ABORIGINAL REPRESENTATION: CONFLICT or DIALOGUE in the ACADEMY

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Abstract

This research begins with the premise that non-Aboriginal students are challenged by much Aboriginal writing and also challenge its representations as they struggle to re-position themselves in relation to possible meanings within Aboriginal writing. Many non-Aboriginal students come to read an Aboriginal narrative against their understanding of what it means to be an Aboriginal Australian, accumulated via their prior reading of Australian history, literature and more contemporary social analysis and popular commentary. Aboriginal writing is confronting when it disturbs the more familiar representations of Aboriginal experience and characterisation previously encountered. The aim of this paper is to provide a more informed basis from which to consider higher education pedagogy for this area of literary studies. A further aim is to contribute to the literary studies discourse on Aboriginal representation in Australian literature.

Introduction

This paper is a discussion of representations of Aboriginal Australians by white authors in literary narratives and the ways such images contain and locate Aboriginal people in the colonial psyche. Such accounts impact on the way Aboriginal representations by Aboriginal authors are received in current educational settings. While there is an increase in Aboriginal writing, many non-Aboriginal people find the representations challenging and are reticent to relinquish images and representations constructed by non-Aboriginal authors with which they felt comfortable.

I became conscious through my observations as an Aboriginal educator of the way non-Aboriginal students disconnect with Aboriginal narratives and the representations contained within because many of these representations do not conform to what these students thought they knew about us. For example, when students encounter narratives where the Aboriginal characters are imbued with agency, or who live in urban settings and do not exhibit any obvious signs of a traditional lifestyle, or are well educated or affluent or when the characters attack national myths or history that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to believe such as the concept of a "fair go nation" or a "peaceful settlement". This paper seeks deeper understandings of how to inform pedagogical opportunities for teaching Aboriginal texts in higher education courses to undergraduate students.

Looking at the ways that Aboriginality became incorporated and contained in national narratives and became part of the nation's literature or the national literary canon in the nineteenth and twentieth century is an important starting point. I give the twentieth century particular focus because the country's literature changed after Federation (1901) and an intense desire to manufacture through literature a unique and distinct Australian identity became much more prevalent. This distinctly unique "Australian" person was usually an unmarried male; a handsome, care free, anti-intellectual bushman, apathetic and unaware of the wider world around him and who embraced and practiced the art of mateship. The most vivid examples of "the bushman" can be seen in the poems and stories of Henry Lawson and Andrew Barton (Banjo) Paterson. This literary construction leaves a lot of people out of the picture. Women, urban people, immigrants and Indigenous people were usually excluded or if they did feature in such literary

narratives were peripheral and mediated through the bushman character such as the character of "Black Mary" in Lawson's (1892) *The Drover's Wife.* But there were some authors such as Katharine Prichard (1883-1969), Eleanor Dark (1901-1985) and Patrick White (1912-1990) who realised that the "bushman" character was totally manufactured even at the time and their works attempted to construct the different experiences of those outside this meta-narrative.

The representation of one cultural group by another is a vast area which spans many genres. From the early nineteenth century onwards soldiers, sailors, governors, explorers, scientists, ethnographers and convicts all wrote of Aboriginal people. These accounts inspired the imaginations of and in some instances gnawed the consciences of fictionists who moved "the Aboriginal subject" from these raw accounts to literary narratives in the style of social realism. This shift from personal accounts to public literature made white author's construction of the Aboriginality accessible to non-Aboriginal audiences.

In his seminal study, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, Healy describes Aboriginal Australians as "moths caught in webs of words" (1978, p. xvii). Such webs of words weave particular images of Aboriginality at different times and construct a kind of familiarity with and control of Aboriginality for non-Aboriginal people throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The irony of authors so quickly making Aboriginal Australians their subjects, despite the general lack of regard for Aboriginal Australians as living people for much of the nineteenth and twentieth century, needs to be elicited to students, as does the fact that this is no co-incidence or accident. Before any specific texts are encountered by the students it is crucial to point out that literary narratives are not benign and that they play an important role in maintaining hegemony. For this discussion, the work of Gauri Viswanathan is useful as he shows how "the humanistic functions traditionally associated with the study of literature – for example the shaping of character or the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking can be vital in the process of socio-political control" (1987, p. 2) .The manufacturing of "the Aborigine" through its many literary phases in the consciousness of the coloniser has been an integral and powerful part of the colonising process. My approach seeks to explore this by looking at authors, the language they use to represent Aboriginal people, the time and context in which they wrote as well as the representation itself at any given time, and to emphasise that such representations are more accurately seen as a manifestation of white consciousness of Aboriginal Australians, rather than of Aboriginal Australians.

