1997

Canon formation and indigenous anthologies

Marisa Virtich

University of Wollongong

Recommended Citation

CANON FORMATION
AND
INDIGENOUS ANTHOLOGIES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

HONOURS MASTER OF ARTS

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by


Department of English

1997
Abstract

This study examines the ways in which minority literatures in general, and indigenous literatures specifically destabilise and interrogate the values which construct a mainstream canon by creating and generating work that challenges and negotiates the 'representative' nature of largely white patriarchal mainstream values. 'Mainstream' in this sense refers to the predominant racial group that produces anthologies as opposed to minority groups.

A key focus of this study focuses on the use of anthologies as part of the process of canon formation. Anthologies present, create a sense of and a feel for a particular area of study. They are, on the surface, a collection of a broad range of writers and work, but in fact they often reinforce or construct a narrow set of values and interests. In terms of mainstream anthologies, indigenous writers are often neglected or misrepresented, and hence, indigenous groups have found it necessary to produce texts that reflect their own realities rather than the ones prescribed by the mainstream. The paradox for indigenous work is that whilst it resists the mainstream's canon it does at the same time negotiate and challenge what defines the canon by producing alternative literature. Indigenous literature therefore resists, but also ironically participates in canon formation.

Works produced as a result of this situation are often termed 'sectional'
works and are judged to be of ‘secondary value’ by the mainstream because of these interests. This study aims to uncover some of the reasons for such thought and how it affects indigenous work and to consider ways in which *Inside Black Australia* and *Paperbark* might call into question the idea and practices of canon formation in Australia.
CANON FORMATION
AND
INDIGENOUS ANTHOLOGIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction: Canons and Canonisation 1
2. The Place of Anthologies 9
3. The question of ‘Race’ and ‘Voice’ 21
4. Ghettoization and Anthologies 34
5. Publishing infrastructures and the literary aesthetic 43
6. Case studies: *Inside Black Australia* and *Paperbark* 52
7. Case study one: *Inside Black Australia* 55
8. Case study two: *Paperbark* 77
9. Conclusion 96
The aim of this study is to analyse the ways in which two publications, *Inside Black Australia* and *Paperbark*, represent a range of subject positions regarding ‘Aboriginality’ and to consider the ways in which these anthologies negotiate and contribute to the formation of ‘Aboriginal literature’ within the context of an Australian Literary canon. These two publications have been chosen because of their significant historical entry into the supposed ‘canon’ of Australian literature. Both claim to be ‘firsts’ as Aboriginal anthologies. They also claim to be ‘comprehensive’ in the sense that they encompass a wide range of work from Aboriginal writers. *Inside Black Australia* features the work of Aboriginal poets whilst *Paperbark* anthologises Aboriginal writing encompassing a number of different genres.

The first part of this discussion aims to examine the issues of canon making and its place in literature. The encyclopaedia defines a canon as something that represents ‘general rules’, ‘fundamental principles’, ‘standards of judgment’ and ‘authority’. Yet rarely do these definitions explain or define how these canons have been constructed and by whom.

Robert von Hallberg has argued that

A canon is commonly seen as what other people, once powerful, have made and what should now be
opened up, demystified, or eliminated altogether.

(Cited in Lecker, 1991:3)

Hallberg’s point is that the only constancy about the canon is change and that what people believe to be fixed and unchangeable can, and does, become destabilised over time. In examining literature and literary history, questions should be asked about the way the canon is constructed. Who forms it? How is it formed? And on what basis? How is it assessed? This discussion of the canon, therefore, is not concerned with identifying or formulating a particular canon of literature but rather hopes to interrogate the forces that constitute and determine canonical activity in literature and criticism. At the heart of this examination lie questions about what is valued and why. It also seeks to uncover the wide-ranging differences in the perception of literary merit.

No matter how they are looked at, canons construct value. Dermot McCarthy maintains that

the function of the literary history and the canon is to show how the literary development mimes the social, political and cultural progress of the nation, and further, how that progress is both material and spiritual, as well as coherent and cohesive.

(Cited in Lecker, 1991:38)
Literary history therefore can never be separated from other forms of history; whether formed deliberately or inadvertently it will always reflect the discourses out of which it derives: social, cultural, ideological. But the idea that the literary development mimes the social, political and cultural progress of the nation is misleading for these words suggest that canons do, and will, include what happens in the social, cultural and political spheres in all of society. But do they? Minority women and indigenous groups have often been ignored by the ‘centre’ or have remained mere shadows rather than reflections in the mainstream. One only has to glance at the early literary canons of Canada, New Zealand and Australia to realise that the indigenous populations of those cultures were effectively ignored or dismissed. The controlling force behind the canon — the dominant group — had defined quite a specific and exclusive presentation of society.

Although critics have questioned the use of a generalised postcolonial theoretical framework as prejudicial to indigenous minorities (King, Hodge and Mishra), and while even broad postcolonial theorising insists on the cultural and social specificities of each minority, canon formation operates largely within national parameters and its dynamics tend to be the same whether it is minority interests entering the majority national space or the proto-nation establishing its cultural identity against some colonialist centre of power. Hence, the focus of this work is on the Australian and specifically Aboriginal Australian process of canonical struggle but examples from other indigenous groups are used within a
In the growing discussion of work in the field of the canon and its implications, Paul Lauter observes that the power to suppress minority groups and voices has come about because

Marginalized works are, largely, the products of groups with relatively less access to political, economic, and social power. To say it another way, the works and authors generally considered central to a culture are those composed and promoted by persons from groups holding power within it.

(Lauter, 1991:49)

This control of cultural definition by the dominant political / class group has far-reaching implications for society because canons are political objects, instruments for re-enforcing cultural orthodoxy or even cultural repression. Canons also frequently represent the dream of national unity, the ‘best’ of a culture and the uniqueness of a national experience. By ignoring or leaving out marginalised groups, the canon fails to reflect the social, cultural, ideological range of a society. If a canon is to reflect the national ‘reality’ (whatever that reality is determined to be) it requires both parallel and integrated accounts of various literary traditions, thus offering an elaborated and perhaps even contradictory account of what constitutes its parameters.
In recent times, particular attention has been placed on reassessing the canon. The so-called margins have begun to speak for themselves rather than to continue to be silenced by history. This has meant they have been defining their own distinctive voices, creating their own artistic forms and critical discourses, developing their own institutions, their own foci for cultural work. In essence the margin has gained the power to participate in defining cultural form and value. In the process, the margins themselves have been transformed.

Traditionally excluded cultural forms and values have become increasingly problematic for a canon which often attempts to assess such work within the confines of an already established set of forms and values. And because the canon views marginal works as ‘coming into the centre’, that is, because it believes the margins can and want to belong to the centre, it insists upon using already established means of assessment. This challenge to the canon is a strong one as the canon is placed in a position of losing much of what it has already gained, even if by default. In essence the canon cannot adequately deal with texts from the margin, because their inclusion, even as marginal, calls into question the values on which the canon is constructed.

It is in this present state of affairs that minority literature continues to ask questions of the canon just as the canon questions the literature produced by the minority. Each challenges the other’s worth, ideology, value,
interpretation, assessment and difference. One formulation of the relationship that exists between two groups is the ‘centre’ and ‘margin’. This is commonly employed in discussions of post-colonial writing. In this sense post-colonial writers, those in the margins, write in order to respond to a perceived centre and in doing so are locked into a dialogue that reinforces the margin’s position as ‘secondary’ and of lesser importance largely because the margin is writing for, and in response to, the centre. Whilst this remains problematic, theorists such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin suggest that this process has value even if it is constrained by such a relationship. They argue that the margins can ‘assert themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasising their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre’ (Ashcroft, and Tiffin, 1989:2). In other words, the discourses of power allow for counter-discursive views of the world that are different to that presented by the centre. In terms of Aboriginal writing, critics such as Mudrooroo argue that these counter-discursive practices also create a space for indigenous work. Therefore, Inside Black Australia and Paperbark are texts that appear in the new cultural space and are texts that aim to challenge the centre’s established view of the canon. Yet, this situation does not occur without paradox. Mudrooroo argues that the ‘Aboriginal writer is a Janus-type figure with one face turned to the past and the other to the future while existing in a postmodern, multicultural Australia in which he or she must fight for cultural space’ (Narogin, 1990:24).
This study, of course, is not isolated from the relationship of power discussed by Mudrooroo. In my role as a non-Aboriginal student of Indigenous literature, there is certainly the danger that in speaking about and for the margin that I perpetuate the very power relationships that have circumscribed marginal writing and may be seen as another colonising practice. However, although to some extent this study cannot remove itself entirely from a parasitical practice, as described by Joseph Pugliese (Pugliese, 1995:345), it is hoped that it also plays a part in what Mudrooroo sees as the role of literary criticism. That is, to develop new techniques in working with texts and create work that helps to ‘spread a knowledge about the Aborigines of Australia and their unique culture’ (Narogin, 1990:3).

It is with this view in mind that I suggest the two anthologies *Inside Black Australia* and *Paperbark* are interesting cases for examining important issues. Both present a Black aesthetic and both chose to use the anthology as a means of offering a collection of writers and their work. But before examining these two texts it may be useful to discuss how anthologies traditionally play a role in maintaining or supporting the canon. If this is true, then the fact that these anthologies contest an accepted canon raises important questions.

What exactly are anthologies and why choose an anthology amongst all the other forms available? Given the previous discussion it is clear that anthologies play an essential role in maintaining and defining a dominant
“canon” because they comment on and in a sense determine what a society values in its literature or sees as important to its national identity.
The Place of Anthologies

By simple definition anthologies are ‘collections’ which change over time because of their context. In essence anthologies are not solely governed by an available body of literary texts, but involve individuals, writers, editors, publishers (governed by the economics of what sells and what is in demand), institutions and readers. None of these elements necessarily agree entirely with what a particular anthology represents at a given time. As Vincent Buckley states,

The anthology signals its meaning, conveys some sense of its own importance, according to the needs it is seeking to satisfy. Some anthologists assert themselves by including only “the best”, some only the “historically important”, whether by following or varying an established tradition.

(Buckley, 1986:9)

Anthologies have also been used as devices to espouse causes, highlight philosophies and attitudes, illustrate particular literary movements, types of writing and groups of writers, and draw attention to places and regions. They collect small-press-magazine and out-of-print material into a compendium and are used as a teachable unified package to be sold to the profitable school market by publishers as an ideal form of collective representations.
Yet the most significant fact about anthologies is the marketing drive of the publishing house. Many anthologies are produced for general reading and are works that are meant to be enjoyed by a wide readership. In so far as anthologies declare themselves definitive and comprehensive, especially under the name of the nation, they necessarily obscure or erase from their ‘representative’ field those aspects of society or writing not included. While they declare themselves to be ‘passively’ descriptive of their field, they therefore perform an active prescriptive function. This only becomes evident in those ‘sectional’ anthologies produced with the intention of being included in a particular “canon”. Because they are representative of a particular time or a movement, they are marked out as ‘political’ texts. The canon, however, rarely markets itself as political. Rather, it styles itself as “natural” or obvious, and it frequently purports to offer general (albeit the best) reading material.

There is a problem, however, when an anthology claims to be part of a tradition, a canon of literature representing a national identity. A prime example of this situation is found in the publication of a series of anthologies edited by Walter Murdoch. The anthologies included *The Oxford Book of Australasian Verse* which was published in 1918, revised editions which appeared in 1923 and then 1945, *A Book of Australasian Verse* (1923), and a final edition in 1950, retitled *A Book of Australasian and New Zealand Verse*. These works were invested with a sense of authority (suggested in part through their association with ‘Oxford’), and
hence shaped and established a poetic literary canon. However, these editions were contested by the critics on the basis of their supposed ‘representative’ nature and ‘poetic judgment’ and as a result of these debates were proved not to be reflections of a consensual tradition but were in fact merely a personal collection reflecting the taste and enterprising power of an individual. In the foreword to the last anthology Murdoch states, ‘I have never for a moment set up as an authority on poetry; I have left that to my critics. The book was simply, as I have said, a collection of poems which, for one reason or another, I had happened to like’ (Sessor, 1970:176). This example says much about how some works have been falsely established in the literary canon. Murdoch may have simply been an anomaly but as Kenneth Slessor points out, the unfortunate thing ... is that numbers of people interested in poetry, particularly those in England, were given the notion that it was a work of authority, in effect a kind of semi-official synopsis on which a passing knowledge, and even a judgment, of Australian poetry could safely be based.

(Slessor, 1970:176)

Although Murdoch saw himself operating out of a personal aesthetic pleasure, his publisher had chosen him as a known (inter) national name that would lend academic authority to the books and had circulated them
across a general public as standardizing examples of a national literary culture. And even if these poems were simply aesthetic works to be read purely for enjoyment they are read out of context in an anthology. Slessor maintains that

The proper function of an anthology, it seems to me, should be to condense into a comparatively small volume the effect of a large amount of writing, so that the reader is offered an easily comprehensible view of a diffused field which would be out of perspective if it were scanned through one aperture or a few apertures only.

