

INTRODUCTION

The voices in this collection of essays are many. Some of the contributors reside in Australia, some write from countries elsewhere in the world. Some contributors speak from the academy, some are members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, some occupy a place in both. Sometimes the voices describe, sometimes they analyse, sometimes they theorise. Given the different positions from whence these voices come, not surprisingly, their tone and intent varies. But they are all engaged in the same important enterprise: to shed light on the writers, the readers and the texts of multicultural Australia.

A single all-encompassing way to understand this literary field is not possible, given the complexity and multifaceted nature of culturally and linguistically diverse writing in Australia. The aim of this collection is therefore not to provide a definitive statement about multicultural literature in Australia. Nor is it to encompass all forms of that writing and all forms of authorship. No single volume could do such a thing. But what a collection like this can do is to open another space for debate. And given the nature of multicultural literary production in Australia, it is imperative that that debate includes as many types of analysis – as many voices – as possible.

The collection opens with an essay by Alison Bartlett. She discusses *Neem Dreams*, a novel by Inez Baranay published in India, which is ‘acutely aware of the cultural politics of representation’. The broader focus, however, is upon Baranay as a multicultural writer as she engages with the institution of Australian literary criticism, the academy, and the critical theory that informs much of the work undertaken in that environment.

In discussing the literary career of Inez Baranay in relation to 'shifting cultural formations', Bartlett does not shy away from her own involvement in 'the matrix of relations' that has constructed Baranay's career, saying 'I had more than a passing interest in Baranay, so I feel obliged to introduce myself as a character in this story of critics, crucibles and literary careers.' With great insight she goes on to examine the 'Australian literary politics' and 'shifts in institutional and political discourses' that underpin the reception of Baranay's writing and her reputation as a writer.

Similarly focused upon one author and her oeuvre, Anne Brewster looks at the writing and reception of Anna Couani's work produced from 1977 to 1989. Brewster theorises the generic conventions of experimental writing and Couani's specific use of textual strategies such as first person narration and quotidian description to create anti-realist texts which posit a fragmented subjectivity and exemplify 'the condition of cultural/ethnic minoritisation'.

If Couani's writing foregrounds 'the lived contexts of events', Brewster's analysis skilfully reads Couani's career through a biographical and chronological perspective which contextualises it within the author's own 'ethnic and gendered difference'. She finds that during the 1970s and 1980s Couani's experimental writing defied the exclusions of mainstream white Australian culture, particularly within the publishing and literary industries.

Debra Dudek is motivated by a strong belief that multiculturalism can and should be more proactive against racism. She contends it is crucial to understand how the concept of race 'anchors' multiculturalism in order to more effectively combat racism. She therefore argues for a 'critical multiculturalism' which would acknowledge how race underpins multiculturalism and in turn allow for radical and racial difference.

Dudek employs the notion of 'critical multiculturalism' to read two texts written for children. She finds that the representation of multicultural issues in Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* and Ranulfo Concon's

Nirvana's Children offers a critique of hegemonic multiculturalism. She concludes that 'critics must put to work critical multiculturalism as a reading and writing strategy' when studying multicultural literature in order to 'shift discourses of multiculturalism from cultural difference to racial difference and therein to work against racism.'

Konstandina Dounis gives an account of Greek-Australian women's writing, paying special attention to intergenerational differences, relationships between mother and child, and connections to homeland(s). She begins with her own biography which she deftly interweaves with the development of Greek-Australian literary criticism and the trajectory it took through the 1990s.

Dounis' voice is of the critic who is herself 'bilingual and bicultural', addressing the sombre reality that multicultural women writers continue to be marginalised. Believing literary translation into English to be the vehicle for the necessary 'transferrings across' that will allow such writers to participate in the mainstream literary arena, she interprets the works of Greek-Australian women like herself. Indeed throughout her analysis her personal perspective is striking: she writes as one of those writers and one of those 'second generation daughters'. In her own life, and her mother's life, she finds 'crystallised' many of the 'thematic preoccupations' she identifies in the works written by other Greek-Australian women.

An intensely and intentionally subjective voice is heard as Hoa Pham, together with Scott Brook, speaks about herself and fellow Vietnamese-Australian writers. Based upon interviews with Dominic Golding, David Nguyen, Chi Vu, Tony Le Nguyen and Binh Duy Ta, the focus of this paper is the '1.5 generation' – those born in Vietnam and raised in Australia. These are young people who are 'between' the 'parent culture' of first-generation migrants and the 'host culture' of the adopted country. They are 'cultural intermediaries' who mediate public perceptions of the Vietnamese-Australian community and representations of contemporary Vietnam for non-Vietnamese audiences.

