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This revised edition is designed primarily for use by Year 11 students of English. Like its predecessor, it provides clear and accessible explanations of core concepts and approaches to a range of reading, writing and interpretation activities that underpin effective teaching and learning in subject English at the senior level.

The book is structured in three parts, the first of which familiarises students with key concepts that are integral to the process of successful interpretation, appreciation, analysis and construction of texts, including those shaped by students. These central concepts enable students to operate as more appreciative, critical and self-reflexive readers and creators who pay attention to the interactions among the text, its author, its readers and the interpretive communities to which they belong. These include examining how values, attitudes and beliefs that are available in a culture at particular times operate to shape both the creation and reception of texts.

In this revision, the authors have comprehensively and extensively adapted and refined the original edition, adding engaging and challenging new material, including the addition of a new chapter on approaches to the close reading of a novel, as mandated in the draft Senior English Syllabus, 2008. There is a wider range of Australian material, with a greater emphasis on visual, digital and multimodal texts and, as the draft Syllabus requires, a fuller incorporation of indigenous works, as well as a broadening of perspectives on notions of national identity.

The book judiciously integrates a range of strategies drawn from different approaches to the teaching of English to enable students to be eclectic and effective users of language in the twenty-first century. It has a strong emphasis on close readings of an eclectic range of literary texts, including new imaginative activities that facilitate an appreciation of, as well as creative and critical engagement with these.

*Queensland Senior English Book 2*, the companion text to this volume, has been written to accommodate and to address the greater complexity and sophistication of language use required of Year 12 students.
Margaret Miller and Robyn Colwill have extensive experience in the teaching of English at senior secondary level and in the writing and development of curriculum materials and work programs. They have both been Heads of Department (English) and members of District and State Panels in English.

Both have postgraduate research degrees in English from the University of Queensland: Margaret an MA and Robyn a PhD, both in literary studies.

They have also been lecturers and tutors in English Education at tertiary level. They thus draw on comprehensive and informed theoretical and practical understandings in the writing of this book.
PART A

UNDERSTANDING KEY CONCEPTS
What comes to your mind when you see the following word?

KANGAROO

You might have a very clear picture in your mind that this is an animal; you can visualise it. The word (or sign) represents, or stands for, a thing—in this case an animal, a furry herbivorous marsupial with powerful hind legs—that exists in the world. That might be what you visualised or thought of when you read the word.

Other ideas or impressions may also have come to mind when you saw the word. Perhaps you thought ‘pest’ or ‘Australian icon’. Equally, you may have immediately thought of a member of an Australian football team.

People’s responses would have varied, depending on their prior experiences and knowledge of kangaroos. The meaning that readers, writers and viewers make of a particular word derives from, or relates to, the concept they have of the thing the word stands for—in this case, the kangaroo.

Activity

If a farmer, a kangaroo shooter, a Japanese tourist and a car insurance executive wrote or spoke about a ‘kangaroo’, each would presumably have quite a different concept of ‘kangaroo’. They are likely to have different attitudes and beliefs about kangaroos and so value them differently. Suggest four captions for the photograph above, from the viewpoint of each person.

a Farmer
c Japanese tourist

b Kangaroo shooter
d Car insurance executive
As you can see, the meanings of a word are not fixed or stable. A word does not always represent the same thing; instead, it varies according to the different attitudes, beliefs and values that operate in a culture. Each of these people has a different version of what a 'kangaroo' is.

When we produce texts (spoken, written or visual), we use words and images—often in combination—to represent ideas, to make meanings and to represent our version of the world to others. When we interpret texts made by others, we make meanings as well: we consider what has been represented, how it has been represented and how it relates to our view of the world.

Explaining representation

There are two important aspects of representation:

- Representations do not reflect, or mirror, the real world; they are selective constructions or textual choices.
- These selections or choices are mediated or influenced by the attitudes, values and beliefs of both the writer/shaper/speaker and the reader/viewer/listener. These selections do not give us 'reality' but 'versions of reality'.

It is important to recognise that textual representations are re-presented versions of people, places, things, objects and concepts. These selective constructions do not reflect what is in the world. Representations are always influenced or mediated by ways of thinking about the world. They are not fixed but can change.

Reading representations

How representations are constructed

Texts can be constructed, or composed, in many different systems of language—verbal, visual, auditory or digital—operating either separately or in combination. Textual representations can thus be composed through words, phrases and descriptions, visual images, sounds or gestures. Analysis of representations will reveal the writer’s/speaker’s/artist’s likely attitudes towards and beliefs about things, people, social groups, places and times.

This road sign is a very familiar sign, or code, to drivers in rural Australia. It represents danger. Here the kangaroo is not constructed as a grey, furry marsupial—it is a traffic hazard.
Model

The following is an example of how you could analyse the representation of the kangaroo in the road sign and how it has been constructed:

The road sign does not provide a realistic image of the animal—it is stylised: it is not the usual colour one associates with the animal; it is simplified; it is a solid black against yellow. Yellow is a dominant colour in the spectrum and therefore stands out and catches people’s attention. The stylising takes away the sense that this is an animal and abstracts it as a danger. In this context, the kangaroo represents danger.

Is it likely that everyone in the class would interpret the visual signs in the same way? What other readings could be made of the road sign? Account for these different readings of the same text.

Different readings

It is important to note, at this point, that the model analysis above is the invited reading of the road sign. To the driver of a car, the road sign might represent danger, but other people might read it differently. Conservationists, for example, might see it as a sign that there is a concern for the wellbeing of fauna. Overseas tourists might see it as a sign that they are going to be fortunate enough to see some wild animals in their natural habitat. Different readings of representations are possible, although there may be a recognisably acceptable and dominant or invited one.

Activity

Each of the pictures on the opposite page stands for, or represents, something slightly different. Identify what you think each kangaroo represents. Analyse specific features of that representation.

To do this, first consider carefully the choices, or selections, that have been made in constructing each picture of the kangaroo. Then decide on the meaning that you would make about what the kangaroo represents in this particular context of its use. You may find it useful to concentrate not only on what is ‘in’ the text but also on your knowledge of the broader cultural context. For example, the kangaroo sculptures are part of a permanent art installation in George Street, Brisbane. How is the reclining kangaroo represented and why do so many people have their photograph taken in the vacant seat?

Share your interpretations with the class and discuss similarities and differences in the readings.
Christopher Trotter,
City Roos

Vincent Serico,
Woorabinda 2001,
acrylic on canvas, 61 x 106 cm
Activity

Look at this advertisement from the English magazine *The World of Interiors*. The kangaroo is a key feature of this advertisement and is used to market an Audi; it is a representation, constructed in words and images, that serves as an analogy for the vehicle.

1. Examine in detail the construction of the advertisement and analyse the representation of the kangaroo to market the car. Why would a kangaroo be used to sell a car to European consumers?

2. What aspects of the kangaroo have been selected by the advertisers, and for what purpose? Analyse the advertisement by referring to specific words and phrases as well as aspects of the visual image.
Understanding how representations work in texts

Representations do not operate in isolation within texts. Representations of individuals, groups, times and places intersect with representations of other individuals, groups, times and places, and the intersections between these representations enable meanings to be made.

The following texts all feature varying representations of the kangaroo. As you read them, think also about how the representations of the kangaroo influence or shape other representations in the texts; for example, the narrator or the characters.

Text 1

Germaine Greer is an Australian academic and writer. In this excerpt from her autobiography, Greer describes a car trip she made in the bush.

... I concentrated on keeping the car steady on the crown of the road. The wind kept lifting up her tail, urging her to slide off into the racing vermilion mud of the storm drains. Leaves, twigs, and even branches clanged off the doors and fenders. I hoped the windscreen would hold. On and on I drove, blind and deafened in that howling, clanging frenzy, hoping the storm-system was not more than a few miles across.

Suddenly it was daylight and black-opal-blue sky above me. The harsh sunlight flashed off tinkling droplets and sheets of bright water reflected the sky's burning blue. The air was loud with birdsong. I put down the window. Behind me I could still hear the muffled roar of the storm. Every kind of animal and bird was frolicking in the water but I had to hurry if I didn't want night to overtake me on the track. Navigating on these broad stock routes is easy enough by day, but by night you can be sidetracked, literally, and drive many miles in the wrong direction and find yourself at a bore-hole in the middle of nowhere with insufficient petrol to get you on the road again. I drove as fast as I could and hoped I would not collide with any of the bandicoots and kangaroo rats and goodness-knows-whats that were leaping and skipping and dashing about in all directions. All went well until I came up to where two kangaroos were washing their faces in a puddle, an unusual sight at three-thirty in the afternoon. The female looked, turned to part the fence-wires with her little hands and hopped through. The male kangaroo pricked his ears aggressively and then jumped the wrong way, right across my road. I stood on the brake and pulled the wheel around, hoping I wouldn't broadside him.
Kangaroos are in general impossible to avoid under these circumstances, because if you swerve to avoid the leading end you usually hit some part of the tail, which whips the creature around and slams it into the car. Any broken bone and the kangaroo is doomed. Generally it’s better to hit the leading end and kill the animal outright than condemn it to a slow death, fly-blown and gangrenous and savaged by pigs. The worst thing to do is to risk your own life by braking and swerving and kill yourself and the kangaroo as well. But I did it just the same. I didn’t have much choice, after all. If I’d hit the ‘roo without ‘roo bars, I’d probably have smashed the radiator, even if I didn’t end up with the ‘roo through the windscreen and in my lap.

The Holden did not hold the road well at any time. On loose sand and gravel it was usually sliding without the benefit of locked wheels. This time it whipped itself round and danced back up the road in an imitation of the prince’s solo in Swan Lake. I have never liked ballet, and I didn’t enjoy this performance, except for the part where I saw the kangaroo’s astonished face flash past me as he bounded over the wire fence and off through the scrub. The Holden finally came to rest half-way up an embankment. I looked out of my window at the red gravel a foot away and hoped the car would not crown her gymnastic performance by tipping all the way over. I had to think for a moment to work out which way I was facing. I was going south-south-east, therefore I had been driving away from the sun. At first the car wouldn’t start, and I thought I’d knocked out the transmission. Then I remembered to put her in park. She slid down the embankment, agreed to turn round in the road after some argument, and we were off again to Bourke.

I had done it. I had broken the primal elder’s curse. I hadn’t hit the kangaroo. Nor did I hit anything else until the Holden climbed up on to a tarmac road just north of Bourke and I increased my speed. A flock of galahs feeding beside the road rose and flew directly towards me. One hit the windscreen right between my eyes and bounced off dead as a doornail in a storm of pink and grey feathers. I had a chip out of the windscreen to remind me that it was back to square one.

Germaine Greer, *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You*

discussion

1. Does this representation of the kangaroo align with any of the previous ‘versions’ of kangaroos that you have encountered in this chapter?

2. Why does Greer mention an encounter with a kangaroo? How does the incident with the kangaroo construct the driver/narrator?
Eva Hornung, another Australian writer, has written a short story about an encounter between a kangaroo and an urban family unfamiliar with the Australian bush.

Amin and Zeen invited Samir and Ilham to go for a trip to Berri. They had relatives in the Riverland and all were excited at the adventure such an unprecedented trip would be.

‘Just for fun!’ they said to each other. ‘Just for a drive! What a surprise we will give everyone. Why didn’t we think of it before?’

It would be like going up to the village in the mountains. It would be all family, a real get together. Both Ilham and Zeen dressed carefully for the trip and the arrival.

They set off in high spirits in a suitable country car, a white Valiant borrowed from Uncle Mahmoud. Zeen and Ilham sat in the back; Amin and Samir in the front. Ilham wore a hat and Zeen wore the latest Candy Frost lipstick. They consulted the map carefully, surprised to find there was only one road so getting lost was impossible. Who would have thought you can just go there, on these lovely, civilised new roads, seeing the Australian countryside as you go. Zeen wound down the window and let the breeze blow her hair about. No wonder the Riverland relatives had been urging them to come up. It was so easy. Not even snipers to worry about and no roadblocks.

The heat of the day intensified and the landscape became too much to look at and comment on. At a sign from Ilham, Zeen wound the window up. Ilham pulled out the cards and dealt and they played a rugged game of tahneeh, couple against couple, made more difficult by Amin having to concentrate on the road and keep eye contact with Zeen through the rear vision mirror. They entered mallee country, noticing briefly that there were now straggly grey trees everywhere, dappled in white light; then returning to the game.

Suddenly Amin said, ‘Look, look! Oh Lord!’ and they all looked up.

A red kangaroo was bounding down the centre of the highway towards them. It didn’t deviate off the white lines, just bounded hypnotically, its powerful toes planting regularly about every third or fourth strip. Uncle Amin slowed the car down, waiting for the animal to sheer off to the side and bound away into the bush. It got larger and larger, and then, at the very last minute, it swerved as if suddenly magnetised, straight into the roof bar of the car. Its red form filled the windscreen and everyone screamed, leaned back and pushed their feet hard to the floor. There was a slow, almost elegant impact. The kangaroo disappeared and the car slid sideways down the road, on and on. The tahneeh cards flew around the cabin like wheeling
seagulls. Everyone sat still, staring at the slowly crazing windshield as if at the movies in a particularly tense scene. The car stopped.

The sun beat down, the mallee trees shook in the breezes, a bird flew by. Everyone breathed out in unison and relaxed their taut bodies.

‘Praise be …’ Ilham began. She stopped. The car had begun to shake. It was as if something had the car in its teeth and was throttling it. The Valiant gave little irregular shudders and then sharp lopsided jerks. Ilham began to wail in a high voice just as something outside began to roar in heavy gasps. Zeen stared ahead, white as a wedding dress, her short hair rising.

The kangaroo suddenly stood up, shaking the car heavily as it rose. It stood a good two metres above the bonnet and leered through a bloody eye at them, bleeding mouth open, showing enormous yellow rat teeth. Samir, Amin, Ilham and Zeen screamed and slammed back rigid in their seats. The kangaroo raised its fists and began beating wildly at the bonnet. They could feel it kicking and tearing at the radiator.

Amin gasped. ‘The poor thing. Oh my God. I have to do something!’
Ilham shrieked, ‘Stop it from destroying the car! Quick! Quick!’
Amin bashed the driver’s door open with his shoulder and got out.

No-one could quite explain what happened next, it all happened so quickly. Amin walked up to the distressed animal, hands outstretched placatingly, although what he was going to do, no-one was quite sure. The kangaroo turned to face him, rose up high above his head and grabbed him from behind the neck with a huge black fist, sinking black claws into his nape. It wrenched his body around into a headlock, threw its head back, and with its nose pointed to the sun and roaring, began to jump about, tearing its hindlegs against the body in its embrace. Amin disappeared from sight behind the bonnet. Then, before anyone quite registered what was happening, Zeen was outside, hauling her patent leather stilettos off her feet. She rushed up to the animal, brandishing the shoes above her head and screaming. She thwacked it across the head with one heel and then the other.

Zeen and the kangaroo fought. The kangaroo dropped Amin and faced the shoes. Zeen balanced lightly on her stockinged feet and had to spring at the tall beast with her feet together, for her pencil skirt could not be rucked above her knees.

She held the shoes by the toes and beat the kangaroo to death. The car was spattered with blood, and Amin, standing by with his shirt shredded, looked on in shock. He staggered over to the driver’s door and sat down.

Zeen screamed with each blow, ‘Kill my husband? Kill him? God is GREAT!’
When she finished she crisply vomited onto the road and then climbed shakily back into the car.

‘What sort of animal was that?’ she asked, her chest heaving. Her clothes were speckled, her stockings torn and the shoes broken and bloody.

‘A kangaroo,’ Amin whispered.

There was a silence. Everyone stared ahead, the car ticking slightly in the heat.

Eva Hornung, The Kangaroo

discussion

1. How is the kangaroo constructed? Indicate words or phrases that seem to be significant in constructing the attitudes/values/beliefs about the kangaroo in this text.

2. What does the kangaroo represent? Does it represent the same thing(s) as the kangaroo in the Greer extract or is this representation different?

3. To what uses do Greer and Hornung put the kangaroo in their texts? Consider how Greer makes use of the kangaroo to construct her relationship with the Australian bush. How does this differ from the relationship that the characters in the Hornung story have with the bush?

Text 3

In this excerpt from Blood Junction, a detective/thriller novel set in outback Australia, Caroline Carver also uses kangaroos to represent particular attitudes, beliefs and values.

The house was partly concealed by a stand of low trees but as she approached she could see it was neat and well cared for. She reached a gate set in a high wire-mesh fence surrounding a dusty corral and the rear of the house. She saw several tin sheds, a water trough, and a kangaroo. She pressed her head against the fence. The kangaroo obligingly hopped over and pushed its nose through the mesh. Unable to resist, India stroked the soft grey muzzle. It felt like velvet.

‘That’s Billy,’ a woman’s voice said behind her. ‘His mum was killed in a motor accident so we got him as a very young pinky. Now he’s grown he’ll be off soon.’
India turned. The instant their eyes met, the woman’s friendly grin dissolved. ‘Sweet Jesus,’ she said. The colour drained from her face. ‘You … You’re …’

‘Yes, I’m India Kane. My friend, Lauren Kennedy, was murdered and I want to find out what happened, and why. I’m hoping Mrs Elizabeth Ross can help me.’

‘Sweet Jesus,’ she said again.

‘Are you Mrs Ross?’

The woman gave a jerky nod.

India turned back to the kangaroo, who had thrust one furry ear forward, the other back, and was surveying her steadily through liquid brown eyes. ‘Lauren Kennedy had your phone number,’ she said, keeping her tone calm. ‘I wanted to know why.’

The woman made a choking sound and unlatched the gate. Immediately five kangaroos appeared from behind the various sheds and looked across expectantly, standing on their hind legs. The woman stepped inside the corral and headed for the rear of the house. India followed.

‘The biggest problem in areas like this,’ the woman said, her voice unsteady, ‘where it’s heavily bushed, is there’s no lights, no nothing, and the animals graze to the edges of the road, from one side to the other, and get hit by cars or trucks or whatever.’ She pointed at the smallest kangaroo who was hopping slowly after them. ‘That’s Annie. She lost a fight with a station wagon. And that’s Randy, had him since he was a pinky too …’

While the woman talked, India studied her. She was slightly built, in her late-thirties India guessed, and wore ill-fitting jeans and a T-shirt smeared with what could have been porridge. Her skin was tightly drawn and her eyes looked tired, despite the incongruously bright blue eyeliner on her lower lids.

‘Do they all have names?’

India received a strained smile.

‘Sure they do. We can have them for up to two years and you can’t keep just saying, “Oi, you”.’

India asked how many ‘roos they rescued a year, and they were still discussing it when they entered the house. Three kangaroos followed them. In the living room another kangaroo with a bandaged hind leg and tail lay on a pink quilt and nibbled at a pile of grass left within its reach. Another larger ‘roo, at least four feet, was sprawled on the overstuffed couch, tail draping from the armrest and resting on the floor. Neither acknowledged their presence aside from a brief flick of the ears.

India stepped over a pile of pellets, her face puckering as she inhaled. The smell of the kangaroos reminded her of a roomful of unhousetrained cats.

‘They’re family orientated,’ Elizabeth Ross said, a little defensively. ‘You can’t just put them in a shed and feed them every four hours. Without the support of their mates they’d never return to the wild, so we have to make
them part of our family so they can survive in the bush.’

India found herself transfixed by a tiny face peering from an artificial pouch made of an old tartan blanket hanging on the far wall. Its long, delicate silhouette was dwarfed by paper-thin floppy ears and a pair of huge glistening eyes.

Elizabeth Ross smiled. ‘She arrived yesterday. I'll have to feed her day and night every two hours for the next few months. I've called her Jilly.’

‘You’re a dedicated woman, Mrs Ross,’ murmured India.

Caroline Carver, Blood Junction

discussion

1 As in the two earlier texts by Greer and Hornung, there is a reference by Carver to kangaroos and road accidents. How are kangaroos represented differently in her text?

2 How does the representation of her relationship with the kangaroos construct the character of Elizabeth Ross? How do the attitudes, values and beliefs of Elizabeth Ross differ from those of Greer and the characters in the Hornung text?

3 From these texts, what have you learnt about how representations work in texts to construct different meanings?

Text 4

Consider how the kangaroo is represented in the following poem by the Australian novelist and poet Eve Langley. Think about the representation of the kangaroo in the text, especially in terms of its interrelationship with the representations of the Australian landscape and the narrator.

Native-born

In a white gully among fungus red
    Where serpent logs lay hissing at the air,
I found a kangaroo. Tall, dewy, dead,
    So like a woman, she lay silent there.
Her ivory hands, black-nailed, crossed on her breast,
    Her skin of sun and moon hues, fallen cold.
Her brown eyes lay like rivers come to rest
    And death had made her black mouth harsh and old.
Beside her in the ashes I sat deep
   And mourned for her, but had no native song
To flatter death, while down the ploughlands steep
   Dark young Camelli whistled loud and long,
   ‘Love, liberty, and Italy are all.’
   Broad golden was his breast against the sun.
I saw his wattle whip rise high and fall
   Across the slim mare’s flanks, and one by one
She drew the furrows after her as he
   Flapped like a gull behind her, climbing high,
   Chanting his oaths and lashing soundingly,
   While from the mare came once a blowing sigh.
The dew upon the kangaroo’s white side
   Had melted. Time was whirling high around,
Like the thin woomera, and from heaven wide
   He, the bull-roarer, made continuous sound.
Incarnate lay my country by my hand:
   Her long hot days, bushfires, and speaking rains,
Her mornings of opal and the copper band
   Of smoke around the sunlight on the plains.
Globed in fire-bodies the meat-ants ran
   To taste her flesh and linked us as we lay,
For ever Australian, listening to a man
   From careless Italy, swearing at our day.
When, golden-lipped, the eagle-hawks came down
   Hissing and whistling to eat of lovely her,
And the blowflies with their shields of purple brown
   Plied hatching to and fro across her fur,
I burnt her with the logs, and stood all day
   Among the ashes, pressing home the flame
   Till woman, logs, and dreams were scorched away,
   And native with night, that land from whence they came.

Eve Langley

**Activity**

Answer these questions as preparation for producing your reading of the poem:

1. How are the three main ‘participants’/‘characters’ constructed? Draw up a grid like the one on the next page and list the words and phrases that are used to describe each of them.
1 Representation

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Narrator</th>
<th>Kangaroo</th>
<th>Camelli</th>
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2 Some parallels are made in the constructions of the woman and the kangaroo. What are they? What oppositions (binary oppositions) exist between the young Italian, Camelli, and the woman/kangaroo? Do you notice any other patterns about these descriptions?

3 What reasons could be offered for linking the woman and the kangaroo? What reasons can you suggest for constructing such a strong affinity as that which seems to exist between the woman and the kangaroo?

4 What is the invited reading of both the woman’s dreams and the kangaroo being scorched away or reduced to ashes?

5 It could be argued that, in this poem, the kangaroo becomes a powerful representation not only of the woman’s relationship with the bush but also of her identity as a woman. How can the kangaroo be read as representing symbolically both national and gender identity? Elaborate, providing detailed examples from the poem.

6 What does the male represent at this higher symbolic level in the poem?

Activity

Eve Langley wrote predominantly during the first half of the twentieth century. The poem ‘Native-born’ is based on an experience she had when she was working as an itinerant farm worker in Gippsland, Victoria, in the late 1920s.

The poem was first published in the 1930s. At the time, many people would have seen it as a poem about Australian identity, one that showed a love of and an affinity with the landscape. Although this may have been the conventional reading of the poem, some readers may have been more likely to focus on producing a reading that could be termed feminist. Using the construction of the kangaroo as a starting point for your discussion, produce either reading in a piece of extended writing.
Text 5

Rex Backhaus-Smith is a contemporary Queensland artist with an affinity for the Australian landscape and its animals. In his painting *Rear Vision*, he constructs his version of the experience of a road trip in the bush.

**discussion**

1. Consider the images in *Rear Vision* and discuss the following:
   a. the way the kangaroos are constructed as blurring into and out of the landscape
   b. the use of the rear-vision mirror
   c. the use of the thin black line

What is the overall effect of these choices in representing a road trip in outback Australia?

Text 6

The following poem by Barron Field was written in the early nineteenth century, in the first decades of settlement at Sydney Cove. Field was an early judge of the New South Wales Supreme Court and sometime poet. As you read the poem, consider the ways in which the poet’s language and attitudes may differ from those of readers in the twenty-first century.
The kangaroo

Kangaroo, Kangaroo!  
Thou Spirit of Australia,  
That redeems from utter failure,  
From perfect desolation,  
And warrants the creation  
Of this fifth part of the Earth,  
Which would seem an after-birth,  
Not conceiv'd in the Beginning  
(For GOD bless’d His work at first,  
And saw that it was good),  
But emerg’d at the first sinning,  
When the ground was therefore curst;—  
And hence this barren wood!  

Kangaroo, Kangaroo!  
Tho’ at first sight we should say,  
In thy nature that there may  
Contradiction be involv’d,  
Yet, like discord well resolv’d,  
It is quickly harmonized.  
Sphynx or mermaid realiz’d,  
Or centaur unfabulous,  
Would scarce be more prodigious,  
Or Pegasus poetical,  
Or hippogriff—chimeras all!  
But, what Nature would compile,  
Nature knows to reconcile;  
And Wisdom, ever at her side,  
Of all her children’s justified.

She had made the squirrel fragile;  
She had made the bounding hart;  
But a third so strong and agile  
Was beyond ev’n Nature’s art;  
So she join’d the former two  
In thee, Kangaroo!  
To describe thee, it is hard:  
Converse of the camélopard,  
Which beginneth camel-wise,  
But endeth of the panther size,  
Thy fore half, it would appear,  
Had belong’d to some ‘small deer’,  
Such as liveth in a tree;  
By thy hinder, thou should’st be  
A large animal of chace,  
Bounding o’er the forest’s space;—  
Join’d by some divine mistake,  
None but Nature’s hand can make—  
Nature, in her wisdom’s play,  
On Creation’s holiday.

For howsoe’er anomalous,  
Thou yet art not incongruous,  
Repugnant or preposterous.  
Better-proportion’d animal,  
More graceful or ethereal,  
Was never follow’d by the hound,  
With fifty steps to thy one bound.  
Thou can’st not be amended: no;  
Be as thou art; thou best art so.

When sooty swans are once more rare,  
And duck-moles the Museum’s care,  
Be still the glory of this land,  
Happiest Work of finest Hand!

Barron Field
Look at the more complex representations of the kangaroo on pages 19 and 20. These are no doubt less-familiar representations. They draw on a range of different cultural understandings. Garry Shead’s painting, *Thirroulia*, contains many intertextual references. For example, the male figure in the foreground is a representation of the famous English author DH Lawrence, who visited Australia in 1922 and was inspired to write his classic Australian novel, *Kangaroo*. (Note: To understand the Skippy references on the next page, it is necessary to have prior knowledge of the television series *Skippy, the Bush Kangaroo*.)

1. Examine how the representations are constructed. What selections of words, images and symbols are made? What cultural understandings are being mobilised in these texts? What cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs mediate in the construction of each of these representations? Write a paragraph analysing each representation.

2. Select one of these images as a stimulus and write a text incorporating a representation of a kangaroo. The kangaroo should be used to represent particular attitudes, beliefs and values. You will need to make a number of decisions:
   a. the genre—for example, a narrative (short story) or an exposition (feature article)
   b. your audience and purpose
   c. specific words and phrases to set the scene and describe the participants, as appropriate to your chosen genre
   d. the names; what is included or excluded; who speaks and who does not; how the representation of the kangaroo relates to other representations in your text.

These are all significant features of representation. They are all part of the selection and construction process, and these choices will influence or position your reader to respond in particular ways.

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**Activity**

1. Like many of the early settlers, Barron Field was both fascinated and disconcerted by the strange flora and fauna encountered in Australia. What phrase in the first stanza foreshadows the kangaroo’s status as a national symbol?

2. Locate some epithets, or phrases, that describe Field’s ambivalent response to the kangaroo’s appearance.

3. What is the invited reading of the kangaroo in the final stanzas of the poem?
Paul J Livingstone, Where are they now? #1 Skippy
Consolidating your understanding

By this stage it should be very obvious that the representations of the kangaroo are many and varied and are put to many different uses in texts. This is because there are different attitudes, values and beliefs or different ways of thinking about kangaroos. The representations in these texts derive from differing cultural understandings or selective constructions of the kangaroo. This holds true for representations of other things, people, places, events and concepts.

The choices of what to include or exclude in any text, and whether to present a predominantly positive or negative representation, are part of the selection process that the author/producer of a text makes to construct meanings and position readers to respond in particular ways. The choices made in the construction of particular representations, therefore, do ideological work in texts and as a result have consequences on the way people think about and construct their world.
The painting *Red Dream* is taken from a series called *Strange Memories*, a multimedia work exploring images of the Australian landscape. Anna Glynn is a contemporary Australian artist who in her artist statement says that ‘she is intrigued by the landscape as an entity on its own, and as a stage for the performances that are acted out within it’.

This painting has a surreal, or fantastic, quality in its incongruous insertion of the armchair into a landscape with an audience of kangaroos waiting for some kind of action. One can speculate about the reactions of the kangaroos to this strange or unidentified foreign object in the middle of their natural habitat. In surrealism in fiction and in art, fantastic elements are introduced in narratives of the familiar and the ordinary.

Consider your response to this painting. What possibilities can you imagine for the scene depicted in *Red Dream*? Compose a short narrative, drawing on the conventions of surrealism in response to the images contained within the painting.
Research

Examine the textual representations of teenagers/young adults in a wide range of texts, such as magazines, newspapers, television, feature films, fiction, songs. The cultural construction of teenagers as a distinctive subset of the general population originated in the 1950s, largely to create a significant niche market for commercial enterprise.

a. To what extent are teenagers constructed homogeneously in the texts you select?

b. To what extent are they represented positively or negatively?

c. To what extent are stereotypical antisocial representations of teenagers perpetuated? And to what purpose?

d. What versions of being a teenager are silenced?

e. What consequences can these representations have on how teenagers perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others?

Compile your findings for a seminar presentation to the class.
Attitudes, values and beliefs

Understanding how attitudes, values and beliefs shape texts

In the 2008 film *Australia*, produced and directed by Baz Luhrmann, there is an amusing scene where Lady Sarah Ashley and Drover, the two characters played by Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman, are travelling to an outback station and a mob of digitised kangaroos suddenly appears in full flight alongside the vehicle. Lady Ashley rhapsodises about the beauty and unexpectedness of these unique animals, which she is seeing for the first time. Suddenly, blood spatters the windscreen as one of the animals is shot by Drover’s Aboriginal brother-in-law, Magarri (David Ngoombujarra), who is riding on the roof of the cabin.
The juxtaposition of these competing attitudes, values and beliefs creates the humour because the newcomer’s reaction is counterpoised with an indigenous set of attitudes, values and beliefs in which kangaroo is considered unsentimentally as good tucker. Englishwoman Lady Ashley and Aboriginal stockman Magarri are operating within different discourses: on the one hand, these exotic creatures are appreciated and one feels the thrill of experiencing them up close; on the other hand, there is the very pragmatic decision to take advantage of the opportunity to provide a meal for their arrival at the station.

Explaining attitudes, values and beliefs

Ways of being in the world include possessing sets of attitudes, values and beliefs that are characteristic of a particular group and its social practices. Membership of these social and cultural groups influences the ways in which individuals, as members of groups, use language to understand and act in the world.

There are differing ways of being, thinking, acting and using language so that individuals and groups can identify themselves, or can be identified, in particular social and cultural networks. These include cultural and social practices through which individuals and groups use language to establish their identities and to become aware that they are playing socially meaningful roles. These are neither fixed nor stable but are subject to shifts over time.

Particular ways of being in the world allow groups to share and affirm their views of the world and to resist opposing ones more successfully.

Potential viewers of *Australia* might have similar backgrounds to each of the two characters. Some might ‘read’ the scene as Lady Ashley did and share her shocked horror when a ‘roo is shot, while others might find her initial reaction to be effusive and excessive and might be more in sympathy with the pragmatism of Magarri.

Still other Australians might be entirely sceptical about the harmonious digitisation of the flight of kangaroos and feel a sense of relief when Magarri disrupts the fiction with a shot of realism. There is always the possibility that someone shaped into acceptance of the attitudes, values, beliefs and practices of one group may at some time re-appraise these and come to accept those of another group. Lady Ashley changes from a cultural ‘outsider’—as she was on arrival—to a struggling property owner trying to make a ‘go’ of the outback station. Thus, in time, she may come to consider that the mobs of kangaroo eating her grass are pests that should be culled rather than exotic marsupials to be admired.
Reading attitudes, values and beliefs

Specific representations of attitudes, values and beliefs operate in all types of texts to represent the world in particular ways and from particular viewpoints. Because differing sets of attitudes, values and beliefs are so implicated in all aspects of life, creators of texts make assumptions that readers will recognise those that operate within texts. Readers of cartoons and advertisements, for example, are expected to draw on knowledge of cultural assumptions and ways of life to make meanings of the texts. Some quite complex cultural understandings and assumptions can be conveyed in a few words and images.

Text 1

This R.M. Williams advertisement from Outback magazine mobilises sets of cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs about gender and the bush.

Our tough new work boot doesn’t mind putting in a little overtime.

There’s no tougher work boot than our new All-Wee, and you’ll feel comfortable in them after hours too. That’s because the upper is crafted from a single piece of heavy-chromed tanned hide, for a better fit, then oil impregnated, making them water resistant. At ground level, the combination of its dual density.

Identifying cultural assumptions about national identity

Attitudes, values and beliefs operate in the shaping of identity at individual, group and national levels. Those that are available in the culture are reproduced in texts, as you have seen in your analysis of the R.M. Williams advertisement where you have drawn on attitudes, values and beliefs that relate to gendered identity and the bush ethos.

Text 2

In 1958, Russel Ward in *The Australian Legend* described representations of being Australian in the following way:

... the ‘typical Australian’ is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improver, ever willing to ‘have a go’ at anything, but willing too to be content with a task done in a way that is ‘near enough’. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. Though he is ‘the world’s best confidence man’, he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endures stoically rather than one who acts busily. He is a ‘hard case’, sceptical about the value of religion and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great ‘knocker’ of eminent people.
The following poem, ‘The men of the open spaces’, was written by Australian bush poet Will H Ogilvie (1869–1963). The literature of a culture plays a powerful part in shaping national identities. Will Ogilvie, like AB Paterson and Henry Lawson, contributed to the shaping of an Australian identity that was located in the bush. This version of national identity valorises attitudes, values and beliefs such as mateship, independence, stoicism, egalitarianism and anti-authoritarianism, and a capacity to improvise. It forms part of a predominantly masculinist version of identity.

Like Ogilvie, Russel Ward has drawn his constructs of Australian identity from the literature that established white Australians’ connection to the bush and the pioneering tradition of enduring hardship. This literature shapes Ward’s representations of the ‘typical Australian’. This version of national identity has been frequently reconstituted and drawn upon, as in Paul Hogan’s ‘Crocodile Dundee’ character and in the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. The opening ceremony began with the entry of the iconic and emblematic Australian: the horseman—‘the Man’, as in AB Paterson’s ‘The Man from Snowy River’.

discussion

1. From your own experience within the culture, as well as from texts with which you are familiar, what aspects of this particular way of being Australian can you recognise? Think about films, television programs, advertisements, school playgrounds, school parades or assemblies, novels, poetry, song lyrics, ceremonies. Although this text was produced in 1958, many of you may be familiar with many, if not all, of the attitudes, values and beliefs about being Australian that are emphasised in Ward’s text.

2. Who is included in this particular representation of national identity? Who is excluded from it?

3. What versions of being Australian are excluded from this dominant version of national identity?

4. List ten attributes that you think are essential for an Australian of the twenty-first century. Then, reflect on any similarities to or differences from those described by Ward. Suggest reasons for these. Discuss as a group the ways in which contemporary contexts may require shifts in sets of attitudes, values and beliefs.
The men of the open spaces
These are the men with the sun-tanned faces
   And the keen far-sighted eyes—
The men of the open spaces,
   And the land where the mirage lies.

The men who have learnt to master
   The forces of fire and drought
And the demon Flood's disaster
   In the fields of furthest out.

The men who have stood together
   And shared in the fight with fate,
And known the strength of the tether
   That holds a mate to his mate.

Who ride with a gallant bearing
   Where every saddle's a throne,
And each is an emperor sharing
   An empire enough for his own.

They are strangers to airs and graces,
   And scornful of power and pride—
The men of the Open Spaces
   Who rule the world when they ride.

Will H Ogilvie

Activity

Reflection
Consider the relationships between this poem and the Russel Ward excerpt. In each stanza of the Ogilvie poem, locate words, phrases and images that construct attitudes and practices that either are consistent with or contest this dominant version of the representation of Australian identity as elaborated by Ward.
Sets of attitudes, values and beliefs exist in the construction of all texts. They are drawn upon to construct the representations of individuals and groups in texts. These texts then may operate to perpetuate certain core attitudes, values and beliefs within the culture and to position or influence readers/viewers/listeners in relation to these.

Text 4

The following seemingly simple sonnet by Les Murray, one of Australia’s leading poets, develops a scene that illustrates the taciturnity referred to by Ward. Examine the poem’s simplicity of language, the representations of the reserve of the men, the silences between them, and the stillness of the surrounding scene except for the contrasting action and noise of the bees.

The Mitchells

I am seeing this: two men are sitting on a pole
they have dug a hole for and will, after dinner, raise
I think for wires. Water boils in a prune tin.
Bees hum their shift in unthinning mists of white
bursaria blossom, under the noon of wattles.
The men eat big meat sandwiches out of a styrofoam
box with a handle. One is overheard saying:

drought that year. Yes. Like trying to farm the road.

The first man, if asked, would say I’m one of the Mitchells.
The other would gaze for a while, dried leaves in his palm,
and looking up, with pain and subtle amusement,

say I’m one of the Mitchells. Of the pair, one has been rich
but never stopped wearing his oil-stained felt hat. Nearly everything
they say is ritual. Sometimes the scene is an avenue.

Les Murray

discussion

To what extent do you think Murray privileges a dominant version of Australian identity? To answer this, identify and discuss:

- the subject matter and the use of language
- the shift in the last line
- the tone of the poem and the stance taken towards the subject matter and
- a comparison with Russel Ward’s description.

privileges: to promote; refers to particular cultural assumptions, values, attitudes and beliefs that the reader is being invited to accept
Although there is an obvious similarity of two men sharing a tea break, or ‘smoko’, the painting *Morning* by ST Gill develops quite different subject matter from that of the Murray poem.

**discussion**

Suggest ways in which the painting:

- is shaped by the same version of Australian identity as in the Murray poem
- evokes the mood of ‘The Mitchells’.
Russel Ward recognised the physical prowess associated with sporting achievement as a key element of the dominant representations of Australian cultural and social identity. This quintessential aspect of Australian culture continues to be valorised in Australian life in art, literature, music and the mass media. View and discuss the painting *The Cricketers* by Russell Drysdale.

**discussion**

How does Russell Drysdale’s iconic painting, *The Cricketers*, represent not only the Australian obsession with sport but also other aspects of the representations of attitudes, values and beliefs associated with Australian national identity?

Text 7

Cricket is a major obsession for many Australians, and the competition is particularly intense when England is the opposition. This mutual competitiveness may be interpreted as a residual remnant of tensions and animosities from the days of Britain’s colonial enterprise in Australia.

Read and, if possible, listen to Paul Kelly’s ballad ‘Bradman’ about the Australian cricketing legend, Sir Donald Bradman, famous not only for his batting
skills but also for withstanding the ‘bodyline’ attack by the English bowler, Harold Larwood, in the 1952–33 Test series. You can find out more about Paul Kelly at <www.paulkelly.com.au>.

**Bradman**

Sydney, 1926, this is the story of a man
Just a kid in from the sticks, just a kid with a plan
St George took a gamble, played him in first grade
Pretty soon that young man showed them how to flash the blade
And at the age of nineteen he was playing for the State
From Adelaide to Brisbane the runs did not abate
He hit ‘em hard, he hit ‘em straight

He was more than just a batsman
He was something like a tide
He was more than just one man
He could take on any side
They always came for Bradman ’cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand

A team came out from England
Wally Hammond wore his felt hat like a chief
All through the summer of ’28, ’29 they gave the greencaps no relief
Some reputations came to grief
They say the darkest hour is right before the dawn
And in the hour of greatest slaughter the great avenger is being born
But who then could have seen the shape of things to come
In Bradman’s first test he went for eighteen and for one
They dropped him like a gun
Now big Maurice Tate was the trickiest of them all
And a man with a wisecracking habit
But there’s one crack that won’t stop ringing in his ears
‘Hey Whitey, that’s my rabbit’
Bradman never forgot it

He was more than just a batsman
He was something like a tide
He was more than just one man
He could take on any side
They always came for Bradman ’cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand
England 1930 and the seed burst into flower  
All of Jackson's grace failed him, it was Bradman was the power  
He murdered them in Yorkshire, he danced for them in Kent  

He laughed at them in Leicestershire, Leeds was an event  
Three hundred runs he took and rewrote all the books  
That really knocked those gents  
The critics could not comprehend his nonchalant phenomenon  
‘Why this man is a machine,’ they said. ‘Even his friends say he isn’t human’  
Even friends have to cut something  

He was more than just a batsman  
He was something like a tide  
He was more than just one man  
He could take on any side  
They always came for Bradman ’cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand  

Summer 1932 and Captain Douglas had a plan  
When Larwood bowled to Bradman it was more than man to man  
And staid Adelaide nearly boiled over as rage ruled over sense  
When Oldfield hit the ground they nearly jumped the fence  
Now Bill Woodill was as fine a man as ever went to wicket  
And the bruises on his body that day showed that he could stick it  
But to this day he’s still quoted and only he could wear it  
‘There’s two teams out there today and only one of them’s playing cricket.’  

He was longer than a memory, bigger than a town  
His feet they used to sparkle and he always kept them on the ground  
Fathers took their sons who never lost the sound of the roar of the grandstand  

Now shadows they grow longer and there’s so much more yet to be told  
But we’re not getting any younger, so let the part tell the whole  
Now the players all wear colours, the circus is in town  
I can no longer go down there, down to that sacred ground  

He was more than just a batsman  
He was something like a tide  
He was more than just one man  
He could take on any side  
They always came for Bradman ’cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand.

Paul Kelly
Activity

1. How is Bradman represented in these lyrics? What is Kelly's attitude to Bradman, as represented here? How does the imagery construct both the representation of Bradman and the songwriter's attitude to him? How does this position the reader/listener to respond to the song?

