

# Antipodean Childhoods



Antipodean Childhoods:  
Growing Up in Australia and New Zealand

Edited by

Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Ulla Ratheiser

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SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Antipodean Childhoods: Growing Up in Australia and New Zealand,  
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## FOREWORD

### JUNE FACTOR

MELBOURNE

Everyone was once a child, and everyone remembers childhood. It is no accident that world literature is richly endowed with oral tales, memoirs and fiction that focus—joyously, grimly, reflectively—on the experience of being small, weak, ignorant, powerless, energetic, curious, hungry for friendship and prodigiously imaginative. Paradise lost or Hell on earth, we are marked and moulded by those short childhood years.

Yet it is no accident that in 1965 the English historian Peter Laslett mourned “the crowds and crowds of little children . . . strangely absent from the written record”. While there is now a small but growing network of historians and other professionals in the humanities looking closely at the lives of children past and present, theirs is still a minority interest. Childhood may well be the last significant area of neglect in historiography.

It is therefore a welcome development that the editors of *Antipodean Childhoods* have brought together a group of scholars from diverse disciplines within the humanities who share a common interest in childhood experiences in what was once known as the Antipodes: Australia and New Zealand. Both these countries are abundantly endowed with writing about—and for—children in the traditions of fiction and memoir, but, as elsewhere, less generously blessed with scholarly attention to this writing, and to the experiences it illuminates. A number of the contributors to this book undertake just such a task, with a particular emphasis on the social and cultural environment that so powerfully influences the lives of the children in the work they discuss.

An added attribute of the book is its inclusion of studies of cultural modes other than writing. Explorations of childhood as depicted through oral history, photography and film offer new possibilities and suggest new limitations. Again, there is special interest in the broader issues of class and race—issues hardly peculiar to Australia and New Zealand but having very particular modalities in these two countries.

The book contains fresh insights, and also, as is expected, some enduring themes. One is universal: children observing or remembering the adults—

good, bad, indifferent or mysterious—in whose orbit they perforce must live. Another I suspect is strongly marked in all settler societies, for whom the environment is oftentimes alien, even threatening: the lost child. The old fairy and folk tales have their quota of lost children, but there the danger seems to emerge more from primal fears—loss of parents, cruel parents—rather than the ominous, unknown/unknowable new world. And in a painful variation of this theme, a number of the contributors examine work which focuses on indigenous children taken from their families to be brought up “white.”

Old arguments emerge as well, sometimes explicitly, more often implicitly. Is childhood merely an adult social construct? Can a writer, photographer or film-maker of one culture truly represent the children of another? Is it wrong to try?

If readers of this book are drawn to seek out the literary and artistic material about which the contributors write to make their own evaluations, that will be evidence of the book's true success.

# INTRODUCTION

ULLA RATHEISER AND HELGA RAMSEY-KURZ

UNIVERSITY OF INNSBRUCK

The main title of this book is all but self-explanatory. A gamut of associations are prompted both by the very specificity of the realities to which the phrase “Antipodean childhoods” refers and by the metaphorical meanings with which it has been charged as a result of its routine application to colonial and postcolonial contexts. Whether employed literally or figuratively, “Antipodean childhoods” is suggestive of a whole range of opposites (beyond those of young and old, small and big, weak and strong, distant and near, peripheral and central, below and above) and eminently productive of ambiguities and contradictions. It may well be for this reason that the idea of Australia and New Zealand growing up or of people growing up in New Zealand and Australia has attracted relatively little scholarly attention so far. Somewhat paradoxically perhaps, whereas the metaphorical application of the notion of childhood to Europe’s colonies at large and to those “down under” in particular has come to be taken for granted, the literal link between the Antipodes and childhood tends to be perceived as an even less likely subject of academic inquiry. At best, it may be said to have inspired some isolated investigations, none of them comprehensive enough, though, to provide a starting point, let alone a framework for the study of childhood in Antipodean cultures.

This volume broaches the subject of Antipodean childhoods from both directions: while the collected papers deconstruct the established colonial equation of the childlike with the Antipodes, they also demonstrate the resourcefulness of literary and other artistic representations of the Antipodean child in its own right. They show that it is precisely by departing from the habit of likening colonies to children and coloniality to childhood in order to obtain a clearer view of childhoods lived in the colonies that fascinating and important new insights into the cultures, histories and societies of Australia and New Zealand can be gained.

