‘The Nightwatchers’ a novel

and

‘Breaking English’ an exegesis on ‘The Nightwatchers’

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ABSTRACT

The creative work 'The Nightwatchers' is a novel with gothic undertones, written for a young adult audience. Twelve-year-old Mattie Russo and her best friend Harry are the 'nightwatchers', who entertain themselves by watching the comings and goings of the residents of their apartment block. When five-year-old Sammy goes missing, they play detective, discovering his corpse by the local river. Mattie and Harry realise the murderer is someone from the apartments who's been watching where the local children play; this puts them in danger. Mattie cannot turn to her illiterate Italian grandmother (Nonna), or her depressed father for help; nor can Harry turn to his drunken, violent parents. When another boy disappears, Mattie and Harry return to the river in search of him, terrified that their silence has cost the boy his life.

The plot of the novel is a device to engage the young adult reader; the novel is most importantly a 'multicultural' work, drawing attention to the need for cross-cultural communication in Australia. The relationship between Mattie and her Italian migrant grandmother is crucial to the novel. Their struggles to communicate (Nonna's broken English and Mattie's inability to speak Italian) mean they must each 'culturally negotiate' two cultures.

Although the contemporary relevance of the concept of multiculturalism has been contested, I use the arguments of Wenche Ommundsen to support my claim that recognition of cultural difference and representation of minority groups is still important to Australian society and literature. My exegesis, 'Breaking English', analyses contemporary sites of 'cultural negotiation', including my own experiences of negotiation, both as a 'writer' and a supporter of 'multiculturalism'. I examine multiculturalism in a social and political context, in relation to contemporary literature and to my own novel. I compare my novel to Melina

Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi* and other multicultural young adult narratives. Finally, I consider the process of writing a novel with my illiterate grandmother Esterina as a muse.

DECLARATION

I, Melanie Kinsman, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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BREAKING ENGLISH

Introduction

'The Nightwatchers' was written when I was twenty five years old, and it began as a creative exercise exploring the idea of 'voice' in fiction. It was inspired by Ania Walwicz's 'No Speak', a short story narrated from the first person perspective of a girl who speaks broken English. Written entirely in dialogue, the story begins with a babble of broken words: 'i no speak sorry i this where is john street please a ticket and a sixpence please i no speak where is john street is where this is book this is school this is teacher this mary has a house i no speak sorry'(1982, p.34).

Walwicz's prose poem is complex, transgressive and open to wide interpretation. While reading this piece I thought of my grandmother Esterina catching a bus, and was able to relate to the story immediately. Catching public transport, a simple act for most Australians, is a difficult task for migrants with English as a second language. It requires negotiating a foreign culture and journeying across unfamiliar territory, while being unsure of how to get to one's destination. In Walwicz's story, the difficulty of this seems to go unnoticed. The repetition of 'No Speak' suggests that the character's attempt to speak English amounts to nothing, because it falls on deaf ears.

Walwicz's character has a voice that challenges conventional forms of English; the dialogue is a parody that uses broken English for comic effect. Like poetry and music, 'No Speak' is a play of words, with its own rhythms and meanings, and was a revelation to my twenty five year old self: I had always considered broken English to be 'bad' English, grammatically incorrect, with no place in literature. 'No Speak' challenged my understanding of English, and I saw the creative possibilities of broken English rather than its limitations.

What struck me about the character's voice was not only its use of language but its sense of familiarity. When I read the piece aloud, I read it in my grandmother's voice. It was a voice I have been listening to my whole life, but had never seen on paper.

Inspired by this story and my grandmother Esterina's speech, I set myself the challenge of creating a fictional character who spoke broken English. Like Walwicz, I wanted to represent the illiterate in literature. Creating a voice from dialogue in broken English seemed like a wildly transgressive, postmodern act: creative writing would allow me to explore notions of 'voice' while avoiding the limitations and expectations of literary forms such as history and memoir.

However, I also felt that whatever voice I created would serve the same purpose as the migrant in Walwicz's story. The message of 'No Speak' and that of 'The Nightwatchers' are the same: all migrant voices need an audience willing to listen. My intention was to give unheard migrants a public forum. I wanted to function as a 'multicultural' writer. However, my multicultural role seemed to be political and social (representing the voiceless) while the other was creative, imaginative and artistic, the 'writer' role. It seemed that my roles as a fiction writer and as a multicultural messenger were at odds.

Now, at thirty two years old, I reflect differently on my journey of opposing discourses. This exegesis is not, as writer Stephen Muecke suggests, a 'fictocritical journey where the writer reveals what is at stake for him or her as they take the reader gently but firmly on a journey whose signposts sometimes express feelings, sometimes ways of knowing' (2008, p.16). Rather, it is a reflection of a previous self, an interpretation of past events, a looking back.

This exegesis focuses upon my roles as a 'writer' and a supporter of 'multiculturalism'. My quest to reconcile these roles, to see them as complimentary and possible, can be seen in my theme of 'cultural negotiation'. I am aware that much of my audience (children and young

adults) may not identify the novel as multicultural. ‘The Nightwatchers’ is not simply ‘multicultural literature’: it is also a young adult murder mystery set in a gothic atmosphere. As children’s literature theorist Professor John Stephens notes, ‘multiculturalism can be advocated by harnessing the form of a popular genre’ (1996, p.16). The crime, young adult and gothic elements of the novel are conventions of genre which I used to shape the novel’s form rather than convey its message. The murder mystery element was developed in order engage the reader and create a sense of intrigue. Written in the present tense from a child’s first person perspective, the novel focuses on the children’s immediate experiences, and relies on action and dialogue rather than reflection upon past events. As a young adult author, engaging the reader was my greatest concern. As author Steven King writes:

> I think novelists come in two types…those who are bound for the more literary or ‘serious’ side of the job examine every possible subject in light of the question: *What would writing this story mean to me?* Those whose destiny…is to include the writing of popular novels are apt to ask a very different one: *What would writing this kind of story mean to others?* The ‘serious’ novelist is looking for answers and keys to the self; the ‘popular’ novelist is looking for an audience. (2000, p.xxii)

This exegesis focuses on what the story means to me. The first chapter of this exegesis, ‘Silence and Noise: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and the Need for Multicultural Fiction’ places my work in a political and literary context. Writers who are considered ‘multicultural’ are subjected to what novelist Brian Castro describes as the ‘immense public noise’ which they must inevitably hear if their work is published in Australia (1999, p.85). I discuss how I negotiated this noise, how I developed my understanding of multiculturalism as ‘cultural negotiation’ and how this informed my novel. Using the arguments of Professor Wenche

Ommundsen, an internationally renowned theorist on multiculturalism, I argue that multiculturalism, 'the m-word', remains necessary because Australia is not a postmulticultural nation (1994-1995, p.13). Although 'the m-word' is controversial, it reveals a need for a discussion about the ways in which different cultures interact within Australia, and how cultural difference in everyday life needs to be recognised. I examine multiculturalism in a social and personal context, and consequently how I, as a multicultural writer, produced a work of fiction in that context. I argue that national recognition of multiculturalism is still necessary. I discuss the problems of associating 'The Nightwatchers' with Australian nationalism, and identify how these national narratives influence contemporary politics and media. Finally, I suggest what 'The Nightwatchers' offers the contemporary discourse on multiculturalism which broader social and political debates about nationalism do not.

The second chapter, 'Breaking Boundaries: Reconceptualising Multicultural Narratives in Young Adult Fiction', focuses on how 'The Nightwatchers' uses cultural negotiation as a multicultural narrative. I narrow my focus from general literary fiction to young adult fiction. Using Melina Marchetta's 1992 novel *Looking for Alibrandi* as a comparison, I discuss the need for multicultural fiction which moves beyond stereotypical 'identity' or 'migrant in a foreign land' narratives. I argue that while many of *Alibrandi's* multicultural messages remain necessary, the plot has become outdated. 'The Nightwatchers' challenges the conventional understanding of multicultural novels (young adult in particular) as multicultural *bildungsromans* (Stephens, 1996, p.2) in which the narratives revolve around the solution to crises of third-generation personal identity. I explore how 'The Nightwatchers' narrative of cultural negotiation developed, and why the novel is essentially multicultural despite its adherence to the genre conventions of young adult and detective novels.

The third chapter, ‘Strangers in a Strange Land: Writing and Representing Migrants in Multicultural Fiction’, documents the process of ‘culturally negotiating’ my grandmother Esterina’s broken English in order to create the fictional ‘voice’ of the character Nonna. I discuss how other writers have represented broken English in fiction, and the challenges of representing migrants in contemporary fiction. I expand upon my negotiations of the role of multicultural author, using questions of authorial identity and authenticity and the issue of appropriation to address the conflicting discourses of multiculturalism and writing. My writing process is explored through a changing lens. My representation of a migrant is dissected, analysed and contested, and the confines of biographical truth and the freedom of fiction are compared.

SILENCE AND NOISE: NATIONALISM, MULTICULTURALISM, AND THE NEED FOR MULTICULTURAL FICTION

> Books dealing specifically with multicultural issues examine the effects of migration, resettlement, and cultural negotiation on individuals and their immediate environment; they also create imaginary realms nurtured by a diverse cultural repertoire.
> (Ommundsen & Dudek 2007, p.3-4)

When I was six, my grandmother Esterina took me to a supermarket. I followed her reluctantly, wondering why I had to go with her. My grandparents' farm was an idyllic, childhood garden of Eden, where I could chase chickens and roam through strawberry fields. I wasn't interested in the world beyond the farm's borders.

As a child I had almost no sense of Australian nationalism. I thought everybody who lived in this country was Italian, because the local school I went to was full of Italian kids like me. Although my father is Anglo-Celtic, my grandparents' farm was the family business and the place where I spent most of my time.

The farm was bought in 1951, when Magill was considered a backwater. It remained a farm into the late 1980s, the last migrant estate in the area. As I grew up, suburban Australia gradually advanced upon this Italian Eden, eventually surrounding my childhood heartland. I barely noticed. It wasn't until the first time I followed Esterina into the supermarket that I realised my grandparents were from a minority, and that world I knew was a small part of a large, multicultural nation.

In the supermarket, Esterina went through the aisles, shelf by shelf, instructing me to look at cans and boxes and packets and tubes.

'Tell me what this say,' she asked.

'You know what it is,' I answered. 'It's pasta. Macaroni.'

'Does it have egg in it?'

'I don't know!'

'You read me the box. You tell me. I no read.'

'If you can't read, ask someone here,' I said.

'Mele, you no understand.'

'Just ask them in English,' I insisted.

'No, you no understand. When I talk English, the *Australiani*, they no hear nothing.'

This moment has always been one of my most important childhood memories: it is the moment I began the process of what Wenche Ommundsen and English literature theorist Debra Dudek define as 'cultural negotiation on individuals and their immediate environment' (2007, p.3). It was the first time I realised that in the supermarket, a place which was part of the 'Australian nation', Esterina was essentially invisible; her accent meant that she was ignored, unheard and unseen. Whenever she asked a question in English, the person she asked would look at me, waiting for a translation.

Esterina had given up trying to speak. I watched people ignore her, realising that although she was speaking English, it didn't matter. I became Esterina's reader, and even more importantly, her voice, speaking and translating for what linguist Russell West-Pavlov calls the 'monolingual ears' of the Australian nation (2007, p.40).

This experience is the seed from which 'The Nightwatchers' grew. The novel is about an elderly migrant woman and her granddaughter trying to communicate in contemporary Australia. Nonna's broken English and Mattie's broken Italian mean that they must negotiate two languages to communicate, which is often difficult for them. Sometimes Mattie and Nonna can only communicate through body language, or broken English. At other times, no

words are needed and they find comfort in each other's presence. However, when Nonna has a stroke and her broken English is forgotten, a crisis ensues and their complete failure to communicate causes Mattie great despair.

This need for communication is a metaphor for the need for a national, ongoing dialogue about cross-cultural communication in Australian society, and how minority groups require representation in a nation which gives them little public attention. Writing 'The Nightwatchers' was a political act, a venting of my frustrations over failures to communicate.

Brian Castro describes the role of the multicultural writer as a struggle with 'an immense public noise' (1999, p. 85) about issues such as nationalism, identity, immigration and multiculturalism. My own struggles with this noise are chronicled in this chapter and I discuss the difficulties in distinguishing the boundaries between my personal experiences, my social observations and political and national debates about Australian nation, which formed the fictional spaces of 'The Nightwatchers'.

'The Nightwatchers' is based on my personal understanding of social and political multiculturalism. Rather than writing about migrant displacement (longing for the homeland) or identity politics (the pre- and post-migration self), my multicultural narrative is built upon 'cultural negotiation', an act which refers directly to the interaction of cultures within Australia. This narrative engages with the public discourse on multiculturalism and thus it was inevitable that I would have to deal with the pressure of negotiating the public 'noise'. The setting of the novel may be imaginary, but it is a depiction specific to an Australian context. As writer Zeny Giles has noted:

> What has always interested me in my writing has been the interaction of the Greek culture with the Anglo-Saxon culture, and if I've achieved anything in my writing, it's in that area, exploring the interaction between my Greek relatives and my Australian

> friends…in terms of my literary life, it's been a combination of the two. I'm not particularly interested in exploring, say, life in Greece. (cited in Nickas 1992, p. 245)

Many theorists commenting on the idea of multiculturalism distinguish between 'everyday multiculturalism' and 'political or state multiculturalism' (Dudek & Ommundsen 2007, p. 3; Gunew 2004, p.16-17; Stratton 1998, p. 206). 'The Nightwatchers' focuses on the everyday experiences of cultural negotiation for the characters Nonna, Mattie and Harry; it is about the intersections between cultures as a lived experience. Personal and national notions of multiculturalism, narratives of nation and the political and social circumstances in which they are produced, are central to my novel because it focuses on the idea of cultural relations in the Australian nation. Multiculturalism (although it has many contested forms) ultimately deals with migrants, who, once arriving on Australian shores, must deal with the notion of belonging to the Australian community.

Australian Imagined Community

> 'We decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come'. (Former Prime Minister John Howard quoted in Marr & Wilkinson 2003, p.277)

There is little doubt that Australia is, at least demographically, a diverse, multicultural society. When my husband and I take our son to the local playground, I see a cross-section of Australia's population in microcosm: Sudanese teenagers, post-World War Two European migrants with their grandchildren, and children whose parents are from different cultures, like my son. However, if one were to ask 'who in this playground is Australian?' the majority of respondents would identify my Anglo-Celtic husband and my blond haired son. Although I identify as Anglo-Celtic, my olive skin and dark hair and eyes suggest that I am an 'other'.

