

On writing *The Ocean Road*.

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as they are ordered in this book.

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Abstract

It is the week after the failed Australian Republic referendum, 1999 in Port Noarlunga, a working class neighbourhood south of Adelaide. Libby is on the verge of becoming a woman and her mother, writer Genevieve Smart, has just been reported a missing person. There are no clues to her mother's disappearance; all that is left behind is a completed, but unpublished, manuscript which appears to be a family history.

The Ocean Road is a contemporary literary novel which tells the story of the Smart family, a ragtag bunch of smokers and drinkers who fight too much and spend too much time together. Their story runs alongside a parallel story, the unpublished manuscript, which is set in Adelaide and Melbourne in 1938, 1972 and 1986 and which outlines the struggles and stories of people who, it might be said, are aspiring to the level of working class enjoyed by the Smart family. The story set in 1938 describes an Aboriginal couple, Jack and Margery, and what they do to try to survive.

"On Writing *The Ocean Road*" describes the way I tried to ensure the authenticity of these two characters and their story. The exegesis focuses on Aboriginal Literature, a subjective reading of several works by Aboriginal writers and a literary analysis from various perspectives such as Modernism, the Flaneur tradition and through Language. In each chapter, I describe what I learnt and how it was expressed in the novel and provide examples.

The novel and the exegesis are my attempt to examine and represent an Australian perspective.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material that 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 of the thesis.

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Introduction

If the lost word is lost, if the spoken word is spent

If the unheard, unspoken

Word is unspoken, unheard...

(TS Elliot 102)

You're the voice, try and understand it.

(John Farnham 1986)

Writing a novel is a profound and mysterious activity that deserves study. As I come to write this dissertation on my own creative writing project, *The Ocean Road*, I am struck by the different skills required: now to tell instead of to show and to show what I have worked so hard to hide.

There are two aspects to this exegesis, simply described as the how and the why of the writing of *The Ocean Road*. The how describes my education, at Adelaide University and elsewhere, and is a description of my research method, critical approach and the effects of these on the text. This

process of creative writing research has been described as, “whereby affects and emotions interact with rational processes” (Hecq 4).

The Ocean Road contains a story about a hidden Aboriginal ancestor. The research I have done on Aboriginal Literature, storytelling and culture was designed to make this story ring true, so as to, as Alexis Wright describes, “make a good book, a fine book” (Wright, Interview with Kerry O’Brien 215). Aboriginal culture is so deep and rich and various that entire academic careers can be devoted to its study and a non-Aboriginal researcher is destined, it seems, to always feel like a pretender. A creative writing project, though, allows a more spontaneous approach to this vast field of knowledge. This exegesis provides me with an opportunity to pay my respect to those who have devoted themselves to sharing this knowledge with us.

I am lucky to have had Aboriginal teachers, along the way, and I will try to include their lessons in this paper, to show how they have helped me to imagine this country through “black eyes” (Heiss, Dhuuluu-Yala 27). In doing this though, I will respect my Aboriginal friends’ ideas of authorship and ownership and only use what is in the public domain. When it comes to these experiences, this paper is concerned with showing how I learnt, on the ground as it were, rather than what I learnt.

The second aspect of this exegesis, the why, represents the aspect of creative research characterised as “a radical gesture...a radical subjectivity” (Strange 1).

My Master's Degree project was my first novel, *Judy's Cure*. It was a 'portrait of the artist as a young woman' set in an abattoir. I read the writers of last century that I admired - Joyce, Hardy, Flaubert and I incorporated what I had recognised as familiar in their styles into my novel; I wanted a gravitas (or what I thought passed for such) for this lowly story of a working class intellectual and her fate of thwarted dreams. In *Judy's Cure*, there is a scene where Judy imagines the life of an Aboriginal girl who might have lived before her, but it is a side story, an expression of the non-Aboriginal character's search for understanding. Reflecting on that work, I now see my ignorance and, thankfully, corresponding lack of confidence.

This turn, I read Aboriginal Literature; writers like Alexis Wright, Kym Scott and Jack Davis and I looked for the familiar and I incorporated that into my style, just as I had done with European writers as an undergraduate. I am conscious of the politics around such an act, the arguments around appropriation and assimilation and I appreciate the opportunity to show in this exegesis the sincerity of my undertaking.

The question of why I wrote *The Ocean Road* I can answer simply – it is a response to the failed bid for an Australian Republic. That is where the idea started and that is why the novel is set in November, 1999. What this failure represents to me, and the more complicated response to be answered in this exegesis (and the passionate anger that is the fuel for the whole project) is the continuing acceptance of the representation of us, of Australians, as inferior. To me, the vote not to have an Australian Republic was the political version once described in artistic terms as the 'cultural cringe'.

I wanted to write a novel through 'working class eyes' without seceding to this automatic position of inferior. I wanted to look within or at least just outside, to show this perspective; I didn't want to look across the water to Europe. I wanted people like me to like my book, even if they hadn't been to university. I wanted to describe this process for an audience who were perhaps (probably) middle class, who may not know the working classes or even believe people like me exist.

Aboriginal writers have come so far towards non-Aboriginal Australian audiences in their embracing of English language and European literary forms, the forms of their colonisers, to tell their own stories, that they had a lot to teach me about writing my own story in my own voice. Aboriginal people have used their written stories to fortify their own rich culture, promote their own values and most importantly, to represent themselves as they want to be seen. Of all that I have learnt while completing this PhD., learning how to write my story to achieve these three ambitions has been the most important.

Aboriginal Literature

Modern Australian Aboriginal literature grew from a strong and distinctive oral tradition of song and storytelling. Aboriginal people started to adopt elements of British literary culture almost immediately upon contact. There is evidence that from first contact with Europeans, writing was understood and used by Aboriginal writers within Aboriginal frames of reference. In *Writing Never Arrives Naked*, Penny van Toorn describes this:

“Aboriginal people adapted writing to their traditional protocols of communication, reinforcing rather than undermining their orally grounded, kin-based, place-based and gender-based social order”.

(van Toorn 22)

The lack of published works by Aboriginal writers for most of the twentieth century is well documented but van Toorn examines other forms of writing to examine how Aboriginal people adopted the European form and made it their own. The letters to the Aboriginal Protection Board are heartbreaking in the carefulness of the choice of words but it is in the repetition and rhythms of their words and the importance of place and the need to pay respect to important family connections, that you can see the continuity of their Aboriginal culture.

Traditionally, Aboriginal stories were told in relation to the listener – certain people could hear certain stories. When Aboriginal people started telling their stories to Europeans, they were aware that they were addressing outsiders and tempered their stories accordingly. Stephen Muecke has acknowledged this aspect of Aboriginal stories, his role as listener and the effect that had on the way he was told the stories in his book, *Textual Spaces*. He also noted the importance of presenting the text of the stories he was told by Aboriginal storyteller, Paddy Roe, word for word from taped recordings, the way the story was told is as important as the content.

When Aboriginal stories were written down, there remained evidence of this oral tradition. Anita Heiss suggests that,

Aboriginal speech patterns put into the written form provide Aboriginal writing with character, passion, authenticity and humour. (Duuluu-Yala 31)

Other Aboriginal writers point at the colloquial language, used in a straight forward fashion, to distinguish them from non-Aboriginal writers. Yet others highlight the way people behave socially, the details of a story, to tell if an author is Aboriginal or not.

Sandra Phillips describes the recognisable qualities of Aboriginal Literature thus,

The similarities...to my mind as an editor having worked on titles in the last two years is the complete rootedness in this country – Australian characters, mannerisms, landscape

depictions, it's from here, and you don't get enough of that sort of sense from many Australian writers. (quoted in Heiss, "Duuluu-Yala" 28)

Critical assessment of Aboriginal literature has been limited, partly due to the short time period academics have had to consider these works but also because of what Alison Ravenscroft has described as "radical uncertainty," and the "necessary estrangement of...white readers"(198). An approach from a creative writing perspective allows more freedom to explore Aboriginal writing, to identify, reflect on and experiment with techniques, styles and representations as a writer rather than as a critic or a 'white'.

Aboriginal writers have themselves already reached across this divide, to show how it can be done. One example of an approach is captured in the character of Bobby in Kim Scott's novel, *That Deadman Dance*. Bobby is a dancer and he can learn the moves of his Nungar people, he is taken away for initiation but he can also move like the soldiers and the whalers, who come from all over the world. Bobby expects the same from the non-Aboriginal people in the town, the same respect for otherness, when he says,

We all different from when we were babies, you and me too. I change, doesn't mean I forget all about my people and their ways. But some people come to live here, and wanna stay like they never moved away from their own place. Sometimes I dress like you people, but who here I ever see naked like my people? (Scott 391)

In *That Deadman Dance*, Kim Scott states in the notes at the end of the novel, that he wanted to highlight the sophistication of the Nungar people in his novel. He writes,

I wanted to build a story from their confidence, their inclusiveness and sense of play, and their readiness to appropriate new cultural forms – language and songs, guns and boats – as soon as they became available. Believing themselves manifestations of a spirit of place impossible to conquer, they appreciated reciprocity and the nuances of cross-cultural exchange. (398)

The 1980s saw a renaissance in the publishing of Aboriginal writers after a sixty year absence from the Australian literary landscape; finally, Aboriginal people were able to tell their own stories and reflect upon contemporary Australia. This body of work provides a resource for non-Aboriginal Australians to gain more of an insight into the lives of Aboriginal people. There has also been a commensurate growth in the number of Aboriginal scholars and critics who provide even more insight into the ways these stories are shared. This body of work is a resource for cross-cultural exchange.

I hope my novel is a contribution to the continuing dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian writers, to be, like the Nungar people, ready to play with new (only to me, actually ancient) cultural forms. Over one hundred years ago, David Unaipon became the first

Australian Aboriginal to be published. Unaipon hoped for non-Aboriginal Australians to read his legends and be inspired to use them as a basis for new Australian stories.

Over the next eighty years, there were a few Australian artists who tried to incorporate Aboriginal characters, motifs and stories into their creative work but without Aboriginal writers getting published, these people were counted among the thieves and discouraged. Today, this approach seems to be entrenched.

Aboriginal writer Bruce Pascoe has bemoaned the lack of fully realised Aboriginal characters in Australian stories written by non-Aboriginal writers in his essay in *Southerly* entitled, "The Dead Cat". In the piece, he suggests that our inability to really get this country, to understand it and see it so that we can capture it with words or paint, is due to our collective denial about some of the worst parts of our recent history. The analogy he uses is that of a dead cat - what happens and what tricks must be turned when guilty children try to hide the truth about their dead cat.

We all want to be good children. We want to be proud of our home and deserving of its love and warmth. The cat is our only problem. We glare at the mat where the cat used to sit and mythologize its disappearance. We're good at that. We're storytellers (15).

