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# The Representations of the Japanese in Contemporary Australian Literature

Megumi Kato\*

The end of the Pacific War, the lifting of the White Australia policy and the shift towards a more multicultural society from the 1970s in Australia brought changes in the relationship between Japan and Australia. Exchanges between Japan and Australia, beginning mainly for economic reasons, became more varied, with organisations such as the Australia-Japan Foundation beginning to coordinate cultural and educational interchanges. Japan's international, economic expansion generated a huge interest in promoting the learning of English language, which resulted in teachers of English from outside Japan being invited to Japan to teach, and Japanese students being encouraged to go overseas to study. Australia became a key supplier of language instructors, as well as a destination for Japanese students wanting to study abroad. Such interactions between their citizens were a new phenomenon in the history of the relationship between the two countries, thus offering new opportunities for Australian writers to experience and observe the Japanese in both countries.

Multiculturalism, which became established in Australia during the 1980s, gradually influenced both authors and readers in the way they identified with, and perceived their country, their society and themselves. In the post-modern, postcolonial environment in many parts of the world in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the universality of Eurocentric values were being questioned, while the values of minority groups were recognised as legitimate. Some of these values even became appreciated by the wider community. Such changes in Australian society and thinking in turn had an impact on Australian literature, with the emergence of writers from different ethnic backgrounds.

Since its colonisation by Britain, Australia has always tried to 'define' or 'invent' its own unique culture and literature. However, this definition was mostly along the line of its Anglo-Celtic, European heritage. In the 1980s, the line of this orientation broadened to include not only the North Western hemisphere but also the North Eastern hemisphere. Although Anglo-Celtic heritage was still dominant in the centre and that of so-called ethnic minorities were on the periphery, the situation was no

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\* 一般教育 助教授 英語

longer that of 'dominant centre' versus 'minor other'. It was, as Graeme Turner points out, a time when, with the development of multiculturalism as a stimulus, "literary theory and government social policy appear to have been more or less in step,"<sup>1)</sup> thus opening the way for people to look at those different from themselves — the 'other' — in a serious manner. With the changes going on outside Australia, mainly in North America with its ethnically plural society and minority based political movements, and the changes happening inside Australia, with new, changing patterns of immigration and the increase of population from the Asia-Pacific region, literature in Australia inevitably started to be seen from different perspectives, both by its creators and its readers.

In such an atmosphere, Japan provided a source of unique literary topics, different from those of the pre-war years. In post-colonial literature, where the formerly colonised re-examine themselves as well as the coloniser after the historical period of colonisation, mainstream writers in Australia tried to look at themselves as being both coloniser and part of the British colonised. Japan was for a long time an incomprehensible ally, then a possible/real invader and enemy. Now Japan had become an economic ally/enemy/invader for Australia. The master-subordinate relationship during and after the war, with fear, suspicion and misunderstanding on both sides, remained a characteristic of the relationship between Japan and Australia, although it was different from other post-colonial relationships. This 'difference' seems to be uniquely reflected in some literary works of the period.

The environment of the time accelerated the emergence of various authors in Australia writing on Japan, from professional to amateur, from experienced to superficial. The genres of their writings also varied from fiction to non-fiction, from crime to romance, from observation to hearsay. As Australian society became more ethnically plural and the presence of the Japanese was no longer unusual, the use of Japanese characters, even as protagonists, became less extraordinary in Australian writing. In such a context, authors writing about Japan can be categorised into groups according to their themes or positions: those who visited Japan on business or as travellers; those who stayed for a while as journalists, teachers and academics; those who chose to stay and work in Japan; and those who used the Japanese as ordinary characters be it in Australia, in Japan or elsewhere.

In this paper the different types of Australian authors in the 1980s and 90s are examined according to the above groupings. Would these authors present totally new images of the Japanese? Or, would they still be affected by the old biases held by their predecessors in early writings? What 'types' of Japanese are dominant as characters? When they employ Japanese figures how confident and sure are their characterisations? Are the Japanese characters 'authentic' when described in fictitious stories? Looking at what is new and what remains the same in the present

multicultural environment of Australian literature may help in the understanding, however partly, of the nature of contemporary Australian society.

## 1 Visiting Authors in Japan

With the rapid development of technology, interactions between Japan and Australia became more active than at any time since the end of the Second World War. This was especially so in the business field, with the rapid post-war recovery of both countries serving as the background. Despite the antagonism caused by the Pacific War, Japan became one of Australia's biggest trading partners and the relationship seemed to be smooth and controlled, with any personal and private feelings that may have existed being pushed below the surface. As Gerster puts it, businessmen became "the most visible of contemporary Western travellers in Asia".<sup>2)</sup> Soon after the war, businessmen from both countries were at the front line of this increased interaction. Each had the opportunity to observe and directly interact with the other.

Among those Australians visiting Japan on business, some are portrayed as conquerors revisiting to again conquer, just like the post-war occupation forces and the pre-war exploiters of the under-developed Japanese society. They may not be described as crudely as they were in pre-war or occupation stories, however, behind the official talk and business negotiations, they take the opportunity as visitors in an extraordinary situation away from home to behave in ways they would not normally. John Bryson and Robert Allen are among those writers who give unabashed pictures of such businessmen from Australia.

Bryson's "Whoring Around", a novelette from the book bearing the same title (1981), depicts how the protagonist tries looking for sexual adventures while in Japan on business. Japan again becomes the place where magical affairs could, or should happen, and where Westerners can live in a fantasy world of double standards. Humphrey, the protagonist, now an Honorary Treasurer of an exclusive tennis club in Australia, recollects his business trip to Japan. Even before his arrival, he tries to put his fantasies about women into practice at the first stop in Hong Kong. For Humphrey, to achieve sexual conquest is a way to show his virility, a form of revenge against his dominant and sarcastic wife as well as a reward for all his hard work.

