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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
I, Judith Ann Thistleon-Martin, state that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

Signed
For my parents

John Edward Terence Thistleton
(1920-1982)

Merryl Thistleton (nee Biggers)
(1924-1996)
A Note on Usage

In this study the term 'Aborigine' is used to mean all peoples of Aboriginal Australian descent. The term is capitalized because it refers to a specific population, the indigenous people of Australia.

In such value-oriented fields as history, sociology and art, labels become quickly outmoded; most usages in this thesis incorporate current self-definition within groups as well as my own preferences. In a chronology of time such as this study reflects, however, some racist terms have been included and placed in inverted commas. At no time is any disrespect intended.
Abstract


This thesis is a seminal in-depth study of how non-indigenous writers and illustrators construct Aboriginal childhood in children’s fiction from 1841 – 1998 and focuses not only on what these texts say about Aboriginal childhood but also what they neglect to say, what they gloss over and what they elide. This study probes not only the construction of Aboriginal childhood in children’s fiction, but explores the slippage between the lived and imagined experiences which inform the textual and illustrative images of non-Aboriginal writers. This study further contends that neo-colonial variations on the themes informing these images remain part of Australian children’s fiction.

The argument draws on the work of recent postcolonial theorists, most notably Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) who state that all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination. Aboriginal childhood has played a limited but telling role in Australian children’s literature. The very lack of attention to Aboriginal children in Australian children’s fiction – the white ‘silence’ – is resonant with denial and self-justification. Although it concentrates on constructions of Aboriginal childhood in white Australian children’s fiction, this study highlights the role that racial imagery can play in any society, past or present by securing the unwitting allegiance of the young to values and institutions threatened by the forces of change. By examining the image of the ‘Other’ through four broad thematic bands or ‘myths’ - the Aboriginal child as the primitive; the identification of the Aboriginal child with the landscape; the Aboriginal child constructed as the marginalised and as the assimilated and noting the essential similarities that circulate among the chosen texts, this study attempts to reveal how pervasive and controlling the logic of racial and national superiority continues to be. By exploring the dissemination of images of Aboriginal childhood in this way, this study argues that long-lived distortions and misconceptions will become clearer.
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I wish to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr Francis De Groen, for her unwavering support, guidance and patience. Louise Anemaat, curator of the Children’s Literature Collection at the Mitchell Library, for constantly tracing my requests about children’s books as well as spending many hours with me discussing possible research directions. My colleagues, Dr Helen Woodward and Dr Catherine Sinclair for encouraging me to keep going. My husband John, my children Allyson, Andrew and Elise for allowing me the luxury of uninterrupted time.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................. V

Introduction ....................................................... 1

Chapter One: Memory, Place and ‘Metonymies of Presence’ in the Autobiographical Work of Charlotte Barton, Ellen Campbell and Jeannie Gunn 1841-1905. ........................................ 21

Chapter Two: ‘Seven Little Piccaninnies Meet Uncle Remus and Sambo’: Constructions of Aboriginal Childhood in the Australian Picture Story Book 1919-1971. ......................................................... 58

Chapter Three: The Documentary ‘Picture Book’ and the Construction of Aboriginal Childhood: A Problematic Example – Axel Poignant’s Piccaninny Walkabout ...................................................... 94

Chapter Four: Australian Picture Books 1989-1998 – From Witchetty Grubs to Welfare. ............................................................. 126

Chapter Five: The European Quest Motif and the Construction of the Traditional Aboriginal Boy. ....................................................... 165

Chapter Six: Constructing the Aboriginal Girl: Daughters of a Broken Dreaming. ................................................................. 214

Chapter Seven: Constructing Contemporary Masculinity: The Aboriginal Boy 1971-1993. ................................................................. 263

Conclusion 303

References 332

339
Introduction

The concept of childhood is not biological fact. Its definition depends on, and is determined by, the culture to which it belongs. The ideology of childhood is constantly changing to suit the needs of the society from which it is derived. Australian childhood is no exception. The history of European childhood was, until recently, a much neglected area of research, both in Australia and overseas. Aboriginal childhood is presented as one part of a much larger, traditional Aboriginal life cycle. Anthropologists, and more recently historians, have written a great deal about traditional Aboriginal life but much less on child-rearing practices. A specific history of Aboriginal childhood remains unwritten.

Children's literature is written for children, rarely by them. Accordingly it reflects not so much the reality of childhood as how adults perceive that reality. The literature a society produces specifically for the edification and amusement of its children correlates with what that society perceives its children to be. As the perception changes so, too, does the literature. The degree to which Australian children's literature expresses and illuminates the reality of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal childhood, as perceived by the adults who write it and the society which publishes it, is as yet, unknown. Indeed, literature specifically written for children is a relatively new phenomenon. The notion of 'childhood' as a separate, unique and valuable state of being was a product of the Romantic Movement. Australian children's literature has its beginnings in the didacticism of Victorian England, a European theory of education and the uniqueness of the Australian landscape. Before the mid-eighteenth century, children's recreational reading was identical to that perused by adults. Australia's first children's books attempted to integrate John Locke's educational theories advocating the 'right' attitudes with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy of natural education. These enlightenment ideas were deployed somewhat incongruously in literature which featured spectacular moods of the Australian landscape - fire, flood, drought - as well as 'exotic' flora and fauna.


This study will examine the construction of Aboriginal childhood as it appears in fiction for Australian children from 1841 to 1998. This time-span is by no means an arbitrary choice as the first known book published for Australian children appeared in 1841. No works prior to this date will be considered. Most societies clearly reveal both their moral norms and their political ideologies through their efforts to acculturate the young. This public morality can be an area of contention as much as of agreement, but there is a particularly powerful urge to consensus in the education of children. While a good deal of scholarly attention has been paid to Australian literature for adults and more recently to Australian children’s literature in general, much less attention has focused on the construction of Aboriginal childhood in books of fiction for children. The heroics of Empire helped to activate and inculcate a belief in British manliness, service, athletic prowess and courage, underpinned by Christian sensibility. In the process, this valorising of Britishness produced an accompanying image of the ‘Other’, the ‘subject peoples’ (the African, the Indian, the Chinese and the Aborigine) in the story of Empire, which enabled the testing of the European self through conflict, and reinforced the assumptions of white superiority. 3 Although contingent upon the racial assumptions of the time, Aboriginal childhood assumed an identity and was given a ‘history’ within the imperial ethos which became self-sustaining and ‘real’ to the European child reader.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Australia’s ruling elite sought to establish a powerful climate of intellectual, ideological and moral convergence in the projection of state power, Australian children’s fiction both expressed and helped produce the changing collective objectives for children. This is particularly true for Aboriginal children where the consequences of government policies regarding the removal of children of part-Aboriginal descent from their families proved disastrous. In the latter half of the twentieth century there has been a growing awareness of the value of exposing these dominant concepts and ideologies in fiction for children. Formulated and informed by the culture in which they are

3 Ibid., p.7.
produced and written within the context of adult views about what children should know and value, they create a degree of social conformity.  

In the late nineteenth century a strong relationship developed between educators, writers and publishers of juvenile literature and imperial propagandists. In history texts, scholarly publications of the new discipline of anthropology and the popular press, images of Aboriginal childhood first ‘officially’ emerged in the interests of imperial expansion. These images helped to build the racist stereotypes and reinforce the process of racial mythologising that was central to the maintenance of Empire. In these constructions of the ‘Aborigine’ the deepest hopes and fears of an imperialist nation found expression, underpinning the ‘illusion of superiority’ and promoting a ‘security of control and acceptance of power’ which in reality was unobtainable.  

The perception of a shared community of values based on ‘Britishness’ and bolstered by the experience of imperial identity, patriotism and loyalty, motivates the literature produced for an Australian child readership. Accordingly, this study is concerned with how non-indigenous writers and illustrators construct Aboriginal childhood in children’s fiction in a period covering more than one hundred and fifty years. It focuses not only on what these texts say about Aboriginal childhood but also what they neglect to say, what they gloss over and what they elide. The silences as much as what is ‘spoken’ disclose a great deal about those who construct these texts and images, revealing an important and neglected ‘component of cultural formation’ that is ‘crucially implicated in the development of ideologies of race’.  

For this study the selection of material aims comprehensively to take account of fictional texts produced for both younger and older child readers. Hence, for example, there are chapters that focus exclusively on books whose interest is primarily pictorial. Bakhtin (1981) defines children literature as ‘an artistically mediated form of communication – a conversation – that a society has with its young’ shaped by the concerns of those who are part of the ‘world that creates the

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., pp. 4 – 5.
The books analysed in this study have been chosen for their representative qualities and include some minor works. Other better known titles, however, have been excluded in order to emphasise authors who write in and about their own time. The focus is therefore on ‘realist’ texts and excludes ‘retellings’ of traditional Dreamtime stories, works of fantasy and historical fiction. The exception to this, however, is *The Hunted Piccaninnies* (1927) by William Fleming where the narrative is set in the 1850s when the frontier was supposedly ‘still just beyond Sydney’. *The Hunted Piccaninnies* is the first full-length children’s story based on Aboriginal life to appear in Australian children’s literature and for this reason has been included. *Australian Legendary Tales* (1896), in which Aboriginal religious beliefs are reduced to ‘stories’ suitable for children by Kate Langloh Parker, historical fiction such as *Manganinnie: A story of old Tasmania* (1979) by Beth Roberts and the fantasy of *Mathinna’s People* (1967) and *Tangara* (1960) by Nan Chauncey for example, have all been excluded. The texts included are, to my knowledge, the only children’s texts in the realist genre which have an Aboriginal child character as the main protagonist. Huck (1997) defines realistic fiction as ‘imaginative writing that accurately reflects life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today’. Realistic fiction depicts characters, settings and events in accordance with reality or, at least in accordance with reality as most readers perceive it. Campbell (1997) identifies realism as a literary technique practiced by many schools of writing which denotes a particular kind of subject matter, while Kaplan (1981) has called realism a ‘strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change’.

Use of the words ‘realistic’ and ‘fiction’ together could be construed as contradictory if the notion that fiction is an ‘unnecessary or undesirable deviation from truth’ is upheld. Realism must, in effect, disguise its own status as artifice and try and force language into transparency through an appeal to the ideologically constructed sense of the real. The child reader is expected to accept that the narrative should not be

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challenged and that it represents a ‘real’ description of things as they are. Child readers are encouraged to accept that the story is both fictionally and culturally true. In other words because Aboriginal children behave this way in ‘realistic’ fiction they must also act this way in the ‘real’ world. 19 Literary fictions establish convincing motivation for the thoughts, emotions and actions of the characters as well as for the turns and twists of the plot. The characters seem to have ‘lives’ independent of the text itself because the author and the Anglo-Australian child reader share the same codes of reality. The reader is invited to perceive and judge the ‘truth’ of Aboriginal childhood as it is constructed by an author whose ‘autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation’. 20 The consensual nature of such codes is embedded so deeply that the reader is encouraged to forget that they are in the presence of fiction. The code as representation denies the productive character of language and suppresses the notion that we only have a ‘world’ at all because we have language to signify it. 21

According to Barthes (1975), the narrative or plot of a realist book is structured around an opening enigma which throws the conventional cultural and signifying practices into disarray. 22 In The Hunted Piccaninnies, for example, the opening enigma is the intention of the Aboriginal ‘witch doctor’ to pursue and kill the protagonists with the approval of the Aboriginal elders. The event throws the white world into a state of suspicion since the reader and the protagonists can no longer trust the ‘Aborigines’ because the signs — people, objects, words — no longer have the obvious meaning they had before the event. But the story must move inevitably towards closure, which in the realist novel involves some dissolution or resolution of the enigma: the ‘witch doctor’ is discredited and the assimilation of the Aboriginal protagonists and their tribal group is achieved. The realist novel drives toward the final re-establishment of harmony and thus reassures the reader that the value system of signs and cultural practices which the child reader shares with the author is not in danger. The political affiliation of the realist children’s novel is thus evident. In trying to show a white perception of the Aboriginal world as it appears to be, the

fiction reaffirms the ideology of the dominant discourse. As Belsey (1980) notes the compulsion by the end of the nineteenth century for the author to ‘show’ the truth rather than ‘tell’ it continues into the twenty first century where classic realism is ‘still the dominant popular mode in literature, film, and television drama’.  

17 C.Belsey, op. cit., p.67.
Contemporary children’s literature is no exception. Recent publications of children’s fiction, such as the picture books *The Drover’s Boy* (1997) and *You and Me Murrawee* (1998) continue to construct Aboriginal childhood as it is reflected in the order inscribed by a neo-colonial discourse. Thus, what is intelligible as realism is the conventional and therefore the ‘familiar, recognizable articulation and distribution of concepts’ about the life of Aboriginal children. It remains intelligible as ‘realistic’ fiction because it reproduces what we already seem to know.  

Realistic writers may display various degrees of plausibility in contrast to writers of fantasy who integrate everyday details into a ‘supernatural’ world. The combination of ‘real’ and ‘supernatural’ suggests a place of greater opportunity and fulfilment than one consisting of ‘real’ elements alone.  

Magic realism according to Chanady (1985), with its interweaving of realism and fantasy within a realistic framework, constitutes the primary difference between ‘magical realism’ and pure fantasy.  

Magical realism is characterised by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a rational worldview and the other on the acceptance of the irrational as part of everyday life. Magical realism blurs the distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘supernatural’ allowing the material world to become fused with the fantastic and the spiritual. Under the guise of ‘magical realism’ publications such as Mary and Elizabeth Durack’s *The Way of the Whirlwind* (1941), Davison’s *Children of the Dark People* (1958) and Downing’s *Tinka and his Friends* (1963), juxtapose Aboriginal spirituality (which functions as the ‘fantastic’ element) alongside the ‘reality’ of Aboriginal childhood.  

Historical fiction portrays life as it may have been lived in the past and the subject matter often encompasses both public and private events. The protagonist may be either an actual figure from the past or an invented figure whose destiny is involved with actual events. It therefore merges on one level with realistic fiction.

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18 C.Belsey, op.cit., pp.46-47.
21 The term ‘magic realism’ was first used in 1925 in connection with Post-Expressionist art but is more often associated with the Latin-American novel of the 1950s and 1960s.
Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting – on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth.  

A difficulty can arise, however, where only the setting and little else differentiates the fictionalised period from the present. Most historical fiction for children with an Aboriginal protagonist is set either before the first contact between Aborigines and white settlers or at the time when the first white settlement in an area is being established. The focus is usually on a romanticised and limited version of traditional Aboriginal life in, for example, *The Courteous Savage: Yagan of Swan River* (1964) by Mary Durack, *Millingi* (1973) by Amy Bunker, *Nunga* (1985) by Rus Center and *Nungadin and Willijen* (1992) by Percy Trezise.

The exploration of Aboriginal childhood, from the perspective of Australian children's fiction, raises difficult questions of authenticity, interpretation, judgement and factuality. This study provides an historical context for Aboriginal experience against which the literature is 'measured' or rather, in which the discussion of the fictional images of Aboriginal childhood is 'placed'. The views of the authors and the social realities of the times do not always align. Said (1978) has stated that in 'any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation.'  

This is not to say, however, that there is no connection between text and 'reality'. What is important is not an approximation of presence, which seems to be the intention of many of the authors, but rather the conformity of the works to an ideology. This study also, however, attends to the realism of the constructions of Aboriginal childhood and the truths which some claim to depict. At the same time, the realism of the texts, their

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ideology, the ideology of their authors and illustrators and their culture will also be considered.

In considering the ways in which Aboriginal childhood invites or challenges literary engagement, it has been necessary to include some books that are poorly written and illustrated. Such titles become significant in a body of literature which has few Aboriginal protagonists. Titles such as The Prince of the Totem (1933) by Tarlton Rayment, The Magic Kangaroo (1944) by Mavis Mallinson and This Child (1976) by Alice Hawkins are less well known than most of the other books discussed. In the attempt to articulate the construction of Aboriginal childhood ‘minor’ children’s authors such as Rayment, Mallinson and Hawkins, however, write outside what can be considered mainstream Australian children’s fiction – Rayment’s book was adapted from a series of radio broadcasts, Mallinson’s work is in a comic strip format and Hawkins’ publication is part of a reading series. They nevertheless still use the language and narrative structure of the colonizers, not the Aboriginal languages and traditional oral discourse of their protagonists. Rayment, Mallinson and Hawkins connect their protagonists to a political immediacy, blatantly reinforcing ideologies of evolutionary theory, assimilation and the Aborigine as ‘Other’. The ‘minor’ children’s literature in this study is often overtly political, embedding explicitly racist ideologies into poorly written fiction for children, as opposed to the well-written, but more covertly prejudiced discourse of ‘major’ children’s literature. In children’s fiction, however, any attempt by authors of a ‘minor’ literature to generate change has been unsuccessful. Book adaptations from media programs, the comic strip format and books produced for a reading series for example, are still regarded as ‘inferior’ literary forms.

This study identifies within the ideologies of the texts the changes in white Australian attitudes towards Aboriginal childhood. The incorporation of stereotypical attitudes towards Aboriginal people continues to produce a popular imagery found in both print and visual media into the 21st century. Until 2001, there was virtually nothing written about constructions of Aboriginality in Australian children’s

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literature. The development of critical and theoretical models for discussing Aboriginal themes in Australian writing more generally is also only recent – since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and associated with the rise and popularisation of postcolonial literary theory alongside the proliferation of Aboriginal-authored texts. Critical interest in representations of Aboriginality in white adult literature began with J.J. Healy's landmark study published in 1978 which 'deals with the efforts of white Australian writers to come to grips with the Aborigine'.

Pioneering scholarly commentators on Australian children's books such as Maurice Saxby and Brenda Niall are also relatively recent. Saxby's A History of Australian Children's Literature: 1841-1941 and A History of Australian Children's Literature: 1941-1970, published in 1969 and 1971 respectively were the first published histories of Australian children's literature, followed by Niall's Australia through the Looking-Glass: Children's Fiction 1830-1980 in 1984. They have little to say about Aboriginal representation because they are concerned with documenting Australian children's literature more generally. For example, Saxby includes two pages on 'Aboriginal Folk Lore' and 'Reality – Aboriginal Life' in volume one and a chapter on 'Aborigines and Race Relations' in volume two. His subsequent histories, The Proof of the Puddin': Australian Children's Literature 1970-1990 (1993), and an updated version of his original publication Offered to Children A History of Australian Children's Literature 1841-1941 (1998) follow a similar pattern. For example, in The Proof of the Puddin' there is a chapter entitled 'Aboriginal Australians' and in the updated version of Offered to Children 'Aboriginal Life and Lore' are combined in a single chapter. This has been the trend in the few publications on Australian children's literature which touch upon depictions of Aboriginality.

In 1982 The Aboriginal Motif in Children's Literature: Proceedings of a National Seminar held at the University of Tasmania 25-27 September 1981, edited by Twila A.J. Herr, was the first publication to focus entirely on Aboriginal content in

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Australian children’s literature. 27 In his paper ‘The Presentation of Australian Aborigines and their Culture in Children’s Literature: A Brief Overview’, Walter McVitty states that

... the Australian Aborigine and his culture in children’s literature has been, from the beginning, a shamelessly racist catalogue of prejudice and misinformation, of superficial cliches, offensive stereotyping and entirely subjective interpretation. Although things have improved remarkably in recent times, there is still a long way to go.

McVitty identifies the influence of the European notion of the ‘Noble Savage’ and the attribution of cultural difference to biological factors, but is unable to deconstruct the more subtle expressions of racist ideology in texts such as Frank Dalby Davison’s Children of the Dark People (1936) and Audrey Oldfield’s Daughter of Two Worlds (1970). McVitty, like others including author Bill Scott and poet Jim Everett, advocate the need for ‘close involvement by Aboriginal writers themselves’ to redress the ‘regrettable mistakes’ of the past made by ‘misinformed and ignorant white writers’ in ‘presenting Aboriginal life and culture to children’. 28

Rosalind Langford’s (1981) paper is one of the most confronting for Australian children’s literature. She argues that children are being conditioned by the perpetuation of racism through the publication of biased and inaccurate literature about Aboriginal Australians and is critical, not only of publishers, but of those who allow such texts into school and public libraries. She questions the effect of literary racism on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in terms of the development of self-concept and identity through a process of differentiation in which individuals distinguish themselves from each other. As Stephens (1992) argues ‘all

27 The seminar was sponsored by the Tasmanian Branches of the Librarian Association of Australia, The Children’s Book Council and the University of Tasmania with the advice of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Consultative Committee.
developmental paths are ideologically constructed, involving conformity to societal norms, and it is important for anyone concerned with children’s fiction to develop an awareness of the processes and ends of this construction’.  

According to Langford the portrayal of Aboriginal people as inferior and ‘tribal’ encourages Anglo-Australian children to reaffirm white superiority and ‘does little to encourage the development of self-esteem amongst Aboriginal children’.  

Langford’s assertion that there is ‘no excuse for producing books likely to perpetuate racism and misinformation since there are a variety of specialised educational bodies ready to assist and advise’ is even more valid now than it was in her 1981 presentation.

Margaret Dunkle’s *Black in Focus: A Guide to Aboriginality in Literature for Young People* (1994) was the first annotated bibliography in Australia to specifically examine the ‘images and attitudes about indigenous Australians’ by Australian children’s writers.  

It covers the period from post-1960s to 1993 and was written specifically for librarians and teachers enabling them to make more informed decisions about selecting children’s publications containing Aboriginal content. Foster, Finnis and Nimon’s *Australian Children’s Literature: an Exploration of Genre and Theme* (1995) and Julie Markus’ *A Dark Smudge Upon the Sand: Essays on Race, Guilt and the National Consciousness* (1999) each contain a chapter devoted to the representation of Aboriginal people in children’s books. Although these publications contribute in some way to the discourse on the construction of ‘Aboriginality’ in Australian children’s literature, none focuses specifically on Aboriginal childhood. This neglect was recently remedied in part by the publication of Clare Bradford’s *Reading Race: Aboriginality in Australian Children’s Literature* (2001) which explores Aboriginal representation in depth.

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32 Langford, *op. cit.*, p.94.
In *Reading Race: Aboriginality in Australian Children’s Literature* Bradford attempts to analyse Aboriginality through the work of both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal children’s writers. She states that her primary concern is with ‘how non-indigenous writers and illustrators represent Aboriginality’ where the focus is on ‘what they disclose about white culture’. Her secondary concern is to examine ‘the conditions in which these texts are produced and received and the cultural practices that inform them’. 34 Dunkle, however, in her review of Bradford’s book in *Australian Book Review*, sees the work, ‘despite its broad title’, principally as a ‘discussion of forms of racism that the author identifies in books published in colonial times, compared with contemporary examples’. 35

Although the scope and mode of analysis of Bradford’s book does to an extent overlap with this thesis there are significant differences. Rather than selecting a greater number of books where Aboriginal children play only a peripheral role, this study confines its discussion to works of fiction by non-Aboriginal authors and illustrators that feature Aboriginal children as the protagonists in a variety of settings. Bradford includes fiction, non-fiction and school readers as well as texts written by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors. For example, well over a hundred are presented in *Reading Race* in the ‘smorgasbord’ style adopted by the more general Australian children’s literature publications of Saxby and Niall. Several non-Australian books are also included by Bradford with an eye, perhaps, to the overseas market. 36 Of the thirty four books discussed in this study, only six are treated in any depth in *Reading Race*. The following titles, for example, are not mentioned at all by Bradford – *Piccaninny Walkabout* (1957) by Axel Poignant, *Pigs and Honey* (1989) and *Going for Oysters* (1991) by Jeannie Adams and *The Burnt Stick* (1994) by Anthony Hill.

‘Black Child White Story’ adopts a thematic approach and arranges the chapters chronologically in both their overall presentation and in the order of analysis. This allows for a comprehensive, in-depth treatment, highlights differences of approach

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36 For example, *The House that Jack Built* by Gavin Bishop (New Zealand), *A Coyote Columbus Story* by Thomas King and William Kent Monkman (Canada) and *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* by Susan Jeffers (American).
and perspective among chronologically contemporary authors and allows for the
detection of shifts that can occur over relatively brief periods. Dunkle argues that one
of the disadvantages of Reading Race is that it is not arranged chronologically or
within specific themes, becoming confusing where the analysis ‘weaves back forth
between colonial and post colonial texts’, many of which ‘reappear in several
different discussions’.

This study probes not only the construction of Aboriginal childhood in children’s
fiction, but explores the slippage between the lived and imagined experiences which
inform the textual and illustrative images produced by non-Aboriginal writers.
Although Bradford also examines the cultural shifts and evolving ideologies of race
that inform Australian children’s texts, because of the wide variety of genres
included and the large number of examples, Reading Race: Aboriginality in
Australian Children’s Literature skims the surface of Aboriginal representation in
Australian children’s literature.

It is a characteristic of realistic fiction to disguise its symbolic or aesthetic nature and
pretend transparently to reflect reality. As Barthes (1968) has pointed out, realism
entrenches its own moral values but pretends not to do so. This leads to the
intentional blurring of the divide between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, that
generally characterises the construction of Aboriginal childhood in children’s fiction.

The stories that white authors tell about Aboriginal people have been, for the most
part, symbolic in nature. For Rousseau and countless others, ‘uncivilised’ or ‘savage’
figures have been interesting, not in themselves, but as symbolic referents in a
discourse about the virtues and vices of European civilization. The nature and force
of images of Australian Aboriginal childhood derive from the symbolic code or
language of this debate rather than from any understanding of Aboriginal children.
Indeed, as Johnston (1987) suggests, such a symbolic code has often itself produced
‘images by a kind of parthenogenesis’ whereby stories about indigenous people are

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27 Dunkle, op.cit., p.60.
p.62.
often not drawn from personal experiences but from other sources of information, such as the work of anthropologists. 39

Said argues that ‘devils and angels’ cannot appear in a realistic work, but their symbolic functions can be assigned by a writer, in a racist society, to figures of other races. Because the characters in children’s realistic fiction are ‘probable’, child readers who encounter symbolic figures in these narratives expect them to be accurate or true representations. 40 This expectation can contribute to an injustice because child readers derive the impression that the villains, as described, really exist. In The Hunted Piccaninies and Children of the Dark People the Aboriginal ‘Witch Doctors’ are evil figures straight from the pages of imperial romance while Aboriginal boys, because they don’t quite measure up to European mythic traditions, can never be ‘real’ heroes. Repeated over time, representations such as these become ‘naturalised’ and condition readers to accept them as ‘real’. Others that are arguably even more demeaning gained currency within Australian culture, persisting well into the mid-20th century: the Aborigine as the grunting animal, childlike adult, ‘noble savage’ and self-sacrificing ‘native’. All need to be challenged and deconstructed because the fictional figures themselves have come to be regarded as ‘real’ and there are still many writers of children’s fiction who either exploit or use uncritically such racist distortions and so perpetuate the problem. 41

This study of Australian children’s fiction begins in 1841 with Charlotte Barton’s A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales the first children’s book published in Australia. Niall argues that for most of the nineteenth century the ‘literary perspective from which Australian scenes were created was predominantly that of the outsider’. 42 Traditional colonialism in Australia involved the direct political domination of Britain over Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. This enabled representatives of imperial authority to control all aspects of the internal and external life of the colony in the name of Empire, particularly including literary culture. London was the principal place of

40 Ibid. P.33.
41 Johnston, op.cit., p. 51.
publication for children’s books (and most Australian adult publications) during the
nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries. Although Australian juvenile
readership increased, the British child audience still had to be considered.
Although *A Mother’s Offering* was published in Sydney it was not until the 1870s
that large publishing companies generally began to feel that Australian children’s
titles for an Australian market were worth publishing. Australian publishers in the
nineteenth century were usually booksellers, printers and stationers first, and any
publishing was very much an ancillary and minor effort.  
Prentice (1992) considers
1894 as the turning point. A new Australian publishing era had commenced, led by
Ward Lock, Angus & Robertson, George Robertson of Melbourne, Lothian, and
Whitcombe and Tombs and others. These publishing houses made a conscious effort
to publish Australian authors using an Australian imprint rather than relying
exclusively on the British publishing base.  

Although many Australian titles were issued from the London offices of publishers,
many had Australian managers who were based in Australia. For example, William
Steele was the Australian manager who was based in Melbourne for the English firm
of Ward Lock, who published the majority of the work of well-known Australian
children’s authors such as Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce. Saxby (2002) argues
that British sales and good opinions were more important to William Steele than any
others. There was a better market potential and return from publishing in the UK and
any sales to Australia tended to be somewhat incidental. The development of the
publishing industry in Australia was only gradual. Britain, on the other hand, had a
tradition of publishing for children going back to John Newbery in 1744. To increase
sales in Britain, for example, complimentary copies of Turner’s *Seven Little
Australians* (1894) were sent to well-known children, extracting letters of
congratulation from Prince Alexander of Battenburg and the Duchess of Albany.
This campaign suggests Ward Lock’s priorities and the problem of Australian
authors writing for a British publisher and a geographically divided audience.  

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42 B. Niall, *Australia Through the Looking Glass. Australian Children’s Fiction 1830-1980*
43 Holden, op. cit., p.6.
p.5, p.192.
Cook (1996) states that collaboration with the original publisher is a key requirement at the developmental stage of the book as the writer needs to be able to trust the publisher to offer the best publishing strategy and marketing plan to promote the work or works in the territories outside the immediate marketplace. Cook argues that the publisher needs to find the widest possible exposure for successful publication of the writer’s work, otherwise the return, to everyone, is simply not enough to satisfy the expectations of all parties involved in the relationship. Australian writer’s were often under pressure to conform to existing English literary models for children and to the expectations of their British publishers. The works of Ethel Turner and later authors such as William Fleming, Stella Sammon and James Vance Marshall, however, have never been considered anything except Australian.  

Colonial writing for children was generally elitist and Aboriginal children as child readers were virtually ignored. The education system was European and only available to Aboriginal children only through the ad hoc teaching efforts of those working on Missions or on the Aboriginal Reserves.

Postcolonial theory frames and investigates the circulation of imperial discourses but differs from ‘traditional’ colonialism in that it does not involve direct political control, but can be a continuation of past practices. The argument of this thesis draws on the work of recent postcolonial theorists, most notably Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) who state that all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination. They argue that the ‘development of internal divisions are based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations’ and that the ‘continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler societies’ testifies to the fact that ‘post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction’. In this study, neo-colonialism is defined in terms of the impact and influence of a dominant Anglo-Australian society on its indigenous inhabitants, with reference to the construction of Aboriginal childhood by non-Aboriginal authors and illustrators in Australian children’s fiction. Neo-colonialism

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can be clearly observable through the policies and processes of assimilation, but is generally more subtle when racist ideologies are filtered through narrative discourse for non-Aboriginal and, much later, Aboriginal child readers. Historically, Australian children’s fiction has relied on non-Aboriginal authors and illustrators to contribute to its development. These writers, regardless of their personal orientations, cannot escape inscribing Western values and ideas into the books they write. Despite increasing awareness of the injustices perpetrated against Australia’s first peoples many contemporary writers have nevertheless retained in varying degrees the orientation of colonial ideologies and experience. 

The construction of Aboriginal childhood in this study falls into four broad thematic bands or ‘myths’: the Aboriginal child as the primitive; as identified with the landscape; as the marginalised; and finally as the assimilated. The study begins by examining the accounts of Aboriginal childhood by 19th century ‘settler’ writers for children, then traces the development of this trope through 20th century children’s fiction to discern a movement from ‘a sense of difference and otherness to a means by which the white culture might fuse with the alien other’.

The opening chapter focuses on three early Australian settler accounts. Each account supports the colonialist pattern that represents Aboriginal dispossession and exploitation through the lens of a self-justifying ideology. These accounts highlight the deculturation of Aboriginal children and adults, constructing them as primitive and uncivilized. In these early accounts, European mothers are vaunted as worthy of emulation by and essential benefactors to the colonized Aboriginal child. The next three chapters explore the Aboriginal child as the subject of numerous illustrated texts, picture storybooks, documentary picture storybooks and picture books. The discussion exposes the highly inaccurate and fanciful pictorial depictions supported by condescending verbal texts at the beginning of the twentieth century and proceeds to show the gradual emergence of more enlightened perspectives on the lives of Aboriginal children who are increasingly invested with dignity and value.


\[\text{45} \text{ E. Mandel, ‘Imagining Natives: white Perspectives on Native Peoples’, in T.King et.al., The Native in Literature (Ontario, ECW Press, 1987), p. 34.} \]
The construction of Australian childhood, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in children's fiction up until the eighties has been essentially gender bound. The imperial social order created a hierarchy of masculinities and a growing emphasis on gender difference. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided symbols of overall superiority and inferiority, clearly delineating not only the gendered roles of Anglo-Australians, but also those of Aboriginal boys and girls. Australian children's fiction, however, rarely features Aboriginal protagonists and includes even fewer who are female. Those who initiate most of the action in children's fiction are predominantly male. This study acknowledges the disparity by according a more extensive treatment of the Aboriginal boy in two chapters, 'The European Quest Motif and the Construction of the Traditional Aboriginal Boy' (Chapter 5) and 'Constructing Masculinity: The Contemporary Aboriginal Boy 1971-1993' (Chapter 7), than the Aboriginal girl discussed as a separate entity only in chapter six, 'The Aboriginal Girl – Daughters of a Broken Dreaming'.

The concluding chapter examines the simultaneous marginality and ubiquity of Aboriginal childhood in the work of three non-Aboriginal authors through their desire to naturalize the taking of Aboriginal land. The subsequent appropriation of Aboriginal culture to form a 'uniquely' Australian identity is explored. Through the literary text *The Children* (1959) and the film adaptation of that text, *Walkabout* (1971), an imported 'ghost writer' author Donald Gordon Payne and director Nicolas Roeg portray a form of 'natural' and 'native' life alien to themselves, appropriating it for symbolic purpose. The film’s neo-colonial ideologies and western agendas allow for therapeutic meditation on the evil of technology and the virtue of a life close to nature and offer romantic solace and a brief respite from the ills of the modern metropolis. The manner in which *Walkabout* subsumes the category of 'Aboriginal' within that of 'Australian' illustrates Muecke's (1992) definition of appropriation, namely a process wherein meanings 'lose their cultural specificity by becoming a

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part of a more general culture’, obliterating difference through the reductionist articulation of ‘coming together’.  

Aboriginal childhood has played a limited but telling role in Australian children’s literature. The very lack of attention to Aboriginal children in Australian children’s fiction – the white ‘silence’ – is resonant with denial and self-justification. Since the 1970s Australians have been struggling to come to terms with the legacy of the crimes their ancestors committed when they colonised a land they defined as empty (terra nullius) but which in truth belonged to the indigenous inhabitants. This colonial legacy of murder, theft, exploitation and injustice determined the ways in which Aboriginal people continued to be treated by governments and society long after their initial dispossession. Although it concentrates on constructions of Aboriginal childhood in white Australian children’s fiction, this study highlights the role that the construction of racial imagery can play in any society, past or present, by securing the unwitting allegiance of the young to values and institutions threatened by the forces of change. By examining the image of the ‘Other’ through the construction of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children’s fiction and noting the essential similarities that circulate among the chosen texts, this study attempts to reveal how pervasive and controlling the logic of racial and national superiority continues to be. By exploring the dissemination of images of Aboriginal childhood in this way, long-lived distortions and misconceptions will become clearer. Neo-colonial variations on the themes informing these images remain part of Australian children’s fiction. Literary theorist Pierre Macherey (1978) encourages us to focus our literary analyses on the unsaid. He argues that ‘what is important in a work is what it does not say’ and articulates how important it is to investigate the silence ‘for it is the silence that is doing the speaking’. By looking closely at the processes which form the distorted images of Aboriginal Australians in colonial and contemporary children’s fiction, we may begin to recognise and demythologise the ‘unspoken’ racial ideology of Australian society and its attitude to Aboriginal childhood.

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Chapter One

Memory, Place and ‘Metonymies of Presence’ in the Autobiographical Work of Charlotte Barton, Ellen Campbell and Jeannie Gunn 1841-1905.

The three early Australian autobiographical accounts, written for children, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales (1841), An Australian Childhood (1892), and The Little Black Princess (1905) which are the focus of this chapter, construct Aboriginal children, the childhood roles they perform and the spaces of childhood they occupy as vulnerable and endangered. The first text is critical of Aboriginal mothers who are perceived as uncaring and neglectful. Their traditional child-rearing practices are dismissed as animalistic and barbaric. The second constructs the Aboriginal child as sub-human and part of a ‘dying race’ which occupies the lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder and the third emphasises a line of irrefutable cultural difference, constructing the Aboriginal child firmly as ‘the other’.

By the 1850s, despite generations of resistance by the indigenous Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the local colonialist pattern of invasion, conquest, exploitation and political and cultural control, accompanied by a self-justifying ideology, was complete. All three autobiographies reflect certain aspects of this pattern and many of these aspects are still evident in Australian children’s literature today. All three accounts inscribe, in varying degrees, the deculturation of Aboriginal people, constructing them as primitive and uncivilized, at best the lowest ‘humans’ on the evolutionary scale and, at worst, merely examples of exotic antipodean flora and fauna. In the process, each text denigrates Aboriginal cultural practices and traditions, providing a source of amusement for white child (and adult) readers seeking to alleviate the isolation and loneliness of rural life, while, at the same time aiming for commercial success by satisfying contemporary taste. All three texts reinforce the white middle-class domestic perspective, presenting it positively, so that it appears not only acceptable but ‘correct and satisfying’, superior in its
Christian orientation. The European women characters in these texts are presented as essential benefactors to the colonized Aboriginal child and therefore worthy of emulation.

*A Mother's Offering to Her Children: by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales,* is recognised as the first locally produced juvenile work about Australia.¹ Nineteenth century Australian children’s books rarely, indeed almost never contemplate an Aboriginal past. Aboriginal life and customs almost always appear in the ‘here-and-now’ of the white settler story. There is little interest in Aboriginal history or the close study of an Aboriginal way of life.² The *Bulletins* attitude and policy during the 1890s and afterwards, despite fostering a national tradition in literature, did not, and indeed could not include the Aboriginal, past or present. The journal’s masthead, ‘Australia for the White Man’, eloquently expresses its narrowly pragmatic attitude towards Australian life and culture.³ Aboriginal Australians were regarded as ‘too weak to present opposition, and too degraded to excite sympathy’. The fundamental stereotypes of Aborigines as a stone age people who, having failed to make ‘productive use’ of the land, are dispossessed of it, were still widely evident, particularly in academic studies. Likewise, the literary works of the period were virtually devoid of Aboriginal characters, illustrating the concept of ‘terra nullius’ which envisaged an Australian continent empty of indigenous inhabitants and justified absolute European jurisdiction and occupation.⁴

Charlotte Barton, the author of *A Mother's Offering to Her Children: by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales,* was born in London and engaged as governess to the children of former Governor King’s daughter, Mrs Hannibal Macarthur.⁵ Although

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¹ *A Mother's Offering to Her Children: by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales,* was published anonymously, and, until recently, it was thought that the ‘Lady Long Resident in New South Wales’ was a Lady J.J. Bremer, who had never, in fact, been to Australia. Marcie Muir, through access to Louisa Atkinson's notes on family history, was eventually able to piece together the details of Charlotte Barton's life and identify her as the real author of the publication.
⁵ Hannibal Macarthur was a New South Wales pastoralist, businessman and nephew of John Macarthur.
Barton arrived in the colony in 1827, she didn't take up her position, marrying James Atkinson in September of that same year. Atkinson was a well known and innovative New South Wales farmer who had settled at Sutton Forest on the lower Southern Highlands district, south-west of Sydney, in 1822. His model farm was established on Aboriginal land after the dispossession of the local Gandangara people and was worked with convict labour. Atkinson built a substantial house on the property which he named ‘Oldbury’. Eventually it became their home.

After Atkinson’s premature death in 1834, Charlotte Barton married her farm superintendent, George Barton, compounding her already disastrous economic circumstances. Forced to leave ‘Oldbury’ in 1839 because of Barton’s violence and alcoholism, Charlotte and her children lived for a time at Budgong, an isolated outstation near the Shoalhaven River. She eventually moved to Sydney in the late 1840s, to live in rented houses at Double Bay, Darlinghurst and Wolloomooloo. It was during her time in Sydney that Barton wrote *A Mother's Offering to Her Children: by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales* apparently to supplement her family’s income. Months of court harassment had reduced her to near-destitution while fighting the charge of being an unfit and improper ‘Guardian’ of her own children.

*A Mother's Offering to Her Children*, is based on a book Barton wrote and used as reading material by means of which to instruct her own children during their time at Budgong. The didactic episodes draw on her experience of life in the bush and her interest in natural science but also include stories of adventure that had appeared in the local press. The book was printed by the *Sydney Gazette* but the publisher was the bookseller, G.W. Evans.

The book is written in dialogue form, with a question-and-answer format. Catechismal in construction, it resembles, not surprisingly, a Victorian schoolroom text. The purpose is unmistakably didactic - lessons in botany, geology and

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5 Olbury still stands near the Medway Rivulet at Sutton Forest.
6 Barton was fighting the courts in Atkinson vs Barton and Others, not only to gain sustenance from the leased Oldbury, but also for the right to guardianship of her own children. Barton eventually won her case and the family returned to a run down and neglected Olbury in 1846.
anthropology, are interspersed with exciting tales of shipwreck and barbarism embodying 'moral tract' values.

Although Barton includes some fictional characters and settings, she leaves the reader in no doubt that the content of her narratives is based on fact. The book revolves around the imaginary Saville family and is dedicated to ten year old Master Reginald Gipps, the son of the incumbent Governor of New South Wales:

...and the author hopes that the incidents it contains may afford him some little entertainment in the perusal; its principal merit is the truth of the subjects narrated; the accounts of the melancholy shipwrecks being drawn from printed sources; and perhaps it may claim some trifling merit also from being the first work written in the colony expressly for children.  

The Saville children are white, middle-class, well-behaved and well-mannered. Their names and ages closely correspond to those of Barton's own offspring, who provide the author with an imagined but intimately familiar audience to whom to deliver her words of instruction.  The children's responses to their lessons are formal and stilted. They later repeat in trite conversational treatises information which they have already committed to memory in the classroom. For contemporary readers, the contrived didacticism of the dialogue undermines appreciation of Barton's precise botanical knowledge and sensitive observations of native flora and fauna.

Clara - I think the Grass tree, of which the natives make their Spears very handsome, when in full vigour, and that kind which grows with a stem, still handsomer.

9 Barton, Charlotte, A Mother's Offering to Her Children: by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales (Sydney, George Evans, 1841), preface.
10 Barton's children are Charlotte, Emily, James and Louisa Atkinson.
Julius - Some of them have two or three stems to them. How curiously they separate in rings when they are decayed and you break them; and they are so full of maggots. I do not like the Spear part though, they are so hard and thick; and the blossom part so low down that it leaves little besides, and they are so often crooked. ...  

Emma - Well, of all the trees, I still admire the Tea-tree, with its little white blossoms, and its delicate, though ragged bark. I know it is a great favourite with Mamma, too.  

In stark contrast to the Aboriginal children included in the narrative, Clara, Julius, Lucy and Emma Saville are diligent, dutiful and prudent, espousing the adult values of the Victorian society to which their mother belongs. Christian values and achievements are measured against the traditional life of an indigenous population. The contrast between the safely cocooned Saville children and their Aboriginal counterparts involves a confrontation between the good and the almost (but not quite) unspeakably evil. ¹¹

It is in the final chapter of A Mother's Offering to Her Children, entitled 'Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales', that Barton foreshadows what is to come in the construction of Aboriginal childhood in subsequent Australian children's literature texts. She gives voice to the attitudes and values of a white society coming to terms with the attempted annihilation of Australia's indigenous inhabitants. Mrs Saville represents the middle-class white matriarch instructing her white, equally middle-class children and audience in the lessons they need to maintain their social and moral status. Her Christianity begrudgingly allows some compassion for the 'babes' of the 'poor uncivilized savages', because they are innocent and helpless and

¹¹ Barton, op.cit. p.10.  
because she regards Aboriginal mothers as ‘unnatural’.

In the 1800s an expanding middle-class approved of the idea of delaying the moral and economic independence of children and turning childhood over to the formal learning of values and skills. The emphasis was on education and the need for control over childhood, achieved by providing special instruction and guidance over a prolonged period. The family assumed a moral and spiritual function, it ‘moulded bodies and souls’. The status of women became conditional on their biological role as mothers of children and their ability to rear offspring, assigning to them a unique competence as the first educators of the child and shapers of its impressionable mind. As the Saville children exemplify, the gains in nurture, protection and care, however, cost them their freedom and self-reliance, since parental supervision also increased. For society generally, an intolerance towards variety, an insistence on uniformity and a new concept of race, accompanied the rise of the ‘bourgeois family ideal’.

Economic expansion favoured family formation and enhanced the capacity of many parents to translate ideology into action during the prolonged, stable and protective childhood they provided for their offspring. Barton confirmed and approved of the protective solicitude of the colonial mother. She transmitted the image of the vulnerable child and the importance of a stable, loving, protective family life to both her child and adult readers.

The nineteenth century, however, also saw the beginning of a growing challenge to the Church’s traditional role in the formulation of advice on the moral training of children within the home. The role of secular organisations in ‘rescuing’ children seen to be ‘at risk’ also expanded, as the State further usurped the authority of the Church in matters pertaining to childhood. Influential figures in the law, education, journalism and medicine gradually replaced the clergy in advising the State on how to guard the lives and morals of children. The State, however, was not only replacing the Church in the formulation of rules about child nature, but also usurping

16 Kociumbas, op.cit., p.19.
parental authority in order to implement its perception of child rearing ideals. As a consequence, Aboriginal children, living outside the confines of white society, became increasingly conspicuous, a separate ‘species’ whose lack of a ‘standard’ childhood was perceived to render them neglected and ‘at risk’. Accordingly, the State was advised to expand its facilities for the ‘rescue’ and ‘reform’ of Aboriginal children in a conscious attempt to ensure the dominance of Anglo-Australian values and the elimination of threatening or obstructive alternatives.

It is not surprising therefore that Barton constructs an endangered Aboriginal childhood at the mercy of the savagery of the Aboriginal mother and her traditional child-rearing practices.

*I remember a tall woman, quite a stranger, coming with a black infant, of less than a month old. It was so ugly, and covered with long hair, as to not look like anything human: but worse than all, the poor little creature had been terribly burned, by the mother putting it too near the fire; and falling asleep. From the ankle to the hip, on one side, it was nearly burned to the bone. It had been done some days ... I therefore had it dressed with lard spread on rags: soon after, I heard the bandages were off. The negligent mother had left it; and one of their hungry dogs, attracted by the smell of the lard, had torn off the rags; and dragged them away; notwithstanding they had been tied on carefully. They were replaced; but the cruel mother appeared quite indifferent to the sufferings of her tender babe. About a week after, I understood it was dead: probably made away with.*

Mrs Saville constructs Aboriginal childhood in terms that suggest brutality, animalism and suffering. The sub-human condition of the child is reinforced in

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language describing its physical resemblance to an ape. The focus, however, is not so much on the child, but on Aboriginal motherhood. To Charlotte Barton, as well as Mrs Saville, it is the indifference and negligence of the mother that is appalling, not the accidental burning of the child. The intervention of the God-loving and dutiful Mrs Saville, serious about her parental responsibilities, is not appreciated or acknowledged by the Aboriginal mother. Not only is the mother indifferent and cruel, but ungrateful as well. Such a view bolsters not only the confidence of those whom Barton represents, but reinforces the value of her own mothering at a time when it too is under attack.

Mrs Saville is absolutely certain that what she stands for is right, what she opposes wrong. There is no compromise. Barton rejects any challenge to white constructions of motherhood and femininity. Jenny, another Aboriginal mother, abandons three of her children and supposedly kills the fourth:

*Clara. - You know Jenny has left three infants to perish in the bush; because, she said, it was too much trouble to rear them: and when our cook asked if native dogs had eaten them, she replied, "I believe". And I am almost sure she killed that little black baby girl, she had some time ago; for it suddenly disappeared; and when we questioned her about it, she hung down her head and looked very foolish; and at last said, "Tumble down." It was buried in one of our paddocks and some stones laid over the grave: when we were taking a walk, with our nurse, we met one of our men, who opened the grave; and it was evident the body had been burned; for there were remains of burnt bones, ashes, and hair.*

Clara's younger sister Emma, not to be outdone, tells how a black man called Billy kills one of his babies by taking it by its feet and dashing its brains against a tree.

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18 Barton *op.cit.* p.205.
The impassivity with which the children and Mrs Saville listen and contribute to these accounts is not surprising. The violent death of an Aboriginal child is just another ‘fact’ embedded in a narrative full of curious and interesting ‘facts’. There is an acceptance of the portrayal of the Aboriginal as a sub-human species.

The practice of infanticide seems to appeal to the white imagination. Annette Hamilton (1981), in her study of Aboriginal child-rearing in North-Central Arnhem Land, 19 found that Aboriginal women would not keep deformed infants, and in earlier times killed babies of mixed descent. If twins were born one would more than likely be killed, since it was believed that the mother did not have enough milk to feed both. The same would apply to children born very close together. The younger would be killed because of the lack of breast milk. The women involved in the study denied that this happened often, and were reluctant to admit to infanticide themselves. 20 Even today, many white Australians believe, as did Charlotte Barton, that Aborigines simply killed off any baby they did not want. Despite popular belief, infanticide was not used as a means of population control, but depended on a decision made by the individual parents for a variety of reasons. 21 The death of babies was regarded as an expected part of life, and was accepted accordingly.

Charlotte Barton reflects, never questions, the prevailing attitudes and conventions of the time. Emma Saville is not outraged by the violent death of an Aboriginal child. The Saville family think nothing of desecrating an Aboriginal grave because Aboriginal people are similar to animals and deserve to be treated as such. Like many Europeans at that time, they readily condemn a way of life of which they have a limited knowledge, very little understanding, and almost no tolerance.

Barton continually focuses on the supposed indifference and negligence of Aboriginal mothers as this would evoke self righteous horror, possibly delight, appealing to the implied superiority of her reading audience and serving to emphasise the ‘otherness’ of indigenous Australians. This is not unusual or

20 Ibid., p.123.
surprising, considering the courtroom vilification Barton herself endured during the legal proceedings which sought to prove that she was an unfit and improper mother. Barton must have been concerned with establishing, beyond a doubt, what being an unfit and improper person entailed, emphasising her own exemplary motherhood through the character of Mrs Saville.

Nanny 22, a ‘remarkably fine, well-formed young woman’, has no hesitation in handing over her two children to be raised by white families. She ‘cruelly’ rejects the affections of two year old Sally, although proud of ‘her little George’. Both children have white fathers. Obviously Nanny has succumbed to ‘unrestrained passions’ of the most physical kind. Sexual promiscuity was officially deplored by Victorian society, particularly in Nanny’s case where it involves both white and black men, who according to the sexual double standard that applied, are blameless.

Nanny is eventually murdered by her half brother because of her association with the white settlers. George, her son, is educated by the white family who employ his father and becomes a shepherd, eventually owning sheep and cattle of his own. George becomes ‘civilized’. Sally, however, is accidentally killed when a large piece of wood strikes her on the temple.

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Emma.- Jane must have been sadly distressed at poor little Sally’s death; she was so much attached to her.

Mrs. S.- She was, my dear. She told me she would never take another child. Sally for some time had given her a good deal of trouble and additional work: but for the last few years her love for the child, who was very docile and affectionate, had quite overbalanced any trouble she might have had with her; and she found her a great comfort. I suppose the child was about six years old when the accident happened. Jane was from home; and her husband ran immediately for Dr. A., who told me the

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22 The name ‘Nanny’ is probably Barton parodying the occupation, by giving someone who is portrayed as an unsuitable mother the same name.
man was much distressed, as if it had been his own child.  

The comparison drawn between the behaviour of Sally's white adoptive parents and that of her natural Aboriginal mother highlights the inhumanity of the latter. Even the adoptive white father shows more concern for Sally than her birth mother ever does. Sally obviously benefits from living with a white family. Like her brother, she too becomes ‘civilised’ through the selfless generosity and endless patience of her white benefactors. Charlotte Barton's message, although not stated, is certainly implied. The only hope for the ‘half-caste’ child to escape the violence and cruelty of Aboriginal parenting is through white intervention.

Barton strongly disapproves of Aboriginal children not being weaned until they are at least four years old. Although she acknowledges that this practice is due to the ‘uncertainty and difficulty in procuring proper food’, 24 she is still unable to accept it as a valid reason for breast feeding for so long. Barton implies that Aboriginal babies should control their ‘voracious’ appetite, like a ‘tender white babe’, so that they can be weaned much earlier. Barton also disapproves of what she believes is the Aboriginal way of weaning 25, and Nanny, that most uncivilised of mothers, is relegated to the level of an animal. This dehumanising strategy is disturbingly familiar, being a common rationalisation for the ‘dispersal’ of Aboriginal people.

*Mrs.S.- One day when the tribe was encamped near the house; and Nanny and her child nearer than any of the rest: I went into the store at the back of the house, with the cook and your nurse. Suddenly little George gave a piercing shriek. I sent the nurse to see what had happened; and found Nanny had bitten the child severely on the back of his arm. She looked very much

23 Barton, op.cit., p.212.
24 By 1841, the year of publication, many Aboriginal people had been forced from their traditional hunting and food gathering areas. What remained was fast disappearing, both in terms of available land, native game and vegetable food.
25 Annette Hamilton refutes sudden weaning techniques among the Anbarra people of her study. Weaning is done gradually and can sometimes last for months. If the child is determined or screams for the breast it will always receive it, although harsh words are sometimes heard from the mother.
ashamed, when we reproofed her for it; and said, piccaninnie wanted to suck.

Lucy.- Mamma, that is just what pussy does, when she wishes to wean her kittens.

Mrs. S.- It reminded me of a cat Lucy; and I felt quite disgusted with Nanny: but upon the whole her children bore evident signs of her affection and care. 26

As this last sentence reveals, however, the attitude of Mrs Saville is, at times, inconsistent. Having spent most of the narrative condemning Nanny as a cruel and unnatural mother, Barton now condescendingly admits, that the children were given love and care. Nanny personifies all that Barton finds repulsive about Aboriginal women. Barton, and her alter ego, Mrs Saville, are fundamentalist in their Christian beliefs and recoil from foreign cultural practices. The stereotypical characteristics in representations of Aboriginal women in Australian children's fiction which persist well into the twentieth century have their beginnings with A Mother's Offering to Her Children.

The possibility of a free and happy Aboriginal childhood is inconceivable to Charlotte Barton who holds to the prevailing middle-class Christian view of her era, namely that children should be self-disciplined and controlled, never spontaneous. Aboriginal children lived in the midst of camp life, masters of their own social world, their boisterousness tolerated and their demands indulged. 27 Barton could not condone such approaches to child rearing as they threatened her notions of adult authority and her fixed sense of station in Victorian society. In stark contrast to their boisterous and indulged Aboriginal counterparts in real life, the Saville children are undifferentiated, passive and 'sponge-like', absorbing the relentless flow of maternal instruction, secure in their comfortable, 'civilised' life. They are confident in their

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See Hamilton, pp. 67-68.
26 Barton, op. cit., p. 211.
27 Hamilton, op. cit., p. 84.
superiority and indifferent to those who do not share their upbringing.

Barton is confident in her own ability to judge what is truth and what is merely hearsay. She believes that her stories are factual, undisturbed by the diverse nature of her content - from the supposedly traditional practice of burying live babies with their dead Aboriginal mothers, to the native flora and fauna, to the heroics of shipwreck survival. Although based mainly on anecdotal and descriptive evidence, Barton only includes stories which construct Aboriginal childhood as depraved and degraded, because she believes her European sources to be accurate.

The Sydney Morning Herald was glowingly supportive of both the author and the book:

COLONIAL LITERATURE - A very useful little publication entitled 'A Mother's Offering to her Children', issued from the Colonial Press last week. The work is written in a very unpretending style, ... - As a Christmas present, more especially for new-comers, the work is well adapted, and the community are under no small obligation to the authoress for having provided such a fund of amusement and instruction for the rising generation. 21

The Sydney Gazette was equally lavish in its praise:

'The Mother's Offering' ... should be in the hands of every young person ... we can confidently recommend it to the notice of parents, guardians and teachers, who will all find it a powerful auxiliary in inculcating true morality and profitable information in the minds of those intrusted to their care and supervision, and for whose mental improvement they are

21 The Sydney Morning Herald, 27th December, 1841.
responsible ...

We trust that the 'Mother's Offering' will obtain a cordial welcome in the house of every colonist in New South Wales, as, independent of its intrinsic merits - the successful attempt by Mrs Barton to elevate the character of the rising generation of her adopted land, by her excellent work, gives her a claim upon the public that entitle her to their best wishes and patronage.  

Charlotte Barton's book had the support of the Sydney establishment, not only as reading material for children but as a text for parents and teachers. At six shillings a copy, only the wealthy could have afforded to buy it. The influence of A Mother's Offering to Her Children on wealthy Anglo-Australian children would have been considerable.

The early decades of the nineteenth century were a time of considerable Evangelical Christian missionary enterprise in the Pacific. Any suggestion that a primitive, heathen race awaiting its redemption possessed nobility of character, was considered unchristian. Mission organisations stressed the abomination of indigenous society. Australian Aborigines were no longer portrayed as the 'Noble Savage' becoming instead ignoble and degraded fringe-dwellers.

The evangelical Christian and almost Puritan emphasis in the writing of Charlotte Barton assisted in the conditioning of a generation of racially prejudiced Australian children and their parents. Barton and her contemporaries disapproved of tribal cohesion and a traditional Aboriginal lifestyle, believing that the only way to effectively defeat such 'barbarism' was to produce effectively Europeanised 'natives'. This intolerant, defensive attitude hardened between 1837 and 1846 when the colony experienced the worst racial clashes in its history. The spate of attacks on

29 The Sydney Gazette, 23rd December, 1841.
30 At the time the daily wage for a skilled worker was around seven shillings.
32 G.Grey, Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North West and Western Australia (London,
white property and life was so intense that it was considered by some as an Aboriginal ‘rising’. This same generation also witnessed and contributed to the decimation of the Aboriginal people convinced that it was the design of Providence that the inferior races should pass away before the superior races ‘... since we have occupied the country, the aborigines must cease to occupy it’.

In 1859 Charles Darwin published *Origin of Species*, followed by *Descent of Man* in 1871, when racial ideas were already a significant element of British imperialism. The implications of Darwin's theories, when applied to society as Social Darwinism, influenced many facets of Victorian society, extending into Europe, America and Australia. Social Darwinism incorporated the concept of race itself, the idea of a racial hierarchy, and the commonly accepted ranking of the world’s people on a scale from savagery to civilisation. Whereas previously, the belief had been that on the ‘great chain of being’ humans lay fixed somewhere between angels and beasts, in an unchanging line of development, the Darwinian hierarchy, however, postulated that ‘great chain of being’ was in a state of constant evolution, where the interval between ape and man contained ‘numberless gradations’. Theories like Social Darwinism further reinforced the notion of empire. The extinction of the ‘inferior Aboriginal race’ became predictable in the wake of ‘colonial progress’. The poor health and onset of disease which Aboriginal people faced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century further reinforced the belief that they were a ‘dying race’. The land they had considered their home for millennia was regarded as ‘empty’ and therefore ripe for European occupation.

Darwin believed humankind’s ape ancestry was an irrevocable fact. The only uncertainty was whether the primate ancestor was a small species, such as the

35 H. Reynolds, *Frontier* (North Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1987), p.116. The old Linnean idea of a chain of being, fixed and unchangeable, had been gradually abandoned, enabling Darwin’s theories to be accepted. Although revolutionary in many respects, Darwin’s theories fitted easily into the late eighteenth belief in progress. However, those who adapted his theories to human society were often guilty of misrepresentation.
chimpanzee, or a larger, more powerful one, such as the gorilla. In Australia, although evolutionary ideas were not new, Darwin's theories were slow to gain acceptance in scientific and 'intellectual' circles. His ideas, however, did enjoy currency at a more popular level. In fact, it was probably the wide coverage of Darwin's death and subsequent burial in Westminster Abbey in 1882, coupled with the political and economic climate of the late nineteenth century, that sparked greater acceptance in Australia.

Darwin's theories suited the capitalist social order, with the idea of 'the survival of the fittest', a phrase coined by Herbert Spencer, not Charles Darwin, justifying ruthless competition between individuals, classes, nations and races. Physical description became an indicator of place in the hierarchy, the most derogatory being reserved for the Aboriginal, the most inferior of all.

For the thirty years following the publication of A Mother's Offering to her Children, Aboriginal people were treated with contempt by the white community. Their subjugation by the gun, disease and alcohol, ensured the continuance of the stereotypes already in place. Aboriginal people were generally regarded as dirty, lazy drunks, ravaged by disease and promiscuity. Like many stereotypes they contain some elements of truth. By European standards, Aboriginal camps were disorganised and dirty. The men were without regular employment and often drunk. The women were regarded as 'reprobates divested of independence and moral responsibility', while the children were easily infected with smallpox, measles, tuberculosis and influenza. 'Half-caste' children were despised, while 'full-bloods' were given the status once more of 'The Noble Savage'.

In 1892, when the intensity of dispossession had slowed, Ellen Campbell published her autobiographical children's book An Australian Childhood. In it she reminisces about growing up in country New South Wales in the 1850s. Like Charlotte Barton,

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Ellen Campbell lived on an isolated property, but unlike Barton whose husband James had taken tribal land and dispossessed the local Gundungurra people, her contact with the local Aborigines was restricted to the occasional ‘wandering tribe’. Campbell’s narrative, like Barton’s, is anecdotal based on her own remembered experiences. The subject matter covers many aspects of country living from the viewpoint of a white, middle-class child. This raises questions as to the selectivity of her memory forty years later, although it was published as a factual account for both an English and Australian audience.

Ellen Campbell grew up three miles from Carcoar in the ‘Golden West’ region of New South Wales. Her father was the local magistrate. Campbell, although forbidden to haunt the ‘blackfellows’ camp across the creek’ because the society of ‘lubras and piccaninnies’ was not considered edifying by her parents, surreptitiously visits them anyway. The Aboriginal camps held no fear for Campbell. The Scottish property manager, however, doesn’t share her sentiments.

"Want a stick of baccy for that dirty black Jackie? Nonsense. Miss Nell! I can’t do it, it encourages the whole thieving tribe to hang about the place. I wish your uncle would give me my own way about them, I would pull all their rubbishy gunyahs down and send them about their business. I can’t bear to see the lazy black creatures loafing about in their tattered blankets; it’s neither decent or Christian." 41

Campbell’s final chapter is devoted to anecdotes about ‘A Faithful Little Blackfellow’ and his life with her family. Campbell introduces us to the ‘tiny little black boy’ her father has bought for ‘one ninepence and a nubbler’ in order to ‘save’ him. She describes him as a ‘misshapen little creature’, with a large ‘woolly head, thin body, and shrunken shanks’. He is about three years old and ‘small for his age’. Campbell’s description immediately distances herself and her audience from any

physical link with the Aboriginal child. Campbell reinforces the idea of white physical superiority and promotes the notion that whites are higher on the evolutionary scale. This preoccupation with establishing racial superiority through physical description continues to permeate Australian children’s fiction.

In settled areas Aborigines became refugees in their own land. Deprived of their traditional food supply, society, culture and traditions, many parents were unable to care for their children in the traditional way. "Training a ‘tiny little black boy’ in the ways of a ‘superior’ civilisation would have been considered by Campbell’s family as his only hope of salvation.

... if you had seen him this morning, as I did, toiling along behind the other blackfellows, on those poor thin little legs - just look at them - I am sure you would have pitied him. Why, the creature has never in his life known what it is to have enough to eat.  

As in A Mother's Offering to her Children, the child is constructed as starving, neglected and badly treated. This time, however, the child is not given away, but sold by his grandmother. Campbell’s calm, even tone when recounting the event is a direct contrast to the more negative emotions displayed so bluntly by Barton. Campbell’s Christian intent is expressed in language far gentler and far more insidious. The Campbell family are prepared to patronise and tolerate the Aboriginal child because they believe that contact with a white family is best for him. In their self-righteous superiority, the Campbells see themselves as being extremely generous in domesticating one of God’s lowest creatures. The child is re-named Tommy. His Aboriginal name would never have been considered suitable.

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44 Campbell, op. cit, p.85.
"... but what am I to do with a child like that? He will be more trouble and responsibility than any Christian baby, and I shall have all the worry of him."

"We will make a Christian child of him," answered father, a little gravely. ...

"There, say no more," interrupted mother, her kind heart touched. "We will do our best for the child ...." «

Ellen and her sister Mary are given permission, by their parents, to look after Tommy, and he becomes their 'pet'.

... we cast about where to put him to sleep. No one wanted him, that was patent; but I did think it hard when our Irish cook, who, I am sure, need not have been fastidious about the poor baby, objected on the score of cleanliness to having "a black thing like that in my bed-room."

Mary and I would have taken him, but here mother's prejudices stepped in. «

If Tommy is at the bottom of the social scale, being almost sub-human, the Irish cook is obviously much further down the scale than the family she serves. Tommy, like Barton's Sally, prefers to sleep wrapped in the security of his possum skin rug with a dog as his companion, rejecting the bed by the fire that is made for him. Unlike Barton, Campbell refrains from forcefully stating her opinions and beliefs about Aboriginal people. She nevertheless unconsciously expresses the ideology of her era and social class, due perhaps to the retrospective nature of the book.

By the 1860s, traditional Aboriginal society had been destroyed throughout most of

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44 Ibid. p.85-86
South Eastern Australia. Only in those areas not yet settled by Europeans, mainly in the north-west and centre, did the slowly expanding frontier meet with Aboriginal resistance. In the South, indigenous Australians were already considered to be a ‘dying race’. The government decided to ‘protect’ Aborigines by placing them on reserves and missions administered by Protection Boards in most colonies. \(^44\) The Aboriginal population had been ‘brought under control’ by the 1890s, and was of little interest to mainstream Australia, and certainly of little consequence to Campbell’s middle class audience. Her purpose is to recreate her childhood for her children and grandchildren and to amuse and entertain them with her anecdotes about the Aboriginal boy Tommy. Although *An Australian Childhood* was published fifty one years after *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children* Campbell, like Barton, merely recounts and reflects, never questions the prevailing white attitudes of the time. To do so would betray not only her family, but also her audience.

Tommy is stereotypically naughty and has ‘no moral sense’. He is quick, using his intelligence to ‘evade justice’. In a non-Aboriginal child such behaviour would have been considered spirited and mischievous, possibly endearing, but in an Aboriginal child it is unacceptable. Tommy belongs to a conquered race and should know his place in the hierarchy. The relationship between Tommy and the only Campbell son, Ted, reinforces this superiority. Tommy falls down immediately and worships Ted, becoming his faithful servant.

According to Campbell, Tommy is a ‘typical Aborigine’, a sly thief, whose ‘black eyes and quick fingers’ are everywhere. In habit he is closer to the domestic animals than he is to civilised society, preferring the company of a pig to that of the daughters of the household. A motherly old sow makes him welcome, ‘perhaps not noticing any great difference between him and her own offspring’.\(^45\) This dehumanising construction is similar to the cat-like weaning behaviour of Barton’s Nanny.

Campbell records Tommy’s speech only twice in her narrative. The first time is

\(^{44}\) The Protection Boards began in Victoria 1860, New South Wales 1883, Western Australia 1886 and Queensland 1897.

\(^{45}\) Campbell, *op.cit*, p.91.
when he ‘lisps’ to her that he has been ‘all along a pig-ty’, and the second is when he refers to ‘Massa Ted’. Both are worth mentioning for their underlying implications. Lisping was a form of speech considered endearing in children’s fiction at the turn of the century. This is a possible indication of an 1890s influence on Campbell’s childhood recollections, although it was usually only white children who lisped, so perhaps Tommy did have a speech impediment. The second example is also revealing because of the Black American Southern accent, which was also becoming a feature of Aboriginal speech in Australian children’s fiction. The American Civil War had begun in 1861, an event which would probably have been known to Campbell, as would the result and its effect on slavery in America. By ascribing an exaggerated Black American form of address from the Southern American plantations to an Aboriginal child, Campbell reinforces the belief that social inferiority is primarily determined by skin colour. Aboriginal Australians had far more in common with Native Americans than Black Americans, but Native Americans were never bought and sold on auction blocks as field workers, house servants and craftspeople. Nor did they arrive from their country of origin in chains. The impact of associating Aboriginal Australians with Black Americans was far more demeaning than linking them to another indigenous people. 41

Tommy, by the end of the book, is about twelve years of age and has lived with the Campbells for nine years, yet his speech patterns remain immature with the author-created Southern American accent. Such inaccuracy, although the utterances are brief, still indicates how deeply ingrained racism had become. The voice of Tommy, as an Aboriginal, is perceived and shaped by social discourse. The Aboriginal child is constructed as a black slave. This speech pattern is prevalent in children’s fiction written before An Australian Childhood and continues for many decades afterwards, particularly in the children’s publications of Mary and Elizabeth Durack (see discussion in chapter two).

The ultimate proof of the inferiority of the ‘dying’ Aboriginal race, comes about when Ted contracts measles but recovers, while the unfortunate Tommy quickly

41 This association is also used by Elizabeth Durack in Piccanninies which will be discussed in Chapter Two.
Two days later, the poor little black boy was raving in a worse delirium than Ted's had ever been.

"These natives take English diseases so badly, that not one in fifty gets over them," was the doctor's verdict.

At the end of the week little Tommy was dead, and Mary and I lamented sorely for our pupil and pet.

Tommy's death is not surprising. Although the Aborigines had been considered a 'dying race' early in colonial writings, "Social Darwinism conveniently explained the near genocidal effects of the massacres and disease which accompanied white settlement. Campbell regards Tommy's death the same way she regarded the deaths of her other pets. This also reflects a persistent association of Aboriginal people with the native fauna. Tommy is missed, but not mourned.

Memory, collective and individual, is consciously and unconsciously selective. It is rooted in culture, education and experience, impression, feeling and perception, as well as a more structured, rational schemata. It cannot be considered objective. The selectivity, interpretation and distortion of memory is socially conditioned. Conflict arises when individual memory and public memory do not align. Barton, and more particularly Campbell, rely upon generational memory to develop their own accounts of Aboriginal childhood as well as on their own experiences. By locating themselves in a specific time, place and culture, the formation of their particular perceptions and subsequent narratives becomes almost predictable.

The interactions between individual memory and collective myth, between individual and national experience, is reflected in the constructions of Aboriginal childhood.

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*Campbell, *op.cit*, pp.95-96
conveyed by both authors. The role of audience is paramount to what constitutes memory which therefore becomes fact to the author and reader alike.

In the case of Barton many of her stories are based on newspaper accounts of actual events, so the factual distortion is doubly accentuated.

... memories are constructed by social groups. Individuals remember, in the literal, physical sense. However, it is social groups which determine what is "memorable" and also how it will be remembered. Individuals identify with public events of importance to their group. They "remember" a good deal that they have not experienced directly.  

