The Albanian and an accompanying exegesis: place and form in The Albanian

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“The Albanian”

And an accompanying exegesis:

Place and Form in “The Albanian”

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PhD in English

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2003
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
Abstract

This thesis takes the form of a novel titled *The Albanian* and an exegesis, “Place and Form in *The Albanian*”. The novel spans the period from October 1989 to the end of 1991 and is set against a backdrop of Eastern European change and its effect on a small group of Albanian refugees and Rosa, a young woman from Western Australia. Rosa narrates the tale in first person, present tense. The novel begins with her arrival in Dubrovnik, where she meets a young Albanian man on the verge of exiling himself in order to survive ethnic persecution. He fascinates Rosa, because of his mixture of aggression and deep feeling and she sympathises with his plight. Rosa travels through the Balkans, passing through Bucharest during the early stages of the Communist overthrow and learning about history and politics, love and her sense of who she is. She is often dreaming of finding the young man again and eventually returns to Dubrovnik. Rosa is disappointed by the difference between what she has imagined during their time apart and who he is in reality but she accompanies him in search of political asylum in Sweden. This journey is a pivotal point in the relationship and Rosa leaves Europe, having begun to love him. Rosa returns home, to Bunbury, where life is unchanged and ordinary and she is torn by concurrent feelings of alienation and belonging. Again, she travels to meet the Albanian in Sweden. This time she learns about his culture, and the truth of his presence there. The novel ends in London in 1999.

The exegesis is divided into three sections, all exploring issues of belonging and not belonging and how they relate to different aspects of *The Albanian*. The first section considers belonging, displacement and transit in the novel and how these states of being are used to explore Australian and refugee identity issues, meanings of home and exile. The second and third sections of the exegesis consider the placement of the novel within and outside established genres. The second section demonstrates the extent to which the novel fulfils the criteria of traditional autobiography through an exposition of sources, and then discusses variations in the genre and the novel’s fictional elements. The third section of the exegesis demonstrates the adherence of the novel to traditional narrative form using Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*, and goes on to explore postmodern elements which hybridise the text.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii) contain any defamatory material.

8th September 2004
Date
Acknowledgements

My supervisor, Dr Richard Rossiter, has been supportive and encouraging throughout the production of this thesis. His perceptive comments on my work and his belief in my ability have made this a joy to write. I would also like to thank Edith Cowan University for the Research Scholarship which has enabled me to continue to study.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank my partner, Graham Parton, and my brothers, David and Paul Mazza for helping me to make the decision to write and for providing moral support. For their encouragement and advice on the novel, I wish to thank Paul Parkes, Carmela Giacci, Lynn Dines, Maria Delledonne, Jo Porter, Lisa Giacci, Anne Salathiel, Ghislaine Sweet, Robyn Bailey and our writing group: Annabel Smith, Amanda Curtin (and for editing), Danielle Wood, Carmel Macdonald-Grahame. I have had much ongoing support and I wish to thank my parents, John and Margaret Mazza, my grandmother, Jean Hainge, Terry and Barbara Parton, Zane Cocker and the girls at Kidz Galore, Yokine. For assistance in research I wish to thank Naso and Vanna Tsingoida, The Thorn Tree Post and the Bunbury Historical Society.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the travellers and exiles I have met because it is from their stories that I have drawn much inspiration for my writing.
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Introduction

After writing *The Albanian*, I found myself with many potential lines of discussion to pursue in writing an exegesis. In order to narrow the field, I was compelled to undertake some deep reflection on my intention, my writing experience and process. I have chosen to write this exegesis in three parts—in effect three essays—connected by a common theme of belonging and a tendency for the novel to fall into the grey zone between belonging and not belonging in each of the three areas of discussion.

The first section of the exegesis explores issues of belonging, displacement and transit dealt with in the novel. I chose this area because it is of personal interest to me and I feel that the nature of the relationship between my Australian identity and the European within has been a major formative force in my own sense of self and my choice of writing material. The European refugee characters within the novel also engage with issues of home and exile.

The second and third sections deal with issue of genre and the ways in which the novel conforms to and subverts traditional forms.

The second section begins with an exposition of autobiographical sources used in production of the novel and the extent to which their use fulfils some criteria of autobiography. This is followed by a discussion which considers the merging of autobiography and fiction. After several months of writing, I found that Rosa developed a voice of her own, quite apart from mine, and the line between autobiography and fiction became very blurred. It was important to me to incorporate as much factual material as possible and I researched the settings very thoroughly in order to recreate the era as credibly as possible. I wanted Rosa’s voice to seem autobiographical, yet I did not wish to confess. Her fictionalisation became quite a natural process.

During initial reading for this exegesis, I came across Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*, and was intrigued by the extent to which *The Albanian* conforms to the traditional narrative form. The third section explores this curious and surprising adherence and the ways in which the novel is hybridised with post-modern elements.
Section 1:

The Textual Dynamics of Belonging, Displacement and Transit in *The Albanian*

Belonging and displacement are major underpinning tensions which drive the characters of *The Albanian*. The novel emphasises issues of home and exile and the degrees of belonging which are found and not found in place. Neither the Australian character Rosa nor her lover, the Albanian, entirely belong in their own homelands and neither belongs in the territories explored outside home either. Transit becomes a liminal zone where their relationship is able to flourish. The place where nobody and everybody belongs—the train on which they travel on their journey to Sweden—is the place where they connect. It is the issue of belonging and unbelonging, in terms of homeland and the internal dilemmas arising in the characters from this tension, which eventually undermines their relationship. The nature of these forces and an exploration of their impact in the novel are the subject of this discussion.

In his essay *The Uncanny* (1919) Freud introduces the concept of *unheimlich*, which is usually defined in light of its antonym, *heimlich*. Both of these German terms are (apparently) awkward to translate but are each generally explained with twofold definitions. *Unheimlich* refers to that which is “familiar and old-established to the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.” (Freud, 1955, p.241). Catherine Belsey discusses these issues in *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, in which she applies Freud’s idea of the Uncanny to demonic lovers in literature. She defines *heimlich* as “familiar (homely), recognisable, safe” but cites Freud as affirming that a “shift of attention brings out another and precisely opposite meaning….hidden, unknown, dangerous”. She glosses *unheimlich* as meaning both “known and unknown” (Belsey,
1994, p.165). The notion of *heimlich* is inescapable in *unheimlich*, because one contains the other. The two terms form a corollary—a double-sided term where one cannot be used without invoking the other. In contemporary theoretical practice the concept is used in discussions on love and desire, travel theory and what it means to be Australian.

In Chapter Two of *Uncanny Australia*, Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs apply Freud's concepts of *(un)heimlich* to national identity issues:

An "uncanny" experience may occur when one's home is rendered, somehow and in some sense, unfamiliar; one has the experience, in other words, of being in place and "out of place" simultaneously. (Gelder, 1998, p.23)

Issues of place and displacement are a feature of postcolonial literatures, where a "crisis of identity" arises in settlers and indigenous peoples in regard to "the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.9). The difficulty of settling in Australia is demonstrated by Gelder and Jacobs through the example of an early ghost story by Rosa Campbell Praed called "The Bunyip":

The creature "promiscuously" emanates its aura through the bush, touching the settlers, preoccupying them and forestalling their homely impulses. Far from being "subjectively immersed" in the landscape these settlers are, at least for the moment, out of place or displaced. (Gelder, 1998, p.32)

An historical demonstration of the "psychological climate of the settler society" is the Pinjarra massacre of 1834, cited by Janda Gooding in her examination of the paintings of early settlers in Western Australia. She examines the implications of a painting by Thomas Turner in light of this massacre:

"Albion House, Augusta" 1836 depicts it as a fortification against physical threat—threat emanating both from the environment and a strong Aboriginal presence in the area....the scene might also be interpreted as a statement of the tension that existed
in the area until the perceived Aboriginal threat was eliminated. (Gooding, 1999, p.107)

The climate of fear that existed among early Australian settlers was not conducive to establishing a sense of belonging and leaving behind the sense of foreignness.

In Uncanny Australia, non-Aboriginal (dis)possession is considered mainly in the context of early settlers, but in a contemporary light, the Uncanny dilemma is experienced anew and continues to be an issue for new Australians, especially those with tangible links to their country of origin.

Julia Kristeva also applies Freud’s concept of (un)heimlich to issues of place and identity and is cited by Gelder and Jacobs as advocating “a psychic coming-to-terms with the ‘foreigner’ within us all”. (Gelder, 1998, p.27) In “Nations Without Nationalism”, she proposes that there is a way of “mending” or finding resolution of the “paradoxical logic” of “uncanny strangeness”. She proposes that:

The...“torn consciousness”(Hegel) is the culture that knows itself as such: knowing that we are at least double...knowing that we are unconscious, we accomplish an essential step in culture. By mending that laceration we shall attain absolute religion or spirit....Let us then...endeavour...to recognize ourselves as strange in order better to appreciate the foreigners outside us instead of striving to bend them to the norms of our own repression. (Kristeva, 1993, p.29)

For many Australians, the foreigner within is not so far removed from the outer surface—it is written in names, on the features and the skin, in memory and family. For recent settlers, the idea of being simultaneously at home and not at home (displaced) is a reality which distances them, not only from the Aboriginal population and the ambiguities of the right to land ownership, as discussed by Gelder and Jacobs, but also from the long-established non-Aboriginal population of Australia.

This displacement is resolved to some extent by the gathering of various ethnic groups into sub-cultures and enclaves, which exist in pockets of Australian cities and provide a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is based on similarities and on shared
differences—on un-belonging in the adopted culture. It is a phenomenon of modern cities which attract the poor and dispossessed of the world, the refugees. There are Little Italies, China Towns, Indian and Turkish Restaurants, Irish Pubs and Gypsy settlements in many cities of the First World. To some extent, these sub-cultures are a fulfilment of Kristeva’s ideal of recognition of the paradox of belonging.

Rejection of migrant cultures is a long established feature of the Australian psyche. It has given rise to events such as the Kalgoorlie Riots of 1919, when returned servicemen violently protested against Southern European workers. Racist attitudes towards Italians, Greeks and Yugoslavs continued strongly through to the late 1960s, early 1970s, when Vietnamese refugees took their place. Throughout the mid to late Twentieth Century, racist terms such as Wog, Dago and Chink became so generally accepted in Australian culture to describe Italians, Greeks, and Asians, that it is surprising to find anyone who finds them offensive. They are so normalised that they are even defined in The Australian Oxford Dictionary, although it does indicate that they are colloquial offensive terms. More recent expressions of xenophobia in Australia occurred during the “Tampa Crisis” of 2001 and in the ongoing debate over refugees. Suspicion of foreigners is not particular to Australians and is not necessarily racist, but can be the manifestation of fears of, for example, social attrition, over-population and a diminishing share of resources (such as employment) for the individual. Many European countries, including Germany, Austria, Sweden and the United Kingdom, have experienced similar phenomena.

Obstacles to entry into Australian society, combined with the previously discussed unheimlich malaise of established Australians (Gelder, 1998, p.24) make the process of adopting a new homeland a multi-generational evolution for immigrants to Australia. When the different cultural heritage has been bleached away by time, a sense of belonging amongst established Australians is possible.

Displacement is amplified for the first generation of Australian descendants from immigrant families. Descendants of immigrants have the knowledge that they are different to established Australians and often experience residual difficulties associated with immigration, such as racism and coming from non-English speaking homes. They did not make the journey over the vast stretches of ocean from the rest of the world to Australia’s shores to find respite from poverty or war, they did not decide to emigrate, yet they still
grapple very directly with the angst of the *(un)heimlich.* The histories of parents and grandparents are their touchstone to the ancestral homeland and are deeply written in the psyche. Family tales of the great journey, the foreign landscapes of the home country and the legendary relatives enter the imagination of the new children of Australia as the myth of a tantalising otherland where part of them belongs, but of which, from birth, they are dispossessed.

From displacement and the imagination grows the desire and the restlessness that led 18% of Australia's population (3.5 million people) to go overseas for various reasons in the 2000/01 financial year (Ausstat, 2001). Australians are famous for being avid travellers. The Australian Lonely Planet Guides series has been among the world's bestselling travel guides since the 1980s (Kenny, 2002, p.1).

Graham Huggan discusses this wanderlust in his essay *Some Recent Australian Fictions In The Age of Tourism:*

Exile, expatriation, migration, travel: a rhetoric of restlessness has underpinned Australia's chimerical search for national selfhood. Torn between the need for definition and the desire to elude it, generations of Australians have sensed that they might better understand their country, or themselves, by leaving it. (Huggan, 1993, p.169)

Departure is a natural evolution in this climate of restlessness. In his poem *A Letter From Rome* (1963), A.D. Hope comments on this 'rhetoric' and its resulting ambiguous sense of identity. Although written forty years ago, the sentiment expressed in the poem is one which holds true and is still a major characteristic of Australian writing.