2. How can Paul Kelly's song be read as perpetuating certain dominant values, attitudes and beliefs about being Australian?

3. To what extent do you think the ballad is an appropriate form in which to elaborate this representation of Bradman and his achievements? Refer to specific elements of the ballad form in your response.

Text 8

Waleed Aly is an Australian lawyer and commentator who describes himself as a ‘cricket tragic’. Aly provides a spirited defence of the role of sport in Australia in his opinion piece below.

This rich sporting life

Australians tend to find their heroes in the world of games. This does not make us trivial—it’s through sport that we tell our nation’s story, writes Waleed Aly.

IN THE depths of winter nights, when sense mandates sleep, thousands across Australia gathered before massive, outdoor screens to watch a game that used to be mere curiosity. The Socceroos were in the World Cup, and for a month, nothing, especially the elements, would compromise our compulsive participation. Now, amid the soaring temperatures of a global meltdown, we are regularly setting new cricket attendance records. This fortnight, even in the absence of a dominant local, we are glued to the Australian Open and have gleefully ordained a new cult hero, this time from France.

What is it about the Australian obsession with sport? Perhaps such obsession is not entirely unique to this country, as any South American soccer player could attest, but there is no doubting its peculiarity, or indeed its breadth.

One need only contemplate the relative smallness of our population, and the relative magnitude of our sporting successes to see evidence of it: on a per capita basis, we are probably the world’s most successful sporting nation.

Much of the sporting talent in our southern and western states is devoted to a football code with no international competition, but even so, our international sporting success scarcely needs statement. We have scores of world-class cyclists, triathletes, swimmers, squash and hockey teams, and (female) basketballers. We’ve dominated cricket for about a decade, and we always figure in the final stages of the Rugby World Cup despite the fact that only two Australian states seem to care about the game. In the Commonwealth at least, we are embarrassingly bereft of sporting peers.

This success is not because Australians are born with more talent than other people. It is ultimately a question of emphasis. We simply take sport more seriously than anyone else.

Our Olympic contingent seems to include most of the adult population. We have a national institute of sport to churn out future sporting heroes, but anyone bold
enough to propose a peak institute for academic disciplines would be branded elitist. In the US, definitive heroes are usually politicians or entrepreneurs. France is more inclined to celebrate its artists and intellectuals. Yet John Howard was entirely believable when he once deemed Don Bradman the greatest living Australian. Of all the life-saving achievements of living Australians, none, in the Prime Minister’s estimation, surpassed those of a man who belted a ball around a park with unprecedented success. This was not in the least controversial. Where other nations define their place in the world with reference to their imperial history, famous military episodes, or their contributions in music, literature or philosophy, we define our place through our sporting feats. Egypt has the Pyramids. We have the MCG.

Never is this more evident than in the sporting equivalent of death. On November 21 last year, Ian Thorpe announced to the world that he would ‘discontinue’ his professional swimming career. If ever a sportsman went on his own terms, it was here. It is true Thorpe had been a long time out of swimming, but there was no question of his ability to return to his apparently effortless supremacy. For most, elite success is a fantasy. For Thorpe, world dominance was merely a matter of his discretion.

Why, then, would he walk away? Unusually in sport, it was a matter of perspective. ‘You can swim lap after lap, staring at a black line, and all of a sudden you look up and see what’s around,’ he said. It seems, though, that mainstream media were not terribly interested in the scenery. Thorpe dominated front pages, back pages, letters pages, even opinion pages in the days that followed. Souvenir books of newsprint were devoted to his young, brilliant career. Evening news bulletins led with the story. Then followed with it until a third of the program had elapsed. And this, as the Prime Minister declared our energy future would be, at least partly, nuclear. The irony was rich. Here was one of the world’s most gifted athletes retiring prematurely because there was more to life, while media gave the distinct impression there wasn’t.

Yet, if this high drama seems the most distant of memories to you now, you can be forgiven, so dwarfed has Thorpe’s retirement been by subsequent sporting tragedies. About a month later, Shane Warne shocked the cricketing world by announcing his retirement. Here was a true exodus of the rarest of riches: Australia’s greatest ever Olympian and greatest ever bowler retiring unexpectedly within a few weeks, when they had plenty more to give. Both sit comfortably in the Australian imagination beside Don Bradman. In a flash, both were gone. Australia’s most successful fast bowler, Glenn McGrath, followed suit within days. Meanwhile, Australian cricket also lost Damien Martyn and Justin Langer, who in any other era would have been giants. It is surely the most remarkable spate of voluntary departures in Australian sporting history.

But more remarkable still, and more culturally instructive, was the reaction. The Warne-McGrath-Langer swansong became one of the most hyped television events in recent memory. Several forests in newsprint and days of airtime were devoted to Warne alone. Tears and tributes flowed all over the continent, Warne, like Thorpe, would insist this was a time for celebration, but there was no hiding the popular mourning. In a sense, the saturation coverage was a form of public grieving.

There is, of course, no such emotion surrounding people like Sir Howard Florey, the South Australian who won the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1945 for the extraction of penicillin. His greatness is understood and acknowledged, but not so keenly felt.

Does this cheapen our culture? I think not. It is not that we are underachievers in the arts or the sciences. It is simply that we choose to present ourselves and our culture to the world in the packaging of sport.

To view this as an indictment is to take a limited view of both culture and sport. Culture is broad enough to find expression in sport, and sport has the capacity to transcend the realm of mere pastime. Australia has never ruled an empire. It has never been to the arts as Vienna.

But through sport, we manifest our own empires, our own art. Let it not be denied that Warne was an artist of the highest order. His was among the most subtle and difficult disciplines in life, which is why so few have done it. He is rightly remembered as a genius because he had the power to control his opponent’s actions.

He not only dismissed batsmen, he forecast with precision how he would do it, then executed the most impossibly intricate of plans. His was an intuitive insight into the workings and weaknesses of the human soul. Viewed through the right lens, sport is an expression of humanity.

And it is here that Australia’s sporting infatuation takes shape. Long after the statistics are consigned to obscurity, the impression remains. Stories are told, occasionally growing in magnificence with time. And then, ultimately, we are left with those pillars around which cultures are so often built: narratives and characters.

This is the true function of the Australian sportsperson. They are the characters that define our national story, and it is from such
stories—not from parliaments—that societies so often derive their values. From the great war-time all-rounder Keith Miller we learn about humility and humanity; from Steve Waugh we learn of grit and courage. From tough, Depression-era footballers such as Jack Dyer and Bob Rose we imbibe hope.

The present crop of retirees, too, have played their roles. Martyn was a distant figure; outrageously gifted, but intensely private, with flashes of anger. Were he not so understated he would have been a Shakespearean hero: precocious, aggrieved and ultimately succumbing to a fatal character trait. He will forever be the sublime genius with a tortured soul.

Langer was his opposite. Courage and selflessness, rather than sublime talent, will be his epitaph. Through 105 Tests he scored more than 7 500 runs, but his definitive story will be of a match in which he scored none. He faced only one ball that week, and it left him in hospital with the most severe concussion the medical staff had ever seen. For four days he vomited and stumbled, confined to his room. He was told that if he batted again in this match and suffered another blow, he would die. With the game in the balance on the final day, Langer padded up. No one could convince him this was unnecessary madness. It is a considerable mercy he was not required.

Contrast, too, Thorpe and McGrath: the slick, globalised, urban, modern Australia and the traditional, hard, pragmatic, regional one. They stand as symbols of this country’s diversity, and how rapidly it has changed in the space of one generation.

Yet, in retirement, all are comprehensively trumped by Warne, and it is worth asking why, for Thorpe in particular has equally compelling claims to sporting immortality. But achievements alone do not define a character’s contribution to a story. Despite their equal successes, Pat Rafter will remain a more central figure in the Australian story than Lleyton Hewitt. Those who endure contribute more than silverware to the narrative.

Warne, like John Howard, had the most revered of all Australian traits: ordinariness. Warne’s shadow is so immense because he is everyman. Only this can explain how, for many (male) cricket fans, his extramarital offences only add to his allure. His stunning Ashes performance in 2005 is enhanced by the sordid, private backdrop against which it was staged.

Somehow the principal issue became not his morality, but his mental resilience. Somehow he managed, after cavorting simultaneously with multiple British models, to look, not grubby, but like an ordinary person crumbling before extraordinary temptation—at least to his male fans.

So, as he did while attempting to relinquish tobacco, he succumbed ordinarily. None would applaud this, but they would tolerate it. Warne captured audiences because he demonstrated that an average bloke could conquer the world. Rightly or wrongly, that was his charm.

Not all of sport’s stories are noble. But then, neither are those of high civilisation. To be moved, humans need an array of legends that introduce us to both our virtues and our vices, and often explore how they co-exist within us. After his last Test, Warne quipped: ‘Maybe I can get my gear off and dance on top of a bar if I want to.’ He hopes that in retirement his private indiscretions will remain his private business. But they won’t, because he is not merely a bowler. He is a major character in the Australian story. That book is not closed; it has merely commenced a new chapter.

There is a popular cynicism that sport trivialises us; that it distracts us from issues of true gravity. At one level there is no doubting that: every society has sought its bread and games, and ours is no different.

But let us not also ignore the richness that hides itself from cynics. Ian Thorpe told us there is more to life than sport. But the public reply is that there is more to sport than games. Sport, after all, can be about life.


Activity

1. Summarise the key points of Aly’s arguments that perpetuate the dominant attitudes, values and beliefs associated with Australian national identity. In what ways do you agree or disagree with Aly?

2. Jim Davidson, in his article ‘A nation of barrackers’, contested Aly’s viewpoints in a companion opinion piece published in The Age on 27 January 2007. Davidson concludes that: ‘… somehow we’ve forgotten that the Greeks, who gave us the gymnasium, the arena, the marathon, the pentathlon, and the Olympics, also gave us
Plato, Aristotle, tragedy, superb architecture, geometry and scientific medicine. We are becoming as one-eyed as the Cyclops.’

Davidson challenges aspects of the dominant sets of cultural practices associated with Australian national identity. What significant aspects of Australian life are excluded and/or devalued in a focus on a single dominant version of being Australian as characterised by Russel Ward and Aly?

3 Is Australia’s reputation for anti-intellectualism justified? Provide specific examples to support your opinion.

discussion

The cartoonist, Nicholson, is obviously drawing on widespread cultural knowledge about Australia’s reputation as a sports-obsessed nation.

1 For what purpose is this representation of Australians as sports-mad fans mobilised or drawn on here?

2 What do you think Nicholson is provoking us to reflect on with this political cartoon? Why does he thus provoke us to reflect on Australia Day?
What is it about Australia that we can’t get out of our system, no matter how far and wide we roam? Amanda Hooton shares those pieces of home—from barbies to brown feet—that kept her feeling true blue.

I am Australian. I was born here, my parents were born here, my grandparents and most of my great-grandparents were born here. I have lived here most of my life. This does not mean I’ve always loved it here, or been happy about being so firmly linked to this country. Sometimes, in fact, I’ve wanted to run screaming from here, never to be seen again.

At university in Britain, I longed to be exotically European, possessed of the kind of careless sophistication that only comes with beautiful architecture, terrible weather, and the apparently effortless ability to speak more than one language. In the dinner queue at my hall of residence, I used to listen to the French girls tearing strips off their glamorous boyfriends—‘Ai dern’t care, Philippe. Eef eet ees nert le Veuve, ou peut-être le Moët, ai e rerm dreeneking eet’—and long, with every fibre of my being, to be a different person; preferably a person from Paris with great hair and the ability to wear small chiffon scarves casually tied at the throat. And in order to be somebody else, of course, I needed to be from somewhere—anywhere—else.

Whether you agree or disagree with Waleed Aly’s valorisation of sport, he nonetheless has a strong sense of being Australian and reflects on what that means in his article.

In a reflective feature article, Amanda Hooton identifies aspects of Australia and being Australian in response to her question: ‘What is it about Australia that we can’t get out of our system, no matter how far and wide we roam?’
And yet, even in the midst of this identity crisis, there were some things I could never get over about Australia: little bursts of light amid the loathing. I would find myself thinking, just for a moment: ‘We do that better’, or ‘I like ours more’, or even ‘I miss that’. For years, I never admitted this, even to myself. But the feeling was there, like the undertow at the south end of your local beach.

I won’t say this feeling sent me home, but it reminded me, perhaps, that home was somewhere other than where I was. The place you come from is like your family. It bores you and wears you out and pushes you to screaming point. But it is the place you understand; the place where you are known. Knowing and being known: in the end, that feels perilously like love. So here are 10 things that kept the Aussie dream alive for me, for all the years that I was gone.

1 The barbecue

The point about clichés is that they are true. Australians are eternally and usually unflatteringly associated with barbecues, but the fact remains that we do them better than anyone else in the world. The Americans are always messing around with ribs and marinades and weird spit-type arrangements, and the Brits, even without the rain, are utterly useless. You can buy a British barbecue at Tesco wrapped in plastic and consisting of 11 woodchips and a disposable foil tray—what more is there to say? Australian barbecues, on the other hand are monolithic structures, like Henry Moore sculptures. Among the barbecues I have known have been the welded half 44-gallon drum, the brick-and-cast-iron forge, and the succession of ‘mobile’ gas grills that weigh in at three or four tonnes when the canisters are empty. I’m leaving out the Weber kettle, which I do not regard as a barbecue at all, but a kind of piss-weak outdoor oven. The Weber is impermanent and self-conscious, and makes the barbecuing men, whose job it is to stand around with stubbies and long turning tongs, look foolish; as if they’ve encircled a tiny UFO. In fact, many Australian men are not foolish at all, but extremely sophisticated barbecue cooks. Or perhaps that’s just conditioning. I only know that however I may wander, wherever I may roam, only the incinerated sausage really tastes like home.

5 The sound of magpies

They say that smell is the sense most closely linked to memory, but they are wrong. Sound is. And the only sound I ever missed when I lived overseas was the sound of magpies carolling. Not even carolling, in fact: just making whatever sound they make when they’re talking to each other or waking up or meditating how the hell they’re going to get that worm out from under that patch of buffalo grass. It is, I suspect, physically impossible for a magpie to make an ugly noise. And when they really get going, and you are lying in bed and the morning light is slanting through the eucalypts and onto your mattress as you listen, it is the most glorious sound in the world, and the most evocative. Suddenly it’s summer and the sun is beating down and you’re running home from school with your lunch box over your head to avoid having your eye taken out by a black-and-white dive-bombing merchant of death. In no other country in the world can nature give you that: a sound as beautiful as a sonnet, and the threat of catastrophic injury. Happy days.

8 The front seat of the taxi

Getting into the front seat of the taxi says many things about a person, and all of them are good. It says you don’t expect to be chauffeured; it says you think the driver is your equal, not your servant; it says you’re prepared to help with the navigation if necessary. And it says you’re confident you’re not going to vomit before the taxi ride is over. For all these reasons, taxi drivers love people who sit in the front seat. And all over the world, these people are Australian.
This is not to say the front seat is always an easy position to occupy. British taxi drivers are initially wary of fronts seat sitters, I suspect because they think the sitter is going to attack them; and Italian drivers seem convinced that either you are a member of the secret police or you have been suddenly overwhelmed by their extraordinary sex appeal and want to go to a roadside bar and drink grappa with them immediately, never to return to your hotel room again. But both of these hurdles can be overcome, and then the great egalitarian principle of Australian interaction triumphs. I am never prouder of my countrymen than when I see someone get into the front seat of a taxi. Not to mention the fact, as every Australian knows, if you can see the meter, it’s bloody hard for the driver to cheat you over the fare.

9 Clive James and Robert Hughes and Cate Blanchett

Australians are regarded as many things by the rest of the world: good-natured, sporty, cheerful, and with an impressive ability to consume vast quantities of beer. But we are not, by and large, regarded as intellectual giants. Especially not by the Brits, who, in the nicest possible way, seem to think we’re morons. In this context, it used to fill me with nationalist fervour to read Clive James, metaphorically walking all over the other literary critics in the English newspapers, and see Robert Hughes, effortlessly encompassing the entirety of Western art on American TV. As individuals, both of them looked like they’d just staggered away from a very long and largely liquid lunch, but they were always the cleverest people in the room, and that’s what counts.

10 The vanishing point

Another sensory memory: driving in the far north-west of Australia, on a grey ribbon of road that rolled ahead of us to the horizon. I was with a man from Europe, who was already deep in cultural shell shock, and when he saw this road he stopped the car, took off all his clothes, and ran wildly up and down the bitumen for some time, pausing only to make me take photographs of him. This is what the vanishing point on an Australian country road can do to people. Or at least some people. It’s never done it to me, but the impulse is there.

And despite everything that is wrong and ridiculous and embarrassing about this country, and however much I’ve longed at times to be gone, Australia has given me, in some essential part of myself, a big space filled with white light and glittering heat mirages and a long road so straight you can see it disappear. Which sounds a bit like a logical impossibility, and probably is.

And once again, that feels like love.

Amanda Hooton, Good Weekend, 24 January 2009

Activity

1 Reflect on then jot down in your notebooks what strikes you most forcefully about Hooton’s selection as reflected in the six categories above. How, for example, is it similar or dissimilar to your own selection?

2 How would you describe the tone of the article; for example, is it romanticising, affectionate, or nostalgic? Justify your choice and provide examples.

3 Who is the implied reader of this article? Does it ‘speak’ to you? Why? Why not? How?

4 In the light of the items from this selection, would you now re-select things you like about Australia? How might sets of attitudes, values and beliefs that shape your identity influence both your reaction to the article and your re-selection of ‘things’ Australian?

5 Some of Hooton’s ‘10 things’ have been omitted here. Using Hooton’s style and tone, write your own segments for items 2, 3, 4 and 7.
Considering alternative versions of national identity

As can be seen from the previous texts, membership of groups with similar ways of being in the world allows people to share and confirm their views and develop particular roles, relationships and identities. However, these are not neutral and by their very nature exclude or marginalise those who do not share the same knowledge, attitudes, values and beliefs. These shared attitudes, values and beliefs operate to empower some people and disempower others.

The dominant representations of Australian identity have valued a particular version of ‘being Australian’. There are many versions of being Australian and, increasingly, different versions are being recognised. These alternative ways of being Australian run counter to, or challenge or interrogate, the widely circulated version of being Australian.

The humour in the brief narrative segment of the film Australia referred to earlier derives from putting two different ways of being into opposition or, if you like, into competition. Representations in texts are shaped by a series of different cultural assumptions, from which come the problems to be solved, the confusions to be clarified. In lengthy texts like novels or films this may be less easy to identify than in shorter texts, such as the following song lyrics by Australian singer-songwriter Graeme Connors, which explores competing versions of being Australian.

The Great Australian Dream

I turned west in search of something I’d never seen before
the kind of Vision Splendid Banjo saw
with a fresh roll in my camera and an eye for things unique
I left my mobile phone at home and went outback for a week

I stood beneath the Tree of Knowledge let my imagination run
way back to the Great Shearers Strike of ’91
and as I quietly contemplated all that tragic history
a tour bus full of kids from the city pulled up in front of me

And it’s baseball caps on backwards like they wear ’em in L.A.
Coca Cola, Nike shoes and Oakley shades
here in the middle of the Heartland I feel I’m caught between
Beverley Hills 90210 and the Great Australian Dream
Thought I’d try a new direction down the Barcoo headed South to the town built ’round the Black Stump and Jacky Howe but it was back on course next morning to the Stockman’s Hall of Fame where I traced the steps of the pioneers and ran into those kids again

With baseball caps on backwards like they wear ’em in L.A. Coca Cola, Nike shoes and Oakley shades in the midst of myth and legend again I’m caught between Beverley Hills 90210 and the Great Australian Dream

I set out to find the spirit the inspiration for John Flynn walked the streets where Fysh and McGuiness gave the Kangaroo its wings but each time I thought I’d found it what makes us who we are that bus pulls up beside me and the kids get out—yeah the kids get out

And it’s baseball caps on backwards like they wear ’em in L.A. Coca Cola, Nike shoes and Oakley shades so I figure there’s an answer somewhere in between Beverley Hills 90210 and the Great Australian Dream

Graeme Connors

discussion

1 What are the competing attitudes, values and beliefs in the song?
2 How does Connors make use of these to reflect on what it means to be Australian?
3 Identify some of the cultural references in the song. Whose cultural experience and knowledge are included in the text, and whose are excluded?
4 What might Connors mean when he says ‘there’s an answer somewhere in between’?
5 How does this song demonstrate ways attitudes, values and beliefs change and evolve rather than remain fixed?

Text 12

Deirdre Macken, in a provocative feature article, interrogates iconic aspects of Australian national identity, including those posited by Russel Ward in The Australian Legend and perpetuated in Australian culture. The following are excerpts of her article ‘The 10 great Australian myths’. 
Every January, a lamb commercial reminds us what it means to be Australian. This year, Sam Kekovich plays a business commentator and blames “Wall St wankers and bottom-feeding bankers” for destroying “the egalitarian values that made Australia great”.

He’s certainly picked the barbecue stopper this Australia Day.

Kekovich might not be able to save Australia with ‘a rescue package wrapped in butcher’s paper’ but the wisecracking, ethnic, old footballer hits the mark if only because he’s funny, ethnic and used to play football.

Of all the images of themselves that Australians hold dear, only a few remain true and most of these can be found in the lightly disguised lamb commercial. Australians love their sports, they appreciate a sense of humour and cherish a sense of fair play. They also like ethnic types who have become more Australian than they.

But other images are looking very 21st century as the harsh edges of Australian character are smoothed by the homogenising effects of globalisation.

The ocker has been tamed by higher education, the bushie has made a sea change, the bloke has turned metrosexual, the suburban family is confined to a courtyard and the quiet achiever is boasting about his plasma TV.

Fifty years ago most would have agreed with historian Russel Ward’s summation in his book The Australian Legend that the typical Australian was “a practical man, rough and ready in his manners—he is a great improviser, ever willing to ‘have a go’ at anything”. (In those days, the typical Australian was, also, always a “he”.)

Now we might see more truth in a summation by researcher IBIS that “the profile of the Aussie bloke is changing from a fun-loving, beer-swilling larrikin to a hard-working, studious type who finds it hard to leave the nest”. (And statistically the typical Aussie is more likely to be a she.)

After you get past this weekend’s races on Sydney Harbour, the waft of barbecue lamb around the continent and Sam Kekovich’s address to the nation, there’s not much left under the umbrella of national identity. Instead, there’s a discomforting sense that if we sat down and had a hard look at ourselves, we’d find a different sort of person than the one that lives in popular imagination. We might not know who we are or where we’re heading but we suspect we’re not what we were.

Indeed, if you dig through files of Australian behaviour, it’s easy to find at least 10 myths of the Australian character.

**Australia is a land of suburban families**

Today you’re just as likely to live next door to a cozy couple as you are to share the street with a mum, dad and a couple of kids running around the backyard. In the past 30 years, couple-only households have risen from 28 to 37 per cent and the ratio of couples with dependent children has dropped from 48 to 37 per cent. Suburbia is becoming a demographic ghetto.

Given that we have fewer people sharing addresses, it’s no surprise that the horizon of red-roofed suburbia is growing lumpy with high rises. For years we’ve been building more apartments than suburban bungalows. In Sydney, 40 per cent of housing is already either units or town houses; in Darwin high density living accounts for 30 per cent of housing stock and in Melbourne, it’s 27 per cent. You have to live in either Brisbane or Perth to live the suburban dream.

**We’re healthy, sporty folk**

Some of us have put on weight since we sent postcards of surf lifesavers across the world to create the image of the sun-bronzed Aussie. Almost two thirds of men and half the women are overweight. And that’s only what they admit to. If you take a tape measure to them, 75 per cent of men would have tubby tummies.

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The 10 great Australian myths

Are our cherished beliefs about what make us Australian still dinkum? On the eve of our national day, Deirdre Macken considers that perhaps we’re not as true blue as we might think.

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continued
Just as we like to believe we’re slimmer than we are, we also like to believe we’re healthy. Some 84 per cent report that their health is good, even though some 20 per cent have some sort of disability and one in 10 has a mental illness, mostly depression or anxiety.

Ah, but we’re sports mad, aren’t we? Not quite. Almost 70 per cent are sedentary or do hardly any form of exercise and, for the other 30 per cent, the main form of exercise is walking. Which is hardly cricket. Or footy. Or even a decent tennis game.

We’re anti-authoritarian
Sure, we treat Ned Kelly as a national legend; we boast about having convicts in our ancestry and we love watching the Chaser crew bust through roadblocks of power and privilege. But we like our laws.

We were the first country to legislate for seat belts, random breath testing and smoking bans and we’re tackling binge drinking by forcing bars to have 10-minute time-outs every hour after midnight—just as in kindy when the teacher sent you to the time-out chair.

We have CCTV at every intersection, the federal government is considering a national net filter and P-plate drivers in some states have to do more hours in supervised driving than some professions have to do in professional training.

There are wardrobe police in shopping malls, whole-body scans at airports and anti-terrorism laws that have stripped us of rights that would be guaranteed in a bill of rights—if we had one.

The courage of the Anzacs is hard to find in a country that has been alert but not alarmed for a decade. Since 2001, the federal government has passed 30 new pieces of legislation on terrorism and every state government competes for the title of Toughest on Crime. In the Northern Territory a 21-year-old was sentenced to jail for stealing $23 of cordial and biscuits and, in NSW, the government passed special laws to protect pilgrims from pests during World Youth Day. Meanwhile, the Queensland government may allow transport officers to handcuff unruly passengers. In NSW, they just play Frank Sinatra at railway stations.

Meat pies, beer and Holden cars
Try sushi rolls, New Zealand sauvignon blanc and a little Hyundai. Last year, the country’s biggest pie maker, Patties Foods, reported that pie sales had fallen and, against the global onslaught of different cuisines, they’ll continue to get a smaller share of our tummies.

Australia has never been that monocultural anyway. We’ve had Chinese food since the gold rush that began in 1851, Italian and Greek dishes since World War II, Asian food since the ’70s, a Thai takeaway in every suburb since the ’80s, the sushi invasion since the ’90s and now there’s everything from Moroccan to Melanesian up the street.

We like our beer. But we’re not married to it. While beer outsells wine by about two to one, its share gets smaller every year. And it’s not as if the beer drinkers are those lager-swilling lads in the pub. The biggest growth in beer is in low-carb beer, boutique brands and brew-your-own varieties.

As for Holden cars, the national marque is responsible for only one in five of the cars sold in Australia and if the shift away from big cars continues, it stands to lose market share faster.


activity

In the rest of the article, Deirdre Macken covers the following six topics:

- ‘We love cutting down tall poppies’
- ‘We are a self-reliant, stoic people’
- ‘Mateship is our mantra’
- ‘Australians yearn for the bush’
- ‘We’re laidback workers in the land of the long weekend’
- ‘We are not fussed by pomp and ceremony’

Choose one of these topics and respond in a similar way to expose it as a ‘myth’.

discussion

1 Who is the implied reader of this article? On what basis do you draw this conclusion?

2 What strategy does Macken predominantly use to contest the myths which she considers form part of the dominant representations of being Australian?

3 To what extent are you challenged by Macken’s perspectives? To what extent do you agree with these?

4 Macken’s contention is that globalisation and modern technology have moderated Australia’s geographical and cultural isolation. How does Macken thereby demonstrate that sets of cultural practices are neither fixed nor stable but subject to a process of constant renewal and evolution?
Read the lyrics of ‘From little things big things grow’ and, if possible, listen to the recording of the song. Paul Kelly and Kevin Carmody, an Aboriginal songwriter, combined to honour the achievements of the Gurindji people, who were led by Vincent Lingiarri. Lingiarri challenged Lord Vesty, the English ‘absent’ landlord who owned the company Vesty's Pastoral, which ran cattle properties in the Northern Territory and provided poor conditions for their workers. The Gurindji action began the land rights movement for Indigenous peoples in Australia.

**From little things big things grow**

Gather round people let me tell you a story
An eight year long story of power and pride
British Lord Vesty and Vincent Lingiarri
Were opposite men on opposite sides

Vesty was fat with money and muscle
Beef was his business, broad was his door
Vincent was lean and spoke very little
He had no bank balance, hard dirt was his floor

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Gurindji were working for nothing but rations
Where once they had gathered the wealth of the land
Daily the pressure got tighter and tighter
Gurindji decided they must make a stand

They picked up their swags and started off walking
At Wattie Creek they sat themselves down
Now it don't sound like much but it sure got tongues talking
Back at the homestead and then in the town

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Vesty man said I'll double your wages
Seven quid a week you'll have in your hand
Vincent said uhuh we’re not talking about wages
We’re sitting right here till we get our land
Vesty man roared and Vesty man thundered
You don't stand the chance of a cinder in snow
Vince said if we fall others are rising
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiarri boarded an aeroplane
Landed in Sydney, big city of lights
And daily he went round softly speaking his story
To all kinds of men from all walks of life

And Vincent sat down with big politicians
This affair they told him is a matter of state
Let us sort it out, your people are hungry
Vincent said no thanks, we know how to wait

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiarri returned in an aeroplane
Back to his country once more to sit down
And he told his people let the stars keep on turning
We have friends in the south, in the cities and towns

Eight years went by, eight long years of waiting
Till one day a tall stranger appeared in the land
And he came with lawyers and he came with great ceremony
And through Vincent’s fingers poured a handful of sand

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

That was the story of Vincent Lingiarri
But this is the story of something much more
How power and privilege can not move a people
Who know where they stand and stand in the law

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Paul Kelly and Kevin Carmody

discussion

1 The competing cultural assumptions are obvious in the song. What sets of attitudes, values and beliefs about property and about other people do you see underpinning the representations of the landowner, Lord Vesty, and the activist, Vincent Lingiarri?

2 What is the stance or attitude of the singer-songwriters to each of the major participants in this action? How are listeners influenced by specific word or phrase choices and by the vocals?

3 Explain the significance and effect of the refrain of this ballad.

4 As this is a song, we should give attention not only to the written and vocal lyrics but also to the instrumentation. What do you consider to be the attitudes, values and beliefs shaping the choices of harmonica, banjo and didgeroo, as well as the more familiar instruments?

5 In ‘Bradman’ and in ‘From little things big things grow’, Sir Donald Bradman and Vincent Lingiarri are constructed as Australian heroes. What common attributes or qualities do the two men share?
This famous image represents the Australian Government’s initial recognition of Indigenous land rights in 1975. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam is the ‘tall stranger’ referred to in the Kelly/Carmody song.

discussion

Analyse how the conventions and resources of visual language are used to construct the significance of this episode in Australian history.
The following poem by the performance poet Komninos probes issues of national identity and its links to ethnicity, class, and access to power and influence within Australian society.

**if i was the son of an englishman**

if i was the son of an englishman,  
i’d really be an aussie,  
i could be a high court judge,  
or an actor on the telly,  
i could be a union boss,  
or a co-star with skippy,  
i could even be prime-minister,  
or comment on the footy.  
if i was the son of an englishman,  
i’d really be an aussie.

*but my father eats salami,*  
*and my mother she wears black,*  
*my last name’s papadopoulos,*  
*and my first name’s just plain jack.*

if i was the son of an englishman,  
i’d really be true blue,  
i could drink myself to delirium, and glorify the spew,  
i could desecrate the countryside,  
and destroy the kangaroo,  
i could joke about the irish,  
the greeks, the abos and the jews.  
if i was the son of an englishman,  
i’d really be true blue.

*but my father he drinks ouzo,*  
*and my mother she wears black,*  
*my last name’s papadopoulos,*  
*and my first name’s just plain jack.*
if I was the son of an englishman,  
i’d really be fair-dinkum,  
i’d be seen and not be heard,  
i’d be quiet on the tram,  
i’d be rowdy at the footy,  
and cold to my fellow man,  
i’d build four walls around me,  
and wouldn’t give a damn,  
if I was the son of an englishman,  
i’d really be fair-dinkum.

but my father eats salami,  
and my mother she wears black,  
my last name’s papadopoulos,  
and my first name’s really komninos.

1 What does the repetition of the line ‘if I was the son of an 
   englishman’ foreground about acceptance, success and 
   empowerment in Australian life?

2 In what ways does the narrator position himself as being 
excluded from dominant representations of Australian 
identity?

3 In stanzas 2 and 3, how does the poet contest certain 
attitudes, values and beliefs associated with Australian 
identity? Quote the words/lines that indicate these 
representations:
   a racism and intolerance of difference
   b little concern for the natural environment
   c xenophobia and isolationism
   d reluctance to display emotions
   e heavy drinking as a sign of manhood.

4 The poem, although it is satirical, still privileges masculinist 
cultural practices and representations of Australian identity.  
How does it do this?

5 What does the change of name from Jack to Komninos 
in the last line of the poem suggest about the poet’s 
relationship to Australian identity?
Another Australian poet, Ania Walwicz, who was born in Poland, shows an incisive understanding of the dominant cultural practices associated with Australia and being Australian, which she interrogates and contests in her poem ‘Australia’. Whereas the satiric element in Komninos’s poem is moderated in performance by his affability so that audiences often laugh with him, the Walwicz prose poem is more confronting for readers, especially those who might identify with the dominant representations of national identity.

**Australia**


Ania Walwicz
While the Walwicz poem contests the dominant cultural values and assumptions associated with being Australian, it is also possible to situate this poem within a continuing narrative of the alienation and strangeness that Australia holds for recent immigrants. Geoffrey Blainey, in his 2001 Boyer Lecture ‘Loyalties,’ says:

The people in the First Fleet in 1788, and most of those who landed during the following century, did not feel at home in the new land. Their Australian-born children, however, usually felt more at home. The climate, especially the heat, the strong summer light, the distinctive eucalyptus and other vegetation and the upside-down seasons were puzzling to new arrivals. A love for the land itself was to take many generations to achieve—it has not yet fully been achieved, if contrasted to the feeling of those Aborigines who never lost their sense of place, or have recently refound it.

Poets and painters helped to make white Australians feel more at home and to like the strange landscape and vegetation. The poets gave the settlers new eyes.

Even Dorothea Mackellar, in ‘My Country,’ which affirms her love of the rugged landscape of Australia, challenges the attitudes of those who consider the ‘fields and coppices’ of England to be beautiful and the landscape of Australia strange. Ania Walwicz, however, is writing about being alienated not only by the landscapes but also by the culture—by particular attitudes, beliefs, values and associated social practices. She is trying to confront and provoke her readers, especially those who align themselves with the dominant versions of being Australian.

The majority of Australians are urban, despite the dominant stereotype of the bush in representations of Australian cultural identity. Contemporary writer Sam Wagan Watson, a Queenslander, draws on intersecting cultural practices associated with childhood, class and Aboriginality in representing a suburban childhood in Brisbane. Features of his suburban life might seem similar to many other Brisbane children of a certain era. Read the poem ‘White stucco dreaming.’

**Discussion**

1. In the poem, the narrator addresses different things or different people. Who/What are some of these? Suggest reasons for focusing on these in the text.

2. The narrator in this poem is likely to be a fairly recent immigrant. How does Walwicz construct the narrator and his/her homeland or culture?

3. How does Walwicz construct being Australian? Refer to specific words and phrases.

4. What attributes identified by Russel Ward as belonging to the myth of the ‘typical’ Australian does Walwicz contest and challenge?
White stucco dreaming

sprinkled in the happy dark of my mind
is early childhood and black humour
white stucco dreaming
and a black labrador
an orange and black panel-van
called the ‘black banana’
with twenty blackfellas hanging out the back
blasting through the white stucco umbilical
of a working class tribe
front yards studded with old black tyres
that became mutant swans overnight
attacked with a cane knife and a bad white paint job

white stucco dreaming
and snakes that morphed into nylon hoses at the terror
of Mum’s scorn
snakes whose cool venom we sprayed onto the white stucco,
temporarily blushing it pink
amid an atmosphere of Saturday morning grass cuttings
and flirtatious melodies of ice-cream trucks
that echoed through little black minds
and sent the labrador insane

chocolate hand prints like dreamtime fraud
laid across white stucco
and mud cakes on the camp stove
that just made Dad see black
no tree safe from treehouse sprawl
and the police cars that crawled up and down the back streets,
peering into our white stucco cocoon
wishing they were with us.

Sam Wagan Watson

discussion

1 What words and images does Watson use to construct such an evocative memory of childhood?

2 In the poem, he disrupts representations of class that incorporate disadvantage. How is this done?
Another Sam Wagan Watson poem, ‘Strange fish’, was written after he travelled to Alice Springs where he saw Indigenous Australians living in the River Todd—usually a dry riverbed running through the town. The ‘strange fish’ he refers to are wine-bags that he saw in the Todd.

**Strange fish**

*(Alice Springs, September, 2006)*

An abandoned school of silver shapes, partially imbedded in the sandy skin of the Todd River. These ‘strange fish’ seemed to have perished in a pack, almost Lemming-esque, when the river disappeared into the dreaming of evaporation. Back in the city we know these strange fish by urban-zoological nomenclature: *Goonius baggas*. Vessels for cheap wine, the most distinguishing feature, a white bulbous plastic eye, like a Cyclops. But here on the Todd these eyes are permanently fixed on the desert sun. Eyes that once held magic! Eyes that were once the gateways of inebriated souls, and now their souls are bled too. Shiny bodies, awaiting fossilisation. Suspended in animation; a sad reflection of a past tide, caught in the immortal sands of this winding, broken, hourglass …

Sam Wagan Watson

**discussion**

1. While Sam Wagan Watson has indicated his shock at the situation of the Alice Springs river dwellers and the segregation of society in Alice Springs, this prose poem is very restrained in its tone. What impact does this emotional restraint in the treatment of the subject matter have on the poem?

2. Consider the effect of his choice to focus on the wine-bags discarded in the sand rather than on a detailed description of the people and their situation. What force does this then give to the description of the plugs of the bags as ‘eyes that once held the gateways of inebriated souls, and now their souls are dead’?

3. On the one hand, the dominant representation of Australian national identity naturalises heavy drinking; on the other hand, there is a widespread predominantly negative representation in which Indigenous Australians are constructed as a social group whose lives have been ravaged by alcohol and substance abuse. How do Sam Wagan Watson’s choices in his poem skilfully negotiate a highly politicised problem in contemporary Australia?
A great many Australians participate in various forms of Australian beach or surfing cultures. In fact, the beach has come to challenge the ‘bush’ in the consciousness of many Australians as the chief stage on which ‘being Australian’ is enacted.

Sets of cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs and their associated social practices underpin all texts, including visual texts. While this may not immediately be apparent when viewing a visual image such as a photograph, this is clearly evident when juxtaposing two related images of beach scenes, both set on the most iconic of Australia’s beaches: Bondi.

Charles Meere’s painting is a stylised tableau of beach activities reflecting the interests at the time (1940), and is a conscious attempt to represent Australians visually as a homogeneous group of blond athletic types. Anne Zahalka’s photograph, while appropriating the set-up of Meere’s earlier painting, is shaped by very different cultural assumptions from those operating in Meere’s work. A key strategy of this work of ‘appropriation’, as it is termed in the art world, is to open up spaces that reveal the omission of certain groups or certain sets of attitudes, values and beliefs.
Activity

1 What versions of ‘being Australian’ are represented in these two works, and what are the underlying attitudes, values and beliefs in each?

2 Write a paragraph explaining how Anne Zahalka challenges the dominant representations of Australian identity. Refer to the use of specific visual resources in each image.

Text 21

Tracey Moffatt is a filmmaker and photographer. Moffatt’s photograph of an Aboriginal Australian invites the viewer to consider questions relating to national identity and interrogates notions of being Australian that are available within the culture.

The commentary accompanying the photo in the source text, Looking at Australia: Talking Art and Culture, states:

In this photograph, called The Movie Star, Moffatt photographs the actor David Gulpilil, posing as a typical beach dweller—clad in board shorts, reclining on the bonnet of a car in a Bondi Beach car park with his radio and his tinny. With this work Moffatt tries to make us aware of yet another stereotype.

The actor painted his face with traditional Aboriginal dot decoration as a way of drawing attention to his own cultural history and to the Europeans’ practice of smearing their faces with another form of body paint—coloured zinc creams for sun protection.

Activity

1 The commentary identifies the intersection of competing cultural practices in this photograph. Explain how Moffatt’s photograph challenges not only the dominant representations of Australian identity but also certain representations of Aboriginality.

2 How does the photograph open up and accommodate notions of difference and multiple Australian identities, rather than of a homogeneous Australian identity?
Consolidating your understanding

As we have seen, sport—and the iconic status conferred on sporting heroes—also figures prominently in representations of Australian identity. Australia is recognised as a sport-loving nation, and a large number of Australians actively engage in sport. Yet Australians who are, for example, surfers engage in very different sporting and cultural practices with very different values, attitudes and beliefs from, for example, AFL footballers, or tennis players, or skydivers, or lawn bowls players, or dirt-bike riders. Nevertheless, many other Australians who do not actively engage in a sport participate as passionate and vociferous supporters and fans.

Text 22

Read the following poem by Bruce Dawe, a Toowoomba-based poet with a satiric eye for aspects of Australian cultural experience.

Life-cycle
For Big Jim Phelan

When children are born in Victoria
they are wrapped in the club-colours, laid in beribboned cots,
having already begun a lifetime's barracking.

Carn, they cry, Carn … feebly at first
while parents playfully tussle with them
for possession of a rusk: Ah, he’s a little Tiger! (And they are …)

Hoisted shoulder-high at their first League game
they are like innocent monsters who have been years swimming
Towards the daylight’s roaring empyrean

Until, now, hearts shrapnelled with rapture,
they break surface and are forever lost,
their minds rippling out like streamers

In the pure flood of sound, they are scarfed with light, a voice
like the voice of God booms from the stands
Ooohh you bludger and the covenant is sealed.

Hot pies and potato-crisps they will eat,
they will forswear the Demons, cling to the Saints
and behold their team going up the ladder into Heaven.
And the tides of life will be the tides of the home-team’s fortunes — the reckless proposal after the one-point win, the wedding and honeymoon after the grand final …

They will not grow old as those from more northern States grow old, for them it will always be three-quarter-time with the scores level and the wind advantage in the final term,

That passion persisting, like a race-memory, through the welter of seasons, enabling old-timers by boundary fences to dream of resurgent lions and centaur-figures from the past to replenish continually the present,

So that mythology may be perpetually renewed and Chicken Smallhorn return like the maize-god in a thousand shapes, the dancers changing

But the dance forever the same — the elderly still loyally crying Carn … Carn … (if feebly) unto the very end, having seen in the six-foot recruit from Eaglehawk their hope of salvation.