Recourse to the idea of childhood for the purpose of explaining the bonds tying both Australia and New Zealand to their British motherland has had a long tradition. It has served to account for, but also to justify the

policies of subjugation deployed by Britain in order to assert her hegemonic position and to legitimise the power asymmetries produced by her parent status. In the event, configurations of the colonies as descendants, offspring, children have acquired immense popularity as have constructions of Britain as parent tree, benevolent guardian, protector and educator endowed with greater maturity, wisdom and experience than her so much younger colonies. As Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffiths argue, the

plant and parent metaphor stressed age, experience, roots, tradition, and, most importantly, the connection between antiquity and value. They implied the same distinctions as those existing between metropolis and frontier: parents are more experienced, more important, more substantial, less brash than their offspring. Above all they are the origin and therefore claim the final authority in questions of taste and value.<sup>1</sup>

Over the centuries, the configuration of the benevolent seniority of colonial powers has been enforced by varying constructions of childhood, each of which has enforced the openly hierarchical conception of the colony as inferior, dependant, weaker, less educated than its European parent. This nourished the expectation that, like a child, the colony could not possibly take care of its own affairs, but that it required the assistance of parents, who, at times, would have to assert a certain strictness vis-à-vis their charge, but would always do so only with the greater good of that charge and its family in mind.

A popular variation of the parent-child metaphor can be found in the depiction of the Indigenous populations of Australia and New Zealand. In keeping with general assumptions that these populations were savage, illiterate, uncivilised, in short, backward, the Māori were expressly identified as “children of nature,” as “innocent and artless” humans “ripe for religious instruction and western education/civilisation.”<sup>2</sup> From this ripeness the European colonisers could conveniently infer the obligation to bestow their knowledge and their learning onto the natives of New Zealand. Accordingly, critic J.A. Hobson’s, for example, proclaimed with the characteristic self-assurance of an imperialist that “there can be no inherent natural right in a nation to refuse that measure of compulsory education which shall raise it from childhood to manhood in the order of nationalities.”<sup>3</sup> In Australia, too, Aboriginal peoples were treated as “childlike savages” from the very first days of European occupation. This treatment subsequently developed into the “protectionist policies” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that conferred near-total control of the Aboriginal population onto a Chief Protector or Protector Board and

culminated in the forced removal of Indigenous children from their parents, a genocidal strategy of social engineering pursued from the late eighteenth century up until the 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, “the parent-child logic of imperialist expansion”<sup>5</sup> was used not only to legitimise strategies of demographic engineering but also to exert cultural control and strictly monitor the colonies’ creative output. As Janet Frame concluded in her *Autobiography* after finding that her 1951 debut collection of stories *The Lagoon and Other Stories* had made literary critics uncomfortable:

. . . having been persuaded that our literature had “come of age,” [they] found themselves embarrassed by so many writers writing of childhood: they supposed, How could a nation be adult if it wrote of its childhood? The longing for “maturity” was desperate . . .<sup>6</sup>

Frame’s reflections throw into sharp relief the far-reaching and lasting effects of nineteenth-century British/colonial family politics on Antipodean cultures. They confirm Jo-Anne Wallace’s observation that the idea of “the child” was a necessary precondition of imperialism, “that the West had to invent for itself ‘the child’ before it could think a specifically colonialist imperialism.”<sup>7</sup> Wallace detects traces of this ideology especially in the children’s literature of the nineteenth century, notably in adventure novels for boys and in fantasy literature. In both of these genres she observes a

consolidation of an enormously contradictory discourse surrounding “the child” as, on the one hand, a sentimentalized wisdom figure and, on the other, national human capital, responsive to careful husbanding and investment. This construction of “the child” coincides with the apogee of English colonial imperialism; indeed, it was an idea of “the child”—of the not yet fully evolved or consequential subject—which made thinkable a colonial apparatus officially dedicated to, in Macaulay’s words, “the improvement of” colonized peoples.<sup>8</sup>

What, then, are the precise origins of this very specific notion of childhood? And how could it have gathered such fundamental importance for the colonial enterprise? To answer such questions we need to look at constructions of childhood from a greater distance and in more general terms and to assess to which extent these constructions tend to be shaped by particular cultural, social and historical contexts. In *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Neil Postman argues:

From a biological point of view it is inconceivable that any culture will forget that it needs to reproduce itself. But it is quite possible for a culture to exist without a social idea of children. Unlike infancy, childhood is a social artefact, not a biological category. Our genes contain no clear instructions about who is and who is not a child, and the laws of survival do not require that a distinction be made between the world of an adult and the world of a child. In fact, if we take the word children to mean a special class of people somewhere between the ages of seven and, say, seventeen, requiring special forms of nurturing and protection, and believed to be qualitatively different from adults, then there is ample evidence that children have existed for less than four hundred years.<sup>9</sup>

In direct opposition to Postman, June Factor submits that “childhood and children’s subcultures exist as a phenomenon of human development in every society—not outside culture but more than a social construct”,<sup>10</sup> for June Factor, most solid evidence of this can be traced in the ubiquity and universality of playing. For only children, she argues, who are “ill in body and mind” do not play. More importantly, they practise these forms of game playing “without adult instruction, supervision or encouragement—indeed . . . often against adult preference and edict.”<sup>11</sup>

