

Write and Wrong: methods and practice of First Nations Australian representation in young adult fiction

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Abstract

Representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) peoples by non-Indigenous writers in young adult fiction is a complex area of study made contentious by political and social tensions stemming from Australia's colonial history. Representations can have harmful real-world effects (Lucashenko, 2009) rooted not only in their consumption but also in the methods of production. When writing about Indigenous Australian peoples, non-indigenous authors are faced with negotiating these tensions. This thesis documents and compares information about the writing practices and reflections of non-Indigenous authors in regard to their critically lauded works that contain representations of Indigenous peoples. In doing so, it indicates moments of tension, success, and possible pathways towards deeper intercultural understanding.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten writers, all of whom published young adult novels shortlisted by the Children's Book Council of Australia between 2002 and 2016, in order to explore their experiences of writing across cultures. Their novels were analysed with reference to postcolonial theories and Indigenous criticisms of representation in writing. The writers' responses to the interview questions were coded and analysed according to established social research methods to establish individuals' motivations and methods, and examine their reflections on writing about Indigenous peoples.

Discussion of the similarities and differences between the participants' responses revealed three main themes relating to the research aims. Firstly, the participating writers have a broad awareness of tensions in Indigenous representation including the potential for appropriation and/or tokenism. Secondly, the participants are concerned about the contribution they are making to discourses involving Indigenous peoples and cultures. Finally, despite general agreement that the *Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Writing (Protocols)* are important, responses given by the writers conveyed varying levels of scepticism and resistance to using *Protocols* as a practical resource. These findings demonstrate the importance of Indigenous representation to Australian young adult literature production, and indicate and define areas of tension that offer opportunities for deeper intercultural engagement by writers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Methods and Literature Review

Note: In this thesis the term ‘Indigenous’ refers to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collectively.

Project Objective

This thesis is a snapshot in time. It documents and compares information about thoughts, emotions, writing practices and reflections of 10 non-Indigenous authors in regard to their critically lauded works that contain representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) peoples. In doing so, it creates a reference point for future research and indicates moments of tension, success, and possible pathways towards deeper intercultural understanding¹.

Using an interdisciplinary approach including interviews and critical discourse analysis this thesis documents the experience and practicalities of writing, from a non-Indigenous perspective, young adult fiction that includes Indigenous peoples and cultures, and interrogates the social and political context in which this process operates.

At its conclusion, this project produced three main findings: that writers have broad awareness of tensions in Indigenous representation, that their contribution to this area of discourse is a concern for them, and finally, that many writers consider protocols and other resources available to writers are limited in their effectiveness.

There are diverse ideas and opinions around representation of Indigenous peoples in literature. There is consensus that representations do have real-world effects on individuals, communities and the nation:

As an Aboriginal woman I am daily affected by and concerned with Indigenous people’s standing and experience in post-colonising settings, and how stories about us inform what other people believe they know about us. (S. Phillips², 2015)

¹ This is a necessarily broad thesis that will hopefully be of use to a broad range of stakeholders.

² Dr Sandra Phillips is a Wakka Wakka woman with a long and varied career in academia and publishing. She is currently an Associate Professor and Coordinator for Indigenous Higher degree by Research at the University of Technology Sydney.

Lucashenko³, Heiss⁴, Bradford and others have been passionately vocal about the damage done to Indigenous culture and people by misrepresentations, and presumptions of speaking for Indigenous people:

Most information that white Australians hold about us is from non-Aboriginal sources. Most of this information is grossly misleading and much of it is prejudiced. I suggest you consider if and, crucially, you want to add yet another non-Aboriginal portrayal to a long and undistinguished list. Are you truly confounded by the lack of interest in hearing Aboriginal stories? If you are genuinely desperate for the Aboriginal experience to be heard, perhaps you could seek to work in conjunction with Aboriginal people on a project of interest to them. Are you seeking to work out your cultural angst in print? There could be a story there; then again, maybe you should go and have counselling. Are you trying to get your head around Australian racism? A worthy objective, but perhaps listening is what is called for, as much as writing. (Lucashenko, 2009, p. 7)⁵

As a contrasting position, other people advocate for representation as an intrinsic part of Australian literature:

I believe that any writing that's done on any theme that comes out of Australia, must or should have Aboriginal undercurrents, acknowledgment or whatever. There is no such thing as the great Australian novel unless it has included that side. If you want to show the psyche of Australia you've got to do that. For me I think that all Australian writers have to be able to put that stuff in, but there are certain things that they can't talk about. (Craigie in Heiss, 2003, p. 11)

These positions are indicative of the discussion around reasons for writing, including the multiple tensions between writing and not writing, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Australia's history and present, Australia's identity and creativity, and social reality. The

³ Melissa Lucashenko is a critically acclaimed Aboriginal writer of Goorie and European heritage. She is known for her short stories, novels, and essays.

⁴ Dr Anita Heiss is a member of the Wiradjuri Nation of central New South Wales. She is a prolific writer of fiction, non-fiction and academic works and an advocate for Indigenous literature and literacy.

⁵ First published in 2000 in QWC News Magazine, number 85, pages 8-10.

two ideas presented here are not mutually exclusive; in her article Lucashenko leaves the door open for representations by non-Indigenous writers who follow protocols regarding Aboriginal Law and take a position that is 'more-or-less-respectful' (Lucashenko, 2009, p. 7) by self-reflexively observing, rather than appropriating, an Indigenous voice.

Protocols are rules that are defined and dictated by Indigenous cultures and peoples in order to maintain respect and protection for those cultures in a multitude of ways. Their import is increased within the Australian context because Australian law contains very little protection for Indigenous peoples' rights to control their own culture (Janke, 2008). Protocols, at a practitioner level, are the most ubiquitous way that Indigenous peoples are able to assert their rights (Janke, 2008). This thesis is concerned with the ways in which writers engage with protocols on writing Indigenous content. Their purpose is to guide writers of any culture to create Indigenous content that upholds the cultural and intellectual property rights of Indigenous peoples (Thomas⁶, 2014). As Thomas (2014) states, 'representations of Aboriginal culture that are developed without observation of Indigenous protocols are more likely to misrepresent Aboriginal people and communities and undermine opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and strengthening of Aboriginal communities and their relationships with others' (p. 1). Protocols are, therefore, highly relevant to this project as they provide an important tool for all writers undertaking Indigenous representation in their work.

Acknowledging the difficulties associated with representation of Indigenous people and culture, the Australian Council for the Arts published a formal set of protocols, *Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Writing (ACA Protocols)*, in 2002, with a second edition in 2007. The publication was edited by Terry Janke, Wuthathi/Meriam woman and Solicitor Director of Terri Janke and Company: Lawyers and Consultants (Terri Janke and Company, n.d.) and Professor Robynne Quiggin, member of the Wiradjuri nation, lawyer and Law researcher with many high profile, national board positions ("Robynne Quiggin – The Conversation," 2018). Well known Wiradjuri woman, author and academic, Dr Anita Heiss (A. Heiss, n.d.), peer-reviewed *ACA Protocols*. In addition, many prominent

⁶ Dr Jared Thomas is a Nukunu person of the Southern Flinders Ranges. He is an award-winning creative writer, academic, and has worked on many projects within culture and the arts.

organisations and writers contributed to the *ACA Protocols*' production. The protocols were devised by 'drawing on the spirit and substance of key international benchmarks, such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2006)' (Thomas, 2014, p. 6) and adjusting for the Australian context. *ACA Protocols* outlines general protocols and considerations for authors when writing about Indigenous people or culture. It offers a starting point and a framework for projects to build an ethical approach to including Indigenous content (Janke, 2008). There are nine principles described in the publication and examples, in the form of anecdotes, showing ways that the principles could be or are commonly implemented. The protocols are mostly concerned with respect, ownership of story and empowerment of Indigenous people. The principles are constructed to address many of the concerns of critics of Indigenous representation by non-Indigenous writers.

Variations of Lucashenko's criticisms of Indigenous representation and responses to them continue to punctuate discourses in the academic and creative writing worlds. At the extreme alternative position, Lionel Shriver gave a provocative opening address at the Brisbane Writers' Festival in which she responded to those who critique appropriation of identity and experience. She stated:

We [fiction writers] make things up, we chance our arms, sometimes we do a little research, but in the end it's still about what we can get away with – what we can put over on our readers.

Because the ultimate endpoint of keeping our mitts off experience *that doesn't belong to us* is that there is no fiction. (Shriver, 2016)

Shriver includes cultural backgrounds in her list of experiences that are within the permissible scope for authors to incorporate into their writing. Her claim that the end of appropriation is the end of fiction is hyperbolic, however, it is indicative of a fear that respectful cultural representation means imposing restrictions that would stifle creativity and deprive the world of imaginative and valuable fiction.

It is evident that non-Indigenous writers find themselves in an uncomfortable space between respectful inclusion of Indigenous peoples and cultures as a part of Australian literature, and potentially adding to the harmful discourses of representations of Indigenous peoples. By selecting the young adult genre as a focal point, the scope of this

project is narrowed to an area that is both manageable within this thesis and known for its transitional, liminal and experimental nature in all areas, including cultural representation.

The experiences of non-Indigenous young adult writers and their methods of negotiating intercultural spaces is a lacuna in knowledge that this thesis seeks to fill. The first aim of this project, therefore, is to explore tensions, emotions, methods and reflections of authors by documenting their experiences of writing about Indigenous characters and cultures. The second aim is to critically consider a selection of representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures within critically lauded young adult fiction texts written by these authors.

The research questions derived from these aims are:

1. How have Indigenous peoples and their cultures been represented in awarded young adult fiction texts written by these authors?
2. What are the practices of ten contemporary non-Indigenous, award winning writers before, during, and after writing about Indigenous characters, culture and/or issues?
3. What, if any, practical methods of addressing political, personal, cultural and/or social tensions have these non-Indigenous writers used, and what are their reflexive feelings about these methods or the lack of methods?
4. To what extent are these authors aware of or feel governed by the *Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Writing* provided by Arts Council Australia?

Methodology

Introduction

This thesis intersects traditional delineations of academic disciplines. It incorporates a mixed method approach in order to gain the most insight into the subject matter. These methods include data collection and coding methods derived from social research methodologies, and considers the output of those processes alongside discourse analysis methods drawn from literary studies.

The primary foci of this project are the methods that writers use and the texts that they create, which makes writers, as a subset of society, a necessary conduit for gathering data.

As such, social research methods and terms have been utilised to provide a framework for answering the research questions above. Writers exist within a social, temporal and geographical location, the characteristics of which are, while subject to change over time, largely out of their control. Their behaviours are affected by these factors but they are not without agency and have control over their reactions to the structures in which they reside. Ontologically, therefore, an underlying philosophy of critical realism – wherein underlying structures are acknowledged but not held as the sole determining factor of ‘being’ – is appropriate (Bryman, 2012; King & Horrocks, 2010).

This research is predominantly inductive in nature and has been approached using exploratory methods. The subject of interest is not only the processes or actions that authors make but also the ‘subjective meaning’ (Bryman, 2012, p. 30) of the social action. By contextualising the responses of the participants with their writing and the writing of others, past and present, those responses helped to indicate matters of interest to the study of Indigenous representation.

The aims of this research, together with the complex, multi-faceted and diverse social contexts in which information on the methods authors use to manage cultural tensions, lend it to an interpretivist ontological approach. It is the meanings that stakeholders (authors, readers, publishers, etc) attach to representations that cause tensions. These meanings are individual and variable depending on context; therefore a methodology that takes account of the irreducibility of experiences is appropriate (King & Horrocks, 2010).

In the domain of literary studies, studies of ‘the author’ have long been contested. The focus on the influence and importance of the author as part of the function of the text has waned in favour of the text in its own right. This is, in large part, due to theories of subjectivity which position texts as a relationship between readers and writing rather than as a creation of a prestigious individual (Barthes, 1977). Viewing a text this way opens up an opportunity to analyse a text’s meaning, focusing on the reader as the space where the text is drawn together into a cohesive whole. However, Barthes’ position, while radically opening up possibilities for textual analysis, has its limitations. Excluding the author completely means denying that production of a text is an active and affective process. In his work, *The Death of the Author*, Barthes (1977) makes several arguments

for divorcing the author from textual analysis. First, there is the problem of expression. A gap in logic is created by the assumption that the one, true purpose of a text is to express something on behalf of an author. Authors have only words at their disposal. Expression of anything other than words is limited by its necessary translation into words, which in turn may only be explained using more words. Additionally, to use the author as the focal point for analysis ascribes a single meaning or explanation of a text, and implies the impossibility of divining that meaning from words. Barthes (1977) theorises that 'a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation[...]' (p. 148). This thesis builds on Barthes' ideas by re-incorporating the author into the analytical framework in ways that provide more holistic lines of enquiry within the research.

While this thesis is not a practice-led project, it is heavily influenced by the arguments for including creative practice as a legitimate generator for new knowledge and, specifically, the value of creative practice to children's and young adult literature research. This is drawing on Bourdieu's definitions of 'field', a conceptual space which Webb (2012) describes as:

[...] a largely autonomous social system in which individuals and institutions with shared interests, concerns and characteristics both operate and compete. Each agent who participates in a field will agree, more or less, on the rules, rituals, conventions and categories that obtain in, and constitute, that field. But fields are about conflict as much as they are about agreement. (p. 6)

Viewing children's literature and young adult as a subset of children's literature, in terms of a field, allows authors and other agents, such as publishers, reviewers and subjects, in this case Indigenous peoples, to take their place in alignment with overlapping and contradicting texts and readers within the frame of literary research. As Nodelman (2008) argues:

[...] specific texts of children's literature are complex sites of social action – how, far from being purely distinctive products of uniquely individual human minds, they find their place in and contain within themselves the manifestations of numerous power relationships [...]. (p. 125)

Nikolajeva and Hilton (2016) build on Nodelman's argument by incorporating the writer's role in the fraught, many faceted field of young adult literature:

Through sympathetically portraying the alienated pains and pleasures of adolescence, through *enacting* adolescence with all its turmoil, writers bring young readers face to face with different forms of cultural alienation itself: the legacy of colonialism, political injustice, environmental desecration, sexual stereotyping, consumerism, madness, and death. (p. 1)

All texts are a product of, and contribute to, a wider, interlaced network of innumerable contexts. These are not fixed, but always shifting due to the actions and conflicts of agents, dictated by power relationships, positioning themselves within the field. For example, there are significant differences between the parameters of children's literature from the 1800s to the present day, as what is considered appropriate changes and is changed by social forces as well as by individual agents. Writers, as agents within the field of children's literature, act through the practice of writing. To use Webb's (2012) definition:

Practice can thus be understood as internalised, historicised knowledge. It is manifested in an individual's particular skills, techniques and approaches to the game that allow them to make sense of what is happening and what might be made to happen: to negotiate the rules of the field; to navigate its spaces; to achieve desired ends. (p. 11)

Writing practice is then not merely an individual in a vacuum, engaged in random production. Writing practice consciously and unconsciously works within and on unspoken yet agreed upon rules that govern the field of children's literature. Thus, writers take their place next to and within texts as an important aspect of children's and young adult literature research.

The nature of the field of children's literature constantly manifests itself in discourses about the purpose and appropriateness of texts and their potential effects on their audiences (Nikolajeva & Hilton, 2016; Nodelman, 2008, 2016). As the relationships between agents and positions fluctuate, so too do the discourses, generating new contexts and rules for agents to negotiate. The power of these rules to shape the field of children's literature is rooted in the relationship of artists, writers among them, with wider culture:

The practices and products of those two fields [art and the academy] are indeed dominant; each has an influence beyond what might be expected of fields that are not central to the power structures, because artists and intellectuals have considerable input into how cultures present, represent and perceive themselves. (Webb, 2012, p. 6)

It is here that the crux of this thesis lies. Australian young adult literature, as a form of art, makes a significant contribution to the ways in which Australian culture(s) manifest. The writers that are the focus of this project find themselves in positions that intersect two cultural sites, Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous Australian. By occupying positions that are in a constant state of flux, all writers at the intersection of cultures are generating new knowledge through their creative practices. Through documenting these practices, this thesis acknowledges the relevancy and agency of authors when engaging in Indigenous representation as one previously excluded part of an intricate and complex system of overlapping conditions and contexts.

Young Adult Literature in Research

Bradford (2007) states that '[...] children's texts purposively intervene in children's lives to propose ways of being in the world' (p. xvi). This opens the possibility that, even without intention at the time of production, the mere classification of books for children can act upon children. Once classification exists, the dissemination of that text is bound by rules dictated by social norms, marketing, curatorship and award-giving bodies, all of which compounds and reaffirms the status of the text within that classification. Bradford's assertion is applicable to young adult literature in addition to children's literature because, despite being a more nebulous category, it is still comprised of texts aimed at an audience that is defined as immature and less capable of being in the world than an adult. Young adult literature and the ideologies the texts contain are potentially very influential in constructing social ideas, and are deserving of scrutiny and critique. An essential qualification for the books that are included in this project is that they are all classified as books for older readers or young adult books by the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA).

Young adult texts have seen a dramatic increase in academic attention over the past decade, however, they are still often omitted or conflated in discourses around ideologies

in literature for young people. Nodelman (2008) insisted that young adult literature can be studied alongside and compared with children's literature. While acknowledging that some differences do exist, Nodelman (2008) contends that both children's and young adult literature are written by adults for younger people and therefore fall into the same category of 'literature for younger children' (p. 97). Young adult literature is indeed born of a complex web of economic and cultural forces that provide literature *for* the perceived desire of an institutionalised audience who lack the power and agency to produce and access literature without assistance (Scutter, 1999). While this remains true for some areas of research, there remain distinctions between children's and young adult literature that, for this project, made sense to focus on young adult literature as a distinct category.

'Young adult' is an unstable term. It rests on a number of factors that are perpetually shifting under the influence of social, biological and individual changes. It is tempting to divide human growth into child, adolescent (or young adult) and adult, but using 'young adult' for everything that changes between childhood and adulthood is too simplistic. The boundaries are rarely clear-cut, but are instead blurred, changeable, and often subversive. When applied to literature the term can refer to an implied audience, an award or marketing category, the characteristics of the text, the real-life audience or the career of an author (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). Young adult literature is made distinct from children's (and adult's) literature predominantly by the nature of its content. It generally deals with issues that are relatable for an assumed adolescent audience (Herz and Gallow, 2005 in Glaus, 2014; Hopper, 2006 in Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). The content of young adult literature is generally characterised by a highly subjective viewpoint and forms the basis for a construction of adolescence (Nikolajeva & Hilton, 2016). Young adult fiction is a part of the culture of adolescence; it is defined by it and also creates it. This paradigm explains the breadth and diversity of texts that are categorised as young adult literature.

More recently, while acknowledging the origins of young adult fiction as an extension of writing for children, there is a distinct boundary drawn between the somewhat static literary construction of a child versus adolescence – a dynamic, tumultuous journey from childhood to adulthood (Nikolajeva & Hilton, 2016). Young adult fiction, mostly written by adults, is a construction of what that journey might or should be. Although still less studied than children's fiction, as young adult fiction has become more defined, the area

of research has increased. The metaphors between the physical and psychological turmoil of adolescent transition and the environmental, political and social change present an opportunity for researchers to open new enquiries into those phenomena (Nikolajeva & Hilton, 2016). The more that research is directed at young adult literature, the more complex and nuanced its definition becomes. Despite being a nebulous term (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019), 'young adult' is important in the world of literature, as a marker for texts that are often transitional, liminal and experimental. This is especially apparent in discussions of power and oppression (Nikolajeva & Hilton, 2016). For this reason, young adult fiction is also a fertile site for exploring issues of representation of Indigenous peoples.

After critiquing Indigenous representation in young adult literature written in the 1990s and finding it severely limited by romanticisation and stereotypes, Scutter (1999) wrote:

The recuperation of Aboriginal memories, not relegated to the ahistorical arena of myth but historicised and politicised is waiting. At the tag-end of the twentieth century those stories are only just being told by Aboriginal writers to an adult audience, and some few to a child audience. I hope next that they are told to a place between, the teenage audience, so that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian adolescents can begin to know the fullness of their history and identity. (p. 194)

The field of Indigenous representation in young adult literature has evolved since Scutter's statement. Her hopes are being met, in part, by a growing body of Indigenous Australian writers producing young adult fiction that provides an alternative to dominant discourses. Non-Indigenous writers are also more cognisant of their role in discourse. The results are mixed, and there are significant numbers of contemporary texts that conform to Scutter's criticisms. There is also evidence, however, that young adult literature is trending towards more nuanced, detailed and ethically produced representations of Indigenous Australian peoples and cultures.

Research Techniques

Creative Literature Review

In order to analyse and classify some of the ways Indigenous peoples are represented this thesis considers fictional, creative young adult novels as case studies. Each text case study includes a brief summary section that, while by no means an exhaustive textual analysis, provides a sense of the treatment of the issue within the text. Given the concern the participating writers showed about their treatment of Indigenous representation, a brief textual analysis is an essential context for the interview data analyses.

Creative texts are chosen for analysis based on several criteria. In line with the aims of the project, the texts must be:

- published, marketed or taught as young adult fiction
- written by non-Indigenous Australian authors who were available for interview
- published between 2001 (the publication date of Bradford's *Reading Race: Aboriginality in Australian Children's Literature*, the last major study in this area) and 2016

The creative literature review is approached from several angles. Creative texts generate unlimited interpretations and ideas, dependant on who is reading the text and in what context. A reader-response approach is therefore appropriate for this project. This approach, as the name suggests, focuses on how the reader interacts with the text to derive meaning (Grenby & Reynolds, 2011). The approach is based on the theory that the reader reading the text at a specific time in a specific space creates their own meaning and narrative due to their personal history, experience, culture and context. As such reading is a creative process and each reading, even a re-reading, is different from the others. Meaning is therefore created through the relationship between text and reader. Author intention and other ways of interpreting the meaning of texts are relegated to a separate, initial aspect of the process (Grenby & Reynolds, 2011).

Paratextual elements are as important to this project as the main narratives. As explained by O'Connor (2010), 'the importance of the paratext lies in the framing strategy it offers readers as a means to interpret the book. Paratextual contributions may overtly or subtly promote authorial credibility' (p. 12). The effect of 'Author's Notes', 'Acknowledgements', and other non-creative components of the text is to reveal the methods that underpin and

have created many of the problematic, implicit ideologies of the texts, as well as shedding light on the extent to which protocols of respect, control, and acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledges have been observed.

The dilemma created when using this method of analysing young adult literature is that the intended audience defines the genre. The young adult audience is largely defined by age or developmental stage and is in many ways far removed from the academic researcher. In fact, it is arguably an insurmountable obstacle for a researcher to truly know how young adults read without making generalisations (Nikolajeva & Hilton, 2016; Nodelman, 2008).

Though this project is concerned with young adult literature, the interest in the potential meanings of the creative texts is larger than the scope of its intended audience, encompassing society as a whole. An investigation into strictly adolescent responses to the texts would be interesting and would no doubt produce useful information, but the focus of this project lies with the writers of the texts, not individual responses of readers. Textual analysis in this thesis therefore explores implied reader responses by utilising critical discourse analysis of those aspects of the text that are designed to elicit a response or meaning creation from the reader (Grenby & Reynolds, 2011).

Critical discourse analysis in this project has, through deconstruction, exposed the ways in which the texts create meaning, perpetuate or subvert social and cultural ideas, and the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters and how they potentially interact with the reader (Bryman, 2012; Denscombe, 2010; Grenby & Reynolds, 2011).

Interviews with Creators of Australian Young Adult Fiction

The second component of this research project is comprised of a study of the writers of the chosen texts, utilising a semi-structured interview process. The interviews focused on the writers' experiences and methods of writing about Indigenous peoples or cultures (see Appendix 2: Interview Guide). The use of a semi-structured interview approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the experiences of writers as a specific group with an emphasis on understanding the experience from the perspective of those inside that group (Denscombe, 2010); an area which has largely been ignored in the field of Indigenous representation.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion with guide questions that allowed for flexibility of response. In order to focus on the participants' individual experiences and understandings, flexibility during interviews was prioritised. Utilising a simple guide accommodated any relevant tangents or contexts that spontaneously arose (Bryman, 2012; King & Horrocks, 2010).

In line with an exploratory approach, all interviews were recorded and transcribed to help dispel the fallibility of memory and allow for a more thorough examination of data (Bryman, 2012). The data gathered from the interviews was subsequently coded and analysed as discussed below, with a view to discovering differences and similarities in experience between subjects. This provided a wider perspective on the difficulties and tensions faced by the participants.

As a part of interpretive research there was a need for reflexivity on the part of the researcher, and a certain amount of self-disclosure of the researcher's background, values and beliefs in order to reflect on how these factors may have affected the interpretation of the data and led to possible deviations from the authentic experience of the research participants.

Much consideration was given to the rights and comfort of the participants to allow them to be as open as possible. With this aim, participants chose the locations of their interviews and were regularly asked if they were comfortable. They were also asked to review their interview transcripts and were reassured that they were able to withdraw from the project at any point.

When combined, the interview data and the critical discourse analysis of the respective interview subjects' creative work illustrate the effect of the action of writing about Indigenous people or culture on the author's writing.

Methods of Interview Data Analysis

This thesis does not strictly adhere to Grounded Theory. It does, however, employ data analysis methods borrowed from Grounded Theory frameworks. Grounded Theory provides a framework where data gathering and analysis occur in a cycle, and feed into each other in a series of recursive processes. This is described by Glaser & Strauss (1967/2009) as:

Joint collection, coding and analysis of data is the underlying operation. The generation of theory, coupled with the notion of theory as process, requires that all three operations be done together as much as possible. They should blur and intertwine continually, from the beginning of an investigation to its end. (p. 43)

Analysis of the data is then incorporated as the research is still in progress to inform future actions. This eventually results in a theory that is developed from all available data rather than being bound to a predetermined hypothesis (Bryman, 2012). It is this method that has been adapted for this thesis.

The most significant departure from Grounded Theory methods in this project is that, within Grounded Theory, data collection and analysis occur in a recursive cycle. The nature and availability of the research subjects substantially prevented this; the participant group was limited, and access to participants was often made difficult by location or timing. Although there was little opportunity to incorporate analysis in further enquiries, there were opportunities, in some cases, to follow up with participants via email with lines of enquiry developed from their initial interview.

This thesis draws upon the process of Open Coding (Bryman, 2012) which involves breaking down the interview data into components and analysing them to draw out themes and relationships. This coding method is relevant because of its open, unfettered ability to draw out themes and relationships rather than starting with a central hypothesis, in line with the exploratory aims of this thesis. Prior to coding, the recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription company for speed and accuracy. The Open Coding process begins from the premise that the data has the potential to indicate theories in line with the research question. When reviewing the data, potential concepts will emerge from indications, or small pieces of information, given by participants. Indications are constantly compared to allow for fluidity to change concepts, should it be necessary. Concepts are then analysed and organised into codes and subsequently into categories. The formation of categories represents an expansion from the literal scope of the data to be representative of a 'real world phenomena' (Bryman, 2012, p. 570).

The coding occurs in two main phases. The initial phase consists of applying very detailed codes to the transcribed text, preferably resulting in a code per line of transcript. The

purpose of this phase is to generate as many ideas about the data as possible (Charmaz, 2006 in Bryman, 2012). This is followed by a focused coding phase, which narrows down or merges the codes by making decisions about 'which initial codes make the most analytic sense' (Charmaz, 2006, in Bryman, 2012, pp. 57-8). In both phases, memos are used to describe and define codes and to track the progress of ideas about different codes.⁷

Categories are formed by analysing the relationships between codes and further refining and reducing the field of ideas based on relevancy to the research questions. Subsequently, the properties of each category are outlined and defined with evidence from the data. The developed categories become the theories, completing the analytical process. It should be noted that to simplify the analyses of the interview data, only direct quotes have been referenced. It should be assumed that, unless otherwise referenced, information contained within this thesis is derived from interview data.

Each of the following chapters is dedicated to one participant. Each begins with a summary of the text and an analysis of the Indigenous representation within that text with reference to theoretical frameworks explored in the Literature Review. Six primary categories emerged from the coding process: introductory information, origins and motivations, contexts, techniques and methods, feedback and reflections. These are used as subheadings within each participant's chapter and form the framework for in-depth analysis of the interview data for each participant. The final chapter is a discussion of the commonalities and differences between the interview responses.

⁷ Appendix 3: Example of Coding Diagrams contains the diagrams that were used to organise and analyse the relationships between codes for one participant as an example of the process.

Literature Review

Orientalism to Aboriginalism

Within Australia's social, political and cultural contexts, discourses about authenticity, identity and protocols are active and prominent. Within the area of Australian literature, one important contribution to the postcolonial theory surrounding Indigenous representations is derived from ideas put forward by Edward Said (2003) in his work on Orientalism. Though Said's focus was on the 'West's' relationship with the 'East', there is an underlying structure to his argument that has been recognised and utilised as a framework for analysing non-Indigenous Australia's relationship with Indigenous Australia, including its manifestation in literature. The participants in this study all displayed awareness of these issues and tensions around Indigenous representation in writing.

The essence of postcolonial theory is that Western or European cultures define themselves in relation to cultures that are deemed to be not Western or European. This creates an oppositional binary pair of Self and Other. The Self has a preconceived knowledge, idea or narrative of the Other's characteristics that is not necessarily related to, and is greatly reduced from, lived experience. The body of knowledge generated and held by the Self is derived from a combination of academic study, imaginative discourses, and discursive practices and includes inherent hegemonic power differentials between the Self and Other.

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more sceptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter. (Said, 2003, p.15)

The Other is considered a lesser culture by the Self. There are various factors that support and protect the Self's view of the Other. The use of particular recurring representations

of the Other in literature, imagery, and social and political discourses generally, sustain and perpetuate the opinions of the Self. Through these representations, the Other is reduced and generalised into one homogeneous group (Bradford, Mallan, Stephens, & McCallum, 2008) containing attributes such as ignorance, infantilism, mysteriousness, exoticism and irrationality, all attributes that directly oppose the manner in which the Self conceives of itself. The Other is therefore not a reality but a negative reflection of the Self (Said, 2003), both in the sense of being inferior and of being opposite. The usage of the Other in discourse is designed to rationalise and legitimise the dominance of one culture over another. This rationalisation and legitimisation of dominance is a recursive process in literature. As Phillips & Ravenscroft (S. Phillips & Ravenscroft, 2016) state:

At the heart of Said's theory of Orientalism is the concept of the 'complex dialectic of reinforcement' [...]where the experiences of readers are shaped by their reading, which in turn shapes what writers are moved to write about, and which is itself shaped by the imagined experiences of an imagined reader. (p. 115)

Representations of the Other are not necessarily overtly negative. The Other is often romanticised, eroticised or imbued with childlike characteristics. Such images allow the Self to assert a paternal attitude towards the Other (Said, 2003) which, again, contributes to a sense of power of one culture over another. A notable derivation of the paternal relationship of the Self towards the Other is the Self's right and duty to speak about and on behalf of the Other. The Self holds more knowledge about the Other than the Other does of itself and the Other is, therefore, incapable of representing itself (Said, 2003).

Orientalism, though a theoretical construct, has real world ramifications. The relationship between knowledge and power has been theorised by Foucault as being closely, even inextricably, linked.

Knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true.' Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations'. (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

Power can give authority to knowledge, and vice versa, making that knowledge ‘true’ to the point where it affects people, events and processes in the physical world. The creation of a body of knowledge pertaining to the Other is, therefore, a way to dominate and subjugate the Other. The knowledge possessed by Orientalists was not only expressed in academic terms but was also disseminated in representations of Oriental culture in art and literature. Said’s ideas have since been utilised as a framework for analysing similar representations.

Aboriginalism

The ideas in Said’s *Orientalism* have been appropriated for use in analysing Indigenous representations in Australian literature. Hodge & Mishra (1991) utilised the core of Said’s ideas in a framework that they termed Aboriginalism.

Aboriginalism in Australia formed out of a need to conserve a historical narrative in which colonial settlers and their descendants were the real and only Australians, the Self, and to legitimise their treatment of and domination over Indigenous peoples as the Other (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). Australia was founded on the lie of *terra nullius*, empty land, meaning that the land was unused and could be freely colonised without bargaining or treaties with the local inhabitants (Kinnane⁸, 2015). Captain James Cook, who declared Australia a part of the British Empire in 1788, had in fact met with Aboriginal people at that time, yet the myth began that Australia was devoid of inhabitants and the British were the rightful colonisers. Contrary to *terra nullius*, it is estimated that there were over 250 distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups across Australia at the time of colonisation (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS], 2019). Each had their own culture and technology, including ways of managing and cultivating land. The two narratives have existed uneasily ever since. The disinheritance of Aboriginal people of their land and rights under the myth of *terra nullius* at the time of colonisation led to a series of events that are yet to be resolved. In the two hundred years since, in the name of ‘progress’ and ‘rightful white dominance’, Indigenous peoples have been massacred, enslaved, controlled and separated from their families,

⁸ Steve Kinnane is an experienced writer and researcher in Aboriginal history. Born in Perth, Kinnane is a Miriwoong Marda-Marda from the East Kimberly of Western Australia.

resulting in devastating inter-generational damage to communities (Kinnane, 2015). These events and their effects are frequent topics in Aboriginalist texts produced from the time of colonisation to the present day, and the outcome is usually an awkward attempt to reconcile atrocities with positive ideas of non-Indigenous Australian identity.

Aboriginalism consists of two distinct avenues of thought. One is defined by the argument that Indigenous cultures were primitive and devoid of value in the modern world, and the other is defined by the argument that Indigenous cultures were imbued with mysterious power and knowledge that would be incomprehensible to the Western mind (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). These theories contradict each other on the value and potential that Indigenous cultures have, but both suggest that Indigenous Australian cultures belonged in a different space, either historical or metaphysical, from non-Indigenous Australian cultures (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). This simultaneous dismissal of and fascination with Indigenous people and cultures has shown itself in texts since colonisation (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). Aboriginalism serves the coloniser by providing a basis and subsequent allowance for power over the colonised:

It is no accident that its vague positivities commonly are cancelled out by the negative meanings that are strongly encoded in it: smugness and a sense of superiority, racist stereotypes, and assertion of rights of ownership in the intellectual and cultural sphere to match power in the political and economic spheres. (Hodge & Mishra, 1991, p. 27)

Aboriginalism is insidious, relying as it does on a discursive regime – built upon social and physical violence – to maintain the supremacy of the coloniser. Despite growing awareness by writers about the contribution of literature to Aboriginalist discourses, Aboriginalism has maintained a foothold in Australian culture by being both the foundation of colonial power and a subliminal entity.

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representation in Children's and Young Adult Literature](#)

Moving from the theoretical realm to the practical, representation of Indigenous culture and people in Australian children's and young adult literature by non-Indigenous authors and illustrators is a contentious issue. The idea that writers have the right to uninhibited topics, narrative tools and research methods often conflicts with protocols designed to

protect the rights of Indigenous people to be represented accurately and with respect, in addition to their rights to maintain possession of their own stories and other intellectual property (Janke, 2008).

The history of Indigenous representation in Australian children's literature has changed significantly over time. The earliest known Australian book for children is titled *A Mother's Offering to her Children* and was published in 1841 (Saxby, 1969). In *A Mother's Offering*, Aboriginal people were referred to as animalistic beings with sub-human intelligence or ignored completely (A Lady Long Resident in New South Wales, 1841). Over the decades since, the representation of Indigenous peoples has changed to strike a more sympathetic tone. In the early 1990s there was a surge in interest from the Australian writing community to be much more inclusive of representations of Indigenous peoples in their work (A. M. Heiss, 2002b). On the surface, inclusive, sympathetic writing seems admirable, especially when compared to early, unsympathetic examples of children's literature. However, the surge also saw the creation of a few disrespectful and hurtful literary representations, where the author fraudulently claimed Indigenous identity (Thomas, 2014).

As touched upon in the introductory paragraphs of this thesis, Aboriginal author and critic Melissa Lucashenko presented another perspective on sympathetic representations in her article *Muwi muwi-nyhin, binung goonj: boastful talk and broken ears* (2009). She argues that though sympathetic representations of Indigenous people are well intentioned, they are rarely created in the interest of Indigenous people, and the reason authors feel compelled to write them is more about excising their own discomfort with cultural difference or racism than being motivated by a genuine desire to give agency to or empower Indigenous people through their work.

Lucashenko (2009) and Wright⁹ (in Heiss, 2002) also outline some of the issues that emerge when non-Indigenous writers represent Indigenous people and culture in their

⁹ Alexis Wright is an award-winning writer from the Waanyi people of the highlands of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. She has contributed to many writers' festivals and conferences, as well as being a Distinguished Research Fellow at The Writing & Society Research Centre within the University of Western Sydney and the Boisbouvier Chair in Australian Literature at the University of Melbourne.

work. Lucashenko reasons that Aboriginal Law is closely intertwined with every aspect of culture, and that misrepresentation of Aboriginal Law has significant and harmful impacts on Aboriginal society. Wright and Lucashenko both emphasise the fact that the source of much non-Indigenous knowledge of Indigenous culture is based on non-Indigenous assumptions, and has generally had very little authentic Indigenous influence, making the chances of creating something harmful far higher, even if the artist undertakes research as part of the creative process.

Lucashenko (2009) explores the issue of authenticity further, arguing that it is not possible for a non-Indigenous author to portray an authentic Indigenous character. She contends that the knowledge required to represent Indigenous people authentically can only be absorbed through generations of learning and cultural practice. Additionally, there are issues of authenticity of specific details of people, culture and setting, and appropriation. Setting a story in Australia, whether the writing is fiction or non-fiction, means that any Indigenous characters will necessarily be of a specific identity and from a specific language group, and will often be taken as a literal portrayal of a people by other Indigenous groups. Hence, according to Lucashenko, there is no way to create representations of anonymous or entirely fictional Aboriginal people within the context of an Australian setting. Omissions or misrepresentation therefore become a serious matter, which cannot be ignored at the discretion of the author.

Lucashenko (2009) concludes by expressing her view that if non-Indigenous authors must write about Indigenous people, they should not appropriate the voice of an Indigenous person. Rather, they should take the role of a non-Indigenous observer to avoid imposing non-Indigenous ideas of Indigenous culture onto Indigenous people. Through her article Lucashenko makes the argument that Indigenous representations in children's and young adult literature are a result of, and complicated by, the unequal relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia since colonisation.

Heiss (2002a) also discusses circumstances under which it might be appropriate for non-Indigenous peoples to write about Indigenous peoples. She posits that there is a place for the non-Indigenous story as well as the Indigenous one when writing about colonisation and its effects, especially in non-fiction and historical writings. Heiss asserts that stories

of the oppression of Indigenous peoples have been largely absent from history books and that it is a space where non-Indigenous writers would be able to contribute.

Bradford (2001) investigates Indigenous representation in Australian children's and young adult literature from a post-colonial perspective by examining the cultural legacy of colonisation in Australia and how it affects children's literature in the present. The fourth chapter of *Reading Race*, titled 'Speaking for the Aborigines: Knowledge, Power and Aboriginalism', is a detailed attempt to engage with the area of non-Indigenous representation of Indigenous people. Bradford approaches the issue by analysing texts from different historical contexts which represent Indigenous culture or people and were created by non-Indigenous authors and illustrators. *Reading Race*, and in particular 'Speaking for the Aborigines: Knowledge, Power and Aboriginalism', critiques the implicit ideologies of texts that have received awards and recognition for presenting positive representations of Indigenous people or issues. By examining critically lauded texts, Bradford brings into question the validity of the framework that Australian society uses to evaluate Indigenous representation in children's literature. Through these examples, Bradford argues that non-Indigenous authors and illustrators are perpetuating colonial ideologies regarding Indigenous peoples, consciously and unconsciously. She further argues that embedded ideologies within texts make assumptions about the background knowledge of the reader, and that ideologies also wield significant power over its subject and its readers.

Bradford (2001) draws on Mishra and Hodge's framework of Aboriginalism to describe texts that are written about and on behalf of Indigenous people for a predominantly non-Indigenous readership. She asserts that Aboriginalist texts both perpetuate the racism they try to combat and patronise the culture they seek to help. While acknowledging the intentions and to some extent the success of such literature in bringing positive attention to Indigenous culture, which would otherwise be ignored or persecuted, Bradford argues that the honourable reputation some authors have attained within Australian society is built on the exploitation and harmful representations of their subjects, specifically citing Kate Parker, the author of *Australian Legendary Tales*.

Bradford's (2001) main argument against Aboriginalist representation is that sympathetic notions such as writing for Indigenous people both assumes that they are

incapable of writing for themselves, and robs them of the capacity to do so by using hegemonic power to take over a space, both in the literary world and in greater society, that would otherwise be filled by Indigenous perspectives. As Wright (2016) comments, 'Aboriginal people have not been in charge of the stories other people tell about us' (p. 58). Wright makes the additional argument that the Australian national narrative, formed from non-Indigenous stories, is weaponised to divide, harm and control Indigenous peoples. She points to many examples of the promotion of negative narratives of Indigenous peoples, the simultaneous suppression of positive narratives, and the real effects within Australian society.

The empowerment or otherwise of the colonised to be present and accurately heard in society's discourse is an essential debate in the area of Indigenous representation. Spivak (1988), in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, describes a people within a colonised culture who are denied full or any access to the dominant culture's power, the subaltern. She then argues that if the subaltern finds a space from which to be heard they cease to be subaltern. The colonisation of Australia did not include pathways, such as treaties, for Indigenous culture to retain power and agency, as had occurred in other colonised countries. Instead, government policies such as child removal from Indigenous families were implemented from the time of colonisation, with the purpose of eliminating Indigenous culture completely. These policies succeeded in dislocating families and displacing individuals, disrupting the flow of language and cultural tradition from one generation to the next (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 1997). The resulting intergenerational damage is a large factor in contemporary Indigenous issues (Atkinson¹⁰, 2002). In modern times Indigenous people are under-represented in government and other prominent positions within non-Indigenous societal structures and over-represented in prisons, health care needs, and educational truancy rates (Beresford & Omaji, 1996, as cited in HREOC, 1997). Despite numerous government programs and interventions, the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is still immense in most key areas such as health, education

¹⁰ Professor Judy Atkinson is of the Jiman people of the Upper Dawson in Central West Queensland, and the Bundjalung of Northern New South Wales. Her academic work focuses on trauma and recovery for Indigenous and all other peoples.

(Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019) and incarceration (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). It is these social, political and historical factors that deny Indigenous peoples a space from which to speak, be heard and therefore empowered, a predicament which places them in the position of Spivak's subaltern.

Spivak (1988) argues, amongst many other points, that there are inherent difficulties with agency and speaking voice created by relationships between the colonised and the coloniser. She criticises the intellectual observer of the colonised who infers theories about the lived experiences of the subaltern, using the examples of Deleuze and Foucault, who commented on the knowledge and articulation of the 'masses'.

The limits of this representationalist realism are reached with Deleuze: 'Reality is what actually happens in a factory, in a school, in barracks, in a prison, in a police station' (FD, p.212). This foreclosing of the necessity of the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production has not been salutary. It has helped positivist empiricism - the justifying foundation of advanced capitalist neocolonialise - to define its own arena as 'concrete experience', 'what actually happens'. Indeed, the concrete experience that is the guarantor of the political appeal of prisoners, soldiers and schoolchildren is disclosed through the concrete experience of the intellectual, the one who diagnoses the episteme. (pp. 274-5)

When a person with the power and ability to speak theorises about the lived experience of the subaltern without reflecting on the irreducibility of that experience and the intellectual's position in relation to the subaltern experience, the theory becomes flawed. It devalues the capacity for forming an ideological position that might challenge colonial power and at the same time, solidifies the superiority of Western intellectual observations over the Other. While non-Indigenous Australian authors of children's and young adult fiction are not the subjects of Spivak's argument, they are arguably still engaged in the process of narrativising an experience for their characters, and could therefore be considered to be, at the very least, potentially reducing and misrepresenting that experience from a place of authority.

There are, of course, differences between academics and researchers, who want to accurately represent the experience of the subaltern, and creative writers. One of the arguments in support of non-Indigenous representation of Indigenous people is that

restricting writers to the sphere of their own experience could limit subject matter, to the severe detriment of the art of writing (Saxby, 1993). Additionally, once boundaries are created around Indigenous representation, historical and social representations become restricted as well. This argument dismisses any damage to Indigenous culture that inaccurate representation might cause as being necessary to conserve artistic licence, and privileges the rights of the writer over the rights of Indigenous people and cultures.

There is no doubt that writers wishing to portray Indigenous people and culture in their work face a minefield of sensitive issues. Children's author Nadia Wheatley points out the double-edged sword faced by writers in this position; if Indigenous culture is omitted from Australian literature, writers potentially represent Australia as a homogeneous Western culture. Including Indigenous representations, however, means that the artist runs the risk of being tokenistic and hollow (A. M. Heiss, 2002b).

Spivak's concept of the dominant culture and the subaltern can be further adapted to examination of the field of Australian children's and young adult literature. Non-Indigenous authors seeking to interpret Indigenous experience and then act as intermediaries or translators between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people automatically adopt a superior position in relation to their subjects, by implying that Indigenous people are in need of interpretation in order to be understood by the wider society. This further diminishes the space from which Indigenous people can speak and be heard.

One clear example of suppression of this kind is found in portrayals of Aboriginal culture that are reduced to myths and legends, popularly termed 'the Dreamtime' or 'Dreaming' (Hodge & Mishra, 1991; Saxby, 1993). When those terms are used, Indigenous culture is placed in a magic space in a primitive time away from the present reality (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). The 'Dreamtime', in particular, has become far less used in recent years because of this connotation. Reducing Indigenous cultures to myths and legends serves to perpetuate colonial ideas of Indigenous people as 'ignorant', 'primitive' 'natives'. This ignorance is not restricted to texts that are unsympathetic to Indigenous history and culture; in the more sympathetic magic stories, such as *The Nargun and the Stars* by Patricia Wrightson, powerful Indigenous magic is forced into a traditional European narrative form and distanced from the cultures and places that give them meaning

(Bradford, 2001). In *The Nargun and the Stars* the spirits of the land are focalised through non-Indigenous characters, while Indigenous characters are relegated to a few comments on the history of the land (Wrightson, 1973). By convincing society that Indigenous culture is distant, magical and requires decoding, Aboriginalist texts deny Indigenous people the ability to represent themselves in alternative ways (Hodge & Mishra, 1991).

Building upon the ideas of romanticising and homogenising in Aboriginalism, deficit discourse describes an oppressive and dominant narrative of Indigenous Australians as victims. Bamblett¹¹ argues:

Sticking to stories about grievances is politically expedient. Concession of Indigenous advantage could be co-opted by people with ideological axes to grind. However, saturating the discourse with deficit language may be necessary to confront racism, create change and respond to politicised readings, but it has also created an essentialised and constraining image of Aborigines. Differences are represented as a binary where Aborigines are the victims and non-Aborigines the victimisers. (Bamblett, 2011)

In an effort to discuss and maintain the argument that racism affects Indigenous Australians, discourse becomes solely about the deficits of Indigenous Australians as a homogeneous group. Through deficit discourse, representations of individual Indigenous characters are stereotyped into struggle and disadvantage metaphors for all Indigenous Australian peoples. Even positive stories are subsumed by the need to portray success in the context of belonging to cultures that innately suffer deficit. Indigenous representations are therefore inextricably linked to ideologies around racism and rarely able to exist without them. Bamblett (Bamblett, 2011) suggests that although Indigenous representations as created by Indigenous peoples are not free from deficit essentialism, their inclusion does create more diversity and complexity, and in doing so challenges aspects of deficit discourse.

The current relationship between the dominant Western culture and Indigenous cultures in terms of the identity of Australian society is a derivative of history. By virtue of their

¹¹ Dr Lawrence Bamblett is the Deputy Director for the Australian Centre for Indigenous History at the Australian National University. He is a Wiradjuri historian with a focus on community development.

subject matter, all texts that include representation of Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous writers reflect Australian identity and the spaces occupied by Indigenous peoples within that identity. Sara Ahmed (2000) suggests that one of the ways identity is formed is through recognising the difference between Self and Others. Ahmed goes on to say that once an 'Other' is accepted as being different in Australian society, that Other can be absorbed into society's identity, because this allows the society to call itself multicultural. In their difference, Others become a part of Australian identity and strengthen that identity.

There are two difficulties with this premise. The first is that the acceptance of differences as part of an identity and a history of cultural diversity ignores and overshadows differences that problematise that identity (Ahmed, 2000). Conflicts such as those between European colonists and Indigenous peoples are an example of this, and are therefore absent from most representations of Australia's multicultural identity.

The second difficulty is cultural difference being defined as something that is intrinsic to national identity. The word 'nation', in this context, refers to an imaginary space in which everybody shares common attributes. Cultural difference is then only accepted if it is the kind of difference that is standard within that national identity (Ahmed, 2000). Others that do not fit the standards of difference required for assimilation into Australian identity are categorised by Ahmed as 'strangers', that are perceived by the dominant culture as dangerous to the wellbeing of the nation. In this way, Australia's multicultural identity has been used both to own and suppress Indigenous cultures (Ahmed, 2000).

The contention surrounding Indigenous representation in literature reflects the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the right to expression for non-Indigenous writers and the right for Indigenous peoples to have their cultures respected. The incongruity of this predicament with Australia's identity as a multicultural society is often reflected in texts representing Indigenous peoples written by non-Indigenous writers.

The voices of individual characters are also important in the questions surrounding Indigenous representation by non-Indigenous writers. One of the common ways to distinguish the voices of Indigenous characters is to have them speak in Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English can be characterised by its different use of words and grammar, and the inclusion of words from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

languages. Without the context of culture and community, Aboriginal English is often classified as a lesser language, indicating a lack of education or a sign of stupidity (Bropho as cited in Heiss, 2002).

Then people tell me that one gardiya [non-Indigenous person] call Windschuttle never listen to my word proper. He never come up here and talk to me face to face in my own country. He write bad way about me because he can't listen to my word proper way....

He keep going pretending I got high English and try to make me look stupid. (Patrick as cited in Grieves¹², 2008)

The quote above is an oral rebuttal by Peggy Patrick of Keith Windschuttle's criticism of her description of the massacre at Mistake Creek. In this quote, Peggy Patrick highlights a potential problem with Indigenous voices in fictional books. Using Aboriginal English in a space where it is directly compared to standard English may imply to the reader that the speaker of Aboriginal English is less educated than the speaker of standard English. This is only implied due to a lack of cultural context. English is not Patrick's native language, and in her own language she is articulate and fluent (Grieves, 2008). She is also referring to things that hold different values in different cultures, such as her 'word', which in her oral culture is far more powerful (Grieves, 2008) than in Windschuttle's cultural frames of reference. In practice, the gaps in communication between a speaker of Aboriginal English and a non-Indigenous listener are often filled by the imagination of the listener and adapted to their frames of reference (Bropho in Heiss, 2002). The use of Aboriginal English in literature becomes a negative stereotype when placed in direct comparison with Standard English unless it is interpreted with reference to the culture of the speaker.

Bradford (2001) contends that using descriptions that perpetuate the colonial idea of savage, backwards natives, even when the primary motivation is irony or historical accuracy, is unacceptable. The use of these colonial ideas in critically lauded novels

¹² Professor Victoria Grieves is a Warrimay person from the mid-north coast of New South Wales. She is a historian with interests ranging from colonialism, the Aboriginal family, mental health in contemporary psychology, and sustainability within Aboriginal Communities.

further entrenches racist ideologies in society. Unfortunately, Aboriginalist texts have often been celebrated for their attempts to portray Indigenous culture and issues, which subverts all attempts to remove embedded racist ideologies. Bradford advocates for literature that does not perpetuate racist ideologies, even under the banner of historical accuracy. In arguing for literature free of racist ideology, Bradford acknowledges that children's (and young adult) literature has the power to transmit ideologies that influence the social values of the young readership and therefore, over time, have influence over future values of society as a whole. Bradford also asserts that writers hold responsibility for the ideologies, both conscious and unconscious, that their published texts contain.

Indigenous representation by non-Indigenous writers in Australian contemporary young adult literature is a complex issue. For as long as children's literature has been produced in Australia it has included representation of Indigenous peoples. Over time the nature of that representation has changed, but time has also increased the prominence, complexity and controversy of the issue. Broadly, representation of Indigenous peoples and the surrounding issues have their context and origin in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples both within Australia's colonial past and as part of its present-day identity. Lucashenko (2009), speaking from a personal perspective as an Aboriginal woman, identified lack of authenticity and disregard for cultural appropriateness by writers as recurring issues within this area. Bradford (2001) took a wider angle and, through analysis, demonstrated that paternalism and the continuation of oppressive colonial ideologies can be found throughout children's literature, even that which has been critically lauded for its representation of Indigenous peoples and cultures. She also theorised that, because of the influential nature of children's literature, these ideologies will have a negative effect on society.

Each of the following chapters focuses on one author, each of whom have published a young adult novel that was acclaimed by the CBCA between 2001 and 2016. The chapters begin with an analysis of each author's critically lauded, published texts and continue with an analysis of the interview data. Within this thesis, Bradford's and Lucashenko's ideas will inform a framework through which to analyse texts written by non-Indigenous writers, to identify the different ways Indigenous people and culture are represented in Australian children's and young adult literature.

Chapter 2: Sue Lawson

Sue Lawson lives in a large town in southern Victoria. She has published a wide variety of books for children and young adults, many of which have attracted critical acclaim and awards. These include picture books, junior fiction, young adult fiction, and non-fiction books. Lawson is passionate about writing and reading, and regularly engages with young writers through workshops and speaking engagements.

Freedom Ride (published 2015)

Freedom Ride was a Notable Book of the Year for Older Readers in the CBCA Awards in 2016, and was on the shortlist for the Young Adult category of the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards. *Freedom Ride* is the story of Robbie, a non-Indigenous teenage boy who lives with his conservative father and strict, over-bearing grandmother in Walgaree (a fictional amalgamation of the real towns of Walgett and Moree). Set in 1965, Walgaree is a country town where racism and segregation of Aboriginal people is social policy. Influenced by the changing attitudes in America, Australia also begins to change. Against this backdrop racial tensions build in the town and are brought to a head at the conclusion of the novel with the arrival of the Student Action for Aborigines Organisation on the historical Freedom Ride. As the novel progresses, Robbie develops his own social and moral identity and the strength to stand up to the town and his family. A short, non-fiction history of the Freedom Ride at the end of the novel acknowledges the participants and the reality of the treatment of Aboriginal people represented in the novel.

Robbie is the focalising character. The narrative is written in the third person but limited to his perspective. The audience learns of the lives of the Aboriginal characters as Robbie begins to question the social conventions that surround him, motivated by his highly unpleasant home life, the progressive views of his employer, Barry, and his colleague, Micky. All three are violently assaulted at points in the narrative, for transgressing the racial boundaries that Anglo-Australians in Walgaree are desperate to maintain. Micky is an Aboriginal boy who, like all Aboriginal people from Walgaree, lives in one of three Aboriginal reserves on the outskirts of town, each more decrepit and horrific than the next. In the excerpt below, Robbie realises that his father has been visiting the Aboriginal reserves for sex and has killed an Aboriginal man while driving drunk. His grandmother and prominent white townspeople have covered up the crime.

Barry clasped his hands on the table. “Robbie, sometimes—”

“It’s true what she said, isn’t it?” I already knew the answer; I’d seen it written across Dad’s face as clearly as if the woman had written the words in ink.

But part of me clung to some stupid grain of hope that he hadn’t been there. That he hadn’t killed Dwayne. “Men like Bull Jackson, Twiggy Mathes, Dad, they go to the Crossing for that.”

Barry brushed invisible crumbs from the tablecloth. “Yeah, they do. But Robbie, don’t judge the women. They do it for their families.”

A wave of emotion swamped me. I bit the inside of my lip trying to force away the tears. “So, you get beaten up, have your business vandalised, just for having an Aborigine working here, but it’s ok for them to sneak off and use the Aboriginal women for sex.” I scoffed. “The same Aborigines who aren’t allowed to buy things from the shops, or enter the pub or RS? It’s wrong. Just so...” I stared at the milky tea, searching for the right word to describe the men’s behaviour.

“Hypocritical,” said Barry.

I looked up at him. “Everyone knows about it, don’t they?”

“Yes, Robbie.”

“And Nan would know what goes on.”

“She’d know.” (Lawson, 2015, Chapter 54, Section 1, para. 44)

This quote is representative of the wide range of racially motivated discrimination and hatred perpetrated against the Aboriginal characters in *Walgaree*. The conditions under which the Aboriginal people are living are described in stark, factual language, neither crude nor insinuated. Lawson often utilises crudeness by white characters to demonstrate their racist beliefs. ‘Abo’, ‘coon’, ‘darkie’ and ‘boong’ are all used liberally by white characters to signify and emphasise their racism. These words are some of the most taboo slurs within Australian culture, then and now. In *Freedom Ride*, however, Lawson uses them within a historical context in which they are authentic and used by characters who are indisputably condemned by the narrative for their abuse of individuals and

disregard for the law and human decency, undermining the discriminatory power of the language.

The Aboriginal characters in the novel are represented solely through their actions and dialogue. If they are physically described, it is within the dialogue from a white character to imply the racism of that white character, rather than evoking an image of the Aboriginal character. For example, when the Freedom Ride students stage a protest at the local public pool the owner, Mr Sneddon, responds:

“Clear off, the lot of you. And take that bunch of layabouts with you.” He gestured at the students in the sun. “Go on, piss off back to where you came from.”

[...]

“[...] Look at youse now. Bare feet, filthy hair. We don’t want your black germs in our pool. (Lawson, 2015, Chapter 57, Section 1, para. 44)

In the description of the event. Mr Sneddon is described as so mean as to be almost a caricature. Through Robbie’s perspective, the reader is encouraged to join in the outrage against Mr Sneddon, including his racist remarks. This stylistic technique is typical of depictions of white characters who display racism in *Freedom Ride*.

Descriptions of the Aboriginal characters are typically about their posture, clothes or demeanour.

[...] I just about cannoned into an Aborigine waiting by the newspaper rack. She stared at the floor, arms wrapped around her stomach. Her dress was faded and her shoes worn. She was too clean to be from the Tip and the Station, the government mission, was the other side of town. She was from the Crossing for sure. (Lawson, 2015, Chapter1, Section 1, para. 16)

The woman in the description appears once, at the very beginning of the novel. Despite the omitted aspects of physicality, this passage describes a holistic character and begins to tell the story of Aboriginal people in Walgaree. This woman’s life is hard because of her cultural heritage, but not as hard as some. She is aware of her position in society and the treatment she is likely to receive in public. Her demeanour is slightly fearful and diminished. In a subsequent passage, her actions and dialogue support this image:

The Aborigine, eyes fixed on the floor as though the mysteries of the universe were printed across it, didn't move.

[...]

"Please." The Aborigine woman's voice was a whisper. "I'll wait." (Lawson, 2015, Chapter 1, Section 1, para 38).

The lack of description of the character's body shifts the focus of the narration away from emphasising immutable differences, often stereotypically associated with race, such as skin colour, eye colour and shape and, in women, curviness. Many of these aspects are a large factor in romanticism or eroticism. Without such differences at the forefront, empathy and relatability are more prominent, signalling the reader to align themselves with the experience of the Aboriginal character and against the people who discriminate against her.

Freedom Ride is a story about racism and the people who fight against it. It is based in a well-documented, recent reality, albeit amalgamated into a fictional, representative town. It does contain characters that uphold the racist, colonial ideologies that Bradford (2001) warns are potentially harmful, no matter the context in which they are presented. It also could be viewed through the lens of deficit discourse by the narratives of oppression and vilification of Aboriginal peoples (Bamblett, 2011). However, the subjectivity of Robbie's perspective and the obvious condemnation of racist characters do overtly signal the reader to not only resist but oppose them.

Interview Analysis

If you don't have any experience but you want to write about it, get rid of the fear and go talk to them. And just give fear a seat, welcome it to the table, but write anyway. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Introductory Information

The introduction phase of the interview (see Appendix 2: Interview Guide) was designed predominantly to develop a rapport with the participant and initiate a flow of communication, rather than necessarily providing research content. However, it became apparent during the initial coding process that, for most participants, themes and relationships between pieces of information relevant to the study were already present in this phase of the interview.

Lawson's interview contained strong, consistent themes throughout all phases that were no less apparent in the introduction phase. Her answers in the introduction phase suggested a strong emotional relationship with writing in general and her own methods in particular. She described intense passion and a desire to write that was overwhelmed by equally intense feelings of fear, doubt and anxiety that prevented her from writing. Adversity, in the form of serious illness, gave Lawson a new perspective and bravery which allowed her to achieve her goal to write.

But it was after that that I went 'why am I not writing? Who cares if my writing is crap? I love doing it.' So that's what gave me the courage to write, and I think that is why I tackle the topics I do. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Lawson's responses showed a cyclical relationship between emotions, overcoming adversity, writing methods, topics, and achievement that formed a pattern throughout the other phases of the interview. Separate events colliding and influencing each other in seemingly random or fateful ways underpinned most of her decision-making processes when it came to her writing, and specifically to the representation of Aboriginal people in *Freedom Ride*.

Origins and Motivations

Lawson's responses to the origins and motivations interview questions continued to suggest cyclical patterns of behaviour when it comes to writing generally, and that

applied directly to *Freedom Ride*. She described the genesis of her writing as instances of random learning: learning something by accident or chance from an event, a memory, reading or facts that she picked up from others. The examples of these random learnings from her responses to the interview questions were uniformly of confronting, horrific or unfortunate situations. She would then have a strong emotional response, usually anger or sadness, to the new knowledge that would be followed by empathy, curiosity, obsession and persistent thoughts that would compel her to research and write about that topic. In the case of *Freedom Ride*, during research for another project on Australian protests, Lawson saw an old photo of Charles Perkins, organiser of the Freedom Ride, in a pool with the caption stating that Aboriginal children had been allowed to swim in the Moree public swimming pool for the first time. Lawson's reaction was disbelieving outrage '[...] I just went "Excuse me? Excuse me?!"' (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016). This reaction was in response both to the treatment of Aboriginal people in places like Moree in the period up to the 1965 Freedom Ride (not to be confused with the American Freedom Ride) but also to her own lack of knowledge about the event and the reasons for it.

So, I'm writing this non-fiction, went to a literary function where Marianne [Lawson's publisher] was and I said 'Look, can I talk to you?' She goes 'Yeah.' I said 'It's about World War II, the book.' She goes: 'How's it going?' I said 'it's not.' She goes, 'What do you mean?' And my exact words were 'The bloody Freedom Ride won't leave me alone.' And she just went 'do it. Write it.' So that's how that story came about. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Lawson was motivated to write *Freedom Ride* by her vehement support of human rights. She believed the story of the Freedom Ride should be common knowledge and that she could contribute to this goal by writing a young adult novel. Lawson's proactive approach to social justice and education came through strongly throughout the interview.