Yet there is something strange, I would agree,  
In those dumb continents below the Line.  
The roots are European, but the tree  
Grows to a different pattern and design;  
Where the fruit gets its flavour I’m not sure,
From native soil or overseas manure.
And this uncertainty is in our bones. (Hergenhan, 1994, pp.147-8)

The desire for elsewhere and national restlessness are common themes in Australian literature. Joan London refers to them in her essay *How Deep Does The Yellow Sand Go?:*

*[Gilgamesh]* is a story of arrivals and departures....[it] is also a story of the yearning for elsewhere, so common to young Australians, perhaps amplified for West Australians, for whom elsewhere, where real life begins, is also the cities of the East Coast. (London, 2002, p.24)

London’s *Gilgamesh*, Simone Lazaroo’s *The Australian Fiancé* and Tim Winton’s novel *The Riders* are recent West Australian novels dealing with travellers, restlessness and the desire for elsewhere. The reasons for this restlessness return us to the Uncanny:

> The status of home is uncertain for the Australian tourist: Home is a place to be escaped from, but also a place to be returned to. (Huggan, 1993, p.177)

This ambiguous sense of home brings about restlessness, and, as a consequence, the search for belonging or the “yearning for elsewhere” of which Joan London speaks. The ability to realise this desire is the province of the affluent, a dimension of First World privilege. Fulfilling the desire to travel to foreign parts by means of a recreational journey is an undertaking made “to restore something that is lacking” (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994, p.204). What is lacking for Joan London’s Edith in *Gilgamesh* is clarity of vision concerning what it means to be Australian, and this becomes a motivational force. Although Edith is not affluent, her privilege allows her to find means to fund her journey in search of identity for herself and her son.

Edith’s journey represents the attempt to trace the connection between here and elsewhere, from the outer to the centre, to find our place in the great movements of
history, and our legitimacy as players in the great human myths. (London, 2002, p.24)

The journeys undertaken by Australians in fulfilment of this desire for clarity, identity, home or for restoration of a missing piece of self are often indicative of the extent of our displacement. Travelling outside of our own language and culture into a foreign language and culture deprives the traveller of "effective dialogue with the human, cultural or natural environment" (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994, p.209). The experience of alienation when arriving at a destination is a natural consequence of being a foreigner and challenges the established sense of identity. This disruption creates a climate of questioning and stimulates writing into the space of unbelonging:

Predominant [in the literature of Australians abroad] are images of thoughtful, observant, sometimes insecure people, who sense that they do not belong. Sometimes they experience delight in different cultures... but more often they experience suspicion and disillusion... (Raines, 1992, p.69)

If it is the search for the elusive sense of a true home that leads Australians to travel abroad, then we will all be disappointed. It is exciting and fulfilling to arrive in the country which has existed in family history, to make the myth real, but belonging is not to be found in these places. People who have left their homelands have, effectively, pulled up their roots. The mythical homelands are the sites of our history, not our present. This sense of not belonging is discussed by Christopher Koch in Crossing The Gap.

Perhaps an Australian writer must be a little more concerned with [the dualities of ground and territory] than others are, since he is bound to find duality deep within his spirit. A European, he is forever severed from Europe, and unlike an American, is even severed from his ancestral hemisphere. (Koch, 1987, p.12)
Australian displacement abroad is dealt with with less deference to national pride in Robert Dessaix's novel *Night Letters*, where he refers to his main character as a “Citizen of Nowhere”.

One of the advantages of being Australian is that you are a kind of blank to other people, I usually find, and so of little interest to them until they have written on you. I've never felt any hostility towards me on account of where I come from, just a refreshing absence of what it might mean and an indifference towards finding out.

(Dessaix, 1996, p.46)

Belonging nowhere is not quite the place where I mean to locate Australian identity—I mean to locate it in the space of transit, in the places between nations, an anomalous zone. In part this placement of identity is driven by the dialectic of the Uncanny, which dominates our connections with homeland and in part it is because Australian identity is founded on a refugee/expatriate inheritance. Being in transit connects us with the journey in search of home and it connects us with the disenfranchised. It is apparent that Australians love to travel, but travel carries with it implications of "crossing cultural boundaries, trespassing, visiting, capture" (Bartkowski, 1995, p.xxiii). Residence in Australia also carries with it these implications because, as Australians, we have "trespassed" through the actions of a colonising force over a dispossessed Aboriginal population.

The vast numbers of human beings displaced from their ancestral homes and inhabiting other lands as refugees face the same Uncanny dialectic as do Australians. Their journeys of necessity are an inversion of the traveller's journey of desire—”[the refugees'] journeys are not circular, they are neither an escape from work nor a pursuit of the intensification of sensory experience” (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994, p.214). The original homeland is no longer the site of belonging. Having (been) uprooted the refugee makes a journey to a foreign land. This journey is both the space between belonging and unbelonging, and the process whereby the refuge seeker becomes dislocated.

“The dispossessed migrant workers or political refugees have no choice but to travel, in a journey 'against the grain' of the tourist in which the return to the
'present' of home, the lost equilibrium which brings closure, coherence and security of identification, is hopelessly deferred.” (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994, p.215).

In his essay “Mutilation Street: on legs, teeth and other foreign tongues” El Zein compares images of amputation and mutilation with the immigrant experience, equating the loss of identity with the loss of a limb. He discusses the changing perception of the refugee, tracking his own experience, his growing sense of familiarity with the new place and growing disassociation with the old place. He comments on the altering relationship between the refugee and the new, host homeland, “to become familiar with a place, after all, is to become blind to its strangeness” (El Zein, 2001, p.72); and the difficulties of negotiating this growing familiarity in terms of loyalty to his nation of origin, “Belonging becomes a form of betrayal” (El Zein, 2001, p.73). The sense of belonging in his old homeland is diluted by a growing familiarity with his host-homeland. This loss of an absolute sense of belonging and the transposition of his identity between the two countries, in this case Lebanon and Australia, takes the author somewhat by surprise, “Suddenly, unwittingly, my country of origin turned into a dark place that one can only escape from” (El Zein, 2001, p.74). The journey into exile is made in innocence of this process of dislocation of identity: it occurs prior to the knowledge that home cannot be regained.

Australians going abroad are innocent as to the outcome of their journeys. They have not yet trespassed or crossed cultural boundaries and have not yet discovered their unbelonging at their destinations. The innocence of the journey space is a connecting point between travellers/refuge seekers, an un-nationalised, neutral space beyond the ambivalence of belonging and not belonging. The journey space is a kind of in-between where the self/other binary no longer operates and all travellers coexist as Other, as strangers but in a similar position. For the Australian and the refugee, the issues of belonging and unbelonging are neutralised in the space of transit, where all lands, home or foreign, are abstracted and all nationals are displaced. Sidonie Smith examines travel from a feminist perspective in Moving Lives, making comment on the disruption to identity brought about by the act of travel.
Modes of motion organise the entire sensorium differently and thus affect the conditions...and the position of the perceiving subject, differentially connecting and disconnecting her to and from the terrain of travel, differentially organizing her ways of negotiating unfamiliar territory and differentially affecting systems of behaviour. (Smith, 2001, p.23)

Alain de Botton also examines “travelling places” such as airports, trains, planes, service stations. On flight he comments:

The clouds usher in tranquillity. Below us are enemies and colleagues, the sites of our terrors and our griefs; all of them now infinitesimal, scratches on the earth. (De Botton, 2002, p.48)

On the alteration in identity, which occurs in transit, he observes the “collective loneliness” as a shared emotional state that links the community of travellers, where “everyone is a stranger”(De Botton, 2002, p.49). Smith names this detachment from home and subsequent reorganisation of self which occurs in the space between places as a “drift of identity” and goes on to comment on the narration of this disruption:

Narrating travel by foot, plane, locomotive, or automobile, the travel narrator negotiates the dynamics of and contradictions in the drift of identity, and reveals the ways in which modes of mobility—engines of temporality, spatiality, progression, and destination—are (un)defining. (Smith, 2001, p.27)

Postcolonial theory deals with the idea of the in-between space. Stephen Slemon places Australian literary practice between First World and Third World, negotiating a new territory of “ambivalence” and in-betweenness, which he calls “Second-World” postcolonial writing.

...the illusion of a stable self/other, here/there binary division has never been available to Second-World writers, and...as a result the sites of figural contestation
between oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, have been taken inward and internalized in Second-World post-colonial textual practice. (Siemon, 1990, p.109)

This in-between space also occurs in the belonging/unbelonging binary, which, in a journey, is the space of transit.

The transient nature of belonging and unbelonging—which is part of the essence of travel and exile and characteristic of Second-World writing associated with the dialectic of the Uncanny—is explored through the characters in The Albanian. The in-between space in a narrative of journey, dealing with places of transit, with displaced foreigners and displaced Australians, is the site where issues of identity are challenged and progress can be made towards their resolution. Questions of (un)belonging as an Australian are explored mainly through Rosa, and reinforced through other Australian characters "on the road" or in her home town. The state of (un)belonging among Europeans in Europe centres on the Albanian characters, particularly the young man, her nameless lover and is also explored through his family and the other refugees caught up in the Yugoslav diaspora of the 1990s. Places of transit act as neutral points in the text where the "drift of identity" affects relationships and reveals emotions otherwise blurred by the anxiety of displacement.

Rosa and (un)belonging

The main character's displacement is foregrounded from the beginning of The Albanian. The novel begins with a scene of acute awareness of her displacement from culture, language and geography and of her lack of knowledge of the systems of travel.

Then Belgrade—so hot it crushed the space between my breaths...

My head hurt, my body prickled with heat and panic, its crackle echoing through the airport. Belgrade is a place accustomed to the static roar of human fear, and mine went unnoticed. The big man took my ticket between thick, slow fingers, grunted, did not look at me.
This ticket is for domestic flight.

His lips tightened at me, he pointed stumpy fingers.

You are in wrong airport. Take your luggage over there.

He waved me away, didn’t listen to me.

Actually, I don’t know if I spoke at all. (Mazza, 2003, p.3)

Her arrival in Belgrade is harsh and Rosa’s response to this arrival is to become incapacitated by fear and anxiety. The text portrays Rosa as invisible, unheard and unable even to breathe. This initiation into travel and into Europe reverberates through the events that follow. Rosa revisits the emotional reactions of the above-cited passage at various points in the novel, in Istanbul, Bucharest, Rome and Fjallstad.

Rosa’s first utterance in the novel is a statement of her unbelonging in Australia. She reports her statement made to Isabella before leaving for Europe—“I am restless. What do I do here? There’s nothing.” (Mazza, 2003, p.6) It is implied in this statement that Rosa set out from Australia with the belief that, in some way, her restlessness would be resolved in Europe. It is apparent from early in the novel that this is unlikely.

At home I imagined Europe in October was a cold place, so I embarked in thermal underwear, boots, trousers, a jumper. Bound in this padding, I couldn’t breathe in the plane, in the humidity of Singapore, in the hot, twisted sleep over the Orient, the Middle East. (Mazza, 2003, p.3)

Throughout Chapter One, Rosa experiences difficulties in making herself heard and/or understood in Dubrovnik. This silencing of Rosa opens her to a sense of threat and discomfort and highlights her displacement in Europe. She overcomes these “silent spaces which could not be filled with words” with difficulty and not without being compromised in some way, by illicit male touches for example. This spell is broken by her encounter with the turtle, which acknowledges her wish and bellows in response. (Mazza, 2003, p.11) Meeting the Albanian gives Rosa some way in to belonging in Dubrovnik. She becomes part of the history of Dubrovnik through her involvement with him, although his residence there is transient and subject to his own narrative of unbelonging. Alain de Botton
comments on cross-cultural relationships and the desire to belong in some way to the lover's culture.

If it is true that love is a pursuit in others of qualities we lack in ourselves, then in our love of someone from another country, one ambition may be to weld ourselves more closely to values missing from our own culture. (De Botton, 2002, p.90)

The lack in Rosa's own culture is subject to comments throughout the novel, in her recollections of home and her family. Comments such as "I have played since I was a child, on these dark rocks but sometimes people have died there—been swept away while they were fishing—sometimes I have gone there wanting to die..." (Mazza, 2003, p. 21) act to project unease into her relationship with home. The threatening nature of the Australian environment, as experienced by early settlers, is connected, by Rosa, with the sea. There is a symbolic contrast between the threatening black rocks of Bunbury, whose menace comes from nature and the white rocks of the Adriatic coast, which are a site of human conflict. The white rocks are on a war-torn coast and represent a land of racial tensions and conflicting civilisations. The black rocks are threatening in their lack of civilisation.

In Chapter Four of the novel, Rosa's unbelonging in Australia is taken up as a major feature of the narrative. Rosa's return journey to Australia is marked by her feeling "flat as butter" and there is a strong sense of separateness from her fellow Australians in Changi Airport, Singapore. Arriving in Bunbury she compares herself to the ibis in the fields, who "have somewhere else to go" and "will leave again soon". Rosa expresses her alienation:

I walk through the little path on our corner to the traffic lights and straight down Stirling Street to the post office. It's such an ordinary street to me. Ordinary offices and ordinary shops selling ordinary things. If I were a foreigner it would delight me with its exotic smell and amazing-ness, perhaps. It is not Istanbul or Dubrovnik or Bucharest, places with layers and layers of the civilised world imprinted everywhere. The layers of this place haven't got prints that I can see. I am a foreigner, really. I am foreign here, where I was born; foreign in Italy, where my ancestors lived; foreign in the Yugoslavia of my beloved. I buy a stamp and a phone
card and I post the letter and punch his press-hard numbers into the telephone. The rings are long beeps, someone picks it up and there is electronic twitter. Molim. Hello? Hullo... and speech I don’t understand and I hang up. Again.