Humphrey's obsession comically diverts to various mishaps, including an old masseuse, with "a wash-house authority" just like his aunt, and an American prostitute who takes him around Tokyo from a casino to a strip show. Such infatuation can be fatal to some, as Humphrey soon discovers when told about the tragic-comical death of an Australian man who accompanied young football players

during their sexual orgies in Japan. Humphrey's 'ambition' in Japan does not amount to anything. Instead he experiences "merely fragments of decay that made him apprehensive and wary", and eventually realises that his place is not next to a prostitute who is known to doormen and card-sharps and whose body is known to businessmen from thirty countries, but back in Australia where he belongs. (p.153) The author, Bryson, is a lawyer-turned writer, and perhaps through his observations of the Australian businessmen, he tries to portray a typical caricature, with Japan simply providing the backdrop.

Robert Allen, on the other hand, writes about such businessmen's opportunities from his own observations and experiences, thus giving a realistic feel to the encounters between Australians and the Japanese. In his *Tokyo no Hana* (1990) he depicts the education of an Australian called Andrew Paton into Japanese society, mainly on the topic of *hana* — of the 'flowers' — of the floating world. Paton's instructor is a plump old Japanese lady in kimono called Nakajima-sensei, his Japanese teacher. Through their comical interactions he learns about both Japanese customs and Japanese society. Although Paton is an outsider who does not try to become one of the locals, being a rather adaptable man in "exotic places", he does not intend to be totally outside, either. He finds himself "starting again from the bottom of the cultural ladder in a society" (p.1), a typical position for most outsiders from overseas in a seemingly homogeneous Japanese society. Paton's interest seems to lie in determining how to maintain the balance between how much one should commit himself and how much he should keep his distance, thereby taking as much advantage as possible by his status as an outsider. While being guided by his instructor in various places and situations, Paton seizes whatever opportunities presented themselves.

Paton observes many other foreigners in Japan, single and married, businessmen and their families, and their unusual and seemingly 'exotic' experiences. For many, Japan still remains somewhere far from home where the rules are different, and especially, an "Illicit Space where serial sex with unequal partners was what a Western man could expect." (p.188) Like Bryson's portrayal, Australian businessmen are described not as keen partners in business itself but rather as opportunists who are determined to take whatever they can from this different social context. This theme is not very different from what we have seen in the works of earlier authors, such as Pierre Loti or Carlton Dawe, a hundred years before.

In stories of this time, Japanese business counterparts also begin to appear, examples include John Brown's *Zaibatsu* (1983) and Peter Corris' crime novel *The Japanese Job* (1992). Japanese businessmen in these novels are depicted mainly as 'invaders' of Australia and its nearby neighbours, thus providing themes similar to

the invasion scare novels published in Australia early in the twentieth century. These novels will be discussed later in this paper.

Businessmen are not the only examples of characters depicted as using Japan as a land of fantasy. The tendency to regard Japan as a place where extraordinary things can happen, where different standards can apply and where one can move beyond one's ordinary self back home, can be observed in other writings. Ross Davy, in his novel *Kenzo: A Tokyo Story* (1985), tells the story of free attitudes toward homo/hetero sexuality among both Japanese and Europeans (Australian and American). As Broinowski points out, *Kenzo* may perhaps be among the first novels to describe male homosexual lovers in Australian writings on Asia.<sup>3)</sup> Because his characters do not belong to the 'normal' elements of society and their associated codes of behaviour in Japan, the author is able to let his characters behave more freely. However, at the same time, it appears that the author does not feel comfortable in describing Japanese homosexuality completely. In the middle of the novel the title character Kenzo dies leaving his homosexual lover alone, with the central character becoming an Australian language teacher called Linda.

When Linda becomes the centre of the story, she has already come under scrutiny as one of the many foreigners who go to Japan "to get away from modern narcissism", in which one has to have reasons and explanation for everything, with everyone trying to be a psychoanalyst or becoming a member of fanatic cult/therapy/self-help group. (p. 23) Through Zen, Linda believes she finds an answer. However, Kenzo sees it as "just a long or short passing phase" for her. Foreigners in Japan are only looking for novelty, which eventually usually ends up with the rejection of their own existence. *Kenzo* thus depicts the free-lance foreigners, escapees of Western society in Japan in the 1980s, looking for the answer or solution for their fantasies, only to find that they end up not belonging to either side.

Another author who chooses Japan as a place for self-discovery is Geraldine Hall. In her *Talking to Stranger* (1982) the protagonist Ebba, who is at her prime at the age of forty-nine and is torn between family claims both from her husband and her mother, finds an opportunity to look for her true self alone in Japan. With English and American seducers providing the cue, she is able to step out of her old self, gains a new insight into her being and starts to become an independent person. Japan here provides the female protagonist with an atmosphere and latitude to discover her 'self', something she cannot do in her own society back home.

The author Hall travelled in Europe and Asia, as did her predecessor Rosa Praed a hundred years before.<sup>4)</sup> Both their protagonists are critical of Australia and Western society in general, including complaints about the Australian male who is described as "a drunk, a snob, and a lout, having no idea beyond racing and the stock

exchange and treating women like chattels". Unlike Praed, however, Hall does not focus on real Japan. Her novel is set in such special places as the area near the Imperial Palace in Tokyo and the exquisite resort of Hakone, places which are described by Ebba as "quite, charming, polite, silent, neat and clean". These are not usual places for ordinary Japanese, either. Hall's aim evidently does not lie in observing and describing the 'different', but rather Japan is again adopted as a unique place, where despite the modern age, a Western woman can feel and act in a way free of the social codes of Australia which are still male-dominant.

Besides the temporary visitors, there are those who stay in Japan for an extended period of time, observing the differences between people and society, and in the process rediscover themselves. Ann Nakano, a journalist for the *Mainichi Daily News* in Japan for ten years, tells the story of a Western woman in Japan, of how she, herself as the 'other' in an alien country, copes with both work and private life in *Bit Parts* (1985). In this epistolary novel, much of which seems autobiographical, Nakano's protagonist Katherine undergoes several difficult phases—her brief and unsuccessful marriage to a Japanese man, unstable employment in journalism, a fragile relationship with another foreign correspondent and the subsequent unwanted pregnancy, her Catholicism and internal conflict with the idea of abortion, the birth of her son and eventual single-motherhood.

