



## **TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO**

### **GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: LENGUA, LITERATURA Y CULTURA**

Britain's *Terra Nullius*: A Historical and Cultural Study of  
Aboriginal Australia through Sally Morgan's *My Place* and  
Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore*

IMOGEN PRESS

[ipress1@alumno.uned.es](mailto:ipress1@alumno.uned.es)

TUTOR ACADÉMICO: Isabel Guerrero Llorente

LÍNEA DE TFG: Historia y cultura de los pueblos de habla inglesa

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

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**Abstract**

This dissertation presents a historical and cultural study of Aboriginal Australia through the literary analysis of the novels *My Place* (1987) by Sally Morgan and *The Fatal Shore* (1986) by Robert Hughes. The use of a postcolonial methodology in analysing the literary works gives new meaning to the texts as the historical context of British colonialism is acknowledged. The methodology also highlights the existence of colonial discourse in literature. A comparative and contrastive analysis for the representation of Aboriginal Australians in both novels shows there is no fixed form of identity or portrayal. A historical and cultural study of Aboriginal Australia, thus, demonstrates the importance of Aboriginal Australians because of their role in shaping the history and culture of Australia, as we know it today.

**Keywords**

Aboriginal Australians; British Colonialism; Culture and Identity; Postcolonial Literature; Australian History.

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## 1. Introduction

We cannot fully understand a piece of literature unless we understand its history and the history of those who wrote it. The historical context in literature is essential as it gives meaning to a text. It allows the reader to understand the social conditions that govern the characters and gives a detailed explanation of the settings where the narrated events occurred. The importance of the use of historical knowledge to approach literature can be seen, for example, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In this novel, the narrative is only successfully comprehended through acknowledging the nineteenth-century social movements surrounding its production. Mary Shelley uses the character of Frankenstein to critique the society into which she was born, yet, without being aware of the historical context of this text, readers would not be able to recognise the writer's full intentions. The relationship between the disciplines of literature and history, thus, is interconnected, as literature is a useful tool in shaping how we view history. It is only through reading literary works that we can discover the truth about the past and the historical events that occurred, such as the case of the British colonisation of Australia.

*My Place* (1987) by Sally Morgan and *The Fatal Shore* (1986) by Robert Hughes are two literary works which narrate the events of the British colonisation of Australia in an Aboriginal context. Understanding the history of the country in which these works of fiction were produced is beneficial for the reader as it fosters a greater comprehension of the cultures that the novels represent.

Upon investigating this topic, it has become clear that not enough research has been done on the culture and history of the First Australians and their tribes. Research into Aboriginal oral histories that has been completed so far, according to West and Murphy, has "often been misunderstood when told to outsiders" due to "vastly different views of the nature of existence between Aboriginal and other peoples" (13). The difference in view that West and Murphy refer to is the irreconcilable conflict between Western and Indigenous populations in their approach to land treatment. Aboriginal peoples believe that land is sacred and partake in a relationship with it based on reciprocal respect. They consider themselves and their ancestors as belonging to the land and include it in the

spiritual rituals and ceremonies that they carry out. Aboriginal Australians, therefore, do not follow the Western tendency to exploit the land for its resources and use it for human benefit. In the case of Australia, the British began to exploit the sacred land, taking it away from the Aboriginals and then benefitting from it by settling there. Whether the colonisers were aware that their actions would have devastating consequences is arguable, but what is clear is that the cultural development of Aboriginal Australians was directly affected by this displacement by colonisers. Forcing them off their land was detrimental in changing Aboriginal Australians' historical and cultural relationships with it.

The British colonisation of Australia has shaped the history and culture of the country, and it has had a great impact on Aboriginal peoples. Nevertheless, the historical events and lasting effects of this colonisation have not yet been fully documented. Initially, this was due to the fact that Aboriginal Australians had not developed writing throughout their precolonial history and therefore did not create a written record of their experiences during the colonisation. In more recent years, postcolonial writers, such as Sally Morgan and Robert Hughes, have begun to use Aboriginal Australian oral accounts to create a written record of the history of their country. However, despite advances, there are still gaps in postcolonial literature as the voices of many Indigenous tribes, especially regarding the consequences of British colonialism in determining their fate, are yet to be heard.

Postcolonial literature seeks to reclaim the past, just as the literary works of Robert Hughes and Sally Morgan do. The study of literature, and its portrayal of the British colonisation of Australia, can be associated with the subject of Postcolonial Literature in the degree of English Literature, Language and Culture. Though the novels *My Place* and *The Fatal Shore* are not studied within the subject content, the context in which they were written is. *The Fatal Shore* narrates the events that occurred in Australia during the colonial period, yet, since it was written in postcolonial Australia, it is influenced by this context. Similarly, *My Place* is a postcolonial novel which reflects on the aftermaths of colonisation and the dehumanisation of Aboriginals throughout three generations of females. Morgan's novel relies on the historical context of colonisation to reveal how its consequence still plays an important part in postcolonial Australian society.

## 1.1 Objectives

This dissertation focuses on *My Place* by Sally Morgan and *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes and their portrayal of the history and culture of Aboriginals in Australia. Therefore, the main aim of this dissertation is to analyse how both novels represent the Aboriginal Australian. Some secondary objectives of this dissertation are:

- To explore the Australian literary canon.
- To reveal the historical importance of the British colonisation of Australia.
- To recognise the cultural importance of Aboriginal Australians.
- To compare and contrast *My Place* (1987) by Sally Morgan and *The Fatal Shore* (1986) by Robert Hughes and their representation of Aboriginal Australians.

## 1.2 Methodology

In order to achieve the main aim and the secondary objectives of this dissertation, a postcolonial critical approach will be used for the literary analysis of *My Place* by Sally Morgan and *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes.

A postcolonial critical approach for the analysis of the novels is essential given that one of the main aims of postcolonialism is to rewrite history. Throughout the colonial period, the British colonists portrayed themselves as saviours, “distorting history by presenting unfair and biased views about aboriginals” (Nandana, “A Postcolonial Overview” 13). This approach, thus, takes the one-sided colonial point of view on historical events and revisits them in writing to invite the reader to reconsider historical representations of events from other perspectives. In addition, according to Chatzi Chousein, “The critical nature of postcolonial theory entails destabilising Western ways of thinking, therefore creating space for the subaltern, or marginalised groups, to speak and produce alternatives to dominant discourse”. Through their literature, both Morgan and Hughes recognise and question the Western ideologies that Chatzi Chousein refers to, and challenge colonial stereotypes by providing new historical representations of marginalised groups. A postcolonial approach to literature interrogates the past from the point of view of the marginalised cultures, in order to gain a greater perspective on history, by decentring the “dominant culture so that the perspective of those who have been marginalised become starting points for knowledge construction” (Browne et al. 20).

The rewriting of history also echoes the importance of acknowledging the historical context in which the work was produced. The term postcolonialism recognises both “historical continuity and change . . . how we read is just as important as what we read” (McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* 33). Hence, this approach will not only ensure that the two literary works are read as postcolonial texts, but also that their historical context is taken into account.

Postcolonial theories share “a social, political, and moral concern about the history and legacy of colonialism — how it continues to shape people’s lives . . . and life opportunities” (Browne et al. 19). In examining a literary text, a postcolonial critical approach evaluates the consequences of colonial ideologies in the aftermath of colonialism and reveals the existence of colonial discourse in literary works. By highlighting the presence of colonial discourse in literature, postcolonialism situates texts in history and exposes how the historical context influences their meaning. A postcolonial approach analyses a text for its representation of the colonised subject, seeking to find where Western knowledge provided the truth about the inferiority of marginalised cultures. The value of a literary text is then based on these findings.

Therefore, a postcolonial approach will be the most effective method for three reasons. Firstly, it will ensure that the main aim of analysing how the novels represent the Aboriginal Australian is achieved. Secondly, it will make certain that the secondary objective of revealing the historical importance of the British colonisation of Australia is accomplished. This will be done through an exploration of the novels for the colonial ideologies that they acknowledge and represent. Finally, it will also set the historical and cultural context in which these novels were written and give way for the marginalised voices, including that of the Aboriginal Australians, in the two literary works to be heard. This will accomplish the aims of recognising their cultural importance and exploring the new genre in the Australian literary canon.

The novels will be analysed by studying both the historical context which they represent and that in which they were written. In order to understand the historical contexts they represent, that is to say, the context for the action, I will look at the situation as it stands for Indigenous populations around the world and for Aboriginals in Australia. I will also look at the establishment of penal colonies and the events of the British colonisation, such as the stolen generations, that changed the natural course of the country. Once an understanding of the

historical events has been fostered, I will begin to analyse the two novels for the historical context in which they were written. A historical context analysis must first explore the background of the authors in order to evaluate whether their past experiences will influence their form of narrating events or even produce a biased perspective. Then, I will look at their use of settings, plot, structure and style, characterisation, and themes in both literary works. Finally, the dissertation will conclude with a comparative analysis of the two novels. In order to carry out this comparative analysis, the figure of the Aboriginal Australian will be used as the basis and the authors' representation of them will be compared and contrasted.

### **1.3 Historical Context**

To achieve the main aim of analysing Sally Morgan and Robert Hughes' representations of the Aboriginal Australian, we must first look at the social, political, and economic context addressed in *My Place* and *The Fatal Shore*. It is useful to situate these historical contexts in order to provide a background for the novels. This is particularly important given that the context in which *The Fatal Shore* was written and the context which Robert Hughes represents are not the same. *The Fatal Shore* was written in 1986, in a postcolonial context, but discusses colonial events between 1787 and 1868. In the case of *My Place*, Sally Morgan reveals how the British dictated Australian society in a social, political and economic context from as early on as 1893. She refers to these contexts from a postcolonial perspective, in 1987, to reiterate how they continue to exist and shape Aboriginals in Australia. In the following paragraphs, therefore, I will address the social, political, and economic context of both novels through an introduction to Aboriginals and their history.

According to The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Indigenous peoples can be defined as “descendants of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived”. However, such a straightforward definition, for more than 5% of the total worldwide population is not always as simple as having a direct genetic link through Indigenous ancestors, given that it is more a question of identity and sense of belonging for the individual.



Yet, at the same time, this sense of belonging is not always commonplace for Indigenous peoples due to the fact that they have experienced a disconnection from their culture as a result of colonialism. Colonialism, according to Boehmer, can be defined as “the settlement of territory, the exploitation . . . and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands, often by force” (1). From as early as the sixteenth century, the British Empire began to establish overseas colonies, making use of the Doctrine of Discovery philosophy to justify their conquest of Indigenous lands. The term *terra nullius* was also often employed by British colonists to describe land which did not belong to anyone and therefore was able to be acquired and populated by the empire. In postcolonial literature, McLeod defines *terra nullius* as a concept which “meant not only that the British could claim legal sovereignty over the entire continent . . . but also that they did not need to negotiate any formal treaties with the Aborigines” (*The Routledge Companion* 73) These principles, according to the United Nations were “based on racist, unscientific assumptions” as there was, in fact, no legal standing for the actions of the British. The colonisation of Australia, therefore, was carried out by the British simply as a result of their belief system regarding land rights.