He has not written when I get home. (Mazza, 2003, p.168)

Rosa’s expression of her unbelonging within Australia and her alienation from her parent Italian culture locates her in the dilemma of the Uncanny. Its inherent unease characterises her feelings towards home as homely/unhomely, familiar/unfamiliar. The dispossession that occurred with her family’s emigration prevents Rosa from belonging in Italy. This sense of unbelonging results in her restlessness and in the journey/quest for attempted resolution.

Rosa’s experience in Rome makes comment on her disconnection from her ancestral Italian culture. Her decision to go there is a search for belonging or home, following the long journey around the Balkans and a choice not to pursue a relationship with the Albanian. Her arrival in Rome is confusing and she is identified as a foreigner by the Hotel receptionist, who comments on her Australian-Italian mix. Faced with fountains and the need to wish once more, Rosa’s resolve is undone. Her wish has already been made and fulfilled and she must return to the Albanian. Rome does not embrace Rosa as a returned exile, but instead sends her onward to complete her journey.

In Chapter Five of the novel, Rosa’s unbelonging is focussed more on cultural displacement than geographical displacement, although the chapter is set in Sweden. Encounters with Albanian refugees and exiles in Sweden are awkward for Rosa and they emphasise the cultural divide between the two lovers. Rosa is a virtual prisoner in the small apartment except for visits to town and to her lover’s Albanian friends. These visits involve short, difficult conversations for Rosa with non-English speakers and highlight her awkwardness with the conventions of Albanian culture, such as shaking hands, removing her shoes and the role of women. She is often suffocated, both in a literal and a figurative sense, by the smoking and conversations of the Albanian men. Her attempts to connect with the Albanian women are difficult and no relationships flourish here for Rosa. For her, the cultural divide is un navigable and proves fatal to the relationship.
**Rosa and belonging**

The world is not an entirely unwelcoming place for Rosa. There are two main domains in which she experiences belonging—in language and in her Italian-Australian sub-culture.

After Rosa's harsh introduction to Europe in Chapter One, she meets the American, Anya, and they become travelling companions through the Balkans. This relationship, with a fellow English speaker, represents a place of belonging for Rosa.

Tourists experience, among other pleasures, that of belonging to a community of language users in temporary exile—a safety which, in everyday circumstances, is as invisible and unrecognized as the air we breathe. (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994, p.207)

Anya's company gives Rosa a sense of safety, which allows her to explore the cultures she encounters and aspects of her relationship to the Albanian. Anya's ability to speak other languages and communicate with locals, her knowledge and experience of the Balkan cultures and of love with a foreigner, combined with her confidence, give Rosa security, because Anya effectively "looks after" her, and provides a role model. This relationship brings about a development in Rosa's character towards a more worldly, knowledgeable and self-assured person.

Another instance of belonging in a community of language users occurs in Rosa's encounter with the Australian traveller, Simon. "Teetering" between "panic and self control", she meets Simon at the border post between Italy and Yugoslavia and is relieved to meet a fellow Australian.

A young man with a backpack and khaki trousers jumps from the steps of the train several metres in front of me. He stops and looks around and sees me in the glow of electric light from the train.

You need a Visa?
A rush of warmth fills me. I am with my brother, my countryman, we become so in this alien land. (Mazza, 2003, p.108)

The fraternity she finds in him assists her to find the inner strength to overcome her fears and lie her way across the border.

Rosa finds some measure of belonging in the house she shares with Isabella and Lucia. It is not explicitly stated, but implied through their names and the ease of the relationships, that all three girls are from Italian families. This is also alluded to by Rosa’s mother, who refers to them as “you girls” (Mazza, 2003, p.165). Rosa’s place in this community is confirmed by Isabella:

— I know it’s frightening to go on your own, but we’ll still be here when you get back. This is your home. Just go. Go where you dream of going. (Mazza, 2003, p. 6)

Then Lucia:

— You can move back into your old room, all your stuff is still here...I’ve been quite lonely. (Mazza, 2003, p. 161)

And reinforced by Rosa:

— Sometimes I wonder why I would ever want to leave here. (Mazza, 2003, p. 184)

Although there are times in the novel where Rosa does experience a feeling of belonging, her sense of unbelonging is dominant.

**Unbelonging and the Albanian**

Preceding the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the war in Kosovë in 1999, the Albanian population of Yugoslavia were subjugated by a hostile government in Belgrade and denied many basic rights. Yugoslavia was created as a heterogenous society, yet many were intolerant of cultural differences and the attitudes of the sundry peoples towards the Albanians varied. They were generally considered with different levels of negative prejudice, regarded as persons of a lower order—thieves, criminals, poor and uneducated. The Yugoslav State did much to make this prejudice become reality, denying Albanians
education and well-paid employment. Oppression incited rebellion and many resorted to violence and, eventually, war. Albanians frequently travelled to more affluent parts of Yugoslavia to work and send money back to their families in Kosovë. Rosa's Albanian is part of this minority culture and experiences unbelonging in Yugoslavia based on his race, language and social position.

He relates anecdotes of his childhood and his period of military service and tales of injustices against Albanians in Yugoslavia. These are an early feature of the relationship with Rosa and identify his position as an outsider in this society. His deprivation of a right to education, as related in his anecdote about the demonstration he participated in at age fourteen (Mazza, 2003, p.27), shows that this society has refused to validate his right to full membership. He will never be able to attain equality with other members of the society who have the right to education. Further instances portray his present mindset towards his position in his country:

I wander through the crammed shelves, gaze at the strange products and unfamiliar words on the packets I recognise.

— Come. Come. You want something or no?
— No, I'm just looking at the different things.

He pulls me by the arm, is silent, pays for the red and white packet of cigarettes. We walk outside.

— Rosa, I am Albanian. When people see Albanian in shop they always think we come to rob them. You are in shop with me and maybe he think we work together, that you take something and hide inside clothes when I buy cigarette. Is normal like this in Yugoslavia. He can make big problem for me with police, very easy. (Mazza, 2003, p.29)

Although he expresses: "most happy time in my life was in Dubrovnik. I think is one place in all world I want to live" (Mazza, 2003, p.229), he is not part of the society and these forces of belonging and displacement invoke the realm of the (un)heimlich. Yugoslavia is, at once, his homeland and the place from which he has been rejected and dispossessed.
Fear contributes to the dispossession of the Albanian from his country. This is shown through his reactions to authority figures such as the shopkeeper in the quote above and his response to the border guards during his flight from Yugoslavia in the “Northbound Trains” sections. Justification for the fear he feels is based on the aggression he has experienced from the Yugoslav state—from the incident of being shot by an officer of the Yugoslav Army, being beaten by police in gaol at fourteen and the stories of others who had experienced such violence from the authorities.

Dispossession from language also occurs in his Yugoslav life, as his first language is made illegal by the State.

In his communication with Rosa, the Albanian uses unconventional or “broken” English and some foreign terms, Albanian, Swedish and Serbo-Croatian. This is a constant reminder to the reader, and to Rosa, of his not (fully) belonging in a particular culture, with the English-speaking Rosa, or in the English narrative. The characteristic difference of his spoken presence within the text constantly makes evident his status as Other. This status is reinforced by him being without a name in the text. Rosa never uses his name in the narrative and therefore does not acknowledge his identity and legitimise him as part of her life.

In exile, the Albanian is dispossessed of home and language and displaced, far from his family and the places he knows. He becomes a refugee and enters into a social position where he truly does not belong. Despite this, belonging is in some ways claimed in Sweden. He learns the language and has some links with Swedish people and he enters into a sub-culture of Albanian exiles in Sweden. The refugee camps where they live, including the former asylum, are a re-creation of their homelands, with their cultural conventions and their employment of the Albanian language. He is welcome here and part of a social milieu. So, again, the dialectic of the Uncanny—the interplay of belonging and unbelonging—becomes part of the narrative.

(U)n(belonging) Together

The relationship between Rosa and her lover is so caught in the tension of where they belong individually, that their belonging together is especially fraught with difficulties. The
connective tissue, which binds the two people together, is sometimes elusive. Rosa finds it impossible, in the first chapter, to locate his place in her imagined geography:

I don't know where his place is, a village in Kosovë. I cannot connect it with roads or railway tracks or the jagged edges of this coast. Maybe I flew over it on my way from Australia. I flew over vast mirrors of sea, over mountains and clouds, trees, patches of pasture and houses. I watched out the window as much as I could but it is endlessly far and I slept and it was dark sometimes and the plane was so high for part of the journey that I couldn't see the ground. To me, this is a dot on a new map, unconnected to my own map. His place is unexplored territory. I find no images in my mind with which I can embellish his story, I have absolutely no idea of where he comes from. (Mazza, 2003, pp.13-14)

Through the course of their relationship, he draws her a map and she travels through Kosovë on the bus, and these actions build her knowledge of him, and strengthen their connection.

Throughout the novel, Rosa questions her motives for pursuing the relationship, destabilising the sense that the characters belong together. For her it is truly a love-hate relationship. He relates tales of his own violent experiences which have marked his character. For Rosa, these anecdotes are alienating—"I have never met anyone who's been shot before." (Mazza, 2003, p.14). Although she is sympathetic towards the role violence has played in his life, and there is an appeal in exotic difference, these issues also deepen the cultural division which exists between them.

His violent actions toward Rosa are points where, from her narrated perspective, the relationship is most apparently flawed. For him, the violence, rape, and emotional abuse which he acts out upon Rosa bring her into his world and serve to close this gap in their belonging together. His violence against her is a kind of initiation into his reality and she experiences abuse and violation, as he has done. Throughout the novel, his violent and aggressive behaviour acts to reduce the disparity between them, resolving in part the unbelonging of the relationship.
Transit and Belonging

The spaces of train travel act in the text as neutral points where the difficulties of belonging and unbelonging are suspended. This in-between space is the territory where the characters caught in the tension of the Uncanny dilemma find ease from the anxiety of their displacement because neither character can claim the space as unequivocally their own. Chapter Three, "The Passengers", takes place almost entirely in transit and is the pivotal chapter for the relationship between Rosa and the Albanian. The majority of this journey together takes place by train from Dubrovnik to Stockholm. Train travel, according to Sidonie Smith, offers the woman traveller a space protected from the "elements" and "their own vulnerability as women in transit" (Smith, 2001, p.128). This safe space is important for Rosa, as it is a hiatus from the feelings of threat which effect her experience of travel, and it is also a safe place to be with the Albanian. This feeling is related in the text:

I feel safe here, on the train with him. It is somehow safer with him in public, I do not feel like he can hurt me here. There are people who might see. (Mazza, 2003, p.132)

Train travel effects the traveller by providing a "vacation from habitual consciousness". Sidonie Smith discusses the change in thinking brought about by being in this enclosed space, changing boundaries into "paths" and transforming obstacles, concluding that travel "lifts" the traveller from the "everyday routine" and "forces an encounter with evanescence". (Smith, 2001, p.130) Alain de Botton also discusses the transformative power of train journeys:

At the end of hours of train-dreaming, we may feel we have been returned to ourselves — that is, brought back into contact with emotions and ideas of importance to us. (De Botton, 2002, p.59)

Transformation of the relationship between Rosa and the Albanian is brought about on the train. In a public space, a neutral environment, Rosa can listen to his anecdotes and get to know him without the divisive presence of his threat, which tends to arise mainly in private
spaces. The train itself is a capsule and this journey is a capsule within the narrative, where the characters are removed from external influences and their displacement in the world outside. On the journey, the focus of each character is on the other. External happenings play little part and Rosa's narration pays less attention to her surroundings and more to the Albanian, who narrates lengthy anecdotes. These elicit Rosa's sympathy and bring about more understanding of him. Both characters are aware of the "evanescence" of their own encounter as they move closer to their destination, Stockholm. They come closer to "emotions and ideas of importance" and finding points of commonality. The end of the journey is marked by a violent return to reality, when Rosa encounters a "ragged" man and his dog in the train station.

Following this journey, their feelings for each other are made clear. The Albanian is forthcoming in expressing his feelings to Rosa and his intention for their relationship. Rosa's emotions impact on her ability to continue narration and her feelings are expressed through fragmentation of the narrative. The end of this journey marks the strongest sense of their belonging together as equals, perhaps for the only time in the novel.