Through these events the protagonist reveals fundamental changes in human relationships in the modern era—such changes as non-committal affairs between men and women, the tendency to avoid or be reluctant to have a family, the "capitalistic indifference" of so-called friends to one another (p. 42), and so on. Japan as the background helps to more strongly emphasise these events and their consequences. Katherine admits that things are exceptional in Japan: "Japan is a haven for illusionists. We foreigners living on the periphery of Japanese society may be what we please". (p. 4) They are again away from normal Western codes, and they are able to act more spontaneously and freely. Tokyo, as Katherine puts it, "destratifies" them and makes them equal, thus enabling her to do things she would not normally be able to do, such as go out with Steve, who is from a different social class and whom she probably would not have met back home.

Katherine's attitudes toward Japan and the Japanese may be typical of those who come and stay in Japan. She thinks foreigners are valued, even though they may have no qualification or reasons to be, simply because they are able to sell their language. (p. 46) This belief leads to her cynical comment, when she observes and concludes that Japan is "the land of cultural transvestites, dressing up as Westerners when really beneath it all they are good old scrutable Orientals." (p. 8-9) She regards Japan as "a culturally unstable and spiritually poor country" as Mother Theresa puts

it. (p. 9) Katherine's initial motive for staying in Japan was to get away from the class-system and her unhappy family background in Derby. However, without any real effort to immerse herself in its society, she finds she is still alone and trapped by what she thinks she has left behind.

As the title shows, Katherine has to "pick up the shattered parts of her personality" (cover blurb) with Japan again providing a setting. Her story is personal and self-centred, more like a story of a woman's self-battle with little if any interest in observing and understanding the environment in which it takes place, or the people and things that are different. When the physical barriers are removed and it is easier to go and live in a country as different as Japan, the less valuable it may become to appreciate the opportunities available to see, recognise and absorb the 'other'. The aim of the author in this novel seems to be not the description of cross-cultural contact but rather of the friction between herself and all others, with Japan providing a unique backdrop in which this can be done.

Another woman's story of the 'self-battle' genre, set in an earlier period, is *Sayonara My Friend Love Annie* (1994) by Charlotte Manessen Mori. This is a memoir of the author about her friend Annie, both of whom are of Dutch origin living in Indonesia before and during World War II. In the form of correspondence, consisting mainly of the letters written over thirteen years from Annie, the book describes how Annie meets Osamu, a civilian Japanese engineer working for the war-time Japanese government in Indonesia, and how they form a relationship and secretly marry. When the war is over Annie accompanies Osamu back to Japan and it is here that her second battle for a life in a totally alien atmosphere starts.

The difficulties experienced by Annie are well chronicled throughout the book, from living in Japan as a foreigner married to a Japanese in the turmoil of the war's aftermath, with scarcity of food and goods, to being troubled by ill health due to tuberculosis. In the closed Japanese society, she often experiences "culture shock", and Japanese notions about abortion is one such example. As seen in Nakano's story, the author reflects on the more practical and less guilt filled attitudes towards abortion in Japan, an issue peculiar to these female authors, which in turn lets them reflect on their own culture's social and religious morals as well as their own feelings about those morals.

Annie's children, with half-Japanese and half-European heritage, cause anxiety and worry for her, as it is not yet a time when Japan is ready to accept such children. Not only Annie but also her children suffer from alienation, even from Osamu's own family, while Osamu himself is too busy supporting a big family with a foreign wife of a weak constitution to concern himself with their feelings.

Annie's observation of Japan and the Japanese is often bitter and penetrating. Their sense of humour is very different from hers. The Japanese people around her

are all private, formal and reserved. They are so group-oriented that it seems to her that such deeds as "Seppuku/Harakiri" (ritual disembowelment) or too much drinking may be a form of "self-denial". (p.84) A Japanese phrase, "shikata-ga-nai", (cannot be helped by oneself) again strikes Annie as typical, something that is also noted by other authors including Nakano who also lived among Japanese.

In the end Annie dies, hoping she and her family can migrate to Australia, a wish which is denied because of the Australian government's then immigration policy. The author decided to make Annie's story public in 1973, although it was not published for almost thirty years after Annie's death. Like war memoirs, stories like these seem to take many years for them to become known to wider reading audience. In 1947, about the same period of time as Annie's story, an Anglican priest and pacifist called Frank Coaldrake went to Japan with his wife as the first Australian civilians. They opened a mission in Odawara, and during this period kept rare documents of their observations of Japan and the Japanese soon after the war—newsletters, letters and articles together with photographs. It was not until 2003 that these materials were published by their son who had been born in Japan. These stories show that, however small, there were cross-cultural contacts at the grass-root level soon after the war.

Elizabeth Kata took Japan as the topic for her stories again after *Someone Will Conquer Them*, in which she described what it was like to live with the Japanese during the war and then after the war with the master-subordinate relationship reversed.<sup>5)</sup> If *Someone Will Conquer Them* was a direct response of Kata's own experience, her later stories are more detached and controlled. A long novel called *Kagami* (1989) depicts three generations of a scholar's family of a Samurai clan, before and after the Meiji Restoration (1868). The author's aim in the novel seems to be to show how a person, family, clan or whole society, despite being still caught within the old traditions, are forced to change as the tide turns and new knowledge and abundant goods and materials are introduced from outside. While they may still worship mythical Mt. Fuji and value the continuation of the family name, there emerges a new breed of Japanese who try to break out of the old mould. Examples in the story include a young man who tries to cut across a feudal lord's procession and is put to the sword, an ex-samurai who sees the limit of the power of such swords and starts a business, a young woman of class who tries to escape the ancient system by mixing with European visitors, and a nouveau riche who buys the title of nobility after the class system of the Edo period collapses. *Kagami* may be the first novel by an Australian author where only Japanese characters appear. Based on her own experiences among the Japanese, Kata seems confident in dealing with them as a people during one of the most dramatic and dynamic periods of



Japanese history, from the nineteenth to twentieth century, a time when Japan opened itself to the world.

