# AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE: DYNAMICS AND DILEMMAS OF THE SELF

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CONSIDERABLE theoretical debate has focused upon the formation of identity and theories of the self. The influence of post-structuralism, postmodernism, and psychoanalysis inflected with structural linguistic thought, has given this debate a focus upon agency. In addressing these fundamental ontological and phenomenological questions, we are concerned not so much with the concept of the self but with the notion of the subject. The term 'subjectivity' does not so much refer to a person or an individual will, but to a process of identity or ego formation. In this, subjectivity becomes a signifying stance effected by the intervention of the phallic third term. It is a rupture of the otherwise dyadic relationship with the mother and the maternal realm. It is a position of enunciation subsequent to both oedipal resolution and specular identification of the self-image. It is a symbolic position through which the subject participates in the social and circulatory network of exchange.

In accordance with the ontological insecurity of these contemporary philosophies, the subject has been irrevocably displaced from any previous position of supremacy. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, the decentring of identity effected by philosophers such as Nietzsche, Marx, Freud and Lacan is tantamount to no less than 'an intellectual revolution'[1] in the face of a prevailing Cartesianism. Quite simply stated, after the work of these theorists, the 'I' of Western consciousness would never again be the same. It would never again be central, in control, fully conscious and secure in its own knowledge. In the words of Jacques Lacan:

> for a long time thinkers, searchers, and even inventors who were concerned with the question of the mind, have

> over the years put forward the idea of unity as the most important and characteristic trait of structure.[3]

However, he continues, 'the idea of the unifying unity of the human condition has always had on me the effect of a scandalous lie'.[4]

The subject, then, is now understood to be divided: improvisational, indeterminate, and discontinuous with itself. This new emphasis upon subjectivity rather than a homogenous notion of the self has allowed for a widening of the concept of division otherwise seen in criticism to date. As a consequence, identity can now be understood as being alienated through specular misrecognition, and split through signification given the subject's enslavement to the metonymy of the signifier. The subject is one who is separated from the 'real' of corporeal reality and trapped in the concatenated networks of representation. It is held captive by desire and determined by the negotiation of repressed wishes and unfulfillable demands. This subject is at the mercy of unconscious or semiotic forces originating from within, and subordinate to alterity from without. The ego no longer depends upon its own intentionality or conscious will but on the introjected and projected images of the other for its continued maintenance. All in all, this subject or newly-understood self is decentered, fragmented, splintered and split.

Whilst the split subject has become the mainstay of contemporary philosophical debate, what effect have theories of the self had upon literary scholarship or the critical appraisal of literary texts? The relevance of the theorised self for literary criticism may be most obvious in the context of the postmodern text in which self-reflexivity, shifting narrative voices and viewpoints, temporal confusion and non-linear plot development reveal the overt presence of a decentred subjective stance. However, there are other less obvious candidates for analysis; literatures which appear to have other orientations but which stand to gain from these contemporary notions of the self, texts with an altogether different intention and implied audience but which nonetheless exemplify the current crisis of the 'I'. Multicultural writing in Australia is one of these literatures, a body of writing in which radical notions of the subject are made manifest in the text. This may not be altogether surprising given Julia Kristeva's positing of a causal relation between the exile of immigration and the internalised otherness of the subjective stance. In *Strangers to Ourselves* she writes: 'one becomes a foreigner in another country because one is already a foreigner from within'.[5] If this be so, a fruitful coupling of theories of

subjectivity and the multicultural text might be expected, and the question arises: does the psychic state of the immigrant mirror the generic dislocation of the decentered self?

This paper will examine this very conjunction of the theorised split subject and the multicultural text. The focal point for analysis will be the self and subjective identity as it is imaged in the literature; however, it will be argued that although this identity is contextualised within or marked by an identifiable cultural diversity, in fact it embodies and illustrates the uncertainties inherent within much wider notions of the decentered self.

From the earliest days of post-war immigration into Australia, multicultural writing has been a potential site of challenge to the British-colonial Australian norm. Able to present the unsavoury realities of building a new life in Australia, multicultural texts could tell of deprivation and discrimination in pursuit of the great Australian dream – the kind of financially and psychologically secure life to which Australians aspired. Writers who chose not to neutralise their ancestry could find ways to analyse the complex question of personal and national or cultural identity. The impact of immigration and the lasting effects of cultural dislocation could be illustrated, 'hyphenated' identity could be explored. A space for cultural icons and stereotypical images to be displaced (at least momentarily) could be created, a different image of Australia could be portrayed. In multicultural writing Australia and the Australian national identity could no longer be a singular, mono-cultural fact.

Whilst these and other identifiable characteristics may function as overt points of resistance, it is my contention that there is another way in which a crisis of identity has been portrayed. Whilst the texts may have destabilised the notion of a singular Australian national or cultural identity, I would argue that what has also been questioned, even if inadvertently, is *any* singular notion of self. Perhaps the psychological effects of immigration or the lived experience of cultural diversity are so fundamental, they bespeak a broader existential doubt. If so, what begins as the subversion of one type of unified, definitive identity in effect undermines the entire notion of identity as unified and definitive in itself. In this, the Australian multicultural text embodies and externalises the contemporary crisis of the self.

Witness an apparent preoccupation with the ego or one's own sense of self. This keen, almost painful, self-consciousness of the speaker can be heard in Monaldo Marinelli's 'The Road':

Under this sun I pant
Sun without air
I drag my body
Memories crowd my mind
Sultry day without wind
My temperature is rising
Parched is my mouth
I no longer feel my feet
Already I am here
Then I think
I don't know what to say
The tongue is dry
It strikes on the palate
I go back
The tongue echoes on the lips
I go back
I feel the frost grip my skin
Then I think
But I am here.'