Contexts

Lawson remembers a number of external events that she described as contributing to the 'melting pot' (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016) during the time she was writing *Freedom Ride*. These events and information were unsought but they caught her attention and formed the context in which she produced *Freedom Ride*.

In terms of politics, the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, came into his second term. Lawson talked positively about Obama and former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, and what their achievements represented in terms of social progression, not only because of their policies, but because their success denoted improvements in outcomes for historically disadvantaged genders and cultures.

Lawson was also consuming entertainment that pertained to Indigenous affairs and social justice. These included the film *Utopia*, the documentary *Blood Brothers* and the fictional television show *Redfern Now*, that all focus upon Indigenous experience. All of these affected Lawson emotionally and resulted in realisations about Indigenous experiences and lives throughout history to the present day. This is not to say that she regarded these films as definitive; Lawson was critical of *Utopia* in particular for being hyperbolic. But she acknowledges the role they played in allowing her to engage with the way Aboriginal peoples have been treated.

Current events during the time Lawson was writing also went into what she terms the 'melting pot'. She remembers there were reports of Aboriginal deaths in custody in the news, one specifically where a man was left in the back of a police vehicle in fifty-degree weather with no water. There were news stories about bad treatment of asylum seekers and Muslim people as well.

Yeah, it was all sort of, all of it [the context] was just creating this thing of, not even trying to write about Aboriginal people, which clearly I was, it was humanity. It was just what's going on with humanity? (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Current events and news were contextualised with specific examples of Indigenous experiences with events from around the world. This had the effect, for Lawson, of situating *Freedom Ride* within a wider discussion about the treatment of human beings universally.

Not all the contexts for *Freedom Ride* were contemporary with the act of writing. Lawson described her father as 'shockingly racist. Really racist' (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016). She remembers being a 'kid' and having confrontations with her father about equality between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples that got quite heated. He was of the opinion that equality was 'shit' and Lawson recalls,

as a child, standing up for her belief that all humans were equal. She describes her belief in equality as 'always being second nature' (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016). This is one example of evidence from the interview that being pro-active and vocal about her beliefs and ideas is one of Lawson's strongest traits, and one which allowed her, in many situations, to overcome or resolve feelings of anxiety or self-doubt. These feelings were often associated with Indigenous representation.

Due to her obsessive cycles of behaviour, Lawson was consuming and being consumed by external politics, events and entertainment that related to social justice, equality, humanity and specifically to racism and Indigenous peoples while writing *Freedom Ride*.

Techniques and Methods

The main issue for Lawson, in relation to Indigenous representation, was her fear of making mistakes. Once obsession had set *Freedom Ride* in motion, Lawson's emotional response was triggered again. Fear, worry and anxiety were clearly evident in her responses both explicitly and implicitly in the detailed and extensive thought processes around the representation of Indigenous people and culture in her writing. The result of this reaction was often avoidance of situations where she had to engage with Indigenous peoples, both in person and in her writing. Lawson used several other methods to manage her fears around doing the wrong thing and overcome avoidance. Lawson overcame her feelings of worry to seek the advice of Aboriginal peoples through the Narana Aboriginal Cultural Centre, not just about *Freedom Ride* but about engagement with Indigenous people in general. The following citation is between a woman from Narana who Lawson consulted about *Freedom Ride*, and relates to a conversation about Lawson running a writing education program at the centre.

I said to her 'It's taken me a long time to get here' and she goes 'Why?' I said I was frightened I'd say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. And she goes 'And how did that work for you?' I went 'Exactly.' (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

While this quote is not explicitly discussing *Freedom Ride*, it reflects a sentiment Lawson appears to have taken to heart in engaging with Indigenous peoples and cultures generally, as well as in her writing. Seeking advice from Narana led to an ongoing

relationship through which Lawson was empowered to overcome avoidance and progress with her writing.

Avoidance sometimes limited Lawson's progress, but in some situations, it became one of the methods she used for setting boundaries around her authorial role in terms of Indigenous representation. The character of Micky, while not a protagonist, has a prominent role in *Freedom Ride*. He is an Aboriginal teenager who works with the protagonist, Robbie, and features regularly as the plot progresses. Giving Micky a holistic character with a background, thoughts and a voice was very difficult for Lawson and was another area where she felt worry and discomfort. Creating Micky required a number of different methods, one of which was strategic avoidance.

Then Micky makes a sweeping movement and says something about country. 'It's complicated, it's country.' And then he just sort of lets it drop and doesn't try and explain country.

[...]

I didn't want to put my words of describing country into his mouth. I didn't feel that was right. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Micky's Aboriginal identity gives him authority over cultural knowledge and Lawson felt that it would be disrespectful to explain culturally important concepts such as Country through Micky. For Lawson, strategic avoidance was based on self-reflection of her white privilege. Lawrinson adopts a similar stance, which will be discussed in more detail in Interview Analysis; even though there are many superficial experiences Lawson had not had, the broader cultural similarities between herself and her white protagonist provided her with a level of comfort and confidence to write about Robbie's life in a way that she couldn't for Micky.

I thought any time I try and imagine, I can only imagine how it feels for him [Micky], and I can only imagine his frustration. I can't know it. Whereas with Robbie, I know how he's feeling. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

In certain areas, especially those to do with deep cultural knowledge, Lawson made intuitive judgements based on her levels of comfort, insight and immersion in the character to avoid some topics.

Despite Lawson's concerns about speaking for Micky, to avoid him completely would mean resorting to tokenism and shallowness of character. This was another aspect that Lawson worried about. Her methods for characterising Micky as a complex individual were to take a detailed model of day to day life (discussed below) and add layers of complexity that were distinct to Micky. Through conflict with Robbie the reader also sees Micky's personal conflicts. He comes from a family and community that has different experiences with, and points of view about, non-Indigenous people as well as other matters. Lawson makes clear early in the text that he is influenced by all of these aspects. As *Freedom Ride* continues, Micky's character learns and grows as a result of his experiences in the novel. Writing Robbie and Micky's relationship as one that was cold and lacked friendship removed the possibility that Micky would be tokenistic, by giving him an individuality that was equal to Robbie's and also did not rely on Robbie.

Primary sources played an important role in *Freedom Ride*. As already mentioned, Lawson had qualms about speaking for Aboriginal Australians. It was a boundary that she did not feel she could cross. Videos and audio of Aboriginal people at the time gave Lawson an opportunity to use real words, taken directly from Aboriginal people from the historical event.

I didn't use the words that she used in the actual footage, but basically 'It's all right for you to come and sleep with us, but not serve us on a Monday morning in the shops.' This woman actually stood up and actually said that. This was at Walgett, on the night, and really went to town at them. So those words I was comfortable. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Paraphrasing Aboriginal voices from history was Lawson's technique for introducing sensitive topics and expressing Aboriginal points of view without imposing her own voice and overstepping her boundary on speaking for Aboriginal people. There were limitations on this technique. In the example above, the subject matter is socially sanctioned sexual abuse. Lawson judged the original statement as unsuitable for a young adult audience and chose to re-word it to sanitise the language and imply rather than explicitly state that abuse of that nature was common.

Creating Aboriginal characters with depth derived from their past experiences, day to day life and family also created anxiety for Lawson. While country life in the 1960s was

familiar to her in some ways, the daily experiences of Aboriginal people who were forced to live in communities on the outside of town were completely outside of Lawson's experience or knowledge. To manage this Lawson used a combination of her social network and research to build a realistic model for the lives of the Aboriginal characters in *Freedom Ride*.

A friend was an ombudsman for Aboriginal Affairs, and he had given me lots of information about, I wanted to know bizarre things. That poor man. I'd say to him, 'How did they go to the toilet?' He goes 'What?' I said 'Well not in the stations, which were run by the government, but in the reserves and the other ones that they set up themselves, they didn't have plumbing. So did they have drop dunnies?' Did they have, I wanted to know. And he's going, 'Why?' Are you going to have your character...,' I said 'No, I just need to know that.' (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Building a model of her characters' lives, the setting and the time period was crucial for Lawson's confidence in her writing. As shown above, no detail was too small or insignificant to help build the model. Lawson used many different types of sources to immerse herself in the world of *Freedom Ride*. She found vintage magazines and newspapers from the time. Not only did they provide an insight into the era, but they gave Lawson perspective on how Aboriginal Australians fitted into Australian society and media. Books, both fiction and non-fiction, historical, from the era or contemporary, but about the era, served a similar purpose. Her collection and consumption of these sources was extensive. Lawson also used primary sources including video, audio, journals, her own memory and the memories of those in her social and professional networks to build a model in minute detail. Many of these details never appeared in the text but knowing them gave Lawson the confidence to overcome her concerns and write.

Lawson's professed aim in building this model was to build an authentic world as the setting for *Freedom Ride*.

So all those little details I really needed to get right. Because I think if you don't get them right, the old packages with the brown paper string, then you lose the reader. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Reader engagement was more than a general aim for Lawson. Keeping the reader immersed was the first step in engaging her readers with her personal sense of social justice and activism. Lawson's proactive approach to her work and the extent to which her emotions and personal ideologies were integral to her motivations and methods of writing, while continuously close to the surface throughout the interview, became explicit on this point of her writing methods and techniques.

That first chapter, I wanted to hit the reader right between the eyes. I wanted to shock them. I wanted them to go 'Oh my god, what are they doing to this [Aboriginal] woman?' (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

As discussed above, the opening chapter of *Freedom Ride* depicts an Aboriginal woman and several non-Indigenous characters being served in a newsagency. Lawson contrasted an imperious, domineering, non-Indigenous woman with an essentially helpless and broken Aboriginal woman with the express purpose of offering the reader a situation so confronting to a modern audience that it forced the reader into the position of the Other, unable to relate to either character. The designated position of the reader in this and other similar scenes was then to question the situation presented to them on a small, human level and incorporate it into a wider social sense; and therefore, raise awareness of Indigenous helplessness in this era of racism and hypocrisy. It was Lawson's intention to use *Freedom Ride* as a method of social activism and as a device for awareness raising, not just of historical events, but of the repercussions of those events that are still a part of Australian society today.

Robbie was also part of Lawson's social justice agenda. In scenes such as the ones that have been mentioned he is an exceptional character. He does not conform to the social norms he in which he lives. At first non-conformity is just in his internal monologue, but it later becomes outspoken action.

He's got my voice, in that I can't make him say things that I just don't believe in. I can have him question, I can have him shocked. But it was tough. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

He was designed as a relatable character for both Lawson and her readers. He is placed in two contrasting worlds, mirroring the placement of the reader between the two characters from the first chapter. In his home life he is subjected to his weak, racist, and

hypocritical father and his imperious, racist, and mean grandmother. At work Robbie is taken in by a mentor figure, exposed to kindness, rationality, and hope that empower him.

I needed him to be really uncomfortable. Because when you're immersed in that belief, and this comes from experience, it's quite hard to break out of it. It's quite hard. You know it's not right, and you're listening to these things and you go 'Ohh I don't know if I agree with that', but you're not game to say anything. So I needed him to be so uncomfortable, and so angry, that he was prepared to go 'Stuff this.'
(Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

[...]

I wanted him to have a mentor but not in a didactic way. Just do as I do. And that's why Barry and his mum were so important to me. That he could see a complete opposite to his own life, and that it didn't have to be like that. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Robbie's characterisation and the characterisation of his family and colleagues was designed to be the ultimate subversion of the racism portrayed in *Freedom Ride*. The tension Lawson created between Robbie's worlds, anger and discomfort with his family, and empowerment and inspiration in his workplace, forms a blueprint for questioning social norms, which was taken directly from Lawson's experiences. This is important for two reasons; firstly, that Lawson was deliberately trying to include social justice ideology in *Freedom Ride* and secondly, the detailed, authentic model of the era demanded equally authentic social ideologies and language, which were at best morally questionable and at worst deeply offensive.

The inclusion of a disclaimer was the first and most practical way Lawson dealt with the problem of language that was necessary for authenticity but also offensive. Originally this disclaimer was placed at back of the book, but at Lawson's insistence it was moved to a prominent position at the front. Most of Lawson's concerns were about racial slurs, though outdated, or quaint language also caused her concern. In terms of Indigenous representation, Lawson utilised the language used by her characters as a technique for undermining racism and promoting her social justice ideologies. Part of the interview included discussion of how Lawson used historical sources to find words she was comfortable giving to her Aboriginal characters:

I had to make it so that it fitted a young adult audience, so I couldn't use some of the terms she used. I think root might have been in there, which would have been all right. But I didn't want that sort of language where you go 'Ha ha, she said root' to distract from what she was saying. So I wanted it to be, [unintelligible] and I also wanted her to sound articulate, and measured, and just show up how ignorant and stupid these men were. So that's where those words came from. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Lawson clearly wrote with an imagined audience in mind. Minimal swearing and sanitisation of language that she was taking from historical sources was a judgement, on her part, of what was appropriate for her imagined younger readership. This is similar to methods used by Lawrinson and will be explored further in this thesis during *Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews*. Consideration that language might be a distraction from a social justice agenda indicates serious thought and analysis of a range of perspectives including an imagined audience reaction and choices about communicating an ideology.

Lawson's deliberate use of language as a combination of characterisation, communication and social justice tool is one of the most striking creative techniques applied throughout *Freedom Ride*. In constructing her Aboriginal characters as articulate, Lawson intended to give them dignity in the face of crudeness from the non-Indigenous characters and use the contrast to once again shock the reader with the brutality inflicted upon Aboriginal peoples, and women in particular, again revealing social justice ideologies. Changing and manipulating the words taken from historical sources was also a departure from Lawson's previously meticulous adherence to authenticity and research-based writing.

When asked about the *ACA Protocols* she stated that she was not aware of their existence. She went on to say that, had she known about them, they may have contributed to her anxieties and fears around doing the wrong thing. Lawson's concerns about correctness had been constant, significant barriers to her writing. Having succeeded in writing *Freedom Ride* Lawson stated that she would read the *ACA Protocols*, as they may be relevant to future writing projects.

Feedback

Lawson received an enormous amount of positive feedback for *Freedom Ride*. The only negative feedback that she was aware of was in the form of a small number of negative reviews from casual readers in online forums such as Goodreads. Only one of these reviews caused any reaction from Lawson, which was that the reviewer ‘just didn’t get it.’ (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016), by which Lawson meant that the review criticised the idiosyncrasies of the time period and the treatment of Aboriginal Australians during that time, rather than being an informed critique of the text. Lawson’s main concern with this particular review was mostly for appearance’s sake. She described with some frustration that it was the first review visible on the web page, but ultimately viewed it with a ‘let it go’ attitude (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

The positive feedback she received was extensive and came from many different facets of the general public and stakeholders in the historical events. As a part of the editing process, *Freedom Ride* was sent to readers to test, amongst other things, its authenticity. Some of these readers had participated in the actual Freedom Ride.

And the feedback from the freedom riders, they just said ‘You got it.’ That’s what it was like. And I went ‘Yes!’ (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Those people who were present at the event itself praised Lawson’s accuracy in facts as well as atmosphere. After *Freedom Ride*’s publication, Lawson received more complimentary feedback, and was gifted historical mementos from people who were tangentially involved with the Ride.

Lawson also received feedback from young readers, mostly in the form of curiosity about the facts of the Freedom Ride event. Lawson greeted these questions with enthusiasm for telling the ‘kids’ about the horrific treatment of Indigenous peoples:

And that’s part of my thing. We’ve got such a long way to improve what we’re doing with Indigenous relations. But unless we start acknowledging that, yeah we bloody well invaded, and we massacred God knows how many people. (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

As always, the social justice elements of her writing were at the forefront of her conversations about the text, this time with an added enthusiasm for the education of young Australians in their history.

Positive feedback for *Freedom Ride* continued in the form of award recognition. It was a Notable Book of the Year for Older Readers in the CBCA Awards in 2016 and was also on the shortlist for the Young Adult category of the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards. During the time of the awards *Freedom Ride* was being purchased in large numbers for use in schools, including a bulk order for four hundred copies. Lawson was also running workshops in schools using *Freedom Ride*. In reaction to the large school order Lawson stated, 'That's so exciting. Because that's why you do it. It's to reach the audience' (personal communication, July 5, 2016). The wide dissemination and education factors were emphasised in the interview as being the most satisfying and exciting elements of the reaction to the novel for Lawson.

Lawson was thrilled with the responses she got from young readers. She was asked many questions that surprised her, such as whether her mother was Aboriginal. This question specifically highlights that a reader assumed, based on *Freedom Ride*, without a factual context, a closeness and authority on Lawson's part to Aboriginal culture. More generally, the use of the text in schools and questions such as these indicated to Lawson that *Freedom Ride* was valued as an educational tool and had the potential to generate ideas in its readership.

Reflections

When Lawson reflected on *Freedom Ride* and her experiences writing she spoke about two main concepts. Firstly, the emotional reaction she had post-publication. Despite a constant undercurrent of pride in her work, Lawson was fearful of its failure, both in terms of sales and her own agenda for the novel. Initially sales were low, leading Lawson to feel *Freedom Ride* was not going to be noticed. But as sales rose and public recognition increased, Lawson's fear turned into excitement. Once the text was written and in the public sphere Lawson no longer had control over the content of the novel, but that didn't stop feelings of ownership and responsibility for Lawson. Time passing was the only solution to Lawson's fear of obscurity. When asked if she would do anything differently

in regard to writing *Freedom Ride* her response was an unequivocal 'no', showing genuine pride in her work despite the difficult or fearful aspects.

The second concept that emerged from Lawson's reflection was inspiration. Lawson's current and planned future projects are mostly about Aboriginal history and culture. Tangential stories that she had come across while writing had set off the same cycle of anger and emotion that had resulted in *Freedom Ride's* creation. Some of these writing projects, both current and future, involve collaborative works with Aboriginal people with whom Lawson formed relationships while researching for *Freedom Ride*.

Lawson also spoke about things she would do differently in the future because of her experiences with *Freedom Ride*. These included reducing the amount of negative emotion such as anger, which she felt, and feels, about the treatment of Aboriginal peoples through history to the present day. She also expressed an intent to lessen the fear of doing or saying the wrong thing when interacting with Aboriginal people. By removing the barriers created by negative emotions the process of writing could be made significantly faster, an ambition that Lawson also expressed. The balancing factor to these emotions is bravery.

[...] when I first walked into Narana it's sort of like 'Oh god don't let me say the wrong thing, don't let me say the wrong thing.' It was great, one of the guys said to me, 'If you don't say the wrong thing, how are you going to know it's the wrong thing?' And I went: 'I'm with you, I'm with you.' So it certainly made me a lot braver, and I can make a difference, and in trying to do little things to make a difference, whether it's attending a meeting, or whether it's talking about the book, it comes from the heart that I want to make a difference, and I'm not going 'Let me help you. I'm just going look at this. Let's talk about this.' (Lawson, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

In the quote above Lawson shows the importance of being brave enough to work through trial and error, knowing there is a chance of error, and being able to accept the consequences and learn from the experience. At the same time, Lawson is aware that there is a role for her to play in making a difference and contributing to a discussion around Indigenous peoples in Australian society. In this, Lawson continues to show how proactivity, social justice, life and emotions feed into her writing and vice versa.

Lawson put forward some advice for other writers based on her experiences writing *Freedom Ride*. In her opinion the most important technique is being brave, acknowledging fear, but setting it aside. Secondly, that education about Indigenous cultures and peoples is an enriching experience and should be approached proactively with talking, asking questions and learning. Once these things are achieved, writing is possible.

Chapter 3: David Metzenthen

David Metzenthen lives in Melbourne, Victoria. His career in writing for young people spans from the early 1990s to the present day. During this time, he has produced over 40 publications in children's and young adult literature. He has won 11 national awards for his writing including CBCA's Children's Book of the Year for Older Readers, Victorian and New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards, and most recently the 2016 Queensland Literary Awards for *Dreaming the Enemy*.

Wildlight (published 2002)

Wildlight was first published in 2002. As well as being listed as a Notable Book of the Year for Older Readers by the CBCA, it received the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction in 2003. The narrative follows Dirk Wildlight as he explores the burgeoning settlements of 1840s Victoria, from the town of Melbourne to the western frontier. Dirk is a foundling, feared and abused by the superstitious settlers of Tilmore, who took him in as a child. When he finds some money in a log while chopping wood, he takes his chance to leave and be free. Dirk moves through Melbourne to the coast, and on to newly settled agricultural properties on the frontline between colonisation and Aboriginal custodianship. *Wildlight* is an adventure narrative, often harsh and violent. Though fictional, it does draw on real historical places, events and people. Like many of the texts examined in this thesis, *Wildlight* is narrated in third-person perspective but is filtered through the lens of the protagonist so that the reader observes events as Dirk does.

Aboriginal representation in *Wildlight* falls into two broad categories. Firstly, the characters are silent and mysterious nomads who fade in and out of the narrative as they travel through the country. Secondly, they are presented as assimilated tenants of non-Indigenous colonists. The former is highlighted in this passage:

'There be some ghosts passin' by.'

Dirk looked, feeling the chill of the rain on his face through the shutter. Outside he could make out four or five shadows slowly walking in the rain that fell with such force and volume it was virtually solid. Natives, Dirk thought. A family, maybe; their faces featureless black smudges as they drifted away, some in

possum capes, others in English clothes, so utterly trapped and soaked by the storm they did not appear to be even looking for shelter. (Metzenthén, 2002, Chapter 10, Section 2, para. 21)

With few exceptions the Aboriginal characters in *Wildlight* are written as invisible, their presence sensed by Dirk or his dog, glimpsed, or obscured as in the quote above. They are indistinguishable from each other beyond a piece of clothing or gender, fitting into the category of 'homogenised Other' (Bradford et al., 2008). They are presented as ethereal beings who don't belong in the reality of the settlement. They move through and around it, always on the nature side of the settlement versus nature divide. These Aboriginal characters are also always silent adding to the unreal quality of their characterisation. They do not speak English and they have no dialogue beyond occasional gestures. They are not completely passive, however. The settlers are terrified by this intangible menace. They are depicted as being at war with the local Aboriginal people. Violence, massacres and murders are threatened, hinted at and perpetrated, and corpses are hidden or defiled. The peak of this animosity occurs at the apex of the narrative as the odious colonist, McNaught, moves to 'relocate the blacks' by attempting to massacre 40 to 50 Aboriginal men, women and children. This is a move favourable to McNaught because of new firearm technology against which the Aboriginal people have no defence. He is thwarted, however, when Dirk sets fire to the countryside.

Assimilated characters are few:

Julian's team of blacks, the Tigers, dressed white trousers, red shirts, and dark blue caps, were lined up by the pitch in order of tallest to shortest. All wore white bones, as slim as a sail-maker's needle, through their noses. Their eyes, Dirk thought, held something like the look of the land – a distant quality together with a natural fierceness that they did not seem aware of. Each wore a coloured sash. (Metzenthén, 2002, Chapter 21, Section 1, para. 3)

In contrast to the 'ghosts' in the first quote, these Aboriginal characters are represented as gentrified. They are well dressed, excel at the colonist's sport of cricket, yet they retain the elements of their heritage, including refined jewellery and an innate connection with the land. These characters are named with quaint English nouns such as 'Black Cap', or 'Sixpence'. They also have small amounts of dialogue.

‘Sixpence unhappy,’ said Black Cap, looking neither pleased nor displeased. ‘You bang that too bloody good. Now he try an’ knock your fuggin’ noggin off.’ (Metzenthén, 2002, Chapter 22, Section 1, para. 16)

The Aboriginal character’s dialogue, however, doesn’t extend much past cricket. Their opinions on the realities of settlement and the fraught relations between the settlers and Aboriginal people are related only through the non-Indigenous characters in discussions amongst themselves.

Despite their acceptance into colonial life and the remnants of their traditional culture, they are a symbol of assimilation into the culture of the coloniser. This notion is reinforced by the pride and ownership expressed by the colonist Julian regarding his land and its occupants, including the Aboriginal people.

Julian sipped. ‘My family have sheep.’ He raised neat black eyebrows. ‘Stocked the place with few thousand of the white woolly bastards. And we’ve inherited quite a few black fellers, too. Kurung, mostly, but a few others. Families of ‘em. We’ve a run of thirty thousand acres. Good country. Bloody hot, though.’ (Metzenthén, 2002, Chapter 4, Section 4, para. 27)

Even though Julian is benevolent towards the Aboriginal people on his property, it is a paternal benevolence. From his perspective, they are his property and his responsibility to feed, clothe, and keep from harm.

In between the dominant ghost-like and assimilated Aboriginal representations there are instances of nuance in Aboriginal identity. For example, a settler finds that his Aboriginal workers desert him on a journey rather than cross into another group’s (these cultures are not named) country, but situations like these are few. The Aboriginal characters who live on Julian’s land may not be otherworldly, but their characterisation as an ‘Other’ that is infantilised by paternalism is still dependant on the coloniser versus colonised binary (Bradford et al., 2008; Said, 2003).

Dirk himself, characterised as non-settler by his uncertain bush origin, is often described as a ‘native’ and ‘heathen’ by his neighbours. His comfort and affinity for the bush, in contrast with the abject terror of the settlers, also aligns him with the Aboriginal

characters in the novel, even as his acceptance into non-Indigenous spaces such as employment and pubs in Melbourne strongly mark him as non-Indigenous.

He felt himself aligning wholly with the bush, his senses expanding above and below what others might detect, as he attuned himself to the rhythm of the ground, the air, and trees. Smiling, he melted into the darkness. (Metzenthén, 2002, Chapter 40, Section 2, para. 47)

Dirk is an exception to the coloniser versus colonised oppositional binary pair. He has attributes of both but belongs to neither group. As the focalising character, his position lends his perspective the authority of being an outside observer in every situation.

Dirk knew that the places did not think of him as one like them, but detected they also did not view him as one truly of Tilmore. In the mornings, crossing from cleared land to forest, he did not feel like an invader. In late afternoons, crossing back, he did not feel he was returning home. (Metzenthén, 2002, Chapter 2, Section 2, para. 11)

Dirk's outsider status degrades as he builds relationships within the narrative. Most of these relationships are with other outsiders such as women, but in setting himself against McNaught, saving the Aboriginal families, and returning to Tilmore in romantic pursuit of his old neighbour, Dirk, at the conclusion of *Wildlight*, is ultimately aligned, together with Julian and his friends, with ideologies of benevolent settlers.

Interview Analysis

I mean you should if you feel that you're able, but then again if you only write who you are, then I don't know. But I'm not going to go into the Indigenous sphere anymore from, certainly from a first-person point of view. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Introductory Information

Metzthen's interview followed a less sequential structure than many of the others for this project. Instead of forming a coherent, logical timeline or directly answering the guide questions, it was the repetition of stories and ideas throughout the interview that created strong emphases on which to base an analysis. Many ideas that recurred first arose in the introduction phase.

Metzthen's early writing career was in advertising, as a copy writer, and in television. These forms of writing are demanding in terms of strictness and structure, and this proved to be a theme throughout the interview. His main inspirations for writing also recurred as the interview progressed. Remote locations throughout Australia featured heavily, as did an affinity for the Western genre, including the themes of exploration and adventure.

Within the first minute of the interview Metzthen mentioned a short story – another form of writing that requires structural discipline – that he had written in the early 1980s;

I wrote a short story was also, which I'd never do now, was like an Indigenous story from the first person. Which I wouldn't do now. Even though as a fiction writer you're quite entitled to, but it's a minefield and I'm not going to enter into it. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Metzthen's assertion that writing from an Indigenous perspective was not something he would do again was emphasised by reiteration several more times throughout the interview. The repetition of this assertion showed an awareness of the issues of appropriation of voice and experience and a desire to avoid them, but was also always combined with comments about the entitlement and freedom that should be allowed to fiction writers to inhabit experiences outside their own should they choose to. Metzthen's responses in the interview, from the beginning, suggested an internal

conflict between avoiding or conforming with social and political pressures in writing, and his strong belief that writers of fiction are entitled to freedom in their writing.

Origins and Motivations

Metzthen was motivated to write a story about the settlement of the western districts of Victoria. It is a location that clearly holds fascination for him, as do the people who colonised it. There was admiration in Metzthen's description of the colonisers as tough, adventurous, and violent, but he also wanted to write about some settlers who were 'good', decent people (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016). The location and the relationship that the settlers had with nature were the crux of *Wildlight's* origin and which drove the inclusion of Indigenous representation in the novel.

They didn't trust it, because they couldn't control the blacks, who just kind of went in and out like smoke. I felt it was a story that had to be told. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Themes such as the fear of an un-developed landscape, which included Aboriginal peoples, and the drive to explore, control and dominate the environment lent themselves to Gothic and Western genres. These were themes Metzthen expressed a passion for, and a specific desire to evoke in *Wildlight*. In particular, he mentioned the trope of the heroic, travelling, gun-slinging, male character who lives by an individual moral code and fights for good.

The final aspect of Metzthen's motivation for writing *Wildlight* was to write an in-depth exploration of a character. As with much of the interview, Metzthen continued to oscillate between the contradictory elements of his interests. In this case, his comments went back and forth between colonisers' positive relationships with Aboriginal peoples in some instances, and their fascination with fear of the unknown and uncontrollable.

Contexts

In this interview Metzthen did not discuss many of the historic external contexts for his writing. However, during the interview, he frequently brought up current (2016) events involving Indigenous issues, offering his analysis on how current events in Australia might have affected Indigenous peoples. These involved things he had seen in the media or television shows demonstrating an awareness and contemplation of Indigenous peoples. Metzthen's answers concerning the period in which he was

writing *Wildlight* were more focussed on his internal motivations, which were reinforced by his actions in retreating to a remote, rural location to write the novel.

Techniques and Methods

Metzthen described his methods for writing, in general, as being reliant on his surroundings.

So I guess I found it really easy to escape from Melbourne in, I don't know when that book came out, but I always have been, that's the deal, isn't it? It's eas[ier] to imagine it than it is, like being in Burwood or Camberwell. That's the joy of it. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Remote or rural locations were emphasised not only as the motivation for and subject of the writing but as the facilitator for imagination and creation. When Metzthen does write in suburbia there is a similar need to escape the surrounding cityscape. He states:

I can never work where there's, I'm quite happy, I always work at home and in my room. Like I look at a wall. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

From this section of the interview it becomes apparent that one of the key methods for Metzthen's writing is isolation from the sights and sounds of built up areas and the people that live in them. This was a recurring motif throughout the interview.

In terms of methods for writing *Wildlight*, Metzthen's emphasis was on characterisation: 'It's just once you get into the character' (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016). He used primary and secondary historical sources both to get a broad sense of the historical landscape and to research specific stories and details that made up the novel. Some sources were unrelated to the location for the setting, such as records of shipwrecks in England, and were used as guides for authenticity rather than a retelling of an actual event. Others were directly about people and events that appear in a fictionalised form in *Wildlight*. In one case, Metzthen read a book authored by a historical figure who he fictionalised as a character¹³. It was hard to tell from this interview the extent and purpose of the use of research for *Wildlight* in particular. There

¹³ A man who sent an Aboriginal cricket team to England.

was no explicit mention of methods or research specifically relating to his representation of Indigenous peoples. It was, however, apparent that the research Metzthen undertook was detailed, meticulous and combined seamlessly with imagination.

Metzthen discussed the perspective in *Wildlight* a few times throughout the interview. His imagined narrating voice guided the direction and tone of *Wildlight*.

But some of the writing in it, as I said, it's kind of like an old-fashioned English voice. And once I locked into it, I thought it was really good for the purpose. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Metzthen enthused about his narrating voice describing it as 'clear' and 'amazing' (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016). It seems to have been the key to writing the narrative. The third person point of view that specifically focusses on the protagonist also solved Metzthen's concerns about appropriating the voice of another culture.

That's why I thought I could do *Wildlight*, because it's like a video camera. It's not speaking for other people. It's only speaking for Dirk as what he sees. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Writing from the third person perspective gave Metzthen the distance to write comfortably about Aboriginal characters. However, there is an arguable incongruity between the amount of weight given to the characterisation of Dirk and the narrating voice as subjective entities, combined with the insistence that *Wildlight* is written from Dirk's perspective and the notion of an objective 'video camera'.

The Indigenous thing is, I didn't want to comment about it. Like let's face it, they were driven out of Healesville, and that's where that sort of starts. But the western district was, but there were some really good people. The guy who had the cricket team, I mean he existed. He sent an Aboriginal cricket team to England. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

While Metzthen acknowledges the violent conflict between settlers and the Aboriginal peoples in Victoria (and elsewhere in Australia), he expressed a reluctance to discuss that conflict in *Wildlight*. Instead, the focus is on the non-violent relationships between Aboriginal people and settlers. In this interview, Metzthen continued to focus on the

characterisation of colonisers through anecdotes of positive relationships some colonists had with the Indigenous population, occasionally compared with the brutal ones that many colonisers had. This positive focus in *Wildlight* reinforced the impression that Metzthen was and is acutely aware of the possible tensions at play and intentionally avoided them in his writing by focusing on other events.

The characterisation of the protagonist, Dirk, was an important factor in the Indigenous representation beyond his 'video camera', non-biased perspective. The character's background narrative was instrumental in creating a more inclusive novel.

And that's why he was a perfect vehicle, because who knew what he was? Maybe he was, and they, like the whites thought he was a heathen, and he was.
(Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Giving Dirk uncertain heritage allowed Metzthen to credibly bridge the gap between the minority or conflicted groups in the novel. Dirk is maligned and vilified by his adopted, colonial family and community because of his ability to move within the landscape, which they find frightening and menacing.

It's kind of like, like going into the forest. It was such an obvious demarcation. He's the only one who feels safe in there, so ipso facto he's a worry, you know? And I really like that, and I love that idea that he always knew he was observed, and he knew if he was going to be fixed up it would have happened. So he kind of felt safe.
(Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

The observers that Metzthen discusses are the local Aboriginal people. They are a large part of the menace that the forest represents. Another part is the brutality of the landscape itself. Dirk's ability to feel safe in the forest aligns him with the Aboriginal characters in *Wildlight*. It is suggested by other characters within the text that he may have Aboriginal heritage. Dirk is also characterised as violent and physically powerful.

It was kind of like trying to calibrate a few views that existed, I suppose. I wanted Luke, I mean I wanted Dirk to be kind of like an avenging angel in a way. Like he is an angel, in some ways. He is. He's like this spirit. So when he lit the fire, you know all the stuff about the rifles is factual.

[...]

I just kind of like felt it was important to try and show how some black people felt. And also, there was, like I wanted to have Teong in there, the Chinese character, because they were instrumental in doing a lot of stuff in Victoria. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Metzthen discussed the culminating scene toward the end of the book where Dirk sets a fire to distract some land-owner's men, newly equipped with powerful guns, from killing a large group of Aboriginal women and children. Contrary to comments about the 'video camera' perspective, Metzthen is concerned with showing the perspectives of the historically marginalised people in the novel, namely the Aboriginal, female and Chinese characters, and acknowledging their presence during early Australian European settlement. It is Dirk's characterisation as an outsider lacking in heritage, a sense of justice, and a lack of prejudice that allows him to relate to the characters who are Others, and allows these perspectives to be represented. Unlike the research into colonists, the construction of these perspectives was not specifically explored in this interview.

Feedback

Aside from a brief comment about awards that *Wildlight* had won (which will be discussed in the 'Reflections' section of this analysis) this interview did not generate any information on feedback.

Reflections

When asked to reflect on *Wildlight*, Metzthen was generally positive about all but a few aspects. The only critiques he offered were about superficial aspects such as the use of grammar or the cover art. His reflections recalled and reinforced his earlier comments about the artistic rights of writers.

Sounds terrible, but it's almost too big a book, kind of, for young people to engage with, I think. I don't even know whether it earned back its, nor do I care, but I don't know whether it would have earned back its advance, you know? But Penguin were really good. They wanted to publish it, and it's kind of an unusual book. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

It is clear that he is very proud of the novel in terms of writing craftsmanship, divorced from its consumption by a readership. This pride is validated by the work of the publishers and the awards that the novel has won.

But I always, always, you know when I got the Victorian Premier's Award for it, I kind of sat down, I don't know whether I even said, but I go all I care is that someone actually understood that it is like, it was done for the right reasons and it is. I did say to my wife reading it, I said 'I know you can't say this, but this is really a good book.' (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

His pride in *Wildlight* is based on the positive critiques of the producers and facilitators of young adult literature, and not on feedback from the intended readership or the reception from the wider community. Metzthen's supposition that the novel was not a commercial success also implied that the readership within the target audience was small, which may account for the lack of feedback from this area. A binary began to emerge as Metzthen's discussion of critical validation versus commercial success continued in the interview.

[...] like I was away last week with Morris Gleitzman, John Marsden, me, Nick Earls and a few other people up in Queensland. It kind of seems it's one or the other. Like I've won a lot of things, which is kind of pleasing, but on the other hand Morris has sold a shit load of books. So has John. You can only do what you do, you know? If I could swap, I mean and you can only really write how you feel that you should be doing it. But there's always stuff you can learn. But just by trying to be commercial doesn't mean you'll have commercial success. You'll just probably shoot yourself in the foot. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Metzthen demonstrates a very strong self-identity as a writer. Throughout the interview were regular comments that implied the belief in an inherent writing ability or style, which was often linked back to the commercial value of the writing produced. This was then, in turn, compared with the critical acclaim that writing might receive. Metzthen's reiteration of these opinions reinforced and elevated the emphasis of artistic freedom rights of writers.

When looking back at *Wildlight* as a whole, pride, fascination, but also concern is evident in Metzthen's statements.

I really like it. I do.

[...]

I think if I set out to fire a few shots, I think I did that. And also I kind of wanted to say that some of the settlers were really good. They had a great relationship with the people and didn't kill them. The western district, shit they killed the animals, they cut the trees down, they killed the people. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

[...]

But no look, I think there's too many commas in it. I don't use so many commas now. But I think as a, what I set out to do, which was write a Western style classical interpretation of the settlement of Victoria, yeah I think it was a success. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Metzthen emphasised through repetition pride in his work and the subjects of his fascination, admiration and writing, while also adhering to politically correct opinions about colonial violence and mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples. The result is an oft conflicted conflation of thoughts and feelings, perhaps suggesting the author's obvious discomfort, and a lack of reconciliation of internal tensions about Indigenous representation.

Metzthen's thoughts on political correctness are exemplified by his response to questions about the *ACA Protocols*. When asked if he had heard of the *Protocols* he responded in the negative and followed, unprompted, with a series of short, pointed questions and opinions and in return about what *Protocols* were, who had written them and what they contained.

Was it written by someone who's black or someone who's white?

[...]

Senator Brandis, in his early days. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

The individual or organisation responsible for the protocols seemed to matter in terms of their validity. The mention of Senator Brandis, then a current Liberal Party Senator and Minister for the Arts, seemed to be made in derision, implying that his involvement would devalue the protocols. Metzthen's initial assumptions were that the protocols would

be written by non-Indigenous people to impose restrictions for the sake of unnecessary political correctness.

It's not that it's a democratic or free society, but perhaps you should do it this way.

[...]

Was it like names that you can use? Not Jacky, Billy, can't do that?

[...]

I mean you can see why they do it, and you can see why they're, you're defeated from the get go, aren't you? (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Metzthen's response to the idea of following protocols seemed to be in line with his previously expressed views of creative freedom for writers. His assumptions about how strict or detailed such protocols might be and the intended purpose of the protocols gave the impression that the existence of them and the possibility of having to follow them might be detrimental to his writing process.

Metzthen's concerns and conflicting thoughts continued in his reflections on this thesis. The comment following is from the end of the interview when he was asked if he had any final comments or questions:

No, no. I just think it's an incredibly, it's a really interesting topic, but it's a really difficult topic. And I'm sure it will be, I don't think the Herald Sun will probably uptake it, but it will be really, I think it will be really widely looked at by a lot of people. They'll just run to the summary. What did she come up with? Does this sort everything out? How do we proceed with this? (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

His enthusiasm for the project, shown in this comment, in preliminary emails, and in the time he gave to participate, indicate an attraction to and investment in the subject of Indigenous representation.

When asked what advice he might have for other writers, Metzthen offered:

Proceed carefully. I think it's all, as long as you don't assume knowledge that you can't have, you should feel free to write whatever you like. But you can't write by

committee. You can't run it by everyone in Australia. But obviously if, you can't assume Aboriginality, like I can't assume an Italian sensibility. If they exist. It's such a paradoxical, never to be solved problem. But if you felt comfortable doing it, I think you should go for it. Just be aware that there might be repercussions. (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Overall this interview, when compared to the others, was quite disjointed, with many tangents and interjections. It suggested that Metzthen maintains a complex and often conflicted relationship between artistic freedoms and Indigenous representation, where the writer is positioned as both subject to and not subject to political correctness. Additionally, divisions between different cultures were both paramount and not important at all. Also evident during the interview was a degree of avoidance, as mentioned above, but also investment and interest. This interview most clearly shows the awareness and concern that can be involved for a writer representing Indigenous cultures.

Chapter 4: Leonie Norrington

Leonie Norrington lives in rural Northern Territory, south of Darwin. She grew up as one of nine children in Barunga, an Aboriginal community. She is currently a journalist and writer as well as a doctoral candidate at Charles Darwin University. She has published 19 works for young people including short stories, picture books, and novels.

The Spirit of Barrumbi (published 2003)¹⁴

The Spirit of Barrumbi is the second book in a trilogy that depicts the life of two families, one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, in a remote Aboriginal¹⁵ camp. It was shortlisted for the South Australian Premier's Prize and listed as a Notable Book for Older Readers by the CBCA. The camp setting is fictional, but it is based on the one in which Norrington grew up, in the Northern Territory. Best friends Dale and Tomias are the main protagonists. Dale's grandfather was the first white person to settle in the area, and Tomias's ancestors have been custodians of the country since time began. Everyone living in camp is subject to Aboriginal education and Law, which often come into conflict with non-Indigenous expectations and methods. The plot revolves around Dale's brother Sean, who knowingly transgresses Aboriginal Law by entering a sacred place, the (also fictional) Death Adder Ridge. His actions bring consequences for everyone in the camp as the country is disturbed. Ultimately it is a story of responsibility, learning, and acceptance while living between two cultures that have different ways of knowing and being.

Unusually for texts with Indigenous representation, non-Indigenous characters are in minority in *The Spirit of Barrumbi*. Dale's family are clearly delineated as non-Indigenous

¹⁴ *The Last Muster* (2004) and *Leaving Barrumbi* (2007) were also recognised by the CBCA. Though they fulfilled the research criteria, they have not been included in this textual analysis, since *The Spirit of Barrumbi* is the earliest of her published novels that fulfils the criteria, and the Indigenous representation in the subsequent novels is so similar that to include them would be superfluous. Additionally, Norrington did not mention them in her interview, therefore their inclusion is not required to contextualise the interview data.

¹⁵ The specific Aboriginal people within the Barrumbi Trilogy are never identified and the location of the camp is fictional. In the absence of a specific name the word "Aboriginal" is used in this analysis to refer to the Indigenous people within these novels and **not**, in its usual sense, to encompass all Aboriginal Australian peoples.

by descriptions of their different looks and sometimes lesser knowledge of language or culture. Norrington often refers to their social standing and relationships within the community. As outsiders they are recognised and have a place in the community but they are not special or exceptional. They have responsibilities to learn and respect the culture and law of their community.

Since Dale was a little boy, Caroleena's serious face and her deep knowledge of the world made him feel warm and secure. And Tomias's mum Mavis too. Mavis and Dale's mum Lucy grew up together. They call each other sister. Dale and his brothers and sisters call Mavis auntie. She teaches them about bushtucker, law and proper behaviour. She's like another mother for Dale. Better than a mother really, 'cause she'll stick up for him even if he's done something wrong. Not like his own mum. (Norrington, 2003, p.4)

Aboriginal and non-Indigenous characters are never presented as an oppositional binary pair, greatly reducing the capacity of the text for creating a Western Self and an Indigenous Other. Delineations exist, but no character is exempt from engaging with both cultures. The tensions between cultures, therefore, occurs in the actions and minds of every character, rather than between characters.

The Spirit of Barrumbi revolves around the power and privilege of knowledge and what happens when two ways of knowing are in conflict, exemplified in this passage where Sean enters Death Adder Ridge after returning from boarding school:

He's been to Death Adder Ridge. He's not allowed there. That's a sacred place. Not even the old men go there. He doesn't care! He thinks it's ok because nobody saw him. (Norrington, 2003, p. 1)

Within the narrative, Sean knows that it is a sacred place and that he should not be there. He has grown up in the camp and been educated by Tomias's mother, Mavis, in Aboriginal Law. However, his desire to study the biology of the snakes that live there, combined with spending time in a boarding school that privileges Western ways of knowing over Aboriginal ones, has influenced his thinking and lessened his respect for the laws he grew up with. The consequences are dire and far-reaching. By disturbing the Spirit and the land, Sean brings flooding, death and other harm to his family and other members of the camp who have responsibility for teaching him how to behave.

The rain's really settled in and everyone is angry, blaming Mavis. Even her family is angry. They reckon it's her fault for taking Dale mob to Barrumbi, for not teaching them properly. (Norrington, 2003, p. 131)

The actions of one boy, regardless of his status as non-Indigenous, are the responsibility of his family. His transgression is shameful and painful for everyone responsible for Sean. At the height of the flood, Sean's sister, Meg, is called by the water spirit and is caught in floodwater:

The people who are related to Meg cry loud wails of pain. Others stand around whispering, 'Poor thing, that girl, daughter for Lucy, brother for Dale. The flood spirit took her. It will finish now. That flood will finish, soon enough.'

Mavis's family are standing around the forty-four-gallon drum on the veranda, crying. Meg is their child, responsibility for their family. This child, they cry. This child has lost her life because she has a criminal for a brother. A brother who doesn't listen to the law. He killed his sister. He will live now. Up there, the spirit will be happy, avenged and that boy will live. (Norrington, 2003, p. 159)

Although *The Spirit of Barrumbi* represents mystical or spiritual content, it subverts Aboriginalist ideologies that argue Indigenous spirituality is quaint and irrelevant to modern times (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). The setting is contemporary and yet the descriptions of the spirits, the conscious landscape, and the actions of the Elders, are not romanticised but represented with a gravitas that is proportionate to the events in the narrative.

The water has her. It feels her stillness, the life oozing out of her. It tries to lap it up, to cling to her warmth, to suck the life from her. But it's bouncing off the rocks and into the air, breaking up, mixing with the air, becoming bubbles, froth. It can't hold her! (Norrington, 2003, p. 156)

The characterisation of the magic and spirits is no more fantastic or romantic than anthropomorphic descriptions of natural occurrences. The water in the quote above is behaving like rushing water. There is nothing unnatural about the spiritual elements of *The Spirit of Barrumbi*. At most they are mildly supernatural. The focus is always on the behaviour of all people and how that can affect the country.

As the narrative continues, Meg is resuscitated and does not die or sustain lasting injuries. Meanwhile Sean is learning from the old men, Elders, and Ceremony men. The lessons are never described, but punishment for his transgression and undergoing scarification is part of his learning process. Through these sacrifices the spirit is appeased and the land and community can return to normal. These sacrifices create discord in those characters caught between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. For most texts this would be a dilemma faced by Indigenous characters, but in *The Spirit of Barrumbi* it is, uniquely, the non-Indigenous characters who are faced with disempowerment in the face of cultural tension. When Sean comes home, safe but scarred and quiet, his mother and father struggle to accept his experiences.

You thought because he was your son that it would be different – that’s the truth, isn’t it! She yells at herself in her mind, her face twisted with anger. You thought that his whiteness protected him.

[...]

What would you have done? Dad sneers at himself. [...] Sandy did what he would have done for his own son. Because for Sandy there was no other way. The most important thing is order in the world. One young man’s suffering is nothing compared to what might have happened. He had no choice. If Tomias broke into a bank, what would you do? Would you cover it up and hide him from the police?

But...!

But what? Is it any different? For Sandy there’s no difference. It’s only you. You and your... No matter how much you think you respect this culture, if you really thought they were going to cut him, you would have brought him out, wouldn’t you? Be honest! (Norrington, 2003, 183-4)

Aboriginal and non-Indigenous ideologies of law, order and justice are in direct conflict. The physical harming of an individual as punishment for breaking the law and restoring order for the community is mandated by Aboriginal Law, and abhorred by Sean’s parents’ Western expectations and understanding of law. By living as part of the community they have accepted responsibilities of Aboriginal Law, but this is the first time they have considered that the consequences of transgression might be applied to them as equals

with the Aboriginal characters. Ultimately, despite these internal struggles, the consequences are accepted and the family, having been challenged on their responsibilities to Aboriginal cultures, remain in the community and learn from their experiences. Ideologically, in *The Spirit of Barrumbi*, Norrington gives equal authority to Aboriginal and Western law, order and justice.

Overtly positive representations can be a veneer for Aboriginalist ideologies of coloniser superiority and inauthentically speaking for Indigenous peoples to a non-Indigenous audience (Bradford, 2001). The implied audience of *The Spirit of Barrumbi* is culturally broad, as indicated by the dialogue and languages represented in the text. Mayali and other non-English words are used liberally within the text.

Meg jumps up and gammon bites Caroleena's hand.

'Yukki!' Caroleena screams and jumps back.

Meg laughs and laughs.

'Whatkind? You mightbe killing me!' Caroleena yells, laughing, holding her heart. [...] She sits herself down in the chair beside Meg's bed and tells her, ' You subbie find gomrdau? Nother name gornorrong.' She starts talking to Meg in language, telling her all about what fruits are ripe at the moment and what will be ripe now all through the Wet season. (Norrington, 2003, p. 165)

The potential negative connotations of broken English are undercut by Caroleena's obvious authority over cultural knowledge and her own language. The meanings of the Mayali and non-English words are generally not explained in-text, nor is their meaning necessarily obvious from the context. They are used by non-Indigenous and Aboriginal characters from the camp; they are used in conversation between cultures, and within cultures. The ingrained usage and lack of explanation within the text implies a reader who is familiar with Mayali language, while a glossary at the conclusion of the novel makes the text more accessible for readers who are unfamiliar.

Other paratextual materials lend additional authority to the Indigenous representation. At the beginning of the text, above the acknowledgements, is a note from the author stating that 'Death Adder Ridge' is a fictional place (Norrington, 2003), making clear to the reader that sensitive cultural information is not being appropriated and published. In

the 'Acknowledgements' themselves, Norrington thanks the Old Mayali people from the Wugularr community for their permission to use their language, giving her use of language authority and authenticity.

The subject matter of laws, language, spirits and cultural knowledge are some of the most featured in Aboriginalist texts, having been romanticised and stereotyped from early colonisation, as well as being obvious points of differentiation for the Western Self to define the Indigenous Other. In *The Spirit of Barrumbi*, far from being dismissed or placed in the ancient past, Aboriginal culture, in particular Law and language, is represented as valid, present and powerful.

Interview Analysis

And I think I wouldn't have continued to write if it hadn't been so well received in communities because that's where the important part of my life is. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Introductory Information

Norrington's approach to her writing, especially the Barrumbi series, is uniquely linked with her childhood, upbringing, and family, and as such the introduction phase of her interview was expansive and descriptive of many personal aspects of her life. Identity, belonging, family, location and culture were the themes that recurred throughout the interview and formed the basis of every aspect of her writing. The interview was mostly populated by small narratives about her life, with a focus on her childhood. It was these memories that informed much of the characterisation and plot of the Barrumbi series. Her upbringing gave Norrington the sensibilities and the network that influenced her writing methods and techniques.

Norrington is one of seven children. Her family moved into an Aboriginal community in Barunga (then called Bamyili) in the Northern Territory, and her family was adopted into a respected Indigenous family.

And so every person in the world is intrinsically connected to country and family. And so when white people come into that country they have to somehow be given to a family and adopted by a family so that they fit in as well. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

At the time that Norrington lived there, Barunga was made up of various Aboriginal groups that had been forcibly removed from their countries into the camp. The different cultural groups remained distinct inside the camp, using their own languages and locating themselves together and on the edge of Barunga that was closest to their countries (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016). Older Aboriginal people would refuse to come into the camp unless special reasons or responsibilities demanded it.

Some old people wouldn't come in like, old [Copper] just didn't come in. He would come in every now and then if he was to visit his promised wives, to check that

they were still okay because he had some promises who were quite young and still at school.

I do remember that being a huge thing for us girls and a lot of the girls that I was at school with were already promised to a husband. But the thing about promises is it doesn't mean that you can't have lovers and it doesn't mean that you even will end up marrying that man that you're promised to. It just means that for the rest of your life you have a responsibility to care for him in some way. So, stick up for him when other peoples are not, feed him when you've got food. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Responsibility to family and the roles that everyone played in caring for each other are emphasised in many of Norrington's memories. In the community, age might have been a differentiating factor in determining your responsibilities to someone else, but everyone was cared for and had a place. Norrington described some of these older people as hunting and fishing for food, or occasionally getting some off their relatives. She also described resistance to accepting 'white fella food' (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016). These memories were directly inserted into the Barrumbi series in the form of both characters and ideologies.

While living in this community as an adopted part of a culturally strong family Norrington experienced intense familial belonging, care, and education in the culture, spiritual belief, and language within the community. She and her siblings were expected to adhere to the strict teachings of the adults who cared for them, including the patriarch of their adopted family, [name redacted]¹⁶, and one of his wives [name redacted], who was their main carer. Fishing and hunting with this wife featured heavily in Norrington's recollection of that time, between the ages of five and thirteen.

And as we were doing that and also with [name redacted], they were really strict about understanding things and it was really quite hard for us as white kids. Because you're not expected to remember much and you ask questions and they'd get so angry because, 'I told you that three days ago and why haven't you

¹⁶ The names of people who are not part of this study or publicly identifiable have been deliberately omitted from this thesis for ethical reasons.

remembered?'. They'd just get really grumpy at you. And remembering the things for things and the language for it and what was important, what was not important and we all remembered the devil devils really and the sacred places where you weren't allowed to go and that kind of thing. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington described growing up in Barunga as 'idyllic' and safe. Upon her family's move back to Darwin she experienced a culture shock, and found it difficult to navigate the different social dynamic in Darwin.

[...] moving back up to Darwin was incredibly hard. Because all of the values that we had were of no use to us, all of the things that we thought were important were of no use so that was a much more difficult time. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Having a strong, individual identity is something that Norrington greatly admires and she attributes her stability and resilience to having a strong sense of self and belonging. Likewise, the lack of stability leads to issues around identity.

Whereas I think that for many Australians and, especially Australians who live in cross-cultural situations or people who move a lot or for a huge amount of reasons, I think they're much more – is nebulous the right word – much more you don't fit in. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

These are issues that the characters in Barrumbi are constantly facing and Norrington's ideologies in regard to identity are obviously present to the reader.

Moving back to Darwin and attending a Catholic School also highlighted a cultural clash of spiritual beliefs.

The religious and strong beliefs in my life were pretty well set then so I find it quite hard to understand somebody not believing in spirit children and it just is very entrenched. We grew up as Catholics but with a very wild kind of Catholicism, which mixed entirely with Aboriginal culture. And when we came back to Darwin and I went to a Catholic school I was like, 'whoa, is that really what people believe?' Because it wasn't what we grew up with, it wasn't the way that Mum taught us. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington's spiritual beliefs, both from her Aboriginal education and Catholicism were a recurrent theme in her responses. They are also issues of concern in the Barrumbi series, and it became clear when feedback for the novels was discussed that those aspects were something to which readers, especially Aboriginal children, frequently responded.

Origins and Motivations

Norrington's emphasis on her family continued when she spoke about the beginnings of writing the Barrumbi series. The motivation to write was inspired by travelling to visit her grandson and initiating interactions with Aboriginal people in a place with which she was unfamiliar. Norrington found that the Aboriginal people she met where her grandson lived would not respond to a casual greeting and would avoid eye contact.

But just about all of the people that I tried to say hello to wouldn't acknowledge me. And so I asked my son about that and he said, 'They're different down here Mum. They are different, Aboriginal people are different down here.' And spending a bit of time in that country in Queensland and New South Wales things are really different and whether it's because Aboriginal people don't have that ownership of land.

[...]

Anyway, it really affected me because I thought 'my grandson is only going to come up here once a year and, of course, I take him out to the community, we go fishing and hunting and everything, but he's not going to learn to respect Aboriginal people unless I can give him those experiences'. And so that's when I started writing those books, they were really for him. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

During her visit Norrington experienced a place with a different social dynamic that had a different history and was less friendly, accepting, and respectful of Aboriginal people. Writing the Barrumbi series came from fears that the place that her grandson was growing up in were going to negatively impact his social ideas about Aboriginal people. She associates this, at least in part, to a lack of power derived from a sense of identity and belonging in the form of land ownership. Norrington was concerned that without her providing a contribution to Indigenous representations, her grandson would be deprived of a perspective that was valuable to her.

The Barrumbi series began as short stories. Norrington was determined to write and keeping to a short format kept her motivated. Coincidentally, a friend who was a teacher made comments about the lack of interest in reading shown by her Aboriginal students. Leonie responded that the books in school were not relevant to Aboriginal lives. The argument ended with a challenge to Norrington to use her life experience to write stories that would be of interest to Aboriginal school children. In response Norrington gave her friend the short stories.

Well, she took them back and she was so surprised. The kids were coming in every day because they just loved, 'read *Lizzy and the Crocodile* again, read *Lizzy and the Crocodile*.' Because in that part of the story, Mavis is a powerful strong character, she has lots of knowledge and lots of understanding so people who are reading it can be proud. But it also acknowledges the fact of culture, that you can have words that are magical, you can have words that come from the Dreaming that can have an effect in the world. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

From this event, Norrington began to consciously consider her personal ideologies and how they related to her writing. She believes that education is important and that the key to engaging children in literature is to make it relevant to them. While inserting her ideologies into her writing began on a small, familial level, Norrington responded to many aspects of this interview in ways that displayed deliberate ideological agenda for her writing that was intended for a wide, generalised audience with particular focus on Aboriginal children.

Contexts

External contexts during the writing process, beyond those already discussed, were not mentioned by Norrington in her responses.

Techniques and Methods

Language is an important aspect of characterisation in the Barrumbi series. Throughout the trilogy Norrington juggles English, Mayali¹⁷, Kriol¹⁸, non-Mayali¹⁹ and Big English²⁰ words. A glossary for each language or dialect is provided at the end of each book for curious readers to use as a reference. Language is inextricably linked with power and identity for Norrington, and it is reflected in her treatment of the topic in the Barrumbi series.

And one of the great quotes from a meeting that I went to at a school once was that this man was so angry, he came to the school and he was brandishing his spears and he was really angry. And he was saying, 'You're ripping us off. You're not giving us the real thing. We want our children to learn Big English. We want them to know how to live in your weird corrupt world, this is what you're not giving us. You might be teaching the kids to read and write but you're not teaching them the Big English, the understanding and the big words that they need to be able to fit in.' (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Events such as this one informed Norrington's ideology that language or dialects can have tremendous power, and as a result she took a lot of care to separate and define the languages being spoken in the Barrumbi series, what language was used when, and by which character. Most of the language in the books comes from Norrington's own knowledge, but she also used other sources to inform her use of language.

One of these sources was community consultation, which was used extensively by Norrington, in general, to bring accuracy and respect for Aboriginal peoples into her writing. In her case, the community was also her adopted family and extensions of the community she had lived in as a child.

¹⁷ An Aboriginal language spoken across the central northern parts of Australia.

¹⁸ 'There's a few different Kriols but mostly it's English words with different pronunciations but entirely Aboriginal grammar and Aboriginal cultural understandings so words can have vastly different meanings.' (L. Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

¹⁹ Colloquialisms or words from Aboriginal languages that are not Mayali.

²⁰ Long or complicated English words or phrases, seen as middle/upper class language.

The character named Mavis is a powerful and knowledgeable woman. She is based, as many of the characters are, on people that Norrington knows. In this case Mavis is based predominantly on the woman, mentioned above, who was her main carer from her adopted family as well as other caring women of her family. Norrington describes consulting with her adopted family about Mavis's language.

There was one thing I did discuss with [name redacted] quite a bit was whether to have Mavis speak in Kriol or speak in English, you know, to write it in English. And she said, 'No, it's got to be Kriol.' Because they were really proud of Kriol as a language. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Despite this discussion, Mavis speaks in English in the books. This is a point of regret for Norrington, though she acknowledges that to have Mavis speak exclusively in Kriol would have presented her with a writing challenge for which she had yet to think of a solution.

Norrington also used linguistic experts to help with accuracy of language. One of these linguists had written a Mayali dictionary. These experts were living in Barunga as part of an Australian government initiative to incorporate Aboriginal language into the schooling system. Given this background, they were accessible and knowledgeable about the community that formed the basis of the fictional Barrumbi community.

In addition to the authority of experts, matters of language accuracy were subjected to further community consultation.

And because language is so important and it's such an identifier it was really important to get it right. So I spent a lot of time on that, you know, working out that sort of thing. We have ginga, ginga is a Gundjeihmi word and a Mayali word and it's spelt the same. And there was a big discussion when I said to them, so this is – and I shouldn't have said it really but I had to, I had to say, in case somebody brought it up later, 'Ginga is spelt the same in Mayali.' 'No, it's not.'

And so I showed them the dictionary and then they were trying to say, no – this old lady, especially because she was adamant that it had to be different. And so she was trying all these different ways of spelling it but they weren't in the dictionary. But in the end they decided, well, one word doesn't matter. But that's how

important it is, that your language is identified with your country. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington sometimes went into levels of detail with Aboriginal languages that would incorporate community and expert consultation to make sure that each individual word was spelt and used correctly, reflecting her strong belief that languages are such a strong identifier that they are inextricably linked with country and culture.

Given the lengths Norrington went to so as to ensure accuracy in her representation of language, it might seem surprising that Barrumbi, while based on Barunga, is a fictional setting. This was, however, a key creative decision that emerged from the consultative process. As with many aspects of the Barrumbi series, the nature of the reality of the novels was subject to community consultation. This particular discussion crossed cultural boundaries of understanding. The community was concerned that if the Barrumbi series was set in a recognisable country, the traditional custodians of the country might think that Norrington's community had given her permission to write a story set in that country. The community also did not want their own country described.

Everyone decided early on that it had to be a totally fictional place. And the idea of fiction was discussed quite a bit but once everyone was happy with that – we call it gammon, so it had to be a gammon place, a place that didn't exist anywhere. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington used several methods to fictionalise the setting of 'Barrumbi'. Firstly, she used her general knowledge to genericise the fictional camp. The tendency for different groups to locate themselves on the side of the camp closest to their country was not particular to Barunga.

And people do that even for all sorts of reasons. Say, when the Katherine flood happened and all the people were brought in to Katherine from the surrounding districts. And so the Barunga mob stayed there on the east and the Kalkaringi there on the west, closer to their own country, it's just an important thing. So there are always top camp, middle camp and bottom camp and often, there's a change in the thing but even if there's not it's always top camp, bottom camp and middle camp.

