

The Search for 'Home' in Glenys Ward's  
*Wandering Girl* and *Unna You Fullas*.

William B Day

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction.

Aborigines are now writing back to the discourses which have sought to define them. *Wandering Girl* (Ward 1988) and *Unna You Fullas* (Ward 1991) are two Western Australian examples of the increasing number of Aboriginal life stories published since the success of Sally Morgan's *My Place* in 1987. The authors of these texts intervene in the process of the colonisation of their people, including what Tiffin ([1987]1995:97) describes as 'the European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space'. Space, and the indigenous people who inhabit it, are described, named and known through texts which strive to naturalise the colonisers' possession of the colonised land.

A theme of writers in nations like Australia which have experienced the domination by a metropolitan power has been 'to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world' (Tiffin [1987]1995:95). Glenyse Ward's two texts also question codes as she journeys in search of a place to call 'home' in her two accounts of her early life.

This thesis asks: How is the search for a place to call 'home' expressed in Glenyse Ward's *Wandering Girl* and *Unna You Fullas*? This search involves firstly the deconstruction of the assimilationist interpretations of 'home' and secondly the finding of a language, community and place where 'home' can be described, experienced and located. Because the nature of 'home' is unstable for the institutionalised Aboriginal girl of the texts, I have placed the signifier in quotation marks to emphasise its contested meaning. I further suggest that in Ward's unfinished search for 'home' the Aboriginality of the texts becomes available to non-Aboriginal Australian readers who are also seeking to locate themselves in 'a shared world which is wider, more in tune with actuality' (Brady 1994a:42).

In this chapter I will define my terminology with a brief discussion of the methodology used, including debates over the application of poststructural and postcolonial literary theories to Aboriginal writing. I also believe it is necessary to distinguish the terms 'Aboriginality' and 'Aboriginalism' which are often used interchangeably in recent articles. In the next chapter I will discuss the author's emergence from 'textual capture' in *Wandering Girl*. I will then show how Ward in *Unna You Fullas* re-establishes community and language through the reinterpretation of the meaning of 'home' as understood in

*Wandering Girl*. In the fourth chapter I will argue that Ward's postcolonial hybridity, textual tropes and nationalist continuities align the texts with a national identity recognising the inclusion of indigenous people and culture as essential for national legitimacy.

In this thesis Ward's stories will be interpreted as 'cultural products' which encode cultural meanings. Although this method of analysis requires a degree of subjectivity, I believe the following comments by Hamilton (1990) in her development of Anderson ([1983]1991) confirm my methodology. Hamilton (1990:15) notes how an increasing focus on texts has 'brought attention to bear on the product of human culture rather than on the behaviour or conscious beliefs of humans themselves'. Hamilton (1990:15) gives novels, films and newspapers as examples of 'cultural products' which can be interrogated 'on the assumption that systematised cultural meanings are embedded in each such "texts"'. All knowledge is 'culturally mediated by various forms of discourse', states Hamilton (1990:15) and therefore empirical investigation cannot be privileged over the analysis of texts for the meanings they may have to the culture which produced them.

This thesis also interprets the two texts as contributions towards the imagining of Aboriginality and of nation, which emerge as necessary ingredients for Ward's sense of place and community. The concept of textual construction of nationality comes from Anderson's ([1983]1991) *Imagined Communities* which argues that 'nation-ness' is a cultural artifact, necessarily 'imagined' because of the impossibility of all a nation's members ever knowing each other. The development of a print media contributed to creating this shared vision of a nation. I will argue that *Wandering Girl* and *Unna You Fullas* contribute to the imagining of an identity for an author whose heritage had been stolen from her, and also to the imagining of a national identity which includes, rather than denigrates or appropriates, Aboriginality. This inclusiveness, I describe as 'hybridity', using the methodology of postcolonial literary theory, as I will presently explain. However, I will firstly discuss other ways Aborigines have been constructed.

### **Aboriginalism.**

Langton (1993:32) claims that in pre-colonial times there was no 'Aboriginality' as it is understood today. Her discussion on the textual construction of Aboriginality includes the point that sixty-seven legal definitions of 'Aborigine' exist in Australia (Langton 1993:28). Jordan (1985) shows through her study of census categories how changing definitions of

Aborigines reveal the power of the dominant society's institutions to control meanings. According to Dodson (1994:7) definitions of Aborigines by 'the intrusive gaze', which he traces in a succession from Captain Cook, 'have served to meet the various and changing interests and aspirations of those who construct them'.

Said (1978:5) traced the construction of the Orient by 'a constellation of ideas' which uses a 'pretended suprapolitical objectivity' to describe, teach, settle and rule over the object of knowledge. More recently, Attwood (1992b:i) uses Said's concept of 'Orientalism' to define 'Aboriginalism', including the institutionalised Aboriginalism of the state and its agents which 'exercises authority over Aborigines by making statements about them, authorising views of them, and ruling over them'. Hodge and Mishra (1990:27) give attributes of Aboriginalism as:

smugness and a sense of superiority, racist stereotypes and assertions of rights of ownership in the intellectual and cultural sphere to match power in the political and economic spheres.

The author describes how she was a victim of policies which the above definitions well describe.

Goldie (1988:61) earlier used Said's analysis, without using the term Aboriginalism, to argue that Aborigines in Australian literature have been a 'semiotic pawn on a chess board controlled by the white signmaker'. According to Goldie (1988:59) 'the signifier, the literary image, does not lead back to the implied signified, the Aborigines of "real life", but to other images'. Goldie then quotes Said's (1978:21) statement that 'there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation'. Roughley (1991:202) replies that Goldie's deconstruction of the Aboriginalists' object of knowledge is a 'gross simplification' of Derrida's concept of deferred meaning, where language operates in an 'unlimited semiotic signifying play in which there is no final limiting signified to arrest the play'. In either case, texts are read as having no fixed single meaning.

Arguments which destabilise meaning can be in the interests of Aboriginal writers like Ward who must write in the language of the coloniser and in so doing, struggle against their own 'textual capture' to find alternative definitions which will help to reconnect them to 'home'. However, an extreme form of 'anti-Aboriginalism', which Goldie seems to advocate by denying a connection between signified and referent, might also 'deny the "reality" of

violence and injustice' and once again disempower Aborigines, warns Hodge (1993:167). Aborigines are reclaiming an identity which poststructural theory could deny them, as I will later discuss.

In recent years Aboriginal writers like Ward, activists like Gilbert or academics like Sykes have ensured the Aboriginal voice is not silenced. Black voices answering back to Aboriginalism make classic Aboriginalism untenable in the 'post-Aboriginalist' era (Hodge 1993:167). As those who were silenced are heard, boundaries between self and Other are blurred. Increasingly 'the global embourgeoisment' of the ethnographic subject ensures a silenced Other can no longer be spoken for, because he/she may also have access to the same institutions of media, law, politics or economy. Lee and Ackerman (1994:346) call this dialectic 'the politics of representation'. A thesis about Aboriginal writing now needs to justify its position or be accused of invading the Aboriginal space. Conversely, whites who have been portrayed in *Wandering Girl* and *My Place* have reacted strongly to the author's representations of them (West Australian, 16 April 1988; Subiaco Post 28 February 1989).

#### **Poststructuralism.**

Glenyse Ward was taken from her Aboriginal mother at the age of one and 'forced to abide by the European way' (Ward 1988:1) at two Catholic missions. This thesis shows how Ward deconstructs the meaning of 'home' and other signifiers like 'family', 'our country' and the English book with their associated values, imposed on her by such an extreme form of assimilationist indoctrination. I believe Aboriginal writers who question the fixed meanings of an imposed language in this way have an affinity with poststructuralism which, according to Saunders (1993:79), views the self as the product of 'social and cultural discourses'. I show how Ward, the author, becomes increasingly aware of the need to free herself of the discourses of assimilation before she can figuratively and literally continue her search for 'home'.

Saunders (1993:26-32) describes discourse as a 'speaking position' which is naturalised by 'commonsense', or 'habitual and conventional ways of seeing and speaking'. As a marginalised minority Ward is in a position to criticise the discourses of the regime which confined her. This conflict is illustrated in *Wandering Girl* by the interpretations given to their worlds by the Bigelows and their 'dark servant'. What seems commonsense to the Bigelows is strange to their servant. In one example of many which illustrate this clash of discourses, Ward writes:

She stood up in a very angry mood and told me to leave the room at once. What I had done was very rude - to blow my nose in front of decent citizens like her and her husband (p.79).

Historicism and mimeticism are techniques used by the dominant discourse to give accounts of past events an aura of truth. Now that Aborigines are writing their versions of the past, historicism and mimeticism are revealed as selectively and ideologically fixed to their referents, the world 'as it happened' and the world 'as it is'. Commenting on the publication of *Wandering Girl*, 'Mrs Bigelow' responded from her own 'commonsense' viewpoint: 'We never had any trouble with the native girls and I just cannot understand why she would be saying these things about us' (West Australian, 16 April 1988).

Poststructuralist theory argues that knowledge is 'partial and provisional, dependent on our perspective and subject to revision' (Saunders 1992:80). For example, in *Wandering Girl*, Ward creates a 'counter image to the misused, oppressed black servant cowering at the edge of white family photographs' (Petersen 1988:130). The Aboriginal girl has reclaimed the centre from those who had marginalised her and now gives her version of events. Later, in *Unna You Fullas*, Ward contests the language of the culture centre as she reinterprets the meaning of 'home'.

#### **Aborigines and literature.**

As mentioned, the importance of literature to this thesis lies in its ability as a culture product to influence the imagining of community and nation. In this regard, Australian literature has been likened to government policies to 'eliminate' the Aboriginal 'problem' (Hodge and Mishra 1990:xiv). The myth of terra nullius, or the empty land, has been naturalised in mimetic texts where (white) Australians move across a landscape 'from which all Aboriginal traces have been removed' (Hodge and Mishra (1990:23). In more recent writing by non-Aborigines an Aboriginal presence may be inserted to 'confer legitimacy' on Australian literature (Hodge and Mishra 1990:26).

Aboriginal writers are sensitive to the absences of literature and to being spoken for by the texts of Aboriginalism; however, because they seek to disrupt the discourses which define them, Aboriginal writers have been criticised for being too political. Jack Davis, the black writer says, 'If you're Aboriginal you're a politician. If you're black you're political' (Shoemaker 1994:32).



The choice of texts for this thesis is also a political choice, in that I seek to help create a 'space' where Aboriginal writers may be heard. Although Muecke (1992:135) suggests that Aboriginal texts expounding social justice may 'walk past the border guards of the literary institutions with Aboriginal passports', I believe Ward's books stand on their own merit and are an important contribution to Australian literature. I also agree with Cowlshaw (1993:189) that it is patronising to pay homage to Aboriginal writers by simply agreeing with them.

Katrak ([1989]1995:256) warns that 'an attempt to get away from narrowly anthropological readings of... texts and thereby interpreting them as "acts of language" may create a 'new hegemony' of Eurocentric literary theory. The historian Wolfe (1992:336) also questions the literary theorists' ability to stand outside the 'will to conquest' which seeks to incorporate all systems into Western knowledge. Wolfe (1993b:887) adds that academics need to renounce 'all that ethnographic ventriloquism that presumes to put words into the mouths of the colonised'. Wolfe (1993:887) advocates leaving an 'extratextual space' where Aboriginal voices can be heard without being 'contained and sanitised'. Anthropologist, David Trigger (1993:609) also criticises semioticians privileging their work by speaking from 'a self-consciously constructed impeccably high moral ground'.