The humidity, the stifling heat, references to the skin, the flesh, breath, the physical perception of existence – all these contextualise the speaker's presence within the material, the corporeal base of the self. Interspersed are workings of the mind – memories, questions, self-awareness - in an inverted cogito where bodily perception precedes thought. There is a distinct sense of insecurity as the speaker's mind is rendered inarticulate next to the powerful perception the body can provide. The once-supreme faculties of reason are shown to be losing their grip.

Similarly concerned with a deteriorating ego is Alba Romano's poem 'Night and Snow'.[7] The first stanza also positions the ego within the sensual realm:

Tonight there's cold, nothing but cold
Deep snow and absent moon
Just myself and the track of my footprints.

Yet, unlike in Marinelli's piece in which there are no external determinants, here there are fixed points of reference against which the self can be seen. The trouble is, however, that the external world is alien, and only serves to highlight the estrangement felt:

The offensive warmth of golden light
that spills from anonymous windows

illuminated worlds that ignore me.

A palpable sense of detachment is created by the tangible quality of the imagery and this severs the speaker from any relation to communal life. This relegates the speaker to invisibility, and the intention and will with which the self is normally associated fades within the speaker's mind:

> I walk without purpose or destination
> The night does not sense me and the trees do not see me
> No system includes me.

The final stanza shows continuing self-disintegration, and a loss of confidence that threatens to diminish the speaker to an unnamed, inconsequential imitation of his or her former self:

> Doubting my being and my name
> I look back, and existence
> is confirmed by deep footprints,
> ridiculous alternating impressions.

Similar sentiments feature in Frane Pervan's 'Said He" and Zoja Kohut's 'Do Not Ask ...',[8] poems in which existential questions are put more directly and without the embellishment of rhetorical device:

> Who and why am I?
> Do not exactly know,
> May be that I am something and nothing,
> But do not know is there either
> Something or nothing at all
> Who and why am I then! ...
> I ask myself over and over again
> Who and why and what am I?
> God tell me."
> Do not ask why you live, with what aim
> Your soles trudge, while the miles mount behind them ...
> Look around you, poor wretch: can you claim
> Life has meanings and you have divined them?[9]

In a very different vein, Franco Paisio's short poem cleverly demonstrates the arbitrariness of any one individual identity. Simply named 'Autobiography',[10] the piece functions by way of an opposition between a distinct awareness of self and the knowledge that this self is in some fundamental way empty. The tone is neutral and the speaker uninvolved. The only fixed point of reference is the date of birth. The

ultimate determinant is that which brings most angst: death. A disturbing vacancy surrounds the proper name; the conscious data an individual has about him or herself which normally constitutes the ego is, in this case, missing. The qualifiable, knowable information which characterises a self to a self is conspicuously absent.

Franco
Paisio
Open parenthesis
One thousand
Nine hundred
Thirty six
Dash
Leave a space
To be filled in
Later
Close parenthesis
Full stop.

These poems are concerned with the very determinants of subjectivity. Nomenclature,[12] self-consciousness,[13] the ego,[14] are all theorised aspects of the self, and they all appear as subject matter in these poems. Phenomenological determinants are similarly explored: the senses, distance, the gaze, motility and intentionality[15] and the role spatiality plays in the formation of the self.[16] Seen in this wider context of psychological and phenomenological determinants of subjectivity, the paralysis and turmoil imaged in these poems gains added significance. The alienation, sense of disintegration, differing levels of consciousness, and self-doubt evident in these works can now be seen as indicative of the psychic dynamics and dilemmas all subjects must endure. The poems no longer need be seen as describing an immigrant self or multicultural identity, but instead be seen to be illustrating the existential crisis of subjectivity itself.

The use of mirror images in the literature may be seen to illustrate the dynamics by which the subject is alienated through specular misrecognition. Lacan's account of the mirror stage,[17] the developmental phase instrumental in the formation of the ego, is renowned for explaining the apprehension of self through identification with a reflected image. This refers to the moment in which the infant first glimpses his or her own reflection in a mirror; however, it is an identification built upon misrecognition or what Lacan terms 'meconnaissance'. The imago appears in the form of a gestalt that is discor-

dant with the infant's actual lived experience, which is one of motor incoordination and a bodily experience of fragmentation due to the 'fœtalisation' or specific prematurity of the human infant at birth. In addition, the image is inverted or reversed through the symmetry of reflection, and there is imaginary triumph in anticipating a degree of muscular control which the infant has not yet achieved. Thus the ego is predicated upon structural division; the discrepancy between the imago and the actual lived experience structures this agency from this moment on - and forever - as alienated.

Ivana Serdarevic's 'My Mirror'[18] portrays this narcissistic, libidinal relation in which the subject is simultaneously present and absent, or, as Lacan puts it, 'symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination'.[19]

> I am looking in a mirror
> I only see the shadow of my inner being
> Through the dust of silver mist
> My breath is blocking my view
> I am supposed to be here?
> But that's not true.

The self-image partly eclipsed may reflect the fact that from the specular moment onwards, the image regulates the relation of the individual to his or her own body. Further to this, the fact that specularisation predetermines the ego to be in a state of exile and in constant pursuit of an illusory unity which lures the subject away from his or her actual self becomes evident in the stanza which follows:

> Only empty space is what I can feel
> What I can touch
> Wandering, lost in the limelight of times
> Gone past.

Soon we realise that somehow there is someone else involved:

> To find you is not a game
> To find you is a must

Unusual as this interruption may seem, it accords with the function of the mirror phase as the advent of alterity, as that which introduces the infant to an otherness within and external to itself. As Lacan states, 'It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other'.[20] The presence of this anonymous other is obvious in the poem:

I am looking in a mirror
My shadow is you.