Transit and Unbelonging
In Chapter Five of the novel, Rosa and the Albanian undertake many journeys by car, which have entirely different repercussions on their sense of belonging together. Rosa assumes the role of passenger—a dependent, sedentary, traditionally feminine role (Smith, 2001, pp.20-8). The Albanian drives the car, taking the traditional masculine position of control. The outcome of this assumption of roles in which the male/female characters belong, according to traditional values, is to emphasise their unbelonging in the relationship. He has no driver's license, therefore his assumption of this role is illegal and arguably a place where he does not belong. Rosa has a driver's license and has driven at a previous point in the novel, and could, therefore, claim that she belongs in the driver's seat, yet he refuses to accept her offer to drive (Mazza, 2003, p.187). Further oppression of Rosa occurs when he leaves her alone in the car in a "very bad place". She is frightened by a barking dog and hides on the floor:
I wait on the gritty floor while the dog barks, my chest is crushed against my knees and I can’t breathe. It keeps barking. How dare he leave me here? When he comes back he will find me on the floor and I should tell him I am angry and that he shouldn’t leave me like this and I should tell him I was afraid. The owner of the car slams his door, shouts at the dog and starts his car. When I look up they are gone but I feel breathless and panicked and angry. What should I say to him? I should get angry about this, or maybe I should be nice and make him feel sorry for me. He might think I am an idiot, being frightened by a barking dog is really quite silly. I should wait until Sali is gone, maybe I shouldn’t say anything at all. (Mazza, 2003, p.218)

The result of this narration by Rosa is suppression of her response and again assumption of the passive role. Their final journey by car is one to visit his refugee brother, the Stargazer, in a northern refugee camp. The roads are icy and he cannot see; it is slippery and difficult to stay on the road. Eventually he crashes the car, which represents a symbolic destruction of their relationship. The resolutions and commonalities of the train journey are completely destroyed by this point. She survives the moment by mentally returning home, as she has done in previous moments of extreme stress, during the rape in Dubrovnik, for example, and contemplating suicide in the bath in Maribor. Rosa identifies herself as belonging with her friends and her family, rather than the Albanian, long before the relationship ends.

I hold the blanket around me, close my eyes. I should pray. I should relax. I think of my place in the sun on the verandah painting my toenails with Lucia and I am moving upward onto the surface again. (Mazza, 2003, p.222)

From this point Rosa's outsider status in his Albanian sub-culture and the disintegration of their relationship dominate their remaining time together. It becomes apparent that they do not achieve a sense of belonging in this relationship and Rosa does not belong in Sweden or amongst the Albanians.
The concepts of belonging and not belonging, the issues of the Uncanny—*heimlich* and *unheimlich*—are held in tension throughout the novel. The characters find varying levels of ease from this dilemma in the different settings but are never free from the issues of being outsiders in any location. The novel ends with Rosa in London, a site of traditional imperial power, not in Yugoslavia or Australia. Rosa has resolved her unbelonging to some extent by moving her home, represented by Isabella and Dave, to another home, the Australian-in-London. London is a place where many Australians have gone to pursue a sense of belonging and the large community of Australians who live there is a sub-culture where the character finds some resolution at the end of the novel. Rosa has opted for exile from Australia, suggesting that the final outcome of her quest for resolution of the dilemma of national identity is a gravitation in the novel towards not belonging. London is a place which acknowledges the Anglo-Saxon origins of Australian identity, but is not synonymous with it. London is not Rosa’s home and is far removed from her Italian origins, but it is the ancestral home of Australia’s dominant settler culture. She opts for an extra-national space within which she may be able to establish an authentic “hybrid” self—

> the hybrid...is uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside...the boundaries...are always besieged by the other scene. (Bhabha, 1994, p.116)

Rosa’s final presence in London is an acknowledgement of the “besieged” and Uncanny elements of her Italian-Australian identity and, in exile, she finds some equilibrium.
Section 2:

Autobiography—belonging and not belonging

The tension surrounding a sense of belonging, which is written into the character of Rosa, is drawn from my own experiences as an Italian-Australian growing up in Bunbury. As a young woman I was restless and longed for the “otherlands”, those places built in my imagination by the oral history of my family. These were not only Italian, as I am of mixed heritage. I travelled the roads that Rosa travels and these journeys, made with an innocence that I wrote back into Rosa, became the basic plot for the novel. I drew material from memory, journals, correspondence and souvenirs from my travels and also from my own emotional experience.

The time frame of the novel is that of my own first journey to Europe and Rosa’s intersection with the bloody history of the Balkans is drawn from my experience. This left an indelible impact on me. It changed my life and the way I perceived Australia and aggravated my own sense of not belonging. I watched the News with an altered sensibility and my approach to life was more grave – I felt surrounded by apathy in Australia, annoyed at the superficiality of people who take football seriously and have only cursory interest in anything that happens “overseas”. I know now that—to some extent—this was the arrogance of youth, but I became a self-imposed exile and this feeling of separation within Australian culture informs Rosa.

The first section of this essay takes the form of a survey of the autobiographical journeys used to inform the creation of the novel, followed by an exploration of the use of other forms of autobiographical material and their input into the writing process. In these ways, the novel belongs in the genre of autobiography. But I have not told a story that holds to autobiographical truths in any strict sense. The second section of the essay takes the form of a counter-discussion, exploring ways in which the novel does not fit into the genre of autobiography, but falls into a space between genres. In Creativity, Kevin Brophy urges the dissolution of strong definition between genres:
…creative writing can be an opportunity to free writers and writing from literary endeavours based upon the constricting templates of traditional or established forms. (Brophy, 1998, p.34)

*The Albanian* is a creative project that aims to disrupt the traditional boundaries between fiction and autobiography. This boundary, according to Kevin Brophy, is subject to dynamic, transformative shifts:

> The apparent demand for the fictive—the unreliable or the invented—in literary texts cannot ever be simple, for the boundary of the fictional is feverishly and constantly rebuilt against fiction’s tendency to take autobiographical details, diaries, letters, newspaper reports, historical and scientific documents and other fiction and non-fiction texts into its writing as sources, influences, references or precedents. (Brophy, 1998, p.29)

Throughout the process of writing *The Albanian*, the collision of fiction and autobiography was a continual issue of consideration. I did not wish to be contained within either form and navigated a course that crossbreeds research, memory and imagination.

**Belonging in the Autobiographical Genre**

(i) **Journeys and the Novel**

Much of *The Albanian* is set outside Australia. My journeys to Dubrovnik, Turkey and the Balkans, Italy, Sweden and London have provided the material necessary to create settings for the novel and have influenced the structure of Rosa’s journey. These have taken place within the time frame of the novel and outside it and, after deciding to write this novel in 1997, I began to gather material with intent.
Dubrovnik

I travelled to Dubrovnik in 1989 and again in 1997, after the war. There was scant journal material from my 1989 journey to Dubrovnik and, as it was my first encounter with anywhere outside of Western Australia, I assumed that my recollections were unreliable, tainted by a heightened emotional reaction to the place. I decided to write this story in 1997, whilst in Italy, and returned to Dubrovnik with the specific purpose of making a record for this work. This journal and accompanying photographic material has proved very useful and has been transformed for the novel. An example of this is the evolution of this journal entry:

I am amazed at every corner—that my memory has preserved so well these scenes. I must write this. It was as if walking through a radar to come down these stairs—look out to these cliffs and the blue-green sea. On the rooftop of Hotel Bellevue the figs are ripening but the fruit is still hard and small. The smell of sweet, ripening figs hangs in the air...the sea crashes against these stony cliffs—a prickly pear grows there and a fig. (Mazza, 1997)

In the novel, this passage evolves into:

At the top of the stairs I am standing in the sun. This is Miramare Bay, these white cliffs, this sea, and there are fig wees by the roadside, perspiring the sweet aroma of over-ripeness, their parcels rotting on the bitumen. (Mazza, 2003, p. 22)

Reliable and informative observations could be found in my 1997 journal and in the documenting photographs taken during that journey. I photographed streets, the chimneys in the Old City, the front of the hotels featured in the novel, a house and its garden near the railway station. Details documented in these photographs have found their way into the work. The little swimming pool and the “prolific, sprawling tomatoes” (Mazza, 2003, p.4) are an example of material drawn directly from photographs. The photographs from 1997 contain much evidence of the 1991 bombing of Dubrovnik and perhaps the feeling of
sadness and loss prompted by seeing this damage has somehow influenced the melancholy feelings of Rosa in Dubrovnik.

The emotional information I required to create Rosa’s Dubrovnik was in my experience of 1989. My strongest memory is the amazing sensation of entering the Old City for the first time and the experience of walking around the top of the City Walls. Early in my writing, I became consumed with these electrifying, crystallised moments and worked hard to translate this experience in the novel, drawing on journal images and writing very dense material.

I left this part of the story to sit in a file, returning to it in 2002 during the editing process. I pared it back, retaining many of the observations that originated from my journal of 1997 and with the intention of retaining this feeling of awe and overwhelmed-ness.

During the research process for this essay, I discovered that the feeling I was trying to recapture for Rosa is not uniquely my own experience:

‘Stendahl’s syndrome’ has been used to describe the feeling of being overcome by awe and emotion in situations where history, beauty and sheer unfamiliarity cause an alarming sense of faintness and disorientation. (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994, p.210)

“Stendahl’s syndrome” affected me on my first visit to Dubrovnik in 1989 and I have written this emotion into Rosa. This feeling has a literary history in narratives of the sublime. Travel writers, poets and authors of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries actively sought out sublime landscapes and I sought out the writings of John Cam Hobhouse (Lord Broughton) and Byron’s “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” to inform the narrative. Both these writers travelled through the Balkans at the time of Ali Pasha (1820s) and were bewitched by the sublime in the culture and landscape of the area.
Turkey and the Balkans

In 1989, I followed the same path as Rosa, by bus from Dubrovnik through Yugoslavia and mainland Greece to Istanbul and then through Bulgaria to Romania and back to Belgrade. This journey, too, yielded a small amount of journal material and a few letters, which I wrote home. My level of engagement with these places was not so intense as with Dubrovnik, and I did not have the advantage of research with intent. The journal was significant because it contained mostly emotional outpourings, which proved of some use during the writing of the novel. This entry helped me to recapture the feeling of threat, being preyed upon by wily Turkish shopkeepers, for example, then making the mistake of having a coffee with one.

He took me for a coffee, I couldn't make much sense of him...he just wanted to walk with me. I couldn't understand him, he couldn't understand me. It was boring and I would have rather been alone, so I started to walk away, he followed and I asked him - “Where are you going?” He pretended he didn’t understand...I felt like I was running out of alternatives...I was feeling really angry with myself for not being able to get rid of him...I didn’t feel strong enough to get out of the situation. I felt like a child. (Mazza, 1989)

The incident with the carpet seller in Istanbul (Mazza, 2003, pp.72-3) was not drawn directly from this journal entry, but I used this for the changes of emotion within the scene. Rosa naively accepts an invitation for coffee, is bored by the inane conversation, feels sexually threatened, panics then feels angry with herself for getting into that situation.

I based much of the material in this part of the novel on recollections of my own journey, supplemented with other research. The imperfection of memory and my journal material gave rise to invention. For example, I have always recalled and wondered about a strange little church I visited in Northern Greece. I don't know where it was and I had no clue of where to find it, except that it was off the main road between Thessaloniki and the Turkish border, which is a large area. I did much fruitless searching on the Internet and through guidebooks and the Atlas. So, it became the source for the Greek islet (Mazza, 2003, p.57) where Anya and Rosa meet the old man who reveres Kyra Phrosyne. Because
there was so much mystery about the place in my own mind, I could use the images to create a sense of mystery surrounding Anya.

__Sweden__

In the early 1990s I lived in Sweden for nine months and befriended a family of Albanian refugees from Kosovë. I spent much time with them in their refugee camp home and learnt a great deal about their lives and their culture. Much of the material for Chapter Five is drawn from my recollection of that time. To protect their identities I have created a fictional setting and changed details.

I had written letters home from Sweden which I used as a source for the novel. These were filled with complaints about the weather and the habits of the sun in the far Northern Hemisphere, the strange and unapproachable nature of the locals and the sad, disturbing world of the refugees. Rosa’s emotional state is informed by this material in the fifth chapter of the novel. The restless state of imprisonment to which she subjects herself and the mundane, everyday existence to which her life is reduced after the heightened romanticism of Dubrovnik are built upon the details and particularities present within my letters from Sweden. Particular features of the lives of the refugees are also drawn from these letters. The use of this raw material adds the autobiographical element and its particularly tangible realities to the narrative.

__Transit__

Places of transit feature strongly in this novel: airports, planes and trains. They are places of waiting, places of deep thought, restlessness, stillness, places where the journals and letters, which I used as sources, were often written. In his *Art Of Travel*, Alain De Botton discusses the connection between movement and the progress of thought.

Journeys are the midwives of thought. Few places are more conducive to internal conversations than a moving plane, ship or train. There is an almost quaint correlation between what is in front of our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our heads: large thoughts at times requiring large views, new thoughts new
places. Introspective reflections which are liable to stall are helped along by the
flow of the landscape. (De Botton, 2002, p.57)

I found the act of travel invaluable in my writing process. Even short journeys by train or
car to Bunbury elicited new thoughts on the novel. Material used for the description of
airports and the experience of the flight is drawn from the many journal entries I made
during my own transit history. Notes taken during my 1999 journey to London were
invaluable in describing Singapore airport.

Somewhere in the space between then (1989) and now I have learnt to manage
anxiety and self doubt and I know where to go, what to do and when to get on the
plane. The artificial plants and flowers hang like a photograph and damp air huffs
through the airconditioning. The seats are even green. Abba I Know Him So Well
plays in pan pipes....bored workers are standing in the toilet with a broom and
bucket listening to trickles and sweeping up pubic hair—I'm glad my life is not so
solemn. (Mazza, 1999)

This journal entry is translated in the novel as follows:

A woman of Singapore stands in the toilet with a broom and a bucket, listening to
trickles and sweeping up the pubic hair. In the halls of the airport, artificial purple
orchids and green, green vines hang and a fountain spatters and Abba play and I feel
anxious, fearful, sad. My love is left behind me. (Mazza, 2003, p.158)

Observations of the place were very helpful in creating a more credible Singapore airport
but it is the first line of the journal entry which was most informative for me. It was the
recollection, in transit in 1999 when this work was in its initial stages, of the self doubt and
anxiety of a novice traveller which helped me to form Rosa's character.