Although the above comments are topical cautions, I believe my literary theory approach is the most sympathetic to an in-depth reading of Ward's two texts. It is an approach which does not claim to give a fixed reading of the texts but offers, with evidence to support my thesis, one of many possible interpretations. Used selectively, literary theory is a useful methodology for 'dismantling colonialism's signifying system and exposing its operation in the silencing and oppressing of the colonial subject' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:177).

Dodson (1994:2) calls for the 're(de)finding (sic) of Aboriginality' through firstly understanding the motivation behind the historical constructions of Aboriginality and how these constructions have been used. Secondly:

[W]e must continuously subvert the hegemony over our own representations, and allow our visions to create the world of meaning which we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to non-Indigenous peoples (Dodson 1994:4).

My thesis aims to assist Ward in her creation of a world of meaning rather than to appropriate that world.

### Aboriginality or Aboriginalism?

The literature used in this introductory chapter has often used the terms Aboriginality and Aboriginalism interchangeably. For example, Muecke (1992:137) believes it is a problem for Aborigines to express a true **Aboriginality** independent of 'the (white) constructions of **Aboriginality**' in legal, anthropological, political and other discourses (my emphasis). However, it is necessary to distinguish the two terms in a thesis on Ward's search for 'home'. Therefore, to clarify the issue, I shall briefly critically review some relevant literature before making my own conclusions.

Langton (1993:34) separates three categories of Aboriginality. Firstly she lists Aborigines interacting with Aborigines within Aboriginal culture, although this can never be an entirely closed experience. This is the form of Aboriginality conspicuous amongst the mission children in *Unna You Fullas*. Beckett (1988:194) uses the term 'private Aboriginality', or how Aborigines view themselves.

Secondly, Langton (1993:34) separates the stereotypes, icons and mythologies of Aboriginality perpetuated by non-Aboriginal people. Beckett (1988:193) uses the term 'public Aboriginality' for these discourse which construct Aborigines in their absence, in particular the discourses of the state and its institutions. I maintain that Langton's second category of Aboriginality and Beckett's public Aboriginality correspond with Attwood's (1992b:i) definition of 'Aboriginalism'.

The three categories of Aboriginalism which Attwood separates all seem to be aspects of 'public Aboriginality' as defined by Beckett (1988:193). Aboriginal studies is the first of Attwood's three categories, followed by the 'imaginary Aborigine' often perpetuated in literature, also described by Hamilton (1990), where the difference between self and Aboriginal Other, as viewed by the self, helps define the self. Both these categories, I will argue, are issues which Ward's texts confront as the author struggles to free herself from Attwood's third category - the institutionalised exercising of authority over Aboriginal people. Ward is allocated to the Bigelow farm as a domestic by the public,

institutionalised Aboriginalism of the state and uses her texts to illustrate her 're(de)finding' of Aboriginality. Understanding her experience is best served by contrasting the two terms rather than by accepting their present indiscriminate usage.

Langton's (1993:35) third category of Aboriginality includes the cross-over of the public realm into the public in 'constructions which are generated when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people engage in actual dialogue'. According to Ariss (1988:134) the publication of Aboriginal writers, which is one form of dialogue, puts private Aboriginality into the public realm. Lattas (1993:261) also stresses that black writers are well positioned to make the personal political and the private public on their own terms.

For Healy (1992:13), Aboriginal writing is like 'symbolic Aboriginal Embassy tents'. Similarly, Ward positions her texts to reclaim the public space appropriated by an Aboriginalism which separated her from her ancestry. The relatively unpoliced public space provided by literature also allows for an 'internal conversation between urban, fringe and remote Aborigines' (Healy 1992:7). That is, literature can cross a regional commonality towards the more 'uniform, symbolic, global and generalising' aspects of public Aboriginality noted by Beckett (1988:4). The texts can become a focal point for the emergence of a pan-Aboriginal ethnogenesis in a process described by Tonkinson (1990).

Another commentator on Aboriginalism is Tim Rowse (1993:128-133). Rowse criticises the analytical value of a term he regards as 'little more than an ethical and political gesture of support for indigenous self-representation' (Rowse 1993:131). Rowse suggests Attwood's (1992a) critique of *My Place* is an example of Aboriginalism because it 'enables [Attwood] to write more knowingly of Morgan's "Aboriginality" than she herself can'. Although earlier I have argued that Aboriginal texts should be subject to criticism and analysis, Rowse's example is a rather extreme case. My thesis does not claim to speak for Aborigines and supports Attwood's (1992b:xiv) later thesis that:

At the most fundamental level what is required is an acknowledgement that all knowledge is *interpretative*... One must therefore abandon the claim to objective knowledge, and to absolute or universal truth.

One problem in separating Aboriginality and Aboriginalism is that it would be a form of

Aboriginalism to assume that only non-Aboriginal people could be Aboriginalists. Langton (1993:27) anticipates this when she claims that to accept Aboriginal representations of Aboriginality as necessarily better than non-Aboriginal representations assumes that 'being Aboriginal gives "greater understanding"'. Although Langton does not use the term, she appears to be describing another form of Aboriginalism. Dibble and MacIntyre (1992:93), in their extension of Hodge and Mishra's (1990) analysis of Aboriginalism, claim that the use of forms of essentialism in pan-Aboriginality and multiculturalism warrants these categories inclusion as Aboriginalism.

This very brief overview demonstrates that boundaries are difficult to draw when Aboriginality is appropriated by non-Aborigines and Aboriginalism is used by Aborigines in the reconstruction of identity. However, in the interests of leaving a space for Aboriginal writers to be heard I will reserve the term Aboriginality for how Aborigines construct and define themselves while Aboriginalism will be reserved for how others have constructed Aborigines.

#### **Postcolonial literary theory and hybridity.**

In this thesis 'postcolonial' refers to 'all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day', as defined by Ashcroft Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:2). Imperialism brings the language and values of the 'homeland' which produces a 'gap' between 'the experience of place and the language available to describe it' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:9), which also applies to Aboriginal writers in standard English. I will give examples of this from the texts in later chapters. Using a 'foreign' language contributes to a crisis of identity and the need for 'the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:9). While writers in the colonies remain marginalised by the values of the metropolitan power, they remain metaphorically 'homeless'. The resultant yearning for a place to call 'home' is often symbolised in postcolonial literature by the construction of buildings (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:28).

Like poststructural literary theory, postcolonial literary theory uses concepts which apply to Aboriginal writing. The latter two both confront the problems of marginalisation and the use of a transported language. However, a discussion on Australia's postcolonial status is complicated by the contradiction of Australia being a colonised and a colonising nation, as

Brady (1994b:30) points out. Hodge and Mishra (1990:xii) also emphasise Australia's colonising role as a racist 'fragment' of a European centre. Although our literature has been marginalised in the past by the standards of a European centre, we have also dominated and silenced the indigenous people. In my last chapter I will suggest how Ward helps resolve this contradiction.

Discussing Aboriginal writing in English, Dobrez (1994:37) states: 'To stress the relation rather than the uniqueness expresses a political wish to prioritise the English or European component'. It is a criticism which might be applied to the juxtaposition of postcolonial theory with *Wandering Girl* and *Unna You Fullas* in this thesis. Wolfe (1992a:329) also claims it is assimilationist to try to 'insert Aboriginal culture into a postcolonial whole'. However, I argue that Ward uses a hybrid style which postcolonial literary theorists like Griffiths (1992:329) accept as the reality of the postcolonial condition.

Hybridity emphasises 'new formations which arise from the clash of cultures' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995:183) and which Ward appears to celebrate. Hybridity in culture products also arises where cultural suppression, assimilation or immigration have made the possibility of reasserting a precolonial past less likely (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995:184). These conditions apply to many Aboriginal children who were institutionalised, as described in Ward's texts.

Hybridity also denies the dichotomising of authentic over unauthentic. Having suffered through the division of 'half-caste' from 'full blood' Aboriginal people, Ward is unlikely to reinscribe a dichotomy which prioritises the 'authentic'. Furthermore, Bhabha (cited in Parry 1987:40) describes hybridity as 'liberating the colonial from its inscription as Europe's monolithic and shackled Other'. I shall later demonstrate, with reference to the texts, how Ward achieves this.

Ward therefore does not conform to the call by Narogin (1990:38) for 'an authentic Aboriginality, opposed to assimilation and foreign formats'. Narogin (1990:58) advocates writers conform to an Aboriginal essentialism which he calls a 'metatext'. However, Ward's texts present the mixing of cultures as a strength rather than a weakness, allowing her to subvert, by means I will demonstrate, the systems which have controlled her. Her

search for 'home' leads towards a situation Smith (cited in Attwood 1992b:xvi) describes as:

'an effective cultural interchange, neither patronising or exploitative', between Aboriginal Australians and ourselves - an interchange which could create 'a convergent culture, with its sources in two traditions, one derived mainly from European sources, the other derived from... [Aboriginal ones]'.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Introduction.

A noticeable development occurs in the meaning of 'home' between Glenyse Ward's first book *Wandering Girl* and her second book, *Unna You Fullas*. In *Wandering Girl*, the sixteen-year-old domestic servant frequently speaks uncritically of the mission as her home (pp.8, 18, 40, 89, 116, 119, 125, 127, 129). This connection between mission and home is 'deconstructed' in *Unna You Fullas* by other intruding interpretations. In this chapter I examine the struggle to subvert the signifying systems which alienate Ward from alternative definitions of 'home'. In the final chapter I will argue that the white family who employ Ward are symbolic of the failure of a postcolonial settler people to connect to their relocated homeland.

After discussing the paratextual material (all the written and pictorial text before and after the story) I will give a synopsis of *Wandering Girl*, commenting on relevant points in the process, before discussing aspects of place and Aboriginality which are important in Ward's search for 'home'. I will also stress how hybridity is used as a technique to subvert the signifying systems imposed by an institutionalised Aboriginalism. It is hybridity which makes a space for Ward to reinterpret the meaning of 'home', not by using Aboriginality in sole opposition to the white constructed world but by subversion from within a postcolonial world of contested meanings.

### *Wandering Girl's* cover and paratextual material.

The reprinted edition, which followed quickly after successful sales, announces on a map of Australia that the book is 'An Australian Story'. The photograph of the Aboriginal girl on the cover returns the gaze of the reader, subverting the nationalist Anglo-Celtic image of 'Australian' while the emphasis on 'An Australian Story' appears to make the girl's Aboriginality available to the reader. Her large eyes and parted lips have an appealing even sensual look. Cowlishaw (1993:185) describes how Aborigines in country towns often establish 'an arena of dignity' or 'closure' by attempting 'to retain a separate social domain free from Whites' intrusion and scrutiny'. However, the cover photograph and Australian map reflect Ward's (1990:23) belief, 'being angry now won't achieve anything'. The overall impression is not of closure but of an Aboriginality available to all, suggesting a hybridity

which blurs racial distinction. Ward (1990:23) claims, 'There's no-one different in this world... we're all the same whether black or white'.

Myths of nationalist discourses are subverted from within by *Wandering Girl*'s publication during Australia's bicentennial year. Dibble and MacIntyre (1992:94) describe how hybridity 'is exemplified when two groups share word and referent but give different values to the later'. The referent of the bicentennial, the celebration of white settlement, provides an opportunity for literary intervention by black writers, now required by the white settlers to legitimate two hundred years of occupation; however, the bicentennial has a different meaning for the indigenous people who remember it as an anniversary of invasion.