Bruce Dawe

Activity

In constructing this poem, Dawe draws on a number of cultural practices that intersect within the text to satirise the allegiance of football fans for their code, in this case AFL.

1. Identify at least four of these by listing words and phrases that construct attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as social practices.

2. Explain how these intersect or overlap to produce the satire of the tribalism of sports fans.

3. Compare and contrast Paul Kelly’s attitude to sport in ‘Bradman’ (see p. 32) with Bruce Dawe’s attitude to sport in ‘Life-cycle’. Write a detailed analysis of their competing purposes and their treatment of the subject matter.

Sets of cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs and their related social practices underpin and shape the representations in all texts. Many texts typically activate more than one set of cultural practices and assumptions, and these intersect across the text to shape the representations contained within it. Some sets of cultural practices and assumptions are more prominent in a text, while others may be used to construct contrasting attitudes, values and beliefs that may be given less significance. In this way, a text is seen to represent, or to ‘privilege’, some attitudes, values and beliefs at the expense of others and, in so doing, texts do ideological work.
The interplay between these different sets of attitudes, values and beliefs can be quite complex, even in a brief text such as an advertisement. Read the Australia.com advertisement promoting a trip to Uluru in the Northern Territory; this sacred site is often referred to as the ‘Red Centre’ or the heart of Australia.
In this advertisement, cultural practices and assumptions associated with the bush are evident, along with those associated with being Aboriginal and with personal identity or ‘finding oneself’. The effect of the intersections of these sets of cultural practices and their associated attitudes, values and beliefs operating in the visuals, in combination with the slogans and the supplementary copy, is to offer travel to the Red Centre as a transformative experience. The traveller benefits by developing a clearer sense of his or her own identity, through developing a spiritual and psychological connectedness to land that ironically parallels that long held by the Indigenous people.

**Activity**

Examine how the advertisement draws on and uses intersecting cultural practices and associated attitudes, values and beliefs to construct this notion of the transformative experience. Refer to specific uses of words and visuals.

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**Text 24**

In Amanda Hooton’s article (p. 38) we have already seen how important memories of Australia as a place are when one is travelling overseas. Read Jaya Savige’s poem, which he based on his experiences in Rome, and reflect on the feelings evoked by the sound of the familiar instrument.

**Circular breathing**

for Samuel Wagan Watson

There’s a man with dreadlocks playing the didgeridoo in the Piazza di Santa Maria, and everyone is listening. Kids sit by the fountain, swapping smokes for laughs, tourists lick gelati as they pass illicit markets, belts, handbags, sunglasses, all made in ________, the place scratched off. Nuns amble, then the Carabinieri, white gloves, black steel-capped boots glistening.

The crowd hems the young musician in, faces glazed with wonder: from where could this strange music have come? Surely not this hemisphere. A drone as deep as yet unexcavated ruins, far older even than the Forum. Armani, Ray-Ban, Dolce & Gabbana, all sink at once into equivalence.
He doesn’t do the kangaroo, the mosquito or the speeding Holden. Just the one dark warm lush hum, the clean energy of circular breathing, familiar as the accordion, yet strange, as though not for the money, not just for the fun, but for reasons unknowable to us—some vast, unhurried Om.

I want to race up the stairs of the fountain and proclaim that the sound is the sound of my home—but stop when I remember how at home few would care if twenty truer players converged on King George Square. The thought turns my measured walk into a lurch. My stomach fills with fire. Far above cold stars wheel around the spire of Rome’s oldest Christian church.

Jaya Savige

Activity

1. Produce a detailed reading of this poem, drawing on your understanding of the ways in which poets:
   - use strategies, such as contrast, in the development of subject matter/ideas
   - use language to evoke feelings and emotions
   - use shifts in attitude and tone to position readers, and
   - draw on intersecting cultural practices and assumptions in shaping these choices.

2. What, ultimately, does this poem invite you to feel about being Australian?
John Tranter uses the iconic Aussie backyard barbecue as the subject of a poem that explores its symbolic place in family relationships and individual memories.

**Backyard**

The God of Smoke listens idly in the heat to the barbecue sausages speaking the language of rain deceitfully as their fat dances.

Azure, hazed, the huge drifting sky shelters its threatening weather.

A screen door slams, and the kids come rumbling out of their arguments,

and the barrage of shouting begins, concerning young Sandra and Scott and the broken badminton racquet and net and the burning meat.

Is that a fifties home movie, or the real thing? Heavens, how a child and a beach ball in natural colour can break your heart.

And the brown dog worries the khaki grass to stop it from growing in place of his worship, the burying bone. The bone that stinks.

Turn now to the God of this tattered arena watching over the rites of passage—marriage, separation; adolescence and troubled maturity:

having served under that bright sky you may look up but don't ask too much: some cold beer, a few old friends in the afternoon, a Southerly Buster at dusk.

John Tranter
Activity

After reading this poem by John Tranter, return either to Les Murray’s ‘The Mitchells’ or Sam Wagan Watson’s ‘White stucco dreaming’ and do one of the following:

1. Contrast Murray and Tranter’s opposing views of being Australian. Examine closely their selection and use of subject matter, language and imagery, and analyse how they privilege particular attitudes, values and beliefs.

2. Compare and contrast Watson and Tranter’s evocations of suburban life in Australia. Examine closely their selection and use of subject matter, language and imagery, and analyse how they privilege particular attitudes, values and beliefs and contest others.
Understanding intertextuality

Study this cartoon by Paul J Livingston.

Paul J Livingston,  
The Mild Colonial Boy

**discussion**

1. What is represented in this cartoon?
2. How is it represented?
3. Why is it represented?
4. This text consists of a visual text with a written caption. How do the visual text and the caption work in combination to contribute to the meaning you make?
The Mild Colonial Boy will be immediately recognisable to you as a cartoon because of your previous cultural experience. Genre is one of the ways in which intertextuality works. Genres enable readers to develop understandings of what to expect of a text in terms of structure and of content. We know a genre has particular work to do—it has a cultural purpose, establishes particular relationships with its reader by adopting a particular tone, and makes particular uses of language. Readers know from experience that with cartoons, for example, they have to ‘read’ the visuals, and make meaning of the relationship between the visuals, the speech bubbles and/or the caption.

Cartoons usually work by being very condensed texts that rely on the reader’s recognition of references to events and situations that occur outside the text (either in other texts or in the world of current events), or familiarity with the ideas, in order to make meaning.

In producing a reading of The Mild Colonial Boy we can draw not only on our prior knowledge of the cartoon genre but also on our awareness of specific allusions—to the cultural construction of Ned Kelly and possibly to the poem ‘The wild colonial boy’ and, more generally, to cultural constructions of the bush. The meaning of the text is formed by the relationships that a particular reader, including this writer/cartoonist, makes between this text and other pre-existing texts.

**discussion**

1. Re-examine the Paul Livingston cartoon. Have you seen an image (or images) like that (or those) shown in the cartoon anywhere else?
2. Consider the landscape as well as the figures. Where and in what context have you previously encountered similar images?
3. How is the cartoon image similar to or different from the images with which you are familiar?

An Australian identity that is inextricably linked to life in the bush has been developed through visual arts, literature and popular culture texts, and embedded in our national psyche. Through the references in the cartoon we draw on our knowledge of being Australian, of myths of cultural identity and the connection to the bush, and of families.

This small text, then, sits in a web of other texts. Meaning is made of the text by the complex interaction of textual experiences of both the reader and the writer/cartoonist, who may—or may not—have shared similar experiences. The cartoon relates to other texts in the culture; it forms an interrelationship with these through intersecting sets of attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as through genre, language and specific allusions that occur visually and in writing.
Explaining intertextuality

Meaning making relies strongly on intertextuality—on a text’s similarity to and connections with other texts. Intertextuality is strongly dependent on cultural knowledge.

It relies on the ability of writers/shapers/speakers to draw on references to and relationships with other texts in order to make meaning. It also relies on the ability of readers/viewers/listeners to recognise such references and relationships.

Intertextuality works in different ways:

- It works at the level of shared sets of attitudes, values and beliefs, where members of a culture recognise ways of thinking or being.
- It works at the level of genre, because texts adhere to particular conventions that are recognisable to members of a culture familiar with that genre.
- It works at the level of allusion, or reference, to previous texts. Some references are quite specific or overt, but others are less direct.

Reading intertextuality: the Australian context

Intertextuality occurs in all sorts of texts—films, advertisements, poems, novels, biographies, newspaper articles, cartoons—as the writers/directors/copywriters draw on ways of assisting readers/viewers/listeners to make new, interconnected meanings by relating their texts to previous texts or genres or events or ideas that circulate in the culture.

Knowing about intertextuality and being alert as a reader/viewer to intertextual connections contribute not only to your meaning making and to your sense of fun and enjoyment in engaging with or creating texts, but also to your ability to read in a more discerning and analytical manner.

Intertextuality works with assumptions about the prior knowledge and experiences that readers/viewers/listeners have of both texts and culture. Some references are quite explicit—or marked out, if you like; some are more subtle and the reader is required to pick up on the reference; some intertextual connections that readers make may not have been considered by the author/illustrator/filmmaker. Different cultural, social and reading experiences mean that texts have the potential to sustain a number of meanings or readings, some of which may not have been envisaged by the writer/speaker.
Activity

The following retrieval grid provides a model of how you might identify and document the connections between the cartoon *The Mild Colonial Boy* and your prior knowledge of other texts. Some ideas have been provided to show how you might deconstruct or unpack elements of the cartoon. Obviously, because of your particular reading and viewing experiences, you may not make the same associations between this and the other texts indicated there, so you would delete these and use your own references. However, as a participant in Australian cultures, you are likely to read *The Mild Colonial Boy* as a reference to Ned Kelly because you are familiar with an image that has assumed iconic status. Use your prior knowledge and experience to add ideas to a grid like the one shown here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landscape</th>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Caption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Far horizon</td>
<td>Man in sleeveless work shirt with box-like helmet</td>
<td>'The Mild Colonial Boy'—the only written text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloudless sky</td>
<td>Woman in black shift and similar helmet—constructed as female by lips and breasts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat ground</td>
<td>Shoeless, carrying a helmeted baby</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clumpy scrub</td>
<td>Helmeted child clutches mother's skirt and holds leash of a helmeted dog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No trees</td>
<td>Figures are in foreground full front on but the eyes of the male figure do not confront the viewer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barren</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outback landscape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associations made of the representations</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many texts about Australia (e.g. films, paintings) are set in the bush or outback; this is seen as quintessentially Australian.</td>
<td></td>
<td>There is a song/poem called 'The wild colonial boy'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is not included that you thought might be there?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Producing readings of the text | |

Intertextuality—the Ned Kelly connection

Many texts have been produced about Ned Kelly. The following examples might extend your perceptions of the intertextuality in the cartoon *The Mild Colonial Boy*.

In considering the meanings made available by the cartoon’s caption, it may be useful to refer to the following poem. Consider the effect of the change from ‘wild’ to ‘mild’. 
The wild colonial boy

'Tis of a wild Colonial boy, Jack Doolan was his name,
Of poor but honest parents he was born in Castlemaine.
He was his father's only hope, his mother's only joy,
And dearly did his parents love the wild Colonial boy.

Chorus
Come, all my hearties, we'll roam the mountains high,
Together we will plunder, together we will die.
We'll wander over valleys, and gallop over plains,
And we'll scorn to live in slavery, bound down with iron chains.

He was scarcely sixteen years of age when he left his father's home,
And through Australia's sunny clime a bushranger did roam.
He robbed those wealthy squatters, their stock he did destroy,
And a terror to Australia was the wild Colonial boy.

In sixty-one this daring youth commenced his wild career,
With a heart that knew no danger, no foeman did he fear.
He stuck up the Beechworth mail-coach, and robbed Judge MacEvoy,
Who trembled, and gave up his gold to the wild Colonial boy.

He bade the judge 'Good morning', and told him to beware,
That he'd never rob a hearty chap that acted on the square,
And never to rob a mother of her son and only joy,
Or else you may turn outlaw, like the wild Colonial boy.

One day as he was riding in the mountain-side along,
A-listening to the little birds, their pleasant laughing song,
Three mounted troopers rode along—Kelly, Davis, and FitzRoy—
They thought that they would capture him, the wild Colonial boy.

'Surrender now, Jack Doolan, you see there's three to one.
Surrender now, Jack Doolan, you daring highwayman.'
He drew a pistol from his belt, and shook the little toy.
'I'll fight, but not surrender,' said the wild Colonial boy.

He fired at Trooper Kelly and brought him to the ground,
And in return from Davis received a mortal wound.
All shattered through the jaws he lay still firing at FitzRoy,
And that's the way they captured him—the wild Colonial boy.
Other writers have described the Kellys as ‘wild colonial boys’:

In a 1954 film of Ned Kelly, *The Glenrowan Affair*, the voiceover constructs the times in which Ned Kelly lived as ‘wild days’ and the gang as ‘four wild colonial boys’.

*Metro Education, No. 15*

So the Paul Livingston cartoon could be read as punning (playing on words) on prior intertextual references to the poem as well as to the poem itself.

More recently, a similar connection was made by Robert Edric in his review of Peter Carey’s novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*:

There is little doubt, either, where Carey’s sympathies lie. He cannot be faulted for the shape and colour of the portrait he is painting when Kelly himself—the original Wild Colonial Boy—is telling the tale.

*Guardian, 6 January 2001*

**discussion**

1. Think about the representation of ‘the wild colonial boy’ that has been constructed in the poem and in the excerpts. Does this representation have negative connotations, or is it more indulgent? If it is the latter, of what is it being indulgent?

2. What is being valued? What, for example, would be the difference if the Kellys were instead constructed as police murderers?

3. How does the pun, or play on words, in the cartoon *The Mild Colonial Boy* create an alternative reading of Ned Kelly?

References to Ned Kelly can be found in Australian culture from the late 1800s to the present day. You may remember the many ‘Ned Kellys’ in the stadium at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics, where they were represented as Australian icons. Sir Sidney Nolan, a famous Australian artist, painted a series of stylised pictures of Ned Kelly, including the famous helmet that has become such an icon of Australian identity.

Consider the dominant construction of Ned Kelly in the painting and in the following extracts from a range of different sources.
This comment was included in a catalogue of the 1964 exhibition of paintings by Sidney Nolan:

But young Kelly—he was only 25—was something more than an ordinary gangster: he loathed the authorities, he thought them brutal and unjust, and his raids were more in the nature of a protest against society itself than an indulgence in blood-thirstiness or greed for private gain. He broke the law because he hated the law …

Alan Moorehead, *Sidney Nolan*, 1964

Here is a more recent comment by the award-winning Australian writer Peter Carey at the time of the publication of his novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*:

Although he was hanged as a murderer and bank robber in 1880, Kelly was courageous, decent and attractive to women, says Carey. ‘He beat the ruling class at their own game: he was smarter and funnier than they were, and he was us.’

Journalist and broadcaster Phillip Adams made the following comments about Ned Kelly during an interview with Peter Carey:

Ned Kelly taps into the complexities of our convict heritage and its emphasis on inequality and harsh punishment. He recalls the struggles of the Irish against the English, the poor versus the rich. The circumstances of his life meant that he had no choice but to become anti-establishment. But Ned combines the elements we’ve always worshipped, that of the larrikin and the rebel, who captured the public’s imagination, and then further ensured the survival of his own legend when he was ultimately defeated, and hung [sic].

Phillip Adams, on ABC radio’s Late Night Live, 12 October 2000

However, some commentators have contested this dominant representation of Ned Kelly, as shown in the following excerpts:

Ned Kelly was really nothing more than a common horse thief. The elevation of this murdering petty criminal to the status of national icon is bewildering … The legend of Ned Kelly seems to satisfy Australians’ perceptions of themselves as rebellious and anti-authoritarian characters.


The resurgence of the Ned Kelly legend … stresses the enigma of why one of the most decent, law-abiding peoples in the world should make a national hero of one of the most cold-blooded, egotistical, and utterly self-centred criminals who ever decorated the end of a rope in an Australian jail.

His frankness in turpitude, his utter vengefulness, his cruelty, his cold-blooded lack of regret at the wiping out of the lives of decent men can only repel even an unfastidious mind. Yet his spirit has been extolled as the spirit of Australia, his animal lawlessness has been held up as a renewal of the spirit of Eureka.


discussion

1. How does the reading of Ned Kelly produced in your earlier notes in the retrieval grid compare with these varying representations, including the Sidney Nolan painting?

2. Why would a convicted police killer be an icon presented on an international stage such as the opening of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000?

3. What part of being Australian does this iconic figure represent?

4. How might overseas visitors have reacted to the Kelly figure? Would they have the cultural knowledge to make the meanings many Australians might make?
Activity

1. Earlier in this chapter you noted your initial responses to the cartoon *The Mild Colonial Boy* in a retrieval grid, making use of your own prior knowledge. The texts you have subsequently explored would have extended your intertextual understandings and the repertoire of texts you can draw upon. Return to the grid and add any further ideas you may now have about intertextuality in the cartoon.

2. Produce an extended reading of *The Mild Colonial Boy* that is informed by intertextual connections and understandings about the way cultural constructions of Ned Kelly influence, and are influenced by, attitudes and beliefs about Australian identity. In your reading, consider:

   a. possible interactions between the bush setting, the family in Ned Kelly armour, the caption ‘The Mild Colonial Boy’, and other texts that the cartoon may, in your view, draw upon or allude to;

   b. how representations of the bush locale (rather than suburbia or the seaside) and the nuclear Kelly family (rather than a single male figure) work with the caption ‘The Mild Colonial Boy’ to reconstruct the dominant representation of Ned Kelly.

In producing your reading, use the term/s ‘intertextuality’, ‘intertextually’ and/or ‘intertextual relationships’.

Strategies of intertextuality

Writers, designers, advertisers, playwrights and painters draw on and refer to other texts for a wide range of purposes, which may either be respectful of the earlier text(s) or ‘disrespectful’/disruptive. As mentioned previously, the foundational element of intertextuality is the use of allusion, which represents a direct or implied reference to another text in literature, history, mythology, religion, art or popular culture. Because of these associations with a prior text or texts, allusion is used to enrich and extend meaning, while simultaneously affording the perceptive reader, viewer or listener the intellectual pleasure associated with recognition. In Judith Wright’s poem ‘Bullocky’, the poet explicitly describes the bullock driver as ‘old Moses’ and ‘the slaves / his suffering and stubborn team’ in a biblical allusion to Moses leading his people to the Promised Land.

While Wright’s is an obvious allusion to a prior text, intertextuality often works at a less overt level. Then it has to be inferred, sometimes from quite subtle references or by drawing from a wide range of prior knowledge and experience of texts—cultural, literary, philosophical, historical and political. Often intertextuality is part of a process of cultural transmission and reproduction. It can be drawn on, however, for subversive (negative) purposes and so deliberately disrupt certain sets of attitudes, values and beliefs.
Parody

Parody is a literary term for the process of intertextual reference to a particular text, genre or form, or to the style of a particular writer or designer. While this strategy is used primarily for comic effect, parody often has the more serious purpose of diminishing or calling into question aspects of the original text through the use of mockery. Political cartoons, for example, often draw on the resources of parody, usually as caricature, to make stringent comments on people, places, things, events and concepts through ridicule and exaggeration.

Read Dorothea Mackellar's iconic poem ‘My country’ and Oscar Krahnwohl's version as an example of parody at work.

---

**My country**

The love of field and coppice,  
Of green and shaded lanes.  
Of ordered woods and gardens  
Is running in your veins,  
Strong love of grey-blue distance  
Brown streams and soft dim skies  
I know but cannot share it,  
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,  
A land of sweeping plains,  
Of ragged mountain ranges,  
Of droughts and flooding rains.  
I love her far horizons,  
I love her jewel-sea,  
Her beauty and her terror  
The wide brown land for me!

A stark white ring-barked forest  
All tragic to the moon,  
The sapphire-misted mountains,  
The hot gold hush of noon.  
Green tangle of the brushes,  
Where lithe lianas coil,  
And orchids deck the tree-tops  
And ferns the warm dark soil.

Core of my heart, my country!  
Her pitiless blue sky,  
When sick at heart, around us,  
We see the cattle die—  
But then the grey clouds gather,  
And we can bless again  
The drumming of an army,  
The steady, soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!  
Land of the Rainbow Gold,  
For flood and fire and famine,  
She pays us back threefold —  
Over the thirsty paddocks,  
Watch, after many days,  
The filmy veil of greenness  
That thickens as we gaze.

An opal-hearted country,  
A wilful, lavish land—  
All you who have not loved her,  
You will not understand—  
Though earth holds many splendours,  
Wherever I may die,  
I know to what brown country  
My homing thoughts will fly.

Dorothea Mackellar
My country

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of open drains
Mid-urban sprawl expanded
For cost-accounting gains;
Broad, busy bulldozed acres
Once wastes of fern and trees
Now rapidly-enriching
Investors overseas.

A nature-loving country
Beneath whose golden wattles
The creek is fringed with newspapers
And lined with broken bottles.
Far in her distant outback
Still whose cities chafe
Find hidden pools where bathing
Is relatively safe.

A music-loving country
Where rings throughout the land
The jingle sweet enjoining
Devotion to the brand.
O, hark the glad transistors
Whence midnight, dawn and noon
Cry forth her US idols
A trifle out of tune.

Brave military pylons
That march o’er scenic hills;
Fair neon lights, extolling
Paint, puppy food and pills!
I love her massive chimneys,
Productions, profit’s pride,
Interminably pouring
Pollution high and wide.

A democratic country
Where, safe from fear’s attacks,
Earth’s children are all equal
(Save yellows, browns and blacks),
Though Man in Space adventure,
Invade the planets nine,
What shall he find to equal
This sunburnt land of mine?

Oscar Krahnwol

Pastiche

Pastiche is the reproduction or recombination of other genres, styles, texts, techniques or ideas that overtly and deliberately sets out to produce a derivation or imitation of the original. For example, Baz Luhrmann, the Australian film director, uses pastiche in his film *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* with its modern-day characters and settings, which draw on the codes and conventions of different popular culture texts, genres and styles. Another example of pastiche occurs in the work of Finnish artist, Mari Kasurinen, who playfully transforms ‘My Little Pony’ toys by drawing on icons of popular culture and the resources of clay sculpture, acrylics and nylon (see next page).
The term ‘appropriation’ is related to parody and pastiche and is used usually in cultural and media studies, and particularly in the fields of art, photography and advertising. Appropriation draws very explicitly and clearly on an earlier text, but usually for the purposes of uncovering the ideological work done by texts. That is, the appropriation calls into question certain attitudes, values and beliefs that
may have become naturalised or normalised or made to seem commonsense. It is used to interrogate a previous text and evoke a ‘rethinking’ that positions readers/viewers/viewers/listeners to re-evaluate certain entrenched attitudes, beliefs and values.

Dianne Jones’s painting appropriates Tom Roberts’s earlier iconic painting *Shearing the Rams* which, in developing a nationalistic sense of Australian identity, privileges the white outback worker. Through the act of appropriation, Jones draws attention to the silencing of the contribution of Indigenous Australians in the project of building the various rural industries. She takes the iconic image and sets out to destabilise it by inserting three members of her extended Indigenous family—her father, uncle and nephew—thus requiring the viewer to rethink understandings of nationalism in terms of who is included and who is excluded in representations of the bush.

Tom Roberts, *Shearing the rams*, 1888–90, born Great Britain 1856, arrived in Australia 1869, died 1931, oil on canvas on composition board 122.4 x 183.3 cm National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Felton Bequest, 1932

Dianne Jones, *Shearing the rams*, 2001 Balardung/Nyoongar born 1966 colour inkjet print on canvas, ed. 6/10 122.4 x 183.0 cm National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Gift of Fraser Hopkins, 2007
Activity

Collect several texts demonstrating examples of the strategies of intertextuality—parody, pastiche and appropriation—and discuss these in small groups. These texts may be advertisements, music videos, poems, cartoons or paintings, or derive from a range of literary genres.

As a group, select one of these examples to share with the class. In your discussion you should consider what prior knowledge is necessary to recognise the intertextuality, how the intertextual references operate, the strategies used and the effects that are achieved.

Using intertextuality to produce resistant readings

As we have seen, intertextual references may be used to align with or to contest the values, beliefs or assumptions of earlier texts in which certain cultural assumptions have been naturalised.

The Australian comedian and actor Paul Hogan achieved iconic status with his portrayal of the laconic bushman in the film *Crocodile Dundee*, which made him an international celebrity. The image reproduced below right, entitled *An Australian*, was created by Hou Leong, an Australian artist whose medium is computer scanning. Born in China but now an Australian, Hou Leong explores issues of Australian identity, using images from popular culture. As in the cases of Diane Jones and Anne Zahalka (above), he sets out to ‘make strange’ or destabilise what seems ‘natural’ by inserting his own image into a familiar text. Hou Leong works intertextually, relying on the viewer’s cultural knowledge to make meaning of the associations between his reconstructed text and the original text.
Both Paul J Livingston’s cartoon (The Mild Colonial Boy) and Hou Leong’s computer art can be read as challenging the dominant representations of Australian identity. Leong asks questions about the alignment between Australian identity and race or ethnicity. Many Chinese Australians have, in fact, been part of the Australian bush experience as early pioneers, settlers and station workers, yet their contribution is often silenced.

Activity

1. Think about the following questions:
   a. In what ways does the substitution by Hou Leong change the meanings you make of the picture?
   b. How does the original publicity still for the film Crocodile Dundee construct ‘being Australian’?
   c. How does the computer-manipulated Leong picture contest or subvert this construction?

2. Write about the ways in which the preceding visual texts can be read as deconstructing the dominant cultural construction of Australian identity, analysing and evaluating the choices made to reposition the viewer.

Reading intertextuality: broader cultural contexts

The texts that have been examined so far have focused on the construction of Australian identity because these contexts are generally more easily accessible. Where intertextuality can become challenging is when references occur to texts outside a culture. Intertextuality, in working across cultures and times, has had a significant role in embedding certain sets of attitudes, beliefs and values that can be sustained for centuries, perpetuating particular versions of identity that can have consequences for sections of the community. These can relate to representations of gendered, racial and class identities, but readings should not be reduced to these categories alone.

Women, for example, have been represented stereotypically and in limited cultural roles in many texts since the biblical construction of Eve. Indeed, Eve has become a common signifier for ‘woman’ in Western cultures. The associations of Eve, and hence all women, as tempted and, in turn, temptress—primarily responsible for the Fall of Man and her expulsion, with Adam, from the Garden of Eden—resonate in an extraordinary range of texts to the present day. These associations are so embedded in the culture that authors can draw upon them by simply alluding to ‘Eve’. resonate: in literature, to echo an image or idea
Consider the following texts and the allusions to Eve as ‘woman’.
The following is an excerpt from a short story by Glenda Adams. The allusion the narrator’s friend makes in this anecdotal excerpt indicates the degree to which intertextuality saturates the culture.

... I encountered my first snake when I went for an early morning walk beside a wheat field in France. I walked gazing at the sky. When I felt a movement on my leg I looked down. Across my instep rested the tail of a tweedy-skinned snake. The rest of its body was inside the leg of my jeans, resting against my bare leg. The head was at my knee.

I broke the rules. I screamed and kicked and stamped. The snake fell out of my jeans in a heap and fled into the wheat. I ran back to the house crying.

My friend said, ‘Did it offer you an apple?’

Glenda Adams, A snake down under

Sonnet 93
So shall I live, supposing thou art true,  
Like a deceived husband; so love’s face  
May still seem love to me, though alter’d new;  
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place:  
For there can live no hatred in thine eye,  
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change.  
In many’s looks the false heart’s history  
Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange,  
But heaven in thy creation did decree  
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;  
Whate’er thy thoughts or thy heart’s workings be,  
Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.

How like Eve’s apple doth thy beauty grow,  
If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show!

William Shakespeare

1 What use is made of the allusion to Eve in the simile in the concluding couplet?
2 How does it sum up the argument in the poem about love and deception, and position the reader to ‘see’ women?

How is intertextuality used in a humorous way in the last line?
Look at the following advertisement for hair-care products.

Femininity is a Weapon. Use it.

1. Deconstruct this advertisement, analysing the use made of intertextuality. Consider the relationship between the Adam and Eve story, the visual image and the slogan in this advertisement.
2. How does this advertisement construct contemporary women?
The following cartoon includes multiple allusions to the biblical Eve. The representation of Eve as 'bad woman' has been retained, but now it articulates with contemporary representations of 'empowered woman'.

discussion

Consider the following in your reading of this cartoon:

- the significance of the many apple cores
- the reference to 'wisecracking woman' in the caption
- the pun in the voice bubble
- the representation of the serpent.
Activity

There are numerous allusions to Eve in paintings, sculpture, music, literature and the mass media: intertextuality proliferates, from Auguste Rodin’s bronze sculpture to Rainer Maria Rilke’s poems; from Rembrandt’s paintings to Ruth Rendell’s mystery thrillers *Adam and Eve* and *Pinch Me*; from Ernest Hemingway’s short story ‘The Garden of Eden’, to Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley*, to Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*.

Locate some further intertextual uses of Eve. Bring these examples to class and discuss whether the intertextual references perpetuate or contest the representation of Eve that constructs women negatively. Be alert to the range of strategies authors can use when making intertextual references. Parody, pastiche and appropriation, as well as *satire* and *irony*, can all be used to question or subvert the attitudes, beliefs and values associated with a representation.

Intertextuality and sets of attitudes, values and beliefs

Read the following poem by the English poet UA Fanthorpe, which comprises three dramatic monologues. As you read, consider who is speaking in each section of the poem and which lines or phrases help you identify each speaker.

**Not my best side**

1. Not my best side, I’m afraid.
   The artist didn’t give me a chance to
   Pose properly, and as you can see,
   Poor chap, he had this obsession with
   Triangles, so he left off two of my
   Feet. I didn’t comment at the time
   (What, after all, are two feet
   To a monster?) but afterwards
   I was sorry for the bad publicity.
   Why, I said to myself, should my conqueror
   Be so ostentatiously beardless, and ride
   A horse with a deformed neck and square hoofs?
   Why should my victim be so
   Unattractive as to be inedible,
   And why should she have me literally
   On a string? I don’t mind dying
   Ritual, since I always rise again,
   But I should have liked a little more blood
   To show they were taking me seriously.
II  It's hard for a girl to be sure if
    She wants to be rescued. I mean, I quite
    Took to the dragon. It's nice to be
    Liked, if you know what I mean. He was
    So nicely physical, with his claws
    And lovely green skin, and that sexy tail,
    And the way he looked at me,
    He made me feel he was all ready to
    Eat me. And any girl enjoys that.
    So when this boy turned up, wearing machinery,
    On a really dangerous horse, to be honest,
    I didn't much fancy him. I mean,
    What was he like underneath the hardware?
    He might have acne, blackheads or even
    Bad breath for all I could tell, but the dragon—
    Well, you could see all his equipment
    At a glance. Still, what could I do?
    The dragon got himself beaten by the boy,
    And a girl's got to think of her future.

III  I have diplomas in Dragon
    Management and Virgin Reclamation.
    My horse is the latest model, with
    Automatic transmission and built-in
    Obsolescence. My spear is custom-built,
    And my prototype armour
    Still on the secret list. You can't
    Do better than me at the moment.
    I'm qualified and equipped to the
    Eyebrow. So why be difficult?
    Don't you want to be killed and/or rescued
    In the most contemporary way? Don't
    You want to carry out the roles
    That sociology and myth have designed for you?
    Don't you realise that, by being choosy,
    You are endangering job-prospects
    In the spear- and horse-building industries?
    What, in any case, does it matter what
    You want? You're in my way.

UA Fanthorpe
Your cultural knowledge of myths and mediaeval chivalry, which includes constructions of knights, maidens and dragons, may have assisted you in your initial reading and allowed you to identify each speaker. Fanthorpe’s poem derives from a fifteenth-century painting by Italian artist Paolo Uccello, entitled *St George and the Dragon*. Uccello’s painting itself derives from the thirteenth-century English legend of St George and the dragon. Seeing the painting may help you to interpret some of the lines in the poem.

Paolo Uccello 1397–1475, *St George and the Dragon*

**discussion**

Fanthorpe’s poem goes beyond mere allusions to tales of dragons, knights and maidens, and it goes beyond a mere poetic description of the painting. Each of the dramatic monologues challenges stereotypical representations of dragon, maiden and knight.

1. What sets of attitudes, values and beliefs are used to challenge the traditional representations of these characters?

2. How does Fanthorpe use satire and humour to *denaturalise* the stereotypes and invite the reader to question these representations?

*denaturalise*: to uncover meanings, relationships or assumptions that may have been taken for granted as ‘natural’ or ‘obvious’
Consider the following cartoon by Judy Horacek.

Intertextuality and the pleasures of recognition

While intertextuality is used for a wide range of purposes—to re-produce or interrogate and contest certain attitudes, beliefs and values, to make political points, to demonstrate the depth of knowledge, to exploit for commercial purposes—one of the aspects often forgotten is the ways its use also affords us the pleasure and satisfaction associated with recognising allusions, references, quotations and appropriations.

Our sense of pleasure when reading or viewing a text often lies in the unexpected, indeed the absurd, use of allusions as well as the irreverence, or disrespect, sometimes accorded to an original work that is often culturally iconic.

Discussion

1. What are the similarities and differences between the Fanthorpe and Horacek texts in relation to the representations of dragon, maiden and knight?

2. What assumptions does the author of each text make about the cultural knowledge and understandings of the reader?
Intertextuality and genre

When writing or shaping texts, writers make choices about whether they should adhere to the conventions of particular genres. Frequently, when working with a particular genre, writers mobilise certain sets of attitudes, values and beliefs conventionally associated with that genre. Narratives often end in familiar ways; again, these endings are conventionally associated with particular genres, such as detective stories, westerns and romance, and therefore do ideological work. When working with such genres, writers may—almost ‘unconsciously’ at times—mobilise particular constructions of characters, plots and settings, as well as resolutions. This happens because writers are implicated in the culture and are familiar with generic conventions, cultural practices and assumptions.

However, writers can also modify genres by playing with and destabilising expectations, for a range of reasons: to startle and delight readers with the unexpected; to invite readers to see, by this destabilising, how texts work ideologically.

Look at this Horacek cartoon. Similar interplay between genres occurs in other texts. Many films make use of such interplay; for example, *Shanghai Noon*, an ‘East (kick-boxing Jackie Chan) meets West (American western genre)’ film, resonates humorously with a rich vein of intertextuality. Even the names of characters (as well as the title of the film) allude to significant texts in each genre.
Use the situation represented in the Horacek cartoon as the basis for a short story.

First, complete a retrieval grid like the one below as a guide to your selection of the particular intertextual references you might mobilise in your text. This retrieval grid allows you to document your current knowledge of the conventions of science fiction and western genres.

In writing your story, playfully employ the conventions of both genres and make use of allusions to specific texts to subvert or challenge the sets of attitudes, values and beliefs that are conventionally associated with either genre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sci-fi, space adventure, alien invasion genre</th>
<th>Western genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Titles of films, TV series, cartoons, comics that are examples of the genre</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alien</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Star Wars</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Titles of novels and short stories that are examples of the genre</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional plot, situations and settings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional characters</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional props (properties)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant roles, actors who played them and famous sayings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variations to the convention in any way—something that challenged the genre or led to fusions with other genres</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blazing Saddles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional codes—which seem to become more extreme with each film</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Words/phrases associated with particular texts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Queensland Senior English 1
Consolidating your understanding

Intertextual references can be very rich, complex and layered, in their drawing on different genres, cultures and periods, and preceding literary texts including classical myths in Western culture. The two texts that follow are provided for you to assist in consolidating your understanding of intertextuality: an illustration by a Canadian illustrator Robert Carter, and a double-page spread from *Old Ridley*, a picture book written by Gary Crew and illustrated by Mark McBride.

This illustration was designed to accompany a commentary on the number of plays currently being written about war, including the politicising of selected Shakespearean texts.
In making meaning from the intertextuality used in the magazine illustration, ‘Sgt. Shakespeare’, you are referred, as a starting point, to:

- portraits of Shakespeare
- allusions to Hamlet evident in use of the skull
- allusion to Henry V, ‘once more unto the breach’
- conventions of military uniforms, insignia and weaponry
- pen nibs and their associations.

The front dust cover of Old Ridley introduces the text as follows:

Why is it that Joachim is so fascinated by Old Ridley, the inventor who lives next door? Are the mysterious rumours about the old man really true? Can he fly? Has he invented light? Is he mad…?

Whatever the truth, the destinies of man and boy are about to be eternally entwined …

This curious tale was inspired by the myth of Tithonus, a mortal youth, and Eos, immortal goddess of the dawn.

When Tithonus fell in love with Eos, she asked the gods to grant him immortality so that he could be with Eos forever. The gods granted this wish, but neglected to give Tithonus eternal youth and so he was doomed to a fate worse than death—to grow old forever and ever. Later, showing mercy, the gods turned him into a cicada, a creature that sheds its skin to renew itself … But just what this has to do with the story of Joachim and Old Ridley, you will have to find out for yourself …

Gary Crew, Old Ridley

In making meaning from the intertextuality in Old Ridley, you are referred to the following:

- the picture book Old Ridley sourced from the library
- the poem ‘Tithonus’, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- the classical myth/legend of Eos/Aurora and Tithonus.
Now, for the first time, Joachim smiled. With one tug he pulled the sheet down and the full extent of the stained glass window he had longed to see was revealed. It was more beautiful than he had imagined.

The patterns of lead and glass were more intricately detailed, the colours more brilliant and lively. This house might be empty, he thought, but it is still alive, and he began looking for the room where old Ridley had been sitting when he spotted him from the window.
Extension

Choose one of the preceding texts—Robert Carter’s illustration on page 87, or the picture book illustration on page 89 (and the text from which it is sourced)—for extension and consolidation of your understandings of intertextuality.

1 How does the richness of the intertextuality inform your readings of the text and the meanings you derive, and how do the references enhance the pleasure of your engagement with the text? Discuss and elaborate your response to and interpretation of the text and its use of intertextuality.

2 Design an advertisement that draws on literary or classical intertextual links or allusions to promote a service or sell a product. Your links need to be appropriate to the context, market niche and purpose, and make intelligent and focused use of aspects of the original source texts.

3 Conceptualise and design the storyboard for an illustrated picture book for an audience you nominate. Make use of classical intertextual links or allusions to develop invited readings and ideas in the text.
PART B
PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE
Reading practices is the term used to refer to the range of ways we can produce meanings of a text and the methods we use to do this. We choose different practices depending on our purposes in reading, viewing or listening.

Consider how different our practices are if we are reading a novel to:

- escape the worries and cares of life or ‘chill out’
- find out ways of being in the world
- share our interpretations and reactions with book club members
- review a text for a newspaper; or
- analyse narratives for study purposes.

Even within the last category we would use different practices dependent on our purposes and how we have been trained to read; for example, if we were reading primarily to:

- analyse the style
- evaluate the uses to which generic conventions are being put
- examine representations of gender, race, religious affiliation, age, national identity or class; or
- question the values a text might support.

If reading a lengthy historical novel for pleasure, we may forego reading boring descriptions about the period and skim sections so we might absorb ourselves in those parts of the narrative we have decided to attend to, such as the plot. We might even skip to the end to find out what happens. If we reread a narrative after a passage of time and in different circumstances, its events may often appear to us as unfamiliar, or we may find that shifts in our own attitudes, values and beliefs have changed our response to the text.

Whatever the practices and the purposes for reading, a reader is not a passive recipient of meanings transmitted by an author who is the only one to know the final—real—meaning of the text. The reader is actively involved in meaning making through:
Reading practices

- visualising what is occurring
- speculating about what might previously have occurred
- anticipating what is likely to occur
- making connections
- responding emotionally
- doubting or disputing what is represented
- solving puzzles.

The converse, however, is also true: we, as readers, cannot simply make a text mean anything we want it to mean; we must attend to the range of authorial choices that have been made.

The cartoon below shows that not all readers produce the same reading or draw on and value the same practices, as fashions in reading change over time.

Authors—that is, writers, speakers or designers—construct texts for particular purposes to produce meanings that invite readers, listeners and viewers to respond in particular ways. Authors make a wide range of choices that construct particular representations and facilitate particular readings.

In making particular choices about what to include, exclude and/or emphasise in their text, authors will privilege certain sets of attitudes, beliefs and values and, in so doing, marginalise others. Thus, in engaging with texts, readers, listeners and viewers need to be alert to the ways in which one author may endorse particular attitudes, beliefs and values, while another may contest or challenge them. Their texts thereby shape the reader's response and invite the reader to respond very differently.
In texts there will be representations that appear to be commonsense or natural to many readers; however, these representations are cultural constructions that reproduce attitudes, values and beliefs that have become naturalised over time.

Meanings that are produced from texts are primarily shaped by a reader’s own prior knowledge and experience as well as their attitudes, beliefs and values. These attitudes, beliefs and values in turn can be influenced by such cultural factors as social position, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, class, political affiliation as well as the ways they have been taught to read. Readers actively produce meanings from a text by using different reading practices. Or they may read against the text by contesting and challenging the invited reading to produce a resistant reading. A reading may endorse or accept the meanings invited by the text, or it may dispute, contest or challenge these invited meanings. With texts from very different times and cultures, readers may feel confusion in the face of the unfamiliar, as they do not have the cultural knowledge—of text conventions, social practices and sets of attitudes, beliefs and values—to draw on and employ in their meaning making.

It is important to identify the values, attitudes and beliefs underpinning texts and the ways in which texts work to perpetuate particular social practices, attitudes, beliefs and values and entrench certain representations as being ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. If readers interrogate and contest textual representations of individuals, groups, times, places and concepts, they will discover the ideological work being done by the text.

Consider this cartoon:
Model

The following are possible ways of reading the above cartoon:

**Producing readings invited by the text:** In such a reading, there would be an acceptance of the construction of femininity as being restricted to appearance. Attention would be paid to the repetition of ‘pretty’, which constructs girls in a limited way—merely as attractive objects. In this reading, an assumption would be made that the figure on the left is male.

**Resisting readings invited by the text:** Other readers may contest the binary that is implicit in the stereotypical gender representations of the cartoon—those that restrict masculinity to strength and mental acuity, and femininity to appearance. Such a reading would argue that many desirable attributes that males may possess, such as sensitivity, consideration and charm, have been silenced; and equally, that many desirable attributes that women may possess, such as intellect, courage and strength, have also been silenced.

