

# Chapter 1

## **Australian childhood through the looking glass: theorising mainstream Australian children's literary fictions, 1953-2003**

'... Oh, Michael, I long for the days when I was ignorant, when childhood stories were the inspiration for grown-up people to live nobly.'

*Ivan Southall Bread and Honey (1970:33)*

Recontextualised for the purposes of modern literary theory, the Archimedes Principle translates today as a reformulation of the Zeno Principle: 'Give me a place to read and I will rewrite the world—subject only to the equal right of all other readers to do likewise.'

*Patrick O'Neill, Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory, (1994:151)*

### **Introduction**

In this study I analyse transformations in the conceptualisations of childhood as represented in a corpus of mainstream realist fictions selected from the literary texts produced and marketed for Australian children between 1953 and 2003. My specific concern is to theoretically articulate the ways that the discursive practices of literature enable the representation of such reconceptualisations. The corpus of fictions I examine reflect global trends in Western reconceptualisations of childhood generally evident in Western children's literature. Most of the fictions in the corpus have entered the global marketplace where they have received an international readership as well as critical attention in reviews and scholarship. I understand Australian children's literature to be a part of an autonomous field of cultural production within Australian society. Children's

fiction production is a sub-field of the field of children's literature. In Australia, as across the Western world, writing and producing fiction for children is a widely endorsed and significant social practice that is regarded as potentially cognitively stimulating and aesthetically pleasurable for child readers. Like all literary texts, children's fictions are ideologically motivated or implicated.

In any examination of the paradigmatic shifts in the ontological status of 'childhood' three concepts are immediately implicated and so receive close attention in this project. The first of these concepts is gender because childhood in Australia means the subjectivisation of the child as either a 'boy' or a 'girl'. The second concept is that of the 'family'. The latter undergoes a substantive reconceptualisation both of its constitution and of its significance in Australian social life from the mid-1960s. This is largely the result of changes in governmental policies and everyday social practices that devolve from the impact of second-wave feminist theory, and particularly feminist arguments demonstrating that 'the personal is political'. In this study, the analysis of changes in the family occurs through a gender studies frame so the implications of paradigmatic shifts in gender regimes are seen as re-shaping family life in Australia. The third concept integral to discussions of the conceptualisation of childhood is that of 'nation' since the state's responsibility for the welfare of its child citizens is a naturalised position by the end of the twentieth century. Interrogation of the concept of 'nation' by critical cultural theories and postcolonial studies has impacted on the significations of 'Australia' and on the socio-political policies that affect children.

Niall's *Australia Through the Looking Glass* (1984) was the seminal study of Australian children's fiction in an Australian Studies paradigm. My project differs from Niall's, as mine is a literary study rather than a nationalist cultural one. Nationalist studies tend to proceed by a focus on the similarities between texts. In contrast, my critical inquiries focus on distinctive, disruptive fictions and so the focus is on the differences

between texts and an analysis of the sociocultural significance of the difference.

Nevertheless, I argue that studies of the 'local'—Australia, in this case—especially the kind of theoretically informed 'thick description' undertaken here, are essential to enable further significant comparative global studies. Indeed, transnational cultural histories that assess patterns of sociocultural difference and similarity can only emerge when detailed studies of the local are available. However, I employ transnational—English and French—theoretical frameworks to demonstrate the extent to which the concerns of Australian children's fictions in fact reflect Western, if not global, trends.

While my historical context and methodology are very different from Niall's (1984), I nevertheless endorse her argument that: 'because of the vigilance with which children's books are monitored, they may reflect their society's values with special clarity' (1984:5). A decade later, Bradford (1996:ix) advised children's literature researchers not to be shortsighted in treating childhood studies 'as a place apart, a metaphorical secret garden' and thereby fail 'to recognise the fact that children's texts form a part of a broader cultural discourse'. I am particularly concerned to historically situate the fictions in my corpus in their socio-cultural contexts.