(Slessor, 1970:167)

Ironically, this situation is not an inadequate framework for the ‘pleasure for the pure aesthetic’ because it is divorced from the writer’s total work (Slessor, 1970:167). It is certainly not the most ideal context for viewing or appreciating works. Critics such as Manfred Jurgensen argue specifically against anthologies for this very same reason. Even though he himself has produced a number of anthologies, Jurgensen believes that

Anthologies are contradictions in terms: whilst attempting to present a representative overview of the subject area or period of literary and social development, they actually function like quotations
out of context. In a very real sense, anthologies create (i.e. invent, manipulate) settings, themes, experiences — and authors.

(Jurgensen, 1992:197)

He further argues that anthologies type-cast writers and their work and that ‘few anthologies rise above the level of self-documentation and the rhetoric of wishing to be heard’ (Jurgensen, 1992:197).

Nonetheless anthologies have continued to be popular, accessible, and far cheaper than purchasing numerous individual works by writers. In this sense, anthologies thus remain a viable form of literary ‘summary’. The process of summarizing, however, rests upon usually undeclared values or assumed consensus about cultural identity: ‘We want them to conform to some set of standards, aesthetic principles, pedagogical theories’ (Lauter, 1991:102). But again, the ultimate question of who decides these criteria, and by what means they are decided upon, remains unresolved.

In The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse (1986) Les Murray claims that his selection was made on the basis of ‘liveliness and readability’. In Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada (1990) the editors collected work from writers who wrote whatever they believed needed to be written. In The Penguin Book of Australian Verse Harry Heseltine proclaims that, ‘generally, I have been guided not only by what personally pleases me but also by what I believe to be essential to an understanding of
the development of our poetry’ (Heseltine, 1972:1972), whereas in *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* by Tranter and Mead (1991) the editors chose works solely on the premise that poets ‘create for readers the enjoyment of a complex and intense aesthetic experience’ (Tranter and Mead, 1991:xxvii). In *Some Other Country* the editors stated that their ‘final choice was governed by the simple decision to print the best stories we could find’ (McLeod and Manhire, 1992:n.p.).

This small sample of editorial methodologies may well confirm for the reader what they have already concluded. As one critic puts it,

> Literary values, literary standards are themselves conventional and ideological, and are not absolute. Yet rarely are the ideological bases for their value judgments made explicit. Ideology, in general, masquerades as common sense, good taste, a firm knowledge of literature and an appreciation of what it means to be an Australian, or some such apparently self-explanatory quality.

*(Taylor, 1987:15)*

This statement, in fact, touches on what may frequently be an unacknowledged side of the anthologists’ project. The following definition by Paul Lauter, of what might be defined as an aesthetic, clearly asks the reader to consider how anthologies frame and construct the reality around
them in order to judge literary works.

In general when we talk about “literary” or “aesthetic” merit we are speaking of the interest the form and language of a text hold for us—even if its values are alien.

(Lauter, 1991:105)

Whether this is an adequate definition of literary and aesthetic merit agreed on by all is debatable, but what is of value in this definition is the term ‘us’. Who is ‘us’? ‘Us’ as defined in terms of the canon has not traditionally encompassed everyone: in fact, ‘us’ has traditionally meant the ‘majority’. The aesthetic, before it even becomes a definable subject, is already preconceived and flawed because it has already excluded rather than included parts of what it is attempting collectively to define. Minority groups have sought to challenge this exclusion and continue to redefine what the canon views as the total picture of, for example, a nation’s literature. The challenge for minority groups has been to operate outside of this framework and yet to make itself heard. In attempting to come to terms with the dominant culture, by seeking inclusion in it, minority groups force the dominant culture to recognise the failure of the canon to account for it in the first place. Therefore whilst indigenous work produced outside of the mainstream can draw attention to gaps that exist in the mainstream anthology, the anthology can also serve as a positive metaphor of the society’s values and attitudes towards minority
groups by intentionally including works specifically aimed at redressing the problems of exclusion. Editors such as Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin argue that the making of an anthology should be seen as an act of ‘positive discrimination’, a ‘political object which may disrupt the thinking “in terms of images of homogeneity and national identity” ’ (Gunew and Mahyuddin, 1988:xiv).

It is therefore through the anthology’s claim to comprehensive representation that minority literatures are able to effect an entry into the mainstream circulation of texts. Often when this does happen literary or aesthetic merit is not the primary or sole basis for expression; rather, the minority’s concerns are to promote the ‘broadcasting’ of voices of minority groups.

The problem is that when they attempt to enter mainstream anthologies they are kept out or packaged as ‘token’ presences. The response then becomes one of constructing counter-anthologies of an avowedly partial, sectional kind. Majority groups will frequently silence these efforts by devaluing them as ‘unliterary’. This argument, of course, is false because marginal work is both literary and aesthetic. Work produced by the margin has not necessarily discounted aesthetics but focuses upon the primacy of voice. Even this focus can be challenged as it highlights the difficulty and the problems in assuming that there might be a focus or an attempt to generalisation work produced by the margin. Publishing however is a means of promoting minority work but it is not its only
purpose. The writing and publishing of works by minority writers is only one area of opportunity in creating a space in the centre. Rather, what such majority ideologies attempt to do is to narrow the focus and the range of the definition of the canon in order to keep out the ‘other’ by being exclusive rather than inclusive. This way of thinking, like the belief in a canon, needs to be challenged.

What this discussion about anthologies suggests is that ‘taste is what governs all anthologies for good or bad’ (Slessor, 1970:167). But whose taste and how does one group’s taste get to be promoted as everyone’s and how then does an excluded group assert its own different taste, are the interesting determiners of the canon.

Lauter believes that

Standards of literary merit are not absolute but contingent. They depend, among other considerations, upon the relative value we place on form and feeling in literary expression as well as on culturally different conceptions of form and function. Thus, in seeking to teach “the best”—as we should—of the various literatures that constitute our national culture, we need constantly to reexamine our cultural yardstick. Otherwise, we shall confine ourselves to works that happen simply
to conform to standards with which we have been familiar or that will suit our professional roles as traditionally defined in academe.

(Lauter, 1991:107)

In essence this response is not an argument for destabilising the canon but to see the stability of the literary canon as a

fiction needed by both its proponents and its challengers. This stability legitimises the former by providing them with the authority of tradition, and the latter by providing them with a tradition they can proceed to "delegitimize" by revealing its authority to be bogus.

(Lecker, 1991:30)

Anthologies therefore are fictions that are needed and are thus powerful. They have power and status within the dominant culture and can be used effectively as a tool by the margin to challenge and re-formulate views of 'otherness' established and maintained by the canon, frequently reflected in certain representations of national identity. Thus specialised anthologies produced by minority groups can signify by their very production the lack of representation of minority groups in mainstream anthologies. Such texts can also signal how representations might be presented to a wider audience and on what basis minority works may be explored. John
Tranter and Philip Mead are fully aware of this potential. They state that ‘an anthology is not just a collection of poems; it is always an act of theory and criticism’ (Tranter and Mead, 1991:xxix). Slessor was perhaps ahead of his time when he commented on the power that anthologies had in creating notions of cultural consciousness and in developing an awareness of national sentiment when he was alarmed by Murdoch’s unrepresentative representation of Australian verse. Later, Slessor recognised the influence his own anthology had on shaping the national identity:

amongst the hundred thousand purchasers of the *Penguin Book*, which was sold overseas as well as in this country, there must be thousands of readers outside Australia who have now realized, possibly for the first time, that there is poetry in Australia as well as uranium, zinc, dried fruits and merino sheep.

(Slessor, 1970:182)

In the various samples of anthologies produced by or for marginalised groups, most reflect a concern for the way in which they have been defined, represented and assessed by the canon and through their publications seek to redress these problems by presenting alternative and new ways of seeing their works. These demands reflect the changes that are occurring in the wider community. On the one hand, minority voices
engaging with canon formation by inserting themselves into anthologies, perpetuate the idea of a totalizing representation of a single national literature. On the other, the very assertion of a minority voice, especially when it relativises canon formation by putting out sectional counter anthologies begins to challenge both canon formation and the idea of a homogeneous national cultural identity.
The question of ‘Race’ and ‘Voice’

Thomas King, in *An Anthology of Canadian Native Fiction* (1987) attempts to explore the uncertainties and problems of defining the body of work known as indigenous literature and raises some important questions relating to its constitution. What does the voice of the group entail? Does voice mean that in the case of an indigenous anthology all works to be included in it are to be produced by indigenous people or can it contain works about indigenous issues by others? There is also the issue of how ‘indigenous’ is defined (blood quotient or cultural identification). Does an indigenous anthology create a narrow essentialist view of indigeneity? Considerations must also be given to audience (is the work a self-affirmation for an in-group or a proselytizing outreach to the nation as a whole?) and how such work will be assessed.

In fact, the methods of assembling works by indigenous groups have become a part of the process by which aesthetic standards are generated and assessments made. The process of gathering information about indigenous literature entails finding (or constructing) some pattern in indigenous work, ‘a pattern or patterns which can be translated into a definition’ (King, 1987:4). This constructing process is a way of arriving at an answer to the broad question, What does the minority seek? This could be answered by suggesting that indigenous groups common desire is for the mainstream to acknowledge it. And yet even this is problematic as indigenous literature does not necessarily want the mainstream thereby
to absorb or conquer it. The problem, as Mudrooroo suggests, is that indigenous writing is meant for, and hence exists because of white audiences. Mudrooroo makes the point that the 'Aboriginal population is too small with little economic clout, and so books for and by Aboriginal writers are goods of little profit, or if they are to be profitable must be written to conform to the dictates of the marketplace' (Narogin, 1990:26). Indigenous literature therefore seeks recognition on equal but different terms.

In the anthology, *Our Bit of Truth* (1990), Canadian indigenous writers and non-indigenous editors attempt to explore the question of voice and to define the position of indigenous writing in the mainstream. In the preface to the anthology Flora Zaharia explains that the editor Agnes Grant, a white academic professor, has 'Because of her long-standing devotion ... been entrusted with material handed down from generation to generation' (in Grant, 1990:v). Dr Grant’s encouragement, according to Zaharia, has 'helped many aspiring storytellers to find inspiration for their own creativity by drawing upon legends and original stories’ (in Grant, 1990:v). As far as Zaharia is concerned, the voices are made up of writers who have ‘tried to capture and retain the voices of their people’ (in Grant, 1990:v). The ‘nativeness’ of the work is explained in detail by Grant who states that ‘Before Native literature can be fully appreciated for its unique qualities it is imperative to identify assumptions underlying the cultural beliefs and practices of Métis and Native societies’ (in Grant, 1990:viii). Zaharia claims that the audience includes two groups: the native students
who ‘will gain a strengthening of their identity as people with a rich and varied background and cultural traditions’, and secondly non-indigenous students who can broaden their horizons and gain a greater respect for people of different backgrounds (in Grant, 1990:v).

Our Bit of Truth, as the title suggests, wishes to present not only a “truth”, but “a” truth about indigenous writing and experiences. In doing so the editors want to communicate an indigenous tradition. As Grant puts it, indigenous readers have

a right to expect that masterpieces of their living tradition be a part of the country’s language arts study. No Canadian literature course can be truly representative of Canada without literature written by aboriginal Canadians themselves.

(Grant, 1990:vi)

Grant’s anthology also poignantly delivers messages about the content of works set in the current historical and literary context where the content is often disturbing to mainstream readers because it comments on the experience of being aboriginal within an atmosphere of rejection by the larger society. Certainly, the history of Canadian aboriginal people in contact with Europeans is not a
proud one; even today racism, in its many forms, affects them, and society, in many ways. A recognition of Native literature could go a long way towards healing the rift by helping aboriginal and other people to come to terms with the past and cope with the present. Until this happens aboriginal writers may well continue to produce material that is generally disturbing for mainstream readers.

(Grant, 1990:vii-viii)

In the New Zealand context, Into the World of Light (1982), edited by Witi Ihimaera and Don Long, begins with similar sentiments to those of Grant in that the editors discuss the ‘fight against prejudice and distrust to attain literary standing’ which the anthology focuses on (Ihimaera and Long, 1982:1). According to the editors, the writers included in their collection, of whom all claim Maori ancestry, ‘have had to create an audience, both Maori and Pakeha’ (Ihimaera and Long, 1982:1). The editors insist that ‘there has always been a need for New Zealand to take its Maori personality more into account’ (Ihimaera and Long, 1982:1).

What was needed was for Maori people to wake up to the fact that integration of people did not automatically make for integration of culture, and that the Maori cultural base needed to be regained if the Maori was not to become simply a brown
The anthology also recognises that the work it contains reflects the impact of colonisation on indigenous peoples and the experiences they write about. In other words, it reflects the period of colonial contact, assimilation and of learning to write in English under a white education system. The editors state that

In this sense the emergence of Maori literature written in English became as much a launching point for, as well as a development from, the period of protest during the past twenty years — indeed, the 1970s have been critical years for writing throughout the Pacific.