One of Kata's short stories on Japan, published earlier than *Kagami*, also looks at Japan in the early twentieth century. It was a time when such scholars as James Murdoch from Australia and other European countries were actively involved in educating Japanese students, and Japanese society was more open and eager for foreign influence than the later period just before World War II. The characters of her story, "The House on the Hill", (from *With Kisses on Both Cheeks*, 1981.) nostalgically depict a family's life in Yokohama, the life of an English man and his Japanese wife living with their son, his Russian wife and her parents from Manchuria, their grandchildren, a Chinese cook and a Japanese assistant. This embodiment of the harmony of East-West simply collapses during the earthquake of 1923, which is then followed by a period when Japan once again starts to look inward.

A more recent resident in Japan, Roger Pulvers, writes about Japan and the Japanese from a different point of view, a difference that may derive from his own culturally rich experiences. Born in the United States into a Jewish family, educated both in the United States and Poland, learning both Polish and Russian, Pulvers eventually became an Australian citizen. Pulvers taught in both Japan and Australia, as well as writing novels and plays and directing them. As a resident in Japan, Pulvers had the chance to observe all kinds of Japanese, and as an outsider, he was able to analyse them and their behaviour, putting thoughts to paper.

In *The Death of Urashima Taro* (1980), using the Cowra breakout of the Japanese from the prisoner-of-war camp in Australia during the war and its consequence in present Japanese society, Pulvers describes a particular group of Japanese who express a strong degree of racial prejudice and have not fully accepted that Japan was defeated during the war. Here Pulvers even goes on to talk about the problematic issue concerning the responsibility of the Showa Emperor for the Pacific War. The protagonist Ron, a correspondent from ABC, tries to unveil the murder during the Cowra uprising, an activity which eventually leads to the discovery of a plot concerning how the war should be ended to protect the whole system of Japanese society. Ron's observation of the Japanese system, as an outsider trying to be inside, reveals how difficult it is to do such a thing. For Westerners including Ron, "everything is logic, thinking, the mind". For the Japanese, however, "everything is felt... [e] ven the mind is felt," and Ron is denied access to the people he wants to interview because no matter how long he stays in Japan, he "will never be a Japanese or understand [their] *nasake* (compassion, kindness, mercy)." (p. 44) This denial of outsiders by the Japanese is often noted by other authors, too,

including Kata, Nakano, and Caroline Shaw who will be discussed later.

This belief by the Japanese that they cannot be understood by outsiders, nor can they understand the outsiders themselves, is apparent when outsiders try to become 'insiders'. However, at the same time, many authors note Japan's desire to be seen as equal to Western society. This may be one of the reasons why criticisms on Japan by outsiders are widely read in Japan, as Pulvers points out in his *General Yamashita's Treasure*.

When Ron's attempt to uncover information about the murder cases, past and present, reaches the delicate issue about the war, his attempt meets all kinds of obstacles. He realises that "[t]he Japanese must never be confronted with the truth. If they are they will withdraw to the periphery, leaving nothing at the centre where all cause and responsibility reside". (p.96) As Broinowski points out, this is a "surrealistic masked drama"<sup>6)</sup> and there is no real enemy or entity to Ron's fear. He is lost and left for 'dead' as an outsider who wanted to know too much.

Pulvers' *General Yamashita's Treasure* (1994), written a little after *The Death of Urashima Taro*, was translated and published in Japan earlier in 1986, which indicates how the author had made Japan the focus of his literary activities. This story again adopts a war-related topic, this time the feud between an Australian and a Japanese starting from the time of the occupation of Japan. Again using a form of slapstick comedy, the author allows his Japanese protagonist Hirose to look back at the war and its aftermath.

Hirose was an interpreter, a go-between for the master and the subordinate during and after the war—for Japan in the Prisoner-of-War camp, and for the allied forces during the occupation of Japan and the Korean War. He regards himself as a tool of the perpetrator, saying he is "a victim, used by one side against another... [a] man dies, the executioner vanishes, and I alone, the interpreter, retain the memory." (p. 170)

Having been tormented by this middleman's burden, Hirose takes his revenge on Major Stick who after the war prides himself on being an expert on Japanese culture profiting by the Japanese appetite for criticism of themselves, and on ex-lieutenant-colonel Kakuta, who in war-time Manila hides treasure that he confiscated in the Philippines. By killing both of them Hirose is finally able to end the war for himself. In this novel Pulvers tries to look at the Pacific War from the Japanese point of view, which becomes possible both by the author's attempt to be an 'insider' and by contemporary circumstances, especially in Australia where a multicultural view point has become politically and socially accepted.

Another group of people who stayed in Japan for a period of time, and who wrote about their impressions of the country and its people were the academics. Such

descendents of James Murdoch include Humphrey McQueen, James Myers and Robin Gerster. Apart from their own academic education and research, they are able to write about their honest views on Japanese universities as institutions and as working places, and about the people working and studying there.

Gerster, in his *Legless in Ginza : Orientating Japan* (1999), tries to give an “idiosyncratic picture of Japan”, thus making the book “part travel, part personal and professional memoir, cultural study” (cover blurb) as well as a study of the travel experience itself. As an invited professor at Tokyo University from 1996–98, Gerster’s description of Japan ranges from the tiny apartment for public servants in Chiba prefecture, to the overcrowded commuter trains and drinking places in the middle of Tokyo.

Gerster’s reason to be in Japan as an academic is not for “fun and profit”, for it would “fall prey to Orientalist fancies of the gorgeous East, and goes to show how Japan, that paradigm of the ‘politically incorrect’, continues to stump even the most zealous post-colonialist.” (p. 12) He has gone to Japan simply for “a change as well as a challenge”. Like his predecessor McQueen, whose reason for his visit was “to see Australia better” (p. 12), Gerster finds himself in a situation of confronting Australia when he wants to get away from it. Like anyone in a foreign country, he becomes a representative for his country. He becomes concerned about how the news on Australia (almost always bad while he is there) is given a one-sided view. But he notes, too, how the same is true in Australia, as “Australian journalists have been prominent in promoting a gloomy picture of Japan”. Thus people in both countries have been forced to look mainly at negative images of each other portrayed by journalists, because they are sensational and eye-catching journalism, a situation similar to the image of Japan as a scary enemy-invader portrayed in the early twentieth century. (p. 106) Eventually “some things become clearer when seen from a distance” and his stay in Japan becomes a “ritual of reassurance” (p. 232) of Australia, as well as of Japan.