In the case of Australia, there was also a secondary motive behind the colonisation. After the loss of land in the American colonies, prisons in Britain called for the establishment of a penal colony in order to deal with the issue of overcrowding (West and Murphy 41). Not only did the colonisers use the term *terra nullius* to justify their legal right to occupy the land and create penal colonies for their overflowing prisons, but they also believed it was their duty to teach and assimilate the Aboriginal children into Western culture. British colonists were convinced that the best way to achieve this was “to remove Aboriginal children from their families and bring them up away from them and their culture” (Behrendt 12). The implementation of political policies in taking children away from their families has devastated the Aboriginal population to such a point that most Indigenous cultures have seen themselves under the threat of extinction. Many Aboriginal cultures still suffer from the consequences of colonial political policies, which continue their dominant influence in Australian society, today. This dissertation, therefore, serves as a reminder of the past and a manifestation of the need for change in the present, in order to enable these cultures to thrive.

While some efforts have been undertaken by postcolonial institutions to amend these wrongdoings and promote Indigenous cultures in Australia, policymakers are still making mistakes. It is often wrongly assumed in policymaking for Indigenous affairs that Aboriginal peoples are a single identity. Yet, nowadays, there are over 500 different clans of Aboriginal Australians, separated according to whether the nation is matrilineal or patrilineal and the language used. Despite the numerous clans, there is still a lack of cultural awareness in relation to Aboriginal Australians and their cultures. Bullimore reiterates this fact as he states in his article that “today, 232 years after invasion, institutionalised and systemic racism remains central to Australian capitalism, ensuring that Indigenous people remain the most socioeconomically disadvantaged group in the country”. The results of the British colonisation, therefore, are still seen today in the continued unjust treatment of Aboriginal Australians, who remain at a disadvantage to the dominant culture in society.

The fact that Aboriginal Australians form a key part of their country’s history means that they are culturally important. A recent genetic study found that “Aboriginal Australians are descendants of the first people to leave Africa up to 75,000 years ago” (Australian Geographic). This arguably means that Australia is home to one of the oldest continuous cultures in the world, yet, despite their long history, Aboriginal peoples have not been protected. The historical importance of Aboriginal Australians is the very reason that the topic of Britain’s *terra nullius* in literature has been chosen for this dissertation. The fact that little is known about the first-hand accounts of the world’s oldest civilisation needs to change. In addition, a deeper understanding of the culture and history of Aboriginal Australians needs to be fostered in order to avoid the total extinction of one of the world’s oldest cultures, as well as to protect other Indigenous populations all over the globe. The call for a greater level of awareness and appreciation of Indigenous cultures can be achieved through literature.

Literature, however, is sometimes biased in its representation of native cultures given that the author’s perspective and ideology can influence their work. The postcolonial concept of metanarrative draws attention to the way literature is constructed due to the fact that it is always told from a particular point of view. As

Said argued, writers are “bound by established assumptions about the Orient, assumptions reflecting a dominant ideology in which Western imperial power shaped images in the West” (14). In the case of Aboriginal Australians, they were often misrepresented in literary works. This was not only to gain power over them but also to justify to the colonising nation that it was necessary and right to rule over the Indigenous population. Western imperial powers presented observations of Indigenous cultures as scientific truths, despite the fact that they were often based on assumptions (McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* 22). These bound assumptions and ideologies were strengthened through colonial discourse, language that was used in literature to maintain colonial rule. “The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment” (Thiong’o 4). The language used by the British Empire, therefore, ensured that the Indigenous population of Australia and the British colonists saw themselves a certain way which reflected what they believed to be the natural order of life. This can be seen in literary works, such as William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, which have tended to portray Indigenous habitants as savage and uncivilised. In Shakespeare’s work, Caliban is depicted as a reckless Indigenous and the coloniser, Prospero, enslaves him by justifying the need to control his actions. From a postcolonial perspective, therefore, Prospero and Caliban can be seen as synonymous with the figures of the coloniser and the colonised, assuming the roles that colonisation had assigned them.

Other literary works have represented Indigenous peoples as speaking broken English, suggesting that they are not as mentally developed as their colonisers. As Bratlinger points out, the use of “pidgin English in colonial Australian fiction reinforces the stereotype of ‘mental deficiency’ on the part of Aborigines” (132). Essentially, racist attitudes, in the form of colonial discourse, on behalf of white Australians have meant that we have not always been able to hear Aboriginal Australians voices directly in literature. This has resulted in a lack of recognition of Aboriginal Australians’ cultural importance. The history and recognition of the cultural importance of Aboriginal Australians, therefore, will be essential to the literary analysis of *My Place* and *The Fatal Shore* given that it is key in evaluating how they are represented throughout both novels.

## **2. Aboriginal Identity and Belonging. *My Place* (1987) by Sally Morgan**

### **2.1 Sally Morgan - An Introduction**

Sally Morgan was born in 1951 in Perth, Western Australia (Morgan). Throughout her upbringing, she had been led to believe by her mother and grandmother that she and her four siblings were of Indian-Bangladeshi descent. Yet, at the age of fifteen, Morgan learnt that she was in fact of Aboriginal heritage as she recalls in *My Place*. She was not aware of her ancestry from “the Palku/Baligu people of the Pilbara” until her teenage years due to the fact that her female relatives thought it was the best way to protect her, and her siblings, from institutional racism (Shakil). Despite being born over fifty years after Australian independence, she has still suffered the lasting effects of the British colonisation. Her family believed it was better to represent themselves as “citizens belonging to another nation as these citizens received better treatment when compared to that of natives” (Nandana, “A Postcolonial Overview” 9). Morgan wrote her biographical novel, *My Place*, to reveal the discovery of her true heritage and describe the events surrounding her search for the truth. This novel not only presents an Aboriginal assessment of Australia’s past but also helps to construct an Aboriginal identity for Indigenous Australians in the present. The development of an Aboriginal consciousness in *My Place* demonstrates the value of cultural inheritance. Morgan provides this new postcolonial consciousness in her novel to create an alternative history for Aboriginal Australians. Consequently, it has become one of the best-known Indigenous texts in the Australian literary canon.

### **2.2 Post-Colonial Aboriginal Australia Setting**

As aforementioned in the methodology, a postcolonial approach to this novel is key to analysing how it represents the Aboriginal Australian. This literary approach calls for the need to read texts in relation to their social, cultural, and historical context. Sally Morgan acknowledges all three of these contexts in her choice of setting.

*My Place* is set in Sally Morgan’s place of birth, Perth, Western Australia. Setting plays an important role in the social and cultural context of the novel as the plot is consistently influenced by the author’s relationship with her physical surroundings. It is the very community in which the book is set that Morgan

attempts to understand, and reconnect with, through her search for identity. Part of finding one's identity includes the recognition of forming part of a community. Setting, therefore, is key for Morgan in acknowledging her place in society, given that for so long she has felt as though she did not belong. Fundamentally, Morgan's understanding of a present-day Aboriginal Australian identity is influenced by her reflection on their social and cultural circumstances in Perth.

Morgan also relates to the historical context of her novel through setting as she uses it to introduce one of *My Place's* key themes, Aboriginal identity. The novel drives both Indigenous and white Australians to determine if the Aboriginal history, and their representation, that has been told is correct. *My Place* analyses the events that have taken place in Perth and looks at Morgan's own history through the experiences of three of her family members also living there. It is important to consider the historical context of this setting when analysing the novel in order to fully understand the life of Sally Morgan, as well as the lives of her ancestors and those around her. As Wicomb argues, "setting is the representation of physical surroundings that is crucially bound up with a culture and its dominant ideologies, providing ready-made, recognisable meanings" (146). Despite being freed from colonial rule, Indigenous peoples are still not free from its aftermath. Morgan wants to highlight these presiding colonial beliefs within her community that continue to control Aboriginal Australians, long after the British colonisation. This is also the main aim of postcolonial literature, to reveal and question Western ways of thinking. As postcolonial theories assert, drawing attention to the use of colonial discourses in the past can act as a means of resisting it in the present. Throughout *My Place*, Morgan highlights Western colonial beliefs in order to resist and destabilise them. Thus, her novel could also be considered as part of the postcolonial canon of writing back literature, given that it "challenges the already established notion of white man's Australia" (Nandana, "Representation of Women" 1979).

*My Place* was published in 1987 in Australia. This is essential to bear in mind when analysing this novel given that the postcolonial setting in which it was written affects the social circumstances of the novel. In fact, according to Sjöblom, we tend to "create the past from the perspective of how relevant it is to the present

situation” (237). Morgan writes from the same place her book is set in, looking at its historical and cultural past in reference to its importance in the present. This allows her to include subjective points of view on the events that occurred there. Yet, despite being situated in Perth, it could be argued that the city is a microcosm of Australia. Morgan’s novel begins by showing how life is for the Aboriginals she knows in her city, but this does not mean that it is any different for Indigenous peoples living in other parts of the country. In fact, she also looks at the lives of her Aboriginal relatives living in Corunna Downs and demonstrates how they too continue to suffer as a result of British colonialism. Thus, the author’s choice of setting is arguably reflective of Australia as a whole. Through *My Place*, the author reclaims the history that others have so often discarded, discussing Aboriginal Australians’ past and present through the many voices of her family members, in order to create a shared experience throughout the country.

### **2.3 Plot, Structure and Style**

*My Place* is a memoir, told in storytelling mode, a narrative format traditional in Aboriginal history. According to Sjöblom, storytelling is an important cultural aid in which “cultural information is handed from one individual to another” (241). Thus, this form of narration allows cultural information to be passed down from the older family members to Sally Morgan. Morgan tells her story, and those of her family members, in chronological order so as to engage the reader in her search for a sense of belonging, and the discovery of her heritage. In addition, she tells the oral stories of her family members in written form, in order to reach the widest possible audience. The form of narration also helps to create a bond between the reader and the author due to the fact that the reader must engage closely with Morgan and her family members’ memories throughout the novel.

The plot of *My Place* begins with an introduction to Sally Morgan through a recollection of her upbringing, which presents both her family and her choice of setting to the reader. The novel is then structured into three narratives for each of Sally Morgan’s family members and looks at their life events both in the present and past. These narratives look at the experiences of three generations of Aboriginal women and represent the different types of postcolonial Aboriginal identities and their experiences in Australia.