The dedication inside the book states:

For my mother, husband and children,  
and for all the Aboriginal women who,  
as girls, had to face hard times  
working on the white people's farms  
in the Great Southern and other  
districts of their own country.

The public realm of the 'Great Southern and other districts' and the 'white people's farms' is revealed as being inscribed on the Aboriginal domestics' 'own country'. However, the Aboriginal women's 'hard times' as workers is the language of the 'battler genre' which recognises their contribution to the nation-building enterprise. Ward uses the typical terminology of that genre on the first page, while emphasising the contribution of the Aboriginal people (my emphasis):

you see in *the early days of survival and struggle* there was a lot of *hardship*  
and agony amongst the Aboriginal people (p.1).

The title *Wandering Girl* contrasts with Sally Morgan's *My Place*. Ward's title suggests the author is not settled but still searching. The title is also a pun on the location of the Saint Francis Xavier Native Mission at Wandering in the southwest of Western Australia where Ward spent her childhood. The word 'wandering' also suggests the separation of kin, culture and location which is Ward's situation in the text, shared to a lesser extent by a postcolonial society.



The cover-illustration and the paratextual comments emphasise the individual, self-discovery and 'battler' themes of Ward's life. The Prime Minister is quoted: 'A powerful recreation of some shameful days...', placing those days in the past. 'The story of a 16 year old's battle to come to terms with the expectations she has of herself and those society has of her...' writes a critic, appearing to confirm the assessment by Narogin (1990:149) that the 'battler genre' of Australian literature is an individualised form where 'the concerns of the Aboriginal people are of secondary importance'.

Ward is introduced inside the back cover as 'one of an array of black authors making an impact on the Australian literary scene'. Therefore assertions of Aboriginality may come not so much from the content of the story as from the writing of it. On the inside front pages where Ward thanks Aboriginal writers Jack Davis and Mudrooroo (Narogin) for their 'help and inspiration', she indicates that black writers are now moving beyond being a fringe people needing what Narogin (1990:84) calls 'the seal of approval' from a white person in introductions and forewords.

Although *Wandering Girl's* publishers, Magabala Books, are described as an Aboriginal controlled business, the white editor Bibby (1991:11) admits 'the problem [of control] remains. It is a paradox because there are few black editors'. McGuinness and Walker (1985:44) believe a work ceases to be Aboriginal when there is interference or lack of control in funding, content or the finished product - a definition which would include Bibby's role as editor. However, publication by Magabala Books suggests Ward has now found a more secure sense of 'home' through her acceptance as an Aboriginal author.

In *Wandering Girl* the author writes of her struggle against a state-sponsored Aboriginalism which attempted to define and control Aboriginal people, therefore it is ironical that funding is acknowledged from several state bureaucracies and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bicentennial Programme. State funding reappropriates the Aboriginality which the state tried to take away from children like Ward but now requires to legitimatise itself. However, it is the struggle to gain control, not from white editors or government funding but from language itself, that is a unresolved

theme of *Wandering Girl*, as my next chapter argues.

The contents pages of *Wandering Girl* echo Facey's successful autobiography *A Fortunate Life*. Muecke (1992:130) makes a literary connection between Facey and Morgan's Western Australian autobiographies and *Wandering Girl*. They are the 'battler genre' in the 'popularist rubric of the ordinary Australian's life told in his/her own words' (Muecke 1992:130). A sample of chapter headings - 'Police witness', 'Goodbye', 'Travelling home' (*A Fortunate Life*); 'A new career', 'Owning up', 'A beginning' (*My Place*); 'End of the road', 'Christmas', 'A wandering' (*Wandering Girl*) - shows a similarity of style.

Narogin (1990:149) believes the Aboriginal life story of the 'battler genre' moves into a space created by books like Facey's. These are texts which shift the life of the ordinary man/woman from the colonial fringe to the postcolonial centre. Watego (1985:83) links the ballads of Kath Walker (Oodgeroo), whom Davis (1985:12) calls 'the forerunner of modern Aboriginal writers', to the fellowship of the downtrodden' given voice by Lawson and other nationalist writers. This affiliation places the Aboriginality of Walker's poems amongst 'the workers of the world' says Watego (1985:83). Ward belongs to this tradition but adds race to categories of culture and class by (re)placing the absent Aborigine into nationalist discourse.

Interspersed through the two Ward texts are illustrations in 1.5 centimetre-wide strips intersecting the pages. As an integral part of the text, these illustrations effectively Aboriginalise everyday items from the story. Girls' bloomers, Ajax cleaner dispensers, ghosts and banking forms are a few of the objects illustrated. Celebrating hybridity, the objects are surrounded by Aboriginal-style hatching, dots and repetitions. The unfamiliar telephone which confuses the young Aboriginal servant in the text (p.102) becomes familiarised by the illustration which no longer privileges the written word. These drawings demonstrate an observation by Dobrez (1994:36): 'when non-Aboriginal forms or language are appropriated by Aboriginal writers something new is brought into being'. That is, the sketches are metonymic for the subversion of the hegemonic role of the English book by the black author.

In a review of *Wandering Girl*, Tonkinson (1988:579) notes how Ward makes no obvious attempt at 'political or social analysis and leaves the reader 'without knowledge of the historical context in which these events occurred'. Tonkinson's observation seems to confirm that Ward's texts have more to say about the present than the past. Their subjective approach invites an interpretive textual analysis without undue reference to the historical records.

It will not be possible in the limited length of this thesis to give a summary of the policies which institutionalised so many children of Ward's generation. However, Muecke (1992:131) believes historical works like that of Haebich (1988) have helped open a space for Ward to be heard. In a review of two other histories of Aboriginal institutions (Maushart 1993; van den Bey 1994), Brady (1994a:45) states: 'Australia then also had its Gulags... Moore River was the Aboriginal Siberia'. These social experiments were done at the cost of very real human suffering and cannot be interpreted by semiotics alone. However, when Ward states on the first page, 'We lost our identity through being put into missions, being forced to abide by the European way', she does prioritise the need to search for new meanings or to remain lost.

#### Synopsis and commentary.

Glenyse Ward, as Glenyse Spratt, begins her story as she leaves 'home' (the mission) to work for the Bigelow family on a farm in the southwest of Western Australia. She is sixteen when the book begins and has been in children's institutions administered by the Catholic Church since she was one year old (Ward 1990:19). On the first page the process of decolonisation begins as the policies and language of those Ward ironically calls 'earnest white people' are reinterpreted:

Through the misguided minds of earnest white people we were taken away from our natural parents. This affected all of us. We lost our identity through being put into missions, forced to abide by the European way (p.1).

Ward realises her life is linked to the social policies of 'earnest white people'. The broken bonds of kinship through 'natural parents' are reclaimed. The 'welfare' policies are reinterpreted as 'force' resulting in trauma and loss.

Working through traumas in black writing accentuates the connection between black and

white. The 'brutal sorry history is a shared one' claims Thomas (1989:44). Rowse (1993:102) believes there is 'a common feeling of regret among Australian readers that so much damage has been done and offence given to indigenous Australians'. If Rowse is correct, today's readers assent to Ward's criticism of a transported 'European way'.

An introductory nine-page coverage of mission life is written in a style described by Tonkinson (1988:580) as 'an odd mixture of formal and vernacular expression'. The restricted life of the servant girl seems reflected in the formal writing style while there is a subversive questioning of the authority of the standards set by the cultural centre when a more oral style of expression is allowed to intrude. The public written word is dominated by the centre, while speaking belongs in the private Aboriginal domain. These domains intersect in the texts, bringing the conflict to the fore in *Unna You Fullas*, but anticipated in *Wandering Girl* by a brief comment to 'our way of speaking' in a closed environment:

'Choo, I am winyarn, big shame!' Bill asked me what I meant by that? I told him, "That's our way of speaking at the mission..." (p.93).

'For the first time in my life I was leaving home', (p.8) comments Ward after she is collected by a well-dressed white couple for what she calls her 'journey into the unknown' (p.9). 'I had to work hard for these nice people. And not to forget to say my prayers' (p.9), Ward remembers ironically. Ward quickly discovers that she is to be classed as a 'dark servant'. She is kept apart from the family and treated 'like a robot'. Other than being given an unending sequence of chores, the 'dark servant' is ignored and nameless. A telling moment comes when Ward introduces herself to a party guest of the Bigelows:

I just stood there smiling. I thought it was wonderful that at last people were taking notice of me... I turned to the lady who did most of the talking and said, 'My name is Glenyse'. She was quite startled; she said, 'Oh dear, I didn't realise you had a name' (p.24).

Ward answers back to the hailing of the unitary Aboriginal subject of Aboriginalism. By giving her name to the surprised guest and in writing her book, Ward replies to Aboriginalist conventions Hodge and Mishra (1990:107) describe as 'eliminating Aboriginal authorship, Aboriginal control, the Aboriginal voice'.

After three months at the farm, Ward receives her first pay and a trip to town brings her

into contact with voices which *do* ask her name. At the bank, 'all of a sudden he asked me what my name was?' and the shopkeeper 'asked me where I came from?' This contrast between agents of the state and a freer commercial world is another theme running through Ward's books, which I take up in later chapter.

From the insider's position, Ward is able to observe and mimic the strange customs of the Bigelow household, an established family of Ridgeway (Bridgetown). Mrs Bigelow in her makeup looks as though 'she was ready for the circus' and other white ladies 'looked like clowns' (p.23). The Bigelow family, dressed to go out, remind Ward of 'characters out of a book I used to read when I was a child, called "The Three Musketeers"'. Parody in this example subverts hierarchies, divesting the white people of their assumed authority. Cowlshaw (1993:186) observes that when marginalised groups 'parody or exaggerate notions of propriety' they challenge the legitimacy of the dominant society's values.

Duties are relentlessly described with boundaries between servant and mistress firmly drawn by Mrs Bigelow, including the policing of a respectable distance between Ward and the men of the family. Ward is told: 'It wasn't very nice for a slave girl to be all alone in the presence of a male member of the family'(p.50). This is a discrete comment by the author which draws attention to an aspect of the removal of mixed-race children and the placement of girls as domestics which is not otherwise discussed in Ward's texts. The comment also indirectly questions the morality of the white concepts of family and home. On the farm Ward is surprised if someone should speak to her as if 'interested in me as a person' (p.62). She is more accustomed to Mrs Bigelow 'yoohooing out to me, like she was out in the paddock, trying to round up a horse or something' (p.51). After Ward befriends old Bill, a Scottish farm labourer, she finds life a little easier. Her dissatisfaction with the Bigelows is now given more direction by Bill's class concepts of justice. 'He couldn't understand why people should be treated the way they were. It was very unfair and unjust' (p.65).

*Wandering Girl* creates a 'counter image to the misused , oppressed black servant cowering at the edge of white family photographs' (Petersen 1988:130). Although there are long and detailed descriptions of the domestic tasks Ward performs, there is little information of

the Bigelows' personal life. From being 'just a shadow in this mansion' (p.77), Ward becomes the central character. No longer the nameless slave, she is the author of her own story. When the Bigelows are out, Ward eats their food, plays the piano or enjoys the luxuries of Mrs Bigelow's bathroom and toiletries. The servant uses the techniques of carnival - the reversal of roles and temporary suspension of authority (Saunders 1993:29) to destabilise the inner-sanctum of the Bigelows' meticulously-kept home.