But when I was working out how the action would happen that's how I placed things all over the place. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Secondly, Norrington used the plot to construct the setting, basing many features of the landscape on what events would take place where and the imagined logistics of the characters travelling between them.

Because I put my white fella head on and just totally imagined it, just totally said, I need to have Barrumbi reasonably close, I need to have a river for that to happen in, I need all of these different things. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington's approach to characterisation was similar. The basis for most characters were her experiences with and memories of people. Some characters were genericised by amalgamating many different people or generalising a group of people. When asked about creating an experienced, older, Aboriginal woman character called Caroleena, Norrington responded:

Yeah. So over the years I've met lots and lots of women like old Caroleena who just - often the most important ceremony woman in the area who just take on - they're just like queens. They take on the responsibility and speak to everyone and people look up to them and they're just really powerful people. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Others were based on a specific individual or only two or three people combined, as with the character of Mavis. In these specific cases, all of the characters were close family members, and in the case of the character named Dale, Norrington used herself as inspiration.

Dale, as I said, is based pretty well on me and my brother, the brother who's just older than me. Lizzie, I think, is a combination of all my sisters and my friends at that time because they were - my sisters are really brave and they know what's right and wrong. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington's answers were overwhelmingly couched in positive terms for the people in her life, and by extension for her characters. Even when she was describing people who had yelled at her or scared her it was always framed by that person's positive attributes

such as knowledge, power, or morality. When asked about the few characters from the 'Barrumbi' series who are not as positively depicted, such as Mrs Winterson, a teacher who is always critical of the children's behaviour, Norrington's positivity was still strongly present.

She's based on our teacher, Miss Wilson. And Miss Wilson was this amazing woman, she worked in the same community for years and years and years and she really believed in education and worked really hard. And she was as disillusioned when people wouldn't employ Aboriginal people even to work in the school because the kids were really clever. She was an amazing woman, she was funny. I did make the character worse, much worse. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington used real events to flesh out the cruelty and racism that appear in the Barrumbi series. When asked if it was challenging to include ideologies that are so clearly in opposition to her own and those she had tried to communicate through the novels, her response was 'No. Because that's the reality, that's what you see around you all the time' (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016). Despite her positive outlook and personal ideologies of acceptance, the importance of culture and education, Norrington showed keen awareness of racism; both the causes and the repercussions.

But I think most people genuinely if they know somebody and meet somebody on equal terms they're not cruel.

But systems are put into place which allow people to be cruel and that's when they are. I think teachers on remote communities don't realise just how powerful they are or how much damage they can do and you'd be endlessly surprised. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington was aware of her strong feelings about cruelty and racism and the potential for them to come through her writing. She didn't want her ideas and feelings to overwhelm her writing and took care to show the wider social systems that tolerate and perpetrate the cruelty that is shown by her characters.

Feedback

The feedback that Norrington received for the Barrumbi series was mostly positive, with a small number of people expressing negative reactions. Their complaints were about appropriation, accuracy, and the appropriateness of the stories.

There was one issue once where a lady said to the publisher – I can't remember what it was, whether she was talking about Barrumbi or what it was – but I spoke to her and I said where I'd come from and that the place was imaginary and she was fine about that. She just read it and thought, you can't say that stuff, this is not right. But she didn't realise it was an imaginary place. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington resolved the complaints by explaining the methods she had used to write. Norrington's methods had given her a solid, defensible, and understandable position in relation to her writing. There were no complaints originating from Norrington's community or local people from the surrounding area.

The remaining feedback that Norrington received was very positive. The first two novels in the trilogy were shortlisted for the Children's Book Council of Australia and the New South Wales Premier's awards, and there was much feedback from readers, especially educators and Aboriginal children. As part of her community outreach work, Norrington spends a lot of time visiting remote schools with many Aboriginal students. She discusses the novels with the students and answers the many questions they ask her. On these visits, she is often given feedback such as:

For Indigenous kids and for schools that work with Indigenous kids, the feedback is incredible. This is the first book this child has ever read. In fact, they have these classes in lots of places that they call children at risk, so kids who are starting to not be involved in school. And in one of these groups they started reading 'The Barrumbi Kids' and the kids came to school – the teacher emailed me and said, 'Thank God you wrote three books because I've got them to come to school.' Because he was just reading a chapter every day and they would come to school every single day. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

According to this feedback, the *Barrumbi* series has the potential to engage students from a range of cultural backgrounds and ages, and have a tangible effect on social issues such as truancy rates.

The most important feedback for Norrington came in the form of support from her community.

If I can't go to Melbourne and talk it doesn't really matter, if I can't go to Brisbane, if I can't go to Edinburgh - although I had great fun in Edinburgh at the writer's festival - but if I can't go there then it's not going to affect my life. But if I can't go back to my own community or go and work in all the different schools and stuff that I - my people, Northern Territory people, if I can't work with them well, then who am I, how does that work? (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

As with so many aspects of her writing, family, community, and her ideologies, especially in regard to education, were reflected in the feedback the *Barrumbi* series received and reinforced the worth of her writing.

Reflections

Norrington's reflections on *Barrumbi* from the present day are quite positive, especially in light of the feedback that she received. When asked about any changes she might make if she had the opportunity her response was that she would include less swearing to be more in line with 'white fella' culture (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016). Norrington explained that when she was communicating in the context of her Aboriginal community, swearing was used as an exclamation and not a taboo. Reducing the amount of swearing might gain the novels a little more acceptance.

Norrington was clearly proud of two specific aspects of the books. The first was that the novel contained multiple perspectives, while not privileging one point of view over another.

One of the other things that I thought was really important was to try and get that egalitarianism that we don't have. We tend to think in white fella writing that there should be a point of view. Because in remote Aboriginal culture, in most places

that I've ever had anything to do with, people are individuals and equal. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

The second was the presence of supportive and loving adults in the narrative.

In white fella books, we tend to get rid of the parents as fast as you can even if they die. But your family is so important in an Indigenous culture. You try and read Harry Potter to kids and they'll spend the first two weeks trying to recover from the parents dying. It's just really such a traumatic thing even though lots of kids have parents that die. But they didn't even have aunty and uncles that cared for them. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

It was important for Norrington to include active, loving and caring adult characters in the Barrumbi series, who added to the pace of the narrative and did not impede the adventures of the child characters.

Norrington's reflections on the Barrumbi series reveal thought processes that assess and include ideologies from both Aboriginal and 'white fella' cultures that she believes to be important or even crucial for her readers to experience.

When reflecting on Indigenous representation in general Norrington laments the lack of it in books, but also stresses the importance of avoiding tokenism or shallow characterisation. She also states that settings in areas of Australia such as the Northern Territory are impossible to write about without including Aboriginal people.

And I think, sometimes, Aboriginal characters are complex. But you're always questioning yourself all the time whenever you're doing Aboriginal characters: what are you saying to your reader, what's this representing? And also all of that is taken back to community people. (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016)

Norrington's technique for tackling the complexity of Indigenous representation is essentially a reflection of the real-world impacts of writing that she has witnessed and experienced. At the core of her approach to Indigenous representation is a consideration of what to fictionalise and how, what the writing is presenting to the readers, and what impact that will have.

Chapter 5: Kirsty Murray

Kirsty Murray lives in Melbourne, Victoria, although she is frequently travelling. Her fictional works for young people focus on Australian history. She has published 16 works for young people including novels, picture books, and a graphic novel. She has been granted many awards and accolades for her writing, including 12 national awards and two nominations for the international Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

A Prayer for Blue Delaney (published 2005)

A Prayer for Blue Delaney (*Blue Delaney*) is the third book in the Children of the Wind quartet. The Children of the Wind novels are written about migrant child protagonists from different places around the world. Indigenous representations in *Blue Delaney* are present in two categories; firstly as part of an Australian national identity, and secondly as secondary characters found in tangential, vignette narratives. *Blue Delaney* won the Western Australian Premier's Book Award in 2005 in the Writing for Young Adults category, and was a CBCA Notable Book for Older Readers in 2006. The text intersects many genres, being simultaneously a young adult novel, an historical fiction, a travel narrative and a small, intimate narrative about an orphan boy finding a family. The different genres are crafted together into a cohesive novel. *Blue Delaney* is a novel that focuses on the 'outsiders' of society, transporting the reader into a mid-1950s landscape that is in flux.

As the oppression of the Second World War lifted, less restrictive immigration became a necessary tool to replenish the working forces in Australia. This brought a substantial influx of people from all over the world. Any person who fell outside white Australian culture was expected to leave their culture and religion behind and assimilate. At the same time, among Indigenous peoples, children were removed from their communities and placed into institutions that would separate them from Indigenous influence and educate them in the Anglo-Australian way. It was also expected that Indigenous people would die out completely over time (Kinnane, 2015). These social ideals were reflected and fed by government policies such as the White Australia policy, a range of immigration policies favouring Caucasian European migrants which had been in place since 1901, and the Aboriginal Protection Acts, which gave state governments control over every aspect of the lives of Indigenous peoples.

In the period in which *Blue Delaney* is set, religions, cultures, politics and even maturity were brought together by overarching government policies that are rarely mentioned in the novel but are evident through their impacts upon individual characters. The protagonist, Colm, is an orphan transported from England to Australia as part of a government-supported child migration scheme. The narrative follows his journey as he is mistreated by the Catholic institution entrusted with his care, and runs away. He subsequently forms a relationship with Bill, a middle-aged Irish man, who traverses the country picking up work where he can. The two travel through Australia meeting many characters along the way. Small and powerful individual narratives litter the novel, all quite separate but linked by common threads of family and humanity.

In *Blue Delaney* Aboriginal peoples are rarely the focus of the narrative, yet they are often present.

A plump, dark-skinned woman came out of the shanty house and joined in the talk.

Colm felt even shyer. He'd seen plenty of Aboriginal people in the towns they'd driven through but he'd never spoken with any of them. It hadn't occurred to him, when Bill had mentioned Nugget's wife that she would be anything other than white. (Murray, 2005, Chapter 14, Section 1, para. 20)

Small comments like this one, the appearance of Aboriginal servants, and other peripheral characters, locate Aboriginal peoples as a background presence throughout the narrative and therefore throughout Australia as Colm and Bill travel through much of the country.

Colm's perspective is that of the outsider. His youth, immigration status, and sparse education limit his understanding of what he observes. This creates a space for the reader to infer their own meanings, or for exposition from other more knowledgeable characters. Focalising the narrative through Colm's naïve and disrupted perspective creates a mostly non-judgemental, empathetic lens through which the reader can observe the sufferings and conflicts of others. Colm's perspective and the vast array of characters and geography is a deft and delicate way of including Aboriginal peoples in the social, political, and geographical representation of Australia, while questioning the discrimination that was common in 1950s Australia. In this respect, *Blue Delaney* is successful in inclusively

representing Aboriginal peoples and cultures as present and intrinsic to Australia (Craigie in Heiss, 2003) while maintaining a respectful perspective (Lucashenko, 2009).

The structure of *Blue Delaney* reads like a travel narrative. Bill and Colm travel from place to place, from Western Australia to Victoria, stopping to share overtly unrelated experiences with different people, before moving on to the next location and the next people. All of these smaller narratives are linked by ideologies of family, childhood, and difference. In one of these narratives Bill and Colm stay with Nugget, an Irish friend of Bill's who is in a domestic relationship with an Aboriginal woman named Doreen with whom he has an undetermined number of children. His daughter, Rosie, is left in charge of Colm during the visit. It is through their story arc that the reader is introduced to government policies, particularly those of South Australia, and social opinions in regard to Aboriginal peoples in the 1950s. Nugget's vaguely illegal gambling catches the attention of the local police which leads to a raid on his family. Rosie explains the panic to a naïve Colm as they hide from the police with the other children:

'She [Doreen] gets real scared if she hears the coppers have been sniffing around.'

'Why? She hasn't done anything wrong.'

'It's not about being right and wrong. It's about us being Aboriginal.'

[...]

'They're gonna try and take us away. Some of Mum's first kids, they got taken before I was born. I've got a big brother called Pat and I've never seen him. Emily, these ones' mum, she got taken away too, but she was bigger and she came back. When I was little, Mum used to dig a hole and cover me up in it. I used to have to sit quiet as a mouse. But they don't mess with us when Dad's home. I wish Dad was here.' (Murray, 2005, Chapter 17, Section 1, para. 3)

The raid concludes with Colm escaping capture with one small child, but Rosie and another child being taken away:

Doreen was sitting alone in the dust, bent over like an old woman. For a moment Colm thought someone had beaten her, she looked so crumpled and broken. (Murray, 2005, Chapter 17, Section 2, para. 17)

Nugget's family is vulnerable and unstable largely due to his reckless drinking and gambling. He is wildly emotional, swinging from amiability to belligerence, anger, and despair. He had 'taken' Doreen across state lines to Western Australia as they were unable to get married in South Australia. It becomes apparent that the children could be removed at any time and taken anywhere. It is left to Nugget, the Caucasian family member, to petition the government authorities to retrieve his children. It is uncertain whether he will succeed because of the complex and varied laws that govern each state.

Doreen is characterised with a fully formed and holistic identity, though it does tend towards overly romantic images of motherhood and Aboriginal magic. She is described as the matriarch of the family. She cares for everyone despite Nugget's reckless behaviour.

Rosie was sitting close to Doreen, listening intently. One of the little girls was curled up in Doreen's lap and the other children leant against her as well. Colm stood on the edge of the firelight. (Murray, 2005, Chapter 15, Section 1, para. 6)

In Nugget's frequent absences the family is close, affectionate, and content. Doreen includes all her extended family including neighbouring children and, to a lesser extent, Colm into her sphere of love and teaching. As demonstrated in the quote above, Colm, though included in the audience, is removed and observing from the outside. Doreen is determined to teach the children her Aboriginal language and to be strong in the face of hardship and pain. In return the children respect and obey her. They are always represented as physically affectionate and close. Even when Rosie is away from her mother, Doreen's advice is at the forefront of her thoughts.

The characterisation of Doreen contextualises her cultural and family heritage for the reader, by using language and storytelling to educate the children.

'The home of our people, Ngarrindjeri people, it's a long way from here at a place called Raukkan, way over in South Australia. Raukkan, it means 'the ancient way' and I'm gonna tell you about those ancient ways, the Dreamings of our people. This story, it's as old as the night sky.'

Doreen's voice grew deep and sure as she began her tale. In the smoky night air, the words seemed infused with magic. (Murray, 2005, Chapter 15, para. 8)

Doreen is a fictional character but is identified as belonging to a non-fictional Aboriginal nation, Ngarrindjeri. The source for the cultural references that form Doreen's identity is acknowledged at the front of *Blue Delaney*. The main source used by Murray was *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, a book written by David Uniapon, Ngarrindjeri man, a famous preacher, speaker, inventor, and author, whose image is on the current Australian fifty dollar note (Jones, 2014). *Legendary Tales* was written in the late 1920s, 30 years earlier than the setting of *Blue Delaney*. Despite the difference in era, Murray used it as a primary source for language and stories belonging to the Ngarrindjeri people. It is acknowledged as such in the paratext.

Doreen has a detailed identity, language, and beliefs. She is situated within the time, place, and society in which she lives. These details are informed, not only by non-Indigenous sources, as so many historical Indigenous representations are, but also by primary and secondary Indigenous sources. These are specifically but not limited to the contents of Uniapon's book, combined with present day consultation with Ngarrindjeri people (Murray, 2005). These factors are in line with Lucashenko's (2009) 'specific authenticity.'

The contrast between these images of a close and loving family and the tension when Nugget is present is confronting. The following quotation covers the moment in the narrative when Nugget has come home from gambling to find his family raided by the police.

'What the hell were you doing, you stupid cow!' Nugget yelled at Doreen. He turned and kicked a big dint into the wall of the tin shanty and then marched menacingly across the room toward Doreen. (Murray, 2005, Chapter 17, Section 2, para. 23)

Doreen's dialogue in response to Nugget's outburst is equally spirited, preventing her from losing her established strength and becoming passive or a victim, which is a departure from colonial representations of incompetent and unintelligent Indigenous mothers (Bradford, 2001) as well as from Aboriginalist romanticised representations (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). Not only is Doreen represented as strong, she is a competent carer of both her own children and the children of others. She has authority and makes use of what agency she can get between Nugget's inconsideration and government persecution. Her authority, however, does come from her differences and the racism,

institutional, and personal, that she faces, positioning her narrative within the space of deficit discourse (Bamblett, 2011).

Bill explains the situation to Colm:

‘The thing is, the authorities reckon it ain’t right for a black woman to raise a white man’s kids,’ said Bill awkwardly. ‘The black fellas ... they’re not like citizens in the way white folk are.’

‘That’s stupid! Why not?’ (Murray, 2005, Chapter 17, Section 2, para. 55)

Colm’s question is left unanswered, inviting the reader to contemplate the differences and similarities between past attitudes and present ones. The contrast between government policy and social attitudes that treat Indigenous people as lesser beings and the humanity that Colm has seen and experienced with Rosie and Doreen highlight, for the reader, the inherent flaws in such policies.

Blue Delaney’s representation of its Indigenous characters varies depending on the role of the character in the narrative. Since characters such as Doreen and Rosie are prominently featured there is depth and dimension to their characterisation. Although Doreen is sometimes depicted in a romanticised image of mysticism or maternal strength, ultimately, she and Rosie are characterised as pragmatic and forthright which mostly prevents them from becoming flattened into an Aboriginalist representation of Indigenous women as exotic and romantic.

Interview Analysis

Do your reading, listen, talk to people and be respectful, that's all. I mean it's not rocket science, it's actually just good manners. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Introductory Information

Murray's experiences, professionally and personally, gave her skills and knowledge that allowed her to write *Blue Delaney*. In her professional life, she was employed in publishing in the 1990s, while working to becoming an author in her own right. Her first three publications were non-fiction.

[...] I didn't have a lot of confidence. I actually thought I'd left it all too late and that the only way to go forward to actually – because I had three kids [...] (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016).

Murray felt insecure about her ability to succeed in fiction, thinking that non-fiction and journalism were more marketable. Her first fictional work was well received and won the Western Australian Premier's Book Award, giving Murray confidence to continue in fiction. Since then she has written eleven novels, eight publications in junior fiction and non-fiction, and has had many short stories published.

I was studying part-time at RMIT, working part-time at University of Melbourne other times and parenting fulltime. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray's description of the time when she began writing revealed a pattern of hard work and meticulousness, especially in regard to accuracy and truth, education, and family. All of these proved essential to her writing methods and to creating *Blue Delaney*.

Another of Murray's professional positions had a direct bearing on her approach to *Blue Delaney*. In 1979-1980 Murray worked as the 'secretary to the legal advisor of the Pitjantjatjara council' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016).

So I already had the context of understanding a lot about how stories work, what's appropriate because I used to process the requests like, take all the correspondence that people were asking to come onto Pitjantjatjara land. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

This position gave her an understanding of the culture she was working with as well as a more general knowledge of Indigenous cultures including stories, relationships and histories and experience working with cross-cultural requests and permissions and consultation processes. All of this background knowledge would directly impact writing *Blue Delaney*.

Origins and Motivations

Blue Delaney is the third book of a quartet entitled *Children of the Wind*, which included, sequentially, *Bridies's Fire*, *Becoming Billy Dare*, *A Prayer for Blue Delaney* and *Secret Life of Maeve Lee Kwong*. In the interview, Murray often contextualised her answers based on the whole series. This approach was appropriate and necessary when discussing the motivations, origins and contexts behind *Blue Delaney*. Ideas for *Children of the Wind* emerged during the research for her previous novel. Murray was traveling within Australia and began to think about immigration, Australian identity, and what it means for individuals.

I started to actually push these ideas around about immigration²¹, which it's not actually about immigration, it's actually about that Australians are all children of the wind, we all came here from somewhere else unless you're Indigenous that your stories are part of a great immigrant tradition which I know I never really read about that in my own growing up. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Children of the Wind is therefore a series originating from what Murray perceives as a gap in Australian storytelling in general, and writing for young people in particular. While she describes the way Indigenous peoples are excluded from a common experience integral to Australian identity in this quote, as the interview progressed there was discussion about Indigenous migration within Australia that included similar themes to those of non-Indigenous immigrants. Murray discussed the effect that the lack of literature had on her as a young reader as having 'interfered with my sense of cultural

²¹ 'Immigration' in this interview encompasses all people who moved to Australia from other parts of the world, including those who had full agency, those who had little agency and those who did not consent to immigration, such as orphan children migrating under government policy.

identity' (personal communication, October 11, 2016). She, personally, filled this gap by travelling overseas in her late teens and early twenties. Doing so allowed her to process her own Australian identity, stating 'like a lot of Australians you have to leave Australia to understand what it is to be Australian' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016). The implication behind these statements is that Murray feels that there is a detrimental lack of literature for children and young adults about Australian identity, which led to Murray's agenda of a 'commitment to writing Australian children's literature about Australian experiences' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016).

Children of the Wind, then, is not about the act of migration but about the effects migration has upon the immigrant and the generations that follow. Murray was interested in the way that immigration breaks apart families and culture.

So, an immigrant nation is defined by loss which means they like to forget and they like to say, 'well, I know I miss them and all those other things are gone' but part of the idea behind it was looking at that idea. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

For Murray, what it means to be Australian is defined by loss, memory, identity, and how individuals construct those things into something meaningful in new surroundings. *Blue Delaney* is therefore one part of an attempt to make a contribution to Australian young adult literature that encapsulates uniquely Australian experiences, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Contexts

There were several external factors that influenced *Children of the Wind*. In *Bridie's Fire* many of the characters are refugee immigrants from Ireland. During her research into this period in Australia's history, Murray read comments made about the refugees in newspapers from the time.

And in the 1840s when those girls came here the Barton quote for the newspaper was these are not the sort of people we want in our country. I thought, 'wow'. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

The reason for Murray's amazement was the similarities between political discourse at the time and the almost identical discourse being put forward by John Howard, the

Australian Prime Minister at the time Murray was beginning to write *Children of the Wind*. Howard (2001) made speeches including comments such as 'we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come' (The Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, n.d.). The recognition that immigration was an ongoing and unchanging social and political issue throughout Australian history, and the lack of fictional representations of some of those early narratives, such as child immigration as represented in *Bridie's Fire* and *Blue Delaney*, initially spurred and inspired Murray to embark upon *Children of the Wind*.

Deducing that *Children of the Wind* would be a large and ambitious project, because of the aspirations of covering large periods of time and space, Murray applied for an Australia Council grant. The process of applying for this grant forced Murray to 'interrogate' her practice and was therefore a formative experience.

So I worked really hard on the grant application and spent months thinking about what this might mean. If I was going to write about those girls what did that story mean for the kids living now and where did that story intersect with stories from Australian history. So, of course, it intersected with the orphans of empires through the 1950s so that was *Blue Delaney*. And so I knew, as soon as I decided I was going to write *Bridie's Fire* I knew I would write *A Prayer for Blue Delaney*. And I actually structured quite a lot of it before I even submitted the grant. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

The discussion of the grant proposal re-exposed the characteristic work ethic and meticulous thought processes that Murray possesses, and also introduced an element of responsibility. In the above quote, there is consideration of the meaning of her work and the possible effects for her subjects and readership, which has implications for her Indigenous characters as well as those who had immigrated from other countries. Murray's responses indicated a high level of awareness and consideration of political and social contexts, historical and present day, as well as her responsibilities as a writer to consider *Children of the Wind* as her contribution to discourses about Australian identity.

Techniques and Methods

Murray's approach to the *Children of the Wind* series as a whole is an important context for *Blue Delaney*, because each novel in the series was designed to both stand alone and,

simultaneously, be inextricably linked. The impact of this approach on Indigenous representation, as with all other subjects, is to attempt a continuous, panoramic view of Australian history that is inclusive of Indigenous peoples. French takes a similar approach in *The Girl from Snowy River*. An analysis of this approach, including both novels, will appear in the 'Discussion of Interviews' section of this thesis. Such a complicated structure, involving independent novels that also function as a cohesive ensemble of work, required careful planning to determine the differences and intersections between each book.

Facilitated by the requirements of the grant application Murray mapped *Children of the Wind*. She made many choices and decisions about the ways the novels would intersect in time and space as well as the characters that would appear in multiple novels. The novels of *Children of the Wind* are situated chronologically from the 1840s through to the 2000s. First and foremost, Murray did not want to replicate the form of intergenerational novel series that already existed.

And I was crazy because I thought, 'no, I don't want to do intergenerational, that's too easy, let's not make them related to each other, let's make them really different, let's look at the largest immigrant group of the 1840s, which are the Irish and the largest immigrant group of the noughties which, at that stage are the Chinese [...]' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

At every stage of the writing process Murray was pushing the limits of what she felt she was capable of and conventional methods for what she was trying to achieve. A large part of her goal was bringing together different characters with different cultural backgrounds, including Indigenous peoples, linking them thematically, and also through the narrative. True to her characteristically methodical thought processes, Murray grounded her decisions about what stories to tell about which cultures in statistical data about the most common cultures to migrate to Australia during the time periods in which each novel was set.

And I thought, 'okay, so I'll look at the fact that the Chinese have diaspora which is amazing too. So, in parallel with the Irish I'll research the Chinese.' Went to China, went to Ireland. I just kept looking at all the threads, it was very exciting. So Colm's story had to intersect with Bridie's story and through Billy Dare and then to Maeve.

And so it was like this big web where all those themes are echoed and repeated in each book. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray's approach to the novel was influenced extensively by travel. In this case, traveling to Ireland and China allowed Murray to immerse herself in the cultures from which her characters came. Murray also travelled throughout Australia; it was an important principle of her research that she had visited all locations that were included in her writing.

Despite the methodical, planned nature of *Children of the Wind*, the process was often emotional for Murray. Child abuse and forced immigration was at the core of *Blue Delaney*.

So I went through two Royal Commissions: there was a Royal Commission into the children of empire in the post second world war period and I also read the Royal Commission into the Stolen Generation and realised that there was this nexus between their experiences and what that said about us too, the way we treat children and the way we treated children historically, it's not a very good track record. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

It was evident that Murray felt that the treatment many Indigenous and migrant children received and still receive at the hands of institutions and government policies is a topic worthy of shame, for Australians individually, and for the nation as a whole.

I was so naïve. It was such great, rich material. I thought it would be really – there was lots to work with. But of the four books in the series it was the most traumatic to write because what happened to those orphans of empire, those boys and those girls, what happened at Bindoon²². (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray researched *Blue Delaney* in part by reading information produced by a Royal Commission, saying 'there was a Royal Commission into The Children of Empire in the post second world war period' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016),

²² Bindoon was a Catholic Institution in remote Western Australia. Children who resided there were subject to emotional, physical, mental and sexual abuse (Marks, 2009).

which focussed heavily on government child migration schemes and the institutions to which those children were often sent. Additionally, she read information from the Royal Commission into the Stolen Generations, and noted that while the two situations were different for many reasons, there was a connection through trauma and abuse. Trauma was an inspiration for Murray's writing, but the subject also created challenges. Murray described an empathetic connection to the subjects of the Royal Commissions, which prompted emotional and ideological reflections.

Murray used research into historical child abuse as the basis for characterisation.

[...] when I write fiction it's empathetic, you get inside the character and you feel what they feel and it gets really exhausting when your character is going through huge and difficult times because you go through it with them. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

She suffered not only the effects of empathy for the characters and historical cases of abuse, but also feelings of distress and discomfort that, in the case of *Blue Delaney*, the era of the setting was close enough in history for the real-life subjects of abuse to be living.

I thought, I just can't write this. I mean, how do you tell the truth which is an important thing to me? I mean there's no point writing historical fiction and you don't tell the truth, you know, bend the truth. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray's dedication to truth and honesty was complicated by her feelings of responsibility to her subjects and to her perceived audience. She felt it was her responsibility to protect readers from the unadulterated, graphic abuse that was perpetrated against the subjects that became her characters.

How do you tell the truth and make something that is possible for a young reader to digest like, not just make it appalling and disillusioning and relentlessly heartbreaking? Because I don't feel that is an appropriate thing to give to a younger reader, to say 'let's destroy your hope and your optimism and your faith in your culture like this.' I don't want to do that. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

The problem of truth and responsibility was a cause of anxiety and exhaustion for Murray. The feelings were intense enough to slow writing progress of *Blue Delaney*. Murray solved the problem in two ways; firstly, by researching, in small detail, as broad a range of facts as possible and then amalgamating them into one character that was representative of the era and experiences of many, and secondly by constructing a shadow text that implied trauma without graphic description. Murray wanted to accurately represent historical events without appropriating the story of an individual.

But to write a whole novel and then have somebody feel like you'd used their story but not made it their story didn't sit well with me. And I think, when you're writing any sort of history on a person's life and you're trying to represent a time it's important to look at all the different facets of experience rather than a single individual experience. So Colm, to me, is just a distillation of all the boys I read about in the senate enquiry and all the kids I read about in the secondary sources and all the letters I read and the memoirs. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray did not only research by reading. She conducted interviews with many people in her personal network, both closely connected and further removed, about their memories of living in the 1950s. Memories played an important role in this process.

I love reading other people's memories, they're so unreliable. Memories, I think, you're looking through a very narrow lens when you read one and I think fiction is actually more powerful is you can take all those lenses and you can make it a panoramic view. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

She used these interviews as part of her amalgamations for characterisation. All of Murray's characterisation methods were based on using many small and detailed stories to build a larger narrative representative of an aspect of Australian national identity. Part of truthful and authentic representation was representing the different facets and contexts of the perpetrators of violence and abuse.

I read all Barry Culdrey's books about the Christian Brothers and what it was like from their perspective too. So, to try and see well, how do you tell the story and tell it with some integrity and some warmth? So, to me, that's what you do when you write responsibly about something [...]

[...]

And they were malicious bastards but a lot of people were just drowning in their own eyes which is not a justification for doing the wrong thing and not speaking up but it is a context. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray went to great lengths, using detailed research and an empathetic outlook to provide a multi-dimensional view of all her characters. She not only empathised with the victims of abuse, but also with the perpetrators, and extended the same consideration of truthfulness to all aspects of the era, people, and events within *Blue Delaney*.

Murray was also concerned about her responsibilities to a young audience when writing about traumatic subject matter that was integral to the historical basis of her narrative. She decided to imply violent and sexual abuse through a shadow text which would be discernible to readers with background knowledge while avoiding graphically depicting abuse.

And I needed to do something emblematic to show how bad the abuse was but I didn't want to overtly write about sexual abuse. And so that's always a difficult thing to write dark where it can be read by an adult and they understand what's happening but it can be read by a child without them necessarily understanding the full brutality, that they see the shadow without seeing the gratuitous violence. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray's personal ideologies concerning appropriate content for her perceived young readership led her to signify the full horror of child abuse in a way that could be understood by a mature audience while simultaneously implying it to a young audience. Balancing these factors was technically difficult, and at times Murray was demoralised to the point of losing faith in her abilities. To combat these feelings Murray employed a few simple methods to cultivate hope and restore motivation.

And I wrote the last chapter, I wrote that scene where he's sitting there and realises that he's going to have a family and that he's found a place. And writing that chapter made the whole book possible. I could finish it because I could see that chapter at the end which I pinned up above the desk saying, okay, he'll be all

right, he'll get there and relentlessly play 'Que Sera' on the CD player. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

The planning stage of *Children of the Wind* meant that at times when motivation was low or unforeseen problems arose there was still a sense of direction and an ending that ultimately helped resolve emotional and technical problems.

Active research and knowledge building form the bedrock of *Blue Delaney*.

Well, fiction is a dream and the author's job is to hold the reader in the dream. So they hear the cranking of the machinery in the background then the dream is broken, you don't want to break the dream with something as basic as a really stupid mistake that you could have looked up on Google in two minutes [...] (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Implicit in this quote is the recurrence of Murray's ideological positions on truth and responsibility to her subjects and readership, and the role that research has to play in fulfilling those ideals. Murray's descriptions of her research for her writing in this interview went well beyond a cursory online search for information. She put a significant amount of time and resources into many different avenues of research.

Murray used primary sources, such as interviews with people who lived through the era in which *Blue Delaney* is set, as well as using consultations on her writing, specifically to ensure accuracy and respectful representation of Aboriginal and Chinese cultures. One of the challenges of writing *Blue Delaney* was that the specific cultural identity required for an individual Aboriginal character had to be balanced against a broader national narrative about the treatment of all Indigenous cultures.

Murray also travelled extensively as part of her research.

And I went everywhere too, that's the other thing. I've circumnavigated Australia a few times so a lot of the settings are places that I've visited or I know intimately or I've spent time. I spent a lot of time driving up and down through the Territory and I've crossed the Nullarbor a few times and sort of rabbit around in those particular areas. Went to Kalgoorlie, there's no town that's mentioned that's not one I've been to. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

There is an implied ideology of authenticity and integrity in Murray's statements. Travelling to many places, some remote, some which required a significant investment in resources to reach, combined with her assertion that if she had not included a location in her writing that she had not also visited is further indication of the diligence with which Murray carried out her research according to her personal ideas about honesty, truth, and responsibility. The use of remote locations was problematised when *Blue Delaney* was translated into German for use in secondary education in Germany. In some cases, Murray knew the spelling of the town name but not the pronunciation. As place names were to be phonetically translated Murray found herself faced with researching the correct pronunciation for some settings.

There were a lot of embarrassing phone calls to councils about that. So nobody's pulled me up on any of the history in that book and I worked very hard on it. If you don't know it, you don't use it. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Having full knowledge of the subject of your writing is at the core of Murray's methods, not just in relation to setting, but also in terms of cultural representation and characterisation. Travel and location were also central to Murray's representation of Indigenous peoples in her writing.

The treatment²³ of children throughout Australia's history was a major inspiration for Murray. During her research into this topic she had read the reports of the two Royal Commissions, one into child abuse, and one with a focus on the Stolen Generations.

[...] I mean, it's a repetitive theme our treatment of Indigenous people so that it's a wider statement about where we're fitting and what we're thinking. And so, I read a lot about miscegenation was illegal, that white men couldn't marry Aboriginal women. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

²³ In this interview, the word 'treatment' was used almost exclusively to refer to abuse and atrocities perpetrated against children by institutions and government policy. The usage of 'treatment' in an implicitly negative sense was also prevalent in Lawrinson's interview.

While researching *Blue Delaney* the treatment of Indigenous children expanded into the recurring mistreatment of the entire Indigenous population of Australia.

One of Murray's earlier, non-fiction published works, *Tough Stuff*, was a compilation of stories about courageous children from around the world, and had included the story of a Ngarrindjeri²⁴ woman. She was a singer who was also one of the Stolen Generations.

I interviewed her several times about it and she read it and we did lots of conversations about how it would work and why I was writing it. And she approved the final story and was really pleased with it and it was used a lot in schools. It's still photocopied a lot and used as a text talking about the Stolen Generation and what the whole life of somebody who experiences that can be. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

The experience of writing this story for *Tough Stuff* relates to *Blue Delaney* in two ways. Firstly, it extended Murray's cultural consultation experience with the Pitjantjatjara Council into the world of writing. The same methods of interviews, consultation and consent would be relevant for writing *Blue Delaney*. Secondly, the network Murray created for *Tough Stuff* became instrumental in the inclusion of key aspects of Aboriginal representation in *Blue Delaney*.

Tough Stuff was an inspiration for the Aboriginal representation in *Blue Delaney*. She wanted to call upon the themes of land, hope, and place that appeared in *Tough Stuff*. In order to achieve this, Murray wanted Doreen, an Aboriginal, maternal character, to tell stories to her children. Originally, her idea was to find a story from the Aboriginal cultures with which she was the most familiar from working on the Pitjantjatjara Council in central Australia.

I wanted that echo [of *Tough Stuff*] about land and place and hope and unfortunately most of the myths of the Western Desert in that region are rape stories [...]. They're fantastic stories but they weren't appropriate within the context of the story. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

²⁴ The Ngarrindjeri Nation is situated in South Australia in the Lower Murray, Coorong and Lakes region (Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority, 2016).

Murray, relying on her sense of responsibility to her readership, used her personal judgement to make the decision that Aboriginal stories from the Western Desert regions were inappropriate. As part of her ongoing research into traditional Aboriginal stories Murray read *Tales of the Aborigines* by David Uniapon, a Ngarrindjeri man. Murray then made the connection between the Ngarrindjeri woman who was subject of her *Tough Stuff* story and the cultural ownership of the story, titled *Mungingee*, she was considering using in *Blue Delaney*.

Murray proceeded to use the network she had developed while writing *Tough Stuff* to seek permission from the Ngarrindjeri nation to include the story of *Mungingee* in *Blue Delaney*. One of the most problematic aspects of this process was timing.

So we actually got quite close to the final draft and my editors and publisher are saying 'you've got to take it out, if you don't want to use it without permission then you have to take it out. You can either use it without permission or you can take it out but you can't hold off any longer. You've got to do something one way or the other.' And [the editors and publisher] said 'just take it out, it's too hard.' Because I'd find lots of people and said, 'look, I'm looking for permission' and [the editors and publishers] said 'just don't bother, take it out.' Like, I shouldn't be using it. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray was under pressure from her publishers to deliver the book to a predetermined deadline with no flexibility for extensions. She was also under pressure to remove the story, not just if there was no permission, but also because the processes involved in consultation with the cultural owners of the story was seen by her editors and publishers as requiring too much effort. Other, non-Indigenous people that Murray talked to, some with experience in consultation, agreed with the publishers on this point.

Well, the most intense thing was actually other people's discouragement which I found really annoying, so many people saying don't bother, don't bother, it's too hard. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray's personal ideological position was that if she did not have permission to use the story, she would cut it from the book. It eventuated that Murray did get in contact with the Ngarrindjeri woman that she knew from *Tough Stuff* in time to ask permission. The woman did not have the authority to give permission herself, but was able to connect

Murray with another Ngarrindjeri woman who did have authority. In contrast to the negative attitude from her publishers and others about the process of seeking permission, Murray received encouragement from the Aboriginal people she spoke to: ‘No Aboriginal person said don’t bother, they said, “good on you for trying.”’ (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016).

When Murray did get in contact, after three months, with a representative of the Ngarrindjeri Nation who had the authority to give permission for the story to be used, there was a generous, supportive, and in-depth consultation about the use of the story and the acknowledgements to the original owners.

So then I had to find [name redacted] and talk to her and she was lovely too and she said, ‘Look send it to me.’ And she loved it and she’s great and she wrote back – I’ve got her email here too. So it was a big exciting adventure for all that. And we wrote to each other quite a lot. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

The consultation process for the use of the *Mungingee* story took three weeks. It was conducted over the phone, fax, and by email. The discussion ranged from how to abridge the story to fit into *Blue Delaney*, to the definitions of Ngarrindjeri language that were included, to the details of exactly how the character would tell the story.

[...] and so there was lots of little titbits of things where they would say, ‘can you make her do this, can you make her say that, no, she wouldn’t say it like this she would say it like that.’ (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Despite the discouraging advice from her publishers and others to avoid having to consult and ask permission for using the story Murray found the experience ‘[...] highly consultative and that was a very satisfying process [...].’ (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Once the use of the story itself was worked out there was a more in-depth consultative process involving the wording of the acknowledgements section of *Blue Delaney*. Murray began by writing a draft on which to consult so that she could begin with something to present to her contact. Murray would discuss the draft with her contact. The draft would then be taken back to the council and then the community, including Elders, for further

consultation. Finally, Murray would rewrite the draft based on the feedback from the council and community and the process would begin again until final approval was given to the phrasing of the acknowledgements.

[...] she said, 'I want you to be really specific about the wording in the acknowledgment' which was 'David Uniapon's *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines* provided a source for the legend of the *Mungingee* and the Ngarrindjeri woman, who befriends Colm, Doreen is fictional but the details of the Dreaming she tells are true and belong to the Ngarrindjeri people.' [...] We worked over that a few times where I rewrote it a few times for us to find exactly how – and she said, 'That's the wording we want. That's it.' So that was highly consultative about how that acknowledgement read [...]. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

This process was focussed on clarifying for the readership, in detail, what was true, what was fictional, and where the ownership of the story lies, aligning with Murray's own prominent ideologies of honesty and integrity. The inclusion of *Mungingee* was the anchoring point for Indigenous representation in *Blue Delaney*.

The character of Doreen who tells the story of *Mungingee* was, in Murray's original plan, from the Western Desert. Based on the cultural knowledge she represents in *Blue Delaney*, the character had to be given a new identity as a Ngarrindjeri woman. This placed Doreen far from her traditional land when the protagonist meets her in Western Australia. Murray's meticulous research provided a solution for this logistical problem.

[...] because the thing is in the destruction of a lot of communities there was a lot of transience, of Aboriginal people moving back and forth from South Australia. So, it was perfectly logical that you could be Ngarrindjeri and be temporarily located in Western Australia.

[...]

And that South Australia were meaner - like, in the book Nugget and Doreen have gone to Western Australia so they can live without being harassed so that was already an embedded premise [...]. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray's research had provided her with the knowledge that differing treatment of Aboriginal peoples in different Australian states meant that movement between states was frequent and, in the case of her characters, necessary to maintain their relationship, given South Australia's more strict miscegenation laws. In addition to the historical research, Murray also consulted on Indigenous representation in *Blue Delaney* generally. Consultation took the form of sending drafts of the novel to her contacts who disseminated it within their community and relayed feedback, suggestions, and approval.

Feedback

The feedback that Murray talked about receiving for *Blue Delaney* was almost universally positive from award panels, individual readers, education professionals, and Indigenous peoples. In terms of award recognition, it won the Western Australia Premier's Book Award in 2006 and was listed as a CBCA notable book. Murray is also pleased to have received many fan letters from readers. The only negative feedback Murray received was from readers who were upset at the artistic decision to include the death of a beloved character in the narrative.

Blue Delaney was incorporated into secondary school curriculum in Germany. It was published in an abridged form and is currently being reprinted for continued use in German schools. Murray attributes the German interest in *Blue Delaney* to several aspects.

So they do America and they do South Africa and, obviously, England but they look at English language countries and the variations and their culture and the history and so that was used to teach. Also they use the material on the Stolen Generation and talk about Australian history. So he liked the combination of history and landscape.

[...]

And also it's hard for them to find books that can work in the curriculum that actually look at those political ideas about nation, about Indigenous affairs because our lousy track record on Indigenous affairs is of great interest to the rest of the world so that's why they picked it. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Blue Delaney is used to introduce and discuss Indigenous Australian history in the German curriculum. Murray's discussion with her German contact suggested that it was also the positioning of Indigenous treatment as present and continuous within the history of Australia that made it desirable as a school text in Germany.

Feedback from the community Murray had consulted with was overwhelmingly positive.

Which I do like that quote on [unintelligible] is that 'your story epitomises the strength and pride of the Ngarrindjeri Nation and hope your book does well.' That was really nice. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Murray's demeanour, as well as her statements about the satisfaction of the consultation process, suggested that she was proud and touched by the kind words she received in the emails, copies of which she brought to the interview. Positive feedback on the Indigenous representation in *Blue Delaney* also came from outside the Ngarrindjeri Nation.

I mean most of the feedback would have come when it was released so there was all sorts of nice emails and comments on it. People always correcting your usage, it was pretty meticulously worded in the acknowledgements and I worded the acknowledgements to what the Ngarrindjeri people tell me to do [...](Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

The usage of *Mungingee* did garner some interest. Murray was questioned about whether she had permission to use the story and how she had used the story within the text. In response, Murray points to her rigorous processes and the 'Acknowledgements' section as the tools that allowed her to write that part of *Blue Delaney*. Despite a few corrections and questions about the *Mungingee*, most feedback on the Indigenous representation, as well as other aspects of *Blue Delaney*, were very positive.

Reflections

Murray's general reflections on Indigenous representation were centred on diversity, not just of characters but also of writing and methods. She expressed regret at the small number of Indigenous characters in children's literature but also stressed the importance of the inclusion of Indigenous peoples.

But I also think there needs to be more cross-cultural collaboration because just because you live something doesn't mean that you're neurotic enough to want to

sit down for six months at a time and write about it. And the role of a storyteller is to listen sympathetically and to work with people and sometimes to go to difficult places. (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Teasing apart writing and storytelling was perhaps the key idea that allowed Murray to work on Indigenous representation in *Blue Delaney*. There were multiple occasions, such as the *Mungingee* story, when storytelling was privileged above writing. Murray demonstrated this by being willing to abandon the story if the protocols of storytelling could not be fulfilled. The inclusion of Indigenous peoples was not limited to collaboration. Murray also stated that she was aware of talented Indigenous writers and that Indigenous representation would benefit from those writers receiving 'better platforms' (personal communication, October 11, 2016).

Murray's advice for other writers was:

I'd say do your homework, don't assume anything. Indigenous Australia is rich and it's complex and it's a fantastic and interesting history. And my experience is that most people – well, actually every Indigenous person I've ever spoken to or worked with or interviewed – has been generous and kind and enthusiastic.

And you hear a lot of bad stories about, 'they're going to be rude or somebody's not going to – and they're going to say, no, you can't go there.' And I think 'well, how rude are you being then if they're saying that to you?' I mean, or talked to the wrong person, just listen, that's what I'd say, 'listen.' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016)

Whether writing fiction or non-fiction, Murray described a proclivity for real people as subjects and participants in writing. Her reflections are further indicative of the importance of this method to her personally.

Chapter 6: Clare Atkins

Clare Atkins grew up in Sydney, New South Wales and has lived in Bathurst and the Yirrkala community in Arnhem Land. At the time of her interview, she resided in Darwin. She gained a teaching degree from Charles Sturt University before going on to work as a television script writer. In addition to mainstream television, Atkins worked on an independent scriptwriting project called Represent, which focused on young writers from diverse backgrounds. *Nona and Me*, published in 2014, was her first novel. In 2018 she published a second young adult novel, *Between Us*, which was shortlisted for four awards in 2019.

Nona and Me (published 2014)

Nona and Me was critically acclaimed upon publication. It won the Honour Book Award in the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers 2015, was a co-winner of the Northern Territory Literary Awards 2016, was longlisted for the Inky Awards 2015, and was highly commended in the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards 2015.

Nona and Me's plot revolves around non-Indigenous protagonist, Rosie. She grew up and lives with her mother in Yirrkala, a remote Yolŋu community in Arnhem Land. Her father lives in a different, even more remote Yolŋu community. Her family and Nona's family are intimately connected, making them sisters or yapas (in Yolŋu Matha language). Rosie and Nona are inseparable until Nona's father dies. Afterwards Nona moves away for several years, returning in 2007, as both girls are going into Year 10 of high school. In the meantime, Rosie has lost interest in the community in Yirrkala, preferring to spend time with her non-Indigenous friends in the nearby mining town. When Nona returns Rosie is unsure of the meaning of their childhood relationship as they become adults, and outside the context of Yirrkala. She is faced with the impossible task of negotiating different cultures in a deeply divided place during a period of political upheaval as the government is sending the military into Aboriginal communities as part of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response (colloquially known as the Intervention).

The initial impression of *Nona and Me* is that it handles the multiple facets of Rosie's experience with deft nuance. Limiting the narrative to Rosie's first-person perspective gives the novel permission to observe complexity of situations themselves, without

needing to also show all possible permutations of interpretation. Adopting a non-Indigenous first person perspective also reduces the risk of appropriating Indigenous perspectives (Lucashenko, 2009). By limiting the perspective, *Nona and Me* creates space to cover an extraordinary range of social, political, and cultural topics, without generalisation or essentialism.

Rosie's boyfriend Nick and their relationship, in many respects, is an exploration and dissection of Aborigine ideologies. Nick's background narrative includes a bad experience with an ex-girlfriend in Sydney who was Aborigine. The experience solidifies his characterisation as someone who feels superior for being non-Indigenous. As a result, his perspective on the Yolngu characters, and Aborigine peoples in general, is one of homogenisation and negative biases. When he is hurt or stressed he retreats into this construction of Self and Other (Bradford, 2001; Hodge & Mishra, 1991; Said, 2003) by first rationalising his beliefs with common stereotypes and, when unobserved by Rosie or pushed, making racist jokes or otherwise expressing cruelty towards threats to his identity as Self.

Dad continues. "They've had their whole way of living dismantled in three generations. They got lumped with a mine they didn't want –"

Nick seizes on this. "But they get money for that. Heaps of money. And special treatment, too. Like the kids at our school. They get so much help, a special room, different homework ... and they all drop out by Year 10."

"If you tried to learn in German [another language], you'd probably struggle too." Nick shakes his head, but Dad continues. "Those kids have real knowledge – it's just not reflected in the classroom. Take them out bush, and it's a whole other story."

[...]

Nick's face is a frown. He drains his cappuccino. It has to be cold by now. "I'm not saying they don't know stuff, or they can't be nice people ... just that they're different ... you know, underneath. (Atkins, 2014, Chapter 36, Section 9, para. 21)

This discussion continues for several pages as an overt expression of ideologies of racism, acceptance, cultural belonging, and values that weave through the entire novel. Nick

defends his superiority as a non-Indigenous person against Rosie's dad, who continues to challenge and contextualise Nick's prejudices with cultural, political, and historical factors. With Nick representing Aboriginalism and Rosie's dad in the role of teacher and historian, Rosie is caught in the middle. She loves Nick and knows his personal history and reasons for his views. Her time with Nick is easy and fun, full of friendship and parties. Her experiences growing up and living in Yirrkala has meant that she has experienced isolation and loss as friends move or grow apart, but she also has the knowledge that what her father says is true. She wants to keep both in her life but both are immovable.

But I know now that I can't expect compassion from Nick. Not when it comes to Aboriginal people. I tell myself that's okay. Just got to compartmentalise. Keep the worlds separate. (Atkins, 2014, Chapter 31, Section 6, para. 9)

At first Rosie tries to switch between ideological positions but she learns that there are fundamental parts of her Yolŋu upbringing that she cannot deny and which will not be accepted by her friends in town, including Nick. Rosie finds it increasingly difficult to 'compartmentalise' her life and values. Events culminate when Nona and Rosie's wāwa (brother) dies by suicide. The funeral is held at Yirrkala and lasts some weeks, during which time Rosie stays in the community and is re-immersed in the culture. During the funeral, Rosie re-establishes bonds with her Yolŋu family and observes and participates in Yolŋu funeral practices. In doing so, she discovers that despite neglecting the community since moving to high school, she is still an accepted member and has responsibilities that are ultimately rewarding and as important, if not more so, than her life with her non-Indigenous friends in town.

As Rosie becomes firmer in her cultural identity, Nick becomes more frustrated and crueller, eventually breaking off their relationship once Rosie no longer enables his identity as the superior, Western Self. Rosie is devastated by the break up and it takes her a long time to recover. *Nona and Me* resists Aboriginalism by critiquing and rejecting it through the character Nick. Nick's character, however, is not completely demonised. The narrative resists the binary opposition of Self and Other. When Nick finds a job in Bali after leaving school, Rosie responds with compassion:

Despite everything that's happened, I'm happy for him.

I say, "He'll be good at that – after all his teaching."

Selena nods. “That’s what I thought too.”

We talk like it was an amiable break-up, like Nick and I are still friends. (Atkins, 2014, Chapter 39, Section 4, para. 2)

Just as she has re-discovered confidence and acceptance within her Yolŋu family, Rosie is happy for Nick’s success. The last line, however, implies that although Nick’s success is positive, Rosie no longer desires him. Nick and Rosie’s relationship concludes without clearly defined emotional resolution, suggestive of a breaking down of any possible ideological binary opposition.

Paratexts frame the main narrative of *Nona and Me*. They promote the credibility of the author (O’Conor, 2010) as well as placing the main narrative within a well-researched, culturally specific framework. In addition to the usual pre-text pages, there is a guide to the spelling and pronunciation of Yolŋu languages.

ŋ	pronounced as ‘ng’ as in sung
ä	pronounced like the ‘a’ in father
<u>d</u> , <u>t</u> , <u>l</u> , <u>n</u>	retroflex consonants formed with the bottom of the tip of the tongue curled up to the roof of the mouth

(Atkins, 2014)

The addition of this pronunciation guide implies a non-Yolŋu language speaking and reading audience. Its inclusion as a short paratext positions the correct pronunciation of Yolŋu Matha as a necessary frame for reading the novel. It also, unusually for a young adult novel, invites the reader to engage with language by making sounds aloud. It is a page that is optional to read or use as a reference, in a way that it would not be if the information were embedded in the text, giving it the flexibility to include non-speakers without excluding a readership familiar with Yolŋu languages. If Aboriginalism is partly defined by writing about and on behalf of an Indigenous culture for a non-Indigenous readership (Bradford, 2001), the pronunciation guide in *Nona and Me* goes some way to transcending the cultural division of audience that supports Aboriginalist ideologies.

After the main narrative there is an ‘Acknowledgements’ section that lists, for the reader, the contributions made by many people, mostly Yolŋu, as well as Atkins’ gratitude. In this

section the Yolŋu cultural content that is used throughout *Nona and Me* as part of a fictional narrative is brought, with intention, into non-fiction;

Heartfelt gratitude to Dhāngal Gurruwiwi, Djaly Gurruwiwi and Dopiya Yunupiŋu, my wāwa Yotjiŋ and their family for adopting me and inviting me and my family to share many amazing experiences. Their friendship and generosity has been, in many ways, the inspiration for this story. They also allowed me to use Gikal as Stretch's homeland. (Atkins, 2014, Acknowledgements, Section 1, para. 3)

This acknowledgement is one example of many. Each individual is named, their contribution recognised and their specific cultural identity acknowledged. This inclusion directly subverts Aboriginalist hallmarks of homogenisation and addresses concerns of specific authenticity (Lucashenko, 2009) as well as addressing protocols around appropriate acknowledgement of cultural material, source communities, and Indigenous individuals (Janke, 2008).

Interview Analysis

Like I can fundamentally not know that character to that extent, I can't write from that perspective [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Introductory Information

Nona and Me is Atkins' first novel. As such, writing it was a learning process that incorporated her familial, cultural, residential, and professional backgrounds and identity and redirected them at young adult fiction. From the early stages of the interview, human development from child to adult through adolescence was a recurring theme. Ideas about family were closely intertwined with discussions of development, beginning with Atkins describing her own childhood and early fascination with Indigenous cultures.

Atkins' mother was Australian and her father was Vietnamese. Her parents separated and her dad remarried a Vietnamese woman with whom he had two children. Atkins lived with her mother when she was growing up and considers herself as an only child during that period, which directly influenced an interest in Indigenous cultures.

I think from being an only child that I kind of really – I think I saw something as a young teen and the idea of like extended family and community really appealed to me. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Discussion of living locations in this interview proved to be intrinsic to her writing in a variety of ways. Travelling and moving were a part of Atkins' childhood. In her mid-teens, her mother gave her a choice of holiday destination and Atkins chose Uluru.

And I think that's kind of probably where it began, you know, like I was just really into – I knew that I wanted to live in a community, in a remote community and experience that [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

The desire and interest Atkins felt towards living in a remote Indigenous community continued to motivate many decisions in her life. At university she studied Community Development and participated in a month-long literacy project in Papunya, in remote Central Australia. With each experience, Atkins' motivation was renewed. She returned to Papunya annually and began to bring her partner with her. Community engagement continued as Atkins moved from student life into professional spheres.

Atkins began writing professionally as a television scriptwriter. While this is indicative of a background of writing experiences and practice, it proved to be more influential in terms of the ideologies of Indigenous representation than on her writing in general, and is discussed further in the 'Reflections' section below. After scriptwriting for mainstream television shows, Atkins changed careers to work in the public service for the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS). In this position Atkins was responsible for running Indigenous leadership workshops. It was through these workshops that she met a Yolŋu woman from Arnhem Land, in the northern part of the Northern Territory, who extended an invitation for Atkins to visit. Throughout the interview, but especially when discussing her previous professional experiences, Atkins' language and judgement of events demonstrated a long-standing, strong set of principles and ideologies surrounding Indigenous representation, demonstrating keen awareness of and engagement with the subject.

Atkins and her partner visited Arnhem Land several times at regular intervals, over a three-year period, volunteering for the Garma Festival. During this time Atkins and her partner had a child, who accompanied them on their journeys. It was apparent that there was a strong, continued interest that motivated Atkins to spend time working and living in remote Indigenous communities. When her partner was offered employment, they moved there and were adopted by a local Yolŋu family in order to fit into the community (Norrington and Atkins have this in common, which will be explored further in 'Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews') and lived there for two years. It was during this period that Atkins conceived the idea for *Nona and Me*.

Origins and Motivations

Nona and Me originated through Atkins' musing on the degree of engagement between people of different cultures.

I guess it had kind of been stewing and in a way, it was a way of making sense of what I saw happening around me and processing where I was living and the weird culture shock. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Through observing her children in preschool, Atkins noticed that young children from different cultures did not have the barriers to inter-cultural friendships that older children and adults have.

I had two young kids while we were living there and I had another third one while I was there and just seeing them, you know, playing with Yolŋu kids and my son went to pre-school with a whole group of Yolŋu kids and was learning Yolŋu Matha and you know, I just really was thinking a lot about, you know, how they're growing up side by side basically and what if we lived here, what would life be like, you know, would they actually be able to maintain that really innocent friendship as kids when they're older, when they're teenagers or would they just be, you know, too far apart and when do they start drifting apart and how does that happen. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

The idea that cultural differences that are insignificant in childhood might widen with growth and maturity became the central theme in *Nona and Me*. Atkins developed a strong young adult agenda. From its earliest stages, she wanted the novel to be accessible to a teenage audience. Given her own experiences of becoming interested in Indigenous cultures from a young age, Atkins wanted to use *Nona and Me* to target a young audience and disseminate a representation of a different side of Australia that was inclusive of Indigenous cultures. Observations of Atkins' own behaviour was also surfacing in the maelstrom of ideas about cross-cultural relationships.

Atkins realised that she was experiencing intense culture shock in the months after moving to Arnhem Land. She found it easier not to choose activities that had previously engaged her with the Yolŋu community. Atkins was feeling a lot of discomfort, some emotional, and some physical. She found herself generally withdrawing. Aside from the difficulties of moving to a new location and community there was one specific issue that Atkins found particularly distressing; the high rate of death within the community.

Yeah, and also, I think the death had a big impact on me as well, you know, like just the fact – I didn't really know how to handle the fact that, you know, every two weeks or so there was a funeral and there was somebody dying and that person would be somehow linked to people that I was close to, whether immediately or you know, they knew them or their immediate family. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

This emotional stress was combined with physical stresses. Atkins struggled to cope physically with the weather and the activities she would do with Yolŋu people.

[...] if I had the choice, you know, between like I could go out and do a bush trip today, which often involves like lots of time in the hot sun and looking around or fishing and not catching anything or you know, wandering through the bush looking for bush honey and you know, eventually finding some, it's not the easiest – like it is a lot of fun but it often involves quite physical –

[...]

A lot of energy, yeah and I just – I think it was to do with the weather too, you know, it was stinking hot and I was pregnant and so I was just kind of like, you know, I think I'll just choose not to do that, you know, choosing not to do that meant that you're choosing not to engage essentially [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

The stress that Atkins was under led to a lack of enthusiasm and motivation to engage with Yolŋu people. The realisation of her state of mind, the opportunities she had, and the choices she was making, gave Atkins motivation to re-engage and also precipitated thoughts about the ease with which you could live in a location and, yet, choose not to engage with the community.

Nona and me emerged from Atkins' disengagement and also became her motivation to re-engage. When the idea of writing a novel first occurred to her, she sought advice and asked questions, which created engagement. This was a pattern that recurred throughout the interview. Atkins' motivations, context and methods were often so intertwined that they were one and the same.

Contexts

The context in which Atkins wrote *Nona and Me* was dependent on her location and political events over the years preceding her move to Arnhem Land. Two political events of major significance to Indigenous populations had taken place in this time. The first was the Northern Territory National Emergency Response (hereafter referred to as the Intervention), which was initiated in 2007. The Intervention was a government policy that, when initiated, purported to be combatting prevalent child abuse in remote Aboriginal communities by using extreme measures, including the use of military force (Monash University, 2016). This was closely followed in 2008 by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd making a formal apology to the Stolen Generations (the Apology).

At the time of the Intervention, Atkins was working in the public service in Indigenous Affairs and was on leave to make her annual visit to Papunya.

I was in Papunya and it was announced overnight and then in the morning people in the community were talking about it saying 'oh, did you see, I think it was Lateline last night, they've announced something that the army's coming to take our kids!'

So, it was like this kind of Chinese whispers thing in the community, real panic and obviously no consultation, they had no idea what was happening or what it even meant or ... then they were running around cleaning up their yards, thinking like 'if we clean up all the rubbish in our garden then they might not take our kids because then we look like we're responsible,' you know, whatever. It's just like this really crazy and horrible scenario. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

When Atkins returned to work, the atmosphere was chaotic. There were copious quantities of resources and man-power incentivising people to move to the Northern Territory in order to work on the Intervention. Atkins' impression, once back at work, was that communities were in danger of being damaged and disrespected by an influx of unskilled workers. For this reason, Atkins terminated her employment.

I don't want to remember myself working on this side of it and so yeah, I left shortly afterwards and that was the end of the political working for the government, it lasted about eight months. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins' actions demonstrated both her awareness of the repercussions of government policy on communities and a commitment to her personal ideologies of supporting communities. In the aftermath of the initial flurry of activity of the Intervention, Atkins was spending time in Arnhem Land and noted the community feeling a couple of years on.

But the funny thing was that when I started researching and asking the community about the Intervention, it didn't have the same kick that it did down in Papunya

because the way that people up there explained it to me was that they weren't as affected by the Stolen Generations, like they were a little bit more protected [...]

[...]

Being more remote. And so there were things that happened there and they were also one of the last communities to agree to sign onto it and they really held off and protested and everything. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Despite being more protected, the Yolŋu community expressed nostalgia for the control they had lost over running their own community and the jobs that had been taken away through various policy decisions.

[...] like kind of glory days of like, back when we used to have the Indigenous guys doing the garbage run and back when we used to do this and like, you know, so they would kind of refer back to it as like a better time before the Intervention [...]
(Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins described an atmosphere of despair and hopelessness that was attributed to the Intervention by the people to whom she spoke. Atkins observed that it seemed as if suicide rates had risen steeply after the Intervention was announced, which she viewed as a strong indicator of the damage to communities. Despite the conversations Atkins had about the Intervention, she also noticed that public discourse on the subject had declined as people acclimatised to the continuing effects and changes to government policy. The Intervention and the Apology became not just the context in which *Nona and Me* was written, but also informed the setting, plot and characterisation within the novel.

