Regenerative Voices:
Narrative Strategies and Textual Authority in Three Post-colonial Novels

Exegetical component of a 2-volume thesis
with accompanying novel *The Wheel Pin*

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Chapter One: Critical and Cultural Contexts

This chapter and the next examine the cultural contexts and theoretical issues critical to understanding the role of narrative in post-colonial texts, and outline three narrative strategies effective in representing post-colonial experiences. These chapters can also be read as a map of my quest to understand the cultural context of my creative work.

In this chapter, the first section, *Feminist Narrative Strategies*, investigates ways of representing the complexity of women's experiences through alternative narrative strategies as demonstrated in the work of Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Leslie Bloom. DuPlessis analyses literary fiction, while Bloom is a social researcher working with women to articulate their life narratives. Each offers valuable perspectives on the nature of women's narrative texts. DuPlessis's analysis of fiction provides an historical context and an understanding of feminist literary strategies, while Bloom's discussion of women's narratives provides insights into the ways narrative voice can reflect changes in women's awareness and sense of self. The next section, *A Narrative Approach to Therapy*, outlines the therapeutic model developed by the late Michael White and draws a parallel between his method of assisting people to deconstruct and re-imagine their life stories, and the ways in which literary narratives might be constructed. The third section, *Post-colonial Concepts*, broadens focus to include considerations that have arisen due to specific geographical, historical and cultural contexts of literary production in twenty-first century Australia and New Zealand. The final sections draw on the foregoing material to outline the narrative strategies of *Textuality* and *Assemblage*.

Feminist Narrative Strategies

I completed my undergraduate degree in the 1970s, before feminism had fully found a voice in Australian universities. My award-winning novella, *The Healing Effigy* (2006), was informed by my work in psychotherapy and counselling.[23] This led to an interest in feminist theory, a field of diverse and often conflicting voices. In writing my first novel, I was grappling with the problem of structure: how to tell a

[23] Michele McCrea, *The Healing Effigy* (Cranbrook: The New Writer, 2006). Winner of novella section in The New Writer annual awards.

compelling story from multiple viewpoints. These challenges gave me the focus of my research: narrative structure, voice and textual authority.

Writing beyond the Ending: Alternative Narrative Structures

In 1985, Rachel Blau DuPlessis published her ground-breaking study of narrative strategies used by significant modern women writers such as Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing and Olive Schreiner.[24] These writers, DuPlessis argues, devised narrative structures radically different from those found in novels of prior centuries, supplanting traditional literary forms like the 'romance plot', which invariably culminates in marriage, and the 'quest plot', which may feature a female protagonist who seeks independent goals, but invariably ends in her marriage, exile, or death.[25] Because the questing female is anomalous, her quest must ultimately fail so that social order can be restored. DuPlessis argues that literary representation of heterosexual couples was fundamental to nineteenth-century society because it embodied cultural conventions about gender roles, the family and the division of labour. Such conventions, she claims, are scripts that both organise human behaviour and prescribe the parameters of literary production. Hence the dominant narrative structures in any era not only reflect but also reinforce the conventions that underpin social structure. The 'romance plot' of nineteenth-century literature reiterated marriage and subservience as a normal woman's destiny; female protagonists were permitted to seek alternatives,[26] but were never allowed to achieve them.[27]

In the twentieth century, social conventions began to change and so too did literary plots.

> When women as a social group question, and have the economic, political and legal power to sustain and return to questions of marriage law, divorce, the 'couverte' status, and their access to vocation, then the relation of narrative middles to resolutions will destabilize culturally, and novelists will begin to 'write beyond' the romantic ending (4).

DuPlessis's argument that such writing represents a deliberate and radical disruption of literary conventions is bolstered by her choice of authors that publicly assert a

[24] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
[25] DuPlessis (1985), pp. 1–5.
[26] That nineteenth century women protagonists were allowed to quest at all suggests *narrative ambivalence*, a phenomenon of women's writing explored by the German feminist scholar Sigrid Weigel in 'Double Focus: On the History of Women's Writing', *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. by Gisela Ecker (London: Women's Press, 1985), pp. 59-80.
[27] DuPlessis (1985), pp. 1–5. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

critical stance on 'androcentric culture.'[28] Her term 'writing beyond the ending' means not merely the plotting of alternative conclusions, but the subversion of literary forms and the social conventions that underpin them. By rupturing conventional literary structures—breaking the customary sequences of events, the rituals of heterosexual relationship and even the anticipated rhythms of sentences[29]—twentieth-century women writers signal their refusal to conform to hegemonic, patriarchal scripts, and their aim of reconfiguring female identities (31–43).

The novelist seeking alternative narrative strategies may focus on relationships such as 'reparenting, female bonding, including lesbian ties, mother-child dyads, [and] brother-sister pairs' (35). To illustrate this point, I take the example of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), in which the protagonist's husband, far from being the centre of her world, is a background figure.[30] Although Clarissa Dalloway is a conservative society hostess, the novel's narrative structure radically illuminates her constraints. Clarissa's meditations on her plans for a party, her impressions of London, her daughter, her long friendship with a man who might have married her and her youthful crush on a girlfriend, all occupy more textual space than her marriage. Despite her lack of education, Clarissa reproaches herself for being intellectually inadequate to the political and social issues with which her husband engages on a daily basis. Restricted by social conventions and the mundane minutiae of running a household, she brings her intelligence, sensitivity and passion to creating a space where people can come together. She doubts her own authority in worldly matters, but it is she, and women like her, who ensure their continuation by their daily activities.

Woolf's female protagonists are permitted their quests, small and large, from throwing a party to devoting a life to art. But a woman's quest is never straightforward, since its resolution involves a fundamental reworking of identity. Nancy Armstrong explains that '[a]ccording to the Oedipal dynamic loosely borrowed from Freud, daughters never want to supplant their fathers but instead compete with other women for his affection. To win such a competition they cannot very well rebel against tradition but instead must submit to it'.[31] Thus the woman

[28]DuPlessis (1985), p. x (preface).
[29] See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 1945; Hogarth Press, 1928), pp. 79–81.
[30] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Hogarth Press, 1925).
[31] Nancy Armstrong, 'What Feminism Did to Novel Studies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. by Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 101.

who seeks her own authority and her right to vocation, independence and freedom, finds herself oscillating between personal ambition and a culturally ordained desire to please or, as Woolf observes, between being the 'natural inheritor of [...] civilisation' and 'outside of it, alien and critical.'[32] The female hero who wants to emulate her father instead of her mother must revisit her earliest psychic roots in order to resolve this dilemma. DuPlessis describes this narrative strategy of 'reparenting' as 'the return by the female hero to parental figures in order to forge an alternative fictional resolution to the oedipal crisis' (83). As shown in later chapters, each of the questing narrator-protagonists in the novels I analyse returns in some sense to her place of origin and revisits her relationship with her parents.

In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the successful reconfiguring of female identity is symbolised by the resolution of a compositional problem in painting.[33] Lily Briscoe, an unmarried artist, attaches herself to Mrs Ramsay, a mother-figure who assists her reparenting project. Lily's painting, like her identity, is fragmented: it oscillates between two strong shapes but has no centre.

> The loop in the Lily plot (a painting untouched for ten years is begun again and finished) expresses the peculiarities of female quest, with its loop back through the family and the psychic stage of preOedipal attachment (DuPlessis, 61).

Towards the end of the novel, Lily, in a stroke of insight, is able to complete her picture by introducing a simple line in the centre. Precisely how this line resolves the two previously warring elements is not revealed: does it connect or separate them? Perhaps neither: resolution may be achieved simply by the introduction of a new and autonomous element.

DuPlessis identifies the trope of the female artist in women's writing as a way to embody the contradiction between the ideal of individual achievement and the pressure to conform to social norms.[34] Seemingly contradictory urges to honour the past and to produce something wholly new may be resolved creatively.

> The young artist's future project as a creator lies in completing the fragmentary and potential work of the mother: the mother is the daughter's muse, but in more than a passive sense. For the mother is also an artist. She has written, sung, made, or created, but her work, because in unconventional media, is muted and unrecognized (93–94).

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[32] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 1945; Hogarth Press, 1928), p. 96. DuPlessis (1985) offers an explanation for such oscillations (pp. 35–43).
[33] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Vintage, 2000; Hogarth, 1927).
[34] DuPlessis (1985) pp. 84–85.

DuPlessis shows that, in contrast to the modernist trope of the (male) artist as an outsider who refuses traditional social roles, novels by women writers depict the woman artist as immersed in, though working to change, her ordinary life, striving to make sense of found fragments and to articulate what has been unspoken in past generations.

Writing Beyond the Ending revealed new horizons for feminist literary criticism and in subsequent decades, much research was undertaken on feminist narrative strategies. Leslie Bloom, a social researcher interested in women's narrative self-representation, outlines a range of strategies to effectively represent women's experiences.[35]

> DuPlessis's strategy for writing beyond the ending, Heilbrun's strategy for expressing women's complex subjectivity, and de Lauretis's recommendation that women write for the female gaze may all be seen as methods for creating narrative texts that allow for women's gendered perspectives and subjectivities to be represented (1998, 69–70).

Teresa de Lauretis recommends that women write about women *for* women, rather than about women as objects of the male gaze,[36] while Carolyn Heilbrun advises women writers to beware of tendencies to represent women narrowly in idealised or stereotypical patriarchal roles (such as the good mother or the *femme fatale*) or to mask the expression of anger, pain or desire.[37] Breaking with conventional narrative structures can illuminate previously hidden conflicts and address power imbalances, providing alternative outcomes for female protagonists and new scripts for social conduct. A further strategy is to make space for, and give voice to, multiple or complex subjectivities.

Complex Subjectivity: Representing Multiplicity

The individualised destiny of romance and quest plots is sometimes broken, in twentieth-century novels, by the use of protagonists that depend on a collective.

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[35] Leslie Rebecca Bloom, *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation*. ed. by Deborah P. Britzman and Janet L. Miller, *Suny Series, Identities in the Classroom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 66–70. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[36] Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

[37] Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), pp. 12–13, 15–18, 126.

Works of speculative fiction like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* series take this notion further and 'replace individual heroes or sealed couples with groups […] whose growth occurs in mutual collaboration' (179). Such 'collective protagonists', DuPlessis claims, represent the possibility of a future in which people are able to transcend their isolation, individual problems and interpersonal conflicts (178–197). The disruption of the singular narrative voice is achieved in a different way by Virginia Woolf in *The Years* (1937) and *Between the Acts* (1941). Here, notions of centrality are ruptured at the level of narrative, where the collective protagonist takes the additional role of non-hierarchical narrative chorus (163–177).

A different kind of complex subjectivity represents multiple experiences and ambivalent perspectives within one individual. The Western philosophical assumption of an homogeneous, objective self, separate from the world it perceives and operating in accordance with reason, has been dismantled.[38] Poststructuralist and feminist theorists claim 'that the notion of the individual subject is an illusion that conceals the multiple "subject positions" we occupy.'[39] The 'self' is a construct, a site of many discourses, and meaning, like the self, is always in the process of being constructed.

According to Sidonie Smith, woman as autobiographer is capable of 'embracing the polyphonic possibilities of selfhood.'[40] The female autobiographer 'experiments with alternative languages of self and storytelling' and 'testifies to the collapse of the myth of presence with its conviction of a unitary self' (59). Likewise, the woman writer of fiction may choose to play with the possibilities of complex subjectivity.[41]

Leslie Bloom explains the significance of the notion of *nonunitary subjectivity* in her social research practice.

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[38] For a succinct discussion of the historical notion of the subject, its destruction by post-structuralist theorists, and its partial resuscitation by Gayatri Spivak and subaltern studies historians, see Gail Jones' unpublished thesis, 'Mimesis and Alterity: Post-colonialism, Ethnography, and the Representation of Racial "Others"', University of Western Australia, 1995), pp. 28–33.

[39] Margaret R. Higonnet, 'Mapping the Text: Critical Metaphors', in *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 201.

[40] Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 58. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[41] See, for example, Marion Halligan, *The Point* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003); Gail Jones, *Sorry* (Sydney: Vintage, 2007); and Drusilla Modjeska, *The Orchard* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1994).

> Claiming the existence of an individual essence in Western humanist ideology denies the possibilities of changes in subjectivity over time; masks the critical roles that language, social interactions, and pivotal experiences play in the production of subjectivity; and ignores the multiple subject positions people occupy, which influence the formation of subjectivity. Because of these limits in concepts of subjectivity, postmodern feminists embrace the idea that an understanding of nonunitary subjectivity in women's lives is critical to feminist research and epistemology.[42]

Drawing on the work of feminist theorists such as de Lauretis, DuPlessis, and Heilbrun, Bloom analyses 'how subjectivity is manifested in narratives' of self-representation by women.[43] She is interested in the fragmentary nature of subjectivity and demonstrates that her women subjects feel more satisfied when they express the complexity of their experience rather than suppressing some aspects in order to represent a unified self. Bloom shows how the self-narrative of one respondent, Olivia, develops from an initial depiction of herself as a 'female hero' to a richer, more detailed narrative embracing nuances of feeling, doubts and conflicts. Bloom assists Olivia to identify earlier, similar incidents in her life and to reflect on their meaning, which gives Olivia the insight and confidence to retell her narrative more fully and to include aspects previously described as 'messy' or 'intolerable' (188).

Although Bloom's use of the term 'nonunitary subjectivity' refers to the fragmented nature of individual consciousness rather than to the multiple subjectivities of a collective, and her recorded life narratives are quite different from DuPlessis's analyses of literary texts, each demonstrates the use of narrative strategies that open new possibilities for the representation of women as complex subjects with narrative authority.[44]

A Narrative Approach to Therapy

Like Leslie Bloom's research, the Narrative approach to therapy developed by the late Michael White and his colleagues depends on the production of narratives, often oral, but sometimes written or recorded. The therapeutic process, which originated in

[42] Leslie Rebecca Bloom, *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation*. ed. by Deborah P. Britzman and Janet L. Miller, *Suny Series, Identities in the Classroom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 3.
[43] Leslie Rebecca Bloom, 'Stories of One's Own: Nonunitary Subjectivity in Narrative Representation', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2 (1996), pp. 176–97. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[44] See Bloom (1998), pp. 61–136, and (1996); and DuPlessis (1985).

constructionist theories of social identity, encourages people to speak about their problem and the meanings they ascribe to it.

> These meanings, reached in the face of adversity, often consist of what narrative therapists call 'thin description.' [...] Thin description allows little space for the complexities and contradictions of life. It allows little space for people to articulate their own particular meanings of their actions and the context within which they occurred. This thin description [...] obscures many other possible meanings.[45]

Olivia's representation of herself as a female hero in her initial narrative may be characterised as 'thin description', as experiences that do not fit with Olivia's image of herself as a feminist hero are omitted. But Olivia becomes dissatisfied with this version and wants to recall more of what happened and how she felt, to uncover aspects of the original experience which she has forgotten or misrepresented. Her process here is similar to the 're-authoring conversation' described in White's Narrative approach to therapy.

> Re-authoring conversations invite people to do what they routinely do—that is, to link events of their lives in sequences through time according to a theme/plot. However, in this activity, people are assisted to identify the more neglected events of their lives—the unique outcomes or exceptions—and are encouraged to take these into alternative story lines.[46]

Olivia's retelling 'thickens' or 'enriches' her story with a wealth of recalled detail and sensory experience. As Alice Morgan explains, it is only when this is achieved that it becomes possible for people to make real choices about how they represent their lives and to construct empowering alternative narratives.

> To be freed from the influence of problematic stories, it is not enough to simply re-author an alternative story. Narrative therapists are interested in finding ways in which these alternative stories can be 'richly described'. The opposite of a 'thin conclusion' is understood by narrative therapists to be a 'rich description' of lives and relationships.
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> […] Rich description involves the articulation in fine detail of the story-lines of a person's life. If you imagine reading a novel, sometimes a story is richly described—the motives of the characters, their histories, and own understandings are finely articulated. The stories of the characters' lives are interwoven with the stories of other people and events. Similarly,

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[45] Alice Morgan. 'What is Narrative Therapy?' Dulwich Centre Publications, p. 1. *The Dulwich Centre website* (2000) <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/articles.html#introducing> [accessed 22 October 2009]. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[46] Michael White, 'Workshop Notes: Re-Authoring Conversations' (Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications, 2005), p. 10. <www.dulwichcentre.com.au> [Accessed 18 March 2011]

> narrative therapists are interested in finding ways for the alternative stories of people's lives to be richly described and interwoven with the stories of others (8).

Interestingly, novelist Peter Carey uses a similar metaphor to describe the process of writing a scene: '[...] it becomes more fully imagined. It's like this thin bit of wire that you want to encrust ... so maybe that's all it is, just building it up so I can see it, believe it.'[47] And again: '[...] I'd want to discover where everything was, what the people looked like, so I could move things around' (39). Carey's description suggests not only a wealth of imagined detail, but the creation of an imagined space in which figures and objects can be manipulated. It is tempting to speculate that, in narrative therapy, a similar marshalling of spatial imagination may be at work.

Whatever the mechanism, it is a willingness to experience and represent the complexity of an experience, according to narrative therapists, that allows people to feel more powerful and satisfied and to make better choices in their lives.

> As people begin to inhabit and live out the alternative stories, the results are beyond solving problems. Within the new stories, people live out new self images, new possibilities for relationships and new futures.[48]

As White notes, there are 'parallels between the skills of re-authoring conversations and the skills required to produce texts of literary merit' which 'encourage, in the reader, a dramatic re-engagement with many of their own experiences of life. It is in this dramatic re-engagement that the gaps in the story line are filled, and the reader lives the story by taking it over as their own.'[49] In fiction, the retrieval, deconstruction and re-assembling of stories can provide expanded possibilities—of identity, of choice and of power—for protagonists and, vicariously, for readers too.

Each of the narrator/protagonists in the novels I studied undergoes a process in which stories that limit possibility because they are incomplete or 'thin' are deconstructed or 'unpacked' and made anew into stories that empower because they are rich with meanings. In addition, these complex stories are more convincing—more *authoritative*—because they are more fully realised.

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[47] Peter Carey, cited in Kate Grenville and Sue Woolfe, *Making Stories: How Ten Australian Novels Were Written*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), p. 39. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[48] J. Freedman, J. and G. Combs, 'Shifting Paradigms: From Systems to Stories' in *Narrative Therapy: The Social Construction of Preferred Realities*, ed. by J. Freedman & G. Combs (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 16.

[49] White (2005), p. 10.

Post-colonial Concepts

The feminist critical research examined so far, produced in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s, constructs a binary opposition between 'hegemonic master narratives' and 'alternative narratives' written by women. However, inequalities of power and the tensions arising from them are complex and, in Australia, have their roots in a different history of colonisation, displacement and oppression. While the aftermath of colonisation is suffered most keenly by Indigenous people, its influence pervades every aspect of Australian culture. Researching my family history, I encountered gaps; my novel is a reflection on people's varying responses to the bringing home of missing stories. Many white Australians could unearth evidence of historical relationships with Indigenous people by merely scratching the surface of their family histories. As feminists and theorists we must include our histories and cultural contexts.

Indigenous Women and Feminism

In 1991, Anne Curthoys criticised 'white Australian feminists' for their failure to acknowledge colonialism and Aboriginal history and for the 'difficulty' they seemed to find 'in placing themselves on the side of the oppressors rather than the oppressed.'[50] She called for the development of a feminist theory that 'takes the problem of colonialism and cultural and ethnic diversity as a central rather than a marginal [...] issue' and pointed out the need to examine the effect of 'the colonial encounter, and the experience of massive migration from a multitude of sources' on all Australians, not just Indigenous people (14).

In *Literary Formations* (1995), Anne Brewster examines texts that offer alternative discourses to the hegemonic master narratives of nationalism and colonialism. [51] These include autobiographical writings by Aboriginal women, whose 'tactics of resistance' are exemplified, Brewster claims, by 'the affirmation of family in the face of governmental coercion […] and the maintenance of a way of life in opposition to specific structures of domination' (40).

But the real issues oppressing Aboriginal women were still not being addressed, according to Jackie Huggins who, in 1998, challenged white feminists in

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[50] Anne Curthoys, 'The Three Body Problem: Feminism and Chaos Theory', *Hecate* 17:1 (1991) p. 14.

[51] Anne Brewster, *Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, nationalism, globalism* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1995).

Australia to recognise the political difference between themselves and Aboriginal women, who were still being 'discriminated against due to their race rather than their gender.'[52] Huggins asserts the need for Aboriginal women to be supported in strengthening their families and communities, rather than divided against their men, and calls for a recognition of white women's historical collusion with, or even active participation in, the oppression of Aboriginal women. White women, she says, having successfully challenged patriarchal power, must now challenge their 'own inherent racism—both individually and collectively' (31).

Aileen Moreton-Robinson's research identifies inequalities of power between Indigenous women and the white academics who write about them and explores 'how race and whiteness work.'[53] She points out the ambiguities arising from white women's feminism and shows 'the myriad of ways in which white race privilege is manifested in both the private and public spheres of [...] feminist lives' (83). In an earlier work, Moreton-Robinson demonstrates the flawed ethnocentric thinking in anthropological studies and argues that feminist writers who rely uncritically on such studies are complicit in the misrepresentation of Indigenous women.[54] She challenges white feminists to examine their own racialised thinking and their assumptions about Indigenous women and to comprehend the complexity of Indigenous women's subjectivity.

> Learning to speak English and mimicking the customs of the coloniser does not fundamentally transform subjectivities that have been socialised within Indigenous social domains. Individuals learn to acquire new knowledges in order to act and function in contexts not of their choosing or control within the dominant culture. Indigenous women have had to gather knowledge about white people and use it in order to survive in the white Australian society. The accumulation of such knowledges does not mean that we have become assimilated. Instead, what it points to is that Indigenous subjectivity is multiple because of the conditions under which it has been and is shaped. However, multiple subjectivities do not preclude the existence of a core subject position that has the ability to acquire, interpret and create different subject positions in order to participate in society (89).

[52] Jackie Huggins, *Sister Girl* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1998), p. 25.
[53] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Researching Whiteness: Some Reflections from an Indigenous Woman's Standpoint' *Hecate*, 29 (2003), p. 72. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[54] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism.* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), pp. 92–93. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Moreton-Robinson addresses the assumption that because Indigenous women have adapted to white culture in order to survive, they have somehow 'lost' Indigenous ways of seeing or the ability to choose how they will respond to situations. Moreton-Robinson calls for new research methods which include and accurately represent Indigenous women's social contexts, and which interrogate white researchers' subject positions as well as the systemic assumptions that privilege Western thought and representation (92–93).

In 2005, Anne Brewster surveyed the state of this ethical project of white self-scrutiny, noting a shift toward 'the personal' in the writing of non-Indigenous scholars about whiteness.[55] Critical whiteness studies in Australia, she concludes, are turning from questions about understanding 'the Other' (which assume 'the Other' as their frame of reference) to self-reflexive interrogations of the dynamics of our (white) attempts to understand. In such writing, historical and cultural contexts are considered in a bid to comprehend the prevailing discourses of race and racism, and the frame of reference switches to the self in order to develop awareness of the internal processes of racialisation.

> Memory and [...] forgetting, are key issues in contemporary writing about whiteness. […] Shannon Jackson describes 'the act of remembering a condition such as white privilege' as being 'like trying to recall an experience that you slept through.' She also defines art-making in which realm we can include writing as 'a mode of attention'[56] (52). New whiteness writing in Australia often focuses on memory, the body, and divided and dislocated forms of subjectivity [,...] interrogates neo-liberal humanist notions of subjectivity, memory and knowledge production; [and] problematises narrative, epistemological and ontological closure and sufficiency.[57]

Such writing enables the writer and reader to focus on the mental processes of memory, attention and the production of meaning. While Indigenous women are compelled to pay attention to cultural differences and to racism because it controls their daily lives, white women must make a choice to become aware if we wish to bridge the gulf that divides us. Writing can assist people in learning to pay attention

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[55] Anne Brewster, 'Writing whiteness: the personal turn', *Australian Humanities Review* 35 (June 2005) <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-June-2005/brewster.html> [accessed 19 May 2009].

[56] Shannon Jackson, 'White Noises: On Performing White, On Writing Performance', *The Drama Review* 42:1 (Spring 1998), 52. Quoted in Brewster (2005).

[57] Anne Brewster, 'Writing whiteness: the personal turn', *Australian Humanities Review* 35 (June 2005) <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-June-2005/brewster.html> Section 6 'The Fold', paragraph 3) [accessed 19 May 2009].

to the internalised cultural processes of recognising, identifying and narrating 'self' and 'other.'

Writing Fiction Across Cultures

In a critique of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1993), Gregory Rubinson asserts that we 'are all threatened by totalizing master-narratives' and lists various examples of 'narratives that authorize oppression' on the basis of gender, sexual preference, race, culture, or politics.[58] However the most insidious master-narratives play out, not in public places, but in our minds. We may declare a belief in equality yet still unconsciously perpetuate internalised master-narratives. We are all threatened—and diminished—by unexamined narratives that control our identities, attitudes and behaviours. Approaching this notion in my novel, I was beset by anxiety. My way seemed fraught, for reasons similar to those expressed here by Inez Baranay.

> We live in an age of anxiety about representations of the Other: in Australia, Indigenous writers have made clear (understandably, I should say) that non-Indigenous writers need to observe certain protocols, including consultations and permissions, to write Indigenous characters and stories into their works, and they're better off leaving these themes alone. I have come up against the resulting anxiety in seeking funding to complete a small novel of my own, set in the Torres Strait, where I once lived. Although the narrating character is a white Australian, and the protocols of consultation do not apply to my material, it was made clear to me that the setting and the presence of Indigenous characters made the project insupportable.[59]

My non-Indigenous colleagues reported similar anxieties. But if we exclude Aboriginal characters from fictional settings in which a reader would expect them to appear, we misrepresent Indigenous Australians and continue the colonial tradition of erasure.

> With the best will in the world there is a dilemma. To write about Australia, particularly rural Australia, without mentioning the Aboriginal presence (current or historical) is to distort reality, to perpetuate the terra nullius lie. However, for a non-Aboriginal writer to write about Aboriginal people is to

[58] Gregory J. Rubinson, 'Body Languages: Scientific and Aesthetic Discourses in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*'. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 2 (2001), p. 229.
[59] Inez Baranay, 'It's the other who makes my portrait: Writing self, character and the other.' *TEXT* 8:2 (2004) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct04/baranay.htm> [accessed 19 May 2009].

