colony and presages the beginnings of political and literary change in Australia with regard to our understanding of the past. In the nineteen-nineties the political and cultural climate had changed following shifts in historical consciousness with the result that Australian novels that respond to our past had a corresponding shift in focus.

*Remembering Babylon* and Thea Astley's *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* are on the cusp of change in Australian representations of the past and of the relationships between Aboriginal and mainstream Australians in fiction. Both novels are self-consciously writing from the white mainstream settler point of view, aware of the role of such writing to define, forget and marginalise Aborigines in history and in contemporary writing, but also aware that to change we as readers need to become more aware of the way that reading, writing, naming and language operate, how mainstream Australians through historiography and foundational narratives alongside science, law and politics have constructed Australia, how Aborigines were written out of the Australian national narrative and how they can be written back into the official discourse of Australia.

# 5. Intertextuality:
## *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*

Thea Astley's novel *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* was first published in 1997 and is based on events that took place on Palm Island in the 1930s. Appearing three years after *Remembering Babylon*, *Rainshadow* received favourable reviews and was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award. The novel is a self-conscious exploration of the marginalisation of Aborigines from official culture, but generated none of the controversy that Malouf's novel did with regard to the representation of Aborigines. Told through the perspective of several characters the narrative explores the multiple ways that people remember, forget and assign meaning to the past, and how the past continues to cast a shadow over the present.

*Rainshadow* also explores the restraints and limitations of fiction to respond to a violent past or to challenge official memory through the structure of the novel as well as at the level of narrative as characters continually question fiction as a means of recording, understanding and coming to terms with the past. Variable focalisation provides layers of detail, highlighting the depth of a problem that crosses generations, gender and class, and demonstrates the ingrained nature of racist attitudes towards Aborigines in some sections of the community. The narrative not only seeks to bring into consciousness a place and its people that by their physical and political remoteness has ensured their silence, but it also builds on the work of *Remembering Babylon* as it seeks to expose some of the methods used to deny Aborigines a place and a voice in official history and describe the difficulties Aborigines face as they try to re-establish themselves as equals within Australian cultural memory and politics. In contrast to *Remembering Babylon* and *Benang* which draw attention to the power of language, *Rainshadow* "point[s] out the limits of language" (Dale 27).

The novel is also a window into the history behind the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal people and responds to the imperative of the report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody that mainstream

Australians need to understand the past with regard to the dispossession of Aborigines. *Rainshadow* brings together fragments from recorded history and biography, provides some historical background to Palm Island and to the exclusion of Aborigines from mainstream culture and understanding; it also reflects the political environment of the nineteen-nineties, as it still reflects the state of Aboriginal politics today.

*The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* is a pivotal text with regard to the history of Palm Island, located between the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and journalist Chloe Hooper's 2008 book, *The Tall Man*, in which she investigates the circumstances surrounding the 2004 death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee (also known as Mulrunji Doomadgee and hereafter referred to as Mulrunji) on Palm Island. Mulrunji died only eight years after *Rainshadow* was first published. *The Tall Man* reiterates the history of the island and tells of the continuing difficulties faced by the Palm Island community and the divide between Aboriginal and mainstream Australians in terms of culture and justice; it also exposes the failure of mainstream Australians to take up the commissioners' call to understand Aborigines and their place in Australian history.

*Rainshadow* offers no suggestions as to how we may change the patterns that Aboriginal affairs follow; it only lays out what those patterns are. Instead of combining the voices of Aborigines and white Australians to create a unity, *Rainshadow* demonstrates the homophonic nature of Australian culture and the unequal opportunities Aborigines have to be heard. Although there are multiple voices, the structure of the novel diminishes the possibility of the Aboriginal voice entering the mainstream historical discourse. The relationship with the other and the plurality of voices do not reflect a syncretic culture, but rather an homogeneous culture that refuses to hear alternative ways of being, a culture, however, that may be on the cusp of change as Australians are forced to confront a past that is different to official versions of history. The novel demonstrates multiple ways of remembering the past and the multiple motives for remembering, as well as the "obligation to perpetuate monologic univocality" that is evident in Australian cultural memory (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 39).

Hooper's book, along with the numerous government documents relating to the death in custody of Mulrunji, interact with the history of Palm Island and with *Rainshadow* in a challenge to Australians to recognise and understand the past and the present of Palm Island from the perspective of the Aborigines who live on the island. *Rainshadow*, *The Tall Man* and the report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody together are an "engagement with the reputation of the Island" (Dale 22) and each stimulate interaction with one another to generate new meanings within the texts (Lotman, Leo, and Mandelker 378).

In the novel Matthew Vine recognises that there "were always patterns" to follow (279) as the whites tried "not to know, not to remember" (282) and the blacks are unable to break the patterns of the past that have fuelled "decades of resentment" (287), patterns and resentment that continue into the present and are described by Hooper. The death in custody of Mulrunji and the subsequent legal process and acquittal of Senior Sergeant Christopher Hurley repeat history authenticating the novel's claim that history continues to repeat itself in well defined patterns. Reading the novel today alongside *The Tall Man* reinforces Astley's pessimism towards the ability of fiction to promote understanding or challenge official narratives as both texts engage with the past and the present of the island which remains in many ways unchanged since 1918.

At the end of the novel the narrator comments that the response to the 1956 strike on the island "was like a replay of that other time" (289). A "posse of white police" had been brought to the island to control the strike by the Aborigines and as they moved through the island the "night is filled with the splintering of wood, the thuds of kicked-in doors, shouts and screams, the howling of kids and women, the three a.m. raging of bullimen rattling handcuffs and chains" (291). In 2004 there is another replay as the Queensland government declared a state of emergency on Palm Island as the residents rioted in response to the State Coroner's finding that Mulrunji had died from an accidental fall and that there was "no sign of police brutality" (Hooper 62). A team of twenty-four police wearing riot gear and balaclavas and accompanied by Rottweilers raided eighteen houses in the early

hours of the morning, arresting eighteen men and three women who were later charged with rioting (Hooper 72-73). In *Rainshadow* as Normie struggles against the police they taunt: "'Maybe a boot'd help', the copper says and he pulls back one foot and delivers a massive kick in Normie's guts" (293). In *The Tall Man* Hooper quotes from Roy Bramwell's police statement; Bramwell was in the police station when Mulrunji was brought in after his arrest: "Chris [Hurley] dragged him … and started kicking him. 'Do you want more Mister, Mister Doomadgee?'" (Hooper 26). "Life no different here from them old days, eh?" (Astley 229).

**Palm Island History**

To provide the context for my analysis of the novel's intertextuality, I begin with a brief history of Palm Island. Palm Island is located sixty-five kilometres north-west of Townsville off the east coast of Queensland. The Australian Bureau of Statistics records Palm Island's present population as around two thousand permanent residents, ninety-five percent of whom are Aboriginal. On every scale of health and well being the people of Palm Island fall way behind the rest of the Australian population: the average life expectancy is around fifty, unemployment is three times the national average, education rates are low and suicide rates are high (J. Watson). Prior to 2004, aside from making news in relation to these types of statistics, Palm Island was usually remembered for the Robert Curry tragedy of 1930. Now it is remembered for the tragic and disastrous events surrounding the death in custody of Mulrunji, either in sympathy with the Doomadgee family or with Hurley. Both tragedies occurred in the midst of the daily and ongoing tragedy of individual lives on the island.

Originally home to the Manbarra people (J. Watson 19), the island's place in mainstream Australian history began in 1914 when it was gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve by the Queensland government. In 1916 Chief Aboriginal Protector John William Bleakely proposed that the island be used to alleviate some of the problems of overcrowding, disease and unrest on the Hull River reserve located north of Townsville. He also believed that segregation was the only way to save Aborigines from extinction as well as preserving the purity of the white race; the

island's remote location would serve to isolate Aborigines from the white community and their consciousness.

In 1918 Bleakely's plans for Palm Island were realised after a cyclone destroyed Hull River reserve and those who survived were relocated to Palm Island. The island's isolation also made it an ideal location for a penitentiary and by the nineteen-twenties large numbers of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were being transported to the island in chains from all over Queensland, often for trivial offences (J. Watson). The reserve was run along military lines by the island's first superintendent, Robert Curry, who controlled and supervised every aspect of the lives of the Aboriginal residents. Children were separated from their families and received minimal education, while the adults were used as cheap labour on and off the island. Curry banned traditional cultural practices, the use of languages other than English and the Catholic Church was responsible for "civilising" the residents. Punishment for breaking the rules was severe and included floggings, solitary confinement and humiliation, such as shaving the heads of women. Children were also subjected to these punishments. Those who were considered uncontrollable were sent to nearby remote islands on starvation rations. In spite of compulsory medical inspections disease on the island was rife and the death rate was high. It is not surprising that, despite the island's isolation, many residents tried to escape (J. Watson).

However, notwithstanding Curry's autocratic style and the harsh conditions on the island, there was a degree of stability at first. Curry had a habit of working alongside Aboriginal workers; he also organised sport, entertainment and celebrations, including corroborees and spear throwing competitions for the island's residents. Throughout the nineteen-twenties Curry encouraged the residents to make and sell artefacts to the tourist groups who came to the island for sightseeing tours and he allowed them to keep the profits from these sales at a time when Aborigines saw very little of any wages that may have been paid to them. In this manner Curry earned a measure of respect and the residents referred to him as "Uncle Boss" (J. Watson). When Christopher Hurley was stationed in

Burketown he “helped out with sports and recreation, and took the kids on camping trips” and the children adored him (Hooper 133).

However, Curry’s style caused tension between him and his staff and throughout the nineteen-twenties a number of complaints were made to the authorities regarding his treatment of the Palm Island residents. In early 1930 following allegations that Curry was interfering with young girls and beating women, the Home Department conducted an inquiry into Curry’s supervision of Palm Island. It was clear that all was not well; however, the Home Department, which had ultimate responsibility for the island failed to act. Despite the evidence of brutality and conflict Curry was cleared of any wrong doing by the Department and was left to continue to run the island. Although Curry was cleared by the authorities, the inquiry left him fearful that he would be transferred from Palm Island and this anxiety, together with his grief following the death of his wife, the impending marriage of his step-daughter and her departure along with the departure of his son to boarding school are all thought to have contributed to Curry’s mental breakdown (J. Watson). An echo of these early attempts to alert the authorities of the conditions on Palm Islands can be heard in the attempt by the mayor of Palm Island to convince government representatives of the “perilous state” of Palm Islander’s lives shortly before Mulrunji was killed in 2004 (J. Watson 1).

On 2 February 1930 Superintendent Robert Curry blew up his home killing his two children, set fire to several buildings on the island, and shot and wounded the resident doctor and his wife (J. Watson 55). Apart from Curry and his two children, two Aboriginal residents also died as a result of exposure after they had been evacuated from the hospital during Curry’s rampage. The Assistant Superintendant on the island issued firearms to several Aboriginal men, instructing them to patrol the beach and to shoot Curry if he returned to the island carrying firearms (J. Watson 60). Peter Prior, an Aboriginal man, carried out the order to shoot Curry.

The ensuing outrage among the white community in Queensland centred on the fact that a black man had shot and killed Curry, largely ignoring Curry’s actions. Prior was not considered a hero, not even a minor one, for his actions, which quite

likely saved lives, but he was instead arrested and charged with murder and served six months in prison before his case came before the Supreme Court where he was acquitted (J. Watson 71). The judge who heard the case dismissed the charges against Peter Prior on the grounds that it was reasonable for the community to defend itself and Prior was acting in the community's best interest. Before dismissing the case the judge asked the prosecutor if the case was only "proceeding because Curry was shot down by a black man and not a white man" (ibid).

Prior's treatment is in contrast to that of Senior Sergeant Christopher Hurley who was charged with the manslaughter of Mulrunji. By the time of his acquittal he had become a kind of folk hero to many white Queenslanders and the response to his acquittal in Townsville was that he had been forgiven: "And in forgiving him, people forgave themselves" (Hooper 266). The role of a hero within cultural memory is to support the community's ideological position, and the story of Senior Sergeant Christopher Hurley, a white man who had selflessly served in some of the toughest Aboriginal communities in the country, fits into the cultural memory of Australia better than the story of Mulrunji, an Aboriginal man arrested for allegedly swearing at a police officer while drunk.

**The Royal Commission**

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody handed down its report in 1991 after three and a half years of investigation. The commissioners concluded that the number of Aboriginal deaths in custody was a result of the high number of Aborigines in custody and that Aborigines were no more likely than others in the justice system to be subjected to racist or poor treatment, although they were critical of custodial standards for Aborigines and found that there were defects in the system, such as the high number of arrests among Aborigines for relatively minor offences. The report also has as a principal thesis that non-Aboriginal Australians need to know the history of Aboriginal dispossession and it calls on Australians to recognise Aborigines "as a distinct people" who were dispossessed of their land and "until recent times denied respect as human beings and the opportunity to re-establish themselves on an equal basis" (E. Johnston 1). The

report recommends changes to the custodial system with three broad prerequisites: firstly Aborigines must take control of their own lives; secondly that governments and society allow and assist in this; and thirdly that the assistance given does not result in welfare dependence (Broome, *Aboriginal Australians* 228).

Although the Keating government earmarked $400 million in 1992 to implement the proposed measures, a 1994 report from the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs described the performance of the Government in implementing the measures recommended by the Royal Commission as "appalling" (cited in M. Griffiths 133). Much of the funding had been absorbed by administration and consultation and very little had made its way to actual improvements for Aborigines.

To date there has still been no translation of the three broad suggestions made by the Commission relating to Aborigines taking control of their own lives into the detail of how to bring about the changes, or any suggestions as to how Australians are to acquire an understanding of the history behind the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal people. In 2006 the Queensland Deputy State Coroner wrote in her report of the inquest into the death of Cameron Doomadgee that "It is reprehensible that the detailed recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody should have to be referred to, so many years after the Royal Commission. The evidence is clear however that these recommendations are still apt and still ignored" (Clements 28).

**A death in custody**

In 2004 Mulrunji died in custody in the police cells on Palm Island, approximately forty minutes after his arrest for allegedly swearing at Senior Sergeant Christopher Hurley. In 2006 the Queensland coroner's court found Hurley responsible for the death of Mulrunji. Initially the director of public prosecutions refused to lay charges; however, following a review of the case Hurley was charged with manslaughter and assault. Although he was acquitted of all charges in 2007, this was the first time that a police officer had been found responsible for the death of

an Aborigine in custody (Hooper 188). In 2009, following his acquittal Hurley appealed to have the findings of the 2006 inquest set aside. A new inquest was conducted and in 2010 the Deputy Chief Magistrate ruled that it was "not possible to ascertain whether the force [that caused the four fractured ribs, liver laceration and portal vein rupture] was deliberately inflicted or accidentally suffered" (Hine 140).

In the meantime the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission had investigated the police response to Mulrunji's death finding that the response was flawed, unprofessional, and characterised by double standards and called for disciplinary action against the six officers involved in the bungled investigation (Moynihan, *CMC Review*). In early 2011, a month before the twentieth anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Queensland Police Service ruled that there was no case for disciplinary action against the six police officers (Moynihan, *CMC Review*). After six years of investigations, three inquests, a trial, an appeal, an internal review of the case by the Queensland Police Service, an investigation by the Crime and Misconduct Commission, the six police involved in the investigation of the death of Mulrunji will not face disciplinary action and Hurley has been found not responsible for causing the injuries that Mulrunji died from.

***The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow***

*Rainshadow* has a polyphonic narrative and displays some of the chaotic nature of the polyphonic discourse; however, unlike Kim Scott's 2010 novel *That Deadman Dance,* instead of dismantling accepted meaning and bringing about syncretism the novel highlights the way that official meaning is established by the dominant culture to result in the marginalisation of the Aboriginal voice from the mainstream historical and cultural narrative. In this manner the novel joins *Remembering Babylon* at the beginning of the process of destabilising official meaning (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 130) by suggesting that there are other ways of representing official history and culture. Yuri Lotman argues that the interaction and interference of languages in a text give the text a richer meaning (Lotman, Leo,

and Mandelker 378); in *Rainshadow* the failure to allow language interaction and interference suggests that the possibility for a richer meaning is often lost due to our refusal to recognise and hear the other. Cheryl Taylor argues that *Rainshadow* "[c]aptures the full colour spectrum of Palm Islanders' twentieth-century voices" (37). However, I argue that the novel reflects the *existence* of a full colour spectrum of voices, but that the Aboriginal voices remain muted in the narrative to illustrate the reality rather than the ideal.

Astley draws on the biography of Peter Prior, *Straight from the Yudaman's Mouth: The Life Story of Peter Prior*, transcribed by his daughter Renarta and published in 1993 (Prior) for the character of Manny Cooktown, Captain Brodie is Robert Curry and Astley has changed the name of Palm Island to Doebin. *Rainshadow* is made up of eight lengthy narratives focalised through the white characters who lived and worked on the island at the time of Brodie's rampage. Each of the white characters' narratives is preceded by a short chapter focalised through Manny to form a chronological biography that tracks his growth on Doebin from childhood to manhood, including his account of the night of 2 February 1930 when Captain Brodie went crazy and the events that led to Manny shooting him. The novel ends more than twenty years later with the failed strike by Aboriginal workers on the island, which is based on the strike on Palm Island in 1957.

The novel opens with seven year old Manny and his family as they are being transported by boat to Doebin Island by the "bullimen" and "gubbamin men" following the cyclone in 1918 that destroyed the Hull River Reserve. The people had been rounded up like cattle "under the Dog Act" and the men are in chains (2). Manny's sections are short, in italics, and in non-standard English featuring the idioms, slang and rhythm of Manny's Aboriginal language in contrast to the Standard English of the white characters. Astley has used multiple focalisers and a constantly changing narrative focus to produce a polyphonic narrative in *Rainshadow*, but although we hear the rhythm of Manny's Aboriginal discourse, Astley presents his discourse in parallel to rather than mixed with those of the white characters. The short accounts of Manny compared with the longer sections of the white characters highlight the limited voice that Aborigines have within

Australian stories of the past. The italics represent the foreign nature of Manny's memories compared with the more "normal" memories of the white characters; his memories are relativised by their positioning within the framework of the memories of white Australians.

The positioning of Manny's narrative within a structure that keeps his narrative separate from the white characters' narratives signals the difficulty Aboriginal people have with regard to being heard within official cultural memory, and their continuing segregation and exclusion from official history and mainstream culture. Although Manny and his people live on the same island as the white characters, Manny and his narrative exist outside the official white Australian reality and the contrast between their lives is conspicuous. The usual structure of a polyphonic novel allows the reader to understand how the hero sees himself and how he sees the world, rather than necessarily seeing the world as it really is (Vice 133); however, Manny is not quite the hero of the novel because his voice is kept to a minimum and rather than understanding how Manny sees his world, we understand how his world fits into the world of white Australia.

Manny has a good memory of the night of 2 February; however, his narrative is not about how he sees the world or understands the events on Doebin, but how his recollections coincide with and are supported by the narratives of the white characters. Without the support of the white characters Manny's narrative would be silenced in the same manner as the testimonies of Aboriginal witnesses in the Mulrunji investigations were silenced. Neither Roy Bramwell nor Lloyd Bengaroo were called to give evidence at Hurley's trial because Bramwell's drinking and the inconsistencies in his witness statements would have made it simple for the defence lawyers to discredit him, and Bengaroo was considered "more copper than blackfella" (Hooper 259).

After Manny's introduction, the narrative switches to the first person narrative of Mrs Curthoys as she arrives on the island with her daughters as "temporary chatelaine" until the missionary is established (11). Mrs Curthoys introduces each of the white characters and speaks of changes that are "merely the beginning of

things" and her awareness that there is "another story" (54); she warns that what follows is only one of many possible stories about the past. Once again, as in *Remembering Babylon*, the story the novel narrates is only one of a multitude of possible stories. The multiple narratives and the structure of the novel stresses the idea that people remember and respond to the same event in multiple ways that are driven by personal as well as political reasons. Mrs Curthoys is sympathetic to the Aborigines and she is the character most aware of the cruelty of life for the Aborigines on the island and the ongoing effect of Aboriginal policies on residents. Using her first person narrative to introduce the characters draws sympathy for the Aborigines on the island despite the limited voice they have in the novel, because she is a reliable narrator: when the focaliser and character coincide the character has added credibility, and the reader is "inclined to accept the vision presented by that character" (Bal 104).

Through the characters of Morrow and Vine two motives and methods for remembering and writing fiction are juxtaposed. Morrow is a failed writer and one of the many white people working on the island for short periods, who are incompetent and unsuited to the work, "time servers waiting for better appointments" (115), representative of the white staff who even today continue to come and go on the island (Hooper 284). Morrow saw a story in the event of 1930, claiming he was an eye witness even though he had left the island just before Brodie ran amok. When thinking about writing his narrative he asks should he "change to present tense" for "trendy immediacy" (73), indicating to the reader that his histories have little to do with remembering the past, but are concerned with the present alone; the event is nothing more than a readymade plot for a story to serve the needs of the present of white Australians and has little to do with the needs of the Aborigines.

Morrow, who "hated to remember" (82) was "still enriching news histories of the area" (282) at the end of the novel. Morrow's type of fiction tells stories of the past, not to remember, to understand or to try to come to terms with the past, but for personal gain reflecting the novel's pessimistic outlook for the possibility of the Aboriginal voice having a place in Australian's cultural memory in the future. The

implication is that too many "failed writers" distort the past for personal gains in the present or to support the established narrative, reducing the effectiveness of fiction to help Australians recognise the past from multiple perspectives. In this respect fiction fails to expand or change official cultural memory within which Australian stories are produced.

Vine's attitude also reflects the role of Lachmann's notion of classical literature or traditional historical fiction in Australia to provide readers with confirmation of their easy understanding of the past by repeating familiar, celebratory narratives; however, he is also positive about fiction as a means to give voice to the downtrodden. Twelve years after Brodie's rampage, Vine the schoolteacher takes up the narrative remembering his short stay on Doebin as he traces the lives of each of the characters. On the island Vine had "drowned … in the poverty, hopelessness, wretchedness, gentleness, kindness and forgiveness of the island blacks" (155) and in return he had taught them to read and write a little, recognising that this was inadequate, but was all he could manage. Vine had "radical notions" (154) for his time, believing that education and literature are not only for the privileged. But he also understood that when only the privileged could read it was not a surprise that writers only "gave lip-service" to the under-privileged (155) and he recognises that it takes "guts" to go against established cultural memory to "credit the underprivileged with emotions, with humanity" (155). Vine's recognition of the courage it takes to challenge established cultural memory is reflected in the criticisms of Alexis Wright for adopting the structure and rhythm of Aboriginal storytelling in her novel *Carpentaria*.

While Vine wants to teach his charges how to read and he values fiction for its role in crediting the underprivileged with humanity, Vine is contradictory in his approach to fiction. On the one hand he believes fiction can give voice to the down trodden, but he encourages Manny to write about his life as a means to forget rather than to remember:

> But after … [the pain and the hurt of reality] was written, and the years had passed, I found I couldn't even remember the faces … or the words or the

> events. Not with any clarity, that is. It was as if the whole of that period had lost its reality and become absorbed as fiction and was as fragile and unmemorable as most fiction is. It had ceased to exist. (285)

Again, similar to Morrow's use of fiction, although he is positive about fiction, Vine's fiction will not change official cultural memory because it is designed to make forgetting the past easier for both mainstream and Aboriginal Australians, rather than to facilitate remembering. As a result, instead of the story of Manny's people entering into the nation's cultural memory, it remains external to it, unmemorable.

For white Australians the inability to recognise the ongoing effect of the past as they grapple with which attitude to adopt towards the past continues to overshadow the present response to history. With the section focalised through Leonie, Mrs Curthoy's daughter and later the wife of the doctor from Doebin, there is a return to a first person narrative. Coming near the end of the novel Leonie looks in the mirror as "another Alice" and the night of Brodie's rampage comes to mind. Here the narrator/character gives some credit to fiction as a means of preserving memories, including those that have been "resolutely thrust down into some dusty box" but which live on in a parallel world (265). As another Alice she recalls the words of the King who claims that he will "never, never forget" the horror of the moment, but as the Queen says, "if you don't make a memorandum of it" you will surely forget (Carroll 26). How else are we to remember the past if it is not in some form of writing? Again as a first person narrative she has some credibility and the narrative swings towards a positive view of fiction as one of the ways to remember.

Fiction may not be a means for Aborigines to come to terms with the past while the patterns of violence and disadvantage continue, but fiction can add new ways of representing the past to the national narrative that reflect changing political imperatives. However, we need to be mindful of how the narrative is manipulated and the purpose to which it is put. Within Brodie's narrative there is a very short section focalised through his son Davey who "was too young to be listening to silences, to be trying to interpret their sticky voids" (112). Davey reflects the

relatively short history of Australia and the attitude that such a fragile national identity risks damage by trying to interpret silences about the past while still in the process of forging a positive and usable past.

The novel further questions the use of fiction to record or to come to terms with the past through the character of Father Donellan. His narrative also continues the theme of the difficulties faced by individuals who seek to make a difference. “He liked to think he created a thread” (199), but he often found that his attempts to change the view of the white authorities towards the residents of the island were “hopeless.” Father Donellan knows that despair is an “unforgivable sin” (226) and he recognises that the curate Paddy Cullen has fallen into despair, unable to cope with the violence on the island, but as Hooper asks in *The Tall Man*, “Can you step into this dysfunction and desperation and not be corrupted in some way?” (81). “It’s a kind of emotional suicide” (215).