He decries the characters created by non-Aboriginal people as "cut from cardboard" or simply devices or examples of "otherness" (Pascoe 16).

This predicament for non-Aboriginal writers is described by Nadia Wheatley, as:

...a no-win situation ... suggesting that those who don't include Aboriginal characters and themes in their work run the risk of painting a white Australian monoculture and inadvertently fostering racism, while on the other hand, those who do include Aboriginal characters and themes may depict Aboriginal people simply as tokens, including them to make white writers and readers feel better, or at worst, create a new form of exploitation and appropriation – however unintentional it may be. (22)

The 1980s inherited the spirit of social equity from the 1970's and there was a recognition and celebration of the range of Australian voices. As well as an increase in works published by Aboriginal writers there was also the emergence of 'Women's Writing' at this time, for example. At the same time, though, there was a movement away from fiction that portrayed working class realities. In his essay "Unfashionable in Literary Terms", Phillip Edmonds describes this shift. Class becomes, he argues, "shadowy and indeterminate" and there is, "the naturalising assumption that the average Australian was middle class or indeed classless" (Edmonds 15).

Of course the reality was that there was still a working class in the 80s, there still is, they're just not represented. Where there is representation of women and women's stories, especially in the academic field, this has also led to more women participating. Statistics show that this has not

happened as exponentially for Aboriginal people. For working class people, increases in attendance at tertiary institutes has not changed despite a number of programs designed to close the gap between them and their middle class equivalents. The limited representation of the working class and their stories seems equally to have led to a similar lack of representation in academia (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne 2).

This puts the working class writer/academic into the same position that exists for many Aboriginal writers, as described by Alexis Wright to Anita Heiss,

What we do as Aboriginal writers is try to second guess the world of literature. We don't enter into the discourse because our experience does not allow it. (qtd. in Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala* 26)

For working class and Aboriginal writers alike, the world of literature, and the world of academic writing, can be considered "*posh* English" (Heiss 32). Aboriginal Literature is known for seemingly simple stories which reveal layers of meaning in a straightforward style and for using short words and sentences, with the aim to be widely understood. This is sometimes mistaken for simplicity but it actually shows the inheritance of the importance of the audience (or the reader) in Aboriginal storytelling. Analysis of Aboriginal Literature has in the past been criticised for being "more interested in reading writers than texts" (O'Neill and Braz 4), but in Aboriginal Literature and in the Aboriginal storytelling inheritance, the place of the writer is more ambiguous.

This is a style, then, that can provide a way through what Heally described as a ‘web of words’ (17), one that can be followed by a writer who may not be ready to be seen.

In writing *The Ocean Road*, I read Aboriginal writers who had told their stories, immersed myself in the words of those who had prepared a creative space all writers could share. I knew I could never understand everything, or all of it but I tried to emulate the form. I was writing for as wide an audience as I could, including Aboriginal readers. Working in this space has affected the novel in many different ways and this exegesis is an attempt to carefully reference how I have been influenced to reveal the layers in my story and to show my quest to tell the story in the right way; to write a good book.

* * *

The 1990s saw an increase in discussions about non-Aboriginal people writing about Aboriginal people. Anita Heiss, in her essay in *Southerly*, “Writing about Indigenous Australia – some issues to consider and protocols to follow,” outlines the arguments and “the difficulties faced by white writers who aim to present material in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way” (199). The result is not that *white* writers don’t include Aboriginal Australians; it cannot be denied that they are there in the stories of this country. Rather, these characters remain unimagined and it is in that way that they stay hidden behind Ruby Langford’s ‘invisible door’. (qtd. in Nyoongar 33)

This effect is echoed in the conversation between the father and his son as they travel across the country in *The Secret River*,

There be any blacks where we're going, Da? Dick asked.

No, son, I ain't never seen a single one. (Grenville 128)

Despite the warnings and with heed to protocols offered by Heiss and others in her *Southerly* essay, I have attempted to write bi-culturally. I have been influenced by Marcia Langton's attempt to "move boundaries and undo the restrictions which make it so difficult for any of us to speak" (7), as she has described in her work, '*Well I Heard It on the Radio and I saw it on the Television...*'.

I have used my imagination. It is imagination that is required, as Paul Keating reminded us in his Redfern speech.

"We took the children from their mothers.

We practiced discrimination and exclusion.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice.

And our failure to *imagine* these things being done to us. (my italics)

With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds.

We failed to ask – how would I feel if this was done to me?”

(Keating 1992)

In the case of *The Ocean Road*, I was imagining a working class Australian family in 1999, in the week after the failure of the last bid for a Republic and I was imagining the history that had lead them to this moment. This family (and the country) had aspired to this, even though they had failed in many ways, this family (and this country) had come from somewhere; people had aspired to reach this point, to give the future to us.

Marcia Langton describes the infinite array of creations arising from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists who, as she describes, “engage in actual dialogue, where the individuals test and adapt imagined models of each other to find satisfactory forms of mutual comprehension” (81) and this process as “iterative”

A similar philosophy is expressed in the introduction of *Boundary Writing*,

My life fulfils the imagination of the generations who came before me, and those whose spirits I carry forward.

They prepared a special place for me, through their hopes, dreams and love.

(Russell 3)

Historical research, as well as my personal experiences in the Aboriginal community, has contributed much to the story of *The Ocean Road*, and I will outline this more, but I will mostly discuss the influence of Aboriginal Literature on the way the story was told. It wasn't enough to tell what happened. The central character Libby is familiar with the Aboriginal culture, has experience with Adnyamathanya and Kurna and Ngarrindjeri people and she knows some of the old legends of the country where she lives. The ambiguity about the truth of the novel-within-the-novel provides an opportunity to create, in Libby, a character who could have Aboriginal great grandparents, though it is never asserted. It is through Libby's voice, direct, humorous, set in a time and place, focussed on family, that I have tried to emulate the sound and the way of telling a story from Aboriginal people. It is in the overall design of the novel, circular, stories linked and repeating, told across a landscape, that I have expressed what I have learnt and applied from reading the works of Aboriginal writers and storytellers.

But historical information is vital and if I was a history student would be central to this thesis. As it stands, most of what I found was triggered by chance findings, often a result of happenstance and what a writer would consider luck as much as strategy. It's correlation to the novel is a result of what Donna Lee Brien has referred to as a Creative Writing PhD's student's ability,

to ask what seems to be unrelated and illogical questions and making wild and unconnected notes in the margins of the historian's neat information rich files about what these texts suggested for the one yet to be written. (Brien 54)

I read Judy Wickes' research on the exemption card in Queensland and I heard stories about it in South Australia. A work mate at Tauondi College told me about someone he knew who had a 'dog's collar' and was arrested for being in Mount Gambier simply because he had relatives living in the South East. The first rule of the exemption card was that you could never associate with Aboriginal people. When I spoke about this part of Australian history to others, I had the same response that Wickes registered even amongst Queensland Aboriginals: people had never heard about it. Of all the bureaucratic policies designed to make the Aboriginal person disappear from Australia, this seems to have been one of the most efficient.

I was involved in building an Indigenous Medicinal Garden, Yungallungalla, with Kurna and Ngarrindjeri people and I learnt a lot as part of this process. In the garden is one bush, I don't remember its Latin name but the local Aboriginal people called it the "shut up tree", some call it the "learning tree" because it produced a gum which they would give to the children when they needed them to be quiet for hunting or travelling or learning. There is a time to be silent, when you are a child, when you are learning. My novel, *The Ocean Road*, is an assertion that Australia's childhood should have finished in 1999 and that the failed Republic bid was a lost opportunity for dialogue, mutual comprehension, a lost iteration.

In 1999, the year that character Genevieve Smart finished her novel, Kombumerri writer, lecturer and consultant in Aboriginal matters, Mary Graham offered the Australian Publishers' Association Residential Editorial Program some basic differences between writing based on oral story-telling and European writing. These differences include:

- 1) A different logic between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal thinking. All perspectives are valid and reasonable in Aboriginal society with no absolutes, where even contradictory things are negotiable.
- 2) There is a different sense of time for Aboriginal people, with the idea of beginning/middle/end being a foreign concept, meaning the Aboriginal view is not linear.
- 3) An individual is a member of a group, and while Europeans would say this leads to 'conformity', Aboriginal people see this as not being isolated from their community.
- 4) Stories don't 'belong' to an individual in Aboriginal society as they do in non-Aboriginal societies and it is against lore to tell someone else's story. And regardless of geography, all stories are traditional.
- 5) The place for authority is well defined in Aboriginal society and the older people in communities work out of a distinction between power and authority. Grey hair is a good thing, denoting authority, and it is a good thing to have children and grandchildren.
- 6) Land is the basis of all life for Aboriginal people and the relationship between land and people sets the tone for the relationship between people, and for this display of manners. All the creative process, culture, comes out of the land itself.

- 7) Decolonisation is demystifying and defining Aboriginality is a new concept. There is a notion of universal 'assumed knowledge' in our culture, which means there is no necessity to describe.
- 8) Contradiction is an issue for the writer, that is, the editor should emphasise craft in editorial comments rather than the 'utopian' idea of perfection. There is not a utopia in Aboriginal culture. The pure/spontaneous thing is natural to an Aboriginal writer.

(qtd in Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala* 33- 34)

While writing *The Ocean Road*, I have read the work of Aboriginal writers and I have let their voices influence the voice of the character of Libby Smart and this has affected the structure of the novel. By placing Libby's voice in the Australian Aboriginal story telling tradition, I hope to give the story authenticity, to pay respect to Aboriginal people's experiences and to use the cultural forms which are this country's inheritance. It is too much to say that I followed the eight rules above; it would be fairer to say that when I read through my novel and compare it to this list, I find evidence that I have succeeded in capturing something of this storytelling tradition.

Myth and Time and Modernism

In *Modernism and Australian Literature*, David Carter writes,

One cannot speak simply of the arrival of Modernism in Australia. After all, according to the critics and anthologists modernism has never ceased arriving....though at times it seems never to have fully arrived. In criticism, modernity, rather like cultural maturity, appears repeatedly to express something ever-present yet ever imminent, always about to be achieved. In short, the concept reveals more about changing notions of Australian culture than about artistic practice itself

(Carter 159).

By applying this term, I hope to avoid arguments about Post-Modernism and Post-Colonialism as these terms have been shown to be “largely meaningless” to a range of

Aboriginal people (Heiss, Dhuuluu-Yala 43).