> run the risk of 'appropriating' Aboriginal experience; speaking on behalf of ... There's been too much of that already.[60]

Indigenous researcher Anita Heiss reports a lack of consensus among Aboriginal people on whether white writers should tackle Indigenous subjects, but the warnings to writers who attempt it are clear: stay away from topics you do not understand or have no right to write about (such as Indigenous spirituality and Aboriginal Law) and do not attempt to write from an Indigenous viewpoint or claim to speak for Aboriginal people. Where specific knowledges are concerned or the issues are unclear, consultation with appropriate Indigenous people or communities is advised.[61]

Eva Sallis acknowledges the 'discomfort' of writing outside one's 'personal experience' but defends 'the authority of the explicitly imaginative', exhorting writers of fiction not to 'bow to the prevailing demand for authenticity'.[62]

> There is no way to be a writer and be comfortable. Seeking authenticity and authority for imaginative work is destructive and leads to writers lying about their names and antecedents and generates an even more authenticity conscious readership. Taken to a conclusion this trend is the death of fiction: we would only have life experiences, based on true stories and the illusion that people knew what they were talking about.[63]

Sallis does not refer specifically to writers contemplating Indigenous themes, but speaks as an ethical researcher and successful writer of cross-cultural fiction. She argues here that fiction exists in a separate realm from factual writing and should not be required to seek authority outside the ethical concerns of the writer. This has been the subject of extended debate in Australia in recent years, demonstrating the sensitivity of these issues and the need for writers to be aware of them.[64]

A White Writer Wrestles with Indigenous Characterisation

In *Searching for the Secret River* (2006), Kate Grenville discusses the strategies she used in her attempt to represent Indigenous characters in her historical novel *The*

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[60] Mag Merrilees, 'Tiptoeing through the Bindi-Eyes: White Representations of Aboriginal Characters', *Dotlit: the Online Journal of Creative Writing*, 6 (2007).
[61] Anita Heiss, *Dhuulu-Yala: To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003), pp. 10–16.
[62] Eva Sallis, 'Research Fiction', *TEXT* 3.2 (1999) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct99/sallis.htm> [accessed 19 May 2009].
[63] Eva Sallis, 'Research Fiction', *TEXT* 3.2 (1999) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct99/sallis.htm> [accessed 19 May 2009].
[64] See for example Inga Clendinnen 'The History Question: Who Owns the Past?' Quarterly Essay 2006 (23): 1–72.

Secret River (2005), without presuming to tell their stories or assume their point of view.[65] Grenville had decided from the outset that, because of her lack of knowledge, she would not attempt to 'enter the consciousness of the Aboriginal characters' but would portray them from the viewpoint of Thornhill, her main protagonist (193). Being unable to research her historical subjects at first hand, Grenville took up the offer of a trip to the Kimberley region to meet contemporary non-urban Aboriginal people, whose lives, while presumably quite different from those of Aboriginal people living on the south eastern coast of Australia in the eighteenth century, might offer some grounding to her imagination. Grenville was determined to show that the Indigenous people in the region she writes about, the Darug, were real people. She did not want them to be invisible, nor to depict them as mere shadows in the white margins of the 'real' story. 'I'd seen that there was an empty space in my own family story where the Aboriginal people belonged,' she writes. 'The whole point of writing this story was to fill that space' (193). But this was to prove problematic.

After several failed attempts to write convincing dialogue for her Aboriginal characters, Grenville decided to remove all Aboriginal dialogue from the novel: 'It might be historically accurate to have the Aboriginal characters speaking broken English, but it made them less sympathetic, more caricatured' (193). This problem highlights the writer's dilemma of 'writing about' without 'speaking for' a particular group. The representation of Aboriginal characters speaking 'broken English' seems caricatured because it is precisely that: a representation which forces readers into a particular, limited viewpoint. They do not hear the complex, articulate exchanges of people speaking their own language nor, as Thornhill might have, the rhythms of a language evidently intelligent despite its unintelligibility to him, nor the hesitant (polite or jocular) efforts of people trying to make themselves understood to a blundering foreigner. Instead, readers see (and hear) English that is *broken*: a damaged, incomplete, imperfect rendition of their own language. The implied assumption here is that the speaker of *broken English* is likewise damaged, incomplete, and imperfect. As Susan Lanser points out, the use of textual representations of non-standard English results in 'a deviant typography' which

[65] Kate Grenville, *Searching for the Secret River* (Melbourne: Text, 2006), pp. 193–199. Kate Grenville, *The Secret River* (Melbourne: Text, 2006). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

creates ‘a visual class distinction between narrator and [non-standard English speaking] characters.’[66]

Grenville attempts to portray complexity in her Aboriginal characters without allowing them dialogue and without crossing the line into their point of view. Grenville maintains that the Darug people’s proper story, the story which holds the Aboriginal point of view, was ‘for someone else to tell, someone who had the right to enter that world and the knowledge to do it properly’ (198–199). The novel belongs to her protagonist Thornhill, and stays close to his perspective. Yet he appears ambivalent toward the Darug people: defensive and fearful yet curious and sometimes sympathetic. He is shocked by the violence inflicted on them yet unable to fully stand up for them.

Although Grenville speaks of an ‘empty space’ in her family story, the metaphor she ultimately uses for shaping this part of the novel is not one of filling a space, but of creating a hollow.

> To create a hollow in the book, a space of difference that would be more eloquent than any words I might invent to explain it. To let the reader know that a story was there to be told, but not to try to tell it (199).

Grenville became aware that in describing the landscape, she was using human imagery, and realised she had found a solution to her dilemma. ‘Humanising the landscape could be a way of showing the link between indigenous people and their land because, in some way that I recognised without really understanding, the country *was* the people’ (199).

Reading Grenville’s account of her research process made me aware of the gaps I must leave in my novel, the stories that could not be told. Jennifer Martiniello, Aboriginal academic and poet, has this to say.

> For many issues there is also a white story, not just a black story—after all, we didn’t create the last 200 years of crap all by ourselves. So long as white writers are aware that there are boundaries they cannot cross when they are writing, and where or what the appropriate protocols are for dealing with Aboriginal people, their stories and their communities, then their work may be approved.[67]

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[66] Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 129.

[67] Jennifer Martiniello quoted in Anita Heiss, ‘Writing About Indigenous Australia: Some Issues to Consider and Protocols to Follow: A Discussion Paper’, *Southerly*, 62 (2002), pp. 197–207. Email from Jennifer Martiniello to Anita Heiss, 12 Nov. 2000. Quoted on p. 200.

An Indigenous woman writer who is also a friend tells me: 'Write from your own point of view, your own experience.' As my friend says, and Martiniello implies, the issue here is one of responsibility. Many non-Indigenous people are unaware of, or unwilling to acknowledge, the extent to which inequity and racism still operate in Australia and the ongoing damage caused by government policies. There is a erroneous notion that 'it's all in the past' and that those who ask us to listen are indulging in a 'black armband' view of history. But there is an imperative to share our experience, and reading (or writing) fiction may offer an opportunity to creatively transform our understandings of the racism in our history and in our present.

Dislocation and Regeneration

Dislocation can mean 'both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event. It is [...] a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location.'[68] People who are invaded by colonisers are often removed from their territory: literally dislocated. But even if they remain on their land, they will be 'metaphorically dislocated, placed into a hierarchy that sets their culture aside and ignores its institutions and values in favour of the values and practices of the colonizing culture.'[69] People who migrate voluntarily also suffer a type of dislocation characterised by disorientation and an imperative to find language and stories to describe their new environment and experiences. Dislocation is thus a broad-ranging term applicable to people whose lives have been disrupted by colonialism, although the effects may vary in scale and nature. In this sense, it applies to the principal protagonists in the novels analysed here.

Regeneration refers to the ways in which cultural groups renew or reinvent themselves in order to survive in the face of dislocation.[70] People (and their descendants) who have moved, by force or choice, from their homelands, or those whose culture has been disrupted or destroyed, must reorient and renew their culture. Remnants of traditional forms combine with new elements, either invented or

[68]Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2nd edn, *Routledge Key Guides* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 65.
[69]Ashcroft et al, (2007) p. 66. For an analysis of dislocation as it has affected an Aboriginal clan of northern Australia, see Richard Baker, *Land Is Life: From Bush to Town—the Story of the Yanyuwa People*. (Allen and Unwin, 1999), especially pp. 169–176.
[70] Ashcroft et al (2007), pp. 65–66.

borrowed, resulting in powerful hybrid cultural forms of dance, song, story or religion.[71]

Textuality as Narrative Strategy

Textuality is a narrative strategy concerned with the representation of cultural identity and the reclamation of imaginative geographies and histories.

Cultural Positioning

All writers make choices about textualising culture: about representing the cultural identities of characters, narrators and themselves as authors, about what is revealed and what is omitted regarding cultural contexts and histories in a text. Until the advent of post-colonial thinking, when narrative texts of all kinds came under scrutiny, the marker of dominance in colonial and post-colonial contexts was what was left unsaid: the shared assumptions of writers and readers. In Australia, the normative type for readers, writers and protagonists was white, middle-class, male and of Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic descent. Any deviations from this had to be marked in a text, for example an author identified only by initials was presumed male and any character was assumed to be 'white' unless textual markers contravened this. The complexities of self representation and the issues involved in representing cultural others are touched on elsewhere in this study and have been discussed in detail by other writers.[72] In the texts studied here, identity-claims made on behalf of authors, narrators and principal protagonists in terms of their culture, lineage or ethnicity are noted, and the role they play in the narrative delineated.

[71] For examples, see Ralph G. Locke, *The Gift of Proteus: Shamanism and the Transformation of Being* (Chapel Hill: Spring Creek Institute, 1999) on the Voodoo religion of Haiti, pp. 28–32, and Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) on Colombian reinterpretations of a Catholic icon, pp. 188–208.

[72] See Anne Brewster, 'Writing Whiteness: The Personal Turn', *Australian Humanities Review* (2005); Gail Jones, 'Mimesis and Alterity: Post-colonialism, Ethnography, and the Representation of Racial "Others"'(Unpublished thesis, University of Western Australia, 1995); Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Researching Whiteness: Some Reflections from an Indigenous Woman's Standpoint' *Hecate*, 29 (2003), 72-85; Esti Sugiharti, 'Racialised and Gendered Identities as Constructed in Some Contemporary Afro-American and Aboriginal Australian Women's Fiction' (Unpublished thesis, Flinders University, 2004); and T. Minh-ha Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post-coloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Imaginative Geographies and Histories

'Imaginative geography' is a term originally used by Edward Said to mean the textual and cultural appropriation of a region's geographical identity.[73] Said explains the origins of the often complex and subtle workings of cultural domination in simple terms.

> A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call 'the land of the barbarians' In other words, this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs' is a way of making geographical distinctions that *can be* entirely arbitrary. I use the word 'arbitrary' here because imaginative geography of the 'our land–barbarian land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours' (54).

According to Said, we apprehend time in a similar way; present time is perceived as *belonging to us*, while past and future, especially the remote past and future, have imaginative connotations of *otherness* and tend to be romanticised or demonised. So *imaginative geography* and *imaginative history* reinforce identity, allowing 'the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away' (55).

Alongside this negative formation of identity, there is another process at work which Said calls 'vacillation'.[74] Here, the designated 'other' by which the self is known (e.g. 'the barbarians') is seen as alternating between familiarity and strangeness, known and unknown. This switching of perception is accompanied by an emotional oscillation between 'contempt for what is familiar and [...] shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty' (59). Said identifies here the mechanics of the ambivalence inherent in cross-cultural encounters noted by Homi Bhabha[75] and Michael Taussig.[76] Over time, Said observes, this oscillation produces a new phenomenon.

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[73] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 54.
[74] Said (1995), p. 59. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[75]Homi K. Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders' in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 29-35.
[76]Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 188–208.

> One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well-known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence, such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things (58–59).

Thus, it is not necessary to really know something (person, place or concept) in order to name it, but then, having named it, one presumes to know it, precisely because it is 'not-self,' or 'other.' In this way, an entire field of knowledge, such as 'Orientalism', may be developed and elaborated over hundreds of years, based on quite erroneous suppositions arising from the need for the *other* (e.g. *Orientals*) to be different from *us* (who do not need to be named) (53–59).

Reclaiming Textual Authority

In her critique of the works of two 'Third World' women writers, Indira Karamcheti takes up the notion of imaginative geography, or the appropriation of territory by the dominant discourse of colonialism, and shows how it can also be used as a strategy of resistance to such appropriation.[77] The ways in which colonised places are represented in texts can either reinscribe or subvert dominant narratives and it is therefore possible for writers to undertake 'an imaginative recovery of local place in literary representation, to enable the liberation and recovery of the colonized self' (126).

Imaginative geographies and histories may thus be seen as textual reclamations of territories (geographical and temporal) that have been lost. Land is stolen, not just physically but culturally, by means of literal and metaphorical mapping. Maps are used by colonisers as tools to claim authority and to dislocate territories from living contexts such as local histories and environmental knowledges, as José Rabasa shows.[78] Mieke Bal describes the power of reinscribing one's own history in a place that has been usurped by the colonial practice of mapping.

> [I]n stories set in former colonies, the memory evokes a past in which people were dislodged from their space by colonizers who occupied it, but also, a past in which they did not yield. Going back—in retroversion—to the time in which the place was a different kind of space is a way of countering the effects of colonizing acts of focalization that can be called mapping. Mastering, looking from above, dividing up and controlling is an approach to

[77] Karamcheti (1994), pp. 125–146. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[78] José Rabasa, 'Allegories of *Atlas*' in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 358–364.

> space that ignores time as well as the density of its lived-in quality. In opposition to such ways of seeing space, providing a landscape with a history is a way of spatializing memory that undoes the killing of space as lived.[79]

Rabasa points out that the practice of mapping (as both attitude and text) in itself 'produces a blind spot that dissolves history as a privileged modality of European culture', creating a space for the colonised to 'write back'.[80]

The textual representation of fictive geographies and histories may either reinscribe hegemonic master narratives or disrupt habitual assumptions about so-called marginalised peoples and places. Karamcheti identifies three 'legends', or mainstream reading codes, that perpetuate the oppression of so-called 'Third World' women (127–129). She calls these *stasis*, *binarism* and *atextuality*.

> *[S]tasis* [...] construes both the exotic and woman as signs connoting stillness, timelessness, lack of change. A second legend, *binarism*, divides the world into pairs of dominant and dominated opposites, male/female, European/native, and so on. The legend of *atextuality* presumes that certain texts lack power to convince of the 'truth' of their representation (127–128).

Karamcheti envisages *atextuality* as corollary to Gayatri Spivak's notion of *textuality*.[81]

> [T]he notion of textuality should be related to the notion of the worlding of a world on a supposedly uninscribed territory. […] I am thinking basically about the imperialist project which had to assume that the earth that it territorialised was in fact previously uninscribed. So then a world, on a simple level of cartography, inscribed what was presumed to be uninscribed. Now this worlding actually is also a texting, textualising, a making into art, a making into an object to be understood (1990, 1).

Spivak refers here to the colonial practice of usurping territory by appropriating textual control of it, simultaneously stripping it of the original inhabitants' historical, cultural and personal meanings and effectively turning it into something different. Textuality is one way in which imperial culture is imposed and the cultural practices of colonised peoples replaced by the language, religious beliefs and cultural protocols of the colonisers. Imperial practices of documentation such as writing,

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[79] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 147–148.
[80] Rabasa (1995), p. 364.
[81] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Criticism, Feminism and the Institution' (interview with Elizabeth Grosz) in *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

mapping, recording and cataloguing in lands like those now known as 'Australia' and 'New Zealand' authorised the appropriation of 'supposedly uninscribed territory.' Colonisers took the land but also took the ways in which the original inhabitants saw, understood and interacted with the land, by assuming absolute authority over its representation. Once this has been accomplished, nothing can be the same again, even if the original inhabitants' rights to the land are partially or fully restored. Michael Taussig refers to this unalterable transformation as 'the magic of mimesis' which 'lies in the transformation wrought on reality by rendering its image.'[82] The power of textual authority can permanently alter people's perceptions, thoughts and behaviour.

But, as Karamcheti says, 'anything represented [...] enters an arena of struggle for representational authority' (129). This 'arena of struggle' is a hybrid space where authority can be claimed only by virtue of its opposite and where resistance can be enacted due to an inherent instability of meaning. Karamcheti is interested in the ways in which women writers 'attempt to retake geographic space and textual authority' by undoing the codes of oppression (131).

> Stasis must be transformed into movement or somehow dynamized; it must acquire a different value. A world constructed in binary terms must be either reconstructed as multiple or more simply wrenched by revaluing, reversing, or replacing its binarisms. Atextuality may be countered by moves to textualize place and so to give fresh local authority to the text (131).

She concludes that although the writers she studies 'do not resolve the problem of writing against the imaginative geographies' of master narratives, they engage in a struggle to achieve such a resolution, attempt to teach alternative strategies for writing and reading, and assert the 'literary authority of [their] text[s]' (144.)

Hybridity and the 'Third Space'

The term *hybridity* or 'the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization,' is widely-used in post-colonial theory.[83] Derived from botany and biology, the word *hybrid* implies both a breaking and a joining together, making it both potentially confusing and rich in metaphoric possibility.[84]

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[82] Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 134.
[83] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2nd edn, *Routledge Key Guides* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 108.
[84] Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 26.

Contemporary use of the term is controversial because historically it was applied to Indigenous people in Australia and elsewhere in pseudo-scientific, racist classification systems (Young, 26–28). However, as Homi Bhabha observes, since colonial and post-colonial discourses are characterised by unstable oscillations of meaning, the term *hybrid*, with its implicit paradox of fusion and splitting, is peculiarly apt for their analysis.[85]

Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term *hybrid* in relation to novelistic discourse, meaning the intentional, ironic play between what he calls different 'languages' (which we might understand as different 'voices') within a literary utterance.[86] Young sees this as 'a particularly significant dialectical model for cultural interaction' since it represents simultaneously opposing qualities: 'an organic hybridity which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically.'[87]

> Hybridity […] involves an antithetical movement of coalescence and antagonism, with the unconscious set against the intentional, the organic against the divisive, the generative against the undermining. Hybridity is itself an example of hybridity, of a doubleness that brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation. For Bakhtin […] the crucial effect of hybridization comes with the latter, political category, the moment where, within a single discourse, one voice is able to unmask the other. This is the point where authoritative discourse is undone (22).

This *undoing* of 'authoritative discourse' is the crux of all attempts to construct narrative from a perspective which challenges existing power structures. In the novels she analyses, Karamcheti discerns such Bakhtinian dialogue between the reader of a 'Third World' text, whose assumed imaginative geographies marginalise the text, and the writer, who tries to disrupt such received reading strategies and counter them with new ones.[88] Such texts are hybrid in the sense that they must claim textual authority while simultaneously interrogating it.

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[85] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 54–56. See also Homi Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders' in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 29–35; Gail Jones (2006), p. 13; and Young (1995), pp. 22–26.
[86] Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. by Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 301–331; 429. See Chapter Three for an example of linguistic hybridity from Terri Janke's *Butterfly Song*.
[87] Young (1995), p. 22.
[88] Karamcheti (1994), p.144.

Bakhtin's notion of the potential for hybridity to undo authoritative discourse in literature is expanded by Bhabha to embrace cultural utterances of any kind.[89] For Bhabha, any representation of cultural identity arises from what he calls the 'Third Space' of enunciation. Because the assertion of dominance has no absolute authority but requires an oppositional term, the space between cultures cannot be fully owned by either. In Bhabha's words, 'in the very practice of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid' (49). The 'Third Space of enunciation' is inherently unstable and open to subversion, appropriation and alteration. This is exemplified in the tendency of Indigenous peoples to appropriate and alter the religious symbols, texts and rituals of the colonisers.[90] For Bhabha, the meeting of different cultures invariably engenders a 'Third Space' of potential resistance, disruption and creativity in which, he claims, there is potential to 'elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves' (2004, 54–56). He gestures here through the ambivalence, confusion and conflict of intercultural meetings, beyond the limitations of binary thinking and the need to assert authority over an 'other', to the possibility of a heterotopia in which people, fully aware of the constructed nature of 'the other', can meet as equals.

The post-colonial texts studied here represent literary 'spaces of enunciation' in which the discourses of settler and colonised cultures coexist. Their imaginative histories and geographies feature deliberate omissions, conflicts and ambivalences of perception or memory. *Textuality* in these novels is a strategy that authorises alternative ways of representing places and their histories, replacing a unified narrative with complex and disparate ways of seeing, and inviting readers to participate in the work.

Assemblage as Narrative Strategy

Assemblage is the term I use here for the construction of a text around objects, embedded texts or memory fragments which link several narratives from different perspectives. The word essentially means the collection or bringing together of disparate objects but it has been used in different ways in a range of disciplines dealing with cultural analysis.[91] Ambiguity has arisen because, in addition to general

[89] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 47–56. Further references follow quotations in the text.
[90] See, for example, Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 188–208.
[91] For details, see George E. Marcus and Erkan Saka, 'Assemblage', *Theory, Culture & Society* (2006), 101.

usage in both French and English, the English language variant has two distinct theoretical genealogies, one from art history and the other from an English translation of the French word *agencement* as used by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.[92] In French, *assemblage* is an everyday term meaning a collection of things, whereas *agencement* is a philosophical term meaning the joining of objects, substances or events to form a third compositional entity. It also has the additional meaning of something *in process*: something that is becoming or emerging, that changes over time, and is unstable in form.[93] *Assemblage* in Deleuze and Guattari's sense therefore appears to have something in common with *alchemy* and also with *hybridity* as it is understood in post-colonial theory.

As a visual arts practice, assemblage has antecedents in the collages of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, was thriving in the 1950s and reached its zenith with the 1961 *Art of Assemblage* exhibition curated by William Seitz at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[94] Anna Dezeuze argues for 'the value of conceiving assemblage as a model of engagement with the world rather than as a formal category.'[95] In other words, it is useful to focus on assemblage as a process rather than merely on the end product. In assemblage, process is transparently represented in the product as diverse materials are selected and juxtaposed in such a way that new relationships emerge between them while their origins remain apparent. Seitz, in choosing works for his exhibition, 'seemed insistent that these heterogeneous materials remain "identifiable"' in the finished artwork, explaining to one artist that his work was considered sculpture rather than assemblage because '"you so often obliterate the sources of the things you use"'.[96] I had a similar transparency of selection and construction in mind when envisaging how I might incorporate my grandmother's stories into my novel. I imagined my text as a block of some solid yet translucent substance, like amber, inside which her stories might hang suspended, their essence and history miraculously preserved even as they were transformed. The

[92]'One of the earliest attempts to translate Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term *agencement* appears in the first published translation, by Paul Foss and Paul Patton in 1981, of the article 'Rhizome'. John Phillips, 'Agencement/Assemblage', *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2006), 108.
[93] Phillips (2006), 108–109. Phillips gives a concise account of the historical usages and complexities of meaning of the two terms, but omits precise references to Deleuze and Guattari's works, either in French or in translation.
[94] Julia Kelly, 'The Anthropology of Assemblage', *Art Journal,* 67 (College Art Association, 2008), pp. 24–30.
[95] Anna Dezeuze, 'Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life', *Art Journal,* 67 (College Art Association, 2008), pp. 31–38.
[96] William Seitz, letter to David Smith, undated, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. #695, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Quoted in Dezeuze, p. 31.

transparency of the process of transformation and of the relationships between objects is essential to the art of assemblage. Comparing *assemblage* as art practice with *bricolage* as 'the do-it-yourself process of constructing objects from odds and ends,' Dezeuze notes that both constitute a 'dialogue with objects' (31).

Gail Jones calls for a 're-imagining' of 'critical paradigms', asking '[w]hat might it mean to take the fragment or the trace as a paradigm of knowledge and to assume that assemblage, not reconstitution, is our critical task?[97] Assemblage might be a literary/creative as well as a critical task: a strategy that allows for representations of memory, culture, and authority while acknowledging the complex, incomplete and provisional nature of such representations in a post-colonial, postmodern, post-feminist world.

> In this model it is the manufacture of intelligible design—rather than, say, the explanation of facts—that generates and constitutes our understanding. It also assumes a culture always-already multiple, such as the term multiculturalism was intended to convey, and a stance of intelligent scepticism concerning unifying (that is to say monocultural) ideologies of nationhood (13).

I envisage the literary strategy of assemblage as a similar transparent piecing together of narrative from disparate fragments (found, remembered or imagined) so that their origins are honoured, their differences respected and the spaces between them (which might represent lost or forgotten parts, or the passage of time) acknowledged, rather than the composing of a narrative that purports to represent a homogeneous, hegemonic, authoritative viewpoint. As well as multiple perspectives, such a text may juxtapose fragments retrieved from the fictive past or other places, creating a literary hybrid space akin to Bhabha's 'Third Space of Enunciation', an inherently unstable field of shifting meanings and boundaries. The literary strategy of *assemblage*, although its model is the postmodern art practice of placing elements together in such a way that their juxtapositions and the spaces between them generate meaning, thus begins to resemble *agencement*: the alchemical creation of an unstable *hybrid.* The elements of assemblage speak to one another in their new context while also revealing their origins, an oscillation which generates new meanings and possibilities. A text of assemblage may certainly have authority, but instead of being absolute or unquestioned, this may be partial, contingent and self-reflexive. it may

[97] Gail Jones, 'A Dreaming, a Sauntering: Re-Imagining Critical Paradigms', *JASAL*, 5 (2006), 13. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

refer to other paradigms, to what is lost or unknown or to its own limits and boundaries.

As Gail Jones points out, assemblage is not an attempt to reconstitute the past[98], recreating it, perhaps, in the way an historical novel may be said to do. Nor is it an attempt to create a work that is *seamless* in the sense that disparate pieces are integrated into a whole, the places where they join hidden or smoothed over. In each of the novels studied, fragments from the fictive past such as objects, photographs, songs, and incomplete memories of places, events and people are placed alongside events, characters and places in the fictive present. In two of these novels, the narrative is literally discontinuous, cutting back and forth between times and places, and/or between different points of view. In another, the narrative is layered, concealing and revealing puzzles and secret messages, as attributed by Jonathon Katz to the 'combines' of the artist Robert Rauschenberg.[99] Such strategies create a transgressive hybrid space in which ambiguities are illuminated and meanings shift and double back on themselves. The partial nature of memories and the gaps in stories provoke questions for protagonists and engagement with the text by readers. Private and public spaces, official and unofficial histories, exist side by side and readers, as Mikhail Bakhtin shows, must actively enter the dialogue in order to make (their own) sense of it.

Conclusion

DuPlessis's work on narrative structures and strategies and Bloom's demonstration of non-unitary subjectivity in narratives of self-representation influenced the writing of my novel from the beginning. Driven by the tension between twin desires to write a well-structured, accessible text and to represent the complexities of my subjects, I researched feminist narrative strategies and the challenges to feminism from Indigenous and post-colonial scholars. I propose *textuality* and *assemblage* as two narrative strategies conducive to the construction of alternative kinds of textual authority to that found in hegemonic master narratives: univocal texts based on the presumption that writers and readers share values derived from white, patriarchal, Anglo-European, Judaeo-Christian culture.