Particularly useful too, was my description of the Belgrade airport in the 1989
Journal, which informed the first scene of the novel.
The flight was so uncomfortable. Then Belgrade. It looks like a Soviet army airport hangar—stark, hot, unfriendly. They weren’t at all helpful. I ended up waiting an hour in a hot queue, only to be told to go elsewhere. I nearly lost my bags and there were no trolleys so I had to carry it [sic] and it’s so bloody heavy. Then I couldn’t check in and had to wait for 1½ hours with my bags, sitting with 3 old women with scarves on their heads while a man sobbed. I couldn’t change money because the office was closed and I couldn’t buy a drink and ended up drinking a handful of water in the smelly filthy toilets. (Mazza, 1989)

This journal entry reminds me of the all-consuming fear which gripped me during my first journey out of Australia and the awful experience of Belgrade just made it all the more terrifying. It is this uncertain, frightened, anxious girl filled with self doubt which was me, that I have transferred onto Rosa.

Rome
The tension of not belonging in the ancestral homelands is something I discovered in Europe, especially in Italy, and Rosa’s visit to Rome is symbolic of this and a major turning point in her character.

(ii) Life Souvenirs and the Novel

In 1987 I bought the December issue of Vogue and discovered a gateway, via a fashion-shoot in Istanbul, into a vast interior sea of longing for that exotic world. A girl in The Baghdad Kiosk in a circa 1987 “balloon” skirt was pinned on my wardrobe door for years. This began a particularly Turkish collection of “life souvenirs”. Since then, I have been collecting things from the places I visited or longed to visit. These life souvenirs include the miscellaneous contents of pockets and handbags, tickets, receipts, commercial souvenirs, feathers and stones, letters and postcards, packaging, plastic bags. They are things I could easily have thrown in the bin, without a thought at the time, but I didn’t. Now they have been transformed into sources and memory triggers. Jane Edwards, in her article “Travel writing in fact and fiction”, describes these collected resources as:
...absolutely priceless when attempting to evoke the atmosphere of a place after the first sharp memories have buffed. On every trip I gather up as much printed material as I can stuff into my suitcase. Sooner or later, it will come in handy when I attempt to conjure up images and describe them so vividly that readers can see that place in their mind's eye. (Edwards, 1997, p.2)

This paraphernalia is blooming with life's little details, things irretrievable through any other source than being present in the specific time and place. Life souvenirs are sensual, honest and immediate and are a great resource. These material reminders evoke a specific sense of place which fortifies Rosa's experience.

**Objects**

Objects have long been invested with the power of being able to transport a sense of the other place and other time to which they belong, into the present. The souvenir is an example which brings a tangible sense of elsewhere back home. Amanda Bishop discusses the significance of souvenirs, as objects which trigger reverie, "refer back to the moment" and are "signifiers of place". (Bishop, 2002, p.11) Objects other than commercial souvenirs also have the power to trigger memory. Maria Jacketti describes a jug from her childhood:

> It is, after all, a perfect poetry seed, something which connects me both spiritually and archaeologically to a childhood which swirled and vanished into the greater past....And so when I retrieve objects like the Scotch jug from the depths of memory, I become...less a prisoner of time. (Jacketti, 1997, p.2)

Traditional souvenirs are the relics of saints, human bones, a hair from Mohammed's beard and such material is collected in the museums through which Rosa passes. During my own pilgrimages to places I have collected my own ephemera, which forms part of the personal narrative translated into *The Albanian*. I will consider three of the pivotal pieces and their effects on my writing.
The first object to influence my writing was a raven’s feather, which I picked up off Blackheath in London. I had completed my research proposal at the time and was trying to commence the writing task. In my mind, I associate the feather with the decayed victims of the Plague, buried beneath Blackheath. This reminded me of a story my cousin told me in Italy of a stone tomb which exploded due to the effect of the heat on the decaying corpse; this transported me to Dubrovnik, the city of stone, in a decaying country, swollen and hot with racial hatred. I remembered an anecdote told by an Albanian refugee of digging up bodies in a churchyard in Yugoslavia, being infected with sores from handling the bodies without protective clothing. I began here because of the series of memories triggered by the feather. Although these particular stories no longer all feature in the final draft of the novel, they were at different times part of the text.

Other objects were very moment-specific, such as the brown ceramic bird. I picked up this bird on my own first journey to Dubrovnik, on the first day I walked into the Old City. A ragged looking man was crouched in a pool of water by the entry gate, blowing into the little bird, which was partly filled with water. It whistled shrilly and loudly. In the walled City this sound was greatly amplified. The memory of the sound and hearing the little bird whistle now in my own hands, reminds me of my own first impressions of the place, the feeling of awe (“Stendahl’s syndrome”), the magnitude of my surroundings and the image of wet marble. There is obviously something very childlike about this moment too, and Rosa approaches her discovery of Dubrovnik with innocence and wonder. The bird was a “poetry seed” to recall this feeling of first encounter.

Stones are collected by Rosa through parts of her journey. I collected my own stones too and like the bird and the feather, they have been useful talismans for my imagination and memory. I have a piece of limestone on my desk, a sharp-edged piece blown from the side of a planter in Trsteno Gardens, Croatia during the 1990-91 war. One side is still marked with the pale green of lichen, which had grown on the planter before its shattering, the other side is clean and sharp. To touch, smell and examine the lichen is a tangible reconnection with the reality of place. The influence of stones I collected on my own journeys is translated into the text, particularly the images of Dubrovnik.
Paraphernalia

Plastic bags float around this world like great drifts of kelp, but I have kept one. This bag is from Istanbul and once contained a dozen baklava. I filled it with bits of paper, postcards and brought it home, thinking nothing of my possession. The plastic bag triggered a memory and provided the particulars for this scene in the novel:

Anya opens the door. She drops a plastic bag in front of me and she smiles. Haci Bozan Ogullari—inside there is a box and inside it is a dozen sticky baklava. She has bought wine and water and we sit on our beds and fill plastic cups with red wine. She is smiling and cheerful and she licks the honey from her fingers. So fine she is, her skin so pale and clear, her face so gloriously happy. (Mazza, 2003, p.71)

Also contained within the plastic bag were various bits and pieces—tickets, receipts, packaging—all raw materials for the creation of fiction. These scraps litter the text of the novel, providing details for Rosa’s journey which are tangible and authentic. A ticket I purchased in 1989 to walk around Dubrovnik’s City Walls informs the passage where “A man stamps my ticket, it says something in Latin and libertas” (Mazza, 2003, p.4); a stray piece of wrapping paper translates into “She hands me a little parcel, wrapped in white paper with red and blue snowflakes” (Mazza, 2003, p.74); a receipt from Konsum Marknad, a Swedish grocery chain, includes a shopping list with jäst (yeast) and vetemjöl (flour) (Mazza, 2003, p.193).

Locality specific details drawn from collected material authenticates Rosa by connecting her with a real time and place, providing a layer of the ordinary, material world which surrounds humanity in every moment.

Postcards and Photographs

Throughout the novel, descriptive sections have been informed by postcards and photographs taken during my journeys. In his Art Of Travel, Alain De Botton comments on the photograph:
...beauty is fugitive, it is frequently found in places where we may never return, or else it results from a rare conjunction of season, light and weather....our anxiety about losing a precious scene can decline with every click of the shutter. (De Botton, 2002, p.218)

Collection of postcards and particularly photographs for research is like collecting a frozen moment, containing many little details: the weather, angles of shadow and weight of clouds, the state of the lawn and which flowers bloom, architectural styles and the effect of weathering on roof tiles. Such captured moments are very juicy writing material.

Swedish postcards, which have surrounded my desk during the writing of the novel, illustrate the kitsch tradition which surrounds the medium of the postcard and contain the signifiers which represent the archetypal Swedish holiday experience. They are “hopelessly cluttered up with sediments of associations, clichés, and images” (Lofgren, 1999, p. 91). For example: amongst the snow-laden conifers, three baby reindeer, ears pricked and dark-eyed, look at a distant point; their three white bottoms face the camera. In another postcard a small village of traditional wooden cottages is surrounded by snowy forest. They represent a kind of Swedish idyll, like the palm trees and white beaches of the Pacific. In her article “Souvenirs”, Amanda Bishop discusses these particular images, linking them to “comforting delusions” about place:

Signifiers of place necessarily exist outside actual time, just as the tourist is briefly connected to the destination, not to the life of its inhabitants. (Bishop, 2002, p.11)

I feel that it has been important to capture the more “touristy” experiences of Rosa alongside the more gritty emotional ones connected with her adventurous experiences and relationships. Her existence in the European settings is indeed a collision of these elements. Despite the gravity of the life circumstances of the Albanian refugees, Rosa remains on holiday in Europe for purposes of romance and self-enhancement. It was my intention to invoke the tensions between these contrasting life situations as a comment on social differences between the main characters and as part of the wider narrative theme of Australian identity.
(iii) **Bunbury**

There is a strong autobiographical element to Rosa’s experiences in Bunbury because it is my hometown. I have been there on hot days and in storms and walked around the quiet streets on my own, grown a garden there. I returned, for research purposes, to revisit the nightclubs of my youth and found them little changed. I was at once listening and observing and remembering, smelling and drinking in the entire experience as I had in 1990 and I was able to translate the memories and experiences into Rosa’s story:

Lucia and I walk into Trafs. The Maori bouncer remembers me Howa ya gowin? I nod and mime good...My shoes stick to the carpet and I am inhaling the warm poison of other people’s cigarettes...We squeeze between the body heat, elbows, bums and smiling moustaches, to the bar. I prop myself higher on the brass foot rail so I can be seen by the barmaid. (Mazza, 2003, p.168)

I supplemented this with research of what music was played and the entertainment venues open at the time.

(iv) **An Era of Change in Europe**

The socio-political backdrop to Rosa’s story is the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe and the subsequent unleashing of ethnic rivalries and resulting Balkan Wars. My interest and education in this period of history began with my own presence in Belgrade in 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell. I read as many English news publications as I could find in order to understand the events unfolding. I had long been interested in the Communist Bloc and had primed myself for my journey to the area with the novels of Milan Kundera. His representations of life in Prague during the 1960s in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* did much to educate and flavour my perception of these places and their history.
News publications from 1989 were useful sources for reviving the feel of the times for Rosa. I had kept some news clippings amongst my journal writings and consulted issues of relevant *Time* magazine. Historic accounts written in hindsight about this period do not retain the feeling of fear and uncertainty which characterised that time, as expressed in this clipping from the *International Herald Tribune*:

> Paris—Considerable anxiety and some hysteria is being expressed about conflicts of nationality and territory supposedly reopened in Eastern Europe and the Balkans by the retreat of the Cold War. People who a year or two ago knew little or nothing of Transylvania, Bessarabia, Kosovo and the Oder-Neisse line now seem convinced that new world wars await ignition in the East. (Pfaff, 1989)

Concurrent with my writing of the Balkans, the 1999 war in Kosovë began. The events anticipated by Albanians I had met during my own journey had finally come to pass and this added a dimension of importance to my writing. I was being faced with media images of the sufferings of a people to which I had some connection. This contemporary conflict prompted intense feelings in me: anger at the perpetrators of massacres, fears for the people I had known – and this immediacy fired up my passion to write this story. I immersed myself in news and subscribed to an online journal, “Human Rights Watch” based in Helsinki which emailed me constant reports on the war, including testimonies from rape victims and photographs.
Valmir Deljiaj, an eighteen-month-old infant girl, was found dead at the Donje Obrinje massacre site in Kosovo. She is partially covered by the body of her mother, Mejhare Deljiaj, aged twenty-seven, who died from a gunshot wound to the head.

(http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/kosovo98/photo/dolobr/dolobr_e.JPG)

This photograph is of an Albanian child killed by Yugoslav police, along with eighteen members of her family while sheltering in a makeshift tent in the forest. Her image affected me deeply and has stayed with me during the writing process, reminding me of the underlying reality of my subject matter.
Not Belonging in the Autobiographical Genre – The Realm of the In-Between

*The Albanian* is a novel written into the space between autobiography and fiction. As has been demonstrated by my discussion of the sources used for the novel, there is a strong autobiographical leaning in the work. However it *is* fiction.

Fiction is a term under interrogation by post-modern theory. Defining it as “lies” and “inventions” with “imaginary people and events” (Abrams, 1999, p.94) is inadequate in a contemporary context. Approaching a definition of fiction, Wendel Harris works further from the general definition that fiction is invention, proposing that:

> Generally, a text is regarded as fictional if it contains any fictional statements (propositions). Most fictional texts will, of course, be made up primarily of such propositions, but as John Searle remarks, “A work of fiction need not consist entirely of, and in general will not consist entirely of, fictional discourse”. (Harris, 1992, p.99)

Searle’s remark is of pivotal importance to the issue of writing that operates between the genres of autobiography and traditional fiction, because it makes explicit the possibility that fiction does not exclude fact; is not only an exercise in invention. Therefore the amalgamation of fact and fiction in a work is accepted under the banner of fiction. Establishing a definition of genre appropriate to *The Albanian* can be profitably undertaken through an examination of other hybrid texts of a similar kind.