Between 2004 and 2011 as the investigation into Mulrunji’s death in custody continues to be reported in the media, the despair and hopelessness of many of the people of Palm Island was obvious as was their continuing marginalisation and the fading hope of justice for Mulrunji and his family. Fiction requires an ending and some sort of closure to the narrative, but in reality there is no closure as history continues to cast a shadow over the present for both white Australians and Aborigines, although in different ways. For Aborigines this shadow is the continuation of the conditions and racism that have existed on the island since colonisation.

Brodie’s narrative highlights the entrenched racism and the misguided benevolence from whites towards Aborigines and his failure to understand why his efforts had failed. He has heard the arguments from both sides, the charges of the white politicians, farmers and shopkeepers that the Aborigines did not know their place in the “master-servant relationship” (113) and would not work, and the “sympathisers” who pointed out that they did not need to work as hunting provided all they needed. To which the “sheepmen cattlemen farmers” responded by calling for the removal of this “means of subsistence” (113). A sentiment still

heard today: as she was leaving Townsville after Hurley's acquittal of the manslaughter of Mulrunji, Hooper recalls being told that there was sympathy for Hurley in Queensland with many people holding the view that a lot of Aborigines "should be shot. The jail's just a motel between raping women" (Hooper 266).

Matthew Vine, who is the son of Vine the schoolteacher and the matron from Doebin and the former lover of the island's doctor, moves the narrative forward another fourteen years to the time of the Aboriginal strike on the island. He is now a young lawyer who chooses to work on Doebin "as one of the government officials he had himself learned to loathe" (29). His father is unhappy with his decision to return to Doebin because he fears Matthew will be "classed as a paternalistic do-gooder" (280), one of the do-gooders that Peter Sutton describes as ranging from displaying "saccharine sympathy" through to calls for United Nations intervention, but who actually achieve very little (Sutton 11).

Despite the good intentions of Matthew, Mrs Curthoys and Mr Vine they are aware that as individuals they have limited abilities and are likely to have limited success in providing practical help to the Aborigines on Doebin, recognising that the official political and ideological frame within which they operate restricts what they can achieve. However, it is only "persons" who can bring about reconciliation, by multiple one on one connections that help to break down "mutual disregard and ignorance" (Sutton 214). After Mrs Curthoys has left the island she does what she can to help a number of Aborigines from Doebin; her sympathetic response to the Aborigines is related by her daughter Leonie later in the novel to indicate that her concern is altruistic rather than political.

In contrast to Mrs Curthoys's response to the people of the island, Brodie, like Curry, despite his cruelty towards the Aborigines, truly believed that he was doing his best for the Doebin residents. Brodie, Curry and Hurley all share the belief that they "love the black buggers" (105), but perhaps are nothing more than benevolent despots. Brodie's attitude to his charges echoes later comments about Hurley who is said to have mixed "vigorously with the locals" (Hooper 133). In the media coverage of Hurley's trial much was made of his service to Aborigines in some of

the toughest communities in Australia where he “endeared himself” to the communities through his “kindness to their children” (Hooper 133).

Through Matthew the narrative highlights the difficulties faced by white Australians as they attempt to address the problems faced by Aborigines and their failure to be able to stand back and allow Aborigines to stand up for themselves. Matthew’s narrative wraps up the stories of the white characters in the novel describing where each has ended up since leaving the island: “All the players on stage, in the wings, yet paradoxically scattered” (281). There are several theatre metaphors throughout the novel, which has the effect of reinforcing Morrow’s attitude to the events on the island as material for fiction. For the whites there is a separation from the action as the viewer of a drama is separate from the action on a stage. The Aborigines, however, are part of the action, unable to objectivise their memories and unsure of how to remember, unlike the white characters who each have a strategy for coping with the past and their memories.

Matthew promises that Normie would get a fair trial, but the reality is that he will not be tried, fairly or otherwise; likewise Mulrunji did not receive a trial, let alone a fair one. At the end of the novel Normie has the last word as he sings for his people in his own language, but he is still in chains, still exiled. Within the last chapter there is a short section focalised through Manny’s younger brother, Normie who went to school with Matthew. Normie has an education, is articulate and is able to speak to the island’s Aboriginal residents to convince them that they should strike for better conditions. Manny believed that “The world [was] changin out there … [and] It goin to change for us too” (276) and he hoped that Normie could help to bring about that change. However, it turns out that nothing has changed. Normie’s actions lead to his arrest and exile from the island in chains in a repeat of the way his family had arrived on Doebin.

By embedding much of Normie’s narrative within Matthew’s narrative, the novel hints at a very small sense of connection between the characters; Matthew and Normie had found friendship at school as both were the victims of bullying. However, despite what they have in common, not only are they viewed differently

by the community, but they also have markedly different future prospects. Matthew ends up as the do-gooder lawyer, whereas Normie ends up in chains "taken to another reserve where their troublemaking abilities will get no sympathy," in a place far away (295).

The same mentality of segregation exists in Australia today as it did on Palm Island at the beginning of the twentieth century where Aboriginal communities are by and large in remote areas on community land where individuals have no rights to land ownership, where the community is further isolated by a permit system that effectively prohibits outside scrutiny. These communities are without any real economic opportunities or viable industries leading to high unemployment rates, low education and reliance on welfare and public housing, where there is nothing to do but gamble, drink and take drugs, where children are not the priority of all the people and literacy and education levels are lower than two decades ago. In too many Aboriginal communities small groups of mainly women are left with the responsibility of keeping their communities together, to limit the amount of alcohol and violence and care for their children and grandchildren.

The novel also demonstrates the paradox facing white Australians, labelled do-gooders if they try to help Aborigines, aware, but unsure of how to make the changes needed to recognise white responsibility for the past without allowing white guilt to override black responsibility. The novel echoes the pessimistic view of the future for Aborigines and for the possibility of reconciliation that has appeared in many of the other novels evaluated in this thesis. Peter Sutton is also sceptical about reconciliation because it will not "put food in the bellies of toddlers in the bush, or prevent local acts of violence or abuse" (Sutton 41). Paul Ricoeur argues that forgiveness is the "horizon common to memory, history, and forgetting" (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 457) and Father Donellan in *Rainshadow* says "in that hopeless hopeful voice of his" that "There is more forgiveness … than we can ever assess" (7). Hooper observed on Palm Island that "Among families so ravaged by alcoholism and violence, there is another dimension to forgiveness" (87). Elizabeth Doomadgee recalls forgiving the white policeman who said he was sorry for the

"terrible things done to Aboriginal people" and her response: 'Brother, I forgive you' (Hooper 86-7).

Astley's novel uses a story from the past and reconstructs it from the perspective on the nineteen-nineties when many Australians were aware of the imperative to include Aborigines within the cultural memory of the Australian nation and to recognise them as a distinct people who were dispossessed of their land, denied respect and the opportunity to "re-establish themselves on an equal basis" (E. Johnston). *Rainshadow's* narrative highlights the resistance of Australians to adjust their memories to include events that challenge Australia's self image as egalitarian and fair, as a nation where individuals can expect a fair go. Each of the white characters shares a single cultural memory within which to remember, which is different to the framework the Aborigines use to construct their memories.

The novel reinforces the nature of shared memories for white Australians through the entanglement of their lives in the years after they leave Doebin, Matthew Vine came to understand that there were "links between them, however tenuous" (281). Each of the white characters belongs to a group in which cultural memory is defined (Assmann130); however, this group excludes Aborigines whose experiences remain liminal to the larger national narrative, despite the links between the groups. *Rainshadow* is very uneasy about the value of fiction as either a means to remember the past or as a means to come to terms with the past. The narrative demonstrates how memories are distorted to serve a particular purpose, as in the way Morrow uses the past for personal gain, or memories are consigned to the pages of fiction in order to forget them, as Vine suggests. However, the novel is also aware that writing stories is a means of remembering as Leonie understands. Normie, however, is less equivocal about the value of fiction: "'Fuckin fiction!' … That wouldn't work for me, he thought, seeing how it goes on and on, how it lives each day with me and my kids and the rest of us … This fiction, it don't go away" (285-6).

On one level the novel represents in fiction an event in Australia's history, the circumstances that contributed to the event and its impact on those who were

witnesses. On another level the novel contextualises the event within the broader history of Aboriginal affairs and the relations between Aborigines and white Australians and the way that white Australians have applied racist thinking and racist laws to strip Aborigines of all control over their lives and how they came to be disproportionately represented in the justice system. The novel is an attempt to provide Australians with some understanding of the history behind this disproportionate incarceration; however, it also recognises that mainstream Australians do not feel the need to come to terms with the past; it is not their trauma that is being remembered. While the deaths of Aborigines are remembered, they are Aboriginal deaths, not Australian deaths. Along with the need to know the history of Aboriginal dispossession the commissioners investigating Aboriginal deaths in custody also called for the government to provide assistance that did not result in welfare dependence. How to achieve either goal continues to elude us and the myth of the inevitable failure of Aboriginal society continues. In 2008 Palm Island "was a place that was out of control" (Hooper 161).

*Rainshadow* is an axiological text in that it attempts to dismantle the "continuation of a tradition" by acting as "a point of interference" within "encoded cultural experience" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 33). It reflects the interplay between history, trauma and memory and draws attention to the way that cultural memory is constructed and how Aboriginal memory is kept outside official cultural memory and in a small way disrupts official meaning by exposing the history of Palm Island. The structure of the novel mirrors the structure of Australia's cultural memory, where there is acknowledgement of the right of Aborigines to have their own culture and their own history, but separate from mainstream culture and history, and it gives some insight into the history of Palm Island and how that history may have contributed to the events surrounding the death in custody of Mulrunji. Since it is at death that we tend to ask about the value of a person's life, against what values do we judge the life of Manny/Prior, Brodie/Curry, Mulrunji and Hurley? Hurley was acquitted and his career in the Queensland Police continues with the incident on Palm Island nothing more than a minor interruption to his ambitions. Mulrunji is dead, his family still grieves and the people of Palm

Island continue to follow the patterns from the past and struggle with theirs and the island's reputation.

Hayden White argues that there are some events that certain social groups find difficult to forget and equally difficult to remember as the event continues to cast a shadow over the present. That the event occurred is not in question, nor is its "continuing effects on current societies and generations," but what is in question are "the different possible meanings" and "what attitude we ought to take with respect to them as we make plans for our … future" ("Historical Emplotment" 70). The white characters were and are able to leave the island, to continue their lives separate from the events and to some degree to choose whether to remember or forget, and they were and are also able to remember in ways that suit them. However this choice is often not available to the Aborigines who live on the island. Following the events on Doebin, Manny like Peter Prior, lived the remainder of his life under the shadow of the events of 2 February 1930: although no one talks about "that night", he "Can't stop thinkin bout it, bout what he done." "He keep askin himself why why why" (137). Like Prior, Manny is haunted by his actions, angry at being asked to do the whiteman's "dirty work," and "to fight [the] whiteman's quarrel" (138), fearing death because he had broken the commandment that thou shalt not kill (Hooper 83). One can only hope that Senior Sergeant Christopher Hurley is similarly haunted.

Although the intertextuality between the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *Rainshadow* and *The Tall Man* appears at first to be similar to the intertextuality between *Bringing Them Home* and the testimony and trauma literature of the Stolen Generations, the contrast between the influence on public opinion of the Royal Commission and *Bringing Them Home* is stark. Whereas the public took up the cause of the Stolen Generations, the fate of Aborigines who are arrested for drunkenness and put into police cells to sleep it off is of less interest. There is no sorry industry for those Aborigines who live in places such as Palm Island. Stolen children as a cause are more socially acceptable, unlike the violent drunks who beat their wives to death, the petrol sniffing children, the child

prostitutes, the illiterate and the hopeless. As Mrs Curthoys observes: “The world is full of moral disapproval … [but] Nothing is easy” (7) and those who struggle for Aboriginal political rights often overshadow those “who are in the coalface caring business” (Sutton 11).

As I began this chapter a number of events coincided: the twentieth anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the continuing failure to put in place the recommendations of the report; what appears to be the final report into the death in custody of Mulrunji on Palm Island and the subsequent police investigation, seven years after his death; the lawsuit by nine people of Aboriginal descent against right wing commentator Andrew Bolt and the *Herald Sun* over comments he had made about fair skinned Aborigines claiming benefits intended for Aborigines with genuine needs; and the offensive tweet by one of those litigants, Larissa Behrendt against Bess Price, chair of the Northern Territory Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council following Price’s comments on the ABC’s Q&A program in support of the federal government’s Northern Territory Intervention. All of which to some degree bears out the novel’s pessimism towards the ability of literature to contribute to understanding – the limits of language. However, these events also underscore the power of language and present a challenge to everyone to use language to empower rather than control Aborigines. *Remembering Babylon* points to the way language defined the new colony and its role in the dispossession and silencing of Aborigines, *Rainshadow* is about the limits of the language of fiction to undo the damage. *Remembering Babylon* demonstrates how Aborigines became other, *Rainshadow* how the process was continued and *The Tall Man* indicates how the official discourse of Australia still has Aborigines as other; the texts all follow the same pattern.

# 6. Historical Fiction:
# *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant*

In this chapter I take up Lachmann's notion of classical literature as the basis for my discussion of Kate Grenville's two novels, *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* that I read as traditional historical fiction. I make many of the same claims for traditional historical fiction in Australia that Lachmann makes for her notion of classical literature as a space "where memory is shaped within a given culture," and where a cultural group's identity is fostered and maintained (*Memory and Literature* 176). Traditional historical fiction and Lachmann's classical literature are texts that already belong to the national canon or are in the process of being canonised and there is a "utopian element" to these texts as they are considered the perfect forms for cultural expression (178). However, traditional historical fiction and classical literature rely on a rigid memory structure that "resembles a struggle to establish a particular interpretation" (177), are linked to the founding of the community and are oriented "towards national interests" (178); they seek consistency, continuity and celebratory accomplishments and are considered to conform to established standards that are recognised as being of the highest class, as worthwhile and significant.

The process of canonising literature requires many of the qualities of traditional historical fiction as both insist on the inclusion of "exemplary things" and the "highest achievements" taken from cultural memory, and the exclusion of things and achievements that do not meet particular criteria (178). Canonisation is thus a process of evaluation, not only of the literature that is included in the canon, but also of the heroic achievements of people and the nation's traditional texts such as the archive that such literature refers to (188-9). In other words, canonised literature functions as a cultural constant that legitimates official culture, and when "cultural interpretations (or reinterpretations) approach the point where a canon takes shape, they arrest the literary process and they put a halt to literary controversies as they seek to draw a final sum" (180).

I argue that Grenville's novels are a return to the tradition of realist and didactic novels occupied by the earlier texts of writers such as Herbert, Prichard and Keneally as discussed in Chapter 2. Despite the efforts of Malouf and Astley to demonstrate that the language and form of the official historical narrative have contributed to the manipulation of cultural memory, Grenville has returned to a style reminiscent of almost a century ago. Despite wanting to project a liberal progressive view, the novels take a very traditional and conservative participative intertextuality approach, grounded in nationalism and the authority of anthropology and the archive, as they seek to aestheticise history and politics. Grenville does "tap into discourses of national relevance" as Brigid Rooney argues ("Kate Grenville as Public Intellectual" 34), but the novels remain "repackaged revisionist historical accounts" ("Kate Grenville" 33) from the mainstream Australian point of view.

As participatory intertexts that imitate, repeat and remember traditional written texts and the archive, *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* are concerned with the foundation of the modern Australian nation. Although the novels seek to expose aspects of our past that are supposedly shameful and hidden, there is both a "celebratory afterglow" (Gelder and Salzman, *After the Celebration* 85) and a self-congratulatory tone in the novels that reflect Grenville's own feelings on the history she writes about and the claims she makes for her novels:

> But I now feel a great sense of relief I've taken the skeleton out of the cupboard. The kind of paralysis we've been in over what we should do about our Aboriginal heritage can be opened up, and we can move on. There's a chance for something better to happen. (Sullivan, "Skeletons Out of the Closet" npn)

Grenville is a very successful Australian writer who has published eight novels, together with four works of non-fiction about the process of writing one of which, *Searching for the Secret River*, is her exegesis of *The Secret River*. (*The Secret River* formed the basis of Grenville's Doctorate of Creative Arts from the University of Technology, Sydney.) Although *Joan Makes History*, published in 1988, is a light

hearted look at how history is written, who is included and who is excluded, *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* are her only historical novels to date.[1] *The Secret River* in particular was well received by critics and the public; it has done very well in terms of both awards and sales and is now on school and university courses, well on its way to canonisation. The reception of *The Lieutenant* has also been positive, but without the intense media interest that Grenville drew when she described *The Secret River* as history; Grenville has been keen to point out that *The Lieutenant* is fiction, that it "should not be mistaken for history" (*The Lieutenant* 307).

Although *The Secret River* was generally well received Grenville did upset a number of historians, not with her representation of the past, but with her claim that she "wanted to put flesh on the bones of history" and that her novel was a new form of history writing (qtd. in Sullivan, "Making a Fiction of History ..."). Grenville's remarks that *The Secret River* was another way of writing history drew sharp rejoinders from historians Mark McKenna and Inga Clendinnen in particular. McKenna was concerned that Grenville considered the novel to be alternative history ("Writing the Past"), while Clendinnen argued that Grenville had made "opportunistic transpositions and elisions" within a predictable and well known plot ("The History Question" 16). Although Clendinnen believes that the past is owned by everyone, she also argues that it is the job of historians to resist opportunistic appropriations in contrast to those who, like Grenville, exploit the past for their own purpose (65). Grenville made truth claims for *The Secret River* that professional historians considered were beyond what she could reasonably claim.

**Historical fiction**

The traditional historical novel foregrounds a fictional plot against an "identifiable historical context" that integrates historical material (Nünning 362). Historical fiction can be a "valuable adjunct" to historiography not only for its use as "popular education" but also to stimulate an interest in history (Slotkin 222) by bringing out the "hidden value and significance" of the past that may be obscured by the written records (224). Historical fiction is also an important memorial form

[1] The final novel in Grenville's "Colonial Trilogy" *Sarah Thornhill* was released in late August 2011

when the lack of available information makes historiography difficult or impossible (Rigney, "Plenitude" 22). Hayden White sees historical fiction as complementary to historiography and argues that professional historians, in attempting to remain objective, are not able to engage with "discussions of the main political, ethical, and ideological issues" of modern society, and that what is needed is a "return to the intimate relationship it [history] had with art, poetry, rhetoric, and ethical reflection" ("The Public Relevance of Historical Studies" 335). To conjure up the past with both its reality and possibility "requires art as well as information" and the writer of historical fiction, using all the literary devices available, gives a representation of the past that possibly "transcends the truth" (H. White, "Introduction" 149), because a "simply true account of the world based on what the documentary record permits one to talk about … can provide knowledge of only a very small portion of what 'reality' consists of" (147).

White further argues that in times of "profound historical disruption" the novel deals with those political issues that demand a "new conception" of what is real (150), a reality that is not necessarily recorded in official documents, although historical fiction maintains close links to historiography and official documents contained in the public archive. The complementary relationship between historical fiction and historiography brings out an interest in history and provides possible accounts of the past that may not be fully supported by evidence; however, despite the association of literature and history in historical fiction, there is still a distinction between the past that is recalled by historians and anthropologists and the past that is remembered in literature (Assmann 113). Mark McKenna warns that it is important to understand the difference between fiction and history and to be aware of "the dangers and consequences of confusing the two" particularly when historical fiction provides a history we are comfortable with rather than an account of the past based on what we actually can know ("Comfort History" npn). He further claims that eliding the difference between fiction and history within historical fiction also precludes any testing of claims about the past that historiography is subjected to, which risks reducing "our cultural memory to 'dream history'" (McKenna, "Writing the Past" 105).

Historical fiction may not make the "truth claims" of testimony and historiography that hold non-fiction back from the freedom to explore issues and emotions, and which allows for an imaginative investment in the story (LaCapra, *Writing History*); however, historical novels are strongly bound up with history as well as the current cultural and political climate. When an historical novel is marketed as "based on a true story" or is closely linked to long-held understandings of foundational narratives by its association with archive material and other authoritative literature the novel is automatically linked to "the truth." *The Secret River* is used by a number of teachers as an adjunct to teaching Australian history. Rooney, who teaches Australian studies, considers the novel as possibly a useful way to encourage students' imaginative engagement with the "broader conceptual issues" of Australia's past ("Kate Grenville as Public Intellectual" 34). Imaginative engagement with the past is essential for an understanding of the past and is "essential to citizenship" as Martha Nussbaum argues; however, it is "narrative imagination" that is cultivated by literature rather than the pursuit or exposure of "truth" (*Cultivating Humanity)*. The historical material contained in historical fiction may be carefully researched and "true;" however, the conclusions and interpretations that a fiction writer draws from archive material is beyond what we can know and is where literature most obviously diverges from history.

***The Secret River***

*The Secret River* began as non-fiction, as the record of Grenville's research into her family history and her great-great-great grandfather Solomon Wiseman who was the original ferryman at Wiseman's Ferry on the Hawkesbury River (*Searching for the Secret River* 3). While researching her family history, Grenville participated in a reconciliation walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000 and she describes how her imagination was sparked when she made eye contact with an Aboriginal woman, which led her to think about the possibility of their ancestors meeting, what that meeting would have been like and what the phrase "took up land" meant to Aboriginal people ("On The Historian Within"). She recounts how she was forced to see in a different light the words "took up" in relation to land that was an

unquestionable part of her family story following a discussion with Melissa Lucashenko who argued that Grenville's ancestor "took" the land rather than took it up (*Searching for the Secret River* 28). Grenville also describes feeling a sense of envy for indigenous families because they had a connection to the land whereas, as "only" a fourth generation Australian she felt that she had no connection to Australia but must begin her genealogy in Britain (ibid). These four themes, researching her ancestor, the reconciliation walk, the confrontation with the realisation that her ancestor "took" land from Aborigines, and the desire for a sense of national belonging underpin the novel.

The narrative is set in the early nineteenth century. The protagonist is William Thornhill, who is convicted of stealing and sentenced to transportation from London to New South Wales for the term of his natural life. As was common at the time, he was accompanied by his wife and children. The novel begins with a short prologue as Thornhill arrives in New South Wales as a convict, which is followed by a long section set in London that begins with Thornhill's early childhood up to his transportation. This section is in the realistic style of nineteenth-century English writers, focussed on the physical and social situation of Thornhill's early life growing up in rooms where "no one could move an elbow without hitting the wall" (9), looked after as a baby by his six-year-old sister and where they were "always hungry" (11). It was normal to steal "turnips from time to time" (9) and he had even "eaten the bedbugs more than once" (12). They were "always cold" (9) living in the shadow of the "House of God" (10). This section contains every cliché of nineteenth-century Victorian England: Thornhill's mother dies when he is thirteen and there was no money for the parson so she was buried in a common grave and soon after his father dies, leaving Thornhill as the head of the family. The only work he could get was hard labouring, but the "best work … was being a lumper down on the wharves" where he was surrounded by "excess" (21). Thornhill did his best by his family, but in a freezing winter, his sister and his wife Sal's parents fall ill and die. The cost of their medical treatment leaves Thornhill and Sal with no savings and, at the point where he could hope for nothing, he inevitably turns to crime.

Thornhill is the victim of Victorian England before he arrives in the "sad scrabbling place" (75) that was Sydney in 1806 – a place with "only one purpose: to be a container for those condemned by His Majesty's courts" (75). The hard life continues for Thornhill and his wife until he is finally a free man after receiving a Governor's pardon. He claims one hundred acres on the Hawkesbury River where he aims to settle his family. But his encounters with the Aboriginal people who already live on the land create a momentary disruption to his path towards respectability and a place in society. The novel proceeds in a chronologically linear fashion up to his old age in his grand house on the Hawkesbury River, a successful member of the new Australian landed gentry. The remainder of the action of the novel takes place in and around the Hawkesbury River area and the conflict between the settlers and the Aborigines of the area where the new settlement begins is the basis of the novel's plot. The novel is narrated by an external narrator and the majority of the narrative is focalised through Thornhill, it is his story.

The realist novel is the standard form of traditional historical fiction that reflects a particular social criticism and draws from the nation's archive and written canon without question or reservation. Classical literature and traditional historical fiction are where "the authority of … cultural heritage [is] transmitted" (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 67). Material is selected for inclusion in traditional historical fiction if it supports a particular cultural position or identity, and the selection process is linked to politics, ideology and power structures (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 67). The process of selection and exclusion is not immediately obvious, particularly when the texts are in the form of celebratory foundational narratives, as they hide the manipulation of reality, the mechanisms of remembering and forgetting, and the complex political and ideological function in which particular interpretations are favoured over others. The texts draw on material contained in the public archive and traditions that are perpetuated in a linear fashion, respecting boundaries, and keeping genres and styles pure (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 176).

