

5251: The Short Story Cycle and the
Representation of a Named Place

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Chapter One

Finding Form

‘The form is given by grace ... it descends on you. You find it. You work and you work and you work. And you make connections.’ Grace Paley (Bach in Lister 75)

Discovering the short story cycle

When Frank Moorhouse decided to experiment with arranging related stories that ‘stood alone’ into a ‘larger framework’ in the late 1960s, his first publisher, Gareth Powell, was at a loss for how to describe [or categorise] his work. Clearly it wasn’t a novel, but nor was it a collection of stories. Moorhouse spontaneously came up with the term, ‘discontinuous narratives’ (Baker 224). The Australian writer and his publisher would not have encountered the world of short story cycle theories back then, because it had barely been established. Forrest Ingram’s first monograph on the genre – *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century* – appeared in 1971. Even so, in 2001 the form was described by James Nagel as the ‘most neglected and misunderstood of the major genres in American literature’ (246), a claim still readily quoted by theorists today.

My introduction to the short story cycle as a distinct genre began with a literature search on the writer Jhumpa Lahiri, whose short fiction has influenced

my own. I was interested in the continuity of ideas between her stories, the way she constantly interweaves the diverse experiences of Indian migrants in the United States, and in her precise and illuminating attention to detail. The search revealed Noelle Brada-Williams' paper, 'Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* as a Short Story Cycle' (2004). While the stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* feature unrelated characters, multiple locations and a variety of narrative styles, Brada-Williams refers to Lahiri's 'intricate use of pattern and motif to bind the stories together', unifying recurring themes, such as the dichotomy of care and neglect and the balancing of a range of representations (451). The paper introduced and illuminated the possibility of a deeper reading of collected stories, one I'd perhaps sensed, but had not consciously registered.

In *Alone With All That Could Happen* (2008), David Jauss writes of his own insight that a story collection should be read in the order determined by the writer, rather than dipping in randomly: 'I thought I'd read a lot of story collections in my life, but in a way, I realized, I hadn't read more than a few. I'd read the *stories*, sure, but I hadn't read the *books*' (149). The possibilities for meaning inherent in the arrangement of stories began to take on renewed significance for me, too. Continued searches of theory and criticism began an appreciation and awareness of the potential of story cycles, both as a reader, and in my creative practice as a short story writer. I was yet to discover the full extent of opportunities this form could provide, both within the publishing marketplace and, more significantly, for the writer concerned with representation of place.

Curiously, Jauss refers to collections that are ‘unified’ when he discusses the features of works such as James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and Eudora Welty’s *The Golden Apples* (1949) (156). He makes no reference to the fact that these are texts understood among theorists and scholars to be classic examples of short story cycles. When asked why, Jauss said that he hadn’t heard the term ‘short story cycle’ for quite some time, probably not since the early 1980s. ‘I don’t know why that term disappeared’ he wrote. ‘I can’t remember hearing anyone complain about it or argue that another term would be more appropriate’ (personal email: 2.6.2010). Even so, while Jauss does not become embroiled in taxonomy, his work would become an invaluable guide for my own project, particularly toward the end when the subtleties of arrangement demanded more careful consideration.

Problems with nomenclature are a constant source of frustration for anyone conducting research on the historic and fluid genre of what, for the purpose of consistency, I have chosen to call the ‘short story cycle’. The plethora of names used by theorists to describe the genre include macrotext, recueil, short story compound, integrated short story collection, composite fictions, rouvelles, paranovel, quasi-novel, composite novel and the three most common terms: short story sequences, short story composite and short story cycle. Along with discontinuous narratives, other terms used by readers, reviewers, critics and writers include linked stories, story collections, novels, novel constellations and novel-in-stories. While marketing of works in this genre plays a significant role

here (sometimes to their detriment), the issues around taxonomy have dominated much discussion and debate among theorists.

The term ‘short story cycle’ was initially coined by Ingram, and as Elke D’Hoker and Bart Van Den Bossche note, seems to be the most commonly used term in current discussion, at least within the Anglo-American tradition (9). Each label for the genre gives weight to a particular feature and, while the word ‘cycle’ implies a circular patterning or use of framing stories which may or may not be present in a text, I don’t think any of the other names with their various nuances are better suited or more inclusive. I use other terms in this exegesis when quoting others directly.

Preferred names for the genre emphasise particular features or effects, or attempt to encapsulate as many features as possible. This in turn has generated debates in relation to definition and the questions: what exactly is a short story cycle? And who decides: the creator/writer, the interpreter/reader, or the critic/theorist?

In *Unsettling Stories: Settler Postcolonialism and the Short Story Composite*, an analysis of the genre in the ‘settler colonies’ of the USA, Canada and Australia, Victoria Kuttainen prefers short story composite, arguing that this term ‘best describes the many cultural and literary configurations that can be discerned in this literary form’ (20). Robert M. Luscher argues for ‘short story sequence’ because the emphasis is on the ‘reader’s progressive development’ (1989, 149). James Nagel and Michelle Pacht continue to use Ingram’s first coined ‘short story

cycle', which emphasises the cyclical nature of these works, though Nagel argues that Ingram's early definition of a cycle, which includes a component of intent by the author, is inadequate for this very reason. He suggests a more appropriate definition would be based on the stories and volumes themselves, rather than on the intentions of the author or understanding of the reader (11). In his paper 'Story Cycles as a Challenge to Literary History', Peter Hajdu suggests that the reader ultimately decides the arrangement of stories in a cycle as it is the reader who makes the ultimate decision of the order in which to read them (53). He suggests that Ingram's early definition of a cycle as 'a set of stories so linked to one another that the reader's experience of each one is modified by his experience of the others' (Ingram 13) leads us, logically, to a 'set of texts selected by a reader from the whole of world literature, in the widest sense of the word' (51). This notion alludes to the broader interconnectedness of literary texts: writers, as well as readers, create meaningful connections (and arguably, even story cycles) through successive development and recycling of other writers' earlier stories. Henry Lawson's 'The Drover's Wife,' published initially in *The Bulletin* in 1892 and then collected in *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* in 1894, is a case in point. There is a long tradition of Australian writers consciously reimagining and reframing this story: Among others, 'Drover's Wife' stories have been written by Murray Bail (1975), Frank Moorhouse (1980), Barbara Jefferis (1980), Anna Gambling (1986), Chris Eipper (1996), Mandy Sayer (1996) and most recently, Ryan O'Neil, who has retold the story in varying experimental incarnations in online magazine, *Seizure*. And while I position the primary influences on my own

short story cycle in scholarly and literary traditions in the United States, I am also connected to the early Australian writers, particularly those who used the cycle form to portray regional life, such as Barbara Baynton, Henry Lawson and Steele Rudd.

Of course, there is nothing new about the central concept of a short story cycle. Scholars remind us that, with its roots in ancient narrative traditions, the cycle antedates the concept of the formal novel (Nagel 1). The term ‘cycle’ seems to have been first applied to the series of poems written by Greek poets to supplement Homer’s account of the Trojan war (2). There are a number of early and influential examples of framed collections, including *A Thousand and One Nights*, Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* and Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*; these include works that function independently as stories but are enriched by inclusion in a group. Forms closer to contemporary cycles surfaced in the nineteenth century and became widespread in the twentieth, particularly in the United States and in cycles that are deeply concerned with place. Joyce’s *Dubliners* and Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, are perhaps the two most discussed examples of twentieth century cycles employing locale as a foundation for coherence. Conceptually, it could be argued that the text Frank Moorhouse was attempting to define just over four decades ago, was in fact as old as storytelling itself; but the problem, on that day, was essentially one of marketing.

Writers of story cycles are notorious for having strong ideas about what their texts are and are not, particularly in their publication and marketing. It is well known that William Faulkner insisted “and Other Stories” be omitted from

subsequent editions of *Go Down, Moses* (1940), while Susan Minot insisted that the word “novel” be deleted from her contract for *Monkeys* (1986). Australian writer Patrick Cullen is more pragmatic, but wholly aware of the tension and fluidity of his 2009 cycle, *What Came Between*, sitting as it does between genres:

The thing is, if you can get your head around the fact that a book can actually be two different things at once ... Not an easy thought, I know, but it's possible. If someone had one shelf on their bookcase for novels and another for short stories I'm happy for *What Came Between* to be on either shelf. And even happier if it's on both! (Case 2009)

Perhaps more pragmatic again, Eva Hornung says of *Mahjar* (2003): ‘Oh yes, *Mahjar* is a short story cycle. We just said novel so we could market it’ (personal interview: 13.12.2012).

In *The Subversive Storyteller: The Short Story Cycle and the Politics of Identity in America*, published in 2009, Michelle Pacht analyses twelve representative cycles by American writers from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and argues that each of them produced short story cycles to present subversive or controversial ideas that were relevant to their time, as well as to create work to suit a particular publishing marketplace. For example, Pacht looks at Charles W. Chestnut's cycle *The Conjure Woman*, published in 1899 when America was still reeling after the Civil War. Pacht explains that Chestnut, marginalised by his race, ‘hoped to write novels that denounced racism and explored the struggle faced by mullattoes in post-Civil War America’ (28). She suggests that he was forced to comply with the literary marketplace at the time

and to write 'local color stories' to establish himself as an author, though eventually, he was able to utilise the cycle genre to 'safely express his controversial views to a likely unsympathetic public' (28). With the stories held together by an 'internal frame', Chestnutt was able to 'indict racism obliquely, allowing him to teach his white readers about racial inequality without alienating them' (28).

Pacht argues that writers such as Chestnutt were able to use the cycle's 'unique generic makeup' to subtly express subversive ideas without alienating readers or damaging their marketability (6). This idea was formative to my own exploration of place in a contemporary setting. It was useful to be reminded that 'genres are not abstract literary forms; they are made and re-made 'in concrete historical circumstances' (Howard in Zagarell 437).

Michelle Pacht's work offered guidance beyond definitions and analysis of process, to the myriad of opportunities the genre could offer in the exploration of themes, and within difficult publishing contexts. Pacht organises her chosen texts chronologically, in the context of historical and cultural events, to better understand the aims of each author. She suggests that while the short story itself is a genre suited to a fast developing society, able to register the fleeting moment, while at the same time resonating with wider meaning, the cycle offers additional opportunities: 'to combine these fleeting moments together and create a more comprehensive, more lasting image of a nation as it grows, changes and struggles to understand itself' (140). This is discussed in more depth in chapter two, along

with an analysis of the relevance of spatial theory in representations of place in the short story cycle.

In sympathy with Hornung's statement, Pacht agrees that the 'novel has long been deemed to be both the most commercial and prestigious literary form, so it makes sense for authors (and their publishers) to attempt to enhance their reputations – and their sales – by calling their works novels' (5). In his 2008 essay on the decline of the popularity of the short story in the UK, writer John Beevers suggests that the cycle is 'a pragmatic solution that pre-exists the [British] Arts Council identification of the short story problem' (25). He argues that the cycle could sustain the short story as a commercially viable art form in the short term 'and if the autonomous short story does achieve its anticipated gains in popularity, supplement it in the longer terms as a separate and synergistic category of fiction' (25).

In this way, the short story cycle may be seen to enable promotion of short stories in an industry where the novel is considered a more marketable entity. *5251* is also written within the context of an industry marketplace where it is easier to have a novel published than a collection of short stories, but where publication of individual stories is both possible and increasing, particularly with the proliferation of peer and industry reviewed opportunities online. The cycle thereby enables the possibility of 'double' publication of short stories, independently and then together. Marketing, however, is partly responsible for the frustration of theorists that cycles are so often 'misunderstood' by readers and 'neglected' by critics (Nagel 246). The writer is more concerned with utilising the

genre to realise an artistic vision; the pragmatics of a publishing marketplace are necessary, though perhaps secondary. How does the reading of a text change or deepen when it is considered through theoretical constructs of the short story cycle genre? In chapter three, I consider this question, drawing particularly on Pacht's hypotheses, through an analysis of Belle Boggs' representation of King William County, Virginia, in the United States of America (USA), in *Mattaponi Queen* (2010).

With its history of 'misunderstanding' and 'neglect', most agree that intellectual inquiry into the short story cycle has only begun to gain momentum in the last decade or so (Nagel 258), and certainly the last couple of years have seen more critical study in the form of dedicated conferences and journal editions. *Interférences littéraires / Littéraire interferences: Multilingual e-Journal for Literary Studies* (2014), for example, seeks, for the first time, to provide an overview and comparison of various theoretical approaches developed across literary and linguistic traditions – the anglophone, the francophone and the Italian. Much study remains to be done, particularly, I would argue, in Australia where use of the genre has become increasingly popular in recent years.

Difficulties in Definitions

Nagel suggests that, along with the individual short story, we can describe genres relating to short stories better than we can define them (13). In 1989, Susan Mann's *The Short Story Cycle: a genre companion and reference guide* built on

Ingram's work and sought to clarify the genre's characteristics through analysis of the unifying techniques used within nine representative cycles. Most theorists have since agreed with Mann's claim that:

There is only one essential characteristic of the short story cycle: the stories are both self-sufficient and interrelated. On the one hand, the stories work independently of one another: the reader is capable of understanding each of them without going beyond the limits of the individual story. On the other hand, however, the stories work together, creating something that could not be achieved in a single story. (15)

Mann's 'essential characteristic' became the guiding principle for my creative project. The form for *5251* descended on me not so much from grace, as Grace Paley suggests, but through the discovery of a theoretical construct. Stories that are simultaneously self-sufficient and interrelated not only influenced the writing of *5251*, but also significantly dictated its parameters. Mann's definition, along with the work of theorists and scholars such as Nagel, Pacht and Luscher, who have expounded upon it, appealed for a number of reasons. The notion of 'self-sufficient' promotes and preserves the short story as an independent genre, important to the short story writer wishing to extend and develop skills in the form. 'Interrelated' invites and speaks to an inherent artistic impulse, to an 'aesthetic of arrangement', something I had not considered, nor been aware of, before embarking on this project. The interplay of 'self-sufficient' and 'interrelated' affords unique opportunities for the writer interested in subversion

and in representations of place. These opportunities are discussed in more depth in chapters two and three.