The identification with the other means the specular is the moment which foreshadows future social relations, and what Lacan calls 'the deflection of the specular *I* into the social *I*' [21] appears in the final stanza of Serdarevic's poem:

I know you are not gone
You are here to protect me
Your face becomes my view
Whilst a golden ray of sun at last
silently shines through.

The optimism with which the poem concludes and the sense that strength comes by way of the other reaffirms the notion that the specular image discontinuous with itself is, indeed, the lasting self.

Similar implications are to be found in Manfred Jurgensen's 'family portrait'[22]:

taken sixtyeight years ago
its reproduction stays with me:
three generations of myself
banished into antipodes.

Notable here is the overt reference to exile and the implication that some form of migration has taken place – be it actual travel or a psychological displacement of the self. This brings to the fore an important consideration: in the poems so far referred to the existential insecurity that marks the subject matter is expressed in general terms, but more often than not the crisis of identity is contextualised within a lived experience of migration or an experience which is culturally diverse. This overt concern with the experience of immigration or the negotiation of personal identity in the face of conflicting cultural demands may have led to an underestimation of the work. As Sneja Gunew has stated, readers and critics have been prone to relegating multicultural writing to 'mere' autobiography or socio-historical tract.[23] It is too easy for the work to be seen to be lacking universal appeal and hence literary worth. Yet I would argue that the subject matter alone, if viewed within a wider theoretical framework, has held significance far beyond its apparent experiential claim.

The fact that the realities of immigrant experience and theories of the subject can be a fruitful conjunction that provides useful insights into the workings of the self is shown by Kristeva's account of for-

eigners in *Strangers To Ourselves*. Unlike her other works which explicate psychoanalytic and textual process, here she addresses the issue of subjective identity in specific connection with foreignness and exile of a 'practical' sort. The result is a 'journey through the historic images of the foreigner',[24] and the first paper, 'Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner', is a fascinating description of personality traits and psychic mechanisms which govern the alien and the host. In this, an account of immigrant experience and observable behaviours are combined with more general, theoretical formulations of subjectivity. The combination of the experiential with experimental hypothesis makes this a most appropriate framework within which to explicate the Australian multicultural text, for the literature in question might also function as a juxtaposition of lived experience and philosophical thought.

Kristeva recounts the emotional and psychological realities of being a foreigner and the reactions both on the part of the immigrant and those who are forced to accept his or her presence. She describes the animosity which greets the 'intruder', and the fact that this will be made painfully obvious without tact or regard for the sensibilities which may be hurt. The foreigner is meant to be grateful for being tolerated; meanwhile the intolerance of the host is summed up in one sentence coined by Kristeva: 'That's it, and if you don't like it why don't you go back where you came from!'[25]

This sentiment seems common enough and it is well-illustrated throughout the literature. George Papaellinas's 'Christos Mavromatis Is a Welder' describes a hostile encounter between the protagonist and a 'typical' Australian on a suburban bus. The scene is taut with anger and unexpressed fear, and ends with the familiar refrain:

> 'Well you'll be goin' back 'ome, won't ya? ... Won't ya?' and Christos sits silenced in the old bloke's trap, caught by the old bloke's leg, swinging and playing as the old bloke faces Christos.[26]

The power play is evident not only because he feels physically trapped, but in the way in which Christos scurries off the bus to escape:

> 'My stop ... please ... my stop,' and Chris is pushing past the old bloke's legs, slow as the arms of a turnstile, 'my stop, here, please', and he almost drops his bag ... he catches it, pushes the accountant out of the way, a receptionist almost goes over, he pulls himself along the handrail.
>
> "Scuse me ...'scuse me.'

> 'Well, go back there, you smart bastard!'[27]

The final words with which the story concludes echo the ultimate rejection – 'Go home, Christos'.[28] But just as important is the fact that while Christos has raced off the bus in a mad dash, his antagonist 'isn't even looking out the window'.[29] Thus the 'real' Australian – old, drunk and doddery as he is – poses more of a threat than any 'dopey wog'[30] ever can.

Similar inequalities are evident in Tad Sobolewski's 'The Cruel Sunday'.[31] Here a Polish immigrant dreams of owning a poultry farm, and to this end approaches the wealthiest landowner in the area, Mr Stanley, in the hope of acquiring some land. That Stanley is in immediate control is evident by Kubiak's acquiescent manner; however, when the long pauses which prolong the agony are replaced by deliberate baiting, he is forced to try and defend himself. Stanley has been denigrating Poland and immigrants in general, and after Kubiak's brave (but polite) attempt at defending his homeland, the old man ridicules the immigrant and his current dilemma:

> 'So! And after all that glorious past, after all those historical achievements, you are coming here begging for food and shelter?'[32]

The derision has the desired effect:

> Kubiak almost fell back. He saw the old farmer as if through a telescope, a blurred picture of an unshaven, barefoot pauper, who, for some inexplicable reason, had the power to make this hot, sunny Sunday so suddenly cruel.[33]

The altercation leaves the protagonist angry and humiliated but he remains powerless to act:

> He clenched his fists and stared at the man as if he wanted to grasp him by that toothless snout and strangle the last words in his throat. But he turned round and marched towards the gate, his eyes welling with tears of bitter, undeserved insult.[34]

In both these stories, the Anglo-Australian is in an immediate position of supremacy and retains real or imaginary mastery over the immigrant voice. This dynamic of power and powerlessness is one which Kristeva refers to, indicating that the 'suffering' whereby the immigrant 'bleeds body and soul' may be analogous to the dialectic

of master and slave.[15] G.W.F. Hegel has shown how the struggle between the powerful and the powerless is integral to the development of the self. It is a necessary stage in the formation of self-consciousness where the self is confronted by another 'I' with whom it must contend. Hegel terms this 'the process of recognition' whereby the self defines itself next to the 'other as ego':