Within traditional historical fiction cultural memory and the dominant group's identity are shaped and confirmed by repeating and reinforcing the already uttered and known (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel") in the form of celebratory foundational narratives and invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger). This style of literature is associated with nation building and white descendents of settler Australians and reflects the desire in Australia for a more acceptable past that better aligns with modern sensibilities; the texts take an axiological position on the past in search of closure. Grenville's novels have been received as belonging to a literary tradition that has been canonised and which have strong links with the archive and historiography. The novels are understood as belonging to the nation's progress and provide an authoritative standard for other narratives. Literature that has been canonised or that seeks to be associated with the canon belongs to a process of "developing a consensus of how works should be read" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 180).

The violence that occurred between the Aborigines and the settlers is acknowledged in *The Secret River*, and at times is described quite graphically; however, there is a failure to give voice to the Aboriginal characters or to represent in any way an Aboriginal perspective. As Thornhill confronts the violent treatment of the Aborigines his thoughts are only for himself and the reader is drawn to identify with him and his self pity as Thornhill has a tendency to see himself as the victim. Tzvetan Todorov argues that that there is a risk in "the tendency to proclaim oneself a victim" (qtd. in Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 89) as doing so fails to see the other who is also the victim. Australian history abounds with heroes and the white settler is both hero and victim. Australians are "used to seeing their forebears as victims, not oppressors, as sufferers, not perpetrators" (Attwood, *Telling the Truth* 30-1), and as *The Secret River* draws on the tradition that celebrates these heroes, we are once again led to sympathise with the white settler Thornhill.

At the same time the novel can be read as trying to seek absolution for Thornhill's part in the violence of colonisation. The issue is not Grenville's bringing to light hidden massacres or secrets from the past, but that Thornhill perpetuates

the myth of the good man forced to make bad choices. Like Heriot in Randolph Stow's *To the Islands*, Thornhill, as the mouthpiece for modern Australians, seeks absolution for his sins so that he can be free of guilt and "move on." I argue that *The Secret River* appears to be the typical Australian foundational myth of the convict turned settler; the basically good man unwittingly caught up in the violence of his time over the struggle for land and the novel does not give the reader a new form of history writing at all, nor does it challenge the official foundational narrative. There are two episodes in particular that demonstrate both the lack of an Aboriginal perspective and the novel's attempt to absolve Thornhill of his guilt for the violence between Aborigines and settlers, guilt that reflects our modern sensibilities rather than historical ones.

The first episode that demonstrates a lack of Aboriginal perspective is when Thornhill heads off to buy some dogs from his neighbour Smasher that he wants as a form of protection because there is a perception of increased violence from the Aborigines towards the settlers. On the way to pick out the dogs Smasher takes great delight in showing Thornhill the black woman he keeps hidden in a tent and in chains for his use as a sex slave. Thornhill's initial response to what he sees is to imagine "himself taking the woman" – a response that lasts "no more than a single hot instant, the animal in him" but which leaves him with a sense of his own guilt (253); guilt for his sexual reaction to the woman rather than for avoiding his responsibility towards her. He quickly leaves Smasher and the woman, ashamed at the thought of telling his wife because the telling would make him the same as Smasher, so he decides to keep what he has seen a secret. Although he acknowledges that he did nothing to help the woman his grief is for the way "the evil of it was part of him;" he has no grief for the woman in chains, only for himself (253).

The second incident is when Thornhill pulls into shore to investigate an Aboriginal campsite, curious about the silence and a lack of smoke. He finds a family of Aborigines who appear to have been poisoned. Everyone is dead except for a small boy about the same age as one of Thornhill's sons. He attempts to give

the boy water; however, the boy continues to vomit and groan and it is clear he is near death. In his fright and disgust, Thornhill leaves the boy, still alive, to die alone, aware that this was another picture that he would not share with his wife, that he would "pretend … did not exist" (278). These episodes support Grenville's suggestion that she exposes otherwise hidden aspects of Australia's past; however, Thornhill's response to the cruelty is anguish for him rather than for the enslaved woman with no imaginative engagement with the Aboriginal victims of the violence. The violence by the settlers against the Aborigines is juxtaposed with two violent attacks by the Aborigines against the settlers: one, the humiliation of the Webb family and the other, the spearing of Sagitty (292); in both instances the conflict is related by the settlers without providing any understanding for the motivation behind the attacks by the Aborigines.

Thornhill chose to keep silent about the violence he witnessed the other settlers committing against the Aborigines and these choices inevitably led to his decision to take part in the massacre. He does not want to lose his land and he decides that being able to stay on his land with his wife and family was "worth any price" (299). So, as long as they were home by breakfast and this further violence by settlers towards Aborigines was kept secret he was ready to play his part in the massacre. As Thornhill steers his boat to the place of the massacre he asks himself: "How had his life funnelled down to this corner, in which he had so little choice?" (300). Despite the number of choices that Thornhill had already made and will continue to make, Grenville repeatedly urges the reader to consider Thornhill as the victim of his time and circumstances rather than as having agency or taking responsibility for his choices.

Thornhill was faced with difficult choices – he could either walk away from the land which he now considered his own or stay and defend it by whatever means necessary. A further influence on his decision was that should he refuse to join the avenging group he would have alienated himself and his family from the other white settlers, which would also have left him on his own in the face of violence from the Aborigines – but he did have choices and he chose to join in the massacre. He transports a number of participants to the site of the massacre; he watches it

occur, he kills a man and he helps destroy the evidence of the massacre. To give him the resolve to go through with the violence, Thornhill pictures Sagitty in his dying moments. For most of the massacre Thornhill was as "helpless as a beetle" (305) and too slow to fire his gun, and it is not until Smasher is speared in front of him that he shoots and kills Whisker Harry, almost against his will.

Although Thornhill is clearly distressed by the violent and cruel treatment of the Aborigines by some of the settlers, as a number of episodes show, the focus of the narrative is on Thornhill and the dilemma the violence creates for him because of the choices he is forced to make regarding the Aborigines. The novel fails to confront the dilemma between exposing the settlers' participation in the violence of first contact and the desire for an acceptable past that celebrates the heroic efforts of those same settlers. In her book *Searching for the Secret River* in which she gives her account of the process of researching and writing *The Secret River*, Grenville says that the novel is essentially about the choices that Thornhill had to make in order to "be" in "the country he'd come to" which includes both his relationship with the land and with the Aborigines (185). This aspect of the novel is very well drawn, even if some of his dilemmas seem to echo those of twenty-first century sensibilities rather than the nineteenth century, but the impact of his choices on the Aborigines is less well articulated or understood and the refusal to have Thornhill take responsibility for his choices relieves us all of the need to face the reality of the violence of contact or to reconcile the violent and the heroic aspects of our past. Grenville claims that she has tried to show the violence as "it happened on both sides" ("Interview") but in actuality there is a single perspective as the reader only sees it from the point of view of the settlers, or more particularly Thornhill.

The reader is shown the settlers inflicting as well as suffering the violence and the violence by the Aborigines towards the settlers is related second hand by Thornhill. There is little recognition that Aborigines responded to the settlers with violence of their own at times, and when they do the reader is given almost no insight into what caused the Aborigines to react with violence; is it the cruelty of

Smasher and Saggity or the struggle over land, or a combination of both? The attack on the Webb family seems to be motivated by mischief and the attack on Saggity as revenge, neither are related to the struggle over land. Sal, Thornhill's wife, does remind the reader that "*they was here … Their grannies and their great-grannies. All along*" (288). But she says this more to encourage a negotiated approach over contested land than as a reason for Aborigines responding with force to the prospect of losing their land. Grenville wants the reader to identify with and share the feelings of her characters ("Interview"), but her decision to only have the action play out through Thornhill's consciousness and to avoid focalising any of the narrative through any of the Aboriginal characters, means the novel becomes yet another white perspective on history and is limited to the level of Thornhill's sensibilities and contemporary liberal values of guilt and regret for the past.

Grenville also elides two distinct periods of violence towards Aborigines in *The Secret River*: the violence of settlement and the later violence related to solving the Aboriginal problem with the hope that the "blackness would be bred out in a few generations" (327). Jack who survived Smasher's shot, was left scarred and broken, just wanting to "*Sit down hereabouts* … as if the very dirt was a consolation" (329) and Sal and Thornhill are unable to understand why their offer of welfare was not gratefully received leading Thornhill to claim that if "that blackfeller was hungry, well, it was no fault" of his (330). It is important to separate the violence of first contact from the violence aimed at solving the Aboriginal problem in the first half of the twentieth century that involved destroying Aboriginal communities and removing children from their families. The first violence was motivated by the need for settlers to protect their land, property and families, regardless of whether we consider the land as taken or taken up. The later violence was motivated by "cold-blooded cruelty … in pursuit of the ideal of racial purity" (Hirst 90). Drawing such a clear link between the initial violence of contact and the later violence as though there was and is a single reason for modern Aboriginal disadvantage is to ignore the complex nature of our past and present.

Land, and its importance to both the settlers and Aborigines, is integral to the narrative of *The Secret River*, but the struggle over land is portrayed as a

misunderstanding that could have been avoided. This stance is in contrast to the other novels under consideration in this thesis that demonstrate a deliberate effort to exclude Aborigines from particular spaces. The novel implies that without the violence of the likes of Smasher and Saggity there could have been a negotiated and peaceful settlement. The violence committed by Thornhill could be viewed as protecting himself and his family from starvation, but Saggity's and Smasher's violence is of a different nature altogether. It is the unnecessary violence that appears to be the reason for the Aborigines' violence towards the settlers, rather than a struggle over land as the violence between the two groups seems to exist separately from any contest over land.

The land that Thornhill had taken up on the Hawkesbury was important to him, not just as a means to feed and house his family, but also as symbolic of his new life as landed gentry in his new country. Land ownership is linked to his sense of belonging, his new identity and to the invented traditions and memories that he wants to pass on to his children. A modern understanding of land that is informed by Aboriginal discourse is transported back to the nineteenth century. Thornhill had tamed the once alien land and made it his own, but the old Aboriginal man Jack refuses to leave because he still retains his link to the land, reflective of a modern dilemma of who has rights to the land. Grenville describes the land as a palimpsest that bears the outline of an Aboriginal fish carving beneath the structure of British settlement. The land is both a physical memory site and a symbol of Australia's memorial heritage that is essential for the survival of official cultural memory, wishing it were otherwise does not change that reality.

When Thornhill has become a respectable citizen he invents a new history for himself based on another man's past believing that "[n]o one was the poorer for the theft" (321), but the land that he fought so hard for fails to bring him comfort. In taking the stance of self suffering guilt for Thornhill, the novel then is unsure about how to deal with his success. Even if he finds no comfort in the land that he has fought so hard for, his descendents certainly will – as is the case in reality. And although he suspects the secrets "would not fade," he expects that his children's

children would "never know what was beneath their feet" (316) because "[n]othing was written on the ground. Nor was it written on any page" (325). Here again the novel displays a belief in the written archive; however, not being written on any page has not ensured the continuation of silence and secrets. Not only can the archive be reinterpreted but the silences and omissions tell their own story along with the oral histories of Aborigines. As with other writers that belong to the tradition of realist historical fiction, Grenville has assumed a moral certainty with regard to narrating the past and the novels not only fail to expose a secret river of blood, they reinforce a particular narrative that continues to deny Aborigines a place in our cultural memory.

The novel can be read as an allusion to the history wars that were raging in Australia at the time of the novel's writing and publication and the stance taken by Keith Windschuttle and others that there was limited violence between settlers and Aborigines because there is little documentary evidence to support such a view. However, despite the secrets that people like Thornhill kept regarding the violence and the desire to exclude it from historiography and cultural memory, the memories have not completely faded. The novels of Scott and Wright demonstrate the tenacity of Aboriginal memory and expose the irresponsible and fatuous response of Windschuttle to the violence of contact.

Thornhill also acts as a metaphor for Australia the nation that is unsure of how to celebrate present day success while at the same time acknowledging that the land upon which this success rests was taken from the Aborigines. The novel suggests that like Thornhill Australia has invented a new history believing that we can forget those aspects of the past that do not fit with our modern perception of ourselves, and that we find no comfort in the land that we have taken or taken up. There is a conflict between acknowledging past wrongs and the desire to continue to celebrate the settlers as the founders of modern Australia that is unresolved in the novels. Sue Kossew argues that any attempt to reconcile the two "is fraught with complexities" (8) and "moral ambiguities," particularly as Grenville belongs to white Australia (17). Breaking the Great Australian Silence in itself is not enough for healing and reconciliation, the history that Grenville writes about needs to be

considered as a shared history, which *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* fail to do as they are so strongly concerned with Thornhill's and Rooke's dilemmas.

Peter Craven's review of *The Secret River* is indicative of the generally positive response to the novel. He argues that Thornhill is a "limited man of naturally decent impulse [who] becomes implicated in an act of reprisal against the blacks" but that he manages to do so "[w]ithout becoming any kind of fiend" (Craven, "Tragedy in Black and White"). Thornhill is neither a fiend nor an evil man, especially when compared to characters such as Smasher or Sagitty, but the early violence against the Aborigines was on the whole not carried out by evil men as such, nor was their intent evil. It was men like Thornhill rather than Smasher or Sagitty who were responsible for much of the violence of settlement as they sought to protect their families and the land that they believed was rightly theirs; and it was also people like Thornhill who were responsible for the success of the new colony. As Grenville points out, when "two different sets of people [need] … the same resource ... it's almost inevitable that you're going to have violence" ("Interview"). Thornhill's attitude to the Aborigines is, according to Grenville "fluid, driven by day-to-day problems" (*Searching for the Secret River* 189) and his choices are prompted by pragmatism rather than a considered attitude. But this is at odds with the desire for an acceptable past and the maintenance of the cultural symbol of the heroic pioneer who played no part in the massacre of Aborigines.

What we "celebrate under the title of founding events are, essentially, acts of violence legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right" (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 79) and we all live with "the heritage of founding violence" (82). Ricoeur argues, following Thomas Hobbes, that there exists no historical community that did not have a violent birth (79). But *The Secret River* fails to reconcile the heritage of Australia's founding violence primarily because Thornhill is only judged against contemporary standards and a modern desire for peaceful coexistence without recognising the legal and social contexts of the time he lived in or the early settlers' daily struggle for existence and security. In an attempt to make "comfort history" the novel portrays the past as a singular, homogeneous narrative

to cover a vast range of contact situations across Australia over a lengthy period of time, a past that is complex and complicated. The depiction of Thornhill as a "naturally decent" (Craven, "Tragedy in Black and White") man and helpless when it comes to his role in the violence against the Aborigines undermines the suggestion that this is a new way to write history or that the novel offers any new insight into the past; Australian history is grounded upon heroic settlers and pioneers and these are well known stories. The novel seeks closure; the narrative displays a desire for a more acceptable past, or at least for a quarantining of the violent past from the present, rather than acceptance of the past as complex and shared.

***The Lieutenant***

The notion of the possibility that there could have been peaceful negotiation over land is also taken up in *The Lieutenant*; the main character Lieutenant Rooke believes that language is the key to mutual understanding and peaceful settlement. Rooke, unlike Thornhill, is not involved in the struggle for land as a matter of life and death, and is perhaps in a better position to protest against the treatment of Aborigines by refusing the order to seek vengeance for the death of the gamekeeper – Rooke argues that the Governor's "orders were a most gravely wrong thing" regretting his "part in the business" (285). Rooke's refusal should also be understood in light of the understanding that the marines could not be court-martialled in New South Wales (Pybus, "Not fit for your Protection"), thus making it easier to disobey orders.

Similar to *The Secret River*, *The Lieutenant* has a good man as its central character and is also traditional historical fiction that uses archive material to repeat and reinforce a celebratory foundational narrative that promotes a hero we can be proud of and feeds the discourse of official history (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 85). The selection process that foregrounds a particular cultural position is hidden behind the simple good fictional story based on an historical character. This novel is not about coming to terms with the past as *The Secret River* is, on the surface it is nothing more than fiction that is inspired by an historical character. However, it joins those Australian novels that have a monologic narrative

that help to stabilise meaning with stereotypical Australian heroes as their central characters. Stella Clarke concluded in her review of the novel that it mobilises "a fairly painless moral discourse" (4).

Traditional historical fiction adheres to the official national narrative that is contained in, and supported by, the public archive. Australia has a well documented beginning and there is a risk that in accessing the archive as a rich source of information we forget that the source was constructed by a very narrow representation of the nation's people. Whereas *The Secret River* draws on a tradition of Australian writing that celebrates the struggling hero, *The Lieutenant* makes extensive use of the archive. The archive is a privileged source where "physical, historical, or ontological principles" began and where "authority [and] social order is exercised" (Derrida 1). The archive contains official documents that "speak the law" (2) and are usually contained in an institution, such as a library or museum, that preserves and transmits official memories. Grenville's use of the archive assumes it is stable and exists as an entity in itself without omissions, and disregards the construction and manipulation of the material it contains. Grenville uses the archive as canonised material that belongs to the nation building project that is unchanging, and is the perfect form of cultural expression. In contrast Scott's use of the archive in *Benang* points to the constructed nature of the material, the limited point of view, the manipulation of the material and the omissions of people and records. The utopian element of the canon is evident in *The Lieutenant* as only a particular interpretation is considered.

The novel is the story of the relationship between Lieutenant Daniel Rooke and Tagaran, a young Aboriginal girl of the Cadigal people and is set in New South Wales during the first months of British settlement. The characters are based on Lieutenant William Dawes and Patyegarang, the young girl who helped Dawes to learn and compile a short record of the Eora language and its grammar. Grenville states in the author's note to the novel that she made extensive use of historical sources including Dawes's two unpublished notebooks that contain his vocabulary and grammar of the Eora language. Very little is known about Dawes as there is

only passing mention of him in the writing of his contemporaries and his notebooks are all that remain of his documents. The novel is a straightforward narrative that proceeds in chronological order from the protagonist's childhood to his death and is focalised entirely through Rooke. The opening sentence sets up a tension between Rooke and the narrator by describing Rooke as "quiet, moody, a man of few words" and then indicating that what follows are Rooke's memories: "He had no memories other than of being an outsider" (3). In the final chapter the allusion to Rooke's memories is much stronger as he remembers Tagaran and "every detail of New South Wales" (299). The linear nature of the narrative from childhood to death and the authoritative external narrator undercuts the ability to read the novel, with the exception of the last section, as the memories of Rooke.

Unlike *The Secret River* there is no blurring of the boundary between history and fiction, despite the inclusion of archive material *The Lieutenant* is presented as fiction. It has not had the attention that *The Secret River* had, but it still provides a comfortable narrative about an historical hero. Unlike Thornhill who is a good man forced to make bad choices, Rooke is the good man who makes a good choice but the consequences cut short his work on the Eora language and his contribution to early Australian settlement. Tim Flannery describes Dawes as "the most morally upright man in the colony" (36) and Inga Clendinnen is similarly positive about him (*Dancing with Strangers*). Cassandra Pybus argues that Dawes is one of the few white men of Australia's colonial past "who can inspire a universally good press from historians," but she contends that his activities in New South Wales were "morally dubious and exploitative" and continued in West Africa and the West Indies ("Not fit for your Protection" 12.1). She concludes that if "Australians are to find an impeccably moral and humane man as a founding hero, we will have to look further afield than Lieutenant Dawes" (12.6).

The narrative begins on Rooke's fifth birthday and ends with his death in Antigua at seventy-four. The first section moves quickly through his schooling, describing Rooke as an outsider with interests in mathematics and music, who becomes an amateur astronomer and linguist. He joins His Majesty's Marines at fifteen, serves on the *Resolution* with Talbot Silk (who is based on Watkin Tench) before he is

injured. By the time he recovers from his injuries the war with the American colonies had been lost and Rooke is reassigned to the *Sirius*. The second section begins on board the *Sirius* on its way to Australia with the First Fleet and then covers Rooke's establishment of his observatory away from the main settlement where he is relatively free to interact with the Aborigines. In the third section Rooke meets Tagaran and begins to learn her language which he records in his notebooks. After Rooke speaks out of turn to the Governor regarding the failed expedition to capture or bring back the heads of six natives as retribution for the murder of the gamekeeper he is sent away from Sydney (285). There is then a jump of fifty years from the time Rooke leaves Sydney to his impending death in Antigua when he reflects on his life and his time in New South Wales.

*The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* are traditional historical fiction, but they also exhibit many of the features of the Bildungsroman where the narratives follow Thornhill and Rooke through their difficult path of growth to discover or build their identity. Rooke and Thornhill are the everyman representatives of the type of settler we would like to have and their search for identity is a metaphor for Australia's supposed difficult path of growth and discovery. Our social order must "appear *symbolically legitimate*" and "draw its inspiration from values recognised by society as fundamental" and these social norms must feel like our own and the Bildungsroman represents the merging of official culture and personal desires to provide the "comfort of civilization" (Moretti 16). Although I believe the novels ultimately fail as Bildungsromane because there is very little evidence of growth in either character over the course of the narrative. Whether as Bildungsroman or traditional historical fiction, the novels seek comfort for particular readers: those who wish for a more acceptable past and those who seek absolution for past sins.

*The Lieutenant* fails as a Bildungsroman because the Rooke who narrates from his deathbed is indistinguishable from the Rooke of the main part of the narrative and there appears to have been no growth in the character beyond ageing. *The Lieutenant* is more a narrative of ordeal as described by Bakhtin in which the hero is tested, in this case as a "liberal reformer," for his suitability for membership of a

select group – in this case those with a white liberal conscience (*Speech Genres* 16). Rooke's test as a hero comes when he is ordered by Governor Phillip to take part in a "punitive expedition" in response to the spearing of the gamekeeper to "bring in six of those natives who reside near the head of Botany Bay" (243). Rooke is to join the expedition as navigator, but he is aware that his job as a marine also involved force (199). He wants to refuse "*because the men we bring in might be the uncles, the cousins, even the brothers of Tagaran …* [and] *I am too fond of Tagaran* (246), but saying no is not an option for a marine and like Thornhill, Rooke is in the habit of allowing himself to "be propelled by circumstance, situation, need" (249). However, Rooke determines to act otherwise on this occasion. After he questions Tagaran to understand the reason the Aborigines speared the gamekeeper, satisfied that they were justified in their actions, he decides that he will participate in the expedition, but will ensure its failure by warning Tagaran. Then, Rooke again is like Thornhill in his slowness to join the massacre; Silk, who was to lead the expedition, had "run along" with his justification for the violence leaving Rooke "at a standstill, trying to remember how to put one foot in front of the other" (248).

Like Thornhill, Rooke also takes his time to load and fire his gun and then aims for the water when he does shoot (264). When he contemplates the hacking off of a head with a hatchet he is "loudly, thoroughly, sick" (276). However, although he warned Tagaran and did his best not to actively participate, Rooke concludes that by going along with the expedition he was as guilty as the others, despite his good intentions, suggesting that those of us in the present who have benefited from colonisation are also guilty even though we did not take up either gun or hatchet: "If you were part of that machine, you were part of its evil" (280). The problem with this argument is that it only allows for one interpretation of the past, and that interpretation depicts the colonisers as evil even as it attempts to portray characters such as Rooke and Thornhill as good men.

Grenville describes *The Lieutenant* as an unusual historical novel about Australia's beginning because it has "a proper lovable hero with something resembling a happy ending" ("Interview"). One reviewer agreed with this description, pleased that "for once appreciation, sympathy and admiration get the

better of impotent guilt" in an Australian foundational narrative (Shriver). However, once again this novel, like *The Secret River*, seems to wish for a different history: if only there had been more people like Lieutenant Rooke to take the time to understand the Aborigines and learn their language there could have been a negotiated shared use of the land that avoided violent conflict. However, although there is friction between Rooke's beliefs, morals, desires and judgements and that of his society, he does not "alter the social face of the world" making his particular heroism "unproductive and uncreative" even though he is an historical hero (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 16). The novel is really a case of what might have been in terms of the past rather than the development of the character of Rooke or of a contribution to changing our understanding of the past.

The regret for what might have been is articulated by Rooke when he tries to feel regret for the choice he made in New South Wales not to join the punitive expedition and its consequence of taking him away from Australia before he could learn more of Tagaran's language and understand her people better (295). Clendinnen suggests that we may have missed out on a "brilliant ethnography" (*Dancing with Strangers* 157) by Dawes being sent back to Britain. But she also suggests that even if Dawes had remained in New South Wales it is likely that he would not have used his understanding of the language to "open the local people to easier communication" because that would have led "to more disruptive exploitations" (ibid). Although Rooke gave the better part of his life to the slaves of Antigua in *The Lieutenant* he looks back on his life as something of a failure. His life had "begun with such promise" but his choices led him away from New South Wales where he had hoped to spend the rest of his life, a place he had also hoped to return to but never did (297). Neither Clendinnen, nor Grenville through the character of Rooke seems to place much importance on the work that Dawes is credited with doing for the slaves of Antigua subsequent to leaving New South Wales; there is more focus on the potential loss to Australia, although Pybus concludes that Dawes's "subsequent endeavour" in Africa and the West Indies may contradict the view of Dawes as "morally upright" ("Not fit for your Protection").

Rooke is also portrayed as a good man in his relationship with Tagaran. Patyegarang is thought to have been about fourteen or fifteen when Dawes met her (Pybus, "Not fit for your Protection"), but Tagaran is younger, reminding Rooke of his sister at "ten or twelve" (147). Pybus's reading of the conversations between Dawes and Patyegarang suggest an "unmistakably sexual element" to their relationship ("Not fit for your Protection" 12.1). Grenville claims she was anxious to avoid any possibility of Rooke being seen to exploit Tagaran and so she deliberately made her younger than Patyegarang to ensure that nothing sexual could be read into their relationship ("Interview"). Rooke otherwise has a healthy sexuality, and therefore the only way to ensure his relationship with Tagaran did not have a sexual aspect to it was to make her much younger than the historical character she is based on. Unlike Thornhill who was momentarily tempted by the woman in chains, Rooke avoids any temptation by seeing Tagaran as like his sister. The relationship that they have is instead centred on language.