In writing a short story cycle in the context of a PhD, I often questioned whether the driving force in the creative project was theoretical, rather than artistic; marketing was also a consideration, particularly as individual stories from the cycle began to be independently published. As the individual stories were being published, both in Australia and overseas (a long way from 'home' and from the company of the other stories within the cycle), the addendum to Mann's 'essential' characteristic began to seem incongruous. A reader may be capable of understanding a story without going beyond its limits, but what if the meaning is significantly altered – perhaps even ironically its opposite – when read in the context of other stories within the cycle? Can the reader truly be capable of understanding the single story from a cycle when it is read independently? If not, is it still a short story in its own right, or is it something else? Does it carry a frayed edge from where it was torn?

The interplay between these three forces – theoretical constructs, artistic impulse, publishing concerns – was pertinent and constant throughout the project. In terms of understanding the process of writing *5251*, these forces provided more relevant filters than Ingram's classifications of 'composed', 'completed' and 'arranged'. Hajdu's suggestion that genre only has relevance in literary criticism began to strike a chord. Was there more to be found in theoretical discourse beyond definitions?

Again, Jauss' work was enlightening. In the chapter 'Lever of Transcendence: Contradiction and the Physics of Creativity', Jauss explores the notion that at the heart of all things is a fundamental truth of contradiction. He draws on the work of psychiatrist Albert Rothenberg, who concludes that the creative process requires 'the capacity to conceive and utilise two or more opposite or contradictory ideas, concepts, or images *simultaneously*' (192). Rothenberg calls this 'both-and' form of cognition (as opposed to 'either-or') 'Janusian thinking', which he draws from Janus, the Roman god of doorways (and significantly, Jauss says, of communication [192]). The two faces of Janus simultaneously looked in opposite directions, representing an essential mode of thinking for creativity. Drawing on philosophy and physics, Jauss builds a compelling argument for contradiction and he discusses its manifestation in literature through techniques such as paradox, irony, symbolism, metaphor, thematic complementarity and parallaxic structure (207). 'Both-and' is at the heart of the short story cycle. It is also at the heart of Mann's 'essential characteristic'. Stories are both self-sufficient *and* interdependent. Jauss' exploration of contradiction enables a deeper response to the effect created by stories that are 'both-and', not just within the arrangement of a cycle, but also beyond it, as individual stories are published in contexts often a long way from home.

While I had my eye on the whole and the subterranean narratives relating to place and recurrent themes, the major focus throughout the initial drafting, at least, was on each individual story. Luscher identifies difficulties inherent in the concept of independence and inter-dependence in the context of definitions of the

short story as a single unit (1989, 151). The well understood idea of a short story – expressed by Edgar Allen Poe in his essay, ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ in 1846 and later articulated by Brander Matthews in his 1901 *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (17) – is that it must have a unity of effect, and not be conceived of as part of something bigger, without which it is somehow inadequate. In essence, a short story should not be a short version of something else, but rather a perfectly formed single unit of art. The tension engendered from the ‘both/and’ dichotomy of the short story cycle was ever present. Should the needs of the ‘whole’ be paramount over the artistic needs of each individual story? How could they have equal importance? Luscher explains that a writer

need not expand and elaborate each story so much that it loses its distinctiveness; simply by judicious arrangement (or, if necessary, minor revisions and additions) he may shape a work in which each story elaborates upon and expands certain contexts, actions, symbols, or ideas developed independently by the others. (1989, 151)

Contexts I drew upon included the work of short story writers who deal with themes such as suburbia, gender, domestic relationships, regionalism, alienation and yearning. A number of the stories in *5251* were drafted ‘in conversation’ with the work of a range of writers, including Flannery O’Conner, William Faulkner, Lorrie Moore, Edna O’Brien, Raymond Carver, John Cheever, Alice Munro, Bonnie Jo Campbell, Belle Boggs and Jhumpa Lahiri. For example, ‘Here We Lie’ adopts the technique of first person plural narration, as used by Lahiri in ‘The Treatment of Bibi Haldar’, published in *Interpreter of Maladies* (2000).

Explaining in an interview with *Pif Magazine* that she was inspired by Faulkner's use of the technique in 'A Rose for Emily', Lahiri said that she wrote her own story as 'an experiment' for herself (Brada-Williams 461). While Lahiri's story represents a group of women 'with no particular identity', 'Here We Lie' is narrated by the town's Apex club, as they consider the life of Lorelie Hastwell, daughter of an old and established local family.

Both Lahiri and Faulkner explore the idea of a community perceiving a woman as barren and loveless, when all the while she has a secret world of intimacy and sensuality. I wanted to experiment with the challenge and technicalities of conveying what lies beyond the perceptions of a community, including the notion of collective and suppressed guilt. The intention of using this 'communal voice' in the framing story of *5251* is to create a signal to the reader that the notion of community is central across the whole text; in one sense, it is an attempt to address what scholars consider an 'unresolved tension' between the 'centripetal and centrifugal forces' of the genre (Alderman in Marais 17). Certain novels may work in a similar way, especially by writers who are also drawn to the short story form, such as William Faulkner and John Cheever. In part, this may reflect a creative process where a writer expands a single story or collection into a larger work, or where a novel with several starting points rearranges itself as a sequence of stories. While it may not be necessary to draw hard and fast lines around formal definitions, my point is that it is worth identifying the particular qualities and potential of the short story cycle.

While most critics either question or completely disregard Ingram's early categorisation of the genre for being too heavily or misguidedly based on authorial intent, I initially imagined his three classifications of cycles would be useful in discussing my own short story cycle. Ingram proposed that short story cycles are either:

1. Composed: this is the most unified, defined as a text planned as a cycle from its inception;
2. Completed: conceived of as a whole only after it was begun, involving numerous additions and deletions as required;
3. Arranged: this is the least unified and is put together after the stories have been written, involving even more modification and addition (Ingram 17-18).

With respect to my own project, Ingram's focus on authorial intent as a genre qualifier was less than helpful. Presumably he would have classified my cycle as 'composed'. However, the creation of *5251* involved a constant interplay between composition, completion and arrangement and my awareness of Ingram's classifications created a peculiar sense of unease.

Writing is an act of discovery and stories take on their own life. As a writer who acknowledges a primarily sub-conscious creative process, was I compromising or diminishing the necessary artistic process by consciously (and perhaps even stubbornly) deferring to theoretical classifications? While I consciously set out to write a cycle, and composed each story with that single

intent, I didn't know how else the stories would connect beyond the one unifying strategy of place. When a short story cycle is most effective, the reader almost has a sense of the uncanny as patterns and details develop and overlap and cycle back on each other. How could I create this effect? Would it be achieved subconsciously in the writing process or would the stories need to be modified and arranged again afterwards? If Ingram's 'completed' cycles involved adding additional pieces to existing ones in a pattern that may have 'subconsciously' begun, what parts of the process are subconscious and what parts are conscious and does it even matter?

Even when a form is consciously adopted, the writer still depends on Paley's grace. Jauss' work was more instructive in my search for guidance. His chapter on arrangement 'Stacking Stones: Building a Unified Short Story Collection', affirmed the notion that much of the unifying work is, at least initially, subliminal. Specific unifying techniques and considerations of arrangement could be both covert and overt. Through placement and arrangement with other stories, Poe's 'single effect' is magnified and juxtaposed to create a more comprehensive effect. Further, the arrangement of stories can be 'thematically mimetic', that is, it can embody 'in its very structure, the author's meaning' (180).

Opportunities in Definitions

Attending the 13th International Short Story Conference in English in Vienna provided me with opportunities to participate in discussions with scholars and

writers on why writers gravitate to the short story cycle. As writers reflected on the opportunities afforded them through the genre, I agreed with Adnan Mahmutovic who, speaking of his work, *how to fare well and stay fair* (2012), said that he used the form to echo the ‘paradoxes of life’, because as a writer he could ‘contradict [himself] between the stories’ (2014). In this way, Mahmutovic is able to use the structure of arrangement in a way that is ‘thematically mimetic’. This notion of paradox is further fuelled when the cycle of stories might allude to notions of community. For example, Ian Reid’s claim that short stories often focus on one or two individuals isolated or separated from their community (27) is amplified by the metaphoric effect of a ‘community’ of stories. The independent stories also act as an echo to the isolated characters within them. This echoing effect, or ‘network of associations’, produced by the short story cycle is both subtle and cumulative in its thematic impact (Luscher 1989, 149).

In *The Collected Stories of Hortense Calisher* (1975), the New York author writes in her preface that

a story is an apocalypse, served in a very small cup. Still, it wants to be considered in its company only. The presence of neighbours changes it. Worlds meant to be compacted only to themselves, bump. Their very sequence can do them violence. (in Luscher 1989, 148)

On the one hand this represents a pertinent warning to the short story cycle writer and one that held particular relevance as I grappled with the effects of various configurations of arrangement throughout the project. For example, one of the difficulties in using synchronicity across the stories in *5251* has been the risk of

creating an unbalanced arrangement that inadvertently becomes parodic. 'Barking Dogs', in which a dog's throat is cut using a kitchen knife, was initially placed next to an independent story in which a woman climbs her roof and hacks off a faux architectural feature using a wrecking bar. While the second story involves satire, I didn't want that to 'bleed' back into the first story, which doesn't. These were examples of 'liaisons', motifs and recurring subject matter such as Jauss refers to in *Alone With All That Could Happen*: connections which may or may not have been subconsciously created, but certainly must be overtly managed in the sequencing of stories. However, Calisher's notion of collected individual stories acting as 'neighbours' is also significant as it provides further opportunity for thematic mimesis across a cycle.

American theorist J. Gerald Kennedy suggests that the essential characteristic of the genre as identified by Mann, provides a provocative analogy to a community. He quotes sociologist Philip Selznick's observation that a sense of community 'begins with, and is very largely supported by, the experience of interdependence and reciprocity' (Kennedy 194). A number of studies have looked at the work of American cycle writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who have exploited this unique tension to represent regional communities fragmented by the encroachment of modernity (Berne 181). Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, published in 1919, provides a classic example of a short story cycle that embodies what Kennedy describes as 'an insistently paradoxical semblance of community in its structural dynamic of connection and disconnection' (195). Anderson uses the cycle to magnify the lack

of community by allowing only the reader to perceive fleeting connections between characters who inhabit the same locale. I discuss Anderson's text in more detail in chapter two.

Kennedy claims that

some story collections literally "represent" communities; others imply by an interweaving of voices and narratives a communal consciousness. Whereas ethnic and minority sequences usually affirm an ongoing sense of community – sequences portraying mainstream, middle class life typically emphasize the precariousness of local attachments. (xiv)

Invoking and portraying the 'precariousness of local attachments' through the cycle was of particular interest to me. I wanted to explore the ways in which a trauma or an act of violence lives on the periphery of communal consciousness, not necessarily in its immediate and raw impact, but in its effect on the communal psyche, the ways in which the trauma 'sits' in unspoken space, in the 'negative space', where it might be appropriated, or discarded or absorbed. In this way, fragments of the 'silent story' – the murder of schoolgirl Sophie Barlow – exist within a number of the other text-pieces, but essentially it only exists 'in effect' in the spaces between them. As Pacht suggests, it is often these spaces in-between the stories – the discontinuities – that enable suggestions of a broader canvas.

Because meaning exists in the spaces between the text-pieces—in those invisible threads that link them to one another—the cycle's structure demands that much of the interpretative work be done by the reader. (137)

The short story cycle further enables exploration of the ‘precariousness of local attachments’ as the stories can ‘highlight isolated events and the collective ramifications of those events at the same time’ (Pacht 137). For example, in *5251*, in the story titled ‘World Peace’, twelve-year-old Janis is fixated with the implications of Sophie’s murder in her own small and consuming world. In another, ‘Raising Boys’, middle aged Malcolm has titillating dreams about the missing schoolgirl as he grapples with his own lack of agency. The newspaper reports of the case play on the fears of an isolated ‘kindergarten mum’, Donna, in ‘Dancing on your Bones,’ and Donna vows never to let her four year old ‘do Facebook, or anything like it’. As previously discussed, while the Barlow family is at the centre of the story ‘Something Special, Something Rare’, this story is arranged out of temporal sequence so that the reader already knows what happens after the events of the story. While the murder of Sophie Barlow is not mentioned in the remaining stories, I have sought to weight the gravity of the incident through two synchronic events: the murder of the dog in ‘Barking Dogs’ and the implied historic trauma inflicted upon a younger Lorelie Hastwell in ‘Here We Lie’. In this way, the diachronic dimension isn’t subverted completely, but I have tried to use associative relationships to assemble pattern and meaning across the text (Luscher 1989, 166). In addition, the remaining seven stories carry no reference to Sophie’s murder at all, thereby acting as analogies for unaffected ‘neighbours’ in the community.

Notions of ‘community’ are also a unifying device in Lahiri’s work, even though place is not; while Lahiri’s characters experience similar malaise and

explore recurrent themes, they inhabit various settings across countries. As Brada-Williams points out, the cycle genre allows Lahiri to solve ‘the problem of representing an entire community within the necessarily limited confines of a single work by balancing a variety of representations rather than offering the single representation provided by the novel or the individual short story’ (453). I discuss this particular opportunity of the cycle in the context of geocritical studies in chapter two.