Australian national identity (which I consider to be a very limited representation of 'Anglo-Celtics') imposes limits on the notion of belonging to Australia.

Australia's national imaginary is something I regard as a divisive social construct; while it is not necessarily 'real', it can be interpreted in a postmodern sense as symbolic of representation. As Morrissey *et al.* suggest, 'nationalism is an ideology of social unity, an "imagined community" as Benedict Arnold calls it, which describes a so-called "people" who live within the boundaries of a nation-state' (1992, p.103). Rather than define a version of Australian national identity in detail, I regard it as 'an ethnocentric mythic imaginary' (Hartley & Green 2006, p.349) that excludes many ethnic groups who live within the nation.

The position of Aboriginal cultures is not discussed in this exegesis, because the relationship between migrants (as new members of the nation) and Aboriginal groups (as the first members of nation) is contested and debated. However, as Dudek states, 'multiculturalism was not created to acknowledge first nations within nation-state borders' (2006, p.2). In this sense, my discussion of multiculturalism centres around migrants who are not classified as 'Anglo-Celtic'.

Professor Jon Stratton, a cultural studies theorist, argues that it was former Prime Minister John Howard who popularised the idea of a central, dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian national identity in 1998, and identified multiculturalism as a threat to this core culture and its sense of nationhood (pp.105-106). This limited sense of Australian culture creates a narrative of 'us' and 'them' which positions migrants as invaders. As David Marr and Marianne Wilkinson, authors of *Dark Victory*, note:

> Australia has never seen itself as a haven for people fleeing persecution and poverty as Britain or America have. At the far end of the earth, Australia set out to build a new, white nation. The fear of being swamped by Chinese helped draw the colonies

> together into a federation and this new Australia became the pioneer of immigration restrictions. They were always popular. The attitude to the Chinese in the 1880s and the Afghans in the 1990s was much the same: do what it takes to keep them out. No questions asked. Most Australians have never really wanted to know what is done to protect the nation from its great fear: invasion by migration. (2003, pp.34-35)

Bob Hodge and John O'Carroll, authors of *Borderwork in Multicultural Australia*, call the perception of Australia as an island with fixed borders 'fortress Australia' (2006, p.1). These borders are '"arbitrary dividing lines" which function on a social, cultural and psychic level. As such they are always metaphors and part of the discursive materiality of power relations' (Brah quoted in Hussain 2004, p.104).

Thus, our national imaginary is represented as an island inhabited by legitimate Anglo-Celts who need protection from invaders. This border must be maintained and patrolled, something which is reflected in Australian media, in particular, the highly popular reality television show 'Border Security: Australia's Front Line' (Seven network, 2011). 'Migrants as invaders' is a powerful narrative which has real consequences for those who land upon Australian shores.

On the 15th of December, 2010, a boat full of refugees smashed against the rocks of Christmas Island, and while I watched the boat splinter and people spew into the water, the noise of the media inevitably followed: why did the Australian Navy let 'them' get that far? If they're not citizens, are they the responsibility of the Australian Government? Who are they, and do they have a right to cross Australia's borders? The term 'illegal immigrant' now has a constant presence in the media.

'The Nightwatchers' is not a novel about newly arrived refugees, but the 'invasion by migration' narrative is not limited to newly arrived migrants. It is a narrative which suggests

that many migrants, such as my grandmother Esterina, do not belong here. The notion of not belonging to Australia continues to haunt the children of migrants who have been born and raised in Australia, something Brian Castro notes in his essay ‘Memoirs of a Displaced Person’ (1999, p.49).

The events of September 11, 2001 had a considerable effect upon my family. My brothers, who have olive skin, black hair, black beards and racially ambiguous facial features, found themselves suddenly classified as ‘not white’. My features, more typically Italian, are now considered whiter than theirs. Since September 11, my brothers have often been detained and questioned at Australian airports.

The Cronulla Riot of 2003 was yet another very public reminder that many who live here are considered to not belong. Cronulla Beach has been identified as a white, Anglo-Celtic symbol of Australian nationalism, particularly by ‘The Australian’ newspaper (Hartley & Green 2006, p. 351). The riot, which was initially caused by media attention to an altercation between ‘Anglo’ lifesavers and a ‘Lebanese’ group was ‘all about identity—a fight about different ways of being Australian…what was at stake in the confrontation was culture—the use of the beach and the right way to “be” Australian’ (Hartley & Green 2006, pp.351-352).

In *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis,* Stratton deals directly with the ‘problem’ of belonging to Australia, by using the legal terms ‘*ius sanguinis*’ (trail of blood) and ‘*ius soli*’ (place of birth). He argues that in Australia, Anglo-Celtics are ‘*ius sanguinis*’, and that this is the strongest indicator of belonging to the nation (1998, pp.188-189). The refrain ‘I grew here you flew here’ (Rintoul & Zreika quoted in Hartley & Green 2006, p. 352) seen on a rioter’s chest at Cronulla, echoes the same sentiment. If your appearance is not obviously Anglo-Celtic you are always, in some way, identified as not belonging. If your heritage can be visually tracked back to a point in time at which your grandparents or parents migrated, you remain traceable, *ius soli*, identified as belonging to somewhere else.

Professor Sneja Gunew, who has written extensively about multiculturalism in both Australia and international contexts, writes that notions of whiteness and ethnicity are subject to change in Australia:

> While the European immigrants could (with some effort and strain perhaps) be amalgamated with the Anglo-Celts or 'whites', it proved rather more difficult to do this with the so-called Asians. In other words, while there is no 'natural' logic which orders racialized discourse, it is made to appear as though there were. (2004, p.22)

Taunted as children for being 'wogs', my brothers have never really been *white enough,* despite identifying as Anglo-Celtic. As Gunew notes, the point being made is that 'we are dealing with who belongs to the nation and who does not and that this may be organized around quite arbitrary markers' (2004, p.23).

As a writer I cannot speak for all 'multicultural writers'. Likewise, I do not represent 'Italian-Australian' writers. Although I identify with two cultures (Anglo-Celtic and Italian), 'The Nightwatchers' is not a novel about Italian migrants in Australia. Perhaps one cannot directly compare the experiences of Italian to Lebanese migrants in Australia, but in my novel's fictional setting of Clifton Street, the 'Australian Imaginary' includes varying cultural identities. Anglo-Celtic identity is one culture of many, and the junction of cultures is represented as a normal part of Australian life.

There has been much criticism of the term 'Anglo-Celtic'. Morrissey *et al.* suggest that it is a general term based on four nations (England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales) which is further complicated by being an identity which is attached to an Australian, postcolonial context (1992, p.5). While I personally identify as an Anglo-Celtic Australian, it is beyond the limits of this exegesis to deconstruct or define this category, just as I am unwilling to

define my own concept of Italian identity. If the Australian national identity can be characterised, it can be seen in representations of white Australian males, such as diggers or bushmen, as Graeme Turner, a professor of cultural studies writes (1986, p.108). Likewise, literature theorist Terry Goldie suggests that '[Russell] Ward's version of the little Aussie battler is everywhere' (2004, p.91).While these representations of Anglo-Celtic identity are important to the discourse on Australian national identity, there is not the scope to further distinguish and dissect them in this exegesis. What is important to my novel is not what the Australian narrative is; as Turner suggests, it is 'what it *does*' that I am concerned with (1986, p.2). The issue is not of identity but representation. The 'Australian Imaginary' is represented as an absurd border between 'us' and 'them', surrounding what novelist Inez Baranay identifies as the 'illusion of an Anglo nation' (2004, p.120). Whether Anglo-Celtics are a definite group or not, they are seen in Australia as the dominant mode of representation, they are those who belong here (Turner 1986, p.109).

Turner writes that narratives of the Australian nation are not in fact historical, but representations of a 'very specific way of seeing the nation' (1986, p.107). If one looks from within, as I have as a writer, Australia's cultural identity is monopolised by Anglo-Celtic representations and is thus rendered 'white'. For a nation located in the Asia-Pacific region, there is no 'Asia' attached to the signifier 'Australia'. Only occasionally is the word 'Australasia' used. Representations of Australian society, particularly in the media, do not reflect the diverse cultures that live here.

The absurdity of this is depicted in comedian Chris Lilley's mockumentary television series 'We Can Be Heroes: Finding the Australian of the Year' (ABC 2005). Parodying the idea of the ideal 'Australian', the Chinese-Australian character Ricky Wong (a nominee for the award who considers himself a proud Aussie) auditions to be a lifeguard on the television series 'Home and Away'. This role will always be beyond Ricky's reach, despite his

nomination, as the job of Australian lifesaver requires whiteness. Likewise, Castro notes that attitudes towards Australian-Chinese youth reveals that ‘national identity is often only skin deep’ (1999, p.53).

In this sense, Australia is not a ‘postmulticultural nation’ (Ommundsen 1994-1995, p.13). Narratives about migrant invasion affect the way in which many migrants and their descendants are treated. As Ommundsen (1994-1995, p.13), Gunew (2004, p.19) and Stratton (1998, p.105) note, ignoring the relationship between ‘nationalism’ and ‘multiculturalism’ has had serious consequences for Australian society. Australian national identity continues to impose limits on belonging. As Ommundsen notes:

> if our “imagined community”, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s term, is to move beyond nationalism with a window-dressing of depoliticised multiculturalism, we will have to think about ways our models for multiculturalism, in political as well as cultural discourses, can be made to respond to our realities and desires as a nation. (1996, p.153)

Although I refer to the concept of ‘critical multiculturalism’ in this chapter, the model of multiculturalism is not necessarily the key issue. Rather, it is more important to pay attention to what Ommundsen suggests, which is that those who do not belong to the current concept of Australian nationhood—such as Esterina, myself, my brothers and even Ricky Wong—remain on the margins of the national imaginary (2007, p.50).

It seems simple enough to describe Australian culture as multicultural, yet the word ‘multiculturalism’ rarely makes an appearance in contemporary Australian media: politicians don’t say it and journalists don’t write about it. The ‘m-word’ is now notorious and has become a mixed or ‘empty signifier’ (Ommundsen 2000, p.10). Gunew refers to it as a ‘floating signifier’ that has different meanings in different contexts (2004, p.28).

In Australia, the origins of multiculturalism in government policy have been criticised by theorists on both the right and left side of politics (Ommundsen 2000, p.10; O'Carroll and Hodge 2006, p. 11). Professor Ghassan Hage, an anthropologist, has famously described multiculturalism as the 'positioning of non-White Australians within the White nation fantasy' (2000, p.121). Politicians such as former Prime Minister John Howard have condemned multiculturalism because it fails to recognise the need for migrants to assimilate or blend into the Australian nation, essentially threatening the notion of Anglo-Celtic national identity.

Multiculturalism is not without faults: it arranges Anglo-Celtics and ethnics into a binary structure, a model which is absurdly simple and reductive, as writer and essayist Robert Dessaix has noted (1991, p.24). It also fails to acknowledge concepts of race and how this has influenced national identity (Stratton 1998, p.11). It also excludes Aboriginal cultures and imposes great limits on personal identity, meaning one is identified as ethnic or Anglo-Celtic, rather than acknowledged as having a culturally diverse selfhood.

What is now undeniable is that the word is a negative signifier, and that multiculturalism, despite meaning a number of things, has failed. What I suggest in 'The Nightwatchers' is that it is not important whether it has failed as a government policy or theoretical concept; rather, that writers need to pay attention to its existence and influence on our national stories. In this and many other ways, multiculturalism has both failed and succeeded.

In 1937, the Calabrian mafia threatened to kill my great grandfather Rocco Pinneri, and took his land. Fleeing with what money he had left, he migrated to Australia as a refugee. Desperate, he bought a bicycle and rode around the Adelaide hills, asking for work. An Anglo-Celtic Australian called Mr Jones gave him a job.

When I see refugees on television now, I think of my great-grandfather standing in Mr Jones' field at night, hoeing it with a lantern swinging from his neck. In the early 1930s,

Italians were not considered to be white, and were regarded as the ‘olive peril’ (Andreoni 2003, p. 81). It is easy to assume that Mr Jones exploited Rocco for cheap migrant labour, but what Mr Jones did was give Rocco a chance. Rocco worked for Mr Jones until he earned enough money to buy his own land. After this, Rocco continued to work for Mr Jones, because an important relationship had been established. ‘Fair go’ (an ethos often seen as part of Australia’s Anglo-Celtic culture) benefitted both Mr Jones and Mr Pinneri. An illiterate refugee and an Anglo-Celtic farmer paved the way for this creative writing PhD; in this sense I am standing on the shoulders of ‘ethnics’ *and* ‘Anglo-Celtics’.

Multiculturalism is a word which can represent this complex relationship; it is easy to criticise and hard to defend. But, as Ommundsen argues, the ‘m-word’ cannot simply be discarded (2000, p.5): its most literal meaning is *multi-culture*.

Ommundsen (2000, p.10) and O’Carroll and Hodge (2006, p.36) believe that multiculturalism is still crucial for public debate about Australian society. They acknowledge that although the term is difficult—dirty even—it is still necessary because it recognises issues of cultural cohabitation and calls for a public discussion about the ways in which different cultures interact in Australian society. Multiculturalism can raise awareness and representation of minority groups while simultaneously acknowledging their marginalisation.

In her 2000 article, ‘Not the M-Word Again: Rhetoric and Silence in Recent Multiculturalism Debates’, Ommundsen discusses conflicting models of multiculturalism and moves beyond arguing what multiculturalism means or can be identified as. Rather than list all her models, I focus on the void she has identified:

> It is not simply that these images are damaging, though I think many of them are, but that their juxtaposition, conflation even, reveals contradictions, gaps and silences at the heart of the multiculturalism debate which remain unresolved and under-theorized. (pp.6-7)

In 2007, Ommundsen argued again that the silence around multiculturalism was even more disconcerting and that it had fallen into a state of 'benign neglect'. She describes this as a paternal approach that hides the real issue at stake: an imbalance of power between the majority of Australian society and others (p.43). In order to deal with this silence, cultural difference in Australia must be explored and debated, rather than merely tolerated or ignored. Ommundsen suggests that this can be achieved by using a postcolonial theory perspective (2000, p.6). While there can be no real or static concepts of identity, it is important to recognise that there is a battle being waged between images of national/Australian identity as 'Anglo-Celtic' and those who can be crudely defined as 'other'. Those who sit in parliament, who appear on television, and have political and economic power are all too often in the latter camp.