**Language and Voice**

As an amateur linguist Rooke is keen to learn Tagaran's language, but he wanted to do more than create a word list, he wanted to understand the grammar of the language. He brought to this task his listening skills and an "urge to understand how things worked" (152). Rooke places a lot of faith in the power of language to bond "one human to another" (25) and to operate as a "machine for thinking" (10), or as a system that had to be understood (152) as the key to the way a society organised itself and understood the world (154). Conversation is likened to a fugue which "was not singular, as a melody was, but plural" (13). "The few notes [of the fugue] spoke to each other, subject and answer, by repetition, by diminution, by augmentation, even looping backwards on themselves" (12). He saw himself as "part of a whole, one insignificant note within the great fugue of being" (14). This novel operates in opposition to *Remembering Babylon* which is about the way language was used by the settlers to define their new place and community and to exclude the other, and is integral to existence, whereas in *The Lieutenant* language is a tool that can be used to unite. It was language that had changed Rooke "syllable by syllable" so that he no longer thought of the Aborigines as strangers (280).

Rooke believes that "Once two people shared language, they could no longer use it to hide" (215).

The novel skims over any possible negative uses of language despite some recognition of the powerful and dangerous nature of words (123), words that can be used to damage, as in *Benang* or to silence as *Remembering Babylon* demonstrates or to make invisible as in *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*. Rooke thought "that putting the thing into words would make it go away," but in reality his "game of words" proved powerless to prevent either the punitive expedition or its consequences for Rooke (254-5). On the one hand language has the power to unite people through conversation and understanding, where language is linked to forgiveness: Tagaran's language was "a language whose very cadence sounded like forgiveness" (254). On the other hand language can be used to control and manipulate and the novel ignores such a use. Aborigines and mainstream Australians share a language, but that does not mean language is not used to hide behind.

The act of naming is a mnemonic device; in order to remember we need to give the idea, the object or the person a name. Rooke visualised words "as if written" in order to commit them to memory (115) and Tagaran's name is the first word of the Eora language that Rooke learnt; in addition he "was pleased to have been named: it was a gift" (143). However, Rooke also believed that naming the natural world does not change the reality of their existence, he draws back from naming places, from the desire to use language to mark out one's place, and sometimes he suffers a failure of language when he could find "no word for what he had learned with Tagaran and he could not attach a name to what he felt for her" (281). Rooke thinks of the earth as an "enormous breathing being" that is arbitrarily divided into maps and given names that "were not just irrelevant but false" (277). The novel does not respond to the dilemma that *Remembering Babylon* faces, that language was used as part of the process of colonisation to define boundaries and mark ownership of the land. Rooke seems to suggest that if we did not name those things such as the stars or create irrelevant maps of the earth that we could avoid the political reality

of land rights in the modern Australian nation. Rooke believed that by learning Tagaran's language the boundaries between the two peoples were "being crossed and erased" as "one language was melting into another" (178). Although there is some friction between the positive and negative uses of language, the novel presents a simplistic view of language as a uniting tool.

Grenville says that she did an enormous amount of research for her novels and that talking to the Aboriginal people "wasn't research, it was a matter of courtesy" (*Searching for the Secret River* 130). However, her courtesy in talking to the Aboriginal people did not make its way into the novels. Despite her research, Grenville shied away from giving voice to any of her Aboriginal characters in *The Secret River* or *The Lieutenant* saying she did not feel that she could do justice to them. Although *The Lieutenant* is "based solidly on history" she decided not to invent any dialogue between Rooke and the Aboriginal characters, relying completely on the material in Dawe's notebooks to provide the dialogue in the novel. The words that Rooke and Tagaran speak are the words that Dawes and Patyegarang "really said or wrote" (Grenville, "Interview" 3), which means that Tagaran is only depicted interacting with Rooke and her voice is filtered through Dawes and Rooke. Rooke is sympathetic to Tagaran, but the reader is not offered any understanding of her motivation for befriending Rooke or her response to the arrival of the British. Similarly, in *The Secret River* the motivation for action by Aboriginal characters is unclear and the response is limited to Thornhill's reaction which is so self-centred that there is little room for understanding any of the Aboriginal characters.

Using Grenville's approach of not inventing any dialogue between settlers and Aborigines has the potential to keep Aborigines silent. The failure of early settlers to record the point of view of Aborigines continues to drive modern accounts of the past. Even had there had been the will at settlement to record the voice of Aborigines there was the problem of language differences, which is well explored in *The Lieutenant*. Although others such as Watkin Tench recorded glossaries of Aboriginal words, William Dawes is remarkable for recording scraps of conversation, but they remain scraps completely filtered through his understanding

of the Aboriginal language. As a novel primarily about the central hero, the lack of an Aboriginal voice in *The Lieutenant* is relatively unimportant; however, in *The Secret River*, the Aborigines are so important to the narrative that their silence perpetuates the myth of the failure of Aborigines to resist or adapt to colonisation. The reluctance to be seen appropriating the voice of Aboriginal Australians reduces the Aboriginal presence to little more than background material, even though the novels recognise the violence of contact.

**Intertextuality**

*The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* are participatory intertexts that repeat the written texts of the archive and the celebratory foundational narratives that contribute to Australia's cultural memory and national identity, while supporting and confirming the authority of that cultural position. Grenville also links *The Secret River* to Australia's foremost anthropologist with her claim that she took the title of her novel, *The Secret River*, from W. E. H. Stanner's 1968 Boyer lecture in which he is supposed to have said that: "There is a secret river of blood in Australian history, which is the history of our relationship with the Aboriginal people, the river of blood" ("Interview"). She seeks to use the authority of Stanner to underpin her version of history; her reliance on the work of an anthropologist mirrors the reliance of Prichard, Herbert and Dark for their understanding of Aborigines and Aboriginal culture that informs their novels. As participatory intertexts the novels repeat and imitate earlier texts and because they have such a strong reliance on the written archive, although Grenville talked to Aboriginal people as part of her research, oral history would always be over written by the archive and the established narrative tradition.

The writings of Watkin Tench and William Dawes that Grenville draws on belong to an Australian literary tradition that is achieved when the writing of an author is continued into the present by other writers and there is agreement on how that writing should be read (Gelder and Salzman, *After the Celebration* 85). Tim Flannery has edited collections of archival material in *Watkin Tench 1788* and *The Birth of Sydney*. Other well known writers have used the same material, for example, Inga

Clendinnen's *Dancing with Strangers* and Thomas Keneally repeats much of Tench's narratives in *The Commonwealth of Thieves*. Writers who have become part of a nation's tradition in this way can only be freed from that tradition if the "barriers protecting the work" are broken down (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 185). Grenville has not broken down the protective barriers surrounding this literary tradition; instead the novels repeat archival texts, remaining true to the written archive and the tradition in support of a homogeneous community with a unified and singular history that includes a celebratory foundational narrative that protects the texts and their interpretation.

Although there is no mention of a river of blood by Stanner in the Boyer lectures he does talk about "a simple forgetting" that has turned into a habit "on a national scale" and he would like to see a new narrative that would bring Aboriginal people "into the main flow" and "break the cult of disremembering" ("After the Dreaming" 189). I argue that *The Secret River* does little to change the national narrative by disclosing a secret river of blood, because the secret was already known and the novel is inclined to leave the reader with the feeling that it would be better to confine the crimes and their causes to the past. Nor does the novel break the cult of disremembering or provide a new narrative as Aboriginal people continue to be disremembered in the novel. *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* celebrate achievements that are considered worthwhile and significant, even while they expose those aspects of the past that do not support the national narrative that began at Federation, a narrative that depends on consistency and continuity to celebrate achievements that conform to established standards while excluding those aspects that diverge from this narrative. The novels are focussed wholly on white settler heroes and pick up on novels of the early twentieth century that although sympathetic to Aborigines and their place in the national narrative, nevertheless, continue to silence and exclude them from the narrative. They address white guilt and mourn what might have been for the nation.

There is an attempt to neatly define and conceptualise the past as though there is only one meaning, only one interpretation and therefore only one narrative. The novels are still "making claims about the past" (Radstone and Hodgkin 5) on behalf

of the descendents of British settlers as they reflect a contemporary concern about what to do with the legacy of that past in the search for modern closure. Unlike memorial novels that highlight the ambiguous nature of our knowledge about the past and refuse homogeneity, these novels perpetuate a monologic voice and represent history as unambiguous, as having a clearly defined single meaning. Grenville claims to have created "a world" that, if we can "[i]nhabit it for a while … [we are] likely to come out a little changed" ("On The Historian Within"). But "self-suffering guilt" is the position taken by Thornhill, the representative of the early Australian settlers, and *The Lieutenant* is sentimental hero worship, and nothing is gained in terms of understanding our past. The novels are "faithful to the shape of the historical records, and the meaning of all those events that historians had written about" (*Searching for the Secret River* 191) but without challenging our understanding of those records.

Literature plays an important role in offering new and alternative ways of responding to the past beyond what we can know, as a place to represent the circumstances and problems of others (Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*); however, literature also plays to the needs of the present. Grenville has taken a psychoanalytic approach to understanding the past by seeking closure through publicly acknowledging and talking about a traumatic or shameful event from the past in the hope that it will help us to come to terms with the past, as though as a nation we can be cured of our past. Coming to terms with the past, however, often means shaping the past into a narrative that is more acceptable to contemporary sensibilities by providing a history that fits with the desire for a more comfortable past, or to provide closure so that we can "move on," effectively giving licence to forget rather than accepting or understanding the past. McKenna argues that Australian historical fiction has become a substitute for history and shapes our current understanding of the past that conforms to a desire for "comfort history" ("Writing the Past" 98; "Comfort History"). There is little to be gained in a discussion about whether novelists or historians are better at writing about the past; however, the intense discussion that followed Grenville's remarks, in particular her step ladder analogy, where she described herself as on a step ladder

looking down at the history wars "outside the fray" ("Interview") have attached themselves to the novel.

Fiction can be used to challenge our understanding of others, both past and present. Charles Johnson speaking of fiction about slavery in America argues that "reading a critical work of fiction should challenge readers to think differently about their humanity and what it might mean" (qtd. in Walcott 140). Grenville claims that she "hoped to create an experience for a reader in which they could understand what that moment of our past was really like"("On The Historian Within"). However, the reader only gets a limited experience from the white characters' perspective and is not challenged to think differently about Australia's past. The novels further contribute to official cultural memory work that is of and for white settlers, what Gelder and Salzman refer to as "a monolithic white liberal consciousness" (*After the Celebration* 85). Roger Simon argues that one of the positions the non-indigenous listener takes when hearing the story of colonisation and resistance is one of "prideful arrogance [or] self-suffering guilt," and that nothing is gained by these positions because they have little impact on "our collective historical imagination"(19).

At issue is not whether *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* are accurate as history, whether historians or novelists tell a better story about our past, or if Grenville had the right to tell her stories in the way that she has. What is problematic is to say that the spark for the *The Secret River* came from imagining the other, which raises expectations that have not been met by the novel. To say that you are telling the story from both points of view and then to have a very silent other throughout the novel fails to realize what Roger Simon calls "the responsibilities of an ethical relation to past lives" (5). Without any difficulty we see the world of the novel through the eyes of men in the nineteenth century living in circumstances few of us would have encountered in even the slightest way. Seeing the world through the eyes of Aboriginal women should not be beyond the imagination.

With regard to *The Secret River*, when Craven says people will find the book "satisfying" I am sure he is right, as once again, the myth that the settlers had no choice, were basically good and it was all one big unfortunate accident, is a comfort ("Tragedy in Black and White"). The only aspect of history that is fleshed out in *The Secret River* is the settler's story and the novel does very little to bring the Aborigine's story into contemporary consciousness. Adam Gall sees the popular success of *The Secret River* resulting from the confirmation of the "good" settler and its work to "solidify that position in the consciousness of the reader" (101). *The Lieutenant* serves a similar purpose of confirming that good people existed among our early settlers as it celebrates a white hero. Celebrating heroes and the good people in our past is a worthy project; however, in both these novels seeking to confirm Thornhill and Rooke as heroes has required that the past be simplified and made unambiguous which is in contrast to reality that is complex and ambiguous.

Gay Lynch argues that *The Secret River* "revives a hidden story of Australian settlement" and challenges "accepted conservative views about the dispossession of traditional landowners" (3). However, the history of Australian settlement is not hidden and has not been for some time, and while there may be accepted conservative views there are also accepted progressive liberal views and neither has any exclusive claim on the past. *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* make value judgements and take a particular moral stance that reflect contemporary liberal values in opposition to contemporary conservative values and as such contribute to the history wars in which the polarised sides of politics battle it out over who tells the better or truer history. Selective treatment of the past "regularly provokes opposition from those who hold different ideas about what deserves to be incorporated in the cultural tradition" (Lachmann, "Cultural Memory" 170).

The notion of a "great Australian silence" and the cries of "why weren't we told" are in danger of becoming invented traditions and slipping into myth, overtaking the myth of peaceful settlement, but myth nevertheless. Remembering and forgetting Aborigines have become part of the political cycle (C. Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*) that allows for successive revelations about the past, indicating that

there is resistance to changing our foundational narratives to incorporate uncertainty and ambiguity (C. Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*). It could be that it is the certainty and security that classical foundational narratives provide that leads us to cling to these stories rather than any unwillingness to accept that there is an alternative to the myth of peaceful settlement. Grenville does augment Australian cultural memory as Lynch argues, but it is a particular memory that she augments, the official memory that provides consistency, security and continuity; the novels expand on an already existing memory rather than adding anything new or challenging the old. *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* are linear, monologic narratives that represent the past in neat and self contained episodes. The novels respond to an "already uttered" and "already known" narrative and reflect the "common opinion" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 279) as well as the desire for a more acceptable past that better fits with present sensibilities.

Roger Stitson claims in his review of *The Secret River* that it "resonates with a long-internalised welling of sorrow, grief and despair for who we may really be as a people, for what happened along the journey, and for what we have become through our giant nation-building" (Stitson, "Torrent of Grief"). But the "sorrow, grief and despair" that resonate in the novels is for contemporary Australians who, like Grenville, are the descendents of those who were responsible for the violence against Aborigines, and who wish it were otherwise. The regret is for the failure of the settlers to create a different set of circumstances where mutual understanding between Aborigines and settlers would have allowed for a truly peaceful settlement. Had there been such understanding Thornhill would not have needed to participate in the massacre to secure his land and in *The Lieutenant* Rooke would not have been banished from the new colony resulting in the lost opportunity to continue his work which would then have opened up dialogue between the settlers and Aborigines. The novels seek to "wipe out the sin of the white men who massacred these people's [the Aborigines'] relations, but we can't ever quite do it, because we're not the same white men" (Stow 53).

My argument in this thesis is that literature contributes to cultural memory and the contact and friction between fiction and non-fiction is integral to that

contribution – they do not stand in opposition to one another. Grenville has clearly exploited the written archive for her fiction, as do all authors of fiction that responds to the past, and whether she has selfishly exploited the material or employed it to its greatest advantage is of little importance. What is important is that we recognise when archive material is manipulated to provide a traditional narrative that meets the needs of the present by appearing to recognise past violence when instead the narrative is focused on the perpetuation of a particular cultural position that celebrates stereotypical heroes. Fiction writers are free to write what they like and to use whatever material is at hand, including the historical archive, but if we are to look to novels as complementary to historiography we need to read critically. Novels that are viewed as sitting on the border between history and fiction tend to be more problematic than those that are clearly fiction.

In the desire for a past that fits more appropriately with our modern day sensibilities Grenville's style of historical fiction seeks to gloss over the reality of the past, to perpetuate the usual binaries and continue to victimise and silence Aborigines. Grenville's project is to redeem Australian history by reintegrating the bad bits of our past into the good or progressive present; she seeks to reaffirm the idea of the good Australian. This style stifles questioning official narratives; it even goes so far as to endorse earlier literature. As I have demonstrated in chapter 2, traditional historical fiction with its singular and certain narratives has the perhaps unintended consequence of keeping Aborigines either silent or victimised. The text affirms a long tradition of re-writing history where possible or of silencing those aspects that are incompatible with contemporary understandings of what Australia should be. The novels make the British responsible for events that set in train lost opportunities – Rooke is sent away so we lost an opportunity to learn the Eora language and subsequently the opportunity to have meaningful dialogue with the Aborigines to understand them and their culture and to avoid bloodshed.

Grenville writes in *Searching for the Secret River* that she wanted to tell the story of the "fear, misunderstanding and violence" as "unvarnished" and as truthful as she could (146), and to imagine how characters may have behaved in relation to

archival material without attempting to whitewash the reality. But as Bernard Schlink reminds us: “the demand for fiction to be representative by presenting typical characters and situations doesn’t come out of a concern for the truth but rather for keeping up a precious image of events” (130). The novels fulfil the expectations of readers looking for confirmation of a precious image of the Australian foundational narrative based on notions of past glory that is characterised by celebratory stories. The novels draw on the archive and the canon to reaffirm official culture.

# 7. Menippean Satire and Polyphony: *Benang* and *That Deadman Dance*

The complex unity of a memorial text comes about through the amalgamation of literary and non-literary texts, as well the employment of particular literary devices within the novel. Lachmann's theory of memory and literature relies heavily on a number of literary devices including intertextuality, double-coding, polyphony, dialogism and syncretism, techniques that break rules, and combine styles and genres – particularly historiographical styles with non-realistic styles. The rules that are broken can be linguistic, stylistic, social, political or cultural and in breaking the rules, the text seeks to dismantle a tradition and challenge official memory and history narratives. This syncretic "semantic act dissolves cores of meaning and at the same time ostentatiously allows meaning that has been gathered from various contexts to unfold" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 129). In the intertextual process memorial novels reintegrate knowledge that was once considered unofficial, such as oral history and family memories as well as those aspects of the past that have been either silenced, forgotten or misunderstood (173).

In this chapter I explore Kim Scott's novels, *Benang: from the heart* and *That Deadman Dance*, to understand how he employs particular literary devices to create memorial novels. Scott's novels do not seek closure or rely on the stereotype of the good hero; instead they question the official narrative rather than reinforce it, and ask questions rather than seek answers. Rather than taking a moral stance in support of the binary oppositions of black and white, and good and evil, the novels unsettle established binaries and presage the beginning of change as "each cultural layer [within the text] reflects the one lying 'beneath'" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 132) Traditional historical fiction, testimony and trauma literature have a tendency to portray Aborigines as the other, as a repressed minority, powerless, and always the victim (Mudrooroo, *Indigenous Literature* 52); however, *Benang* and *Deadman* demonstrate how Aborigines can refuse victimhood, and instead tell stories of how the people, along with their culture and languages can survive and

grow. Bakhtin argues that "it is only in the eyes of *another* culture that the foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly" (*Speech Genres* 7), that it is when two cultures come into contact and engage in dialogue that particular meanings about and within each culture are revealed. Both novels describe the contact between two cultures, and show how Aboriginal and mainstream cultures and languages can merge and mix to create a new heterogeneous culture where each culture is "mutually enriched" without diminishing either or creating an homogeneous culture (ibid).

In many respects *Benang* and *Deadman* are quite different novels; *Deadman* appears to be a more straightforward narrative, without the fantastic elements of *Benang*; however, where the novels coincide is in their syncretism. *Deadman* has cultural and memory layers, is polyphonic, and incorporates aspects of an oral storytelling style into the traditional Western novel. *Benang* employs a number of features of cryptic Menippean satire, which is a syncretic genre free of the limitations of memoir, history and legend, which tends to dissolve the image of a concrete reality by using the fantastic, and "is politically and socially disturbing" (Kristeva 82). Menippean satire, a sub-genre of carnival, "exteriorizes political and ideological conflicts of the moment" (Kristeva 83) and acts as a counter tradition to the epic and to traditional historical fiction (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 140). Menippean satire is a hybrid genre that disrupts the "epic and tragic distance" of official genres (Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival" 140-1) in contrast to traditional historical fiction.

*Benang* and *Deadman* have non-linear narratives and both draw on history, myth and Australia's foundational narrative as well as Scott's own family history, also published as non-fiction under the title *Kayang and Me*. Although *Deadman* was "inspired by the history of early contact" (397), Scott does not reproduce as much historical or archive material in *Deadman* as he does in *Benang*. The novels bring together conflicting or opposing positions without privileging one over the other or claiming a single or final version of the truth that may have the capacity to bring about "closure" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 131). *Benang* and *Deadman* are

memorial novels that seeks to reinvigorate that space where the possibility of understanding can be turned into actual and lasting understanding, “as if some story had left a space into which he [Bobby] might venture” (335), where if we hear the “sound of the 'Other' [we can] … hope that might open up a space for understanding" (Scott qtd. in Yeoman).

Syncretism is the reconciliation of different belief systems that results in a new heterogeneous system made up of dissimilar parts. It is a central element of transformational intertextuality and refers to both the quality of a text and the techniques used to produce it. Transformational intertextuality is the process of incorporating and playing with intertexts to disrupt their official meaning and to create a struggle between the texts. It can take the form of references to other texts, both literary and non-literary, including myths, foundational narratives and oral histories, or by including archival material within a new narrative (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 123). The incorporation of fragments of archive material creates semantic friction through contact with the surrounding text of the novels, but at the same time the new text preserves the alterity of the intertexts (17). The material is not appropriated or altered by its inclusion in the new text, which allows the reader to question the accepted understanding of the material; to understand the material outside of his or her own cultural understanding or to understand it alongside or within the cultural understanding of another.

The historiography that is referred to in Scott’s novels is continuous in that the greater whole of the history the novels respond to remains intact, but the perspective that the novels bring forth ruptures the established meanings held within that whole. The novels do not re-write or replace history, but create semantic friction within the existing historical narrative to prompt a new way of understanding the past and to insert a new perspective and meaning into the existing discourse, or as Harley in *Benang* and Bobby in *Deadman* attempt, to alter the existing narrative to allow for an expanding discourse comprising multiple voices, and to provide a space where these voices can be heard. Both novels highlight the syncretic nature of Aboriginal culture, in particular the acceptance of

the settlers in *Deadman* demonstrated by the uptake of European music into Aboriginal dances, the wearing of European clothes, and learning English to build a bridge between the two cultures. Bobby shows mainstream Australians how to adjust one's world view and culture without losing the fundamental and important aspects of one's own culture.

Dialogism, a further dimension of the memorial text, "generates ambivalent meanings" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 102), it provokes disorientation, non-exclusive opposition, and meaning that is plural and shifting. Within a dialogic text everything is understood as being part of a greater whole where there is a "constant interaction between meanings" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 426). There is also interaction between author and reader as commonly held understandings of the past are challenged and as new perspectives on the past are posited. "The author makes use of someone else's discourse for his own purposes, by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 189). The dialogic text is double-coded, sitting between oral and written narratives, and uses oral speech patterns and every day, idiomatic language. Such texts are neither didactic nor additive, but are implicative and inclusive (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature*). Double-coding refers to both text and vocabulary, both of which undergo continual change. The term first white man born used to describe Harley of *Benang* is double coded, having two different meanings dependent on one's point of view, and as a half-caste he is also bodily double-coded. Bobby of *Deadman* is similarly double-coded as he attempts to "be" simultaneously in two cultures.

***Benang, from the heart***

*Benang* was first published in 1999 and jointly won the Miles Franklin Award in 2000 along with Thea Astley's novel *Drylands*. Scott was the first Aboriginal to win the award. The time-frame of the narrative covers a one hundred year period beginning just before Federation in 1901. Harley, the protagonist of the novel, is a character bound narrator who is the first white man born in his family, and depending on one's point of view, either the successful outcome, or the victim of

his white grandfather's efforts to breed out the colour in his family. Time in the novel is non-linear, sometimes circular as the narrative follows an oral storytelling rhythm that is accentuated by the self-conscious narrator. As a character bound narrator telling his own biography, Harley's story carries a certain truth or authenticity despite the plot's non-realistic elements. The novel dissolves one type of meaning and replaces it with another as Harley goes from victim to survivor.

After a decade in which Aborigines were increasingly defined by their position as victim, the novel reflects the beginning of a change in the political rhetoric surrounding Aborigines, and recognises that there is no longer a need to educate Australians about the treatment of Aborigines under policies designed to breed out the colour, but instead it is present day Aborigines who need to be understood beyond the paradigm of the powerless and oppressed. This does not mean forgetting the past, it means that the past needs to be remembered in new ways that allow Aborigines to reclaim responsibility and choice, and refuse victimhood. The novel is also a self-conscious exploration of the methods used to research and record history as well as the impact that these processes continue to have on the present. The structure of the text and the narrative style suggest a rethinking of the form, the content, and the perspective of the narrators and narratives that tell stories about the past, beginning with the premise that written documents are neither complete nor necessarily accurate representations of the past before moving towards elucidating other ways of recording, viewing and coming to terms with the past.

