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"My Two Countries Firmly Under My Feet":
Explorations of Multicultural Identity in the Fiction of Amelia Batistich
and Yvonne du Fresne

by Nina Nola

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
University of Auckland 2000
This thesis offers a detailed reading of the fiction of the Dalmatian New Zealand author Amelia Batistich and the Danish New Zealand author Yvonne du Fresne, from the perspective of multicultural literary criticism. It draws strongly, throughout, on interviews and discussions with the authors themselves, and on their personal papers. The Introduction explores the term "multicultural literary criticism", examines its significant development in theory and practice in Australia (especially in the writings of Sneja Gunew), and discusses the challenging issues raised by its use in a bicultural context, in New Zealand. The body of the thesis is organised into two parallel sections, the first (of five chapters) on Batistich and the second (of four chapters) on du Fresne. Each section begins with an introduction to the writing life of the author concerned, with particular reference to the forces shaping her sense of identity as a New Zealander from an ethnic minority community. Subsequent chapters then discuss chronologically the development of the author's work from short fiction and articles through to the later novels. Each author's struggle to find a fictional voice which expressed her identity as a hybrid New Zealander is highlighted. The role of editors and publishers in shaping the migrant voice of both authors is also explored, and the reception of both authors' works by critics often unwilling or unable to read for difference in a literary landscape dominated by the perception of New Zealand as socially homogeneous. The thesis argues - in an extended enquiry into the constructedness of identity - that both authors have struggled throughout their careers to find a place for both themselves and their characters in New Zealand literature. The bibliography contains a checklist of the published writings of both authors, primary and secondary material related to the field of ethnic minority writing, and a checklist of other migrant writings and creative multicultural works in New Zealand.
"No matter how far fate has blown the frail tree of my life across foreign lands, its roots have always sucked nourishment from that little barren clod of soil from which it sprung."

Ivan Meštrović (Dalmatian sculptor, 1883-1962.)

"The earth is our mother, wherever we find ourselves."

Amelia Batistich, The Olive and the Vine.
"Today a gap had closed; I felt my two countries firmly under my feet. Both equal."

Yvonne du Fresne, *Motherland* p. 205

**My Two Countries**

Here is the fern, the kauri sapling straight as a larch
Young, like my country, strong.

There is the olive, grey with dreams
Crouched over the stony land -
like a woman in childbirth.

Both gave me life -
the kauri and the olive.

Here my father ate the bread of exile.
There my grandfather ate the black bread of poverty -
By the blue Adriatic
But what matter now?

My grandfather sleeps in his own earth -
His bones have melded with his own soil -

Alien, my father sleeps on Hillsborough Hill
overlooking the Manukau.

But here was his work -
Here was his home.

Amelia Batistich (1985)
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS -

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