The Ocean Road can be described as an Australian Modernist novel; there is no absolute truth for Libby, all is relative, she represents her world for the reader in a stream of consciousness as if perceiving it for the first time. As Libby tells her story, and as she doles out her mother’s story, in parts, to the reader, there is a breaking down of the limits of time and space. In the novel, people travel across the landscape - sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly and seemingly across time, a Grandmother in Libby’s story is a young woman in one of her mother’s stories and a girl in yet

another. Lastly, *The Ocean Road* is an attempt to tell a universal story through a highly localised one.

These aspects of Modernist literature can also be applied to Aboriginal literature as discussed in an essay on Mudrooroo Narogin's novel *Wildcat Falling*,

...the basic narrative is in a form of the present tense, which departs from the expected past-form of classic narrative by not situating the narrative comfortably in a fictional past. This is odd in English, except in modernist texts, but is...a normal feature of Aboriginal languages, which typically use a form of the present as the usual narrative mode. Into this linguistic matrix, however, are inserted fragments of official discourse ('Another debt paid to society') and contemporary slang ('Swell hopes'). The result is a fissured consciousness, in which the boundaries between Aboriginal and White are constantly shifting, speaking a language which is both crushingly banal and ordinary yet also aberrant, marked, experimental, and a form of modernist writing.

(Hodge and Mishra 110)

In Jack Davis' play *Kullark*, there is a linear history which incorporates archival material, from non-Aboriginal sources but the story is also organised around the Yorlah family over this same time period, Alex as a married man and then as a child. By using the European idea of history as a series of actions across time and juxtaposing it against a more circular, Aboriginal idea of time focussed

on the family, Davis is able to show the different possibilities, both of opportunity and of perspective, offered by different circumstances.

Davis' play *No Sugar* is part of a trilogy which uses a similar, circular technique except that it moves from pre-invasion times to the period of assimilation and on to the 1970's when the final act shows the ramifications of all that has gone before.

I have used a similar technique to convey the same sentiment in *The Ocean Road*. The narrative moves between Libby's first person oral storytelling, as she tells the reader, "This is life, not a story," (Clark 251) which nevertheless moves in a linear fashion and her mother's fictional history. The novel-within-the-novel, the fictional history, is not linear as Libby reads the story in the order of her preference – the story set in 1972 alongside the reader first; next she reads the story set in 1986, when she was a baby but she reads it first, telling the reader,

I've read it now, the one about me, who cares about the order. I've read it and you haven't. I don't want to spoil it for you. (Clark 112)

But Libby doesn't give the reader the whole chapter; as the story reaches its climax, she defers, she can't handle the pain of reading it while her mother is missing. In the next scene, the start of the next chapter, Libby is getting her face plucked by her cousin, thus representing the circularity of the story. Finally, she reads the chapter about the Aboriginal ancestor without fanfare; this is

the true start of her mother's fiction. *The Ocean Road* finishes with the end of the chapter that Libby originally left out. The character introduces the last section of the chapter with,

You want a death? Of course. And you know what, I can give you one. The end of Mum's story. Well, I've ruined it for you now, Cherry ruined it for me too, but hopefully it will feel like some kind of ending. (Clark 251)

However the stories are disclosed, they are connected across time with each other and with Libby in her present. Setting *The Ocean Road* in 1999, with Libby speaking directly to readers across time to 2014, is another attempt to show the continuity between all of these times and the present and the future.

In *The Ocean Road*, I have tried to apply what I have learnt about writing all time through reading the works of Jack Davis and Alexis Wright, and other Aboriginal writers. Alexis Wright explains this aspect of Aboriginal writing thus,

the way people tell stories; they will bring all the stories of the past, from ancient times and to the stories of the last 200 years (that have also created enormous stories for Indigenous people), and also stories happening now. It is hard to understand but all times are important. (Wright, Interview with Kerry O'Brien 217)

In the story set in 1928, there is a moment of recognition of time, it is the saddest scene in the book for me, when Jack, reading *The Abo Call*, (an actual publication that only lasted half a year in 1928) imagines that he has acted too quickly in taking the Exemption card, that the future will be better for Aboriginal people and he has denied this future to himself and his children. It is especially sad because, despite Jack's anguish, we know, even now, not enough has changed for Aboriginal people in Australia.

It wasn't the war though that had killed him, after all, it was *The Abo Call*. Reading it, he still had the shame of not working, of his drinking, but now he had regret. It was the gnawing of that that finished his belly, thinking that perhaps he could have been an Aboriginal man, lived as an Aboriginal man and still been a man after all; if only he had waited. Here it was! He was reading it in black and white, on paper, arguments that white men and women could read, that couldn't be mucked around with, that given the same opportunities as a white man, a black man would achieve the same as him. Words that couldn't be twisted to hide that in Australia, a man was still judged by the colour of his skin. That's why Jack had got away with it. He knew though, he knew that even if his skin was pale, even if his hair was straight or his eyes blue, even if he wore the same clothes as them, if he wore clothes, he was Aboriginal. He was Adnyamanthya. Perhaps he could have been that, if he had waited.

Margery couldn't imagine it. What difference were words on a page? "We have been forgotten in their march to nationhood," she read to him from *The Abo Call*. What a march it was, look at them marching past her front door now. All they did, they went

around in circles. It was going to be a long time before anything changed in this country. She didn't say this to him, to Jack, because he had imagined unlikely things in the past and had been proved right. She wanted to believe him that it could be different, at least while he was alive. Even though the thought that he had made the wrong choice was eating his insides, she never said to him that it couldn't have been any other way. She never said that.

We survived didn't we? She'd said it often enough. But he hadn't. (Clark 222)

In *The Ocean Road*, by including a novel-within-a-novel that moves across Australian history which is not linear; I have applied what I have learnt from Aboriginal storytelling to make a statement about the lack of change in Australian society - over the last one hundred years, over the last fifteen years, until now. I hope to show the continuity of time and the idea of all time existing at once as expressed by Aboriginal writers and in Aboriginal culture.

Alexis Wright, at Writer's Week Adelaide 2014 provided another perspective. Aboriginal writers are concerned with all time, she said, as has been discussed, but she insisted on including the future. Aboriginals are not only looking backwards, she argued, but are focussed on the future as well and especially their children. Libby refers to the future at the end of the novel, questioning the reader about how long they'll be around,

It'll be Summer soon, that's the best time. How would it work though? Would you come out with me this weekend? Stay home and wait for Henry's call? Would you come with me to Taf on Monday? (Clark 251)

Alexis Wright has stated that overseas writers like Carlos Fuentes have shown her "how to write all times," (Interview with Kerry O'Brien 217) and yet Mary Graham identified a different sense of time as a recognisable feature of Aboriginal storytelling. By using this device in *The Ocean Road*, all time, including the future is, as Alexis Wright suggests, presented as relevant to Australian writers.

* * *

The Centre for Modernism Studies in Australia, University of New South Wales website describes Modernism as:

... the defiant gesture of negation and liberation that overturns established ways of doing and being, and sets human thought and perception on new roads of discovery and freedom.

(Centre for Modernism Studies In Australia Home Page)

By structuring *The Ocean Road* to include the influence of both Aboriginal storytelling and European writing on the two narrators, I have attempted to overturn the established narrative

which keeps these worlds as separate and distinct. Kim Scott describes his own attempt to show both of these influences on a modern Australian writer in the writing of *That Deadman Dance*.

It's politically a little bit dangerous, because some people will interpret it - really stupidly, I think - as a sort of desire for assimilation or something. I don't think it's anything like that. It comes out of a supreme confidence and it's very postmodern even. It's very global in instinct. It's the essence of cultural exchange - you learn something new.

(Keenan 2010)

In the character of Bobby Wabalanginy, Scott has created a typically Modernist character, one who uses all his knowledge to undermine the accepted status quo. He uses mimicry and dance to show the Europeans themselves. He uses his own language and he uses the language of the Europeans to create uncertainty. His character creatively resists the attempts of the working class characters to place the Aboriginal characters beneath them in the colonial hierarchy.

The way the story unfolds, (or the structure of the novel), has many elements that are recognisable in Aboriginal Literature. The different sense of time encountered in Aboriginal literature can be observed as Bobby moves across time, is all at once the young boy given to Doctor Cross, the young man falling in love and the old man acting the clown for the tourists.

One can recognise the unique quality of maintenance of culture in the way the story is told, and the way family relationships are described, in *That Deadman Dance*. The story is moved forward through visits from elders and their authority would be instantly recognisable to an Aboriginal reader, as would the purpose of their visit. Aboriginal readers would recognise that when the uncle and aunty come to take Bobby away, it could only be for his initiation. *The Ocean Road* can be read similarly, with visits from her relatives and Libby's travels and visits to her Nanna moving the plot forward.

Libby also undertakes an initiation. David Unaipon described one part of a young person's initiation in *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, where each young Ngarrindjeri person would undergo three tests: hunger – where they would be forbidden to eat for a number of days and then would be tempted with delicious food and have to resist; fear – where the young person would be told scary stories and then left in the dark where the elders would hide and return later to try to scare them and finally, a test which involved suffering pain.

In *The Ocean Road*, Libby undertakes these three initiations. The novel is in three parts and each part entails Libby being tested in this ancient way. In the first chapter, the food cupboard has been emptied, presumably by Libby's mother, Genevieve and with a stomach empty except for tea, Libby refuses to eat when food is offered. In the second test, Libby wakes in the middle of the night, the volume of the television is inexplicably loud, she is woken by Malcolm Turnbull (Libby calls him Malcolm Turmoil), the sound of his voice as he blames the failure of the Republic bid on John Howard. The lights go on and off and Libby runs through the house screaming. Lastly, Libby

undergoes an initiation of pain; a depilation, her eyebrows are plucked. This is an initiation right that many women go through.

The initiation of Libby Smart is implicit; she is not aware that she is undertaking instruction. The reader is not aware and at the end, when Libby has passed, there is no celebration, just a subtle movement from the kid's table to the adult's table. Libby stops making the cups of tea. I hope the reader is able to come along with Libby without being fully aware of what is happening to her. I also hope that the reader realises, at the end of the novel, that something has changed and that Libby has grown up without having to know that there was an initiation, one undertaken in her part of the country forever.

In this way I have responded to Unaipon's call from last century and I have followed in the footsteps of Modernist writers before me. In the earliest critical recognition of Modernism, T.S. Eliot's *Ulysses, Order and Myth*, he describes this aspect of modern literature thus,

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history (Eliot, *Ulysses, Order and Myth*)

Carpentaria by Alexis Wright dramatizes an “Indigenous epistemology and knowledge system,” (Devlin-Glass 2007) from an insider’s perspective. Wright starts with the myth of the snake winding in and out along the coast, creating the waterways before stopping at the town of Desperance. The town was built without the knowledge of this myth, without the knowledge of the movement of the snake and so ends up kilometres away from the water. The story of the Rainbow Serpent is a common one amongst many different Aboriginal peoples and it speaks to a need to know the land to find fresh water and to share this knowledge. These qualities are central tenets of Aboriginal culture across the country and can also be recognised in Aboriginal Literature.