> I behold myself and yet also an immediately existing object (another ego absolutely independent of me and opposed to me).[16]

But this meeting of two self-consciousnesses results in a confrontation:

> The process is a battle. I cannot be aware of me as myself in another individual, so long as I see in that other an other and an immediate existence: and I am consequently bent upon the suppression of this immediacy of his.[17]

This 'life and death struggle'[18] imaged by Hegel in terms of the master and slave[19] relationship is, in fact, one of three necessary stages in the development of the self.[20]

Hegel makes clear the fact that relations with the other in the form of a confrontation are essential for the eventual resolution and identity formation of the self. This being the case, the power plays evident in literature that reflects cultural diversity may be seen to image the phenomenal relations which *all* subjects must at some point undergo. That these necessary relations and negotiations of alterity are brought to the fore by the lived experience of immigration is shown not only by the texts themselves but by Kristeva's account of foreignness and 'the face that is so *other*':

> At first, one is struck by his peculiarity – those eyes, those lips, those cheek bones, that skin unlike others, all that distinguishes him and reminds one that there is someone there.[21]

However, as well as confronting the 'I' with an ego or consciousness that is external to it, the newcomer reminds us that that 'I' can be an other as well. As Kristeva writes:

> Living with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility or not of *being an other*.[22]

This advent of alterity ushered in by the cultural cosmopolitanism of our modern era is not only intersubjective but bespeaks an otherness within the self:

> It is not simply – humanistically – a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of being in his place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself.[43]

This specific form of intrasubjective exile, what Kristeva calls 'being alienated from myself',[44] is poignantly illustrated within certain Australian multicultural texts, where in addition to dramatising the separation between individuals, often what is portrayed is a rupture within the self. This can be expressed as a metaphorical division, as Margaret Diesendorf's poem 'We Immigrants'[45] shows:

> We immigrants of 1938
> were chopped in half
> even before we left out homeland,
> by the hatched of one man's fierce will,
> Body and Soul (the latter now unnameable)
> existing still
> but henceforth separate:
> at best trotting next to one another
> hand in hand,
> twin glancing surreptitiously at twin,
> at worst, *Seele* limping behind,
> Body throwing stones at the wayward companion
> .....
> Then the Pacific sungod
> swung his sharp dazzling hatchet
> and chopped in turn:
> quartered, we continue to run
> (Soul's fled long ago),
> fourlegged, yet not fast enough.
> Four legs
> without the bridge of a spine?
> Thus we shall run until death,
> with a final blow,
> severs the life line.

While this poem presents a graphic image of dislocation, more often, the self-image as a function of internalised otherness is expressed in terms more readily understood. In Eleni J. Roumenliotakis's 'My Heart'[46] it is contextualised in the common theme of the dual allegiance an immigrant may feel:

> Our hearts have but one beat,
> Though yours and mine have two
> As I belong to two countries,

So I love them both.
Which country can I run to,
Which country can I turn to,
If I choose to remain here,
One part of my heart will cease to beat.
I will be lost.
If I return to the other,
Both parts of my heart will cease to beat.
I have but one heart in my breast,
It has broken in two.

Often those growing up in Australia born of immigrant parents will describe their 'two selves' in terms of the conflicting demands imposed upon them by both of their cultures. Rashmere Bhatti speaks of negotiating a personal identity by having to 'constantly juggle my thoughts, emotions and actions between two very different ways of life':

> Growing up I was constantly aware that I was different from my peers, but in my early twenties I realised that I would have to make a conscious decision about my cultural identity and how I was to adapt to being both Australian and Indian.[47]

The speaker of Myron Lysenko's unnamed poem is an adolescent 'struggling with words and cultures' and facing his own conflicting desires:

Every saturday morning, 9 till 1
I'd be at Ukrainian school
listening to the language,
reading the words, writing
the difficult letters
and attempting to remember
as much of our history
as possible.
But a second language is hard
everything was transposed
inside my head into english
and I had to battle the thoughts
of my friends at the swimming pool
or the football club
or sitting around in groups
with their easy aussie conversations.[48]

Despite the attraction of being an 'Aussie', the speaker retains a sense of a cultural identity that is Ukrainian:

> I told everybody: I'm Ukrainian
> and when they accused me
> of being born here I'd reply:
> 'If a horse is born in a pig-pen
> does that make the horse a pig?
> If a child is born in an aeroplane
> does that make the child aeroplanian?'[49]

Despite these protestations, however, the concluding words of the poem show a hyphenated Ukrainian-Australian cultural identity, as the speaker's own assertion is juxtaposed with distinct and iconic Australian idiom: 'I'm Ukrainian, mate'.[50]

Other texts image internal division as an estrangement and alienation within the self. A dreadful existential ambiguity is evident in 'The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale' by Patricia Pengilley.[51] Here the protagonist is a so-called 'Chee-Chee', being neither Indian nor English while at the same time being both. This is shown to be a position of existential uncertainty:

> Well, about 1947, the family was planning to migrate; planning 'TO BE OR NOT TO BE ... THAT IS THE QUESTION'. Of course, the real questions was: TO BE WHOM BLOODY WHO?[52]

Soon we realise the threat of non-existence – the issue is not so much what kind of cultural or racial identity to negotiate, but how to have an identity at all:

> So I was an in-between, gutter scum. I had become miserable; it was worse, I told myself, than the fate of a Jew. I mean a Jew even in a concentration camp was a JEW. This is ... nothing ... Even Wendy called it ... IT[53]

To cope with the trauma of constant negation, Sally fabricates an identity by pretending her Indian relatives were royalty, a trick often employed by those who cannot 'face up to an Indian in their midst'.[54] She admits that this is pure delusion, saying 'I was fibbing like mad, making up the story as I went along'.[55] Nonetheless, it is an effective ploy since the unsavoury Indian part of her can simply disappear – 'Like fairy stories the princess vanishes away ... phoo'.[56]