The public silence that Ommundsen identifies (resulting from controversial government policies, conflicting social agendas and various imposed images of multiculturalism) is perhaps the most relevant and radical reading of national and social 'multiculturalism' and the one closest to 'The Nightwatchers' themes of migrant marginalisation. 'The Nightwatchers' is one response in the void. Instead of silence, there is a discussion of Esterina's marginalisation (how she has been ignored) and how those like Esterina and I have dealt with cultural difference in our daily lives.

The novel's theme of cultural negotiation acknowledges both the difficulties and failures of multiculturalism. If there is a form of multiculturalism that 'The Nightwatchers' ascribes to, it is Dudek's concept of 'critical multiculturalism' (2006, p.12). Dudek argues that there is a need to address cultural relations, and in particular, racial difference in Australia. 'Critical multiculturalism' addresses Ommundsen's rhetoric of silence, the 'dangers—of exclusion or erasure, for instance—inherent in a multicultural society that fails to embody racialized others

into a society in ways that neither erase difference nor default to a multiculturalism of tolerance' (2006, p.2). Likewise, Gunew argues that a form of 'critical multiculturalism' gives minority cultures public attention, and challenges the representation of Australia as an Anglo-Celtic society (2004, p.28).

Although the Anglo-Celtic and 'ethnic/racial/other' paradigm suggests a scenario of 'us' and 'them', multiculturalism can still provide redemption. It is symbolic of hope rather than defeat, and discussion rather than silence. As Ommundsen argues, it is a practical attempt to address the reality of cultural cohabitation, and not the misguided policy described in various arenas of public and political discourses. What the 'm-word' can still offer is the idea that noise about social cohabitation and interactions between cultures in Australia remains crucial to Australian society.

To ignore how national discourses represent 'Australian' society is an act which ignores almost everyone who goes to my local playground, and it ignores the possibility of children who are raised by migrants and must negotiate two cultures; somewhere between 'us' and 'them'. It continues to ignore migrants, such as those who arrived in the 1950s postwar European mass migration, and it ignores those who arrive now, particularly those who have undertaken perilous journeys on fragile boats.

As a multicultural writer, I had to consider what the novel offered to the national debate and the manner in which the nation is represented. Ommundsen (1996, p.150) and Gunew (2004, p.29) suggest that multicultural writing now has an important, postmodern role to play in deconstructing and critiquing representations of nation and related terms such as multiculturalism, identity, ethnicity and race. Essentially, the function of the multicultural writer is to break down the borders between 'us' and 'them'.

While writing the novel I struggled with ideas about place, space and belonging in Australia, and how these ideas were represented in it. In the first few chapters, Nonna's home

is represented as an Italian space within a greater Anglo-Celtic Australian context (Clifton Street). Like my grandparents' farm, Nonna's bedroom and kitchen symbolise little Italian islands; domestic refuges from the bigger, more dominant culture outside. I used the metaphor of two worlds meeting to describe the junction of different cultures, embodied in places such as the ethnic domestic home and the public Anglo-Celtic spaces of Clifton Street.

Nonna's kitchen is stereotypically ethnic and Italian, a place where she plays Italian radio and cooks spaghetti sauce. Mattie claims that Nonna's bedroom 'looks like a church with all its religious paintings and statues of the Virgin Mary' (p.14). It is an Italian space, an extension of the Roman Catholic church her father goes to. When Mattie visits Harry's flat, she describes his kitchen as 'look[ing] even worse than the people sitting in it…I think about Nonna's kitchen with its smells of hot bread and pizza and cotoletta' (p.24).

The problem with this binary of 'Anglo-Celtic' and 'Italian/ethnic' space is that later in the novel, the boundaries between Mattie and Harry's homes begin to blur, and their similarities overwhelm their minor cultural differences. Both homes have troubled fathers who are often absent (Mattie's father is reclusive and Harry's abusive) and both have maternal figures (Nonna and Harry's mother) who are unable to control this environment. Mattie and Harry eventually seek refuge in the old abandoned house. The abandoned house becomes their home, a place where they belong. The first night Mattie sleeps there, she has a dream in which these two worlds merge:

> Nonna drifts away from me. The church candles flicker out with a gust of wind, and I'm standing in the dark. I feel a hand reaching for mine and then Harry is with me, leading me down Clifton Street to the old house. As we pass the flats I spot Dad near the bin lane, lying on a dirty mattress and listening to his old movie. Harry's parents are visible in a window, screaming at each other, and Sammy's sleeping under an olive tree that's

> grown up through the road…Nonna reappears and follows Harry and me, mopping the pavement behind our feet. (p.108)

The olive tree growing through the road is a symbol of Italian space breaking free of its domestic boundaries (the ethnic home) and positions Nonna's Italian culture as an organic part of public and national culture (the Clifton Street neighbourhood). In this dream, Mattie realises her home is not an Italian island, rather it is part of Australia, and that the cultural differences between her home and Harry's are irrelevant.

All the 'ethnic spaces' of the novel ultimately merge: the café that Mattie's father owns is a hybrid space, a place frequented by both 'Anglos' and 'wogs'. The borders between Nonna's kitchen and Clifton Street are eroded, and the 'Australian Imaginary' of the novel is represented as a culturally complex and diverse environment.

The work of novelist and postcolonial multicultural literature theorist Sabina Hussain inspired me to reconsider the borders between Mattie's Italian home and Clifton Street as fictional constructions reflecting narratives about Australia as a nation. Hussain argues that such borders are theoretical constructs which can be deconstructed by multicultural writers. Writers can then reconstruct Australian spaces which challenge the idea of the national imaginary:

> The creation of borders gives an imaginary authentication to an In- and Outside and defines their specific spaces…space is an effect of discourse which divides it into differently perceived zones constituting social categories and, with this, maintaining binary oppositions. Consequently, if space is only an effect of discourse, then a new way of speaking, a different way of imagining, and a transformed way of narrating, can change it. (2004, p.104)

In ‘The Nightwatchers’ there is no authentic outside culture (Anglo-Celtic) which denies an inside culture (an ethnic minority) the right to belong.

What ‘The Nightwatchers’ offers is not a representation of fixed national identity, but a challenge to the dominant one. Instead of an Anglo-Celtic nation which marginalises those on the basis of social attitudes of ‘not belonging’, it reflects an ‘Australian Imaginary’ which is composed of many cultures. It destabilises it rather than replaces it. It is an ‘…imaginary [realm] nurtured by a diverse cultural repertoire’ (Dudek and Ommundsen 2007, p.3).

Despite this instability, it is important to recognise the issues of marginalisation and representation that this limited imagining of Australia creates. The ‘migrant as invader’ narrative is still an important discourse that deserves representation in fiction.

In 1991, Robert Dessaix argued that ‘the patronising picture of a marginalising Anglo-Celtic centre and a marginalised body of ethnic writers exists only in the heads of the culture doctors’ (p.24). But, as I have argued, the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘Anglo-Celtic’ are social and political constructions rather than real cultural groups. Dessaix has dismissed the power of these constructions, and the way in which these representations affect migrants. The idea that any form of multiculturalism is no longer necessary and that ethnics are no longer marginalised has never quite fit in with my social experiences, and subsequently my writing.

In ‘The Nightwatchers’ Nonna is positioned as a migrant and the fact that her personal ethnicity is Italian is irrelevant. It is her subject positioning within the ‘Australian Imaginary’ that is important; Nonna is positioned as an ‘invading migrant’ in Clifton Street.

My grandmother Esterina’s public invisibility inspired many of the scenes that are in the novel. My bewilderment and frustration at her invisibility is represented in Chapter Two, when Mattie narrates her feelings about helping Nonna in the supermarket.

Nonna always overreacts to things and makes me do her dirty work. In fact, she uses me like a personal message service. I have to speak for her at the supermarket and post office and everywhere we go. She says that Australians don't understand her, and I guess it's true that most of them don't. As soon as they hear her broken English they look confused and turn to me.

'When I talk, they no hear nothing,' she says. 'Still I talk English, but they no understand'. (p.19)

Gunew argues that although multiculturalism is an easy target for criticism (due to the simplistic binary of the Anglo-Celtic/ethnic model) it still has an important role to play in literature, because it 'attempts to highlight a language of representation dealing with inclusions and exclusion in the narrative of the nation' (2004, p.19). Nonna's character is a representation, a symbolic subject of marginalisation, one of many exclusions from the national sphere.

Children's literature theorist Beverley Pennell, in her discussion of Odo Hirsch's novel *Have Courage, Hazel Green* writes that several European migrant characters are disempowered and voiceless like Nonna, and this is ultimately linked to the Australian idea of nation: 'Australia's multiculturalism, however it is constituted—is the top-down imposition of a particular conceptualisation of national identity' (2007, p.52). The migrants in Hirsch's novel do not belong to the Australian national identity, and have little representation in a national or cultural sense.

The novel subverts the structure of social relations established by national discourses and social policies that celebrate cultural difference but delimit migrant opportunities throughout the community; rather than inclusion there is economic, social, educational

> and political exclusion of migrant citizens, and rather than living with difference there is suppression of serious ethnically-based differences. (2007, p.53)

In my novel, Nonna shows that the illusion of an Anglo-Celtic nation, and the notion of belonging, means she is almost literally erased from public consciousness. Nonna does not belong to the world outside her door, and Mattie is embarrassed by her behaviour in 'Anglo-Celtic' places such as the local post office. Nonna is an 'invader' who cannot conform to Australian norms and culture. Her broken English is symbolic of her inability to belong to Australia; she is 'just an old woman who can't speak' (p.79). When she has a fight with Harry's mother, Nonna expresses frustration that Anglo-Celts ('*Australiani*') think she is related to the mafia, and acknowledges that because of this attitude, she is unable to belong to the country she lives in.

The Australian nation, which is supposedly a democratic, egalitarian nation, is thus exposed as Hodge and O'Carroll's 'fortress Australia' (2006, p.1), a land hostile to migrants. As Turner writes, 'that the myth of Australia's radicalism and egalitarianism can survive the contradictions of one's everyday experiences reveals how effectively it has been mythologised' (1986, p.108). My novel draws attention to these conflicting narratives of nation. Nonna's presence in the novel, as the ignored and marginalised, serves as a 'cautionary tale' about the folly of ignoring the need for multiculturalism.

More importantly, the successes and failures of Mattie and Nonna's attempts to communicate are metaphors for the necessity of the 'm-word'. Their endeavour to communicate forms the basis of the novel. Although Mattie is often Nonna's public voice, there are times when she cannot communicate with Nonna. Mattie and Nonna's failures to communicate are often comedic, particularly when Mattie tries to explain the movie 'The

Castle' to Nonna (p.28). Nonna does not understand the Australian humour and thinks the movie is a documentary rather than a comedy.

Mattie and Nonna's failures to communicate are also quite serious. Although they share a deep concern for Mattie's father, their frustration often leads to silence. Mattie often avoids conversations about him because they seem futile to her. Nonna's broken English and Mattie's broken Italian are great barriers: 'sometimes Nonna and I can only understand each other by our faces and our hands' (p.72).

When Nonna has a stroke and forgets her broken English, Mattie realises that this frustration is quite superficial: 'Nonna looked at me with happiness in her eyes because she loved me more than anyone in the world—because even though I didn't speak Italian and her English wasn't good, we understood each other better than anyone else' (p.131).

Nonna's broken English, which has previously been a symbol of a failure to communicate, is now recognised as being an important, successful tool of cultural negotiation. Nonna's broken English is her voice, which belongs to neither Australia nor Italy, but both. The loss of this voice—and with it Nonna's memories of her life in Clifton street—is a tragedy which results in silence. Mattie, unable to talk to Nonna at all, finds her father because she 'needs someone to speak Italian; someone who can tell Nonna who I am' (p.135).

Like the idea of multiculturalism itself, Nonna's voice both fails and succeeds. Her voice, a product of the Anglo-Celtic and Italian cultures in which she lives, reflects cultural negotiation: a fusion of the spaces she belongs to. Nonna and Mattie's need for communication, which occurs within this fusion of spaces, also symbolises the need for the 'm-word' to return to public discourse. The novel celebrates the successes of their communication, and the elaborate lengths to which they go in order to communicate, because ultimately, silence is the worst outcome of all.

Ommundsen and children's literature theorist Debra Dudek argue that multicultural literature plays an important role in the social development of children, and that multicultural literature can 'build cultural citizenship'. It has the ability to transform the way children see Australia, the way we think about who belongs and who doesn't: 'it thus has a major impact (greater, perhaps, than any other mode of cultural production) on the shaping of individual and group perceptions of their social environment and beyond that, on the future of social and cultural relations' (2007, p. 4).

Children's literature theorist Maria Jose Fernández argues that contemporary children's literature is

> heading towards a greater understanding of the debates that resonate and rumble within the Australian community at both the personal and national levels. It is important that our young adult fiction deal with these issues and tensions in a society because that is how a literature stays relevant and integral to a culture. (2001, p.39)

Likewise, Pennell (quoting Bourdieu) argues that national power can be contested in fiction 'in the construction of counter-narratives' (2007, p.53). My hope is that children reading the novel will sympathise with Nonna's plight, and recognise the culturally diverse and inclusive Australia that forms the inspiration for the fictional world of the novel. It is a counter narrative which challenges the illusion of an Anglo-Celtic nation, and questions the idea of Anglo-Celtics as belonging exclusively to such a limited representation of Australian imagined community.

In 'The Nightwatchers' I tried to offer something which political debates in the media rarely do: an opportunity for an audience to feel a sense of familiarity with a 'migrant other'. Nonna is a character with whom the readers are invited to sympathise, understand and feel

empathy for. By seeing Nonna as part of the nation, rather than a faceless other, Nonna is 'us' (a diverse Australian nation) rather than 'them' (the other).