If meaning exists in the ‘spaces’ of a short story cycle, perhaps this goes some way in addressing the conundrum with Mann’s definition. When an individual story is independently published, the spaces in which its deeper meanings lie, stretch further; readers may, or may not, be aware of them. If we accept that a short story should not be a short version of something else, but rather a perfectly formed single unit of art, with unity of effect, we invoke a crucial tension associated with the cycle. While the stories in a cycle will indeed stand alone and have their own ‘unity of effect’, when arranged together, they become not just interrelated, but *interdependent*. In a sense, the stories only truly stand alone when they are physically separated from the other stories and published externally and independently. An attentive reader may make intertextual connections, but not as easily, and only when either the cycle is published as a whole or the stories intended to form the cycle are also published independently. If the stories ‘stand alone’, they may in fact subvert the greater meanings of the broader text, or even their own meanings within it. Perhaps the individual stories become subversive entities in their own right? For example, in the context of *5251*, Graham’s

epiphany about his family in the story ‘Something Special, Something Rare’ is intended to be ironic, poignant and ultimately tragic, as the reader discerns the fate of his daughter, Sophie, in the ‘gaps’ between the stories. However, in the independent publication of this story in *Best Australian Stories* (2014), this context is absent and therefore its meaning is significantly altered. Graham’s epiphany has a different ‘effect’. After the story was published, I received an email from the editor, Amanda Lohrey, passing on the following feedback from an early reader: ‘I thought this story must surely turn dark any minute and was delighted when it didn’t’ (personal email: 17.11.14).

Only the reader of the cycle will know that while Graham may feel invigorated by his new understanding of his family, he is in fact on the precipice of the greatest darkness. In the context of the cycle, this darkness is intended to be evident (particularly in a ‘second’ reading). Outside the cycle, the element of darkness is perhaps dissipated through the closure of the individual story. The notion of a ‘happy ending’ simultaneously held with a ‘tragic ending’ or an ending that ‘turns dark’ is an example of the genre’s ability to play with the dynamism and tension of ‘both/and’. In this example, the ‘happy ending’ is subverted by the cycle.

Inherent meaning may be explored within the confines of a single story; meaning may be altered, or subverted in the context of other stories, but also held – indefinitely – in the spaces between them. In his essay, ‘It’s a Short Story’, John Barth makes the generalisation that ‘short-story writers as a class, from Poe to Paley, incline to see how much they can leave out, and novelists as a class, from

Petronius to Pynchon, how much they can leave in' (26). The short story cycle negotiates this tension. I explore this dynamic further in my analysis of *Mattaponi Queen*, which mirrors gaps that partition social reality in King William County, Virginia, USA.

While the breaks between stories remind us that the characters within them rarely meet or become aware of a shared alienation, the reader is able to fathom Kennedy's 'semblance of community' (195). When characters inhabit the same locality, walk the same streets and frequent the same pub, the parallels and estrangements are most vividly felt (Kennedy, 196). In some ways then, the characters themselves become involved in the interpretative interplay between writer and reader in creating and understanding meaning in the short story cycle. Jeff Birkenstein, in his unpublished doctoral thesis submitted in 2003, suggests that this 'dislocation between what a character sees and knows and what an author and/or reader sees and knows' is in fact the key to the genre (29). When a story is independently published, I would suggest that it is often only the author who 'sees' and 'knows'.

The contribution of the reader to the production of meaning, through interpretation, is an essential element of the individual short story. This agency is seen as 'a gift of the genre', which in return, 'demands imaginative and intellectual engagement' (Hurley 29). Joyce Carol Oates says the reader of short fiction must be 'attentive' (7). The reader of a short story cycle, Pacht argues, must in fact 'read the text through to the end and then start over at the beginning in order to fully understand its meaning' (2). One would hope that this might

involve impulsively flicking back through the pages for a satisfying clarification, rather than a laborious re-reading. The short story cycle fundamentally extends the benefits and demands of the single short story; if the short story is demanding for the reader, the cycle both offers and demands more. I would argue that the many opportunities for the reader to ‘read between the lines’ in short story cycles fuels the subversive quality of the genre. The attentive reader will use pattern-making faculties to build connections encoded across the stories.

In this chapter I have sought to contextualise my creative project *5251*, through an analysis of the genre in which it is written and the peculiar opportunities and difficulties that arose as a result of exploring critical notions relevant to the genre. Writing *5251* involved a constant interplay between an engagement with theoretical constructs of the short story cycle, my own artistic vision and the realities of the publishing marketplace for short stories. Awareness and interrogation of these three factors proved to be of more relevance to contextualising and understanding the creative process than the early classifications of the genre as set out by Forrest Ingram. While such classifications might be restrictive to the creative process of the writer, engagement with contemporary theoretical discussion can enable and extend the writer’s awareness and exploitation of the genre’s opportunities.

Chapter Two

Place and Space and the Short Story Cycle

‘The truth is, fiction depends for its life on place’ – Eudora Welty (1956)

‘Place’ and the short story cycle

Important short story cycles such as Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (1940), established a tradition in which writers came to use the genre to represent place, and particularly a regional area, to explore specific communities, whether these communities be real and/or imagined. According to J. Gerald Kennedy –

In a broad sense, the mixed voices and multiple perspectives in these self-conscious “narratives of community” expose the element of communal dialogue inherent in all short story sequences. (194)

Many theorists have documented the development of regional and ‘local colour’ writing, including the ‘village sketch’ texts of the nineteenth century, all of which are understood to be precursors of contemporary short story cycles where ‘place’ is a primary element of interconnection.

In short story cycles of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries there has been a wide scope of variation in representations of place. While one could take a walking tour of the actual streets and locations represented in Joyce's *Dubliners*, Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* has no geographical connection to the real town of Winesburg at all, but rather is loosely based on the writer's experiences of growing up in Clyde, Ohio. Australian writer Patrick Cullen's short story cycle *What Came Between* (2009) is set in the 'real' city of Newcastle; Mandy Sayer's *15 Kinds of Desire* (2001) is set (in the main) in and around Sydney, as is Frank Moorhouse's *Futility and Other Animals* (1969); Gretchen Shirm's cycle *Having Cried Wolf* (2010) is set in the 'fictitious' coastal town of Kinsale (Shirm was born in Kiama, on the south coast of NSW). Gillian Mears' short story cycle *Fineflour* (1990) uses the fictitious river Fineflour to link its stories. Belle Boggs takes the winding Mattaponi River in the USA's Virginia as literal and metaphoric ground for the twelve linked stories in *Mattaponi Queen* (2010), which I discuss in the following chapter.

The desires and motivations to represent place are as varied amongst writers as the works they produce. It wasn't until Sandra Cisneros went to Iowa and heard the stories of others that she considered her own world as a potential source of creative inspiration. Of writing her well known short story cycle, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), she says, 'until Iowa I had never felt my home, family, and neighborhood unique or worthy of writing about' (in Nagel 104).

I was similarly influenced by the work of other writers – including that of Cisneros – in the decision to seek inspiration from a world I know, from my own

‘neighbourhood’. I was also intrigued by an acclamation of Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘exquisite attention to exotic detail’ by the editor of *Pif Magazine* (Aguiar 1999). Lahiri’s short stories reveal a writer who returns repeatedly to a world she knows (and perhaps seeks to understand). The ‘detail’ in her stories is only ‘other’ and therefore ‘exotic’ to readers outside that world. Of his exploration of places in the world that have become lost and forgotten, geographer Alastair Bonnett concludes, in *Off the Map* (2014), that the human relationship with place is filled with paradox: ‘It seems that ordinary places are also extraordinary places: that what is most exotic can be round the corner or right under our feet’ (298). I wanted to reconsider the ‘ordinary’ from my own world, in such a way that details might be seen as ‘extraordinary’, or potentially ‘exotic’, for readers. The tradition of Southern American short story writers in creating regional literary identity, without shying away from place naming, has been strongly influential on writers with whom I would align myself. While she reminds us that it is not just an American tradition, Mary Louise Pratt states that short stories as well as cycles have been used (particularly in colonial or formerly colonial territories) to ‘introduce new regions or groups into an established national literature, or into an emerging national literature in the process of decolonization’ (187).

While committed to grounding the stories in the verisimilitude of my own neighbourhood, I have not sought to portray a factual or even ‘wholistic’ representation of Mount Barker; some streets and buildings depicted in the stories exist, others are fictitious. At various stages of the writing process I wondered whether the town should be entirely ‘fictitious’. I was yet to discover the

relationships between geographical, spatial and literary representations of place. Nevertheless, drawing upon a 'real' place, admittedly with the freedom afforded in a creative project, felt like a significant responsibility as well as a potential restriction. Could I have it both ways? I wanted the 'place' of Mount Barker to serve as 'imaginative space that delimits [its] characters' lives even as it brings them together in a loose community, one that [could seem] to withhold the possibility of a fully coherent existence' (Luscher 2013, 198). When I raised this conundrum in discussion with Dr Eva Hornung her response was emphatic: 'your work should only be set in Mount Barker if it *must* be set in Mount Barker' (personal interview: 13.12.2012). Initially, I wasn't sure what that meant, but it bothered and encouraged me in equal measure.

The 'referential field'

In *The Composite Novel, The Short Story Cycle in Transition* (1995), Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris refer to Eudora Welty's well known essay 'Place in Fiction' (1956) in which she states: 'Place in fiction is the named, identified, concrete, exact and exacting, and therefore credible, gathering spot of all that has been felt, is about to be experienced' (30). Dunn and Morris point out that Welty understands 'place' and 'setting' as interchangeable, so that 'where' also includes 'when', 'for how long' and 'with whom'. They also suggest that a clearly defined common setting in a short story cycle can provide what Wolfgang Iser termed a 'referential field' (31). This term is useful in understanding the ways in which the genre can be used to establish connections and meaning through the use of a

common setting. As Dunn and Morris state, ‘place-as-setting involves much more than location, for place and people reflect and define each other.’ As a ‘referential field’, setting is not only place but also the *effect* of place and includes beliefs and attitudes, history and heritage (40).

What is apparent in historical and contemporary texts such as those mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is the relevance of setting (with ‘place’ as one aspect) as ‘referential field’, which serves as a primary element of interconnection. As Robert Luscher says of *Winesburg, Ohio*, setting (in this case, era and region) provides both ‘literal and metaphoric common ground for the stories’ (2013, 194). Dunn and Morris remind us that ‘the “village sketch” has come a long way since nineteenth century writers grounded it in verisimilitude’ (33). I understood Dr Hornung’s advice then to be about *effect*, as articulated by Dunn and Morris, and saw the need for setting to act as a ‘referential field’ in establishing meaning. While Mount Barker is like a ‘container’ for the stories in *5251*, its relevance for the whole text goes beyond being just that. I wanted place to provide both ‘literal and metaphoric common ground’ (Luscher 2013, 194) for the stories.

In seeking texts that use the cycle form and ‘place’ as a primary unifying device, I was drawn particularly to Sherwood Anderson’s rendering of a fictitious town in *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and Belle Boggs’ representation of specific areas in America’s Virginia, in *Mattaponi Queen* (2010). The short story cycle allows both these writers to explore representations of place that are relevant to the times in which they were published. The genre also allows them to subvert and encode

ideas and meanings through patterned associations, and in the spaces between the stories. Because much has been written about *Winesburg, Ohio*, I focus most of my attention in this exegesis on *Mattaponi Queen*. While Boggs' text is marketed as collected short stories, I argue in chapter three that it is more appropriately read as a short story cycle, as defined by Mann, Pacht and Luscher.

Considered and understood as a cycle, *Mattaponi Queen* is appealing for a number of reasons. In not 'pretending' to be a novel, as many cycles do, the text upholds the individual short story as its primary concern, which is also mine. *Mattaponi Queen* is a contemporary representation of a place that is personally familiar to the author, yet is unknown and unfamiliar (and therefore 'exotic') to most readers, like me. Unlike Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, the Mattaponi River and specific places through which it winds can be located on Google Maps. *5251* is an imagined representation of the 'real' place of Mount Barker; the town is identified, the Indigenous owners of the land are named, some street names are identifiable on Google Maps but others are fabricated. The significance of 'naming' place proved to be a tension throughout the project; it was resolved in some measure, through an exploration of spatial theory, and more specifically, geocriticism.

Spatial Theory

The last three decades have seen an abundance of writings on concepts of place and space, and the commonly discussed 'spatial turn' has led to critical discourse that favours the spatial over the historic or temporal (Ross 449). More recently,

these concepts have been directed towards literary analysis, while still drawing on other disciplines, such as geography, philosophy, sociology and architecture.

In her paper, 'Space and Place in Italian Literature: Writing a Region' (2013), Silvia Ross reiterates the point that 'space' and 'place' are often used interchangeably. She draws on De Certeau's definition and distinction from his 1984 work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which I likewise find useful. While 'place' is defined in terms of fixity of location and can also be created by the act of naming, 'space' is a 'practiced [sic] place', or an ensemble of movements (454). 'Space' and the 'social' essentially construct one another. Therefore, as Ross points out, 'an essential component of the spatial is the presence of people' (454). Ross draws on the work of Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard in *People and place. The extraordinary geographies of everyday life* (2001), to conclude that the spatial is ultimately linked to identity formation and that place then provides the forum where that identity is played out, or practised (455). I was interested to hear geographer and writer Alastair Bonnett at Adelaide Writers' Week (1.3.2015) speak disdainfully of this abstract notion of 'space' as he feels it demotes the more grounded 'place' in geographical thought. In *Off The Map* (2014) he argues that we are 'a place-making and place-loving species' and that 'placelessness is neither intellectually nor emotionally satisfying' (3). While I agree with this statement, I don't find the idea of 'space' to be in opposition with 'place'. Both are important considerations for the writer who names a place identifiable on Google Maps, while also engaging with the 'effect' of that place through fictive imagination, which I discuss later in this chapter.