Gerster makes it clear that he is not an insider nor ever dreams of becoming one. Also without the language, he finds it hard and agrees with Harold Stewart when he says “expatriates in Japan exist in a ‘kind of social vaccum’”. (p. 221) However, again as Stewart has put it, Gerster becomes an “onlooker from the sidelines... but the observer sees most of the game”, (p. 221) and despite his lack of language, Gerster observes Japan and tries to define it in some ways as an outsider within the inside.

Gerster’s definition of Japan seems to reach a conclusion that the image of Japan is an elusive, ever-changing one. He cites Marilyn Ivy’s comment on Japan, that it “appears ubiquitous, nomadic, transnational by virtue of the nation’s global economic presence... Japan’s economic expansiveness is countered by a ‘national inwardness’, so that the country often seems to reinscribe old distinctions between

'East' and 'West'" (p.83), although he refuses to delineate the country this easily. For the author, Japan "challenges the representational 'hegemony' exercised by the Occidental imagination over the Oriental world, ... Its elusive character, by turns brazenly 'Western' and inscrutably 'Eastern', intrigues, perplexes and finally irritates the hell out of foreign observers". (p.84) Further he cites observations from people such as Basil Hall Chamberlain in the nineteenth century to the *Lonely Planet* of late twentieth century, suggesting that the West has a difficulty in forgiving Japan for outgrowing its image of the country by becoming industrialised and financially successful, and suggests that the West has tried to impose its own favourite picture on how it thinks Japan should be. (As probably the reverse is the same.)

## 2 Japanese Characters Seen in Australian Society

As Australian society becomes more ethnically diverse, more Japanese characters are included in Australian stories, as either major or minor figures. In past Australian writings, the Japanese were always a special topic, and such writing was often given a special category. During the 1980s and 1990s a Japanese presence in Australian society gradually became a common phenomenon, thus making Japanese characters in Australian writing a not unusual feature.

There are some works, which inevitably retain earlier images of Japan, such as Japanese as invaders of Australia, but this time it is not as physical or political invaders but rather as economic invaders. Peter Carey's *Illywhacker* (1985), the saga of three generations in Australia, ends with the protagonist Herbert Badgery's grandson Hisao becoming a worldwide salesman of Australian animals, as a Japanese company takes over their pet shop. In Australian business history, when the first generation like Herbert tried to produce and sell nationally made airplanes and cars, Australians wanted to buy the British or American made products. The second generation were more practical, and Charles, Herbert's son, opened a pet shop selling exotic animals overseas, an enterprise supported by American capital. As the third generation Hisao is an efficient salesman, not only of animals but also of human beings in Australia, with capital support from the Mitsubishi Company. The author himself was once an advertiser in the business community and so is able to realistically describe Australian dependence on foreign capital, especially on Japanese capital in the post-war years.

The Japanese and business in Australia becomes the topic of other writers, such as John Brown and his novel *Zaibatsu* (1983). Brown, with his own twenty-seven years of experience in Papua New Guinea working initially with the Australian Administration and then, after independence with the PNG government before becoming a full time writer in Australia, examines the Japanese passion and

persistent interest in the island during and after the war. Although Japanese characters are presented as 'evil' with nefarious ambitions, while the Dutch and Australians are 'good', the issue becomes complicated through the local Papua New Guinean unrest over the annexation of West Papua (Irian Jaya) to Indonesia. Australia, as well as Japan, is partly responsible for the unrest, as both countries had their own political and economic agenda in mind by their reluctance to intervene. In *Zaibatsu* (meaning a conglomerate), Japan's financial power succeeding its military power in the Asia-Pacific region is emphasised, and while the Japanese characters are not given full character descriptions, they still play an important role in the story.

A more direct invasion by the Japanese in Australia is depicted in John Lynch's *The Proposal* (1995). Lynch was a senior public servant and later for many years a consultant whose speciality was in tourism and trade issues. The author used his knowledge of the relationship between Japan and Australia as a resource for his story. In the novel, a place called Acacia Point has been targeted by the Japanese to be made into a big resort. The Japanese side, again a big company with cold-blooded entrepreneurs, tries to take over the place, while on the Australian side are an assortment of people with a variety of motives, including a stubborn ex-POW parish priest against any development, Aboriginals who worship the place as sacred, an eco-conscious artist who wants publicity for herself, a real-estate developer hoping for as much profit as possible, a Chinese resident who believes the opposition is based on racism, bureaucrats in Canberra who need the investment, and a journalist who wants a sensational scoop to further her own career.

The Japanese are described generally as one-sided, as their role is principally that of invaders. However, the Japanese sub-protagonist called Kurosawa, the head of the entrepreneurs, goes beyond ordinary negotiation and talks with opposing Australians as an individual. In the end Kurosawa, after becoming acquainted with the local residents, decides to leave and the place is saved from being a Japanese resort/territory. This novel was published at the time of the unsuccessfully planned multifunction-polis in Adelaide, thus revealing a certain degree of anxiety in Australia about Japanese development in Australia at the time.

Peter Corris' crime novel *The Japanese Job* (1992), one of the Pokerface series with Ray Crawley as the detective, also adopts the theme of Japanese ambition in Australia. The Japanese plan to build a skyscraper in Brisbane is halted with the murder of the head of the Japanese company by a group called "the Diggers". Crawley investigates the case, confronting interference both from Canberra and from the Japanese. He is aided by a Japanese-American woman called Kurosawa, typically young, beautiful and fluent in English, just like the Japanese woman helping an agent in *Little Blue Pigeon* by A. G. Hales almost a hundred years before. Although

the Japanese characters are once again described from a one-sided perspective, and conveniently named after internationally famous real figures (like Kurosawa and Ohira), they start to interact with Australians, thus giving real images to Australian readers even if it is as villains. At the end of the story Crawley solves the murder, however, he is unable to uncover the whole affair, for both he and his enemies are all puppets of the higher ranks and victims of the company, the government and the nation.