Nonna is symbolic of all migrants who are in some way excluded from the national imaginary; Nonna makes the national personal. Phil Sparrow, author of *From Under a Leaky Roof: Afghan Refugees in Australia* reflects upon his own process of writing migrants into the national context:

> This book is necessarily personal in places and I have not attempted to erase myself from the gathering of stories and information. The information I have gathered represents only a small selection of that available, as there is a wide diversity of opinions in any community and the expatriate Afghans, both new and well-settled, are no exception. At the same time, the study accurately represents some of the prevailing hostility, misrepresentations and misconceptions visited upon these most recent refugees, and the impact this is having on their lives. (2005, p.26)

Like Sparrow's book, 'The Nightwatchers' is personal in places, but it also reflects current Australian society and politics, and national and social attitudes which affect migrants, such as racism and marginalised positioning. In this sense, the novel is a collaboration of the personal, the generational, the social and the national. It offers more than the debate which rages in the media over boat people, immigration and national boundaries. The concept of 'cultural negotiation' offers something else which national and political debates do not: an understanding of how personal and individual experiences of cultural negotiation exist within national contexts.

I cannot speak for all migrants. But I did try, in a very conscious way, to show that the 'm-word' is still necessary. Through the everyday lives of Nonna and Mattie, I suggest that

there is a need for novels to engage with social and national discourses. It is awareness, a noise that protests against the silence of a deaf nation.

> The success of a multicultural society depends on its ability to foster a culture of social inclusion and enable citizens, new and old, to enjoy a sense of belonging…If we get caught in the trap of "us" and "them", if as a society, we close ourselves off from new stories, we will create the conditions of social exclusion and alienation. To avoid this trap we must recognise cultural differences, while continuing to respect the fundamental rights we hope all our children will enjoy. And we must listen. (Von Doussa quoted in Smith 2005, pp.x-xi)

'The Nightwatchers' is an attempt to counteract the public silence around issues of multiculturalism, to create noise in order for an audience to listen. The stories fiction writers tell their audience matter; 'The Nightwatchers' is my attempt to encourage young readers to allow everyone to belong to the nation, regardless of personal culture or appearance. To close our doors, our borders and our ears is not only to reject those who arrive on our shores by boat; it is to ignore those migrants who are already here.

BREAKING BOUNDARIES: RECONCEPTUALISING MULTICULTURAL NARRATIVES IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Multicultural fiction, like the m-word, has acquired a slightly dirty reputation, one I have struggled to explore while writing this exegesis. Its reputation was the subject of heated literary debate in the early 1990s, when Robert Dessaix published 'Nice Work If You Can Get it' in the *Australian Book Review*. In this essay, Dessaix argued that there is no such thing as a 'multicultural writer' and that it is an invention of academics, a category created by 'multicultural professionals' to give public attention to migrant perspectives (1991, pp.22-23). He argued that there is no Anglo-Celtic majority or publishers ignoring or failing to publish minority literature. Migrant writing, he implied somewhat sarcastically, is 'Nice Work If You Can Get It' because it is often bad writing, funded and published for sociological or political reasons rather than literary purposes (p.26).

In 'Who's Knocking Now? The Rise and Fall of "Multicultural" Literature', Jessica Raschke charts the origins of multicultural writing from the late 1970s to the 1990s. She notes that a 'climate of positive discrimination…saw the 'ethnic' arts industries receive considerable financial support from government, particularly via the Australia Council and its Literature Board' (2005, p.21). She also notes that the Helen Demidenko scandal (an Anglo-Celtic posing as a ethnic Ukrainian author) was significant, and that the political climate of the 1990s (when the Howard Government was in power and race was a key issue), supported Dessaix's then timely argument that multicultural writing was not marginalised by an Anglo-Celtic centre. Raschke identifies several opposing 'pro-multicultural' key figures, most notably Sneja Gunew. Raschke claims that Dessaix's essay was part of a 'literary stoush' which contributed to the 'fall' of multicultural literature (p.21):

> After years of growing pluralism in certain areas of Australian society and culture, and with optimists believing that the white or Anglo face of Australia is no longer sustainable or tenable, there does remain an imbalance towards white or Anglo tradition in Australia's realms of power and influence, including in Australian publishing and literature. Gatekeepers not only continue to keep watch at the gates, they knock out anyone who goes near them. (2005, p.26)

There is no question that multicultural debate has all but disappeared from the public arena. The current national anxiety appears to focus on maintaining an Anglo-Celtic identity, and rhetoric about cultural cohabitation has deteriorated. The term 'multiculturalism' is no longer linked even to the somewhat condescending term of 'tolerance'. As Fernández writes:

> Austin (1993) asserts that what we should in fact aim for is a literature in which 'multicultural society is just a fact of life — no comment is needed (this to my mind is virtually *post*-multicultural)' (p.204). However, it is arguable that such a literature can only be a product of a society which has fully come to grips with its cultural plurality on *all* fronts and which is no longer threatened by the pervasive and ongoing inclusion of the Other into the mainstream…Australia has still some way to go before this type of post-multicultural literature can become a true reflection of contemporary Australian society as well as an easily identifiable literary genre and literary debate of its own. (2001, p.43)

In adult multicultural literature the situation seems to be similar. Baranay has pointed out that novels published in Australia maintain 'the illusion of a completely Anglo nation' (2004, p.120) and that Australian literature has not sufficiently dealt with multiculturalism (p.127).

Linguist Russell West-Pavlov also acknowledges that ‘in the main, then, Australian literary studies would appear to be hegemonically Anglo in its constitution and attitudes, an anomaly in our polylingual and polycultural society’ (2007, p.39).

On a social level, it is hard to argue that marginalisation does not exist. I think that it is reasonable to infer that marginalised people aren’t being overwhelmingly represented in fiction. Dessaix dismisses the reality of social marginalisation too readily, and fails to acknowledge the racist history of Australia and its ongoing effects. This defaults to the paternalistic indifference that Ommundsen has identified. I believe that it is important that multicultural writers address the framing of marginalised ‘others’.

Dessaix also denies that an Anglo-Celtic concept of nationhood is privileged above a multicultural one. Like Ommundsen, I believe that multiculturalism should not be reduced to an empty signifier, and problems of identity and representation should not mask or ignore racism and cultural difference. Although I agree with Dessaix that there are no solid, fixed identity categories of ‘Anglo-Celtic’ and ‘ethnic’, there are issues of power and representation at stake.

This chapter does not focus on adult multicultural fiction, much of which has been discussed in journals such as the *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* and *Australian Literary Studies*, for example. Interestingly, most journal articles (but certainly not all) concerning multiculturalism and young adult literature have been written by Australian critics and published in *Papers: Explorations of Children’s Literature*. There is a now a sense that multicultural fiction has been ‘dealt with’, and that the popularity of Melina Marchetta’s 1992 novel *Looking for Alibrandi* means that multicultural novels are now passé, like the word itself. I think that it’s hard to argue that the market is exhausted when multicultural literature is still struggling to find a strong position in young adult fiction. Novels which have been published since *Alibrandi* and can be broadly considered as

multicultural include Roseanne Hawke's 2010 novel *Marrying Ameera* (about the arranged marriage of an Muslim-Pakistani-Australian girl) and Randa Abdel-Fattah's popular 2005 novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (which is narrated from the perspective of an Australian-Palestinian-Muslim girl). In terms of children's picture books, refugees are being represented, most notably in Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* (2006). Jeannie Baker's *Mirror* (2010) is another highly successful picture book which deals with multicultural issues. Despite this and other publications, there is very little evidence that Australia is now postmulticultural. In the 2012 Adelaide Festival Awards for Children's Literature, only three submissions featured characters who could be identified as multicultural (Franzway 2012, email 25th June). I feel that there is still a need for the 'm-novel', and that young adult writers have an important role to play in drawing attention to multicultural issues.

It is hard to judge the impact that Dessaix's essay has had on both the publishing of multicultural fiction and academic debate concerning multicultural fiction. The way in which multicultural fiction is perceived is no doubt an issue, but to hold Dessaix responsible for the decline in multicultural fiction is perhaps extreme. Although Dessaix denies that the multicultural writer has some important sociological functions (such as reimagining the notion of 'Australian community', counteracting the 'migrant as invader' narrative, and counteracting racism through literature) the poor reputation of multicultural fiction is also a consequence of audiences perceiving such texts as 'real'. The words 'migrant narrative', 'Italian-Australian writer' and 'multicultural writer' imply 'spokesperson' and 'autobiography', as Gunew has suggested:

> [multicultural writers are] constructed as 'insider' sources for 'information-retrieval' rather than being deemed capable of postmodernist writing. In short, their ability to produce 'textuality' is ignored. As well they are legitimated in large part by their 'eye-

> witness' accounts of certain minority histories which also confine them to realist genres and, as I've argued in the past, they are read more for sociological evidence than for literary merit. (1994 citing herself in 1996, p.5)

Although 'The Nightwatchers' is concerned with social justice and ideas about community, it is first and foremost a work of fiction. As a fiction writer, I wanted to tell a story with its own narrative, rather than confining it to my family's story. This freed me to move beyond the idea of truth and the limits implied by the genres of history, memoir and autobiography. Although the novel is a reflection of how an elderly migrant and her granddaughter deal with two cultures, it is not an autobiographical account of my real life and experiences. If the novel contains any truth, it is because the narrative's depiction of cultural negotiation is relevant to both my own life and the novel as a text.

The question Dessaix's essay ultimately led me to is: can novels have both a sociological and literary purpose? Dessaix argues that fiction written by migrants or their descendants must ultimately be judged on their author's 'literary skills' (1991, p.28). Any sociological content or political objective seems to be (at the very least) a secondary consideration of the fiction writer. Likewise, Castro suggests that although multicultural writers cannot ignore or disassociate themselves from the national, political and social context in which their work is produced, 'the novel itself must be debated purely on literary grounds within the confines of the text' (1999, p.108).

The narrative (or form of multicultural novels) seems to be the problem rather than the messages of multiculturalism. Dessaix's suggestion that multicultural writing must be literature, and not focus on traditional, clichéd narratives, was something I took into consideration at the beginning of my novel. This was necessary because the bad reputation of multicultural fiction is at least partly due to repetitious plots and clichés. The challenge I

faced while writing ‘The Nightwatchers’ was to ‘produce textuality’ and create a novel that was, in a sense, more sophisticated and moved beyond didactic delivery of multicultural themes. I used the conventions of detective fiction (a mystery element) and gothic fiction (the romantic, gloomy setting of the novel) to keep the reader engaged. The multicultural messages of the novel are metaphorically represented through Nonna and Mattie’s relationship.

Just as Australian society needs to rethink the ‘m-word’ to address the issues at stake (imbalances of power and social justice), multicultural novels must evolve beyond clichés. While the various definitions of multiculturalism are broadly accepted and utilised in the context of social and government policy, the opposite phenomenon seems to exist in contemporary Australian literature. What is deemed multicultural is restricted to two narratives: the migrant’s displacement and identity crisis, and the identity crises of successive generations. I realised that my novel had to offer something different from second generation identity narratives (seen in young adult fiction in the 1990s) or the migrant-focused ‘stranger in a strange land’ narrative. As a writer, what I faced was a seemingly impossible scenario: the task of writing a novel which claims that Australia is not a ‘postmulticultural nation’ (an assumption that Ommundsen suggests is, at best, premature) and finding a narrative which would communicate these ideas in my novel.

Multicultural writers must deal with a nation that is not ‘postmulticultural’ and the fact that novels need to be written with postmodernity in mind: in essence, moving beyond these restrictive narratives which centre on identity. Castro, who has often dealt with his work being considered autobiography (e.g. *Birds of Passage* is considered autobiographical despite being set in the 1920s) has stated that: ‘it seemed to me that identity had become more important than writing, with the inevitable consequence of writing becoming invisible’ (1999, p.29).

My novel would have to move beyond the identity narrative, and it would have to break the boundaries of what is normally considered to be multicultural fiction. To illustrate how I moved on from the 'multicultural identity novel', I shall compare my work to Melina Marchetta's young adult novel *Looking for Alibrandi*.

Looking for Alibrandi has a unique position in Australian multicultural literature—it is a successful novel in a genre usually considered niche. Since its 1992 publication, no other multicultural novel has arguably had the mainstream success or cultural impact of *Alibrandi*. The 2000 film adaption was also a success, winning an Australian Film Institute award for best film. This popularity has ensured that it has remained the most relevant text with which to compare and contrast 'The Nightwatchers'. Although children's and young adult multicultural fiction has evolved as a genre since *Alibrandi's* publication (and I briefly refer to post-*Alibrandi* multicultural novels in the latter stage of this chapter), a literature review is not the focus of this chapter.

Children's literature theorists John Stephens and Sharyn Pearce have identified stages (or phases) of multicultural children's and young adult literature from the 1970s to the present, which have been useful in placing 'The Nightwatchers' in context. Stephens notes that the first stage of this genre treated multiculturalism superficially, and was written by Anglo-Celtic authors (quoted in Pearce 2003, p.238). The second stage of this is the 'multicultural *bildungsroman*', (Stephens 1996, p.2) the stage which *Alibrandi* belongs to. While their analysis of multicultural young adult novels from these eras is also important to my discussion, the direction of 'The Nightwatchers' was ultimately determined by *Alibrandi.*

The greatest challenge in writing a multicultural novel, regardless of publication date, is dealing with issues of representation: in particular negotiating what Dudek calls a 'a tension between representing an acceptance of cultural difference and a possible flipside of that dynamic, which is representing all people within a culture as the same' (2007, p.43). For

Alibrandi and 'The Nightwatchers', the 'sameness' is the wider Anglo-Celtic community versus the 'difference' of the ethnic minority home. Through comparison of plots and themes, discussion of character subjectivity (both ethnic and Anglo-Celtic) and how key relationships between characters represent this tension, I will explain how I have dealt with this issue differently. I believe that migrants remain or continue to be socially and politically marginalised from an Anglo-Celtic base of power. My challenge was to address 'difference' and 'sameness' without falling into the identity narrative trap of 'them' and 'us'.