Pham and Brook find that ‘the idea of an experience that is specific to a 1.5 generation has been a powerful metaphor for catalysing the arts of young Vietnamese’. Identifying a number of concerns – living between two cultures, notions of home, return narratives, and sense of self – they conclude that: ‘the ongoing search for Vietnamese-Australian identity and the return home is a pressing tension for Vietnamese-Australian artists of the 1.5 generation and features strongly in Vietnamese-Australian works’.

Nijmeh Hajjar also provides a poignant and personal perspective as she reviews the most recent novel by Jad El Hage. Tracing themes of hope, idealism and pacifism, she writes not only as a literary scholar but as an immigrant to Australia originally from Lebanon, the country in which the novel is set.

Hajjar’s critical perspective is informed by her own experience of Lebanon. She contends that the author’s point of view is also inextricably connected to Lebanese heritage, saying ‘Let’s remember, Jad is first an Arab novelist.’ This touches upon the complex issue of how multicultural writers should be positioned. Her lament that the novel is not written in ‘our beautiful Arabic tongue’ bespeaks the multicultural reader who enacts a bicultural and bilingual reading strategy.

So personal is Hajjar’s response that she likens the protagonist of the novel to her own brother. And she relates the title of the novel – *The Myrtle Tree* – to her own recent experience of eating the hinblass berry while in Lebanon. This reflects on her intention to ‘emphasise the role of the reader in the creation of the text’.

Sonia Mycak provides an overview of a specific body of multicultural writing but in doing so offers an empirical approach. Interested in the question of how literary activity is enacted within culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia, she employs an institutional approach based on field theory. Drawing upon the work of Dutch scholar Kees van Rees on the contemporary literary field in Western European countries, Mycak theorises a model which

illustrates the structure by which literature is produced, circulated and consumed within the Ukrainian community in Australia.

This is part of a larger project to study the literary cultures of communities and writers who migrated to Australia as so-called Displaced Persons immediately after the Second World War. It is hoped this model of Ukrainian-Australian literary production will have a wider applicability as a study of immigrant community writing in Australia and can reflect upon other community-based culturally and linguistically diverse literary fields.

Igor Maver's overview of Slovenian writing in Australia shows a similar focus upon community, in that he begins by outlining the history of Slovenian migration to Australia and the cultural and literary infrastructure which has supported 'the literary creativity of Slovenian migrants in Australia'. His comprehensive survey of Slovenian-Australian writers comes to rest upon the poetry of Jože Žohar, a writer who 'deserves special attention' for the innovative quality of his work.

Maver's work provides an opportunity to hear an important viewpoint: analysis of a migrant literature from a source country perspective. Undertaking his analysis from 'here in Slovenia', he finds these works 'transcend the thematisation of the Slovenian migrant experience in Australia and adopt a cosmopolitan existential stance which addresses readers internationally'. Maver concludes that the texts enrich both the 'source' and the 'target' cultures alike while the authors are '“transcultural” writers in the best sense of the word' whose 'literary voice and vision have pluralised and globalised Australian as well as Slovenian literary production'.

Harriclea Zengos undertakes a detailed survey of Greek-Australian poetry, prose and drama, finding that it has 'undergone profound developments in the last two decades'. She notes that the term 'Greek-Australian' as applied to writers and literature is 'difficult to define'. Zengos nonetheless traces 'two types of writers' and 'two streams of literature'. She differentiates between the first-generation migrants who

came to Australia as adults and write in Greek, and the second generation who were born in Australia of Greek immigrant parents or came to Australia as young children. 'This dichotomy in Greek-Australian literature also gives rise to a duality of theme.' The former are preoccupied with exile, the lost homeland and the foreignness of the new world; the latter are concerned with ethnicity, identity and hybridity.

Zengos concludes that such categories are now being 'redefined'. Since work is now being accepted by mainstream publishers, she feels it 'has moved from the margins' and 'Greek-Australian writers have become a part of the Australian literary scene.'

Sissy Helff is concerned with the positioning of culturally and linguistically diverse literature, particularly within a national context of multiculturalism. She first discusses the problems inherent within existing terminology such as 'migrant writing' or 'multicultural literature'. Then she invites us to consider an alternative term 'transcultural literature', arguing that 'seeing Australian mainstream culture and national identity through a transcultural lens might open up new avenues of coming to terms with the complex category of national literature'.