But whilst the writing does demonstrate the struggles of the past, the editors aim to produce an anthology which ‘could well have charted a course towards death’ in that it could have focussed upon the negativity of colonial contact but instead, ‘charts a course towards life’ (Ihimaera and Long, 1982:5).

Where this anthology differs from others is in its use of translation. The translations that appear in both languages challenge the accepted ways in
which translations appear and in doing so renegotiate how the centre views the margins and on what basis. The translations in this anthology are not simply translations of Maori writing into English but are also translations of English works into Maori. This is a crucial and necessary step in the evolution of the use of translations in indigenous anthologies. It subverts the primacy of English as the central language or focus of communication and instead sees translations in both languages as necessary to an understanding of the many cultures and languages existing in the same community. The editors state clearly that the translations in both languages mirror ‘what is happening to New Zealand’s no longer monolingual literature’ (Ihimaera and Long, 1982:5). This practice recognises the fact that New Zealand culture is multilingual and that English is not the sole nor the primary language used by the whole population. The warning to the ‘establishment’ comes clearly and concisely from the editors: ‘Let there be no doubt that as far as we are concerned the contributors as artists belong as much to the mainstream as they do to the written tradition of Maori literature’ (Ihimaera and Long, 1982:5).

_The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse_ by Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen (1985) was the first non-Native poetry anthology to include Maori writing. Maori poetry appears in tandem with its translated version. Wedde states that the works were included because ‘The need for Maori content was obvious and problematic’ (Wedde and McQueen, 1985:45), yet he does not explain what he means by this. Rather the
editors seem to have gone to great lengths to identify, date and give tribal identity to the works. The bulk of translation was done by Margaret Orbell but Wedde, McQueen and Orbell consulted with five other authorities to complete this task. Yet this method of translation does not take into account the cultural context of writing and translation as evident in *Into the World of Light* in which Maori and English is used to appropriate context and translation. Vincent Buckley’s criticism of *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* was that the editorial practice, especially in the translating of the Maori work, lent itself to an anthropological approach. Buckley, for example, claims that Orbell’s introduction sounded ‘like that of an anthropologist rather than a poet-editor; she makes them objects of passing wonderment rather than full attention’ (Buckley, 1986:10). The solution to the problem he thought was to

leave the job to a Maori editor ... The present good-hearted editors, claiming necessity, succeed in making Maori poetry seem uninteresting. My tentative conclusion is that it should be selected more generously, presented in a less anthropological fashion, and not by Pakehas.

(Buckley, 1986:11)

*The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* does attempt to address the question of what constitutes New Zealand poetry and thus sees the
collection reflecting 'a process, not a national condition' (Wedde and McQueen, 1985:29). The main problem however is that the organisation of the anthology doesn’t quite convince the reader of this. The editors’ vision to include both non-indigenous and indigenous poems together in chronological order tends to crowd the Maori works into small sections or it gives eminence to traditional / oral material compared to modern English Maori poems mixed in with pakeha ones.

The ‘Native Issue’ of Canadian Fiction Magazine (1987) edited by Thomas King, is a recent anthology of short fiction by indigenous writers in Canada (reprinted with minor changes as All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native fiction, 1990). Many of the writers who are represented in the anthology are unknown or are published there for the first time, thus fulfilling its stated aim of exploring voices and providing opportunities for indigenous writers. The subject matter and concerns presented in the collection do not focus primarily on confrontation, conflict and alienation, but work instead to present a wide range of themes. This is a development of the representation in previous anthologies. King’s tone stresses the importance of selecting and viewing works that cover a range of human emotions in a panorama of contemporary indigenous life. King claims that the collection ‘is not definitive nor is it representative’ but that it is a ‘beginning, and at the same time, a continuation of the traditions of storytelling that have always been a vital part of the Native communities’ (King, 1987:10).
The anthology, *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada* (1990) insists upon providing ‘a place for Native women to speak’ (Perreault and Vance, 1990:xi) and does so with minimal constraint. The anthology was created as a result of the editors’ ‘inability to find many voices of Native writers in bookstores and libraries’ (Perreault and Vance, 1990:xi) and like many of the other anthologies featured in this discussion, appears at a time of ‘profound change within Aboriginal communities and in relationships between Native and non-Native Canadians’ (Perreault and Vance, 1990:xi). There is a recognition that the collection of the work is a radical move which departs from the ‘prescribed’ view of anthologies as being ‘specifically literary’ or ‘narrowly political’. The method used to compile the anthology and the editorial processes significantly reflect the changes occurring in the wider socio-political arena (Perreault and Vance, 1990:xi). *Writing the Circle* verges on being a piece of post-modern art, a bricolage of works in so much as the collection is made out of what was received by the anthologists rather than what they knew, read, sorted and selected. ‘Most of the writers here sent a variety of pieces. This allowed us to choose work on the basis of the anthology as a whole as well as according to individual pieces’ (Perreault and Vance, 1990:xiii).

This almost random method of selection is certainly different to the process adopted by most of the editors discussed above. Both indigenous and non-indigenous readers of this collection can expect to find works that do not adhere to white conventional standards of literary excellence and
will presumably ‘discover the limitations of their own reading practices as they encounter the emotional and intellectual demands of this collection’ (Perreault and Vance, 1990:xi). The collection recognises the fact that voices need to be heard if they are to be understood. Although the editors claim that they would have preferred the editing to be done by both non-indigenous and indigenous editors working alongside each other, they have been constrained by the ‘historical moment of its inception (1986)’ (Perreault and Vance, 1990:xiv). As a result these voices are given place by editors who found themselves

in professional positions that allowed us to make our early wish for a collection of Native women’s writings a reality. Although we are not Native, we felt then, as we do now, that anything we could do to work to lift the blanket of silence would be of value.

(Perreault and Vance, 1990:xii)

This defence might well reflect what some feminist theory has called ‘white women’s guilt’, which, as Audre Lorde has argued, is how white women often respond when confronted with the knowledge of racism. Their guilt is indicative of ‘a response to one’s own actions or lack of action’ (Lorde, 1984:130). However, the editors of this anthology, in publishing and wanting others to hear these indigenous voices, free themselves, in part, from this position of guilt because they have
facilitated the transmission of indigenous voice. As Lorde states, if guilt leads to change then it can be useful, since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness.

(Lorde, 1984:130)

In editing and publishing *Writing the Circle*, the editors have the power to transfer their own sense of guilt onto the non-indigenous reader.

The cruel racism of the past and present can no longer be understood merely as an abstraction by the white reader. Whites, too, must feel the pain of that reality and must look into the reflections of ourselves these words make for us. If we don’t like what we see in the mirror of these works, we have been offered the gift of change by the truths told here.

(Perreault and Vance, 1990:xiv)

These ideological beliefs extended into every aspect of the editorial
process. In terms of the editing very little was done to the works submitted.

We followed conventional editorial policy, making grammar, spelling, and punctuation consistent throughout the manuscript and working with individual authors to rework and rewrite a piece at the author’s request. But, any substantial editorial changes we wanted to make were only made with the approval of the individual writers and, sometimes, that was not given.

(Perreault and Vance, 1990:xiv)

While very little may have been done to the submitted work, conventionalising white editorial standards were nevertheless imposed on the indigenous work. Whether the reader considers ‘conventional editorial policy’ (that is, standardising grammar, spelling and so forth) as a form of appropriation remains a contentious issue. The editors of this collection have in principle at least sought and acknowledged the authors’ right to their work.

Like many of the other anthologies in this discussion, Writing the Circle recognises that indigenous people are still making a transition from oral to written literatures, from aboriginal to foreign languages, and that this process takes time. In this process indigenous people are attempting to
find a voice as well as to discover a sense of what their own voices represent. The term ‘transition’ however may unintentionally be read as suggesting a process of changing one kind of literature into another, meaning that oral traditions are left behind (lost) in the discovery of written ones. This is a false and often unintended conclusion drawn by readers. Rather it must be understood that transition, here, suggests the continued influence of the past which changes the arena into which it moves, so that the ‘transition’ is not an apology for literary works by indigenous writers struggling with the new demands. Rather it should be seen as a process and result of transition in which new ways of seeing are possible.
"Ghettoization" and Anthologies

Many indigenous anthologies offer, or promise to present, new ways of seeing. Indigenous anthologies can be seen as markers of the processes of indigenous writing (they define, redefine or reject notions offered by the mainstream) by renegotiating categories of 'otherness'. The indigenous anthologies discussed previously claim that much of the initial indigenous writing, whether blunt or subtle, is protest literature in that it speaks about the processes of colonisation: dispossession, objectification, marginalization. The constant struggle for cultural survival is expressed in the movement for structural and psychological self-determination and is a position that is not fixed. Indigenous writing is continually reassessing its place in relation to a number of communities—white, indigenous and other minorities.

Of course, categorising literature according to ethnicity, gender, or politics raises the spectre of ghettoization. Indeed, grouping indigenous writing under one category, as has been done for this discussion, can lead to the assumption that all indigenous writing is of one kind, or that it addresses the same issues. The initial discussion presented here, however, is not intended to homogenise indigenous writing but to reveal patterns which emerge, and conceptual tools used, in anthologies which have indigenous work as their focus. Such delineations, as Thomas King has pointed out, can lead to false expectations which restrict what indigenous writers can say. Thomas King suggests that when discussing and
attempting to construct dialogue around indigenous writing ‘we need to be reminded that while literature can be a great many things, we should not insist that it be a proper cultural catechism as well’ (King, 1987:6). It is then extremely important that the term, ‘indigenous’ should be an operational rather than an homogenising one, a term that facilitates the ending of exploitation and oppression, instead of ensuring its perpetuation. There must be support for both indigenous literature and indigenous studies if the ‘canon’ is to be challenged or expanded to reflect society’s multiple voices.

What these anthologies reveal is their use of English as an operational mode for facilitating change. In many respects, English is the new native language, literally and politically. While many indigenous people are beginning to re-learn their indigenous languages, English is nevertheless the common language of a great many indigenous people. Despite the legacy of oppression it suggests, the wide-spread use of English can also be read positively as offering a way to raise political consciousness in the community, and to de-colonise and to unite indigenous peoples.

Nearly all of these indigenous anthologies speak of their role as part of a process of change, and of their having found their way into print. This process is seen as an inevitable transition as oral traditions which extend back hundreds of thousands of years become part of the written form as well as maintaining their role in indigenous societies. Writing would permanently record the past, the present and the future. Yet at the same
time indigenous cultures maintain an oral tradition that is coeval to this process. In contemporary times, the oral and written traditions are equally important in indigenous cultures. This situation is best reflected in a passage from *Writing the Circle*:

This integration of an ancient and ongoing tradition of oral history and literature with the printed word has been troubled, struggling against the overt destruction of ancient communities and violent abuses at the hands of Europeans. Despite the damage done to Indian and Métis peoples, the will to be heard has remained strong, and their refusal to be silenced finds an image in the words of Alanis Obomsawin: “I know I’m a bridge between two worlds”.

(Perreault and Vance, 1990:xii-xiii)

Indigenous works may serve many purposes. The purpose of indigenous writing is arguably to raise questions, challenge authority and tradition, perceptions, assessments, seek change on different but equal terms, and seek to alter understandings. Indigenous works also insist on being assessed in a different way to European works. This raises the complexity of whether or not non-indigenous assessments of indigenous writing can be valid, either within literature or cultural politics generally. How can white, rather than indigenous intellectuals better speak for the indigene?
As the editors of *Writing the Circle* have already indicated, they as professional First World women should not seek to proclaim themselves as authorities of indigenous women’s work, or to supplant indigenous women’s voices. One could argue that the role of white editors (as in *Writing the Circle*), can be strategically useful in challenging expectations about the canon since their concerns cannot be played down as sectional or marginal. Their patronage reminds the mainstream that there are legitimate concerns about issues of representation, racism and appropriation.

Yet there must also be an awareness of the dangers of speaking about indigenous peoples and of the danger of building a need for such patronage. Certainly not all white women or men always adequately work on behalf of indigenous writers. More to the point, many critics feel such intervention is merely another form of appropriation. Kalpana Ram (1994) argues that if women who are not in the position of Third World women take on their cause, they do not represent the true indigenous voice but are in fact appropriating it. Ram points to critics such as Spivak who she sees as arguing for Third World women from a coverted First World academic position, far removed from the voice and its struggles.

These concerns are not solely ones of literary assessment; they are also problems of publication and control. Lawrence Bourke (1993), for example, questions whether ‘cultural institutions of the modern state (government agencies, publishing houses or university departments)’ can
‘accommodate a marginalised indigenous culture without either depoliticising it or undermining its discourse of the sacred’ (Bourke, 1993:23). He sees the inclusion of some indigenous works into mainstream anthologies, particularly translations of oral songs that are part of sacred ceremonies, as contentious.

The controls which indigenous writing can be subjected to under such patronage are frequently dangerous and alternatives to mainstream presses have already been found as a result of such problems. Mudrooroo states that ‘the only recourse is to apply to recognised and hopefully sympathetic publishing houses’ (Narogin, 1990a:28), or to establish Aboriginal publishing houses such as Magabala Books which in 1988 was established under the control of the Aboriginal community in Broome. However the final resort for some Aboriginal writers has been to not go through the processes of being published. Instead, ‘their works are produced in small editions on equipment in the Aboriginal settlements and are for local consumption’ (Narogin, 1990a:30).