There is a sense of discord created for non-Waanyi readers, those who don’t know the place as well as Wright. Her confidence though, is enough to take the reader with her into the deep and ever-changing waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Wright’s use of myths from her own country is echoed in the words of her character, Big Mozzie, who dismisses Bible stories as “lived in somebody else’s desert” (Wright, 140). The myths that Wright uses can pass on knowledge which is recognisable to the Waanyi people and vital to maintaining their culture. This is the primary role of stories in Aboriginal culture and this can be noted as central in Aboriginal Literature.

The role of myth in Aboriginal stories has been noted as a recognisable quality of Aboriginal drama also, and contributes to the centrality of the symbolism of these myths in modern Aboriginal writing. Dennis Carroll has noted in his essay published in *Modern Drama*,

The defining characteristics of Aboriginal drama...include Aboriginal myth (and history-as-myth) functioning in the present. A “contemporaneously active past” which affects the structure and patterning of event in the plays; characteristic Aboriginal patterns of thinking and perceptions involving analogy and Symbolism, affecting vivid non-realist representations and bold juxtapositioning of very different theatrical styles. (102)

To appreciate the complexity it helps to place Aboriginal Literature alongside Australian Modernism and within Modernism itself. In *Modernism and Australian Literature*, Carter reminds us that,

H.P.Heseltine argued that Australian literature had discovered, even before European literature, the “peculiarly modern element in modern literature.” Beneath its mateship, democracy and realism, Australian literature reveals “the terror at the basis of being,” a concern which “guarantees its continuing modernity. (167)

Yet, in this essay, the signifiers Carter names as those of “an art distinctively Australian and yet modern, distinctively modern and yet Australian....an art local and yet universal,” (167) can be attributed to Aboriginal Literature.

In 'Dreaming of Others' Ravenscroft draws a parallel between Alexis Wright and other Modernist writers; of *Carpentaria*, she writes that,

It accomplishes its political work through an aesthetic of uncertainty, a radical, irresolvable equivocality in language and form. This is not a dialectic synthesis. It instead raises, for me as a white reader, an aesthetic reminiscent of modernism rather than magic realism. This is an aesthetics that recalls James Joyce, whom Alexis Wright admires. (205)

This 'aesthetic of uncertainty' has also been noted in the work of David Unaipon. When Unaipon wrote in "A Blackfella Pleads for his Race" that Aboriginal people needed help and to leave them behind would be like "an Aboriginal leaving a white man in the desert" (qtd. In Jose 10), he is using a metaphor which a *white man* would understand but, in doing so, he is asserting his own knowledge; the desert isn't a desert to him.

As Nick Jose notes,

Unaipon's *Native Legends* draws directly from the living well spring of his traditional culture, but is also literary in its adaption of his cultural imagination to particular modes of authorship and narration"

(Jose 10).

Stephen Muecke argues that Indigenous modernity can be seen as,

a predisposition to (both) resistance and adaptation to the rapid changes introduced by invasion and colonisation. This modernity is quite distinct from European modernisation processes since it developed its own form.

(Ancient and Modern 5).

* * *

This way of resolving the place of Aboriginal Literature in the wider canon of Western Literature, through a Modernist lens, places Aboriginal myths alongside those of the Greeks or the Jews, as a text to be drawn upon by artists hoping to see their own world more clearly. It seems obvious that Aboriginal writers would utilise their own myths and that non-Aboriginal writers would respond somehow.

According to Hodge and Mishra, Aboriginal published works,

...are difficult texts, with precise entry conditions and circuitous semiotic routes through their patterns and levels of meaning. The difficulty is not extrinsic, a result of unfamiliarity

by white readers with the language and conventions at issue, though this adds to the problems of decoding: it is more akin to the quality of difficulty that T.S. Eliot once declared was essential to modernist writing (87).

Unaipon has provided a book of myths – simple versions that are especially for children in Ngarrindjeri culture. He wrote these stories with non-Aboriginal readers in mind, it is a starting point and it is where I started. Alexis Wright, in *Carpentaria* has written a book which shows, “the deep interpenetration of the ethno-biological and geological with the sacred” (Devlin Glass 84) as it relates to her part of Australia. Wright has written a book which is a more complex myth, one for adults. It is behoven to non-Aboriginal readers to recognise the depth of Aboriginal mysticism.

Responding to these works as you would any Modernist writing, or any Modernist response, or as the latest arrival of an Australian Modernism can provide insight into the Australian-ness of the text. The response to argue for Surrealism or Magic Realism for works by Aboriginal artists ignores an opportunity for a new understanding of a modern Australianised myth beyond Patrick White. This response reminds me of what Lewis O’Brien wrote in his autobiography *And the Clock Strikes Thirteen*, that he gets angry when children ask him if the Aboriginal myths he tells them are true. He considers it rude and not a question a child would ask in church, for example. It is not the question asked about White’s novel *Riders in the Chariot* and it shouldn’t be asked about Wright’s novel, *Carpentaria*.

This argument has been succinctly articulated by Ravenscroft, who notes Alexis Wright's resistance to accepting only a non-Aboriginal version of reality and magic.

Texts labelled magical realist draw upon cultural systems that are no less 'real' than those upon which traditional literary realism draws – often non-Western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, tradition over innovation. Their primary narrative investment may be in myths, legends and rituals (199).

For as Stephen Muecke argues,

Australia is not, as has often been said with the period of Whitefella dominance in mind, a young country. It may be literally a young nation, but whatever is unique about its culture is linked to the ancient. For this reason there is no longer any need to speak of a cultural cringe, as if Australia needs to strive to catch up with the rest of the world

(Ancient and Modern 64).

Unaipon was eager to share his culture with non-Aboriginal Australians. It is a generousness I have seen time and time again in all Aboriginal people, not just the Ngarrindjeri. There is reference to a Kurna story in *The Ocean Road*, the Tjilbruke Dream time in the beaches and in the tears shed by the story's hero, Libby. I have travelled this story, which I will discuss in the next chapter – it takes work to hear these stories. Yungallungalla Medicinal Garden is based on Tjilbruke's travels but you won't find any signs in the garden telling you so. There is a story circle at the end of the path that

runs through the garden – you can hear the story there. I've heard the story behind what is referred to as the Hindmarsh Bridge Affair, what is described at the Kumarangk campaign in Veronica Brodie's autobiography, *My Side of the Bridge*.

The Ocean Road is not explicit and my hope is that it inspires others to go do their own research, walk the paths and sit in the story circles themselves. My motivation is a Modernist one; to make it new, from division to a kind of wholeness. These are private desires, exposed as part of writing this exegesis: 'me' divided up into literary influences and then made whole through writing *The Ocean Road* and then divided up again for this exegesis. Both works attempt to represent what I see now, the way I see, from my exposure to the various influences available to a modern Australian writer.

I am a Creative Writing student but I noted while auditing the 2013 class 'Modernist Literature', that it included no Australian authors. I will leave it to those more interested in Academic trends or the study of literature as an end in itself, to ponder on the reasons for that. This is my crack, as they say; or as Marcia Langton refers to it, an iterative. It is my contribution to Australian Modernist Literature. As A.A.Phillips wrote in 1950, about the cultural cringe and modern Australia,

there is no short-cut to the gradual process of national growth

(Phillips 302).

Land and the Australian Flaneur

The term Flaneur conjures images of the urban landscape, a city, and so it is hard to reconcile the image of an Aboriginal storyteller in what still seems to be an empty landscape to many non-Aboriginal eyes. The idea of sauntering might be seen as a bit much to describe the actions of a semi-nomadic people who covered vast distances, but it is worthwhile to remember that Sainte-Beuve wrote that to flaneur was the opposite of doing nothing. The role of the Flaneur as first described by Baudelaire, as moving slowly, four miles an hour perhaps, simultaneously part of a landscape and apart from it, acting upon the space, within it and also above it all. The Flaneur travelled understanding and participating in the landscape and portraying life as they saw it.

I was inspired by this idea in my novel *The Ocean Road*, but I arrived via several examples in Aboriginal Literature which then lead me to try the same technique, depicting the character Libby Smart as the Flaneur in a suburban Australian landscape.

I read *Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin where he describes listening to an Aboriginal story told across a landscape,

As Arkady turned the wheel to the left, Limpy bounced back into action. Again he shoved his head through both windows. His eyes rolled wildly over the rocks, the cliffs, the palms, the water. His lips moved at the speed of a ventriloquist's and, through them, came a rustle: the sound of wind through branches.

Arkady knew at once what was happening. Limpy had learnt his Native Cat couplets for walking pace, at four miles an hour, and we were travelling at twenty-five.

Arkady shifted into bottom gear, and we crawled along no faster than a walker. Instantly, Limpy matched his tempo to the new speed. He was smiling. His head swayed to and fro. The sound became a lovely melodious swishing; and you knew that, as far as he was concerned, he *was* the Native Cat.

(Chatwin 324)

Linguists have observed this same characteristic, this same sense of movement in the stories that emerge when Aboriginal artists write. It has been noted that,

Undoubtedly, what they write is not fully traditional, but that does not make it any less Aboriginal. The routes that they establish back to traditional forms are passable for other Aborigines as well as for non-Aborigines.....different starting points but along the same map.

(Hodge and Mishra 101)

As discussed earlier, Aboriginal writers have provided a route through the 'web of words' that other, non-Aboriginal writers can follow. Most analysis of these texts has been through what could be called an anthropologist's eyes; Aboriginal relationships with the landscape have been seen mostly through activities. But as Stephen Muecke has noted, " in the way Aboriginal peoples were

obsessed with space, the Europeans were obsessed with time,” (*Travelling the Subterranean River of Blood* 5) I have earlier discussed the context of time in relation to Modernist readings of Aboriginal Literature and a similar comparison with the role of the Flaneur can provide an insight and another entrance into these texts.

Ruby Langford, for example, takes the reader with her on a journey in *Don't Take Your Love to Town*; movement is explicit in the title. Place is an important theme in the novel, each chapter is sub-titled by the names of the places which are important to that part of the story. Much of the novel itself describes Langford's travels to and from various important places, Bonalbo and Inner Sydney. These travels are a constant theme in the novel and her descriptions of place is closely connected with her relationships with the people who live in these places. This is true when she travels to Uluru and even to India. Langford offers a way of seeing through what she calls “the glass door”, a route to follow and a destination – the work itself. *Don't Take Your Love to Town* is an auto-biography and so Langford herself is the Flaneur.

