Un-Australian Fictions
Un-Australian Fictions: Nation, Multiculture(alism) and Globalisation, 1988-2008

By

Eleni Pavlides

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING
To my father Panayiotis and my mother Niki
for their courage and their struggle.
To my sister Kiki Pavlides and my niece Maria Pavlides-Kontou
in their hope for a life of worth and dignity.
Of what country shall we record Homer to be a citizen, the man to whom all cities reach out their hands? Is it not the truth that this is unknown, but the hero, like an immortal, left as a heritage to the Muses the secret of his country and race?

—Anonymous from *The Greek Anthology*

Life how shall one escape thee without death; for thou hast a myriad of ills and neither to fly from them nor to bear them is easy. Sweet are thy natural beauties, the earth, the sea, the stars, the orbs of the sun and moon. But all the rest is fear and pain, and if some good befall a man, an answering nemesis succeeds it.

—Aesop from *The Greek Anthology*
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Identity—who we are, where we come from, what we are—is difficult to maintain. We are the ‘other’, an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus.

—Edward Said, *After the Last Sky* 16

‘a work conceived radically is a movement of the same unto the other which never returns to the same’. To the story of Ulysses, Levinas opposes that of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever, never to return. This figure of the diaspora returns us to one of the most important aspects of Levinas’ formulation of the relation of the ethical to the political

—Robert Young, *White Mythologies* 17

My birth was a happy accident which occurred alongside the reactive aftermaths of British colonialism. From very early on Papa taught me off-putting things about the British who were (in Papa’s opinion) perfidious in all their habits of colonial government. As a Greek Cypriot he could never forgive the attempted assassination of Archbishop Makarios. However, according to Papa, this duplicity did not extend to the ordinary British soldier who was as much of a victim of the British ruling class as the peoples who they colonised. Unity could be found amongst the common man. It was British soldiers who taught Papa English, allowing him to migrate to Australia as a literate man; an important thing in the 1950s when the post war Greek diaspora populated Melbourne. Befuddled by English documents, mainland Greeks sought out my father to translate papers. Papa took enormous pride in the copperplate writing which the British had taught him. So helpful was Papa’s work that it bought him to the attention of Mama’s fellow villagers. Having come across such an excellent bachelor who was educated in English, they informed the village and after an exchange of letters and photographs which was brokered by her family, Mama was dispatched to Australia to marry. Shortly afterwards, I was born in Melbourne—a different outpost of the British Empire. Nothing like Cyprus, Melbourne was founded in 1835 by white
British settlers. For the 2000 square kilometres surrounding the Yarra River, John Batman and his party paid the traditional owners the equivalent of one hundred British pounds. As under the doctrine of *terra nullius*, only the British Crown held title to the land, the arrangement was soon repudiated. In 1837, the city was officially renamed in honour of the
British Prime Minister—Lord Melbourne. By the 1890s, Melbourne flourished and was for a time the second largest city in the Empire. Peter Craven’s introduction to Malouf’s essay, Made in England, affirms colonial Australia as: “a transplanted form of England itself, and its nineteenth century cities—especially but not simply Melbourne—had the relation to London, the seat of the Empire, that provincial cities like Birmingham and Leeds had” (iv).

For my father, relocation to this seat of empire posed a new set of naming and language problems. There were fresh ruptures in the symbolic order. Much to the birth registrar’s annoyance, when I was born in Melbourne, Papa refused to name me properly. Honouring hundreds of years of agrarian tradition, he gave his first name as my last since this was custom in his village. I would be known by the patronymic. Thus I would carry the “name of the father” until I was renamed and married. But here his proper name for me was rendered illegitimate, local nomenclature did not allow for such an overt honouring of the patriarchal bond and I was recorded in the English way. Papa maintained that it was practices such as these that had subjugated the Celtic peoples of Britain long before the British had exported them to their colonies and dominions. Beaten, he acceded to a new symbolic order: “What happens when the subjectivity acquired within one symbolic order is lost in another: are we left with an empty space and a vacated subjectivity, a type of aphanasis or fading of the subject?” (Gunew, “Home of Language” 46). Etymologically, aphanasis derives from the Greek and means to disappear, to become invisible. In psychiatry, aphanasis is first defined by Ernest Jones—a follower of Freud—as the inability to enjoy sex, as the extinction de la capacite de la jouissance: the enduring denial of the possibility of the satisfaction of desire (Lukacher 74). Lacan subsequently redefines aphanasis as the act of subjective destitution which has its locus in the very moment of the subject’s creation. The signifier of the symbolic “I”, its separateness, only comes into being because of the loss of pre-verbal plenitude (75).