Research in the field of 'children's literature and culture is radically pluralistic and interdisciplinary' (Stephens 1996a:161). It is integral not only to Australian studies and English literature studies, but also to academic arenas related to childhood—including education, library and information sciences—and sociology, law, history and cultural studies. My theoretical frameworks, examined below, engage particularly with the history of childhood, history and sociology. Conflation of disciplinary paradigms is never intended but rather the possibility of intercontextual ratification. Carter (2000:285) argues that interdisciplinarity undermines the legitimacy of literary studies but I agree with Turner (1998:361) and Bradford (1996:vii) that such work confirms the significance of literary production as a social practice. I examine the macrotextuality of my corpus and attempt to

be self-reflexive by situating my academic process in a macrotextual framework.

While literary texts engage with conceptualisations of childhood rather than with the lived experience of children, as history and educational research attempt to do, the intention of fictions employing the realist mode is nevertheless to admit child readers to a discursive interrogation of lived experience or ‘realities’ (O’Neill 1994:36-8; Stephens 1992:242). The pedagogical significance of this is confirmed by research that shows children hold opinions about childhood. They can, therefore, engage with literary representations of their socio-cultural positionings if they have developed the narrative literacy skills that enable them to access the intratextual and macrotextual meanings of fictions.

I argue the historicity of Western conceptualisations of childhood. Since World War II, the substantial and inexorable transformations in the lived experiences of children mean that significant changes occur in the theoretical conceptualisations of childhood. This in turn impacts on the literature produced for children (Zipes 2002:viii). At the *fin de siècle* the international community’s reconceptualisation of childhood was formalised in the United Nations’ *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). Cunningham (1995:185) argues that this convention provides ‘not only for the protection of the child but also for its right to be heard in any decision that may affect her or his life’. Article 5 of the Convention enjoins all lawful authorities with duty of care for a child to assist her or him in ‘the exercise’ of her or his rights. It also requires that both the state and parents acknowledge the ‘evolving capacities’ of the child (cited in Bailey 1993:151-66). Of course, this reconceptualisation of childhood—as increasingly independent and self-determining—circulates in dialogue with the traditional conceptualisations of childhood that understand childhood as a time of passivity and dependence. In this study I examine the socio-cultural shifts in the Western conceptualisations of childhood during the period 1953-2003 and the concomitant changes evident in the fictive representations of child

subjectivity. I am especially interested in the changes in ways of understanding childhood agency and in the shift to interpellations of Australian children as competent subjects and agential citizens.

All literature is implicated in the gender order of Western societies. The socio-cultural changes in Australian gender relations that inform the life decisions of adults—as parents and child-carers—are integral to the reconceptualisations of childhood. Bourdieu (2001:84) argues that an understanding of the effect of changes that devolved from 1970s second-wave feminism can ‘be expected only from an analysis of the transformations of the mechanisms and the institutions charged with the perpetuation of the order of genders’. His view reiterates second-wave feminism’s claim that ‘the personal is political’. Thus I examine the literary representations of familial change in children’s fiction over the half century not only in the micro-level of the domestic household but also in the macro-environment of the Australian public sphere.

Children’s fictions interact with wider sociocultural and intellectual issues. Thus the theoretical paradigms underpinning my diachronic study include cultural studies, second-wave feminism, masculinity studies and post-colonialism. Studies of gender practice, for instance, elucidate the ways that children’s fictions seek to address the social injustice of gender inequality. Reconfigurations of gender practices diversify the representations of childhood experience and allow the possibility of democratic adult-child intersubjectivity. Australian children’s experiences are, however, explicitly sexed/gendered from birth: compulsory birth registration designates a male or female body for the newborn and an engendered habitus is interpellated for the child from then on. Consequently my study necessarily undertakes an examination of reconceptualisation of ‘girlhood’ and ‘boyhood’.

