Representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian Literature

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Representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian Literature

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Abstract

This thesis, entitled “Representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian Literature”, examines the way Iran and Iranians are represented in Australian literature from a postcolonial perspective, with particular attention to Said’s theory of Orientalism. It investigates the impact of cultural shifts in Iran and also the relationship between the two countries in the way knowledge about Iran has been constructed in Australian literature, and how this representation has changed from colonial times to the present. After examining this representation in writing by non-Iranian Australians, I analyse Iranian Australian writing to find out whether the themes are similar to or different from the themes in works by non-Iranian Australian writers. This research also shows the position of Iranian Australian literature in multicultural Australia, and Australia’s ability to incorporate new literatures and new cultural influences into its national body of writing.
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I would like to dedicate this work to my parents whose unconditional love and unwavering support will never be forgotten.
Certification

I, Farzaneh Mayabadi, declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Date: 30/08/2018
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Introduction

The writing of literature is a cognitive activity. It is a form of contemplative action that may change our world by affecting our cognition—by changing the way we think about and see ourselves and our society.

Michael Mack, How Literature Changes the Way We Think (p. 170)

Throughout history Iran/Persia has been at the centre of the West’s fascination and fear. This is also the case in contemporary times: Iran is very much present in news and public discussion, which are mostly based on politics. This research, however, is an examination of the representation of Iran and Iranians in literature which provides a more complex and varied view of nations and the cultural understanding between them.

In 2010, when I came to Australia on a student visa to do a Masters by Research focusing on 19th century feminism in Britain, I confronted cultural misunderstanding between Iran and Australia which were mostly reinforced by the media and dominant political discourses. I met people who asked me if I came to Australia by boat or was told how lucky I was to be in safe Australia away from all the dangers, violence and even war in Iran, which was quite different from my experience of living in Iran. I faced an Australian scholar who did not know that the official language in Iran is Farsi/Persian and not Arabic.

This experience made me curious to examine library catalogues and websites to find sources on the way Iranians are perceived by Australians. I noticed that
there was no systematic research devoted to the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature. Therefore, I decided to work on this topic to fill this academic void. This has provided me with an opportunity to look at the cultural understanding between the two countries. Being familiar with both Iranian and Western culture, I have the privilege of examining issues from the perspective of both an insider and an outsider.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on writing by non Iranian Australian writers from colonial times to the present. This body of work is minimal but nevertheless provides an insight into how dominant political discourses shaped Australia’s understanding of Iran and how this understanding and representation have changed over time. I also included a selection of texts written by non Australian authors but published in Australian journals because they were read by Australians and might have shaped their perception of Iran and Iranians.

The second part of the thesis examines texts written in English by the first generation of Iranian Australians who immigrated to Australia, mostly after the 1979 revolution. The texts selected in this section are also taken from a relatively small body of writing. Like other diasporic literature in Australia, we are not dealing with a huge number of works, particularly given that the history of Iranian immigration to Australia is recent. In these texts, I examine if Iranian writers answer back or reproduce the images represented in the writing by non Iranian Australians. At the same time, I illustrate Australia’s ability to incorporate Iranian literature into its national body.

In terms of methodology, I use postcolonial theory, especially Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism. Said writes generally about the Orient but I want to use his theory to specifically examine the representation of Persia/Iran and Persians/Iranians in Australian literature. Iran/Persia has long been at the centre of
the West’s fear of and fascination with the Orient. One of the very first works about the Orient is *The Persians*, a play by Aeschylus first performed in 472 BC. It represents the Persian King Xerxes as a cruel enemy. Said considered this play to be the foundation of Orientalist works:

as early as Aeschylus’s play *The Persians* the Orient is transformed from a very far distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar (in Aeschylus's case, grieving Asiatic women). The dramatic immediacy of representation in *The Persians* obscures the fact that the audience is watching a highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient.

*(Orientalism 21)*

*The Persians* encapsulates the elements and sentiments about the Orient that Said highlights. My thesis asks to what extent Australian literature has inherited that perspective.

My research has allowed me to examine to what extent the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature dramatises Australians themselves—their fears, dreams and desires—in the process of constructing knowledge about Iranians. I will also illustrate the ideological background behind this knowledge and ask if Iran is merely a passive presence in its construction as the West’s “other”.

The fear of and fascination with the Orient is manifested through reworking *One Thousand and One Nights*, which was appropriated rather than translated for Western readers. *One Thousand and One Nights*, considered a masterpiece of world literature, has Persian origins and has influenced many works by Western writers.
It has been reworked and its motifs have been used in Australian literature from the colonial period to the present. This reworking reflects the political situation of the time of writing and conveys the authors’ purposes.

This reworking is also a theme in Australian children’s fiction which aims to educate children while reflecting “some aspects of the attitude and ideologies pertaining at the cultural moment in which that retelling is produced” (Stephens and McCallum x). For example, in the 19th century this reworking was a means to convey an imperial message: an English hero travels to the land governed by the Persian king, Xerxes, to save the people from his cruelty. Xerxes is represented as an enemy who must be defeated by the Western hero. The hero and characters in *One Thousand and One Nights* are represented as weak, rescued by the Western hero with the use of magical tools taken from *One Thousand and One Nights*.

In a more recent text, *Sons of the Rumour*, the motifs and structure of *One Thousand and One Nights* are used to represent the Persian king as a conservative Muslim, and Muslims as backward and misogynistic. The 19th century concept of the West’s mission as a civilising and liberating agent is repeated. Influenced by a Western man and a Westernised Shahrazad—with blond hair and blue eyes—the cruel Shah becomes a liberal man.

After the 1979 revolution religion became more dominant in Iranian society and the tendency of the West to conflate Iranians with Arabs increased. The literature I examine reveals how the mystical and exotic Iran changed in the eyes of Westerners into a Muslim and sometimes mistakenly Arab country. This conflation reflects Said’s argument about the generalisation of the Orient by Orientalists. While I have faced Muslim Arabs who criticise Iranians for not being
true Muslims, the Australians often conflate Iranians with Arabs. Iranians’ Islam is different from Islam in Arab countries. While the majority of the world’s Muslim population are Sunni, 95% of Iranians are Shia. After the Muslim invasion (633–651 AD), Iran was forced to convert from Zoroastrianism to Islam and their culture was influenced by Islam. Iranians are not Arabs and their ethnicity, culture and official language are different.

This research illustrates how political discourse has influenced the representation of Iran in Australia, and how the 19th century colonial view of Iranians survives into modern times in Australian literary texts. It also shows how Iranians are perceived and imagined in relation to Australian national culture. The objectives of this research are:

- to examine the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature from a postcolonial perspective;
- to illustrate the impact of cultural shifts in Iran and also a changing relationship between the two countries in the way knowledge about Iran has been constructed in Australian literature;
- to find out how this representation has changed over time; and finally,
- to analyse Iranian Australian writing in order to discover to what extent the themes are similar to or different from the themes in work by other Australian writers, and Australia’s ability to incorporate new literatures and new cultural influences into its national body of writing.

My thesis is divided into six chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter One, “Historical, Theoretical and Literary Background”, is divided into three
sections. The first section is a historical background on Iran and its social, cultural and political relationship with Australia and the world. I offer an explanation for the reason behind the negative image of Iran in the world, why Iran is considered as a potential enemy, and how the political situation influences Australians’ view of Iran. It will also provide a history of Iranian migration to the West, especially Australia. The historical background helps to contextualise my analysis of the selected texts. As literature looks at issues in depth and from various perspectives, this thesis aims to provide readers with an insight into the complexity of debates surrounding Iran and a better understanding of its culture and society.

The second section of this chapter deals with the theoretical framework. My analysis of the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature is underpinned by competing theories of Orientalism, especially Said’s influential Orientalism (1978). I review these discourses and theories, together with contemporary critiques of the discourse of Orientalism. I thus provide readers with an understanding of the evolving debates surrounding Orientalism as a theory and how these debates inform my analysis of the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature.

The third part will examine the representation of Iran and Iranians in The Persians by Aeschylus and “Persia and the Persians” by Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin as early and influential texts that have informed Orientalist readings of Persia and the Persians in Western literature.

In Chapter Two, entitled “Persia and the Persians in the Australian Colonial Imagination: The Australian Journal”, I examine the representation of Iran and Iranians in colonial Australian writing, at a time when Orientalism was pervasive.
This chapter presents an overview of the importance of contemporary research on 19th century publications and the reading habits of Australians at that time.

As 19th century Australian writing about Persia and the Persians was influenced by the motifs and structure of One Thousand and One Nights, in this chapter I provide an introduction to One Thousand and One Nights—its origin, and its impact on world literature and 19th century writers.

The texts selected for this chapter were published in the Australian Journal. They are: “Silver-Land: Or, the Wonderful Adventures of Tim Pippin (I)” (1876) by an anonymous author, Pearls from Persia; a series of short stories about Persia and Persians by Tom Cringle, which consists of three stories, “The Story of Abdulla” (1869), “Ahmed the Cobbler” (part 1, 1869), and “Ahmed the Cobbler” (part 2, 1870); and “Her Imperial Guest: A Mayfair Mystery”, a short story by James Payn.

Although some of these texts are not written by Australian writers, they reveal the way Australian thinking about Persia and Persians was constructed. I examine the selected works from a postcolonial perspective, in the light of Said’s argument on 19th century Western writing about the Orient. I investigate how these stories can be understood in relation to gender roles, and the way the authors describe Persian culture, history and religion, and to what extent the stories and motifs from One Thousand and One Nights are used to represent the Persians during the colonial period.

Chapter Three, “The Survival of Orientalism in Recent Australian Texts”, examines the way 19th century Orientalism has survived into modern times. While
Chapter Two illustrates the representation of Iran and Iranians in colonial Australia, this chapter looks at “postcolonial” texts by non Iranian Australian writers—written after the colonial period but still conveying colonial ideology. These texts are *Citiplex: a Story* by Paul Rigby published in 1980, two years after Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and one year after the Iranian revolution of 1979, and *Monsters in the Sand* (2009), an adventure novel for young adults by David Harris.

I begin this chapter with an introduction to the concept of modern Orientalism and how it is manifested in writing after Said’s thesis. I explain how Islamophobia and a negative view of the East have been strengthened after Samuel P. Huntington’s article on the dichotomy of East and West in his article “Clash of Civilisations?” published in 1993, and the 9/11 attack in the US. This provides a background to examine how Iran/Persia is represented in the selected texts in contrast to Australia/the West, and to what extent 19th century imperial perspectives have survived into modern times.

In Chapter Four, “Reworking One Thousand and One Nights”, I examine the rehearsal of themes and structures of *One Thousand and One Nights* in novels and short stories by non Iranian Australian writers. This chapter provides an introduction to the roles and impact of *One Thousand and One Nights* in modern Orientalism. It traces parallels between *One Thousand and One Nights* and *Sons of the Rumour* by David Foster, *Slave of the Lamp* by Paula Fogarty, and selected stories from *Dreaming of Djinn*, edited by Liz Grzyb, in order to establish the cultural and ideological effects of this rewriting for a 21st century Australian readership. As *Slave of the Lamp* and the selected stories from *Dreaming of Djinn* are written for young adults, I use John Stephens and Robyn McCallum’s thesis in
Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children’s Literature to examine how cultural identity is shaped through literary texts.

Chapter Five, “Iran and Iranians in Writing by Iranian Australian Writers”, examines writing by Iranian Australian writers to discover if the themes they represent are similar to or different from those of non Iranian Australian writers examined in previous chapters. I first provide a brief history of Iranian immigration to Australia, Iranian writing in diaspora and the way Iranian writers represent Iranian cultural identity. This chapter will primarily focus on Scattered Pearls by Sohila Zanjani, Transactions and The New Angel by Ali Alizadeh, and the film My Tehran for Sale by Granaz Moussavi to examine how Iranian Australian writers construct and negotiate their cultural identity and their portrayal of their home country in their writing.

In my “Conclusion”, I sum up my findings and provide a review of each chapter. I delineate the differences between writing by non Iranian Australians and Iranian Australian writers. I position Iranians within multicultural Australia, and discuss Australia’s ability to incorporate new literatures and new cultural influences into its national body of writing from the colonial period to the present.

The selected texts by non Iranian Australian writers examined in this thesis have rarely received critical attention. Sons of the Rumour by David Foster has been examined by Susan Lever. In her article “Strange and Beautiful: David Foster’s Sons of the Rumour”, Lever examines the philosophical and aesthetic aspects of his novel. There have also been some reviews of Foster’s novel, and of
David Harris’s *Monsters in the Sand*. However, no one has examined the representation of Iran and Iranians in these texts.

Among the works by Iranian Australians, *My Tehran for Sale* has received international attention. It was an official selection to the Toronto International Film Festival, and has been screened by many other international film festivals. Alongside some reviews of the film, Niloo Sarabi in her article “Contemporary Iranian Cinema at the Intersection of Arts and Politics: Granaz Moussavi’s Aesthetic and Political Vision in *My Tehran for Sale*” examines aesthetic and thematic aspects of Moussavi’s film, and the way her poetic narrative style and cinematography are used to comment on Iranian society. Fiona Sumner in her article “Between Nostalgia and Activism: Iranian Australian Poetry and Cinema” examines the different ways of representing Iran and Australia in Granaz Moussavi’s works and in the poetry of Roshanak Amrein. Michael R. Griffiths in his article “Form, Frame and Allegory in Recent Transnational Short Fictions” compares Ali Alizadeh’s *Transactions* to other examples of transnational short fiction. Lachlan Brown in his article “Worlds Apart: Nam Le’s *The Boat* and Ali Alizadeh’s *Transactions*” reads Alizadeh’s *Transactions* as a response to the literary internationalism of Nam Le’s *The Boat*. There have also been short reviews of Alizadeh’s *The New Angel* and Sohila Zanjani’s *Scattered Pearls*. However, the relative lack of criticism on the selected texts demonstrates the originality of this research which contributes to knowledge about the way Iran and Iranians are represented/imagined in Australia, and to Australia’s ability to integrate Iranian Australian literature and its cultural influences into its national body of writing.
Chapter One: Historical, Theoretical and Literary Background

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is a historical background on Iran and its social, cultural and political relationship with Australia and the world, and common misconceptions about Iranians. It will also provide a history of Iranian migration to the West, especially Australia. The historical background helps to contextualise my analysis of the selected texts. As literature looks at issues in depth and from various perspectives, this thesis aims to provide readers with an insight into the complexity of debates surrounding Iran and a better understanding of its culture and society. The second section of this chapter deals with the theoretical framework, providing an overview of postcolonial theory, especially Said’s Orientalism which informs my approach to the selected texts. The third part will examine the representation of Iran and Iranians in *The Persians* by Aeschylus and “Persia and the Persians” by Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin as early and influential texts that have informed Orientalist readings of Persia and the Persians in Western literature.
Part One: Historical Background

Iran or Persia

There is much confusion and indeed conflation of the names Iran and Persia. The name “Iran” is derived from the word “Aryan” which means good, pure or noble. It refers to the land and race of Aryans. Aryan changed to Iran over time. Iran and Persia are both names that have been used for this land. To be more specific, Iran refers to a “nation-state and the geographic area it occupies” (Daniel 3), while Persia refers to the “homeland of one Aryan tribal group, the Persians, but acquired a wider meaning as it has been applied to all the lands ruled by Persians or dominated by Persian culture” (Daniel 3). In other words, all Iranians are not necessarily Persian, though the majority are Persian. Other ethnic groups in Iran include Lur, Turkish, Kurd, Arab, and Baloch. However, the country has been known as Persia both among Iranians and in the West because, as Edward Granville Browne in A Literary History of Persia states:

Fars is one province out of several. But because that province gave birth to the two great dynasties (the Achaemenian in the sixth century before, and the Sasanian in the third century after Christ) which made their arms formidable and their name famous in the west, its meaning was extended so as to include the whole people and country which we call Persian. (4–5)

Because of the importance of the dynasties which emerged in Fars, its names had been used to refer to the whole of the country. Westerners preferred to use Persia
instead of Iran until 1935 when Reza Shah Pahlavi asked his diplomatic partners to use Iran instead of Persia and Iran was adopted as the official name for the country.

**Major Shifts in Iranian History**

The main cultural change in Iran happened in 651 AD when the Sasanian power collapsed and the whole country was overrun by the Arabs. This was a new beginning for Iranian culture because it became an amalgam of pre-Islamic Persian culture and heritage, and Islamic culture. This amalgam is quite clear in the arts and architecture of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736). The Islamic revolution in 1979 was a major cultural shift in the recent period, as a result of which the impact of religion on Persian culture became more noticeable. For example, before the Islamic revolution Mohammad Reza Shah celebrated the anniversary of 2,500 years of continuous monarchy since the Persian Empire was founded by Cyrus the Great. However, after the Islamic revolution this celebration has been toppled. Ayatollah Khomeini called it “the devil’s festival” (Milani, *The Shah* 324), and, by issuing a statement, asked heads of state to stop this celebration. Another example of this cultural change is Mother’s Day. Before the Islamic revolution, Mother’s Day was celebrated on 25 Azar which was the birthday of the queen’s mother and after the revolution it was celebrated on 20 Jumada al-thani, the sixth month in the Islamic calendar, which is the birthday anniversary of Fatemeh, daughter of Mohammad.
Iran and Foreign Powers

Before the recent Islamic revolution, Iranians had experienced the interference of several foreign powers in their country. Although Iran declared its neutrality in World War I (during the Qajar dynasty), it was occupied by the British (in the South) and Russia (in the North). They took control of the country and attempted to protect their regional colonial possessions (Poulson 77–78).

In 1926, Reza Khan founded the Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Khan attempted to modernise and Westernise Iran by reform. He introduced civil law and established the first national bank. At the same time, he attempted to abolish all foreign rights and make the country independent from the interference of foreign countries. After World War II, however, Iran was occupied by Russia and Britain for the second time. Britain wanted to restore the power of the Qajar dynasty as they served British interests. The British and the Soviets crowned Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi “with a pledge to correct the mistakes of his father” and sent his father, Reza Shah, into exile (Milani, Eminent Persians 12).

The Iranian people have always resisted the interference of foreign powers in their country. For example, Naser al-Din Shah Qajar sold a monopoly for marketing and cultivating tobacco to Britain in 1890. However, Mirza Hassan Shirazi, who was a famous cleric of the time, prohibited the use of tobacco in 1891. People obeyed the order and took to the streets in large numbers, forcing the Shah to cancel the contract.

By 1951, the oil industry of Iran was under British control. Mohammad Mosaddegh, who was the prime minister of Iran from 1951 to 1953, led the
nationalization of the Iran oil industry movement against British control and consequently Britain boycotted Iranian oil. In 1953, the US, which was fearful of the influence of the Soviet Union, supported Britain in stimulating a coup against Mosaddegh which pushed him out of power and returned Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, paving the way for new oil agreements. This plays a significant role in the mistrust of America that has continued in Iran until today. Ivor Benson argues that foreign interference was dominated by an interest in controlling Iran’s resources, notably oil. In this sense,

Foreign powers have heavily influenced the country’s international affairs to suit their own economic and strategic interests, with scant regard for the opinions and interests of the citizenry. Until 1945 the foreign powers dominating Iran were mainly Russia and Britain. Russia was interested in territorial expansion, Britain in cornering the Iranian market for British trade, in securing the continental land bridge to India and later, of course, in controlling Iran's oil resources. (143)

At that time, the relationship between Iran and Australia was informal and Australian interests in Iran were represented by the UK until 1968, when Australia opened an embassy in Tehran. In 1974, Mohammad Reza Shah and the Queen visited Australia, which established greater prominence for the relationship. During this visit, the two countries conferred about Australia’s access to oil and Iran’s access to Australian uranium. At this time, the left-of-centre Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, noted that the resources of Australia “have been predominately owned and controlled from overseas and we want to profit by the experience of Iran” (Bookmiller 30). As Australia was under the influence of the British for a long time,
the relationship between Iran and Australia has been influenced by the continuation of UK interference in Iran.

During the colonial period, Australians’ understanding of the world was shaped by texts mainly brought from the UK which conveyed a 19th century Orientalist ideology. This is evident in the representation of Persians in Australian colonial texts. For example, “Silver-Land” was written by an anonymous British writer but was published in the Australian Journal for Australian readers. This short story clearly conveys the imperialist ideology of the 19th century: the British hero as agent of civilisation and liberation travels to the East to save the people of Silver-Land by defeating the Persian king.

In an Australian contemporary text, Monsters in the Sand, 19th century colonial and imperial attitudes are criticised. While the text aims to criticise 19th century archeologists and their method of “Dig, Grab and Run”, the genre of the novel is adventure story and the white archaeologist is the hero of the story. The readers of this text might find it difficult to read this novel as a criticism of 19th century archaeology rather than a reinforcement of its ideology unless they also read the preface to the novel. In fact, 19th century ideologies survive into the underlying structure of this contemporary text.

The Islamic Revolution

In 1979, the Pahlavi dynasty was overthrown by the Islamic revolution. Before the Islamic revolution, the government was Western-oriented; however, the foundation of the Islamic revolution was to counteract the Westernising of the
country. Before the Islamic revolution, according to BBC Persian, Ayatollah Khomeini had exchanged messages with the US, and the Carter government supported him to return to Iran from exile. In one of his messages Khomeini said, “It is advisable that you recommend to the army not to follow [Shah’s prime minister Shapour] Bakhtiar”, and “You will see we are not in any particular animosity with the Americans” (Kamali Dehghan and Smith np). In another message sent in the same month, Khomeini assured Americans that their economic interests would be served by a change of power in Iran: “There should be no fear about oil. It is not true that we wouldn’t sell to the US” (Kamali Dehghan and Smith np). Two weeks after Mohammad Reza Shah had left Iran, Khomeini returned to Tehran on 1 February 1979. The Iranian military, which was under US influence, capitulated, and Khomeini became the supreme leader of the Islamic republic (Kamali Dehghan and Smith np).

However, after the revolution Khomeini called the US the “Great Satan”, and Iran’s relationship with Washington was destroyed after the hostage crisis of November 1979 (Kamali Dehghan and Smith np), in which 52 American citizens and diplomats were held hostage for 444 days. In 1980, during the hostage crisis, the US imposed sanctions against Iran and put its allies under pressure to follow suit. On the one hand, Australia wanted to support the US to bring about the release of the hostages; on the other hand it did not want to break its ties with Iran. Finally, the Fraser government imposed a sanction on non-food items until the hostages were released. Washington wanted its allies to withdraw their ambassadors from Iran. However, Australia refused and referred to the importance of its presence in Iran “to maintain a channel for pressing Australian views on Iran”, “to keep a flow
of reporting of developments in Iran”, and “to protect Australian interests” (Bookmiller 42).

While Australia had a good relationship with Iran before the revolution, after the death of Mohammad Reza Shah Australia joined the UK and the US in attending the funeral. However, to avoid making the Iranian government angry, Australia “stayed in the background” (qtd in Bookmiller 44).

The Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988)

It appears that the US secretly supported the Iran–Iraq war after the revolution which is another reason for Iran’s mistrust of the US. At that time America was allied with Iraq and sold missiles to the Iraqis. During the Iran–Iraq war which lasted for eight years, around 300,000 Iranian soldiers were killed and thousands of people were suffering from the effects of chemical weapons deployed by the Iraqi army, provided by the US. During the war Iran was largely isolated and most world powers including the UK, France and the Soviet Union supported the Iraqi army. In September 1980, Australia played a significant role in bringing international attention to Iraq’s use of chemical weapons against Iran. However, as Iran and Iraq were two of Australia’s largest markets in the Middle East and Australia was dependent on the UK and the US, it declared its neutral position in regard to the conflict between the two countries and rejected Iran’s request for hospital beds to treat injured soldiers (Markovic 11–12).

Another major event which impacted on Iran’s relationship with the world was the change of Iran’s government in 2005 when Mahmood Ahmadinejad
became Iran’s president, and Iran was making advances in enriching uranium. The US imposed more sanctions against Iran and put its allies under pressure to follow. The relationship between Iran and Australia also became more complex. Australia’s response to this situation was quite complicated. On the one hand, Australia is strongly related to the US in terms of defence and political ties and on the other it is keen to keep on good terms with Iran to sell goods. At the same time, changes were happening in the Australian government. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd attempted to gain a UN Security Council seat by having an active presence on the international stage. In 2008, Rudd, in his speech to the UN, pointed to Iran’s non-compliance with international rules regarding its nuclear program (Akbarzadeh 4) and started sanctions against Iran which brought Australia much closer to the US. Finally in 2012, Australia had to introduce international sanctions against Iran in line with its key Western partners including the UK, US and EU. The impact of sanctions on Iranian students was that Australian universities were not allowed to enrol students applying for fields of study which could be connected to nuclear programs or military applications.

In 2013, after Hasan Rouhani, a moderate and reformist, was elected as president, Iran’s relationship with the world changed significantly. He committed to more cooperation with the international community to solve concerns about Iran’s nuclear program, and expressed his support for the improvement of the human rights situation in Iran (“Iran Country Brief”). He was viewed as a reformist and expected to improve Iran’s international relations. In November 2013, a formal negotiation was started between Iran and the P5+1 on Iran’s nuclear deal.
While the bilateral relationship between Iran and Australia improved after 2013, Australia remains concerned about the human rights situation in Iran. At the same time, the Iranian foreign minister, Javad Zarif, on his visit to Australia in March 2016, labelled the living conditions of asylum seekers as “unconscionable” and stated that “human rights concerns regarding Iran and Australia go both ways” (Williams and Andersen).

In 2015, under Barak Obama’s administration, the 5+1 countries and Iran agreed on an accord, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), under which Iran limited its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. However, in 2018 Donald Trump withdrew the US from the deal and decided to reinstall harsher sanctions on Iran. Trump’s concerns about Iran go beyond Iran’s nuclear activities. Iran is one of the biggest and most powerful countries in the region which are anti-Israel and anti-Saudi Arabia while America is allied with Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran. The US has a strong presence in the region by supporting Israel and has sold Saudi Arabia $147 billion worth of military equipment. The aim of this deal, as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said, was to send a “strong message to our common enemies” (“What’s the goal of America’s arms”, ABC News 25 May 2017).

Ali Alizadeh, Iranian Australian writer, shows his awareness of these political circumstances in his novel The New Angel. While he is a critic of the Iranian government, he also criticises the role of the West and the US in the revolution and the war, and details the suffering Iranian people endured over those years.
The Position of Women in Iran after the 1979 Revolution

Iran was a patriarchal and religious society even before the revolution. However, after the revolution male domination has intensified and the state became Islamic. The revolution imposed more limitations and restrictions on Iranian women. While the West and human rights activists criticise the limitations and restrictions imposed on Iranian women, Iranian women’s reactions and resistance to political and patriarchal domination receive less attention. At the same time, after 9/11 the notion of Islamophobia and the rhetoric of “saving Muslim women” have intensified, which merely served the US and the West’s imperial ambitions in the Middle East, and tends to present a passive image of Iranian women, and a “dogmatic and violent” image of Iranian men (Rostami-Povey 1). In contrast to the common perception of Iranian women and men, Elaheh Rostami-Povey argues:

Iran today is a modern religio-political state and society with an authoritarian, patriarchal and ideologically exclusive system which exerts power through modern state institutions. What is significant is that the more this authoritarian state denies women’s rights and democracy, the more women and men challenge the status quo and conservative ideologies. (3)

[T]he Islamic state, under pressure from socio-economic and political factors and women’s struggle for change, has been unable to confine and isolate women within the domestic sphere or to create a sexual apartheid. Despite political repression, women are clearly visible in all aspects of society. (5)
Literary texts written after the Islamic revolution mostly represent Iranian women as subjugated and in need of a white saviour. *Citiplex* shows Iranian women as subjugated to patriarchy which originated from Islam. In this novel, the Iranian woman is saved by Troy, the white Australian man in safe Australia while her agency is questionable. This stereotypical image of Iranian women is reproduced in *Scattered Pearls* by Soliha Zanjani, an Iranian Australian author. She represents Iranian women, like her own mother, as oppressed and subjugated to patriarchy and Australia as a safe place for women without any violence. She represents a black and white image of Iran and Australia. Rostami-Povey argues that these stereotypes make the situation more difficult for Iranian women because alongside resisting the political and patriarchal domination inside the country they have to resist the West’s stereotyping of Iranian women as oppressed and powerless. In contrast to these two texts, Granaz Moussavi, in her film *My Tehran for Sale*, reacts to these stereotypes and shows that Iranian women are not accepting restrictions and stand up for their rights.

**Misconceptions about Iran: Islamophobia and Slippage between Race and Religion**

There are many misconceptions about Iran among Westerners. Mainly due to the Muslim conquest in 651 AD and its noticeable impact, Iran is often believed to be an Arab country with Arabic as its official language. Before the Muslim conquest which ended the Sasanian Empire in 651 AD, the dominant religion of Persia was Zoroastrianism; after the conquest the state religion became Islam. Zoroastrianism is the oldest religion in Iran and has survived until the present day.
Although as in Arab countries the state religion in Iran has been Islam since 651 AD, Iranians belong to a different ethnic group. Arabs are Semites; their language is Arabic. The official language in Iran is Persian or Farsi. The major ethnic group in Iran is Persian; however, not all Iranians speak Persian. Azarbaijani and Kurdish are the most commonly spoken languages after Persian. Arabic and Armenian are less common.

Islamophobia and the slippage between race and religion are other reasons for conflating Iranians with Arabs. After 9/11, fear of Muslims has increased globally. In Australia, after the Cronulla riots in 2005 this fear was “induced and exacerbated in cycles of Islamophobic moral panic” (Hussein and Poynting 335). While acknowledging that there is a diversity of views about Iran and Iranians in Australia, Shakira Hussein and Scott Poynting argue that the Cronulla riots were misread at the time by shifting the “focus of racist Othering in Australia, from the ‘Arab Other’ to the ‘Muslim Other’, as Islamophobia becomes increasingly mainstreamed in Australian culture following the trend throughout the global West” (333). They argue that Islamophobia which leads to racism has become normalised: “Donald Trump may scandalise respectable liberals with his anti-Muslim rantings, but the fact is that he sees electoral advantage in it, just as former Prime Minister Tony Abbott did in his own lesser efforts with ‘Team Australia’. It is the new normal in the globalised Islamophobia of the West” (336). In Sons of the Rumour, David Foster reproduces the same slippage between race and religion. Ali Alizadeh criticises racism in The New Angel: the Iranian character is suffering from racism and being mistaken for Arab or Muslim by Australians. Perhaps the common slippage between race and religion could be part of the reason for conflating Iranian
women with Arabs. An example of this is the short stories in *Dreaming of Djinn* (2013). While the editor of the anthology emphasises the writers’ awareness of the stereotypes of Eastern women, some of the authors fail to distinguish between Iranian and Arab women.

Iranian Islam is different from the Islam in Arab countries. While Sunni Muslims constitute 87–90% of the world’s Muslim population, there are only 10–13% Shia Muslims. 95% of Iranians are Shia which shows their differences with Arab countries. According to Bernard Lewis:

> Iran was indeed Islamized, but it was not Arabized. Persians remained Persians. And after an interval of silence, Iran reemerged as a separate, different and distinctive element within Islam, eventually adding a new element even to Islam itself. Culturally, politically, and most remarkable of all even religiously, the Iranian contribution to this new Islamic civilization is of immense importance. The work of Iranians can be seen in every field of cultural endeavor, including Arabic poetry, to which poets of Iranian origin composing their poems in Arabic made a very significant contribution. In a sense, Iranian Islam is a second advent of Islam itself, a new Islam sometimes referred to as Islam-i Ajam. It was this Persian Islam, rather than the original Arab Islam, that was brought to new areas and new peoples: to the Turks, first in Central Asia and then in the Middle East in the country which came to be called Turkey, and India. The Ottoman Turks brought a form of Iranian civilization to the walls of Vienna. (*From Babel to Dragomans* 91)
While the majority of Iranians are still Muslim they are very sensitive about being compared/conflated with Arabs. Iranians and Arabs consider each other as the enemy. Iranians also use similar stereotypes as Western people to describe Arabs. Marguerite Del Giudice, a journalist who traveled to Iran and published her article “Ancient Soul of Iran”, states that “the first thing people said when I asked what they wanted the world to know about them was, ‘We are not Arabs!’ (followed closely by, ‘We are not terrorists!’)” (np). She adds that although Iranians are not economically performing as well as Arab states like Dubai and Qatar, they still feel exceptional. The Arabs who conquered Iran are commonly regarded as having been little more than Bedouin living in tents, with no culture of their own aside from what Iran gave them, and from the vehemence with which they are still railed against, you would think it happened not 14 centuries ago but last week. (np)

**History of Iranian Immigration to Australia**

The first group of Iranians immigrating to Australia were service workers from the oil industry who arrived before the 1979 revolution. The Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Iran–Iraq war, from September 1980 to 1988, brought a deep change to Iran. Since then, because of economic and political pressure and religious persecution, a considerable number of Iranians have immigrated to Western countries, especially North America and Europe, and Australia.
In 1981, Australia established a special humanitarian assistance program for Baha’is who were escaping religious persecution in Iran; half of the people in the Baha’i community were born in Iran. During the 1980s, because of the ongoing war between Iran and Iraq the number of Iranians who immigrated to Australia increased and then after the war in the late 1980s and 1990s many professionals immigrated to Australia, under the Skilled and Family Streams of the Migration Program, because of political and economic hardship.

The Iranian born population in Australia increased significantly in 2006, after Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad became the president of the Islamic Republic in August 2005. There was another significant increase in 2009–2010, after the Green Movement which refers to political protests after the presidential election in 2009, the largest increase since the revolution of 1979. Green was initially a colour associated with Mir Hossein Mousavi’s campaign. However, the Green Movement arose after Ahmadinezhad was announced as the elected president; protesters who believed that the election results were manipulated were seeking the deposition of Ahmadinezhad.

Australia’s 2016 census suggests that the number of Iranians who have arrived in Australia is heavily influenced by the political situation inside Iran. Based on this census, 58,338 Persian speakers live in Australia. The number of Persian speakers who arrived in Australia in 2004, before Ahmadinezhad’s presidency, was 884. It increased to 1,040 in 2005 when he was elected president. This number increased to 1,932 arrivals in 2009 when the first round of his presidency finished, and reached its peak, 6,990 arrivals, in 2013 which was the last year of his presidency. This number decreased significantly to 2,848 arrivals
in 2014 when Rouhani, a reformist president, was elected and to 1,391 arrivals in 2016. There are still refugees from Iran in Australian detention centres. The number of Iranians who seek refuge has decreased from 1,770 people on 30 November 2013 to 94 people on 30 June 2017 (SBS, “Census Explorer”).

The number of Iranian refugees in Australia increased during Ahmadinezhad’s presidency. Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr told the ABC on 20 July 2013:

The fact is, these people are middle-class Iranians. They’re leaving their country because of the economic pressures—much of it produced, I guess, by the sanctions that apply to Iran, because of the nuclear ambitions of its Supreme Leader and its Guardianship Council. (Agius np)

However, this is not consistent with what many Iranians who fled their country claim. Ali Akbar Mousavi, who was a former member of the Iranian parliament, left Iran in 2009 and lives in the United States. While he admits that a large number of Iranians fled because of increasing inflation and economic pressure as a result of sanctions, he claims that protestors were easily pursued and tortured by authorities. He also claims that freedom of speech was restricted during that time (Agius np). Ethnic and religious minorities are discriminated against in terms of access to education and employment. According to the Australian Immigration Department, “asylum seekers from Iran claim persecution on the grounds of their political opinion, race or religion” (Agius np).
On the other hand, Australia is not a welcoming place for refugees as some are treated brutally in detention centres. An example of this is the death of Iranian refugee Reza Bayati, who arrived in Australia in July 2013, in a riot at the Australian-run detention centre on Manus Island on 17 Feb 2014. After two weeks of peaceful protest, 16 Feb 2014 was the due date for authorities to give an answer to the detainees about when their claim for protection would be processed. However, the detainees were given no timeframe by which their claim would be dealt with, which led to a riot (“Incident at the Manus Island” np). The next day, Barati, who was seeking refuge from the violence outside, was pulled out of his room and beaten to death (“Incident at the Manus Island” np).

Australian attitudes and politics towards refugees have had a great impact on Australian literature and there are many writers dealing with refugee issues in their writing. Granaz Moussavi in *My Tehran for Sale* and Soltany-Zand’s poetry clearly reflect this issue. For Soltany-Zand who spent time in a detention centre, Australian democracy is like a noose which is always with him. The refugees who are accepted by the Australian government and have become a part of Australian society have witnessed severe brutality in detention centres that they can never forget. This will perhaps have a negative impact on the future of Australian society.

Alongside the Iranians who came to Australia as refugees, a considerable number of Iranian postgraduate students came to Australia from 1994 to 2000 and stayed through the skills assessment program. However, as Crock and Ghezelbash state,

few would complain of the contribution these people have since made to Australia. Contrary to common preconceptions, Iran’s education
system has been world class—notably in the maths and sciences. Australians of Iranian heritage now work as leaders in law, politics, science and the arts. (ABC News 25 July 2013)

In the financial year 2011–2012 Iranians were the 9th biggest nationality arriving under the points-tested skilled migration stream, with 2,390 arrivals (Seefar, “Iranian Refugees”, 3).

The Impact of Cultural Change on Iranian Literature

The revolution and the cultural change it brought with it impacted on the nature of Persian literature. Before the revolution, during the Mossadegh government, Iranian activists experienced freedom of expression which had been absent previously. In 1953 Mossadegh was overthrown and imprisoned by the Shah who was supported by the US. This resulted in opposition to the Shah who was called a puppet of the West. To repress opposition and Iranian liberals, the Shah imposed censorship and set up the Organisation of Intelligence and National Security. In this era, there were two kinds of literature, one was “pure” literature which had nothing to do with political and cultural issues, and the other one was “committed” literature which was critical of the social and political status quo. The latter was about freedom, equality and justice in society but it also supported Islam. In this era, as Talattof argues, literature “became the medium most appropriate in the eyes of all groups for communicating the revolutionary messages about socio-political change, which they envisioned would improve the condition of the Iranian people” (67). However, because of the censorship, activists and writers, whose
main purpose in their writing was to encourage people to revolt against the Shah’s government, had to use figurative language, symbols and allegories to protect themselves from being persecuted, and some remained anonymous; otherwise, they would be imprisoned. For example, in the 1970s Hushang Golshiri was jailed for his work *Prince Ehtejab* as it argued against the Shah’s regime and in support of revolution. Writers and activists played an important role in the revolution of 1978–79. The new theocratic regime turned Iran into an Islamic country. The fundamentalist government was against Westernised culture and set up Islamic law and rules. There were two groups of writers after the revolution, one of which found that the revolution had failed to bring about their stated purposes and therefore started criticising the new regime. The other group of writers supported the revolution and Islamic law. Some of the Islamic authors who wrote before the revolution became more active after the revolution because they were supported by the government as their work was about the revolution and Islamic ideology. Islamic discourse became explicit in their writing to the extent that a new kind of literature called the Literature of Islamic Revolution (*Adabiyat-I Inqilabi-i Islami*) appeared (Talattof 112).

After the revolution, Iranian writing in diaspora flourished. The way Iranian writers in diaspora construct and negotiate their cultural identity very much depends on their experience of living in Iran, their social class, and also their experience of living in the host country. However, this writing is clearly against the tradition of Islamic discourse and mostly focused on the theme of exile. While some of this writing has focused on deconstructing stereotypical representations of Iran by the West, other writing has reproduced Orientalist views for the sake of
commercial success. I will examine Iranian writing in diaspora, particularly in Australia, in Chapter Five.

**Part Two: Theoretical Background**

**What is Orientalism?**

A useful theoretical platform from which to examine the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature is that of Orientalism. “Orientalist” is a term which mainly refers to European writers’, artists’ and tourists’ perception of “otherness” in the 19th century. However, the history of Orientalism goes back to the time when Europeans were first interested in the philological study of Oriental literature. During the 16th and 17th centuries, Orientalism found its expression in European travelogues about Persia and Turkey (Teo 3). During this era, the main concerns of Orientalism were religion, theology and philology.

The era after the Renaissance was a new stage for philological studies which substituted criticism for hermeneutics. Contact between Europeans and the Orient increased in the 18th century. This was accompanied by the establishment of organisations which started training in languages such as Persian, Arabic and Hebrew; Orientalism became less about theology and biblical studies. In other words, from the 16th to the 18th century there was a shift from a theological driven to a political and cultural Orientalism.

After the 18th century, Orientalism developed to offer intellectual support for European colonialism. Orientalism emerged as a result of the close relationship of
France and Britain with the Orient. In the 19th century, industrialisation led to a new imperialism. During this time, colonial powers like France, Britain and Germany took over countries in Africa, the Middle East, Far East Asia and numerous islands of the Pacific to benefit from their raw materials. However, they justified their occupation by identifying it as the expansion of education and civilisation, consequently showing their own superiority. It was this “civilising mission” which underscored the imperial endeavour. Homi Bhabha in “The Other Question” argues that the West must face an image of itself “‘in double duty bound’, at once a civilising mission and a violent subjugating force” (“The Other Question” 71). An example of this kind of justification is Ernest Renan’s observation:

Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity, and almost no sense of honour; govern them with justice, levying from them, in return for the blessing of such a government, an ample allowance for the conquering race, and they will be satisfied; a race of tillers of the soil, the Negro; treat him with kindness and humanity, and all will be as it should; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race … Let each one do what he is made for, and all will be well. (italics in the original) (qtd in Said, Reflections on Exile 419)

For Renan, Chinese are “workers” without any sense of “honour”, unable to govern themselves, and needing Europeans who are “masters and soldiers” to rule over them. In other words, by representing a hegemonic relationship between
European and non-European peoples, the West justified colonisation. After World War II, America joined European countries and used the same approach—domination of the Occident as the superior power over the Orient as inferior. This was based on a hierarchal dichotomy and reproduced inequalities that were race-based and politically and commercially driven. Thus, 19th century colonialism became an intellectual framework within which colonisation and imperialism were justified. Our current understanding of this relationship is mostly due to the work of Edward Said.

Said’s Orientalism

Said’s theories of Orientalism represented a momentous change in the understanding of Orientalist writing. Orientalism, first published in 1978, has been an outstanding text in the field of postcolonial studies for its unique analysis of colonial discourse and practices. In examining the way colonisers rule over the Orient, Said makes a connection between knowledge and power; the construction of knowledge about Orientals is a way of ruling over them. He argues that knowledge cannot be pure and there is no difference between “pure” and “political” knowledge because scholars, consciously or unconsciously, are products of their circumstances and society, and there is no way to detach their involvement (Orientalism 10). He states that the West looks at the Orient from a political perspective that works as a filter for constructing knowledge about the Orient. This filter distorts reality. As a system of knowledge Orientalism became a framework for colonisation. Said in Culture and Imperialism argues that:
Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like “inferior” or “subject races”, “subordinate peoples”, “dependency”, “expansions”, and “authority”. (8)

These hierarchal terms became key tools for colonial control over “others”. The Orient is irrational, childlike, and different; in contrast, the Occident is rational, virtuous, mature and normal. The Occident is peaceful, liberal, logical and capable of holding real values and the Orient is none of these. As Vanessa Andreotti argues:

the construction of the “Other” as backward, is necessary for the construction of the “self” as culturally superior, which justifies the exercise of domination and control as a burden to intervene in the name of progress—to civilize, to educate, to modernize, and to develop the Other. (22)

Colonialism is about politics and power and Orientalism is the intellectual aspect of colonialism and shows how power enables colonisers to look at the rest of world as inferior. Colonisers conquer the Orient not only militarily but ideologically. They use Orientalism for cultural imperialism. M.H. Abrams states that
this mode of imperialism imposed its power not by force, but by the effective means of disseminating in subjugated colonies a Eurocentric discourse that assumed the normality and preeminence of everything “occidental,” correlative with its representation of the “Oriental” as an exotic and inferior other.