Techniques and Methods

The three foundations of Atkins' methods were living in Arnhem Land, self-reflection and engagement with the Yolŋu community. Material drawn from her own observations, interviews, consultations, and experiences were the main sources for the setting, plot, and characterisation of *Nona and Me*. All of the people who supported Atkins with her writing are acknowledged for their specific roles in the 'Acknowledgements' section of the novel. Atkins also did background reading. She mapped the field of Indigenous and

other cultural representations in young adult fiction with the aim of producing something that contributed in a unique way.

You know, like when I went to write the book, I did look at what existed already because I thought I don't want to be writing something that somebody's already written [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins cites Melina Marchetta's work, especially *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca*, as strongly influential in terms of representing the experience of growing up between cultures. She also read young adult novels that specifically represented Indigenous peoples and cultures, such as Gwynne's *Deadly, Unna?* (published in 1998) and Moloney's *Dougy* (published in 1993) and *Gracie* (published in 1994). Atkins states that her search returned limited results and she posited that there was a degree of fear associated with writing about Indigenous people and culture.

But anyway, I did just look around to see what existed and I just didn't see a whole lot to be honest and I did think that it was probably to do with fear and I definitely did feel a bit of fear writing it as well, you know [...]

[...]

Just afraid of – I mean, I think as a writer you always ask you know, like is this my story to tell? And am I the best person to tell this story? And that's why it ended up just being from Rosie's perspective because I just thought like even the chapters, you know like asking [Merrki] about Nona, saying you know, what would she think about when her dad's gone? (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Gwynne received strong criticism for his representation of Indigenous peoples in the screenplay adaptation of *Deadly, Unna?* (*Aussie Rules*), primarily for relating the story of the death of a real-life Aboriginal man without community consultation. Moloney's novels were written in first person, from an Indigenous perspective. These were issues of which Atkins was aware, and she does not seem to have used these texts for inspiration. Reading them contributed to her fears and insecurities about the potential appropriation of Indigenous perspective in *Nona and Me*. Her solution to this problem was to tell the story

from the perspective of a non-Indigenous Australian and, therefore, to represent Indigenous characters and cultures through the lens of an observer.

Atkins wanted the setting of *Nona and Me* to be as accurate and authentic as possible, from the physical location and orientation of landmarks to the atmosphere and social composition.

I tried to make it like really accurate so that if somebody like – there’s a principal or ex-principal who grew up there who’s Anglo and she said that she read it and sent me a message and was like ‘this is just how it was for me, you know, and I sent it to my sisters,’ so like that was kind of my aim, was to make it authentic to people who had grown up there [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins mentioned that she did think, briefly, about fictionalising the place but that the source materials, her surroundings, were too identifiable to fictionalise (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016). She cited the mining town atmosphere and the cultural diversity as aspects that would make the town instantly recognisable. As with all aspects of *Nona and Me*, Atkins interviewed and consulted with Aboriginal people, especially on locations of cultural significance.

And even to the extent of like home land, like I asked if you – like my Aboriginal family, can I use your home land to be from this character’s home land and they’re like yep, that’s fine. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

In asking permission to use locations Atkins encountered a range of positive responses. In general people were relaxed, open, and happy and, in some cases, very helpful and generous.

Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs²⁵ (Atkins referred to her as Merrki or Merrkiyawuy throughout the interview) was Atkins’ main support and consultant throughout the

²⁵ Because Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs’ role in producing *Nona and Me* is acknowledged in the public domain her name has not been redacted in this thesis.

process of writing. She was supportive, relaxed, and generous with her knowledge, skills, and time.

[Merrkiyawuy] was great. I mean I've said a lot of times that I couldn't have really written it without her because I felt like I was constantly asking her 'like is this a white construct?', like for example, Nona wanting to be a nurse, I was just like you know, 'that's a really Western concept actually', you know, that you've got to want to be something and that you've got to want to do a job in order to be looked on as a success [...] so I wasn't really sure, 'like is that me saying that she should want to do something, like apart from be in the community?' and Merrki actually did become a nurse at 18, so she was like 'no, no that's right, that's what she'd do!' (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins was reflective and aware of her potential cultural biases, as a non-Indigenous person, which may not have applied to her Indigenous characters. She was also aware that her biases might be problematic in terms of authenticity. Her solution to accessing social contexts other than her own was to use consultation. Merrkiyawuy provided a sounding board for plot and character decisions that Atkins made for the Aboriginal characters in *Nona and Me*.

[...] I was also able to just ask her questions about like the scene with Nona talking about when her dad dies and then just ask stuff like what would she actually be thinking, like you know, about where her dad's gone, what her kids think about that and she was able to say, you know, well it can get quite confusing because of Christianity so, you know, some kids might think where's my dad? He's lost, you know, because – has he gone to heaven or has he gone to the home land? Where is his spirit?

You know, what if it gets lost because it's confused about those two places and all that kind of thing, so ... like stuff like that just came from talking to her directly and just saying what would this character think in this circumstance because I have no idea, you know, how can I possibly know what that character is thinking because they're brought up in a completely different cultural context to me. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

This consultation process allowed Atkins to include authentic details in her characterisation of Yolŋu and other Aboriginal characters, as well as the background of the community in which *Nona and Me* is set. The history of the Yirrkala community as a Christian mission has resulted in a complex and diverse range of cultures and religions that interact with and affect each other. Accurately incorporating these, as in the example of concepts of death in the above quote, provided authenticity. Achieving this authenticity was dependent on Merrkiyawuy's knowledge. Merrkiyawuy's advice provided validation and an authentic Yolŋu perspective, and her warmth and support were a major motivating factor for Atkins.

Yeah, all the time I'd just say to her like – because when I first came up with this story I sat down with her and told her the story [...] and she just cried and she was like 'I think you should write that story.' [...] and I think you should write this story and I'll be your Yolŋu mind [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins expressed intense gratitude for Merrkiyawuy's help with her writing on many occasions throughout the interview. Showing reciprocity and acknowledging Merrkiyawuy as a cultural consultant was something that Atkins felt was important. She includes Merrkiyawuy in the 'Acknowledgements', along with many others, but Atkins wanted to go beyond acknowledgement to reciprocation.

I guess I just kind of thought like that cultural expertise should actually be valued at the same rate as like a professional writer who would come and assess your manuscript because they're putting in the work [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins made the decision to pay Merrkiyawuy as a cultural consultant. She tried and failed to find a standard rate of pay for a cultural consultant on a manuscript. Instead, she based the amount on the cost of a professional manuscript assessment. This partially fulfilled Atkins' desire to reciprocate. Ideal models for reciprocation that Atkins' considered are discussed in the 'Reflections' section below. This stage of the consultation process was very collaborative, successful, and rewarding for Atkins, both in terms of production and personal satisfaction. She did, however, experience some unforeseen difficulties with the

consultation process due to her inexperience using consultation techniques within the context of writing a novel.

For example, she severely underestimated the amount of time it would take to write *Nona and Me* (personal communication, September 1, 2016). Additionally, she discovered that her writing was not going to progress linearly or without extraneous sections that would need to be discarded.

I realised as I was writing 'I'm just going to be wasting [Merrkiyawuy's] time, you know, half of it's just getting chucked out, I'm not going to use that so there's no point asking about this and that and this and that, I just need to write the damn thing!' (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

The importance of having a draft on which to work in the consultation process was brought up in both Murray's and Atkins' interviews. Atkins also stressed the importance of the draft making 'cultural sense' before the consultation begins (personal communication, September 1, 2016). For *Nona and Me*, the role of the author was the initial writing of the story, and the role of the consultant was to assist the author to craft that writing to ensure that it was respectful, authentic, and would meet the approval of cultural stakeholders.

Part of writing a realistic, authentic setting was incorporating a wide array of views from a diverse population. This meant including racist comments and ideologies in *Nona and Me*. Atkins drew upon ideas and comments she read and overheard in the course of her day-to-day activities to give some of her characters racist perspectives. Including negative aspects of the town in which she was living, while necessary, presented challenges, such as the fear of causing offence. Atkins managed this by keeping a record, when she was able, of the reality of racism in the community.

[...] at that time there was like a whole spate of horrible Facebook posts on the notice – like the community notice board, whatever, and I just saved them to a folder thinking, like you know, 'if anybody ever says this is not real, then like this is much worse actually, what I'm reading that's just kind of accepted on the notice board.' (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Another challenge was creating a realistic context within which her characters could express racism, while still preventing certain characters from becoming entirely negative or one dimensional.

[...] I don't think the families there are like actively, you know, 'I hate Aboriginal people' or anything like that, it's just more kind of ignorance and that they just don't have any exposure really, so how do they know any different?

[...]

So I thought it was really important to incorporate those views because that's what it felt like at the time, like town and community were just so separate and yeah, lots of the people in town that I met, some did have a lot of contact and some had never even been out to Yirrkala, just 20 minutes away. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Giving her characters a context for their racism enhanced the realism of *Nona and Me*. Atkins evoked empathy, and combined it with her observations of the separation between the town and Yirrkala, to create depth and authenticity for her characters, even those whose ideologies contradicted to her own.

Atkins approached characterisation by amalgamating information she obtained through questioning, interviewing, and consulting the people around her in Arnhem Land. She also used her own feelings and experiences but, as with her reflections surrounding Indigenous experiences, she was aware of their limitations.

Rosie's journey was based on my own experiences living in that community but then of course I wasn't born there and I haven't grown up there so I didn't have the extreme like really – Rosie's ties are like back three generations so I don't have that, having only gone there for the first time as an adult. So yeah, then I was talking to people who had lived there or whose kids had grown up there alongside Aboriginal adopted family and yeah, it was really informed by those interviews a lot and those people's experiences and their kids experiences as well. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Throughout the interview, Atkins expressed tremendous respect for the structure and interpersonal relationships of the Yolŋu community at Yirrkala. Many of her methods

were used in service of conveying her respect for the community. Amalgamating the experiences of many subjects into the characterisation of one character allowed Atkins to authentically and respectfully represent the familial and community relationships that are built upon and reinforced by generations of connection, yet to write from a non-Indigenous observer perspective. In terms of characterisation of some of the Indigenous characters, the technique of interviewing, observing, and experiencing followed by amalgamation of this information was Atkins' primary method. When asked about the character of Nona's grandmother, Rripipi, Atkins described the inspirations for the character:

Yeah, she was based quite a lot on the woman who adopted – who invited me to Arnhem Land and then her family adopted me. So ... and but all – her, combined with a lot of other really fantastic women of that generation up there, just really strong, really funny, like you know, just lots of personality, amazing leaders, you know despite dealing with it all, extremely talented, could speak many different languages and constantly busy, like working with the community and not giving up and looking after grandchildren and just no crap as well, you know, like kind of just like cut straight to the chase. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Again, Atkins utilised her adopted familial connections to construct a character that embodied an amalgamation of real women whose defining characteristics, as she observed and experienced them, were strength, knowledge, motivation, and activity. Atkins' position as an adopted family member, living in Arnhem land, meant that these women accepted, cared about, and cared for her. Gratitude and respect for the women who supported her were explicit and implicit throughout the interview. Atkins' position gave her the material to draw on when characterising Rripipi, and other characters as well. As Atkins mentioned in the quote above, the Yolŋu women in Yirrkala were, in part, so impressive because their knowledge and strength is contrasted with their ability to cope with the problems suffered by the community.

Suicide and death are frequent in Yirrkala. Attending funerals and experiencing grief over suicide is an inevitable part of life in the community that Atkins was living in. It was a topic that was brought up several times and one of the few negative parts of living in the

community that Atkins spoke about during the interview. Suicide is powerfully depicted in *Nona and Me* through a kind and loving character, Lomu, who dies by suicide, leaving his family and young child bereft.

Yeah, his character came about because there was a spate of suicides, especially in Ski Beach²⁶, it was just after the intervention was announced and it was mostly young guys as well and like even now, you know, while I was there, there was a suicide and this is a big thing, you know, like there's – yeah, suicide in remote communities is unfortunately a really unavoidable – I don't think you can write about a remote community honestly, without having that occur because that is unfortunately what happens at the moment and so his character is not based on anybody in particular [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins, again, used amalgamations of real people and events to characterise Lomu. The methods used in his characterisation and his narrative allowed Atkins to incorporate a sensitive, sadly frequent, and integral part of life in the community. Her dedication to an honest and authentic representation of life in Arnhem Land necessitated including suicide in *Nona and Me*, however there was also an intense, personal, emotional aspect to this inclusion.

[...] he was inspired by thinking about those guys and the reality of who they were and how young they were and how much they had to live for and also attending a lot of funerals and a lot of them of people with kids and how that affected the next generation who would then be growing up with grandparents or extended family or fostered. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins describes being compelled by her experiences of suicide, death and funerals. The sheer frequency took an emotional toll on the entire community of which she was a part. Atkins also drew on personal experience, a non-Indigenous acquaintance of hers who died by suicide. She describes being haunted by the image of this man. She said:

I just do not know how people deal with the grief there, to me it's just too much, like even for me, the number of people that I know who have died there, it's too

²⁶ Located near Yirrkala in East Arnhem Land.

much. And then for them, you know, when it's their close family and it's every other week and it's just, you know, I do not know how they cope at all. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Inclusion of suicide was a significant part of creating *Nona and Me*. It was essential for authenticity and a realistic representation of the community, as well as contextualising and informing characterisation. Atkins' emotions and personal experiences played a role in the inclusion of suicide, which contributed to a powerful and personal perspective on the issue of suicide in remote communities.

Aside from personal and interpersonal research and reflection, Atkins used the contexts of the Intervention and the Apology as integral parts of her characterisation.

So that's why I wanted to set it during the Intervention and also because that kind of mirrors Rosie's journey as well, like with the transition to the Apology and kind of what does the Apology actually mean, you know, if the actions – like the Intervention wasn't repealed and nothing happened, just say sorry and continue on with exactly what we're doing. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Rosie, as a character, was preconceived as the embodiment of government policies. Whether or not the reader would discern this, it is an interesting method of characterisation that brings a national level of complexity to an individual character. It also allowed Atkins to inhabit a space from which she could use more general knowledge from her employment experience and her experience in Aboriginal communities elsewhere to write *Nona and Me*. One of the most striking effects of this method is to leave Rosie and her story open-ended, resulting in characterisation that changes over the course of the narrative but is, if not completely, partially unresolved.

The transition between childhood and adulthood, especially in regard to intercultural relationships, was a major inspiration for *Nona and Me*. Aside from the differences in development and priorities between teenagers from different cultures, Atkins was also interested in the relationship that teenagers have with their location.

But I think it's like, you know, no matter how big or small [the place that you live is] it's like 'oh God, this is such a bloody hole,' you know, 'I want to get out of here!'

And so, you can imagine, if you're living in a remote community that that would strike even more [...]

[...]

Yeah, it's harder to get out and there's not that many people around, you know, yeah, who would be interested in the same things as you as a white teenager. So ... yeah, and that is the time in life that the teenagers – like the gap is as big as it gets really, like that's what it seemed to me, is that like the teenagers in the community might be having babies or spending a lot of time intensively with family or you know, just hanging out, whereas the white teenagers in town, all the Anglo teenagers were kind of gearing more towards like, you know, study, study, get ready for Uni, get ready to go somewhere else, whereas ... yeah. So in terms of connecting, like two friends connecting from those different cultures, that just seemed to me to be the key time that they wouldn't connect and that's what people said who lived there as well, that it was kind of like they – as kids they were really good buddies, teenagers on totally different planets and then only once they had kids they could kind of come back together. Or if they come back to the community as an adult, like in their 20s, late 20s or something then they can reconnect, but as teenagers it was just ... yeah, totally different. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

The implications of what might be seen as rites of passage, either moving away from home or intensifying the bonds with home, seemed to Atkins to cause inevitable breakdowns in intercultural friendships in Arnhem Land. She describes the commonalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children evaporating during teenager years and then returning in adulthood. Atkins, again, used interviews, consultation, and her own observations to write about this phenomenon as realistically as possible. Her research for *Nona and Me* suggested that this was a cycle familiar to inhabitants, and that Atkins' portrayal of it was authentic when read by those inhabitants. Atkins, similarly to Lawson (see 'Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews') chose to represent a problematic relationship between her non-Indigenous and Indigenous protagonists. Doing so created a space for nuance in characterisation for both characters, in addition to exploring the differences and similarities between cultures.

Feedback

The feedback that Atkins received for *Nona and Me* was universally positive. In terms of accolades, it won the CBCA Honour Book of the Year for Older Readers, was longlisted for the 2015 Inky Awards and highly commended by the judges for the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards for Writing for Young Adults (Atkins, 2014). Feedback that Atkins has received from readers is almost entirely from people in Arnhem Land. She has received feedback from readers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and teachers who use the book in their curriculum. Teachers have commented on the contemporary setting of *Nona and Me*. The relatively recent setting makes the novel relevant in many different ways, making it ideal for incorporating Indigenous studies into the curriculum.

Residents of Arnhem Land related to the authenticity and realism of the book.

Yeah, only positive, you know, people who have grown up there who said 'yep, that's what it's like for me as an Anglo person and growing up there.' Yolŋu community who've enjoyed reading it and you know, were kind of happy to see themselves written about [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

The non-Indigenous readers related to the authenticity and realism of the setting, and the experiences of the protagonist as a non-Indigenous teenager growing up in that setting. While the Yolŋu readers also related to the authenticity, they expressed pleasure at seeing themselves represented in fiction. Atkins received some feedback that was more personal.

[...] my momo's daughter, like she was introducing me to some extra family members, 'your family members', she's like 'this is Clare, you know, *Nona & Me*,' like they – you know, like I'm sure they've really never heard of it you know, but it's like – she counts it as, well, as like something that you should know and you should be proud of that and like ... yeah, so it's really lovely. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins' adopted family expressed acceptance and pride in response to *Nona and Me*.

Atkins' comments in this interview convey that she has accepted this feedback with gratitude and pleasure. However, when asked to reflect upon aspects of writing *Nona and Me*, she identifies spaces for improvement in future writing projects.

Reflections

Throughout the interview, Atkins frequently reflected on Indigenous representation. She spoke about her previous television writing experiences as well as Indigenous representation through the lens of her community education training. She also reflected on her personal ideologies, regrets, and fears concerning Indigenous representation.

During her time as a script writer for mainstream television Atkins was asked to write a character who conducts an armed robbery. The specifications did not include a cultural background for this character, but during the casting process an Indigenous man was cast in the role. It was unusual for this show to cast actors with cultural backgrounds other than Anglo-Australian.

There was one character who came in and waved a gun around and was like just basically a fruit loop and a criminal and they cast an Aboriginal guy in the role and I said at the time like 'I don't agree with that and I have a lot of issues with that fact, you know, there's nobody else in the show that's Aboriginal let alone of another ethnicity and this character comes in' [...] the background of the character wasn't explored at all, like it wasn't a regular character where we get to know why they're like that, nor was there another Aboriginal character, like, to balance that viewpoint of the Aboriginal person, nor was there a reason for them to be Aboriginal [...] the people didn't really like [me voicing my concerns] and one person was even like 'oh, you're racist because you're telling us that we shouldn't cast this Aboriginal actor, you know, so you're the one who's actually saying we shouldn't give him a job, you know, he's going to get a job out of this and you're saying we shouldn't.' (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins' ideologies concerning Indigenous representation are long-standing, deeply held and actively expressed, even when there is risk of conflict. There are undertones of emotions such as anger and frustration at the lack of consideration given to Indigenous representation by others. As a result of this incident, she experienced verbal bullying from colleagues and eventually she left the position. Later, while working on Indigenous

workshops through FACS, Atkins found her ideologies supported in discussions with Indigenous women.

I said at the time, 'I've just come from a job working for [mainstream television show] that's what I used to do' and a few of the women did come up to me and said 'you know' (and they all thought that I was Aboriginal because, like, nobody can tell where I'm from), so 'you know it's – the best thing that you could do is if you actually just went back to your job at [mainstream television show] and you just wrote in an Aboriginal character who just had a milkshake at the diner and was involved in a love triangle, you know, like just – like no particular story, that's like not – doesn't have to be a cultural story, just a person who ... yeah. That's their heritage' and so that's what they said at the time, that they would have wanted to see, which was a really good thing to hear. (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

This reflection on past experiences also demonstrates Atkins' belief that in-depth context and diversity of characterisation and narrative within a cultural background are major factors in respectful representation, and that there is value in representations that bring Indigenous people into mainstream narratives without having to comment on culture, as well as representations that authentically represent the detail of culture. The emergence of these ideologies through the interview, themselves, provides a context for the consideration Atkins gave to the backgrounds and authenticity of her characters in *Nona and Me*.

Atkins studied protocols from various Arts industries and noted that the film industry has a comprehensive set of protocols for working with Indigenous peoples. She contemplated the usefulness of having a similar set of protocols for authors.

[...] would it really help like if authors had protocols for working with Aboriginal people or people of colour in order to write books and stuff and talking about it we were just like basically what it comes down to is like there should just be a box like don't be an asshole. You know, you can have all the protocols you want, you know, it is good to have them, but [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins acknowledges that having protocols is generally positive, but questions the practical utility of them, suggesting that common sense, politeness and decency are the main factors in working respectfully in the sphere of Indigenous representation. When asked if she had read the *ACA Protocols* (see Appendix 2: Interview Guide) Atkins responded that she had read them as part of her Community Education university degree along with a range of different protocols from different professional sectors. Rather than being specifically relevant to authors, the way Atkins referred to them in the interview was as part of a maelstrom of general protocols that she applied in her writing.

It became apparent through the interview that Atkins has spent a lot of time reflecting on and analysing the difficulties of writing cultural representations generally and Indigenous representations specifically. She has discussed the issues with a wide variety of people and, at the conclusion of the interview, asked questions of the interviewer about their opinions and ideas, demonstrating a willingness and propensity to actively engage in discourse when given the opportunity, as well as an intense interest in this research project. One of the issues she has contemplated is the difference between representing Indigenous peoples and cultures and representing other cultures with reference to the cultural background of the author.

I'm not white Irish decent as I claimed Rosie was, you know, and she [a fellow writer] kind of said 'you can write a lot of characters and nobody blinks, but when you go to write an Aboriginal character, it immediately draws this, you know, why is that?' and I kind of was thinking about it and thinking that it really is about the power imbalance you know, that – like the history of it and the fact that those voices have been silenced and that – yeah, I think what it basically comes down to is the power imbalance [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

When asked to reflect on the experience of writing *Nona and Me*, Atkins spoke about her regret at the lost opportunity to use methods and techniques that she considers ideal for Indigenous representation in writing and addressing the power imbalance as mentioned in the quote above.

So yeah, if I had – I still don't feel capable of doing it now I've got to say, because I still have young kids, but if they're a bit older and I had more capability, I would want to run like a [...] writing workshop with young people alongside it so that

they could be writing their own stories and to kind of create like an anthology of their stories at the same time which is then – which could be published or even if it wasn't published it wouldn't matter because the skills would be there. Yeah, so I think that would be like the ideal model [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Atkins' ideal methods for young adult fiction writing are resource intensive and would require dedication that she doesn't feel able to give while her young children are a priority. *Nona and Me* was successful in terms of accolades, feedback, and to a large degree, personal satisfaction, however Atkins does feel some regret that her methods and techniques for writing and publishing it are not the best practices of which she could conceive. For Atkins, practicality is not only a consideration but a deciding factor in what methods and techniques can be used in Indigenous representation. Her reflections reveal a balance between resources, techniques, and methods in Indigenous representation in young adult fiction.

Despite some regrets, Atkins acknowledges the pride she feels for the novel, but adds a qualifier.

Yeah, I'm proud of it, you know, like I did the best job that I could at that time and I think that as a writer it's really important to just recognise your limitations as well [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

While Atkins is happy with *Nona and Me*, her self-awareness precludes unequivocal statements on the subject of her writing. She feels that perfection is unattainable because resources are finite. Therefore, any given project will have flaws that more resources could rectify.

[...] I do feel like with *Nona* I would have liked to have a little bit more time to go through and do a final like line edit and like – because I had a baby after I had finished the first draft and so I was like still writing, mostly working on the flashbacks to try to make them more real in the second draft and like with a baby on my lap so yeah, I was just kind of like, you know, sometimes you've got to cut yourself a break and say 'you know what, you did the best that you could in those circumstances' [...] (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016)

Despite the qualifiers Atkins' reflections on the experience of writing *Nona and Me* were, on balance, positive. She focussed on her own development as a result of writing, reiterating that one of the most important lessons she learnt from her experience of writing a novel for the first time was to write the first draft before seeking consultation from others, as well as aiming for collaborative methodology when representing Indigenous peoples. Through these lessons the experience of writing *Nona and Me* has a direct bearing upon her approaches to current and future writing.

Chapter 7: Julia Lawrinson

Julia Lawrinson grew up and lives in Perth, Western Australia. She attained a Bachelor of Laws with Distinction, a Graduate Diploma in Education and a Doctor of Philosophy. Her writing for young people includes eight young adult novels, nine books for children, as well as short stories and contributions to collections. Lawrinson's novel *Obsession* has won the Western Australian Premier's award twice and two other novels have been shortlisted. Her novel *The Push* was shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards for Best Young Adult Book in 2008.

Bye, Beautiful (published 2006)

Bye, Beautiful was shortlisted for the 2006 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards and was the CBCA Notable Book of the Year for Older Readers in 2007 (Lawrinson, 2006). Lawrinson tells the story of Sandy and her family moving to a Western Australian country town in the 1960s, where her father is to be the police sergeant. Sandy is besotted with Billy; a boy whose father was Aboriginal but whose mother was not. To Sandy's dismay her sister, Marianne, wins Billy's love and carries on a forbidden affair behind her family's back. When the two lovers are discovered the consequences for both young people are severe. Billy and Marianne's trials, at times violent and cruel, all stem from the town's opinions on Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal characters are also shaped by how they cope with the prejudice of others. Billy is outgoing and boisterous while his sister, May, is hard, determined, and reserved in the face of adversity.

Bye, Beautiful's 1960s setting is a distant, unknown time for the intended audience. Social etiquette, attitudes and activities are all vastly different from those in modern Australia, including racism and Indigenous rights. The focal character, Sandy, is used as a conduit between the setting of the novel and the reader. Sandy is a young girl, still a child in most ways, and so her understanding of the events going on around her are as limited, if not more so, than the understanding of the reader. Through Sandy's realisations about events in the novel the reader comes to understand the subtle comments on Australia's past racial attitudes. It is when Sandy overhears her parents speaking with Dot and Bill Read, townfolk with unappealing, judgemental characteristics, that it is explicitly revealed that already well-established characters have Aboriginal heritage.

‘So that means...Pat’s the...the...’

‘Yep. She’s a half-caste. Or quarter-caste depending’.

‘You can see it if you look,’ Dot said to Glad. (Lawrinson, 2006, pp.103-4)

Sandy’s reaction to this revelation that Billy and his mother and sister are of Aboriginal descent is dramatic. She runs away, cries, and is obviously deeply disturbed, particularly about Billy. Indigenous culture, characters, and issues are regarded in the novel as horrific, scandalous, and detestable by the non-Indigenous characters. The language they use when discussing such things is accusatory, angry, and derogatory. Terms such as ‘half-caste’ as in the above quote, which reflect Australian government policies that made a deliberate attempt to assimilate Indigenous peoples into white society both by culture and by breeding (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 1997), have an additional impact upon a contemporary reader. Sandy’s extreme reaction to the news is a product of the attitudes of society around her.

Lawrinson subverts the moments of overt racism within *Bye, Beautiful* by describing Sandy’s reflection on her newfound knowledge of the characters in question; Billy, Pat, and May. May’s character in particular had caused Sandy discomfort because of her unfriendly behaviour. Through Sandy, May’s behaviour and looks are analysed for visible signs of her genetic heritage, and for reasons to dismiss May’s attitude as a meaningless symptom of Aboriginality. When May’s characteristics fail to place her firmly into Indigenous or non-Indigenous categories, Sandy’s character is discomforted and confused further. The analysis of May concludes when Sandy reflects that reducing May to ‘just a part-Aborigine, after all: what did her opinion matter?’ (Lawrinson, 2006, p.107) was mainly an attempt to find a convenient way to hide her own insecurities and failings. Sandy’s character has a desire to preserve her own identity as a part of the dominant culture, and therefore be somehow superior to May. May’s lack of assimilation into non-Indigenous or Indigenous culture is a point of discomfort in the novel. Sandy is unable to position her identity in relation to May, and therefore becomes confused. This situation could easily be used to position May as a fictional exemplar of the ‘dangerous stranger’ of Ahmed’s (2000) theory of Australia’s multicultural identity. Lawrinson’s use of reflection conveys to both Sandy and the reader the realisation that her feelings are her own

responsibility, and that May can be accepted as a character with a strong identity who poses no actual threat, despite the inability to categorise her.

Reflection on cultural difference continues when Sandy attempts to use the information about Billy's background to temper Marianne's affection for him. It has no effect on Marianne, but is obviously intended to shock and repulse. Marianne's response represents a change in attitude.

'And even if Billy was part Aboriginal, what would it matter?'

Sandy had never thought of this before. She kicked unhappily at the gravel, and could not find an answer. She reasoned that it must matter, because everybody behaved as if it did. (Lawrinson, 2006, p. 116)

Through Sandy's reflection, *Bye, Beautiful* describes a development of understanding of racial prejudices, both within Sandy and in other characters. Not only does it provide insight into the eventual death of Billy and bring the novel to a close, but it points to an ideological lesson about the harm racism can cause individuals and the overall pointlessness of it in society.

Conspicuously absent from *Bye, Beautiful* are the voices of Billy, Pat, and May. They have a few lines of dialogue scattered throughout the novel, but their words tell the reader very little of their ideas and feelings about themselves, their history, and their heritage.

'Yeah, but imagine if I listened to what some people think about me and my family, eh?' Billy said, cradling Marianne's face in his two hands and looking into her eyes. 'Bloody useless half-castes, bloody living off some white man's money, don't know where they belong. Imagine if I listened to that – I'd be a mental case, wouldn't I?' (Lawrinson, 2006, p.216)

This quote is the only dialogue in the novel in which Billy is able to voice ideas about his identity. It does not reveal many details about his feelings, and is made even less significant by the context in which it takes place. At the time Billy is comforting a distraught Marianne and convincing her to make their relationship legitimate. It could be interpreted as an attempt by Billy to hide deeper feelings for the sake of her comfort. Except for these small pieces of dialogue, the characters of Billy, May, and Pat are almost exclusively focalised through Sandy and through the opinions of the other characters.

Placing the Indigenous characters in a situation where they are under scrutiny from everyone else in the novel yet unable to speak puts them at a disadvantage. In a way, it privileges the knowledge of the non-Indigenous characters over the Indigenous ones (Bradford, 2001). The style of representation of the Indigenous characters is far from assuming an Indigenous voice, but it is not quite impartial observation, as is preferred by Lucashenko (2009) either. Every character who speaks about or muses on the Indigenous characters, including the young and naïve Sandy, undermines their own credibility as an impartial observer by displaying the degree to which their views are biased according to the cultural attitudes towards race around them.

Despite the subtlety of racism in Sandy's narrative, the climax relies on Billy's identity as a boy of Aboriginal background and of the general feelings of the town towards Aboriginality. Billy is killed, and though it is never explicitly stated in the narrative, it is implied that Sandy's father, having discovered Marianne is pregnant to Billy, is responsible for his death. All evidence of this is discarded at the inquiry and blame is transferred to young Aboriginal boys of the area, against whom there is little to no evidence.

By describing the obvious bias of the inquiry into Billy's death and then following with Sandy's very believable imagining of her father's violent rage, Lawrinson shows the depth of racial bias within the town. Even in situations as serious and horrific as murder, the town cannot put aside its prejudice. Instead scapegoats are blamed, and no one is brought to justice. There is the distinct impression that, had Billy not been Aboriginal, he would not have died, and that Sandy's father escaped open suspicion because he was respected in the town and in a comparative position of power within the community.

If anybody else suspected a different story, a story that included Frank Lansing, they did not say so. Even if such suspicions existed, the general opinion among the adults was that if Billy Read was so silly as to meet up at night with a copper's daughter, and one who was already in trouble, he would have deserved a bit of a shove. (Lawrinson, 2006, p. 240)

Through a number of insights into the sentiment of the town, Lawrinson undermines the reader's trust in the town authorities and suggests that the attitudes of society towards both police and Aboriginal people causes bias, even in a legal system that is meant to be

impartial. Marianne's fate is to be exiled from her family by her father. It is Billy's mother Pat – herself often ostracised from society – who shows compassion by visiting and helping Marianne once the relationship to her family is severed.

Bye, Beautiful successfully evokes empathy for those affected and suppressed by racism, and in Marianne's case, other social stigmas. Some other children's and young adult fiction that deals with Indigenous issues and characters makes a spectacle of Indigenous identity and subsequently builds a story around it (F. French, 2002). The issues of discrimination, miscegenation and violent racism in *Bye, Beautiful* are present and underpin the narrative, and the author's ideologies are clear, but they are not the main focus. In *Bye, Beautiful* cultural identity itself is not the issue that causes conflict, but instead, ingrained racism.

Interview Analysis

I do think, well, if white people can only write about white people - there's a difference between writing about and writing from the perspective of, in my opinion. I think we have to because we live with Aboriginal people. I mean, we cannot escape the history of this country and it just seems very naïve to ... I mean, it's not going to be relevant to all stories in the same way that gender is not necessarily. A story is what it has to be. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Introductory Information

Lawrinson's interview was the most difficult to complete. It was the first scheduled, however due to technical difficulties, the first interview was not recorded. The combination of Lawrinson's schedule and the travel required (between Melbourne and Perth) meant that a second attempt was difficult to schedule. Initially both Lawrinson and I tried to recreate the interview in writing from memory, but this proved unsuccessful. Subsequently, Lawrinson generously agreed to redo the interview. The second interview was restricted both in terms of time and location and was subsequently, very direct. The 'Introduction' phase (See Appendix 2: Interview Guide) was omitted completely. There was also some existing familiarity with the questions and responses from the first interview. These factors resulted in a faster interview, however, they also resulted in omission of some details or failure to explicitly state information for the sake of the recorded data. Analysis of parts of this interview, therefore, differs slightly from the others. Any anomalies will be highlighted and explained in full.

Origins and Motivations

When asked about the origins of *Bye, Beautiful*, Lawrinson immediately discussed her family history. Previous generations of her family, in particular her mother and maternal grandfather, feature heavily on all phases of the interview. Lawrinson (personal communication, October 26, 2016) describes her grandfather as a policeman, 'black and white,' very strict and with a strong sense of morality, which he imposed upon his wife and children, including Lawrinson's mother, as illustrated in the anecdote below:

She was probably eight or nine or something, locked her in the lockup and left her there for some time and she freaked out and he came back and said, 'I want you to think of that if you're ever tempted to be really badly behaved because that's

where you'll end up.' Yeah, he was kind of harsh and also very ... a disciplinarian would be an understatement. Yeah, so he did used to use corporal punishment on all the children and it was pretty intense. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson describes her mother's feelings as both loving and being fearful of growing up under the care of Lawrinson's grandfather. Both Lawrinson's grandfather and mother formed the basis for main characters in *Bye Beautiful*.

Events of Lawrinson's own childhood also contributed to the motivations and origins of *Bye, Beautiful*. She describes growing up in the wheatbelt of Western Australia²⁷ in small, rural towns. As an adult, Lawrinson had begun to think differently about her childhood experiences. She realised that she had a growing awareness of people, places, and events in her memories that had not even occurred to her when she was a child. This realisation was compelling to Lawrinson, especially in relation to her growing awareness of the Indigenous history of Australia and contemporary Indigenous issues.

[...] I think I'd become aware of things that I hadn't really known about in my childhood, like the fact that there were Aboriginal camps outside all the Wheatbelt towns and things like that. I just had no idea and I spent a lot of time in country towns and in Mukinbudin in particular. Again, they had an Aboriginal camp outside of town and I knew nothing about it. I think it was still there in the seventies. I could be wrong about that. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

The subjective and fluid nature of perspective over time was a concept referred to throughout the interview in reference to Lawrinson's writing, characters, and personal reflections. In terms of the origins of *Bye, Beautiful*, it was an interesting phenomenon that motivated Lawrinson to explore events in her family's history from multiple perspectives and include the presence of Aboriginal people who, despite her lack of awareness as a child, were present in the places in which she had grown up.

²⁷ Located in the area surrounding Perth, in the south-east region of Western Australia.

Lawrinson cited three main objectives that she wanted to include as she began writing *Bye, Beautiful*. The first was to create a discussion around the treatment²⁸ of women in the 1960s and the legacy of that treatment in contemporary Australia. The second was the treatment of Indigenous peoples, particularly those people of mixed cultural heritage. This was motivated by Lawrinson's feelings that her awareness and her education had been inadequate on the subject. The third aim was to represent complexity in her Aboriginal characters' relationships with each other, to represent Aboriginal identity as belonging to individual people and non-homogeneous. The focus upon these subjects in her writing was motivated by Lawrinson's feelings, through hindsight, that her own awareness and education on the subjects had been inadequate.

Contexts

Lawrinson's answers concerning the context for writing *Bye, Beautiful* were focused on her internal ambition as well as external factors. She had an idea of how her writing was positioned within the space of young adult fiction, especially in relation to Indigenous representation, and was influenced by texts she perceived as being relevant to the position of her writing. She also had premeditated aims for her writing, which formed an internal context for her decisions regarding *Bye, Beautiful*.

Lawrinson (personal communication, October 26, 2016) wanted *Bye, Beautiful* to be different from her previous writing in several ways. She defines her previous writing as being 'humorous', 'contemporary' and/or 'gritty.' Her ambition for *Bye, Beautiful* was to write an authentic historical novel with serious subject matter. In order to accomplish authenticity, Lawrinson was adamant that *Bye, Beautiful* would contain Aboriginal characters:

[...] it would have just felt really false if I'd been writing about a West Australian town and not talked about Aboriginal people. It just would have seemed unrealistic, I guess. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

²⁸ The word 'treatment' was used predominantly as a euphemism for 'mistreatment' throughout this interview. The context in which it appeared in Lawrinson's answers gave an implicit negative meaning to the word. This was also the case in Murray's interview.

Further, Lawrinson was concerned that the writing should transcend her previous writing in quality:

I guess that's what my ambition was and I wanted it to be a really good piece of writing in itself. That's where I started out. I remember when I started, I had no idea whether I was actually going to be able to do it or not. I was quite apprehensive and it was really hard writing. I mean, it was hard writing it from an emotional perspective but it also felt very - it felt like I was channelling something. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson experienced some strong emotions while preparing and writing *Bye, Beautiful*. The personal nature of her inspirations, motivations, and ambitions were all drawn from close family members or self-reflection. The process of writing a novel founded in such a personal space and under the pressure of ambition caused Lawrinson to experience fear and anxiety during the writing process. However, as mentioned in the quote above, there was another emotional force compelling her to write. At the time of the interview, Lawrinson was still unable to define that compelling force, though she hypothesises that real events matching the narrative of *Bye, Beautiful* may have subconsciously contributed to her feelings of 'channelling'.

[...] when it was published I did have a woman who I think grew up in Pinjarra and said, 'Oh, you're talking about what happened with the Pinjarra copper's daughter.' I said, 'What?' Apparently, this is what happened there, that the policeman's daughter went out with an Aboriginal boy and the policeman killed him and nothing ever happened. I still have no idea whether that's actually true or not but she said, 'Oh, yeah, no, everybody knows about that.' I'm like, well, I didn't. I don't know. Maybe I was channelling that. I don't know. Maybe that family trauma or something, I don't know. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Whether Lawrinson was subconsciously drawing on real events and trauma is unclear. Lawrinson's answer, however, is indicative of the kind of compulsion she was feeling. Her feelings were powerful, at times difficult to manage, but also keenly motivating throughout the writing process.

Aside from these internal contexts, Lawrinson was influenced by her awareness of the social, professional, and academic spaces in which she was writing. In the interview, she

spoke about fellow young adult fiction author, Phillip Gwynne, whose experience of representing Indigenous characters and culture in his writing had public, negative results.

I had met Phillip Gwynne at some writers' festival somewhere and it was at the stage - and I'm sure he would have moved on from that [by now] but he was, at that point, quite traumatised by what had happened to him because his view was that he'd done the right things and got the right permission and spoken to people and he was very upset by the Aboriginal response to the book. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson was aware that Indigenous representation in her writing could have serious consequences for readers and for herself. She was aware that she had to be careful and thoughtful in her approach to Indigenous representation. Talking to Gwynne reinforced her ideological position in relation to identity that had formed during the 1990s at university.

You know, I'd gone to university in the nineties and identity politics was a huge thing and I was very conscious of not wanting to write from an Aboriginal perspective. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

At this time, at university, Lawrinson also met an Aboriginal woman who became the inspiration for one of the characters in *Bye, Beautiful*.

I was at uni with a woman called [name and identifying details redacted]. I went to university with her and it was quite instructive for me, getting a different perspective or getting an Aboriginal perspective, I guess, on the way that white people interact with Aboriginal people. I thought about it kind of theoretically, I guess, but that kind of put it right out there for me. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Through this acquaintance Lawrinson experienced, first-hand, the social tensions that can exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. She points to a naivety about the reality of intercultural relationships, despite academic and personal reflection, that was dispelled by interacting with this person at university. These experiences amount to an awareness of multiple cultural perspectives and of the external contexts in which she

was writing, and influenced the techniques and methods Lawrinson used to write *Bye, Beautiful*.

Techniques and Methods

Lawrinson used a wide array of source material to write *Bye, Beautiful* and to inform decisions on narrative, setting, and characterisation. As her own family history was a major factor in the origins, motivations, and context of *Bye, Beautiful*, it was also an important source of information and inspiration for writing, especially in regard to characterisation and narrative:

Yeah, so the character, Frank, in *Bye, Beautiful* is very much based on my grandfather who was a policeman and he was fairly much like the character in the book except he was probably a bit more hard-core than that.

[...]

[...] the story based on the girl getting pregnant out of wedlock was very much my mother's story, so those things were taken from life. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson's family was the basis of much of the characterisation as well as the central conceit of the narrative. Despite the intimacy of Lawrinson's relationship with the subject material, there were still gaps in her knowledge. For example, Lawrinson is still unsure of the identity of her sibling's father, and so in *Bye, Beautiful* that narrative detail was filled by Lawrinson imagining or estimating realistic, plausible solutions, which were also based on what would best serve the narrative. Lawrinson's major source for characterisation was observing real people. Certainly, all of the main characters have their basis in an individual from Lawrinson's family or personal network.

Lawrinson also used her own experiences and reflections as research sources for *Bye, Beautiful*. This was mostly used in creating the time and space for the setting, but also to create the perspective from which the narrative is told.

Okay, well, I did rely on my experience of having spent a lot of time as a child and those memories are very strong for me and I have been back to those areas as an adult and it feels completely different. I was very conscious of that contrast and I wanted to get the childhood sense of it. And again, when I was researching the

novel I specifically went around those areas again [...] (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

By combining her childhood memories with travel and spending time in places she knew as a child, Lawrinson was able to create the setting of *Bye, Beautiful* from two different perspectives, encompassing the space between her naivety as a child and her growing awareness as an adult, especially regarding the proximity of Aboriginal communities. Lawrinson further expanded and contextualised the setting, both in location and time, through reading.

Lawrinson read historical copies of local newspapers and magazines, such as *The Mercury* and *The West Australian* newspapers and *The Women's Weekly* magazine, on microfiche, to gain a broad sense of the social and political atmosphere of Western Australia in the 1960s. Because of her grandfather's position in the police force, Lawrinson was given special access to the State Records Office of Western Australia's archive of Police Occurrence Books.

[...] which was just amazing because I got to see the handwritten notes of the police after every shift, writing about who they had arrested, what had happened and what really came out from reading those firsthand accounts - because they are just writing a record of what they have done. It was very clear to me the way that they wrote about Aboriginal people, what their attitude was to them, it was amazing, just really seriously in police notes it was very evident. Some you could see were quite sympathetic. Others were much more hard-core and of course coming from here, I knew the names. I could recognise Aboriginal names but I think they said native as well, just in case. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Not only did these primary sources provide a broad context for the social environment of *Bye, Beautiful*, as seen through the lens of policing and crime; to Lawrinson, the personalities of the individual policemen who had documented occurrences were implicit in their handwriting and language.

It was more a style thing, so I mean if they had read each other's notes would they have picked it up? I don't think so because they wouldn't be looking for it either. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson identifies her biases here. She was looking for content in the documents other than their intended purpose. As a result, her interpretation of the Occurrence Books is subjective, if grounded in primary evidence. For Lawrinson the Occurrence Books as a source contained a wide variety of individually identifiable personalities, and each had their own opinions and attitudes, including opinions on and attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples.

This diversity gave Lawrinson source material upon which to base contrasting characterisation within groups of characters, such as policemen, in *Bye, Beautiful*.

That was really instructive and that influenced the way that I constructed Constable Bates, for example. I wanted to have that contrast between ... because not all policemen were the same and I wish I could talk to my grandfather now because I still am not entirely sure what his relationship was with Aboriginal people. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson was uncertain about some aspects of her grandfather and therefore was uncertain when developing Frank, the character based upon him. Her understanding of his relationship with the Aboriginal peoples in the towns in which he worked was based on anecdotes from un-verifiable sources, which often contradicted each other.

He felt that he had a good relationship with Aboriginal people and my mum told me about - there was an Elder when they were living in [unintelligible town name] who used to come along and run a stick along the side of the house when she wanted to talk to Pop about what was going on. I think he had a good relationship with the Elders but I don't know about the rest of it and I know that Al Grassby, who was Whitlam's Immigration Minister [...], when he met Pop, called him a racist. Pop said, 'Listen, mate, you've got the wrong end of the stick.'

To this day, I don't know what triggered that interaction or - I talked to somebody else who said 'Al Grassby thought everybody was racist.' Again, I have never spoken to Aboriginal people who had to deal with him, either. I just don't know, so part of the - it was kind of trying to imagine what somebody who was nominally kind of sympathetic but still had that ingrained racism, how they would respond to things. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson resolved her uncertainty using a combination of estimation, by working on the assumption that he was a product of his context, and imagination, in order to consider what actions his context might precipitate. She used the same approach to fill other gaps in her knowledge of family history. More broadly, the nature of the relationships between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal characters was always approached from the non-Indigenous perspective, even when imagination and estimation were used to flesh out the narrative.

Characters who were not directly based on Lawrinson's family and other networks had to be characterised using the same sources; non-Indigenous primary sources, memory, and imagination, but with different methods. The historical social setting of *Bye, Beautiful* includes overt and ingrained racism and sexism. To give her characters authentic perspectives that were consistent with their setting, Lawrinson drew upon real people, mostly employed in police work, by using primary sources.

The name escapes me but a boy who died in custody in 1980. I read a book about that and they had excerpts from the interview with the police from that time and I mean just dyed-in-the-wool racist remarks, so I used that to inform, and again those attitudes towards half-castes was a real, strong element in the way that - yeah, John Pat I think his name was, the way that they - it absolutely informed the way they dealt with people. So, I guess I picked those things out and made characters around them but it wasn't that hard because I also - I do remember what they were like. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson used her memories in much the same way as was mentioned above. She reflected on her thoughts and feelings as a child and used hindsight to build a layer of informed, adult perspective over her naïve childhood memories. When asked about the non-Indigenous characters that made up the background of *Bye, Beautiful* and created the sense of racist social ideologies of the era, Lawrinson said:

Look, some of these, like, I just remember people like that. I remember being a kid and just having very strong reactions to adults. Because I was an only child, I spent a lot of time listening and looking and I just used to come across people like that and I didn't really understand why I didn't like them. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson described and demonstrated obvious biases against people who expressed racist ideologies, and described her biases as being present from childhood. It is important to note these biases are inevitably influential on the personal memories Lawrinson utilises as a writing resource. They are also the foundation of the social justice ideologies reflected in her writing. Between primary sources and her memories, Lawrinson was able to build a diverse cast of individual characters who were consistent with their setting in terms of social attitudes, including towards Aboriginal peoples.

Shifts in socially acceptable behaviours and language over time presented a problem for Lawrinson. Many of her writing methods were aimed at achieving historical accuracy, authenticity, and realism. However, language and behaviours that were common in 1960s Australia have since become taboo. For example, Lawrinson read police occurrences where officers were unable, within the law, to protect women from domestic violence and abuse. In terms of Indigenous representation in *Bye, Beautiful*, the vernacular of the era was highly problematic, with many phrases in common use that are highly offensive in a contemporary context.

Yeah, look, I mean, I think we had - I know we had debate with my editor about the use of the word 'boong²⁹' and things like that because if I was going to be true to the time it would have been much more - that language would have been much more prevalent. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson and her editor reached the conclusion that not only would it be socially inappropriate to use such language in modern times, but that using taboo words would disturb the relationship between text and reader. The decision to minimise the use of taboo language was therefore made by considering an assumed audience and prioritising their needs over fidelity to historical accuracy and realism.

I did pare it back because in the same way that I don't use the word 'fuck' in the way that I actually do in my normal speech, I don't use it in my books because it deflects from what the book is about and you can't put readers offside and to me there would have been a point where if I'd been actually accurate it would have

²⁹ A derogatory term for an Indigenous person.

been so offensive to so many people that it would have been difficult to read, even if it was a correct depiction. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

These sentiments are similar to those expressed by Lawson; that the spectacle of historically accurate language may detract from more important elements of the text. This idea will be discussed in more detail in this thesis during 'Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews'. Though language was edited and sanitised, racism was an important element of *Bye, Beautiful* and so was represented in more subtle ways.

Lawrinson used her memory and imagination to add complexity to the characters in *Bye, Beautiful*. Racism, though present throughout the novel by design, was not at the forefront of Lawrinson's thoughts while writing.

I guess I was thinking about what - I guess I was kind of - the racist stuff gets planted fairly early but it's not total. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Racism is only overtly visible or expressed when more than one culture is present as a subject. As Lawrinson constructed many of her characters from memory, despite her real-life aversion to some people, she was fond of people who in some contexts would express racist remarks or ideas. These people were endearing because of their hobbies or interactions with people of their own culture. To illustrate her feelings about multi-dimensional personalities, Lawrinson uses a character from Gwynne's *Deadly, Unna?* as an example:

One of the things that I really liked about *Deadly, Unna?*, though, was it was a grandfather who was - he went fishing with all the -

[...]

Who, by all accounts, seemed like a perfectly decent person except that he was really racist. [...] That 'except' obviously is a big thing but - (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson values multidimensionality in characters. Racism can be present and influential, but it moves between the background and the foreground as one of myriad

variables that inform characters and events. A notable example of this is the non-Indigenous teenager, Marianne, who falls in love with Billy, a 'half-caste', handsome, teenage boy. Lawrinson sees Marianne as having higher priorities than racial propriety, though she is aware of its existence.

I mean, she's the teenage girl. He's a really good-looking boy. She wouldn't have cared. Also, I think because Billy had high esteem in the community, if he hadn't been like that it might have been different. Also, she is a bit of a rebel but she hides it. It kind of fits in with her to go - you know, she doesn't have any holds barred because he's Aboriginal. That probably attracts her to him more because it kind of fits in with that secret side of herself. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Marianne's characterisation as secretive and rebellious, and Billy's as charismatic and handsome, allows them to challenge the social boundaries of *Bye, Beautiful's* setting and have the illicit relationship that results in the climax of the narrative. Racism is a present and driving force, but without multidimensional characterisation, the plot would not be logical and cohesive.

The narrative protagonist, Sandy, is characterised as a self-portrait of the author, in keeping with Lawrinson's reflections on her child-self.

I was painfully shy and I spent a lot of time looking and listening to what adults did and trying to make sense of it. I still remember just listening and going 'what are they talking about?' I could always get that there was - people were saying things, but there was meaning that was going on beyond that. I remember just being so frustrated when I was a kid, just going 'I want to understand.' I've given that to her. She's watching and she can see things but she doesn't get them. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Characterising Sandy as a quiet, shy observer, who finds much of what she sees inaccessible, aims to create a lens for the reader that performs several functions. She observes subtext but does not explain it to the reader, thereby avoiding didacticism in the text. Sandy's perspective also helps to moderate the taboo behaviours and language mentioned above.

Well, I guess, yeah, because if it had been written in the third person that way, it would have a completely different effect but because you are seeing it through that naïve lens, it is also then the reader has to interpret that as well in a way that I don't think you would [otherwise] [...] (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

By writing through a 'naïve lens', Lawrinson creates situations where the readers are encouraged to impose their own interpretations of events onto the text to derive meaning. This creates a space for the reader to compare and contrast contemporary social values with what is occurring on the page, emphasising the difference in attitudes towards race and gender without the need for explicitly offensive content.

The characterisation of Aboriginal characters in *Bye, Beautiful*, as discussed in this interview, was focussed on May and Billy. May was based on the aforementioned Aboriginal woman who Lawrinson had met at university. Throughout her discussion, Lawrinson emphasised her biases and subjectivity in interpreting the real-world person and the interactions that she drew upon for characterisation. She began by describing her general impression of the person upon whom May was based:

I guess I was probably a bit scared of her, to be honest, because she was so smart but she knew what she wanted. She was very ... I always felt like I was very ... I was very passionate about things but I was also very wishy-washy. I just wanted to try everything. It was really interesting for me to find someone who was absolutely clear. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

This person was intelligent, successful, passionate, and driven. While admiration and respect were evident in her description, Lawrinson admits to feeling intimidated and frightened by her university peer. There was one interaction involving a miscommunication about funding that Lawrinson spoke about in terms of inspiring May.

I seem to remember her kind of getting antsy and just going - I'm paraphrasing. She did not say this but, 'You white people want to - you think you are all great giving out the money but you always want something.' There was something around it, anyway. I just felt that she didn't like me because I was white and again that may not be an accurate perception but it made me reflect on the way that - is that a reasonable response, given how she's probably been treated all her life?

Sure, in the same way that men don't understand sexism because they don't experience it. They just don't get it, so it really made me think about those things and how limited our experiences are. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

The interaction also led Lawrinson to reflect on the cultural and social paradigms that affect behaviour, and the perceptions of the meaning of that behaviour. Despite guessing at the causes of this person's behaviour and accepting it as reasonable within its context, when Lawrinson incorporated similar behaviour into May's character, she avoided extending her guesses to assume the perspective she was attempting to represent. Avoidance, born out of a desire to respect Indigenous culture, was used by several of the participants, notably Lawson, and a more in-depth discussion of avoidance will occur in 'Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews'.

That's why May in the book is always a bit separate. I didn't try and get in her mind, really, because I think it's important to be able to respect the otherness of people and just go that - on one level it's important to understand or be empathetic or whatever. I don't think you want to be - it's different to wanting to colonise someone else's experience. That's really where she came from, was my reflections on her and how that gave me a different experience of myself as a white person. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson not only used her experiences to inform her writing, but her writing also influenced her perspective of herself. Writing *Bye, Beautiful*, and reflecting on the character of May in particular, broadened her awareness of her position in society relative to those of Indigenous culture. The writing of Indigenous characters being a transformative experience is also not unique to Lawrinson and will also be discussed further in 'Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews'.

May's brother, Billy, was also based on a real person, a current acquaintance of Lawrinson's, who she had met in school. Unlike May's real-world counterpart, Lawrinson was careful not to disclose identifying details about Billy's real-life inspiration. This was largely because the person did not already have a public profile, but also because his status as a current acquaintance of Lawrinson's could make him identifiable, which was

of concern to Lawrinson as a matter of ethical practice. Lawrinson describes Billy's real-world counterpart as:

He was based on a boy I went to school with and I know he's still around but he was just this beautiful boy. He was just gorgeous and I mean some of the Aboriginal boys at school were kind of scary and he wasn't. He was just a sweet guy and I'm sure he probably still is. I still see some of his friends on Facebook and his ex-girlfriend and stuff. It was kind of based on him. He was just easy going and comfortable in his skin [...] (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Key characteristics that Lawrinson drew upon to describe Billy's character included the aesthetics of beauty as well as her perception of him as different, non-threatening, good-natured, and self-confident. Billy's characterisation as a popular, young, Aboriginal man in a hostile, racist setting is made possible by these key characteristics.

Yeah, he's kind of the - when a racist person would say something like, 'Oh, I don't like all Aboriginal people but, that Billy, he's all right.' Like that's the kind of affection that he would garner, I guess. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

The 'effortlessly charming' demeanour of Billy's real-world inspiration, which marked him as different from his peers as perceived by non-Indigenous people, allowed Lawrinson to write an Indigenous character that could challenge racism and be accepted with affection by non-Indigenous, racist characters. Without this dynamic the central plot of a love affair with Marianne would either be implausibly contrived or impossible all together.

Lawrinson's approach to Indigenous representation, in general, began with attempts at consultation. The attempts were unsuccessful.

They never responded and I don't blame them. I kind of went, well, I can't really consult with the community. Who am I going to talk to and what am I going to say and so the way that I dealt with it was to say 'I am always approaching this as...' - this is why it's from Sandy's point of view, as well. It's from the white girl's point of view. I didn't make any pretence that I am talking for or from the perspective of

Aboriginal people. I just stayed right away from that, which I think appropriate.
(Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

The lack of success in contacting Indigenous groups led to feelings of uncertainty of how to go about representation. Lawrinson's solution was to write from a position from which she was comfortable and confident, foregrounding her own culture and gender, and avoiding stepping into different, inappropriate cultural spaces.

Feedback

When asked about the feedback she received for *Bye, Beautiful*, Lawrinson states that most of the focus within feedback was on the gender issues in the novel. Feedback regarding Indigenous representation was mostly descriptive rather than analytical or inquiring. The comments were neutral, neither positive nor negative. As this feedback was discussed toward the end of the interview and Lawrinson's answers were quite definitive, not much time was spent exploring this topic.

Reflections

During the interview, Lawrinson reflected upon the experience of writing *Bye, Beautiful*, racism in her writing, her personal development regarding Indigenous representation, and Indigenous representation in writing generally. As was discussed in the 'Contexts' section, Lawrinson experienced varying levels of stress while writing *Bye, Beautiful*. In addition to both motivating and hindering her writing, the stress caused disturbing intrusive thoughts and nightmares, predominantly about her grandparent's house, during the time she was writing.

I have never had the experience writing since. It was really ... went to quite a dark place, for want of a better description. It did feel really emotionally haunting.
(Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson's reflections on writing *Bye, Beautiful* describe a unique, intense, and difficult yet ultimately rewarding experience that drew on intimately personal parts of her own history. When asked to reflect on *Bye, Beautiful*, her response was 'that is one to be proud of' (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016).

One month before this interview took place, author Lionel Shriver delivered a speech at the Brisbane Writer's festival in which she denounced the concept of cultural

appropriation in fiction (Shriver, 2016)³⁰. Lawrinson referred to Shriver's speech multiple times throughout the interview. Lawrinson strongly disagreed with Shriver's opinions on fiction writers having the unfettered right to write about the experiences of others. When reflecting on Shriver's speech she commented:

I really do object to writers just thinking that they can write about anything without any sense of respect or whatever. I think that's completely wrong headed. I mean, they can - you can't stop people from doing it but it's not something that I would choose to do as a writer. It doesn't fit with my sense of ethics. There are other people that I know who have written from the perspective of Aboriginal people or people of other races or whatever. They have done it with respect, with empathy, with consultation, with all of those things. To me, that makes all the difference in the world. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Lawrinson's comments here, again, demonstrate a clear ethical position against cultural appropriation, in particular as it relates to Indigenous representation, and a belief that other writers should adopt a similar ethical stance. Also contained in this opinion is the belief that an ethical approach to writing makes a difference to the quality outcome; that methods and techniques, guided by ethics, can produce writing of a higher quality.

Lawrinson's ethical framework is based on her experiences and upon self-reflection. She made no mention of formalised instruction on the ethics of Indigenous representation. When asked about the *ACA Protocols*, Lawrinson said that she had read them when applying for an Arts Council grant but had viewed them as an administrative necessity and not a practical resource.

When asked what advice she would give to other writers Lawrinson responded:

I think just try and really connect with the people that you're trying to write and just be very clear about why you are doing it, I think. What is it that - Aboriginal

³⁰ Shriver's controversial speech was prominent in discourse in the literary fiction world for several months after its dissemination, both in academic and professional spheres, as well as garnering prominence in the general public domain. As such it was mentioned multiple times in extraneous conversations with the participants. Lawrinson was the only participant to discuss the speech within the recorded interview.

people are really good at sniffing [recognising] bullshit. I do work with a lot of Aboriginal people in my current job and they brook no rubbish and so I think just being honest about why it is and why you want to do that. I think that it's important that white writers do have Indigenous characters [...]

[...]

You can't force it, as well. You can't just put token Aboriginal people in and think that's going to be okay, either. I don't know. I think it requires deep thought. (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

Additionally, this statement from the first interview was paraphrased by myself and confirmed by Lawrinson: 'Last time, I'll just add in, you mentioned be careful and do your research as well.' (Stanton, personal communication, October 26, 2016). Lawrinson's advice, built from her experiences writing *Bye, Beautiful* and in other professional capacities, can be summarised as follows: be thoughtful and careful, be prepared with clarity of purpose, consult with honesty, write about different perspectives, not from them, and keep your subject matter relevant, without tokenism or avoidance. Most of these methods are evident in her discussion of the writing process behind *Bye, Beautiful*. The exception is consultation, which, as mentioned above, was attempted but proved unsuccessful. It is indicative of the transformative experiences Lawrinson has undergone since writing the novel that she now places emphasis on consultation and connection with Indigenous people as an important method for writers. In response to a follow-up question regarding the development of her ideas and methods of writing about Indigenous characters Lawrinson stated:

I am more aware of what an impost it may be on the people you're consulting with, and the way that they may feel about it. I'm aware, for example, that a lot of Aboriginal people are cynical about being consulted, because consulting is very different to engaging with. This is especially the case with fiction, where the writer is the person with their name on the book, no matter how much you put in the acknowledgements. My approach now is to do online or other research where I feel it may be invasive or potentially exploitative to be getting someone's story for essentially your benefit (though with fiction I hope there are broader benefits, in showing readers different experiences of life, and how others' different

experiences changes them). Where it is non-confronting and appropriate, I consult - speaking to a children's lawyer about what happens to kids in a particular legal predicament I'm writing about, for example. But for me, for the kinds of books I'm writing, I am still careful not to write from the point of view of someone who is marginalised. I write from the perspective of the dominant culture, and I don't want to pretend I am doing anything different. But we need kids from the dominant culture not to believe that their experience is the only or the best experience of being alive. (Lawrinson, personal communication, July 19, 2017)

Lawrinson has clearly evolved her creative practice methodology since writing *Bye, Beautiful*. Her emphasis is still on avoiding appropriation, but she now acknowledges greater awareness of the potential difficulties with consultation. She points out that the normal attribution of a book to an individual person could be a barrier to acknowledgement of consultation. This implies that acknowledgement is integral to respectful representation. Lawrinson also makes the distinction between consultation, as simply asking for expert information, and engagement as a reciprocal process. Additionally, she acknowledges that consultation has a significant cost of resources to the consultant(s). To overcome these difficulties, Lawrinson talks about her methods as avoiding exploitation or invasion of privacy by impersonal, general, research methods which relegate the use of consulting, in the sense of getting information from an expert, when the information needed is more clinical.