Mudrooroo clearly emphasise the need for indigenous work to ‘escape from the trammels of the publishing world and its conformity’ (Narogin, 1990a:30) because editing can often remove or take away the essence of the work. Bruce McGuinness warns that

unless Aboriginal people control the funding, unless

Aboriginal people control the content, the
publishing, the ultimate presentation of the article, then it is *not* Aboriginal; that it ceases to be Aboriginal when it is interfered with, when it is tampered with by non-Aboriginal people who exist outside of the spectrum of Aboriginal life; of Aboriginal culture within Australia.

(McGuinness, 1985:44)

This situation reflects frustrations with the editing and publishing industry more than it does the desire to release indigenous voices from silence. Indigenous voices are often silenced or have few opportunities to be heard. The fact remains that if minority works do enter into the mainstream they find themselves in the situation Penny van Toorn describes:

To address an audience is to hold it (hopefully) in one’s power: but it is also to place oneself in *its* power, to expose oneself to its judgments, its categories, the rules and customs that pertain to its culture. When a minority voice extends its range beyond the confines of its immediate cultural community, it enters the political field of a new and very powerful social group: the dominant audience.

(van Toorn, 1990:102)
Whilst there are truths to be found in such a statement, the essential concern for indigenous writing entering into this position is for it not to be fearful or intimidated by the mainstream. It must assert its power in negotiating new ways of seeing, new ways of challenging the canon, otherwise silence remains forever the fate of the minority.

Indigenous writers have realised that

As a market force, the Aboriginal reading community is dwarfed by the sheer numerical strength of the non-Aboriginal reading public. Aboriginal writers who seek funding from bodies such as the Aboriginal Arts Board or the Literature Board of the Australia Council, feel acutely constrained by the necessity to produce work which falls within the paradigms defined by the policies of these funding agencies.

(van Toorn, 1990:107)

These are obstacles that would be best done without, but they are symptomatic of the ways in which the minority is continually negotiating with the mainstream. In principle,

it’s no good for Aboriginal people to be writing what non-Aboriginal people, what white publishing
These negotiations must establish new ways of encouraging the production and publication of works that produce an active solidarity. Solidarity can be seen to be an act on the part of indigenous writers for gaining space and a position in the mainstream, assuming that is where they want to be. Collective bargaining power can be useful for indigenous groups wanting to make gains in the mainstream. Spivak (1993) argues that strategic essentialism is a useful tool for minority groups. But can minority groups entering into the mainstream use provisional measures such as producing and publishing sectional works to correct political imbalances? Can these really be effective or does this process simply renegotiate and constantly remind the minority that it is not part of the mainstream by insisting on defining the margin as other?

Whilst Bourke and others find it ‘difficult to see where (or how) boundaries might be drawn between valid and invalid uses of the concept’ of strategic essentialism (Bourke, 1993:31), it is not a question of boundaries but of negotiating those boundaries when there are opportunities to speak in the first place. Space can be created, manipulated and redefined accordingly in order to stretch the boundaries and renegotiate the framework. This space is also not a static space and certainly not fixed in time. Indigenous and non-indigenous contact after
all, has already been played out in history. The process of colonial history should perhaps not be repeated in the canon. What needs to occur is a reassessment of the publishing infrastructures for indigenous writers and methods of assessing such works.
Publishing allows for movement and exposure. Publishers have now begun to broaden the range of works they offer and this includes a variety of works by indigenous writers. Stephen Muecke has argued that the publishing industry is in a state of 'readiness, even eagerness, to publish work by Aboriginal writers' (Muecke, 1988a:413). But what does this readiness entail? A readiness for social change or a readiness to capitalize on publications that continue to reinforce or perpetuate an appropriation of indigenous peoples? Jurgensen has argued that recent publications of such work are considered to be sectional not canonical and should be regarded as 'general reading'. This situation has come about because of an eagerness by publishers to print topical and commercially viable products to meet the increased demand for such reading. Yet Jurgensen maintains that the popularity and reception of such anthologies by the reading public may be signs of successful publishing but are not reflections of literary merit nor of a canon. The following viewpoint offered by Jurgensen comments specifically on the publication of such texts and highlights the fine line between representation for representation's sake and writing for pure expression.

The flood of self-righteous, self-generating anthologies may be a reflection of the general publishing situation in this country. All anthologies have a political aim; not surprisingly therefore,
most are heavily subsidised, frequently by the Australian taxpayer. If such publications guarantee a diversity of voices in the nation’s literary forum, they are to be welcomed. However, few anthologies rise above the level of self-documentation and the rhetoric of wishing to be heard. If we want more than voices listening to themselves — and the general sale of anthologies indicates the limited appeal of such autism — it is essential to provide individual authors with as wide a range of readers as possible.

(Jurgensen, 1992:197)

Yet regardless of the merits or ills of such publishing policies there is cause for concern in the appropriation of indigenous works as well as the promotion of such works as solely narrow in focus or being sold and presented as topical or symptomatic of publishing conditions. These positions and views simply subtract rather than add merit to the work.

Furthermore, the publishing of individual authors rather than anthologies would certainly generate interest in a wider range of writers but the issue of who gets published in the first place would need to be addressed. Past trends have demonstrated that the lack of indigenous writing in Australia requires a change in publishing practices because an upsurge in publishing funds would not necessarily change social attitudes.
Anthologies have a role to play in indigenous writing because they emphasise community voices over individual work. Mudrooroo argues that indigenous writing is a community effort, a community voice:

The Aboriginal writer does not exist in isolation, but as a member of the community who see, or attach certain values to his or her literary production.

(Narogin, 1990a:37)

The indigenous voice represents the varying views of life.

Aboriginal reality is different from white reality in that it is an expanded reality akin to the dreaming life.

(Narogin, 1990a:37)

Significantly indigenous writing styles have reflected an holistic way of seeing place and time which produces a sense of integration with the variant aspects of life. The link to the land and to what that represents to Aboriginal peoples is an integral part of understanding indigenous culture and belief. To argue for a separate individual voice, detached from the indigenous view of life, is to ‘resist hegemonic pressures which seek to neutralize them by repressing their political nature’ (Gugelberger,
Indigenous culture belongs to and is part of the land. It is this connection to the land that has been, and is still being, contested which is an issue central to many writers’ subject matter. Thus to reject this connection or devalue it is to deny indigenous people their existence.

In a reading of Michael Foucault’s discussion of the repressive hypothesis, Stephen Muecke has argued against the use of such an hypothesis for categorising Aboriginal literature. Muecke resists the impulse to view political expression as the main motivator of creativity used by minority groups because

The logic would seem to be: social conditions are bad, we have to speak up, and if we make enough noise something will be done about it. This makes good political sense, but as a theory of literary production it is quite crude and as an account of the rise of the institution of Aboriginal literature it is inadequate.

(Muecke, 1988a:406)

Muecke states that this type of response to literary production and an aesthetic simply reduces literary works into a singular indigenous consciousness and political strategy. The voice, rather than voices, becomes the vehicle of social justice and truth. Muecke undervalues the fact that indigenous writing has had to face systemic racism in a society
that has made every stage of writing and publishing less accessible to indigenous writers than it has to others. He also seems to disregard Jack Davis’ view that ‘most Aboriginal writers were involved within the Black movement ... We all started off as political people’ (Cited in in Shoemaker, 1990:187), and that this is a significant statement by Davis because it recognises the important developments gained by indigenous writing that should not be taken for granted. Also significant in opposing Muecke’s repression / expression is the view that many writers wish to retain the political consciousness they have developed (in Shoemaker, 1990:187).

In terms of Muecke’s view of agency, Anne Brewster argues that,

> In constructing these Aboriginal narratives as products solely of white technologies (that is, of a complex of social and cultural practices such as institutional and popularised discourses and epistemologies through which the dominant culture fashions notions of racial identity), Muecke is in danger of writing out the agency of Aboriginal people.

(Brewster, 1995:29)

As previously argued minority literature is political and has collective value therefore the repression / expression is a necessary path for
indigenous writing to take because it creates spaces that are needed for political self-definition.

Certainly what Muecke does not want is for minority work to fall into a 'sub-standard' class of literary production or for it to be seen as literature that is of less literary aesthetic 'value' because it takes the role of speaking out of a 'lesser' philosophical viewpoint. Again, this view threatens to become another hegemonic pressure that wishes to undermine indigenous writing and publishing by subverting its political message. As Mudrooroo has argued, 'In Aboriginal poetry, it is the message which is supreme, with any aesthetic appeal being of lesser worth' (Narogin, 1990a:35).

The real problem for critics such as Muecke is that they want indigenous writing to move beyond the repression / expression nexus but they neglect what the indigenous writers themselves know and assert their position to be — which is political and viable for the time being. There is often an urgency in wanting change to happen immediately or at least to create alternative reading positions to compensate for the time delay. The solution should become an examination of the text for the social, multiple interpretations which allows the writing to be viewed as a 'social text' (Muecke, 1988a:418). Again, this view detracts from the work rather than enriches it and reflects an anthropological approach to indigenous writing. Critics such as JanMohamed and Lloyd warn that the 'monolithic critique of identity can be destructive to those for whom creating identity is an important political project' and that critics who favour indeterminacy of
culture for the minority speak from a position of privilege (Cited in Brewster, 1995:37).

In terms of the agency and advocacy of indigenous voices, Muecke suggests that the ‘story of Aboriginal relations to the publishing industry is not one of persecution and struggle’ (Muecke, 1988a:413); rather he contends that the publishing industry is enthusiastic and receptive about Aboriginal work. How true is this when Cheryl Buchanan ‘almost singlehandedly published Lionel Fogarty’s first volume of verse, Kargun’, because ‘no publisher wanted to touch such “heavy political material” ’ (Shoemaker, 1990:188). As Adam Shoemaker asks, ‘How many other Lionel Fogartys are there in Australia who have never broken into print due to the negative response of many commercially oriented publishers?’ (Shoemaker, 1990:188). If the mainstream publishing houses are in fact in a state of readiness one may well ask why the National Aboriginal and Islander Writers’, Oral Literature, and Dramatists’ Association (NAIWOLDA) had to be established as a means of addressing the lack of opportunities available to indigenous writers.

Muecke’s view of an already adequate literary aesthetic used to judge works that fall into a prescribed category is a view that attempts to separate and sectionalise indigenous work. It suggests that the canon is untouchable, ratified and therefore permanent. This claim must be challenged. Is the literary aesthetic that Muecke speaks of an aberration to pure literary judgment and one that is to be seen as a compensatory
measure rather than a progressive and encompassing tool for assessment and inclusion of indigenous literature? Indigenous work redefines and challenges traditional genres and calls for a different and new analysis of such literary measures. Traditional and mainstream methods of assessing such literature are therefore hardly adequate tools for assessing indigenous work. The view held by the centre is a reflection of the old dependencies: it is symptomatic of the centre and its conditions which do not offer, as William New states, an ‘alternative cycle of communication to the one on which the “dominant” society has long depended’ (New, 1990:8). Therefore views such as Muecke’s can be dismissed because it insists upon this cycle, whereas:

Margins have a way of speaking back from the edges of power, of resisting those who occupy a centre by having laid claim to the terms that declare that they do occupy a centre. If they are not recognised for the creativity of the differences they bring to bear on cultural perception, margins also have a way of making the centre irrelevant, and of speaking on their own.

(New, 1990:8)

It is then at this point in this study that Inside Black Australia (1988) and Paperbark (1990) will be examined as two examples of anthologies that seek to negotiate and construct self-defintions of indigenous people and
their experiences. Their production, reasons for editorial selection and reviews will be examined as part of the discussion concerning anthologies and canon formation.
Case studies:

*Inside Black Australia and Paperbark*

Both *Inside Black Australia* and *Paperbark* can be seen as specific interventions into the mainstream that are aimed at changing common perceptions about the Australian literary canon and indigenous writing. Questions of aesthetic are addressed in the introductions by the editors but neither anthology is concerned primarily with establishing an Aboriginal aesthetic. In other words, aesthetics motivations are not the primary concern; instead, both collections aim to make indigenous voices heard. The editors have made an effort to produce anthologies which, as Andrew Taylor (1987) points out, challenge the assumptions of value-formation which has served to privilege the dominant over the margin. These anthologies claim to speak from outside the centre, outside a perceived social establishment or received discourse. In doing so they draw attention to the ideological bases - and hence limits - of what until recently was regarded as canonical practice. Their essentially partisan nature is thus a challenge to any unitary conception of an Australian tradition which earlier practice may have fostered.

The two anthologies have as their purpose a looking to the past and present in order to provide a group identity, historicity, and culture. According to the editors of *Paperbark,*

Aboriginal writing can often be seen as a
community gesture towards freedom and survival,
rather than the self-expression of an individual author.