The number of story lines into which authors can construe 'happenings', the roles that can be assigned, such as hero, villain, saviour, dupe, exploiter and exploited, the morals that can be drawn and the intents for telling what is recalled, are limited by what is experienced. What is remembered and how an author and their audience perceive that memory also impacts on the meaning attached to the narrative. Similarly, a reader can never have direct access to exactly what is remembered.  

It is subject to the limitations imposed by the conditions of publication. The cultural features of such accounts are not simply the product of individual authorship; they draw upon general cultural repertoires, features of language and codes of expression. All help to determine what may be said, as well as how, and to what effect. The intervening events in the experience of the authors may have induced them to diminish the importance of some events, or enhance the importance of others, beyond proper proportion. Both are influenced by the narrator's prior receptivity to certain ideas and not to others.

This raises questions of reliability and accuracy. It is the selectivity of omission and inclusion which makes the autobiography fiction. The epic scale of Campbell's life has been reduced to that of her childhood, in itself exclusionary, limited even more by the confines and constraints of narrative structure. The lapse of thirty years or more between what actually happened and what Campbell chooses to remember, increases the subjectivity of the book even further. For Barton, the intervening trauma of fleeing a violent second husband with her four young children and maintaining respectability when her fitness as a mother is questioned, interferes with the textualization of her reality. It is through reflection that Barton and Campbell compose and re-compose their memories to conform with the circumstances in which they find themselves. The 'facts' of their lives are made to accord with their present situation. Matters which offend cultural taboos are likely to go unreported. Examples of whites murdering Aboriginal children in the most horrific way could not be included. They would have been denied. Such information may also have genuinely been outside Barton's and Campbell's knowledge.

The most effective way to influence opinion is through the selection and arrangement of appropriate facts. All facts are open to distortion, manipulation and falsification. Factual status is determined by interpretation. 'Pure' factual representation, existing objectively and independently of interpretation, is a fallacy. The subjectivity arises from the textualization of the facts not from the facts themselves. Subjectivity is another way of creating meaning.

The way the public myths and private memories of Barton and Campbell reify and elide with each other, the ways in which the 'reality' of Aboriginal childhood is presented, emphasises what society chooses to forget. Traditionally Aboriginal children were born into a stable community and treated with love, concern and pride by their tribe and family groups. Their role in Aboriginal society was predetermined and predictable, their education revolving around survival and their cultural heritage. They were given the freedom to play and required to do little except 'be' children.

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The Aboriginal children of Barton and Campbell never play, never sing, dance or imagine. They have been denied their childhood, portrayed as victims of parental and tribal indifference, neglected and mistreated. Aboriginal childhood fails to conform to the approved ‘norms’ of white prescriptions of child care. The lives of Aboriginal children are full of hardship, their very existence a battle against starvation and disease. Although their only ‘crime’ is that of belonging to a conquered people, they are treated as criminals, their primary role to amuse and reinforce the ‘superiority’ of a wealthy white audience.

The images of Aboriginal childhood portrayed in nineteenth century Australian children's fiction are marginalised just as the characters themselves are peripheral to the action of the plot. An Aboriginal child is never the focus of a children's book, but included merely as an entertaining oddity.

In spite of the prevalence of ‘helpful’ blacktrackers in the early adventure literature and stories of pioneering life, and the faithful Man Friday character in Australian children’s books, there was little attempt to observe Aboriginal Australians as people, with individual personalities. In 1905, however, Mrs Aeneas (Jeannie) Gunn, published *The Little Black Princess: A True Tale of Life in the Never Never Land*, catapulting 'Bett-Bett', ‘a little bush nigger girl’, to national stardom as the main character (previously unheard of), in an Australian children's book.

Of Scottish descent, Jeannie Taylor was born in Melbourne on June 5th, 1870, her grandfather a Baptist Minister. Educated at home, Jeannie married the son of Melbourne's first Gaelic preacher, Aeneas Gunn, in 1901. Before his marriage Gunn had gone into partnership with Joseph Bradshaw and established Victoria River Downs Cattle Station in Northern Australia. He returned to Melbourne suffering from malaria, the effects of which would plague him for the rest of his life. Shortly after their marriage, the Gunns left Melbourne to take charge of the Elsey Cattle Station in the Northern Territory. It is here that *A Little Black Princess* is set.

Elsey Station is an isolated property, the nearest neighbour being one hundred miles away, the nearest doctor three hundred. Life for Jeannie must have been excruciatingly lonely, as the only female company she had were the Aboriginal
women who worked on the station and with whom she had nothing in common. Consequently, she wrote long letters to her friends in Melbourne describing her experiences and the incidents of her daily life which so amused and entertained them that they later persuaded her to publish them in book form as autobiographical accounts. *The Little Black Princess* was the first followed by *We of the Never Never* in 1908. Their popularity has been so great that they are still in print. Gunn first 'discovers' Bett-Bett, whose Aboriginal name is unknown, when she emerges from her hiding place after her tribe had been suddenly attacked by the 'Willeroo' blacks. "Jeannie Gunn invites Bett-Bett to come and live with her at the homestead. The familiar white narrative pattern about Aboriginal childhood emerges once more. There is no attempt to ask the permission of Bett-Bett's family. The thought that someone might actually look for the child or even worry about her is never mentioned. The implication is that no one cares enough to find out if she has in fact survived the attack. Gunn implies that the Aboriginal child is neglected. Just as Barton justifies Sally's removal and Campbell justifies the purchase of Tommy, Gunn justifies taking Bett-Bett to the Elsey homestead. The influence of a caring and concerned white family is presumed to be more desirable than that of an allegedly neglectful Aboriginal one. When Gunn asks Bett-Bett if she would like to come and live with her she readily agrees, 'grinning with delight'. Gunn constructs Bett-Bett as an amusing distraction in the boredom of her days. Campbell had Tommy as her pet, Gunn has Bett-Bett.

Gunn immediately imposes white standards of dress and Bett-Bett is given a blue and white singlet taken from one of the station hands. She dresses herself in it at once, and looks just like a 'gaily-coloured beetle, with thin black arms and legs, but she thought herself very stylish, and danced about everywhere ... ""Bett-Bett instantly becomes a figure of fun, likened to an insect, and gently ridiculed because she believes herself to be stylish in a white man's clothes. The distance between white and black is established immediately. Gunn wastes no time in reassuring her audience of their superiority. Bett-Bett finds a 'Missus', while Gunn finds a 'nuisance'.

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54 The Willeroo blacks come from Willeroo station.
According to Horton (1994) "at the time of Gunn’s occupancy, Elsey station was situated at Warloch Ponds, south of Katherine. From the late 1800s, European and Chinese miners and farmers moved inland along the Daly River, closely followed by Jesuit missionaries. Most of the agricultural enterprises, however, failed, and although the Jesuits (1886-1899) seriously curtailed the traditional ceremonial life of the Aborigines in the area, they found few converts to Christianity and were eventually wiped out by floods. Cattle stations were established in the 1880s, forcing Aboriginal people off the grasslands into the rugged sandstone ranges. Many, however, were born and raised on cattle stations, living in poor conditions on station settlements controlled by Europeans. "This is Bett-Bett's inheritance.

Gunn makes 'shimmy shirts', or white petticoats for Bett-Bett, but is frustrated when she wants to share them with others.

Like all niggers, she had such a generous heart that she could not bear to have anything good without sharing it with everybody. This was rather a nuisance, for as soon as her clothes were finished she wanted to give most of them to the other lubras.

Gunn has a limited understanding of the ethic of communal sharing which underlies Aboriginal culture. Finding it an annoyance she trivialises and dismisses it as merely indicating a generous people. As one would expect, Gunn's perspective is European when it comes to the ownership of property. Likewise, when Bett-Bett makes a 'pretty little bag' from what Gunn at first presumes to be thread from rags, Gunn’s praise eventually turns to anger when she realises that it is the 'shimmy shirts' which have provided the necessary string. Being the Christian lady that she is, Gunn forgives Bett-Bett because she cannot be expected to know any better: 'I was really angry with her now, and set her to sew at a new one. She obeyed with such a cheerful

56 Horton, op.cit., p. 370.
57 Ibid.
58 Gunn, op.cit. p.7.
grin that I began to feel quite mean for punishing her, for how could she understand that it was wrong to tear up her own things?" 59

The novelty of the shimmy shirt doesn’t last long for Bett-Bett. Revealing herself to be an innovative child, she puts the shimmy shirt material to a more practical use - a carry bag. The weaving of bags was traditionally done by women, a skill which would have been passed on to Bett-Bett by her older female kin. Similarly Goggle-Eye uses the leg of one of his trousers for the same purpose. Both Bett-Bett and Goggle Eye could see no real value in clothing, accepting Gunn’s offer so as not to offend the ‘Missus’. The differences between what white and black cultures deem to be essential for life to function successfully are highlighted by the actions of Bett-Bett. Neither Gunn nor the Aboriginals can empathise with the other about their cultural practices. The whites see it as another indicator of the ‘uncivilised savage’, while the Aboriginal community compromise because they are in no position to resist.

Gunn informs her audience that she never laughs at their ‘strange beliefs’ because under every ‘silly bit of nonsense was a great deal of good sense’. Her choice of words such as ‘strange’, ‘silly’, and ‘nonsense’, reveals that although she regards such beliefs as trivial, she at least has some understanding of why they are valued. Gunn finds the Aboriginal kinship system impossible to understand, which is not surprising as it is a very complex system requiring detailed knowledge, not only of the individual tribal groups but of their languages, spoken and signed. Aboriginal kinship provides a code of behaviour appropriate for each kind of relative with whom an individual interacts. The relationship between Goggle Eye and Bett-Bett is characterised by avoidance because Goggle Eye is Bett-Bett’s ‘little-bit-father’, and must never look at or speak to her. Gunn regards this as one of the strangest customs the blacks have, and asks for an explanation, but is more interested in explaining the

59 Gunn, ibid., p.10.
punishment if the law is broken, rather than the actual custom itself. 60

Bett-Bett's chewing of tobacco is regarded by Gunn as undesirable, although it appears that she accepts the habit for the adults, as she constantly 'rewards' them with sticks of 'chew-bac'. Consequently, Gunn devises a variety of punishments for Bett-Bett to stop her chewing, as she is determined that Bett-Bett will obey. Both situations reveal Gunn's need to be in control.

Whipping her was no good, for I couldn't hurt her a little bit. I only seemed to tickle her.
"You too muchee little fellow, Missus," she explained cheerfully.
Any other punishment she got nothing but fun out of.
I gave her sewing to do, and she threaded ticks on to her needle and cotton.
I gave her bread and water for dinner, and she and Sue caught water rats; and Bett-Bett made a fire and cooked them. In fact, they had a splendid picnic.
I took Sue away from her, and chained her up; but the little dog howled so dismally that I was more punished than Bett-Bett.
I shut her in the bathroom by herself. She always called it the "bogey-house"; and she pretended that she was hiding from her enemies...
I could think of nothing else, and was at my wits' end; ... In despair, I had almost decided to send her back to the bush, ...

60 The kinship system of Bett-Bett and Goggle Eye is of a classificatory kind, where the mother's sisters are also called 'mother', and the father's brothers are called 'father'. Bett-Bett is Goggle Eye's niece, which explains why she calls him 'little-bit-father'. Relatives by marriage are brought into the same kin classification as blood relatives. Kinship classification indicates the general nature of behaviour between individuals but, as in any society, actual behaviour depends on the closeness of the relationship, personal history and personalities. Horton, op.cit. p. 553. Of course Goggle Eye may well have told Gunn more, but she might have considered the full explanation beyond the understanding of her audience.

61 Gunn, op.cit., p. 20.
Bett-Bett won't abide by Gunn's rules and refuses to conform, turning all forms of punishment into imaginative games. The significance of European methods of attempting to control her behaviour are alien to Bett-Bett. They have no meaning in the context of her own indigenous society. As an eight year old Aboriginal girl, Bett-Bett would have been expected to obey the demands of both her female and male relations. If she refused to comply with their requests, however, there would have been no punishment, either in the form of verbal or physical abuse. The underlying assumption is that a task is completed because the child wishes to do it, not because of fear of punishment. By the same token, there would be no rewards for obedience. Authoritarian child raising practices are absent from Aboriginal tradition. No demands are made for unquestioning obedience. Adults expect little of children while children, up to a certain age, can make demands on adults. Children are not expected to obey or respect adults merely because they are adults. Young children are indulged and most of their desires are met, while their most unreasonable and even unrealisable demands are responded to with concern. Such 'permissiveness' would be seen as the ruination of character by Gunn and her audience. In her ethnocentrism, Gunn sees sending Bett-Bett back to the bush and her own people as the ultimate punishment. Gunn views rejection by civilised white society as the most severe of sanctions, and mistakenly believes that Bett-Bett feels the same way.

Although Gunn doesn't express shock or concern at a two year old smoking his mother's pipe, her resignation at the behaviour of a 'wild little nigger boy' is implied:

*Bitterwine sat on his mother's knee, looking from me to the piccaninny, with big wondering eyes. Every little while he took his mother's pipe out of her mouth, and put it in his own for a few sucks - smoking Donald's health, I suppose.*

An Aboriginal mother cannot be expected to know any better. Gunn is far more

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63 Gunn, *op.cit.* p.90.
astonished by the skin colour of the newborn Donald.

*I stood for some minutes, too astonished to speak, for instead of
the shiny jet-black piccaninny I had expected, I found one just
about the colour of honey.

"What name, Topsy?" I asked at last. "Him close up
whitefellow, I think."*

Gunn is obviously relieved when it is explained to her that all Aboriginal babies are
born paler in colour than their parents. Some Aboriginal mothers may smear their
baby with charcoal and ashes to darken it. After a few days the skin colour darkens
with only the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet remaining pale. **Gunn is
obviously not happy with the thought of more ‘half-caste’ children at Elsey Station.

Gunn attempts to teach Bett-Bett to read, although white society generally believed
that the Aborigine was incapable of learning a great a deal beyond the skills of a
trade, such as a gardener or domestic servant. The exchange between Gunn and Bett-
Bett about the letters of the alphabet is meant to be entertaining, as the dialogue is
lively and the anecdotal style humorous and well paced. Bett-Bett, however, again
reveals herself to be highly imaginative, attempting to come to terms with a system
of writing which has no meaning for a child whose culture is transmitted orally. Bett-
Bett attempts to make sense of the alphabet by drawing on her existing knowledge
and associating the various letters with her own real life experiences: ‘We began
with the capital letters. Bett-Bett repeated ‘A’ after me, and made it on paper, and
then wanted to know what is was. Was it tucker, or an animal, or somebody’s name?’

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Gunn perseveres, although Bett-Bett is clearly unimpressed. Ironically Gunn
includes dialogue concerning Bett-Bett's attempts to understand the relationship

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64 Gunn, *ibid.* p.88.
65 Hamilton, *ibid.* p.29.
between the upper and lower case letters. Gunn explains the difference between them as capital ‘A’ being the mother while the smaller ‘a’ is the baby. This is acceptable while the letters remain side by side in the primer, but when Bett-Bett discovers an entire page of print, her reaction gives far more insight into the relationship between an Aboriginal mother and her child, than Bett-Bett’s ability to read.

"Look, Missus!" she cried, excitedly. "Picaninny belonga mumma 'A' sit down by meself." Then she scolded the little letter dreadfully. "You go home longa your mumma," she said, in a loud, angry voice, shaking her finger at it. But small "a" never moved; it just sat and looked at her, and Bett-Bett told me it was "cheeky fellow longa me," meaning it was not at all afraid of her. "My word! you badfellow alright," she went on, scolding hard; "Debbil-debbil catch you dreckly." As little "a" took no notice of this awful threat, she turned back to tell "mumma A" about its naughty piccaninny. There she found that the little letter had slipped home, and was sitting quietly at its mother's knee. She was so pleased about it.

"Look, Missus," she said, coming to show me; "him goodfellow now."  

Bett-Bett is obviously concerned that the child should stay with its mother, and scolds and threatens when it doesn't comply with her wishes. The image of Aboriginal mothers being neglectful of their children is challenged by an eight year old's innocent role play. Gunn, however, still makes no mention of Bett-Bett's own mother and her possible concern at Bett-Bett's prolonged absence. Recounting an Aboriginal child's attempts at learning the alphabet is included only because of its value as entertainment. The deeper implications are once again ignored.

Bett-Bett's formal education seems to come to an end when the naughty 'piccaninny'

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Gunn, ibid., pp.50-51.
returns to its ‘Mumma’, as there is no further mention of Bett-Bett's reading lessons. The impossibility of the task, even for Jeannie Gunn who is a qualified teacher, is implied. Gunn's audience would once again have been reassured that the Aboriginal child could not be formally educated. Bett-Bett is an expert on natural history, however, as she has been taught by ‘Mother Nature’, and learnt her lessons well, unlike many white children. The implication, once again, is that the cognitive capacity of Aboriginal children limits them to learning lessons of survival, and their superiority to white children, and even white adults in this, or any other task, is worth mentioning because of its rare occurrence. The construction of the Aboriginal as ‘Other’ is reinforced.

Tracking skills are prized by Bett-Bett and the Aboriginal women working on Elsey Station. Gunn willingly confesses her own inability to learn to track animals or even recognise the footprints of her own husband. In spite of patient teachers, and Gunn giving her ‘very best’, she still fails dismally, because she didn't have ‘a blackfellow's sight for tiny differences’. Gunn provides her audience with indisputable evidence of the contrast between the two cultures. The European is firmly established as being central, the ‘exotic’ Aboriginal providing the perfect foil. Gunn treats the two cultures as separate systems, with herself as the go-between for her audience: ‘Blacks are blacks, and whites are whites, and as looked from the merry black faces to the clean white clothes, I knew their way of working was best - for them, at any rate ...’

Cannibalism is once again referred to, but Gunn lacks the obvious relish that characterises Charlotte Barton's account. Bett-Bett recounts how the Willeroos had taken her, some lubras and other piccaninnies. At supper time, when there was no tucker according to Bett-Bett, the Willeroos killed and ate some of the other piccaninnies. Bett-Bett and the Roper River lubras eventually escaped after white stockmen had frightened off their captors. When asked why she hadn't been killed and eaten, Bett-Bett replied with a chuckle that she was too thin.

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* Gunn, *ibid.*, p.36.
"Me too muchee all day bone fellow" -she had evidently not been worth eating, when fatter piccaninnies were about! ...
Poor little mite! she had seen some fearful doings in her short life.
When I asked her if she had eaten any of these piccaninnies, she said that the blackfellows had not left any for her.
"Blackfellow bin finissem, Missus," was all she said, and I don't believe she would have refused to have eaten her share. 65

Even though Gunn appears to believe Bett-Bett's story and sympathises accordingly, the tone of the entire episode is couched in suppressed humour, unintentionally implying that Bett-Bett is more interested in telling the 'Missus' a good story, than recounting actual events.

Cannibalism is the most grisly of the practices which separate the 'savage' from the 'civilised'. By including it Jeannie Gunn reinforces the image of the Aboriginal as 'Other'. The Aborigines of the Roper River region, including Bett-Bett and by implication all Aboriginal peoples, can never become a part of the dominant white culture, their 'otherness' is too extreme. Although it is the more 'traditional' Willeroos who actually perform the act of cannibalism, Gunn doesn't doubt that Bett-Bett, if given the chance, would have eaten her share. Even the 'station blacks' can never be truly 'white'. Gunn, however, still persist with the 'civilising' of Bett-Bett, and attempts to prevent her from feasting with her own people.

When the earth and fire were at last scraped away, everybody helped themselves to huge junks [of bullock] and began tearing at them like wild beasts, dog and master eating from the same joint. I called Bett-Bett then, and we went to our camp, leaving our guests to their feast; for this part of the entertainment was not very pretty. 66

65 Gunn, ibid., p.83.
66 Gunn, ibid., p.74.
The images Gunn uses once again depict the 'bush blacks' as wild, savage and primitive, but this time she doesn't acknowledge Bett-Bett as one of them. They, the Aboriginals, are 'our' guests and they, Gunn and Bett-Bett, retreat to 'our' camp. The sense of 'Other' created by Gunn marginalises Bett-Bett totally. She will never belong to white society, but Gunn believes her influence has been sufficiently 'civilising' to separate Bett-Bett from the more 'barbaric' aspects of tribal behaviour. The difference between the white culture of Mrs Aeneas Gunn, inscribed in notions of empire and propriety, and those of the Aborigine, were determined by the categories of colonisation. 'Barbaric' and 'primitive' were diametrically opposed to 'civilised'. "Bett-Bett, however, doesn't share the aspirations of her 'Missus', and has no intention of missing out on the joint of meat she carries to the fire to be cooked.

... I heard a peculiar scrunching going on inside Bett-Bett's mosquito net. I went over to see what it was, and found that she had crept back to the feast for her precious ox-tail, and that she and Sue were just finishing picking the bones. "

Gunn's perceptions, however, are contradictory. When Bett-Bett becomes lethargic and listless, Gunn suggests that she 'go walkabout' and return to her people, the very same people whose eating habits she regards as uncivilised, and undesirable for Bett-Bett to be exposed to. Gunn believes that the sooner Bett-Bett goes 'the quicker she would be cured'. Gunn never considers that Bett-Bett might choose to return to a traditional lifestyle permanently, or that her family might prefer to keep her with them as a useful member of their tribe. Gunn trivialises Bett-Bett's desire to return to

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72 Gunn, op.cit. p. 74.
her people by regarding it as an illness from which she will recover.

It is Gunn who makes the diagnosis, and then suggests the cure. It is Gunn who confidently presumes she has control over Bett-Bett's life. Bett-Bett is patronisingly presented as a child who merely wants to be a 'little black nigger girl for a while'. Gunn attempts to deprive Bett-Bett of her Aboriginal identity, but offers no alternative by accepting her as a part of white society. Gunn 'knows' that Bett-Bett will need her 'Missus' and come back 'bright and happy again'. Obviously Gunn believes that Bett-Bett could only be happy with her, as she finds little value in traditional Aboriginal life. Bett-Bett, although apparently well treated by Gunn, is there primarily to amuse and entertain. She is Gunn's companion in an isolated and essentially hostile environment dominated by men. Gunn considers her own needs first, often disregarding those of Bett-Bett, other than her most immediate physical requirements. When Aeneas Gunn dies of malaria just over a year after their arrival, his wife doesn't hesitate in leaving Bett-Bett behind, her usefulness being at an end. Suddenly Bett-Bett's Aboriginal family is the most desirable place for her to be. Melbourne society would never accept an Aboriginal child, and Jeannie Gunn never considered taking her.

Gunn romanticises the 'other' because the 'Never Never' is still an isolated frontier, enabling her to create a Utopian Aboriginal existence. Gunn idealises traditional Aboriginal childhood, creating images of 'little shiny-black piccaninnies' playing and rolling over each other on the river bank while their 'childlike' mothers 'play' at doing the washing. The smaller babies are placed in coolamons 73, which rock and dance among the water lilies. This enables Gunn to nostalgically mystify Aboriginal childhood in the context of the present. For her reader, Gunn includes some Aboriginal 'truths', valid because of their ancient knowledge of survival, ecology, health and social relations. Her essential purpose, however, is to amuse whilst being entertained herself: 'My friends used to wonder why I was not lonely, a hundred miles from any white neighbours, and I used to wonder if any one could be lonely with a perpetual circus and variety show on the premises.' 74

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73 An oval shaped carrying dish used for holding food and water as well as cradling babies. The favoured source material for making coolamons is often a hollow section of a living tree.
74 Gunn, op.cit., p.36.
Jeannie Gunn writes as a well-educated teacher, selecting details which are outside the direct experience of her audience, but extend the racist stereotypes, and to a certain extent, the general knowledge of her projected reader. The cross-cultural encounters she depicts locates her readers as non-Aboriginal, enabling her to establish and emphasise a line of irrefutable cultural difference. Constructed in this way, Aboriginal childhood bears no similarity to that of its white counterpart. Although the original letters on which *The Little Black Princess* is based were written specifically for an adult audience, their publication as a children's book highlights the acceptability of the Aboriginal child focus in the relatively uncontroversial genre of children's literature. *The Little Black Princess*, unlike *We of the Never Never*, is perceived as children's fiction and therefore harmless.  

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*We of the Never Never*, an account of Gunn's life on Elsey Station for an adult audience, was finally published in 1908 after the manuscript had been rejected by at least six publishers, who were not swayed by the success of *The Little Black Princess*. Ironically, *We of the Never Never* is also still in print.
Chapter Two

‘Seven Little Piccaninnies meet Uncle Remus and Sambo’: Constructions of Aboriginal Childhood in the Australian Picture Storybook 1919-1971.

According to Muir (1981), illustrated Australian children’s books date from the 1890s. Prior to that period, fewer than fifty children’s books had been published in Australia. The first illustrated work for children produced in Australia, *The Australian Picture Pleasure Book*, was published by J.R. Clarke in 1857. The preface of the book suggests that the work was intended more for ‘our young friends in England’ than an Australian audience.¹ It was not until the 1930s that the picture storybook for very young children began to appear. Illustrated children’s books had reached a fine art with the productions of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite but in Australia the book with integrated text and picture did not become established until late in the 1940s. Most picture books produced in the latter part of the twentieth century maintain a balance between the illustrations and the text, so that neither is completely effective without the other. Picture books with more complex storylines produced to cater for the older reader are not as dependent upon pictures to develop their plots. Because of this complementary relationship between the text and illustrations, many early Australian picture books are not picture books, but either illustrated texts or picture storybooks, where the illustrations provide a literal interpretation of the text.

For the first hundred years of settlement, illustrations for Australian children’s books were almost without exception drawn by artists who had never set foot in Australia. British-based artists and publishers were not concerned about realism in illustrations, especially those set in such a remote and little known outpost of Empire. Artists who travelled to Australia had difficulty learning to ‘see’ the strange new antipodean

world they experienced, let alone in adapting European pictorial conventions and traditions to represent Australian life with verisimilitude. It was not until the end of the 19th century that artists learned to 'see' the Australian environment as it was and not as a distorted facsimile of the Northern Hemisphere. As the camera was deployed outward from Europe to the colonised world it was used to show visual evidence which accorded with a Eurocentric world view and offered a generalised comparison between so-called 'civilised' and 'primitive' societies. Lacking first hand experience of Australian Aborigines, most artists who illustrated children's books generally relied on illustrations from books about other 'native' peoples. Not surprisingly therefore, in the early children's books which treated Aboriginal themes, pictorial images of Aboriginal children were drawn to resemble those of other indigenous peoples, notably Africans, West Indians or Native Americans, viewed through the lens of British imperialism.  

2 Those who constructed the images ignored miscegenation, fringe dwelling and the urban Aboriginal population, creating a physical prototype, usually of a young Aboriginal male in loin-cloth, sometimes ochred, with one foot up, clutching spears, ready to hunt.  

Muecke (1982 & 1992) observes essentialist or geneticist determinations of racial difference, and identifies the Anthropological, the Romantic and the Racist as the three major discourses which have dominated neo-colonial representations of Aborigines. All three discourses are constructed through 'perceptions of difference'. Muecke acknowledges that these are not the only discourses and also that there is much overlap between them. The Romantic and Racist discourses, for example, utilise a series of metaphors which designate Aboriginal people as childlike, animalistic or inanimate, subject only to the laws of nature.  

The persistence of these neo-colonial representational practices is evident in children's picture storybooks from the 1920s to the 1970s. In *Mia Mia Mites* (1919),

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for example, Muriel Portnett regards Aboriginal children as a source of amusement and ridicule: their physical depiction resembles contemporary images of South Sea Islanders rather than Aboriginal Australians. Similarly, the primary focus of May Thomas in the cheap, poorly produced picture storybook Gundy (1944), is on the essentialist bush survival skills of a traditional Aboriginal life, revolving around hunting and gathering. This trend, which represents Aboriginal children as primordial, constructs them from a romantic nostalgia about a ‘natural’ and uncontaminated past as the ‘Noble Savage’. The tradition continues in the work of Victor Barnes and Hal English who also introduce the commercial influence of Disney animations into Little Binjy (1971) ensuring audience identification. In Piccaninnies (1941), Elizabeth and Mary Durack linguistically and visually link their Aboriginal child characters to plantation African-Americans and the American experience of slavery. The Duracks intentionally blur the lines between fact and fantasy in The Way of the Whirlwind (1942), enabling the non-Aboriginal child reader to differentiate him- or herself from the ‘inferior’ Aboriginal ‘other’ who was part of a ‘dying’ race. Kookano and Kangaroo (1963), the final children’s book published by the Durack sisters, cruelly caricatures Aboriginal childhood in the minstrelsy tradition usually associated with Empire. Mavis Mallinson’s The Magic Kangaroo (1944) uses the picture-strip comic format for a story of adventure and friendship between an Aboriginal boy and his superior white counterpart. While warnings might be voiced elsewhere of the dangers of savagery, Mallinson’s fiction illustrates the excitement of ‘going native’ and the potential for the child reader to escape from the adult world and its demands. The ‘savage’ waits as an ally, subservient to the needs and wishes of the reader, beckoning them to join the white protagonist and leave the constrictions of middle-class morality and conventions behind. In Tinka and His Friends (1960) Brownie Downing adapts her illustrations of Aboriginal children to the decorative ‘Aboriginal-style’ of painting, characteristic of the 1950s souvenir and homeware market that commercially exploits a degraded ‘caricature’ version of Aboriginal motifs. Margaret Paice in Mirram (1955) and Namitja (1956) incorporates a message of assimilation. All of these books represent Aboriginal children as members of a ‘primitive’ society and construct them as

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exemplars of ‘otherness’ defined in terms of blood (‘full-blood’), place (the bush), culture and spirituality. Most have their Aboriginal child protagonist speaking the ‘wild’ language of the animals and living independently, entirely on their own, irrespective of their age.

Two key influences on Australian conceptions of Aboriginal childhood during this period, particularly in the picture storybook genre, were undoubtedly the first of the ‘Uncle Remus’ books, Uncle Remus, His Songs and Sayings (1881) a collection of stories from the American deep south written by Joel Chandler Harris and Little Black Sambo (1899) by Helen Bannerman, the Scottish wife of an army doctor who spent thirty years of her married life in India. Harris created a ‘lovable old plantation Negro’ based on ‘three or four old darkies’ he had known, using the ‘delightful words a darkie would have used’. Regarded as the first story with a sympathetic black hero, Little Black Sambo became both a household name and a classic of children’s literature. Bannerman published seven sequels between 1903 and 1936, and brought out multiple editions of her original book in the United States during the 1920s, 30s and 40s, where the Uncle Remus books had also become classics. Many of the ‘piccaninnies’ portrayed in picture storybooks share Sambo’s demeanour and dialect and emulate his ‘cuteness’.

Castle (1996) and MacCann (1998) show that the message communicated by American and British children’s authors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is consistent with the construction of Aboriginal childhood in Australia. African-Americans and Africans were regarded as inferior, unintelligent, simple and not quite human. They were caretakers to and for the white man. Castle and MacCann both argue that children’s literature was used as the primary instrument to enuncrate white children to continue the pattern of white supremacy. The

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8 Before the Second World War most imported children’s books came from Britain, but some booksellers also brought in children’s books from the United States.
popularity of the pictorial construction of *Little Black Sambo* during the first half of the 20th century expressed an acceptance of racist attitudes towards blacks and a fascination with the distorted images the entertainment industry presented of them. Minstrel-shows featuring the ‘blackface’ style of performing, emerged in the United States in 1830 and became popular in England in the 1860s and 1870s, continuing to draw audiences until well after the turn of the century. Minstrel performers appeared before Queen Victoria and were considered innocent family entertainment.  

In Australia ‘blackface’ was used to parody and caricature Aborigines (sometimes cruelly) as part of colonial and neo-colonial control. The effects of the exaggerated burlesque of Aboriginal people as ‘Will Wimble’, ‘Jacky’ or ‘pantomime buffoon’ were pernicious, whether the blackface was performed thoughtlessly or with deliberate malice. Another variation of minstrelsy was the piccaninny show, performed by Negro children and usually led by one adult. Salicia Bryan and her ‘Pics’ toured Australia in 1898. ‘Miss Josephine Gassman and Her Piccaninnies’ were the most popular exponents of the conventions of dramatic ‘spectacle’ associated with this type of performance. They toured Australia briefly in 1900 and again in 1914-1915. The African of the minstrel image reflected many of the deepest held views about ‘blackness’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The characterisation emerged as a consequence of the aftermath of the American Civil War and served to neutralise the threat of freed slaves. That these images transferred effortlessly to the Australian context testifies to the universal appeal of the black minstrelsy character and to its social usefulness. Aborigines were reduced to caricatures of incompetence, reinforcing stereotypes which were already well established and popularised.

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10 *Children's Literature Review* Vol. 21, p.16.
13 Castle, op.cit. p.97.
14 The play *Me and My Shadow* dramatises the psychology of this fascination with the ‘dark other’ (the shadow self) played by white actors in the minstrel shows.
15 It is interesting to note the cover of the special edition of *Coles Funny Picture Book* published in 1987 by Angus and Robertson. Although the man depicted is ‘dark skinned’ rather than black, he incorporates the physical mien of the African minstrel – bulging eyes, enormous smiling mouth and tightly curled woolly hair. His clothes are a combination of plantation overalls and flapping shoes covering over-large feet. The resemblance and intention is unmistakable. There are more obvious examples on pages 183 and 185.
The influence of the ‘piccaninny show’ style of representation of African-American children is apparent in some of the children’s books produced by Mary and Elizabeth Durack, May Thomas and Victor Barnes who clearly expect their readers to be familiar with its content and form.\(^{16}\) Their Aboriginal characters, like those of the minstrel tradition, offered the reader superiority based on the colour of their skin.

*Mia Mia Mites* (1919) was the first Australian children’s book published in which the pictorial interest focuses exclusively on Aboriginal children. Ponnert’s\(^ {17}\) text defines Aboriginal culture as ‘queer’ (i.e. curious, strange, eccentric, and thus worthless). Aboriginal children are a source of amusement, their traditional way of life a curiosity:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Do you know the little Aborigines?} \\
\text{They are such quaint wee people} \\
\text{with chubby black faces} \\
\text{that will not come white} \\
\text{however much they are washed. ...} \\
\text{Just peep inside this book and you} \\
\text{will see Fuzzy Head, Woolly Top, and} \\
\text{learn of the queer, queer things they do.} \quad ^{18}
\end{align*}
\]

Measured against a ‘white’ norm, they are condemned to eternal inferiority: ‘they will not come white’. Unlike Gunn, whose paternalism encompasses affection and a degree of shrewd admiration for Aboriginal neighbours, Ponnert objectifies and ridicules her ‘mia mia mites’. It is doubtful whether Ponnert knew any ‘little Aborigines’. Her depiction of their physical appearance indicates that she was


\(^{17}\) Muriel Porrirtz (1894-1982) changed her name to Ponnert perhaps under pressure from the anti-German sentiment during World War 1. Ponnert studied at the South Australian School of Arts and Crafts under James Ashton and Fred Britton just prior to the War. *Mia Mia Mites* is her sole published work. ‘Books and Writers’, *Table Talk* 4th December 1919, p.36.
extremely ignorant of Aboriginal people. The image of Aboriginal children with the ‘fuzzy’ tightly curled hair common among some Negroid peoples is a white misconstruction, popularised in school readers and text books\(^{19}\) and perpetuated in the later work of May Thomas. Porrent’s characters, Fuzzy Head and Woolly Top (demeaning names in any culture) are very plump, wear animal skins and gum leaves, show flashing white teeth and resemble Melanesian warriors rather than Australian Aborigines.

Like many subsequent children’s illustrators, Porrent drew her characters not out of malice, or even a conscious racism, but because she was a conventional product of her era. As an Australian and member of the British Empire, she no doubt saw one dark-skinned non-European as looking much like another. In Australia during the early decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century, Aboriginal people, generally, were regarded as inferior and treated with either contempt or benevolent paternalism. Set alongside contemporary Australian writers of frontier romance for adults Porrent is blatantly condescending and her work appears more racist in tenor.

The early years of the twentieth century saw the values of ‘white’ Australian society defined and ratified. The period from 1901 to the Depression of the early 1930s was characterised by national growth and development, especially in the larger cities where the bulk of the population was increasingly concentrated. In the country, station and homestead life followed a more settled pattern than had previously been possible. The frontier had moved back to far North Queensland, the Northern Territory and the deserts of Western Australia. Expansion, in the sense of occupation and exploitation of the continent, continued up to the Great Depression. Although the First World War was disruptive, it speeded industrial growth and enhanced Australia’s sense of nationhood and international status.\(^{20}\) The position of Aboriginal children during these decades, however, became less secure than it had been prior to Federation. Aboriginal people were not classed as citizens and therefore not included in the Federal constitution which enshrined the ‘White Australia’ policy. The

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19 For example, A. Buckley’s *Class Book of Geography of 1888*, a widely used text in Australian schools at the time, says that the Aborigines are of the Negro race and have woolly hair.
Protection Board of New South Wales had the power to take Aboriginal children from their parents and send them to work as apprentices, labourers or domestics. Thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from their families and placed in government and mission institutions. Some would never return home. The total number of children removed is difficult to estimate but, in the fifty years after 1912, probably two out of every three part-descent children from the Northern Territory spent some of their lives away from their parents as a result of government policy. 21 The law makers and administrators acted in accord with what they believed were ‘humane’ motives. They argued that the removal of children from circumstances which were an affront to the White Australia Policy and offended white notions of family care, gave Aboriginal children a chance of success in the dominant society, the more so if their sense of Aboriginality was erased in the process. Those placed in institutions were subjected to pressures to repudiate their cultural roots. 22 It was envisaged that their ‘white blood’ would make them useful citizens. If Aboriginal people did not die out as popular belief predicted, their survival entailed the dispossession of their lands and the loss of their culture. These harsh facts failed to influence the constructions of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children’s fiction until the 1990s. Indeed, the images of Aboriginal childhood prevalent in Australian children’s fiction, particularly in the picture storybooks, are romanticised, sentimentalised and, by their implicit acceptance of Aboriginal ‘difference’ (ie. inferiority, backwardness and animal closeness to ‘nature’) rationalise European exploitation and deny Aboriginal people full participation in contemporary Australian life.

In *Mia Mia Mites* there are no adults present, just an Aboriginal girl and boy of approximately five years of age who are portrayed as capable of looking after themselves. This is a pattern which occurs repeatedly in stories with Aboriginal children as main characters, but doesn’t emerge in comparable narratives about white children until the late 1960s. Ironically, the most popular genre in Australian children’s fiction at the time *Mia Mia Mites* was published was the family story but it

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did not include Aboriginal families. This is not perhaps surprising. Not only were Aboriginal families being forcibly separated but the complicated dynamics of the traditional Aboriginal family itself were not understood or valued. Pornett’s opening gambit proffers information about ‘the little Aboriginals’ but her meagre knowledge of Aboriginal culture is confined to broad notions of bush survival skills - gathering food, hunting, making a fire and constructing a shelter. This set of tropes will be repeated with monotonous regularity throughout twentieth century Australian children’s fiction whenever an Aboriginal character appears. Moreover, as Holden (1988) demonstrates, Mia Mia Mites marks the beginning of an illustrative tradition which sacrifices verisimilitude for decorative effect, and continues through the later work of Brownie Downing, 23 establishing a pattern of representation that becomes synonymous with traditional Aboriginal childhood. Mia Mia Mites also highlights acceptance by Australian publishers of pictorial representations that bear no resemblance to reality. The book does not seem to have sold well as only one edition was printed and the title is not well known. Perhaps the Australian child reader, or more significantly, the adult purchaser, was not yet attracted to an illustrated book with Aboriginal children as the sole characters. 24

The neo-colonialist implications of the ‘piccaninny’ motif are even more evident in the work of Mary and Elizabeth Durack. Written in verse, Piccaninnies (1940) describes the bush survival skills associated with Aboriginal child characters. The unnamed children, a boy and girl, dig for lily roots, hunt a frill necked lizard, go fishing, make tea in a billy and cook goanna for dinner. Again there are no other Aboriginal people mentioned, and parents are again noticeably absent. From a 21st century perspective, this ‘innocently’ romanticised depiction of parentless Aboriginal children happily roaming the bush is deeply ironic, both hinting at and contradicting the painful experience of the ‘stolen generation’, where black children are officially orphaned by removal from their families and confined in public institutions. The narrator invites white children to come away from ‘the ole white world’ and play with ‘my black mate an’ me’ where ‘the bush is big an’ wild’. The black and white line illustrations depict the Aboriginal girl wearing a dress, while the boy remains

23 Holden, op.cit, p.32.
naked except for a scarf around his head. The girl’s dress is the only signifier of her
gender as her physical features are almost identical to those of her male playmate.
Their physical depiction, like their southern ‘drawl’, evokes images of plantation
African-American children from the ‘Deep South’. The didgeridoo, inappropriately
played by the girl during the corroborees, ‘when the moon is big an’ bright’ and
identifiable by the illustration is called a ‘bamboo trumpet’. Indeed, there is very
little to indicate that this book is about Aboriginal children. The traditional life it
supposedly represents is bowdlerised to resemble that of another black culture with
which Aboriginal children share very little, except perhaps skin colour. If the
Duracks unwittingly point to the tradition of dispossession and slavery shared by
Aboriginal Aborigines and the plantation blacks of the Deep South of America, they
nevertheless also demean Aboriginal people by attributing to them the use of a
dialect which distorts their cultural tradition rather than sustaining it. The Australian
children’s novels depicting Aboriginal children prior to Piccaninnies also suggest the
black slave culture of the ‘deep south’ in the idiom used by their characters. The
fact that the Duracks had grown up among Aboriginal people reveals the persistence
of certain neo-colonial ‘ways of seeing’ Aboriginal people expressed in ‘ways of
representing’ them.

In 1997 Elizabeth Durack revealed that she had adopted the persona of the
Aboriginal artist “Eddie Burrup”, allegedly a Pilbara man, endowed with the secrets
of his people and ‘a man of power within his tribal situation’ who had produced the
work bearing “his” signature. Elizabeth Durack remained convinced until her

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24 The next book, Piccaninnies, featuring Aboriginal children as the primary illustrative focus did not appear until 1940.
25 Joel Chandler Harris’ Uncle Remus: His Songs and his Sayings, brought Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox and
the Tar Baby into world folklore and set the fashion, predominantly in America, for exploiting
Southern American plantation dialect.
26 The playing of the didjeridu is taboo for women in some Aboriginal groups. The name ‘didjeridu’ is
not an Aboriginal one, but seems to have been coined, on the basis of sounds made by players
practising on the instrument, in 1926 by Herbert Basedow (1881-1933), an independent state member
of parliament who championed the then novel notion of Aboriginal rights and wrote several books
about Aboriginal people.
27 For example, Alfred Dudley; or, The Australian Settlers (1830), The Wurra Wurra Boys (1903),
Frank Hardinage: From Torrid Zones to Regions of Perpetual Snow (1908)
28 These images of Aboriginal childhood predict the prevalent use of African slave imagery as a form
of Aboriginal representation which Elizabeth Durack incorporates into her artwork in the 1950s
29 C. Dauber, ‘Stand Up the Real Elizabeth Durack’, in Julie Markus (ed), Picturing the ‘Primitif’
death that her intimate knowledge of Aboriginal people, gained as a member of the wealthy Durack pastoralist family, gave her the right to paint as one. In the furore that followed her disclosure, Durack seemed bewildered that others did not understand that "Eddie Burrup" was a composite of several Aboriginal men who had worked on her family properties. Durack was astonished that it had hurt or offended anyone, believing that the spirit of "Eddie Burrup" had been channelled through her. Durack was incapable of seeing that rather than contributing to a process of reconciliation she was insulting black people by appropriating an Aboriginal voice.

The Eddie Burrup Web site 31, set up by Durack and her daughter Perpetua Clancy, continued after her death in 1999. As Nicholls (2000) demonstrates, the site gave a complex and detailed account of the 'Eddie' persona, constructing him as a simple, jolly, vaudevillian Blackfella who opposed the Mabo and Wik decisions and spoke with quasi-Irish brogue inflection, incorrectly described by its creators as 'Aboriginal English' and 'Kriol', a necessary, indeed essential, accompaniment to the Eddie paintings, serving to 'authenticate' his art by commodifying the artist as an individual. 32 Dauber (2000) believes that Durack showed great insensitivity by attempting to imitate this language, marginalising Burrup by exploiting his inability to speak the language of power in his own land. 33

_A'right, I know'm letter D a'right - on'y not too much ABCD._
_T'e goodnuns bin learn'm me ABCD Longa school l'a Broome._
_Sister whasaname? whasaname? Sister Bilomena -dat t' one_
_'m bin learn'm me - poorfella binish now - 'm go up straight_
_for heauen sit down right side d' Lord Jechuschrist my savior_

33 Dauber, _op.cit_, p.259.
Nicholls argues that Eddie Burrup is a 'Black and White Minstrel version of Indigeneity, brought to life to act as an Al Jolson-esque conduit, or Blackface mouthpiece for Elizabeth Durack's own idealized philosophical and conservative political ideology about the colonizing process and about Black-White relations in this country'\(^{35}\). Durack and Clancy maintained that the authorship of the site had been declared as a note on the site read: ‘Elizabeth Durack asserts the moral right to be identified as the substituent of Eddie Burrup’. But there was no other explanation.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Mary and Elizabeth Durack together produced several articles for *The Bulletin* about Aboriginal life which were subsequently published in book form as *Allabour* (1935) and the sequels *Chumuna* (1936) and *Son of Djaro* (1940). According to Muir (1981) and Mary Durack (1952)\(^{36}\), these books are not classified as children's books, although their large format allows space for many marginal drawings giving them the appearance of children's books.\(^{37}\) The Duracks' not only had difficulty in separating their attitudes from those of their father and grandfather, but also from the popular thought of the time. The name Durack functions as a sign of patriarchal power responsible for the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their Kimberley land and signifies the role of a white colonial supremacy.\(^{38}\) The young Duracks' brand of affectionate paternalism in *All About* is reminiscent of Gunn in both style, language and the construction of Aboriginal childhood.

*The Way of the Whirlwind*, first published in 1941, is probably the most significant contribution to Australian children's literature by the Durack sisters. Although generally regarded as fantasy it should be mentioned briefly in this chapter because


\(^{35}\) Nicholls, op.cit., p.2.

\(^{36}\) *Walkabout*, September 1\(^{5}\), 1952, p.41.

\(^{37}\) Their subjects came directly from the Aboriginal people and from the incidents of station life which they witnessed on Argyle and Ivanhoe Stations. Their narratives derived especially from three years of experience managing Ivanhoe Station in the Depression of the early 1930s.

\(^{38}\) Dauber, op.cit., p.253.
of its close connections with *Piccaninnyes* and its inclusion of themes, such as assimilation of the Aboriginal Dreaming (interpreted literally), which occur in later Australian children’s books depicting Aboriginal children. Resembling the finely produced illustrated books of the 1920s rather than the cheap wartime issues which were the order of the day in 1941, the tipped in illustrations are bold and strikingly coloured in the hues of outback Australia. The Duracks stress that the story, although retold by them, is factual because they believe it happened. At the same time, however, they imply that it is really Aboriginal fantasy. The lines between reality and fantasy are thus deliberately blurred, suggesting that although they identify with an Aboriginal perspective it does not prevent them from exploiting it for their own ‘white’ artistic purposes.

In *Piccaninnyes* Aboriginal children are constructed as happy and innocent, never worrying very much about anything. The children have no lessons to learn and are permitted to wander anywhere they choose without adult interference. Like many Australian children’s authors, Mary and Elizabeth Durack imagine a Utopian existence for Aboriginal children which is devoid of responsibility, discipline and learning. They choose to ignore the traditional teaching of the tribal group and the sacred restrictions placed on the wandering of children. By ignoring the realities of Aboriginal life the Duracks indulge in the construction of a consoling narrative that serves white interests, providing white readers with the image of a pastoral paradise and absolving white Australia of responsibility for Aboriginal dispossession. At the same time the Duracks present this narrative as a factual interpretation of Aboriginal culture, an interpretation which acquires credibility through their own first-hand experiences in the Kimberley region and their inherited high social status as the daughters of a pioneering squatter.

*Kookanoo and Kangaroo* (1963), is the last children’s book written and illustrated collaboratively by the Durack sisters. Published nearly twenty years after *Piccaninnyes* and *The Way of the Whirlwind*, the book describes in poorly constructed rhyme, Kookanoo’s attempt to hunt a kangaroo. The ‘blackface’

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illustrations parody and cruelly caricature Kookanoo as part of a still popular neo-colonial primitivist construction of Aboriginal childhood. The elongated body, exaggerated nose, large ears, flashing white smile and big feet testify to the lingering appeal of the black minstrelsy character and its African-American slavery connection. Kookanoo is reduced to a caricature of incompetence, again reinforcing well established stereotypes of the Aboriginal persona.

The illustrative style of depiction of the Aboriginal children in The Way of the Whirlwind and All-About is similar, often identical, to that in Piccaninnies. Although the lavishly produced coloured illustrations in The Way of the Whirlwind do not physically match the text, the book must certainly stand as the most strikingly produced children’s book in Australia in the 1940s. In tune with the nationalism prevalent at the time, it was quickly reprinted in a further three editions before the end of the Second World War and proved to be very popular with Australian children. The illustrations in Kookanoo and Kangaroo, however, although similar in style to the earlier books reduces the Aboriginal child to a comic ‘buffoon’ more suited to a popular comic strip cartoon construction than a children’s book.

Why did Elizabeth Durack draw identical Aboriginal children in the earlier books she illustrated? The Aboriginal children of her paintings are often similar to the depictions that appear in her children’s books. Holden’s analysis of the limiting ‘distinction’ drawn by Australians between ‘high art’ and ‘illustration’, the former associated with the ‘artist who supposedly creates his own vision entirely’ and the latter with ‘he who creates a complementary vision’, does not apply to Elizabeth Durack. Whether in her role as an illustrator or an artist, Durack’s representation of Aboriginal children employs imagery based on a fascination with primitivism.

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40 See the work of cartoonists such as Alex Gurney and Eric Jolliffe.
42 Holden, op.cit., p.33.
44 Elizabeth Durack’s painting ‘Erosion’ (1954), depicts a group of Aboriginal children as some sort of ‘primordial throwback’, a ‘lost people standing on the threshold of non-existence’as the ‘less than human Other’. Dauber, op.cit., pp.247, 248.
Mary and Elizabeth Durack seem to genuinely care about Aboriginal people. The public perception of their role as ‘the squatter’s daughters’ might well have influenced their publishers and the way they themselves perceived their audience.  

The paternalism which permeates Piccaninies is an unconscious (or mistaken) belief that they truly understand Aboriginal people and their culture from an Aboriginal viewpoint. This is also evident in Elizabeth Durack’s adoption of an Aboriginal alter-ego, Eddie Burrup. That the Duracks displayed sympathy and empathy towards Aboriginal people is undeniable but their perception of Aboriginality is unmistakably white: ‘... the source of their inspiration, the material of their dreams, the dominating interest of their minds, still remains the Australian aboriginal: not as the whites see him, but as he sees himself. As Mary says, “you cannot really know the blacks until you work with them, until they have been your companions.”’  

Because they employed Aboriginal workers and spent time living on an outback property, the Duracks’ representation functioned within ‘a paternalistic discourse of power’, which spoke about and for a people seen to be incapable of speaking for themselves.

The Duracks’ children’s books implicitly articulate the view that Aboriginal people can be companions but never equals. This construction of Aboriginal childhood is based on a series of binaries - the employer/employee relationship; the powerful and the disempowered; white superiority and black inferiority. The stories are set in the Kimberleys and feature characters based on the Aboriginal people who worked the Durack family properties and glorify a way of life that had ceased to exist for most Aboriginal people. The idealised way of life depicted in their work reflects a limited neo-colonial perception based on limited experience of ‘station blacks’ treated with paternal care by the Durack family. The wider political issues of station life during

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45 ‘Their homes have become little centres of attraction for the discussion of art, letters and other facets of national life ... particular emphasis is given to the position of aboriginal Australians in our society. ... One meets many distinguished older men and women there, and many whose tongues have not yet mastered the idiom of what from now on is to be their own national language. Continental people are always enormously attracted by Elizabeth’s interpretative pictures of the aborigines and the north ... ’Walkabout, op.cit., p.41. Walkabout was a fashion and travel magazine published by the Australian National Travel Association.

46 Walkabout, op.cit., p.42.

47 Dauber, op.cit. p.250.
the mid-20th century such as assimilation and the separation of part-descent children from their Aboriginal families are never mentioned.

Mary and Elizabeth Durack had first-hand experience of living in isolated communities with Aboriginal people. When most other children's authors lacked contact with Aboriginal people and relied on newspaper reports and anthropology texts to create their narratives, they had the opportunity to present realistic stories grounded in fact. Unable to transcend the conventions of their generation the Duracks idealised traditional pre-invasion Aboriginal life, presenting an essentialist view for children and reinforcing the stereotypes which already existed. Their children's books construct Aboriginal people as nice, friendly, happy and harmless. They are racist in aetiology and fail to bring about change. As Geoffery Dutton (1974) comments, Mary and Elizabeth Durack were able to disregard 'the evidence around the settlements and paint an idyllic picture of the happy children of nature carrying out their ancient ceremonies under the approving eye of civilized man and woman.'

During the Second World War, there were many restrictions on the importation of books into Australia as well as a paper shortage. As a consequence, printers capitalised on the demand for low-priced children's books, flooding the Australian market with inexpensive, locally produced picture-story books of dubious quality. During the period from 1941 to the early 1960s, a few local publishing companies vigorously produced children's 'board books'. Most board books, however, were published by printing companies and distributed through toy-and-gift market wholesalers to department stores, bookshops and newsagents. These inexpensive board-covered books with illustrations in full colour were generally trivial in content and shoddily produced but differed markedly in design and layout from the coloured

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49 During the war years the most significant factor controlling the publication of books in Australia was the supply of paper. Consignments of paper were made to printers, not to publishers, with the size of the allotment based on the amount of paper a printer had previously used. Paper was rationed throughout the war and for some years afterwards. J.Prentice and B.Bird, Dromkeen A Journey into Children’s Literature (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1988), p.88.
picture storybooks previously produced in Australia. In a market starved for children's books, they sold extremely well.\textsuperscript{50}

The accelerating production of picture storybooks in Australia was also influenced by the increased demand for books for the pre-school market resulting in the allocation by some Australian printing firms of a percentage of their rationed supplies of paper to print books suitable for children in the younger age groups.\textsuperscript{51} American servicemen in Australia during World War Two created a greater demand for children's books with Australian content. Children's books featuring Australian animals, birds and plants were sent 'back home' to families in America. Since Aboriginal children in Australia had long been synonymous with the Australian bush in Australian children's fiction, it is not surprising then that the number of books published with an Aboriginal child as the main character also increased.

Like Charlotte Barton, May Thomas wanted to write and illustrate a book about the Australian bush and its animals for the entertainment and education of her daughter. Published in 1944, \textit{Gundy} was her first attempt, exemplifying the poorly produced and repetitive house styles of printing that were prevalent at the time. \textsuperscript{52} The book has a limited narrative structure. The main character who is also the narrator meets his friend Joey Kangaroo and they go 'walkabout' in search of their 'tucker'. A litany of the eating habits of the various animals they encounter follows. Originally the story was about a little white girl who went into the Australian bush and met a number of animals that she spoke to. Thomas was dissatisfied with this as she found it incongruous for a white child to live close to native animals in a bush setting. The association of Aboriginal people with bush food and native Australian animals was so deeply entrenched that Thomas revised her story to utilise the dominant construction and the little white girl became an Aboriginal boy called Gundy.\textsuperscript{53} The

\textsuperscript{50} Prentice and Bird, \textit{op. cit.}, p.88.
\textsuperscript{52} Thomas also wrote \textit{Warranimi} (1945) and \textit{Wandi} (1946).
occasion for the inspiration was a September afternoon in the south-west of Western Australia at a place called Narrogin: 54

I became aware that I was the object of rapt attention of a native child of about four years. He was standing some yards away, quite naked and it was apparent from the distended nature of his shiny round stomach that he had recently been gorging himself. I watched him as he started to move cautiously towards me in an endeavour to see what I was doing. As soon as he knew I had seen him he moved behind a tree, from which vantage point he still watched me. When I moved he ran away and in that moment while I watched his comical, dusky figure running swiftly through the bush I think Gundy was born. 55

The linocut illustrations are flat and uninteresting, depicting Gundy as an improbably chubby, black, two-year-old boy with tight, curly hair. Both he and Joey the kangaroo are merely silhouettes, except on the cover, where Gundy strongly resembles the stereotypical African-American child with chubby cheeks, pursed lips and tight curly hair.

Gundy's language is stilted and contrived, with a limited, repetitive vocabulary and non-standard grammatical structures intended to suggest the familiar kriol speech patterns of Aboriginal English in Australian children's fiction. Such patterns signify social and racial inferiority and are unacceptable for white child characters. Non-Aboriginal children do not speak like Gundy in Australian children's books.

54 Narrogin is a town, approximately 200 kilometres south-west of Perth, on the main southern railway line to Albany. Thomas often saw small parties of Aborigines as they moved to 'fresh haunts'. The Willman held great meetings at Narrogin with the surrounding groups for purposes of trade, settling old scores and arranging marriages. The atmosphere was charged with tension and fights often broke out, with all disputes being resolved by the end of the ceremonies.

Joey and me go to look for Jack Kookaburra. He makes cheeky fellow snakes dead fellows. I am not frightened of cheeky fellow snake when Jack Kookaburra near. Joey and me watch Jack Kookaburra make cheeky fellow snake dead fellow. Jack he flies off tree catches cheeky fellow snake by the back, with his claws, then flies high. He drops snake. Then he picks snake up again. Flies up high, drops snake again, until cheeky fellow snake he bin dead fellow.  

Thomas was born, educated and married in Cottesloe, Western Australia. An interview conducted in 1972 clearly indicates that she felt little sympathy for the local Aboriginal people, whom she regarded as primitive, dirty and simple, pathetically ignorant of white conventions of dress and manners and sharing the reproductive instincts of animals: 'for like all bush denizens they were prolific'. In this interview which is indicative of the prevailing views of Australian society about Aboriginal people, Thomas describes the young men ('bucks') in animalistic terms 'stalking majestically' and the women as 'beasts of burden', victims of a brutal society which has abused them for generations. The children, in their innocence, are proud and happy in their dirty cast-offs.

Thomas views Aboriginal people as she would animals in a zoo. They are not human. She observes them in what she considers their 'natural surroundings', a camp on the fringes of town, as well as in other, more 'unnatural' situations.

There was a large number of natives in the district who were rationed from the town. I lived near the local hospital and whenever a native was admitted the whole family would camp in the vicinity.  

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56 M. Thomas, Gundy (Perth, Imperial Printing Company, 1944), np.
57 Anderson, op. cit., p.100.
Thomas appears to find such segregation acceptable as she doesn’t question or offer an explanation as to why Aboriginal people are ‘rationed’ from the town. The fact that so many come near the hospital when one of their group is admitted is indicative of the strong kinship ties of Aboriginal people which Thomas neither comprehends nor acknowledges but finds interesting enough to relate to her white audience. From her condescending neo-colonial perspective Aboriginal people are uncivilised and comical:

_The advent of the Agricultural Show was always a great occasion for the aboriginals. For some weeks before they would be around begging clothes and on the day would visit the show in droves, wearing their newly-acquired finery. With their passion for bright colours and their complete lack of discernment, some of the effects produced were laughable in a rather pathetic way._ 59

May Thomas has much in common with Charlotte Barton. Like Barton she is disgusted most by Aboriginal women. To her they appear downtrodden and hopeless, flaunting their sexuality by bearing so many children, while the men are dignified figures, made grotesque only by their cast-off clothes. Thomas finds the ‘serious little faces’ and ‘quick shy glances’ of the children ‘fascinating’, yet at the same time regards her ‘dusky’ Aboriginal child model Gundy as comical. 60

Prior to the publication of _Gundy_, Mary and Elizabeth Durack wrote and illustrated a successful picture-strip for the _Sunday Telegraph_ called _Nungalla and Jungalla_ (1942 to 1943) which adapted Aboriginal stories and brought to life a series of cave

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58 Ibid.
59 Ibid
60 Ibid.
drawings as seen through the eyes of two Aboriginal children. Newspaper strips had a longer history and future than the indigenous comic book industry which flourished under war-time import restrictions but waned in the face of syndication and economic pressures by the 1950s. Literary commentators often unfavourably compared comic books with ‘real books’, drawing further distinctions between the comics contained in the popular British boys’ and girls’ papers such as Schoolgirls Own, Chums and Magnet and those published by American syndicates. The former were not valued by official literary culture but were considered acceptable reading material for the ‘lower’ or less-educated classes, while the latter were regarded, generally, as ‘trash’ contributing to the ‘Americanization of Australian culture’. Even today, most books written about children’s literature often omit any discussion of comics, despite their continuing popularity with children.

The format of Mavis Mallinson’s The Magic Kangaroo (1944) is that of a comic book, cheaply produced by John Sands, poorly written and illustrated and epitomising the inferior quality of many children’s books in Australia at this time. Mallinson chose the strip serial medium because The Magic Kangaroo had already been serialised in Woman magazine and proved ‘popular with children’. John Sands chose to publish it because of the minimal editorial time, money and effort it would require to transform a weekly strip serial into a book with an illustrated narrative and an already established audience.

61 Nungalla and Jungalla are pictorial replications of the children from Picanninies and The Way of the Whirlwind. Elizabeth Durack collected her comic strip drawings of Nungalla and Jungalla into book form as A Book of Picture Stories (1942).
62 British comics have always been traditionally aimed at a young audience, meaning that they are cheap, easy to understand and not too sophisticated. American comics cater for the older adolescent and adult reader and are usually more developed and sophisticated in style, often incorporating political awareness and satire, while the illustrations are generally more inventive. N. Tucker, The Child and The Book (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981) p.143.
63 According to reading surveys the peak age for the consumption of comics is on average about 12 or 13 years of age. Comics are still considered a potent form of periodical reading for adolescents. See F. Whitehead et al Children and their Books (London, Macmillan Education, 1977) for details of reading surveys. Written reminiscences from the late 1930s onwards also record the impact of comic reading, particularly among adolescent readers. M.Lyons and L.Taska, Australian Readers Remember (South Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 91-92, 160.
64 Mallinson spent most of her childhood at Ulverstone, on the north-west coast of Tasmania. She entered the teaching service and was posted to Hobart. Mallinson also studied art at the Technical College, achieving some fame as a sculptor influenced by the style of Hoff.
*The Magic Kangaroo* centres on Dicky, a white orphan boy and his Aboriginal friend Nooroo. Dicky is a model child, unwanted by the lazy, ill-tempered uncle with whom he lives. It is Dicky’s uncle who is the catalyst for the adventure when, in a fit of violent temper, he knocks over a kerosene lamp, causing a fire which burns the house to the ground and in which he himself perishes, although the author does not state this explicitly. Dicky flees from the house and is found by Nooroo who speaks Pidgin English in a style similar to Gunn’s Bett-Bett: ‘Encouraged by the black boy’s friendly grin, Dicky told him what had happened. “Uncle belonga you bin finishem alright,” said Nooroo. “You come longa home belonga meself.”’ 65 The introduction of the magic kangaroo seems to be a device to enable the author to get her main characters out of difficult situations with a minimum of creative effort. Although weakly linked to the Aboriginal past, the magic kangaroo also enables the element of fantasy to be introduced, thus imaginatively rendering inaccuracy acceptable and more easily explained. There is no doubt, however, that *The Magic Kangaroo* signifies the ‘real’ world as the supernatural is presented without explanation and part of the everyday life of Dicky and Nooroo. As Chanady (1985) argues realistic detail is essential to magic realism for without the presence of a realistic framework the story would become pure fantasy. 66

As a white boy, Dicky is always in control and makes most of the decisions. Even the adult Aboriginal warriors do as he asks. Nooroo takes the initiative only in the survival skills of hunting, gathering food, cooking and tracking and ‘smelling’ water. The Aboriginal child (and by extension, Aboriginal people generally) is once again associated primarily with an essentialist ‘instinctive’ way of life:

\[\text{As they arrived back at camp, other natives came in laden with the spoils of the hunt. Some of them had kangaroos from the plain, others had wild pigs from the jungle. The lubras}\]

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66 Chanady, *op.cit.*, p.46.
and children brought fruits, roots, wild honey, goannas and bandicoots. 67

Mallinson’s purpose in The Magic Kangaroo was to ‘awaken in Australian children a kindly interest in the Aborigine’ 68 and to instruct about traditional Aboriginal life in northern Queensland. Her text constructs Aboriginal childhood as universal and perpetuates the stereotypes and derogatory concepts evident in earlier children’s works featuring Aboriginal characters. It also conveys a great deal of explicit information through the descriptions of boomerang and spear throwing, techniques of food preparation and an account of a corroboree that are unobtrusively integrated with the fictional events in the narrative. The style is accessible without the stilted and lengthy explanations usually associated with a didactic text. The account of a corroboree is instructive:

Suddenly a shrill note rang out - weird and uncanny - followed by another, and another, and the first dancers appeared. With tall head-dresses, and bunches of leaves rustling on their ankles - with strange markings on their faces and bodies, they looked fantastic and weird as they tramped rhythmically into the firelight. The onlookers began a slow, rich chant to the rhythm set by the dancers. 69

In her closely observed description Mallinson successfully conveys aspects of the atmosphere of a corroboree transcending popular misconceptions associated with the word itself. Although reluctant to explore in depth what is traditionally a complex and varied ceremonial life, Mallinson does attempt to present it as something more than ‘just a bit of entertainment’. Unfortunately, her choice of language in describing the ceremony as ‘weird’ and the body markings of the dancers as ‘strange’, once

67 Mallinson, op.cit, p.42.
68 Anderson, op.cit., p.58
again stresses the exotic and infers inferiority by highlighting differences from an implied white norm.

*The Magic Kangaroo* has an easy to follow format, where the main characters resemble child heroes traditionally found in adventure books. Dicky and Nooroo overcome the ruthless white adult males, who are often violent in their desire to see that law and order be maintained. They are firmly anchored in the natural world, as opposed to the supernatural one, despite the presence of a flying kangaroo. Many other aspects of the story are highly improbable. No one searches for Dicky or his uncle. The trooper doesn’t question Dicky’s presence in the Aboriginal camp nor does he attempt to return him to the white community. By locating the adventure on the last remaining Australian frontier in far north Queensland and including a young Aboriginal boy, *The Magic Kangaroo* becomes both romantic and exotic.

Like many of her contemporaries, Mavis Mallinson had never met an Aboriginal Australian, deriving her information and romantic notions, not from first hand experience but, as she explained in an interview, from the pages of books and the stories of others:

*My interest in the Australian aborigines began when I was quite young and I was fascinated by a book of my father’s which dealt with the subject. From then on I read every book about aborigines which I could beg, borrow, or buy. The more I read about these happy people, the more I felt that they should either be left entirely alone or given every opportunity and encouragement to be assimilated and absorbed into our life.*

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70 Mr W. Linklater, ‘Billie Miller’, an ‘old bushman and cattleman’ called regularly for three years at Mallinson’s home in Tasmania and talked to her about the Aborigines of whom he had ‘a fund of first hand knowledge’. Anderson, *op.cit.*, p.58
The picture-strip comic is unrivalled in children’s fiction for sheer ease of communication and Mallinson exploits its potential to the full. The illustrations in *The Magic Kangaroo* use a three-colour format, offering an instant comment on and interpretation of every passage of dialogue. Mallinson also communicates with readers by means of dramatic colouring, such as heavy shadows and exaggerated facial expressions which clearly identify the villains and mark out the Aboriginal characters. The isolating of figures against the background of a bush landscape and the repetition of certain character-revealing patterns of behaviour reinforce the stereotypes continually associated with Aboriginal Australians in children’s adventure stories.

The narrative ends with Dicky and Nooroo being rescued from a bushfire by the magic kangaroo and taken to The Great Barrier Reef, where ‘Dicky smiled as he thought that he was like a little Robinson Crusoe with his man Friday’. 71 The neo-colonial perspective of the text on Aboriginal-white relations emerges here in sharp relief. The Aboriginal child is subservient to his white age-peer: theirs is a servant-master relationship. The inclusion of this final section is significant. The linking of Robinson Crusoe to the idyllic image of tropical North Queensland leaves the reader with a clear message that Nooroo is the ‘Noble Savage’. Dicky and Nooroo could live in perfect harmony as master and servant (perhaps even slave) in uninhabited natural surroundings without the constraints of urban living and adult interference, with an integrity precluding the adoption of ‘civilized’ ways. They will remain untouched by the world’s corruption, abandoning both white and black society to pursue the ultimate adventure embodied by the shipwrecked Robinson Crusoe. The pride, self-sufficiency and independence of Nooroo is celebrated, particularly when he puts his ‘savage skills’ at the disposal of Dicky. This theme is taken up and developed more fully in Nicolas Roag’s film *Walkabout*, based on James Vance Marshall’s book *The Children*, which will be discussed in chapter eight.

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By the mid 1950s the integration of picture and text in Australian picture storybooks remained deficient. At the same time few artists had accepted the challenge of illustrating. Imported books from the United Kingdom, beautifully presented with coloured illustrations and integrated text, were again making an appearance in Australian bookshops. The high cost of colour reproduction made it difficult for Australian publishers to compete in the smaller Australian market. Consequently, interest in publishing picture-story books diminished in favour of junior fiction.  

Even from the late 1940s, Australian publishing began to focus upon newly emerging authors of junior novels.

Margaret Paice’s *Mirram* (1955) is an illustrated example of this emerging genre of junior fiction which concentrates on the traditional aspects of Aboriginal life. Like the texts already discussed, it constructs Aboriginal childhood in neo-colonial terms. Mirram is an Aboriginal child who, with her friend Wini, wanders off into the bush and becomes lost. Without realising it, the children break a taboo by sleeping in the sacred burial place of their ancestors. They are eventually found and scolded for wandering away. Such a scenario is highly unlikely as the children would have known that the site was sacred and the punishment for such a transgression would have been severe, even fatal, depending on the beliefs of the particular Aboriginal group. Paice trivialises the significance of such a sacred site by reducing it to a venue for a childish prank.

In the remainder of the narrative, a prolonged drought forces Mirram and her people to look for food beyond their traditional lands. They discover a white property and are visited by the ‘station blacks’. Mirram ventures to the house where she becomes fascinated by the white baby. The white woman is kind to her, gives her a dress, which her black playmates laugh at, and allows her to play with the baby. Although the woman asks Mirram to stay when the drought breaks, she declines knowing that

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72 With the end of the Second World War on August 15th, 1945, the American Children’s Book Council conceived the idea of making their annual Children’s Book Week for 1945 an international one. It was from the Australian Book Week Committee formed in 1945 that the present Children’s Book Council of Australia evolved. It was suggested that Children’s Book Week should not only include an exhibition of children’s books but also an Australian Book of the Year Award. A separate book of the year award category for picture books was established in 1956, ten years after the original awards were introduced. For many years, however, no award was made as few books of quality were being published.
she belongs with her people and must return with them to their traditional lands. There is no conflict on her part, merely sadness because she must leave a friend. The white woman represents an idealised image of white femininity. She is understanding and compassionate, but still embodies a symbol of imperial female authority over a ‘lesser’ race. Mirram’s childhood is carefree, although she participates in the traditional women’s work of gathering food. The text reveals a limited view of traditional Aboriginal childhood.