Although she has yet to find her own true 'home', Ward politicises the domestic, private realm with actions which Petersen (1988:130) claims are 'more subversive than protests or complaints [would be]'. Lattas (1993:241) also emphasises 'micro forms of resistance... organised around the disciplining and control of racialised bodies'. The servant girl resists being marginalised by the impressively appointed and spotless Bigelow home of carpets, antiques, silverware and chandelier (p.11). From within the Bigelow household, Ward exposes what Lattas (1993:261) calls 'the artifice of the so-called natural sphere of civil society'. In her case, the Bigelows' sense of the natural order is shown to not only be particular to one group within society but to be constructed on the domestic labour of a poorly-treated Aboriginal girl.

Old Bill's Scottish origins make him a sympathetic character to Ward. He is also a displaced and marginalised character, cut off from family ties:

We both had tender memories of childhood but I never asked him where his home was or where he was from. I guessed in time he'd let me know. He sat there with a faraway look in his eyes (p.91).

'Lassie, never put yourself down', Bill tells Ward in response to her remark, 'Choo, I am winyarn, big shame' (p.93). Their variation from standard English represents their shared exclusion from the culture centre. As they join together singing 'I love to go a'wandering' they turn the Bigelows' 'VIP room into a concert hall'(p.96). The ideological signifiers of upper middle class respectability, the piano and the 'VIP room', are given new meanings through their temporary appropriation by the rootless employees. For an afternoon they claim the space as a 'concert hall' and sing popular songs together.

After talking to Bill, Ward is able to look her mistress 'straight in the face' (p.99), which

causes Mrs Bigelow to be 'taken aback'. The Aboriginal Other confronts her mistress from what Bhabha (1986:xv) terms 'the space in between' the white self and the white self's paranoid fantasy of 'the Otherness of the self'. From this space in between, Ward momentarily stops playing the game of being Mrs Bigelow's imaginary Other, and stares back. Bhabha (1986:xv) argues that 'the depersonalised , dislocated colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place ' by exploiting this ambivalence of the colonialist who distances the Other, while needing them. Gaining confidence, Ward is able to return society's gaze, through her text, demanding recognition as herself, as she sees herself, and not as the Otherness of the white self represented by the generalised voiceless Aborigine in Aboriginalist texts.

The Bigelows ignore Ward except to demand service or to reprimand her. This treatment is continued when she is taken once a week to clean at the home of the Bigelows' daughter, Janet, in the town. Ward then becomes a curiosity to Janet's neighbours: 'They reminded me of a mob of chooks in a cage', writes Ward of the white faces peering out at her (p.108). It is the white women who are imprisoned by their racism. Their alienation from the imaginary Aboriginal Other also represents their alienation from themselves and ultimately the Australian environment, I shall argue in the final chapter of this thesis.

After eight months, Ward is rewarded for her work by an offer to meet a friend from mission days now working at a nearby farm. The meeting lifts Ward's spirits as the two girls exchange experiences . Later the two ex-mission girls plan to meet at the Ridgeway fair which is to be opened by Mr Bigelow, the 'mayor' of the district. The structure which confines Ward is suspended in the carnival atmosphere of the fair where the girls meet a 'Nyoongah girl' (p.138) who gives them the address of an older friend at Dunsborough who might be able to help the girls escape.

Through the text there is a gradual making of connections which break the isolation Ward feels. The lonely servant girl meets the friendly shopkeeper in town who tells her 'not to take any notice of [Mrs Bigelow's] attitude and to just do my work, as a lot of girls had worked for Mrs Bigelow and they had all felt the same way as I did' (p.38). Ward is pleased to have 'found a friend in whom I could confide'. After meeting old Bill, Ward

'wasn't feeling so withdrawn in myself anymore' (p.99). The thought of meeting another girl from the mission overwhelms Ward who 'thanked God for letting me be near my mate' (p.111). After joining the older girl in Dunsborough, on the southwest coast, Ward 'found I was a human being again' (p.154). This progressive breaking out of the isolation of being a servant at the Bigelows' could also reflect the author's making of connections as an Aboriginal woman writer, writing her first book. As mentioned, literature becomes a means of imagining a community, in much the same way that letter writing keeps us in contact with those we do not see. Ward says: 'How I wished my mates were with me. Next time I went to town I'd get some writing paper and write some letters' (p.79).

As Ward breaks out of her sense of isolation, she re-establishes a sense of community in her second book, *Unna You Fullas*. Despite Narogin's (1990:149) criticism of the life story's concern for the individual, life stories can become 'a fragment of collective history' (Nelson 1990:32) as Aboriginal writers 'seize control of the projection of [their] own image' (Sykes 1988:115). As the fragments of a scattered community are pieced together, Ward is able to take control of her life and her expression of it.

Christmas is a time of yearning for family in both of Ward's books. In *Wandering Girl* the servant girls are dropped off in town to spend Christmas Day by themselves: 'We were told we could stay in town all day as Christmas was a time for families - their's that is' (p.148). Refuge is found at the town convent and after 'an enjoyable day' Ward decides to leave the Bigelows' farm. Before long an opportunity arises to join the friend of the 'Nyoongah girl' who has written to Ward from Dunsborough. A job follows at the Busselton hospital nearby.

The story concludes with the sentence, 'There was no looking back for me'. An epilogue in the form of a poem ends the book. Ward has married 'a very fine Gentleman':

Who had the honour of being  
The Governor's hair-dresser.  
We are blessed with two beautiful  
Children, a girl we named  
Jodi Anne, who is ten years old,  
And a boy we named  
Brian-Ocean, who is eight years old.  
I named him after my dead brother  
Who I had only seen  
Once in my life.



Having established herself, Ward wishes to ensure the future of her children. Her reference to 'no looking back' is explained by her values of social mobility and achievement. However, her second book does 'look back' at the mission childhood, for reasons I will later suggest. The epilogue concludes:

So they can take their places  
In today's society as Lawyers or Doctors.  
Or etc.- and be equal in the one human  
Race!

Not surprisingly, Muecke (1992:129) describes this theme of achievement within the dominant society as 'conventional, even assimilationist' and Narogin (1990:149) calls the book 'an assimilationist affirmation'. However, these opinions overlook Ward's role as a mother who is anxious that her children, and also, by extension, her people, should have a better life. Peter Bibby (1991:11), the editor of Ward's books, puts the writing of Aboriginal life stories today in the context of: 'the children are now parents with their own children, and often facing that dislocation and trauma in their own relationships which proliferate down generations'.

*Wandering Girl* does not celebrate the Other. Although the text is 'a story of resistance' (Tonkinson 1988:579) it is subversive rather than oppositional. During (1993:118) argues that 'to celebrate the "Other" is to reaffirm a structure of centre/margin'. This is what Roughley (1991:208) calls the 'undeconstructed terrain' of reversed hierarchies of binary opposites. Ward's hybridity subverts the Bigelows' authority to define servant or master, civilised or uncivilised, as Ward explores the gap between some whites' contempt of her race and the need for her labour. By contesting the definitions imposed on her, Ward reveals what Dibble and MacIntyre (1992:94) describe as 'the fault lines of Australian colonial discourses'.

Eventually Ward rejects 'the definitions of herself and the expectations of her future imposed by others' (Tonkinson 1988:579). Having rejected those definitions, Ward searches for new signifiers from her past in *Unna You Fullas*. 'It was just like being put in a cage [at the mission], like you're a bird and then all of a sudden you're set free [in the work force]

and you don't know where to fly or what's going on', says Ward (1990:23) of her experiences, related in *Wandering Girl*.

#### **'Home' as place.**

Ward begins and ends her story with displacement. She begins with: 'Today was the day I was leaving my home' (p.1) and ends, 'So I said goodbye to Dunsborough for the present and we drove off' (p.157). Benterrak, Muecke and Roe (1984:219) describe the decentring of texts by Aboriginal writers and storytellers as 'nomadology': 'For the nomad, Australia is still not divided into eight "states" or territories, it is criss-crossed with tracks'. 'Home' for the nomad is going to have a different meaning than 'home' for the settler. A wandering girl can remain unfixed to the assimilationists' signifying system, resisting attempts to be incorporated into the society which divides 'their [Nyoongah] land' into agricultural districts. When the servant girl begins to feel like a zombie' (p.20), someone who has lost their soul, she sings the song taught by the German nuns, 'I love to go a'wandering along the mountain track...' In hybrid fashion the song takes new levels of meaning when sung by an Aboriginal girl.

The uncritical acceptance of the mission as 'home' contrasts with the rejection of the imprisoning Bigelow household. After returning from a holiday at her mission 'home', Ward meets her friend: 'I told her that I had gone home. She was feeling like me, real homesick' (p.132). Rowse (1993:31-47) argues that institutions created to 'protect' or assimilate Aborigines were not the oppressive 'total institutions' described by Rowley (cited in Rowse 1993:46) to 'smash the indigenous social structure' by robbing 'inmates' of their civilian or private selves. Rowse (1993:46) uses the example of Ward's text to show how 'institutions such as Wandering could generate a fellowship'.

Tonkinson (1988:579) believes the mission shielded Ward from the racial hostility she experiences elsewhere. The most memorable symbol of this shielding is an incident when Mrs Bigelow gives Ward tea in a tin mug: 'I politely asked her if I could have a cup and saucer to drink from, as I wasn't used to drinking out of tin mugs and never had done so at the mission' (p.12).

The mission is an idealised home because 'everything was so secure when I was living at

the mission' (Ward:1990:23). Away from the mission, Ward is dislocated. She uses expressions of incompleteness: 'my sanity was slipping' (p.20), 'I jumped up and pulled myself to my senses' (p.58), 'to come back to reality with myself' (p.75), 'to put my thoughts to one side' (p.80) or 'to collect myself again' (p.103). The concerns of the dislocated servant coincide with the description by Warley (1993:25) of the postcolonial preoccupation with the 'intersection of language and place... in opposition to the invasion of territory and mind'. Although space at both the mission and the Bigelow farm is measured, ranked and gendered, the mission provides a connection to place which is later explored more fully in *Unna You Fullas*.

'Fascinating', 'lovely' (p.55), 'photogenic' (p.2) and 'picturesque' (p.10) are words used to describe the countryside in *Wandering Girl*. These descriptions signify a framed, fenced, captured and controlled landscape. Back at the mission, possession of the land is indicated by the familiar landmark of a crucifix on a wide round stand 'which gave a lot of room to rest on' (p.127). It appears that the symbol of Christianity has displaced Aboriginal connections to the land in *Wandering Girl*.

Despite indications of a colonised place, there are some continuities with Aboriginal ties to the land in the text. Although the mumaries, or cave spirits, are a threatening presence, the shared fear of them acts to draw the girls together. Another continuity is the girls' habit of walking with sticks in hand which the nuns cannot understand (p.54). However, the overriding sense of 'home' in *Wandering Girl* comes from references to the mission:

Very pretty, the gullies and the sweeping plains. The big hills that surrounded the [Bigelow] property brought memories to me of my [mission] home! (p.18).