Alibrandi appeals directly to ethnic young adults growing up in Anglo-Celtic Australia, and the plot is focused around protagonist Josephine 'Josie' Alibrandi's identity dilemma, and her struggle to reconcile her Italian and Australian cultures. *Alibrandi* explores the universal themes of self discovery and a search for a place to belong. Seventeen year old Josie is struggling to complete year twelve, which is a key life event for most young adults. Stephens (1996, p.15) notes that it is also a teen romance novel, which appeals to young female readers. Josie's romantic interest, Jacob Coote, is the archetypal bad boy from the wrong side of the tracks, but he is also popular and the captain of his school. Josie is presented as the plain girl who gets the handsome prince.

Alibrandi is essentially an identity crisis novel. In such novels, the characters' ethnicity is posed as a problem (Kroll 1999, p. 34) requiring a *bildungsroman* journey of discovery to acceptance of self (Bunbury 1996, p.245). Josie struggles to reconcile the two worlds of her Italian family and her Anglo-Celtic school, and represents the divided subjectivity of children from migrant families. Josie is essentially a metaphor for multiculturalism itself; her journey aims to meet the same objectives as multicultural policy and rhetoric, which is social inclusion by both cultures. *Looking for Alibrandi* could have easily been titled *Looking for Multiculturalism*.

Both Stephens (2000, p.56) and Fernández (2001, p.39) identify not only *Alibrandi* but Allan Baillie's *Secrets of Walden Rising* as multicultural *bildungsromans*, and discuss them in similar terms. In his article 'Multiculturalism in recent Australian Children's Fiction: Re-constructing Selves Through Personal and National Stories' Stephens notes that in both novels 'the construction of individual subjectivities is pursued in interaction with the idea of a minority culture's sense of identity, and functions as an analogy for a national development of multicultural awareness and agency' (1996, p.2). Fernández agrees that 'changes in the individual are represented as being metonymically linked to the changes occurring in the society as a whole' (2001, p.2).

This clearly occurs in *Alibrandi*. Josie constantly questions her Italian ethnicity and Australian identity. Josie's physical appearance is an important signifier, and early in the novel she describes herself as looking like other Greek and Italian kids of her primary school, with 'dark hair, dark eyes, olive skin'(1992, p.7). She describes the other teenagers at her high school as 'mostly Anglo-Saxon Australians' (p.6) and her nemesis, Ivy Lloyd, as having 'perfect white skin and not one split end in her strawberry blonde hair' (p.21). Her appearance represents her self-perception and depiction as 'other'.

Overall, however, Josie's journey does move towards a sense of multicultural reconciliation that merges her divided self. On page 88, Josie claims 'I'm an Italian. I'm of European descent', but by page 259 she says 'If someone comes up and asks me what nationality I am, I'll look at them and say I'm an Australian with Italian blood flowing rapidly through my veins'. Stephens refers to her as an 'intercultural subject' who does not feel she belongs in either world, but reconciles them and becomes what he considers to be a 'multicultural' subject:

> The novel's strategy of using first-person narration is an important factor here. In principle, first-person narration by a member of a minority community has the potential to be a powerful means of expressing subjectivity; Josephine's propensity to melodrama and overstatement in describing her sense of lack of agency enables her transition from an intercultural subject to a multicultural subject to be articulated very overtly. (1996, p.14)

Josie's subjectivity clearly determines the structure of the novel. Through her relationships her personal subjectivity emerges as a problem requiring narrative resolution. Relationships with both Anglo-Celtic and Italian subjects reflect Josie's struggle with her inner self. Does she belong to the ethnic, Italian world of her family and home, or does she belong to the Anglo-Celtic world of her school, workplace and Sydney?

In *Alibrandi,* characters like John Barton, Ivy Lloyd and Jacob Coote have Anglo-Celtic subjectivities that reflect the wider world, while Josie's Nonna, mother, cousins and aunts reflect her family life and Italian community. The relationships that are most important to my discussion are Josie's relationship with Jacob Coote, and her grandmother Nonna Katia.

Jacob Coote's subjectivity is Anglo-Celtic, but he is middle class, just like Josie. He claims 'You're middle–class and I'm middle-class, except you're a middle-class snob who goes to an upper-class school' (1992, p.62). However, Jacob soon admits that he doesn't know anything about Italian culture, and this admission positions him as different. Jacob is presented as an overtly masculine, working class, Anglo-Celtic Australian male who wears metal band t-shirts, fights, smokes, drinks and rides motorbikes.

Josie's relationship with Jacob Coote reveals the 'ethnicity as a problem' scenario of *Alibrandi*. The relationship has a rocky start: 'You're nothing but an ignorant Australian' Josie yells at Jacob on page 107. As their relationship develops, the cultural tension between

them is obvious. Josie and Jacob argue about their cultural identities, even though Josie is unsure about her Italian-Australian subjectivity:

> 'Don't you dare call me an ethnic,' I said, furious.
> 'Well, what the hell are you? The other day you called me an Australian as if it was an insult. Now you're not an ethnic. You people should go back to your own country if you're so confused.' (p.123)

Later, Josie tells Jacob that 'We live in the same country, but we're different. What's taboo for Italians isn't taboo for Australians' (p.152).

Despite the characters forming a romantic relationship and developing a greater understanding of each other's cultures, the text emphasises their differences rather than their similarities. Josie claims that their relationship will never work because their ethnicities are too different, and the social codes and rules of her Italian community allow less freedom than Jacob's Anglo-Celtic one (p.206). At the end of the novel they break up, because Jacob feels he is not enough for her: his class and cultural differences are once again raised in an argument. In the last chapter Josie says:

> 'And Jacob? Well, I don't think it is my Italian background and his Australian one that are keeping us apart. I think, at the moment, we're too different. We haven't figured out what we really want from ourselves, let alone from each other.
>
> I think that during the year Jacob got a bit more ambitious than he used to be and I became a bit less.' (pp. 259-260)

Marchetta's aim seems to be to show that Jacob and Josie don't break up due to cultural differences, and through each other they gain cultural understanding and knowledge. Fernández writes that *Alibrandi* has '…the essentialist human perspective that individuals will ultimately be united by their shared humanity which will inevitably overcome any differences in culture, religion or race' (2001, p.40). *Alibrandi* may aim to do this, but I'm not sure that it does. As Dudek notes, many young adult multicultural novels use the relationship between the female ethnic subject and the Anglo-Celtic boy in this manner:

> Cultural and racial differences manifest themselves in confrontations with the protagonist's parent(s) or grandparent(s) when the protagonist/focaliser expresses desire for a boy who is not of the same cultural background as her family. In other words, the family becomes the site upon which tensions surrounding cultural difference are enacted and resolved. Usually, the girl protagonist reconciles herself with and embraces her cultural difference (from mainstream Australia) and finds a sense of belonging within the cultural sameness of the family unit. (2007, pp.45-46)

This happens in *Alibrandi*, but the fact that Josie is born in Australia is important. Josie comes to terms with Jacob's Anglo-Celtic status, and finally her own status an Australian citizen in both a legal and social sense. Her status as a figure in between two worlds (Stephens' 'intercultural subject') is unsatisfying to her, so she must also reconcile her Italian self into the multicultural subject.

When I began writing 'The Nightwatchers', I realised that there was no point in writing a multicultural *bildungsroman*. Mattie's subjectivity is given very little focus in my novel, and she does not function as a metaphor for multiculturalism. While the 'ethnic as other' identity scenario has a very obvious focus in Josephine (with her physical appearance of olive skin

and dark hair), Mattie's blonde hair and white skin resembles not Josie, but her Anglo-Celtic nemesis, Poison Ivy:

> I don't have olive skin or black hair. My skin is white: almost as white as Harry's, but without the freckles. My hair is the colour of dirty sand. I'm much fairer than my dad and my grandmother. I should have black hair and olive skin, but I don't. (11)

Mattie is not the obvious ethnic subject, and the only indication of her Italian heritage is her last name 'Russo', which is a common Italian name. Matilda, with its Australian connotations, suggests that she is also Anglo-Celtic, but aside from her physical appearance, this is the only reference to her cultural identity in the novel. Mattie is intended to reflect children who have one Italian and one Anglo-Celtic parent, who may not have inherited typical Italian traits such as olive skin and dark hair. By avoiding the narrative path of Josie's identity crisis, 'The Nightwatchers' follows Pearce's advice to 'move on' from this second stage in the genre's history (2003, p.244).

I wanted to explore acceptance of difference and debate about living with two cultures. Writing about acts of cultural negotiation and cross-cultural communication (rather than focusing on the individual subjectivities of my characters) was essentially an attempt to seek a balance between 'difference' and 'sameness'.

In 'The Nightwatchers' Mattie and Harry see themselves as children rather than adults, and this is the key focus of their identities. Just as Mattie's personal identity is irrelevant, Harry's Anglo-Celtic subjectivity is also given little attention in 'The Nightwatchers'. He is not the Anglo-Celtic, masculine romantic interest that Jacob Coote is.

Unlike Josie and Jacob Coote, Mattie and Harry do not define themselves as intrinsically different ethnically, so their families do not cause conflict for them. Their relationship never reflects the 'ethnicity as a problem' narrative that Josie and Jacob's does.

In recent years, there has been a shift to promote both Anglo-Celtic and non-Anglo-Celtic characters as similar, perhaps in reaction to *Alibrandi*. Pearce considers such novels to be the third stage of the genre's evolution, where the characters are not overtly ethnic and the plot does not focus on their identity (2003, p.244).

Some of the justifications for this are obvious. Dudek notes that characters from seemingly separate racial and ethnic backgrounds share experiences that transcend narrowly defining, all encompassing racial and ethnic terms: 'The everyday lived experiences of people…reveal how solidarity and belonging can exist in and across difference, and specifically racial and gendered difference' (2007, p.45). She warns against presenting categories such as gender, race and class as 'homogenised' categories.

English literature theorist Robyn McCallum also points out that 'the ethnic as other' narrative is problematic in that it denies similarities between different cultural groups:

> There has been a tendency for nationalistic and multicultural discourses in Australia to define ethnicity in ways which position it in opposition to Anglo-Celtic culture…such definitions mask the 'ethnicity' of Anglo-Celtic experience and evade intersections which emerge within the social structuring of cultural diversity and class and between individuals from Anglo-Celtic and non-Anglo-Celtic cultural backgrounds but who occupy similar positions in relation to mainstream society. (1998, p.40)

Mattie and Harry are frightened and struggle with a sense of powerlessness, but Nonna, Sammy and many of the other characters are also often silenced and marginalised. Mattie and

Harry are united in their lack of power and social status, and this unification goes beyond nationality or race.

In the beginning of the novel Harry and Mattie's homes are presented as being different. Mattie compares Nonna's food to the 'tin can diet' of Harry's family, and Harry struggles to pronounce the names of meals Nonna cooks. These differences, however, prove to be superficial. In this sense they avoid functioning as symbolic representations of their cultural backgrounds, and the 'self as community' model is replaced with characters who are more sophisticated and reflect a diversity of cultures and other influences, such as age, social environment, class and gender.

Positioning ethnic or migrant characters with other individuals who are marginalised by middle-class, Anglo-Celtic Australia is not new. McCallum discusses this in relation to Australian youth films, and points out that 'All the main characters in the three films [*No Worries* (1993), *Captain Johnno* (1988) and *On Loan* (1985)] have been displaced, either physically, culturally or socially, and they occupy alienated subject positions in relation to mainstream Australian society' (1998, p.41).

Pennell's discussion of Odo Hirsch's *Have Courage, Hazel Green* explores the connections between disempowered migrants and children within an apartment block called the Moodey building. The novel acknowledges the links between those disempowered by Anglo Celtic, middle aged males ('the Other' being women, children, the elderly and migrants) that is, those who lack social and financial capital (2007, p.56).

This reflects the broader narrative of my novel, and counteracts the idea of an Anglo-Celtic nation. Although writing about marginalisation and acknowledging the need for those who are not represented to 'speak' was important for me, I also felt it was important to examine my own process of cultural negotiation. Throughout my novel, there are many scenes dealing with Mattie and Nonna's attempts to reconcile two cultures.

Post-*Alibrandi,* multicultural young adult novels that avoid the ethnic identity narrative are not unusual. For example, Stephens, in his discussion of Matt Zurbo's *Idiot Pride* (1997), notes that the protagonist has no fixed subjectivity which informs the novel's plot or results in 'an essential selfhood' (2000, p.66).

Novels that can be considered multicultural (even in the broadest sense of having a character with an ethnic name) are veering away from identity narratives, and most crucially, are not dealing with the idea of negotiating two cultures. Cultural negotiation has become invisible, hidden in the wake of identity narratives. The new wave of multicultural modern novels seems to be anti-*Alibrandi*, dodging the unspoken 'm-word' entirely. As Pearce suggests:

> These new novels are not "ethnic" texts, but texts about a social world (school, home life, friends and leisure pursuits) that would be recognized by many, if not most, Australian readers. While they feature minority groups in subject positions, multiple focalizations, and are told from an insider perspective, above all else they are important because they actually take their multicultural social contexts for granted as they get on with their plots…the characters' cultural heritage is incidental rather than pivotal, one of a number of factors influencing their subjectivity. (2003, pp.244-245)

Pearce goes on to claim that '…*ethnicity is not a marker of cultural difference, but an accepted part of Australian life'* [author's emphasis] (2003, p.246) and that multiculturalism has been domesticated. As a writer and person who identifies as multicultural, I think this is an overreaction. A balance between difference and sameness still needs to be addressed. Cultural heritage being reduced to *incidental* is a step too far.

The reality of growing up in multiple cultures (with at least one being a minority in Australia) is a different experience from growing up under the influence of one. Culture is one aspect which makes a difference to personal perspectives. Novelist Inez Baranay, who acknowledges that she is identified as the foreign 'other' in Queensland, agrees with this point.

> What the Anglos once might delicately refer to as "your background"—the black bread and salami childhood—does give you a different slant on the world, a different accent in your thoughts, a different kind of narrative you've identified with. (2004, p.127)

Likewise, Fernández writes that the children of migrants from ethnic backgrounds are raised with 'notions of inherited and inherent difference' (2001, p.44). As a writer, I felt the need to celebrate difference and its importance to everyday life.