Diachronically speaking, the emergence of the concept of childhood is not very well documented so that the later development of the idea, too, is rather difficult to reconstruct. Nonetheless a number of useful theses have been advanced that have helped us to obtain at least some general understanding of this evolution. In *Criticism, Theory, and Children’s Literature*, Peter Hunt, for instance, informs us that during times when poverty produced high mortality rates in certain social strata the “view of childhood as a protected developmental stage was not possible.”<sup>12</sup> Lloyd de Mause refines this observation in his *History of Childhood*, isolating distinct forms of caring or neglect to reconstruct a coherent history of child-abuse that evolved from antiquity to the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> If de Mause’s history documents a specific continuity in the Western understanding of childhood, Philippe Ariès’s work has done so even more effectively by famously outlining how, until the thirteenth century, there were practically no depictions of children in the visual arts. What we find instead are small-scale adults and this, according to Ariès, is indicative of an almost complete absence of any notion of childhood as we understand it today.<sup>14</sup> People in the Middle Ages apparently had no concept of childhood whatsoever, and in the Renaissance the different needs of children were still not recognised.<sup>15</sup> As a result, grown-ups agreed that children ought to “to be seen, not heard.” Of necessity, therefore, Renaissance children reached social maturity at a relatively early stage.<sup>16</sup> As long as they had not reached maturity, though, their legal status was



obscure and comparable, if at all, to that of servants. As such, they had no rights, but were literally owned by their parents.<sup>17</sup>

In the Enlightenment, finally, a developmental link was recognised between adults and children so that adults came to be positioned as products of their childhood, as the inscribed versions of those blank slates to which Locke compared children in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. As Patrick Ryan has argued very convincingly, it was in opposition to the “Lockean love of reputation (*amour-propre*), fostered by obedience to a politically correct individual virtue” that Rousseau asserted the “love of the self (*amour de soi*), . . . developed through engagement with ‘natural consequences’.” “Locke,” Ryan observes, “offered a child conditioned to control his corporeal desires, whereas Rousseau countered with an authentic child who ‘lives and is unconscious of his own life’ (*vivit, et est vitae nescius ipse suae*).”<sup>18</sup> Besides authenticity, the Romantics valued, indeed celebrated imagination, naturalness and innocence, i.e. strengths seen as providing an effective antidote to the ever so adult sensibilities of the Enlightenment. Believed to be equipped with these strengths more fully than adults, children began to be regarded as blessed beings inhabiting a realm separate and crucially different from that of grown-ups, but also as cursed insofar as they were doomed to forfeit this realm in the inevitable process of growing up.<sup>19</sup>

Romantic discourse configures the child as a “noble savage” of sorts, as a creation closest to natural perfection and hence to God and it is a clear measure of the general infatuation with the child at the time that no critical voices were raised against the distance into which the child was projected through almost obsessive idealisation. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century and the very acme of the imperialist enterprise that the negative effects of routinely othering children began to dawn on people. Barbara Kaye Greenleaf sums up the huge significance which the idea of childhood gathered during the Romantic period:

The Romantics . . . seized upon the child as a symbol of all they believed in: nature, goodness, joy of living, human progress, instinct, and original innocence not original sin. Through their prose and their poetry, the Romantics created the Cult of Childhood. It has colored all our thinking about children today.<sup>20</sup>

By the beginning of the Victorian period, the distinction between adulthood and childhood had become commonplace.<sup>21</sup> More than that, according to Julia Briggs, it had come to rest almost entirely on the systematic relegation of the child to the status of a complete Other, “with all the idealization, horror, and projection such a status implies.”<sup>22</sup> While

during the Romantic period the child's assumed innocence had begun to be challenged by adherents to the newly revived doctrine of original sin, few decades later the conviction that children needed to be evacuated from their own unculturedness or wildness into the safe fold of Christian civilisation received new fuel from "scientific theories of evolution which represented the child as biologically, intellectually, or socially primitive."<sup>23</sup> "And as such theories of origin began to take hold," Briggs writes,

the concept of "recapitulation" became popular, the idea that childhood was a process during which different stages of animal or human development were progressively transcended, eventually reaching the evolutionary summit of fully formed adulthood.<sup>24</sup>

With the discovery of schooling as a remedy against the animal wildness of children, fewer and fewer young people remained to qualify as savages. In fact, the label came to be reserved for poorer children still without access to education. Often these were called "street arabs" and perceived as alien and homeless wanderers. Their existence on the margins of British society came to be compared to that of natives in the colonies. As Briggs notes:

The uninhibited spirits of childhood were equated with those of supposedly "primitive" societies, and progress towards socialization was identified with progress towards civilization. Both the family and the extended family of empire required to be ruled with a mixture of kindness, firmness, and self-confidence.<sup>25</sup>

There were analogies, then, between the manners in which the Empire and the Victorian family were ruled by their "heads," or "Governors,"<sup>26</sup> who, even in the case of Queen Victoria, were proud proponents of patriarchy. Part of this manner was also the advised rigorous disciplining of children by physical and mental deprivation and castigation. Both whipping for minor offences and the restriction of a child's diet to bread and water over a period of several days were commonly accepted practices at the time, meant to improve the child and equip it with adult virtues.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, with the demise of the Romantic notion of the child's innocence, the parents' morality was swiftly rehabilitated and their authority restored. This, along with the idea that childhood constitutes only an interim phase in the human subject's progress towards adult maturity, finds articulation in nineteenth-century fiction, notably in the *Entwicklungsroman*, which consistently identifies childhood as a phase

one must leave behind or, indeed, strive to grow out of by way of personal improvement.

It is against the background of such developments that one needs to read the colonial construction of non-European nations as children to fully understand its socio-political implications. More recent representations of the child in former colonies also bear the imprint of this construction. At the same time, active engagement with and resistance to the practice of “be-littling” the colonies may be said to have contributed to a fascinating diversification of the postcolonial discourse of Antipodean childhoods to which this volume hopes to do at least some justice. The plurality of approaches chosen in the following chapters certainly conveys some idea of the broad range of experiences that have shaped the notion of childhood prominent in settler cultures in general and in Australia and New Zealand in particular. While drawing on a considerable variety of data, media and genres, all of the essays collected here concentrate on childhoods and children as formed and formulated by adults.

This is not to say that they are oblivious of Patrick Ryan’s plea “to depict children as actors . . . with a part to play in their own representation.”<sup>28</sup> However, this book has not emerged from an ambition to forge and advance completely new depictions of children, but from a commitment to the task of critically reflecting already existing depictions of children and accounts of childhood. It is important to bear in mind that this in itself is a relatively recent scholarly undertaking. Only in the 1980s the child and its treatment in adult literature begin to attract critical attention. Goodenough, Heberle and Sokoloff attribute the conspicuous marginalisation of the subject of the child before then in the first place to “the deracinated and improvident urgencies of postmodern society” by which the child is routinely reduced to some “domesticized Other.”<sup>29</sup> Those responsible for the child’s domestication are, obviously, the adults without whose active construction and mediation of the child’s otherness, children would have even less of a voice than they do.<sup>30</sup>

Goodenough, Heberle and Sokoloff speak of a “radical problem” informing adult endeavours to give children a voice, meaning “the uniquely difficult accessibility of children’s consciousness to the adult imagination, let alone its articulation, and the attendant complexities entailed in speaking for children, or in their names.”<sup>31</sup> By inference, writers willing to attest the child greater significance and wishing to give expression to this significance are bound to fail in the face of the epistemological impossibility of capturing the child authentically. Already Coleridge famously lamented this in *Biographia Literaria*, implying that while children do not have sufficient command of their language to

formulate childhood experiences, the adult writer, while possessing the necessary linguistic skills to do so, no longer has the ability to think like a child.<sup>32</sup> Wordlessness thus defines the child, whereas “full acquisition of language marks the dissolution of childhood”; for the child’s consciousness “is progressively defined within a system of signs communicated by parents and siblings in the first instance, but ultimately imposed by social convention.”<sup>33</sup> Of necessity, then, children in literature are wholly artificial constructs generated by adult writers and mostly also by adult readers. Literature for and about children, therefore, is ultimately a history, as Goodenough, Heberle and Sokoloff put it, of “manipulation, power and desire”: “Child-centred writing is never free of adult concerns, whether to indoctrinate young minds or to wrest young minds free of conventional assumptions.”<sup>34</sup>

The “adult concerns” underlying representations of children in postcolonial texts may be expected to be of a special political nature, also given the anti-colonial momentum marking these texts. It inevitably poses questions concerning the political function not only of the childhoods described but of the very figure of the child as used in writings addressed “back to the centre.” In these texts, the child may stand for other members of society than its own age group. In fact, as a very productive and flexible cipher of subalternity, the child may at times symbolise forms of dependence and abjection that very clearly are not in the first place the result of its physical smallness or lack of experience.

This generates special complications where postcolonial writings juxtapose or combine childhood and indigeneity, thereby directly or indirectly reacting to the colonial practice of conflating the identities and agencies of Indigenous subjects with those of children and projecting “the native” as a child who, in growing up, willingly endorses the views and values of its colonisers. For Indigenous readerships, this practice constituted as double inscription that confronted them with the schizophrenic situation that even where they were represented as “good” children they were required to identify not only with a persona that they had never been but also with one they may have had little or no intention to become.