Since the 1960s, control of Aboriginal representation has been destabilised by Aboriginal Australians accessing and utilising the coloniser's dominant form of communication, which is, writing. This now means that non-Aboriginal students encounter Indigenous educators who are called upon more and more to introduce courses in Indigenous Studies and/or Indigenise existing curricula. More significantly, it means that representation of one group by another is no longer a one way process and can become a contested site.

Aboriginal writing is confronting for non-Aboriginal students when it disrupts more familiar representations of Aboriginal experience and characterisation and, most particularly, when accretions of students' prior reading of Australian literature, history, contemporary social analysis and popular commentary contradict many of the images now encountered from Aboriginal writers and educators. Non-Aboriginal higher education students come to read an Aboriginal text against their understanding of what it means to be an Aboriginal Australian, and because the power of previous representations of Aboriginality are strong and enduring the introduction of a different set of representations calls their own into question. Non-Aboriginal students are not accustomed to analysing literary representation of Aboriginality as the *re-presentation* of Aboriginal Australian's, part of a process of weaving us into national narratives according to the needs of the colonial mind.

Containment

Aboriginal Australians are contained in the meta-narratives of the national literary landscape and situated in particular discourses of Australian writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that inform what many non-Aboriginal people know or think they know about us. Given the authority of the author and the status of literary texts in Western culture, it is not necessarily obvious to readers that the use of Aboriginal characters, and the images and representations of Aboriginality reveal more about the consciousness of the writer as part of a greater dominant social group than they do about being Aboriginal at any given time. Gunther Kress (1985) points out that the literary text is a valued Western artefact and argues that every aspect of education is about the transmission of society's culture through language in the production of spoken and written texts. My observations of Western students confirm that many students see literary texts by acclaimed Western authors as sacred and universal rather than culturally grounded.

Students are eager to look at the constructions, images and representations within narratives and often overlook the stand-point and socio-historical context of the author. They have not been trained to question the authority of the author or the representation. Nor are they necessarily encouraged to consider the author as part of a dominant group whose knowledge may appear universal but is culturally grounded in

different values and discourses that influences the type of language used and the contexts created when depicting "otherness". In all this I need to be conscious of my own speaking position and standpoint and that being an Aboriginal person first as well as an educator impacts on my teaching. I also need to be mindful that I am dealing with students who may be encountering an Aboriginal person for the first time and that I may not conform to their images of Aboriginality either.

An in-depth analysis of some non-Aboriginal literary texts constructing Aboriginal characters that were previously used and considered influential at the time, reveal that the language used and the contexts set when representing Aboriginality is an important aspect of how non-Aboriginal people become aware of and are informed of Aboriginality. Research by socio-linguists and educationalists such as Norman Fairclough (1989), Michael Halliday (1985), James Gee (1996, 2001) and Gunther Kress (1985) are useful to elicit the ideologies inherent in language, the common sense assumptions implicit in language from different cultural perspectives and the semantic registers and memory resources the use of certain types of language triggers in readers.

Language as ideology/Ideology as language

Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a useful lens for examining character identity development and context in narratives written by non-Aboriginal authors that represent (and re-present) Aboriginality. The type of descriptors used to depict Aboriginality, the type of verbs used for conveying Aboriginal actions and the contexts that are created to locate Aboriginality are significant in terms of gaining insight into non-Aboriginal understandings of and assumed familiarity with Aboriginality. Students come to read novels by acclaimed authors (e.g., Katharine Prichard (1929), Patrick White (1961, 1976), David Malouf (1993) and Kate Grenville (2005)) as universal but as James Gee (1996, 2001) argues, the discourse within novels and the subsequent discourse devoted to discussing events and characters occur within communities of practice and are relative to the way one cultural group locates another in their consciousness.

Students are used to reading and seeing Aboriginality framed in certain ways. Analysing the type of language the students are accustomed to when reading about Aboriginality is an important process to lead students to understand that language carries with it certain assumptions. Fairclough calls these common sense assumptions. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a useful tool for making implicit assumptions more transparent. Fairclough argued that the language spoken by a particular cultural group is permeated by common-sense assumptions that are known and accepted by the collective. These assumptions are the ideologies of a certain group. This is useful theory to use with students as a basis for looking closely at the language one cultural group uses to represent another. No choice of words that go together to construct representations of the "other" is neutral. Furthermore, no choice of words used to construct any text is neutral. The choice of words used to construct one cultural group for the intellectual consumption of another sets up particular connotations, expectations and associations for the reader. Readers from one cultural group may read a text that is seminal for a different cultural group and may have a different set of connotations and associations or may miss the point of a written or spoken text altogether.