In his essay ‘Geocriticism, Geopoetics, Geophilosophy, and Beyond’ Eric Prieto writes of the ‘concept’ of place, and the notion of a ‘sense of place’ as being important in an era where these are under threat by the ‘transformations that modernity (and *a fortiori* postmodernity) have wrought on our built and natural environments and the consequences of these transformations for the ways in which we relate to the world around us’ (15). He draws on the work of theorists such as Bertrand Westphal and Robert T. Tally Jr., who recognise the strategic role literary representations can have in our conceptions of human spatiality. Westphal argues that ‘space has become more important than time and geography has become more important than history as a guiding metaphor for the postmodern era’ (Prieto 19). It is to literature that Westphal and others have turned their attention in the study of spatial representation.

The ‘nonlinear spatial metaphor of the map’ (19) can be found in the structure of short story cycles that explore place, and it is not surprising then that Pacht and others consider the short story cycle, with its elements of fragmentation, dislocation, and pattern-making, to be suited to representation of regions that are undergoing accelerated change. Short story cycles, by their very structure, lend themselves to paradoxical representations of community. As Kennedy points out in his analysis of Raymond Carver’s *Cathedral* and Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*:

Using the short story sequence to expose the absence of community – a critique all the more searing because it teases us with moments of connection – Carver links his work with Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* and other twentieth-century collections that implicitly represent the atomistic tendencies of modern,

technological culture. The arranged collection lends itself to this cultural work perhaps because the short story form – with its inevitable circumscription of relations – isolates characters from a larger social order, whereas the sequence, with its inevitable breaks between stories, mirrors the gaps or barriers that partition social reality along lines of class, gender, religion, education, or ethnicity. (213)

The structure of the short story cycle is able to be ‘thematically mimetic’ (Jauss 180) and enables writers such as Carver to pursue what Kennedy terms ‘cultural work’. In her study of Tuscan literature, Ross suggests that the way in which writers choose to ‘inflect their spatial representations ... speaks volumes about their artistic agendas and ideologies’ (459). Writers utilising the short story cycle to explore spatial representations of place are able to pursue these agendas through the unique structural features of the form. For example, as Pacht points out in her discussion of Carver’s *Cathedral* as a short story cycle, the genre offered:

a unique way to address [Carver’s] lack of faith in and connectedness to society while at the same time showing just how common a problem this disconnectedness was. The act of putting these stories together allows the lonely and isolated to achieve a community of sorts; they are joined together by the loneliness and isolation that define them. (103)

There is a frisson in *Mount Barker*, a sense of push and pull, of desire and disappointment. Drawing upon (and limiting myself to) the spatial field of the town involved exploring issues such as gender, class, age, land, aspiration,

‘development’, politics, history, culture, and psychology that are peculiar to the place. Naming Mount Barker in *5251* enables an imaginative exploration of the reciprocity between place and space; it is a literary-spatial representation of the town. The notions of ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ become at once irrelevant and more relevant.

The ‘Real’ Place: Mount Barker, 5251

Mount Barker is a major regional town in the Adelaide Hills, in South Australia. The District Council of Mount Barker includes the town, the semi-rural areas surrounding it and a cluster of other smaller towns, including Littlehampton, Nairne, Meadows, Macclesfield and Hahndorf. Colonists surveyed the land where Mount Barker is now built in 1839, though early farmers did not settle there until 1844. The Indigenous landowners of the area are the Peramangk people and the Mount Barker Summit is also of significance to the Ngarrindjeri people. The Summit is now a conservation park and with its 517-metre elevation, enables views to Mount Lofty in the north (the highest point in the Southern Mount Lofty Ranges) and Lake Alexandrina in the south-east. Signage at the Summit informs visitors, somewhat vaguely, that:

Mount Barker lies within the home country of the Peramangk aboriginal [sic] people. There are a number of small aboriginal heritage sites on the Mount Barker Summit. The Ngarrindjeri [sic] people from the east also used the Summit. It was used for ceremonial rites and smoking of the [?]. The Summit was called Yaktanga by the local people and Womma Mu Kurta (Mountain upon the Plain)

by eastern tribes.

There is a general paucity of knowledge or information about the Indigenous landowners in the region; it is an issue I wanted to explore and which I discuss further in this chapter.

The outdated coat of arms of the Council of Mount Barker reflects the colonising paradigm of the town's history. A large clover leaf is featured in the centre, as a reference to the now little known fact that the area was the location of the discovery of subterranean clover as a fodder crop (previously it was considered a useless weed). The clover revolutionised farming practices, not just in Australia but also around the world. The arms include small pictorial representations of the industries on which the town was established: the steam flour mill (the first to be built outside of Adelaide, in 1844), a factory (possibly the old tannery or foundry), and the heads of a sheep and a cow, signifying the strong farming and grazing activities in the district. These activities still exist although rural areas of fertile land are increasingly being replaced with 'lifestyle properties'.

Mount Barker is situated thirty-three kilometres up the South Eastern Freeway, east of the city of Adelaide. It is an easy thirty to sixty minute commute depending on time of day, but in many ways it fits the kind of location traditionally represented in short story cycles. As Pratt points out, it is 'on the regional periphery that the short story cycle has been most likely to make its appearance' (187). She clarifies 'regional' as 'marginal with respect to some metropolis' (187); this certainly applies to Mount Barker. The town is close

enough to the city of Adelaide for residents to commute, and far enough from Adelaide for people to think of it as ‘country’, far enough to ‘pack a water bottle’. Locals of Mount Barker quaintly say they are ‘going to town’ when travelling to Adelaide and the suburbs of Adelaide are almost always referred to as ‘the plain’, or ‘down on the plain’.

As one of the fastest growing regional towns in South Australia, Mount Barker is in the process of undergoing a major population growth. The population forecast for the District for 2015 is 32,339, which is expected to grow to 52,216 by 2036 (<<http://forecast.id.com.au/mount-barker/home>>). As Pacht suggests, the genre of the short story cycle is well suited to depicting a regional town in a state of flux (3). While in Mount Barker there are families that include fourth and fifth generation locals, the last decade in particular has seen a massive influx of new residents, a trend that is ongoing and increasing. Some come for a tree-change and are willing to commute, others for the cheaper housing and more rural lifestyle. New sub-divisions and cheaper larger houses appeal to an ‘aspirational’ demographic, while the rural aspect appeals to those wanting a slower lifestyle. As a result, Mount Barker holds a relatively mixed demographic, though racially and culturally, it is largely homogenous: the 2011 census revealed only 4% of the Council’s population spoke a language other than English in the home; the top five ancestries nominated by the population in that year were English, Australian, German, Scottish and Irish (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).

The population forecast in Mount Barker is a result of a state government decision in 2010 to rezone a large proportion of agricultural land surrounding the

town into residential development, allowing for 7,000 new houses and the expected increase of approximately 20,000 residents over the next twenty years through an expansion of the townships in the district. The decision ignited much controversy within the community around ideological issues of land usage, as well as questions over the provision of adequate infrastructure. Living in Mount Barker involves tolerating increasing levels of traffic congestion, road works and detours as the town's infrastructure runs behind its growth. New housing developments and fast food chains are being built faster than the roads to accommodate them.

Interestingly, Prieto raises the question of spatial *orientation* and the ability of individuals to orient themselves geographically, particularly in texts such as Joyce's *Ulysses* or the more contemporary Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*, where spatial orientation is linked to the theme of personal identity (24). Prieto asks:

What roles do the cues that enable individuals to orient themselves in space play in the constitution of human subjectivity? What are the costs and benefits of uniformity and variation, predictability and surprise, and grids and curves in different kinds of environments? (24)

Prieto draws on the work of Marc Augé's *Non Places* (1995), which describes the airports, railway stations, motels, highways and fast-food restaurants that arise from standardisation and increasing uniformity and asks, do these nonplaces 'disrupt something essential in the spatial practice of those who use them' (24)? These are interesting questions that the limitations of word length prevent me from discussing here. However, I am curious about the way these questions and

the issues they raise might be explored by writers using the short story cycle to represent regional towns, such as Mount Barker, that are subject to rapid population growth and the subsequent expansion of housing developments and franchised 'chain' businesses. For example, in my story 'A Simple Matter of Aesthetics', Francis' response to the finial is an attempt to interrogate the 'fourth dimension of architecture' and, in this case, her response to enforced 'uniformity' in her environment.

Behind the controversies around development of land has been the largely ignored lack of consultation with the Indigenous landowners of the region, particularly in relation to significant sites. Aboriginal land rights are not a high priority on the agendas of any level of government in Australia and, in mainstream culture, the notion itself is derided or disdained, and most often dismissed. In relation to this issue, in particular, I was interested in Pacht's argument that authors have been able to 'express culturally and politically unpopular ideas by exploiting the cycle's ability to integrate disparate narrative threads while still highlighting the discontinuity inherent in the genre' (5). I wanted to make reference to Indigenous land ownership, but I also wanted to 'touch the nerve' of the mainstream view of that ownership. I wanted to explore the genre's capacity to be 'thematically mimetic' (Jauss 180) by creating spaces and absences, including stories that make no reference at all to Indigenous land issues.

Part of the early reticence I had about an 'imagined' representation of my own hometown was also related to a sense of responsibility around 'naming', since the

notion of naming is of course a powerful aspect of colonisation. Paul Carter argues in *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (1987) that Australia's 'discoverers, explorers and settlers were making spatial history. They were choosing direction, applying names, imagining goals, inhabiting the country' (xxi). He argues that spatial history evokes the 'spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence. It is spatiality as a form of nonlinear writing; as a form of history' (xxii). In naming Mount Barker and exploring the effects of regional expansion, housing and population growth, I was conscious of contributing to a postcolonial representation of land, and one that I wanted to address in some way through the cycle genre.

The challenge was to write about the spatial tensions of stolen land, national identity and notions of 'Aboriginal reconciliation', particularly in the minds of members of the postcolonial dominant culture, like myself, who are often ignorant of anything pertaining to the original and displaced owners of the land. In the story, 'Dancing on Your Bones', new resident and alienated 'kindergarten mum', Donna, has 'never heard the word "Peramangk" spoken aloud', but when she does, 'it did ring a bell'. In this story the somewhat awkward and self-conscious second person point of view is employed in an attempt to comment on the tensions inherent when a non-Aboriginal Australian writer chooses to explore tensions around land, race and racism. In 'Something Special, Something Rare', Jenny informs her husband and son that 'Laratinga was a Peramangk word for the Mount Barker Creek'. The family is embarking on a bird-watching excursion in the Laratinga wetlands, a geographical site in Mount Barker, which was

constructed by the District Council in 1999. It is a small and seemingly innocuous moment in the story that again self-consciously situates the ignorance of non-Aboriginal characters occupying Aboriginal land. Through these and similarly small patterned references, I have attempted to subtly (perhaps too subtly) place Aboriginal dispossession into the spatial field of the text. I was encouraged by the restrained and indirect ways in which Belle Boggs deals with race and racial tensions in the spatial field she creates through the cycle genre in *Mattaponi Queen*, which I discuss further in chapter three. However, I was also conscious of the critique put forward by Kuttainen in *Unsettling Stories: Settler Postcolonialism and the Short Story Composite*, that ‘composites’ concerned with region and place often play their own role in ‘local myth-making’, along with their ‘supposed challenges to dominant cultural orthodoxies’ (98). Kuttainen is critical of ‘composite’ texts that are ‘fetishized for their hybridity, or regarded as organic metaphors of the national or settler condition’ as they are so often ‘complicit with power formations that designate home, nation, and colony as natural’ (181). Of Olga Masters’, *A Long Time Dying* (1985), for example, which is set in the small town of Cobargo in New South Wales in 1935, Kuttainen argues that the narrative, along with its representations of Aboriginality, is ‘caught up in re-inscribing the power dynamics it pretends to merely describe’ (168). As part of a fictitious representation of the real place of Mount Barker, the discomfort inherent in the story ‘Dancing on your Bones’ is precisely an attempt to address this tension, as it acknowledges the absence of an Indigenous presence in the mainstream space, and allows for a double reading.

Geocriticism and Mapping Place

Geographers and other spatial thinkers are increasingly interested in literary representations of place and space and rather than draw a 'sharp line between imaginative, theoretical, and empirical discourses, they explore the borders and zones of overlap between them' (Prieto 14). The work of Westphal, Tally and others in the development of geocriticism as a mode of literary criticism is centred not on texts or authors so much, as on geographical sites. Texts are 'mapped' according to their representation of geographical space, alongside as many texts as possible that also deal with that space. The texts are then brought into dialogue with one another and may include non-literary texts such as tourist brochures, reports and records (21). What is then analysed is not just the 'point of view' of one author, or even a series of authors writing from the same 'identitarian space', but potentially a multiplicity of points of view, none of which is favoured or esteemed more highly than any others (20).

In Australia, drawing upon other geocritical mapping projects around the world, Peta Mitchell and Jane Stadler have embarked on a project entitled 'A Cultural Atlas of Australia'. This project seeks to investigate the 'cultural and historical significance of location and landscape in Australian narrative fiction [and] presents the first national survey of narrative space spanning Australian novels, films and plays' (55). An interactive map uses digital cartography to create a 'geovisualisation' to document the ways in which 'spatial storytelling enacts, produces and translates space across different media' (55). The map

(< <http://australia-cultural-atlas.info/CAA/>>) currently only includes the spatial representations of a relatively small number of mostly contemporary and award winning novels, plays and films. At this stage, there are no short stories (or cycles) or poems included. Mitchell and Stadler argue that the project is one way in which ‘geocriticism can put into practice its capacity to reframe understandings of place and space by revealing connections between separate strands of spatial enquiry’ (55), but also to potentially ‘suggest new ways of thinking about location and landscape and to break down traditional typologies of Australian space’ (57). The questions Mitchell and Stadler ask of themselves and their Cultural Atlas project are similar to those of the short story cycle writer who is interested in spatial representation of place, particularly as they relate to the naming of culturally sensitive Aboriginal sites. It is acknowledged that literature ‘imaginatively invokes spaces in ways that subsequently inflect the meanings readers associate with actual places’ (58). Geocriticism therefore proposes that all texts, not just literary texts, are capable of intervening in the ‘cultural field’, altering perceptions and orientations in relation to the ‘real’ physical environment (58).