In the white settler mythologies of Australia, the “aphanasis” of the child in the bush, the lost child, established itself as a poignant and enduring image from the nineteenth century onwards (Pierce, The Country of Lost Children). Alone in the darkness/vastness of the bush, in fear and confusion, disorientated and completely defenceless, the lost child is pitilessly exposed. With no witness to respond the child becomes invisible, its cries unheard, the child disappears, only suffering remains—circumscribed by the cruelty of a traitorous continent. In 1867, the “Three Lost Children” in Daylesford, Victoria were found dead inside a tree, silently compliant with their betrayer. In luckier circumstances, Jane Duff
and her three brothers—bush children lost and found in 1864—had their narrative commemorated, recalled and reinterpreted within the safer limits of educational films and school readers. Pervasive and enduring, the image of the lost bush child retains its hold on the modern Australian imagination and the unconscious brutality of the act is symbolically perpetuated. Media frenzy surrounding the more recent disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain and films such as One Night the Moon, disseminate this Australian anxiety for its contemporary audience—leading one historian to ask: “But what is it in our experience of colonisation and settlement that established this image at the core of Australian popular mythology, and why does it retain its potency?” (Torney 11). If the lost child archetype resonates within the settler psyche it is not the only leitmotiv in the gallery of images of unfulfilled promise that haunt the national imaginary (at least amongst the dominant Anglo–Celtic group). Possessively inhabiting that gallery are also the images of the youthful, dying Anzac and the courageous but doomed explorer.

When Mama felt slighted due to her new immigrant status, she would come home from the Melbourne factory announcing that she was proud that she had not come to Australia with “her hands tied together”. For her, unfairness was the natural outcome of Australia’s convict settler past. If you appropriated your “home” from the other and the other still kept place there, then yours was a haunted nation. Should the betrayer not acknowledge the betrayal, then the omission taints all recognition and the stain remains. This is the paradox of fidelity that the betrayed and the betrayer share. Non recognition for Mama reflected her tormentors’ own tormenting lack—it was one from which they could not instigate a chronicle of belonging for themselves let alone for new Australians (as they were known back then). Forever tantalizing, always alluringly out of reach, the “natural inheritance” lives on for the white settler as a manifest symptom of the extinction de la capacite de la jouissance—the enduring denial of the possibility of the satisfaction of desire. Meantime, Papa remained much more concerned with the blight of Britishness. Gallipoli and Churchill’s abandonment of Australia after the fall of Singapore in World War 2 further proved to him the duplicity of British governance. If the subaltern was about race and class for Papa, Mama was thrice denied because for her it was about race, class and gender.

As she could not speak English, Mama was tied to speechlessness. Having gained her access to the symbolic order through language she now lost her right to enter.

For a while, like so many immigrants I was in effect without language, and from the bleakness of that condition, I understood how much of our sense
of self, depends on having a living speech within us. To lose an internal language is to subside into an inarticulate darkness in which we become alien to ourselves. (qtd in Gunew, “Home of Language” 46)

This is Polish-American writer Eva Hoffman writing about the émigré condition of aphasia. Aphasia is also known as aphemia, both words deriving from the Greek and prefixed by the morpheme “α” which means without or lacking. Lacan elevated the morpheme α to the status of trope, incorporating into it a psychoanalytical meaning of archetypical lack, a hole of unfillable desire (Wilden 24). In a drier definition the Encyclopedia Britannica describes aphasia as a condition which impairs the capacity to produce and/or understand language. Usually, it is a result of damage to the language centres of the brain. For Mama, it was an inverted condition she lost a language and thus weakened her mind. Use it or lose it, they say and named her “inarticulate darkness” depression. Suffering expressed is articulated as creativity. Neurosis is unexpressed suffering symptomatised across the body/mind. Language is everything. Regardless of which language was used and what was said at home, I went to Australian schools where I learned that I had joined what Churchill termed the English speaking peoples and that: “the greatest thing about that inheritance is that we speak the language Shakespeare wrote and are inward by our birthright with the glories of that great master of metaphor and association” (Craven, “Introduction” iv).

Faithfully, I served my apprenticeship as a colonial Australian, as a Shakespeare Wallah. I wrote eloquently about the creations of “that great master of metaphor and association” (iv). With alacrity, I embarked on the project of English. It echoed my own trans-generational theme of purgatory and redemption through language. Yet where Craven recalls the Bard’s Henry V on the field of Agincourt: “And you, good yeoman, whose limbs were made in England/Show us here the mettle of your pasture”—I took up arms and sided with Papa (H5 3.1 26-27). I resonated to the rage, suffering, and despair of the Bard’s articulate and ridiculous Shylock, the voice for the world’s first stateless people—the Jews: “Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means … If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?” (MV 3.1 70-72). I understood the fury of being rendered contemptible—of being unseen and unheard. In time, the demands of individuation being what they are, my views and Papa’s diverged as well as merged. Many liberal, generous “real” Australians aided and supported my passage to emotional and intellectual maturity. But this was during the 1970s, when
the Multiculture(alism) created by the vast post-war European migration was looked-for, identified and welcomed.