The illustrations depict Aboriginal children realistically, rather than in a stylised mode or from a romanticised or neo-colonial viewpoint. Paice has probably drawn the Aboriginal people she encountered in the places in which she lived. She is reasonably objective in her storytelling, telling her tale with only a hint of white superiority. Mirram is a gentle, innocuous story, offering nothing new in terms of insight into the traditional ways of Aboriginal people. The lifestyle described recapitulates what is already known from the work of earlier writers. There is, however, an obvious affection for the characters about whom she writes, both black and white. No one is brutal or savage. The language is not condescending, although it can be gently critical of the station blacks who think that they are superior to their ‘natural’ brothers. This changes when they realise that they share some of the same totems.

Paice, like her contemporaries, generalises that all Aboriginal people resemble her characters. She, too, fails to identify the Aboriginal group (or indeed groups), from whom she draws her story, slipping into the all too common pattern of presenting traditional Aboriginal life as unilaterally idyllic in its simplicity.

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73 Margaret Paice was born in Brisbane in 1920 and educated in outback schools. When she was very young her father decided to go gold prospecting along the Fly River in New Guinea, so she learnt to speak fluent Pidgin. During the Depression her father once again went prospecting, this time to Cracow (inland from Bundaberg in Queensland). Consequently, Paice spent much of her childhood in isolated gold mining camps. In 1942 she met and married Herbert Paice. For a time they lived in Brisbane, but were eventually transferred to Townsville, where they remained through the war years. Paice spent fifteen years in North Queensland, with trips to Cairns, Green Island, the Atherton Tableland and the Gulf Country to Normanton, and west to Cloncurry. Anderson, op.cit., p.77, McVitty, 1989, p.164.
Yes, life was good, for the seasons were good, and there was food and water in abundance. Only when someone broke a tribal law was there any disturbance within the tribe.  

Although there has been some previous contact with whites through Mirram’s father and the desert camel trains, Mirram’s people are indifferent to Europeans. The text mentions black resistance to white settlement when ‘the tribes had hated and feared white men, their one thought being to spear their cattle’, but Paice interprets this as a consequence of Aboriginal people selfishly refusing to share a country which once belonged to them alone. The narrative implicitly denies Aboriginal people the right to object to the destruction of their traditional food supplies or their forcible removal from the land they had occupied for thousands of years before white settlement. According to Paice, these times have now ‘passed’ emphasising her naïve version of history written from a neo-colonial view of the inevitability and justice of white settlement.

In 1956, Paice followed *Mirram* with *Namitja*, a story with a very different tone and featuring an Aboriginal boy as protagonist. The book begins by describing Namitja making a spear and attempting to catch a kangaroo. The first ten pages provide a context, once again of traditional Aboriginal life. When Namitja breaks his leg and is rescued by a white man called Bluey the tone changes significantly. Namitja is taken to Bluey’s camp where Barney the cook, Jim West the boss of the droving outfit to which the men belong, and a ‘blackfellow’ named Jacky, are waiting. Namitja doesn’t understand Jacky’s language, which indicates he is from a different ‘tribe’. Paice, however, doesn’t elaborate.

The stereotypes and racist associations absent from *Mirram*, emerge in *Namitja*. In this text Paice, like many of her earlier contemporaries, associates Aboriginal people with animals.

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75 Paice, *op.cit.*, p.22.
... He [Namitja] was not hungry. He didn’t like this white man’s food.

"Let him go," Barney said. "He’ll be hungry enough to eat anything by dinner-time."

But Bluey knew that was a long time ahead. He coerced the boy as he had coerced many an orphaned animal to take food from him.  

Namitja is taken to ‘the homestead’, where Bluey feels compelled to cover the boy’s nakedness with one of his own shirts. Here Namitja meets other Aboriginal people - the ‘old blackfellow’ dozing by the shed and Aboriginal women with combed hair wearing clean dresses. Namitja stares as they do not look like his mother. Again Aboriginal people are portrayed as lazy, dirty and unkempt and the only positive influence is that of the intervening whites. Namitja is washed, dressed and placed on a stretcher in the storeroom, along with the sacks of flour and sugar. A bedroom in the main part of the house is never considered. Eventually Namitja’s leg heals, with the assistance of the Flying Doctor, and he settles easily into station life, living with the ‘station blacks’ at their camp. He is forced to make a decision when ‘some wild myalls’ come in from the bush. They are members of his ‘tribe’. In contrast to Mirram, however, Namitja decides that he will not return.

Would he go back with these people to his own tribe? He didn’t want to go. He liked being here on the station with Peter [the owner’s son] and the horse and dogs and Ginger, the cat. After all, he didn’t want to be a hunter any more. He

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76 M. Paice, Namitja (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1956) p.17.
wanted to be a stockman, to work for Mr Fletcher when he was old enough and live in the camp by the lagoon. 77

The 1950s represent a time that was particularly oppressive to Aboriginal people because of the assimilationist policies enacted by the federal government. With only a year between the publication of Paice’s two books, however, it is nevertheless difficult to understand what prompted Paice or why there is such a shift in representation. 78 Although Mirram’s ‘heart was sad’, she returns with her people to their own country. Staying with the white family is never an issue. Mirram is never described as dirty, although she eventually wears the dress offered to her and learns to wash and comb her hair. Namitja is much harsher in tone and advocates assimilation. Namitja chooses to be part of the white man’s world because his tribal life no longer appeals to him. He chooses to work for the paternalistic white station owner.

Throughout the assimilationist years of the 1950s and 1960s Aboriginal motifs were being applied to a range of souvenirs and domestic ware, signifying both the authentic and the commercial. Marcus (2000) uses the term ‘Aboriginal-style’ to describe any applied decoration which has appropriated Aboriginal motifs and used them as a central feature. 79 Tinka and His Friends (1960) published by Brownie Downing 80 with her husband John Mansfield (the nature and extent of his contribution is unknown), was the first in a series of picture storybooks in which Downing uses the ‘Aboriginal-style’ of painting employed in her commercialised depictions of Aboriginal children. Throughout the 1950s Downing created many such designs which employ the Aboriginal-style she had featured in her depictions of Aboriginal children on ceramic souvenirs, porcelain dishes, wall plaques and miniature tea sets. The Aboriginal motif proved very popular, and her work enjoyed

77 Paice, op cit, pp.31-32.
78 Paice’s husband died in 1955, while they were living in Townsville. The family then moved to Sydney. Perhaps the stereotypical attitudes of Sydney society influenced her depiction of Namitja.
80 Born in 1924, Viola Edith Downing (Brownie) grew up in what was then outer suburban Balgowlah. She graduated from Manly High School, the Sydney Technical Art School and eventually the Julian Ashton Art School.
commercial success. 81 When *Tinka and His Friends* was published, 60,000 copies were sold. The book also won the *Daily Telegraph Award* for the Best Book of the Year, 82 although Downing had already left for Britain, never to return to Australia.

Downing’s depiction of Aboriginal children was initially based on images and information in the anthropological books on Aboriginal culture and photographs and descriptions of tribal life her father kept around the house. Downing did eventually visit Aboriginal communities, but not until her career as an artist had been well established. 83 *Tinka and His Friends* tells the story of Tinka, the child of a ‘people whose wisdom was old when the mountains were still only ant-hills.’ The plot concerns his use of Aboriginal magic to grant a wish which ultimately goes wrong. Shelley, a fair-haired, blue-eyed white girl, appears at Tinka’s camp, without introduction, and asks him to make her ‘pigtails’ longer. Tinka works the magic but doesn’t know how to stop her hair growing. This necessitates a journey to Tinka’s uncle, Dooliba, the ‘witch-doctor’ of the ‘tribe’. The ‘witch-doctor’ is a powerful characterisation of the Aborigine which appeared in Australian children’s fiction in the late nineteenth century, becoming a symbol of unacceptable barbarism. Portrayed as the enemy of Imperialism, this figure represented a malign influence within Aboriginal society. 84 The power of Dooliba, however, has become trivialised and benevolent as he shrinks Shelley’s pigtails to the requested size and magically returns her, without explanation, to her home, the location of which is never mentioned. Shelley appears from nowhere and, like Tinka, has no context.

It is difficult to suspend disbelief in *Tinka and His Friends*. Although the element of the fantastic or supernatural is always evident in the story, the reader still feels that they are in the ‘real’ world. Tinka appears to be about five years old and lives on his own. Until Shelley arrives, his only companions are talking animals. Tinka himself is the quintessential Aboriginal boy of Australian children’s fiction: he can make his

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82 H.J. Greenberg, ‘Brownie has painted the world’s children’, *Palma* newspaper interview (n.d. but probably the 1970s).
83 Higgins, *op.cit.*, n.p. Robert Holden, an art historian and author, apparently saw a scrapbook of Downing’s filled with live studies of Aboriginal children. The pictures on the wall plaques and the illustrations in her books, however, remained highly stylised.
84 For further discussion of the characterisation and role of the Aboriginal ‘witch-doctor’ see chapter Six.
own canoe, knows the language of the birds and wild animals, is able to recognise ‘every footprint and mark in the dust’ and plays the didgeridoo. The book is not written to instruct or raise awareness about Aboriginal life. Aboriginal childhood is contextualised through the supernatural world of magic. Many local authors have sought, with varying success, to create the fairies and other magical creatures of European memory, but felt them to be incongruous in bush settings. As Conniff (1990) indicates, magic realism has been described as an impulse to create a fictive world that can somehow compete with actual history. So while the book functions on one level as a kind of fantastic adventure, on another level it constructs a white reality of what constitutes traditional Aboriginal life. The magic realism of *Tinka and His Friends* addresses only a white audience so there is no attempt to evoke traditional cultural values or consider Aboriginal spirituality. Downing appropriates the ‘magic’ of the Aborigines, attempting to create fairy characters based on indigenous traditions and culture. Tinka and Dooliba become Aboriginal fairy tale tricksters whose magical powers are used to help the white child heroine obtain her goal. Fairytales often state and enforce the sentences of a culture with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts. *Tinka and His Friends* as a fairytale is not merely a European construction of Aboriginal childhood and ‘magic’, it also indicates what a neo-colonial Australian society considers important about the behaviour of its children both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

The illustrations in *Tinka and His Friends* romanticise the depiction of the characters, both human and animal. The children are ‘chubby’ featured and ‘cute’. Tinka is black-skinned with black curly hair. Most of Downing’s work is spontaneously drawn from memory, but ‘she also illustrates to publishers’ requirements’. Through her sketches, watercolours, porcelain items and, later illustrated children’s books, Downing earned a distinct place in Australia’s art world yet during an interview with the magazine *Talk of the Town*, she seemed bemused by the success of her work.

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Do you know, during the days I was painting them (the original inhabitants of Australia), I sold millions of prints of pudgy native babies in bark coolamon cradles, and native boys fishing with Koala bear chums or sprawled in the dust with birds on their toes. 87

Ean Higgins, in an article in The Australian, is intrigued by Downing’s achievement because ‘her most successful subject, Aboriginal Australia, was one she did not really know first hand; only in an idealised form’ 88

The prosperous postwar decades of the 1940s and 1950s witnessed the re-emergence of the picture storybook. Just as the ‘Aboriginal-style’ of decorating held an important place in the souvenir and homeware market, Australian picture storybooks continued to provide exemplars of a ‘primitive’ society placed in a natural history or ethnographic context through both text and illustration. 89 The depictions were not, however, ethnographic in content as the reality of the depiction was unclear. This view did not begin to change until the 1950s with Axel Poignant’s Piccaninnny Walkabout, which will be discussed in chapter three, where the use of photographs as illustrations in a fictional text emphasised the artistic importance of the images as well as their ethnographic function.

The appropriation of Aboriginal motifs by Australian artists and the subsequent commercialisation of Aboriginal childhood by Downing could only take place in a cultural context with a neo-colonial view of Aboriginal culture. Although the art movements of the 1930s and 1940s successfully identified the nationalistic potential of Aboriginal culture, it wasn’t until the 1950s and 1960s that its commercial application was exploited. This practice was riddled with contradictions however, as in adopting the ‘Aboriginal–style’ of decoration, artists appropriated an indigenous

88 The Australian Tuesday July 18, 1995.
89 Markus, op.cit., p. 188.
art form to promote an emerging Australian identity which excluded Aboriginal people.  

The commercialisation of the pictorial image of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children’s fiction begun by Brownie Downing, continues in Victor Barnes’ picture storybook, *Little Binjy* (1971). Illustrated by Hal English, *Little Binjy* is the only book included in this chapter where the author and the illustrator are not the same person. Born in Sydney, Barnes created *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo* which ran to over ninety episodes on Australian television and wrote children’s books featuring Aboriginal legends. *Little Binjy* shares the essentialist themes found in the works of Portnett, Mallinson, Thomas and Downing but differs in style, attempting a pictorial ‘Disnification’ of Aboriginal childhood.

*Little Binjy’s* physical demeanour resembles Tinka’s: he runs, climbs and throws boomerangs and, like Gundy, is chubby, cute and curly haired, with the features of an African-American child. Where the illustrative technique of Downing reflects the ‘Aboriginal-style’, English, known primarily for his comic book cartoons, uses the style of Disney animation. Binjy’s friend the possum appears squirrel-like and the rabbit bears a strong resemblance to Thumper from the Disney movie *Bambi* (1938).  

None of these creatures are recognisably Australian, although they are all called ‘bush animals’. Barnes and English have written and illustrated for an American market.

The production qualities of the book are poor and inexpensive, with flat, two-dimensional illustrations and garish colours. The distribution of Golden Press has always primarily been geared to mass-market children’s and adult books with a strong focus on licensed products. Over the past fifty years Golden Press has distributed many key licences including Disney. The cultural authority of the Disney Corporation rests on its mythical status as a purveyor of American innocence and moral virtue. It continues today as an icon of American culture, dispensing the

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90 Markus, *op.cit.*, p. 192
91 These too are illustrated by Hal English and published by Golden Press.
fantasies through which the myths of childhood innocence and adventure are mass-produced, experienced and affirmed. 93 Barnes and English construct Aboriginal childhood to make it compatible with Disney animations and consumerism through a sanitised notion of identity, difference and history in the seemingly apolitical setting of the Australian bush. Little Binjy trivialises the reality of Aboriginal childhood through constructing a cultural homogeneity and historical purity that erases complex Aboriginal issues, cultural differences and social struggles. The Disney view of indigenous culture mirrors the Australian construction of Aboriginal childhood that prevailed well beyond the 1970s. Binjy is portrayed as active, but stupid. He is bitten by bull-ants, pricked by a spiny anteater, hit by the returning boomerang which he has thrown and is bamboozled into believing that his reflection is another boy. The book represents the crudest form of pulp children’s entertainment. It exploits Anglo-Australian children as subjects and Aboriginal children as objects and continues the commercialisation of Aboriginal childhood begun by Downing, prioritising the Disnification of the image over the intellectual challenge of authentic representation.

Little Binjy is positioned in a time when the modern Australian picture book came into existence. 94 The association of the illustrations with the Disney movie Bambi allows the author and illustrator to perpetuate ideologically loaded images of the Aboriginal child as innocent, entertaining, trivial and imaginary. Read in the context of previous picture-storybooks purveying neo-colonial constructions of Aboriginal childhood, Little Binjy foreshadows the appropriation of the Aboriginal child in later Australian picture books for the commercial tourist market.

94 Watzing Matilda illustrated by Desmond Digby and published in 1970, has been hailed by Muir (1981) and Saxby (1993) as marking the beginning of the contemporary Australian picture book.
Despite the fact that many powerful elements of Aboriginal Dreaming in the book contribute to the aura of the ‘fantastic’ at least for white readers, the ability of the Aboriginal characters to transform themselves suggests a superior complex culture compared to that of the whites. The mode of magic realism now offers Aboriginal writers an imaginative and effective means of showing the ‘real’ living experience of Aborigines in their day-to-day survival while expressing the tremendous value and importance of their rich and complex ‘magical’ cultural heritage. This continues to inform their unique sense of Aboriginality. At the time these books were written, however, it was not the case.
Chapter Three

The Documentary ‘Picture Book’ and the Construction of Aboriginal Childhood: A Problematic Example - Axel Poignant’s Piccaninny Walkabout

In 1957, photographer Axel Poignant published his children’s book, Piccaninny Walkabout, featuring photographs of Aboriginal children that illustrate a fictional narrative. This narrative follows the path of two Aboriginal children who become lost while playing in the bush and are forced to camp overnight while they wait for their parents to rescue them. As a work of children’s literature Piccaninny Walkabout is difficult to categorise. Photographs in children's books have traditionally been associated with a didactic purpose where the reading of information texts and the dissemination of factual material is the main objective. For young children the ‘concept book’ is the first informational book they encounter and photographs are used extensively to sharpen their perceptions and ‘enlarge their growing understanding of the world’. 1 Piccaninny Walkabout was one of the first Australian picture books to combine a fictional text with ‘factual’ photographs. 2 Although Poignant’s work won the second Picture Book of the Year Award, Piccaninny Walkabout is not a picture book, but presents a documentary record of Aboriginal children with the photographs carrying the essential elements of the narrative. 3 Poignant’s conception of a picture story in photographs for children is regarded by The Art Gallery of New South Wales (1982) as ‘a pioneer work in this field’. The layout is a product of his film experience and ‘long term interest in arranging sequences of pictures’. 4

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1 The book was republished in 1962 as Bush Walkabout. A revised edition was also published in 1972, using the same title but presenting an identical narrative with ‘more skill’.
3 Suckford’s Chandra: the boy and the tiger, English edition 1960; Ylla’s The Little Elephant, 1956; Anna Riwkin-Brick’s, Elle Kari, 1956, were other children’s books of this period in a similar format.
Piccaninny Walkabout shapes and is shaped by the ideological forces and assumptions associated with the economic and political circumstances of its production. How that production process contributes to the construction of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children’s fiction is also significant. Viewed from this perspective Poignant’s work inscribes values even when not overtly espousing them. The social and cultural framework in which the book is read reflects the ‘imbalance of power’ between adult writer and illustrator on the one hand and the child readers on the other.

The intended audience for picture books is traditionally inexperienced, still learning how to think about the world and understand how they, and others, fit into it. Consequently, picture books contribute significantly to the way we integrate young children into Australian culture. Whilst the words and images share a special relationship, it is largely the illustrations which will attract readers, enticing them to venture inside the cover. Like most narratives, picture books are constructed to guide readers into culturally acceptable ideas about identity, often through two different points of view – those of the author and the illustrator. Reading and viewing from these perspectives, the child reader sees and understands the events and people within the ideological framework that the narrative, textually and visually, establishes.

When we look at the work of an illustrator using the more popular methods of painting, drawing and graphic design, we usually attempt to analyse and debate the meanings implied by the artist, speculating as to why certain aesthetic decisions were made, and examining how the illustrator has interpreted the written text. We automatically assume that the scene depicted in the book is not as it might appear in reality. The artist has incorporated his or her own emotions, experience and individual way of visualising. Visual theory, however, has taught us that photographs are constructed through principles such as selection, cropping and framing, which shape the particular point of view of the photographer. Photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings, although we still tend to believe that the captured image is the truth, a factual document of
something that existed in the exact form in which it has been created. Both forms of illustration offer the viewer a position of power. They allow us to observe a representation which cannot in any ‘real’ sense look back at us. The viewing is essentially one way. There is no ‘exchange’ of glances. It is possible for some images, however, to disturb and reorient the viewer so that the image can, in another sense, ‘look back’ at and exert power over the viewer, but this rarely occurs in books for children.

It is interesting to note, however, that in spite of the representative nature of children’s book illustration and the popularity of photography as an expressive medium, photographs have not often been used to illustrate picture books. Perhaps this is because the reality captured by the camera cannot fully convey the imaginative quality of the fictional narrative. In books for young children, where the material included is often factual, the purpose is usually educative rather than recreational. Photographs are used to encourage the young child to become aware, through labelling and naming, of the pictured objects which exist in their physical world. For example, concept books are often recommended for use in stimulating the cognitive development of children, where illustrations, often photographs, depict simple concepts such as common shapes through images of everyday objects.

Ironically, the depiction of Aboriginal children in picture books is still predominantly conveyed through photographs and almost exclusively via those depicting a traditional way of life. The accompanying text is usually factual, produced specifically for the tourist market, and indirectly for the child reader. Two such examples are *Growing Up in Kakadu* (1995) and *Growing up in Uluru* (1995), written by Stan Breeden, an international award-winning writer, photographer and film maker and published by Steve Parrish Children's Publishing. The quality of the production is high, while the content is factual, the purpose to inform. There are also more experimental photographic forms of illustration being used in novels for younger readers, where the illustrations have become far more interpretative and artistic. For example, *My Girragundji* (1998) and *The Binna Binna Man* (1999) by Meme McDonald and Boori Pryor. McDonald does not use photographic illustration

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of Aboriginal people in a traditional or conventional manner. She uses techniques to
distort the image, as well as interpret and extend the reality of the photographs, just
as an illustration is meant to extend and interpret the meaning of the text. The
combination of photographs and fiction is, however, still relatively rare in the picture
book format. Pictures are still perceived to provide an unimpeachable witness and,
supposedly, a source of highly reliable, factual data with little imaginative input.

The picture-book genre is a complex form, absorbing and using codes, styles, and
textual devices, which frequently push at the borders of convention. The pictures
‘illustrate’ the text, attempting to complement what is meant by the words. The
combination of photographs as illustration and the text as fiction does not, however,
automatically produce a picture book or an illustrated story. *Piccaninny Walkabout*
is an example of a hybrid form of children’s book with many of the characteristics
typical of a documentary book or photo-essay, a form not traditionally associated
with children’s fiction.

Just as a ‘good’ children’s picture book meets certain basic criteria, so too does a
‘good’ children’s documentary book. Although most of the information is conveyed
through the photographs, so that the text can be compressed and concise, the
photographs and text must still be in balance. Tight, economical writing is the
hallmark of the documentary book, where the general is expressed through the
specific. A universal theme can be presented by concentrating and limiting the scope
of the coverage or the story can be told in terms of people and their activities.
Children are often the subjects of documentary books.

The dominant feature of *Piccaninny Walkabout* is the documentary image. Poignant
has created a photographic record of Arnhem Land children at play while also
portraying traditional hunting and food gathering activities. Like most documentary

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8 The tradition of the documentary photographic book began in 1873 with John Thomson’s
*Illustrations of China and Its People* where the photograph was intended to ‘afford the nearest
approach that can be made toward placing the reader actually before the scene which is represented’.
9 J. Bainbridge and S. Pantaleo, *Learning with Literature in the Canadian Elementary Classroom*
(Edmonton, the University of Alberta Press, 1999), p. 143.
photographers, he attempts to rise to the challenge of producing technically perfect photographs.

_The seeing of the proof, at each stage so soon after taking, has helped me develop and improve, and shows me how very far I have still to go to approach what I feel about the subjects taken. Frankly, on a quick look through I feel I have failed. At least I know that I have only begun to touch the outside of the material available._"'

Axel Poignant was one of the first photographers in Australia to be influenced by the documentary movement. Variously called 'straight', 'modern', the 'new photography' and 'documentary photography', these developments were internationally widespread by the 1930s. Their adherents believed in exploring the camera's unique capacity to present aspects of the real world and contemporary life. The documentary movement took its name from a usage coined by the film critic John Grierson in 1926, claiming only to 'put the facts'. The movement sought new ways of scrutinising 'it', representing 'it' and seeking to transform 'it' (in Poignant's case, preserving 'it'). In America, in particular, the movement intersected with older practices and discourses of philanthropy and sought to represent, reform and reconstitute the social body in new ways. The Farm Security Administration (FSA) is probably the most famous example of the Documentary Movement. The function of the FSA was to provide assistance to the rural poor and migrant agricultural workers as a government response to the Great Depression. The FSA is well known for the body of documentary photographs produced through its photographic section. The documentary movement coincided with the introduction of 35mm cameras with the German Leica in 1925 which facilitated a change in traditional approaches to photography. Its compact size, ease of operation and faster shutter speeds enabled photographers to produce more spontaneous pictures, utilising a wider range of viewpoints and to work in situations not possible with earlier cameras.
The son of an English mother and a Swedish father, Poignant arrived in Australia in 1926. After training briefly to be a farm hand, he obtained his first job in Coolamon, New South Wales. These first years in Australia, however, were years of hardship. Enteric fever, appendicitis and jaundice in quick succession made him unfit for heavy farm labour. He eventually set up a photographic studio in Perth in 1930, specialising in portraits, particularly of children. As a feature for his clients he compiled small, attractively sequenced photograph albums of their children at play. It is therefore, not surprising, that Poignant chose to photograph a children's book. At this point, however, he was less interested in the aesthetics of his craft than in searching for subjects he could interpret with his camera. His concern was for content. 

In 1934 Poignant became a press photographer and was introduced to the photo-story layout appearing in illustrated magazines. The photo-story was a vital part of documentary photography. A related set of pictures were used to dramatise a story for readers, often contributing an insight into the subject more fully and forcefully than any single image, taken as a simple shot of record. By 1938 Poignant's distinctive vision as a photographer had emerged. His subjects are confronted directly and dramatically, enabling him to convey their personalities more forcefully. At the same time Poignant was becoming conscious of his concern to use photography as a way to express clearly and simply what he had to say about his subject. His work of this period also shows an awareness of the work of the American Farm Security Administration photographers, exemplified in his technical skill and compositional strength. He was also influenced by the 'New Photography' and the social concerns and beliefs of the documentary film movement.

Early in 1942 Poignant joined a camel expedition to check the wells along the Canning Stock Route. This journey introduced him to Aboriginal people on the cattle

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11 Axel to Roslyn Poignant November 12th, 1952. Poignant Papers, National Library MS 7623, Box 5, Folder 37.
13 Art Gallery NSW, op. cit, np.
stations. "Two of Poignant's most famous photographs were probably taken during this trip, one of an Aboriginal stockman and the other of an Aboriginal girl breast-feeding a newborn baby romantically referred to as 'Madonna and Child'. " The portrait of the Aboriginal girl shows a new mastery in Poignant's use of the close-up and low angle, revealing a relaxed assurance on the part of the individual photographed. It also shows – in the monumentality of composition and form – a relatively new recognition of the richness and power of the Aboriginal culture represented. In the hundred years of photography which preceded this work, few similarly humane portraits of Aboriginal people exist, particularly of Aboriginal women. "In their attempt at a sympathetic portrayal of Aborigines, these two images certainly break with the convention of representing Aborigines as remnants of a dying race, but they are still generalised images, in the heroic documentary tradition, which tell little about the specific conditions of detribalised Aborigines. This draws attention again to the distinction that must be made between the simple factual photographic record of anthropologists, and the expression of an ideal of 'humanism and brotherhood' that the documentary movement aspired to. From such encounters experienced on the Canning Stock Route, Poignant became curious about the traditional Aboriginal way of life. He also became more familiar with the documentary approach through working on the film, Namatjira The Painter (1946) for the Department of Information " and began to explore, through first hand experience, the relationship between Aboriginal people and the land.

Wishing to communicate his insights into this relationship and hearing of plans to establish a government station on Liverpool River in Arnhem Land in an area that was designated 'uncontrolled', Poignant decided to go there to record a way of life which he believed was about to change profoundly. It was the prospect of an

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14 The Canning Stock Route begins in Western Australia. Poignant's trip went from Wiluna railhead passed Lake Disappointment and went as far north as Hall's Creek.
15 Both photographs were published in Australian Photography in 1947 and the Madonna image was awarded a gold medal.
16 See also the photographs of anthropologist Donald Thomson whose work was also sympathetic towards the Aboriginal people he portrayed.
17 Art Gallery (The) of NSW, op.cit, pp. 203-204. Over the next decade Poignant returned many times to the Northern Territory both as a freelance photographer and on assignments for the Department of Information. He also joined the camera crew of the British Ealing Studios' film The Overlanders (1946), filmed in the Northern Territory. The nine months spent filming in the Northern Territory stimulated his interest in Aboriginal people and he began reading books such as Spencer and Gillen's
encounter with people who were relatively 'uncontacted', that provided the immediate impetus for his self-generated assignment. 18 He saw change as inevitable and regarded the missions and trading posts as buffers against the worst effects of contact. He was interested in the 'small details of everyday life', the hunting and food gathering, the integration of the social and ceremonial life and wanted to photograph Aboriginal people as 'human beings' rather than as specimens. 19 Permission had to be obtained, from Paul Hasluck, the Minister of Territories, to enter the reserve. The Department of Native Affairs warned Poignant that 'these people are not truly tribal ... not wholly aboriginal because of their contact with our civilisation through the missionaries and established trading posts'. It was thought, however, that 'they could be readily induced to revert to the wholly primitive for Mr Poignant's purposes'. 20

Poignant had previously visited Milingimbi in 1951 as assistant to Life photographer Fritz Goro and had thought that it had potential as a location for a children's story. He was fascinated by the children and wanted to convey 'something of their life with his camera'. Poignant arrived in the Northern Territory in 1952 with his own mixed and somewhat idealised notions about 'traditional ' Aboriginal life. The book was photographed in the last three weeks of his five-month stay in Arnhem Land with Aboriginal communities. He regarded the inaccessibility of the region, which necessitated minimum contact with non-Aboriginal culture, as an indicator of the authentic, an attitude he shared with many others at the time. His beliefs, however, continued to reflect the dominant discourse, which categorised Aboriginal culture in terms of loss. By the 1950s, official segregationist policies were slowly giving way to a new policy of assimilation. Aboriginal people were being encouraged to abandon their culture. 21 At the end of the decade, residential segregation, low wages and poor living conditions continued to be the lot for many Aboriginal people. In

Across Australia (1912) and The Arunta (1927) and Black Civilization (1937), a classic ethnography of the people at Milingimbi, Arnhem Land, by the American anthropologist, Lloyd Warner.
19 In a letter to the Methodist Overseas Mission, requesting assistance with transport and guides, Poignant argued: 'In the past the scientist has had the main say. This might be an opportunity to see them as human beings'. Poignant Papers, National Library MS 7623, Box 6, Folder 40.
20 Letter, FJS Wise, NT Administrator, to CR Lambert, Secretary, Department of Territories, 18th February 1952, Australian Archives ACT Canberra. W818/1/6. Series A518. CA60.
fact, the paternalism of assimilation policies, expressed via constant monitoring and harassment by police, welfare officers and station staff, ensured that Aboriginal people remained second-class citizens. This was the socio-political frame within which Poignant operated. Poignant wanted the story to emerge out of his experience and to this end spent five months among the Yolngu people, obtaining privileged access to their day-to-day life as well as to ceremonial occasions. The photographs he took attempted to portray positively the traditional Aboriginal way of life. In many images he stressed the warm relationship between children and adults, giving a sense of a rich culture being handed down from one generation to another.  

Poignant later identified the mission station on Milingimbi Island as the setting for Piccaninny Walkabout. Unlike the 'uncontrolled' Liverpool River region, Milingimbi's people had enjoyed long-term contact with Macassan trepangers, Japanese pearlers (who began working around the island during the 1870s) and Methodist missionaries (who opened a mission in 1923). Mission ventures included language studies, a sawmill and a health clinic. When the Japanese bombed the station during the Second World War, most of the island's inhabitants were relocated to Elcho Island and the mainland while Milingimbi became an air force base. Demonstrating an unusually enlightened approach to the existing culture, the missionaries returned at the end of the war and set up a school in 1951 with a curriculum which stressed literacy in the local Aboriginal language. Unfortunately, neither Poignant nor his publishers shared such a vision. They did not consider a bilingual publication of the book, although they included Aboriginal words as part of the original translation. Just as the intended audience for previous children's publications concerning Aboriginal children was Anglo-Australian, so too was Piccaninny Walkabout. The 'English-only' text of the book effectively excluded the local Aboriginal community from reading it and to my knowledge, there is no evidence available to indicate that the local people portrayed in the book actually saw the final publication.

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22 O'Callaghan, ibid, p.108.
23 Willis, op.cit, p.204.
24 The church retained administrative control of the station until 1974, when it passed management to the federal government. As a result of the missionaries' enlightened approach to the existing culture,
Roslyn Poignant incorrectly regards *Piccaninny Walkabout* as the first introduction Australian children had to ‘the idea that the bush was a sustaining environment, accessible to those who learnt the appropriate skills and became self-reliant’. Children’s literature which focuses on Aboriginal childhood has always presented Aboriginal life as dominated by the search for food and hence by the notion of survival. The book reinforces these essentialist stereotypes. *Piccaninny Walkabout* is all about food: ‘Wanting it, searching for it, preparing it, eating, and being comforted by it’. It could be argued that the entire book is a metaphorical incorporation of an Anglo-Australian construction of an Aboriginal life-view. 25

Axel Poignant also exploits the universality of the lost child motif, returning to this ‘arresting’ figure so prevalent in the history and folklore of colonial Australia and in Australian children’s fiction. In this instance, however, the Aboriginal children – not settler children - are lost. Instead of being consumed by a hostile land, as a white child would, the Aboriginal children Rikili and Nullagundi are nurtured by a familiar landscape in which daily activities are presented not only as life sustaining but also life-saving. Their sustenance by the environment provides the key to the book’s authorial construction, revealing the easy cross-cultural transposition from a supposedly traditional Aboriginal story to a book for Anglo-Australian children. As Pierce (1999) argues, the lost child represents not only the children of European origin who strayed into the Australian bush, but also symbolises the essential, if never fully resolved, anxieties of many white settler communities and their often nostalgic desire to ‘belong’ to what seems to them an inhospitable environment. 26

Poignant attempts to show the symbols of Aboriginal society through child-centred activity and a total, if superficial involvement, with his subjects. By using a traditional story Poignant tries to maintain the truth of what he perceives to be his subjects’ traditional Aboriginality. He pursues this goal through the text as well as through the images 27 and attempts to convey a sense of presence as he wishes to preserve what is there, at the same time making it possible for readers to explore the

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Aboriginal customary religion and Christianity co-exist there amicably. The government transferred responsibility for the island’s administration to a council during the mid-1970s.
life and environment of the Arnhem Land child as if they *themselves* were there. Poignant tries to cultivate a sympathetic understanding of Aboriginal children by using photographic, as well as textual detail, to reveal what he perceived as the day-to-day life practises of the Aboriginal people and their children. The concept construction of *Piccaninny Walkabout* belongs to the genre of children's fiction, but the presentation style is that of documentary photography.

The idea for the book developed over several years. In 1951 Poignant had drafted an outline for a book based on a story told by Bill Harney of an urbanised Aboriginal family in Darwin who are made castaways by a monsoonal storm and have to relearn survival in the bush. He subsequently wrote a one-page outline about a young child who becomes lost in the bush while looking for his parents. It was a simple narrative and unpublishable in its original form. He abandoned both of these possibilities in favour of a more ‘authentic’ storyline reflecting Aboriginal beliefs supplied by Miss Beulah Lowe, the mission teacher at Millingimbi. Lowe had transcribed and translated a story told by Raiwalla, a local Aboriginal man. For Poignant, the participation of Raiwalla in shaping the narrative and in the photographs as one of the children’s parents, transformed the story into the ‘most terrific authentic tale you could imagine’.

*I must tell you what has happened here. The KID’S STORY. Raiwalla’s help has turned it into something terrific. I am now sure that this set of pictures is the most important I have done so far. My only fear is: will my film last out? I think it might. I enclose a FIRST literal translation of his story. Also our shotlist. ... I have circled the shots taken so you will have an idea when you develop them ... Raiwalla has developed and enlarged so many of the finer points and details, things which only show in the photographs, their clothing, the house they live in now,*

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27 Rothstein, *op.cit,* p.122.
how they do this and that etc. We have copious notes,
but at present they are mostly in the native language
and have to be translated. 39

Poignant had hoped to continue the active collaboration with Beulah Lowe and
through her with Raiwalla, but ‘she simply hadn’t the time’. 30 The final translation
of the traditional story was sent in May 1954 31, but, by this time, the book had,
according to Roslyn Poignant, already taken shape. 32 The final published story was
supposedly based on the original, story-point oral telling. Interestingly, however,
some of it is word for word from the translation, while other parts have been added,
which were not in the original. 33

In the preface to Piccaninny Walkabout, Poignant refers to the adventures of
Nullagundi and Rikili as an Aboriginal bedtime story, as it is supposedly told to
children around the campfire at night. Poignant regards Nullagundi and Rikili as
‘typical of the laughing, happy children found in Arnhem Land’. 34 He goes on to say
that a short time after the pictures were taken, Nullagundi went through the first of

28 Raiwalla had been a friend and guide to well-known anthropologist Donald Thomson in the 1930s
and served with him during the Second World War.
29 Letter to Roslyn Poignant November 12th, 1952. Poignant Papers, National Library MS 7623, Box 5,
Folder 37.
30 Letter from Beulah Lowe in Millingimbi to Axel Poignant in Sydney – ‘...I haven’t yet even
completed the initial translating - I just simply haven’t had time. ’Poignant Papers, National Library
MS 7623, Box 5, Folder 32.
31 The May 1954 letter from Beulah Lowe to Axel Poignant, written while she was in Sydney, makes
no mention of changing the order of events and even ‘some of the happenings to fit in with your
pictures’. Nor did she mention that the final translation was enclosed. By this stage, the events had
already been changed. ‘Poignant Papers, National Library MS 7623, Box 5, Folder 32.
32 R. Poignant, op. cit., p.29.
33 Beulah Lowe’s letter to Axel Poignant in July 1953 suggested that Poignant find ‘someone to write
the actual story - i.e. reduce the material to story form’. Lowe also offered to send Poignant the
‘translation of all we did with Raiwalla’ and was quite willing to ‘find out anything you wanted to
know further’. There is some confusion surrounding the translation process and the time frame of the
composition of Poignant’s text. Roslyn Poignant’s version of events in her 1994 article ‘they ate until
they could eat no more’ and the letters, held in the National Library, offer divergent interpretations. It
appears that the shot-list from Millingimbi Island and the story-points associated with the ‘first literal
translation’ of the story told to Poignant by Raiwalla and translated by Beulah Lowe was used to
construct the initial photographic sequence of Piccaninny Walkabout. The published version,
however, appears to have been based on a later, modified translation sent to Axel Poignant. There is
only one translation, apart from the shot-list annotations, in the Poignant Papers, and it appears to be a
final copy. This in turn creates confusion and contradiction about the time frame indicated by Roslyn
Poignant and is difficult to resolve. Poignant Papers, National Library MS 7623, Box 5, Folder 32.
34 The children in the photographs are Jimbatju (Nullagundi) and Muraygir (Rikili), but Poignant
does not acknowledge them, although Beulah Lowe sent a copy of their names to him, obviously
presuming that he would. Raiwala and his wife ‘play’ the parents.
the initiation ceremonies that would ‘make him a man’. There is no mention of female initiation ceremonies. Rikili just ‘goes on growing up’ and, although she is already promised in marriage, her role is seen to be less important than the role of the boy. The preface also emphasises the significant role that Nullagundi, as an Aboriginal boy, will play in the story. The narrative that follows highlights the skill required to throw a spear and the importance of hunting. Nullagundi’s fishing is preparing him to become a man, while the digging of worms and collecting of honey by Rikali, is shown to be merely the game of a child and of little value.

A comparison of the original and published versions reveals a heightened privileging of the male role. The differences are subtle but the implied meaning reinforces contemporary (1950s) western notions of appropriate gender roles with the male the dominant figure. In the published version of Piccaninny Walkabout, Rikali’s suggestion to eat the food raw is dismissed as ‘silly’, whereas in the original version, the boy simply doesn’t see it as a good idea. In the published version, Rikali uses her ‘tender hands’ as an excuse to escape work, the implication being that her hands are tender because of laziness, whereas the original explains that her skin is peeling off because of the manual work she has already done. Poignant’s published book portrays Nullagundi as being firmly in control. The original version, however, doesn’t give Nullagundi such a dominant role, presenting him realistically with the same childish fears and uncertainties as his sister Rikali.

Poignant changed the tone of the story with his gendered, European construction. This indicates that the context of book, although based on some form of the original translation as claimed by Poignant, was altered when it suited. 31

Original Translation 1952

Oh, yes, oh, dear. How am I going to make the fire?
Maybe I’ll break the stick! We’ll rub the sticks together and try and make a fire. And the girl says –
Yes wawa you are a big boy! – Come on sister, we will
try and help each other and make this fire. – No my hands are too soft, the skins peeling off – says the sister – and because I’m hungry I will eat the fish etc. raw! No, says the boy, don’t do that, I’ll have a try at making the fire. He does and succeeds. So he cooks the goanna and they eat it.  

Published version Piccaninny Walkabout 1957

"You are brave and strong," said Rikali.
"Come on, little sister, you help me and it won’t take long."
"No, brother, you do it. My hands are too tender. Anyway, I’m so hungry, I think I’ll eat it raw."
"Don’t be silly. You go and collect some firewood. I’ll try to make the fire, and we’ll soon have it cooked."  

In seeking to convey the ‘authenticity’ of his subject matter, Poignant manipulates Raiwalla’s traditional story so that it fits with his own notion of ‘authentic’ Aboriginal childhood, underwritten by a preoccupation with how to translate his aim ‘to get these people as they are’ into photographic practice. His view of ‘authentic’ Aboriginal childhood belongs to a neo-colonial discourse, but is more sympathetic, romantic and utopian when compared with other Australian children’s books discussed in previous chapters. It must be acknowledged, however, that although Raiwalla’s story may be ‘traditional’ his retelling of it would also involve a degree of alteration. Poignant’s published version is therefore constituted by ‘many’ stories, none of which is ultimately ‘authentic’.

The language of Poignant’s version is stilted and formal, with a controlled vocabulary. The children use Standard English, although their contact with

35 R.Poignant, _op.cit_, p. 161. Although the story was told at Millingimbi, photographs taken at Goulburn Island and Nagalarramba were also included.
36 Lowe, _op.cit_., p.2.
Europeans is supposedly minimal. The visual dominates. The text is included to support the visual images, and is of secondary importance. 38 Piccaninny Walkabout was published to profile Axel Poignant’s photographs, rather than to make a contribution to Australian children’s fiction. The book reinforces, albeit unintentionally, the stereotypes that were already well-established in children’s books with an Aboriginal focus. The message that Roslyn Poignant regarded as new was already embedded in previous children’s publications.39

The content is once again essentialist. Poignant views the search for food as one of the most significant aspects of Aboriginal life. This may well be true, but Poignant does not explore the rich and complex significance attached to the act of finding food and the cultural meaning associated with the food itself.

The cloak of a traditional tale provided Poignant with a fictional resolution of some of the tensions he had been experiencing over the preceding months in trying to reconcile his stated aim of ‘making a record’ with his desire to convey a more holistic view of Aboriginal life. Poignant sought to minimise his interference by using an observational filming technique which attempted to record things 'as they are'. 40

Daguerre and Talbot produced the first fixed photographic images in 1839. Within twenty years gentleman scientists who collected butterflies and other objects from the natural world in order to gain knowledge through detailed observation and classification, were using the camera as a scientific instrument of proof. Empiricism reigned supreme: the measurable, the visible, whatever could be subject to scientific scrutiny, was becoming increasingly valued. Those who subscribed to such notions of positivism believed that through the accumulation of observable facts all the truth

37 A. Poignant, Piccaninny Walkabout (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1957), p.23.
38 In any of her writing about Piccaninny Walkabout, Roslyn Poignant doesn’t discuss the narrative content or the actual construction of the text. Her focus and analysis is almost entirely on the photographs. It is clear that for her, at least, the text has little value.
39 Apart from Piccaninny Walkabout, Axel Poignant’s Arnhem Land photographs, as a collection, would only be published as intermittent illustration in Fred McCarthy’s Australian Aborigines (1957), until Roslyn Poignant presents them in Encounter at Nagalarramba in 1996. They were never formally exhibited. Roslyn Poignant’s ignorance of Australian children’s literature generally, reinforces this notion.
40 Poignant, R, op.cit., (They ate ...) pp. 28, 29.
about the physical world would eventually be revealed. The objective, mechanical eye of the camera seemed to provide the ideal means by which to collect facts, to capture and order a world of great complexity and diversity. The photograph emerged as a source of truth, a facsimile of reality not possessed by other, more conventional images. 41

The coupling of evidence and photography in the second half of the nineteenth century was bound up with the emergence of new institutions and new practices of observation and record-keeping which were seen as central to the restructuring of the local and national state in industrialised societies of the time. The development of new regulatory and disciplinary apparatuses was closely linked, throughout the nineteenth century, to the formation of new social and anthropological sciences, 42 redefining the social, both physically and environmentally, as the object of their technical interventions. 43 The documentary movement became a part of this approach.

Aboriginal Australians were constituted by photographers as the passive objects of knowledge and subjected to a scrutinising gaze. They were represented and knowingly rendered as incapable of speaking, acting or organising for themselves. Documentary photography traded on the status of the official document as proof and inscribed relations of power in representations which were structured - speaking to those with relative power about those positioned as lacking it, offering a comparison between so-called 'civilised' and 'primitive' societies, so-called 'advanced' and 'backward' races. The 'other' emerged as capable only of being offered up to the benevolent, transcendent gaze of the camera and of the paternal Eurocentric world view.

41 Willis, op.cit., pp. 18-20.
42 These included criminology, psychiatry, comparative anatomy, germ theory, sanitation and so on... and the new kinds of professionalism associated with them. The production and dissemination of new knowledge released new effects of power. The early social use of the camera was primarily concerned with portraiture and the many commercial studios and later itinerant street photographers were taken up with capturing a good likeness of their subjects.
There is a close, if not conspiratorial relationship between the 19th century classificatory photograph and the classificatory system itself. The photograph came to operate as proof, not disproof of a particular interpretation of evidence. The photograph did not challenge the theory and the theory did not question the photograph. "Poignant's photographs, products of the 'documentary' tradition, were perceived to be an unmediated reflection of traditional Aboriginal life. Piccaninny Walkabout was thus believed to be a true record of the lives of its child subjects.

The neocolonialist assumptions informing Poignant's project are evident throughout Piccaninny Walkabout. The preface thanks the members of the white community who made the publication of the book possible but neglects to acknowledge the local Aboriginal people, the subjects of the book:

It would have been impossible to photograph this little story if it had not been for the invaluable help given not only by Miss Beulah Lowe but also by the Reverend A.F. Ellemor, Chairman the North Australia District of the Methodist Overseas Mission, and his devoted staff and helpers on their mission station. They put up with the inconvenience of having me around while coping with their own problems: problems of helping aborigines and white people to understand each other and so smooth a vital transition period. Australians can be proud of this fine effort. I would also like to thank the Honourable Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories, for his help in making this venture possible."

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44 A. Dewdney, Racism, Representation and Photography (Sydney, Inner City Education Centre, 1994), pp.20-21
45 A. Poignant, Piccaninny Walkabout (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1957).
The white child-reader is clearly interpellated into the discourse of paternalistic, state-directed, assimilationist reform. Although Poignant claims his photographic role is one of 'witness' rather than as a collector of 'evidence', he uses his children's book to render visible the traditional lifestyle of Aboriginal people. *Piccaninny Walkabout* seeks to establish the imaginary identification of viewer and image, reader and representation, locking them into the paternalistic relations of deference and power, through the purported authenticity of the subjects and the interrelationships of gesture, behaviour, location and the universality of childhood.  

In dramatically changed wartime and postwar conditions, a new cultural formation took shape. While practices of surveillance proliferated in an atmosphere of militarism, McCarthyism and Cold War politics, traces of documentary photographic style lingered only in the trade pictorials of *Life* and *National Geographic Magazine*. Consequently, Axel Poignant's photographs found few publication outlets. With their emphasis on the traditional way of life, they were seemingly out of step with 1950s state ideologies on race. The official policy was assimilation, visually constructed in magazines such as *Dawn* (published by the Aboriginal Protection Board of New South Wales) which presented photographs of Aboriginal children in school uniforms and young women being trained as domestic servants at Aboriginal Protection Board homes.  

Poignant's decision to publish a children's book was very much a marketing decision. It was probably the only available commercial outlet for his photographs.

In Australia, by the mid-1950s, photographers committed to the documentary idea were being treated with indifference by the professional photographic establishment. It was the era of photojournalism and the story essay. It was also an era in which commercial photography, particularly fashion illustration, flourished as never before.  

The decade of the 1950s was also a difficult time for creative photographers concerned with working in a meaningful way personally or professionally. The Institute of Photographic Illustrators and other professional groups gave preference

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46 Tagg, *op. cit*, p.12  
47 Willis, *op. cit*, p.205.  
48 G. Newton, Silver and Grey, *Fifty Years of Australian Photography 1900-1950* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1980).
to commercial photography. Contemporary 'creative' photographers had no exhibiting venues and personal exhibitions were very rare. 49

Just as all photographs have a social context of production, so too does a children's picture book. An awareness of this context is the basis for understanding both the meaning of the text and the illustrations. In *Piccaninny Walkabout* the social or material context in which the photographic illustration is viewed is equally significant. Poignant resolves the tension between his own aesthetic and ideological goals - to salvage the 'vanishing' Aboriginal culture, and the need to produce photographs commercially - by creating a documentary book based on an 'authentic' Aboriginal oral tale and posing the photographs to suit the story. He would deny that the resulting production reinforces and reproduces already established definitions and perspectives about Aboriginal people in Australian children's fiction. Photography has always had the power to define and control. 50 What differentiates the photograph as artefact and the photograph as illustration is the text. The meaning of any individual photograph can never totally be resolved. In order to see photographic meaning, the shifting tension within the ways photographs are used must be identified. Whilst technical determination of a photographic result can be separated out, in practice it is part of the wider process of mediation which is essentially cultural. The choice of what is photographed, where, when and how it is photographed, the framing of the field and angle of view and the point at which the shutter is released are but the primary moments of human invention. Beyond and behind such moments lie the reasons, impulses and occasions which have led to the decision to take, or rather make, a photograph. 51

The camera is a technical object designed to make an exact copy of what is seen through a series of mechanical functions. The camera merely reproduces, capturing a moment and preserving it in detail, exactly as it appears. But just as an artist makes decisions about how the final illustration will look, so too does the photographer.

49 In 1955 the Sydney breakaway group (In 1954, simultaneously in Melbourne and Sydney Max Dupain and Athol Smith formed breakaway groups from the Institute of Photographic Illustrators which had been formed in 1948) organised an exhibition called "Six Photographers" at David Jones' Gallery. Axel Poignant was one of these exhibitors. Their aim was to make unstaged, spontaneous and personal records. *Six Photographers* David Jones’ Art Gallery exhibition catalogue.
51 Dewdney, *op. cit.*, p.25.
Technical decisions about shutter speeds, apertures and type of film will all affect the final result, as well as what is and is not included in the photograph and which photographs will be included in the book. Unlike artists, photographers can (and do) produce hundreds of photographs in order to publish a limited few.

Roslyn Poignant states that Axel took approximately 2500 photographs during his five month stay in Arnhem Land. *Piccaninny Walkabout* used seventy. All required some form of interpretation and personal selection, which in turn influenced the 'reality' of the photograph, which is taken for granted.

Just as the American Farm Security Administration documentary photographic project of the late 1930s took dozens of frontal pictures of their subjects until they were satisfied that they had captured 'just the right look on film', Axel Poignant made decisions about the precise expression on the faces of Nullagundi and Rikali. These decisions supported his own notions about outback survival, children, childhood, gender, light, texture, exploitation, composition, children's stories and Aboriginality.

Those preferences, which the photographer prioritises, have the effect of imposing a judgement on behalf of the viewer. The main elements of the image, as decided by the photographer, become the elements which the viewer notices and pays attention to. The photographer's view is presented as 'real' and the audience usually accepts it unquestionably. Poignant's photographs are thus received as material evidence for the existence of Aboriginal children and their way of life, yet the image has been simplified - our gaze is directed by the photographer's preferences which determine the rendition of a scene.

Another aspect relating to the apparent reality of the photograph is ambiguity in respect of time. When we look at the image of an object, we are reassured that it exists or existed. Yet time has passed between the instance of taking the photograph and the present viewing. Five years elapsed from the time the photographs for *Piccaninny Walkabout* were taken in 1952 and the time they were published in 1957.
What had once been the reality of the subjects depicted in the publication would no longer be so. The children themselves would have become adolescents. The influence of the mission at Milingimbi Island would have changed their way of life. Although the photographs were taken five years before the book was published, they remain frozen in time and enter the consciousness of the viewer as images from 1952. The passage of time that elapses between the moment in 1952 when they were ‘snapped’ and the ‘present’ moment when the viewer gazes at them does not alter that reality. When Poignant returned to Sydney, not only did the reality of the subjects of the photographs change but so too did the reality of the photographer. Once the photographs were developed and the images produced, his reality and the reality of what he originally saw became a memory, and memory is highly selective. Coupled with this is the fact that Roslyn Poignant, who had never been to Milingimbi Island and thus brought a different perspective to the project, also developed some of the photographs. Her input into the final production of the book and her role in the selection of the photographs adds to the complexity of the final illustrative process.

Photographic images are a powerful medium for persuasion, due to the inherent belief that they are evidence of the reality of the scene depicted. As the aphorism ‘one good picture is worth ten thousand words’ attests, photographic evidence carries much more persuasive weight than written text – and this is especially the case in Poignant’s book - where the children are posed and the narrative artificially constructed. Within a photograph we distinguish one isolated moment of time. It provides all the information we require to identify the reality of that moment. The inclusion of a text to accompany the image gives it meaning - past, present and future in the context of a fictional narrative. Piccaninny Walkabout is a contradiction in terms as it creates a deliberate ambiguity between the ‘reality’ produced through the photographic images and the fictional narrative articulated through the text. It activates narrative conventions which provoke recognition in the reader and produce a certain response, reinforcing whiteness and dominance.

52 Axel Poignant and his wife Roslyn returned to Europe, visited Sweden and settled in London for family reasons. Axel and Roslyn went on to publish Kaleku (1972), a children’s book on New Guinea,
Poignant uses the photographs in *Piccaninny Walkabout* as 'proof' of an experience. He constructs an ideal, capturing images of a traditional way of life. But this traditional life had already changed through contact with western civilization. Poignant achieved his 'ideal' Aboriginal by excluding images that suggested the incursions of modernity. He worried, for example, about western clothing being included, as it was not 'natural'. He wanted to film the Aboriginal world as he imagined it before the missionaries arrived. On Milingimbi Island, the missionaries were already there, so he had to erase any traces of their presence. Colour had not yet become a viable alternative when Poignant was working on *Piccaninny Walkabout*. Since the advent of colour, however, the notion that the black and white image signifies historically 'authentic' documentary 'truth' has become current (see for example its use in films such as *Newsfront*, *Raging Bull* and *Schindler's List*). Thus for the contemporary reader his unavoidable use of black and white photographs reinforces the impression of 'truthfulness'. The photographer and the viewer appear to be observing a situation with much more clarity and honesty - in 'black and white'. This is because black and white photography has been associated with the tradition of documentary realism, often depicting poverty or war. Black and white is also considered appropriate for the depiction of Aboriginal people. The author has been 'out there', but still produces his publication from within the safety of an achieved and comfortable world. Poignant does what many commercial and official photographers have always done - ventured beyond so-called 'civilised' society, to record and capture the 'natives', the 'others', and returned to seek a reward through displaying them to 'us', the audience. Confronted with the unmediated reality of the photographer, the suburban city reader is invited to put away other contexts they may know or imagine and respond to the photographs and text as if they had been authored by their subjects. These images nevertheless remain incontrovertibly the property of the photographer. 35

Poignant has socially constructed a cultural image by attempting to ignore the tentative nature of our understanding of any culture. Aboriginal representation in Australian children's fiction depends upon a history of portrayal, of anthropological

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35 Dewdney, *op.cit*, p.35.
conceptualisation, viewer expectation, didacticism and the pre-conceived popular culture stereotype that all Aboriginal people live a traditional, isolated life in the remote and exotic regions of Central and Northern Australia. White photographers have generally located Aboriginal people within ‘exotic’ environments representing them as examples of the surviving native flora and fauna, and thus using them to construct 'a new nationalism around a timeless land', created by writers of the travel genre. 54 Poignant plays a significant role in perpetuating this lingering mythical identity of the 'real' Aboriginal, always shown in traditional contexts of primitive and simplistic happiness which congeals around the repeatedly constructed image of the typical, black, nomadic tribal family. Piccaninny Walkabout can be read as yet another episode in this family's life. Poignant thus demonstrates the continuity of a neo-colonial ethnocentrism, which continues to commodify traditional Aboriginal culture whilst ignoring the contemporary and urban. 55

Looking at the images of a person produced by a photographer is clearly different from looking at the same person directly. Indeed, the camera frequently enables us to look at people whom we would never otherwise see at all. In a very literal sense, the camera turns the person depicted into an object, establishing a distance between viewer and viewed. 54 Because the images of their faces are available to both a seen and unseen observer, they signify, not just the observer’s right to gaze, but also their own concealed consciousness of an observer – and therefore, their own passive willingness, even desire, to be gazed at. In Piccaninny Walkabout, however, although the children gaze for the photographer willingly, they are unaware of the wider audience. The concept of a documentary picture book would be alien to them. They are gazing for the camera and the photographer, unaware of the public context. Piccaninny Walkabout maximises the power of the viewer because the children are utterly unaware of the voyeuristic nature of the documentary picture book. As subjects they exist as real and recognizable characters, not illustrations drawn from

54 J. Beckett The Past in the Present; the Present in the Past; Constructing a National Aboriginality (Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988). Steve Parrish's children's publications (see page 2.) also undoubtedly belong in the travel genre.
55 J. Ruby, 'Visual Anthropology', in D. Levinson and M. Ember(eds), Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology Vol.4 (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1996), pp. 1345-1351. Photographs are valued because they give information, particularly to those who find reading difficult. Young children are usually unable to read or are just beginning and, therefore, are an ideal viewing audience, reinforcing the populist identity of Aboriginal children and therefore Aboriginal life.
the imagination of an artist. The implied viewer, however, is still given the right to look, to linger over details, to enjoy and interpret and make judgements. 7

'The gaze' is a technical term which was originally used in film theory in the 1970s but which is now more broadly used to refer to both to the ways in which viewers look at images of people in any visual medium and to the gaze in visual texts. 8 In controlling the image, 'the photographer has power, temporarily, over those in front of the lens, a power which may also be lent to viewers of the image. In this sense, the camera can represent a 'controlling gaze'. 9

Focalisation, or the perspective through which the story is told, as a discourse, is as important a consideration in the interpretation of documentary picture books as it is in the reading of other narrative forms as it tends to distance the audience from the 'story'. Strategies exist, however, with which to establish various subject positions ranging from introjection to detached observation. Introjection, which involves identification with a character, encourages internalization of the book's ideology. 40 Poignant's approach promotes introjection in terms of cultural identification and association. The Anglo-Australian reader has already constructed the 'Aboriginal child' through his/her experience of the conventional code familiar from previously encountered publications that produce the consensus reality of society as a whole locating the Aboriginal in remote sites, having little or no contact with the 'outside' world. The ideology of Piccaninny Walkabout, as a children's book, like other texts discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis, reinforces the beliefs of a dominant white society. The children hunt and gather as the white audience would expect them to do, but they also become 'lost' and this activates the iconography of the lost child, an identifiable white Australian construct.

Picture and text in interaction need not construct one single subject position, but can replicate, complement, contrast with, or as is the case in Piccaninny Walkabout, reinforce. In their tendency to reflect dominant social practices, particularly for young children, picture books often advocate values widely regarded as socially

57 Hunt, op. cit., p.76.
59 Ibid.
desirable, such as co-operative play, caring for others or social responsibility. Nullagundi plays co-operatively with his friends in the water, while Rikili and another young Aboriginal girl make daisy chains. Both activities have been specially selected for inclusion by Poignant, as most of the play section doesn’t appear in Raiwella’s original oral retelling. Poignant has added images of what he regards as desirable social values. These socially desirable attributes (i.e. cooperative play, social responsibility) suggest that Aboriginal children are just like their white counterparts. In this way the subject position of the reader is constructed in terms of the dominant orientation of an Anglo-Australian self to the world. By attempting to render ‘the other’ accessible, Poignant merely reconstructs it as ‘the known’. Poignant’s written ‘fictional’ text thus renders the otherwise exotic but ‘real’ photographic images familiar to white child readers. A photograph may raise doubts and questions, but the writer can supply the answer. In children’s fiction this usually means that invented characters are placed within settings which are historically ‘accurate’ in terms of time and space. In Piccaninny Walkabout, Poignant photographically identifies people, places, and objects. Rather than ‘fixing’ the time via the creation of a timeless and imagined place, a ‘fictional’ world, Poignant suspends a traditional way of life in a timeless actuality, as recognisable now as it was in 1952 when the photographs were taken. Stephens (1992) argues that ‘realism typically illuminates life as it is, presenting social and personal concerns in a context which includes a range of human desires and responses; it reflects society, and in doing so by means of a fictional construct, or representation, can offer its audience new experiences.’ In Piccaninny Walkabout the narrative provides the audience with familiar experiences while the photographs introduce ‘new’ characters in an unfamiliar and exotic setting, encouraging them to ‘identify’ with feelings or experiences rather than the characters themselves.

A photograph means what it seems to mean and that meaning is complete. But it also forms a part of a larger signifying structure that includes but goes beyond the book

\[\text{60 Hunt, op.cit, p.77.}\]

\[\text{61 Hunt, op.cit, pp.198-199. Poignant also constructs a white masculinity for Nullagundi, through being responsible for his younger sister and attending to her needs. Again this doesn’t appear in the original retelling. The Aboriginal version sees the boy as less decisive and dominant, while the girl is portrayed as a much stronger character. Poignant affirms the dominant ideologies, advocating one social practice in preference to another.}\]

which frames it. Within the wider context, the single photograph has many shades of meaning – involving the location of the shoot, the photographer’s purpose and the wider societal implications of the cultural knowledge and assumptions of the reader. The Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land would have been considered 'exotic' by the majority of the implied readers. In 1952 the Anglo-Australian population would most certainly have interpreted photographs of 'exotic' people in terms of the popular traditions of representation they were familiar with: The Noble Savage - Rousseau’s innocent natural man; or his degraded opposite – the Primitive underdeveloped, culturally deprived, illiterate beast who is sorely in need of the benefits of civilization. In exemplifying the former model, Poignant’s piccaninnies satisfied the romantic desire of white Australians to feel at one with the strange and often hostile land they had appropriated.

As a documentary children's picture book, Piccaninny Walkabout visually incorporates multiple points of view. The reader, as viewer, is always positioned in front of the photograph, while the photographer, with a different point of view, exploits the perspective by foregrounding a particular segment of the picture. Point of view can also be seen through the eyes of a character within the photograph, enabling the viewer to see from the same vantage point as the focalizing figure. For example, when Nullagundi is convincing Rikili that they should try looking for their parents somewhere else, the reader is viewing him through the eyes of Rikili. 

Alternatively, the viewer may see a scene from a different vantage point, which includes within it a figure seeing. When Nullagundi calls out to his parents, the reader sees Rikili looking at Nullagundi. "This enables the viewer to construct quite complex subject positions being able at once to assess the perspective of the focalizing figure within the picture and to remain separate from that focalization."

In Piccaninny Walkabout, the viewer is always positioned as the spectator, gazing at the images of the Aboriginal subjects. Poignant has studiously avoided the direct address or mutual gaze of those depicted. He photographs the children in a position of being less powerful, objectifying them in relation to the controlling gaze of a

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63 A. Poignant, op.cit. p.27.
64 A. Poignant, op.cit. p.45.
65 Hunt, op.cit. p.162.
white child audience. Nullagundi and Rikili, in particular, barely acknowledge the
viewer as their gaze is always directed to one side, particularly in the close-up shots,
to someone other than the photographer, that the viewer cannot see. The
photographer’s gaze becomes the gaze of the spectator and therefore the viewer.

The Aboriginal children have thus entered into a relationship with the implied but
also physically present white viewers, making them (the white viewers) the subject
of their (the Aboriginal children) direct address. The children ‘demand’ that the
unknown viewer, not the reader, make them the object of their look. Throughout the
book the attention of the children is drawn, not only to the unknown viewer off
camera, but also towards each other and other children. Both Nullangundi and Rikili
are posed as the passive objects of an active gaze. Poignant reinforces the voyeuristic
role of the reader by photographing the children looking away from the camera
linking the controlling gaze of the viewer to a position of power.  

Directness of gaze is closely related to the camera’s angle of view.  
Although Poignant avoids the direct gaze, he employs frontality, where the frontal angle
depiction represents involvement. Frontality is also a style of photographic
documentary technique, offering up whomever it depicts for closer scrutiny and
evaluation. Historically, the frontal portrait has been associated with those deemed to
be socially inferior. Poignant’s use of the technique is not accidental.

The use of high, vertical angles, establishes a relationship between the photographer
and the viewer, where both have symbolic power over those represented. There are
no low angle shots in Piccaniny Walkabout, which would reveal a relationship in
which the depicted person has power over the image-producer and the viewer. The
sole exception is the image of the Aboriginal father looking for his lost children. He
is recognised by Poignant as the adult male who has authority over his own children

66 Foucault relates the ‘inspecting gaze’ to power in his discussion of surveillance. M. Foucault,
67 G.Kress and T.van Leeuwen, Reading Images:The Grammar of Visual Design (London, Routledge,
68 Tagg, op.cit. p. 37.
69 Kress and Leewin, op.cit. p.146.
70 A. Poignant, op.cit. p.43.
as well as over the child reader. Here the low angle suggests noble or heroic qualities as the gaze is directed into the middle distance rather than directly at the viewer. 71

Poignant uses the rear view of the children in longshots of land and seascapes, to signify the turning away of Aboriginal people from the everyday world of the viewer in order to enjoy the wonders of nature in an exotic and unspoilt location. This has the effect of inviting the viewer to marvel at the spectacle and wish they were there. 72

In his camera work, Poignant uses a variety of shot sizes, ranging from long to medium close-up. Modes of address are also reflected in shot sizes - close ups 'signifying intimate or personal modes, medium shots a social mode and long shots an impersonal mode'. 73 Nullagundi and Rikili, however, are the only characters he shoots in medium close up range - where the face, head and shoulders are shown in great detail, with the focus on the person’s feelings or reactions, to increase both the attention of the viewer and their involvement. These close ups reinforce the stereotype of happy Aboriginal children with fixed smiles and ‘flashing’ white teeth.

The photographs in Piccaninny Walkabout explore themes of traditional Aboriginal life, the Aboriginal child and the fictional story. The smaller photographs, which highlight traditional life, often appear in a grid with the focus on action. They show day-to-day activities such as catching fish, weaving a basket, sharpening a spear and making a bark canoe in a sequence of isolated moments. 74 The smaller, key photographs appear not to be posed, as the subjects are unaware of the camera. 75 These have been selected by Poignant to illustrate traditional activities, but the fact that they were probably taken in the Liverpool River region and not on Milingimbi Island, subverts any notion of ‘authenticity’. 76 The time frame implied by Poignant

72 Messaris, ibid, pp.24, 27.
73 Kress and van Leeuwen, op.cit, pp.130-135.
74 A. Poignant, op.cit, pp. 8-9.
75 These photographs exemplify what Roslyn Poignant would call ‘observational filming’, where Poignant is endeavouring to record things ‘as they are’.
76 The corroboree included at the end of the book, on pages 48 and 49, is an excellent example of this point. The children depicted are not the same children who were photographed in the roles of Nullagundi and Rikili, although the text and photographs imply that they are. The night time group
constructs these activities as taking place on a daily basis and not over the five-
month period in which they were shot. His purpose here is specifically educational,
to inform and instruct his audience about traditional Aboriginal life.
Most of the longshots are of groups or pairs of anonymous Aboriginal children,
located in their idyllic and exotic playground. There is no mention of the mission
school. To the young viewer, the life of these children is enviably carefree. The
frequent use of backviews and receding figures reinforces the presence of the reader
as viewer and voyeur. Although it appears to be the story of Aboriginal children
from the ‘inside’, it remains an outsider’s vision. 

The close up and medium shots revolve mostly around Nullagundi and Rikili acting
out or ‘collaboratively reconstructing’ the fictional narrative interaction between the
two characters as they survive the night in the bush. The presentation of multiple
perspectives works reasonably well photographically, resembling a filmic
construction, but not textually, as the relationship between the text and the
illustrations is not always complementary. 

*Piccaninny Walkabout* was published at a time when the picture-story book as a
publishing category had diminished in popularity. Picture and text still lacked real
integration and understanding, while few artists had accepted the challenge of
illustrating. Photography was increasingly used to produce studies of inanimate
objects such as dolls, puppets and toys. Realistic animal stories had also traditionally
used photographs as the illustrative medium. In the 1950s, children also began to
appear, photographically in children's books, which were at best mediocre, at worst
descending into vulgarity. Beautifully presented children's picture-story books with
coloured illustrations and integrated text, imported from the United Kingdom, were
again making an appearance in Australian bookshops and libraries. The high cost of
colour reproduction made it difficult for Australian publishers to compete in the
smaller Australian market. Consequently, interest in publishing picture-story books

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shot shows traditionally painted adults, obviously startled by the flash of the camera. Roslyn Poignant
specifically mentions the impact of the flash when Poignant was in the Liverpool River region.
77 R. Poignant, *op. cit*, p.29 *Overland*.
78 For example see pages 13, 25 and 39, where what is included in the text is not what appears in the
photograph.
diminished in favour of junior fiction. Even from the late 1940s, Australian
publishing had begun to focus upon newly emerging authors of junior novels.  

In 1958, *Piccaninny Walkabout* was awarded a UNESCO commendation as a
children's book which promoted 'understanding between peoples'. As such it brought
a new dignity not only to the photographing of children, but also to the inclusion of
Aboriginal children as subjects in children's fiction, where previously they had often
been caricatured in poorly produced picture-strips.  

Poignant's influence can be seen in the way Aboriginal children were subsequently
depicted in the children's books published in Australia. *Ngari the Hunter* (1968) by
Ronald Rose  

1 presented a simple text and equally simple photographs. In 1969,
Phyl and Noel Wallace published, in colour, *Children of the Desert*. Although the
book was not intended primarily for children, the descriptive text and photography
did attempt to tell the story of the lives of the Pijantjatjara children of the Musgrave
Ranges with dignity, beauty and imagination.  