The first narrative is told by Arthur Corunna, the brother of Morgan's grandmother, Daisy. Arthur was born around 1893 to Annie Padewani and Alfred Howden Drake-Brockman, "the white station owner" (Morgan 175). He tells of his experiences as an Aboriginal Australian growing up on Corunna Downs Station in the Pilbara, north of Western Australia. "In the Pilbara it was common practise to forcibly retain Aboriginal people on pastoral stations to be used as slave labour" (Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre). It appears that this is exactly what happened to Arthur, his family was retained on Corunna Downs Stations. There, he lived and worked beside them until he was taken to the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission. Throughout his narrative, Arthur uses lots of Indigenous words, such as when he describes the station, "we called the top half of the station, where I lived, Mool-nya-moonya" or when he tells of his Aboriginal name "Jilly-yung, which meant silly young kid" (Morgan 175-176). In the instances where Arthur employs Indigenous words, explanations are added, or footnotes are given by Morgan, to clarify the meaning of them. Arthur ends his story by explaining his desire to tell it as "it's important, because then maybe they'll understand how hard it's been for a Blackfella to live the way he wants. I'm part of history, that's how I look on it" (Morgan 213). He feels it is essential for non-Aboriginals to understand the past and the current experiences of Aboriginal peoples throughout Australia, in order to change social attitudes towards them.

The second narrative is told by Gladys Milroy, Morgan's mother. Gladys' story begins in 1931 and reveals her separation from her mother, at the age of three, as part of her education at Parkerville Children's home. She also discusses her work as a florist, meeting Sally's father and having children. Gladys does not see her Aboriginality as limiting her connection with the dominant postcolonial culture, though she does not use Indigenous words to tell her story either. She reflects on her life at the end of her narrative and recognises the importance of her heritage in forming an identity. Gladys expresses remorse for having denied her ancestry as she acknowledges that she is proud to be an Aboriginal.

The third narrative is told by Daisy Corunna, Sally Morgan's grandmother. Her story begins in 1900 and immediately introduces her Aboriginal name, "Talahue" (Morgan 325). Daisy's narrative includes descriptions of her beginnings at Corunna Downs, her heavy workload at Ivanhoe and her heartbreak when she had to send her daughter, Gladys, away to Parkerville. Throughout the novel,

Daisy has been reluctant to tell her story, which she explains is due to fear “I been scared all my life, too scared to speak out” (Morgan 350). Though, she finally agrees to tell her granddaughter about her past as she feels it’s time for others to learn about Aboriginals and “what it’s been like in this country” (Morgan 349). Through her story, the reader comes to understand why some Aboriginals, just like Daisy have chosen to deny their heritage in order to protect themselves. Daisy concludes her story similarly to Gladys as she expresses regret for having felt ashamed of her heritage and holds hope for a better future “I like to think the black man will get treated same as the white man one day” (Morgan 350).

When the three narratives are read separately, it appears as if the plot is incomplete. It is only when the texts are read together that the idea of an Aboriginal Australian identity begins to be represented. Therefore, the narratives serve to start forming a bridge between the Aboriginal past and present.

Despite providing an alternative history, through the voices of her family members, there are still apparent silences in the stories Morgan retells, resulting from the fact that she is not an omniscient narrator. The author partakes in the story that she tells and narrates the plot in the first person. Morgan foreshadows information that is later developed in the three narratives, yet she never learns of the full extent of the past from her family members. Her choice of narration enables the reader to understand her emotions and see the world, as well as the history of Australia, from an Aboriginal perspective.

The structure of the plot, in the form of three narratives, and the storytelling style in which they are told, are key in Morgan’s representation of the Aboriginal Australian. Through the narratives, she introduces the cultural, social, and historical past of her Aboriginal family members. This is essential in shaping the idea of Aboriginal identity, though it also shows that each family member has experienced the past differently, which affects their willingness to share.

#### **2.4 Characterisation**

In *My Place*, the characters are not fictional and form an important part of Sally Morgan’s life. They are initially introduced and described through the author’s own words, which gives the reader an insight into their individual experiences and personalities from the standpoint of an outsider. Gladys, Daisy and Arthur then



go on to develop unique Aboriginal identities as they come to tell their own version of past events towards the end of the novel. Sally Morgan, thus, uses her three characters to represent the different Aboriginal identities that exist in postcolonial Australia, in addition to her own.

#### **2.4.1 Sally Morgan**

Sally Morgan is the first-person narrator and the protagonist of *My Place*. She tells the story of her search for the truth about her heritage and her subsequent discovery which gives her a sense of place. Sally represents an Aboriginal Australian trying to establish an identity in a postcolonial context, which she finds difficult due to a lack of a sense of belonging. This is highlighted in *My Place* when she explains how she feels like “a very vital part of me was missing and that I’d never belong anywhere” (Morgan 106). Establishing an identity is also difficult for Sally due to her scarcity of knowledge about the past. Like many others, she admits she “knew nothing about Aboriginal people” (Morgan 100). Due to the fact that her ancestry had initially been hidden from her, Sally was not aware of the historical past of her people. She acknowledges her naivety in saying “I always thought Australia was different to America . . . but we had slavery here, too. The people might not have been sold on the blocks like the American Negroes were, but they were owned, just the same” (Morgan 151). Therefore, her role in *My Place* is to present a true historical past of Australia for Aboriginal Australians. She achieves this through rewriting the history of Australia from a postcolonial perspective which describes both her experience and that of her family members.

In contrast to Sally’s approach to the subject is her sister, Jill, who does not appear to possess a need to know about her cultural heritage, nor the desire to acknowledge the past. In fact, Jill tells Sally that “it’s better not to know for sure, that way you don’t have to face up to it” (Morgan 99). Jill insists that it’s a “terrible thing to be Aboriginal. Nobody wants to know you . . . You can be Indian, Dutch, Italian, anything, but not Aboriginal!” (Morgan 98). The preference to distance oneself from the past is commonplace for many postcolonial Aboriginals, as a result of ‘the cultural bomb’. Thiong’o describes how Western cultures employed the cultural bomb weapon “to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (3). This has resulted in some Aboriginal

Australians, like Jill, wanting to associate with what is furthest from themselves. Other Aboriginal Australians, like Sally, however, gain a sense of pride and belonging through acknowledging their Aboriginality. Thus, for the first time in the history of her family, Sally represents an Aboriginal Australian who embraces her identity and is not afraid to confront the past.

#### **2.4.2 Gladys Milroy**

Gladys Milroy is Sally Morgan's mother and an important character in *My Place*. Throughout the novel, she is put in a difficult position by two of her family members. Whilst her mother, Daisy, is adamant about them both denying their heritage, her daughter is insistent on knowing more about their past so as to discover her true identity. Despite her difficult past, Gladys has been able to make something of herself in a postmodern context. She is a successful businesswoman, who understands the importance of education and encourages her children to study in order to fulfil their full potential.

Just like Sally, Gladys also struggled as a child with feeling like she did not belong due to the fact that she had been taken away from her mother at such a young age. Gladys formed part of the Stolen Generation, the First Nations children who were "forcibly removed from their families as a result of various government policies" (Australians Together). The impact of this historical past for many Aboriginal Australians was the creation of a sense of shame for their Indigenous heritage because they had consistently been forced to reject their culture. At Parkerville, Gladys and the other children were told "never to talk openly about being Aboriginal. It was something we were made to feel ashamed of" (Morgan 264). As a result, she finds it hard to openly admit her heritage and speak out about her experience. For this reason, she starts off by asking Sally to "just leave the past buried, it won't hurt anyone then" (Morgan 152). Eventually, in her narrative, Gladys accepts her anger about the fact that her history, and the history of others like her, has been ignored and recognises a need for her and other Aboriginals to speak out because there's "been nothing written about people like us, all the history's about white man. There's nothing about Aboriginal people and what they've been through" (Morgan 161).

Thus, for the author, Gladys represents an Aboriginal Australian who has suffered the consequences of British colonialism and their resultant ideologies

first-hand. This has led her to struggle in discussing her heritage and to have mixed feelings in terms of belonging. Gladys develops her identity throughout *My Place*; where she initially refuses to acknowledge the past, she finally sees its importance in changing attitudes and creating cultural identities in the present.

### **2.4.3 Daisy Corunna**

Daisy Corunna is Sally Morgan's grandmother and another important character in *My Place*. Sally describes her relationship with her grandmother as a close one, though it is sometimes puzzling as she explains that there was "so much about Nan I didn't understand" (Morgan 67).

Sally is persistent throughout the novel in wanting to discover the past, yet her grandmother is unwilling to share. Daisy admits "It makes me sick to talk about the past" (Morgan 161). She still struggles to accept what British colonialism did to the Aboriginal Australians and is too scared to talk openly and honestly about her experience. Gladys explains to Sally that Daisy "has been frightened all her life. You can tell her things have changed, but she won't listen. She thinks it's still like the old days when people could do what they liked with you" (Morgan 142). Thus, Daisy continues to fear authority due to her personal experience and mistreatment at the hands of the British government. Her scepticism and fear of authoritative figures have also rubbed off on her daughter and Sally, who reveals "It was nan who first brought out the sceptic in me. I was suspicious of outsiders, especially those in authority. Nan convinced me that most people were untrustworthy, especially doctors" (65).

Like her daughter, Daisy Corunna also suffered at the hands of the British colonials. Though, unlike Gladys, who was forced to spend the school term away from her mother, Daisy was permanently taken away from her family. She reminisces on forming part of the Stolen Generation in her narrative, "They told my mother I was goin' to get educated . . . They should have told my mother the truth. She thought I was coming back" (Morgan 332). In a similar manner to many other families, Daisy's mother had been led to believe that it was in her child's best interest to be sent away so that she could gain an education. Sadly, this was not the case for many Aboriginal children, like Daisy, who were put to work instead of being taught how to read and write. She discloses her sadness at not having been taught when her brother, Arthur, mocks her "I can't help it if I can't

read or write . . . I always wanted to learn” (Morgan 163). In addition, because of her upbringing and the cultural shame that came with her Aboriginality, Daisy chooses not to use her Indigenous tongue, Balgoon, other than with Arthur.

Therefore, for the author, Daisy represents an Aboriginal Australian who continues to struggle in coming to terms with belonging in a postcolonial context. Her past experience has taught her that the things she most cares about are taken away, leading her to worry about the consequences of telling her story. Daisy is insistent on ensuring her family is kept safe from authority, despite no longer living directly under British rule. She actively participates in bringing her grandchildren up to believe that there are of different heritage because she feels it is the best way to protect them from the painful experiences she has gone through. Essentially, Daisy exemplifies an Aboriginal Australian who has been made to feel so ashamed of her Aboriginality to the point that she wishes to hide it and creates a new postcolonial identity. Sally initially fails to understand this and questions “why did she want to be white?” (Morgan 107). Yet, upon hearing Daisy’s story, the reader is able to empathise with her and fully understand her silence, as a result of her fear in telling the truth about the past and its potential consequences in the present.