As informed and aware readers of texts, we can draw on a range of contemporary reading practices to identify:

- textual representations of individuals and groups that may be influenced by particular sets of attitudes, beliefs and values about age, ethnicity, gender or social class
- the ideologies implicit in the text
- who or what is privileged in the text
- who or what is marginalised in the text
- the invited reading(s)
- other readings that may be possible.

In summary, different authors invite readers to take up different positions in relation to the texts they have produced, as they will use their texts to explore and take positions on ways of being in the world. Readers may—but do not have to—accept an invited reading.

In this chapter, you are encouraged to use different reading practices to explore various ways of reading the following short stories. In producing these readings, consider how and why representations may have been constructed, how and why the attitudes, values and beliefs operating in a text may intersect or compete, whether particular attitudes, beliefs and values may be privileged or marginalised, and why this may be so. In producing your readings, pay attention to ways intertextuality influences the meanings that may be made. You are asked to reflect on ways in which the use of a single practice might limit a response to and reading of a text. You will also have opportunities to draw on your understandings to produce your own texts.
Analysing elements of narratives

Having been immersed in narrative since childhood, it might be expected that you now have an understanding of key elements of narrative such as character, setting, plot and structure (orientation, complication and resolution). Narratives, however, represent one of the most flexible genres and we should pay attention to the ways in which these key elements are used and experimented with—especially in, and as a result of, new media and technologies.

The power of narrative

Narratives have been one of the most engaging and powerful means of understanding how the world is, what humans may be, and how and why we act in certain ways. Narratives also are used to reinforce, legitimise or entrench certain social practices or ways of being. In narratives, authors exploit and manipulate ways to draw us powerfully and vicariously into the represented world of others—of characters, their relationships and other aspects of their lives. Through our engagement with the world of the narrative, we are able to experience the pleasures of the story by identifying with or being appalled by the characters and their actions. The power of the narrative may be such that we are enabled to reinforce, rethink or redefine aspects of our own values, attitudes and beliefs.

Thus, we should become more alert to the ways authors use these familiar elements to shape representations in order to influence us in particular contexts and media.

The plot and story

While a narrative, typically, is a series of actions and events connected by a time sequence, what is crucial in the successful development of the plot is the causal relationship between these events. So, while the story is the whole series of events represented in a narrative, the plot is what holds these events together or connects them in some way by a pattern of cause and effect. Plot (why things happen) is the driver of events. Whether the temporal connections be linear or non-linear, causality is important as one event creates a ripple effect that leads on to the unfolding progression of the story. While the organisation of events may be chronological, an author may choose to use a range of strategies, such as flashback, juxtaposition or temporal shifts to speed up or slow down the action, cross-cutting or jumping between simultaneously occurring events. Some non-linear narratives allow us to choose between alternatives, as in the children’s ‘choose your own adventure’ stories, or hypertext narratives. They actively seek to destabilise meaning by providing a number of alternatives or versions of events, as is done in the film Sliding Doors.

The narrator or narrative point of view

In a sense we can think of a narrative as a story told to another, and so the relationship between the teller of the story and the reader or listener is crucial in inviting or
positioning the latter to respond in particular ways. This imaginary storyteller is conventionally referred to as the narrator. The narrator, however, should not be confused with the author himself or herself, any more than we would confuse the character being portrayed in a film with the actor playing the role.

Different choices of narrator have very different effects: a story told in the first person establishes a very different relationship with the reader from one told in the third person. There are advantages and limitations to each of these authorial choices.

Obviously, first person narration, by a character who is a participant in the action, heightens the sense of reader involvement as it enables a greater empathy to develop between reader and narrator. One of its chief limitations is that only the subjective perspectives of this narrator are represented, so the understandings provided of other characters and certain events are thereby restricted.

One of the most common forms of narration is that of the third person narrator, who is an outside observer of the action and events and, from this point of detachment, is able to recount, describe and evaluate actions, events, characters and their motivations. Use of the third person narrator can also provide the viewpoints of a range of characters, particularly in the case of the omniscient or all-knowing and thus ostensibly more objective narrator. However, not only can this narrator ‘go everywhere’, but also he or she can be in the position of selecting which or whose version of events to represent.

The narrator is the linchpin in our understanding of a text, providing not only information but also helping to establish the stance taken to that information. Sometimes a choice is made to have an intrusive narrator—one who directly addresses the reader, as in ‘And so dear reader …’. Some authors, for particular artistic or ideological purposes, bring into question or call attention to the reliability of the information and deliberately set out to destabilise reader trust and certainty through the use of an unreliable narrator. Sometimes through the use of a naïve narrator, such as Forrest Gump in the film of the same name, the reader has another relationship again with the teller of the tale. Thus, as readers, we must always be alert to distinctions between the narrator and the implied author of a text.

The narrator is therefore a key figure in developing our sympathies or antipathies to certain characterisations or character representations. It is through representations of character that we can enter—in a range of powerful, focused and emotionally dynamic ways—into the world of the text, wherein we can have vicarious and often deeply transformative experiences while being insulated from the reality of such experiences.

The closure

Characters are used as representations of particular sets of attitudes, values and beliefs; we are invited to respond negatively or positively to characters through their words, actions, behaviours and sets of beliefs, although this response is also affected by our own personal sets of attitudes, values and beliefs. Narratives, historically, have constructed representations of the identities of members of groups within a culture to reinforce certain ideas about identity and acceptable
power relations. Through the resolution of the conflicts and problems represented within the narrative certain ideological work is done, so it is also important to pay attention to the way readers are positioned by the closure—or lack of closure—of a story.

Indeed, paying attention to the selective and purposeful use made of all these conventional elements of narrative—plot, story, sequence, time, narrator, narrative closure—remains an important aspect of meaning making.

### Activity

In reading the stories in this chapter, evaluate the uses made of these key elements of narrative. Draw a grid such as the one below and fill in the gaps once you have read the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Plot—one sentence identifying causal links</th>
<th>Sequence of events &amp; consider the effects of these</th>
<th>The narrator</th>
<th>Evaluate the choices made in relation to the narrator</th>
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Reading gaps and silences

Gaps in texts

Because of the selective nature of the construction of texts, assumptions are made that readers will bring their prior knowledge—of texts and of the culture—to a text in order to make sense of it. Thereby the reader is expected to complete the gaps in the text. Leunig's cartoon and its subtext require the reader to fill in the gap that Earth is a troubled planet at present with problems ranging, for example, from international economic crises to global warming to wars and epidemics of disease. Through drawing on such prior knowledge, the reader is able to fill in the gap between the man’s statement and the woman’s observation. The humour in the cartoon lies in her ironic response to scientific data that indicates that Mars is moving in its orbit further away from Earth.

Silences in texts

Silences are much more difficult to identify and comprehend than gaps. Any text is constructed by choices being made about what to include, emphasise or exclude. Silences may be conscious or unconscious omissions on the part of the author. They may be deliberate, as when an author chooses not to include some information in a text because it may be too personal, painful or embarrassing, or because it conflicts with the values, attitudes and beliefs he or she wishes to privilege in the text. For example, in his film representation of Romeo as hero, Franco Zeferelli
deliberately omits Shakespeare’s scene where Romeo kills Paris at Juliet’s tomb, in order to retain greater audience sympathy for Romeo. Unconscious or unwitting silences occur where, for example, an author omits something because this has been repressed or withheld from his or her own active consciousness. This form of silencing is more readily evident in autobiographical or biographical writings.

The following classic science fiction short story, ‘Embroidery’, by Ray Bradbury cleverly juxtaposes a rural domestic scene with the ultimate horror represented in the climax of the story. Discuss the following questions before reading. Then, as you read, think about Bradbury’s purposeful use of gaps and silences.

**discussion**

- What is your knowledge of embroidery? Who does it?
- What is your attitude to embroidery and embroiderers?
- What are your expectations of a story entitled ‘Embroidery’?

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**Embroidery**

The dark porch air in the late afternoon was full of needle flashes, like a movement of gathered silver insects in the light. The three women’s mouths twitched over their work. Their bodies lay back and then imperceptibly forward, so that the rocking chairs tilted and murmured. Each woman looked to her own hands, as if quite suddenly she had found her heart beating there.

‘What time is it?’
‘Ten minutes to five.’
‘Got to get up in a minute and shell those peas for dinner.’
‘But—’ said one of them.
‘Oh yes, I forgot. How foolish of me …’ The first woman paused, put down her embroidery and needle, and looked through the open porch door, through the interior of the warm house, to the silent kitchen. There upon the table, seeming more like symbols of domesticity than anything she had ever seen in her life, lay the mound of fresh-washed peas in their neat, resilient jackets, waiting for her fingers to bring them into the world.

‘Go hull them if it’ll make you feel good,’ said the second woman.
‘No,’ said the first. ‘I won’t. I just won’t.’

The third woman sighed. She embroidered a rose, a leaf, a daisy on a green field. The embroidery needle rose and vanished.

The second woman was working on the finest, most delicate piece of embroidery of them all, deftly poking, finding, and returning the quick
needle upon innumerable journeys. Her quick black glance was on each motion. A flower, a man, a road, a sun, a house; the scene grew under hand, a miniature beauty, perfect in every threaded detail.

‘It seems at times like this that it's always your hands you turn to,' she said, and the others nodded enough to make the rockers rock again.

‘I believe,' said the first lady, ‘that our souls are in our hands. For we do everything to the world with our hands. Sometimes I think we don't use our hands half enough; it's certain we don't use our heads.'

They all peered more intently at what their hands were doing.

‘Yes,' said the third lady, ‘when you look back on a whole lifetime, it seems you don't remember faces so much as hands and what they did.'

They recounted to themselves the lids they had lifted, the doors they had opened and shut, the flowers they had picked, the dinners they had made, all with slow or quick fingers, as was their manner or custom. Looking back you saw a flurry of hands, like a magician's dream, doors popping wide, taps turned, brooms wielded, children spanked. The flutter of pink hands was the only sound; the rest was a dream without voices.

‘No supper to fix tonight or tomorrow night or the next night after that,' said the third lady.

‘No windows to open or shut.'

‘No coal to shovel in the basement furnace next winter.'

‘No papers to clip cooking articles out of.'

And suddenly they were crying. The tears rolled softly down their faces and fell into the material upon which their fingers twitched.

‘This won't help things,' said the first lady at last, putting the back of her thumb to each under-eyelid. She looked at her thumb and it was wet.

‘Now look what I've done!' cried the second lady exasperated. The others stopped and peered over. The second lady held out her embroidery. There was the scene, perfect except that while the embroidered yellow sun shone down upon the embroidered green field, and the embroidered brown road curved towards an embroidered pink house, the man standing on the road had something wrong with his face.

‘I'll just have to rip out the whole pattern, practically, to fix it right,' said the second lady.

‘What a shame.' They all stared intently at the beautiful scene with the flaw in it.

The second lady began to pick away at the thread with her little deft scissors flashing. The pattern came out thread by thread. She pulled and yanked, almost viciously. The man's face was gone. She continued to seize at the threads.

‘What are you doing?’ asked the other woman.
They leaned and saw what she had done.
The man was gone from the road. She had taken him out entirely.
They said nothing but returned to their own tasks.
‘What time is it?’ asked someone.
‘Five minutes to five.’
‘Is it supposed to happen at five o’clock?’
‘Yes.’
‘And they’re not sure what it’ll do to anything, really, when it happens?’
‘No, not sure.’
‘Why didn’t we stop them before it got this far and this big?’
‘It’s twice as big as ever before. No, ten times, maybe a thousand.’
‘This isn’t like the first one or the dozen later ones. This is different.
Nobody knows what it might do when it comes.’
They waited on the porch in the smell of roses and cut grass.
‘What time is it now?’
“One minute to five.’
The needles flashed silver fire. They swam like a tiny school of metal fish in the darkening summer air.
Far away a mosquito sound, then something like a tremor of drums.
The three women cocked their heads, listening.
‘We won’t hear anything, will we?’
‘They say not.’
‘Perhaps we’re foolish. Perhaps we’ll go right on, after five o’clock, shelling peas, opening doors, stirring soups, washing dishes, making lunches, peeling oranges …’
‘My, how we’ll laugh to think we were frightened by an old experiment!’
They smiled a moment at each other.
‘It’s five o’clock.’
At these words, hushed, they all busied themselves. Their fingers darted. Their faces were turned down to the motions they made. They made frantic patterns. They made lilacs and grass and trees and houses and rivers in the embroidered cloth. They said nothing, but you could hear their breath in the silent porch air.
Thirty seconds passed.
The second woman sighed finally and began to relax.
‘I think I just will go and shell those peas for supper,’ she said. ‘I …’
But she hadn’t time even to lift her head. Somewhere, at the side of her vision, she saw the world brighten and catch fire. She kept her head down, for she knew what it was. She didn’t look up, nor did the others, and in the last instant their fingers were flying; they didn’t glance about
to see what was happening to the country, the town, this house, or even this porch. They were only staring down at the design in their flickering hands.

The second woman watched an embroidered flower go. She tried to embroider it back in, but it went, and then the road vanished, and the blades of grass. She watched a fire, in slow motion almost, catch upon the embroidered house and unshingle it, and pull each threaded leaf from the small green tree in the hoop, and she saw the sun itself pulled apart in the design. Then the fire caught upon the moving point of the needle while it still flashed; she watched the fire come along her fingers and arms and body, untwisting the yarn of her being so painstakingly that she could see it in all its devilish beauty, yanking out the pattern from the material at hand. What it was doing to the other women or the furniture or the elm tree in the yard, she never knew. For now, yes, now! it was plucking at the white embroidery of her flesh, the pink thread of her cheeks, and at last it found her heart, a soft red rose sewn with fire, and it burned the fresh, embroidered petals away, one by delicate one …

Ray Bradbury

**discussion**

**Think/Pair/Share**

The story was written at a time when the world feared a nuclear war. This fear dominated consciousness for about thirty years during the period after World War II when the international superpowers—the United States of America and the United Soviet Socialist Republic—were at ideological loggerheads. In that context, certain assumptions are made about the prior knowledge of readers. For contemporary readers, filling in the gaps and silences may be more challenging now than when the story was written.

1. Identify gaps that the reader has to fill and say how you are able to do that. For example, how do you complete the gap about the significance of impending disaster at 5.00 pm?
2. What silences are there in this story? Who is omitted and why?

**Reading imagery and symbolism**

Short story writers use a range of techniques, including symbolism, simile and metaphor, to create powerful analogies, to stimulate the sensory perceptions, and to create more vivid images in the reader’s mind. While these techniques allow us to visualise, they also affect our feelings and emotional reaction. Use of figurative language and of rhetorical resources, such as irony, not only contribute to the reader’s enjoyment, they are also powerful resources for authors, allowing them to take a stance on the subject matter and to position readers.
Rered ‘Embroidery’ by Ray Bradbury on pages 102–105, and consider the uses of irony, imagery and symbolism in order to answer the following questions.

**Activity**

1. In the first paragraph Bradbury compares the needle flashes to ‘a movement of gathered silver insects in the light’. Look for other examples of imagery in the story as you read, and consider the effects that are created by these.

2. Why do you think Bradbury uses a rural domestic setting in what is essentially a horror narrative of nuclear holocaust?

3. How is the delicate creativity of the women’s needlework used metaphorically as a contrast to the possibilities of unfettered scientific invention?

4. What irony is present in the first woman’s observation that ‘we don’t use our hands half enough; it’s certain we don’t use our heads’?

5. How does the second woman’s needlework mistake and correction provide a symbolic counterpoint to, and foreshadowing of, the events to come?

6. How is this sustained metaphor or symbolism used to chilling effect in the climax of the short story?

7. How do the visuals shown here represent the juxtaposition of creation and destruction in Bradbury’s story?

8. Select two starkly contrasting images of your own and use these to develop a plot outline for a proposed story.
Reading within your own cultural experience

It is easier to make meaning of texts that represent and explore aspects of a familiar culture or experience. The short story ‘Twenty-minute hero’ by Brisbane writer Nick Earls focuses on cultural knowledge, understandings and experiences likely to be familiar to most contemporary senior students. In making meaning of this story, draw not only on your cultural understandings but also on your knowledge of reading practices.

**Twenty-minute hero**

This is about Louise. Louise, it could be said, was my first love. It could be said, at least, if you used my working definition of love (1980–87), that being a wistful, mildly nauseating feeling held about a person long after a single conversation. These were eight years when I met people only once, and I don’t know why. I guess they never asked for my number.

Louise was the first girl I took outside at a school dance. First of two. Same thing happened both times. Conversation. And Louise wasn’t much of a talker.

I meant to ask her friend to come outside, but that’s okay. I was a bit nervous, and I twitched at the critical moment and ended up looking at Louise. Looking up at Louise. Louise was much bigger than her friend, who was distinctly medium-sized. But Louise was big in a particular way, a big-across-the-shoulders way, a punching-out-sides-of-beef, winning-the-woodchop-at-the-Ekka way.

Louise, it turned out, was the eighteenth-best breaststroker in the world over two hundred metres. And I didn’t want to tell her, but I wasn’t world-ranked in anything. As my mother once said to me as I stood in
front of the bathroom mirror, 'No matter how many of those things you squeeze, no-one else counts theirs, so it won't be a world record.'

We walked outside, Louise and me. And next to her I felt pared-back, ultimately flimsy, not much bigger than a piece of bent wire, a little pipe-cleaner boy. Louise, though all I ever really saw were her shoulders, had muscles. Excellent muscles, in places where, all my life, I'll just have skin.

We got ourselves a couple of cups of Tang and we sat on the grass, in full view of the assembly hall, as required. And I waited for Louise to take the initiative. After all, I'd done my bit. I'd got us out here. Wasn't that enough? Minutes passed. Maybe not.

Pretty good Tang, she said eventually, hinting that she wasn't the world's greatest conversationalist.

And I said, Yeah, hinting that I wasn't, either.

Don't get to drink much Tang, she said. Training diet.

She told me she ate fourteen Weetbix for breakfast. Louise was the first person I ever met who ate fourteen Weetbix for breakfast. And still the only one. I tried it the next day and I slowed down after three, and had to lie down mid-way through five. Lying there thinking, thinking, that Louise, she's nine Weetbix and a million laps ahead of me already today, and it's only eight-thirty.

But I lay there thinking more than that. Thinking about the dream she told me she always dreams, of a long, black line, shattered every thirty-two seconds by a tumbleturn. Thinking about her shoulders and how I wanted to dream about her shoulders, or to have her shoulders, or be near her shoulders. Any of these would have been fine, as long as I didn't get hurt. Thinking about her brown eyes and her delicate eyebrows, hinting at the Louise that might have been, had she not had that breaststroke ranking and done all those laps. The smaller, inside Louise, who didn't talk much, but who, I suspected, thought about things a lot. I liked them both—big, muscle Louise, and small, thinking Louise—the whole Louise package was fine by me.

And I thought about the time the night before when I'd said something funny, slightly funny, and she gave me a bit of a slug on the shoulder. Well, when it left her it was a pat, but when it got to me it was more of a slug and I did fall over briefly and end up with a lot of grass on my back.

And she had to go home and I went inside, inside to my friends, and I was a hero for twenty minutes, a girl outside and all that grass on my back. A hero for twenty minutes till they found Michael Morgan down by the lockers, nude and with a girl similarly clad and a mostly empty bottle of vodka. And my hero status vanished like a Weetbix at Louise's place round breakfast time.

But worse things have happened, and Louise was special. I planned to think about her for months, and I did. I knew I'd see her again. We'd gone outside together, hadn't we? And I did see her again. About twelve hundred
Weetbix later, in Moscow. I was in the lounge room, but Louise was in Moscow and we were together two minutes and twelve seconds. And Louise, despite the shoulders, looked much smaller than the East Germans.

And I cheered all four laps of her heat but she finished ninth-fastest overall, missing out on the final by one spot.

And it was a bad moment, a bad moment for both of us, when she got out of the pool and looked up at the board and saw her time, even though it was the best she’d ever done. And I wanted to tell her—I wanted to tell her but I wasn’t in Moscow—I wanted to tell her that in the end it didn’t matter. That a win would have been fine, well, great, but that what I actually liked was Louise.

And I’d been a hero myself, for about twenty minutes. I’d had my time in the spotlight but, Louise, it’s so fleeting anyway, for most of us. Michael Morgan might be a hero forever, long after his suspension at least, but that’s okay. That’s not what it’s about. It’s about time on the grass, talking, Tang, minutes on end when you want to ask for her number or maybe give her yours, whatever it is you do, but you don’t quite know how. Next time, maybe. Next time I’ll take the chance. Because if you don’t take the chance you’re not even a contender. Louise took the chance, trained all those months and didn’t make the final, and she was still just what I wanted.

Nick Earls

discussion

1. How important to this story is the choice of a first person narrator? How does this narrative strategy operate to construct both characters? How does it add to the humour that is integral to the story?

2. What attitudes and beliefs about adolescent gender relationships are foregrounded in this story?

3. In what ways does the story challenge some of the stereotypes of gendered identity and gender relationships that you may be familiar with from other texts in the culture?

4. What are some of the gaps and silences that you are able to complete because of your familiarity with the social practices or attitudes, values and beliefs operating in the culture?

5. What is the invited reading of this text?

6. What other readings could be made, and what factors would influence the production of such readings?
Activity

- Intervene in the story to construct an alternative outcome. You could alter roles and representations of the characters, and the plotline, to achieve your purpose.
- Share these interventions with your classmates and discuss the effects.

Reading across cultures

Our cultural knowledge and understandings shape, to a large extent, the values, attitudes and beliefs that we hold; as readers, these in turn influence our response to the world around us, including textual representations of that world. Some stories may provide challenges to some readers—those who do not have access to the cultural knowledge, assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and values that influence the construction of the text. Other stories may be more accessible to readers outside a particular culture because representations are shaped by some attitudes, values and beliefs that are shared across cultures. This applies not only to cultures outside Australia but also to the diversity of cultures within Australian society.

The stories in this section provide examples of different cultural constructs and representations.

Contemporary Australian author Tim Winton is well known for novels such as Cloudstreet, Dirt Music and Breath. His short story ‘Neighbours’ explores how the initial suspicion and intolerance of a young Australian couple change as they gradually come to appreciate the values, attitudes and beliefs of the migrant families who are their new neighbours.

Since the end of World War II, many people from other countries and cultures have settled in Australia. Close familiarity with aspects of one’s own distinct cultural heritage and the way social practices, attitudes, values and beliefs come to be seen as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ mean that those of other cultures may seem ‘strange’ or ‘foreign’. One response is to treat other cultures and their attitudes, values and beliefs with suspicion or even fear, whereas another potential response is to experience the enlarged horizons that result from the recognition and appreciation of difference. Winton’s story explores these different responses.

Neighbours

When they first moved in, the young couple were wary of the neighbourhood. The street was full of European migrants. It made the newly-weds feel like sojourners in a foreign land. Next door on the left lived a Macedonian family. On the right, a widower from Poland.
The newly-weds’ house was small, but its high ceilings and paned windows gave it the feel of an elegant cottage. From his study window, the young man could see out over the rooftops and used-car yards the Moreton Bay figs in the park where they walked their dog. The neighbours seemed cautious about the dog, a docile, moulting collie.

The young man and woman had lived all their lives in the expansive outer suburbs where good neighbours were seldom seen and never heard. The sounds of spitting and washing and daybreak watering came as a shock. The Macedonian family shouted, ranted, screamed. It took six months for the newcomers to comprehend the fact that their neighbours were not murdering each other, merely talking. The old Polish man spent most of his day hammering nails into wood only to pull them out again. His yard was stacked with salvaged lumber. He added to it, but he did not build with it.

Relations were uncomfortable for many months. The Macedonians raised eyebrows at the late hour at which the newcomers rose in the mornings. The young man sensed their disapproval at his staying home to write his thesis while his wife worked. He watched in disgust as the little boy next door urinated in the street. He once saw him spraying the cat from the back step. The child’s head was shaved regularly, he assumed, in order to make his hair grow thick. The little boy stood at the fence with only his cobalt eyes showing; it made the young man nervous.

In the autumn, the young couple cleared rubbish from their back yard and turned and manured the soil under the open and measured gaze of the neighbours. They planted leeks, onions, cabbage, brussels sprouts and broad beans and this caused the neighbours to come to the fence and offer advice about spacing, hilling, mulching. The young man resented the interference, but he took careful note of what was said. His wife was bold enough to run a hand over the child’s stubble and the big woman with black eyes and butcher’s arms gave her a bagful of garlic cloves to plant.

Not long after, the young man and woman built a henhouse. The neighbours watched it fall down. The Polish widower slid through the fence uninvited and rebuilt it for them. They could not understand a word he said.

As autumn merged into winter and the vermilion sunsets were followed by sudden, dark dusks touched and the smell of woodsmoke and the sound of roosters crowing day’s end, the young couple found themselves smiling back at the neighbours. They offered heads of cabbage and took gifts of grappa and firewood. The young man worked steadily at his thesis on the development of the twentieth-century novel. He cooked dinners for his wife and listened to her stories of eccentric patients and hospital incompetence. In the street they no longer walked with their eyes lowered. They felt superior and proud when their parents came to visit and to cast shocked glances across the fence.
In the winter they kept ducks, big, silent muscovies that stood about in the rain growing fat. In the spring the Macedonian family showed them how to slaughter and to pluck and to dress. They all sat around on blocks and upturned buckets and told barely-understood stories—the men butchering, the women plucking, as was demanded. In the haze of down and steam and fractured dialogue, the young man and woman felt intoxicated. The cat toyed with severed heads. The child pulled the cat’s tail. The newcomers found themselves shouting.

But they had not planned on a pregnancy. It stunned them to be made parents so early. Their friends did not have children until several years after being married—if at all. The young woman arranged for maternity leave. The young man ploughed on with his thesis on the twentieth-century novel.

The Polish widower began to build. In the late spring dawns, he sank posts and poured cement and began to use his wood. The young couple turned in their bed, cursed him behind his back. The young husband, at times, suspected that the widower was deliberately antagonising them. The young wife threw up in the mornings. Hay fever began to wear him down.

Before long the young couple realised that the whole neighbourhood knew of the pregnancy. People smiled tirelessly at them. The man in the deli gave her small presents of chocolates and him packets of cigarettes that he stored at home, not being a smoker. In the summer, Italian women began to offer names. Greek women stopped the young woman in the street, pulled her skirt up and felt her belly, telling her it was bound to be a boy. By late summer the woman next door had knitted the baby a suit, complete with booties and beanie. The young woman felt flattered, claustrophobic, grateful, peeved.

By late summer, the Polish widower next door had almost finished his two-car garage. The young man could not believe that a man without a car would do such a thing, and one evening as he was considering making a complaint about the noise, the Polish man came over with barrowfuls of wood-scraps for their fire.

Labour came abruptly. The young man abandoned the twentieth-century novel for the telephone. His wife began to black the stove. The midwife came and helped her finish the job while he ran about making statements that sounded like queries. His wife hoisted her belly about the house, supervising his movements. Going outside for more wood, he saw, in the last light of the day, the faces at each fence. He counted twelve faces. The Macedonian family waved and called out what sounded like their best wishes.

As the night deepened, the young woman dozed between contractions, sometimes walking, sometimes shouting. She had a hot bath and began to eat ice and demand liverwurst. Her belly rose, uterus flexing downward.
Her sweat sparkled, the gossamer highlit by movement and firelight. The night grew older. The midwife crooned. The young man rubbed his wife’s back, fed her ice and rubbed her lips with oil.

And then came the pushing. He caressed and stared and tried not to shout. The floor trembled as the young woman bore down in a squat. He felt the power of her, the sophistication of her. She strained. Her face mottled. She kept at it, push after push, assaulting some unseen barrier, until suddenly it was smashed and she was through. It took his wind away to see the look on the baby’s face as it was suddenly passed up to the breast. It had one eye on him. It found the nipple. It trailed cord and vernix smears and its mother’s own sweat. She gasped and covered the tiny buttocks with a hand. A boy, she said. For a second, the child lost the nipple and began to cry. The young man heard shouting outside. He went to the back door. On the Macedonian side of the fence, a small queue of bleary faces looked up, cheering, and the young man began to weep. The twentieth-century novel had not prepared him for this.

Tim Winton

discussion

1. The early part of the story foregrounds a mutual mistrust of different cultural attitudes, beliefs and practices. Identify some of the ways in which this mistrust is constructed.

2. What situations show that the newlyweds and their neighbours develop increasing familiarity with and acceptance of difference?

3. The story establishes a binary opposition between the different types of suburban communities. In the new neighbourhood, there is close interaction among neighbours; in the ‘expansive outer suburbs … good neighbours were seldom seen and never heard’. How is the reader positioned to respond to this binary?

4. Discuss the implications of the closing events of this story, and then consider the significance of the final line in particular: ‘The twentieth-century novel had not prepared him for this.’
Richard Frankland is an Indigenous Australian filmmaker, writer and activist. His story ‘Who took the children away?’ also examines cultural differences within Australia. He explores race relations and constructs these differences from an Indigenous perspective through the context of the Stolen Generation and evidence relating to the Commission of Inquiry into this.

Who took the children away?

The match misses the bin, I load up and flick again. Miss. The TV is blaring, some fantasy world with a guy who looks not only like he stepped out of a magazine, but also so smart he could get a couple of doctorate degrees. He’s solving forty-five murders an hour, walking off with the girl and driving a Porsche on a cop’s wage. I stand and look around the motel room. I look at the phone, no one to ring. Look at the paper, the work I do is all over the front page again. Don’t want to read it, they always miss the point anyway. I stare at Mr Beautiful on TV and laugh.

I grab hold of my briefcase and decide to look through the investigation papers; statements collected about lives, they tell a different story from the official one. All of a sudden I can hear an aunty’s voice. ‘He was a great horseman and drover. Well known in Moama and Echuca, everyone liked him. Men like him were really great men. Way they’ve been coming across in the Royal Commission hearings, you’d think they were just nobodies. As if nobody wants them, that they were unloved. That’s not true, they were dignified men—he was a gentleman.’

I close my eyes and see a young black man riding as if born to the saddle, wheeling his horse with great skill, guiding cattle. He flashes me a grin as he cuts yet another one out and skilfully brings his horse to a halt. I think he’s gunna talk to me—but the hero on TV brings me back to the motel room. He’s solved another murder, killed everyone and got another girl.

I flick idly through the statements, shaking the sleep from my head, and light another cigarette. The guy on the TV is smiling at me through the credits. Not a hair out of place even though he’s just saved the world. I give him the finger, say he wouldn’t know if his arse was on fire, but he keeps on smiling.

I lie back and think of a train ride that led to death and the questions of a grieving family. ‘He’d committed no crime, other than yelling out that he’s missed his station. Can’t understand why he was placed in a prison cell.’ He’d served his country. At one time that old man was a soldier. I easily fall through time and see a young man in uniform. He’s playing two-up behind a shed. There’s a group with him, mostly white, but they don’t seem to see his colour. He’s got them all laughing at something. I walk closer as he throws the coins in the air. He looks at me, smiling, and points to the coins. I look up and the coins become lost in the glare of the fluoro light of my motel room.
No more, I think, don’t think no more, it’ll send you crazy. I sit up and look at the videos I picked up from reception. I grab one at random and throw it in the machine. I stand to draw the curtains, my thoughts absorbed by the darkness outside, when the phone rings, startling me. I stare at it with contempt before answering it. It’s reception reminding me to put in my breakfast order. I silently question their motives. Have they done it out of kindness or for my money? I’m paranoid, I keep telling myself, they don’t all hate us. ‘Very cooperative and well mannered for a Black Deaths in Custody interviewing officer.’ No, I think, they don’t all hate us, they just can’t see their own racism.

The world of video has me in its thrall and I watch the previews leading into the movie. A slowly building theme song has started and the music pushes me back so that I’m knocking on the front door of a house. It’s a beautiful day and rock music is playing loudly somewhere inside. I can hear kids laughing the way that only kids can, and a flustered young mum answers my knocking.

The music has stopped now and we are sitting inside looking at photographs of a young man, he has clear eyes and a strong look. He’s standing in front of a truck proudly showing it to the world. She’s explaining to me what that truck meant to them and a single tear begins to form as their dreams lie shattered in her memory. One of the kids bursts into the room and I see how much he looks like his dad.

On the TV, the hero and his sidekick have burst into a room to capture any crooks or villains that may be hiding. I wonder about those heroes—what would they do in my situation? Could they even identify the villains, villains who don’t wear masks, not the kind you see on TV anyway.

I light another cigarette and my eye catches the breakfast order. I fill it out then put on a jacket—it’s cold out—and walk to reception. There’s a pub in the distance, maybe a hundred yards, it looks like it’s open. I decide to go for a drink. I’m shaking now and I can’t work out whether it’s the cold or my nerves.

I walk down the road towards the pub and stop to light a smoke. The pub carpark has about half a dozen cars in it. A slamming car door and muffled voices break the silence of the night. I think of sitting in my car listening to someone whose brother has died tell me ‘thanks, thanks’. I think, for what? I haven’t solved anything, haven’t resolved anything, not even close. I accept the thanks anyway and he shakes my hand, places a leather headband in it. I look behind him and see a prison officer and a minimum security prison sign. He can’t come with me, he’s in jail. Later I tie the headband to my guitar, and it stays there for years.

I walk through the pub door. Like all country pubs everyone looks as you come in. A little hostility in their eyes and manner—don’t ask me how, but I can feel it. I ignore them and walk straight to the bar and order a scotch and Coke, short glass, no ice, but not too much Coke. The barman silently
takes my order and my money. Everyone else resumes their conversations
and I concentrate on my drink, trying to escape the ghosts.

‘You an Aborigine, are ya?’

The voice comes from a weather-beaten face. Silently I nod my head, I
have heard this a thousand times before.

‘I grew up with your people.’ He looks at me smilingly for approval.

I take a sip and smile back, with the rest of the pub looking on. Having
proved his credentials, he’s now going to take the opportunity to claim a
degree in Aboriginality—probably regards himself as the local authority.
What power I wield. He looks over his shoulder to check that everyone has
seen my nod. Satisfied, he turns back to me.

‘They were all right back then.’

I wearily stare at him.

‘Bloody good footy players …’

Silent reflection as he delves into his memory for more accolades about
my race. I think about how he’d react if I told him that footy is a Koori game
… and what he’d do if I said I had just come from taking statements from
some of my people about how some of his people had imprisoned them.
That many of them had died.

‘Good on the knuckle too …’ Some of the pub have lost interest and
he glances over his shoulder in panic, realising he must do something to
regain their attention. ‘Drink too bloody much though.’

I look at him, taking in his bulbous nose and broken veins. His peers,
now sitting in silent disarray, look at me, waiting for my reaction. I knock
back my scotch and order another. I want to grab these guys by the back
of the head and run them through my life, run them through the stories
coming out of the Royal Commission, just so they can see the horror and
despair, the hate, the anger, the dispossession. I want them to wear my
shoes; to live my life just once, just so they know.

I want to turn their heads around so they look at themselves, sitting
there pissed while their wives are at home with the kids, while the front
page blares out how hard the farmers are doing it. One of his mates yells
out—saving me from having to answer, saving me from having to justify my
existence yet again. Relieved, I light another cigarette and let the scotch
take effect.

I decide to have one more. The barman answers my summons and
tentatively smiles, the smile disappearing as fast as my money. I think of
another smile, a gentle smile from a young girl talking about her uncle.
How he could protect her and her family, how he was taken away at the age
of eleven, how he came home after not seeing his family for some incredible
amount of years, and how he loved them.

I think of how he died—lost in a religion that never really forgave
him—lying on a toilet floor with a paintbrush protruding from his eye.
And I think of her tears, the way she quietly sobbed her hurt to me and
how helpless I felt.
I drink my scotch, faster this time, and feel it warm me against the cold. The blokes in the pub are ignoring me now, I don’t seem to be a threat to them. The mood in the room has long passed that stage where you feel claustrophobic—I’m feeling reckless anyway. But I ignore the other drinkers, there’s no way they could live in my world, they could never know my world—but I know theirs.

I finish my drink and walk outside, the fresh air sending cold fingers into my lungs. I hope that I can sleep tonight. In the distance I can see the motel and notice that the reception has closed. I realise that I haven’t put in my breakfast order, it’s still in my pocket. A song starts in my head, it’s Archie Roach singing about taking the children away. I look back at the pub and think of the guy at the bar who thinks he knows everything about my people. I wonder if he would have taken the children away.

Richard Frankland

discussion

1. How does the use of a first person Indigenous narrator position readers in this story?

2. Examine the juxtaposition of the narrator with:
   - the television representation of the ‘cop’ who is ‘solving forty-five murders an hour, walking off with the girl and driving a Porsche on a cop’s wage’
   - the representation of the young Aboriginal horseman ‘riding as if born to the saddle’

   What do these contrasts contribute to the construction of the representation of the narrator?

3. How does the narrator’s conversation at the hotel bar contribute to the story?

4. How does the use of ‘flashbacks’ contribute to narrative structure and reader positioning?

5. What are some ways in which different sets of attitudes, values and beliefs of readers might influence the reading of this story?
The following painting, a self-portrait, is described by the artist, Jaiwei Shen, as ‘a millennial joke’ in which the Y2K bug has transported him back to 1900. Note: it was feared that at midnight, at the start of the year 2000 and the new millennium, the world’s computer systems would be in danger of being infected by what was termed ‘the Y2K bug’. Computer owners were warned to install protection against this bug, which turned out to be a false alarm.
Although a contemporary painter, Jaiwei Shen adopts a retrospective persona and depicts himself in traditional Chinese attire. In the commentary that accompanies the painting in the source text *Federation: Australian Art and Society 1901–2001*, Jaiwei Shen says:

In this painting I pay tribute to Mr Mei Quong Tart. Behind my figure you can see the well-known ‘Quong Tart's Tea House’ in King Street, Sydney. In the last two decades of the 19th century, many famous Australians and visitors … frequented Quong Tart’s.

In 1890, the young Henry Lawson noted that amidst the anti-Chinese crusades, ‘the best known and perhaps the most respected gentleman in Sydney was a Chinaman, the philanthropic Mr Quong Tart’.

**discussion**

How does Jaiwei Shen construct his identity through contemporary and historical references?

Jaiwei Shen entered this painting for the Archibald Prize, an annual art award for portraits established on the bequest of JF Archibald, who was founder and editor (from 1887 to 1903) of the *Bulletin* magazine. This magazine vociferously advocated the White Australia Policy and carried the slogan ‘Australia for the White Man’. Jaiwei Shen says:

… I would hope that if Archibald were alive today in our multicultural society his attitudes would be quite different.

That is why I painted myself as a contemporary of Quong Tart and Archibald. Through the cockatoo, I show the harmony which exists between me as an immigrant living in Bundeena, and the local indigenous Australians.

**Activity**

Construct a narrative frame, concept map or plotline for a story that is suggested to you by the painting and the information from Jaiwei Shen. Try to integrate the cockatoo symbolically in your plan to explore issues surrounding Australian identities.
Flight

Cries of ‘Khawulele! Wenk’umntu!’ shattered the stillness of the saucer-like village nestling in the valley, surrounded by green hills and scrub-dotted mountains.

Echoes bounced from hilltops, clashed mid-air, ricocheted and fell in jumbled noises that boomed, invading our ears and jamming out all other sounds.

\[\text{weh weh weh khauu khauu khauu} \]
\[\text{leb leb leb tuu tuu!} \]

Like a powerful magnet, the commotion pulled us away from the rag dolls that had so occupied us but a moment before.

\[\text{lii-ii-iiiWuu-uuuuu!} \]
\[\text{Mmbaa—mbeeehh–ni!} \]
\[\text{Qhaaa-wuu-lee-lee-laant!} \]

An old man, short, tight-curled springs of wool on his head making a grayish-white skull cap, tottered past in what I saw was his earnest attempt at running. His left hand clasped the blanket loosely wrapped around his body; his right arm, from the shoulder, was stuck out as if from a toga. Thin, long, and bony, it swung back and front in time to his intended accelerated step. Held high in the hand, a knobkerri jutted out and away from his body. Each time he shouted—‘Mbambeni!—Catch her!’ he stretched out the arm holding the knobkerri, pointing the stick towards the mountain.

My eyes leapt to where he pointed. The mountain was playing a game of hide and seek with the sun. Or was it with the clouds? Anyway, half the mountain had disappeared. I threw my eyes towards the remaining half. There, distance-shrunk figures scurried, hurried, ran, and scrambled.

Ahead, a lone figure darted like a hare with a pack of dogs hard on its tail. The clouds were no idle players, I saw. They were the third party to this game; and they would make the telling difference.

Clearly, that day, I witnessed the birth of tears. The clouds wept and showered soft tears of mist onto the silent mountain. Would the fleeing figure gain the mist blanket in time? The sun smiled and the mist disappeared in a spray of long, hot, yellow needles, the children of the sun.

Sindiwe Magona, a short story writer, poet and autobiographer, was born in South Africa and lived in the black townships of Cape Town as a child. She was active in anti-apartheid struggles and has degrees in psychology, history and social work. The following story is set in the black homelands of South Africa, where there was extreme poverty. The homelands supplied a source of black labour for the mines and other industries. These male workers were only permitted to return home for one month of the year.

definition:

knobkerri: an African club or stick
There she was, clearly, I saw her. Surely, her pursuers too could see her?—see her as I did?

My insides churned. A hot ball of fear curled inside my stomach. But the clouds, not to be outdone, wept. Thick, fat, dark-grey spears fell. Fast and hard they came. Thick, fat; safe for her to be enveloped in and lost to her pursuers.

‘Uye phi? Uye phi? Where’s she gone?’

Sounds of distress from those who were bent on her capture reached me. I held my breath as I strained with her, willing her to elude them, urging her on and on and on.

My last glimpse of her: blue German-print dress paled to a soft sky-blue by distance and lack of light … there she was, flitting here and there between boulders, her long new-wife-length dress making her seem without fear. As she hurried escaping, she appeared to me to be riding the air—no part of her body making contact with the ground. 

Away she floated; the men plodded behind her.

I saw her waft into the wall of mist. I saw it close the crack she’d almost made gliding into it. Like a fish slicing into water, she’d but disturbed it. And it rearranged itself, accepting her into itself. And away from those who harried her.

I cannot remember her face at all. It was a long time ago and perhaps she had not tarried long with us. I don’t know. But I remember her leaving. And that is because it taught me about determination, the power of one’s will.

She was a young woman, a new wife. Her husband, my uncle, was away at work in one of the mines where all the men of the village went for a very long time. Later, much later, with great learning to aid me order my world, I would come to know the precise length of their stay—eleven months each year. However, this knowledge was light years away from me that fear-filled day long, long ago.