Here identity is improvisational, imaginary – a matter of illusion – and hence one is reminded of Kristeva's notion of 'the actor's

paradox'. By this Kristeva refers to the foreigner who multiplies 'masks and false selves'[57] and is never completely true nor completely false. While this may seem a harmless delusion in Sally's case, Kristeva leaves no doubt that the consequences of dissembling are critical for it means 'the foreigner has no self'[58]:

> Barely an empty confidence, valueless, which focuses his possibilities of being constantly other, according to others' wishes and to circumstances. I do what they want me to, but it is not 'me' – 'me' is elsewhere, 'me' belongs to no one, 'me' does not belong to 'me' ... does 'me' exist?[59]

This dispossession of the self is cleverly illustrated in the conclusion of the story in which Sally fills out her own immigration form. The dramatic impact of the 'document' gives her non-existence apparent official status:

> TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN
>
> NAME: ..... Chee Chee
> AGE: ..... Don't care
> COMPLEXION: ..... Take one European
> ..... Take an Indian
> ..... Cocktail them
> ..... Add an olive ...
> ..... then lump it or like it
> EYES: ..... Not blue
> ..... Not brown
> NATIONALITY: ..... Mongrel
> COUNTRY OF BIRTH: ..... No Man's Land
> OCCUPATION: ..... Vanishing princess
> AMBITION: ..... To be a human being[60]

The subject fading to the point of complete disappearance is also evident in Linda Leung's story of an Australian-Chinese woman, 'Inside an Outsider'.[61] The very title implies exile and alterity, and early in the story we are told of the protagonist's realisation that she barely exists:

> 'You're nothing, you don't exist', replied my eight-year-old peer when I told her that I had not been christened .... And so my formative years were plagued by a perpetual game of charades: Who am I? What am I?[62]

This metaphorical disappearance almost becomes literal when, at age seventeen, the protagonist contemplates killing herself.

The dissolution of identity evident in these stories, the motif of the vanishing self, is reminiscent of one of the ways that Lacan images the relation of the subject to alterity.[61] Here, what Lacan calls 'the division of the subject' is connected to otherness and networks of representation which effect a certain fading of the subject at the same time as they signify the subjective stance:

> when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as 'fading' as disappearance.[62]

Lacan terms this particular dynamic 'aphanisis':

> aphanisis is to be situated ... at the level at which the subject manifests himself in this movement of disappearance .... [this] fading of the subject.[63]

Aphanisis has a contradictory function whereby the only way a subject can appear as meaning is to disappear through aphanisis:

> there is an emergence of the subject at the level of meaning only from its aphanisis in the Other locus.[64]

Aphanisis is a function of 'the original mechanisms of alienation' whereby 'the subject appears first in the Other'.[65] This mapping of the subject in the locus of alterity and aphanisis itself is a function of both the signifier and the representation or signification of the subject.[66] In this context it is significant that these stories feature a certain dissolution of identity which is caused by relations with the other and the manner in which the protagonist is signified by others. Pengilley's Sally is the 'vanishing' princess because she is negated by a social system that excludes her and signifies her as a 'half-caste'. Leung's character is told by her classmate that she does not exist. These protagonists are simultaneously determined by and made to 'fade' at the hands of the other. In this they may be seen to enact aphanisis as a function of alterity and representation. If this be the case, these texts are illustrating a general principle of subjectivity. After all, as Lacan states, all subjects are enslaved by such dynamics:

> There is no subject without, somewhere, aphanisis of the subject, and it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established.[67]

Thus, while the estrangement and 'disappearance' of identity in multicultural literature may be actualised by the lived experience of cultural diversity, the dynamics of aphanisis that underlie the experi-

ences are those which all subjects endure.

Lacan's theoretical formulation of the relation between self and other posits an indeterminacy of the subject. Because the genesis of the subject lies with alterity, behind the symbolisation or representation of identity, the psyche lacks fixed points of reference. As Lacan writes:

> If he is apprehended at his birth in the field of the Other, the characteristic of the subject of the unconscious is that of being, beneath the signifier that develops its networks, its chains and its history, at an indeterminate place.[70]

Indeterminacy is a notion Kristeva, too, focuses upon, naming it as a visible characteristic of the immigrant psyche. In her account, it is imaged as a homelessness and wandering; the fact that 'Always elsewhere, the foreigner belongs no-where'.[71]

These sentiments are well-illustrated within Australian multicultural writing, which often adds a certain aimlessness to the itinerant state of mind. Serge Liberman's 'Two Years in Exile'[72] tells of the sense of arbitrariness and psychological displacement that the immigrant feels, and illustrates Kristeva's point that whilst the past haunts the foreigner, '*Elsewhere* versus the origin, and even *nowhere* versus the roots'.[73] Liberman's protagonist says:

> Mother cannot forgive Melbourne, upon which, she says she has merely stumbled. Nor Europe, now left behind. And even while her feet tread the dry dusty earth of this firmer quieter shore, the ship of her existence floats, homelessly, on an ocean of regret and dejection, of reproach and tears.[74]

Similarly, Kristeva's contention that the foreigner is characterised as

> Not belonging to any place, any time, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory.[75]

is succinctly illustrated in Eva Cox's piece 'What Ethnic Identity?'[76] Here, the protagonist displays a nomadic sense of self:

> So I drifted in the margins of the many worlds I half knew, and, in doing this, wondered whether I would ever experience a sense of belonging. I adopted this country of mine as do many second generation children. Even if it did not identify with me, it was all I really had, were I not

> to be always an observer in other people's lands.[77]

Heinz Nonveiller also presents a character who drifts in the story 'That part of the world':