In his 1997 article “Postcolonialism, Children, and their Literature,” Roderick McGillis adds yet another aspect to the discussion of children and postcoloniality, apparently drawing on Perry Nodelman’s pioneer 1992 paper “The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children’s Literature.”<sup>35</sup> To him, all children are, in effect, subject to colonisation by adults:

Children are the subaltern and simply for me to speak of them in the context of postcolonialism is to raise a contradiction: postcolonialism and children. If we think of postcolonialism as a phenomenon of late twentieth-century political, economic, and cultural reality—a liberating from an outmoded paternalism curtailing a people's freedom of expression and movement—then children are to a great extent exempt from the benefits of such postness.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, McGillis concedes that children and their literature can also be seen as carrying within them some inalienable postcolonial momentum, that is, as long as “postcolonial” is understood as denoting that which “stands outside and in opposition to tradition and power.”<sup>37</sup>

Such argumentation clearly illustrates the combustible energy inherent in metaphorical equations of childhood with the condition of colonisation and the challenges it poses to our understanding of the postcolonial. This, however, does not allow us to overlook that, in contrast to political colonisation, the child's socialisation is designed to result in relative independence. In response to Nodelman's likening of the child-adult relationship to that between Orientals and Orientalists, Clare Bradford therefore insists that

children stand in quite a different relationship to adults than do Orientals to Orientalists, since children are always seen as occupying a state or stage that will lead to adulthood, whereas Orientals never transmute into Orientalists and are thus always and inescapably inferior.<sup>38</sup>

Bradford further criticises that the comparison of the child-adult relationship to that of colonised and coloniser ignores the relevance of the category of race which forms such a strong underpinning of the binaries established by colonial discourse between the “civilized” and the “primitive.”<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps it is above all the perceived self-liberating capacity of the child that accounts for the deep respect for the young by which, according to McGillis, postcolonial writing tends to be marked. While “indigenous and diasporic voices continue to speak from the periphery,”<sup>40</sup> recent postcolonial texts feature children that help to foreground difference more optimistically as a productive category and to thus indicate new or hitherto overlooked choices for the young.<sup>41</sup>

In any case, the prominence of child characters in postcolonial texts may be interpreted as symptomatic of an emergent sense of de-colonisation. Analogously, the figure of the strong child engaged in a struggle for independence may be understood as epitomising the condition of the young nation born out of colonisation as it were and, after political

independence, seeking cultural autonomy. In even more general terms, it may also be grasped as a cipher of humankind at large, asserting itself against forever new political and environmental pressures. This at least is the function Goodenough, Heberle and Sokoloff envisage the figure of child to fulfil in contemporary and future postcolonial writings:

[P]erhaps we believe that in pursuing this liminal figure we may know children as we do not know ourselves. As our sense of endangered nature on this shrinking planet becomes acute, children become the last frontier, embodiments of existence without bounds, of freedom, of possibility, purity, primitivism; they provide a perspective on the exotic, the unknown . . . .<sup>42</sup>

The essays in this collection constitute first attempts at mapping this “last frontier” and at following paths as yet untrodden to the subject of childhood and the postcolonial. The beginning is made by Ian Henderson and Annabell Marinell, whose analyses of the films *Jedda* by Charles Chauvel and *Night Cries* by Tracey Moffatt and of the plays *Box the Pony* by Leah Purcell and Scott Rankin and *Belonging* by Tracey Rigney, respectively, insist on the modernity of contemporary aboriginal childhoods and the need to make this modernity visible, i.a. in order to open up new possibilities of self-identification for young Aboriginal Australians.

For this purpose, Henderson chooses to temporarily “shift[] the focus of what little mainstream attention there is to Indigenous cultures from the traditional knowledge of the elders to the experiences of young Aboriginal men and women.” Precisely such experiences he sees critically processed in Moffatt’s *Night Cries*, which he proposes comprehending as a reading of *Jedda* exposing and transcending Chauvel’s identification of Australian Aboriginality with true “savagery” and of Australian culture as one “anciently arrested.”

Marinell concentrates on possibilities and conventions of performance and focuses on the theatrical enactment of Aboriginal adolescence in her discussion of two contemporary Australian plays that broach the theme of growing up from a markedly modern, i.e. later twentieth-century Indigenous perspective. She outlines how, in *Box the Pony* and *Belonging*, two Aboriginal girls fight against various forms of victimisation and stigmatisation and how, eventually, they come to accept that being a young Aboriginal woman in Anglo-centric Australia means having to insistently make oneself heard and seen, believed and understood. In both cases, the choice to accept the need to engage in dialogue ends on an emphatically self-assertive note, unlikely as one critic observes, and yet

indispensable, ultimately, for a reconceptualisation of Aboriginal agency in other terms than the familiar ones of subordination and defeat.