Mostly in terms of contexts created by non-Aboriginal writers, Aboriginality is marginalised physically through motifs such as borders, boundaries, frontiers and fringes which are common spaces where Aboriginality is located. These margins are zones where Aboriginality can be explained and contained by non- Aboriginal writers. Urban examples are rarer (for example *Riders in the Chariot* by Patrick White (1961) and *The Fringe Dwellers* by Nene Gare (1961) but also represent Aboriginality on the social and geographical fringes of urban settlements. White's central character Alf Dubbo lives in Sydney but he is geographically marginalised to the outskirts of his suburb and socially marginalised by most of his white neighbours. Gare's narrative depicts a young Aboriginal woman who encourages her family to move from a mission to a housing commission home in town and "live white". Initially, their well meaning white neighbours are accepting and some even try to give the family second hand goods but the moving in of extended family members, the father's reluctance to find work to support the family and pay rent and the altercations that break out between family members isolates the family from their neighbours and continues to perpetuate stereotypes and "one dimensional images" of Aboriginality. In my experience, these are the sorts of text students are accustomed to before they encounter Aboriginal writers. They are also the texts that most of their teachers encountered and many students have been educated by a generation of teachers who are used to reading of Aboriginality being spoken *about* and are not used to speaking black subjects in the literary landscape.

An example of how language influences perceptions of Aboriginality and how CDA can work in practice to reveal this is through an analysis of works representing Aboriginality by Patrick White. White received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1973. He is a staple in Australian literary studies courses in Australian and international universities. White is still credited by many non-Aboriginal academics and critics for being "generous" in his writings of Aboriginal people and for "making visible" dimensions of the Aboriginal character and society, such as innocence and order that many

readers had not previously connected or associated with Aboriginal existence (e.g., Vanden Driesen, 2009). Yet in his 1976 novel, *A Fringe of Leaves,* where he constructs a white woman loosely based on Eliza Fraser, he describes her presence at the burial ceremony of an Aboriginal child as such:

> They allowed her to accompany the funeral procession, traipsing into the forest until they found a hollow log in which to shove the body. At once their grief evaporated, except in the mother's case, who was prepared to keep up her snivels, but only a while for they were returning to the fish feast (White, 1976, p. 234).

The choice of language here, particularly the verbs, are crucial in constructing a binary between Black and white. The Aboriginal women's aimless "traipsing", the irreverent "shove" that places "the body" in "a hollow log" and the apparently superficial grief and "snivelling" that "evaporates" when food takes over is mediated through the eyes of a white woman. CDA can elicit, for non-Aboriginal readers, how White's choice of verbs in this and other significant passages within the text, positions Aboriginality on a lower rung of the human ladder.

Another useful approach from the field of socio-linguistics, is Michael Halliday's (1985) concept of "register". "Register" is a subconscious trigger that occurs in the minds of readers triggered by association and familiarity. Socio-historical accretions that students already have about Aboriginality, by the time I meet them in the tertiary sector, trigger a different set of registers in relation to what they are presented with when they encounter representations of Aboriginality by Aboriginal people. Register relates to the ideational function of language; that is the ideology that has given rise to the choice of words on a page and the type of responses they will elicit from a particular cultural group. For example, when Mary Durack wrote the foreword to Colin Johnson's (aka Mudrooroo) first novel *Wild Cat Falling* (1965), she described the Aboriginal community which he came from as "breeding among themselves" (1965, p. iv) and a "drifting coloured minority caught in the vicious circle of lack of opportunity and their own lack of stamina "(1965, p. vii). These verbs have connotations that are closer to animal behaviour rather than human behaviour. Many in Western Australian Indigenous communities do not accept Johnson's claim of Aboriginal identity. The author considers it appropriate to mention his work as it was read at the time by audiences as a novel by an Aboriginal author.

Looking at language in this way elicits that people who speak a common language (e.g. English) do not necessarily share a common discourse or make sense of things in the same way. Analysing the language that non-Aboriginal authors have used to speak to and speak about Aboriginality is an important process to lead students through. It is also important to emphasise that "discourse" is not universal; it is a culturally grounded way of making sense of the world, one's place in the world and others in the world.