In Kim Scott's novel, *That Deadman Dance*, the character Bobby could be described as a Flaneur. He is at once above the landscape and a living part of it. His descriptions of his movements include the landscape and the creatures in it, almost as other characters with whom he ponders deeper ideas.

Bobby walked a path that ran through the dunes from the whalers' camp to the estuary. Then walked along the beach; he liked to look for the silhouette of fish in the waves, the flash of silver he might at any time see. Who knows, maybe even the spout of a whale.

And,

It was a calm day, the tide so very full that the sea on the beach seemed to be brimming, was like water in a bowl about to overflow. Seaweed floated, not moving, as if the sea, too, had lost direction, was also waiting.

(Scott 339)

As in *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, what is drawn is what Kylie Valentine has described as a, "complicated web of not only people, but also places in which the narrator moves" (5). Also, there is an example of a non-Aboriginal, non-Flaneur in the character of Dr Cross who is described as "tired and lulled" (Scott 112) by the walk and doesn't lift his eyes until just before nightfall.

In *The Ocean Road*, as the character Libby describes walks she has done with her mother and their dog, she describes the landscape. In one part, Libby also describes the particular understanding required for living on this land, in these waters. She describes the suburb as she drives with her Aunt, the places and the people and even the dogs: Libby describes the enemy dog that lurks behind the high fence on the corner. Libby describes the cliffs – unstable, the dried leaves under the trees. Another time, Libby is walking home along the Esplanade and as she walks, she describes the surf conditions of the various beaches along the coast, how to surf them. In these

instances, I have tried to represent Libby as an Australian Flaneur influenced by Aboriginal ways of travelling, of using the country and seeing the landscape, the special relationship with the landscape described by Mary Graham.

In *Nourishing Terrains*, Deborah Bird Rose describes the country as, “Not just imagined or represented, it is lived and lived with” (7). There is no hierarchy with people, animals and the land, as Rose notes, “country gives forth life, and included in that life are the people of the country” (39). I tried to show Libby living in and being given sustenance from her ‘sea country’.

In *The Ocean Road*, Libby describes walking along the beach, she is describing the journey, where the sustenance can be found; she is living in the place.

That’s what I need to do. What is that smell in the air? I need to follow my nose down to the beach like Dizzy used to. Find the seaweed in clumps, lift it up and bury my nose in the smell underneath. Find the shells before they break or as they break into pieces, find the broken parts, the tiniest pieces and smell them. Follow the fox’s trail underneath the box thorns, down the cliffs, try to find his scent underneath the walkers and their dogs, sniff out his cave, smell his piss and then when he dies, smell that sweetness in the air and know it comes from here. (Clark 170)

I was influenced by a song-poem Rose quotes, by a Waljbira man from Western Australia. It describes the journey to his place and the name of the place which is also what it provides, 'water throughout the year' and finally the feeling of knowing that place; it provides ease.

The Bulbul Bird

Bulbul is here

Follow the stony creek, your track to northern shores!

Bul Bul is here

This pool is 'water throughout the year'

Stir my heart and also give rest.

(Brandenstein & Thomas 45)

Carpentaria is a novel of wild diversions, unforeseeable events, dense with life and catastrophes like the landscape in northern Australia. *That Deadman Dance* is a wide book, an easy gait and gentle seasons and rhythms that sound like the ocean, like the west coast of Australia. In *The Ocean Road*, I have tried, in the telling, to similarly capture the gentle rhythms and sudden high tides of the cool, south coast waters, the evenness of the seasons and the straight streets of the city of Adelaide as the characters move across this part of the country.

* * *

Travelling across the country, the landscape would have been so familiar to an Aboriginal storyteller that they might not explicitly describe it. A story would have expressed ties to the land and these would have served to maintain Aboriginal culture, “keeping things alive in their place” (Muecke, *Subterranean* 7) but not, traditionally, as an aesthetic. Aboriginal Literature, then, in adopting the style of the Flaneur, is another adaptation to ensure a continuing link with their culture.

Hodge and Mishra describe this as a recognisable Aboriginal form, as,

... A continuity between traditional and contemporary forms of cultural expression of this theme amongst Aborigines. Traditional culture provided a highly flexible set of ways of encoding a nexus of rights and obligations towards the land.

They argue that Aboriginal writers use this continuity as,

...a means of relocating themselves in White Australia, reconstructing an identity which is fully Aboriginal yet adequate to the new situation. (92)

There are many instances of Libby telling a story as she moves across the landscape and there is a connection between walking through the landscape and gaining knowledge. Her various travels are shown as opportunities for her to reflect. Libby describes this,

As I walk, pushing the bike, I think, I wonder if she meant something more. (Clark 172)

There is a similar scene in the novel-within-the-novel when the Aboriginal character from the story set in 1938, Margery, makes the half hour walk into Adelaide. As she walks, she remembers first coming to the city, making up stories for herself and her future and she describes these against the steady clip clop of her too-big shoes. Her story of the unremitting grind of living under the rules of the Aboriginal Protection Board is told against the steady rhythms of the seasons reflected in a walnut tree and a daily march into the city made by those with hopes of work.

In each case, I have tried to express, in the way of Australian Aboriginal writers, the value of the land and knowledge, the importance of maintaining family relationships and how these are linked together. Libby describes the journey to her Nanna's house that she takes with her mother while she's travelling with her Aunt. Libby's walk along the Esplanade is punctuated by her Aunt calling out to her to "get a horse" (Clark 170). Libby describes travelling up the stairs from the beach with her mother and talking to their neighbours, the Townsends; they discuss the importance of the Republic vote. In this way, community outside of family and the wider sense of Australia as a nation can also be considered in connection to this particular landscape.

I was taken on a journey across this landscape that I describe in *The Ocean Road* by an Ngarrindjeri man. Driving through the middle of the Fleurieu Peninsula, the dense trees up against the road, an occasional dip and rise of a small valley, the turns and the stops as he showed me many sights; places where Aboriginal people would meet, there had been a street sign, they would all arrive at

once, no one knew how they communicated the meeting time. Non-Aboriginal people took the street sign away but the people still came to that spot, still come today, still name the place after the missing sign. He showed me trees that could be seen as brothers and sisters, whole families, if you knew how to look at them. He took me to significant sights, now covered with car parks or people whale watching. He told me the story of Tjilbruke and took me along the dreaming trail. I was very, very, very car sick.

It was wretched. Pulling over and emptying everything out of me into the dirt over and over, leaning on the trees, on a thick arm or leg, wiping my mouth with my hand and then wiping my hand on my suit jacket. I sat in the front and there were people in the back of the car, education department people, someone from the council, listening and looking politely away. My guide laughed so hard, in between pitying me, and always said afterwards that there was a bit of me on the Tjilbruke trail.

This was my first introduction to Aboriginal storytelling; it was connected to the land, it was told as we moved through the landscape and it required action from me, the listener. It seemed to anyway.

Non-Aboriginal Australians are still learning to see the Australian landscape as evidenced in Bill Gammage's book *The Biggest Estate on Earth, How Aborigines Made Australia*. Gammage asserts that Australia was extremely well maintained, as well as any of the garden estates of Europe. European eyes could only see wilderness or desolation. The term Flaneur has come to take on a

range of meanings over time, imagining the character Libby Smart as an Australian Flaneur is yet another. Looking at the Australian landscape through 'black eyes' enables an Australian writer to see the country bursting with life, to see our part in this place and to reflect on our country in a way that has been done for time immemorial.

Critically considering these two literary traditions simultaneously mirrors my creative effort when writing *The Ocean Road*.

Language, Lingo and Linguistics

In *That Deadman Dance*, Kim Scott notes the importance of the language to knowing a place and its people,

“Boodawan, nyoondokat nyinang moort, moortapinyang yongar, wetj, wilo ... Nitja boodja ngalak boodja Noonga boodjar, kwop nyoondok yoowarl koorl yey, yang ngaalang.....

Because you need to be inside the sound and the spirit of it, to live here properly. And how can that be, without we people who have been here for all time?” (394).

Much has already been written on the oral nature of Aboriginal history and culture and the effect of this on the development of Aboriginal literature. At first, it was thought that Aboriginal writers could never hope to encapsulate the wit, the depth and the poetry contained in these original stories, losing these qualities as they were committed to paper and were made for a broad readership rather than for a particular audience. Similar to the incorporation of landscape though, Aboriginal writing has evolved so that the words, the way language is used and the way stories unfold is now another way to maintain culture.

The way that Libby tells her story in *The Ocean Road*, it is clear that she is determined to use her own language and lingo. In a way, she is similar to Derrida’s ‘colonised poet’ who is “attempting to speak the other’s language without renouncing their own” (Derrida 1985). Like an Aboriginal storyteller, Libby is speaking directly to a particular reader, one who she assumes is educated, she

addresses the reader directly, “You’re a fucking snob”, she says (Clark 33) but she uses her Noarlunga lingo from the start: “Yep, Nup, and Nah” (Clark 4) and “P’noid. To the max” (Clark 2), putting “man” at the end of sentences and referring to Noarlunga Technical College as TAF.

It has been noted that,

The Aboriginal oral tradition depends a great deal on the sound of words, the effects of repetition of certain sounds and syllables and the symbolic. (Ravenscroft, 207)

I have tried to use repetition of sounds, there are many examples: the clip clopping of Margery’s shoes, the sound of the wind, and the high pitched squeal of the older sister’s response to her mother’s admonitions against her father.

The tap-tapping of the dog’s unclipped paws in the hallway is a recurring sound in *The Ocean Road* and I have used the symbol of dogs throughout the novel. I have noted the role that dogs play in Aboriginal life, my personal experience is echoed in books such as *Don’t Take Your Love to Town*, by Ruby Langford where the dogs are represented as equal characters in the novel. There are two dogs in *The Ocean Road*, Dizzy and Captain, one dead and one alive. Dizzy comes back to Libby in dreams and memories, similar to her missing mother; Captain represents Libby’s current situation, an unwanted and dark intrusion. Also, there are no dogs in the novel-within-the-novel, representing a more European approach to dogs as simply pets.

Libby is transformed over the arc of the novel in many ways and one is in the way she tells her story. At first, the way she writes is similar to Aboriginal oral traditions, more like a spoken word piece, but by the end, she is aware of the structure of a story written as opposed to a story told to another, she is more explicit about time and movement and conversations between characters.