How has the concept of the nation changed across this period? Issues of national identity preoccupied the intellectual field when *Australia through the Looking Glass* was

published. Australian studies scholars produced significant cultural studies within this paradigm. Niall's (1984:2) text is symptomatic of the at the time, with its examination of how children's fictions help 'to shape an Australian sense of self'. While stopping short of the postcolonial moment, Niall exhibits proto-postcolonial insights in her valuing of local fictions and in her critical perspectives, especially her comments about literary spatiality and Australian publishing, discussed below. Postcolonial literary research explores the tendency of white settler societies to exhibit a 'landscape obsession' (Ashcroft et al, 1989:37). Delineating the importance of this in Australian literature, Niall writes that even though most Australians lived on the coastal fringe '[o]ur writers create contrasting images of the outback; and whether it is paradise or purgatory, dream or nightmare, it is still "the real Australia"' (1984:6). A measure of the importance of this is that Niall (1984:181-214) devotes an entire chapter to 'The Spirit of Place', examining the period from the 1890s to about 1952. Here she argues that in Australian literature generally there is a predominant theme of 'man's insignificance in the landscape' (1984:251).<sup>1</sup> While agreeing that spatiality is a significant component of the conceptualisation of the nation in a white settler colonial society such as Australia, I argue that the situation is more complex and nuanced than earlier commentators acknowledged.

This 'unreal' Australian cultural preference for the outback, or the bush, is the reason that I find Bourdieu's concept of the 'doxic moment'—a fictional originary chronotope—to be an appropriate frame for the discussions of fictions from the immediate post-war. Postcolonial theorising also generally allows the dual affirmations involved in Derridean textual deconstruction. First, there is the disclosure of logo-phallo-Euro-centrism and second, there is the challenge offered to such a bundle of dominant discourses since they 'are never without flaws ruptures and inconsistencies ...' (Grosz 1994:145; see also Belsey 1999:131). Postmodernist as well as postcolonial frames are employed to

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<sup>1</sup> My research into Australian spatial frameworks identifies the paradigmatic shifts from the rural preference

elucidate the narrative reconfigurations of the concept of 'Australian' from signifying a unitary 'national identity' to problematisation of such an idea in the transformative fictions of the *fin de siècle*.

Niall's (1984:6) examination of Australian children's fiction spanned 150 years of publishing and her focus question was '[w]hat could be deduced about Australian society from the children's books ...?'. She examines the growth of a national tradition from its 'British beginnings and considers some of the reasons why certain modes of writing flourished in Australia while others barely survived transplantation' (Niall 1984:xi). Indeed, Niall (1984:1) was '... as much concerned with Australia in children's books' as with Australian children's fictions because 'the one preceded and influenced the other'. In Chapter 6 of this study I examine both aspects of Niall's formulation but I reverse the order. That is, my critical focus is the fictions in the corpus and their representations of 'childhood' as conceptualised by Australian children's writers.

At the end of the 1980s, Niall (1988:555) acknowledged the major shift in the focus of the children's literature field to internationalisation. She also commented on the shift from an interest in the 'Australian child' to a concern with the ontological status of childhood. By the *fin de siècle* the problematisation of Australian literary spatiality becomes more urgent for quite different political reasons and the voices struggling to be heard in the texts populations represent diverse social orientations with regard to ethnicity, and diverse lifestyles. Some challenge is offered in the fictions in the corpus to the coherent humanist subject by representing the struggle for subjective consistency and for the possibility of intersubjectivity. New millennial transformative fictions in the corpus reject homogeneity and highlight the internal hybridity of community identities. However, fluidity between communities is not uniformly achieved across the nation's social space as boundaries are maintained and patrolled.

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to positively valued city and suburban spatio-temporal frameworks (Pennell 1997). Stephens (1995) and

Symptomatic of this is the fact that my focus on mainstream fictions means the elision of the voices of the Aboriginal peoples. It seems appalling to new millennial readers that reference to Aboriginal peoples occurs in Niall's chapter called 'The Outsiders' (1984:273-89). The following comment now seems ironic too: 'with the increasing preoccupation of children's writers of the 1960s with urban and suburban settings, there were few roles for Aboriginals to play' (1984:282). Recent Australian critical attention to the representation of Aboriginal peoples and textuality is found in Bradford (2001). Bradford offers a theoretically grounded examination of the attempts of Australian children's writers to engage with issues of indigeneity and reconciliation. Through the 1990s Aboriginal writers appropriated the fictional form as a tool for representation of their child and youth culture. As such, the most significant texts are written in Standard Aboriginal English and represent patterns of childhood and family and sociocultural issues entirely different from those in my corpus. Thus a full study of the corpus of indigenous fictions falls outside the parameters I set for this study.