Muecke's (1992) work is helpful when considering discourse as a way in which people make sense of the world around them collectively, how they make sense of themselves in the world *and* how they make sense of "others". Muecke identified three available discourses on Aboriginality; the anthropological, the romantic and the racist. These discourses all seek to represent Aboriginality in terms of "otherness" and they all claim some authority to represent based on Aboriginal deficiency. To this list of already available discourses, I added the following based on my observations, discourses of philanthropy, tolerance and charity which are all different layers in the broader over-arching discourse of post-colonialism. Such discourses are paternalistic, and while they have moved on from the racist discourse used by Durack to describe Johnson and his community, they are still grounded in notions of Aboriginal deficiency and white authority.

Post-colonial discourse and literature

Post-colonialism can be defined literally as a period of time after colonisation or very broadly a time after a colonised country such as Australia or New Zealand were given their independence from Great Britain. This occurred early in the twentieth century and both countries have since set about forging a more distinct national identity. However, this is problematic for Indigenous peoples, whose populations are like smaller nations within larger nations. Such "independence movements" were movements of white succession. For example, the transfer of power from Great Britain to Australia, where it moved from colony to federated nation in 1901, was a transfer from one white hegemony to another. In an Indigenous context, post-colonialism is a continuation of colonialism through different or new relationships concerning power and the control and production of knowledge.

Postcolonial theories are embedded in intellectual movements such as philosophy, literature, political science and film by the representation and analysis of the historical experiences and subjectivities of "victims" of colonial power. This casts us as "victims" and thus powerless in the colonial scheme. Within a post-colonial discourse, Aboriginal people are spoken about in terms of "closing gaps" between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians or "Aboriginal Australians harnessing the mainstream". Both descriptors are embedded in deficiency theories and reinforce the superiority of the white mainstream as "the ideal norm"; the benchmark to which cultural minorities should aspire to achieve.

What post-colonial discourse does in literature is intervene and in some cases re-write colonial histories. Often, it re-casts Indigenous peoples as powerless victims and while it does have the potential to represent the colonised in a more human light, it risks absolving the colonisers of responsibility for addressing the impacts of colonisation by assuming that Aboriginal inhabitants were already doomed to a timeless, un-evolving fate. For non-Aboriginal authors, post-colonial narratives re-write colonial discourse and unsettle the underside of the violent colonial project of the previous decades, by introducing alternative colonial practices that *might* have resulted in more peaceful and co-operative "settlement" of Australia. In this way, non-Aboriginal authors have the potential to "unsettle" previous notions of settler violence and massacres that implicate themselves as the descendents of colonising settlers by representing at least some settlers in a more humanist, favourable light.

An example of this discourse in the Australian context can be seen in the writings of David Malouf (1993) and Kate Grenville (2005). Malouf narrates with hindsight the emergence of settler encroachment in the Bowen district of Queensland. In this retrospective account, relations between local Aborigines and settlers are mediated through the eyes of insightful whites. Colonisation is assigned a divine purpose through the recognition of some settlers that the original inhabitants have invaluable knowledge of the environment which, if combined with European practices of agriculture and cultivation, could result in an ideal "hybrid" colonial project. Malouf's narrative does affirm the pre-existence and continuing value of Aboriginal knowledge but only within the settler context, channelled through the voice of more enlightened settlers. Malouf represents Aboriginal Australians as part of a grander scheme that is the Anglo-European utopian dream expressed by Reverend Frazer in *Remembering Babylon.*

Frazer compares the coming of white settlers to Australia to the domestication of biblical lands in the Old Testament. The passage is laden with Western social and religious values and land practices.

> Did we not, long ago, did not our ancestors, bring in out of the mere wilderness, the coarse old grasses … and separating the grains and nursing them to plumpness, learning how to mill and grind and make our daily bread... create settled places where men and women sit at tables among neighbours in daily sacrament which is the image of the Lord's greater one? All this can be done again. This is what is intended by our coming here… (Malouf, 1993, p. 132)

More recently, Kate Grenville's narrative *The Secret River* (2005) re-writes colonial discourse to unsettle settler violence towards Aboriginal Australians by emphasising the "fear of the unknown" factor that drove usually reasonable men to unreasonable and inhumane measures such as massacres of Aboriginal men, women and children. Grenville reinforces the place of convict emancipists in colonial discourse, as victims in exile, poorly treated both at home and in the emerging colony. Both narratives experiment with "hybrid identities" where some settlers are re-cast as white Indigenes.