*Ballander Boy* by Colin Thiele and photographed by David Simpson,  

1 was published in 1979. Although an illustrated text rather than a picture book, *Ballander
Boy* is of particular interest as it is the first photographic children's book, with an

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79 J. Prentice and B. Bird, *Dromkeen A Journey into Children's Literature* (New York, Henry Holt and
81 Ronald Rose also published, for an adult audience, *Living Magic: The realities underlying the
psychical practices and beliefs of Australian Aborigines* (1957), a book which discusses 'the savage
appeal of primitive magic, the training of prospective aboriginal doctors, and the role of women in the
'dead heart' of Australia'. His other publications include another photographic picture book, *Inoke
Sails the South Seas* (1966), and two historical novels for children.
82 Other books in the 'documentary story book' genre include *The Firemaker* (1969) by Frank and
Betty Few which was published as part of an ongoing series (Alcheringa Films ABC), documenting
aspects of traditional Aboriginal life. The didactic purpose is thinly veiled with a 'fictional' narrative.
It also uses black and white photography. Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil, published a traditional
story, *The Birirrk Our Ancestors of the Dreaming* (1983), and appears in the accompanying full
colour photographic illustrations, taken by Neil McLeod. This is the first photographic picture book
which has an Aboriginal author appearing as the subject of the illustrations. The illustrations in
*Nungadin and Willien* (1992) by Percy Trezise and Mary Haganikitas, also show camp life with the
focus on children. Interestingly, most of the illustrations of children, not photographs, seem to be
based on the photographs from *Piccaninny Walkabout*, as are the line drawings in Fred Baxter's
*Snake for Supper* (1968).
83 Ballander from Macassarese balanda, from the Malay belanda, a corruption of Hollander
(i.e.Dutch) which means 'A white person, white people'.

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123
Aboriginal focus. "Where the text is written by a recognised Australian children's author and not by the photographer. Thiele, however, follows the established pattern constructing a narrative to match pre-existing photographs. This narrative follows the familiar theme of a white child lost in Arnhem Land then found by an Aboriginal family and taken back to their camp where he learns about traditional Aboriginal life, escapes from a crocodile, catches a barramundi and witnesses a corroboree. Although published twenty-two years after Poignant's Piccaninny Walkabout, the photographic representation remains consistent with the established tradition, implying authenticity and reiterating essentialist themes."

Although an anomaly in Australian children's fiction, Piccaninny Walkabout is indeed a work of collaboration, but not between Aboriginal people and a European photographer. The children were chosen and posed, the setting was constructed using photographs of locations and Aboriginal people other than those who lived on Milingimbi Island, some aspects of the traditional tale were included but most of the genuinely Aboriginal aspects were rejected. The role of the mission or the missionary Beulah Lowe, in the actual process of translation is not clear and neither is the role or influence of Roslyn Poignant as an anthropologist, the developer of the photographs and later as Poignant's wife. Axel Poignant excludes any information about the processes of production and his role as the photographer. He deliberately distances himself from his characters, firmly establishing them as 'the other' via the rhetoric of the preface and the acknowledgments. The names of the Aboriginal children and the adults involved in the production of the book are noticeably absent. The children, in particular, are anonymous, portrayed as the universal Aboriginal child, captured 'forever' and firmly located in the past.

Poignant selects and preserves significant moments in the everyday lives of one group of Aboriginal people but presents it as a wider representation of Aboriginal culture so that the quality of the life which he believed was being lost would not go unreported. Axel Poignant died in 1982, but in 1996 Roslyn Poignant went to

44 David Gulpilil, who also 'starred' in the film Walkabout, appears as the Aboriginal father in the book, while 'Jardi and his Aboriginal friends of Murwangi Station' play the children.
45 Thiele again reinforces the stereotypes – implies mental telepathy between Aboriginal people through the use of 'special' powers to transmit thought messages, Bindayangi's white teeth still
Nagalarramba in Arnhem Land to present the collection of photographs taken in 1952 (including those used for *Piccaninny Walkabout*) to the Aboriginal community. She hoped that the images would prove a valuable resource, both in the economic and cultural sense, for the contemporary Aboriginal people in reconstructing their cultural identity. Roslyn Poignant argued that with the recovery of the visual narrative of encounter and the return of the photographs, a new phase had begun for the Yolngu people of the Nagalarramba community. 

*flash*, and the only 'real' knowledge Aboriginal people have is about the land - the animals, the weather and the seasons.

86 R. Poignant, *op.cit.*, p.157 (*Encounter*)
Chapter Four

*Australian Picture Books 1989-1998: From Witchetty Grubs to Welfare*

As discussed in chapter two, the 'traditional' Aboriginal child was a popular subject for both older and younger readers in numerous illustrated texts and picture story books up to the 1970s. Most pictorial depictions were still highly inaccurate and imaginative, with accompanying texts condescending to both the subject matter and the younger reader. Many illustrations in nineteenth and early twentieth century Australian children's books were decorative rather than forming an integral part of the text. By World War 1, Australian books for children were more colourful, with pictures becoming mandatory for younger children. Until 1918, Australian writers had, in the main, concentrated on the interests of older readers and, in particular, the young adolescent. More attention was now paid to the much younger child, and the picture book, illustrated in a maximum of three colours, began cautiously to appear. ¹

The 1960s marked the beginning of a new era in the depiction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian children's fiction. Increasingly dignified and sympathetic images of Aboriginal Australians began to appear reflecting a more sensitive understanding on the part of the writers and illustrators but not all were able to grasp the vital difference between equality and paternalism, between self-determination and assimilation. Subtler forms of racism still go unchallenged. Stereotypes such as witchetty grubs, walkabouts and flashing white teeth continue to appear in the work of some modern writers. ²

¹ *The Way of the Whirlwind* (1942), written by Mary Durack and illustrated by Elizabeth Durack is a notable exception.
The persistence of these neo-colonial representational practices is evident in children’s picture books well into the 1990s. Romantic nostalgia for a ‘natural’ and uncontaminated past which has no connection to contemporary life persists in very recent work. In You and Me Murrawee (1998), for example, Kerri Hasmi and Felicity Marshall continue to construct the Aboriginal child as the primordial ‘Noble Savage’.

Although the intention may well be positive, You and Me Murrawee incorporates subtler forms of discrimination that are dehumanising for an Aboriginal child reader. In contrast, Jeanie Adams in Pigs and Honey (1989), Going for Oysters (1991) and Tucker’s Mob (1992) incorporates the voice of the Aurukun storytellers to portray contemporary Aboriginal community life and demonstrate how mainstream technology can be adapted to traditional lifestyles. A refreshingly new approach is evident in Anthony Hill’s The Burnt Stick (1994) and Helen Bell’s Idjihil (1996) which firmly locate Aboriginal experience in historical time. Both of these books focus on the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families, a theme not previously explored in Australian children’s literature. Most of these books, with the exception of those by Adams, represent an Aboriginality uneasily positioned between past and present. Hashmi and Marshall disclose tensions between a contemporary white girl and an Aboriginal girl whom they construct as a ‘fictive figure from a distant time’. Hill and Bell carefully examine past and present relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians by incorporating stories of the ‘Stolen Generation’ into narratives which reveal the impact of removal upon Aboriginal adults in the 1990s.

‘Picture book’ is an umbrella term which indicates a basic format where both text and illustrations are mutually necessary to construct meaning. Picture books can include wordless books, concept books and picture storybooks. There is often overlap among each category. In America and Canada there is a tendency to differentiate between the picture book and the picture storybook. In Australia the term ‘picture book’ is used to include any book with a picture-book format. Although some differentiation is

\footnote{Ibid., p.4.}
acknowledged, such as the difference between an illustrated text and a picture book, the
generic term is used most frequently. For this reason I will use the generic definition of
‘picture book’ in this chapter. The seventies saw the birth of the modern Australian
picture book together with a dramatic increase in the number of picture books published
in Australia. The list of illustrators available to publishers of children's books also
increased enormously.

The rapid advances in technology extended the scope of picture book possibilities as
well as initiating the beginning of far-reaching developments in artistic form, media, and
an increasing diversity in subject matter. Over the last three decades the appeal of the
picture book widened to include first books for babies and more complex metaphors for
older readers. Picture books now have a universal appeal to older as well as younger
readers.  

Illustrations in modern picture books ‘replicate the function of extended prose in novels
by providing the metaphorical framework inherent in the telling of narrative’, 7
constructing the story seamlessly through a unique combination of text and illustration.
In many modern picture books, the use of written text is minimal, but the simplicity of
the language belies the complexity of the underlying themes embedded in the
illustrations, enabling the book to be read on many different levels. The illustrations
extend and reflect the meaning conveyed by the words. The multilayering of visual and

5 The modern Australian picture book is generally recognised as coming into being in 1970 with the
publication of Desmond Digby's illustrations for A.B. Paterson's Waltzing Matilda. This book established
Australian picture books as an art form, moving beyond merely being decorative and complementary to the
text. For further discussion of Waltzing Matilda see H.M. Saxby, The Proof of the Puddin’ Australian
6 From 1970 onwards many of our picture books were being co-published overseas, lessening the need to
consider the 'Australian' or the 'European' child but rather producing literature that has universality. Much
debate continues over 'realism' in contemporary picture books and whether or not some contemporary
literature actually mirrors contemporary society or provides a spearhead to challenge and provoke new
awareness. H.M. Saxby, Books in the Life of a Child Bridges to Literature and Learning (South
7 M. Hertzberg, 'Picture books and Drama' in J. Callow (ed), Image Matters: Visual Texts in the
Classroom (Newtown, Primary English Teachers Association, 1999), p.15.

128
written texts allows children to examine and construct different meanings based on their prior experience and socio-cultural background.  

Just as spoken and written texts are influenced by the cultures, values, ideologies and world views through which they are created and consumed, so too is the visual text. An impression of the same landscape will vary from the pictorial representation of the artist, to the director’s interpretation through film, to the photographs of the same landscape taken by a property developer. This diversity provides depth and variety to the images we see, allowing us to appreciate various cultures and ideas that we would not necessarily encounter in our own experiences. At the same time, this will mean that certain images and ideas about the world are privileged and presented as the dominant discourse, while other beliefs and points of view are marginalised. Many images and pictorial representations are so familiar to us that we assume their meanings to be clear and universal, forgetting that they are in fact culturally specific. 

Picture books have an immense potential for influencing children ideologically. If pictures communicate as powerfully as words, or in some cases even more strongly, what children see can help condition their view of the world and its values. Learning about images through the explicit understanding of visual codes, is essential if the audience simultaneously reading and viewing is to deconstruct the cultural and contextual aspects embedded in both text and illustrations. Picture books need to reflect verbally and artistically the integrity of a child’s world, as well as reveal the many imaginative and undreamed of possibilities lying beyond the edge of vision. 

The artistic styles of picture books have also shown a dramatic shift away from the more contemporary realistic depiction that prevailed prior to the 1970s. Illustrators now incorporate a variety of styles ranging from the abstract, to the impressionistic to the

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8 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
cartoonish and the interactive. Subject matter is also more wide-ranging and often controversial, breaking previously held taboos about what children should not only read, but view. The modern Australian picture book has moved beyond what adults expect or want children to be to take a more irreverent and humorous approach to life, particularly to childhood. 12

Some of the silences of history are now being addressed in Australian children's fiction. Since 1970, modern picture books depicting Aboriginal themes, people or stories have also increased in number in mainstream publishing. What many of those books say to Aboriginal children, is that 'the way you look and the life that you have and the way you speak are still not good.' 13 Even today very few non-Aboriginal illustrators are able to portray Aboriginal people realistically and positively. Somehow they seem unable to see people of other backgrounds except in stereotypes. 14 Some illustrations incorporate the drawings of Aboriginal children from isolated communities throughout Australia, while others, set in an urban setting, 'stigmatise by omission'. It is nevertheless still not uncommon to find Aboriginal Australians treated with condescension and depicted textually and pictorially as inferior people who are not quite as capable or as intelligent as their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

In 1989 and 1991 respectively, Jeanie Adams published Pigs and Honey and Going for Oysters and became one of the first non-Aboriginal author/illustrators of Australian children's books to write primarily for an Aboriginal, rather than a non-Aboriginal audience. Adams was born in Hamilton, Victoria, in 1945 and spent her childhood in Victoria and Tasmania. She trained first as a teacher and then studied anthropology and sociology at Monash University. After teaching for several years, she moved with her husband, John, and their three sons, to live in the Aboriginal community at Aurukun, on

the Archer River in the Gulf of Carpentaria on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula. She worked in community development, bilingual education and art/craft administration from 1976 to 1984. "Adams became committed to educating the wider community about positive contemporary Aboriginality and to help people reaffirm the value of their own way of life. She did this by documenting the traditional crafts but also saw the potential for the children of the community to enjoy coloured picture books about themselves.

*Pigs and Honey* and *Going for Oysters* are Wik-Mungkan stories, the lingua franca of Aurukun. "Adams was very aware that Aboriginal children had very few books in their own languages to read. Only the Bible and a few typed offset booklets, mainly in black and white, and the irregular local newspaper were available. 'Real' coloured picture books were translated by pasting typed photocopies over the English text. Adams wanted to create a book which moved away from the 'standard' Aboriginal topics - myths and legends and anthropological or historical depictions of traditional, pre-contact life. Such books, written only in formal English, continually spoke about what Aboriginal people 'did' in a 'timeless' past, failing to acknowledge the existence of the contemporary Aboriginal child reader. Adams wanted to create a picture book which would allow the children of the Aurukun community 'to see their life and their language in print'. She wrote in English but used phrases which would easily translate into Wik-Mungkan."

When Omnibus accepted Jeanie Adams' manuscript they requested the endorsement of Aurukun's community leaders that the book offered an authentic portrayal of their community. This demand marked a significant change in the attitude of publishers who

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13 A bilingual program, using Wik-Mungkan, began in the school at Aurukun in 1973, was dropped in 1988 and re-introduced in 1994.
15 Wik-Mungkan is the main language spoken at Aurukun. The people now living at Aurukun settled there over a number of years, from the mid-1920s to the early 1960s, coming to the coast from inland as far east as Coen and from the south around Pompuraaw (Edward River). Most of these people spoke one of the Wik dialects. Others, from the north, spoke unrelated languages. The developing Aurukun community became the gathering point for the Wik and northern groups. The area also attracted the Wik-Mungkan-speaking people from inland along the Archer River. As these people settled at Aurukun in increasing numbers, their language became the dominant language of communication.
had previously given little thought to the politics of representation of Aboriginal people in children's fiction. The community courageously requested a small Aboriginal language edition with the first printing. Omnibus responded by donating 300 sets of unbound pages, where only the illustrations are included, to be printed in Wik-Mungkan. The translation of the book into other Aboriginal languages followed.

The two picture books are candid, intimate stories based on the actual life of the people as Adams and her family shared it. These stories break new ground in their sensitive portrayal of contemporary Aboriginal life, adapting mainstream technology to traditional life styles. In Pigs and Honey the extended family travel by truck, hunt pig, drink billy tea and sleep under mosquito nets beneath the trees.

Pigs and Honey is an unemotive account of an Aboriginal family's drive out into the bush to hunt wild pigs. Adams chose a pig hunt 'because it was a common but also fairly high status activity in Aurukun' and reflected the ordinary life of the community in which she lived. Pigs and Honey is probably the first Australian picture book to depict the traditional Aboriginal practice of hunting and gathering in contemporary terms - the shotgun coexists with the woomera. Although Dad is an excellent shot with the woomera, his skill is not dwelt upon, but merely stated, as the pig has only been stunned by the shotgun blast and must be killed quickly because of the danger.

And, sure enough, the pig wasn't dead. It jumped up and started to charge us while uncle was reloading. Lucky Dad had a spear ready in his woomera. He threw the spear hard and straight. Kirr! The pig fell down dead. "

19 J. Adams, Pigs and Honey (Adelaide, Omnibus, 1989), np.
The narrative voice is that of a young, Aboriginal boy. Like all the characters in the story, he is unnamed. 20 By using a male narrator, Adams respects the traditions of the Aurukun people - the community would not have accepted a story with a girl as hunter. Although the tasks on the hunt are divided along gendered lines, Adams makes it clear that the division of labour does not mean a difference in value. The women are seen as equally important, they just do different tasks. The boy uses simple, direct language which creates a feeling of immediacy, of someone speaking directly to the reader. The boy recounts the events simply and without embellishment, rarely imposing his own perspective. The representation of masculinity differs from that in Piccaninny Walkabout where the original story was changed to reflect an Anglo-Australian construction. Adams isn't interested in maintaining Eurocentric stereotypes. The boys are not worried about admitting that they are frightened.

Cousin-brother was up in a tree by this time. I stayed on the ground, well out of the way, but I was shaking and my heart was really pounding. 31

Adams has selected the first-person narrative because it creates intimacy and immediacy and is associated with candour. Young readers are encouraged to be sympathetic to the narrator's first person viewpoint, to identify easily with the limited view of the boy. Although he is a central character involved in all the action, his viewpoint remains that of a child and he is not expected to know any more about what is happening than any child would because first-person narrative is limited to the perspective of the narrator. As a consequence we don't hear Granny's story because the boy narrator falls asleep, and we don't know the fate of the rescued piglets because that is in the future.

20 Adams acknowledges, in the book, her debt to 'my families at Aurukun, who taught me about the bush.' The families are not named which enables the community to identify with a generalised picture, encompassing more than one family.
As it got dark, Granny said she would tell us a story. She told us about how she used to camp here with her family in the Mission days, and how Mum had been born just nearby. But I was so tired I fell asleep before she finished.  

Although Granny’s story about the ‘Mission days’ remains untold it conveys an ‘air of authenticity’. For many Aboriginal people, missions offered the best of the limited educational options available to them and ensured that they retained a communal Aboriginal identity. Aurukun was the third mission started by Moravian missionaries on Cape York for the Presbyterian Church. Established in 1904 it provided a centre for Wik people from south of the Archer River. Unlike in other missions on Cape York, there were no forced removals of people from other parts of the region or the state to Aurukun. There was, however, an attempt to prevent the maintenance of cultural life by confining children to dormitories where they were isolated from the influence and knowledge of the older people. In spite of this, the culture remained strong.  

The events in Pigs and Honey give due respect to the memories and traditional ways of the old people. Although the text is a little stilted and the activities tend to read as a list, there is no romanticism in the words or the illustrations. The people are the focus. The story is a factual recount of the outing, yet it is highly evocative and compelling, because it has true dignity. There is no straining for effect. The events speak for themselves. The adults have finished work for the week. The family is going away for a recreational

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21 Adams, op.cit. np.
22 Adams, op.cit. np.
23 Aurukun was situated on a huge bauxite deposit. In the late 1960s prospecting began on the Aurukun reserve. In 1975, after a number of years of strenuous protests by the Aurukun people, but no consultation with them by the Queensland government, the Queensland parliament passed a Bill authorising mining on the reserve. Around the same time people began moving out of Aurukun to establish outstations. In response to both this development and the protests against mining, the community was placed under direct
weekend which involves hunting. It is not their livelihood and the feeling is one of celebration. The boy-narrator sets the scene before the story begins by explaining why they are going hunting. This use of an Aboriginal voice to orient readers within the setting represents a significant shift in narrative strategy. In most children's books prior to *Pigs and Honey* the context is determined solely by the Anglo-Australian author. The Aboriginal characters usually remain silent. In *Pigs and Honey*, however, a feeling of community involvement permeates the narrative.

*Going for Oysters* also has a first-person narrator, but this time it is a girl who recounts the boat trip with her family to Thukkal (Love River) to collect oysters. In this text Adams recreates another aspect of the life of the Aboriginal people at Aurukun: spearing crabs in the shallows, fishing for mullet, looking for pandanus fronds for basket-weaving, diving in the water to scare the crocodiles, cooking the oysters and dancing at sunset. In *Going for Oysters*, Adams also introduces an aspect of Wik-Mungkan spirituality when the children forget their grandfather's warning and enter the dangerous story place associated with Yaatamay, the Carpet Snake and the quicksands of the eastern swamp from which people never return.

*Cousin said, "Let's row to the east side."
 I forgot all about Grandad's warnings, and we all climbed into the dinghy and pushed off. ...

... when I remembered Grandad's words about the story place, I got worried. I pulled the other girls back and we yelled for the boys. Then, as we waited in silence, there was a noise like thunder in the ground.

*We heard Brother calling, "Sister! Cousin! Come!"*

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state government rule. D. Horton, *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia Volume 1, A-L* (Canberra,
Cousin was sobbing beside me, saying, "Let's go back to camp," and I wanted to run away too. But I said, "We can't leave them. They are our brothers." So we started up the bank, following their tracks.

Suddenly we heard them coming, and they came rushing out of the bushes. They looked as if they had really seen a ghost.\textsuperscript{24}

Few other non-Aboriginal writers have been able to convey such immediacy and involvement when depicting Aboriginal people. Although she has obviously absorbed the life which she recreates in words and pictures,\textsuperscript{25} Jeanie Adams makes no attempt to explain or speak on behalf of the characters. The inclusion of a non-Aboriginal school friend and disco dancing reinforces the contemporary setting. Adams tends to select subjects from what might be called the ‘underprivileged’ classes of society but always presents them in a dignified way as interesting on their own terms and worthy of our attention – she neither denigrates nor patronises her characters.

Adams' eye for physique and action is fluid and accurate, with swift, impressionistic glimpses of dark figures moving through the bush, but problems arise when she attempts close-ups of faces. Here, the white outlines of nose, mouth, eyebrows, coupled with an erratic inability to see children as they are, unintentionally results in exaggerated features that come close to being racist stereotypes. This unintentional effect is due to Adams' signature illustrative medium of watercolour on tough, handmade paper (Bemboka). Wax crayon is used as resist, under and over the watercolour. Watercolour is also sprayed over the top with an atomiser to create more atmosphere and highlight the

\textsuperscript{24} Adams, \textit{op.cit.} np.

\textsuperscript{25} The publication of \textit{Pigs and Honey} was endorsed by members of the Aurukun community through their minister of the Uniting Church, the Reverend Silas Wolmby, and the elders of the church. This endorsement doesn't appear in the book.
texture of the bush. Adams builds up many transparent layers, similar to the techniques used by printmakers. The wax-resist technique, produced by applying Art Masking Fluid, using a small plastic bottle with a fine metal nozzle, gives a white outline to the figures which come to life dramatically. This rubbery liquid masks or resists the paint. It is lifted off when dry, leaving the paper ready to paint on again.  

Although the book is clearly intended as a celebration of enduring traditional practices, many urban Aborigines have expressed concern that what they see are ugly caricatures of themselves. Adams tried to convey a ‘particular setting and time of day, and accurate information about the situation’. She wanted the local Aboriginal community to recognise themselves and outsiders to learn something new. The choice of media enabled Adams to avoid being too literal and maintain some freshness and spontaneity. It is unfortunate that the first artist to authentically portray contemporary Aboriginal community life should use a technique that frequently results in making people look grotesque.

The white outlines, along with free-flowing shapes, and a mixture of media and techniques, including spatter-work, successfully recreate a lush tropical setting, but are unable to move beyond a distorted, impressionistic depiction of the Aboriginal people themselves.

In Tuckers Mob, published in 1992 and illustrated by Jeanie Adams but written by Christobel Mattingley, Adams has obviously taken on board the criticism of her previous books, by attempting to modify her illustrative technique. The simplified medium of wax crayon and watercolour without the resist, allows much brighter and flatter areas of colour. But the style is still not successful. The white lines have disappeared but most of the children are drawn either from the back or in profile, so that their faces are not revealed. Those depicted frontally seem to be all large lips, flashing white teeth and

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26 S. Scobie (compiler), The Dromkeen Book of Australian Children's Illustrations (Gosford, Ashton Scholoastic, 1997), p.12.
27 Ibid., p.13.
wide, flat noses. The stereotypes are evident but not intentional. The illustrator simply cannot draw children.

Christobel Mattingley was born in 1931 in Brighton South Australia. She is a well known and much published children's author. While visiting outback Queensland in 1975, as part of a lecture tour, Mattingley established a rapport with the Aboriginal people with whom she came into contact. This forced her to confront the differences between her own middle class background and their status as second class citizens, leaving her feeling enraged by the imposition of European values on Aboriginal culture. In 1979 Mattingley was appointed as the editor and researcher for an Aboriginal history of the 150 years since white settlement in South Australia. The work involved extensive archival research and wide consultation with Aboriginal people. The book met with countless problems ranging from lack of professional publishing expertise to the South Australian Government selling it off to private enterprise without first consulting or informing the Aboriginal participants. Consequently, it became the subject of an eighteen month controversy, as the Aboriginal rights to the material and the copyright were contested through parliament and the media. The Bannon Government reversed its decision - returning the book to Aboriginal ownership on condition that the first print run was a sell-out. The book, *Survival in our own land*, was eventually published in 1988 and sold out within ten weeks. Sadly, the Aboriginal co-editor, the Reverend Kenneth Hampton, died before the book was released.

*Tucker's Mob* is set in the contemporary Barunga Aboriginal community near Katherine in the Northern Territory. This is significant, indicating a shift away from the essentialist representations which had, up until this point, characterised illustrated texts with a primary Aboriginal focus. Unlike *Pigs and Honey* and *Going for Oysters*, *Tucker's Mob* does not have a first person narrator and as a consequence lacks the immediacy and celebratory tone of the other two texts. *Tucker's Mob* does, however, incorporate the Kriol language into the illustrations as speech bubbles. When Sam's teacher writes down

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26 Dunkle, *op.cit.*, p.4.
his story about Tucker the cat, it is written in Kriol. This is the first picture book in mainstream publishing to use Kriol.

Kriol, like Aboriginal English, is derived from the varieties of Northern Territory Pidgin English that was used as a form of communication between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century. These included Darwin, Chinese and pastoral frontier pidgins which had converged and stabilised by the turn of the century. It first developed into a 'full' language early in the twentieth century, when the children of eight different language groups were brought together at the Roper River Anglican Mission school, founded in 1908, not far from the present day Katherine where *Tucker's Mob* is set. The pidgin that they were all familiar with was expanded into a language. As the second generation of station residents grew up, the pidgin was creolised with other languages spoken by residents - the first instance in the Northern Territory where this had occurred. Government and mission agencies tried ignoring or discouraging it but, by the 1980s, its use had become a 'badge' of Aboriginal identity. Like Aboriginal English, it has been and often still is the object of prejudice and misunderstanding, being seen as a 'deficient' or bastardised form of language and needing remedial attention. Kriol now has its own spelling system and an increasing body of literature. It is spoken by over 20,000 people and is the first language of many people in northern Australia.  

Research conducted in the early 1990s highlights major differences between the values and behaviours which are emphasised in many Aboriginal homes and those taught in the majority of Australian classrooms. Schools frequently fail to recognise the significant differences in language, communication and learning styles among Aboriginal children.

By incorporating Kriol into the illustrations in a picture book for children, Omnibus, as a mainstream publishing company, has recognised it as a legitimate language form.

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30 Mattingley and Adams clearly want to emphasise this point in *Tucker's Mob*, as the first book Sam ever reads is the one where his own words have been scribed in Kriol. It should also be noted that Aboriginal people in NSW, and most other states in Australia, did not have proper and equal access to education until the mid-1970s.
Conventional English is, however, still presented in *Tucker's Mob* as the most desirable and acceptable first language. The main text is written only in English while Kriol still remains marginalized, confined to the illustrations and only incorporated selectively.

Mattingley like Adams represents a white author who has taken on board the demands of the Aboriginal community. Together they represent the shift towards an awareness of the political complexities in the construction of Aboriginality evident in white texts since the late 1980s. Not surprisingly therefore, the early nineties marked a major shift in the representation of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children's picture books. Whereas previously depictions of a traditional hunting and gathering existence were the norm, they now gave way to narratives with more contemporary subject matter and settings often focussing on town life. Although the urban environment is still not widely featured, Aboriginal communities and languages are beginning to emerge as valid 'contemporary' subjects while Aboriginal characters now no longer appear merely as exotic and primitive denizens of a timeless bush landscape. Adams, in particular, clearly sets out to represent the everyday life of the Aboriginal community on which she based her books, rather than presenting what she perceived *should* be happening or what *had* happened long ago. This reflects her purpose in writing primarily for an Aboriginal, rather than a non-Aboriginal audience. Although her illustrations of the facial features of her child subjects tend to be unflattering, her style has gradually moved the depiction of Aboriginal children away from the realistic 'factual' representation of the Aboriginal 'other' exemplified in the documentary photographs of Axel Poignant, to a more impressionistic, contemporary image.

In 1990, *Pigs and Honey* won the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award for Younger readers and the Victorian Crichton Award for a first-time illustrator. Adams' groundbreaking approach has clearly influenced *The Burnt Stick* (1994), written by Anthony Hill and illustrated by Mark Sofilas, and *Idijil* (1996), written and illustrated by Helen Bell. Both books courageously tackle the theme of the 'Stolen Generation'. Illustrated texts rather than picture books, they have been included in this chapter
because they are the first illustrated children's books to foreground the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and their discussion advances this chapter's argument about the radical shift in representation that took place in the 1990s. An illustrated book differs from a picture book in that only particular incidents from the story are illustrated. The text remains dominant, with the illustrations creating interest by complementing or enriching what is written. In a picture book the illustrations and text work together to convey and extend meaning.

*The Burnt Stick* is a gently told story about John Jagamarra who grew up at the Pearl Bay Mission for Aboriginal Children on the far north-west coast of Australia after being removed from his Aboriginal mother who gave birth to him at Dryborough Station. In it Hill tackles the issue of a 'stolen generation', rather than an 'assimilated' one, anticipating the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. In 1942 Anthony Hill was born in Melbourne. In 1959 he entered journalism as a copy boy and later became a cadet reporter with *The Melbourne Herald*. He has also worked for *The Australian* newspaper, *The Financial Review* and *The Bulletin*. In 1989 he joined the staff of the Governor General, Mr Bill Hayden, as Executive Assistant and speechwriter, a position he held until Mr Hayden's retirement. He is a writer and contract journalist now living in Canberra. His first children's book, *Birdsong*, was published in 1988. His other books include *The Bunburyists* and *Antique Furniture in Australia*.

The release in 1981 of Peter Read's *The Stolen Generation*, a short but comprehensive history of removal policy in New South Wales, was aired by the media and finally given a public profile. This marked the beginning of the process of sensitizing both Aboriginal

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31 In 1997, The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families published its findings as *Bringing Them Home*, a report which included fifty four recommendations that adopt international provisions for responding to and redressing violations of human rights. The Inquiry consulted widely among individuals, families, Churches, governments, missionaries, foster parents, welfare workers, doctors, health professional, academics, police and independent charities, in a mixture of public and private proceedings. During the Inquiry's public sittings in Sydney, the NSW government estimated that in NSW alone, at least 8000 Aboriginal children were removed from their families between 1885 and 1969.
and non-Aboriginal people to an ongoing and systematic government policy. Prior to 1981, there were no written histories of the removal of Aboriginal children, even though the policy was clearly stated in official government documents. Since the 1930s several white writers including Katharine Prichard, Xavier Herbert, Donald Stuart and Patrick White had highlighted the injustice and inhumanity of this policy in their fiction. For example, Herbert’s *Capricornia* (1938) and *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975), Stuart’s novels about Aboriginal life in Western Australia (1950s – 1960s) and White’s *Riders in the Chariot* (1960). Writers for children were slower in attending to this critical theme due to the perception that it was an unsuitable topic for children’s fiction.

The forced removal of indigenous children happened in every state and territory in Australia. Laws sanctioning the separation of Aboriginal children were in place in Victoria and NSW as early as 1885 and in some states were not formally abolished until the early 1970s. The idea for *The Burnt Stick* arose during a journey to the Kimberleys in 1991, where Hill came into contact with an Aboriginal man who mentioned that he had been taken from his family. The story made an impact on Hill because he felt it reflected the way a society can judge people on the superficiality of skin. Hill doesn’t name or acknowledge the source of his ‘inspiration’. Although in the preface Hill indicates that the incidents in his narrative are mostly fictional, he argues that they are based on a central fact.

*It was the practice by the authorities in many parts of Australia, until as late as the 1960s, to take Aboriginal children of mixed parentage away from their mother, and to have them bought up either in institutions or with foster parents.*  

32 Indigenous children have been forcibly separated from their families and communities since the very first days of the European occupation of Australia. Violent battles over rights to land, food and water sources characterised race relations in the nineteenth century. Throughout this conflict indigenous children were kidnapped and exploited for their labour, still being ‘run down’ by Europeans in the northern areas of Australia in the early twentieth century. Young Aboriginal servants were cheap and were never paid
Australia has a long history of placing ‘destitute’, ‘neglected’ and ‘delinquent’ children into institutional and foster care. During the century since Federation, however, governments throughout mainland Australia far more readily applied these labels to Aboriginal children, especially those of part-descent and made it easier to remove them from their families. Self-identity suffered, as Aboriginal children were taught that they were inferior.

The Protection Board of New South Wales had the power to take children from their parents and send them to work as apprentices, labourers or domestics, without parental approval. Thousands of Aboriginal children were taken away from their families and placed in government and mission institutions. Some were never to return home. Government officials theorised that by forcibly removing mixed descent Aboriginal children from their families and sending them away from their communities to work for non-Aboriginal people, they would, over time, 'merge' with the non-Aboriginal population.

*The Welfare said it was for the children's own good. After all, their fathers were generally white men - sometimes stockman, or cooks, or overseers on the cattle stations of the inland. It was felt to be best if those children with the*
light-coloured skin were sent to be taught in the white man’s ways. ...

Because he must be taught the white man’s way ... to read and write in English, to count and to learn a trade. The blackfeller’s way is not enough for him. You know that. It is the same for all those with the light-coloured skins. 36

Law-makers and administrators considered their intentions to be ‘humane’. They argued that the removal of children from circumstances which were an affront to the White Australia Policy and offended white notions of family care, gave children the chance of success in the dominant society, especially if their sense of Aboriginality was lost. Aboriginal children placed in institutions were subjected to subtle and not so subtle pressure to repudiate their cultural roots. 37 It was envisaged that their ‘white blood’ would make them useful citizens. If Aboriginal people would not die out as popular belief had predicted, assimilation into the white community entailed loss of their language and culture and was a viable alternative.

Aboriginal people were not citizens, therefore not included in the Federal constitution until 1967. Powers exercised over Aboriginal people varied considerably. These powers were most extreme in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory where large numbers of people of full descent remained on the northern frontier. Laws were passed in an attempt to limit the growing numbers of Aboriginal children of part-descent. Europeans were forbidden to enter Aboriginal settlements and permission for an Aboriginal to marry a non-Aboriginal had to be applied for to the Protection Board. By the late nineteenth century it had become apparent that although the full descent Aboriginal population was declining, the part-descent population was increasing. The prospect that this mixed population was growing made it imperative to governments to

force these 'half-castes' to join the workforce instead of relying on government rations. In that way they would be both self-supporting and satisfy the needs of the developing Australian economy for cheap labour. The fact that they had some European 'blood' meant that there was a place for them in non-Aboriginal society, albeit a very lowly one.

Hill's narrative unfolds gradually, presenting Jagamarr'a's mother Liyan's desperation. She attempts to conceal the lighter colour of her son's skin by rubbing him with ashes from the fire. Twice she is successful and the Big Man from Welfare is deceived. The third time John is taken away:

"You thought you could trick me,' said the Big Man from Welfare.'But I know a better trick than that. I spoke to the Boss this time - not his missus - and waited where you could not see me. Now I have come back and this time your boy must come with me.'" 31

Although the narrative implies criticism of government policy, Hill doesn't demonize the station owners or the government agents, stating that it was the law of the white people at the time and they were just doing what seemed right. Harriet Grainger, the station owner's wife, however, openly admits that it is wrong. Her husband, it seems, is not so charitable. Hill attempts to make sense of both cultures and both points of view, focussing on points of difference as well as points of similarity.

The illustrated format Hill adopts has a deliberately spare and detached style. The narrative voice is effective because the simplicity of the language makes it accessible for younger readers. The tragedy of the events is so apparent that the story told through the accompanying illustrations carries the emotional impact rather than the words. The fears,

31 Bringing Them Home, op.cit., p.29
stratagems and eventual despair of the Aboriginal mother are evoked to contrast with the child’s vivid memories of daily life when he was enfolded in his mother’s family. The sub-title of the book, ‘A story about growing up’, is subtly ironic rather than overtly propagandistic as the narrative isn’t about growing up Aboriginal, but about being inducted into a discriminatory society that removes children from their families because of their mixed racial heritage. John Jagamarra ‘grows up’ and eventually returns to Dryborough Station with his own son, although it has long been deserted. Even in 1994 either the author, or most probably the publisher, was still nervous about the truth and attempted to soften the focus of the book.

Despite the personal style of The Burnt Stick, the central character, six year old John Jagamarra, remains fictional. He symbolically represents all those Aboriginal children taken from their families and brought up on missions. Many children lose a parent in their lives, but for older readers John’s greater losses require more reflection than Hill is able to offer. The loss of culture, the loss of the sense of generations, the loss of language, and the effects of such a massive dislocation, are some of the central issues in the separation of Aboriginal children from their parents that Hill vaguely implies but doesn’t explore.

The black and white illustrations are soft and evocative, deploying various grades of lead pencil. The muted tones and shading soften the impact of the narrative by creating an almost romanticised atmosphere of unreality. Because the title is The Burnt Stick the illustrator has tried to create the effect of charcoal. The cover is in colour with the Aboriginal boy positioned to be viewed in profile, his eyes downcast conveying an aura of sadness. His demeanour is of one who has been defeated. He is alone and isolated. While breaking new ground Hill treads carefully.

38 Hill, op.cit. p.48.
39 Forty three of the ninety nine deaths investigated by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody were of people who were separated from their families as children. Many of them had experienced a lifetime of institutionalisation and severe psychological distress related to their removal.
The evocative drawings capture the scenes and moods of the story, none more effectively than the despairing image of the mother on hands and knees with an empty road stretched out before her. The emotional impact of Sofila's illustrations is particularly apparent in the contrast between the depiction of traditional Aboriginal practices and the heavy truck with its padlocked wire cage that takes John away.

To compare the perspective of some white officials implementing the policy of segregating mixed race children from their families with the response of Aborigines suffering the effects of that policy is to understand the blind inhumanity of the policy and the cruel tragedy it wrought. Hill suggests the extent of the difference through the attitudes of Grainger and the Welfare who believe that the mothers will soon get over their loss because 'they are not like us. They soon forget.' This reflects the attitude expressed by James Isdell in 1909: 'I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring.' 

Clearly, as exemplified in *The Burnt Stick*, government policy underestimated the strength of the family bonds they were trying to break.

Unlike non-Aboriginal children who came into the state's control, Aboriginal children never saw their parents or families again. They were often given new names, and the greater distances involved in rural areas made it easier to prevent parents and children on separate missions from tracing each other. John Jagamarra is sent from the desert to the coast. This effectively isolates him from any contact with his mother or family. He vows to search for his mother and those people to whom he belongs. John appears as the victim, traumatised by his loss, the effects of his removal being implied through the text and illustrations rather than explicitly stated.

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Hill presents the mission in a positive light although missionaries as well as governments were responsible for the inculcation of European values and work habits and targeted Aboriginal children for removal from their families. Both agencies were also responsible for the resulting hardships visited on generations of Aboriginal people. Witnesses told the Bringing Them Home Inquiry that Church and State worked together to take children from their families. Government officials physically removed them but the Churches willingly received them. Some Church organisations received subsidies from governments to operate homes for Aboriginal children. Others were allocated land on which to set up missions. The complicity of the Church was the key to the success of the policy of removal.  

... if it wasn't for the willing and active cooperation of Churches and Christian organisations, governments around Australia would not have been able to implement this policy as effectively as they did ... Churches, related organisations, religious orders and missionary societies were key players in this practice because they operated and controlled the missions and institutions that those Aboriginal children who were removed from their families were placed in.  

Some Aboriginal children in the missions did have positive experiences of love and care from the nuns in particular. The bonds they formed as children with such people went some way towards helping them overcome the damaging effects of removal. As adults,

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41 At the Inquiry's public hearings some Church organisations, including the Catholic Church in Australia, the Anglican Church and the Uniting Church, officially apologised for their role in taking Aboriginal children. Ibid. pp. 288-291.

42 S. Hall, ‘No better than anyone else - a discussion paper on the role of the churches and related organisations, religious orders and missionary societies in Aboriginal child removal and institutionalisation’, Social Responsibilities Commission of the Anglican Church in Western Australia, November, 1995, p.46.
however, they wished that they had never been taken from their own families. From 1937 the States began adopting policies designed to 'assimilate' Aboriginal people of mixed descent. Implicit in the assimilation policy was the idea current among non-Aboriginal people that there was nothing of value in Aboriginal culture. The mission agenda intruded significantly into the Aboriginal family structure, undermining sacred Aboriginal traditions:

But they [the Fathers at the mission] could not teach the children the songs, the dancing and the picture-making of their own people. They did not speak to them, as their families did, in the Aboriginal tongues, or tell them the stories of the Dreaming and the Ancestor spirits of the land that once had been told around the campfires. They did not show them how to follow the kangaroo through the bush, or how to make spears, or how to find where wild yams grew. These things the Fathers did not know. Because the Fathers did not know them, they were not allowed. And because they were not allowed, as the years went by, most people forgot them. No, it was not like home. ⁴¹

The image of John Jagamurra rubbing black charcoal into the skin of his son is poignantly tragic, powerfully depicting a man who associates his lost Aboriginal identity, and that of his son, with the colour of their skin. He has been stripped of his culture, his language and his family in the hope that traditional Aboriginal Law would die out from lack of perpetuation. John is conscious of his displacement and feels alienated - his skin is not light enough to be white, and not dark enough to be black. He

⁴¹ Hill, op.cit. p.53.
is a man caught in a twilight zone, uncertain and insecure about where he belongs. The rubbing of the charcoal into their skin not only symbolises the beginning of John's search for his family, but his desire to re-establish a spiritual connection with the land.

*That night, under the watching eyes of the stars, among the Ancestral spirits of the ancient land, John Jagamarra knew that he would look for his mother and those people to whom he belonged - and would keep on looking for them until they were found, no matter how many years it took.*

*And in the morning before they left, John Jagamarra gathered a handful of ashes and black charcoal from the fire, and rubbed it into his skin and the flesh of his young son. He rubbed it in as deep as he could, so that it might become a part of them and never wash out again. Not now. Not so long as they lived.*

In its sparse text bereft of rancour and bitterness, *The Burnt Stick* recalls a deeply disturbing part of our history. The impact on our senses is all the more chilling because of this restrained telling. *The Burnt Stick* is a quiet, but powerful book, significant in Australian children's literature because it is the first to attempt to break previous taboos in the construction of Aboriginal childhood.

The depiction of John Jagamarra as a victim is in sharp contrast to Helen Bell's 'stolen child' in *Idjhil*. The front cover of this 1996 publication shows Idjhil sitting with Aboriginal men, but turning to confront the reader, his gaze slightly off centre looking

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*Hill, op.cit. p.52-53.*
beyond the frame. This Aboriginal boy immediately emerges as confident and self-assured. The context is firmly established through the sub-title, '... and the land cried for its lost soul', which appears on the frontispiece. Bell bases her story on the memories of Cedric Jacobs, and again in contrast to Hill who does not specify a precise geographical setting, locates *Idjhil* in the Swan Valley in Western Australia in 1952. Bell acknowledges the contribution of Jacobs and, unlike Hill, incorporates Jacobs' Nyungar words to authenticate his recollections of childhood. Bell also attempts to combine documentary fact with a fictional narrative through the inclusion of a glossary, a map, and a footnoted introduction. The body of the text is presented as non-fiction, with the names of the characters changed. It is only on the dust jacket that the book is identified as fictional.

It is interesting to note that the authors and/or the publishers of both books felt obliged to state that the stories were fictional, but based on real events and real people. This indicates a dramatic shift in attitude concerning the role of non-Aboriginal authors in writing the stories of Aboriginal people. In the past, Aboriginal people were seen as incapable of writing about themselves. The non-Aboriginal perspective was considered to be both acceptable and desirable, regardless of inaccuracies or misrepresentation. Adams, Hill and Bell and their respective publishers are much more attuned to the need for Aboriginal involvement in the publication of Aboriginal material, and much more nervous about getting it 'wrong'.

*Idjhil* is not merely the story of a 'stolen child', but presents the bigger picture of the relationship of the Nyungar people to the land through the traditional cycle of the seasons. This is interrupted by the spread of cultivated land by the wadjallahs, the White people. Idjhil's people are shown finding paid work picking grapes in spite of the danger to their children. Idjhil and his family 'kept to bush tracks as much as possible on the walk into town. They all knew that Nyungar children could be taken away and used the cover of the bush to help protect them from the eyes of strangers.' A curfew for Aboriginal people is in place, requiring the Nyungar people to be out of town by 6pm.
Bell establishes a wider context, extending it beyond the traditional and this is what separates *Idjihl* from Hill's *Burnt Stick*. The narrative voice is much stronger, much more confident, both in the text and the illustrations. If Hill has 'blazed the trail', Bell follows and explores it further. The removal of nine year old Idjihl to Mogumber on the Moore River is carried out swiftly and without sentiment. The year is 1952 but Idjihl, unlike John Jagamarra, grows stronger at Mogumber, learning the 'ways of the strangers of his childhood'. Idjihl is strong in the knowledge that he is a member of the Nyungar clan, bound to the land. Like John, Idjihl becomes an adult and has children of his own but Idjihl doesn't search for the family he knows to be dead. Instead he becomes an elder of his clan and 'strives to reconnect his people with their Land', renewing the Nyungar culture. Bell's story ends with the celebratory image of survival and cultural continuity: an Aboriginal man taking control of his own life and the future of his people. Idjihl moves on. The pain and anguish of Idjihl's removal is never downplayed or denied, but unlike John Jagamarra, Idjihl is never cast as a victim.

Idjihl is removed to Mogumber 110 kilometres north of Perth, but not as far away as Hill implies John Jagamarra was taken. Idjihl is much closer to home. The removal of children had been an anticipated part of Nyungar life since the last 'full-blood' member of the Swan River tribes, Joobaitch, died in the early 1900s, leaving all of the remaining people vulnerable to the 1905 Western Australian Aborigines Act. Set in the 1950s, *Idjihl* presents a more contemporary perspective on Aboriginal people. Hill vaguely locates *The Burnt Stick* in the Australian desert, and implies that John's people were

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45 A settlement 60km inland from the mouth of the Moore river, 140 km north of Perth, established in 1917 by the WA government as a place to send Aboriginal people who were living in camps in and around urban centres. Within a year its purpose had been expanded to include children of 'mixed descent', who were forcibly taken from their parents, to be trained as labour useful for white society: domestic servants and farm labourers. It was also to be a place of re-education, where Aboriginality could be isolated, controlled and, in the case of the children, trained out. Moore River expanded quickly. In January 1919 there were 19 inmates, in June 1919, 93 inmates, by June 1927, 330 inmates and by 1932, 500. The Moore River Settlement became Mogumber in 1951, when taken over by the Methodists, after the government had decided to close the Moore River settlement. The institution catered almost exclusively for children, male and female, and became known for its emphasis on vocational training. P. Biskup, *Not Slaves Not Citizens* (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1973). A. Haebich, *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia, 1900 – 1940* (Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1988). C. Choo, *Aboriginal Child Poverty* (Melbourne, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 1990).
more ‘traditional’, leading a much simpler lifestyle than the Nyungar, but one that is dominated by white station owners. The Nyungar are presented as retaining their dignity, spirituality and sense of community, whereas John Jagamurra is depicted as losing both.

Where John’s people have learnt to live within the confines of station life, the Nyungar have adapted to wire fences and the loss of their tribal lands. But John’s people, for whatever reason, are eventually forced to move on, possibly because of drought. Idjhiil’s people, however, strive to reconnect with their land: ‘the people could be taken from the Land but the Land could never be taken from the people.’

The Moore River Settlement was notorious for the harsh treatment of Aborigines sent there and features in several important Aboriginal texts including *No Sugar* (1985) by Jack Davis. The conditions were described by one observer as 'more like a concentration camp than a residential school for Aboriginal children'.

> It’s a wonder we all survived with the food we got. For breakfast we got a bit of porridge with saccharine in it and a cup of tea. The porridge was always dry as a bone. Lunch was a plate of soup made out of bones, sheeps' heads and things like that, no vegetables. For dinner we had a slice of bread with jam and a cup of tea. After dinner we were locked up in a dormitory for the night."

Former WA Chief Protector, A O Neville described in his 1947 book some of the treatments meted out by his staff at the Moore River Settlement.

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48 WA woman who lived at Moore River Settlement from 1918 until 1939, in A.Haebich, *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia, 1900 – 1940* (Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1988), p.59.
One Superintendent I had, because he suspected him of some moral lapse, tarred and feathered a native, and he did the job thoroughly, calling the staff to see the rare bird he had captured ... Another Manager I did appoint, an ex-Missionary, and a good man too, I had to dismiss for chaining girls to table legs ... Indeed, it was found necessary to provide by regulation for the abolition of 'degrading' and injurious punishments and the practice of holding inmates up to ridicule, such as dressing them in old sacks or shaving girls' heads. 49

Paul Hasluck, who eventually became Minister for territories from 1951 to 1963, visited the Moore River several times in the 1930s.

The setting was a poor one with no advantage for anyone except isolation. The facilities were limited and some of them were makeshift. The staff were inadequate both in numbers and qualification. The inmates disliked the place. It held no promise of a future for any of them and they had little or no satisfaction in the present. It was a dump.50

Bell incorporates a range of illustrative styles from the literal, with the main illustrations focussing on the text and depicting predominantly what is written, to the interpretive,

where a tearful Idjhal, overshadowed by an Aboriginal elder, attempts to push the Welfare officers away. The illustrations are often decorative and do not always reflect specific aspects of the narrative. There is some minor variation in the mediums which Bell uses. Coloured pencil and crayon are utilized for the main, full page illustrations depicting the more traditional aspects of Aboriginal life. Lead pencil is used for the smaller illustrations which appear as part of the text and for the more contemporary aspects (such as picking grapes) and for the impact of the wadjallah (white man) on the landscape, symbolized by a bulldozer and barbed wire. Bell's artistic style and technique and the actual layout of the book, however, show little variation.

Idjhil's family's lifestyle does not meet government standards of how Aboriginal families ought to live. After Idjhil and his brothers are removed, a magistrate's committal hearing takes place where the local police are asked to prepare a charge sheet indicting the children as 'neglected and under incompetent guardianship'. Within a week of the court hearing Idjhil and his brothers are placed into State care and not allowed to return home. Like Sofilas, Bell also focusses on the anguish of the mother through illustration, but the effect is not as dramatic or emotionally evocative as in *The Burnt Stick*. Idjhil's mother is simply shown as tearful, clutching her hands together, with an indistinct court document drawn behind her.

*Later that day the clan crowded into the courthouse.*

*Idjhil, in the tight arms of strangers, searched desperately through the sea of faces for his parents.*

*It took only a few moments for the strangers to speak. It took moments for Idjhil and his brothers to be severed forever from their parents. They had no chance to say goodbye. Idjhil did not see his parents.*

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59 P. Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness: Aboriginal affairs 1925-1965* (Melbourne, Melbourne University)
After 1940 the removal of Aboriginal children was governed by the general child welfare law. Once removed, however, Aboriginal children were treated differently from non-Aboriginal children. Under the general child welfare law, Aboriginal children had to be found to be 'neglected', 'destitute' or 'uncontrollable'. These terms assumed an Anglo-Australian model of child rearing and regarded poverty as synonymous with neglect. Consequently, these terms were applied by courts much more readily to Aboriginal children than non-Aboriginal children. The same welfare staff and the same police who had previously taken children because they were Aboriginal, now utilised the neglect procedures to continue to separate Aboriginal children from their families. During the 1950s and 1960s even greater numbers of Aboriginal children were removed to advance the cause of assimilation. Not only were they 'stolen' on the grounds of their alleged neglect, they were removed to attend school in distant places, to receive medical treatment or to be adopted out at birth. 51

John Jagamarra and Idjhil are both fortunate in that they know and remember their Aboriginal history. Most Aboriginal children who were removed grew up knowing very little, if anything, about their Aboriginal families, heritage or culture. Many were told that their parents were dead or had abandoned them, others were told that they had no family. A significant number of these children did not know their real names or where they had originally come from. Unlike John and Idjhil, when many of these stolen children became adults, they chose not to return home for fear that no one would
recognise them or know who they were. As The Burnt Stick clearly exemplifies, most of those family members left behind were not permitted to communicate with their children after their separation and many had no idea what became of them. Many Aboriginal families still don’t. 53

Idjhil is always presented as successful. He is confident and seemingly self assured, appearing as an autonomous individual who consciously adapts to a different world with new opportunities, rather than as a passive victim of circumstances. Idjhil retains the knowledge of his ancestry and his people. His Aboriginal identity is never lost. The distance factor and the circumstances surrounding the removal of both boys influence their adult development as does the fact that the protagonists are both male. By choosing to make their central characters boys, both authors have avoided the more difficult issues surrounding the removal of girls, such as the sexual abuse and the pregnancies which often resulted. Although children in every placement were vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, girls were much more at risk than boys. 54

Both books locate the phenomenon of the ‘stolen generation’ in the past, although the report Bringing them Home states that the removal of Aboriginal children is still taking place at a rate that far exceeds that involving their non-Aboriginal counterparts. The stolen generation phenomenon is a sensitive and highly politicised issue – indeed its significance and validity remain the subject of heated debate. The actions of the past resonate in the present and will continue to do so in the future. The laws, policies and practices which separated Aboriginal children from their families have contributed directly to the alienation of many Aboriginal people today. The Burnt Stick and Idjhil both adopt a slightly sentimental tone to make what was undoubtedly a terrifying ordeal more acceptable to a child audience. If Australian children’s authors have at least begun to tackle the stories of those whose lives were irrevocably changed the moment they

53 Link-Up is an Aboriginal organisation founded c.1980 to help separated children ‘make the journey home’.
54 Almost one in ten boys and just over one in ten girls allege they were sexually abused in a children's institution. One in ten boys and three in ten girls allege they were sexually abused in a foster placement or placements.
were removed from their Aboriginal families ⁵⁵ the full effects of such removal have yet to be voiced in Australian children's fiction.

*You and Me Murrawee* (1998), written by Kerri Hashmi and illustrated by Felicity Marshall, "views Aboriginal life through the eyes of a young Anglo-Australian girl camping beside a river with her family. Hashmi uses the intersection of 'race' and 'time' as markers of difference, but then strives, throughout the book, to represent the Aboriginal girl, Murrawee, and the unnamed non-Aboriginal female narrator, as being 'the same'. The spirit of Murrawee is 'friend and guide', although she is firmly located in the past - two hundred years before. Hashmi appropriates the position of the Aboriginal 'other', constructing Murrawee as the imagined 'double' whose presence is crucial for the Anglo-Australian narrator's sense of identity. The double motif is usually found in fantasy fiction but Hashmi uses it here to explore the social construction of subjectivity, recognising and measuring 'otherness' in terms of chronological 'distance' and constructing a perception of the present self as complete. The 'double' motif places the Anglo-Australian girl in an authorial role and Murrawee in the role of authored character, locked into a position of voiceless passivity. ⁵⁶

The idyll of traditional Aboriginal life resurfaces. The past becomes an idealised construction both textually and visually. Murrawee's uncle interrupts the children's play to warn them not to frighten the fish. In contrast the non-Aboriginal father warns his daughter to 'watch out for broken glass'. Modern man's presence has contaminated the

⁵⁵ In 2000, Jukurpa Books published *Down the Hole*, written by Aboriginal authors Edna Tantjingu Williams and Eileen Wani Wingfield, and illustrated by Aboriginal artist Kunyi June-Anne McInerney. This children's picture book focusses on how Aboriginal children were hidden, from the State 'down the hole', from 'that old woman' anthropologist Daisy Bates, in Ooldea. The publication of such a book, four years after *Idjihil* and eight years after *The Burnt Stick*, is indicative of future trends whereby Aboriginal people are assuming responsibility for recounting the more painful aspects of their history.

⁵⁶ Kerri Hashmi grew up in the Adelaide Hills. As an adult she has worked as a teacher and as a diplomat, travelling extensively and living in Asia. Kerri Hashmi now lives in Canberra. Felicity Marshall spent her childhood in the country on the outskirts of Perth. She too has travelled widely and been a teacher, as well as working for some time in the film industry. Felicity Marshall now lives in Melbourne and is a practising artist.

environment destroying the exotic paradise that once supported traditional Aboriginal life.

Murrawee and the Anglo-Australian narrator participate in the same child-centred activities - drawing, collecting and exploring their surroundings. The sentiments expressed are superficially positive. Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children sleep under the same stars, listen to the stories associated with their culture, cook food in the open and breathe the same air. The difficulty is that the narrator must go camping to share her affinity with an Aboriginal girl - the only place where she can be 'the same' or 'walk in the footsteps of an Aboriginal' is out in the bush.

Hashmi’s narrative thus perpetuates the notion that Aboriginal people are an unchanging group who live in an unchanging environment. No mention is made of Aboriginal children in a contemporary setting, since the text implies that they have all been absorbed into ordinary Australian life. There is a wistful tone to the text: the non-Aboriginal girl laments that although she will never meet Murrawee, they are separated only by time. The implication being that there are no other Aboriginal children in her own time with whom she can share such childhood experiences. Hashmi equates 'Aboriginal culture' with a pre-contact tribal way of life. Such a perception seems to be entrenched in the minds of many children's authors and illustrators as the only valid construction of Aboriginality.

The policy of assimilation, officially implemented from 1940, became central to the denial of legitimate Aboriginal identity by the dominant majority. All tradition-oriented cultures in Australia have, to varying degrees, been influenced by contact with Europeans. Many European goods and technologies have been incorporated into Aboriginal ways of living, as exemplified in Pigs and Honey. Hashmi has difficulty accepting that the world view of urban Aborigines remains essentially Aboriginal in character. You and Me Murrawee equates Aboriginal culture with lost traditions, and suggests that no equivalent, contemporary replacement has been found. This leads to the
conclusion that Aboriginality has also disappeared. Some indefinable 'mystical bond' nevertheless links Murrawee and her modern Anglo-Australian double. The text extends this bond to us as both readers and viewers suggesting that we too can 'experience the rhythms of one day, and become strikingly aware of what can be gained simply by listening and sharing ... life as it would have been two hundred years ago'. The 'real' Aboriginal lives only in the past.

The artwork reinforces the familiar stereotypical images of the traditional Aboriginal child, always happy with flashing white teeth, always very black, obviously 'full-blood' living an uninterrupted idyll. Marshall's illustrations enrich and extend the textual images, portraying the lives of two young girls, from different cultural backgrounds, in the same ancient, but relatively unchanged, physical environment. Marshall uses watercolour, gouache and coloured pencil to create strong, although at times flat, illustrations, deeply coloured, and often intricately detailed displaying semi-photographic qualities. The cover of the book, however, immediately reveals some of the tensions that mark the uneasy construction of Aboriginality positioned between past and present. The term modality, when used of visual texts, refers to the 'various ways in which they seek to persuade viewers of their accuracy and reliability' 38. High modality is often attributed to the white girl through the use of light and shade and her placement at the centre of the illustration. The face of Murrawee is visible at the bottom of the page, but her upper body disappears into the rocks of the river and her hair is lost in the patterns created by sand and water. The lower modality with which Murrawee is treated suggests that she is a phantasm, a fictive character created by the imagination of the white girl, whose 'reality' assumes the status of a norm against which Murrawee’s existence is measured. 39

The portraiture format, on the other hand, where the human figures dominate the landscape interchangeably and share equivalent signs of modality, serves to emphasise the two girls 'sameness', reinforcing the tension between past and present.

38 Bradford, op. cit. p.119.
39 Ibid.
The Aboriginality of Murrawee is presented as generic. The tribal group, to which she belongs, is not identified in the text or the illustrations. The name 'Murrawee', as explained in the acknowledgments, means 'older sister' in the language of the Ngarrindjeri people from the Murray River in South Australia. Marshall also obtained the permission of the Yorta Yorta people of the Riverine on the New South Wales and Victorian border, to portray one of their traditional possum cloaks. Yet, both of these aspects of Aboriginal culture, from two different groups in three different states, are presented as belonging to all Aboriginal people. The author and illustrator have sought Aboriginal 'involvement', but it is both tokenistic and inappropriate. They regard Aboriginal people as an homogenous group, without recognising the cultural diversity of Aboriginal Australia. For thousands of years the original inhabitants have striven to maintain important cultural distinctions. Never in Australia has there been either a single, cultural identity or a single generic name. When Europeans first arrived in Australia they applied the term 'aborigines' to refer to the total population of original inhabitants with the unfortunate effect of classifying them inappropriately as one homogenous cultural group. Today there are Aboriginal communities in cities and rural areas, as well as traditional communities living on remote outstations. These communities have diverse lifestyles and cultures. By failing to consult the relevant Aboriginal people from the Canberra area, which provided the inspiration for the setting, Hashmi and Marshall unwittingly created in their text a tension between a local regionalised identity and the concept of pan-Aboriginality based on a common cultural framework. The only consultation they sought concerned endorsement of an Aboriginal 'name' and an 'artefact', not about the narrative itself.

Linda Birney (1992) questions the role of non-Aboriginal authors and publishers in the production of stories about Aboriginal people or stories with Aboriginal content arguing that they need to consult the relevant Aboriginal people about matters of cultural fact. Birney concludes that it is better left undone than wrongly done.  

The work of Adams, Hill and Bell represents a significant new development in the literary construction of Aboriginal childhood, abandoning covertly racist stereotyped and romanticised images of a traditional pre-contact lifestyle to embrace depictions of more diverse and contemporary historical realities, including the impact of assimilationist policies. Despite its 1998 publication date, however, *You and Me Murrawee* harks back to retrogressive constructions of Aboriginal childhood. Ignorance and good intentions are no longer acceptable excuses for non-Aboriginal children's authors and illustrators to construct Aboriginality as 'timeless' and to depict all Aboriginal people as sharing the same culture. Aboriginal children are not the same as children with an Anglo-Australian heritage, or a Chinese heritage or an Arabic heritage. Universalism is a 'Eurocentric' viewpoint, a means of imposing Anglo-Australian ideas of rationality and objectivity on other peoples. Universalism is racist because it denies the possibility of non-European viewpoints. 61

*You and Me Murrawee* is a conscious attempt to mark Aboriginality with positive values but incorporates subtler forms of discrimination which still remain largely unchallenged by publishers and editors. Although the intention may well be benign, the result is still dehumanising, for Murrawee becomes the object, not the subject. Hashmi and Marshall seek to 'indigenize' the Anglo-Australian narrator, as well as 'reindigenize' Murrawee. The presence of Murrawee is visual only, while her counterpart has survived and flourished to tell the story, reinforcing, yet again, Social Darwinian theories of survival. The construction of a shared childhood connects the non-Aboriginal child with the power which Murrawee represents. It also expresses the white Australian yearning for national legitimacy prevalent in pre-1960s literature. Murrawee is shaped into an historical artefact, a remnant of a golden age which has no connection to contemporary life. The temporal contrast between the golden age and contemporary decadence is also explored in the film *Walkabout* discussed in detail in chapter eight.

Aboriginal identity and culture is based on a distinctive heritage which incorporates special meanings given to the land and people and is centred on core values, not traditional lifestyle. This heritage has modified and adapted in response to new knowledge and experiences brought in by Europeans. Aboriginal people see opportunities for their cultures to be further developed, extended and refined through education. This will be achieved through Aboriginal people’s participation in Australian life but also requires Aboriginal identity to be affirmed and recognised by all Australians, in whatever form it may take. The ‘new’ Aborigines, are all those who are of Aboriginal descent and identify themselves as Aboriginal people, carving out for themselves a particular niche in Australian society. They may not be identifiable by skin colour or lifestyle. Through their mode of representation, Hashmi and Marshall deny the "new" Aboriginal child the right to identify as a "real" Aborigine. This retrogressive ideology is maintained in Australian children's fiction largely through repression or erasure of uncomfortable truths – by what is omitted from the text. Aboriginal history since European occupation has indeed been associated with inhumane practices. But You and Me Murrawee ignores history and denies a positive voice to Aboriginal people whose lives are fulfilled and enriched, in spite of difficulties.

Murrawee is aligned with Nature and thereby excluded from the contemporary, more scientific world of rationality and decision making. By aligning contemporary notions of 'equality' with the Romantic Rousseauist idea that equal rights are inalienable because they are ‘natural’ (i.e. they derive from ‘nature’), Hashmi and Marshall adopt a simplistic and contradictory approach to a very complex idea. They ignore historical understanding which indicates that these rights are socially constructed and that political equality is something we make ourselves. The appearance of difference is usually taken at face value, and taken as evidence of a multiplicity of categories of humanity. Hashmi and Marshall use the 'face value' of engaging in identical activities, in an identical place, as a sign of sameness not difference. This alignment is the mainstay of patriarchal ideology. You and Me Murrawee mythologises Aboriginal culture and perpetuates essentialist

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41 C. Bourke et.al., Aboriginal Australia (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1994), p.45.
'racial' identity and relations associated with neo-colonial constructions of Aboriginal childhood. 43

43 Ibid., p.15
Chapter Five

The European Quest Motif and the Construction of the Traditional Aboriginal Boy

Each age and culture produces its own representative heroes who, if they are clever enough and brave enough, become immortalised in legend. Often they are superhuman - part human, part god, idealised heroes who occupy the space between the gods and humanity, providing mere mortals with an ideal that they can aspire to. Less often they are folk heroes, ordinary men and women who represent the common person who encounters and overcomes all kinds of obstacles. The literalization of the ancient quest tales and poems has come about in part because myth and folktale have largely been relegated to stories for children. Children's versions of myths are usually simplified, remodelled and remoulded to appeal to a young audience, often reduced to a series of adventures with mythic trimmings, rather than the traditional metaphysical journey, such as occurs in the Arthurian legends.

The nineteenth century, particularly in Australia, clearly delineated the gendered roles of Anglo-Australian boys and girls. The image of ‘white’ masculinity was crucial, particularly where proof was necessary to reassure the rest of the world that the ‘colonial strain’ would indeed survive. Boys needed to be physically strong because pioneers couldn't afford to be weak or they perished. The landscape was harsh and uncompromising and only the fittest were perceived to survive.

The remarkable success of the English as colonists, as compared to other European nations, has been ascribed to their "daring and persistent energy"; ... we can at least see that a nation which

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produced during a lengthened period the greatest number of highly intellectual, energetic, brave, patriotic, and benevolent men, would generally prevail over less favoured nations.

Girls, however, were needed to perpetuate the race, to keep the strain ‘pure’ and attend to the physical, emotional and psychological needs of their mates. Being a good wife and mother was tantamount to being a successful woman. If women desired anything else, such as an education or a career, then they were deemed unnatural.

Not surprisingly, nineteenth century Australian children’s literature told the story of the frontier in graphic and heroic detail. Anglo-Australian boys read about other ‘white’ boys, courageously fighting ‘savage natives’, surviving incredible shipwrecks and rescuing girls from the raging torrents of flood-swollen rivers, all in the name of Empire. Life in the Australian landscape required qualities that were usually denied to non-Europeans. The hero, representative of the ideal man, succeeds because of his prodigious strength, his intelligence and cunning, his perseverance, his courage, his idealism and his endurance.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the British Empire was slowly beginning to shrink. It became acceptable for fictional heroism to take place in Australian settings where the dangers and hardships of the Australian landscape and its perception as a genuine frontier could still be maintained. The greatness of Britain was still widely celebrated, as was the sterling character of Englishmen, but it was up to Australian writers to localise their heroes.

The three books discussed in this chapter The Hunted Piccaninnies (1927), The Prince of the Totem (1933) and Aranda Boy (1952) all incorporate aspects of the three dominant images of the Aboriginal boy which had, by this time, emerged in

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4 Saxby and Ingpen, op.cit, p. 7.
Australian children's literature. First, he was seen as part of a burdensome and pathetic race, inferior to the dominant white society and inevitably doomed to 'die out'. Secondly he was depicted as a wild, barbaric and uncivilised 'savage'. Third, although 'savage' and often a remnant of 'The Stone Age', he could nevertheless be shown to be noble, untouched by the materialism associated with an industrialising society. Although uneducated, the 'Noble Savage' appeared knowledgeable and wise, as well as strong, with a muscular and manly physique.6

Aboriginal affairs began to cause public concern in the middle of the 1920s because of a series of well publicised clashes and white atrocities. A number of enquiries into race conflict on the frontier revealed government authorities in a bad light. Humanitarians, who lived mainly in the cities, began to ask for better palliatives, better protection, better health measures, and better conditions of employment for Aborigines but few could think beyond protection and segregation. In the Northern Territory, as late as 1933, there had been several murders, including that of a policeman in Arnhem Land. Public indignation prevented the government from sending a punitive party to 'teach the aborigines a lesson', because people now sensed that the era of reprisals was over. A clear breakthrough, however, did not emerge until 1934 when anthropologist A.P. Elkin and others spoke out strongly about the need for change from the negative and unsuccessful policy of protection and segregation to a more positive alternative.7

The imperial ideologies underpinning the widespread view of Aboriginal racial inferiority, however, were still perpetuated in Australian children's literature well into the twentieth century. Biological racism was reproduced in children's books through a preoccupation with physical differences. Aboriginal boys often only appeared in texts as a point of scientific interest, to reinforce the general

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6 The eighteenth century notion of the 'ignoble savage' relied on a 'four stage theory' of human progress and was perpetuated by the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly Adam Ferguson, and French philosophs such as Turgot. See R. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage (London, Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.150-154. P. O'Brien, 'The Gaze of the "Ghosts": Images of Aboriginal Women in NSW and Port Phillip (1800-1850)', in J. Kociumbas, Maps, Dreams, History (Sydney, University of Sydney, 1998), pp.322, 328, 255.

representation of them as a lower form of humanity manifesting animal-like behaviours and living a Stone Age existence. Considered together, these images expressed the ideologies of the period of pastoral expansion which preceded the announcement of an official federal assimilation policy in 1951 and promoted the continuing currency of Social Darwinist assumptions. Aboriginal people generally, and Aboriginal boys in particular, were represented as negations of British values. In imperialist literature, Australian heroes often gained their status because they defeated the ‘savage’ Aboriginal.  

By the early twentieth century Australian pioneering was virtually over. The southern states with their rapidly expanding capital cities were widely settled. Children's writers, however, could still locate an imagined frontier in the relatively unexplored regions in Northern and Western Australia or in overseas battlefields.  

Although published in 1927, William Montgomery Fleming decided to set his children's novel, The Hunted Piccaninies, in the past, when the frontier was still just beyond Sydney.

The choice of an Aboriginal hero is rare in Australian children's fiction. Coolamon, the twelve year old Aboriginal hero in The Hunted Piccaninies, is an exception. Coolamon and his younger brothers Cubbie and Binjie, are being pursued by the evil 'medicine man' Dirribandi. The narrator of the story is fourteen year old Dick, a white boy who, with his brother Joe, has become separated from his pioneering family. The Hunted Piccaninies thus has all of the classic elements of the hero journey, including conflict between good and evil, the struggle for survival against seemingly insurmountable odds, the discovery, where the reader recognises that the hero has indeed earnt his title and finally the return, where the hero must influence with his hard-earned wisdom those who have remained behind. In this tale, however,

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9 Niall, op.cit. p. 151.
10 The Hunted Piccaninies was recommended reading for sixth class in the 1941 English curriculum. An extract also appeared in The School Magazine, April, 1950, Part 4, and on a school radio broadcast on 9th June, 1950. Fleming's assimilationist message was still seen as relevant 23 years after publication.
the ‘white’ protagonist, Dick takes precedence over his Aboriginal counterpart: the neo-colonial children’s adventure story cannot countenance a ‘savage’ hero.