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[98] Gail Jones, 'A Dreaming, a Sauntering: Re-Imagining Critical Paradigms', *JASAL*, 5 (2006), 13.
[99] Jonathan D. Katz, '"Committing the Perfect Crime": Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art', *Art Journal* 67 (College Art Association, 2008), pp. 39–55. Rauschenberg's 'combines' are works consisting of painting, collage and assemblage.

Chapter Two: Narrative Voice and Textual Authority

This chapter examines theories of narrative voice and textual authority by feminist narratologists Mieke Bal and Susan Lanser. Together with the concept of nonunitary subjectivity discussed earlier, these theories contribute to an understanding of *nonunitary narration*, or narration by more than one voice, with a disjunction of time, perspective or person between the voices.

Bakhtin and the Polyphonic Novel

Both Bal and Lanser refer to earlier theories of narratology and to the seminal work of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose essential contribution was, according to Jonathon Culler, to characterise the novel as 'fundamentally polyphonic (multi-voiced) or dialogic rather than monological (single-voiced): the essence of the novel [being] its staging of different voices or discourses and, thus, of the clash of social perspectives and points of view.'[100] This notion of literary polyphony is relevant to feminist and post-colonial criticism, since both are underpinned by the call for resistance to master narratives and for an awareness of cultural differences in expression. Misunderstandings arise between people, even those who ostensibly speak the same language, due to different usages of the multiple possibilities of meaning inherent in language. As Bal explains, our understanding of this phenomenon owes much to Bakhtin.

> He developed the notion that language use—or rather, discourse—is always an intertwining of different discourses coming from a variety of backgrounds. This principle is known as the dialogic principle. What Bakhtinians call dialogue, however, is better understood as a metaphor that underscores the heterogeneity of discourse (64).

Bakhtin shows that novelistic discourse always consists of the interplay of multiple texts and voices, though these may be mediated or masked in different ways. Bal stresses the 'liberating potential' of his work, which allows readers to recognise the non-unitary nature of language.

[100] Jonathon Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 87.

> The very notion that language is not unified provides access to bits and pieces of culturally different environments within a single text. It makes readers aware of the limited importance of the individual author and the impossibility of completely repressing ideological and social others. To realize that any text is a patchwork of different strata, bearing traces of different communities and of the contestations between them, is an essential insight (66).

Such understanding allows for 'reading between the lines' and 'against the grain' of the surface meaning of a text in order to discover the traces of prior influences. Building upon Bakhtin's ideas, Susan Lanser analyses different kinds of narrative voice and develops distinctions between what she calls *authorial*, *personal* and *communal* voices.[101]

Feminist Narratology

Narratology: A Synopsis

Narratology is the formal analysis of narratives pioneered by Vladimir Propp, Henry James, and Percy Lubbock.[102] Wayne Booth was the first to describe narrators in terms of their level of involvement in the story, self-consciousness, reliability, distance from events and privilege.[103] Booth is also responsible for the notion of the *implied author*, 'an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes' (151), or 'the version of himself or herself the author constructs in writing the narrative.'[104] Gerard Genette's comprehensive analysis of narrative order and types of narrator was a major contribution to the field, notably for the distinctions he made between *heterodiegetic* and *homodiegetic* narrators (the former being outside the story while the latter is a character within it) and between narrative levels, *extradiegetic* describing the 'first' or frame narrative, and *intradiegetic* the secondary, or embedded narrative/s.[105]

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[101] In, particular, Lanser refers to Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. ed. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) and *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. ed. by Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
[102] Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. 6th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 711–712.
[103] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 149–165. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[104] James Phelan, 'Narrative Theory 1966-2006: A Narrative', in *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 299.
[105] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 227–247.

The Impact of Feminist Theory

In the 1970s and 1980s, the field of narratology was dramatically altered by the work of feminist scholars, who brought cultural and contextual considerations to textual analysis, as well as 'valuable studies of the difference gender makes in the production and consumption of narrative at particular historical junctures.'[106] As Phelan explains, structuralist narratology fell out of favour with theorists until 1986 when 'Susan Lanser proposed joining the analytical precision of structuralist narratology with the political concerns of feminism as a way to contribute to the projects of both approaches' (296.) Despite opposition from both feminists and narratologists, this was an important turning point, and according to Phelan, '[t]he work of Lanser and others has now established feminist narratology as a significant movement within narrative theory' with its main principle the primary influence of gender on narrative form (296).

However, Ruth Page claims that feminist narratology has never been a unified discipline, and has developed in a variety of ways in response to increasingly complex notions of social identity.[107] 'The problems of universalism' for which narratology has been criticised were, Page asserts, 'countered by the inclusion of multiple perspectives that resulted in the fracturing of narratology and feminism into increased pluralism that went hand in hand with a focus on localized contexts' (11). Contemporary feminist narratologists like Mieke Bal, Isla Duncan and Ruth Page look beyond gender to 'alternative sources of oppression or exclusion, such as race, class or sexuality, […] age, historical period or academic discipline' (15). The inclusive theories of narrative structure and point of view developed by Bal and Lanser offer valuable perspectives on the formally complex novels in this study.

[106] Phelan (2006), p. 296. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[107] Ruth E Page, *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 16. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Mieke Bal: Three Levels of Narrative Analysis

Bal's theory of narratology integrates aspects of Genette's theory with her own concepts.[108] Her work is characterised on the one hand by rigorous textual scrutiny and on the other by careful attention to cultural contexts and questions of status and power, both indispensable attributes in any study of post-colonial texts. Bal's paradigm of the types and functions of narrators and focalizers is used to identify structural elements and levels of textual authority in the selected novels. The following section sets out the main principles of Bal's paradigm and illustrates her three levels of narrative analysis with an original diagram (see *Figure 1*).[109]

[108] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 64. Further references are given after quotations in the text. A different three-part theory was developed by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and is explained in his *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics.* (London: Methuen, 1983).

[109] Bal stresses that these levels are intertwined within texts and are considered in isolation solely for analytical purposes (67). In the later revised edition, Bal reverses the original order of the three levels of narrative analysis, working from the most complex and inclusive to the simplest level. I have chosen to present them in the original order, beginning with the fabula, and moving to the narrative text. Bal (1997) *Narrative Text, pp. 16–75; Story, pp. 708–170; Fabula, pp. 175–214.*

Bal's Three Levels of Narrative Analysis*

Bal emphasises that the three levels are intertwined in the text and separated solely for the purpose of analysis (67). The narrator has a higher degree of textual authority than the focalizer, and the focalizer has a higher degree of textual authority than non-focalizing characters.

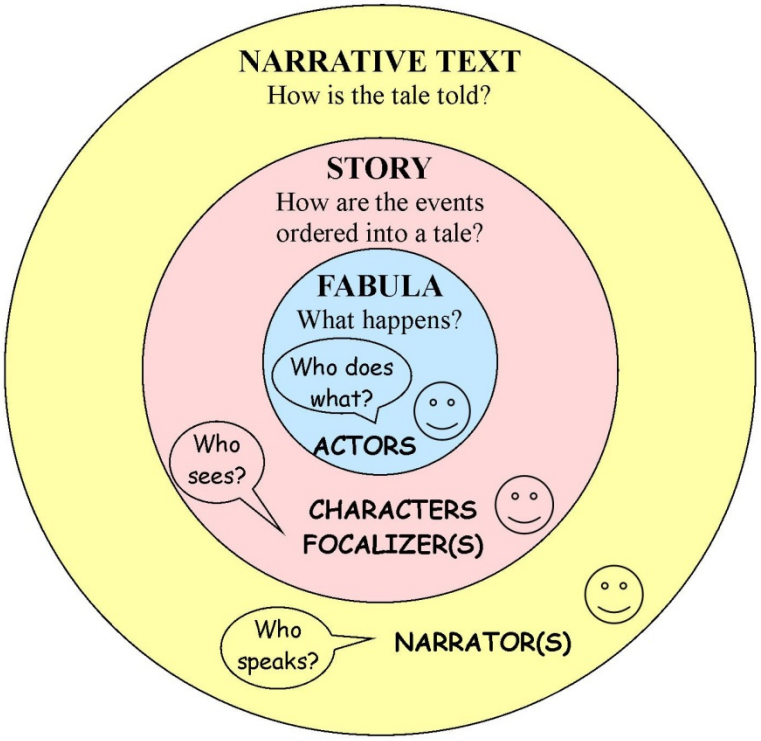

Fig. 1. Original diagram demonstrating Mieke Bal's three levels of narrative analysis.

FABULA

'A series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors' (5). The elements of the fabula are fixed objects (actors, locations, things) and changing processes (events taking place over time) (182). The *fabula* includes who does what to whom, and when and where the events take place.

STORY

'A fabula that is presented in a certain manner' (5). '[...] the result of an ordering' (78). How do the events of the fabula unfold? The *focalizer*, which may (or may not) coincide with one or more of the story's characters (so-called 'point of view' character/s) is an organising principle.

NARRATIVE TEXT

'A text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium' (5). The *narrator* relates the story, producing a particular kind of narrative text, e.g. novel, short story, film, etc. Narrators may or may not be identified with focalizers and/or with characters.

*Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Second ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

Fabula

The fabula can be thought of as the bones of a story—what happens, where and when. These elements remain constant across different versions of a story. The events of the fabula have a logic that makes it possible for readers to follow their order, even if the story is presented out of sequence. Bal defines the fabula as '[a] series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors' (5). 'Actors' are distinguished from 'characters' at this level, since the elements of the fabula are independent of characters' thoughts and emotions. The elements of the fabula may be fixed (objects, actors and locations) or changing (events that unfold over time) (182).

Story

The story level of analysis is concerned with how the events, actors and objects of the fabula are presented: in what sequence and from whose perspective. 'A story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner' (5). Story is 'the result of an ordering' of the imaginative material of the fabula, distinct from both the fabula itself and the narrative text, whose nature is determined by its medium (78). A story may unfold in chronological order, mirroring the events of the fabula, or it may be presented out of sequence. *Plot* is determined by the narrative order: what is revealed to the reader, and when. Here, *actors* become *characters*: their thoughts and feelings, as well as their actions, are significant. At least one character usually assumes a role commonly known as the 'point of view' character, defined more precisely by Bal as the *focalizer*. Focalization is an organising principle: what is revealed, and what concealed, depends upon whose thoughts, feelings and attitudes are shared with the reader.[110] Bal distinguishes between 'character bound' focalizers, where the point of view is limited to that of a character in the story, and 'external' focalizers, where the point of view has the potential to be more wide-ranging. Focalization can shift between characters and from character-bound to external modalities and vice versa.[111]

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[110] I am indebted for my understanding of this subject to Vincenzo Cerami for his elucidation (in translation) of the relationships between narrative sequence, focalizer, and plot. Vincenzo Cerami, in an interview about the differences and similarities in writing novels, plays, and screenplays at the Australian Writers' Guild Filmmakers' Forum at Wirra Wirra Vineyards, McLaren Vale, South Australia (unpublished, 6 September 2009).

[111] This summary is a much simplified account of Bal's theory. For a detailed account of focalization, see Bal (1997) pp. 142–161.

Narrative Text

This is defined as '[a] text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium' (5). The agent is called the *narrator*. The way in which a story is narrated produces a particular kind of narrative text, which may be in any medium, for example, short story, novel, film or theatre. Narrators may be identified with focalizers and/or with characters in the story, but their function is distinct from any of these, and so for analytical purposes they are considered separately. Narrators, like focalizers, may be character-bound or external. The narrative function can also shift from one modality to another.

Information about the structure and meaning of a narrative text can be gleaned by asking meaningful questions about narration, focalization, ordering and action (223). In the present study, by teasing out the strands of 'what happens' (fabula), how it is presented in terms of sequence and perspective (story) and the manner in which it is told (narrative text), an understanding is gained of each novel's structure in terms of plot, focalization and narrative voice, which in turn illuminates underlying narrative strategies and shows how textual authority is constructed.

Narrators and Focalizers

The narrator may be characterised as the one who speaks, or tells the story, while the focalizer is the one who sees, or whose point of view is presented.[112]

Who Speaks? The Narrator

Bal defines the narrator as 'that agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text', distinguishing it both from characters in the story and from notions of authorship (18). But is it really necessary to posit the existence of a creature called a 'narrator' unless it refers to itself? In other words, does narration necessarily imply a 'narrator'? This question has been debated by contemporary narratologists including Dan Shen and Marie-Laure Ryan. Shen argues that the narrator is an unnecessary construct, and that to successfully analyse a text, only two levels of narrative analysis are required, as opposed to the three proposed in the theories of Bal, Genette and Rimmon-Kenan.

[112] Bal dislikes the use of terms such as 'voice' and speaking' in relation to textual analysis, claiming such metaphors promote 'individualism and language-centrism' (1997, p. 223). However, such metaphors are almost impossible to avoid, and indeed Bal herself uses them (for examples, see pp. 16–18 and 143). I would argue against her assertion that auditory terms such as 'voice' are purely metaphorical where written texts are concerned, and for practical purposes have used these terms along with Bal's concepts.

> As far as the narrative itself is concerned, there is little point in having a separate category 'narrating' or 'narration', since the real narrating process lies beyond the narrative and any fictitious process of narrating is not accessible unless it becomes an object being narrated.[113]

When aspects of the narrating process become accessible, Shen argues, they automatically enter into one or the other of the remaining two levels of analysis (for example, when the narrator is also a character in the story). In fact, the narrator is a theoretical construct, knowable only by the traces it leaves in the text.

Marie-Laure Ryan, while acknowledging the validity of the narratorial role, questions the need for the narrator as an entity, calling it a 'theoretical primitive.'[114]

> [T]he notion of narrator has generally been treated as necessary, given, monolithic, and self-evident. The logic behind this stance is easy to follow: if narrative is a type of message produced through an act of narration, this act must be performed by an agent; and what should this agent be called, if not a narrator?[115]

Ryan claims the real function of the narrator is to 'relieve the author from the responsibility' of truth-telling, arguing that while readers of non-fiction expect veracity, readers of fiction expect to be entertained by invention, while not necessarily wishing to label the author a liar (146). Hence the theoretical divergence of *author* and *narrator* which, as Genette notes, occurs invariably in fiction, though not in non-fiction.[116] Instead of a theoretical 'narrator,' Ryan suggests the notion of three 'narratorial functions': 'the creative (or self-expressive), the transmissive (or performative), and the testimonial (or assertive) function [s]' (147). The creative function shapes the story, the transmissive function produces the text in a particular medium, and the testimonial function is responsible for veracity within the fictional world. Ryan's proposal demands a paradigmatic shift from previous ways of theorising narrative texts toward the construction of an entirely new theory of narratology, and in recent work she has drawn on understandings of digital media to

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[113] Dan Shen, 'Narrative, Reality, and Narrator as Construct: Reflections on Genette's "Narrating"', *Narrative* 9 (2001), p. 123.

[114] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'The Narratorial Functions: Breaking Down a Theoretical Primitive' in *Narrative* 9.2 (2001), p. 146.

[115] Ryan, (2001), p. 146. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[116] Gerard Genette, *Fiction and Diction*. Translated by Catherine Porter. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 73.

suggest new ways of theorising narrative as process rather than as the product of a narrative agent.[117]

Who sees? The Focalizer

The focalizer is Bal's refined and redefined version of the 'point of view' character. Genette points out the inadequacy of the term 'point of view' for its slippage between narrative voice (who speaks) and vision (who sees).[118] Bal, too, criticises traditional theorising about 'narrative points of view' (variously called narrative perspective, point of view, narrative viewpoint, narrative situation or narrative manner) for their failure to distinguish between 'the vision through which the elements [of the fabula] are presented and [...] the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision' (143). In Bal's paradigm, events and actors (elements of the fabula) are apprehended by the focalizer, and presented by the narrator. Although in practice the agents of narration and focalization may coincide in one character, they are formulated separately for analytical purposes. Bal argues that 'the speech act of narrating is [...] different from the vision, the memories, the sense perceptions, thoughts, that are being told' (146). For instance, in *Gulliver's Travels* (1727) there are at least three distinct 'Gullivers': one who narrates, one who recalls his experiences and one who acts in the fictive past of his story (my example).[119]

Narration, Focalization and Textual Authority

In general, narrators have a higher degree of authority than focalizers, and focalizers have a higher degree of authority than non-focalizing characters.

> If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character.[120]

Thus, the viewpoint of the focalizer is persuasive. And, if Bakhtin is correct, the viewpoint of a so-called 'unreliable narrator' (which compels readers to engage in a sub textual dialogue in order to decide what to believe) may be more effective at drawing readers into the fictive world than one whose word is accepted unquestioningly.

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[117] See, for example, Marie-Laure Ryan, *Avatars of Story* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); and *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
[118] Phelan, 2006, pp. 316–317.
[119] Jonathon Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Children's Press, 1965)
[120] Bal (1997), p. 146.

Susan Lanser: Point of View, Narrative Voice, and Textual Authority

Point of View

Susan Lanser's 1981 book *The Narrative Act*: *Point of View in Prose Fiction* addresses formalist-structuralist theories of literary point of view from a feminist perspective.[121] Lanser identifies an additional ambiguity inherent in the term *point of view*, in that it can mean either *standpoint* (the physical vantage point from which one looks) or *attitude* (the particular bias with which one looks). She argues that the latter meaning, with its implications of ideology and subjectivity, has been overlooked in favour of the former, which is concerned merely with observable phenomena. While acknowledging the validity of Genette's distinctions between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrators and between extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrative levels, Lanser criticises such shortcomings in formalist approaches to narrative interpretation as the prioritising of form over ideology, values, and relationships, and of text over context. Such biases, she argues, lead to the neglect of social values, historical perspectives, gender, race, culture and the presence of the author (37–46). Lanser calls for a reintegration of texts with their contexts, and for a poetics of point of view which includes cultural as well as structural aspects, in order to develop 'an understanding of the relationship between the writer's position as literary communicator and the point of view of the fictional work' (61–63).

Narrative Voice and Textual Authority

In *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992), Lanser investigates the nature and authority of narrative voice.[122] Since the narrator is the interface between text and reader and real-time creator of the reader's vicarious world, it is, Lanser asserts, much more than a technical device.

> The narrative voice and the narrated world are mutually constitutive; if there is no tale without a teller, there is no teller without a tale. This interdependence gives the narrator a liminal position that is at once contingent and privileged: the narrator has no existence 'outside' the text yet brings the text into existence; narrative speech acts cannot be said to be mere 'imitations', like the acts of characters, because they are the acts that make the 'imitations' possible (4).

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[121] Susan Sniader Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[122] Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

In other words, the narrator is a mediator between the worlds of text and reader, bringing the fictive world into being through performative acts of language.

Claiming that 'gendered conventions of public voice and of narrative self-reference serve important roles in regulating women's access to discursive authority', Lanser differentiates between 'private voice' or 'narration directed toward a narratee who is a fictional character' and 'public voice' or 'narration directed toward a narratee "outside" the fiction,' and between texts in which 'explicit attention to the act of narration itself' is permitted, and those in which it is not (15). Further, her theory rests on the articulation of three kinds of narrative voice which she calls 'authorial, personal, and communal' (15). These classifications are pertinent because they have been formulated to include considerations of cultural context, gender difference and textual authority; are more precise, comprehensive and nuanced; and are more responsive to post-colonial narrative texts than conventional labelling of narrators as 'first person/third person' or 'limited/omniscient.'

Authorial Voice

Authorial voice is 'heterodiegetic, public, and potentially self-referential' (15). The narrator is located outside the story, as is the narratee. Because it is external to the story, the authorial voice has greater textual authority than any characters, even those who are also narrators. The external narratee is 'analogous to a reading audience', meaning that readers may be invited to 'equate the narrator with the author and the narratee with themselves', an equation which confers 'a privileged status' on the authorial narrator (16). A further degree of authority is implied when the narrator is 'self-referential', meaning able to refer to matters beyond the limits of the story, including the narrative process itself (16–17).

Authorial narration claims the highest degree of authority and has been conventionally considered masculine unless textual markers contradict this. Historically, its use has been problematic for women writers, because 'adoption of overt authoriality has usually meant transgressing gendered rhetorical codes' (17–18). In the past, the authority of a text written in authorial voice could be weakened if the writer identified herself as female, hence a number of women writers adopted male pseudonyms or invented male narrators in an attempt to preserve textual authority.

Personal Voice

Personal voice refers 'to narrators who are self-consciously telling their own histories' (18). It is not a feature of all homodiegetic narratives, but 'only those Genette calls "autodiegetic," in which the "I" who tells the story is also the story's protagonist (or an older version of the protagonist)'.[123] Personal voice may be either public or private, and may also have the potential for self-reference.

> The authority of personal voice is contingent in ways that the authority of authorial voice is not: while the autodiegetic 'I' remains a structurally 'superior' voice mediating the voices of other characters, it does not carry the superhuman privileges that attach to authorial voice, and its status is dependent on a reader's response not only to the narrator's acts but to the character's actions [...] These differences make personal voice in some ways less formidable for women than authorial voice, since an authorial narrator claims broad powers of knowledge and judgement, while a personal narrator claims only the validity of one person's right to interpret her experience (19).

Investigating the use of the personal narrative voice in a range of works by women writers (155–219), Lanser concludes that it 'establishes a less certain hegemony [than authorial voice], yet it also has the power to engulf the reader in the vision of a single consciousness' (278–279). This might be disputed by A.S. Byatt, who disparages 'first-person mimicry' in favour of an authorial narrator able to 'creep closer to the feelings and the inner life of characters.'[124]

While admitting the general truth that a diegetic or 'authorial' narrator is less limited in scope than a mimetic or 'personal' narrator cleaving to one point of view, Lanser questions the oppositional roles usually assigned to them, claiming that this masks similarities and intermediate forms (20–21). Intermediate forms and narratives that shift between different kinds of narrative voice are common in contemporary writing, including the novels studied here. A.S. Byatt admits to using such an intermediate form in her non-fiction writing, describing it as 'an exploratory and "authorial" first person'.[125]

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[123] Lanser, 1992, p. 19. See also Genette (1980), pp. 227–247.

[124] A.S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). pp. 55–56.

[125] A.S. Byatt (2002), p. 102.

Communal Voice

Lanser describes *communal voice* as 'a spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority.'[126] This means not merely an inclusive authorial voice, nor multiple alternating narrators, nor the differing perspectives found in epistolary novels, but rather 'a practice in which narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community' (21).

Possibilities for communal narration include one narrator representing a collective; *simultaneous voice*, or multiple voices speaking as 'we'; and *sequential voice*, or collaborative individual narrators taking turns to speak (21, 256). Examples are Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), in which 'a "we" of two sisters [...] comes to include other black adolescents and ultimately a larger community' (257); and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), a sequentially narrated text in which 'seven women [...] narrate interlaced segments of their own histories' (264).

Like DuPlessis, Lanser holds that communal narrative voice offers 'political possibilities of constituting a collective female voice through narrative' because it shifts texts away from individualism and calls into question the status quo of heterosexual marriage and family, 'the heterosocial contract that has defined woman's place in Western fiction' (22). According to Phelan, 'communal voices get their authority through their connection with the communities they represent even as they implicitly challenge the dominant paradigm in the Western novel that associates authority with a single voice.'[127] Two of the three novels studied here display some of the qualities of communal voice, where a single narrator shifts from telling her personal story to representing the members of a family over several generations.

Reconfiguring Textual Authority

As Lanser observes, each kind of narrative voice carries its own risks in terms of textual authority. While *authorial voice* appears to have a high degree of textual authority, its traditional association with the masculine may be problematic for women writers, and attempts to subvert master narratives by mimicking their authorial voice risk excluding or marginalising other voices. *Personal voice*, with its

[126] Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 21. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[127] Phelan (2006) p. 322.

contingent authority of 'one person's right to interpret her experience'[128] may be more appropriate to post-colonial subjects, but can suffer from the limited representation of one perspective. *Communal voice*, if handled skilfully, can give texts authority that is grounded in a collective, thus challenging the literary tradition in which authority is represented by a single voice.[129]

Narrative conventions in the realist novel establish an oppositionally defined hierarchy in which 'social and textual success is measured by educated white standards', effectively undermining any attempt to give authority to marginalised characters (125). Since the legitimation of formerly unheard or marginalised voices could not be accomplished merely by mimicking hegemonic structures, new forms had to be invented. In the postmodern aesthetic which emerged after 1960, the 'shift in discursive relations of power that enables the emergence of hitherto marginalized voices exposes the constructed and conditional status of all authority' (127). Lanser shows how Toni Morrison achieves this in *Beloved*, suggesting that the text's 'transformative power' arises from 'its overturning of white-realist authority' and from 'its rich narrative polyphony, in which the "rememory" of slavery is created through a multiplicity of authoritative characters whose voices often merge in free indirect discourse with the authorial voice' (278).

In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, authority is vested in hitherto marginalised voices by means of a 'double and alternating structure—two voices, two sets of titles, even two different typographies' (130). Here, the personal voice of the protagonist takes turns with 'the omniscient voice of an authorial narrator' until the final pages, when the two narrators seem to merge, a shift that 'legitimates personal experience as the basis for authorial voice' (130). This is a new kind of textual authority, grounded in shared social experience rather than arising from superior status. It is an authority that is human and fallible rather than absolute. Her accomplishment here, Lanser argues, gives authority to Morrison's narrators in subsequent books and 'undermines the conventions of narrative omniscience' (130–132). Having read Morrison, readers may thus be more inclined to interrogate narrative authority. Kelly Ana Morey's *Bloom* (2003) reveals a similar blend of personal and authorial narration: in the early part of the text, and sporadically throughout, the protagonist Connie Spry is both active character and personal narrator, while in the sections relating her mother's and grandmother's stories, the narrative voice shifts to an

[128] Lanser (1992), p. 19.
[129] Phelan (2006) p. 322.

authorial mode whose authority derives in part from Connie's family relationships and shared history.

Nonunitary Narration as Narrative Strategy

Nonunitary narration breaks the tyranny of the singular, hegemonic subject and provides alternatives to the choice between *authorial* or *personal* narrative voice. Although the use of multiple narrators or different kinds of narrator is neither new nor specifically post-colonial,[130] the interactions between and shifts within narrative voices in the novels studied here influence textual authority in new ways. Separating the three layers of fabula, story and text, and identifying narrators and focalizers, using Bal's method, allows for the deconstruction of textual authority and of the 'patchwork of different strata [that bear] traces of different communities and of the contestations between them.'[131] Identifying distinctive types of narrative voice, as Lanser does, gives insights into the kinds of authority claimed, disavowed or subverted in texts.