In the novel Harley's grandfather, Ernest Solomon Scat (Ern) is an enthusiastic devotee of the ideas of A. O. Neville, who was the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia from 1915 to 1940. Neville argued "the need for both social and biological *absorption* of the Native Race" (43) and selections from his speeches and writing are reproduced in the novel. Ern, who is Neville's fictional cousin, arrived in Australia from Scotland during Neville's term as Chief Protector, elated at his prospects in Australia where "He knew he could make something of himself" and where "he was surrounded by the very best of men … All of them experts on the

poor Aborigines, and on their situation. All experts on this country" (49). Ern was a man of "sly lust" (77) who discovered an enduring interest in coloured girls in South Africa on his way to Australia, has a series of Aboriginal women as sexual partners, who "married a Nyoongar woman, despite the law" (98), and who sexually abuses Harley. Although it is unclear if Ern married his Nyoongar woman out of love or power, his marriage nevertheless makes him an eccentric character. Not many white men married Aboriginal women at that time, despite the common practice of taking them as their sexual partners: "if *that* was all he was after then he needed only to make a short trip to the *native camps*" (98), he did not need to marry her. Harley is also an eccentric and hybrid character who had grown up with his grandfather after he was given into his care by his father as a seven year old because as a white man Ern was able to give Harley opportunities that his Aboriginal father could not. As a young man and following a car accident in which his father is killed and he is seriously injured, Harley returns to live with his grandfather to recover his health. The lives of Ern the white man and Harley the half-caste are inextricably linked.

During his recovery Harley discovers his grandfather's "dusty archive" which contains the record of Ern's efforts to breed out the colour in their family. Harley is powerless and oppressed and facing extinction: already a victim of his grandfather's sexual abuse, impotent following the injury he sustained in the car accident, he now discovers he is the victim of this larger quest to breed out the colour from his family. He is angry at first, "full of self-pity" (20); "defeated, and guilty" (23) – "no matter how much I tried to savour my memories I tasted only bitterness; what has been taken away" (350). Finding his name at the end of each sequence of photographs, always at the end of the line, or the first white man born depending on how you looked at it, he determined to prove his grandfather a failure and to prove the records wrong, that he is neither the end of the line nor the first white man born. On discovering Harley rifling through his papers, Ern has a stroke that leaves him speechless and helpless. Harley now takes care of his grandfather while he continues to search for his ancestors in his grandfather's papers, while at the

same time slowly destroying their house and carving words into his grandfather's skin in revenge.

The tragic struggle created in the novel by the use of transformational intertextuality is how to remember and record past events and the problem is returned to again and again: in memory, in historiography, in the archive, cut into skin, written on paper, in the lines of age and experience on skin that is parchment like, and the damage that the record can do, the damage that words can do. Harley seeks to disrupt the commonly held belief of Aborigines as victims and himself as an ending: "I had thought I was an end, [says Harley] and had wanted a beginning, but that is to think of it in the wrong way. It is instead a continuation. It is survival" (178). The narrator is aware that there is a risk in remembering, both in the "objective information" to be passed on in memories and in the impact remembering has on those in the present (Sebald 87). Harley's anger is equally directed towards his grandfather's record of their family history as it is towards his grandfather's attempt to breed out the colour from his family, or towards his grandfather's sexual abuse. Ern's program to breed out the colour in the family ultimately functions more powerfully at the level of historiography than it does at the level of biology. *Benang* also explores the practice of giving European names to Aborigines and registering them as white, which resulted in people becoming lost in the official record and losing their Aboriginal identities. The deletion from the white man's record, the re-naming and the loss of their oral tradition to pass on to family and therefore the loss of cultural memory have erased the memory of Harley's ancestors leaving him alienated from his heritage and his people.

The amalgamation of disparate points of view is a feature of Menippean satire, a style which combines "genres, languages, cultures or changes of voice to oppose a dangerous, false or specious and threatening orthodoxy" and which "lives in a precarious universe of broken or fragile national, cultural, religious, political, or generally intellectual values" (Weinbrot 6-7). Menippean satire sits in opposition to traditional historical fiction. Characters and plots are often eccentric and hybrid in an effort to undermine any certainty of purpose – to undermine "teleological

orientation" characters may have a single sound, but they "bring together various doublings and multiple copies" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 131); Ern and Harley are eccentric characters. Menippean satire "allows for every manner of hybrid" (126), and is not the easy answer to the complexities of bringing together Aboriginal and mainstream cultures that Perera claims, but instead allows the complexities to exist together rather than erasing either one of them. Hybridity in *Benang* also includes the half-caste, which extends the treatment of language and words onto the body and the fantastic is used in the novel as an ideational function to search and test truth (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 114). Harley tests what appears to be the truth about him and his family to find that there is another truth contained within his family history and within the wider history of Australia.

The novel has several concerns: it tests the use of language, building on the work of Malouf in *Remembering Babylon*; it contemplates the effect of writing in relation to recording events, reflecting Astley's concerns in *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*; it is concerned with the problems associated with perpetuating myths in traditional historical novels and how to avoid doing so; and it is concerned with the marginalisation of people from mainstream cultural memory. As a Menippean satire *Benang* explores language and writing and tests ideas rather than supplying heroes, and creates spaces within fantastic worlds for the hybrid or the doubly-coded repudiating ideas of purity of race, language or culture (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 114). While there is a serious side to the novel, there is also a playfulness that demonstrates "the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important" (Rorty 39-40).

A technique of Menippean satire is to make extensive use of inserted material and show a concern with current affairs (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 118). Scott quotes or inserts archival material from journals, letters and newspapers, oral history, his family history, he makes allusions to past and present politics and ideology, signals other foundational narratives, Aboriginal dreaming, popular culture, historiography and the theories of Social Darwinism and eugenics. Apart from the inclusion of archive material within *Benang*, the text also evokes

contemporary debates about Aborigines, in particular two essays by Noel Pearson: "Our right to take Responsibility" in which he draws attention to the devastating impact of passive welfare on his people, and "White guilt, victimhood and the quest for a radical centre" an essay considered to be a turning point in Aboriginal affairs in which he argues that victimhood has come "to be the accepted basis of the relationship between Aboriginal people and the rest of the country" ("White Guilt"). *Benang* and *Deadman* turn away from the identity politics that informs Stolen Generations narratives, but confronts the politics relating to the problems facing some Aboriginal communities and the relationship between Aborigines and mainstream Australians. The novels bring together political and historical texts within the fictional narrative to disintegrate established meaning by taking the traces of ideas contained in other contexts and transplanting them into a new context, which changes their meaning and breaks apart the whole (Lachmann 132). Although Grenville and Scott both exploit the archive, Scott does not validate the archive as the single, authoritative depository for history, nor does he accept that documents from the archive are necessarily representative of the past in all its complexity and ambiguity.

The novel seeks to understand how the attitude towards Aborigines and half-castes developed and reached its peak and then how that attitude has shifted but has left lingering damage. The historical documents that are reproduced in the novel, out of their earlier context where they were supported by scientific and political theories, now in their new context support the repudiation of these theories. The so-called science of eugenics is stripped from its supporting rhetoric and is laid open as damaging and inexplicable as it relates to the lives of real people who continue to bear the pain inflicted by the application of the policies based on this science. Scientific and political ideas that were highly regarded in the early part of the twentieth century are shown to be both senseless and cruel. As well, the reader is led to question contemporary policies, which may also be misguided and ultimately doomed to failure. The novel seeks to transform the myth of the dying race and the corresponding myth of peaceful settlement into a narrative of hope and growth that recognises the violence and destruction, but without relying on

Aboriginal victimhood. *Benang* is both an uninterrupted account of Harley's family history, a container for fragments of other texts, and a part of the larger whole of the cultural memory of Australia.

Gordon Briscoe in his review of the novel argues that Scott's overuse of archival sources without placing them in their "chronological context" may lead some readers to believe that the novel "is really history" and that "such an impression would be false, for *Benang* remains fiction despite its historiographical appurtenances" ("Review" 240). He further argues that unlike historiography which is critically tested Scott does not "assess [his narrative] in a duly critical, historiographical manner" and his focus has "a personal rather than historical dimension"(ibid), as though the personal or the individual have no place in historiography. Taking the documents out of their chronological context is precisely what allows the reader to understand the effect that the science and the policies had at an individual level, it is a subjective rather than objective use of archival sources and as fiction is not required to critically assess the material, although I would argue that despite the novel's fictional status it does assess the material, but not according to historiographical or contemporary mainstream rules. The individual focus allows Scott to add a new dimension to existing understandings of the past that is unavailable when the documents contained in the archive are considered the only sources of history. The novel presents historiography as problematic due to its reliance on the archive and the material trace, but there is no suggestion that the archive should be ignored.

On the contrary, archival material forms part of the story and historical documents are included within the text in a number of ways: as epigraphs, and inserted between and within the narrative. One chapter is made up entirely of reproduced letters to and from the Chief Protector of Aborigines and one epigraph is an excerpt from a book by a well known Australian historian, with citation (149). The novel does not blur the boundaries between historical material and the fiction of the text; the archive material is acknowledged by the author, is set apart with italics in the text and often attributed to an historical character and the individual,

personal stories are woven into and determined by the historical texts and their contexts (Slater 62). The author also acknowledges several Aboriginal sources, but their contributions to the novel are more difficult to discern. The point of the novel is to assess the effect of policies on individuals and to highlight the arbitrary nature of historical archives and stories about the past, in contrast to traditional historical fiction, which builds on the archive and existing stories about the past.

The historical documents reproduced in the novel retain their foreignness within the text and create semantic friction between oral and written history, and between personal and official history. There is also friction between "real history," memory and the fantastic; Harley reminds the reader over and over not to rely on his words: "my memory was poor" (14), words "blur, and shift" (15), he has "an inadequate memory" (27). Harley is also responding to "other rhythms, to other memories" (53), rhythms and memories that are not held within the archive documents or the official history of Australia, but within the cultural tradition of his people. In the Western tradition of historiography, the written trace is given primacy over oral evidence; however, over the past twenty years or so there has been a growing number of historians who have incorporated oral history from Aboriginal sources into Australian historiography. Along with supporting the changes in where historiographical material is sourced, *Benang* uses memories, oral history and written documents in such a way to show that they are all susceptible to change and distortion over time as the words scratched into the grandfather's skin change over time as they heal, becoming difficult to read.

The fictionality of the narrative is brought to the reader's attention when the narrator interrupts his narrative of the past by inserting a contemporary road trip, apologising for the interruption and by directly addressing the reader. Harley, like historians and other people who record and interpret the past, cannot possibly know all that he narrates, either from the archive, his own memory or from his uncles' memories and he reminds the reader of this when he comments that his uncle was not possessed of a remarkable memory that could recall his birth, but was instead relating the story of his birth that he had heard many times from

others. The title, *Benang: from the heart* indicates that this is not objective historiography; the narrator is not detached from the story he tells because he is writing to understand is own place in history and is therefore emotionally involved, uncertain of his moral stance.

There are three guiding metaphors in the novel: writing on the grandfather's skin as content, the dismantling of the house that Harley and his grandfather live in as form, and Harley's ability to float as perspective. The metaphor of Harley carving words into his grandfather's skin concerns the content of written records and the damage that words can do, as well as the risk to memory that the written record poses. Harley needed to carve words into his grandfather's skin because he "wanted to scar and shape him with … words because his had so disfigured me" (287). Following on from the exploration of the power of language and naming in *Remembering Babylon*, writing, naming, language and words in the novel are ambivalent not only in the double-coded meaning of words, but also in the uses that words are put to. "With such a language [Boon, Coon, Nigger], it is hard not to accept such concepts (312).

Writing and language on the one hand record, but they also exclude, naming remembers but it also helps to forget. "Names are disposed of. You would think this no place, and that there are no words here, from which to continue" (181). The naming of people is one way that Aboriginal people became lost in the official record. Benang is the name of Harley's great-great grandmother and although she is introduced early in the narrative, the reader does not know that she is the Benang of the title because it is not until much later in the narrative that her full name is given and the reader can make the link between the names and the person. Recording people according to their blood rather than with names also excluded people from memory. The captions on the photographs in the grandfather's archive are not names, instead they are the fraction of the person's Aboriginal blood: full-blood, half-cast, quadroon, and octoroon, "each individual was designated by a fraction" (26) which made it impossible for Harley to be certain of who they were.

Harley knows that his grandfather's words have defined and disfigured him and he sets out to show how they have done so. The power of words to damage resides in the way that reconstructing the past is "liable to distortion" (Nünning 364) and manipulation, and further, how the political use of material "thought to be specifically historical," already subjected to distortion and manipulation in its reconstruction, also bears on the interpretation of this material (H. White, *Content of the Form* 60). Traditions that rely on memory to maintain important rituals have a "general distrust" of systems that rely on writing because of the possibility that mistakes can creep into the written text or that secret traditions can be disseminated (Assmann 115). The view of some Aborigines is that the "white man's law" is more "open to change" because it is on paper, whereas Aboriginal law is "in their minds and landscapes and is unchanging and thus superior" (Sutton 199). The distortions and manipulation of written documents are revealed in a number of ways in the text, most obviously through the removal or exclusion of material from the archive. Photographs of ancestors had been withdrawn from the record "because they were evidence of a too-dark baby" (97). The record also disregards those "shot, brain-bashed and stolen," forgets those "poisoned, those chained and force-fed with salt until they led the way to water" (493).

However it is not only Aborigines who are excluded from the record. White whalers, sealers, explorers and assorted adventurers (493) are also left out of the record as is their contribution to the program to breed out the colour, albeit unknowingly. The capacity to forget is not limited to white people either; a number of Harley's family members have poor memories, either because they are too pale, were too young to have been able to remember particular events or have deliberately chosen to forget. In some cases it is a physical inability to pass on information about the past: two members of the family had oral cancer which rendered them unintelligible.

Apart from the removal of material from the archive, the choice of language to recall the past may also distort the record. Benang's name is spelt in various ways suggesting carelessness towards the person behind the name, and she is given a

European name in the records that masks her real Aboriginal identity. Consequently, "We cannot depend on such names put down on paper" (103); and the "we" that Harley refers to is both black and white Australians. Naming and recording operate as a controlling device of both people and history and promote forgetting, but ironically naming and recording also created an archive that can be used to prevent forgetting. Harley claims that Aborigines themselves conspired in their "own eradication" (97-8) by registering their children in the white man's records. On the one hand this allowed children to be accepted by the white community and to participate in education, but children were also registered for more pragmatic reasons. If Aboriginal people were recognised by the law as white, then when white people "took, used, killed like they did" (178) it was considered murder. Without such recognition in the record there was no protection for Aboriginal people. But registration also "meant another sort of death, for our ancestors, because some of us tried to forget about them altogether" (177).

The grandfather's archive also defined who and what Harley was by his placement within the material, always at the end of the line, the full stop, the last entry in the family tree, evidence of the success of Ern's program. A further way that language effaced people from the records was to describe them, not as people, but as part of a process. Aboriginal people are described in terms of "animal husbandry" (91) and in relation to breeding and training. There are hints of the possibility that the program constituted attempted genocide through descriptions of people moved in stock cars (90) and who have their heads shaven as punishment (92). And in the more overt remark by Ern: "They had some good ideas, those Nazis … But they went a bit far" (154). The grandfather uses "his scientific method" (29) of "timetables and a systematic approach" (23) and draws on the language of science to describe his family as he records his part in the program to breed out the colour. In this manner, the grandfather controls the past: "It was still his story, his language, his notes and rough drafts, his clear diagrams and slippery fractions which had uplifted and diminished me" (37) says Harley.

The novel makes reference to the system of exemption certificates that was put in place in the nineteen-thirties whereby half-caste Aborigines who were "intelligent and well-conducted" in return for "not living or associating with aboriginals"(L. F. Johnston 13) could be considered white. Essentially the certificates were an exemption from the status of Aborigine as it required the applicant to disassociate himself or herself from other Aborigines, including their families, allowing Aborigines to enter into white society or pass for white as part of the process to create an homogeneous white society. Disassociation from Aboriginal society, however, did not mean inclusion in white society. Tommy, Harley's father, had tried singing for a while, but he chose the white man's medium and words and when he attempted to insert his own words the crowd drifted away and he eventually stopped singing altogether. An uncle's attempt to write a local history and Tommy's attempts to sing both fail because they restrict themselves to white ways of being and using words that are unaccepted as white man's history and culture, but which also ignore their own history and culture.

Harley's singing on the other hand is a continuation of his great-great-grandmother Benang's singing – she sang to her children and her grand-children of people she had lost, in her language and softly enough that they would remember (245-6). The text and the narrator suggest that the way to successfully tell stories about Aborigines is through a mixture of mediums to give a richer version of the past in which memory and written traces are combined and when physical and psychical traces are from multiple perspectives, as it is also possible to retain the quality of Aboriginal culture while using the medium of writing, despite the past use of writing to define and marginalise Aborigines. This syncretic process results in an heterogeneous culture that contains multiple voices and practices.

Historiography has the status of a discipline that applies precision and objectivity to the collection, interpretation and re-writing of traces of the past as a narrative; historians are set apart from fiction writers and the transformation of history into a discipline involved aligning the study with the physical sciences (H. White, *Content of the Form* 59). However, in this novel science and the objective point of view is

shown to fail Aboriginal people; the narrative undermines the accepted rigour of the written archive by exposing the manipulation and distortion of material within it, which then puts into doubt the idea of historiography as a science. The novel also demonstrates that science is open to manipulation and distortion by the way the theories of eugenics and Social Darwinism were used to support the program to breed out the colour. The novel supports Hayden White's suggestion that there is a "connection between interpretation, narration, and understanding" that makes historical studies a "special kind of discipline" and that there should be a resistance to demands to make it a science (*Content of the Form* 60). Harley is reacting against the supposed scientific rigour that informed his grandfather's record keeping (29) and the text is a reaction against the supposed rigour of historiography as well as the conventions of the historical novel: "And I further acknowledge, and nod to, the demands of Historical Fiction" (323).

On the one hand the narrator says he is aware of the demands of the historical novel and the need for accurate records, but on the other he deliberately destroys the order of his grandfather's papers and excuses his failure to keep good records because he is easily distracted. The scientific discipline of Ern's record keeping only ensured a particular part of the past was recorded, in a manner that suited his purpose in support of the program to breed out the colour with little regard for the truth. Harley seeks to demonstrate how the record of the past has the potential to continue Ern's work and how assuming that record is objective and scientific further supports the policy to breed out the colour by writing Aborigines out of history and cultural memory.

The structure of the novel, where the written archive is reproduced and acknowledged within the fictional text, also reflects the physical nature of the written record as opposed to the more ephemeral nature of memory. Not only does the archive provide the material from which historiography is written, but it also provides a framework for historiography and traditional historical fiction that does not leave either enough space or the right type of space for new stories. The acceptance of writing; however, does not mean accepting the existing framework

for writing. There is a rejection of the white people's way of thinking "just to make you sad" (111) as the only way to tell stories; Harley accepts that the changes that have come to his people mean he has to change his methods of storytelling, as Pearson also argues that "to continue to rely upon our oral traditions is unsustainable" (*Our Right to Take Responsibility* 64).

The text repeatedly challenges the reliability of the archive and the damage the uncritical use of the archive can do and the need to augment the archives of white Australians with the memories of Aborigines and with imagination, but it also accepts that English is the language we share and that writing and the novel provide the most effective means to share cultural memory, and that there must be a response to the archive. Early Aboriginal novels followed the style and manner of white writers and were often heavily edited and controlled by publishing houses (Jones) to ensure a white perspective, which diminished the Aboriginal voice in the stories; however, *Benang* illustrates a syncretic style of writing that breaks the rules and brings a new perspective on the past that allows the Aboriginal voice to be heard.

The form of storytelling about the past is also controlled and manipulated by its production within a rigid cultural framework. The grandfather's house operates as a metaphor for mnemonic architecture, a location that acts as a storehouse of experience with rooms and places where images are deposited and controlled (Lachmann, "Cultural Memory" 176). The house where Ern and Harley lived was a boarding house and Ern dreamt of setting it up as a bed and breakfast business as part of the mainstream economy. It is also a metonym for the missions, reserves and the huts of the fringe dwellers where Aborigines lived after they were removed from white society and it is a symbol of the prescribed historiography that has marginalised and silenced Aborigines in print on paper. Dismantling the house is a metaphor for dismantling a tradition of confining Aborigines within spaces ruled by white people. Harley wants to write a family history that not only returns to the record those who have been removed and that names the nameless but one that also provides some creative spirit. However, to do this he first has to disrupt the old

tradition and the official narrative that prescribes how stories about the past should be told.

The damage that words can do is at the level of both content and form – Harley views his grandfather's words as a virtual prison from which he must be freed if he is to write his family history. The contents of the archive that have been distorted and manipulated help to define and disfigure Harley and his people, but the framework as well as the contents needs to be challenged. Harley dismantles the house so he could see "the light showing through the gaps where there had been mortar" (109) as a metaphor for the glimmering light of other stories and memories making their way into the memory storehouse of Australian culture (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 37). Harley slowly dismantles his grandfather's house while the narrative dismantles the family history that his grandfather has built with words on paper, and as he dismantles the house light is allowed in through the gaps he creates. The metaphor of the house is emphasised by the grammatical use of ellipses throughout the novel to indicate gaps in Harley's memory and the national narrative, but which also have the potential to allow the light to shine on previously hidden stories.

The third guiding metaphor in the novel is that of Harley's ability to float following his car accident, which allows him to view the problem from an unusual perspective, which "results in a radical change" in how what he observes is understood (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 116). The experimental fantastic which is a facet of Menippean satire allows a problem to be viewed from an "unusual point of view" (ibid). Harley's floating is also ambivalent in that not only does it allow him an unusual perspective, but it is also a literal manifestation of his grandfather's success in uplifting him as part of Neville's larger desire to "elevate these people to our own plane" (399), demonstrating the success of his grandfather's efforts. It also demonstrates his inability to ground himself in either black or white culture, as well as the need for distance from the problem so that he can see more than what is contained in the archive. His "*propensity* for elevation" (12) provides Harley with a

more objective point of view because judgement "depends for precision on the distance separating" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 162) one from the problem.

Harley's ability to float has given him a new perspective on history and a better understanding of his people, but it is born out of his crisis of identity and may not give him a clearer picture of the material or a more precise or truthful version, just a different one, particularly as he wants to include memory and imagination in the new history because he knows that this is the only way that some of the gaps in the story can be filled. But, the narrator's awareness of the risk in remembering is made obvious by the way light and darkness are allowed to ebb and flow through the gaps he makes in the house. On the one hand the light is a return of those who had been either ignored or removed from the record, who now have a new space into which their stories can be inserted. On the other hand the darkness represents those who have been forgotten and cannot be retrieved, the unknown and the unspeakable darkness from the past that seeps into the present. The merging of light with darkness is one of a number of metaphors for the syncretic process of bringing together dissimilar parts to create an heterogeneous whole, and of diluting the darkness of pain with the light of hope.

As well as distrust for the white man's archive because it manipulates history, Harley recognises the limitations of the archive to provide a complete picture of the past even when used by Aborigines. Harley wants to do more than offer an alternative view of history; he wants to completely alter the framework to open up spaces in which new stories, new perspectives and new storytelling styles can be inserted. In keeping with the housing metaphor, this would mean an entirely new house rather than simply adding a room or two reflecting Chris Healy's view that more is required than just "adding" an Aboriginal "component to Australian history" (*Forgetting Aborigines* 114).

In addition to the three guiding metaphors there are a number of other recurrent minor metaphors that bear upon the difficulty of writing and the unreliability of memory and two of these are worth mentioning. The first is the blending of black and white. The coming together of dissimilar parts of cultures

does not necessarily result in a "merging or mixing" of culture, but instead results in "mutually enriched" cultures (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 7), but *Benang* is sometimes sceptical of the equality of cultural blending. There are several instances where black and white occur naturally together, blend together or change with time and movement, such as the Yate tree which has a black trunk and white branches and the merging of tributaries into rivers where the different coloured waters blend, as syncretic processes that are also metaphors for the program to breed out the colour, which was likened to "a small stream of dirty water entering a larger clear stream. Eventually the colour of the smaller is lost" (5). There are a number of occasions when black and white do have common features or parallels. The grandfather also floats: "Ernest Solomon Scat floated all his life, in a different way to myself," he rarely touched the country but his footsteps resonate: "the rhythm of his steps is peculiar, very particular, and it was this which alerted me to other rhythms, to other memories held there" (53). One of Harley's uncles had earlier attempted to write a "little history of this region" (165); and both Harley and his grandfather are masochists because of their obsession with going over past pain and memories that hurt (286).

The text is also an amalgamation of the methods used to recall and record the past: written history, memory, and imagination. Instead of emphasising difference, and highlighting marginalisation and oppression *Benang* highlights commonality without making the stories "flattened and homogenized" or becoming "a parable of injustice and cruelty" (Cowlishaw, *Blackfellas, Whitefellas* 210). The process of bringing together is not without its difficulties and these difficulties are highlighted in the text through a series of oppositions. Writing is both damaging and beneficial; reading his grandfather's archive both uplifted and diminished Harley; the archive was responsible for feelings of "anxiety … anger and betrayal" (9) and was also responsible for leading him to write his family history and claiming his identity as a Nyoongar; the grandfather is a reprehensible character, but part of the family and its story; white family members participated in killing Aborigines, but they also married their Aboriginal partners and acknowledged their children; children are

registered to try to save them from murder, but this also rendered them white in legal terms, thus denying them their Aboriginality.