William Montgomerie Fleming was born in 1874 at Avon Plains in the Wimmera district of Victoria and grew up near Walgett in New South Wales. The third son of a grazier from Scotland, Fleming was educated at home before attending the Cooerwull Academy at Bowenfels when he was fifteen and eventually entering Sydney University, where he spent only one term. In March 1900, Fleming married Caroline Benn and settled at Russley, near Aberdeen, north west of Newcastle. In 1901 he became the youngest member of the Legislative Assembly by winning the Upper Hunter seat of Robertson. Endorsed by the State Farmers and Settlers’ Association, Fleming won the Federal seat of Robertson in 1913, but his political career was turbulent, eventually ending in 1922 with the loss of his parliamentary seat. He remained, however, chairman of the metropolitan (Sydney) branch of the Country Party until 1934. An ardent patriot, he enlisted in the First World War as a Light Horseman and member of the Australian Air Corps.

In *The Hunted Piccaninnies* Fleming immediately establishes his beliefs about Aboriginal people by reinforcing the imperial notion of white supremacy, declaring that the land was ‘unoccupied’, and there were ‘no people at all - except blacks’. The use of a white narrator further reinforces the notion of white superiority. Dick is immediately perceived to be in control because the story is told from his viewpoint. He describes himself as small for his age, which suggests flawed masculinity. Dick is not the tall, muscular and athletic boy who traditionally becomes a hero. The representation of Australian childhood in children's literature from 1841 to 1914 is fairly consistent. The role of girls as future wives and mothers is continually emphasised as the badge of their femininity: a boy's physical appearance and prowess are crucial to his masculinity. A boy who is small for his age will have difficulty becoming a ‘real’ man. Australian boys, who are characterised as being skilled at bushcraft, shooting and survival, but not as skilled at intellectual pursuits, are acceptable. Real Australian boys live in the bush, while those born and bred in

12 'Terra Nullius', a Latin term meaning 'no one's land'. Although James Cook found Australia inhabited, he concluded that because Aboriginal people were itinerant hunter-gatherers, they had not advanced to a stage of civilisation which would endow them with rights of prior ownership.
the city do not quite measure up. Knowledge of these cultural conventions about masculinity alert Fleming's readers that this adventure will not follow the usually prescribed path. Dick's lack of physical perfection enables Coolamon to be identified initially as a 'hero' because he is Dick's obvious antithesis. Coolamon, however, is still an Aboriginal boy at the mercy of a white narrator. It is Coolamon's masculinity that Fleming admires, not his Aboriginality.

Fleming's message is very clear. Coolamon is not imbued with the qualities of a great mythic hero who embarks on a fantasy journey. Even though he represents the Noble savage, his Eurocentric trajectory precludes inscription as epic quest. Instead, Coolamon remains grounded in reality and plausibility. 'True' Aboriginal heroes are those who assimilate, and recognise white supremacy. It is nevertheless possible to trace Coolamon's development through several stages of the myth cycle. There are, of course, endless variations on the monomyth theme, but its basic structure is universal to all cultures.  

The sub-text in The Hunted Piccaninnies, presents the hero's journey as a quest for assimilation.

The first stage of the hero's quest is the departure, which typically begins with a 'Call to Adventure' when a 'Herald' or announcer of the adventure appears. He is often a dark and terrifying figure whom the world has already judged to be evil. Dirribandi, the medicine man of Coolamon's tribe, fulfils these requirements. His magic is feared by all. Fleming depicts him as an evil figure who manipulates his tribe to achieve his own ends and maintain his power.

In children's fiction, the hero quest involves the initiation of the adolescent hero into the adult world. Such an initiation can take many forms. Significantly, Fleming ignores the traditional rites of passage that Coolamon, as an Aboriginal male approaching puberty, would have been ready to undergo. It is at this stage that

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Coolamon would have learnt his rights and obligations as an adult member of his tribe, embarking on the long process of learning the oral history, religion and secret knowledge of his people. He would have already undergone a test of worthiness and courage, requiring endurance of pain and acquisition of new knowledge. Instead, Coolamon must now undertake a white rite of passage to become a ‘real’ man. The Aboriginal equivalent is seen as primitive and barbaric. White perceptions of masculinity and leadership must be met if Coolamon and his people are to qualify as potential members of white society. Coolamon’s quest requires him to cease measuring himself in terms of the culture of his people. It is Coolamon’s Aboriginality that will be challenged on his journey, not his manhood.

Embarking on an adventure involves risks, danger, and personal growth. The presence of parents automatically precludes their child from adventure. Parents belong to one reality, while adventure belongs to another. Consequently, Coolamon and his brothers are orphans as this strategy of characterisation eliminates the symbols of security that retard the hero’s development by shielding him from the dangers that promote maturation. There is no place for parents in the traditional adolescent hero journey. Fleming ignores the kinship ties of the Aboriginal people, enabling Coolamon to embody, initially at least, the characteristics of a white hero. The true hero cannot refuse the call, decline adventure, avoid risks or ignore opportunity. For Coolamon the acceptance of the call to adventure represents not only separation from the tribe of his parents, but symbolises the severance of his people from their traditional way of life. He will be the facilitator of white contact.

The malignant agent Dirribandi, significantly also the arch-opponent of white civilization, drives Coolamon and his brothers into ‘the wilderness’ of the Australian bush. The brothers are summoned to ‘cross the threshold’ from the safety of their own tribal boundaries to the land of the ‘wild tribes’. Fleming signals to his reader that the familiar tribal obligations have been outgrown. The traditional Aboriginal concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns are no longer relevant.

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16 Babbitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152.
So Coolamon and his little brothers had to decide whether it was more dangerous to stay on the ground they knew and try to avoid Dirribandi and his nephews there, or to go right away and risk their lives amongst the wild tribes beyond the boundaries.  

Dick and Joe have also become separated from their pioneering parents. Although Dick's heroic pattern is similar to Coolamon's in terms of parental separation, his role, at first is that of a protective figure who, in the traditional mythic quest takes the form of the helpful old crone or wizened old man, often possessing supernatural powers, protective supplies, amulets and advice the hero will require. As the older European male, Dick becomes Coolamon's guide and teacher. He is the protective figure, the embodiment of the wider, all encompassing Empire, who provides the amulet - in the form of a tomahawk - which Coolamon and his brothers find both fearful and wondrous. This supernatural principle of guardianship and direction, developed in the higher mythologies, is both protective and dangerous.  

By responding to the call and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero's act coincides with that for which his society itself is ready.  

Fleming deems Aboriginal people, represented by Coolamon's tribe, ripe for assimilation into a superior white society. Dick is also the rational guide in this larger quest, leading Coolamon and his people to a 'civilised' life. The hero who comes under the protection of the benign power of destiny, cannot be harmed.  

Coolamon, however, must be tested and found worthy. Dick doesn't need to be initiated to take his place in white society. He has achieved this status already merely by the colour of his skin and his British ancestry. Coolamon, by journeying with Dick, chooses the rites of a white passage to adulthood. Without the timely arrival of Dick, Joe and their tomahawk, Fleming intimates that Coolamon and his brothers would never have been able to survive the trials to come. The symbols of the benign  

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17 Fleming, op.cit. p. 29.  
18 Campbell, op.cit. p. 73.  
19 Ibid., p. 72.
and protecting power of white civilisation are clothed subversively in ancient hero mythology.

The coming face-to-face with the confusions, terrors and pains of the hero journey is part of the lesson the hero must learn before he can become an adult. That lesson takes many forms. In this instance of the hero journey, Coolamon must reject Dirribandi and his magic, using his own skills to survive in an often hostile landscape. He must also take responsibility for Dick, Joe and his own brothers. The most important lesson Fleming wants his Aboriginal hero to learn and his implied reader to remember, however, is the superiority of white civilisation. Once he has accepted this, Coolamon can then leave childhood behind and become a man.

Dirribandi becomes the ‘threshold guardian’, representing the limits of Coolamon’s known world. As the medicine man of the tribe he is highly respected and feared: his people believe that he possesses supernatural powers, acquired through his meeting with the spirits. For Coolamon to cross the threshold and challenge the power of Dirribandi is to step into the unknown, characterised by darkness and danger on a physical as well as spiritual level, the dangers that every hero who steps beyond the limits of his traditional lifestyle and beliefs must face. It is only by advancing beyond those bounds and provoking the evil power of Dirribandi, that Coolamon can pass between good and evil, between uncivilised and civilised, and leave his former self behind. Coolamon moves on, not to face the risk alone, but to rendezvous with the white narrator. Coolamon’s first encounter with white civilisation has now become part of his destiny.

Coolamon’s ‘perilous’ journey leads him through the process of rejecting and moving beyond the familiar images of his childhood. Dick introduces him to the ideals and practices of a civilised Christian world. By eventually exposing Dirribandi as a fraud, the product of a ‘superstitious, ignorant and uncivilised’ society, Dick is able to convince Coolamon that his own powers are greater, although the reader knows that he, too, has used trickery and deception. The rational white settler is far more powerful than the ignorant and easily fooled ‘savage’. What is deemed

unacceptable behaviour for the Aboriginal Dirribandi is acceptable for Dick as the representative European. White dishonesty is justified as it is the only means by which Dick can convince them that Dirribandi is a fake. Coolamon must accept this before he and his tribe can begin to assimilate into white society. Fleming believes that the Aboriginal people must reject their beliefs, which he sees as childish and irrational. For him, they are of no value, the stuff of fantasy, make-believe and fairy tale, suitable only for children, and as such, have no place in the society of European adults. The end, it seems, justifies the means.

In Fleming’s text, the role of Dirribandi is crucial to the theme of Aboriginal assimilation. The medicine men of ‘primitive tribes’ are seen as the centre of Aboriginal culture and society. If they are discredited then the remainder of the tribe should be much easier to manipulate. Human groups are actuated by their group ideals, so by destroying the credibility of Dirribandi, Dick undermines the traditional belief system of the tribe, causing changes in the individual and cultural psyche of its members. Dick sets out to render powerless the spiritual symbols of Coolamon’s mythological and religious inheritance - to be civilised is to be rational.

After it has been raining continuously for three days Coolamon takes control, checking the river and indicating that they must all move or be flooded out, as the river will continue to rise. They do as he asks, unquestioningly. Coolamon uses his ‘instincts’ — instructive powers which Dick sees more pragmatically as knowledge able to be acquired by anyone. The flood is a substitute for the traditional protective mist, conjured by benevolent supernatural forces to protect the hero. The flood separates them from Dirribandi, causing the circular sand ridge, on which they are stranded, to become an island. This allows them to sleep soundly, content in the knowledge that the river will protect them.

*When the light was sufficient for us to see properly, we noticed that the flood-waters were still rising and had spread on every side of us. They stretched so far and*
looked so endless under the level rays of the rising sun,
that I uttered an exclamation of wonder.21

Dick acknowledges the ‘magical’ quality of the flood but his appreciation of its beauty lies in his wonder at its creation by a Christian God. Coolamon's ‘journey to enlightenment’, thus involves not only recognising the superiority of the white invaders, but also replacing tribal spirituality with Christian theology. His ‘suffering’ is psychological, driven by fear. His setbacks occur when that fear overtakes his judgement. It is Dick, his guide and teacher, who now offers reassurance and drives the journey forward.

Islands have often been used as places of escape or as prisons. The image of the island has recurred in literature, history and art, variously pigmented as a source of freedom, sensuality, inspiration, punishment and exile. A microcosmic terrain in which characters are enlightened and transformed, the island setting magnifies emotions and allows the expression of extreme moods.22

Coolamon is pleased by the isolation and assured by the plentifullness of food in the form of birds and animals who have also gathered to use the island as a refuge from the flood. Their island is truly a paradise, a land of plenty.

The sun was beginning to slope towards the west. The pine-trees around us gave a pleasant shade filled with their drowsy, resinous perfume from its creamy, butterfly-like blooms. Faintly, delicately, those perfumes mingled around us as the gentle breeze stirred the stillness. On every side sweet growing things filled the lazy air with perfumed breath. From the slight rise on which we lay, not more than three

21 Fleming, op.cit., p.67.
22 J. Murphy, Treasure Isle Exhibition  Mitchell Library, August 1996.
feet above the level of the water, we could see far over the flood. In the distance a group of graceful myall-trees were mirrored in the water which now surrounded them. The scene held much contentment in its warm, scented, soothing peace ...

Just as Noah built his ark to escape the flood in the Biblical story, the island is Coolamon's ark, while the surrounding flood separates him and his companions from the forces of evil. Although Dirribandi is not destroyed by the flood as 'corrupt man' was in the Bible story, the symbolism of birth and rebirth associated with water would have been understood by Fleming's Christian readers. Just as the mythical hero must return from his journey transfigured by the lesson of life renewed, the 'rebirth' of Coolamon as an assimilated Christian is inevitable.

The island provides the perfect setting for Coolamon to display his hunting skills. The hero is indeed in his domain where he teaches Dick and Joe how to hunt without a gun. The image of such a paradise also reinforces the notion of the Aborigine belonging to an exotic past. Fleming implies that most of the significant differences between Dick's 'civilised' world and Coolamon's more 'primitive' one are essentialist. The Aboriginal people are seen as being able to survive effectively in the hostile Australian landscape because of their compelling primitive drives. Their ability to hunt and gather successfully is partly a consequence of their 'nature'. Coolamon and Binjie are portrayed as belonging to a group of people whose sole purpose in life is to roam aimlessly across the land looking for food, 'dependent on what nature produces without any practical assistance on their part'.

To hear quickly and see silently are two good things for those who are dealing with practical things. In both of these the piccaninnies were easily our masters.

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... They knew where to look for everything that grew. They knew how to capture every animal that was worth hunting, how to secure the birds that were good to eat. And how to make use of almost every plant that was not poisonous. For them life was mostly a matter of getting things to eat, and eating them. There are some people who believe that they are civilised who spend most of their time over things to eat. Coolamon and his brothers did not do that. They never thought as much of the eating of things they had caught as they did of the catching of them.  

Eventually the floodwaters subside, and the 'red plain' reclams their island refuge. In a carefully devised variation on the hero pattern, it is Dick who eventually exposes Dirribandi, not Coolamon. Dick arrogantly believes that Dirribandi would not feel as confident about finding Coolamon and his brothers if he knew that their companions were white. Coolamon is the hero in the tradition of the 'noble savage', not quite measuring up to white ideals. Living an idealised life of simplicity he knows nothing of the burdensome demands of civilisation. When called to the true test, he cannot overcome the 'Threshold Guardian', Dirribandi. It is Dick with his Christian God and 'powerful' tomahawk who heroically triumphs. The polished blade of the white man's talisman flashes in the sun, forcing Dirribandi to cover his eyes with his animalistic 'claw-like hand' and fall grovelling to the ground.

The narrative implies that Dick is able to defeat Dirribandi, liberating himself and his companions from immediate danger, and ultimately releasing the tribe from their misguided beliefs. By accepting Dick's superiority, Coolamon's journey of discovery is now over. He has found what he was sent out to look for and is now ready for 'The Return', the final stage of the adventure. By acknowledging Dick's power, Coolamon can become a Christian member of white society.

35 Ibid., pp.82-83.
The return of the hero is frequently accomplished with ‘assistance from without’. Dick's intervention allows the piccaninnies to return to the tribal camp. His white superiority has been established over Dirribandi's 'black' magic and Coolamon's fear of Dirribandi, at least while Dick is with him, has lessened. The reason to continue the journey has been removed; the 'ultimate boon' has been identified.

In many Aboriginal cultures initiation reinforces the importance of tribal knowledge. Individual interests are already subordinate to the good of the group and everyone is subordinate to the Law. The complex and sophisticated system of kinship relationships ensures that everyone belongs, unless they break the Law. This is illustrated, to some extent, by the fact that Coolamon already understands the notion of 'brotherhood' as the fabric of Aboriginal society. Therefore, as a child hero returning to an Aboriginal adult community, Coolamon cannot easily give up his former self to be reborn into a white world. He is not permitted to sacrifice himself for a new existence in which he will be on equal terms with boys such as Dick. He can, however, be assimilated. Such a compromise creates further conflict.

Coolamon is torn, not by his own desire for individual freedom, but by the choice either to continue living the traditional tribal life of his people or to succumb to white society's demand for discipline, exemplified through the 'civilised' instilling of a work ethic. The choice is inevitable. When confronted by the obvious superiority of Dick, Coolamon must choose the latter, and this condemns him to exist in a limbo world between two cultures, unable to belong fully to either.

No matter how successful our life journey, death is still the ultimate separation feared by most. In myths and fairy tales, heroes seldom die a literal death, but often die symbolically. In _The Hunted Piccaninnies_, Dirribandi tells the tribe that the boys have indeed been killed, displaying animal parts to verify his claim. Consequently, when the boys physically return they have been symbolically resurrected. Through Dick's bravery and Christian conviction, Coolamon and his brothers have been saved. Dick alone has the power to save them and bring them back from a symbolic death.

*26 Ibid., p.212.*
For Coolamon and his brothers, 'happily ever after' means not only returning to their tribe, but coming into contact with the white man. Coolamon has completed his trials, led the others, with Dick's help, safely through them, and has therefore earned his final reward. He is found worthy. Equality, however, is not a consideration. Coolamon has successfully moved from childhood to manhood, from black world to white. His initiation is now complete.

*I looked at Coolamon. The set expression on his face made me feel what a responsibility he was carrying. For quite a long time I watched him as we went, when quite suddenly I realised what a manly chap he was. My last doubts about him flew away never to return. Instead of a little blackboy who might be anything, I saw a leader.*

Predictably the quest of the Aboriginal hero takes a form somewhat different from that of the traditional white male hero. The outlines of tales of mythical journeys are subject to damage and distortion over time, while traits which have their origins in the archaic, are generally eliminated or subdued. *The Hunted Piccaninies* is no exception, with the imported storying traditions of an Anglo-Celtic culture being revised to fit the customs and beliefs of white Australian society and the contours of the 'outback' landscape. Although the underlying quest pattern is recognisable, Fleming manipulates the meaning and structure by blurring the lines that distinguish the classic hero. This allows the Aboriginal hero to take only the initial part of the traditional symbolic journey alone, sharing the remainder with the omnipresent narrator Dick. The already schizophrenic nature of the heroic journey is further divided physically between the two boys, rather than following the traditional pattern Fleming's readers would have come to expect. The narrative structure marginalises Coolamon's quest in a pattern which continues as he attempts to assimilate into Dick's dominant Anglo-Australian society.

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27 *Ibid.*, p.120.
White society has passed from a mythological ethos to a secular-materialist one. As a consequence of this evolution, older images from a superstitious past are no longer believed and find approval only as stories for children. Coolamon does not have the freedom to pass back and forth between the two societies. His journey, although cyclical in its construction, is linear in its design. He and his people will not be permitted to return to their traditional cultural practices. Coolamon as the hero is only a symbol to be contemplated, not an example to be followed. The effect of the narrative is thus to soften racist attitudes and to promote Aboriginal assimilation into white Australian society.

Coolamon's people are permitted to live on the tribal land that Dick and his family take. In time, they all come to believe that Dirribandi had been wrong in his dismal prophecies that the white man 'would destroy the blacks', for they were 'well fed and cared for'. Fleming doesn't offer an explanation as to why only the 'musical names they gave to the places they knew so well' was all that remained of the Aborigines in that region. The implication, however, is that they are indeed a 'dying race'.

For the white male hero the dominant culture itself provides the map which charts the route of the quest. An Aboriginal hero has no such map of symbol and ritual which is acceptable in the dominant white discourse. He must borrow from someone else. He may choose to travel the accepted routes to selfhood marked 'white only' and face ridicule and hostility. Or he may be forced to find a different path altogether. Fleming reaches a compromise. The symbols are culturally coded as white, but the setting is designated as black, although under threat from white settlement. As a marginal figure, Coolamon finds his way using the traditional skills of his people, not by the accustomed heroic routes. Although it is only the final test that he fails, this is enough to enable the white male to emerge as the true hero. Dick takes control and destroys the power of Dirribandi, their enemy. His victory is at the expense of Coolamon's personal defeat – a defeat that mirrors the subjugation of

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34 Ibid., p.184.
35 Ibid., p.185.
Coolamon’s people.

Fleming brings his audience back to the present at the conclusion of his story by informing his readers that:

... all of this happened many years ago, and one of Coolamon's grandsons served in the Great War as a trooper under my son, who was a colonel of the Light Horse in Palestine. And Binjie became a well-known black-tracker who did some great things with the mounted police; while Cubbie ... has long since been at rest."

Just as Coolamon has, in the end, been unable to fulfil the role of a true hero, his grandson can only be an ANZAC by serving as a trooper under Dick’s son, who is a colonel of the Light Horse in Palestine. The Aboriginal male is always inferior to his white counterpart. He cannot lead but is forced to follow the ‘Spirit of the Anzacs, which made the name of Australians stand for all that is greatest in days of danger and in times of trial’. According to Fleming the ‘true’ ANZAC spirit came from those white pioneers who ‘knew the back-country’, the archetypal tough, resourceful, anti-authoritarian bushman."

Coolamon and his brothers are excluded from this image of nationhood and cultural identity. Binjie has fulfilled the stereotyped role of a black tracker, while Cubbie has proved his inferiority by dying young. The defining image of desirable and typical ‘Australianness’ was undoubtedly white and male. ‘True’ heroes and leaders could not be black, and ‘true’ Australians could not be Aboriginal.

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32 Ibid., p.185.
33 Many Aboriginal men responded, with the support of their families, to the call to defend Australia, although they were not considered citizens until 1967.
Fleming was obviously a man ahead of his time, as it was not until the end of the 1930s that the world began changing its attitude towards ‘indigenous’ peoples, and Australia responded at least as much to outside events and sentiments as to events and sentiments within it. In 1938, Mr McEwan, the new Minister for the Interior, placed before the Commonwealth Parliament proposals which later became known as ‘the New Deal for the Aborigines in the Northern Territory’. It was then that the concept of ‘assimilation’ was adopted, although it took another ten years before its effects became obvious.

In 1926, Sir Baldwin Spencer, the famous anthropologist, then Professor of Biology at Melbourne University, wrote that the structural simplicity of the Aboriginal brain meant that ‘he is like an overgrown child in matters of character and emotional expression’, and was as such ‘ill-suited to higher forms of education’. 34 From the 1930s, in contrast to the diminishing attention Aboriginal people were receiving in historical accounts, ethnomological studies were escalating. Aided by the professionalisation of anthropology, popular and academic studies found ready publication, giving new currency to the old Aboriginal stereotypes which, legitimised by social science, would prove relentlessly enduring. 35

In 1933, The Prince of the Totem. A Simple Black Tale for Clever White Children, by Tarlton Rayment, was published. The title itself sets the tone for the story while evolution provides the framework. A narrative with an Aboriginal focus must perforce be ‘simple’ because Aborigines are a simple child-like race, unlike the superior Europeans. Anthropologists and scientists had long characterised Aboriginal people as a ‘child race’ and Rayment sets out emphatically to reinforce it. Born in 1882, in Reading, England, Tarlton Rayment (whose father was a member of the Royal Navy) was the youngest of seven children. Rayment came to Australia around the turn of the century, via India. He worked as a commercial artist 36 and apiarist, becoming a world authority on bees, wasps and ants. He was President of the Entomologists’ Club of Victoria 1913-1931 and wrote many articles on natural

34 The Sydney Morning Herald, 7th January, 1926.
35 Kociumbas, op.cit. p.16. The 1930s also saw, however, several works of fiction which exposed the racism of Australia’s policies and practices towards Aboriginal people. Xavier Herbert’s Capricornia (1938) is one such text which exemplifies this trend.
36 The Prince of the Totem is illustrated from crayon drawings by the author.
history, as well as contributing regularly to *Walkabout* magazine, the popular geographical journal with a fascination for the ‘primitive’. Rayment also gave many radio talks and produced Australia's first films about native bees. *The Prince of the Totem* was first presented as a series of radio broadcasts on the ABC's *Children's Session* in Melbourne in 1933. In 1952, Rayment became honorary entomologist for the National Museum of Victoria. He died in 1964. 37

The preface to *The Prince of the Totem* includes two Message Sticks. 36 The first is written in the style of a poem, addressed to ‘my brother Unaipon’ and is signed Ka-Vai, which is, according to Rayment, the ‘Kabi’ tribe name for the stingless native bee, Trigona Cassiae. 39 The author signals a connection between himself and David Unaipon, 40 which is unlikely although possible considering David Unaipon's background in science. The Ka-Vai’s invitation to Unaipon, an ‘educated’ Aboriginal man to ‘live for an Hour in the Happy Days of the Alcheringa of your Race’ implies that Unaipon has probably never lived as a traditional Aboriginal. Rayment, in the persona of Ka-Vai, believes that Unaipon's ‘brown People’ have already ‘died out’ because the ‘Euro and Emu make way for the sheep; the Whirlwinds of the White Man's car scatter the Seed of the Munyeroo; your sacred Churinga rest in his Museums’. 41 The traditional Aboriginal people have indeed become artefacts; their culture confined to a museum and their lands overrun by

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37 L. Young, *The Melody Lingers On: Biography of Tarlton Rayment* (Melbourne, FRZS, 1967), p. 357. S. Lees and P. Macintyre, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Children's Literature* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press), p. 357. Rayment was also a member of The Melbourne Savage Club, which was established in 1894 as a gentlemen's club, and still exists today. Raymont was a member from 1934 to 1947.

38 Raymont has appropriated the idea of Aboriginal message sticks for his white child readers. The primary communicative function of the message stick was that of identifying its carrier as a genuine messenger. The author wants to identify himself as a genuine messenger who is telling a story based on truth and providing accurate information.

39 Ka-Vai is a pen name used by Rayment. His other pen names include Ralph Darling, Johan Moorst and Moroka.

40 David Unaipon (1873-1967) was born at the Raukkan (Point McLeay mission in South Australia, a descendant of the Ngarrindjeri, people of the Riverine region in the Coorong, around the mouth of the Murray River and was essentially self educated. He subsequently wrote two books which were the first published creative writings in English by an Aboriginal author. In 1909 he patented an improved type of handpiece for mechanical sheep shears. Unaipon travelled and lectured widely. This gave rise to the presumption that he was no longer in touch with his Ngarrindjeri roots, which Rayment obviously believed. Diane Bell, however, disputes this in *Ngarrindjeri Wurrwarrin: A world that is, was, and will be* (1998).

41 The 'churinga' is the equivalent of the bull-roarer or whirler and has special significance among Spencer's 'Arunta tribe'. Raymont is also familiar with Spencer's Alcheringsa - which becomes the focus of the Jindyworobak movement and will be examined later in this chapter.
sheep and cars - signs of progress and civilisation. But the book will take the audience back to the ‘Happy Days’ of an Aboriginal past, because ‘in their pure native state’, an Aborigine has no future. The superior ‘White Man’ will soon be telling his ‘Great Deeds’ to the young men and showing his ‘Cherished Relics’. They are the victorious heroes - they have the food, the numbers, the artefacts and the stories, while the Aboriginal is the conquered and dispossessed who failed to cultivate the land and must therefore be removed from it. Aboriginal people were too unsophisticated and weak to survive the arrival of the more robust Europeans. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Rayment had any contact with the Jindyworobak Movement, discussed later in this chapter, his language and motifs anticipate Jindyworobak verse. Although more racist than Jindyworobak rhetoric (which was focussed on appropriating Aboriginal imagery for white nationalist purposes) it is remarkably similar. Rayment is not, however, a nationalist in the anti-British Jindyworobak manner.

Born and raised in England, Rayment glorifies British pioneering progress in the Antipodes, celebrating the heroic efforts of explorers and pastoralists as they sought to tame the environment. He confidently assumes that colonisation was constant and inevitable, and that indigenous people had been easily and irrevocably crushed. Rayment affirms the respectability of Australia's past as a legitimate and honourable colony of Britain, failing to mention the savagery of European practices and policies.

*In reparation for the taking of their lands we owe the aborigines at least an earnest effort in understanding of their habits and traditions. Mr Rayment provides in Gor-ree a boy hero around whom is clustered a mass of legends, myths, forest lore, romance, fighting and hunting.*
... The approach of Victoria's centenary makes the tales topical and increases their acceptability.  

To further establish cultural authenticity, Rayment anglicises Aboriginal sounding names which he says are Aboriginal words. These are then broken into syllables, making the pronunciation easier for the 'clever white children'. The result not only reinforces the undervaluing of the complexity of Aboriginal languages, but also trivialises their original context and meaning. Words, such as Doo-loo-boorah and Bra-yak-alung, sound artificial. Rayment justifies his position at the end of the second message stick to 'all White Children', by stating that 'the Aboriginal words in the text are from many tribes', although none is acknowledged, and that 'all warriors are honoured in one cenotaph'. Rayment aligns Aboriginal men with a memorial to dead Australian soldiers, and although they might well have been heroes, Aboriginal warriors too have 'passed on', their many languages combined and their origins ignored. Rayment conflates and replaces their languages by what he deems to be a more 'authentic' version.

Anticipating an overseas audience, Rayment also attempts to inform and instruct by using scientific terms and footnoted explanations of flora, such as the 'mulga tree'. The supposedly factual style of writing in *The Prince of the Totem* reflects an anthropological approach, seemingly based on the accounts of well-known anthropologists at the time.  

Rayment was a member of the Anthropological Society of Victoria which meant that he was probably very aware of trends in Australian anthropology. At no stage in the book, however, does Rayment acknowledge his sources, nor is there any evidence to suggest that he ever saw traditional Aboriginal life, first hand.

The tone of the second message stick changes with its stated recipients. The first, to David Unaipon, is imperialistic in both language and content, celebrating the

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47 *The Teachers Journal of Victoria*, 20th December, 1933. *The Prince of the Totem* was also seen as a companion volume to the *Little Black Princess*. Rayment sent a copy of his book to Jeannie Gunn in 1934.

48 For example, Baldwin Spencer, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and W.E.H. Stanner.

49 It is Rayment's son, a medical doctor, who spends two years, much later, in Arnhem Land.
achievements of the white colonisers over a dispossessed and supposedly extinct indigenous population. Rayment's perception is that Unaipon, as part of a 'civilised' society, will applaud such progress and wish to look back on the past with nostalgia, but not regret. The second message stick, to white child readers, is much more revealing than the first. The Aboriginal people were a simple child-like race who morphologically and culturally still belonged in the 'Age of Stone'. Although somewhere in the 'dim past' they had failed to evolve, Aboriginal people are probably 'excellent portraits of our own ancestors', relics of a type of mankind once scattered all over the world. Rayment clearly rates his own society as the highest on the evolutionary scale of human development and Aboriginal society as one of the lowest, believing that Aborigines 'in their pure native state' have 'passed away' and been replaced by 'higher forms'. "Rayment constructs racial inferiority as a fixed essence that cannot change. He allows no possibility for a culture of resistance and survival, offering instead a useful structure for legitimising racist ideologies and frontier violence. In this way he effectively denies the historical experience of many Aboriginal people. "He moves beyond the threatening landscape of the colonial writers, which was inhabited by 'savages' and convicts, asking his reader to value the childishness of the Aboriginal, not despise it. His narrative illustrates how, as the frontier slowly disappeared, so the 'dispossessed and controlled remnants of past battles were elevated within anthropology's internal hierarchy, to make way for a new occupant of the lowest rung'.""

The opening paragraph of the second message stick emphasises that the Aborigines of Australia are not black, but coppery brown, because, Rayment concludes, 'the sun has made them so'. The implication seems to be, that if their ancestors hadn't spent

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45 According to J.W. Barrow and others, the idea that surviving 'primitive' peoples represented earlier stages in the development of modern society had its beginnings in the Enlightenment.


so much time in the sun then perhaps they, too, would have white skin, as black skinned people are the true ‘savages’. Rayment correlates skin fairness with racial ancestry and social and intellectual superiority. The ‘full-blood’, black skinned Aboriginal would occupy the bottom of the hierarchy, the fair skinned European the top. Gor-ree and his ‘brown’ people seem to lie somewhere between. 48 The audience is encouraged to ‘visit little Gor-ree and his brown brothers and sisters’, as the author is sure they will find in them ‘many good qualities to admire’, because they are not ‘a low savage-natured people’, but happy and contented. They don't steal, are exceedingly moral and truthful, but ‘of course’ they are also ‘simple and primitive’. Rayment firmly locates Aboriginality in relation to an imagined primordial past, creating a novel based on a form of romantic nostalgia: images of gentle surrender to a persistent natural force inscribes Darwin’s notion of ‘survival of the fittest’. The bloody battle for possession was confined to the Aboriginals themselves - between the ‘wild’ blacks and the more ‘noble’ tribes.

In the 1930s, anthropologists came to re-evaluate Aboriginal cultures and attempted to reconstruct them, changing their methodology to include information about culture and intelligence. They retained, however, the evolutionary emphases on archaic elements and ‘otherness’, ignoring the majority of the Aboriginal population in settled Australia in pursuit of the ‘uncontaminated’ cultures in more remote locations. For it was there that "real" Aborigines would be found and a concept of white Australian selfhood could be predicated on ‘essentialist notions of authenticity and natural behaviour’ and the characteristics of Aboriginal culture could be sanctified. 49 Trained patrol officers were ‘pacifying’ the frontiers in the north, enabling anthropologists to observe and study living societies. The garnering of new, more abstract ‘cultural’ data was now hailed as ‘a modern, scientific process enabling suitably trained experts to advise an ever more interventionist state’. 50

48 In Rayment's original manuscript for The Prince of the Totem, he refers to the ‘brown people’ only in the preface. For the remainder of the novel, he refers to Aboriginal people as ‘blacks’, ‘strange black savages’ and ‘black-fellers’. It is his editor who has gone through and crossed out the original words, changing them to ‘brown’.
49 D. Hollinsworth, 'Discourses on Aboriginality and the politics of identity in urban Australia', Oceania, 63, 2 (1992), pp. 138-139.
50 J. Kociumbas, Maps, Dreams, History (Sydney, University of Sydney, 1998), p.18.
Although claiming to do otherwise, Rayment constructs his narrative around the hierarchical white-colonizer/black-colonized binary opposition, that underpins colonial power structures. At the beginning of post-contact Australian history, there is the perception of a ‘golden age’ and support for the heroic Aborigine - the 'Noble Savage' in Fleming's *The Hunted Piccaninnies*. This disappears from fictional constructions of contemporary life, as the Aboriginal in contemporary society is seen to be degraded. Rayment’s text, informed by the discourses of racial purity and evolution, constructs Gor-ree and his people as radically ‘other’, unable to survive contact with the more highly evolved and superior Europeans because they represent the most primitive form of humanity. Rayment has rendered other possibilities of survival, for example, as invisible. Even David Unaipon is not regarded as a ‘real’ Aborigine.

The narrative structure is episodic, reflecting its origins as a radio broadcast, and as such, can be divided into three broad sections. The first is Gor-ree's life with his ‘birth’ family when a very young infant. The hero status of Gor-ree is established early when he single handedly rescues his friend Daan, by clutching the tail of a large black snake and flinging it out of the water where Daan is swimming. Gor-ree, small though he is, faces the snake fearlessly. In the accompanying illustration, drawn by the author, Gor-ree is depicted as being a toddler of about two or three years of age, making his heroic feat even more incredible and setting him further apart from his peers.

The second section concentrates on his childhood with his mother's ‘tribe’. Gor-ree is the only survivor of a ferocious attack by the savage Achilpa Wild-cat men. He decides to find his mother's people who live a great distance away. Gor-ree, the toddler, runs fast, needs little rest and is much hardier than other boys. He arrives at his destination, without getting lost, and is accepted into his mother's tribe as a cousin. Here he learns to be a man.

The third is his final initiation into manhood, through a simplified quest journey. The call to adventure comes when Gor-ree alone feels the meaning of the songs of Ku-ang.
They were the tales of the famous men of the tribe, who had lived long ago, and when she sang, he felt that someone inside his breast was urging him to be a great man. To grow up strong, so that he could overcome enemies; to eat only a little, so that hunger, if it should come, would not make him sick; to speak the truth, so that all could understand; to be kind of heart so that the weak ones of the tribe would not suffer when food was scarce.

Just as Fleming incorporates Biblical symbolism into his narrative, so too does Rayment. It rains for forty days and forty nights when Gor-ree, in a newly made canoe, is swept ‘on the crest of a flood’ and pursued by ‘a horde of savage men’. A spear passes through the calf of his leg. He removes its blade by cutting his flesh deeply with a sharp, stone knife. Gor-ree eventually drifts back to his people on the river and discovers that the flood which saved his life took the lives of others. Again Gor-ree has proved that he can survive in a harsh landscape as well as withstand intense physical pain. His position as hero is consolidated. The flood is followed by drought, reinforcing the image of indigenous Australians before European settlement as a ‘miserable, dehydrated, inhuman life; primitive random wanderers, on the verge of starvation, in an impossibly harsh environment, and inevitably dying out’. The great journey of Gor-ree involves the quest for water to save his people from death and starvation. He answers the call to adventure which issues from the songs of Ku-ang. Although ‘very young’, this is to be his greatest journey alone, the final stage of his initiation to manhood. Gor-ree thus becomes the definitive Aboriginal male, representing all Aboriginal people.

Day after day without finding water, Gor-ree groans in anguish because he has failed his people when they had trusted him with their lives. Just when it seems that he can

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11 Rayment, _op cit_, pp.70-71.
12 J. Marcus (ed.), _Picturing the 'Primitif': Images of Race in Daily Life_ (Canada Bay, Lhr Press, 2000), p.36.
endure no more, a black swan, his brother, comes to rest beside him. The swan carries Gor-ree back to the tribal land of their father where he himself was born and his people were murdered - the promised land, a land of plenty. Gor-ree returns to his tribe and leads them, like Abraham, to their new country. Just as Fleming allows Dick to refer specifically to his Christian God, Rayment calls the arrival of the Black Swan a miracle, further emphasising the Christian context of Gor-ree’s journey and ignoring the obvious symbols of Aboriginal spirituality and belief. Gor-ree is fully initiated after his courageous and successful journey, for it was ‘a horrible trial; no food, no water, and no shelter for many, many days from the fierce rays of Yhi, the sun’. Like Coolamon before him, however, Gor-ree cannot become a ‘true’ hero on his own. Outside help is once again needed for the quest to be fulfilled. Although Coolamon, too, leaves his isolated paradise, unlike Gor-ree, he moves on. Rayment leaves Gor-ree in ‘the Promised Land’, locked into a primeval past, eternally ‘primitive’.

Rayment, like many other authors, includes ‘traditional Dreaming’ stories in his narrative. He disqualifies them as history, however, categorizing them as myths, legends and fairy tales for children, markers of the primitive and child-like, never considering them as Aboriginal encodings of the past. The text is driven by contradiction, exemplified when Rayment dismisses the tale of the Laughing Boy Gor-ree, as a ‘native bed-time story’, when he has actually constructed it as the history of Gor-ree's family. Rayment presents these stories as a legitimate part of ‘Aboriginal lore’. At no stage does he mention their adaptation nor does he acknowledge his source. Throughout the book, Rayment adopts a patronising tone, but continually tries to convince his readers that Aboriginal people who live a traditional life are ‘just like us’, while his examples clearly emphasise the differences rather than the similarities.

Although his survival skills are exemplary, Gor-ree's physical masculinity, unlike

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53 One of these stories, the story of Piggiebillah which is also included in Aranda Boy, has been adapted from Kate Langloh Parker's Australian Legendary Tales (1896). There are also a number of ‘Aboriginal’ words used by Raymont, which also appear in Langloh Parker's glossaries. For example, birrahlee (baby), Daen (a blackfellow), gilah (galah), and Yhi (the sun). The story of 'Tirtelak' is the familiar 'Tiddalik' which still appears in children's publications. Although I have searched widely, I am unable to trace the remaining four 'Dreamtime' stories and suspect that they are the author's original work.
Coolamon’s before him, is flawed. His ‘ape ancestry’ is all too obvious, with his large upper lip implying large teeth, which in evolutionary theory would indicate a characteristic of biological inferiority. Gor-ree doesn't quite measure up as the ideal image of the male hero in Australian children's fiction. Gor-ree is:

... tall and well-formed, with the big, soft, dark brown, limpid eyes possessed by all Australian Aborigines. True, his great deep upper lip was far too large to please other people’s sense of beauty, but he was as supple as a snake, tough as red-gum wood, and no long journey had ever found him weak. Each muscle was trained to endure hardship, and where animals could not survive, Gor-ree still managed to exist."

Like Gunn and Poignant, Rayment clearly delineates gender differences between Aboriginal men and women: the men are posited as active through hunting, fishing, tool preparation and combat; the women are passively engaged in domestic activities, usually preparing bush foods and caring, predominantly, for female children. Aboriginal girls merely play, while Gor-ree and his male friends engage in mock fights and make weapons. Domestic representations of Aboriginal women in The Prince of the Totem confirm European preconceptions of Aboriginal gender roles that are reinforced later in the work of Davison. This stereotype idealises women as passive child-rearers, subordinate to men, peripheral participants in the search for food and excluded from the decision making. Rayment reflects these conservative conventions and continues to promote constructions of Aboriginal male dominance."

Rayment also uses the archaic form of speech ‘thy’, to show superiority on the part of the speaker or contempt or scorn for the person addressed. Rayment only allows

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54 Rayment, op.cit. p.118.
55 Marcus, op.cit. p.199.
the adult males to use the expression, revealing his unconscious acceptance of masculine superiority, even though Aboriginal men would never have spoken this way. By using such an inappropriate and archaic form of speech, Rayment also reinforces a misguided version of the past and an image of the Aboriginal race as 'dying out'. The women, children and occasionally, the men, also speak in an immature form of English, further emphasising their childlike nature. This is used interchangeably with the more formal language structure. The author seems unable to remain consistent.

"Wah!" said Ku-ran-dur in surprise, "What name your mother?"

"Tul-kara, the quail," answered the boy, "and I am Gor-ree!"

"Wai! Wai! I am thy brother, Gor-ree, for Tul-kara was my sister." Kur-an-dur, of course, meant tribal brother and sister. 66

Rayment also trivialises Aboriginal rituals and ceremonies, ridiculing what he terms 'sacred'. The 'churinga', the equivalent of the bullroarer or whirler, which has special significance among Spencer's 'Arunta tribe', becomes the 'Churinga of the Water-babies', while corroborees become 'little plays'. Rayment acknowledges that the 'brown men' don't call them plays, because for them they were a serious ritual and part of their spiritual beliefs but still presents them as trivial, amusing and entertaining, likening them to the performances of children. He encourages his readers to laugh with him at the childish behaviour of the Aboriginal. His tone is patronising in the extreme.

Gor-ree's quest journey is complete when he avenges the death of his family and

66 Rayment, op.cit. p.32.
kills the Wild-cat leader Wini-thon-garu. He drives the Wild-cat men out of his tribal land, but shows compassion when he spares the women and children. Gor-ree returns to claim the traditional reward of the ancient hero for the successful completion of his quest. The narrative ends with Gor-ree and his young childhood friend, Ku-ang, setting up house in a new guyah which Gor-ree has built. The author announces that at last the hero ‘was really home’.

Of the three books discussed in this chapter, *The Prince of the Totem* is by far the weakest in terms of literary merit. The narrative itself is disjointed, testimony to an unsuccessful adaptation from radio broadcast to print. The content reflects the attitude of an entomologist who is firmly convinced that Darwin's theories of evolution are absolute, and that their application to Aboriginal Australians is not only appropriate but also indisputable. Rayment not only patronises his Aboriginal characters, but the voice of the narrator is also condescending to the child audience, both as listeners and as readers. *The Prince of the Totem* lacks the cohesion of both Rex Ingamells' *Aranda Boy*, which will be discussed later in this chapter, and *The Hunted Piccaninnies*. The author has severely and inappropriately edited Gor-ree's heroic journey, as the original manuscript also leaves gaping holes in the story. The hero journey of Gor-ree doesn't use the sequential quest motif employed by Fleming. Instead, Rayment, like Ingamells, selects specific aspects and characteristics of the mythic child-hero and manipulates them to convey a series of messages which perpetuate the prevailing neo-colonial racial ideology of early 20th century Australian society.

*The Prince of the Totem* is circumscribed within a pre-colonial context to fit Aboriginality into the ‘noble savage’ and ‘survival of the fittest’ evolutionary categories. Although Rayment had no formal training in natural science, he was regarded as an ‘expert’ and this seems to have qualified him as an authority on Aboriginal people, although he had no first-hand experience of their way of life nor acknowledged any sources for his information. Throughout the narrative, Rayment continually mixes truth, half-truth and untruth, presenting them as fact. He

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57 Rayment spoke at the 38th Battalion AIF reunion in 1935. His talk was entitled, ‘Who said evolution was absurd?’
58 *The Prince of the Totem* still managed, however, to sell seventy thousand copies in three editions.
encourages his readers to believe the unlikely and improbable and firmly reinforces Aboriginal difference:

Nobody seemed a tiny bit surprised that the information came miraculously, as it were, out of the very sky. ... As a matter of truth, the news which had passed so rapidly and accurately, over a wide stretch of country, was actually thoughts sent over the air by Deenyi. Some brown men most certainly possess this extraordinary power of sending their thoughts on in advance ... 39

The Prince of the Totem was praised by most of the newspaper reviews of the time as breaking 'new ground', because it is 'a story of aboriginal life and tribal history', written by an author who 'has the knowledge' on the subject. 40 It was regarded as factual, because the rhetoric of scientific discourse was equated with and accepted as signifying truth. Tarlton Rayment, who was a respected entomologist, must therefore also be an expert on the Aboriginal people about whom he writes. Along with his bees, wasps and ants, they too are categorised as objects of scientific investigation.

Aranda Boy: An Aboriginal Story 41, written by Rex Ingamells and published in 1952, also explores the growth of an Aboriginal boy from boyhood to manhood. Gurra, however, is identified as belonging to the Northern Aranda 'tribe', in the desert country of Central Australia. Like Rayment, Ingamells also sets his story in

39 Rayment, op.cit. p.17.
40 The Dominion, 26th January 1934, n.p.
41 The name Aranda is an incorrect earlier spelling of Arrernte, and is no longer used, unless a publication has consulted an earlier source. The Arrernte have been described as being divided into five or so groups which share a rich heritage of song, ceremony and story. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen refer to this group as Arunta, while Aranda is the spelling adopted by both Norman B. Tindale and T.G.H. Strehlow. For consistency and clarity, Aranda will be used in the discussion for this chapter.
the past, as Gurra is born in 1872. This date is significant. According to T.G.H. Strehlow, one of Ingamells acknowledged sources, any Aboriginal person born before 1875 would still have been initiated fully into the old Aranda religious traditions.

Ingamells was born in 1913 at Orroroo, a small outback town in South Australia, on the edge of the salt-bush plain and one of the far limits of Aranda country in South Australia. He studied history at the University of Adelaide and became a high-school teacher, a tutor for the Workers’ Educational Association, a freelance journalist, and a representative of a Melbourne publishing firm. In 1938 Ingamells founded the Jindyworobak club in Adelaide, which subsequently became the Jindyworobak Movement. In 1938 Ingamells published Conditional Culture, a prose manifesto which explained the aims and methods of the movement. The Jindyworobak Movement arose partly in opposition to contemporary colonialist attitudes and cultural inferiority, and partly as a counter to the international influences that had made steady inroads into Australia’s isolation throughout the 1920s. The Jindyworobaks were regarded by some, including H.M. Green, as the most extreme expression of the revival of Australian nationalism in the 1930s.

The Jindyworobaks stand for a precise cultural movement. While we realize that culture springs from varied sources, we insist that a nation’s culture depends for significance on distinctive qualities, peculiar to that nation alone. It is to stress such qualities in Australia that the Jindyworobaks have sprung into being.  

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62 Gurra, the Northern Aranda word for bandicoot, is part of the Dreaming of the gurra men of Ilbalinga through their ancestor Karora. Gurra is also the name of a northern Aranda informant and head of the Ilbalintja who appears in Strehlow’s 1947 publication, Aranda Traditions. Ingamells, in Aranda Bay, has Gurra’s people eating bandicoots. This would never have happened, as the bandicoot was their totemic ancestor.

63 Editorial in Venture Jindyworobak Quarterly Pamphlet, No, 1, April, 1939.
Ingamells applied the term ‘Jindyworobak’ to individuals who were endeavouring to free Australian art from alien influences and bring it into proper contact with ‘real’ Australian material. Following the lead set by P.R. Stephensen’s *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936) he insisted that the national culture depended on a clear recognition of ‘environmental values’ coupled with an understanding of Australian history and traditions – primeval, colonial and modern. Australian writers were urged to express their distinctive environment, not in conventional terms suited to other countries but through language, imagery and idiom which had its own primal essence. The Jindyworobaks wanted to develop a distinctive Australian poetry which described the unique Australian landscape, without paying deference to England and its literary works. *\(^4\) He advocated liberation from

\[Psuedo - Europeanism which clogged the minds of most Australians, preventing a free appreciation of nature ... the massive gum trees along the banks of the Murray, the gums and the mallee and the tea-tree that straggle about this vast continent; the empty spaces of our deserts; and the atonal music of the magpie and the good-natured mocking of the kookaburra - these are the things that must remain.\]^5

Ingamells believed that ‘the laws, the customs, and the art of the Australian Aboriginals went to make a culture which was closely bound in every way with their environment’. He believed that the Jindyworobak movement could best develop by assimilating and identifying with the spirit of Aboriginal culture. Modern Australian culture could learn the necessary techniques from Aboriginal art and song and

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^4 Rex Ingamells selected the word from the glossary at the back of James Devaney’s *The Vanished Tribes* published in 1929. Devaney had taken a range of ‘Aboriginal words and names used by various tribes’, none of whom are acknowledged. Ingamells changed Devaney’s spelling from Jindyworabak to Jindyworobak. The word supposedly means ‘to annex; to join’.


achieve a ‘pristine outlook on life’ from Aboriginal legend, ‘sublimated through our thought’. The linking of Jindyworobak philosophy with Aboriginal culture proved controversial and was often ridiculed.  

Ingamells wanted to express something of the ‘spirit of place’ which he believed defied expression in English words because of their contaminating European influences and associations. He celebrated particular Aboriginal words because they seemed to have in them much of the striking quality of his perception of an Australian primevalism.  

Ingamells enthusiastically incorporated and appropriated elements of Aboriginal culture which reflected the relationship Aboriginal people had to the natural environment, claiming that the time lag in the Anglo-Australian adaptation to the landscape was the chief problem of Australian verse.

Anthropologist Balwin Spencer’s book, *The Arunta* (1927) was the inspiration for *Aranda Boy*, crystallising for Ingamells a number of ideas and attitudes.  

Above all it presented him with the concept of the Aboriginal Dreamtime or ‘Alchera’ or ‘Alcheringa’, the time of creation itself when the ‘mythical’ ancestors lived and created the foundation of all Aboriginal lore. Ingamells felt that the order and spiritual wholeness implanted in Aboriginal life through the concept of Alcheringa could be taken as a symbol or image which might provide the means of access to a larger Australian ‘Dreamtime’. Opposition movements, such as ‘The Angry Penguins’, sprang up in response to the Jindyworobaks’ insularity and their recourse to Aboriginality. Although it was a force in Australian poetry from about 1938 to 1945, the Jindyworobak movement was still referred to in largely disparaging and dismissive terms.  

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67 Poet A.D. Hope described the Jindyworobaks as the ‘Boy Scout School of Poetry’, because they had the same boyish enthusiasm for playing at being primitive.


69 The fieldwork and data analysis of Baldwin Spencer was filtered through the preconceptions and values systems of both Darwin's evolutionary theories and Empire. He believed that the Aboriginal people were surviving fossil remnants of a remote, but pristine past. They were a relic of ‘the early childhood of mankind left stranded’. That Ingamells absorbed such implicit racial superiority is exemplified in *Aranda Boy*.

70 Alcheringa is a term used by Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen in their publication, which they claim is the name the ‘natives’ give to explain the far distant past with which the earliest traditions of the Aranda (Arunta) deal. The term, however, doesn't appear to have been widely acknowledged or used, except in literary circles. Its origin is therefore questionable. More recently, however, it has undergone a more favourable re-evaluation. Brian Elliot (1979) sees evidence of a Jindyworobak continuation in the work of Xavier Herbert, Les Murray and Peter Porter.
Although regarded as Jindyworobak prose, 'Aranda Boy' represents, in its construction, a contradiction both of the Aboriginal elements of the Jindyworobak ideal on one hand, and Ingamell's attempt to move the Jindyworobak philosophy forward on the other. The Aboriginal element in the Jindyworobak movement did not involve a commitment to write Aboriginal history or to describe Aboriginal culture. Although the Jindyworobaks drew on the work of archaeologists and anthropologists, their ethnological information was often incorrect perhaps because their use of the material was always directed to literary ends. In 'Aranda Boy', Ingamells partly goes against this focus and intentionally explores Aboriginal culture for its own sake by attempting to present Aboriginal family life from an Aboriginal point of view. At the same time, however, Ingamells uses the metaphor of the life cycle of a cicada to create a masculine hero who, as he journeys through childhood to manhood, is still sensitive to the natural beauty around him. This is quintessential Jindyworobak, providing an appropriate example of 'environmental values' in action, based on a 'pantheistic interpretation of the Australian landscape'.

In 1951 Ingamells was appointed a judge of the Commonwealth Jubilee literary competition and lectured in Australian literature at the Melbourne Technical College. Although his own poetic talent was inadequate for the task of carrying the Jindyworobaks to the eminence he desired for them, he was considered by some to be a competent craftsman with a capacity for 'graceful imagery and picturesque description'. To others, however, his poetic style was 'slap-dash and journalistic', while his ideas were neither 'new nor profound'. By the mid-1950s the movement had lost most of its impetus and the death of Ingamells in a car accident in 1955, saw it disappear almost entirely.

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71 See Brian Elliot (ed.), The Jindyworobaks (St. Lucia, University of Queensland, 1979).
72 'The Jindyworobaks, whose whole campaign has rested upon the uniqueness of the Australian continent among the lands of the world, believe that this uniqueness is properly explained only by an understanding of Australia's primeval story, as revealed by scientists'. R. Ingamells, 'Conditional Culture', in J. Barnes (ed.), The Writer in Australia 1856-1964 (Melbourne, 1969), p.249.
73 Elliot, op. cit. p.xxi.
74 Elliot, op. cit p. 240.
76 Ingamells's publications of poetry include Gumtops (1935), Sun-Freedom (1938) and The Great South Land (1945), which won the Grace Leven Prize for poetry. As well as being the general editor of the Jindyworobak Anthologies published annually (1938-53), edited both a poetry anthology for
Although some commentators claim that they didn't achieve any major success in significantly altering the literary climate of the time, the Jindyworobaks still managed to create 'more controversy than any other body of writers in Australian literature'. The movement was symptomatic of a deeply felt need to perceive and express a sense of national identity. It was a step towards a more 'Australian' focus in poetry and met with some encouragement and support. In that it attempted to force Australia's literary development into narrow nationalistic channels it failed, both because it was too idiosyncratic and backward looking and because it was parochial and isolationist. In the final outcome it was simply swept aside by the inevitable movement of Australia after the Second World War into the wider international arena, where the simplicity, perhaps naivety, of the Jindyworobak dream appeared to have no real relevance. Australia would never again be so isolated, so provincial, so 'self-limited and self-occupied'. The Jindyworobak movement might well have been motivated by misguided idealism but the concern of its advocates for the 'spiritual welfare of the nation' was genuine. Aranda Boy was published at the time that the Jindyworobak movement disintegrated.

In many ways Aranda Boy represents a narrative version of Ingamells' 'Aboriginal' poetry. Elements of his themes, poetic style and language permeate his often lyrical text. His dawn descriptions around the camp of Gurra reflect the images created in 'Evening in the Macdonnells', as does the setting. The screech of birds is recreated from 'Garchooka the Cockatoo' and 'Garrakeen' (the parakeet), while the theme of

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schools, *New Song in an Old Land: Australian Verse* (1943) and *Garchooka, A Magazine for Australian Boys* published by Jindyworobak Publications. This was an attempt to broaden the Jindyworobak ideal to the children's market. The magazine, however, only lasted for one issue, April, 1945.

77 Green, *op.cit.*, p.1069

disappearing traditional Aboriginal life introduced in poems such as ‘Long Ago’, ‘Forgotten People’ and ‘From a Dying People’, is extended and reinforced. They have indeed become a ‘forgotten people’ and their passing has meant the destruction of ‘an age old culture’ whereby in the ‘flowering of their arts of poetry, drama and painting ... intense qualities of tender loveliness, vivid beauty, stirring and noble daring, moving pathos and stark tragedy’ can be found.  

Unlike his poetry, however, Ingamells’ narrative prose doesn’t attract criticism for ‘Aboriginalizing’ his language and escapes ridicule for the ‘exoticism’ of his ‘foreign verbiage’. In the Aboriginal context of Aranda Boy, Ingamells’ preoccupation with Aboriginal words and parochial ‘poetic diction’ appears natural and appropriate. There can be no misconception here, as his emphasis is clearly on Aboriginal culture. Captivated as he is by Aboriginal words, like Rayment, he never attempts to relate them to the original languages and dialects. Ingamells never loses touch with the European lyrical traditions he was seeking to transform by appropriating an Aboriginal perspective.

Aranda Boy is Ingamells’ answer to the critics of the Jindyworobak movement. He doesn't compromise his position as a poet, but reinvents himself first as an adult novelist, and then as a children’s writer. Perhaps author James Devaney influenced him to write for children, or perhaps Ingamells felt comfortable writing for the child audience he had once taught, using it as a means to rekindle the Jindyworobak philosophy in the children’s market. Ironically, Aranda Boy is regarded as noteworthy in the history of Australian children’s fiction because of its Aboriginal content. The very philosophy for which the Jindyworobaks’ adult poetry was criticised is uncontroversial and even praised in the context of writing for children. The Aboriginal perspective Ingamells developed via his absorption of the vicarious experience of others, namely Strehlow, is considered to be inadequate and riddled

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79 Ingamells (Conditional Culture), op.cit. p.249.
80 Reminiscient of Devaney, there is a glossary of ‘Aboriginal’ words at the end of Aranda Boy. Ingamells, however, includes ‘spiny anteater’, honey ant, ‘gin’ and ‘lubra’, all of which are English, the latter two being derogatory terms for Aboriginal women. There are no Arrernte words in the glossary.
81 His adult novel, Of Us Now Living: A Novel of Australia, was also published in 1952.
with flaws in poetry for adults but is regarded as commendable in a children's narrative in post-war Australia. 82

Through the life journey of Gurra, Ingamells expresses the Jindyworobak desire to 'annex and join', rather than to invade and conquer. He seeks to promote recognition of a total Australian identity where a vast span of history from pre-contact Aboriginal times, through the era of colonial pioneering to the modern-contemporary period, is represented. Traditional Aboriginal life, the arrival of the overland telegraph line in Alice Springs, the coming of the settlers and the subsequent assimilation of black into white all form component parts of Ingamells' dreamtime. *Aranda Boy* captures his wonder at the enviable lives of Aboriginal children who run free in a world of sunshine and kindness. A pastoral simplification, *Aranda Boy* idealises the tribal life of the Aborigine presenting it as ordered by democratic custom and mutual consent, and spiritually controlled by the mythological authority of the Dreamtime. This seemed to Ingamells to constitute a perfect human community, which nothing in the inherited white civilization could equal. Unlike some Jindyworobak poetry, *Aranda Boy* is not haunted by the phantoms of deprivation and death. Although Ingamells creates an 'Aboriginal pastoral novel' depicting a people who identify totally with the environment, Gurra and his 'Family Group' escape being figures in an overly nostalgic lament for a lost, but historically golden time. 83 Instead, the past is replaced by a 'promising' Aboriginal future, written for Aboriginal people by a dominant Anglo-Australian authorship. Aboriginal culture can continue under the guardianship and 'protection' of benevolent white property owners, typified by the character of Don Byrne. Although Ingamells has empathy with the Aborigines of whom he writes, ultimately, his commitment is not to the Aboriginal people, but to his Anglo-Australian child readership.

For Ingamells, the Aboriginal Dreaming becomes the new 'White Australian Dreamtime' into which the young can enter as the vision of the 'old world' of Europe disappears. This vision of the new becomes compelling, enabling Ingamells

82 A Rex Ingamells poem, *Platypus and Kookaburra*, illustrated as children's picture book by Percy Trezise and Mary Haginikitas, was published in 1987 by Collins.
to assimilate the Aboriginal as part of the quality of Australian uniqueness, giving rise to a distinctive Australian culture based largely on the Jindyworobak 'spirit of place'. Gurra's old grandfather is known to have once been a splendid hunter and warrior, but now he is merely 'full of memories'. Although the older men of the Aranda are respected as the most important people in the group, Ingamells emphasises that their links are with the past and the unknown traditional secret life, not the future. The future belongs to the young and heroic Gurra and his wife Rira, in the 'new world' of white Australia.

Ingamells creates a joyful camp life, full of movement and activity, where the narrative text, lyrical at times, evokes clear images of the surrounding countryside. Traditional Aranda childhood practices are described. The boys stay with the women until initiation. For Ingamells, the mystical sensations of site-magic are the key to his imaginative expression. His inspirations, for the most part, are visual. The image of the cicada is a recurring theme, while the screech of the birds and their occasional flashes of colour, are an essential part of the scarlet, gold and green light of morning. All cohere in a brilliant Anglo-Aboriginal impressionism. He writes most evocatively about what he can touch or see. The rocks and trees or the effects of light, the open landscape and the people who 'animate' it. Light inspires Ingamells and he is vividly responsive to the moods of dawn or dusk or the splash of light on a cliff face, creating descriptions, both observed and imagined, of the relationship between the physical landscape and a primeval, atmospheric spirit of place. "Ingamells the poet comes to the fore in Aranda Boy.

_A Family Group was camped on the dry white sands of Lilliri Creek under the outstretched arms of great white ghost gums. The ranges stood huge, scrubby masses of ancient rock, about the red earth flat through which the creek-bed wound. In the dawn, mists rose upward in a slow swirl. As they rose they_

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12 Elliot, _op.cit_, pp.xxx-xxxii.
were as white as the creek stands, as white as the trunks of the ghost gums, until, writhing higher than the trees, they caught the glitter from the light-capped summits of the hills; and then they fumed with the scarlet and gold and green of the changing sky. 

Gurra is a songmaker performing ‘traditional’ songs from the Aranda men's song cycle. The Aranda songs are ceremonial and ritual epics, which do not conform to an English construction of narrative. They are sacred texts and often secret, never ascribed to any individual author, but handed down through generations. The young men of the Northern Aranda learn a special collection of chants on their way to initiation, although Ingamells doesn't mention this in Aranda Boy. Ingamells models his songs on those that Strehlow collected, where sets of couplets are regarded as verse. These are often sung as a chant and can be asymmetric in form, although Ingamells does not adopt this style.

(Ingamells)

The tall ghost gums of Lilliri Creek
stand dreamily quiet in the still noon.

Their clouds of green leaves make great shadows
on the white sands and their own white branches.

It is very pleasant to shelter from the hot sun
under the strong branches of the ghost gums.

All is still and quiet. Even the black crows

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55 Ingamells (Aranda Boy), op.cit. pp.15-16.
56 Strehlow's Songs of Central Australia is regarded by Les Murray as a book of ‘scrupulous scientific accuracy which still manages, often, to flower into poetry of a high order’. Not surprising then that it was used by Ingamells as his primary source of literary experience. It is now a rare book. Ingamells was acquainted with Strehlow as he appears in the acknowledgements in Aranda Boy.
are quiet, and the heat-haze shimmers noiselessly. ...

(Strehlow)

High in the heavens shines the afternoon sun:
His heart is filled with yearning to return home.

My own home, my dear home,
O Ulamba, rugged, chasm-cleft.

The birds are speaking with many voices
At Ulamba, chasm-cleft Ulamba.

My own home, my dear home,
Whose feet have disfigured it?

The mulga parrots have disfigured it;
Their feet have scratched the deserted hollow."

Gurra ‘was a handsome, strong, well-proportioned boy’ who would one day be ‘a great hunter’. At six years of age, Gurra already manifests the markers of a hero from the traditional Aranda epics. Like Gor-ree before him, his physical appearance and his athletic prowess are emphasised, and he, too, can already outrun his male peers. He is curious for his age and courageous, willing to brave the bad spirits to follow the men to the Euro Rock Pools before dawn, although it is forbidden for the uninitiated to do so. Gurra thus demonstrates an early assertion of will and

\[^{87}\text{Ingamells (Aranda Boy), op. cit. p.82. Sixteen year old Gurra’s song about his natural surroundings.}^{88}\text{K. Strehlow, The Strehlow Research Foundation: Aboriginal Women. (South Australia, The Strehlow Research Foundation, n.d.), pp. 57-58. Song about the Northern Aranda ancestors who long to return home from where they originated.}\]
dominance. He is already an ‘exceptional’ Aranda boy.

... indeed, he often beat all his playmates in their contests, could scale trees, just as he could race, more quickly than any others of his age. To his physical strength and fleetness, however, was added an imagination and quick understanding beyond the ordinary; and this, which his elders had already noticed, was later to make him important among all the various groups of Aranda peoples. 89

Like the mythological hero, Gurra acquires the skills and accomplishments which will speedily make him a great Aboriginal warrior. His initiation into manhood begins early. Gurra also shows obedience to the elders of his group and submission to the traditional moral and ethical code of his community. The ‘aliraka iwuma’ ceremony, meaning to ‘toss up into the sky’, is described by Ingamells whose source is undoubtedly Strehlow. This ceremony marks a definite break in Gurra's life. It is carried out as he approaches puberty and warns him that his childhood days, spent mainly in the company of girls and women, are nearly over. He is taken aside and told to avoid females in future. Ingamells omits significant aspects of the first stage of the initiation rite. Although Gurra is thrown into the air several times, Ingamells doesn't describe the way an Aranda boy would be hit on the breast and back whilst in the air, often until he begins to bleed from the nose and the mouth. As a result, this first stage of initiation in Aranda Boy becomes a very trivial, harmless game, which Gurra doesn't find ‘particularly alarming’, when in fact it was quite an ordeal. 90

Nearly always in his youth or adolescence the hero proves his manhood in some way, often through his initiation. The traditional hero is given labours to perform, a

89 Ingamells (Aranda Boy), op.cit. pp.30-31.
90 In their 14th and 16th year, the young Northern Aranda males undergo the main initiation rites of circumcision and subincision. Ingamells briefly describes one aspect of subincision but only hints at another, more painful rite. See Aranda Boy, pages 76 and 94.
task to accomplish or a quest to fulfil. Almost always the task or quest involves a journey. Many a hero takes with him a talisman, sword or special object. Unlike Rayment's appropriation and misuse of the message stick, Ingamells incorporates its traditional role showing how the Old Men entrust Gurra with the 'Message Stick of a Special Messenger travelling alone and according to the laws of the Tribes' which even his enemies should respect. Symbolically leaving at sunrise, Ingamells builds on the dawn-image as the symbol of enlightenment for Gurra's transition from the colonial dark in order to seek the help of Don Byrne, himself an extraordinary man and friend rather than an extraordinary opponent. Gurra is betrothed to Rira, and will marry her when he returns. The traditional reward of the ancient hero for the successful completion of his quest will also be claimed by Gurra, as Gor-ree has claimed it before him.

In 1891, by the time Gurra is nineteen years old, he has still had no contact with the white men who have entered Aranda territory. The overland telegraph line, discovered by Nulliga, a warrior of the Eastern Aranda People, was completed in 1872. Its construction has meant the creation of an open road through the heart of Aranda country leading to the establishment of a number of cattle stations. The discovery of the Arltunga goldfield in the closing years of the century settles the fate of the Eastern and Hale River Aranda. Ingamells' Eastern Aranda also carry news of a terrible massacre in which many Aranda have been shot and killed. The Aranda men decide that ambushing the white settlers is the only way to defeat them. Traditional confrontational methods, however, are no match for firearms.

Ingamells presents the white settlers as taking Aranda land and destroying their sources of food and water. He acknowledges the destruction as evil, but reinforces the notion that the Aranda are powerless to prevent it from happening. The white man has superior weaponry and will succeed in taking Aranda land. Indeed, some

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91 The Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg, west of Alice Springs, was set up in 1877.
92 In 1874, the first major clash came when the telegraph station at Barrow Creek, 180 miles north of Alice Springs, was attacked by members of the Kaititja tribe. The severe reprisals taken included the indiscriminate shooting of many innocent Unmatjera people within an area up to 50 miles south of Barrow Creek. To counter the growing discontent occasioned by the closing of many surface waters to the Aranda on most of the cattle stations. Constable Willshire and a fellow police officer Wurmbbrand inaugurated a severe 'pacification' policy during the 1880s, by the liberal use of firearms, which broke the organized Aranda resistance.
of the Aranda people have already decided that they will not drive these men away but help them settle in the country. Not all white men are evil, however. Don Byrne is a friend to the Aranda people. He stops other white men from ‘doing unfriendly acts’.

*If all White Men were like this Dongberna, it would be right to have some of them as guests in our Countries. This Dongberna kills bullocky for Unmatjera people, and the Unmatjeras have great feasts at the waterholes in the part of the Country where Dongberna lives. He does not drive the Unmatjeras from the waterholes in those parts, saying that those waterholes still belong to the Unmatjeras. He keeps his bullocky from those waterholes and, by agreement with the Unmatjeras, the bullocky drink at the waterholes where their presence is not contrary to sacred legend.*

The seeds of assimilation are planted and the traditional way of life for the Aranda comes under threat. Ingamells' message is clear: they will never overcome the superior white man. The Aranda are naïve to believe that they can welcome ‘foreigners’ as friendly visitors who come and go. Ingamells gently ridicules such naivete, suggesting that their only hope is a man like Don Byrne. Gurra recognises the plight of the Aranda people and is glad to think of such a person as his friend.

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93 The Unmatjeras are one of the northern tribal groups in the Aranda-speaking area. Gurra is also Northern Aranda. But Ingamells seems to misunderstand as he sees the Unmatjera people as a completely separate group to the Aranda, when in fact they too are Aranda. Gurra's family probably lived in and around the MacDonnell and surrounding ranges which has probably always been an important Aboriginal meeting place. Following the building of the Overland Telegraph station at Alice Springs, grazing properties spread across the region from 1870 to 1890, but clashes with local Aboriginal people and drought restricted pastoral development until the twentieth century and, in some districts, until after the second world war.

94 The traditional tribal organization and social structure of many of the groups in the Aranda-speaking area had been severely disrupted in the 1880s. Sacred ceremonies continued to be held in those parts of Aranda territory where access to sacred sites had not yet been prevented by cattle owners, such as Ingamells’ Don Byrne.
When Gurra eventually meets Don Byrne, the Unmatjera stock boy who is accompanying Byrne tells Gurra that ‘Dongberna helps us; and my people on his station are better off now than before he came, when other White Men were pushing us hither and thither upon our own country’. Don Byrne was as ‘much interested in the welfare of the native people as in doing well for himself as a stock-owner’.  