It must have been midday for the sun was well up and we children were already outside at play; that is, those of us too little to go to the one mud-walled, grass-thatched house called school.

I know I should’ve been sad at losing an aunt. I know she was a good makoti, cooked and cleaned well, and we children were saved from a lot of chores by her coming—new wives are worked like donkeys as initiation into their new status. I know I should have sympathized with my uncle who lost not only a wife but also the cattle, the lobola, he had given for her.

All I know, is the thrill I felt watching her escape into the thick grey cloud and mist.

Sindiwe Magona
'The blue bouquet' by Octavio Paz, a Mexican writer, explores issues relating to the dispossession of indigenous peoples. The story focuses on the Mexican post-colonial experience and draws on elements of surrealism to reinforce the invited reading. Unlike ‘Flight’, where some key cultural understandings that are necessary to make meaning are glossed in the text, ‘The blue bouquet’ assumes the reader will draw on knowledge of European colonisation and its effects of dispossession and disempowerment.

Complete the following activity before reading the story.

**Activity**

- Given the title, list five possible subjects for this story.
- Discuss these as a class and decide on the most likely one.

**The blue bouquet**

I woke covered with sweat. Hot steam rose from the newly sprayed, red-brick pavement. A gray-winged butterfly, dazzled, circled the yellow light. I jumped from my hammock and crossed the room barefoot, careful not to step on some scorpion leaving his hideout for a bit of fresh air. I went to the little window and inhaled the country air. One could hear the breathing
of the night, feminine, enormous. I returned to the center of the room, emptied water from a jar into a pewter basin, and wet my towel. I rubbed my chest and legs with the soaked cloth, dried myself a little, and, making sure that no bugs were hidden in the folds of my clothes, got dressed. I ran down the green stairway. At the door of the boarding house I bumped into the owner, a one-eyed taciturn fellow. Sitting on a wicker stool, he smoked, his eye half closed. In a hoarse voice, he asked:

‘Where are you going?’
‘To take a walk. It’s too hot.’
‘Hmmm—everything’s closed. And no streetlights around here. You’d better stay put.’

I shrugged my shoulders, muttered ‘back soon’, and plunged into the darkness. At first I couldn’t see anything. I fumbled along the cobbledstone street. I lit a cigarette. Suddenly the moon appeared from behind a black cloud, lighting a white wall that was crumbled in places. I stopped, blinded by such whiteness. Wind whistled slightly. I breathed the air of the tamarinds. The night hummed, full of leaves and insects. Crickets bivouacked in the tall grass. I raised my head: up there the stars too had set up camp. I thought that the universe was a vast system of signs, a conversation between giant beings. My actions, the cricket’s saw, the star’s blink, were nothing but pauses and syllables, scattered phrases from that dialogue. What word could it be, of which I was only a syllable? Who speaks the word? To whom is it spoken? I threw my cigarette down on the sidewalk. Falling, it drew a shining curve, shooting out brief sparks like a tiny comet.

I walked a long time, slowly. I felt free, secure between the lips that were at that moment speaking me with such happiness. The night was a garden of eyes. As I crossed the street, I heard someone come out of a doorway. I turned around, but could not distinguish anything. I hurried on. A few moments later I heard the dull shuffle of sandals on the hot stone. I didn't want to turn around, although I felt the shadow getting closer with every step. I tried to run. I couldn't. Suddenly I stopped short. Before I could defend myself, I felt the point of a knife in my back, and a sweet voice:

‘Don’t move mister, or I’ll stick it in.’
Without turning, I asked:
‘What do you want?’
‘Your eyes, mister,’ answered the soft, almost painful voice.
‘My eyes? What do you want with my eyes? Look, I’ve got some money. Not much, but it’s something. I’ll give you everything I have if you let me go. Don’t kill me.’
‘Don’t be afraid, mister. I won’t kill you. I’m only going to take your eyes.’

‘But why do you want my eyes?’ I asked again.
‘My girlfriend has this whim. She wants a bouquet of blue eyes. And around here they’re hard to find.’
‘My eyes won’t help you. They’re brown, not blue.’
‘Don’t try to fool me, mister. I know very well that yours are blue.’
‘Don’t take the eyes of a fellow man. I’ll give you something else.’
‘Don’t play saint with me,’ he said harshly. ‘Turn around.’

I turned. He was small and fragile. His palm sombrero covered half his face. In his right hand he had a country machete that shone in the moonlight.

‘Let me see your face.’ I struck a match and put it close to my face. The brightness made me squint. He opened my eyelids with a firm hand. He couldn’t see very well. Standing on tiptoe, he stared at me intensely. The flame burned my finger. I dropped it. A silent moment passed.

‘Are you convinced now? They’re not blue.’
‘Pretty clever, aren’t you?’ he answered. ‘Let’s see. Light another one.’
I struck another match, and put it near my eyes. Grabbing my sleeve, he ordered:

‘Kneel down.’ I knelt. With one hand he grabbed me by the hair, pulling my head back. He bent over me, curious and tense, while his machete slowly dropped until it grazed my eyelids. I closed my eyes.

‘Keep them open,’ he ordered.
I opened my eyes. The flame burned my lashes. All of a sudden he let me go.

‘All right, they’re not blue. Beat it.’

He vanished. I leaned against the wall, my head in my hands. I pulled myself together. Stumbling, falling, trying to get up again. I ran for an hour through the deserted town. When I got to the plaza, I saw the owner of the boarding house, still sitting in the front of the door. I went in without saying a word. The next day I left town.

Octavio Paz

Activity

Post-reading reflection

Given your expectations of the blue bouquet, what was your emotional reaction to the discovery of what the bouquet actually comprised?
The story thus relies on the dissonance between your expectation and what actually occurs.
Given the later information, how might you reread the description of the owner of the boarding house?
In a colonial context, what can ‘blue eyes’ and ‘brown eyes’ be read as signifying?

How does the reader know that the narrator is an outsider to the place and to the culture?

How does Paz foreground a physical sense of menace, and the alienation of the narrator from the outset?

Identify all the words and phrases associated with sight and seeing. Suggest reasons for this repetition and emphasis. Does the narrator ‘see’ or understand anything about this culture?

What reasons might underlie the Mexican’s girlfriend’s request for ‘a bouquet of blue eyes’?

How are readers positioned by this story? To whom, for example, are you most sympathetic or unsympathetic? Why?

How can the story be read as contesting dominant attitudes, values and beliefs about colonisation? To answer this question, you may need to do some research into colonisation and imperialism.

Activity

In groups, imagine and discuss the alternatives for the Paz story offered below. Then explain to the class how changing the narrator and narrative viewpoint changes the story.

**Group 1:** Discuss how the story might have been told by the owner of the boarding house.

- What is his impression of the particular American tourist and his attitude to Americans or tourists in general?
- What is his relationship with the events in the street and with either or both of the other Mexicans referred to in the incident?

**Group 2:** Discuss how the story might have been told by the man with the knife.

- What is his impression of the particular American tourist and his attitude to Americans or tourists in general?
- What is his relationship with either or both of the other Mexicans referred to in the incident?

**Group 3:** Discuss how the story might have been told by the girlfriend who requests blue eyes.

- What is her attitude to Americans and/or tourists in general? Why does she have this attitude?
- Why does she insist her boyfriend pursue this activity? What is her attitude to or relationship with him?

**Group 4:** Discuss how the story might be told if the person attacking was, in fact, the woman who wanted blue eyes. Discuss any evidence in the story that might support a reading that the attacker is a woman before considering the questions.

- What is her attitude to Americans or tourists in general?
- What is the basis of her motive for wanting a collection of blue eyes?
Activity

Choose one of the following tasks:

1. Using the above discussions as a starting point, rewrite the story from a different perspective.

2. Drawing on your reading and subsequent discussions, transform this story into a short play. You should consider your choices carefully. Do you plan to:
   - develop more overtly the story of dispossession implied by the story?
   - draw more overtly on the part of the story that explores the various forms of blindness, including moral blindness?
   - reframe the story in terms of the woman herself doing the attacking?

Reading texts with multiple voices

Sometimes an author will construct a text in which multiple voices and points of view are deliberately developed. These operate to structure the story by repositioning the reader through each incremental section of the story; the reader’s attitudes and assumptions shift as the versions of events and the representations of the characters change and develop.

Ernest Favenc was a colonial explorer, journalist and author. His explorations of Northern Australia extended from 1865 to 1888. Before he became a journalist, Favenc lived and worked on outback properties, where the inspiration for stories such as the following would have developed.

The Rumford Plains tragedy


It was a serious difficulty, and had occurred so suddenly that my presence of mind entirely forsook me—I saw no way out of it save instant flight. There was the dead body, slain by my hand, and in a few moments I should be confronted with the girl whom I had intended to make my wife. How was I to face her, knowing how fondly she had loved the poor victim?

The act had been quite unintentional. Although there had never been much love lost between us, I had not meant his death. It had been simply the fault of hasty temper on my side and unfortunate curiosity on his. I had ridden out that day, my heart filled with the gentlest feelings; the bright morning and sunny landscape seemed to whisper naught but peace, and now, by an inconsiderate blow, I had dispelled all my hopes, and saw no escape but in prompt and immediate disappearance from the scene. To
continue standing by the poor corpse would be the act of an idiot. By a strange chance no one was about; I had ridden up quite unperceived. So I mounted my horse and hastened back to the township which I had left that morning with such different feelings.

My duties at the bank that day (I was the manager of a small country branch) were, fortunately for me, of the slightest, for my mind was constantly running on the morning’s tragedy, and I was ceaselessly wondering if my deed had been discovered, and picturing the sorrow of the innocent girl whom I so fondly loved. At three o’clock I heard a voice in the bank asking the teller if I was in, and soon afterwards, to my amazement, Ah Foo, the Chinese cook at Rumford Plains, walked into the small apartment that served as manager’s room.

As he glanced at me with his cunning almond eyes I saw in a moment that my secret was known, and it did not need that he should take out two small objects and place them on the table to confirm this suspicion. For an instant I had wild thoughts of shooting him down with the bank revolver and swearing that he had tried to stick up the place, but I restrained myself in order to hear what he had to say.


‘Ah Foo,’ I said, ‘you’re a brick; here’s a sovereign for you.’

‘Alight, Misser Vawn. I no savee who kill him, only, when evelybody say, Misser Muspius, I laugh—’ and he laughed himself out of the room, only to reappear for an instant. ‘You go, see Missee Lawrence to-night?’ he whispered in a stage aside, and vanished.

Of course I would. I would make the most of the golden opportunity. Muspius, my hated rival, was evidently suspected, and Ah Foo had slyly confirmed these suspicions. I was safe, so long as I could bribe Ah Foo; at any rate, I would take his advice and go to Rumford Plains at once; it was only five miles, and I would arrange that the suspicions thrown on Muspius should be confirmed. I had taken the first step in crime; the second was easy.

II  Statement Made by John Muspius, Superintendent of Merridale Station.

It was a pure accident, but a most unfortunate one, to happen on the very morning when I rode over to Rumford Plains to propose to Miss Lawrence. Just as I was going to hang my horse up I saw Tommy standing at the low fence, with his head over the second rail, watching me. Now, I had had more than one bridle broken through his tricks, and after ineffectually telling him several times to clear out, I gave him a tap with the double of my whip. It caught him on the back of the neck, and, to my
astonishment, he dropped down dead. It struck me at once that no one would believe it was an accident, for only the other evening I had got into a dispute with Lawrence about shooting blacks in North Queensland; and he had said that he would not trust anyone's life in my hands. Of course he was in a temper because I had the best of the argument, but this accident happening just after such a remark would look altogether too suspicious; and besides, I dared not face Miss Lawrence, for I knew how fond she was of Tommy. There was no one about, so I just rode quietly off into Wattleville to think it over.

About half-past two that afternoon old Jennings, landlord of the Royal, told me that Ah Foo, the cook at Rumford Plains, wanted to see me. ‘Well, Ah Foo,’ I said, when the old scoundrel came in, ‘What do you want?’ I had no suspicion at the time that he had witnessed the unhappy affair. He grinned and made a motion with his arm like striking a blow, which at once told me that he knew all. ‘Welly unlucky, Misser Muspius,’ he said, ‘poor Tommy—dead.’

‘Ah!’ I said; ‘it can’t be helped. You know I never meant to kill him.’

‘I savee,’ he replied, ‘I saw you. Evelyone say Misser Vawn kill Tommy. I no savee, only laugh. Missee Lawrence cly, cly, cly.’ So that confounded bank jackeroo, Vaughan, was suspected, was he? Well, the best thing that could happen. I gave Ah Foo a sovereign, and he winked and said, ‘You go see Missee Lawrence, I tink welly good.’ Then he vanished. Of course I would not go out of my way to shift the blame on Vaughan, but if anything were said about the matter I would not hide my opinion of him. All’s fair in love and war. Besides, he had no business to be out there at that time in the morning; serve him right if it proved the means of getting him into trouble.

III    Extract from the Diary of Miss Selina Lawrence.

May 1 st.—Such an unhappy commencement to the day; I never thought I should feel so glad afterwards as I do now. About 11 o’clock papa came to me to say that poor Tommy was dead—killed, seemingly, by a blow on the back of the neck! I almost fainted when I heard it. The men were all away at the yards, and no stranger had been seen about the place. Poor Tommy! I cried bitterly all the morning. His body was laid out and I put some flowers on it, he was such a good-hearted, faithful fellow. Papa is very indignant, and says he will never rest until the guilty party is found out; I never saw him so roused before. He says it is a most abominable crime to be committed in broad day. While I was still sorrowing over poor Tommy’s fate the mail arrived. Such glorious news! A letter from Fred saying that his uncle has retired and handed his practice over to him; so now there’s no reason why we can’t get married at once and bring our long engagement to an end—so he writes. Papa’s very pleased, too; he said that the practice is worth nearly two thousand a year, and we are actually going to start for Sydney tomorrow morning, so I’m tired out packing up.
Mr. Vaughan and Mr. Muspius came over this morning. They both seemed very absent-minded and jealous of each other. I suppose Papa told them what had happened when they went out on the verandah to smoke, for they both, I am glad to say, went away early.

Poor Tommy! This good news put his death right out of my head for the moment.

IV Statement of Ah Foo, Cook at Rumford Plains.

(Translated into ordinary English.)

I remember May 1st. I was looking out of the kitchen window when I saw Mr. Vaughan ride up. Just as he approached the house, Tommy, Miss Lawrence’s pet emu, went up and pecked at the buckles of his saddle-pouch, and his horse started back and broke the bridle. Mr. Vaughan turned back and caught his horse, and when Tommy came up again, he hit him with the butt-end of his whip on the back of the neck, and knocked him down. After looking at him for a moment, he got on his horse again and rode back to town. I went out to see if Tommy was dead, and as he still moved, I finished him, for he was always in mischief. Just then I saw Mr. Muspius coming, so I put Tommy up against the fence with his head through, to hold him up, and returned to the kitchen. Mr. Muspius looked round when he got off and saw Tommy, so he gave him a flick with the double of the stock-whip he was carrying, and Tommy tumbled down. He thought he’d killed him, for he got on his horse again and rode away just the same as Mr. Vaughan. I put poor Tommy up again with his head through the fence, and then Mr. Lawrence came along. ‘There’s that d— emu,’ he said, ‘trying to get into the garden;’ and he picked up a stick and threw it at him, and down went Tommy. I came out and looked at him and he looked at me. ‘My word,’ I said, ‘Missee Lawrence make a fuss.’ ‘Hush,’ he said, ‘you no savee anything,’ and he gave me a pound—and he went in to tell Missus some ‘bomniable wletch’ killed Tommy.

That afternoon I went into Wattleville, and Mr. Muspius gave me a pound not to tell, and Mr. Vaughan gave me another. Then, in the evening, Missee Lawrence came into the kitchen and said: ‘Ah Foo, I’m going to Sydney tomorrow morning to get married. Here’s a pound to bury poor Tommy properly.’

Next morning young Wilson, the new-chum, from the next station, came over, and he said, when he saw Tommy: ‘Ah Foo, I want an emu-skin to send home to England, to say I shot him. You skin me this nicely and I’ll give you a pound.’

That welly good emu, that makee me flive pounds.

Ernest Favenc
The inspiration for Martyn Hereward's story 'The clearing' derived from his conversations with people who lived in New Guinea during World War II. In this story, the multiple voices and the different points of view contribute to the ambiguity of the readings of what is in fact a simple sequence of events.

The clearing

I stepped into the clearing and the cicadas suddenly stopped singing. I wondered how they knew to do that. The silence seemed to swell inside my head. The next thing I knew I was spinning like a top, going round and round in slow motion. Then I was lying flat on my face, my mouth full of moss and bark. I wanted to laugh then but I could not move.

* * *

When Curly copped one from the Jap I could see he was hurt bad. He just lay there. I thought to myself, the poor bastard can't get up. I'm gonna have to go in there and get him. I could see where the shot had come from, clump of trees on the edge of the forest, thick and green it was. Bastards, I thought. Just sitting up there waiting. I didn't hang around, just dropped
to the ground and started slithering, snake-like through the undergrowth. When I got to the edge of the clearing I popped my head up to have a bit of a look. As far as I could see Curly hadn’t moved, he was lying with his face in the dirt. There was about twenty metres between me and him so I took it careful, going slow like and keeping my head down. There was a bit of bushy scrub and some long grass but that was about all, so off I set remembering everything from training and thinking bloody oath I never thought I’d be doing this in the middle of the bloody jungle in bloody New Guinea. I don’t think there was more shots fired then, but I wouldn’t swear to it for I was holding my breath and praying that the Japs hadn’t seen me, course I knew they had. Suddenly I was through the grass and there was Curly, he was spluttering a bit and there was blood in his mouth but he was breathing all right. I tried to get his pack off him but it wouldn’t come free because of the way he was lying so I cut the straps and shoved it away. Then I rolled him over, slow and careful. Poor bastard had got one high up in the chest, there was blood everywhere but there was nothing I could do, so I thought bloody hell I’m going to have to drag him back to cover. I didn’t know if I could. He looked at me and I think he knew who I was but he couldn’t talk so I said, take it easy mate we’ll have you out of here and he sort of smiled. I tried to push him but he wouldn’t shift, so I knew then I was going to have to stand up if I wanted to get him moving. Well, I thought, it might as well be now as later, the poor bastard’s losing blood so I said a quick prayer to God knows who, took a hold of his uniform, jumped up and dug in my heels.

* * *

There’s always one, isn’t there? One bright swivel-eyed bastard who insists on playing the hero and covering himself in glory. Everyone knows the orders. They’re standing orders. Captain Maitland and I had made that patently clear. ‘No bloody heroics,’ I told them. ‘We know the Japs are up there somewhere. We move slowly. We play it by the book.’

Not an easy job, damn it, especially as some of these bright boys from the country think they’re straight out of the comic books. Give them a uniform and a gun and they think they’re straight out of the comic books.

I’ve had trouble with O’Brien before. He was the one who gave me some lip the first day we arrived in this God-forsaken country. ‘Ease up, Sergeant,’ he said. ‘This is New bloody Guinea not New South Wales.’

I thought, right you bastard, you’ll keep. I’ve met his sort before. Bloody barrack room clowns who join up and think they know it all. If I had my way I’d break both his bloody legs. That’d send him home in a hurry. I looked across at Captain Maitland, but he didn’t seem to be listening. He’s a good bloke, the captain, don’t get me wrong, but he’s no soldier. He doesn’t concentrate for one thing, I mean who else would walk
into that clearing like he did? Back at camp they say he’s got too much imagination. If you ask me, I don’t think he’s got enough.

‘Get back!’ I shouted at O’Brien, but he didn’t take a blind bit of notice.

I got my gun out and thought to myself, the bastard has got to stick his head up soon if he’s going to do any good, and then the Japs are going to blow him out of the clearing. I shouted to the rest of the men to give him cover and to take aim at the clump of trees on the far side of the clearing. We knew they were in there somewhere.

For a long while nothing happened.

Then the grass parted and Private O’Brien stood up. He was leaning backwards and trying to drag something through the bush.

‘Covering fire!’ I shouted, and all hell broke loose. I let off a couple of rounds myself, and I could see the smoke over by the forest. It didn’t last long, I guess the Japs realised we were on to them and moved away fast. When I looked back at the clearing there was nothing to be seen.

* * *

I was quite close to the clearing when the captain was hit. It was beautiful. He raised one arm high in the air and twisted like a fast bowler appealing to the umpire or a puppet spinning slowly round as the strings went slack. There was a hollow crack as the air went out of him, then he buckled at the knees and down he went. There was no other sound. A red rose began to appear on his right shoulder like some rare medal as he fell.

It was very quiet. The jungle steamed, and the hot stench of decay weighed heavily on tree, fern and man. It was two o’clock in the afternoon.

I wiped the sweat out of my eyes.

I knew that Pat O’Brien would go in after him. Pat was like that: a doer, a scout, a tough kid from Ireland with all the hard edges still on him. His eyes were deep blue and reminded you of the oceans on a clear day and his hair was a bird’s nest after it had been raided by small boys. When you saw Pat, you smiled.

Pat made his way towards the captain, wriggling in the undergrowth. I watched the grasses sway, then stop. The forest held its breath. There was no breeze. The birds folded their wings and waited.

When the firing began I saw it all. Pat stood up with his back to us. He was bent over as if he was hauling a sack of coal across the back yard. A blaze of red greeted us from under the tall gums across the clearing. Pat was still standing. I heard Sergeant Fallon barking out orders behind me and then more gunfire. Still Pat stood, the grasses waving at his feet like the swell of the tide on Bondi beach. He seemed to be caught up in the heat, a blur, a smudge of shadow, and then he buckled up. He was thrown backwards. His legs lurched forwards, but his body snapped backwards.

I saw it all.
I had not picked up my rifle through the whole incident. Pat’s legs were broken, but they were broken from the back.

... 

I tried to tell Private O’Brien about my arm but I couldn’t make any sound. I was ashamed of myself. It was odd but I couldn’t feel any pain. After a while I couldn’t see Private O’Brien any more. I lay there and stared up at the cloudless blue sky and wondered if we were winning the war.

Then all around me, as one, the cicadas resumed their chorus.

Martyn Hereward

**discussion**

1. The story is told by four shifting narrative voices that position the reader to respond to the same event differently. Identify each speaker. Explain how each one contributes new information about the events and indicates possible motives for the actions that take place.

2. What dominant attitudes and beliefs about war are challenged in this story?

3. How is the reader positioned to view Pat O’Brien’s actions?

4. How is the reader positioned to trust or rely on the recount of the fourth narrator?

**Activity**

The stories in this section demonstrate various ways of using multiple narrative voices for particular purposes and effects. Drawing on knowledge gained from your reading of these texts, produce a short story, using multiple narrative points of view as the structuring device.

Use the following painting, *Nighthawks*, as a stimulus. It is by American artist Edward Hopper, who specialised in painting scenes of city life that depict a mood of loneliness and alienation. Consider some of the possibilities and effects of narrative viewpoints that might be suggested by this painting:

- a multi-narrative viewpoint presented from the point of view of each of the four characters inside the café
- a first person narrative by the café worker, interchanging with excerpts from the conversation of the couple
a third person narrative from the point of view of an unseen character: the person standing across the street from the café from whose vantage point we see this scene and who may or may not have a relationship with one or more of the characters

- a third person omniscient narrator
- a multi-narrative point of view based on reference to the image here only as an artwork.

1 Before constructing your short story, consider the possibilities that would result from:
   a your choice of narrator
   b your selection of narrative genre; for example, romance, spy, science fiction/fantasy
   c attitudes, values and beliefs that you mobilise, the representations that you construct, and ways of manipulating the multiple ‘voices’ to construct the characters

2 On completion, read your narrative to the class, explaining how your choices influenced the construction of the text.
Moving beyond narrative realism

As we have seen, texts provide a version or versions of events to invite readers to accept the propositions offered by the text—accept it as ‘being real’ and respond in particular ways. Narratives, thus, typically seek to involve us in the text in ways that enable us to forget, for the duration of the story, that we are reading fictions that are selective constructions.

Other choices could have been made to position readers quite differently. Some writers construct stories that are deliberately open-ended and thus do not have closure. Others offer multiple possibilities that can expose the ideological work that certain genres or text types may perpetuate. Some contemporary writers make deliberate choices to the reader the ‘constructedness’ of the text. Such a choice might be to disrupt the narration in some way by commenting on—even undermining or subverting—what is happening in a third person, seemingly realist, narrative.

The setting and characters that Robert Kelly establishes in his short story ‘Rosary’ are vague and undefined. This adds to the atmosphere of the story. Kelly deliberately avoids a sense of closure to appeal to readers’ imaginations and to enable them to speculate about alternative possibilities that he places before them.

Rosary

Here is a man walking on a road under the half-moon. The trees are tall and well-furred; the light is little. In his left hand, sometimes swinging at his side and sometimes held lightly poised over his heart, he counts the crystal beads of a rosary. After a quarter of a mile of dark road, he passes a large building of some hard to determine kind. In a ground floor wing, one room is brightly lit; near a window sits a woman with glossy black hair, bent to some papers. The man admires the profile, the hair, the air of industriousness. He likes people who work hard. He walks on, dismissing the notion of rapping on window or door and chatting with the woman. It must be frightening to be a woman alone in a building at night, when the building itself is alone in the countryside, nothing for half a mile round except trees and a man with crystal beads in his hand and the young deer he had seen cross the road in front of him a few minutes back. She would be scared if I knocked, he thought, and walked on.

Now it may be that before the man had drawn abreast of the window the woman had seen him coming, had looked out casually from a darkened window in another room and seen this man stepping up the intermittently moonlit road. It may be that the gleam of crystal in his hand seemed to her the gleam of moon on dagger. It may be that she longed for this silent shadowy assassin to come destroy her, to rescue her from hard work or
loneliness or glossy hair. It may be that she posed at the lighted window to woo his attention, and long after he passed still hoped he might be lurking in the rhododendrons. Perhaps ten minutes later she bravely, desperately stepped out of the unbolted door and stood on the lawn and saw no one but the same deer browsing under the fruit tree. Or not the same: who can tell one animal from another?

Robert Kelly

discussion

1 How would you describe the atmosphere of the story? Identify words and phrases that help to establish this atmosphere.

2 What grammatical choices does Kelly make in the second paragraph to destabilise the narrative direction of the first paragraph? Why?

3 Identify the different directions that are on offer in the second paragraph. Some could be interrelated to produce a certain type of story. What narrative genres (for example, crime fiction, romance) could be developed from these alternatives? Consider the ideological work that would be done by these different genres.

Activity

1 Retain the first paragraph of this story but then intervene to construct an alternative ending, selecting one of the genres identified in the discussion above. This ending should be about the same length as the original. Write a brief overview of how your choice of genre mobilised certain attitudes, values and beliefs that led to a particular sequence of events and particular outcomes for the story.

2 To consider further the ideological work being done by Robert Kelly’s text, change the gender of the characters in paragraph one and rewrite the original story by transposing the pronouns. Then write two or three paragraphs reflecting on ways in which the changed text opens up completely different readings.

Even more overtly than ‘Rosary’, Margaret Atwood’s ‘Happy endings’ uses a series of alternative possibilities as a structuring device. Atwood’s choices are, however, not merely about structure but about destabilising the predictable narrative certainties often associated with particular genres. Atwood invites the reader to explore a series of different possibilities that play with a basic plotline of ‘boy meets girl’. Each variation on the basic plotline presented in ‘A’ positions the
reader differently, and thus exposes how all texts are constructions in which an author makes a series of selective choices. Her story demonstrates the ideological work of texts. In particular, Atwood focuses on the way that stories ‘shut down’ or ‘close’, and exposes the contribution this makes to the ideological work being done.

**Happy endings**

John and Mary meet.
What happens next?
If you want a happy ending, try A.

**A**
John and Mary fall in love and get married. They both have worthwhile and remunerative jobs which they find stimulating and challenging. They buy a charming house. Real estate values go up. Eventually, when they can afford live-in help, they have two children, to whom they are devoted. The children turn out well. John and Mary have a stimulating and challenging sex life and worthwhile friends. They go on fun vacations together. They retire. They both have hobbies which they find stimulating and challenging. Eventually they die. This is the end of the story.

**B**
Mary falls in love with John but John doesn’t fall in love with Mary. He merely uses her body for selfish pleasure and ego gratification of a tepid kind. He comes to her apartment twice a week and she cooks him dinner, you’ll notice that he doesn’t even consider her worth the price of a dinner out, and after he’s eaten the dinner he makes love to her and after that he falls asleep, while she does the dishes so he won’t think she’s untidy, having all those dirty dishes lying around, and puts on fresh lipstick so she’ll look good when he wakes up, but when he wakes up he doesn’t even notice, he puts on his socks and his shorts and his pants and his shirt and his tie and his shoes, the reverse order from the one in which he took them off. He doesn’t take off Mary’s clothes, she takes them off herself, she acts as if she’s dying for it every time, not because she likes sex exactly, she doesn’t, but she wants John to think she does because if they do it often enough surely he’ll get used to her, he’ll come to depend on her and they will get married, but John goes out the door with hardly so much as a good-night and three days later he turns up at six o’clock and they do the whole thing over again.

Mary gets run-down. Crying is bad for your face, everyone knows that and so does Mary but she can’t stop. People at work notice. Her friends tell her John is a rat, a pig, a dog, he isn’t good enough for her, but she can’t believe it. Inside John, she thinks, is another John, who is much nicer. This other John will emerge like a butterfly from a cocoon, a Jack from a box, a pit from a prune, if the first John is only squeezed enough.
One evening John complains about the food. He has never complained about the food before. Mary is hurt.

Her friends tell her they've seen him in a restaurant with another woman, whose name is Madge. It's not even Madge that finally gets to Mary: it's the restaurant. John has never taken Mary to a restaurant. Mary collects all the sleeping pills and aspirins she can find, and takes them and a half a bottle of sherry. You can see what kind of a woman she is by the fact that it's not even whiskey. She leaves a note for John. She hopes he'll discover her and get her to the hospital in time and repent and then they can get married, but this fails to happen and she dies.

John marries Madge and everything continues as in A.

C

John, who is an older man, falls in love with Mary, and Mary, who is only twenty-two, feels sorry for him because he's worried about his hair falling out. She sleeps with him even though she's not in love with him. She met him at work. She's in love with someone called James, who is twenty-two also and not yet ready to settle down.

John on the contrary settled down long ago: this is what is bothering him. John has a steady, respectable job and is getting ahead in his field, but Mary isn't impressed by him, she's impressed by James, who has a motorcycle and a fabulous record collection. But James is often away on his motorcycle, being free. Freedom isn't the same for girls, so in the meantime Mary spends Thursday evenings with John. Thursdays are the only days John can get away.

John is married to a woman called Madge and they have two children, a charming house which they bought just before the real estate values went up, and hobbies which they find stimulating and challenging, when they have the time. John tells Mary how important she is to him, but of course he can't leave his wife because a commitment is a commitment. He goes on about this more than is necessary and Mary finds it boring, but older men make good lovers so on the whole she has a fairly good time.

One day James breezes in on his motorcycle with some top-grade California hybrid and James and Mary get higher than you'd believe possible and they climb into bed. Everything becomes very underwater, but along comes John, who has a key to Mary's apartment. He finds them stoned and entwined. He's hardly in any position to be jealous, considering Madge, but nevertheless he's overcome with despair. Finally he's middle-aged, in two years he'll be bald as an egg and he can't stand it. He purchases a handgun, saying he needs it for target practice—this is the thin part of the plot, but it can be dealt with later—and shoots the two of them and himself.

Madge, after a suitable period of mourning, marries an understanding man called Fred and everything continues as in A, but under different names.
D
Fred and Madge have no problems. They get along exceptionally well and are good at working out any little difficulties that may arise. But their charming house is by the seashore and one day a giant tidal wave approaches. Real estate values go down. The rest of the story is about what caused the tidal wave and how they escape from it. They do, though thousands drown, but Fred and Madge are virtuous and lucky. Finally on high ground they clasp each other, wet and dripping and grateful, and continue as in A.

E
Yes, but Fred has a bad heart. The rest of the story is about how kind and understanding they both are until Fred dies. Then Madge devotes herself to charity work until the end of A. If you like, it can be 'Madge', 'cancer', 'guilty and confused', and 'bird watching'.

F
If you think this is all too bourgeois, make John a revolutionary and Mary a counterespionage agent and see how far that gets you. Remember, this is Canada. You'll still end up with A, though in between you may get a lustful brawling saga of passionate involvement, a chronicle of our times, sort of. You'll have to face it, the endings are the same however you slice it. Don't be deluded by any other endings, they're all fake, either deliberately fake, with malicious intent to deceive, or just motivated by excessive optimism if not by downright sentimentality.

The only authentic ending is the one provided here:

John and Mary die. John and Mary die. John and Mary die.

So much for endings. Beginnings are always more fun. True connoisseurs, however, are known to favour the stretch in between, since it’s the hardest to do anything with.

That’s about all that can be said for plots, which anyway are just one thing after another, a what and a what and a what and a what.

Now try How and Why.

Margaret Atwood

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Activity

1. List the ways in which Atwood creates shifts in reader positioning in each version from ‘B’ to ‘F’.
2. Select a simple plotline with which you are familiar—for example, ‘hero saves planet’. Create a similar series of incremental alternative endings.
3. When you have completed your story, indicate how readers are positioned to respond differently to each version.
We have seen how some authors, such as Paz and Bradbury, disrupt traditional narrative realism, juxtaposing the mundane and the surreal for specific effect. In the following short story, Robert Drewe, a contemporary Australian writer, adopts the ubiquitous setting of a gym, where the protagonist routinely uses an exercise bike.

**The obituary of Gina Lavelle**

While crocodiles leapt out of the muddy African river and grabbed river-fording wildebeests by the snout, Clare Wolfe read the morning paper. She set the exercise bike's controls for thirty minutes on the cardio setting—hills of varying steepness alternating with plateaus and valleys—which was generally the time it took her to read the newspaper from end to end. Not sport, finance or the classifieds, but everything else. If she wasn't diverted while she pedalled, her body announced it was exhausted after only five minutes. But if she was engrossed in something, anything other than the compilation of animal maulings and flamboyant human bloopers on the gym's TV, her legs and lungs seemed oblivious to the exertion and she could pedal to the time limit.

Her forty-eighth birthday was approaching and weight-loss hints had been made at home. More than hints—Gavin had been surprisingly hurtful, especially since he'd never looked trimmer himself. She'd decided it was time to join a gym. Secretly. She liked the idea, a few months down the track, of surprising him with a svelte new HealthWorks body.

The floor exercises and weights were still a novelty and diverting in a heavy, repetitive way, but she found stationary cycling so boring that it had taken her a month even to begin to benefit from this supposedly valuable aerobic exercise. HealthWorks was on the first floor, above a hair-removal clinic, discount book warehouse and Oodles of Noodles, and the exercise bikes and StairMasters were lined up along the plate-glass window overlooking Pier Street. There was a wide view of the river.

On the first few visits it had been interesting enough while she pedalled to gaze at the Johnson River streaming one way or the other below her. Although crocodile- and wildebeest-free, it was quite scenic if you disregarded the fort-like public toilet dominating the near bank and focused instead on the far, mangrove-covered shore. For an estuary its currents were also extraordinarily fast-flowing. Only three weeks ago, reddened by ten days of heavy rain from the trailing edge of Cyclone Laura, it had briefly resembled that muddy African river on the TV, and she'd watched fallen trees, a cane chaise longue and a bloated sheep speed past on their way to the river mouth and then, tiny specks, bump over the bar and out into the Pacific.

But apart from sport-fishing boats and the weekly Seniors’ Coffee Tours on the paddle-steamer *Mississippi Gambler*, it wasn’t normally a busy river, and the view of distant mangroves and emerging or disappearing sandbanks, a rusted dredge, the usual two or three elderly breakwater fishermen, a scattering of
gulls, pelicans and cormorants, and of course the toilet edifice, quickly palled. After only a few minutes of pedalling she was bored and puffing.

So Clare tried the diversion of the TV on which Darren Ho, the gym proprietor, continually ran his compilations of race-car crashes, skiing accidents, bungee-jumping miscalculations, zebra-seeking lionesses, wedding-day mishaps (tipsy mother-of-the-bride falls into cake; nervous groom projectile vomits over priest) and her least favourite—the crocs surging out of the river into the migrating wildebeest herd. For a muscle man with exaggeratedly huge shoulders and pectorals, Darren was quite mild-mannered, although Clare found his shaved legs and armpits almost as disconcerting as his taste in entertainment. There was something about sporting accidents, and harmless animals being torn apart by predators, that sat uneasily with the purpose of the gym. They made her too anxious to keep pedalling. The marriage mishaps were wearing a bit thin, too.

The street scene below had also failed as an exercise diversion. Apparently, drunken fights and vandalism were rife when the midnight crowds spilled out of the pubs, but not much happened in daytime Pier Street. As she pedalled she’d sometimes guess which passers-by were heading for the full body wax, which ones for a remaindered airport novel or Thai take-away. From their general age, shape and clothing, however, and their propensity for electric oldster-buggies ostentatiously trailing two or even three Australian flags, not many of them ever seemed candidates for these experiences. In any case, the street scene also accounted for a few minutes’ pedalling.

But the newspaper distraction worked well. The minutes and mock-kilometres flew by. Two birds with one stone—she was up to date these days on politics, celebrity misdemeanours, Third World earthquakes, fine dining, the trend towards olive growing, suicide bombing and most of the current wars. On the day in question, however, the paper seemed slimmer, the world a calmer place than usual. Fifteen minutes into her exercise routine and she’d nearly finished reading. Only the obituaries stood between her and the weather, comics and horoscopes. On the page before her was a photograph of a glamorously haughty, early-1960s-era blonde entering a courthouse besieged by press reporters and cameramen. The heading said *The Complete Goodtime Girl*. Clare began reading the obituary of a woman called Gina Lavelle.

The name rang no bells. Gina Lavelle, she read, was by turns Las Vegas showgirl, B-movie actress, gangster’s moll, perjurer, stripper and memoirist. Intrigued, Clare kept reading, and pedalled on. Born Ruby-Ann Dulch to deeply religious Baptist parents in San Marcos, Texas, she was convicted of perjury in 1960 when her boyfriend, the racketeer Giuseppe ‘Joey the Nose’ Goldman, was tried for tax evasion. Her year in gaol was fatal to her nascent Hollywood career.

Clare looked up from the page for a moment to wipe her damp forehead. On the screen above her a racing car lost a wheel, skittered off the track, bounced, rolled, burst into flames and segued into two lionesses, working ruthlessly in tandem, stalking a zebra foal. Below her, perhaps a hundred metres east down Pier Street, an off-white Toyota Prado was backing into a space by the breakwater.
Clare turned back to the obituary. *Ruby-Ann ran away from home at fifteen to enter and win a Marilyn Monroe look-alike contest, and became a super-size bra model and Las Vegas showgirl. By the age of eighteen, she had married twice and had two children.*

From the exercise bike she couldn't see the Prado's licence plate, but it was a common model, as was the colour, and most of them had that type of roof-rack. She kept up her pedalling rate. Little red electronic numbers told her eighty calories and three kilometres had gone. Eighty calories was just a small apple, or half a cappuccino. On-screen, a bungee-jumper's shocked friends were stammering that they couldn't understand how the accident had happened when Troy had made the same jump from the top of Victoria Falls three times before, and in the wet season. One thing they agreed on was that he would have wanted to go that way. Clare refocused and read: *An inveterate attention-seeker, Gina Lavelle came to public notice when her regular nightclub antics earned her a four-page spread in *Life* magazine. Later, working as a highly paid stripper, she was romantically involved with Albert Anastasia, head of the so-called Murder, Inc.*

On Clare pedalled. The priest on-screen silently mouthed, ‘Do you take this woman …’ and, in anticipation, Clare managed to avert her face as, once more, the young groom, ashen and sickly, vomited over the priest's robes. As always, the bride's face was a picture. A hundred calories gone, twenty minutes, four kilometres. Down the end of Pier Street, sitting previously unnoticed on the breakwater, a dark-haired woman slowly stood up just then, brushed back her hair and strolled, smiling, towards the Prado. The southerly breeze gusting across the river ruffled her billowy skirt. Gulls hung in the air above her. Choppy waves snapped against the break-water. Clare couldn't make out the woman's face but her body was slender and Clare somehow knew she was attractive.

A man got out of the Prado and faced the dark-haired woman, but he made no move towards her. He stayed close to the car, his back to the street, standing perfectly still, as if watching her intently as she approached him, as if (Clare imagined) he was appreciating the sight of her. Drinking her in. When the woman reached him, she moved into his arms and they kissed and held each other for a long moment. His back was still to Clare. Did he have a small bald spot? What sort of jacket was he wearing? Obstacles were in the way—the street verge of oleander bushes with pink flowers, litter bins, telephone poles, gulls hovering low in the wind, pedestrians—and it was hard to make out anything more.

The man and the woman got into the car and the Prado pulled out from the kerb and accelerated away. In Africa, the zebra herd grazed upwind. Camouflaged in the veldt grass, the lionesses crouched low and inched forward on their bellies. In close-up you could see flies crawling on the lions’ faces, in their eyes and lips. They paid no attention.

The obituary of Gina Lavelle, nee Ruby-Ann Dulch, said her memoir, *All Woman*, boasted of affairs with more than 2000 men, including several US senators, three FBI investigators, Joe DiMaggio, Howard Hughes, Johnny Weissmuller, Cary Grant, Frank Sinatra and John Wayne. Her claims to have been
President John F. Kennedy’s lover when he was still a college boy had never been proven. But the way Gina Lavelle stared so languidly from the photograph, Clare could believe anything of her, and nothing.

She was pedalling faster now, and the machine was vibrating so much the newspaper slid to the floor. She pedalled even faster, traversing a continent, a Grand Canyon, of illuminated rectangular highlands, gorges and buttes. Without lessening her speed she reached her preset half-hour and flashing red letters on a dashboard above the handlebars beeped congratulations to her, saying *High Five!* and *Cool Down Now!* She pedalled on. The whole electronic landscape fell away behind her, the hills and valleys now flatlined and defeated. But she kept pedalling, even through the growing discomfort in her chest. For the life of her, as long as she could still breathe, Clare Wolfe couldn’t imagine ever stopping.

Robert Drewe

discussion

1. How does Drewe establish the disengagement of his central character or protagonist, Clare Wolfe, from the reality of the setting or environment of the gym?