The second of the minor metaphors is the difficulty with beginnings and endings; Menippean satires are usually without ending and although *Benang* covers a discernable time period the story has multiple beginnings. The first four chapters begin the story anew, each time introducing the main characters of the novel while moving back and forth in time. Harley, the narrator, is unsure of where to begin the story, "reluctant to begin" with his grandfather (29) and sad that he can go "only so far back as my great-great grandparents" (8). Benang, his great-great-grandmother seems to be a logical starting point for the story as she is the outcome of the first contact between white "whalers, sealers, explorers, [and] assorted adventurers" (493). There is an oceanic feel to the movement of the narrative as it surges forward, then retreats, to surges forward again, gathering information with each movement, which also reflects the role of the ocean in washing up Harley's great-great grandfather and the sea as the source of the first white men in Australia.

There is also some difficulty with knowing where and when to end the story. The title of the final chapter is "continuing …" – there is no end to the story because the family whose history Harley is narrating continues through his children and through the story he has written about his family. The circular nature of the text and the lack of clarity about how and where to begin and end the story highlight the continuation of events from the past into the present and the continuation of the people themselves. Towards the end of the text, Harley comes to the realisation that it is not a point in time or a place where the story starts but with the fact that he is a Nyoongar (494).

A further Menippean characteristic in the novel is Harley's journey in search of the truth about his people and for a physical space among his people where he can test his understanding of history. Harley's journey is both figurative and literal as he sets out on a quest to write his family history, which is interrupted by the literal journey that his uncles take him on to show him the burial sites and traces of his ancestors and the places that are important to his people. On this journey Harley

hears the stories and memories of his uncles, which then become part of the greater whole of the historical narrative contained in the written archive. While on his figurative journey Harley takes the reader through the process of discovering his grandfather's records, researching the historical archive and listening to his uncles' memories, taking him towards an understanding of the correlation and differences between the memories held in the archive and in the memories of his people and that "there is no such thing as a *single* correct view of … [the past] but that there are *many* correct views" (H. White, *Tropics of Discourse* 47).

Although Harley found his grandfather's "world weak in its creative spirit" (472) and his Aboriginal uncles thought that it was material "just to make you sad, reading and looking at things like this. It's just a wadjela way of thinking" (111), he understands that his grandfather's world and the material in the archive belong to him and his people as much as it belongs to white Australians. This contemporary, literal journey puts an end to Harley carving words into his grandfather's skin and dismantling their house; however, he continues to hover in the air and sing, to tell his story from his own perspective. He concludes that it is not possible to completely dismantle historiography and that the written word is the primary way to disseminate information to a broader audience and to record memories of his family so that they become part of the national story. Despite its limitations he had to return to writing.

Harley is the Aboriginal everyman representing all Aborigines, indicated on the last page of the novel by the narrative shift from the first person singular "I" to the first person plural "we." As the first white man born he is the face of the program to breed out the colour. As the victim of sexual abuse he represents the raped and abused Aboriginal women and children, and those who have been subjected to humiliating and cruel punishments at the hands of white people. He represents Aborigines who have been brought up as whites, denied their language and culture. He is also the voice of the modern Aborigine who understands that the Aboriginal oral tradition is no longer enough to record and disseminate Aboriginal culture, that it is necessary to embrace change and use writing as a supplement to the oral

tradition in the same spirit as Benang when she saved herself from the violence by turning towards one of the men who were “stalking the women” and sticking by him (463). Benang barely has a voice in the novel; she speaks only once or twice and is represented through the narrator on only a few occasions. Throughout her life she was often in country where her language was not understood and increasingly it was English that she heard. Her response to this was to turn inward, to look for traces of her ancestors (471) and to sing of her loss. It is through Harley that the voice of Benang continues, and although she is ghostlike, her presence is clearly felt. Benang and her people have been reclaimed from the written word that attempted to forget them and from the program to breed out the colour. Harley now restores them through writing, but writing in a new form.

The novel does not seek to elucidate the past, to re-write history, to prove that the events happened or to educate the reader, instead the text and the narrator are concerned with the way the records of the past are manipulated in terms of their content and interpretation and the rigid framework that the written archive supports and is in turn supported by, and the impact that this has on efforts by Aborigines to tell their own stories. This novel demonstrates that there are gaps in our knowledge of the past that are sometimes deliberately made, and that there are multiple and complex stories and many ways to tell stories about the past that do not need to rely on the archive to imagine what people really felt and said. The novel fulfils the obligation to remember with an awareness of the risk in remembering, of telling yet another story about the past in which Aborigines are the victims of a government program to breed out the colour that further entrenches Aborigines in the mould of the victim. Instead the novel avoids this; the narrative is from an Aboriginal perspective, not as an oppressed and marginalised people, nor an homogenised people, but a complicated and heterogeneous people with a history that is as equally complicated and heterogeneous. It writes against the politics that confines Aborigines within the narrowness of victim politics, and that keeps black and white separate.

The history that is reproduced in *Benang* is reasonably well known to Australians now, although to some extent the myth of Aborigines as a dying race persists. The novel challenges the view of Aborigines as victims, as a powerless and oppressed minority and the persistent idea that Aborigines are unable to adapt and are facing extinction. Although the papers contained in the archive suggest some success with the program to breed out the colour the reality turns out to be quite different. At the beginning of the novel Harley is not sure if he is the victim of his grandfather's program or the successful outcome. By the end of the novel he is sure that he is neither, it is the program that has failed and he is the successful outcome of his people's efforts to survive. As Harley opens up new ways of researching the past beyond the archive he discovers a complex family history in which the dichotomy between victim and perpetrator becomes indistinct. He is not the first white man born in the family, nor is his uncle who was earlier declared the first white man born. His white great-great grandfather who was washed ashore bleached and amnesic and his Aboriginal great-great grandmother, Benang, both turn out to be half-castes.

Harley also realises that his grandfather and other white men are integral to his family's history; the belief that he was the ending, the full stop, is overturned as he begins to see himself as a beginning, in cultural rather than racial terms. The political rhetoric that is built on a strict dichotomy of black and white, and victim and perpetrator, is undercut by this novel as it makes the case for viewing Aborigines neither as victims nor as a people on the verge of extinction, but as a people capable of adapting to change with a strong connection to their past and a strong belief in their future.

***That Deadman Dance***

*That Deadman Dance* was published in 2010 and won the Miles Franklin Award in 2011. The narrative is about the coming together of two cultures; it relates the early success of the friendly frontier in Western Australia and then traces the

changes in the interaction between Noongars[2] and Europeans from the positive and promising beginning, through its unravelling into violence and distrust in the course of the protagonist Bobby's lifetime, ending with the failure of later European settlers to follow the lead of the Noongars and the earlier settlers to recognise and incorporate the belief systems of the other without privileging one set of beliefs over the other; to create a new world and a new language. There was a "good beginning" but a "lot of bad things been done here – we won't speak of them now … but that was a good beginning" (78).

The time span of the novel is 1826 to 1844 and the narrative begins somewhere around 1836 with Bobby "Moving between languages … imagining, remembering" (1). The narrative moves back and forth in time throughout Bobby's life, from a baby watching whales to a young man when he was fearless, confident in himself and his culture, to Bobby the old man who talks to himself because "the young ones never listened" (74) and who now sings and dances for tourists. The novel uses an external narrator, a Noongar, and although it is focalised through a number of characters, both black and white, Bobby, a Noongar man, is the primary focal point for the narrative – this is his story.

The novel begins with a prologue that is focalised through Bobby as a boy. His "command of English was remarkable" (25) and he is "confident and charming, quite precocious" as he incorporates into his own culture the European culture that is changing the world as he knows it. Bobby offers himself "as a fine image of the passing of time" (80) as well as acting as a bridge between the two groups (127). The first word of the prologue is *Kaya,* which may mean hello or yes or both – Scott does not always translate the Aboriginal words he uses throughout the novel. The language of the prologue also contains non-standard English: "Nobody ever done writ that before" (1) and tells of Bobby's interaction with a new language, with writing, Bible stories, imagination and storytelling and with his physical interaction with the white man Chaine. Despite the proximity of the two, Chaine "could not make out a word, could not hear his [Bobby's] voice" and Bobby, "despite the

[2] In my analysis of each novel I have retained Scott's spelling of the name of the Aboriginal people as Nyoongar in *Benang* and Noongar in *Deadman*.

warmth of the body beside him … felt the cold seeping into his bones" (4). Bobby is making an effort to adopt new ways and adapt to the change brought by colonisation, but his efforts do not bring him any warmth and the white man does not hear his voice.

Although Scott was inspired by history and the narrative contains re-created historical events and characters based on historical people, the novel makes no claim to being history, or of being representative of reality. The novel is concerned with the past, but it is also concerned with the present and current affairs, as it looks to the future; it is part of a continuum, incomplete and still becoming, not determined by what has come before, as the action is not confined to the past but lives also in the present. Looking towards the future the narrator of *Deadman* can see the bones of the dead Noongars become the foundations of "the town hall" that will bear the "great weight [of the] … nation's fluttering flag" (355), although that time is "long after this little chapter of a single plot and very few characters, this simple story of a Bobby and his few friends" (357). This is another literary reference to the Australian landscape as a palimpsest.

The narrative makes the link between nation building and the simple story of individuals and the link between the past and the present. Bobby tells stories of his own past alongside the past of his people and the Europeans they came into contact with, the "stories of dark spaces" and how those stories "became the truths they are," a truth that incorporated "a new language of sorts" (130), and in the course of the narrative those truths are tested. Bobby, like Harley the Aboriginal everyman, speaks for his people rather than as an individual. There are similar shifts in the narrative from the first person to the third person, from "I" – "I change, doesn't mean I forget" (391), to the inclusive "we" – "We will sign a paper with them about how we might live" (390). The narrative also speaks for the Europeans in the past of the novel and for non-Aboriginal Australians in the present as Bobby speaks back, "Because you need to be inside the sound and the spirit of it, to live here properly. And how can that be, without we people who have been here for all time?" (394). The novel argues for listening to the other in order to create an

inclusive world that has a strong creative spirit, not the weak creative spirit of Harley's grandfather Ern who relies on the archive for history.

Extending the notion of syncretism to the body, Bobby is a syncretic construction who combines two languages, and "two semantic and axiological belief systems" within him (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 304), he is double coded. Like *Benang*, *Deadman* is also a continuation and a rejoinder as it re-writes and replies to other texts, both historical and fictional (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 36). The intertextuality of the novel and the combination of established Western styles such as the fairytale with Aboriginal storytelling and mixing English with Aboriginal languages refers the reader "back to a social space that possesses certain cultural propensities" a space that is necessary for dialogue that is "without closure that opens an unending process of understanding" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 39). "When a text interacts with a heterogeneous consciousness, new meanings are generated" which break down the unity of the whole to incorporate other meanings (Lotman, Leo, and Mandelker 378).

The form of the novel reflects the conflict within history, and the inability to know who speaks for the past and who is able to speak from the past. Bobby both remembers and imagines as he tells his story from within his oral tradition, it is then narrated by an external narrator who is also a Noongar; his voice is mixed with the voices of others, both Noongar and European, and is further mixed with the narrator's imagination and then presented in writing. This conflict between form and voice liberates semantic difference that is not likely to allow a reading "based on a single meaning" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 39). As the confused chronology makes it difficult to know from where in time the narrative speaks, it is not always immediately obvious who speaks due to the multiplicity of styles and voices in the novel.

Polyphony refers to the voices of characters and narrators in a novel and is one of the devices employed in memorial novels; it is a "central strategy of syncretism" that combines styles and voices and breaks the rules (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 131). Along with the production of new meaning memorial novels break

down the idea of a single "truth" or of agreement about representations of the past, which is then replaced with a "reconciliatory dimension" that is associated with the Bakhtinian idea of polyphony (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 307). Language in polyphonic discourse is mixed, and ranges from formal language through to the everyday as well as incorporating non-English languages, mixed idioms and slang. Each character within the text "brings at least two voices into mutual contact" as the text builds up a network of voices and amalgamates non-official culture with official culture (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 131).

*Deadman* employs many of the features of polyphonic discourse employed by Astley in *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*; however, unlike *Rainshadow* which uses polyphony to highlight the marginalisation of Aborigines, *Deadman* uses polyphony as part of its syncretic project. The large number of characters in the novel brings to the narrative multiple perspectives and voices to create a network of mixed languages, a chaotic and polyphonic discourse that establishes its own meaning as it destabilises official history, dismantles "established meaning" and has an emphasis on listening rather than reading, which directs the text away from a stabilised meaning (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 130). In this regard *Deadman* differs from traditional historical fiction that seeks to maintain close links to historiography and official documents, by instead providing an alternative voice from the past from within official history.

A key feature of the polyphonic text is that each voice within the narrative retains its independence; the polyphonic novel is "democratic" as the characters and the narrator share the same rights (Vice 112), knowing "neither law nor hierarchy" (Kristeva 85); it seeks harmony while "implying an idea of rupture" (Kristeva 89) as it challenges official thought and "the shared nature of the problem gives rise to dialogic relations" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 124). There is a range of voices, a mixture of languages and the narrative and the characters seek to undermine the developing official language and culture as Bobby retains his democratic voice as he attempts to challenge the settlers' cultural hierarchy. The relationship with the other and the plurality of voices of dialogism come together as

polyphony (Vice). As voices are combined to create a unity that is more than the sum of its parts, the whole retains its multi-voiced character while it avoids becoming homophonic. Characters and narrator are on an equal footing as the narrator allows multiple characters to speak and to argue with each other with what seems to be minimal interference from narrator or author. Bobby's voice was unheard by Chaine in the past, but in the novel he is given back his voice, he is the subject of the narrative, not the object (Vice 114). As a polyphonic novel, we are given an insight into the way that Bobby understands himself and how he sees the world, rather than seeing the world as it had become for him and his people (Vice 133). Bobby exposes the cultural hierarchy created by colonialism and even though he fails to stop the growth and eventual dominance of European culture his voice and his perspective remain a part of history and cultural memory.

Bakhtin argues that the unity of the polyphonic novel cannot be "reduced to the unity of an individual … any more than musical polyphony can be so reduced" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 22). Bakhtin takes the term polyphony from music as a metaphor for the difficulties of constructing a narrative that goes beyond "the boundaries of ordinary monologic unity" as music encountered problems when it exceeded the "boundaries of a single voice" (ibid). The musical metaphor refers to the presence of "independent but interconnected" voices (Roger Fowler qtd. in Vice 112); and how we understand each character in a text comes from the character's language, the rhythm of the language and how each voice sits within the whole of the narrative. *Deadman* uses many musical analogies for the bringing together of voices and rhythms to create a new harmony: "They all joined voices with Bobby as the melody grabbed them" as they shared their "songs of celebration" (317-8). As the narrative shifts between characters there is a corresponding shift in the narrative voice and the rhythm of the language.

Bobby's narrative has an oral rhythm, which emphasises listening rather than reading; whereas the European narratives follow a more formal, written rhythm. There is a musical quality to the narrative as a whole that suggests a symphony, a coming together of a number of voices and rhythms to create a harmonic whole.

Cross and other early settler and Noongars used song as a "way to communicate, to say more of oneself than was possible with their limited shared vocabulary" (129). However, as the friendly frontier degenerated into misunderstanding and violence the voice of the white men drowned out the voices of the Noongar and at the end of the novel Bobby sings alone, rather than as part of a symphonic whole. The musical metaphor reflects the desire for an Australian culture that is a united whole made up of a variety of voices and sections speaking and working together from their individual positions.

The syncretic project in *Deadman* examines established memories, stabilising them within the text, but it also draws attention to the different ways that memories are linked with particular people and cultures which gives the memories different meanings depending on their context. The novel draws on two historical incidents of Noongars incorporating European culture into their own that are manifestations of dialogism where a piece of one culture is incorporated into another, giving it a new meaning while at the same time retaining its original meaning, which then becomes the joining of two systems to create a new world (Kristeva 73). One is the Dead Man Dance of the title that Bobby and his people perform, which imitates the British marine's drill, "a dance from way past the ocean's horizon, and those people [who] give it to our old people" (67). The second incident is when "Wunyeran looked up and sang in greeting, *Oh where have you been all the day, Billy boy Billy boy*? (129). The Noongars also mimicked the speech patterns of the Europeans (385); "It was like Bobby *was* them, was showing their very selves, inside their heads and singing their very sound and voices" (376).

The dance illustrates the Noongar's "ability to adopt anything new" (98) without in any way diminishing Noongar culture or the British culture from which it was taken. Bobby also uses song to refuse the "business of a white man thinking he was too good for a Noongar" (317) – all people and all voices are equal in the songs that Bobby creates: black, white, Chinaman, Yankees, convicts, froggies, soldiers, whaling language, blackfella talk, evoking Indian flutes, strange melodies, using familiar words, foreign words and unknown words. However, Bobby's incorporation

of European culture and manners caused discomfort among the Europeans when they heard their language and saw their mannerisms reflected back to them, perhaps revealing to them aspects of their own culture otherwise unnoticed. Unsure if they were being ridiculed or not the soldiers laugh nervously as Wunyeran uses the words of their song in a new context (135). The Noongars appropriate parts of European culture, taking them out of their original context, mixing them in an irreverent and playful manner that takes control away from the settlers; Bobby's name, Wabalanginy, means "all of us playing together" (39) and it is no surprise that the settlers are unable to pronounce his name correctly. There is a semantic interchange between the uses of the song and the dance that challenges the idea of a single meaning, builds relationships and encourages multiple voices.

However, the pace of change proved too fast for the Noongars as they struggled to incorporate aspects of European culture into their own at the pace required to keep up with their rapidly changing world and European culture began to override the culture of the Noongars – there is a limit to how much he can change and Bobby finds he is unable to incorporate writing into his songs (317). He also laments that we "learned your words and songs and stories, and never knew you didn't want to hear ours … "(106). The cultural exchange that began with such promise had turned into cultural domination. Settlers used language to control Aborigines; from legislation and permits, to re-naming the people and the land. Aborigines have also been kept separate from mainstream Australian culture and Aboriginal culture has been marginalised. Europeans struggle to get their tongues around the unfamiliar sounds of the Noongar language, and equally, the names of the white men are strange to the Noongars "until Bobby showed them how" (69) as he was able to switch "from one language to another" (200). When Bobby is an old man it is the names of the Aborigines that sound strange to Bobby's audience; however, he is no longer able to act as a bridge between the two cultures, reflecting the shift in power and control.

Pearson argues that there is "a missing bridge between the country's original culture and the transplanted culture" of Europe and the "bridge needs to be

designed and built from two sides" ("Speaking One's Mother Tongue"). Bobby had brought together broken English, his own language and song (130) to develop "a new language of sorts" (131) to the point where his people risked losing their language and culture and even their way of thinking. "The questions you ask, learning a new way of speech. How it drives your thinking" (133). At the end of the novel, Bobby's excellent English has deliberately reverted to broken English. "Me and my people … My people and I (he winked) are not so good traders as we thought. We thought making friends was the best thing, and never knew that when we took your flour and sugar and tea and blankets that we'd lose everything of ours" (391); the trade was in worthless items; a "spear that would never fly straight for a hat" (73) rather than in understanding. "But some people come to live here, and wanna stay like they never moved away from their own place. Sometimes I dress like you people, but who here I ever see naked like my people?" (391). In *Benang* Harley speaks in English which is the "language we share" (495), but Bobby feels that it is only the Noongars that have had to change and that maybe in the process too much has been lost.

*Deadman* plays with chronology and it is not always easy to follow the movements back and forth in time, which has the effect of shifting the reader's attention "from listening to the story to looking at the central situation" (Frye 267), and "forces one to reflect also on the other elements and aspects" of the narrative (Bal 81). The central situation that the narrative points to is the subtle change in attitude by the settlers that leads to the failure of the friendly frontier, and the way that the past lives on in the present. Playing with temporal sequencing draws attention to and emphasises certain things, shows various interpretations of an event, and indicates a subtle difference between expectation and realisation (Bal 81).

The chronological confusion also reflects Bobby's confusion, who for one moment in the narrative could float above his present reality with echoes of Harley and see into the "future graves" and "into some people's hearts and minds" (127). The passage of time is measured by the change in which of the names sounded

strange. At first it is the European names that were "so strange that no one could say them" (69) and later it was the names of the Noongars that not only "sounded so strange" but were "of people no one else could remember" (72). Many times throughout the novel the narrator refers to the future: "In later years … we might call this a *significant* site" (350). The back and forth rhythm of the novel, redolent of *Benang's* oceanic rhythm, contributes to a sense of "wavering" between the real and the fantastic, creating a sense of the "broken sense of self" and acts as a metaphor for the links between the past and the present, between groups and individuals (Bal 81-2). But it also "suspends temporality" between the time of the text and the time of the intertexts (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 16). The novel makes the historical material part of the present, drawing a link between Bobby's unrecognised efforts to adapt to European ways with the need in the present for recognition of Aborigines' adaptation to modern, Western ways as well as the need for Aborigines to maintain a strong Aboriginal culture.

There is little trace of the Noongar people in the written archives of the Europeans: "Just as no mark of his passing remains in the water, so there remains little trace of his tongue in the air," but if we pause and listen, we may hear (134). Lachmann argues that memory "enshrined in writing is directed against the destruction of cultural experience" ("Cultural Memory" 176). This is the case for cultures that rely on the written word to record and preserve memory, but for Aborigines stories, songs and dance were the methods of preserving cultural experience. With the coming of Europeans to Australia and the destruction of many aspects of Noongar culture Bobby understands that he needs to incorporate writing into his oral culture in much the same way that Harley understood that he had to return to writing. Bobby has also learnt to write and through writing he finds he could make things "happen again and again" (5). But writing is "only imagining," even when he writes of his own experiences "straight from his mother and father's tongue to that of Chaine" (5) what he reproduces is not reality. He understands that writing and imagination are bound up with one another, sometimes just thinking about a thing could make it happen – he "didn't even have to write it down" (20).

However there are also those things that “won’t slip between sheets of paper” (134).

Bobby once carried within him a story about riding a whale told to him by his elder Menak, but he no longer fully remembers the stories of his elders and in any case he discards the remaining memory of this story because it “wasn’t true, it was just an old story” (3). Bobby likens the demise of his people to that of the whales (160). “The whales, though, there was energy there, and this was a path they followed, year after year. A watery path that was hard to follow yet was that of their ancestors and his own, too, since he came from ocean and whales” (34). The Noongar story has now been replaced with the Bible story of Jonah, symbolic of the overlaying of European culture onto Noongar culture. The young Bobby had “heard the stories so many times they lived as memory” (73), but as he grew, and he listened less to the stories of his elders he found that “the picture of the letters written like that came along with the memory” (303). Because he was thinking in letters, the memories of his people would not come to him, only those of the English people, the letters could only evoke “an English voice” (302).

The generic function of some phrases, such as once upon a time, the playful way the Noongars use and copy European songs and English words, is not to affirm them but, through the mixing of languages and the “dialogic usurpation” (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 133) of phrases, words and songs, the way we look at the history of the contact between Europeans and Noongars is changed. The novel opposes the traditional historical novel while, like Harley in *Benang*, it nods to “the demands of Historical Fiction.” It depicts European writing and speaking styles and culture, using the novel genre, but it also refuses them as it refers to Noongar cultural memory (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 134). Bobby and Harley both refuse to accept the finality of the death of their people or that foundational narratives should be told in a particular way. The novel is a new context that is capable of storing and speaking the traces of another culture more used to oral storytelling.

*Deadman* illustrates the cultural upheaval and the multilayered and contradictory social reality (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 27) of the contact between Europeans and Noongars with acute awareness that "Everybody that was there is gunna tell it different, aren't they" (K. Scott and H. Brown 149). Scott moves between black and white culture and his personal experience of contact with both Noongar and mainstream culture may have "helped him to understand more deeply the extensive and well-developed contradictions which coexisted among people" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 27). Memorialising the past and syncretism help to create a collectively shared experience that does not diminish either culture: "Rather than moving from one world to the other – the 'us and them'" there is a desire to create a "heritage and [a] sense of place [to] make it one world" (K. Scott and H. Brown 228). Within a dialogic text everything is understood as being part of a greater whole where there is a "constant interaction between meanings" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 426). The novel brings together history, the trauma of the Noongar people and cultural memory freed from official history, language and modes of storytelling. The narrative proposes a way of remembering the past through cultural transfer. "We are two men of such different backgrounds … and, attempting to fuse them we are preparing for the birth of a new world" (129). However, the novel challenges the belief that white Australians "can redress inequality and injustice merely by exposing and embracing the messiness of Australian history" (Allington 12).

The ambivalence of this novel is that it provides Bobby with a space to tell his story as it inverts official culture, but at the same time it holds a mirror to the present that suggests that storytelling may be limited in its ability to bring about significant change, redolent of Thea Astley's *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*. Bobby was a "storyteller, dancer, singer" (394) he was "a light-hearted, laughing fellow" who could also "squeeze their hearts until tears welled" (159) with his stories, who knew that "it was never good business to stray too far from laughter" (159). But at the end of the novel not only the white men, but also his own people turn away from him. His vision of "all our songs and dances mixing together" (349) was a chimera, a fanciful illusion; ultimately Bobby is too different for the

Europeans to take up his desire to share the land and history. Mr Frazer in *Remembering Babylon* also failed in his attempt to get the settlers to share the land with the Aborigines, because it was outside their understanding of how their world should be constructed. Alexis Wright is also aware of the danger of making literature that is too different from mainstream narratives that makes it difficult to access.