More than 200 people at the bleak desert centre began a hunger strike eight days ago. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock ordered five children removed from the camp to protect them from having their lips sewn together like those of other children in the protest. (qtd in Gunew “Home of Language” 55)

This quote does not belong to the benign multiculturalism of Australia in 1970s. It is cited from a contemporary report on refugees held in detention camps in Australia during the last decade.

Today, for Australians, the “foreigner” poses a considerable philosophical problem of assessment. How do we identify the “foreigner”? Does the “foreigner” merely breach the cartographic boundary or is the “foreigner” someone who resides amongst us threatening the symbolic boundary, just as the bard’s unspeakable Jew, Shylock, threatens to mutilate the body of the Christian Antonio. In what ways do we reject or subscribe to kinship with him or her? “They” stand outside the group identity, the glue that binds “us” together. For that reason there is the political problem of what do you do with the “foreigner”? Should you subjugate the Other or be subjugated by him/her, live peaceably or apart? Try to destroy the Other or fear destruction from him/her? “Who, after all is empowered to define the Subject and the Other? In whose interests are such identities, who profits from these definitions and who suffers?” (Schwartz 79). Does the white settler fear of aphanasis, the fear of the white settler child rendered speechless and terrified in an alien landscape lead him/her to inflict this terror on his or her Other? Does the archetypal lack of a natural inheritance, that Lacanian “a”, that unfillable desire, mean that the white settler must violently exclude the Other through expulsion? Is it a tragic requirement that as the illegitimate child of Britain, the white settler must abhor the Other to legitimate his/her future and valorise his/her past? And should this requirement be endorsed by culture, legislated by authority and enacted by symbolic violence in both its definition and its policy?
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Accordingly, to this day the myth that defining and demarcating ourselves over against what is foreign is a precondition of identity, politics, society, community … Let us call this the ‘territorial either/or’ theory of identity. It assumes that a space defended by (mental) fences is the indispensable precondition for the formation of self-consciousness and for social integration.

—Ulrick Beck, The Cosmopolitan Vision

The Australian nation-state is not a static thing, it is as much a discursive practice and imaginative projection as it is a geographic territory and a state and civic polity. Well into the twentieth century, Australians continued to look towards the unreal homeland of Britain to locate Australia imaginatively and morally within the British Empire (and consequently within the natural superiority of the “West”). Even today, the need to claim a British (and hence Western) inheritance appears to be pre-eminent in the nation’s cultural and political discourse. However, it was only in the nineteenth century that being Western came to mean “being law-governed and socially and technologically advanced” (Bonnet, The Idea of the West 5). According to geographers Lewis and Wigen, it was the Greeks who first recognized a “natural” distinction between Europe and Asia. Greek mariners did not regard any one continent as inherently superior to the other. However, over time, cultural values were attributed to geographical differences and Europe came to be seen as being naturally superior to Asia: “Europe was defined in relation to its superiority—progress, civilisation, and reason—over a less evolved Asia” (Cerwonka 39). In such a binary, Europe (and most particularly Britain) was represented as advancing forces for civilisation, signifying what J. M. Blaut calls “eurocentric diffusionism, the little-challenged belief that there has been a unidirectional flow of culture, innovation, and overall human causality from a European centre to a non-European outside” (qtd in Cerwonka 39).

As modern maps established “the power of a state by writing the identity of the nation on the physical world”—the mapping and writing of
an Australian state onto Asia–Pacific geography became the outcome of British imperial desire (Cerwonka 23). In 1770, when the expansionist ambitions of the colonial powers were both aggressive and adversarial, Captain James Cook took possession of the eastern territory of Australia in the name of the British king:

Captain Cook realised that the Pacific Ocean, which for so long had been unknown in Europe, was almost becoming the Europeans’ own toy harbour. They held most of the Pacific coast of America, the Dutch held the Indonesian archipelago, and the Spanish held the Philippines. Even the Russians in their slow expansion eastwards across Asia, were assembling a loosely held colonial empire which extended all the way from Moscow to the shores of the northern Pacific … (Blainey, A Short History of the World 407)