(Davis, et al, 1990:3)

There is a move toward describing a Black unity in both anthologies and an exploration of how white society orients self-representations around images of the indigene. In doing so the anthologies expose the inconsistencies and problems of such a false and inaccurate construct of the indigene. The anthologies aim to enable indigenous writers to ‘write and express our views more forcibly, and more importantly, more truthfully than whites writing about or making films about us’ (Gilbert, 1988:xv-vi). According to Bourke, indigenous anthologies are therefore able to become ‘one of the textual places where the ideological appropriation of literature becomes most readily visible’. The texts present themselves as vehicles for uncovering the shifts in cultural representations whilst also offering a ‘salutary warning about the totalising procedures that often characterise’ the indigenous as ‘other’ (Bourke, 1993:25).

Yet in seeking to occupy this position, the editors of both anthologies are aware of the irony inherent in such a strategy. For in seeking recognition within the dominant group’s literature in order to gain power for indigenous literature is to run the risk of exposing itself to the dominant culture. It is the lesser of two evils; an ‘accurate’ representation of
indigenous literature is better than a multitude of incorrect and false ones, even if it runs the risk of being trapped in the categories of the dominant group. In this way these anthologies become an arena of struggle within the broader arena of white literary values. It is no longer just a struggle concerning the power of access to the literary market by indigenous groups but a challenge and questioning of the dominant group’s literary criteria and hegemony in dealing with Black literature.

The two anthologies have the same ideological purposes and whilst *Inside Black Australia* is an anthology of poetry and *Paperbark* a collection of Black Australian writing, the editors of the latter see the two as complementary. *Inside Black Australia* presents indigenous poetry as the voice of resistance against the two hundred years of white oppression, whilst *Paperbark* charts the continuation of the voice of resistance but also adds to it in the diverse scope of indigenous writers and genres. What does differentiate these anthologies is the political timing of their publications, the content and theme of each book, the format and the use of genres in order to explore ‘Aboriginality’. It is also worth examining the anthologies more closely to determine how each has positioned itself in the intellectual and economic market place.
Case study one: Inside Black Australia

For Kevin Gilbert, the task of Inside Black Australia is to present poems that are 'an angry call for justice and the restoration of land and the Dreaming' (Gilbert, 1988:back cover). The book was published in 1988 as a direct attack on the Bicentennial celebrations through Gilbert's 'stage managing' of a counter assertion of Black power and truth.

Mudrooroo stresses the political importance of producing such a work during the Bicentennial year. He believes the political importance was to assert power: 'Black poetry from Australia land, now wanking over a two hundred year abortion' (Johnson, 1988:36). The arguments presented in Mudrooroo's review reflect his vision of poetry as a type of guerrilla warfare in which the guerrilla is ignored until his / her actions become too daring and threaten the dominant culture. The threat, in this case, is the publication of a Black Australian anthology, written by Black Australians in a year that reinforces white domination. Nugent also tells us that the anthology was launched to coincide with the opening of the new Parliament House and is specifically aimed at those 'who wish to maintain the conventional (and bicentennially convenient) myth that harmony exists between black and white Australians' (Nugent, 1988:3). This last comment, in its use of the present-tense 'exists', attempts to present a continuous challenge to white culture.

Given this historical situation, the anthology is predominantly about two
hundred years of struggle. In the many instances of injustice and horror committed against Aborigines that Gilbert lists (terra nullius, “Lobbing the distance”, missionaries, apartheid laws, working for the dole and Black deaths in custody) the reader is led predominantly to a cultural and historical focus rather than an appreciation of an individual poet or poetic technique (Gilbert, 1988:xxii). This is symptomatic of minority literature. Gilbert states that Aboriginal poetry has rarely ‘much to do with aesthetic or pleasure or the pastoral views’ (Gilbert, 1988:xvii) but has as its theme the reality of oppression and resistance to it. Gilbert is conscious of what the collective rather than the individual can achieve in terms of politics. The underlying intention of the anthology is a political move. Even though Gilbert believes ‘they are not poems of protest’, the subject matter inevitably leads the poets to a questioning of the injustices of society which are a recognition of political inequality (Gilbert, 1988:xxiv). Inside Black Australia takes up the axiom that we constantly need to examine our cultural yardstick because of the imbalances within the dominant culture not solely in the historical, political and social, but also in the literary arena.

The imbalance which exists is reflected in Gilbert’s anthology. He hopes to redress the fact that in twelve Modern Australian poetry anthologies published from 1968-1991 poems by contemporary indigenous writers comprise roughly one percent of the contents. And when indigenous poets are included, Australian editors repeatedly select one or perhaps two poems by a single indigenous writer, usually Oodgeroo Noonuccal. In
three anthologies out of the twelve, Oodgeroo Noonuccal was the only indigenous poet to appear in the collection (Bourke, 1993:32). In addition, the token gesture by editors (when they did attempt to include indigenous work) was as Mudrooroo says, to

pay word-service and slip one into the beginning of the volume to show that after all they, as Australians, recognised the indigenes as part of Australia, though they wished that they would write poetry more akin to their own.

(Narogin, 1990a:33-34)

Other collections, however, particularly the anthologies by Les Murray (1986) and Rodney Hall (1981), do include traditional and contemporary representations of indigenous poets. Hall’s collection, moreover, acknowledges that Australian poetry originates from 40,000 years ago rather than from the point of colonisation (Hall, 1981:1).

Apart from these anthologies Gilbert attempts to correct the representation of indigenous works excluded or traditionally represented in other anthologies by producing an anthology that opposes these earlier versions of indigenous poetry and indigenous people. Gilbert begins his anthology with an introduction that defines and differentiates indigenous poetry from the white mainstream.
Aboriginal poetry rattles, flings and bends the chains and rules of verse, sometimes in a remarkable manner. But within each bending one can see the cyclical incantation, the emotional mnemonics, the substance from which Aboriginal poetry is made.

(Gilbert, 1988:xvi)

Furthermore, Gilbert suggests that indigenous poetry has at its heart, a link to the land and argues that the poetry can, as in other decolonised countries, demand a new perception of life.

In terms of the poems, Gilbert purposefully selects those that are forceful and that do not resign themselves to defeat by the coloniser. This is apparent in the case of Oodgeroo Noonuccal. He has left out her most recognised poem, ‘We are Going’, because it imitates the early white balladry of the colonial period as well as resigning itself to annihilation: ‘the corroboree is gone. / And we are going’. Instead he includes her more assertive poetry which challenges white society, evident in ‘Colour Bar’, ‘The Unhappy Race’ and particularly in ‘Time is Running Out’:

But time is running out
And time is close at hand,
For the Dreamtime folk are massing
To defend their timeless land.
Come gentle black man
Show your strength;
Time to take a stand.
Make the violent miner feel
Your violent
Love of land.

(Cited in Gilbert, 1988:101)

In an interview with Gilbert in *The Age*, Ann Nugent states that Gilbert’s method of selection explains why the traditional songlines are left out (Nugent, 1988:3). In presenting his view of Aboriginality, Gilbert focuses upon the contemporary indigenous experience. He has left out traditional songlines because they were never intended to be written down but formed part of an indigenous oral tradition which was often sacred and part of a secret ritual belonging to particular persons or groups. They are not poems for the page, but songs designed to accompany ceremonial dancing and sometimes the hypnotic music of clap-sticks or of the didgeridoo. They are representative of the kind of oral culture that extended back for thousands of years. When they are written down, as in the case of ‘Song cycle of the Moon-Bone’, which was transcribed this century, they lose much of their immediacy and lyrical quality on the page.

Gilbert, therefore, does not include them out of respect for their
sacredness as well as wanting to put aside traditional perceptions of indigenous culture and spirituality as solely ‘primitive’ and traditional. In this way Gilbert deals with the question of authorial and custodial rights in a manner that is in keeping with indigenous integrity, whereas some anthologies, such as the *New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (Murray, 1986), fail to acknowledge directly the indigenous owner of the material or alter the indigenous oral accounts by having them interfered with by white poets who changed their poetic form ‘to bring out their spiritual message’ (Narogin, 1990a:46). This fact alone raises some of the problems encountered not only in indigenous literature but in indigenous work that is controlled by or produced under the patronage of the white dominate culture.

The extent of intervention, patronage and publishing are concerns that reflect the complexities of such a process and again leads to the questions regarding the canon. How can the poetry included in this anthology be appropriately and adequately assessed if it is controlled and produced under the patronage of the white dominate culture? Gilbert suggests that the critic is asked to take into account the cultural and historic factors that have produced the poetry as well as realise the new perception of the life around them that this anthology claims to reflect. Gilbert himself states that indigenous poets should be viewed in the same way as any other poet:

> Aboriginal poets share a universality with all other poets, yet differ somewhat in the traumatic
and material experience of other poets.

(Gilbert, 1988:xviii)

But what is further asserted in this anthology is that the language and tradition in which the poetry is written has not easily been accessible to aborigines, nor does it easily express the indigenous oral tradition and is victim to

The imperial education system [which] installs a “standard” version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all “variants” as impurities.


Gilbert’s response to this is that the critic will have to accept the poetry in its present state for the time being, as many aboriginal poets have had ‘limited access to white education and education in the alien English tongue’ (Gilbert, 1988:15). Gilbert does not excuse the writing on this basis. Rather he sees this situation as symptomatic of colonisation. It is a paradox that Gilbert’s view does not highlight the creative potential or hybridity that can come from such a writing but instead focuses upon the poetry as a example of colonial oppression. As Emma Laroque states in Writing the Circle,

Native peoples, however, are still making transitions
from oral to written literatures, from aboriginal to foreign languages. This is both a gift and a challenge. It is a gift to know more than one language, more than one culture.

(Perreault and Vance, 1990:xxvi)

But because white criticism has often perceived Black writing in English as being an impoverishment of language, hybridity as an alternative way of viewing the language has not been reflected in the assessment of the work. The value and analysis of hybridity was to come much later with critics such as Justin MacGregor (1992).

However Gilbert’s comment immediately constructs a sympathetic method of criticising and evaluating the work and attempts to preempt the potentially critical reviews that he suspected the anthology would receive. Gilbert suggests that

there will be many who, not wanting to reveal any overt or covert racism, paternalism, condescension, misconception, self-deception or otherwise to the value of the contribution, will dart like a prawn in a barramundi pond to the safety of antecedents.

(Gilbert, 1988:xviii)
Gilbert wants the critic to accept all that there is to offer in the anthology as well as accepting the poets’ own struggles and achievements as a justification for any criticism that may arise out of the discussion of the use of language, style or theme in this collection. Gilbert’s introduction acts as a warning to the critic who must be cautious in his / her criticism. Perhaps it can be seen as a concessional view, a way of allowing the margins into the centre. Yet it can also be seen as a counter argument in which the interpretation of the work is seen as being of ‘secondary importance’ or of ‘lesser value’. It seems fair to argue, however, that Gilbert is vying for latitude, not sympathy.

Interestingly enough, though, this caution and latitude are evident in confessions and doubts expressed in the reviews. Judith Wright’s review suggests that an honest critic ‘sits on thorns when discussing Aboriginal writing’ (Wright, 1988:73). In the CRNLE Reviews Journal, Alan Riach goes out of his way to be positive about the book when he says that it is a ‘privilege and a pleasure’ to be introduced to these poets (Riach, 1988:62). Geoff Page’s review is cautious in its tone stating: ‘one finds Inside Black Australia a difficult, even dangerous, book to review’ (Page, 1988:B4). In The Canberra Times, the reader is drawn into a long-winded story about the reviewer’s attempt to enter into Australian culture by learning to throw a boomerang, which the critic considered to be part of Australian culture. But by the end of Robert Hefner’s review the reader is supposedly relieved for him because they read how wrong Hefner was in having such a superficial impression of Australia and its indigenous
population. Mark O’Connor, whilst praising the book, tries to appear to speak on behalf of the whites who may sympathise but who ‘will lack the aching need for personal and racial identity’ (O’Connor, 1988:14). In effect O’Connor gives whites a voice in the discourse. He says that these white readers are more likely to ask: ‘“How good are these Aboriginal poets?” and “Do they only write about being Aboriginal?” ’ (O’Connor, 1988:14). O’Connor’s ploy of framing the indigenous work against white responses to it is used to reinforce his own uneasiness in reviewing the anthology. Vivienne Foster becomes humble and apologetic for not including

every poet represented here, all of whom deserve such mention, and short of mentioning none, specifically, at all, one is forced, as ever, to compromise. I hope the poets will understand.

(Foster, 1988:108)

In all of this cautiousness, there is one critic who returns to the safety of antecedents. Geoff Page makes it quite clear in his review that no matter how strong Gilbert’s warning might be, an anthology of poetry, ought to reflect poetry that is well made. The basic problem he sees is that the majority of the poems in the anthology do not integrate the two elements of art and protest satisfactorily (Page, 1988:B4). Page is of course referring to western literary tradition and is evaluating the collection in this manner. In anticipation of the response that some critics would offer
a repeat performance of two hundred years of colonial practice Gilbert showed foresight by including a warning in the introduction to the anthology. This of course did not stop critics such as Page.