(236)

In other words, Orientalism is a discourse that enables the West to “know” the Orient and this knowledge gives them power to colonise the Orient for their own benefit.

The Orient plays a passive role as constructed by the West. As Said argues, Orientalism is a system of knowledge about the society, tradition, history and culture of the Oriental manipulated by the West. They use this knowledge to govern the Orient. Therefore, the Oriental is not free to react to, or resist, the image, knowledge or even description constructed about him in a text. The silence of the Orient in Western writing reflects the strength of the West and justifies the coloniser’s will to control the Orient and construct it as “other”. There is a connection between the construction of “self” and “other” that can be understood through Said’s use of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Orientalism and Freudian Psychoanalysis

In Orientalism, Said refers to latent and manifest Orientalism. By latent Orientalism he means “an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity” and manifest Orientalism refers to “the various stated views about
Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth” (206). As Said argues, “Whatever change occurs in knowledge of the Orient is found almost exclusively in manifest Orientalism; the unanimity, stability, and durability of latent Orientalism are more or less constant” (206).

To explain the “otherness” of the Orient, Said uses Freudian psychoanalysis. Said makes the argument that there is no pure identity and refers to the impact of the “other” on the “identity of self” (Freud and the Non-European 54). The Oriental “otherness” is required for the construction of an Occidental self and identity. Freud makes a connection between the “I” and the “Id” as “other”. To explain the presence of the “I” in defining the “other”, Freud argues that the unconscious and repressed part of the mind projects the true desires, fears and emotions of a person. This unconscious system shapes the image of the “other”. To make the unconscious part of mind accessible the image of the “other”, which exists in the “I”, must be revealed (Moreira 698–699). In this sense, when Orientalists describe the East and call it the “other” they make their own unconscious desires and feelings accessible through the image of the Orient. When Orientalists describe, produce and imagine the Orient, they describe themselves and project their fears, desires, emotions, conflicts and tensions from the unconscious content of their mind onto the “other”. In other words, producing the Orient is a way to access their own unconscious.

**Orientalism in Writing by 19th Century Writers**

Representation of the Orient, as Said argues, became more public in writing by 19th century writers such as Renan, Lane, Flaubert, Caussin de Perceval, Marx,
and Lamartine, and the Orient was represented mainly through books and manuscripts. For example, Sacy’s work was notable in linking Oriental scholarship to public policy. This representation was based on both “contemporary attitudes and popular prejudices” and “the conceit of nations and of scholars”. Therefore, Said calls 19th century writers “Oriental enthusiasts” whose works were “a kind of free-floating mythology of the Orient” (*Orientalism* 52–53).

Generalisation about the Orient is a feature that Said considers to be a distinctive aspect of writing of this era. Characteristics that were attributed to a particular part of the Orient were seen to include the whole Orient. Every aspect of the Orient represented in Orientalists’ writing showed its Orientalness, and the Oriental person was considered as an Oriental before being human. An example of linguistic generalisation is Renan’s “Semitic”. For Renan “Semitic” involves ideas from history, anatomy and geology. Therefore, “Semitic” became a category that predicts Semitic behaviour based on “pre-existing Semitic essence” and interprets “all aspects of human life and activity in terms of some common ‘Semitic’ element” (*Orientalism* 231). Orientalists generalise “every observable detail” and out of every generalisation they make an “immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers” (*Orientalism* 86).

Moreover, Said argues that 19th century Orientalist scholars and writers who represented the Orient ideologically, based on their imaginations, made an attempt to keep the Orient separate and consider it as the “other”, characterised by backward and childish behaviour. Consequently, Orientalists came to the
conclusion that the Orient needed the West to govern and control its countries, and
civilise its people. Based on this assumption, the Orient was not considered as equal
to the Occident; Orientals were considered far removed from European progress in
diverse fields such as science, arts and commerce. Finally, as Said argues, all
characteristics attributed to the Orient appeared to fulfil a specific interest of the
West in the Orient (Orientalism 207). In other words, Orientalism was the breeding
ground for colonialism and imperialism.

Orientalism in Literature

Said refers to the role of Orientalism in the field of literature and literary
criticism. He brings together history, society and textuality and emphasises the
exteriority of Orientalist texts. By the exteriority of texts he means the texts’
surface and not what is hidden in Orientalist texts. Orientalism is based on
exteriority in the sense that Orientalists make the Orient speak and describe the
Orient to the West. What the Orientalist writes or says about the Orient is based
on previous knowledge about the Orient and aimed to place the Orientalist outside
the Orient, “both as an existential and as a moral fact” (Orientalism 21). This
“exteriority” means that the Orientalist, as an outsider, speaks for the Orient, which
is unable to speak for itself. Representation is the principal product of this
exteriority.

As an example of this exteriority Said cites The Persians by Aeschylus in
which people from far away are treated as the “other” (the Orientalist is placed
outside the Orient) and transformed into familiar figures. Aeschylus makes the
Orient speak and describe itself to the West. This exteriority of representation identifies and represents the Orient and the Occident. In analysing Orientalist texts, important features to consider are “style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original” (Orientalism 21).

The important point for Said in studying the discourse of Orientalism or Orientalist texts is “the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a ‘real’ Orient” (Orientalism 5). By this Said refers to the “created consistency, that regular constellation of ideas as the pre-eminent thing about the Orient, and not to its mere being” (Orientalism 5). He adds, “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Orientalism 5).

**Orientalism and Later Critics**

Although this thesis is not a theoretical debate about the problematic aspects of Said’s theory which have been raised by other scholars that I will refer to in this section, it is important to consider some notions developed in postcolonial studies after Said’s work on Orientalism because they may suggest other approaches that could be taken to texts which cannot be simply categorised as Orientalist discourse in Said’s sense.

One of the eminent critics and theorists of postcolonial studies is Homi Bhabha who used Said’s work as a theoretical springboard. Bhabha believes that
Orientalism “inaugurated the postcolonial field” (qtd in Moore-Gillbert 35). While he contributes to Said’s thesis, he also criticises it. In defining colonial discourse, Bhabha agrees with Said that the main function of colonial discourse is to construct knowledge about the Orient that shows a hierarchal relationship between the Occident and the Orient. In this discourse, colonised people are considered as a subject people. However, Bhabha disagrees with Said that colonised people are subjugated and helpless and colonial discourse is entirely in the power of the coloniser—he calls this a simplification. This was a point of departure for Bhabha’s argument.

Bhabha looks at colonial discourse from a psychological and deconstructive perspective and argues that the coloniser and colonised need each other to build up their identity and consequently the “familiar alignment of colonial subjects—Black/White, Self/Other—is disturbed … and the traditional grounds of radical identity are dispersed” (“Remembering Fanon” 113). This view refers to a kind of collusion between the coloniser and the colonised in which the colonised can resist. Bhabha argues that in colonial discourse the colonial subject is neither completely subjugated nor fully opposed to it. Colonial subjects both accept and reject the coloniser and its culture which leads to the ambivalence of the colonised. Bhaba presents a colonial discourse in which there is a possibility of resistance for the colonised subject. He states that this relationship is ambivalent and refers to mimicry in colonial discourse to emphasise a degree of active agency of colonised people that Said denies.

To show how colonised people can resist colonial discourse, Bhabha argues that the identity of colonial power is vulnerable because of its “narcissistic,
colonial demand that it should be addressed directly, that the Other should authorize the self, recognize the self, recognize its priority, fulfil its outlines, replete, indeed repeat, its references and still its fractured gaze” (Bhabha, Location of Culture 140). Colonised people can resist by refusing to fulfill and satisfy these demands of the coloniser. Another way of resisting colonial discourse, as Bhabha argues, is through “mimicry”, “the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination … that turns the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (Location of Culture 159–160). Moreover, the desire of the coloniser is that the colonised subjects “mimic” the view of colonisers which leads to ambivalence on the part of colonisers. He argues that the meaning of colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite [italics in the original]. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. (Location of Culture 122)

Colonial discourse, as a result of mimicry which is not quite accurate, embodies ambivalence. The ambivalence of colonial discourse produces “slippage” and “excess” that show an uncertainty that affirms the partial and incomplete presence of the colonial subject which consequently leads to the agency of colonised people. “Double vision” is the problem or “menace” of mimicry. It discloses “the ambivalence of colonial discourse” and “disrupts its authority” (Bhabha, Location of Culture 126). At the same time, it “makes a mockery of colonisers’ claim to ‘pure’ cultures and/or civilisations” (Teo 15) and “undermines
colonialism’s grand discourses of humanism” (Huddart 60). The slippage of mimicry that gives power to the coloniser to rule over the colonised challenges the West’s notion of universal values. Thus colonial subjects are only partially presented in colonial discourse, and are not absolutely passive.

Another eminent critic who contributes to Said’s work is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She believes that Said’s *Orientalism* “is a source book in our discipline” (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 56). She argues that although Said’s work has nothing to do with marginality, the study of colonial discourse provided by his book creates a ground for marginal groups to speak. While Said’s text mostly focuses on the role and agency of the coloniser, Spivak pays more attention to the colonised. To clarify her theory, she borrows the term “subaltern” from Gramsci who uses this term in his writing to refer to the marginalised groups in European society. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, she examines the degree to which colonised people can speak for themselves; if they have a passive role and are represented only by the coloniser, or whether there is a space for them to speak. She comes to the conclusion that there is no space from which subalterns can speak because colonial discourse is built up to serve the desires and interests of the coloniser. Therefore, by concluding that there is no possibility of agency for subalterns, she supports Said’s view on the lack of agency for the colonised.

Spivak follows Derrida in reading texts *against* their obvious logic and supports the usefulness of deconstruction in postcolonial studies, referring to the important role of deconstruction in undermining the hegemonic principles of the West. However, Said contests Derrida’s theory of deconstruction. He argues that Derrida was not able to explain cultural texts with political content because he
failed to provide enough details about the relationship between power and the intellectual.

Another critic who has addressed Said’s *Orientalism* is Ali Behdad. He credits *Orientalism* as a pioneering text in postcolonial studies. However, he criticises some aspects of Said’s thesis. He argues that *Orientalism* shifts the focus from “textuality to historicity and from the aesthetic to the political” in the field of literary and cultural criticism (“Orientalism Matters” 709). At the same time, in *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Behdad contends that “Said’s text cannot account for the complexities of its micropractices; that is, the specific but crucial points of its dispersed network of representations that include strategic irregularities, historical discontinuities, and discursive heterogeneity” (12). He refers to the ambivalence of colonial discourse and recalls Bhabha’s stand regarding the simplification of colonial discourse by Said, arguing that colonial discourse is productive in the sense that it is a dynamic exchange between the domination of the Occident and the subjugation of the Orient. This exchange “makes colonial authority tolerable to those on whom it is being imposed” (Behdad, *Belated Travelers* 12).

Foucault’s concept of discourse plays an important role in Said’s *Orientalism*. Said argues that to understand the systematic discipline which enabled European culture to manage and produce “the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” it is necessary to consider Orientalism as a discourse (*Orientalism* 3). However, a number of critics criticise Said’s use of Foucault’s concept. Valerie Kennedy argues that in Foucault’s description of discourse, power comes from
everywhere and impacts on the political aspects of society. However, in the discourse that Said presents, power comes from above in the sense that one group is dominated by another. Said uses Foucault’s concept of discourse to show how the West rules over the Orient, but Foucault, in his analyses of discourse, did not include the domination of Europeans over non-Europeans (Kennedy 26). Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* also argues that there is a problem with Said’s use of Foucault’s concepts of power and discourse. He states that the correlation of manifest and latent Orientalism causes the competence and functionality of the concept of discourse to be subverted by “polarities of intentionality” (103). He adds that “the productivity of Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge lies in its refusal of an epistemology which opposes essence/appearance, ideology/science” (103). This is undermined by “polarities of intentionality”. Although he acknowledges Said’s theory of Orientalism “as the misrepresentation of an Oriental essence” he accuses Said of being instrumentalist in using Foucault’s concept of discourse (*The Location of Culture* 103).

Although some critics criticise Said for misusing Foucault’s concept of discourse and avoiding any theory of resistance, Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, in *Edward Said*, argue that by emphasising the relationship between power and knowledge Said “articulate[s] the potential to resist and recreate” (65). They state that for Said, resistance is “to know the Orient outside the discourse of Orientalism” and to present and represent “this knowledge to the Orientalists—to write back to them” (66). This is the nature of Said’s strategy of resistance, which undermines critics’ views on Said’s refusal of the agency of subjugated people.
Bernard Lewis, who is cited as an example of a modern Orientalist in Said’s *Orientalism*, criticises Said in “The Question of Orientalism” and argues that the rise of Orientalism was in the 17th century; however, Said chose to place it in the 18th century to claim that its main origin was in Britain and France. Lewis argues that Said’s work is “false”, even “absurd” and that he did not have an adequate knowledge about scholars, scholarship, Orientalists’ disciplines and the history of the Arab world (51). In response to his attack, Said argued that these kinds of criticism “derive from what to the nineteenth-century mind is the preposterous situation of an Oriental responding to Orientalism’s asseverations” (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 204). Lewis’s argument is an example of modern Orientalism in the field of theory and criticism.

Robert Young in *White Mythologies*, while acknowledging Said's *Orientalism* for indicating history’s collusion with colonialism, finds methodological problems in Said’s work and emphasises its inconsistency. He argues that the major theoretical problem with Said’s work is that on the one hand he claims that Orientalism is only about representation of the Orient and has nothing to do with the real Orient, and refers to “internal consistency” as an important factor in Orientalism. On the other hand, as Young argues, Said refers to the correspondence of Orientalism with a real Orient by arguing that knowledge is constructed as a way to support imperialism and colonialism (196).

Michael Richardson, in “Enough Said: Reflections on Orientalism”, asks if Said believes that the representations of the Orient by the Orientalists are “false” then what are the “true” representations? He believes that there is no way to identify
or make a distinction between “true” or “false” representation (17). However, Said states that:

My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence—in which I do not for a moment believe—but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting. (*Orientalism* 273)

Representations of the Orient provided by the Orientalist expresses his view on what the Orient can or ought to be. At the same time, this representation provides a discourse which fulfils “certain cultural, professional, national, political, and economic requirements of the epoch” (*Orientalism* 273). In fact, by rejecting the idea that there is a pure knowledge, Said makes the point that there is no absolute true or false representation because representation is always based on knowledge.

These critical responses to Said’s *Orientalism* are important and relevant to the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature as they suggest other theories that could be applied to texts which cannot be simply identified as Orientalist in Said’s terms.

**Part Three: Literary Background**

**The Persians**

In the previous section, I presented an overview of Said’s theory of Orientalism and some of his critics as a background against which to examine the
representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature. In this section, I will first study examples of this representation in Western writing to illustrate the ideological position toward Iran that is presented. I have chosen two key texts, *The Persians* (472 BCE) by Aeschylus and “Persia and the Persians” (1886) by Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin.

*The Persians*, an ancient Greek tragedy and an early Orientalist text by Aeschylus, plays a vital role in my research. Said presents it as the foundation of Orientalist texts, showing that the representation of Iran in Orientalist texts goes back to Ancient Greece. Edith Hall believes that the play “represents the first unmistakable file in the archive of Orientalism” (99). Regarding the Orientalist view of Aeschylus, Harry C. Avery argues that there is no historical consistency in the play and the purpose of Aeschylus was to depict the destruction of the whole of Persia (179).

*The Persians* is based on the battle of Salamis in 480 BC which had happened eight years before the play was staged in Athens. The play is about the defeat of the Persians in a war with the Greeks and depicts the Persians’ feelings and thoughts during and after the war through conversations between Persian characters: Atoosa, the ghost of Darius, Xerxes, and the messenger. The setting of the play is Susa, capital of the Persian Empire. Atoosa, mother of Xerxes, is waiting for news of her son in battle. The messenger arrives and relates the defeat of the Persians, and the escape and return of Xerxes. Atoosa asks the Chorus to call up the ghost of Darius’s, Xerxes’ father. When Darius hears of the defeat of the Persians, he condemns his son. Finally Xerxes arrives with torn robes and with the Chorus he laments the defeat of the Persians.
According to Said’s use of Freudian psychoanalysis, in Orientalist texts the West represents an image of itself; the Orient becomes a stage for the West to reach its unconscious fears and desires. The Orient is Europe’s “deepest and most recurring images of the other” (Orientalism 1); through this image, Europe can see its unconscious self. This image of self is apparent in the play through the parallels and similarities David Rosenbloom identifies between Athens and Persia. For example, the Queen, in describing her offers to the gods to call up Darius’s ghost says “and here, Pressed from wild nature’s blossom, is strong wine” (74). “Wild nature blossom” or “wild mother” (different translation), as Rosenbloom argues, suggests the “‘mountain mother’ Cybele, whose temple at Sardis the Athenians and Ionians burned” (qtd in Lloyd 134).

The defeat of Persia in the play is a lesson for the Greeks, referring to their fear of being defeated by the Persians. Rosenbloom argues that the play “dramatizes a fictionalized fall of the Persian empire to demonstrate how empire collapses through overextension and to avert such an outcome for Athens’ imperialism” (qtd in Lloyd 135). Aeschylus represents the Persians as enemies of the Greeks. In the play, after the messenger gives news of the defeat of Persia, the Chorus say “Athens! For ever hateful to thy foes” (64). When the Chorus ask Xerxes where his vassals are, he answers “I left them with their foes” (88). In the play it is the Persians who call Athenians “foe” but the fact is that it is Athenians who consider Persians as their enemy. Aeschylus makes the claim that the Persians are enemies of the Greeks, “and then again by putting on my Persia, an excellent work, I taught my audience always to yearn for victory over their enemies” (qtd in Hall, Inventing the Barbarian 10). The play then is a mirror which reflects
Athenians’ fears and emotions through the failure of Xerxes’ over-extension. *The Persians* becomes a “utopian alternative to Europe” (Gandhi 78) from which Athenians draw a lesson for their own Empire to avoid such an outcome for Athens.

Aeschylus represents the Persians as a barbarous and despotic people, unlike the Greeks who are virtuous and democratic, aspiring towards freedom. Atoosa asks about the Athenians “Who is the ruler of this people? Who Lord of their levies and their revenue?” (61), to which the Chorus answers: “Subject they are not unto any man: They say ‘slave’ sorts not with ‘Athenian’” (61). The Greeks are represented as a democratic nation and there is no kind of master–servant relationship among them. However, for the Persians who are represented as a despotic nation, it is strange that the Greeks do not have master–servant relationships in ruling their country. Atoosa says, “Have they no master? / The less likely they to stand their ground against invaders” (61). The Chorus who represent the people of Persia say to Atoosa “in our breast/ There is no thought save how to serve you best” (58).

The Persians are represented as unable to govern their country, unlike the Greeks who are able to govern in the way they want. About the responsibility of the Greeks towards their country the messenger says that the Greeks were shouting, “sons of Hellas! Free your land, and free/ Your children and your wives, the native seats/ Of Gods your fathers worshipped and their graves” (68). However, just “an answering roar” was heard from the Persians. Aeschylus compares the Greek and the Persian control over their ships through the mouth of the messenger: Persian ships are “crashing in with beak of bronze/ Till all their oars were smashed”, while
Greek ships “Rowed round and round, and with sure seamanship/ Struck where they chose” (68). Athenians are able to control their ships but the Persians are not.

The inferiority of the Orient is represented by the words and vocabularies Aeschylus uses to describe the Persians. Edith Hall states that “the barbarian character is powerfully suggested not only by the elaborate rhetorical style but by the use of a distinctive new vocabulary of words” (99). While 5th century Athenians were proud to call themselves Athenian and non-barbarous (Orientalism 54), Aeschylus calls the Persians “barbarians” (54) which means non-Greek, a person without culture and an uncivilised person. In the play, the messenger who delivers the news of the defeat of Persia says, “All’s lost; the power/ Of Barbary is utterly destroyed” (62), “Victory had crowned the fleet of Barbary” (66), “Fear fell on the barbarians” (67). Atoosa says “An ocean of calamity Hath broke on Persia and all Barbary” (69). Alongside the destruction, inferiority and despotism of the Persians, Aeschylus represents the greatness and freedom of the Greeks. The representation of the Persians as a barbarous nation confirms Said’s argument about the representation of an imaginative geography in which people draw a line between their own land and their surrounding lands and call them “the land of the barbarians” (Orientalism 54). Yang Huang also supports the idea that “the Athenian democratic way of life is highlighted through Persian thinking accustomed to despotism ... The whole play contrasts Greek democracy, freedom, and victory with Persian despotism, servitude, and failure, but speaks through the mouths of the Persians” (559).

Along with the inferiority of the Persians, their inability to govern their country and the superiority of the Greeks, the play refers to the wealth of the
Persians and argues that the Persians are not able to maintain a balance between wealth and governance. Darius says, “Prosperity and power and wealth, which eased/ The lives of men, my long reign’s rich reward/ Is plunder now for some freebooter’s sword” (80). Here Aeschylus shows the inability of the Orient to self-govern. They are rich but they are not able to use their wealth to govern their country in a proper way, a suggestion that they need Athenians to rule over them. The cover page of Rosenbloom’s book *Aeschylus: Persians* states,

The first Western depiction of the causes and limits of the imperialist conquest, *The Persians* is especially relevant today. The play is unflinching in its portrayal of the horrors of the Persian defeat, but it is not merely a paean to Western freedom, democracy, courage and military supremacy; it is mediation on the tendency of wealth, power and success to take on a momentum of their own and to push societies to the brink of ruin. (cover)

The characteristics attributed to the Orient in the play are not only relevant to the Persians but generalised to the whole of Asia. There is a clear distinction between Asia and Hellas. The Chorus say, “Vain all the missiles Asia idly cast/ On Hellas’s fatal shore” (63). After the return of Xerxes, the Chorus say, “Through Asia’s wide regions/ Thy welcome shall be/ Lamentation and mourning and weeping” (87). Here also the defeated is represented as the whole of Asia. Said argues that, “The dramatic immediacy of representation in *The Persians* obscures the fact that the audience is watching a highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient” (*Orientalism* 21). He adds that “Asia speaks through and by virtue of the European imagination, which is

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depicted as victorious over Asia, that hostile ‘other’ world beyond the sea” (*Orientalism* 56).

Rather than aiming for historical accuracy, Aeschylus creates a myth of the Persian War. After the victory of Greece in the battle of Salamis, Persia has not been destroyed completely and is still a threat to them. Avery argues that rather than “historical accuracy” or “logical consistency”, Aeschylus’s purpose for creating “a poetic atmosphere” was to impress the audience with the “enormity of the Persian defeat” (“Dramatic Devices” 179). As mentioned before, Aeschylus generalises Oriental characteristics not only to the Persians but to the whole of Asia which leads to myth making about the Orient. As Said argues, “the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away” (*Orientalism* 6). Thus the characteristics that Aeschylus attributes to the Persians are myths. At the same time, Aeschylus uses religious beliefs and makes myth by representing the voice of gods to affirm his Orientalist views. Most of the interventions of the gods in the play are in support of the Greeks and against the Persians. Atoosa says that their troubles are sent from heaven (64). The messenger says, “A God it was who broke our power, weighed down/ The judgment scale with no impartial hand./ There are divinities that keep the realm/ Of divine Pallas safe” (66), “The Gods the glory of the sea-fight gave/ Unto the Hellenes, armed to the teeth they sprang/ Ashore and compassed the whole island round” (69). Xerxes says, “I have felt the fierce changes of fortune; the blast of God’s vengeance I know” (87). Aeschylus uses people’s religious belief to confirm the failure of the Persians and the superiority of Greece. Darius also gives a theistic explanation for the defeat of Xerxes, saying,
“For long ago I knew the Gods would speed/ The final consummation of that rede,/ And when man, shod with haste and girt with pride,/ Beckons his own doom/ God is on his side” (80). The presence of the ghost of Darius is also a way of mythologising the Orient.

By defining the “otherness” of the Persians, the Greeks represent their own fear of defeat and desire for Oriental wealth. As Edith Hall argues, the play is “suffused” by “oriental colouring” and shows how “the European imagination has dominated Asia ever since by conceptualizing its inhabitants as defeated, luxurious, emotional, cruel, and always as dangerous” (99).

“Persia and the Persians”

Another example of texts representing Persia and the Persians from a Western perspective is “Persia and the Persians” (1886), an article by Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, an American journalist, author and diplomat appointed as the first American Minister to Persia for two years in 1883, during the Qajar dynasty. In 1886, he published his book *Persia and Persians* in which he writes about his experience of living in Iran in great detail. This part will focus on Benjamin’s article which provides more general information about the greatness and fame of the Persian Empire and civilisation, and its physical aspects, its climate and formation, and the vivid scenery of Persia. While this article aims to represent an impartial view of Iran and Iranians, it is influenced by the pervasive ideology of the 19th century.
In Orientalist writing in the 18th century, as Said argues, “The Orient existed as a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress in the sciences, arts, and commerce” (Orientalism 206). Benjamin asserts that the Persian race has “no intellectual superior in Asia. The arts, the literature, the philosophy, the poetry, the governing power of Persia have always been in their hands, excepting that at rare intervals the throne has been usurped by men springing from some of the subject races of the country” (16). At the same time, he writes:

A distinct class of scientific men does not exist in Persia at present as with us. A philosophy of physics that rises above puerility is, one might almost say, foreign to the Oriental mind, although the Saracens and the Persians were in the dark ages leaders in scientific research. The native physicians are sometimes men whose instinct or shrewdness enables them to treat a patient with some success; but they are, for the most part, arrant quacks, usually itinerants, who, after dosing the innocent people of a village with nauseous nostrums, take care to decamp before any of the patients die on their hands. (30–31).

He presents an Iranian nomad called Backtiarees. The real name of this nomad is Bakhtiari, which means the companion of chance, but the author describes Bakhtiari people as “warlike and turbulent”, “cunning and skilful thieves” (45), and represents them as an inferior “other” and writes “the stranger who goes among them will probably lose his life” (45).

Despotism is another characteristic of the Persians identified in his article. He states that the present Shah, compared to other Shahs of Persia who “used their tremendous power with awful cruelty and caprice” (23), has made great progress
because he brought back enlightened ideas from Europe and keeps himself well informed of the world by reading “the leading periodicals of the age” (23). Following this, he writes, “But in the provinces one hears occasionally of deeds of blood that remind one of what a tyrant is capable when he chooses.” (49). It can be implied that the Shah is a tyrant by nature and can only be a man of wisdom when he is under the influence of European enlightenment. Benjamin writes that the Fars province governed by Firmah Firmah “was greatly infested with brigands” (50) and, to control the situation, he executed at least one thousand men in two years. Benjamin states that this kind of behaviour is barbarous; at the same time he endorses it by arguing that it was the only way to treat this people and control the country because they only respected the law because of its power (50).

Said argues that in order to make Islam understandable, Christian writers and scholars link it to their own culture. As Christianity is the religion of Christ, they had an analogical understanding of Islam and called it Mohammedanism as Mohammad was the founder of Islam and as such “the automatic epithet ‘imposter’ [was] applied to Mohammed” (Orientalism 60). Said states that Muslims were not aware of this terminology. In other words, “Islam became an image … whose function was not so much to represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christian” (Orientalism 60). Similarly, Benjamin uses “Mohammedanism” to refer to Islam and Mohammedan to refer to Muslim. He uses terms like “the Sheah faith, or the peculiar sect of Mohammedanism” (44), “Mohammedan conquest” (42), “real Persians, who are all at least outwardly Mohammedan” (43), “Mohammedan Persians” which are terms never used by Persians or Iranians, and “Mohammedan law” (54). All of these combinations are
Western, using the term Mohammed instead of Islam. He does not present Islam for itself but for the West; it is produced by the West for the West.

In conclusion, in Aeschylus’ text the “otherness” of the Persians is particularly clear as it is constantly contrasting the Persians with the Greeks, drawing a line between “us” and “them”. As Said argues, the aspects of the Orient set out by the West in this play “will remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography” and “a line is drawn between two continents” (57). In “Persia and the Persians” Benjamin does not contrast Persia and the West but tries to provide an impartial view of the nation. However, on some occasions he reinforces stereotypical views. The genres of the two texts are different. The Persians is a play that produces myth and fantasy about Persia in a poetic atmosphere. “Persia and the Persians” is an article about Benjamin’s experience of living in Iran. While Aeschylus’ text ends with the defeat of Persia, Benjamin states that with all its ups and downs, Persia “will, in the end, emerge to a new day, and renewed influence and power are in store for the Land of the Lion and the Sun” (40). Perhaps the differences between these two texts could be related to the context in which they were written. At the time of Aeschylus, the Persians were considered as a great enemy of the Greeks whose desire was the defeat of the Persians, while Benjamin wrote his article when Iran was under the influence of Russia and the UK, and both Iran and the US were eager to build a relationship. Iran needed the US as a third power through which to extricate itself from the influence of the UK and Russia, and the US was interested in this relationship because of the discovery of oil resources in the South of Iran. (Partowazar and Soltani 39–40). Benjamin’s writing dramatises Americans’ dreams and desires (for oil resources) in the process
of constructing knowledge about Iranians. This echoes Said’s argument that the
construction of knowledge about Orientals is a way of ruling over them.

Chapter Two will return to the colonial period to examine to what extent the
representation of Iran/Persia and Iranians/Persians in Australian texts was
influenced by the pervasive Orientalist ideology of the 19th century.
Chapter Two: Persia and the Persians in the Australian Colonial Imagination: The *Australian Journal*

**Introduction**

This chapter examines the representation of Persia and the Persians in 19th century Australian writing published in the *Australian Journal*. The texts are: “Silver-Land: Or, the Wonderful Adventures of Tim Pippin (I)” (1876) by an anonymous author; *Pearls from Persia*, a series of short stories about Persia and Persians by Tom Cringle, which consists of three stories, “The Story of Abdulla” (1869), “Ahmed the Cobbler” (part 1, 1869), and “Ahmed the Cobbler” (part 2, 1870); and “Her Imperial Guest: A Mayfair Mystery” (1875), a short story by James Payn. I will investigate how the selected stories are influenced by the writing style of the time, and whether they correspond to Said’s argument about 19th century Orientalist writing. Although some of these texts are not written by Australian writers, I claim they constructed Australians’ understanding of Persia and the Persians. I examine how these stories can be understood in relation to gender roles, and the way the authors describe Persian culture, history and religion, and to what extent the stories and motifs from *One Thousand and One Nights* are used to represent the Persians in the colonial period.
The Importance of Contemporary Research on 19th Century Publications

Reading 19th century publications is important to understanding the reading habits and social conditions of Australians during colonial times. Pauline M. Kirk in “Colonial Literature for Colonial Readers!” states that research on 19th century magazines and journals draws attention to the “unexamined work by lesser known Australian writers and artists which is of considerable interest” (133). She adds that this research reveals that 19th century publications played an important cultural role in “a developing society by providing a means of publication for leading public figures” (133). Elizabeth Morrison, in “Serial Fiction in Australian Colonial Newspapers”, states that studying

the literary content of the colonial magazine and newspaper presses …

may help examination of cultural influences from overseas in the colonial period, particularly in relation to the ideological impact of the fiction brought to colonial readers through the plentiful and cheap supply of local newspaper. (320)

Reading in Colonial Australia

Elizabeth Webby, in “Reading in Colonial Australia: The 2011 John Alexander Ferguson Memorial Lecture”, states that there was a great change in the publishing industry in 19th century Australia: cheaper and cheaper books, magazines and newspapers were published. Most of the books being read in
colonial Australia came from Britain, and the most popular book was the Bible, especially among convicts who were not wealthy enough to own books (119, 123).

The first attempt to form a lending library was by clergymen. In 1808, Samuel Marsden, a missionary, in his proposal for establishing a lending library argued that the colonists needed “a library of mainly utilitarian works, which would help the colonists succeed in their pioneering pursuits while at the same time assisting them to overcome the perceived moral disadvantages of a convict society” (Webby, “Reading in Colonial Australia” 124). By 1901, works by Australian authors were mainly found in local magazines and newspapers such as the Melbourne Punch, the Australian Journal and the Bulletin, and books published in Australia became more popular than the books coming from elsewhere. Among the journals, Webby mentions in the Introduction to The Colonial Voices, the Australian Journal was most successful because it awakened interest in local publication by specialising half in local and half in imported fiction, at a very cheap price (“Reading in Colonial Australia”, xiii).

The Australian Journal

The Australian Journal was one of the most successful literary periodicals, published by Clarson, Massina and Company in Melbourne from 1865 to 1957. Its purpose was “to provide good Australian reading for Australian readers” (Kirk 137). The editors, in the first issue, declared² that their purpose was
to record the phases of Colonial literature, to direct attention to the triumphs of art, and to explain the most recent efforts of mechanical genius, until these pages reflect the literature, art, and science, of Australia … The ablest Colonial pens of the day will be engaged on our staff. Historical romance and legendary narratives of the Old Country will be mingled with tales of Venture and Daring in the new. (qtd in Kirk 137)

The Australian Journal was modelled on the London Journal, a popular cheap fiction magazine. Originally a weekly, the journal became a monthly in 1869 because of increased postage costs. It was so popular among Australian readers that its circulation was equal to English magazines with similar costs and style. Elizabeth Webby writes that, at a time when Australians could not access radio, TV or the internet, reading books, newspapers and periodicals, including the Australian Journal, “was the main way in which adult Australians could learn about what was happening in the world, what had happened in the past, and what was happening in their own country” (Webby, “Reading in Colonial Australia” 133). The Australian Journal includes numerous literary genres: crime, adventure, romance, comedy and sentimental realism. It gave prominence to both local and imported fiction until 1871, when a more nationalistic emphasis was proclaimed:

The Conductor wishes intending contributors to understand that the AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL will publish no “original” story, the scene of which is laid elsewhere than in the Colonies, or which does not—in some way—treat of Colonial life, or subjects of Colonial interest. The Conductor is willing to protect native industry in the matter of tale-
writing, but the tales must be “Colonial”, and suited for “Colonial wear”, not bad imitations of the French and English imported article. (qtd in Webby, “The Beginning of Literature” 47–48)

With its primary focus on colonial fiction, the *Australian Journal* promoted local writing and encouraged local writers for almost one hundred years.

Despite the declaration that it would not publish works without “Colonial interest”, the *Australian Journal* serialised “historical romances like ‘Waif Wander’’s *Clyzia the Dwarf* (29 December 1866 onwards) and *Isabella of England: A Tale of the Olden Time* by Nemo (17 October 1868 to May 1869)” (Kirk 144). This shift from the Australian scene is explained in the author’s introduction to *Isabella of England* on 10 October 1868:

Doubtless, at some future time, these Colonies will have *their* histories too; but at the present day, anything essentially Colonial must be limited to the threadbare topics of squatters, aborigines, diggers, new chums, old hands, gins, lubras, or still more unsavoury excitement. All these have been so often *rechauffeed*, that we hope and believe a “tale of the olden times” will prove both refreshing and entertaining to the readers of the *Australian Journal*. (qtd in Kirk 144)

The first part of “Silver-Land” was printed in 1876; however, it was discontinued because it was discovered that it had been taken without attribution from the original “Giant-Land: The Wonderful Adventures of Tom Pippin” (1844) by Roland Quiz, pseudonym for Richard Martin Howard Quittenton, a British author. “Her Imperial Guest”, written by the English novelist James Payn (1830–1895),
was published in the same year as “Silver-Land”. This story had first been published in *Harper's New Monthly* magazine in 1850 and when republished in the *Australian Journal*, did not mention the author’s name. Although these texts were not written by Australian authors, they were read by the Australian colonial public and, one must assume, were intended to “prove both refreshing and entertaining to the readers of the *Australian Journal*” (qtd in Kirk 144). At the same time, these texts shaped colonial Australians’ perception of Persia and the Persians, something which may have survived into contemporary Australia.

The *Australian Journal* had a policy of publishing the author’s name with the purpose of giving “Australia a strong and capable literary circle and enable[d] the *Australian Journal* to take pride in its sponsorship of the Australian arts” (Kirk 139, 140). This policy provided authors with the opportunity to achieve fame; however, some authors “continued to publish under pen-names like ‘James Skipp Borlase’” (Kirk 140). Another example of a pen-name is Tom Cringle, the author of *Pearls from Persia*, which was the pseudonym for William Walker (1838–1908), a Scottish-born Australian author. A few years after the introduction of television to Australia in 1956, the *Australian Journal*, unable to compete with new forms of entertainment, stopped publication. This journal has been digitised by the Gale Group’s *19th century UK periodicals*.

The stories in the *Australian Journal* were read by the Australian colonial public and addressed general audiences. It is not clear whether some of the stories were intended for children or adults. Matthew Orville Grenby in “The Origins of Children’s Literature” argues that the origin of children’s literature remains controversial because there is no clear answer for what is meant by children’s
literature: “Do we mean texts designed especially for children, or read only by them, not those intended for adults, or a mixed-age audience, that were also used by children?” (5). Before the 19th century, there was no clear distinction between writing for children and writing for adults. The 19th century saw a new understanding of childhood and the needs of children, and therefore more appropriate texts were designed for children. Although *Pearls from Persia* and “Silver-Land” were written during the 19th century, it is not clear from the context that they are aimed at children, adults or both. However, tales of this kind—tales of adventure with an obvious moral lesson and simple language—are suitable for secondary school children and would today be considered to be children’s literature; these stories are also suitable to be read to younger children by their parents. From 1884 to the 1890s, “The Children’s Page” appeared in the *Australian Journal*, focusing specifically on “fairy tales, allegorical fables and short fiction written for children and include[ing] stories by C. J. M. Robertson and others authors” (*Australian Journal*, Austlit).

**One Thousand and One Nights and the Oriental Tale**

In *Literary Orientalism, Postcolonialism, and Universalism* Abdulla Al-Dabbagh provides a background for literary Orientalism. He argues that during the 18th century Oriental tales had great influence on the emerging English novels, and emphasises the impact of Eastern settings on 18th century writing in English. The most prominent among Oriental tales was *One Thousand and One Nights*, most commonly known as *Arabian Nights*. This collection of tales has had remarkable
influences on English literature and a great impact on the West’s understanding of the Orient: Martha Conant calls it “the fairy godmother of the English novel … Critics call these works tales with an eastern frame or tales of pseudo-orientalism, because they use eastern characters and settings for their own purpose that may have little to do with the East” (qtd in Al-Dabbagh 5–6).

One Thousand and One Nights is considered to be major masterpiece of world literature. This collection of tales has had a remarkable influence on English literature and a great impact on the West’s understanding of the Orient. Ulrich Marzolph claims that after the Bible, only One Thousand and One Nights “has had such a long-lasting and deep impact on world culture” (“The ‘Arabian Nights’” 3). It has Iranian, Indian and Arabic origins and the most ancient version of it, Hazar Afsan (meaning one thousand stories in Persian), dates to pre-Islamic times when the Achaemenid Empire ruled Persia. This early collection “profits from both structural devices and narrative contents originating from Indian tradition” (Marzolph, “The Persian Nights” 275). Although Hazar Afsan means “a thousand tales”, this collection included only about 200 stories. In the 8th or early 9th century, the Persian Hazar Afsan was translated into Arabic and was given the Arabic title Alf Khurafa before being retitled Alf Layla (A Thousand Nights). It is not clear how long the Persian Hazar Afsan survived. Based on the authoritative view of Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, a number of tales were added to the collection in Baghdad in the 10th century and some others in Egypt in the 12th century. During these two centuries, a large number of tales were integrated into the initial version and some of the original tales were eliminated (Pellat np).
The story that frames this collection, without any doubt, has Indo-Persian origins and Iran and Iranian culture hold a noteworthy stand in the early stage of textual formation of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Surprisingly, however, the links between *One Thousand and One Nights* and Iranian culture are not widely understood (Marzolph, “The Persian Nights” 275). In the West *One Thousand and One Nights* is mostly linked to Arabs and Arabic culture. Roderick Cavaliero is one of the critics who have attributed *One Thousand and One Nights* to Arabs. As he argues, these tales, wherever the setting is, “are not about Persians but about Arabs, the common core of all the Caliphate in Baghdad, between the eight and tenth centuries” (51). Yet in spite of being commonly known as the “Arabian Nights”, the majority of the tales, including the frame tale, Jiri Cejpek points out, are undoubtedly of Indo-Persian origin, though some tales were added, along with Arabic and Islamic cultural inflections, over the centuries (quoted in Marzolph, “The Persian Nights” 278). Moreover, the names of the principal characters are Iranian. Šahrīār, and Čehrāzād³ are middle Persian names which mean “holder of a kingdom, possessor of ruling power” and “of noble or exalted lineage” (Pellat np) respectively.

Apart from the frame story, the embedded stories also have Iranian origins. However, being elaborated during the 10ᵗʰ and 12ᵗʰ centuries, pre-Islamic Iranian culture and elements were influenced by Islamic culture and perspective. For instance, the perception of Magians, who were the followers of Zoroastrianism, had changed during the Sassanid dynasty and after the Arab invasion. As Marzolph states, in mediaeval Arabic narrative literature the Magians, the fire worshippers, were considered infidels practising strange customs and rituals in contrast to
Islamic tenets: “Magians were vulnerable to being portrayed and stereotyped as a highly dubious ethnic Other” (“The Persian Nights” 280). He adds that in the embedded tales of One Thousand and One Nights, “an ethnically good (and hence, by extension, Muslim) protagonist falls victim to the Magians, the only means to save him is through the help of a Muslim (and hence, by extension ethically good) man” (“The Persian Nights” 281).