A British colony in the Pacific, “the Europeans’ own toy harbour”, was established on the shores of Sydney Cove in 1788. Consequently, historian Stuart Macintyre considers that the history of Australia forms “a late chapter in British, European and world history”. British settlers bought with them a unique inheritance, “fashioned from the objective rationality of the Enlightenment and a corresponding belief in human capacity, the moral certainty and stern duty of evangelical Christianity, and the acquisitive itch of the market”. As well, such a legacy cast history as “an insistent process of improvement and progress that legitimated the replacement of the old by the new”. The isolation, strangeness and disarticulation of the early British colonists was soothed and moderated by attaching their “destiny to imperial origins. Colonial history took British and European achievement as its point of departure” (A Concise History of Australia 2). Australia was irrevocably situated within the reciprocal and binary relationship between the Old and New World. Thus, an Australian attachment to what Edward Said terms a “European imaginative geography” was inevitable (“From Orientalism” 419).

As Australia is isolated in the Asia–Pacific or South–East Asia region, the country’s geography became a symbolic site of anxiety for many Australians, due to “its geographical liminality in relation to the symbolic binary of Europe and Asia” (Cerwonka 39). Therefore, when “chance was turned into destiny” and the six Australian colonies united into a single nation in 1901, Australians demanded recognition of both Australianness and un-Australianness (Anderson, Imagined Communities 19). So what does un-Australianness mean? In its earliest use from the mid 1850s onwards, “un-Australian” was used in a positive sense to describe the things that were akin to the British motherland and unlike the home
Introduction

country. But it was in the 1990s, following a flurry of the use of the expression “un-Australian” by politicians, that the *Macquarie Dictionary* first included a definition of the term. In 2006, whilst conducting a review of the Hansard records going back 20 years, Professor Klaus Neumann found that politicians in the Senate and the House of Representatives had used the term 600 times (Duffy). In the Australian parliament the term had been used to describe anything from rental cars to socialism, to the imposition of import duties. Then again, in the 1990s, academic Joe Pugliese saw the growing use of the term as marking a profound anxiety about Australian identity—a failure that indicated Australia’s incapacity to come to terms with its own history (qtd in Ireland). So prevalent did the use of the term become, that in December 2006 the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia (CSAA) themed its annual conference around the subject of UnAustralia (*sic*).

In 1981, Richard White had already accorded the status of a “national obsession” to the inventing of a national identity for Australia. White declared that:

> There is no point asking whether one version of this essential Australia is truer than another because they are all intellectual constructs, neat, tidy, comprehensible—and necessarily false … When we look at ideas about national identity, we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are and whose interests they serve. (*Inventing Australia* viii)

Like Australianness, understandings of un-Australianness progressed or regressed, depending on whose interests were best served at the time. The two terms formed a binary definition and the qualities attributed to each were mutually dependent on the meaning given to the other. Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard invoked the word “un-Australian” to great effect. In 2004, 28.2 per cent of the mentions of the word in major metropolitan newspapers were attributed to him by Media Monitor. Elected to office four times, Howard took Australians into the new millennium by reinvigorating a homogeneous and one dimensional Australian identity forever indebted to its British origins. As a result, from the mid 1990s to the mid 2000s, Australians failed to move beyond a state of mind that made national identity contingent on the pre-eminence of a white British diaspora. In fact, Ien Ang considers white Australia culture to be the necessary precursor for Australia’s present virulent border protection program: a policy which legislated and mandated attitudes of “self-righteous, self-protective parochialism” and “rigid anti-cosmopolitanism” (“From White Australia to Fortress Australia” 58).
Undoubtedly, the fin-de-siècle political and social environment saw Australia preoccupied with territorial disputes. Within nation-state borders, issues of territorial integrity arose at the same time as Aboriginal land rights achieved limited recognition. Meanwhile, external boundaries were threatened by asylum seekers and refugees. From a European perspective, the virulent response of the Australian state to a comparatively small number of illegal arrivals appeared extreme but as the physical borders of Australia were breached, the Australian state saw national identity as endangered. Fearful of a breakdown in the old order, Australia’s conservative intelligentsia and commentators favoured the sort of nation building sensibility which was politically supported by the conservative government. Capitalising on their popular support, the Howard government proved politically astute in their ability to effectively mobilise “the rhetoric of loss” within Australia (Nolan and Dawson xi). Many “ordinary” Australians felt that they had lost out in the ongoing cultural changes which were part of the revolution that had affected all Western societies from the 1960s onwards. Amongst other things, these cultural changes undermined existing orthodoxies by challenging established attitudes to gender, race, sex, ethnicity and religion. More latterly still, industrialised Western societies were encountering the end of a post-war consensus on welfare-state politics (Schierup, Hansen, and Castles Migration). The protracted crisis in the restructuring of the modern welfare state which first manifested in the mid-1970s, intensified during the 1980s and 1990s—a change which left many Australians feeling socially and psychologically insecure.