> I drifted from job to job. Bar steward, greenkeeper, public relations assistant, freelance journalist for a New Australian paper, taxi driver an finally, proof-reader for the *Daily Truth*.[78]

However, more than being a wanderer, this protagonist is a kind of universal citizen who has no one place to call home. As Kristeva states of the immigrant in general, 'He is a foreigner: he is from nowhere, from everywhere, citizen of the world, cosmopolitan',[79] and Nonveiller's protagonist succinctly illustrates this point:

> By the time I turned thirty I was an old man, bitter and adrift. Gaunt-faced, with deep and hungry eyes that always seemed to have a touch of fever ... I looked like all men who have no country to call their own. True, I had become naturalized in due course, but I was still a man without a country. I want to emphasize this point. I was a man without a country. Such a man is very lonely; he longs to have a country. He longs to have a mother and a father, however stupid they may be. He longs to identify himself with a native earth, a native people. But he has no roots. He cannot act; he can only let himself drift, his life is meaningless.[80]

Homelessness (and the converse, the building of a home) is a motif that reflects either a kind of emotional vagrancy or the struggle to overcome it. Wasyl Onufrienko's poem 'Let it be so' expresses both themes in the image of the house which is not a home:

> Let it be so: past fly the uncurbed days,
> And though the sun is there, you do not see it;
> From windows, only night's dusk meets your gaze:
> The house is called your home, but may not be it.[81]

The house functions as a compact image of the immigrant's desire to be settled. It also bespeaks the fact that in these texts the psychological indeterminacy can be imaged in physical form. In this, the physical surroundings are inscribed with psychic realities. The Australian outback, for example, can symbolise vastness and alienation; the interior of the immigrants' reception centre can represent confinement and frustration; whilst a sense of hope and renewal can be represented by the construction of one's own home. At this point one is

reminded of Gaston Bachelard's method of 'topoanalysis' as it appears in his *The Poetics of Space* – 'the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives'.[5] Here inhabited space and the dynamics of inhabiting are analysed for their psychic significance. As Bachelard himself writes,

> the house's situation in the world ... gives us, quite concretely, a variation of the metaphysically summarized situation of man in the world.[6]

In this phenomenological account of psychoanalytical principles, the house as one of a number of images and spaces is seen to equal the realm of matter which is the external world, and it takes on human values whereby it transcends the purely physical dimensions of space according to the mechanics of desire.[7] Onufrienko's 'No lofty ceilings' is an excellent example of the house which functions as an objective correlative of the immigrant mind:

> No lofty ceilings shall I boast of in my home,
> Nor carpets like a spacious meadow proudly show;
> For here the moving heart among the rocks must roam
> For here the moving heart by torturous ways must go ...
> No, never shall this house a gilded cage be made;
> Into the world hence goes my heart, to wander there,
> And lying spread out on my forehead shall be laid
> Like furrow each new observation, thought, and care.[8]

While there are, no doubt, other examples of immigrant transience made concrete,[9] Onufrienko's work is particularly relevant in this context since as well as expressing the sense of homelessness, it posits what I would argue is a recurrent motif: the endless search. As Kristeva notes, the foreigner is on an 'infinite journey', a 'stride toward an elsewhere that is always pushed back, unfulfilled, out of reach'.[10] Onufrienko's poem 'Painful to love white winters' tells of just such a yearning:

> Painful to love white winters, woods, and streams
> From exile, when the heart that loves is aching;
> To wait for something, seeking in your dreams
> What course the river of your life is taking.
> Always your heart awaits, awaits, awaits,
> Something that's yet to come, something past knowing ...
> Or something that a fierce storm agitates,
> Or else some branching tree, blossoming, growing![11]

It is significant that in this craving the object of desire is the birthplace, Ukraine; or to be more precise, the speaker's love for Ukraine initiates in the immigrant an unfulfillable desire. The presence of this desiring subject brings to the fore the nostalgia that marks this and other Ukrainian-Australian texts.[39] Here Ukraine and signifiers of the homeland become impassioned symbols of longing and torment. Descriptions of hearts torn with pain at the grief of separation accompany a futile longing in which the speaker searches for some thing, some place which remains unnamed. A vocative farewell with a promise that Ukraine will never be forgotten later gives way to the melancholy claim that no matter how many years spent in other countries or the distance traversed, the speaker's thoughts are continually drawn back to Ukraine. Immigrant existence is characterised as an endless wandering among foreign lands, broken relationships often feature, whilst life in the diaspora is characterised as a kind of exile or punishment. An underlying use of the pastoral and recurrent reference to certain motifs (green fields, spring days, flowering gardens and the like) creates the sense of an idyllic past now lost forever, and this is heightened by a contiguity between these symbols and the speaker's own youth.

Although in these examples the sentimental yearning for home and the past is focussed specifically on one country, it is a poignant example of a desire for the homeland which Kristeva sees as generic of the foreigner's state of mind:

> We all know the foreigner who survives with a tearful face turned toward the lost homeland. Melancholy lover of a vanished space, he cannot, in fact, get over his having abandoned a period of time.[40]

Similarly, while Ukrainian-Australian writing has been determined by certain socio-historical conditions and is thus not necessarily indicative of all Australian multicultural texts, it is undeniable that much of the literature has been underwritten by a nostalgic intent. Although, as Sneja Gunew has said, such an assertion may be used to undervalue the writing,[41] I would argue it is possible for nostalgia to be reclaimed in more positive terms. This could involve seeing nostalgic discourse as a successful narrative strategy as well as a thematic preoccupation,[42] or it could involve seeing the nostalgic subject of desire as enacting a more general desire for return. If so, the yearning for the homeland evident in the multicultural text could be seen to be a metaphor for the longing for origin which *all* subjects endure. Likewise the textual production

(and the specific forms of nostalgic discourse) could be seen to actualise a more general dynamic: the sublimation of desire.