Chapter 8: Jackie French

Jackie French was born in Sydney and grew up in Brisbane. For the past three decades she has made a home on a property in the Araluen Valley in rural New South Wales. She has had a long career in writing for young people that has resulted in over 200 publications across many mediums and for all age groups. She has achieved over 100 awards for her writing including, in 2016, the Order of Australia – for significant service to literature as an author of children’s books and as an advocate for improved youth literacy.

The Girl from Snowy River (published 2012)

The Girl from Snowy River (Snowy River) is the second book in The Matilda Saga, an epic, transgenerational, Australian narrative beginning in 1894 and spanning the years to 1978. The series is ongoing, with the final novel in the series, *Clancy of the Overflow*, scheduled for publication in October 2019. In 2013 *Snowy River* was a CBCA Notable Book of the Year for Older Readers. In *Snowy River*, the aftereffects of World War I feature heavily, as the 17-year-old protagonist, Flinty, struggles to maintain her family and their family farm in the mountains. Flinty’s parents are dead, as is one of her brothers, killed in the war. Her two younger siblings are in her care. Her older brother and her sweetheart have both returned from fighting, but have been left emotionally and physically distant by their experiences, leaving Flinty bewildered and frustrated. In a bid for financial security, Flinty successfully rides in a lucrative brumby muster, where she meets Clancy, his Aboriginal wife, and another Aboriginal character, Mr Sampson, the manager of a large and successful property. Flinty is badly injured when she is attacked by a mentally disabled war veteran. The attack leaves her with a back injury that may prevent her from walking again. With the help of her loved ones and Mrs Clancy, Flinty’s condition improves and stability returns to her life.

Indigenous representation in *Snowy River* consists of short cameos of characters that are more prominent in other novels in The Matilda Saga. These include, primarily, Mrs Clancy, Mr Sampson, and some peripheral Aboriginal stockmen during the brumby muster. As an historical novel that describes prominent historical events, inclusion of these characters does address the often complete absence of Aboriginal peoples in retellings of Australian

history (A. M. Heiss, 2002b). There are, however, aspects of the representation that lack detail or are otherwise problematic.

The Aboriginal characters are chiefly distinguished by physical descriptions of their dark skin tone, usually contrasted with white hair or teeth. In the quotes below, Flinty is at a large property named Drinkwater. Across a number of chapters, she meets, gets to know, and works with Mr Clancy and his boys:

His 'boys' were natives, one with white hair and a wrinkled, beardless face under his battered hat, the other a few years older than Andy with paler skin and a sharper nose – perhaps a half-cast.

'Well the rest of us'll be there, with bells on, Mr Clancy.' This man had the dark skin of a native too. (J. French, 2012, Chapter 9, Section 2, para. 20)

The older of Mr Clancy's boys grinned, a white smile in the dark face under the big hat. (J. French, 2012, chapter 11, Section 2, para. 5)

'You'll be welcome,' said Flinty, meaning it. She wasn't sure Mum would have invited a native woman to her dining-room table, and Dad had talked of 'half-castes' a bit like he'd talked about dingoes after the lambs. But once you got over the shock of the colour of her skin Mrs Clancy was just like Mrs Mack, only better in the saddle and at conjuring up food on the road. (J. French, 2012, Chapter, 13, Section 2, para. 5)

Read in succession, there is formulaic consistency in the physical descriptions of the Aboriginal characters in *Snowy River*. They are both separated from the other characters and homogenised by their colouring. Accordingly, though Aboriginal characters are present in *Snowy River*, they are rendered in ways that uphold ideals of Aboriginal peoples as the Other (Hodge & Mishra, 1991; Said, 2003).

The comparison of Aboriginal characters to non-Indigenous characters furthers the effect of homogenisation in *Snowy River*. The characters of Mrs Clancy and Mr Sampson are the only two Aboriginal characters where characterisation extends beyond superficial aesthetics and actions. As Flinty muses that Mrs Clancy is 'just like' her neighbour, except for her skin colour, and on Mr Sampson's ambitions for his sons to be educated and own property (J. French, 2012), the Aboriginal characters are collectively assimilated into

non-Indigenous society. While the deliberately constructed mundanity of these characters does allow French to avoid exoticism or primitivism, it also denies them a complex identity. It is true that, despite being written in the third person, the perspective is not omniscient and is tied to Flinty's naive outlook that signals her upbringing in an historical time. However, there is no part of *Snowy River*, including in the explanatory notes, where the homogenisation and the use of anachronistic and offensive terms such as 'half-caste' are challenged for a modern audience.

Romanticisation – another hallmark of Aboriginalism – is arguably present in the representation Mrs Clancy. In the narrative, she disguises herself as a man to circumnavigate racial and sexual discrimination. The ruse is a well-known secret that allows her to be accepted in places where an Aboriginal woman cannot go in order to remain with the man she loves: 'Mrs Clancy rode with her man even if she had to be disguised as drover's boy to do it³¹' (J. French, 2012, Chapter 34, Section 2, para. 6). Historically, drovers' boys were Aboriginal stockwomen who dressed in male attire to avoid social and legal persecution in early 1900s Australia. There are many facets to this phenomenon. Some historians note the respect demonstrated by non-Indigenous men for the skills these women possessed, some discuss the lack of wages paid to these women and their general disempowerment, and others note use of disguise to circumnavigate laws against interracial marriage and sex (Chesser, 2008). Some of these Aboriginal women were victims of massacres, where the men in their community were shot and the women were kidnapped and forced into slave-like conditions (Egan & Ingpen, 1997). Drovers' boys, therefore, were a complex phenomenon of exchanges between power and freedom. As with much of *The Matilda Saga*, there is an intertextual aspect to French's representation of Mrs Clancy – taken from the folk song by Ted Egan, *The Drover's Boy* (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017), which also depicts a caring relationship between a drover and his 'boy' but includes an ominous verse:

And he told of the massacre in the west

Barest details – guess the rest

³¹ Further discussion of intertextuality in French's writing is discussed in 'Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews'.

Shoot the bucks, grab a gin

Cut her hair, break her in

And call her a boy – the drover's boy

And call her a boy – the drover's boy (Egan & Ingpen, 1997)

This verse complicates the sad, romantic image of the drover mourning the dead Aboriginal woman by suggesting that violent coercion was the origin of their relationship. This aspect of the song is absent in the characterisation of Mrs. Clancy in *Snowy River*, instead emphasising the romance and silencing the complications it implies.

Mrs Clancy is also a keeper of Aboriginal medical knowledge which she uses to aid in Flinty's recovery. In the 'Author's Notes', French (2012) states:

I have deliberately not given any clue about the fungus Mrs Clancy uses in this book. [...] The source of the green ointment and the wattle species she recommends are also left deliberately vague. The bush is a living larder and chemist shop, but it takes many years to learn what can be safely used, and how to do it. (Author's Notes, Section 12, para. 3)

While it is not explicitly stated, it is implied through Mr Clancy's dialogue that his wife's knowledge of medicine comes from her cultural heritage (J. French, 2012). In warning readers, within the paratext, about the expertise needed to prepare and apply 'bush medicine', French acknowledges the importance, power, and reality of Mrs Clancy's intellectual property. Within this acknowledgement, however, lies a contradiction. Mrs Clancy's cultural heritage is never specified. The custodians of this intellectual property are therefore never acknowledged, contradicting Janke's (2008) assertions in *Protocols* that:

Attention must be paid to the cultural accuracy of using Indigenous knowledge, cultural information and stories. (p. 6)

And that:

It is important to seek consent from and acknowledge the Indigenous country and custodians [...] in the acknowledgment of a published text about a specific Indigenous country. (p. 34)

French's use of Indigenous intellectual property is not without care. She communicates respect for such knowledge. However, by presenting this intellectual property while lacking accurate, specific, cultural acknowledgement, French implicitly claims authority over that intellectual property.

Snowy River is one part of an ambitious series about Australian identity. The inclusion of traditionally silenced groups such as Aboriginal peoples, migrants, and women subverts the predominantly white, masculine narrative of Australian history. Close examination of the Indigenous representation elements of the text, however, reveal problems surrounding the construction of specific, strong identities for Indigenous characters and ambiguous authority over intellectual property.

Refuge (published 2013)

Refuge was a CBCA Notable Book of The Year for Older Readers in 2014 and was shortlisted for the 2014 NSW Premier's Literary Awards in the dual categories of the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature and the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW Award. *Refuge* shares much of its ideology with *Snowy River*. The plot begins with the protagonist, Faris, and his grandmother, Jadda, making their way to present day Australia as refugees. They travel by boat from Indonesia. Their boat sinks in rough water, and Faris seems doomed to die in the ocean. He is then transported to a metaphysical plane where child-migrants and refugees appear as they experience a moment of life or death. While they are in this place, 'Refuge,' the terror of their real-world predicament is frozen until they decide to return through a mystic portal. The group of children is very diverse, from different times and places, spanning 60,000 years, and from all over the world. Each child has their own domain where everything is as they dreamed Australia to be. There is also a beach that remains constant, where all the children meet and play with each other. The novel is a grand narrative of migrant history, refugee experiences, and Australian identity, with a heavy emphasis on subjectivity. Analysis of *Refuge*, in the context of this project³², focusses on the characters of Mudurra and, to a lesser extent Juhi. Mudurra was the first child to arrive in Refuge, while fleeing a volcanic eruption 60,000 years in the past.

Subjectivity is emphasised in *Refuge* as the lines between fact and imagination and reality and magic are constantly blurred. The identities of the characters are seated in others' perspectives, and are therefore also blurred and vague. In the 'Author's Notes', French includes a fictional list that appears in the main narrative. It is a list of the refugee children who have appeared in Refuge. First on the list is Mudurra:

1. Mudurra – fourteen years old at Refuge. Born in what is now East Timor circa 60,000 BCE. Arrived in a canoe, fleeing a volcanic eruption. Married Juhi.

[...]

³² There are many more points to be made about Indigenous representation in *Refuge* that are not included in this analysis. In the interests of staying within the bounds of the project, overt representations are prioritised and metaphors and inferences are excluded.

24. Juhi (surname unknown) – born in South Sudan in 1990. Fled Sudan for Ethiopia in 2003. She arrived at Refuge in 2005 and married Mudurra circa 60,000 BCE. May their lives have been blessed forever. (J. French, 2013, Author's Notes, Section 8, para. 1)

Mudurra and Juhi's relationship results in Juhi returning to Mudurra's time and becoming his wife. Her role in history is inextricable from his and therefore holds a similar significance, even though she is mentioned less often within the contexts that are relevant to this analysis. Mudurra, while not born in Australia, journeys to Australia at the point in history at which it is estimated the first ancestors of Indigenous peoples arrived. It is suggested often, though in keeping with the style of the narrative never definitively stated, that he is either the first or among the first humans to travel to Australia. For example, in this exchange between Faris and another character, Susannah:

'What about Mudurra and Juhi?'

'They are too far back for history. But I think they are with us nonetheless. Have you ever wondered who was the first person to step onto Australia? Maybe it was Mudurra.'

'With Juhi beside him?'

She laughed again. It was the girl's laugh, from the old woman. 'Why not? Maybe he dreamed Australia just like he dreamed the beach. Maybe without him none of us would be here. (J. French, 2013, Chapter 31, Section 1, para. 54)

Another example is in this passage:

'I never dreamed of a beach like this!'

'Nor did I. Nor Billy. But Mudurra did.'

Faris looked down at the young man calling out something as he threw the ball to Juhi. 'The beach is Mudurra's dream?'

'I don't know,' said Susannah quietly. 'Mudurra came here first, long, long before the rest of us. Maybe the beach has always been here, waiting for those who need it. Maybe Mudurra imagined it, just like you imagined the house you live in now.'

Mudurra never leaves the beach. This is all the world he has.' (J. French, 2013, Chapter 8, Section 1, para. 15)

Mudurra is not only discussed within the text as being the first person in *Refuge* and/or real Australia, but also as the possible creator of both places. The use of 'dream' to describe creating places is evocative of the spiritual and knowledge basis, as well as creation stories of Indigenous cultures, often referred to as the Dreaming. As Hodge & Mishra (1991) note, Dreaming is often used to relegate Indigenous cultures to a primitive space and to imbue them with a mystical, magical quality that resists grounding in reality. In terms of primitivism, Mudurra's physical description as naked and with a stone knife (J. French, 2013) is primitive, but justified by his pre-colonial time of origin. However, that Juhi and Mudurra are the only characters 'too far back' in history to be remembered in modern times does, indeed, set them apart from the other children in a primitive, historical realm evocative of Aboriginalist imagery (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). In terms of mysticism, Mudurra is represented as distant and alluring compared to the rest of the group.

Billy still grabbed most balls. Faris looked at Mudurra. The naked young man had a smile about his eyes.

Mudurra could catch every ball, thought Faris. He is taller and stronger than Billy. But he lets Billy win. He allows Billy to be king. (J. French, 2013, Chapter 4, Section 1, para. 21)

Mudurra is represented as wise, knowing, and paternal. Although every character has dreamed their own version of Australia within a metaphysical plane, Mudurra is the creator of all that makes their dreams possible on the metaphysical plane and in reality, as well as potentially being the first ancestor of Indigenous peoples, with Juhi as his wife.

Refuge represents a hugely diverse range of cultures from a diverse range of times. By telling a grand narrative of migrants and refugees to Australia from the very first people to arrive to the present day, *Refuge* also theorises a pre-colonial settlement narrative for Australia as a continent, in the form of Mudurra and Juhi. Mudurra's characterisation as alluring and unknowable, and his final position as lost to time, conform to some of the signifiers of Aboriginalism. In particular, though he is not born in Australia, he is

presented as a possible creator and ancestor of Australia as a country and potentially, together with Juhi, ancestor to the first Indigenous peoples.

Interview Analysis

But slowly I began to realise that not putting Indigenous characters in was in fact writing them out of history. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Introductory Information

The interview with Jackie French was conducted under unique circumstances. Due to French's availability and requirements, the interview was conducted over the phone, instead of face-to-face, and with a time limit of one hour. French was concerned that there would be parts of the interview that she would not want recorded. We agreed that if subjects came up that she did not want recorded we would change the topic and return to them after the recorded section of the interview was over. For these reasons, it was the most limited of the interviews in terms of conditions and timing. These restrictions had an impact on the level of detail and depth in the discussion and communication. In particular, there was little opportunity to explore some of the complexities sitting at the heart of the central concern of this thesis: for example, French does not agree that *Refuge* contains representations of Indigenous peoples³³. Despite this difficulty, the interview did produce data about French's experiences and methods of writing that have informed the outcome of the project.

Writing is French's life, identity, and passion. When asked about highlights in her career she described an early writing experience:

Probably writing my first book at the age of six, realising that it was so easy, it was so much fun and even better, that you got such rapturous reception from people when they read it. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French views this moment as the one that made writing her identity, as well as an activity she undertook. During her early adulthood, outside influences made French doubt the possibility of making a career out of writing, but when financial pressure built up, writing provided relief.

³³ *Refuge*, nevertheless, fulfilled the text selection criteria for this project. Many public sources contend that it contains Indigenous characters. Such sources were a major influence in selecting texts (see page 181 for further discussion)

[...] I was desperately broke living with a baby in a shed in a bush. I needed it was \$106.44 to register my car and I could think of no other way of getting it than sending off a story [...] (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French received the money she needed, and the confidence to continue to earn money as a writer:

[...] I realised, immediately, almost immediately after sending off my first manuscript that yes, of course you could make a living as a writer in Australia and I should have been doing it at least a decade beforehand. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

From her first novel *Rainstones* (first published in 1991 and one of many of French's books to contain Indigenous representations), French's career continues to be productive, resulting in a large body of work; over one hundred and twenty books, in addition to articles and other publications (J. French, n.d.). Her approach to writing as a career is one of professionalism, routine, and structure. French's interview demonstrated consistent confidence, strong opinions, and an equally strong experiential base.

French described experiences from her life that gave her a feeling of connection to Indigenous peoples.

[...] I was kicked out of home at 15, I was sort of rounded up with a whole lot of homeless [...] kids by Indigenous [name redacted] in Brisbane and with Kath Walker [Oodgeroo Noonuccal] and [name redacted] they decided to make us all Noonuccal so we would actually have a sense of place and belonging. None of us were Noonuccal, of course even the Indigenous ones were from other areas, but they decided that yes, they would adopt us as Noonuccal. I don't identify as Noonuccal, but for two and a half years, I was told I was Noonuccal and given – and basically instructed to be Noonuccal and they – I think they saved my life and saved my sanity. But I'm not Noonuccal and nor do I live there. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French's inclusion in Oodgeroo Noonuccal's education programs gave her support during a difficult period in her life. Her gratitude and fondness for those who cared for her was evident. Also evident was tension on the subject of identity. French's phrasing, 'I was *told*

[emphasis added] I was Noonuccal', implies that a Noonuccal identity was imposed upon her and not adopted by her. French went on to comment on the place she has lived for over forty years (J. French, n.d.):

I live in the land of the Dhurga people of the Yuin nation and those are the traditions that I now keep, not the Noonuccal ones. And I do, to some extent, a very limited extent, but to some extent, I follow the tradition of a Dhurga woman. To a very, very, very limited extent. And look, we're now entering an area where probably a – I can't get – I probably shouldn't talk more about that. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French's connection to the area where she currently lives surfaced throughout the interview, including embracing her family history and the influence on her writing methods. She discussed her connection to the local Aboriginal community, the Dhurga language group, and claims a limited involvement within the cultural traditions. French took care to stress the limited extent of her relationship with Dhurga culture, and stopped short of further explanation.

Origins, Motivations, and Contexts

Due partly to the constraints upon the interview, and also because of the nature of French's perspective on writing, the origins, motivations, and contexts often overlapped with little time to explore them individually. As such, unlike other interview discussions, they are reduced to this single section.

For most of the interview *The Girl from Snowy River (Snowy River)* was discussed within the context of its position as part of The Matilda Saga series, which contained six novels at the time of this interview, with plans for more to be published. More than once during the interview French mentioned that the context of the entire Matilda Saga was necessary to understand *Snowy River*.

[...] so it's a book which can only really be seen I think in the context of the other books, probably even more than all the other books, which probably work better as standalone books. *The Girl from Snowy River* probably is one that has to be seen within that context. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Snowy River is the second book of the series. French spoke about the motivations and origins of The Matilda Saga as a desire to tell the grand narrative of Australia:

I wanted to tell the story of the nation of Australia from the point of view of those who had no official voice, from the point of view of the women, Indigenous people, Afghan, Chinese, etcetera, those who had no vote or had no vote in 1892 when the series began. And so The Matilda Saga is literally the story of – the nation of Australia [...] (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

The Matilda Saga, then, is the story of the formation of Australia's identity as a nation. The novels cover major events both local, such as the federation of the Commonwealth of Australia, and global, such as World Wars I and II, and the Vietnam War. Perspectives vary in time and space. Characters from the past, present, and future interact with each other, and characters move away from Australia and return home again. French's motivation for writing the saga is to fill gaps that she has identified in the narrative of Australia's national narrative by taking the perspective of marginalised groups.

Snowy River fulfils French's motivation by depicting a female protagonist who is socially segregated from male experiences after World War I.

[...] you have got Flinty McAlpine who was not present at a war and finds that the men have come back changed and will not talk to her [...] [as war was a man's secret]. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Traditional Australian folklore and poetry were highly significant as inspirations for the novels in The Matilda Saga. The first novel, *A Waltz for Matilda*, and *Snowy River* both take their titles and narrative inspiration from well-known Banjo Paterson poems, *Waltzing Matilda* and *The Man from Snowy River*.

French demonstrated a passion for history throughout the interview. The contrast between past and present were often found in her interview responses, and formed a consistent context for her writing. When discussing the poetry that inspired *A Waltz for Matilda*, French stated:

There are questions in *Waltzing Matilda* that the modern reader simply doesn't understand. You can't stuff a sheep in a tucker bag, trust me, I used to be a sheep farmer [...]

[...]

It was obviously a set up and people who sang the song back then would have known that. This was a song about a setup, a man being set up for a crime he did not commit who would prefer to have actually jumped in the billabong than be taken for a crime he didn't commit. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French's passion and confidence in her interpretations extended to the inspirations and intended purpose of her writing. French draws on her experiences in farming and her passion for history in her interpretation of *Waltzing Matilda*. French believes her interpretation is accurate based on the historical social context in which it was first published and read.

The poem³⁴ that was based on actually ends with the horse dropping dead because a willing horse will literally run until it dies for a rider that it trusts enough, and so the original poem was written as a warning; you do not do that to your horse, you don't ride it down the 'mountainside where any slip was death', nor do you ride it until their 'sides are wet with foam' etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. You do not do that, and any horseman or horsewoman listening to that poem back then knew that. The man from Snowy River was not a hero, he was someone who did something a good horseman should never do to a willing horse. And so that – that really, again, is where the book comes from; the fact that modern readers read these poems, read the stories, read the legends, but we have lost the context in which they were written.

We're not horseman or horsewomen anymore, we don't realise the crimes that the man from Snowy River committed. But Flinty McAlpine – and Flinty McAlpine

³⁴ A preliminary survey of relevant sources such as the Introduction from *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses* found nothing to suggest that *The Man From Snowy River* was based on a previous poem (Kirkpatrick, 2009). It is possible that suggesting so was an erroneous slip of the tongue, referring to controversial claims of the basis of the main character being a man named Jack Riley (Australian Government, n.d.).

[too] does not realize until she does it herself. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French's writing of *Snowy River* was motivated by a desire to contradict modern romanticisation of *The Man from Snowy River* as a heroic tale and assert her interpretation of historical social contexts, which inverts the narrative into one of folly and recklessness.

French incorporated other, more contemporary, Australian folk culture into her work. Ted Egan's *The Drover's Boy* provided a context which influenced the narrative and characterisation of two particular characters in *The Matilda Saga*, Clancy of the Overflow, a non-Indigenous stockman, and his wife Rose, an Indigenous woman who works with Clancy while dressed as a man.

The point about *The Drover's Boy* is that as the drover's boy lies there injured, the [watchers] realise that the drover's boy is in fact a woman and the wife of the man who is kneeling by her as she's injured. And it was not very common but reasonably common then for Indigenous women to work with cattle, but as men. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French proceeded to discuss the real-life women who were the historical basis for the character of Rose. When asked about the possible abuse the women may have suffered, French responded:

Yes, it may have been a way of getting sex etcetera, but nonetheless, they would certainly be respected as comrades, but anyone on those [trips] would be. And also they would be months away from civilization. There are so many stories of white stockmen getting incredibly belligerent at pubs when their black comrades weren't served and in fact the phrase 'in fact he's a white man', that was one of the ways it was used. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

While acknowledging the possible sexual nature of the relationships in *The Drover's Boys*, French focusses on stories that demonstrate respect for the experiences and skill of the Indigenous women. In this discussion, as with many in this interview, French distils historical events to uncover essential pieces of Australian identity. In this case traditional Australian values such as mateship, bonding, protecting, and advocating with your peers,

is brought into an unexpected context. Where it would traditionally apply to white men only, the stories French focusses on expand mateship to include Indigenous women as well.

When asked about the contexts in which she wrote *Refuge*, French acknowledged the influence of contemporary events and social issues.

I think it is important to realise that everyone who has come to Australia pretty much has actually come as a refugee, whether it's 60,000 years ago or most certainly at a time of great geologic upheaval to the north or whether it's today, basically we have all come as refugees, it has always been much easier to go somewhere other than Australia. We are a long way away from anywhere and for some people they had no choice, for some people it was [aspiration] and for other people, in fact probably quite a lot of people, the distance of Australia from other places was actually an advantage, particularly after World War I and World War II, people just wanted to get away from places where they had [suffered] and Australia is pretty much as far as you could go.

[...] Australia has never been an easy option and yet people have chosen to come here. So, I wanted to make the point that basically we are all boat people, we have had 60,000 years of boat people and it is not going to stop. The reasons why people have come here to escape or to get our resources are not going to change. We have to look at what's happening today in historical context, but we also have to accept that if it's happened for 60,000 years it's very, very unlikely to stop next week, no matter what government policies we have. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Refuge was written in the latter half of 2012 (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017), within the context of Australia's preoccupation with and fear of refugee migrants³⁵. Within her assertions that most migration is out of necessity, French overtly

³⁵ The term 'boat people' came into usage in Australia in 1976 at the beginning of the mass migration of Vietnamese asylum-seekers post-Vietnam War (J. Phillips & Spinks, 2011). The term is generally used, in modern vernacular, to connote illegality and unfairness as well as 'asylum seeker' or 'refugee'.

indicates parallels between all migrant experiences, from Indigenous peoples from thousands of years ago to diverse migration in the present day. This is despite the spectrum of circumstances that have necessitated migration. Refugee policy was prominent in political discourse during the period French was writing. As with *The Matilda Saga*, French was motivated by the desire to tell a grand narrative, about refugees and Australia, that encompassed past and present.

Techniques and Methods

French has a pragmatic, professional, and structured approach to her writing. Working on one book at a time, after an initial thinking and planning period that could last years, French's writing falls into an annual cycle.

[...] I usually think about books for at least three years before I write them. So that – the rhythm is one that I've just found works for me. December/January or January/February is usually quiet – I can really focus on the big book. Usually by the latter half of the year I've been talking to schools and kids a lot so I'm more in the mood to actually write for that age group. Picture books can really be written at any time, depending on the inspiration and just having a couple of weeks free to do it. So yes, it fits in with the rhythm. No, I've never – there's never been anything that's interrupted it. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Since that post-Vietnam War era the arrival of refugees by boat and otherwise has become increasingly politicised, in part due to the introduction of major political policies. In 1992, the Keating Government introduced a requirement of mandatory detention upon arrival for non-visa holders. In 2001, the Howard Government enacted policy preventing refugees from reaching Australia by either turning boats away before they reach Australia's migration zone, or detaining and processing asylum claims off-shore (Betts, 2003).

Subsequent governments have built on these policies or used them as powerful rhetoric in their bids for public attention. The policies are strongly opposed by proponents of humanitarian treatment of refugees and supported by those concerned by Australian resources being used for refugee management and the threat of multiculturalism to Australian identity (Betts, 2003; Laughland-Booy, Skrbis, & Tranter, 2017). Because of the divisive and affective nature of the discourse, refugees and Australia's response to them has been a constant, if not increasingly, public and political issue throughout the 2000s to the present day.

Driving this work cycle is dedication and passion for the act of writing. French described writing when mundane circumstances prevent it and stated that '[...] even a heart attack 13 years ago didn't interrupt the writing [...]' (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017). French's dedication to writing was further demonstrated as she recited a story about her upcoming knee surgery:

I have actually asked the surgeon whether I could actually have an epidural and keep writing [through the operation] but he said no, I'd be moving too much, my upper body would be moving too much, so no, I'm not going to be able to write. Remain conscious, yes, but not allowed to write. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French's approach to her writing career is striking in its structure, precision, and assurance of production, no matter the obstacles. The act of writing is inevitable, with no dependence on content. While her motivation is constant, as the interview moved on to specific novels, it became apparent that French uses a broad variety of methods to craft her narratives.

Techniques and Methods in *Snowy River*

Poetry, in addition to acting as inspiration, was a major influence upon the content of *The Matilda Saga*, including *Snowy River*. Elements such as plot and characterisation were drawn directly from French's interpretations of poems. *The Drover's Boy* also provided inspiration for the plot and characterisation of *The Matilda Saga* characters Clancy and Rose.

And also to – look, there is also so many of the things that many of the old poems that actually come out in that story but seen from a different point of view, why did Clancy go to Queensland? (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

In the poem *Clancy of the Overflow* by Banjo Patterson (2009), the narrator is informed that 'Clancy's gone to Queensland droving, and we don't know where he are'. French used this and other gaps in the narratives of many poems as a basis from which to imagine new narratives for poetic characters, which she then used in *The Matilda Saga*. Additionally, she fulfils one of her motivations for writing *The Matilda Saga* by imagining the events described in Australian poems from alternate perspectives, including that of the 'drover's boy' in the form of Clancy's wife Rose. Bringing the two historically unrelated folk-poems

together is an example of the complex intertextuality that underpins *The Matilda Saga*. By using intertextual elements from well-known Australian poetry, folk songs, and folklore, French's writing is saturated with markers of 'traditional' ideas of Australian identity in line with her motivations for writing the story of Australian nationhood.

The second of French's motivations was to write that story from marginalised perspectives. *Snowy River* is set within a time and place where women and people of other cultures – including Aboriginal peoples – were highly restricted within Australian society. In order to create characters that were credibly, but unusually empowered within their setting, French used her knowledge and experience of education as a tool for empowerment, especially in rural Australia. French describes her view of rural education in the 20th century as:

Australia was a place where there were a lot of very, very well-educated people who had social mental problems or alcoholics etcetera, etcetera. They certainly weren't fit for respectable society, but they also were very, very, very educated and that education was often what they really had to sell. So you'd probably get a teacher who might actually whip you till you bled [unintelligible] and has various other social problems that we won't even go into, but nonetheless, they would give you access to a very, very, very good education. When I was young and in fact first coming into farming areas, that was always one of the enormous surprises of people who, on one hand would be barely literate, but on another had an extraordinary education within specific areas that their teachers had known. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

This view is informed by French's own experiences living in rural areas, and also through family stories, as her great-grandfather was a teacher in a 'bush school' and went on to become a headmaster in a 'major school'. French gave these positive, educative backgrounds to her characters. This contrived to give characters who were female, poor, or Indigenous plausible, progressive perspectives and allow them to transcend the social and political constrictions of their setting.

Well, with the women, I usually make them come from very well-educated backgrounds. Matilda is from a very poor background but she has been – she goes to what they called [penny schools] run by two very, very stropky sisters. It was

quite common for them and actually my grandmother for that matter, who had an extraordinarily good education but never had any form of schooling whatsoever, she went to a school run by women. The father was happy to hire a tutor in any subject she wanted, but she was never allowed to go to university. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French drew on family stories about her grandmother to inform the educational backgrounds of her female characters. Even with a patriarch who was supportive of education for women, French sees her grandmother's experiences as less formal and more restricted, yet still resulting in a quality education. French implies that giving her characters backgrounds that included good education was a narrative device to make her characters exceptional.

[...] so I had my characters do that, but basically for – this was the sake of narrative possibility, you need to have someone who has a slightly modern point of view because otherwise they don't even notice limitations of the society around them. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French often used directive and controlling language when describing her characterisations or character narratives, such as 'I *had* my characters *do that* [emphasis added]'. This phraseology implies that decisions about different characters arise from problem solving actions taken by French towards an overarching idea. By making her characters, in this case the female ones, special or exceptional in comparison to others of their era, French gains the opportunity to challenge 'limitations' and anachronisms which disempower women, Indigenous peoples, and other marginalised peoples within the settings of her novels.

Generally, French describes her methods of storytelling and characterisation as having a basis in historical reality.

My novels are fiction but nothing in them is untrue. Every character, every incident is based on a real person and a real incident. Every place is based on a real place, so – well I certainly won't run out of stories because my past has been rich in stories and I'm still gathering the stories, but you can't write about any character out of nothing. Or you can't write well about any character out of nothing

and to understand any culture you need a very, very, very long exposure to it. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

As French describes it, she needs to feel that she understands the people and places about which she writes fictional stories. Understanding is achieved through experience, and immersion over a long period of time.

[...] if you don't have that exposure to the culture, the very deep exposure that it takes years, not weeks or months, it's not going to work. I don't research any of my books. If I need to do any major research I know I do not know enough to write the book. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French makes a clear distinction between knowledge acquired before the writing process and that acquired during the writing process. She firmly believes in beginning to write with most if not all of the knowledge required to complete the writing project already in place. Like many of the other participants in these interviews, French amalgamates and manipulates observations and experiences from her life to form her writings. She is unique, however, in the localisation of her sources to her home and its immediate surroundings.

Even *Refuge* which covers so many cultures and so many thousand years, it's still based on people who live in [redacted], which is a town that's made up of people from many cultures over 60,000 years [...](J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

By firmly grounding her writing in and around the narrow area where she lives, French relies on her immersion in the people and land to provide the 'understanding' she feels is necessary. She uses imagination to change the more superficial elements, such as setting, to create difference and variety between her novels.

French purposely accumulates stories from the people around her:

I have been very lucky to grow up, very richly provided with stories, but also to – I like listening to stories, it's still what I mostly do when I talk to people, you ask them where they're met, you ask them where they met their husband, you ask them where they grew up, etcetera. I just automatically get people telling me

stories and so I'm still gathering the stories that get made into patchworks that become my books [...] (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

As well as using stories from her family and personal background, French habitually collects stories from people she meets to incorporate into her writing. These people range from friends and family to barest acquaintances. In one case – which will be discussed in the 'Reflections' section of this thesis – an acquaintance had a pivotal influence on Indigenous representation in another of French's novels, *Nanberry*.

When asked about Mrs Rose, Clancy, and Mr Sampson, her Indigenous characters in *Snowy River*, French again stressed the importance of providing her characters with educational opportunities to give them the broadness of mind to successfully negotiate and challenge the strict, oppressive social structures of their setting.

Mrs Clancy has worked as a maid for the [unintelligible] so again, she probably would have been taught in a school as she obviously has learned English, she has had access to books. One of the great influences of my childhood was Kath Walker, later known as Oodgeroo Noonuccal. Kath worked as the maid for white people but they were well educated white people, they liked her and they gave her freedom of the library and look, unlike of course Rose Clancy, they then encouraged her to go to university etcetera, etcetera and to write poetry. But it was fairly common for servants to be given the freedom of the library as long as they made sure their hands were clean and they didn't take the books beyond the room. And so an intelligent woman like Rose Clancy, who's extremely intelligent, would have availed herself of that and would have been self-educated. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French drew inspiration from the life of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, a mentor and role model from her years in Brisbane. She characterised Rose Clancy as having innate intelligence and motivation that would allow her to take advantage of opportunities given to her while in servitude to a well-educated and benevolent non-Indigenous household. Only snippets of Rose's history are revealed in *The Matilda Saga* (as of 2017). However, it is evident from the interview responses that French collated information and histories that are never explicitly written into the narrative and yet which nonetheless underpin the text.

This suggests that the characterisation process in French's writing is supported by an invisible base of historical and social knowledge and opinions.

Mr Sampson is similarly imbued with natural intelligence beyond his peers, but he is not given the same educational opportunities in his narrative.

Mr Sampson is, I think, pretty much like any extremely intelligent stockman would have been back then. He is not particularly educated. It is not even made clear in fact whether he can even read or write, but certainly he listens, he evaluates, he's an intelligent man. It's not made clear in the story, but my assumption would be that as soon as he was actually getting wages he would make sure that his children went to school [...] (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

While formal education is not part of Mr Sampson's narrative, the value of education as means for advancing beyond oppressive circumstances is still integral to his characterisation. As was historically the case, Aboriginal characters in *Snowy River* are excluded from schooling. It is only later in The Matilda Saga timeline that Aboriginal children are allowed to go to school. French has explicitly characterised Mr Sampson as an intelligent man. An important part of the narrative as focalised through this character is that his intelligence allows him to absorb the information around him, and predict that education and schooling will be important for his children. Generally, in *Snowy River*, French's characterisation of her Aboriginal characters is inspired by her knowledge of history and folklore, and real people, which are then harnessed in service to communicating her over-arching ideas about Australian national identity and values.

Techniques and Methods in *Refuge*

Discussion of Indigenous representation in *Refuge* presented a unique challenge. *Refuge* fulfilled the selection criteria for this project because an online search divulged that the publisher, Harper Collins, produces teacher's notes on the novel that explicitly state that one of the characters, Mudurra, is Indigenous (Harper Collins, 2016). French categorically denies that there is any Indigenous representation in *Refuge*. The result was a conflict between rigorous selection criteria and the opinion of the author of the novel selected. The decision to retain *Refuge* as part of the project, once this conflict came to light, was made because of the unique characterisation. Mudurra may not have been intended as an

Indigenous character but his characterisation can be read as such. French's position on Indigenous representation in *Refuge* (or lack of it) is therefore pertinent to this study.

French's intention with the character of Mudurra was that he was, like all the other characters, a refugee to the Australian continent in an era pre-human habitation.

No, remember [Mudurra] is not Indigenous, he comes from somewhere to the north. There is no Indigenous character in that book. He will probably become the ancestor of Indigenous people, but he is not Indigenous, his culture is different, his values are different. He would come from, in fact, a nation which ceased to exist about 60,000 years ago and is now probably under water, but he is not Indigenous, he may be the ancestor of Indigenous people, but he himself is not Indigenous. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French's response to queries about Mudurra were extensive. She stressed some ideas and repeated others to add emphasis. French has strong convictions about the origins of Indigenous inhabitation of Australia through global migration. She firmly makes the distinction between the people who were the first to literally step onto Australia's shore as non-Indigenous, and those that descended from them as Indigenous. French asserts that Mudurra is the former and gives many reasons as to why this is the case. Part of *Refuge's* narrative suggests that Mudurra dreamed the setting, a non-descript Australian beach, and also modern-day Australia, into existence. French reasons that Mudurra is not Indigenous because this narrative is contrary to her knowledge of present-day Indigenous histories.

So yes, there is the possibility in the book that in fact that the very land that we are on is the one that he dreamed or he – but no, he himself is not Indigenous, nor is what he imagines, nor is that part of Indigenous tradition. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

[...]

There are – I do know several stories of – Indigenous stories of the first people to come to Australia and in all of them, the person who first put their foot on land was not a man but a woman in all of them. And in most of them she's pregnant and in most of them, she's actually carrying [plants] etcetera with her. If you actually

think about it, that actually makes sense. If you are in a craft, a water craft or something fleeing from a tsunami, from a volcano, etcetera, when you arrive at a beach, what you normally do is that in the shallow water all the passengers actually jump out while the men, the strongest people there, stay with it to actually haul it [onto] the beach.

So it would make sense that when they actually came to Australia, the women and the children would hop out to make it lighter and it would mean that they would be the ones who would first step foot on – be the first humans to set foot on Australia, while the men were actually pulling the craft up through the waves [so it could stand]. But so, no – so I haven't drawn on any Indigenous traditions of actually coming to Australia or human arrival in Australia, even though I'm aware of several of those Indigenous histories. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French combines her knowledge of Indigenous histories with an estimation of the practicalities of arriving in pre-human Australia to claim that Mudurra is in no way an Indigenous character. Another of French's reasons concerns the thematic elements of the novel that apply to other characters that, while not included in the text of *Refuge*, would also apply to Mudurra.

And also, as well, remember that like all of the young people there, he was on the point of death when he came to the beach, so you can imagine that whatever his journey is going to be after that, his viewpoints and dreams may change, [unintelligible] by the time he got here. So again, what he experienced, what he is dreaming in that book does not really have any relevance at all to Indigenous history. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

For French, the established premise that the trauma experienced by all the characters on their journey changes their ideas and their dreams further removes Mudurra from Indigenous histories. French also asserts that she consciously employed methods to fictionalise the representations of Australia in *Refuge*, as imagined by those who have never experienced it, to keep it separate from the lived reality of Australia and therefore Indigenous peoples.

I should probably add to that, he [Mudurra] was made deliberately fictional and the Australia he was going to and the beach again was made deliberately vague and the deliberately fictional. So that I did not use any Indigenous traditions in doing that. The book is about an imagined beach and an imagined Australia. The only real Australia in that book is in the final chapters. All the other Australias are in fact the Australias of the imagination of the characters. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

French used imagination to ensure no identifiable feature of the setting or narrative was present, even unintentionally. She remained vague and drew solely on the creations of her mind to avoid using Indigenous histories and traditions as a part of *Refuge*.

Feedback

Feedback that French received for both *Snowy River* and *Refuge* were universally positive. French (personal communication, May 8, 2017) explained that feedback she received from readers for *Snowy River* was mostly regarding the horses in the book rather than the human characters. She attributes the relatively demure reception of the novel to its position in a series of stronger works. Despite the critical recognition of both novels, French expressed the opinion, multiple times, that *Snowy River* is of lower quality than her other writing. Discussion of feedback in this interview, therefore, was mostly related to *Refuge*.

Oh yes. As far as I know, there's been no – I haven't heard any non-positive reactions to either book. The reactions from – certainly *Refuge*, there was a lot of feedback from – well, basically just about every culture that's represented in the book and they like it and recognised it and was glad it was there. A surprising number of people assumed from the list at the back³⁶ [...] that those people actually existed and went through a surprising amount of trouble to actually try

³⁶ Under the 'Author's Notes' section in *Refuge* there is a list of characters and details about their lives that are not discussed in the main text. The list is referred to in the main text as being written by one of the characters, Susannah. The subtitle in the 'Author's Notes' is 'Susannah's List'. While there is no explicit information that distinguishes the fictional list from the non-fiction author's notes, there is an additional section of the 'Author's Notes' under the subtitle of 'Susannah' that states that she is an entirely fictional character (J. French, 2013).

and find their street³⁷ without realising that no, they are all fictional. So, look, it was shortlisted, *Refuge* was shortlisted for several awards, well actually several awards in several categories and *The Girl from Snowy River*, I think – look it’s by far – look, it’s not a bad book, but it’s a long way from being one of my best or well-known books. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Feedback from her readership and award bodies are an important barometer for French’s sense of the success or failure of her writing, both in terms of overall reception, and in terms of details and aspects within her novels including representations of culture. Her opinions expressed above are closely aligned with the feedback she is discussing. This tendency was made more prominent when French used anecdotal feedback from readers as a measure of the success of her writing. When speaking about representations of Indigenous people in her writing in general, French said:

I was going to say I don’t know if I’ve written successfully about Indigenous characters, but actually that’s not true. I have because the people that they were based on have recognised themselves and liked it [...] (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

In this statement, French’s sense of the success of her representation of Indigenous peoples would appear to be reliant on the expressed approval of the individuals portrayed who have recognised themselves in her writing post-publication. Feedback, therefore, is highly significant to French’s writing craft and especially for her writing of Indigenous peoples and culture.

Reflections

French reflected on her various representations of Indigenous peoples across her writing career. She began with memories from primary and high school. She witnessed discrimination and racism towards the Aboriginal children by the teachers.

So the Indigenous people I knew in my late teens, early twenties were struggling/battling to be able to have a voice in Australia and it seemed to me then that I shouldn’t be that voice, that basically space needed to be left for them. But

³⁷ Each character in *Refuge* lives on a personalised street within the narrative.

slowly I began to realise that not putting Indigenous characters in was in fact writing them out of history. They were there and I wouldn't and still wouldn't have an Indigenous protagonist [...] (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Through witnessing her Indigenous peers, French had a sense that they were struggling for a 'voice', to be heard and gain access to societal discourses. She avoided writing about Indigenous issues, culture, and peoples, believing that by using her own access to discourse, published writing, she would prevent Indigenous peoples from being heard. However, complete exclusion brought up other issues of authenticity. As French stated: 'the Indigenous people needed to be in those books because they were there' (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017). Over time her opinions shifted in favour of limited inclusion of Indigenous peoples, culture, and issues. They would not be invisible but they would also not be protagonists. French made a major exception to her protagonist rule in *Nanberry: Black Brother White (Nanberry)* (2011).

In *Nanberry*, the eponymous character is a Cadigal Aboriginal Australian child whose family dies from smallpox soon after the arrival of the First Fleet. The colony's surgeon, who Nanberry calls 'Father White', adopts him. As the colony ages and grows, illness, starvation, corruption, and the increasingly difficult relationships with the Eora Aboriginal Australian peoples threaten to obliterate it. Nanberry struggles to find belonging in both the English and Eora (the name given to collectively refer to several distinct language groups from the region that became Sydney, including Cadigal) cultures. He assists in translation for the colony and helps his adopted father but as he matures to adulthood, finding his identity and social standing too constrictive, he decides to become a sailor.

Nanberry was the exception to [not having an Indigenous protagonist] but I didn't mean to write the book about him, it was meant to be [about] the possum who kissed the convict, it was meant to be about Surgeon White trying to domesticate a possum [...] I'd already rewritten the book twice and suddenly all of this information about Nanberry, who had actually been the very minor character in the book, literally landed on me about three weeks before it all went to print and the book was completely rewritten with Nanberry as the main character and that was entirely accidental. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

In the course of reading letters written by William Dawes, a member of the First Fleet (Mander-Jones, 1966), French acquired aliases used by Nanberry. Also, by coincidence, she met someone professing to be an ancestor of Nanberry's, which denoted a traceable lineage. With Nanberry's monikers, French was able to find public records of Nanberry that revealed huge amounts of detail about his life and activities. The quantity and content of the information French uncovered in her research had a profound effect on her writing. By using phrases such as 'accidental' and 'I never made the decision', French's comments reflect a compulsion to tell Nanberry's story that she feels was out of her control.

So I never made the decision to have him as the protagonist and I had made the decision, which I think is still probably the case that I would not have an Indigenous protagonist, though I will have a white protagonist telling the stories or trying to find out about Indigenous people which will make them pretty much the subject of a book, but nonetheless, it will still be from the outsider looking in, it won't be from the point of view of an Indigenous person. (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Another of French's novels, *Walking the Boundaries*, had its origins in engagement with an Indigenous culture.

One of my books, *Walking the Boundaries*, was written deliberately as a signal. I met a woman who had been given lore and items by an Indigenous woman when they were rounded up and taken down to the coast in the 1890s. She knew she didn't have very long to live, she was in her 90s and she needed to pass it onto me and until she – she said 'until the black gins³⁸ come back.' (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

After unsuccessful attempts to find a culturally appropriate woman to pass the 'lore and items' to, French wrote a novel designed to hint at knowledge that she possessed, and to signal that it needed to be passed on.

³⁸ 'Gin' is a derogatory word for an Aboriginal woman. This is not French's word. French uses it here as a direct quote from the older lady who is the subject of the discussion and made apologies in the interview: 'Excuse the term, but that was what she used.' (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017).

[...] 20 years after writing it, an Indigenous woman, who was a teacher, had read it and then rang her sister and said look, I think the author of this book knows a lot more than she's put into the book, I think we need to go and see her. And finally, more than 20 years later, two [unintelligible] and we were able to fulfil what was lost in the 1890s. So that book was written deliberately trying to signal to Indigenous people who still were part of that tradition that yes, well – yeah, 'hey, I'm trying to attract your attention.' (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

As with the discussion of *Nanberry*, French emphasises the exceptional circumstances that led to writing about Indigenous characters. She expresses reluctance to proffer Indigenous perspectives, but also feels that exclusion is unfitting. The tension between inclusion and exclusion is resolved by the circumstances that led to her writing. The more compelling French finds the reason for inclusion, the greater the role of the Indigenous characters and culture within the text.

Chapter 9: Ursula Dubosarsky

Ursula Dubosarsky was born and lives in Sydney, New South Wales. In the early 1990s she briefly lived in Canberra, and also spent some time in Israel. Her writing for young people includes over 40 works of fiction for children and 10 picture books. Her writing has attracted much critical acclaim. Dubosarsky has won or been shortlisted for 63 awards locally, nationally, and internationally.

The Golden Day (published 2011)

The Golden Day is an atmospheric thriller, published to global critical acclaim, winning awards from the International Board of Books for Young People (IBBY), and in Germany, the United States of America, and Australia. Australian awards include the Adelaide Festival Award for Literature (2012), as well as being shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers (2012), and the New South Wales (2012) and Queensland Premier's Awards (2011).

The Golden Day is set in 1967. Eleven schoolgirls are taken on an excursion by their eccentric teacher, Miss Renshaw, and her secret lover, Morgan, to a mysterious cave. Their teacher disappears, leaving the girls profoundly affected by confusion, anxiety, and guilt, feelings that will last the rest of their lives.

As the story unfolds the reader is presented with aspects of the narrative that are slippery, obscured, and difficult to keep in mind. Every detail is contradicted by a different character's perspective, or by different senses. What the characters see may not be felt, what is remembered is not necessarily seen, ghosts and other mystic elements may or may not exist; reality is entirely subjective. A notable exception to this entanglement of perspectives is Morgan's explanation of his knowledge of Indigenous culture.

'Are you an Aborigine?' asked Cynthia.

An Aborigine! The little girls had never met an Aborigine. But no. Morgan tapped the cigarette on the back of his hand. No, he said, no he wasn't. (Dubosarsky, 2011, Chapter 4, Section 1, para 70)

While there are no Aboriginal characters in this text, there are several descriptions and allusions to ancient Aboriginal culture. The excursion to the cave is purportedly to show

the girls some ancient Aboriginal rock paintings. Morgan, who is not Aboriginal, claims to have spent time living with 'a tribe' in the 'outback' who had 'taught him many things' (Dubosarsky, 2011). As with every aspect of the text, this claim is thrown into doubt by Morgan's evasion of questions about the details. The suggestion that Morgan possesses knowledge of the secrets of the land and caves, including the ancient Aboriginal rock paintings, gives him an air of authority, power, and intrigue.

At various times it is suggested that the rock paintings are genuine ancient Aboriginal art, are non-existent, or have been forged by Morgan. This is never resolved. Their presence, however tangible, adds to the atmosphere of mysticism and spookiness that pervades the narrative. Morgan's character is, like much of *The Golden Day*, contradictory. That he is trusted and loved by Miss Renshaw, an authority figure, implies good character. His uncertain background and the oddness of his presence among schoolgirls, however, calls his character into question. As a consequence, the reader is unsure whether to take Morgan at his word, especially later in the text as the school girls consider their memories of him.

Representations of Aboriginal culture in this text are relegated to ancient, magical status.

Caves, he said, hidden caves with Aboriginal paintings from the Dreamtime, thousands of years old, he said.

'We know about the Dreamtime,' said the tallest Elizabeth. 'Last year in Term One we did fairy tales, in Term Two we did Greek myths and in Term Three we did the Dreamtime.' She counted them off with her fingers. (Dubosarsky, 2011, Chapter 4, Seson 1, para. 66)

From the perspectives of the schoolgirls Aboriginal culture is reduced to a generalised set of ancient fictional legends with no relevance to the time and place they inhabit. One of the themes raised in the text is the relevance of historical facts and fictions to here and now, and the validity or reality of events that leave nothing but a story as evidence of their passing. Aboriginal culture is incorporated into this theme through the uncertainty of the existence or validity of the paintings.

'Look,' said Morgan.

The torchlight swung up and down the rocky wall, like a swooping bird with wings made of light.

‘Thousands of years old,’ said Miss Renshaw softly. ‘Thousands and thousands of years. Think of that, girls. These paintings have been here all those thousands of years. There were people here, inside the cave.’

Cubby stared at the wall of shaking torchlight. She had imagined big drawings of kangaroos or people with spears. But she couldn’t see anything. Was that something faint and figure-like in the depths of the stone? The torch moved away again before she could be sure.

‘There!’ The light hovered like a spaceship. ‘And there!’

Cubby had such a feeling of loneliness, even though she could feel the warm breath of the others around her. (Dubosarsky, 2011, Chapter 5, Section 1, para. 63)

Whether or not the paintings exist and whether or not Morgan’s claims of Aboriginal knowledge are true, the depictions of Aboriginal culture in this text are homogenised into a monolithic ideal. They are placed within a space of legend, magic, and mysticism. This serves the narrative by contributing to the atmosphere of mystery and uncertainty, but is also arguably reminiscent of romantic Aboriginalist ideals, and relies on an Aboriginalist perspective of Aboriginal cultures as a single, magical, mythical entity (Hodge & Mishra, 1991) to create atmosphere, inevitably reinforcing those ideals.

Interview Analysis

I would have to say, I don't even think in terms of Indigenous [representation] in that sort of sense is just kind of – this is the world we live in and this is in our world and this is something compelling that has to be responded to [...] (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Introductory Information

Dubosarsky's descriptions of her writing career suggest an organic and informal emergence of writing from other interests and her home life. Rather than identifying defined moments or achievements, she reflected upon her professional writing career as a constant continuum, punctuated with occasional 'thresholds' that gave an impression of progression. Having small children was one circumstance that she felt had a profound effect on her ability to write.

I've got three children and I must say, when I was at home with the children, because nobody – like you're a mum, nobody wants to see you when you have children and in a strange way that's a sort of good thing because you're just alone for many hours with these small creatures who don't necessarily share their thoughts with you, like you're together, so you're not lonely, you're not sharing each other's thoughts, you're in your own little world with your own little projects and in some weird sort of way you're kind of at the centre of the earth [...] (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Isolation from the outside world, and the physical presence contrasted with the intellectual distance of her children, resulted in a routine that allowed time for work, meaning that it was a productive, 'fertile' time for Dubosarsky's writing. It was a haven from a modern world that teems with busy, external attractions and distractions. Introversion and personal reflection were consistent themes of Dubosarsky's interview. Her excitement and satisfaction in her own writing are derived from revelling in creativity in a quiet and introspective way. She describes her creative process:

But I'm very tangential, so that would be my creative process that you've just described there because in fact you don't know what you're going to discover so you sort of follow of even though you know it's sort of strictly speaking, irrelevant,

but you let yourself and sometimes it's totally irrelevant. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Writing fiction for Dubosarsky is an unplanned journey, in which she is following and thinking through ideas to their conclusions, whether they seem directly related to her project or not. There is intentionally minimal structure to her methods, allowing for flexibility and exploration during the writing process.

Origins and Motivations

The origins of *The Golden Day* lie in a paragraph that Dubosarsky wrote for the University of New South Wales for use as an educational resource.

And I have a feeling – I don't have that little paragraph anymore, but I have a feeling I possibly, you know, because I can't remember, they give you how many words and the general scenario and I have a feeling there was some sort of – I think there was possibly [...] 'setting out to an excursion' that might have been in one of those little paragraphs and I suppose [...] when you write a book, paragraphs fit somehow - if you've got something that interests you in it that – you have some sort of funny feeling that if you do keep going you'll find something there if you don't know what it was. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

This paragraph was both generated from Dubosarsky's ideas, and generated new ideas as it was written. The paragraph was an exploration, both in its subject matter of an excursion, and in terms of affirming her intuition that the idea could be probed and expanded into a novel format.

Rather than identifying specific influences for the subject matter of *The Golden Day*, Dubosarsky spoke of things she associated with the novel at the time of interviewing. These things may well have been influences, but she described them as 'flashes' of memory or images that occurred to her during the interview. Her answers characteristically resisted a sequential or narrative format. The strongest identifiable influence was related to her visits to the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra. Dubosarsky worked a short distance from the NGA and was able to visit frequently in her lunch breaks. She was captivated by a painting by Charles Blackman called *Floating School Girl*.

I do remember this painting when I lived in Canberra and the art gallery was free and I was working in West Block and I used to walk over at lunch times and I saw this big beautiful – many times – painting of Charles Blackman, the Floating Schoolgirl and it was simply just an intuition that, you know, I love that painting, it wasn't like 'I'm going to write a novel about that' or anything like that, but it was just you know, I love that painting. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

The impression Dubosarsky gave of the origin of *The Golden Day* was a maelstrom of feelings, memories, imagination, and art that, motivated by curiosity, she explored in the form of a novel.

So it has to be something, you don't know why it interests you, but it's going to sustain you [...] it's like sort of swimming under water and going through a school of little fish and they're all the ideas and – so it's not so much there's a lack of ideas, but which one is *the* idea? And that's just a sort of - look, I must admit, I've never really started a novel that I haven't finished, you know what I mean? (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Dubosarsky's approach to writing is driven largely by inspiration and curiosity, but there is also a high degree of discernment. The individual idea that she chooses from among many others must contain enough possibilities to endure the entire process of writing a novel. Those ideas that Dubosarsky does not judge to be substantial enough are left unexplored. The consistent completion rate is due to careful discernment, and also to dedicated pursuit of the outcome once the decision to write a novel is made.

Contexts

As with most of her answers, when asked about the contexts in which *The Golden Day* was written Dubosarsky started with introspection. *The Golden Day* is a product of her as an individual. An individual who has historical, contemporary, and experiential contexts, all of which are unavoidably present in her writing. While such contexts are inherent in texts regardless of author intentions, Dubosarsky actively incorporated her introspective context into *The Golden Day*. While writing, she reflected on her own childhood memories and noted the peculiar details of her perspective as a child. For example, she mentioned the death by drowning of Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1967.

Certainly the death of Harold Holt is one of those childhood memories because you know, we were at the beach, [it's terrible] and you're told 'oh, the Prime Minister has drowned' and of course because you're a child you think he drowned on your beach, wherever that was, you know, in the north of Sydney and then all I remember is as we drove home from the holiday everybody had their headlights on, because I don't know if people still do that, but it was a sign of respect. So that's my memory. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Dubosarsky, as a child, was affected by the public melancholy that she witnessed, yet also falsely related the event to a location she was familiar with, regardless of the factual location. The clarity of focus on some facets of an event and the use of imagination to fill in the gaps and relate more strongly to that event are quintessential to the child perspective. Memories such as this one formed the context from which she built child subjectivity into *The Golden Day*.

There were other memories that that made up the contextual mindscape for *The Golden Day*. Dubosarsky talked about a love and fascination with 'school stories' such as those written by Enid Blyton. In regard to the tense atmosphere of the novel, she talked about seeing the film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* in the 1970s and describes it as being '[...]an enormous influence in all sorts of ways at a sort of dream level I think [...]' (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017). She also described her feelings about the natural world:

I'm a stranger in nature, I feel like - I feel like it doesn't welcome me to be perfectly honest, which is not like - it doesn't have to, but I'm not one of those people that - human civilization I feel more like - somehow, that's where I belong [...]
(Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Both *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and her relationship with nature evoke feelings of tension for Dubosarsky. She describes using events from her memories, such as a school excursion from her childhood, and bending the details away from sources or settings of comfort and towards those that were disturbing for her. None of these contexts related directly to Indigenous peoples and cultures, but the affectation of uncanny, disturbing, and sad yet beautiful contexts frame the representation of Aboriginal culture in *The*

Golden Day. It too, is incorporated into the overall frightening yet romantic atmosphere of the text.

In past employment, Dubosarsky was a transcriber for courtroom proceedings. Transcribing these proceedings exposed Dubosarsky to crimes, punishments, and the full gamut of human experience. One case that was very influential for *The Golden Day* was a high-profile case in which a man had murdered a young girl, named Samantha Knight, who he had been babysitting. This man became the inspiration for the character of Morgan, and provided the framework for the menacing, predatory tension between children and adults in the novel.

[...] he was a good person because he loved nature and he knew all about Indigenous culture, do you know what I mean? He was like – so in a way – but in a way that was just – maybe he did love both of those things and he did appear to know a lot about it, but it didn't turn him – he was just a completely predatory man, you know, just obviously a sick individual. But anyway, so then he started babysitting for this poor woman and other children and he did various terrible things [...] (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Dubosarsky was struck by the biases people have towards some character traits, and the ability of a predatory person to take advantage of those biases. Some mothers perceived Samantha Knight's killer as a good and trustworthy person to whom they could entrust their children, at least partly because of his professed knowledge of nature and Indigenous cultures. Dubosarsky noted that knowledge, authority, or contact with Indigenous cultures was interpreted by mothers as impressive evidence of wholesomeness and authority, but they masked the abhorrent, abusive facets of his character. That knowledge of nature and Indigenous cultures could hold such authority and respect as to hide how dangerous this man was to others intensely affected Dubosarsky.

So I guess that's absolutely an answer to your question, I was completely and utterly influenced, completely and utterly influenced by something that I was exposed to at that time. And I remember, I was particularly – what was particularly terrible was the ordinariness of it all and you know, the various witnesses, it was just ordinary. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

The juxtaposition of the vile and the ordinary, or even good, in the Samantha Knight case was another unsettling context for Dubosarsky's writing. *The Golden Day* was written within the context of Dubosarsky's reflections on discomfort, strangeness, and suspense. Without consciously using specific details of her memories and feelings, in hindsight, Dubosarsky identifies these as having shaped the novel.

Techniques and Methods

In discussing the construction of *The Golden Day*, the interview explored the methods used to create the setting, atmosphere, plot, content, and Aboriginal representation. Dubosarsky indicated a preference for writing from a perspective that is distanced in time from the events in her writing.

[...] who do you want to write the account of a battle? The soldier who's in the middle of the battle who obviously has this amazingly powerful apprehension of what's going on, or you know, or perhaps 20 years later or 30 years later when there's a bit of distance— you know, that sense of distance? So, I think it's when you sort of can think 'what did that all mean?', which may not be so key to you at the time, [...] there are great advantages to being in the seat of the battle [...] but it's a different kind of writing.

[...]

It's narrower, but it's sort of [...] powerful, but I'm not really that kind of writer, I sort of have a sense of distance [...] (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Dubosarsky describes setting her writing in the past as a comfort zone. It is a space that feels good and fitting for her perspectives. She acknowledges that a contemporary, immediate perspective can be a powerful one, but that she feels a more reticent perspective allows her to write more effectively.

Dubosarsky gave the school setting as an example of the effectiveness of reticence in her writing. Dubosarsky had a love of school stories. She mentioned that her early attempts to write stories about school experiences had fallen into disappointing, stereotypical examples of the genre. She also had memories of being in high school and observing the students of the newly opened, and therefore small, attached primary school.

[...] I remember thinking how, probably ambivalently, but with some envy you know, because I'd been to a big state co-ed primary school, perhaps not envy, but certainly fascination as to what kind of experience, [...] that must be, I wouldn't have put it in those terms when I was 12 or 13, but just some recognition that that was a sort of very specific kind of educational experience and it was quite – the sense of being at the mercy of your teacher you know and you spend more time with your teacher than your parents at that age, you know, it's an intense relationship. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

In this response, it becomes apparent that a distant perspective is not just a preference for her written characters but also, often, Dubosarsky's own perspective. Here, she is discussing using a memory to create part of her novel, in which she has assumed the role of observer with no experience of attending a small, quaint primary school. The distance of both time and the perspective of her memories was a comfortable space from which to write. She found that it freed her imagination and prevented clichéd or trite storytelling.

Dubosarsky's feelings towards her subjects also has a significant influence on their representation.

Well look, I soon realised while I was writing it, that personally I simply couldn't bear to write a book about a murdered child, so that was just not going to happen. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Despite drawing heavily on Samantha Knight's murder as source material, *The Golden Day* does not include the murder of a child. In fact, the victim is an adult, and even then, the exact crime is only implied and never made explicit. Dubosarsky's visceral aversion to victimised children overrode the original source material to dictate direction the plot would take. While this was a stark example, the interview frequently revealed that personal feelings had a subtle but consistent influence on Dubosarsky's creative decisions.