The desire to avoid the limitation of individual viewpoints through geocritical analysis, in many ways mirrors the cycle writer’s desire to avoid a singular ‘voice’ or representation of place, preferring to create a sequence of stories that is both whole and fragmented, unified, and yet potentially contradictory. This resonates with the concerns of acclaimed Nigerian novelist and short story writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie when she discusses ‘the danger of the single story’ in

her Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) talk in 2009. In her concluding statements on the detrimental effect of singular representations of African characters in literature, she says: ‘When we reject the single story, when we realise that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise’ (2009). This is entirely in keeping with Westphal’s assertion that the ‘principle of geocritical analysis resides in the confrontation of several outlooks which correct each other’ (in Prieto 21). As discussed in the previous chapter, at the heart of this tension in the short story cycle is the potential power inherent in the spatial arrangement of stories; if I say this ‘here’, then I can refute myself ‘there’. I have attempted to use this technique, to some extent, in representations of masculinity and masculine alienation. While the character of Nathan Long is doing his best with the resources he has in ‘Barking Dogs’, he ultimately destroys everything through the one compulsive and violent act. In ‘Raising Boys’, Malcolm Wheeler is paralysed by his own passivity and desire for affirmation, and finds himself both repelled and envious of the ideas about masculinity espoused and promoted by pop psychologist Steve Biddulph. In the story, ‘Something Special, Something Rare’, Graham Barlow longs for the feelings he imagines will accompany commercial and social success. Close to nature and within the liminal space afforded by the Laratinga wetlands, Graham experiences an epiphany about his family and the tenuousness of life. Across the cycle of stories, it becomes apparent that his epiphany is ultimately of no value as the reader – hopefully – deduces that it is his daughter who is the murdered schoolgirl. Graham, ultimately, is too self absorbed and inattentive to save her.

An Imagined Place: Winesburg, Ohio as Template

As Anderson's most admired work, *Winesburg, Ohio*, is well understood to be a seminal short story cycle and discussion and analysis of the text is established by primary theorists and scholars such as Ingram, Mann, Dunn and Morris and more recently, in the work of Kennedy and Luscher. Written during 1915 and 1916, the twenty-five semi-impressionistic short stories centre on significant moments in the lives of characters intrinsically tied to the fictive town of Winesburg. The significance of this work in the context of my own project lies not so much in Anderson's (disputed) claim that he invented the 'Winesburg form' ('It is a form in which I feel at ease. I invented it. It was mine.' [Mann 7]), but in the influence it has had, and continues to have, on other writers interested in using the genre, and particularly, in rendering place and 'community'. Anderson's 'Winesburg form' has influenced or provided a 'pattern' for such significant writers as Hemingway (Mann 7), Carver (Kennedy 203) and, in Australia, Frank Moorhouse (Baker 224). Critical analysis of *Winesburg, Ohio* has involved particular focus on the *bildungsroman* (and *künstlerroman*) of George Willard, the cyclically arranged symbolic patterns (Ingram 154) and themes including alienation of the grotesques or corruption of local life by 'modernity' (Kennedy 201). However, Luscher argues that by attempting to understand the 'subtle and balanced role of place' in *Winesburg, Ohio*, readers can be guided regarding other regionally based and structured texts. He suggests that the 'complex spatiotemporal role of place'

working with other narrative elements, is what establishes the ‘coherence and thematising discontinuity’ peculiar to the short story cycle (2013, 194).

I was interested in *Winesburg, Ohio* as a potential guide in understanding the use of the form in rendering an ‘effect’ or ‘essence’ of place. In his concluding analysis of the text, Ingram states that the community revealed in ‘Winesburg’ does not inhabit a realistic town, but rather, ‘a landscape in the narrator’s imagination’ (193). Anderson’s Winesburg is a place invoked partly through memory. While I have lived in Mount Barker since 2004, I did not spend formative childhood years there, as Anderson did in Clyde and Boggs in Virginia (Boggs was born in Richmond and has childhood memories of playing on the banks of the Mattaponi). However, my maternal grandfather spent one year living in Mount Barker as a teenager and before he died in 2009, he shared his memories of visiting a great aunt who lived in one of the cottages on Druids Avenue, of attending Mount Barker High School, and visiting relatives who had lived in the nearby town of Littlehampton from the early 1900s. The region has been part of my consciousness, if not necessarily embedded in my own memory, for longer than I have been a resident there myself. This notion of landscape in imagination is useful. Eric Prieto claims that: ‘It is precisely the imaginative dimension of fictional narratives and metaphorical language that gives them their peculiar form of power over the real’ (14). Whether it be the narrator’s, the author’s or ultimately, the reader’s imagination, this dimension foregrounds and affirms constructs of space and place.

In his essay ‘What is Real is Imagined’, Irish writer Colm Tóibín reflects helpfully on the tensions and processes inherent in writing imaginatively about a known and real place, in his case, a town in which he spent time as a child.

The world that fiction comes from is fragile. It melts into insignificance against the universe of what is clear and visible and known. It persists because it is based on the power of cadence and rhythm in language and these are mysterious and hard to defeat and keep in their place. The difference between fact and fiction is like the difference between land and water. (Tóibín 2012)

Tóibín reflects on the experience of walking through the town, the interplay invoked by perceptions of reality and memories of his mother walking through the streets to work wearing a red coat. ‘It brings with it a sort of music and a strange need’ he says (2012). This involves the compulsion to write down what is happening in his mother’s mind, which of course can only come from his imagination, can only be ‘fictitious’. Perhaps in this way, the fiction writer is able to address dissatisfactions between abstract notions of ‘space’ and the more concrete ‘place’ as expressed by Bonnett in *Off The Map*, as the work of the imagination seeks to meld the unknown with the known. Memory of place (and space) in this instance is pertinent to an understanding of creative process.

American writer Siri Hustvedt describes the act (and feeling) of writing fiction as ‘remembering what never happened’ (2006, 41), which strongly resonates with me. Writing fiction is the act of bringing together fragments from the conscious and subconscious mind, of collecting them together and arranging them in a way that ‘works’, that *feels* right: right in the sense of resembling something that is as

truthful, at least, as memory. Tóibín says he wants the writing to have ‘a rhythm and a sound that will come from the nervous system rather than the mind’ (2012). And yet Tóibín admits that he actively seeks and needs connection with the ‘real’.

If I tried to write about a lighthouse and used one that I had never seen and did not know, it would show in the sentences. Nothing would work; it would have no resonance for me, or for anyone else. If I made up a mother and put her in another town, a town I had never seen, I wouldn’t bother working at all. (Tóibín 2012)

This resounds with my own decision to both centre my project on place, and to name that place as Mount Barker. I was driven by a desire to capture something of the ‘real’ essence of the place, in a way that a ‘factual’ representation could not. And I too wanted the impulse for this – the outworking of it – to come from the ‘nervous system rather than the mind’.

Prieto writes:

The “Fictive imagination” (to borrow Timothy Reiss’s expression) seems to be more sensitive to those qualities of spatial and geographical formations that are most difficult to detect from within the established, formalized explanatory frameworks of the physical and social sciences. (14)

The evocation of place and space from somewhere as nebulous and vague and creative as a writer’s ‘nervous system’ is perhaps just as ‘useful’ or defining as any other discipline, such as cartography or geography. The inherent ambiguities of spatial dimensions ‘constructed by the power of words’ are discussed by Anne-

Kathrin Reuschel and Lorenz Hurni in their paper, 'Mapping Literature: Visualisation of Spatial Uncertainty in Fiction' (2011, 294). Geocriticism is interested in the layering of spatial representations of place and while the fiction writer might create from imagination (creating a myriad of difficulties in 'mapping'), Reuschel and Hurni acknowledge that cartography is also capable of creating 'uncertainty' as a result of subjectivities caused by factors such as 'generalisations' and 'personality' (299). Literary representations of place engage with the spatial field and bring the 'uncertainty' or 'added layer' of the writer's imagination. The short story cycle brings further idiosyncratic layering through the effect of the borders that demarcate individual stories, through the spaces in-between the stories, and through the associative patterning across them.

Prieto points out that geocriticism has its limits, such as it only considers spatial representations of places with a 'distinct cultural and topographical profile' (22). In this way, Westphal rules out the mapping of 'nongeographical places', meaning places that are too intimate to be included or recognised on a map, such as the domestic spaces described in Bachelard's, *Poetics of Space* (23). Geocritical analysis may therefore miss potential meanings to be found in these 'intimate' spatial representations that pertain to place. For example, as Ingram points out, in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* the chief furnishings of most of the rooms—a window, a chair, and a bed—offer a repeated interior architecture that represents the 'only kind of existence open to its inmate. On the bed (or in a chair) by the window, he lies (or sits) and dreams' (181). The effect reinforces the cycle's theme of 'debilitating stasis' in the face of growing industrialisation and

accelerated change. Commenting on an earlier draft of *5251*, Eva Hornung observed that the interior lay out of each house throughout the stories was essentially the same (personal interview: 13.12.2012). As a patterning device this had the effect of reinforcing the uniformity and homogeneity that can accompany new housing developments, as well as the opportunity for mirroring and metaphor. It also raises questions very similar to those of Prieto's regarding the costs and benefits of such spaces on the constitution of human subjectivity.

An Impulse of Arrangement

Intrinsic to the role and interplay of space in representations of place in the short story cycle is the idea of arrangement. For me, the *feeling* of writing fiction—the sensori-emotional experience—is more akin to arranging three-dimensional objects within a space, than the *feeling* of wrangling with words on a page. Arranging ordinary objects within an ordinary space is something I often do, both literally and mentally: flowers in a vase, candles on a table, shells in a bowl, small pots or bottles on a shelf. Arrangement naturally follows collection; collected objects speak to one another through sameness, variation and contrast. In arranging objects, one considers spatial relationship, shadow, echo, and ultimately, combined 'effect.' A jug may be moved slightly to the left and back, forward a centimeter and back. Decisions about effect may take a long time. For a writer the same experience of arrangement might apply to something as

apparently minor as placement of a comma, a connection between words or spaces on a page.

The likening of words to objects that are then shaped and arranged together is not a new idea, particularly in poems, including prose poems, nor is it new in regard to the short story, which can sometimes resemble a form of prose poetry (for example, in the work of Lydia Davis). In her definition of the short story as a literary form in *Story to Anti-Story* (1979), Mary Rohrberger states:

A short story, like any work of art, is a construct whose dimensions and parts are patterned according to some idea or governing principle. If the work of art is successful, all of the parts will work together in harmonious relationship to give significance to the whole. (9)

In approaching arrangement in the short story cycle, I was curious about other art forms guided by similar impulses. For example, the work of Australian ceramicist Gwen Hanssen Pigott and the paintings of the Italian artist Giorgio Morandi are both instructive and resonant in understanding the spatial tensions inherent in the arrangement within and between stories. Hanssen Pigott famously arranged her seemingly ordinary cups, bowls, bottles and beakers—sublime in their elegance, clean lines and delicate curves—into three-dimensional still life groupings, described as almost anthropomorphic, like a family in the way each individual member has its own characteristics while also being related to the other members. Art critics have also drawn musical analogies to describe the relationships in her arrangements (Timms in Rye 6). In the evocation of arranged everyday objects, the potter plays with relativity and balance and invokes meaning in the objects

themselves and in the spaces between them. Hanssen-Piggott attributed her source of the idea of grouping to Morandi; her exploration of ‘negative space’ was borne from her love of his painting and prints, which from 1950 to 1964, were mostly painted groupings of bottles. In response to an exhibition of his late work from this period, Siri Hustvedt, a renowned art essayist as well as writer, observes: ‘In these still lifes, we are neither outside nor inside, but both inside and outside’ (2005, 127). Similarly, in the short story cycle, understanding resides neither outside nor inside the individual stories, but both inside and outside. It is the both/and paradox discussed in chapter one that is central to the aesthetic of the genre. As Kennedy explains:

The tension between unity and multiplicity ... relies on a balancing of centrifugal and centripetal impulses and on the ambiguous interplay between its discrete narrative parts and the formal or aesthetic whole. (xi)

Being constrained by a particular space and informed by and involved with specific objects is central to the work of Hanssen Pigott and Morandi. It is almost as though they prefer to create from a limited palette. In limiting himself to bottles, Morandi’s path was one of ‘restraint, patience, repression, and suggestion’ and Hustvedt argues that ‘the very narrowness of the field became the vehicle of his liberation ... reduction opened up possibilities that inclusiveness did not have’ (132). How the aesthetic of arrangement central to the short story cycle is utilised and understood across other art mediums cannot be accommodated in the scope of this exegesis, however it is an area that invites further enquiry. Short story writers have long drawn analogies between the genre and other art forms and the cycle

invites more, particularly within discourse on spatial theory and representations of 'intimate' spaces.

Chapter Three

Reading Belle Boggs' *Mattaponi Queen* as a Short Story Cycle

Mattaponi Queen won the 2009 Bakeless fiction Prize and was subsequently published by Graywolf Press in 2010. The stories are set in King William and King and Queen counties in Virginia, in the United States. The twelve stories are set largely in the rural surrounds of these counties, including the Mattaponi Indian Reservation and along the winding banks of the Mattaponi River. Boggs was born in Richmond, and grew up in the rural Tidewater region of eastern Virginia, where the stories are located.