#### **2.4.4 Arthur Corunna**

Arthur Corunna is Sally Morgan’s great uncle and the third important character in *My Place*. Initially, he is the only one willing to tell Sally the truth and the sole male figure in the novel to reflect on his upbringing. Arthur is key in initiating the discussion about the past, as it is only after he has told his story that Gladys and Daisy agree to tell theirs. In his narrative, Arthur recalls how hard it has been for many other men like him to get by as it “seems like the whitefella doesn’t want the Blackfella to get a foot in this world” (Morgan 195). Like his sister, Arthur was also taken away at a young age. He reiterates how misleading this was as he “thought they wanted us educated so we could help run the station some day, I was wrong” (Morgan 182). It was at this moment, when he had been separated from his family at Corunna Downs, that he “got the name Arthur” (Morgan 183). He took on this new identity as a means to survive and has had to endure hardship as a result of being an Aboriginal Australian.

For the author, Arthur represents an Aboriginal Australian who feels a need

to express his anger about the past. He feels that the British colonisation was hypocritical as “the white people in Australia . . . brought the religion here with them and the Commandment, Thou Shalt not Steal, and yet they stole this country. They took it from the innocent” (Morgan 213). Thus, he highlights how the British believed that it was their duty to westernise the Indigenous communities, but in doing so they went against their own teachings. Despite this, Arthur is not ashamed to acknowledge his Aboriginal identity, unlike Daisy, and states that he is “proud of bein’ a blackfella” (Morgan 147). In his narrative, he presents Aboriginality as a split identity. Arthur wants to assert his difference as being Aboriginal and feels a sense of pride in his heritage, yet at the same time he resents being treated as different and recognises that if he “had been born a white man, my life would have been different. I’d have had an education the proper way” (Morgan 332).

## **2.5 Themes and Symbols**

Themes are essential to *My Place* since they introduce the underlying ideas that the author wants to convey. In her search to represent the Aboriginal Australian, Morgan covers three key themes: identity, family and British Colonialism. To develop her themes, she employs symbols which she uses to explore meanings of everyday objects and events, both in the past and present.

### **2.5.1 Identity**

The first main theme of *My Place* is identity, which also looks at the history of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. There are many occasions in *My Place* where Daisy and Gladys choose to hide their Aboriginal identity, not only from society but from their own descendants “Tell them you’re Indian” (Morgan 38). Throughout the novel, the author attempts to define herself, through discovering her true heritage and understand her place in society. She wants to form an Aboriginal identity so as to gain a sense of belonging in postcolonial Australia. Morgan employs the use of symbols, in the form of flora and fauna, to foreshadow her discovery and define her Aboriginal heritage within this theme.

In terms of flora, *My Place* looks at Aboriginals’ spiritual and cultural connections with their landscape through the symbol of fire. Morgan and her family are often drawn together around the fire, which gives them a feeling of

safety, “we felt very secure in front of an open fire” (Morgan 74). This symbol addresses a relationship with fire which has long been about. Fire is used by Aboriginal Australians as a practical tool in everyday events, such as cooking, as well as a creative tool in traditional ceremonies such as dancing or storytelling. The symbol of fire is, therefore, representative of Morgan’s heritage and culture.

In terms of fauna, *My Place* uses animals as defining symbols of Aboriginal identity. Throughout the novel, Morgan associates her heritage with her Nan who has influenced them greatly in their “attitudes to the wildlife around us” (Morgan 56). The symbol of a bird is introduced in the novel to reflect Morgan’s spirituality and foreshadow death. The author also uses a snake to reflect on the history of Aboriginal Australians. The snake is defined as an animal that “won’t chase you to bite and kill you . . . You only get bitten if you tread on them, they’re just protecting themselves. People always try to kill snakes whenever they see them. They should leave them alone” (Morgan 178). This choice of animal is therefore symbolic of the Aboriginal Australians, who were not initially violent. For these cultural communities, it was only when they were forced off their land and killed at the hands of the British that they began to protect themselves and fight back.

Morgan also reflects on the theme of identity through her visit to the hospital. There, she sees herself as “a grubby five-year-old in an alien environment” (Morgan 11). This symbol foreshadows how she may feel when she discovers her Aboriginal heritage, surrounded by the unknown and out of place. In addition, she looks at the theme of identity through her descriptions of the hospital amputees. Upon visiting the soldiers at the hospital, the protagonist wonders how they “could have so many parts missing and still live” (Morgan 12). The author also links this to her lack of knowledge about her heritage, which left her feeling that “a very vital part of me was missing” (Morgan 12). Hence, the soldiers mirror the Aboriginal Australian experience in a postcolonial context. Just like the Aboriginal Australians, the soldiers have had a part of them taken away and consequently struggle to feel a sense of belonging in the present.

Through the theme of identity, the author poses the key question which she attempts to answer, “what did it really mean to be Aboriginal?” (Morgan 141). Morgan admits the importance of having found an identity given that, without it,

her family “would have never known our place” (Morgan 233). Yet, upon including the three narratives in *My Place*, the author fails to present a clear explanation of postcolonial Aboriginality. McLeod supports this representation of identity, as he argues that only through challenging ways of thinking about identity can colonialism be destroyed (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 21). Postcolonial theorists argue that a society can only be free of colonial rule and its discourse through questioning stereotypes and the notions of fixed identities and cultures. In *My Place*, Morgan questions stereotypes by presenting Aboriginality as a complex topic. She shows it is not possible to produce one straightforward definition, such as the case with her grandmother who was “stuck in the middle. Too black for the whites and too white for the blacks” (Morgan 336). Throughout the novel, Morgan highlights how difficult the concept of Aboriginality is, and how challenging it is to define one single postcolonial Aboriginal identity as it is constantly changing.

### **2.5.2 Family**

The second main theme of *My Place* is family. At the beginning of the novel, Morgan explains the significance of her family who she felt was “the most important thing in the world” (Morgan 38). Her three relatives, Gladys, Daisy and Arthur also look at the theme of family in narrating their removal from and subsequent loss of family. In the novel, the idea of the family plays a key role in developing an identity given that it provides a sense of belonging. When Gladys is taken to Parkerville, she admits that it was “every kids secret wish to have a family of their own” (Morgan 247). All the children at the home, and Gladys herself, longed for a family which made them feel secure in that it allowed them to belong. In fact, in her narrative, Gladys recalls how Daisy “sensed I needed to belong” (Morgan 251). Yet, due to the British policies of separation, many children missed out on this important developmental stage and sense of security in their childhood. Furthermore, the parents of these children suffered immensely because “They had nothing, especially the old ones. A lot of them had been separated from the young ones, all their kids had been taken off them, they had no one to look out for them” (Morgan 262). Aboriginal mothers who had born children to white men had no chance of sharing cultural values and giving their children a sense of belonging as they were taken away and raised to partake in Western culture.

Morgan also looks at the theme of family when she discusses Daisy's attitude towards her heritage. Gladys worries about her mum due to the fact that she is so unwilling to address the past and wonders whether she will ever be able to embrace her family, expressing that sometimes "I think she thinks she's white. She's ashamed of her family" (Morgan 148). British colonists taught Aboriginals to be ashamed of their heritage by consistently reminding and regarding them as "barbaric, wild and uncultured . . . As a result, aboriginals always looked down on themselves" (Nandana, "A Postcolonial Overview" 10). In *My Place*, the author reflects on the colonial indoctrination which Aboriginals suffered through the character of her grandmother, Daisy. Sally's grandmother is fearful of acknowledging her heritage because she had been made to feel ashamed about it for so long. Daisy also plays an important role within the theme of family as she is the author's link to the past. Through her grandmother, Sally connects with the past and learns about the true history of Aboriginal Australians. The fact that her grandmother is the source of her family's heritage means that Sally worries her Aboriginality, and her relationship with the past will disappear when Daisy dies.

Through the theme of family, Sally Morgan discovers and reveals her true heritage. By interviewing her family members for their unique perspectives on the past, *My Place* rewrites the history of Australia and reveals the richness of her family's culture. As a result of embracing their Aboriginal heritage, the author and her family are finally able to gain a sense of belonging in postcolonial Australia.

### **2.5.3 British Colonialism**

The third and final main theme of *My Place* is British colonialism. Through addressing British colonialism, Morgan also looks at the subthemes of racism and prejudice, oppression, gender inequality, alcoholism, and silence.

Just as postcolonial theories reveal the presence of colonial discourse in literary texts, Morgan focuses on its continuing existence, and its resultant dominant ideologies, in the form of racism. *My Place* consistently addresses the topic of racism by calling out the British government for its treatment of Aboriginal Australians. She includes their actions when reflecting on her own history and in discussing how "Thousands of families in Australia were destroyed by the government policy of taking children away" (Morgan 164). Here, she expresses



her anger by saying that “None of that happened to white people” (Morgan 164). Therefore, the author highlights how unjust the British government was in creating a policy that specifically targeted and aimed to change the cultures of the Aboriginal Australians.

This also relates to another theme that *My Place* points out, oppression. In his narrative, Arthur recalls “seein’ native people all chained up around the neck and hands, walkin’ behind a policeman . . . what have they done to be treated like that” (Morgan 181). British colonials overtly mistreated the Indigenous populations through acts of cruelty such as this event which continues to haunt Arthur. This treatment was due to the fact that the British saw the Aboriginal Australians as different and felt it was their duty to educate the Indigenous cultures of colonised lands. The Western cultures saw Oriental people as their other. The British colonists felt they needed to be civilised and justified colonialism by claiming the Indigenous needed saving from themselves (McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* 45-46). Settlers from Britain viewed themselves as colonial missionaries with a moral obligation to assimilate the Indigenous population of Australia into their Western culture. In his poem, “The White Man’s Burden”, Kipling reflects on how British colonists viewed themselves as servants of the empire, forced to endure “The blame of those ye better, / The hate of those ye guard – ” (lines 33-36). Kipling, therefore, shows how the British accepted the consequences that came with their job, believing Aboriginal peoples needed to be educated by them, despite their unwillingness to learn.