In terms of Indigenous representation in *The Golden Day*, Dubosarsky drew upon her own perspective and feelings to give the protagonist, Cubby, authentic reactions to Morgan's claims of Indigenous knowledge and his excursion to see Indigenous paintings in a cave. Other children's reactions are different from Cubby's but, as the focalising character, Cubby's perspective is emphasised.

I guess with Cubby, you know, I guess I'm a bit like Cubby, I suppose it's my point of view, but it's something so esoteric – I suppose it's how I feel about Indigenous paintings when I look at them, it's so hidden from me that I feel as if I had no way in [...] it will always be just remote from my understanding, like I'm just sort of plonked here, and so here is this [painting], but it's almost like I just can't understand it, I just can't – I won't be able to understand it. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Cubby's inability to see the paintings mirrors Dubosarsky's feelings about Indigenous artworks. Her feelings on this topic are in stark contrast to her affinity for the paintings of Charles Blackman, which not only provided inspiration for *The Golden Day*, but were even woven intertextually into the narrative as chapter titles (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017). In the former case, the meaning of the artwork is so distant as to be completely inaccessible. In the latter case meaning is inspired, created, and adapted.

Also feeding this sense of mystery and uncertainty – which Dubosarsky drew upon as a motif for the representation of Indigenous culture in the novel – was a recognition that social perspectives change throughout history. As she explained, a few of her novels are set in Australia's past where children were exposed, or not exposed, to different kinds of information than they are in the present.

[...] the kind of representation of Indigenous children that someone in the 1950s in Sydney or in the 1940s in Sydney would have of remoteness, of mystery, of sort of mysterious people that you can't understand, but – a bit like what I suppose I was saying [about] when I was at home with the children, leading concurrent lives that are hidden from you [...] (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Cubby's response to Morgan's cave excursion comes from an attempt by Dubosarsky to have Cubby honestly and authentically react to an unknown, inaccessible stimulus. The reaction not only had to be consistent with Cubby's characterisation, but also needed to be consistent within the context of a society and culture that has no framework for understanding the stimulus, aside from labelling it mysterious and unknowable.

Feedback

When discussing feedback for *The Golden Day*, Dubosarsky acknowledges that the novel has a niche and defined readership that is curated to a large degree by educators and other gatekeepers of literature. Most of her contact with her readership happens in schools, where teachers have assigned the book to students and engaged them with the text as part of their curriculum. This results in predominantly good feedback and also in considered and interesting questions, especially about the ambiguous ending to the novel.

The few exceptions to positive feedback concern the uncertainty cultivated in every aspect of the book.

And so for some people, uncertain endings just really annoy them, really upset them, and sometimes – I remember going to a book club and – this was an adult book club, and it’s interesting, when I explained to this woman who was a scientist – she’s actually a very nice woman, but she started off very belligerent [...] – she also had the sense that I was kind of trying to trick the reader or there was some sense of [...]you [as a reader] were being tested, which was just not remotely the case [...] (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Feedback for *The Golden Day* is highly polarised by the subjective and mysterious plot. Some readers, often facilitated by teachers, relish the opportunity to guess and imagine the ‘truth’, while others feel irritated, tested, or even betrayed by the author’s refusal to be explicit. Dubosarsky’s response to the frustration of some readers is that she, like the readers, has an interpretation that she favours, but no definitive, secret solution that she is withholding.

Reflections

Dubosarsky’s reflections on Indigenous representation in *The Golden Day* centred around observation and subjectivity. As discussed in the ‘Origins and Motivations’ and ‘Techniques and Methods’ sections of this chapter, much of the novel was informed by Dubosarsky’s observations of contemporary and historical events against the backdrop of her introspective thoughts and feelings. The Indigenous representations were no exception.

I would have to say, I don't even think in terms of Indigenous [representation] in that sort of sense is just kind of – this is the world we live in and this is in our world and this is something compelling that has to be responded to, do you know what I mean? [...] there's no choice, you know, it's not – and I suppose with Cubby she's not choosing not to see [the paintings], she just can't see and I suppose it's – it's not a choice, it's – but I suppose – I would have to say the coming to [...] - well, it's not coming to terms, I suppose at some level I feel I can't come to terms. It's just – I find it – it's a sad situation, but that's just how I feel that, you know, I may be quite wrong, you know, obviously, but it just seems to me something - you know, perhaps not very reconcilable, it's just a situation that has to be accepted, that's all. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

There is little hope or optimism in Dubosarsky's reflections. The emphasis is on honesty and genuineness in individuals responding to situations as they experience them, and also facing situations and accepting them. As was a theme in her interview, Dubosarsky does not presume to be an authority, even on her own writing. In her responses there is a complete absence of didacticism, only clear statements of her personal thoughts.

She also reflected on the different experiences and education that her children have in comparison to her own. Dubosarsky describes her formal education in Aboriginal studies as being highly romanticised, with a focus on exotic, ancient mysticism.

[...] some of the first stories I wrote that I remember being excited about when I was about eight, I remember the first line 'My name is Ilinga, meaning sun' and it was completely based on projects that we had to do but about tribal people. [...] that's how we were educated about Aboriginal people is they're sort of mysterious tribal people with these amazing musical instruments, corroborees, you know, that was sort of how you were taught about it and so that was the sort of, the perception. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

The short story was reflective of the education system and curriculum in the late 1960s, and she notes how different the system has been for her children.

[...] whereas obviously my own children went to school with Aboriginal children, you know, they're just kids in school, so that's a completely different thing. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

For her children, some of the children they go to school with are from Aboriginal backgrounds. They are contemporary peers instead of romantic, distant, and unknowable subjects. Dubosarsky reflects that changes in the education system are due to the passage of time, changing social values and the increased inclusion of Aboriginal children.

Since those early stories she wrote as a child, Dubosarsky has developed a confidence in writing from her own perspective, and an aversion to the idea of imagining and subsequently writing from a different one.

I'm not actually saying you should or you shouldn't, but I know for myself to write something good, I can't do that. That's my personal limitation and so in that sense, I would never – and I'm afraid I guess – and this may not be the right thing, but I guess I just feel ... well I guess I feel I'm the owner of my own perspective on the world. (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Dubosarsky views writing from her own perspective as essential for the quality and integrity of her work, both limiting her writing and strengthening it.

When asked whether she knew of the *ACA Protocols*, Dubosarsky said she was aware of them, but could not remember if she had read them or not. The interview discussion moved on to what advice she would give to other writers. Dubosarsky responded 'Well look, that's a hard one for me too because I just never give advice, so I just never feel I have any authority to give advice' (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017). However, she did reflect on the experiences of a friend of hers who was engaged with Indigenous representation in a picture book at the time of the interview.

I'm just thinking of someone like [name redacted], but you know, extremely thoughtful creators don't do things thoughtlessly. They think about it a lot and are anxious about it a lot, but yet they're driven in a certain creative direction. So I know [redacted publisher] who this book is going to come out with also have like a body of people or consultants and I know [name redacted]'s been in interesting conversations with those consultants with whom he doesn't always agree and I think, you know, it's an ongoing conversation, but – and that said, I don't think – it's not like the consultants that would appear to be having some sort of veto, do you know what I mean? 'Publish that book and die!', you know, or 'you'll never show your face in this town again!', or something like that. It's just that that

consultant is giving her authentic opinion on what she – and you know, that’s very good, you know, she should and [name redacted] wants to know it [...] (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

Dubosarsky acknowledges the complexity of representing Indigenous cultures in writing. Her response indicates that, in general, she considers respect, thoughtfulness, care, and nuance to be essential in the act of writing Indigenous representations. Additionally, she sees the value of consultation as a collaborative process, where the author listens to advice but retains ultimate control of their work. In order to achieve best practices in this area she states:

Well, I think you have to be very strong and knowing what you’re doing. So I think, you know, [name redacted] been working for 30 years and is incredibly serious about his work, so I think it – I think it’s an unknown territory, but I think if you feel – if you sort of feel – and why you are doing it[...]? (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017)

This response implies that to approach representing Indigenous cultures in fiction writing, seriousness, surety, and strength of character are necessary attributes.

Chapter 10: Bronwyn Blake

Bronwyn Blake grew up in Melbourne, Victoria. She lived in Alaska before moving back to regional Victoria. Her career outside of writing has been varied, from teaching to community work to hospitality and retail. She began writing full-time in 2000. She has published seven young adult novels and two books for younger children.

Find Me a River (published 2001), *Rock Dancer* (published 2002)

Find Me a River and *Rock Dancer* are books one and two in the Gippsland Trilogy³⁹. The final novel, *Out of the Blue*, followed in 2015. *Find Me a River* and *Rock Dancer* were both listed as Notable Books for Older Readers by the CBCA. The plot of the trilogy is a linear narrative, and the reader is often assumed to have read both novels in sequence. As such, it makes sense to view them together within this project. *Find Me a River* has more Indigenous content than *Rock Dancer*, and accordingly much of the analysis will centre on its narrative. *Rock Dancer* is also an interesting subject for analysis because it builds characterisation and provides further context for Indigenous representations within *Find Me a River*.

Find Me a River is the story of two interconnected, multi-cultural (See Appendix 5: *Find Me a River* Family Tree) families living on a rural cattle property in Gippsland, Victoria. Drought and bushfire ravage the land, and the future of the families on their property is uncertain. The children, sometimes joined by another boy, Brian, from Melbourne are left to their own devices during the school holidays. They spend the time helping their parents, developing their own interests, and devising ways to save the property. They are ultimately successful. Kes begins to understand that her father is a member of the Stolen Generations, removed from his parents as a result of government policies which removed Aboriginal children from their families and disconnected them from their culture. She searches for her father's family to better understand herself and where she comes from. In *Rock Dancer*, a traumatised Leah moves to Gippsland in the wake of a tragic accident. Soon after arriving she is sent on a camping and rock-climbing excursion with Sarah and Angie, characters from *Find Me a River*.

³⁹ The third instalment, *Out of the Blue*, was published in 2015 and did not fit the criteria for this project.

The Gippsland Trilogy is told from a third person, omniscient perspective. Focalisation moves from character to character in an unstructured, fluid way, exposing the thoughts and movements of characters as their personal perspectives become relevant to the broader flow of the narrative. Because of this, both *Find Me a River* and *Rock Dancer* do take a position of authority over the perspectives of the Aboriginal characters, identified as Koori⁴⁰ in the text. The perspectives have much in common with problematic first-person perspectives that appropriate Indigenous voices and speak *for* their subjects (Bradford, 2001), however, the Gippsland Trilogy lacks many of the other hall-marks of Aboriginalism in its handling of the Indigenous content. Examination of Kes's journey to, search for, her father Pat's family suggests the possibility that Aboriginalism is subverted, at least to some extent, in *Find Me a River*. Kes's journey starts with conflicting advice from two 'experts' in Stolen Generations information.

Firstly, Miss Hatty, archivist for the church that owned Pat's orphanage, responds to Kes's request for information on her father's history with a letter:

I am assuming by your handwriting and the nature of your inquiry that you are quite a young person, and possibly lack guidance, otherwise I would not be taking this trouble to communicate with you.

I must point out to you that it is most inappropriate of you to be attempting to trace your father's family. Not only is this information legally confidential, but you are involving yourself in something which is none of your business. (Blake, 2001, p. 74)

The patronising tone implies that Miss Hatty is clearly intended, by Blake, to be the villain. She is scathing of Kes's age and intentions and actively dismissive of Kes's quest for information, to the point of exaggerating and lying about the accessibility of the information that Kes is requesting. Her attitude is indicative of an ideology intended to uphold the legitimacy of the practice of forced removal of children, while simultaneously suppressing evidence of its existence. Miss Hatty and Kes's interactions could easily become a romanticised dichotomy of bad racist versus good Koori girl triumphing over

⁴⁰ 'Koori' denotes Aboriginal peoples from the southern New South Wales and northern Victoria region.

the odds. Blake resists this notion, however, and instead, Miss Hatty, despite being a cruel caricature, introduces Kes to an ethical dilemma that is arguably at the heart of the plot; does she have the right to seek her father's family without his consent? This dilemma is painstakingly explored with lengthy expositions on Kes's thoughts and discussions with others, including her cousin and confidant, Finn:

'Dad stared at the mountains and he looked so sad I thought he'd cry, and he said he wouldn't let past wrongs ruin his happiness now.'

'I see.'

'You don't . You had to be there and see his eyes. He also said he'd wished many times that he knew his family, where he'd come from. That's what started it. [...]

[...] it became important for me too, that I knew who I was and where I'd come from. It's my grand-parents too, Finn. Don't you understand? You know yours, I don't know a single other person from that side of my family. The people I get my skin colour and God knows what else from. I want to find them for me as well.'

'Then at least be clear what you're doing it for. Is it for you or Pat or both?'

'For both of us. I think... and for Sarah and the twins, they have a right to know too.'

'Yeah, well, I don't know where everyone's rights start and finish in this. Leave the little kids out of it for a minute. Who has the greater right, you or Pat?'

'I don't know. That's why I'm trying to talk to you.' (Blake, 2001)

It is worth noting that while the concept of the Stolen Generations is mentioned within the text, there are no paratextual elements that contextualise the Stolen Generations or acknowledge the factual basis for Kes's experiences and perspective. After her experiences with Miss Hatty, Kes meets Rose Bannock, an Education Liaison Officer from the Aboriginal Co-operative, who provides more background information about the Stolen Generations. Rose's dialogue provides exposition on the real-life services available to Indigenous peoples who were impacted by the forced removal policy. It is Rose who eventually puts Kes in touch with her father's family.

Kes's journey is complicated by Miss Hatty's initial almost comically mean response. This subplot, while somewhat didactic, does examine a complex and fraught situation with many personal, emotional, and ethical factors for Kes to consider, both as an individual and as part of a family. By switching focal characters, an array of perspectives is presented to the reader and none are privileged over the others. Conspicuously absent is Pat's perspective. The narrative is never focalised through him, and so the reader is kept ignorant of his inner thoughts and emotions. Given he is the one who experienced being taken as a child, and the number of characters who do voice opinions on the subject, it is odd that his perspective is not included. The reader does learn that Pat is reticent about learning about his past, as Kes reflects:

She hadn't really considered the possibility that her father may not want to know his family history, but he'd told her clearly that he didn't want old wrongs to destroy his present happiness. (Blake, 2001, p. 76)

Seen from a different angle, excluding his view does allow a perspective that observes Pat's traumatic history from the outside, as suggested by Lucashenko (2009) and others. The narrative perspective adopted is nevertheless an authoritative one, that of a Koori girl who feels the impact of the Stolen Generations. The result is uncomfortable tension, making the reader complicit with Kes's decision to withhold information from the character most affected by it.

The resolution of Kes's journey is a happy one. It is at this point that the text arguably turns to romantic idealism. In the wake of the relief and euphoria as the children tell the adults that the farm is saved, Kes, with approval from Finn, reads a letter to the whole family from Pat's mother. The letter is beautiful, and full of love and excitement. Pat's reaction is shock and gratitude:

Kes stopped reading. Pat stood up, walked around the table, and folded her up in his arms. He stood rocking her gently while his tears dripped down onto her head. (Blake, 2001, p. 255)

Suddenly the tension is gone, and the ethical dilemma resolved as the ends justify the means. The novel concludes with Pat's family visiting the property.

She turned to watch her family. They were all coming now. Everyone from both families. Kes watched with infinite happiness, the months of self-doubt evaporating.

[...]

She laughed aloud. Here on this hot summer day, still in the middle of an unrelenting drought, in the middle of a burnt out world, she couldn't imagine greater happiness than this circle of her family closing around her. (Blake, 2001, p. 263)

The sudden resolution of every problem, dilemma, and conflict is idealistic and romantic. In this respect, the representation of the Stolen Generations and experience of reconciliation in the novels is overly positive, arguably suggesting that by reuniting families all problems are solved and the original trauma is erased. This potentially reinforces Aboriginalist tendencies to romanticise Indigenous experience while restricting and silencing diversity and authenticity.

Alternatively, the Gippsland Trilogy can also be read as resistant to ideas of Aboriginalism. In *Rock Dancer* Angie briefly mentions that the process of getting to know Pat's family is new but going well, thereby acknowledging that the conclusion of *Find Me a River* was not the ultimate reparation of Pat's history.

Like all the characters in the Gippsland Trilogy, Sarah has a special interest: tracking. In *Find Me a River* she spends hours learning to track everything that moves on her property. In both novels Sarah's tracking skills are the lynch-pin of the action, as she rescues her peers when they become lost in potentially dangerous situations. The 'black tracker' is an archetype in popular Australian culture with a history reaching back to the early 19th century, as Anglo-centric views forged an Australian identity where settlers and the outback were intimately connected (Collins & Davis, 2006). Black trackers are the tool that settlers use to negotiate the untamed landscape and find, usually, lost children or animals. Black trackers are a category of Aboriginalist romantic images of Indigenous peoples (Hodge & Mishra, 1991). They are uncannily, mystically and innately skilled, beyond the comprehension of Western understanding. Sarah's narrative does evoke the black tracker stereotype, but it is constantly undermined. She is self-motivated and self-

taught, spending hours practicing with her cousin Angie. When others witness her tracking ability, they are incredulous.

No one ever believed her first time around. Only Angie really believed her, but then Angie could track too. (Blake, 2002, p. 166)

Angie's tracking ability, though not as impressive as Sarah's, does begin to break down the stereotype of the uncannily, mystically, and innately skilled black tracker. Despite their differing cultural backgrounds, Angie and Sarah practice tracking together, and through hard work both gain skill. Sarah is still the more proficient and is described as a 'natural', but this too is distanced from her Koori heritage.

'She's extraordinary. Who taught her?' Ji watched her silhouette against the sun.

'She taught herself.' [said Angie]

'I thought... maybe...'

'You mean because she's Aboriginal?'

'Yes... well, I wondered if maybe one of your family...'

'No, Uncle Pat's useless. He's of the stolen generation. He was taken when he was two and grew up in an orphanage in Melbourne. He doesn't know anything about tracking. Only what Sarah's taught him. [...] He's... we've only just found his family, they come from northern New South Wales. Sarah's great-uncle was the best tracker in the region, grandmother Mari said.

[...]

'Sarah's a natural; she found Brian, our friend who got lost at our place before she'd even started to learn. By the time we went to visit Uncle Pat's family up north, she could track really well. Anyone who knew anything about tracking up there, taught her things, but she was better than many of them already.' (Blake, 2002, pp. 169-70)

This is one of a few examples of characters witnessing Sarah's tracking and assuming that her skill comes from being Aboriginal. The conflict between the reader's awareness of Sarah's independent hard work and practice, and her school teacher Ji's assumption that

Sarah's tracking ability comes from her cultural heritage creates dramatic irony. Through this irony the reader is aligned with Angie's perspective as she explains Sarah's father's history and reunion with his family to Ji. In acknowledging that tracking is a skill that some Indigenous people possess, the Gippsland Trilogy re-associates tracking with cultural heritage and evokes the romanticised settler narratives of black trackers. However, it also complicates and adds dimension to the image by emphasising the teaching and learning processes that develop tracking skill.

Ultimately, the Gippsland Trilogy arguably often engages with Aboriginalism and problematic representations of Indigenous Australian peoples and cultures. It does, however, attempt to and often succeed in subsequently resisting many of these problematic representations.

Interview Analysis

But it's that common humanity that, unless you're talking about quite dysfunctional people or dysfunctional times, like times of war or whatever, I think that there is just far more that bonds us as ordinary people – an ordinary Indigenous person and an ordinary non-Indigenous person, we just have far more in common than our differences. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Introductory Information

Blake's responses to questions were primarily characterised by a matter-of-fact tone and factual content. The interview was about the first two books of the Gippsland Trilogy, *Find Me a River* and *Rock Dancer*. The final book of the trilogy was only recently published, after a gap of many years. *Find Me a River* was Blake's first published novel and without hesitation she described the highlight of her writing career as the moment it was accepted for publication.

Yes. When [my publisher] rang me and told me that she'd accepted my first book with Lothian. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Writing a book and having it published started as a random idea and developed into an ambition. With the acceptance of her first book, Blake fulfilled this ambition and has since built a career around writing and encouraging others to write.

Origins and Motivations

Find Me a River and the Gippsland Trilogy are grounded in location, history, and multiculturalism. On long drives through rural Australia with her children in the car, Blake found herself with time to think about the history of the country she was travelling through.

I was thinking about – really about the history of Australia and how many different components there have been in our – how many different influences there have been through our immigration. Yeah, so that was really the core of it and I thought it would be really interesting to put this combination of Indigenous, Chinese and Australian-European into a family or a pair of families who were closely intertwined. So that's really how that came about and it was also, of course, the start of the time when we were just starting to hear about the Stolen Generations.

Yeah ... so that was really the genesis of it. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

These drives were taking place in the early 2000s when the horrific consequences of Australia's child-removal policies were becoming prominent in the public consciousness. The *Bringing Them Home Report* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 1997) had been published a few years earlier in 1997. Not long afterward, in 2006, an inquiry was commissioned to investigate the Stolen Generations, resulting in the *Little Children Are Sacred Report* (Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, 2007), which was publicly released in 2007.

During these times of reflection, Blake was connecting the country she was driving through with ideas of belonging, politics, and Indigenous and other cultures mingling and interacting. These ideas became the foundation for the setting, plot, and characters in the Gippsland Trilogy. Once the idea to write a book had taken hold, Blake threw herself into writing without pause.

So, there was quite a bit of research obviously, that I did and – I mean, I wasn't obviously totally ignorant about the whole situation with Indigenous people, but I just hadn't had any first-hand interaction really. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Blake admits to having limited knowledge of and contact with Indigenous peoples before beginning to write. As part of writing the trilogy, she undertook research to expand her understanding of the issues she was writing about in relation to Aboriginal peoples and the Stolen Generations.

Blake was strongly motivated by her feelings of excitement for writing a book.

I think I was swept away with the idea of the excitement with writing that I just plunged into it. I can do this, I can write a book! (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

She had hopes and ambitions that her book would be published. She submitted it to publisher a few times, and was rejected. Blake's support network began to play a role in her writing as a friend who worked as a librarian passed the book on to a publisher she

knew, unnamed by Blake in this interview, who accepted it for publication. This publisher became an important figure in Blake's writing career.

The origin of *Rock Dancer's* narrative was an incident at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. As the hosting country, the excitement with which Australians followed the Olympics was palpable. It was intensely scrutinised and reported on by the media, and satirised by comedians, and was therefore heavily influential in public and cultural discourse during that year. During the gymnastics competition, the equipment was set at the wrong height, arguably affecting the performance of some of the gymnasts, and causing some dramatic falls. This real-world event was the inspiration for the plot of *Rock Dancer*.

Yes and I saw her fall and I was thinking how – because I'd been a phys-ed teacher and a gymnast and I was thinking if you had – if you'd been catching bars on the – uneven bars and you had missed a catch and you'd really damaged somebody, how would that influence your life? (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Blake's experience in the field combined with a real-world event to cause her to become curious about some tangential aspects of high-level gymnastics: safety, pressure, and fairness. She imagined a worst-case scenario and explored it as the main narrative.

Contexts

Blake recalled becoming aware of political upheaval over the treatment of Indigenous peoples as she was beginning to start writing professionally. The Stolen Generations in particular were prominent in her political awareness at that time. She engaged with these issues and events as a history that was parallel to her own, despite not developing awareness of them until the early 2000s. For example, Blake reflected that when she was attending university in the 1960s:

It really was the end of the Stolen Generation⁴¹, I mean there was still – there was still women who were my age who were going off to be nurses in missions where

⁴¹ While the Stolen Generations from 1970s, and before, were being investigated and acknowledged as an atrocity in the early 2000s, the intergenerational effects of the Stolen Generations are still present in the lives of most Aboriginal Australians. The term has also been extended to apply to modern day child removal

the kids were being taken to, but we heard nothing about that. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

The Stolen Generations became one of the subjects explored in the Gippsland Trilogy. Blake reflected on the prominence of the Stolen Generations in political discourse as a highly contentious and volatile subject at the time that she was writing.

Well, politically, it was a very hot potato. I remember at a – something that [name redacted] took me to, ... it was at the Melbourne Club which of course is very, very conservative – oh I know, it was at the launch of the May Gibbs mentorships and fellowships. It was the launch of it and I was the first one for a mentorship and I remember there, a very, very angry man accosting me about the Stolen Generation and how it was all bullshit and it never happened [...] (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

This incident demonstrated the tension in the political context in which Blake was writing. The May Gibbs launch was a formal event, and the man's emotional outburst was even more surprising given the etiquette usually expected at such occasions. When asked how she reacted to the angry man, Blake said that etiquette and surprise prevented her from confronting him.

Blake has remained engaged with Indigenous issues and politics and has updated her knowledge through reports and media, such as the *Little Children Are Sacred Report*, up to the date of this interview. This was demonstrated within the interview, with many tangential discussions about current political and societal events that were not relevant to this analysis of her writing.

Techniques and Methods

Much of the writing for the Gippsland Trilogy was informed by places and people with whom Blake was intimately familiar. When collating information about these subjects, Blake relied on her memory, and routines that were already in place. When the plot called

policies that result in Aboriginal children being taken into out of home care at 10 times the rate of non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2018).

for a detail that was missing from the real-life location, Blake used her imagination to insert the required detail.

Yeah. And Rock Dancer is set in Croajingolong National Park which I've been going to since I was I think 19.

[...]

Yeah. Unfortunately, they don't have climbable faces in Croajingolong, so that was a bit of [licence], to stick that in. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Some content, such as information about the Stolen Generations or the intricacies of farming, were included based on personal curiosity, and were researched by gathering information by talking with people who had direct experience in the topic.

The houses are sort of based around the old weather board house that I used to live in in Heidelberg and so is the start of Rock Dancer, you know, when she's leaving and she's saying she knows the wallpaper and she knows the steps and yeah, so that's that old house in Heidelberg which doesn't exist anymore. So I suppose the old weather board houses I know really well, but no, I don't really know anything about farming, but I had a neighbour at Loch Sport who were farmers, so I used to say 'now [name redacted], tell me - tell me what do you do? Why do you move them? And then what do you do?' (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Reading also played a large role in Blake's writing research. She read 'what I could get my hands on' (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017). When Blake described the research that she undertook for the Gippsland Trilogy, almost all of the information sources she mentioned were research reports or non-fiction that is particularly scientific or factual in nature. She read both fiction and non-fiction, though mostly the latter, on the topics of the Gippsland area and the Stolen Generations.

Blake conducted further research into Indigenous Australian issues by contacting the Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation in Sale and attempting to contact another cultural centre.

I got some help from Ramahyuck, the Aboriginal Cooperative in Sale, but not a lot and I had tried to contact or tried to get response from one of the cultural centres on the New South Wales – Queensland border but didn't get response. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Blake's attempts to research Indigenous issues for her writing by contacting cultural centres had limited success. She placed a far greater emphasis on reading written sources as a useful research tool for her writing.

Behind many of Blake's writing methods is her support network. It includes her professional writing mentors such as her publisher and editor, as well as her friends and family. Blake repeatedly brought up the significance of the support from her publisher in her writing, and showed obvious gratitude and admiration for her professional writing team as colleagues and people. Their feedback heavily influenced the content and methods of her writing.

Blake's family provided emotional and practical support, as well as inspiring and even becoming a part of *Rock Dancer*.

With *Rock Dancer*, my son is a rock climber and it was actually his girlfriend at that stage or the girl on the cover –

[...]

That's him, yeah. Yeah. She said that it was like watching a dancer on a rock face which is where I got the title. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Several of the characters in the Gippsland Trilogy were modelled on real people from Blake's life, including Angie, a deaf girl with superb lip-reading skills. Sarah's tracking skills were inspired by Blake's own experience and fascination with tracking animals. The interactions of young people in general are heavily informed by Blake's experiences as physical education teacher, in which position she had the opportunity to observe the behaviour and interactions of young people and children.

Blake's family, when not directly inspiring her writing, act as a sounding board who help the writing process by discussing and providing feedback. Evidence of this arose at several points during the interview, most clearly during discussion of characterisation.

Blake's characters developed as she wrote, rather than being fully imagined or planned beforehand. Most characters from *Find Me a River* and *Rock Dancer* (excluding the central protagonists) began as one or two characteristics or ideas and only became fully formed characters as their plot, co-characters, and settings developed around them.

[...] he started out being quite two dimensional and I think that is something that happens when you start writing with a couple of – two or three or four central characters. But obviously they're going to have [a cohort] around them and they start out being very two dimensional, sometimes even black and white and then they need to grow and have a voice of their own. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

The character Blake is discussing above is Brian. He is socially isolated, and from a wealthy family who are judgemental of cultural differences. At first, he carries the same racist views as his parents. As the plot develops, Brian spends more time with the Aboriginal characters and becomes more respectful and accepting. However, Blake's original intentions were for Brian to remain judgemental and racist. It was through discussion with her partner that she changed the direction of her writing.

I wasn't actually – at the start I wasn't going to change his character. I think I remember it was a long discussion I had with [name redacted], my partner, about his character, I think it was through a discussion with her that I just – I wasn't happy with his character, it was too black and white, you know, here's the bad boy from the bad parents, da-di-da and if you don't, ... if your characters don't change, they're dead in the water. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Brian, as a stereotype of a privileged non-Indigenous boy, did not work for Blake's writing. Through feedback from her support network, Blake found that character complexity, progression, and development, especially with regard to racism and acceptance, was integral to successful writing.

I think he really sort of developed as he went along because he – he either had to change or completely drop out of the book or you know, completely – he couldn't stay static in that environment because he would have either not been reintroduced beyond chapter one and that's a real no-no, you can't bring in a

character and then say alright, I'm finished with you, you go away. You have to have consistency, and he comes back in in the third book.

[...]

I've got a great deal of sympathy for that character because even though he's come from a wealthy family, in a way he's been terribly neglected and he's almost – he's a nuisance in the family. So he's an outcast in his own right and even at his school, he's – I don't know whether that comes through in that book. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Brian's character is made complex by his suffering. It gives him aspects of humanity that make him more than two-dimensional, and capable of growing past the racism that has been ingrained by his upbringing, which allows him to contribute nuances to the portrayal of racism in the Gippsland Trilogy.

When asked about writing racist ideas into her novels Blake responded:

No, I didn't have a problem with introducing that [racism], just because it's still alive and well and if you don't name things, if you don't talk about it -

[...]

It persists [...] (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Presenting racism in her writing is about realism for Blake. It is a part of her experience that children and adults alike carry sentiments, racist and otherwise, that marginalise difference. She also believes that excluding racism from discourse allows it to continue, unchallenged, in society. There are other characters who express judgemental, racist sentiments, and by contrast a couple who are very compassionate and sensitive and who remain that way, but these others appear only as cameo characters. When asked if there was inspiration for the racist Miss Hatty and the kind, compassionate Rose Bannock, Blake replied:

No, I think there are just good compassionate people that are good to stick in there. And Miss Hatty, I – I loved it. I loved writing her.

[...]

I guess they're all probably a little bit overdrawn those characters, but look, if it's your first book, [you over-write things] (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

In her enthusiasm and inexperience, Blake wrote characters who were stereotypical examples of racism or social progressiveness. Blake found writing Miss Hatty pleasurable, despite the character's despicable traits, because she was a caricature bordering on satire. Rose Bannock, at the other end of the spectrum, is an obvious positive force in the novel, and an extension of themes of positivity and humanity that Blake values and deliberately works into her writing.

When asked how she wrote character's personalities and outlooks that were consistent with their cultural backgrounds and settings, Blake reflected that her personal perspective on society, in general, is that difference pales in comparison to commonality.

I think my overwhelming thought... and I think this is really – I think this is almost in hindsight when I think about it, I thought the things which make us different are small in comparison with the huge amount of humanity – humanism that is similar. So I suppose I wrote from that point of view that a confident, young, Indigenous woman like Kes would have far more in common with her school cohort than she would not have in common, and that is probably a bit idealistic [...]. I do know young Indigenous teenagers that really fly through high school in the same way as the other kids do, and they're not destroyed by racism, and the racism that they get, they can handle. [...] (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

In the Gippsland Trilogy, Blake deliberately intended to write positive representations of Indigenous children and families. She felt that the stories that were prominent in Australian public discourse at the time she was writing were horrific. In writing the Gippsland Trilogy, Blake was trying to tell a story that contributed to more wholistic representations of Indigenous peoples that included success and positivity. Advancing positivity within her narrative meant that Blake wrote from an idealistic perspective, emphasising the commonalities between cultures rather than the differences, in order to unite her characters through shared humanity.

So from that point of view, I think I had the idea that I wanted to write something that was very positive and I think, you know, it's hard to remember now, but I

think a lot of the stuff that was around at that time was very negative, it was very Stolen Generation and this is terrible, and it obviously was terrible, I'm not saying that it wasn't, but that is not the full picture. I know people still live rich lives and particularly with a family, or with that family that I'd tried to create, and I deliberately tried to create a very supportive, very positive family. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

The primary ways that Blake made representation of her Indigenous characters positive was to depict a strong family unit and give central characters intelligence and education. In this section of the interview Blake discusses Kes's father, Pat, and her mother, Kate. She describes the methods she used to characterise a strong, positive family dynamic.

Well, you've got an Indigenous man who is married a white accountant, so you've – you know, we're not talking nuffies –

[...]

So, we're talking about intelligent people, so there's your first criteria. Then his wife, whose name I can't remember now, is not a bleeding-heart, in fact none of them are, so she hasn't married him because she felt sorry for him, she's married him because she loves him. So, you've already got an expectation that there's going to be a type of life that will develop between the two of them and really, that was pretty much how I developed his character, bouncing between the two of them. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Blake describes Kate, her intelligent, progressive personality, and Pat's intelligence as the starting point for developing Pat's character. Not only is Kate empathetic and accepting of Pat's cultural heritage, but she is also sensible and straightforward. She isn't dramatic, overly romantic, or pitying. It is through the perspective of Kate's character that Pat's character developed. Together with the example of Kes's success in school, academically and socially, it seems that Blake imbued her characters with intelligence and insight as a narrative device to overcome the pressure to produce darker, more tragic representations of Indigenous characters.

Feedback

Blake remembers receiving a wide range of feedback for *Find Me a River* and *Rock Dancer*; both positive and critical. Her efforts to portray a strong, culturally diverse, caring family was explicitly brought up by her publisher.

So yes, the development of the family was quite deliberately positive which was one of things that actually [my publisher, name redacted] said to me ‘Oh, it’s such a joy to read about such a family that isn’t dysfunctional!’ (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

The implication behind this feedback is that positive, idealistic portrayals of family life for culturally diverse people, including Indigenous peoples, were not the norm at the time that Blake was writing. Blake’s publisher, as a member of the industry, was immersed in representation trends and found Blake’s representation of family refreshing and uplifting.

Blake also received positive feedback from her child readership. Members from the demographic of child readers who live in rural Australia told Blake that they were surprised and excited to see their location and their lifestyle represented in fiction.

Yes, yes, particularly from rural kids because they say things like ‘I can’t believe somebody is writing about the country’ because so much is metrocentric and particularly, of course, stuff in Gippsland, you know [...] (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Children also pointed out technical mistakes and continuity errors. Much of the negative feedback or criticism Blake received from adults brought up considerations and decisions, such as using swear words, in light of a young readership. Blake mentioned that her publisher used discretion when passing on negative feedback.

Then a lot of the negative stuff, [redacted] just didn’t pass on, and that was mostly to do with swearing or – it was mostly swearing I think because there’s a whole –
[...] A whole tribe of people who write about –
[...] every book that’s got swearwords in it should be banned. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Blake's publisher took on the role of being a barrier against the inundation of feedback. Blake was aware that her books received criticism for their language but did not have to receive the full brunt of numerous critiques on the subject.

Aside from being accosted by the man at the May Gibbs Mentorship event, mentioned above, Blake received almost no feedback, positive or negative, about her inclusion of representations of Indigenous peoples. It was mentioned in reviews in a descriptive sense but was not critiqued or analysed.

Reflections

Reflecting on the Gippsland Trilogy from the time of the interview, Blake is content and proud of her books. She said wouldn't make any changes, stating 'you've got to let them stand or fall' (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017), however, *Find Me a River* went through extensive changes pre-publication to become the book that was eventually published.

Yeah, I'm happy with it. [...] I think when you write your first book, you think it's going to be the only book you write so you try to get everything into it. Which is why I ended up taking the whole first third off because it was too much– and you know, as you get further away from it, you think well, that's a little bit over enthusiastic [...] (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Blake's enthusiasm and inexperience meant that the first attempts at writing *Find Me a River* resulted in a draft that was both overly long and convoluted. Looking back, she stated that the craft of writing requires practice and improves over time.

Subsequent writing projects required Blake to read the *ACA Protocols* as part of a grant application. She referred to it as strictly an administrative necessity, and said that she could not remember much information about them.

Her current writing project at the time of the interview involved collating stories from women in the Gulf of Carpentaria. She ran workshops which encouraged and supported fifty-five women, from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural backgrounds, to write their stories, which were then collated into a book that has since been published under the title of *Gulf Women*.

It does take practice. It does. It's been really interesting because with this book that I've been editing and collating, I've done a lot of mentoring with probably 50 of the 55 women who – the first thing they say is 'I can't write, I haven't written anything since I was at school, my life's just ordinary, I don't have anything to say, it will be a dog's dinner'.

[...]

But [I've done] a lot of mentoring and it's really interesting seeing the – I suppose the mistakes that they have made, I think, 'I did that, I did that, I did that, I did that' - took about 10 years but I learned eventually. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

In helping the women in the Gulf to write, Blake reflected on her own writing process and identified the pitfalls and successes. She advises starting with a core, an event, on which to elaborate and build.

I was saying to them, you write about an incident – because they all wanted to write about incidents – most of them wanted to write about an incident because their lives are full of horrendous incidents –

[...] so they're actual stories from women on cattle stations and on boats and living on Mornington Island or working around the Gulf of Carpentaria and, you know, their lives are pretty dramatic [...]

[...]

So I said to them look, get an incident down and then – the term I use is embroidery. You embroider it around that. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

This 'embroidery' is a combination of adding details and editing, and is a potentially infinite process to bring the writing to maturity. Producing *Gulf Women* also gave Blake a different perspective on Indigenous representation than she had when she wrote her first book. When asked what advice she would give to other writers on the subject, Blake said:

I would – now, having met many Indigenous people and become friends with several, I would just say, '[do] not [...] be as bold as to think you can write Indigenous characters without talking to Indigenous people and certainly if you're

going to write about them in a particular place, you need to absorb that place and you need to talk to them preferably in that place. I would be very much – I would be much more hesitant now about writing an Indigenous character knowing now – I suppose being somewhat part of Northwest Queensland country and station life and knowing far more about Indigenous people in that area, I would be much more hesitant about doing that now. (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

Blake has not included Indigenous characters in her writing since the Gippsland Trilogy, not through deliberate avoidance, but as her writing has moved into different areas. It is also clear that her work on *Gulf Women* has shifted her perspective on what is appropriate and achievable in terms of Indigenous representations, and what methods and methods she would now use to write them, emphasising intimate knowledge and connection with people and places.

Chapter 11: Vikki Wakefield

Vikki Wakefield lives in Adelaide, South Australia. She has published four young adult novels, with a fifth scheduled for release in September 2019. Each of her novels has received multiple accolades.

Friday Brown (published 2012)

Friday Brown is Vikki Wakefield's second novel. Upon publication, it was shortlisted for the 2013 Inky Award, the Prime Minister's Literary Award 2013, the Queensland Literary Award, and the Western Australia Premier's Book Award. It was also an Honour Book in the 2013 CBCA Book of the Year Award for Older Readers.

Friday Brown is written from the first-person perspective of the eponymous character, Friday, who has grown up constantly moving around small, remote towns with her mother. Her mother tells her many stories; one states that there is a curse which means that the Brown women all die a water-related death on a Saturday. When her mother dies, by drowning on a Saturday, Friday stays briefly with her grandfather before running away to a nameless city, trying to escape her grief and fear. She falls in with a gang of squatters made up of a diverse group of teenagers, controlled and led by the fearsome, charismatic Arden. Arden's plan is to move her gang out of the city to a fictional abandoned town called Murungal Creek. The novel is divided into two halves; metropolitan and rural.

Indigenous representation in *Friday Brown* comes in the form of brief descriptions of memories of rural life with Friday's mother and, more substantially, via the Aboriginal character of Bree. From Friday's perspective, Bree stands out as being much friendlier and more caring than the other members of the gang. She has a maternal and trustworthy personality that contrasts with the often bad-tempered or cruel ways in which the other teenagers treat each other and Friday. She moves through the environment of the city with an ease and confidence that Friday lacks:

'I've only ever lived here.' She spread her arms, held out her hands like cups. Behind her, the blueish silhouette of buildings shrouded in smog, miniature by distance and held in her palms. (Wakefield, 2012, Chapter 8, Section 1, para. 60)

Connecting and conflating Indigenous peoples with nature in the tradition of the noble savage has long been a trope in Aboriginalist texts, serving to distance, romanticise, and infantilise the Indigenous Other from the intellectually and technologically advanced Western Self. Bree's representation throughout the novel is almost an inversion of this stereotype. Subversion of the stereotype continues the second half of the novel, set in Murungal Creek. Bree is completely lost, uncomfortable and uncertain in the rural setting, while Friday is a confident authority.

'I don't think I've ever seen you smile.'

'Of course you have.' I blushed. 'I smile all the time.'

'Not from here to here.' She drew a line from one ear to the other with a finger.

'See, I'm just not feeling it.'

'Feeling what?'

'Whatever it is I'm supposed to feel. You know, some deep connection with the land, or whatever. What a load of shit.' She wrapped the sleeping bag around her shoulders.

'You're pretty hard on yourself.'

'I want to go home.'

'Me too. Wherever that is.' (Wakefield, 2012, Chapter 22, Section 1, para. 22)

Although the character of Bree resists being represented as innately connected to nature, she is represented as feeling deficient for not fulfilling that stereotype. The gang turns to her for advice, assuming she will know what to do in a rural setting because she is Aboriginal, and she responds with anger and frustration, some of which is aimed at herself. Bree also repeatedly asks Friday to recount all the places she has been, as if she longs to escape the city and know the country. Bree, so confident in many ways, is uncertain about her connections to her family and her culture. Friday meets Bree's family in a park in the city:

Bree gestured to a group of Aboriginal men and women sitting in a circle on the grass. They were darker-skinned than Bree, dressed in traditional costume, their

faces and arms painted with streaks of grey. 'They're doing a performance for the festival.'

'Can I watch?' I walked closer to the group and Bree followed reluctantly. 'What do you do?'

She shook her head. 'I help out but I don't ... you know. I just don't.'

'Why not?'

'It's not my thing,' she said and kicked the ground. (Wakefield, 2012, Chapter 8, Section 2, para. 11)

The first-person perspective means that the reader can only observe Bree's discomfort without understanding the cultural details or implications, aligning well with Lucashenko's (2009) recommendation that non-Indigenous authors should avoid imposing inauthentic ideas of Indigenous culture onto Indigenous people. There is very little exposition to expand on Bree's situation, or illuminate her thoughts and feelings. In this she is one of a cast of individual characters observed by Friday; each one with a unique personality, situation, and role in the narrative.

At the conclusion of the novel, as the gang disperses, Bree returns to her family and decides to go and live on country with her aunts to learn more about her heritage.

'Where are you going?'

'Cooktown,' she said. 'To stay with my auntie. They live the old way.' She looked away, embarrassed. 'Everything was so big out there, Friday. You know?'

'I know,' I said. (Wakefield, 2012, Chapter 34, Section 4, para 32)

The resolution of her narrative implies a dichotomy between Indigenous identity in metropolitan and rural settings. While her only experience is metropolitan Bree cannot be fulfilled in her cultural identity. So, despite efforts to resist the noble savage stereotype, Bree's narrative ultimately ends by falling back into the trope of returning to nature to process, affirm, and legitimise her identity.

Interview Analysis

When you stray off course a little bit and you're navigating territory that's strange then I think I would have to venture outside of my own little bubble and seek – I wouldn't do it, I just wouldn't, I know I wouldn't because I would be too – I'm not a brave human being. There are plenty of writers out there who can and who will. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Introductory Information

Wakefield's most striking attributes during this interview were introspection and reflexivity. Her comments were carefully considered. As she described the highlights of her writing career so far, she picked up on moments of achievement that were subjective to her personally, rather than more universally recognised milestones such as receiving awards or reaching publication. She spoke, firstly, of the relief and celebration she felt after experiences such as public speaking engagements at Writers' Festivals, events which she had viewed previously as anxiety-inducing career requirements. While those events impacted her, for Wakefield, relief and celebration are not as important as other more private moments.

So those small moments when I just get it right and I think okay, I'm really starting to narrow it down and I'm finding out what this book is about, that's probably the best part. And that happens with no one else around. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

She described incremental moments of solving problems, making progress, and achieving 'rightness' or satisfaction in her writing as the highlight of her career. Like many of the participants, Wakefield's writing practice follows a cycle. Her cycle, as described in the interview, begins with uncertainty and anxiety about a complex variety of factors, including the daunting prospect of writing a novel, and potential mistakes and failures. If unmanaged, this uncertainty leads to stagnation and procrastination. Making small progress restores confidence, at least temporarily, and increases motivation. That Wakefield has such detailed knowledge about her internal motivations and cycles is indicative of self-reflection and self-criticism, which extended into her methods of writing Aboriginal characters. This was apparent throughout the interview, and was the first example of a theme which touched on in much of the content which was discussed; the

value of the ‘small’, ‘narrow’, ‘intense’ and/or ‘intimate’ moments, and that for Wakefield when these moments are widened there are losses in productivity, and an increase in pressure.

Origins and Motivations

In contrast to a usually methodical and professional attitude, Wakefield described the origins of *Friday Brown* as:

‘Friday Brown’ is me just going crazy with stories, like, lots of things fed into this book.

[...]

Yeah. And I got really emotional with this book, whereas, some, I can be quite clinical about the story I’m trying to tell. The one [novel] I’m working on right now, I’m full business, you know? *Friday Brown* was really quite an emotional roller coaster of a book. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Friday Brown emerged from a creative and emotional frenzy. In contrast to her other works, which were written more methodically, this writing process was about piecing together multitudes of fragments from different stories, all drawn from different sources, times, and places. This was an artistic writing project, that Wakefield often described using metaphors drawn from art and craft.

This was like a crazy quilt making session with strange arts.

[...]

[writing this character] was like throwing paint at a wall.

[...]

And I think I’d been less self-conscious in this book than I have in any other so there’s a whimsical quality to it that maybe isn’t in some of my other work. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017).

Friday Brown came from a creative and artistic impetus to connect and amalgamate different, disparate stories and tell them in the form of a single novel. All of Wakefield’s comments on her motivations for writing *Friday Brown* are centred on a certain internal

freedom that she felt to freely release her emotions and ideas, resulting in a novel that she feels stands out from her oeuvre as eclectic and 'whimsical'.

Contexts

When asked about the context in which she wrote *Friday Brown*, Wakefield responded:

I can't lay claim to being the most insular writer you've interviewed but it's pretty likely. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

In this statement Wakefield acknowledges that she is introverted and introspective, demonstrating self-reflection and awareness. The primary contextual factors for *Friday Brown*, therefore, were derived from Wakefield's internal world: her reflections on herself and her experiences with others.

Discussion of external contexts and their relationship to the novel is more vague. Generally, Wakefield's writing is firmly rooted in and influenced by the communities to which she belongs, including her writing community, her local community, and her friends. Additionally, she frequently referred to books and media she had consumed to illustrate her ideas and comments, which form part of the context for her writing. Like Lawrinson, she also raised Shriver's speech on appropriation:

There are some friends occasionally will raise like, when Lionel Shriver's speech occurred and we have quiet conversations over wine about what does this mean, what does this mean for the industry, what does it mean for us, what does it mean for the people who have been hurt? We have those conversations and we try to work it out. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield's comments on Shriver continued to reinforce the extent to which she relies upon reflection and analysis. She demonstrated concern for the discourses on events within her communities and motivation to participate in those discussions. Despite initially dismissing external contextualisation due to her natural introversion, Wakefield did display awareness of external events in her communities.

Location and the implications of location were discussed in many different ways throughout the interview. Wakefield's location and the people that share her local community are influential on her writing, and on the way in which she crafts Indigenous representation in her novels.

It would be, like, me writing about my community and the people around me and of those people, there would be Indigenous people in that group and therefore, it was just a natural decision to include those people. So, I grew up in the north of Adelaide. So culturally pretty diverse now, even more so than it was when I was growing up. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield's community heavily influences her writing. Her characters and their cultural backgrounds are a direct reflection of the people she is surrounded by and has relationships with. Aside from individual personalities, the socio-economic demographics of locations familiar to Wakefield play a prominent role in the context of her writing.

Issues and events concerning Indigenous representation were mentioned often, indicating that considerations of Indigenous contexts are embedded in Wakefield's perspectives and ideas. While there were no specific external contexts that had a direct link to *Friday Brown*, the interview demonstrated consistent engagement with events within her immediate sphere of experience, and a curiosity and analytical attitude towards the implications of those events.

Techniques and Methods

Wakefield discussed her writing methods at length in the interview. These were not often related specifically to Indigenous representation; however, her general approach provides an important context for her treatment of Indigenous content. Wakefield organises her writing to manage the cycles of progression and stagnation mentioned in the 'Introductory Information' section.

I've learned to have a couple of things on the go so that I don't place too much expectation on the thing that I'm working on like the thing that has the looming deadline. Like, the book that I'm working on now is due in December but I'm thinking about the next one just in case. This one could dive at any moment and I just don't know. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Having multiple projects active performs two functions. The first is to provide an alternative project to write when the first is difficult or stagnated, relieving pressure and increasing momentum and motivation. The second function is to provide a feeling of

security; should another project become unworkable, there is something else to fall back on.

Wakefield sees the structure of each writing project as being comprised of multiple scenes rather than being one linear narrative.

And I've found I'm not quite so icky now about jumping around the place and it helps to work in – I'm using the Scrivener app now so I can see all those little chapters and all those little scenes and it's more like Play Doh than it is colouring in, it's more freeform. And that freaked me out a bit at first but now I'm starting to enjoy it. I'm more productive I think. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Breaking down each project into this structure of scenes allows for greater creative freedom and flexibility. Despite being initially intimidated by new methods of writing, Wakefield feels that the change in her approach has resulted in greater enjoyment and an increase in productivity.

Friday Brown is constructed from a multitude of disparate sources that Wakefield connected to each other. These ranged from a story about a missing boy that was reported in a newspaper, to *The Drover's Wife*, a short story first published in 1892 by famous Australian writer, Henry Lawson. Each of the different sources had some quality that made them intriguing or thought provoking, and so made them eligible for inclusion in *Friday Brown*.

Friday Brown is me just going crazy with stories, like, lots of things fed into this book. Like, the boy in the tank was a newspaper clipping about a young boy who'd crawled into a rainwater tank on his family's property and they didn't find him for a very long time.

When I riff off *The Drover's Wife* in that, that was because I'd had this kind of epiphany where I'd read *The Drover's Wife* in school and was bored by it and then read it again 20 years later when I was living on a property [...] and there was snake on my doorstep. And I'd just had a baby, she was 6 weeks old [...]. I've encountered snakes before but this thing almost was just evil personified that day, because I was so fragile after having the baby.

And I'd come out and it was between me and my car on the front doorstep, I couldn't go anywhere. And suddenly I just had this moment of empathy with *The Drover's Wife* and how she's sitting there waiting to cut this thing, waiting for it to come up under the floorboards. [...] (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

In using *The Drover's Wife*, Wakefield uses intertextuality in a similar way to French; namely, drawing on seminal Australian folk stories and retelling them. Further analysis on the similarities and differences of these author's approaches can be found in 'Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews'. Wakefield was struck by the change in her own perspective on *The Drover's Wife* due to the passage of time, and the events she experienced as a mother in a remote location. She was suddenly able to relate to the character of the Wife and find the emotion and thrilling terror within the story, beyond the rather dry surface of the narrative.

Experiences with people also formed sources of inspiration for narrative and characterisation elements of *Friday Brown*.

And Arden is a really strange friendship that I had with a person, who exists and is still around, that never found an ending so I kind of gave them one. Silence is several young people who are quite dear to me who I just rolled into one person. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Real people formed an important and prominent source of inspiration for *Friday Brown*. This includes their characteristics, as observed and remembered by Wakefield, and also relationships and interpersonal dynamics.

This array of sources was filtered through Wakefield's subjective experience. They were used not as objective, factual events, but as subjective retellings of moments and fragments that Wakefield found significant in some way, and she subsequently amalgamated them into a single novel.

The personal and subjective nature of the techniques and methods Wakefield used for *Friday Brown* meant that writing the novel was a fairly intimate and emotional experience, as mentioned in the 'Introductory Information' section. She contrasted the process of

writing *Friday Brown* with her other work by saying that she is usually less emotional and more clinical in her decision making while writing.

But it is what it is and I just sort of left it alone, I didn't mess with that story [*Friday Brown*]. Sometimes I iron out creases that I feel maybe sway the work more towards young adults than adults. Sometimes I have to make a decision which way to point the needle. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield resisted critiquing and changing her writing based on a more distant 'adult' perspective, and let a more immersed 'childlike' mindset lead the writing process.

It's quite often tone related [...]. And you have to make a definite decision about the tone or the context or whatever from that childlike part of your brain instead of the adult part which will take over and tell you to write a beautiful sentence. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield's audiences play a significant role in how she sets the tone of her writing. She demonstrated a keen awareness and thoughtfulness of her readership, both real and imagined. Decisions about tone rest on the tension between conforming to audience expectations about what is appropriate for young adults, and what a readership familiar with her work expects from future writing.

Sometimes you conform to what people think and sometimes it's a battle not to conform.

[...]

You kind of know that if you change lanes you're going to need to indicate way ahead because there's readership there and mine is small but wonderful.

[...]

So what I do imagine is I try not to think now about who my readers are, I rather just have a strange collection of people in my head but who would be my ideal readers like, some slightly odd kinds, maybe some kids with not an ideal childhood, like, a big [group] of those kids, that's what I have to imagine and then just go from there. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

In many respects Wakefield uses an imagined audience, combined with respect for her real audience, to dictate the direction of her writing. Providing her readership with writing that they like, and which matches their expectations, is a priority in her decision-making processes. She also acknowledges that this can be too restrictive on her writing. At that point, Wakefield uses her imagined ideal audience as a tool to break with conformity, and to set the tone of the writing and her mindset going forward into new material. She believes that her young readership has the agency and resilience to accept newness, and complex or grim ideas. Using this audience as a decision-making tool, however, can result in compromising her instincts.

But sometimes I think I let people convince me that that adult tone doesn't work with kids but I beg to differ because I think they get it. It's just that you can't go in writing for teenagers assuming that you know better than they do, what they should be reading. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

In order to achieve a flow of ideas and write in her preferred tone, Wakefield relies upon self-awareness and reflection to keep her analytical, perfectionist perspectives in check. This was the most evident when discussing her editing methods.

And sometimes I will deliberately scrunch up an idea or a sentence or a paragraph because it needs those creases and it doesn't need to be perfect, it shouldn't be perfect. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Deleting, reflecting, and resisting perfectionism are all part of Wakefield's editing processes, which form a prominent part of her writing. Much of what is written is never read by another person. The writing process is a very private one until the first draft is complete.

I write stuff that no one will probably ever read because I tend to have mass deletion events. Like, I just figure that I don't ever want to read those words again and so they're gone forever.

[...]

And I don't ever feel funny about deleting words, I feel if I didn't like them the first time around I'm probably not going to need them ever again which used to freak

my editor out because I only keep one continuous word file and if I made changes I didn't back it up [...] (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield is unconcerned about deleting her writing. She uses some digital writing tools, but often in the most minimal ways. She intermittently uses email to make a back-up to protect against losing more than a week's work, and only keeps one copy of any project. There is a notable certainty once the decision has been made about words that are not needed.

No. And my editor, [name redacted], is the first person to read the book when it's done so no, consultation wise, it's kind of just me and my ego on one side and my conscience on the other and we just kind of bicker about stuff until we figure it out. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

In line with her assessment of herself as an insular person, Wakefield is solitary and self-sufficient in her writing processes. She reflects and analyses her writing as she writes it, changing and discarding it as she deems necessary. Once a first draft is complete her editor reads it for the first time.

I think I make my changes [...] they're so minute as I go that I don't notice them as one sweeping change because I'm so finicky and I'm trying to drive this theme I will go back over the last three chapters, tweak, push forward a chapter, go back again.

So essentially my drafts, when they're done, are pretty clean but there's a huge amount of work that goes into writing it. [...] But *Friday Brown* was written in pieces too but they were chapters and they were printed out and they were on the table and I was moving things around. I was doing it so physically that you have a disconnect mentally, whereas when you're looking at a screen and you're moving it's a different process. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield's methods of editing involve physical manipulation of her writing. In a further rejection of purely digital writing methods in favour of manual processes, she prints hard copies of her writing and changes them physically by cutting out sections and changing their order until she is satisfied. In this sense, Wakefield's approach to writing bears a strong resemblance to methods and ideas from three-dimensional art forms, such as

sculpture. Writing scene-by-scene and making incremental changes simultaneously means that the project as a whole comes together slowly, but is highly refined by the time the first draft is completed.

Wakefield separates the settings in *Friday Brown* into rural and urban. Both had a bearing on Indigenous representation. Wakefield constructed settings and characters to comment on stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as wild, rural and also connected to their country. Both the city and the rural settings are amalgamations constructed from fragments of many real places that Wakefield is personally familiar with.

Friday Brown, because it covers so much ground, was many specific [real] settings geographically not located where they are in the book but they are quite specific to me. And I just sort of gather them in and create this fictional world. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

The amalgamations were constructed from memory alone, and were artistically motivated to atmospheric or emotive devices rather than orienting the reader within the world of the novel. In fact, often, Wakefield's aim was to disorient the reader with the anonymity of the setting.

It's a bit of a mess, I don't really want anyone to know where they are because I feel like then they're looking for a familiar and I don't want them to experience that. I want them to just see it the way I want them to see it. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

When creating the settings for *Friday Brown*, Wakefield was trying to convey a specific perspective and feeling about the environment that takes priority over the technical location. In order to prevent the reader from focusing on a particular location about which they may have pre-conceived ideas, Wakefield is deliberately vague with names and plays with the geographical relationships between places. This means that she can emphasise ideas, feelings, and atmospheres of the settings through her characters.

In terms of settings, anonymity is not only used for atmosphere, but is also a method of managing the ethical responsibilities that Wakefield feels as an author. Similar to Norrington and Lawrinson, she feels an obligation to protect and respect her subjects

when they are drawn from reality, by obfuscating their identity. To illustrate this point, Wakefield gave an example from her previous book, *All I Ever Wanted*.

But setting, I feel like I just don't want to be bound by it. Also I don't want to – I mean *All I Ever Wanted* is so obvious to an Adelaide person that it's set in Smithfield Plains but surprisingly, there's only a really small demographic of people who spot that [...]

Other people are willing to accept that it could be any number of about 10 suburbs in that general area and even that is too specific for me. But it was a very specific novel right down to the street [...]. It was not hard to figure out and yet why didn't I just name it? All of the details were correct. Well, because I don't want to hurt people and I don't want people to make assumptions. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield's concern is that using real places as settings for her entirely fictional characters creates the opportunity for readers to harmfully impose the characters onto the real-life occupants of those places. This has direct parallels to Lucashenko's (2009) assertions on authenticity, where she encourages writers to distance their perspective from Indigenous ones to avoid appropriation or projecting incorrect and inauthentic representations onto real Indigenous peoples. Lucashenko also advocates for specific authenticity, which demands detailed cultural identities, if not individual ones, complicating an approach to creating distance that fragments and disorients identity. Wakefield feels an ethical obligation to actively distance all real people from the characters that occupy the same specific space, while also maintaining the integrity of her artistic sensibilities by keeping the settings that are integral to her narrative.

Wakefield's primary technique for creating characters in her writing is to imagine them.

[...] when I play through scenes I do it in quite a cinematic way and almost like they're speaking lines. I don't read my work aloud, I don't practice dialogue between my characters, but I can absolutely see it when I close my eyes, I can see that kitchen in the abandoned house and I can see Joe and Darcy and AiAi and I can move them around the place and I can see the way they work, just little details like that.

But that's a lot of thinking time in there, there's lots of daydreaming goes on before I can get them to have those conversations that make them feel like they're distinct people. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield's characters are produced through their relationships and dialogue with each other. They are built up over time, becoming more vivid and nuanced the more time is spent imagining them. Developing dialogue this way is the key component in characterisation. It is through the conversations that the characters come into being, rather than through physical or active descriptions. Wakefield expressed a preference for and enjoyment of writing dialogue. She describes it as easy, satisfying, and enjoyable, especially the humorous elements.

It's really easy to write an entire scene in dialogue but suddenly you've got to let everyone know who's talking, what's happening, someone's just put a cup down, well, when did they pick it up? You know, these little things that stitch it all together and make it seamless.

So quite often I'll write dialogue and it will just be pages and pages of to and fro. And then I've got to take out the stuff that doesn't mean anything and then I've got to put in those details. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

For Wakefield, dialogue is the primary method of developing characters. The actions and aesthetics of characters take longer for her to write, and are typically edited into a scene after the dialogue is written. This includes many of the signifiers that give characters their cultural identity, such as physical descriptions, culturally identifiable clothing, or other attributes that distinguish culture. Due to the visual imagination process that Wakefield uses, communication of signifiers of cultural difference does not occur until the editing part of the writing process. When asked about creating Bree, a prominent character with Aboriginal identity and heritage in *Friday Brown*, Wakefield responded:

Well, she was there from the beginning. I always saw her as Aboriginal but I found it – I had to go back and actually tell people that. But this happens with all of my characters so it's not like it just happened with Bree. If you ever look at the first round of structural edits that come back from my editor, [they] will underline more character description please. I do not describe my – I describe what they say and I describe what they do but physically I don't describe them apart from just a

fleeting let's get that out of the way and then move onto it, you know? (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

The process of writing Bree, then, was exactly the same as writing any other character; internally imagined at first, and then written with very little description. All characters required fleshing out with descriptions and details, however for Bree there was an underlying tension with which Wakefield and her publisher wrestled; they perceived the possibility that a lack of description might, by default, signify a Western, heteronormative culture. As a consequence, signifying Bree's Aboriginal identity was a conscious effort. When the time came to 'go back' and communicate Bree's cultural heritage there were particular details that had to be added. In order to signify Aboriginal identity, Wakefield admits to using stereotypes, such as connections to nature and portrayals of ancient ritual, because they are effective ways to communicate. Wakefield also subverted stereotypes as part of the narrative structure to add irony and interest into the interpersonal dynamics between Friday and Bree; namely, having Friday uncomfortable in urban settings and comfortable in rural settings, and vice versa for Bree. The following is Wakefield's response to the creation of Bree as a character:

I guess for starters I did not – when I wrote Bree I didn't – if I had a cast of characters I would not have written Aboriginal next to her or Indigenous. She just turned up on the page and I always knew I needed some diversity in the group because this is not real life, this is a book and it's entertainment, it's like a movie. If you have three or four characters who are very similar then you'd get a flatness that happens.