Unlike many short story cycles masquerading as novels, *Mattaponi Queen* is presented and marketed as a collection of short stories interlinked by place; the word 'stories' underlies the title and in the tradition of collected stories, the book shares its title with one of the individual stories. While Mann identifies these signs as 'generic signals' that a collection is not to be read as a cycle (14), Boggs' text also meets the widely agreed upon 'essential characteristic' of the genre: the stories are both self-sufficient and interrelated. The most compelling evidence for self-sufficiency is independent publication; four of the twelve stories in *Mattaponi Queen* were previously published. 'Good News for a Hard Time' first appeared in *Glimmer Train*, 'Homecoming' in *At Length*, 'Imperial Chrysanthemum' in the

Paris Review and 'Jonas' in *Five Chapters*. Each of the remaining eight stories may also be read in isolation. While 'place' is a clear and obvious unifier and has relevance to my own project, the linkages between Boggs' stories are mostly 'quiet', and the interrelatedness is subtlety and thematically cumulative. I was drawn to *Mattaponi Queen* for these reasons, and the fact that the text clearly places the single unit of the short story as its primary concern. However, in this chapter I will establish that the expanded meanings inherent in *Mattaponi Queen* are best understood when the text is read as a short story cycle, as defined and discussed by theorists and scholars including Mann, Luscher, Nagel and Kennedy, both in its strategies of coherence and unity, as well as through discontinuity and fragmentation. Central to these strategies are the concerns of the contemporary short story writer representing a known and 'real' place through the 'referential' and 'spatial' fields pertinent to that place, as discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter will also explore the ways in which the genre enables Boggs to subtly express subversive ideas. It is the cycle's 'unique generic makeup' that facilitates the 'veiling' of meaning, 'so that those who are sympathetic to the cause will recognise it, though all readers are likely to be influenced by the message' (Pacht 137).

It is in the 'second reading', as Pacht reminds us, that the meanings inherent in a cycle are most fully understood (2) and this applies to *Mattaponi Queen*. The first reading builds an overarching 'effect' of place; in this case, it is confining and constricted; we begin to construct an imagined 'sketchy map' of King William, King George, Tappahannock, Kinsale, Route 66, Richmond; we sense

the old and the new: bare fields, cemeteries, cinder-block houses and encroaching flimsy housing developments; the river is ever-present. In the first reading there are occasional moments of recognition when characters' lives intersect, but it is the second reading that both consolidates the sequentially accrued 'network of associations' as well as revealing the deeper meanings in the gaps in-between the stories and in the element of discontinuity that characterizes the form (Luscher 2012, 362).

Through patterning, repetition, juxtaposition and contrast, the cycle form enables its author to present concerns relevant to a place she knows well, particularly in relation to the environment, racism, entrapment, isolation and pride. Dominant recurring themes include the inherent 'goodness' of nature (most notably the river), and the value of what lies beneath the surface. Each of these themes may be seen to relate to issues that are pertinent to the time and place in which the text was written and to reflect specific concerns of the author (Pacht 5). The genre also enables Boggs to express paradoxical themes of maternal yearning and loneliness alongside a sense of community, and of the simultaneous desire to stay and also leave.

Whether or not they are intended by the author to be traditional 'framing stories', the first and last stories in a cycle invariably have a significant impact, particularly in subsequent readings when dominant themes begin to circle back on themselves. Pacht suggests that:

The opening text-piece tends to introduce the themes that will be elucidated throughout the cycle just as the closing piece sums them up and expresses the

author's final thoughts on the subject. The order of the internal pieces cannot be changed without changing the impression the text makes on the reader. (3)

The framing stories of *Mattaponi Queen* reveal two metanarratives that run concurrently throughout the text, sometimes in affirmation of one another, and sometimes in opposition, reinforcing the cycle's potential to express paradoxical and subtly subversive ideas. On the one hand, there is a recurring tension between pride and disdain for 'place'. On the other, and perhaps more powerfully, is the notion that what is most worthy can be found when one digs deeply enough, finding treasure where others may only see rubbish.

In the opening story, 'Deer Season', an entire school is taken over by a 'general air of femaleness' as the teachers, girls and a few 'nerdy guys' relax in the absence of the 'redneck' boys, who have special leave to go deer hunting. In this moment of reprieve, the Art teacher, Mrs. Hayes, reflects on an argument with her husband over a twenty-foot deep hole on their property. He claims it is a sinkhole needing to be filled with 'sand or dirt' and that it isn't 'safe' or 'right' to keep, as it might get 'bigger' and 'bigger' and ultimately degrade the value of their land (5). However, Mrs. Hayes disagrees with her husband's assessment. She speculates fondly on the small and beautiful artifacts she has found from digging and 'scraping the damp clay walls with her fingers': a 'hand-blown glass bottle, an arrowhead, a Confederate belt buckle, a bone toothbrush without any bristles' (5). Covering the hole will come at a cost. Reviewers have pointed out the symbolism of the sinkholes that 'pock the country' and the longing for escape that the characters express (Gallari 2011). But the symbol of the sinkhole in this story

also suggests something about textual practice: that words can be mined for what they cover, something more valuable.

This metanarrative provides a guide to the reader intuitively approaching the text as a short story cycle. Boggs' notion of searching, probing and digging beyond the surface is pertinent. As Pacht states in reference to the short story cycles of Raymond Carver and Flannery O'Conner:

In order to see all that is there, we must uncover much of it ourselves, searching out the absences, the gaps, and the spaces in between in order to fully understand the text. (103)

The idea of buried treasure, of buried *meaning*, is repeated throughout the cycle. The bounty of the opening story's sink hole is mirrored in 'Jonas' when Melinda attends the 'Fabergé egg exhibit' in Richmond with her husband, Joan, as he practises being in public as a woman: 'What Melinda liked best, she decided, was the idea of the surprise inside the egg, something special and hidden and fine, something to make you catch your breath' (112). In 'Homecoming', when Marcus loses an important game of football, the bruising he feels 'was just on top. Underneath, *where it mattered*, he was muscle and heart' (159, my emphasis). When Loretta is finally able to buy her boat, and Mitchell has second thoughts about selling, his warning takes the form of a metaphor. 'A boat is a hole to pour money into, you know. A boat like that is a deep hole' (181). The effect of the repeated symbol and the late placement of this story in the sequence, enables the reader to entertain contradictory meanings; there may be advantages for Loretta in

giving up gainful employment and pursuing a life on the river, not financial ruin at all. This is immediately reinforced by the memories of ‘valuable junk’ and ‘relics’ Mitchell and his brother Gary would find in the fields and woods around their grandfather’s house which they would trade for cash with dealers: ‘silver gravy spoons, rusted rifle stocks, Civil War belt buckles, bullets, coins, knife blades’ (181). The symbolism of digging deep for small treasures, ‘past deep roots and rock beds, making a mess’, mirrors that of ‘Deer Season’.

The book cover offers another intratextual device. Designed by artist Frances Pelzman Liscio, it is a collage of artefacts that allude to found treasure: singular flowers, an old bottle, a vintage toy truck, a tiny cameo locket or ring and bursting seed pods. The inclusion of the word ‘Mattaponi’ alludes to connection, as the Mattaponi River winds both literally and metaphorically through the region and through the stories. *Mattaponi Queen*, like many cycles where place provides literal and metaphoric material for the stories, is ‘grounded solidly in a particular era as well as a particular place’ (Luscher 2013, 194).

The Mattaponi River represents immense cultural and traditional value to members of the Mattaponi Indian tribes who trace their ancestry back to Chief Powhatan, father of Pocahontas, who ruled most of Tidewater Virginia when Europeans arrived in 1607. As Boggs explains in an interview, the Mattaponi Indians have ‘maintained many of their traditions – especially shad fishing – and members of that community are very important to the protection of the Mattaponi, which is one of America’s most pristine coastal rivers’ (Forbes 2010). As discussed in chapter two, the short story cycle unified by place provides the writer

with unique opportunities to ‘inflect their spatial representations’ with their own ‘agendas and ideologies’ (Ross 459) and this is seen in the way the river is depicted throughout *Mattaponi Queen*.

Throughout Boggs’ text, the River is consistently presented as ‘innocent’ and ‘pure’, contrasting with the ‘subdivisions full of trashy plastic houses like the ones across the river’ (175) and in contrast to the difficulties faced by the characters. The first reference to the river occurs in the second story, ‘Good News for a Hard Time’; it is described as ‘beautiful’ and in contrast to everything else that isn’t ‘exotic or special’. In the third story, ‘Imperial Chrysanthemum’, the river represents solace and clarity for Loretta and reprieve from the racism and social politics that surround her. Throughout the cycle, there is no negative connotation relating to the river; it represents the best of everything: homes with views of the river are valued, both spiritually and monetarily; characters fish from the river, catching a prodigious variety of species – ‘shad’, ‘trout’, ‘crappie’, ‘yellow perch’, ‘catfish’ and ‘striped bass’ – feeding their families, bonding with one another and celebrating. In ‘Good News for a Hard Time’, Bruce bakes ‘shad’ for hours to celebrate Jeremy’s homecoming from war and as they approach the house they can smell the ‘bones soft and gelatinous in the tough salty flesh. Ronnie could almost taste it, intense and rare, not like food at all. It was like love, she thought’ (27). In the title story, Loretta takes off down the river in the ‘Mattaponi Queen’ to her new life, as Mitchell has second thoughts about selling her his boat, sentimental about the river he grew up on: ‘As a boy he swung from the same rope that still hangs from the arching branch of a red oak tree’ (184). In

this story, which appears tenth in the sequence of the twelve stories, the river is also presented as primordial: ‘The mud beneath his toes when he let himself sink beneath the pollen-dusted surface was an ancient mud, the leaves that his feet churned were thick and rubbery’ (184). And then a threat to the river is made explicit:

Now they wanted to dam it up, to make a reservoir feeding the new white plastic developments in Newport News and Hampton Roads, the old, mean brick ones too. The retirees in Williamsburg needed more water; the NASA scientists in Poquoson and their smart children and their patient wives needed water too, for sprinkler systems and soccer fields and koi ponds. (185)

It becomes apparent, only toward the end of the cycle that the Mattaponi River is at the centre of a significant political, cultural and environmental dispute. And something is malevolently awry, as ‘Mitchell saw all this approaching like a snakehead’ (185). This patterning of meaning, along with the judicious arrangement of stories, creates a clear ‘ideological’ stance in the text that the river is not merely ‘good’ but worthy of conservation. On the one hand, this represents the familiar notion that a ‘sense of place’ (particularly pertaining to a natural environment) is considered important and worth preserving in the face of ‘modern’ and ‘artificial’ encroachments, as discussed in chapter two. However, Boggs’ representation of the river also demonstrates the way writers are able to use the unique structure of the cycle to subversively address an issue controversial to the time and era in which their work is published, as argued by Pacht (137).

In her work, *Protecting Pocahontas's World: The Mattaponi Tribe's Struggle Against Virginia's King William Reservoir Project* (2010), Professor of Law, Allison M. Dussias, documents the Mattaponi Tribe's litigation challenge to stop the major proposal by coastal Virginia cities to extract water from the Mattaponi River through the construction of a 78-foot high dam and a 1500 acre reservoir in King William County (3). This is an area, writes Dussias, where over 150 archeological and sacred sites, mostly Indian, are located (3). The project was expected to result in the destruction of more than 400 acres of wetlands and 21 miles of streams, along with adverse impact on another 875 acres of upland wildlife habitat, 105 acres of wetlands downstream of the dam, and significant threat to prime shad spawning grounds and other aquatic animals and plants. Dussias states that the adverse significance of the project for 'the land, water, people (both living and dead), flora, and fauna of the area would, it seems, be difficult to overstate' (3). This project was to be located within 3 miles of the Mattaponi Reservation, where a number of Boggs' stories are set and a number of her major characters live. At the time *Mattaponi Queen* was being published by Graywolf Press, the Mattaponi Tribe was pursuing litigation against the reservoir project in state and federal court.

We don't discover the outcome of the reservoir project in Boggs' story. The threat to the river is a narrative thread that lies concurrently with three others: Loretta's acquisition of the boat, the romantic tension building between Mitchell and his brother's wife, and Mitchell's lack of luck in love and its impact on his daughter, Annabel. Boggs weaves this significant political and environmental

issue into the spatial fabric of this story, where we are only told that Mitchell's daughter is doing a school project on endangered rivers at school (186). But the full impact of Boggs' message is in the associative and patterned references throughout the cycle, where she is able to inflect her spatial representation of the river as being both literally and symbolically 'good' and therefore, worth preserving in its pristine and natural form. The words of Webster 'Little Eagle' Costello, Chief of the Mattaponi Tribe, strongly resonate with the metanarrative in Boggs' text that meaning and value are found with effort, and beneath the surface:

All my life, I've fished out there. From a little boy on up... You had to eat the fish, you had to get out here and dig in the earth to get what you needed to live... We wouldn't be here today without that river. (in Dussias, from Robert Little, *'We've Had Enough': Mattaponi Tribe Cities 320-year-old Treaty to Thwart County's Reservoir* John Lankford, Ed The Virginian Pilot, April 6, 1997, at A1)

In this way, the structure of *Mattaponi Queen* becomes 'thematically mimetic' as the genre enables the manipulation of the whole text to build meaning through progression, repetition and the spaces in-between. Boggs is also able to utilise the genre to 'veil' meaning (Pacht 137).