Although the perspective of Muslim Arabs impacted on pre-Islamic Iranian elements in this collection, the stereotypical representation of the pre-Islamic fire-worshippers in the Persian translation of the Arabic version of One Thousand and One Nights is maintained. The reason for this, as Marzolph argues, is that the Islamic perspective shared by Arabs and Iranian Muslims goes beyond national or ethnic allegiance. Because their religious practices are different from Muslims, fire worshippers are alienated by Iranian Muslims. As Marzolph states, “[a]t any rate, the negative image of the Magian is characteristic of Arab sources, and no truly Persian version of a given tale would—for various reasons—employ the character of the Magian as a villain” (“The Persian Nights” 282). In Modern Iran, One Thousand and One Nights is not as popular as in the West. Marzolph speculates on the reason for this:

The consumption of alcoholic beverages and the indulging in extramarital sexual relations, both of which are frequently encountered in the Nights, contradict the moral values presently propagated in Iran, and publishers opt for different strategies to adjust the text so as to eliminate reprehensible components … Whereas the Western world has grown accustomed to regarding the Nights as a monumental and
uninhibited affirmation of the joy of life in all its manifestations, Iranian readers are restricted to textual versions that have been adapted to their present political circumstances. ("The Persian Nights" 289–290)

After being elaborated during the two stages of Arabic influence in the 10th and 20th centuries, this collection was introduced to Europe by Antoine Galland, a French Orientalist and archaeologist, who translated it from Arabic to French. Galland’s translation was published gradually, as the translator gained access to the Arabic manuscripts from 1704. During the 18th century, this collection was translated into English, German, Italian and many other languages. The Arabic title has had several translations in English and European languages such as One Thousand Nights and a Night, One Thousand and One Nights, The Arabian Night’s Entertainments (by Galland), The Arabian Nights, or The Nights.4

Although, because of the folkloric origin of the tales, there was “a reflected gleam of the Nights in Western literature even before Galland’s translation” (Pellat np), the West came to know One Thousand and One Nights through Galland’s translation at the beginning of the 18th century. Since then, it has had a major impact on literature, theatre, opera, music, painting and architecture, up until contemporary times. History of Nourjahad (1767) by Frances Sheridan (Irwin 245), New Arabian Nights (1882) by Robert Louis Stevenson (Irwin 274), Midnight’s Children (1981) and Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights (2015) by Salman Rushdie are examples of the texts influenced by One Thousand and One Nights. Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Edward FitzGerald, Marcel Proust and James Joyce are some other famous writers influenced by this collection.
During the 19th century, a period of rising imperialism, Orientalism was a dominant ideology. Regarding the rise of Orientalism in 19th century Australian writing, Robin Gerster in “Representations of Asia” argues:

It is hardly surprising that colonial Australian writers resorted to some of the descriptive habits of Orientalism famously analysed by Edward W. Said, that representational hegemony in which Europeans sought to define “degenerate” Asian peoples as part of an all-embracing system of political, military, ideological, scientific—and, indeed, imaginative—control. (304)

At the same time, he states that it is plausible to consider that Australians “merely mimicked European Orientalists” because Australia itself, as Said suggests in Culture and Imperialism, “belongs to the same camp as ‘the Orient’” (Gerster 304). Gerster argues that in the 19th century, it was indispensable for White Australia to consider itself as an “outpost of British conquest” and consequently colonial Australian writers endorsed the “prevailing imperial ideologies in representing Asia as not only essentially and irretrievably ‘different’, but as backward and barbarous and in dire need of Britain’s benign civilising influence” (Gerster 304).

Nineteenth century Australian writers considered themselves as British when they left their land and looked at Asia from an imperial perspective; for them “to be white in ‘the East’ was to be English” (Gerster 305). It should be noted that while British colonialism was the practical example for Australian writers to follow (Gerster 321) in the colonial period, contemporary Australian literature represents a wider range of understanding of Iran and Iranians.
*Pearls from Persia* and “Silver-Land” are influenced by the motifs and structure of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

**Pearls from Persia**

*Pearls from Persia*, which began publication in the *Australian Journal* in 1869, is a series of short stories about Persia and the Persians by Tom Cringle. This series consists of three stories, “The Story of Abdulla” (1869), “Ahmed the Cobbler” (part 1, 1869) and “Ahmed the Cobbler” (part 2, 1870). Tom Cringle was the pseudonym of William Walker (1838–1908), a Scottish-born Australian author, who contributed to a range of Australian 19th century publications. Walker’s pseudonym was derived from another pseudonym used by Michael Scott (1789–1835), the Scottish writer, in *Tom Cringle's Log*, a book of travel writing published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* from 1829 to 1833 (Room 124).

**“The Story of Abdulla”**

In a note to “The story of Abdulla” (Melbourne, Feb 24, 1869), Cringle states that in spite of the common view which attributes the origin of *One Thousand and One Nights* to the Arabs, Arabia borrowed the substructure of the stories from the Persian “who is now the admitted great story-teller of the east—in fact so great, that he cannot, without a great effort, tell the truth—and is therefore esteemed the greatest liar” (464).

It appears that the main message of “The Story of Abdulla” is the importance of charity, honesty and humanity in life. The story is set in Persia, when Shah
Abbas I (1588–1629) ruled the country, and shows that helping poor people is always rewarded.

Abdulla is an honest and poor peasant who lives with his family in a village in Korassan. One day, Abdullah is rewarded with ten piastres by his rais (boss) for his good efforts. He decides to go to the city of Meshed to buy what his wife, Zeeba, his son, Yusuph and his daughter, Fatima, ask for. When he arrives in Meshed, “like a good Mahomedan” he devotes one-fifth of his money to the holy shrine of Imam Mehdee. Going to the shops afterwards, he finds that everything in the city is so expensive that he cannot afford to buy anything and decides to go back home. On the way back to the village, he meets a beggar exclaiming “Charity! Charity! He that giveth to the poor lendeth to God; and he that lendeth to God shall be repaid a hundredfold” (463). Simple and good Abdullah gives all of his money to the beggar in the hope of being paid back hundredfold. When made aware of this, his wife becomes angry and informs the rais. To punish Abdullah, the rais orders him to dig dry soil in order to look for water. While digging, Abdullah finds a vessel full of white stones. Believing that he has found something valuable, he decides to go to the city of Meshed to sell them. In Meshed, a jeweller discovers that Abdulla has found the long lost treasure of Khoosroo7. The magistrate of Meshed then sends Abdulla, his family and the treasure, under guard of five hundred horsemen, to Shah Abbas the Great in Isfahan.

Meanwhile, Shah Abbas has a dream in which the holy Imam Mehdee tells him, “Abbas, protect and favour my friend” (463). The Shah does not understand the meaning of his dream until the couriers from the Governor of Meshed arrive. Abdulla, who gave one-fifth of his money to Imam Mehdee and the rest to the
beggar, becomes “the chosen instrument of Providence for discovering the treasures of Khoosroo” and “the revealed friend of the holy imam Mehdee” (464). Finding piety and honesty in Abdulla’s character, the Shah makes him a ruler and Abdulla is able to give his family what they had asked for. Later, Abdulla becomes the Governor of Korassan, famous for his humanity and justice. Zeeba also becomes very happy, and has “no rival in the affection of her husband, who continued to cherish, in his exalted situation, those ties and feelings which had formed his happiness in humble life” (464). While the author believes that the Persians are great liars as indicated in his note, he uses Persian characters to give a moral lesson to Western readers that a pious and charitable person is always rewarded.

**Religion**

“The Story of Abdulla”, apart from affirming the importance of honesty and charity in human life, suggests prioritising religious beliefs over worldly desires. During the late 19th century, Christianity was very powerful, and it was very important to be pious and good. This ideology is translated into the story of Abdulla but in the shape of Islam, because the setting of the story is Persia. Abdulla is not only a moral man but also a pious man who wants to do the right thing for religious reasons. When poor Abdulla is rewarded with ten piasters, the first thing he decides to do with the money is to pay Khums to the holy Imam Mehdee, like a good “Mahomedan” (462). A priest, reading the Koran in the shrine of Imam Mehdee, tells Abdulla that his ultimate happiness, which is beyond worldly life, is achieved by charity (462). After Abdulla finds the stones, although he does not
know that they are the treasure of Khoosroo, he dreams of buying what his family had asked for. At this time, the narrator says, “But while the pious Abdulla indulged in this dream, he always resolved that the Imam Mehdee should receive a fifth of whatever wealth he obtained” (463). All of these examples show that in “The Story of Abdulla” prominence is given to following religious/Islamic rules rather than worldly desires. At the end of the story, Abdulla is rewarded with a fortune because he follows his devotion to his religion. At the same time, the author is contradicting himself. He represents the Persians as good and honest people, with some flaws, who meet the happy ending they deserve. However, the author’s note to the story of Abdulla is Orientalist as he clearly states his view of Persians as despots and liars. This contradiction reveals that from the author’s perspective the real Orient is different from his portrayal of it, which echoes what critics call “pseudo-orientalism”; the stories “use eastern characters and settings for their own purpose that may have little to do with the East” (Al-Dabbagh 6). The author represents Persians and Muslims—who in reality are liars and despots—as good and pious people, and uses Persian settings and characters to give moral/religious lessons to Western Christians.

“Domestications of the Exotic”

In “The Story of Abdulla”, it is clear that the text is being appropriated and transcribed for a 19th century Western audience. Said states that the reception of Islam in the West is the best example of “domestications of the exotic” (Orientalism 60). By referring to Norman Daniel’s study of the reception of Islam
in the West, Said argues that Oriental culture was introduced to the West by linking it to Western culture: “since Christ is the basis of Christian faith, it was assumed—quite incorrectly—that Mohammed was to Islam as Christ was to Christianity. Hence the polemic name ‘Mohammedanism’ given to Islam” (*Orientalism* 60). In “The Story of Abdulla”, the author uses “Mahomedan” (462) instead of Muslim. The author uses “priest” in order to refer to the Muslim clergyman who is reading the Koran (462). Said argues that in the process of “domestications of the exotic … what is more important still is the limited vocabulary and imagery that impose themselves as a consequence” (60). Abdulla goes to the holy shrine of Imam Mehdee in Meshed. This is not accurate because the holy shrine of “Imam Reza”, and not Imam Mehdee, is located in Mashhad/Mashad, not “Meshed”. This echoes Said’s argument that in the Orientalist writing “Islam became an image … whose function was not so much to represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christian” (*Orientalism* 60). Walker’s lack of knowledge about Persia and his limited vocabularies shows that his claim, mentioned in a note to “The Story of Abdulla”, that “The present writer was upwards of four years in Persia” is likely to be false.

“*Ahmed the Cobbler*” (Parts I &II)

“Ahmed the Cobbler” was serialised in two parts in the *Australian Journal*, 5.55 (December 1869, pp. 235–237) and 5.56 (January 1870, pp. 294–295), under the title *Pearls from Persia II*. The first part of “Ahmed the Cobbler” once again begins with the affirmation that the Persians are the best storytellers in the world. Like *One Thousand and One Nights*, this tale has the structure of a story within a
story, as Nader Shah’s storyteller tells the story of “Ahmed the Cobbler” to Nader Shah to ease his journey. “Ahmed the Cobbler” is set in two different periods. The story of Ahmed happens in the time of Shah Abbas but is told to Nader Shah a century later. Nader Shah ruled the country in the 18th century; however, the story of “Ahmed the Cobbler” is set in Isfahan during the rule of Shah Abbas (1588–1629).

The moral message of this story is that honesty and sincerity is always rewarded and envy and greedy desire always have an unhappy ending. Ahmed is an honest and industrious cobbler in Isphahan. His wife, Sittara, is a greedy woman who wishes to become rich. Sittara is the antagonist who tends to manipulate Ahmed. Seeing the rich and wealthy wife of the chief astrologer to the king in Hemmam, Sittara persuades Ahmed to give up cobbling and become an astrologer to prove his love for her. The next day Ahmed goes to the city and exclaims, “I am an astrologer … I can foretell everything that is to happen” (235). The king’s jeweller, who has lost the most valuable ruby belonging to the crown, goes to Ahmed and tells him that he will be paid two hundred pieces of gold if he finds the ruby; otherwise, he will be put to death as an impostor. Distressed because of the envy and selfishness of his wife, Ahmed exclaims, “Oh, woman, woman! Thou art more baneful to the happiness of man, than the poisonous dragon of the desert” (236). Overhearing this and misunderstanding Ahmed’s comparison of a woman to a dragon, the female slave of the jeweller’s wife goes to her mistress, who has secreted the ruby to obtain riches for herself, and informs her that she (the jeweller’s wife) has been discovered. The jeweller’s wife goes to Ahmed and begs for mercy. Ahmed tells her to go back home and put the ruby under the jeweller’s pillow. In this way, Ahmed is able to find the ruby and receives the two hundred
pieces of gold. However, his wife is not satisfied by this amount and wants her husband to continue as an astrologer to earn more money.

Ahmed continues with astrology because of his wife’s insistence. One day, the king’s treasury of forty chests of gold and jewels are stolen. Having become famous for the discovery of the ruby, Ahmed is called by the king and asked to find the thieves of his treasure. Ahmed guesses that there are forty thieves in this robbery because there were forty chests of gold, and asks the king to grant him forty days to find the treasure. The king accepts and warns Ahmed that if he does not find the treasure within forty days he will be put to death. This is clearly reminiscent of “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves”, which is one of the best-known stories in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Having no knowledge of astrology and therefore anticipating his death, Ahmed goes home and asks his wife to give him one date each night for forty nights so he is able to mark time as he is getting closer to death.

Overhearing Ahmed’s conversation with the Shah, one of the thieves believes Ahmed knows there were in fact forty of them, and informs the chief of the gang. The thieves decide that one of them should go to Ahmed’s house at night and listen to his conversation with his wife to discover his progress in detecting them.

One of the thieves arrives at Ahmad’s place just as Ahmed’s wife gives him the first night’s date. Taking the date, Ahmed says, “there is one of the forty”. The thief hastens to the gang and tells them about the supernatural knowledge of Ahmed as Ahmed told his wife that one of the thieves was there as soon as he arrived. The gang decides to send two men the next night. Like the previous night, when the two men arrive, Ahmed is given the second date and says “to-night there
are two of them” (237). This continues until the last night when all of them go to his house and Ahmed exclaims, “The number is complete. To-night the whole forty are here” (237). The thieves are sure that Ahmed has discovered them through his skill in astrology. They decide to knock on Ahmed’s door and confess everything. When they ask for mercy, Ahmed tells them to bury all the treasure behind the king’s palace. Two hours after this, Ahmed is called by the king. Sittara knows nothing of the thieves’ confession, and Ahmed decides not to tell her anything until he sees the result. In the meantime, Sittara, thinking that her husband is going to his death, fancies that her beauty might attract a rich lover so she leaves Ahmed. Promising the thieves to spare their lives, Ahmed goes to the king and asks him if he wants the treasure or the thieves, as the stars will grant only one. The king chooses the treasure and Ahmed tells the king where it is buried.

Finding his treasure, the king assigns Ahmed as his chief astrologer and declares that he will marry the king’s daughter. As in “The Story of Abdullah”, after becoming the lord of a rich palace and finding his real love, Ahmed’s character does not change, and he continues “to ascribe his good fortune solely to the favour of Providence” (237).

The second part of “Ahmed the Cobbler” begins with a description of Sittara who despairs when she learns that her husband has become the chief astrologer, the very situation she had desired for him. Hearing about Ahmed’s happy life with the king’s daughter, Sittara decides to destroy him. Meanwhile, the king of Seestan sends an emerald to the king of Irak carried by three servants, the only ones who have a key to the emerald box. In Isfahan11, the servants find out that the emerald has been lost. As the lock is not broken, they start accusing each other of stealing the emerald. When the king is unable to find the thief and the report of this spreads
through the city, Sittara sees an opportunity to indulge her thirst for revenge. She goes to the king of Isfahan and tells him that Ahmed is not an astrologer but the chief of the thieves and because of this he was able to find the royal treasure. To prove the truthfulness of her words, Sittara wants the king to command Ahmed to find the emerald. The king calls Ahmed and gives him twenty days to find it. Being unable to find the emerald, the pious and humble Ahmed tells the Princess about the events of his past life. Loving Ahmed and understanding his sincerity and honesty, the Princess decides to help him find the emerald. This time, Ahmed’s sincerity and honesty is rewarded by the Princess.

The wise Princess invites the three servants who carried the emerald, and befriends them until they become confident of their safety. One day, she recounts to them some past events of her life. The Princess tells them that being the only child of the king, she believed that she had the power to be virtuous and make everyone happy. One day, she saw that the old gardener looked miserable. She asked him the reason and swore to solve his problem and make him happy. The gardener then told her that he had fallen in love with her and could not stand seeing her with another man. Swearing to make him happy, the Princess promised to meet him in the garden an hour before midnight. Before midnight, she dressed with rich jewels and went toward the garden. On the way, a thief tried to seize her jewels. The Princess told him the story and promised to return to him after meeting the gardener. Proceeding on her way, she met a furious lion. She promised him also to come back after fulfilling her vow. Arriving in the garden, she told the gardener what had happened to her on the way. Influenced by her story, the gardener assured her that the only way she could make him happy was to forgive his presumption. As the Princess had promised to go back to the lion and the thief, she went to meet
them. They also set the Princess free when they heard how the gardener had absolved her from her vow.

After finishing her story, the Princess asks the three servants to give their opinion on who had the greatest generosity, the gardener, the lion or the thief. The first servant chooses the gardener, the second chooses the lion, and the third picks out the thief: “the thief had by far the greatest merit. Gracious Heavens! To have within his grasp such wealth, and to refrain from taking it” (295). Hearing this, the Princess realises that the third servant has stolen the emerald. The third servant confesses his guilt and gives the emerald to the Princess. The Princess then brings the emerald to Ahmed to present it to the king.

The Princess’s story is a story within the second part of the story of “Ahmed the Cobbler”. In both One Thousand and One Nights and this story, Shahrazad and the Princess use storytelling as a device to achieve their respective purposes, saving Shahrazad’s life and finding who stole the emerald. At the end of her story, the Princess learns the lesson that

the power of human beings to do good is very limited, and that when they leave the narrow path marked out for them by their Maker, they not only lose their object, but often wander far into error and guilt by attempting more than it is possible to perform. (295)

The story concerns and elaborates on the flaws and weaknesses of Ahmed’s character. He is a good and normally honest man. But because he loves Sittara, he does whatever she wants to make her happy which leads him to deceive people. This is a weakness rather than wickedness. The weakness and strength of Ahmed are revealed through the conflicts that Sittara, the antagonist, creates for him.
After giving the emerald to the king, Ahmed, conscious of his faults, tells the king all the past events of his life. Delighted with his daughter’s knowledge and wisdom, the king asks the Princess whether she wants to dispose of Ahmed or stay with him. The Princess replies: “As to Ahmed, I love and esteem him; he is sensible, sincere, and pious; and I deem myself fortunate in having for my husband a man so peculiarly favoured and protected by heaven” (295). The story has a happy ending as Ahmed’s honesty is rewarded and soon after he becomes the vizier (the king’s advisor). Sittara is left disappointed and her ending, as the narrator says, gives a lesson to “those who admit envy into their bosoms, and endeavour to attain their ends by unreasonable and unjustifiable means” (295).

**Gender Identity**

The structure and gender relations in the story of “Ahmed the Cobbler” are influenced by *One Thousand and One Nights*. These two works have the same plot structure. Nader Shah’s story, like Shahriyar’s, constructs the frame story and “Ahmed the Cobbler” and the Princess’s story, told to Nader Shah, are embedded stories. Sittara and Ahmed’s relationship also echoes *One Thousand and One Nights*. Reinhard Schulze in “Images of Masculinity in the Arabian Nights” contests the European perception of male and female figures in *One Thousand and One Nights*, which “has been primarily preoccupied with the images, characters, and archetypes occurring in the tales”. He states that in the European perception women are generally regarded as passive “objects”, while men have been considered as “a passive victim of feminine agency” in the sense that, in the imagination of European readers, men “are not described, explained, or interpreted, but are rather accepted as they appear” (46). He adds that a man is compelled to
fall in love and consequently to “react to the women’s breach of faith” (47). Therefore the hero’s individuation is determined through the deeds of others.

Ahmed’s character confirms European perceptions of male characters in *One Thousand and One Nights*. At the beginning of the story, Ahmed’s function is to be an honest cobbler. What makes Ahmed different from others is his honesty. However, Sittara’s desire to be rich interferes with the fulfilment of Ahmed’s prescribed function of honesty. Sittara provokes him to behave in a manner that is contrary to his principles. Deceiving people negates Ahmed’s honesty until he confesses everything to the Shah and is rewarded. By contrast to Sittara who, like some women in *One Thousand and One Nights*, is thinking about cheating on her husband, the Princess, like Shahrazad, is a wise and knowledgeable woman who uses storytelling as a device to achieve her purposes. In other words, Ahmed is manipulated by his first wife, and then is rescued by the princess but he is still passive. He is a good but weak character, and confirms the European perception/stereotype of Oriental men.

Schulze adds that the male character’s individuation is “only the result of his passive involvement in an event, and not of any active participation. Only rarely do men act; they exist, rather, through the deeds of others” (47). Ahmed is a weak character and cannot act independently; he is controlled by his wife and reacts to her greedy desires. Furthermore, he tells many lies and deceives people in order to earn money. Ahmed’s confession at the end of the story is also the consequence of the lesson that the Princess gives him through her story.

Schulze contests the common European perception of male characters in *One Thousand and One Nights* and argues that:
the image of male characters in the *Arabian Nights* is not as static as it appears in the European reception. Man is not a transparent glass puppet but rather a personified function that gains form through the narrative itself. An initial visually created character, resulting from the events he experiences in the course of the tale, acquires an identity that by the end of the story develops into a fully ego-equipped persona. (39)

Abdulla’s character echoes Schulz’s perception of male characters. He is not a “static” character. He is a strong man with agency who follows his faith. His religion is so important to him that he gives his money away for religious reasons and makes his family angry. This is in contrast to the story of Ahmed, a good and moral man. Ahmed is aware of his misdeeds; however, he prefers to lie and pretends that he has supernatural powers in order to please his wife; he does everything to please her. In the two stories, it is clear that although Ahmed is regretful for what he has done Abdulla is the best character as he is pious in his life, and thus rewarded at the end of the story.

In *One Thousand and One Nights*, many different and contradictory types of women are represented. Similarly, in the story of Ahmed and Abdulla, there are different types of women. Abdulla’s wife is a devoted woman who stays with him until the end of story. Sittara is a wicked woman who plans to betray her husband and creates problems for him. The Princess is not only a good but also a wise woman. Paul McMichael Nurse, in *Eastern Dreams: How the Arabian Nights Came to the World*, argues that in *One Thousand and One Nights* women like Scheherazade “exhibit the superior wit and courage, more often associated with male heroes, necessary for bringing dangerous situations to safe conclusions” (82).
In the story of Ahmed, it is the Princess who saves the life of Ahmed when he is close to death.

“Her Imperial Guest: A Mayfair Mystery”

“Her Imperial Guest: A Mayfair Mystery” is a short story by James Payn. It was first published, in December 1875, in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, the oldest general-interest magazine in the US, launched in 1850. In 1876, this short story was published in the Australian Journal, without citing the author’s name. James Payn (1830–1895) is an English novelist and son of William Payn, a British government official. James Payn was educated at the Military Academy at Woolwich and then at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was the editor of Chambers’s Journal, 1859–74, and The Cornhill Magazine, 1883–96.

“Her Imperial Guest” is set in London and is from a first person point of view, using the “I” narrator. It is a comic story of Mrs Patterini’s ball for the Shah of Persia. Mrs Patterini is a Baroness, doing whatever is necessary to gain social standing. The main purpose of the story is to criticise Mrs Patterini’s attempt to achieve a social standing in London society. The story consists of three sections: “Invitation”, “Dubitation” and “Delectation”.

In “Invitation”, the narrator describes the background of Mrs Patterini’s family and introduces Mr Cyril Clarke. Clarke is a twenty-six year old barrister, without a shilling in the world, and yet he dares to fall in love with Mayra, the daughter of Mrs Patterini. Clarke has been very useful to Mrs Patterini because he has brought people to Evelyn Lodge who would never have come there on their
own accord. As Mrs Patterini “did not give up all hope of getting into society—real society—through Cyril’s good offices” (431), Clarke promises to invite the Shah of Persia to her house. Being a kind of person who “left no stone unturned to ‘get into society’”, she says to Clarke, “If you bring his Imperial Highness the Shah of Persia beneath my humble roof, there is nothing—nothing that I can deny you. You have only to name your reward” (433). Cyril replies that he wants to marry Myra, and Mrs Patterini who “was not one to go back from her word” says, “If the Shah comes here … you shall have Myra” (433).

The second section of the story, “Dubitation”, is about the excitement of people in London at the arrival of the Shah of Persia and describes different aspects of the Persian king’s attitudes, how he dresses, behaves, and eats, that I will refer to later in this chapter. It is the happiest day in Mrs Patterini’s life when the Morning Post announces that the Shah of Persia will honour her with his Imperial presence at Evelyn Lodge.

The last section, “Delectation”, describes the day when the Shah of Persia goes to Evelyn Lodge and then leaves London. The narrator says that “everybody who had caught a glimpse of the Shah that evening was dazzled and delighted” (434).

The day after the Shah leaves London, while Mrs Patterini is dreaming about the greatness of the Shah of Persia, Cyril Clark marries Myra Patterini. Mrs Patterini notices that newspapers describe last night’s event at her place and her house is complimented; however, there is not a word about the Shah’s visit to Evelyn Lodge (435). Then a “ridiculous and malicious rumour” spreads that the Shah of Persia “had never been at the Patterini ball at all” (435). The narrator then
says that, “among the numerous members of the household of Cyril Clarke, Esq.,
was to be seen an Eastern retainer, said to have been the Persian crossing-sweeper
in Regent-street, who disappeared at the very date of the great event I have been
describing—the ball at the Patterini’s” (435). The narrator reveals at the end that
Myra was aware of everything from the very beginning when Cyril “assured her
that ‘the man’ would come, and offered to ‘lay his life that her dear mother should
not be disappointed’” (436). The ending of the story shows that it was not the Shah
of Persia who has visited Evelyn Lodge but Clarke’s Persian servant.

The story presents a criticism of the English class system through Mrs
Patterini’s snobbery, and her struggle to be a part of a higher social class is mocked.
In order to criticise the class system in British society, the author chooses a Persian
servant in disguise of the Shah of Persia to convey his purpose. Mrs Patterini
invites the Shah of Persia who, like herself, is prestigious on the surface but shabby
underneath. In fact, “Her Imperial Guest” is not a story about the Shah of Persia
but about British women of a particular class; the author’s choice of the Shah of
Persia in order to convey his purpose is another example of “pseudo-orientalism”,
associated with tales which “use eastern characters and settings for their own
purpose that may have little to do with the East” (Al-Dabbagh 6).

The criticism of Mrs Patterini’s social climbing is represented through the
contradiction between the narrator’s and Mrs Patterini’s views of the Shah of
Persia. Mrs Patterini is fascinated by the Shah’s appearance: “Look at his fez cap;
look at his sabre; he is one blaze of diamonds, and every diamond worth a million
at the very least” (343). However, the narrator’s view of the Shah is that:
the personal appearance of the Eastern despot was itself attractive … His frame and face, it is true, reminded our Indian officers so strongly of a low-caste native servant that it is said they felt scruples in paying him due honour; but he gleamed with diamonds precious stones, rode a horse with a painted tail, and was evidently a person of distinction.

(432)

This contradiction is also apparent in Mrs Patterini’s character. She expends money to be named in the newspaper and on improving her social standing but she does not deserve it. The narrator’s view of the Shah, which contrasts with that of Mrs Patterini’s, echoes the narrator’s view of Mrs Patterini herself.

The narrator’s description of the Shah is Orientalist. The narrator compares the progression of the Shah among others in the ball to “a species of imbecile shamble that once distinguished him from the common herd” (434). Like The Persians, this story depicts the inferiority of the Shah of Persia.

While the purpose of this story is to criticise the British class system, the comedy is created through the mockery and humiliation of the Shah of Persia. In this text, the Oriental character is used to convey the author’s views on Western society. Although this text is not about Persians and is not written by an Australian author, it was read by the Australian colonial public. These kinds of texts, as Morrison argues, reveal “cultural influences from overseas in the colonial period, particularly in relation to the ideological impact of the fiction brought to colonial readers through the plentiful and cheap supply of local newspapers” (320).
“Silver-Land: Or, the Wonderful Adventures of Tim Pippin”

“Silver-Land: Or, the Wonderful Adventures of Tim Pippin” (1876), a fairytale for children by ‘Anonymous’, was published in the Australian Journal, a publication that was not scrupulous about copyright infringements. The first part of this story was printed in 1876, in vol. 11 no. 129 of the journal, and it continued in the next issue, vol. 11 no. 130. However, it was then discontinued because it was discovered that it was taken without attribution from the original Giant-Land: The Wonderful Adventures of Tom Pippin (1874) by Roland Quiz, the pseudonym of Richard Martin Howard Quittenton, a British author. Quiz’s stories of Tim’s adventures became very popular. In 1870, one of four Tim Pippin novels appeared in Our Young Folks Weekly Budget, a magazine published in the UK that continued to be reprinted until the end of the Second World War (Fowler np). Although “Silver-Land” is not written by an Australian author, it is an example of a 19th century text about Persia published and read in colonial Australia.

The story begins in typical English fairytale tradition: “LONG, long ago, there lived in a small village, situated on the border of a dense forest, a worthy old dame, named Marjery Pippin, who earned an honest, but scanty living, by making rush-bottoms for chairs” (307). The story also uses features of One Thousand and One Nights throughout Tim’s journey to the city of Silver-Land. Tim is empowered by magical tools taken from One Thousand and One Nights including a magical ring, a genie that obeys Tim’s commands and a silver lamp, which gives him light to go through the dark cave to rescue the characters Alladdin, Sindbad,
Ali Baba, Assad, Badroulboudour, Morgiana, Zuleka and Fatima from spirits and serpents. These characters, taken from One Thousand and One Nights, are represented in a different way in this story. Tim is represented as their saviour from serpents and spirits. These characters, some of whom are represented as heroic in One Thousand and One Nights, are represented in “Silver-Land” as weak and in need of rescue by Tim. In fact, the features of One Thousand and One Nights are juxtaposed with those of a Western fairytale. Magical elements in One Thousand and One Nights are given to a Western hero who makes use of them to rescue characters taken from those stories.

The genre of fairytale generally deals with a hero archetype, like Tim, who is very small for his age, smart and very brave. Tim is later appointed king of Silver-Land, and saves that city from being conquered by Xerxes, the king of Persia. Little Tim is able to defeat Xerxes, who has a huge army of twenty kings and five million men, by going to Xerxes’ chamber in an invisibility cloak, humiliating him and forcing him to withdraw his forces. To construct a hero, the presence of a villain to offset the hero is necessary. Xerxes by contrast to Tim is represented as a coward, who is both wicked and despicable.

Xerxes’ luxurious setting is described in detail, indicating his wealth and power: “Upon a rich cushion in the centre of his pavilion, where the floor was covered with a small square carpet that had a deep fringe of gold, sat the mighty Persian conqueror” (311). Xerxes is very proud of his wealth and fame and does not tolerate any disrespect of his authority. When Xerxes hears the voice of invisible Tim commanding him to leave Silver-Land, he threatens that it is better to “put your head into a lion’s mouth” than to treat him without respect (312).
Unlike Tim, Xerxes is not a heroic character but is shown to be a coward. Brave Tim lifts Xerxes off his feet and flings him to the ground, ordering him to leave Silver-Land, otherwise he will be dragged to the palace of torment. Frightened Xerxes screams for help, and by the command of Tim he becomes “as quiet as a mouse” and says “[y]ou’re a good spirit—I know you are—and I am a bad King” (312). Xerxes agrees to retreat, promising Tim he will withdraw his forces and return to Persia. While he has been defeated, he is very anxious about keeping his reputation. When Xerxes agrees to retreat he tells his Captains that they are returning not because of being defeated by Tim but because he has some urgent business that he cannot neglect for the sake of conquering Silver-Land, an unimportant place (112).

Xerxes is also represented in Aeschylus’ *The Persians*, introduced by Said as the foundation of Orientalist texts. Both texts show the defeat and humiliation of Xerxes. In *The Persians*, Xerxes’ humiliation is represented through his torn clothes and in “Silver-Land” through his cowardly behaviour and fear. The difference between these two texts is that in *The Persians*, the defeat of Xerxes is constructed through exultation of the Greeks over their enemy; however, the defeat of Xerxes in “Silver-Land” is because of his cowardly and faulty character. The defeat of Xerxes in “Silver-Land” is related to its genre. For Tim to be constructed as a hero, the presence of the defeated villain, Xerxes, is crucial. The Persian king is represented as extravagant, wicked and cowardly by contrast to self-disciplined, honourable and courageous Tim, the Western hero. “Silver-Land” is an example of the texts that Australians read about the Orient and Persians during colonial times.
In “Silver-Land” the Persians are represented as despotic, and there is a Western saviour who travels to Persia in order to civilise Persian people. However, in the story of Ahmed and Abdulla, there is no Western saviour. The Persians are represented as pious, honest and friendly people. The kings are not despotic but very generous. In “Silver-Land”, the motifs of *One Thousand and One Nights* are used to convey the author’s Orientalist purposes; the Western hero saves the hero of the stories in *One Thousand and One Nights*. However, in the stories of Ahmed and Abdulla, the motifs of *One Thousand and One Nights* are used to present a positive image of the Persians.

**Reworking *One Thousand and One Nights* in Other Colonial Journals**

Other colonial journals published stories influenced by structures, motifs and stories from *One Thousand and One Nights*, which came to Australia through writing from overseas. For example, in “A Little Persian Maid: How She Loved Her Father”, a short story by Alice Ham, an Australian writer, published in the *Queenslander* in 1886, the main character, Hal, is represented as a wise and strong Persian girl. She is the heroine of the story and makes an attempt to save the life of her father who is imprisoned by the king in a tower on an island in the river Tigris. Hal says, “I am young and strong”. The narrator comments, “when she was little and weak, she had determined, when she grew older, to save her father or die. Nothing could change the child's mind” (493). Although after rescuing her father they are arrested by soldiers and put to death, a monument is constructed in
memory of them called *Pearls from Persia*. Hal is represented as a symbol of courage and wisdom for other women as they, afterward, bring blossoms to hang on her tomb. In contrast to the common practice of representing Iranian women as oppressed and subjugated, in this colonial text an Iranian woman is represented as wise and strong, saving the life of a man.

“A King in Persia” is another example of the influence of *One Thousand and One Nights* on the representation of Persian women during the colonial period. This poem by C. A. Gordon-Cumming was published in *Birth: A Little Journal of Australian Poetry* in 1920. The representation of the Persian Princess in this poem is different from the other texts; it does not portray Shahrazad but the king’s first wife and her infidelity. Most of the rewritings of *One Thousand and One Nights* are about Shahrazad. However, this poem shows the backstory which makes Shahrazad’s story possible, and refers to the original reason for the Shah’s cruelty to women. In this poem, the Shah is represented as a kind and good governor who trusts his wife. However, the Princess is disloyal and in love with another man. When the Shah comes back from the council meeting he says:

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Beloved, all the council through to-day
Your face was with me like a flower
Concealed within my turban:
I could feel its petals, fragrant, pressed
Upon my brow
As your sweet lips—Ah! Kiss me even now. (42)
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In contrast, living with the king causes suffering for the Princess; she cannot rest and all her jewels are a burden for her. She shudders when she has to kiss the king. Every day she dreams of her beloved who, she says, is too passionate. When the king tells her “How cool your lips—how chaste, demure, art thou”, she dreams:

Alas, the fool!
How should he know
That did my lover only touch my hand
My heart would rise in a red flame,
And all my being grow suffused
With little veins of fire. (43)

Shahrazad saves the Shah from his cruelty which has root in the infidelity of his first wife. This shows that the Shah’s life was manipulated by the women with whom he lived, which is also a theme in the embedded stories of One Thousand and One Nights. In this poem the Persian king is not cruel and diabolic but rather romantic, which shows the complexity of responses to the reworking of One Thousand and One Nights.

Conclusion

The texts discussed in this chapter provide an overview of the way the Persians were represented in Australian colonial writing by focusing on texts published in the Australian Journal. This journal started with the purpose of providing Australian writing for Australian readers, and later in 1871 issued a
declaration that it would only publish stories set in the colonies, or serving colonial life or interest in order to “protect native industry in the matter of tale-writing” (qtd in Webby, “The Beginning of Literature” 47–48). However, two of the three texts which represent Persians were written by non-Australian writers, and none is set in Australia.

“Silver-Land” and “Her Imperial Guest” are neither set in Australia nor written by Australian writers. British authors wrote these two texts, which replicate Orientalist stereotypes. For example, in “Silver-Land”, a British boy is the saviour of Silver-Land from the despotism of Xerxes. This story represents a similar image to that of Xerxes in Aeschylus’s The Persians, introduced by Said as the foundation of Orientalist texts. Both texts show the humiliation and defeat of Xerxes, the despotic Shah of Persia. “Her Imperial Guest” also represents a very negative and erratic image of the Persian king, although its main purpose is not primarily to represent Persians. In “Her Imperial Guest” Persian characters are used to convey the author’s main purpose, which is to criticise the class system in Britain. This story is an example of what critics call “tales of pseudo-orientalism, because they use eastern characters and settings for their own purpose that may have little to do with the East” (Al-Dabbagh 6). Like Aeschylus’s The Persians, “Her Imperial Guest” shows the inferiority and humiliation of the Persian Shah who is proud of his wealth.

In contrast to “Silver-Land” and “Her Imperial Guest”, Pearls from Persia is about Persians and was written by an Australian writer for Australian readers. Although this series presents a positive image of Persians, the author’s note is clearly an Orientalist comment, presenting Persians as incapable of telling the truth:
the Persian “is now the admitted great story-teller of the east—in fact so great, that he cannot, without a great effort, tell the truth—and is therefore esteemed the greatest liar” (464). This shows that while the Australian Journal made an attempt to protect the native Australian literary industry by encouraging colonial writers, the impact of British ideology on the way Australians were thinking about the Persians was inevitable.

*One Thousand and One Nights* as a masterpiece of world literature, the impact of ancient Greek writing about Persia on the West’s understanding of the Persians, and British imperial ideology during the 19th century all played an important role in shaping Australian colonial writers’ perception of Persia. At the same time, Australian colonial writing about Persians is an example of what critics call “pseudo-orientalism” as they have little to do with the Orient and use Oriental characters and settings to convey the authors’ other purposes. The next chapter will examine to what extent the 19th century colonial view of Persians survives into modern times.

**Notes:**

2. This declaration was announced under Marcus Clarke’s period as editor.
3. These names are transcribed in different ways in Australian literary texts.
4. In my thesis, I prefer to use *One Thousand and One Nights* to refer to this collection.
5. Korassan: Khorassan is the name of a province in Iran.
6. Khums refers to the religious obligation of Muslims to pay one-fifth of the war booty to Mohammad and his family as a tax.
7. As footnoted in the story, “Cyrus—There is a common belief in Persia that an immense treasure was buried by this monarch”.
8. Shah Abbas’s capital was Isfahan. However, two different spellings are used by the author in the two stories: in “The Story of Abdulla” and “Ahmed the Cobbler” (part two), Isfahan; and in “Ahmed the Cobbler” (Part one), Ispahan.
9. The king in both “The story of Abdulla” and “Ahmed the Cobbler” is Shah Abbas the Great. However, the latter is told to Nader Shah by his storyteller a century later.
10. Hemmam or Hammam: a steam room, similar to the Turkish bath.
11. Isfahan/Ispahan is located between the two cities of Irak and Seestan (Arak and Sistan).
Chapter Three: The Survival of Orientalism in Recent Australian Texts

Introduction

While the previous chapter deals with the representation of Persia and the Persians in colonial Australia, this chapter discusses this representation in texts by non Iranian Australian writers in modern times. They are: Citiplex: a Story by Paul Rigby published in 1980, two years after Said’s Orientalism (1978) and one year after the Iranian revolution of 1979; and Monsters in the Sand (2009), an adventure novel for young adults by David Harris. I will examine how Iran/Persia is represented in relation to Australia/the West in light of an Orientalist consciousness, and to what extent 19th century imperial perspectives have survived into modern times.

Modern Orientalism

Modern Orientalism refers to the way 19th century Orientalism survives in contemporary discourse and cultural representation. Said’s theories of Orientalism constituted an important shift in writing about the Orient. Said argues, however, that modern Orientalists use stereotypes created by 19th century Orientalists to represent the Orient. Modern Orientalists follow the inherited lessons from their predecessors to the extent that 20th century Orientalism has been “formalized into a repeatedly produced copy of itself” (Orientalism 197). Extensive focus on the
Oriental past, as Hsu-Ming Teo argues in “Orientalism: An Overview”, was criticised by Abdel-Malek “because of the assumption that historical knowledge of the far-distant past shed light on the present, and that the study of language and religion were sufficient to understand the Orient and the Oriental” (7). Said argues that the essence and characteristics of the Orient inherited from the past were modernised and secularised to emerge as modern Orientalism. Thus, the East was accommodated to the framework of new ideas and texts.

After Orientalism which critiqued Orientalism as a means of domination, Leela Gandhi argues that now it is the critic’s task “to refuse the pleasure of an Occidental stereotype” (79). She adds that this refusal is possible “by returning to the Orientalist archive so as to listen more carefully to the Orientalists themselves” (79).

However, since the 9/11 attack in the US, the notion of Islamophobia, and views on Islamic fundamentalism have been strengthened. In an introduction to Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran Elaheh Rostami-Povey refers to these racist ideologies and argues that:

the “threat of Islamic fundamentalism” … and the rhetoric of “saving Muslim women” have conveniently served the West and in particular the USA’s project of imperial domination in the Middle East and North Africa region … The Muslim world in general and Iran in particular have been portrayed as archaic, pre-modern, rigidly dogmatic and violent, while Western societies are presented as being modern, progressive and secular. The idea that the “West” and the Islamic world can be said to form distinct and oppositional
“civilisations” is problematic and fundamentally ahistorical. It ignores both the rich history of contact and exchange between cultures and the diversity present within them. (1)

In 1993, the dichotomy of East and West was elaborated by Samuel P. Huntington in his article “Clash of Civilisations?” His thesis was then developed in a book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, published in 1996. Huntington argues that “THE WEST IS NOW [capitals in the original] at an extraordinary peak of power in relation to other civilizations” (39), and adds that, “The very phrase ‘the world community’ has become the euphemistic collective noun (replacing ‘the Free World’) to give global legitimacy to actions reflecting the interests of the United States and other Western powers” (39). Referring to V. S. Naipaul’s argument, Huntington states that “Western civilization is the ‘universal civilization’ that ‘fits all men’” (40).

The discourse of the clash of civilisations, as Rostami-Povey argues, “suggests a clash between an ‘anti-modern’ Islam and Western modernity. It ignores the fact that modernity is a process which occurs at different levels and is experienced unevenly” (2). She adds that this discourse ignores the fact that modernity implies the following: capitalist development; the formation of different classes and patriarchal relations; the formation of the modern state and other institutions such as the army, education, health, employment, the media, constitutional laws and monopoly of power over people within the framework of the nation-state, all of which have occurred in all Muslim-majority societies including Iran. (2)
In this chapter I will investigate how the debates surrounding the clash between West and East are represented in late 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} century Australian literature.

\textit{Citiplex: a Story}

\textit{Citiplex: a Story} is a novel by Paul Rigby published in 1980. The story is set after the Islamic revolution (1979) in Iran. It appears that the main subject of the novel is the journey of Sacha and Troy to the village of Findhorn in Scotland where they undergo personal transformation through introduction to the New Age Movement. Before starting their journey, they meet in Australia under strained and coincidental circumstances. Sacha’s and Troy’s family backgrounds are represented through their conversations. In this way, the novel examines differences between religions, cultures and genders, especially Sacha’s experience as a woman dominated by her father and husband in the patriarchal and religious society of Iran and its impact on her life.