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This analysis of Australian multicultural literature has tried to grapple with the psychological and psychical aspects of the texts. Whilst my account is not exhaustive, I have explored aspects of the self and identity as they are imaged in the texts, and tried to show them to be indicative of certain existential uncertainties which plague all subjects, not only immigrant selves. Thus general dynamics of ego awareness and self-consciousness, specular self-imaging, intersubjective and intrasubjective otherness, aphanisis, indeterminacy, phenomenal relations, maternal and oedipal desire have been shown to mark multicultural writing. However, in doing so they bespeak wider theoretical notions of the decentered self. In other words the texts illustrate general principles of the subject in process, dynamics and dilemmas of the self.

Such a move away from seeing multicultural writing as merely documenting an immigrant reality, and a move towards seeing the texts as imaging generalised structures of the mind may be a way in which previously marginalised multicultural works can be better understood. For these texts, if viewed in a wider theoretical framework, can be shown to hold significance far beyond their subject matter or experiential claim. Moreover, interpreting the texts in light of theories of the subject shows that works which reflect cultural specificity need not preclude the wider meanings normally attributed to mainstream works. This petition for greater appreciation is not a bid for New Critical universality, by which a supposedly great piece of literature speaks to all people irrespective of time and place. And it need not rob a text of its specificity, since we can appreciate the unique and culturally-specific expression of a dynamic whilst realising that some form of that dynamic is common to us all. However, apart from providing new interpretations of the work, such an analysis can acknowledge the role multicultural literature now plays in contemporary literary and philosophical debate.

## Notes

1 Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan. A Feminist Introduction* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), p.1.

2 Jacques Lacan, 'Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever', in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man. The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp.186-200 (p.190).

3 Lacan, 'Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever', p. 190.

4 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 14.

5 Monaldo Marinelli, 'The Road', in *Ethnic Australia*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen (Brisbane: Phoenix Publications, 1981), pp. 191-192 (p.191).

6 Alba Romano, 'Night and Snow', in *Beyond The Echo. Multicultural Women's Writing*, ed. Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1988), p. 116.

7 Frane Pervan, 'Said He...', in *Mirrors in the Shadow/ Zrcala U Sjeni Dvojezicna zbirka poezije i proze – Bilingual Collection of Poetry and Prose*, ed. Anna Kumarich (Sydney: Croatian-Australian Literature and Art Association, 1994), p. 95.

8 Zoja Kohut, 'Do Not Ask...', in *Australia's Ukrainian Poets*, ed. R. H. Morrison (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1973), p. 39.

9 Pervan, 'Said He...'.

10 Kohut, 'Do Not Ask...'

11 Franco Paisio, 'Autobiography', in *Joseph's Coat An Anthology of Multicultural Writing*, ed. Peter Skrzynecki (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1985), p. 133.

12 Nomenclature is a necessary prerequisite if an individual is to be designated (both by oneself and by others) and take up a rightful position in the social and symbolic order.

13 Hegel theorises the development of self-consciousness in both *Philosophy of Mind* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977)

14 The term the 'ego' draws upon both the common usage of the word as meaning the image one has of him- or herself or being one's own person, and an accepted use in psychoanalytic theory as being one agency amongst others functioning within the psyche. As an agency of consciousness or will, the ego is undeniably a mechanism of self-actualisation; however, it is both dynamic and conflictual and as such is positioned on the threshold of a splitting which marks the subject.

15 The two factors Maurice Merleau-Ponty names as being an integral aspect of identity-formation in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge/New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1989), pp. 98-147.

16 Jacques Lacan has pointed out the importance of space in the development of the subject, saying 'animal psychology has shown us that the individual's relation to a particular spatial field is, in certain species, mapped socially, in a way that raises it to the category of subjective membership', 'Aggressivity in psychoanalysis', in

*Ecrits A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 8-29 (p. 27).

17 As outlined in 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', in *Ecrits A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 1-7.

18 Ivana Serdarevic, 'My Mirror' in *Mirrors in the Shadow/ Zrcala U Sjeni. Dvojezicna zbirka poezije i proze - Bilingual Collection of Poetry and Prose*, ed. Anna Kumarich (Sydney: Croatian-Australian Literature and Art Association, 1994), p.101.

19 Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', p. 2.

20 Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', p. 5.

21 Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', p. 5.

22 Manfred Jurgensen, 'family portrait', in *Ethnic Australia*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen (Brisbane: Phoenix Publications, 1981), p. 87.

23 Sneja Gunew, 'Anna Walwicz and Antigone Kefala: Varieties of Migrant Dreaming', *Arena* 76 (1986), pp. 65-96.

24 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 95.

25 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 14.

26 George Papaellinas, 'Christos Mavromatis Is a Welder', in *Neighbours: Multicultural Writing in the 1980s*, ed. R. F. Holt (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1991), pp. 3-7 (p. 7).

27 Papaellinas, 'Christos Mavromatis Is a Welder', p. 7.

28 Papaellinas, 'Christos Mavromatis Is a Welder', p. 7.

29 Papaellinas, 'Christos Mavromatis Is a Welder', p. 7.

30 Papaellinas, 'Christos Mavromatis Is a Welder', p. 3.

31 Tad Sobolewski, 'The Cruel Sunday' in *Ethnic Australia*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen (Brisbane: Phoenix Publications, 1981), pp.171-173.

32 Sobolewski, 'The Cruel Sunday', p. 173.

33 Sobolewski, 'The Cruel Sunday', p. 173.

34 Sobolewski, 'The Cruel Sunday', p. 173.

35 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 6.

36 Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 170.

37 Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 171.

38 Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 173.

