

‘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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