Applying her argument to Indo-Australian literature, Helff questions the label 'Asian-Australian writing' as a category which constructs homogeneity without respecting the differences between South-Asian, South-East Asian and East-Asian literatures. Exploring to what extent Indo-Australian writing should be considered part of Australian literature, Helff embarks upon a close reading of Suneeta Peres da Costa's *Homework* and Bem Le Hunte's *There, Where the Pepper Grows*, two novels which she considers imagine multicultural Australia in very different ways.

One of the texts Sissy Helff looks at deals with 'the predicaments of growing up in an immigrant family in contemporary multicultural Australia'. Such a focus is shared by Mary Besemeres who considers the cross-cultural dimension of relations between children and parents in immigrant families, an issue which is evident in a large number of

intercultural narratives. Beginning with the question of how child rearing practices construct a certain 'cultural self', Besemeres comes to address the wider issue of cross-cultural families as they impact upon the formation of cross-cultural subjectivity.

Drawing upon works of psychological anthropology to theorise the relationship between culture and self, she interprets two novels both of which are by Australian Jewish writers whose parents emigrated from Eastern Europe but published 35 years apart: *Whole Life* by Morris Lurie published in 1987, and *Alien Son* by Judah Waten published in 1952. She finds

what narratives like Waten's and Lurie's can add to our understanding of the influence of particular cultural patterns of child rearing on individuals is the light they shed on the development of a person's 'cultural self' – or conflicting 'cultural selves' – from the inside. (p. 43)

Christine Sun interrogates the representation of Chinese cultural identity in writings produced by five Australian authors with Chinese ancestry. Given that migrants of Chinese descent come not only from China but also from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and other South-East Asian countries, Sun reminds us that regional, linguistic, gender, political, socio-economic and ethnic differences emerge when considering 'Chinese' cultural identity. As she states, "Chineseness" in Australia is and will continue to be a site of contested meanings.

Sun differentiates between 'reductive and essentialist ways of representing 'Chinese' cultural difference in literary texts' and a more 'open-ended cultural expression'. The former constructs a 'universal' or 'global' definition of 'Chineseness' based on certain cultural practices that are stereotypically ascribed to Chinese people. This may ignore 'individual' and 'local' expressions of Chinese identity formed within different types of Chinese culture all over the world. A 'non-essentialist' representation, she finds, is able to demonstrate 'the multiplicity of

narratives that construct a sense of cultural identity' and present a diverse and subjective range of cultural experiences.

Deborah Madsen also considers the complexity of Chinese cultural identity. She takes as her focus the body of Chinese-Australian literature which developed in the years following the end of the so-called White Australia policy. She does this because 'despite the presence of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Australian communities since the time of the gold rush, it was only after 1975 that a generation of writers of Chinese heritage began to emerge'.

These decades have seen several waves of 'very different migrations' which 'complicate the history of the Chinese-Australian community'. Such differences and complications are of interest to Madsen as she provides an overview and analysis of the literary texts. As she explains,

Mapping the impact of these differences upon Chinese-Australian literary production, while attending to points of convergence that allow us to speak of a coherent body of work that would constitute modern Anglophone 'Chinese-Australian Literature' is the aim of this essay.

Gaetano Rando begins with an overview of the corpus of work by first-generation Italian-Australian poets. Noting that these writers are little known outside the Italian-Australian community, he focuses upon the work of one particular poet. Paolo Totaro, Rando explains, 'constitutes an exception for his many years of engagement in "mainstream" political, cultural and intellectual endeavours'. Thus begins Rando's analysis of the poetry of 'an Italian intellectual [who] became a pioneer of multiculturalism' in Australia.

Among Totaro's many achievements is the fact that his 1978 publication *Participation* was 'instrumental in determining for the first time multicultural policy' in several Australian states. However Rando's appreciation of Totaro's work here is primarily literary. He quotes at some length from the poetry, which is necessary given Totaro's collection of

more than 100 poems is largely unpublished. Rando finds the 'plurilinguistic lyric experimentation' particularly interesting and concludes that Totaro is able to present the 'recesses of his soul as well as the collective experience of the migrant diaspora'.

Robert Pickering analyses *Days in Sydney* by Didier Coste, a novel in which 'bilingualism would seem to be a fundamental prerequisite' in the attempt to 'seize the contemporary contours' of a multicultural society. This is a text which enacts cultural difference not through translation but by alternating two languages in a 'properly organic' relationship between English and French. Language, however, is comprehended both as a 'living presence' and in its 'opacity' and 'elusiveness'. Experimental in structure and narrative technique, this novel posits 'the problematic of identity' which 'is articulated through a questioning of the very adequacy of language, style and form to give it presence and meaning'.