Discourses on or about Aboriginality have informed what many non-Aboriginal people think they know about Aboriginality which inform the setting of certain boundaries for Aboriginality. When these boundaries are transgressed by Aboriginal authors and educators, some non-Aboriginal students are confused, some are aggressive and some disengage. Foucault points out that what constitutes a limit is discovered not by tracing already existing boundaries but by crossing them. In this way, transgression "forces the limit to face its imminent disappearance to find itself in what it excludes" (1977, p. 35). Facing this limit with students can be very challenging because it breaks new ground and takes them to unfamiliar territory.

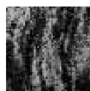
Why bother?

Many if not most students bring with them images and representations of Aboriginality that are not authored or created by Aboriginal authors. It appears that there is a comfort zone where many non-Aboriginal students locate Aboriginality that they are reluctant to disturb. They are used to Aboriginal people being afforded certain actions, performing certain tasks, conforming to a particular appearance, having certain aspirations that are usually different. It is important for me as an educator to understand where students locate Aboriginality in their consciousness and what has informed this. This information will need to be gently unpacked in a non-judgemental way. Students are encouraged to keep a journal that documents their attitudes and responses to the images they are now encountering in Aboriginal writing. Rather than focus on what students think is "wrong" with a particular representation or image I encourage them to consider what it is about this particular representation that upsets them or disturbs their previously familiar understandings of Aboriginal people. It is important that as the teacher I also keep a journal which documents students' resistance, responses and changes in attitude.

Canadian academic and critic Terry Goldie (1989, pp. 15-17) argued that when white writers write of Indigenous people they always imbue us with "the basic commodities of the Indigene" which are sex, violence, orality, mysticism and the prehistoric. That no account of the Indigene in white discourse is possible without recourse to the invocation of these particular commodities holds true in the Australian

context. These commodities not only homogenise and universalise Indigeniety; they also keep us static in the colonial mind.

When Aboriginal authors' images don't conform to non-Aboriginal student's expectations, disconnection and disengagement can occur. The notion of Aboriginal characters not acting or conforming to non-Aboriginal understandings is a key issue in the reactions of non-Aboriginal students to such representations. To a certain extent, students find the explorations of the everyday reality of Aboriginal people too confronting. But there is another level of discomfort that relates to the loss of control over the production of what was previously understood, through art, literature, film and photography, that placed Aboriginal people as a phenomenon in white consciousness. For non-Aboriginal people, the realisation that they no longer orchestrate the characters and images across such genres and thus no longer control the order of things for Aboriginal people seems to be as confronting for some students. But if Aboriginal educators cannot engage non-Aboriginal students, literary images and representations produced by both Aboriginal and white writers will continue to be sites of contestation and this undermines the tremendous potential for literary images to be sites of reciprocal understanding for both cultures and to shed light on the authors themselves as part of a larger cultural group and the way such groups seek to make sense of each other. In order to facilitate this process it is necessary to introduce the concept of "multiple truths" and explain that one particular event or incident will be interpreted differently depending on one's cultural standpoint. A good example to start with is to point out that while most non-Aboriginal people refer to the arrival of the British in Australia as a settlement Aboriginal Australians consider the 1788 arrival of the British an invasion. This approach will assist students in understanding that a text has no life of its own, and is dependent on the reader (and the teacher) to bring it to life. The same text will almost inevitably be read differently in one cultural group than another and that it is important to understand that different readings are culturally grounded. This will also assist students to recognise the author's cultural stand-point which is never universal.



As an Aboriginal educator, what am I asking non-Aboriginal students to do when I present them with texts by Aboriginal writers?

It is important to ask myself this question and to know that I'm not just giving non-Aboriginal students words on a page when I present them with representations of ourselves. I'm asking them to transit one set of ingrained cultural assumptions and to consider engaging with another. I'm leading them to identify "limits and boundaries" which, previously, Western culture dictated for Aboriginal people and that are now being crossed by Aboriginal people.

Barbara Johnson, an American literary critic from the Yale School of critical literature, argued that what is at stake in writing is the nature of authority. Johnson quotes from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, an American Slave Written by Himself* and argues that the function of writing is to enslave or emancipate. Johnson goes on to say:

> What enslaves is not writing per se but control of writing, and writing as control. What is needed is not less writing but more consciousness of how it works … The "other" can always learn to read the mechanism of his or her own oppression … what is at stake in writing is the very structure of authority itself (Johnson, 1990, p. 48).