If the works studied by Henderson and Marinell project a future in which the Indigenous youth of today's Australia will have learnt to assert their Aboriginality with confidence, Ann McGrath turns to the past and the injustices Aboriginal Australians have had to suffer at the hands of the Australian government. In a detailed and, in part, very personal account of the discourse that evolved in Australia after the tabling of the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* Report, McGrath emphatically asserts the need for a nation to properly tell and understand its history even if this involves facing the uncomfortable truth that one's history has been informed by a "malevolent, even genocidal" form of colonialism. This is suggested by the *Bringing Them Home* Report, which documents the systematic forced removal of tens of thousands of children from their Aboriginal homes by the Australian state. The responses this suggestion has triggered range from blanket denial to self-blame and can, as McGrath shows, only be understood correctly if they are not viewed in isolation but grasped as intricately connected parts of a larger narrative.

A remembering of a quite different kind than that urged by historian Ann McGrath is the remembering proposed by Rowena Bond, who, in her study "Little Gems or Tough Nuggets?: Discovering the European Child on the Australian Goldfields during the 1850s and 1870s," reconstructs a story largely deleted from Australian collective memory: that of children growing up on Australian goldfields in the second half of the nineteenth century. In her analysis of popular narratives and photographs preserved from that time, Bond highlights how fantasies of the child's innocence were kept alive mainly for the purpose of telling a better story than reality had to offer of the gold-digging communities and their lives in dire poverty and under severe hardship.

The rewriting of Australian history is also addressed in the paper "Adult into Child, Child into Adult: Immigration and Infantilisation in Richard Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*." It explains how Flanagan uses the childhood of his protagonist as a passageway into the history of Slovenian immigrants who fled to Australia during and after World War II. As the essay shows, it is only through a child's remembering of her parents' stories that this history, which is also one of horrendous atrocities and painful discrimination, can be made bearable and finally afford the offspring of immigrants a sense of belonging her parents could find nowhere in mid-twentieth-century Australia.

With Béatrice Bijon's contribution, "Childhood and Poetic Experience in Janet Frame's *Owls Do Cry*," the book shifts to a fictional account of

growing up in twentieth-century New Zealand. Here, too, as in Ramsey-Kurz's reading of Flanagan, the focus is on individual recollections of childhood that emerge out of a blending of childhood memories and adult experiences or a refraction of the former through the latter. In Frame as in Flanagan, a deeply traumatising childhood is recounted—a childhood which, as Bijon contends, epitomises the otherness of the Antipodes, while also foregrounding the special otherness Frame's individual characters are granted the opportunity to enjoy because they are children.

Janet Frame's writing is also the object of Marc Delrez's essay. In "The Legacy of Invention: Determinism and Metafiction in Janet Frame's *Mona Minim and the Smell of the Sun*," he attends to a story only supposedly written for children, yet in actual fact intended for (and covertly addressed to) adults. As Marc Delrez shows, it is rather nightmarish dimensions of human existence and human nature that *Mona Minim* captures and incorporates into a craftily extended metaphor comparing human society to an ants' nest whose inhabitants represent the "painful erasure of individualism" which children undergo as they learn to recognise the "dictates of communal existence" and to accept them.

Georgia Hinterleitner, too, studies literature written for children by a New Zealand writer. Her paper "From the Centre: The Children's Fiction of Patricia Grace" echoes Henderson's, Marinell's and Bond's interest in visual renderings of Antipodean childhoods as it examines the imaging of Indigenous childhoods in three children's books by Patricia Grace: *The Kuia and the Spider*, *Watercress Tuna* and *the Children of Champion Street* and *The Trolley*. Hinterleitner's interpretation begs to be understood as one by a non-Indigenous reader for other non-Indigenous readers, providing clues not needed by initiated child readers but which, when pointed out to outsiders, render visible the artful encodedness of Grace's texts.

In "Representations of Childhood in the Stories of Katherine Mansfield and Witi Ihimaera," Simone Oettli acknowledges Mansfield's admiration for both Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater and traces the influence of the latter's miniature *Bildungsroman* "The Child in the House" in her stories. From Pater, Oettli argues, Mansfield derived above all a desire to write about children and validate their way of thinking by treating them as individuals and presenting the world from their perspective. This desire was enforced also by a personal longing to recuperate former childhood friendships in writing. However, Mansfield did not live long enough to complete this project. In a manner of speaking, Witi Ihimaera took on the task in her stead, consciously constructing an Other to Katherine Mansfield in the process, an Other, though, that, quite like Katherine Mansfield herself



and hence still in keeping with Pater's idea of childhood, is the adult she (or he) is because of the special childhood he (or she) experienced and has never completely forgotten.