I began the writing process with autobiographical material – real world evidence of the place and time I wished to re-create for the narrative and some relevant life experiences – but I did not wish to write a confessional novel. Despite my desire not to divulge my life story, I did not wish to write pure fiction either. I wanted the story to seem as if it were real, so I employed a first-person, present tense narrative, and I wanted to write about the places and the times of my own experience. This led my writing into an in-between space, not belonging in the genre of autobiography and not belonging in the genre inhabited by traditional fiction.
Many contemporary authors have written in various ways into this in-between space – Robert Dessaix, Drusilla Modjeska with *Poppy*, Kim Scott with *Benang*, Jeanette Winterson – yet there is still little critical material that explores it in great depth and no definitive term with which to label this space. It is clear that there are genres which blend autobiography and fiction in different ways but the terminology is vague and contradictory.

The literature of this space is sometimes described as "autobiographical fiction" or "fictionalised autobiography".

During the 18th c. we find there is some connection between autobiography and the then relatively new form of the novel. For example, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768) are taken to be a kind of autobiographical fiction, or fictionalized autobiography. A good deal of fiction since has been fairly thinly disguised autobiography; and there has been an enormous quantity of it in the last fifty years or so, owing, in some considerable measure, to the development of the stream of consciousness... technique. (Cuddon, 1998, p.65)

The terminology may be new, but the genre, clearly, is not. Despite the history of this form, neither term (i.e. fiction or autobiography) is constant or pinpoints precise characteristics which distinguish one from the other.

The term “fictional autobiography”, the one most often used, is defined as “fictionalised personal experience”(Stein, 1998, p. 247) and described as writing which “often conflates the lives of its writer and narrator” (Lesch, 1996, p. 1). *The Albanian* does both of these things. Yet fictional autobiography is also used to refer to novels in a clearly different genre, created from the lives of historical figures or around historic events, such as Thomas Keneally’s *Schindler’s Ark* or *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood (Gee, 1997, p.10). These novels set out to tell a pseudo-autobiography of the main character, who is an historic figure. This does not apply to my work.

Cuddon does not distinguish between fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction. Both terms are used in contemporary discourse and seem to attract definitions of their own, such as, for autobiographical fiction – “narrative [made] out of personal
"experience" (Huddle, 1991, p.17). This is not unlike the first definitions of fictional autobiography, yet it suggests a foregrounding of the personal experience aspect. The narrative of *The Albanian* is constituted of things other than my personal experience.

Another term associated with the production of fiction stemming from autobiographical material is "memoir". This term removes the focus from the author's own story and onto "the people and events that the author has known or witnessed" (Abrams, 1999, p.22). Although my own work focuses on Rosa, not the events or people who intersect with her journey, it is useful to consider the hybrid nature of the memoir work of authors such as Robert Dessaix. Drusilla Modjeska considers his work in her article "Refreshing the Memory" and also makes observations of writing from in-between space. She refrains from giving such writing a label:

> At the beginning of the 21st century, we are sophisticated enough to hold several layers of reading at once, and to enjoy the interplay between the conceit [that the story being told is true], the fiction and the authorial stake in the story told. (Modjeska, 2000, p.26)

She claims that Robert Dessaix was the:

> ...first to push memoir into the post-postmodern age, pointing the way to a different meaning of the term, opening an array of questions about the relationship between fiction and truth, story and meaning...(Modjeska, 2000, p.5)

This would indicate a possible redefinition of the meaning of "memoir" to include work which also crosses into fiction. The term memoir associates too strongly with memory work to successfully transmit this new meaning and Modjeska does not present it as a new definitive term.

I have found no terms relating to the literature which lies between traditional fiction and autobiography satisfactory, though their meanings are close to what I require to describe *The Albanian*. My work started with memory, experience and observation, I added history and research, imagination and invention and constructed the novel from the collision – and collusion – of these sources.
The reinvention of events is a reconstruction in itself, which requires the creation of a narrator through which the author speaks. The act of writing autobiography involves the author diving into memory and inventing a new "truth" from this material. So the narrator or textual persona is telling the history of the author, from the source of the author's own memory:

...one's personal past is not simply recalled and placed into the text in a strictly narrative, chronological, linear order, it is renegotiated; and this personal, narrative truth should never be confused with historical, objectified truth... (Gasyna, 2002, p.4)

Renegotiating the past is a step towards fictionalisation of that past; there are gaps in memory and gaps between the lived tale and the re-telling. There is a division between the past and the present, the author and the narrator and there are the additional divisions made by hindsight and reinterpretation. Brian Castro considers this process in autobiographical writing:

You have to be the inventor of your own legacy.
Not to soak up the static accumulations of what has gone before, but to light upon what can be constructed. To invent in the old sense of the word; invenire: to find written or to come upon in writing: a montage built by blasting out the myth of the past. To dispense with...the continuum. (Castro, 1998, p.5)

The nature of autobiographical writing, with its tenuous links with even the possibility of recreating real world experiences, is that it leaves itself open to renegotiation and therefore to amalgamation with fiction. Drusilla Modjeska considers the nature of translating the autobiographical subject into narrative:

...memory and remembering, like life, like the present, do not have the smooth shape of a novel. There are dangerous seductions in fiction. (Modjeska, 2000, p.6)
The conflation of fiction and autobiography is a blending of truth and lies, imagination and experience which "smoothes out the shape" of lived life into a readable narrative. The distinctions between these elements in my own work are blurred into the narrative voice of Rosa, a figure who certainly contains elements of myself, but perhaps more of that self which I shed during the process of growing up. Drusilla Modjeska refers to the narrative voice as the intermediary between fact and fiction:

Perhaps the question isn’t so much one of truth as of voice. In any piece of writing worth its salt, something essential is held in the voice...the way the voice can encompass the material it works with: fact, fiction, memory, speculation, invention, retrieval. And its ability to make distinctions as well as connections, weaving the words of others, the traces left by history, by experience and by memory into new patterns that will carry us forward...(Modjeska, 2000, p.6)

She goes on to liken writing in the space between fact and fiction to “running a knife between the tree of memory and the bark of history”, concluding that it is “all part of the same endeavour”. (Modjeska, 2000, p.26)

When considering my own/Rosa’s position in the balance of fact and fiction I found that it has become very difficult to run that knife between what is fiction in the novel and what is not fiction. Each has overwhelmed the other. I have, in effect, rewritten my own memory so that what actually occurred in my own experience is coloured and blurred by what happens to Rosa. David Huddle writes of this experience:

When I start writing a story, it’s usually based on something I lived through, but as I’m writing it, I quickly forget what actually happened...Even though I begin with personal experience I’m tinkering with it from the first words I set down. When I finish writing...my memory of the truth of what happened has been clouded by my many alterations of it. (Huddle, 1991, p.16)
I am not Rosa but I no longer even know where the truth is located in the text because the weave is so tight that some measure of fact, researched or experienced, and some element of fiction sits side-by-side in almost every sentence of the novel. I have specified some of the ways my own life-experiences have influenced and been translated into the novel. This is not a thorough dissection of the sources for the novel, but it gives some indication of the influence of the autobiographical. Whether it be the fact that I have been to a place or I have felt Rosa’s feeling or I have seen or heard or smelt a thing, my own self is the nucleus of the text because I have written the work. It is part of the nature of the in-between space the work occupies, to be apart from defining genres and at the same time to hold some of their characteristics.
Section 3:

Myth—belonging in and displacing tradition

Vladimir Propp was a Russian Formalist best known for his *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, published in 1928. It consists of a structural model devised to analyse the narrative components of traditional stories. Propp's model sets out to classify all folk tales into seven "spheres of action"—the villain, the helper, the hero, the sought-for person, the donor, the dispatcher, the false hero (Propp, 1984, p.xxx)—and thirty-one "functions" or narrative units through which the plot progresses.

Since its initial publication, Propp's theory has remained a significant reference point in discussions of traditional tale structure. It has received some sceptical and critical responses from academics such as Terry Eagleton, who describes it as "drastically economical" (Eagleton, 1983, p.104) in his compendium of literary theory. It has become the basis of subsequent theories of traditional narrative structure, such as A. J. Greimas' 1966 reworking of Propp's Morphology to include twenty narrative units. In fact, modifying Propp's theory has been done so frequently that Peter Gilet was able to compile a comprehensive study of the many variations of Propp's theory in 1998, and provide yet another revised set of units. After rigorous consideration of the various reworkings collected in *Vladimir Propp and the Universal Folk Tale*, Gilet states that "Propp's work is still most relevant" (1998, p.6). I found it an interesting proposal to examine my work in light of a seventy-five year old theory, which is still considered to be a relevant authority on matters of narrative structure.

My consideration of Propp's Morphology and its relevance to *The Albanian* took place after the novel was complete. I was intrigued by the extent to which the novel actually does fit into the structure of the thirty-one narrative units. This adherence to tradition took place unconsciously. Traditional tales feed into the overall story of Rosa—the story of Ariadne and Theseus and "The Four Clever Brothers". Their narrative structures have, perhaps, had some role in unconsciously shaping the novel. Traditional tales make impact on our unconscious from the moment somebody reads us a story in
childhood and their pattern is written into our understanding of story. When writing a story of my own it is impossible to remove this understanding of the traditional story from the creative process. The Albanian draws on these traditions and fits Propp’s model very well at the level of plot, yet there is a fundamental shift towards the realm of the feminine. The substitution of the traditional male hero with a female hero changes the implications of Propp’s theory, making it more consonant with contemporary ideologies and, in this case, pitting the female and male characters against each other, respectively, as hero and villain.

The purpose of this discussion is to examine the ways in which the plot of the novel belongs in the traditional structure outlined by Propp’s thirty-one functions and the ways in which it displaces or subverts this tradition.

(i) The Thirty-One Narrative Units and Rosa’s Journey


The initial situation is followed by:

The Functions of Dramatis Personae

I. ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF A FAMILY ABSENTS HIMSELF FROM HOME. (absentation)

This first function is directed at a male character by Propp’s references to “Himself”. This function is performed by Rosa, who has absented herself from home on a quest to resolve her restlessness. Her family includes the girls she lives with in Australia, Isabella and Lucia. By “absenting” herself from home, Rosa is fulfilling the active role traditionally associated with the male hero.

II. AN INTERDICTION IS ADDRESSED TO THE HERO. (interdiction)

Propp identifies an interdiction as a warning, suggestion or command which is told after the absentation, although “the sequence of events... actually runs in the reverse” (Propp, 1968, p.26). The novel follows this function precisely. Rosa recalls her conversation with Isabella, who presents an interdiction as a command—“...Just go. Go where you dream of going”—and as a warning or piece of advice—“I know it’s frightening to go on your own, but we’ll still be here when you get back” (Mazza, 2003, p.6). Isabella’s conversation at this
point pre-empt Rosa’s confrontation with fear, aloneness and her own and others’
difference.

III. **THE INTERDICTION IS VIOLATED. (violation)**

According to Propp’s model functions II and III are a “paired element” and the form of the
violation corresponds to the form of the interdiction. As Isabella’s interdiction took the
form of a command, Rosa’s violation takes the form of fulfilment of that command. (Propp,
1968, p.27)

The first, and most simple fulfilment is of the command “Just go”. Rosa has gone
from Bunbury to the places where she dreamed of going.

Rosa confronts the three major elements of Isabella’s interdiction in the early part
of the novel: the depth of history she encounters in Yugoslavia, its difference from
Bunbury and the effect of this on her consciousness; her loneliness and her fear. Propp
specifies that the Villain enters the tale at this point; one way this can happen is by
“sneaking up” on the hero. The entry of the Albanian into Rosa’s story takes place as a
violation of her personal space—he is a stranger who touches her in the street (Mazza,
2003, p.11).

The villain is traditionally associated with dark forces and is usually a dragon,
witch, devil, stepmother or bandit (Propp, 1968, p.27). It is interesting to note that,
although the hero is always male, it is possible that the villain is female, so not
untraditional for male and female characters to be adversaries. The association of the
Albanian with the dark forces of the Villain changes the essential relationship in Propp’s
model, aligning the male and female protagonists with the opposite sites of the tradition.

Having identified the Albanian as the Villain and Rosa as the Hero, the remaining four
functions, which make up what Propp calls the “Initial Situation”, follow the events of the
first day of their relationship.
IV. THE VILLAIN MAKES AN ATTEMPT AT RECONNAISSANCE. (reconnaissance)
The Villain gleans information about the Hero by deceptive means. During their first interview, Rosa reveals scarcely anything of herself, but the Albanian steals her passport and finds out her name:

— How do you know my name? I have not told you.
He pulls my passport from his shirt pocket and hands it back to me.
— I steal it, to show you that you must take more care of your things. There is danger in this place. (Mazza, 2003, pp.14-5)

This is in keeping with the first form of this function. Propp also cited an inversion of reconnaissance, which can apply to The Albanian, whereby the “intended victim questions the villain” asking questions such as “Where is your death…?” (Propp, 1968, p.28) During their first interview, Rosa asks a question of the Albanian, who goes on to give an extensive account of having been shot by a member of the Yugoslav Military (Mazza, 2003, p.13).