The British colonisation of Australia can also be linked to the topic of gender inequality. This is firstly seen in *My Place* with the Aboriginal children who were divided by gender at the home. Gladys recalls her upbringing at Parkerville, where the girls were forced to carry out certain tasks and boys were made to do others that were deemed appropriate for their gender roles, which she found unfair. Furthermore, gender inequality was particularly prevalent for Aboriginal women during the colonial period, as they faced double oppression. These women were made subservient to the patriarchal values in both the Aboriginal and colonialist societies. Women, like Gladys and Daisy, were subdued primarily by the patriarchal system within their Aboriginal cultures, with Daisy admitting herself that “this is a white man’s world” (337). At the same time, they were also

oppressed by the British colonists since Aboriginal women often became the objects of sexual desire of white men. Just as white women, Indigenous females were subjected to the patriarchal society of Western cultures. Western cultures, through colonialism, have also interrupted Indigenous communities in colonised countries. Carby argues that gender roles have been impacted as a direct result of the nuclear family structures which colonialism has destroyed (in *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies*, 224). Within the colonial society, nuclear family structures were destroyed as “Aboriginal women weren’t allowed to keep children fathered by a white man” (Morgan 301). This was due to the fact that these females were not considered to have “sufficient civilization to raise children born to white man” (Nandana, “A Postcolonial Overview” 12). Furthermore, *My Place* also addresses the idea of a white man’s world in Western culture through acknowledging male privilege with the character of Bill, Sally’s father. One night, Bill openly assaults Gladys without fear because he knows there will not be any repercussions for his actions. Hence, the novel highlights the injustice Aboriginal women and girls suffered in the aftermath of the British colonisation, due to the fact that they were still seen as inferior in both the Aboriginal and colonial cultures. Through addressing the existence of gender inequality, Morgan reiterates how many Aboriginal women still experience such inequality in the present.

Another topic that is developed throughout the novel is alcohol, as “drinking seemed to be the main hobby of everyone we mixed with” (Morgan 28). The author links the topic of alcohol to British colonialism, as it was consumed in great quantities by all who experienced the colonisation of Australia. Initially, alcohol was used by British convicts, who turned to drink as a way to escape their harsh treatment. Then, it became a form of payment; as coins were not readily available to prisoners, rum was used as a currency. Alcohol was also consumed by Aboriginals, provided to them by the British colonists in exchange for sexual favours, as payment for their labour and so as to incite them into fighting for entertainment (Langton 196). Furthermore, alcohol played a key role in the dispossession process. British colonists constructed and spread the image of the drunken Aboriginal in order to justify occupying their land. This has had a lasting effect on Aboriginal cultures given that the stereotype of their alcohol dependency is still apparent today. Yet, “the rate of alcohol misuse in the Aboriginal community

is actually less than in the general population” (Langton 196). Despite popular belief, they are no more dependent on alcohol than any other culture. Morgan addresses this topic in *My Place*, through the character of her father, Bill, who was very much absent in her early years as a result of his alcohol dependency. Having been a soldier, he was deeply affected by the burden of his memories which shaped his ability to function in everyday life. Bill’s days in the army led him to turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism for accepting the past. Despite Gladys’ attempts to help her husband, she admits that she “couldn’t heal his mind, it was too damaged, they hadn’t broken his spirit or his will to live, but they’d broken his mind” (Morgan 290). Morgan recognises that she also feels at fault for not being able to help Bill, and “blamed myself for being too young” (Morgan 14). Through her father, and the symbol of alcohol, therefore, the author indicates the lasting effects of Australia’s colonial past. *My Place* shows how alcohol is still used in postcolonial Australia, often as a coping mechanism for the trauma of the past, by both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians.

The final topic that the theme of British colonialism presents is silence. In *My Place*, Bill’s silence leads to devastating consequences and Morgan bears witness to the impact of the colonial past from a young age. The characters in the novel are so affected by their past, as a result of British colonialism, that they find it hard to reveal their true history and feel like they belong in the present. Morgan sees how her family’s silence and reluctance to discuss their colonial past is the result of their suffering due to the British colonisation of Australia. She endeavours to give them a chance to overcome their trauma in order to save them from falling to the same fate that her father did. The author sees the importance of readdressing the past from a postcolonial perspective so as to decentre the dominant culture that continues to determine their fate. Therefore, throughout her novel, Morgan renegotiates the boundaries of silence that have been placed on her, by both her family and society and speaks out for the first time so as to encourage her relatives to also do so. Though Daisy is unwilling to share the full extent of her painful past, Gladys recognises the value of telling their story and admits “If I stay silent like Nanna, it’s like saying that everything’s all right. People should know what it’s been like for someone like me” (Morgan 238). The significance of including the three narratives of her family members

allows Morgan to create a pattern that describes the repeated experiences of the past. These experiences not only speak to each other but also for each other when they are read collectively. Together, they aim to break free from the silence of the colonial past and rewrite the Aboriginal history of Australia.

### **3. Criminals and Colonies. *The Fatal Shore* (1986) by Robert Hughes**

#### **3.1 Robert Hughes – An Introduction**

Robert Hughes was born in 1938 in Sydney, Australia. He began as an art critic but took an interest in colonial history after struggling to find information in his research into the beginnings of Australia. Hughes reported that the cultural background of his country and its past “was either denied or romanticised” (McNay). His novel, *The Fatal Shore*, therefore, presents a complete history of the British settlement in Australia, from 1787 to 1868. It reflects on important events that took place during the period of colonisation from the point of view of the colonists. In *The Fatal Shore*, he tells of the hardship that the settlers suffered at the hands of the British through describing their brutal treatment within the convict transportation system. The author also addresses some of the early encounters between the settlers and the First Australians, and the resultant racist attitudes towards Aboriginal cultures. Posthumously, Hughes was described as “the man who had shown us who we were, or what darkness we had to confront in order to grow up. He had grasped the cruelty of our birth and shoved it in our faces” (Carey). His straightforward approach to history in his novel means no details are spared in relaying the harsh truth of Australia’s past. *The Fatal Shore* also played a role in transmitting ideas about what settlement in Australia really meant back to Europe. In his novel, Hughes rewrites the past and highlights the development of a new Australian identity which ultimately led to the creation of a new society. As a result, *The Fatal Shore* is one of the most important books in educating on the events that shaped Australian history and culture.

#### **3.2 The Georgian Era and Colonial Australia Setting**

As aforementioned, a postcolonial approach to literature requires the text to be read in conjunction with its social, cultural and historical context. Hughes presents these contexts in *The Fatal Shore* through two settings, England and Australia.

In his first choice of setting, eighteenth-century England, the author looks at the impact of the Industrial Revolution on society. Hughes describes the rise in city populations, which came about as a result of the Industrial Revolution, in order to fully depict the social context which surrounded the British colonisation of Australia. Within the setting of Georgian London, Hughes accounts for the social and cultural changes that led to an increase in criminal activity throughout the country. Due to the lack of employment opportunities and dire working conditions in cities, there was a significant rise in petty crime. The most common type of crime was pickpocketing, as Hughes recalls “Fagin’s school for boy thieves in *Oliver Twist* was no fantasy” (172). In fact, Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* epitomises the conditions for young boys in Georgian London. In his novel, Dickens describes how the orphan boys were taught to steal and forced into a life of organised crime on account of the fact that they had been born poor. In order to solve the growing crime rate, the authorities introduced harsh consequences, such as capital punishment for crimes and longer sentencing, but this soon led to prison overcrowding and the government was forced to find an alternative. *The Fatal Shore* addresses the reasoning behind the government’s decision to deport convicts to Australia, explaining how “the idea that Australia might carry a British penal colony was raised by . . . a crisis in England’s hulks and jails” (56). Those who had been condemned to death or life imprisonment in England were deported to Australia to carry out their sentences. This was done so in order to solve the problem of overcrowded prisons and act as a deterrent, so as to warn others against committing crimes in England. Essentially, what “the British Government wanted was a regime harsh enough to frighten the criminal classes at home into mending their ways” (Kiernan). Hughes also explains how the British colonisation of Australia was actually the “largest forced exile of citizens at the behest of a European government in pre-modern history” (2). The deported criminals were represented as deserving of the harsh punishment, to support the idea that sending them to colonise Australia was necessary. Hughes links the setting of England to his second choice of setting, Australia, through addressing the historical, sociological and political reasons that led the British to settle there.

In his second choice of setting, Australia, the author presents the social, historical and cultural contexts which led to the development of a new Australian

identity. He compares the settler experience in various parts of Australia, such as Sydney Cove in New South Wales, and Norfolk Island, in order to present an accurate summary of their experience throughout the country. In Sydney Cove, Hughes describes how “the land was not what it seemed. It looked fertile and lovely, but it proved arid, reluctant, incomprehensible” (92). The harshness of this setting led to famine amongst the new arrivals who lived “for five years on the bleak edge of starvation” (Hughes 97). This led many convicts to turn to violence in search of food and in some cases, cannibalism. In fact, on Norfolk Island, the author reveals how the daily floggings and dire living conditions drove many convicts to commit murder in a desperate attempt to get off the island and be sent back to Sydney for trial. Since the prison population on Norfolk Island was cut off from the mainland, they were virtually left to their own devices. Consequently, the officers took control of the population and punished the prisoners according to their own rules. Hence, Hughes shows the injustice, on Norfolk Island, where the prisoners were treated as the colonised, and the officers stepped into the role of the colonisers. The second choice of setting in *The Fatal Shore*, the penal colonies throughout Australia, reveals the contexts that led to the creation of a survivalist attitude among the prisoners and the beginning of a new nation.

In addition, the setting of Australia is of particular interest when comparing it to America, as both countries underwent colonisation. Yet, whereas in America the settlers arrived by choice, in Australia they were sent there involuntarily as a punishment. Hughes recalls the fate of his country in recognising how “the British . . . demonized Australia . . . by chaining their criminals on its innocent dry coast. It was to become the continent of sin” (44). This historical context is important when reading *The Fatal Shore* to highlight how Australia was initially seen by many as the land of suffering, born from a need to house convicts, in sharp contrast to America which had been seen as a place of opportunity.

Hughes also relates to the social, cultural and historical context of *The Fatal Shore* through the two settings which he uses to introduce his key themes: the Industrial Revolution in Britain, the deportation of a criminal class to Australia, and the British colonisation of Australia. The novel analyses events which took place in both countries and reveals the circumstances which surrounded them from the perspective of those who experienced the convict transportation system.

Through his novel, Hughes retells the British colonisation of Australia from a postcolonial perspective and destabilises the idea that the convicts' story was not worth telling. Previously to his work, little was written about "the feelings and experiences of these men and women . . . They were statistics, absences, and finally embarrassments" (Hughes 11). *The Fatal Shore*, therefore, proves that the true history of Australia is not complete without their voices.