Sacha is a young, educated Iranian woman who left her children with her parents in Iran to move to Australia with her husband, Allan, because of his employment with the Iranian diplomatic service. Allan, born and educated in London, had talked about the freedom and equality of women before their marriage but he has gradually assumed an autocratic role after their two children are born. He uses the Islamic faith as an excuse for his behaviour. Sacha had been hopeful that the move to Australia would make Allan less domineering in their relationship but this does not occur, so she eventually leaves him.
Troy is an Australian whose partner, Deborah, has died in an accident. On the way back from her funeral, Troy’s car crashes into Sacha’s car. This is one of the many implausible plot twists in the novel. Sacha follows Troy to his home, seeking compensation. Being in a miserable mental condition Troy invites her into his apartment. The narrator then states, “Something important was revealing itself but she couldn’t guess what” (18). In this way, the novel introduces the notion of fateful meetings and spiritual destiny.

Sacha and Troy fall in love and Troy decides to accompany her to Iran as Sacha feels compelled to bring her children back to Australia because life in Iran would not be easy for her. She makes clear distinctions between Iran and Australia, stating for example that in Iran people are shot, but not in Australia. When she returns to Iran, Sacha’s father, who is represented as a religious and patriarchal man, wants her to stay in Iran where she will benefit from family protection. He tells Sacha that he will not allow her to take her children to Australia. However, she leaves her Iranian family and goes with Troy as “she didn’t want the benefits of religious law or political promises” (60). “Benefits” here is ironic in the sense that what is considered as a benefit for Sacha’s father is considered as a loss of freedom for Sacha.

Throughout the novel, Sacha and Troy are guided by spirituality and a higher power. On the way back to Australia, Troy reads an advertisement in a tourism magazine about the village of Findhorn in Scotland. In yet another highly contrived plot coincidence, they meet Martin who has spent time in Findhorn. Martin, seated next to them on the plane, tells them that the Findhorn community “is where people learn to live guided completely by their own intuition” (77).
Extending the novel’s thematic concern with fate and spirituality, Sacha and Troy’s journey is extended to include Findhorn as “The stuff about Scotland had to mean something” (79).

In Findhorn they learn to look at their religions in a different light. Catholicism returns to Troy, and Mr and Mrs Robinson, an elderly couple in the community, give Sacha a new vision of her country: “Do you realise how much of our Western culture comes from Iran?” (150), they ask, and tell her about Zoroastrianism because “what we know today as Judaism and Christianity developed directly from there” (150). Finally it is revealed to them in Findhorn that all monotheistic religions are looking for the same thing—“One True God” (150). By linking all religions with spirituality, the community of Findhorn creates a world culture which includes people from different parts of the world with different religions. In this way the novel tends to break down barriers between East and West.

Sacha and Troy exhibit conflicting characteristics. They are non-religious and critique their parents’ religions and backgrounds. At the same time, they are influenced by the spiritual religion in Findhorn. They are also ordinary and fallible; Troy falls in love with another woman and temporarily leaves Sacha for her sake. These conflicts mould them, however, and prompt them to search for enlightenment. They receive a mission to tell the world about their revelation in Findhorn. At the end of the novel, Sacha and Troy come to understand that they are part of the universe and their spiritually-inspired relationship means they were meant to be together.
The novel interrogates both Catholicism and Islam through several characters’ responses and offers New Age thinking as an alternative. The final message of the text is positive in its representation of Iran’s pre-Islamic religion. The novel, despite these grand aims, stumbles into divisive or dismissive discourse which at times privileges Western cultural and religious values.

Iran, the West/Australia and the New Age Movement

Citiplex explores the possibility of creating a world culture based on New Age ideals. Its purpose, arguably, is to break down the barriers that have been historically and ideologically constructed to divide East and West. The novel does this by the use of parallel plot structures in representing Sacha’s and Troy’s families and their personal lives, and also by introducing a world culture in Findhorn at the end of the novel. This plot structure allows for an exploration of the values of Iranian families, their cultural and religious beliefs and gender roles compared to those of Australians/Westerners, which is not without its problems.

Family is an important concept not only for Sacha’s parents but also for Troy’s. Iranians rely on the strength of their families for protection and, for Troy, “the family was a constant theme of his mother … a common denominator for all denominations” (35). Both Sacha’s and Troy’s parents are religious and want their children to follow their religions. Troy’s mother accepted Troy’s relationship with Deborah, his previous partner, as she was also Catholic. Similarly, for Sacha everything was perfect in her relationship with her husband, Allan, at the beginning because her father was impressed by Allan’s conversion to Islam (24). While the
novel represents parallel family values, it is not neutral and a sense of Iranian “Otherness” pervades both Troy’s and Sacha’s discourse.

While the novel exaggerates patriarchy in Iranian society, it represents Australia as a totally egalitarian society. In Iranian society, the father and husband are represented as the core members of a family. Sacha’s mother calls her husband “The Master of My Soul” which was “the affectionate title of honour that the family had conferred on father years ago” (60). The father is represented as a person who makes decisions for other members of the family and defines what they have to do and how they have to behave. Sacha’s father does not let her take her children to Australia and blames her for leaving her husband. His patriarchal stance is indicated through his directives to Sacha and his belief that, “when a girl gets married [she] leaves the protection of her family and enters the protection of her husband’s family” (58). Although Sacha’s father allows her to go to university, when she comes to take her children to Australia he says, “I sent you, a girl, to the university … but now I know that you would have been happier without such freedom” (58). However, Sacha does not want “the benefits of a benevolent patriarch” and resists her patriarchal family (60).

The representation of Sacha’s character presents a sense of women’s oppression under patriarchy in Iran. There is a causal link between this representation of oppressiveness and her decision to stay in Australia. Sacha implicitly states that in Iran “things couldn’t go well” for her (31); “so many educated girls in Iran have no choice, but for me it’s different” (31). She believes that being in Australia is a good opportunity for her to have freedoms that women in Iran do not have. This sets up a dichotomy in which Australia is represented as
an egalitarian country where educated women like Sacha can find what they are looking for, whereas in Iran women are oppressed and have to endure restrictions on freedom. Sacha is presented as comparing herself with Australian mothers and sees a better situation for them: she couldn’t “claim her sons as easily as an Australian mother. She had tasted the West but it didn’t make her Western” (34). This implies a privileged position for Australian mothers in comparison with Sacha, as an Iranian mother, an oppressed outsider. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty states, the construction of oppressed “other” women are created by reference to Western women who have the freedom to make their own decisions (65).

In Citiplex, the author makes an attempt to avoid constructing barriers and boundaries between East and West. When Sacha and Troy talk about Islam and Catholicism they agree that while there are differences there are also fundamental similarities. Before going to Iran, Troy criticises the common perception of boundaries between East and West by saying, “East was East and West was West and the twain could never meet. Who the hell dreamed that one up anyway?” (36). Troy tells Sacha, “we fit together much more completely than most couples” (40). Despite Troy’s view on East and West, Iranian women are represented in the novel as oppressed and Iranian men as patriarchal and misogynistic. Troy is positioned as Sacha’s saviour, a historically entrenched ideal which, as Spivak has noted, involves “white men saving brown women from brown men” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 33). Troy saves Sacha from patriarchal and backward Iranian men. Some parts of the novel suggest that his attitude is typically Western. For example, Troy shelters Sacha in his house when she leaves Allan and becomes homeless. Sacha tells Troy not long after their meeting that: “I’m accustomed to you. I’m afraid to
leave *you*. I know I must go to my children whatever is happening in Iran. But without you—I am lost” (38). To emphasise the role of Troy as Sacha’s saviour and her dependency on Troy, the pronoun “you” is written in italics. Statements such as these underpin divisions between East and West, white men liberating oppressed and subjugated Eastern women.

Individuality and freedom for women are frequently represented as outcomes of Western power which justifies colonisation as a civilising mission. As Wan-Chen Yen in *Governing Sex, Building the Nation* states, European colonialism often justified its “civilising mission” by claiming that it was “rescuing native women from oppressive patriarchal domination” (31). To be free from their patriarchal society, Iranian women need the West to protect and save them: “She liked more about this man than his goodness. He had literally smashed up her old existence. He was an agent of liberation” (34). As an agent of liberation, Troy is once more positioned as superior, with agency and heroic qualities.

Troy tells Sacha that he loves her and has decided to stay with her, and says, “If you really want to live in Perth and be pregnant you can do it with me” (174). While Troy is positioned as her saviour, the traditional gender role represented by pregnancy is still required to secure the superiority of Troy. At the beginning of the novel, Sacha hopes that her life with Allan would be better in Australia as “a very free and easy place” (25). Iran is presented not as a free country, but a patriarchal country where there is no chance of betterment in her relationship with Allan. However, it is questionable whether Sacha finds the freedom and equality which she failed to achieve in Iran with Allan, in Australia or in Findhorn with Troy, as she is still reliant on a man.
While Troy is positioned as Sacha’s saviour, it is his broader comments about Sacha and Iran that also add to the novel’s stereotypical representation of the West/East dichotomy. Sacha and her culture are described as “a closed book”. She is “an unknown quality”, “Supposedly impure. Certainly a gamble. After all she was from the East” (41). In this way Sacha is presented as the mysterious and exotic “other”. The novel is not sophisticated enough to criticise Troy’s limited understanding of the East. There is no full authorial control of the message, particularly in terms of the narrator’s position in relation to the characters. At some points, it is not easy to differentiate the author from the narrator.

Troy’s stereotypical view is not limited to Sacha. He describes Iran, before his visit:

There’s oil, the most beautiful women in the world and at the moment they shoot people … The Iranian character is poetic; it is said, even mystical. When such a quality of idealism is applied to something practical like politics it can be rather dangerous … I should have added that the Iranians I know are remarkably intelligent. (45–46)

Said argues in *The Persians* that “there is the motif of the Orient as insinuating danger. Rationality is undermined by Eastern excesses, those mysteriously attractive opposites to what seem to be normal values” (57). Iranians are intelligent but their intelligence is subverted by mystical and poetic characteristics, which make for a kind of dangerous idealism. Moreover, after travelling from Iran to Findhorn, Troy generalises about Iranians and says to Sacha, “I thought you were a level-headed scientist despite those mystical desert donkeys you have in Iran” (136). As Said argues, this generalisation makes an “immutable law about the
Oriental nature, temperament [and] mentality” (Orientalism 86). After visiting Iran, Troy’s view of Iranians or “mystical desert donkeys” becomes worse and Sacha is not differentiated from them.

In the novel, Iran is described through the lens of Western ideology. However, Australia exists almost as a neutral background in the sense that very little is said about it, but what is said is always positive. In contrast, Iranian society is represented mostly through criticism of Sacha who comes from Iran but is the creation of an author from the West. In The Persians, as Said argues, it is the Persian queen who describes the Persians and it is the West who speaks for the Orient. Similarly, in this novel, the main voice of the narration is given to Sacha, but it has to be noted that Sacha, the Iranian character, is created by the Western author. When Troy decides to accompany Sacha to Iran she warns him, “Iran isn’t like Australia. Here [in Australia] there is a mail strike and the truck drivers protested by blocking off the main roads. People get upset but nobody is shot” (38). This statement implies that Australia is a safe and democratic country, but Iran is not safe and people are shot for protesting. Sacha tells Troy how people in her hometown were treated by the Shah’s soldiers in 1945 when,

Azarbaijan province [her hometown] declared itself an independent socialist republic. A year later the Shah’s soldiers moved into Tabriz. More savage killing. It doesn’t matter who was right and who was wrong. There was great misery just the same. (48)

After hearing this, Troy says,
we thought things were bad in 1975 … Gough Whitlam’s socialist government was dismissed by the Governor-General. I expect you’ve heard about it. That was a travesty of democracy. But as you were saying about Australia last night, no-one got shot. (48)

Troy’s qualification that at least “no one got shot”, is an implicit demarcation of a safe Australia as against an uncivil Iran. Troy goes to Iran without having a visa and the officer does not let him pass the border. Troy tells him a lie—that he is in Iran for business—and asks for a transit visa. However, the officer rejects his claim, takes his passport and detains him at a hotel at the airport. Finally Troy gets his passport back and leaves the country with Sacha without being able to visit Iran. When Troy leaves Iran, he says, “Now I know how it feels to pass in through the pearly gates … It means how fantastic to be free” (73). He understands the value of the freedom he has in Australia after experiencing Iran. This implies that in contrast with Iranians, Australians are free. Negative issues about Iran are highlighted and exaggerated and almost nothing positive about Iranian society is said. When the couple are on the plane to Scotland, the narrator reveals Troy’s thinking: “Had he forgotten so quickly that in Iran people were dying. Men were being pushed up against walls and shot in cold blood. Maybe they deserved it but there was no way of knowing” (90). While depicting the barbarous and murderous Orientals, this suggests that they deserve it. This is similar to Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin’s view in “Persia and the Persians” that Iranians deserve the despotism of their government: “it was probably the only remedy that could be salutary in such a country” (50). Troy voices these views without having experienced Iran at all. His detention at the airport may have felt like imprisonment,
but it came not because of Iranian tyranny but as a consequence of his own carelessness: he had not applied for a visa.

Although very little is said about Australia, there is a clear description of Findhorn and its main purpose, which is to create an ideal hybrid culture. It is trying to create a “new planetary culture” (103) through what the novel terms the “One Divine Source” (103). In Findhorn, Sacha and Troy learn to look at their religions in a different light when Mr and Mrs Robinson, an elderly couple in the community, explain how monotheistic religions, especially Zoroastrianism and Catholicism, are in agreement with each other: “the Persians were nearer to Findhorn ideas”, and confession of sins and even apologising for sins against the earth is similar in both Zoroastrianism and Catholicism (148). Mrs Robinson says about Islam that the Prophet Mohammed was working to bring about an agreement between religions and “Islam was not so tough as we think of it today” (150). By connecting all monotheistic religions through spirituality, the novel attempts to create a world culture which includes people from different parts of the world who follow different religions to break down barriers between East and West.

However, Islamic Iran both before and after the revolution is not endorsed by Findhorn’s ideology. Iran is contrasted with Findhorn through Sacha’s perspective. For example, after remembering “the worsening climate of strikes in Iran prior to the revolution” which was because of disagreements between different revolutionary groups, she says to Troy, “that’s the whole point about Findhorn. They don’t always agree with each other but they have the courage to solve their problems without fighting” (131). By contrast to a democratic and privileged West, Iranians are represented as irrational, and unable to understand and accept different
views. In Findhorn, Sacha sees that people, who are too many to be one family, kiss each other in public. She compares this with how it was in Iran where only members of one family might kiss each other in public. Sacha sees this cultural difference as a barrier between people in Iran and considers the way Westerners behave to be a privilege:

There was something entirely Western about the way barriers between people had been broken down. Despite her university training and her inclinations to freedom she knew that in the last analysis she was Eastern. It was a quiet internal admission; no-one could have squeezed it from her by any argument. (98)

Although Sacha is educated she is not able to break down the barriers as she remains Eastern.

Although the people of Findhorn want to set up a world culture, a hybrid space for people from different places and different cultures, they are critical of cultural differences. James, one of the members of the community, tells Sacha that he came to Findhorn “because it’s a gateway into the New Age. This is where the new culture is. This is where we can discover our new role. This is the place for the new people to come and recognise each other: share with each other” (119). At the same time, he, a supporter of world culture in the community, criticises Sacha for what she is and wants her to forget her past and Eastern characteristics in order to fit the world culture practised in the community. For example, Sacha has a backache but does not allow James to massage her. James criticises Sacha for this and says, “Don’t give me that corny stuff ... I thought you had cut yourself free of that eastern Harem garbage and become a free woman ... I thought you were your
own person. If you could come all the way here from Iran just on guidance then you ought to be free of outdated conventions”. Sacha replies, “Yes I am a free person. And also I don’t need massage” (116). She doesn’t want to be touched which is a consequence of the way she has been brought up. This shows that James does not accept cultural differences and suggests that this world culture is not a tolerant space but more inclined to favour the West.

After being criticised by James, the narrator reveals Sacha’s thinking that, “There was some truth in what James had said. The Foundation was a civilized place and not some backward village” (117). Sacha confirms James’s words by admitting that her behaviour is not acceptable in the Foundation, “a civilized place”, implying that Iran is “an uncivilized place and backward village” (117). At the end of the novel when James, Sacha and other members of the community are in the bus, the narrator reveals Sacha’s thinking, “it was natural to put their arms about each other. They were all one family—whether their upbringing was Western or Eastern. It was natural to touch James in a cousinly way” (122). This challenges the community’s desire to create a hybrid culture: Sacha’s cultural differences are not acceptable; she is struggling to pass cultural barriers and detaches herself from her own culture in order to conform to the community’s values.

The world culture created in the community is presented as rooted in the great civilisation of Iran. Mr Robinson says:

Do you realise how much of our Western culture comes from Iran? In the Most ancient times there were the Magi, the mysterious holy men. And out of that tradition came Zoroaster. He was very great spiritual
leader around six hundred BC. What we know today as Judaism and Christianity developed directly from there. (147)

In other words, Iran is represented as a source of Western civilisation. Said argues that:

What gave the Oriental’s world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West. (40)

Sacha’s character is created by a Western author. She criticises almost everything about Iran and Iranians. In Findhorn, it is Mr and Mrs Robinson and Tim, the gardener, who project wisdom onto Iranians and enlighten Sacha about the history and the greatness of pre-Islamic Iranian civilisation. The Findhorn affirmation of Iran is mostly limited to pre-Islam Iran, which actually sets up a contrast, casting Islam and modern Iran in a poor light.

The novel breaks down the barriers between East and West by showing similarities between them such as parallel family and religious structures. Alongside these similarities, their differences are maintained which illustrates a hegemonic relationship between East and West. The novel promotes a world culture, a hybrid place, by bringing all the monotheistic religions and people from different parts of the world together through spirituality. However, this space is not accepting of any cultural difference between East and West. Sacha, in order to be a part of this hybrid culture, has to give up her Eastern attitudes, and only then comes elevation of Sacha at the end of the novel. Findhorn appoints her as “an
incarnation of one of the Masters of wisdom” (150), and yet to be with Troy she still needs to retain her traditional role of partner and mother.

**Monsters in the Sand**

*Monsters in the Sand* (2009) is an adventure novel for young adults by David Harris, part of a series called *Time Raiders*. The story is set in the 19th century. The novel narrates the story of Austen Henry Layard, an Englishman, who has started his journey to the Middle East to follow his childhood dream of finding Nineveh, the lost civilisation of Assyria (2500 BC to 605 BC). Nineveh, one of the world’s greatest cities in antiquity, was the capital and the oldest city of the Assyrian empire. Today, the Assyrian territory is part of several nations, including northwest Iran, northern Iraq, northeast Syria and southeast Turkey. In this novel, historical facts and real people are combined with fictionalised events. The main concern, as the author and publisher state in the novel’s Preface, is to criticise the 19th century archaeologists who were destroying and plundering archaeological sites (np).

The novel includes historical fact and is heavily influenced by the real Austen Henry Layard’s memoir, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (1853). The main characters in the novel are based on real people. Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894) was an English traveller, archaeologist, politician and diplomat known as the excavator of Nimrud and Nineveh. Another European, Paul-Émile Botta (1802–1870), was a French scientist who served as Consul in Mosul from 1842. Both of these men were looking for Nineveh in 1842, the year given in the
novel for Austen’s excavation of Nineveh. The main plot is based on historical fact. In both the novel and in real life, after spending months in Persia, Austen returns to Constantinople in 1842 where Sir Standford Canning, the British Ambassador, employs him to explore the ruins of Assyria. Austen is looking for Nineveh, and finally finds it in Kuyunjik which had already been partly excavated by Botta. The novel has a happy ending in the sense that Austen finds Nineveh and sends rafts of treasures to England. Despite the problems created by some local people and lack of time and money, Austen achieves his aims with the help of the British embassy and the native people working for him. By using real people and historical facts, the author makes an attempt to provide his novel with a greater sense of reality.

The genre of the adventure story generally deals with a hero who is overcoming obstacles to accomplish a mission in exotic locales with “intriguing details” and “formidable obstacles”, and villains who “are almost always drawn in extremes and are very evil” (Saricks 15, 19). While the novel is a criticism of Austen, it seems that there is at the same time a tendency to emphasise his heroic qualities. For him to be shown as truly heroic, the native people are generally represented in a negative light. Austen’s story is described on the back cover in these terms: “He rides into a WAR, stumbles barefoot across the searing desert and fights to protect his monsters from NOMADS who, at any moment, will be moving in for the KILL”.

While this shows the novel’s generic conventions, including the fight, the hero and exotic location, this description reinforces imperialist and Orientalist
views of the native people. They are nomads and backward and Austen goes to protect his monsters, Assyrian sculptures, from them.

The novel has an episodic plot in the sense that one short adventure or dangerous situation comes after the other. There are no logical links between episodes because the story is all about Austen’s adventure of finding Nineveh. It focuses on Austen’s mission and what happens to him. In between his adventures, he rescues native people. At the beginning of the novel, for example, when Austen is in Persia, he goes to the eunuchs’ tent to save Prince Hussein. However, after Austen goes to Constantinople to get help, the novel then continues with his adventure in Iraq and readers do not find out what happens to Hussein whose story remains unfinished.

The novel includes paratextual materials to frame and add an informative and authoritative touch to the story. As mentioned previously, the Preface to the novel states the main concern and ideology of the novel, which is to criticise the archeologists and their 19th century method of “Dig, Grab and Run” (np). However, without reading this Preface, the reader may not realise this because in the novel’s narrative Austen is represented as a hero. After the Preface, there is a “Warning to the users of this product” which informs readers that the novel is a combination of history and fiction, and the author is attempting to reveal the hidden truth of history through his historical fiction. Moreover, the novel starts with an urgent letter dated 20 June 1842 from Colonel Taylor to the British embassy stating that Austen, who has important information from the Persian wars, has been sent to the embassy. It is likely that the Persian wars refer to the presence of Russia in Iran. From 1826–1828 there was a war between Iran and Russia which was ended by the Treaty of
Turkmenchay. Based on this Treaty, some parts of Iran were ceded to Russia. At this time, there was a conflict between Russia and Britain. Both of these Empires wanted to have control over countries in Central Asia and the presence of Russia in the region was a threat to Britain. The novel refers to the presence of Russia in Persia, for example, when the narrator notes that the army of Teheran’s governor has a regiment of Russian-trained artillery (14) and that there are Russian officers in his camp (22). The letter sets the book firmly in the period it describes.

In the “warning to users of this product” the readers are informed that “These stories are a portal into an alternative reality, an amazing world where fiction tells the truth … The author has the dirt on things these archaeologists revised, made up, or left out of their official versions. Historical ‘truth’ may lie. Historical fiction reveals all kinds of truths” (np). The intended readers of this novel are young adults who are informed, in the Preface, that the novel is a criticism of Austen and other 19th century archaeologists who were destroying and plundering archaeological sites. At the same time, the main purpose of children’s fiction is to teach them and help them develop a world view. The novel is an Australian text written for mainstream Australian secondary school readers. In noting the pedagogical function of storytelling, Jill Brown argues, “Children’s stories have taught, indoctrinated and built boundaries. The changing boundaries implicit in Australian children’s fiction both mirror and reinforce the changing boundaries of Australian society” (3). While the main concern of the novel is to criticise 19th century archaeologists, boundaries are constructed in such a way as to make a distinction between colonial white men and the native peoples of the Middle East. Brown adds that national identity for Australians is created by representation of the “dominant
group as the norm and others as deviant” (3). In this novel, while the archaeologists are represented as reckless and competitive adventurers, white men are represented as the dominant group who are convinced that they are saving the archaeological sites. This dichotomous and hierarchical ideology of racial superiority perpetuates a belief that the Orientals need colonial powers to civilise their land and society. In fact, the ideology of the earlier period seems to be embraced by Harris throughout the story and the novel replicates Orientalist thinking. The novel is written in the tradition of Indiana Jones (author website) which is an example of the contemporary adventure genre in which the theme of imperialist domination is represented through the plotlines of the adventure story (Postone and Traube 13). The Orientalist ideas are criticised in the Preface, at the same time as these ideas are reinforced in order to construct Austen as a hero.

“A Portal into an Alternative Reality”?

Monsters in the Sand is not primarily concerned with Iran and Iranians and the main setting is not Persia. However, Persians are part of the story and remain connected as the novel tends not to differentiate between Arabs and Persians but rather homogenises different groups of people in the Middle East. The local people move from one place to another while cultural and geographical borders and boundaries are not clearly defined. The novel tends to conflate non Western countries into the homogenous cultural entity which is another characteristic of Orientalism. Austen is in Iraq; however, he wears Persian clothes and offers his friend, who is seated on a “carpet”, “Persian wine” (99). Benjamin Isakhan argues
that the output of Orientalism was an ideological fantasy that “served to homogenise, demonise and stereotype the Middle East according to fairly reductive and negative terms” (6). Local people are generally represented in a negative light, doing cruel things and constantly fighting with each other, in need of the West to rescue and civilise them. Austen, the white man, is represented as their saviour. This is not his main mission but he does it in order to achieve his main purpose—finding Nineveh.

In accordance with the conventions of the adventure genre, the author has imaginatively selected and added details to history. In Layard’s book, for example, after introducing his host, Awad, the sheik of the Jehesh tribe which had been plundered by the pasha, Layard offers him regular employment and a fixed wage as a superintendent of workmen. Layard then gives a brief account of his desire to find the treasures and the next day Layard, Awad and his workmen go to Nimrud. In Layard’s book this episode is written in just three short paragraphs. However, what Harris makes of this episode in his work of fiction is quite different. Harris narrates this episode in five pages. In the novel, as in Layard’s book, Awad is introduced as the sheik whose Jehesh tribe had been plundered by the pasha. However, Awad then tells Austen how unjust and cruel the pasha is. When Awad understands that Austen is looking for Nineveh, he asks whether Austen is the Englishman, known as “the Lion” for his secret ability to find gold (73–74). As a hero of an adventure story, Austen has ingenuity and the skill to find gold which help him accomplish his desperate mission which is finding Nineveh, an exotic and mysterious ancient city in the Middle East. Harris presents the native people as blessed and happy for Austen to be in their land (76). Awad thanks God for
sending Austen to his people (74). Austen then tells Awad that he, Austen, must hide his possessions and equipment, otherwise they will be stolen (75). Finally, before going to Nimrud, Awad, who receives two silken handkerchiefs from Austen, assures him, “From this night, you may pass safely through my land with a tray of gold on your head” (76). Oscar Moro-Abadia argues that recent historians of archaeology voice their dissatisfaction with their “predecessors as the history of archaeology had been limited to a simple chronicle of spectacular discoveries ‘without taking much account of the ideas and institutions surrounding them’” (4). This is true in Layard’s account of discoveries in Nineveh. Layard mostly describes the archaeological sites, their shape, history, and inscriptions without writing anything about his motivation. Layard’s book is fictionalised in the 21st century by Harris to criticise the 19th century Orientalist view; however, in the fictionalised events, Austen, the English man, is known as “the Lion” for his secret ability to find gold (73–74), and the Orientals feel blessed and happy for Austen to be in their land (76) which shows the hierarchal relationship between Austen and the locals. Austen is the hero of the adventure story, and the novel reinforces the depiction of him as saviour and civiliser of the locals.

Local people all over the region are represented as poor and savage, always at war with each other. In Persia, a Persian leader, Au Karim, takes Austen to Castle Tul to save the life of Prince Hussein. He sees crows tear the flesh of doctors who were not able to cure Hussein, and the soldiers of Teheran’s governor are hanging from spikes (9). He sees a soldier punishing a servant for dropping a plate by smashing out his teeth and hammering them into his skull (16). When he starts his mission in Iraq he finds that sheik Awad’s village has been destroyed:
the walls and roofs have fallen in and been blackened by fire without any sign of life remaining (69). People are starving and have scattered because of the civil war. In Mosul, people have been killed; “[s]keletons sprawled in heaps” and “[d]ried corpses hung heads down” (112). Although only a short part of the story is located in Persia, Persians are represented as the most savage people in the region as they kill each other in dreadful ways.

The natives are represented as naïve people who don’t have any concern for their treasures and do not understand that the white men are plundering their archaeological sites. They excavate the land not because they are interested in Nineveh and its treasures but because they are starving and dig the land for Austen to receive food in return for finding priceless treasures for him. While the native people are excavating to find an ivory sculpture, Austen promises them a feast: “tonight we will kill a sheep—two sheep. We’ll open bags of figs and raisins. We’ll feast until our stomachs are so hard we crack fleas on them” (81). This makes the workmen shout and laugh. When they find the sculptures the narrator comments that Austen “didn’t know whether to cry or laugh” (83). Nothing is said about the feeling of the natives. Not only do they not understand that they are being plundered by Austen but they are happy and believe that they are blessed that Austen is in their land. When Austen returns to Selamiya, people are happy that “the Lion” has returned and they lick his hand for they will be prosperous again (123). In Layard’s account, after finding the sculptures, he mentions that, “The Arabs were no less excited than myself by the discovery” (25). This shows that Orientalist hegemony is reinforced in the novel. Native people are represented as passive, non-autonomous and non-participating (Orientalism 97).
Some native characters are represented in a positive light; however, these characters also do not have any regard for their treasures. Hormuzd is represented as Austen’s assistant who wants to be an archaeologist. Hormuzd goes to Mirkan to save the lives of his people. However, in response to Hormuzd who asks him why he prepared to battle an army for people he does not know, Austen says, “I’ve been waiting for an excuse to examine some old ruins in your mountains” (111). Hormuzd then says excitedly, “Mr Layard, you’ve always told me the truth” (111). In fact, Hormuzd, who wants to be an archaeologist, does not understand Austen’s colonial motivations. Tahyar is represented as an educated and honourable person who aims to bring about prosperity and glory for the people of Mosul. However, he does not understand that Austen aims to plunder the archaeological sites so informs Austen about the exact location of Nineveh and allows him to dig in Kuyunjik just to prove to him that he is wrong about excavating Nimrud. Tahyar and Hormuzd are represented as good characters; however, they do not have any understanding of their treasures being plundered and help Austen achieve his purposes in their land.

Austen is the hero of the adventure story, and the novel reinforces the depiction of him as saviour and civiliser. After Austen tells Hussein’s sister, Khanumi, who asks Austen why he does not escape, that he does not like running away from tyrants (17), he teaches Hussein, “there are some things we must do—or die here … Like search for Nineveh” (19). This is an example of Austen as hero of the adventure story: he is strong and committed to his assigned mission and nothing can stop him achieving his purpose. However, through the construction of the hero, local people are represented as tyrants, and Austen’s motivations for his
actions are questionable. Austen gathers people of the sheik’s village, who were scattered and starving because of the war, puts up tents for them and gives them money and food. In fact, Austen’s purpose for doing this is to find workmen to excavate the land and find treasures for him (74–75). Moreover, being informed that people in Mosul and Mirkan are at war, Austen decides to go there and save lives. His purpose for going to Mirkan and Mosul is not actually to help them but to explore other archaeological sites. Austen tells Hormuzd that one day he may excavate the ruins of his city, Mirkan (111).

Austen attempts to teach some of his values to the local people. When Muslim workmen refuse to work with the new Christian workers as they believe they will kill each other, Austen attempts to encourage them to work together by saying, “[l]et the spirit of harmony live here among a community of believers … [And] make sure each man will respect the others” (127), and asserting that “no man will interfere in the private worship of another” (128). However, his underlying reason is to have both Muslims and Christians work to achieve his purpose. He realises that if the workmen kill each other, he will not be able to find Nineveh.

Austen has a self-serving relationship with the natives which is clear in his attitude towards the sheik. In order to have the sheik’s support to find workmen and protect the tents and treasures in his absence, Austen helps the sheik’s people and rescues them several times from tyrants. To convince Awad to find ropes and felts for him to be able to send treasures to the museum, Austen tells the sheik, “[b]y the laws of our friendship, sheik, what is my property is also yours. What is yours, I may claim” (148). However, later when the sheik informs him that the
ropes and felts are not in his tent, Austen threatens to send one of the crudest tyrants, Daoud, to the sheik’s camp in search of his ropes and felts: “Think what Daoud will do with your people, while you are imprisoned in a dark underground pit of lepers crawling with lice and rats. Think of the floggings you will suffer. Most of all, think about the executioner” (148). His attitude towards the sheik has changed because without the ropes and felts he is not able to achieve his purpose of shipping treasures from Nimrud (144). At the end of the novel, intending to return again to send further treasures to England, he tells sheik Awad, “we will always be only one breath apart” (173), an attempt to rekindle their friendship for his own further gain.

Alongside of Austen’s self-serving motivations for helping local people, there are moments when his motivation seems humanitarian. When the governor of Teheran wants Hussein to be sent to his tent, Austen decides to go to the tent in disguise to protect and save the life of Hussein. Being attacked by the army of Teheran’s governor, Austen has to leave the camp and go to the British embassy to get help for Hussein. At the beginning, Austen’s intention for going to the embassy is to get help for Au Kerim and Hussein. In the embassy, however, as Austen does not stop raving about rescuing Hussein, a doctor gives him double doses of diabolical *Mother’s Comfort*, sending him to sleep for four days. Austen still keeps trying to escape in his sleep as he “promised Au Kerim” (34). However, because the security of the British in the region is in danger, Taylor does not allow him to send troops to Au Karim, and instead employs him to find Nineveh. This implies that Austen’s actions were controlled by British officials.
Austen’s presence in the region is justified by his knowledge of the Orient; he knows everything about Oriental people and believes he knows them better than they do themselves. Austen has important information about the Persian wars, and also has “mapped river crossings, mountain passes and hundreds of useful topographical details” (38) which show the imperial essence of his excavation. He is also fluent in Persian, Arabic, Turkish and local dialects (38) and Turks, Arabs, and Persians trust him. Said argues that Balfour justifies his presence in Egypt as “he knows how they feel since he knows their history, their reliance upon such as he, and their expectations” (34). The native people’s reliance on Austen is evidenced when people of Mirkan refuse the offer of Tahyar, the new ruler who has replaced Pasha, of a ceasefire. Austen decides to talk to them: “you know who I am. You can trust me. I tell the truth when I say that the new ruler, Tahyar, will keep his promises of safety” (118–119). Austen is convinced that the local people consider him a trustworthy person who can help them and if people do not listen to Tahyar they will listen to him.

Said argues that when the French arrived in Egypt they attempted to restore its former glory “by the instruments of Western knowledge and power” (Orientalism 87). It seems that in this novel the French and the British try to restore the past glory of Nineveh through their Western power and knowledge of the Orient. Layard in his Autobiography and Letters justifies his presence in the region, showing the imperial purpose of his archeology by saying, “I was engaged in an important though secret mission, which, in the event of my discharging it to the satisfaction of the Ambassador, would in all probability lead to my permanent official employment in the East, the great object of my ambition” (2:22).
In the embassy, Colonel Taylor informs Austen that the French are also looking for Nineveh and tells him, “We wouldn’t want them to steal the glory, would we?” (41). Botta tries to convince Austen to work for him and says, “[t]o hell with national glory. Why don’t we share the fame” (50). When Austen is employed to find treasures, Rawlinson, the British diplomat, says, “it would be rather nice to have our own Assyrian palace to play in” (62). At the end of the novel, when Austen finds Nineveh, he gathers together the sheik and other native people who help him as “the glory of Nineveh was theirs as much as it was his” (168).

There is competition between the British and the French to find the treasures and send them to the Louvre or London museums (60). Regarding the British and the French as hostile rivals, Said argues, “it was in the Near Orient, the lands of the Arab Near East, where Islam was supposed to define cultural and racial characteristics, that the British and the French encountered each other and ‘the Orient’ with the greatest intensity, familiarity, and complexity” (Orientalism 41). For Austen the lost civilisation of Assyria is considered as both “barbaric” and “wonderful”. Austen calls it “the beauty, the mystery” (58). To find Nineveh, Botta and Austen deceive each other and the locals. To stop Austen excavating for Nineveh, Botta sends him a false message that Nineveh has been found by the French. Moreover, when Austen goes to Mosul to find Nineveh, Rawlinson warns him that the French will certainly bribe the pasha of Mosul to stop British archaeological work. To beat the French and find Nineveh, Austen deceives the pasha by saying that he is not going to Nimrud as an archaeologist but as a tourist interested in antiquities and may pick up “a few odd things”. Then Rawlinson says,
“Just make sure you find me a palace with an enormous library” (62). This shows the cunning nature of colonial powers and their desires in the Orient, the ownership of Assyrian sculptures, and the connection between archaeology and colonialism. It is true that Austen is interested in archaeology and antiquities; however, he has colonial desires to make them his own. In other words, the novel shows how archaeology was a way of legitimating colonisation. Moro-Abadía states:

In Africa and Asia, the development of archaeology during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was clearly related to the political and economical interests of Western nations. It is not therefore surprising that the most famous archaeologists from this period were men in government service such as the French consul Paul Emile Botta or the Englishmen Austen Henry Layard and Mortimer Wheeler. (11)

The novel presents conflicting ideologies. There is a mixed attitude toward Austen. In the preface it is very clear that what Austen does is plunder archaeological sites and the author is criticising archaeological plunder. Austen is cunning and has a self-serving attitude towards native people. On the other hand, he is an adventurous hero who is represented as a saviour of native people. As Orientalist thinking was dominant at the time of Layard, it would be unrealistic to represent Austen outside this ideology. The book, however, was written in the 21st century and it seems that through adherence to genre conventions Harris has reinforced Orientalist attitudes. At the same time, the novel assumes too much prior knowledge on behalf of young adult readers who perhaps have limited understanding of the Middle East, its people and history of colonisation to notice that the novel is a criticism of those ideas. Young adult boys would read the novel
as a fiction and perhaps be more fascinated by Austen’s heroic action and adventure than by Harris’s criticism of Austen and 19th century archaeological destruction.

**Conclusion**

*Citiplex* and *Monsters in the Sand* are postcolonial texts in the sense that they have been written after the colonial period yet also convey colonial messages while they aim at criticising 19th century Orientalist ideology. In *Citiplex*, the author goes beyond East/West boundaries and introduces a world culture in which people are equal and motivated by their intuition. In *Monsters*, the author criticises the imperial behaviour of 19th century archaeologists through his fiction which works as “a portal into an alternative reality” (np). Alongside these aims is a strong sense of continuity of 19th century thinking. In both texts the 19th century Orientalist stereotypes are reproduced. The white man is represented as the saviour of Eastern people. Troy is the saviour of Sacha, Austen is the saviour of the natives, and the Eastern Shah or governor is represented as cruel and despotic. In *Citiplex*, the world culture created in Findhorn is not tolerant of cultural differences and Western culture/Christianity is given more value than Eastern culture/Islam. This is also the case in *Monsters in the Sand*: while the novel criticises 19th century archaeological methods, it depicts the white man as the hero of the adventure story. The young readers will perhaps be more fascinated with the heroic action of Austen than take it as a criticism. This
shows that while the surface of discourse has changed since colonial times, the underlying message remains unchallenged and at some points is even reinforced.

It seems that *Citiplex* was influenced by the social and political situation of its time. It was written one year after the Iranian revolution. The West heard about the changes in Iran, especially changes to the status of women from a modern/Western lifestyle to Islamic rule. In fact a large number of Iranian women were supportive of the new regime before and at the very beginning of the revolution as much of the rhetoric of the new regime was about valuing the position of women in society. However, changes in Iranian women’s lives might have prompted the Australian author to present Iran as an absolute patriarchal country in which women have no voice.

The next chapter will examine the rehearsal of themes and structures of *One Thousand and One Nights* in contemporary writing by Iranian Australians.
Chapter Four: Reworking *One Thousand and One Nights*

Introduction

While the previous chapter examines the way 19th century Orientalism has survived into modern times, this chapter\(^1\), in light of work by Said and other postcolonial theorists, traces parallels between *One Thousand and One Nights*, and *Sons of the Rumour* (2009) by David Foster, *Slave of the Lamp* (2014) by Paula Fogarty, and selected stories from *Dreaming of Djinn* (2013) edited by Liz Grzyb, in order to establish the effects, cultural and ideological, of this rewriting for a 21st century Australian readership. This chapter will also examine to what extent the themes that attracted early scholars and readers to the *Nights* have survived into the rewriting of this Orientalist classic for the 21st century.

Introduction to *One Thousand and One Nights*

The West came to know *One Thousand and One Nights* through its translation, first into French by Antoine Galland, and subsequently into other European languages, during the 18th century. Since then this collection of tales has had a remarkable influence not only on world literature but also on the West’s understanding of the Orient.

After the collection was introduced to the West it was formed into its present version “by European demand and influence”. “In this manner” as Marzolph argues,
this collection “has not only shaped the West’s perception of the ‘Orient’ as the quintessential ‘Other’ but has also contributed decisively to developing and channelling creative imagination in virtually all areas of human activity” (The Arabian Nights Reader vii). At first, it was read for entertainment, then, as Irwin states, “the serious study of the Nights coincided with the development of orientalism as an academic discipline” in the early decades of the 19th century (42–43). Regarding Western versions of this collection, Marzolph claims that “the equally collective fascination of the West with the Oriental Other played an important role” in its attractiveness. Marzolph adds that what Galland did was to appropriate rather than translate the text for the 18th century reader (“The ‘Arabian Nights’” 4). Edward Said, in his path-breaking work on Orientalism, uses the example of Silvestre de Sacy to criticise the belief that the presence of the Orientalist scholar was necessary for Arabic poetry to be appreciated. What Galland did to The Nights is similar to Sacy’s approach to the selection of Arabic poems in his Chrestomathie Arabe (1806), in which he adapts this work for a French readership. Sacy, a 19th century French Orientalist, was “the teacher of nearly every major Orientalist in Europe” (Said, Orientalism 183). Said argues that Sacy’s work is “essentially compilatory; it is thus ceremoniously didactic and painstakingly revisionist” (Said, Orientalism 126). Sacy believed that Oriental writings, with their superstitions and prejudices, were totally strange to Europeans and could only be understood by Europeans “after long and painful study” (Said, Orientalism 128). Sacy also argued that by themselves, these texts did not contain “enough interest”, or “taste and critical spirit” to be worthy of publication (Said, Orientalism 128). As a consequence, it was necessary for Orientalists to transform Oriental writing by using “a series of representative fragments, fragments
republished, explicated, annotated, and surrounded with still more fragments” (Said, Orientalism 129). This was arguably the thinking, and the methodology, that inspired the translation of all Oriental texts, including One Thousand and One Nights, for European readers. Interestingly, as Charles Pellat argues, apart from some embedded tales which have been used by novelists, writers and poets, it is the frame story of One Thousand and One Nights that has had by far the greatest impact on Western culture,

and through it on contemporary Arabic literature, which has sought in it a source of inspiration truly Arabic, even though the protagonists bear Persian names. Such exploitation is an indirect tribute to the Indo-Persian storytellers who provided the foundation for a monument long disdained by the Arabs and then revealed to the world by a West that has not yet finished taking delight in it. (np)

In regard to the influence of One Thousand and One Nights on world literature, Fahd Mohammed Taleb Saeed Al-Olaqi states: “the Arabian Nights combines the knowledge of the Oriental culture and artistic luxuriance with dramatic, gothic and ironic elements which eventually help any English writer to produce a work that suits his own formula” (394). Rana Kabbani, in Imperial Fictions: Europe’s Myths of Orient, writes:

In the European narration of the Orient, there was a deliberate stress on those qualities that made the East different from the West, exiled it into an irretrievable state of “otherness”. Among the many themes that emerge from the European narration of the Other, two appear most strikingly. The first is the insistent claim that the East was a place of
lascivious sensuality, and the second that it was a realm characterised by inherited violence. (5–6)

This is, of course, precisely Said’s argument in *Orientalism*.