Following this line of thinking, what is at stake in representation is the nature of authority. There is an authority to manufacture someone or something in representation and when the ability to represent self becomes available, the authority of those with the previous monopoly on representation is destabilised and needs re-negotiating.

Robert Berkhofer Jnr, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of California, published an extensive critical study of images of America's First Peoples from Columbus to the present. To paraphrase Berkhofer:

> Beneath the good and bad images used by explorer, settler, missionary, policy-maker alike lay the idea of Aboriginal deficiency that assumed … whites do something for Aborigines to raise them to European standards (Berkhofer 1978, p. 119).

It is not only a loss of control of orchestration of images and representation that non-Aboriginal people are experiencing; it is also a loss of paternalism.

Many non-Aboriginal students approach courses in Aboriginal literature or education, or any course that contains the word Indigenous or Aboriginal, with the view that it is their role to help Aboriginal people rather than educate themselves about different cultural contexts. One student asked openly "How can I help Aboriginal people climb up the ladder?" This got me thinking that it is more important for students to understand why the ladder is there in the first place and how the ladder works, or has worked, to make it easier or harder to climb for some than others and that advancing up a ladder is a white cultural metaphor for success. Many non-Aboriginal students want a "recipe" to help them "help" Aboriginal people and get very frustrated when their teacher starts asking them to consider different cultural contexts, different histories and to consider that they, as non-Aboriginal Australians have some responsibility in what they thought was "an

Aboriginal problem".

Guiding students through aspects of colonial history that they may not be familiar with, such as the Mission System, The Aboriginal Protection Boards and the Assimilation Policy, assists them in identifying the emergence and continuation of discourses of charity, adaptation to white standards and paternalism that they are used to hearing about when Aboriginality is referred to in much of the contemporary media and current debate. It is crucial to point out that since the arrival of the British, Aboriginality has been defined in terms of deficit theories and that even now, some white Australians still see it as their "duty" to "change" and/or "elevate" Aboriginal Australians. However, it is not Aboriginal culture that needs to change, although we have demonstrated over the past two-hundred and twenty years that we are capable of many changes and our culture, however diverse, is resilient. It is non-Aboriginal Australians who need to re-assess the way that they as a group have been taught to think about Aboriginal Australians and to consider the way dominant culture has been used as a yardstick to measure achievements and failures in Aboriginal Australians. What needs to change here is attitude. But this can only happen if I accept what students already know and assist them to unpack what has informed these opinions of Aboriginal people in the first place.

Conclusion

Addressing these issues takes time but it is crucial to stress the broader dimensions of literature and the images and representations within. When non-Aboriginal students are presented with an Aboriginal text containing images that disrupt their comfort zone, they are not just being asked to read it and possibly disagree or to consider another set of (deficit/devious) images. They are being asked to step outside their own socio-cultural and historical context into another which may be unfamiliar, but which is equally relevant to the production of representations and images as the one with which they are familiar. It is also worth pointing out that it is quite confronting for non-Aboriginal students to see themselves represented by Aboriginal authors when they are accustomed to coming from a culture that controls the representation of "others". A discussion of reciprocal representation and the role literature plays in locating the position of "others" in the consciousness of the writer is important.

The approach I take with non-Aboriginal students, is to be explicit about and demonstrate the re-presentation, re-construction and re-packaging of Aboriginality in literary narrative by non-Aboriginal authors through language, context and assumption at different times that reflect the colonial mindset. Manufacturing images is a continual literary process. As Aboriginal Australians, we have been manufactured and re-manufactured across many different genres that locate us in the continuum of white consciousness from 1788 to the present. The dominant representation is white consciousness, not Aboriginal Australians.

As an Aboriginal educator I am constantly reminding myself that I am asking non-Aboriginal students to transit one set of culturally grounded understandings and attempt to engage with another. Likewise, I am constantly reminding students that looking at literature produced from any cultural standpoint is not about dismissing it because it does not conform to their present understandings of that culture, nor is it about debating whether the representations and images within are the "higher truths" of that culture or not. Engaging with literature from other cultures is about asking yourself, as the reader, why this particular image or representation disrupts your present understandings of that culture and how you reached those understandings in the first place. In this way, literary images can move from sites of oppositional contestation to sites of mutual understanding in educational contexts.

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