From the 1990s onwards and well into the 2000s, two Prime Ministers (and their respective governments) shaped Australia—Paul Keating and John Howard. In spite of the many differences (and similarities) between them, both attributed the national unease to the tenuousness of the existing definition of Australianness. Leading public documents, such as Australian Citizenship for a New Century prepared by the Australian Citizenship Council in 2000, supported these conclusions. The Citizenship Council reported that they could find no “particular answer” to the question of what was distinct about Australian political life (Galligan, Roberts, and Trifiletti 2). As a consequence, both Keating and Howard sought to take control of the narrative of Australianness. The debate that Keating set off—about who Australians are as a people—lingers long after his departure from office. A staunch republican, he hit out at his conservative opponents’ commitment to Britishness and monarchy:

I tell you I learnt one thing: I learnt about self-respect and self-regard for Australia. Not about some cultural cringe to a country which decided not to
defend the Malaysian peninsular, not to worry about Singapore, not to give
us our troops back to keep ourselves free from Japanese domination. This
was the country you people wedded yourselves to, and even when they
walked out on you and joined the Common Market you were still looking
for your MBEs and your knighthoods and all the rest of the regalia that
comes with it. These are the same old fogies who doffed their lids and
tugged the forelock to the British establishment. We will not have a bar of
it. (Speech to House of Representatives, 24 February 1992)

More than a decade later, equally determined, conservative Prime Minister
Howard also used power to tell his version of the national story and to
propose a different cohesiveness for the nation. He claimed victory in the
culture wars, as he declared an end to the “divisive, phoney debate about
national identity” and that Australians did not have to “smother or
apologise for our place in the Western political tradition in order to build
our relationship in Asia or any other part of the world” (Address to
National Press Club, 25 Jan. 2006). Australia’s influence in the rest of
world could be assured on its own terms:

Most nations experience some level of cultural diversity while also having
a dominant cultural pattern running through them. In Australia’s case, that
dominant pattern comprises Judeo-Christian ethics, the progressive spirit
of the Enlightenment and the institutions and values of British political
culture. (Address to National Press Club 25 Jan, Australia Day 2006)

As well as other differences, Keating’s and Howard’s perspectives
exposed the false homogeneity and consensus of an Australia portrayed as
an Anglo–Celtic nation.

Sectarian, political, and economic divisions between Protestant English
and Irish Catholics were very evident in Australia before the 1960s. Paul
Keating’s strong republican and anti-British stance is generally attributed
to his Celtic, Irish-Catholic background. By contrast John Howard’s
valorising of British institutions and staunch monarchism is attributed to
his Protestant Anglo heritage. Over time, as Australia’s post-war
immigration programme bought in immigrant groups of much greater
difference, Anglo–Celtic dissimilarities were subsumed and rendered less
obvious. To date, Australianness had been secured by a vigorous exclusion
of “un-Australianness”—a term which operated, amongst other things, as a
linguistic repository for Australia’s “Others”. Elaborating on the “Other”
from the standpoint of the “anti-discipline” of cultural studies, John Frow
capitalizes the word as making “a mythical One out of many” (Cultural
Studies and Cultural Value 7, 3). Frow’s interest lies with that social group
“from and for which knowledge of the objectified Other is produced” (3).
The knowable Other is generated from within “our” cultural framework, operating as a mirror image to tell us “what we want to know about ourselves” (3). Consequently, there can be no unmediated encounter with the Other; all that we really do is create an internal contrast to our own social framework, using our own language. Created within specific social systems, the “Other” works like the shadow self in psychoanalysis, illuminating unexplored and often unacceptable parts of our own world. As definitions of the “Other” are absorbed into that selfsame world, this system is changed. But the encounter with the “Other” is always mediated by the cultural lens of the “specular relationship” (3).

Reproduced from the fourth edition of *The Macquarie Dictionary* published in 2005, the following four definitions of un-Australian suggest the “cultural lens” of contemporary Australia’s “specular relationship” with its “Others”:

1. not Australian in character; an un-Australian landscape; an un-Australian novel.

2. (of conduct, behaviour, etc.) not conforming to ideas of traditional Australian morality and customs, such as fairness, honesty, hard work, etc.; Mr Elliott said the idea should not be seen as un-Australian or against the ethos of the nation’s culture of not dobbing in mates’, -West Australian 1992.