For Nonna and Mattie, issues of otherness and ethnicity are faced daily. Pearce's argument ignores the reality of Mattie and Nonna's positions within Australian Anglo-Celtic society. While Mattie is not having an *Alibrandi*-type crisis of ethnic identity, it is part of her lived experience to negotiate between two cultures. Pearce writes:

> In texts like this, [*Head On, Idiot Pride*] where second- and third-generation non-Anglo-Australian writers are finding their places in shaping a national identity, we seem to have reached a point where non-Anglo-Australians are no longer seen as in any way undesirable or suspect, marginalized or displaced, but reveal that creolization rather than ghettoization or assimilation is nowadays the norm. (2003, p.246-247)

What I have tried to do is counteract the illusion of an Anglo-Celtic nation, addressing and working with the fact that those who do not have power in Australia remain ignored and marginalised. There has been, in a sense, a backlash against *Alibrandi*, as represented in Pearce's reaction to *Idiot Pride*:

> It never refers in any explicit or jarring way to the cultural backgrounds of the characters, and it is devoid of cultural clichés or emphasis upon its characters' exotic or alien lifestyles and behaviors. Instead, it incorporates ethnicity in a low-key manner, as a "normal" part of social life, and presents none of that hackneyed and hoarily problematic interface between ethnic identity and mainstream Australian life. There is a total absence of those often-tokenistic cultural stereotypes where multiculturalism is largely represented as a spectacular form of ethnicization involving costumes, customs and cooking (the so-called "pasta and polka" approach to migrant culture [Jupp 330]). Zurbo's characters are not alien to Australian society but feel very much a part of it. (2003, p.245)

Is dealing with cultural negotiation an attempt to deal with 'that hackneyed and hoarily problematic interface'? This is where the metaphor of cultural negotiation surprised me: why did the 'two world' approach need to be represented as a problem?

It was in examining my novel for examples of the problematisation of multiculturalism that I realised cultural negotiation was a positive experience for Mattie; if anything, she seemed to benefit from having two cultures. 'The Nightwatchers' proposes a somewhat radical solution to the problem of dealing with two cultures for the third generation subject: what if cultural negotiation is positive? What if a multicultural narrative can provide two

systems of information, two different ways of seeing culture, which can help a third generation character to interact with a culturally diverse group of people?

In 'The Nightwatchers' the process of cultural negotiation is not a problem requiring resolution as it has been represented in the traditional multicultural *bildungsroman*. Mattie's experience of negotiating two cultures is not the anguished process of Josephine Alibrandi: Mattie is not in constant turmoil or conflict, and she does not weigh one culture above the other, or choose sides. Differences are recognised, but they are not always a 'cultural clash'; at times, these cultures are both interchangeable and even complementary.

The multicultural message of 'The Nightwatchers' is that two sets of cultural values, with two sets of knowledge and tradition, are an *advantage*, rather than a problem. This is the eventual outcome of *Alibrandi*, but I argue that the 'identity as problem' process that leads to this is now irrelevant. Mattie begins where Josie ends; while she may superficially complain about 'wogginess' at the start of the novel, she embraces both worlds easily. Mattie is the privileged subject from the beginning. Her ethnic culture and family life is coveted and desired by Harry, who lives with his violent father and oppressed mother. Mattie's family home and ethnic background is the preferred environment for both young adult characters. Harry adores Nonna, revelling in her Italian food, culture and environment, using it as a haven from which to escape his troubled parents. Harry, who is considered 'Anglo', also reflects the 'life within two worlds as an advantage' message. His interaction with Nonna and understanding of family and love is enriched through knowing her, and his relationship with Mattie also reveals this.

I am not arguing that ethnic homes are better than Anglo-Celtic ones. Rather, I am making the point that ethnic families do not have to function as they do in *Alibrandi*, as 'the site upon which tensions surrounding cultural difference are enacted and resolved' (Dudek

2007, p. 46). Nonna is not the embodiment of the Italian family that Nonna Katia of *Alibrandi* represents, nor is Harry the Anglo-Celtic alternative which is represented by Jacob Coote.

It is Mattie, however, who truly benefits from acts of cultural negotiation. Her life with Nonna and inside knowledge of a minority culture—as well as her wider experience in the Anglo-Celtic community of Clifton Street—gives her a sense of cultural fluency. Her understanding of two cultures enables her to identify with a wide variety of people, accept alternative cultural, religious and social perspectives, and tolerate a range of behaviours without judging them as foreign or unusual. For example, Mattie realises that Nonna would never accept Harry into their house if she knew his father drank and smoked, but she herself accepts this behaviour.

Mattie's understanding and negotiation of both cultures is put to its greatest test, however, when Nonna is hospitalised. Mattie must act as interpreter for Nonna's needs and wants, and while this is difficult for her, it is even more of a challenge to the characters who have little understanding of Italian culture.

When a paramedic arrives to take Nonna to the hospital, and is bewildered by Nonna's speech, Mattie observes this behaviour with resolution: 'The woman paramedic looks at me, just like every other stranger who's ever asked Nonna a question (when I talk they no hear nothing, still I talk English but they no understand!) and clamps a mask over Nonna's face' (p.129).When Mattie tells the nurse that Nonna won't eat roast of the day because she's Italian, the nurse waves her away and tells her to pick something. Likewise, a doctor assessing Nonna's condition is incredulous that Nonna can't write or read, but Mattie's calm acceptance of her illiteracy reveals her complex cultural insights and maturity. Her dual cultures enable her to deal with the situations around her more effectively than most of the adult characters.

While 'The Nightwatchers' is a radical rereading of the 'ethnicity as a problem' narrative common to young adult novels, I could not ignore the reality that many ethnic migrants face marginalisation, nor could I suggest that acts of cultural negotiation are always a positive experience.

I think Pearce's approach—to ignore cultural background and difference altogether—is too dismissive for both Nonna and Mattie. Although Mattie is not the ethnic subject like Josie, she does have to deal with two cultures and the resistance of many members of Anglo-Celtic society towards acceptance of other cultures. For Nonna, engaging with broad Australian culture is often difficult. Although Nonna is actually Australian as well as Italian, the other Anglo-Celtics in the novel don't accept this; she is only visibly Italian and therefore, 'other'. Resistance to minority cultures within Australian society is evident in the novel, and Nonna's struggle to communicate reveals that English is the only language truly accepted. This point is made in both *Alibrandi* and 'The Nightwatchers', albeit differently. Although Mattie's two worlds are an advantage to her, this is unrecognised by the mainstream Anglo-Celtic population. For Mattie, her family and background are a problem only to those Anglo-Celtics who can't accept a truly multicultural Australia. For Josie, her family and background are a personal problem.

Dudek, in writing about contemporary children's multicultural fiction, suggests that an approach of 'critical multiculturalism' which still addresses cultural junctions in Australian space, is now necessary. She identifies a fourth stage of young adult fiction, which acknowledges that both ethnicity and race signify the 'other' and that by using a critical approach to multiculturalism, the mythic construction of Australian culture as 'Anglo-Celtic' is revealed (2006, p.1). Likewise, Fernández notes that:

> It is safe to say that there is a real, cultural nostalgia for an Anglo, monocultural Australia still present within our society. It does, however, exist alongside a relatively progressive mainstream which actively supports multiculturalism and sees it as a positive and defining characteristic of contemporary Australian culture. This presence, however, must not be allowed to elide the very real and day-to-day conflicts and failures in dialogue which do occur between the diverse ethnicities that coexist, contrast and blur into one another within the contemporary Australian milieu. In the same way that an individual's identity is subject to constant change and flux, so too is a country's sense of national identity. (2001, p.41)

This is where I find the idea of cultural negotiation useful. It allows room for Dudek's concept of critical multiculturalism, which addresses both the successes and failures of cultural interactions in Australia space. Likewise, it allows room for discussion of the unspoken 'm-word' into the silence around issues of cultural cohabitation that Ommundsen has identified. Finally, the concept of cultural negotiation acknowledges what Robert Dessaix does not: that Australian institutions, particularly the media, marginalise and repress minorities, and reproduce representations of Australian culture as 'Anglo-Celtic' which does not reflect the social reality of Australia's diverse ethnic population.

Representing acts of cultural negotiation (and representing sameness and difference, as Dudek, 2007, p.43 suggests) is challenging, and representations of identity remain difficult territory for authors to engage with. Despite these difficulties, and the controversial nature of the 'm-novel', including cultural diversity within Australian young adult literature is critical to challenging the Anglo-Celtic construction of the Australian imaginary.

The genre of multicultural novels is still, I believe, in development. Two post Alibrandi novels I will briefly discuss in terms of these challenges are Randa Abdel Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?*(2005) and Roseanne Hawke's *Marrying Ameera* (2010).

Does My Head Look Big in This? is narrated from the first person perspective of a young girl named Amal Mohamed Nasrullah Abdel-Hakim. Amal identifies as a 'an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian. That means I was born an Aussie and whacked with some bloody confusing identity hyphens' (2005, p. 5). The novel focuses on Amal's decision to embrace Islam and choose to wear to the hijab, a decision that she is able to make with her parents' support. Amal fears that her choice identifies her as 'other'. She claims that Anglo Australians respond with difficulty to her hijab, and remarks that it seems to have a striking effect on others around her. The hijab has 'powers which transform Muslim girls into UCOS (Unidentified Covered Objects), which turn Muslim girls from "us" into "them" (2005, p. 34). It deals with not only Amal's identity crisis but those of the family members around her, some who actively want to assimilate into Anglo-Culture and appear less 'other'.

Like *Alibrandi,* there is a romance angle with an Anglo-Australian boy that ends because the characters decide that culturally their differences outweigh their similarities. Fattah's novel is particularly important to young Muslim girls and many will relate to the story and the complex acts of cultural negotiation which occur in the novel. At the end of the novel, Amal once again frames her identity as a 'hyphenated Australian' (2005, p.339) and remarks that it has been successful acts of cultural negotiation with other migrants of various backgrounds (in particular an elderly Greek neighbour) that have been able to help her come to terms with her plural identity. The novel, however, can be identified as a multicultural *bildungsroman*, the second stage of the genre, and does not progress beyond this now clichéd and tired narrative. Amal's subjectivity is the focus of the novel and her process from what Stephens

claims as an 'intercultural subject' to 'multicultural subject' (1994, p. 14) clearly positions in the novel within this second stage.

Roseanne Hawke's *Marrying Ameera* (2010) contains themes of identity and belonging, and more deftly deals with issues facing contemporary multicultural authors. In the first part of the novel, which is set in Australia, the main character identifies as being a Muslim Pakistani. Although she often identifies with an 'Anglo' personal subjectivity, she dominantly views herself as the 'other'. She finds the process of cultural negotiation difficult, as her father represents the family as a site of ethnic difference and tension (Dudek 2007, pp 45-46). Cultural negotiation is presented as a difficult process with few rewards, as her father punishes her for any acts he views as 'Anglo'.

When Ameera wants to be friends with a boy her own age, she laments that 'In Australia people of opposite sexes and different ages were friends all the time. But for me, a Muslim Pakistani girl, even securing a friendship was a problem' (2010, p.31). When she strikes up a friendship with a Christian boy, her father reacts by sending her to Pakistan, in order to become a 'true Muslim' (2010, p.61).

However, when Ameera is sent abroad to Pakistan, her self-actualisation of identity swiftly changes: she is considered too 'Western' by her relatives. The process of cultural negotiation is also a difficult process in this country. While Ameera identifies as being a Muslim Pakistani, she acknowledges that Australia is her homeland, regardless of her personal identity. Later in the novel, when she is forced into an arranged marriage, she questions her Pakistani identity and fears that if she does not go through with the marriage, she will lose her family and identity (2010, p.184). 'Was our Pakistani culture in Australia so different? Maybe Mum had unconsciously made me more Australian than Pakistani, for if this was Pakistani culture then everything that made me who I was fought against it' (2010, p. 148).

By page 256, she acknowledges that at least a part of her personal identity is Western, and becomes, as Stephens notes, ‘an intercultural subject’ who moves towards a ‘multicultural’ subjectivity (1996, p. 14). Later in the novel, she realises that she ‘always thought I was both Australian and Pakistani but now all I could think of was returning home’ (2010, p. 264).

Although the novel contains many elements of multicultural *bildungsromans* such as identity crises and notions of belonging, this novel has in a sense, ‘moved on’ from the genre as Pearce (2003, p.244-245) suggests, due to its predominant storyline concerning arranged and forced marriages. At the same time, Hawke is able to deftly acknowledge that ethnicity is not ‘incidental’ as Pearce (2003, p.246) claims, and that it remains an issue particularly in regards to acts of cultural negotiation. This text can be positioned more closely within what Dudek suggests is the fourth stage of this genre, ‘critical multiculturalism’ (2006, p.1).

Novels with multicultural themes and characters are still being under-represented and the very real need for such voices remains in young adult fiction. Although texts like *Alibrandi* and *Does My Head Look Big in This?* are didactic and problematic in terms of the genre’s development, they remain intrinsically important to young readers.

‘The Nightwatchers’, a novel which I have intended to reposition within the fourth stage with texts such as *Marrying Ameera*, treats its subject matter differently from *Alibrandi,* but it also builds upon it. It ultimately exists because Alibrandi was an important predecessor. Josephine Alibrandi’s voice is a refreshing alternative to the ‘Anglo’ voice of many young adult novels, and ‘The Nightwatchers’ also aims to represent characters who are marginalised and given limited representation in Australian fiction. Likewise, my novel also has a female protagonist who must negotiate two cultures, and has a complicated relationship with her first-generation migrant grandmother. While it is important not to reproduce *Alibrandi*, novels with multicultural themes still have an important role to fulfil, and deserve a place in

Australian young adult fiction. The messages of *Alibrandi*—cultural cohabitation, tolerance of difference and attention to issues of marginalisation—remain as important as ever to Australian literature and the notion of an inclusive Australian society.

STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND:WRITING AND REPRESENTING MIGRANTS IN MULTICULTURAL FICTION

The Multicultural Author

The title 'multicultural author' arguably imposes limits and responsibilities on the role of the fiction writer, limits which are more commonly imposed upon biographers, memoirists, historians and sociologists. However, for all its limitations, stereotypes and connotations, calling myself a multicultural writer signifies that my work belongs to a genre. Yet, my name, Melanie Kinsman, suggests I am an 'Anglo' and not from an ethnic minority; it signals I am not a multicultural writer. As Gunew notes, this is a problem because 'The foreign name is also a signifier which appears to function independently of the texts produced "in its name". Critics apparently allow the authorial signature to pre-empt the space of the text' (1994, p.75). My Anglo-Celtic name does not provide the novel with a signifier of authenticity. Just as I have found limitations upon the concept of multiculturalism and multicultural literature, my role as multicultural author is a complex one.