When they meet, Don Byrne is very much in control. He makes the moves, he attempts the language, and he controls and decides what should happen. He gives Gurra his first experience of riding a horse and decides, uninvited, to accompany him part of the way back to his camp at Kandrapinta Gorge. Gurra accepts it all without hesitation. Within a remarkably short time he comes to trust Don Byrne implicitly and regards him as a friend. Such is the charisma of the white man.

Gurra speaks confidently and strongly at the ‘Council of War’, while the elders of the Aranda Family Groups listen attentively. It is decided that all of the Family Groups will return to Kandrapinta Gorge and Gurra will seek Dongberna’s aid for his people, to save them from the worsening famine. The cattle station is presented as an idyllic, where Aborigine and settler coexist in a paternalistic relationship that is legitimised in terms of the antiquity of the ‘natives’ and the modernity of the whites.

Gurra will embark on the final heroic journey of his initiation to manhood. The symbolism of a biblical ‘famine’ endured by a ‘lost’ people wandering in the desert, a place of danger and privation, would not escape the understanding of the 1940s child reader.

Yilta declared: "The rains are late in coming this year, and we are on the edge of famine now. We could not sing the yams; there are few yams for us to eat. If famine grows upon us there will be practically nothing

93 Ingamells (Aranda Boy), op.cit. p.99.
94 See Olaf Ruben’s Naked Under Capricorn (1958) for a similar construction of an ‘idyllic’ cattle station.
to eat; and, with the White Men's power against us, we must surely perish."  

The Jindyworobaks did not require Anglo-Australians to 'become Aboriginal', but viewed the 'real' Australia as a country untouched by white influence, where everything that is derived from other cultures is alien. Their ideal Australia is that of the Aborigines, not of the so-called white 'usurpers'. Ingamells divides the usurpers into good and evil. Don Byrne personifies the 'good'. The 'bad' are depicted as only interested in teaching the 'blacks' a lesson for stealing their bullocks. They actively set out to drive the Aranda off their traditional land permanently. If they meet resistance, then killing a few will be necessary to intimidate the rest.

Over much of the Aranda territories now, White Men were hounding the blacks away from the waterholes where they were disturbing the cattle. The White Men thought that the Arandas could live elsewhere. The Whites, knowing very little about the native way of life did not see that the Arandas could not live outside their own special territories without moving into the lands of other peoples, and that they needed the right to visit their ancestral waterholes from season to season.

... Three White Men drew rein beside the fire, and one dismounted.

"No sign of beef-eating here," he said. "Still, we've got to teach all these blacks a lesson they won't forget in a hurry. They're all the same. Kill a bullock as soon as look at one. We can't run a station with them around."

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97 Ingamells, op.cit. p.114.
"There's a little debt they've to pay, these blacks," said one of the other two men, who were sitting on their horses. "Three of our bullocks speared in four days! We just have to scare the blacks away altogether, that's all. If the beggars show fight, shoot one or two. That'll make the rest scamper."

Don Byrne is seen as a hero because he saves the Aborigines by choosing the land and waterholes the Aranda can access, while others take their land but allow them to live on it. Such settlers are not usurpers but friends. It is the Aranda who must change their traditional way of life to accommodate the white man, not the other way around. Don Byrne’s paternalistic style is not only acceptable to Ingamells but, in his opinion should be encouraged, as assimilation is the only way to save a ‘dying race’ of ‘bewildered people’. For Ingamells, living in harmony with the white cattlemen, in the Australian landscape is the only acceptable solution for the Aranda if their traditional culture is to be preserved.

According to Jindyworobak philosophy, true Australians must also trace their culture back to the ‘primitive bliss’ of the ‘Alcheringa Dreamtime’. Australians must disown Europe and consider only their present surroundings and true past. Ingamells doesn't question Byrne's right to take Aranda land in the first place, because such harmony is the true spirit of Ingamells' white 'Alcheringa'. Byrne has crossed the boundary to become a part of Aboriginal culture, shedding his European past and appropriating those aspects of Aboriginality which he needs to establish his true Australian identity. Ingamells' theoretical commitment to the ideal of joining the worlds of black and white Australia into a cohesive whole, began with his mystical Jindyworobak poem, ‘Moorawathimeering’, and comes to fruition in Aranda Boy.

Don Byrne is the white saviour of the Aranda people. They will not survive without his help. Ingamells uses the environmental conditions created by a severe drought as the catalyst for Gurra's search for the white hero. The contribution of the 'usurpers'

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to the plight of the Aranda, depriving them of their traditional sources of food and water, is seen as a secondary cause. Ingamells chooses to soften the atrocities by using Byrne as their antithesis. He is the friend of the Aborigine because he pities their primitive lifestyle which renders them incapable of helping themselves. Byrne doesn’t view his help as an act of humanity from one man to another. He views it in terms of the concession the coloniser makes to the colonised, the superior to the inferior.

Gurra arrives safely at the home of Don Byrne, but Ingamells sets Unmatjera against Aranda, and the Aboriginal stockmen drive Gurra away, spearing him in the leg. They want to preserve not only Don Byrne’s help for themselves, but also their livelihood as stockmen on his property. Although the two groups are not at war, it is plausible, if unlikely, for them to refuse to help Gurra. Jimmy, Byrne’s favourite stockman, goes against the actions of his people, secretly keeping Gurra alive with white man ‘tucker’ and medicating his injured leg with white man ointment. The mighty Aranda hero cannot survive without the intervention of an ‘assimilated’ Aboriginal stockman. Clearly, like Coolamon and Gor-ree before him, he is not a true hero.

The station Unmatjera are presented as the ‘bad’ Aboriginals, willing to turn their back on their own people, further elevating Byrne’s status as hero. There is no understanding of the traditional relationships between the Aranda groups. They are all Aboriginal, therefore they should all help each other. Only Byrne is able to move beyond ‘difference’ and offer his help to all Aboriginal people. The station Unmatjera turn on Gurra, ignoring the Message Stick from the Old Men which should have guaranteed him protection. Traditional Aboriginal culture and society is beginning to break down and the Unmatjera ignore the laws of the Tribes. It is only the great Don Byrne who is willing to share his land, his food and his water with the Aranda in plentiful times as well as in drought. He is the true hero, noble and unselfish. Without the benevolence of Don Byrne, Gurra and his people will die. Byrne is in control, pointedly telling the Unmatjera to send another message stick,

"Elliot, op.cit. p.252."
this time to the Aranda, bidding them to come to his property. The message stick of
the great Don Byrne, unlike its predecessor carried by Gurra, is not ignored.

The lines are clearly drawn between good and bad, black and white, but the white
hero is still superior to the black. The black hero only survives because of the
intervention of the white. In this children’s narrative, as in his journalism, Ingamells
welcomes the white man’s destiny and but no longer laments the black man’s fate.

*Our interest in the aborigines will, we hope, prove to be not only a literary appropriation, but also vital for their welfare. We wish to deepen the existing sympathy with an understanding for them, which must precede effective legislation on their behalf. We note with pleasure that, through the efforts of humane anthropologists, the governments are adopting a more considerate policy towards the blacks.*

Byrne’s status as a mythic hero is confirmed through a corroboree created by Gurra.
This epitomises Aranda acknowledgment of Byrne as heroically superior and
exemplifies the Jindyworobak philosophy linking the modern with the primal
through Aboriginal song and performance. Through the corroboree, Don Byrne has
truly become a part of indigenous ritual. It connects him with the power which the
‘real’ Aboriginal represents, firmly rooted in the land and Ingamells’ spirit of place.
Although Gurra is a hero to the Aranda because he leads them to Byrne and
salvation, like Coolamon he has no mythic claim to greatness in the European
tradition. Ironically, Ingamells celebrates, perhaps inadvertently, a European mythic
construct intrinsic to the very heritage he seeks to dismiss.

Just as the heroism of Coolamon and Gor-ree is inferior because they are Aboriginal,
so too is the heroism of Gurra. Byrne, the real hero, promises to negotiate with the

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190 Ingamells (Venture), *op.cit.* p.3.
other white station owners to allow the Aranda access to the waterholes for their Yam ceremonies - if they stop killing the cattle. Not only is he a hero to the Aranda, but he is respected among his own kind. Don Byrne is the personification of Rex Ingamells who sees himself as the Jindyworobak hero able to ‘annex’ and ‘join’ two cultures, and is now taking the movement to a new generation of readers. Gurra and his people return to their country when the rains arrive. The drought and famine are symbolically broken when Byrne intervenes. Like Dick’s, Byrne's ‘white’ magic is far stronger than Gurra's ‘black’.
Chapter Six

Constructing The Aboriginal Girl: Daughters of a Broken Dreaming

Australian children’s fiction features few Aboriginal protagonists and even fewer who are female. Aboriginal women and girl characters are usually part of a much larger, mixed tribal group, appearing occasionally in the background to add some local ‘colour’. Jeannie Gunn’s depiction of Bett-Bett as The Little Black Princess in 1905 was the first Australian story to have an Aboriginal child as the main character and remains one of the most enduring. The Little Black Princess constructs three versions of the feminine: Bett-Bett as a young Aboriginal girl, the Aboriginal women of Elsey station, and Gunn, the white narrator, as an Australian version of the memsahib.1 Although the focus of The Little Black Princess is primarily on Bett Bett as an amusing pet, Gunn does record, anecdotally, some traditions specifically involving Aboriginal women and girls. Nimmitybel in Dalby Davison’s Children of the Dark People (1936) is constructed within a framework of colonial masculinist discourse as inferior to Jackadgery, her male companion and constrained by domestic responsibilities and feminine ‘frailty’. The theme of assimilation is explored through Sammon’s The Lucky Stone (1969) and Daughter of Two Worlds (1970), where the ‘half-castes’ Quei and Melalla are encouraged to reject their Aboriginal heritage. These books also show the impact of second wave feminism – the feminism of ‘equality’, while those that emerge during the 1990s bear the impress of various ‘liberation’ movements, and of multiculturalism and the feminism of ‘difference’. In contrast, Gracey and Nessa in Maloney’s Gracey (1994) and Hutchin’s Bring Back the Songs (1998) respectively, emerge as independent young women who reclaim their Aboriginal identity and take their place in contemporary society. The final book discussed in this chapter, The Drover’s Boy (1997) by Ted Egan, explores the relationship between

a white male drover and his female Aboriginal ‘boy’, romantically reconstructing it as a
love story told from the drover’s point of view.

In *The Little Black Princess*, many aspects of Bett-Bett’s traditional role in an Aboriginal
community are mentioned. The practices which Gunn selects, however, tend to focus on
the more unusual aspects of Bett-Bett’s life and those of the older women, firmly
differentiating them from the intended audience. Indeed, Gunn presents the Aboriginal
marriage practices and avoidance behaviours as incomprehensible. She reads food taboos
as a way for the older men selfishly to take advantage of their status to protect their right
to the choicest food items and therefore the most nourishing bush tucker. The desire to
amuse and entertain allows Gunn to treat lightly traditions taken very seriously by the
Aboriginal community.

In *The Little Black Princess*, the gendered roles in traditional Aboriginal society are
clearly delineated. Goggle Eye appears one morning with his wife’s waist-belt around his
head, signifying that he has a headache. A wife’s waist-belt or hair ribbon worn around
the head of her husband was used to charm away a headache. If the headache persists,
then the wife has been up to mischief of some sort, and she will be punished. The
women say that the belts do not always speak the truth, but the men disagree. Gunn gives
Goggle Eye a dose of Epsom salts to help the ‘belt-cure’ and save his wife from a
beating. Goggle Eye’s headache eventually disappears, which Gunn privately attributes
to the Epsom salts, but publicly gives credit to ‘Mrs Goggle Eye’, a ‘very good lubra’.
Clearly Gunn sees the Aboriginal women as being subordinate to the men, easily led to
believe and support ‘superstitions’ which enabled their husbands and older tribal males
to exercise their masculine power over the women and children.

Women’s status differs according to the particular Aboriginal culture to which they
belong. Some generalisations can nevertheless be made. Gunn sees the women and girls
in Bett-Bett’s community as pawns or chattels of the men. She fails to recognise that their
status is that of junior partners, rather than powerless females. Aboriginal women accept
this junior role, secure in the knowledge that they alone, in the physical sense, can bear children. The men validate their senior status through their control over the spiritual life of the community. Seniority, which obviously increases with age, plays a major part in determining a woman’s power. In general, however, the authority and power of a woman will still be less than that of a man the same age. The junior partner status originates, in part, from the widespread custom of marrying young girls to much older men. Each girl starts married life in a markedly junior role, but since this custom also causes most women to be widowed at least once, higher status can be achieved if, on remarriage, her husband is younger or of similar age.  

Of all the Aboriginal practices reported, it is the marriage arrangements which cause the white writers of Australian children’s books the most difficulty. Gunn is no exception. Bett-Bett is engaged to Billy-Muck, one of the ‘wise old men of the tribe’, while Biddy’s infant daughter is engaged to Goggle-Eye. Gunn finds this difficult to understand and impossible to accept, reading the practice as barbaric further evidence of the powerlessness of the women and girls. A girl is generally married in her early teens, just before puberty, to a much older man to whom she has been promised at or before birth. Such promises had to be made within the prescriptive rules of the kinship system.  
Generally, the complex web of rights and responsibilities in which a promised marriage is enmeshed provides protection and support for young wives.  

The rights and duties of the women are clearly defined and accepted by Bett-Bett in her kinship group, as well as by the wider Aboriginal community. Unfortunately, Gunn sees the punishment of a woman who fails in her obligations as evidence of her subordinate status, rather than acknowledging that the solidarity of the men, gained through rites of

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4 Under customary law in many Aboriginal communities, men could have more than one wife simultaneously, while among groups who had a history of mutual hostility, such as that between Bett-Bett’s clan and the Willeroo blacks, wives could, in some cases, be obtained by capture, as is exemplified by
initiation, merely makes their dominance more visible. While women have less publicly acknowledged authority than men of the same age, they are not without power to influence decisions. When Murraweedbe runs away from her husband Monkey, there is no attempt to force her to return.  

The nature of marriage arrangements in Aboriginal society has not been ignored, but women's role in establishing and maintaining marriages has been neglected or relegated to the domain of the secular. It is the way in which solutions are sought which has rendered women inarticulate in the ethnographies.  

Goggle-Eye is Bett-Bett's uncle; her mother his younger sister Katie and because of this, neither could look directly at the other or be in close physical proximity at any time. The rules governing these relationships frequently require social avoidance in varying degrees and take many different forms. It is common for those involved to look away from each other, or even to face in opposite directions. Gunn doesn't mention Bett-Bett's white father as to do so would be acknowledging complicity in an intolerable situation where Aboriginal women become sexual objects and miscegenation a threat to racial purity.  

The wise men of the tribe ... have always taught that you must never, never look at any little girl or lubra if you are her "little-bit-father," or "little-bit-brother", or any near relation to her. You must not even speak to her, or listen to

'White, op.cit. pp. 36-37.
'Bell, op.cit. p.237.
her voice, unless she is so far off that you cannot see her face.  

Such behaviour appears to serve social functions, ensuring that certain kin treat each other with due respect while keeping apart those who are likely to have conflicting interests. Breach of these avoidance patterns is often spoken of as bringing shame on the person responsible.  

Bett-Bett, like the other females of her ‘tribe’, is an excellent tracker, knowing the ‘tracks of every horse on the run, and every blackfellow of the tribe, and if they came on a stranger’s track, they knew the tribe he belonged to.’ Although in Aboriginal society women and children generally did the bulk of gathering, the gendered division of labour was not so clear-cut. Women as well as men hunted and fished, with women usually hunting the small animals, while men occasionally gathered plant food.  

Gunn highlights how the search for food was as much a part of play as it was a part of the daily routine for both adults and children. For Bett-Bett the line between work and play is indistinguishable and often dependent on the spirit of the moment. When the ‘Missus’ invites her to ‘come for a walkabout’ to find water lilies, Bett-Bett invites all the women within hearing to join them.

... By the time I [Gunn] reached the slip-rails, there were six or eight lubras, a few piccaninnies, and about twenty dogs at my heels and I felt like a Pied Piper of Hamelin.

We had a very merry walkabout that afternoon.  

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8 Gunn, op.cit., p.16.
10 Horton, op.cit., p.405-406.
11 Gunn, op.cit., p.58.
Although both boys and girls accompanied adults in a society where children learned indirectly through observing and participating, the difference between the social life of the girls and boys is noticeable in their relationships with the adults they imitate. The boys remained free of the imperative to assist in the domestic tasks of the day, while the young girls were expected to accompany the older women and participate in food gathering expeditions, as well as look after the younger children. It was not uncommon for small groups of young girls to go into the bush alone, catch a lizard or bird, and cook it on their own fire. Likewise, when left to her own devices, Bett-Bett was capable of finding and preparing her own food.

I [Gunn] gave her [Bett-Bett] bread and water for dinner [as a punishment], and she and Sue caught water-rats, and Bett-Bett made a fire and cooked them. In fact, they had a splendid picnic.  

Taboos on food for the young men and ‘lubras’ are also a part of Bett-Bett’s life. They must not eat fat turkeys or the tail of the kangaroo or indeed any of the best things that they find when hunting.

If they do, a terrible thing will happen, for a big hunting Debbil-debbil will come on with a rush, and in a moment make them very old and weak. “Look at us!” cry the old rascals. “We eat these things, and behold, we are weak old men, with no strength to fight an enemy!” ... Bett-Bett

13 Hamilton, op.cit., p.104.
believed all these tales, for she was a little nigger, every
bit of her. 14

Food taboos were practised widely in Aboriginal society, although their nature and
duration varied throughout Australia. The strictness of the rules varied from group to
group, and also depended on family and other close relationships. Old men or women
were favoured by food taboos imposed on others, not merely to provide for their old age,
as Gunn flippantly suggests, but primarily to recognise the importance of their
responsibility in ritual roles. 15

Bett-Bett also demonstrates that she already has some of the traditional skills associated
with the work of Aboriginal women. Inventively Bett-Bett makes string from the threads
of her unravelled 'shimmy shirt', utilising the source materials available to make a dilly-
bag by weaving and knotting the string together. 16

"You are a good little girl, Bett-Bett," I said. "Now come
and help me tidy your box."

When her clean clothes were neatly in place, I found that
the "Shimmy Shirts were all missing, and asked where
they were.

13 Gunn, op.cit., p.19.
14 Gunn, op.cit., p.7.
15 Horton, op.cit., p.386.
16 Dilly bags are usually woven from fibre twine and are worn even by the very young. Characteristically,
they have thin straps of twined fibre string at one side and are worn suspended from the forehead to rest
behind the head on the neck and back. Some are made from hand-spun fibres of various origins including
hair, bark, reed, grass, palm leaf and plant stems, the method of construction often reflecting the
availability of the source materials. C. Haagen, Bush Toys Aboriginal Children at Play (Canberra,
“Me knock up longa Shimmy Shirts,” Bett-Bett said with a grin, meaning that she was tired of wearing them.

“But where are they?” I said.

“Longa string,” she answered cheerfully. “Me bin make em.”

Then I knew that the piles of rag she had unravelled to make into string were her new “Shimmy Shirts.”

I was really angry with her now, and set her to sew at a new one. 

While Gunn gives the reader a glimpse into Aboriginal culture from a female perspective, she also suggests that her perception of what skills a young girl needs to become a woman are at odds with the traditional beliefs of Bett-Bett and her people. Gunn recognises that forcing Bett-Bett to sew clothing on which she places no value is a waste of time, not because the task is culturally inappropriate, but because the practices of a civilised white woman are beyond a little ‘nigger’ girl like Bett-Bett.

Nimmitybel, in Frank Dalby Davison’s Children of the Dark People (1936) is also presented as a traditional Aboriginal girl, although unlike Bett-Bett, Nimmitybel is introduced to the reader in the context of her family group and the wider Aboriginal community.

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17 Gunn, op.cit., p.10.
With their mothers and fathers, among a tribe of aborigines, there once lived a little girl named Nimmitiybel, and a boy named Jackadgery. ...

After they had travelled many days they would enter the jungle, build fresh mia-mias for themselves, and settle down for a short while, living on the green heads of the cabbage palms, on fruits that they found, and honey that they took from the nests of the wild bees. Later they would journey on again until they came to the mountains where the bugong moths, of which they were very fond, were plentiful at a certain season. 18

Davison provides a detailed description of the women's gathering and hunting routine, although, like Gunn, he emphasises it as an enjoyable but essential pastime. Hunting the goanna is of primary value to the rest of the community because it provides food for Nimmitiybel's 'daddy's tea'. He also shows that the women derive undeniable pleasure and excitement when they locate productive areas of yams or when a goanna needs to be chased. What remains unsaid by both Gunn and Davison, however, is the hard grind that can be associated with the extraction of tubers because the yield is directly related to the amount of effort that is invested in the activity. The longer and harder a woman works, the more she produces. A man may spend half an hour searching for a kangaroo, capture one, and be finished for the day. A woman too may spend half an hour locating a rich yam field but in contrast, her first tuber is merely the beginning of a long and arduous period of digging and searching. She is certain to return with provisions whereas the hunter may return empty-handed. Much preparation, including the elaborate processing of toxic plants and the cooking of food, is carried out by women. This is not to take away

credit from the men but to raise the profile of the women as significant contributors to the food production of the group.  

Nimmitybel’s father was a hunter and a warrior in the tribe. Early every morning, when the smoke of the breakfast fires was dying down, he and all the other fathers of the tribe took their spears and boomerangs and went off through the bush, hunting. They would be gone all day, returning at night with the wallabies and kangaroos they had killed for meat.  

The importance of the men’s hunting is emphasised by the seriousness with which their departure is described. The women, however, leave the camp with noise and festivity:

Nimmitybel and her mother, and all the mothers and children who lived near by, and the very aged men who were too old for hunting, took their dilly-bags and yam sticks and went off into the bush like a big picnic party to dig for yams and to hunt for fat witchetty grubs and to gather seeds and berries that were good to eat.  

The men’s food production would never be likened to a ‘big picnic party’. A crucial feature of the women’s contribution to the production of food is that it is generally

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19 Horton, op.cit., p.262.
20 Davison, op.cit., p.6.
21 Davison, op.cit., p.3.
reliable and once areas containing roots, fruits and tubers are known they can be exploited each season with considerable confidence.

Davison, like Gunn, mentions that the kidnapping of brides by men from neighbouring ‘tribes’ was a part of Aboriginal life. He seems unduly fascinated by this practice, romanticising it from a masculine perspective as a rape fantasy by including it as a much-loved story that Nimmitbyel repeatedly requests her mother to tell her. The experience of kidnap from the girl’s perspective, however, was neither romantic nor pleasant. To be abducted, removed from family and forced to ‘marry’ someone from another group could hardly be considered romantic. The girl’s point of view, however, is never considered.

And her mother would tell her how a quarrel arose with a neighbouring tribe because a young man of one tribe had stolen a girl whom he wanted for his wife from the other tribe. How the warriors of the tribes met on the plain with their spears and shields and a great fight took place. 22

Throughout Nimmitbyel’s adventure she is cast in a subservient and inferior role to Jackadgery. The construction of the gendered roles resembles those in European literature. Nimmitbyel is identified in terms of her domestic role as ‘housekeeper.’ Her frivolous interest in clothes is exemplified when the Spirit of the Caves takes her away to look at crystal dresses and contrasts with Jackadgery’s more important task of drawing ‘some tribal pictures’ on the walls of the cave. Nimmitbyel does not make decisions nor does she show much initiative. She is also cast as the victim, kidnapped by their enemy, the evil witch doctor, because she is too tired to climb to the top of a high hill with

22 Davison, op.cit., p.6.
Jackadgery. Through her lack of physical endurance she is forced to wait for her male companion to rescue her.

Nimmitybel’s main role is to look after Jackadgery, cooking his food and supplementing any hunting he might do, as well as preparing their campsites. Her Aboriginality is identified only through her appearance, food production and methods of housekeeping, features which identify _The Children of the Dark People_ as a white narrative with Aboriginal characters.

... Though different in appearance from white children she [Nimmitybel] was very pretty; with smooth dark skin, soft dark hair, and big dark eyes in which sadness and laughter dwelt by turns. 31

The activities of the seacoast tribe are described in detail, but the focus remains fixed on the production of food and the gendered division of labour. The roles are once again clearly defined according to the author’s limited understanding of their function in Aboriginal society. Jackadgery walks ahead with his weapons and shield and Nimmitybel follows behind with her dilly-bag loaded with food. What emerges is an Aboriginal girl who is concerned with the ‘trivial’ aspects of tribal life, whose needs are secondary to her male companion, and whose life revolves around food and its preparation. Nimmitybel is a ‘good and pretty little girl’ who will grow up to ‘be thought a great deal of by the people in the tribe’. While Jackadgery has superior skills in tracking, throwing spears and boomerangs and is sure to become ‘a fine warrior and hunter’, Nimmitybel is sweet, ‘busy and helpful’, uncomplicated and inferior.

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31 Davison, _op.cit._, p.1.
When he [Jackadgery] had returned Nimmitabel had lit a
fire and was roasting the bandicoot, for, although she was
very tired, she had made up her mind that she was the
little girl and the housekeeper and that she was going to
do her best. 24

As in most fairy tales, when they return, Nimmitabel and Jackadgery are promised to
each other in ‘marriage’. This would have been highly unlikely in a traditional
Aboriginal community as Nimmitabel, like Bett-Bett would have already been promised
to a much older man. While Jackadgery tells his male peers about his adventures,
Nimmitabel, in her parent’s mia-mia, is thinking about what a ‘nice daddy’ Jackadgery
will make when they grow up.

*The Little Black Princess* and *The Children of the Dark People* are the only two
children’s books published prior to 1969 which present girls as main characters.
Significantly they both depict them in a traditional ‘tribal’ context and imbue their
behaviour and role with European meanings. From 1969 onwards the narrative pattern is
in tandem with the increasing influence of assimilationist policies. The post-1969 texts
explore the clash between traditional life and European standards, a clash from which
white ‘civilization’ emerges victorious.

*The Lucky Stone* by Stella Sammon 25 was published in 1969 and is aimed at children
seven to ten years old, a relatively new audience in Australian children’s fiction. The
language is stilted with a simplified vocabulary and the occasional archaic expression.
Although the main character, Quei, is female, she is used primarily as a device to
advocate change. Sammon believes that the traditional life of Aboriginal people is not

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24 Davison, op.cit., p.35.
25 Although born in Sydney, biographical information on Stella Sammon remains elusive. Published studies
on Australian children’s literature such as those by Saxby, Muir, Hill and Barlow, have also been unable to
discover more detail about this author.
strong enough to survive the encroaching white world, even in the most isolated of places.

Quei has dark skin and ‘very black eyes’, as well as a lame leg, and lives in an Aboriginal camp at the edge of a station owned by white people. Quei’s traditional life, as ‘a little wild Aboriginal’ seems to involve fishing and keeping her grandmother company. There is no sense of community. The younger Aboriginal men work as stockmen and don’t appear to hunt, while the younger women, including Quei’s mother Flora and sister Annie, work at the homestead in domestic service. The traditional female role in the production of food is not discussed, while Quei’s father, like Bett-Bett’s, is never mentioned.

The Aboriginal people depicted are never identified but presented as a fractional group comprised mainly of old people and a few very young children. Quei’s grandmother and a tribal elder called ‘One-Eye’, are characterised as cantankerous and unbending, linked to the lame Quei through the infirmity of age. Quei is useful to them, her physical disability setting her apart from other girls her own age. The traditional patterns of behaviour which remain are enforced by the elders of her tribe but do not appear to apply to Quei. Not only do the old men talk to her when they will talk to no other little girls, but she is not expected to stay with either her mother or grandmother. Quei is different, doubly set apart.

Tony, the infant son of the Boss and the Missus, disappears. Quei, using the tracking skills her grandmother has taught her, finds and saves Tony from drowning in the waterhole. She is not thanked for her bravery, but ignored. The Flying Doctor arrives to check on Tony and suggests that he take Quei with him so that her leg can be fixed. Although not explicitly stated, this seems to be Quei’s reward. One-Eye, as a tribal elder, decides that Quei will remain behind. The Boss, however, has already decided that Quei should be given the opportunity to go. One-Eye is presented as being selfish, not wishing

227
to loose Quei to the white world beyond the camp, and ignoring what might be best for her.

"She is the little girl of the camp", One-Eye said.
"She is the lame little girl. She cannot go away."

"But we will look after her," said the Boss. "She will come back."
One-Eye shook his head. "All the Young People go away now," he said. "Who will learn to fish and to hunt the black duck and look after the Old Ones?"

"It is good for the Young Ones to learn other things, One-Eye," said the Boss.

But One-Eye shook his head again. "We do not wish Quei to learn new ways," he said. "Her lame leg does not hurt her". 37

The older Aboriginal people are presented as rejecting change, selfishly denying Quei the chance to walk properly because of their own fears. Sammon has no sympathy for the plea of either One-Eye or Grandmother Jinny to stop the destruction of their traditional way of life. To her, Aboriginal people will be better off adopting the ways of a dominant white society. Ultimately it won't really matter what the elders of the tribe think as change is inevitable and they are foolish to try and prevent it. Flora agrees with the Boss

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36 This is in sharp contrast to the time, later in the book, when her brother Budjell rescues the white Mr Lee Brown also from drowning. Budjell is not only thanked but also adopted by the man he rescues.
and thinks it would be good for Quei to go. In the past, Flora would never have dared to question, let alone contest, a decision made by the elders.

Quei is presented as a pathetic figure who ‘hop-jumps’ her way around and is constantly compared to other more able bodied children, particularly her very active younger brother Bundjell. Quei has been taught by her grandmother to fear the doctor and his plane. Taking matters into her own hands she runs away, with her brother’s help, and hides in the bush. When Bunjell manages to get his arm stuck in a hole in a tree, Quei attempts to get help, but becomes lost. Although she is able to use her tracking skills to find the wandering Tony, it seems she is unable to use those same skills to help Bundjell. When Quei is eventually found, the image is one of a distraught and pitiful figure who cannot help herself.

_The Boss drove very slowly now and presently the lights shone out on to Quei. She sat in a clear patch among the grass, rocking backwards and forwards and crying to herself because she was lost._

In spite of cousin Jacky’s ability to climb a tree ‘like a monkey’, Bundjell’s rescue doesn’t go according to plan. Bundjell is badly cut and needs stitches. Consequently, Quei will have a companion when she flies off with the doctor. To ensure that she returns, Grandmother Jinny gives Quei a lucky stone as a symbolic reminder of her Aboriginal heritage.

When they arrive in the town, Quei is afraid and uncooperative, refusing to enter the hospital in contrast yet again to Bundjell who finds the experience exciting, and willingly follows inside. The frightened child separated from her family, transported in a

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28 Ibid., p.31.
plane she has been taught to fear, and deposited in a large town thousands of miles away from the only community she has ever known is presented merely as timid, lacking the courage and curiosity of her brother.

Quei’s difference is highlighted yet again at the hospital, where her lack of shoes, her silence and her decision to sleep on the floor, are ridiculed by the other children, all fair-haired and blue-eyed. In contrast, Bundjell enjoys the trappings of white society. He is delighted with his new clothes and his new lifestyle at the hospital. Not surprisingly, Bundjell does not want to return to his family camp near the waterhole. Unlike Quei, he does not have a lucky stone to remind him of his Aboriginal heritage.

Quei is eventually persuaded to wear the boots she is given to speed the recovery of her leg. Sammon, however, continues to portray Quei as a figure of ridicule, by reducing her movements to a ‘clump, clump, clump’, across the room. Quei’s traditional link to the land is trivialised by her reluctance to wear boots and constant need to wriggle her toes so that she can pretend to feel the dust and the soft ground along the river bank near her home. Although the clean pink dress and the ribbon in her hair transform her outward appearance, underneath she is still the ‘wild little Aboriginal girl’ whose life is ruled by a stone given to her by her grandmother to remind her of the traditions she has left behind. Quei’s physical disability may have been removed but Sammon’s text constructs her as a flawed being because of her unwillingness to give up her Aboriginality.

In comparison with Quei, Bundjell is never depicted negatively or as ‘weak’ as Quei. When confronted by the sea for the first time, he takes off his shoes, runs to the waves with the other children and attempts to drink the water while Quei stays behind, afraid of the very big ‘water-hole’. When Bundjell saves Mr Lee Brown from drowning he is a hero, in contrast to Quei, who, when she rescues Tony, barely receives acknowledgment. Bundjell willingly goes to live with Mr and Mrs Lee Brown, while Quei stubbornly
refuses the offer. The Matron (The Blue Lady), from the Home by the Sea, where they have been recuperating, cannot understand Quei’s opposition.

_The Blue Lady shook her head. ‘I am sorry that you do not want to live with Mrs Lee Brown,’ she said. ‘They would be kind to you and you would go to school._

_In a few years only very old people will be left in your Camp by the water-hole. All the young ones, like you and Bundjell, will go away to learn new things. You would learn lots of things from Mrs Lee Brown._

When Quei’s lucky stone disappears from its secret hiding place, she believes that she will be forced to live with Mr and Mrs Lee Brown against her will. Although Quei refuses to stay, Sammon implies that there would be nothing that she could learn from the ‘old people’ left at the ‘camp by the water-hole’. The narrative places no value on the culture and traditions of Aboriginal people handed down through the elders suggesting that it is appropriate for Aboriginal knowledge to die with them. The future lies only in the knowledge provided by white people. Much of the traditional cultural knowledge of many Aboriginal communities has already disappeared. Such a cultural heritage has no place in a civilised society. The text expresses no sense of loss or remorse, but regards Aboriginal culture as an expendable casualty of progress.

Quei’s lucky stone is found and she returns home alone, no longer a wild Aboriginal child because she wears clean clothes and has learnt to relate to the white urban world. She has lived with white people long enough to become ‘civilised’. In her absence, huts have been built for her people, eliminating the need for them to live in a makeshift camp.

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29 See the Far West Children’s Home at Manly and an equivalent in Victoria sponsored by Harold Blair.
Sammon never fully resolves the battle between the Old People wanting to maintain their traditional way of life and their children wanting change. When Grandmother Jinny snatches the lucky stone from Quei, change triumphs, as Quei decides to live at the Big House to help the Missus look after Tony. Disability is associated with Aboriginality — a crippled condition needing to be ‘cured’ by white civilization. By rejecting the traditional practices of her grandmother, Quei chooses the way of the white people, associating a better life with drinking tea in a white cup. The disabled Quei has gone. By accepting that the elders are wrong Quei now becomes a whole person, welcomed into a better life with a brighter future.

_The Missus has said that she could come and Tony would be glad to see her. Jim the cook would give her tea in a white cup. She passed the new huts and the school, walking without a limp and carrying her dilly bag._

_All the people would not go away, she thought; there would be some young ones left and when the teacher came they would all go to school. She came in sight of the Big House. The Missus stood in the doorway and when she saw Quei coming she waved to her and sent Tony running to meet her._

Sammon, like many children’s authors before her, never considers the Aboriginal point of view to be valid – indeed is unaware of its existence. Her text advocates assimilation of Aborigines into white society. Quei’s fears are never deemed to be legitimate, she is merely a weak and flawed little Aboriginal girl. Quei, it seems, doesn’t deserve sympathy.

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30 Sammon, _op.cit._, p.105.
In Audrey Oldfield’s 32 *Daughter of Two Worlds*, published in 1970, the theme of assimilation explored in *The Lucky Stone* is taken a step further. The female Aboriginal protagonist, Melalla is manifestly ‘different’ but unlike Quei, who is set apart through her physical disability, Melalla is identified as ‘half-caste’, descended from an Irish grandfather. Where Quei means ‘little girl’, Melalla means ‘shining’, because of her unusual golden hair.

Melalla has caring and loving parents who indulge her every whim, particularly Dulderana, her father. Unlike the absent fathers of Quei and Bett Bett, Melalla’s Dulderana is fascinated by his ‘golden skinned’ daughter.

*Apart from her golden fuzz she was the typical glossy Aboriginal baby, with delicate pink palms and pink soles to her feet. Her skin grew much paler as she grew older, but this trait in her father had never bothered the tribe, and the same attitude applied to his children.*

*To her mother it mattered not a scrap that she was different; she treated her as she would have treated any other baby. But her father was strangely intrigued with this little one ... he had always been conscious of his own dissimilarity. Now here was one in whom the difference was even more marked.* 33

Melalla’s physical difference is accepted by her people as is her attachment to her father. The Big Boss also accepts Melalla’s presence on the saddle with Dulderana, as long as

32 Audrey Oldfield was born in 1925 at Mullumbimby in northern New South Wales. She eventually became a teacher and librarian.
she doesn’t interfere with his work. Eventually Melalla becomes the only Aboriginal girl child allowed to ride the station horses. Aboriginal boys, however, have always enjoyed this privilege as a part of their training to be stockmen.

Just as Bett Bett’s ‘kingdom’ is the bush, so too is Melalla’s. The white families entrust their children to her because ‘Aborigines never lose their way’. Melalla, as an Aboriginal girl, is much more competent and skilled than her white playmates. At home in the bush, she shares a rapport with the landscape. The whites fear the land, finding it harsh and cruel. Melalla, like Bett Bett before her, is presented as having the ability to track based on an understanding of her surroundings unmatched by white children or adults.

They seem to know every tree and rock of their tribal lands, and their sense of direction was unerring. Because of Melalla, the white children enjoyed a freedom which would otherwise have been denied them, for no adult could spare the hours to go roaming with them. Indeed, not even an experienced white stockman would have cared to leave the beaten tracks and wander on foot through the bush and up into the ranges. ... To the white man it was a harsh and cruel country, and he must always beware of it.

But it was not so to Melalla. The bush was her home, familiar and loved. She slept in it, she ate in it, she played in it, and she learned from it. 34

Whereas the child Quei is portrayed without personality, characterised by timidity and weakness, Melalla is vibrant and in control, daring her white friends to eat the uncooked

witchetty grubs she finds in the tree-roots. Melalla’s eating of witchetty grubs is designed to shock her white playmates rather than educate the reader, providing an opportunity to reveal her sense of humour.

Although Oldfield mentions fishing, searching for yams and the ‘overwhelming urge to wander’ in search of food, unlike Gunn and Davison, she does not attempt to inform the reader by the inclusion of anthropological detail concerning the daily food gathering of the women. In return for ‘a small amount’ of labour, Melalla’s people are given food rations and clothing, enabling them to live the ‘life of the semi-civilized native’. Melalla wants no other life. Her future prospects of marriage and child rearing, as well as working at the homestead, are ‘entirely satisfactory’. Leaving her people is never an option she considers.

Melalla’s difference is highlighted even further when she is taught to read and write ‘by accident’. Faced with the prospect of losing her white playmates to lessons, Melalla asks to be included. Ruth White agrees, and for the benefit of the teacher in Perth who marks her lessons, adds in brackets, ‘Part Aboriginal’. Melalla’s difference now takes on a new dimension. Apart from looking different to most of her people, as well as preferring white playmates to black and riding the station horses, Melalla has now been officially recognised, by white society, as ‘Part Aboriginal’. Although no one ever expected Melalla to use her schooling, it irrevocably changes her life.

Oldfield attempts to present the working relationship Melalla and her people have with the white station owners, Ray and Ruth White, as protective of tribal integrity. After a measles epidemic decimates Melalla’s people, killing her father and younger brother, the eleven year old Melalla is chosen to be the wife of the fifty year old Merupa. Ray White is not perturbed by the news, priding himself on his policy of non-interference, preferring the Aboriginal people on his station to maintain their own traditions outside

\[\text{Ibid., p.4.}\]
working hours, being careful over the years ‘not to break down their laws’, although he too subscribes to the ever popular belief that they are a dying race.

“Ruth,” he said calmly, “you know the native customs as well as I do. They’ve been through a lot of trouble these last weeks. Every man must have a wife to care for him and cook his food. It isn’t the fault of the tribe that they must fall back on a child of Melalla’s age to fill the gap. There just aren’t many of them left. Once there used to be over a thousand in this area. Now there are less than two hundred. It won’t be just a one-sided arrangement, you know. Merupa will do his share in providing for her needs now that she has no father. He’ll hunt for her and provide shelter for her.”

His wife, on the other hand, has no such convictions, and is unable to accept that Melalla should obey the elders and marry a much older man. Ruth regards her differently from the ‘other blacks’, because she has taught her to read and write and because she is ‘part white’. Ruth interferes, going against the decision of the elders and the advice of her husband, arrogantly believing that she is right to send the child away, taking the hesitancy and silence of Melalla and her mother as assent. The narrative endorses Ruth White’s views presenting Melalla’s situation as evidence of the victimised status of women within the ‘tribe’. Melalla’s mother is merely a powerless woman in a patriarchal society, too timid to oppose the opinion of the Missus. While she doesn’t approve of Ruth’s methods, Oldfield sees her as a strong, decisive woman, in sharp contrast to her Aboriginal counterpart, who deserves only pity.

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Ruth was a person of decision; she could never understand that this Aboriginal woman had never made a vital decision in her life. There had always been a man to make them for her. Without a man she floundered in uncertainty, and did not dare to venture an opinion which opposed that of the Missus.  

Clearly Melalla is to be spared such a fate. Ruth’s decision and methods prevail. The best place for the ‘part Aboriginal’ Melalla, is the Mission school. No other Aboriginal from Mount Locksley has ever been given the chance to go away to school. No one in their right mind would want to stay and live in the camp if they had ‘the chance of learning to live like white people’. Melalla is privileged to be given such an opportunity, although she vows to return to her people and continue to live a traditional lifestyle. Oldfield, like Sammon and Hashmi, constructs traditional Aboriginal life as belonging to the past, not the future, seeing Aboriginal culture as ‘stone age’, having no place in a dominant white, civilised society. Oldfield regards assimilation as the only solution. Once the protective veneer of isolationism is disturbed, hope for the retention of the tribal self must be abandoned:

Oh, Melalla! Melalla! When the time comes for your return the tribe will indeed be here, but the old ways will be gone. The twentieth century is creeping up on your people, as well as on you. It is a miracle that has preserved for so long these customs rooted in antiquity. Soon the hum of mining machinery and the activity of a

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big mining camp on Mount Locksley will destroy the rhythm of the Aboriginal life forever.  

The Mission is described in idyllic terms. The children, its only inmates, are well cared for and supervised by kind and helpful white adults. The children are taken on picnics and visited by their parents. The Government Welfare Officer regularly checks their progress. They sleep in dormitories, eat ‘civilised’ food, and endure lessons all day long. The regimentation is benign but thorough, supporting the view that because the task of educating Aboriginal children is so difficult, rigid training is necessary to overcome their ‘wildness’.  

Oldfield only hints at ‘the Stolen Generation’; “The Welfare Officer brought me,” replied Helen shortly.” He said my mother wasn’t capable of looking after me.” But Helen is ‘more white than black’, and her skin is only ‘lightly coloured’. Helen lacks the ‘round face, squat features and heavy forehead of the true Aboriginal’. Helen’s parents are both drunks, living on a reserve in something her father ‘knocked together’ out of posts, tin and hessian. He is unemployed, unable to hold down a ‘proper’ job for more than a few weeks. Her mother has done the unthinkable, neglected and abandoned her children. In spite of all this Helen still loves her and believes that her mother returns that love. Mary, a mission teacher, feels that Helen should be protected from such a degraded and unnatural woman. Oldfield justifies the action of removing a ‘part Aboriginal’ child from her parents. The blame for Helen’s and her brother’s predicament, rests squarely with her irresponsible parents.

“Helen still feels that her mother must love her. Because of this, she might run away to be with her. But her mother doesn’t love her, you know. She has deteriorated a great deal since Helen was taken from her. She’s living a most

38 Such institutions still existed in the 1960s and 1970s.
degraded life, and I don't think she ever gives her children a thought. Why, she wouldn't have anything to do with the baby boy when it was born. She wouldn't see it, or even give it a name. ... It is a terrible thing that we have to protect Helen from the unhappiness that love for her own mother could bring her." 40

Helen’s situation is presented as the norm. Melalla is the only child at the Mission who comes from an isolated station, where her people are still living a traditional way of life. The implication is that the rest of the children have been removed from reserves similar to Helen’s. Their removal is the only way that they can be saved from the degraded life of their parents.

Oldfield presents Aboriginal people as dispossessed and drifting towards the towns. They are portrayed as powerless victims of the dominant white society, accorded the lowest social status, unable to care for or keep clean the housing they are given as well as being ignorant of personal hygiene. Aboriginal people clearly have no understanding that cleanliness is associated with being civilised. Although critical of the reserves set aside for Aboriginal fringe dwellers, Oldfield constructs the actions of Helen’s mother within a feminist frame of reference, seeing her as another weak Aboriginal woman dependent on a man, unable to make decisions for herself and her family, choosing alcohol over motherhood. 41 Like Barton a century before, Oldfield cannot excuse poor mothering, exemplified by the apparent neglect and rejection of Helen by her mother.

40 Oldfield, op.cit., p.117.
41 In her 1992 publication Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle?, Oldfield acknowledges that the Australian suffragists had shown no concern for the voting rights or plight of Aboriginal women in any colony because they shared the prevailing belief that the Aboriginal race was ‘dying out’. The suffragists also shared the Anglo-Australian feelings of ‘superiority over all coloured races’ and knew little about or preferred to ignore ‘the cruelties and sexual degradation being visited upon black women by white men in the period’. Oldfield acknowledges that it wasn’t until the 1930s (Oldfield was born in 1925) that women’s organisations in Australia began to show ‘any great concern’ for Aboriginal women. Even in 1970 when Daughter of Two Worlds was published, Oldfield doesn’t show ‘any great concern’ for older Aboriginal
The living conditions of the fringe dwelling Aboriginal people are accepted as unfortunate and criticised, but they are not subjected to a political or economic analysis.

The narrative endorses the Mission as the only hope for Aboriginal children like Helen and Melalla, giving them a chance to live in a society they would otherwise be excluded from. Oldfield extols the virtues of the Christian ideals of those involved with the Missions. The Missionaries teach Aboriginal children that being black does not mean that they are inferior. They are all equal in the sight of God. Skin colour does not matter. Melalla has ‘never experienced a feeling of inferiority’, even though a white woman has arrogantly decided what is ‘best’ for her, going against her wishes and those of her mother, and ignoring the decision of the elders for Melalla to marry an older man from her ‘tribe’. Instead, Melalla is separated from her family and community who, in turn, are forced to observe the many rules and regulations imposed by the station owner if they are to remain on their traditional land. Melalla, and indeed Oldfield, never question what they both perceive to be an idyllic existence. It is only the other children, forced to live in an ‘unreal’ Aboriginal society on reserves who have been exposed to exploitation and degradation.

Melalla is academically gifted and sent to Perth to attend a suburban high school. With the purchase of new clothing, Melalla symbolically wears the white man’s armour and goes in to battle for her people. Mary notes the ‘first strengthening of self-will in a child who was usually so placid.’ Melalla is learning to be white, rejecting the timidity Oldfield associates with Aboriginal women, becoming more decisive like Ruth White and less a victim like her mother.

Inevitably Melalla encounters prejudice in many forms from the overt rudeness of some adults to the snide jibes of some of her classmates. Much of the remainder of the book describes Melalla’s reactions to these incidents. She emerges as a courageous and highly motivated young woman, able to deal with the prejudice she encounters. In spite of the women but concentrates her efforts on the assimilation of the young. A.Oldfield, Woman Suffrage in
paternalism of the well-meaning missionaries and white teachers, intent on guiding her path, Melalla retains her determination to return to her people with a vision to help them adjust to the changes they will be forced to make in their traditional patterns of living. Oldfield optimistically believes that Melalla, as an Aboriginal girl, can belong in two worlds. She is unable, however, to acknowledge that the world she sees as Aboriginal is only ‘traditional’ according to imposed white criteria. Melalla is encouraged to fight for her people, but only where the construction and definition of Aboriginal identity remains white.

“... Of course you belong here, in this world. You belong here, and you belong with your people, too. The other children in this school are poorer than you, Melalla; they have one world, but you have two.”

Melalla knew that he was right; that from the time when she had first seen the light of day in the gorge above Mount Locksley homestead, where all the women of her tribe gave birth, she had been destined to be the daughter of two worlds.

The emphasis in Australian children’s fiction shifts from traditional life and culture to contemporary situations for Aboriginal female protagonists with the publication in 1994 of Gracey, by James Maloney. The character Gracey is introduced in Dougy (1993) 44

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42 Paradoxically, European missionaries expressed goodwill and concern for Aboriginal people, but were more intrusive and disruptive than other Europeans as they endeavoured to deny Aboriginal people their law, languages and the use of their land. They also managed to break down belief systems and destroy ceremonies in an attempt to undermine the very fabric of Aboriginal society. In this they were fully supported by the various governments of the day.

43 Oldfield, op.cit., p.155.

44 Dougy will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.
and lives in a country town with her mother, an alcoholic father, and two brothers, Raymond and Dougy. In *Dougy*, Gracey is ‘good at lots of things’, unfortunately it is only her talent as a gifted runner which is highlighted by Maloney, reinforcing the stereotype that young Aboriginal people are only good at sport and unable to succeed in any other area.

The story begun in *Dougy* is taken up two and a half years later in *Gracey*. Little has changed. The original township has been washed away in a flood and its residents moved to Cunningham, an hour’s drive away. Gracey has taken up a sports scholarship to attend Hamilton College, a private girl’s boarding school in Brisbane, and the Aboriginal people are tolerated but still not accepted. Gracey has learnt about well-meaning white people in the city and how afraid they are of appearing racially prejudiced. The people from Cunningham still don’t care. When Dougy uncovers Aboriginal bones marked by bullet holes at a building site, Gracey dryly remarks that her own people don’t know anything about the traditional way Aborigines treated dead bodies, implying that contemporary Aboriginal people are ‘inevitably disconnected from an authentic religious sensibility’.

This is the reason white specialists from Brisbane must be called in. The experts judge the bones to be over one hundred years old, and that the grave contains the victims of a mass killing. The reaction expressing the subconscious hostility of both the black and white townspeople is recognised by the outsider Angela, Gracey’s school friend. Through Angela’s eyes Gracey, too, finally acknowledges the divisions that exist in the small country town.

Though blacks and whites had stood together carelessly to hear the experts, now that the story was out and the suspicions of a week had been put into words, the pools and islands had formed themselves. And hanging there above the whole scene like a morning mist lay a faint

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45 *Bradford*, op.cit., p.63.
hostility, a hostility which was always there but as undiscerned by Cunningham’s residents as the intangible heat of summer. “

The narrative structure is complex with the story being told from three different points of view – Gracey’s, Dougy’s and Trent Foster’s, the local police constable. Gracey, the main narrator, tells the story of life at Hamilton College from the perspective of the only Aboriginal girl at the school. Intertwined with this is her commentary about her family and life in Cunningham. Dougy keeps the reader informed about what is happening in Cunningham in Gracey’s absence, while Foster, in his weekly reports to his father’s answering machine in Brisbane, focusses his bemused racism on Raymond, Gracey’s older brother.

When Gracey decides to find out more about the Aboriginal massacre at Cunningham, it becomes more than a search for information; it becomes Gracey’s quest to find her own identity. She has lived in a white world and been so thoroughly absorbed into it that no one thinks of her as being Aboriginal, despite the colour of her skin, and this troubles her. Up until now Gracey has hated the small town life that is Cunningham and despised her family for what they are and where they live. Gracey had come to regard Hamilton College as home, but this changes when she returns to Cunningham because of her mother’s illness and subsequent death.

“How can I sit around here, in this white school,” I asked Angela. It was clear that I did not want a reply. “How, when I know what’s happened between white people and black people. How can I take up all the manners and proper language and be part of these classes. I just feel so

*J. Maloney, Gracey (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1994), p.42.*
out of place here, like some kind of alien from another planet. I'm different from every other kid in this school. I shouldn't be here.”

Gracey’s need to belong to a family has diminished during the years she has spent away. Angela, her closest friend, has, in some ways, replaced her mother. Gracey is guilt ridden as she attempts to reclaim her family. Initially, their survival becomes the focus of her time and attention, but this broadens to include involvement in a rally organised by the local Aboriginal men to preserve the gravesite of their murdered ancestors and seen by Moloney as exploiting notions of sacredness for political gain. Gracey desperately searches for somewhere to belong. Unlike Oldfield’s Melalla, Gracey is indeed caught between two worlds, unwanted by both. This is highlighted further when she discovers that the white man who actually shot the six Aboriginal men is her great-great grandfather.

Gracey is an educated, articulate girl and a gifted athlete, but the future she sees for herself in Cunningham is no different from that of her peers. The aspirations of her mother to provide her with choices seem to have been in vain.

Walking back to Paddy’s dusty car, my eye picked out from amongst the muddle of bodies in the street a number of other black girls of my age, or a little older. Everyone of them had a child at her side or in her arms. It was what girls did in Cunningham. They didn’t attend protest meetings or organise rallies or tell the men how to set out their placards. Before I could settle my uneasy mind, I imagined a long queue of these girls, babies in tow, lined

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41 Ibid., p.90.
up at the post office counter and there amongst them I saw myself. I stood for a few moments in the middle of the main street, weeping quietly at what the future held for me. "

The protest march brings the narrators' stories to a climax. Raymond and Dougy are arrested for attacking a police constable, and taken to the local police lock up. Raymond's despair at his unemployment, his drunkenness and the loss of his football career becomes overwhelming and he takes his own life whilst in custody. He has come to see himself as Constable Foster and the white community see him: a man without hope.

*Saw him tonight, with his string bean of a brother. Drunk both of them. Don't know who was guiding who home. That's what I mean, you see. The brother's only about fifteen. And there he is, following in big brother's footsteps. No-hopers, both of them. May as well curl up and die. *\(^49\)

Raymond is portrayed as the victim, not Gracey. Although angry about her brother's death, Gracey is also relieved that it isn't Dougy, her favourite. Gracey feels her isolation even more after Raymond's death. The Aboriginal men dislike her because she is an outspoken woman who questions and challenges their authority. They mistrust her motives because she has been given the opportunity to achieve in the white man's world and has succeeded. Gracey feels remorse for the indifference with which she has treated her mother, and regret at allowing the black activist Kevin O'Shea to betray her because she allowed blind anger to overtake her judgement.

Gracey is one of the few female Aboriginal characters in a children’s book to be portrayed with inner strength. Gracey achieves what she does through her own hard work and determination. She agonises over her identity and the world to which she belongs, finally realising that it isn’t knowing she is a Murri that is important, but feeling it. The difficult decision she makes to return to Hamilton College is hers alone. The message is not one of assimilation, but one of resistance and hope for self-determination. Gracey is never portrayed as a victim, but as an Aboriginal girl who can bring about change for her people, not through political activism alone, but through education. Gracey begins to see her place in the bigger picture as someone who can write the history of her people from an Aboriginal, rather than a white perspective, giving a voice to those who up until then had remained silent. To do this she must return to Brisbane. Hamilton College no longer represents home, but a means to an end.

Gracey is not taken from a traditional life and plunged into civilised white society. She is taken from a country town and plunged into life in a capital city. There is no magic stone and no kindly missionary to guide and protect her. Although supportive and protective, the school and its occupants don’t patronise her. Gracey has earned her scholarship and her place.

Cunningham is a country town with a mixed population of white and Aboriginal people. The attitudes of resentment between the two simmer continuously below the surface, boiling up only when outside events force confrontations along racial lines. Each racial group is ready to blame the other. Maloney’s depiction of racism moves beyond the cliched stereotypes of Aboriginal people as dirty and lazy, with a stone age culture and mentality, to highlight differences between the ‘authentic’ Aboriginal traditions of the past and the ‘modern’ Aboriginal who attempts to exploit or debase these traditions and thereby exacerbate divisions within the Aboriginal community. Gracey and her peers don’t gather food or participate in traditional ceremonies. The language usually

\*\*Ibid., p.65.\*\*
associated with the characterisation of Aboriginal girls is absent. Although Gracey belongs in a contemporary world, where the issues are land rights, deaths in custody and equal opportunity, Maloney still constructs her, however subtly, as being disconnected from the authentic religious sensibility of her ancestors and somehow she remains less than a 'real' Aborigine.

In 1998 after two years of research, Elizabeth Hutchins published Bring Back the Songs featuring Aboriginal teenaged girl, Nessa Musgrave, as the central character. Just as Gracey embarks on a journey of self discovery, so too does Nessa. Where Gracey already knows of her Aboriginal heritage, Nessa doesn't realise that her mother was Aboriginal because no one has told her. When her mother is killed tragically in a bush fire, much of Nessa's family history is destroyed with her. When her father remarries, Nessa gains a hostile stepsister and a stepmother who has great difficulty coping with a stepdaughter and her memories of the past. Matt is Nessa's innocent three year old half-brother, who lovingly accepts them all.

_Pam was irritated again and, turning to Nessa, said, 'I thought we agreed years ago that the past is over and done with. I don't want to hear about yours and I won't bother you with mine._'  

The story has two parallel themes. The first is Nessa's journey to discover her own identity through contact with her mother's Aboriginal family in the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. The second follows the gradual breakdown and eventual disintegration of her step-family. The 'ghost' of Nessa's mother, which her father never manages to lay to rest, is a benign but powerful force.  

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51 He moves them all to Port Augusta where he and his first wife met, as well as carrying a photograph of the dead Margaret in his wallet, rather than one of Pam and his 'new' family.
past, the more dysfunctional her family becomes. The climax comes when Nessa identifies herself as Aboriginal and Pam returns to Adelaide with Matt and Elle. The two events are subversively linked. Pam and Elle, as characters, are not really given a chance to develop. They are both portrayed negatively, always angry and aggressive, with an undercurrent of racism, while Nessa and her father, with their Aboriginal connection, are usually gentler and more understanding. In her attempt to get the story ‘right’ in line with constructions of ‘political correctness’, Hutchins overcompensates and succeeds in stereotyping Nessa’s white stepmother and stepsister.

Hutchins tries very hard to inform her readers about the Aboriginal people from the area, particularly Wilpena Pound. Unfortunately, the narrative lapses into didacticism and becomes rather monotonous. Unlike Gracey who has no knowledge of the traditional culture of her people, Nessa is immersed in the attempt to revive the traditional stories and beliefs of the Adnyamathanha people, studied as a part of the Aboriginal Studies curriculum in the local high school. The Aboriginal students at the school are realistically portrayed as coming from varied cultural backgrounds, where the different languages and communities are identified. 22

Nessa’s physical journey to Wilpena Pound parallels her inner quest. Suspecting her Aboriginal heritage before she goes, the more she travels the more obvious it becomes that her mother was Aboriginal. Nessa is olive skinned, with brown eyes and hair, and closely resembles Debra Forbes, a local Aboriginal girl. Nessa discovers her mother’s maiden name was also Forbes. Nessa’s journey brings her into contact with the traditional stories told by Bob Fisk the white tour guide and father of her friend Janie. Like Melalla, Nessa is presented as belonging to two worlds.

*I am two people, thought Nessa. One person was Ness-the-tourist, Janie’s friend, standing in a large honey-gold*
ochre pit and listening to Bob talk about the ochre that
was used for ceremonies and traded widely with people
from other groups. The other person kept saying to herself,
I am part of this land.\textsuperscript{12}

Like Gracey, Nessa initially wants to reject her Aboriginality, and not accept the ‘link of
blood’. Hutchins is unable to successfully combine her purpose to inform and her
characterisation. Where Gracey’s intense struggle with her identity is punctuated by
tragedy, Nessa’s inner journey is calm and superficial. Although Nessa is a pleasant girl,
who tries to please her family and her friends and accepts her life without complaint, as
the central character she lacks depth.

Hutchins tries to be accurate and non-judgemental, telling the story of white invasion
without emotion. She tries to let the facts speak for themselves, refuting stereotypes
wherever possible.

‘You mean the Aborigines didn’t just go walkabout then?’
Samantha asked. ‘I always thought they were nomadic.’
‘Certainly not; their journeys had a purpose,’ said Bob.
‘White people were just ignorant about what the
Aborigines were doing. In fact the routes they followed
were the best places to find food and water and to trade.
And often the stories told them about the animals and
plants and where to find them.
‘Does this still happen?’ asked Jim.
‘No. The last initiation ceremony up here was held in

\textsuperscript{12} Keith Thomas from Goolwa is identified as Ngarrindjeri, and speaks his own language which noone else
can understand.
\textsuperscript{13} Hutchins, op.cit., p.59.
1947. By then the missionaries were discouraging Aboriginal people from having anything to do with their old culture and anyway they had to live off the land - eat certain foods as part of the preparation for the ceremonies. And the station owners didn't welcome them, especially when they substituted a nice calf for some animal that had been made extinct by the invasion of the white people.  

In contrast to the earlier books (with the exception of Gracey) Hutchins attaches no stigma to being of mixed descent, nor are there any assimilationist messages. Nessa knows she must choose whether she wants to identify herself as Aboriginal, regardless of what 'percentage' of Aboriginal blood she has. Through Nessa, Hutchins tackles the issue of Aboriginality and its associated stereotypes. Nessa doesn't want to be an Aboriginal because they are identified as lazy no hopers, uninterested in school, unable to read and unemployed.

'So what's so terrible about being Aboriginal?' she asked in her usual direct way.

Nessa hesitated, looking for a way to say it that wouldn't sound all wrong. 'It's just - well, I don't want to be like Chrissie and that Dexter, who don't care a bit about school, or some of the people you see hanging round without jobs...'

She trailed off.

'You mean there are some real no-hopers.'

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54 Hutchins, op. cit., p.44.
‘I guess so.’
‘But there are plenty of white people like that too. What about all the successful Aborigines? What about Cathy Freeman? And look at Yothu Yindi. They’re great.’

Rosemary Craddock, an Aboriginal education worker from the West Coast, joins the tour to tell the tourists stories from Nepabunna, which was originally a mission. Rosemary tells a little about her history and the removal of her mother from her family. Unlike Oldfield, Hutchins makes no attempt to justify such actions from a white perspective. Aboriginal women are not presented as being neglectful of their children. Hutchins does not apportion blame; she allows Rosemary to simply state what happened.

‘... Nepabunna was a mission. More and more people came in to live there and gave up Adnyamathana men’s ways.’ She paused for a minute, and no-one spoke.
‘Then they started removing the children. My mum and her sisters were taken away to live in a children’s home. My mum never even learned her own language or her stories. And the other sisters never came back.’

Rosemary clearly delineates the difference between the traditional roles of the Aboriginal men and women, moving beyond the distinction between food gatherer and hunter as the primary signifiers. The Aboriginal women in the narrative are all strong and positive, seeking to enhance the cultural awareness of their people. They are presented as innovators, reviving the languages and many of the cultural traditions that

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55 Hutchins, op.cit., p.69-70.
56 Hutchins, op.cit., p.74.
have always been the responsibility of Aboriginal women. The men are rarely mentioned.

Nessa claims her Aboriginal family when she attends her great-great grandmother’s funeral, but returns home to discover that her step-family has left. There seems to be little remorse from either Nessa or her father. The contrast is sharply drawn between the bond that exists between the members of Nessa’s Aboriginal family who welcome her, and the resentment and antagonism that Pam and Elle radiate. Hutchins doesn’t give them a chance, nor does she blame Nessa’s father for refusing to let go of the past. The impression is that Pam should have accepted his unwillingness to relinquish the life he shared with his now deceased Aboriginal wife. Her insecurity is seen to be unreasonable. The message, which can be interpreted as inverse racism, is that Nessa’s Aboriginal family can accept her white history far better than her step-family can accept her black heritage.

As an Aboriginal character Nessa is one dimensional, searching for an identity with very little struggle or reflection. Hutchins uses Nessa and her search as the vehicle through which many issues concerning Aboriginal people are raised, but none, however, are actually explored. Her intention is to introduce to child readers the many difficulties and prejudices that Aboriginal people face on a daily basis, raising their awareness, but leaving the discussion of these issues to others. Unfortunately, there is also an underlying naivety that assumes that prejudice can instantly be overcome by confronting those who perpetuate it. There is no reconciliation between the ‘blended’ family of Pam and Peter, nor between Pam and Elle as mother and daughter. Matt, who belongs to both, is unable to bind them together. Nessa is reunited with her Aboriginal family, and in a less tangible way, so is her father. But the chance of a reconciliation between Pam and her husband seems remote.

Nessa, like Gracey, has control over her own destiny. Their future doesn’t rest in the hands of a male or of a bureaucracy. They are their own person, able to make decisions
about their own lives. This is in marked contrast to the Aboriginal girls represented in the Australian children’s literature of earlier times. Bett-Bett’s life and future depends upon the benevolence of a white ‘boss’. Nimmitybel’s is identified with her male companion Jackadgery. Melalla and Quei are dependent upon the mission and policies of assimilation. What sets Gracey and Nessa apart is their belief in themselves regardless of their heritage. Their Aboriginality is seen as a strength, not a weakness. They do not reject their traditional culture, but reclaim it. Their identity as young women is as important as their Aboriginality, and never questioned. It is never suggested that their goals are unobtainable because they are Aboriginal. The difficulties faced are not denied, but their right to a place in a modern, contemporary society is never questioned.

The final book to be considered in this chapter, The Drover’s Boy, was published in 1997 and written by Ted Egan and illustrated by Robert Ingpen. It is included here because it is the only Australian children’s book to raise the issue of Aboriginal girls as drover’s ‘boys’. 51 The Drover’s Boy is a picture book in which the text is a song published and released, for an adult audience, in 1981 as part of The Faces of Australia series featuring Ted Egan’s ‘interpretation of Australian history in song and verse’. The picture book, however, was awarded ‘notable’ status in the 1998 Children’s Book of the Year Awards, and for this reason it must be regarded as a children’s book and included in this chapter.

The implied child reader of The Drover’s Boy is older and more experienced, bringing to the text historical and political understandings. The words to the original song have not been changed, but their representation has. Although the child has become the intended reader, the implied audience is still adult. Although the written and visual texts are

51 The drover’s boy was a horse tailer, the key ‘man’ after the head drover. It was the horse tailer’s job to have enough horses for the day ready to be caught and saddled before first light. During the day, the horse tailer had to find water and grass for the spare horses, and in dry seasons, this often meant detours, or even camping with the horses overnight on a small patch of grass two or three kilometres from the main camp. The horse tailer did not see a great deal of the other men, but then he asked for, and usually got, more money for his demanding and solitary work, unless he was Aboriginal. P. Forrest, The Overlanders (Richmond Victoria, Greenhouse Publications, 1981), p.39.
directed at different narratees, both child and adult are encouraged to see the narrator not only as reliable, but also as accurate and historically correct.

The book, constructed as part of the ‘boss’ drover’s journal, centres upon the life of a drover and his relationship with his Aboriginal ‘boy’. The narrative is told from the drover’s point of view, while the illustrations are an archival device which present an encapsulated white history of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. At the literal level the illustrator suggests discourses associated with items of truth, sexuality and power through pictorial representations of photographs, a lock of hair and official documents. The notion of literary and political subversion in the depiction of Aboriginal women and their relationship with white men is crucial to understanding the use of history as the ‘social ground for subjectivity’. Ingpen exploits Foucault’s notion of history as an archive. 58 The picture book uses different layouts to replicate documents and photographs supposedly kept by the drover. The drover’s journal includes the official recognisance paper of Rusty Walker implying that the drover obtained his ‘boy’ legally, and that she was paid for her work. The ‘journal’ also uses ‘extracts’ from reference books defining ‘Aboriginal institution’ and the Northern Territory Aborigines Act 1910, passed ‘to make provision for the better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Northern Territory’. 59

58 L. Bourke, ‘Cunning Passages: History in Gary Crew’s Strange Objects’ in Papers, Volume 4, Number 3, (December 1993), p.42
59 South Australia was in control of the administration of the Northern Territory from 1863-1911. In 1910, the South Australian parliament passed the Northern Territory Aborigines Act in preparation for the transition to federal administration which established an Aborigines department under a chief protector. When the Commonwealth took over control of the Northern Territory in 1911 it viewed Aborigines as a vulnerable group in need of protection. Legislation aimed at controlling black-white sexual relations was extremely unpopular with white men. The N.T. Aboriginals Act 1918-20, Section 34 made it an offence for an Aboriginal or part- Aboriginal women to be ‘in male attire and in the company of any male person other than an Aboriginal or half-caste’. No specific references were made to cohabiting or consorting with Aboriginal women, so the offence was inapplicable if the woman was dressed in ‘female’ clothing. An amended Aboriginals Ordinance of 1918 declared it an offence for a white man or Asian to ‘habitually consort’ with an Aboriginal woman or ‘half-caste’ penalising men in long-term, overt relationships with Aboriginal women. The amended ordinance of 1918 would be particularly relevant to the drover Dan Williams as the ‘date’ on Rusty Walker’s recognisance papers depicting the regulation as a part of the Aboriginals Ordinance of 1911, is 8th August 1920.
Rusty Walker appears to have come from either a mission or an Aboriginal reserve. ‘Photographs’ of outback Northern Territory locations and people as well as ‘maps’ are also included to further authenticate the historical accuracy of the narrative. The documents are not sourced with publication details or the names of those depicted and only a select number of the photographs are captioned with general descriptions such as, ‘Stockwomen at Alexandria Station Northern Territory, 1916’. Each inclusion offers a different perspective on the drover and his boy revealing that history becomes a matter of ownership and property as entrenched masculine constructions suppress alternative versions of events in favour of their own European narratives. The question of conflicting historical accounts is also implicit in the absence of an Aboriginal voice in the text. The narrative isn’t about the competence of the drover’s boy as a stockworker. Instead, the focus is on how well the drover treats her. The drover’s boy is not permitted to tell her own story.

The Aboriginal ‘boy’ is constituted as an object within a male-centred narrative. *The Drover’s Boy* doesn’t tell just one story so much as recreate an archive which contains a number of possible stories about Aboriginal people and their relationship with their white ‘masters’. In this way *The Drover’s Boy* decentres its world, dissolving the unitary subject into a collection of artefacts and texts which together constitute a picture book. The book shows history as an object of discourse dependent upon more than one narrator, inflected with their biases, and an object in itself where the reality of the life of the drover’s boy can exist independently of historical accounts and the underlying implications of government legislation and its enforcement.

Ingpen’s illustrations accord varying degrees of ‘credibility’ to the different representations of the text. This is realised mainly through the use of colour and the ‘reproduction’ of historical evidence and primary source material. The use of watercolour provides muted, soft golden-brown hues, which suggest age through sepia, where the human forms lose some of their identity. The focus is softer when the human

\[^6\] Bourke, *op.cit.*, p.43, p.45.
characters are portrayed, blurring visual detail such as facial features, while the historical artefacts and documents have a much sharper focus so that they can be read more easily. In this way the pictorial representation of the 'written' evidence is depicted as 'real' and 'factual' while the recreation of events become 'what might have been', a possible even probable interpretation of events.

The use of a range of textual forms demands more of the reader than simply being absorbed into the story through a seamless construction of narrative. In The Drover's Boy the very seams and gaps between the various voices and styles are foregrounded, integrating the 'facts' of history and the 'probable' of fiction, blurring the 'seam' between the factual and beliefs, truth and illusion. 41 This is exemplified by the use of the double page spread where the 'factual' contains the words of the song and then the 'possible' where there is no written text just Ingpen's illustrative interpretation of probable events. The devices of literature and history are both exposed as artefacts, crossing boundaries intertextually. This forces the reconsideration of the ideas of origin and originality between culturally significant intertexts. 42 The historical and the popular are mixed in with the naturalistic and the sensory. The narrative is presented as a romance supported by the illustrations as historical fact.