**Sons of the Rumour**

David Foster’s 2009 novel *Sons of the Rumour* is one in a long line of literary texts which take their inspiration from the *Nights*’ exotic themes and intricate structure. Drawing on the work of Edward Said and other postcolonial theorists, I trace parallels between *One Thousand and One Nights* and Foster’s novel in order to establish the effects, cultural and ideological, of this rewriting for a 21st century Australian readership. I argue that by turning this pre-Islamic story cycle into an argument in contemporary debates about gender and religion, and beyond that, about the clash of cultures which has seen Islam demonised as a religion not only of misogyny but also of terror, *Sons of the Rumour* perpetuates some of the Orientalist stereotypes which have accompanied the West’s fascination with the *Nights* since the beginning of the 18th century.

*Sons of the Rumour* is a novel of immense complexity. Its loose adaptation of the structure of *One Thousand and One Nights* sees the story of Shahrazad and the Shah framing a number of seemingly unrelated tales told not by Shahrazad but by members of a Sufi fraternity called the Sons of the Rumour. These stories, based on considerable erudition as well as great flights of fancy, take the reader on a romp through exotic locations, different belief systems and exquisite accounts of suffering, all illustrating the human quest for meaning and the seeming absurdity of all religions. My analysis focuses exclusively on the frame narrative, which at
one point, rather mysteriously, morphs into a contemporary Australian story, and I thus make no claim to account for the postmodern complexity of the novel as a whole. My aim is to trace the dichotomy it establishes between East and West, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality. When the Australian story zooms in on a particular event, the Cronulla riots, and on another contrast, between Islam and Western secularism, I argue that the novel echoes the slippage between race and religion that has characterised much of the post-9/11 commentary linking the Middle East, Islam and terrorism, and by so doing contributes to the us-and-them discourse that blights communication between mainstream and minority communities in Western nations.

*Sons of the Rumour* is an extraordinarily complex novel, the main concern of which is the human quest for happiness and enlightenment through spirituality and religion while humanity is bound, through the body and in particular through sexual desire, to the physical world. The novel has an intricate plot, adopting the frame and embedded story-structure of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The frame story is a version of the story of Shahrban, king (Shah) of Persia, and his wife Shahrazad (Sheherazade in most translations) with its focus on jealous husbands and adulterous wives. In *One Thousand and One Nights*, Shahrban is so enraged by his first wife’s infidelity that he takes revenge on all women, marrying a virgin every day and beheading her the following morning. Shahrazad, the Wazir’s daughter, voluntarily marries the Shah, and then recruits her sister, Dinazad, to ask her to tell a story at night. The Shah listens, spellbound, to Shahrazad’s story, and when she stops in the middle, grants her request to spare her life for one more day so she can finish the tale. This scenario is repeated night after night until the Shah
falls in love with her and abandons his murderous plot. In Sons of the Rumour, this frame story is called “Iranian Days”. It is also interspersed by other stories, in this case not told by Shahrazad, but by members of a Sufi fraternity, the Sons of the Rumour. These stories, with their intricate plots and extravagant settings are all, in the words of Susan Lever, aimed at “educating the murderous, misogynistic Shah in the possibilities for spiritual life and the fatal nature of sexual desire” (“Strange and Beautiful” 88). The story of the Shah and his rebellious wife mysteriously merges with the contemporary Australian story of Al Morrisey, fleeing to Ireland after the break-up of his marriage to his adulterous wife Pastel. It then concludes on the Shah’s miraculous conversion to a more enlightened view of gender relations.

While the frame story echoes that of One Thousand and One Nights there are important differences relating to the main characters and their motivation. In the original, the Shah is represented as selfish and naïve, beheading virgins to protect his honour. In Sons of the Rumour he is cruel, obsessed with sex, diabolical even. He beheads virgins to do God’s justice and delays murdering Shahrazad because of her sexual attributes, also because she claims to be pregnant. He has no interest in Shahrazad’s tales, preferring those of the Sufi masters. His conversion comes as the result of the spiritual education he receives from the embedded tales, as well as the revelations that come to him through his dream of Al.

The transformation of Shahrazad is even more startling. In One Thousand and One Nights, she is represented as a virtuous and wise woman, a selfless character who, through her stories, finds a way to save and protect the lives of other women. Shahrazad thus stands in sharp contrast to the women in her tales,
often portrayed as being without self-control, regularly betraying their husbands. The Shahrazad of Sons of the Rumour is represented as a Western woman, blonde and blue-eyed, with modern attitudes and a marvellously vulgar (and Australian-accented) language to match. Shahrazad and Pastel, Al’s wife, are both sexually confident, and the Shah and Al are both anxious about their masculinity and deeply troubled by their wives’ sexual adventures. The novel refers to both Shahrazad and Pastel using the term ‘elephant’, a symbol of sexual licence and disloyalty, at the same time as it signals power and wisdom.

Embedded Stories

The storytellers who give the novel its title have no match in One Thousand and One Nights. The Sons of the Rumour are also known by the name Pir, a title for Sufi masters devoted to finding the inner dimension and path of Islam. The Sons of the Rumour perform spiritual practices in the Khangah, where the Shah visits daily, seeking their guidance in his quest for happiness and enlightenment—and to keep his mind off Shahrazad and his sexual desires (7). Their tales, though based on extensive research, are clearly a product of Foster’s imagination, and not, even within the frame narrative, presented as factual: “while Rumour remains more powerful than Truth, we are Sons of the Rumour” (Foster 5). While the Shah is desperately looking for happiness and enlightenment to release himself from “his monstrous jealousy, [and] his masculine self-doubt” (Sornig 29), the tales offered by the Sons suggest that his quest may be pointless and that he should seek alternative routes. As one of the Sons puts it, “it is not a case of, ‘Do this, that or
the other and you will achieve Happiness’, but rather ‘Achieve Happiness and you will find yourself doing, instinctively, this, that or the other’” (37).

The stories of the Sons are about lonely men whose sexual desire binds them to the physical world. “The Mine in the Moon” by a tartar shows a fantasy world in which there are no women, and boys come from the moon. They grow up in monastic isolation without a mother, and the emergence of sexual desire bans them from the icy land and moves them to a real/material world. “The Tears of the Fish” shows men who participate in a sexual orgy and subsequently feel guilty, deciding to castrate themselves and join the monks because “We’d lost something of value, possibly our souls, and we all know it” (64).

The characters of the storytellers’ stories suffer in prison or alone in the desert or magical lands in order to understand their relationship with the spiritual world. For example, in “The Tunic of Santa Eulalia” the narrator suffers in prison for twenty years because of his failure to find the saint’s tunic. Yet this suffering is revealed to be indispensable for the revelation of another world: “I heard myself suddenly sobbing, as the door opened on another world. I had found the Tunic of Santa Eulalia” (229). In “Blue Melons”, the narrator suffers imprisonment in a latrine, and then walks naked across a desert on a spiritual quest. The sermon to “Blue Melons”, which is the last tale of the storytellers, emphasises the absurdity of the human quest for enlightenment: “Man, who prefers to configure himself as the Centrepiece of God’s Creation is, in fact, at best a superfluous, at worst a menace, the Ape who has Forgot” (420). Regarding the embedded stories Lever states:
Readers may feel themselves to be enduring the same suffering as the cameleers, warriors and holy men who tell their stories. We are being invited to share the characters’ awareness of a world beyond the material one … Foster is not going to allow us any easy access to spiritual enlightenment. (“Strange and Beautiful” 94)

Characters in these tales are aware of the world beyond the physical world and suffer deserts or prison in order to achieve enlightenment. Lever argues that “the revelation would be meaningless without the suffering that precedes it” (“Strange and Beautiful” 93). The descriptions of people and landscapes in these tales are very detailed. For example, in “The Gilt Felt Yurt”, the Turks’ new friend, Anahitaivandak decides to take the day off school—a school in which he studied the thirty-six languages together with mathematics—in order to show his two new pals around the city of Samarkand, a gesture perhaps formulated on some mercantile gut instinct and amply rewarded in later years when Bogu decided he needed Sogdian help in building Samarkand-on-Steppe. It was Anahitaivandak, by then a wealthy shroff, to whom Bogu turned to procure him the sculptors, blacksmiths, masons, faience artists, potters, builders, landscape architects, milliners and pastry cooks to help him realise his dream—a dream, no doubt, begotten the day of which I speak, beneath a fringe of spring onion. (93–94)

The novel takes the readers to a fantasy world of exotic locations where the detail is so great that on some occasions it stops the flow of narrative. It includes a vast
range of opinion, learning and stories and refers to historical events which might go well beyond the scope of readers’ knowledge.

The tales are derived from many different civilisations and contain motifs from diverse geographical areas, from the Far East of Asia to Europe, and show debates around different religions. For instance, “The Man Who Fell in Love with His Own Feet” deals with the origin of foot-binding in China. The suffering of foot-binding leads to a “Celestial aesthetic” which is “a link with heaven” (158). Regarding the embedded tales in the novel, Susan Lever in “Stark consolation of philosophy” states,

They are violent, brutal stories about lonely men without family love, in a world where animals, children, women are expendable to their appetites. The tale tellers are a mix of races and religions, men who have travelled from China to Europe, their stories explore the possibility of release from the flesh into the spirit world. (2)

**Misogyny Eastern and Western**

The novel’s two main plotlines are intertwined. “Iranian Days” is set in the early ninth century AD, and Al’s story in present-day Australia. The ninth-century Shah faints while visiting the Mosque in Cordoba, Spain, and has a dream, which turns into the story of Al Morrisey. Through Al’s stream of consciousness, we learn about his life, his trouble with women (his elderly demented mother, his wife), about the Cronulla riots, which he witnessed before leaving Australia, and about his dreams. Al has been reading “voraciously, over the past decade, of Central Asia
with its religious pammixia” and is now suffering from nightmares about all things Persian (286–287). As the story of Al is happening in the Shah’s dream-world, and vice versa, the Shah and Al must at one level be regarded as the same character, their fates closely inter-connected. Susan Lever has pointed out that Al is also “clearly a version of Foster himself, a musician and small farmer” (95). Within the exotic locations, deliberate anachronisms and convoluted story-lines of *Sons of the Rumour* we find a world that is at the same time distant and close, read through a cultural lens that is recognisably of our own time.

Through its multiple and entangled plotlines, *Sons of the Rumour* demonstrates the absurdity of all religions—Islam, Judaism, Christianity, even Taoism—as spiritual guides to human happiness. These belief systems, and Islam and Christianity in particular, are also shown to be hostile towards women. The portrayal of the Shah and Al (a secular Jew), and the parallels between them, focus on their misogyny, their fear and loathing of, and their helpless dependence on, the women in their lives. However, not all misogynies are equal, so alongside the parallels and similarities between Al and the Shah, there are differences between them which stereotype Muslims and imply a more redeemable position for Western man, and for post-Christian Western society. The frame story of *One Thousand and One Nights* arguably stands as the literary prototype for misogynistic behaviour, and this particular rewriting of the tale, with its emphasis on the Shah’s religious motivations and on Western agency in his redemption, turns the pre-Islamic story into an argument in contemporary debates about gender and religion, rehearsing familiar ideas about the sexism inherent in Islam and Islamic culture.
Foster’s Shah, like his counterpart Al, is not only obsessed by women’s bodies, but admits to being a hopeless romantic. When the Pir asks if he is a misogynist, he replies, “[t]o the contrary … I adore them. I’m the complete romantic” (177). On another occasion he says, “I am earth for her treading and dust to her sandals. My vitals are consumed. My love for her is mingled with my flesh and with my blood and has entered into the channels of my bones” (133). At the same time, he is in no doubt that this love has to be based on male domination, as justified by his religion: “[b]ecause Allah has made the man superior to the woman” (126). Similarly, Al believes that “men should be in charge of women” (291), though his justification is not religious but rather a vague sense that this is in the “natural” order of things. R. Howard Bloch in Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love explains this co-existence of woman hatred, male possessiveness and romantic love as a product of medieval misogyny:

The coming into being of Western romantic love was part of a particular moment in the history of misogyny—a moment at which, because of contemporaneous changes in both the forms of property and relations of power between the genders, the debilitating obsession with woman as the source of all evil became inverted into a coconspiring obsession with woman as the source of all good. (11)

Both the Shah and Al fear and love women in equal measure, are obsessed with them as objects of sexual attraction, want to own them and treat them as their concubine and regard their wives’ betrayal as a threat to their masculinity. As Judith Kegan Gardiner argues,
Men’s feelings of possession and entitlement reach a negative extreme against wives and girlfriends who leave or reject them. Even honour killings, in which men murder wives, daughters or sisters for alleged unchastity, can be seen as partly springing from feelings that the beloved is the property of the lover, her behaviour reflecting on his, so that he would rather destroy her than allow another man to possess her.

(370)

Romantic love becomes a strategy to convince “free women to become subordinated wives” (Gardiner 370). The Shah’s murderous campaign thus finds its parallel in Al’s (and his own) romantic posturing; both, however, are thwarted by their rebellious wives’ challenge to their authority.

There are also important differences between Al and the Shah. At the end of his marriage, Al is contrite, acknowledging that he may himself be responsible for his wife’s infidelity: “you have, perhaps, ill-treated Pastel, to get out of the marriage?” (308) Al calls himself “a failed womaniser” (309) and, unlike the Shah, decides to stay alone rather than look for revenge after Pastel’s infidelity: “I guess I love you enough that I want you to have what you want to have for yourself, Pastel” (304). By contrast the Shah, in Sons of the Rumour, is even more barbarous and lustful than his counterpart in One Thousand and One Nights. His own subjects criticise him as “a Poisonous Dragon who feasts each night on a fresh virgin, destined on the morrow for the scaffold” (169), and the narrator calls him “the Beast of Merv” (70, 169). One of the Sons of the Rumour tells him “[y]our mistake was in falling in love with a woman like a god and then behaving like a beast” (73). Not only is he brutal towards women, he is also, as both the Sons of the Rumour
and Shahrazad point out, incapable of governing his country. His inadequacy as a man, a lover and a ruler comes to a head when he travels to Cordoba to speak at a conference (anachronistically) entitled “Silk Road: Implications for Future Umayyad Policy Directions” (250). He initially has no idea what the Silk Road is, thinking that it is, literally, a road made out of silk. His speech at the conference is confused and confusing: he soon stops talking about silk altogether, moving on “to a confession of his distrust for women” (275), finally bursting into tears (276). His subsequent humiliation is complete: his accent is ridiculed, his servants make off with his money and he is reduced to begging for bread. Rescued from certain death by divine intervention, the Shah heads to the Mosque, where he sustains the head injury which leads to his vision of Al. On awakening he seems a changed man, not only restored to his former status, but also “cured” of misogyny. On his return to Merv he summons Shahrazad and Dinazad and delivers the following speech:

Good morning, ladies. I have a dream. In this dream I see many women all but naked but don’t get the wrong idea. They are unmolested and freed of the tyranny of kinsmen, working as Wazirs, Qadis and mirabs. I see them holding chairs in universities, becoming firemen, bishops and rabbis, dressing entirely to suit themselves, living alone if they so desire, divorcing their husbands if and when they choose. I see them in command of their own destinies, drinking alcohol, eating bhang, smoking opium and ephedra, walking the streets at night unaccompanied, conversing with young men never before seen while laying about stark naked in the sun, indulging in each and every sexual
peccadillo assured of universal respect … You go, girls! I’m setting you free. (387–388)

His conversion is so complete that it has everyone, including the Sons of the Rumour, worried. It also strains credibility. In this postmodern text, all characters and positions are presented ironically and there is more than a hint of mockery of the Shah’s newly found feminist conviction. While Sons of the Rumour clearly exposes the contradictions inherent in misogyny, medieval and modern, Eastern and Western, it can hardly be argued that it does so from a contemporary feminist perspective. Moreover, the Shah’s feminist conversion is not only unconvincing, it is also tainted by the novel’s Orientalist reading of East-West relations.

Even before the Shah’s conversion, Shahrazad is Western and modern. She also, rather strangely, seems to be Australian, using expressions such as “check that out, mate” (60) and “cool” (122). In a conversation between the Shah and Shahrazad when they go for a coffee (another anachronism) in the city of Merv, Shahrazad asks, “[why] can’t a woman wear what she wants to wear in a civilised city? Guys wear what they want to wear. Why can’t a woman do the same?” (126) The Shah’s reply, that man’s superiority is Allah’s decree, sets up a contrast between Western, secular woman and Muslim man which runs through the novel. In a review of the novel James Ley argues that “the personal difficulties between the Shah and Shahrazad are to a significant extent a consequence of their being a curiously modern couple” (16). This is only partially the case: while Shahrazad is undoubtedly modern, the Shah clings to a higher authority to justify his dominance over her. When she resists covering her hair he tells her that she is not a good woman, at the same time unwittingly echoing Said’s argument regarding the
Oriental veil which symbolises “Muslim women’s oppression and eroticism simultaneously” (Weber 125).

Shahrazad’s challenge to the patriarchal order sets the scene for the Shah’s re-education, and his conversion comes as a consequence of a dream of independent and emancipated women. Modern women, then, can be seen as saving him from misogyny, just as he, arguably, through his conversion becomes the saviour of Shahrazad and numerous other women from certain death. They thus exemplify the common trope of Western women’s agency in the salvation of Eastern women and men which has become known as “Feminist Orientalism”. “Feminist Orientalism” confirms the superiority of modern Western women (Bahramitash 222). It is not an Eastern but a Western(ised) Shahrazad who claims control over her body, resists becoming a concubine and refuses to cover her hair. Roksana Bahramitash, in her article, “The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism”, refers to Parvin Paidar’s argument in Women in Public Spaces, Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran that one of the characteristics of “Feminist Orientalism” is that it considers Oriental women as victims of patriarchy and not as agents of liberation and social transformation. Feminist Orientalism “is blind to the ways in which women in the East resist and empower themselves. Therefore, Muslim women need saviors, i.e., their Western sisters” (Bahramitash 222). There are, in fact, no Iranian women as such in the novel. The text does not give voice to Eastern women; by transforming an Eastern woman into a Western one it shows that Eastern men need Western women for their re-education. Talpade Mohanty, in “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, a critique of Western feminist discourse on
women in the Third World, argues that Western feminists are representing themselves as “educated, modern […] having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions” (55). By contrast, non-Western women or women in the Third World are represented by Western feminists as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized” (Mohanty 56). It can be argued that the representation of women in *Sons of the Rumour* offers a perfect illustration of “Feminist Orientalism” which, in Bahramitash’s words, “used women’s rights as an excuse to legitimate their colonial presence and their modern version such as the current neo-conservatives who raise support for war in defence of women’s rights” (Bahramitash 221). By reinforcing popular stereotypes of Muslim women as victims of “an inherent misogyny in Islamic tradition” (222) which can only be defeated through Western agency, the novel turns the story of the Shah and Shahrazad into a parable for our times: a confrontation between the East and the West over the control over women’s bodies.

**Rewriting Cronulla**

In the Author’s note at the end of his novel, Foster states that the writing was prompted by the Cronulla riots in 2005, at which he was present (423). His premise was that “a major flashpoint now exists between (fundamentalist) Islamic man and (anti-Christian) secular Western woman” (424). In the novel, his contemporary character Al is an observer of the events in Cronulla on December 11, 2005. He remembers a Surf Club member looking for men of “Middle Eastern
appearance” asking him, a Jew, “So, you a Muslim, pal? You still livin’ the Dark ages? … I hate all Mustafas” (336). His own thoughts on the “Leb hoons” are that “[t]hey want jihad but they’d like a slice of Aussie slut” (335). He goes on to reflect on the Cronulla memorial to the seven young women who were killed in the Bali bombing of 2002. Juxtaposing these events enables him to reinvent the Cronulla riots as a confrontation between the secular West and Islam:

And that is the entire problem. Modern Western Secular Man, Cronulla Man, does not fear God.

Mustafa from Punchabowl fears Allah. Allah says to him, in Bali – do Me a favour. Rid Me of these infidels. See how they fornicate and drink alcohol in the place where they worship the monkey? (359)

His conclusion is a deep pessimism: “Mustafa from Punchabowl envies and fears modern Western debauchery. We fear and envy his Eternity and contempt for Death … And we can’t defeat someone who has no fear of Death. Deep down, we’re fucked and know it – but deep down” (375).

By representing the Cronulla riots, a confrontation between youth gangs from different ethnic backgrounds, as motivated by religion rather than race, the novel not only misrepresents the (mostly) Lebanese youths—Australia’s Lebanese community is predominantly Christian—it also turns the event (ugly enough, but for different reasons) into an argument in the Islamophobic discourse which has had a major resurgence since the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. As Lawrence Davidson writes in “Islamophobia, the Israel Lobby and American Paranoia”: 
Islamophobia is a stereotyping of all Muslims (that is the stereotyping of over a billion human beings) as real or potential terrorists due to the alleged hateful and violent teachings of their religion. Islam is reduced to the concept of jihad and the concept of jihad is reduced to terror against the West. (90)

Or, as Said puts it in *Orientalism*: “Islam comes to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma” (59).

The racism on display in the Cronulla riots, with its echoes of a white Australia many believed had been laid to rest, has received extensive commentary since the event. As Greg Noble and Scott Poynting write, “The Cronulla riots illustrate not simply the persistence of racism in Australia, but the complex interweaving of space and national belonging that has occurred over several years … it showed the ways the local and the national became entwined in practices of inclusion and exclusion that had dire consequences for Australians of migrant background” (499–500). Moreover, as Shakira Hussein and Scott Poynting have recently argued, the riots marked a “shift in the focus of racist Othering in Australia, from the ‘Arab Other’ to the ‘Muslim Other.’” Pointing out that the racism expressed in the riots has over the years since the event “become normalised as an acceptable part of ‘debate’ in Australia”, they argue that this is not a unique development but “in line with trends in Europe and the US” (333). This normalisation of Islamophobia, producing race in the guise of religion, has become the face of contemporary racism, but one that allows its proponents to argue that to vilify unacceptable aspects of a faith is not racist: “This slippage
between racial and religious labels continues to characterise contemporary hate speech in Australia” (335). *Sons of the Rumour*, by representing the Cronulla riots as caused by irreconcilable systems of belief, and by linking them to the Bali bombing, can thus be read as an illustration of the normalcy of “everyday” Islamophobia. Its construction of an “us and them” based on elements of Islamic faith as opposed to Western secularism also echoes the slippage between race and religion which, in much of the commentary on the riots, led to the conflation of Lebanese and Muslim.

In an interview with Paul Sheehan, Foster said that his novel was “not an attack on Islam … My favourite Islamic position is the sufi position. Islam is a very broad church. The Taliban are blowing up sufi shrines. It’s an attractive form of Islam, noble. It’s the one that I like.” “It [The Arabian Nights] is a strange frame tale”, he added. “It’s a sufi parable. It equates sex and death. I think sex is death. Death is the price you pay for sex” (Sheehan 26–27). In the novel, Sufism, as represented by the Sons of the Rumour, provides what philosophical wisdom is available in a world of fear, violence and superstition. In the contemporary world, Al Morrisey, searching for spiritual guidance among the flotsam and jetsam of Western and Eastern belief systems, has also found solace in Sufi mysticism. However, the “broad church” of Islam does not, in this novel, present any real alternatives to the misogyny and terror, which, to the Shah as well as to “Mustafa from Punchabowl”, are direct functions of the Muslim faith. And as for Al, modern, secular man, letting go of the misogyny which defined his masculinity has little to do with spiritual enlightenment but rather signals his defeat at the hands of his more resourceful wife.
Sons of the Rumour offers no ringing endorsement of the opponents of Muslim fundamentalism. The Cronulla life-savers are ill-informed thugs, Shahrazad is vain and vulgar, even the Sons of the Rumour act out of selfish as well as spiritual motivations. However, for all the complexity of its historical, religious and mythical universe, for all the postmodern inventiveness and instability of its story-telling, it would be hard to argue that it does anything but harden and exaggerate stereotypes of Islam and Muslims which have found such fertile ground in the West in recent decades. Scholars researching the origins and development of One Thousand and One Nights, and particularly its translation for a European readership in the 18th century, comment on its popularity as a function of the West’s abiding taste for a sensual and violent Oriental “other”. By recreating the familiar structure of One Thousand and One Nights for a contemporary Western understanding of and taste for Orientalist material, Foster’s novel does little to dispel the fear and fascination associated with the mythical East in the Western imagination.

The next part of this chapter will examine reworking One Thousand and One Nights in writing for children and young adults.

Reworking One Thousand and One Nights in Children’s Fiction

John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, in the Preface to Retelling Stories, Framing Cultures, look at the process through which traditional stories are retold for young readers. They believe that retellings are more appropriate to children’s
literature and culture rather than adult culture (3) because the retellings take children away from everyday experience by offering them access to an exotic and exciting world. They state that in the rewritten versions of a story, a particular difficulty is that the retold story may pretend to convey the component of “a culture’s formative traditions”; however, what is always clear is that the new tale will contain “some aspects of the attitude and ideologies pertaining at the cultural moment in which that retelling is produced” (x). They argue that the retelling of traditional stories for young readers is shaped within the frame of narrative “as a large interlocked set which implies the existence of a less readily definable metanarrative, so to speak, operating at a still more abstract level” which they call the “Western metaethic”. They emphasise that this metaethic “expresses a [European] culture-specific idea of transcendence and not universal” (7).

Stephens and McCallum argue that the concept of the Orient emerges in children’s fiction through retelling the stories from *One Thousand and One Nights* and also using its motifs. The retellings characteristically framed by the Western metaethic

are strange, especially in their physical and social settings, and yet familiar, because so often retold within Western culture, it seems inevitable that a telling will be constructed so as to convey a sense of universal human values, moral insight, and some aspect of cultural tradition. (229)

The Orient in *One Thousand and One Nights*, they argue, is “already constructed as a fantastic other” by the Orient itself and then reconstructed by the modern West as “a fantastic Other … which exists to be appropriated” (230). Therefore, the
readers of retold stories are dealing with an “other” which is exotic and still familiar (230).

Apart from entertaining children, Perry Nodelman, in “Illustration and Picture Books” in the *International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature*, states that the purpose of children’s fiction is to target “improved literacy, education, morality and emotional well-being” (116). Stephens argues that “all literature for children is, in some way, ideologically driven” (Webb 71). Regarding the way children’s literature conveys adult ideology, Nodelman even claims that, in children’s texts, children as a colonised group are spoken for by adults, just as Orientals are spoken for by Orientalists. By considering Nodelman’s and Stephens and McCallum’s arguments on the transmission of adult ideology to children’s texts, I ask Said’s question, “How does Orientalism transmit or reproduce itself from one epoch to another”? (*Orientalism* 15) and illustrate what kind of knowledge is built up for the readers in *Slave of the Lamp* and selected stories from *Dreaming of Djinn*.

**Slave of the Lamp**

*Slave of the Lamp* (2014) by Paula Fogarty is a fantasy tale for young readers. The novel is the story of Rufus, a 13-year-old boy, who is applying for a job with Heroes Inc. during the school holidays. Living in contemporary Australia, he is appointed and sent magically to China, Greece and Persia to help the heroes Aladdin, Theseus and Scheherazade2, respectively, to solve their problems and assist them to meet their destinies. Rufus’s employer is Abu Hassan, the genie of
the lamp. Fogarty presents the main concern of the novel through this quotation from Henry Miller: “One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things” (np). When the genie tries to convince Rufus to take the job, he says “This is your chance of a lifetime! Gold and silver, precious gems and treasures beyond the wealth of kings could all be yours. Helping heroes to their destiny, slaying dragons and vanquishing evil magicians will be part of your everyday work experience” (13). At the same time, the novel shows that the power of human ingenuity goes beyond any magical power. Rufus is not able to do magic or to use any weapon (17) but by his “sheer native cunning” (13) he is able to overcome challenges.

Rufus is the “slave of the lamp” in the title of the novel. Rufus journeys to different places and in different times, determined by the change of ownership of the lamp. He is called by the person who rubs the lamp to help that person do heroic deeds. This adventure novel is a reworking of the frame and embedded stories in *One Thousand and One Nights* and includes motifs such as the genie, the magical lamp and ring, monsters and magical beasts. Apart from retelling the frame and embedded stories, the plot structure of *One Thousand and One Nights*, a story within a story, is reproduced in this novel. Of his three adventures, I will focus on Rufus’s mission to help Scheherazade in Persia.

In this story, Rufus goes to Scheherazade’s chamber to help her find more tales to tell the Shah in order to save her life. Rufus tells Scheherazade about his experience of helping Aladdin. Scheherazade thanks Rufus for this story, and asks him for more tales. Rufus, not having any other story, is taken, in disguise as a poor person, by Dinar Zad², Chief Steward of the Harem, to the town so that he
can meet merchants and traders from other places to learn stories from them. In
the town, Rufus sees a rich man, Omar Khayyam, who is respected by the crowd,
and goes to talk to him, believing that he might be able to help him with some new
tales or at least poetry. Omar, who is accused by Ali Baba of having murdered
Kasim, Ali Baba’s brother, is telling Rufus the story of “Kasim the Merchant and
the Thirty-Eight Businessmen”. When Dinar Zad corrects Omar that it is “Kasim
the Merchant and the Forty Thieves”, Omar says that they are not thieves but
businessmen.

In Fogarty’s novel, the story of Omar is itself a reworking of “Ali Baba and
the Forty Thieves” in One Thousand and One Nights. In the original story, Ali
Baba discovers the cave where the thieves hide their treasures. Kasim, Ali Baba’s
brother, having heard about the cave, goes there with the intention of stealing but
the thieves kill him. Then the head of the thieves tries to kill Ali Baba as he knows
about their secret cave. However, they are all defeated and Ali Baba becomes the
owner of all the treasures.

Omar starts his tale by telling Rufus that he and the other businessmen were
trading in the East and brought back valuable treasures with them, including a
magical lamp. They recognise that Kasim, one of the merchants, is deceiving them
and that he is the head of a band of thieves. Omar seeks help from Abu Hasan, the
genie of the magical lamp. Abu Hasan takes Omar to a cave to hide the valuable
treasures and advises him to take the treasures to Baghdad bit by bit to avoid
paying tax and being attacked by Kasim’s band of cutthroats. However, one day,
Omar and other businessmen find the body of Kasim in the cave and recognise that
a large part of the treasure is missing. They decide to take the remaining treasures
to Baghdad and leave Kasim’s body in the cave. Omar guesses that Kasim’s murderer was Marjaneh, Kasim’s slave, as footprints left in the cave were small. She must have told Ali Baba about Kasim’s death and he spreads the word in the Shah’s palace. On the way back to the palace, Dinar Zad and Rufus see Ali Baba and decide to follow him. They spy on him and see that he is measuring the content of a sack with a kitchen scale. Seeing this, Dinar Zad says “it was silly of me, but I could have sworn he was up to no good” (181).

After Rufus tells Scheherazade the story of Kasim, she starts her own investigation into the mystery of Kasim’s murder and asks to meet the Shah’s general. When the general comes to the palace, he says that he has arrested Omar and Khalifeh, another “businessman”, convicted them of murdering Kasim, and that the sentence of death will be carried out on the following day. Scheherazade asks the general to bring the two prisoners, Ali Baba and Marjaneh, to the palace so that she can investigate the case herself. She finds that Omar, Khalifeh and Marjaneh are innocent. Meanwhile, Dinar Zad brings Scheherazade the set of kitchen scales Ali Baba was using, in which a piece of gold is left. This reveals that it was actually Ali Baba who stole the treasure and killed his brother. Ali Baba then confesses that when he saw his brother going to the cave, he followed, killed him and stole the treasure.

Scheherazade then asks Rufus to talk to her husband to remit her death sentence and Rufus accepts. When he talks to the Shah, the Shah says that he had never really intended to kill Scheherazade. When Scheherazade herself asks the Shah to spare her life, he says to the crowd:
This is my beloved wife, Scheherazade, who I pardoned for her own sake long ago. She is the most wonderful, brave and beautiful woman in the world, and I do not deserve her love. Each of these thousand and one nights she has shone more brightly than the sun for me. (210)

It seems that this novel, as children’s fiction, aims to entertain young readers while giving them a moral lesson and building up their identity. This purpose is achieved through a reworking of ancient mythology and through Rufus’s heroism. Alongside the obvious moral of the text, however, the novel also includes underlying messages of an Orientalist nature. By considering Stephens and McCallum’s argument discussed above, I will focus on how the structure and the motifs from *One Thousand and One Nights* have been reworked in Fogarty’s novel. I will look at gender roles from a feminist perspective as the story shows wise and strong women and a wise king, and will examine what kind of heroism is represented and what its moral impact might be on readers and their identity.

The main moral of the story is the power of human intelligence, represented through Rufus's heroism which is quite different from the heroism in other adventure stories. In “Silver-Land”, for example, Tim Pippin is empowered by magical tools taken from *One Thousand and One Nights*, including a magical ring, and a genie that obeys Tim’s commands. While there is magic in *Slave of the Lamp*, Rufus, as the hero, cannot use magic or any weapon in his missions. The genie tells Rufus, “In the twenty first century, teenagers are far better educated and much more devious than ever before in the history of humankind” (13). This statement of the genie suggests that the power of human knowledge and intelligence in coping with difficulties goes beyond any magic and also that this intelligence is
not available prior to the 21st century. Rufus, later in the novel, overcomes all challenges by using argumentation and intelligence. Identifying with Rufus, the young 21st century readers will understand the power of human knowledge and learn that by using their intelligence they are able to solve problems and help others.

The importance of human knowledge and intelligence is also represented through Scheherazade, a self-taught, strong-willed and wise woman. After investigating Omar’s case and saving his life, Scheherazade tells Rufus how she has used her knowledge to overcome difficulties in her own life and to help others:

I have spent my life as a student of human nature, listening to the stories of my people. Fate forced me to live my life in this cage of gold; love holds me its prisoner still. But I have tried to make the most of my knowledge. Tonight I learned I could save others, not just myself, with my gift. (201)

Thus the moral of the story is represented not only through the male character but also through a female character. This perhaps helps readers of both genders identify with the hero and heroine of the story and learn the lesson that they can use their knowledge to overcome life’s problems. In other words, the moral of the story is not just male oriented.

As this is a work of fiction, the author takes liberties in representing Khayyam, a Persian philosopher, astronomer and poet who is one of the most influential scientists of the Middle Ages. In the novel’s glossary of terms, the author notes that Omar Khayyam was a famous poet and astronomer, but never a merchant. He says that he “had no choice but to include him” (215). Perhaps the author decides
to include Khayyam in his story because of Khayyam’s fame in the West. Like *One Thousand and One Nights*, Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat*, translated by Edward FitzGerald, has had a great influence on world literature. Khayyam is totally absent in *One Thousand and One Nights*; however, in *Slave of the Lamp* he is a businessman who tells the story of “Kasim the Merchant and the Thirty-Eight Businessmen”. The author finds Khayyam, a famous figure in world literature, to be the best option for storytelling, to construct the novel’s plot.

By contrast with much Orientalist writing, the normally cruel Oriental Shah is here represented as a kind and pleasant man, which disrupts the expectations of both the readers and the hero of the story. When Rufus meets the Shah in his chamber, the narrator says, “Rufus thought the Caliph did not look like the fearsome despotictyrant he had been led to expect” (206). He is not a despotic and cruel king and has never had the intention of killing Scheherazade. The Shah’s statement that, “I have always tried to rule this country in a just and honourable way, rewarding the innocent and punishing only the guilty … I don’t much like the idea of executions, in any case” (206) clearly presents a new image. Rufus finds out that the Shah did not kill his first love. When he asks the Shah if he had put his first wife to death, the Shah replies: “How could I possibly do such a terrible thing?” (208). Although the Shah is not a despotic person, he is still anxious about his image in public. In fact, similar to Xerxes in *The Persians*, and the Khaan in “Romance of the Arrow Girl”, the Shah in *Slave of the Lamp* is concerned about his reputation. This anxiety is clear in his words to Rufus: “You mustn’t let anyone else know … I need everyone to fear me, in order to maintain stability and the status quo” (206).
Slave of the Lamp, written by a Western author for Western children about the Orient, is framed by what Stephens and McCallum called a “Western metaethic”. When Scheherazade tells Rufus about her own situation, that the Shah wants to kill her, the narrator, from a 21st century perspective, reveals how strange Scheherazade’s situation is: “Maybe it was all a misunderstanding” (163). Rufus then offers Scheherazade a solution from a 21st century educated boy: “Why don’t you speak to him about it?” (163). Rufus’s advice relies on the Western practice of solving problems through negotiation. Rufus then saves Scheherazade’s life by talking to the Shah. In this novel, Scheherazade, at first, does not accept Rufus’s approach as it might dishonour the Shah. However, at the end, after Rufus has talked with the Shah, the Shah spares her life. This underlines the moral of the story—the problem is solved through intelligence and talking about the problem. It also shows that both Scheherazade and Rufus believe in the same value, that of having good government. However, their approaches are different. Scheherazade needs to keep certain social standards of her time and place; she cannot talk to the Shah directly and is supposed to protect the Shah’s dignity.

Rufus’s heroism represents him as an agent of liberation and a saviour of Eastern heroes and heroines. While the novel tends to avoid stereotypes, the Orientalist concept of the West’s civilising mission is still reinforced. Although the Shah is not cruel and Scheherazade is wise, they still need Rufus, the boy from the West, to help them: Scheherazade tells Rufus: “I trust that you may indeed be able to help me” (159), “My last hope is in you” (163). In contrast to the original version of One Thousand and One Nights, in which Shahrazad is her own saviour, in Slave of the Lamp, as in Sons of the Rumour, it is not Scheherazade’s tales which
save her life but, respectively, Rufus’s arguments with the Shah, and the Shah’s transformation after his dream of Al.

Although the novel is clearly making an attempt to avoid reproducing the stereotypes of cruel kings and oppressed women by representing a pleasant Shah and a wise Scheherazade, unconscious Orientalist messages, such as Rufus as agent of liberation and civilisation, also inform the text. Peter Hollindale in Ideology and the Children’s Book states:

The values at stake are usually those which are taken for granted by the writer, and reflect the writer’s integration in a society which unthinkingly accepts them. In turn this means that children, unless they are helped to notice what is there, will take them for granted too. Unexamined, passive values are widely shared values, and we should not underestimate the powers of reinforcement vested in quiescent and unconscious ideology. (13)

The unconscious message of the text demonstrates the operation of European cultural hegemony in the story, which transmits an unconscious understanding of the West as the agent of liberation and saviour to its audience who assume it as natural and universal. This also echoes Nodelman’s argument that children are colonised by adults, and answers Said’s question “How does Orientalism transmit or reproduce itself from one epoch to another”? (Orientalism 15): the Western cultural hegemony is transmitted to children by adults unconsciously and thus reproduces itself through generations.
Dreaming of Djinn

*Dreaming of Djinn* is an anthology of eighteen short stories edited by Liza Grzyb, published in 2013. It is speculative fiction for children. Like other Western writing that adopts the structure and themes of *One Thousand and One Nights*, this collection is a reworking, “paying tribute to the original mood of *The Thousand and One Nights*” (14). The editor adds that the stories in this book, “in addition to portraying sensitive yet strong male characters who have vulnerabilities and flaws” (14), aim to show strong and influential female characters who, like Shahrazad³, resist oppression and build up their own life and destiny.

The stories come out of the authors’ imagination but reflect the typical elements of *One Thousand and One Nights* such as the magical lamp, fairies, and supernatural creatures. At the same time, they show Persian culture and gender relationships. My analysis of this anthology will be based on three stories that are most relevant to Persia and Persians: “The Dancer of Smoke” by Joshua Gage, “Harmony Thicket and the Persian Shoes” by Havva Murat and “Romance of the Arrow Girl” by Richard Harland. Each story in this collection is followed by an Afterword by the author, which is quite explicit about the author’s intention. I will give a plot summary of the stories before starting their analysis.

“The Dancer of Smoke” is set in ancient Persia. The main moral of the tale is that helping poor people is always rewarded. As the author writes in the Afterword, “when one gives to the lowest, the poorest and the most needy of people, one is rewarded” (59). The story includes themes such as equality between men and women, and respect for Eastern women. It also highlights Persian
hospitality, their foods and musical instruments which are common features of Persians in literary works. The story is about a family with a son, Pahlbod. They have their own business, running a small restaurant, but their trade has not been good for a while. One day, a poor traveller, Narin, comes to their kitchen and asks for food. They treat him as their guest and provide him with different kinds of Persian food. In return, Narin teaches Pahlbod how to play *tombak*, the ancient Persian musical instrument, and gives him a phial out of which a magical female dancer comes out if Narin claps twice. Before he leaves their place, Narin asks Pahlbod to treat the dancer with respect, as he would his sister, and guard her. Because of this magical dancer, their restaurant becomes very famous and people across Persia come to their place to feast and be enchanted by the dancer. One day, Ariobarzanes, a Persian satrap, goes to their restaurant with his guards and soldiers. When the dancer appears they try to touch or catch her. Pahlbod becomes helpless, as their attitude toward the dancer goes against what Narin had asked of him. Therefore, Pahlbod starts making music by hitting the bottom of a pot to attract attention away from the dancer to himself. Suddenly, Narin appears with his *tombak* and takes the rhythm from Pahlbod. Finally both Narin and the dancer disappear in smoke.

In the Afterword, the author of this story notes that she was inspired by Molly Bang’s *The Paper Crane*, “a retelling of an ancient Chinese myth about the Yellow Crane Tower, in which a stranger draws a crane of [sic] the wall with an orange peel to attract customers” (59). It is also clear that “The Dancer of Smoke” is a reworking of “Aladdin’s Lamp” in *One Thousand and One Nights*. In both stories, there is a magical lamp out of which a genie comes and gives prosperity to its
owner. Aladdin is a poor boy who is tricked by a magician in a Chinese town to bring the magical lamp from the cave. Being smart and brave, Aladdin keeps the lamp for himself and becomes rich and eventually marries the Sultan’s daughter. However, in “The Dancer of Smoke”, the magical dancer is given to Pahlbod as a reward for generosity towards a poor stranger. The author uses the motif of Aladdin’s story to give children a lesson on generosity and respect for women.

“The Harmony Thicket and the Persian Shoes”, the story of an Australian girl, Harmony, who is fascinated by vintage shoes, is set in contemporary Melbourne. The author notes in the Afterword that “the world of Melbourne vintage shopping collides with the magical courts of Persia in this story” (160). It seems that the main concern of the story is the power of faith in human life. In this story, Iranian men and women, and the relationship between Eastern men and Western women, are represented differently from the perspective of Orientalist writing. At the end of the story, Harmony, who was looking for the right man to love, falls in love with a Persian man.

One day, Harmony finds that Yesterday Treasure, the vintage shop she usually goes to, has a new manager, Houri, an Iranian woman who came from Isfahan where she had antiques stores. Houri offers Harmony a pair of antique, 19th century Persian shoes which were made by a royal shoemaker for a princess. On the shoes some love spells are scribbled. The shoes, which symbolise love, belong to the person who fits the shoes. Houri explains, “[i]t’s not a question of money or age—it’s a question of whether the shoe fits” (147). Although the author writes in the Afterword that the idea of this story comes from a photo of 19th century Persian shoes that she found on the internet (160), perhaps this story
reminds readers of the *Cinderella* tale. Harmony gets excited when the shoes fit her. Houri lends them to her for the weekend and says, “[s]hoes are magic, Harmony. They can turn you into someone else” (148). At this stage, readers become aware of the mystery in the story. Wearing the shoes, Harmony goes to the National Gallery and meets a Persian man, Amr Husseini, who is a curator there. Amr invites Harmony to dinner. However, when she goes to meet him she falls onto the road and the love spell on her shoes disappears. Feeling humiliated and upset, she leaves without paying attention to Amr’s attempt to convince her to stay.