Gilbert’s anthology also raises the issue of whether the critic’s orientation can provide an adequate basis from which to discuss literature that may originate from a different cultural context, or whether all literature can be read as a text where origin is one more function of discourse (Bourke, 1993:24). An example of the first point can be found in Anthony Burke’s review when he states that,

As a white, attempting to write meaningfully about black poetry, I must be aware of my position, and pay heed to warnings like Cliff Watego’s about black writing.

(Burke, 1988:470)

Burke continues his review in a way that tries to accommodate the white critic’s tentative ground by avoiding issues that he considers the ‘essential character’ or ‘fibre’ (of indigenous literature) may be. He is content to review the book on the premise that he is

get [ting] a clear sense from the poems in this anthology that black poets are writing with a different set of imperatives and concerns to their
white counterparts.

(Burke, 1988:470)

In contrast to this position, the review by Dennis Nicholson is an example of what can happen if the critic does not at least have some understanding of Black literature. The review begins with a strange orientation of the critic’s endeavour to read the poetry:

I hear my stumbling vocalization of some typographical code and remembered recordings of didgeridoos and music sticks. Yet, I feel a being—"isness"—incomprehensible to me, as one who must continually strive for the destination, existence, rather than simply being physically and spiritually, without tense, a localization of it.

(Nicholson, 1988:86)

This rather obscure discussion does not help the reader come to an understanding of the poetry, but only seeks to evade issues or confuse readers’ views of indigenous oral songs and literature. The review continues much in this same vein but becomes specifically condescending when it suggests that the poetry and its messages are aimed at white people and that ‘even the most elusive White conscience’ could not miss the message (Nicholson, 1988:86). Nicholson’s projection of guilt onto the white audience also reflects earlier discussions of the ways in which white
critics respond to minority literature. Nicholson’s guilt reflects the power of the poems in evoking such sentiments. Worse still is the statement directly after this in which Nicholson discusses the atrocities perpetuated by whites. Specifically, the

atrocity called “Lobbing the Distance”—the decapitation of Black children by kicking, which I find hard to believe. Is this anatomically possible?

(Nicholson, 1988:86)

Nicholson’s questioning of these gruesome details makes his review particularly disturbing because his critique lends itself to sensationalism rather than understanding and appreciation. This review demonstrates quite clearly the perils of an ill-informed critic. Or perhaps the reviewer is purposefully using such a technique in order to discredit and undermine Gilbert’s introductory critique. Both positions ultimately destroy the credibility of the reviewer.

Paul Sharrad’s review is broader in its consideration of the debate regarding indigenous poetry. His review discusses whether all literature can be read as a text where origin is one more function of discourse. He suggests several approaches that can be taken in evaluating the poetry in Gilbert’s collection. These can be divided into two areas. The first is the political side of culture which examines the funding, patronage of publishers and historical timing of the book. The second is the issue of
what constitutes the traditional white canon of Australian Literature and whether or not the fundamental standards in which the canon chooses to assess the poetry in the anthology is based on ‘“pure” literary value versus sociological import; “universal” qualities as opposed to sectional and topical relevance’ (Sharrad, 1989:93-94). Sharrad effectively argues the role that discourse can play in critiquing such work. He suggests that *Inside Black Australia* can be reviewed by both traditional tools of assessment as well as alternative ones. He attempts to evaluate the work by taking into account writing that includes both ‘minority causes and their rhetoric’ as well as work from ‘Eurocentric values of a literary “great tradition” ’ (Sharrad, 1989:5-6). This dual method of analysis may seem to acknowledge differences, but in doing so suggests a compromise rather than a new method of assessing indigenous work because it applies the traditional tools of assessment as ‘proof’ of how indigenous work can be assessed by these standards. Overall however this review certainly presents the reader with possible alternatives and challenges narrow assessment practices. Lastly the review does acknowledge that the anthology promotes Black causes even if it does proclaim it to the reader.

For some reviewers the method of assessing the anthology may simply be a matter of taking a stand in deciding what values and priorities are going to be used to assess the work. Many critics argue for the maintenance of the anthology since it shapes the canon. Whilst some critics will argue in favour of literary traditions which are subjective, and as in the case of minority groups are in fact a misrepresentation of that society, others will
however argue for aesthetic and literary merit. But again it must kept in mind that for minority discourses, the act of writing is political and is central to the work; therefore the most appropriate way to assess the anthology is to examine it as such.

An equally relevant question may be raised at this point about who the intended audience of Inside Black Australia might be. In the introduction to the anthology Gilbert addressed both the white and Black audience although his tone clearly signals a ‘Black’ versus ‘white’ stance. Both audiences, he claims, should see this anthology as an affirmation of the existence, resistance and pride of indigenous people rather than as a defeat of the colonial process. Gilbert states:

> While inhumanity continues as it does continue this day in this country, the cry for justice, the cry for inhumanity will never be silenced.

(Gilbert, 1988:xx)

Gilbert’s statement is a recognition that because of the anguish, the cry for justice will continue. This injustice and anguish is projected onto the literary establishment and the canon is also challenged for its Eurocentric vision of Black writing. Rather than ignoring or silencing minority work this anthology acknowledges and values an indigenous poetic tradition that exists, through the anthology, in the mainstream. A challenge is also presented to the mainstream audience participating in the Bicentennial
events. The controversial launch of the publication in the Bicentennial year challenged white perceptions of nationhood by raising questions of race and injustice that could have easily been forgotten and dismissed.

The anthology also provides white readers with a glimpse into the different aspects of indigenous poetry as well as challenging notions of indigenous unity and the ways Aboriginality is expressed in the wider community. An example of what that Aboriginality signifies is explored in Johnson’s review. He suggests that the anthology is affirming for indigenous readers because it reinforces that indigenous ‘culture is intact and growing ever richer’ (Johnson, 1988:36). The anthology strengthens the voices, words and identity of indigenous people. It is ‘an anthology of which we can all be proud’ (Johnson, 1988:36). For Mudrooroo the language of the colonist is now the tool by which the colonised cannot only speak to the oppressors, but also to one another. The anthology offers a means of sharing experiences and reinforcing Black identity.

By displacing the assumption that the reader of the review will be black not white, Mudrooroo cleverly plays upon the notion of subversion. In stating, ‘shall I thank them [whites] for being able to read it [the anthology]?’ (Johnson, 1989:35), Johnson employs an interesting technique in disturbing preconceived assumptions of white readership.

Johnson’s critique of the anthology highlights succinctly the problems indigenous writers face when their work is controlled, patronised and
published by the white mainstream. Johnson suggests that when whites read of the sufferings and misery inflicted on indigenous people, their reading of the poetry will become another whoring or voyeurism of indigenous work. Johnson is conscious of the anthology’s ability to ‘expose’ poets rather than educate white audiences about indigenous issues. In order to counter-act such a response by white readers Johnson candidly demonstrates how, as van Toorn argues, indigenous cultural practice is packaged as a cultural commodity by the dominant community (van Toorn, 1990). Johnson realises that the anthology has been part of the paradox of writing for, to, and in the language of the coloniser. It is an awareness of indigenous literature in the mainstream and of the judgments that go with it. His ploy is to treat the position of reviewing Gilbert’s anthology as a strategy of guerrilla warfare. He refuses to allow the paradox to happen; instead his review subverts the position of the white reader rather than acknowledging it by appealing to the Black audience.

Apart from what the reviews do say, it is interesting to examine what remains unspoken. One of the issues that is not discussed is that of patronage; the economic and financial endorsement of the anthology. In using the publishing company, Penguin, Gilbert faces the dilemma of attacking and gaining recognition within the dominant culture that he chooses to address which only serves to reinforce the problems of such patronage. In doing so it does restrict, rather than liberate Black culture from the majority culture. Such patronage, as van Toorn has observed, negatively reinforces the power relationship of centre / margin.
The old political relation between subject and object thus sneaks back into play at a more insidious level, at the site where, through sponsoring discourses, the dominant culture issues minority writers with their licenses to speak.

(van Toorn, 1990:103)

Although the content of *Inside Black Australia* challenges and argues against the issue of patronage, given that the indigenous community has come to realise ‘that we can write and express our view more forcibly, and more importantly, more truthfully than can whites writing about or making films about us’ (Gilbert, 1988:xv-xvi), it does not however escape entirely from the trappings of this patronage. The commercial packaging of the anthology, its use of verbal and non-verbal signs, holds it in position.

The back cover blurb, for example, plays a significant role in imparting status to the text by orientating the reader and establishing the manner in which the anthology should be interpreted and on what grounds it should be evaluated. The tone used approaches a parody of advertisements for Hollywood films when it states, ‘From the campfires and “reserves” of the desert, from riverbanks and prison cells, from universities and urban ghettos come the inside voices of Australia’ (Gilbert, 1988:back cover). This manner of writing gestures towards a stereotypical social identity
and threatens to reinforce prejudices already held by the dominant community. Furthermore the offering of the poetry as ‘tough poems’ also frames the reader’s anticipation of them. The audience the anthology is targeted at (whites) is predetermined (readership) by the comment that ‘the Aboriginal lives glimpsed give white Australians a hint of the deep possibilities of belonging in this land’. Finally, the marketing potential of the anthology is significant as it contains over forty poets. The use of the Aboriginal flag as a confirmation of Aboriginal authority and nationhood and the cover illustration by another indigenous writer and artist, Sally Morgan promotes Aboriginality as a cultural commodity to be consumed by the white mainstream.

Ironically, Nugent’s article labours the point that Gilbert was uncompromising in his protest against the Bicentennial and ‘refused to be bought off’ by the propaganda, yet the book’s funding was assisted by the Literature Board of the Australia Council, the Federal Government’s arts funding and advisory board (Nugent, 1988:3). Unfortunately this situation reflected the lack of recognition and opportunities given to Black writers. Because indigenous writers had traditionally to appeal to white readers to sell well, it is not surprising that indigenous literature was slow in coming into print. According to Davis and Shoemaker, there were ‘at least fifty current practising Aboriginal poets in English (let alone the wealth of oral poets in the traditional and tribal sphere)’, yet only about twenty of those writers were in print in 1988 (Hergenhan, 1988:36). In light of this it may be understandable and of greater irony that Gilbert’s
white patronage resulted in a sales success both for him and the publishers.

In July, 1988 Inside Black Australia became one of the highest-selling paperbacks in the nation, giving rise to optimism that Aboriginal voices will be heard even more clearly in the future.

(Shoemaker, 1989:270)

If the success of the book’s publication was a result of an increasing interest in indigenous culture (encouraged by the Bicentennial), or its own merits, one can only speculate. Perhaps it might well have been a result of both situations. Nonetheless, the success of the anthology created the space for the discussion of the representative nature of anthologies (of indigenous anthologies as opposed to white anthologies or Australian anthologies), within the dominant culture. Yet it was more than this. The literary debate uncovered the politics of oppression it hoped to expose. As Riach states, ‘Identity in society is confirmed as a function of position, and position is a function of power’ (Riach, 1988:22). The reality of what this power entailed, is, for Nugent, the political reality that ‘white Australians are now aware that they are standing on black land’ (Nugent, 1988:5) and that Australia has come of age because the ‘Land of the Jumbuck Dreaming is a fraud’ (Foster, 1988:107). Most importantly the anthology is an example of the resistance that was part of Black politics in the Bicentennial year.
How much of this awareness was to filter down into all levels of society can never really be assessed. Gostand (1990) suggests that change can happen at the grass roots level of education where the anthology can be utilised as a ‘useful handbook for teachers who wish to make “Australian Literature” a more generally representative study than it has been in the past’ (Gostand, 1990:66). This view recognises that perhaps perceptions of Aboriginality and of Australian literature can be changed through education. As a paperback it accommodates the needs of mass-production (11,557)\(^1\), cheapness ($12.95), availability (Penguin; a multinational publishing house) and social representation well. This framework works on the notion that what cannot be learnt from history perhaps can be learnt through education. Gilbert himself recognises the power of that education when he states that the book should be in every school,

> not from any sales value type approach, but [because] children throughout this land must be made more aware of what this land is about, and what the people of this land are about and what history is about.

(Cited in Hefner, 1988:7)

In terms of the N.S.W HSC Syllabus, the anthology has been on the topic area list for several years.\(^2\) Naturally a text prescribed or recommended

---

2 Board of Studies, HSC Prescribed Text for NSW Schools, 1989-96.
for study in schools, especially of the secondary level, gains a degree of ‘legitimacy’ that increases the longer it remains on such a list.

Other issues raised by the anthology’s production include the oral nature of the poems and specifically the preservation of traditional forms of expression, particularly oral ones. The publication of such an anthology can now preserve some of these traditions in print (O’Grady, 1988:7). This point refers to the retaining of print as a literary history rather than as a process of preserving indigenous culture and oral expression as history; the latter can give the impression of a static and timeless culture. A literary history can become a place where information can be stored for many reasons. Some of these may include: recording oral tradition as part of a literary tradition before it is lost; providing a place to record a people’s literary work that may be facing natural extinction or genocide and also to record important contributions to literary work. Shoemaker notes that

Although many of the traditional song-poets have died, Black Australians’ awareness of the lyricism and power of the spoken word lives on in the verse of its contemporary poets.