#### **'Home' as Aboriginality.**

Discussing intersections of Aboriginality and Christianity in life stories, Barwick (1981:82) observes: 'the acceptance of Christian religion [by Aborigines] is either ignored or lamented by anthropologists and historians'. However, Trigger (1988) gives an overview of several examples including the Bandjalang acceptance of Pentecostalism which empowers them as God's special people, in contrast to the whites' sinfulness. I discuss the significance of Christianity in Ward's search more fully in another chapter. In *Wandering Girl* God is an

ally, accessible by prayer, in Ward's plans to escape (p.135) and in making contacts (p.111). Sin and religion appear to be a human construct punishable by the nuns or priests, whereas God is forgiving.

#### Food and 'home'.

Women's writing is often marginalised for its descriptions of 'intimate details of daily events' claim Langness and Frank (1981:94). Although Ward's texts are crowded with such descriptions, Aboriginal girls were trained in domestic duties rather than a more general education (Haebich 1988:210), making home duties a highly politicised realm.

Furthermore, the appropriation of food from the kitchen and orchard, and the unequal distribution of food described in the text by someone who fought for scraps at the mission (p.55) can be seen as a symbol of redistribution and nurturing which prepares Ward for her escape. That is, (re)appropriating nourishment taken from the land strengthens Ward's resistance to white concepts of order and fairness. I believe that it is this connection between food, resistance and thus with Aboriginality that predominates in *Wandering Girl*. As Cowlshaw (1993:184) states: 'Appropriating the property of the white man can... be the basis of affirming Aboriginality'.

#### Conclusion.

Separated from her own language and kin, Ward must first break out of a linguistic and political system which seeks to confine her within its hegemony. Her treatment by the white settlers reveals their own alienation from 'the Otherness of the self', representing that part of their history which they deny. Although, by the end of *Wandering Girl* Ward is freed from both the farm and the mission, in her second book she returns to her mission 'home' to continue her search.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Introduction.

This thesis has suggested that Glenyse Ward's first book, *Wandering Girl*, represents the coming into consciousness of the need for Aboriginal writers to break out of the confining, defining control of space and cultural expression imposed by a colonising of mind, body, land and language. As the title suggests, the story is dislocated rather than located as the author explores the contradictions of the coloniser's language and value system. The exploratory nature of the text is reflected in a restricted writing style which, were it not for the theme of confinement and contested definition, would justify criticism as an assimilationist narrative. Ward's second book, *Unna You Fullas*, does not follow chronologically but returns to earlier childhood at the Saint Francis Xavier's Native Mission at Wandering in Western Australia's southwest. The private, relatively closed space of the Aboriginal dormitory children provides a space and sense of community where Aboriginality can develop and be brought into the public, open space by the text which makes Aboriginality accessible to the reader.

### Paratextual material.

The title is translated as 'isn't that right, you fellows' (Ward 1991:182) in popular usage amongst Nyungar (sic) people. By its prominent position on the cover, the title becomes a defiant expression of continuity. Toussaint (1992:20) says the use of Nyungar words in English maintains solidarity and can exclude non-Nyungars. However, the 'You' of the title is ambiguous enough to include the sympathetic reader. In my final chapter I will maintain that the 'You Fullas' of the title belongs to a new inclusive nationalist discourse which appeals to all sympathetic Australians.

The title's privileging of words not found in an English or Aboriginal dictionary celebrates hybridity by subverting the hierarchy of authentic, or 'proper' language, over unauthentic or colloquial language. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:38) describe similar hybrid languages, which they term 'english', as 'the abrogation or denial of the privilege of "English"'. The speaking habits of the community have 'seized the language of the centre' and 'replaced' the language of the metropolis into a style developed in the postcolonial location (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 189:38).

The cover photograph of the relaxed, smiling young girl in the plain khaki uniform is a very sanitised studio version of historical photographs of institutionalised children used by Maushart (1993). A further contrast to those drab settings is the cover's background of Aboriginal designs on a stained glass window. Assimilationists forcibly attempted to detach Aboriginal children from their culture; however, the cover reflects present-day values by fusing Aboriginality (symbolised by the backdrop) the book, the girl and spirituality.

The inside cover informs the reader of the 'ironic clash of culture, religion and personality' in *Unna You Fullas*. Irony in the broadest sense is 'conflict between reality and appearance' (Yelland, Jones and Easton 1983:93) or the conveying of an idea different from the literal meaning. Irony is common in postcolonial literature because it is a trope which emphasises 'the importance of the place/language disjunction' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:28). That is, expressions in one context come to have a different meaning in another. Another example of irony is the paratextual comment: '*Unna You Fullas* is about Aboriginal children looking out for each other as they struggle to conform to the Good Christian Way'. The capital letters deepen the ironic subversion of the supposedly universalist values of the culture centre, as they are experienced by the institutionalised children.

*Unna You Fullas* has a one-page glossary at the back of the book (p.182) with fourteen Nyungar terms and twenty colloquial terms, headed 'other special words'. The heading further emphasises the importance of language in the text by avoiding labels which imply deviance from a culture centre. Glossing also foregrounds the gap between cultures, say Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:61). An example of this is the glossing:

mumaries                      spirits.

The glossing suggests that the meaning of 'mumaries' is the referent 'spirits'. However, the text describes mumaries as 'redeyes', 'little hairy men' who live in caves and kidnap girls in a big sack. Obviously the English words are inadequate to define a so

distinctively located word as 'mumaries'. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:63) suggest the postcolonial text is an exploration of this 'gap' or 'psychological abyss between cultures'. However, the placing of the glossing at the back of the book and the use of the Nyungar words in the text without glossing has the effect of emphasising meaning in context. That is, the meaning of the word comes from its situation, in what has become a mixed language. This technique also releases language 'from the myth of cultural authenticity' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:66). A hybrid language is born.

Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation has published *Unna You Fullas*; however, unlike *Wandering Girl*, the book is listed as fiction. Perhaps this listing is a recognition of the revisionist nature of the life story. Murphy (1986:167) describes stories based on memory as 'figurative' and 'to make sense of the present'. The recognition of the figurative aspects of Ward's writing is also the analytical approach of this thesis.

Ward dedicates her work to members of her family, including 'the father I did not meet' and 'For all Aboriginal people who have lost their families and are still searching'. The sense of a journey continues as *Unna You Fullas* begins with a shift of location: 'The old grey ute kept chugging along the endless highway. Then we made our way down a winding bush track, a cloud of dust behind us'. Ward is 'about five years old' (p.1) and being driven to the Wandering mission which the Catholic church proclaimed was 'founded to bring to half-castes the benefit of the higher standards of our civilisation' (Battye PR 4510). In the mission the girls are so close, 'We all considered one another sisters' (p.2). Although there is no suggestion this bonding is a mystification of a common blood tie (a theme of oppositional black writers), the use of fictive kinship is a form of cultural continuity (Eades 1988:102; Toussaint 1992:21).

#### **The mission and language.**

*Unna You Fullas* helps explain why Ward calls the mission 'home' in *Wandering Girl*. The girls at the mission create a space, partly by their use of language, in which Aboriginality can be expressed. The form of secret sign-language used by the girls (p.31, p.84) is another continuity of pre-colonial communications:

I straightened up, shrugged my shoulders with both hands stretched out and rolled my eyes back towards Sister, which spelt out silently to Tessie. 'Where is Sister Gertrude?' (p.31).

However, the hegemony of standard English and its use in the assimilation policies is made plain in the demands of the state schoolteachers who replace the nuns. Ward reflects this indoctrination in her writing style in *Wandering Girl* but subverts it in *Unna You Fullas*..

The teacher, Mr Pitts announces:

'Another word I do not want mentioned in either Mr Foley's class or mine is the word "unna". What sort of language is that? Unna! A sort of language that has to be stopped' (p.114).

The family atmosphere of the mission changes after the state teachers replace the nuns:

'the nuns never told us that we were black or that we weren't any good. But the State school teachers did' (Ward 1990:20).

Muecke (1992:129) believes that it is 'a profoundly apolitical move' of Ward's to demonise the state by setting up 'the private sphere against the [negative] public sphere'. However, definitions of 'Aboriginality' had been imposed by a state Aboriginalism and the only option available for the children opposing the official line lay in forms of 'micro resistance'. In criticising Rowse for his privileging of the public, political process as a form of resistance Lattas (1992:243) makes the point:

For often it is the refusal of the Aboriginal body to observe the disciplinary regimes of white society (its notions of etiquette, quietness, and polite speech) which outrages those who require this body to show proper deference and respect to white culture and white bodies.

In *Unna You Fullas* the signifier 'home', applied so uncritically to the mission in *Wandering Girl*, is reviewed<sup>ed</sup> as the author's consciousness is raised. 'I wasn't really aware of my situation, you see. What made me aware of it as the years went by and we got older was that more kids kept coming in, taken from their families' (Ward 1990:20). Because *Unna You Fullas* is about an earlier stage of Ward's life, before she was sent to the Bigelows' farm, yet reflects a maturing of her understanding of 'home', the book is further evidence that her life stories act more as metaphors for the present. That is, alternative voices show



more awareness of the alternatives to the mission as 'home' than are given in *Wandering Girl*, Ward's first book chronologically. Characters are used to figuratively represent a growing critical awareness of the writer's limitations using standard English which limits her expression of Aboriginality as an equal partner in a developing hybridity.

#### The mission as 'home'.

Neither of the texts attempts to represent home by a building. 'Home' is more often associated with being part of a family. 'Home is where Mum and Dad are', one of the new girls tells Ward (p.116). Families also offer support, as told by Gina: 'Mum got a brother and I seen him having a fight with three big rough wadjalas down the street outside the pub, because they was gunna mob dad's cousin' (p.120). Buildings are more often repressive or threatening, like the haunted laundry or the farmhouse that lures the runaways to their capture (p.80).

When two sisters from an Aboriginal reserve not far from the mission plan an escape they ask Ward if she will join them. She replies:

'Nah this is my home.'

Then Bella put her hands on my shoulders and looked straight at me. 'This not your home'. She shook me.

'Where's your mum, Sprattie?'

'She wakes us up every morning'.

I noticed tears welling in Bella's eyes again as she put her arms around me and pressed me into her bosom. Everyone just sat there quietly. I felt the back of my head getting wet.

'Bella you're wetting me'.

'Sprattie, I am crying for you' (pp. 70,71).

After the runaways are returned to the mission Bella says, 'The bush is our home, you girls, this is what we miss so much at the mission' (p.78). Sprattie cannot understand, so Bella adds:

'When you find your real home one day, Sprattie, I hope you will think of me. Then you'll know what I have been trying to tell you ... I'll excuse you because you are only little and don't know any better'.

#### Language and the child.

Ward must return to this 'littleness' in *Unna You Fullas* to re-examine the definitions

indoctrinated into her by assimilationist policies. Through the eyes and ears of a child, meanings can be destabilised and defamiliarised as illustrated earlier in *Wandering Girl*:

I remember when I first set eyes on the brothers. They seemed so strange to me... they wore these things on their eyes, which looked so funny (p.3).

To the mission children, Mr Pitts's violin is not an instrument of high culture and learning but a 'brown object, hollow and made of wood, with thin wires all in a row, running up to some knobs at one end' (p.115). The metonymic power of words is also not understood by the children. When Mr Pitts makes an announcement, the children's response is blank stares:

'The school I have come from held Assemblies, so we shall do the same. Assembly will be every second Friday'.  
Us kids had never heard of the word, it was a new one on us (p.113).

On another occasion, Mr Pitts yells, '... what gives you the right to speak to a person in authority such as me? Do you know what authority means, Poppy Turner? Answer me!' Poppy replies shyly, 'Nah'(p.128).