3. violating a pattern of conduct, behaviour, etc., which, it is implied by the user of the term, is one embraced by Australians; It’s un-Australian to drive past a pub. -John Singleton 1988.

4. Obsolete disloyal to the Australian nation, especially by virtue of being subject to manipulation by an influence from outside Australia, derived from certain political, religious and ethnic affiliations.

—*The Macquarie Dictionary*

From the bicentenary onwards, rejected and expelled “un-Australianness”, survived in a liminal border zone: a boundary sector that was physically realised by the creation of a migratory exclusion zone for incoming refugees. But these so-called “illegals” were only a small part of the possible spatial incursions into the territorial and symbolic sovereignty of Australians. For Australians in the new millennium, possible definitions of “Others” now encompassed a multiplicity of threatening and unauthorised representations. Moreover, as both of Australia’s major political parties forcedly advocated Australia’s commitment to economic globalisation, the traditional left was marginalised. Capital became international and won the day in Australia but the price was high. There was social disintegration
within affected areas, particularly amongst rural communities and the 
manufacturing sectors (Castles, “The racisms of globalisation” 38). 
Economic deregulation occurred “in advance of renewal in Australian 
civic culture and articulation of Australian citizenship”. Old certainties 
were “eroding without a new consensus emerging” (Galligan, Roberts, and 
Trifiletti 2). For Australians, already unpersuaded by a connection to a 
solid sense of national identity, the changes in the century’s last decade 
and beyond, were seen as menacing to both identity and community. 
Hence, from the 1988 bicentenary onwards, to name who someone was, as 
well as what he/she represented as being Australian, grew to become a 
mounting problem of definition. Indeed, during the whole of the 
bicentenary year, which commemorated two hundred years of British 
settlement, the country was consumed by the question of national 
identity—a contentious discussion that continues today. The dilemma was, 
and still is, how to introduce oneself as being Australian.

**Being Australian: Bicentenary to Global Financial Crisis**

For all of these reasons, the twenty years from 1988 to 2008—
beginning with the bicentenary and ending with the global financial crisis 
in the new millennium—represented a testing time for Australia. Not 
altogether celebratory, it was also a sobering, unsettling and introspective 
time. This book scrutinizes selected literary Australian fictions published 
during these years. During this time, did events within Australia’s literary 
establishment in any way reflect the wider socio-political landscape? Were 
there parallel developments within the category specified as Australian 
literature? Or does literature only exist and persist in its own 
hermeneutically contained universe? More to the point, does politics have 
anything to do with literature and does literature have anything to do with 
politics? Undoubtedly, academic Mark Davis would answer this question 
with a “yes”. For Davis the decline of the Australian literary paradigm is 
concurrent with government policies related to globalisation and the end of 
post-war consensus on welfare state politics: “seen in these terms the 
decline of the literary paradigm isn’t simply to do with literature; it’s to do 
with a broader reconceptualisation of the public sphere itself” (“The 
Decline of the Literary Paradigm” 117). Yet, although I agree with Davis 
with regard to the changes that have reshaped the Australian public sphere, 
I do not consider the literary paradigm to be in decline—even though it is 
most certainly being refashioned. Rather, in this book I propose the 
opposite, suggesting that literary fiction during this period played a key
role in the critical processes of “disenchantment” and “remoralisation” that were taking place within Australian society.

The terms “disenchantment” and “remoralisation” were first invoked by social scientist Max Weber. He believed it was the vocational duty of social scientists to identify these factors and to recognise the differences between them. Whilst I do not want to reduce Australian literary form to a national political and social allegory, in this book I contend that literary fiction not only reflects the “disenchantment” of the political and social but that it also plays a key role in its imaginative restoration or “remoralisation”. Not all literary fiction takes on this task. Nor do I believe, by any means, that all literary fiction must do so or that all fiction must only be given critical attention on the basis of its political engagement. It just simply happens that some literary fiction more obviously takes on this commission. Consequently, this book goes on to consider selected Australian literary fictions published between 1988 and 2008 which vigorously engage with those cultural changes that undermined existing orthodoxies by challenging established attitudes to gender, race, sex, ethnicity and religion. They are not the only fictions published in Australia at this time to do so. Nor does this book claim any comprehensive coverage for Australian fiction published between 1988 and 2008—literary or otherwise. Rather, in dealing with specific fictions I seek to mediate between the nation’s political and social discourse that is the public realm and the subjective, private and fictionalised discourse in the world recreated and represented by the author. There has always been a classic liberal tension between private and public spheres and, in one sense or another, the authors who are the point of this study replicate this strain subjectively. As well, the critical attention given to the correlation between these two disparate discourses reflects the tension between liberal and radical movements in postmodern times. Where liberal movements seek to “fix” the existing system, radical movements look towards its fundamental overhaul. Once again, the authors studied in this book variously take up these positions. All of the authors in this study can lay claim to the status of an Australian national. Yet, in the various imaginative fictions and characters that they create, they show that Australian identity in this twenty year period was not a settled thing. Australianness is a fluctuating, variable and at times negating concept and during this period these un-Australian fictions show national identity as being rewritten “within a framework of modern Western ideas about science, nature, race, society, [and] nationality” (White, Inventing Australia ix).