The next day, when she goes to Houri’s shop to return the shoes, Harmony finds out that Houri knows about Amr and that she is the one who wrote the spell on the shoes in the first place. The author reveals these details at the end to keep the mystery of the story alive. Houri explains to her that she was aware of Harmony’s search for love and gave those shoes to her to create faith that she would be able to achieve her goal: “you believed these shoes had a love spell on them and they led you to love … if you believe it, then that is all that matters … Now you believe in yourself. Believe that you are worthy of being loved without any magic shoes on your feet” (158–159). Finally Harmony is persuaded to meet Amr again.

“Romance of the Arrow Girl” is set in ancient Persia. It is the story of Khaan Arash-e Azam, the ruler of Khorasan, who falls in love with Parisi, a beautiful peasant girl. The Khaan invites Parisi and her friend, Laleh, to his palace and provides them with servants, food, new clothes and private rooms. Being a peasant girl, she could never dream of marrying him, nevertheless she asks him to offer
her marriage, and does not accept being his concubine. He goes to her in the palace many times but she refuses him. She also asks him to prove his love for her and only then will she marry him. Finally the Khaan sends his mother to Parisi to propose to her, as is their tradition. However, Parisi goes to the Khaan’s chamber and wants him to propose to her himself. He gives her the rarest turquoise in the world as a gift but she does not accept it. Then the Khaan asks: “How low must I go … You want me to beg in front of my own generals?” (230). Finally, Parisi, believing that the Khaan truly loves her, accepts his offer of marriage. However, on the first night after the wedding, the Khaan injures Parisi with a knife to avenge all the humiliation that she had caused him. He says: “She’s my wife, I’ll do whatever I want with her. Whatever I want … Every shame and slight and humiliation she put me through—I remember every moment of it. She will pay for it all the nights of her life” (233). The plot of this story is influenced by the frame story of One Thousand and One Nights. Both the rulers want to take revenge against women because of being dishonoured by them. As the author says in the Afterword, “All the fairytale tales and romance associated with the Arabian Nights—the perfect context within which to uncover the reality of the Khaan’s behaviour” (235).

Laleh who always takes care of Parisi sees her friend severely injured by the Khaan and decides to take revenge by killing the Khaan with his own knife which was left on the floor. Laleh takes the knife and runs towards the Khaan; no one can stop her: “She would find the tyrant before they could catch her” (235). The story shows the despotism and pride of the Khaan, and his savage and misogynist
attitude. However, in contrast to Orientalist views of Eastern women as oppressed and subjugated, Persian women in this tale resist despotism.

It seems that one of the main appeals of the stories in *Dreaming of Djinn* is the representation of strong women and respect for them, which is illustrated through a reworking of *One Thousand and One Nights*. In contrast to many Orientalist reworkings of this collection, the stories in *Dreaming of Djinn* tend to have a positive representation of women and men of the East. As the editor states in the Introduction:

[t]here are so many references to Scheherazade and *The Thousand and One Nights* in Western culture which focus only on the orientalist view of the Middle East and even now still show a one-sided view of women … With *Dreaming of Djinn* I wanted to reinvent elements of this orientalist idea but also question it through exploring different threads of the same cloth. (14)

I will examine whether these stories relate to Said’s theory of Orientalism, and if they do, how. I will also investigate how *One Thousand and One Nights* has been used and reworked in these stories compared to other Australian texts, especially *Sons of the Rumour*, considering the editor’s claim that the stories tend to question Orientalist ideas that have been adapted from *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Gender representation is an important theme in the three stories. While they tend to avoid stereotypes by showing “strong” and “sensitive” male characters, and influential women, the way that Persian men and women are presented is still controversial. “Dancer of Smoke” presents a double image of the Oriental man.
On the one hand, Pahlbod and his father respect and protect women. For example, when the family invites their neighbour to see the dancer, Pahlbod’s father asks them to treat her with “the dignity and respect they would afford any woman” (52). On the other hand, the stereotype of the lascivious Oriental man is reproduced by the satrap’s guards who “leaned forward, trying to touch her or catch her off guard, each of them a ravenous wolf eager to taste the juiciest morsel of the flock” (56).

Similarly, in “Romance of the Arrow Girl”, a double image of the Khaan is represented. At the beginning of the story, he is very kind and respectful to Parisi; however, being dishonoured by her, the Khaan becomes cruel and savage, and injures her. By contrast to these two stories, which show a double image of Oriental men and reproduce stereotypes of lascivious and cruel Oriental men and rulers, in “Harmony Thicket and the Persian Shoes”, a new image of Persian men is presented: handsome and attractive, not cruel and sexually voracious.

In “Dancer of Smoke”, women in ancient Persia are presented as emancipated. The dancer and Pahlbod’s mother, as the author mentions in the Afterword, are the powerful characters who have control of men’s attention. (59–60). However, the dancer is not able to protect herself from the men who disrespect her. It is the male characters, Pahlbod and Narin, who are her saviours. Unlike “Dancer of Smoke”, in “Romance of the Arrow Girl”, it is not a male character who saves women from the tyrant but the girls themselves who support each other. Women’s autonomy and self-respect are represented through the female characters, Parisi and Laleh. Parisi refuses to be the Khaan’s concubine and therefore his sexual object. In *The Metaphysics of Morals* Immanuel Kant argues: “in polygamy the person who surrenders herself gains only a part of the man who gets her completely, and
therefore makes herself into a mere thing” (Kant 63) and consequently a sex object. Parisi is looking for self-respect which is a core tenet of feminism. When the Khaan’s mother tells Parisi that, “[i]t is humiliating for a great Khaan to be at the mercy of a peasant girl”, Parisi replies, “I have my self-respect” (226). At the end of the story, when the Khaan injures Parisi and no one dares to rebel or ask a question, Laleh resists tyranny and takes revenge by stabbing Khaan in the ribs and running away.

Gender representation in Harmony’s story works to counter Oriental stereotypes. In this story, it is not the Oriental man who is fascinated by a Western woman; it is an Australian girl who falls in love with a Persian man. The narrator reveals Harmony’s thinking that she had “never met anyone as ridiculously gorgeous as this shoe god” (151). At the same time, contradicting Orientalist writing in which West/Western women teach a lesson to the East/Eastern women, in this story it is Houri, the Persian woman, who teaches Harmony, the Australian girl, how to gain self-confidence and faith. She tells Harmony:

On Friday night you believed these shoes had a love spell on them and they led you to love didn’t they? ... So who’s to say what is real and what is not? If you believe it, then that is all that matters … So, now you believe in yourself. Believe that you are worthy of being loved without any magic shoes on your feet. (158)

In “Dancer of Smoke”, there is no heroine but little Pahlbod who has been told to respect the dancer, and his father and Narin do respect women. Perhaps, by reading this story, young male readers learn a lesson to respect women, and girls learn that they should be respected. In “Romance of the Arrow Girl” and
“Harmony”, however, the heroines are girls who have a feminist outlook. Perhaps it is easier for girl readers to identify with heroines and learn a lesson that they should have faith and self-confidence to achieve their goals and also be strong and emancipated.

In “Dancer of Smoke”, the author, Gage, confuses Iranian women with women in Saudi Arabia. In the Afterword, Gage explicitly states that he has chosen Persia as the setting because in ancient Persia women had equal rights and power to men. Though patriarchy was pervasive in ancient Persia, women could have their own career and property and this sense of power has since been stolen from them (59). This statement implies that Persian women were powerful only in ancient times, and they are now powerless and cannot have their own property and careers. However, this is not the case as Iranian women “are able to sit in parliament, to drive, to vote, to buy property and to work” (Burke and Elliott 58).

Another example of conflating Iranians with Arabs is that the author uses the term “Bedouin”, which means an Arab seminomadic group, to describe the characteristics of Persians. When the stranger asks for food, Pahlbod’s father says, “Stranger, in your travels, have you met many Bedouins? … then perhaps you are familiar with the idea that a Bedouin’s wealth is not counted by the number of camels or horses in his flocks, but by the number of guests who eat beneath his tent each evening” (47). “Bedouin”, meaning “desert dweller”, are “an ancient Arab people” (Losleben 4) who were historically located in the Arabian and Syrian deserts. In contrast with Pahlbod’s father’s description of “Bedouin”, Peter Malcolm and Elizabeth Losleben write that Bedouins “measure their wealth by the number of animals in their herd and the quality of their thoroughbred Arabian
horses” while one of the characteristics of Bedouins is hospitality (64). Persians are also famous for their hospitality, but they are not Bedouin.

In “Romance of the Arrow Girl”, readers become familiar with Iranian culture through the details of the story. In the Afterword, the author notes, “Many of the details come from the real world and real world history. The form of a Persian marriage service, the royal titles, the names of almost all the towns and countries” (236). From the beginning of the story, it is clear that the story is written for Western readers. To show that everyone in the wedding disagrees with Khaan’s marriage, the author writes: “The priest’s face wore a sour expression” (219). This is an incorrect use of the term priest: it is a Muslim clergyman who performs the marriage rituals in Iran and not a priest.

These generalisation and conflations in representing Persian culture, history and religion show that the authors were not equipped with enough knowledge of Iranian culture and history. Therefore, the discourse which constructs “the cultural implications of a retelling” becomes more important than what is retold (xi) and the readers, as Stephens and McCallum argue, have no alternative “but to misread by contextualizing such stories within the Western metaethic” (7).

Genie stories in children’s literature, as Stephens and McCallum argue, belong to two main formations. One form involves retelling stories in One Thousand and One Nights, such as the stories of Aladdin, Ali Baba, and Sinbad, “which seem to have a timeless appeal within Western capitalist societies”. They call these stories “rag-to-riches stories which combine the unexpected gaining of unimaginable wealth with notions of the spiritual destiny of the individual” (230). They add that in Aladdin’s story the reason that makes him deserving of good
fortune is missing (232). However, the good fortune of Pahlbod and Harmony is achieved through their personal development and good deeds. The restaurant of Pahlbod’s family does not become crowded because of their spiritual destiny but because they are helping poor people. Harmony also achieves her dream of finding true love after learning to have faith and self-confidence. In “Romance of the Arrow Girl”, however, the dream is met with disappointment. The second form of genie stories, according to Stephens and McCallum, usually shapes modes of behaviour by representing moral values with the purpose of criticising “the forms and practices of contemporary Western society” (231). This second formation of genie stories applies to these three stories. By evoking and also questioning Orientalist ideas, the authors of these three stories aim to criticise most Western reworkings of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which, as the editor of *Dreaming of Djinn* states, “focus only on the orientalist view of the Middle East and even now still show a one-sided view of women” (14).

Stephens and McCallum argue that “the retelling of ‘Arabian Nights’ stories and the appropriation of oriental motifs into sword-and-sorcery narrative both tend to reproduce older ideologies” (250) which are Oriental stereotypes. In “Romance of the Arrow Girl”, as the author notes, the main purpose of the story is to show how a monster “lives inside the human heart”, “the male ego” (235–236). This is shown, like in *Sons of the Rumour*, through a reworking of the frame story in *One Thousand and One Nights* as it represents a brutal Khaan who is taking revenge on a woman because he has been dishonoured by her. For the author, as she notes in the Afterword, *One Thousand and One Nights* is “the perfect context within which to uncover the reality of the Khaan’s behaviour” (235). The stereotypical
representation of a Persian ruler is reproduced here. The Khaan is rich: “He wore rich red robes under his red cloak and the helm on his head bore an inscription of two interlocking gold ‘A’s’” (221). Khaan’s mother, who disapproves with this marriage from the very beginning of the story, criticises her son for his pride and says: “You acted out of lust and now you’re acting out of pride” (233). This stereotypical representation of the Khaan takes us back to the representation of Xerxes in *The Persians*: a rich, proud and defeated king who is criticised by his mother.

These stories rework *One Thousand and One Nights* to convey the authors’ messages, to give children a moral lesson. In *Sons of the Rumour*, the author reproduces the frame story and also the structure of *One Thousand and One Nights* for adult readers to criticise the absurdity of all religions. In the short stories, Persian women are represented as more supportive, powerful and emancipated whereas in *Sons of the Rumour* the emancipated Shahrazad is represented as a Western woman with blue eyes and blond hair. The use of romance in these two works is also different. In *Sons of the Rumour*, the author presents romance in ancient times as the flip side of misogyny in order to criticise misogyny in contemporary Australia, while in “Harmony Thicket and the Persian Shoes”, romance is used to influence young readers to have faith and self-confidence. Yet while the stories set out to challenge some stereotypes, they are reinforcing others. In “Romance of the Arrow Girl” and “Harmony Thicket and the Persian Shoes”, women characters help and support each other. However, in “The Dancer of Smoke”, the genie is powerless and needs to be rescued by the male characters. At the same time, a double image of Oriental men is presented. While Pahlbod, his
father and Amr are represented as good characters as they respect women, other men disrespect the dancer. The Khaan is also represented in the Orientalist fashion. The stories tend to illustrate women who can overcome tyrants; however, the stereotype of the male ruler, the Khaan, is still the same. These contradictions are explained by Stephens and McCallum: modern authors use traditional texts for their own time and purposes, appealing to contemporary readers and ideology. At the same time, some historical and cultural knowledge represented in these stories is not accurate. Thus it seems that “the discourse which shapes the cultural implications of a retelling is more significant than what is retold” (xi), and the texts examined in this chapter affirm Stephens and McCallum’s view that the Orient in One Thousand and One Nights “is an Other which exists to be appropriated” (230).

The next chapter examines writing by Iranian Australians writers to discover if the themes they represent are similar to or different from those of non Iranian Australian writers examined in previous chapters.

Notes:

1. A part of this chapter has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Intercultural Studies: “Shahrazad in Cronulla” by Farzaneh Mayabadi and Wenche Ommundsen.

2. In Slave of the Lamp, the spelling for Shahrazad and Dinazad is Scheherazade and Dinar Zad, respectively.

3. The spelling for Shahrazad in the editor’s note in Dreaming of Djinn is Scheherazade.

4. In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “satrap” is defined as the governor of a province in ancient Persia.
Chapter Five: Iran and Iranians in Writing by

Iranian Australian Writers

Introduction

While previous chapters examined the representation of Iran and Iranians in writing by non Iranian Australians, this chapter investigates this representation in writing by Iranian Australians. These texts to be analysed are: *Scattered Pearls* by Sohila Zanjani, *Transactions* and *The New Angel* by Ali Alizadeh, and the film *My Tehran for Sale* by Granaz Moussavi. I will examine if the themes they represent are similar to or different from those of non Iranian Australian writers examined in previous chapters, and how Iranian Australian writers negotiate their cultural identity and their portrayal of their home country in their writing. Before examining selected texts, I will first provide a general overview of Iranian writing in diaspora to illustrate its historical background, its themes and concerns, and debates surrounding this writing.

Iranian Writing in Diaspora

In an introduction to her book *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora*, Sanaz Fotouhi argues that Iranian writing in diaspora has its origin in writing by Iranian migrants who wrote in languages other than English, like Amineh Pakravan’s *Le Prince Sans Histoire* (1944) which is the first French novel by an Iranian writer in diaspora. The first Iranian diasporic writing in English dates back to the late 1950s. Examples of this writing are *Persia is My Heart* (1953) by Najmeh Najafi, and The
*Day of Sacrifice* (1959) by Freydun Esfandiary, both published in London (Fotouhi 4). Despite the long history of Iranian writing in diaspora (especially in languages other than English and Farsi), it was after the revolution that this writing flourished.

It took almost 35 years for the Iranian diaspora to build a substantial body of work which is now considered a part of world literature in English, mainly centred in the US. The first Iranian American writer, Nahid Rachlin, published her first novel, *Foreigner*, in 1978. Persis M. Karim states that Rachlin:

is an early pioneer of what critics call ‘Iranian immigrant literature’ ...

Rachlin now joins a cadre of women writers who are defining the contours of an emerging body of Iranian diaspora writing, such as Tara Bahrampour, Gina Barkhordar Nahai, Azar Nafisi, Azadeh Moaveni, and the France-based graphic memoirist, Marjane Satrapi. (“Talking with a Pioneer” 153)

In the early writing by Iranians in diaspora the theme of exile is prominent. In “Iranian Diaspora Literature since 1980” Ardavan Davaran writes that “The reality of living outside the familiar society, and the difficulty of living in a strange, new environment has imbued early writing of exile and emigration with a sense of alienation, together with a nostalgic longing for the lost life of the homeland” (12). While recognising that these are common themes in all diasporic literature, Davaran adds that in Iranian diasporic writing “possibilities for reconsideration of the past and discovery of new ideas, exploration of identity and assertion of difference” (12) are flourishing. While acknowledging Davaran’s views on alienation as a common theme in Iranian diasporic writing, Daniel Grassian argues in *Iranian and Diasporic Literature in the 21st Century* that many Iranian diasporic
writers “might not always be able to ‘assert the dignity of their existence,’ and formulate ‘a new consciousness,’ [and ‘a new identity’] but, through their depictions, we can see the beginnings of an amalgamation of Western and Iranian worlds” (5). The perspective of the younger generation of Iranian writers in diaspora, Karim argues, “is less oriented toward the past and more focused on what is yet to be, and perhaps, their work is much more attenuated by the perspective of ‘neither’ and ‘both’” (“Reflections on Literature” 155).

Grassian argues that because “Iran and the West have been subjected to many false stereotypes”, the literature by Iranians in diaspora has a vital role in “deconstructing Western caricatures of Iran and Iranian caricature of the West”; however, these texts have rarely appeared in academic study or literature courses of the West (4). Regarding the writing by Iranians in diaspora, Grassian argues:

On the one hand, Iranian and Iranian diasporic memoirs can been seen as activist texts that authentically give voice to the previously voiceless while exposing and trying to address perceived human rights violations in the Islamic Republic. On the other hand, these memoirs have also been seen as colonialist texts that debase the subjects they supposedly seek to liberate and contribute to further denigrating generalizations and stereotypes about Iranian and diasporic Iranians. Ultimately, both viewpoints are somewhat accurate but extreme and neither is comprehensively accurate. (89)

While the latter viewpoint seems more credible I will take Grassian’s argument into account in my reading of Iranian writing in Australia.
Women’s Memoirs

After the revolution, Iranian women’s writing in diaspora has dominated the literary production of Iranians in North America and Europe to the extent that Iranian women’s writing can be said to be responsible for making Iran visible in literature (Karim, “Reflections on Literature” 152). The explosion of women’s memoirs in diaspora was caused by the particular history of Iranian women, and Americans’ desire to know more about Iran, and perhaps the lives of Iranian women.

Influenced by the presence of British, Russians and Americans in Iran, Reza Shah (1878–1944) decided to modernise Iran. A part of this was the Women’s Awakening Movement of 1936, in which soldiers forced women to discard the veil and participate in society like men. While the purpose of this forced modernisation and unveiling was to encourage the participation of women in society, many women stayed at home as they could not accept unveiling. In this regard, Fotouhi writes:

Caught between tradition and modernity, many Iranian women never had or gained the opportunity or ability to express themselves. Although modernisation affected the façade of the country, it did not change core values. While some families levied more freedom to women, the majority still operated according to strict gender and public/private dichotomies that had ruled Iranian society for centuries. Within this dichotomy, women’s voices were still silenced and the stories of their lives kept within the domestic realm. Following the Islamic Revolution and the consequential forced re-veiling of women
in the early 1980s, women’s situation became even worse and their voices were further silenced. (8)

Writing became a medium for Iranian women in diaspora to express themselves. In “Reflections on Literature after the 1979 Revolution in Iran and in the Diaspora”, Karim argues that women’s memoirs provide “an opportunity for self-revelation” and “self-representation” (153).

The common themes in writing by Iranian women in diaspora, as Karim argues, are:

the tensions between Western and Iranian culture, between Islamic and, say, American culture and values, and the obvious desire to both maintain connections to Iran and Iranian culture and divorce the country from the prevailing view of the Islamic Republic today. (‘Reflections on Literature’ 152)

These women choose literature as a field of resistance to respond to the stereotypes imposed on them by “both the Islamic Republic and the Western media” (Karim, Let Me Tell You 19). Examples of this writing are memoirs like To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America (1999) by Tara Bahrampour, and fiction like At the Wall of the Almighty (1999) and The Bathhouse (2001) by Farnoosh Moshiri. Karim argues that:

These writers … helped make visible the experiences of living through the Iranian Revolution and its accompanying problems—war, exile, and adjustment to a new culture—but also have found ways to challenge the representation of women both in the Islamic Republic and in the Western media. They are essentially writers whose lives and
work operate at the juncture between two cultures. (“Reflections on Literature” 153)

Iranian writing in diaspora was also influenced by 9/11 and its aftermath. After 9/11, there was an increasing interest in writing from the Middle East, however, this interest among publishers, scholars and readers “was primarily focused on, and framed in relation to, the Arab/Muslim women’s position after America’s declaration of ‘War on Terror’” (Fotouhi 5). Karim argues that in addition to providing “an opportunity for self-representation”, women’s memoirs are popular because this writing “has been skillfully marketed to suggest that Iranian women are telling their true lives and their secrets to an American reading public who might otherwise not be able to move beyond the occulted, veiled images of Iranian women purveyed in the media” (“Reflections on Literature” 153). Karim adds that the problematic aspect of memoir is the creation of “a self-other dichotomy” as it often privileges “the individual life”. This dichotomy in the memoirs of Iranian women evokes the idea that their experiences “serve as the essential symbol for the oppressive forces of Islam or the Islamic Republic of Iran” (“Reflections on Literature” 153–154). Examples of this, Karim states, are Azadeh Moaveni’s *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran* (2005), and Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), which provide information about the situation of Iranian women that Western readers might not otherwise encounter (“Reflections on Literature” 154). These works represent a black and white image of Iran and Iranian women, and exaggerate the stereotypes. Interestingly, critics like Hamid Dabashi, Negar Mottahedeh and Fatima Keshavarz criticise these memoirs harshly. Hamid Dabashi, in *The World is My Home: A Hamid Dabashi Reader*, states that “[t]he
field of Iranian studies … is a direct descendent of old-fashioned Orientalism” (128). Negar Mottahedeh also suggests that:

It cannot be coincidental that the memoirs by Iranian female authors now living in the West, such as those of Firoozeh Dumas, Marjane Satrapi and Azar Nafisi, have found such phenomenal commercial success at a time when Washington hawks would like the authors’ country of birth to be the next battleground in the total war of the twenty-first century. (Mottahedeh np)

In her groundbreaking book *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* Gillian Whitlock includes a chapter on Iranian memoirs in English, which is considered and discussed as “a serious and emerging discourse” (Fotouhi 5). Remarking that most of the Iranian memoirs recall the 1979 revolution and its aftermath, Whitlock points out that “the question of how we might read these memoirs and understand their contemporary currency is an important one” (161). She asks, “what are the dynamics of the circulation and reception of these memoirs now?” (161) and argues that these memoirs, appear “convincing”, “realistic”, “familiar” and “welcome” to contemporary American readers, by contrast to contemporary Iranians who consider them as outdated and unfamiliar (165). This, as she argues, is “a conjunction that signals their entanglement in complicated and mutable lines of filiation, connection, and commodification” (165). She adds that these life stories respond to the desire of “the curious and uninformed American readership eager to know about Iran and primed for stories of disenchantment by exiles” (165). Whitlock refers to Mottahedeh’s remarks quoted above and adds:

it is not a coincidence that a memoir that frames relations between America and Iran in these terms should achieve such phenomenal
commercial success now. The turn to exilic memoir at a time of resurgent nationalism and patriotism in the war on terror demands that we hold literature and history together and that both the allegro and lento registers remain in play to open the reading room onto the bloody streets. (185)

These memoirs on some occasions harden stereotypes and justify the role of the West as a savior, which furthers the West’s interest.

**Iranian Australian Writing**

As a younger generation of Iranians are living in Australia compared to North America or Europe, a sustained body of work has emerged in Australia over the last few years both in Farsi and English. There is a growing body of writing by Iranian Australians in Farsi, some of it translated into English. For example, Granaz Moussavi was a poet in Iran and has continued her writing after immigrating to Australia. She is representative of the younger generation of Iranian writers in diaspora. Moussavi is the filmmaker of the well-known film *My Tehran for Sale* (2013). She published a collection of poems called *Red Memory: Hafezeye Ghermez* in Farsi in Australia in 2011. Her other poems translated into English include “Post-Cinderella” and “Moving Sale” translated by Zack Rogow, and “Song of a Forbidden Woman” translated by Niloufar Talebi in 2008. Moussavi writes for a Farsi readership and her poems reflect on nostalgia, feeling lost and in-betweenness. Laetitia Nanquette quotes Bhabha’s concept of the third space, “The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space—a third space—where the negotiation of incommensurable
differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (Nanquette 395) and argues that in the Iranian context the third space conveys a specific meaning, “as there can be a rejection from the host society due to international and internal politics” (“Iranian Exilic Poetry” 402). However, as Nanquette argues, in Moussavi’s poems the third space “does not dissolve the self in multiple identities”:

Moussavi’s poems help to give new meaning to the third space and original perspectives on it by offering it as a way to implement the continuity of her self and her belonging to an unchanging nature, far from national belongings … Moussavi avoids political stances and makes affirmation of belonging to nature. (“Iranian Exilic Poetry” 349–402)

Roshanak Amrein, another Iranian Australian writer, immigrated to Australia in 1994. She has published two bilingual Farsi/English books of poetry in Germany: One Million Flights (2010) and Songs from a Far Island (2012). The poems are originally written in Farsi and then translated into English by the author. There is also a considerable number of Iranian Australians who write in English. Fotouhi argues that there are different motivations behind the choice to write in English:

For the writers it is a means of expression and communication with the people of their host country. As such it can be seen as a way of establishing dialogue and introducing their own culture and ideologies into their new environment … English provides many who previously did not have the ability to express themselves in their home or host cultures with new linguistic possibilities of expression. For some,
English has given them the ability to tell their stories, to speak, and to have a voice where they previously did not have any. This means that through this new language, and by becoming a speaking subject, they can reconstruct their own sense of damaged identity and redefine already established stereotypes through their narrations. (16–17)

Fotouhi’s argument is relevant to Sohila Zanjani’s *Scattered Pearls*. She first published her book in Farsi but did not find a readership in the Iranian community in Australia; therefore, she decided to publish her book in English which provided her with the opportunity to express herself and be heard.

Writers as well as academics like Ali Alizadeh and Mammad Aidani are the best examples of Iranian Australian writers in English. Ali Alizadeh is a well-known Iranian Australian writer and poet born in 1976 in Tehran. He migrated to Australia in 1991, after the Islamic revolution and the Iran–Iraq war. In Australia, he has published a considerable number of works. Some of his short stories are: “Samira was a Terrorist” (2014), “Sally” (2013) and “The Ogre” (2012). The common themes in his writing, similar to themes in other diasporic literature in Australia, are related to refugee issues, racism and ethnic stereotyping, displacement and the search for identity. He addresses international terrorism, racism, rape and discrimination, and looks at them from a very modern and radical perspective. He shows that these issues are not particular to any specific group of people or nation and exist everywhere in the world.

Nanquette states that “[t]he discourse on refugees is prominent in Australian society and, although refugee life writing is not a genre practised by other Iranians around the world, it has proved a useful way to express the situation of Iranians in
Australia” (“Refugees life writing” 2–3). Mohsen Soltany-Zand, who spent four years in a detention centre in Australia, is a poet who writes in English. Some of his poems are “Realpolitik” (2004), “I am Not Crazy” (2004), and “Drought” (2004), all published in Southerly. These poems mainly reflect detainees’ suffering in detention centres and the poet’s search for freedom and democracy. Shahin Shafaei studied English literature in Tehran and was a successful playwright and actor in Iran. Because of a ban on his works he fled to Australia and spent 22 months in a detention centre. His play Refugitive: A One-Man Theatre Work (2003), which is a conversation between a man on a hunger strike and his hungry stomach, was published in Southerly.

Although there are many similarities in the writing by Iranians who have migrated to Europe and North America and those who have come to Australia, there are some differences as well (Nanquette, “Refugee Life Writing” 1). These differences are partly due to class differences. After the Islamic revolution, Nanquette argues, Iranians who migrated to Europe and North America “tended to come from upper class and elite backgrounds” (“Refugee Life Writing” 5). An example of writing by this group of Iranians in diaspora is Azar Nafisi’s memoir, Reading Lolita in Tehran (2003). Nafisi comes from an elite family and now is a professor at John Hopkins University. Nanquette argues that such memoirs also exist in Australia; however, the writers of these memoirs “do not share Nafisi’s privileged position” (“Refugee Life Writing” 5). Zahra Ghahramani’s memoir, My Life as a Traitor (2007), Nanquette argues, “is the closest Australian example to Iranian-American memoirs like Reading Lolita in Tehran” (“Refugee Life Writing” 6). Ghahramani’s memoir reinforces stereotypes, and Iranian readers perhaps would not fully believe her story. By contrast to Nafisi, Ghahramani
belongs to a middle-class family. She was arrested and imprisoned because of her political activism. An Australian writer, Robert Hilman, helped her to escape the country and migrate to Australia.

Diasporic writing by Iranians in Australia features diverse themes and subjects. Some texts are very critical of Iranian society and the way women are treated, like *Scattered Pearls* (2016) by Sohila Zanjani. Zanjani is an Iranian Australian lawyer who wants to empower all women in the world by writing her own story of being abused by her father and husband. *Blood and Carnations* (1993) by Lily Izadi Monadjemi which shows how the 1979 revolution changed the life of Westernised families, “Standing in the Cold” (2016, short story) by Nasrin Mahoutchi, and *Sorrow of My Native Land* (2007) by Banafsheh Serov which is an autobiography about her family’s escape from Iran to Turkey and then to Australia after the Islamic revolution, are other examples of women’s memoirs by Iranian Australians in English.

Nanquette also refers to life writing by Iranian minorities, especially Baha’i and Jewish minorities, who faced persecution and restrictions after the revolution. Memoirs by Iranian-American Jewish writers “insist either on their high status, despite their social marginality, or on their intellectual standing” (“Refugee Life Writing” 6). However, Kooshyar Karimi’s *I Confess: Revelations in Exile* (2012), a memoir by an Iranian-Australian Jewish writer, narrates his poor childhood in a Jewish family and how he was mistreated and tortured by the Iranian government in order to force him to cooperate with them and spy on other Jewish families in Iran, before fleeing to Australia. *I Confess*, Nanquette argues, “is relatively rare among the canon of Iranian memoir in that it directly addresses issues of poverty” (“Refugee Life Writing” 6).
This chapter will primarily focus on Iranian Australian writing—*Scattered Pearls* by Sohila Zanjani, *Transactions* and *The New Angel* by Ali Alizadeh, and *My Tehran for Sale* by Granaz Moussavi—to examine how Iranian Australian writers reconstruct and form their cultural identity as well as their portrayal of their home country in their writing.

**Scattered Pearls**

*Scattered Pearls* (2016) is an autobiography by Sohila Zanjani. As an autobiography, this book is a witness account which narrates the lives of three generations of women in Iran—Sohila, her mother, Shahin, and Sohila’s grandmother, Laya—and their struggle against patriarchy. The book is a critique of misogyny and domestic violence at the hands of Iranian men. Zanjani’s autobiography is motivated by a wish to help women who are in a similar situation to herself, to stand up for women’s rights and struggle for freedom. In an interview on ABC Radio National, Zanjani said that her intention in writing this book was to show the importance of “personal growth” and self-realisation. She hopes that someone will “think about a better way to live” after reading this book (3 May 2016). She dedicates the book to all oppressed women in the world, showing her sympathy not only toward Iranian women in this situation but to all women across the world: “[t]o all those women the world over/ who have cried in silence, / unseen and unheard” (italics in the original) (np).

The Farsi version of this book (2,000 pages) was first published in 2002. In 2009, Zanjani decided to write an English version of the book to address a Western
audience and gain a wider readership. She collaborated with a ghostwriter, David Brewster, over a period of seven years until the English version of 350 pages was published in 2016. The book’s writing style is plain and Zanjani is very direct in narrating what had happened to herself and her mother.

The title of the book, *Scattered Pearls*, refers to Sohila’s pearl necklace, and to a dramatic scene in which Reza, her Iranian husband, pulls and tears her pearl necklace and all the pearls scatter on the carpet (Zanjani, ABC Radio National 3 May 2016). It also refers to “the people she likens to pearls, the men and women around the world who are experiencing family violence” (Somerville 36).

*Scattered Pearls* shows Western readers today what life was like in pre-revolution Iran, and also after the revolution when Sohila came to Australia. The first part of this memoir is set in pre-revolution Iran, where Sohila grows up in poverty and under her father’s (Asghar) abusive behaviour. Sohila’s mother, Shahin, also suffers from Asghar’s misbehaviour and abusive language. Sohila faces many difficulties in her life as a teenager. For example, when some boys give her a lift home her father gets angry and slaps her in the face. She writes, “[t]he slapping continued. My father’s hands were heavy, working hands and he was hitting hard. My eyes went black and I started seeing stars. I felt that I was going blind” (54). In spite of all the humiliation and hardship in her life, Sohila is ambitious and at the age of 19 finds a full-time job in a reputable company with a good salary. She then helps her mother financially and buys furniture and household goods for their house.

To escape from her childhood memories, Zanjani decides to leave Iran. At the Australian embassy in Iran, Sohila meets Reza’s brother who introduces them to each other in order for Reza to help her to get an Australian visa. When Reza
meets Sohila, he tells her that he is a PhD student at an Australian university. He keeps visiting her and gradually they fall into a relationship and finally marry. Sohila travels to Australia on Reza’s visa. In Australia, Sohila finds out that Reza is not a PhD student and does not have any plans for the future. Sohila finds a place to live and a job; however, Reza becomes increasingly idle and keeps smoking and gambling. Worst of all, he physically and verbally abuses her. He calls her Mrs Silly, slaps her hard and pushes her around (183).

The birth of their first child, Ali, does not cause any change in Reza’s behaviour, and Sohila’s situation becomes more difficult as she has to do all the housework as well as taking care of Ali (163). Sohila is relieved when her younger sister Fariba and her brother Mansour come to Australia. Fariba helps her by taking care of Ali when Sohila goes to work. Reza becomes more brutal when she has her second child, Shirin:

The slightest noise from me or the children would cause him to storm out of his bedroom, swear at me, and beat me about the head or pull my hair. All of this would take place in front of the children, and while he did not hit them he would shout at Ali to shut up. (209)

A year after she is granted Australian permanent residency, Sohila is pregnant with twins and her parents come to Australia for a visit, which brings about a change in her life. Sohila is anxious about the custody of her children and believes that Reza will take Ali and Shirin back to Iran where fathers have custody of children. However, her increased understanding of Australian law and the support of her family help Sohila get a divorce from Reza as well as the custody of her four children. After her divorce, Sohila becomes stronger than before and ready to build
the new life she aspires to. After she leaves Reza, she writes, “there was one thing I did have, and it was perhaps the most important thing of all: my future” (264).

As her earlier suffering in part was due to her ignorance of Australian Family Law, she enrols to study law to be able to help women in a similar situation: “I was so driven to help women avoid what I had been through” (283). Although she endures hardship as a single mother who is also studying, Sohila successfully graduates from the school of law. She then finds a job in Prime Law Brokers, and later develops her business, completing a “shift from oppressed housewife and overburdened single mother to self-assured businesswoman” (293).

The book depicts the life of individuals as well as gender relations in Iranian society. Regarding the representation of Iranian masculinity in the literature of the Iranian diaspora, Fotouhi writes:

Ironically, many books by Iranian women writers in English replicate a stereotypical Orientalist depiction of Iranian men. ... In many, Iranian men are depicted hypervisibly, as negative, violent fanatics, sexually deviant, or, worse still, rendered almost invisible. (178)

In this section, I will examine how Laya and Shahin face domestic violence perpetrated by Iranian men differently from Sohila, and to what extent the representation of Iranian masculinity in this book corresponds to Fotouhi’s argument. I also investigate how differently the text represents Iranian and Australian responses to domestic violence.

Sohila’s mother and grandmother are aware of domestic violence in their family and do not accept it, but they have to survive because of the children and also because patriarchy is condoned as the social norm in Iran. However, although she acknowledges that her mother was “a very strong woman” and very supportive
of her children, Sohila also believes that her mother is submissive; at the same time, she does not show any alternatives to submission available to her mother. Regarding her father and mother’s relationship and attitudes she writes:

His loose mouth, his lack of appetite for beauty, his ignorance of the feelings of others. These things made him a monster in my mind. And I realised how submissive my mother was, yet how she retained, inside her, a strength that my father could never break. She was so accepting of her own destiny, yet so determined not to accept that mine would replicate hers. (65)

In Australia, when Shahin asks Sohila why she has ended up with a fate worse than her own, Sohila says, “[b]ecause I was like you! Because I was doing as you did, putting up with all the insults and humiliation. Accepting these things as the way my life was going. Not questioning anything” (224). Laya’s advice to Sohila when she visits her grandmother for the last time before leaving Iran is also about hope, courage and self-confidence:

Ah, hope. Hope is so good. To have hope. To have dreams. If you fall you stand up. You run and run to reach … to reach happiness. But if they close the path to you … you want to fly but they cut your wings. You are imprisoned. And inside yourself you may become dead … Don’t live a life in which others define your destiny. Like my life. Like you mother’s life. There was no way out. Poverty. Lack of education. We were entangled and could not live any better. For you it can be different. (3–4)

By contrast to Sohila’s view that her mother is submissive, Sohila’s mother and grandmother do not reinforce patriarchy, and are not submissive to domestic
violence, but they have no means to stand up against it: they were “entangled” and “could not live any better” (4). They live their feminism through their mothering by giving Sohila confidence and courage to make her own life. This echoes Fiona Green’s statement that “[f]eminist mothers want their daughters to develop to their full potential as human beings, to be strong and confident as children and as adults” (99).

The patriarchal system in Iranian families did not just appear after the Islamic revolution. In the introduction to Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran, Rostami-Povey writes:

male dominance and female subordination in Iran can be traced back to pre-Islamic civilisations. Thus the roots of patriarchal oppression go far deeper than the Islamisation of state and society since the 1979 revolution. Western [political] discourses which state that women’s liberation will come with liberation from Islam and from Muslim men is, therefore, simplistic and damaging. (2)

Mahnaz Afkhami also argues that the problem for the women’s movement during the Pahlavi era was not primarily the government but “male-dominated society…. The law as the expression of the will of the state was indispensable to the securing of women’s rights in Iran” (14). Women’s rights were a vital part of Reza Shah’s purpose in modernising Iran, but changing the law was not sufficient to change the underlying patriarchal culture. This contradiction was seen in Reza Shah’s own behaviour. Although he ordered the unveiling of the Iranian women, “he felt wretched the day his wife and daughters appeared in public unveiled” (14). This movement was against the will of the Shia religious leaders at the time. After
the revolution, religious leaders became the government of the country and therefore religious practices were reinforced by the state.

Iranian society has a very important role in Sohila and her mother’s suffering. Sohila is not able to stand up to her husband, partly because of her cultural background. She does not call the police or seek help in Australia because “[r]eporting issues like mine to the authorities was not something many people did in Iran. To go to the police was to be looked down upon, even if you were the victim. It signalled an inability to work things out yourself (or put up with them)” (226).

Sohila is initially unaware of Australian Family Law and thinks that in Australia, like in Iran, Reza would get the custody of her children:

I had no familiarity with Australian law, certainly no understanding that I had some rights of my own. I thought simply that if he wanted to take Ali and leave me behind, he could do so, as would have been the case in Iran … I didn’t understand that Reza’s violence toward me was against the law. In Iran he could have done almost whatever he liked with me, short of murdering me, and he would always remain above the law. It had never occurred to me that the laws affecting family and relationships might be different in Australia. (189)

Sohila finds the courage to stand up for her rights only when she finds out that Australian Family Law is protective of women. For her, Australian Family Law is the main reason for her success in standing up to her husband. Although Zanjani dedicates her book to all suppressed women in the world, she presents a very positive view of the Australian approach to domestic violence. While she criticises Iranian society and believes that her misery is rooted in the deprivation of freedom
and domestic violence prevalent in Iranian society she writes very little about Australian society where, as statistics show, “[o]n average, at least one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner in Australia” (“Domestic and Family Violence”). In fact, women are not protected from domestic violence in Australia either, in spite of the law.

Not all families in Iran were like Sohila’s. In the book, Zanjani compares her own life to that of her friend:

Though I was more than capable of running my own life, I walked “hunched over” … under the weight of culture and family. This was not just because of being a woman. I knew women who were independent (whether married or not) and had some control over their lives. My friend Elahe was a perfect example of a woman who had moved away from the constraints of Iranian culture and found her own way. But in my case my family background—in which as we have seen, women were entirely subordinate—combined with a national culture in which young people were not encouraged to pursue their interests, and even if they want to, opportunities were limited. (111–112)

In her interview on ABC Radio National, Zanjani was asked “Was what was going on in your family house common or different in Tehran of those days?” She replied, “I think it was different. Probably we are one of the unfortunate ones … Yes, there are families like us, I can say that, but there are at the same time families like my friend’s. In Persia, it is a mixture of these two extremes” (3 May 2016). Although domestic violence and misogyny took root in Sohila’s family because society and “national culture” accepted it, Sohila’s life story is not representative of the life of the majority of Iranians.
The representation of male characters is subjective and *Scattered Pearls* shows many different modes of male behaviour. Sohila marries a man who is like her father. However, her approach to them is different and personalised. When Sohila grows up she tries to understand her father’s behaviour; however, she never forgives her husband. Zanjani writes that after hearing about Asghar’s abusive childhood,

I started to understand why my father was the way he was as I was growing up. Given more opportunities, including an education, he might have made something of himself. For all his faults, my father always worked hard, which was quite different to my own husband. (249)

Both Reza and Asghar are the products of Iranian patriarchal culture and extreme examples of misogyny. However, the book is not a complete condemnation of Iranian men and shows that it is possible for them to change. Asghar redeems himself and becomes a better man in Australia. He helps Sohila to leave her husband and openly shares his love for her: “My good daughter, I love you more than my own life” (259). After her father’s behaviour changes Sohila says, “[a]ll my life I had dreamed of a father like this. Now I had one—I did not know how—and I was going to make the most of it … [T]his ‘new’ father of mine was someone I could, and did, love and respect for the rest of his life” (260). By contrast to Asghar, there are weaknesses in Reza’s character that he is not able to overcome. Reza is in Australia where he has the opportunity to have an education and a job; however, during his life with Sohila, he never tries to use his opportunities and instead becomes increasingly indolent.
While it is true that Sohila and her mother are mistreated by their husbands, there are other male characters who do not correspond to this pattern, such as Sohila’s brother Mansour who is very protective of her. An example that shows the differences between Reza and Mansour is when Sohila confronts Reza about his gambling. Reza slaps her and yells at her:

Remember who brought you to Australia … You are a woman and I am a man. You are the second sex! You are a donkey, you have no brain. I have a wife to put her down and screw her up. You are not human yet. You need to be bashed up more in your head so that you become a human … It is time that I will take you to Iran and divorce you.” (191)

After this, Sohila decides to escape from Reza and goes to Mansour’s place. As Sohila writes, Mansour tells her that “[h]e was pleased that finally I was doing something to break free from my violent husband” (193) and promises to help her.