The innovative style of Scott's novels particularly when compared to traditional historical novels acts as a rupture in the continuity of foundational narratives and discontinues the automatic patterns of official memory. The first rupture to continuity comes with the beginning of the novel, "Once upon a time," indicating that in the Western literary tradition what is to follow is a true oral folktale, except that that is not what the reader gets. Instead the novel attempts "to give the lie to the myth claiming durability for officialised literature" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 40) and the oral folktale contained in the narrative is Aboriginal rather than European. The new perspective and style opens up semantic potential without denying earlier narratives or the dependence of this text on those earlier ones. Scott uses national history and his family's history to write a new story, not with a desire for a more acceptable past, but with the desire to see the past from a different perspective and to provide hope for a better future. The novel is an "act of renewal" as it looks forward with an eye on the past as it "defines the relationship between the old and the new positively rather than negatively" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 36).

*Benang* and *Deadman* are memorial novels that attempt to bring together two different belief systems; as memorial novels they allow for cultural and linguistic "contact, crossing and overlapping" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 126) that helps to prevent "the formation of a consensus" (114). They seek to break down the idea of a single, official historical narrative and to create a new way to tell the story of our past without seeking to erase or alter the officially accepted cultural memory. They highlight the importance of multiple voices and ways of speaking to tell the story of the past, and the importance of bringing to life the memory of the

dead rather than preserving the material trace that often tells only part of the story. History, trauma and memory come together in narratives told with multiple voices using hybrid storytelling modes to shift the frame of remembrance to allow alternative ways to remember the past which also seek to understand and change the present while offering hope for the future.

# 8. Carnivalesque: *Carpentaria*

The publication of Alexis Wright's 2006 novel *Carpentaria* and the novel's Miles Franklin Award in 2007 were in the context of continuing media reports of violence and dysfunction in Aboriginal communities and the introduction of the national emergency response, or the intervention, by the federal government with the aim of protecting Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. Aborigines continue to have lower standards of health, housing and education, fewer employment opportunities than other sectors of the community and are still more likely to commit a crime or be the victim of one (M. Griffiths 174). The Northern Territory government's inquiry into allegations of widespread sexual abuse of Aboriginal children (2007), the catalyst for the intervention, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task force on violence (2000), *Bringing Them Home*, and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody all conclude that a history of dispossession and marginalisation resulted in the breakdown of Aboriginal culture, which has in turn contributed to the current dysfunction in Aboriginal communities.

Despite the media coverage and the statistics that paint a bleak picture of Aboriginal people, Wright's novel resists being framed by the history of dispossession and marginalisation that defines Aborigines as silent and passive victims. Instead the novel presents an alternative world where there are other ways to remember the past and to be in the present, offering a cautiously positive outlook for the future in line with Scott's novels and in contrast to the pessimistic outlook of *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* and the uncertainty of *Remembering Babylon* – Wright believes the patterns of the past can be broken and the "utopic, although refracted in its encounter with the historical, nonetheless breaks through it time and time again" (Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival" 129). *Carpentaria* is a syncretic text that uses a Western literary form adjusted to suit Aboriginal ideas of storytelling, that makes frequent references to Western music and literature, and in which the characters incorporate Christianity into the Aboriginal Dreamtime and make the English language their own.

Elizabeth Lowry in her review of *Carpentaria* considers the ending wishful thinking, and the persistence of racial violence and the continuing antagonism between Aboriginal land rights advocates and the mining sector throughout the novel seems to supports this view. There is also an underlying struggle with the possibility of reconciliation – a reconciliation that Wright herself sometimes feels is "unimaginable" ("Politics of Writing"). Ultimately there is no reconciliation in the novel: Mozzie Fishman, the religious zealot responsible for keeping Aboriginal Law alive in his community, found he could not teach white people about reconciliation (130). However, despite the wishful thinking, the failure of reconciliation and the continuing struggle over land rights and mining, the novel offers a vision of the future as a space where "dreams come true somehow" (519). Nevertheless, an element of caution is evident in this vision because the space that allows dreams to come true is a space from which all the white people have departed and where the Aboriginal survivors could hear voices "singing the country afresh" (519).

On the level of cultural, linguistic and religious syncretism the novel is positive, but on the level of political reconciliation the narrative remains sceptical. It may well be that the former is necessary before the latter can be achieved, but for this to occur the syncretic process needs to be two way, with mainstream Australians accepting Aboriginal culture, not as "Aboriginal culture" but as a natural aspect of Australian culture. As the opening sentence of the novel recognises, "*we know your story already"* (1), yet we fail to incorporate the full story into our national narrative in a way that recognises the active role of Aborigines in history, the present and the future. Recognition of the past and moves towards reconciliation are impeded by dialogue that is framed by the persistent belief that Aborigines are a marginalised group, forever the victims of oppression, or as belonging to a silent aspect of history. The novel seeks to sweep aside the rhetoric surrounding Aborigines and their place in history and replace it with a new style of communication that puts Aborigines and mainstream Australians on the same level, speaking the same language, and having the same dreams for the future.

The modern Australian state does not dictate an official culture any more than there is an official language; however, modern cultural practices are produced and

performed within a socially constructed cultural memory framework that creates the equivalence of an official culture. The people of *Carpentaria* endeavour to respond to both the current and historical reality faced by Aborigines free from the official, universally accepted view of Aborigines as dysfunctional, always on the verge of self-destruction, passively accepting the roles that have been defined for them by white Australians and statistics. Wright says that she aimed to write a novel that was outside the usual framework for Australian fiction and to create a space that was not enclosed "within the imagined borders that have been forced" on Aborigines ("On Writing Carpentaria"). The result is a small shift in official cultural memory that allows a different way of speaking and storytelling to be heard.

The narrative employs a number of the forms and symbols of the carnivalesque, a form that features ambiguity, opposes uniformity and homogenisation and mocks authority and the familiar through the use of parody, exaggeration and the comic (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 40) that allows a marginalised section of society to resist the dominant culture. Bakhtin calls the carnivalesque form the voice of the people that seeks to:

> consecrate inventive freedom to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted … [and it] offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (*Rabelais and His World* 34)

Bakhtin locates the origins of the carnivalesque in mediaeval Europe when the church and the state dominated culture and were generally treated with a great degree of seriousness by the people, except during Carnival time when the people were free to make fun of these institutions (*Rabelais and His World* 73). The culture that he describes as official in the context of the Middle Ages was the culture associated with "ecclesiastical, feudal, and political" forms of rituals and

ceremonies (5) and it is these rituals and ceremonies that the people sought freedom from during Carnival. From the seventeenth century a process of marginalising Carnival began as populations moved from being primarily agrarian to more capitalist and the natural cycles of production and consumption that were associated with Carnival were replaced with the working week making Carnival less relevant to the emerging middle class. Carnival gradually became too distasteful for this new middle class and initially the celebrations were moved out of the towns before being transferred from physical celebrations into appearing in literature, art and music as the carnivalesque (Stallybrass and A. White 181), a process that Bakhtin describes as "the carnivalization of literature" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 122). Carnivalesque literature contains the spirit of carnival that is associated with folk traditions and popular culture (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 3), but remains distinct from Carnival that was a "spirited celebration" at a particular time and within particular cultures that aimed to overthrow "commonly held values"(Danow 3).

Although the narrative structure of *Carpentaria* is "closely and essentially linked to popular sources" in the style of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 2), the popular sources are not associated with the dominant culture which means that non-Aboriginal readers are often in unfamiliar territory; Frances Devlin-Glass argues that there is "much to confound European paradigms" in the novel ("Review Essay" 83). The non-conformist structure has drawn some criticism from reviewers who find the novel demanding to read, overly long and circular, awkward, and lacking in chronology, making it difficult to follow the narrative plot (Dooley; Guest; Poster; Lake). The structure, with its circularity and indeterminate chronology, is reminiscent of the "traditional long story" form of Aboriginal oral storytelling (Wright, "On Writing Carpentaria" 80) and the rhythm of much of the narrative mirrors the speech rhythms of an old Aboriginal person who speaks to his audience as storyteller. Wright knew that there was some risk in using this structure and rhythm ("Gulf Music"), and she anticipated some of the criticism the novel received, including the suggestion that "she may have to tailor her technique to the tastes of a more impatient audience" (Dooley).

However, rather than adapt her style to a non-Aboriginal audience Wright has challenged those who belong to the dominant white culture to hear an alternative Australian story. Wright employs an old and traditional Western literary form together with idiomatic language and the speech patterns of an old Aboriginal storyteller to challenge the hegemony of Western literary forms and mainstream political domination (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 71). *Carpentaria* as a carnivalesque novel is dialogical and intertextual (Kristeva 78; Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 137); it communicates with literary and historiographical representations of the past, mainstream and Aboriginal as well as creating a dialogue between the Aboriginal characters and mainstream Australian readers.

*Carpentaria* tells the story of the Pricklebush people and the Phantom family who live in the fictional town of Desperance in the Gulf country of north-western Queensland. The Pricklebush people were split into Eastside and Westside by the great war of the dump, instigated by Angel Day to deflect attention from her statue of the Virgin Mary that she had found in the dump, and was fuelled by the "faded memories of the ancient wars" (31) between Aboriginal clans in the Gulf. With the split, Uptown, where the white people live, found itself surrounded by Aborigines; a reversal of the usual framing of Aborigines by white people.

The landscape is described in the style of a Dreamtime story; the sea, the land and the weather, along with fish and animals are as essential to the narrative as the human characters. The fringe "humpies" where the Phantoms live are built out of rubbish from the local dump and sit among the Pricklebush scrub, an imported European weed. Several vignettes provide a brief history of the area and include the fate of the abandoned camels of two Afghan camel drivers, the comings and goings of the mining industry in the area, a reference to Aboriginal massacres through the character of Uncle Micky who collects spent cartridges that he finds with a metal detector, and the failed attempt by the Town Council to re-name the local river after Normal Phantom, which bemuses the Pricklebush people because the river already has an Aboriginal name.

Only the first two chapters of the novel have epigraphs and the epigraph for the second chapter is essentially an abstract of the novel:

> One evening in the driest grasses in the world, a child who was no stranger to her people, asked if anyone could find Hope. The people of parable and prophecy pondered what was hopeless and finally declared they no longer know what Hope was. The clocks, tick-a-ty tock, looked as though they might run out of time. Luckily, 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. So … (Wright, *Carpentaria* 12)

Many of the large cast of characters have the qualities of the universal, everyman in the style of Scott's protagonists Harley and Bobby, and most lack definite characterisation, which means they are not located in any particular part of the world or any specific time in history (Wright, "On Writing Carpentaria" 84). Will Phantom "acts as [a] super-individual transcending history and time," he is a universal character, directed at the whole world (Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival" 123), and the novel as a whole has a world perspective. The main protagonist, Normal Phantom, is "encumbered" with the title "leader of the Aboriginal people" (7). He is the head of the Westend Pricklebush people who spends his days fishing or stuffing fish, "a supernatural master artist who created miracles" (206) by preserving fish in the tropics. He is married to Angel Day, whose main purpose in life seems to be to disrupt all and everything she comes into contact with. Will, the son of Normal and Angel, is an activist opposed to the Gurffurit mine and is on the run from police for attempted sabotage of the mine. Will and Norm are the Pricklebush versions of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza of Cervantes's carnivalesque *Don Quixote* (Wright, "On Writing Carpentaria"). Normal has disowned Will because he married the granddaughter of Joseph Midnight, the head of the renegade Eastside mob. Her name is Hope.

There are two other characters associated with the family who play an integral role in the narrative: Mozzie Fishman, a religious zealot who has an affair with Angel and rescues Will after he is kidnapped by employees of the mine, and who

orchestrates the explosion that destroys the Gurffurit mine. The other is Elias Smith, also a friend of Normal who appears one day out of the sea. Elias is of indeterminate nationality, without a memory or identity, who is given the name of Smith by the town's white people. He is eventually run out of town by the white locals because they believe he is somehow responsible, as a "new Australian" (167), for a string of unexplained disasters in the town. Elias rescues Will's family from the mining thugs before he is murdered by the same people in their attempt to frame Will for the murder as a means of getting rid of him.

In terms of intertextuality, the novel is evocative foremost of Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, most obviously in the title. Both of the novels are set in the north of Australia, both have long and sometimes untidy narratives and a number of characters have Dickensian names. *Capricornia* has for example the Shillingsworth brothers, the Reverend Hollower, and O'Crimnel and O'Theef the police troopers. In *Carpentaria* the most notable are Truthful E'Strange the policeman, and Stan Bruiser the Mayor. Most of the Uptown people, the whites, are named Smith, and in an episode where Wright pushes naming to the limits there is reference to Y. Pedigree's dog, I. Damage's husband, A. Clone's family, U. Torrent the fuel attendant, the conservative B. Easy and Mrs C. Caucus the local diva (88). Animals, particularly fish, play a significant role in the narrative of *Carpentaria* and Herbert also includes animals in his list of characters for *Capricornia*.

Both novels use parody to challenge Australian institutions and respond to the friction between mainstream and Aboriginal Australians brought about by opposing views on economic progress. The significant difference between the two novels is that Herbert's *Capricornia*, with its foundational saga form, belongs to the Australian nation building narrative, it is a monologic epic, entrenched in the Australian tradition of realism, is descriptive and submits to the rules of the official cultural memory narrative that both desires and perpetuates continuity. Whereas *Carpentaria* challenges the official narrative and uses a narrative form that opposes the epic. Comparison between *Carpentaria* and *Capricornia* offers a view of how Australian culture has changed in the seventy years between the two novels.

Kristeva argues that Western literature can be divided into the epic and the carnivalesque, and one generally takes precedence over the other depending on the political imperatives of the times, but carnivalesque remains "the life source reanimating literary thought, orienting it towards new perspectives" (80). Aborigines no longer rely on white writers to tell their stories as they display syncretic methods of storytelling that foreground Aborigines and their stories and challenge the official political and historical narrative. *Capricornia* challenged Aboriginal politics of its time, but remained an epic oriented towards the status quo. While *Carpentaria* also enters into the political debates surrounding Aboriginal politics – the narrative is centred on the struggle between a large mining company and the Pricklebush people and there is reference to deaths in custody and to the "thug copper from The Valley in Brisbane" (72) – the novel uses the carnivalesque to open up new perspectives on history and politics.

Wright employs several carnivalesque techniques in her novel to challenge authority, break the rules and invert social conventions, including the use of humour and parody, a lack of chronological order and the distortion of time in the narrative, the disruption of the rules of grammar and syntax, and the use of vernacular language, not only by the characters, but also by the narrator. There is a blurring between the narrator and the characters that is unusual in Australian literature that responds to the violence of contact between mainstream Australians and Aborigines. Narrators, whether black or white, tend to follow the rules of Standard English in their narration and there is a clear distinction between the language of the "educated" narrator and the vernacular language of the characters, particularly when they are Aborigines.

In *Carpentaria* the characters' speech is scattered with malapropisms and twisted idioms: "nilly pilly" (46), "airs and fancies" (48), "Desperance shared a slither of similarity with others" (55), "but for all and all" (65), "eagerly-beavering people" (79), "foot to mouth" (131), "sense of smelling" (131), "from woe to finish line" (245), "lock stock or barrel" (4), "stuffed mullet" (22), "fitted like a stuffed black glove" 121), "never gave two frigs" (66), "humpteen" (17), and Guyfork (409). *Carpentaria* draws on "the verbal wealth of the vernacular" using oral forms often

unknown outside the communities where they are spoken, and they remain "unpolished by the literary context" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World 457).* Wright's characters also parody language conventions, asking "pardon for using white man diction" (155) and expressing surprise when people use words that are "not the language of the Pricklebush" but belong to Uptown (39) as though even language is the property of Uptown people, reflecting the use of language to dominate and silence Aborigines. The satellite disc "was some kind of gadget that can take away all your myall words, transcribe what you say in better language so people can understand what you are talking about" (99).

Language is inextricably linked to cultural memory participation, as Malouf demonstrates in *Remembering Babylon*; however, language use has an "inherent tendency to elitism," despite a modern inclination towards a diversification in both the transmission and linguistic varieties of cultural memory, cultural production is still associated with formal language (Assmann 116). The slightly eccentric use of language in *Carpentaria* reinforces the narrative's resistance to the established order; although the Pricklebush people use English, they have made the language their own, with its own style. Not only does the style of speech challenge authority, but it also allows a new means of communication to develop outside of the existing order. Wright challenges her white readers to hear a new way of speaking about a well known story told with the language rhythm of an old Aboriginal storyteller. Although there are sections of the novel that are in recognisable Western styles: the chapters devoted to Will's capture by the mining company and his subsequent rescue have the pace and diction of a crime novel (385), other sections recall fairytales (209, 43) and some moments are described using the diction of a police report (344). *Carpentaria* is an excellent example of syncretism of language and style.

The Pricklebush people live permanently in carnival time which is lived time, free of rules where "actors and spectators" are one and the same and the spirit of carnival permeates the entire world (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 7). The omniscient narrator moves about freely in time and space to create a confusion of

chronological order where “Time was a fleeting whisper” (164). The title of the first chapter is “From time immemorial” and the many biblical references signal that the novel is broad in its scope, at least in terms of chronology, and possibly also in its moral reach. Time is both truncated and protracted and there are frequent analepses in the form of flashbacks and memories that are often without any indication that the narrative has switched to memory as there is often no clear demarcation between shifts in chronology or narrative styles. Norm’s five year fishing trip is unremarkable and the Pricklebush people have four hundred year old grievances. Following the cyclone Will seems to exist for several years, if not decades, on his island in the ocean while Norm, Hope and Bala (the son of Hope and Will) are adrift for forty days and nights after the cyclone; however, these two events seem to coincide within the narrative. The effect is a little like being caught up in the narrator’s memories as they move around in time and space as prompted by external stimuli. This is particularly conspicuous in the first third of the novel. The seamlessness of past time and present time sometimes leaves the reader confused as to the temporal location of the narrative, although some passages in the novel are clear in language, structure and chronology.

There are frequent references to the methods used to recall and refer to the past: history, religion, memory, rituals, archives, dreams, wishes, prayers and imagination. A further amalgam with other memorial novels: *Remembering Babylon* is concerned with how language creates and shapes culture, *Rainshadow* takes up the problems associated with recording the past and *Carpentaria*, joins *Benang* and *Deadman* in their imperative that Aboriginal voices be heard within the national narrative, as they all question the language and methods of recording and recalling the past. The novel repudiates the Western reliance on the written archive for its history; Aboriginal history is written on rock (28), is told with imagination and plucked at random from any “era of the time immemorial of the black man’s existence on his own land” (103) and is considered as equally valid as official versions of history.

The written archive on which Western historiography depends is portrayed in the novel as being just as impermanent as oral history: “one hundred years of

impeccable recorded history" of the local Smith family (89) goes up in smoke, and the town itself is blown away by a cyclone. And because the people of Uptown only record their past in the archive, in memorial objects and through rituals rather than within the narrative of their lives, they need to continually recreate their own legends, unlike the Pricklebush people who undertook daily "memory tribunals" (51) as a means of keeping the past alive. The novel argues that it is the people who are responsible for passing on the essential stories of history and culture to their families as lived or communicative history, not the national history held in public archives and managed by institutions.

Another important method that Wright uses to challenge authority is foregrounding memory over history; Devlin-Glass argues that Wright "problematises western notions of the real" ("A Politics of the Dreamtime" 406). *Carpentaria* is not an historical novel in the sense of retelling an historical event; however, the past pervades the narrative, most often in the form of memory. Once again there is an elision of memory, dream and imagination that appears in *Benang*. In the same manner that chronology is confused, so too are the boundaries between memory, history, reality and imagination. Memories are inherited, stolen, revised and paid for. Memory is short, defective, rich, lost, painful and "honoured in death" (153). There are "sweet reminiscences" (157), "childhood memories" (163) and "elephantine memories" (66) and the lad who was writing memory with a firestick made "lightning look dull" (163). The narrator warns the reader to be prepared to wait for the old people to "climb out of the mud" where they lie buried with their "besieged memories" to "tell you the real story" (11). Not the story told by Western historiography that may offer an "impeccable recorded history" (89), when it is nothing more that "just a half-flick of the switch of truth – simply a memory no greater than two life spans" (57), but the story that incorporates the stories of the people and Aboriginal history into mainstream history.

Wright further problematises notions of the real by combining features of carnivalesque that include magic and the supernatural with Aboriginal storytelling that relies on "symbol, imaginary presences and magic" (Jose). A number of the

characters in *Carpentaria* have supernatural powers: Angel Day was "purely magical" (16), Mozzie "was a wizard or some kind of magic man" (133), Norman was a "supernatural master artist who created miracles" (206), the Gundugundu spirit men are more dangerous than the white man devil Kadajala (276), and the "Phantom house took regular forays into other-worldly matters" (139). There are "moments of magic," exorcism (139) and miracles, people are "possessed by dreams" (512) and devils, angels and spirits coexist with real people. The cyclone that brings the narrative to a conclusion occurs in the time of magic when the sea is full of spirits, and is brought about by the sea woman "spinning herself into a jealous rage … if you could believe in the power of her magic" (276). Using fantastical elements annuls classical realism and brings about a pause in the official narrative of political disagreement, Aboriginal victimhood and dysfunction. Blending the real with the surreal gives voice to possibilities that may seem unattainable in a world otherwise "in perpetual political conflict" (Danow 71), but miracles do "not automatically happen" (514).

Madness and foolishness, like magic and the supernatural, are further manifestations of boundary transgression in the novel, which allows characters to communicate a "speechless terror" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature 174).* Madness may also allow characters to view the world outside the normal paradigms, such as when Mozzie Fishman saw visions, and Norman "felt like a fanatic, a madman" (237) as both men sought a better future for their people. Madness is also a shield against the vagaries of life. Loneliness caused Angel Day to "collapse into temporary insanity" (337) when she was left alone while Mozzie was on the road. Lloydie Smith was in love with a mermaid that lived in the wood of his bar that was made from the salvaged timber of a shipwreck (341), and the policeman Truthful was "off with the pixies" after he found the three little boys dead in the police cells (361). Uptown people suffer from paranoia (33) and phobias (51) and thought Pricklebush people were "like mad people" when they spoke their "mumbo jumbo" (77). Many of *Carpentaria's* characters exhibit some form of "temporary insanity" (337) or eccentricity. The whole town had gone "stark raving mad" when Will Phantom had tried to stop the mine (350). Captain Nicoli Finn is a

madman (65), Elias Smith thought he was going mad when he found himself washed up on the beach in Desperance (77) and the "bohemian priest" had the mind "of a sixties hippie" (183). Some people have moments of madness, while others are permanently mad; Kevin is "a mental retard" after an accident in the mine (104). Madness and laughter save the people from otherwise unbearable aspects of life when "[r]evolt is not a solution, neither is submission" and all that remains is "laughter, metaphysical laughter" that is more than mere entertainment (Wiesel, *Souls on Fire* 199). Madness may also be the only choice when one is left to choose between the roles of victim, perpetrator and bystander (Danow 39).

Madness is the "carnivalization of the mind" and is juxtaposed with laughter "that liberates and redeems" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 175). Bakhtin argues that epics, traditions and epic distance are disrupted by the comic; that laughter, the comical, and popular speech oppose the epic by making the subject familiar and opening up the subject to examination in an effort to understand ("Discourse in the Novel" 23). As well as breaking the rules associated with authority, the other fundamental feature of the carnivalesque form is laughter, which performs a double purpose. Firstly laughter frees the people from the constraints of unreasonable authority and violence, and secondly laughter is an antidote to fear and humility and often has the "ring of madness" (Patterson 126). *Carpentaria* is a very funny novel for the most part and in this aspect alone it is a challenge to the usual Australian novels that respond to the violence associated with the dislocation, disruption and destruction of Aborigines and their culture. Although Herbert uses parody in *Capricornia*, and is at times also very funny, he undercuts the humour with overly didactic monologues; there is neither magic nor madness to relieve the unrelenting reality that runs through the novel. Australia's traditional historical fiction has tended to follow an established seriousness as writers endeavour to impress upon their readers the history of violent and inhumane treatment of Aborigines.

Instead Wright uses parody to challenge entrenched beliefs and she mocks the dominant cultural institutions responsible for remembering and preserving the

past. Humour allows Wright to bring together the ills and grievances, and the tragic circumstances of the Pricklebush people without overwhelming the reader with negativity or defining the Pricklebush people by their circumstances alone, and instead allows a vision of hope. Laughter releases social and political tensions and makes way for the "little stories" in between the lines of the larger, national narrative. One little story is the sometimes negative impact that missions have had on Aboriginal communities that the narrator sums up in the description of a rivergum as "where those up-to-no-good Mission-bred kids accidentally hanged Cry-baby Sally" (2). Laughter, particularly the humour of the people, is employed to help understand history from the people's point of view, as a counterpoint to repression and as essential for freedom. The narrative is happy and triumphant, philosophical, and utopian, but it also seeks to mock and deride to keep doubt at bay and keep hope alive (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 13-14).