(Shoemaker, 1989:224)
Case study two: *Paperbark*

*Paperbark* was to be a more comprehensive collection of works that advanced the initial voices found in *Inside Black Australia*. The ‘advance’ was not only in the many different genres that were being used by Black writers, but also in the many different forms of communication used by them. Whilst *Paperbark* promotes Black voices it does not focus on the theme of confrontation to the same degree as *Inside Black Australia*. Rather it attempts to add to these voices. The fact that *Paperbark* does not take a confrontational stand does not mean it depoliticises indigenous issues, it simply goes about it another way. As Chris Tiffin has suggested,

> The confrontationalist strategy used at some stage by most Aboriginal writers depends upon putting black and white into two piles labelled good and bad. While this has power and validity at a certain level, it was necessary for the discussion to go beyond this eventually.  

*(Tiffin, 1985:168)*

Hence the editors of this collection reinforce the idea that indigenous literature ‘has never been divorced from the Aboriginal struggle for economic freedom, legal recognition and reforms of basic living conditions’ (*Davis, et al*, 1990:2). Indigenous writing is political and literature is a way ‘of getting political things done’ (*Davis, et al*, 1990:2).
The editors also recognise that indigenous discourse needs to move forward in its development and that it is not fixed but rather negotiates its position at each stage of its development. *Paperbark* makes

no claim for an Aboriginal literary aesthetic divorced from rhetorical writing. Its aesthetic, if anything, lies in the force of the political statements that it makes.

(Davis, *et al*, 1990:2)

In other words, the overall theme of the collection is to express Black voices in their various forms and present an overview of what has constituted the literature over a period of approximately one hundred and fifty years. The primary political force does not lie solely in the content of the anthology but in the production and publishing of the collection that aims to redefine and explore Black voices. Prior to the publication of *Paperbark* Davis and Shoemaker stated that Aboriginal writing was

far more than counter-cultural. It is, rather, pro-Aboriginal; a reflection of a strong and adaptive Black culture in modern Australia.

(Hergenhan, 1988:40)

As such *Paperbark* is essentially a ‘ground breaker’ and a ‘watershed’ in Australian literature in many ways. Firstly, unlike Gilbert’s sole editing
of *Inside Black Australia, Paperbark* is a collaborative effort by both Black and white editors. Davis and Mudrooroo are both writers and critics and are also active indigenous spokespeople, whilst both Muecke and Shoemaker are academics, critics and enthusiastic supporters of Aboriginality. This partnership, whilst it may be argued takes Black writing out of the hands of Black people (McGuinness, 1985), to some degree renegotiates and challenges this view. A possible reason for the editorial panel’s composition is put forward by Mudrooroo Narogin who states,

It is little use calling for an independent literature when over the last year, 1988, many Aboriginal books published were cooperative efforts between Aborigines and Europeans. In one case brought to my knowledge by the writer it was to her detriment. At least there has been progress. The Aboriginal writer, or storyteller is given his or her due share of acknowledgement ... Thus creativity is a collective effort and this will most likely remain so even in Aboriginal publishing houses.

(Narogin, 1990a:47-8)

The text, like Black writing, now claims to move into a new era of negotiation between Black and white editing and publishing. This has come about as a result of pressure and challenges to white editorial
practices which in the past was guilty of misrepresentation and tokenism which led many Black writers to call for independent Black control of writing. Whilst in part that did happen with the rise of Black publishing houses, mainstream literary practices were also affected and moved to correct their previous positions in regard to Black writing. The position for Black writing is now one that requires mainstream editing and publishing to consider and consult Black authority. Whether this practice has occurred because of movements in the academic field of Black literature which has led to alternative reading and evaluative methods or the mainstream market has now ventured strongly into Black writing as a profitable and marketable area requires further investigation. Whatever that circumstance may be, Paperbark is a reflection of a collaborative editorial team that has managed to entrust to and encourage indigenous works in the mainstream. That this new editorial arrangement was successful is suggested by the fact that the editorial team received ‘at least another book’s worth of writings which, unfortunately, cannot appear here, but we firmly believe that there will be other opportunities for those voices to be heard in the future.’ (Davis, et al, 1990:xi).

This collaborative effort has also been recognised in the method of collecting material for the anthology:

The editorial process was a communal one, which took place over a period of six years in various locations. Each editor collected submissions
independently and then we had round table discussions — with manuscripts spread before us — in Perth, Sydney and Brisbane, in order to arrive at the final product.

(Davis, et al, 1990:xii)

Furthermore, the editorial team’s commitment is reflected in the initiation of an award for new Black Australian writing created out of the funds for the anthology. In essence, these factors are appendages to the pro-indigenous cause and emphasise collaboration, consultation and commitment to Black writing whilst also acknowledging the difficulties faced by new, particularly indigenous writers in being published. This encouragement in the form of a grant and prize is again a recognition of the latitude required in promoting and encouraging Black writing.

This latitude is also reflected in the opening lines of the introduction to the collection which states that ‘A comprehensive collection of Black Australian writing is long overdue’ (Davis, et al, 1990:1). This anthology claims to represent a national selection which reflects and demonstrates the presence and traditions of indigenous people. The claim for a resurgence and re-discovery of Black works is set against the nationalistic white myth-building exercises, particularly of the Bicentennial year.

Further renegotiations include defining what constitutes writing for indigenous people. The editorial definition of such writing was,
any sort of meaningful inscription, and in the case
of Aboriginal Australia this would include sand
paintings and drawings ... body markings, paintings
as well as engravings on bark or stone.

(Davis, et al, 1990:3)

This definition opens up new ways of seeing and understanding Black
work but it also raises further questions about how to evaluate and ‘read’
the material contained in the collection. The definition not only stretches
the boundaries of canonical definitions of writing, but also the grounds
for aesthetic assessments. In many respects the anthology moves into areas
beyond the capacity of many critics trained or knowledgeable in specific
areas. For example, how do literary critics evaluate Jimmy Pike’s work
which is, according to this collection, a ‘form of writing’ as well as art?
And does the critic have the necessary understanding, criteria and tools
for such an assessment? Muecke has pointed out that such work at times
moves far beyond the capacity of current methods of assessment and as
such are often of an ‘unknown’ value. Eric Michaels (1988) has identified
the lack of evaluation procedures in indigenous visual arts and why at
times judgment has been difficult or even suspended because such works
fail to ‘belong’ or do not have an adequate aesthetic as yet that reflects its
artistic quality.

This definition of writing also recognises the sacredness of the works as
'culturally significant' artifacts in their own right (Davis, et al, 1990:4) which the editors define as distinctly different from artifacts which disseminate information or ideas on a mass scale in commodity form. This would also answer and respond to Gilbert’s previous concerns in excluding songlines in his anthology. Muecke’s point is that there are different types of songlines for differing audiences: those that are sacred and those that are public (Hergenhan, 1988:33). This clarifies the position of exclusion or inclusion further and recognises that Gilbert’s concern was really in regard to sacred songlines and the permission and publishing of such works. These are the sorts of areas of negotiation and renegotiation that *Paperbark* enters into and is co-opted into in the process of negotiating its own position.

Further, *Paperbark*, like indigenous writing itself, reinforces the point that Black writing has been in the making well before white contact. Oral literature has a longer connection to the past which brings forward into the present a strong literary tradition that now has to be negotiated to include the written from. This process also recognises that oral literature exists as a tradition apart from writing. The editors clearly state that this work is a recognition and a challenge to the constructs of literary history.

Just as Australia was not discovered by the British in 1788, black writing was not “discovered” in the 1960s: what appears in these pages is only a fragment which indicates what has always existed.
and what can exist in the future.

(Davis, et al, 1990:1)

The collection therefore includes oral ‘literature’ (or ‘verbal art’) and is reproduced according to the technique first used in Paddy Roe’s book, *Gularabulu* (1983). There are problems with this technique because it seems to fragment the work. Muecke maintains that ‘The simple act of writing down stories (as well as phrasing them in good English) inevitably involves departures from Aboriginal narrative styles’ (Narogin, 1990a:111). He further argues that,

> It is clear that urgent decisions will have to be made concerning the preservation of Australia’s Aboriginal heritage. But if “preservations” means translating or transcribing, publishing and promoting, then we must ask to what extent the literature will remain oral.

(Hergenhan, 1988:34)

Mudrooroo suggests that if the works are to be transcribed and written down,

> then an audio cassette should be supplied along with the book; but if this is impossible, then the editing process utilised should leave the text as close to the
The editors of this collection have obviously decided to include such works knowing that they are but a ‘partial’ representation which nonetheless serve as an example of the types of works that exist in the oral tradition.

This response by the editors however is not intended to pass off or demonstrate the ease with which decisions are made by the editorial practice or to discount such issues. The editors acknowledge that the inherent paradox of ‘putting an oral culture into books is like “embalming” it for posterity, and even this book enters into that’ (Davis, et al, 1990:4). These problems are raised in Irruluma Guruliwini Enemburu’s review of Paperbark when he argues that ‘Much of this writing doesn’t sound like Blackfella talking’ but is an ‘English form made ready for a wider reading public’ and has ‘the vernacular, pidgin and creole toned down.’ According to Enemburu the editors, in doing so, have not recognised ‘the real-life English used by the biggest mob of Blackfella in this country’ (Enemburu, 1990:7).

His criticism may be true in part, especially as the anthology does include a range of writers who have become successful manipulators and users of the English language, as in the case of Weller, Narogin and Morgan. But there are also examples that do reflect the use of vernacular, pidgin and...
creole. In particular ‘A story of Wongawol Station’, ‘I went to Perth Once Too’ and in ‘Here comes the Nigger’ reflect this usage even if they might be, according to Enemburu, ‘brief samples’. Enemburu’s review however falls into the trap of reviewing what he believes should be in the anthology rather than discussing whether or not the editors of the anthology have adequately done what they intended to do in presenting such a collection.

This advice-giving is typical of reviewers who seem to argue on points that are totally contradictory to the editors’ intentions. The anthology did not seek, as Enemburu suggests, to put together ‘A Modern collection of Blackfella writings in vernacular, pidgin and creole’ but rather aimed to present a comprehensive range of their writings or texts. It includes material from ‘all states and territories of Australia, from a wide range of age groups, and from both urban and rural environments’ (Davis, et al, 1990:xi). He goes on to say that ‘what appears in these pages is only a fragment’ (Davis, et al, 1990:1). This discussion tends to reflect not so much the issue of language but the fact that there is an imbalance in the collection due in part to the various works that make up the collection. Roger Milliss observes correctly that in ‘drawing an overly eclectic bow’ the collection contains a certain unevenness in the quality of the selections. Mudrooroo Narogin takes up a quarter of the ‘book and tends to overshadow the other prose pieces, some of which are only a page or so long’ (Milliss, 1991:99).
Whilst Enemburu may be arguing on grounds of the ‘representative’ nature of language he maintains that not all of these modes are oral or are evidence of the process of transforming for oral to written forms. There is a range of work in the collection and some, even when they are written down such as David Unaipon’s work, does appear to be written in the sanitised form of eurocentric standard English. Roberta Sykes, for example, declares that ‘Unaipon’s style is dated which adds to its charm’ (Sykes, 1990:8). Perhaps this discussion is again really about whether the anthology’s aim to recover and discover Black writing has been adequately met. Enemburu’s view insists on a specific type of work and in doing so attempts to write out the agency of Black writing according to his own notions of what it should represent. And that to him means ‘that the sophistication of the art of any Blackfella storytelling is lost in this written from’ (Enemburu, 1990:8).

The editors of Paperbark want to maintain the primacy and the power of literature as a means of changing and shaping perceptions of the world. The anthology is part of a canon that asserts power and influence especially by contributing to the ‘various institutions that are training the next generation’. The work will ‘contribute to the process of “learning the country” for the reader, both in this nation and overseas’ (Davis, et al, 1990:6).

As a result the collection aims to include a breadth of work, not only for the representative nature of Black voices but also for the publishing
educational domain it seeks to engage in and thus becomes a comprehensive educational tool for exploring Black themes. It includes writings from oral traditions, generic writings of western literature, poems, dramatic scripts, novellas and short stories. The work represents urban and rural environments as well as reflecting the historical process of colonisation on Black writing. Some writers are included in the collection and are pronounced to have 'no pretensions of literary grandeur' whilst others are included for the experiences they offer as indigenous people who 'write because writing is one way of coming to terms with the struggles of daily life' (Davis, et al, 1990:2-3).

The inclusion of such work is not dissimilar to the ideals of the editors of Writing the Circle yet it does depart from it in terms of the definition of 'writing' and the way in which this is included and presented in the collection. Included in Paperbark are authors appearing for the first time, authors who have been published in alternative presses or who have now been 'discovered'.

The editors of Paperbark recognise that the anthology is an example and product of the publishing and marketing forces where mainstream publishers are increasingly 'eager to profit from the local and international interest in Aboriginal literature' (Davis, et al, 1990:3). Headon agrees that 'black Australian writing has obviously reached the point where it is a commercially viable proposition' (Headon, 1990:B8). And Penny Brock also sees further potential in the historical research that
would be of interest in Unaipon's work (Brock, 1992:147).