The Pacific War still casts a shadow over the story of the relationship between Japan and Australia. Like the 'Diggers' in Corris' novel who feel very bitter about a second wave of 'invasion' by the Japanese, there still remains suspicion and antagonism about the former enemy as well as memories of those hard days. In David Malouf's *The Great World* (1990) two protagonists, Digger Keen and Vic Curram go to the war, become acquainted, and form a strong bond of mateship. Nourished by their experience as prisoners of war, their relationship lasts into the 1980s. As a result of the harshness of Japanese camp order, their bond remains strong even though their paths take very different directions in the post-war period. The author acknowledges that he owes a lot in describing the POW camp to such memoirists and writers as Stan Arneil, Hank Nelson and Edward Dunlop, and incorporates several episodes from their stories, thus helping give a vivid picture of two Australian men during the war.

Malouf himself has no real battle experiences, and despite the vivid descriptions of the hard life in Malaya during the war, he retains a balanced view and does not portray all the Japanese characters as villains. The POW experiences seem to be the chance for both characters to recognise and develop their own ideas and goals, which eventually affect their life after the war. Vic, who was young and dependent on Digger, becomes a tough survivor and tries against all odds to climb up the social ladder, while Digger tries to suppress his feelings and live quietly, with the only consolation being from his deceased soldier-mate's sister-in-law. While Japan and the Japanese are not the main topics in the novel, they provide a place and time in the story for the characters to develop.

Steven Carrol writes about a relationship between an Australian interpreter and a Japanese woman during the occupation of Japan in *Momoko: A Novel of Betrayal* (1994). In the story a naïve young Australian called Spin, once clad in the uniform of authority of the occupation force, tries to conquer everything including the Japanese girl's full attention. He has "never known the onset of defeat, is full of enthusiasm and liveliness and feeling they have moral superiority and odd sense of power" against the occupied. (pp. 49-50)

bombing of Tokyo by the B-29s which burned forty percent of Tokyo and claimed almost a hundred thousand people's lives. She retains detached, cynical views of both enemy and ally, West and East as well as the old traditions and the new system. Although they form a relationship, for Momoko it is an act of liberation. Spin's obsessive and possessive attitudes soon invite disillusionment and disappointment. Spin, despite his role as an interpreter who should be able to understand both sides and be a go-between, is unable to see the other side clearly. When Momoko leaves him he believes he has been betrayed, when in fact it is Spin who betrays her trust in him by failing to answer to Momoko's expectations. The power relationship is evident in the story, however, it does not work on the individual level. Carroll's story seems to suggest that there is difficulty in forming a relationship without knowing the 'other' well.

During the 1980s and 1990s, more writings with Japanese characters, which were not necessarily war-related, started to appear. Such authors as Brian Castro, Nancy Corbett, Kim D'ono and Clive James tried to use Japanese as the main or sub characters in their novels. Among them, D'ono, originally from North Korea, is one of very few Asian writers writing in English in Australia since the 1970s, while Castro has complex and 'hybrid' family background.<sup>7)</sup>

D'ono's earlier novel called *Password* (1974) was about a Chinese intellectual who, after the fall of Nanking, finds himself in a dilemma when he comes under the Japanese military's command. In the *Chinaman* (1983), D'ono tells the story about a Japanese student in Australia and the physical and emotional hardship he experiences during a voyage on a yacht with other Australians. Jo-bu, the protagonist, is nicknamed 'Joe' because Dean, an Australian taking Japanese lessons from Joe, maintains: "in this fair country of ours, we've got to have fair sounding names, don't we?". (p.12) As this is also a time when Japanese investment in Australia is high, Joe is forced to listen to crude comments about Japan and the Japanese by the other Australian crew. Furthermore, Joe finds it very uncomfortable to hear the crew's cry "kill the chinaman" when a fish called "Chinaman", the most poisonous one in the reef, appears.

Eventually Joe realises several things: "that not shared but separate realities make living together possible, and that not sharing but the destiny of that march itself is the primary question". (p.71) He furthermore realises his predecessor called Lee, who wrote about his experiences as an early Asian in Australia, is right about what it is like for Asians in Australia: "a revolution can change a government overnight, but what revolution would change the soul of man, what could change the shape of [their] love?" In the book Joe is reading, Lee insists that "the issue is not how not to be a racist but how to be a racist well", because racism is part of the ability to

discern differences which make the idea of an individual possible. (p. 115)

This story has two protagonists, with Lee's story incorporated into Joe's, with both of them telling their own stories on how they find their own way to cope with the racism they experience and survive in Australian society with its mainstream Western influence. Lee, trapped in his own pessimism, finds no way to solve his dilemma and his attempt to "undermine the Western culture" by his writing fails, resulting in him killing himself. Joe, his reader, is still searching, but is far from finding the answer. In fact the people around Joe are also in an ambiguous state of mind. They are vague about whether they are content with being Australian, and thus try to escape their reality by cruising a boat in the reef or visiting a Buddhist congregation in the mountains behind Cairns. As the name of the yacht "Quovadis" — 'whither goest thou' — shows, the novel seems to suggest people both of the mainstream and of the periphery keep looking for guidance to find their own position in the contemporary world.

Problems between East and West are also the topic of Brian Castro's *Stepper* (1997). This story is based on a real spy called Richard Sorge from Germany who served as a spy for the Soviet Union in Japan in the 1930s, and who was eventually caught and executed in 1944. In Castro's novel, Stepper believes that the East-West relationship can be best formed through the relationship between man and woman, something he practices and uses in his mission. Without claiming any concrete nationality and identity (although he does his job for communism's sake), Stepper is always on the border, coming and going between East and West, Japan and Germany/USSR, love and flirtation. He is solitary, and even when the only woman in whom he finds a kindred spirit wants their child, he refuses because it "will be a hybrid. Won't belong anywhere; like [him]. Look damned funny... The world's not right for that yet". (p. 147) Being a spy between cultures, Stepper does not belong to either side, nor does he claim any identity, trying to deceive both sides for his own survival. Set in Japan before and during the war and using both Japanese and other nationalities but not Australians, *Stepper* seems to offer another example of diversity both in themes and settings in contemporary Australian literature, raising still unresolved questions of people's perception of 'self'.