As a result, even though this book is primarily situated in the area of literary studies, because of its mediated interaction with political and
social discourse, it also has a foothold within cultural studies, Australian studies and cultural history. The prefix of un-Australian is applied to the selected authors’ fictions because of the challenges these particular texts represent, through various and different means, to authorised, accepted and customary representations of Australianess. Within the projected mental spatiality of “real” and “ordinary” Australians, the border between un-Australia and Australia is already formed, existing figuratively as cerebral blockade. A “mental fence”, of the sort Beck refers to in the epigraph to this chapter, had already been historically premeditated for Australia’s “Others”: “national identity is not ‘Born of the lean loins of the country itself’ … but is part of the ‘cultural baggage’ which Europeans have bought with them, and which we continue to encumber ourselves” (White, *Inventing Australia* ix). Before going on to specifically define the use and purpose of the remaining terms in the book title—“Nation”, “Multiculture(ism)”, and “Globalisation”—I would like to briefly consider the historical evolutions of un-Australianess. In part, I do this because of the enduring hold that these “mental fences” have upon the Australian psyche. National identity may be weak and tenuously conceived but these “mental fences” have also played a de facto nation-forming role. Up to now, they have to a large extent determined the independent status and authority that, as a nation-state, Australia has been able to command. The following brief social, historical and spatial analysis goes some way towards explaining Australia’s difficulties during the decade before and after the new millennium, in locating itself within a rapidly changing geo-political environment. Equally, further on in this book, these uncertainties are reflected in the study of the selected literary texts.

**A Brief History of Un-Australia**

The unity of Australia is nothing, if that does not imply a united race. A united race means not only that its members can intermix, intermarry and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by the same ideas, an aspiration towards the same ideals, of a people possessing the same general cast of character, tone of thought.

—Alfred Deakin (1901) qtd in Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* 142

Residing securely “within the British Empire that was the dominant global organisation of the day”, Australians expanded their self-government whilst at the same time retaining their identity as British subjects (Galligan, Roberts, and Trifiletti 3). But, from the very beginning
the creation of Australia was based on a racialised ideal. The new nation’s constitution denied citizenship, franchise and the right to serve in the armed forces to Africans, Asians, and Aboriginal people. For Macintyre, the new nation’s “[r]acism was grounded in imperial as well as national sentiment, for the champions of the Empire proclaimed the unity of the white race over the yellow and the black” (*A Concise History* 141). In 1901, the first act passed by the Australian Federal Parliament was the *Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act* which came to be known as the White Australia policy. Another stratagem in ensuring Australian racial purity, the policy was finally dismantled in 1973. Surveying the policy as the inevitable outcome of modernity, David Walker sees that the White Australia Policy was impelled by “a profound unease at the collapse of distance in the modern world and the growing and unwelcome interaction between peoples of different races and cultures” (“Race Building and the Disciplining of White Australia” 42). Nonetheless, it was not only fear that impelled the mission of Australian racial purity. Prestige could be achieved, as well as global prominence, if the national vision was articulated as ensuring the future of the white races. Consequently, the White Australia Policy gave Australia an imposing and inflated responsibility for the European and Western world (43).

With nationhood came the binding racial imperative of conferring membership to the nation. Australia was to be a white, sovereign and modern European state. “Un-Australia” would contain those groups to be physically or symbolically excluded from national belonging—the collectivised “Others”. In line with the Social Darwinism and racial determinism of the late nineteenth century, Australia was designated to become the protected reserve of the “higher races”. As Carter explains:

> Racialised thinking ... was pervasive in white or European societies by the turn of the century ... The key point in the Australian case is that racialised thinking organised around the core concepts of whiteness and Britishness, became absolutely fundamental to conceptions of the Australian nation. It was not so much Australians were ‘racist’ as that ‘Australia’ itself was a racialised idea. (*Dispossession, Dreams and Diversity* 312)