[...]

So how do you introduce an Indigenous character? Well, I describe her physically, I mean I saw her dimple, I saw her smile, I knew she was going to be a really warm individual but also a take no crap individual. I needed her to be probably the least under Arden's spell, I needed her to be quite feisty in that respect. But also in the mirror thing or the flipside, you know, you've got the city and then you have [dust], I guess it appealed to my whimsy too to have a character, the fish out of water, flip.

And that maybe at some point - that seems like a really obvious device now but I don't know that that many people spot it or do they see it in context of the whole

structure of the book? Friday is completely lost in the city, Bree knows her way around. She tells Friday 'you'll get lost, it's the big city'. And then we have a girl whose, in identity, she'd be tied up, you know, in country and in the land and it's the other way around.

But that did not seem to me, at the time, to be forced or – that's just me pulling some strings, that's me having a little bit of fun with the underlying structure of the novel and the themes and the – I'm not an academic, I'm just thinking in terms of pictures and images and I make little connections that maybe no one will ever know are there but me. And so yes, I deliberately make Bree and Friday opposite poles in opposite ends of the book.

Whether that is a poor representation of Indigenous culture as in: am I using Bree as a plot device? Yeah, but no more than I've used any of the others, you know. Joe gets beat up and everyone will go all the gay kids always get beat up. The original – well, when I chose to write realistic novels I kind of knew that I'd be pushing out some stereotypes there and I'm always aware of that, it's never an accident. If they are stereotypical it's always deliberate. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield's comments on diversity and her inclusion of an Aboriginal character demonstrate her awareness that Indigenous representation is part of the discourse of young adult fiction. Diversity, including cultural diversity, is both a function of Wakefield using her real-life community as inspiration, as mentioned in the 'Contexts' section, and of her perspective on writing as a product for the entertainment industry. Writing realistic novels, for Wakefield, means establishing social diversity between her characters. As a necessary consequence, she has characters with very different social and cultural identities to her own. She is, however, cognisant of the discourses around representation of other identities, especially minority identities. She is also aware of the gap between stereotypes and reality, and shows concern over their impact by carefully deliberating her decisions. Wakefield uses identity stereotypes for various narrative purposes. In some cases, it is to facilitate communication with her audience, while in others, it is ironic and subversive. In each case, it is something she is reflexive of and aware of her decisions.

Wakefield uses what she describes as her internal 'checklist' to deliberate her decisions and make sure than they conform to her personal ethical standards. Throughout the interview, though it was never the direct subject of conversation, it was evident that Wakefield habitually reflects on her decisions, and interrogates them to make sure they were made with honesty and integrity.

I guess my litmus test is if I'm questioned, if I'm asked the question, can I answer it truthfully, honestly and would I change anything? If the answer is no, then that's what I go with, that's what I have to go with otherwise I feel like someone else is controlling my story.

[...]

I think I can still answer yes to those questions and I feel like I'm not being – like I said, I'm fairly resolute in my ideas behind my characters once I've made up my mind. I've gone through a really long process of making sure that I'm okay with it so I have not yet gone back and gone no, I would not have done that again. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Not only does Wakefield use her checklist at the time of or just after decisions are made; upon receiving feedback, she revisits old decisions and re-applies the interrogation to see whether contexts and time have changed her opinion of her actions.

Feedback

Wakefield discussed receiving many different types of feedback from many sources. From her wider audience, online, she received feedback from fans who 'loved' her writing and negative feedback describing her books as 'slow paced'. The feedback she received from reviewers was uniformly good, despite some pointing out some technical or continuity errors in certain scenes.

Wakefield has received some criticisms for parts of her writing that portray perpetrators of crimes as evading consequences and victims of crimes as undamaged, or at least able to overcome their ordeal quickly and without ceremony. Her response to these criticisms is that:

But again, I did that deliberately because that's a chunk of real life. For example, when I was fresh out of school, I got a job in a bank and within six weeks of working

I was in a bank holdup. I was behind the counter; I was one of the customer service people. And I keep waiting for some kind of PTSD to kick in and it never has. I've always been really quite stoic about what happened even though it was violent and it was life changing and all the rest of it. I didn't come out of it scared or vengeful in any way. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield applies a similar reflective process to receiving criticism as she does to developing the content of her writing. When she receives feedback, she feels motivated by curiosity to reread or revisit the subject of the critique, and re-evaluate it according to her internal, reflexive checklist. If the writing upholds her personal standards of honesty and authenticity, she is satisfied, whether or not the writing portrays traditional, didactic, or moral narratives.

Within her close, personal sphere of friends there was one conversation that Wakefield had about the representation of Indigenous characters in *Friday Brown*.

And a friend of mine who is an Indigenous writer herself and same person that we have very honest conversations about things, had told me that *Friday Brown*, had she read it before it was published – you know, we're talking this is published in 2012 – so had she read it before it was published there were a few things that she would have pointed out. We did not have that conversation [at the time].

[...]

- it's okay because I put the – so in a way I'm feeling like again, that's my internal check list, it has paid off but maybe some of that broader stuff has not. It is a minefield. See, that's a conversation that was never quite finished but – and I suspect that I know that little things like you can't just plonk the word 'didgeridoo' in a sentence and it be authentic.

You can do a little bit of background and all the rest of it but I still do feel like my – Bree is not me, I am not Bree and I never wrote her that way - but maybe some observations I'd made of family or of relationship to land are insensitive. It doesn't mean that they are not faithfully – because I feel like I can still answer that question, that big question, I can still say 'yes' because, to me, Bree, as a character, is utterly real and all of those problems, those things that I did to flesh out her life

were real. So yes, I can answer 'yes'. Does that mean it's not going to hurt anybody?
No. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

This is feedback which Wakefield received from a close, trusted person, who also has expertise and authority in Indigenous representation. Wakefield emphasised the value of this feedback and the intimate way it was communicated to her privately and frankly. In line with her usual response to feedback, Wakefield reflected on her writing and concluded that, while the criticism is legitimate, her internal ethical sensibilities are her ultimate guide. Further, that Bree passes her internal interrogation of her writing processes. This does not mean that Wakefield feels that readers do not have the right or cause to find fault with Bree. Part of this reflection is the acceptance of responsibility for the pain felt by those who might see Bree's characterisation as hurtful.

Reflections

Wakefield reflected often on Indigenous representation, both as part of her writing practice and as a general concept. Her explanations and reflections on her own work reaffirm the importance of the familiarity of her subjects as drawn from her experiences and communities.

[...] I guess there's a line in *All I Ever Wanted*, 'it is what it is'. That explains my reasons for writing indigenous characters, that's my community, that's my upbringing, that's my history. And yet I would not choose to write a Muslim character because I seriously don't know many Muslims. Could I write Greeks and Italians? Absolutely, as neighbours and friends and people growing up. I feel like you have a needle and your needle points in a certain direction. What you find when you head in that direction is what informs your stories. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield's 'needle' points her towards subjects which she knows intimately, and she feels anxiety and fear at the prospect of moving beyond that space. She strongly indicated that she feels a weight of responsibility to her subjects that she would not be able to fulfil if she were to step outside of her immediate, familiar context. She also put a heavy emphasis on her personal perspective, both as a writer and within her writing.

And people generally – we don't all go out there and say that the art comes first and people come second. I protect people all the time in my work. I know that

some characters are out there still living and I – so I wouldn't say that I tread carefully around just Indigenous representation, there's a whole bunch of stuff that I will circle warily for a while and just try to figure out where my position is, do I know enough, what are my reasons, who am I going to hurt? That's for everybody, not just Indigenous characters. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Consideration of people and their feelings is built into the way Wakefield writes. Leaving out identifying features, names, and places are all methods that she mentioned. She also discusses characters and events with individual people who might be affected by their inclusion in her writing.

The responsibility Wakefield feels is inspired by times when she has felt hurt or irritated by representations that she relates to which have poorly presented aspects.

I had to think of something that was important to me and that I would feel strongly about if I read it in a book and it was misrepresented or hurtful or the author got it really wrong or was lazy or was mean or was arrogant or any number of reasons did not do the work required, what would it be?

And I just thought, you know what, sometimes I read representations of class about kids who maybe grow up really tough, with tough lives and who – you read the comment section on articles where another feral family has trashed a house, a government house. You only have to read those comments to see that there is a stereotype and most stereotypes are stereotypes for a reason, because they're common. But if you don't learn to understand that person you can't break down, you have a really hard and fixed idea of who that person might be.

And there's so many teens who are stuck being judged that way [...] So when I see class done badly I get upset and pissed off. And so when I think about Indigenous culture done badly I figure they must feel the same, once I could find that empathy.

[...] when I get pissed off about representations to class, particularly in young adult literature, I think don't just write a sad kid or a bad kid because it makes a good story, just what are you trying to say, what are you saying and why are you saying

it? Is there someone who could say it better? (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield sees authors as having a higher responsibility than simply producing an entertaining and well-constructed story. There is a risk of hurting, trampling, and further marginalising already marginalised people by representing them in literature, particularly young adult literature, which demands adherence to a standard greater than artistic merit.

When a mistake is made, Wakefield believes the author also has a responsibility, as has already been discussed, to take ownership and apologise for any hurt their writing has done.

[...] there can be brief intimate moments between people that are satisfying for everyone instead of these fights that everybody starts and no one can finish.

[...]

Yep. And I know there are problematic things in 'Friday Brown', I know that, I've been told that but that came much later, there's nothing I can do about that. Can I say sorry to one person because there's something in there that hurt them and can they accept my apology? Yes, it absolutely can happen, it does not need to happen on social media. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Small scale, interpersonal discussions, apologies, and understandings are relatively easy to engage with. When the discussion is broadened out to the public arena it becomes more difficult; rushed, chaotic, and defensive. Nevertheless, Wakefield feels responsibility to engage and participate in discussions on Indigenous representation as a part of the writing community.

But it is happening but that's what I mean. There are conversations taking place that are not for public yet but it would be good if they could be public because they're respectful and they're – it's a two-way conversation. There have been. Can they happen in the open? I don't know, it's difficult.

I was, some time ago, going to be at the Melbourne Writer's Festival and we were going to be talking about exactly this, writers writing Indigenous characters. And

we were just going to have a free-for-all. We were going to be as honest as we possibly could and if that meant me talking about what I'm talking about today and there is a certain element of throwing yourself under the bus when you do that because there's a whole bunch of people out there who are quite willing to be heard and pile on [...].(Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Despite the difficulties in communicating in a large arena with many voices, the participating writers were excited at the possibility of open discussion and generation of ideas. While the event ultimately did not take place, Wakefield described her anxiety at the prospect of participating in this event, and her decision that the importance of the issue was enough to overcome her anxieties.

Wakefield also engages with the wider view of Indigenous representation through the *ACA Protocols*. She has not only read them, but keeps herself abreast of changes and updates. She considers the *ACA Protocols* as common knowledge in the writing community. Her feelings about them are somewhat mixed. Wakefield thinks they are an important starting point, but that they have flaws.

So the broad guidelines are somewhere to start but I think that that internal compass is as important. It's not enough just to tick the boxes.

In fact, I find that a really cold and clinical way of looking at another human being in considering their story. [...]

[...]

Like, it shouldn't just be a way of not being litigated, you know. It shouldn't be that. It's about understanding, it's not just about how do we not get sued or how do we not cop flack or how do we not have to pull this book from publication. That, to me, is the checklist, the understanding and the internal checklist is as, well, if not more, important. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield holds some cynicism that official guidelines are used by writers in the true spirit of respect for other people's stories. She sees potential for writers to use the *ACA Protocols* to appear respectful in an administrative and legal sense, but to avoid working on deeper, more empathetic levels of intercultural understanding. Wakefield continued

to emphasise the importance of the smaller, personal, human elements in making ethical decisions about Indigenous representations as well as other areas of writing.

When asked what advice she would give about representing Indigenous peoples in writing, Wakefield asserted that reading the *ACA Protocols* is necessary and makes a good starting point. She continued by stating that self-reflection and self-questioning is equally important.

You need to ask yourself why and from which viewpoint you are telling the story and then [make the] appropriate decision to tell the story. It's not saying you can't be somebody else but you need to know somebody else in order to be them. If you're not willing to do the work then don't tell the story. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

There has to be a clear, appropriate purpose for the inclusion of Indigenous representation, and such representation must be written with integrity and knowledge. Without these elements, representation is inappropriate and should not be attempted. The writer is accountable for their representations, and must work to ensure their writing is ethical and responsible.

And you will hurt people if you're writing about cultures not your own, you just will. But I think you need to be able to imagine that you're talking to that person who is hurt and can you explain to them why you did what you did and are you self-aware enough to say I'm sorry if you do get something wrong? And are you willing to listen to voices, people who are not you.

I don't know too many writers who do not question themselves continuously. I'm sure there are a few who are just really focused on the product and things have to be that that's it, that they don't have another viewpoint. If that's the case, then you need to be really sure about what you're writing about and you need to be able to answer that question as well about why you're writing and 'can I justify why I'm writing?' And if the answer is 'yes' then go right ahead. (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Wakefield values the broader external resources such as the *ACA Protocols* and feedback from others, as well as an internal, personal, ethical checklist. As a writer, having a wide-

angled perspective on Indigenous representation is important in understanding your responsibilities towards other people. On another layer, with more significance, the writer bears interpersonal responsibilities towards specific persons or people, and ultimately it is the internal checklist that bears the most responsibility for ethical, responsible Indigenous representation.

Chapter 12: Concluding Discussion of Interviews

This concluding chapter draws together the data across individual interviews to answer the research questions regarding the practices and methods of the participants when writing about Indigenous characters or issues, including their engagement with the *ACA Protocols*. The coding process produced three main categories that were common across all interviews: the personal and introspective aspects of the participants' engagement with Indigenous representation, the creative practice of writing and actions that writers take, and the activism and ethical considerations that were involved in the writing process. Codes within these categories have been collated, and the data from each participant compared with the others to analyse differences and similarities. The analysis shows three key findings: that writers have broad awareness of tensions in Indigenous representation; that their contribution to this area of discourse is a concern for them; and, finally, that many writers consider that protocols and other resources available to writers to guide Indigenous representation are limited in their effectiveness.

Personal and Personality: Emotions, Mindsets, and Reflections

Emotions: Fears and Empathy

Emotional responses are significant to this project due to their ability to act as motivation or obstacle to writers attempting to represent Indigenous cultures and/or peoples. These emotions are also often generated in reaction to, and are therefore an indication of, current tensions in the field of writing with regard to Indigenous representations.

Fear of entering a cultural space where they would not be welcome or where they would be inadvertently hurtful to Indigenous peoples was discussed by both Lawson and Atkins. Both writers were aware that the cultural communities they were engaging with had historically been greatly harmed and exploited by other outsiders. They were afraid that they would create more harm with their presence and activities than by avoiding contact. Both authors were also aware that they were not only ignorant of the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples, but also were incapable of understanding those peoples they were writing about well enough to inhabit their perspectives. These fears affected both writers deeply. The fears complicated and hindered writing; they interrupted and affected decisions that Lawson and Atkins made regarding Indigenous representation. As a solution in both cases, the writers distanced themselves from Indigenous perspectives in

their writing while simultaneously spending time engaging more, in person, with the communities they were representing, qualities that are extolled by Lucashenko (2009).

Similarly, Dubosarsky spoke about the esoteric nature of Indigenous cultures and arts. Unlike Atkins and Lawson, she does not fear engagement with Indigenous cultures. Rather, she feels so grounded within her own perspective that there is no possibility of understanding from an Indigenous perspective:

I suppose it's how I feel about Indigenous paintings when I look at them, it's so hidden from me that I feel as if I had no way in [...] it will always be remote from my understanding [...]' (Dubosarsky, personal communication, May 8, 2017).

The Golden Day does not contain Indigenous characters, but does use the idea of Indigenous culture and art as a mechanism for framing characterisation and for creating an inaccessible, mysterious, and tense atmosphere. The atmosphere in the novel is a direct insertion of Dubosarsky's feelings from contemplating the unknown and the permanently inaccessible.

Caution had as much of an influence on Lawrinson as fear had on Lawson and Atkins. Lawrinson began to become aware of the tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples during her time at university in the 1990s. At university she had formal education in identity politics and had some fractious interactions with a fellow student, who was an Aboriginal woman. Through these events, Lawrinson built an awareness of herself as a non-Indigenous person, and developed a responsibility to show care and respect towards Indigenous experiences.

Within the writing community, Lawrinson also considered the experience of Phillip Gwynne, who drew heavy criticism for his appropriation of Indigenous characters and stories and who she had judged to be 'quite traumatised' (personal communication, October 26, 2016) when she met him. Lawrinson was one of several participants who mentioned Gwynne as a cautionary case of Indigenous representation in young adult writing. Additionally, *Bye, Beautiful* was a deeply personal book to write. Lawrinson's family history, her own experiences, and issues she cared about such as women's rights and Aboriginal rights were all subjects that were addressed in the novel. She felt great ambition to do her subjects justice by producing a 'really good piece of writing' (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016). Ambition, responsibility, and

caution put enormous pressure on Lawrinson when she was making decisions about Indigenous representation in her writing.

The practice of writing sometimes became a source of emotional responses such as fear or traumatisation. Many participants wrote about subjects that had their roots in abuses and atrocities, stemming either from a tragedy of circumstance or from violence perpetrated by powerful people onto the disempowered. Some of the participants who dealt with such subject matter discussed an intense empathy with their subjects wherein they were affected profoundly and emotionally.

Murray's *Children of the Wind* series required her to research child abuse. She became intimately familiar with Australian government policies that denied children their rights and institutions that facilitated and ignored child abuse, as well as individual people who abused children and children who were abused. In the course of her research into migrant children, Murray also read information on the abuse of Aboriginal children and found there were parallels between the government, institutional, and personal abuse suffered by both groups. *A Prayer for Blue Delaney* includes representations of child abuse inflicted on both migrant and Indigenous children. While writing this subject matter, Murray felt emotions such as distress and hopelessness. As she describes it '[...] it gets really exhausting when your character is going through huge and difficult times because you go through it with them' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016). Empathy was an important part of the writing process for engaging deeply with her characters, but it also meant she imagined and felt the traumatic events that they went through in detail. Murray's empathy with the subject matter nearly derailed *A Prayer for Blue Delaney*. She managed to keep writing by completing the final happy chapter and looking at it to remind her of hope and happiness during the sombre, depressing moments in the narrative.

Atkins was also overwhelmed by emotional reactions to her subjects. As an adopted member of the community in which she set *Nona and Me*, she was present and involved in the world her novel was based on. Suicide, especially involving young people, was and is a common and devastating part of living in Yirrkala⁴². As a part of the community Atkins

⁴²A fact talked about extensively by Atkins and borne out by many news articles (Billias, 2015; James, 2016)

experienced the emotional toll and grieving that takes place when someone dies by suicide: '[...] the number of people that I know who have died there, it's too much. And then for them, you know, when it's their close family and it's every other week [...], I do not know how they cope at all' (personal communication, September 1, 2016). Unlike Murray, Atkins did not employ specific methods to manage her emotional response while writing. The significance of Atkins' empathy and emotions to her writing is that the ubiquity and emotional toll of suicide meant that it was a subject that Atkins felt was essential include in the novel for setting to be authentic.

Awareness, Contact and Immersion

Family and Upbringing

All of the participants had varying levels of awareness of, contact with, and immersion in Indigenous Australian cultures and history throughout their lives, as well as part of their writing. The degree of involvement, their learning and understanding, and their reaction and reflections on their involvement all proved to be significant when talking about their writing.

Lawrinson realised later in life that her childhood was spent adjacent to and in contact with Aboriginal communities that she had no awareness of at the time. She grew up in country towns in Western Australia, and came to understand that there were Aboriginal camps on the outskirts of some of the towns in which she lived. During her tertiary education, Lawrinson received education in Indigenous politics and history as well as for the first time knowingly interacting with Aboriginal people. *Bye, Beautiful* is, in inspiration and source material, grounded in Lawrinson's childhood. The disparity between her lack of awareness of Indigenous peoples in childhood and what she came to understand as an adult affected her and contributed to her determination to include Indigenous peoples in her writing; she was motivated to make diversity as visible and complex as it is to her adult self, in a setting that is drawn from her childhood and family history.

Norrington's childhood was also intrinsic to her inclusion of Indigenous peoples in her writing, however, in Norrington's case, awareness and immersion in Aboriginal cultures was an ingrained aspect of her childhood. She grew up in Barunga in the Northern Territory, a camp in which local Aboriginal peoples were forced to live. Norrington's

family was adopted into an Aboriginal family to give them a place in the community, including familial relationships, education, and responsibilities. She was immersed in ways of living, day to day, that are in line with her Aboriginal family's culture, and very different from a typical Anglo-Australian way of living. Her education was delivered by a member of her Aboriginal family, as well as other Elders, and included language as well as basic rules for living within the community.

When Norrington moved back to Darwin and a more Anglo-centric environment she found that her upbringing in Barunga had instilled her with values that 'were of no use to us, all of the things we thought were important were of no use, so that was a much more difficult time' (personal communication, August 29, 2016). As an adult, as her own family grew and moved to different parts of Australia, Norrington became aware that away from the Aboriginal communities with which she was familiar, there was far more segregation between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous peoples. Norrington became concerned that her grandson would not learn the respect for Aboriginal cultures that she valued so much in her own life. The Barrumbi series, like *Bye, Beautiful*, owes its nature to the childhood of its author, but where Lawrinson reflected back and found a lack of awareness of Indigenous peoples in her childhood, Norrington looked back at her immersion in culture and wanted to communicate that to future generations of her family.

French is another participant who experienced awareness, contact, and to a certain extent immersion in Aboriginal culture, namely that of the Noonuccal people, in her early life in Queensland. French now lives in New South Wales and she currently claims a limited connection with the Dhurga traditions: 'I live in the land of the Dhurga people of the Yuin nation and those are the traditions that I now keep, [to] a very limited extent' (personal communication, May 8, 2017). Unlike Lawrinson and Norrington, French drew few explicit connections between her awareness, contact, and immersion in Aboriginal cultures and her writing practices, at least in terms of *The Matilda Saga* and *Refuge*. She described it separately, as a broad context of her life, rather than as a direct or specific creative influence on her writing.

Prior Professional Networks

Murray and Atkins both cited their professional lives as having given them awareness of respectful approaches to working with Indigenous peoples and contact with networks

that would subsequently be invaluable to their writing. Murray's work for the Pitjantjatjara Council taught her 'a lot about how stories work, what's appropriate' (personal communication, October 11, 2016). She received practical experience in working across cultures and understanding lore and protocols in many aspects of Pitjantjatjara culture, including the treatment of stories and seeking permission.

Atkins described many short-term professional and volunteer positions that gave her experience working on community and government projects within Aboriginal communities. She pursued these positions through a desire and passion for working in Indigenous communities. Since childhood, Atkins had been drawn to the strong familial connections and societal structures around which Indigenous cultures are built. It was in a public service position, running Indigenous leadership workshops, that Atkins met a Yolŋu woman who invited her to Arnhem Land. After moving there with her family, she lived there for two years during which time, after a period of culture shock, she was immersed in community life, language, and culture, as were her family. During this time, she wrote *Nona and Me*, which was set in the same community, and reflected many of the experiences that she was encountering. In writing her first novel Atkins used skills that she had learned in her career, many of which required building relationships within the community.

Self-reflection

Writing about Indigenous peoples or cultures was, for some of the participants, a transformative experience that made them reflect on their own actions and identities. Lawson, Lawrinson, and Wakefield described distinct examples of self-reflection. Through researching *Freedom Ride*, Lawson came to understand more of Australian history and formed relationships at her local Aboriginal cultural centre, that have since resulted in workshops for Aboriginal children and collaborative writing projects with Aboriginal writers. The experience of writing *Freedom Ride* directly influenced the course of Lawson's subsequent writing.

While writing *Bye, Beautiful*, Lawrinson reflected upon her interactions with an Aboriginal woman at university and developed a new perspective on herself. She reasoned that she was acting within a set of social structures that had accepted her as white woman, in ways that were inaccessible to her fellow student as an Aboriginal

woman. These structures dictated different perspectives and behaviours in each woman. Lawrinson created the character of May through: '[...] my reflections on [my fellow student who was Aboriginal] and how that gave me a different experience of myself as a white person' (personal communication, October 26, 2016). Despite the empathy that such a revelation requires, Lawrinson is aware in her reflections and writing that her perspective is limited to her own experiences and that she can never inhabit the perspective of someone else.

Unlike Lawson and Lawrinson, Wakefield's self-reflection is habitual rather than spontaneous. Wakefield's entire writing process, from the subject matter to her methods and decision making, are based on self-reflection. She is constantly engaged in introspection and self-interrogation. Writing about Indigenous characters and culture is no exception: 'you need to ask yourself why and from which viewpoint you are telling the story and then [make the] appropriate decision to tell the story' (Wakefield, personal communication, October 17, 2017). This approach to writing requires Wakefield to take full responsibility for the consequences of her work once it is in the public sphere, which in turn requires much work and reflection to ensure that authorial decisions are defensible. This is a concern Wakefield has generally for her writing, including Indigenous representation.

Positivity from Participants

A universal aspect of this project was the enthusiasm and generosity of the participants. All participants were aware that Indigenous representation is an important issue within the writing community and that research within the area, such as this project, is valuable and welcome. This is clearly demonstrated in the time, effort, and thought that each participant contributed to the project, including performing post interview reviews of the transcripts and answering follow-up questions. All of these contributions were addressed with vigour. Every interaction with the participants confirmed that Indigenous representation in writing is a current issue in Australian young adult fiction production.

Writing and Righting: Techniques, Methods and Messages

Creating and Using Networks

Networks, either existing or created specifically for the text, were significant for the majority of participants. These networks were diverse in form, relationship, and purpose.

Some authors were experts with professional or personal experience in subjects that were to be included in the texts. Lawson utilised a friendship she had with a former ombudsman for Aboriginal Affairs to ask many obscure questions about the lives of Indigenous peoples who lived in camps and reserves in the 1960s. He was able to furnish her with details that are poorly documented elsewhere, and some that were undocumented. Blake, similarly, called upon a neighbour who is a farmer for details on farming practices and the effects of drought on Gippsland farms. These relationships were essential for Blake and Lawson to build the basis for their characters and settings.

Murray's networks were more cultivated than Lawson's and Blake's. She used an established network that she had acquired through a previous writing project, the novel *Tough Stuff*, for *Blue Delaney*. Murray had relationships with some members of the Ngarrindjeri Nation from Southern Central Australia. Her ideas for the character of Doreen as a maternal figure and storyteller required permission from an appropriate person from the Ngarrindjeri Nation, both to represent Doreen telling a traditional Ngarrindjeri story, and to include the story itself in *Blue Delaney*. Although her existing network could not give her permission, they were able to put Murray in contact with an appropriate person who did.

As has been discussed, Norrington was immersed in the Aboriginal community at Barunga, and they provided support and assistance in a multitude of ways, including consultation, approval, and language when she was writing the Barrumbi series. She had an extensive, established network resource that, unlike the other participants, she did not have to consciously build or seek out for the purpose of writing. Through visiting Barunga, she also cultivated relationships with some linguists who were working there as part of a government initiative. One of these linguists had written a Mayali dictionary, a language which Norrington used in the series. In this way, she received expert advice that helped her include Mayali accurately in her writing.

Networks, whether incidental, sought, or cultivated, provided essential knowledge as well as professional support for many of the participants while they were writing.

[Actively Seeking Indigenous Feedback and Advice](#)

Many of the participants felt it was important to include Indigenous peoples in their writing process for appropriate authenticity and respect, showing a departure from

criticisms such as Lucashenko's (2009) about Indigenous representations rarely involving Indigenous people. Inclusion, however, was rarely straightforward. Those participants who were living (or had lived) within the communities they were writing about, such as Norrington and Atkins, had direct access to people who were able to give them information and feedback on the content of their writing. Others who had pre-existing networks, such as Lawson and Murray, found that while it was not always a simple task to access people, they had pathways to talk to the people who could provide them with most of the information or permission which they needed to write. For authors who did not have previous relationships with Indigenous peoples, the process was not as simple.

Blake and Lawson approached Aboriginal cultural centres for information and help. Blake received some assistance from one centre, but received no response from another. Lawrinson also received no response from a community that she asked for consultation. Lawson was the only participant who had success from making unsolicited contact with cultural centres. In her case, the relationship became much more than requesting information; she became involved in teaching and running writing workshops for the centre, in addition to receiving advice for her writing. Existing relationships were an advantage to those participants who wanted to include Indigenous peoples in their writing process, however with time and commitment it was possible for some participants to create the sort of reciprocal relationships that made inclusion possible.

Research and Resources

In the context of this project, close interrogation of the research methods used and sources drawn upon hold the potential to subvert the ingrained racism of Aboriginalism as well as address issues of authenticity. While all participants used some kind of reference material on which to base their writing, not all actively sought new information through research. Active research was undertaken by most participants, as part of their writing process however the type and reason for research varied vastly across the participants.

Reading

Reading from non-fiction sources of knowledge was, by far, the most widely used method utilised by the participants to gather information on a diverse range of topics. It was the

preferred research solution for most questions, informing setting, social and political contexts, and characterisation. The mediums utilised for research ranged from first-person accounts to monographs, newspapers, internet searches, and government documents and legislation. Non-fiction writing was viewed by participants as accessible, diverse, and practical as a research method.

Primary sources were used by several participants. Lawrinson's access to archival police records from the 1960s was a privilege granted her due to her grandfather's historical position in the police force. These records proved to be a rich resource. Analysis of historical documents written by members of the police force, an institution that was well known to be highly discriminatory and cruel towards Indigenous peoples, presented a few challenges. The documents contained material that would be considered unthinkable racist in today's context, but also contained diverse perspectives, written, as they were, by many different police officers, including 'some you could see were quite sympathetic [to Aboriginal people]. Others were much more hard-core [...]' (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016).

Lawrinson used these documents to get a sense of the social context of her setting and to assist in building the characters of the police in *Bye, Beautiful*; notably, she did not use them to create the Aboriginal characters. She did not avoid using the overtly racist, cruel content, and neither did she homogenise or amalgamate the diversity. She did not re-create the world that the documents described, but instead, drew upon her subjectivity as a progressive, modern woman to interpret them.

Memories

'Memories' was a term that recurred throughout the coding process as a common knowledge resource drawn upon by the participants for their writing. Memories, by their nature, are both subjective and immediate, but sometimes distant and fragmented. They were often a distinct example of the tensions that can exist between deeply personal subjective sources and desires to be respectful of Indigenous peoples.

Lawrinson used memories in creating both the setting and characters for *Bye, Beautiful*, as they were based on places she knew, in addition to family and friends. In her case, she wrote from a subjective perspective, similar to herself as a child, and filled gaps in her memories with research she was able to perform as an adult. Lawrinson based the

character of Frank on her grandfather. She had heard of her grandfather's relationship, in a professional capacity, with the Aboriginal people in his community from several conflicting perspectives. Her grandfather and mother both thought he had 'a good relationship' (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016) with the Aboriginal people in his jurisdiction. By contrast, there is also a family story that he was called racist by Immigration Minister, Al Grassby. Lawrinson based the character of Billy on an Aboriginal boy she knew in school, and with whom she is still distantly acquainted. 'He was based on a boy I went to school with [...]. He was just gorgeous and I mean some of the Aboriginal boys at school were kind of scary and he wasn't' (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016).

In both these examples, the subjective quality of memories as a source of information is obvious: they are Lawrinson's authentic perspective of her grandfather and her school peer. To judge by the standards set by Bradford, Lucashenko, Heiss, and others, however, the subject of police relationships with Indigenous peoples and the characterisation of a young Aboriginal man seem charged with cultural bias, without the inclusion of an Indigenous voice. Writing from a subjective perspective, focalised through Sandy, reinforces the subjectivity of her source material and brings the novel closer to Lucashenko's non-Indigenous observer stance.

Lawrinson's example of using memories as a source stood out from the other authors, most of whom used memories in some way while writing. Norrington relied on memories of her childhood to write settings and characters. Wakefield used memories of her personal relationships and motherhood. Blake drew upon memories of her professional role, as a teacher, for characterisation. Unlike these examples from the other participants, in Lawrinson's interview use of memory dominated discussion of her writing practice. The personal nature of *Bye, Beautiful's* creation brings the novel to an inevitably subjective place. It was then combined with the sensitive and complex topic of the treatment of Indigenous peoples' relationship with police; a topic that remains, to the present day, a source of contention, pain, and suffering. Lawrinson's interview exemplified the quandary presented by the use of memories as a source. On one hand, they indisputably belong to the writer. On the other hand, some events are too politically, socially, and culturally charged to be viewed and represented by one perspective alone, especially across a cultural divide.

Interviews

Interviews were another primary source used by some participants. Interviews, as referred to here, are short face-to-face or phone conversations specifically to get information from the interviewee (longer form consultations and collaborations will be discussed below in 'Ethical Responsibilities'). Blake, Lawson, Atkins, and Murray all recounted interviewing people specifically for the texts. The people who were interviewed had experience of places, eras, or events that were represented in the author's creative writing. Atkins was the only participant who explicitly discussed interviews with Yolŋu people, the Aboriginal people she was representing in her writing. Interviews, generally, served the purpose of discovering the small details of human experience that was not discoverable in various media or published research. From Lawson's questions about toilet facilities in remote Aboriginal missions and camps, to Atkins' questions about realistic life ambitions for a teenage Yolŋu girl, interviews were often the crucial method for obtaining the level of detail needed for the world of the novel to be specific and authentic (Lucashenko, 2009).

Intertextuality

If authenticity is about grounding writing in reality, intertextuality is often used to bond writing to a broader and more conceptual narrative. Both French and Wakefield used Australian folk narratives in their novels, but in different ways. French drew upon literal interpretations of the poems and songs that she referenced in her writing. In some ways, she wanted to subvert popular interpretations by attempting to reposition them in an historical context, such as her use of *The Man from Snowy River* poem. In other ways, instances, such as the characterisation of Rose in *The Drover's Boy*, she used intertextuality to expand upon the narrative and give the characters, including Indigenous people and women, a life beyond the words of the original piece. French's use of intertextuality supported her aim of telling 'the story of the nation of Australia' (personal communication, May 8, 2017) by bonding The Matilda Saga to quintessential Australian folklore, albeit in the colonial Anglo-Australian tradition.

Wakefield also drew on a well-known Australian folk poem, *The Drover's Wife*, which referenced a wider experience of Australian women. She also had a strong perspective on which she based her interpretation of the poem. She related the poem to her own personal experiences of being a mother confronted with a snake. Wakefield's application

of intertextuality differed from French's more literal interpretation, by emphasising parable, subjectivity, and the relationships that individuals have with folk narratives.

Places and Spaces

Location was discussed by all participants as being highly influential to their writing. For some, such as Atkins and Norrington, they were physically situated in the location that they were writing about and observed their setting in real time as part of the writing process. Others, such as French, Wakefield, Dubosarsky, and Metzenthén, were intimately familiar with the locations in their novels, though as a necessity for their productivity they physically wrote in specific, comfortable space, instead of the location about which they were writing. The rest of the participants travelled to locations to research them in detail. Murray, in particular, emphasised that there was '[...] no town that's mentioned that's not one I've been to' (personal communication, October 11, 2016). In Murray, Norrington, and Atkins' writing, the authenticity of a location was closely tied to language, culture, and stories; in short, to the identity of their Indigenous characters. Without the care and detail to make the setting authentic the Indigenous characters would not have a strong and specific identity (Lucashenko, 2009). In all cases, even when an Indigenous representation did not denote a specific, named Indigenous culture, intimate knowledge of the setting was a matter of integrity for the participants. There was room for small adjustments for the sake of the writing, but even for settings that had been amalgamated from different locations, authenticity of the setting was discussed as being very important.

Representations of Intercultural Relationships

Intercultural relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters are a source of tension in the texts. Balancing cultural difference without falling into clichés or appropriation of voice, all within the context of racism and hegemony, is a fraught space. Every one of the participants' novels acknowledge and reference social and systemic racism. It is often represented as an obstacle or catalyst for intercultural relationships, either as a device for distancing characters or by creating a context for intimacy that is exceptional.

Atkins and Lawson approached the central intercultural relationships between their protagonists by leaving significant distance between them. Atkins' protagonists, Nona

and Rose, have grown up as sisters, but have grown apart and barely see each other as teenagers. Lawson's protagonists, Robbie and Micky, spend time with each other as colleagues, not out of friendship. They learn about each other, but there is not much affection between them until the last chapter of the novel, and even then, the narrative separates them without promise of a continued connection. For Atkins, she observed her small children making friends with Yolŋu children in preschool, and wondered about how those relationships would fare once the young people became more socially and politically aware. She confirmed with her Yolŋu mentor that it was indeed common for intercultural friendships to dissolve under the pressures of growing out of childhood. The resulting relationship was therefore realistic and without contrived romance. Similarly, Micky's cool relationship with Robbie was indicative of his experience growing up on the metaphorical and physical outskirts of society, the reality of which Lawson researched fastidiously. By avoiding forced friendships, both Lawson and Atkins gave their Aboriginal characters an independent and non-tokenistic place in their novels.

The intercultural relationship in *Bye, Beautiful*, in contrast, is depicted by Lawrinson, as close and romantic. In order to create an exception to the racism within the setting, Lawrinson contrived characters that would be drawn together despite or even because of the taboo of their intercultural relationship. She created characters that are aware of the social pressure and taboo of their relationship, while their characteristics are designed to drive them to overcome the problem of racism and form a relationship.

Wakefield's characters in *Friday Brown* have a mostly unremarkable friendship that stands largely outside the context of racism, and which has been formed in an unconventional social group. It is, however, conceptually based on a stereotype of Aboriginal people being equated to and associated with rural land (Bradford, 2001). Wakefield deliberately used the stereotype as part of a plot device to mirror the journeys of the two characters. At the beginning of the narrative the stereotype is subverted by the non-Indigenous character, being intimidated and lost in an urban environment in which the Indigenous character, is completely comfortable. When the narrative takes them to a rural environment this dynamic is reversed, satirically flipping the stereotype on its head. The conclusion of the novel, however, sees the indigenous protagonist returning to a rural environment to learn traditional ways of living from her family and overcome her discomfort with a rural setting. This ultimately re-establishes her as being aligned with

the stereotypical cultural heritage that was, until that point, satirised. The non-Indigenous protagonist, meanwhile, has lost any discomfort with her surroundings, moves through the urban environment with familiarity and ease, and has seemingly completed her development. For the bulk of the narrative, far from avoiding stereotypes, Wakefield embraced them and satirised them, however Wakefield's final character development of Bree somewhat limits the impact of the satire.

Writing Boundaries: Wills and Won'ts

Tokenism vs Appropriation

Non-Indigenous writers are faced with dilemmas of inclusion versus elimination, and subsequently, tokenism versus appropriation. To exclude Indigenous characters and cultures contributes to a harmful, discriminatory national narrative, yet to include them requires negotiating a complex and fraught space with many pitfalls that may also discriminate against and harm Indigenous peoples and cultures. Awareness of these issues was an underlying theme across all of the interview data. Some participants went to great lengths to address and manage them directly, while others found compromises between inclusion and avoidance.

The presence of Aboriginal people in *Wildlight* is more than tokenistic; they are a constant presence and are represented with some diversity of context. During his interview, Metzthen acknowledged the violent conflict between settlers of western Victoria and the Aboriginal population, but did not want to comment on it. He chose to place more focus on the non-violent relationships. In this way, while Aboriginal characters were present in the novel, Metzthen avoided some of the more violent details of history in favour of the rarer, more eccentric historical narratives, such as the real-life settler who organised and sent an Aboriginal cricket team to England.

In their interviews, Lawson, Norrington, Atkins, and Lawrinson mused more freely on the decisions they made and their concerns about appropriation and tokenism. Lawson had very clear boundaries about positioning herself as a non-Indigenous outsider to Indigenous perspectives: '[...] I can only imagine how it feels for [Micky] [...]. Whereas with Robbie, I know how he's feeling' (personal communication, July 5, 2016). She felt uncomfortable inhabiting her Indigenous characters, and used this discomfort to guide her decisions between appropriation and tokenism. Atkins also had strong internal

convictions about tokenism. Before writing *Nona and Me*, she had experienced workplace bullying after arguing that stereotypical, tokenistic Indigenous characters in television scripts are insulting and damaging to Indigenous identities. Similarly, Lawrinson (personal communication, October 26, 2016) reflects that ‘you can’t force it [...]. You can’t just put token Aboriginal people in and think that’s going to be ok, either. I don’t know. It requires deep thought’. Lawrinson is firmly in support of inclusion of Indigenous characters, as long as the inclusion is relevant in the way that the story demands. Norrington (personal communication, August 29, 2016) echoes this when she says ‘[...] you [don’t] just want to have a token Aboriginal person in every book. But it’s got to be impossible, I think, if you’re living in the Northern Territory, not to have an Indigenous people in your writing.’ All four of these participants expressed deeply held ethical convictions about tokenism and appropriation. These convictions were uniformly the product of years of thought, education, experience, and actively seeking contact with Indigenous people.

Perspective: Keeping Your Distance

Appropriation of Indigenous voices and perspectives as well as presuming to speak for Indigenous peoples is a major concern for critics of Indigenous representation by non-Indigenous writers. This was a point of tension that most strongly unified the interview data. The participants in this project were highly conscious of their decisions, and dealt with these issues by writing from a perspective that created distance between the perspective they had taken and possible Indigenous perspectives within the text.

Many participants stated adamantly that they felt it was completely inappropriate to write in the first person from an Indigenous perspective. No participant said that it was something they felt they could do. French (personal communication, May 8, 2017) also said that she would not have an Indigenous protagonist, with one notable exception. All participants agreed that a non-Indigenous, Anglo-Australian perspective was an appropriate one for them to write from, either because they did not have the requisite knowledge to utilise an Indigenous voice, or in French’s case, as she believed that space should be left for Indigenous voices. Dubosarsky (personal communication, May 8 2017) not only felt limited to non-Indigenous perspectives, but to her own personal perspective, in order to write skilfully.

Lawson and Lawrinson both deliberately avoided intimate exploration of their Indigenous characters, Micky and May respectively. They felt that to explain their Indigenous characters fully, especially on matters of traditional culture, would be disrespectful and inappropriate. As Lawson (personal communication, July 5, 2016) said 'I didn't want to put my words of describing country into his mouth. I didn't feel that was right' and Lawrinson (personal communication, October 26, 2016) mused '[...] on one level it's important to understand or be empathetic [...] – It's different to wanting to colonise some else's experience'. Both May and Micky are viewed exclusively through the lens of the non-Indigenous protagonists of both novels. There are gaps in the narrative, in which the non-Indigenous protagonists are observing May or Micky without being able to fully access their experience, and it is in this way Lawson and Lawrinson managed their concerns about appropriating Indigenous experiences.

Atkins echoed their opinions when she discussed the character of Nona: '[...] I can fundamentally not know that character to that extent, I can't write from that perspective [...]' (personal communication, September 1, 2016). She also used the perspective of an Anglo-Australian observer to view her Indigenous characters, but did not avoid Indigenous perspectives as much as Lawson and Lawrinson. Instead, she supplemented the gaps in knowledge with consultations about Nona's perspective with her Yolŋu mentor.

Metzthen wrote *Wildlight* in the third person. He chose that perspective because '[...] it's like a video camera. It's not speaking for other people. It's only speaking for Dirk as what he sees' (personal communication, July 22, 2016). Dirk is a foundling. He lives on the fringes of colonial society and is aligned, in many ways, with other maligned groups such as the Aboriginal peoples and a Chinese character. His status as an outsider with uncertain cultural lineage is what allows him to 'see' others in *Wildlight*.

Despite the emphasis on distancing perspective in order to avoid appropriation of Indigenous voices, Dubosarsky, Metzthen, and French all described instances in the past where they had written from, or close to, the perspective of an Indigenous person. Dubosarsky and Metzthen had written short stories, decades previously, that were in the first person from the perspective of an Indigenous protagonist. They both stated it

was before they were aware of how inappropriate and insensitive it could be to write from that perspective, and that it was something that they would never do again.

French has one exception to her rule of not having an Indigenous protagonist. Her novel *Nanberry: Black Brother White* has Nanberry of the Cadigal people, an Indigenous character, as a protagonist. Although written from a third person perspective, each chapter has a focal character and omniscient perspective on the thoughts of that character, which moves the narrative deeper into Nanberry's perspective within his chapters. French justifies this by stating that initially Nanberry was not the focus of her writing: 'suddenly all of this information about Nanberry [...] literally landed on me [...] and the book was completely rewritten with Nanberry as the main character and that was entirely accidental' (personal communication, May 8, 2017). French crossed the boundaries that she set herself in regard to Indigenous characters when the weight of the information she received compelled her to tell Nanberry's story. Factors in this decision included the proximity of the information to the real-life Nanberry, through colonial records, leading to meeting an ancestor of his combined with the amount of information.

Characterisation and Setting

Characterisation and setting are core elements of Indigenous representation in the texts. They are the main signifiers of cultural identity. They are what the reader sees on the page as the public declaration of the author, the result of research, decisions, design, and contemplation. The practicalities of creating characters and settings were wide-ranging between participants, however, there were some commonalities between writing methods, and seldom any extreme contrasts.

All participants based their characters on real people to some extent. Sometimes inspiration came from a type of person, some authors amalgamated real people into a single character, and others directly referenced individuals to create their characters. French, Norrington, and Wakefield were strongly influenced by their immediate and familiar communities. These writers expressed the importance of their location and their strong ties of belonging to their homes. French described characterisation in *Refuge*: 'Even *Refuge* which covers so many cultures and so many thousand years, it's still based on people who live in [redacted] or near [redacted] [...]' (personal communication, May 8, 2017). Similarly, Wakefield, without necessarily basing characters on specific

individuals, sees the cultural diversity within her writing as a function of growing up in multicultural North Adelaide. Wakefield's characters and their relationships were often drawn from her own experiences, creating an authentic intimacy within her writing. Norrington also based many of her characters and their relationships on people she was close to while growing up in Barunga. She both created characters based on one particular person, as with Ms Winterson, and amalgamating many people into one character, such as Caroleena.

Murray also used amalgamation of real people in creating her characters. Unlike Norrington, she did not have personal relationships with those from whom she was drawing inspiration, however, her reasons for doing so were the same. Norrington and Murray used amalgamation to introduce some anonymity and make their characters more generic: '[to] have somebody feel like you'd used their story but not made it their story didn't sit well with me' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016). Amalgamations are used in this context to take some of the identifiable realism out of the narrative while keeping true to history and community, and thereby providing protection for other people's stories and identities. Atkins also wanted her writing to represent people and places authentically, but after briefly considering fictionalising the setting, she chose instead to represent the place and people with as high a degree of accuracy as possible.

Several of the participants were overtly aware of the impact of their personal identities and perspectives on their characters. Of these, Lawson and Dubosarsky discussed the relationship between basing characters on themselves and Indigenous representation. Lawson described Robbie as 'he's got my voice, in that I can't make him say things that I just don't believe in' (personal communication, July 5, 2016). Characterising Robbie based on her own beliefs and experiences, Lawson created a protagonist who effectively holds a progressive perspective on racism. This contemporary perspective permits a position within the text that argues against the historical, racist social setting that is relatable to a modern audience. Additionally, it allowed Lawson to promote social justice ideologies in *Freedom Ride*.

Dubosarsky strongly believes in writing from her own perspective. When writing a scene in the cave, Cubby's inability to see the paintings mirrors Dubosarsky's own perspective

on Indigenous artwork '[...] it will always be remote from my understanding' (personal communication, May 8 2017). Writing from a personally subjective point of view allowed Lawson and Dubosarsky to express their position, and that of their characters, as an outside observer of Indigenous cultures. This is a position that is not only proposed by Lucashenko and others as being broadly respectful, but also fulfilled the participants' sense of what they thought was appropriate.

Writers writing about racism are faced with the challenge of bridging the immovable incongruities between racial discrimination and their Indigenous characters. Blake and French both used representation of education as a bridging tool. These participants were the only two to mention education and intelligence as a method of characterisation, but representations of Indigenous characters as the 'exceptional Other' through innate intelligence or special educational opportunities were common across a few of the texts. These characteristics were contrived in service of the writing, with the exception of Rose in *Snowy River*, whose educational opportunities were based on French's knowledge that Oodgeroo Noonuccal's employers had allowed her the use of the library while she was in their service. Progressive social ideologies are firmly linked to education for both French and Blake. In this approach, it is through education and intelligence that non-Indigenous characters are accepting of marginalised groups, and it is through education and intelligence that marginalised characters, including Indigenous characters, are able to overcome oppression and discrimination.

Where Blake and French predominantly evoked characteristics of exceptional intelligence and education in their characters to bridge the gap between racism and the inclusion of Indigenous characters in their texts, Metzthen used exceptional relationships, circumstances, and affinity with nature in his. His characterisation of Indigenous peoples in western Victoria at the time of colonisation was driven by a fascination with the pioneer settler's perspective, and was illustrated by some eccentric and dynamic relationships that individual settlers had with the Indigenous population, and the perspective of the Indigenous population themselves as expressed by a few feature characters. From the perspective of Metzthen's settlers, the Indigenous population are almost supernaturally skilled at navigating the environment that the settlers themselves find intimidating. Navigation skills also translate into exceptional survival and fighting skills, which make the Indigenous peoples a constant, menacing

presence for the settlers. Metzenthén's characterisation of both the settlers and the Aboriginal characters are reliant on othering. The settlers define themselves and their purpose as being opposed to, and dominant of, nature and the Indigenous population.

Where there is a less stark demarcation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters there are other challenges for writers. In her interview, Wakefield discussed her concern, also shared by her publisher, that without clear signifiers, the readers' perception of her characters might default to heteronormative, Western and white. Expressing a character's cultural identity that differs from this and is not tokenistic or stereotypical is challenging. Wakefield did decide to use stereotypes, but in a way that was cognisant of the origins of those stereotypes, and she was therefore able to subvert them in certain ways; for example, Bree's discomfort with rural life going some way towards subverting the stereotype of Aboriginal people being equated with nature.

Australia's Identity: Grand Narrative and Political Approaches

In these texts, intercultural relationships were not just shown between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Refugees and migrants to Australia, and their subsequent incorporation into Australian society was also a theme across a number of the texts. To take a broad view, there are three common themes within the novels that contained representation of refugees and migrants as well as Indigenous peoples: Indigenous peoples are the only Australians exempt from the migrant experience, refugee migrants are other, and cultural diversity is a key part of Australian national identity. The point was made by Murray, Blake, and French, in their interviews, that '[...] unless you're Indigenous that your stories are part of a great immigrant tradition [...]' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016). Despite the premise that all Australians share a migrant tradition, recently arrived migrants and refugees are viewed as other by the dominant culture, and therefore parallels are drawn by these writers between migrant experiences of discrimination and disenfranchisement and those of Indigenous peoples. As Murray (personal communication, October 11, 2016) states about forced English child migrants known as 'children of the Empire' and the Stolen Generations '[...][I] realised that there was a nexus between their experiences and what that said about us too [...]'. There are obvious tensions and contradictions between pride in multiculturalism within Australian national identity (Ahmed, 2000) and the role of

racism in social and political discrimination of various cultural groups within Australian society⁴³.

Returning to the representation of intercultural relationships, the three aspects mentioned above are present in texts where the author has attempted to write, or at least engage with, a 'grand narrative' of Australia, encompassing history, culture, and politics. This is represented more subtly in Blake's work than Murray's and French's, by embedding these themes in the cultural makeup of the central family rather than through the construction of epic sagas spanning decades of Australian history. This makes it an underlying theme rather than a feature, and as a consequence Blake did not have to feature issues of identity and cultural inclusivity, though they were sometimes present within the Gippsland Trilogy.

French's approach in *The Girl from Snowy River* and the rest of The Matilda Saga was to take a very wide-angled view, incorporating local and global events that formed Australia as a nation. Not only did French aim to tell the grand narrative of Australia's nationhood, but she wanted to do it from the perspective of 'those who had no official voice' (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017), including Aboriginal voices. French does present the reader with a diverse range of characters; all ages, many cultures, and many socio-economic backgrounds are represented in her series. She unites this diversity into 'the story of the nation of Australia' by thematically bonding the characters together with folklore and historical events until every character is connected in the one story.

Murray's approach in *Blue Delaney* and the Children of the Wind series is also a grand narrative of the formation of Australian identity, but in contrast to French's broad strokes approach, Murray uses highly detailed, microscopic snapshots of small, individual, subjective stories that infer wider implications on a national and global scale. As Colm and Bill travel across the country, the pauses in their journeys become cameos. Stopping off in Kalgoorlie to meet Nugget, his wife Doreen, and their children, introduces the reader to the stories of those characters while they are experiencing the effects of a

⁴³ The tension between Australian identity as multicultural but also as homogeneous, and the ways in which that is expressed in children's and young adult fiction, is thoroughly deserving of future, in-depth analysis that is beyond the scope of this project.

myriad of government policies, now considered shamefully racist, such as controlling miscegenation and the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents. French's interview suggests she was focussed on the enormity of history, and telling that story explicitly through her imagined characters. Murray's focus, however, was empathetically amalgamating the small personal stories of real people who experienced historical events into one character, thereby showing the impact of the wider political and social context on individuals.

Murray's use of amalgamation was employed to portray the effects of discriminatory policies on Indigenous peoples in the 1950s. Atkins, similarly, explored the implications of the Australian government's policies and treatment of Indigenous peoples during the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007 and up to the National Apology in 2008. The novel is set during this period of time and makes overt references to the Intervention, however, in terms of exploring the effects of the policy, Atkins adopted a less direct approach than either Murray or French. She instead used Rosie's narrative as a reflection of political events, and to pose questions to her readers about the long-term effects, if any, of the National Apology. Under this method, references to literal policies are secondary to more philosophical musings about the nature of words and actions.

As a forcibly colonised country, Australian history and politics are inseparable from the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples. Writers aspiring to tell an overarching narrative about Australian identity have many horrific, complex, and sensitive stories to navigate and incorporate. French, Murray, and Atkins all adopted different approaches, which were ultimately dependant on and reflective of their ideologies and purpose in writing.

Ethics and Activism

Ethical Responsibilities

Care and Respect

Within their interviews, all participants offered reflections on Indigenous representation that were sometimes, but not necessarily, related to writing the specific texts in question. Often participants would comment on public events that were not related to their writing at all. These tangents often arose when participants were asked what advice they would give to others. The value of these comments lies in the degree to which they indicate a

common desire amongst the writers to engage with better practices and ethical stances, unfettered by practicalities.

'Care', 'respect', 'knowledge' and 'understanding' were common words that participants used to describe ideal ethical practices of representing Indigenous peoples and cultures. '[People] have [written about Indigenous peoples] with respect, with empathy, with consultation, with all those things' (Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016). Lawrinson was hesitant in extending that opinion to provide definitive comments. She views the issues around Indigenous representation as complex, and evolving and changing over time. Lawrinson's views were echoed by most participants.

Emphasising the importance of consultation, Blake instructed '[do] not [...] be as bold as to think you can write Indigenous characters without talking to Indigenous people [...]' (personal communication, March 24, 2017). Immersion in cultures and places was cited by most participants as being vital to the kind of knowledge and understanding that is integral to ethical representations. As Wakefield summated 'it is what it is. That explains my reasons for writing Indigenous characters, that's my community, that's my upbringing, that's my history' (personal communication, October 17, 2017). Wakefield's ethical stance was similar to Lawrinson's and Blake's, with the slight adaptation that she is firmly situated in her own community rather than venturing out to others. She explained that her stance of always and only writing from a place of knowledge and immersion in her place and community excludes a number of cultural representations from her writing. Aboriginal people are a part of her life, and are therefore within her sphere of experience and knowledge.

French agreed that she needs to understand the people and places that she makes the subjects of her fiction. Of all the participants, she was the most confident about her established writing methods and abilities. Along similar lines to French, Metzthen discussed the importance of being aware of your own limitations, however, his statements demonstrate less concern for appropriation than some of the comments above. 'Proceed carefully. I think [...] as long as you don't assume knowledge that you can't have, you should feel free to write whatever you like' (Metzthen, personal communication, July 22, 2016).

The ethical responsibilities of writers were often discussed in conjunction with the rights that should be afforded to them. Together with advising caution and care, Metz then advocated writing whatever feels comfortable, including Indigenous representation, but acknowledged that in publishing work, writers open themselves to consequences and repercussions for their writing. Wakefield also discussed the balance of responsibility, rights, and consequences. She has a very clear and strong sense of ethics she described as her 'checklist', which involve a constant process of evaluation and re-evaluation. She also has a long list of responsibilities as a writer including protecting and respecting the real-life subjects of her writing. Accepting total responsibility for her own ethical decisions allows Wakefield to feel in control of her own writing. Wakefield was the only participant to describe her ideas about the reality of accepting responsibility for her writing in the face of criticism for her representation of Indigenous culture and experience, by expressing the idea that if her writing is responsible for hurting an individual, she believes in apologising on an inter-personal level.

Permissions

Permissions are a more practical, less personal topic than reflections on personal ethics. For the authors who engaged with getting permission, the results were intense but rewarding. Norrington, Atkins, and Murray all engaged with Indigenous peoples on the subject of permissions for aspects of their Indigenous representation within their writing. The processes for asking and receiving permission differed depending on the community and the intellectual property in question.

Norrington was involved in continuous consultation with the community at Barunga. All aspects of her writing were subject to scrutiny by the community and often debated at length before a decision was reached. This was especially important with language and spelling. The subject of permission was raised in relation to the setting of her narrative. The community decided that the place should be 'gammon' or fictional so that it would not be erroneously taken that the traditional custodians of the land had given their permission for the story to be set there. The reasons that permission was not available were not discussed in the interview, but it was established that through consultation a solution was found that the community supported and which suited Norrington's writing needs.

Murray wanted to use a traditional story owned by the Ngarrindjeri people. She had an existing contact from the Ngarrindjeri people from a previous writing project, as well as some understanding of permission protocols from working in the Pitjantjatjara Council. She sought permission through her contact, who did not have authority themselves, but who was able to connect her to the appropriate person. The most significant challenge was balancing the timing of seeking permission with the strict timeline set by her publishers. Murray was pressured by publishers to abandon her efforts to get permission because of the time it was taking. They suggested that she either remove the story or continue without permission⁴⁴. Nevertheless, Murray persisted despite the pressure to not 'bother' (personal communication, October 11, 2016), and was able to include the story with the appropriate permission.

Atkins, similarly to Norrington, consulted on many aspects of her writing, rather than one specific one. Much of the consultation was about accuracy and authenticity but some was about asking permission to use culturally significant information as part of Nona's narrative, '[...] I asked [...] my Aboriginal family, 'can I use your home land to be from this character's home land?' and they're like "yep, that's fine"' (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016).

These three participants invested much time and effort in consultation and gaining permissions for the Indigenous content in their writing. All three had experience living and working in Indigenous communities, and through these experiences, learnt to recognise and value protocols around Indigenous intellectual property.

Acknowledgements and Remuneration

Closely linked to consultation and permissions are acknowledgement of the contributions made to these novels by Indigenous peoples. Murray and Atkins were not the only writers to include Indigenous contributions in their 'Acknowledgements' section, however, they were the only two to discuss the importance of acknowledgement in their interviews. For Murray, acknowledgement was an integral part of gaining permission to use the Ngarrindjeri story. The wording of the acknowledgements was

⁴⁴ *Blue Delaney* was published in 2005. Since then, awareness about the importance of asking permission for use of Indigenous stories has become far more common in publishing.

exchanged between Murray and her Ngarrindjeri contact multiple times. Correct wording of the acknowledgement was one condition for using the story, demonstrating the value of correctly communicating ownership of intellectual property. Atkins was not only adamant that the Yolŋu people who contributed and helped her with her writing would be properly acknowledged in the novel, but also that the cultural consultant Merrkiyawuy was paid for her work on the book: 'I guess I just kind of thought [...] that cultural expertise should actually be valued at the same rate as [...] a professional writer who would come and assess your manuscript' (Atkins, personal communication, September 1, 2016). Atkins used her proceeds as author to pay Merrkiyawuy and commented that 'it's quite a big chunk considering that you don't earn much but then at the same time [...] I actually wouldn't have a book if I didn't have her input' (personal communication, September 1, 2016). Atkins was the only participant to talk about remuneration in her interview. Even though the publishing process did not contain provisions for cultural consultation, Atkins overcame publishing conventions and upheld her personal and ethical obligations.

Decisions Regarding Assumed Readership

Most of the participants were aware, while they were writing, that their texts would eventually be targeted at young adult readers. Some participants made decisions that were specifically tailored with their young adult audience in mind.

A few of the texts dealt with subject matter that the participants were uncomfortable relating in explicit terms to a young adult readership, including violent or sexually explicit content and strong language. In these cases, participants described making decisions to adopt a more implicit than explicit approach to the material, and to sanitise the language they were using. Murray's real-life subjects in *Blue Delaney*, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, suffered horrific violent, psychological, and sexual abuse that Murray felt was too explicit for her imagined young adult audience. Her solution was to deliberately write in such a way that the text could be 'read by a child without them necessarily understanding the full brutality, that they can see the shadow without seeing the gratuitous violence' (Murray, personal communication, October 11, 2016). Similarly, Lawrinson used a naïve lens or voice, that of the character Sandy, through which the readers view the narrative of *Bye, Beautiful*. Sandy observes obscene racism without understanding what she is seeing. There is no exposition about what she observes,

leaving readers to fill the gap with their own understanding. The result of this is a shadow text that is powerful, but limited to the experiences and understanding of the reader, removing the need for explicit or gratuitous content.

Some participants manipulated dialogue in order to manage similar concerns. Lawson recreated a scene in *Freedom Ride* from footage of an Aboriginal woman in Walgett directly accusing white men of taking sexual advantage of Aboriginal women while simultaneously discriminating against them. Lawson, while still relying heavily on the original dialogue, changed the language her character was using in order to be less explicit, and removed the sexual language to only imply sexual assault, in order to make her writing more appropriate for her young audience. Similarly, Lawson and Lawrinson removed profanity from primary sources as they were incorporated into their writing. This was not necessarily about preventing readers from being exposed to explicit language, but could also be intended to keep anachronistic or rude language from distracting readers from the content. By contrast, Norrington did include swearing that was accurately representative of speech patterns in her community, where swearing is used as a common exclamation rather than being taboo. She expressed some regret for including so much swearing because of the possible impact upon the book's reach and market penetration.