Clive James' novel *Brrm! Brrm!* (1991) is set in England, also away from Australia, with a Japanese man as its main character. Suzuki is the 'butt' of many jokes because of both his name, which is the same as the motor-bike company, as well as his inadequacy in the English language and his cultural misbehaviour. James portrays Suzuki as a person of contradiction: as a graduate of Tokyo University he is an intellectual, but he looks 'dumb' because of his slowness in spoken English. He has pride in Japan and the East but wants to become like Westerners. He is polite



and patient with English people but ignorant of history, such as the atrocities committed by the Japanese during the war. Through his martial art skills he is strong but he is always picked upon and bullied because he is a foreigner. He seems to easily gain favours from girls but ends up becoming obedient to them. In this way, James tries to portray the incomprehensible Japanese from many different angles.

While this novel is a comedy, behind the comic scenes James seems to raise serious topics of concern, such as the existing racism in England including that by police officers against Asians, as well as the Japanese's own biased comments against Europeans. James' father, like Robin Gerster's, had battle experiences with the Japanese, and James' father was a prisoner of war in Changi prison. Nevertheless, James, like Gerster, tries to keep a fair attitude towards his characters, partly because of his "fondness for Japan" and partly because of his ability to use his imagination understand the impact of the fire raids and bombs over Japanese towns and cities.<sup>8)</sup> Like Malouf and Pulvers, we see the shadow of war cast over James' novel. However James, as a member of the post war generation, also seems to be able to maintain a balanced and fair attitude toward the Japanese characters.

Japanese characters are sometimes portrayed with less restraint and hesitation by female authors. One such writer is Nancy Corbett, and in her "boldly imaginative"<sup>9)</sup> novel called *Floating* (1986), two women characters, Australian and Japanese, are destined to meet, because of their former lives during the Edo Period in Japan. Hannah, an Australian dancer, realises she is a reincarnation of a Tayu, the highest ranked courtesan with great dancing skills, while Hanako, a Japanese model, has also inherited the Tayu's talents. Hannah's name sounds like 'Hana', the Japanese name for flower, while Hanako's name means 'flower', thus suggesting their heritage as ones admired in the 'floating world'. They inevitably fall in love with the same man, and during the tug-of-war in their triangle relationship, they eventually realise their identical fate and recognise each other as one.

Corbett juxtaposes the Tayu's episodes with contemporary ones, thus showing that women face difficulties in oppressive societies, be they in the eighteenth or the late twentieth century. Examples include the refusal of Hanako's immigration application to Australia by the authorities because of her sex and age, and the difficulty the Tayu faced at the 'Sekisho'—a checkpoint designed to check female travellers in Japan during the Edo period. This novel is a romance with Japanese tradition and history as its spice, and it creates an exotic atmosphere of a fantasy world which befalls an ordinary Australian woman. Although the ideas of reincarnation and destiny sound unrealistic in mainstream Australian society, the fact that a novel where Japanese characters—both past and present—are main

characters, show changes in Australian society.

Another female writer of crime novels, who introduces the Japanese as key characters, is Caroline Shaw. In her Lenny Aaron series, *Cat Catcher* (1999) and *Eye to Eye* (2000), Dr. Sakuno, Lenny's psychiatrist and zen instructor, plays an important role in maintaining her mental stability as a detective. Lenny is a cat-catcher-detective in Melbourne who is also an ex-police officer. She suffers from the after effect of a traumatic attack by a criminal, in which her arm was injured. To relieve the trauma she is on a number of different drugs, mainly aspirin and other analgesics, a habit which is just on the verge of being illegal. In order to make herself less dependent on such drugs, she seeks guidance from the Japanese instructor.

This rather comical doctor-instructor Sakuno, who believes that "to be the Japanese is the highest form of life on this planet," tries to teach Lenny how to become Japanese, by growing bonsai, drinking Japanese tea, and meditating on tatami mats. The reason Lenny goes for Sakuno is because of his 'difference'. Sakuno values action more than discussion, and does not give Lenny any sympathy. A loner with a complex background, including an abusive family and the hard life of a policewoman, Lenny needs Sakuno's indifference and bold honesty. Among Lenny's other neighbours, which include a hairdresser from Russia and a porn-shop owner with a strong northern English accent, Sakuno fits easily into the multicultural city life of Melbourne, a place where many people like Lenny lose their orientation and seek guidance from other religions, thoughts, and cultures.

Shaw lived in Japan for some time, with one of her visits subsidised by AsiaLink from Melbourne University. Travel grants like this seems to help authors who wish to experience the 'other', and which eventually result in enabling them to make the 'other' part of their own society.

### 3 Short Stories and Plays

Apart from novels, there also emerged a number of short stories and plays by Australian writers during the 1980s and 1990s, which included Japan and the Japanese as their subject. These works portray various authors' experiences in Japan and/or their contact with the Japanese, as well as their interest in things Japanese. Plays, being a physical art, produced for an audience, attract a different kind of attention from that of books. With the direct interaction of producers, directors and actors between Japan and Australia, supported by both public and private funds, Australian plays on Japan have been performed in both countries, often resulting in the publication of the scripts.

dramatic changes going on around them caused by globalisation, advances in computer technology and the presence of more visual methods for mass audiences, seem to try to dig “deeply into their personal and communal experience to show continuities as well as discontinuities of contemporary living”, by asking how one’s sense of belonging and alienation is affected or how one’s sense of identity becomes dislocated.<sup>10)</sup> In such an atmosphere, some writers use Japanese places and people to help examine their own self and society in a brief, intense short form.

In a story called “The Bonsai Nursery”,<sup>11)</sup> Alison Dell sees rows of bonsai as the symbol of conformity in Japanese society, and then superposes her own childhood on this image. She compares herself, an unconventional child, to bonsai, which are thrown away when they outgrow certain forms. Chris Doran expresses his uneasy and helpless feelings in meeting an English-teaching Japanese woman, a self-outcast in Japanese society, too old to be married and left on the shelf like a “Christmas-cake” after Christmas Day.<sup>12)</sup> The protagonist himself is acutely aware that he does not belong there, although that is where he has ended up for the moment.