The three novels in this study use a range of narrative voices in structurally different ways. In Terri Janke's *Butterfly Song* (2005), the personal voice of a young woman narrator alternates with an authorial voice that tells the story of an earlier generation. In the final section, there is a hint that these two voices are linked, if not identical. Kelly Ana Morey's *Bloom* (2003) opens with the distinctly personal voice of a young woman narrator telling her own story, which later segues into 'historical' narratives about her grandmother and her mother. Because of the novel's structure and the ways in which the later stories are anticipated, it seems natural to accept them as if told to and related by Connie, but the kinds of details revealed in them betray the presence of an authorial narrator. In Gail Jones's *Sorry* (2007), the personal voice of the young woman narrator alternates with the voice of an authorial narrator telling effectively the same story from a different perspective, giving the curious impression of double vision. The personal narrative is focalized through the protagonist as a child, giving a characteristically idiosyncratic, feeling-centred view, while the authorial narrative paints a broader historical picture from an apparently external perspective.

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[130]For example, William Faulkner uses multiple narrators in *As I Lay Dying* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Chatto &Windus, 1963), and Charles Dickens alternates between personal and authorial narrators in *Bleak House* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

[131]Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 66.

Distinct and discontinuous narrative voices are evident in the strategy I have called *nonunitary narration*, which serves both to reinforce textual authority through the layering of multiple stories or perspectives and simultaneously to undermine the hegemonic tendency of the single authorial voice. In addition, the narrative voice may shift from one mode to another, allowing the text to become fluid, a process of weaving and unravelling, a task that is always 'mysteriously unfinished', like Penelope's shroud, a way, not to entangle, but 'to avoid entanglement' in the sticky threads of a false authority.[132]

The strategy of *nonunitary narration* works alongside those of *textuality* and *assemblage* to authorise multiple perspectives and fragmented stories in novels of colonial and post-colonial dislocation, where the question of 'authority' is itself problematic. Both assemblage and nonunitary narration are characterised by fragmentation of the text, 'the technical means of subversion most typical of women's writings.'[133] The following three chapters explore the influence of these narrative strategies on textual authority in *Butterfly Song* (Chapter Three), *Bloom* (Chapter Four), and *Sorry* (Chapter Five). The narrative structure of each text is analysed using Bal's three-level paradigm of fabula (what happens), story (sequence and focalization) and narrative text (narrative voice). Textual authority is examined in terms of Lanser's categories of authorial, personal, and communal voice. Each novel is next considered in terms of the textualisation of cultural identities and imaginative geographies and histories. Finally, the assemblage of each text around elements that link disparate narratives and time periods is analysed. Chapter Six examines these narrative strategies in relation to the research and writing of *The Wheel Pin*.

[132]Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* (Melbourne: Text, 2005), p. 119.
[133]Margaret R Higonnet, 'Mapping the Text: Critical Metaphors', in Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton, eds., *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 206.

Chapter Three: Alternative Texts and Cultural Authority in Terri Janke's *Butterfly Song*

> They say that each generation draws from the spiritual strength of those who came before. We might not know them in this physical space, but their lessons are timeless.[134]

Introduction

Terri Janke's first novel, *Butterfly Song* (2005), is about the dispossession of an Indigenous family and their struggle to claim identity, power and purpose. Tarena, a smart but self-doubting final-year law student, travels from Sydney to her ancestral country on Thursday Island, where her mother tells her of the theft of a pearl butterfly, a gift of betrothal from Tarena's grandfather to her grandmother when he left the island. The carved butterfly, symbolising their love and their resistance to the forces that kept them apart, was stolen many years later by a doctor, whose daughter produces official documents to authenticate her ownership. Tarena's family know it is theirs—but they must find proof, and Tarena's mother persuades her to use her legal skills to reclaim the butterfly. Tracing forgotten threads of her family's history, Tarena combines her new knowledge with old traditions as she searches for evidence. The forgotten lyrics of a song and the revelation of a hidden detail in the carving restore the butterfly and reunite the family. The butterfly—as living creature, song, and carving—flits through the narrative as an emblem of freedom, resistance and regeneration.

Integrating a complex narrative structure that embraces three locations and three generations, Janke's prose is lucid and grounded in sensory detail. This apparent simplicity may have deceived reviewer Deborah Forster, who dismisses the novel as 'a kind of parable about indigenous land rights' with flat characters, 'short, declaratory sentences and lame dialogue.'[135] Her assertion that '[s]omething is missing' may well be correct. However, what is missing is a lack of awareness on Forster's part rather than any shortcoming in Janke's literary achievement.[136] Minh-ha Trinh points out the tendency of the western 'dualistically trained mind' to believe

[134] Terri Janke, *Butterfly Song* (Camberwell: Penguin, 2005), p. 292. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[135] Deborah Forster, 'Indigenous Issues pinned on a brooch' (book review) *The Age*, 19 March 2005. Accessed online 28 October 2009 at <http://newsstore.theage.com.au>
[136] For a discussion of cultural differences in reading, see Muecke (1988), pp. 417–418.

'the story to be just a story' and to separate narrative structure from narrative content. In so doing, mainstream readers can fail to see the complex unity and holistic process of storytelling and impose upon another's narrative our own, alien structure, values and ways of doing things.[137] Another reviewer, Tony Smith, makes a stab at praising Janke's writing: '*Butterfly Song* speaks subtly of complex themes'.[138] But his description of Tarena as 'a complex individual who cannot be reduced to racial caricature', and of the author's language as 'unpretentious [and] surprisingly rich' is patronising.[139]

On close reading, Janke's text reveals intricate connections between the various layers of story and the extended metaphors that allude to music, song and oral and written texts, the full implications of which may be apparent only to readers who share the author's cultural knowledge. As the story of one family is rediscovered and retold, it becomes a source of regeneration, a site where justice is restored and family solidarity and spiritual strength are renewed. *Butterfly Song* is both the title of the novel and the title of a song within the text, a powerful symbol and a multi-layered synecdoche. Like human lives and loves, the butterfly may be fragile and short-lived, but the creations it inspires—the pearl-shell carving and the song—live on through generations. The song's lyrics relate to a family heirloom that symbolises the family's ongoing quest for freedom, and become the means by which the family reclaims its power. This story might stand for the lost stories of countless Indigenous and migrant families who have been relocated, separated and forced into lives not of their own choosing. Together, the stories of individual family members form a greater story that reaches across time and space to illuminate the effects of Australia's colonial history from the standpoint of colonised peoples.

Nonunitary Narration

Fabula

Butterfly Song contains two fabulae, one consisting of events from Francesca's life from 1941 until her death in 1954, and the other of events from Tarena's life from the 1970s until the 1990s.

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[137] T. Minh-ha Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post-coloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 141–143.
[138] Tony Smith, 'Towards an Australian "voice"' (book review) *Eureka Street 16.4*, 16 May 2006. Accessed online 28 October 2009 at http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=565
[139] Tony Smith, 2006.

Francesca

In 1941, on Thursday Island, Francesca falls in love with Kit, known as 'the guitar man,' and sneaks out to meet him despite the disapproval of her elder brother, Essa. Kit leaves his job after a fellow pearl diver is abandoned at sea by a brutal boss, deciding to seek work on the mainland as a sugar-cane-cutter so that he can earn money to return and marry Francesca. Before leaving, he composes the *Butterfly Song* to accompany the pearl butterfly he has carved as a token of his love for her. Eventually they are reunited, married, and have two children, Lily and Tally. In 1949, Kit dies as a result of medical negligence, and Francesca moves to Cairns with her children. In 1954, Francesca dies on the verandah of a Cairns hospital and her pearl butterfly is stolen by the doctor who came too late to save her life.

Tarena

Tarena grows up in Cairns with her parents and siblings, moving to Canberra in 1981, where she attends high school. In 1988, Tarena commences an arts-law degree at a Sydney university, where the usual challenges of university life—full-time study, part-time work and socialising—are complicated by institutional, personal and internalised racism. In 1992, after her final exam, Tarena travels to Thursday Island to meet her mother, Lily and her Uncle Tally. They show her a newspaper article about the butterfly carving and request her help to reclaim it. Her quest takes her to places her grandparents lived and people who knew them, and, bit by bit, she unearths fragments of their story. The family claims ownership of the butterfly carving in a court of law, with the clinching evidence emerging after the surprise appearance of a long-estranged relative, Francesca's brother Essa.

Story: Sequence and Focalization

The story is presented in such a way that the two fabulae are interwoven, with the events of Tarena's life in the fictive present providing a frame for the events of her grandmother Francesca's life in the fictive past. The extradiegetic narrative, the 'frame story,' is set in the fictive present and focalized through the character Tarena, while the intradiegetic narrative is set in the fictive past and focalized primarily through Francesca, though sometimes through Kit or Lily.

The novel is structured as discontinuous narrative, with numerous short chapters identified by date and location. The two stories are linked by the symbolism of the frangipani tree, the pearl butterfly, and the song that accompanies it. As Tarena moves imaginatively backward in time to learn more of her grandparents' story, their

story unfolds in alternate scenes, moving forward in time from their first meeting to Francesca's death. Tarena's story is complicated and enriched by flashbacks into her personal past. This retroversion provides additional links to Francesca's story, as Lily shares information about the family's history. The cinematic technique of cutting between time frames and settings in brief, visually powerful scenes emphasises family connections that transcend time and space, and allows for an intense layering of the novel's themes.

> Playing with sequential ordering is not just a literary convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization, and much else besides. Interestingly, it is literary narrative's way of achieving a density that is akin to the simultaneity often claimed for visual images as distinct from literature.[140]

In this manner, events from different times and places are juxtaposed to highlight not only the transgenerational effects of racism and dislocation but also the emotional strength drawn by the characters from their connectedness to family, home, and cultural traditions. Early in the novel, Tarena's anxiety about her place in the world appears to be an inexplicable personal flaw, like the maddening itch of her eczema. Confronted with the impersonality of Sydney, and the white institutions of university and the legal profession, she dreams of another place, and almost abandons her law degree. But as Tarena's family history unfolds, her dreams become clear, and her anxiety is seen in the cultural and historical context of a world where white institutions and those who work in them hold the power to determine not only how people live but whether they will live or die.

Narrative Text

The double narrative in *Butterfly Song* appears to be told by two distinct voices. In the opening chapters of the novel, Tarena tells her personal story, beginning with her arrival on Thursday Island and her mother's request for help in reclaiming the butterfly carving. This voice is personal and homodiegetic: a character-bound narrator speaking in first person and present tense, focalized through the character Tarena, and directed to an ostensibly public narratee.

[140] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 82.

> Waves splash at the sides of the jetty. The boat lolls. The water is like a living gemstone, green and blue with shades of light. I can smell the ocean, salty and sweet. In front of me the island lies like a marine animal, the edges soft and flat, rising up to a hill.
>
> This is my first time on Thursday Island, but it feels familiar because I've heard so much about the place (3–4).

Tarena's story alternates with scenes from the story of her grandparents, Kit and Francesca, told in the past tense by a public, authorial narrator that is heterodiegetic (external or 'third person') and focalized through the characters of Francesca and Kit.

> Francesca looked at the toppled-down house where she had always lived. [...] The house was old, falling down. She could hear the walls of the wooden house cracking in the afternoon sun. Cracking like the yearning inside her. Beyond stood the frangipani tree. She wished she could see the guitar man today (41).

The emotional nuances of Kit and Francesca's relationship, and details about events unknown to the primary narrator, Tarena, are revealed in this second narrative. One such detail—a small etching of a guitar on the back of the pearl butterfly—is crucial to the successful resolution of the court case near the end of the novel.

The two stories are interwoven in such a way that their interdependence is gradually revealed. Tarena's individual story expands as the narrative proceeds to become intertwined with her family's story, until, near the end of the novel, she represents them quite literally, in a court of law. In this way the personal voice is also, at the same time, a communal voice.

While the two narratives remain separate, and do not merge in the way that personal and authorial narrators do in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye,*[141] the text is framed in such a way that the two voices are linked. The opening and closing paragraphs of the novel, ostensibly part of Tarena's story, are spoken in a voice quite different from the very immediate, practical sensory-based, personal voice that relates the bulk of the narrative. The first two paragraphs are rhetorical and the voice might be either personal or authorial: at this point it is impossible to tell, since it has a timeless quality, and speaks in generalities.

[141]Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1970). See Lanser (1992), p. 130.

> They say if you live on an island for too long, you merge with it. Your bones become the sands, your blood the ocean. Your flesh is the fertile ground. Your heart becomes the stories, dances, songs. […]
>
> They say that when you leave, the sounds of the waves stay with you. The smell of the sea is a constant, never-ending reminder. The island calls you, and your children, and their children (3).

In the third paragraph, there is a shift to the personal mode, and to a voice that is grounded in sensory detail and specific events.

> I arrive late one afternoon towards the end of 1992. The sun sits low in an orange sky. A slight breeze makes the palm trees sway. My dress sticks to the back of my legs as I walk down the gangplank.

This personal voice continues narrating Tarena's story throughout the novel, alternating with the authorial narrator and becoming subtly more communal as Tarena's involvement deepens and her responsibility grows.

Ultimately, in the final paragraphs of the novel, in a brief, self-contained section entitled 'gathering spirit', the timeless voice of the opening paragraphs resumes, recalling the authorial narration of Francesca's story and linking it firmly to the personal voice of an older, wiser Tarena. There is, in addition, a surprising twist regarding the identity of the narratee.

> They say that each generation draws from the spiritual strength of those who came before. We might not know them in this physical space, but their lessons are timeless. […]
>
> It's a cycle, a cultural circle, and when the time comes, my dear great-great-grandchildren, you will remember my story, you will draw from my strength, and you will know I'll always be there with you.

Thus the two narrative voices come together to produce a third entity, a narrative voice that might be called *cultural*, since it combines qualities of personal, authorial and communal voices, and speaks for a cultural community across time.

Textuality

Cultural identity, place, and time are textualised in *Butterfly Song* in ways that invite readers, perhaps especially non-Indigenous readers, to question their customary assumptions. Three kinds of textuality are identified here: the cultural positioning of the narrator and characters, the revision of imaginative geographies and the recovery and retelling of imaginative histories.

Representing Cultural Identity: Naming and Claiming

The cultural positioning of authors, characters, and texts influences how readers think about the text in relation to themselves, and themselves in relation to the text. In *Butterfly Song*, cultural identity is overtly declared in various ways. The author, like the narrator-protagonist, is identified as of mixed Indigenous descent. Janke reveals the inspiration provided by her family history in the book's dedication to her mother and grandparents, and in its acknowledgements: '*Butterfly Song* is a work of fiction, but in writing it I have been guided by my family history' (294). She has also emphasised this in interviews: 'I felt much guided by my grandmother who died when I was very young and also my mother, I spent a lot of time talking to my mother, listening to her stories [...][142]

The ethnic origins of the narrator/protagonist's Malay/Aboriginal grandfather, Kit, and her Filipino/Torres Strait Islander grandmother, Francesca, are revealed early in the novel (48). Every generation suffers the effects of racism, a significant theme of the book. Scenes from Tarena's student days show her alienation as she faces the challenge of completing her degree, struggling with and overcoming obstacles invisible to her non-Indigenous peers and lecturers. At the restaurant where she works, her Italian boss tells her to 'lighten up' when she responds angrily to a racist customer (72–73). She is confronted with institutionalised racism, such as the legal concept of *terra nullius* (249–250), and an insidious internalised racism that fills her with self-doubt.

> Big shame job if the lecturer asks me a question. I just like to keep quiet, like at high school. Too worried I might say something stupid. Too shame people might find out I don't know anything, that I really shouldn't be here (30).

But Tarena has a strong sense of justice and a fighting spirit that keeps her going. The following exchange takes place in a Sydney nightclub.

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[142] Terri Janke, interview with Rhoda Roberts on *Deadly Sounds*, 18 April 2005. http://www.deadlysounds.vibe.com.au/dsounds/archive/read.asp?id=690 Accessed Thursday 18 October 2007.

> ‘What country do you come from?’ Peter asks me.
> ‘Australia. I’m Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.’
> ‘Oh, really?’ Peter wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.
> ‘What do you mean, oh really?’
> ‘You know what I mean. It’s just that you don’t get that many Aboriginal people in Sydney.’ He lights a cigarette.
> ‘Perhaps there were more, say, two hundred years ago.’ (81).

Tarena’s ironic retort dismays and angers her companions; this dialogic juxtaposition of viewpoints invites readers to think about what is being said, and to formulate their own response. This, according to Bakhtin, is the mark of an ‘internally persuasive’ as opposed to an ‘authoritative’ argument.[143]

> [T]he internally persuasive word […] enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to mean (343–4).

The exchange between Tarena and Peter is an example of an ‘intentional novelistic hybrid’ in which ‘one voice is able to unmask the other.’[144] The reader is impelled to participate, taking an imaginative leap backwards in time from present-day Sydney through two hundred years of history to arrive at an understanding of ‘the collision between differing points of views on the world ...’ and to acknowledge Tarena’s angry irony.[145]

Imaginative Geography and History

Cultural identity is linked to the ways in which places and events are represented. The three legends of ‘otherness’ identified by Karamcheti as stasis, binarism and atextuality may be countered by the narrative strategies of dynamism, multiplicity, and textuality in order to break readers’ habitual ways of perceiving so-called

[143] Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. ed. by Michael Holquist, *University of Texas Press Slavic Series* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 342–347. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[144] Young (1995), p. 22.
[145] Bakhtin (1981), p. 360. For a discussion of Bakhtin’s concept of hybridity, see Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 20–28.

'marginalised' cultures.[146] All three strategies are identifiable in *Butterfly Song*. The characters and the narrators are *dynamic*, moving between a number of city and country locations. Tarena finds her way forward by turning back to family, listening to old stories, and telling them in new ways. The activities of returning and listening are depicted not as passive but as active and creative. The narrative world is *complex*, with multiple tellings and contested interpretations of events. Finally, locations and events are represented or *textualised* in ways that illuminate the unknown or contest received understandings.

Imaginative Geography: Locating Cultural Identity

In spite of important theoretical work on spatial imagination by feminist theorists such as Margaret Higonnet and post-colonial critics such as Paul Carter, it is easy to relegate the geographical settings of fictional narratives to the status of background (as if they were theatre sets) or emotional reflection (as if they were expressive costumes).[147]

> Geography is so deeply embedded in our thinking that it remains largely unexamined as an active force in the ways we understand literature, particularly the ways we produce significance in post-colonial texts by women.[148]

Karamcheti argues for the possibility of 'an imaginative recovery of local place in literary representation, to enable the liberation and recovery of the colonized self' (126). Terri Janke's narrative text is exemplary, giving fresh local authority to Thursday Island, a place formerly inscribed as 'remote' or 'exotic', and to its history. The days of the pearling industry in the Torres Strait, north of Australia, are represented not merely as a romantic idyll (although the trope of tropical romance certainly features) but also as a harsh and difficult period for the island's inhabitants.

Butterfly Song opens as Tarena steps off a plane on Thursday Island, the home of her maternal grandparents, and a place she has never been before. But, as foreshadowed in the opening paragraphs, the island is calling her (3). The narrative loops back and forth between locations and time periods like a plane circling over islands in the ocean, from Thursday Island to Cairns, Canberra and Sydney, from

[146] See 'Reclaiming Textual Authority' in Chapter One: Critical and Cultural Contexts.
[147] See, for example, Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton (eds.) *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); and Paul Carter, *Living in a New Country* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).
[148] Karamcheti (1994), p. 125. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

past to present and back again. Images of the tropics suffuse the text, evoking the presence of Tarena's ancestral home, even in scenes set far away in Sydney.

> My blue pen moves as fast as a saltwater fish ... The pen is moving across white pages ... The saltwater fish becomes lighter and lighter until it merges with the sea. It's almost at an end, my last exam (7).

The themes of oppression, flight and survival, and the tropes of love, loyalty and music recur through the generations, linking voices from past and present. This creates a multi-layered structure in which Tarena's individual tale is seen as one strand among many in a narrative of interdependence and combined strength. As she reclaims the geography of her grandparents and gives rightful authority to their stories, she finds her own voice and power.

Imaginative History: Retelling Stories and Restoring Power

The interrogation of old stories and the construction of new ones can offer hope to fictional characters and, vicariously, to readers too. Tarena, as narrator of *Butterfly Song*, begins with a limited understanding of her family story, but as she asks questions and pieces together events, her family history comes alive, enriched with empowering meanings. The family's cooperative renewal of old stories creates a space in which characters who have struggled alone find solidarity and hope.

When Tarena first learns about the lost family heirloom, her understanding is limited and disconnected from her life.

> My mother digs into her bag and brings out a crumpled piece of newspaper. On it is a photograph of a carved butterfly under the heading BUTTERFLY OF BEAUTY—A RARE JEWEL OF ANTIQUITY. 'Look, the shop in the paper is trying to sell it.'
>
> 'I can see that,' I say.
>
> 'But they can't. It doesn't belong to them. It belongs to my mother.' Mum is slapping the paper with her hand with each syllable.
>
> 'You're not serious? A brooch? Who would ever wear an old ornament pinned to their clothes? Sounds like some old fogey's thing,' I say (16).

To unravel her grandparents' story and uphold the family's ownership claim, Tarena embarks on a journey of discovery that is as much about her own identity and place in the world as it is about her forebears. At first, she is overwhelmed by the task of proving that her family owns the carving. Her case seems hopeless: despite the recollections of family members, she has no independent proof that the butterfly was

stolen. Then she meets a musician who recalls the forgotten lyrics of a tune her mother used to hum (134-6).

> *I give you this butterfly*
> *Made from a shell of pearl*
> *Forever together*
> *You're my frangipani girl* (63).

The song is the first piece in an accumulation of evidence that enables Tarena to build her case. As she investigates the provenance of the butterfly carving, her understanding of its significance grows, and she begins to see her life as part of a larger pattern. The world becomes less intimidating as she gains confidence and realises she has a unique role to play. The retelling of the story she has inherited and made her own brings the butterfly carving back to the family (135-6). The novel ends with an affirmation of cultural survival through storytelling as the narrator addresses her unborn descendants, telling them they will remember her story and draw from her strength (292).

Assemblage: Oral Histories and Alternative Texts

Assemblage is the arrangement of retrieved objects or fragments in a new context so that they resonate together to generate fresh meanings while still bearing evidence of their origins. As Tarena builds the case for her family's ownership of the pearl butterfly, the objects and memories she collects function as alternative texts to the 'official' documents—such as legal deeds, affidavits, and newspaper articles—that threaten to rob the family of its heritage. Kit's guitar, the remembered tune and its lyrics, the frangipani tree and the pearl butterfly are all significant in the parallel narratives of past and present, linking the two stories to form a complex of interlocking symbols that speak of love, resilience and the power of narrative. These objects are perceived or created in the intradiegetic, authorial narrative of Francesca's life, accruing personal and symbolic significance for the characters. The same objects, and the fragmentary memories surrounding them, provoke questions in the extradiegetic, personal narrative of Tarena's quest. Ultimately, because of their relationships to one another and the questions they provoke, these objects and memories generate new meanings.

Guitar Story

As an example of how objects link the two narratives, let us take the example of Kit's guitar, noting how it functions in each narrative; the ways in which it is linked to fragmented memories and to other objects like the pearl butterfly, the frangipani tree, and old photographs; and its structural and thematic roles in the text. The guitar appears in the opening chapter, not as a physical object, but in Tarena's imagination. Arriving on Thursday Island for the first time, she imagines Kit 'playing his guitar under a frangipani tree' (4). The second chapter, set some weeks earlier, is entitled 'ghost guitar.' It tells of an urgent phone call from her mother Lily, who is spooked because the guitar that belonged to her father has fallen from its hook on the wall. Tarena tries to reassure her mother, but Lily is convinced the incident is 'a calling' from her father Kit (5–6). On Thursday Island, after learning about the pearl butterfly, Tarena meets relatives who show her a photograph of Kit and his fellow band members, the Castaway Cruisers, with their guitars. 'On the back of the photograph someone has written the words "Guitar man, 1938"' (35). The relatives do not remember the butterfly carving, but they recall 'a song about a butterfly' (36).

The second narrative begins in 1941, as Francesca follows a real butterfly to a frangipani tree and finds 'a man with hair slicked back like it was wet. A light-coloured wooden guitar hung from a strap around his neck and shoulders' (38). Francesca recognises him as 'the guitar man' (39). Kit's guitar is as much a part of his identity as his name, so that when Francesca sees the shape of a guitar carved on the trunk of the tree where they met, she recognises it as his signature (41, 45). But guitar music is non-traditional and, to Francesca's brother Essa, marks Kit as 'crazy', weak, and unreliable. Essa forbids the couple to marry (48).

When Kit leaves the island to seek work and prove he is worthy of marrying Francesca, he gives her the butterfly carving. 'On the back she could see the outline of a guitar—an etching of a round body and a few lines for strings' (62). Later, although Kit works hard in the cane fields to support Francesca and their children, he is most himself when playing his guitar. But after his foot is injured in an accident, Kit neglects his guitar.

> Tally went inside and brought out the guitar. 'Dad, play us a song.'
> 'Not now, son, I'm too tired.'
> 'Oh, c'mon, play us "old TI".' Tally held the guitar up. 'Show me how to strum.' Kit moved awkwardly and banged his foot against the guitar. The instrument emitted a hollow sound, like a wounded bird. Kit winced in pain (108).

Three days after Kit's death, he visits Francesca in a dream, singing to her and reassuring her that he is with her, in her heart.

> In the morning she woke feeling strangely rested. The pearl butterfly was in her hand. She'd held it so tightly as she dreamt that it had dug into her skin. There was a red imprint on her palm. It ran across the lifeline' (115).

Kit's talisman is etched on her palm as his carving of the guitar is etched on the frangipani tree, and as his love is etched on her heart.

In the courtroom scene towards the end of the novel, things are going nowhere, with each side claiming ownership of the pearl butterfly, and no-one able to produce conclusive evidence, until an old man, Essa, makes a dramatic appearance, claiming he can demonstrate that the carving belonged to his sister, Francesca (257–274).

> 'But how can you prove that?' says the magistrate.
> 'Look closely at that butterfly. Check the back of it. There was an etching on the back.' (275)

The magistrate asks that the clasp (which was added after the theft) be removed from the brooch, and the etched emblem of a guitar is revealed (277). The doctor's daughter, realising the family's claim is genuine, abandons her own.

The guitar makes its final appearance in the text as the family celebrates Tarena's success in her law examinations. Her new love, Sam, is handed Kit's old guitar and asked to play the *Butterfly Song*. 'He starts to play the song and we all join in with the words where we can. Uncle Essa too.' (282)

From the half-remembered lyrics of a song, from memories passed down the generations and from imprints on tree bark, pearl shell, flesh and hearts, alternative texts are formed containing the cultural values and spiritual strength that flow through Tarena's family. The authority of these texts of the heart prove more powerful than oppression, death or the written precedents of whitefella law.