Norrington's imagined audience was her grandson. She wanted to share her experiences growing up in Barunga with him. She was concerned that the social environment in which he was living did not value Aboriginal people or cultures and that he was 'not going to learn to respect Aboriginal people unless I can give him those experiences' (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016). Norrington's stories began to be consumed by a wider audience. She received feedback on the responses from children, and Aboriginal children in particular. Based on this, she began to broaden her agenda for her writing positive and culturally relatable stories for children and young adults, including stories that acknowledged '[...] you can have words that come from the Dreaming that can have an effect in the world' (Norrington, personal communication, August 29, 2016). Norrington's outlook was to celebrate and share the cultural education she received and highly values.

Social Activism

Politics, society, culture, language, and people all contribute to the tensions that make Indigenous representation a current social issue. It is unsurprising, then, that participants often referred to these as contexts for their writing, even if they were far removed from the writer's specific subject matter.

Blake and Lawson both viewed the Indigenous representation aspects of their writing as their response and contribution to discourses about humanity generally as well as Indigenous peoples. For Lawson, current affairs, local and global, contributed to her ideas about writing *Freedom Ride*. In politics, American President Obama and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard were breaking racial and patriarchal conventions of who could hold power in the Western world. At the same time, Lawson was learning about Indigenous history and literature. It seemed to her that the racial discrimination against Indigenous peoples and the challenges of Indigenous representation were only one part of many interrelated issues of hegemony. All of these factors combined to ignite a passion for social progression in Lawson, which directly fed into her writing.

Blake's perspective is similar, but more specific to Australia: 'an ordinary Indigenous person and an ordinary non-Indigenous person, we just have far more in common than our differences' (personal communication, March 24, 2017). Blake acknowledges that those differences are important and need to be respected. However, she emphasises the shared humanity that she feels bonds all people together. Blake and Lawson considered Indigenous representation not just an issue for themselves and their subjects, but as part of a human power struggle of othering, subjugation, and resistance.

Many of the participants wrote with a specific ideology and reader response in mind. Often this was evident in attempts to convey socially progressive ideas and to subvert racist ideologies. Lawson opened *Freedom Ride* with a scene where an overtly racist character bullies an Aboriginal woman while other characters watch the humiliation unfold. As Lawson says, 'that first chapter, I wanted to hit the reader right between the eyes. I wanted to shock them' (personal communication, July 5, 2016). Blake's approach was gentler but just as deliberate. Based partly on her observations of strong Aboriginal school children who showed resilience in the face of racism, and partly based on an inclination to write an idealistic representation, Blake wanted to write the Aboriginal

character of Kes as a confident, popular young woman. Published stories that she was aware of, other than the Gippsland Trilogy, were darkly negative stories of Aboriginal life and history, and it appealed to her ideals of shared humanity to contribute alternative representations of Aboriginal peoples which depicted resilience to manage or rise above racism without being destroyed by it.

Blake, Norrington, and Atkins all commented on the importance and, often, difficulty of including racism and racist characters in their writing. Whether racism was actively subverted, as in Lawson's opening, or not, these participants felt it was important to show the reader these perspectives because the prevalence of these themes in the real world might not always be noticed by those who are not affected by them. Atkins related an example where the brutality of the racism experienced by the Yolŋu community was so outrageous, that she was not sure it would be believed. By including racism and racist characters in their writing, these participants felt that they were presenting to the reader the flaws that exist in reality.

Given the subject of this project and the interviews, it is unsurprising that all participants discussed their opinions on diversity in young adult literature or literature generally. The perspectives of marginalised peoples, including Indigenous peoples, were often mentioned as being an important presence in writing. In some cases, it was an expressed purpose of their writing: 'I wanted to tell the story of the nation of Australia from the point of view of those who had no official voice' (J. French, personal communication, May 8, 2017). French was not alone in recognising and taking it upon herself to be more inclusive in Australian narratives, especially historical ones. Metzthen also wanted to emphasise the perspectives and presence of Aboriginal, female, and Chinese people to the early days of Australian colonisation. This approach points to a risk for well-meaning writers who are dedicated to inclusivity in their representations of Australian society. In telling stories that purport to bring silenced or colonised people into the narrative, writers may, unwittingly, be contributing to a form of benign colonialism, such as those theorised by Hodge and Mishra, Spivak, and Said. This may occur either through inadvertent misrepresentation, or through the author using their own writing to fill a space which might better be left for Indigenous voices.

French and Lawrinson both stated in their interviews that inclusion of Aboriginal characters in their texts was unquestionably necessary for their writing to have authenticity and integrity. Both *Bye, Beautiful* and *The Matilda Saga* are historical fiction set in real locations where Aboriginal communities existed and still exist today. It was inconceivable to both French and Lawrinson that they would not include Aboriginal characters.

Inclusion without homogenisation was a value shared by Atkins and Lawrinson. Atkins' perspective is that mainstream representations are as important as those that focus on and emphasise Indigenous peoples. When Atkins talks about this, she is not suggesting that Indigenous peoples should be homogenised or assimilated into Anglo-Australian culture. These mainstream representations would still be connected to Indigenous heritages. When writing for mainstream television, Atkins fought for Indigenous characters that would have the same storylines as their non-Indigenous counterparts to normalise reading, seeing, and hearing Indigenous peoples within Australian entertainment. One of Lawrinson's goals in her representations of Indigenous peoples was to introduce diversity and individual complexity to her Indigenous characters.

The participants were often consciously attempting to disseminate their own social values and ideology in regard to racism and Indigenous representation through their writing. For the most part these ideologies would be described as progressive and inclusive, which meant a focus upon including Indigenous peoples in respectful and appropriate ways and aiming to improve on literature that had been published before.

Arts Council Protocols

To establish the extent to which participants are aware of or feel governed by the *Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Writing* provided by Arts Council Australia, most⁴⁵ participants were asked about their awareness of and opinions on the *ACA Protocols* (see Appendix 2: Interview Guide). The participants indicated varying degrees of awareness and expressed a range of opinions on the concept of a protocol document as well as the *Protocols* themselves. Generally, participants were either unaware of the

⁴⁵ Murray, Norrington, and French's interviews did not include discussion of the *Protocols* due to timing factors.

Protocols, or aware of them as an administrative necessity for Arts Council funding applications. Dubosarsky was aware that they existed but could not remember reading them. Lawson, who described high levels of anxiety around initial engagements with Indigenous content, said that she was not aware of the *Protocols* and that, had she been aware, they would have added to her anxieties in a non-productive way. Metzenthien was also not aware of the *Protocols* and put forward an assumption that they may have been the product of conservative government policy. Lawrinson and Blake had read them as part of the application process for Australia Council grants. They both viewed the *Protocols* predominantly as an administrative resource, as opposed to a practical resource for writing Indigenous content (Blake, personal communication, March 24, 2017, and Lawrinson, personal communication, October 26, 2016). Atkins and Wakefield expressed similar opinions. They were both highly cognisant of the *Protocols* and viewed them in a positive light, but doubted their usefulness beyond a broad starting point. They both cited the personal ethics of a writer as being more important to respectful writing practices.

When viewing the responses of the participants as a whole, there are a few aspects of consensus. Awareness of *Protocols* is limited in the writing community. Those writers who were aware of the *Protocols* see them as a bureaucratic and administrative task, rather than a practical, essential resource as Thomas (2014) describes it. Many writers only come across them as part of an application process, which contributes to this view. Additionally, there is a degree of resistance to being governed by something that is seen as an administrative entity. There is also a degree of scepticism about the usefulness of protocols generally in achieving respectful representation of Indigenous cultures and peoples; that the use of protocols would be used as a shallow exercise of bureaucratic protection, rather than in the spirit of respect and acknowledgement.

Summary of Key Findings

- Writers have broad awareness of tensions in Indigenous representation.
- Writers' contributions to this area of discourse is a concern for them.
- Many writers consider that protocols and other resources available to writers to guide Indigenous representation are limited in their effectiveness.

Moving Forward

There are issues of cultural literacy and considerations of bias that remain to be explored at the conclusion of this project. A lack of Indigenous readers' or writers' responses to the texts examined in this thesis is one such issue. Preliminary searches found no records of Indigenous responses to these specific texts. In fact, with the exception of a few key examples, such as the screenplay adaptation of Phillip Gwynne's *Deadly, Unna?*, there are few records of the responses of Indigenous peoples to representations of Indigenous cultures in young adult texts.

Another issue, concerning cultural literacy and biases, is that extensive and dedicated research by writers may still be problematic in terms of the type and biases of research sources that are produced in a hegemonic space. Even Indigenous sources may be problematic, filtered and shaped to a power dynamic and cultural context that is likely to distort information. While many participants used Indigenous sources for gathering information, reciprocal processes between Indigenous peoples and writers such as accountability, acknowledgement, and permissions were used in fewer than half the participants' writings. There are few resources for authors, who are aware of the importance of consultation, to pursue it successfully. With growing awareness, however, consultation is becoming more common within this context. Arguably, it is an essential aspect of authentic representation that is worthy of future exploration.

The research documented in this thesis, extends knowledge of Indigenous representation by non-Indigenous writers into the field of writing practice. It creates opportunities for stakeholders within the writing profession to situate themselves as contributors to cultural discourse and also to reflect on their contributions with reference to the past practices of individuals.

In a panel at the 2018 Canberra Writer's Festival, Melissa Lucashenko commented that 'there is no point in having a voice if everyone is deaf'⁴⁶. At present, and despite some progress there would appear to be a distinct difference in perspectives on the ACA

⁴⁶ In panel *GR60: First Things First*, moderated by Dr Sandra Phillips, 25th August 2018. Visions Theatre, National Museum of Australia. Quote verified and permission to use quote confirmed by email (Adsett, personal communication, April 23, 2019).

Protocols between Indigenous voices and non-Indigenous users of those protocols, as well as the continuation of current writing practices and publication of texts that perpetuate Aboriginalism. These factors are evidence that Lucashenko's frustration is borne out in writing practice. This thesis, produced by a non-Indigenous academic, is not intended to add another voice, nor to deny voices or perspectives. What it does intend to do is demonstrate that there is awareness that writers need to listen, describe what is being heard, and with that knowledge, begin to find ways of listening better.

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Appendix 1: Participant Information and Consent Form

Project Title: Indigenous Representation by non-Indigenous authors in Australian Children's Literature

I agree to take part in the above University of Canberra research project undertaken by Sophie Stanton. I have had the project explained to me. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to (please circle):

- be interviewed by the researcher about my published works that represent Indigenous issues or characters Yes No
- allow the interview to be audio-taped and/or transcribed Yes No
- complete a questionnaire asking me about my published works that represent Indigenous issues or characters Yes No

I agree that this information will be held and processed for the following purposes (please circle):

- to analyse their approaches to writing Indigenous experience, and the methodologies that they employed to do so. Yes No
- for this project, to be completed as assessment for the Doctor of Philosophy in Communication program at University of Canberra Yes No
- for future research projects by Sophie Stanton over the next five years Yes No

I understand that any information I provide will be individually identifiable.

I understand that I have given approval for my name to be used in the final report of the project, and future publications.

I agree to Sophie Stanton recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose set out in this statement.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw (including any data I may have given) at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I would like to receive (please circle):

- a transcript of my interview for my approval before it is used in the project Yes No
- a copy of the final thesis upon its completion Yes No

Name:(please print)

Signature:Date:

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Introduction

My plan is to start very generally, not necessarily focussed on Indigenous representation and we'll narrow it down as we go.

Beginning Stage

Introduction

- To ease into this interview:
 - What aspects or moments have been highlights for you?
 - Have there been aspects or moments that have challenged you?
 - What happened?

Intensive Stage

Origins and Writing Motivations

- Where did the ideas for *[text]* begin for you?
 - What were your expectations for the novel when you started writing?

Writing Contexts

- What was the context for your writing, what was happening in your life while you were writing?
 - Were you aware of any particular politics or issues as you were writing?
 - Were there any Indigenous specific contexts that you can remember?

Writing Techniques and Methods

- Did *[text]* change while you were writing it?
 - How?
 - <probe specific writing methods>
- *[text]* is set in a real time and place, and one that has many differences from now. How did you create the setting?
- <prompt with inspirations and research methods>
- Social attitudes were very different at the time the novel is set compared to today, particularly in regard to social expectations and Indigenous peoples. How did you

go about giving your characters personalities and outlooks that were consistent with their setting?

- In many ways [*text*] is critical of out-dated social opinions. Was it challenging to reconcile social ideas that would now be considered racist, with contemporary ones that you and your audience have grown up with?
- How did you manage your <feelings, opinions, concerns>?
- Were there any people or writings you were aware of, that influenced you or that inspired you at the time you were writing *Bye Beautiful* was published <were there any influences from sources outside of the world of young adult> - <**Australian Council for the Arts Protocols**>

End Stage Questions

Feedback

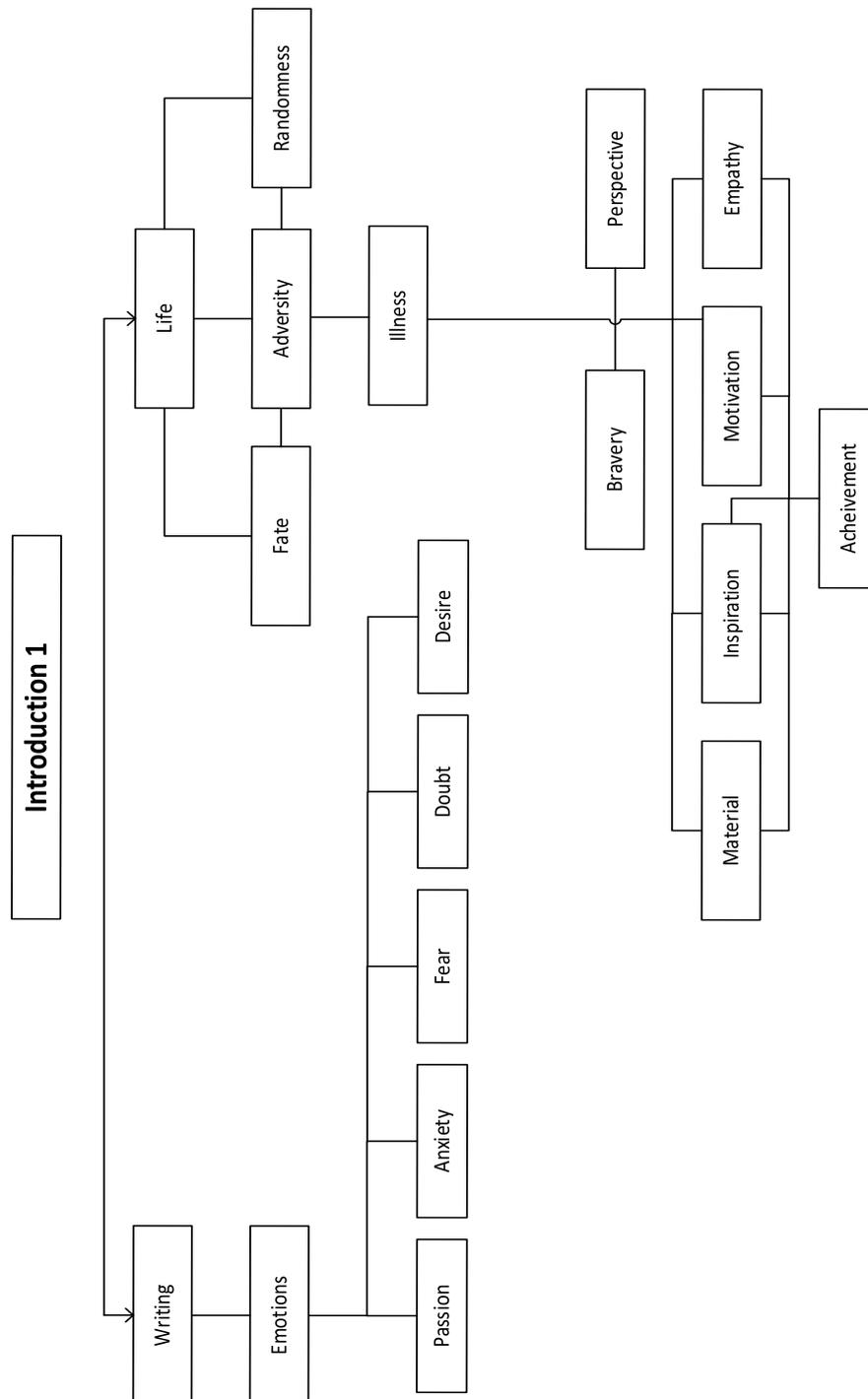
- Did you receive any feedback on the novel once it was published?
 - Any that was specifically about the Indigenous characters or the social attitudes toward race?

Reflections

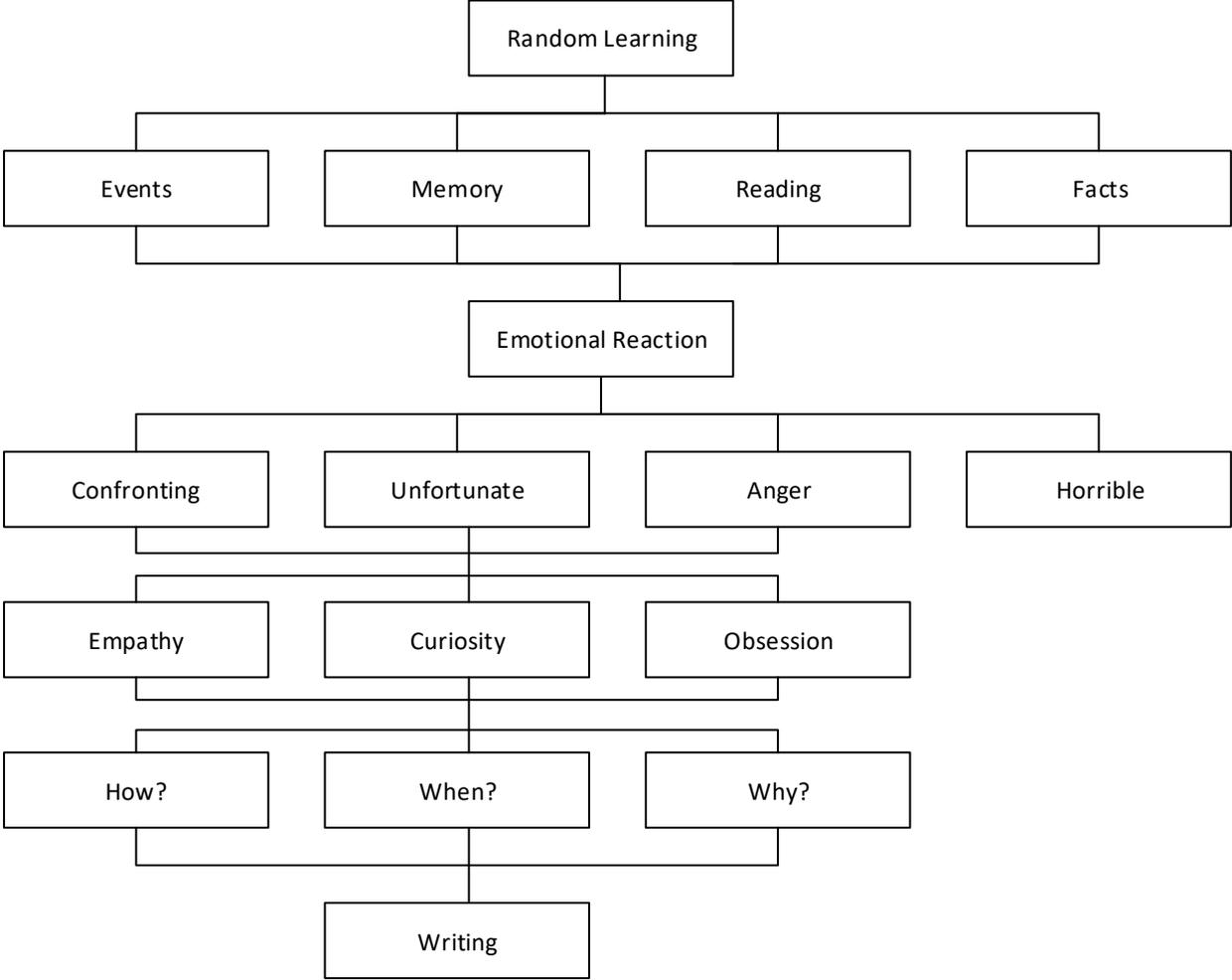
- How do you feel about [*text*] now that it is out in the world?
 - Is there anything you would like to go back and do differently or is there anything you'd like to change?
- Have, or will there be any changes to your methods as a writer as a result of your experience writing [*text*] especially in regard to Indigenous characters?
 - Could you tell me about them?
- If you were to give advice to other writers about Indigenous representation what would you say?
- Do you have any questions for me or is there anything that you would like to add before we conclude the interview?

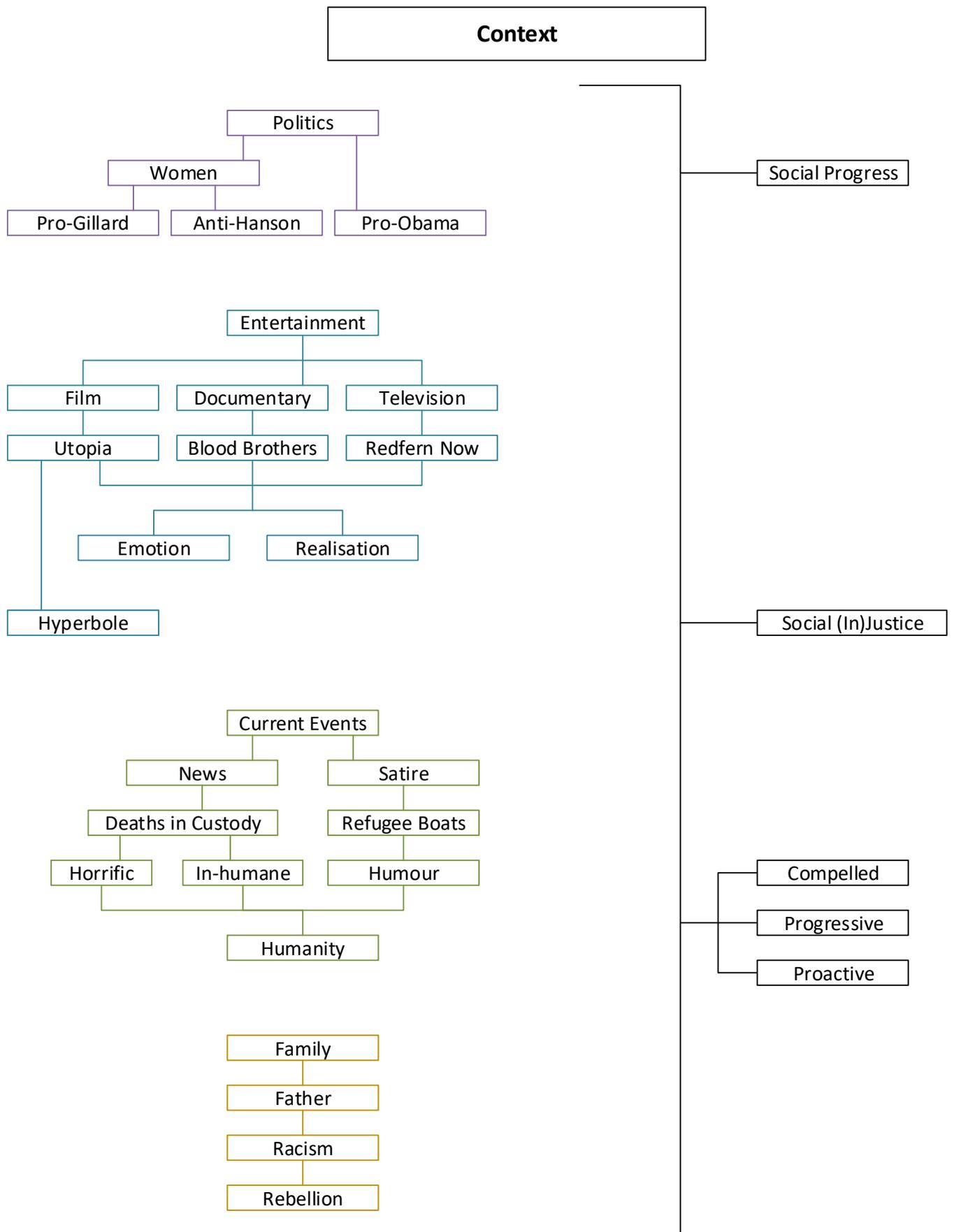
Appendix 3: Example of Coding Diagrams

Sue Lawson: Coding Diagrams



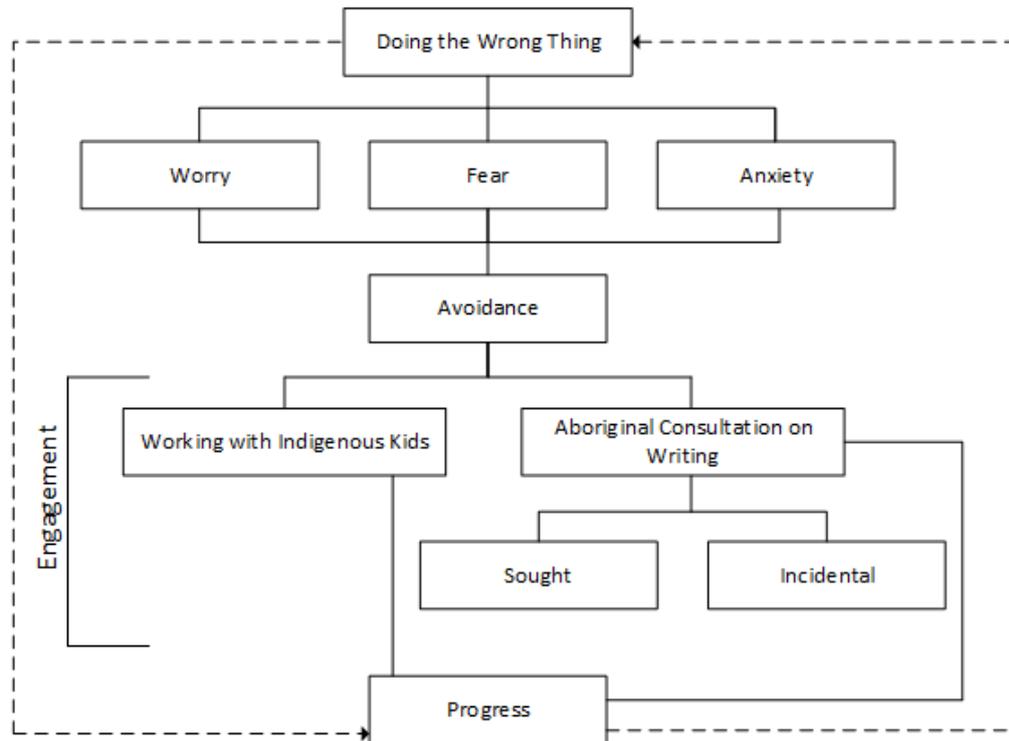
Introduction Phase 2
General Writing Motivation

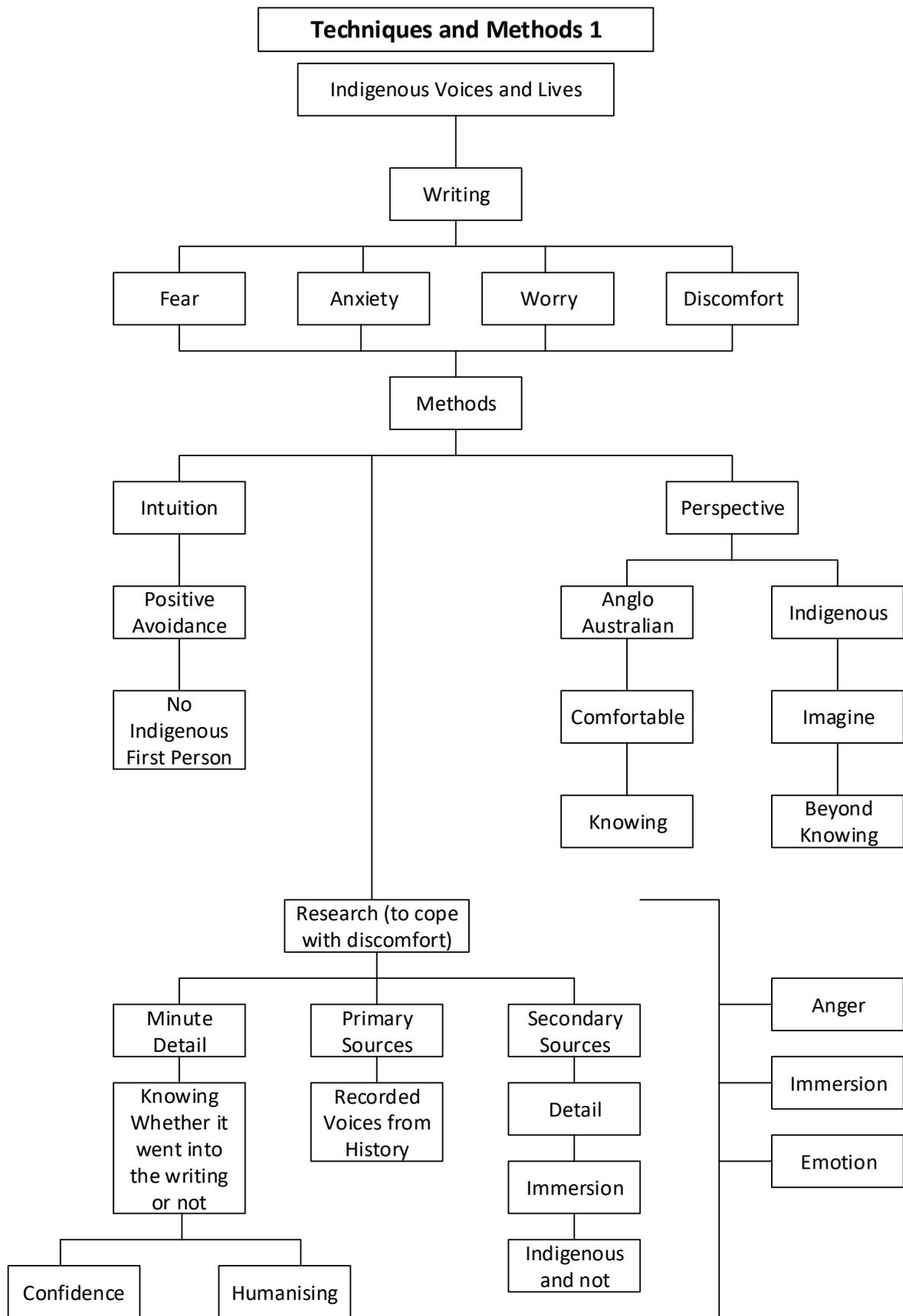




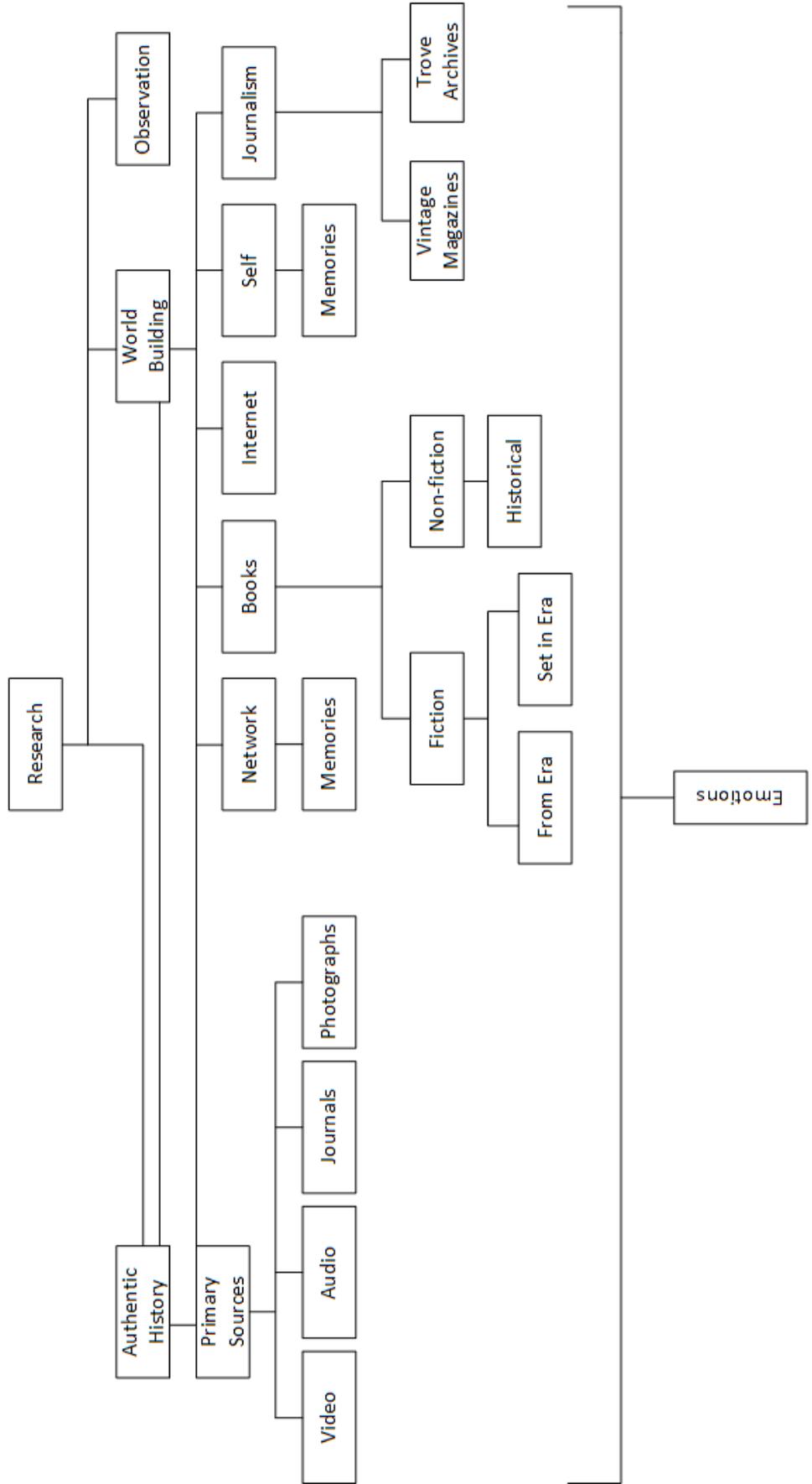
Techniques and Methods 1

Memo:
Positive Avoidance – omissions made to respect intimate details of culture and protect it from white privilege

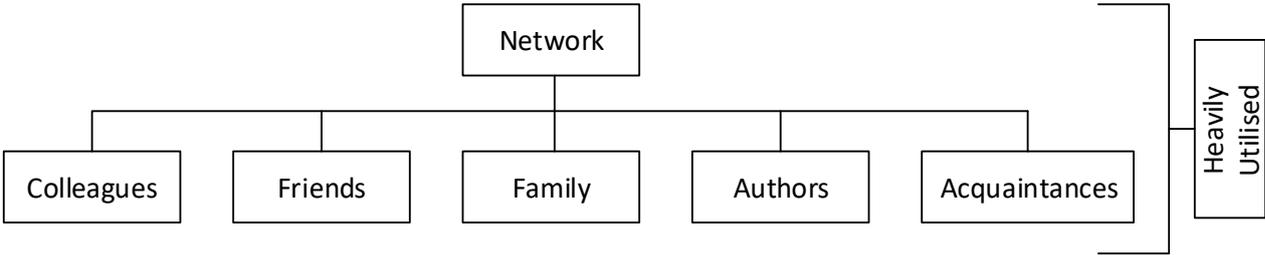




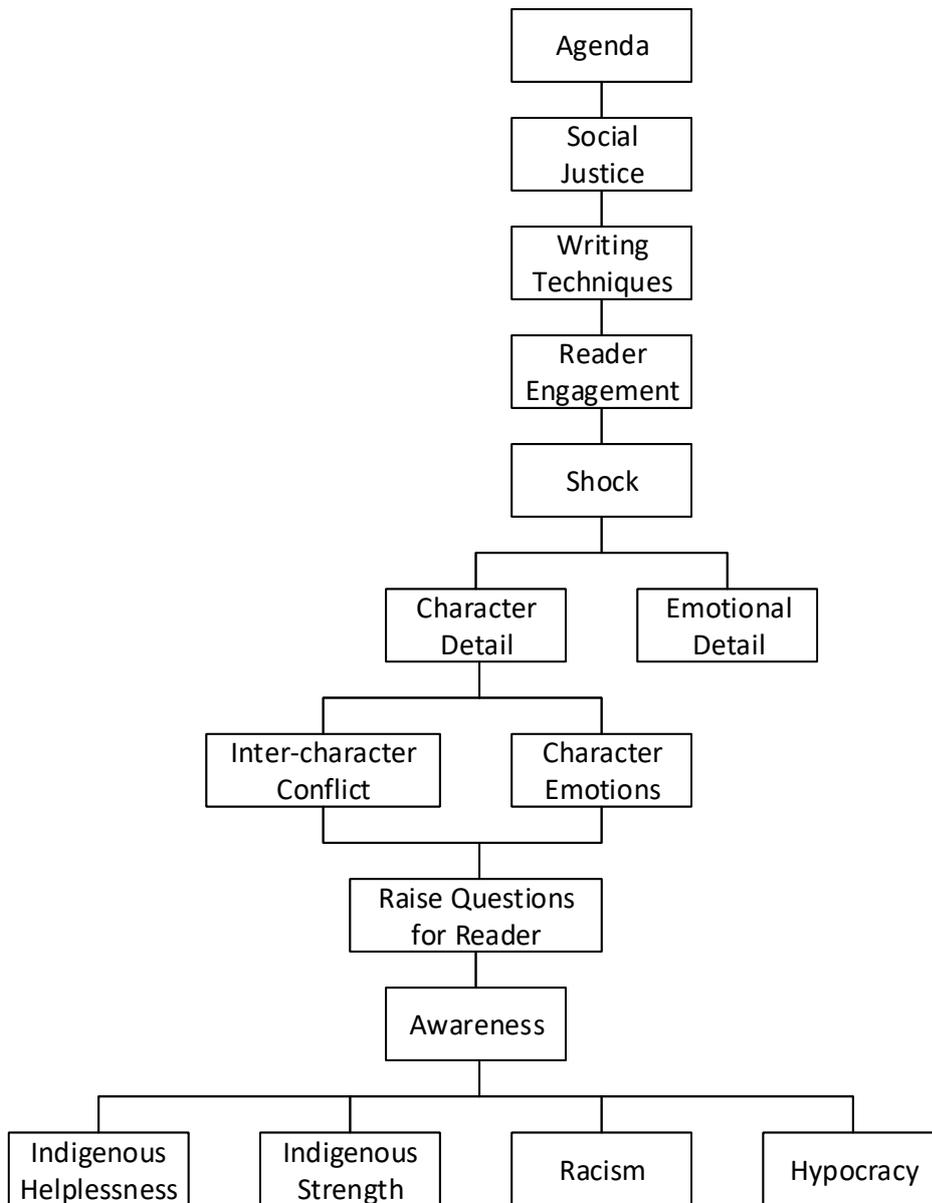
Techniques and Methods 3



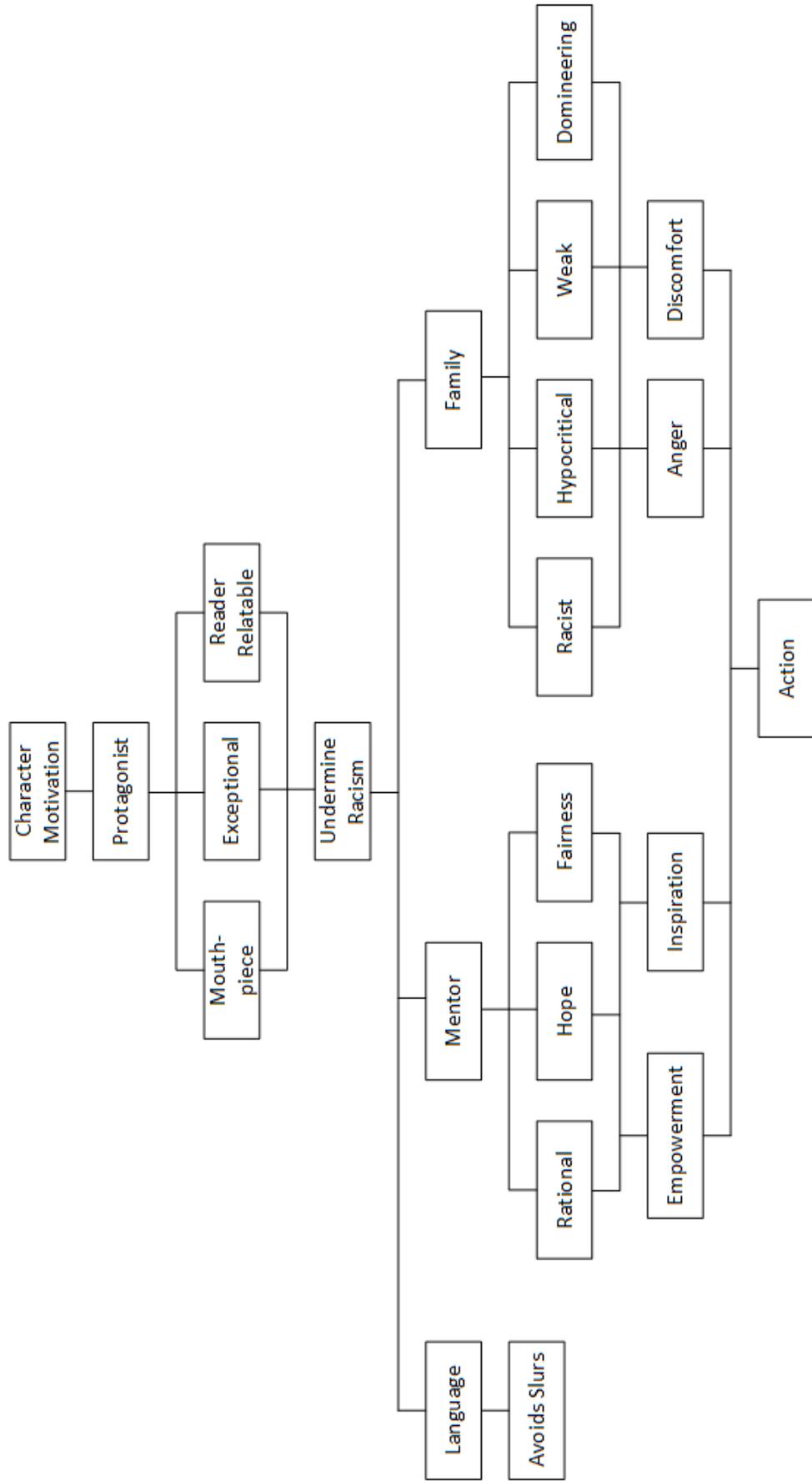
Techniques and Methods 4



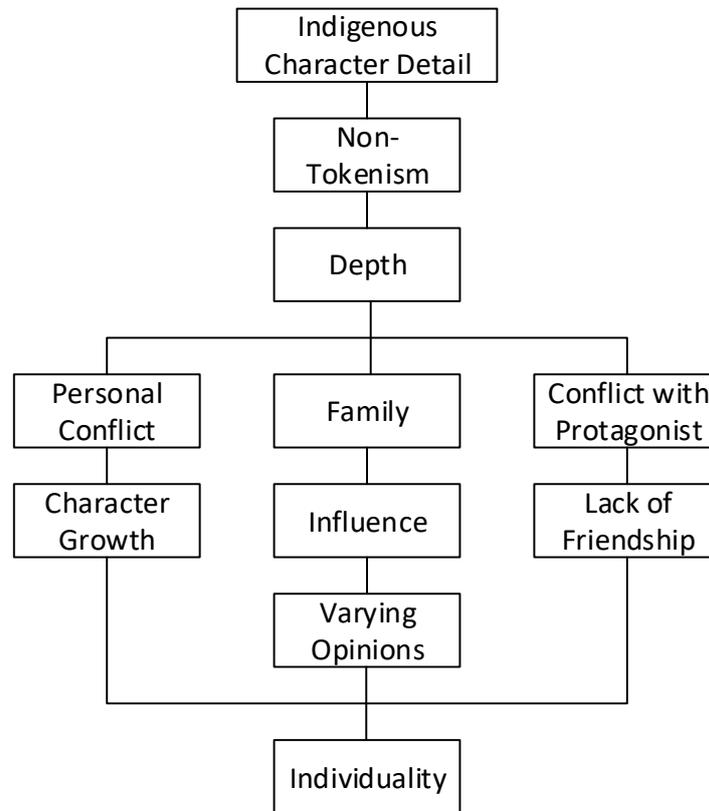
Techniques and Methods 5



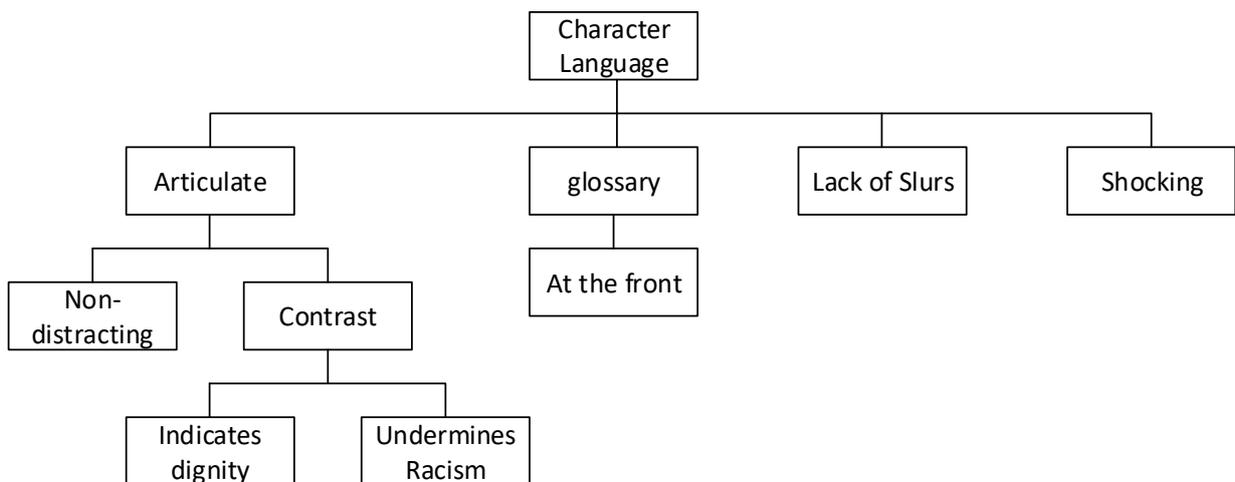
Techniques and Methods 6



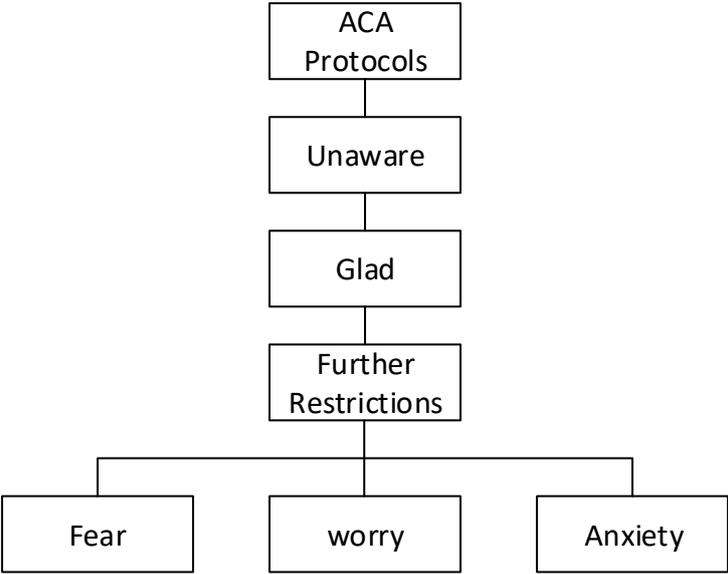
Techniques and Methods 7



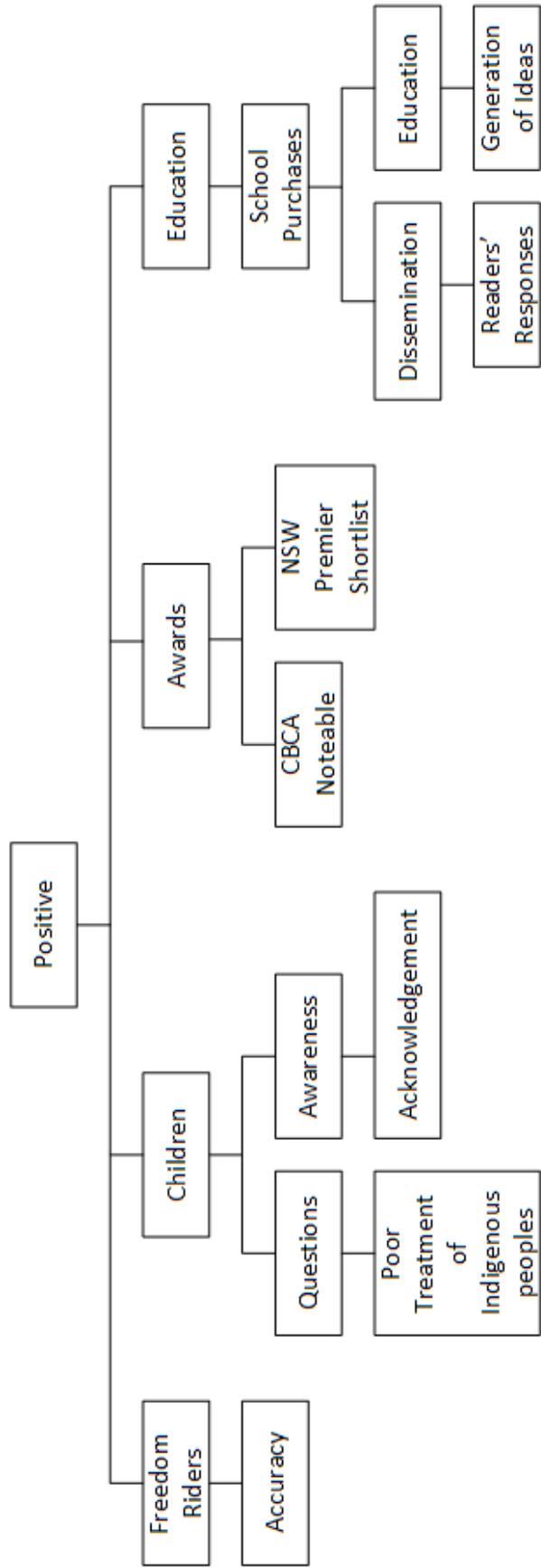
Techniques and Methods 8



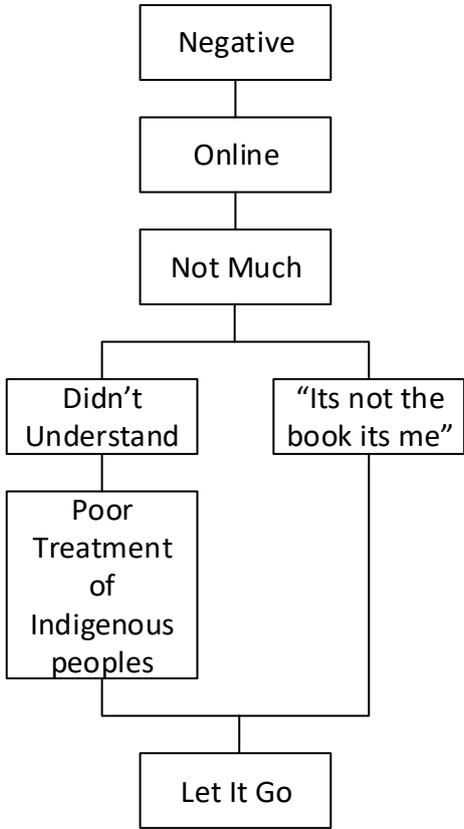
Techniques and Methods 9



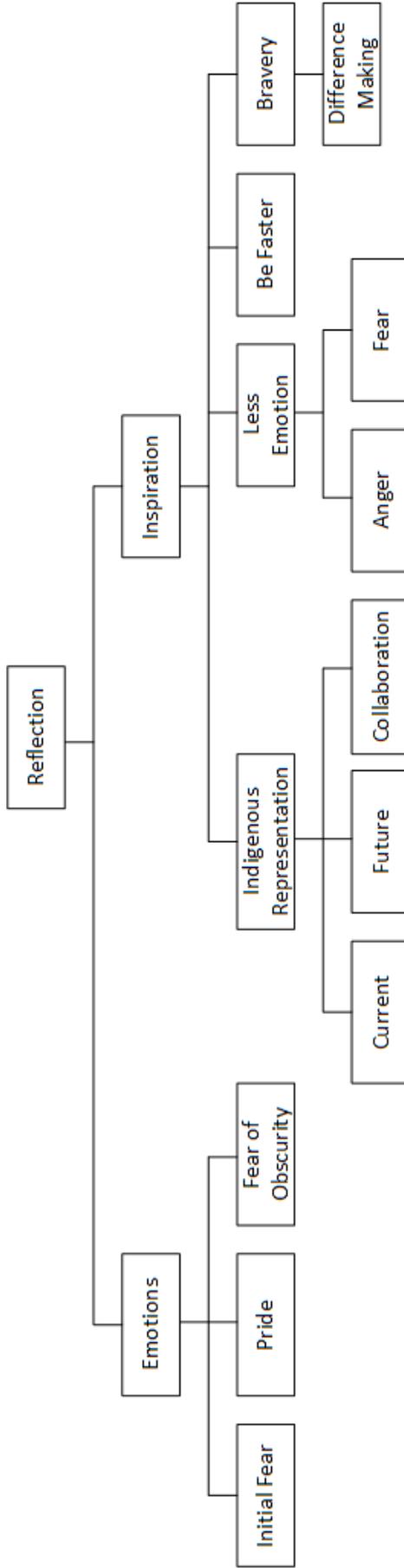
Feedback 1



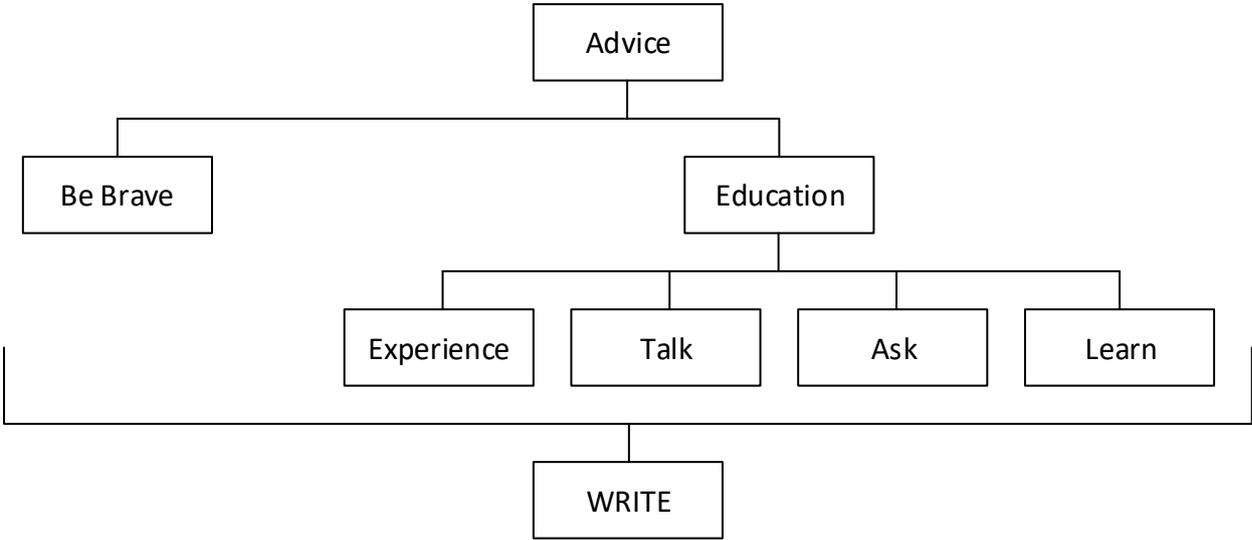
Feedback 2

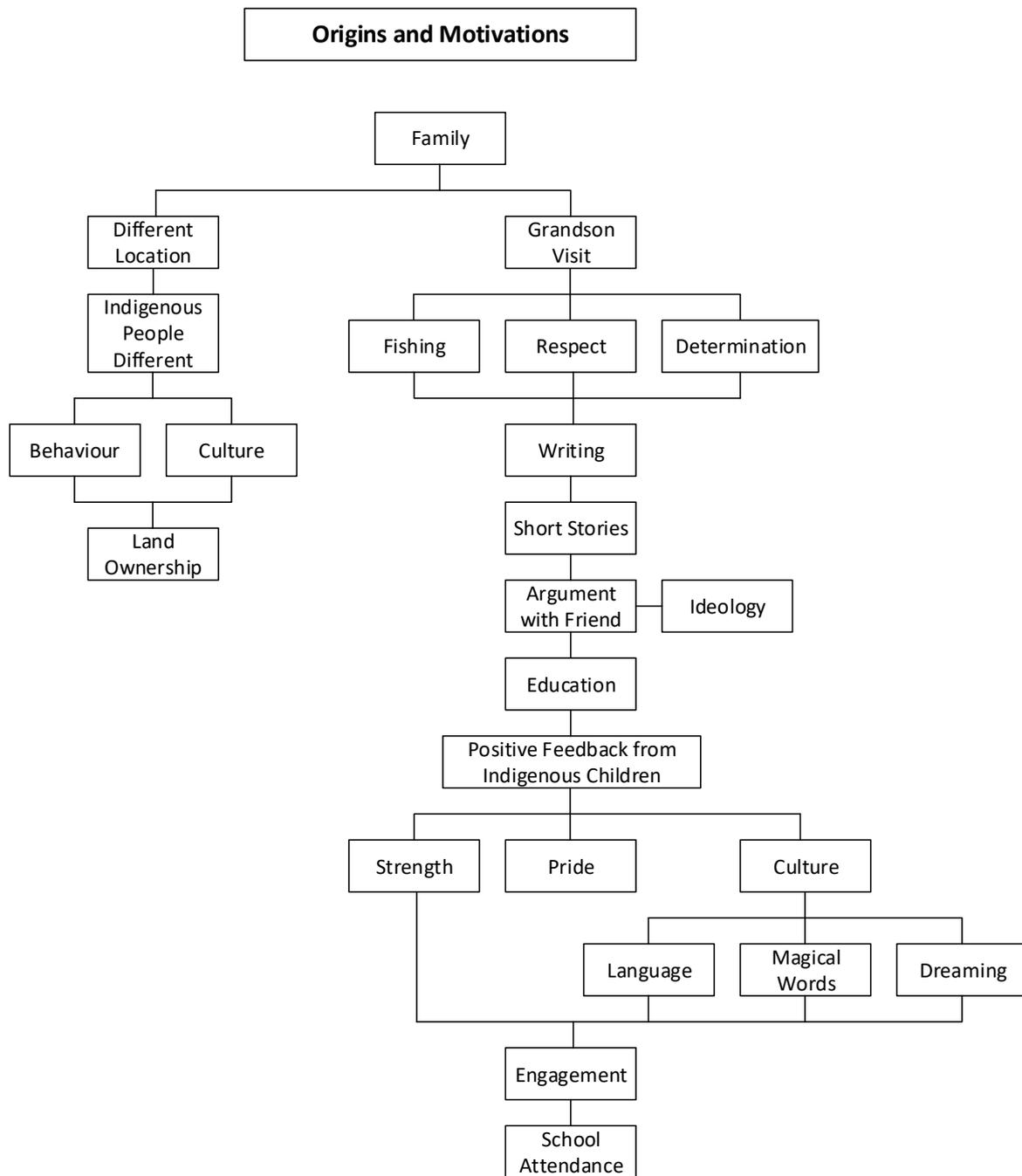


Reflection 1



Reflection 2





Appendix 4: List of Texts that Fulfilled the Selection Criteria

Writer	Title	Year of Publication	Publisher	Year of CBCA Notice	Type of Notice
Gwynne, Phillip	Nukkin Ya	2000	Penguin Australia	2001	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Wheatley, Nadia	Vigil	2001	Penguin Australia	2001	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Blake, Bronwyn	Find Me a River	2001	Lothian Books	2002	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Svendson, Mark	Poison Under Their Lips	2001	Lothian Books	2002	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Blake, Bronwyn	Rock Dancer	2002	Lothian Books	2003	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Lowe, Pat	Feeling the Heat	2002	Penguin Australia	2003	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Metzthen, David	Wildlight	2002	Penguin Australia	2003	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Ridden, Brian	Sweet Tea	2002	Lothian Books	2003	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers

Writer	Title	Year of Publication	Publisher	Year of CBCA Notice	Type of Notice
Whitebeach, Terry and Brown, Michael	Bantam	2002	Fremantle Arts Centre Press	2003	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Bowles, Colin	Nights in the Sun	2003	Penguin Australia	2004	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Norrington, Leonie	The Spirit of Barrumbi	2003	Omnibus Books	2004	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Bone, Ian	Sleep Rough Tonight	2004	Penguin Australia	2005	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Norrington, Leonie	The Last Muster	2004		2005	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Freeman, Pamela	The Black Dress	2005	Black Dog Books	2006	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Murray, Kirsty	A Prayer for Blue Delaney	2005	Allen & Unwin	2006	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Lawrinson, Julia	Bye, Beautiful	2006	Penguin Australia	2007	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
McDonald, Meme	Love Like Water	2007	Allen & Unwin	2008	Shortlisted, Book of the Year: Older Readers

Writer	Title	Year of Publication	Publisher	Year of CBCA Notice	Type of Notice
Norrington, Leonie	Leaving Barrumbi	2007	Omnibus Books	2008	Shortlisted, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Dubosarsky, Ursula	The Golden Day	2011	Allen & Unwin	2012	Shortlisted, Book of the Year: Older Readers
French, Jackie	The Girl from Snowy River	2012	Harper Collins Australia	2013	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Nowra, Lewis	Into That Forest	2012	Allen & Unwin	2013	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Wakefield, Vikki	Friday Brown	2012	The Text Publishing Company	2013	Honour Book, Book of the Year: Older Readers
French, Jackie	Refuge	2013	Harper Collins Australia	2014	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Atkins, Clare	Nona and Me	2014	Black Inc.	2015	Honour Book, Book of the Year: Older Readers
Lawson, Sue	Freedom Ride	2016	Black Dog Books	2016	Notable, Book of the Year: Older Readers

Appendix 5: Find Me a River Family Tree