Some poststructural literary theorists suggests meanings are imposed on the child as the 'Law of the Father', representing the dominant discourse, attaches signifiers to signified. According to Kristeva (cited in Seldon 1989:149) the 'Law of the Father... censors and represses', resulting in 'the tyranny of unitary meaning and logocentric (and therefore phallogocentric) discourse'. Kristeva (cited in Seldon 1989:83) believes that radical social change can come through the disruption of these imposed discourses by using pre-Oedipal 'semiotic' expression rather than the regulated language of an adult. Although it is not possible to examine the theories of Lacan or Kristeva here, the process they theorise is acted out literally in *Unna You Fullas* through the brutal beatings of the Aboriginal children by the priests and teachers. For Ward, as a child, the intervention of the 'Law of the Father' was so early and thorough that she believed Father Albertus was her father. The punishment and loss associated with the imposition of the world view of patriarchal authority are demonstrated when Glenyse and her friends are confronted by an angry-looking nun:

At the harshness of her voice they fell down on the gravel, thinking they were going to get a hit too. Sr Ursula spoke to me in a soft voice. 'Girl, your father was killed today ... It all seemed so strange. I wanted to say, 'That's my father over there. He's all right,' pointing to Fr Albertus ...(p.47).

I believe the need to return to a freer linguistic stage explains the observation by Narogin (1990:81) that the 'idealising of childhood is a common trait in Aboriginal writing'.

Narogin (1990:81) misses the point when he suggests this idealisation may be because the black Australian experiences adulthood, rather than childhood, as an 'awful state' of existence. I suggest the idealisation comes from the freedom childhood gives from conforming to an imposed 'correct' way of interpreting the world.

#### **The Germans and language.**

The nuns and priests speak a more fractured language in *Unna You Fullas*. Compare: 'Come Glenyse, you must be hungry' (Ward 1988:129) with 'Komm, komm, girls, ve vill go back to zer mission' (Ward 1991:27). Ward's phonetic spelling of the speech of the German priests and nuns further destabilises and questions the unitary meanings of standard English. The fluidity of grammar in the language-mixing at the mission allows for word games and parody:

Banner explained our names real slow-way, ending with mine, 'G-l-e-n-y-s-e'. Sister followed the motions of Banner's mouth and after trying for awhile became puzzled. 'Ve don't have zhis name in Shermamy' (pp.37, 38).

Despite their severity, the priests and nuns are sympathetically portrayed in comparison to most white Australians. Like Bill in *Wandering Girl*, they are far from home, on the margins spatially, politically and linguistically. Prayers are said for a nun's mother 'back in Shermamy' and Father Albertus 'made a big sacrifice in leaving his family in Shermamy' (p.137). Sister Ursula tells the children: 'He made his home in Australia in dedication for you children oontz your people'. The sister's statement from one marginalised and exiled person to another excludes the colonising centre by making a direct connection between 'Australia' and 'your people', the Aborigines.

#### **The teachers and language.**

Racism comes from outside the mission with the arrival of the teachers. A basis of 'Law of the Father' theories is that the child is compelled to differentiate itself from others to be placed in position in the linguistic and social system and given an identity (Seldon 1989:85). In this way, white is superior to black in the outside world where teachers 'let them white kids call us black boongs and niggers' (p.99). This desire for purity and authenticity,

leading to the marginalisation of the Other as the lesser in a relationship between binary opposites, is subverted in the atmosphere of hybridity at the mission until divisions are made between the girls by the new teachers. A teacher, Mr Pitts, separates the fairer students because he believes 'he had already wasted enough time on the darker ones' (p.133).

Glenyse, classed amongst the dark group, grows bitter and taunts the fairer girls, 'You think you white but you just a poor black thing like us'. The nuns are shocked at the teachers' grading of children by colour and ask the girls, 'What iss ziss language, girl, darkie, what iss zhis meaning?' (p.135).

*Unna You Fullas* illustrates Nelson's (1990:31) belief: 'If European texts had functions as instruments of cultural destruction for the blacks, the Aboriginal texts can now serve as means of cultural regeneration'. Although Ward expresses her love for stories from the *Young Readers Digest* (p.130), she dramatically shows the power-relations and contested ownership associated with the texts in an incident during a reading lesson:

'Right, Poppy Turner, start reading again out loud and clear, so I can understand you, and stop that stupid jabbering.'  
Very frightened, Poppy continued with *Treasure Island*. Her voice went shaky. Suddenly Mr Pitts lifted his foot. The full force of it sent Poppy and a couple of girls flying, as they caught her falling. She lay limp on the ground in front of us' (p.130).

In a work described as fiction where events are ordered and emphasised by the author, it is unlikely to be coincidental that the girls who escaped from the mission to return to their bush home are escorted back during a reading lesson (p.74). Confinement is associated with the reading lesson. Glenyse and her friends are reading from *Little Red Riding Hood* when they see the 'ute' bringing the escapees back. The excited readers are dragged screaming back to their desks as order is returned. 'We fell in a bundle in front of the other girls waiting for their turn to read. "You will continue reading "Jack and zer Beanstalk"', orders a nun.

An imperial literary canon privileges the centre, 'emphasising "home" over "native", the "metropolitan" over the "provincial"' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:5). Colonialists

have used their canon to instil an identification with the centre as a cultural home, or standard, and Ward shows on a 'micro level' how this policy was applied to the Aboriginal children. However, she claims stories like *Treasure Island*, from the authority of the centre, for a hybrid postcolonial culture.

Mr Pitts asks the class to write a story based on one of a series of articles on Australian explorers printed in the monthly *School Paper*. Ward notes how one of these explorers had 'done wonders' making discoveries 'with certain people, Aborigines, who were his helpers' (p.154). Another article in the same magazine told of Australian Aborigines 'who lived in the desert, in what they called maya-mayas, bark shelters'.

Glenyse writes her story based on her own gathering of bush foods around the mission including the opinion 'that if it was not for that black man showing the white man certain things out in the desert, he might have got real sick, or lost, or died' (p.155). The generalised, voiceless, distant and authentic Other of the Aboriginalist text now answers back through Glenyse's story and ultimately Ward's book. She uses the same technique as Davis, described by Tompkins (1993:11) as working alongside while subverting white History. Like the Aboriginal guide in her school story, Ward can now participate in, rather than be the object of history.

The reaction of Mr Pitts demonstrates the warning in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:177) that the unsettling of meaning does not in itself change things. Therefore, they believe, there is a need for 'the deconstructive and the political to go hand in hand'. Although Mr Pitts demonstrates his power by ripping Glenyse's story 'into little bits', Ward can rely on today's reader and the greater political influence of Aborigines to support her ironic subversion of Mr Pitts's tirade. My italics show the phrases which are given the opposite meaning in the context of Ward's book as it is understood in today's political climate:

We are talking about the white *explorers* who gave *great service* to this *country of ours*, not those people you are writing about. I tell you what Glenyse Spratt, you ought to *thank your lucky stars* that you are not out in the scrub eating berries or whatever they eat! You should be thankful you are *on a nice home* with *good decent people* to look after you (p.156).

### Aboriginality.

An association between food and identity is confirmed in Glenyse's composition 'about my people, how they used to be happy taking food back to the camp, to feed the kids' (p.156). The detailed description which follows, of the mission girls' food gathering (pp.154, 155) and their collection of tree gum to make toffee, against the orders of the nuns, identifies the girls with the land. Glenyse's story about 'my people' also makes a clear connection between the freedom to gather food from the bush and Aboriginality. However, although Muecke 1992:132), discussing *Wandering Girl*, interprets the many references to food as a continuity with Aboriginality, an awareness of this is not shown in Ward's first book.

The development of Aboriginality is closely associated with the constructions of alternative understandings of 'home' in *Unna You Fullas*. Two sisters, 'newcomers to the fold', tell what becomes a story-within-the-story of their life on the Aboriginal reserve (pp.64–69). These undisciplined voices are able to express a depth of Aboriginality that is not available to the children separated from their kin. The sisters' story presents the only viable alternative to the mission 'home', apart from the hunter/gatherers of Glenyse's story. After telling the story in the dormitory the sisters sigh, 'Oh, I wish we were home, we miss our home and Mum and Uncle and Clinton' (p.69). They ask the girls, 'Do you want to come with us to our home? Mummy and Clinton and all that mob on the reserve will look after yous. Some of that mob might be your relations' (p.70).

The voice of authority, Mr Pitts the teacher, has a different view. He viciously tells Glenyse she has no future: 'you can't read, your spelling is up the creek and as for writing, you'll never do it, you can't even write your name properly' (p.158). He continues, 'There is no hope for you, you are going to end up back in the camps where you came from!' Glenyse is confused and resistant. She asks, 'I only want to know what a camp is. I've never been to a camp' (p.159). The Aboriginal writer writes back from the present, intervening in the past and subverting the invader's discourse from within. She reclaims the right to define 'the camps' and gives the Aboriginal communities positive nurturing values in the story of Clinton and his relatives on the reserve.

Continuities of Aboriginal culture and values help construct a located home in *Unna You Fullas*. A sense of humour is shared by the children who rarely fail to 'see the funny side' of even the worst events. Attwood (1989:141), in *The Making of the Aborigines*, sees humour in life stories as a 'crucial mechanism for getting the better of life by dispelling anger and soothing pain'. When a boy is beaten for urinating in the teacher's flower pot, the children laugh at the 'funny side' (p.112) which converts the action into a form of resistance. 'Can't you see the funny side, good job Mallee done that to your teacher', says Banner. The 'funny side' in this case becomes the Aboriginal interpretation of events which subverts the official version.

The shared understanding of humour acts to exclude others. When Sister Ursula becomes muddled in her speech (p.35) the girls found it was 'hard to control ourselves from laughing, especially if we looked at one another'. The fractured and heavily accented speech of the nuns and priests helps the girls laugh at authority. This contrasts with the 'pompous stately look' of Mrs Bigelow which made the older Glenyse 'feel timid and afraid' (Ward 1988:17). Sister Ursula attempts to regain control of the smirking girls by regaining command of the language of the centre. 'Vhot iss zhis vord? Ah yes, zhis iss zer vord, no? S-i-l-l-y!' (p.35).

Shame, usually referred to as 'koondang' in *Unna You Fullas*, is another form of cultural continuity important in egalitarian societies. Shame also strengthens cultural mores. When the teacher forces the Aboriginal girls to partner the boys in folk dancing, Ward says: 'Talk about koondang... Choo, I never felt so ashamed in all my life' (p.126). However, in *Wandering Girl* old Bill emphasises the negative side of shaming in a postcolonial society where the hegemony of the dominant group can make the marginalised feel deviant: 'Lassie, never put yourself down', he tells Ward (p.93).

By bringing the treatment of the 'stolen generation' into the public realm, Ward's two texts act as shaming devices. What was hidden becomes public, to shame a society which must bear some responsibility. Referring to *Wandering Girl*, Petersen (1988:129) states:

It lays bare to the world the glaring injustices and cruelties, and it believes in the persuasiveness of the morally superior standpoint... it pre-supposes a colonizer with a conscience willing to be disturbed by a confrontation with his

own evil'.