Textual Authority in *Butterfly Song*

In countries with a history of colonisation, the question of who owns the past, and who has the right to own or tell particular stories, is complicated. In *Butterfly Song*, the narrator, as legal representative and family member, becomes the spokesperson for her family, including her deceased ancestors. There is cultural precedent here: to speak for one's community in this way is traditional in Australian Aboriginal cultures, or, as Gail Jones puts it, the conception of 'the speaking subject as implicitly collective rather than individual' is 'fundamental to Aboriginal story-telling.'[149] Stephen Muecke suggests that in reading Aboriginal texts as the expressive output of individual authors, we may be missing much.[150] He contrasts the 'Romantic literary subject' of the past two centuries of Western literary production with Aboriginal narrative traditions where '"custodianship" tends to displace "authorship," where individual subjects are socially positioned as the repeaters of traditions rather than the sources of original or creative material' (406). Considering the cultural and historical contexts from which Aboriginal texts have arisen, Muecke suggests they be read with the understanding that they refer to 'a range of subject positions' and with 'an awareness of distinctive repertoires of knowledges, different readerships and the ideological pressures which privilege different ways of reading' (418). Muecke calls for an enhanced scrutiny of all texts, presaging the concerns of post-colonial scholarship with textual subject positions and power relations (418).

The three narrative strategies discussed here offer ways of resisting and disrupting received reading codes, and create new ways of textualising family, home, and history. By means of nonunitary narration, stories set in disparate times and places form parts of a larger narrative. The two distinctive voices that tell these stories—one personal, one authorial—turn out to belong to a greater voice that is communal but might also be called cultural or spiritual, a voice that speaks across time to children of the future. By textualising Indigenous identities, cultural values and imaginative geographies and histories, this novel offers a new perspective to readers on phenomena which may be either familiar (city life, racism) or exotic (island life, Indigenous spiritual beliefs). For non-Indigenous people who read with

[149] Gail Jones, 'Mimesis and Alterity: Post-colonialism, Ethnography, and the Representation of Racial "Others"', (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Western Australia, 1995), p. 35.
[150] Stephen Muecke, 'Aboriginal Literature and the Repressive Hypothesis', *Southerly* 48 (4) (Sydney: The English Association, 1988), pp. 405–418. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

awareness, it offers rare insights into Indigenous experience. But, as Mieke Bal says of narratology, one must be able to ask the right questions in order to obtain useful answers.[151] The assemblage of objects, fragmented memories and traditions sets up, in the context of the family and Tarena's developing skills, a resonance that creates hope, resilience and a new kind of text. The child finds her voice from listening to her mother sing the half-remembered lyrics of an unforgettable tune. In the hybrid space of such narratives, meanings are broken and made anew.

[151] Bal (1997) p. 223.

Chapter Four: Keeping the Home Fires Burning in Kelly Ana Morey's *Bloom*

> I loved that idea of Constant being the lit fire of history and remembering, also it's one of those Māori concepts that translated well into a Pakeha context—keep the home fires burning. And those fires still burn and it's still about the land.[152]

Introduction

Like Tarena's, Connie's quest in *Bloom* (2003) begins with an ending. Living in a rambling share house in an unnamed city, Constant Spry, the personal narrator-protagonist, works as a waitress, drifting through her nights and days in a haze of smoke, drugs and forgetting: '... I fell into the rhythms of the house and of my job […] for a while at least, I was able to forget who I was, where I had been and what I had done.[153] But Connie's maternal grandmother, Algebra, has a dream that tells her it is time to die, and summons her granddaughter home to begin her real work. This is a variation of the recursive plot identified by Du Plessis as a narrative strategy that empowers female protagonists to resolve their ambivalence and claim authority.[154]

The setting for much of this novel is the Spry family hotel, situated in remote Goshen at a crossroads between the mountain and the sea, home to Algebra and her daughter Rose, Connie's mother. Although the Spry women's troubled pasts have endowed them with 'a talent for forgetting,' history continues to haunt them. For Connie, history takes the particular shape of Nanny Smack, an ancient Māori ghost with a teasing sense of humour and a length of blue crochet-work (tomorrow's sky) forever spilling from her *kete*.[155] Although Connie knows little of her family's history, not even the identities of her father or grandfather, Nanny Smack tells her repeatedly that her job is 'To remember. To keep the home fires burning' (14). Connie, the drifter, has a real job in the spirit realm: as keeper of the family flame and of the remembrance of history and resistance to injustice. The name given to Connie by her Māori neighbours is *Ahi Ka Roa*, which translates as 'long burning

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[152] Book Club Co NZ, 'Conversation with Kelly Ana Morey', A&R Whitcoulls Group, (2003) <http://www.book-club.co.nz/books03/8bloom.htm> [Accessed 17 April 2007].
[153] Kelly Ana Morey, *Bloom* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003), p. 16. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[154] See Chapter One, pp. 3-5, and DuPlessis, (1985), p. 83.
[155] A traditional Māori bag, usually woven of flax. See Morey (2003), p.7.

fire', a reference to the controlled fires that Māori people once used to signal that the land was occupied. Thus Connie herself is 'the lit fire of history and remembering'.[156]

Algebra tells Connie her life story. After Algebra's death, Rose continues the saga, recalling the lost years when she fell in love, bore two daughters and escaped an abusive relationship, almost drowning in the process. With the help of Rose's lifelong passion for photography, old riddles are solved and new ones arise. Connie's sister Hebe, too, is burdened by a history of abuse and self-protective forgetfulness. As the women's individual stories coalesce, new perspectives emerge, revealing a bigger picture. Seemingly insignificant events recur, accruing new meanings with each succeeding layer of narrative. The enigmas of Connie's existence (her inability to settle anywhere, her haunting by Nanny Smack and the mysterious boxes of books that arrive wherever she goes) begin to make sense. But never completely. Questions, this novel seems to insist, are more important than answers. But acknowledgement of the past, though painful, brings healing of sorts, and awakens subtle senses. Working together in the darkroom, Rose and Connie gaze at a new print of an old photograph: a group of children with white feathers in their hair, arms linked, singing.[157] 'How do I know they are singing?' Connie asks Rose . 'You can hear it too?' Rose replies (247).

> She flicked the enlarger back on so that the image bloomed […] once again. And there it was, fainter than the rustle of a swallow's wings, an energy rather than a sound, like a heartbeat or the steady tik-tik-tik of a fire biding its time. It felt like survival (247).

The children's singing resonates through the text as a testament to resilience and regeneration.

[156] Kelly Ana Morey, interviewed by Book Club Co NZ (2003).
[157] The white feathers are a symbol of resistance to the taking of Māori land.

Nonunitary Narration

Fabula

The fabula in Bloom consists of three interlocking narratives. The story of Connie frames the stories of her grandmother, Algebra and her mother, Rose.

Connie

Connie is born at a commune where her parents Rose and Elias live with their firstborn daughter Hebe. When their father is killed in a car accident, family friend Elijah (Eli) finds Rose and her children and brings them home to Goshen. As a toddler, Connie meets Nanny Smack, a ghost from the time of the Land Wars who haunts her throughout her life, teaching her an alternative view of history. Hebe and Connie become infatuated with Alistair, 'the pakeha schoolteacher.' On the day he is due to leave, Alistair falls down the cliff, but it is unclear whether he dies or leaves in a taxi as he had planned.

Connie finishes high school and leaves, first to study at university, then to work as a waitress in the city. She returns to Goshen, and hears the story of her grandmother's life. After Algebra's death, Connie is offered rent-free accommodation so that she can work on her writing. In addition to a murder story, she writes the text for books of her mother's photographs. Visiting her sister Hebe in the city, Connie discovers some old photographic plates that Rose had begun working on, though some are missing. Back in Goshen, Rose finds the missing plates, including one of Nanny Smack. Rose recalls events at the commune and tells Connie about her father. Seeing an old photograph of Māori children, Connie realises that the strength of their connection to the past is also their hope for the future.

Algebra

Algebra is three years old when her parents die in a house fire. She is blamed for their deaths and abused by persons unknown. As a young woman, she takes up with Jeremiah Spry, a pornographic photographer and gambler. To silence the ghosts that haunt her, Algebra becomes addicted to alcohol and opium. She is rescued by Han, who devotes his life to her care while remaining faithful to his wife in China. Han says it is his 'life's work' to find Algebra's lost soul (74). Algebra bears a daughter by an unknown father, and Han cares for both, weaning the baby of addiction, but unable to cure the mother. He loses everything, then wins a rundown provincial hotel in a game of mah jong. They move to the country, and Algebra begins a new life as 'Mrs Spry,' landlady of the Goshen Hotel, giving up opium but retaining a fondness

for gin. After Han's death, Algebra is visited by his ghost, who tells her that he has found her soul. She knows her own death is near and summons Connie home.

Rose

Rose is a vague child with a tendency to get lost. On the beach at Goshen, she meets a strange boy who is called away by his mother. Later she befriends a neighbour, Elijah (Eli) Wairangiwhenua, who lives with his grandparents. After leaving high school, Rose moves to the city to study photography at art school, and falls in love with Elias. When Rose becomes pregnant, she is forced to study part-time but still manages to graduate and get a job printing photographs at the city museum. Elias develops a mysterious skin complaint, drops out of university, and joins a commune in the bush, taking Rose and baby Hebe. Rose grows vegetables and bears a second daughter, Connie. But things turn sour at the commune and Elias grows increasingly controlling. After a violent argument, their car plunges into the river and Elias is killed. Eli finds Rose in hospital, remembering nothing of the accident. Eli brings Rose and her children home to Goshen. Decades later, when Connie returns, Rose is settled in a relationship with Eli and a life of gardening, horses and photography.

Story: Sequence and Focalization

The narrator-protagonist Connie is the primary focalizer in the novel. Many elements in the fabulae summarised above are hidden or merely hinted at: *Bloom*'s narratives grow every which way, like a tangle of plants in an untamed garden. The story sequence is convoluted, moving back and forth in time and place, with few signposts for the reader. Unlike *Butterfly Song*, the novel has no convenient headings giving dates and locations, only the thread of story with its thematic links, mimicking the way memory works, although this was not, Morey explains, a deliberate strategy.

> I had no idea how or what I wrote, I just wrote. I had to know about these women. Which in many ways I think is the reason why *Bloom* wanders off on little tangents, sometimes I even go backwards because I had no idea what I was doing. But I'm so conscious of it now, that I'm finding it quite hard to do.[158]

Despite, or perhaps because of, the multi-layered narratives and the work required of the reader in unravelling the connections, the novel is engaging. The stories of Algebra, Rose and Hebe unfold in loose chronological order within the framework of

[158] Book Club Co NZ (2003)

Connie's story of return and remembering. Because this is a family, there are places where the stories intertwine and places where they conflict, raising questions about whose version of events is correct. For example, there is an ongoing dispute between Connie, Rose and Hebe about a photograph of a Chinese man that once hung in the hallway of the Goshen Hotel. Hebe says that the photograph was of Ho Chi Minh, although 'Rose and Mrs Spry always insisted [it] was Han' (100). But when Connie questions her, Rose denies it: '"I'm sure I didn't tell you that it was Han. You made that up." She put her cup down. "Anyway, it's not Ho Chi Minh at all, it's Chairman Mao"' (105). When Connie goes to fetch the evidence, she finds the photograph is missing.

After six chapters, the point of view shifts. The following seven chapters telling Algebra's story are focalized firstly through Han, then Algebra. When she is offered opium for the first time '[a] quiver of hope bloomed under her skin' (49). As her addiction grows, smoke from the drug is described as 'an intoxicating incense that kissed and bit at Algebra's throat and made her mouth fill with an unmistakeable longing' (50). But when she gets to Goshen, Algebra gives up opium.

> What will be will be, she thought, finding herself strengthened rather than cowed by the realization. She cocked her head to one side and listened intently. In the distance the ocean crashed, the wind roared and the gulls screamed, but no voices cried 'murderess'. She knew that they would find her again eventually. The respite that the Goshen Hotel and Bar offered would allow her the distance she needed to gather her resources and stare them down (67–68).

Connie resumes the role of focalizer as the narrative returns to the fictive present, but in a later sequence of seven chapters, Rose becomes the principal focalizing character. In order for such shifts in focalization to seem natural to readers, care must be taken to maintain textual authority.

Narrative Text

Connie is the homodiegetic narrator of the extradiegetic narrative that frames the stories of the other characters. As Connie tells her own story, she is both narrator and active protagonist. But in the sequence of seven chapters that tell Algebra's story (Chapters 6–12, pages 38–76), the character Connie retreats, and the narrative voice becomes indistinguishable from that of an authorial, heterodiegetic narrator, allowing for an external mode of focalization that is capable of 'zooming in' to inhabit the characters of Algebra, Han, and the child Rose. In a much later sequence (Chapters

32 to 38, pages 198–243), the story of Rose is narrated in similar heterodiegetic fashion, with Rose, and later Eli, as focalizing characters. These shifts from a homodiegetic narrative voice to one that is effectively heterodiegetic (similar to the voice that narrates Francesca's story in *Butterfly Song*) are accomplished smoothly by the skilful weaving of intradiegetic stories into the extradiegetic narrative, and by their foreshadowing in earlier chapters. Connie is established early in the novel as the person whose job is to remember and record the stories of others. Although Connie remains the narrator and focalizing character in the chapters immediately preceding Algebra's authorially-narrated story, there is a transition over several pages as she meditates on the final days of her grandmother's life. This can be seen as a framing device similar to the phrase *Once upon a time...* as used in fairy tales.

> There was a baggage excess for travelling into the afterlife. [...] so rather than taking it with her, she left it behind with me for safe-keeping. Mrs Spry spent the long afternoons of her final winter in Goshen transferring the things that she no longer wished to remember, to me [...] (37).

A similar transitional scene heralds the sequence of chapters that tell Rose's story, with the discovery of an old photograph of baby Connie in her father's arms. Connie questions Rose once more about her father, and this time Rose promises to try and remember (197). The story of Rose's life as a young woman follows, told by an extradiegetic, authorial narrator.

The transitions from personal to authorial narrative voice are assisted by shifts in focalization. For example, the opening scenes of Algebra's story are externally focalized. In a literary analogy of the cinematic 'establishing shot', we see a dark-clad man hurrying through the streets (38). For two pages, the focalization remains external; the scene is described as if viewed through the lens of a camera. Then the camera moves in close to focus on the man, and, for the first time, the reader is allowed to share his thoughts as he waits in a strange house, staring at a grand staircase: 'The red glow of the kauri timber reminded him of the intricately carved tortoiseshell boxes in which his grandmother had kept her hair-pins, perfumes, jewellery and sleeping powders' (40). Here, Han becomes the focalizer. Thus, while Connie's narration frames the novel as a whole, the focalization shifts from character-bound to external modalities and thence to other characters. The chapters at the end of the sequences that relate the stories of Algebra and Rose respectively are characterised by more frequent shifts in focalization between

characters and between character-bound and external modes, heralding a return to the fictive present and to Connie as personal, intradiegetic narrator and focalizer.

Textuality

Representing Cultural Identity: A Game of Hide and Seek

Cultural identity is woven through *Bloom* like a fugitive thread, alluded to but never plainly evident. Information about the author is minimal: 'Kelly Ana Morey was born in the Far North of New Zealand in 1968. As always, she is between locations' (*Bloom*, 2003, front matter.) On the website of the New Zealand Book Council, Morey is identified as 'of pakeha and Ngati Kuri descent'.[159] She also acknowledges her debt to the tradition of Māori writing because it means 'I don't have to explain who I am in my own country'.[160] *Bloom* does not explain itself in terms of master narratives about history and race, but assumes its own authority, inviting readers to participate in its world of many possibilities.

Representations of cultural identity in a text, whether of author, narrators or characters, influence how readers think about the text in relation to themselves and vice versa. Although both novels feature non-mainstream, extended matrilineal families with itinerant and fragmented histories, *Bloom*, unlike *Butterfly Song*, is often ambivalent about cultural positioning. Where Tarena grapples with racism, Connie is haunted by the gaps in her history. However, both ultimately find a way forward for themselves and their families by reclaiming their lost heritage.

The deliberate ambiguities and evasions in *Bloom*, its circular, layered structure, and its playful hinting about questions of identity evoke Bhabha's creative, disruptive 'Third Space of enunciation'.[161] The text is resistant to simplistic interpretations, refusing to succumb to assumptions about where characters fit or how they ought to behave. For readers, the inability to name and label characters as unambiguously belonging to a particular group is unsettling. *Bloom*'s deliberate ambiguity is a subversive strategy that nudges readers gently to a place where they might query the codes by which they read and 'know'. Connie is a child of uncertain ancestry, coming from the space of ambivalent and protean meanings where cultures

[159] 'New Zealand Writers: Morey, Kelly Ana', New Zealand Book Council, (2007) <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/index.html> [Accessed 20 November 2007].
[160] Book Club Co NZ, 'Conversation with Kelly Ana Morey', A&R Whitcoulls Group, (2003) <http://www.book-club.co.nz/books03/8bloom.htm> [Accessed 17 April 2007].

[161] Bhabha (2004), pp. 47–56. For a discussion of Bhabha's term, see Chapter One.

meet. It is not surprising, then, that her voice is teasing and ironic, raising uncomfortable questions which might well be unanswerable.

Imaginative Geography: Reanimating the Homeland

Bloom depicts strong, dynamic female characters who move decisively through a landscape that is alive with meaning. Social and domestic activities such as returning and listening, cooking and gardening, are portrayed as positive and creative engagements with family and community, and are undertaken by male as well as female characters—Eli, for instance, is a great cook. Its complex fictive world embraces multiple versions and contested interpretations of events.

Although the precise location is not identified in the text, *Bloom* is set in Taranaki province on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand.

> [I]t's definitely Taranaki, but I don't like to make a NZ location too specific […] Emotionally it's Manaia—the lone soldier standing at the cross roads—but not really. I'm just always struck at how, Māori and Pakeha alike, when you've spent any time in Taranaki the mountain becomes written across the back of your eyes. It's a haunting, but in the nicest way.[162]

Named Mount Egmont by James Cook as he sailed along the west coast, and now known as Mount Egmont/Taranaki, the mountain is a looming presence. It has haunted me since my visit in 2006, and made such an impression on my grandmother as a child, that five decades later in Australia she wrote a story set, like *Bloom*, in its shadow.[163]

The landscape in *Bloom* is often personified, as in this passage from Connie's homeward journey: 'The land groaned and sighed as she shifted her weight from one leg to another, settling into herself. Resting her bones' (30). In a spirit of ironic playfulness, Morey honours the revisionist tradition of Māori prophets like Te Whiti o Rongomai by transposing Biblical imagery to the New Zealand landscape. Te Whiti characterised the Māori people as the tribes of Israel, and their land as the mythical setting for the fulfilment of prophecy. The crumbling city house occupied

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[162] Book Club Co NZ, 'Conversation with Kelly Ana Morey', A&R Whitcoulls Group, (2003) <http://www.book-club.co.nz/books03/8bloom.htm> [Accessed 17 April 2007].

[163] Freya Foster, *Mysterious Mount* (unpublished ms, 196?). An alternative title is *Snowy Mount*. See Appendix II. The story tells of a disturbance at night as Māori people see a fire high on the mountain's slopes. They tell the missionary they are afraid that the sleeping mountain is awakening, and will destroy their villages in a tide of molten lava and ash. The missionary, believing the volcano to be extinct, convinces them there is nothing to worry about. But if this part of the story is true, the Māori were right, for Taranaki is merely dormant.

by Connie and her friends is an abandoned convent that still goes by its former name, The Little Sisters of Bethlehem; the house owned by Jeremiah Spry is situated on Jerusalem Street; and the seaside settlement with its lone hotel is called Goshen.

> Goshen is the land of light and plenty in the Old Testament which ties in with the lit fire theme that runs through *Bloom*. It seemed like the perfect place for hope to be located, the place where the home fires burn.[164]

The lives of the Spry women are intimately and intricately connected with those of their neighbours, the Wairangiwhenua family. Their name is composite: *wai* means 'water', and *whenua* means 'land' or 'homeland', but can also mean 'afterbirth'—a reference to an old Māori custom of burying the placenta in the earth. When Connie is born, Rose is living with Elias at a commune in the bush.

> After the birth there had been endless community meetings regarding the disposal of the placenta and Rose, tiring of their unceasing debate, had taken things into her own hands and buried it out there in the bush. She refused to tell anyone where.
> 'You have no spirituality,' Elias accused her […] (232).

Rose retorts tartly that it is not spirituality she lacks, but refrigeration. Her spontaneous decision to bury the afterbirth demonstrates her fundamental practicality as well as her intuitive connection with the earth and with Māori spiritual traditions.

New Zealand geography is re-imagined in this novel as a landscape infused with the living presence of history. Connie reflects on the knowledges she has gathered: 'The King country, I knew, was where Te Kooti sought sanctuary with Tawhiao, the Māori King' (29) and Nanny Smack reminisces about her life: '"Now the Chathams in winter, that was cold. Have I ever told you about those years us Hauhau were separated from our homelands on that god-forsaken island?"' (30). Here, geography is re-imagined as a textual equivalent to Māori landowners' defiant removal of settlers' fences and surveyors' pegs in nineteenth century Taranaki. It is an act of reclamation that reanimates the land with the songs, deeds and stories of those who lived, fought, and died there.

Imaginative History: Reclaiming the Past

In *Bloom*, the past returns again and again, haunting the characters in unexpected ways. But this is not just one family remembering its past; there is an urgency here, a

[164]Book Club Co NZ (2003).

broader significance. There is still a war on, Nanny Smack reminds Connie. Remembering is part of the fight. But it's okay to have a laugh along the way; the narrative tone is cheerfully subversive.

The particular history of Taranaki province, the setting for Goshen in *Bloom*, underpins the personal stories of the characters. The region, dominated by the mountain known as Taranaki or Pukehaupapa by Māori peoples, produced in the late nineteenth century a burgeoning of spiritual and resistance movements. In March 1860, war erupted in Taranaki over the issue of land ownership.

> In 1862 a new religious faith grew out of the conflict over land in Taranaki. It was the first organised expression of an independent Māori Christianity. Māori leader Te Ua Haumene based the new religion on the principle of pai marire – goodness and peace. He called his church Hauhau: Te Hau (the breath of God) carried the news of deliverance to the faithful. The terms Pai Marire and Hauhau became interchangeable as labels for those who followed this religion.[165]

Morey says she was haunted by undercurrents of tension emanating from land wars, although at the time she did not fully comprehend this.

> I went to boarding school in Taranaki about the time that many of the 100 year old leasehold properties were nearing expiration. Many of the girls I went to school with were the daughters of Pakeha farmers and although it didn't impact on me at the time, I remembered the tension, the unease which was in no way directed at me and in no way did I ever feel had anything to do with me being Māori. I just remember. Then later your knowledges start to catch up with you and it starts making sense.[166]

The need to remember and record is not merely personal, because although 'Taranaki history [...] was recorded in song and story for oral communication', there is a dearth of Māori texts and archival sources from the time, probably due to the 'language and literacy barrier' which 'left the government free to record its activities with some frankness.'[167] It also left the colonisers free to textualise the world they claimed in ways that suited them, to 'world the world,' in Spivak's words, which

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[165]'Pai Marire', NZ Ministry for Culture and Heritage, (2009). <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/politics/pai-marire/pai-marire-intro> [Updated 13 October 2009, Accessed 19 November 2009].

[166] Kelly Ana Morey, Interview with Book Club Co NZ (2003).

[167] Dick Scott, *Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka* (Auckland: Heinemann / Southern Cross, 1975), p. 211.

they presumed uninscribed, in their own image.[168] But history does not stand still, and this particular 'arena of struggle for representational authority' now resounds with contentious voices.[169]

The narrative of the Spry family circles back and forth through time and space, weaving a container for the interdependent stories of three generations of women. But (unlike *Butterfly Song*), *Bloom* offers no convenient diagram, no family tree. Instead, clues are planted like seeds throughout the work, awaiting fortuitous circumstances in which to sprout and bloom. The reader who wishes to make sense of things, to know the identity of Connie's father, or who killed whom and how it happened, must play an active role in tracing the tendrils of narrative that twine and multiply. The Spry family stories are intertwined with the larger net of history, like tomorrow's sky that is continually crocheted by Connie's familiar ghost. Nanny Smack is the embodiment of history, a *kuia* from the nineteenth century Land Wars, when Māori defended their land against the government. Her portrait is preserved in an old photograph labelled 'Hau Hau witch,' but, as always, it is Nanny Smack herself who has the last word.

> 'I remember the day the Pakeha took that picture of me,' Nanny says. […] I look old, eh? I was for those days. Not by today's standards, though. I was sixty-four, a broken old woman. But that's war for you. The Pakeha said he wanted my side of the story. He said that I was the last of my people, that we were dying out. So I told him about the land and about the hardships and he called me a witch anyway' (197).

Nanny Smack is a 'preposterous ghost': a gleefully ironic embodiment of patronising predictions in the pakeha press of the demise of the Māori prophetic movement.

> The days of Tohu and Te Whiti are nearing their end. For some years now the old prophets have been living in the light of a little flame which they themselves kindled. The flame is now beginning to flicker. It is nearly burnt out … Under the circumstances, is it any wonder that there is a decided slump in the prophecy business? A prophet cannot live long with the electric light, the telephone, and the motorcar, and the Māori of the new generation is neither so superstitious nor so gullible as the young brave who went to battle

[168] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Criticism, Feminism and the Institution' (interview with Elizabeth Grosz) in *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.1.
[169] Indira Karamcheti, 'The Geographics of Marginality: Place and Textuality in Simone Schwarz-Bart and Anita Desai' in *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 129.

> [...] a generation ago. Wherefore the old men can now make walk only the preposterous ghosts of the glories they once created.[170]

Nanny Smack annoys Connie by popping up at inopportune moments and rapping her with a walking stick, reminding her that the struggle continues. Her acerbic interventions authorise an alternative view of colonial history. When Connie brings home a schoolbook on the Land Wars, Nanny Smack is unimpressed with the words of the text, saying she is 'familiar with this version of events' (175).

> She went immediately to the photographs. Small cries of recognition and greeting escaped from her mouth, embellishing the images. Three times Nanny went through the pictures, murmuring and sighing as she went. Then she tore the pages out and stuffed them quickly into her kete before I could protest (174).