V. THE VILLAIN RECEIVES INFORMATION ABOUT HIS VICTIM. (delivery)
The Victim, Rosa, reveals her vulnerability and fear to the Villain, the Albanian:

Night is beginning to settle and I know I can't find my way easily out of this corner of the city. It unnerves me to walk the long road to my hotel room, there are too many parks and long, dark staircases. I tell him this.
— I must go now.
— I can walk you back to your room after I serve the dinner for restaurant, probably nine o'clock. I promise I will not try to kiss you again. I am sorry Rosa, is just something inside tell me to do it when I look at you.
— OK.
But I am unsure. He leads me back up the rocks, through the tunnel and along the walls to the Café Lucullu. Lights are appearing all around me, night is deepening shadows, changing the scenery. The darkness is coming. (Mazza, 2003, p.15)
This revelation by Rosa puts into play a chain of events whereby the Albanian is able to take advantage of her weakness, as foregrounded by Isabella’s interdiction.

**VI. THE VILLAIN ATTEMPTS TO DECEIVE HIS VICTIM IN ORDER TO TAKE POSSESSION OF HIM OR OF HIS BELONGINGS.** *(trickery)*

Propp specifies that in this function the villain firstly “assumes a disguise” then uses some means of “deception or coercion”. The disguise slowly manifests itself in the novel. The Albanian’s admission of feigned niceness to American tourists and his false smile hint at some kind of trickery. In this quote, the darkness which hides his face may be interpreted as a disguise which allows him to take emotional advantage of Rosa:

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He is silent a moment, the sea beats slowly on the rocks in the darkness and the sound is piped up to us through the seam in the cliff.

This place make me dream. I show you Rosa because I want to love you. You make me cry.

His face is hidden by the darkness. He wipes at tears. (Mazza, 2003, p.19)
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Following this scene, Rosa allows him into her room where he rapes her. His statement “This place make me dream” and his musings on the role of Dubrovnik in his life replay in her memory the following day and help Rosa convince herself to return to him. The statement, together with her sympathy, work as a form of bewitchment, which is in keeping with Propp’s theory on the workings of the Villain using “magical means” (Propp, 1968, p.30).

**VII. THE VICTIM SUBMITS TO DECEPTION AND THEREBY UNWITTINGLY HELPS HIS ENEMY.** *(complicity)*

Rosa’s complicity occurs through her inability to act against the Albanian raping her:

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His grip is stone. No, no, no, get away from me. But he has seized me, leans against me. I arch my back over the balustrade, encircled. In my mind I see the cliff, the
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tortured fig, the roots in the crevice. I cannot speak, no words in my head, no words on my tongue.... I am collapsed, my limbs lifeless...(Mazza, 2003, p.19)

This state of inertia is brought about by his bewitchment, signalled by the reference to the cliff and the fig. Propp pairs this function with the previous one as a “deceitful agreement” comprising of the “deceitful proposal”—the Albanian’s actions of taking Rosa back to her room and raping her—and the corresponding “acceptance” or complicity, which is Rosa’s inability to act against him. (Propp, 1968, p.30) It is a situation which has its origins in Isabella’s interdiction because it is fear and aloneness that deliver Rosa into the arms of the Villain.

Rosa’s complicity allows the relationship to continue. Throughout the next day, Rosa’s instinctual flight from the Hotel Bellevue and her decision to hide from the Albanian are eroded by two factors related to enchantment. As part of this function, Propp cites falling asleep as a form of complicity whereby the hero may fall victim to bewitchment by the Villain. (Propp, 1968, p.30) Rosa falls into a magical sleep the following day, which indicates that she has allowed her sense of personal boundaries to be altered:

I dream my body floated on the sea, swelling and waning with the tides. The water washed onto me, into me and I swallowed the salt and I bloated and I sailed like this to a shore which was humming and buzzing with insects. When I stood, water poured from me, through my skin. It poured so I didn't know where the edges of me were anymore, my boundaries blurring and changing. (Mazza, 2003, p.23)

Rosa’s transfer into a bewitched state is also shown through her entry into the shell, indicating the state of bewitchment induced by Dubrovnik itself:

I followed a path which ended in a cave—I stepped inside. The floor and ceiling formed a curved tunnel which was smooth: the texture of a fingernail. I could hear the sea, smell the sea, it roared and hushed all around. Was I inside a sea shell? (Mazza, 2003, p.23)
The reasons for Rosa’s complicity are compounded by her recollection of enchantment occurring through her wish upon the turtle:

I made a wish and the turtle bellowed with my coin on his back and I wished to meet him and there he was, with me: a dark figure on the cliff with wet eyes—this place make[sic] me dream. (Mazza, 2003, p.24)

This recollection of the enchantments which have affected Rosa—the bewitchment of the Albanian, the magical sleep and the wish upon the turtle—lead her to a second act of complicity by breaking her resolve to hide and returning to the Albanian the following day.

Rosa, however, has installed in the tale a subversive action by providing her own means of escape, booking herself a ticket to Istanbul.

Propp’s theory states that “the first seven functions may be regarded as the preparatory part of the tale” and what follows in the next function is a vital “complication” by which the “act of villainy” begins. (Propp, 1968, p.31)

**VIII. THE VILLAIN CAUSES HARM OR INJURY TO A MEMBER OF A FAMILY OR ONE MEMBER OF A FAMILY EITHER LACKS SOMETHING OR DESIRES TO HAVE SOMETHING (villainy or lack)—Subset 8: the villain demands or entices his victim.** (Propp, 1968, p.32)

This function relates to types of harm, which befall the victim of a tale as a consequence of their desire or at the hands of the Villain.

Following the Albanian’s enticement of Rosa (function VII), which refers to his bewitchment of her at the cliff-face, he issues a demand:

His words stick to my flesh.

— Come to me tomorrow in cafe. I wait you. If you do not come, I find you. I find you anywhere. I have eyes in all Dubrovnik.

Shuffling, the door closes. (Mazza, 2003, p.20)
This demand, according to Propp is the "result of the deceitful agreement" (Propp, 1968, p.33). If the deceitful agreement is the rape committed, then this example from the novel would hold true to Propp's model as being the Villain's demand.

The second part of this function relates to the lack of something. The situation in which Rosa finds herself at this point in the novel is that she has a goal, to reach Istanbul and quell her restlessness, and she has not yet fulfilled that intention. This may be her lack. However, she also lacks human company and this missing element may be what has led her into companionship with the Albanian/Villain.

Functions IX and X are linked in the novel, representing the two roles of Rosa and the Albanian prior to her departure for Istanbul, which occurs at function XI.

IX. MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS MADE KNOWN; THE HERO IS APPROACHED WITH A REQUEST OR COMMAND; HE IS ALLOWED TO GO OR HE IS DISPATCHED. (mediation, the connective incident)

Propp differentiates between two types of hero at this point—the "seeker-hero" and the "victimised-hero". Seeker-heroes go off in search of something and victimised-heroes are either seized or banished (Propp, 1968, p.36). Although Rosa is the Victim in this tale, her journey at this point is the result of her seeker action. The plan to go to Istanbul is set into motion at a point where she is rising above victimisation and empowering herself to action against the Albanian and his demand. Propp goes on to outline four different types of incident that can possibly occur at this function for the seeker-hero. This one applies to Rosa:

3. *The hero is allowed to depart from home.* In this instance the initiative for the departure often comes from the hero himself.... The hero sometimes does not announce his real aims for leaving... (Propp, 1968, p.37)
Rosa announces her intention to go to Istanbul the night before she is due to leave. She tells the Albanian her reason for going:

— I have dreamed of Istanbul all my life, of its minarets and onion domes, of magic carpets and the Grand Bazaar. (Mazza, 2003, p.36)

She does not mention her real aim of escaping from him. Following this announcement comes the Albanian’s response, which Propp would call “counteraction”.

X. THE SEEKER AGREES TO OR DECIDES UPON COUNTERACTION. (beginning counteraction)

This function only applies to seeker-hero characters and involves a “volitional decision” preceding “the search” (Propp, 1968, p.38). Before her parting from the Albanian, Rosa agrees to return, she makes a promise which effectively counteracts her departure as a means of escape:

— Please make for me one promise? Please come back in Yugoslavia. Find me Rosa, promise me.

He takes the waiter’s pen from his pocket.

— Have you some paper? I write my address for you.

He watches me. I open my bag, take out the blue address book and hand it to him. He is engraving his name in there, earnestly creating the elaborate letters of his name, his place. I can feel the lines and curves marking my skin, embedding me with their meaning. He hands it back to me and I drop it in my bag. I don’t know his name, I’ll have to search to find it. He takes my hand from the bag.

— How long must you go in Turkey?

Perhaps I will lose myself. I cannot imagine time in such a place of dreams.

— Maybe two weeks, maybe a little longer. I have no visa to return, no ticket.

— You must promise me Rosa.

— I will, I’ll come back. (Mazza, 2003, p.37)
XI. THE HERO LEAVES HOME. (departure)

At this point, Rosa leaves for Istanbul at the beginning of Chapter Two. Propp specifies that a new character enters the tale at this stage, a "donor" or "provider" who is "encountered accidentally...along the roadway". This donor will provide the hero with an agent "which permits the eventual liquidation of misfortune". On the bus to Istanbul, Rosa meets Anya and they become travelling companions. Anya is the donor, who provides guidance and knowledge to Rosa, helping her to become more confident, better able to understand the social situations she encounters on the remainder of her journey. Eventually the self-assurance Rosa gains enables her to remove herself from the Albanian.

The following three functions outline the development of the relationship between the donor and the hero and how they lead to the transference of the "agent" between them. Function XII and XIII represent the test posed by the donor and the hero's response:

XII. THE HERO IS TESTED, INTERROGATED, ATTACKED, ETC., WHICH PREPARES THE WAY FOR HIS RECEIVING EITHER A MAGICAL AGENT OR HELPER. (the first function of the donor)

AND

XIII. THE HERO REACTS TO THE ACTIONS OF THE FUTURE DONOR. (the hero's reaction)

At this point in the folk tale, the donor tests the hero by various means to ascertain whether or not she is worthy of receiving the "agent". Throughout their journey together, Anya tells stories and challenges Rosa's relationship, her intentions and her ideas about many things. Major tests include the smoking of the hookah with Kamil and Asil Nadir, where Anya leads Rosa into a situation where she feels personally threatened, yet does not lead them back to safety. She allows Rosa to do this. Rosa "withstands" this test by leading them both to safety in the following scene:

- Kamil asks if we'd like to go to his boat?
- No, Anya, I must get away from them.
- Are you sick, honey, was it too much?
I nod. The men speak Turkish, seem to argue with the rose-carrier. He walks to me, hands me the rose.

— They say they trick you, you cannot find way back to 'otel. I come. I help you. Leave them, they are bad persons.
— No, no, no. I know the way.

I throw his rose on the ground and Anya takes my arm and we walk, very fast and the tea-set clatters and we walk I don’t know where, but this corner looks familiar and I remember walking under the bridge. There are footsteps behind us and I know he followed, the one with the rose, but I see a policeman.

— Hello! Can you help us? We are a bit lost.

The rose man is gone. I hand over the card for Otel Benler and soon he is opening the door for us and I am asleep in the crushed velvet of our safe, safe room.

(Mazza, 2003, p.77)

Another major test is Rosa’s language acquisition. After relying on Anya for the entire journey to speak on her behalf, Rosa uses her guide book to translate Romanian in Craiova.

At this stage, having established the adherence of The Albanian to Propp’s theory to the point where all major “spheres of action” have been introduced, I will summarise the remaining functions.

XIV. **THE HERO ACQUIRES THE USE OF A MAGICAL AGENT**
Through the journey with Anya, Rosa learns how to travel, becomes more worldly-wise and courageous.

XV. **THE HERO IS TRANSFERRED, DELIVERED, OR LED TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF AN OBJECT OF SEARCH.**
This function encompasses Rosa’s solo journey from Belgrade to Rome and back to Dubrovnik, where she reunites with the Albanian, who is at once the Villain and the Object of Search.
XVI.  **THE HERO AND THE VILLAIN JOIN IN DIRECT COMBAT.**
Rosa joins the Albanian in Dubrovnik and stays with him for his journey into exile in Sweden.

XVII. **THE HERO IS BRANDED.**
Rosa is marked and wounded in the concrete room.

XVIII. **THE VILLAIN IS DEFEATED.**
During their train journey to Stockholm, the Albanian mellows somewhat and Rosa begins to understand him and to love. In this way, the Villain in his character is defeated by Rosa.

XIX. **THE INITIAL MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS LIQUIDATED.**
Rosa's quest is fulfilled at the end of her journey to Stockholm. Her restlessness has been assuaged by much travelling, her aloneness and her need for love have been satisfied by the Albanian.