Due to the aforementioned lack of published stories by Aboriginal writers over the last century until the 1980s, letters provided me with an insight into Aboriginal life and expression. I was moved and inspired by the story of Bessie Cameron, an Aboriginal woman from Western Australia, a relative of Kim Scott and a prolific letter writer who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century. In her letters, you can see the repetition and rhythm and you can see the importance of maintaining culture as she returns to family connections and place in her letters. In *Writing Never Arrives Naked*, Penny Van Hoorn describes the effect of writing on Bessie,

We can see her transformation over time...Her writing not only reflected this change, it facilitated it. (193)

I have structured the novel so that Libby makes this similar transition but, at the end, she rebels. As she started the novel proclaiming her life as real and the fiction world as false, she finishes with the same admonition to the reader, who she suggests, always wants a neat ending. Rudely she writes to the reader, "Fuck off", refusing to give anything more of her life and giving them instead the last part of a chapter from the novel-within-the-novel, the fictional death of the character that most resembled her mother in the end of chapter set in 1986. Libby says at the start of the

chapter that it is her life but at the end of the novel, the reader understands that it obviously isn't, as in real life, Libby's mother and her aunt lived.

In this way I have tried to emulate the vitality of the oral tradition that continues to resonate in Aboriginal literature today, to represent 'real life' and juxtapose it against the European structure which I have used for the novel-within-the-novel, and which modern Australian storytellers have also inherited, to represent the 'fictional life'. By employing two storytellers, Genevieve Smart using the European form in the novel-within-the-novel and Libby Smart employing the Aboriginal form to tell her story, I hope to make these two traditions explicit. I hope that the character Libby will cause discord for the reader in the way Kim Scott's character Bobby did in *That Deadman Dance* as they both straddle two cultures.

In Libby I wanted to echo the confidence of Bobby. In the face of her perceived middle class reader, she refuses to follow the script where she is less or lower and as she is telling the story, so she has the power. The power of language to disrupt the social divides is captured perfectly in a scene from *That Deadman Dance* which describes the discord created by Scott's character Bobby when he calls out to non-Aboriginal characters,

His pronunciation was formal, a near copy of the vowels of Mrs Chaine, and he seemed able to adopt different ways of speaking at will – from the mixed up English most of the natives used, to high formality. But it was a child's voice for all that. And there was

something in its timbre; call it a dark voice? ...the social class implied by Bobby's voice irked Skelly, the more so because its source was a black boy. (Scott 198)

Libby is working class but she has had access to middle class ideas, such as class itself, but she also references Aboriginal culture that her mother has told her about, that they know about, even though they are not Aboriginal.

She'd talk to me about what she was learning, away from her desk, in the evening before the night shift. She'd be smoking then too. Sitting cross-legged on the couch. She told me she was learning about Aboriginal history, she told me about exemption cards and the Aboriginal protection board and *The Abo Call*. She told me about the Aboriginal people she'd met, who were helping her, teaching her, mostly how they took the piss out of her, like family. She told me that she looked our family history up at the Museum, at the Aboriginal Link-Up service, and there was no record of us there. (Clark 244)

Libby admonishes the reader for not knowing about Aboriginal culture and links this to her knowledge of place describing her and her mother swimming at each beach along their coast.

She didn't swim at Christies Beach, the sand was too pebbly. She only went to that beach to people watch and to walk around the cliffs to Port Noarlunga, for a swim. She swam at Moana, held up her overdue rates notices and drove the car on, played the car

stereo and hung sheets between cars for shade. She liked the small, neat waves in sets of three. We would stay all day and into the night. Someone would make the long walk back to the kiosk for hot chips. You might even move the cars back towards the sand dunes and stay later.

We never went in the dunes at Moana. It's a sacred place. People go there if they want a baby and can't get pregnant. Everyone in the south knows this. It's not secret business. Me knowing it doesn't mean we are Aboriginal. Look at me; I'm probably lighter than you.

Ok, ok. I mean, I get it; I know that colour is not the point. (Clark 231)

The character Bobby has access to Aboriginal initiation and European education and, like the character Libby, is a musical artist, she plays guitar and Bobby is a dancer. Kim Scott has written of how he was inspired by the story of a military drill Matthew Flinders' marines performed on the beach which was then transformed into a dance by the local Noongar people. It is the art of mimicry that Bobby uses, an Aboriginal skill which Scott has highlighted in his novel *That Deadman Dance* that I have given to the character Libby Smart and to Jack and Margery, the Aboriginal characters in the 1938 story.

Many critics have written on David Unaipon's use of mimicry, interested in the politics of his use of his skills, was it "creating a space for hybrid identity....or assimilation?" (Miller 1) and examining it from a 'whiteness studies' perspective. These writers often discuss the fact that Unaipon wore a suit or spoke perfect English with a light Scottish accent; this aspect takes away the agency of the mimic, the skill.

Benjamin Miller recognised this and uses Unaipon's own stories to illustrate the way the writer saw the skill of mimicry. In his story *Confusion of Tongue*, Unaipon wrote of a time when all the animals could communicate with each other but one day they used this skill to imitate each other, causing many problems amongst the animals. Only the Lyre Bird, who strives to reconcile the group, is rewarded by now being able to mimic all the others. This shows that Unaipon saw the art of mimicry as something to be valued. I'm sure he understood, and was gaining advantage as his capacity allowed.

Miller takes this further,

Whitefellas, controlling history and working to keep the natives in their place, are challenged by Unaipons' master of *their* styles and skills. Mimicry is a powerful tool for Indigenous people not only because it challenges assumptions of white superiority and white ownership over knowledge. That is, Unaipons' mimicry worked to decentre assumptions of white superiority by showing Indigenous culture to be equally...spiritually, morally and epistemologically significant. (3)

At the beginning of *The Ocean Road*, Libby catches herself talking like her Aunt and then she talks like an American cop to the policemen, uses mimicry to get them to listen to her and it works. The character Margery does the same thing in the story set in 1938 – repeating the words of the women serving her in the pharmacy, looking at a non-existent watch to emulate the busy exasperation of non-Aboriginal mothers she has seen.

“May I ask what the problem might be?”

A direct approach, that’s what Margery had always practiced, it was what white women did; rich white women, at least.

“No, of course not, Mrs. It’s just um, procedure.”

“Procedure. Mmm. “

She remembered how the Nun’s and the other ladies would repeat what you said as a kind of insult. They would do it to each other.

“It’s just because there’s no Sunday trading. You know, drinkers, looking for something.”

“Drinkers? Sunday trading? What is this to do with me? I’ve got to get back to my family.”

She looked at her wrist where a watch would be if she owned one. It was like a dance.

(Clark 194)

I would like to say that I wrote these scenes as a critic of whiteness, to undermine the power structures of Australian society, the assumptions accepted as knowledge but the truth is, the characters in *The Ocean Road* are surviving or trying to survive; I imagined what these characters would do to that end. *The Ocean Road* does not represent the inequality in these power structures explicitly, but rather, by giving a voice exclusively to working class characters, women and Aboriginal people, the novel doesn't figure 'white culture' as the primary source. Recognising Aboriginal forms of communication as equal and an as Australian inheritance, and then placing these forms inside the European form of the novel, is my attempt to illustrate that both forms of knowledge are equal and accessible for those who seek.

As well as masters of mimicry, Aboriginal people are known as the masters of non-verbal communication. Ruby Langford has pointed out that Koori leave it to the non-verbal gesture and I have given this trait to some of the characters. Libby's Nanna motions with her bottom lip, a tiny gesture, a tribute to this skill, and an act that again raises the question of whether the novel-within-the-novel contains some truth as Cherry, Libby's cousin makes the same gesture. Libby tells the reader,

Cherry looked at Donald and Noah then, turned her head towards them, but her mouth was still talking to me. Kind of like Nanna, (Clark 98)

In Aboriginal storytelling, often what is left out, what is not said, is as important as what is said. This has been very difficult for me to learn about and one of the factors, I think, that leads to Ruby Langford's "invisible glass door" (231) between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. In

Aboriginal culture, silence is used as a power and it is difficult for a non-Aboriginal person to appreciate in the first instance.

In Aboriginal literature there are knowledge systems and information that, it is understood, are left out, that are left unsaid. Even in the poem *The Bulbul Bird*, referred to earlier, Rose explains that,

The poet does not tell us further meanings of the place; that knowledge, we are meant to understand, is not to be sung for an unknown audience.(8)

Such exchanges traditionally occur in Aboriginal culture, when story-tellers move beyond familiar territory. This has been described by Deborah Bird Rose,

Each whole country is surrounded by other unique and inviolable whole countries, and the relationships between countries ensure that no country is isolated, that together they make up some larger wholes, clusters of alliance networks, Dreaming tracks and ceremonies, trade networks, tracks of winds and movements of animals. In this way a working system can be known to exist way beyond one's own countries, but no one ever knows the full extent of it all because knowledge is of necessity local. The fact of localised knowledge is itself Law. This system does not invite people to assume that they can or

should know everything. Nor does it commend itself to people who believe that they can and should (or already do) know everything. (12-13)

I was at a community lunch for the local Aboriginal Elders with a colleague and a young trainee I was mentoring, both young Aboriginal women. A young man in his early twenties burst into the hall, he was angry, someone had been badmouthing him about his relationship with a young girl, she was coming to his house, he was saying and he was gonna get whoever was responsible for saying anything otherwise. He railed. He raised his fist in the air. Around the room, everyone stared down at their hands, no one said a word. He came near us, he looked at my trainee. I bristled but he didn't give me a single look. I wanted to stand and fight but I knew enough by then to know I knew nothing and to shut my mouth. Afterwards, Donna, my colleague, explained to me, simply, that the elders wanted to stop the fight and they did. He couldn't fight with nothing.

* * *

At first, Libby uses a device that has also been recognised in Aboriginal storytellers, she dodges, she denies, she seems open but she is not telling everything. Libby tells the reader directly that she doesn't want to say anything. Muecke describes this style in Aboriginal storytellers as a "discursive strategy of non-disclosure in the face of the demands to speak." (*Textual Spaces* 128) Libby's attitude reflects this, at first. She is a reluctant narrator, her mother has disappeared and

the role of storyteller has fallen to her. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Libby does grow into the role of story teller, but at first, she is embarrassed and ashamed of her house and her behaviour the weekend before her mother goes missing. She argues that she isn't a child but it is clear that, at the beginning at least, she is yet to grow up.

This is similar to what Rosamund Dalziel has noted in her work, *Shameful Autobiographies: Shame in Contemporary Australian Autobiographies and Culture*. Dalziel notes that "being ashamed is an integral part of the experience of being a child" (9) and that shame is when "one is visible and not ready to be visible" (6).

Aboriginal Australians use the word shame differently to non-Aboriginal Australians. I've often heard the phrase 'shame job' used in the Aboriginal community. When I've heard it said, it's usually related to stepping outside of culture; bad behaviour. There is an aspect of it, though, a consideration that someone is looking, that you are visible, which is unique to the Aboriginal idea of shame. Some Australians would recognise the idea of shame as the cringe described all those years ago by A.A.Phillips, with Australia as a country not yet ready to be visible.