## **Temporal Frame of the Study**

In the mid-1980s Niall (1984:4) argued that '[t]he renaissance in Australian children's books after World War II deserves a volume to itself, and I have only briefly discussed its main directions ...'. My study undertakes the project Niall foreshadowed by offering a diachronic study of a corpus of fictions that record the changing representations of childhood and implied child readers from the post-war period, through the progressive texts of the 1960s and 1970s, to the postmodern texts and transformative texts of the *fin de siècle* and the new millennium. The new status of children's literature in the post-war period has been acknowledged internationally as well as in Australia (Hunt 1994:9; Metcalf 1997:49). The concomitant expansion of scholarship and institutional support in the field

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Scutter (1999) also examine Australian spatial frameworks.



occurred at this time has also been noted widely (Hollindale 1995:83-85; Beckett 1997:ix; Saxby 2002:26-40).

This study avoids rigid historic periodisations, such as by decade, because these are reductive with regard to social and literary shifts. The publication dates of the fictions in the corpus determine the significant historical context that needs examination and critique. Terms like 'the fifties' or 'sixties' are fictions and I only use them when such a qualifying comment is helpful (Gerster & Bassett 1991:20-2; Murphy 2000:218-9). Fluidity should be assumed even when such designations appear. I employ the Bourdieusienne term, 'doxic moment' to describe the immediate post-war period that begins my study. This concept too is a fiction, an idealised abstraction from many possible realities (Lane 2000:135; 1999:96-7). I use the trope of the 'doxic moment' as the opening strategy of my study. Bourdieu's early structuralist training led him to search for unity and coherence in the doxic moment. In contrast, in a poststructuralist ethos, I now find plurality in my synchronic study of 1950s children's fictions.

The half-century, 1953-2003, is characterised by sweeping changes in everyday living and in modes of work in Australia as it is in the Western world generally. In ways revealed in children's fictions however, the public sphere, especially as government policy, continues to impede changes occurring in the realm of family life. In conservative discourses the latter is still erroneously assumed to be a private sphere, that is, to be beyond public intervention. This is despite 'the personal is political' mantra of second-wave feminism. The conservative *fin de siècle* Australian government explicitly espouses the mythic familial patterns of the 1950s where Murphy (2000:222) argues, the private space of childrearing is conceptualised as the centre of personal happiness. In the first epigraph to this chapter, the grandmother in Ivan Southall's *Bread and Honey* (1970) expresses her nostalgia for pre-World War II, remembered as a time of stability, universal and transcendent values. I argue that the corpus of new millennial mainstream children's

fictions in this study reject such nostalgia and its tendency to imply the re-assertion of child dependency and of the child subject as having limited competency and rights.

Niall (1998:552) argues that although British publishing houses remained a major power in children's publishing in post-war Australia, there were no longer any restraints on Australian writers and the boundaries of children's fiction writing expanded beyond stories suitable for Sunday School prizes. Niall (1998) writes 'there is no evidence of editorial pressures on the writers of the 1950s to choose (or to avoid) specifically Australian themes and situations ...' (ibid). This freedom was, however, not taken up immediately with 'the happy homestead story' and its 'celebration of rural life' apparently suiting 'the mood of the period' (Niall 1984:216). By foregrounding literary spatiality as a major strategy operating in Australian children's fictions, Niall (1984:216) draws attention to the similarities between the fictions of Joan Phipson and Nan Chauncy. In my study, Chauncy's shift to metaphysical realism marks her as being significantly different from Phipson. That is to say that, when the literary discourse of the fictions in the corpus is foregrounded, rather than spatiality, it is the difference in emphases between the writers that matters. Niall's (1984:216) generalisation about 'the celebration of rural life' offered by Chauncy and Phipson also elides significant cultural tensions that are foci of my study. I avoid the monolithic perspective in order to focus my critical inquiry on literary discursive 'distinctions and nuances' (Orr 2003:62).