Ulrika Andersson, too, looks into Witi Ihimaera's short stories, more specifically into his collections *Pounamu Pounamu* and *The New Net Goes Fishing*. In her contribution "Nostalgia and Hierarchy in Witi Ihimaera's Early Short Stories," she draws attention to the influence Romantic celebrations of childhood freedom have had on Ihimaera's idealisation of rural Māori childhoods. Andersson illustrates how this freedom becomes restricted by the stable hierarchical structure and strict cultural norms marking traditional Māori communities.

In another vein, the last paper in this collection, "Not to be Belittled—Anti-Colonial Child Images in Patricia Grace's Novels," investigates the politically subversive qualities that child characters assume in two of Patricia Grace's novels, *Potiki* and *Dogside Story*. Both texts are read as featuring a child character who was mutilated by colonialism, but, who, through his rootedness in Māori cosmology, can attain healing for his entire community. This, clearly, suggests a conception of childhood and child agency radically different from Western notions of the child, which still tend to be informed by a relative inability or reluctance to think of the child as actively partaking in its own representation as well as in that of others.

The intention underlying this volume is certainly not to idealise childhood; rather the goal shared by all contributors has been to highlight the importance and resourcefulness of childhood as a field of contestation and to do so against the odds of persistent tendencies to downplay the cultural, social and political significance of children. What is contested by artists, writers and scholars as they chart the discursive field of childhood is an otherness curiously, but at times also disturbingly familiar. Whereas denial may be a common response to such familiarity, it is not always possible in political and cultural contexts with a history too recent as yet to permit forgetting or even the pretense of it. As the essays in this book demonstrate, the Antipodes provide such contexts, so that, while already possessing a certain history of negating the otherness of their children, they may still be attested a special disposition to do greater justice to it in the future— not least thanks to the presence of creative minds capable of taking children seriously.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Helen Calvert, "Contextualizing Māori Writing: A Study of Prose Fiction Written in English by Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, Keri Hulme and Alan Duff" (Ph.D. diss., University of Waikato, 2002), 105.

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Hobson, "The Political Significance of Imperialism," in *Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918*, ed. Elleke Boehmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 296.

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Canberra: HREOC, 1997), 22-9.

<sup>5</sup> Jo-Ann Wallace, "De-Scribing *The Water Babies*: 'The Child' in Post-Colonial Theory," in *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*, ed. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), 175.

<sup>6</sup> Janet Frame, *An Autobiography* (New York: Braziller, 1991), 217.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace, "De-Scribing *The Water Babies*," 176.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte, 1982), xi.

<sup>10</sup> June Factor, "Enduring Myths about Childhood and Children's Playlore," (lecture, University of Innsbruck, March 22, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Factor, "Enduring Myths."

<sup>12</sup> Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 59. Also cf. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage, 1962), 38: "People could not allow themselves to become too attached to something that was regarded as a probable loss."

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd de Mause, "The Evolution of Childhood," in *The History of Childhood: The Evolution of Parent-Child Relationships as a Factor in History*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (London: Souvenir, 1976), 1-73.

<sup>14</sup> Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 33-4.

<sup>15</sup> Hunt, *Criticism*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Oscar W. Ritchie and Marvin R. Koller, *Sociology of Childhood* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1964), 20.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Kaye Greenleaf, *Children Through the Ages* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 40.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick J. Ryan, "How New Is the 'New' Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38 (Spring 2008): 569.

<sup>19</sup> C. W. Sullivan III, "Fantasy," in *Stories and Society: Children's Literature in its Social Context*, ed. Dennis Butts (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 100.

<sup>20</sup> Greenleaf, *Children Through the Ages*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> However, as Ritchie and Koller argue, this is not to say that "childhood" as such was available to all children in the 19th century; child labour, for example, was widespread, and the living conditions provided for many children were not what we would nowadays deem suitable for "the child." *Sociology of Childhood*, 20.

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<sup>22</sup> Julia Briggs, "Transitions (1890-1914)," in *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*, ed. Peter Hunt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 168.

<sup>23</sup> Briggs, "Transitions," 169.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Greenleaf, *Children Through the Ages*, 79.

<sup>27</sup> Priscilla Robertson, "The Home as a Nest," in *The History of Childhood: The Evolution of Parent-Child Relationships as a Factor in History*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (London: Condor, 1974), 414-16.

<sup>28</sup> Ryan, "'New' Social Study of Childhood," 555. It seems that this is a task more easily carried out in disciplines concerned primarily with contemporary formations and articulations of childhood. For examples of corresponding studies see Ryan, 567. June Factor's endeavours to encourage, collect and publish writing by Australian children are also an excellent case in point.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff, introduction to *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Even literature written by children must be considered by an adult editor and his/her (adult) expectations before it is published.