Charlie Perkins said that the way to overcome shame was to put everything up front, and so he named his biography, *A Bastard Like Me*. Libby, too, takes on that approach and quickly moves away from shame to being unashamed via a series of revelations about her house, about her Mum, about her family, and finally about herself. Her openness is juxtaposed against the closed

lives of her relatives. Libby's style is also contrasted against the novel-within-the-novel which is a lesson in the damage lies and secrets and hiding do over time.

Alexis Wright has commented on this aspect of Aboriginal culture when discussing her own writing,

It's very hurtful for our family sometimes to talk about that history. And I think it gets passed down to the next generation through the following generations of not wanting to bring up hurtful things, hurtful things that happen to us even now, and the family will just say, "let it go, don't say anything," (Wright, Interview with Kerry O'Brien 216).

Judy Wickes has written on the exemption certificates in Queensland, though it was offered to Aboriginal people all across Australia, and this is the starting point for the fictional family story in *The Ocean Road*. The novel-within-the-novel explores an Australian family trying to survive with limited choices. As she explains in her paper,

The exemption certificate represented the only legal mechanism by which Indigenous Queenslanders could live independently away from reserves or missions, out from 'under the Act'. However it required severing all ties with their Aboriginal kinship and culture including connections with country, or the exemption could be revoked by the state, (74).

Jack and Margery's lie about their Aboriginality is the first lie of the novel-within-the-novel -with all of the characters subsequently having to also practice deception to survive and, vitally, to keep their children. This need to hide results in shame for the characters. Contrasted against this, Libby grows over the course of telling her story, losing her initial shame as she stays open about her family and true to herself despite how she thinks her imagined reader is judging her.

The history of the exemption card was still largely unheard of in 2008, according to Wickes' report, even amongst Aboriginal people. Libby is telling her story in 1999, a time, I am purporting, when Australia was experiencing a building of national pride based partly on a new willingness to confront past atrocities. Libby's mother's novel, also written in 1999, with its openness about the negative aspects of Australian history, is meant to represent this process. Genevieve's hope for an Australian Republic represents a move away from shame and towards an acceptance of what could be called, 'Bastards Like Us'.

In starting the novel-within-the-novel with an Aboriginal man and woman and creating an ambiguity about the history of Libby's family, I wanted to suggest a successfully hidden Aboriginal past. To do this, I wanted more than just to tell the facts, I wanted to try and write in the same space as Aboriginal writers have done before me, to learn from them, their ways and apply it along with the European influences I have had; that they have had too. I have detailed many of the ways I have done this, my many devices, previously in this essay.

Finally, to end this chapter, I would like to outline the way I used the information I gained from linguistics to inspire and structure many of the scenes in *The Ocean Road*. Linguists have identified a range of qualities in Aboriginal stories through the application of ‘cultural schema theory’ to Aboriginal English discourse. Schemas, ideal types named by Plato or the procedures of imagination described by Kant, are applied to a particular culture as a means to identifying a shared process of understanding. The investigations linguists have done show that an audience, or a reader, recalls a story better if it accords with their own schema of story.

By analysing over 200 oral narratives, Malcolm and Sharafian found “recurrent semantic and formal patterning across a large body of narratives,” (169) certain linguistic features that recur in Aboriginal storytelling. They found that particular schemas were strongly identified with particular Aboriginal cultural values. They found that five schemas accounted for over 70 percent of these linguistic features. I have included these features in various scenes throughout *The Ocean Road*.

Travel schema: the representation of the experience of known participants, organised in terms of alternating travelling (or moving) and non-travelling (or stopping) segments, usually referenced to a time of departure and optionally including a return to the starting point. (Malcolm and Sharafian 174)

In *The Ocean Road*, the travelling thematic is expressed through the various journeys in the novel-within-the-novel, the characters travel back and forth between Adelaide and Melbourne, the focus on the time of the family’s various departures from Adelaide, their starts and stops and returns. In

the story set in 1938, the focus is on Margery's return to her son, who is living north and describes journeys across the city of Adelaide.

Hunting schema: the representation of experience of known participants, organised with respect to the observation, pursuit and capture of prey, usually entailing killing and sometimes eating it. Success is usually associated with persistence expressed with repeated and or unsuccessful actions (e.g. shoot and miss, look and never find). There are a number of subschemas associated with hunting, including Cooking, Fishing and Spotting. (Malcolm and Sharafian 174)

In *The Ocean Road*, I utilised the hunting thematic variously in the scenes where the neighbour Lynda is searching the missing writer's desk for a suicide note and where Libby is searching for money for fish and chips. It is most clear in the scene where Libby is trying to find teabags to make her Nanna a cup of tea.

I reach as far as I can into the cupboard under the sink searching for the teabags. Tupperware containers with that stock stuff my Mum's described turned hard in the corners of the lids, flour in puffs underneath, sauce bottles with lava threatening to blow their lids and their own circles of sticky under them. There's some Peppermint Tea in here Nanna. No, not that shit, keep looking. (Clark 21)

Libby persists at her Nanna's encouragement; she looks but can't find the teabags. She eventually finds the teabags but it is her tenacity which is highlighted.

Observing schema: the representation of experience, usually shared experience, in terms of observed details, whether of natural or social phenomena. (Malcolm and Sharafian 174)

In the same scene with her Nanna, Libby describes her experience of observing her natural and social exchanges, she comments on this aspect of the story directly to the reader.

Nanna was in her lilac dressing gown, too hot for November and the satin bib covered with cigarette burns. Nanna put a hand-rolled ciggy to rest in the ashtray. Her fingernails were long and filed and a grey/yellow colour that matched the contents of the ashtray, and strangely, somehow, the lilac dressing gown.

I seem to be noticing everything. Things that you would want to know, I imagine. Like Nanna's lilac dressing gown at 4.30 in the afternoon. Bella's car. Descriptions of the streets that I've seen so many times, I could walk them blindfolded. They are not different colours usually, they are just colour. To me. You want more though – a story goes a certain way. There are expectations. (Clark 20)

I incorporated these scenes into the novel to provide alternative pathways into the stories, using the linguist's information to provide guides, information such as the,

Scary Things schema: the representation of experience, either first hand or vicarious, of strange powers or persons affecting normal life within the community and manifest in the expression of appearance and disappearance or seeing or not seeing/finding evidence of the phenomenon in question.

(Malcolm and Sharafian 174)

In *The Ocean Road*, the scary things schema is described as part of Libby's initiation, the lights going on and off, the loud television, the dreams of the dead dog. There is also the terror at the bird in Libby's bedroom and the dog's attempt to kill it and the frightening visions seen by the character Uncle Del.

Family schema: the representation of experience in relation to an extended family network.

(Malcolm and Sharafian 174)

Libby's experience is related to the extended family network of aunts, cousins, friends and neighbours and of course, her missing mother. It is her shared experiences with these other characters that moves the narrative forward.

Malcolm and Sharafian concluded that, linguistically, modern Aboriginal stories, “show continuity with English but conceptually show continuity with Aboriginal culture.” (178) The linguists noted that, like so many aspects of Aboriginal Art, these recurrent patterns are an important part of maintaining Aboriginal culture

The act of telling the story, then, is part of the story. Aboriginal storytelling traditions include telling the story straight into the listener’s mouth or pulling a fingernail from the listener just as a character in a story has a fingernail pulled. In *The Ocean Road*, the reader is addressed directly, is asked questions, abused and apologised to - is present as the story unfolds. Aboriginal stories are told according to the audience and there is a shared understanding of this – that some things will not be told. In *The Ocean Road*, the novel-within-the-novel is related to the audience in the order that Libby reads it; she is the custodian of the story, another important aspect of Aboriginal storytelling. Finally, in writing Libby’s story, in describing her life, I have tried to use various linguistic patterns as noted in Aboriginal discourse studies.

All of this was done with the aim of creating an authentic story; none of what I have described above is explicit in *The Ocean Road*, these are layers hidden within the story, it not the frame but rather, it is the warp of the loom.

Australian Perspectives

Australian Literary criticism traditionally starts with European writing and in my opinion, like many other Australian institutions, this perspective has lasted longer than it should have. As Herb Wharton puts it,

When they're describing Australian literature, there's no cut-off date for the history of Australia. The literary history or the recorded history. 1788 is when Europeans came. But Australian history and its literature and stories were there all the time." (qtd in Heiss, Dhuuluu-Yala 44)

As noted by Jeanine Leane, "literary narratives are not benign and...they play an important role in maintaining hegemony" (33). In this dissertation, and in the literary narrative of *The Ocean Road*, I have tried to disrupt hegemony. In *The Ocean Road*, I have attempted to create an authentic Australian literary narrative but in disclosing in this thesis the lengths I have gone to in my attempt to achieve an Aboriginal perspective, I expose how atypical a rounded Australian education really is. By juxtaposing an Aboriginal storytelling style against a more conventional European narrative, I hope to give them equal weight and relevancy in my creative and critical thought.

It is also worth noting the lengths I have gone to in the past to learn the literary narratives of the 'dominant culture'. As remote as Aboriginal culture is to me, in many ways it is more familiar,

more in line with my working class upbringing and less of a shock than the education I gained in an approved Arts degree. I have met three other working class people, apart from myself, my entire university career: one was years ago, he was a tiler; he would always tell people he was a tiler and never admit he was a Philosophy student. One was more recent, a miner I think he had been once; the Creative Writing librarian remarked to me, excitedly, that she would never have seen anyone like him in a university in the past. The other is recent too, and young, but she's from Reynella and they're practically the hoi palloi.

It is similar to an experience I had once at an Aboriginal festival at Raukkan. I can't remember now why I was there or how I knew about it, only that Jimmy Little played that night; I might have gone to see him. I was right up the front when he played. I ate kangaroo tail that night, straight off the fire, pulled the fur back myself. There were only about three other white people there that night, none of them as white as me.

I played Women's football for a year with the Brighton Bombers. I was put in defence where the football would always find my chest and I would quickly kick it back. Though I wanted to be a forward, I stopped many an opponent. I went along to the first practice with my best friend, who, I thought, just happened to be gay but it turned out that I was the only heterosexual in the league that year.

For a Creative Writer, to be the outsider is an ideal position, you can see the relief not just the shadows. You also get to see the similarities, to understand, for example, that the middle classes love their children too.

I agree with Deborah Bird Rose, who introduces her work, *Nourishing Terrains*, with,

I conclude that the use of creative arts to forge links among people has a higher priority at this time than does the use of creative arts to express the differences among people.