The text also makes the subtle point that preserving the river is both a concern and desired outcome for all racial groups in the region, not just the Mattaponi Indians, for whom it obviously holds great cultural and spiritual significance. Writer Michelle Latiolais states on the back cover of the book that the Mattaponi River is 'the confluence of three rivers' which acts as a 'stunning metaphor for a place where three races have lived inextricable histories for generations'. There

are other minority groups living in contemporary Virginia, but Boggs' characters are drawn largely from these three races whose histories are 'inextricable'. The 2013 census identifies that non-Hispanic white Americans compromise 63.6% of Virginia's population, Black or African Americans compromise 19.7% and American Indians make up 0.5% (U.S. Census Bureau). Dussias states that the reservoir project was effectively a continuation of colonial demand for tribal land and resources by a growing non-Indian population, and at the heart of the demand, as in the past, were commercial interests (55). Where Powhatan corn, land and labor was once at stake, now it was water and fish (56). In writing fictively about a place (land and water) where colonisers have made 'spatial history' through their presence and associated 'fantasies' (as discussed by Paul Carter in relation to Australia), Boggs engages with the complexities of contributing to that spatial history. While she uses motifs and repeated themes throughout the stories to highlight the goodness and worthiness of both water and fish, Boggs applies these values to characters from all three racial groups represented in the cycle, not just the indigenous. In the title story for example, she makes explicit the need to rescue and preserve the river through the concerns of characters who are non-Indian. In choosing to make a political point about the river in this story through the characters of Mitchell and his daughter Annabel, Boggs is perhaps also indicating that the preservation of the river is not merely a 'minority' concern, but a concern for everyone. While their claim on the river is not steeped in thousands of years of tradition or ownership, it is only in this story, through the sentiments of Annabel and the childhood memories of Mitchell, that Boggs provides explicit

topographical information about the river. In this way, Boggs engages somewhat controversially with the spatial tensions inherent in naming and identifying land that has been subject to a bloody history of colonisation. She suggests that the river, in a sense, belongs to everyone. And yet, the independence of the individual stories enables her to both make this statement quietly while simultaneously denouncing it.

Race and racism are handled subtly in *Mattaponi Queen*. Boggs' characters include men, women and children from the three major racial groups, and in many ways, the breaks between their stories mirror what Kennedy describes as the 'gaps or barriers that partition social reality along lines of class, gender, religion, education, or ethnicity' (213). Race and racism are significant issues in the world from which Boggs draws her fiction; Virginia has a long history of deeply entrenched racism, of dispossession, enslavement, violence and continued disadvantage (Dessais 25). Segregation policies in particular – the 'Jim Crow laws' – created a bureaucracy of 'blood' that has had ramifications in the way 'race' has been, and still is, understood. However, while characters who are identified as Mattaponi Indians – such as the recurring mechanic, Skinny – are of particular significance in the stories, race is often not explicitly stated. The fact that the reader cannot necessarily know the racial identity of each character is perhaps, partly, the author's point. Racial tensions run like an undercurrent; deep racism is revealed in unexpected moments, catching the reader off guard. In 'Opportunity', the reader inadvertently discovers that Lila is white and her on again/off again musician boyfriend is black, when she goes to one of his 'Kings

Dominion’ concerts and must pass through metal detectors to enter the park, ‘which were set up for black acts’. When Lila questions them at the ticketing window, officials tell her the ‘precautionary’ security measures are required for a ‘D.C. crowd’. ‘They said it apologetically, conspiratorially, as if Lila would understand’ (54).

The idea that ‘Lila would understand’ may be ‘mined’ for deeper meaning, as Boggs perhaps seeks to instruct her readers about racism in contemporary Virginia. As Pacht suggests, while the author manipulates the subversive opportunities afforded by the genre to present issues they may not want to overtly discuss – such as race, racism and class divides – it is the reader who ‘does the work toward unifying the disparate threads inserted by the author...just as the characters portrayed within try to make sense of the new and unwieldy society in which they must learn to live’ (38).

While her review of *Mattaponi Queen* in *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* (2011) is largely positive, Loree Westron suggests that the two stories where racial tension is most explicit are the two ‘weakest’ stories in the collection, ‘seriously marred by the presence of racial clichés: the alcoholic Indian; the black kid who sells drugs; the deferential black woman who secretly resents her wealthy white employer’, all of which reinforce stereotypes (131). While these representations may seem clichéd when considered within each independent story, their impact and effect may be viewed differently when the stories are read *interdependently*, in the context of a cycle. Alcoholism, for example, is a repeated concern throughout the cycle and underlines social

isolation and entrapment; Jeremy's white father John is an alcoholic in 'Buckets of Rain', and his mother is recovering. In this way, a representation seemingly based on race or class is balanced or juxtaposed in other stories.

Boggs also explores the controversial notion of determinism; there is a strong sense of inevitability in the characters' lives, particularly, and most tragically in the life of Marcus – 'the black kid who sells drugs' as described in Westron's review. In terms of talent, ability and intelligence, everything is going well for Marcus. He is, in fact, *not* a 'black kid who sells drugs' although he is mostly surrounded by drugs and crime. Even when he moves to Virginia to live with his Granny, those embroiled in drugs gravitate toward him, so that not only does he eventually sell them himself, but he also becomes the scapegoat for the white kids who sell them and who avoid being convicted. The reader is told early in the story that Marcus' father has been 'in jail since Marcus was eight' (133). He is released twice but both trips home are 'cut short by his probation officer' when Marcus is told by his father, 'You can't fight it' (133). The somewhat unpopular notion of entrapment – and particularly as a result of 'race' – is repeated through the cycle, embedded in single stories and connected implicitly between them. When Marcus' Granny tries to warn him away from the 'wild' twins, Tasha and Wally, as she remembers them from when they were little, Marcus asks her, 'People change, don't they?' to which she replies, 'No, they don't' (145).

Boggs' representation of the 'alcoholic Indian' is a more complex characterisation when the text is read as a short story cycle rather than as a collection of independent (or even 'interlinked') short stories. As Nagel points

out, the stories in a cycle depend on 'intertextual context for the full development of character, motivation and theme' (Nagel 246). 'Skinny' is a 'Mattaponi-Pamunkey' mechanic dying from a drug resistant strain of hepatitis C on the Mattaponi reservation. He is first introduced in the sequence as a minor but important character in Ronnie's story, 'Good News for a Hard Time'. He is more fully drawn in his own story, 'It Won't Be Long', where the reader is privy to his teenage children's perception of him. Finally, in 'Homecoming', we meet him all over again, through the eyes of Marcus, who responds to Skinny's newspaper ad seeking an 'odd jobs' casual worker for his flagging car mechanic business (135). Marcus wants the extra cash to buy a cell phone so he can call his friend back in Brooklyn, to 'tell him how boring everything was' (135). At first, Marcus brings his own prejudices to Skinny's life and the reservation: 'he pictured teepees and feather headdresses, stony silences' (135). Marcus, however, finds that not only is the reservation 'no different from anywhere else he'd seen in King William: trees, fields, squat little houses and trailers' (135) but that he safe there; Skinny provides him with nurture, guidance and help when he gets into trouble. As a father, Skinny 'fails' to care for his own children in these ways. He is more successful with Marcus, although he is not able to save him. In this way, the structure of the cycle enables 'inter-story meaning' that allows a reader to perceive a character within a community, in a way that character may never know or articulate themselves within a single story. The delimiting boundaries of each story allow the reader to be 're-introduced' to Skinny in different contexts and from different vantage points, enabling both a fresh perspective and a 'layering' of associative

and contradictory ideas. Boggs signals and affirms the theme of dichotomy, particularly as it relates to people, in 'It Won't Be Long'. Skinny's cynical and jaded son, Tyler, decides that the activities on the reserve during 'Homecoming' week are 'just weird':

'All this church stuff, like a regular Baptist church, and then you put on feathers and do these dances to honor the spirit or whatever. It seems contradictory'. But Skinny shrugs and says, 'How many things in life don't contradict each other?' (88)

Skinny echoes one of the central themes writers drawn to the short story cycle often wish to explore: paradox and contradiction. In this way, the primary characteristics of the cycle – self-sufficiency and interrelatedness – contribute to the thematic concerns of the text. Boggs is able to explore 'culturally and politically unpopular ideas' of race and racism, by linking the individual texts internally and creating connections in the spaces between them (Pacht 5).

Pacht suggests that short story cycles often 'indicate a struggle to define and understand the always-changing world in which their authors live' (137). This struggle is evident in *Mattaponi Queen*, particularly in the tension between staying and leaving, of place as attractive and place as repellant. Within the text-pieces and also between them, lies the dichotomy of what is both 'ordinary' and 'exotic':

the reservation was just like anywhere else, trailers and double-wides and clapboard ranchers set on weedy lawns far off the black asphalt road. Pickup trucks with expired

license plates. Girls who wore tight jeans and hairspray. It wasn't exotic or special, just a big bunch of acres on the river.

But the river was beautiful, even a mere silvery glimpse of it here and there through the thick growth of trees. (13)

All of the characters across the stories in *Mattaponi Queen* are developed in relation to this spatial tension. The element of textual discontinuity enables the contradictions inherent in 'place as appealing' and 'place as repellent'. In the title story Annabel says of her less than attentive stepmother, Joanne: 'She acts like she's from somewhere good ... But she's just from *Powhatan*' (183). In 'It Won't Be Long', we learn that Skinny's estranged wife had moved into a 'condominium', where Skinny finds everything to be 'cheap and hollow and new', Skinny must travel to Lorton, up in northern Virginia, 'two hours each way' to visit his children, Tyler and Erin. His ex-wife doesn't want to live in 'King William or Caroline or King and Queen' as she 'was done with that backward place' (72). Skinny's children reject their father, their own tribal identity and the land itself, when they rebuff the option to 'call for' Skinny's 'lot' after he dies. We learn in 'Good News for a Hard Time' that Ronnie's mother Susanna had deserted her when she was young and Ronnie 'knew that Susanna hated the reservation, hated making beaded jewelry and dancing in the annual tribal dances. Hated their little cinder block museum with its Stone Age relics' (20). Like Susanna and the 'youngest daughter' in the final story – both characters we hear of, but never meet – they not only reject, but are also repulsed by 'place'.

With the elliptical closures and new beginnings of the cycle form, each story stands almost in *denial* of what went before it, thereby fuelling and enabling tensions. In this way, the representation of place becomes increasingly fragmented, so that it ‘serves as the imaginative space that delimits characters’ lives even as it brings them together in a loose community, one that often seems to withhold the possibility of a fully coherent existence’ (Luscher 2013, 198).

In her review, Westron suggests that the location’s specific history in Boggs’ text is not allowed to seep into the stories as ramifications in the present. In addition, the ‘shape of the land, and the sweep and width and movement of the river are elusive’ (134). Westron questions the lack of distinct description of landscape:

although we are told the locations for these stories, and can locate them on a map, we are shown only occasional glimpses of the landscape in which they exist. The Mattaponi region, as we find it here, feels small and confined, almost claustrophobic. (133)

As discussed in chapter two, the writer who chooses to represent a ‘real’ place in fiction may experience particular anxieties about justifying such a representation. Westron offers a view similar to Dr Hornung’s counsel to me when she writes that ‘landscape in which a story is set can form an integral part of the narrative, shaping characters and action so that the story cannot be lifted out of its current location and repositioned in another and remain unaffected’ (134). However, it is the interplay between space and place that informs the regionally based short story cycle. Essential to the creation of spatial field in place is the presence of

people, or in the case of fiction, characters (Ross 455). Place then provides the forum where the characters' lives are played out, or practised (455). Is the lack of sweeping landscape description in *Mattaponi Queen*, or even the lack of historical meta-narrative that Westron alludes to, in fact integral to the text's spatial field and governing meanings? For while the region may be entrenched in the national psyche for the largess of its political, military and cultural history, Boggs' characters have little sense of it; they *are* 'confined' and restricted, and for many of them the Mattaponi region *is* 'claustrophobic'. Boggs creates a spatial field through her stories that is prescribed and shaped by the landscape and which in turn, contains and defines the landscape. The importance and significance of the Mattaponi region is never in question, but it is held tight and small in the stories, almost as though it is being *protected*. Furthermore, because the stories are self-contained, the region is effectively introduced afresh with each one; the same 'ground' is covered again and again.

Of those characters in the cycle who 'stay', there is justification, nostalgia for another time when things were 'better' and 'more interesting'. There is also a further layering of the theme of entrapment. In 'Imperial Chrysanthemum', Loretta says:

It used to depress me to think of being born so close by—the idea, I guess, was that I hadn't gotten anywhere—but now I don't mind as much. I'm able to see what has changed and what has been the same, even if those things are not all good things. Somehow it's a satisfying feeling, like staying to the end of the party to make sure you don't miss anything'. (43)

The relationships between the stories in a cycle are far more complex than what is represented through ‘sequentiality’ (Nagel 12); ‘readings’ may be enriched through other techniques, such as internal rhythms created by recurrent imagery, motif and juxtaposition. Luscher suggests that a ‘network of rhythmic recurrences’ in a short story cycle brings ‘diverse manifestations of the same phenomenon into relief’ (2012, 362). *Mattaponi Queen* gives repeated attention to education, friendship, alcohol, buzzards, mothers and daughters, maternal yearning, parental love and parental neglect. Characters are disconnected from others around them: children, particularly, are disconnected from parents. The importance of a mother’s love to a child is reinforced throughout the cycle, along with the grief associated with its loss. Ronnie in ‘Good News for A Hard Time’, Lila in ‘Opportunity’ and Annabel in the title story, have all lost their mothers, either through death or abandonment. Lila and Byron’s relationship is complicated by the fact that they are both motherless. He tells her sadly that ‘No one will love you like your mother did ... Nobody’s never gonna love you like that again’ (51). In ‘It Won’t Be Long’, ‘Skinny used to worry about Ronnie after Susanna left – every girl needs her mother – but she’d turned out all right’ (79). And in ‘Jonas’, Melinda doesn’t expect the therapist in Richmond to understand a place where ‘daughters were their mother’s best friends, boys their fathers’ (100). This theme is fully developed and sharpened in the title story when Mitchell is morose and mystified by his bad luck with women and love. After Loretta has paid the final installment on the *Mattaponi Queen*, Mitchell is moved to ask her, ‘do you think women and men both need each other, or is it just men that need

women?’ Loretta thinks about the question and replies: ‘Only thing you truly need is somebody to love you when you’re little ... Anything more is a bonus’ (200).