When analysing *The Fatal Shore*, it is important to bear in mind, nevertheless, that the novel was published in London in 1986. Therefore, the postcolonial setting in which it was written affects the social circumstances of the novels. Hughes' postcolonial writing reflects on the events that took place during the British colonisation of Australia and their historical and social consequences. By looking at the historical and social past of the country, *The Fatal Shore* highlights its importance in the present. It ensures that the country's history is viewed from a different, more objective, perspective in order to demonstrate how these contexts continue to influence the present.

### **3.3 Plot, Structure and Style**

The plot of *The Fatal Shore* starts in England and ends in Australia. The novel begins with a Georgian setting, which marks the birth and growth of a criminal class and then documents the resultant deportation of the convicted British citizens. This choice of plot allows Hughes to chronicle historical events which took place in both countries and focus on the arrival of colonists, as well as the settler experience in Australia.

The structure of *The Fatal Shore* begins with a linear plot that follows the eighteenth-century events surrounding the Industrial Revolution in England. Hughes employs a chronological structure to present the rise in crime and follow the deportation of British convicts to Australia. Upon arrival to Australia, however, the author then changes the structure of the plot to follow a non-linear narrative. Hughes does this in order to place focus more on the topics he addresses, rather than on the years in which they occurred. Thus, the key theme of the British colonisation of Australia is presented through a non-linear structure since it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the colonial concepts, exploitation and oppression. In addition, by way of employing a non-linear plot, Hughes is

able to switch between characters in order to give various perspectives on several historical events. Consequently, this choice of structure is key in giving the reader a true sense of what life was like for the many colonial settlers in Australia.

In his novel, Hughes is a third-person narrator as he does not take part in the story that he tells. Though he is knowledgeable of the events which take place, he is arguably limited in his narration given that, for the most part, he is unable to relay the emotion and thoughts of his characters. In addition, the novel is not entirely objective as, despite relying on facts, the plot of *The Fatal Shore* is portrayed from the author's point of view. Due to the fact that there was little information available in the form of historical documentation, Hughes combines official government documents with convicts' testimonies. He does this in order to reveal as much objective information as possible, as well as to maintain the reader's interest through engaging them in detailed subjective accounts. Hughes' choice of narration, therefore, allows the novel to acknowledge the unique experiences of multiple people and provide their different perspectives in reference to the colonial events all around Australia.

In terms of language use, the author chooses to employ technical vocabulary throughout *The Fatal Shore*, particularly when referring to the voyages and the settlers' reactions to the plants and animals in their new surroundings. When describing the voyages which led to the discovery of *terra australis*, Hughes includes nautical jargon such as "at the end of 1770 Cook was ready for the homeward voyage . . . more than 2,400 miles of New Zealand's coastline were chartered" (52). He also makes use of specific vocabulary when describing the fauna and flora with botanical names, as in "on its shallow flats immense stingrays, *Dasyatis brevicaudatus*, were caught" (Hughes 55). The author's choice of language style, in the form of scientific and technical vocabulary, creates a more descriptive image in the reader's mind, ensuring an understanding of the settlers' complexity of this land. Hughes also includes images, such as the scene of a public hanging in 1749 in London, to further explain the social setting which led to the British colonisation of Australia.



### 3.4 Characterisation

In *The Fatal Shore*, the characters are not fictional, they are all real people who lived in the past, with unique narratives and perspective on the historical events that occurred within it. Hughes introduces his characters and relates them to the common experience of colonial events, within the British colonisation of Australia.

The main focus of *The Fatal Shore* is the settler experience as part of the British colonisation of Australia. Hughes approaches this focus from the point of view of those who lived through it, yet he does not turn to just one character. Instead, he places various convicts as his focal point in order to portray the overall consequences of the events on the country, rather than how they affected one individual's everyday life. When referring to the convicts, Hughes often describes their experiences in Australia with explicit references to the ways in which they were tortured, "One prisoner named Joseph Mansbury had been flogged so often – some 2,000 lashes in 3 years – that his back appeared quite bare of flesh" (115). Yet, the author seems to suggest that despite their harsh treatment, even as convicts, their life in Australia was preferable to what it would have been back in England leading into the nineteenth century. This is due to the fact that Hughes portrays the prisons in England as "holes in which prisoners could be forgotten for a while. Their purpose was not reform, but terror and sublimation" (37).

Through his choice of convict characters, the author questions how they were portrayed in the history of the founding of Australia. In fact, for a long time, it was denied by many that the convict system had marked Australia as a nation. Hughes, therefore, sets out to uncover documents written by the convicts in order to demonstrate their role in the history of Australia and rewrite their silenced perspectives on historical events. He reveals how the first criminals sent to Australia were often depicted as dangerous thieves and murderers, doomed to a life of crime since "One hundred and fifty years ago it was assumed that men and women chose a life of crime" (167). Yet, *The Fatal Shore* argues that the idea of the most dangerous criminals being deported was erroneous, given that "the atrocious criminals remained in England, while their victims, innocent and manly, founded the Australian democracy" (159). The novel reconsiders historical representations of the convicts and challenges historical stereotypes of them. Hughes, therefore, achieves one of the aims of postcolonial literature through his

writing, which questions previous portrayals of marginalised cultures.

*The Fatal Shore* also looks at the representation of female convicts who were sent to Australia. These women were “naturally thought of as whores. The assumption was simply made that any female convict transported must be ‘loose’” (Newman 350). However, many of the female prisoners who were sent to Australia were not initially prostitutes. As Hughes points out, “their fate was foisted on them by a tyrannous male power structure” (245). For many of them, it was not until they arrived on Australian shore, and as a result of the harsh circumstances they experienced there, that they were forced to turn to prostitution as a way to survive. Through the characterisation of convicts in *The Fatal Shore*, therefore, Hughes aims to show the true past of Australia. He forces the reader to reconsider how colonial literature made use of stereotypes, and sympathise with the pain the convicts experienced as a result of their deportation to Australia.

Due to Hughes’ focus on the convict experience, he fails to look at the British colonisation of Australia from the point of view of the Aboriginal Australians. Although *The Fatal Shore* does introduce the Indigenous population of Australia, they are always represented from the author’s perspective, and from the point of view of those settling there.

Throughout the novel, the Aboriginals are consistently seen in direct contrast to the convict settlers, even up to their survival skills as “the first white Australian settlers were so conspicuously unfit for survival in the new land that they lived on the edge of starvation in the midst of what seemed natural abundance to the Aborigines” (Hughes 7). From the start, it was clear to the settlers that the Aboriginal population was much more equipped to survive in such an environment. It was also made clear from the outset that the Aboriginal Australians were unwilling to give up their land to the colonists. Upon arriving to Australia, Hughes quotes Captain James Cook’s diary entry which noted that “All they seem’d to want was for us to be gone” (54). In fact, the main divide between the Aboriginals and the colonists was over the issue of property. Before the English colonial settlers arrived in 1788, Indigenous Australians had “occupied the continent for more than 65,000 years” (Jalata 1). Despite their history on the land, the British viewed the Indigenous as primitive, which led them to believe that they could colonise the land at their own will. Hughes reflects on this idea in

*The Fatal Shore* and concludes that the fact they appeared to be “culturally static primitives . . . seemed to eliminate any claims they might have had to prior ownership. To some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century eyes, this invalidated them as human beings” (12). In eighteenth-century Britain, property was seen as a way of showing social status and formed an important part of class structure. For some British colonists, therefore, the fact that Aboriginal peoples had no sense of property to demonstrate their social status justified the need to civilise them. However, colonisers, such as Captain James Cook, recognised that as a result of their lack of property and materialistic belongings, Aboriginal Australians “may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth . . . but in reality they are far happier than we Europeans . . . They live in Tranquillity which is not disturb’d by the Inequality of Condition” (Hughes 54). Even back then, some settlers were able to value the simplicity of Aboriginal cultures, which allowed them to live happily with relatively little social inequality, in the form of possessions, in comparison with the British settlers. Other settlers, however, “considered natives as ‘orient’. What West is not is regarded as ‘orient’” (Nandana, “A Postcolonial Overview” 11). A postcolonial approach to literature highlights the existence of Manichean aesthetics, “a process of polarizing society, culture and the people into colonizer and colonized terms with their binary oppositional category of good and evil” (Ahmed and Abbas Khan 58). Many literary works compared the two cultures to prove the superiority of the West. Hughes also compares the Indigenous and Western cultures in *The Fatal Shore* to demonstrate how dissimilar their lives were. Yet, he does not represent Aboriginal Australians as evil or degenerate. Instead, he looks at them in contrast to the British settlers and shows how each social group played a part in the creation of a new Australian identity. His characters, therefore, represent the birth and growth of colonial Australia, which shaped the country into what it is today.

### **3.5 Themes and Symbols**

The themes of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and the deportation of a criminal class to Australia and the British colonisation of Australia are essential to *The Fatal Shore*. In his search for the true history of his country, Hughes uses his key themes to reclaim the past from a postcolonial perspective. Within the theme of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and the deportation of a criminal class to

Australia, the author connects with the past from a postcolonial perspective as he engages in questioning the historical events of each country. He reclaims Australia's history by readdressing colonial events which occurred in his selected colonial setting. Hughes also connects with the past within the theme of the British colonisation of Australia by way of employing the concepts of exploitation and oppression. He connects these terms with the past by using them to highlight the colonial ideology that existed within it. These concepts reveal the past from a critical perspective, reflecting on the consequences of the British colonisation of Australia for both the settlers and the Aboriginal peoples. Together, therefore, the author's choice of themes plays a part in depicting a more informative historical past of Britain and the once-colonised nation, Australia.

### **3.5.1 The Industrial Revolution in Britain and the Deportation of a Criminal Class to Australia**

The Industrial Revolution began in Britain in the eighteenth century and saw a "change from an agrarian and handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing" (Britannica). This historical movement led to a boost in factory production and gave way to urbanisation, the mass movement of a population from the countryside to the city. Though urbanisation was generally welcomed by the country as a whole, citizens from the lowest social class suffered from its negative consequences. For the poorest families in the city centre, poverty levels reached higher than ever and many were forced to turn to crime as a way to survive. In *The Fatal Shore*, Hughes shows how this social context resulted in the rise in crime. He demonstrates the impact of a soaring birth rate on the job market as "between 1750 and 1770 the population of London doubled . . . the labour market was saturated with the young. No mechanisms existed for the effective relief of mass unemployment" (Hughes 25-26). England was not socially or economically prepared for a mass unemployment problem and, with the lack of financial support, many young people had no other choice but to steal in order to get by. In response to the sharp increase in crime, a harsher penal system was introduced to discourage citizens from committing even the pettiest of offences. Hughes takes this historical era in *The Fatal Shore* and links it to the emergence of class consciousness. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, the social class structure became more fixed than ever and led those

who committed crime, and the working class, to be labelled and seen as other in England. In his novel, the author takes the historical event of the Industrial Revolution and highlights its role as the catalyst for the birth of the criminal class, seen as “a distinct social group” which “produced crime”, and lead to a “subterranean existence below and between the lower social structures of England” (Hughes 165). *The Fatal Shore* begins in this social context and then narrates the consequences of those convicted, linking the eighteenth-century events in England to its second theme, deportation to Australia.