A major conjuncture of historiographic circumstances and paradigmatic shifts in literary representations of childhood is found in the impact of the late 1960s counter-culture movement. Writing from a Eurocentric perspective Metcalf (1997) argues that Ariès (1962) and his fellow scholars revealed the concept of childhood as 'myth and social construct' thereby rekindling debates about the status of children and adults. From this emerged 'a fundamental rethinking of intergenerational relationships' which 'cleared the way for a new social and cultural construct of the child that has affected much of the

literature created for children since then' (1997:51; also Grenz 1997:151). Metcalf's claims are verified in the contemporary Australian fictions. Niall (1984:267-8) comments on the thematic changes to representations of family life in crisis and on the trend, evident by the end of the 1970s, to ambiguous or open narrative closures where 'happy endings' are a matter of hope rather than certainty.

Mackay's (1993,1997) Australian social research labels this post-counter culture era as Australia's 'Age of Redefinition' and finds that, at the *fin de siècle*, the process of redefinition is continuing (1997:194). He specifies seven major areas of change and five of these impact directly on the formative life experiences of children: the gender order, the redefinition of marriage and family, changing work patterns and multiculturalism (1993:2-3). It is not surprising then that these issues feature in realist children's fictions. In the new millennial transformative fictions the child participants/subjects are cognisant of the impact that the decisions of the public sphere have upon their lives and accept responsibility for being agential in responding to such interpellations.

There is agreement among cultural researchers that the women's movement of the 1970s was the rupture from which the patriarchal social system and its gender order could not recover. Lake's (1994) and Murphy's (2000) histories argue that there is a long lead-in to these changes in Australia. Post-war children's fictions offer evidence to support their arguments. Mackay (1993:239) argues that the greatest measure of change is the early-1990s conservative backlash. He argues that the imagined 'certainties and simplicities' of the 1950s have appeal 'even though contemporary Australian society has so little in common with the society that spawned those values'. A nostalgic 'back to basics' discourse is symptomatic; and Mackay (1993:240) finds three predominant words in the discourse and these are also central to this study: 'motherhood', 'domesticity' and 'the family'. Mackay comments that these words are capable of endless interpretations 'but they have become popular as signposts which might lead us out of confusion and

complexity ...' (ibid). Children's fiction in fact offers little comfort that the future will be stable or easy: transformative new millennial fictions reconfigure childhood and family life almost as significantly as has happened in lived experience.

### **The attribution of socio-cultural significance to Australian children's texts: situating the critical field**

Bourdieu (1993:163) argues that the autonomy of a cultural field such as children's literature is organic: it grows more influential as it acquires 'specific laws of functioning within the field of power' so that it becomes 'an independent social universe'. Such independence is signified by the existence of the field's own institutions, hierarchies and rituals that assist with the development of economic and symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is not a material reality but rather it is a way of recognising a relational feature of the social space. Symbolic capital designates a kind of social power that has a cognitive foundation and that rests upon the knowledge and recognition of others. Holders of such power acquire an authority that leads to the obedience and submission of others (Bourdieu 1998:104; William Earle 1999:183). For instance, with a social practice such as the production of children's literature, symbolic capital accrues to it by the establishment of an organisation such as the Children's Book Council of Australia (hereafter, CBCA).

The CBCA emerged nationally in 1945 and instituted an annual children's book award scheme at the end of the 1950s. This provides social structures and hierarchies and creates the social practices and rituals that consecrate and promote children's literature as a significant field of social life. The CBCA achieves these goals by conferring symbolic, and sometimes economic, capital on those writers and books that it honours through its award systems. It promotes the writing and publishing of children's literature through its journal, *Reading Time*. In terms of economic capital, the significant market place value of children's literature is remarked upon (Hunt 1994:127; Griswold 1997:37; see also

Cunningham 1995:183). In the 1990s ten per cent of the books published in Australia were written for children (Bennett 1998:257).