Aboriginal women were the principal shepherds in northern Western Australia and were preferred to men in Queensland's Central West. It has been estimated that during the first decade of the twentieth century fifty per cent of all stockriders were women. 43 In such isolated areas Aboriginal women performed a wide range of tasks, such as mustering cattle, droving, working at road and fence building and repairing, as well as

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41 Ibid., p.48.
accompanying camel teams. It is, however, in the area of sexual relations that the inequality between white and black, male and female, is most clearly shown. Although Aboriginal men were rarely accepted as sexual partners by European women, European men pursued Aboriginal women and girls but were rarely willing publicly to admit their prohibited liaisons. The drover of The Drover’s Boy is no exception.

Attributing a representation to someone else is often a way of distancing oneself to a greater or lesser degree from its truth. To make clear to the reader that second-hand and third-hand accounts are not based on the reporter’s direct observation, the reporter usually attributes the information about an event to a source. Egan’s text employs this distancing device on several occasions. In the Camooweal Pub a stranger tells about the massacre in the west where the Aboriginal ‘bucks’ were shot, and the ‘gins’ were taken.

In the Camooweal pub they talked about
The death of The Drover’s Boy,
They drank their rum with a stranger who’d come
From a Kimberley run, Fitzroy,

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64 According to McGrath (1987), many Aboriginal women from the stations went droving, often with their husbands. Egan it seems is not interested in the story of Aboriginal women who went droving, legitimately, with their husbands. A. McGrath, Born in the Cattle (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1987), p.52.
65 During the first three decades of the 20th century black-white sexual liaisons were prohibited in the Northern Territory, except with special dispensation from the Chief Protector, Dr Cecil Cook. He sometimes allowed part-Aboriginal girls (the paler ones, i.e. ‘quadroons’) to marry working class white males as part of his ‘fuck-em white’ policy. Apartheid was alive and well on the Australian frontier. White males who wished to cohabit with Aboriginal women did so in defiance of the law — and most did so secretly.
66 The sexual and racial paranoia of white society destroyed the possibility that relationships with white men could work out equitably for Aboriginal women. The white man usually tried to conceal his black mistress to avoid social ostracism, or else treat her as a sex object. The man who made a habit of associating with Aboriginal women or who admitted an attachment to a black woman was a social outcast. McGrath, op.cit. P.70-71. H. Reynolds, Dispossession: Black Australians and White Invaders (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1989), p.146.
And he told of the massacre in the west,
Barest details, guess the rest,
Shoot the bucks*, grab a gin*,
Cut her hair, break her in,
Call her a boy, The Drover’s Boy,
Call her a boy,
The Drover’s Boy. 70

Whether a representation is judged credible is not necessarily a matter of its absolute truth. What one social group considers credible may not be considered credible by another. Modality realises and produces social affinity through aligning the reader or listener with certain representations. Not everyone, however, believes that one can ascertain the truth only through ‘direct observation’. 71 Although it is not widely recognised that they were accomplished stockworkers Aboriginal women played a prominent role in the cattle industry on the northern frontier from Queensland to the Kimberley’s. Egan as the writer distances himself and therefore the audience from the truth by telling the reader to ‘guess the rest’. The author gives his representation the highest credibility, expecting the reader to align and accept as accurate the way he constructs his story. The Aboriginal ‘boy’ remains silent because the abduction, rape and ongoing sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls by white men cannot be openly included in texts for children.

The illustration on the front cover is taken from a photograph originally held by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and reproduced in Ted Egan’s The Aboriginals Songbook with the caption: ‘In a male-dominated group of newcomers it was inevitable that many men would seek sexual gratification from Aboriginal women’. The song,

70 Egan and Ingpen, op.cit., n.p. A disclaimer appears in smaller print at the bottom of the page, justifying the use of offensive words such as ‘bucks’ and ‘gin’, stating that the ‘offensive words represent the attitudes of some people towards Aboriginals and are in the song to portray those attitudes’.

258
however, appears in *The Overlanders Songbook* but is not reproduced in *The Aboriginals Songbook*. This clearly indicates that it wasn’t the drover’s boy that Egan wanted to celebrate but the drover. The ‘boy’ was his companion and although she made a contribution it was the drover who was important. The implied message for the adult has already been established. The sub-text, unknown to the child reader, is about the drover’s boy and sexual exploitation. As on many book covers, the title is superimposed over the illustration emphasising its higher value, as it provides the essential, generic, abstract and hence ‘ideal’ version of the message. 71 The gaze of the unnamed woman in both the photograph and the illustration is not direct, but looks just to the left of the reader to someone beyond the frame. The girl is not speaking to or looking directly at the reader which indicates that she is not the narrator. Whoever is beyond her gaze tells the story.

The drover’s boy is depicted as an object for the contemplation of the reader, not as a subject for the reader to enter into an imaginary and equal social relation with. Given the history of the photograph and the contextualising of the caption, it is possible that the illustrator deems it to be inappropriate for a child to enter into a ‘relationship’ with an Aboriginal girl perceived to be sexually promiscuous. 72 Throughout the book the drover’s boy makes no eye contact with the reader as viewer. The eyes are either not distinct so there is no discerning gaze, or the face is concealed by shadow. Just as the girl on the cover does not seek the viewer’s recognition, so too the drover’s ‘boy’ is prevented from forming a relationship with the reader.

In a picture book the sequencing of the images is the construction often used to make concrete the relation of power and involvement. Ingpen changes the sequence depending on whom the image depicts. He reveals his view of the relation of power and involvement from page to page. The images narrativise the point of view of the illustrator imposing himself as a fictional viewer between the textual narrative

71 Bourke, *op. cit.*, p.50.
representation of the songwriter and the meaning extracted by the reader. At a superficial
textual level, the messages are at times conflicting, making demands on the reader's
capacity to construct meaning.

The long angle of the double page spread depicting the drover on horse back makes him
look imposing and awesome and gives the impression of superiority, exaltation and
triumph. This is in sharp contrast to the smaller, undignified image of the drover's boy as
she falls off the back of her horse. The drover and the horses dominate the frames; the
'boy' is insignificant. Compared to the white drover 'mounted on his thoroughbred',
there is nothing noble or heroic about the way she falls to her death. The drover has the
power and is in complete control. The manual work of the drover's boy is of less
importance than the work of the male drover. She is marginalised through her gender
roles as child bearer and companion and through her race as proscribed (and hence
secret) lover and concubine, part of a patriarchal ideology in which the female is subject
to and governed by the male. The drover's boy is exploited through the tyranny of
dependence. The drover is associated with notions of power, status, and control, while
the drover's boy is aligned with ideas of subservience, inferiority, and passivity.
Aboriginal women came to be viewed as sex symbols or 'black velvet', implying that all
black women were 'available' for prostitution; white men could thus assuage themselves
of possible guilt for rape, disease or responsibility for the resulting offspring. The
drover demanding that his sexual needs be satisfied after a hard days work still embodies
the 'duty' of women to satisfy the needs of a man, which Egan constructs as admirable.

Feminine difference is also valorised through the semiotic links between the drover's
boy and white women – 'faithful wife, never a bride'.

77 Ibid., p.28.
78 McGrath, op.cit., p.68.
79 M. Langton,'Well, I heard it in the Radio and I saw it on the Television ... ': An Essay for the
Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People
and Things (Woolloomooloo, Australian Film Commission, 1993), p.50, p.89.
80 Black women's role as sexual partners for white men, and white people's reactions, shaped
contemporary society more fundamentally than any other aspect of Northern Territory history. Aboriginal
women's 'availability', their willingness to perform arduous work, and the advantage of using them in the
dual roles of worker and sexual partner made them an extremely valuable asset for white men - especially
those who were away from the eyes of white society. McGrath, op.cit. P.68, p.69.

260
The afterword describes the book as ‘a work of fiction based on indisputable historical fact’ written as a tribute to those ‘pioneering Aboriginal women’ who dressed as drover’s boys to get around the law that prevented the employment of Aboriginal women as drovers. Egan does, however, acknowledge that:

Many of these women were the victims of incidents like the ‘massacre in the west’ mentioned in the song. When white men took ‘reprisals’ against a group of Aboriginal people, they often abducted the women, having ‘dispersed’ or shot the men. These women became virtual slaves, working without pay to move cattle all over Australia, often far from their own country. And yet, in some cases, as the song suggests, genuine love between the ‘drover’s boys’ and their white bosses developed out of mutual dependence. Many of the children of such unions testify with affection how their parents truly loved one another.’

*The Drover’s Boy* suggests as ‘indisputable historical fact’ a romance between a white drover and an Aboriginal girl, using a children’s picture book as the vehicle to reconstruct a shameful period of Aboriginal-European relations as ‘one of the many paradoxes of the Australian frontier’. What the story ignores are the young girls who were kept as virtual prisoners, abused physically and sexually, and then either discarded or killed when they were of no more use. The narrative is remarkably free of explicit violence, confrontation or political reference to race relations while the illustrations further dilute the impact of the depicted events. In the context of the soft watercolours, inter-racial violence is effectively displaced. The book and its accompanying illustrations romanticise a situation from an Anglo-Australian male point of view which, for many Aboriginal women and girls, was intolerable. As William Sowden demonstrates,

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however, not all white men supported the exploitation of Aboriginal women as drover’s boys:

In 1998 Ted Egan made a seven million dollar bid to film his story of *The Drover’s Boy*. In *The Weekend Australian* (1998), the reporter states that the movie is ‘driven by love on several levels’; the romantic love in the story, the love the drover’s boy has for her work and the reciprocated love of Egan for his country. According to the film’s prospectus, *The Drover’s Boy* is set in 1920 and includes a massacre, fights, cruelty, and ‘really frightening brutality’, all drawn from ‘real’ life. Egan says that the drover’s boy is a ‘wonderful’ role. Everyone else has flaws, but she is ‘heroic’. Egan states that he cast the Aboriginal actor Ningali to play the drover’s boy, because she was ‘black enough’ and spoke ‘the language’ as well as being ‘uninhibited about being naked’. Egan expresses surprise that although Ningali ‘performs in [traditional] ceremonies’, she still manages to ‘grasp’ the ideas of the western world. The only thing that he didn’t say was that Ningali was a ‘real’ Aborigine. The story of the drover’s boy it seems is still being told through the eyes of the white man for whom she was a ‘faithful wife’ but ‘never a bride’ at the direction of a white man who is still incorporating her into his version of Australian history.  

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82 Ibid.
83 To my knowledge, the film is still in the pre-production phase.
Chapter Seven

Constructing Contemporary Masculinity: The Aboriginal Boy 1971 - 1993

The representation of Australian childhood in children's fiction up until the eighties has been gender bound. The protagonists in most stories for the young are predominantly male and at least eleven or twelve years of age. The boys make the decisions and initiate most of the action. The voice narrating stories of Aboriginal childhood are white, adult and often condescending. The normative figure is the white boy hero whose masculinity is constructed according his height, courage and initiative. The imperial social order created a hierarchy of masculinities just as it created a hierarchy of communities and races. The colonisers distinguished 'more manly' from 'less manly' groups among their subjects. At the same time, the growing emphasis on gender difference in European culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided symbols of overall superiority and inferiority. As Bradford notes, Aboriginal masculinity is frequently represented as an ‘infantilised and desexualised state’ that functions within ‘a set of contrasts’ between the virile Anglo-Australian boy heroes and their more effeminate Aboriginal counterparts. ¹

Australian children's fiction is strikingly consistent in its construction of Aboriginal masculinity across generations of white authorship. Most texts display deeply ingrained versions of racism and are unable to transcend contemporary Australian discourses to present more culturally sensitive representations of masculinity in which ideologies of gender and race intersect. In David Martin's Hughie (1971), the hierarchies of race and gender are congruent with those in The Hunted Piccaninnies, where the white boy hero demonstrates his superior strength and intelligence. According to Connell, phallocentricity implicates gender and sexuality in race and therefore requires an analysis of 'men' and the 'native' together. ² In Hughie, Aboriginal masculinity is constructed through the description of events which


263
involve Clancy's swimming ability and Hughie's artistic talent. Hughie's masculinity is set against the more robust physicality of Clancy, and is seen as lacking.

In Alice Hawkins' *This Child* (1976), one of the main thematic and ideological strands in the novel is the construction of masculinity focused through Will's relationship with his sister Ann. The other principal thematic strand is that of assimilation, filtered through the racist ideologies of the townspeople towards the fringe dwelling Aboriginal community. In *Doug* (1993), James Moloney's narrative also foregrounds the racist ideologies of a country town directed towards the Aboriginal community on its outskirts. Doug's masculinity is set against the physical prowess of his football playing brother Raymond. *The Fat and Juicy Place* (1992), however, is one of the few Australian children's books to consult Aboriginal organisations rather than relying on the stereotypes and racist ideologies about Aboriginality that predominantly inform the construction of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children's literature. Set in urban Sydney, Diana Kidd deploys Aboriginal English to connect Jack with the cultural and kinship traditions of his family.

When David Martin, born Ludwig Detsinyi in Budapest, first arrived in Australia in 1949, he became the editor of a weekly Jewish newspaper in Sydney, before moving his wife and son to Putty, on the edge of the Hunter Valley, in New South Wales. Putty lies on what was the old coach road from Sydney to Singleton. In the 1960s, it was merely a few houses built along a creek. This was also the time of the Aboriginal freedom rides and indigenous political activity. In 1965, a group of about thirty Sydney University students formed the Students Action for Aborigines. Led by Charles Perkins and Jim Spigelman, the group undertook a 3,200 kilometre bus tour across northern New South Wales towns investigating and protesting about discrimination against Aboriginal people and challenging the nation's social

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4 The Wonnarua people focused on Singleton as their centre and survived as a community. There was an Aboriginal mission reserve at St Clair and an Aboriginal Inland Mission Home for boys in the Singleton district.
conscience. In Moree, the group picketed the town swimming pool, which prohibited Aboriginal children unless they were with organised schools groups. Singleton provides the setting for Hughie, while Moree and the freedom ride of the Students Action for Aborigines provides the context, making Hughie one of the first Australian children’s books to attempt to present Aboriginal rights through the eyes of a contemporary Aboriginal child.

The 1960s and 1970s saw Aboriginal people express rising levels of frustration. The strengthening of the Aboriginal voice in politics, increased access to education, and a broadening of white support, were countered by deeply entrenched institutional racism in both rural and urban Australia. Hughie’s cousin Greg predicts that the effects of their ‘Freedom Sing-out’ at the Merringee swimming pool will become the concern of ‘the whole country’. These decades generated innovative formulations of Aboriginal aspirations, including self-determination and then sovereignty, paving the way for the 1967 referendum which allowed indigenous Australians to become citizens. Many fundamental tensions nevertheless remained unresolved.

Author David Martin has experienced persecution, and is profoundly humanist in his approach, espousing the cause of Aboriginal people as a persecuted minority and apprehensive about the injustice they have suffered. He seems to view the moulding of children's sensibilities as a legitimate way of improving an imperfect world. It is therefore no surprise that Hughie becomes the medium for informing his Anglo-Australian audience of the alienation of Aboriginal Australians. As discussed in other chapters, many children's writers have used children's books to instruct their audience about the traditional practices of Aboriginal people or to reinforce the 'virtues' of assimilation. Martin, however, is the first children's author to present an

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5 D. Horton, *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia Volume 1, A-L* (Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994), p.390-391. When Martin published Hughie, his first book for children, in 1971, he was already a successfully established writer for adults. The first draft, however, was written in 1968, while Martin and his wife were in Prague as Russian troops occupied Czechoslovakia.


7 Martin’s father was a Hungarian Jew and his mother German. In 1934, when he was a member of a left-wing Berlin youth group, anti-Nazi leaflets were discovered, by his parents, hidden in his gramophone. He left Germany never to return. His parents fled to England in 1938, but other members of his family were less fortunate; sixteen of them, including his grandfather, were killed.

Aboriginal child, actively engaged in opposing the attitudes of the white majority. But children's literature in Australia did not prepare readers in the 1970s for a young Aboriginal protagonist who questions segregation and publicly opposes racism. Martin doesn't preach but his intent is unmistakably didactic, with a strong moral purpose. His emphasis on story conceals his exploration of the themes of alienation and belonging that reflect the problems and paradoxes of his own life experiences. His ambivalence creates conflict between the demands of exploring contemporary Aboriginal themes and the need to solve the varied but elementary details of plot. Hughie is a story laden with incident and attempts to explore serious themes but only succeeds in treating them superficially. In so doing, Martin abdicates responsibility for challenging the ethos of the white majority who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, further alienating the Aboriginal as 'other'.

One of Martin's central concerns is how to represent the uncomfortable and often unhappy situations in the 'real' world without compromising too much or destroying the young reader's hope and belief in the possibility of a secure and worthwhile future. Part of this reality includes the presence of death. People die and some of them are young children. Martin justifies his interest in tragic realism in the following way:

*It is pointless to hide tragedy from children, but to leave them without hope is criminal. They read books in order to have a model for living. Fiction is an ordered reality, to read fiction helps them to bring some order, some pattern into the chaos of expansion, of growing up. It does not hurt kids to identify with suffering and with struggle, but they also need to identify with hope.*

Given his desire to help children cope with such realities, it is understandable that Martin should choose to highlight dispossessed children and fragmented families.

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9 Such experiences led him to espouse Communism and he was a member of the Communist Party until 1956.

10 Walter McVitty, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-42.
Hughie begins tragically with the drowning of the protagonist's young cousin Chrissy, in a waterhole considered unsafe for the white community, but acceptable for the Aborigines.

Hughie's masculinity, like that of Coolamon, Gurra and Gor-ree before him, is flawed. Unlike his white antithesis, Clancy, who has the 'chest and shoulders of a man', thirteen year old Hughie has the body of a child. Even his older cousin Greg calls him 'the infant Hugh' and his 'baby cousin'. Hughie prefers to draw and paint rather than play sport, while Clancy, whose name recalls a celebrated icon of bush-bred Australian masculinity, is the local swimming champion. Hughie's nickname is 'Poodles', because of his curly hair. The fact that a poodle is often an effeminately groomed dog lends further weight to Hughie's less than acceptable masculine image. As Connell argues, the racialised humiliation of subordinated Aboriginal men and boys both lies in, and is experienced as, their feminization. Subordination is seen as a lack of masculinity.\(^\text{11}\)

The values of solidarity, struggle, working to uphold justice and fighting for the 'underdog', were a significant part of the ethos of the Anglo-Australian male. The codes of mateship developed by the early settlers continued in the armed forces, particularly through the ANZAC tradition. Loyalty was regarded as more important than life itself, while disloyalty was viewed as the most heinous of crimes. This sense of belonging to an Australian tradition of 'mateship' gives Clancy a sense of mastery and strength over an oppressive country town hierarchy. Racism and bigotry are present in Merringee and link Hughie and Clancy in a shared struggle against prejudice. While the notion of mateship in Hughie is clearly coercive, it is also used to emphasise the bonding of black and white in the longer term, underpinned by the larger, more common purpose of Aboriginal activism. The friendship between Clancy and Hughie, however, only becomes possible after Hughie's parents move out of the 'black's camp'.

\[\ldots\text{ he could have had a marvellous time in the new pool right in the middle of Merringee, the Olympic}\]

pool, opened only at the end of the previous summer, where he [Clancy] did all his serious training. ...

Then why, if he had the pick of the best, did Clancy go for his dips where Hughie went?

Hughie knew why, though they had never discussed it. He did it because they were mates. They had been knocking about as a pair since they were knee-high to a grasshopper, almost from the day Hughie's people had moved out of the black's camp ...  

Clancy is a true mate. Although he falters briefly, he ultimately makes the supreme sacrifice, giving up the prestige of his swimming title to stand by Hughie, and publicly oppose his parents and many of the other white townspeople. Like his literary namesake, Clancy exemplifies the characteristics required by mateship: reliability, loyalty, toughness and courage, as well as humour. Clancy is a boy who has survived against the odds, recovering from the life-threatening illness meningitis. He is depicted as physically and intellectually superior to Hughie, an Aboriginal boy whom Martin implies has survived little by comparison. The ethic of mateship promotes comradeship in adversity, so Hughie and Clancy band together for a common purpose in response to an external threat, the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the local swimming pool. Given Martin's personal history, as both a Communist and a Jew, it is not surprising that he champions the cause of the racially oppressed 'underdog'.

Hughie's open ending suggests that intrinsic happiness is possible with or without success. Clancy gives up his chance at swimming success to reconcile himself to Hughie, becoming the noble hero in the process. Through Clancy's sacrifice, Martin implies that reconciliation is possible between Aboriginal people and Anglo-Australians, but the actual events depicted in the narrative offer little hope or support

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for improved race relations in Merringee. Hughie, however, is not left to cope on his own. 14

Boys and men have traditionally defined themselves within the terms of reference of power, status and control. 15 Clancy dominates Hughie and is always in control, demonstrating a sense of power. As a swimmer, Clancy ‘charges away like a torpedo’, has ‘unbelievable power’ and looks ‘unconquerable’. Hughie, by comparison, is easily knocked into submission by the much stronger Clancy: ‘When the dust had settled Clancy was sitting on top of him like the dog on the tucker box, and Hughie was spluttering and laughing’. Hughie and Clancy have both learned that in a society which favours masculine strength, image is more important than physical safety. Denying emotions and feelings and engaging in ‘acceptable’ practices and pursuits, such as sport, constitute what it means to be a man. 16 In Merringee power means dominating others, while being stronger makes you right. The colonial and post colonial history of the subjugation of Aboriginal masculinity, however, has led to an assumption of power and control by the white majority, on the grounds of both benevolence and self-defence. In the 1970s in Australian writing for children, to be Aboriginal and male is to remain marginalised.

The ideology of masculinity also measures the worth of a man through work, where competition and the power dynamics of the workplace are often the only source of self-value and self-assessment. Hughie’s parents both have jobs, so the family moves out of the black’s camp to live in a ‘proper fibro house at the edge of Merringee’. 17 The blacks camp is seen, by Hughie’s father in particular, as a dangerous place because after dark the men drink. Like Ingamells, Rayment and Hawkins, Martin implies that the unwitting Hughie faces a greater threat of physical danger from his own fringe-dwelling people than he does from the non-Aboriginal townspeople.

14 Martin (Overland), op.cit., p. 33.
17 During the 1930s, many Aboriginal people lived in rented accommodation in Singleton. Towards the end of the 1930s, just outside Singleton, a large army camp was built. Accommodation in the town became scarce, with landlords evicting their Aboriginal tenants in order to get higher rents. Many Aboriginal families were forced to live on the Singleton common on Redbourneberry Hill, where makeshift houses were built from old kerosene tins and hessian bags. By the 1950s, there were
Martin briefly describes the camp as being made up of 'a dozen or so humpies made of flattened petrol tins and cut-up sugar-bags nailed to wooden frames and white-washed after a fashion'. There is no electricity or running water. The camp is obviously poor, but Martin doesn't dwell on the surroundings. Although the camp holds no fear for Hughie, he is glad that he no longer lives there.  

In contrast, however, the Aboriginal men living in the camp are all unemployed, perceived to be lazy, unskilled and unmotivated and depicted with little dignity as they are unable to support their families in what the non-Aboriginal townspeople regard as appropriate levels of care. The white majority treats them with contempt because they appear unable to change their condition. Any problems associated with Aboriginal men in the workforce are seen to arise from the Aboriginals' own nature, unadapted to the norms of a European work ethic. Although Martin does not raise the question of lack of employment opportunity or workplace discrimination his realist method subtly suggests these injustices. His literary style is to 'show' rather than to 'tell'. His communist training gave him an acute sensitivity to inequality and class and gender oppression. Those who work, like Hughie's parents, are tolerated, the others are not. Hughie's masculinity already established as physically flawed, is scrutinised further, and his potential as an artist and future 'breadwinner', is questioned and found lacking. Mr Appleby, the garage proprietor, wryly observes that a mechanic makes 'a better living'. By excelling at an activity that is quiet, unquestioning, cooperative, and passive, and not vigorously taking up 'masculine' pastimes, Hughie as both male and Aboriginal, is perceived to be feminised.  

Clancy, however, demonstrates to the reader his success at getting his gender 'right', by avoiding attributes that epitomise what he knows he is not - female. The attributes Clancy values are those embodied by his father and other significant males, such as his swimming coach. These include being assertive, competitive and physically

still a number of families, black and white, living on Redbourneberry Hill. This is the model for Martin's 'blacks camp'.

James Miller, in Koori Will to Win, describes the Singleton common on Redbourneberry Hill, where he spent part of his childhood, as a place of makeshift houses. He lived in 'a humpy made of an ironbark sapling frame covered with hessian bags and kerosene tins'. Unlike the humpies in Hughie, however, the uprights were tied together with wire because the local council insisted that no nails should be used, further emphasising the impermanent nature of their accommodation. There was no electricity and 'no drinking water closer that the Hunter river'. It was a place of poverty, but 'a happy poverty'. J. Miller, Koori: A Will to Win (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1985), pp.157, 181.
active, all of which are approved and applauded by the people of Merringee, as appropriate to his gender.

The reality of Hughie's sophisticated artistic talent, his adroit escape from police in a city he has never been to before 19, and the success of his other escapades in the printery and the Merringee lock-up, are pure exaggeration. There is something facile about many aspects of the plot. Hughie's lone trip to Sydney, which is quite a feat for a young Aboriginal boy who has never been away from home, is made to appear incredibly easy, and Hughie has no trouble in finding his cousin in a city of over two million people. Although Aboriginal writers such as Robert Merritt 20 make this same assumption and show Aboriginal people gravitating to Redfern and easily finding relatives and contacts, Martin implies that all urban Aboriginal people live in inner city Redfern. Finding Greg isn't therefore a problem for thirteen year old Hughie, as Aboriginal people everywhere know each other.

'Training for the Olympic games?' the conductor inquired. He was an Aborigine, the first Hughie had encountered since saying good-bye to Jim in the timber camp. He had to wait for his breath to return before he could ask where the bus was going. ...
Hughie explained that he was from the country and that he was looking for his cousin, but did not have his address. ... When Hughie mentioned his name he [the conductor] whistled.

'Course I know him, my oath. Who doesn't?' 21

Hughie is at times awkward and stilted. Although the opening is direct and dramatic, the ending remains unresolved. The exploration of racial and class antagonism in an Australian country town is undeveloped and often unconvincing. The problem lies in

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19 Hughie fails to win a national painting competition outright and is forced to share it with a non-Aboriginal girl. This further undermines his masculinity.
20 In the 1970s there were immediate concerns generated by increasing police harassment, most noticeably in the inner suburbs of Redfern but also in rural areas. Police were being called on more frequently to 'manage' Aborigines in the seeming vacuum left by the Welfare Board.
21 See Robert Merritt's play The Cake Man.
Martin's straining towards balance between historical reality and the fictional world. The successful Aboriginal university student, Greg, offers an alternative to the poverty of the Aboriginal camp; the honest simplicity of the country town balances the harsh unfriendliness of the city; adult racism is redeemed by the change of heart of a few rare individuals; the brawl outside the swimming pool is seen to be out of everyone's control. We 'know' each character at first glance, but discover nothing more. Despite Hughie's difficulties and doubts, the book is essentially a conventional 'disaster-followed-by-recovery' children's novel. It is this very conventionality which softens and diminishes the harsh realities of the story.  

It is only in the dying moments of Hughie that the relatively shallow characters make any emotional impact on the reader. Clancy as the hero is so good, and at times so bland, it is hard to believe he could exist outside the parameters of fiction. The quality of unswerving goodness makes for boring characterisation - or defeats it. Although Hughie does rebel, it still is not enough to get him into trouble. Hughie's convenient artistic talent, or his 'knowing what it was to get an attack of that restlessness which seemed to want to draw you away into the unknown', remind the reader that he is Aboriginal, hinting at the more 'primitive' aspects of his nature. It is the minor characters who seem more convincing, as though they have been closely observed in real life and presented briefly but precisely in cameos and asides.

The language also lacks conviction, particularly the recording of direct speech. This is surprising because Martin has expressed a special interest in the everyday lore and language of the young, claiming that he listened closely to what children said and wrote down what he heard. The existence of the individual words and phrases he records cannot be doubted, but collectively, the slang of the dialogue jars with the often stilted and more rigid formal language of the narrative. The reader knows what is meant, but at times the expressions become so ludicrous that they detract from the

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22 Martin, op.cit., p. 81.
23 Greg is obviously modelled on Charles Perkins, who was the first Aboriginal to attend university. Greg is intelligent, but the headmaster has 'wangled' a special scholarship for him enabling him to attend, the implication being that because he is Aboriginal he didn't really get there on his own merits.
actual content. Acknowledging a gift of money from three timbrcutters, Hughie talks in mixed metaphors, British expressions and verbal excess.  

You're terribly decent coves', he managed to say, hoping it did not sound too casual. 'Thanks ever so.' His eyes were shining.

'You'd better tell the boss that,' Jim said, which Paddy rounded off with, 'Don't go blowing it all on ice cream. You might need it for a flea-bag.'

The readers, as well as the bushmen, would find such awkward and unnatural speech incredible. Unfortunately, Martin intends it to be taken seriously, which leads to an overpowering sense of the ridiculous. The influence of dated Hollywood movie jargon is also evident in gangster expressions such as 'had somebody blabbed' and 'spill the beans'. This is combined with the inappropriate overuse of the Australian speech vernacular – ‘bonzer’, ‘cripes’, ‘corker’, ‘sport’ and ‘take a gander’. Such extravagant use of colloquial language weakens the characterisation, intruding into the narrative itself, trivialising, yet again, Aboriginal childhood. The voice is that of an omniscient author, who has lived most his life somewhere other than Australia, and not of an Aboriginal boy growing up in an Australian country town in the 1970s.

The country town racism in Hughie is covert. Martin does not criticise the attitudes of the townspeople; he presents their arguments as expressing the reality of the time. Because he does not explore the socio-political reasons behind inequality Hughie and his family perform as token ‘good’ Aborigines.

Clancy, not Hughie, emerges ultimately as the ‘hero’. Clancy sacrifices his future for

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26 Martin, op.cit., p.69.
the sake of friendship, while Hughie is presented as having given or lost little. Clancy's effort is seen to be much greater. Hughie's heroism is undermined by a white, Anglo-Australian construction of masculinity. Just as the heroism of Coolamon and Gurra is compromised by the intervention of Dick and the station owner Don Byrne, so too Hughie is constructed against the virile Anglo-Australian boy hero Clancy and found wanting.

Aboriginal masculinity in *This Child* by Alice Hawkins, is constructed through the relationship between the child William Johnston and his sister Ann and filtered through the racist ideologies of the townspeople. In contrast to Martin's more moderate approach, the fringe dwelling Aboriginal community in *This Child* is identified as a 'problem' by the 'respectable' townspeople. Regarded as a threat to public hygiene, morality and civility, most remain living in the unsupervised reserve on the outskirts of the small Australian town that supplies the narrative setting. Hawkins graphically describes the segregation, poverty and debasement in the Aboriginal camp, alerting the reader instantly that this is not going to be a lighthearted book. *This Child* is not a particularly well-written narrative but has been included for two reasons. First, although Saxby and Dunkle regard it as children's literature it was also part of the 'Encounter' reading series produced for Australian schools by Cassell Australia and as such would have enjoyed a very wide child readership. Secondly, although the central themes are masculinity and assimilation, the text also explores many of the themes evident in earlier texts which have been previously discussed, including for example, the 'good and bad' Aboriginal mothers, Aboriginal girls and women as sexual objects, the acknowledgment of growing land rights activism by non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, and the belief that the more 'noble' Aborigine lived in the past. In a contemporary context, however, *This Child* contains some of the most racist constructions and stereotypes of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children's fiction.

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William Johnston, the protagonist of *This Child*, born in February 1959 in the separate 'blacks' ward at the district hospital, is immediately identified as being a member of an underclass, a fringe dweller on the edge of a 'civilised' settlement.

*This reserve was an open paddock dotted with trees, and bounded on one side by the river bank. It had no running water, no garbage disposal, no sewerage arrangements of any kind. It was remarkable only for its filth and poverty and the degrading misery of the people who lived there.*

*Garbage was piled at intervals throughout the whole area. Human excreta lay where it had been dropped.*

...  

*William knew little else but this reserve for the first few years of his life. The dilapidated shacks, made out of odd pieces of wood and corrugated iron; the shabby tents pitched here and there, sometimes up against a gum tree; the awful squalor and loneliness of the whole camp.*

William accepts his environment without question because he knows no other. His sister Ann is described in language which categorises and locates her in the past as 'typical of the simple dignity of the ancient aboriginal race'. This strategy firmly places the author and the reader in a position of superiority. The Aboriginal people are depicted as a race whose culture and history only existed when they ‘owned the land and used to roam in majesty with the earth, handing down their culture and

29 Alice Hawkins was a clinical nurse who wrote articles for nursing journals, both nationally and internationally.

legends, from generation to generation, through the old men of their tribe and through the corroboree'.

*This Child* extends the depiction of the racialised hierarchy to include class, gender, religion and language. Opposition underpins the text, 'whites' on one side and 'Aborigines' on the other. Essentialist cliches remain the mediators through which contemporary interactions are conducted, refracted back and forth in the mirrors of history, identity, disgust and desire.

*This Child* reinforces and exploits many existing Aboriginal stereotypes. Aboriginal people are dirty, lazy and irresponsible; the men are drunks and the women are prostitutes; as parents they neglect and abuse their children and as a group they are both pitted and reviled by the white townspeople. Their dignity can only be found in a traditional past because they have no future. They are victims, but at the same time, the narrative holds them responsible for their own degradation. Hughie is depicted as a dangerous and violent drunk who beats his 'small fat gin' until she is covered with bruises and her screams tear the air around the reserve. Most of the Aboriginal community think it is amusing, while the other men suggestively offer her accommodation.

The characters are clearly divided into the 'good' blacks and the 'bad' blacks. The 'good' blacks live in houses, are clean, neat and tidy, love their wives, husbands and children, go to church and have jobs. The 'bad' blacks who live on the reserve in squalor are lazy, unemployed and dirty. They ignore their children and their main activities are sex and alcohol. Those who live on the reserve reject the life of the 'decent' black man who works hard, saves his money and ends up living as a 'respectable' citizen.

Will as an Aboriginal boy is pro-active. Hawkins implies that he is bright, for an Aboriginal, and has the potential to learn to read and write. He is interested in books and brings home a picture to colour, though presumably he has no pencils. On the other hand Ann, his sister, is beautiful but spends her time running away from the

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31 *Ibid*, p.12
taunts and abuse of the other children. She is repeating sixth grade, while Will is
beginning school earlier than he needs to, which reinforces the notion that he is the
more intelligent. Will begins school with much fuss from his community as well as a
'new' school bag. He has more than Ann from the very beginning. 

Hawkins constructs Ann as a sexual object, portraying her as encouraging sexual
innuendo, even in primary school.

Black gin! Dumbo! How many years you gonna be in
sixth class?" they yelled. One larger boy leeringly
suggested: "Come around behind the bike shed with
me!"

... Ann, a large smile making her teeth gleam and
shine, flounced into the cloak room to leave her lunch.

An agonized Will watched her, longing to protect her.

Ann screams excitedly as children chase her, all yelling derision - not with fear or
anguish, but 'excitement', as though she enjoys it. Ann's role as the victim comes to
its climax, inevitably, with her violent death at the hands of a child molester. Will is
not victimised by the other children, nor is he ridiculed or bullied. He is left alone.
There do not appear to be any other Aboriginal children at the school, which is
surprising, considering its proximity to the reserve and the number of children who
obviously live there. This Child alienates Will and Ann completely by not allowing
any support from their Aboriginal peers, adding further to Ann's powerlessness and
reinforcing Will's difference. Will wants to protect Ann, but in the end is unable to

\[^{32}\] Until 1972 the NSW teacher's handbook still contained the regulation requiring principals to defer
or refuse enrolment of Aboriginal children on the grounds of 'home conditions' or 'substantial
/community) opposition'. Hawkins is inconsistent. The school did not attempt to exclude Will and
Ann, in fact it made allowances for Will starting early.

\[^{33}\] Hawkins, op.cit., p.36
save her. As an inadequate Aboriginal male, he cannot fulfil his role as protector. Like most of the Aboriginal boys in Australian children's books, his masculinity is flawed.

The existing Anglo-Australian constructions of masculinity are reinforced where economic security, prosperity and a sense of belonging are the determinants of success. Like Hughie's father in Martin's Hughie, Kevin Vines, the 'good' Aborigine, is only able to obtain employment as an unskilled labourer although he lives on the 'respectable' side of town away from the reserve. Despite his material acquisitions of success, unequal outcomes and power relations continue to operate in the town. The male artefacts of difference, such as a house, a car and a job, are on display, to be desired and consumed by the marginalised Aboriginal community.

White masculine values represent the civilised, the righteous, the pure and the powerful. The descriptions of the 'good' women of the patriarchy in whom lust and other vices are absent or suitably repressed, contrast sharply with the suggestive, sensual imagery which surrounds Ann making her appear much older than her seven years. Both her innocence as a child and her sensuality as an Aboriginal girl, are defined in terms of her relationships with her brother and the boys in the playground. William is the true innocent because he is male. To be 'good' Ann must become white, but Hawkins denies her any opportunity to achieve this. It is Will who is taken into protective care.

Harry Jones, whom Hawkins describes as the 'hairy man', a creature from the Aboriginal Dreaming, is taken into custody for Ann's rape and murder. Although he is undoubtedly guilty, Ann's people are blamed for her death. The Aboriginal community allowed her to wander freely, condemning her to a degrading life of miserable poverty and setting a promiscuous example for her to follow. The white activist, already guilty by association, merely performs the deed for stirring up Aboriginal opposition and giving in to the 'wild' aspects of his primitive, masculine

34 The 'hairy man' in Aboriginal stories is a spirit figure, incorporated into a totalising Western cultural schema where it takes on the significances of figures from Western traditions. Thus, the hairy men enter the realm of brownies, hobgoblins, boggarts and bogies, used to frighten children not to go out after dark. Bradford, op.cit., p.147. See Caden Walaal (1994), About this little devil and this little
nature. Although a cynical charlatan, Ann’s murderer attempts to give the ‘bad’ Aborigines a voice, and is therefore doomed. He is not condemned, however, for the horrendous crime he has committed, but presented as being remorseful, with his head in his hands, shaking with sobs for what he has done. The narrative implies that he is vindicated through diminished responsibility, because he was under the influence of drugs at the time. This seems to be punishment enough. The fringe dwelling Aboriginal women’s lack of self-respect or self-control, justifies the decision to remove William from his family, on the grounds of both benevolence and his own protection. Ann’s violent death becomes the catalyst for William's removal.

The ‘Aboriginal English’ spoken by Will’s mother is emphasised as a gender specific construct, when compared to the Aboriginal men who only ‘lapse’ occasionally. Non-standard English usages signify and reinforce the lowly status and inferior intellect of women and girls in the narrative. Maintaining middle class standards is indicative of white superiority and imperative in the face of increased immigration on the one hand, and 'the masses' on the other. Hawkins uses the 'correct' standards of dress, behaviour and speech as evocations of 'good taste' to reinforce dominant cultural norms. The fringe dwelling Aboriginal women are immediately identified as aberrant in dress, manners, taste and speech, being the opposite of the acceptable representations of a normative whiteness. The Aboriginal men and boys, however, are not judged according to the same criteria.

This is a grim book, full of graphic accounts of violence and poverty, lacking any projection of a positive future for a desperate people. Will's life is devoid of hope. His young sister is brutally raped and murdered. The violent and drunken Hughie also ends up dead, while Mary, his mother, knowingly facilitates the work of assimilation by remaining unmoved by Ann's death and readily giving Will up to foster care – ‘Take 'im, 'e's no good ter me, an’ 'e don't 'ave much of a life on the reserve’. This Child doesn't explore but only alludes briefly to possible reasons for the degradation of the Aboriginal people who live on the reserve. There is no mention of the lack of governmental provision of housing, amenities, or even at this time, of unemployment benefits much less any job opportunities. Racial difference

manifests as economic inequality: Will becomes more aware of the meanings inherent in the differences in clothes and belongings between himself and the other children.

Kevin Vines’s wife (the Woman), is Will’s only hope. Hawkins suggests there is no other alternative. Aboriginal people who live on the reserve are depicted as a degraded people, incapable of saving themselves from poverty, prostitution and alcoholism. They are victims, but the text clearly attributes blame to the Aboriginal people alone, even though complicity of the local townspeople is evident. Manipulative whites also attempt to exploit the Aborigines by scripting their activism and emphasising the ownership of the political and physical ground of protest by Anglo-Australians. The Aboriginal men in particular, are portrayed as too passive and too feminised to do it themselves. Despite ‘white’ involvement, *This Child* still regards Aboriginality as the corrupting agent: ‘Ah, these boongos wouldn’t know whether they have organizations or not,” said the hairy man. “As long as they get the entertainment and free grog, that’s all they care about!”’ 35 Only Kevin Vines, the ‘decent’ black man, remains unconcerned. 36

The townspeople, including the local policemen, are presented in a much more positive light. They give the children pitying looks and extra food when they go into the general store. The attitude of the police is paternalistic: as they are only trying to help the Aboriginal men and protect their families, because the Aborigines ‘don’t know any better’. The police are kind and never abuse the Aboriginal men whom they take into custody. It is the publican they threaten to ‘lock up’ for supplying the alcohol. The police are portrayed as the heroes, trying to save the ‘poor Aborigine’. 37

The teacher, too, shows her concern by taking Will to the hospital when he becomes

books.
35 Hawkins, op.cit., p.49
36 Burke, op.cit., p.30. The establishment of an Aboriginal Tent Embassy outside what is now Old Parliament House in Canberra, began in January 1972, as a protest over land right statements made by the McMahon government.
37 The prohibition of liquor seems to have led to close surveillance of the camps, but not to prevention of the supply of liquor. Police rarely charged Europeans with supplying liquor to Aborigines, but they regularly arrested Aborigines for drunkenness. Beckett (1965) describes the chilling experience of having police patrol the reserve six times a day, breaking into houses if they believed a drunk Aborigine to be there. Under these conditions there was little point in trying to escape and Aborigines were not deterred by the fines, prison sentences and beatings allegedly inflicted upon them. Drink thus attained enormous significance in the lives of Aborigines. Beckett 1965: pp.41, 40.
ill but there is no mention of the segregation which existed when he was born. It is his uncaring mother who refuses to allow him to stay.

The only chance for Will is assimilation. He must become like Kevin Vines and reject the Aboriginal life of the reserve, assuming a 'white', Christian identity.

Will's eyes fell from her [the Woman's] face; from her smile. He stared at the floor. He knew about the Woman and her world. It was a world of clean clothes, church on Sunday, neat gardens and neat children. The world of white people. He felt the familiar shame of dirty clothing, the shame of living in ragged tents and humpies. The shame of being black. The shame that drove so many of his people including his mother and Hughie, to drinking, dishonesty and violence. All this he felt while the Woman watched and waited. He could not put this feeling into words; he could not tell others of it. But it was there. 38

Kevin Vines and his wife represent the generically assimilated Aboriginal couple. Tolerant, civilised and Christian, affirming benevolent whiteness by thinking and acting white. Like Hawkins and her readers, the Vines are socialised to embody and aspire to the values and attitudes of white supremacy, directly exercising their power over other Aboriginal people. They encourage Will to attend Sunday School, and eventually become his foster parents. They don't acknowledge the Aboriginal people who live on the reserve and they have no obvious association or connection through kinship with their Aboriginal heritage. The Vines family reinforces the power of the dominant society by taking Will and giving him the opportunity to leave the degradation and poverty behind, while condemning the rest of his community to their own inevitable destruction.

38 Hawkins, op.cit., pp.90-91
This Child, Daughter of Two Worlds, The Burnt Stick and Idjihl all reveal how the beliefs and practices associated with evolutionary theory and genetics have helped shape Australia’s history. Aboriginal 'half caste' children were selected and deemed to be potentially assimilable based on the criteria of lighter skin colour, while dark-skinned or ‘full blood’ members of the same family were spared the experience of forced separation, or if taken, were often subjected to different treatment and expectations. The fixity of essentialist racial classifications supported a variable scheme of racial value. A hierarchy of whiteness was constructed, with groups identified by their lighter skin colour as better able to 'blend in' placed higher on the scale of assimilation.

Will is ashamed of being black because, according to the narrative logic of Hawkins’ constructions, to be an Aboriginal male means that he will automatically become a violent drunk, dishonest and lazy. The circumstances of Will's life are created because of his Aboriginality, not because of the dispossession of his people. Hawkins encounters the double bind of assimilation by attempting to characterise Will as already being 'just like us' in some respects, but at the same time providing clear, opposing examples, which demonstrate that he can never be 'just like us'. For every positive Anglo-Australian character and context there is a negative Aboriginal equivalent. Will becomes 'the other' in his own community. The Woman is sure that the life she is offering him is in every way superior to the life he has always known. This Child assumes that the solution to the Aboriginal 'problem' lies in redefining Aboriginality through assimilation, not by changing non-Aboriginal values.

In contrast, The Fat and Juicy Place, written by Diana Kidd and published in 1992, is one of the first (and still remarkably rare) contemporary novels for children with an Aboriginal protagonist who lives in an urban environment. The plot focuses on Jack coming to terms with his father's death by learning the traditional stories and culture of his people. Kidd reconciles past, present and future by using both traditional Aboriginal and contemporary Anglo-Australian motifs of storying. Birdman, who Jack eventually discovers is his uncle, is the link between the Dreaming of Jack's Ancestors and his father's family from 'up north'. Birdman

\[\text{Perera, op.cit., pp.185, 186.}\]
becomes Jack's friend, enabling him to come to terms with the loss of his father and thus to move on.

Kidd rejects the notion that Jack's Aboriginal family has assimilated into the urban Anglo-Australian population. She presents Jack and his family as having worked out their own view of their Aboriginality and doesn't impose unnecessary limits on what it is to 'be Aboriginal'. Jack's family is diverse without destroying their sense of Aboriginality. Kidd implies that Aboriginal identity is inherently fluid, not fixed or unalterable. The past experiences of Birdman inform and extend the identity Jack already has. The Fat and Juicy Place moves beyond a postcolonial emphasis which is more about the survival of cultural traditions than about survival in the sense of day to day economics. Kidd manages successfully to combine both, rejecting the reworking of traditional stories of Aboriginal Australia into acceptable forms for non-Aboriginal readers. She presents truths, which are valid for Jack, because they carry the ancient knowledge of survival, ecology and kinship which belong to the country of his people, allowing him to celebrate and reclaim an image of his past, an image which had been lost, initially, because of the removal of Jack's father from his family, as a child, and his premature death as an adult.

Kidd incorporates past practices whereby traditional Aboriginal information is handed down in an oral and musical form. The stories of the Dreamtime and the customary ways people should treat each other are continued through Birdman. Although he does not have a strong city land base to practise the traditional ways of passing on knowledge to Jack, Jack adapts and interprets them in his own surroundings.

Many Aboriginal people migrated towards the cities after the Second World War. Some have returned to their original country, unable to find suitable employment and housing in the city, where, like Birdman and his brother, Jack's father, they are separated from the network of relations, and become disillusioned with the white man's way of life. Others drifted back and forth between city and country. A significant number, however, have been able to carve out a way of life in the city and surrounding suburbs, benefiting from jobs, education and in some ways a higher standard of living, without completely compromising their 'Aboriginality'. While
white urban life has attractions for most Aboriginal people, a feeling for the people and country 'back home' is always maintained. 40

Many white authors and readers find it difficult to accept the multidimensional nature of Aboriginal life and are unable to accept urban Aborigines as ‘fully’ Aboriginal. Diversity existed before European settlement and as The Fat and Juicy Place exemplifies, it still exists today. The lifestyle of one Aboriginal group should not be regarded as more or less valid than any other. 41 In Australian cities and suburbs many Aboriginal families retain, to varying degrees, the kinship system of their ancestors. Aboriginal people often have non-Aboriginal partners and live embedded in non-Aboriginal society. The family structures of urban Aboriginal people are therefore different from many more traditionally oriented groups. In The Fat and Juicy Place, Jack’s family has developed their own culture through family and community and this provides them with psychological and physical support as well as a sense of security. Unfortunately, the themes of cultural change and adaptation have rarely been explored by children’s writers before the 1980s. The preoccupation with the so-called ‘traditional’ culture has left contemporary Aboriginal people in the position of being depicted as having ‘lost’ their culture. This is exemplified by Dougy, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Like the Aboriginal families in the picture books Pigs and Honey and Going for Oysters, Jack’s family remains strong, celebrating the strength of family affiliation and the preservation of a distinct culture that has defied assimilation, despite aggressive government policies. 42 Irrespective of their hardships and disadvantages in terms of housing, employment, education and training, their sense of kinship remains a dominant characteristic. The feeling of family unity, the ability to rely on each other, and the forging of a spiritual bonding between Jack and Birdman, help to further develop a strong sense of identity:

'Us fellas gotta take care of each other. Whether you're poor or rich, makes no difference. Still gotta look after our brothers and sisters and aunties and uncles and grannies and grandfathers.' That's what Gran says. 

Gran and Birdman are the elders of Jack's family. They have the wisdom, knowledge and spirit which draws Jack back to traditional ways. Elders play an extremely important role in Aboriginal families. Birdman becomes Jack's role model and educator, while Gran undertakes much of his upbringing because his mother is in the workforce. As is often the case within Aboriginal families, whenever problems occur between parents and children, Gran is always the one that Jack and his siblings run to for security. “The guidance of Gran and Birdman permeates their everyday life. Jack observes, listens and follows and goes on to not only teach his own family but his non-Aboriginal classmates as well. Jack's matrilineal family, through his mother, grandmother and aunts, provide a cultural core, remembering and passing on to their children the knowledge that provides them with an identity in a crowded and often impersonal urban environment. 

Jack does not directly address the reader. He tells his stories to his pet lizard. Although in the role of observers, readers nevertheless become involved in the lives of the characters. The story, however, always belongs to Jack. As a contemporary Aboriginal child narrator, Jack is not forced to take up a position of being Aboriginal as defined by white-imposed cultural markers. He is not called upon to display any particular skill or adopt a position of essentialist representativeness and knowledge. Jack is always in control. He chooses the stories to tell, the games and traditional practices he will re-enact and share. He chooses the dances and songs he will perform. The author, by making him the narrator, gives Jack the control to choose his words. Jack uses what Bradford calls an 'approximation' of Aboriginal English.

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44 Eversley, op.cit., p.53
45 Langton, op.cit. p. 17.
46 Bradford, op.cit. p. 141.
to tell his story and share the day to day happenings in his life. Kidd incorporates her 'version' of Aboriginal English to exemplify what Muecke designates 'affirmative appropriation', when 'it is acceptable to dialogue respectfully across cultural boundaries, by stylistic quotation'. 47 Kidd does not use language as a weapon against Jack to prove his inferiority and hold him up to ridicule. Jack's language is the way he speaks and the author, unlike Hawkins, does not pass judgement. 48 While Jack's language is different to Birdman's, it is still recognisable as an Aboriginal English, foregrounding the difference between the language and the culture which it encodes. 49

*The Fat and Juicy Place* is accessible to a contemporary Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian child audience. In the past, fiction written for children excluded the Aboriginal child reader, and although Aboriginal children were sometimes significant characters, their voice was that of the white narrator. Martin's Hughie and Hawkins' Will are the protagonists, but primarily function as vehicles to promote the ideologies of their authors. Kidd, although her ideology might be considered to be 'politically correct', moves beyond political correctness to depict a contemporary Aboriginal lifestyle from an urban Aboriginal perspective and to utilise Aboriginal English. Kidd wrote the book primarily to raise awareness of Aboriginal culture and history in her readers, without at the same time supporting the ideologies of government policy and rhetoric.

Kidd doesn't generalise Aboriginality, nor does she employ stereotypes. Jack's family is presented as clean, tidy, educated, hard working, polite and attractive. Although Jack's dad played football and Jack himself likes to draw, these details are not included to exemplify the 'respectable' ways for Aboriginal people to find identity in the dominant society - through sport or particular forms of culture such as painting. Jack doesn't play football nor is he a talented artist. Unlike Hughie, Jack isn't feminised through his art or idealised like Goree and Coolamon, because of their physical attributes as the 'primitive', the Noble Savage or the pseudo hero.

48 For further discussion about Aboriginal English see J. Harkins, *Bridging Two Worlds: Aboriginal English and Cross Cultural Understanding* (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1994).
The narrative presents the childhood of Jack as being very different to the childhood of Birdman. Both are presented as Aboriginal. One is not regarded as more 'authentic' than the other. Birdman tells his story about the Hairy Man and then invites Jack to reciprocate, but unlike Hawkins, Kidd keeps the Hairy Man as part of the traditions of Aboriginal storying. The emphasis is on the sharing of stories, not on the stories themselves. Birdman's traditional story is not set up against Jack's modern tale of space travel. Neither Jack nor Birdman is constructed as the 'Other'.

As Jack’s relationship with Birdman deepens, so too does his knowledge of his cultural heritage. Gradually his stories begin to reflect this change:

I’ve got this deadly story to tell you lizard. These fellas are out hunting and they spear a big turtle. Then they have a real good feed. Then they see another turtle laying eggs. They’re real greedy, those fellas, and they kill that turtle too. But they don’t know she’s a Turtle Ancestor from the Dreamtime. And the spirit of this Turtle Ancestor sets fire to the hunter’s canoe and then this huge wave crashes over them and drowns them.  

Kidd also includes a number of principles which govern the way some Aboriginal speakers circumvent the use of directness in their language. Jack builds a context for his story before he begins to tell it. Rather than beginning immediately, Kidd allows Jack to draw the reader in and then begin his story.

I reckon you’ll burn around our place at 100 kilometres an hour when I tell you what I’m gunna tell you, Lizard. Yeah, you’ll race up the back stairs and do

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Jack and the reader realise that Birdman is Jack's uncle long before Jack reveals it to Birdman or his Lizard. The knowledge is implied before it is actually stated. It is almost as if there are restrictions to this knowledge, so Jack restrains himself from revealing it until he decides that the time is right. This is also highlighted when Jack finds Birdman's secret bag, protects and eventually returns it to him without ever looking at its contents. Jack knows it is very significant to Birdman, and never considers opening it, allowing Birdman himself to reveal the contents. In some Aboriginal communities the adults make decisions about when it is appropriate for children to be told certain information; 'wait time' and silences are inherent in the way meanings are constructed.

Jack's Aboriginal masculinity is never used as a measure of his inferiority. He is the narrator and his position is not compromised by Anglo-Australian interference. Jack is not portrayed as a hero, although he does help a 'gubbah kid' who sprains his ankle. Kidd doesn't describe Jack's physical appearance (or that of the other characters). His skin colour is not used as a marker of his Aboriginality. He is prepared to fight if necessary but knows that a boy who is as big as 'King Kong' is not worth taking on. Jack is an exuberant character, energetic, playful, and full of mischief, but like most children happy to have friends and just enjoy being a child. Food is mentioned often, but not 'bush tucker'. Jack and his family happily eat cakes, chips, sausages, watermelon and apple pies, as well as other people's cooking. Jack is not presented as a talented athlete or artist; he doesn't revere physical activity, although he is physically active through play; he is not powerful, solitary or dominant. Unlike Martin and Hawkins, Kidd doesn't position Jack in opposition to anything female, nor does she construct his Aboriginality as submissive and therefore feminine. Jack is simply a young Aboriginal boy who lives in the city.

—Ibid., p.43.
As a non-Aboriginal writer, Diana Kidd sought guidance from the New South Wales Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group (AECG). She approached them with the original idea and was encouraged to seek the experiences of a range of Aboriginal educators and others from the Aboriginal community. To complement the text Aboriginal artist Bronwyn Bancroft was commissioned to provide the illustrations. The final manuscript was submitted to the NSW AECG State Secretariat for approval and their endorsement appears on the opening pages of the book and in their journal. 

In spite of such recommendations, The Fat and Juicy Place still attracted criticism. Sally McInerney, a reviewer for the Sydney Morning Herald, wrote that she 'cringed with embarrassment at its white author's attempts to capture Aboriginality', saying that 'Aborigines must be getting sick of hearing how they all stick together in great big loyal "mobs"!'. "Once again an Anglo-Australian writer claims a position of authority on Aboriginal matters, based on ignorance. Her position is Eurocentric, as she ignores the endorsement given by those who represent the people Kidd is depicting. McInerney believes her own construction, opinion and position is more informed, and therefore superior because it is right. Her attitude is very much one prevalent over time - as an Anglo-Australian, she knows Aboriginal people better than they know themselves and decides to speak or protest on their behalf ('Aboriginal people must be getting sick of hearing ... ', 'this book will no doubt confuse ... many Aboriginal city children').

McInerney suggests that urban Aboriginal children wouldn't understand The Fat and Juicy Place because the contemporary setting and Aboriginal English dialect would 'confuse as many Aboriginal city children as it would encourage'. McInerney privileges standard English as 'English', the implication being that the 'bad, lifeless grammar' in The Fat and Juicy Place is unacceptable. Dixon notes that the differences between Aboriginal English and standard forms are not 'arbitrary' and rarely due to 'any lack of ability to master the standard variety'. "McInerney stigmatises words such as 'mob' and 'tucker', as non-standard forms, but fails to

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associate their frequency with their significance in Aboriginal English. Bradford argues that Kidd’s deployment of Aboriginal English is both ‘subtle and varied in its representation of Aboriginal subjectivity’ and constructs a ‘strong subject position from within Aboriginal culture’ enabling Jack to dramatise and understand his increasing knowledge about Aboriginal culture.  

Many letters criticising the review were sent to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, but none were published in the newspaper:

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG Inc) must protest at the ignorant and insensitive savaging by your reviewer of Diana Kidd’s excellent book for children The Fat and Juicy Place (SMH ‘Spectrum’ 14th March 1992). The NSW AECG highly commends Ms Kidd for her sensitivity and cultural insight and trusts that her unfortunate experience at the hands of your reviewer will not deter either her or other writers in future.  

(Letter from Linda Burney, President of NSW AECG Inc, to SMH Editor 20th March 1992.)

I find [the] article a mixture of ethical compromises. I applaud Glenyse Ward and I admire any Koori writer who can get their work published but I endorse The Fat and Juicy Place by Diana Kidd ... The targeted

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age group of 7-8 year olds, I am sure would enjoy the book because of its simple but positive statement. My Koori nephew lived it. Koori people have been confused by white governments, reporters, teachers, police, religions and the various other cultural restraints placed on the Aboriginal nation, but for Koori children to be confused by this book's simple message, I think not. 58

(Letter from Bronwyn Bancroft, to the Editor of SMH, 18th March 1992.)

Constructions of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children's fiction continues to disclose commonly held misconceptions including those publicly disseminated by journalists like McInerney. As a functionary in a media industry controlled by non-Aboriginal executives and their organisations, McInerney fails to understand or acknowledge the fear felt by modern Aboriginal people that their children will lose their cultural beliefs and not identify strongly enough with the Aboriginal community. She denies urban Aboriginal children the right to a sense of pride in their history and culture so that they too have the opportunity, like other Australians, of knowing who they are. 59 McInerney is the antithesis of Kidd, attempting to maintain white myths while perpetuating the misrepresentation of urban Aboriginal life. Such representations help to form, and in this case, reinforce, already existing opinions, fulfilling and justifying the stereotypes. 60 Kidd, unlike McInerney, recognizes in The Fat and Juicy Place, the integrity of an urban Aboriginal family and their urban Aboriginal culture.

58 Ibid. pp.77-78.
60 An Australian National Opinion Poll survey found that the predominant stereotype of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was negative - namely, primitive, nomadic, passive and lazy. It found that dual criteria were used by non-Aboriginal people to judge Aboriginality - namely darkness of skin and the practice of tribal lifestyles. Mainly Urban: Report into the inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander People. November 1992.
The Fat and Juicy Place set a precedent in children’s fiction that was followed, in 1993, by Dougy, written by James Maloney. Dougy, like Jack, is a young Aboriginal boy who tells his own story. Although Dougy is the first person narrator, the book is not essentially about him. It is about racism in a small country town and what happens when tempers flare and hatred takes over. A government 'handout' creates anger among the already prejudiced white community. Maloney attempts to present the wider implications of racism and its impact on individual characters - the use of guns, the effect of Aboriginal achievement and the influence of government policies. The government pays for Dougy and his family to go to Brisbane and watch Gracey compete in the State athletics championships. But the initial excitement over her success is overshadowed by the perception of the white community that 'the blacks get things for nothing’.

The lives of Dougy, Gracey and Raymond, as young Aboriginals, do not exist in a social vacuum. They are embedded in the structures of the wider society and within the social attitudes of the rural community in which they live. Conflict theorists argue that society consists of competing social groups who do not have access to the same life chances and social rewards. Within this competitive system, relationships between dominant and minority groups can be antagonistic. 41 The Anglo-Australian members of the community resent the government assistance that will allow Gracey the opportunity to move into the arena of an elite athlete. The hostility originates in the dominant group.

James Maloney was born in Sydney, but moved to Queensland at the age of seven and has lived there ever since. In 1977, he received a teaching appointment to Cunnamulla, a small town in Queensland’s outback, 730 kilometres west of Brisbane. 42 It was in Cunnamulla that Maloney came into contact with Aboriginal people for the first time, and it is here that Dougy, his second children’s novel, is set. On the long train trip out to the far west Maloney read The Australian Aborigines by

41 Q. Beresford and P. Omaji, Rites of Passage (Freemantle, Freemantle Arts Centre, 1996), p.17.
42 Dougy was an Honour Book for the Children’s Book Council of Australia Book of the Year: Older Readers 1994. Dougy also won the Family Award for Children’s Literature 1994 and was commended in the Human Rights Award for Children’s Literature 1994.
Norman B. Tindale and Beryl George, published in 1976, which explains traditional Aboriginal lifestyles in detail. "But when he arrived in Cunnamulla, he found Aboriginal people who were far removed from Tindale's descriptions. They lived in houses, bought their food at the local shops, sent their children to school in uniforms, and supported the town's football team. He also noted that as the Aboriginal children grew older, they came to a 'growing awareness of the fact that if you were black, you were considered inferior and were expected to fail.' Maloney spent two years in Cunnamulla, returning to Brisbane in 1979, to take up a teaching position with the Catholic education system."

Cunnamulla has a sizeable Aboriginal population. Consequently, half of the classes Maloney taught were comprised of Aboriginal students. He found himself totally unprepared to deal with life in such a town and unable to adapt his teaching style to suit the needs of his students. He became distressed and upset by his sense of failure. The Aboriginal characters in Dougly are based on some of the children he taught. Dougly became a 'kind of purging' for Maloney, because he had 'experienced certain things', seen 'certain things' and 'taken part in certain things'. Although Maloney does not elaborate on the 'certain things', he does admit that he found teaching Aboriginal children very difficult because of his ignorance. Maloney affirms that the character of Dougly is one he particularly likes because he sees Dougly as remaining gentle and naïve, despite the upheaval around him. Maloney, unlike Kidd, however, fails to come to terms with contemporary Aboriginality. The traditional Aboriginal lifestyles he read about in The First Australians strongly

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63 During the 1920s, Tindale participated in zoological expeditions to Groote Eylandt and Cape York. His fieldwork stimulated his interest in anthropology. In 1933 he led University of Adelaide anthropological expeditions to the Mann Ranges on the South Australian and Northern Territory border, and to the Warburton Ranges in 1935. He also organised and led a joint Harvard - Adelaide University expedition which conducted anthropological research over many Australian regions. Tindale published many important works in archaeology and prehistory.

64 The authors give a general overview on Australian Aboriginal people, some of which based on Tindale's fieldwork with the Pitjantjatjara in 1933. The last chapter is a cause for concern as it discusses 'Primitive Aborigines', Aboriginal people as part of 'The Stone Age' and is generally assimilationist in tone.

65 Notes, UQP Focus on: James Maloney (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1998), p. 1.

66 Maloney does confess, however, to telling 'black jokes', the 'same as everybody else'. He also 'called Aboriginal people the usual derogatory terms, particularly when teaching them - because they're damn hard to teach'. He admits that he has tried to be honest and write without bias, deleting sections which he thinks people will take the wrong way. J. Maloney, 'White Writing Black', Orana (May 1994), pp.102-103.

67 Ibid.
conflicts with the lifestyle of the Aboriginal people in Cunnamulla. Tindale’s anthropological influence permeates the book and Maloney still struggles, even in 1993, to reconcile the two:

Sometimes I wish I believed in those spirit stories like you, Dougy. Then I’d know I was a real Aborigine. I’m black all right and people call me boong when they want to get nasty, but they as well call me a fool or a thief or something. It’s just a way to single you out, say you’re different, that they don’t like you. Dougy, you know what it’s like being a real Aborigine better than me. The type they had around years ago, that they talk about at school. I don’t think I’ve ever known. And I’m never gonna find out here. …

Maloney has difficulty accepting the diversity of Aboriginal subcultures, implying here that a traditional Aboriginal lifestyle is more valid than any other. Just as urban Aboriginal families retain, to varying degrees, the kinship system of their ancestors, rural Aboriginal people also maintain their family ties and live in non-Aboriginal communities. Just as the family structures of urban Aboriginal people are different from the traditionally oriented groups, so too are the family structures of rural Aboriginal people. Dougy’s family, like Jack’s, has developed its own culture through family and community. Where Kidd is able to celebrate diversity, Maloney portrays his contemporary Aboriginal characters as having ‘lost’ their culture. This is reinforced by Paddy O’Shea, whom Dougy regards as ‘special’ because he is the ‘blackest bloke’ he’d ever seen, making own his family look ‘half-white’. Maloney implies that only ‘real’ Aborigines are ‘special’, using the hierarchy of skin colour as the signifier. Maloney hints that Dougy’s family is of mixed descent and is therefore ‘less’ Aboriginal.

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Maloney positions Doug as the narrator in an attempt to create an authentic Aboriginal voice, relying on memories of a lived experience fifteen years before. Maloney also attempts to create a 'safe haven' by avoiding any discussion of Aboriginal experiences of history, relieving him of any obligation to return to or consult with the Aboriginal people of Cunnamulla. If such cooperation has taken place, it remains unacknowledged.

Historically, from the 1840s to the early 1970s the Aboriginal people lived largely in fringe camps around Cunnamulla. The population of the camps increased sharply during the depression of the early 1930s, when the pastoral stations of the district laid off their Aboriginal workers. As the camp population increased, its health problems multiplied. In 1971, the infant mortality rate of the camp was four times higher than the rate among non-Aboriginal children in the district. The South West Queensland Aboriginal Cooperative Community Advancement Society was established in 1975 as a housing agency, concentrating on the purchase of houses in the town for people on the reserves. 69 Doug refers to this when he describes where he lives:

Years ago, before I was born, the gov'ment bought a whole lot of houses in the one street, 'cause people were leaving to go and live somewhere else. Mostly blacks like us live in those houses now, except for two houses at the end of the street where the teachers from the primary school live; one for the headmaster and one for the other two together. Everyone calls it after that TV program, "Sesame Street", on account of it's full of teachers and blacks. 70

The images of masculinity in Doug are violent, abusive and aggressive, for both Non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal men and boys. The ideal Australian male is expected to be Anglo-Australian and encouraged to project a tough, dominant image and

70 Maloney, op.cit. p.7.
enjoy physical confrontation. Different masculinities often exist in relations of hierarchy and exclusion. Cooper embodies a hegemonic form of masculinity, although it is not the most common form of masculinity in Dougy. The hierarchy of masculinities can be a source of violence, since force is used in defining and maintaining the hierarchy. The fear of being at the bottom of the hierarchy, like Dougy, or being defined as a ‘poofier’ or a ‘sissy’, is a familiar way of training boys and men to participate in combat and violent sports. Cooper calls the local policeman gutless and a coward, challenging his masculinity because he won’t force his way into Aboriginal houses without a warrant.

Masculinities are often sustained and enacted not only by individuals, but also by groups. Cooper gathers a ‘small army’ around him with enough guns ‘to start a war’. Physical fights occur more than once, while the holding of a gun represents the ultimate in masculine power. Cooper and Raymond both realise that the gun, in all its forms, gives them the power to demand obedience. 71 As Messner and Sabo argue, the gun becomes the ultimate alienator, reconnecting with archetypal European male images that have little relevance to modern society or to issues of equality. The tensions that have developed around social difference and racism become the source of the violence, regardless that the initial reason for the confrontation no longer exists. 72

Cooper is presented as being even more marginalised than the Aboriginal because he is forced to live with his alcoholic father on the outskirts of town in a ‘falling down shack’. He is also an unskilled labourer, with limited job prospects in a small country town.

"... Things were fine around here before the government started putting Abos ahead of proper whites. This day’s been coming a long time. Blacks

71 It was in Cunnamulla, that Maloney developed an intense dislike of guns and the way in which gun ownership changed people, objecting to the idea that ‘a man empowers himself with a gun in the hand’. Notes UQP, op.cit., p.1.
have been getting everything for nothing for too long. Today they’re going to pay for it. There’s going to be a lot of drunken no-hopers pay for their bludging today.

... “

“Look at those houses along there,” shouted Cooper. ... “Given to the blacks for nothing. Never had to work a day. And what state are they in now? Pigsties. Ruined, most of ‘em. ... And what do they do all day? Sit under a tree down near the river and get drunk on handouts. “

“But me,” he roared, “Does the government give me a house for nothing? Does it?” He paused. “Oh no. I’m a white fella. I gotta live in a hovel. Same one me father lived in all his life as well. They give me sweet nothing. ... “

Cooper directs his anger and resentment at the Aboriginal community, firmly blaming them for his circumstances, rather than examining the culpability of his father. Gracey challenges Cooper’s claims, but is ineffectual as she only addresses them at a personal level. Cooper has never been in any of the houses so how would he know. Their house is clean and tidy, without any walls missing. Gracey’s accusation that the town is ‘just a gaol for blacks. And whites like you are the gaol keepers. And if one of us looks like gettin free, you do all you can to stop it’, results in a threatening response. Cooper aims his gun straight at Gracey’s face. Although Cooper is personified as racist, his accusations reflect a common misconception, namely that Aboriginal people get money for almost anything. His bitterness finally erupts because he believes that Gracey and her family are being privileged, receiving benefits that he and his father, whom he regards as being truly disadvantaged, can’t.

7 Maloney, op.cit., pp.94-95.
access. Maloney uses Cooper and his fallacious arguments to construct a powerful critique of white racism.

Many of the themes introduced in Hughie and This Child are also included in Dougy: the provision of 'free' government housing for the blacks in the town where they live; the presence of alcohol (the publican only allows those Aboriginals who won't 'get drunk real fast and start a fight' onto his premises); a protagonist who is unintelligent, rather than disadvantaged and failing in a white education system which doesn't acknowledge his learning needs. Although Dougy is thirteen years old, he is still in year six, and portrayed as incapable of learning: 'I'm not real good at reading and writing, eh! Not much good at anything'. Maloney constructs the problems faced by the Aboriginal community realistically, and criticises a white racist system that has oppressed Aboriginal people. Although the language of the Kunja people isn't mentioned, only the Aboriginal characters employ a non-standard form of English (they drop their word endings). Sport also features strongly as the only way to get ahead.