Yet reviewers such as Enemburu argue that the anthology is not easily accessible. He states that,

> For someone with little knowledge of Koori struggle this book has little relevance and indeed some of the writings can appear obscure, isolated from their completed texts and awkward outside their original intention and context.

(Enemburu, 1990:7)

Enemburu's point reflects Jurgensen's earlier arguments that anthologies are fabrications outside meaningful frameworks. This is true of most anthologies because they are samples of writers' work frequently out of context. Insisting on a comprehensive view of Black work negates the ways in which anthologies are constructed in their attempts to present an overview. Readers of anthologies are also aware that if they are interested in a particular writer featured in an anthology they must, as Mudrooroo points out, go outside the text in order to gain further understanding. This is true of non-indigenous and indigenous work. In many western texts writing can allude to symbols, signs and traditions which the reader may or may not be associated with. Whilst they can be taken for granted in western literature, in reading indigenous works, or 'foreign' texts for that matter, these 'codes' and practices need to be reexamined. Susan Hosking
Approaching a collection like this one, or, for that matter, Kevin Gilbert’s recent anthology of Aboriginal poetry (*Inside Black Australia*, 1988), is and should be a completely new experience. The “pigeon-holes and prejudices” of Western critics must be left behind.

(Hosking, 1990:35)

This is possible for the local market but for the international market Enemburu’s criticism might have some merit. Whilst not denying that writing is a tool for expressing a world view, it does raise the issues of whether international readers have access to material and knowledge outside of the text. But is this exercise of going outside the text really necessary if the work claims to have a universal appeal? If it is grounded in socio-political history, what difference does this make? Billy Marshall-Stoneking believes the anthology

is deeply human and capable of crossing cultural boundaries, not only within Australia but around the world.

(Marshall-Stoneking, 1990:16-17)

He goes on to say that the best work
communicates at a level of human emotion that transcends the differences and points the way towards a better and richer society.

(Marshall-Stoneking, 1990:16-17)

Marshall-Stoneking seems to suggest that there is a universal aesthetic of literature that can transcend parochial, minority, racial and national barriers. It is an aesthetic that reflects a world monoculture. What has been forgotten in this equation is that indigenous work is in part a product of specific colonial conditions, experienced differently by various cultures. It is experienced at different stages of indigenous development and even if it freed itself from the constraints of a particular time in history or a process, to suggest it belongs to a universal aesthetic is to ignore an indigenous one.

In terms of the gaps that the anthology leaves in its representation Headon questions the representative quality of the collection and is surprised by the number of writers not included in it. His explanation for the absence of writers such as ‘Kevin Gilbert, Bobby Merritt, Lionel Fogarty, Bobbi Sykes, Louise Corpus, Faith Bandler and the late Robert Walker, to mention only the most important’ is due in part to

Paperbark's sponsorship by the national bicentennial Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island

(Headon, 1990:B8)

If this is so then certain conclusions can be drawn from this. Whilst *Paperbark* does acknowledge Gilbert’s anthology as being complementary to it, Gilbert in fact had no input into the former apart from the introductory remarks to *Inside Black Australia* in the introduction. Oodgeroo Noonuccal is included as one of the editorial consultants whilst Gilbert is not. None of the other reviews discuss the funding or exclusion of writers. Yet Roberta Sykes, who is included in Headon’s list of writers left out or not wanting to be included in the anthology, does not mention any of the politics of funding in her review (Sykes, 1990:8).

Furthermore, it could be argued that although *Inside Black Australia* was not published with Bicentennial money, it appeared under the patronage of Penguin who were a major sponsor of Bicentennial publications in 1988. Whilst Gilbert had one view of the Bicentennial, other Black writers, Oodgeroo and Jack Davis in particular, did participate in the Bicentennial events of that year (Narogin, 1990a:179). Consideration must also be given to the fact that Mudrooroo and Davis are the co-editors of *Paperbark* and have work included in the collection. Therefore, whilst *Paperbark* was created as a result of the 1983 First National Aboriginal Writers’ Conference that acknowledged the difficulties indigenous writers
faced in getting published, *Paperbark* kept its commitment to the conference by giving voice to Black writers as well as using the ‘funds’ for the anthology in the establishment of the Unaipon Award which is an award presented annually for a book-length manuscript of any type, either in English or Aboriginal or Islander languages, written by an Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander who has not previously had a book published.

(Davis, *et al*, 1990:xi-xii)

However, as Headon points out, the same commitment by the publisher, the University of Queensland Press, ‘has, until recently been modest at best’ (Headon, 1990:B8). Headon argues that the anthology is not ‘truly representative’ (Headon, 1990:B8) because the exclusions reflect the political debate over funding more than it does the representation of writers expected to be found in such a collection. He does nonetheless confirm that the anthology is an important work that does challenge the canon.

Books like *Paperbark* are in the vanguard of what will surely be one of the great (Australian) cultural debates of this decade: how long can an ex-colony like Australia allow some of its universities to
continue to indulge their colonial habits? How long will Old and Middle English, 17th-and 18th-century English literature be the literature major staples at our universities? When will the dominant pressure be post-colonial? Change, Paperbark proclaims, is afoot.

(Headon, 1990:B8)

Susan Hosking suggests that Inside Black Australia and Paperbark are essential texts

For those of us who teach courses in Australian Literature, [and] with these two anthologies now readily available in paperback, there can be no excuse for excluding Aboriginal writing from them.

(Hosking, 1990:38)

Billy Marshall-Stoneking also heralds the collection as signalling a 'renaissance' in Australian literature and encourages the reader to 'Be part of the revolution. Read this book' (Marshall-Stoneking, 1990:16-17). Christopher Ward points to the collection as a turning point in indigenous literature which has strengthened its field and frameworks and has sought differing methods of assessing it. As Ward says 'we must appreciate cultural difference and the necessity neither to belittle nor falsely flatter
that which belongs to the “other”’ (Ward, 1991:125).

Finally the packaging of the book is demonstrative of the definition of writing contained therein. It is not the artwork of Jimmy Pike that is featured in the collection, but rather the work of Peter Evans and Trevor Nickolls which seems to suggest an afterthought rather than a sample or reflection of the work contained in the collection. The presentation also makes it a marketable product in terms of its colour and glossiness. The collection remains quite affordable at $16.95 and has a viable market in the general public as well as educational institutions. The blurb on the back cover gives some insight into the collection but does not depart greatly from what is offered in the foreword or introduction. Three reviewers’ comments are included, two being Black. One of these claims the anthology is ‘a watershed in Australian literature’, whilst the other, an unspecified reviewer from a mainstream newspaper (in the typical voice of patronage), gives the indigene license to speak on the condition that the voices are contained and distanced from reality:

Tragedy rubs shoulders on these pages with warm humour and celebration of the survival of an ancient and much persecuted race ... an anthology to come back to again and again.

(Davis, et al, 1990:back cover)
Conclusion

*Inside Black Australia* was a significant political achievement but it also furthered the literary debate about indigenous poetry and the way in which the canon was viewed. The literary debates as previously mentioned were, and still are, predominantly about whether or not the poetry is of ‘pure’ literary value according to western literary standards or whether the critic should, in his or her assessment, take into account the sociological perspective of the poetry. A further question is whether the poetry presents both of these concerns adequately in a type of hybridity which demands a different standard of evaluation for indigenous work.

For example, on the question of European poetic forms Mudrooroo, argues that in indigenous poetry the Aboriginality of the work inherently provides a sub-text.

We often ignore the fact that words and verse structures are mere signs signifying this reality. A deeper understanding of these signs breaks up this simple signification and what we then read is not objective reality, but the effect assimilation has had on Aboriginal writers.

(Narogin, 1990a:52)

Mudrooroo sees that the poet’s aim is to mirror the indigenous condition.
Therefore to take any indigenous poem as either ‘pure’ literature or sociological literature is too simplistic.

For Mudrooroo the complexities of analysis become apparent in the newer generation of poets, such as Lionel Fogarty and Robert Walker, where the critical assumptions of European values cannot adequately accommodate the poetry. As a result

Critics are either forced to condemn outright, or attempt to arrive at some understanding by utilising their theory, and to modify it to arrive at new ways of seeing and understanding.

(Narogin, 1990a:50)

Critics such as Adam Shoemaker and Mudrooroo attempt to explain these alternative literary values. Shoemaker (1992) believes that what constitutes the literary values in indigenous poetry is the immediacy of the poetry, its rhyme, its oral tradition impact when read aloud, its phonetic sounds and the spoken dialect of contemporary Aboriginal speech. But how might this value be assessed?

Mudrooroo demonstrates how this might function for the critic. First the reader must read the verse as an entire oeuvre. Mudrooroo insists that the reader must not take each poem as an individual text to be solely deciphered or decoded. The individual text must be seen as part of a
complex network of Aboriginality which in effect transcends any simple reading. Secondly, the poem needs to be read aloud in order to capture the ‘oral’ quality of the work. Thirdly, the poem must be read to consider the narrative content then re-read a few more times in order to discover the ‘metatext of Aboriginality’ in the work (Narogin, 1990a:53-54). What is essential in Mudrooroo’s method is the fact that even after the reader has employed this technique he/she may have ‘to go outside the text to gather information in order to decipher it’ (Narogin, 1990a:54).

Critics such as Homi Bhabha see such devices as ‘types’ or ‘variants’ of literary theory.

The effectiveness of such an enterprise is to valorise a specific literary-cultural practice and inscribe within it a particular political and social value, under the guise of pure criticism.

(Bhabha, 1984:103)

The result of such devices is to develop a new discourse which is more than just a synthesis of ideas from the same conceptual field. The concept of hybridity or syncreticity calls for change to the way in which the centre views the margin and further renegotiates the centre’s way of thinking about the margin.
There is value in arguing in terms of gaining a position in the discourse as a means of creating a space which, in turn, can provide some change to the perception of the minority’s concerns. New perceptions can be gained by taking into account Shoemakers’ definition of indigenous poetry, Mudrooroo’s literary practice as necessary to our understanding of and access to indigenous poetry, as well as Bhabha’s political theoretical practices. These include: an understanding of Black literature and an adequate assessment of it; its contribution to Australian literature and the canon; and recognising the space it creates in opening up new ground in the discourse of literary theory.

Gilbert’s anthology reveals that everyone is vying for the same thing — ‘a position’ from which to argue and this is particularly evident in arguments of reviewers who may disparage an anthology because they don’t like what the editor is trying to do, they have a different agenda to the editor, or the anthology does not conform to their view of the canon (whatever that may mean).

*Inside Black Australia*, then, serves as a political touchstone for discussing indigenous issues and is a protest against white domination, not just on a historical-cultural level but also on a literary level. It challenges poetic forms as well as the English language in establishing an indigenous identity and indigenous literature. In doing this it serves two purposes. It

not only establishes the independent paradigm of
Black Australian verse but also demarcates the wide-ranging talent of Aboriginal poets.

(Davis, et al, 1990:5)

Gilbert’s anthology presents to the reader a sense of the urgency needed in giving Black voices a space to be heard in the climate of the Bicentennial year. Its limitation however is that in raising Black voices it chose ones that all took a similar speaking position. In addition to this it is also limited to a single genre.

The publication of Paperbark continued to challenge the mainstream’s view of what defined and constituted Black writing. The editors’ decision to include a wide range of forms and genres encompassing a national selection of work spanning just over one hundred and fifty years signalled a new movement in Black writing in Australia. The renegotiation of how that message was to be communicated, and the ways in which this was to happen raised further questions about indigenous work and its assessment within the mainstream literary culture. Many of these questions remain unresolved and a challenge to the mainstream, and yet Black work continues to evolve and progress with or without the mainstream’s white hegemony and authority. Black works have a way of speaking on their own. Inside Black Australia and Paperbark are significant markers of the literary development of Black writing and of the ways in which indigenous work seeks to be represented in the mainstream.
With the publication of these two anthologies the mainstream cannot maintain the view that it has always included a complete picture of the nation. And whilst both Inside Black Australia and Paperbark do not claim to present a complete picture of indigenous people and Black experiences, nor of offering a fixed aesthetic, they do question the representative nature of white anthologies. Therefore white anthologies now need to be vehicles for changing views of ‘us’ (Native people) and of changing ‘us’ (the mainstream) in order to give ‘us’ (all people) a better understanding of ‘our’ literary, social, historical and political development.
Works Cited


Gunew, S. and J Mahyuddin. 1988. *Beyond the Echo*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia,


JanMohamed and D Lloyd. 1987. ‘Introduction: Minority Discourse—What is to Be Done?’, *Cultural Critique* 7 (Fall), 5-17.


Skyes, R. 1990. ‘Rare gems fill a paperbark treasure-trove’, *The Age*, Saturday Extra (May 19), 8.


Turner Hospital, J. 1993. ‘Aboriginal Encounters’, *TLS*, No. 4716 (August 20), 4-5.