While Asghar has been given a voice and a chance to redeem himself and show his love for Sohila, Reza’s voice is absent. When Asghar expresses his love for Sohila she writes:

How these words from my father lifted my heart. From my father! Less than a decade earlier I could never have imagined such language coming from that mouth about anyone, let alone me. Yet here we’d been … walking the streets together looking for somewhere for me to live with my two—soon to be four—children, and my father was openly sharing his love for me. (259)

However, she does not give Reza any chance to rectify the situation. Zanjani says that she never loved Reza and never felt that Reza loved her (ABC Radio National
3 May 2016). In a session with their mediator before their divorce, Reza expresses his love for her and says, “[y]ou are the only woman for me. I want you to carry on our relationship” (257). Sohila does not give him any chance to redeem himself: “It was, of course, all too late. By now there would be no reconciliation on my part” (257). Even after their session with the mediator, Reza makes an attempt to talk to her. He tells her that he does not want to hurt her and just needs to talk to her. However, she cries and calls the police, and after that she never sees Reza again. She does not even know what happened to Reza, her children’s father, after getting a divorce.

The subjective representation of male characters can be related to the genre of the book as an autobiography. Although in autobiography the narrator, author and the main character are the same person, the way the story is told is very much dependent on the time of narration. At the time of writing the book, Zanjani is still a relatively young woman whose writing aims to criticise domestic violence and Reza’s behaviour is represented as an extreme example of domestic violence. At the same time, it seems that her writing is driven by her emotions. The book is partly a rewritten version of her diaries. The writing in her diaries is based on her emotions; however, when she was rewriting them as an autobiography she had a purpose. She forgives her father, whose character is very similar to Reza, because she was under the emotional impact of her father’s death when she was writing her book. Regarding “the positions of enunciation” Stuart Hall argues:

Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write—the positions of enunciation. What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say “in our own name”, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who
speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practises then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as “production”, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (222 [1990])

Zanjani’s point of view and the way she presents the characters at this particular time might have changed if she had written her autobiography later in her life because identity is “always in process”.

*Scattered Pearls* is similar to *Citiplex*; they are both stories of Iranian women who travel to Australia after their marriage and suffer under the dominance of their husbands, violent and brutal Iranian men. In both *Citiplex* and *Scattered Pearls*, the stereotype of Iranian men as brutal and violent, and Iranian women as oppressed and subjugated, are reinforced. In *Citiplex*, it is a white man who saves Sacha from her miserable life. However, Sohila gets out of her relationship without the help of a Western man. However, her book can be seen to confirm Fotouhi’s argument that “Ironically, many books by Iranian women writers in English replicate a stereotypical Orientalist depiction of Iranian men” (187).

In Zanjani’s writing, there is no sense of alienation or nostalgia. What caused her misery during her youth and childhood, unlike in many Iranian women’s memoirs, was not the Islamic revolution or women’s oppression as such. She left Iran to escape her childhood memories:

My “escape” would not be for political reasons, or any higher cause; the oppression of women was not yet what it would become … No, I
simply wanted to escape my childhood and explore the world. 

(Scattered Pearls 112)

Most Iranian women’s memoirs in diaspora present a critique of Iran after the Islamic revolution. What makes Zanjani’s writing unique is that her book is a critique of Iranian society before as well as after the revolution and it still reproduces similar stereotypes.

By contrast to Zanjani, Ali Alizadeh refuses a black and white image of Iran and Australia/the West, and criticises both sides.

**Ali Alizadeh**

In Australia, Alizadeh’s love for writing and poetry led him to enrol in the Creative Arts Program at Griffith University in 1995. During these years of study, he completed an experimental narrative poem, *Elixir: A Story in Poetry*, which was a part of his Honours thesis and was published in 2002; he then completed his PhD at Deakin University, Melbourne.


According to the biography offered on the website of Monash University, where he works as a lecturer, Alizadeh’s writing has been described as “‘heartbreaking’, ‘beautifully twisted’, ‘harrowing’ and ‘hilarious’”. It also states
that he has an interest in “[r]adical subjectivity, the philosophy of history and the theory of art” (np). This chapter will provide a close reading of *The New Angel* and *Transactions* from a postcolonial perspective. His interest in the philosophy of history is manifested in *The New Angel* through which he criticises Iran and Australia/the West.

**The New Angel**

Published in 2008, *The New Angel* is Alizadeh’s first work of fiction. The novel is the love story of Bahram, a young Iranian boy and Fereshteh (which means Angel). Bahram grows up in Tehran after the Islamic revolution and during the Iran–Iraq war. He then immigrates to Australia with his family and must deal with a new world. These are the autobiographical elements of the novel.

It seems that the main message of the novel is that life can change completely by a storm of uncontrollable events; a disaster can impact every aspect of life in the future as well as the present. The title of the book, taken from Walter Benjamin’s essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, also echoes the main message of the text. Alizadeh begins his novel with a quotation, which serves as a paratext, from Benjamin’s interpretation of Paul Klee’s painting, *Angelus Novus* (*New Angel)*:

… His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and
make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward … (np)

Although Bahram is in Australia and many years have passed since Iran’s revolution and war, his mind is still engaged with the traumatic past. Alongside the impact of history on human life, the themes of longing for his beloved and loneliness are prominent in the story. This is illustrated by the poem Fereshteh reads from Rumi’s first *masnavi* to Bahram. *Masnavi* is the most influential work of Sufism written in Farsi by Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi, Rumi. It is a long poem arranged in a series of six books. Fereshteh reads Rumi’s first *masnavi* from book 1:

Listen to the reed, it weaves  
A tale of separation, it grieves  
They tore me from the marshland, that’s why  
My breathy song makes women and men cry … (82)

She then explains its meaning to Bahram:

You know what this poem means Bahram? It’s about love, and loneliness. The reed is cut off from the other reeds. So it wants to return, but it can’t. So it cries instead, and every time someone blows into the reed flute, it’s the sad song of the reed’s loneliness that makes people cry, the sad story of its loneliness and yearning for love. (83)
The novel has an intertwined plot: there are two parallel chronologies—two stories. The first is the story of Bahram driving from the Gold Coast to Melbourne where he eventually murders his cousin, Abbas. This is set in contemporary Australia. This narrative begins with a description of a pistol and the call Bahram receives from Abbas, and reaches its climax when Bahram kills Abbas, ending with Bahram’s own death. The motivation for this plot is developed in the second story which emerges from Bahram’s flashbacks to Iran at the time of revolution and war, a story which explains his act of murder.

The second plot provides readers with the background story to understand what has happened to Bahram, and what motivates Bahram to kill his cousin. The narrative voice of the two plots shifts from third person to first person when the focus is on what is in Bahram’s mind and the emphasis on the psychological impact of his past. The story shows Bahram’s feelings of disgust, disenchantment and anger at what has happened to him in Iran and the effects of the past, which have left him depressed and disappointed in his new life in Australia. The second plot specifically shows Bahram’s anger toward his cousin. He blames Abbas for the death of his love, Fereshteh.

Abbas is represented as a young man influenced by the rulers of the Islamic regime to stand against all infidels and Westerners but Abbas is not a true Islamic revolutionary and advocate for the Islamic regime. At the end of the novel he confesses to Bahram, “I was young and impressionable” (250). Instead, he is represented as a mindless follower of the regime, who abuses the power he gained by being a supporter of the revolution and a member of the Basij community.

Basij is a Farsi word with the complete name Sazeman-e Basij-e Mostazafan which means Organisation for the Mobilization of the Oppressed. In his book
Captive Society: The Basij Militia and Social Control in Iran, Saeid Golkar argues that this organisation pervades all aspects of Iranian society (Golkar xiii). It has a significant role in maintaining the state’s control over all aspects of society, and the persistence of the Islamic Republic in Iran (Golkar xiii). Golkar adds that “by organizing this cluster of people-driven networks, the regime is able to penetrate, manipulate, and control an increasing share of the public and private lives of its citizens” (122). At the same time, Basij’s activities create a gap between its members and the public: “The role of Basij members in social control and suppression has caused a deep hatred of the Basiji [Basij member]” (194). Like Golkar, Alizadeh represents the oppressive role of the Basij in the public and private life of citizens, and the public hatred of Basij members through Abbas’s and Bahram’s characters.

Bahram witnesses Abbas’s abusive behaviour, especially against women, both in public and in his family, and this has a deep psychological impact on him. Bahram narrates how cruel Abbas is to a couple he observes kissing each other and drinking in a park. Fereshteh and Bahram are watching the couple’s acts of affection and sensuality when they hear someone shouting, “STOP IT YOU DIRTY ANIMALS” (112). It is Abbas, a member of Gasht-e-Islami, Islamic Watch. When the woman tells him that they are engaged Abbas yells at them, “SHUT UP YOU REVOLTING WHORE. HAVEN’T YOU READ THE KORAN? HAVEN’T YOU HEARD OUR SUPREME LEADER’S INSTRUCTIONS? YOU ARE BETRAYING THE PROPHET, YOU ARE LUSTFUL PIGS” [capitals in the original] (113). When the woman asks Abbas to forgive them he slaps her on the face and orders two militants to “[c]all the Woman’s Watch. Tell them to pick up this slut from our station. The sisters will
give this animal a good lashing” (115). After watching this, Fereshteh decides not to meet Bahram anymore and he cannot make her change her mind. Fereshteh leaves Bahram because she has witnessed what Abbas does to women; she does not want that to happen to her.

Abbas, the young revolutionary who acted so brutally towards the woman in the park accusing her of lust, himself rapes Bahram’s mother, his aunt. Bahram is in his room without his mother’s knowledge when he hears Abbas’s voice at the door. Abbas makes sure that his aunt is alone at home and asks her to let him in. Abbas tells Bahram’s mother that she is guilty because of an article she has written before the revolution. He calls his aunt “filthy whore” (137) and rapes her. She has to submit in order to “save herself from torture and rape at Evin Prison” (138). Witnessing this horrific scene has a severe psychological impact on Bahram who faints: Bahram “opens his mouth to scream, but his voice box has been knotted by his tensed muscles, and nothing comes out. He tries to lurch at the religious pervert rapist, but his lungs run out of air and he faints” (138).

Bahram’s father decides to leave Iran because life is not safe for anyone there as the war escalates and Iraqis use missiles to bomb Iranian houses. Bahram must join the army if his marks are not good enough to enter university. As a secular and anti-Islamic family, it is difficult for Bahram’s family to live under the Islamic regime. Finally, Bahram’s father obtains a visa for Australia. At the same time, Fereshteh suggests to Bahram that they escape together and get married in another country. Bahram loves Fereshteh and so prefers to escape with her rather than going to Australia with his father.

However, once again Abbas, as a representative of a regime that controls people’s lives, causes the separation of Fereshteh and Bahram. They are unable to
run away together because Abbas stops Bahram after he has managed to leave the house without his father’s notice. Abbas, who is there to prosecute Bahram’s father, pulls Bahram inside the house and does not let him go.

Abbas tells Bahram’s father that he has heard that they are going to Australia and asks him, “What if in Australia the agents of CIA ask you for secret information regarding our government?” (230). Abbas also tells Bahram’s father that it is not suitable for Bahram to go to Australia to “be exposed to Western decadence and pornography … The filthy Western materialists worship sex and money. Their idols are tempting to the youth. It’s my duty to ensure that my own cousin doesn’t become influenced by the Great Satan” (231). This echoes Golkar’s argument on the role of Basij in controlling people’s private and public life for the benefit of the state. Abbas doesn’t have pity even on his own family. He remains at his uncle’s home until he makes Bahram’s father promise to return to Iran soon.

Distressed, Bahram calls Fereshteh and promises to meet her the following day. However, the next day when Bahram goes to Fereshteh’s house he finds that it has been bombed by Iraqis missiles; the whole family is dead. After these traumatic events, Bahram blames Abbas for everything that has happened to him, to his family and other people during this tumultuous time in Iran. His gun is a means of revenge and he kills Abbas to do justice. At the end Bahram tells Abbas:

You can’t overpower me anymore … all my life you controlled me … it was … my life … the story of your power … but I’m not here to avenge anything … I’m not here to liberate myself from your horrible shadow. It’s too late for that. I’m here for justice. Justice, Abbas. The world has ended … it’s time for the judgment … You’re the Great Satan cousin Abbas. And I have to be the angel. I’m done with being a
human. I have a duty. A duty to all the victims. A duty to corpses. Get on your knees. (251).

Abbas, who had embraced the religious revolution and its anti-Western attitudes at the beginning of the revolution, ironically finds transition into the new world of Australia much easier than Bahram who is a secular and Westernised intellectual (Alizadeh, Radio National 14 July 2008). In Australia, Bahram feels alone, mourning for his love. He fails his PhD thesis and is unable to find a job. Abbas, on the other hand, gets married, has children, and becomes a successful businessman. In an interview on ABC Radio National, Alizadeh said: “Abbas presents a view of history, somebody who prepares to erase the past and just move on so at the end of the novel when Bahram meets him again he becomes a capitalist, he is in Australia and loves Australia … that is not a prevision of his initial goals” (14 July 2008).

*The New Angel* deals centrally with violence in Iran after the Islamic revolution and during the war. At the same time, a parallel is set up between Iran and Australia to show that violence also happens in Australia. An example of this is when the narrator reveals Bahram’s dream on the way to Melbourne. In his dream vision the history of Australia and his memory of Iran come together. Bahram’s mind floats toward his school in Australia. He hears Persian words from the street behind the school. It is a turbaned Islamic priest¹, a mullah, who preaches about the “sin of prostitution”, and the “filthy woman” as “the enemy of Islam” (125). He is referring to a public hanging of a woman. While the violence of the Iranian mullah is represented in Bahram’s dream vision the mullah has been given Australian characteristics. The mullah, who speaks in Queensland-accented English, says: “This dirty bitch’s degraded our community. She’s gonna get what’s
coming to her. Bring her on” (125). Then Bahram notices “The mullah’s turban turns into a wide-brimmed Anzac hat” (125), and “The Islamic Anzac priest” howls out the crime of the hanged woman: “This woman … She has fucked so many different blokes, she’s a fuckin’ disgrace this bitch … Allah O Akbar! Allah O Akbar!” (126) In Bahram’s dream vision there is a tractor with a kiosk at the end of the long horizontal apparatus from which the persecuted woman is hanged, and his cousin Abbas, the executioner, is in the kiosk screaming “Aussie Aussie Aussie! Oi Oi Oi” (126).

While the novel criticises the Iranian Islamic mullahs and Basiji militants who perpetrate violence against women, the bizarre comparison also implies a similar criticism of Australia and Anzac. It seems that Alizadeh’s purpose with this comparison is to look at the Anzac tradition from a postcolonial perspective and criticise its imperial aspects. In “What have you done for your country?”, an introduction to *What’s Wrong with ANZAC*, Marilyn Lake argues that it is not appropriate “for a modern democratic nation to adopt an Imperial, masculine, militarist event as the focus of our national self-definition in the twenty-first century” (14). Australians went to Gallipoli in 1915, not because Turkey threatened Australia but to serve the “Mother country” (Lake 18): “Australia’s security was totally dependent on the maintenance of Britain’s power and prestige. The colonists were at one with Britain heart and hand” (Reynolds, “Colonial Cassandras” 61). However, “Today the cause of the war has been largely forgotten and its Imperial dimension is ignored” (Lake 19). While the emphasis in Anzac celebrations is on sacrifice and death, Australians seldom talk about killing (Reynolds, “Are Nations Really Made in War?” 40).
Bahram’s dream vision continues: watching the scene of the Iranian woman’s execution in Australia, Bahram is too late to return to school to attend his history lesson. This history lesson is about the massacre of an Aboriginal tribe by the European settlers near the Brisbane River between Nambour and Dalby. He has memorised the facts of the lesson about how the Aborigines were killed by poisoned flour that the Europeans had called ‘Death Pudding’ at Kilcoy Station. (126–127)

Before Bahram remembers how Abbas raped his mother, an intrusive narrator refers to atrocities in Australia. When Bahram parks his car alongside a stream called Myall Creek he “doesn’t see a sign or even a didactic plaque noting the notorious 19th century massacre of Aboriginal women, children and elders by an armed posse of European settlers beside this very Creek” (131–132).

Alizadeh is not representing a black and white image of Iran and Australia but arguing that violence against women is not specific to Iran but also happens in Australia. In Bahram’s dream vision the history of Australia, Anzac, the massacre of Aborigines, and his memories of violence in Iran come together. The Iranian mullah, Anzac and massacres in Australia, all represent violence against and killing of innocent people, serving as allegories of international violence.

In an interview on ABC Radio National, Alizadeh refers to Benjamin’s view that “[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” and states that Bahram sees the same movement he saw in Iran here in Australia (14 July 2008).

The novel also portrays the obstacles Bahram faces in Australia as a newly arrived immigrant. For Bahram, Australia is not a welcoming or safe place. He
experiences racism and bullying, and is labelled a terrorist. The novel shows how he was bullied at school, “C’mon camel-fucker! Say somethin’! Speak English ya fuckin’ wog! Muslim terrorist cunt! ... This is not yer fuckin’ country, mate. Go back to where ya came from” (128). In his second year of university, he starts talking to a girl about music at a party, saying, “Cool music, huh? You like this band, Angela?” (139) The girl responds: “What was that again? I can’t understand your accent” (139). Bahram explains that the music is the Sex Pistols but the girl misunderstands him and says, “Sex what? You want sex? ... Listen. I’m not interested. OK? ... Since when do you Arabs bother talking to White girls first, eh? Don’t you just go ahead and rape them like those Lebanese gangs in Sydney?” (140) On his way to Melbourne, when Bahram stops at a hotel for a drink a man tells him “yer one o’ them queue-jumpers. One o’ them Muslims from the Detention Centre, are ya?” “We don’t like bloody Muslim terrorists in our town”. The man then tells his friend “You don’t remember what these dirty fuckers did in Bali? It is aw’right for them to kill Aussies but we can’t touch’em” (213–214). Like Foster’s *Sons of the Rumour*, this novel refers to what happened in Bali and shows the widely held view of Muslims as terrorists. In *Sons*, this stereotypical view is reinforced and supported; however, this novel seeks to counter it. These stereotypes imposed on Bahram echo Said’s argument on generalisations about the Orient in which all peoples of the East are described with similar characteristics and behavior by the West: they make an “immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type” (*Orientalism* 86). The stereotypes attributed to Bahram also echo Said’s statement that in the Orientalist mind, Arabs are “camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization” (*Orientalism* 108).
In response to the racist behaviour of the men in the hotel, Bahram takes out the gun from his briefcase and points it at them, saying breathlessly:

It’s a history lesson … *mate*. I guess you haven’t done your homework … Any thoughts … on the Iran Iraq War from … 1980 to 1988? Don’t you think the West’s support … your government’s support … for Saddam, for the Mojahed in Afghanistan, for the Likud in Israel … fuelled and created … the fucking Islamists. You and the terrorists deserve each other … you make a nice … disgusting pair… (215)

Said also argues that stereotypical representations of Muslims and Arabs are caused by “a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world” (*Orientalism* 287). Regarding the US approach to the Iran–Iraq war, Richard Murphy states:

*[D]uring the Iran-Iraq War, Washington was by far Baghdad’s most important ally. Saddam was a monster, sure enough, but he was our monster during the war. Why? As the dialogues that follow make clear, the United States supported Saddam for one reason, and one reason only: because of the fear in Washington, which the participants in the dialogues recall as outright panic on occasion, at the spectre that Iran would capture the oil-rich area around the southern Iraqi port of Basra, then move on to Baghdad and perhaps capture and occupy all of Iraq, then follow up this unprecedented victory by igniting the majority Shiite population of Iraq to take up arms against U.S. interests all over the Middle East, and move to close the Strait of Hormuz, the single most important passageway for getting Middle Eastern oil to the West.* (italics in the original) (95–96)
Similarly, Bahram reacts to the stereotypes projected onto him by referring to the history of the Iran–Iraq war and how the imperialist acts of the West impacted on his country.

**Transactions**

Like *The New Angel*, the stories of *Transactions* echo Alizadeh’s philosophy of history that the past has an inevitable impact on who we are and what we do in the present and the future. *Transactions* is a collection of linked stories. As a whole, the text offers an indictment of the capitalist world, a system which exploits people. It shows that contemporary violence such as racism, rape, discrimination, and terrorism are not confined to a specific group of people or nation. The title of the book might refer to the transactions between the characters of each story, which are unequal interactions. Regarding the genre of the text, Gay Lynch states that *Transactions* “fits cross-genre: part thriller, part realist drama, part satire, part diatribe against global capitalism and every other patriarchal ism” (1).

The collection has an interconnected plot structure. The text begins with a girl with a blue lapis lazuli amulet writing letters to her dead mother. The girl is a female terrorist whose Afghan mother was killed by the CIA. Although the book does not provide readers with the details of what happened to the girl’s mother, in an interview with Kate Evan Alizadeh said that the terrorist girl might be the daughter of Meena Keshwar Kamal, an Afghan feminist socialist who was against both Soviets and Islamists. Alizadeh dedicates his book to her. Keshwar Kamal was murdered in the 1980s. While Americans said that Soviets were responsible for the assassination, Alizadeh believes that she was strangled by a CIA agent. Alizadeh says: “I thought what it would look like if her daughter came back to take revenge. I have a sense that it might be in fact her daughter” (22 June 2014).
Alizadeh calls the terrorist girl an “avenging gun” (ABC Radio National 22 June 2014). Both Bahram in *The New Angel* and the terrorist girl in *Transactions* are victims of past violence which motivates them to commit murder.

While the short stories are very diverse in terms of characters and locations they are focused on a similar issue which is unequal relationships between people in which the powerless are always exploited. The stories are linked by the presence of the girl who wants to do justice, taking revenge on the characters who represent the values of the capitalist world by murdering them with a noose. These characters include a Ukrainian prostitute with a shocking past, a deceitful Iranian asylum seeker in Amsterdam, wicked aid workers in a charity in Africa, a spoiled sadistic rich girl from the Arab Emirates, among many others. Through this diverse range of characters, Alizadeh represents the anxieties of the 21st century about “migration, asylum seeking, child labour, pornography, violence, murder, financial crises, suicide, rape, nuclear accidents, PTSD and human trafficking” (Lynch 3). Alizadeh describes his book as “an interconnected landscape of terror and exploitation … with lots of sex and violence” (ABC Radio National 22 June 2014).

The girl’s motivation for committing serial murder is the death of her mother. In a letter to her mother she writes: “It was my loyalty to the event of what they did to you. My vow to never forget. This made me become the person I am” (146). Her suffering leads to her radicalisation, demonstrating Alizadeh’s view that the past makes us what we are today, and Benjamin’s angel of history whose “face is turned toward the past … he sees one single catastrophe” (np). The girl expresses her “loyalty to the event” of the past and vows “to never forget”. 
In the name of justice, the girl kills all exploiters who commit violence against women and represents the violence as effects of the capitalist system of which her mother was a victim. She writes to her mother, “What else could I possibly do, given how you left me, with your non-existence? I need to know what this world’s wretched occupiers desire and how these desires have turned the world into a grotesque wasteland” (10). Alizadeh does not justify her action as a murderer but he uses his writing to criticise capitalism, and to examine the causes of radicalisation. He shows why people come to do what they do regardless of their nationality, and how people’s past situates them in the present. Francesca Sasnaitis argues that in this novel, Alizadeh uses extreme examples of disenfranchisement, disempowerment and the unrestrained exercise of power to expose the inequities of the capitalist system and shock the reader out of his or her complacency. He names the chapters after the Major Arcana cards in the Tarot deck, and dispenses the contradictory attributes of the twenty-two archetypes to both the culpable and the innocent. Moral certainty fluctuates. (np)

The collection is not primarily about Iranians but ranges across the entire world, and depicts global crises. The stories set out to examine the roots of contemporary violence, and criticise the effects of international capitalism, in many cases associated with rape and violence against women. Two chapters of the book, “The Hermit” and “The Hanged Man”, are about an Iranian soldier seeking refuge in Amsterdam. Both chapters are set in Amsterdam, and told from a first person point of view; the soldier is telling his own story.

“The Hermit” provides readers with some background information about what the soldier was doing in Iran and why he is in Amsterdam. The soldier was
working as a rapist for the guards in Evin prison in Iran. He raped women who had been arrested for not being supporters of the revolution or Islam before their execution. Based on Islamic beliefs, if a virgin girl is executed she will go to heaven. Therefore just before they were taken to the execution ground, they were examined and if they were virgins the guard would assign this soldier, who was the only unmarried guard in the prison, to rape the virgins so they would go to hell after being executed.

Later, in Amsterdam he is arguing that he was himself a prisoner in Iran, hoping that this will enable him to get a visa. In Amsterdam, he has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder by the counsellor. In fact, he is a fake refugee and a tyrant. He says:

It’s a good thing these Dutch do-gooders don’t ask too many questions.

Well, they do ask too many questions but they don’t ask the right questions. They’ve asked me all about the terrifying prison. About the torture techniques, about the political prisoners and so on. But they haven’t really bothered to uncover in what capacity I was at the prison.

Fools. I am thankful for their idiocy. (100)

He has committed serious crimes, but it is also revealed that he was himself a victim of war and poverty. He was a poor peasant boy in south Iran who moved to Tehran after the Iraqis attacked his city. In Tehran, as a homeless, angry and uneducated boy full of “hatred for wealthy, sexually attractive women” (101), he joins the Basij to earn money.

The soldier’s motivation for committing acts of extreme violence was to satisfy his thirst for attractive women and money. He continued doing this for ten years and was then given a university scholarship, and a job as an engineer. He
married and became rich enough to buy a villa in North Tehran: “I had finally become an urban middle class person. I even lost my country-hick’s accent over time. Now I can become an EU citizen. A Westerner” (102).

In “The Hanged Man”, the Islamic rapist is murdered. His crime is rape and violence against women, similar to the attack on the girl’s mother by the CIA. Although the soldier is himself a victim of capitalism, his actions cannot be excused. The soldier did this horrific violence as a job and never experienced any moral consciousness about it: “we were just doing what had to be done” (Transactions 129). He victimises women for his personal lust, and to earn money. When the terrorist girl goes to the soldier’s room to kill him, he says “I found it easy to become erect. I was just a teenage boy, full of sexual energy. Of course I didn’t enjoy doing it. It was what I had to do for our government” (130).

Like Abbas in The New Angel, the soldier exploits the power he has been given for personal gain, and as way of getting on in the world. Similar behaviour is on display in Amsterdam where he seeks asylum. To gain a visa, he tells many different lies to convince the case officers. First, he tells the officers that he wants to convert to Christianity. The next day he tells them that he has been to the nuclear power plant facilities in Natanz because he was told that any information about Iran’s nuclear weapons program would help his asylum application. He is then given 2,000 euros to buy himself a computer. In his own words:

And I’ll tell the intelligence agents what they want to hear … I’ll tell them that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. I’ll tell them the Islamic republic plans to sell their nuclear bombs to Al Qaeda or something equally idiotic. I’m sure they’ll love it. They’ll give me EU citizenship
for that. They’ll call me a heroic dissident or something like that. Idiots.

(99)

Neither Abbas nor the soldier is an admirable individual. They are hypocrites who are pretending to act out of religious conviction, but in fact exploit the system to get on in the capitalist world.

Another story in the collection which criticises international capitalism and contemporary violence, is also divided into two chapters: “Wheel of Fortune” and “Death”. In this story, Western characters use their power to exploit the colonised for their personal gain. This story is set in Africa and is about Danish aid workers who commit violence against woman under the guise of a Christian charity called Global Rescue. “Wheel of Fortune” is the story of a 22-year-old African woman, Nowa, with her six-year-old son. She seeks protection from the charity because she has been raped many times by government militias and is too poor to send her son to school. Nowa tells Anna, the founder of the organisation, how badly she had been treated: “One time they made her eat the flesh of another Kpelle girl that they’d kidnapped. They had cut off the girl’s breast. They were high on speed and told Nowa to eat” (104). However, Anna refuses to give her shelter, as she believes that Nowa is not a true Christian and there are women who deserve their protection more than she does. When Nowa is leaving Anna’s office she sees Anna’s brother, Hans, the co-founder of the charity, who lets Nowa and her son stay in their quarters for that night. After dinner, Hans wants to baptise her to wash away her sickness and degeneration. Nowa tells him that she is not morally sick but it is those who abducted and raped her who are degenerate. Hans does not accept this and tells her: “You need to be washed clean of wickedness” (111). He asks her to go to the bathroom and get ready.
In “Death” it is revealed that Hans is killed by Nowa after she has been raped by him in the bathroom. In this story, the terrorist girl appears in the guise of a Mexican interviewer, Adriana, who speaks to Anna about her charity. In response to Adriana’s accusation that Global Rescue puts “religion before humanitarianism”, Anna declares:

I say that we have never forced, nor will we ever force, anyone to convert to our Faith. We are not missionaries. I am a devoted Lutheran, but myself and my aid workers tend to the needs of all needy victims of conflicts regardless of the victim’s religious beliefs, be they animists, Muslims, or followers of other Christian sects. (135)

Anna then claims that they are “setting up a program for providing protection and medical aid to the victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence” (135). These claims are clearly inconsistency with what her brother did to Nowa. This Western charity pretends to help victims out of a noble motive while it exploits and causes more harm to the colonised. It becomes clear through Adriana’s interview with Anna that in fact their charity is a cover for human trafficking. Adriana asks Anna:

Was it for money, your talent spotting? … You’d hand-pick the most attractive, most vulnerable rape victims, convert them to your religion to soften them up psychologically, then you’d let Hans gradually indoctrinate them into his other “religion”, before selling the most eligible graduates from your “seminary” to the sex markets in Europe and the Middle East. That’s how it worked. (140)

Finally she drowns Anna in a bucket of water. Like Abbas in The New Angel and the Iranian soldier in this collection, Anna and her brother exploit the power given
to them by religion for their personal gain, though in this case the religion is Christianity.

In the story “Justice”, the girl takes revenge on the CIA agent Jim O’Reilly who killed her mother. Jim is a philanderer who works for the CIA, with many passports. In this story, the girl appears in the guise of a Persian girl, Fereshteh Hashemi, who is a PhD student in an American university in Qatar.

While Jim is serving Washington during the Cold War in places such as Cambodia, Nigeria and Afghanistan, he has sex with numerous journalists, activists, political prisoners etc. Finally, he decides to resign from the CIA, suppress his sexual desire and return to his wife and family. After his resignation, he receives an invitation to attend a conference at an American University in the Middle East to talk about international relations. He decides to attend with the hope of having a last thrill before returning to his family and pursue a sedentary life. When he arrives in Doha airport, he sees his hostess, the most beautiful girl he has ever seen: “Jim wonders if she’s a virgin. He hasn’t had one of those for quite some time, and he has certainly never been with a virgin this beautiful” (117).

When they get in to the car, Jim starts flirting with Fereshteh. While openly staring at her, Jim sees her necklace and asks her if it is Persian. Fereshteh replies: “It’s lapis lazuli. From … Afghanistan. My mother gave it to me” (118). Jim remembers where he saw the pendant. He was sent to Afghanistan to help Afghan socialists who were against both Islamists and Soviets, posing as Michael Malcahy, an Irishman. He infiltrated the anti-US Afghan groups who aimed to establish a secular democratic republic in Afghanistan. His role was to make sure that Afghanistan would pass into the control of the Islamic allies of the US. Jim murdered “one of the most vocal opponents of the misogynist Islamists, the
outspoken Afghan feminist, poet, and Maoist, Anahita Keshwardoost. He remembers what he did to her, and he remembers that she wore a piece of jewelry. Was it a sparkling lapis lazuli phoenix?” (121). Jim tells Fereshteh, “I was only doing my job, Fereshteh … I was serving my country Fereshteh” (122). She replies, “You should have got a different job … You should have served humanity. Not just your country” (122). She then kills him with his belt, the same way he killed her mother. Both Jim and the Iranian soldier try to justify their act of violence by saying that it was simply a job they were assigned to do. However, both committed violence against women, exploiting the power they had been given for personal gain, and so they are punished.

The text abounds in paradox. It has a strong universal message, criticising the capitalist world and worldwide contemporary violence. The terrorist, whose nationality is not clear, is writing about her secrets to her mother in airport transit lounges which she says are “the nearest thing I have to a home” (5). The place she chooses as her home, transit lounges, is located between/beyond borders of nations. In a letter to her mother she first promises her, “I will not be cruel. I will not enjoy my work” and on the same page she writes, “I’m feeling uneasy. I am becoming cruel” (146). It is not only the characters whose behaviour is paradoxical, but the collection itself has paradoxical themes. The paradox stems from the contrast and similarity between violence committed out of cruelty, the desire for power and personal gain by characters who exploit their roles, and violence as an act of justice by the terrorist on a mission to avenge her mother. The terrorist girl does not seem to do it for personal gain, and does not have the same cruelty as the characters in the stories. The paradox is that while the motivation behind her acts and those of the other characters are different, they all commit
similar crimes and there is no way to stop the cycle of cruelty. They are all murderers whose crimes cannot be justified. In this regard, Lynch argues that Alizadeh “sets up paradoxes between humanity and country, and justice and revenge, to explicate themes of power and exploitation” (2). These paradoxes encourage the reader to distinguish “thin lines between terrorism, fundamentalism and justice in acts of violence” (2). Alizadeh states that in this collection he wanted to “set up how everything is interconnected” (June 2014). His theory, as he says, is that with the end of the Cold War exploitation did not end and capitalism became “more ruthless than it has ever been”, “exploitation has been much intensified now” (June 2014).

In *The New Angel*, by setting up parallels between Iran and Australia, Alizadeh shows that barbarous things have happened in both countries. In *Transactions*, Alizadeh goes further and uses Iran as an example parallel to other examples to criticise international capitalism. Lachlan Brown calls Alizadeh “a neo-Marxist” (3). Alizadeh is taking contemporary violence like terrorism and putting it into a postcolonial context. This echoes Vladimir Lenin’s argument that imperialism is “the highest stage of capitalism” in the sense that “financial and economic circumstances impelled national governments and private business corporations to world-wide competition for control of natural resources and human labour by means of colonialism” (Evans and Newnham 79). The anti-capitalist avenging girl’s mother, a Maoist who was “one of the most vocal opponents of the misogynist Islamism”, is assassinated by the American agent who was assigned to support “US-backed Islamists waging a civil war against Kabul” by infiltrating “the anti-US Afghan dissident groups planning to establish a secular democratic republic in the aftermath of the Soviets’ inevitable withdrawal” (120), and make
sure that “Afghanistan would fall into the hands of America’s Islamist allies” (120). This shows that the advancement of the US imperialist purpose in Afghanistan came at the expense of war and assassination.

The characters in Alizadeh’s fiction blame the West for the war and the revolution in Iran:

Do these idiots understand that it was because of their hunger for our damn oil that we had that Shah bastard, then we had the damn war with Iraq? All of that for the sake of these pampered Westerners. So that they could have their cheap oil and drive their cars and enjoy their Heineken and waffles. They’ve got more blood on their hands than the guards at Evin. (Transactions 97)

Alizadeh’s writing refuses a black and white image of Iran and Australia. Unlike Zanjani, who claims that women in Australia are protected from domestic violence, Alizadeh’s novel sets up a parallel showing that violence against women happens both in Iran, Australia and elsewhere. Instead of just blaming Iranian culture, Alizadeh goes further back and shows what the West has done to countries it has colonised. What Alizadeh seems to show in his writing is that to conquer imperialism we must first conquer capitalism. In a review of Lenin’s Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism, John Heath refers to Lenin’s thesis that “in its economic essence imperialism is monopolistic capitalism”, and adds that:

economic development had found its political expression in “imperialism” the world-wide scramble for colonies between the four or five great capitalist Powers; and this scramble had ended, as it was bound to end, in the Great War. The moral (capitalism = Imperialism = War) is vigorously and pithily pointed, and Kautsky, who believed that
imperialism could be fought under the capitalist regime, soundly trounced. (447–448)

The outcome of imperialism and capitalism is contemporary violence.

Alizadeh then shows that contemporary violence such as terrorism could happen everywhere in the world for varied reasons and speaks out against stereotypical views on current acts of violence. At a time when the world seems to think that Muslims commit all acts of terrorism, Alizadeh attributes acts of violence to characters from diverse religions and locations; however, he does not make any excuses for Muslim terrorism. If the story of Bahram had actually happened in Australia, the media would represent it as a Middle Eastern man killing a successful businessman. In the case of the girl in Transactions, the media would present the story as a Middle Eastern terrorist killing a Christian aid worker. Alizadeh demonstrates that such a view may be deceptive. Regarding Alizadeh’s reaction to stereotypes, Elizabeth Bryer, in a review of Transactions, argues that “It is no mean feat to present such a geographically and culturally broad vision of humanity without falling into stereotypes, but Transactions navigates this carefully” (np).

Granaz Moussavi reacts to stereotypes by presenting a more nuanced and new image of Iran and Iranians in her film.

**Granaz Moussavi**

Granaz Moussavi, an Iranian Australian poet, film director and screenwriter, was born in 1976 in Tehran to a family with careers in television. Her father was a sound engineer and her mother was a video grader. She is a poet whose first
poem was published in Tehran in 1989. At the age of 17, she was doing book reviews and literary criticism for *Donyaye Sokhan Literary Magazine* in Tehran. She has published books of poetry in Tehran, such as *Paberahneh Ta Sobh* (*Barefoot Till Morning*, 2000), and *Avazhay Zan e Biejazeh* (*The Songs of the Forbidden Woman*, 2002).

In 1997, Moussavi immigrated to Australia with her family, and pursued Screen Studies and Filmmaking at Flinders University. The film produced for her Honours degree, *A Short Film about Colour* (2002), won the best director award from Flinders University and got Moussavi an honorary membership of the Australian Screen Directors Association (ASDA). She then attended the Australian Film, TV and Radio School in Sydney and in 2006 graduated with a postgraduate degree in Film Editing. She completed her PhD at the University of Western Sydney on “*My Tehran for Sale: A Reflection on the Aesthetics of Iranian Poetic Cinema*”. *My Tehran for Sale* was a part of her dissertation.

**My Tehran for Sale**

*My Tehran for Sale*, written and directed by Moussavi, was the first featured collaboration between Iran and Australia. The film was shot in 2008 and produced in 2009. It won the 2009 Inside Film award, and was an official selection for the Toronto International Film Festival (2009). The film shows the life of Iranians behind closed doors and in underground locations. While it presents a critique of Iranian society it also shows some new aspects of Iranian life which are rarely
broadcast in Western media. In an interview with IndieWire Moussavi said that what influenced her to make this film was “the enormous energy and vibe for transformation in contemporary Iran, the youth and their subcultures, the underground art and life in Tehran, and most importantly the unheard voices and bottled up stories of people around me” (np 1 Sept 2009). The film’s plot is also influenced by the stories that Moussavi was told when she was working as a volunteer translator in Woomera detention centre.

The film is the story of Marzieh, a middle-class actress whose aim is to pursue her artistic ambitions while society and her family attempt to prevent her from doing so. She leaves her family and performs underground to fulfil her desire. At an underground party in Tehran, Marzieh meets Saman (Amir Chegini), an Iranian Australian man who becomes her boyfriend and moves into her flat. As Marzieh encounters many obstacles to her life as an artist in Iran, Saman offers her a way out by coming to Australia and being able to work freely. However, at the end of her visa process, Marzieh receives a letter from the embassy declaring that she has been diagnosed as HIV positive, which disqualifies her from going to Australia. Reading the letter, Saman also leaves Marzieh; her past has become a serious obstacle to her future prospects.

The film was shot guerrilla-style, with much of the camera work handheld by the film’s cinematographer, Bonnie Elliot. It does not have a time frame and is formed through artful and lyrical flashbacks to the past—Marzieh’s story of survival in Iran and finding a way out to Australia; and the present—Marzieh in a detention centre in Australia. The film, mainly in Farsi with English subtitles, was made in Iran, even the scenes set at Woomera detention centre in Adelaide.
The film begins and ends with a reference to the condition of refugees in Iran and Australia, respectively. It begins with Afghan refugees who are guarding the underground rave party at which Marzieh meets Saman. Militia raid their room and arrest them as they are working illegally in Iran, and then conduct a raid on the party and arrest everyone present. At the end of the film Marzieh is answering questions posed by her case officer in the detention centre in Woomera where she finds that she has less freedom than in Iran. In a review of My Tehran for Sale, Annette Basile writes that it is “[a]n artful and poetic film, which is also timely considering the current illegal immigration headlines” (np).

Marzieh Vafamehr plays the role of Marzieh in the film. She is Moussavi’s friend and there are similarities between her and the character she is playing. Moussavi describes her friend’s role in the film’s conception:

Marzieh Vafamehr herself was one of the central inspirations. I witnessed Marzieh's struggle to build a life of her own and to survive as an actress in Iran under circumstances that threaten her morals, principals [sic], and viewpoints as an artist and as a woman. When I travelled to Iran and visited Marzieh it motivated me to make a film with her to tell OUR story—the story of young modern Iranian women who fight against all the odds under the political and social situation to preserve their principals [sic]. (Medialuna)

While it has been argued that the film was shot underground in secret and without government approval, in an interview with VOA Persian Moussavi denies this. She says that the film producers made a very tendentious press kit with the aim of marketing and promoting the ticket sales. She declares that the film is not
political; it is an urban life story with some social aspects (VOA 9 September 2009).

After acting in this film without covering her hair, Vafamehr was arrested in June 2011 and sentenced to one year in jail and 90 lashes. However, she was released after three months, without being lashed, after the court reduced her imprisonment to three months and cancelled the flogging. Regarding the reporting of Vafamehr’s sentence in Australian media, Sumner argues that what was reported about the film in mainstream Australian news media was Vafamehr’s sentence and not “the broader context of the film’s Iranian and Australian settings. The partial media representations of one element of Vafamehr’s real-life story reflect the broader context that My Tehran For Sale complicates”: Marzieh in the film sees Australian immigration laws as “incomprehensible” and “indifferent” to her situation by contrast to “its grand promises of happiness”, and Australian news sees Vafamehr only as the victim of Islamic law, “rather than a complex participant in an urban subcultural life that negotiates innovative artistic possibilities”. While the film represents Marzieh as an activist who seeks freedom of expression, Vafamehr’s personal life seems more interesting to Australian audiences (6). This should not be generalised to all Australians as not all Australian audiences’ responses to Moussavi’s film are reflected by the mainstream media. Australia is very diverse, and there are Australians who have more complex understanding of what the film aims to represent.