To Nanny Smack, the photographs are not archaic records of a forgotten time, but living memories that she must free from collusion with the white man's words. Her reappropriation of these images is an act of subversion and restitution analogous to the ploughing of confiscated land by the followers of Te Whiti, the visionary Māori leader who 'would not resort to violence but had ordered the ploughing to assert his right to the land'.[171] Nanny Smack reclaims her people's history by tearing photographs from a school textbook, since, as Morey says, '[w]ithout history all is lost.'[172]

Assemblage: Embedded Narratives and Unstable Objects

While the narrative structure of *Butterfly Song* alternates the stories of protagonists from different eras, *Bloom* uses a different structural strategy. The intradiegetic stories of Connie's mother and grandmother are embedded in the framework of the extradiegetic narrative. In a sense, these embedded stories are themselves elements of assemblage. In addition, there are objects that link past with present, and an interactive historical resource in the form of Nanny Smack.

Objects from the fictive past turn up in the fictive present, linking Connie's narrative with those of Algebra and Rose, and with the older history of the country

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[170] *Weekly Press*, (Christchurch, 2 May 1906), quoted in Dick Scott, *Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka* (Auckland: Heinemann / Southern Cross, 1975), p. 190.
[171] Hazel Riseborough, 'Te Pahuatanga o Parihaka' in Hohaia, O'Brien and Strongman (eds.) *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance* (2001), p. 27. Te Whiti's memorial at Parihaka was shown me by his great grandson, who told me that Te Whiti had been the source of and inspiration for Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of passive resistance.
[172] Book Club Co NZ (2003).

and its people. The objects include photographs, photographic negatives, Rose's old camera, an ancient *kete* and Algebra's opium pipe. Then, of course, there are the hauntings: Circus, the spectral terrier; the mysterious boxes of books that turn up addressed to Connie wherever she happens to be; and Nanny Smack, who brings history into the present in unpredictable ways.

The stories of Algebra and Rose are narrated separately, but are embedded in Connie's main narrative, resulting in a layered structure concealing puzzles and secret messages. Meanings shift and double back on themselves; I found myself turning back to earlier pages seeking clues I had missed and trying to clarify ambiguities. Private and public stories, official and unofficial histories, exist side by side, and readers must actively enter the dialogue to make sense of it.

Rather than a means of fixing the past, photographs are represented here as magical objects with the power to change history and to render identity fluid. Like Nanny Smack, they have the power of shapeshifting. Is the photograph that hangs in the hallway a portrait of Mao Tse Tung, or Ho Chi Minh, or Mrs Spry's dear friend Han? And what of Rose's self-portraits, which turn out looking like other people?

> 'Hmmph,' says Nanny, [looking at a photograph of Rose] 'you'd almost think she was a Māori, looking like that. With feathers in her hair. I reckon her birth certificate is about as authentic as yours, cookie.'[173]

Nanny Smack hints that not only Connie and her sister, but their mother, too, has Māori heritage.

Textual Authority in *Bloom*

The narrative voice in *Bloom* possesses a similar blend of personal and authorial qualities as that in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), where two distinct narrators merge to become one voice bearing a new, hybrid textual authority.[174] In the early part of *Bloom,* and recurrently throughout, Connie tells her own story as a personal narrator, while in lengthy intervening sections she retreats from the personal to become the authorial narrator of her mother's and grandmother's stories. However the textual authority of this authorial narrator comes not from superior status, knowledge, or abilities, but from the intimacy of shared histories. Though it bears similarities to the voice that speaks at the beginning and end of *Butterfly Song*, the

[173] Kelly Ana Morey, *Bloom* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003), p. 250. The people of Parihaka wore *raukura* (white feathers) in their hair as a symbol of peaceful resistance to the theft of their land.
[174] Lanser (1992), p. 130.

authority of the communal voice in Bloom is asserted earlier, and is more complex and more deeply embedded in the events of the various fabulae. Textual authority is maintained despite shifts in the narrative mode from personal to authorial and back because Connie is not merely a personal narrator but also a *cultural narrator*: an individual who speaks for her family in the present, past, and future. In a scene quoted in the introduction to this chapter, Rose and Connie gaze at a photograph of Māori children from an earlier time and hear them singing (247). Connie's ability to listen to and speak for her ancestors ensures the continuation of their voices in a sustaining music of resistance.

Chapter Five: Troubled Speech and Double Vision in Gail Jones's *Sorry*

> This is a story that can only be told in a whisper.
> There is a hush to difficult forms of knowing, an abashment, a sorrow, an inclination towards silence.[175]

Introduction

Silence, shame, forgetting: Gail Jones's fourth novel is about 'what it means to forget ... to have history with a gap in it.' [176] *Sorry* (2007) deals with the fragmentation of consciousness that results from experiencing trauma, the loss of 'the capacity to integrate the memory of overwhelming life events.'[177] Through the primary focalizing character and sometime narrator, Perdita, the novel 'allegorizes the "forgetting" of the so-called Stolen Generations in Australia, those Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families by order of state policy from about 1900 to 1970.'[178] The novel's central traumatic event, the murder of Perdita's father, is recalled by her in fragmentary fashion in the opening pages. The pieces missing from her memory, the gaps in narration, raise questions which Perdita approaches with mingled curiosity and fear.

The narration of the novel is split between the recollections of the adult Perdita and the observations of a more emotionally distant yet knowing external narrator. Each narrator contributes to the story, one sharing personal recollections and reflections, like close-up shots in a movie, while the other broadens perspective to reveal the panorama of wartime events in Australia and abroad. The alternations in narrative voice shape the content and structure of the text, influence the way the imaginative histories and geographies of the novel are represented, and determine its textual authority: the way in which the narrative draws readers into the fictional world. As in the previous two novels under discussion, the text may also be seen as an assemblage of special objects and memories that link the fictive present to the fictive past.

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[175]Gail Jones, *Sorry* (North Sydney: Vintage, 2007), p. 3.
[176]Gail Jones, speaking about *Sorry* (2007), in an interview with Summer Block, 'January Interview: Gail Jones', January Magazine (9 May 2008).
[177] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (London: Pandora, 1992), p. 34. See pp. 34–35.
[178]Gail Jones in *January Magazine* (2008).

Nonunitary Narration

Fabula

The novel consists of a single fabula told from two main viewpoints. The story is essentially Perdita's, though from a broader perspective it embraces the history of the Second World War as well as the stories of other characters, including Perdita's parents and the Aboriginal girl Mary.

Nicholas Keene is an English anthropologist who, in 1928, marries Shakespeare-obsessed Stella. Dreaming of a better life, he takes his wife to Australia. Their child Perdita is born two years later, and raised for eight years in a cabin in the scrub twenty miles southwest of Broome. Nicholas develops habits of solitude, violence toward his wife and sexually abusing Aboriginal servants. Stella schools Perdita at home, increasingly retreating into obsessive recitations of Shakespeare and bouts of mental instability. Perdita has two friends: Mary, an Aboriginal girl brought in as housekeeper when Stella is hospitalised, and Billy Trevor, the deaf-mute son of neighbours who run the cattle station on which the family lives. From Mary, Perdita learns about the lives of the saints, tracking bush tucker, and playing poker. From both friends, she learns ways of seeing and being in the world that her parents are unable to teach her.

One day Perdita returns home with Billy and Stella to find Nicholas raping Mary. Nicholas is stabbed with a carving knife, and dies. Mary confesses to his murder and is placed in juvenile detention. But was she really the killer? Perdita, unable to remember the incident clearly, develops a stutter.

Perdita and her mother go to Broome, but Broome Harbour is attacked by Japanese bombers, and the town is evacuated. They sail to Perth, where Stella finds work with a florist and Perdita is ostracised at school because of her speech impediment. Stella is hospitalised again, and Perdita is placed with foster parents who take her to a psychiatrist who gains her trust and works with her stammer. By chance, Perdita finds her old friend Billy, and together they visit Mary in detention; the relationship of the three friends is now awkward.

Perdita finally recalls that it was she who stabbed her father. Her stutter disappears, and she implores her mother to verify her account of events, so that Mary may be freed. But Stella cannot, or will not, face the truth. Perdita asks Mary why she took the blame, and Mary replies that it was to protect Perdita and Stella.

‘Mothers and daughters, they need each other’, she says (203). Perdita is overwhelmed with shame. She realises later that *this* was the moment when she should have said *sorry*. She does not, and then it is too late: Mary dies in prison.

Story: Sequence and Focalization

Aspects of the same story are told from two distinct narrative perspectives, which dovetail neatly as first the personal, and then the authorial vision is revealed. The transitions are eased by the presence of the young Perdita as the primary focalizing character in both narratives, although other characters sometimes take this role.

The broad sweep of the story is presented chronologically, but the events surrounding Nicholas’s murder recur like a haunting, a hiccup, or, indeed, a stammer, reflecting the author’s engagement with ‘the idea of the traumatic time, which is a time that is broken, and that is recursive’.[179] The death of Perdita’s father, and the loss of her ‘sister’ Mary, coincide with the onset of her stutter, a disability that is to change her life utterly.

Narrative Text

Until the fourth chapter, Perdita is the sole narrator, sharing her adult reflections as well as the childhood experiences of her younger self.

> I was a mistake, a slightly embarrassing intervention, and knew this melancholy status from earliest childhood. Predictably, both [my parents] treated me as a smallish adult, arranging a regimen of behaviour, insisting on rules and repression, talking in stern, pedagogical tones. Neither thought it necessary to express affection, nor to offer any physical affirmations of our bond. I was, in consequence, a beseeching child, grumpy, insecure, anxious for their approval, but also wilfully emphatic in ways that I knew would test and annoy them (4).

Although this voice bears the attributes of Lanser’s ‘personal narrator’ (telling her own story in first person, and having self-referential capabilities), it also has a somewhat authorial style, a detachment that is almost ironic.

Six paragraphs into the fourth chapter, there is a shift in narrative voice (33). The story is taken up by an external narrator, a detached voice which delineates a broader human perspective on events both global and local, from the massive upheavals of war to the domestic bickering of a married couple. In Lanser’s terms, this second narrator is ‘authorial’: heterodiegetic, public, and with the potential to

[179] Gail Jones, speaking to Summer Block. ‘January Interview: Gail Jones’, *January Magazine* (9 May 2008).

refer to the narrative process itself. A pattern of alternation is established between the authorial and personal narrators as they interrupt each other periodically to give their different perspectives on the story. There is an internal logic, a rhythm that regulates the disruptive effect of these dramatic shifts in voice producing a kind of narrative duet. Although the two voices are distinct, with the personal narrator consistently referring to herself (and her younger self) as 'I', while the authorial narrator always refers to the same character as 'Perdita', there is sufficient similarity of style and tone to call the identity of the second narrator into question. Is this truly an 'authorial narrator', or could this voice, too, be Perdita's, relating the bigger picture surrounding the events of her life in a detached mode reminiscent of the dissociation that can occur after the witnessing of trauma?[180] Although such speculation is intriguing, evidence in the text is inconclusive. In any case, the effect of this double narration is dissociative, requiring intellectual work and thus distancing the reader periodically from the emotional immediacy of Perdita's experience. It is a text that requires the engagement of head as well as heart.

Textuality

The making into story of people, places and histories previously uninscribed, or the revision of received colonial representations, is sensitive work for a white novelist. Gail Jones tackles this work with integrity, innovation, and a light touch: 'Perhaps Adolf Hitler was at this moment eating a boiled egg, sitting perched on an iron stool with a silver spoon in one hand and a salt shaker in the other' (127). The child narrator's imaginative curiosity lends a unique perspective to the impersonal dimensions of war and the horror of violence.

Representing Cultural Identity

The representation of cultural identity influences the way readers apprehend a text: the degree to which the reader identifies with authors, narrators, and characters, whether they are seen as 'barbarians' or 'one of us' depends on their language, behaviour and established contexts. *Sorry*, unlike *Butterfly Song*, makes no overt claims about the cultural identity of its author, narrators, or primary protagonist. Nobody says 'I am white,' or 'I am English/Anglo-Australian.' However both

[180] 'The traumatized person may experience intense emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail but without emotion.' Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (London: Pandora, 1992), p.34.

narrators use the style and vocabulary of educated, white, middle-class people, clearly placing themselves in a specific cultural context. The author thanks 'Aboriginal Australians' and identifies the source of her knowledge of an Aboriginal spirit mentioned in the novel (215–218). In acknowledging her debt to Aboriginal people and their culture, Jones positions herself as non-Aboriginal.

Like the families in *Butterfly Song* and *Bloom*, the Keenes find themselves isolated and struggling in a strange new place. Perdita, like the narrator-protagonists of the aforementioned novels, finds strength and opportunities for learning from an extended family: the Aboriginal women who raised her, and her friends Mary and Billy. With the loss of Mary, and the subsequent move to Perth, Perdita has only her mother, a woman haunted by regret and committed to pessimism. So Perdita, who has learned that Aboriginal people are friendly, reliable, and great sources of knowledge, befriends Aboriginal people in town, and through this alliance, finds Mary again. She is a child touched by another's culture and wanting to learn, yet she cannot bridge the gap that yawns between them. Like Tarena and Connie, Perdita can only find her way forward by recovering a lost piece of her history. Her realisation that she is responsible, not only for the death of her father, but for the ruin of her friend's life, is a bitter one.

This text is positioned deliberately in the precise cultural context of Aboriginal–white race relations in Australia. It was published in a year when, despite the fact that the 'forcible removal of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families' took place until the 1907s in accordance with federal government policy, the Prime Minister repeatedly refused to formally apologise to the Aboriginal community (215). The title, and a note at the end of the novel, declare Jones's allegorical intentions in advance of the discussion about this at the time of publication.[181] In fact, as Kerryn Goldsworthy notes, the book goes beyond allegory.

> It's not too much of a stretch to read this as a lament for the country's failure to offer a formal apology to the Aboriginal people for the sins and crimes of the past, and as a bleak suggestion that it may now already be too late for such a thing to be of any use. But it's also hard not to read this book as Jones' own personal, formal and explicit statement of apology: to see it as a kind of

[181] Gail Jones, Sorry (North Sydney: Vintage, 2007), p. 215. See also Summer Block, 'January Interview: Gail Jones', in January Magazine (9 May 2008); Kerryn Goldsworthy, 'Sorry: A Literary Reconciliation', The Age, 12 May 2007; Maya Jaggi, 'Days of Atonement: *Sorry* by Gail Jones', The Guardian Saturday 26 May 2007; Katharine England, 'The Hardest Word', *AdelaideNow* 19 May 2007.

> enactment in fiction of her ideas about Australian race relations and reconciliation, and as a suggestion that if the country's government cannot bring itself to offer an apology then perhaps its artists, at least, might step up to fill the gap.[182]

The title, the content, and the timing of its publication allow *Sorry* to be read as a declaration: a cultural and political act of contrition, and an example, perhaps, for others to follow.

Imaginative Geography and History

The geographical settings of the novel are Cambridge, England in the late 1920s, where Nicholas and Stella meet; the port of Broome; a 'small shack' on a cattle station some distance from Broome; and the city and suburbs of Perth (18). Perdita is born in 1930, and the main events of the novel unfold through the 1930s and the years of the Second World War. Nicholas is murdered in 1940, when Perdita is ten years old. The novel ends in the post-war years, with Perdita as an adult reflecting on her life. Far from being 'uninscribed', lonely outback settings and rough dwellings have been repeatedly inscribed in Australian writing since colonial times, as in this example by Henry Lawson.

> Twenty years, and from daylight till dark—twenty years it was split, fence, and grub;
> The reward was a tumble-down hut, and a bare, dusty patch in the scrub.[183]

Other settings, such as the wartime pearling and fishing port and the coastal city, also bear the romantic patina of literary reiteration. With *Sorry*, Jones has set herself the twin tasks of interrogating earlier representations of places and events and re-inscribing them with complex, new perspectives.

Imaginative Geography

As Nicholas, hoping to become a new person, and Stella, railing against her fate, disembark in Broome, a 'brassy light enveloped them, stunning in its brightness; there were wondrous high skies and broad horizons, so that Nicholas felt expanded, as if on a mission' (14–15). Nicholas is 'bent on discovering the why and the wherefore of primitive man' (13). Stella, on the other hand, is intimidated by the

[182] Kerryn Goldsworthy, '*Sorry*: A Literary Reconciliation', *The Age*, 12 May 2007.
[183] Henry Lawson, 'Ruth', *Poetical Works of Henry Lawson* (Sydney: Angus & Robinson, 1947) p. 235.

harsh light and limitless space of Australia. From the beginning, Aboriginal people are seen as part of this new landscape.

> Corrugated iron shacks lined the red gravel roads, many of them rusted, aslant, looking drunkenly derelict; there were boab trees, mudflats, mangy wandering dogs. Pearling luggers, caught by the receding tide, listed in despondent formation beyond mangrove swamps; the sea was visible, a strip of shine at a muddy distance. In town, small groups of Aboriginal people sat talking in peaceful clusters, or lounged in doorways, or on narrow verandas. It was a slow town, calm. There was a serene equanimity in the way the locals moved, in the hush of their talk, in the gestures of solicitude by which greetings were made and tasks were performed (15).

For Perdita, from her earliest years, Aboriginal people fill the gap left by her parents' lack of physical warmth.

> If it had not been for the Aboriginal women who raised me, I would never have known what it is like to lie against a breast, to sense skin as a gift, to feel the throb of a low pulse at the base of the neck, to listen, in intimate and sweet propinquity, to air entering and leaving a resting body (4).

Her Aboriginal mentors, especially Mary, teach Perdita how to read and interact with the land in ways alien to Stella and Nicholas, ways that require all her bodily senses, her intellect, and her spirit. As a result, she is saved from the devastating alienation suffered by her parents.

The narrative illuminates the distorting and fragmenting nature of perception and memory, but also suggests new ways of relating to landscape, to people, and to the experiences of everyday life. These might involve paying attention, like someone hunting in the desert, to minute signs; or expressing, like someone communicating in sign language, not merely facts but nuances of emotion; or being aware, as Mary suggests, of one's connection to others even in solitude, across time and space: 'Mary had a theory that when people read the same words they were imperceptibly knitted; there were touchings not of the skin, and apparitional convergences' (73). In *Sorry*, the landscape is retextualised: not merely a theatrical set or points on a map to be traversed, it is a space of connection with the earth, its creatures, other human beings and the self.

Imaginative History

The two narrative perspectives on Perdita's story contain parallels that link them, pointing beyond the personal story to allegorical dimensions and broader social implications. Maya Jaggi points out the rhythmic nature of this structure.

> Just as Perdita's story is punctuated by turning points in the war, so her memory loss is counterpointed by gaps in official history, such as the Japanese bombardment of Dutch refugee ships in Broome in 1942—another atrocity that people elected to forget.[184]

En route to Perth, Stella and Perdita stay at a convent in Broome. The pearling industry grinds to a halt as Japanese pearl divers are interned. Everyone is leaving. The authorial narrative describes the flow of transient and displaced people through the town, in particular, the Dutch refugees who arrive in flying boats from Java, mooring in Roebuck Bay and living on board as they wait to refuel (126–127).

On the third of March 1942, Perdita sneaks down to the bay by herself and steals two pieces of pearl shell from an unlocked shed. While she is there, nine Japanese planes descend on the town, sinking sixteen Dutch refugee planes in the bay and destroying six military planes at the airport. The authorial narrative is focalized through the child Perdita as she watches the Japanese planes fly overhead, and hears 'human voices lifted in the wind, transported by terror', followed by explosions. The narration then returns to external focalization.

> History records what Perdita could not see from the shore: that the refugees trapped in the planes were bombarded as they leapt into the water, or burned to death as their planes exploded. That there was undignified scrambling, anguished mayhem, and appalling suffering. Almost one hundred people died. Later a mass grave would be dug for those whose names and faces had been so swiftly obliterated, who were now simply charred or mutilated bodies, simply the Dutch (132).

Later, a third perspective on this tragedy is offered in a personal narrative by the adult Perdita.

> Of my complicated childhood, this event haunts me still: the slaughter, that day, of Dutch refugees. I was far enough away to see it all as a spectacle, and indeed I may not have heard any screams, but simply imagined I did, after the fact, as it were, after hearing the gory details. It was, I suppose, a direct encounter with war, but it was also at a distance, and alienated, and involved the swoop of shiny planes through a cobalt-blue sky, the glittering sea

[184] Maya Jaggi, 'Days of Atonement: *Sorry* by Gail Jones' (Book Review), The Guardian, Saturday 26 May, 2007.

> stretching before me, puffs of telltale smoke far away arising, rather than any real meeting with physical suffering. […] I was witness and not witness […] (135).

There is an insistence throughout the text on telling what is not seen, not heard, not witnessed—not so much to fill gaps in awareness as to acknowledge that they exist. The nature of memory, carefully scrutinised, is found to be full of holes, wayward, skewed, and makeshift, cobbling together fragments to cover its incompleteness. Here, Perdita reflects on her departure from the shack where she had spent her childhood.

> I have thought about it all my life, this moment of eclipse. It is perhaps because departures are complex, not simple, that we are tempted to cast them reductively, as if they were episodes in a novel, neat and emblematic. There is a relish with which people speak of their childhoods, but also a shrewd suppression of moments of inversion, when what is deducted begins to define the experience. In the deepest folds of memory, the heaviest sediments, paradoxically, are those produced by loss. The convolutions of what we are include unrecognised wanderings, pilgrimages, perhaps, back to these disappeared spaces, these obscurely, intangibly attractive sites. I wanted a 'last glimpse' memory so that I could seal the shack, and the death, and my life with Mary, into an immured and sequestered past. To guard against what? To guard against haunting (117).

Sensing that the incompleteness of her remembering, like the fragmentation of her speech, is caused by something blocked or hidden, Perdita begins to believe in ghosts, insisting 'that what is *missing* continues on, persisting, somewhere else. Mary had taught her this, the principle of invisible presence, that one must always reckon on more than one sees' (145).

After more than a year of therapy, the psychiatrist Dr Oblov asks Perdita what she would like to tell him about herself. She 'felt herself fill up with a thousand possible stories. She held the [glass] dome in her hand, turned it and noticed the convex distortions of the flower shape. Everything depended on the angle of vision' (165). She starts to tell Dr Oblov about her father's death, but realises with a shock that she is unsure of exactly what happened. Her speech falters. 'There was a dissolving of memory as she approached its substance; there was a gap and shapelessness to her own lost history' (166). For Perdita, this is a crisis. She must remember what happened if she is to heal, to have a future. When she does recall the events clearly, her stutter vanishes.

Her mother Stella, on the other hand, survives by avoiding the truth. She represents the extreme of memory's skewed malleability, twisting Shakespearean speeches to fit her deranged outlook, and teaching Perdita idiosyncratic versions of schoolbook geography, history and social studies.

> From her mother Perdita inherited an addled vision of the world; so much was unremembered or misremembered, so that the planet reshaped into new tectonic variations, changed the size and outline of countries on shaky hand-drawn maps, filled up with fabricated peoples and customs (many of them disquieting, weird, remote from understanding). […] Stella had coded the world into her own fierce antinomies, super-populated with villains and evil-doers, fuelled by daft purpose and maniacal intention (35–36).

The imaginative history of the text recasts not only personal but collective memories as cultural artefacts subject to alterations and erasures arising from fear, self preservation and self interest. Though we cannot avoid the quirks of memory, we can become alert to them, and sensitive to interpretations that differ from our own.

Assemblage: Unreliable Images

Although it is set during the Second World War, *Sorry* is not an 'historical novel' in the sense of pretending to recreate the authentic narrative of a bygone era. Instead, it can be seen as an assemblage of memory fragments and images in which the correspondences between the personal and authorial perspectives knit the narrative text together, while the gaps within them and the disjunctions between them—as well as the self-referential function of both personal and authorial narrators—draw attention to the constructed and fallible nature of memories and of texts.

Careful descriptions of items of clothing appear repeatedly in the narrative text as expressions of the wearer's character. After Nicholas's death, though Perdita's memory 'falters', she does recall that 'Stella took to wearing her Spanish shawl—this is a reliable image because others, I recall, remarked upon it, taking the extravagance as a sign of genuine mourning' (99).

> This shawl, black and tasselled and embroidered with looped patterns of scarlet poppies, became for Stella the sad emblem of all her lost dreams, of all that was un Shakespearean about her life' (9–10).

Stella's play-acting ends abruptly with a brisk return to practicality. 'When at last she cast off her Spanish shawl, Stella enlisted Mr Trevor to teach her to drive' (102).

But images are not always reliable, since their meanings depend almost entirely on the contexts in which they are seen. Certain images in the text are juxtaposed and reiterated cinematically to build and reflect upon layers of meaning. Rather than linking the narratives of past and present, the elements of assemblage in this text highlight the inadequacies and subversions of all attempts to configure the past. These elements include Nicholas's collection of newspaper clippings, in which the overwhelming disturbances of war are reinterpreted as manageable fragments of black-and-white text; books—especially a copy of *The Lives of the Saints*, which links the two girls, Mary and Perdita, in joint custodianship of a history that ultimately belongs to neither; and the rag floor mat that covers the stain of Nicholas's blood: 'a cheery, a glorious lie, a text of other men's shirts and cast-offs, floral and scrappy fragments' (997–98). Finally, there is Stella's 'snow dream', appropriated by Perdita, which frames the text in a compelling image of the insidious obliteration of memory.

> I saw a distant place, all forgetful white, reversing its presences. I saw Mary, and Billy, covered by snowflakes. I saw my mother's bare feet beneath the hem of her nightgown. Everything was losing definition and outline. Everything was disappearing under the gradual snow. Calmed, I looked at the sky and saw only a blank. Soft curtains coming down, a whiteness, a peace.[185]

Snow is forgetting, oblivion, a respite from the difficult work of remembering.

Not only does the text represent omissions, and complex or multiple perspectives, it also refers ironically to the partial and contingent nature of representation itself. An example is the image of Mary's blue dress, its various meanings dependent on who sees it, what their assumptions are and what else is seen and heard in the same context.

The Story of the Blue Dress

Perdita's first recollection of the scene of her father's murder is 'just this single image: her [Mary's] dress, the particular blue of hydrangeas, spattered with the purple of my father's blood.' After Mary rises from the floor, her dress covered in blood, Perdita clings to her, and Mary says 'Don't tell them' (3). The apparent conclusion to be drawn from this sparse scenario is that Mary is the killer. Yet she confesses to the crime, so why the admonition 'Don't tell them' (3)? In this text,

[185] Jones, *Sorry* (2007), p. 214. See also page 19.

ambiguity is rife and absences are more telling than presences. As time goes by, Perdita puzzles over the gaps and anomalies in her memory, which echo her halting speech, a constant reminder of the trauma.