I have always been aware of the notion of authenticity and its importance in the Australian literary context. Gunew suggests that the 'question of authenticity continues to haunt the reception of minority writings' (1996, p.2). Although I have no 'authorial signature' it never occurred to me that I *wasn't* a multicultural writer. As Castro notes, 'appearance is everything in Australia' (1999, p.49). I have always been made to feel Italian or 'other' by 'wogs' and 'Anglos' alike because of my black hair, dark eyes, and olive skin. Some of my readers have said that I have written about 'wogs', and that I would be criticised because 'your name does not match your face'.

The representation of ethnic minorities has become a sensitive issue in Australia, particularly following the Demidenko scandal. This scandal raised issues facing 'ethnic'

authors and their place in relation to the Anglo-Celtic majority. There is now a sense that ethnic writers must have an 'ethnic authority' or 'authenticity'; an identity that gives them the right to represent minority groups (Goldie 2004, p. 95; Gunew 1996, p.2; Mycak 2004, p. 13l). As writer Sonia Mycak notes:

> The Demidenko Affair was a destructive lesson that the authenticity and cultural authority of the speaking/writing voice are important. Because minority ethnic groups have so little access to public discourse, whatever enters the public arena is particularly influential and potentially damaging. (2004, p.130)

In Mycak's view, ethnic authors have a responsibility to represent their minority cultures in both authentic and positive ways, because the ethnic author's work is held accountable by others who identify with that same ethnic group. Mycak notes that Ukrainian-Australian responses to *The Hand that Signed the Paper* were largely ignored by the mainstream press, and suggests that had the novel been contextualised with other works of similar subject matter, Darville's fraud would have been easily exposed (2004, p.121). Darville's perspective on World War Two was not common to Ukrainian-Australian writing (p.122), and her apparent anti-Semitism offended many in the community, who felt they were being misrepresented (p.129).

Why is there such an anxiety about defining a writer's ethnic identity? To answer this question one has to look at the relationship between minority cultures and the perceived Anglo-Celtic majority. Australian literature theorist Terry Goldie claims that the Anglo-Celtic majority has a desire for 'authentic' ethnic others and indigenous subjects (2004, pp.96-98). Others, like literature theorist Ben Authers, argue that multiculturalism is a way of managing difference, and that by defining an ethnic other, the national identity of the Anglo-Celtic

dynamic is maintained (2004, p.133). Poets and literature critics Maria Takolander and David McCooey suggest that the anxiety surrounding ethnic author identity is symbolic of anxiety surrounding Australia's national identity (2004, p.61).

Researching the issue of authorial authenticity and issues of minority representation induced a sense of paranoia and fear that I hadn't previously anticipated. Having grown up with Esterina, I felt I had a natural right to represent her, and thought that I could act as her spokesperson. I considered myself an insider, at least in cultural terms. I saw my literacy as a way of getting an illiterate migrant woman's voice into fiction. I felt a cultural obligation to represent her in ways that could not be seen as racist, or stereotypical. What haunted me throughout the writing process was the idea that I was a voice not only for Esterina but my 'people', and that the fiction writer (although not a historian) is in some way accountable for the representation of minority groups, as Mycak suggests.

Although the character Nonna is Italian, what I ultimately realised was that her ethnic identity is not particularly important. I wasn't speaking for Italians as a group or culture, rather, I was speaking for a marginalised migrant woman who spoke broken English. I was writing for the illiterate—essentially anyone who is a migrant and speaks English as a second language. Oral historian Michal Bosworth, who co-authored *Emma: A Translated Life* (1990) with Italian migrant Emma Ciccotosto, had the same agenda of representing someone who cannot represent herself in literature. Of their first meeting, he writes:

> When I met Emma on a bus trip with the other members of Amicizia she was alert to the possibilities of having her tale at least listened to by someone who might help her. She says that she had wanted to tell her story for so many years but her husband had always laughed at her, saying "you can't write a book, you can't even speak English properly." (p.313)

As Bosworth also notes, immigrant memories are invisible to the general public because they are told in the private home rather than the public arena (1996, p.311). Perhaps it is the responsibility of later generations (who are literate and can speak fluent English) to try. Surely an entire section of Australia's population should not remain invisible to the national discourse. As Fernández writes, novels with multicultural 'voices' ensure that marginalised voices are given public attention, which 'minimise[s] the marginalising potential of being an ethnic minority' (2001, p.45). She also notes that it is important to [foster] 'the production of Australian texts which give voice to the smaller pieces of the entire cultural mosaic which make up the whole picture of contemporary society today' (2001, p.46).

Although I moved away from notions of individual identity, I knew that Nonna's social position as a disempowered, ignored migrant was to be shown through the character's voice. When I began the novel, I still felt the weight of minority representation; through the act of writing, I was (in some way) preserving some of Esterina's self and experiences. Her voice had to be authentic; at the very least, it had to be a voice that was believable for the audience. Nonna's dialogue would be something readers could recognise as an Italian migrant's voice.

Writing Broken English

I was born in 1979. My first word was *acqua*, the Italian word for water. Although Italian was the first language I spoke, my Anglo-Celtic father discouraged it. In the early 1980s, I grew up listening to the sounds of Esterina's broken English. In 1984 I went to school, an event that left my fragments of Italian, and domestic 'European' life, behind. I learned to write and read English.

As a journalism student in the late 1990s, I spent three years turning 'real' speech into news writing. News writing follows very specific rules, and the training I underwent was hard

and repetitive. In my first year of university, journalism students were given an hour to assemble a story from a page of facts. By the third year, we were given five minutes. Assignments were failed on the misspelling of a name. ‘Who, what, why and when’ had to appear in the first sentence of a news story, in exactly twenty-five words. During those years I interviewed over a hundred people, handing in weekly reports.

Journalism is the art of listening, rather than the practice of writing. I learned shorthand. I listened to hours and hours of tapes, writing out monologues. I learned an alphabet of symbols, hundreds of signs for words, and symbols for word beginnings such as ‘under’, ‘ultra’, and word endings such as ‘ism’, ‘ment’, and ‘ship’. I could write down verbatim the words people said them as they spoke. These notes, always dated and signed, were reporting: legal proof of real words. At the end of my degree, I could transcribe over a 100 words a minute, words I believed were truth.

Discontented with this lack of freedom, I was drawn to fiction writing and its creative possibilities. After the dry, impersonal reporting of journalism, reading Ania Walwicz’s experimental writing was completely liberating. Inspired, I decided to create a character who spoke broken English. With the use of my shorthand, I was confident that I could produce word-for-word examples, real speech for the novel, and capture Esterina’s voice on paper. This would ensure my character had the authenticity of a first generation migrant.

Esterina and the first generation migrants who live near her speak the same regional dialects that Italians spoke in Naples during the 1950s, and they have preserved the phrases, words and idioms of this time. However, it wasn’t until I attempted to write her speech down that I realised it was not a neat blend of perfect, time capsule Italian mixed with contemporary Australian conversational English. I also began to recognise how much living in Australia has affected her speech. My analysis of Esterina’s broken English revealed that she has been influenced by three important factors: her Italian (a Neapolitan dialect) her English, and the

words that exist between these languages; words that have been adapted by her (such as 'shoppa' for shop).

Esterina's English words can be vaguely accurate (such as *frox* for *fox*) but they do not function as mispronunciations, rather as actual words. She knows the word for *fox* is not *frox*, but she does not care. Her primary aim is communication, not accuracy. Some of her words are harder to approximate to their English counterparts, and I recognise them through repetition. For example, she has a particular fondness for the word 'bastard' which is close to the Italian *bastardo.* However, she does not use *bastardo* but 'barst' or 'barst-tard'. Other words are completely made up, in the mistaken belief that they are English.

Another problem was my limited knowledge of her Italian. I can understand conversations on family and domestic matters, but other topics are harder to follow, and some of what Esterina says is lost in translation. Esterina's speech is also directly influenced by what she thinks I can understand, and she switches haphazardly between Italian and English, particularly when she attempts to explain something.

Esterina does not speak in conventional narrative forms and she will often talk about two separate topics at the same time. For a fiction reader, this would be almost impossible to follow. In the example below, Esterina talks about three separate topics: my cousin wanting her to make pizza, another cousin who eats too much pizza (insinuating he is fat) and what suburb I have recently moved house to:

> Maka pizza. David want a bloody pizza gotta make a what you move where are you now see this the boy you remember now eat everything you see.

Esterina's English is pronounced with a thick accent, uses only one tense (the present) and, contrary to perceptions about the limitations of broken English, has an extensive vocabulary.

It is difficult for the untrained ear to understand this version of English in a significant way, because it has its own syntax and style. (This example shows that Esterina's English makes Ania Walwicz's 'No Speak' look relatively simple in comparison.) I cannot speak fluent Italian, but there is no doubt that I understand Esterina's broken English when other people do not.

To make things clear, I organised Esterina's dialogue by topic, and produced a 'direct' transcript of a conversation with Esterina. Some selected fragments are as follows:

Esterina:

> You mummy recognise Jessica marry in this house. Nobody marry! You no marry no good. When you get h'old nobody look after you. My bloody sister cry when die never say nothing.

My translation: (an English adaptation that another English speaker can understand)

> Your mother agrees with me that none of my grandchildren are going to marry—only Jessica seems likely to. It's no good to be single. When you get older there is no one to take care of you. My sister's son is very old and has never married. My sister cries because she knows that when she dies there will be no one to look after him.

This fragment shows how I have learnt to process Esterina's verbal speech into her more complex, sophisticated ideas. Esterina's broken English is essentially a code, which reveals a simple statement is far more complex than it initially appears.

What the ear hears and the hand writes are not one and the same. Esterina's English is not merely 'broken', it has rhythms and patterns that it follows; writing her words down

without context was like writing the notes of a song on a sheet of music without staves. Without context, Esterina's words died on the page, my sense of her voice was lost and the cadence of her language disappeared. Her language appeared 'broken', as if I had transcribed a string of random, unrelated words.

I realised that like a journalist, the creative writer must concede to the demands of their written form. I would have to mould and shape Esterina's words for a young adult audience. At the same time, however, I still faced the challenge of retaining some semblance of authenticity.

Ultimately, whatever voice I gave my Nonna character would have to suit the novel's overall narrative requirements. I began to research how other authors had written broken English, and how they had dealt with the issue of creating migrant voices in fiction.

Breaking English

The use of broken English is contentious because it can make the multicultural subject seem unintelligent, uneducated, or even cartoonish. Given a history of representations in the light of John O'Grady's *They're A Weird Mob* (1957), Joe Dolce's ridiculous song 'Shaddap You Face' and other lampooning of the 'Italian voice', I was reluctant to recreate a voice with such negative connotations. Having had little luck with finding journal articles on the subject in Australian multicultural fiction, I looked for contemporary (and hopefully less insulting and cartoonish) representations of the 'Italian voice' in multicultural short fiction edited by notable writers, such as Manfred Jurgensen, Peter Stryznecki, and Sneja Gunew. What I ultimately decided, however, was that 'No Speak' remains the biggest literary influence on Nonna's voice. It might seem ironic (as it is a parody) but somehow its voice seemed authentic to me. I read the poem aloud many times, listening to the rhythm in Walwicz's writing. By eliminating standard punctuation, the cadence of the ethnic voice becomes

evident, and the flow of language is uninterrupted: ‘i no speak English sorry i this where is john street please a ticket please i no speak’ (1982, p.34).

This technique could not be sustained through an entire novel. This rapid flow of language seems to reflect the migrant’s urgent and confused attempts to communicate. Nonna is not constantly in a state of panic over cultural negotiation, pleading for assistance or understanding. Although Walwicz’s work is transgressive and interesting, as literature theorist Lisa Jacobson writes: ‘Her prose-poetry (the distinction is difficult to make and not entirely necessary) has a reiterative insistence on division and alienation; its fragmented syntax, frequent lack of punctuation, and non-linear narrative structures work against a definitive closure’ (1990, p.148). I avoided this technique because it was too disruptive to the narrative, and more structure was needed in order for conversations involving Nonna to make sense.

Writer Haitho Massala, whose prose/poem ‘To Pethi Mou (My Child)’ which appears in Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin’s *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women’s Writing* (1988) was another example I considered, most notably because the piece is written phonetically:

> Mai dota she vork veri hart
>
> She ticha
>
> She studi
>
> She get good muni
>
> She noo kind of woomun
>
> No hafta wayt for man
>
> She support hesself. (p.66)

I decided that although Hassala's poem seems authentic due to its phonetic words (and although Nonna's words are often a blend of Italian and English), writing most of the dialogue like this would be too difficult for young readers and possibly alienate them.

Nonna's voice had to convey meaning for the character; her sense of self had to be revealed through her words. To subject an audience to what Jacobson describes as Walwicz's 'chopping' of language, to create 'new languages' was not my purpose (1990, p.159). The spoken word could not be truly authentic. Without context and organisation, Esterina's words made no sense. Punctuation would have to be put back in. I would have to break English in my own way. Like Ania Walwicz's 'No Speak', it was useful to think of Esterina as a source of inspiration, rather than a real-life version of her fictional counterpart.

In *Looking For Alibrandi* (1992) Nonna Katia and several other Italian characters speak English as a second language. However, she does not speak in broken English, and her 'Italian-ness' is conveyed mainly through pronunciation:

> 'Oh, Jozzie, you still do not understand,' she sighed. 'Could you imagine how life would be for me if I married Marcus? Could you imagine what life would be for my sister? People are cruel. They would make our lives hell. But mostly, Jozzie, tink of Christina. Back then, tink of the way my darling Christina would be treated. It is not like these times, Jozzie. She would have had no one. No Australians, no Italians. People would spit at her and say she was nuting'. (Marchetta 1992, p.225)

The use of English endearments, such as 'my darling' is surprising, and there are no Italian words in her English sentences. I am not suggesting that broken English is the only way migrant speech should be represented, but Nonna Katia's English is almost perfect, and her original tongue is largely ignored in the novel. It is hard to believe that a woman who

migrated from Italy (albeit over forty years ago) makes little or no references in Italian. Marchetta's Nonna addresses this point on page 78:

> 'The Australians knew nuting about us. We were ignorant. They were ignorant. Jozzie, you wonder why some people my age cannot speak English well. It is because nobody would talk to them and worse still they did not want to talk to anyone.
>
> 'We lived in our own little world and as more relatives and friends from the same town came out to Australia, the bigger our Italian community became, to the point where we didn't need to make friends with the Australians.' (1992)

Nonna Katia's English is too much like standard Australian English: her bland, long, ordered sentences have had Italian speech patterns or pronunciations erased from them. I realise that there is a risk in using broken English (and inviting representations of the unintelligent migrant) but removing it altogether goes too far. Nonna Katia's speech does not reflect how many first generation migrants speak.