Deportation was the established sanction for prisoners who had been convicted and sentenced to long-term imprisonment or capital punishment. It aimed to do “four things: sublimate, deter, reform and colonise” (Hughes 582). Instead of adding to the already overcrowded prisons, or having convicts publicly hung in the gallows, they were sent to Australia in order to help build a colony. Once they had arrived, prisoners were to provide free labour in the established penal island so as to benefit the British Empire. In *The Fatal Shore*, the author recalls the motive behind the transportation of convicts to penal colonies in Australia, as they would supply “Britain with a large labour force, consisting entirely of people who, having forfeited their rights, could be sent to distant colonies of a growing Empire to work at jobs that no free settler would do” (Hughes 40). The authorities were desperate to colonise Australia as part of their Empire, at the same time as freeing the streets of England from crime, especially of murderers and prostitutes. Yet, contrary to popular belief, the first convicts were not murderers or prostitutes. Hughes points out that “Not one person was shipped out in 1787 for murder or rape . . . No woman on the First Fleet . . . had been transported for prostitution” (71). The main category of crime for those deported was minor theft. Such was the case of James Grace, an eleven-year-old, convicted of stealing “ten yards of ribbon and a pair of silk stockings” (Hughes 72). Hence, the idea that deportation was effective in freeing up the city streets from the most dangerous of criminals was more of a social construct than necessarily factual. Furthermore, the conditions on the First Fleet for the petty criminals were deplorable, with almost 1500 people spread among eleven deportation ships. In his novel, Hughes explains how the prisoners were locked under the ship deck, and how one captain revealed “the stench was so powerful that it was scarcely possible to stand over them” (79). Under such harsh

conditions, many died during the voyage on the way to Australia. Those who did make it to the country's shores were subjected to between seven and fourteen years of labour, depending on the severity of their crime. *The Fatal Shore* describes how one man, Thomas Hawell, was sentenced to deportation to Australia for "seven years for heinously stealing one live hen to the value of 2d., and one dead hen to the value of 2d" (Hughes 72). However, many convicts found they were unable to return home after carrying out their sentences and were forced to live out the rest of their days there. For many men, like Thomas Hawell, therefore, being sentenced to deportation to Australia for seven years ultimately meant they would never return to England. Hence, Hughes' theme of deportation reveals the creation of a new society in Australia, a nation that was born out of the British transportation system which did not allow the convicts to return home.

### **3.5.2 The British Colonisation of Australia**

*The Fatal Shore* looks at the concepts of oppression and exploitation on behalf of the convicts, as a result of the British colonisation of Australia. According to Cambridge Dictionary, oppression can be defined as "a situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom" ("Meaning of Oppression"). This definition is applicable to those who were sent to Australia, the oppressed citizens of a lower social class. These working-class citizens were unfairly governed by a bourgeois society, which wanted to free the Georgian streets of crime and poverty, so they were sentenced to deportation. Hughes demonstrates this fact by pointing out that the main goal of the transportation system "was less to punish individual crimes than to uproot an enemy class from the British social fabric" (168). Kiernan emphasises how this type of oppression was effective as it was "more likely to produce a cowed, submissive mass than men capable of rebellion". Thus, the aim in oppressing the convicts was to create a compliant class which did not question the idea of working for free in order to give back to their society. The second concept, exploitation, can be defined as "the use of something in order to get an advantage from it" (Cambridge Dictionary, "Meaning of Exploitation"). Not only were the convicts oppressed by the society that they were born into, but Britain then went on to exploit them for their free labour. The deported citizens were used to economically benefit Britain in the formation of its Empire and colonise Australia.

Hughes also looks at the themes of the British colonisation of Australia, and the terms exploitation and oppression, in reference to the Indigenous population. Despite not having been convicted, the fate of the Aboriginal Australians was also determined by the British colonisation of Australia. This was due to the fact that the penal system displaced the Indigenous population from their land and forced them to live under British law. *The Fatal Shore* highlights how the act of depriving Aboriginals of their territory “was to condemn them to spiritual death – a destruction of their past, their future and their opportunities of transcendence” (Hughes 18). Newman expands Hughes’ idea in explaining how exploiting the land resulted in the destruction of most Aboriginal cultures, “if not through the total eradication of the people, then by the imposition of Western culture, not the least of which were two drugs of the West: Christianity and alcohol” (350-351). Their land was taken from them and exploited to economically benefit the British Empire, and the social practices of the colonial settlers were pushed upon them. The lives and cultures of the Aboriginals, therefore, were altered as a direct result of the British colonisation of Australia. In addition, the oppression of the British convicts by the penal system led to a growing sense of anger, resulting in Indigenous peoples becoming scapegoats. From a postcolonial perspective, Fanon points out that the concept of a scapegoat in white society is based on myths of progress and civilisation (194). The fact that the prisoners viewed themselves to come from a more progressed, and civilised, nation than the Indigenous population meant that they resented them for the hardship they experienced in Australia. Hence, Hughes argues that the origin of racist attitudes stems from the prisoners who, “galled by exile, the lowest of the low . . . desperately needed to believe in a class inferior to themselves. The Aboriginals answered that need. Australian racism began with the convicts” (94-95). Thus, *The Fatal Shore* highlights how the Indigenous population of Australia was oppressed by the settlers, and more specifically by the persecuted prisoners. Hughes shows how the native inhabitants were important in creating a sense of worth for the convicts as, in comparison to Aboriginals, they no longer considered themselves to be at the bottom of the food chain. Destabilising this mindset of cultural superiority has been, and continues to be, one of the main struggles of decolonisation. As postcolonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o argues, in order to gain cultural liberation from colonialism, we must decolonise the mind and free it

of colonial concepts (16). Hence, through successful decolonisation of the mind, the colonial concepts of oppression and exploitation would cease to exist. Nevertheless, *The Fatal Shore* ends with the discovery of gold, suggesting that it cannot be considered as a land of punishment anymore. "Gold was the mineral that put an end to transportation, because its discovery plucked off the last rags of terror that clung to the name of Australia" (Hughes 571). Hughes, therefore, implies that Australia will no longer serve as a penal colony which oppresses and exploits its inhabitants. Instead, he leaves an open ending so as to encourage the reader to envisage a future free of colonial rule and its injustice.

Within the theme of the British colonisation of Australia, Hughes also looks at the topic of disease. As a result of the close contact between the English settlers and the Indigenous population, many Aboriginals were exposed to a wave of epidemics for the first time. West and Murphy noted how "the worst epidemic was smallpox, which killed an estimated 50 percent of the population in a matter of months in 1789" (42). Others, such as the postcolonial historian Clendinnen, have gone as far as to say that "smallpox was let loose by the British to destroy the possibility of Aboriginal resistance". In his novel, Hughes reveals how the spread of diseases, during the British colonisation of Australia, was viewed by many as facilitating "Destiny's plan for the blacks" (281). *The Fatal Shore* looks at the devastating effects of the epidemics on the native population, "shot like kangaroos and poisoned like dogs, ravaged by European diseases and addictions, hunted by laymen and pestered by missionaries" (120). In fact, Hughes reports how it "took less than seventy-five years of white settlement to wipe out most of the people who had occupied Tasmania for some thirty thousand years; it was the only true genocide in English colonial history" (120). Through the topic of the British colonisation of Australia, therefore, Hughes warns about how the oldest culture in Australia was nearly wiped out as a result of British colonists arriving and occupying their land.

Finally, through the theme of the British colonisation of Australia, Hughes reflects on the surprising success of the nation from a postcolonial point of view. The deportation of the members of the criminal class to Australia was an eighteenth-century social experiment that many believed would rid the English



streets of crime. It was then assumed that this group of people would continue their life of crime in Australia, as they were deemed incapable of forming a law-abiding society. These people, however, “in spite of their inhuman treatment, managed to rise about their past. . . against incredible odds . . . managed to recreate their lives and push on to establish themselves in a new, even harsh environment” (Newman 357). In fact, a successful society was born out of this social experiment. Newman also argues that the interesting features of this social process are “the other characteristics that were both attributed to, and actually were, behaviors of the convicts and how they produced important features of Australian culture that remain even today” (Newman 349). The image of the bushranger, for example, arose from the latter period of colonisation in which criminals who escaped into the wilderness of Australia developed survival skills. *The Fatal Shore* shows the appearance of these characteristics in the convict penal colonies, which led to the birth of a successful society and the creation of a new identity and culture in Australia.

#### **4. Comparative Analysis of *My Place* (1987) by Sally Morgan and *The Fatal Shore* (1986) by Robert Hughes**

##### **4.1 Setting**

*My Place* and *The Fatal Shore* both make use of their settings to elaborate their representation of Aboriginal Australians and convicts. Sally Morgan’s *My Place* is set in Perth, Australia, and the plot is influenced by her relationship with her choice of setting. Morgan attempts to understand her surroundings in order to gain a sense of belonging and connect with her community. For this reason, her setting does not change from the location of Perth throughout most of the novel, apart from when she visits Corunna Downs Station to discover the truth about her country’s past. Robert Hughes’ *The Fatal Shore*, however, begins with its plot in England in order to present the historical, social and cultural contexts of the events which led the British to colonise Australia. The author looks at how Australia was considered to be the solution to growing crime rates in England, which led to the colonisation of his country. Hughes uses the two settings to assist in elaborating his plot, at the same time as allowing him to represent the settlers’ individual experiences as a part of the colonisation of Australia.

Morgan and Hughes both use their settings to further develop their key themes. In *My Place*, Morgan looks at the history of Aboriginals in Australia through the theme of identity and family. In doing so, she poses a key question to the reader as to whether previous historical accounts about her country and its people, have been truthful. Morgan's novel, therefore, sets out to address the past of Australia in order to rewrite it. She also makes use of an Australian setting to provide a cultural and social background in which to reflect on what it means to be an Aboriginal in postcolonial Australia. Hughes, on the other hand, uses his two settings to develop the theme of deportation. After initiating the plot in eighteenth-century England, he turns to the setting of Australia, where he examines the unique tales of the deported convicts. Hughes' choice of setting creates a connection between the convicts who share the common experiences of deportation and form part of the colonisation of Australia. Hughes highlights how the British convict transport system, as part of British colonialism, led to the creation of a new type of identity in Australia and the birth of a new nation, which has shaped the postcolonial setting from which he writes.