In Australia, generally, commentary and critique of children's literature is not well supported by the publishing industry. It is thus easy to trace the trajectory of the rise of children's literature, first, as part of the Australian literary field and then as an autonomous cultural field. In education, Saxby's (1970) literary history was seminal. In mainstream academic commentary, Stewart's *Snow on the Saltbush* (1984) includes children's literature as a significant part of the Australian literary tradition. Stewart's publication date coincides with Niall's *Australia through the Looking Glass* (1984), a clearly significant symbolic moment in the history of Australian children's literature because this moved the study of children's literature beyond the educational sphere. The inclusion of Niall's, 'Children's Literature' chapter in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australian Literature* (1988) reinforced the field's status. Here Niall (1988:557) wryly comments that children's literature is 'the sandpit, perhaps, in the Aust. Lit. garden'. The trope is self-reflexive, of course, acknowledges the legitimacy that her chapter confers on children's literature scholarship. Her statement interpellates the Australian literary field as a field of power, in which, as Bourdieu (2001:74) argues, games of power are played seriously.

A decade later, in the *Oxford Literary History of Australia* (1998), Bennett (1998:257) argues that writing for children has been 'especially prominent since the 1980s'. References to children's literature occur as a part of mainstream literature throughout the text. This critical attention suggests that the function and merit of Australian children's texts are recognised, as Bradford (1996:109) argues, as a 'part of the establishment'; however, Bradford (1996:108-9) argues that the position of children's literature is conflicted, since children's books 'in postcolonial terms are both marginalised and mainstream, both colonising and colonised': they are marginalised in terms of the adult literary field but are a part of the mainstream in terms of education and publishing and

through the CBCA and its awards schemes. For the purposes of this study I see no need to posit a relationship between the field of adult literature and that of children's literature. The emphasis on literary texts in Australian educational systems—in English syllabi, in library and information sciences—and in family and community child-raising practices, in Bourdieusienne terms, legitimates an autonomous field that requires independent scholarship.

During the 1990s Australian scholars have produced internationally significant book-length studies in the field of children's literature and all have pedagogical implications: Wall (1989); Stephens (1992); Stephens and Robyn McCallum (2000); McCallum (1999) and Stephens (2002). Book-length studies of the local/national scene include Bradford (2001). Saxby's *Images of Australia* (2002), the revision of the third volume of his compendious history of Australian children's literature, remains untheorised but includes the theoretical perspectives offered by other scholars. Foster et al (1995) published an undergraduate textbook that denies its sub-title as it pays insufficient attention to genre. It is structured around thematic chapters and the one entitled 'Family Life versus Individualism' is weakly framed by Ariès (1962) and therefore was outdated at the time of publication. This chapter, like most others, is concerned with storylines and themes rather than with discourse and narrative conventions. Historical contexts are ignored. Scutter (1999) examines such a wide range of texts that close readings are precluded. Scutter's (1999) corpus of fictions makes no distinction between fictions for pre-adolescents and those for young adults. Consequently Scutter avoids discussion of the differing thematic concerns and the discursive practices of texts intended for implied readers of different ages.

Edited volumes and the academic journal, *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, played a vital part in the children's literature field throughout the 1990s. These volumes also offer snapshots of the changing context of children's literature. Stone (1992,

1993) record the field's research interests at the beginning of the 1990s. A number of papers in Stone's volumes signal the shifts in children's fictions from unitary conceptualisations of Australian identity (Stone 1993:xi). Bradford's edited volume (1996) portends a grappling with notions of both 'Australian' and 'child' but the disparate nature of the papers means that little dialogue occurs around either concept. Scutter's paper, in Bradford (1996), is relevant to my project. She comments on the ambivalence she senses about the conceptualisations of separate spaces of childhood and adulthood. She argues that until the 1970s the model of childhood as 'lack' predominates, so that child subjectivity is represented as a 'deficient self' (1996:2). The shift she observes involves a progress towards an ideal of adult maturity. This model, Scutter argues, coexists alongside romanticism's childhood. Unfortunately I find that the failure to discriminate between adolescent and children's fictions weakens her argument.