2. How does this capture the ways in which we can disconnect from the ‘real world’ and be subsumed in and by our thoughts and imagination? Think of times and places when you do this yourself.

3. How does Drewe represent the representations of world events that occur in the news? Why might we be simultaneously engaged by, but seek disengagement from, such sensationalised, graphic and disturbing events?

4. Clare observes the passersby from her vantage point by the large glass windows of the gym. Comment on Drewe’s narrative strategy of switching between her detachment from the television images she sees and her similarly detached reaction to events taking place in the real world around her.

5. What apparent impact does reading the obituary of Gina Lavelle have upon Clare? Why does she keep pedalling the exercise bike, despite its electronic warnings to her?

Activity

Drewe ends his narrative at the climax, enabling the reader’s thoughts and imagination to continue beyond the tale. Write a paragraph that provides more specific closure to his story.
Extension

These surreal in-camera images were created by Samantha Everton, an Australian photo-artist who was influenced from an early age by the works of Salvador Dali. These images are from her collection *Vintage Dolls*. Select one image before completing these activities.

1. Consider what aspects of your chosen image particularly arouse your interest. What seems to be the strangest and most surreal aspect of this image? What possible meanings can you give for what is happening in this image?

2. Write a short story inspired by the image you selected.
Like all other texts, auto/biographical or lifewriting texts are selective re/constructions. They position readers in particular ways and create personae and invited readings that are favoured by the author. Lifewriters are themselves socially and culturally constructed, and shaped by such factors as gender, age, class and race or ethnicity. These factors shape the stories they tell about their lives and the lives of others.

When considering lifewriting texts we need to be aware that they do not necessarily correspond to a simple binary of ‘fiction’ (invention, fantasy) and ‘non-fiction’ (fact, truth). A better approach may be to place such texts on a continuum from ‘most fictive’ to ‘least fictive’. With this in mind, some of the factors we need to consider are:

- gaps and silences
- the author as unreliable narrator
- the reinvention of different selves and life-scapes across time
- how lifewriting operates as a journey into the self
- how lifewriting constructs the lives of others.

**discussion**

1. What does the cartoon by Dunn imply about lifewriting?
2. Why is lifewriting in part an invention by the author?
Constructing shifting selves: the unreliable narrator

As we construct and deconstruct lifewriting we need to consider the choices that are made in representing the self, and the inevitable process of selection that is at work. Factors such as the representation of public and private selves influence this selection. Auto/biographers are not always ‘truthful’ in their accounts and recounts, just as ‘history’ can be revised or rewritten in different ways. The gaps and silences in autobiographical texts hint that the author may sometimes be an unreliable narrator, constructing his or her version of places, people, events and ‘shifting selves’.

How does the cartoonist Judy Horacek imply that the self is a fluid identity that can be continually reconstructed or reinvented?

How does she use intertextuality to do this?

Suggest some reasons for lifewriters omitting or altering versions of events and people.

How does your ‘self’ as a senior student differ from that ‘self’ who was a preschooler? Clearly we change and grow and perceive differently at different stages of our lives. For example, had Anne Frank survived, her life story written as a sixty-year-old woman recollecting the events of her past would have been different from the account in her teenage diary. This is evident in the recollections of Bert Facey, who wrote about harrowing episodes from his youth more than sixty years later in his lifewriting A Fortunate Life. He is able to write with a detachment and equanimity that he clearly would have been incapable of feeling at the time of his youth.
Lolo Houbein lives in South Australia. She migrated to Australia from Holland in 1958, as a survivor of World War II in Europe. Elsewhere in her lifewriting, she vividly recalls the words of an immigration official who spoke to the Dutch families after their ship docked at Fremantle: ‘Don’t think you can escape the past. You have carried it with you in your suitcases, your bags and your heads.’ In the following extract Houbein introduces the notion of our different selves as she speaks of her ‘nine lives’, and how she intends to narrate all those selves in many different ways, to create different ‘life-scapes’ and representations.

One of nine lives

When it comes down to basics, I haven’t got much personality. When I am by myself I never feel irritated, annoyed or frustrated, depressed or happy. In fact, I hardly notice I’m there. I am only really aware of what I am doing—writing, weaving, gardening, making sounds—or what I am doing things with—plants, earth, wool, paper, colours … and other people.

What people call personality only rears its personable countenance when in the company of other personalities, and then mainly in an adjusting capacity. When I’m with a meek person, I adjust the situation by being firmly assertive, to compensate and get things moving; when with aggressive characters I counteract them by being calm and peaceful and tolerant. In the company of intellectuals I often revert to my rural, philosophical self and when with rural, philosophical individuals I prefer to listen mostly and contribute just the occasional intellectual observation when we get bogged down. When amongst the stingy types I tend to be moderately generous, but when with spendthrifts I change to temperate habits.

In all such situations and their endless variations, I am. I do not act. I play no roles. I merely try to adjust the situation, the atmosphere, the conversation, to a golden mean of harmonious proportions by being, for the duration of the event or encounter, the opposite of whatever the counterparts offer too much of in my perception.

Hence, if a scoresheet were kept by the hundreds of people who think they know or knew me well enough to give a thumbnail character sketch, not one account would tally with another. I know from rumours, loose-lipped references and intuition that the profile stretches from one extreme to the other: from saint to sinner, from guru to goof, from peace personified to provocative pugnacity, from sublime honesty to ridiculous caginess, from killing kindness to cold callousness. Whereas some people feel the need to be reintroduced to me every time we meet, others find me so memorable they recommend me for the Who’s Who.

None of all this has anything to do with any personality of mine, but only with the adjustments I made—in words, deeds or attitudes—to their own state of mind at the time we met.
This lack of personality on my behalf threatens to defeat the purpose of writing an autobiography. It wouldn't really be about me, but about everyone who knew me. The other complication is that I'm the cat with nine lives. No matter how I push and pull and pummel my material, I see no hope of fitting all my adjustment experiences into one book that would simultaneously show me as a product of my times 'in the round'.

But perhaps herein lies the solution. Having already spent eight of my nine lives, why not spend the ninth writing eight autobiographies? Not eight accounts of chronological periods up till now though. That would not sufficiently reveal the undercurrents at work, the karmic links, the flights of imagination which landed me on solid ground. Nor would it do justice to the crazy patchwork created by history in the making, which cross-stitched erratically all over the nice regular pattern I was working on.

... People live at least two lives, an inner and an outer one, because society dictates that whatever it is that moves us remains largely hidden so as not to complicate 'reality'. But many find their lives so inextricably rooted in the inner life that it colours all aspects of daily existence. I realise that after living eight lives in just half a century, I have become tired of hiding my sources, or what I imagine my sources to be. I want to reveal what it is that stirs me into action and not hide behind a fictional character.

Lolo Houbein, *Wrong Face in the Mirror*

discussion

1. In the opening paragraph of the extract, what does Lolo Houbein say are the three sources of her awareness? To what extent is this true of your own experience of identity formation?

2. How does she construct her personality as shifting when she engages with others? Why?

3. Identify some intersecting attitudes, values and beliefs that contribute to the construction of her different ‘selves’.

4. How does she account for the many and varying perceptions of her that are held by those who know her?

5. What does she mean when she says in the second-last paragraph that ‘People live at least two lives, an inner and an outer one’? How true is this of your own experience?
Activity

As Shakespeare said, we are all actors on the stage of life, playing many different parts and roles. Think carefully about the implications of this statement, and of Lolo Houbein's text, then write a short account of the social roles that you 'play' in day-to-day living—the different selves that constitute you as a participant in the different attitudes, values and beliefs that affect and shape your life.

Reinventing our former selves: life-scapes of childhood

Judy Horacek's cartoon makes observations about the inevitable changes that occur in our lives as we grow from childhood to adulthood. The cartoon is an example of intertextuality, as it derives from the works of William Blake, an English poet, painter and mystic who wrote the collections of verse *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* between 1783 and 1793.

Activity

Write a paragraph analysing the effects of Judy Horacek's use of intertextuality and word play in her cartoon.
Childhood reflections

The following lifewriting excerpts are of the early childhood of various writers. As you read, consider how these writers construct a sense of the time and place for their childhood experiences.

Raimond Gaita was born in Germany in 1946, of a Romanian father and German mother. He and his parents formed part of the European postwar migration boom, arriving in Melbourne in 1950 on assisted passages. Gaita is now Professor of Philosophy at a Melbourne University. His memoir of his childhood and of his father has been transposed into an award-winning film of the same title, *Romulus, My Father*. The following excerpts feature his father and two family friends, Hora and Vacek. Gaita recalls some of the incidents associated with them from the perspective of a child but refracted through his adult perceptions. This also shows the close links between author and subject and their inevitable intersection in family lifewriting texts.

My father and friends

Most weekends, my father and I went by motorbike to visit friends or to the cinema …

I particularly liked going to Maryborough because after the film we always drank a coffee in the milk bar opposite the theatre, and, later, because I could play the jukebox …

We travelled everywhere by motorbike. I was particularly proud of the Sunbeam. It was a fine machine with tyres as thick as those on a small car and driven by a shaft rather than a chain. Although my father drove at speed and often dangerously overloaded it, he was always conscious of how inherently dangerous motorbike travel is.

‘They only have two wheels,’ he reminded people.

Anxious for my safety, he decided I was more likely to slip off the back pillion than he was to crash and fall onto me, so until I was eight I sat on the petrol tank of whichever motorbike we happened to be using …

In later years Hora and my father built an aluminium boat which Hora and I often sailed on Cairn Curran. My father and Vacek accompanied us to the water’s edge where they swam a little, but they were not at home in the water and were not keen to go in the boat even though it was unsinkable, with outriggers and 20 litre drums at either end …

My father was made only a little less anxious by our exploits on the
water. Late one afternoon Hora and I were becalmed considerably further from our launching spot than we had ever travelled before. With no paddles, we were stuck. When evening came we knew we had no choice but to swim to shore, pulling the boat behind us, and then to walk the five or six kilometers to Frogmore. I shall never forget that night because we had to walk through long paddocks of dry Scotch thistles, some as high as my waist, barefoot and with only our swimming trunks. Until we became numb, only the searchlights sweeping across the reservoir near the main wall distracted us from our pain. When we reached the road we met my father beside himself with anxiety and angry with us both. He had called the police from Maldon. The lights we had seen were searching for us …

When Hora was at Frogmore he and my father often talked until the early hours of the morning, the kitchen filled with cigarette smoke and the smell of slivovitz. They talked to each other in Romanian, which I understood reasonably, but could not speak. To me they spoke in German until my teenage years when, to accommodate my foolish embarrassment, they spoke to me in English. Their individuality was inseparable from their talk—it was revealed in it and made by it, by its honesty. I learnt from them the connection between individuality and character and the connection between these and the possibility of ‘having something to say’, of seeing another person as being fully and distinctively another perspective on the world. Which is to say I learnt from them the connection between conversation and Otherness.

Hora’s openness to the voices of others when they spoke with disciplined honesty from their own experiences showed also in his reading. He read, as few people do, with an openness to the possibility of being radically altered …

The philosopher Plato said that those who love and seek wisdom are clinging in recollection to things they once saw. On many occasions in my life I have had the need to say, and thankfully have been able to say: I know what a good workman is; I know what an honest man is; I know what friendship is; I know because I remember these things in the person of my father, in the person of his friend Hora, and in the example of their friendship.

Raimond Gaita, *Romulus, My Father*

discussion

1 Raimond Gaita’s recount includes both positive and unpleasant recollections. What is revealed in his representation of his relationship with his father and with Hora?

2 What qualities and characteristics of his father does Gaita privilege in his representation of the man?

3 What important things does Gaita consider that he learned from observing the conversations of Hora and his father?
In the following excerpts, three other noted Australian writers also reflect upon their childhood—and specifically their formal schooling—from the differing perspectives of city children and bush kids. As you read, compare and contrast the differences, both in the nature of their education and in their responses to it.

Hugh Lunn grew up in Brisbane in the 1950s. Lunn is an award-winning journalist and popular writer whose autobiographical accounts of his youth, *Over the Top with Jim* and *Jim and Me*, were bestsellers.

**Classroom stresses**

The only thing I was considered to be any good at was reading aloud from the School Reader. But then Sister Damian woke up to what I was doing. This particular morning, when it was my turn to read the next sentence, I stood up and read: ‘The big grey cow walked over to the fence;’ and there was an audible gasp from all the girls, who turned from every desk to look at me like the plaster clowns that swallowed the ping-pong balls at the Exhibition. ‘Read that again, Hughie Lunn,’ asked Sister Damian with a suspicious look on her face. They knew, they all knew now, that I couldn’t read all these words. I must have made a mistake with a word, but which one? ‘The big grey cow …’ I said, and Sister Damian had me. The book, she told me, clearly said ‘brown’ cow and a ‘b’ sounded nothing like a ‘g’. ‘You have been memorising every line,’ she said. And once again I had to write out the alphabet.

This wasn’t easy because I couldn’t seem to make the transition from slate pencil to pen and ink. It wasn’t that I didn’t have all the right equipment. Mum had got me a double-decker wooden pencil case and, once the lid was pulled backwards a bit, the top part swung to the side to reveal the pens beneath. Plus I had a new propelling pencil with lots of smooth little lead pieces in a tiny glass holder to reload it with, and several nibs to stick in the end of my ink pens. But almost every day I got into trouble for untidy work, particularly when writing in my copy book. This was our most important book now that we were learning to write running writing. Across the top of the page were words already written in perfect girl’s hand-writing, while, across the bottom, lots of lines were drawn to help us copy these words exactly. I found this difficult and the nuns used to claim that my copy book ‘looked as though the chooks had walked across it’.

The trouble with using a pen and ink was that the ink marked wherever it touched and you couldn’t just rub out mistakes like you could with slates. One end of the rubber was supposed to rub ink out but all I could do when I used it was to rub a hole in the page. Also, unlike with a slate pencil, extra ink had to be added to the pen all the time—which increased the chances of an accident.

… Because ink was a liquid it was incredibly easy to drop some off the nib on the journey from the top right-hand corner of the desk to the spaces
Judith Lucy is one of Australia’s best-known television performers and comedians. In her characteristically quirky and hilarious memoir of growing up, *The Lucy Family Alphabet*, she uses the original format of A–Z chapters that define various aspects of her life.

S is for school

I loved school. School gave me friends, helped me realize I was not a complete idiot and got me out of the house. It was also where I realized that I wanted to perform.

I was one of those students who, every time something had to be read out (a passage from the Bible, a page from *Wuthering Heights*), really couldn’t understand why it wasn’t her reading it. How could our English Literature teacher, Mrs Lange, let other students massacre T.S. Eliot when I was only too willing to give a performance that would make even the biggest slut sitting up the back realize what a work of art ‘J. Alfred Prufrock’ was?

It started in primary school when I wrote and performed in a play based on *I Dream of Jeannie*, but my big break came in Grade Five when I got to play Jesus, probably using nothing but a sheet and the cord from my father’s bathrobe. We were in the Last Supper and we certainly weren’t light on for ham. During the last two years of primary school I won the...
talent contest by writing original compositions. One was ‘The Nose’ (‘It’s skin in the form of a lump; no, no it’s more of a bump. Well it just sits there and wriggles now and then but it can’t read, write or pick up a pen’), and the other more fittingly called ‘A Load of Rubbish’. A couple of friends and I freestyled across the stage as we sung our masterpieces—no wonder the kids who had spent hours choreographing an impressive dance routine to the ‘Rhythm of Life’ were pissed off.

High school meant I could study drama, and when I was sixteen I was cast as the lead in the school play, the best thing that had happened to me at that point. I was Annie Sullivan in The Miracle Worker. My Irish accent may have been reminiscent of James Coburn’s IRA explosives expert in A Fistful of Dynamite and I may have had lines like, ‘Rats? Rats? We used to play with the rats because we didn’t have toys’, but I loved it! There was a particularly nasty fight scene with Helen Keller (some people might argue that she was the lead but, hey, I didn’t see her working any miracles), and even though she bashed my mouth with a jug and I nearly lost a tooth, I would not have missed a second of those rehearsals, which were even better because they were all after hours.

I may have acted my heart out but I couldn’t project. If you were in the first three rows you knew I was the next Anne Bancroft, but any further back and I was probably mistaken for the deaf/dumb one. The play was only on for three nights and the evening my parents were supposed to see it dad was sick. Years later I think Niall told me he was drunk and this was the beginning of my parents not always feeling the need to come to their daughter’s shows.

Straight out of high school I auditioned for NIDA. They very rarely took high school graduates, but I was convinced that they would take me, spirit me off to the other side of the country and turn my life into the movie Fame.

Not only was I not accepted, but I was told that I needed to have an operation on my nose—not because I was repulsive, but because my voice was too nasal and unless it was surgically corrected I would never be a success. I was hoping to tell this story when I accepted my Academy award.

Fortunately, I had also applied to study theatre at Curtin University. On the very last day that I walked down the steps of my school, a particularly awful nun asked me what my plans were. When I told her that I intended to study drama, she gave me a worried look and said that she had known other girls who had done that course and who had been quite swept out to sea by it. I had no idea what she was talking about; were they doing Brecht one minute and in the navy the next? Whatever it meant, I couldn’t wait.

Judith Lucy, The Lucy Family Alphabet
The following two extracts, from the writings of Australian poet Les Murray and musician Mandawuy Yunupingu, illustrate the cultural divide between city students and the ‘bush kids’.

**Bulby Brush school**

Close in around the school were the first pine trees I ever saw, and I still associate the smell of pines with Bulby Brush school. We also had silky oaks, which I’ve loved ever since. The last thing you did before you walked up the slope to school was to jump over the gully. It was hard to do—you could only just get there—but it was a matter of pride you didn’t walk around.

We used to jump over fences. We’d race to jump over a gate and the fellow who came last would say, ‘It’s all right, I’m last, but I’ll be first in heaven.’ We were all soaked in the bible. We talked about bible stories on the way to school as part of our normal conversation: ‘You remember when Samson went up against the other blokes …’ We never had a word of it at school. There was just the visit of a minister, maybe once a year.

We had an air-raid trench provided for us in case the Japanese air force came over the hills and decided to take this strategically important school. There were sixteen kids when I started and fourteen or thirteen when I left. About six kids could sit at a desk. Two people dipped into a common inkwell. When you started mucking around, sooner or later the ink ended up down the front of your trousers. Every time it landed in the same place, soaking down the front of your trousers.

At the front of the room was the teacher’s table. There was a library, a three-by-three shelf, which I devoured. I can still remember the books on it. There was Mawson’s journal of his travels in the Antarctic, a great big tome, and I fell upon it. The teacher knowing I was only nine years old said, ‘Oh, that would be too advanced for you.’ I said, ‘Can I borrow it anyway, Sir?’ I devoured it, thought it was wonderful, and still remember chunks of it.
What IS an Australian education?

My own education was a Yolngu education. It took place with our large family group living in the places on our land that hold special importance for us. With Mum and Dad, we went from place to place, and every place had its stories. Some of these were sacred stories that we heard sung in ceremonies. Some were family stories, like Mum’s stories of when she was a little girl in this place or that. We knew that my granddad had been here, and his granddad before him did these things, and right back to the ancestors who made the land as they went about doing just the same sorts of things we did in our ordinary life and in our ceremonial life.

Mandawuy Yunupingu is famous internationally as a rock musician with Yothu Yindi. His account reflects a cultural divide that extends beyond that of Les Murray.

discussion

1. What irony is evident in Les Murray’s comment about the Japanese air force and Bulby Brush primary school?
2. What does Murray mean when he describes the city teachers who were transferred to the school in the bush as belonging to ‘something like the official culture of Australia’?
3. What is the significance of the intertextuality in the allusion to ‘Dad and Dave’?
4. In what ways does Murray suggest that the bush culture had little in common with urban culture? Do you think that this still holds true today? Why?

... The teachers sent from the city belonged to something like the official culture of Australia, and the official culture didn’t exist in the small-farming bush. We were always despised as Dad and Dave, and all that. But it was an utterly different culture. It was the culture of hard-working peoples, based on music and storytelling. It was entirely oral, and heroic and ancient. It had nothing to do with city culture. If teachers couldn’t step across the cultures, then they were isolated, the poor souls.

Les Murray, ‘Bulby Brush boy’
Mum and Dad travelled long distances with us kids. Just by going and living in the various places, we were respecting those ancestors of ours who made the world. My father followed the seasons in his lands. Sometimes Mum took us over to her places.

Like during April, when it was starting to get chilly at night, we would be inland. We were in covered places where it was sheltered; all those cosy places. We would camp there in the jungle and get honey from beehives in the rocks—rock honey. When the cold snap was coming on, after April into May/June, when it is almost going into the dry season, that’s when we’d start hanging around there.

… Each move was a change of context as far as my education was concerned. Each new place has new concepts associated with it. Each place is connected to other places in deep ways. And I learned about that, both from being in the place and by associating it with the songs and dances of our ceremonies. In this way, the more abstract knowledge of how places are connected was linked with the practical and emotional knowledge of actually living in a place.

My father would teach me to be a man and take me hunting, spear fishing. He taught me all the fish names. And he would tell me off for doing naughty things too. I remember the nighttimes best. We would listen to stories at night by the campfire. All the stories had a strong lesson for us kids. They would be stories to get us to stay put by the fire and not wander about. They would get us frightened and get us to sleep much faster.

This is the ’50s and early ’60s I’m remembering. But, as I grew, our Yolngu world was no longer ours alone. Changes in my family’s lifestyle were taking place. Influences outside the family and clan were being felt. Both Yirritja and Dhuwa people were being moved around by white people. Clans were being assembled here and encouraged to leave there. The missionaries had been around all my life. Somehow they started to have more impact on us all.

About this time, my father and uncles and my older brother were involved with the court challenge to the government of Australia and NABALCO, the big foreign mining company that wanted our land. The struggle was to find ways of explaining our laws and beliefs to white Australia in an attempt to retain all that is important and sacred in Yolngu life—our land. That struggle to explain our laws and beliefs is what you hear in Yothu Yindi’s songs today. In our songs we have found a way to help people hear us today. But back then it wasn’t possible.

After my initiation, I began to go to school regularly. It was all quite funny to me at the same time. But it had its exciting bits. As I see it now, I needed this different sort of energy, different learning. But a whole lot went along with it, like having to wear clothes. Sometimes when I had no shorts, I’d wear naga. It didn’t worry me. The missionaries had their ‘young ladies’, the Yolngu girls’ sewing class, make our uniforms for us.
Sometimes I found aspects of education really good; I learned something new. It was like every day you were looking at things, and then you were challenged. I’d try to match it. I could practically hear my brain working. But sometimes I found the classroom isolated, cut off from everything I knew and loved. I’d sit in that school for five hours or twenty minutes and then go back home and play to our own rules.

School worked for me. For my type of thinking, western education could fit in. I think my parents had it fixed in their minds, too, that I should be schooled in order to give me a good balanced education. Learning English just kept me coming back for more. I remember learning lots of bible words. Learning English was a pleasure. I already knew ten or so clan languages and English was a great new challenge. I remember coming back to the family with new English words which I’d try out on them. I distinctly remember showing off to my sisters by reciting ‘The house that Jack built’.

But looking back now, I can see that the teachers probably saw things differently to me. Many of their demands were quite incomprehensible. They weren’t just teaching me ‘useful things’; they had a theory, an ideology. I see now that it was a curriculum driven by the ideology of assimilation. I marvel at the ways we knew how to resist it. I see now that a lot of what motivated those white teachers was the view that it was only when Yolngu stopped being Yolngu that we could become Australians.

But what about schooling now? Have schools stopped being the instruments of assimilation? My children are in school. I became the principal of the school where I once sat at a desk with the other Yolngu kids. Are my kids having a Yolngu education comparable in depth and rigour to what my parents gave me? I would answer a firm yes. But I can only answer yes because for nearly a quarter of a century, people, both Yolngu and Balanda, have worked to achieve this. We have transformed the missionary, assimilation ideology into an authentic Yolngu schooling. It took a lot of imagination and struggle.

Mandawuy Yunupingu, Yothu Yindi: Finding balance

1 How does Mandawuy Yunupingu’s representation of his education in the 1950s and early 1960s demonstrate the Yolngu’s strong cultural, social and spiritual links with their land? How does this differ from the construction of the relationship of European and other settlers with the land?

2 When he attended school, what division existed between school and home?

3 Why was English only one of the ten or so languages Mandawuy knew and spoke?

4 What does he mean when he states that he studied ‘a curriculum driven by the ideology of assimilation’? What is ironic about the teacher’s view that ‘only when Yolngu stopped being Yolngu ... could [they] become Australians’?
Memories

Memory likes to play hide-and-seek, to crawl away. It tends to hold forth, to dress up, often needlessly. Memory contradicts itself; pedant that it is, it will have its way.

When pestered with questions, memory is like an onion that wishes to be peeled so we can read what is laid bare letter by letter. It is seldom unambiguous and often in mirror-writing or otherwise disguised.

Activity

As we have seen, cultural assumptions, values, attitudes and beliefs play a major role in constructing identity, including our own.

1. Write a short memoir of a significant incident in your own childhood.

2. After you have done this, consider your memoir in terms of the questions below.

   a. What attitudes, values, beliefs and cultural assumptions are evident, either implicitly or explicitly, in your own text?

   b. What gaps and silences are present in your text? In your selection process, why did you choose to include some events/people and omit others?

   c. How did these choices help shape your representation of the event(s)?

If you wish, share your memoir with your class.

Lifewriting as a journey into the self

Your reading so far, and your own written responses, demonstrate that the ‘self’ is more or less invented in any lifewriting. Thus the act of writing a life narrative involves some disengagement from the subject of the narrative. It is inevitable that the author, at the point of writing the text, constructs a version of reality filtered through the mind of who he or she is now, which is not the same as that former self in a past life.

Günter Grass, Germany’s most celebrated contemporary writer, who was awarded the Nobel prize for Literature in 1999, wrote his own extraordinary life narrative, Peeling the Onion, tracing his life from his childhood when he was a boy soldier fighting the Russians in World War II. He uses the sustained metaphor of peeling an onion to describe the retrieval of memories that forms an integral part of the lifewriting process.

Memories

Memory likes to play hide-and-seek, to crawl away. It tends to hold forth, to dress up, often needlessly. Memory contradicts itself; pedant that it is, it will have its way.

When pestered with questions, memory is like an onion that wishes to be peeled so we can read what is laid bare letter by letter. It is seldom unambiguous and often in mirror-writing or otherwise disguised.
Beneath its dry and crackly outer skin we find another, more moist layer, that once detached, reveals a third, beneath which a fourth and fifth wait whispering. And each skin sweats words too long muffled, and curlicue signs, as if a mystery-monger from an early age, while the onion was still germinating, had decided to encode himself.

Then ambition raises its head: this scrawl must be deciphered, that code cracked. What currently insists on truth is disproved, because Lie or her younger sister, Deception, often hands over only the most acceptable part of a memory, the part that sounds plausible on paper, and vaunts details to be as precise as a photograph: The tarpaper roof of the shed behind our building shimmered in the July heat and in the still air smelled of malt lozenges …

The washable collar of my primary school teacher, Fraulein Spollenhauer, was made of celluloid and was so tight it put creases in her neck …

The propeller-shaped bows in the hair of the girls on the Zoppot Promenade when the police band played its snappy melodies …

My first Boletus edulis …

When we were excused from school because of heat …

When my tonsils flared up again …

When I swallowed my questions …

The onion has many skins. A multitude of skins. Peeled, it renews itself; chopped, it brings tears; only during peeling does it speak the truth. What happened before and after the end of my childhood knocks at the door with facts and went worse than wished for and demands to be told now this way, now that, and leads to tall tales.

Günter Grass, Peeling the Onion

**discussion**

1. Do you consider the sustained analogy of memory retrieval to the peeling of an onion (the title of Günter Grass’s memoir) to be an effective one? Why is this so?

2. What is implied in the personification that ‘Lie or her younger sister, Deception, often hands over only the most acceptable part of a memory’? Why do you think that we reconstruct or repress some memories? What effect might negative emotions such as shame or guilt have on this process?

The construction of lifewriting

As Grass acknowledges, memory retrievals can be uneven, with recollections and reminiscences clouded by interim events. We have noted that for all an autobiographer may ‘confess’ in a life story, there are elements that have been
‘repressed’. There may be much factual detail, but the process is still a re/invention of the past. We should be wary of making neat distinctions between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ when reading and writing auto/biography, as these can slide and slip quite fluidly, even unintentionally. We have all related ‘true stories’ to friends and embroidered or modified details or aspects of our narration to make it, for example, more exciting, more humorous, more romantic for our listeners.

In your own brief memoir, as narrator of an actual event, you may have slipped into ‘fiction’ in parts of the process of telling your story. You may have embellished, distorted, selected and changed small things, so you constructed a representation or version of the ‘reality’ that happened.

We know that our past is actually peopled by a succession of selves who have grown, developed and changed, and have operated in different discourses. The autobiographer is a creator of text, the self who is now, writing about a self who once was. Like historians, lifewriters interpret fragmentary and incomplete available sources, sifting through memories (their own and those of others), documents, photos, memorabilia and so on. From all these sources, representations of the self and of others emerge.

Some autobiographers expose and explore extremely painful and troubled aspects of a life, such as a struggle with relationships or illness. Other autobiographers ‘censor’ anything that may bring them criticism or public disapproval, just as most people when recounting a quarrel, for example, will omit parts that may make them look foolish or spiteful or in the wrong. Many celebrities permit only the writing of ‘authorised’ biographies or versions of their life, and may even use the courts of law to prevent ‘unauthorised’ biographies being published. Gossip is a perfect example of the recounting of versions of reality, of which some part might be termed ‘truth’ and another part ‘conjecture’ or fiction. Thus, autobiographers select, shape and create versions of reality as they reconstruct a life, or part of a life: the failures, the achievements, the character of the individual and so on. The past, like the present, is the result of negotiated versions and representations of what, how, why something happened.

Rita Huggins, who grew up in the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg in Queensland, in the preface to her life story, Auntie Rita, discussed the (re)writing of her life and the process of selection and self-censorship—the ‘silences’ that remain.

Writing Auntie Rita

I have often wondered why we like to read books about the lives of other people. Perhaps we are interested in what shapes people, or maybe we’re just plain busy-bodies.

This book tells the story of my life. These are my own recollections. I speak only for myself and not how others would expect me to speak. The book exposes me and my family. But I can only be myself and hope people can judge me on that, whether it be good or bad. I’m not perfect, just Auntie Rita.
We want the book to be a record for my children and their children and other members of my family. Hopefully it will speak to other people, too, including those white people who want to know what the story looks like from the Aboriginal side.

This book was such a huge task. We didn’t realise when we began how enormous it would be. Far from sitting down and writing when a thought came to mind, it has to follow some order. But we found it can’t always do that so smoothly. People’s lives aren’t like that. Lives jump here, there and everywhere and then return to the beginning and start again. Like an Aboriginal meeting, as you’ll know if you’ve been to one.

It’s like time in Aboriginal society. In the old days there wasn’t time like we think of it now, and there are still ways today when time isn’t important to us as it is to migaloos. I’ve noticed it in places where our people can still live their old ways like Ti Tree and Alice Springs. The old people sit for hours. You can’t say, ‘I’ll meet you at seven o’clock’ and expect someone to show up just because your watch is on seven. With Murrie time, it can be hours later and no one bats an eyelid. In the old days the sun and moon told us the time.

Family and health crises arose during the writing of this book. Since doing this book I have lost another brother and two sisters, a nephew and some dear friends. Interruptions came as family members came to me with their problems. A year ago I had a serious illness but was determined to see my book published.

The title of this book comes from the term ‘Auntie’ that we use in our communities. It is one of respect and affection. You don’t have to be blood relations or anything. Everyone calls me Auntie or Nan.

There are some parts of my life that I probably didn’t want to have in the book because to me they are shame jobs. But they are part of the story and Jackie tells me, in her loving way, that I don’t need to feel ashamed. Look who’s talking! My story is not rare among Aboriginal women.

There are, though, other things that I just cannot speak about because they are too painful to remember. These things I must keep to myself. Much has been done to me and my people that we find hard to talk about. One of the things that amazes people is that we have managed to survive without a huge amount of outward bitterness. Aboriginal people of all generations, and for very good reasons, withhold their bitterness about the injustices that have happened and still continue to happen today. I’m not sure why I let go of my bitterness. I certainly remember those feelings but try to replace them with more positive feelings. That is how I have survived, and remain feeling strong.

Rita and Jackie Huggins, Auntie Rita
Writing the lives of others

Biographers are no more or less ‘truthful’, for they write from discursive positions that have been socially constructed. They cannot, therefore, be neutral, and they make decisions about what to ‘leave in’ and what to ‘take out of’ a life story, thus shaping representations of their subjects. The biographer (re)constructs the subject, rather than actually presenting the subject as he or she ‘really is’ (or was). To complicate this notion, we know that we interact differently with different people at different times in different places—we have seen previously in this chapter that we function within shifting sets of social practices and comprise multiple ‘selves’ that are constantly growing, developing, changing.

Drusilla Modjeska was born in England and came to Australia in the 1970s. She now lives in Sydney, where she works as an author. The following extract is from *Poppy*, the award-winning narrative in which she endeavours to write the life of her mother. In the process, Modjeska struggles to discover not only the multiple past selves of her writing subject (her mother) but also of her self as writer, and the other lives that she is (re)creating.

Who are you, my mother?

I have taken two photos from the others and have propped them up on my desk by the window. In these *Poppy* is not obscure, or obscured, to me. In the first she is a child, about six years old. Her hair is curled, her dress is clean, her shoes a glossy satin. Although her eyes meet the camera steadily enough, and her mouth is split wide with a bright smile, the child I see is vulnerable. Maybe it’s her feet, formally arranged in third position. Or the monkey perched behind her and tethered to a stand. It is wearing a jacket and a small Fez hat, its face mimicking hers like a shadow. Or perhaps it’s the plaster on her finger, and an arm held out from her dress at a barely perceptible, but self-conscious angle. In this photo there is the restless energy of hope.
The second photo, taken the week after Marcus died, comes towards the end of her life and the grief is clear for all to see. Her hair is straight and loose, streaked with grey. She is reading a book. I can’t make out its title, but I can see that although the spine has been patched with sealotape, the pages are falling loose. Behind her the garden is in full summer bloom. The emotion in this photo is calm.

The portrait of her as a child is the earliest any of us have of her. It was taken by a photographic studio whose name and address is stamped on the back. The most recent photo I have was taken by me. It’s on the board in the kitchen. She asked me to take it that last summer. ‘So you’ll remember me as I am today,’ she said. She is lying, completely relaxed, on a fold-out chair in the garden. There is honeysuckle on the fence behind her. In each of these photos she is alone. In the others pinned on my wall, she is embedded in the family. Hemmed in, surrounded. Is that how she felt? Weighed down, as I am by the photos themselves, random images of a family past?

... Here in the house I share with Mary, where the newspapers are delivered each day and friends come to tell stories lived right now, I have the books Poppy read, the diaries she kept and the letters that were in her attic. I have an atlas, books on the history of Britain, and maps that are detailed enough to show the town where she lived after the divorce, the village where we lived when we were a family, and even the house on the hill where we moved after her breakdown, part of a settlement that settled nothing but gave us a good view over that part of southern England. I also have memories, and as I write I find they increase and magnify, repetitive, exaggerated, useless. I have a ring, a string of pearls, a locket and a gold heart. These I wear. The papers are piled around my desk, tied with the thread she made, along with the notebooks I kept of our conversations during that strange last summer. Through this patchy evidence I piece together the story of Poppy who was born in 1924 and died in 1984, daughter of China and Jack, wife of Richard, lover of Marcus, mother of May and Phoebe and me. That is how we mark a woman, by her kin and progeny. But it doesn’t tell me who she was.

Drusilla Modjeska, Poppy

Drusilla Modjeska’s account is very self-reflexive as she is, of course, intimately involved in her mother’s life—she is both author of and participator in the story.

1. What were some of the specific difficulties that she encountered in trying to represent her mother’s life?

2. How does this extract illustrate that any life text provides only a version or versions of what may have happened?

3. Read the second-last sentence of the extract carefully. Consider the ways in which we ‘mark’ or represent others. What forms part of the different ‘marks’ or representations of the various cultural constructs of, for example, skaters or surfies?
Kate Lilley, daughter of the Australian writer Dorothy Hewett, explores the process of construction or fabrication of her mother and past events in the following poem. Lilley wrote the poem when she was 16 years old.

**Fabula**

1
Resurrecting my mother I fabricate
a narrative rich in detail.
In it we two are mapped layer on layer,
connections immanent in every choice.
Those stories not included I have
forgotten as insignificant
to me or my understanding of you.
The discontinuities are easiest to list:
daughter of a farm-girl I never went barefoot,
never rode a horse;
while you did correspondence and drew
pictures for the agricultural show
I pedalled to school on my bike,
ignoring the stop signs.
When we drove to see ‘the country’
I fell asleep in the back seat—
that was thirty years later, and I was your child.

2
Never saw your farm or even
a representation of it
but you once pulled out a photograph
of a farmhouse matched in style and period.
Although you had never been there you knew
the interior plan minutely.
Now I can describe it too using something
more than mimickry.
Our lives are not unique, discrete—
Moments kidnapped from the general store
are hostages of need, instantial.
To catalogue myself I turn biographer
of a blood relation who is not dead,
relocating you in a fictive past
to which you have only partial access.
The course I chart holds good for now,
Stands with earlier versions.

**discussion**

1 What does Lilley mean when she says: ‘To catalogue myself I turn biographer’?
2 Why is it inevitable that, in the attempt to retrieve her mother’s past, Lilley fabricates ‘a narrative rich in detail’?
3 Locate and discuss the significance of lines that reveal the process of selection and invention that the poet acknowledges to be part of the process of writing her mother’s biography.
4 What implications are contained in the title of the poem?
**Merging ‘other’ and ‘self’**

We are by now well aware that *fiction* and *non-fiction* are not binary oppositions, but rather are fluid categories that blend and shift, intentionally or otherwise. There is also slippage between writing about the Other and writing about the Self, especially when the lifewriting subject in biography is a family member. Biography may also be presented as fiction, as in Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark*; and fiction is often written as implied ‘truth’ or ‘reality’, as Joan Lindsay did in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. In addition to this, in the editing process that occurs before any publication, editorial decisions unrelated to those of the author are made concerning what stays in and what is left out. And, even then, individual readers produce their own interpretations or readings of a particular text.

Like Drusilla Modjeska and Kate Lilley, most of us enjoy the memories that are triggered by looking at old photos, snapshots of former selves at various points in an earlier life. When writing of family members, authors inevitably recount elements of their own lives as well. For lifewriters, the powerful recollections and emotions that are evoked are translated from the visual stimulus into language.

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**Activity**

Find a cross-section of photographs from your own childhood. Use some of these to write about the memories and associations that these snapshots evoke in you. Consider the attitudes, values and beliefs you have mobilised in constructing these representations of your ‘self’.

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**Avatars and the construction of virtual selves**

The Sanskrit word ‘avatar’ refers to the visible manifestations adopted by Hindu gods when they appeared in the mortal world. These days the term is used in the digital world to refer to an online representation of an alter ego, a ‘second self’.

Tens of millions of people explore notions of identity construction and lead rich and satisfying dual lives through their construction of avatars, or virtual characters and identities that inhabit parallel ‘metaverses’ in cyberspace. Some people become so immersed in these alternative lives that their avatars seem to be alter egos or extensions of their actual selves. The challenges and experiences available in these digital worlds parallel those in ‘real life’, but obviously it is infinitely ‘safer’ to explore re/created realities—in the virtual world, one may grow rich, have relationships with others, fight battles and conquer enemies.
1. Do you see these avatars as dystopian, rather than utopian virtual realities? What do you consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of simulation over the ‘real’?

2. Think about The Matrix trilogy of cult science fiction films written and directed by the Wachowski brothers. These films are rich in intertextuality, with embedded allusion and references to, for example, cyberpunk, religion, philosophy, literature, animé and spaghetti westerns. In the films, humans are held captive in colossal stacks of individual pods, inhabiting a simulated virtual reality—the Matrix—while their biodynamic heat and electrical impulses are controlled and tapped by robots as an energy source.

What associations do you see between these imaginative worlds and the interface of parallel digital universes in the lives of millions of people? What might be the implications of this on conventional human identity as we know it?

3. What other slippage and re/construction of identity do you see in cyberspace—for example, on Facebook and MySpace sites? To what extent do you think these constructions mirror the human tendency to reinvent the ‘self’?

On pages 166–168 you will find three linked biographical snapshots of online gamers with accompanying details from their avatar profiles. These are from the book Alter Ego: Avatars and their creators, by Robbie Cooper. Cooper’s book contains interviews with online gamers from America, Asia and Europe together with profiles and images of both their real-world and virtual characters. Carefully read the profiles on the following pages before completing the activities below.

Activities

1. Divide into small groups and select a person and their avatar from pages 166–168. Create a profile, using the following guidelines as a basis. Add any additional comments that you think are of interest. Then report back to the whole class and share and discuss your findings.

   - To what extent do the representations of the real person and their avatar intersect or correlate? To what extent are there apparent differences? Do you think that these have been selected deliberately or unconsciously?
   - What are some of the attractions that the avatars and their virtual worlds appear to have for this player/gamer?
   - To what extent and in what ways does this avatar empower its creator?

2. Construct a representation of an avatar of your own, either in small groups, in pairs or individually. Reflect upon the reasons for your choices of gender, age, personality, type, game environment, actions, and the values, attitudes and beliefs of your avatar.
The difference between me and my online character is pretty obvious. I have a lot of physical disabilities in real life, but in Star Wars Galaxies I can ride an Imperial speeder bike, fight monsters, or just hang out with friends at a bar. I have some use of my hands—not much, but a little. In the game I use an on-screen keyboard called ‘soft-type’ to talk with other players. I can’t press the keys on a regular keyboard so I use a virtual one. I play online games because I get to interact with people. The computer screen is my window to the world. Online it doesn’t matter what you look like. Virtual worlds bring people together—everyone is on common ground. In the real world, people can be uncomfortable around me before they get to know me and realize that, apart from my outer appearance, I’m just like them. Online you get to know the person behind the keyboard before you know the physical person. The Internet eliminates how you look in real life, so you get to know a person by their mind and personality.

In 2002 at the Ultimate Online Fan Faire in Austin, I noticed that people were intrigued by me, but they acted just like I was one of them. They treated me as an equal, like I wasn’t even the way that I am—not disabled, not in a wheelchair, you know. We were all just gamers.