<sup>31</sup> Goodenough, Heberle and Sokoloff, *Infant Tongues*, 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>35</sup> Perry Nodelman, "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature," *Children's Literature Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1992): 29-35.

<sup>36</sup> Roderick McGillis, "Postcolonialism, Children, and their Literature," *ARIEL* 28, no. 1 (1997): 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>38</sup> Clare Bradford, *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* (n.p.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> McGillis, "Postcolonialism, Children, and their Literature," 10.

<sup>41</sup> Roderick McGillis, introduction to *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*, ed. Roderick McGillis (New York: Garland, 2000), xxviii.

<sup>42</sup> Goodenough, Heberle, and Sokoloff, *Infant Tongues*, 12.



## CHAPTER ONE

### “GEE, HEAD STOCKMAN!”: PROSPECTS AND PROFESSIONS IN CHARLES CHAUVEL’S *JEDDA* (1955) AND TRACEY MOFFATT’S *NIGHT CRIES* (1989)

IAN HENDERSON  
KING’S COLLEGE LONDON

Students (and I) laugh at Joe during the otherwise harrowing cliff-top finale of Charles Chauvel’s *Jedda* (1955): the extravagantly-torn clothes, the silent-cinema attitude (one arm stretched forward of the other, palms upwards, fingers splayed), the melodramatic shrieking (“Jedda!”), the recourse to pidgin when imploring the cursed and insane Marbuk to show his victim mercy (“She no good for you! She wrong skin!”). When the outlaw hurls himself and Jedda to their deaths, Joe turns all too quickly, as if sharing our relief that the sagging last quarter of the film is at an end, as if he too is thinking “oh well...NEXT.” It does not help that a film opening with fanfare about its Aboriginal Australian actors has ended with a character played by a white actor in blackface. Paul Reynall acts up a celluloid storm, but his Joe only accumulates the screenplay’s tawdry racism.<sup>1</sup>

Even so this is not the end: there will be one more twist in *Jedda*’s lurching shifts of genre. The camera rises to the sky above Joe’s downturned head; now one, two, three, then four Disney-esque cartoon geese fly through animated clouds (to Isadore Goodman’s soaring chorale) while Joe’s voiceover intones:

Was it our right to expect that Jedda, one of a race so mystic and so removed, should be of us in one short lifetime? The Pintubis whisper that the soul of Jedda now flies in the lonely plains and mountain crags with the wild geese and that she is happy with the Great Mother of the World in the Dreamingtime of tomorrow.<sup>2</sup>

Now, at last, “The End.”

## Crisis Talk

My original plan for this chapter was to elucidate the representation of Jedda’s childhood in Chauvel’s film. I was, and still am, interested in the way the character’s childhood is ghosted by her adoptive white mother’s dead baby. I intended to use Tracey Moffatt’s *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989), a short film in its own right but also an incomparable reading of Jedda, to approach this topic.<sup>3</sup> But watching *Jedda* and *Night Cries* again in the light of two recent experiences has made me change tack. Instead, against all former habits, I want to take Joe very seriously as a character, to centre discussion on his prospects and career as a head stockman, and to seek a new way of understanding Chauvel’s final sequence.<sup>4</sup> *Night Cries* remains fundamental to this recovery of new (to me) meanings from *Jedda*, and indeed to a consequent re-thinking of my critical approach to Indigenous Australian cinema: the longer I know Moffatt’s film, the more provocative it becomes.

The first of these two experiences was seeing Warwick Thornton’s *Samson and Delilah* (2009), a film set in the present in a remote Aboriginal community and in Alice Springs, where a young man and woman negotiate a complex but cautiously successful relationship in the face of poverty and addiction. The film is remarkable both for its style—there is almost no dialogue—and for its uncompromising portrayal of the realities of some young Indigenous Australian lives. Its ending, grimly uplifting, put me in mind of Iven Sen’s *Beneath Clouds* (2002), in which a film’s-worth of mutual distrust and emotionally fraught power struggle is undergone before the two Indigenous Australian protagonists are able to experience a single, fugitive moment of communication: one (heart-rending) hug and they are separated again, facing divergent, extremely uncertain futures.

The second experience was attending a paper by Professor Marcia Langton, presented in 2009 at King’s College London, in which she outlined and critiqued the *Northern Territory Emergency Intervention Act* (2007).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Langton (who also stars in *Night Cries*) was scathing of neo-liberal attitudes towards Indigenous lives, the ignoring (for example) of Aboriginal women’s reporting of abuse within communities for fear of re-invoking racist stereotypes in the media, with the result that incidents of sexual and domestic abuse had exacerbated the challenges facing Indigenous communities and induced an extreme crisis for Aboriginal Australia. Among the many shocking statistics listed by