Bradford (1996:ix) argues that '... much Australian discourse on children's books is limited to discussions of theme and content, reading at a relatively superficial level their explicit and implicit ideological and moral concerns'. She argues further that children's literature scholarship's 'purchase on "seriousness" and "respectability" is tentative; it must continue to argue on its own behalf in various academic forums' (1996:vii). Bradford (1996:ix) notes that the discourse about children's books in the Australian literary field, is pervaded by references 'to values and moral codes' (1996:viii). Conceptualisations of childhood, often implicit, frame such criticism of the fictions, as Bradford acknowledges (ibid). She argues for a focus on the discursive practices of children's fictions rather than on thematics (1996:ix) and thus adds her voice to Stephens' (1995:131), in an attempt to move researchers beyond formalist values-laden commentary. With these guidelines in mind, I will now outline the methodology of my study.

## **Methodology**

This project is founded on an interdisciplinary and theoretically informed model of literary

study in which hermeneutics and poetics are both significant. A critical Bourdieusienne macro-frame overarches the micro-frames employed in each chapter. Some of the theoretical frames underpinning the methodological design of the study have been foreshadowed above: sociology, history, law, gender studies, second- and third-wave feminism, postcolonialism, Australian Studies and Critical Cultural Studies. The study incorporates the methodology for textual study that Stephens (1992:5) employs to investigate the interaction of child subjectivity and the reading of literary texts. Stephens' method combines insights from critical linguistics and narrative theory. The analysis of literary discourse is pivotal to the examination of the corpus of fictions but I present the analyses informally because of the space constraints. The selection of the corpus of texts was a paramount concern and tight parameters were determined to promote measures of reliability and validity. The selection process for the corpus of fictions is described in the next section of this chapter.

Bourdieu (1993:263) alerts researchers to the problems posed by the importation of intellectual work from other national fields but he nevertheless argues that his conceptual apparatus can be used transnationally. Like other researchers I have found this to be the case. Calhoun (1993:66-7) argues that Bourdieu's analytical approach allows 'historical and cultural and social organisational specificity' and so is productively transnational. It enables the identification of distinctive social breaks, or ruptures, that foreground different issues and instantiate new social organisations. In literature such ruptures require writers to reconfigure literary discourse and conventions and researchers to employ different analytical tools.

Bourdieu's analytical concepts assist the articulation of the epistemological and material implications of subversive discourses and/or of reconfigured story-worlds and storylines. Bourdieu's philosophical sociology emphasises the 'primacy of relations' (1998:vii). Transformations in literary representations of the 'primacy of relations' — or



intersubjectivity—are foregrounded in my corpus of fictions. Bourdieu (2001) conceptual framework enables an analysis of the current state of gendered social relations in Australia at the *fin de siècle*. Bourdieu (2001) offers the means to understand the third reconfiguration of masculine subjectivities represented in Australian children's fictions since 1953. Bourdieu (2001) also enables an assessment of the material success of second-wave feminism as evidenced in the profeminist children's fictions in the corpus. My discussions of the family and the nation are framed by two papers from Bourdieu (1998), 'The Family Spirit' (64-74) and 'Rethinking the State: Genesis of the Bureaucratic Field' (35-63).

Bourdieu (1996) draws on the diverse analytical tools of textual studies. He employs the narrative theories of Rimmon-Kenan, Genette and Bal, all published in the 1980s, to inform his synchronic study of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (Bourdieu 1996:31). My method too, employ tools such narratology to examine intratextual conventions such as storyline, discourse, and story existents. I am also concerned with macrotextuality, that is, the interactivity of writer and reader in production of textual meanings and intertextuality (O'Neill 1994:24-5), discussed further below.

Bourdieu (1994:104) warns text scholars against anachronism. I concur with Bourdieu on this and I argue that dehistoricised readings of literary texts produce misreadings. I am aware however, of the inherent ontological and epistemological problems that arise when dealing with the past. I address this problem by attending to the macrotextual and intertextual resources available to illuminate the socio-cultural dynamics of the historical contexts of the fictions in the corpus. Contemporaneous socio-cultural, critical and academic works are significant here. Anachronism certainly occurs if re-reading of the realist fiction of the 1950s and early 1960s is historically decontextualised. From the perspective of the new millennium such fictions are classist, sexist and racist. The approach I adopt enables recognition of ruptures, and distinctions and nuances that

envision transformations in the fictions in the corpus. However, such transformations in one aspect of social life may sit beside conservative values represented in other parts of the fictions in the corpus.