Moya Ellis’ “Feathers”<sup>13)</sup> describes the decadent and destructive life of foreign girls working at drinking places in Japan. They are drifters in Japan, where they can earn easy money by selling their ‘otherness’. Pam Harvey writes about a woman’s search for her lost brother, supposedly living like a hermit in Kyoto.<sup>14)</sup> She is a photographer, but realises the pictures of her brother do not convey what he really thinks and feels, and knows that the brother away from home in Kyoto may be the true person underneath, a person unknown to her and her family in Australia.

Sexual encounters between one and the ‘other’ are still favoured as a topic. In “Tasuma-san”,<sup>15)</sup> Bruce Grant, in a comical conversation between a professional Australian woman and a Japanese customer over the telephone, shows a new form of sexual conquer of East by West. The Japanese man is desperate for sympathy from the woman to fill the void in his family life, trying to talk to her in his clumsy English.

In Robert Drewe’s “Life of a Barbarian”,<sup>16)</sup> the situation is reversed and a businessman from Sydney tries to recover from the disappointment of his shattered family life. Pond, the protagonist, is discouraged because of his only son’s choice to become a member of the Hare Krishna and his wife’s associated bitterness. He seeks comfort from professional women when he goes to Japan on business, but is never given any sympathy, nor pseudo-love. Japan was always an enemy for his father, even after the war, and Pond realises the reverse is true for the Japanese, too. Although the distance between Japan and Australia seems to become shorter, the mental distance between people is not easily overcome.

The form of short stories seems to provide these ex-expatriate writers with a

chance to talk not only about the Japanese but also about themselves. Such short stories are written to record both the impact and impressions of the 'other', as well as the redefinition of themselves.

Plays also do a similar thing. Beside such plays as Pulvers' "Yamashita" whose topic is the recollection of the war between Australia and Japan, there appear a number of other plays with diverse topics, ranging from a remake of *Madam Butterfly* by Daniel Keene's *Cho-Cho San*, (1987) to a new type of play based on the contemporary relationship between Australia and Japan in tourism.

Anna Broinowski describes the cultural gap between Australia and Japan in a play about an Australian guide for Japanese tourists in *The Gap*. (1995) The guide eventually realises that being a tour guide is delicate work and that she needs to be a "buffer" for the Japanese tourists who encounter Australian ways for the first time. The 'middleman's burden' falls on such occupations in this globalised time.

John Romeril, after describing the depth of the mental wound of an ex-prisoner-of-war in *The Floating World*, revives the eighteenth century text of Monzaemon Chikamatsu, a playwright for Kabuki and Joruri—dramatic narratives—in the modern Australian environment. The play, being rather illogical and dreamlike in a way similar to Nancy Corbett's *Floating*, draws the protagonists together, a bankrupt Australian businessman and a Japanese bride-to-be engaged to the wrong man. Their fate, which brings them together, also brings about their own ends. A double suicide out of love is not usually a popular subject in Western literature, and this experimental play by Romeril provides a new dimension in Australian drama.

The diversity of authors, both visitors to Japan and recipients of Japanese visitors, as well as the diversity of genres, has, as we have seen, given contemporary Australian literature many different ways to describe Japan and the Japanese. Political, economic, and demographic changes in Australian society appear to have allowed such diversity to grow and have encouraged more experimental works to be written. As the form of short story has given many writers a chance to tell their own experiences, more non-professional Australian writers have also started to write and publish their stories about Japan. Examples include Cynthia Menadue, the wife of former Ambassador to Japan, and her *Ambassador's Wife—Minshuku Tour*, which was translated and published in Japan in 1983. *Encounters with Japan: Twenty Extraordinary Stories* which was published both in Japan and in Australia in 1994, shows that different people have different experiences of their encounter with Japan and provides simple and straight-forward ideas and opinions about Japan and its people.

This variety in contemporary Australian writings on Japan and the Japanese has contributed toward enriching Australian literature, not just as one form of English literature, but rather as a literature of us all. These writings on Japan and the Japanese will perhaps contribute further to enhancing and enriching the themes of the novels and stories by Australian 'professional authors', which, as examined in this paper, still mostly fall prey to the old stereotypes and patterns. Such patterns and stereotypes are an easy form for many stories, and give a sense of comfort not only to authors but also mainstream readers. On the other hand new forms of writings are now being attempted. Such writings, together with the writers themselves, will continue to interact and influence each other, and in turn help expand Australian literature into a more multicultural and diversified form.

## [Notes]

- 1) Graeme Green, "Film, Television and Literature", *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, p. 353.
- 2) Robin Gerster, *Hotel Asia*, p. 410.
- 3) Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, p. 184.
- 4) On Praed and her writings see my "Madame Izàn: Butterflies and the Incomprehensible Japanese", *Interactions: Essays on the Literature and Culture of the Asia-Pacific Region*, pp. 164-170.
- 5) On *Someone Will Conquer Them* see my "Senso to Hanayometachi: Dai Niji Taisen to Nichi Go Kankei (2)" ("War and Brides: Japan-Australia Relationship and World War II", in Japanese), *The Southern Hemisphere Review*, v. 19, pp. 25-34.
- 6) Broinowski, op. cit., p. 71.
- 7) Brian Castro, *Writing Asia and Auto/Biography: Two Lectures*, pp. 6-7.
- 8) Gerster, *The Australian Book Review*, January. 1997, p. 17.
- 9) Wilde, et. al. eds., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, p. 192.
- 10) Bruce Bennett, *Australian Short Fiction: A History*, p. 225.
- 11) *Redoubt*, 7/8 Nov. 1989, pp. 1-6.
- 12) "Christmas Cake", *Westerly*, v.38, no. 4, Summer, 1993, pp. 90-101.
- 13) *Westerly*, v. 27, no. 1, March 1982, pp. 5-6.
- 14) "Searching Kyoto", *Westerly*, Autumn, No. 1, 1996, pp. 72-74.
- 15) *Overland*, no. 117, 1990, pp. 44-47.
- 16) *The Bay of Contented Men*, 1989, pp. 147-167.

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