Australia looked to the new government to enforce the exclusion of inferior races by law. Initially, undesirable races were excluded via means of a dictation test administered in a European language. By 1900 the majority of British subjects were Indians and Africans. Given their important strategic interests with China and Japan, the British were keen to avoid any overt racial discrimination being encoded into Australian law. A dictation test appeased Britain. As added insurance, parliament granted
customs the responsibility for administering the dictation test in a language unfamiliar to the immigrant identified as racially undesirable (Tavan 10). Paul Kelly observes that historians have tended to apologise for, or diminish the White Australia Policy because of its overt racism. However, the policy had “near universal support and longevity” and was central to the “Australian story”. Far from being deviant, the policy was “merely typical of its age” (The Australian Story 52). In Anxious Nation, David Walker argues that the racialising drives in Australian nationalism “would have been a good deal less intense, had it not been for the geo-political threat attributed to awakening Asia from the 1880s” (5). Thus, with the “empty” continent of Australia so conveniently close, populous Asia emerged as Australia’s pre-eminent threat, before and after Federation. A strongly expressed nationality was deemed crucial for the infant Australian nation—a weakly expressed nationality could only lead to an Asianised disaster. Is it any wonder then that racial purity and the imperative and pre-eminence of British ancestry (after all the British were the masters of an Empire that ruled a quarter of the world) became the touchstones of Australia’s fledgling national culture? As well as labour protection (cheap Asian labour was seen as a threat to the working man) and egalitarianism, Kelly links the “powerful social and economic logic” of the White Australia Policy to the founding of “an enlightened, democratic, progressive Australia” (The Australian Story 53).

Yet, from the very beginning, this utopia was based on racialised thinking—it was utopia but for the white man only. Whiteness of course evolved in definition over the decades of the White Australia policy. From Britishness and the initially accepted Protestant and Nordic peoples, it subsequently moved eastwards across Europe to include Greeks, Italians, Maltese and other World War 2 European refugees. Like the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, the Migration Act in 1958 which replaced it, also did not mention race or the White Australia policy. Nonetheless, the Migration Act of 1958 perpetuated the White Australia Policy for another ten years (Jupp, From White Australia to Woomera 9). During the 1960s and the 1970s, the massive, post-war migration of non-British Europeans required Australians to reassess the pre-eminence they accorded to their British heritage. International conditions also challenged Australia’s sense of “nationness”. It became increasingly difficult for Australia to locate itself imaginatively and morally within the British Empire. Between the 1960s and the 1970s decolonisation and global migration escalated. International opinion condemned the regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa. Britain joined the European Common Market and as Australian agricultural markets were lost overnight, Australians felt abandoned.
Further weakening ties to Britain, Australia took Japan as a major trading partner and the United States as a major military partner. Theories of political plurality were championed within the academy and Western democracies experienced a rise in activism: civil rights, the Vietnam peace movement and Aboriginal activism. Both nationally and globally Australia was being forced to redefine itself. In response to the need for change, Australians elected the Whitlam Labor government in 1972, ending 23 years of conservative Coalition government.

Motivated by a reformist agenda, the Whitlam government introduced initiatives in key areas and Al Grassby, the Whitlam government’s Minister of Immigration, is generally credited with pioneering Australian multiculturalism. Australian multiculturalism is often seen as a response to Canadian multiculturalism which was adopted as state policy in Canada in 1971. Multiculturalism is a word devised to describe something that had not existed before, namely “that cultures had relevance beyond the immigrant generation” (Jupp, *From White Australia* 80). However, Canadian and Australian multiculturalism had different histories and were driven by dissimilar imperatives. Mark Lopez views the Canadian model as emphasising cultural maintenance and exchange whereas the Australian model was focused primarily on migrant welfare (*The Origins of Multiculturalism* 117). Nonetheless, from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, multiculturalism became the accepted policy framework for managing Australia’s post-war diversity. This also established a tradition of treating “White–Aboriginal” relations and “Anglo–Ethnic” relations as two separate spheres of life—a problematic convention that persists today (Hage, *White Nation* 24). On the other hand, from the early 1980s onwards, the Australian political climate was changing. As the ambassador of disaffected conservative opinion, the journal *Quadrant* had been critical of multiculturalism from the early 1980s. However, Whitlam successor and coalition Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser’s enthusiastic support had kept conservative opposition at bay. Electoral defeat and the prospect of long years of entrenched Labor government bought the conservative critics out in force from the mid 1980s. In 1984, Professor Geoffrey Blainey aired his ambivalence toward Asian migration and published *All for Australia*, a volume which was highly critical of multiculturalism—the “Asian” part of it in particular. He coined the term “ethnic payola” to refer to the grants and subsidies being distributed to ethnic organisations. Further denunciation of multiculturalism came from Katharine Betts, an academic who published the influential *Ideology and Immigration* in 1988.