While a child’s need for a mother’s love is repeated throughout the cycle, babies and the fulfilment they represent, along with the thwarted desire to have them, also has strong thematic resonance. Boggs has written elsewhere on maternal longing and her own experience of infertility, with its associated grief and burden. Her essay, ‘The Art of Waiting’ was published in *Orion Magazine* in 2012 and was a runner-up in the 2013 William Hazlitt Essay Prize. In it she explores commonalities between the human and animal worlds, of which the latter is also ‘full of paradoxical examples of gentleness, brutality, and suffering, often performed in the service of reproduction’ (Boggs 2012).

Boggs documents her own anguish in trying to conceive while also describing the isolation and camaraderie inherent in her infertility support group, much of which centres around discussing options associated with in vitro fertilisation (IVF). Developed in the 1970s, IVF is very much a phenomenon of Boggs’ generation and which she points out is now a ‘multibillion-dollar industry’ (2012).

Infertility and issues surrounding IVF are pertinent to the time and place in which Boggs writes. They also reflect her specific and personal concerns. Through the short story cycle, Boggs is able to explore this personal and social issue more deeply. The genre enables her to present the dichotomy of isolation and commonality inherent in this very contemporary experience.

To this effect, Boggs creates a collective protagonist by presenting a series of individual female characters with similarly deep maternal yearning. In 'Jonas', Melinda's daughter is struggling to get pregnant and is on IVF; at the Fabergé egg exhibit in Richmond, Melinda notices that 'some were tiny, like a baby's fist' (112). Ronnie keeps her pregnancy a secret from her husband in 'Good News for a Hard Time', even though he is back from war in Iraq with a missing arm: 'Because more and more, when she thought of the baby, she was filled with a crazy, happy feeling that she didn't want to share with anybody' (14). In 'Imperial Chrysanthemum', Loretta hopes her niece Tamara will 'have some babies soon, to focus the both of them' (33). She says, 'I never had any babies', adding, 'but that was never my choice' (33). In 'Opportunity', Lila has 'pangs, sharp stabbing pains' in her breasts and worries that she carries her mother's breast 'cancer around too, in her own full and heavy breasts' (49). But her friend, Donelle, tells her that 'this was from never having children; sometimes her breasts felt that way too' (49). Finally, Mitchell's dissatisfied second wife, Joanne, in the title story, 'had a condition that made her menstrual periods excruciatingly painful and kept her from having children' (183). This longing for the fulfillment of children both unites the characters across the stories and alienates them from one another as the grief and disappointment is contained and isolated within each text-piece.

Kennedy describes the way 'sequences' differ from the novel in the way they typically offer 'no transitions, no narrational bridges connecting one story to another. Instead, breaks or intervals between narratives produce a formal cleavage and impose a textual insularity' (196). In this way, the sense of loss and desire for

babies is ever present in *Mattaponi Queen*, but rarely shared between characters. And it is when characters inhabit the same locale, Kennedy argues, that ‘mutual estrangement’, or in the case of *Mattaponi Queen*, mutual *grief*, is most sharply evoked, as ‘textual divisions correspond to absolute boundaries between one life and another’ (196). However, as Pacht argues of Carver’s *Cathedral* (1981), the ‘act of putting these stories together allows the lonely and isolated to achieve a community of sorts; they are joined together by the loneliness and isolation that define them’ (103). Similarly, in *Mattaponi Queen*, Boggs is able to utilise the genre to sharpen the evocation of loneliness associated with maternal yearning and loss, while simultaneously creating a sense of communal comfort as the characters are connected through a pattern of repetitions, parallels and variations.

While *Mattaponi Queen* is presented and marketed as a collection of short stories, linked to a degree by place, it is more appropriately read as a short story cycle, as defined by Mann, Luscher and Kennedy. The short story cycle lends itself in unique ways to a subversive representation of place and to subtle explorations of issues pertinent to a particular time and place in history, as argued by Pacht. Through the genre and its essential characteristic of stories that are both self-sufficient and interrelated, Boggs is also able to present her views on the paradoxical experience of maternal longing and loneliness and a sense of community. Through patterning, repetition, juxtaposition and contrast, the cycle form enables its author to present concerns relevant to a place she knows well, particularly in relation to the environment, racism, entrapment, isolation and pride.

Conclusion

When asked about the importance of place as the source of inspiration for her fiction, Eudora Welty says:

Not only that, it's my source of knowledge. It tells me the important things. It steers me and keeps me going straight, because place is a definer and a confiner of what I'm doing. It helps me to identify, to recognise and explain. It does so much for you of itself. It saves me. Why, you couldn't write a story that happened nowhere. I couldn't anyway. (*The Paris Review* 92)

The creative project for this PhD was essentially steered by two 'sources of knowledge': the genre of the short story cycle and the place of Mount Barker. They both 'defined' and 'confined' the writing of *5251*. In this exegesis, I have considered and interrogated the implications of these two 'sources': the opportunities they provided and the difficulties and tensions they posed. By contextualising my short story cycle in this way, I have placed the influences on *5251* within a number of traditions. These include traditions of the form itself, which Nagel argues has its origins 'decidedly antecedent to the novel' (1), and of 'regional writing' in the nineteenth century and its development into contemporary representations of place in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

By consciously adopting the short story cycle form and confining it specifically to Mann's widely agreed upon 'essential characteristic' of the genre, I sought to extend my practice as a short story writer by extending the potential

meanings of single stories across a sequence of stories. At the heart of this motivation was an artistic vision which speaks to an ‘aesthetic of arrangement’ and I have likened this to the spatial tensions between objects. In the short story cycle, these tensions exist between the ‘centripetal and centrifugal forces’ at play inside and across the stories (Alderman in Marais 17) and go toward creating the desired ‘unity of effect’ in both. Analogies between the aesthetic of arrangement, which is central to the short story cycle, and that utilised and understood across other art media, invite further consideration, with particular reference to contemporary practice in visual art, performance and film, which is outside the scope of this essay.

Through the work of theorists and commentators including Luscher, Kennedy, Jauss and Pacht, I have discussed my adoption of various techniques and opportunities peculiar to the cycle, including utilising the spaces-in-between the stories to subtly express subversive ideas (Pacht), create ‘patterns of association’ (Luscher), ‘thematic mimesis’ (Jauss), and finally, a ‘semblance of community’ (Kennedy).

I was alert to the tensions of taxonomy and the (sometimes) confusing ways in which short story cycles are marketed. I have acknowledged the interplay between the vision of the writer, the publishing marketplace and in the case of my own project, the influence of theorists and scholars. Ultimately, I found examination of the relationships between these factors useful in my own understanding of what I was attempting to achieve – more useful than early definitions of the cycle genre, based on authorial intent, as articulated by Ingram.

Short story cycles are balanced precariously in the centre of a genre spectrum, with short story collections at one end and novels at the other. While Pacht reminds us that, within the context of a theoretical discussion, genre confusion and blurriness is both natural and to be expected (5), such confusion is not so easily tolerated in a publishing context. Theoretical contextualisation of *Futility and Other Animals* (1969) was not on the mind of Frank Moorhouse's publisher when he asked: 'what are we going to call it?' (224).

Over the course of writing this PhD, nine of the thirteen stories in *5251* were published as stand-alone texts and seven were individually recognised for awards or prizes. In this sense, the project was successful in complying with Mann's essential characteristic of stories that are 'self-sufficient': independent publication is perhaps the best (and only) 'evidence' to support this. If independent publication is compelling evidence for Mann's first theoretical 'requirement', the second might then be satisfied by publication of the whole, which both writers and theorists have argued is one of the more pragmatic and even 'subversive' advantages of the genre.

In chapter two, I placed *5251* within the tradition of short story cycles where the trope of place is the central unifying device. In choosing to 'write from home' and to name the town of Mount Barker, in which I live, I felt increasingly and *uncomfortably* 'confined' in representing this 'real' and known place in fiction. I could identify with Eudora Welty, who, when questioned about her reputation among critics as a 'regional writer', stated: 'I just think of myself as writing about human beings, and I happen to live in a region, as do we all, so I write about what

I know – it’s the same for any writer living anywhere’ (91). Welty articulates the writer’s perspective on the mutual construction of ‘space’ and the ‘social’ and it was the exploration of recent developments in spatial theory that enabled me not only to resolve some of my discomfort but also to consider what further opportunities could be found in representing Mount Barker through the spatial field. I have acknowledged the relevance of geocriticism and the mapping projects undertaken by Westphal and Tally, and in Australia, by Peta Mitchell and Jane Stadler. I have discussed the parallel between the geocritical notion of multiple non-hierarchical representations of place with opportunities afforded by the ‘community’ of ‘voices’ in a short story cycle. I have also contrasted the ‘uncertainty’ of a literary representation of place, as discussed by spatial scholars Reuschel and Hurni with the writer’s *sense* of ‘certainty’, as articulated by Colm Tóibín as he describes the role of the subconscious in a fictive rendering of place.

With its roots loosely understood by many theorists to be in the ‘most ancient of narrative traditions’ (Nagel 1), the short story cycle has been utilised by writers in various incarnations throughout centuries, and yet it was only in the late twentieth century that literary critics and scholars began to take the form seriously enough to warrant its rigorous analysis. Most agree that there is still much research to be done, particularly in relation to more recent adaptations of the form, including hyperlinked text and multiple, diverse art forms. Rene Audét argues that the hypertext in fact provides an insight into understanding how readers engage with story cycles, where ‘textual parts and links’ form a ‘non-hierarchic network’ for readers to explore and decide on their sequence themselves (in D’Hoker and

Van Den Bossche 12). This is an idea similar to that proposed by Peter Hajdu: that the reader ultimately decides the arrangement of stories, as it is the reader who makes the ultimate decision about the order in which to read them (53).

Such understandings of the cycle genre raise the question of whether debates about taxonomy – in both the critical and commercial communities – are relevant. Does it matter what we call these texts (and subsequently, how we read them)? In chapter three, I have argued that it does matter. Drawing particularly on the hypotheses of Pacht and Nagel, through an analysis of Belle Boggs' representation of King William County, Virginia, USA, in *Mattaponi Queen*, I have proposed that the text is more appropriately read and understood as a short story cycle than as 'collected stories'. The application of theories to a selected literary text helped to clarify, for me at least, an understanding of what distinguishes a short story collection from a short story cycle. In this case, the 'narrational and structural principles' unique to the genre offer a 'vital technique for the exploration and depiction of the complex interactions of gender, ethnicity, and individual identity' (Nagel 10). Reading *Mattaponi Queen* as a cycle, the reader may also discern that the Mattaponi River lies at the heart of 'veiled' meanings encoded throughout the text, in patterns created by repeated images, in the spaces in-between the text, and in the judicious placement of stories, which cumulatively and subliminally give weight to the author's point of view.

While American theorists lament a paucity of research on texts that fall within the fluid and historic genre of the short story cycle, I would suggest there is an even greater need for further study of Australian texts that can be seen as

belonging to this genre. What do we miss without an interpretative lens through which to examine potential Australian short story cycles? What generic parameters and characteristics are distinctive in works written by Australian practitioners? Contemporary Australian examples of this increasingly prevalent form include Nam Le's *The Boat* (2008), Tony Birch's *Shadowboxing* (2006) and *Father's Day* (2009), Steven Amsterdam's *What we didn't see coming* (2009) and *What the Family Needed* (2011), Ellen Van Neerven's *Heat and Light* (2014), and Wayne Macaulay's *Demons* (2014). Each of these texts is highly distinctive; they all deal with significant contemporary issues and perspectives, and they all employ strategies of fragmentation and interrelatedness unique to the form.

Literary short stories generally allude to something larger, leaving their primary meanings to be found by discerning readers in the spaces, in the absences. In a novel, re-introductions may seem repetitive, but within the structure of a short story cycle, repetitions play an important role. Of Henry James's short story cycle, *The Finer Grain*, Michelle Pacht suggests that had the text-pieces been chapters in a novel, the author 'would have been required to provide more description, more access to the setting, and perspectives other than that of the main consciousness.' These would have then 'diluted the sense of disconnectedness he hoped to achieve' (51). Similarly, *Mattaponi Queen* presents a place where the characters are disconnected from the 'outside world' and from an 'outsider' perspective of who they are, where they live and what is important to them. Likewise, the place of Mount Barker in *5251* provides the 'container' in which the spatial field is

constructed and where the characters practise their identities, in the ‘nonlinear spatial metaphor of the map’ (Prieto 19). In this way, the cycle genre may be seen as appropriate for the writer who, in a sense, does *not* wish to provide an unproblematic ‘representation’ of place. Arguably, the genre allows for an ‘anti-representation’ of place, as the textual discontinuity can be an attempt to subvert any cohesive notion of place.

Of place as a definer and confiner of her work, Eudora Welty acknowledges that it ‘does so much for you of itself’ and that it ‘saves’ her (92). In choosing to be confined in a creative project, the writer almost ‘sets up’ the task of finding ways *out* of those confinements; the confinements must be subverted, or at least, be conducive to subversion. The peculiar out-workings of this task cannot necessarily be planned or even anticipated at the outset of the project, but rather, they might provide insight retrospectively. For the ‘act of writing’ allows for discovery: as Welty points out in her essay on ‘Place in Fiction’, discovery does not ‘imply that the place is new [or indeed that its details might be ‘exotic’], only that we are’ (13). The short story cycle offers unique opportunities to writers who might struggle to ‘define and understand the always-changing world in which the characters – and their creators live’ (Pacht 1). Writers who represent place invariably ‘inflect their spatial representations’ with their own ‘agendas and ideologies’ (Ross 459). In naming the town of Mount Barker in *5251* my representation of place ultimately illuminates both these observations.

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