39 Elsewhere, in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel employs the metaphor of the lord and bondsman.

40 The last of these stages is what he terms 'universal consciousness' whereby the 'I' of self-conscious awareness and the ego of the other can exist independently and in a state of mutual reciprocity. This final stage of development is 'the affirmative awareness of self in an other self' (Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 176). Hegel writes: 'In this stage of universal freedom, in being reflected into myself, I am immediately reflected into the other person, and conversely, in relating myself to the

other I am immediately self-related' (*Philosophy of Mind*, p. 177).

41 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 3.

42 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 13.

43 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 13

44 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 13.

45 Margaret Diesendorf, 'We Immigrants' in *Ethnic Australia*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen (Brisbane: Phoenix Publications, 1981), p. 114.

46 Eleni J. Roumenliotakis, 'My Heart' in *Ethnic Australia*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen (Brisbane: Phoenix Publications, 1981), p. 183.

47 Rashmere Bhatti, 'The Good Indian Girl' in *Who Do You Think You Are: Second Generation Immigrant Women in Australia*, ed. Karen Herne, Joanne Travaglia and Elizabeth Weiss (Sydney: Women's Redress Press, 1992), pp. 131-36 (p. 131).

48 Myron Lysenko, Unnamed, *Migrant* 7, no 2 (no other details available).

49 Lysenko, Unnamed.

50 Lysenko, Unnamed

51 Patricia Pengilley, 'The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale', in *Beyond The Echo. Multicultural Women's Writing*, ed. Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1988), pp 107-115.

52 Pengilley, 'The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale', p.108.

53 Pengilley, 'The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale', p.110.

54 Pengilley, 'The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale', p.113.

55 Pengilley, 'The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale', p.113.

56 Pengilley, 'The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale', p.113.

57 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 8.

58 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 8.

59 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 8.

60 Pengilley, 'The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale', p. 115.

61 Linda Leung, 'Inside an Outsider' in *Who Do You Think You Are: Second Generation Immigrant Women in Australia*, ed. Karen Herne, Joanne Travaglia and Elizabeth Weiss (Sydney: Women's Redress Press, 1992), pp. 14-17.

62 Leung, 'Inside an Outsider', p. 14.

63 As outlined in 'The Subject and the Other: Alienation' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 203-215 and 'The Subject and the Other: Aphanisis' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 1978, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp 216-229.

64 Lacan, 'The Subject and the Other. Aphanisis', p. 218.

65 Lacan, 'The Subject and the Other: Alienation', p. 207-208

66 Lacan, 'The Subject and the Other. Aphanisis', p. 221.

67 Lacan, 'The Subject and the Other: Aphanisis', p. 218.

68 Lacan writes: 'the subject appears first in the Other, in so far as the first signifier, the unary signifier, emerges in the field of the Other and represents the subject for another signifier, which other signifier has as its effect the *aphanisis* of the subject'

('The Subject and the Other: Aphanisis', p. 218).

69 Lacan, 'The Subject and the Other: Aphanisis', p. 221.

70 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p.208.

71 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 10

72 Serge Liberman, 'Two Years in Exile' in *Ethnic Australia*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen (Brisbane: Phoenix Publications, 1981), pp. 63-76.

73 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 29.

74 Liberman, 'Two Years in Exile', p. 64.

75 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p.7.

76 Eva Cox, 'What Ethnic Identity?' in *Who Do You Think You Are. Second Generation Immigrant Women in Australia*, ed. Karen Herne, Joanne Travaglia and Elizabeth Weiss (Sydney: Women's Redress Press, 1992), pp. 61-65.

77 Eva Cox, 'What Ethnic Identity?', p. 63.

78 Heinz Nonveiller, 'That part of the world' in *Displacements migrant story-tellers*, comp. Sneja Gunew (Deakin University Press, 1982), pp. 124-131. (p. 124)

79 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 30.

80 Nonveiller, 'That part of the world', p. 124.

81 Wasyl Onufrienko, 'Let it be so' in *Australia's Ukrainian Poets*, ed. R. H Morrison (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1973), p. 19.

82 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. 8.

83 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 27-28

84 See the first chapter entitled 'the house, from cellar to garret, the significance of the hut' and the second chapter entitled 'house and universe' (Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*).

85 Wasyl Onufrienko, 'No lofty ceilings' in *Australia's Ukrainian Poets*, ed. R. H Morrison (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1973), p. 21.

86 One thinks immediately of Josef Vondra's 'Paul Zwilling'. The piece opens with the protagonist driving through the Australian outback, and the plot revolves around his journey back to the town that had housed the migrant camp in which he had spent time as a child. Josef Vondra, 'Paul Zwilling' in *Displacements: migrant story-tellers*, comp. Sneja Gunew (Deakin University Press, 1982), pp. 140-186.

87 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 6

88 Wasyl Onufrienko, 'Painful to love white winters' in *Australia's Ukrainian Poets*, ed. R. H Morrison (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1973), p. 23.

89 The following argument has been explicated in detail in my paper 'Imagining The Imaginary: Nostalgia And The Ukrainian-Australian Text', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 20, no 1-2 (Summer-Winter 1995), pp. 97-110.

90 Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p. 9.

91 'Anyone working in this area in Australia will undoubtedly have experienced the repeated and often dismissive response that ethnic minority writing 'simply' deals with nostalgia, and that its mode is elegaic. This usually translates into accusations of a ghetto mentality, or else justifications for the quaint preservation of anachronistic social rituals ranging from embroidery to marriage customs. The logic

appears to be that this writing deals with a landscape of the mind, of memory, which being apparently of minimal relevance to the here and now is therefore something to be outgrown'. Sneja Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), pp. 111-112.

92 See my paper 'Simple Sentimentality Or Specific Narrative Strategy? The Functions And Use Of Nostalgia In The Ukrainian-Canadian Text', *Canadian Ethnic Studies* Vol XXX, no 1 (1998), pp 50-63