Brady (1994b:34) argues that Aboriginal writing directs the violence of white society 'back at us'. For Brady, Aboriginal writing suggests that 'our hatred of the blacks may be self-hatred'. This suggests that the 'dedicated Christians and Native Welfare Supervisors' who believed 'our [Aboriginal] people's way of life was no good' (Ward 1991:98) were acting in self-hatred in their fear of 'the Otherness of the Self'. Their belief that the indigenous people's way of life was 'no good' reflected the Australian continuing inability to fully equate their postcolonial nation with 'home'. That is, 40,000 years of experience is ignored as imported meanings have been inscribed on 'terra nullius'. My next chapter discusses how Ward's two texts work towards a resolution of the problem for a postcolonial settler society learning to call Australia home.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Introduction.

Lattas (1989:51) observed 'the pivotal role given currently to Aboriginality in the construction of Australian nationalism' in Australia's bicentennial year. This chapter discusses how Ward's search for 'home' is made available for appropriation into the national psyche. Rather than opposing the nation as a coloniser, Ward subverts from within it, making her text conform to typical postcolonial themes of dislocation. Additionally, the publisher's intention is made clear by the label 'An Australian Story' on the cover of *Wandering Girl*, published during the bicentennial celebration of nationhood with the assistance of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bicentennial Programme. The guidelines for assistance from this organisation were:

- Commemorate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life, people, events or customs.
- Celebrate some aspect of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander life or achievement.
- Preserve or develop Aboriginal or Torres Strait life, custom or society.
- Create a better understanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait presence and experience in Australia.
- Promote social harmony and understanding in Australia (Morissey 1988:12-13).

Narogin (1990:14) who advocates that Aboriginal writing should conform to an Aboriginal 'metatext', claims that writers like Morgan and Ward 'do not see themselves as part of an active ongoing movement' and that their style indicates 'activist literature has moved to literature of understanding'. I have agreed that Ward is not an oppositional writer and, accepting Narogin's observation, in this chapter I attempt to analyse the nature of the national understanding which is gained from Ward's texts.

Ariss (1988:145) notes a trend towards the appropriation of black political action into the state, partly because of the increasing reliance on government funding. Political expression of Aboriginal aspirations have become less obvious than in the past, leaving 'Aboriginality as culture, as art, literature and dance' (Ariss 1988:145). Aboriginality therefore becomes a text available to be read in the interests of 'imagining' a nation.

Petersen (1988:130) claims in regard to *Wandering Girl*: 'Cultural liberation is obviously much harder than political liberation'. However, as Ward struggles toward liberating culture from the hegemony of the colonial centre, she confirms Ariss's (1988:145) observation that culture and politics cannot be easily separated. Dale (1992:394) confirms the difficulty of separating politics and culture in his claim that: 'Literature is a site at which... myths about national identity are proposed, cultivated, refined and disseminated'. In a nation built on the legal fiction of terra nullius, any increased visibility for Aborigines inevitably becomes political.

Aboriginal writing seeks to 'deconstruct' European representations and to 're-present' Australian history as Aboriginal history... from the perspective of the oppressed, the indigene (sic), rather than the colonialist' (Ariss 1988:134). However, Ward sees the 're-presentation' of Australian history as inclusive rather than a closed, oppositional Aboriginal text. She believes 'we should all live as one race' (Ward 1990:23). The problem of accepting Australia's history as an inclusive history has been expressed by Goldie:

The Aborigine is Other and therefore alien, But the Aborigine is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Australian must be alien. But how can the Australian be alien within Australia? There are only two possible answers. The white culture might reject the indigene (sic), by stating that the country really began with the arrival of the whites, an approach no longer popular but significant in the nineteenth century... Or else the white culture can attempt to incorporate the Other...

Hodge and Mishra (1990:xiv) describe this dilemma as 'schizoid'. For Brady (1994b:41) the excluded Other/Others may well be the central problem which is returning to haunt Western society in general and Australian society in particular. I interpret Ward's texts as attempting to resolve this dilemma figuratively by personalising the coloniser and allowing the enlightened reader to identify with the colonised.

Although Bhabha (1988:105) warns that to make an individual or ethical problem of racism may fail to recognise its political and historical significance, Ward enables the reader to resolve the national schizophrenia by reading her texts as parables. The individuals then come to represent personalised aspects of society. Having voted overwhelmingly in 1967 to recognise Aborigines as citizens, Australians in this new paradigm reject the smug superiority of the Bigelows and the Follingtons, the arrogant

certainty of Mr Pitts or the foreignness of the German missionaries. Identifying with Ward, readers realise that they too are without a place to call 'home' until they are able to integrate the Aboriginal experience which Ward also seeks to reclaim.

When Mrs Bigelow disdainfully tells her servant to move from the front seat of the car as though she was 'shooing a chook out of her car' (p.34), I propose she symbolises the failure of white Australian people to accept the Aborigines. As though scrubbing away any trace of polluting Aboriginality, Mrs Bigelow orders Ward to use Pine-o-clean to wipe the seat where Ward had been sitting (p.40). Most readers in an age of reconciliation identify with the author and reject Mrs Bigelow's attitudes. This is encouraged by the writing style which Marshall-Stoneking (1988:13) believes 'reads like the most intimate of diaries' which allows the reader to feel they know the Aboriginal girl 'almost as one knows a member of one's own family'.

The establishment, represented by the Bigelows and the teachers as agents of the state, are distinguished from the marginalised Scot and Germans. The establishment, representing the culture centre, are unable to communicate effectively with the indigenous people through an imposed language and values. Their irrational contempt for the Aborigines suggests it is the 'Otherness of the self' they fear. Hamilton (1990:16) describes this otherness as 'imaginary' - 'ourselves looking at ourselves while we think we are seeing others', like the child looking in a mirror at itself but imagining it sees another.

Ward explores the gap between the white self and its Other. While working in town for the Bigelows' daughter, she walks the streets and notices 'there were ladies everywhere, over the fence in the front yards - all eyes were on me!' Gaining confidence, she is able to return the white gaze: 'I made my way over to the nearest house and when I got to the fence, glanced up. There was no-one in sight. I sang out, 'Are you there!' (p.108). Nobody replied to Ward then, but today there is a readership for Aboriginal life stories. Many Australians since 1967 are prepared to recognise that the wandering and dispossessed Aborigine also represents our own postcolonial dislocation and failure to adapt to our new 'home'.

#### **The past and 'home'.**

There is a dialectical relationship between images of the past and the present situation in which these images are illuminated, observes Morris (1990:85). Understanding that

relationship is important in interpreting the role Ward's stories perform in today's new paradigm. It is that dialectic which contradicts Narogin's (1990:15) claim that the life story 'is a literature dealing only with the past'. Morris (1990:89) notes how the narrator disrupts the telling of the past by interrupting with references from the present. He views this as empowering because the oral story is then not subordinate to an official 'History' which lays claim to factual certainty.

Ward's interjections into the past also reveal what Morris (1990:83) refers to as 'conversion', or a changed way of thinking since the events. The servant's response to her mistress is followed by the comment, 'You see, in those days, not so very long ago either, we were not allowed to say anything against our white bosses' (p.126). Through conversion, Ward is able to answer back and intervene in 'History'.

'Looking back on it now', Ward in *Unna You Fullas* says she understands the German nun, Sister Erika, 'having taught my own two kids the folk songs we used to sing'. Ward then comments on the feelings of the nun:

There must have been a real longing for her home and it would have seemed so strange to her, having tall redgum trees... blue skies, singing birds and dark-skinned snotty nosed kids jumping up laughing and shouting for joy around her (p.19).

The dark-skinned children in this context become the Other which defines the foreignness of the nun. The children are grouped with the 'strangeness' of the other icons of Australian identity, as they appear in the eyes of the German nun. Australia is not 'home' for the nun; however by implication it is 'home' for the Aboriginal children who are aligned in the text with the other icons.

*Unna You Fullas* ends:

We faced abuse and torment at the jobs we came up with, because of our lack of knowledge, being brought up not knowing who we were, or where we were bound, or what lay ahead of us'(p.180).

Many of those questions have now been answered for Ward. From her position as author, mother and possessor of knowledge she can reach back and rescue the little child from the grip of 'History' and its accomplices - the type of Aboriginalism which silenced the servant

and the schoolgirl of the texts. The author becomes almost a mythical being who releases the abducted child from bondage in *Wandering Girl* and, in *Unna You Fullas*, restores the Aboriginal girl to community and language.

#### Aboriginality as 'home'.

The criteria for myth include a guide for values, a charter for action and a source of rules (Berndt 1983:14). My thesis, using Anderson's ([1983]1991) concepts of an 'imagined community', suggests ways Ward's books might fit these categories. Mythical women also often laid down the Dreaming tracks, not scorning domestic work which the West undervalues (Berndt 1983:14). In her search to restore people to place, language and each other, Ward begins the reconnection of the songlines broken by the Aboriginal diaspora which Gilbert (1977:3) calls 'the rape of the soul'.

Hopefully, an analysis using Aboriginal concepts helps free Ward's texts from the colonising potential of Western literary theory. However, to present a black interpretation against a white reading would suggest a symmetry between two dichotomies which becomes a mirror image of a Manichean, or dichotomised, system of thought (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:170). In hybrid fashion, Ward explores 'the space in between' where Bhabha (1986:xxii) says it is possible 'to cross. even shift Manichean boundaries'.

Ward's sharing of her journey to find 'home' and a located language offers the 'You' of *Unna You Fullas* the opportunity to join the journey and be equal in 'the one human race' of *Wandering Girl's* epilogue. By viewing Aboriginality as a shared concept in this way, the common features of Australian black writing as listed by Nelson (1988:4) take on a new meaning. Nelson finds the thematic similarities are: searching for cultural wholeness; forging a healing and liberating sense of self; seeking strength in community; reconstructing the past; subverting white texts; recreating rituals and ceremonies and celebrating blackness. I will now explain how Ward's inclusive texts allow these themes to be interpreted on the national level.

The first and second of Nelson's listed themes, 'a cultural wholeness' and a 'liberating sense of self' can be extended to apply to a truly national self free of the prejudices of the past where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal share a sense of nationality. Similarly, community becomes the national community. 'White texts' can be equated with the racist texts of

Aboriginalism similar to those in the *School Paper* so ably subverted by Ward as a schoolgirl. 'Celebration of blackness' in Aboriginal literature corresponds with the acceptance of Aboriginality by non-Aboriginal readers.

White Australians reading Aboriginal literature can discover 'the shadow side of our history and culture' (Brady 1994a:42), leading to a set of shared meanings and values. Brady (1994a:48) suggests the neglected 'shadow' represents 'our disowned self' which when recognised in Aboriginal texts and accepted leads to a more inclusive and insightful way of conceiving the world. Lattas (1991:312) critiques Aboriginalist texts by arguing that violence against Aborigines is made to 'correspond to spiritual death inside a Western psyche which has wandered away and become exiled from its European spiritual homeland'. By 'celebrating blackness' with Ward, the reader parts with that fixed place of exile inhabited by the Bigelows, Mr Pitts and also the missionaries (who are admitted exiles).

#### **'Home' and the Other.**

Not surprisingly for someone who spent almost her entire childhood in white-run institutions, Ward gives a great deal of space in her texts to the whites, rather than using the techniques she demonstrates in the relatively closed Aboriginal story-within-the-story told by the sisters from the reserve in *Unna You Fullas*. Petersen (1988:129) views this concentration on how whites think, feel and behave as a weakness in *Wandering Girl*. However, Ward does show the dependency of whites as masters, missionaries or teachers on 'their' blacks, which enables her to reveal the dialectics of the relationship more than a closed Aboriginal story would. However, Ward does not bring the Aboriginal domain entirely into the public space. Another, less generous, interpretation would be that Ward's hybridity of style silences those Aborigines who have been able to keep their language and their connection to place, although I expect these issues to be developed more in her third book.