Name: Jason Rowe
Born: 1975
Occupation: None
Location: Crosby, Texas, USA
Average hours per week in game: 80
Avatar name: Rurouni Kenshin
Avatar created: 2003
Game played: Star Wars Galaxies

Robbie Cooper, Alter Ego
My character is a knight. Growing up, I used to love reading stories about the warriors of Korea’s Silla Kingdom, as well as the knights of medieval Europe. I admire their bravery and prowess in battle. Sometimes I wish I could have lived in those times.

I enjoy playing Lineage because it’s a place where I can control my own destiny. In the real world, you have to conform to the expectations of your parents, teachers and peers. What matters most is how much money you have, what schools you go to, and who your parents are. Where you start determines where you end up. In Lineage, it’s different. You create your avatar—it’s not already chosen for you. The path forward is up to you. Play well, and you will get ahead. It’s not like the real world where things are set for you.
My avatar in *City of Heroes* is my complete opposite. Stygian Physic is big, black and male. I created him that way because I didn’t want to get hit on all the time. I wanted to be noticed for my skills, not my pixel-boobs. By playing as a guy, I found that people treated me differently. Being a guy enabled me to form relationships that I would never otherwise be able to experience. The guys just assume I’m a guy. If I’m the leader, I can make a call and they’ll all just follow. And they’ll open up about problems with their girlfriends and so on. When I play as a female character, I get challenged a lot more and have to argue about everything. No thanks, I’ve made some good friends playing as a guy. To this day they don’t know I’m really a chick. I don’t lie about it. They just assume that I’m a guy and never ask.

I have a six-year-old daughter who’s needed more of my attention lately, and because of that I’ve cut back on my playing hours a lot. I would say that I used to be a ‘hardcore’ player, because I would spend literally all day sitting at my computer. But now my daughter’s getting older, I just don’t have that luxury any more. It’s my hope that she grows up to like games, so we can all play together. That would blow my mind. My husband and I used to play together for the first year. When we’re old and grey our reminiscences will probably consist of things like, ‘Remember that time we slaughtered the Hydra and got level 40 at the same time?’
Brief details of a person can often provide insights into their interests, lifestyles, character and personality. In *Good Weekend*, a regular series of short bios profile various Australians through the device of having them identify and discuss their three favourite things. Read the following profile of Andy Doyle.

**Favourite things**

**Andy Doyle, lifesaver and carpenter**

**Board**  As a volunteer surf lifesaver, Andy Doyle, 23, devotes hundreds of hours a year to patrolling Victorian beaches. In 2006, he was on duty at Lorne when he saw a man get whacked by a wave, then picked up by a vicious rip that swept him out to sea. ‘Within 10 seconds he’d travelled 50 metres,’ says Doyle, who grabbed his lifesaver’s board and started paddling. When he eventually caught the man, 300 metres offshore, ‘the guy was grey, so tired he couldn’t move, about to slip into unconsciousness’. As Doyle rolled the man onto his board, ‘all this water poured out of him, he started coughing, and gradually his colour came back. It was a very, very near thing.’

**Nail gun**  ‘No one at my school ever mentioned doing a trade,’ says Doyle, who was steered towards an engineering/commerce degree, which he began but never embraced. A lifesaving contact realised Doyle was a bit lost and hauled him in for a stint in a carpentry business. Doyle loved the work instantly, ‘because you’re outdoors, you use your brain all day long’ and it’s tangible. ‘I can look over my shoulder and see what I’ve done,’ he says. The nail gun, the first tool he bought, is a practical boon—‘in two days this week we put in 6000 nails’—but shelling out $700 was also Doyle’s way of saying, ‘I’m going to stick at this. This is where I’m going to make my mark.’

**Wok**  Five years ago, Doyle moved from his mother’s place in Melbourne to Anglesea, on the Great Ocean Road. ‘I went from total reliance to total independence,’ he says. ‘It was a huge step.’ When the takeaway containers threatened to topple, Doyle finally turned on the stove. ‘It’s a steep learning curve when you start to cook for yourself and have to decipher what julienned carrots are,’ he says. He lit on Chinese cooking because it’s ‘quick, easy, healthy and delicious’ and considers the wok a symbol of his self-sufficiency. ‘It gives me a chance to think about the choices I’ve made along the way and how, slowly but surely, everything has fallen into place.’

Dani Valent, *Good Weekend*, 24 January 2009

**discussion**

1. What competing attitudes, values and beliefs are evident in this profile of Andy Doyle?

2. How do his selections of a surfboard, a nail gun and a wok operate to create key aspects of his interests, lifestyle, character and personality? What strategies does the author use in the representation of these?
Extension

Design a page for a magazine profile of your own using the 'Favourite things' model. You may work in pairs. Select three of your favourite things as individuals and then collaborate to create a brief bio for each person. When you have compiled your profiles, edit these and devise the layout for each. You should incorporate a photograph that includes the subject and the person's three favourite things. Your magazine page should be created digitally, and then incorporated into and published as a school-based online class magazine of biographical profiles.
Note: This chapter includes activities based on film versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, one directed by Franco Zeffirelli and the other by Baz Luhrmann. You will need to view both films before beginning these activities.

One of the best-known of William Shakespeare’s tragedies is *Romeo and Juliet*. Similar stories of tragic lovers from warring families or tribes exist in many cultures, and Shakespeare’s dramatic version probably derives from the narrative poem *Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke, written in 1562.

Many versions and revisions of Shakespeare’s tragedy reappear in contemporary culture. For example, the musical *West Side Story*, set in New York in the 1960s, is based on Shakespeare’s plotline, transposing this to a mid-twentieth-century New York setting, with the conflict occurring between rival street gangs. Baz Luhrmann’s film *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, while retaining much of the original text and dialogue, is set in a postmodern urban world of Verona Beach, on the west coast of America.

As with other texts, canonical texts—that is, texts that have been designated as great classics within a culture—can sustain multiple readings. Meanings are not fixed in texts, although some readings may become institutionalised or dominant through a range of practices, such as the way in which they have been taught.

Canonical texts have been read—and continue to be read—over time and across cultures, but the readings that are produced can differ markedly, generating what may be termed ‘rereadings’. The closure of a text (how it ends) also contributes to the invited readings and works to position readers to accept or to reject certain values, attitudes and beliefs.

Like all texts, canonical works contain representations that are socially, culturally and historically situated. The different versions of *Romeo and Juliet*—whether theatre or film—are also situated in social, historical and cultural contexts, which influence the choices made by the stage and film directors. Later in this chapter we will explore film versions of *Romeo and Juliet* that refocus and realign the ideological work done by the original Shakespearean text.
Producing invited readings of Shakespeare’s play

*Romeo and Juliet* is the first of Shakespeare’s great tragedies and the loveliest. It is golden with the light of morning and heavy with the death of all bright things, and the names of Romeo and Juliet have passed into the language as a symbol of youth and love.

Marchette Chute, *Stories from Shakespeare*

Many such traditional readings of the play situate it as perhaps the world’s greatest love story. The power and potential of young love are privileged and the tragedy develops from the course of true love being thwarted by fate or chance, combined with the destructive forces of human hatred. Reading *Romeo and Juliet* primarily as a love story has become the dominant institutionalised reading of the play. However, it could be argued that Shakespeare is as much preoccupied with ingrained and longstanding hatreds as he is with love.

The prologue to the Shakespearean text sets up the invited readings of the play, constructing it as a story about ‘two households, both alike in dignity’ who are engaged in a feud that disrupts not only the relationships of the families of Capulets and Montagues but also the peace of the city state of Verona. The audience knows from the outset that the ‘pair of star-cross’d lovers’, Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet, have a ‘death-marked love’ and ‘doth with their death bury their parents’ strife’.

**Reading representations of love**

The following speeches of Romeo and Juliet are spoken when each is alone. In the first, in Act II, Scene 2 in Capulet’s Orchard, Romeo sees Juliet on the balcony of her bedchamber. The second speech occurs, in Act III, Scene 2, as Juliet, oblivious to the brawl and the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio, impatiently awaits the return of the Nurse to bring her news of plans for the consummation of her secret marriage that day to Romeo.

Such speeches by lone characters on stage are called soliloquies, and these represent a common dramatic convention in Shakespearean plays as they are useful in revealing to the audience a character’s innermost thoughts, feelings and motivations. Close reading of these soliloquies enables an audience to gain insight into the psychological complexities of Shakespeare’s representations of characters.
Further, close reading of these speeches reveals their dramatic and poetic power. It also demonstrates how our aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of language is inextricably linked to both plot development and the ideological positioning of the audience.

In Act I, Scene 5, when Romeo first sees Juliet he says 'she doth teach the torches to burn bright!' Here Shakespeare draws on the traditions of the courtly blazon, wherein the lover is stereotypically dazzled by the loved one's beauty, idealising her various physical attributes as if those of a goddess to be worshipped from afar. In this soliloquy, he further extends this image of the radiance of light associated with Juliet.

**ROMEO:**

> But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
> It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!  
> Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
> Who is already sick and pale with grief  
> That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.  
> Be not her maid, since she is envious.  
> Her vestal livery is but sick and green,  
> And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.  
> It is my lady. O, it is my love!  
> O that she knew she were!  
> She speaks, yet she says nothing. What of that?  
> Her eye discourses; I will answer it.  
> I am too bold. 'Tis not to me she speaks.  
> Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,  
> Having some business, do entreat her eyes  
> To twinkle in their spheres till they return.  
> What if her eyes were there, they in her head?—  
> The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars  
> As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven  
> Would through the airy region stream so bright  
> That birds would sing and think it were not night.  
> See how she leans her cheek upon her hand.  
> O, that I were a glove upon that hand,  
> That I might touch that cheek!

*William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene 2*

**discussion**

1. Identify and interpret metaphors and similes that figuratively construct Juliet’s dazzling radiance. What is the effect of the use of this imagery?
2. How is Romeo represented in this soliloquy?
3. What is the dramatic function of this soliloquy in the development of plot?
Having married in secret that day, the following scene begins with Juliet impatiently anticipating nightfall and Romeo’s arrival.

JULIET: Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds, Towards Phoebus’ lodging! Such a waggoner As Phaëton would whip you to the west And bring in cloudy night immediately. Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night, That runaways’ eyes may wink, and Romeo Leap to these arms untalked of and unseen. Lovers can see to do their amorous rites By their own beauties; or, if love be blind, It best agrees with night. Come, civil night, Thou sober-suited matron, all in black, And learn me how to lose a winning match Played for a pair of stainless maidenhoods. Hood my unmanned blood, bating in my cheeks, With thy black mantle till strange love, grown bold Think true love acted simple modesty. Come night, come Romeo; come, thou day in night; For thou will lie upon the wings of night Whiter than new snow upon a raven’s back. Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-browed night, Give me my Romeo; and when I shall die Take him and cut him out in little stars, And he will make the face of heaven so fine That all the world will be in love with night And pay no worship to the garish sun. O, I have bought the mansion of a love But not possessed it; and though I am sold, Not yet enjoyed. So tedious is this day As is the night before some festival To an impatient child that hath new robes And may not wear them.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene 2

discussion

1. Despite Juliet’s extensive imagery of night, she nevertheless represents Romeo as illuminating both the night and her life. In what ways does her imagery contrast with, yet also reinforce, the imagery used by Romeo? How does this act to construct their relationship as an interdependent union?

2. How does this soliloquy contribute to the representation of Juliet?

3. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience is aware of a circumstance or event of which the character is oblivious. How does this soliloquy function as dramatic irony and thereby increase dramatic tension?
Activity

In constructing a tragedy of young love, Shakespeare explores diverse attitudes, beliefs and values about romantic love through his various character representations.

1 Analyse and interpret how Shakespeare has constructed differing perspectives to romantic love and the institution of marriage through representations of the attitudes, beliefs and values of the following characters. Use evidence and quotation from the play to support your interpretation:

- Romeo
- Mercutio
- Lord and Lady Capulet
- Juliet
- The Nurse

2 Which of these perspectives of romantic love do you consider to be endorsed by Shakespeare in this play? On what do you base this conclusion?

Reading representations of social and political institutions

Other readings of the play could focus on the operations of power in society. The institutions of state, church and family, and the power relationships associated with these, are integral to the conflicts that develop in the play and to its tragic outcome. In the context of producing readings about the operation of power in the play, you will need to analyse the roles and representations of the state, the church and the family in the play.

Activity

Consider the effect of Shakespeare’s representations of the uses and misuses of power on the events and outcomes of the action.

1 Select one of the nominated institutions and, using a retrieval grid like the one below, work in groups to produce a reading of how that institution is constructed in the play.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Things that happen involving that institution</th>
<th>Your conclusions about the role and influences of this institution in the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **STATE** (represented by the Prince) | Threatens death if there is more civil disorder
Banishes Romeo
Reconciles the families by being angry at the end
Acknowledges that he is implicated in the tragedy by not taking stronger action to halt the discord between the families |                                                                                   |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Things that happen involving that institution</th>
<th>Your conclusions about the role and influences of this institution in the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CHURCH (represented by the Friar) | Father figure/confessor to Romeo  
Marries Romeo and Juliet in secret  
Comforts Romeo after swordfights  
Arranges for Romeo to visit Juliet  
Cautions Paris about marriage (because he does not want to perform a bigamous marriage)  
Gives Juliet potions  
Sends message to Romeo to arrange for him to be there when Juliet awakens  
Goes to tomb and then flees  
Gives evidence to Prince | |
| FAMILY (the Montague and Capulet parents) | Families involved in historic feuding  
Capulet orders Tybalt not to be rude at the party and rebukes him for being defiant  
Capulet can negotiate the arranged marriage of his daughter as a business proposition  
Capulet orders Juliet to marry on threat of expulsion from the family  
Capulet has the power to overrule his wife | |

2 Report back to the class to lead discussion on how your designated institution has been constructed to influence the outcomes of the play. Have the influences of these institutions been constructed positively or negatively? What are some reasons you could suggest for Shakespeare’s invitation to view two of these institutions more negatively than the third?

Reading binary oppositions

At the beginning of the play, the prologue sets up love and hate as binary oppositions. These binaries are developed through events and complications in the plot and through representations of the characters. The binaries of love and hate intersect in the text to shape meaning and position the audience, and thus do ideological work. For example, the way these binaries intersect positions the audience to view romantic love, or ingrained feuds, or young males in particular ways.

When producing your reading of the play, it is useful to identify any such patterns of binaries that are developed as a structuring device to position the audience.
Consider the intersection of the following binaries in various parts of the play:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional power</th>
<th>Individual free will</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darkness</td>
<td>Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion and feeling</td>
<td>Judgment and self-control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashness</td>
<td>Patience and caution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowardice</td>
<td>Courage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Pacifism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate</td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorrow</td>
<td>Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folly</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td>Secular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The binary’s contrasting elements work in opposition to construct meanings and do ideological work in the play. One part of the binary is valued or represented positively and one negatively.

1. In groups, select a different character from the play and identify which aspects of the binary are associated with the representation of that character. Identify the elements of the binary from the lists above. Using this information, consider whether the character is being constructed positively or negatively. Discuss your findings with the class.

2. Along with the reading of young love, there is an associated reading that constructs Romeo and Juliet’s fate as deriving from their youthful impetuosity and passion. Which aspects of the play and which binaries would support such a reading?

3. An alternative reading to this could suggest that the play represents some of the older characters as displaying the same rashness, folly and impetuosity as the young do. What aspects of the play support this reading?

4. A reading that was available to Shakespearean audiences, but not so readily to contemporary audiences who are used to constructing this as a story about romantic love, relates to the dangers of secret marriages. In Tudor England, secret marriages were outlawed to prevent political liaisons between powerful families that might have threatened the throne. In this case, which aspects of the text would be drawn on to produce such a reading?
Meanings in texts are not fixed or final. Texts are not static, but are subject to revision and adaptation that work to invite new readings. In this section, we will explore how Romeo and Juliet has been reread or re-interpreted in the films produced by Franco Zeffirelli and Baz Luhrmann. As you view each film, compare and contrast the directors’ adaptation of the original playscript, and consider how and why each has produced a rereading of Shakespeare’s text. Consider the social, cultural, historical and technological factors that may underpin or influence such changes.

### Influence of settings and locations on readings

Texts construct social worlds in which actions occur and characters function and interact. In reading films, it is important to deconstruct the semiotic codes and conventions that operate to produce meanings in the film. Set design, lighting, music, sound effects and costumes all work in combination with dialogue to generate meaning. Whereas Shakespeare, who worked on a bare Elizabethan stage, relied on descriptive and symbolic language to convey information about place and time and to create atmosphere, film directors can exploit technology to do this. To make meaning of a film text, it is essential to interpret these semiotic codes and conventions.

Consider the choices made in each film in terms of the construction of the sociocultural world in which the action takes place. Zeffirelli chooses to recreate
a past world within a mediaeval city, with a piazza and 'men in tights', while Luhrmann situates his film in an urban setting that is recognisable as twenty-first century America.

These locations operate as symbolic codes that are integral to shaping meaning. They also make a powerful contribution to the film narrative and to the invited readings available in each film. The key settings and locations in both films are symbolically significant in terms of the representations of events and characters. For example, in the Zeffirelli film, the piazza is a communal space whose usual peacefulness is disrupted by the youths of the Montague and Capulet households, who engage in swordplay and violence. This disruption of the peace of the piazza can be read as representing the way that the city of Verona is destabilised by the feud between the families. As another example, Luhrmann has opted to locate the 'balcony scene' in the swimming pool of the Capulet mansion, thus foregrounding the symbolism of water in the construction of the relationship between Romeo and Juliet.

### Activity

1. In groups, add some other key locations from the films to a grid like the one below. Make notes about their symbolic significance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zeffirelli’s major locations</th>
<th>Symbolic significance</th>
<th>Luhrmann’s major locations</th>
<th>Symbolic significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piazza</td>
<td></td>
<td>Petrol station forecourt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balcony</td>
<td></td>
<td>Swimming pool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Discuss your observations and insights with the class.

3. How do the multiple locations used in Luhrmann’s film construct a different social world from that in the original play and in Zeffirelli’s film?
Examining intertextuality in the film
*William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*

Luhrmann’s film makes extensive use of intertextuality as both a structural and a symbolic device. In structuring the film, Luhrmann replaces the prologue with a television newsreader who provides news updates throughout the film. This is one of the ways that he exploits the television medium to suggest the fragmentation, pace and discontinuity of contemporary life. Fast editing and crosscutting make the film resonate with viewers familiar with MTV.

The film draws on contemporary culture to realign meanings and so connect with a contemporary audience. Intertextual references include witty allusions to many different film and television genres—westerns, thrillers, gangster and kung fu movies; and MTV, news, current affairs, sitcoms and soaps. Other intertextual links draw on a rich range of references to different cultures. Throughout the film, significant use is made of religious iconography and symbolism. In the opening scene, an aerial shot from behind the twin towers of the Montague and Capulet commercial empires, shows them dwarfing the statue of Jesus, thus mobilising competing attitudes of capitalism and religion.

Luhrmann also uses intertextuality through carnivalisation, which derives from the mediaeval carnival and discussion

1. Viewers’ prior experiences will influence their ‘readings’ of any film. What specific connections do you make between Luhrmann’s film and other texts?
2. What do you think the film gains from these intertextual references?
3. How do the references drawn from the range of film genres mentioned above contribute to the foregrounding of violence in the film? What contribution do these make to the dislocation of social order that is evident in the society constructed in the film?
4. The film could be read as showing the impact of hedonism, violence and decadence on traditional religious values, attitudes and beliefs.
   a. Discuss how the intertextual references construct (i) the institution of the church and (ii) the society of Verona Beach.
   b. How does this contribute to an invited reading about the lack of ethics and morality in contemporary society?
its destabilisation of privileged and dominant attitudes, values and beliefs through the use of parody. On one day of the year during the carnival, all that was normally taken seriously in a particular society or culture could be mocked and thus overthrown. In street parades and processions, important figures and institutions were parodied. Hierarchies, norms and rules were overturned and destabilised, thus enabling people to see all of these in a comic and radically different way. Modern versions of ‘carnival’ are found in elements of the Rio de Janeiro Carnivale and the Mardi Gras.

Often ‘carnival’ is used to show that hierarchies, conventions and rules are socially constructed within a culture at a particular time to form power structures and ways of being in the world that are not fixed and unchangeable.

Reading gender in the play and in Luhrmann’s film

In contemporary culture, many people consider gender to be socially constructed rather than a biological fact. They argue that gendered identity is constructed historically and culturally and learnt as a person is socialised within a culture. Gender is constructed differently in different cultures at different times. Nevertheless, some gender constructions can become naturalised and made to seem ‘normal’. Attitudes, values and beliefs about gendered identities and appropriate roles and relationships can become an entrenched part of the culture and reproduced in texts across time.

Canonical texts, many of which were constructed hundreds or even thousands of years ago, can be influential in perpetuating such gendered identities. Representations of gender in texts thus have a powerful influence in shaping and perpetuating gender roles, relations and stereotypes in the culture.

discussion

1. What aspects of Luhrmann’s film invoke elements of ‘carnival’? Consider the party and the representation of Mercutio’s performance. Who or what is being parodied in this scene?

2. How does Luhrmann use ‘carnival’ to parody and thus interrogate aspects of contemporary society? Consider how elements of ‘carnival’ operate to shift and reposition audience attitudes, beliefs and values to wealth, power and status in society.

3. Consider the choreography of some of the fight scenes. Could an argument be made that Luhrmann ‘carnivalises’ violence in some parts of the film to show how contemporary audiences have become desensitised through film and television representations of violence?
Activity

Look at the representations of gender in the play and in Luhrmann’s film. As you respond to the questions in the following grid, consider whether the invited reading of each text reinforces or contests stereotypical gender roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shakespeare’s play text</th>
<th>Luhrmann’s film text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which characters act and speak in the public sphere?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which characters are seen predominantly indoors?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which characters are constructed as exercising authority and control over others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which characters are expected to acquiesce in this authority and control?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which characters are constructed as sensitive?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which characters are physically active and perpetuate conflict?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What objects in the text symbolically construct masculinity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What objects in the text symbolically construct femininity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What imagery is associated with or used to construct femininity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What imagery is associated with or used to construct masculinity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which characters subvert stereotypical gendered roles?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity

Producing a close comparative reading of a scene from Shakespeare’s play and Luhrmann’s film

Analysing Luhrmann’s rereading of Shakespeare’s play helps to uncover the ways that texts sustain multiple readings. Each rereading has the potential to reposition the audience, sometimes in markedly different ways.
Work in groups to deconstruct a scene from Luhrmann’s film that appears both in Shakespeare’s play and in Luhrmann’s film. Compare the scenes and explore the potential and the limitations of each genre examining the following:

1. **The structure and filmic restaging of the scene**
   a. Consider the contemporary setting and its significance; the structure, dramatic function, visual impact and effectiveness of the scene; the use of lighting; the use of soundtrack (for example, sound effects and music; other film techniques and devices; the use of televised images/genres).
   b. Indicate what you consider to be the relative strengths and weaknesses of the film interpretation of this scene from the play.

2. **The representations of characters**
   Consider how the representations of the characters and their relationships with other characters are constructed.
   a. Evaluate Luhrmann’s representations of characters/roles compared with those in Shakespeare’s play; for example, consider the invited readings of characters in the play and any alternative or resistant readings in the film.
   b. Consider Luhrmann’s positioning of viewers/audience.

3. **The use of language/dialogue**
   a. Examine the use of language structure and devices (for example, use of figurative language, symbolism, binaries) in the play, and the semiotic codes (for example, type of shots, soundtrack, editing) of the film.
   b. Suggest reasons for Luhrmann’s omissions/cuts from Shakespeare’s play.
   c. Identify gaps and silences.
   d. Consider the effectiveness of retaining Shakespearean language and dialogue in a (post)modern film setting/context.

   Where appropriate, use specific examples and quotations from both the film and play to illustrate your points.

4. **The invited readings**
   a. What is foregrounded and privileged in this scene?
   b. How might a contemporary audience read Shakespeare’s play? Would that audience be likely to accept or reject aspects of this text? Why?
   c. Does Luhrmann maintain the invited reading of Shakespeare’s play in this scene, or does he make alterations to accommodate contemporary screen audiences? What are the effects of any such alterations?

In a class seminar, present and discuss the findings of your group.
There are instances where Zeffirelli and Luhrmann intervened to alter the original plotline of Shakespeare's play. Whether minor or significant, these adaptations influence the readings made available by the text.

Activity

The way that any story closes not only shuts down the action but also does important ideological work, positioning readers or viewers to respond in particular ways.

Complete a retrieval grid like the one below as a prewriting strategy for exploring other plot choices and directions that could have been made in the play—in particular, from the point where Romeo was banished. On the grid, indicate any interventions that Zeffirelli and Luhrmann may have made, and consider how the audience is repositioned to read the tragic ending. The interventions in the text may be substitutions or omissions. Explain the effects of such interventions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shakespeare's play</th>
<th>Zeffirelli's film</th>
<th>Luhrmann's film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romeo is banished</td>
<td>Romeo is banished</td>
<td>Romeo is banished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo threatens to kill himself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo leaves for Mantua</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capulet says Juliet will marry Paris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliet threatens to stab herself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friar concocts plan for Juliet to drug herself and achieve a state ‘like death’; she is to be interred for 42 hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friar plans to advise Romeo so that he can return to Verona and take Juliet back to Mantua with him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliet tells her father, who unfortunately advances the wedding plans one day (Friar is left with little time to effect his plan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliet’s ‘death’ is discovered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balthazar arrives (before Friar John) and tells Romeo that Juliet is dead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo goes to apothecary and buys poison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friar John does not get to Romeo with the message as he has been quarantined in a house where people have the plague</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris goes to tomb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo arrives at tomb, they fight, Romeo kills Paris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Shakespeare’s play** | **Zeffirelli’s film** | **Luhrmann’s film**
--- | --- | ---
Juliet is close to reviving, as Romeo (ironically) notices |  | 
Romeo kills himself |  | 
Friar arrives and tries to get Juliet away before she sees Romeo |  | 
Friar runs away and leaves Juliet |  | 
Juliet kills herself |  | 
Friar confesses all to Prince |  | 
Prince is angry |  | 
Families of Montagues and Capulets are reconciled |  | 

**Activity**

Your retrieval grid from the previous activity shows the events that followed Romeo’s banishment and the interventions that Luhrmann and Zeffirelli made. Using it as a guide, intervene in the play to construct an alternative ending that will create an ideological shift, repositioning the audience in terms of the underlying attitudes, values and beliefs.

**Guidelines and suggestions**

Your intervention can be anywhere in the play from the point when Romeo is banished. For example, it could be at the point where Romeo leaves for Mantua. Alternatively, it might be right at the end, with the Friar remaining to support Juliet so that she does not kill herself; or it could be with Juliet’s awakening, when she decides not to take her own life, but to pursue another course of action.

Make your decision about your point of intervention in terms of the change of events and the altered outcomes that would follow, and how these would achieve an ideological shift. The shift could change the role of the Friar as a representative of the Church. Rather than constructing him as a secretive but well-intentioned meddler, he could be someone who behaved more responsibly. This would construct the Church in a more positive light. Another shift might entail changing Romeo and Juliet’s impetuosity and defiance to maturity and responsibility, thus constructing more positive representations of youth. Romantic love could be reinterpreted so that the notion of being unable to survive without the object of the heart’s desire is contested, thereby challenging the idea of committing suicide for love, rather than enduring separation.

It may be helpful to construct a web plan/mind map or similar concept map to plot your point of intervention and consider the alternative events and outcomes, before making your final decision about the changes that you will make after the point where you have intervened.

To ensure that the narrative you create is effective, you will need to craft it carefully. Consider genre, structure, word choice, dialogue, use of imagery (including symbolism) and binary oppositions.
Influence of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on other texts

Shakespeare's play about the two 'star-cross'd lovers' has had an enduring and powerful influence on Western culture, and has generated innumerable references and allusions in many other texts and genres—from cartoons, to song lyrics, to advertisements. Examples of this intertextuality range from the serious, through the satirical or parodic, to the commercial. Some of these texts show little reverence for the original, while others perpetuate some of the representations and cultural assumptions, values, attitudes and beliefs of the original.

The several examples on the following pages demonstrate the pervasive use and effects of such intertextuality.

The first example is this tobacco advertisement that appeared in American newspapers and magazines in 1873.

![Advertisement](image)

### discussion

1. Who do you think is the target market for the advertisement? What explicit and implicit persuasive appeals to this market are being mobilised?
2. What readings are invited by the advertisement?
3. How does it contest stereotypical representations of Juliet, and to what purpose?
4. What attitudes, values and beliefs of masculinity and femininity are operating in this advertisement?

In the early twentieth century, Australian poet CJ Dennis used intertextuality in more direct ways in his poem *The play* (on pages 187–189). The narrator, 'the bloke', recounts his responses to a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* that he attended with his girlfriend, Doreen.
The play

‘Wot’s in a name?’ she sez … An’ then she sighs,
An’ claps ’er little ’ands, an’ rolls ’er eyes.
‘A rose,’ she sez, ‘be any other name
Would smell the same.
Oh, w’erfore art you Romeo, young sir?
Chuck yer ole pot, an’ change yer moniker!’

Doreen an’ me, we bin to see a show—
The swell two-dollar touch. Bong tong, yeh know.
A chair apiece wiv velvit on the seat;
A slap-up treat.
The drarmer’s writ be Shakespeare, years ago,
About a barmy goat called Romeo.

‘Lady, be yonder moon I swear!’ sez ’e.
An’ then ’e climbs up on the balkiney;
An’ there they smooge a treat, wiv pretty words
Like two love-birds.
I nudge Doreen. She whispers, ‘Ain’t it grand!’
’Er eyes is shinin’, an’ I squeeze ’er ’and.

‘Wot’s in a name?’ she sez. ‘Struth, I dunno.
Billo is just as good as Romeo.
She may be Juli-er or Juli-et—
’E loves ’er yet.
If she’s the tart ’e wants, then she’s ’is queen,
Names never count … But ar, I like ’Doreen’!

A sweeter, dearer sound I never ’eard;
Ther’s music ’angs around that little word,
Doreen! … But wot was this I starts to say
About the play?
I’m off me beat. But when a bloke’s in love
’Is thorts turn ’er way, like a ’omin’ dove.

This Romeo ’e’s lurkin’ wiv a crew—
A dead tough crowd o’ crooks—called Montague.
’Is cliner’s push—wot’s nicknamed Capulet—
They ’as ’em set.
Fair narks they are, jist like them back-street clicks,
Ixcep’ they fights wiv skewers ’tid o’ bricks.
Wot’s in a name? Wot’s in a string o’ words?
They scraps in ole Verona wiv the’r swords,
An’ never give a bloke a stray dog’s chance,
An’ that’s Romance.
But when they deals it out wiv bricks an’ boots
In Little Lon., they’re low, degraded broots.

Wot’s jist plain stoush wiv us, right ’ere to-day,
Is ‘valer’ if yer fur enough away.
Some time, some writer bloke will do the trick
Wiv Ginger Mick,
Of Spadger’s Lane. ‘E’ll be a Romeo,
When ’e’s bin dead five ‘undred years or so.

Fair Juli-et, she gives ’er boy the tip.
Sez she: ‘Don’t sling that crowd o’ mine no lip;
An’ if you run agin a Capulet,
Jist do a get.’
’E swears ’e’s done wiv lash, ’e’ll chuck it clean.
(Same as I done when I first met Doreen.)

They smooge some more at that. Ar, strike me blue!
It gimme Joes to sit an' watch them two!
’E’d break away an' start to say good-bye,
An’ then she’d sigh
‘Ow, Ro-me-o!’ an’ git a strangle-holt,
An’ ‘ang around ’im like she feared ’e’d bolt.

Nex’ day ’e words a gorspl cove about
A secret weddin’; an’ they plan it out.
’E spouts a piece about ’ow ’e’s bewitched:
Then they git ’itched …
Now, ’ere’s the place where I fair git the pip!
She’s ’is for keeps, an’ yet ’e lets ’er slip!

Ar! but ’e makes me sick! A fair gazob!
’E’s jist the glarsey on the soulful sob,
’E’ll sigh and spruik, an’ ’owl a love-sick vow—
(The silly cow!)
But when ’e’s got ’er, spliced an’ on the straight
’E crools the pitch, an’ tries to kid it’s Fate.

Aw! Fate me foot! Instid of slopin’ soon
As ’e was wed, off on 'is ’oneymoon,
’Im an’ is cobber, called Mick Curio,
They ’ave to go
An' mix it wiv that push o' Capulets.
They look fer trouble; an' it's wot they gets.

A tug named Tyball (cousin to the skirt)
Sprags 'em an' makes a start to sling off dirt.
Nex' minnit there's a reel ole ding-dong go—
'Aft round or so.
Mick Curio, 'e gets it in the neck,
'Ar rats!' 'e sez, an' passes in 'is check.

Quite natchril, Romeo gits wet as 'ell.
'It's me or you!' 'e owls, an' wiv a yell,
Plunks Tyball through the gizzard wiv 'is sword,
'Ow I ongcored!
'Put in the boot!' I sez. 'Put in the boot!
'Ush!' sez Doreen … 'Shame!' sez some silly coot.

Then Romeo, 'e dunno wot to do.
The cops gits busy, like they allwiz do,
An' nose around until 'e gits blue funk
An' does a bunk.
They want 'is tart to wed some other guy.
'Ah, strike!' she sez. 'I wish that I could die!'

Now, this 'ere gorspl bloke's a fair shrewd 'ead.
Sez 'e 'I'll dope yeh, so they'll think yer dead.'
(I tips 'e was a cunnin' sort, wot knoo
A thing or two.)
She takes 'is knock-out drops, up in 'er room:
They think she's snuffed, an' plant 'er in 'er tomb.

Then things gits mixed a treat an' starts to whirl
'Ere's Romeo comes back an' find 'is girl
Tucked in 'er little coffing, cold an' stiff,
An' in a jiff,
'E swallow lysol, throws a fancy fit,
'Ead over turkey, an' 'is soul 'as flit.

Then Juli-et wakes up an' sees 'im there,
Turns on the water-works an' tears 'er 'air.
'Dear love,' she sez, 'I cannot live alone!' 
An' wiv a moan,
She grabs 'is pockit knife, an' ends 'er cares …
'Peanuts or lollies!' sez a boy upstairs.

CJ Dennis
Mark Knopfler from the group Dire Straits also appropriated elements of the play to create the song ‘Romeo and Juliet’ on the album *Money for Nothing*.

**romeo and juliet**
a lovestruck romeo sings a streetsuss serenade
laying everybody low with a lovesong that he made
finds a convenient streetlight steps out of the shade
says something like you and me babe how about it?

juliet says hey it’s romeo you nearly gimme a heart attack
he’s underneath the window she’s singing hey la my boyfriend’s back
you shouldn’t come around here singing up at people like that
anyway what you gonna do about it?

   juliet the dice were loaded from the start
   and i bet and you exploded in my heart
   and i forget i forget the movie song
   when you gonna realise it was just that the time was wrong juliet?

come up on different streets they both were streets of shame
both dirty both mean yes and the dream was just the same
and i dreamed your dream for you and now your dream is real
how can you look at me as if i was just another one of your deals?

when you can fall for chains of silver you can fall for chains of gold
you can fall for pretty strangers and the promises they hold
you promised me everything you promised me thick and thin
now you just say oh romeo yeah you know i used to have a scene with him

   juliet when we made love you used to cry
   you said i love you like the stars above i’ll love you till i die
   there’s a place for us you know the movie song
   when you gonna realise it was just that the time was wrong juliet?

i can’t do the talk like they talk on tv
and i can’t do a love song like the way it’s meant to be
i can’t do everything but i’d do anything for you
i can’t do anything except be in love with you

and all i do is miss you and the way we used to be
all i do is keep the beat and bad company
all i do is kiss you through the bars of a rhyme
julie i’d do the stars with you any time       (Repeat second refrain.)

a lovestruck romeo sings a streetsuss serenade
laying everybody low with a lovesong that he made
finds a convenient streetlight steps out of the shade
says something like you and me babe how about it?

Mark Knopfler
Maxine Kumin used the Elizabethan sonnet form to develop her satirical reconstruction of an alternative ending to the play.

**Purgatory**

And suppose the darlings get to Mantua, suppose they cheat the crypt, what next? Begin with him unshaven. Though not, I grant you, a displeasing cockerel, there’s egg yolk on his chin. His seedy robe’s a flap, he’s got the rheum. Poor dear, the cooking lard has smoked her eye. Another Montague is in the womb although the first babe’s bottom’s not yet dry. She scrolls a weekly letter to her Nurse who dares to send a smock through Balthasar, and once a month, his father posts a purse. News from Verona? Always news of war. Such sour years it takes to right this wrong! The fifth act runs unconscionably long.

Maxine Kumin

**Discussion**

1. Why does Kumin begin the poem with a question?
2. How is the relationship of Romeo and Juliet re/ constructed in the sonnet?
3. Consider the ideological shifts that occur. How are traditional and conventional representations of romantic love subverted and shifted in the text?

**Activity**

1. **In role:** On your school’s intranet or on The Learning Place, construct a blog from the point of view of one of the characters in Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*. This blog should document that character’s responses to key events and attitudes to other characters. You may give attention to your own use of dramatic irony and to completing gaps and silences in the original text. Your classmates, in assuming the identity of other characters in the play, may add comments to your blog, either agreeing with or disputing your views.

2. **As yourself:** On your school’s intranet or on The Learning Place, participate in an online discussion of your interpretations of and opinions about Shakespeare’s play.

3. **In role:** As Lord Montague, in an interior monologue, reflect upon the events and outcomes of the play and reveal the reasons for the historical feud between the Montagues and the Capulets.
Extension

Journalist Kevin Fedarko writes for *Time* magazine. In his article ‘Bosko and Admira’, he uses intertextual allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* to make analogies with a real-life tragedy.

1. For what purpose does the author invoke the intertextual links?
2. Why does he suggest that Shakespeare presents us with an unrealistic ending to the play, through the reconciliation of the Capulets and Montagues?
3. How is the photograph of Bosko and Admira a visual representation of an intertextual link with the play?
4. What other links to the play are evident in the article? Do Bosko and Admira represent a contemporary Romeo and Juliet?
5. How does Fedarko position his readers in the final paragraph of the article?

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**BOSKO AND ADMIRA**

by Kevin Fedarko

*A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life; Whose misadventure piteous overthrows Do with their death bury their parents' strife.*

It’s painfully inapt, this impulse to lend meaning to the death of two Bosnian lovers by invoking *Romeo and Juliet*. Had he but glimpsed Sarajevo today, Shakespeare surely would have known better. In Sarajevo, the Bard would have realised, it is too much to ask that the murder of Bosko Brkic and Admira Ismic could put to rest their parents’ strife. In Sarajevo, the Bard would have noted, it is almost too much even to ask that their bodies be buried together.

He was a Serb, she a Muslim. They had been sweethearts since high school, both were 25 years old, and although both died through the same mindless hatred that has doomed 158,000 Bosnians in the past year, their final embrace goes further than perhaps any other image in capturing the intimate, unutterable sadness of this war.

When Bosko’s family fled Sarajevo for Serbia, he chose to remain in the besieged city rather than abandon his lover. ‘He had no one here, just Admira,’ explained the woman’s mother. ‘He stayed in Sarajevo because of her. And Admira wanted to repay him by travelling with him to Serbia.’ After striking a deal with local commanders for passage across the battle lines, the couple set out on foot, carrying only two bags and their hope of living together in peace. Exposed to snipers from both sides, they passed into no-man’s-land near Vrbana Bridge. And then somebody mowed them down with a machine gun.

When they were hit, Bosko died instantly. Mortally wounded, Admira crawled over and, during her final seconds, succeeded in tenderly wrapping her arm around his body. Then she too passed away. And in an obscene reflection of the insanity that suffuses this city, they lay there for the next five days while Serbs and Muslims—each blaming the other for the killing—bickered over which side could recover the bodies. Last Monday night, Serbs finally claimed the remains.

The Bard fathomed only too well what they left behind: as yet to be assuaged, a continuance of their parents’ rage.

*Time, 7 June 1993*
PART C

CLOSE READINGS OF A NOVEL
Reading *The Secret River*

*The Secret River* by Kate Grenville explores Australia’s ambiguous relationships with its colonial past, and in doing so has drawn on both the historical record as well as the creative imagination. As a contemporary Australian writer, Grenville endeavours to retrieve and represent the voices and contexts of the colonial past in complex and challenging ways. Her novel represents a fictive depiction of events and incidents that derive from both the lives of her own ancestors and the Australian colonial heritage of early white settlement with its frontier conflicts and dispossession of the Indigenous peoples.

Reputable writers of fiction engage in careful research of the period and setting of their works. Grenville draws on and appropriates a range of historical sources, including primary sources such as British court documents, Colonial Governors’ Despatches and genealogical records. She initially sought to write a family history about her pioneering ancestor, Solomon Wiseman, who settled on the Hawkesbury River in New South Wales as an emancipist. In her companion volume, *Searching for*
The Secret River, Grenville recounts her early research and the subsequent transition to the creation of a work of fiction, and as such provides interesting insights into the writing process and the associated textual choices and omissions.

One critic, Eleanor Collins, has suggested that the book not be read simply as a historical novel but rather as an exploration of three central founding ‘myths’ of Australia: the myth of the convict transportation for minor offences caused by poverty and social inequities of British society; the myth of the toiling pioneer settler hacking out a precarious life in the unforgiving bush; and the myth of first contact between the Indigenous peoples and the British colonisers. Judith Wright, one of Australia’s foremost poets, has said that ‘we live in a haunted country, torn between our love of the land and the guilt of invasion’. In reading the novel, it is useful to consider both the observations of Eleanor Collins and of Judith Wright and the extent to which these are evident in the text.

The material and activities in this chapter are designed to guide you through a close reading of The Secret River, utilising a range of approaches that combine textual analysis, aesthetic appreciation and critical reflection. In Chapter 4, we have seen that there are many ways to approach the reading of narratives. As Grenville has done as writer, we—as readers—bring our own prior knowledge and understandings not only of the conventions of fiction but also of Australian history, specifically of early Australian settlement, as well as our own values, attitudes and beliefs to our engagement with the text. Any reading of the text is inevitably affected by these factors.