In any cultural setting, violent and aggressive masculinity will rarely be the only form of masculinity present. Dougy represents the Aboriginal male who is perceived as having nothing to offer anyone, on the lowest rung of the masculine hierarchy. He is compared to his father, who is rarely at home and usually drunk.  

It's okay if you're a whitefella who can't do much. They usually find something for you to do, some place for you. But blackfellas have to be special to get on. My Dougy's gonna end up like his father, most likely. I can't think of much to do for him. When your as old as he is and you still can't read any good or work out those sums they give you and don't even talk much, well, those whitefellas poke you and prod you a bit

Interestingly, The Australian Broadcasting Commission documentary, Cunnamulla, screened on 22nd November, 2001, showed that there was very little in the town for anyone to do – minimum
more and then they shove you out of the way and
forget about you. You're like a machine that don't work
no matter how much they try to fix it and then it just
gets left behind."

Drinking, fighting, reckless driving and sport, all have a particular meaning for boys,
becoming important markers of manhood in Anglo-Australian culture. Raymond
drinks his father's beer and attacks Dougy for interfering in his fights. Johnny
Warren is angry because he doesn't have a car like all the white blokes his age.
Raymond's masculinity is determined by his identity as a talented football player.
Dougy, however, is seen as lacking because he has no sporting prowess at all: '"
Ha!" laughed Raymond. "Dougy can't tackle, can't kick. He can't even catch a
bloody football and trips over his own feet. He's useless." Football is regarded as a
test of male courage, strength, skill, endurance and determination actively producing
particular versions of masculinity.

Dougy becomes an unlikely hero. He is the one who is always frightened -
frightened of the Moodagudda, of being knocked about, shouted at, ridiculed and left
on his own. When confronted by the violence of Cooper, Dougy does nothing. It is
Gracey who attempts to take control of the situation using persuasive words, while
Raymond, through his inexperience with firearms, manages accidentally to kill his
football hero, Ron Kendall. It is only when the floodwaters threaten the injured
Gracey and the devastated Raymond that Dougy starts to make decisions to save
their lives, in spite of his fear.

Dougy is convinced that it is the Moodagudda who pulls Gracey into the
floodwaters. Gracey tries to convince him that it was Cooper, not the Moodagudda.
But Dougy refuses to accept her explanation, so Gracey allows his version to
become truth. Dougy finally becomes 'special', patronised because he is the only

opportunities for work of any kind, for whites or blacks. Cunnamulla was portrayed as a 'hell on
earth', devoid of hope and peopled by those who could not escape to somewhere better.

7 Maloney, op.cit. p.46.
8 Messner & Sabo, op.cit., p.215.
one who believes that an ‘old’ Aboriginal Dreaming story is real. Dougy alone remains true to himself. His belief in the Moodagudda is unshakeable.

Dougy is seeking the cultural signifiers which will make him, in contrast to the others, a ‘real’ Aborigine. The local high school has a ‘mob that do the old Dreamtime dances’ and Maloney implies that Dougy will join. Dougy measures his Aboriginality by his appearance. He doesn’t look like a ‘real Aborigine’ because his body isn’t painted and he wears conventional clothes. The other children don’t ‘look any more like real Aborigines’ than Dougy. Once again the reader is left with the perception that the external signifiers of the ‘real’ Aborigine are the only representation of Aboriginality for Aboriginal children. For Gracey, Dougy’s belief becomes a cultural ritual in response to the racism of Cunningham. She wants to preserve an ‘imagined’ past for him, because she too believes he has no real future. Maloney has succeeded, perhaps unintentionally, in creating the Aboriginal as ‘Other’ in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Raymond is different from most other men because he has a talent for playing football. Gracey is different from most other young girls because she is a State champion in athletics. Dougy, no matter how ‘special’, will always be a ‘typical’ Aboriginal male, constructed as culturally discredited and intellectually and physically useless.

The Aboriginal women in *Dougy*, however, are all strong, able physically to stand up for themselves and articulate their points of view decisively. Gracey and her mother demonstrate their courage without the use of violence or a gun. It is the men, once again, who are flawed. Raymond is aggressive, quick tempered and irresponsible, measuring his masculinity and power only in terms of his skill at football, while his ineptitude at handling a gun results in tragedy. Dougy is useless, unable to read, write, do simple arithmetic or carry on a conversation. Their father is an irresponsible drunk who deserts his family for months at a time, leaving his wife to support them. Even the non-Aboriginal men are depicted as violent, racist or weak, unable to stand up to Cooper and his aggressive and vitriolic hatred for Aboriginal people. They find it difficult to come to terms with the inadequacy of their own lives, and what they perceive to be the unearned advantages of being Aboriginal. The men show little tolerance, on either side, for the weaknesses of the other.
On the surface, *Dougy* appears to be a children’s book which empowers the Aboriginal narrator and his family. But Dougy, unlike Jack in *The Fat and Juicy Place*, is never in control. He remains detached and unemotional, calmly recounting his experiences without inviting the reader to share them on any other level. The voice of the Anglo- Australian author dominates the novel. Maloney has written Dougy from his memory of a two year experience which he didn’t seem to enjoy. He appears to have struggled with his own attitudes towards the Aboriginal people, believing that the traditional lifestyle of some Aboriginal groups identifies them as the ‘real’ Aborigines, none of whom live in rural Cunnamulla.

Maloney presents Dougy and his gentle masculinity as heroic in opposition to the less attractive violence of Cooper and the aggression of Raymond. But Dougy, like most of the Aboriginal heroes who have gone before him in Australian children’s fiction, remains fundamentally flawed. Dougy’s belief in belonging to something bigger than himself gives him a sense of mastery and strength over an oppressive country town hierarchy. But racism and bigotry are still present, simmering below the surface, despite the town’s symbolic destruction by floods.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Queensland was seen by the other states as an authority on the administration of Aboriginal affairs. With hindsight it was an accolade which was clearly misplaced. As Ann McGrath (1995) comments, State paternalism has saturated every piece of legislation dealing with Queensland Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, slowly extracting any power they have over their own lives. The traditional authority of the elders has been replaced by the authority of the State. In *Dougy*, Maloney attempts to challenge this institutionalised racism. During his time in Cunnamulla, however, Maloney seems to have identified, not surprisingly, with the ‘whities’ of the town and although his claim that Dougy is a ‘purging’ of this connection, he is still bound, albeit unconsciously, by their beliefs and attitudes. The ‘purging’ is betrayed at the level of discourse where it is articulated in new perceptions of difference. Cooper appears to suffer greater disadvantage than his Aboriginal neighbours. He believes it is the *whiteness* of his skin that denies him the same access to housing. For Dougy’s
Aboriginal family, who are less than Maloney’s ideal of the ‘real’ Aboriginal, the category of difference evolves into the category of ‘special’.

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Chapter Eight


The ‘noble’ image of the Australian ‘native’, naked and transfixed in time has a genealogy that can be traced through ethnography, art, illustration and photography. The masculine Aboriginal image has been constructed as an example of the uncivilised, untouched, ‘native’ Australian, exemplifying primitive male power and freedom from the constraints of civilisation - the power of the wild. But, as The Hunted Piccaninnies and Aranda Boy indicate, the masculinity of the objectified native subject is locked into a primitive domain of nature and a lost past. Both are subjected to a feminising subordination by progress and evolution. The Aboriginal male, as Marcus (1999) comments, is captured in the 'before' space of historical time occupied by the critically important cultural form of the 'nomad', becoming part of settler Australia's 'Dreamtime'.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Australian children’s writers moved from their preoccupation with bush settings and accepted the identity of their characters as city dwellers. The world of childhood created by the writers of the frontier was deemed to hold no significance for the Anglo-Australian child readership of the 1950s. The narrative emphasis was on high adventure with characters firmly divided into 'good' and 'evil', rather than the 'civilised' and the 'uncivilised'. James Vance Marshall’s The Children, published in 1959, is an exception, as it combines a desert frontier setting with characters who represent both the ‘civilised’ and the ‘uncivilised’. The passage of events in The Children is psychodramatic as the characters engage with psychological conflict as well as external physical action and adventure.

The adaptation of a novel into film involves a process whereby the film generates a narrative, using the novel as a springboard for ideas and replacing words with

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1 J. Marcus, A Dark Smudge Upon the Sand (Canada Bay, LhR Press, 1999), pp. 127-128.
images. The formative principles of film are space as well as time. There is often a widespread assumption, particularly among general readers, that film-makers should capture the spirit of the original novel and avoid, where possible, distorting the detail contained in the narrative plot. The reader as viewer often fails to see the construction of filmic narrative as a separate, creative process of representation, with its own point of view. A written account and a visual realisation can rarely, if ever, interpret a narrative exactly the same way, no matter how ‘faithfully’ the film adaptation may aim to follow its predecessor. There are inherent differences in the way novels and films work to construct their meanings and to engage the attention of their audiences. The different conventions governing the production, distribution and reception of each form ultimately determines the final product.

In 1967, the well-known British film director Nicolas Roeg was sent James Vance Marshall’s novel, *The Children*, although the book had been reprinted under the title *Walkabout* in 1961. *The Children* was first published by Michael Joseph as an adult title, then chosen by Kaye Webb from Methuen for her ‘Peacock’ list because of its relevance to the adolescent reader. Roeg’s decision to film *The Children* as *Walkabout*, was the response of an English film-maker to an English author’s work. *Walkabout* was filmed in 1969 and released in 1971, the year Yirrkala Aborigines lost their two-year legal battle for land rights at Gove, NT, site of Nabalco’s bauxite mining project, and the year Neville Bonner was chosen by the Liberal Party to fill a casual Senate vacancy and become the first Aboriginal member of any Australian parliament. The over-all effect of a novel is usually governed by the tone created by a single author, who has almost total control of the text. In film, the director is usually part of a wider, collaborative enterprise. The relationship between the author of *The Children* and the director for the production of the film *Walkabout*, however, appears to have been very unusual if not unique. *The Children*, as a novel, has two authors with two different voices and points of view, although only one name appears on the cover.⁴

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⁴ The authorship of *The Children*, published when James Vance Marshall was 62 years old, is an interesting, if puzzling, arrangement. He is referred to as a co-author of the book. *The Children* was apparently written by English born author, Donald Gordon Payne who used Marshall’s notes, with his permission, supposedly compiled while Marshall was working as a sandalwood-cutter in the Northern Territory. Subsequent children’s books, similarly reliant on his notes, have also been published under
Payne is in fact the ghost writer although the book bears the name of Marshall. Without Marshall’s original notes, which are not archived, it is difficult to determine whose voice is the most dominant. Payne, in fact, is rarely acknowledged because his role is not generally known. Lees and Macintyre (1993), however, state categorically that Walkabout ‘was based on notes derived by Donald Gordon Payne from Marshall’s life as a sandalwood-cutter in the Northern Territory’. In spite of this, Lees and Macintyre still enter the book in The Oxford Companion to Australian Children’s Literature under the name of James Vance Marshall. Saxby (2002) also discusses the book referring to Marshall as the author although he acknowledges Payne. Roeg exploits and extends this duplicity. Walkabout is a sophisticated extrapolation from the novel, suggesting erotic themes by photographing Anna, played by sixteen year old English actress Jenny Agutter 1, with insistently sexual low camera angles and full frontal nudity. 4

Roeg exploits and extends this duplicity. Walkabout, however, is far from being a children’s film. It is a sophisticated extrapolation from the novel, suggesting erotic themes by photographing Anna, played by sixteen year old English actress Jenny Agutter 1, with insistently sexual low camera angles and full frontal nudity.

Roeg was interested in the idea of ‘a great landscape, like the Australian outback, which had hardly been surveyed and would be like a backcloth, a big, empty backcloth but visually very beautiful’. 1 The reaction of author, ‘Marshall’ and filmmaker Roeg to the landscape is that of ‘outsider’, using criteria derived from other

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2 Lucien John, Roeg’s own son plays the English boy, and the Aboriginal boy is played by David Gulpilil, spelled as Gumpilil in the credits. The film was also entered in the Cannes Film Festival in 1971.
3 In 1982 the Teaching Resources Division of Services in the Department of Education published a curriculum kit which focussed on the ‘junior’ novel Walkabout by James Vance Marshall. In the Teacher’s Notes it is recommended that the film ‘Walkabout’ be hired from the ‘Australasian Film Hire or 20th Century Fox Film Corporation’ as one of the teacher directed activities. Saxby (2002) also mentions that the book was ‘popularised by the film made in 1971’ (p.355).
4 Lucien John, Roeg’s own son plays the English boy, and the Aboriginal boy is played by David Gulpilil, spelled as Gumpilil in the credits. The film was also entered in the Cannes Film Festival in 1971.
experiences and other cultural perceptions. Roeg also liked the idea of ‘people lost somewhere’, particularly children because it is ‘very easy for a child to be lost, emotionally or physically’. Roeg explores, expands and eventually develops into a filmic allegory the time-honoured Australian theme of the ‘lost child’. In Roeg’s film interpretation the ‘lost child’ is urban Australia, coastal city and small inland town, represented by two lost English children, rather than the two American children of the novel. Roeg’s interpretation extrapolates the most powerful themes in the book. Marshall’s book focuses on the powerful essence of the harsh, desert landscape recreating it as a setting, a backdrop and context for his protagonist’s rite of passage. Roeg, however, elevates the role of landscape to that of a character, a brooding, spiritual presence. In the film, *Walkabout*, the visual becomes the narrative and Roeg, as director and photographer, becomes its author.  

There are three concurrent and interdependent themes running through *The Children*. The most obvious and most dominant is the journey, the physical movement across the land paralleling Mary’s inner journey from childhood to adulthood as a ‘rite of passage’. This is overshadowed by the Aboriginal bush boy’s interrupted journey from boyhood to manhood. Another theme is the landscape, its connection with Aboriginal people, Australian identity and the motif of ‘the lost child’.

James Vance Marshall was born in Casino, New South Wales in 1897. As a boy Marshall attended Fort Street (Sydney) Model Public School. When he was sixteen he had the opportunity for a short tour of the Orient. He travelled for several years working in places such as China, Japan, Canada and the USA. He returned to Australia from Central America and Brazil in 1917 and married Miss Belle Sirman.

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9 It has been said that *Walkabout* resembles a giant travelogue on the wonders of the ecology of Australia. B. Mc Farlane, *Words and Images Australian Novels into Film* (Victoria, Heinemann Australia, 1983). Interestingly, Payne is also a writer of travelogues. Roeg has obviously tapped visually into the writing style of the novelist.

10 It has been suggested that *Walkabout* did not do well at the Australian box office because of its intensely poetic evocation of the severities of the Australian desert and its unusually sympathetic view of the black protagonist. Such a depiction was regarded as simply too strange, too removed from the conventionally accepted images of Australia and its people. B. Mc Farlane and G. Mayer, *New Australian Cinema Sources and Parallels in American and British Film* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.182.
Marshall was a prominent member of the Labor Party, a union organiser and a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). He became Secretary of the Social Democratic League in Sydney in 1919 and was imprisoned on more than one occasion because of his opposition to the Conscription Act of the Hughes government. Based on his own experiences in the gaol system, Marshall wrote two controversial pamphlets, *Jail from Within* (1918) and a collection of poems and sketches in *The World of the Living Dead* (1919), which includes a preface by Henry Lawson, with whom he was friendly. Marshall became disillusioned with Australia and left for Britain. The British Labour Party honoured him with an appointment to the London Bench of Magistrates. He was appointed to the position of ‘official lecturer to H.M Forces’ in Britain in 1942 and earned decorations for rescue work during the London blitz in World War Two. Returning to Australia, he worked in the Department of Labour and National Service looking after newly arrived immigrants until 1958. After his retirement, Marshall moved to Oberon, in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. He died in 1964.

*The Children* is set on the Sturt Plain, in the centre of the Northern Territory, near Tennant Creek, Hooker Creek and Daly Waters and incorporates the Murrangi Stock Route, which was known as the Murrang-ji Track, the ‘ghost road of the drovers’. It is here that an aircraft carrying two American children crashes, leaving them as the only survivors. The aircraft appears to be a cargo plane bound for Adelaide.

... *She was in the aeroplane again, and she knew that something was wrong. She and Peter were the only passengers,*

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11 On December 1st, 1916, twelve members of the IWW were charged with arson and sedition. Ten were sentenced to between five and fifteen years’ gaol. In Bathurst, on December 28th of the same year, two members of the IWW were hanged after being found guilty of murdering a policeman at Tottenham.

12 The Social Democratic League was formed in 1917 by a group of breakaways from the Australian Socialist Party, who wanted to practise the Victorian Socialist Party tactic of ‘boring from within’ the Labor Party.

13 Vance Marshall became a regular speaker in the Sydney Domain and was leader of the Anti-Conscriptionists who opposed the Conscription Act.

sandwiched between the crates of vegetables and the frozen carcasses of beef ...

There is no explanation as to why two young children aged 13 and 6 were travelling on their own from Charleston, South Carolina in the USA to their Uncle Keith in Adelaide aboard a cargo plane which flies over Central Australia. The scenario is highly improbable, and seems to indicate the ignorance of the author on matters Australian. This is further reinforced by numerous examples of incorrect information concerning desert flora, fauna and bird life, also described in the novel.

A lumbering wombat came creeping out of his ground den. His short stumpy body forced a way through the underscrub; his long food-foraging snout ploughing through the sandy earth in search of his favourite roots.

The author goes on to describe platypus, koalas, kookaburras, and flying foxes all living in the centre of the Northern Territory. The landscape itself alternates between a 'luxuriant' Garden of Eden to the 'salt pans of the great Australian Desert'. The misinformation is presented as fact, either by Payne as an Englishman whose interpretation of Marshall's notes was questionable, or by Marshall's notes which reveal that he had probably never been to the inland desert region of Central Australia. Either way the audience is encouraged to believe the truth of what is written about the flora and fauna in an isolated region of Australia.

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16 There is no logical reason why the children are flying in a cargo plane across central Australia to get to Adelaide when commercial passenger aircraft are flying both domestically and internationally. Charles Kingsford Smith, C.T.P. Ulm, and Americans Harry Lyon and James Warner made the first flight across the Pacific, from California to Brisbane, in May 1928. In January 1958 Qantas inaugurates a round-the-world air service. In July, 1959, Qantas received its first 707 jet aircraft which made its initial flight to San Francisco.
18 In the late eighteenth century the fashion for exotica, especially of the botanical kind, created interest in Australia. A different order of nature seemed to prevail; bizarre plants and fauna that violated the Linnaean system of taxonomy created antipodal fascination. Utopian planners saw Australia as nurturing the ultimate flowering of Western civilisation.
Donald Gordon Payne was born in England in 1924 and educated at Charterhouse and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He also wrote under the name of Ian Cameron. Payne served in World War Two as a pilot in the Fleet Air Arms (which is possibly where he met or heard about James Vance Marshall) and subsequently worked for a number of years in publishing as an editor. He began writing full-time in 1956, producing numerous novels, works of non-fiction and children’s books. 19

Marshall uses the flora and fauna as tokens of Australian nationality, viewed as touchstones of what is unique, even typical, in Australian life. The physical differences between the Australian continent and Northern Hemisphere lands have continued to fascinate people overseas. It is interesting to speculate that since Payne was English and had probably never been to Australia, his response expresses a colonial attitude to Australia as the ‘land of oddities’. As a non-Australian author he is most fascinated by this uniqueness. His response to the Australian landscape is located very firmly in the colonial past, where the status of the coloniser, as author, confers the power to define identities for the colonised.

Marshall also encapsulates the binary oppositions which characterise national attitudes to the Australian landscape. He links the unique beauty of the desert with the terror it invokes in those trying to survive and indeed overcome the hardships it presents. The essentialised system of racial difference which permeates colonial discourse is one which sees ‘white’ and ‘black’ as mutually exclusive. This is extended by Marshall to include opposition between the attitude of Australian society to Aboriginal people and American society to Black American ‘Negroes’. White Australia views Aboriginal people as a dying race, noble but lowly, while America fears its black population, and would ‘lynch’ the ‘darkie’ without hesitation. There is also binary opposition between the English and Australian experience. Englishness is rendered as a binary opposite to Australianness, largely via the figure of the female protagonist Mary, who embodies a ‘missionary’ rigidity and obsession with ‘correctness’, while trying to follow an Aboriginal way of survival. 20

20 Binary opposition can also be applied to the identification of Aboriginal Australians by Anglo-Australians. In 1988 the Mackay Report found that respondents to the study made distinctions
Mary’s search for adult identity evokes a sense of displacement and loss, not only for herself as a character, but also for Marshall and Payne as authors: Mary and Peter are displaced from their American home; Marshall has returned to Australia after living in England for a significant number of years,\(^2\) while Payne is trying to write about a setting and way of life about which he probably has no direct experience. The authors are not confident in using Anglo-Australian children as characters, as neither is able to draw upon recent experience of what it means to grow up in Australia. Consequently, they return to the ‘arresting’ figure of the ‘lost child’ prevalent in the history and folklore of colonial Australia. The lost child represents not only the children of European origin who strayed into the Australian bush, but symbolises the essential, if never fully resolved, anxieties of many white settler communities. Stories abound of pioneering families suffering the anguish of losing children, some of whom perish without trace, while others are miraculously saved, often with the help of Aboriginal trackers.\(^3\)

The role of the ‘black tracker’ in Australian history can be viewed as that of a ‘go-between’. It is the presence of an Aboriginal that provides the possibility of entering the Australian desert or bush and finding the lost child. Aboriginality represents, in this context, the link between European settlers and the land. The Aboriginal tracker was often the only chance of saving the lost children from the perceived terror of the bush. Marshall extends this structure by also employing the character of the Aboriginal bush boy as a ‘go-between’. The conflict between Marshall’s ‘white’ and

\(^2\) For Marshall, the publication of *The Children* could reflect a concern with recovering an effective identifying relationship between himself and the country of his birth. The pervasive interest Marshall shows towards the ‘myths’ of identity could well reflect his desire to authenticate his position as an expatriate Australian, to reaffirm his beliefs about Australia and recover his own identity as a displaced person. Similarly, Payne could well be interested in perpetuating the same ‘myths’ of identity because he is physically and emotionally distanced from the very sense of place he is trying to create.

\(^3\) P. Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.xi. The most famous ‘lost children’ in colonial Australia were the three Duff children — Issac (9), Jane (7), and Frank (3) who lost their way in the scrub near Horsham, in Victoria in 1864. They were found alive, miraculously, after eight days. Not so fortunate were William and Thomas Graham and Alfred Herbert Burman whose bodies were found three months after they had disappeared.
‘black’ worlds is also between the ‘primitive’ and the ‘civilised’. The bush boy becomes the physical mediator between the lost children, the landscape and survival, but also the psychological mediator between Mary’s childhood and adolescence, between innocence and sexual awareness. The bush boy cannot cross the divide between cultures. Only his death can justifiably prevent this from happening, the implication being that Mary and Peter, as Anglo-Americans, are permitted to cross the cultural divide but the Aboriginal is not. The place of the bush boy within the structure of the narrative becomes an index of the limits of his personal and social power.  

Although lost, displaced and insecure in a strange, new land, Mary and Peter don’t share the anxieties of nineteenth century European settlers. The focus of the narrative is on the ‘rites of passage’ of European and Aboriginal Australia. Marshall aligns the Aboriginal ‘bush boy’ with the early settlers, revealing his apprehension about Aboriginal people belonging in a society where he believes they will never be accepted. Marshall transfers the motif of the ‘lost child’ to the Aboriginal boy who he believes belongs to a ‘dying race’, a ‘disappearing, anachronistic species’, dispossessed of both land and culture.

As the ‘pre-pubescent girl lost in the Australian desert’, Mary ironically becomes the symbol of the Australian struggle for maturity. Through the shedding of childhood and her subsequent desert survival (a necessary signal of national origin), Mary challenges the physical dimensions of Australia. By representing Mary adopting Aboriginal ways and linking her journey spiritually to the land, Marshall authenticates The Children as an Australian children’s novel. He uses the ‘communal memory of the Australian experience’ to express his definition of the ‘true’ Australian, thus articulating not only his vision of the past, but his aspirations for the future.  

Marshall introduces the Aboriginal ‘bush boy’, who remains unnamed throughout
the novel, as ‘ebony black and quite naked’. Like those before him, Marshall
describes the physical appearance of the Aboriginal boy in great detail. Skin colour,
nose shape and head size have all been used as defining markers of Aboriginalities.

He wasn’t the least bit like an African Negro. His skin was
certainly black, but beneath it was a curious hint of
undersurface bronze, and it was fine-grained: glossy, satiny,
almost silk-like. His hair wasn’t crinkly but nearly straight; and
his eyes were blue-black: big, soft and inquiring.

Mary is disturbed, not by the colour of his skin, but by his nakedness which she finds
‘shockingly and indecently wrong’ while Peter and the bush boy remain
unperturbed. Marshall puts the Aboriginal boy very firmly on the lower levels of the
evolutionary scale of humanity. With his ‘long prehensile toes’ the Aboriginal boy
‘scratched away the top soil’, part of his attention always ‘subconsciously focused on
the ever-present problem of survival, the never satisfied search for food’. The
Aboriginal lived a way of life that ‘was already old when Tut-ankh-amen started to
build his tomb’. Marshall appears to have been aware that carbon dating, which had
become available from the late 1950s in geology, enabled academic experts to
quantify the age of Aboriginal weapons, tools and skeletal remains. This assisted the
quest to establish Australia’s ancient credentials, by celebrating, rather than
exterminating, Aboriginal culture.

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25 The most obvious sign of difference is the deployment of blackness itself, in this case through skin
colour. Black has always been associated in European culture with evil, a sign of the primitive and the
unknown.

26 Marshall, op.cit., p.25.

27 Twentieth-century racial attitudes were, and to some degree, still are, entrenched in nineteenth-
century notions of ‘white’ superiority. Aboriginal people were viewed as being physically and
intellectually below Europeans, as their evolution was incomplete, they had not evolved completely
from their animal state. According to Darwin the feet of some savages had not altogether lost their
prehensile power, ‘as shewn by their manner of climbing trees, and of using them in other ways ... the
feet should have become perfected for support and locomotion’. C. Darwin, The Descent of Man

It was believed that Aboriginal societies were less sophisticated than their white counterparts and were still fossilised in an early stage of 'development'. Aborigines were regarded as a simple, child-like people chiefly preoccupied with the daily search for food. Marshall resurrects the ideal of the 'Noble Savage' and a romanticised 'primitivism', reflecting an anthropological trend that by the 1950s had come to be called 'ethnohistory'. Aboriginal culture, with its emphasis on myth, animism and the spiritual, was regarded as the ultimate in primitivism. The only "real" Aboriginal was a remote "full-blood", still cut off from present-day life, conforming to particular biological or cultural characteristics which were construed as the essence of all Aboriginal people.

29 The ideology of the 'noble savage' saw Aboriginal people as a happy race unaware of material want, exemplary 'specimens' of a society without civilisation.
20 Kociumbas, op. cit., p. 20.
Among the secret water-holes of the Australian desert his people had lived and died, unchanged and unchanging, for twenty thousand years. Their lives were unbelievably simple. They had no homes, no crops, no clothes, no possessions. The few things they had, they shared: food and wives; children and laughter; tears and hunger and thirst. They walked from one water-hole to the next; they exhausted one supply of food, then moved on to another. Their lives were utterly uncomplicated because they were devoted to one purpose, dedicated in their entirety to the waging of one battle: the battle with death. ... the job they’d been doing for twenty thousand years: the job they were good at.  

Marshall collapses distinctions between the Aboriginal and nature by deliberately blending the Aboriginal bush boy with the landscape, making him indistinguishable from it. The effect of this is to establish the difference between the submersion of the Aboriginal in the land, and the whites’ struggle for occupation of it. This is a dehumanising strategy, and has served to legitimate white settlers’ treatment of the Aborigines as ‘pests’ well into the twentieth century. Aborigines have been, and continue to be seen as metonyms for an Australian landscape. Like koalas and Uluru, they are among the natural attributes of the land signifying strangeness and otherness in the Antipodes. This ‘naturalising’ of the bush boy’s marginal and subordinated place within white culture presents, yet again, an unspoken justification for the inability of Aboriginal people to assimilate. It is also a way of displacing social, cultural and political problems. To see the Aboriginal as a dying species rather than a ‘subordinated culture’ is, as Turner (1988) comments, ‘to explain their condition as

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31 The Children, op.cit., pp.26, 27. Marshall reduces the threat and constant presence of death to Aboriginal people to essentialist parameters; he ignores the spiritual aspects surrounding death through the Dreamtime and the symbolic death of boys through initiation.

32 The Australian perception of ‘self’, sharpened by contrast with perceptions of ‘other’ becomes problematic in the context of The Children – Marshall is Australian born, but lived a significant part of his life overseas; Payne is English born and probably lived all of his life in England; Mary and Peter are Americans; and the bush boy is Aboriginal. Who is the ‘other’?
the result of the inevitable operation of natural forces rather than as the product of a specific history.\textsuperscript{35}

Marshall couples the exotic image of the Noble Savage with Darwinist stereotypes of indigenous inferiority and simplicity, defining the 'authentic' Aborigine in the context of evolving intellectual traditions and transforming colonial relations. Historically, the initial emphasis eventually shifts from racial to cultural categories.\textsuperscript{34} Marshall's cultural comparison alludes to a search for unity in an increasingly chaotic and technologically advancing world. The instinctive life of the Aboriginal bush boy might well hold the key to a 'paradise lost', where deeper, mythical truths might be rediscovered beyond 'what the rational, scientific laws of perspective could represent.'\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{quote}
Brother and sister were products of the highest strata of humanity's evolution. In them the primitive had long ago been swept aside, been submerged by mechanization, been swamped by scientific development, been nullified by the standardized pattern of the white man's way of life. They had climbed a long way up the ladder of progress; they had climbed so far, in fact, that they had forgotten how their climb had started. Coddled in babyhood, psycho-analysed in childhood, nourished on predigested patent foods, provided with continuous push-button entertainment, the basic realities of life were something they'd never had to face.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

The children's names are also symbolic; Mary as the 'Virgin' mother of Christ and the spiritual mother of Christianity, represents a woman who is 'pure' not having had

\textsuperscript{34} I. Anderson, 'I, the 'hybrid' Aborigine: film and representation', \textit{Australian Aboriginal Studies}, 1 (1997), p.7.
\textsuperscript{35} Kociumbus, \textit{op.cit.}, p.2. It is this 'mystical truth', which Nicolas Roeg explores, in much greater depth, in his film version of \textit{Walkabout}.
sexual intercourse, while Peter literally means ‘rock’. It is Peter who finds it easier to adapt to the demands of their physical journey and it is he who eventually leads them out of the desert.

Mary begins her journey in the Australian desert, where the natural landscape becomes the setting for her ‘Trial by Ordeal’ which, if overcome, will admit her to maturity. On a symbolic level, the Aboriginal boy is ‘killed’ by Mary, enabling her to mature and move on towards adulthood. Through his death the bush boy enables Mary’s enlightenment to take place. The classical references and the alternating settings of Eden (Australia was often referred to as the ‘New Eden’, the land of opportunity) and the desert, reinforce this notion of penance and rebirth. The new beginning will start when Mary and Peter eventually return to a civilised white society to reveal the paradise that has been lost and the need to return to a simpler, more fulfilling life. The Aboriginal bush boy physically sustains both Peter and Mary by showing them how to survive in a harsh desert landscape. The boy is sacrificed so that Mary can understand and move beyond her prejudiced, colonial ‘missionary’ fears and beliefs. Although his death once again places their survival under threat, in her mind Mary has moved on, reinforcing the idealised Australian character of literature and myth which posits that freedom is not necessarily physical but the ‘possession of self in the reaches of the mind’.

As part of his male initiation, the bush boy has left his mother to join the world of men. Mary is portrayed as a mother figure to her brother Peter, a relationship he too rejects as the story progresses. Marshall again reinforces a Darwinian notion of the essential biological distinction between male and female. The relationship between Peter and the bush boy reinforces this construction of masculinity, effectively

37 For a more detailed discussion of Joseph Campbell’s quest motif see Chapter 6.
38 Churches in Europe and America in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries established missions to Christianise those suffering as a result of slavery and colonial expansion, as well as out of concern for indigenous peoples. Mission work in Australia was part of a worldwide movement.
39 Nimmo and Foster, op. cit., p.32.
40 Marshall’s bush boy travels his journey of initiation alone. The reality is that the journey would have a social and spiritual purpose and would be undertaken by a group of boys with initiated men. They would visit distant groups, settling long-standing disputes, exchanging information and inviting participation in the boys’ initiation. The boys’ inner knowledge expands concurrently along with their experience of their country. By focussing only on the physical aspects of the bush boy’s journey Marshall is not only showing his ignorance but once again reducing Aboriginal culture and beliefs to essentialist notions of mere survival.
excluding Mary. ‘Real’ Australian men live in the bush, while those born and bred in
the city don’t quite measure up. Symbolically, Aboriginal boys ‘die’ as part of their
journey of initiation, to be reborn as men. Also, an important part of the initiation
ritual is betrothal, although the marriage will probably not take place for many years.
In Anglo-Australian society a betrothal between an Aboriginal boy and a white girl
was unthinkable. A physical relationship between them was even more unacceptable.
Mary could not be placed in a compromising position, where the ‘primeval nature’
and ‘basic instincts’ of a primitive Aboriginal boy approaching puberty might prove
too strong for them both. On a realistic, as well as symbolic level, the bush boy’s
death was essential. 41

Marshall was an ageing man when he wrote The Children. He had lived through two
world wars and a depression; he had been imprisoned for his political beliefs and
outspoken viewpoints, eventually being ‘exiled’ to England. It is not too difficult to
believe that he was disillusioned with Anglo-Australian attitudes and values. Given
also that his political beliefs were socialist, it would follow that he had an idealistic,
romantic attitude towards ‘primitive’ Aboriginals and their apparently Utopian
existence, untainted by modern civilisation. 42

41 Marshall couldn’t allow the integrity of ‘white’ Australia to be threatened by the consummation of a
physical relationship between ‘black’ and ‘white’, which could result in the birth of a ‘half-caste’.
42 Marshall’s Aboriginal ‘bush boy’ had never had contact with a white person. Marshall’s geography
is terribly wrong as he states that the Sturt Plain is 1400 miles from Adelaide and had a population
of ‘roughly 4,500’ people who lived mainly around the townships of Tennant Creek, Hooker Creek and
Daly Waters. Elsey Station, located to the north, was established in the 1880s and was the home of
Jeannie Gunn, author of The Little Black Princess. The area had two roads, one of which was a fair-
weather stock route called the Murrangi Stock Route or the Murranji Track, which Ernestine Hill
describes as ‘the northern rim of nothing, the most notorious dry stage of Australia in the number of
its deaths by thirst and fever’. It ranged from open coolabah and lightly timbered country, to the
‘gnarled dark woods’ of the dense hedgwood scrub which forced explorer McDougall Stuart to turn
back on his fifth journey north. The track ends at Top Springs, ‘a glad surprise, pandanus palms a –
shimmer by a miraculous little river thirty feet deep, seeping out of a cleft in the rock, pretty with
ferns, bottle-green and brimming for miles, never known to be dry’, not far from Victoria River
Downs Station, while the Tanami Desert is located to the south. E. Hill, The Territory (Sydney,
Angus and Robertson, 1951), pp. 299, 301. When Nathaniel Buchanan formed Wave Hill Station in
1883, he pioneered the track for cattle travelling west. Links between Aboriginal groups in the area
were well established. There were mission stations at Newcastle Waters and Elliot, approximately
sixty kilometres from the Sturt Plain. It is unlikely, therefore, that in 1959, the year of the book’s
publication, that the Aboriginal boy had never seen a white person given the expansion of the pastoral
industry and the presence of missionaries in the area.

317
Mary’s inner journey is reflected in her growing awareness of her sexuality. This manifests itself in her fear of the bush boy when he suddenly recognises her as ‘a lubra’, and realises that she is not a male as he had first thought.

_White girl and black boy, a couple of yards apart, stood staring one at another._

_The girl’s eyes grew wider and wider._

_The bush boy’s eyes widened too. He realised, quite suddenly, that the larger of the strangers wasn’t a male: she was a lubra, a budding gin._

The bush boy had already briefly explored Mary’s face, frock and sandals and come to the conclusion that she was a larger version of her brother. The inclusion of the bush boy’s need to physically ‘explore’ the appearance of Mary is a literary device used by Marshall to accentuate her sexual tension and highlight the differences in attitude between Anglo-Australians and Anglo-Americans towards the ‘blacks’.

_The idea of being manhandled by a naked black boy appalled her: struck at the root of one of the basic principles of her civilised code. It was terrifying; revolting; obscene. Back in Charleston it would have got the darkie lynched. Yet she didn’t move; not even when the dark fingers ran like spiders up and down her body._

_She stayed motionless because, deep-down, she knew she had nothing to fear. The things that she’d been told way back in Charleston were somehow not applicable any more. The values she’d been taught to cherish became_  

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43 Marshall, _op.cit._, p.54.
44 Marshall chooses to ignore the estimated 10,000 Aboriginal people killed in northern Australia alone from the 1860s to the 1930s.
suddenly meaningless. A little guilty, a little resentful, and more than a little bewildered, she waited passively for whatever might happen next. 43

Marshall constructs Mary as submissive and passive. Uncertain and unsure in the desert landscape, Mary ‘fell back on a woman’s oldest line-of-action: passivity. She’d simply wait and see’. 44 Mary takes on the traditional role of an Aboriginal woman and carries the kill without argument, following behind the males. The bush boy makes the decisions because he has the knowledge that will enable them to survive. As he lies dying, it is to Peter, not Mary, that he gives directions. It is Peter who attempts to learn the language and communicate. It is Peter who addresses him directly as ‘darkie’. On the journey Mary is internally active, struggling with her prejudices and fears, but is physically inactive, submitting to the males who make the decisions. The much younger Peter leads the way. Age becomes irrelevant. Peter is seen as more decisive and more capable. Initially, Mary’s role as ‘mother’ is emphasised: later it is usurped by the bush boy. As Mary journeys from childhood to adolescence, Peter moves from his dependency on Mary as a mother figure, to greater independence.

The climax of the narrative arrives when Mary presents the bush boy with her lace-edged underpants and he performs a ‘ritual dance’ and ‘jamboree’ 45 in response to the gift. There is no obvious reason why he now recognises her as female. The gendered appearance of the lacy underpants – ‘symbol of civilisation’ – means nothing to the ‘primitive’ boy until the elastic breaks and the gift ‘lay under his feet, trampled into the desert sand’. The breaking of the elastic is symbolic of the ending of the friendship between Mary, Peter and the bush boy. Their relationship can never

43 Marshall, op.cit., p.31.
44 Freud posited that men are active and women are passive. His ideas entered the popular imagination. To be a man one must be active; being passive is regarded as being inactive therefore unmanly.
45 Obviously, Marshall means an Aboriginal ‘corroboree’ but confuses it with a Boy Scout ‘jamboree’. The only conclusion about this glaring inaccuracy is that Payne didn’t bother to check the correct name and that Marshall didn’t proof read the novel before publication. The fact that the English publishers also allowed this to slip through only emphasises their ignorance of Aboriginal cultural practices.
be the same, nor does it have a future. Conventional morality prevents the consummation of Mary’s sexual attraction for the Aboriginal boy.

Marshall’s civilised world equates with clothing, an interpretation synonymous with nineteenth century ideology. What separates white and black are the trappings of the civilised; covering one’s nakedness conceals and contains primeval impulses, distinguishing humans from animals. Marshall’s symbol, however, is clumsy and inappropriate, bordering on the ridiculous.

The bush boy tramples the author’s symbol of civilisation into the dirt, innocently rejecting assimilation. He cannot survive as an Aboriginal in a society dominated by a Eurocentric culture and beliefs. The bush boy interprets the fear in Mary’s eyes as her reaction to the image of death, he believes she, in turn, sees reflected in his eyes. This is biological determinism at its least complicated, providing the narrative justification for the bush boy’s death.

He took a half-pace forward. Then he drew back. Appalled. For into the girl’s eyes there came a terror such as he’d seen only a couple of times before: a terror that could for him have only one meaning, one tragic and inevitable cause. He began to tremble then, in great, uncontrolled, nerve-jerking spasms. For, to him, the girl’s terror could only mean one thing: that she had seen in his eyes an image: the image of the spirit of Death. “

Marshall gives the control of the bush boy’s life to Mary; it is the fear in her eyes, which seals his fate, not his fear of tribal law or the elders. The construct of the ‘Spirit of Death’ originates with Marshall, not Aboriginal tradition. Although Mary’s role in Marshall’s hierarchy is subservient to men, she is still superior to an Aboriginal boy. The bush boy ‘couldn’t take a gin before his manhood had been

48 Marshall, op.cit., p.54.
proved’ and he had still to prove his manhood. Mary’s sex was therefore of no interest to him. It is Mary who has transferred the fear of her own ‘budding’ sexuality into a fear of his approaching manhood.

Marshall applies the Darwinian notion of the ‘survival of the fittest’ to the bush boy’s tribe arguing that natural selection was already a part of their culture; the white anthropologists and scientists did not introduce it.

In the bush boy’s tribe every male who reached the age of thirteen or fourteen had to perform a walkabout – a selective test which weeded out and exterminated the weaker members of the tribe, and ensured that only the fittest survived to father children. This custom is not common to all Aboriginal tribes, but is confined to the Bindaboo, the most primitive and least-known of the Aboriginal groups who live among the water-holes of the Central and North Australian desert. 

Marshall believed that ‘death was the Aboriginals’ only enemy, his only fear’, for them there was no life after death, no ‘Avalon, no Valhalla, no Islands of the Blest’. It is obvious that Marshall has no understanding of the spiritual aspects of Aboriginal people and misinterprets the bush boy’s desire to have a burial platform as one of superstition, so that the ‘serpent that slept in the bowels of the earth couldn’t creep out and molest his body’. Marshall reduces Aboriginal Dreamtime spirituality to a simplistic level, implying that such an irrational belief was held by those whose lives were ‘dictated by custom and instinct rather than thought’ and relegating the bush boy’s beliefs to the realms of childish fantasy. To Marshall the bush boy has no capacity for intellectual understanding; he is indeed the lowest form of humanity. As

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5 For many Aboriginal people it is the profound responsibility of the living to ensure that the spiritual component of the dead person is separated from this world and can proceed to the next, a responsibility that the bush boy realised that Mary and Peter would be unable to undertake. R. Lawlor, Voices of the First Day Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime (Vermont, Inner Traditions International, 1991), p. 343.
in the Darwinian model of evolutionary theory what separates man from the animals is his capacity to think.  

Marshall’s belief in assimilation is reinforced by the death of the bush boy, the ‘lost child’. The dying boy smiles forgivingly at Mary, as she gently cradles his head while her long golden hair tumbles about his face in a highly romanticised, almost Victorian, ‘death bed’ scene. In that moment, Mary realises that the ‘world she had thought was split in two was one’. The children shed no tears nor do they mourn the boy’s passing which Marshall presents as a unifying occasion, symbolically uniting black and white. The bush boy, however, is not only denied the traditional burial rites of his people, but is ‘christened’ at Peter’s insistence so that he will go to heaven. His sacrifice is complete. His traditional Aboriginal beliefs have been buried along with his mortal remains.

The legacy of the bush boy lives on in the survival skills he has taught the children. In death, as in life, his value is measured in terms of how well he has adapted to a harsh landscape. The children apply the knowledge they have been given not only to survive, but also to return to the ‘civilised’ world.

The representations of Aboriginal people in the first decade of the film industry revival, from 1971-1980, were markedly more positive, more knowledgeable, and more tolerant than those previously depicted. The value of Aboriginal culture had certainly become more widely accepted but it was also more marketable as Australiana. The conventions of representation tend to focus on the final link in a much longer chain of cultural production. Most interest in the representation of Aboriginal people in film has concentrated on the text of the film, to the exclusion of the material connections between texts and their determinants in institutions, government policy and discourse.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} In an interesting twist, Mary, so overcome by fear because the bush boy has seen her swimming naked in the billabong, becomes like an animal, ‘snarling like a cornered dingo’, and grabs a rock to defend herself from what she perceives to be a threat to her virginity. The bush boy, however, has admiration only for her golden hair as it ‘trails like a comet’ through the water. His primary concern is with the construction of his burial platform, which he subsequently realises Mary will never build.

\textsuperscript{32} Turner, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.138, 137.
The 1957-58 Annual report of the Northern Territory disclosed that 8,000 people, or about 48% of the Aboriginal population, were residents in institutions. They were controlled, submissive and isolated. Their legal rights were compromised. The assimilation policy of the 1950s became one of absorption to change Aboriginal people into Europeans with black skins – the successful Aborigine was the Europeanised Aborigine.  

Aboriginal people were still being forcibly removed from their lands and families were still being separated. Aboriginal people did not have the right to vote in federal elections until 1962, and were not given full citizenship rights until after a referendum in 1967. In NSW alone official records show that approximately 5,625 children had been removed from their parents between 1883 and 1969 and placed in Aboriginal Children’s Homes.  

By the end of the 1960s, after much Aboriginal-initiated protest, few restrictions remained, although reserve dwellers in the Northern Territory and Queensland were still controlled by special acts. At the time of the release of the film Walkabout in 1971, the Labor Party leader Gough Whitlam was declaring that ‘Australia’s treatment of her Aboriginal people will be the thing upon which the rest of the world will judge Australia and Australians not just now, but in the greater perspective of history’.  

Roeg, as the director of Walkabout, is preoccupied with the spirit of place that Australians often associate with the inland desert regions. The desert becomes the ‘space’ between Western civilisation and Nature, the rival powers for possession of the European mind, where the interior is still overflowing with ‘a spiritual infinitude which answers the needs of Eurocentric mankind escaping from a shrinking Europe’.  

For many Australians, the desert provokes the introspective examination of individual desires and conflicts, and provides a stage on which they can be acted out in the construction and performance of identity. Roeg presents the desert as a metaphysical experience, where the children of a flawed and exhausted ‘civilised’ European society, are abandoned to the merciless spirit of the wilderness in order to engage in ‘a spiritual reacquaintance with the land, a reawakening of Eden’.  

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54 C. Bourke, E. Bourke and B. Edwards (eds), Aboriginal Australia (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1994), p.86.  
55 K. Gilbert, Because a White Man ’ll Never Do It (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1973), p.30.  
57 Ibid.
Depicted diversely as ‘beautiful, monotonous, menacing and expansive’, the desert is portrayed as a complex balance of all such attributes, offering metaphysical enlightenment for those able to accept its rich diversity.  

Anna, the girl in the film, never experiences a spiritual relationship with the land. She is more materialistic, more imprisoned by possessions, more dependent on companionship and therefore more possessive than either her brother or the Aboriginal boy. For her the land remains ‘the other’. One of the most immediate and universal impressions of the desert is of its immensity, emphasising the smallness of human life and its concerns.

The desert teaches a valuable lesson of renunciation. It is only when Mary discards her material possessions in the form of her clothing, freeing herself of all encumbrances, that she finds enlightenment. Anna is never attuned to the desert and carries her possessions until she returns to the civilised world. Enlightenment is never really hers, even in retrospect.

Roeg wrote to Edward Bond, a leading London playwright, and described what he wanted to do – ‘I don’t think I sent him the book’. Bond wrote a fourteen-page screenplay about ‘a journey, the journey of life, and discovery, and growing up….’ There was no description and Bond didn’t come to Australia. He did ‘no research about Aborigines or anything’. Roeg and company managed to ‘pad’ it out to forty-six, fifty pages.  

Roeg takes the essence of the novel, captured by Bond’s screenplay and develops the simplicity of the Rousseau-like perspective into an allegory of the urban disillusionment with modern life and the idea of the desert as a paradise lost. The ‘spiritual purity’ of the desert is set against the material complexities of civilisation – the radio, the private school uniforms, the girl’s makeshift umbrella. Marshall’s colonial preoccupation with the ‘exotic’ Australian flora and fauna is likewise retained and explored further, with close ups of lizards, parrots and kangaroos appearing throughout the film. The ‘Noble Savage’, most

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[10] Combs, *op.cit.*, p. 166. Not surprisingly there is very little dialogue in *Walkabout*, but numerous shots depicting the Australian landscape from a variety of different angles, using different techniques.
‘exotic’ of all, is also represented but romanticised more fully by the way the camera frames the Aboriginal boy against the desert landscape. 41

Roeg creates a ‘Garden of Eden’ in the desert, combining the apparent innocence and lack of responsibility of childhood with the Aboriginal way of life, to create the symbolic setting for a lost paradise. This last reserve of natural power is seen as a wilderness knowable only in its spiritual Aboriginal truth, where the unusual landforms, the exotic flora and fauna and the traditional transmission of the Aboriginal Dreaming, emerge as the only positive forces in an otherwise hostile landscape. 42 At the beginning of the film the children’s father returns to the desert, the setting symbolising for him, the pastoral tradition, which he associates with a period of past abundance and happiness. Unable to return to nature and get ‘in touch’ with his ‘inner self’, a disturbing but increasingly common phenomenon, he takes his own life and attempts, unsuccessfully, to take the lives of his children. Sophisticated man has ‘fallen’.

According to the film, only the innocent can save mankind. Childhood, black and white, is seen as a period of freedom which inevitably disappears with the responsibilities of adulthood. Mary loses her innocent belief in old attitudes and values, while Anna in the film returns to the adult world to wistfully recall the innocence of a lost landscape. The Aboriginal boy can never be admitted to the adult world of a Eurocentric culture, so he remains, through death, forever innocent, forever the ‘Noble Savage’. The desert supplants the garden as a symbolic place of healing and renewal, becoming a convincing alternative setting where the innocence and well being of paradise can be sustained.

For Marshall, Mary’s journey is a symbol of the time before sexual awakening, where she faces her demons and accepts her passage to adulthood by overcoming her own fears, as well as the perils of the desert. For Roeg, the archetypal journey of life - long, perilous, sometimes rewarding, sometimes futile - becomes the reawakening

41 The more obvious racism and overtones of Social Darwinism are not as evident in the film. The boy, for example, does not call the Aboriginal boy ‘darkie’ in the film as he does in the novel, perhaps because he is English and not American, but probably because such overt racism was no longer acceptable.

42 Dermody and Jacka, op. cit., p.81.
of urban Australia’s lost association with the land. He attempts to link the children to Aboriginal culture, and, indirectly by association, to the land, by allowing them to paint on the ancient rock face using traditional Aboriginal techniques. The Aboriginal boy also paints their bodies with traditional designs. The English boy in his childhood innocence accepts the ritual, while Anna, faced with a circumstance where civilised codes are irrelevant, refuses to accept the uselessness of her own cultural artefacts in the context of the desert landscape.

The Aboriginal boy is painting on a rock face already covered with other traditional paintings.

English girl: *I wish we had a proper pencil.*

Aboriginal boy: *Speaks in his own language.*

English boy: *Why did you say we were the first white people he has ever seen?*

English girl: *I always thought you had lots of crayons and pencils in your satchel. Please have a look.*

Like an ancient myth, Roeg’s *Walkabout* is cautionary, examining the inter-sexual and inter-cultural tensions between black and white. It helps to define the code of what is deemed to be acceptable behaviour. The Aboriginal boy wants Anna as his wife, but intermarriage, or the physical consummation of a relationship between the two cultures is impossible for Roeg and Marshall. The code is defined. They must remain separate, one constructed in the Rousseauist tradition forever ‘noble’, forever innocent; the other moving forward as sophisticated and technologically advanced, forever destructive.

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The novel’s concern with Mary’s rite of passage and her growing sexual awareness is ignored in the film. Anna has moved beyond this point. She is already aware of her own sexuality. She bathes unashamedly naked, luxuriating in her own feelings of empowerment. As with Mary, clothing to Anna represents civilised life; it signifies the trappings of a privileged and pretentious modern life, a life to which she knowingly and consciously wishes to return. She doesn’t react to the nakedness of the Aboriginal boy. In fact neither of the children are alarmed by his sudden arrival. It is as if they were expecting him to turn up sooner or later. He comes with the territory - ‘naturally’ - as much a part of it as the exotic flora and fauna. Here Roeg picks up Marshall’s alignment of Aboriginal people with the land. Because the boy is one with the land, he can never be part of a world which has lost touch with nature.  

In Australia, when an Aborigine man-child reaches sixteen, he is sent out into the land. For months he must live from it. Sleep on it. Eat of its fruit and flesh. Stay alive. Even if it means killing his fellow creatures. The Aborigines call it the Walkabout.

The girl initially treats him like a child, asking for water, speaking patronisingly as though he is intellectually impaired because he doesn’t understand what she is saying. She is always superior. Her attitude is haughty, arrogant and like Mary’s, mostly aloof. His primary purpose is to lead them safely through the desert.

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44 It is interesting to note Matt Coyte’s review on the DVD release of Walkabout where he writes that Walkabout remains ‘one of the most loving depictions of the Australian outback and Aboriginal culture ever made’. M. Coyte, ‘Walkabout’ in Empire (January 2002), p.108.

43 This text appears at the beginning of the video of the film Walkabout, restored, with some additional scenes, in a new director’s cut, 1998. The word ‘walkabout’ is an Anglo-Australian construction, not an Aboriginal one.
The Aboriginal boy appears for the first time. He has been hunting and speaks to the children in his own language, which they don’t understand. He walks away. They chase after him.

English girl: We’re English. Do you understand? This is Australia. Yes? Where is Adelaide?

English boy: ASK HIM FOR WATER!

Aboriginal boy: Speaks in his own language.

English girl: Water. We want water to drink. Anyone can understand that. Water to drink. I can’t make it any simpler. Water to drink. The waterhole has dried up. Where do they keep the water?

English boy: Water ... glug...glug... glug... Mimes action of drinking. 66

Anna has moved beyond Mary’s stage of awakening adolescence. Instead, she plays with, tests out and practises her sexuality on the Aboriginal boy, teasing him with her presence. The Aboriginal boy responds to and misinterprets Anna’s games, making advances to her. He takes her flirtations seriously and performs a courtship dance for her. Anna feigns innocence, pretending not to understand and so, ignores him. Roeg introduces betrothal as part of the Aboriginal male initiation process, an aspect not explored in the novel. The Aboriginal boy depicted in the film is far more sexually aware than Marshall’s bush boy. He doesn’t mistake the signals. He is less childlike and less naïve. Contrary to what Anna believes 67, the Aboriginal boy has had contact with whites, whereas Marshall’s bush boy has not.

66 Transcribed dialogue from the video of the film Walkabout (1971)
67 There is a scene in the 1998 version which was cut from the original, where the Aboriginal boy encounters a white woman whom he obviously knows. He speaks to her and ignores her response and keeps walking. The viewer knows that there is contact but the children don’t.
Unlike Mary, Anna consciously and deliberately rejects the advances of the boy. Mary struggles to come to terms with her sexuality, transferring her fears onto the actions of the bush boy. Although Anna knows exactly what she is doing, the end result is the same. The Aboriginal boy is once again sacrificed. The image is captured far more explicitly on film. The boy doesn't die gently in the arms of the girl. His death is far more violent and blatantly more symbolic. He hangs himself from a tree, positioning himself as though on a crucifix – arms outstretched, body hanging limply, feet together and head bowed. All that is missing is the crown of thorns. Ironically, although he lived a traditional Aboriginal life, his death is once again heavy with Christian symbolism. Roeg combines the desire of Marshall's bush boy to be buried on a tree platform, with Peter's desire to give him a Christian burial, but the traditional Aboriginal rituals still die with him. The Aboriginal as 'go-between' has died yet again. He has given up his life so that the girl and her brother might live. By leading them to the road, his purpose in the film, as in the novel, to lead them back to civilisation is complete, but it is a path, which he cannot follow.

Anna is washing her brother and herself at the pump attached to an artesian bore. The Aboriginal boy is missing.

English boy: Where's he gone?

English girl: He's gone home.

English boy: Why?

English girl: There was no reason for him to stay. He just wanted to bring us to the road. We must be near a town, so he's gone back to his family.

English boy: Ahhh! Ooooo! ... It's lovely and warm [the water]. He didn't say goodbye to us.

English girl: Yes he did. That was what the dance was about. It's their way of saying goodbye to people they love. It will be
lovely to have a warm bath with clean towels. And eat with real plates and knives and forks and a proper sheet. And records and cleaning my teeth properly, and wearing all my own clothes.

They dress in their school uniforms. The boy announces to his sister that the Aboriginal boy is dead. 4

Again, the children show no grief. The girl glances at the Aboriginal boy’s lifeless body and asks her brother if he has had breakfast, lecturing him on how it should be eaten sitting down. Anna’s attachment to the dead Aboriginal boy is one of ‘civilised’ obsession with cleanliness, when she unemotionally brushes the insects from his dead body.

Anna and her brother, like Mary and Peter, don’t mourn his passing, just as they don’t mourn the death of their father. 5 They remain essentially unemotional and detached (Ironically, it is the Aboriginal boy who cries when he realises that Anna has rejected his betrothal).

The film begins and ends with unnatural and violent death. The death of the children’s father gave them the opportunity to begin the journey; the death of the Aboriginal boy gave them the opportunity to end it. The circle is complete. Hope never vanishes. There is always the possibility of redemption. Metaphorically the girl and boy are reborn to face life anew. 6 The symbolic journey, although fraught with danger and peril, perceived or real, always leads home. Hence Anna looks back with regret, knowing what she has given up.

4 Dialogue from the video of the film *Walkabout.*
5 Early in the film Anna does shed a quiet tear, but it is difficult to ascertain whether it is grief for her father’s death or anguish because of their predicament. The boy initially refuses to believe that his father is in fact dead, referring to him in the present tense.
6 Just as Mary regards cleanliness as important, noting that the bush boy was ‘healthy and scrupulously clean’ Roeg uses water as the symbol of new life. The children are ‘reborn’ and return to their civilised life, although Anna’s future resembles her past - she marries someone like her father who wears the same suit, carries the same briefcase, works in the same city, and even lives in the same apartment. Water is the symbol of a ritual cleansing, the promise of a new beginning. The children will supposedly return to city life wiser and more able to cope with its complexities.
Roeg, and to a lesser extent Marshall, suggest that there was a Garden of Eden and a Golden Age where the gods and humans remained forever young, where man lived in harmony with his environment. For author and film-maker it is the 'lost child', the Aboriginal boy who will remain forever young. The cunning and deceit of European man has destroyed the spiritual relationship with the land. Mary's pride and fear in the novel, Anna's pride and deceit in the film, bring the dream to an end, with all involved lamenting the passing of a 'golden age'.
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**Box 1**

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Box 5


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Conclusion

The theme of Aboriginal childhood has assumed a limited but telling role in Australian children’s fiction. Since the 1970s Australians have been struggling to come to terms with the crimes committed during the settlement of their country and with the ways in which the Aborigines were treated by governments and society after dispossession was complete. In some parts of Australia, Aborigines were driven into reserves, like Palm Island in Queensland or Moore River in Western Australia. In other parts, Aborigines worked on cattle stations or the fishing industry in return for rations but no wages. The Roth report, part of a 1904 royal commission into the condition of the natives of the north of Western Australia, documented widespread white abuse of Aborigines in the outback: white men sexually exploited Aboriginal women, white officials representing the government kidnapped Aboriginal children and placed them in white institutions remote from their families, white police arbitrarily arrested Aboriginal men for cattle theft and imposed on them long sentences in appalling prison conditions. At the same time in the ‘more civilised south’ injustices were commonplace. Aborigines were frequently driven away from the outskirts of the country towns where they tried to settle. Unless they were granted a ‘certificate of exemption’ from their Aboriginality even the most intimate and vital details of their lives – such as whom they might marry or where they might live – were controlled by government officials. Frequently, Aboriginal children were refused permission to attend government schools on the grounds that they were dirty or sexually precocious or suffering from disease. Very frequently, under one pretext or another, Aboriginal children were simply taken away. After the publication of Bringing Them Home many Australians were astonished to discover what had happened so recently in their country’s history and struggled to come to terms with what they had previously failed to understand.¹

The unstable relation between the fantastic and the factual fictions about Aboriginal childhood is historically and theoretically complex. The first Australian children’s book to be published, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children by a Lady Long Resident

in New South Wales, expressed aspects of author Charlotte Barton’s first-hand experience of Aboriginal people. Included in her book is not only what the author regarded as an accurate representation - lent authority by her experiences on the family property - but also allegedly ‘true accounts’ of infanticide, shipwreck and cannibalism. Her stories, designed to be spiritually and morally instructive, portrayed the Aborigines through a veil of religious allegory as the ‘infidel’ in the ‘civilised’ world of British Christianity. The ideology, or social construction of reality imbibed by Barton, shaped her fiction which in turn shaped the ‘reality’ of her readers and would be re-shaped by their interpretations over time. A 21st century ‘reading’ of her work is very different from mid-19th century readings. The mode of representation justified the ideology – the ideology generated the fiction.

A complicated process of identification and appropriation ensues when white writers choose Aboriginal children as literary material. The main purpose of many of the works examined in this study was neither to abolish the myths, nor question them, nor to alter the political situations of Aboriginal people, since in the minds of the writers Aboriginal people, if they had not already ‘died out’ were a ‘dying race’. For many of these neo-colonial authors, an Aboriginal child protagonist from a past era provided a more effective means of embodying British imperial values than a contemporary Aboriginal child in an urban setting. Often, too, as a consequence of the neo-colonial orientation of the author, the Aboriginal characters in children’s fiction play a marginal role in terms of the amount of text devoted to them even when their function is central to the plot, characterization or theme.

This study therefore traces the role that racial imagery can play in any society, past or present, particularly in securing the allegiance of the young to values and institutions threatened by the forces of change. By examining the image of the ‘Other’ through the construction of Aboriginal childhood in Australian children’s fiction and noting the similarities across a wide selection of texts, the pervasive and controlling logic of racial and national superiority is revealed and long-lived distortions and misconceptions become clearer. Neo-colonial versions of these images persist in Australian children’s fiction into the early 21st century. By looking closely at the process which gave them life in the minds of colonial generations and
continues to nourish them today we can recognise and demythologise a pervasive element of the Australian ‘mentalite’.

Mandel (1987) argues that four myths inform the representation of Native people – the myth of the primitive; the myth of origin or ancestors; the myth of the frontier or the identification of the Native and landscape; and the myth of marginality, that seeks the identification of writer, ‘Native’ and place. These ‘myths’ mark the construction of Aboriginal childhood by Australian children’s writers. Australian children’s literature begins with settler accounts of Aboriginal childhood and moves on to incorporate the changes in Government policy from protection to assimilation, tracing the movement through ‘a sense of difference and otherness to a means by which the dominant white culture might fuse with the alien other’.

The neo-colonial connection between the symbolic and representational use of Aboriginal characters by early white writers and the contemporary concern for greater representational accuracy in contemporary children’s fiction is evident in the conscious and creative subversion of earlier racist conventions and ideology. As has been argued in this study, Australian society and children’s fiction have not yet outgrown the colonially-inspired images of the superior Anglo-Saxon and the inferior Aborigine. Aboriginal children remain essentialised, constructed as being at one with the land through hunting and gathering practices on the premise that Aboriginal people have always been simple hunters and gatherers leading a traditional lifestyle and will continue to be so because modern life has no interest for them. Australian children’s fiction reinforces this pattern and continues to remind child-readers of the ‘primitive’ aspects of ‘traditional’ Aboriginal culture. Thus the ‘real’ Aborigine is presented as the descendant of a once wild and savage people resisting domestication and civilization by the European colonizer. It follows from this trope that the colonizer must maintain a position of superiority in order to prevent the ‘Aborigine’ from ‘slipping back’ completely into the original ‘pre-civilized’ form. The tension created by these contradictory tropes energises the

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3 Ibid., p.11.
refusal of governments to acknowledge land rights and apologise to the stolen generation. It also justifies the view that the ‘primitive’ natives are incapable of managing their own affairs in the complex contemporary world. To concede that ‘contemporary’, fully human Aboriginal citizens, heirs of the legacy of the dispossessed clans, inhabit contemporary Australia would entail a challenge to the right of the colonizer to take the land and the children. By exploring the processes of representation that inscribe these contradictions we question colonial and neo-colonial perspectives and challenge the myth that all Aborigines are primitive, Stone Age savages who cope with contemporary life by being lazy, drunk or violent.

The roles assumed in children’s fiction by Aboriginal characters are defined by writers conditioned in varying degrees by the perspective of the white culture of which they are a product. Thus, while the culture of the Aborigine may be viewed from a variety of perspectives, within a frame, each of those perspectives implies the point of view of an outsider looking at an unfamiliar culture. Australian children’s fiction provides few insights into the nature of Aboriginal childhood. Instead, the heritage and dilemma of Aboriginal people have served primarily to define the nature of white experience, illuminating aspects of the colonizer’s sense of national, social or personal identity. In the first sixty years of Australian children’s fiction, most of the writers ally themselves with the vested interests of the land-owning section of the community. The settler account of Charlotte Barton in A Mother’s Offering to Her Children by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales, is generally unsympathetic towards the Aborigines and sees the physical contact between white and black as unavoidable because the Aborigine endangers the lives and property of the settler. By the 1890s there is a marked change in public opinion regarding the Aborigines and this is reflected in many children’s books of the period. Ellen Campbell’s An Australian Childhood and Jeannie Gunn’s A Little Black Princess are sympathetic but patronising towards the Aboriginal child as they no longer regard Aborigines as aggressors but see them as victims and accept their ‘dying out’ as inevitable and proof of their inferiority.

Well-intended efforts to include Aboriginal characters in books for children can often have counter-productive effects. The neo-colonial dynamics that continue to exist in our society makes it difficult for new, pro-Aboriginal texts to be valued.
Until the colonial dynamics of postcolonial Australia are confronted and deconstructed, books which represent Aboriginal childhood will continue paradoxically to reinscribe old colonial notions. Many contemporary children’s writers still rely on anthropological studies to inform the construction of Aboriginal characters and the ‘realistic’ recreation of Aboriginal culture.

Neo-colonialism imposes common structural features on both the colonised and the coloniser. In Australian children’s fiction this is exemplified by the use of a European narrative construction in both language and story structure. William Fleming’s *The Hunted Piccaninnies* uses the European quest motif, Tarlton Rayment’s *The Prince of the Totem* employs archaic English phrases and David Martin’s *Hughie* freely incorporates British colloquial expressions into the dialogue. The construction of Aboriginal childhood in white-authored children’s fiction is thus frequently evaluated in relation to a limited and limiting set of conceptions about language and textuality as well as about Aboriginality. Slippage between character and ‘reality’ discloses a confusion about representation itself. Readers (and arguably writers too), entering into the imagined and imaginative world of the text elide ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’. The ‘pleasure’ of reading fiction may largely depend on this imaginative engagement – what Coleridge called the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. The danger lies in correlating fictional characters with ‘real’ people existing in the ‘real’ world rather than viewing them as figures constructed through language by the author for particular narrative (and hence ideological) purposes.

It could be argued that some contemporary authors attempt to achieve ‘political correctness’ by including, for example, Aboriginal words or Aboriginal English in their representations of indigenous childhood. Some authors attempt ‘authentic’ documentary representation after consultation with the appropriate Aboriginal groups. Diana Kidd did this with *The Fat and Juicy Place*. Others prefer cosmetic revisions which when examined more closely as in *Binji* by Victor Barnes and *Gundy* by May Thomas, reveal a palimpsest with underlying layers perpetuating neo-colonial assumptions.

The continuing and predominant use of standard English as the language of instruction is one of the most important aspects of neo-colonialism, speeding the loss
of Aboriginal languages and cultures in successive generations of Aboriginal children. The pre-eminence of English hampers and deflects indigenous intellectual life and cultural development. \(^4\) Aboriginal traditions become detached from places, languages, narratives and particular groups of people. Removed from associations with sociality and place, sources of cultural meaning dry up. \(^5\)

Some white writers and illustrators, such as Elizabeth Durack, believe that they have so completely fused with Aboriginal culture that they write and paint as an Aboriginal person. Durack embodies Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘delegate’ who lays claim to a public which she believes she represents. Durack as the ‘delegate’ is not a ‘cynical calculator’ who consciously deceives people, but someone who ‘in all good faith’ takes herself to be something that she is not. \(^4\) Some, such as Axel Poignant and Rex Ingamells, have attempted to immerse themselves in another culture — an Aboriginal culture — by acquiring knowledge and exercising a sympathetic imagination. They feel empathy for the Aboriginal child and criticise some aspects of white culture and its history of exploitation, cruelty and indifference. Both authors, however, in their own individual ways, attempt to commodify Aboriginal childhood by inserting it into an essentialised and dehistoricised culture. For example, Nicholas Roeg’s *Walkabout* conflates traditional Aboriginal culture with a sacredness he believes capable of restoring to modernity the spirituality it has lost in its desire for material gain.

Today’s urban Australian children continue to absorb an idealised, Dreamtime picture book version of indigenous Australia. They chant utopian songs about the rainbow serpent and recite the poetry of Noonucal Oodgeroo to the accompaniment of a didgeridoo; they explore the techniques of ‘traditional’ dot painting; Aboriginal dancers and cultural groups come to perform for them; they view films such as *Rabbit Proof Fence* and cry for past injustices. The fact that there are often only one or two Aboriginal children among five hundred school students reinforces the sense that they are still learning about something exotic and remote. The magical qualities

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\(^4\) P. G. Altbach, ‘Education and Neocolonialism’, *Teachers College Record*, 72, 1, May, p. 554.


of Aboriginal culture, music, mythology and humour contained in the school curriculum are generally undisturbed by the grimmer realities often confronting Aboriginal people who live within as well as beyond Australia’s more densely settled areas. Children’s fiction, particularly for older readers, however, is beginning to move beyond the ‘traditional’ constructions of Aboriginal childhood to confront the ‘reality’ experienced by those who live beyond the boundaries of suburbia. 

As this study demonstrates, images of race constructed in the nineteenth century persist into the twenty-first. The association of national and individual identity with racial superiority is passed to generations of children as an active legacy of the colonial era. Racial difference continues to be a marker of heroes and villains. In the post-colonial world, efforts have been made to remove from children’s fiction the more obvious distortions created by racist ideologies. For example, when Angus and Robertson republished the sixteen books in the ‘classic’ Australian Billabong Series (1910-1942) of Mary Grant Bruce in 1992-93, they attempted to modify the text and remove expressions now regarded as offensive. References to Black Billy as ‘a lazy young nigger’, were edited out but the more subtle constructions of the inferior Aborigine remain – Black Billy is passive, grins from ‘ear-to-ear’ and rarely speaks while his ‘civilised’ nature balances precariously on ‘the edge of savagery’.

This study is intended to contribute to the tradition of criticism which deconstructs colonial discourses and disempowers the images created by collusive forms of knowledge. One of the challenges of the post-colonial perspective is to find a form of language and representation which can carry understanding and respect, without the old patterns of dominance. By studying the images of the ‘Other’ produced in an earlier age we come to understand how, in a particular time and place, false historicism and racial mythologies have permeated the ‘education’ of the young and entered the consciousness of successive generations.

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