Ward remains the mediator between the reader and the related experience which can only be known through her. She reduces the distance between reader and subject by making her persecutors the Other. The wrongs are committed by other than the sympathetic reader who can now identify with the persecuted Aborigine. Racist acts came from those who are unsympathetic to their environment, which their rejection of the indigenous people

represents. The Bigelows and Mr Pitts are alienated and alien, freeing the reader of guilt for things which were done by other than ourselves. However, one criticism of this structure I make is that 'our disowned self' now becomes the spiritually dead and exiled whites who are Ward's Others, but whom we should not disown until national wrongs are righted. By disowning the Bigelows and Pitts characters, the danger is we disown our responsibility for the dispossession of the Aborigines

Apart from the cover of *Unna You Fullas* and the art work, there is no conscious exploitation of Aboriginal spirituality in Ward's texts. Hybridity avoids the textual imprisonment of blacks within the binary opposites where, Lattas (1989:61) warns, Aborigines become 'the system of meaning which White society has lost'. Lattas (1991:323) critiques arguments on Australia's perceived spiritual alienation and the transformation of Aborigines into 'that which the West lacks and must recoup if it is to re-establish wholeness'. Ward subverts concepts of authenticity and rejects the form of Aboriginalism which Lattas critiques (1989;1991;1992). Instead, as I have argued, she presents a parable which blends Aboriginality with nationalism.

#### Christianity as 'home'.

Ward takes the universalist teachings of her Christian 'home' and emphasises qualities of those teachings which subvert the authority of the white possessors of 'the Book' or 'the Word'. It is the boys and girls who carry the statue of Mary around the mission each year (p.177). Earlier Ward tells how the children were 'driven around everywhere in Our Lady's Truck... The nuns and brothers said that Our Lady would protect us on our picnics and excursions into the city' (p.7). In the last chapter, 'The Nativity', Ward tells how she was never asked to carry the statue because her behaviour was not up to mission expectations. She replies 'Not that it worried me, as long as God still loved his sinners. I still prayed at night and asked forgiveness' (p.177)

Through this selective use of the Christian message the hegemonic power of the mission, in the form of a culturally constructed religion, is isolated from the personal relationship between Ward and a protective higher power. Ward quotes the hymn "Lobe Den Herren", in German and English:

All you who hear  
Now to his altar draw near  
Join in profound adoration (p.146).

The hymn bears a message of a supreme patron, a mediator of the race and class divisions imposed on Ward and her friends. When the girls fight after being graded by the teacher into skin colours, Sister Ursula reassures them 'we were all equal under God's care, nobody was different' (p.136). The picture of the Bigelows' servant girl 'thanking God for letting me go to the fair' (p.136) makes a stark contrast to her callous treatment by the Bigelows who are shown to be connected to the mission and the public administration of power, spelled out by the comments from the priest:

'Und zer girls vill make excellent cleaners I am sure, vhatever farm you vill vork at girls. Remember all zhat ve haf taught you, und you vill make zer white people who you vork for very happy"' (p.146).

#### Australia as 'home'.

In the hybrid text, triumphal songs quoted by Ward take on a different meaning in their transplanted context. 'Our own dear land Australia' almost becomes a protest for land rights in the context of its performance by the Aboriginal girls. Taken from the past and read in the present, the songs are also given an irony which was not perceived at the mission in the imagined homogeneous nation of the period. When Aborigines sing for the visitors the irony of their song speaks for itself in *Unna You Fullas*:

Thee oh Christ the Prince of ages...  
Thee the nation's glorious King...  
From our own dear land Australia  
Drive the night of heresy...(p.144-5).

I believe Ward makes this point with a quote from the song she sings as a solo, 'No Fairer Land'. The meaning of 'our own dear countryside' becomes ambiguous when sung by the Aboriginal girl. 'Somehow that used to upset me, especially the words of the first verse,' she says.

No fairer land lies far and wide  
Than this our own dear countryside (p.151).

The concert is performed on a stage with a painted bush-scene backdrop. The backdrop shows an appropriated land with iconic gum trees and iconic kookaburras behind the 'thin white sheets which served for curtains' (p.150). On stage the children sing to the beat of a



wooden ruler waved by a nun:

Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree-ee,  
Merry merry king of the bush is he-ee,  
Laugh Kookaburra, laugh...  
Kookaburra's life is gay and free! (p.150)

'The Kookaburra Song' and 'The Happy Wanderer' are the two songs Ward associates most with the mission days. The contrast with mission life and the kookaburra's life emphasises the separation of culture and environment as experienced by the mission children who are not free. The kookaburra in the bush is free unlike the children who sing. However, the kookaburra of the song, as distinct from the bird in the bush, is described, named and appropriated into that system of signifiers which also confines the institutionalised children. Similarly, the concert performance in front of a painted scene illustrates the separation of the signifiers of the Australian bush from their referent, the bush which the runaway girls described as 'our home'. The children are kept apart from the real bush and perform to painted version of it. Like the 'Happy Wanderer', a postcolonial Australian society has yet to locate itself.

It does not seem coincidental that the gum tree is a recurring symbol in *Unna You Fullas* - as a meeting place away from the nuns (p.60,p.173) or as a central point in the playground (p.116,p.141,p.166). By frequent references in the text the gum tree becomes a central icon and a place of security which is reclaimed by Ward in the text in the same way that she contested the icons of explorer and Aborigine in her school story.

#### **A new paradigm.**

The shift into a new paradigm which has now guaranteed a readership for Ward's books began in the 1960s at about the time when Father Albertus is replaced by Father Maxwell in *Unna You Fullas*. Sister Ursula's introduction of the new rector is a step towards reconciliation between nation and indigenous people, nation and language. Non-Aborigines and Aborigines are now speaking the same language while, in the same sentence, the German nuns become a foreign Other which helps define the nation:

He iss from Australia. Therefore you vill be able to understand him, not like when ve nuns first arrived from Shermanny... you may remember(p.164).

Ward explains the changes which were occurring in the Western world in the 1960s in this figurative way, although the arrival of Father Maxwell heralds a change from the institutionalised long khaki dresses to 'modern skirts and tops' (p.168). The uses of new buses instead of Our Lady's Truck to transport the children seems to indicate an infusion of funding from the state. Also Father Maxwell, who causes a stir by arriving wearing shorts, later told Ward: '[H]e couldn't believe it when he came to the mission that day. He thought he had walked into another world. A world of the past' (p.167).

The globalisation and accessibility of commodities which also spread in the 1960s, including popular music, is associated with resistance and the construction of 'home' in *Wandering Girl* and *Unna You Fullas*. The mission girls readily adopt the popular culture spread by expanding communications because these influences subvert the language of the dominant race and class hierarchies. In *Wandering Girl*, Ward used commercial product-names to tentatively destabilise 'correct' English. Household brand-names like 'Ajax, Pine-o-clean, Silvo, Brasso etc' (p.69) are listed with Weeties and Dettol. These are words which do not privilege authentic over unauthentic speech, making a space for a fuller assault on language in her second book.

During (1992:342) believes the 'global popular' of Coca Cola and similar transnational products comes to represent 'a humanism transcending national boundaries'. This is particularly noticeable in *Unna You Fullas*. 'Beatles music was belting out all over the world', says Ward (p.173). As the influences of religion decreases, popular music appears to give Ward an alternative expression of 'the one human race'.

#### The body as 'home'.

The missionaries' reaction to Ward's teenage obsession with the singer Brian Hyland makes her aware of the religious repression of the body, associated by the nuns with 'lust and sex' (p.172). Earlier, Ward makes a connection between Aboriginality and the claiming of the body by mission teaching. Said (cited in Parry 1987:54) notes the symmetry between 'suppressed Victorian sexuality at home, its fantasies abroad, and the tightening hold on the male late nineteenth century imagination of imperialist ideology'. Similarly, Ward had recognised the body as a contested site between mission teaching and Aboriginality in the *School Paper* story:

I couldn't understand at the time why [Aborigines] walked around naked,

because the nuns told us that it was very bad and sinful to show your body bare to anyone and that was a mortal sin (p.155).

Significantly, the more open Australianness of Father Maxwell is not enough to release him from repressive attitudes to the body. His reaction suggests an Aboriginal girl still represents that which the nation represses at the end of the book, indicating our search for a shared 'home' is not over. However, Ward has used the 'global popular' to transcend the hegemony of the mission. She now has access to alternative definitions of signifiers like 'beauty' and 'dirty':

I didn't understand why Father should say all those terrible things about what I thought was a beautiful song. Why was I feeling strange inside me? I should have been feeling really dirty but somehow or other, for once in my life, I felt on top of the world after this kind of lecture (p.176).

Ward indicates how globalisation by the communications revolution and international economic shifts can liberate Aborigines from the discourses of Aboriginalism which have attempted to define her. However, the same forces create a reaction described by Hamilton (1990:16):

[T]he problem of distinguishing a national self has moved to the forefront precisely as it is challenged by social, economic and political mechanisms which undercut the prior senses of national, ethnic, local, class or trade-specific identities.

It is the circulation of 'collectively held images' in texts which helps create an imagined community, says Hamilton (1990:16). Aboriginal intervention in this process is possible through the publication of life stories and other literature which intersects what Hamilton (1990:22) describes as 'the disenchantment of certain sections of Australian society with itself'. As the values of the 'white explorers who gave great service to this country of ours' (p.156) are questioned, the Aboriginal contribution to the Australian community is recognised. As leaders of the first people, it is Aboriginal writers who offer Australians the opportunity to find a healing sense of community as we search with Ward for a place we can all call 'home'.

### Conclusion.

In this thesis, I have interpreted *Wandering Girl* and *Unna You Fullas* by Glenyse Ward as figurative texts. A review of the texts as stories of an institutionalised childhood would severely limit them. Using a similar approach to another Aboriginal writer's work, Brady

(1994c:49) explains that by 'pointing behind the narrowness of the merely literal and empirical, these stories remind us of the way "reality" is bound up with the imaginary and thus setting us free to reimagine who we are and where we are situated'.

Poststructural and postcolonial literary theory have also been useful to understand the questioning of an imposed language and the search for place to call 'home', which are themes of the two texts. Making a clearer distinction between 'Aboriginality' and 'Aboriginalism' was also necessary before discussing Ward's reclaiming of Aboriginality from the Aboriginalism which confined her. Using Anderson's ([1983]1991) concepts of 'an imagined community' I have also extended the meaning of 'home' to 'nation'. The postcolonial literary theory explanation of hybridity has been useful in understanding how the emergence of an imagined nation with a shared culture might be assisted through texts.

Echoing Anderson, Murphy (1986:166) describes 'remembered history' as 'the afterlife of a group's past action which forms the interpretative framework through which [the group] acts upon the social world'. If Ward's texts are viewed as an 'interpretive framework', as I believe they were intended, then a degree of subjectivity is required in any analysis of them. However, I have tried to support my arguments with references to the texts.

Although I have discussed how Glenyse Ward subverts the hegemony of the systems which confined her in *Wandering Girl*, and connects with community and language in *Unna You Fullas*, her search for a located 'home' is unfinished as she invites Australians to join her journey in the 'one human race'.

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