A third of the way through the text, the murder scene is reprised from the perspective of an authorial narrator. More details of the setting and of the events immediately following the murder are revealed, but this narrator's scope is not omniscient: 'The day unveils itself in partial scenes and stages, as if a memory-camera is fixed, and cannot swing around to envision the entire room or every one of the players' (91). Two policemen from Broome come to investigate the murder. They see the family dwelling as 'a madman's shack', note Perdita's difficulty in speaking and Stella's composure, and drive off with Nicholas's body in the back of their ute and Mary, who has evidently been raped and has confessed to the crime, sitting between them. She does not look back (91–93).

Perdita, on the other hand, continually looks back to that day on which her life was so shockingly changed. The third reprisal of the murder scene takes place toward the end of the novel, during Perdita's sessions with Dr Oblov. On her second visit, she tries to tell the doctor about her father's death.

> [B]ut as she drew near the topic she realised, with the force of a revelation, that she was not at all sure who had killed him. Mary was there, and her mother, and Billy, and herself. Four of them. Just four of them. A strange elliptical quality entered her telling, a manifest inaccuracy. Her mouth became muddled; she could not speak (165).

She suspects her mother may have killed her father. But after she has been seeing the doctor for more than a year, she finally recalls everything that happened on that day. Perdita had burst into the shack ahead of Billy and her mother, to find Nicholas in the act of raping Mary. Perdita had taken up the carving knife and plunged it into her father's back, and then into the side of his neck. Billy had arrived and removed the knife as Mary struggled from beneath the dying man (192–194).

The image of the blue dress spattered 'with patches of purple' recurs in each version of the murder scene. At first it is simply an image, stark and horrifying. In the second telling, the bloodstained dress becomes a signifier of Mary's guilt. And in the third telling, the staining of the dress represents the violations and injustices suffered by Mary. Like Mary's injunction to Perdita ('Don't tell them'), the image of the blue dress depends for its meaning on the context in which it appears.

Textual Authority in *Sorry*

The effect of the double narration in *Sorry* is a paradoxical kind of seeing, which at times seems blurred and headachy, a literary equivalent of physiological 'double vision', and at other times sharpens events to a three-dimensional focus that is hyper-real, like viewing a 3D movie or looking at photographs through an old-fashioned stereoscope.

Sigrid Weigel suggests that the strategy of splitting the narrative persona was, historically, an expression of women writers' awareness of and ambivalence about writing in a patriarchal context.[186]

> The split gaze [...] can be further linked to the traditional association of women with the doubling of mirrors and masks. The dramatic increase in the number of women who pick up a pen at the end of the eighteenth century [is attributed] to a shift in theoretical norms that made such self-reflexivity acceptable and that dissolved the 'closed' text into fragments. Thus the revolt against neoclassicism made it possible for violations of formal unity, long attributed to women writers of letters and fiction on the grounds that they were less erudite or skilled than men, to be reconceived as deliberate deviations.[187]

For a contemporary intellectual like Gail Jones, such a strategy is indubitably deliberate, the splitting of the narrative persona a means of representing a divided self and culture, as the stammering voice of the protagonist speaks for a white nation that represses a part of its history and its self.

Other manifestations of dissociation, 'splitting', or doubleness in the novel include changes of tense, the contrast of voice between highly articulate narrators and the stuttering child protagonist, the bouts of mental illness suffered by Stella, the estrangement between Perdita's parents, Nicholas's violence and, of course, the Second World War, which plays out as a looming, unstable backdrop to Perdita's childhood.

The longing to speak, and the inability to do so, are recurrent themes in Gail Jones's work.

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[186] Sigrid Weigel, 'Double Focus: On the History of Women's Writing', in *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. by Gisela Ecker (London: Women's Press, 1985), p. 68–72.

[187] Sigrid Weigel's argument is summarised here by Margaret R. Higonnet, 'Mapping the Text: Critical Metaphors', in *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 206.

> There are dreams of speaking […] but there are always forms of evasion, loss and silence that govern our relationships. So I wanted to set speech against those sorts of silences.[188]

As evasions and silences in our speaking to ourselves and to others may be seen as a microcosm or perhaps even a source of the erasures and omissions of a nation's history, so Perdita's story becomes the story of white Australia. *Sorry* is a compassionate and sober investigation of the emotional and psychological nuances of denial, and the complicated connections between cultures that arise in a post-colonial world. But its double nature also points to alternatives, to the rich possibilities of understanding and communication that arise when different cultures or sensibilities meet.

> There was an entire universe […] of the visible and the invisible, the unconcealed and the concealed, some fundamental hinge to all this hotch-potch, disorderly life, this swooning confusion. For Mary there was authority in signs Perdita had never before seen; there were pronouncements in tiny sounds and revelations in glimpses (60).

Far from being duplicitous or confusing, the fragmented double narrative of *Sorry* shimmers with a new kind of textual authority born of a painstaking scrutiny that views events from many angles with considered empathy.

[188] Gail Jones, in an interview by Lyn Gallacher on *The Book Show* (ABC Radio National, Australia, 22 February 2006).

Chapter Six: Imagining *The Wheel Pin*

> All writers must go from now to once upon a time; all must go from here to there; all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past. And all must commit acts of larceny, or else of reclamation, depending how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it's useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more—which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change.[189]

Introduction: On Not Knowing One's Place

The Wheel Pin features a number of journeys through time and place, all framed by the journey of the central character, Cat, and linked by the motif of the wheel pin. Cat returns to her home town after twenty years, but swiftly departs on the trail of Jack, a great uncle who ran away to the bush in his youth. Along the way, Cat discovers an artefact from Bronze Age Europe, the *Radnadel* or wheel pin, which eventually brings the key characters together to make a decision about its final resting-place.

The text may be read as a quest for a place to belong; as a meditation on migration, dislocation, and identity; and as an allegory about writing as a journey of discovery. It explores how one woman's story is both complicated and completed by the larger story of her family and its history, which is in turn shaped by the meeting of cultures. Weaving personal and historical strands together to make some sense of the present, this novel is motivated by 'the importance of reworking national histories in literature to take account of imperial subjectivities, lost ancestral histories, and complex hybrid identities'.[190] I chose fiction as my medium in an impulse possibly similar to that which drove my maternal grandmother, Elfrieda Foster. As I transcribed and edited her stories and reframed them in my novel, I felt that I was integrating her quest for understanding with my own—carrying on a tradition. Elfrieda was born in 1898, the daughter of a German missionary who worked in New Zealand and then in Australia. She played with Māori children as a

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[189] Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 178–179.

[190] Gay Lynch, Book Review of 'Ancestral Narratives: Irish Australian Identities in History and Fiction' (VDM Verlag Dr Mueller, 2008)', *Transnational Literature* (Adelaide: Flinders University, 2009), p. 3. http:/fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html Accessed 30 November 2009.

girl and worked with Aboriginal children as a young woman. Her father was narrowly religious in his beliefs, but Elfrieda had an irrepressible hunger for the new ideas which abounded in her youth. She married an Anglican, left her father's church, and referred to herself thereafter as the 'black sheep' of the family. She dabbled in music and mythology, read Yeats and tealeaves, and wrote stories at her dining room table on a little blue typewriter. A letter to Sir Walter Murdoch seeks his opinion on *Charlie*, the tragic tale of an Aboriginal man torn from his traditions.

> If you think that the story is not worth publishing, please candidly say so, as I highly value your opinion. So far, I've tried to have two children's stories published, but without success, perhaps I lack the ability to express myself. To get the urge to write out of my system, I wrote the enclosed. It's an experience I had as a teenager, which turned me into a complete agnostic—sad really, as my late Father was a clergyman.[191]

I wonder at the resignation, the curious apathy, in that 'sad really': it is as if she speaks of someone else's life. Her story tells of a young woman working in a mission home for Aboriginal children who is ordered by her superiors to punish a child by beating him with a cane. She is unable to complete the punishment and horrified at herself for having begun it.[192]

My grandmother repeatedly submitted her writing to academics and publishers, requesting critical feedback, querying the possibility of publication. For decades she worked alone, without editor or literary friend to guide her. Her work was never published.

There was another 'black sheep' in our family, an elder brother of my maternal grandfather, who went bush to work as a drover and never returned. He is the inspiration for my character Johann Weis/Jack Robinson. In the 1980s, I learned that my great uncle had married an Aboriginal woman who had borne him two children. I wondered about those children, now adults, and considered seeking them out. A decade later, a serendipitous phone call led to a meeting with a cousin of those relatives, who put me in touch with them. I learned that, as young children, my mother's cousins had been 'evacuated' by cattle truck to Alice Springs, along with other children from their region. They were sent to institutions in the southern states,

[191] Elfrieda Foster, unpublished letter to Sir Walter Murdoch, (Adelaide, 23 August, 1967).
[192] Later in the story, the protagonist meets the boy, now a young man, at a tennis party. Laughing, he tells her he has never blamed her for the punishment she inflicted. The fictional representation of Charlie's forgiveness relieves the narrator-protagonist (and by implication, the author and reader) of guilt for collusion with institutional injustice.

separated from one another, and never saw their mother again. In 1997, I travelled with them to their ancestral country in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The story of Merran's mother and uncle in *The Wheel Pin* is inspired by their stories and by those of other Stolen Generation people I have met, and my memories of that trip formed the basis for Cat's journey in *The Wheel Pin*.

Cat is a disturbing character whose struggle to escape the entrapment of family ties enmeshes her firmly in its net. The questing woman is by definition one who does not know or will not settle for her place—the role assigned to her by tradition and circumstance. That women must 'know their place' is a truism of an earlier era, yet the woman who seeks to create her own identity must still revisit her origins in the circular quest of 'reparenting' if she is to untie the knots that double bind her. Cat doesn't know her place either literally or figuratively. A woman approaching forty, she acts like a teenager: defiant and unpredictable. As a young woman she roamed the world on a perpetual working holiday. When she tries to settle down, she cannot, and eventually leaves her job and partner of seven years. Cat embodies the restless heroic spirit of her ancestors, but lacks her great-grandfather's missionary vocation, or her great-uncle's romantic self-assurance. Uncertain of her right to live in a country that was taken by force from the Indigenous inhabitants, she longs to belong somewhere. Cat does not know her place because she has none.

Nonunitary Narration

Fabula

The Wheel Pin contains four principal narratives set in two time frames: the stories of Cat and Lily take place in the fictive present, while those of their grandmother Freya and her brother Johann (Jack) occur in the fictive past.

Cat

After twenty years away, Cat returns to her hometown in South Australia for her grandmother's funeral. But reunion with her mother and her sister Lily reignites old conflicts, and when Cat finds an enigmatic letter from a long-lost uncle, Jack, she decides to go bush to find out what became of him. Her search leads to a story about a missing Bronze Age artefact, the wheel pin, and to a ruined mission on the edge of a desert. When Jack's trail runs cold and her car breaks down, Cat warily accepts a lift from Dingo, a visiting archaeologist. They drive to the small town of Barramundi near the Gulf of Carpentaria, where Cat meets Merran, an Aboriginal counsellor who

is searching for her mother's relatives. Evidence indicates that Jack lived in the region, but Cat's search is frustrated until she discovers the wheel pin in the local museum. She steals it and travels with Merran to Rufus River where an old man, Spider, shows them Jack's grave and sends them to the island home of an Aboriginal woman who acknowledges Merran as her great-niece. Emily tells the story of Jack's death and the removal of his children.

Lily

When Cat leaves without a word to anyone, Lily sets off to track her down. Along the way, she reads the stories left by their grandmother, Freya, and pieces together clues about Jack's story. In Barramundi, Lily discovers Cat has eluded her, and joins forces with Dingo. They follow Cat and Merran to the island, where both resolve their differences with Cat. The museum keeper arrives to claim back the wheel pin, but Dingo reveals that the artefact was stolen from an ancient gravesite in Germany, and that his goal is to return it to its country of origin. Everyone agrees to this plan.

Freya

Elfrieda Weis spent her early childhood in New Zealand and her teenage years at an outback mission in Australia. When the wheel pin, a treasured artefact from her father's collection, goes missing, an Aboriginal boy is blamed and Elfrieda is ordered to cane him. Anguished, she tries to obey, but stops after one stroke. Johann goes missing, after which the family moves to the city. Elfrieda marries and leaves her father's church. Later, she receives a letter from Johann (now Jack), and travels to the north coast to visit him. She agrees to be a guardian for Jack's children if necessary, but when he dies, the children are taken away, and she cannot trace them. She pours her guilt and regret into her stories, which she bequeaths to Lily, leaving Cat a hatbox of papers and a cryptic message: *Find the children.*

Jack

Upset by conditions at the mission, Johann steals the wheel pin from his father and runs away to the bush. After years of cattle work, Jack settles down beside a river in the Gulf of Carpentaria, leasing a salt pan with a friend. He marries Pearl, an Aboriginal woman from a local clan, and they have two children, Maisie and Jack Junior. The family lives across the river from Pearl's people, growing fruit and vegetables, and shipping salt to Barramundi. When a local policeman brutally beats an Aboriginal woman in his custody and leaves her to die, Jack writes to the local newspaper demanding an inquiry. He dies in 1941 in a shooting accident, after which his children are taken from their mother and placed in institutions.

Story: Sequence and Focalization

Decisions about story involve how to present the events, actors, and objects of the fabula: in what order, and from whose perspective. My challenge in writing *The Wheel Pin* has been to weave together the stories of characters from different historical periods while maintaining the forward impetus of the narrative. For six years I lived inside the question: *how can I write this story?* This question spawned further questions about voice and perspective, about ownership and authority.

Because the four stories I chose unfold in different times and are related in complex ways, shaping the novel was my biggest challenge. After writing everything down higgledy-piggledy in the first draft, I began to consider plot, sequence, and structure. I considered various strategies that included presenting a number of linked but separate stories, as do Drusilla Modjeska in *The Orchard* (1995) and Marion Halligan in *Valley of Grace* (2009); or alternating between two or more personal narrators each telling their own stories in chronological sequence, as Joanne Harris does with the three narrators of *The Lollipop Shoes* (2007).[193] Eventually, in order to unify rather than further fragment my material, I chose an extradiegetic narrative to frame intradiegetic stories from the fictive past, linked by embedded texts such as fictitious letters, stories, and journal entries, in the manner of A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990).[194] In this way, the hidden events in the lives of Freya and Jack are revealed through the discoveries made by Cat and Lily.

Narrative Text: Who Speaks?

The question of how to write a text leads to a related question, crucial to the understanding of textual authority and narrative voice. *Who is writing this text?* Decisions about narration invite reflection on the purpose of the writing, and the nature of the writer. Some writers claim the role of artisan, or tradesperson, while others claim the role of medium through which the writing flows from the unconscious or another source. Some say their characters write the novel, or at least attempt to hijack the writing process. Whether the writer surrenders to such wilful characters or grapples for control of the plot is another question, but even authoritarian writers who stamp out mutinous behaviour might admit that successful

[193] Drusilla Modjeska, *The Orchard* (Sydney: Picador, 1995); Marion Halligan, *Valley of Grace* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2009); Joanne Harris, *The Lollipop Shoes* (London: Doubleday, 2007).
[194] A. S. (Antonia Susan) Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990). I am indebted to Dr Robyn Cadwallader for suggesting *Possession* as a literary model. The strategy of using embedded texts in a frame narrative is explored in detail in the section on *Assemblage* in this chapter.

characters, like Pinocchio, *come to life*: they do not remain puppets, but are animated by unique characteristics and independent motives.

Margaret Atwood, in *Negotiating with the Dead*, argues that writers lead a double life and thus develop a double identity: one who lives a more-or-less normal, human life, and one who is the author. 'The authorial part—the part that is out there in the world, the only part that may survive death—is not flesh and blood, not a real human being.'[195] Yet the human being-who-is-a-writer is inextricably bound to this other, since it is impossible to decide which of them does the writing. They are mutually dependent, like Siamese twins joined, not by flesh, but by the act of writing.

Giving Voice to *The Wheel Pin*

The analysis of written texts is one way to understand narrative voice and textual authority. A different perspective, of equal value to the novelist-researcher, is offered by reflection on the creative process, summarised here in the style of a journal.

First Draft

In the beginning, I simply write down everything that comes, using 'free writing' and the writing practice method taught by Natalie Goldberg.[196] Sometimes, instead of writing, I draw, paint or make collages, which helps me find my way in to the world of the story and its characters.[197] Lily is an artist, a character who functions primarily on a visual-feeling axis. Although she thinks and speaks, words are not as important to her as what she can see and feel. So I make an artist's book for Lily, a sheaf of pages filled with the images, colours, textures and words-as-objects that make up her world. When it's done, I understand Lily well enough to write her. Both visual art practice and free writing are ways of breaking new ground, proceeding from safe to uncharted territory. Patricia Leavy likens visual art production to keeping a journal, noting how it 'opens up multiple meanings'.[198] Graeme Sullivan writes of 'the possibility of new knowledge that may be generated by moving [...] from the "unknown to the known" whereby imaginative leaps are made into what we don't

[195]Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 45.
[196] Natalie Goldberg, *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life* (New York: Bantam, 1990), pp. 1–5.
[197] See Appendix III.
[198] Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), p. 215.

know as this can lead to critical insights that can change what we do know'.[199] Making art helps me to see my project in different ways, inspiring leaps of insight and imagination.

My characters speak to me in the first person, each in his or her particular voice. They often wake me at night, and I grumble and turn over, but they are insistent, so I switch on my bedside light and scribble in my journal. My first attempt at structuring the novel follows these intrusive voices, giving alternate autodiegetic chapters to Cat and Lily. But early readers say they find this either distracting or confusing.

Second Draft

The book needs an integrating force: a structure that can bring together its disparate elements. So I prune historical material in order to focus on the contemporary narrative. I write from the perspective of an authorial narrator, with Cat and Lily as primary and secondary focalizers, their voices now firmly established.

But what of the authorial narrator? When and where and how much should it be allowed to stray from its 'limited third-person' perch on the shoulders of either Catherine or Lily? I dream of Virginia Woolf's daring, free-spirited narrative voice, darting in and out of characters' minds, soaring into the sky for a bird's eye view, and zooming back through time in the blink of an eye. A.S. Byatt and Hilary Mantel use the power of the authorial voice unapologetically. Here is what Byatt has to say on the matter.

> Fowles has said that the nineteenth century narrator was assuming the omniscience of a god. I think rather the opposite is the case—this kind of fictive narrator can creep closer to the feelings and the inner life of characters—as well as providing a Greek chorus—than any first-person mimicry. In *Possession* I used this kind of narrator three times in the historical narrative—always to tell what the historians and biographers of my fiction never discovered, always to heighten the reader's imaginative entry into the world of the text.[200]

Byatt distinguishes here between the particular kind of authorial or third-person narrator often described as 'omniscient', and the kind more commonly employed in

[199] Graeme Sullivan in Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (eds.), *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 48.
[200] A.S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 55–56. Byatt uses the 'Victorian' narrator in *Possession* (1990), pp. 273–288, 446–462, and 508–511.

contemporary fiction (including *Possession*), and known as 'limited third person'. Byatt writes of her early 'mistrust of the first person' voice which is now commonplace in fictional narratives.

> My instinct as a writer of fiction has been to explore and defend the unfashionable Victorian third-person narrator—who is not, as John Fowles claimed, playing at being God, but merely the writer, telling what can be told about the world of the fiction.[201]

However it is interesting to note that 'changes in the rhetoric of criticism' have led to self-confessed changes in Byatt's critical style from traditional scholarly impersonality to a more overt 'exploratory, and "authorial" first person' (102). Could this be the nonfiction equivalent of the narrative voice Lanser characterises as a convergence of personal and authorial narrators in Toni Morrison's novels?[202] Skilfully deployed by writers of the calibre of Morrison and Byatt, such a voice integrates two kinds of authority: the experiential, relational authority of the personal self and the overt, external authority of the observer/creator.

Third Draft

Although Cat is my principal protagonist, I want to give another contemporary viewpoint, that of her sister, Lily. This is not a solitary hero's journey, but a journey from dislocation to a glimmering understanding of what community and belonging might mean. I try a personal voice for Cat and an authorial voice for Lily, focalized mainly through her but sometimes roaming more freely. Narrative structures in which a personal narrator alternates with an authorial one are increasingly common, possibly as a result of the influence of cinema and television, where point of view is dictated by the camera and usually embraces multiple perspectives. Such alternations can work well in novels if the reader is given cues or predictable patterns that indicate at the outset whose perspective is current. Some examples are Marion Halligan's *The Point* (2003) and Lian Hearn's *Across the Nightingale Floor* (2002).[203]

Yet my interest in deconstructing unitary narrative voice goes beyond the simple use of multiple narrators. The ideas of feminist scholar Rachel Blau DuPlessis

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[201] Byatt (2002) p. 102. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[202] See Chapter Two of the present study.
[203] Marion Halligan, *The Point* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003); Lian Hearn, *Across the Nightingale Floor*, *Tales of the Otori* (Sydney: Hodder, 2002).

and social science researcher Leslie Bloom, as discussed earlier, influenced my thinking from the beginning.[204] The concept of non-unitary subjectivity arose in the 1980s as an alternative to the 'coherent, unified, univocal' self-representation of Western humanism.[205] Bloom argues that 'nonunitary self-representation subverts humanist and patriarchal modes of discourse and that the act of narrating a nonunitary self allows for greater self-knowledge'.[206] Freedom from the illusion of 'unified subjectivity', she claims, can lead to self reflection and to 'respect for the complexity of subjectivity and the validation of conflict as a source' of strength and authentic self-expression in 'an alternative feminist discourse' (93).

The possibilities of representing non-unitary subjectivity in literary form are intriguing. How fragmented, ambivalent or conflicted can the narrative voice be while still holding a reader's interest? The consciousness of my protagonist, Cat, is fragmented due to her gender, her childhood witnessing of her father's accident and conflicts in her inherited family and cultural values. I want to show her dawning comprehension of her privileged status and of the partial, contingent nature of her own perspective. I attempt to establish a rhythm and internal logic for Cat's inner journey using recurrent memories and motifs as a pathway for readers to follow.

Final Draft

After working with mentor Kelly Ana Morey, I expand and then drastically cut Gottlieb's story. Continuity is improved, characters' motives are challenged and enhanced, and narrative perspectives are altered once again. Now, Cat is the main focalizing character in an extradiegetic narrative containing embedded texts, while Lily is the personal narrator of interspersed chapters forming a second narrative that follows the first, filling in some of its gaps. When the sisters reunite, the perspective of each is represented, highlighting their differences and their need for each other, and mirroring the complementary diversity of the community in which they find themselves.

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[204] See Chapter One.
[205] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) p. 17.
[206] Leslie Rebecca Bloom, 'Stories of One's Own: Nonunitary Subjectivity in Narrative Representation', Qualitative Inquiry 2.2 (1996): pp. 176-197. Further references are given after quotations in the text. See also Chapter One of this study.

Textuality

Representing Cultural Identity

As a non-Indigenous Australian writer concerned about injustice yet not wanting to speak for cultural others, I have attempted to emulate Gail Jones's respectful, conscious stance. My principal protagonist is white, something she never thinks about until she journeys into unfamiliar territory. Although my characters are fictitious, the novel draws on people, places, and stories I have known. At first anxious about representing relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters, I talked to friends, and plucked up courage; everything can be edited. I noticed my oscillating emotions and identifications as I attempted to represent my protagonists' experiences of whiteness, and stuck with their viewpoints, tracing their learning as they encounter the trauma and resilience, generosity and humour of Aboriginal lives past and present, and as they hit the limits of their own understanding.

Imaginative Geographies and Histories

Writing this novel, like the historical, geographical, and archival explorations that inspire it, has been a journey of discovery. It has been a quest with no clear goal but to complete the journey, to go to a new place and to return home, empty-handed but with stories to tell.[207]

The quest of the two sisters, Cat and Lily, requires that they give up old ways of seeing and being in the world. They move through a landscape that is at first familiar and then strange, from the southern coastline, through the central Australia desert and the gateway of the Heartbreak Hotel, to the looking-glass-world of the tropical north, where everything is topsy-turvy: not just seasons, but cultural values and customs as well. They visit remote places: a ruined mission-site, a ghost-town-in-waiting, a run-down camp on a riverbank and a cyclone-ravaged island. Such settings have been textualised as uncivilised, wild and dangerous, or alternatively as romantic, exotic and idyllic. Deconstructing such representations shows these settings as places in their own right, with their own nature and centrality, contrasting,

[207] I am thinking here of Margaret Atwood's summary of Gilgamesh's journey: 'Gilgamesh was the first writer [...] He wants the secret of life and death, he goes through hell, he comes back, but he hasn't got immortality, all he's got is two stories—the one about his trip, and the other, extra one about the flood. So the only thing he really brings back with him is a couple of stories.' Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 176.

for example, Jack's romantic representation of his cultivated 'bush paradise' with Spider's easy acceptance of his home among trees, dust and goats, perceived by white visitors as 'rundown' and 'primitive'.

Can a text subvert 'master narratives' by mimicking them, or must it do something utterly new? There is no easy answer to this. Whatever strategies are chosen, the risk of reinforcing master narratives is always present, since new writing must respond to the old. Karamcheti suggests that, in post-colonial texts attempting to reclaim textual authority, there is always a struggle, a Bakhtinian dialogic engagement, between 'the reader, attempting to determine the text by imaginative geographies that marginalize the text, and the writer, attempting to counter those strategies and teach new ones.'[208]

The juxtaposition of disparate representations of the fictive past contrasts the rosy glow of the myth of otherness with the harsher light of lived dislocation, and highlights gaps of unknowing and places where master narratives are imperfectly joined. Cat comes to accept the world as it is: her Great Uncle Jack may not have been the renegade her family scorned but neither, perhaps, was he the hero she imagined. In the greater scheme of things, perhaps it does not matter. Cat's is just one voice, that of a stranger passing through. At the beginning of the novel she is isolated from history and community, seeing herself as the hero in her own private movie without realising the impact of her actions on the people around her. By the end, she is more aware of everything: the earth speaks to her, the waters, the stars, and finally, she can listen to people. Perhaps it's not possible for her to be a hero, not because she's female, but because the time for individual heroism is past. Cat needs her history, as she needs Lily, Dingo, Merran and others in her community: this is where she belongs.

Assemblage

The strategy of embedding secondary texts within the main narrative results in a multi-layering of narrative voices and perspectives, integrating stories and characters from different eras and linking them in ways beyond the merely chronological. A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) is structured by revelations in the fictive present of

[208] Indira Karamcheti, 'The Geographics of Marginality: Place and Textuality in Simone Schwarz-Bart and Anita Desai', in *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 144.

documents from the fictive past. These intradiegetic texts, some fragmentary, are sought, discussed, and fought over by the protagonists, as well as being literally embedded in the text. Similarly, in *The Wheel Pin*, the stories of characters from the past intrude in the lives of characters in the present via their artefacts.