It is important to note that both novels were written and published in a postcolonial setting. Sally Morgan's *My Place* was published in Australia in 1987, and Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore* was published in London in 1986. Yet, despite being produced in a postcolonial setting, both of the literary works look at the past of Australia. In doing so, the two authors coincide in their aim to reveal the true colonial past of their country and its significance in the present. *My Place* and *The Fatal Shore* acknowledge the role of Aboriginal Australians in the history of Australia, which demonstrates their cultural importance in postcolonial society.

#### **4.2 Plot, Structure and Style**

The two authors follow different forms of plot, structure and style in their novels. *My Place* is written in an autobiographical storytelling mode. The plot begins with Morgan as a young girl and reflects on her memories of early childhood, a time when she was not aware of her Aboriginal heritage. *My Place* then follows her search for a sense of belonging, leading to the discovery of the truth of her ancestral past. The structure of the novel, in the form of an introduction and three personal narratives, is reminiscent of an Aboriginal oral storytelling tradition, used in many Indigenous cultures. This allows the history of Aboriginals in Australia to

be rewritten from the point of view of her family members. Thus, the structure of *My Place* presents a different perspective on Australia's past given that the plot is told by Aboriginals who suffered the consequences of the British colonisation. In terms of style, Morgan's choice of the first-person means that she participates in the story she tells. This style of narrative allows her to be subjective in portraying her emotions. In addition, the narratives of her family members, in first-person form, also ensure that the reader is empathetic and understanding of the challenges they face in acknowledging their true identity.

*The Fatal Shore* follows a chronological order. Hughes' plot begins in 1787, with the rise of a criminal class in England and narrates the beginnings of convict deportation to Australia that same year. The structure of the novel allows him to chronicle the events which took place in both countries, between 1787 and 1868, in order to provide an accurate and complete historical account. His choice of style also permits him to look at the convicts' individual experiences, comparing how, despite the strict regime of colonial Australia, they still lived better than they did in Georgian Britain. In contrast to Morgan's choice of first person, Hughes' narrates his novel in the third person. This type of narration means he is able to distance himself from the story and retell the history of the two countries from a more objective perspective, as he includes various accounts of the past.

### **4.3 Characterisation**

In terms of characterisation, the two novels are alike in that they both place real people as their characters. Yet, whereas some of the characters in *My Place* are still alive, *The Fatal Shore* places its focus on people from the past.

*My Place* takes three of Morgan's family members, and the author herself, as its main characters. The family members are initially introduced from the narrator's point of view, though they then go on to develop their own personalities through the telling of their unique narratives. Morgan places her focus on characterising the Aboriginal Australian and employs each of her characters to represent the different types of Aboriginal identities. These identities, seen in a postcolonial context, range from Arthur, who is unashamed of his heritage, to Daisy, who consistently denies it for fear of the consequences. *My Place*, therefore, takes a more personal approach in its characterisation. The use of four related protagonists allows Morgan to reflect on the events in the plot from an

individual, and Aboriginal, perspective.

*The Fatal Shore*, on the other hand, takes more general characters who are not related to the author. Unlike Morgan, Hughes does not place his main focus on Aboriginal Australians, but on the British convict settlers instead. The deported characters are introduced in regard to the historical events in which they partake. Yet, rather than describe their individual personalities and identities, Hughes employs each of his characters to reflect on the new social and cultural circumstances that surrounded them. He looks at the convicts' different perspectives on the British colonisation of Australia and quotes their opinions on the historical events they witness so as to retell the history of his country. Rather than Morgan's individual perspective, Hughes employs a more general approach in his characterisation through his use of various unrelated characters. This allows *The Fatal Shore* to reflect on the historical impact of colonial events on its members of society, and the lasting effects of colonialism on Australia as a whole.

#### **4.4 Themes**

The two novels reflect on the theme of the British colonisation of Australia to highlight the impact of colonialism on their country. This theme shows how the fate of Australia was marked by the events that occurred within the colonial period. From a postcolonial perspective, McLeod quotes Fanon in examining the psychological effects of colonialism, concluding that "those effected are doomed to hold a traumatic belief in their own inferiority" (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 21). Through the theme of the British colonisation of Australia, the impact of colonialism can be seen in both novels given that they show how the identity of their characters was determined by this historical event. Yet, while the theme is used in *My Place* to reflect on the lasting consequences of British colonialism for the Indigenous inhabitants and their identities, *The Fatal Shore* uses it to look at the psychological impact the historical event had on the settlers within the penal colonies and its consequence in determining the future of Australia.

In *My Place*, Morgan looks at the main themes of identity and family, in addition to the theme of British colonialism. She uses animals, fire and the hospital as symbols to develop her themes and highlight the underlying colonial discourse she wants to portray. *My Place* was pioneering in its choice of themes given that it confronts many issues surrounding postcolonial Aboriginals which

had not previously been discussed. One such issue that Morgan confronts is the existence of colonial ideology in postcolonial Australia. Morgan calls colonialism out for its dominant role which continues to shape Australia for the Aboriginals, and protests the need to change the colonial mentality, as overturning colonialism “requires decolonising the mind” (McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* 22). Since the publication of *My Place*, many Aboriginal people have gone on to write their own stories, adding to and developing the new genre in Australia’s literary canon.

In *The Fatal Shore*, Hughes looks at the main themes of the Industrial Revolution and the deportation of a criminal class to Australia, in addition to the theme of the British colonisation of Australia. Unlike Morgan, however, he does not employ symbols to develop his themes. Instead, Hughes elaborates on his themes through the use of narratives which demonstrate the social impact of the historical events both the society of the convicts and the Aboriginal cultures. These personal accounts also serve to illustrate key colonial terms, such as exploitation and oppression. Hughes highlights these concepts through his choice of themes to call out colonial discourse for its historical representation of Australia, and reveal the truth about the history of his country.

#### **4.5 Representation of the Aboriginal Australian**

Sally Morgan and Robert Hughes both represent Aboriginal Australians in their novels. The two literary works not only look at the context which surrounded and defined the history of the Indigenous population but also at the events which marked the history of Australia. At the same time, from a postcolonial approach to literature, both texts have value in revealing colonial ideologies. The two novels highlight the existence of dominant beliefs during colonisation, which determined the fate of the Aboriginal Australians, and continue to do so in the present.

The type of Aboriginal Australian that is represented by each author, nevertheless, differs. *My Place* looks at the postcolonial representation of the Aboriginal Australian. Throughout the novel, Morgan reflects on the lives of her family members and looks at what it means to be of Aboriginal heritage in postcolonial Australia. She employs Gladys, Daisy and Arthur to highlight the different types of postcolonial identities, in addition to her own. Yet, at the same time, their narratives serve to demonstrate how Aboriginal identity is fragmented and diverse. Morgan, therefore, does not represent the Aboriginal Australian as

one single identity, but instead as a concept with a complex cultural context which means they cannot be represented through a single definition.

Contrary to the postcolonial representation in *My Place*, *The Fatal Shore* represents the colonised Aboriginal Australian. Throughout the novel, Hughes narrates the society of the Indigenous population during the British colonisation of Australia. He represents the Aboriginal Australian through colonist descriptions, which highlights how they were seen by the British settlers as primitive and less developed. In *The Fatal Shore*, the Indigenous population is seen as the antithesis of the British convicts due to the fact that Hughes represents them in direct contrast to the colonial settlers and convicts. Yet, Hughes also highlights how the labelling of a criminal class in Georgian England meant that the convicts, just like the Aboriginals, were seen as the other too. He, therefore, shows the hypocritical nature of the idea of civilisation, given that the concept is defined within colonial discourse. *The Fatal Shore* reveals the historical importance of the British colonisation of Australia in demonstrating the role of British colonialism in shaping the Indigenous population. Hughes shows how the Aboriginal Australians were oppressed by the penal system as they were persecuted by the convicts within it. *The Fatal Shore*, therefore, acknowledges racist colonial attitudes, as well as the impact of the British colonisation of Australian in determining the history and culture of its Indigenous population.

## **5. Conclusion**

*My Place* and *The Fatal Shore* are two postcolonial literary works within the Australian literary canon which are both fundamental in educating about the history and culture of Australia. *My Place* reflects on the culture of postcolonial Australia from an Aboriginal point of view and explores the history of Aboriginal Australians. *The Fatal Shore*, on the other hand, looks at the history of colonial Australia from the perspective of the deported British convicts and sets out to describe the new culture, and identity, that arose from their arrival to Australia.

Analysing the novels from a postcolonial point of view reveals the importance of applying a colonial context to *My Place* and *The Fatal Shore*. As a result of applying this context, the colonial history which the texts represent and reveal are fully understood. Furthermore, through applying the colonial context of

the British colonisation of Australia to both literary works, an understanding of the historical importance of this event is achieved. The two novels reveal the impact that British colonialism has had on Australia as they demonstrate how it has determined the history and culture of the country and its citizens.

The two novels also play a role in shaping views on the history of Australia. Both *My Place* and *The Fatal Shore* question past representations of their characters in order to draw attention to the fact that many previous literary works on the history and culture of Australia were conditioned by colonial discourse. Both pieces of literature, therefore, aim to overturn colonialism by destabilising colonial values and invalidating the dominant perspective from which Australia was represented to the world. Thus, through their writing, Morgan and Hughes set out to rewrite the history of Australia from a postcolonial perspective. They reclaim the past of Australia by inviting the reader to reconsider the colonial portrayals of both the Indigenous population and the deported convicts. In doing so, they reveal the power of literature and dominant ideologies in representing marginalised cultures, not only to themselves but also to the rest of the world.

*My Place* and *The Fatal Shore's* representations of the marginalised cultures, nevertheless, differ. *My Place* represents the marginalised voices of Aboriginal Australians in postcolonial Australia. Morgan revisits and reinterprets the colonial past of her country to gain a greater understanding of Aboriginal history in Australia. As a result, she reveals the consequences of the British colonisation on the identities and cultures of Aboriginal peoples within her postcolonial setting. Hughes, on the other hand, represents the Aboriginal Australian in the colonial past in comparison to the marginalised British convicts who were deported to Australia. In doing so, he reveals the role that both the British convicts and the Indigenous population of Australia played in the creation of a new Australian identity and the cultural development which led to the birth of the postcolonial nation. Consequently, the two authors demonstrate how the historical past of Australia has determined the identity and culture of the country and its citizens today. Yet, despite their different representations, the two authors coincide in that their novels rewrite history from a postcolonial perspective. As a result, both Morgan and Hughes recognise the cultural importance of one of the oldest civilisations in the world, the Aboriginal Australian.

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