Carnival laughter is the people's laughter, it is shared, ambivalent and universal and in *Carpentaria* laughter is directed at the Pricklebush people and their four hundred year old hostilities, as well as Uptown people and their institutions of white culture: law, education, religion and the economy. Seriousness and laughter appear together as two parts of the whole, they "coexist and reflect each other" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 122) creating a deep sense of ambivalence in the narrative, with its "blend of realism and the visionary" (Sharrad 60). Much of the ambiguity in the novel lies in the juxtaposition of the realist passages that depict Aboriginal deaths in custody, racism and the third world living conditions of Aborigines with the proposition of a new world order that is a return to pre-colonial times. Laughter seeks to banish ambiguity by bringing together life and death, us and them; laughter is used as a "balm" (Patterson 126). However, there is also ambivalence towards the possibility of a future where good and evil, and black and white are no longer clearly defined and the old rules no longer apply. Old Joseph Midnight struggles to understand the "contemporary world" and he "did not want to understand if it all meant that in the end the hope for a better world had perished in the sea" (379).

David Danow suggests that along with the positive side of the carnivalesque there exists a negative side, where tears mix with laughter, and life with death and that these two "poles of experience are inextricably connected"(2); carnivalesque novels often present a "correspondingly sober perspective" to the comic and fanciful (34). Along with laughter and play, carnivalesque also depicts "hopelessness and extreme confusion," unable to bring about or even justify reconciliation (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 166). Mudrooroo argues that irony and humour are used in Aboriginal novels to "lessen the reality of the narrative" (Narogin, *Writing from the Fringe* 173); however, the humour in Wright's novel is juxtaposed with passages of serious prose which has the effect of highlighting the reality and the violence rather than lessening the effect. Kevin Phantom is in many respects a comic figure. He is the youngest of the Phantom children and was considered to be the brains of the family who got an A plus for his essay on Tim Winton (104), but he was not expected to get a job because he was the "most unco kid you ever come across" (106). Despite this he was given a job in the mine, to the dismay of his family. He came out of the mine on his first day on the job "barbecued," "burnt and broken" and an "idiot" (109). Later in the narrative Kevin is savagely beaten by a gang of Uptown louts in revenge for the death of Gordie, the town guard, and for the memories of when his brother Will Phantom opposed the mine (356).

Despite the narrative's sometime highly improbable plot, exaggerated characters and carnivalesque humour this is "not Vaudeville … Wars were fought here" (11); and Carnival was often the time when old "antagonism came to a head" (Dentith 73). The novel gives a glimpse of a space where laughter is silenced, not because it is parody but because it describes murder and revolution (Kristeva 80). Laughter undermines the official narrative that defines how history is to be remembered and recorded, the way responses to the past should be framed, and official claims to the truth. Laughter also introduces flexibility into the narrative, undermines the seriousness of Uptown's approach to history, although it does not undermine the seriousness of the subject matter, which is the dispossession of Aboriginal people.

A significant example of syncretism in the novel is the bringing together of the Dreamtime and Christianity to create a new working of the traditional place of Christianity and religion within carnivalesque. Kristeva describes carnivalesque as "antitheological" and cynical, challenging God along with other forms of authority to impose its own rules (78). Wright does not challenge Christianity or God as a form of authority, but incorporates both into the Aboriginal cosmogony. Instead of struggling against Christianity and following in the footsteps of Western carnivalesque novels Wright's narrator and characters create their own form of storytelling and religion that is a blend of their ancient Aboriginal culture and the culture brought by settler Australians. *Carpentaria* and *Deadman* display the same confidence in Aboriginal culture to absorb aspects of European culture without damage. The novel does not parody or profane religion, but incorporates "the global winds of the world's religions – Apache, Hindu, Buddhist, Jew" that had "drifted into everyone's lives" (141). God, Christianity and the Bible have strong presences in the novel. The plot begins with Angel Day's discovery of an abandoned statue of the Virgin Mary in the town dump and the Old Testament stories of Jonah and the whale, Noah's ark and the Great Flood are woven into the narrative and characters pray, evoke the Lord and learn from the Bible.

However, this acceptance of white culture does not extend to official cultural memory that is imposed upon Aborigines while at the same time either excluding their voice or defining their place in the culture within white, Western forms. The goal of the carnivalesque novel is freedom, freedom from fear, oppression and violence and provides at least temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and established order. Exaggeration and parody are not intended to obscure reality, but to show it from the perspective of those who live in the reality that the novel is drawn from. The novel paves the way for pathos rather than pity through laughter that expresses hope for a better future, for social justice and economic prosperity (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 81).

Bakhtin argues that those who laugh at themselves and their world are expressing their belonging to that world (81). Wright and her characters are asserting their spiritual and political belonging to the world and to the land.

Laughter is a uniting force and joins with the new speech styles to bring people together for a conversation where they are equalised. It is through laughter that the people seek to turn the official world on its head, to challenge the authority of dominant institutions and to create "freedom of thought and imagination" (49). Not only does the novel seek freedom from political oppression, but it also seeks freedom from oppression of the imagination.

Carnivalesque literature is a space where two cultures and language systems intersect that contains traces of a "non-literary" or "pre-literary" practice (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 159). Kristeva argues that the carnivalesque produces a "more flagrant dialogism than any other discourse" (79), a view which is borne out in *Carpentaria* where the narrator displays a particular political and ideological alignment with no attempt at objectivity. Wright blurs the boundaries between oral and written traditions, communicative memory, the "memory tribunals" of the Pricklebush people, and the form of cultural memory recorded in institutions. The Pricklebush children are sent to school to search the "whitefellas' history books" (57) for "the secrets of white people" (58), but they could not find any heroes or "places of worship" (57) because Desperance was just another small town "struggling to survive" that "sought glory in its own legends," but the place was not marked on a map had no monuments, "no culture, no song, no sacred places" (58), no cultural memory.

Cultural memory is specific to a group and its values and the Uptown people of Desperance love "the memories of their personal histories" even if it was an "aberration" from the official history (61). But Uptown people also celebrate the memorial rituals of official history: Australia Day, May Day, Picnic Day, and Pioneer Day (35), which are "shorthand" for a complex past (Irwin-Zarecka 183). These rituals did not include the Pricklebush people; it was enough to indulge in a piece of symbolism from time to time, such as re-naming the river after Normal, to assuage possible guilt or to fulfil any political requirements. The novel suggests that the history of the dominant culture is built on "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm and Ranger), arguing that the oral tradition of the Pricklebush people is more effective

in keeping the past alive. However, the paradox is that the preservation of the Pricklebush memories is in a novel in English.

The narrator has little desire for detailed truths in the belief that accuracy to historical fact is less important than the essence of an event (Felman and Laub); "never let the truth stop a good story" (48). Paul Sharrad claims that the story is stranger than history with its "undercurrent of *unheimlich* subaltern history" (54). Only the sea lady knows the names of the people and the exact times and locations of the past, but her ability to bring forth the past with precise details was "bereft of glory" (262); the exactness of the sea lady's memory squeezes all humanity out of history. Knowledge of the past with "adding machine" precision is counterproductive as it reduces memories to nothing more than a "celebration in pain" (262) rather than a celebration of survival and growth. Adherence to truth is in any case impossible because possible truths are open to interpretation; Australian historiography and traditional historical fiction is testament to the way "truth" can be distorted to conform to the dominant culture's memory framework. The novel suggests that memory and storytelling with their fallibility and inaccuracies are far better ways of preserving the past as they better reflect the people's history. By moving away from any claim to the truth storytellers are free to make an imaginative investment in the story and to bring humanity and pathos to history.

The carnivalesque "pathos of change and renewal" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 11, 49) is manifest in the novel, firstly in the landscape that alternates between being under water and bone-dry, where the river suddenly changes course leaving behind a "waterless port" and cyclones regularly alter the landscape (3) and even disrupt time by stopping all the clocks. Change is integral to the lives of the people in the Gulf, who have lived there since "before time began" (6) have witnessed a succession of foreigners, including other Aboriginal people who "should be in the Territory somewhere" (157) rather than in the Gulf, who all brought with them new plants and animal species, Christianity, alcohol and rubbish. Uptown people on the other hand try to control their environment by erecting a giant net around the town; they also have town patrols, laws and council planning

in an effort to maintain order. While attempting to control the environment Uptown people fail to notice the impending cyclone that destroys the town because they are too intent on killing bats. The Pricklebush people know that nothing good can come from "locked gates" and "barbed wire," that it is impossible for Uptown people to lock out the "black demon" and to protect their boundaries (59). *Remembering Babylon* describes the way the early settlers erected linguistic and material boundaries in the form of fences, roads and map making, boundaries that *Carpentaria* seeks to break down or transgress or at least show to be useless in terms of protecting culture.

Lachmann is somewhat sceptical of the power of carnivalesque, arguing that it is as much directed against "the loss of utopian potential" ("Bakhtin and Carnival" 130) that results from the authority of official culture, as it is directed towards permanent change. It is only a temporary release from the law and white hegemony. Carnivalesque, like official culture, "clings to its own memory" and operates "as a rejoinder to official forms of historiography" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 137) acting as a "substratum of official Western culture" (Kristeva 78). While carnivalesque is the "irrepressible, unsilenceable energy" that disrupts and resists official culture by offering a "permanent alternative to official culture," ultimately it may leave "everything as it was before" (Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival" 125). In carnivalesque literature the narrative is ambivalent which allows "two spaces," the dialogical which indicates becoming and the monological which indicates continuity (Kristeva 72). There is also the problem that the subversiveness of carnival may only be allowed to exist within the text; leaving the dilemma of how the novel's subversiveness and hope can be translated into the day to day of Aboriginal lives and politics. Carnivalesque may remain "without effect" in the social and political world (Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival" 132) and can be seen as a yearning for a return to a lost paradise reflecting the desire of some sectors of Aboriginal politics for a return to pre-colonial times, to a time when Aborigines supposedly lived in a perfect paradise. Wright almost suggests a desire for a return to pre-colonial times with the dream of a space where all the white people have disappeared.

In the Middle Ages Carnival was linked either to the feasts of the Church or to "breaking points" in natural and biological cycles, such as deaths and births, and at other times of change and renewal (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 9). This made Carnival only a "temporary liberation" (10) from the rules and a "temporary transfer to the utopian world" (276). It was only during Carnival that everyone could be considered equal, where speech and behaviour were free from the dominant social conventions. This freedom and equality were only "a permissible rupture of hegemony," as Terry Eagleton argues (148), and unlikely to lead to a permanent change in the status quo. Following Carnival the people had to return to their place in the world where they respected established hierarchies and rules. Thus it may be that Wright's novel is only a temporary suspension of the dominant framework for the production of art and historiography, and from political and economic hegemony and inevitably there will be a return to the dominant culture, because all the processes of carnivalesque are unable to permanently affect official culture (Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival" 132). However, although fiction may only be a temporary suspension of reality it remains a place where carnival can converge with the everyday to challenge official culture and those who make claims on an official order and in the process makes the official "vulnerable," open to change and re-ordering (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 165). Carnivalesque is a celebration of life and call for a re-birth of Aboriginal culture; it is "the life source reanimating literary thought, orienting it towards new perspectives" (Kristeva 80) and must be allowed to flourish outside breaking points in the natural and political cycle.

The novel is a celebration of the Pricklebush people, Westside and Eastside, and their capacity to survive and to change, to recognise that some traditions must make way for the new world, for instance "Nomadism was no longer the answer" and "*Aborigine* people were different now, they knew the scientify as well" (123). They recognise that some aspects of their culture have to be relinquished and that to survive and prosper in the modern world they need to have a mainstream education as well as their traditional learning. Mozzie and his pilgrims were "responsible for keeping the one Law strong" (124) even though the people found

the responsibilities associated with keeping the law too imposing. It is significant that the Pricklebush people resist change that is imposed on them by Uptown people but accept change that is generated from within their own culture.

The narrator recognises that there is a danger that the capacity of Aborigines to adapt will be seen by mainstream Australians as a way to solve the Aboriginal problem, by simply waiting for Aboriginal culture to die out. But there is a difference between cultural loss and cultural change and the novel offers change in the service of the Pricklebush people. Along with changes to the Pricklebush world, all aspects of the established order of the Uptown people are either destroyed or made over into a new form. The novel's "changing time" and ambivalence allows for "the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and of historic change" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 25) outside of the usual historical and literary framework. *Carpentaria's* narrative seeks to return to a different sense of unity and harmony by bringing together myth, history, memory and imagination, by combining humour and seriousness, Dreamtime and Christianity, ambivalence and certainty, and politics and art in a "grand style" that is "contradictory," "double-faced" and contains the "fullness of life" (62). The combination of laughter, parody and irony together with the serious produces a new meaning that sits outside the usual framework for the production of cultural memory.

Rather than simply record the numbers of dead in the past the narrator of *Carpentaria* echoes the narrator of Scott's *Benang* as they both ask the reader to join them and their people in a celebration of survival and hope for the future. *Carpentaria* offers an alternative means to remember the past and just as importantly, how to dream for the future. The narrative expresses an awareness of history, but is not constrained by the historical narrative that has been defined by mainstream Australia in which Aborigines are portrayed as passive or as victims. *Carpentaria* is not blind to the problems faced by Aborigines; the characters do share "bad realities" (Wright, "On Writing *Carpentaria*" 83), but they refuse to be completely defined by that feature of their reality. The novel resists the "official version of the region's history" (*Carpentaria* 10) from which the Pricklebush families

were excluded, and instead offers to tell the ambivalent, funny and tragic "real story of what happened here" (11) or maybe just "the possibilities of other worlds" ("On Writing *Carpentaria*" 84).

# Conclusion

> This playfulness is the product of their shared ability to appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important – an appreciation which becomes possible only when one's aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description. (Rorty 39-40)

> There are many forms of writing; only in literature, however, can there be an attempt at restitution over and above the mere recital of facts and over and above scholarship. (Sebald 215)

In the course of my thesis I have demonstrated shifts in the representation of Aborigines in the context of Australia's violent past in a number of texts considered to belong to the Australian literary canon that span more than eight decades, and in the process I have also demonstrated a need for a fresh approach to how we read literature that responds to the past. For most of us although cultural memory exists as a fundamental part of our lives, it often goes unnoticed and unquestioned and changes to cultural memory only come about when the community becomes aware of the need for change. Our experience of a sense of loss for the heroic past brought about by the shift in political and historical consciousness since 1988 contributed to our awareness of the need to include stories from all Australians within our national narrative. However, alongside recognition in politics and historiography, Aborigines and their culture also need to be included in Australia's broader cultural memory as part of the process of recovery and reconciliation. I have argued that for much of the modern history of Australia, Aborigines were written out of cultural memory, despite a long history of sympathy for Aborigines in the pages of fiction.

Literature, like other objects of cultural memory, is a product of its context. Many attempts have been made to include Aborigines within traditional historical

fiction to bring to the attention of readers the inhumane treatment of Aborigines and the violence of contact. Nevertheless, the texts may criticise, preserve or transform an event in the past in light of changed political and social expectations, but we must do more than just add an Aboriginal component to historiography and literature (C. Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines* 114). Until recently attempts to expose past violence have tended towards confirming the official memory of Australia that has marginalised Aborigines rather than challenging official memory to actually include Aborigines, and by responding to the needs of mainstream Australians.

I have demonstrated that confining stories to particular genres, from a particular perspective linked to a single idea or to particular intertexts restricts the ability to remember the past in ways that recognise its complexity and complications, and the resulting text is monovocal rather than polyvocal. Traditional historical fiction that reinforces foundational narratives or testimonies that reinforce the idea of Aborigines as victims fail to challenge the official narrative that began to take shape at Federation. The creating and perpetuating of binaries between vernacular testimonies and modernist texts, Western bias and the post-colonial experience and, perpetrator and victim also fail to address the complex nature of Australia's past.

In recent years novels that I call memorial novels have begun the process of re-imagining Aborigines and the violence of contact without the need to position Aborigines as the exotic other, or as victims. Memorial novels are not trauma literature, traditional historical fiction or post-colonial texts, but sit somewhere at the intersection between all three. This new way of reading the past that I put forward is reflective of a turn in Aboriginal politics towards recognising the progress that has been made and the work still to be done. In explicating the syncretic process in fiction, I have opened the way for further debate around representations of the past, and I promote the importance of literature and literary debates within the broader context of Australian culture. By using a methodology outside the usual approaches to Australian literature I have not only provided a fresh look at our literature, but also situated it within a global perspective.

Noel Pearson calls for a "massive cultural change" in the way Aboriginal policies are formed and implemented so that the "cycle of anxiety" that persists with regards to Aboriginal Australians and their place in Australian culture and society can be finally put to rest ("Taking our Culture on the Road"). Literature plays an important role in contributing to cultural change and quelling anxiety about our past and the other, and in promoting compassion and understanding. It is one of the ways to bring the past to public consciousness to provoke debate, to provide what Paul Ricoeur calls "the public space of discussion" (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 78), but I also argue that literature can contribute to fixing culture and confining debate to narrow political and ideological views.

In traditional historical fiction and epics, cultural symbols and heroes are respected and often go unchallenged, or should a hero's actions be challenged they are excused or justified in some way so as not to disrupt the accepted official narrative. Communities seek consistency, security and continuity and traditional historical fiction provides a cultural constant by repeating familiar narratives that celebrate achievements and safeguard an established cultural identity, and through the act of repetition official culture is itself legitimated. Traditional historical fiction continues to repeat celebratory foundational narratives even as it portrays the violence of contact and works towards coming to terms with the past. As W. E. H. Stanner argued, we as white Australians have always been "concerned with our own reputation as much as, if not a little more than, the Aborigines' position" ("After the Dreaming" 159). We have become accustomed to responses to the violent aspects of our past that are framed by a culture dominated by white, Western notions of reading and writing that is typically focussed on the dominant culture and the white response to the past: guilt, coming to terms with a past that is at odds with the perception of Australia as egalitarian and fair, and the desire for reconciliation in the service of white atonement.

Memorial novels seek to disrupt the consistency and security of traditional cultural symbols and heroes, to challenge the official narrative and our traditional use of language and particular forms to represent the past, and to provide alternative voices and ways of responding to the past. They disturb the unity of

genres and ask readers to accept quite different modes of reading as Aboriginal storytelling methods are incorporated into the Western novel form. These novels self-consciously exploit the novel form, combining Western and Aboriginal storytelling methods, and challenge the use of writing and the English language, in texts that are dialogic and syncretic. Many argue that Western literary forms necessarily reduce the authentic Aboriginal voice and any form of writing is problematic for telling the stories of Aborigines who come from an oral culture.

I argue that recent literature demonstrates that using Western forms of literature and English do not automatically diminish the Aboriginality of the stories, the integrity of the individuals or the Aboriginal perspective. Aside from the texts analysed in this thesis, Liam Campbell's 2006 biography *Darby: One Hundred Years of Life in a Changing Culture* successfully combines transcriptions of Darby's oral recordings (which are included on CDs with the text), photographs, the Dreaming or laws and ancestral legends of Jukurrpa that underpin Warlpiri life, alongside Campbell's text. The text is fragmentary rather than linear and the result is a syncretic, polyphonic text, described as "a genre in the making … [that] depends on the depth of … inter-cultural friendships" (Rothwell, "Darby").

In the intertextual process memorial novels reintegrate knowledge that was once considered unofficial, such as oral history and family memories as well as those aspects of the past that had been silenced, forgotten or misunderstood. The narratives are pluralist, ambivalent, heterogeneous and unresolved as narrators and characters re-imagine the past to transgress boundaries and challenge official narrative and linguistic frames of remembrance. They rely less on the common polarities of good and evil, left and right, and black and white and recognise that Australian culture has "layers of identity" that can exist in a "pluralist and united world" (Pearson, "White Guilt" 245). History, trauma and memory come together in narratives that use hybrid storytelling modes to celebrate survival and offer hope for the future.

Traditional historical fiction and memorial narratives are both forms of memory; however, whereas traditional historical fiction condenses meaning within the official cultural memory framework, memorial novels break open meaning and

question traditional narrative forms and the official narrative. The more the boundary between fiction and history is blurred, the higher the risk that fiction will be read as history, as a material trace, rather than as preserving the memory of a past and of people that we can never completely know, a memory that is fragmented and arbitrary. Memorial novels, while still responding to the past and incorporating historical information, are less concerned with the material trace contained in the written archive and more concerned with remembrance; they are not a version of history, but an alternative voice from the past, which transforms the historiographical narrative into a literary representation of the past and exists in parallel with historiography not in place of it. They offer the possibility of another world, a world that is polyvocal and united, a hybrid or syncretic Australian culture that allows for differences and promotes the idea of a collectively shared experience.

Aboriginal politics and mainstream Australians' concept of Aboriginality have changed dramatically since the 1930s (Langton, "Blacklines") and alongside the changed political landscape Aborigines and historians have worked to re-write Australian historiography to reflect the growing awareness of an Aboriginal presence including the violence of contact between black and white Australians. Historiography is often re-written to conform to contemporary ideas of how the past should be represented (Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*) and as the stories of heroes form part of the process of creating political and social stability it is not until stability is achieved that stories of violence and oppression can be told and heard (Winter). In the process of forming political and social stability, however, the story of a nation's foundation based on particular heroes or events becomes so well known that it is difficult to change the story as new episodes are apprehended and enclosed within the existing framework that calls for a particular type of narrative (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 3* 166-71).

*Remembering Babylon* and *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* were at the beginning of a change in Australian literature that responds to our past. The texts recognise the way the official narrative is constructed through historiography and foundational narratives alongside science, law and politics, and how Aborigines

were written out of the Australian national narrative. They demonstrate how language has been used to silence Aborigines and to exclude them from cultural memory and the land, and that writing, both fiction and non-fiction, has continued the process of keeping Aborigines as other, external to the national narrative. The authors of both novels are conscious of writing from the white Australian point of view, aware of the role of such writing to define, forget and marginalise Aborigines in history and in contemporary writing, but also aware that to change we as readers need to become more aware of the way that reading, writing, naming and language operate to influence cultural memory.

The later novels of Scott and Wright write against the official narrative, and seek to re-imagine Aborigines back into the national narrative. They also demonstrate that the archive is constructed and fails to represent all Australians and is therefore open to critical evaluation, reinterpretation and re-imagining. *Carpentaria*, *That Deadman Dance* and *Benang* are a celebration of the Aboriginal world and a complex response to the place of Aborigines within the official Australian culture (Castellanos 1) and they have the potential to disrupt the official narrative of Aborigines that mainstream Australians are used to reading in reports that foreground the breakdown of Aboriginal culture. These novels are also as much about the future as they are about the past. Bobby is the Aboriginal everyman like Harley who is more than himself, "he was all of them" and his friends, soldiers, sailors, tourists, family and Noongars keep him alive "just by loving him, wanting him, and wanting him to stay where he was. Stay in this place" (*That Deadman Dance* 128).

We can never know the past as it really was, but the more stories, the more voices and perspectives we hear, and the more we are critical of what we think we know and understand as well as what we read about the past, the more pieces of the patchwork will be generated so that we can begin to see new patterns emerge and to hear multiple voices from the past. To permanently affect official culture we need to "undercut" the "desire for a singular language, genre or mode of reading" in Australia (Sharrad 52), and to embrace multiple voices and a broader, more inclusive national narrative. Monologic texts such as traditional historical fiction,

foundational myths, memoirs, testimonies and epics, provide an "objectified and finalizing" form of literature that is ideologically driven towards centralisation and unification. Whereas memorial novels add to the whole of cultural memory as part of a syncretic project by combining genres and periods, archival material, imagination, myth and history, written and oral narratives (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 271) as they seek to decentralise and dis-unify (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 272).

The intertextual nature of syncretic texts builds on existing texts to create a more complex narrative. There is no need to overthrow or replace the official or traditional within a syncretic text, to create a new version of the official narrative. Memorial novels are never complete in themselves nor do they complete a process, they are instead the beginning or the continuation of a process. As Harley in *Benang* is a continuation not an ending, as the town of Pricklebush will regenerate after the storm. What they suggest is that the patterns of *Rainshadow* have been broken and new patterns can be made, broken and re-made. The texts break the rules and bring together fragments from other texts, while also allowing an "insight into the impossibility of totality" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature* 334) as they "exclude all one-sided or dogmatic seriousness and [do] not permit any single point of view, any single polar extreme of life or of thought, to be absolutized;" the author has not put a "finalizing period at the end" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 165).

In this thesis I have developed and demonstrated a new way of reading novels that respond to Australia's violent past that does not rely on trauma studies and the notion of victimhood, on notions of the post-colonial or on traditional historical fiction, but instead draws on syncretic and dialogic methods to re-imagine a different past that is syncretic and from multiple perspectives. The new reading allows for a fresh approach to our national narrative in relation to the global environment as well as opening up further debate around literature and its contribution to cultural memory. The first step in the process of challenging official representations of the past is to recognise the need for new perspectives and alternative voices. The next step is to further open up the debate, while keeping in

mind the tendency towards repeating and reinforcing foundational narratives that are narrow in their scope and reach. My new approach helps to break the patterns of the past and build new frames of remembrance to include the possibility of new worlds where all Australians are included. We need to nurture the new confidence that allows us to reconsider how we understand the past, to accept that the past is complex and ambiguous, to let go of the need for certainty and continuity in our national narrative and to envisage hope for the future. As the memorial novels demonstrate, this is a beginning not an ending.

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