Interactions with “the other”: Relationships that cross the line

Several of these texts use cross-cultural relationships to critique historical and contemporary issues of race, gender, power, and discrimination.

Examples include:

- My Beautiful Enemy (Taylor 2013)
- A homosexual relationship between a guard and a teenage internee.
- After Darkness (Piper 2014)
- Homosocial relationships between internees of differing racial backgrounds.
- Barbed Wire & Cherry Blossoms (Heiss 2016)
- A heterosexual romance between an Indigenous woman living in a Christian mission, and an escaped Japanese P.O.W.
- Billaroby (Anderson 1989)
- A fanciful friendship between a young boy in a drought-stricken town and a captive Japanese P.O.W.

An “alternative to the clash of civilizations”?

Through textual analysis and close readings, this research highlights the ways in which authors approach Japanese interment to create narratives from alternative perspectives which bridge historical and cultural divides.

This analysis is informed by transcultural theory, with a focus on the way in which these texts overturn the contemporary and wartime narratives espoused by national canons. Transcultural implies a diffusion and dissemination of culture through individuals, providing an “alternative to the clash of civilisations” (Epstein 328).

Transcultural literature…

“transcend[es] the borders of a single culture and nation, but they also promote and engage with a wider global literary perspective” (Dagnino 2). Texts thus engage with a variety of languages, cultures, races, and ethnicities, disrupting traditional notions and definitions, and moving towards a new understanding or reflection on these terms.

Looking forward by looking back: History that predicts the future

These fictional works provide a strong literary response to the ongoing cultural conflict in Australian society. These texts juxtapose historical attitudes towards certain ethnic or national groups against contemporary concerns in Australia, highlighting parallels between them.

Contemporary issues in Australia:

- Racial discrimination
- Sexual orientation discrimination
- Diasporic populations
- Racial identity / National identity

So… Where are we now?

The various relationships portrayed in these literary works allow for critical reflection on both Japanese internment’s place in Australian history, and how issues depicted in these novels comment on social, political and human rights concerns which are particularly relevant within a contemporary Australian context.