(2)

Ruby Langford described it as telling stories “from our side of the fence” and describes “the sheer magnitude of difference between her and *middle class white people*” (Little 34). *The Ocean Road* challenges the hegemony by putting working class ‘white people’ alongside Kooris, on the same side of the fence.

Langford pointed out that she was excluded from the social enclaves of her critics responding to one in particular that this person,

Talks about us Kooris as though we had a choice, which shows how little she knows of the Aboriginal experience of Australia: and besides, I had the same search for happiness as everyone else. (Little 38)

This concept of the idea of an Australia where everyone has an equal choice has been embraced so fully by the arbiters of Australian culture that the conversation has been relegated, like the struggle to become a Republic, to the collection of subjects that Australians no longer discuss. In his recent essay, *The C Word*, Tim Winton writes on the difficulty of examining the subject of class today and asserts that,

Australians have been trained to remain uncharacteristically silent about the origins of social disparity. (24)

In Australia, as can be seen by the Budget delivered by a Conservative government this year, by the treatment of 'boat people' and the continuing intervention in some Aboriginal communities in Australia, disadvantage is seen as a fault of the victim or, as Winton has noted in his essay, "people getting what they deserve" (24).

Winton writes of the joining the middle class, noting that choice is the main indicator of class, mobility and "so many choices," (28). This lack of choice for working class people is a central theme in *The Ocean Road* and I have tried to describe the so-called tribal world of a working class

family, the Smarts and their community. Winton writes of other working class writers who have gotten through the fence but notes that ‘the world of letters is similarly class bound,’ (26). Though he calls his essay, *The C word*, Winton is disingenuous, at least, about the nature of actually having a cunt, the similar lack of representation and choice, similarly the blackfellas he didn’t socialise with at his footy club, some people cannot move through the gaps as inconspicuously as others.

Langford has noted similarities between ‘poor white and Black women in Australia’ but in her opinion, white women have “had their stories told”. Little, though, acknowledges in the references of her essay *Race and Class*, that in fact,

Working class white women are rarely the subjects of their own storytelling, given the disparity in access to resources that has historically been the case in Australia (46).

The increase in published works from Aboriginal writers, creative and critical, especially in the new century, means that,

present generations of Australians now have the opportunity to obtain a glimpse of Aborigines as they see themselves, rather than as they are seen by others. (Shoemaker 3)

These works can provide insights into Aboriginal communities that might not be easily visible to a non-Aboriginal reader; initiations, secret business, people coming together under a variety of guises, with elders and family and the many ways in which community connections are strengthened.

In *The Ocean Road* I have described a community that, I have argued, may not easily be visible to non-working class readers or even former working class readers that are male. It is a story of a single mother as told by her daughter, who doesn't see her life through a negative perspective. The values which Winton attributes to the working class, "determined certainty and self-limiting tribalism," (Winton 25) are shown as positives in *The Ocean Road*. In the novel-within-the-novel, Genevieve Smart, is presenting the ability for a woman to keep her baby as the highest value, as the only choice worth having. The book, *The Ocean Road*, suggests that, perhaps, this choice is more commonly available for working class women.

In *Straight Line Stories; An Insider's Perspective*, Lawrence Bamblett describes the discourse of deficit as shown in representations of Aboriginal sportspeople in journalism, noting that across a range of publications, there was a focus on negative narratives of racism and poverty experienced by Aboriginal sportspeople despite other available narratives of success, educationally and economically. Bamblett noted that these articles often neglected to focus on family support, which often played a large part in the subject's success.

Libby is aware of her audience and without middle class characters in *The Ocean Road*, it is this device, her assumptions about this imagined middle class reader, which most clearly demarcates that Libby's is a working class perspective. Libby is aggressive towards the reader at first, she could be called 'bolshie' or 'chippy', but she softens as she tells stories about her cousin and her aunty and nanna. She is then showing an insider's view.

This idea of insiders and outsiders is captured by an Aboriginal person describing the way they told stories to new arrivals versus those told within their own community,

When outsiders were not around, my great aunt, and other storytellers within the community, talked about racism as just one of a greater repertoire of stories. They focused much more on telling about the wonderful life experienced within the mission community. They spoke carefully about the achievements of Elders and great sporting events within the community (and some shared with outsiders). They talked about the essence of our culture being sharing and caring for each other and the importance of maintaining our own ways of being. They talked about what made our community a great place to live. The dominant discourse within the community was not about deficit. It was focussed on the advantages of being part of the Erambie community. (Bamblett, 18).

The Ocean Road is my attempt to present a working class family from the inside, to show it as a great place to live; to reject the authorities on class, on gender, on skin colour and present an

alternative idea of success. I have tried to describe the essence of a culture which could be called Australian culture.

Even though class is usually considered from the perspective of the work a person does, Libby and her mother Genevieve are described by the art they practice – a musician and a writer and both are students. Mention is made of the employment of several of the family at the local optical factory, people are ‘coppers’ or ‘plumbers’ or ‘plumber’s wives’ but no action happens at a work site. In the novel-within-the-novel, work is something that happens outside of the frame, people are not described by their occupation. This could reflect the experience of a working class person whose mundane job isn’t something to talk about, he works to live, or it could be reveal a woman’s experience in the workplace – hemmed by children and still not equal to men’s. The fact is, it is actually reflective of the perspective I have gained through readings and experience of Aboriginal culture, rather than what you do, it is best encapsulated in the phrase ‘who you be’.

It is this idea which seems to capture the Australian-ness of Australian culture, which can be identified as a continuous feature of Aboriginal culture, one that was adopted (often out of necessity) by the first Europeans and which is used now when describing the Australian version of multiculturalism, all of our inheritance: *who you be*.

The Ocean Road is, at its most basic, my argument that the failure of the country to become a Republic in 1999 was a failure of us to be ourselves, to realise this inheritance of a country without divisions and a lost opportunity to truly get together on the same side of the fence as Australia’s

first people. This failure foreshadowed, I would argue, an acceptance of the divisions amongst Australians that we see in 2014.

Conclusion

This exegesis started out as a description of the influences of Aboriginal literature on my novel, *The Ocean Road*; it became a lament for what amounts to cultural apartheid and the growing gap between lots of different classes and groups of people in Australia; and it finished with an attempt to identify the similarities between us all, and naming it as uniquely Australian.

I've realised, in the process of writing this work, that keeping family together and namely women having the power to keep their babies, is the core value and the central theme of *The Ocean Road*. I've realised that being able to keep my baby at the age of sixteen, when I had her, in 1985, was the most important choice I was given in my life. Choice is the value that Winton names as the one he relishes most now that he is middle class. Upon reflection, in large part inspired by writing this exegesis, I understand that the choice that I was afforded to keep my baby could be credited to the fact that I was working class, because I had the tribe, because I had low expectations and because I didn't have to worry about offending middle class scruples. Because of that, I kept my baby, grew my daughter and, ultimately, my grandson. The fact that I was on this side of the fence saved us all. I went on to learn middle-class.

Cross cultural exchanges can lead to new perspectives, I appreciate my university education, but none of us are really so different. The Aboriginal Protection Board, the Stolen Generation and now the Intervention are examples of maintaining difference, of trying to stick to a rotten system, a colonial system, which is not Australian. Or doesn't have to be.

There is an Aboriginal idea, loosely translated as Conception Dreaming, which places importance on not only where you are born, but where you are conceived, grow, die and even where you are imagined. As more Australians try and imagine this place here, and more get to express their unique voices, more will be able to imagine this place here and perhaps that's how we will grow.

The two quotes at the beginning of this paper capture the exercise of writing *The Ocean Road* and this exegesis. The TS Eliot quote from *Ash Wednesday*,

If the lost word is lost, if the spoken word is spent

If the unheard, unspoken

Word is unspoken, unheard

(Eliot 102).

This poem is TS Eliot's attempt to make something new, the Modernist call to the artist to "capture honestly what is no longer reliable" (Tew and Murray 113). Eliot is calling for deeper consideration, a meaningful response to a world where nothing is certain and where different representations vie for authenticity,

Eliot uses an important Christian day, the first day of Lent, as the frame for the poem but ash is also very important in Australian Aboriginal rites and smoking ceremonies are used to sanctify places and times. These rituals go back to before Christ and they continue still today and exist alongside European practices in Australia. Alexis Wright starts her novel, *Carpentaria* with the tolling of the Christian bells telling the reader,

A nation chants, *but we know your stories already*"

(Wright 1)

She is asking, where are our stories?

In *Ash Wednesday*, Eliot is describing the need to put some things behind us, the necessary pain of the break with the past required to grow into something new. I have always passionately felt that the Republic was the opportunity for Australia to do this, a chance for us to start telling *our* stories. *The Ocean Road* is my response to the failure of the Republic, an attempt to tell one of *our* stories anyway.

Against the Word, the unstilled world still whirled.

(Eliot 102)

It is not surprising that such an attempt would be influenced by Aboriginal ways. I have tried to show all the influences on a modern Australian writer, but the real learning occurred in the space where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers come together. Through this exegesis, and in writing my novel, I have attempted to say, in Kurna, the language of the Adelaide plains, “Ngaityu yakanatalya, yungatalya” (dear sisters and brothers thank you) to all those who have gone here before me. It is hard for me, at the end of this project, to not see Aboriginal influences, or to look for them at least, everywhere I go in this country. Perhaps everywhere I go.

Although I do not hope to turn again

Although I do not hope

Although I do not hope to turn

(Eliot 104)

On Writing ‘The Ocean Road’, and perhaps every Creative Writing PhD. can be described in the seemingly simple lines of a pop song sung by Australian singer, John Farnham.

You’re the voice, try and understand it.

(Farnham 1986)

John Farnham plays a part in an important scene in *The Ocean Road* where Libby is required to present a paper on songs that have influenced her for a class at TAF. She has named *Playing to Win* by John Farnham, a song that her missing mother has named as an ideal theme song for the Republic bid, as her pick. Libby draws scorn from her classmates and her teacher for her choice. In *The Ocean Road*, their response to John Farnham represents the cultural cringe as the other student's choose overseas artists for their inspiration.

Libby offers her classmates an insight into the creation of art as she describes the construction of the John Farnham song, the dominoes that had to fall over, the combination of the Little River Band and John Farnham, the song's place in Australia's musical history. Libby describes the moves and shifts in the music itself, the build up to a crescendo, the drop, the cry-singing all designed to tell a story, to make an audience feel Farnham's desperation; the art of the song.

This dissertation has described some of the dominoes that have fallen over for *The Ocean Road* to exist and some of the techniques I have utilised to tell the story. Detailing my research and collating the range of the learning that went into writing this novel will provide a guide for my writing projects in the future. Finally, articulating my motivations for writing the novel has helped me to understand my voice, where it comes from and for whom it speaks.

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