Textual choices

Narratives are powerful texts, representing versions of social and cultural realities that are shaped by careful choices of the elements of fiction so that readers are positioned to engage emotionally and intellectually with the ideological work being done by the text. Reading novels therefore requires attention to the effects of textual choices of settings, temporal structure and sequencing, and the use of literary devices, including symbolism and motifs. Such aesthetic choices are powerful components in positioning the reader.

The discussions and activities in this section progressively examine these elements at different stages of the reading process—before, during and after reading.

Cultural context of the settings

Setting creates not only a physical backdrop to the action, but also a sociocultural milieu that situates the events in a particular time and space. The Secret River explores the idea that identity and place are closely interrelated and that people have strong attachments to place that are variously social, cultural and spiritual.

The events of the novel have three distinct settings: London, Sydney and the Hawkesbury River district. Carefully consider the images that follow as these will provide some visual representations of the period and places in the novel.
Activity

1 Compare and contrast the images in these visuals. Suggest ways in which early British settlers might have been challenged and confronted in their new environment, but also encouraged by its beauty and potential.

2 From these visuals, make some observations from the perspectives of the Indigenous Australians of that time.

Historical images of London, circa 1800

William Hogarth, Gin Lane, 1751

William Daniell, View of the Thames River. c.1802–06
Historical images of New South Wales, circa 1800

Conrad Martens,  
River Hawkesbury, near  
Wiseman’s Ferry, N.S.W.,  
1838

M. Dubourg,  
Climbing trees, 1813
Structure and sequencing: time and place

One of the first things a reader needs to do is to work out when and where the events occur. So important is the historical setting in this novel that we are given the time and the place quite explicitly on the first page.

Identifying the time sequence in the novel as developed through the various sections of the book is important, but of even greater significance from the perspective of interpretation is why this choice was made.

Activity

During reading

Draw up a grid similar to the sample below. Complete the columns Time, Place and Brief summary as you read *The Secret River*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Brief summary of section (no more than 3 sentences)</th>
<th>Why this choice in this place in the book?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strangers</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Penal settlement of New South Wales</td>
<td>Arrival of convict ship with main character and his response to the land and first encounter with …</td>
<td>This chapter foregrounds the alienation of the convict William Thornhill and alerts the reader to the …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part One</td>
<td>1777 to …?</td>
<td>London</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Two</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1807 ticket of leave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1808 after 3 yrs in colony</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Three</td>
<td></td>
<td>A Clearing in the Forest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Four</td>
<td></td>
<td>A Hundred Acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Five</td>
<td></td>
<td>Drawing a Line</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Six</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Secret River</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornhill’s Place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity

After reading

Complete the last column of the grid when you have finished reading the book. Then consider further the elements of time and place presented below.

1 Time:
   a Consider how different the novel would have been if it had been structured chronologically (that is, progressively in order of time from Thornhill’s birth in London) instead of retrospectively (beginning part-way through the time sequence, then returning to Thornhill’s early life and following chronologically from that time).
   b The prologue, ‘Strangers’, describes an encounter between Thornhill and an Indigenous Australian. What is the effect of foregrounding this encounter at the outset? Give reasons why you think Kate Grenville’s choice of overall structure is effective or otherwise.

2 Place: Grenville creates evocative backdrops that are significant in developing the events and character representations.
   a How does she develop contrasting attitudes to the land in her depictions of Australia?
   b How might the juxtaposition of her representations of London and Sydney function to position the reader to be sympathetic to Thornhill?

Use of motifs and symbols

Writers engage readers through imaginative use of language. Symbolism and repetition of motifs are deployed explicitly and implicitly throughout The Secret River to emphasise and draw attention to key ideas and concepts. As well as deriving aesthetic pleasure from such use of language, readers are expected to make inferences about the significance of these choices.

Activity

During and after reading

1 Explain how the alienation felt by Will Thornhill is constructed in the first four pages through key symbols and images, especially the repetition of ‘darkness’. How is this then developed and elaborated throughout the rest of the novel?
2 The ‘river’ is an important symbol in the novel. Examine how Grenville uses the parallel images of the River Thames and the Hawkesbury River to trace Thornhill’s fortunes in London, where the Thames is both the site of Thornhill’s salvation and his destruction, as is the Hawkesbury in New South Wales.

3 Examine the symbolic associations of the yellow daisies. What do the daisies represent:
   a to the local Darug people?
   b to the Thornhills?
How do the daisies symbolise the tensions and cultural dissonance on the frontier?

4 The scorched earth where nothing grows is not only a literal description but also has symbolic significance. Consider the significance of the symbolism of the scorched earth in the following passage.

   He [Thornhill] would glance over at where river-oaks circled a patch of bare yellow earth beside the lagoon, marking where the bonfire had burned into the night. Something had happened to the dirt in that spot so that not as much as a blade of grass had grown there ever since. Nothing was written on the ground. Nor was it written on any page. But the blankness itself might tell the story to anyone who had eyes to see. (p. 325)

5 Intersecting symbols are used with the house built on the Aboriginal rock carvings. What is the significance of Thornhill constructing his homestead on the site of the carvings, thereby obliterating all evidence of the carvings?

6 How does being alert to the use of symbols in The Secret River enrich our engagement with, and our understanding of, the novel?

Representations of characters

Representations of people, places, things and events in fiction are shaped by a range of competing attitudes, values and beliefs that intersect in the construction of the characters’ identities and relationships and the ideological directions of the narrative. Character interactions are created by the conflict among competing attitudes, ideas and opinions.

When reading any novel, it is useful to be sensitive to the ways in which the author may pre-figure or foreshadow later actions and motivations of various characters. Readers need to be alert to subtle shifts in attitudes, values and beliefs that signify the complexity of a character’s development throughout the novel.

Class and childhood

The following two excerpts look at the intersection of differing attitudes, values and beliefs associated with class and childhood in the construction of Will’s and Sal’s childhood in Britain.
William Thornhill

He was always hungry. That was a fact of life: the gnawing feeling in his belly, the flat taste in his mouth, the rage that there was never enough. When the food came it was a matter of cramming it into his mouth so his hands could reach for more. If he was quick enough, he could grab the bread his little brother James was lifting to his mouth, break a piece off and get it down his gullet. Once it was swallowed no one could get it back. But Matty was doing the same, ripping the bread out of William’s hand, his eyes gone small and hard like an animal’s.

And always cold. There was a kind of desperation to it, a fury to be warm. In the winter his feet were stone on the end of his legs. At night he and the others lay shivering on the mouldy straw, scratching at the fleas and the bedbugs, full of their blood, that nipped them through their rags.

He had eaten the bedbugs more than once.

There was one blanket for the two youngest Thornhills, and each other’s smelly bodies the best warmth. James was older by two years and got the best of the blanket, but William, though smaller, was canny. He forced himself not to sleep, waiting for James’s snores, so he could pull most of it over himself.

Kate Grenville, *The Secret River*, pp.11–12

Sal Middleton

Sal’s Ma and Dad were gentle with their precious child. The mother would hold the girl against herself, putting a hand along the side of her face, calling her poppet and sweet thing. Within the means of the household, Sal was indulged with every delicacy she could desire: oranges and sweetbreads and soft white bread, and for her birthday a blue shawl of wool as fine as a cobweb. It was another way altogether of being a Ma and a Da, and William—whose birthday was not even remarked—looked on wondering.

Sal flowered under such care. She was no beauty, but had a smile that lit up everything around her. The only shadow in her life was the graveyard where her brothers and sisters were buried. They haunted her, and made her puzzle, the way they had no life, while she, deserving it no more than they, had all the love that should have been shared out. That shadow made her soft in a way new to William. He knew no one else like her, who could not bear to watch the head cut off a hen, or a horse beaten in the street. She had run at a man whipping a little dog one day, shrilling at him *Leave off!* *Leave off!* and the man had shrugged her away and might have turned the whip on her, except that William pulled her, gripping her arm tight until the man and the cringing dog had disappeared around the corner, when she turned her face into his chest and cried angry gusts of tears.

p.17
Class and gender

The dandy and his wife

The gentry seemed another species, more enigmatic than any Lascar, and it came upon him as a surprise that they might be driven by the same impulses as any other human animal. He was up to his thighs in the water one day, holding the boat up to the ramp, so his fares could get in without wetting their feet. He hardly glanced at them as they hailed him, being concerned only to get enough fares for the day and go back to Mr Middleton’s warm kitchen. His legs were numbed, but the upper part of him was frozen, wet from the recent shower of rain, and whipped by the wind. He could smell his own hair, damp under his cap from the rain, a doggy sort of smell, and the wet old wool of his blue coat, and the red flannel waistcoat that had been a gift from Mr Middleton, whose frame could no longer be accommodated within it now that he had such a strong apprentice to do the work for him. The boat was bumping against his legs, driven in by the sharp wind that was whipping the surface into waves, and he was gripping the gunwale with both hands, busy steadying it, when he heard the plummy tones of the gentleman. *Be cautious, my love*, he said. *Don’t expose your leg to the boatman!* He was a white-faced, thin-chested fellow with a little pink rosebud mouth, his curls falling down his cheeks from under his hat, all care as he took his lady by the hand and around her back. His glance at Thornhill, standing in the mud and the water, his hands frozen in shape gripping the gunwale, was not so much one of scorn as one of triumph. *Look at me, fellow, and what I have got!* It was a look that said that the white silk legs, and everything attached to them, were his property, in a way there was nothing in the world that was William Thornhill’s property, excepting only his black cap, shrunk in so many rains, that sat on top of his head like a pimple on an elephant’s behind.
The gentleman looked as though he would not know what to do with a female leg, and although he touched her, there was no pleasure in the touch: the woman, white stockings and silk slippers and all, was a thing he took pride of ownership in, but there was no love in that my love.

And there was the leg, level with the boatman’s eyes as its owner got herself over the gunwale, close enough, had he wished, to reach out and touch its silk surface. The slipper on the end of the leg was a miracle of frivolity, down here at Horsleydown Old Stairs, on the muddy ramp. It seemed impossible that such a substantial person as this woman could be supported on two such tiny slips of poison-green silk. There was no back to the thing, but a little heel that gave her ankle a special fineness, and as she placed the slipper on the bow, the foot was turned outward so the curve of the ankle, the back of the foot, the daintiness of the heel, were all proffered for Thornhill’s close inspection.

Up past the leg was her face, and the mouth in the face said that she thanked her husband kindly, my love, for his care, but the face said she did not expect much fun from him, only this namby-pamby gallantry.

She did not look at Thornhill, and yet her leg spoke to him, its exposure meant for him. Did she hope to provoke the bloodless husband, by showing leg to a mere boatman? Or was it for her own satisfaction, to remind herself that there were other kinds of men in the world, ones who knew what to do with a leg when they saw one?

In the next moment, the gentleman had pulled the skirt down, interposed himself between them: had somehow got them both into the boat, his bottom at one stage brushing Thornhill’s face as he climbed in. Thornhill had his hands full holding the boat, so inept were his passengers, and when he got in himself, feeling his wet legs weak with cold, hardly under his instructions, his passengers were sitting in the stern and the white skirt was well down, the green slippers out of sight.

But the owner of the leg spoke: Henry dear, she said, I am afraid my slipper is all but ruined. She extended her leg out in front of her, and indeed the poison-green silk gleamed with river-water, and the little furbelow on the front hung sad and bedraggled. Her skirt was hiked up almost to the knee so that north of the slipper was the leg again, and beyond that the shadows where a man could guess at all her other charms.

My love, said the man more sharply, you are exposing your leg!

And now the woman definitely looked at Thornhill, and by God it was a sultry teasing look, though gone so quick no husband could find anything to blame. The glance that passed between them was the glance of two creatures, male and female of the same species, recognising each others’ blood.
The dandy put his arm about his wife's shoulders now, although not to Thornhill's eye in a way that promised anything of an interesting nature when they got to the shrubbery of the Vauxhall Gardens.

In any race for survival with this Henry, Thornhill knew he would have been the victor, lad though he was—shipwrecked, for instance, the dandy would have pined and drooped and died, while he himself would have known how to prosper. And yet, in this particular desert isle of London, this jungle full of dangerous creatures in the year 1793, Thornhill was at the mercy of such mincing pansies, who looked at him as if he were of no more account than a bollard.

**discussion**

1. Examine how representations of class and gender intersect in this passage to construct Thornhill's contempt for the gentry.

2. How does this representation of William Thornhill foreshadow his ability to survive and thrive in New South Wales?

**Class and race**

**The Darug**

It was true the blacks made no fields or fences, and built no houses worth the name, roaming around with no thought for the morrow. It was true that they did not even know enough to cover their nakedness, but sat with their bare arses on the dirt like dogs. In all these ways they were nothing but savages.

On the other hand, they did not seem to have to work to come by the little they needed. They spend time every day filling their dishes and catching the creatures that hung from their belts. But afterwards they seemed to have plenty of time left for sitting by their fires talking and laughing and stroking the chubby limbs of their babies.

By contrast, the Thornhill household was up with the sun, hacking away at the weeds around the corn, lugging water, chopping away at the forest that hemmed them in. Only when the sun slipped down behind the ridge did they take their ease, and by then no one seemed to feel much like fun and games. Certainly no one seemed to have energy to spare for making a baby laugh.
On the point of sleep the thought came to him: the blacks were farmers no less than the white men were. But they did not bother to build a fence to keep animals from getting out. Instead they created a tasty patch to lure them in. Either way, it meant fresh meat for dinner.

Even more than that, they were like gentry. They spent a little time each day on their business, but the rest was their own to enjoy. The difference was that in their universe there was no call for another class of folk who stood waiting up to their thighs in river-water for them to finish their chat so they could be taken to their play or their ladyfriend.

In the world of these naked savages, it seemed everyone was gentry.

**discussion**

1. Compare the previous representation of the gentry with the above insight that Thornhill now demonstrates through his contact with, and thoughtful observations of, the local Darug people.

2. How do these shifts in Thornhill’s attitudes and values demonstrate his recognition that the so-called ‘savages’ possess more attributes of dignity and respect than the ‘civilised’ Londoners that he ferried across the Thames?

**Representations of the colonisers and the colonised**

Humans have an instinctive wariness or suspicion of the unknown, often associated with elements of fear or anxiety that may derive from our natural survival instincts. Once we ascertain that there is no danger, we may replace our initial concern with curiosity and a tentative engagement with the alien Other. Provided that this engagement does not lead to any hurtful or harmful outcomes on either side, friendly relations and mutual benefits and advantages may ensue. However, if either party engages in any actions that may appear as a threat to the other, this initial mood of friendship can shift to one of hostility.

**Competing attitudes to the Indigenous people**

In the novel, some characters—Thomas Blackwood, Dick Thornhill and Mrs Herring—are represented as recognising and respecting the ‘otherness’ of Indigenous Australians. Others—Sagitty Birtles and Smasher Sullivan—are represented in terms of such brutal aggression in their treatment of the Aborigines that the question of who actually is ‘savage’ is raised. Other characters, such as Sal...
and Will Thornhill, are ambivalent in their attitudes and reactions. Since events are seen through Thornhill’s eyes, the Indigenous Australians are constructed as the Other, to be feared.

The following activity explores the ways in which representations of characters are shaped by competing attitudes, values and beliefs.

discussion

1 Examine the views of Thomas Blackwood, Dick Thornhill and Mrs Herring and interpret and explain the attitudes, beliefs and values that they share. Consider the function of these characters in the story, both individually and as a group, and how readers are positioned to respond to these representations.

2 Examine the opposing set of character representations and the underlying set of shared attitudes, beliefs and values of Smasher Sullivan, Sagitty Birtles, Spider Webb and others. Consider the function of these characters in the narrative, both individually and as a group, and how readers are positioned to respond to these representations.

3 In the construction of Thornhill, Grenville shows how attitudes and reactions towards race can be ambivalent, contradictory and subject to change. Thornhill is represented as being equivocal in his attitudes to and relationships with the Darug people throughout the novel, at times showing insight into and some understanding of their practices, such as the use of fire to ‘farm’ the land. Nevertheless, how is he persuaded to participate in the massacre?

4 Read the following extract carefully. How is this a further example of Thornhill’s contradictory values, attitudes and beliefs?

In the late afternoon sun the man’s eyes were deep-set points of light. His face was creased around his thoughts, shadowed and secretive.

With no one but blacks around him, other than his own son, Thornhill saw that their skins were not black, no more than his own was white. They were simply skins, with the same pores and hairs, the same shadings of colour as his own. If black skin was all there was to see, it was amazing how quickly it became the colour that skin was.

p. 214

Constructing the Indigenous characters

In Searching for the Secret River, Grenville explained her decisions in constructing the Indigenous characters and, in particular, her choice to eliminate any dialogue by these characters.
It might be historically accurate to have the Aboriginal characters speaking broken English, but it made them less sympathetic, more caricatured.

Their inside story—their response, their thoughts, their feelings—all that was for someone else to tell, someone who had the right to enter that world and the knowledge to do it properly.

I might not be able to enter the Darug consciousness, but I could make it clear that there was one. To create a hollow in the book, a space of difference that would be more eloquent than any words I might invent to explain it. To let the reader know there was a story there to be told, but not to try to tell it.

Around about the same time I began to realise that the Aboriginal people were emerging in a way I hadn’t planned through the descriptions of landscape. The rocks, the trees, the river—I realised that I was often describing them in human terms—the golden flesh of the rocks beneath their dark skin, the trees gesturing, the bush watchful and alive. Humanising the landscape could be a way of showing the link between the indigenous people and their land because, in some way that recognised without really understanding, the country was the people.

Kate Grenville, Searching for the Secret River

discussion

1  Here Grenville articulates her reason for silencing the voice and consciousness of the Indigenous people in her novel. Evaluate the effectiveness of this choice.

2  Grenville is a contemporary Australian writing about the past, which she accesses from a diverse range of historical documents that she appropriates for her own artistic purposes, often re-situating events from one time and place (such as the actual historical incident of the Waterloo Creek massacre) to another. Inga Clenninden, a contemporary Australian author and historian, has criticised Grenville for avoiding appropriation of Aboriginal voices. Do you agree with Clenninden’s assertion that Grenville shows no such delicacy in feeling that she can enter confidently into the consciousness of the emancipist, William Thornhill?

3  Examine how Grenville constructs the Indigenous characters throughout the novel from the point of first contact.
   a  How are the groups of Indigenous people represented?
   b  How and why are Whisker Harry and Long Jack represented as individuals?
   c  How are readers positioned by these representations?
Representations of competing attitudes to land

The Secret River explores the divergent attitudes, values and beliefs of the colonisers and the colonised towards land—of ‘owning’ land and of ‘belonging’ to the land. The notion of ownership of land is most vividly constructed through the character of Thornhill. His attitudes towards land and its ownership become more ambiguous as the novel progresses, even to the point of resenting the spiritual affinity that the Indigenous people have with their land.

discussion

1. Examine in detail how Grenville constructs Thornhill’s attitude towards the land, especially that part of the Hawkesbury known as Thornhill’s Place.

2. Even though readers are not allowed access to the thoughts or consciousness of the Indigenous Australians, what do we learn about their attitudes to the colonisers and to the land? Consider in particular the refusal of Long Jack to leave his place of which he says ‘This me’ (p. 329).

The opposing attitudes, values and beliefs about land of the coloniser (Thornhill) and the colonised (the Darug people) are also evident in the film One Night the Moon (2001), scripted by John Romeril and Rachel Perkins. The film is based on events that took place in 1952. In the film, a child disappears during the night of a full moon. The next morning her father refuses to allow Albert, an Indigenous tracker, to join the search party despite the obvious skills he can bring to the search. In a scene from the script (shown on pages 209 and 210), the song ‘This Land Is Mine’ shows the opposing attitudes, beliefs and values that are held by the father and Albert. The scene opens as Albert watches the party of volunteers trample on and destroy any tracks that remained.

Paul Kelly in the film One Night the Moon
One Night the Moon

32. EXT THE BACK Paddock DAY

MUSIC: ‘This Land Is Mine’

The VOLUNTEERS form up in a rough semi-circle. The FATHER sensing ALBERT’s gaze, turns his back on him to look out across the paddock. He finishes saddling his horse.

FATHER

This land is mine
All the way to the old fence line
Every break of day
I’m working hard just to make it pay

This land is mine
Yeah I signed on the dotted line
Camp fires on the creek bank
Bank breathing down my neck

They won’t take it away
They won’t take it away
They won’t take it away from me

The FATHER mounts his horse.

33. EXT BACK FENCE DAY

Meanwhile ALBERT has been grabbing his swag and now walks off in the other direction.

ALBERT

This land is me
Rock, water, animal, tree
They are my song
My being’s here where I belong

He looks back at the search party.

ALBERT

This land owns me
From generations past to infinity
We’re all but woman and man
You only fear what you don’t understand

34. EXT VERANDAH DAY

The MOTHER watches both men.

FATHER AND ALBERT

This land is mine
This land is me
This land is mine
This land owns me

ALBERT walks off down the road.
FATHER AND ALBERT  
They won’t take it away
They won’t take it away
They won’t take it away from me

The TRACKER looks back toward the house and sees the MOTHER at the window looking out at him.

35. EXT VERANDAH DAY
MUSIC: ‘This Land Is Mine’ ends

The MOTHER shuts EMILY’s bedroom window, closes the curtains and sits down on the bed.

John Romeril and Rachel Perkins, One Night the Moon

discussion

1 In what ways are there resemblances between the film script and Kate Grenville’s novel?

2 Judith Wright, the poet, destabilises such binaries as white ownership of land as a commodity and black spiritual affiliation with and sense of belonging to the land. Wright is a descendant of early pioneers and while she has described herself as ‘born of the conquerors’, she also articulates her own close affiliation with the land where she was born and reared, stating that ‘This is me’. In what sense do you identify yourself as part of this land?

Frontier conflict in The Secret River and other texts

In recent years there have been concerted arguments among historians about the nature of the relationships between the settlers and the Indigenous Australians on the frontier, and about the extent of conflict and ‘dispersal’ (the euphemism used in the colonial record for violent engagement, massacres and Indigenous dispossession). It is also interesting to consider the extent to which the violence and conflicts of frontier settlement have preoccupied the imaginations of our writers and, more latterly, our artists.

‘The Secret River’ is the title of the novel as well as of Part Six. This alerts us to the significance of naming; in fact, the name derives from a quotation from WEH Stanner, an Australian anthropologist, who, in his Boyer lectures of 1968, used the expression ‘the secret river of blood’ that runs through our history.
Explorations of frontier conflict

Grenville is not the only novelist to deal with the subject matter of frontier conflict. Others include Alex Miller, Randolph Stow, Gary Crew and Thea Astley. In this section, you will be asked to compare and contrast representations from selected sources.

Reread Part Six, which describes the massacre of the Darug people at Blackwood’s place on the Hawkesbury River. The scene—while horrific, and focalised through the eyes of William Thornhill who is a participant in the events—is described in an almost detached manner. The focus is on the events and actions and one has to infer the feelings.

discussion

1. In what way does this description contrast with the description of the poisoning of the Indigenous group at Darkey Creek, and then the description of the reprisal murder of Sagitty Birtles, the poisoner?

2. In what way does the detachment of Grenville’s description of the massacre at Blackwood’s, with its focus on the physical, add to the horror of the event?


Massacre of the innocents

The site was very hot. The white sands reflected the sun and the thickness of the foliage blocked any breeze off the lagoon. There were black stones, he thought, just a little beneath, absorbing heat. Sheets of tin too.

It was not difficult to ascertain the parameter of the dig: the hedge-like wall of the lantana clearly delineated the circular site. Still, he remembered his training and sketched the area on graph paper, measuring the diameter of the clearing with a tape. He gathered flowers and foliage from the lantana, placing both in a clear plastic envelope and sealing it. He stapled the envelope to his sketch, shading the area covered by the thicket, and labelled it ‘Lantana Species’.

Working clockwise he paced the circumference of the clearing, stopping every metre to prod the sand gently with his spade, checking for the point of resistance which told where rocks or tin lay beneath or, if the spade penetrated deeper, where there was nothing, only sand.
These soundings he recorded.

Now he was ready. He ignored the makeshift attempt of the previous day, reasoning that three wedge-shaped digs, converging on the centre, would be enough to evaluate the site—as well as saving time; the service of women would not last all morning.

He began at the edge directly opposite his point of entry. He cleared the surface sand with a shovel then, when the layer of black rocks was exposed, he worked with a trowel and his hands, clearing what remained with a brush. He recorded the size and relative position of each rock, then removed it. He collected the sand from the sheet of tin that lay beneath, brushing it onto a paper cone, like a dust pan, checking its content and putting it aside.

The first sheet ran at an angle to his wedge. *Then I change,* he thought and, following the pattern of corrugations, he widened the dig to allow the sheet to be raised in one piece and adjusted his records accordingly.

When the sheet was completely cleared he crouched near the centre of the site and reached into the trench. The edges of the tin were rusted and jagged. He made certain of his grip; the cut on his finger was still open and throbbing. He pulled, dragging backwards, until the entire sheet had been withdrawn; then he looked. There were the tell-tale loops of black rope. He could grab any of these and pull the whole thing out. Then he would know. ‘Remember your method,’ he said aloud and, wiping the sweat from his forehead, he returned to his gear. He drank water from a bottle then rummaged through his bag for the vegetable strainer he used as a sieve. With this in one hand and his trowel in the other, he knelt at the edge of the trench, scooping or scraping the sand from the webbing of the net, then sifting and examining each load before discarding it.

When the heat grew unbearable and every part of him cried out to stop, he repeated, ‘Remember your method,’ and kept on, until the trowel nudged something dense, not the net, softer, and he found his brush and cleared away the clinging sand and there was cloth, multicoloured, and carefully, gripping it between his thumb and finger, he pulled it free. It was a shirt, rolled into a ball, and rotten, but its floral print was clear enough. *This could be a woman’s,* he thought. When he had sealed this in a bag, and set it aside, he picked up the trowel to resume but there in the hole, with the drying sand trickling down, were bones. He craned forward. He had uncovered a human foot. With his fingers he worked back towards the ankle, and when he had reached the primary bones of the leg, he knew that this was too much for him, too big. *A camera,* he thought, *I need a camera,* but he recorded the find as best he could, covered the hole with tin, and anchored it with rocks. *Until later,* he thought. *I’ll come back later.*

He stopped to drink then chose the next site, blocking out the wedge and clearing it as he’d done before. He worked faster, as much through fear as lack of time, and when he had removed the tin and reached the tangle of rope, he said to himself, *Slow down, Sam. Slow down.* In this place the net was
bunched tightly. He rocked back on his haunches, wiping away sweat with his forearm, thinking, I could get under it and pull the lot out. Pull it out in one go. I could. But as before, he recorded the find, replaced the tin, anchored it with rocks, and moved on.

In the third trench the net was loose, its webbing close to the surface. He sifted the top sand, stopping often to drink or wipe his face. He felt sick. Giddy with the heat, the excitement. Who could he tell? Someone. Rachel should know. Sarah too. He could ring Jordy. He could say, Come down. There are human skeletons, I think … Whatever he did, he must do properly. He would be judged by what he did. His lecturers could see this. Or the police, if it was murder …

Protruding from the net were the bones of a hand, and beneath this another, the bones frail, separated only by sand. His graph paper was buried. He kept no record. He lifted the net and the bones slid aside. Now there was fabric, shreds of cotton. And beneath that, a rib cage, supported, it seemed, by the sand beneath. He dusted with his brush, his sweat dripping on the bone. He cleared the forearm to the elbow, the collar bone, the shoulder blade, he gouged deeper for the neck, fallen back, he thought, flopped back in death. His fingers discovered the chin and traced the line of the jaw until he could bear it no longer and dug in, cupping the skull in his hands, feeling his fingertips touch behind. He pulled it free, in one piece, and there it was, grinning at him, ridiculous, its eyes filled with sand, like a mask at a party, like a party joke, until the jaw twisted and fell. He looked down, and there directly below was another. Smaller, white and smooth as china, on its side this time, in profile, but clear of sand since it had been covered by the other, protected by it. He put the first aside, and reached down to touch but as he did there was movement—some sudden shift of sand or release of fetid air—and the skull tilted and rolled, catching his finger, his flap of skin. He pulled back with a cry, then looked again, seeing the baby size of it. He touched its crushed and splintered bone. His blood smeared on its china whiteness.

Sensing he was falling, he raised himself to cry out, yet nothing came; no voice, no name. He fell forward into the pit, surrendering to darkness.

Gary Crew, *No Such Country*

### Discussion

1. Examine the ways in which language and images are used to construct the situation in the extract from Crew’s novel.

2. In *The Secret River*, Grenville represents Thornhill first as the observer of the aftermath of the poisoning of the Darug. Later in the novel he participates in a massacre of these people. Compare and contrast the ways language is used to construct both:
   
   a. the emotional engagement or detachment of the participants
   
   b. the positioning of the reader in each of the three episodes.

3. Suggest reasons why the authors made these choices.
The following artworks illustrate the atrocities perpetrated on the frontier in the contest for land—rape, poisoning of water holes and the shooting or ‘dispersing’ of the Indigenous Australians.
Explorations of settler guilt

Recent rereadings of the poetry of Judith Wright now acknowledge her representation of the violence of frontier conflicts, the silencing of these massacres, and the anxiety and guilt of many of the colonial perpetrators and their descendants. Some readings characterise this history of bloodshed as a haunting of the landscape.

Judith Wright describes how ‘those two strands—the love of the land we have invaded, and the guilt of the invasion—have become part of me. It is a haunted country.’ In poems such as ‘Bora ring’ and ‘Nigger’s Leap. New England’, the residual effects of the violence of Indigenous dispossession are explored. Arguably, these notions of settler guilt and the haunting of the landscape resonate in The Secret River. At the end of the novel, Thornhill is seated, overlooking his property while nevertheless feeling very empty and unsettled. Reread this final section of the book (pp. 330–334) as a precursor to your reading of the two Wright poems that follow.

**Bora ring**

The song is gone; the dance is secret with the dancers in the earth, the ritual is useless, and the tribal story lost in an alien tale.

Only the grass stands up to mark the dancing-ring: the apple-gums posture and mime a past corroboree; the painted bodies a dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot. The hunter is gone; the spear is splintered underground, the painted bodies a dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot. The nomad feet are still.

Only the rider’s heart halts at a sightless shadow, an unsaid word that fastens in the blood the ancient curse, the fear as old as Cain.

Judith Wright
As a child, Judith Wright picnicked near cliffs over which local Indigenous people were once driven to their deaths by white settlers for spearing cattle. Consider the use of imagery and symbolism as you read ‘Nigger’s Leap, New England.’

**Nigger’s Leap, New England**

The eastward spurs tip backward from the sun.
Night runs an obscure tide round cape and bay
and beats with boats of cloud up from the sea
against this sheer and limelit granite head.
Swallow the spine of range; be dark, O lonely air.
Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull
that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff
and then were silent, waiting for the flies.

Here is the symbol, and the climbing dark
a time for synthesis. Night buoys no warning
over the rocks that wait our keels; no bells
sound for her mariners. Now must we measure
our days by nights, our tropics by their poles,
love by its end and all our speech by silence.
See, in these gulfs, how small the light of home.

Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers,
and the black dust our crops ate was their dust?
O all men are one man at last. We should have known
the night that tidied up the cliffs and hid them
had the same question on its tongue for us.
And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange.

Never from earth again the coolamon,
or thin black children dancing like the shadows
of saplings in the wind. Night lips the harsh
scarp of the tableland and cools its granite.
Night floods us suddenly as history,
that has sunk many islands in its good time.

Judith Wright

discussion

How are imagery and symbolism used in these poems to intensify Wright’s representation of settler guilt and the haunting of the landscape?
Extension

Considering intersections of facts and fictions

Carefully read the Epilogue to Dancing with Strangers, an account of early settlement in New South Wales by the Australian author and historian, Inga Clendinnen. In some ways Clendinnen’s historical account coincides with the fictive rendering of events in Grenville’s novel, and in other respects it differs. Be alert to these and note down any significant points of similarity and difference as you read. Then complete the activities that follow.

Epilogue

During an early and relatively benign phase of their imperial adventure the British—or rather the selection of them we have just met—chanced to encounter in Australia one of the few hunter-gatherer societies left on earth. (Today, to my knowledge, there are none.) Despite or perhaps because of the width of the cultural chasm between the two peoples, each initially viewed the other as objects not of threat, but of curiosity and amusement; through those early encounters each came to recognise the other as fellow-humans, fully participant in a shared humanity.

Unseen conflict lay in the path. If less peripatetic than their inland brothers, the people around Sydney Cove were nonetheless compelled to exploit the seasonal resources of all of their territories if they were to survive. During those first years, both the complexity and the fragility of the nomad economy were masked from the newcomers by local population losses and the fortuitous provision of British rations to supplement the diet of those Australians most directly affected by the British presence. Only a handful of First Fleet observers began to grasp the great fact of the Australians' intimate dependence on what the British continued to think of as 'wild', indeed empty, land. And then it was too late. The British, with labour enough from convicts, would find no place for Australians in their colony-building enterprise. What they wanted was land, and they took it. Once that conflict became explicit, racial frontiers, pushing irresistibly outwards, would be marked in blood, and many Australians would die; some from British bullets, more from disease and starvation.

Milan Kundera reminds us that we humans proceed in a fog. By coming to see the fogs through which people in other times battled in the direction they hoped was forward, we may be better able to recognise and penetrate our own. Fast-evolving colonial situations demand swift responses. Our two main protagonists, Phillip and Baneelon, were given no space for reflection, revision or even explanation of their positions. Each failed, to their own and their people’s injury, and to ours. They cannot be blamed for that failure.
We have a duty to the people of the past: to rescue them from the falsifying simplifications we impose if we refuse to see the fog through which they were trying to make their way. W. E. H. Stanner has called the Australians ‘a high-spirited and militant people; and it is as a high-spirited, militant people they leap from the eighteenth-century page. They should be honoured not only for their ingenious adaptation to life on this, the least manipulable continent on earth, but also for their inventive resourcefulness in dealing with the strangers. The men of the First Fleet deserve honour too, for their openness, their courage, and their stubborn curiosity. In the end, it was the depth of cultural division which defeated them, not any lack of energy, intelligence or good will.

Every indigenous person has walked their trail of tears, but few others enjoyed that springtime of trust. Our first shared Australian story is a tragedy of animated imagination, determined friendship and painfully dying hopes. Through time and accumulated disillusionments each group, despite their domestic proximity, lost both curiosity and concern for the other, and imagination atrophied into settled mistrust. Now, with hope for reconciliation renewed over this past decade, it is time to think again about that atrophy: how it came about, and how we might climb out of it.

Accordingly I have introduced a rather more expansive concept of culture into the discussion of race relations in this country than is currently in use. I hope I have persuaded the reader that ‘culture’ is more than a bundle of legal principles, a matter of going clothed or naked, or cherishing privacy or ignoring it, or sharing or not sharing. It is best understood as the context of our existential being: a dynamic system of shared meanings through which we communicate with our own. Because those meanings are rarely made explicit, understanding another culture’s meanings is and will always be a hazardous enterprise.

History is not about the imposition of belated moral judgments. It is not a balm for hurt minds, either. It is a secular discipline, and in its idiosyncratic way a scientific one, based on the honest analysis of the vast, uneven, consultable record of human experience. To understand history we have to get inside episodes, which means setting ourselves to understand our subjects’ changing motivations and moods in their changing contexts, and to tracing the devious routes by which knowledge was acquired, understood and acted upon. Only then can we hope to understand ourselves and our species better, and so manage our affairs more intelligently. If we are to arrive at a durable tolerance (and it is urgent that we should), we have only history to guide us.

Inquiry into our confused beginnings suggests that the possibilities of a decent co-existence between unlike groups must begin from the critical scrutiny of our own assumptions and values as they come under challenge. We might then be able to make informed decisions as to which uncomfortable differences we are prepared to tolerate and which we are
not, rather than to attempt the wholesale reformation of what we identify as the defects of the other. A lasting tolerance builds slowly out of accretions of delicate accommodations made through time; and it comes, if it comes at all, as slow as honey.

There remains a final mystery. Despite our long alienation, despite our merely adjacent histories, and through processes I do not yet understand, we are now more like each other than we are like any other people. We even share something of the same style of humour, which is a subtle but far-reaching affinity. Here, in this place, I think we are all Australians now.

Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*

1 Outline the main similarities and differences that you found between Clendinnen’s observations and accounts and those contained in Grenville’s novel.

2 Milan Kundera employs a powerful metaphor of humans living inside and, indeed, struggling through, the fog of their own historical time period. How and why does this affect your interpretations of early settlement, frontier conflict and dispossession compared with those of the first settlers and Indigenous peoples?

3 ‘In the end, it was the depth of cultural division which defeated them, not any lack of energy, intelligence or good will.’ Do you agree or disagree with Clendinnen’s assertion about the early settlers of the First Fleet? Explain your response.

4 How might this extract reveal that, like the construction of a novel, history itself involves a selection of material—of ‘facts’—and therefore a representation, or version, of what may have occurred?

**Creative explorations**

One way to explore one’s understanding is to enter sympathetically into the ‘identity’ of a character. *As The Secret River* is told in the third person but focalised or ‘seen’ through the eyes of William Thornhill, we might have a different version of events if it had been told by another character. For example, reading a novel about this subject matter focalised by a character such as Smasher Sullivan would be unimaginable.

1 Write passages from Sal’s journal, kept irregularly over the years. These entries should record her feelings, attitudes, changing relationship with Will, and opinions at four crucial stages in her life:
   a William Thornhill has been convicted of theft and sentenced to life in Australia
   b The Thornhills’ arrival in Sydney Cove
   c The Thornhills’ arrival at Thornhill’s Point on the Hawkesbury River
   d Sal’s feelings after the massacre at Blackwood’s Place.
2 Imagine that Dick Thornhill, William and Sal's son, is interviewed as an old man about his life as an early pioneer. What are his recollections of the frontier experience? This could be constructed as (a) an archival record for a Pioneer Register and retained in a library, or (b) a feature article profiling an early pioneer.

3 Imagine that Blackwood's Indigenous child had descendants, one of whom sets out—like Grenville—to research the family history. Blackwood had kept a journal, which is now in the descendant's possession. Select an appropriate genre and context in which to revisit these historical family associations. These could include The Blackwood Family Blog, a magazine or newspaper feature article, or a segment in an episode of Australian Story.
**aesthetic** associated with an appreciation of literary and artistic choices and effects

**allusions** direct or indirect references to another text or texts, or to other events, things or people; allusion can be one of the ways through which intertextuality works

**appropriation** the borrowing from other sources (for example, other writers, cultures) and reusing in another context; appropriation is often viewed as exploitative

**binary oppositions** pairs of contrasting concepts, where one is valued over the other

**characters** imaginary human or non-human textual identities constructed through representations of their appearance, personality, actions and behaviour; characters are represented as possessing attitudes, values and beliefs

**connotations** the emotional or evaluative associations or connections that a word has for a reader/writer/shaper; differs from the literal meaning of the word, which is referred to as its ‘denotation’

**conventions** accepted ways particular texts/genres are constructed

**culture** the social practices, rules and understandings common to a particular community of people

**denaturalise** to uncover meanings, relationships or assumptions that may have been taken for granted as ‘natural’ or ‘obvious’

**destabilise** to overturn naturalised meanings, thereby contesting dominant cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs and inviting other readings

**dystopian** where everything is as bad as can possibly be; opposite of utopian

**explicit** deliberately shown or revealed

**foregrounded** emphasised to draw the reader's attention; refers to specific elements of a text (for example, words, images); should not be confused with *privileged*

**gaps** ‘spaces’ in the text that the author expects readers to be able to fill because of their prior knowledge and cultural understandings; should not be confused with *silences*

**genre** a text category with a recognisable structure and conventional stages; genres are developed for particular cultural purposes (for example, western film, detective novel)

**glossed** explained by providing sufficient information within a text to enable readers to make meaning, even when the subject matter is unfamiliar to them

**ideological** relating to the inculcation of attitudes, beliefs and values operating to position people within a culture in particular ways. Ideological work in texts involves the transmission of those attitudes, values and beliefs; often, these are accepted without question because they have been naturalised

**imagery** a range of poetic techniques such as metaphor and simile to create images or word pictures in the reader’s mind. These images often stimulate our sensory responses, producing vivid and original mental images associated with, for example, colour, sound, light, smell and tactile sensations

**implicit** implied, not directly stated

**interrogate** to question; to contest; to read against the text
**intertextuality** see ‘Explaining intertextuality’, chapter 3, page 65

**irony** wit or humour that subtly mocks someone, something or some situation by inviting a meaning that contradicts the literal meaning; irony can work through understatement or overstatement

**marginalise** to locate on the edge; to relegate to a position of non-importance; marginalisation operates to disempower particular groups or practices in society

**mobilise** to activate cultural assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and values in the production of meaning

**naturalised** has come, over time, to be accepted in the culture as normal, obvious or ‘commonsense’

**parody** an exaggerated imitation that mocks a text, genre, form, style, institution or person; the object of parody is diminished and made to appear comical or even absurd

**pastiche** a reproduction or recombination of other genres, forms, texts or ideas that operates to produce a derivation or imitation of the original

**privilege** (verb) to promote in the text; refers to particular cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs that the reader is being invited to accept

**readings** meanings made by a reader when interpreting a text. Readers may read with the text (invited reading); or against the text (resistant reading)

**register** the interaction of language choices involving subject matter (field), roles and relationships (tenor), and the mode and medium of a text. Changes to any of these ‘register variables’ have a significant effect on a text.

**representation** see ‘Explaining representation’, chapter 1, page 3

**resonate** in literature, to echo an image or idea

**satire** the use of ridicule to mock and to expose, in particular, folly or falsity

**semiotic codes and conventions** signs (such as words, gestures, sounds or images) organised into systems (or codes) in accepted ways to convey particular meanings to readers/viewers/listeners; for example, a camera action is a visual code; a low camera angle makes the subject bigger and so constructs that subject as powerful or in control

**silences** authorial omissions or absences in a text, which may be either deliberate or unconscious; where they are deliberate, silences operate to create a particular invited reading; should not be confused with gaps

**symbolism** when an object is used to represent or suggest another and conveys meanings that extend beyond the original; for example, the stylised kangaroo on the tail of the Qantas aircraft symbolises Australia and evokes associations with Australian national identity and characteristics

**temporal** having to do with or expressing time

**texts** material forms of communication that can be verbal, visual, auditory or digital, alone or in combination; texts are shaped differently depending on the genre, register, discourses and textual features chosen

**utopian** involving a state of imaginary or ideal perfection; opposite of dystopian

**valorise** to hold in high regard in the culture
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