While the Islamic revolution of 1979 imposed restrictions on cinema, Iranian cinema is recognised as one of the most innovative and creative in the world (Mir-Hosseini 26). Regarding the New Wave of Iranian cinema, Michaël Abecassis writes in a review of Hamid Dabashi’s Close Up: Iranian Cinema:
Iranian cinema is characterised by its aestheticism imbued with poetic sensibilities deeply rooted in Iranian culture and inspired by Italian Neo-realism and the French New Wave … In the wake of the Islamic Revolution, Kiarostami teaches us how to look differently at the nature of reality, that of human relationships and seeks a new cinematic language in order to assert, with the unobtrusive eye of his camera, an ‘aesthetics of the real’. (416)

In the following section I will examine the methods of expression that Moussavi used in her film to indirectly criticise some social issues, and also represent Iranian culture, where poetry has a vital role.

In the background of some scenes, protest songs and poetry are played, such as Forough Farrukhzad’s poetry and Namjoo’s Neo-Kantian Ideology song, which are banned in Iran, and mystical poetry such as that of Hafez and Saadi is read. Regarding the use of poetry in her film, Moussavi states:

I was from the outset concerned to demonstrate my understanding of poetic aesthetics and how they may be recuperated through film … I have found poetry to be a necessary survival mechanism: it has provided me the means to forge and express a contemporary Iranian identity that stands against the concrete definitions circulating both within and outside of a highly regulated and politicised society. ("My Tehran for Sale: A Reflection On The Aesthetics" 74)

Moussavi’s film is influenced by Kiarostami’s cinematic style, and Farrukhzad’s poetic style. However, by contrast to Kiarostami who mostly chooses characters and themes within a non-urban environment, Moussavi’s film represents the everyday life of middle class people in the city of Tehran. Moussavi
uses a picture of the poet as well as her poetry in her film, possibly because “Farrukhzad’s poeticizes everyday life” (Sheibani 59), and her language is simple and intimate. In Farrukhzad’s words:

There are endless possibilities in Persian language. In Persian, I *discovered* the possibility of conveying a message in a simple language … as simple as I am talking to you now … if you ask me about what I have gained in terms of language and rhyme, I could say intimacy and simplicity. (qtd in Sheibani 59)

Kiarostami’s films adopt a similar approach. He states:

I believe in a cinema which gives more possibilities and more time to its viewer—a half-fabricated cinema, an unfinished cinema that is completed by the creative spirit of the viewer, [so that] all of a sudden we have a hundred films. (qtd in Rosenbaum)

*My Tehran for Sale* does not have a simple and straightforward conclusion but leaves the audience to draw their own. Sumner states that, like Kiarostami’s films, *My Tehran for Sale* invites audiences’ creativity to expand on the meaning (10). In a review of the film, Annette Basile writes,

Moussavi uses images to tell a story, and dialogue to paint pictures. She finds beauty in the seemingly ordinary, while also taking cinematic advantage of Tehran’s amazing cityscape. She doesn’t spoon-feed her audience—the way in which the story is constructed, shifting around in time, forces you to fit things together. (np)
The film uses poetry and cinematographic technique to enhance the meaning. The film visualises Marzieh’s feeling and emotions when she is informed about her medical condition and Saman leaves her by creating an effective and impressive mise-en-scene (Image 1). The camera is adjusted to shoot Marzieh’s position among pictures of her favourite artists, especially a big picture of Farrukhzad on the wall behind her. The scene shows Marzieh’s feeling of loss among symbols of artistic freedom in her own private space. Later in the film, Marzieh sells all her belongings including these pictures to pay the people smuggler. When Marzieh sells Farrukhzad’s picture the camera’s lens is adjusted to the picture (Image 2), and then to Marzieh watching it going out of the door (Image 3). Moussavi in her dissertation states, “[t]he vision of Marzieh watching Farrukhzad’s picture going out of the door comes to symbolise how her pursuit of freedom is anchored within her culture but will ultimately negate her position in that world” (102)
Image 2. Camera lens is focused on Farrukhzad’s picture

Image 3. Marzieh watching Farrukhzad’s picture going out of the door
At the party, the scenes shift from the bedroom where Saman tells Marzieh about Australia to the living room where young Iranians are playing guitar and a poet (Moussavi herself) reads her poem. The content of the poem reflects Saman’s words. In response to Marzieh’s question, “[s]o what kind of place is Australia? Can you perform there and does it get recognized?”, Saman replies:

Australia? Australia is very cool.
Full of beaches and oceans.
Full of trees and forests.
Green grass. Light ... colourful clothes. Australia is like paradise. A paradise made of coloured paper

Australia is nice and colourful; it is like a “paradise” but made of paper which is fragile. Saman tells Marzieh how difficult life was for him in Australia and that he had to leave school in order to work: “You open your eyes and see that … you've forgotten what you wanted to do when you grew up. You forget what you were after in life”.

In the living room, Moussavi reads her poem “Sale”², which is about the restrictions on Iranian youth which lead them to immigrate to other countries:

… There is nothing in my baggage
Except innocent locks of hair.
Let me go!
Here, flight is always
Delayed …
At the same time, the poem shows that life in diaspora does not live up to their anticipation:

… Stranger than a kite left
behind in a closet,
I am stamped and pass and
miss home …

The content of the poem reflects Marzieh’s situation which leads her to think about leaving Iran, along with Saman’s experience of living in diaspora, which was not as easy as it had seemed. Moussavi comments, “Saman’s monologue about his experiences of life in diaspora intersects with a scene of a poetry reading. The poetic piece being voiced opens an alternative reading of the narrative” (102).

Another example of how cinematography, poetry and the film’s language come together is when Marzieh and Sadaf are seated on a hill from which they can see most of Tehran and are singing poetry by Hafez:

Only a miracle might help
To join one lonely to another.
What awaits us, friends?
Friends of lonely souls and strangers.
I see no green fields of hope,
In this wasteland.

Marzieh then gives Sadaf two books, all her belongings saved from the sale, and asks her to keep them (Image 4). She then goes away from her friend, screaming at Tehran. The camera focuses on Sadaf who can’t look at her friend and tries to hide her tears and sadness (Image 5). The camera’s angle then turns in the direction
of Marzieh’s scream, towards the city of Tehran (Image 6). The atmosphere and meaning of these scenes are enhanced by poetry reflecting the themes of “loneliness”, “friends”, “no hope”, and “wasteland”—a critique of Iranian society where Marzieh can’t find any hope of progress. At the same time, the poetry itself testifies to their traditional culture. Reading Hafez and giving her belongings to her friend symbolise her feeling of nostalgia for her culture; yelling at Tehran symbolises her anger that forces her to leave her city. Regarding these scenes, Moussavi writes in her dissertation:

Through its incorporation into the film the poetry is transformed to stand-in for the current situation in Iran as experienced by these characters, and frames their relationship to each other as well as to the different social realities of which they are, or will become a part: Marzieh and Sadaf are two close friends always together, united in their everyday struggle for cultural and creative freedom, and now saying goodbye; one is taking the path to an unknown and imagined world, leaving the other behind in a homeland where the vision for personal and cultural freedom is generated in response to constant obstacles. (105)
Image 4. Marzieh gives her books to Sadaf.

Image 5. Marzieh is screaming and Sadaf tries to hide her emotions.
The poetic atmosphere adds greater philosophical and critical depth to the film and enables the audience to receive “a contemporary Iranian identity” while it criticises certain aspects of Iranian society. In other words, her film visualises its poetic atmosphere while showing the cultural and social life of Iranians behind closed doors.

Marzieh reads poetry by Farrukhzad and Silvia Plath which serves to criticise patriarchal society. She resists traditional and social conventions and pursues her own will at the risk of being ostracised by her family. Marzieh’s resistance, Sarabi argues, echoes Khosrowjah’s argument on the refusal of “victimization discourse” as an element of Iranian New Wave cinema, clearly evident in Kiarostami’s Ten, “which is often deployed in the Orientalist readings of Iranian films to produce an allegory of Iran as a backward and historically static society” (Khosrowjah 53). Marzieh is not a victim who accepts all the restrictions imposed on her by society and her family but “a young artist … determined to make of her life what she thinks
it should be, and to get out of it what she think she deserves, in spite of her unbending, unforgiving social and political milieu” (Sarabi 3). Sarabi adds that “Moussavi strives to deviate from a melodramatic depiction of Iran, which is often an easy prey to essentialist and Orientalist deductions” (18).

Comparing Farrukhzad and Kiarostami’s approach to reality, Sheibani states that, like Farrukhzad’s poetry, Kiarostami’s camera, apart from providing multiple meanings for the audience, “brings enlightenment, allowing us to grasp reality or what we failed to see before” (61). Moussavi’s film presents an image of Iran that people in the West have rarely seen. As Rosa Jamali writes in a review of the film:

Honesty speaking I have never seen northern Tehran pictured by western news agencies. Life in the northern Tehran is posh, expensive, trendy and full of contradictions. Girls and boys racing cars, underground nightclubs and flashy, heavy make-up worn by young girls ... compared to European standards people sound really loud here! (147)

In an interview with Rosemary Neil, Moussavi admits that she is “a bit critical of the way the mainstream media has portrayed Iranians through the last three decades ... What I wanted to do in my film is to focus on ordinary middle-class, urban people. They are not seen, they are not heard and they haven’t been captured on film” (9).

Through the conversation of Marzieh and Saman, audiences are informed about the social and cultural climate of Iran and how it has changed since the war. Alizadeh’s writing focuses on the representation of Iran after the revolution and during the war and seldom writes about contemporary Iran because he left Iran
many years ago and his memory of Iran belongs to that time. In the film, Marzieh, who shows Tehran to Saman, tells him:

Back when I went to school you never saw any of these colourful schoolgirls. We couldn’t wear white socks, let alone hi-top sneakers and colourful backpacks … During the war, there wasn’t a bird to be seen in the sky over this town. During the bomb raids, it was like a ghost town. And the rest of the world watched in silence.

While Moussavi’s film is still a critique of Iranian society and how artistic freedom is handled in Iran, it shows a vibrant urban life where modern people are discussing modern philosophical ideas, reflecting a deep cultural understanding of their country which resists outdated and stereotypical representations.

The film not only shows new aspects of Iranian life and society, it also presents a new image of Australia for Iranians who aspire to go to Australia as refugees. Perhaps it is a warning to Iranian audiences who tend to think of Australia as a place of refuge. It seems that the film aims to complicate the image of both countries rather than showing a simplistic and clichéd image. Both Saman and Marzieh have an idealistic image of the other country but get a different view which goes against their previous perception. As Said writes, “I say even the notions of the Occident and the Orient are ideological fictions and we should try to get away from them as much as possible” (Interviews 142). The scene in front of the Australian embassy shows Iranians’ zeal to get an Australian visa and how they envy Marzieh who can easily get a visa through Saman, and the smuggler who gives people an alternative way of getting to Australia. Marzieh also thinks that Australia is a place where she will have more freedom to follow her artistic ambitions, and the life she aspires to. However, Marzieh finds herself in a detention
centre where she is deprived of any freedom and where she considers going back to Iran. Saman, who lost all his money in Australia, comes to Iran to find a solution to his financial crisis. In a phone call to his mum Saman says about Iran,

This place is made of money.
It’s really easy to make money.
I have plans ...
Yes, I’m coming to pay off my debts.

However, Saman returns to Australia without being able to earn any money.

Both Marzieh and Saman are looking for a solution to their problems in another country and both fail because their perception of the other country was inaccurate. Regarding Moussavi’s narrative contrast, Sarabi states that it “shed light on the realities young Iranians face both inside and beyond the borders of their homeland as exile” (9–10). The film ends with a flashback to Tehran where Marzieh is walking through the streets and listening to a song by Namjoo. In her dissertation, Moussavi states: “Almost inviting the audience to finally reflect on the film’s role as a conduit for cultural interface, Namjoo’s lyrics fade as he repeats one line:

Tomorrow maybe is our share
Tomorrow maybe is our share”. (107)

*My Tehran for Sale* offers an outstanding illustration of Abecassiss’s definition of Iranian cinema in a review of *New Iranian Cinema*, edited by Richard Tapper:
More than a mere ideological tool, the low-tech but ideologically meaningful Iranian cinema is tinged with poetic realism … It has become for its people and culture a fight for survival. Not only as Richard Tapper puts it, recent international recognition and fascination with film makers such as Daryush Mehrju'i, Barham Beysa'i, Mohsen and Samira Makhmalbaf, and Abbas Kiarostami make it “a channel for reconciliation between Iranians” and between the East and West, but it shows how cinema can transcend religious fanaticism and political repression as an artistic work which can reflect upon itself and unravel its enigmas. (415)

Moussavi’s film, like Kiarostami’s cinematic style and Farrukhzad’s poetic style, uses a simple structure and everyday language in order to convey complex meanings and represent a new image of Iran which counteracts simplistic readings.

**Conclusion**

Previous chapters have focused on the representation of Iran and Iranians by Anglo Australian writers. This chapter examines how Iranians are represented by Iranian Australians. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, Stuart Hall provides two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first way is to explain it as “one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’”, with roots in a common “history and ancestry” (345 [2006]). Many Iranian Australian writers show their “one true self” through Persian poetry which has deep roots in their culture and history. Fotouhi argues:
Persian poetry is an important marker of Iranian cultural identity, which heavily informs the works of diasporic Iranian writers in English. While, by drawing on its nostalgic sensibilities and tropes, diasporic Iranian writers are maintaining a sense of historicised identity, they have also been engaging with it to reconstruct and negotiate a new sense of diasporic identity for themselves. (91)

Alizadeh and Moussavi use Iranian mystical poetry in their works. In *The New Angel*, Fereshteh reads Rumi’s masnavi *Nei Nameh*, for Bahram. Fotouhi argues that in Iranian writing in diaspora one of the most common approaches to engage with nostalgic feelings “is through a direct reference to some famous lines of Persian poetry …, among them, the first section of Rumi’s masnavi, known as the *Nei Nameh* or *Tale of the Reed*, is by far the most known and widely quoted” (70–71). Fotouhi refers to Firoozeh Papan-Matin’s interpretation of these lines, “the account of the separation of the lover, personified as the reed, from the Fatherland, the reed-bed, where it had belonged in the presence of God, the beloved” (qtd in Fotouhi 71), and then concludes that “the painful laments of the reed can be read as the displaced person’s cries for their beloved homeland” (Fotouhi 71).

Moussavi uses poetry in her film to defy and react to stereotypical representations. As Fotouhi argues:

> Centralising poetry as an important part of Iranian cultural identity for a Western audience allows for the opening up of a space for reconstruction and negotiation of a new diasporic Iranian identity, one that replaces the historically imposed images of the exotic and terrorist. (88)
This is what Moussavi has done to build an identity rarely seen in Western media. At the same time, by using poetry she critiques Iranian society indirectly: “diasporic Iranian writers are also drawing upon elements of Persian literary tradition as a form of critique of certain aspects of Iranian society, as well as the Western setting in which they are now residing” (Fotouhi 92).

Hall’s second way of defining cultural identity is a “matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’”:

It belongs to the future as well as the past … Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subjected to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (435 [2006])

The way Iranian Australian writers position themselves depends very much on their experience of living in Iran and Australia, and the way they are positioned by and positioned within each country. For example, the representation of Iranian women is a common theme in the three works I have examined here; however, they have been represented in three very different ways.

Alizadeh has passed through war and revolution in Iran and then experienced displacement in Australia. He is aware of Western politics in Middle Eastern countries and explicitly writes about it. Alizadeh looks at violence against women from a new perspective which is not only critical of Iranian society but of the entire world. The two works by Alizadeh were written during Ahmadinezhad’s presidency, when Iran was under heavy sanctions by the US and other nations. At
a time when Iran was represented as hostile by the West, Alizadeh’s awareness of history and Western politics prompts him to go further back and show how the imperialist purposes of the West negatively impacted on life in colonised countries.

Zanjani left Iran two year after the revolution in 1981 and did not live in Iran during the war. The way she reproduces the image of Iranian women is very familiar to Western readers and echoes Whitlock’s argument that Iranian memoirs appear “‘convincing’, ‘realistic’, ‘familiar’ and ‘welcome’ to contemporary American readers, by contrast to contemporary Iranians who consider them as outdated and unfamiliar” (165). This may be the reason why the Farsi version of her book did not find readership. For Zanjani, Australia is her saviour and Iran the reason for her misery. The way Iranian gender relations are represented in her memoir published in 2016 to some degree reproduces Paul Rigby’s Citiplex of 1980: Iranian men are represented as abusive and brutal, Iranian women as oppressed, and Australia as their saviour.

Moussavi’s film presents what is lacking in Alizadeh’s and Zanjani’s works which is an image of contemporary Iran. Moussavi, who travelled to Iran regularly until 2011 when Marzieh Vafamehr was jailed for acting in My Tehran for Sale, presents an updated and new image of Iran seldom seen by Western audiences, which is not considered as “outdated” by contemporary Iranians. Mousavi’s film echoes what Karim writes about Iranian memoirs:

These writers … helped make visible the experiences of living through the Iranian Revolution and its accompanying problems —war, exile, and adjustment to a new culture —but also have found ways to challenge the representation of women both in the Islamic Republic and
in the Western media. They are essentially writers whose lives and work operate at the juncture between two cultures. (“Reflections on Literature” 153)

Poetry has a significant role in shaping Iranians’ cultural identity in diaspora. However, a critical impetus also emerges in the work of poets like Roshanak Amrein. Moussavi and Amrein are from the same generation. They were born before the Islamic revolution and lived through the war. Amrein is a follower of the Baha’i religion; she was persecuted in Iran and was not allowed to enter university because of her religion. She came to Australia as a refugee in 1994 and never returned to Iran.

While in Moussavi’s film Marzieh fails to find the freedom she seeks in Australia, Amrein dedicates her poetry collection, One Million Flights, “with utmost humility to the people of Australia for accepting me amidst their own with open arms” (np). In her poems in this collection, she compares Iran to a “cage” and refers to her freedom in Australia. In the poem “Conversation” from this collection, she compares Iran and Australia. In Australia:

I go to the seaside
free as a bird.
Freedom wraps around the beachgoers
and like the sea breeze
strokes their carefree cheeks. (10)

She writes about women in Iran:
covering your black hair

to come out of the house

so that in the chaos of the grey city

you may earn your bread. (11)

Sumner argues that this Australian narrator

is not required to cover her hair in public and she earns more than bread

in her clean, orderly, colourful city. Of course, for some Australians, these are not central elements of freedom, and not all Australians have such ready access to their desired forms of political, religious or economic liberation. (4)

This is the case for many Iranians as their understanding of freedom is not limited to the gesture of removing their hijab (in some cases they still want to keep their hijab), but to their desire for more political, religious, and economic freedom. In her poem, “One Million Signatures”, which was written in support of a campaign by women in Iran in 2006 to collect one million signatures to change discriminatory laws, Amrein writes,

come out of the cage of indifference …

Let awareness come to its home

And stay a while. (56–57)

This campaign demonstrates the political awareness of Iranian women. However, the poem also shows Iranian women in “the cage of indifference”. Moussavi’s film represents a new image of women who are aware of their rights and willing to fight for them. She shows that Iranian women do not accept the restrictions and stand
up against them. Marzieh and Sadaf are aware of the possibility of punishment for going to underground parties but they still accept the risk.

Amrein’s poem, “The Child of Home Land”, refers to the tension between love of the homeland and criticism of it:

Her soil trapped in drought
her fields beneath the thorn bushes
her cypress trees fallen
her lions in cages. (51)

This is a gloomy depiction of home as if a catastrophe has happened to the land, namely the revolution. The home is no longer what it had been before and its beauty has been destroyed. The poet is lamenting the lost beauty and prosperity of the land. Perhaps this refers to the aftermath of the revolution when the situation of the Baha’i minority deteriorated dramatically. She then compares Australia to an adoptive mother, to whom she does not belong. Moussavi and Amrein are referring to similar issues but in different ways. Although most Iranian Australian writing is political, in her poetry Moussavi avoids a political stance and shares a sense of in-betweenness and non-belonging.

Moussavi’s view on the situation of refugees in Australia and Alizadeh’s view on Western politics are continuous with what can be seen in Mohsen Soltany-Zand’s writing. The main theme of Soltany-Zand’s writing is the violence in Australian detention centres. Like Marzieh who could not find freedom in Australia, in his poem “The Only Hope after God”, Slotany-Zand shows that his “dream of freedom” has turned into “a quagmire of prejudice”: 
We are innocents who have kissed the noose of Australian “Democracy”
We were the fan to the political fire, who now find ourselves in the flames.
We who believed in the dream of freedom, are stuck fast in a quagmire of prejudice. (86)

While this poem was released in 2003 when Soltany-Zand was in a detention centre, this noose is always with him and prevents him from moving toward the future:

the “noose”, shared by generations of displaced people, continues to suspend him in precarious positions. This noose is not always lethal and may even grow comfortable, but it hinders movement between conversation sites, between past and future, self and other, “here” and “there”. Like Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, propelled in one direction, with locked wings, many displaced people are positioned such that they can neither face the future nor awaken the past. (Breiley np)

The position of Walter Benjamin’s angel of history is also used in Alizadeh’s The New Angel and Transactions. Alizadeh’s character Bahram, the terrorist girl, and this poet can neither forget/awake from the past nor face the future. For Bahram the past refers to the violence in the early years of the revolution in Iran, and for the terrorist girl to the catastrophe of her mother’s death. Neither Bahram nor the terrorist can move toward the future without taking revenge against past catastrophes for the sake of justice, which leads to another catastrophe, murder. For Soltany-Zand the past refers to the violence in Australian detention centres; he
cannot forget his life in detention. In his poem “Write an Essay about Love”, he writes how history has shaped his emotions:

I have seen blood,
My emotions were shaped from it,
I have seen my friend’s blood,
It spurted and settled on my face,
His wounds opened while fighting the fire of Australian “humanity”. (87)

Like Alizadeh, Soltany-Zand criticises Western politics. In his poem “REALPOLITIK”, he writes,

I see a donkey that is singing for democracy
I see a hyena that is waiting for the “war on terrorism”
I see a shark that is helping to rescue boat people
I see a prisoner mouse making a party for a cat
I see a fox teaching freedom to the hen and rooster
I see an executioner putting the mask of religion on his face
I see a locust sowing a green field for humanity. (92)

This poem, as Alizadeh argues, gives voice to the people from the Middle East and of Muslim background who are trapped “in the crossfire of the War on Terror, Jihads, Pacific Solution and other ‘Clash of Civilisations’ catastrophes” (Review of Australian Dream np). The poet presents paradoxes to criticise the idea of the West/Australia as the saviour and teacher of democracy and freedom to the Middle East by referring to “hypocrisies and deviousness of conventional Western views of contemporary Middle East” (Review of Australian Dream np). In this poem,
the fox, a symbol of cunning and guile in Iran, refers to Australia/the West as a teacher of freedom. Regarding the use of animals in this poem, Alizadeh argues:

the image of a donkey singing for democracy is a potently satirical representation of neo-conservative attempts at reshaping the Middle East in the image of USA. The donkey, while signifying “heroic” intransigence and hardiness in conventional American semiotics (e.g. as the mascot of the US Democratic Party), is a symbol of utter stupidity, and a common insult, in Persian. The poem’s other animal motifs each enhance this initial depiction of neo-con idiocy to comprise the scavenging desires of the warmongers (the hyena); the predatory sadism of neo-imperialists (the shark and the cat); the adroit cunningness of the anti-terror warriors (the fox); and a direct and non-parabolic representation of the brutality of the terrorists hiding behind an Islamic mask of sacredness and religiosity. (Review of Australian Dream np)

An awareness of Western politics in Iran over the centuries, the experience of violence in the early years of the revolution in Iran, the suffering in Australia of refugees in detention centres, or of displaced migrants, and reading the history of aboriginals in Australia are factors that play a significant role in reconstructing Iranian diasporic identity in Australia. As in Hall’s argument on Caribbean identities, Iranian Australian identity is shaped by two vectors: “the vector of similarity and continuity”, the use of poetry as the root of their culture, which signals continuity with the past, and “the vector of difference and rupture” (436 [2006]) which is their unique experience of living in Iran and Australia. In contrast to Iranians who immigrated to Europe and America, Iranians in Australia tended
to come from a lower class, like Sohila Zanjani, or a religious minority persecuted in Iran, especially Baha’i followers who have been supported by the Australian government, like Roshanak Amrein, or as refugees who suffer from the negative psychological impact of the violence they experienced in detention centres, like Soltany-Zand. Alongside these, there are skilful writers like Alizadeh and Moussavi who have an important role in “deconstructing Western caricatures of Iran and Iranian caricature of the West” (Grassian 4) by reacting to stereotypes and Western politics, and providing readers with a broader perspective of Iranian culture and identity.

Notes:

1. While most dictionaries define priest with reference to Christianity and the Western church, a general meaning is provided for it by the Oxford Dictionary: “An official minister of a religion other than Christianity or the ancient Hebrew religion.” Alizadeh and some other Iranian writers in diaspora used Islamic priest instead of Islamic clergyman or mullah. Perhaps the reason for this choice is to appropriate the word for Western readers.

2. “Sale” by Granaz Moussavi in Barefoot Till Morning, p. 5:

Search my bag, what’s the point?
My sigh that has forever heard
'halt' lies in hiding, in the bottom of my pocket.
Let go of me!
You know that I will sleep with the raspberry bush
And not regret.
Why always set your sights on the woman
Who sponges up her broken pieces
And pins her heart to her sleeve?
There is nothing in my baggage
Except innocent locks of hair.
Let me go!
Here, flight is always delayed.
For the slingshots in the alleys of war
Or for the floral skirt on
the clothes line
But moths live fast regardless.
At least let me have my
childhood picture back
Stranger than a kite left
behind in a closet,
I am stamped and pass and
miss home.
The antennas aim at the sky
but on the clothes line at
home
My shirt is still holding
God tight.

3. Hafez’s poem:

Hey wild gazelle
Where are you?
I know you from a long time ago,
Us, two wanderers, two lonely souls,
Traps and enemies waiting before and behind us
Remembering the ones who have gone
And the ones who have loved, agree with the spring rain.
Only a miracle might help
To join one lonely to another.
What awaits us, friends?
Friends of lonely souls and strangers.
I see no green fields of hope,
In this wasteland.

4. Namjoo’s song:

Neo-Kantian ideology is for me
Normandy poppies for you
Indulgence and impatience for me
The 15-centimeter love for you
Macaroni and tamarind paste is our share
The streets of Martyrs is our share
Making fun of the shrine is our share
Cleverness and cunning is our share
Neo-Kantian Ideology is for me
Normandy poppies for you
Left-over food is our share
Bootlegged copies of The Godfather is our share
An unwanted generation is our share
Bootlegged copies of The Godfather is our share
Embarrassment of the Government is our share
The thick blacklist is our share
The loser national team is our share
Embarrassment of the Government is our share
‘Constructive Criticism’ is our share
Tomorrow maybe is our share.
Conclusion

This thesis has examined the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature, initially focusing on writing by non Iranian Australian writers from colonial times to the present, followed by Iranian Australian writing. The texts examined provide an insight into the ways Iran and Iranians have been imagined in white Australia and how this imagining relates to postcolonial theory. This representation, I argue, is very much a reflection of cultural and political circumstances at the time of writing.

This research has provided an opportunity to see how dominant political discourses have influenced the representation of Iranians in Australia, and how the 19th century colonial view of Iranians survives into modern times in certain underlying structures. Said argues that the essence and characteristics of the Orient inherited from the past have been modernised and secularised to emerge as modern Orientalism. Perceptions of the East were accommodated to the framework of new ideas.

Overview of Chapters

The first chapter outlines the historical, theoretical and literary background for this study. A detailed account of the history of cultural, social and diplomatic relationships between Iran and the West/Australia is provided in order to examine the representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian texts in light of cultural and social change. This chapter also presents an overview of the scholarship on Orientalism, especially Said’s thesis, and shows how Iran/Persia is represented in
Western literature through the lens of Orientalism. This provides a background for examining the representation of Iran in Australian literature.

The second chapter is an examination of the representation of Iranians in Australian colonial writing, at a time when Orientalist ideas were pervasive. The importance of examining these texts is that they reflect the reading habits of Australian colonial readers. At that time, newspapers, books and periodicals had an important role in shaping Australian colonial readers’ perception of the world.

In the 19th century, Australian colonial readers were influenced by British imperial ideology transferred to Australia through their books and magazines, and Australians as the “outpost of British conquest” endorsed the “prevailing imperial ideologies in representing Asia” (Gerster 5). Although later the Australian Journal made an attempt to protect the native Australian literary industry by encouraging colonial writers, the impact of Orientalist ideology and colonial attitudes from overseas on the way Australians were thinking about Persians was pervasive. “Silver-Land” by an anonymous writer and “Her Imperial Guest” by James Payn are neither set in Australia nor written by Australian writers but were published in the Australian Journal, that was read by Australians and shaped their understanding of the world. In “Silver-Land”, a British boy saves the people of Silver-Land from Xerxes, the despotic Persian king. On his way to Silver-Land he saves the heroic characters of One Thousand and One Nights like Ali Baba and Morgian from serpents and spirits with his magical tools. Similar representations are reproduced in a 20th century text, Slave of the Lamp (2012), a fantasy tale for young readers by Paula Fogarty, in which an Australian boy travels back in time to save the heroes of the ancient stories. In “Silver-Land”, Xerxes is represented
in a very luxurious setting. He is very proud of his fame and wealth and does not tolerate any disrespect; however, at the end of the story he is defeated and humiliated by Tim. The image of Xerxes in this story is very similar to the representation of Xerxes in *The Persians* by Aeschylus, which has been identified as a seminal text in the development of Orientalism. The only difference between these two texts is that in “Silver-Land” the defeat of Xerxes is caused by his cowardice and faulty character, while in *The Persians* it is because of the superiority of the Greeks.

“Her Imperial Guest” is not primarily about the Shah of Persia but about a hypocritical British woman. While the purpose of this story is to criticise the British class system, the comedy is created through the mockery and humiliation of the Shah of Persia. This story is an example of what critics call “pseudo-orientalism” (Al-Dabbagh 6). It has little to do with the Orient but uses Oriental motifs and characters to convey the author’s other purposes. At the same time, like *The Persians* and “Silver-Land”, it depicts the inferiority of the Shah of Persia by comparing him to “a species of imbecile shamble that once distinguished him from the common herd” (434).

Australian colonial writers’ perception of Iranians was strongly influenced by *One Thousand and One Nights* and its motifs. Some of the colonial texts represent Iranian women as strong saviors of men, like Shahrazad. In “A Little Persian Maid” (1886) by Alice Ham, Hal, the heroine, is a wise and strong girl who saves the life of her father who is imprisoned by the king. After her death, she becomes a symbol of courage for other women. *Pearls from Persia* by Tom Cringle presents a positive image of Persian kings as kind and generous. The
Persian woman and the princess in these stories are also represented as wise and intelligent saviors of men, like Shahrazad. Honest, pious and friendly Persian characters who meet the happy ending they deserve are used to give a moral lesson to Western readers. However, the author’s note to the story seems to be in line with Orientalist thinking. He writes that Persians are great story-tellers because they are great liars, and this is because they cannot express their political feelings under Eastern despotism, and fiction becomes the art through which they can find expression. He also claims that he lived in Persia up to four years which does not seem true as the stories shows his lack of knowledge about Persia. Said calls this appropriation of Islam for Western readers the “domestications of the exotic” (Orientalism 60).

The texts examined in Chapter Three were published after Said’s Orientalism, and represent the East/West dichotomy. These texts reinforce imperial ideology while appearing to criticise it. Citiplex by Paul Rigby was published in 1980, one year after the Iranian revolution. The story endorses the aim of the Findhorn community: to create a world culture by bringing together all the monotheistic religions from different parts of the world. However, it gives a higher value to the West and Christianity. In order to be a part of this world culture, Sacha, the Iranian girl, has to give up her Eastern attitudes. The novel makes an attempt to break down the barriers between East and West by setting up parallel family structures in Iran and Australia. However, Australia is represented as an egalitarian society while Iranian men are patriarchal and misogynistic and Iranian women are oppressed and need the help of Western men. The Western reader is
informed about Iranian culture and society mostly through the speech of an Iranian character created by a Western writer.

*Monsters in the Sand* (2009) by David Harris is an adventure novel for young adults in which historical facts and real people are combined with fictionalised events. The historical events in this novel are heavily influenced by Austen Henry Layard’s memoir *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (1853). In a preface to the novel, the author and publisher state that the purpose of this novel is to criticise the 19th century archaeological method of “Dig, Grab and Run”. As Orientalist thinking was dominant at the time of Layard, it would be unrealistic to represent Austen outside this ideology. However, it seems that on one level Harris reinforces Orientalist attitudes in his novel rather than criticising them. Austen is the hero of the adventure story, and the novel reinforces the depiction of him as saviour and civiliser of the locals. In the fictionalised events, Austen, the English man, is known as “the Lion” for his secret ability to find gold (73–74), and the Orientals feel blessed and happy for Austen to be in their land (76) which shows the hierarchal relationship between Austen and the locals.

There is a tendency in the novel to overstate Austen’s heroic qualities, and the novel has a happy ending in the sense that despite the problems created by the locals and lack of money, he is able to find the treasure with the help of the British embassy and the locals who are working for him, and to send the treasures to England. This novel is written for young adult boys who would be more interested in Austen’s heroic actions than in Harris’s criticism of Austen’s method of archeology in the 19th century. In noting the pedagogical function of storytelling, Jill Brown argues that “[c]hildren’s stories have taught, indoctrinated and built
boundaries. The changing boundaries implicit in Australian children’s fiction both mirror and reinforce the changing boundaries of Australian society” (3). While the main concern of the novel is to criticise 19th century archaeologists, boundaries are constructed in such a way as to make a sharp distinction between colonial white men and the native people of the Middle East. Brown adds that national identity for Australians is created by representation of the “dominant group as the norm and others as deviant” (3).

Chapter Four focuses on the representation of Iranians in Australian literature through a modern, or even postmodern, literary reworking of the motifs and structure of *One Thousand and One Nights*. In *Sons of the Rumour*, David Foster exposes the absurdity of all religions, but in the process manages to perpetuate stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. Like *Citiplex*, the novel juxtaposes Iran with the secular West in a way that favours Western approaches. Foster uses the frame story of *One Thousand and One Nights* but changes it in a way to suit his purposes. He gives Shahrazad Western characteristics, so that in his version it is not an Eastern woman who resists patriarchal tyranny but a Westernised (and modernised) Shahrazad. This echoes what has been called ‘feminist Orientalism’ which “is blind to the ways in which women in the East resist and empower themselves. Therefore, Muslim women need saviors, i.e., their Western sisters” (Bahramitash 222).

Reworking *One Thousand and One Nights* is also a frequent theme in children’s fiction. *Slaves of the Lamp* by Paula Fogarty is a reworking of traditional tales for contemporary young adult readers. The main purpose of this novel, as children’s fiction, is to entertain and also educate young readers. John Stephens
and Robyn McCallum argue that retellings are more appropriate to children’s literature and culture than to adult culture. This is because the retellings take children away from everyday experience by offering them access to an exotic and exciting world.

At the same time, the purpose of children’s fiction is to educate them. Stephens and McCallum argue that in the rewritten versions of a story, a particular difficulty is that the retold story may pretend to convey the component of “a culture’s formative traditions”; however, what is always clear is that the new tale will contain “some aspects of the attitude and ideologies pertaining at the cultural moment in which that retelling is produced” (x). The Orient in One Thousand and One Nights, they argue, is “already constructed as a fantastic other” by the Orient itself and then reconstructed by the modern West as “a fantastic Other … which exists to be appropriated” (230). Therefore, the readers of retold stories are dealing with an “other” which is exotic and still familiar (230). In Slaves of the Lamp, while Shahrazad is represented as a wise woman, it is only with the help of Rufus, the Australian boy, that she can save her life. While the obvious message of the story is that human intelligence can solve problems, the unconscious message demonstrates the operation of European cultural hegemony in a story which is transmitted to children by adults. Dreaming of Djinn is also a reworking of One Thousand and One Nights. The stories in this anthology, as the editor claims, aim to show strong women like Shahrazad who resists oppression thus saving their own lives. This collection is to some extent successful in challenging the common practice of representing Iranian women as subjugated and Iranian men as cruel and
misogynistic; however, on some occasions the stories conflate Iranian women with Arabs.

Chapter Five examines texts by Iranian Australian writers. Some texts represent a new image of Iranians as a reaction to common perceptions. Ali Alizadeh is harsh in his critique of the Iranian regime after the revolution, especially in *The New Angel*. At the same time, in *The New Angel*, he creates a parallel structure between Iran and Australia and shows that violence happens in both countries. In *Transactions*, he develops this structure to show that violence happens everywhere in the world, rooted in the capitalist desires of imperial powers. His critique focuses on the negative impact and interference of imperial powers in the Middle East. He concludes that to stop imperialism, capitalism must be overcome. Granaz Moussavi presents a new image of Iranian culture and life in her film *My Tehran for Sale*, one which is rarely represented in the media. However, the way Iranian gender relations are represented in Sohila Zanjani’s *Scattered Pearls* published in 2016 to some degree reproduces Paul Rigby’s *Citiplex* of 1980: Iranian men are represented as abusive and brutal, Iranian women as oppressed, and Australia as their saviour.

The representation of Iran and Iranians in Australian literature has been shaped by several factors such as interest in and fascination with Persia/Iran because of its culture, history and wealth. This is most clearly represented in the adventure stories for young adults through their reworking of *One Thousand and One Nights* or other old stories and historical accounts. At the same time, there are texts which tend to represent a new image of Iranian men and women like the
stories in *Dreaming of Djinn*, though at some points they also fall into the trap of stereotypes.

Australians’ perception of Iranians is also shaped by the current view of the world on Iran as a potential enemy, and Muslims as terrorists. In literature, the representation of Iranians as potential enemies goes back to Aeschylus’ *The Persians* which is the foundation for Orientalist texts, as Said argues. This perception of Iranians has survived into modern times. Twentieth century Orientalism has been “formalized into a repeatedly produced copy of itself” (*Orientalism* 197).

Australians’ understanding of Iran is influenced by the notion of Islamophobia and views on Islamic fundamentalisms, which have been strengthened in Australia. Islamophobia and the slippage between race and religion are reasons for conflating Arabs and Iranians in the Australian mind, which also shows Australians’ lack of recognition of Iran’s distinctive culture and language.

**Iranian Writing in Multicultural Australia**

Most Persian speakers in Australia (76.0%), are first-generation migrants, born in Iran, and only 2.2% were born in Australia (“Census Explorer” SBS). Therefore, Iranian Australian writing is by the first generation of Iranians whose first language is not English. Iranian writers write in both English and Farsi; however, their English, except for Alizadeh who belongs to the 1.5 generation¹, is often rather poor, as in the case of Zanjani’s autobiography. Many write mainly about their immigration experience and try to correct stereotypes.
The writing of the second generation of Iranians in Australia may bring about a change because they will have a double cultural perspective and their writing will reflect aspects of both cultures. The second generation of Iranian Australian writers will have grown up in Australia among diverse cultural groups, absorbing Australian multiculturalism. They will also have inherited the language and culture from their parents, home and community. These double perspective writers will be more likely to catch the attention of mainstream audiences. This is the case in writing by diasporic Australian writers who have a longer history of living in Australia, such as Greeks, Italians, Balts, Poles, and Jews. In “Multicultural Writing in Australia” Wenche Ommundsen argues that:

Australian-born and -educated descendents of these migrants, conversant with the languages and cultures of both their parents and the Australian mainstream, have added a further dimension to the multicultural literary tradition as they in truly contrapuntal fashion explore transformations and tensions in both immigrant and host communities in response to the experience of multicultural co-habitation. (77)

Iranian Australian writing partly reflects Australia’s ability to incorporate new literatures and new cultural influences into its national body of writing. The number of texts by Iranian Australians which have been published in Australia is increasing; however, this number is still small compared to writing by other ethnic groups such as Chinese Australians. The main reason for this is that the history of Iranian immigration to Australia is recent, spanning only 38 years, so the majority of Iranians are still first generation. However, in recent years the number of these
writings has increased, especially after 2005. Another reason is that as Iran became the focus of political attention because of its nuclear programme, many Iranian Australian writers as well as Australian writers have published books about Iran. The works of Ali Alizadeh show that the writing of Iranian Australians is becoming a part of the mainstream. Shokoofeh Azar is also a “rising star” of Iranian literature in Australia. Her recent novel _The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree_ (2017), written in Farsi and translated into English, was shortlisted for the Stella Prize of 2018. She is different from many of the other writers in that she had a writing career in Iran before she got into trouble with the authorities, fled and sought refuge in Australia. Her novel is also different, very literary and magical realist, in spite of its biting political critique. She may be part of the “future” of Iranian Australian writing. Literary critics like Gillian Whitlock, Laetitia Nanquette and Michelle Langford have started to work on Iranian Australian writing and film. This shows the change in Australian literature and literary criticism in terms of a growing diversity.

At the same time, there are some Iranian Australian writers who are not able to publish their books in Australia and are looking for publishers in other countries, especially in Europe. Iranian Australian writing in Farsi remains almost outside the scope of Australian literature. As Michael Jacklin argues in “The Transnational Turn in Australian Literary Studies”:

Research into the transnational dimensions of Australian literature appears to be mostly assigned to mainstream literary studies, meaning that attention will continue to be directed towards the works of Anglo-Celtic Australian writers, in English, or possibly, with regard to
overseas circulation and reception, to the translations of these works. In other words, although the scope and reach of Australian literary studies may expand as the discipline goes global, there is no accompanying assumption that the corpus, or the canon, of Australian literature will be radically altered. (3)

Moussavi, a well-known poet in Iran, also well-known in Australia because of her film *My Tehran for Sale*, has not been able to publish her poetry in Australia, except *Red Memories* which is a self-published poetry book in Farsi. However, she has been able to publish translations of her works in Europe: *Canto di una donna senza permesso* (*Songs of a Forbidden Woman*), originally published in Iran, was published in Italy in 2012. *Les rescapés de la patience*, which is a compilation of Moussavi’s books of poetry, was published in France in 2006. Elyas Alavi, an Afghan writer who lived in Iran from early childhood and then immigrated to Australia in 2007, now based in Adelaide, is a renowned poet in Iran and Afghanistan. He published the poetry books *I'm a Daydreamer Wolf* in 2008 in Tehran, *Some Wounds* in 2012 in Kabul and *Hodood* in 2015 in Tehran. However, he has not been able to publish in Australia and his name is not even mentioned in the Austlit database.

This parallel reading of literary texts by Australian authors from colonial times to the present and writing by Iranian Australians may contribute to a better understanding between cultures and countries, it also shows the way Australians’ view on Iranians has changed, and demonstrates the ability of Australian literature to absorb new literatures into its national body. At the same time it argues that while the surface of discourse has changed throughout history depending on politics and social change, the underlying structures through which Iranians are
perceived and the way in which they are imagined in relation to the Australian mainstream have in many ways remained without change. While Australians have a tendency to generalise about Iran and Iranians, Iranian Australian writers tend to give more nuanced views of the history and culture of the country and present a more complex view of Iranian society.

**Notes:**

1. 1.5 generation refers to the migrants who arrived in their host country as children or adolescents. They are educated in the host culture and language, so their identity is a combination of home culture and host culture.

2. Shokoofeh Azar’s *The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree* (2017) and Ali Alizadeh’s *The Last Days of Jeanne D’Arc* (2017) were published too late to be part of the analysis in this thesis.
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