Pickering's paper bespeaks the question of how to define an Australian text. The novel is an 'account of life and love in Sydney' and grapples with 'what it means to live in contemporary Australia'. Yet it was neither published in Australia nor written by a person permanently based here. Nonetheless, as Pickering argues, the work is 'of remarkable resonance and depth, which adds a distinctly new dimension to Australian creative writing'.

Dennis Haskell addresses the concept of national identity and the way national identities determine personal and cultural selves. He does this by analysing two Australian films, both of which are 'concerned with national mythologies that inform the personalities of the central characters'. Despite this collection of essays having an overt literary focus, Haskell's paper was included to remind us that the multicultural text in Australia can be, and very often is, a film. And just as a multicultural literary text can interrogate notions of national, cultural and personal identity, so too do *The Goddess of 1967* and *Japanese Story* contribute to such a debate.

Maintaining that Australian identity has undergone a process of 'revaluation' in the last thirty years, Haskell addresses the 'reconsideration of Australia's relationships with Asia' specifically in relation to Japan. Tracing the depictions of (and differences between) Australian and Japanese cultures, Haskell finds that 'Australian identity is unfolded partly through comparison with Japanese identity ... in re-envisioning the Japanese, these films re-envision Australians.' He contends that 'both films portray complex, internationalised situations' that reflect the transition Australian national identity has undergone in recent decades.

Despite the different approaches they take, together these essays converge upon a number of important questions.

How does multiculturalism intersect with different genres and generic conventions? How is cultural diversity expressed and enacted within life writing, women's writing, experimental writing, children's literature, poetry, prose and film?

What does it mean to be a 'multicultural writer' in Australia today? Is it a biographically determined category – does one need to be born outside of Australia or born of immigrant parents? Is it a self-identified category or a definition of authorship that is imposed by readers and critics? Does the multicultural writer occupy an enunciative position which is limiting or liberating? Many of the authors whose works are here reviewed show that multicultural authorship can be a fleeting or strategic form of identity a writer enacts at certain points in his or her career, and that while ethno-cultural and linguistic differences and influences can inform the creation of a text so too do other personal, social and cultural contexts come into play.

What is a 'multicultural text'? The essays in this collection show that defining such a text invokes various possibilities: a text published in Australia or published overseas; a work written in one language or bilingual; a narrative set in Australia or located in another place; a

narrative depicting culturally and/or linguistically diverse characters and settings.

In addressing such questions, the perspectives and points of interrogation are many.

The concept of multiculturalism itself comes under scrutiny, particularly the shortcomings of an Australian multiculturalism which has not yet resulted in a fully inclusive cultural field but has left many a fine writer little known outside of his or her own ethno-cultural community.

Terminology such as 'migrant writing' or 'multicultural literature' is queried, as we are invited to consider other terms such as 'transcultural' and 'transnational', which might better encompass the global nature of literary production today.

The construction of ethno-cultural identity is investigated, particularly as it is represented within literary texts. Different frames of reference are employed: intergenerational differences, bicultural and hybrid identity, bilingualism, and cross-cultural subjectivity.

Inherently, the notion of an Australian national and cultural identity is challenged, as are national mythologies as they impact upon the representation of individuals. There is a wariness of stereotypical attributes which essentialise identity. There is attention to global dimensions which admit cultural difference.

Such complications and contestations are welcome and implied in the very title of this book. To Australian readers the term 'Australian made' might evoke certain associations. As a label it most often refers to goods and services in an attempt to circumscribe their origins. But there are disputed meanings of an 'Australian made' product found on a supermarket shelf. Was the item packaged and distributed in Australia, does it contain ingredients from abroad? All these connotations were considered in formulating the title of this book. Certain implications we thought would prove fruitful: the text as a commodity which is distributed and consumed; the text as a product of institutional forces as

well as individual agencies. Contestations also exist when labelling a text as 'Australian literature' – was it written, published, distributed, received in Australia? Did any of these processes occur overseas? To what extent do international influences create any Australian literary text?

Presenting the work of critics and scholars from both Australia and abroad, this collection creates a synergy between local and international perspectives as it explores what it means for a writer or reader to be 'Australian' and a text to be 'Australian made'.

Sonia Mycak and Amit Sarwal