In *Possession*, various notions of possession (by a mood, an infatuation, a passion, an obsession, or a spirit) form a thematic link between the contemporary and historical narratives, while the objects that link them are texts of various kinds. The frame narrative is a detective story in which academic researchers Roland and Maud search for clues about the nature of the relationship between their respective research subjects, two writers from the English Victorian era. Roland, Maud, and rival academics compete obsessively in a race to unearth archival material relating to the celebrated, respectably married poet Randolph Ash and the little-known author Christabel La Motte. The descendants of Ash and La Motte, who hold vital evidence, are also involved in the scramble, inviting the question 'Who owns the past?' The intradiegetic narrative concerns a secret liaison between Ash and La Motte, revealed incrementally in the documents unearthed by the researchers. Obsession becomes possession when the intradiegetic narrative refuses to be contained within its frame, and escapes to haunt the present: Roland finds himself attracted to Maud in an eerie echo of the romance between their subjects, his perceptions of her evoking Melusina, the mythological siren in a story by La Motte. Stories and fragments embedded in the text hint at developments in both relationships while evading the need for narrative conclusiveness. The reader never knows what 'really happened,' but is given only hints. In this way, the embedding of secondary texts and reported or retold stories in this narrative text confers a particular kind of textual authority which resides neither in the extradiegetic narrative nor in the embedded texts, but in the relationships between them, and in the speculations the reader is invited to make. Thus the reader is drawn into a Bakhtinian dialogue between the different texts.[209]

Similarly, in *The Wheel Pin*, embedded texts in the form of letters, stories, newspaper clippings, and descriptions of photographs link narratives of past and present. Key elements are two letters from Jack to his sister Freya, and a newspaper report about an inquiry into an alleged assault by a policeman on an Aboriginal woman. These are fictional texts modelled on historical documents, serving to

[209] See *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. ed. by Michael Holquist, *University of Texas Press Slavic Series* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), and Chapters One and Two of the present study.

motivate the protagonist in her search for ‘the truth’. Other embedded texts are stories written or retold by her grandmother, Freya.

The principal object linking past with present, and the various characters and narratives, is the wheel pin, a European Bronze Age artefact that has been repeatedly stolen, an inanimate object that refuses to be still. It belongs nowhere, at least within the boundaries of this fictive world, and to no-one. It is a magical object, rumoured to hold a curse, but its real magic is its transgressive power. Other objects which play a linking role in the text include the blue hatbox containing Freya’s documents and the Tarot cards, presented to Lily but appropriated by Cat.

The assemblage of embedded texts, objects, and fragmented memories in the context of Cat and Lily’s quest in *The Wheel Pin* allows narrative voices from past and present and from different cultures to be heard together, resulting in a mosaic-like hybrid textual authority appropriate to post-colonial fiction.

Textual Authority in *The Wheel Pin*

The Wheel Pin is an attempt to put theory into practice by assembling narrative voices with different authorities to narrate one family’s post-colonial history. I emphasise here the multilayered *process* of writing because it is this, like the enriching and thickening of a personal narrative in Michael White’s narrative approach to therapy or Leslie Bloom’s fieldwork with women, that gives new perspectives and experiential authority to a text.

The first draft of *The Wheel Pin* was meandering and unwieldy, with a chaotic multitude of voices. The second draft was univocal and *thin*: streamlined and carefully plotted, but lacking in depth and complexity. The third draft reintroduced complexity with Cat’s first person voice, Freya’s life narrative and the stories derived from it and the revision of Lily’s story. Like a narrative therapist, I delved deeper into the experiences of the characters to unearth the richness in their stories.

As my ideas on narrative strategies developed, I incorporated them into my novel in a bid to resist and disrupt received reading codes (both my own and those of potential readers) and offer alternative ways of thinking about family, home and history. The aim of the final draft was to achieve the kind of textual authority that results from setting different voices and stories into a frame that transparently shows the validity of each, accommodating differences and ambiguities.

Nonunitary narration allows stories set in different times and places to take their places in the larger narrative, making room for ambivalence, reversals and a gradual growth of awareness. The two distinct narrators, one personal and one authorial, give alternative perspectives on the values, beliefs and motivations of characters and offer different and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the events of the fabulae.

Textualising cultural values that might otherwise be hidden, and settings that might otherwise seem remote or insignificant, invites readers to look anew at their own perceptions and assumptions. The *assemblage* of embedded texts, objects and fragmented memories links past and present in the context of a contemporary quest, giving validity and unity to disparate narratives.

These strategies are designed to establish a polyphonic textual authority appropriate to post-colonial fiction, an authority accommodating to ambiguity, alternative interpretations and cultural differences. This novel, inspired by family stories, memories and friends both Indigenous and white, aims to provide readers with a diverting journey and a space to reflect on the meanings of ‘otherness’ and belonging.

Polyphonic Textual Authority in Post-colonial Novels

> What might it mean to take the fragment or the trace as a paradigm of knowledge and to assume that assemblage, not reconstitution, is our critical task? [210]

Traditional narrative perspectives, whether *authorial* ('third person') or *personal* ('first person'), tend to mimic and thus reinforce the hegemonic master narratives of colonialism. In the novels analysed here, the effects of post-colonial dislocation are reflected in narrative strategies which interrogate traditional assumptions about textual authority. The alternative narrative strategies of nonunitary narration, textuality and assemblage give authority to fragmented stories and multiple perspectives arising from dislocations of place, time and cultural identity.

Nonunitary Narration

The strategy of *nonunitary narration* challenges the paradigm of singular authority and offers an alternative to authorial and personal narrative modes in the inclusive project of post-colonial writing. Involving two or more narrative voices and a disjunction of time, perspective or person, it includes certain kinds of *communal voice*, but is not limited to narrators representing a collective. Nonunitary narration represents the multiple, fragmented and complex nature of consciousness, whether of one person, a community or a number of different individuals. A post-colonial attitude arguably implies the willingness to see things differently and to embrace new possibilities, therefore, in tracking textual authority in the novels studied here, it is vital to be alert to shifts in the narrative voice as well as to identify different kinds of narrators.

In *Butterfly Song* (2005), a personal narrator shares the telling of one story with an authorial narrator, but their stories are framed by a voice that shares qualities with both, an intermediate form that hints at a connection between the two voices and assumes an authority that is a blend of personal experience and a broader wisdom that might be called historical, cultural or spiritual. Such a voice is able to speak across time to children (and readers) of future generations. In *Bloom* (2003), a personal narrator acquires cultural authority and is thus able to shift almost

[210] Jones (2006), p. 13.

imperceptibly to authorial mode. The narrative appears seamless despite disjunctions in voice, time and place, as the personal narrator anticipates the intradiegetic stories whose protagonists, in turn, become focalizing characters. Textual authority is maintained through shifts in narrative mode because the personal narrator is established early in the text as being responsible for representing her family and cultural history. In *Sorry* (2007), a duet between personal and authorial narrators is established that both interrogates and enriches the narrative as it unfolds, providing a broad historical and cultural context as well as a moving personal story, and offering a double perspective on events as they unfold around a central vortex of ambiguity. In *The Wheel Pin*, personal and authorial narrators tell their stories alternately, interspersed with embedded texts from the fictive past in the form of letters, stories and documents, before uniting to offer a new and more complex perspective as the narrative concludes.

As these texts demonstrate, the strategy of nonunitary narration is more than a way of representing multiple or fragmented perspectives. Handled skilfully, different narrative voices can work together to produce new kinds of textual authority that combine qualities once considered mutually exclusive (such as personal and authorial) or embrace broader possibilities (such as cultural-historical and spiritual perspectives) than those envisaged prior to the meeting of cultures and the necessary invention of 'post-colonial' literature.

Textuality

Textuality is concerned with representing cultural identity and reclaiming imaginative geographies and histories by authorising alternative modes of representation, replacing a unified narrative with diverse perspectives, and inviting readers to work things out for themselves. *Butterfly Song* (2005) reinscribes the geography and history of Thursday Island, as well as the white institutions of law and health, from an Indigenous perspective. Family heirlooms, remembered songs, and cultural traditions take on new meanings in the life of the narrator-protagonist, empowering her to reclaim her family history and forge new ways of understanding ownership and texts. *Bloom* (2003) plays subversive games with cultural identity, refusing the neat labelling of the Victorian ethnographer and ripping Māori images free from their hegemonic binding. The landscape is retextualised, released from surveyors' lines and reanimated by a 'preposterous ghost': a history that refuses to

die. The past is not dead while its voices, images and effects live on. The struggle continues. *Sorry* (2007) investigates the vagaries of memory and offers new possibilities of perception and communication through its subtle undoing and reweaving of textual conventions. The physical landscape and the country of the past evoked by memory are retextualised as spaces that teem with multitudinous possibilities, including ones of discovery and connection, for those who are willing to look, listen and learn. By offering multiple perspectives and by textualising cultural values and landscapes that may be taken for granted in master narratives, *The Wheel Pin* invites readers to look anew at their assumptions and to make up their own minds about its characters and their histories and settings.

Since any textual representation can be interrogated and reinscribed, there is always potential for the resistance of dominant narratives: writers can textually reclaim their geographical, historical and cultural territories. One way of doing this, as Mieke Bal suggests, is to imaginatively return 'to the time in which the place was a different kind of space,' to inscribe there a previously unwritten history, linking the past to living memory in an act of resistance 'that undoes the killing of space as lived.'[211] The power of textual authority goes beyond the page because it has the ability to permanently alter the ways in which people think and behave.[212]

Assemblage

Assemblage, the construction of a text around elements that link disparate narratives and time periods, makes space for ambiguities, alternative perspectives, and the incomplete, provisional nature of memory and understanding. The linking elements, whether they are objects, texts, or memories, carry evidence of their origins and resonate with one another to provoke questions and generate new meanings.

In *Butterfly Song* (2005), the disappearance and re-emergence of the carved pearl butterfly places elements from the fictive past in a new context, creating a puzzle for characters in the fictive present to solve. The unanswered questions in Kit and Francesca's story engage protagonists and readers in a dialogue with the past. Tarena, the personal narrator and focalizing character, acts as a proxy for readers by asking the questions, finding the clues, and piecing together the puzzle that brings both narratives to their conclusion. In *Bloom* (2003), photographs, books and

[211] Bal (1997), pp. 147–148.
[212] For elaborations on this theme, see Taussig (1987) p. 134, and DuPlessis (1985), pp. 1–5.

fragmented memories function as the elements of assemblage, raising questions about the narrator's family history and identity and about her country's colonial past. Specific places in the landscape unlock forgotten memories and lost pieces of information, as does the act of communication or storytelling between the characters. Alternative recollections and differences of interpretation are represented, resulting not in conflict but in a fluid narrative where differences can coexist, much like Nanny Smack's continually-crocheted sky, as a changeable fabric of many possibilities. In *Sorry* (2007), objects (like the book *The Lives of the Saints*) and fragments of memory function as elements of assemblage, linking personal and authorial narratives. However, both perspectives are skewed and incomplete; even the authorial narrator is not omniscient, and cannot reveal crucial information about the central act of murder. The picture that emerges as the two narratives unfold in parallel is a Cubist painting rather than a Classical one, showing multiple reflections in a shattered mirror instead of the comforting illusion of a complete world.

In *The Wheel Pin*, embedded texts and an artefact from the past link various stories, but their meanings are ambiguous, raising as many questions as they answer. Thus, though these post-colonial texts have authority, it is rarely absolute or unquestioned. Instead it may be partial, contingent, and self-reflexive, referring to other paradigms, to what may be lost or unknown, and to its own limits. Appropriately, the space of *assemblage* is hybrid, authorising paradoxes and reversals, gaps and cultural differences.

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Do our histories belong to us, or do we belong to them? This thesis explores some of the ways in which narrative voice determines textual authority in post-colonial fictions about belonging, dislocation and reclamation. It argues that a shifting, polyphonic textual authority has emerged in these contemporary Australian and New Zealand novels in response to the complexity arising from post-colonial dislocations and cultural differences, and shows how this research has influenced my novel *The Wheel Pin*, which explores how our histories, spoken and unspoken, are contained within us, shaping our responses to the present.

The strategies of narrative voice discussed here give authority to post-colonial fiction by representing the fragmentation and ambiguity arising from

dislocation for descendants of both colonising and colonised peoples. In post-colonial fiction, authority no longer lives in the big white house, nor wears a uniform, nor speaks with a singular masculine voice. Authority is now mutable, polyphonic, diverse. Its voices may be harmonious or discordant, fragmented or fluid, changing as the narrative changes. Authority may reside in shared or unofficial histories, in stories, songs, pictures or heirlooms passed down through generations, as well as in written texts. Authority may be uncertain, may speak with a stutter, or have a talent for forgetting. Authority is now able to ask questions and to listen as well as speak. It may even be present in silence.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

Unless otherwise specified, dictionary definitions are from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* Sixth Edn *(version 3.0.2.1)* Oxford University Press, 2002, 2007

Assemblage
1. A bringing or coming together; the state of being collected together. The fitting or joining together of a number of components. The cutting and assemblage of the recordings under the composer's care.
2. A number of things grouped together; a collection, a cluster. A number of pieces fitted together; a work of art consisting of miscellaneous objects fastened together.

As used in the literary context of this study, *assemblage* is a narrative strategy in which retrieved objects or memory fragments are placed together in a new context so that they simultaneously bear evidence of their origins and resonate with one another and with the new context in a way that provokes questions and generates new meanings (McCrea, 2009).

Atextuality
(see **Textuality**, below) 'The legend of *atextuality* presumes that certain texts lack power to convince of the 'truth' of their representation' (Karamcheti, in Higonnet and Templeton, 127-8). Atextuality may be countered by moves to textualize place and so to give fresh local authority to the text (131).

Authorial (authorial narrator, authorial voice)
Term used by Susan Lanser to denote a narrative voice that is heterodiegetic, external to the narrative, and potentially self-referential. (See Chapter Two).

Autodiegetic Narrator
Narrative voice appearing to belong to a character self-consciously telling his or her own story (See Chapter Two).

Binary
A combination of two things; a pair; a duality.
Binarism 'divides the world into pairs of dominant and dominated opposites, male/female, European/native, and so on' (Karamcheti, in Higonnet and Templeton, 127-8). 'A world constructed in binary terms must be either reconstructed as multiple or more simply wrenched by revaluing, reversing, or replacing its binarisms.' (Karamcheti, in Higonnet and Templeton, 131).

Communal (communal narrator, communal voice)
Term used by Susan Lanser to denote a narrative voice or narrative voices that represent a collective. (See Chapter Two.)

Diegesis
A narrative, a report of action, a plot, now esp. in a cinema or television film.
Diegetic (adjective)

Extradiegetic Narrative
The first narrative or 'frame story.'

Intradiegetic Narrative
A secondary story that is embedded within the main story.

Heterodiegetic Narrator
A narrator that is outside the story being told.

Homodiegetic Narrator
A narrator that is also a character within the story he or she tells.

Dislocation
Displacement; removal from a proper (or former) position.
'A term for both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event. [This] may be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location. The term is used to describe the experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial 'Home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those who, as a result of colonialism, have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be 'reinvented' in language, in narrative and in myth. … Because the words to describe the new place adequately cannot be found … new terms must necessarily be invented. … Hence the disruptive and 'disorienting' experience of dislocation becomes a primary influence on the regenerative energies in a postcolonial culture.' (Ashcroft et al, 2007, p. 65.)

'Finally, dislocation in a different sense is also a feature of all invaded colonies where indigenous or original cultures are, if not annihilated, often literally dislocated, i.e. moved off what was their territory. At best, they are metaphorically dislocated, placed into a hierarchy that sets their culture aside and ignores its institutions and values in favour of the values and practices of the colonizing culture. Many postcolonial texts acknowledge the psychological and personal dislocations that result from this cultural denigration, and it is against this dislocating process that many modern decolonizing struggles are instituted.' (Ashcroft et al, 2007, p. 66.)

Focalization
A technical term in narratology, used by Mieke Bal to define 'the relation between 'who perceives' and what is perceived, [which] 'colours' the story with subjectivity' (Bal, 8). The focalizing character, or **focalizer**, is the one that holds the point of view at any given time in a story, the one whose perspective the reader shares. A focalizer for a story may also be the narrator of the text, but this is not invariably so. Therefore it is useful to distinguish between these two functions, 'on the one hand, the vision through which the elements [of a story] are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision' (Bal, 143). In simple terms, the distinction is between the one who sees (the focalizer), and the one who speaks (the narrator) (Bal, 8, 19, 142-161).

Focalizers may be 'character bound' (CF), where the point of view is limited to that of a character in the story, or 'external' (EF), where the point of view has the potential to be more wide-ranging. Focalization can, however, shift between characters and between character-bound and external modalities.

Hybrid
A thing derived from heterogeneous sources or composed of incongruous elements.

Hybridity
The production of new forms arising from the meeting of cultures during and after colonisation. Originally used in horticulture to mean the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third species.

Bakhtin uses the term *hybrid* specifically in relation to novelistic discourse to mean the intentional, ironic play between different voices or different languages within an utterance (301–331, 429).

Hybridity is an inherently ambivalent term, with implications of both breaking and joining (Young, 26). Its use is controversial because of historical associations with racist, pseudo-scientific classificatory systems. Young argues that this association cannot be erased (26–28).

Homi K. Bhabha expands Bakhtin's notion of the linguistic potential of hybridity to undo authoritative discourse to include cultural utterances of any kind (47—56). *For a discussion of this term, see Chapter One*

Imaginative geography is a term originally used by Edward Said with reference to the appropriation of the geographical identity of a place by the dominant literary discourse of colonialism from those who were there first (12).

Marginal
2 Pertaining to an edge, border, or boundary; situated at or affecting the extreme edge of an area, body, etc.; not central.
3 Of an individual or group: partly belonging to two differing societies or cultures but not fully integrated into either. d. Of minor importance, small, having little effect.

Marginality
'Being on the margin, marginal. The perception and description of experience as 'marginal' is a consequence of the binaristic structure of various kinds of dominant discourses, such as patriarchy, imperialism and ethno-centrism, which imply that certain forms of experience are peripheral.'
'[R]esistance can become a process of replacing the centre rather than deconstructing the binary structure of centre and margin, which is a primary feature of post-colonial discourse.'
'[D]espite its ubiquity as a term to indicate various forms of exclusion and oppression, the use of the term always involves the risk that it endorses the structure that established the marginality of certain groups in the first place.' (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 121)

Narrator
The 'agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text' (Mieke Bal).

Non-unitary subjectivity
'Claiming the existence of an individual essence in Western humanist ideology denies the possibilities of changes in subjectivity over time; masks the critical roles that language, social interactions, and pivotal experiences play in the production of subjectivity; and ignores the multiple subject positions people occupy, which influence the formation of subjectivity. Because of these limits in concepts of subjectivity, postmodern feminists embrace the idea that an understanding of nonunitary subjectivity in women's lives is critical to feminist research and

epistemology.' From Bloom, (1998) p.3.

Personal (personal narrator, personal voice)
Term used by Susan Lanser to denote a narrative voice that is *autodiegetic*, or appears to belong to a character self-consciously telling his or her own story (see Chapter Two.)

Post-colonialism/Postcolonialism
'Post-colonialism (or often Postcolonialism) deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies.' (Ashcroft et al, 2007, p. 168)
The meanings and use of this and related terms are the subject of dispute. See Ashcroft et al (2007), pp. 168–178; Heiss (2003), pp. 43–46.

Stasis
2 Inactivity; stagnation; a state of equilibrium.

Stasis is defined in a special sense by Indira Karamcheti as a' received reading code' which 'construes both the exotic and woman as signs connoting stillness, timelessness, lack of change.' (in Higonnet and Templeton, 127–8). To dispel this myth, stasis 'must be transformed into movement or somehow dynamized; it must acquire a different value.' (131).

Synecdoche
A figure of speech in which a more inclusive term is used for a less inclusive one or vice versa, as a whole for a part or a part for a whole.

Textuality
The nature or quality of a text or discourse; the identifying quality of a text. Example (SOED) *Times Literary Supplement 'Kenner's lead article…views Joyce…as a ceaseless experimenter with textuality itself.'*

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak uses the term in relation to 'the worlding of a world on a supposedly uninscribed territory', i.e. making a place and its history 'real' by making it into art (1).

Appendix II: Extracts from Two Stories by Freya Foster

Extract from *Mysterious Mount*

Sandra was up early to watch the sun rise over the Mount, always a glorious sight. She lay quietly in the grass, watching the fleecy clouds, breathlessly waiting for the soaring of the larks—as if at a signal, they all left the ground and rose skyward, trilling all the way, gradually disappearing until they were only specks in the deep blue sky.

Jane joined her, saying, 'Come on in, Dad wants to read a sermon, and will be cross if we do not hurry.'

Rebelliously, Sandra thought she would rather pray out here; but obediently she went indoors. If only she could fly like the lark, she would feel free—free.
Dad read the Bible version of the creation, and explained how God, because they disobeyed Him, drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and cursed the ground, saying, *In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.*

Sandra looked at Dad, appalled, remarking 'But Daddy, when we are naughty you punish, and then forgive us, couldn't God do that? I think he must be a wicked God.'

'How dare you talk of God like that!' Angrily, Dad shook her and smacked her. She tore herself away, crying 'He is not a good God, I hate him, I do!'

Dad fumed 'I could kill her.'

Mother put her hand on his shoulder, gently reprimanding, saying 'That, my dear, would be a most un-Christian act.'

Dad firmly believed in not sparing the rod. When annoyed with them, he would line them up and make them touch their toes. In fact, Sandra thought that at times he got a certain amount of satisfaction in caning them, and after the Sunday episode, she instinctively felt that Dad gave her an extra cut with the cane.

Extract from *Charlie*

With a wilderness to cross or a mountain to climb;
The wild road, my own road, it calls me all the time. —Sir Walter Murdoch

It was up North, at a home for native children, that I first met Charlie, then just twelve years old. I had been offered a job on the staff, as temporary supervisor, and was fascinated with the children, with their complete knowledge of the flora and fauna of Australia. Just by looking at the ground—the smallest line—told them what had crawled across the track.

Among them, Charlie stood out, brooding and dreamy-eyed, always nostalgic for the bush. He dreamed of emulating his forbears, and striding naked through the bush, a dingo pup at his heels, hunting the elusive native creatures, but only snaring enough for immediate needs, as they were taught.

Then he would swagger back to the camp, a small dilly bag clutched in his hand, filled with witchetty grubs—a delicacy—a few lizards, and an Opossum on a stick over his shoulder, to be greeted by crowds of laughing, jabbering piccaninnies, and snuffling dogs. Disdainfully, he would ignore the lubras' shouts of approval.

*****

For I was born to wander, and since I was a boy
There never was but one road that I could tread with joy —Sir WaIter Murdoch.

Often of a late afternoon, the boys would beg: 'Please, will you take us for a walk?' Off we would go, always at a fast pace, among the flowering Ti-trees and thick scrub, stopping occasionally for them to explain their method of tracking, and native names for the plants.

The ancient races' mythology fascinated them. Always they begged for stories to compare with their dreamtime tales. Again and again they wanted to hear: 'How the ancient Egyptians drew the world to resemble a bowl, ringed with high mountains, with Egypt at the centre—the sun journeyed across the rim in a boat not unlike those that still traverse the Nile.' The word 'traverse' had to be explained to them, at which they sagely nodded their heads, adding 'Teacher told us about the Nile.'

They demanded more. 'Well, they also believed that in a dark sky from a network of cables hung the twinkling stars. Every four weeks a sow swallowed the moon piece by piece, after which it was reborn.'

‘Oh,’ said Charlie, ‘that's like some of our dream-time.’

Coal-black little Freddie hopped around excitedly, ‘Tell us about the Shans?’

‘Well, the Shans of Burma believed that the white Ants brought up the solid earth from a vast depth.’

‘And what about that bit about New Zealand?’ Charlie asked.

‘Oh, Charlie, you are never satisfied! The Māoris believed that Maui the demigod pulled the Islands up from the bottom of the ocean.’

I forestalled their queries on the planets and constellations, a subject that fascinated and gripped their imagination; they could not hear enough. His big eyes shining, Charlie would prompt me to divulge the little knowledge that I had of astronomy. Quoting a few lines of Longfellow, ‘The Occultation of Orion,’ they were soon word perfect, and if there had been an audience, they would have been astounded to hear the bush resounding with:

‘The kindling constellation shone,
Begirt with many a blazing star
stood the great giant Algabar
Orion, the hunter of the beast.’

The boys nearly went mad with joy, shouting: ‘Orion, why he is a hunter like us!’ Laughing, they puffed out their chests, jabbering away in their tribal language. They tried to trace the various constellations, and when they succeeded in identifying Orion’s belt, they went crazy with glee, hitching their belts and shrieking with laughter.

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Another incident concerned Charlie, of which I was not so proud. I was only nineteen at the time, but heaven knows that was no excuse. The big, rambling children’s home had separate wings for boys and girls. A promiscuous, full-blooded native girl, of the same age as Charlie, would whenever possible follow him around the playground. To Matron’s embarrassment, one day the girl complained that Charlie had sinned with her.

A request came to me, to report to the Matron's office immediately. With a disparaging look, she eyed me up and down, remarking: ‘What is this I hear? It's not for you to teach the boys heathen mythology. In future keep to the stories of the Bible—that is all they need to know.’ She rubbed her head, sniffed, and said: ‘As I have a bad migraine, you will handle this nauseous affair.’ After some soul searching, I confronted Charlie, who hotly denied the charge. The girl repeated the

accusation, her manner sly and furtive. Again I faced Charlie: ‘Why should she accuse you?’ He shook his head, and just stared at me.

In spite of Matron’s migraine, I felt that we should discuss this matter a bit further. We argued for a while, I maintaining that Charlie was being victimised for not paying the girl more attention.

Matron regarded me coldly, and became quite hostile. ‘We cannot overlook this, and must maintain strict discipline.’ When I continued to protest, she stood up and brusquely commanded that I cane Charlie. ‘That is an order.’

Uneasily and with trepidation, I told Charlie that I had to cane him. For a while, he stood motionless, gazing out of the window; looking so forlorn, that my heart ached for him. Then he shrugged, turned, and stooped for the caning.

In a flurry I gave him two cuts, at which he suddenly straightened with eyes ablaze. Involuntarily, I stepped back. I must have looked scared as he whispered: ‘I won't hurt you!’

Without thinking, I replied; ‘I am not scared of you Charlie.’

An ambiguous look on his face, he shrugged and quickly left the room.

Appendix III: Visual Art and Photographs

The associated DVD or digital file contains a Powerpoint presentation of visual images pertaining to this thesis, including scans of visual art created as part of the research and writing process; and photographs, journal entries and artwork relating to Taranaki province, New Zealand and the Gulf country in the Northern Territory of Australia, both of which provided inspiration for imaginative geographies in *The Wheel Pin*.

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