XX. **THE HERO RETURNS.**
Rosa returns to her home in Bunbury.

XXI. **THE HERO IS PURSUED.**
The Albanian writes letters to Rosa and encourages her to come to him in Sweden.

XXII. **RESCUE OF THE HERO FROM PURSUIT.**
Rosa submits to the pursuit and plans her journey to Sweden.

XXIII. **THE HERO, UNRECOGNISED, ARRIVES HOME OR IN ANOTHER COUNTRY.**
Rosa arrives in Sweden. The Albanian fails to recognise her love for him and the enormity of her action of return.
XXIV. A FALSE HERO PRESENTS UNFOUNDED CLAIMS.
The role of false hero is, perhaps, filled by the Albanian whose claims of love are questionable because of his abusive actions, dishonesty and prior marriage.

XXV. A DIFFICULT TASK IS PROPOSED TO THE HERO.
Rosa undergoes a test of endurance during her stay in Sweden, where she suffers great loneliness and social isolation, and abuse from the Albanian.

XXVI. THE TASK IS RESOLVED.
Sali offers solution and recognition to Rosa by warning her of the Albanian’s priorities and that the life of an exile is perhaps not the best for her (Mazza, 2003, p.211). Sali’s behaviour disrupts the relationship.

XXVII. THE HERO IS RECOGNISED.
Rosa’s heroic behaviour and courage are recognised by Sali (Mazza, 2003, pp.209-10, 216).

XXVIII. THE FALSE HERO OR VILLAIN IS EXPOSED.
The Albanian’s prior marriage is exposed at the end of the chapter. This exposes, to Rosa, his role as Villain and False Hero.

XXIX. THE HERO IS GIVEN A NEW APPEARANCE.
Transfiguration of the hero occurs with this function. Rosa is transfigured at the end of the novel, when Dubrovnik is bombed and the romantic connection between the protagonists is subsequently destroyed. Rosa is empowered and removes herself from Sweden.

XXX. THE VILLAIN IS PUNISHED.
Punishment of the Albanian occurs through the absence of Rosa.
XXXI. THE HERO IS MARRIED AND ASCENDS THE THRONE.

In the final section of the novel Rosa has ascended to the role of confident traveller, no longer alone, but among her fellow Australian travellers in London, the site of Australia’s throne.

(ii) The Significance of Tradition

Traditional narratives—folk tales and myths—are the heritage of storytellers; they are the “poetry seed” for subsequent narratives. There is no escape from this heritage. The pattern we have learned from the old stories is the pattern from which the new tale springs. The Albanian, with its adherence to traditional structure, establishes strong affiliations with traditional narrative. As I have previously stated, this was unintentional and an observation made retrospectively. The very nature of this claim is a strong affirmation of the significance of universalist ideas such as Propp’s Morphology.

In his introduction to “Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice”, John Vickery states that traditional or myth narratives are “inherent in the thinking process” and “answer a basic human need”. He goes on to link myth with literature:

...myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically. As a result, literary plots, characters, themes, and images are basically complications and displacements of similar elements in myths and folktales. (Vickery, 1966, p. ix)

Characters taking part in a narrative where the plot and their roles are preordained as parts of the universal tale structure are living out a form of human destiny. They become archetypes, symbols of humanity and its various conditions and social positions. Major work on archetypes, traditional character roles, themes and narrative patterns were undertaken in Joseph Campbell’s The Hero With A Thousand Faces (1949), Northrop Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism (1957) and Carl Jung’s Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (1959). Frye’s work proposes that literature:
Is not to be seen as the self-expression of individual authors, who are no more than functions of this universal system: it springs from the collective subject of the human race itself, which is how it comes to embody ‘archetypes’ or figures of universal significance. (Eagleton, 1983, p.93)

Discussions of archetypes are closely linked to structuralist arguments concerning traditional tales and myth. Frye himself “can be loosely described as ‘structuralist’” (Eagleton, 1983, p.94) and a more rigidly structured system of literary classification is found in the work of Propp, whose “spheres of action” identify basic archetypes. The links made between The Albanian and tradition is recognition of the existence of folkloric structures in the narrative and this association carries with it the ability to tap into the power of archetypes.

Invocation of traditional tales occurs at various points in The Albanian. Reference to Grimms’ tale of “The Four Clever Brothers” makes explicit the undercurrent of archetypes and the reference to Rosa’s Albanian as “The Thief” reinforces his role as Villain. There are traces of childhood rhymes and behaviours, such as Rosa’s counting of stairs. “Beauty and the Beast” may have had some unconscious influence on my pairing of the heroine with a lover who is ugly, by his own admission and often noted by the narrator. My version of the tale of Ariadne and Theseus in “The Sorrowful Tale of Ariadne Cast Away” is designed to warn Rosa and to reflect elements of her own story. Its presence in the novel also invokes the presence of a mythic dimension, making this tale part of a broader narrative tradition and bringing it closer to the timeless world of archetypes and folk tale.

The Albanian also enters into the discourse of folk tales through his stories of folk figures such as Skanderbeg. The revival of folk history was a key ingredient in whipping up nationalist fervour in the former Yugoslavia during the wars of the 1990s. Marina Warner notes:

…in former Yugoslavia, the different factions are using folklore as one more weapon in their civil strife, raising heroes from the past, singing old ballads as battle
cries, performing folk dances to a cacophony of competing regional music. Folk tales powerfully shape national memory… (Warner, 1994, p.410)

The Albanian’s tales and folk song recall a usage of traditional oral narrative associated with national identity. This tradition is demonstrated by the Albanian (Mazza, 2003, p.149) as a potent and contemporary force, which reflects social life in Kosovë. The work of Albanian author Ismail Kadare uses traditional narrative of the Albanians’ bloody history and links it to recent conflict in Kosovë (Three Elegies For Kosovo (1998)), indicating the powerful force of such old stories on contemporary thinking.

In “Don’t Bet On The Prince”, Jack Zipes makes the observation that traditional narratives and their effects on our culture are particularly significant to women:

Romantic tales exert an awesome imaginative power over the female psyche – a power intensified by formal structures, which we perhaps take too much for granted. The pattern of enchantment and disenchantment, the formulaic closing with nuptial rites, and the plot’s comic structure seem so conventional that we do not question the implications. Yet, traditional patterns…contribute to the fairy tale’s potency as a purveyor of romantic archetypes and, thereby, of cultural precepts for young women. (Zipes, 1987, p.218)

Romantic ideals are a powerful driving force for Rosa and her ultimate disappointment is one of the major themes of the novel. But Rosa is living out her destiny. She makes a conscious decision to do so during her “bewitchment” (Function VII) she narrates—“where are the wings of fortune moving me to?;…chance is part of life’s design” (Mazza, 2003, p.24)—and she convinces herself to return to the Albanian. She has wished—“find me love, turtle”—and she waits for the magic to happen; her romantic programming says that it will. So later when she wishes for more, for something seemingly better than what she was presented with after her first wish, she elaborates, describing some of her “cultural precepts” about her “prince”—“I wish, I wish, I wish to find a companion in my life, to travel with, a brave one, a strong one, a kind one” (Mazza, 2003, p.102). Rosa is describing her archetypal “prince”, the sweep-you-off-your-feet prince of “Sleeping Beauty” and
“Cinderella”. She has learned through traditional narratives that, “one day, her prince will come” and wishing for him really does work because there is always a happy ending.

(iii) Not Belonging as a Traditional Tale

However, Rosa does not find the prince of her dreams and they do not live happily ever after, because *The Albanian* is a contemporary novel, a combination of traditional and postmodern influences. It diverges from the features of a traditional tale by placing the female main character in the role of questing hero and through setting its characters in an industrialised, globalised world, which is possible only in our contemporary age. It deals with characters whose social, economic and political circumstances are of major importance to the outcome of the novel and whose cultural identities are hybridised by contemporary patterns of emigration and travel and by the influence of a post-colonial culture.

The role of the female character as the hero on a quest intrudes into the domain more familiarly occupied by a male character who, in picaresque tradition is the *picaro*, (there is no *picara*, no female term for a questing figure). Although traditional tales also have female protagonists, they are often housebound and their (occasional) journeys (only a walk in the forest for Little Red Riding Hood) have frightening repercussions. Undertaking a quest and making her journey alone are ways in which Rosa subverts the traditional role of the female character and establishes herself as a contemporary figure.

Disruption of traditionally accepted concepts is a major feature of post-modernism. Rosa’s role as a questing female disrupts the gender roles established in traditional tales and in Propp’s theory. Her postcolonial cultural identity represents a species of “global”, “transnational” culture, which is definitively post-modern (Appiah, 1996, p.59); she is not part of a homogenous society as per traditional heroines. Rosa’s parent culture is traditional European (her Italian ancestry) and postcolonial Australian, which associates her with and removes her from the traditional settings of folk tales. It is, at once, her history and culture and not her history and culture. In this way, Rosa, at once, adheres to and eludes simple definition by Propp’s model.

Loss of identity, brought about through emigration, is responsible for Rosa’s decentred state and for the Albanian’s. He, too, is a post-modern figure dispossessed of
homeland and alienated linguistically, culturally and emotionally. Loss of "fixed points of reference" (Selden et al., 1997, p.202), a feature of prescriptive post-modernism, occurs on several levels for the Albanian: his position within his homeland (as Albanian in Yugoslavia) is denied validity by the State; his status as "Yugoslav" is under threat as the country disintegrates; he becomes an exile in a different culture; his partnership with Rosa defines him as different from other Albanian couples in the novel. In these ways, he is outside the defining features of his nationality and becomes a de-nationalised, global figure, decenred and multilingual, reflecting many of the features of post-modern displacement. Yet, he retains a strong attachment to his own traditions and pride in his Albanian culture, not the least of which is his unflinching masculinity, which does much to establish his villainous contrast to Rosa as hero. He is a figure in crisis between these two dimensions of selfhood and embodies much of the intention of this work to examine issues of liminality.

Both Rosa and the Albanian move across various nations and interact with characters from other nations. The novel traverses Europe, from its easternmost edge, Istanbul, to London and from the far northern towns of Sweden down to Italy; its characters represent the United States, Palestine, Bombay, The Philippines, Poland and, of course, Australia. The story takes place in transnational and trans-cultural settings. During the course of events in the novel, European borders change and the known divisions between Eastern and Western Europe cease to exist. Definitions of, and stability of, identity are impossible in this setting, where the known world becomes unknown.

In addition to mutable geography, the relationship between these two characters develops on uncertain emotional and moral territory. On many levels, their claims of love are invalidated: initially by rape, then Rosa's admissions of uncertainty, her hiding, her dislike of his behaviour and acknowledgement of his unattractiveness, the cultural and social differences between them, his theft of her money and dishonesty. The relationship itself is very ambiguous and the feelings of both characters fluctuate. There are deep-rooted cultural differences between them and ideological barriers. Her role as a female hero on a quest is in contrast to his entrenched masculinity. Their differences are further emphasised by opposing tastes in food, attitudes towards homosexuality, his strict rules of conduct in social situations and Rosa's awkwardness. There is also a great difference between one who has voluntarily exiled herself for purposes of self-development and one who has exiled
himself for purposes of survival, and these reverberate through the relationship. This essential difference is one that cannot be resolved. The parameters of the relationship reflect pluralistic and heterogenous aspects of post-modern life and are far removed from the pre-Industrial era in which most traditional tales are set. There is textual ambiguity in its conformation to traditional and modernist modes. The characters are also are caught between these two poles. Their thoughts and behaviours incorporate a strong nostalgia for the past—the Albanian longs for his cultural traditions and Rosa longs for a traditional romantic hero. What they both experience is something in between.

Whilst conforming to traditional narrative structures and therefore supporting the universalism of Propp’s theory, the novel is enacted within a post-modern context. Contemporary theorists on the folk tale, Jack Zipes and Marina Warner, both emphasise how the context in which traditional tales are read is a major shaping force in the evolution of their reception. Warner states:

...the thrust towards universal significance has obscured the genre’s equal powers to illuminate experiences embedded in social and material conditions. These are subject to change over time and ultimately more capable of redress than the universal lessons of greed, lust and cruelty which the fairy tales give us; ...the historical interpretation...reveals how human behaviour is embedded in material circumstance, in the laws of dowry, land tenure, feudal obedience, domestic hierarchies and marital dispositions, and that when these pass and change, behaviour may change with them. (1994, pp. xviii-xix)

A contemporary reading of Rosa’s character points to her complicity with her “fate” and renders her an anti-hero within a feminist tradition. She does not stand up against masculine authority at all junctures, she does take a passive role in some situations and she allows herself to be led by her ideal of the prince as her male counterpart. In part this can be explained by her participation in, and tacit endorsement of, a patriarchal European tradition. She is, however, the picara, the questing heroine acting within the traditionally masculine realm of the folk narrative, and she does intermittently—and in the conclusion of
the novel—assert her own authority over her destiny. Her struggle to claim this authority in the face of male strength is part of her journey.

*The Albanian* uses traditional structure to make comment on the post-modern world in which love does not run to formula, characters do not behave in accordance with expectations and the “world” is a setting marked by instability. The traditional tale and traditional character roles still have a place within our post-modern stories, however contested. Once more, the realm of the in-between is the place where *The Albanian* most comfortably rests. In the case of tradition as opposed to post-modernism, the novel belongs and doesn’t belong in each genre.
Reference List


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