I have translated the previous paragraph of Nonna Katia's speech into what eventually became Nonna's voice. This demonstrates how much more dynamically broken English can convey the same perspective:

> *Australiani*, they know nuting about us then. *(Nonna does not use past or future tense, and generally uses present. Using 'then' is therefore her only way of distinguishing tense.)* We know nuting, they know nuting. Old people like me, we carn speak English proper. When we come to this country no *Australiani* talk to us. We Italian not want to talk to them anyway, so nobody talk. That why I no understand nuting *(English)* now. In the old day before we come to Clifton Street, Italian stay together in one place. We no

> have *Australiani* living on our street. We no need to make new friend who can't understand us.

Nonna's voice was going to a mix between Walwicz and Marchetta's Italian voices; it was clear to me that the character's voice would remain 'broken' and not conform to conversational English. Author Zeny Giles, who has written about Greek communities in Australia, writes that the solution to the problem I faced is not easy, that the writer has to:

> work out all kinds of artificial means of dealing with two languages being spoken and these are the particular problems of writing about characters who are supposed to be speaking Greek and characters who would use English in preference to Greek, such as the younger members of the family. And I suppose I would use a combination of actual Greek words and English which is supposed to stand for Greek. You know, there isn't always a satisfactory solution…I really don't like the idea of using a kind of Broken English which sounds like a caricature of a Greek fish and chip shop owner… it's hard to work out just how to do it. (cited in Nickas 1992, pp.254-255)

Creating Nonna's voice was an 'artificial' solution that I hoped would nevertheless retain authenticity. It seemed I was stuck with the artificial/authentic dilemma, one oddly similar to the position of oral historian Michal Bosworth, who in writing *Emma: A Translated Life*, acknowledged that 'language was one of the difficulties we had to resolve' (1996, p.313). Bosworth and Emma decided to use conventional English to make the book easy to understand. It is perhaps an irony that *Emma* (an oral history) is written in standard grammatically correct English, and that 'The Nightwatchers' a creative work, is represented in broken English.

From Esterina to Nonna: The Construction of Voice

Multicultural literature theorist and writer Manfred Jurgensen suggests that the quest for 'authenticity' is something that functions as a 'powerful disincentive to imaginative and creative transformations of cultural interaction' (1999, p.267). As a fiction writer, I realised that Nonna's character would have to function as more than a shadow of the real Esterina.

In his essay 'Auto/Biography' Brian Castro argues that the relationship between a text and its author is complicated and that in essence, there is no 'reality' that becomes text. He argues that autobiography is not a representation of the 'truth' any more so than the novel form (1999, p.133). My character Nonna would have to speak in her own individual voice.

In his article 'Transformative Identities of Literary Multiculturalism', Jurgensen notes that migrant authors (or those authors descending from migrants) must face the 'archetypal challenge confronting all artists: imagination's needs to formally create voices of its own. The multicultural cultural writer thus shares art's fundamental ability of authenticating imagined identity' (1999, p.272). Nonna's voice is an act of creative imagination, written for an audience of young adults. Mattie and Nonna are not representations of Esterina and me; rather, they are imagined constructions.

Castro acknowledges that fiction is a 'postmodern project' (1999, p.120), and that although the author risks losing a sense of authenticity by acknowledging a postmodern position, no writer is authentic enough to represent an authentic subject: '…whenever we write, we write an other' (p.217). Takolander and McCooey also acknowledge that this loss comes at a price, a 'death that lies in place of authenticity' (2004, p.64).

I will never, I suppose, be entirely able to resolve the issue of authenticity, a position I have consciously taken by declaring myself a multicultural writer. Other writers, even those who do not embrace the term, are faced with the same issue. Ommundsen says that Castro's

novels all deal with ‘questions of authorship, authority and identity’ (1994-1995, p.11). Perhaps it is enough to say that that real life inspiration and experiences leave traces and contribute to a sense of authenticity in one’s work. Castro concedes that the cross-cultural writer ‘flow(s) across borders as a double-agent between cultures’ (1999, p.243). There is something to be said for inspiration and experience, although its influence on a text cannot be presumed to be an ‘authentic’ representation. Ommundsen, in her article ‘Multiculturalism, Identity and Displacement: The Live(s) of Brian Castro’ argues that if multicultural writing can be defined as anything, it is the questioning of voice which is most important to this genre:

> If it is at all possible to generalise about the large and diverse category known as contemporary multicultural writing, one might argue that, while it indeed does offer an arena for writers, readers and critics dissatisfied with monocultural canons, it can be seen to have as its major function (its politics?) that of deconstructing those ‘speaking positions’ which have been associated with it: race, ethnicity, nation, identity, perhaps even that of ‘multiculturalism’ itself. (1996, p.150)

I believe that it is still possible for the multicultural writer to act as a ‘voice’ for those positioned as marginalised in Australia, particularly in young adult and children’s literature, which is traditionally more didactic. It is important to note that a character’s speaking position cannot be represented as an identity of *all* ethnics, or as a definitive ethnic ‘other’, as Ommundsen suggests. Speaking position should not rely on obvious constructs of identity or ‘real’ people, but it can still reflect positions of marginalisation and comment on multicultural life: ‘stories are better when they’re not strictly biographical…the characters are characters of

fiction and they oughtn't to be too closely identified with particular people' (Giles cited in Nikas 1992, p.245).

With the shackles of authenticity loosened, I began to write notes about Nonna as a character. The separation of Esterina from Nonna was a slow process, but once I realised that the separation was necessary, I pushed aside my shorthand notebooks and experimented with writing my own kind of broken English, one that was inspired by Nonna rather than dictated by Esterina. Writing Nonna's broken English was, in a sense, like writing poetry; I had to give the dialogue a sense of rhythm. As literature theorist Lynn McCredden notes, although Walwicz's work seems to transgress language in some ways, it ultimately conforms to the symbolic order of language (1996, p.3).

Walwicz may not comply with the rules of grammar or write in standard English, but 'No Speak' was written as a performance piece. In this sense, I was able to imagine Nonna's voice as a performance piece for the reader–something symbolic of Esterina, rather than a literal translation. With this freedom, I was able to find Nonna's voice. After I had written the first draft, I read Nonna's broken English aloud, to make sure that an Italian migrant could say the words I had written. If it was possible for Esterina to say it, then it was 'authentic'; if it was too eloquent, complicated or unrealistic, I rewrote it. This, I discovered, was where some kind of authenticity was possible; I knew, without a doubt, whether Esterina would be able to say what I had written for her.

Esterina's influence on Nonna as a character was a similar process. I researched Esterina's migration and life in Australia and interviewed her directly on a number of occasions. I had to ensure that the character's voice and social position as a migrant who immigrated in the 1950s (in an official era of assimilation) reflected Esterina's experience. Researching Esterina's background, ideas and values helped me place Nonna within a context

of authenticity. Nonna's beliefs about family values, the role of food in daily life and religion fairly represent those of Italian post-World War Two migrants.

The requirements of the novel form helped me to separate Esterina from my Nonna character, because I did not want to write about the 'migrant longing for a lost homeland' narrative. Nonna could not be a first generation migrant in a strictly traditional sense, like Esterina, who often reflects on the past, yearning for Italy. I wanted to focus on the close friendship between Nonna and Mattie in the novel, so I made Nonna a more modern character, someone focused on living in the present. Esterina is traditional, has conservative European attitudes and resists what she sees as Australian culture in a communal, expatriate environment. In contrast, Nonna is more individual and open to change. Although Nonna grows to hate the neighbourhood of Clifton Street, she does not hate Australia. Despite often being at odds with Anglo-Celtic society, Nonna is not positioned as an exile yearning for the old country. She may prefer her own Italian values and traditions, but she never mentions returning or going back, and Australia is her home. She accepts Australia in a way that Esterina never has. Nonna's previous life in Italy and her migration are never referred to in 'The Nightwatchers'; and there are no scenes that show Nonna sentimentally recollecting the Italy of her childhood.

Rethinking Migrant Identity

Notions of migrant identity are difficult to challenge and critique, not merely because migrants and/or ethnics are marked as 'other' by Anglo-Celts. Migrants themselves often construct their sense of identity through their original country, like Esterina. Jurgensen argues that texts written by migrant authors often fail to move beyond the identity angle: the 'other' dwelling in a foreign land:

> Works gaining access to the literary mainstream display an imaginative creativity which is no longer culture-specific…the creation of a literary self (primarily through images, metaphors and symbols) has the capacity to transform static social identities defined by ethnic origin. The search for a new identity as a creative process of intercultural transformation is a vital step in gaining access to mainstream cultural discourse. Projections of personal images (and "voices") assume the identity of critical responses to sociocultural alienation. At its best, the migrant writer's voice of transformative self-creation can prompt a cultural redefinition of all identity. (1999, p.268)

My research concurs with Jurgensen's findings that multicultural novels tend to have first generation migrant characters with static social identities, suggesting they are 'other' and will never fit in. Second and third generation characters, who are Australian-born but ethnic, are identified as crossover/hybrid subjects, such as Josie in *Looking for Alibrandi*.

This scenario is useful because it emphasises a social reality that migrants can be marginalised, but what it fails to do is reveal how first generation migrant identity is shaped (or has been 'transformed') by living within a wider Anglo-Celtic/Australian environment. What I now realise, through both writing my novel and researching multicultural fiction, is that migrant identity needs to be expressed in new and creative ways. Rather than posing my character Nonna as an 'Italian migrant' in an 'Australian'/Anglo-Celtic setting, I acknowledge that Nonna has lived in Australia for forty years. Nonna's identity is postmulticultural, a product of both her original country and an Australian context. As Hussain suggests, the boundaries of an 'inside' (ethnic minority) culture are formed from the influence of the 'outside' (Anglo majority) culture, meaning that neither culture can be isolated from the other (2004, p.115). Nonna is not simply the 'displaced Italian migrant'

living in a foreign land. Her broken English is a literal example of cultural negotiation, a language of her two selves, rather than a fractured or bad version of English.

Nonna's complex identity deconstructs the reading of a 'migrant' as 'Italian in an Australian land'. It performs what Ommundsen suggests is the function of multicultural fiction: the deconstruction of speaking positions (1996, p.150). In challenging clichéd depictions of migrants as strangers who do not belong, I ask the reader to think about who belongs to Australia's imagined community. In creating Nonna, I tried to transcend 'Italian' and 'Anglo-Celtic' as fixed personal identities defined by ethnic origin. This is often the role of the so-called multicultural author. As children's literature critic Rhonda Bunbury notes: 'it is the third generation of ethnic minority writers who see beyond the migrant "other"/outcast and who in the process, force a national acceptance of difference and hence foster a gradual shift in national consciousness' (1996, p.249).

Readers may often assume that multicultural novels are autobiographical, 'real' and sociological; and that these novels must be 'authentic' and represent cultural minorities in certain ways. Yet authenticity is an uneasy pursuit, even if one can claim it; as Gunew has suggested, in a poststructuralist world, no one can definitively represent an authentic subjectivity (1996, p.3). Castro notes that the distinction between fact and fiction is futile, and that what the novel form offers is the 'greatest mutabilities' between the two (1999, p.15).

Perhaps it does not matter who is speaking, as much as what is being said. As Michel Foucault suggests, the authorial function is not as necessary as the text itself, although it cannot be completely avoided. If one concentrates on the text rather than the author, the message becomes the point:

> We would no longer hear the questions that we have rehashed for so long: who really spoke?...with what authenticity or originality?...Instead there would be other questions like these: what are the modes of existence for this discourse? Who can assume those subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hardly hear anything but the stirring of indifference: what difference does it make who is speaking? (1969)

Although I want the novel to speak for itself, rather than be framed as a work by an 'authentic multicultural writer', I cannot deny that there are traces of Esterina and myself in it. I went to great creative lengths to fictionalise those traces by writing a multicultural narrative that uses conventions of other genres such as detective and young adult fiction. As Castro writes, 'cross-genres relieve the schizophrenic pressures upon the dichotomy of authenticity and inauthenticity' (1999, p.122).

Perhaps it is enough to say that my name and Esterina's are not as different as they seem. My status as an author does affect the text, but as Roland Barthes argues 'it is the language that speaks, not the author' (1977, p.143). My novel's most important message is that there are still migrants who arrived in the 1950s who cannot catch a bus in Australia and whose voices are ignored by those around them. Writing about these voices creates a noise which breaks not only English, but the reverential, exclusive silence around it, allowing new stories to be told.

Afterword

Throughout this exegesis I have explored my roles as a young adult fiction writer and a supporter of multiculturalism. In the time that has passed while writing it, the social and political role of the writer has become more important than ever. Ten years after the Tampa incident, current debate about 'illegal immigrants' and refugees still rages in the media. The notion of the 'Australian Imaginary' as an Anglo-Celtic island under invasion remains an influential narrative, suggesting that many people from minority groups do not belong to the nation. As a fiction writer, I tried to counteract this limited imagining in a young adult novel, revealing the need for cross-cultural relations to be recognised, and suggesting that minorities should have a presence in contemporary Australian literature. I used the metaphor of cultural negotiation, rather than the multicultural narrative of a personal identity crisis, to break down the barriers between 'us' and 'them'.

This exegetical journey has also had an unexpected influence on my personal life. I now view my grandmother, myself and our positions within the Australian nation differently. Despite my role as a third generation, multicultural author, I have discovered that my place within the 'Australian Imaginary' is surprisingly similar to Esterina's, who is a first generation, illiterate migrant. An examination under a theoretical and literary lens has revealed that there are no 'Anglos' or 'wogs', no 'Italy' or 'Australia', no 'us' and 'them'; there is only the role of cultural negotiator, the subject who belongs to no culture in particular.

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