Cunningham's (1995, 1998) research provides the historical perspective on the reconceptualisations of childhood in the Western world up to the close of the twentieth century, that I draw on in my study. Kociumbas' (1997) local history informs my understandings of Australian childhood—as conceptualisation and as lived experience—after World War II to the *fin de siècle*. Murphy (2000) informs my macrotextual readings of the 1950s. The counter-culture period is read through the lens of Gerster and Bassett (1991). The most recent shift in historical discourse surrounding the nation that is relevant to readings of *fin de siècle* fictions in the corpus, is the trope of 'creation'. This trope is employed to describe the socio-cultural processes involved in fabricating a national entity. Feminist histories are significant voices in this discursive strategy, particularly Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath and Quartly (1994). Hudson and Bolton (1997) critique and extend the possibilities of the creativity trope in their edited volume. Other socio-cultural commentary on Australian social life comes from scholars such as Summers (1975, 2003), White (1981, 1997), Connell (1987, 1995, 2000), Gilding (1991), Mackay (1993, 1997) and Turner (1993, 1997).

Fiction production—both genre and mainstream—has flourished in Australia since the 1970s despite the success of Cultural Studies critique of literary studies as an elitist pursuit (Lever 1998:309). Stephens (1996a:63-4) argues that a cultural studies paradigm has much to offer the interdisciplinary field of children's literature. He advocates a model of 'constructive transformative cultural studies' that 'develops in conjunction with the revised humanistic modes of reading that are currently emerging'. Stephens (1996a:4) then cites the research of Schwarz (1990:21) who argues that 'texts are by human authors for human readers about human subjects'. Orr (2003:45-6) also argues that a reconfigured

humanist project is emerging from the trend to interdisciplinarity. This aligns with Rimmon-Kenan's (1996) research into mainstream realist adult fictions at the *fin de siècle* where she finds a move beyond postmodernism's fragmented subjectivity to a post-postmodernist 'glance beyond doubt', that is, a desire for consistency of human subjectivity rather than a normative insistence on the coherent human subject. I find evidence of this in the deployment of metafictional modes in the transformative new millennial mainstream children's fictions in the corpus.

Contemporary narratology takes account of the role of the reader in its study of narrative (Stephens 1992:5; O'Neill 1994; Lever 1998:463). With this in mind, my study examines the clear changes in the demands placed on child readers who are increasingly required to be agential and proactive in their engagement with the mainstream fictions of the corpus. The transforming intellectual and socio-cultural context, as well as the shifting power differential in adult-child relationships, is represented and interrogated in the Australian children's fictions in the corpus. By the new millennium, issues of adult-child power are narratively represented as a concern for child readers. This, then, is an appropriate point to turn to the process of the selection of the corpus of fictions for the study.

## **Selection of the corpus of texts**

In order to examine reconceptualisations of Australian childhood I focus on a corpus of avant-garde mainstream Australian realist children's fictions. Each of the descriptors used for the fictions in the corpus is examined below. Bourdieu's (1993:271-2) conceptual apparatus for socio-cultural analyses demands meticulous attention to 'a particular case' (see also Moi 1997:198). Bourdieu argues that 'one cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of an empirical reality, historically situated and dated, but only in order to construct it as an instance (*cas de*

*figure*) in a finite universe of possible configurations' (ibid). My 'particular case' (Bourdieu 1993:271) then is a specific corpus of children's fictions. My research procedure, then, entails gathering empirical data from the corpus of fictions that enables 'thick descriptions' (Bourdieu 20001). The parameters of the study focus on the issues detailed in the introduction to this chapter: 'childhood', 'boyhood' and 'girlhood', 'family' and 'nation'.

Niall (1984:xi) argues that in her study of Australian children's fictions 'quality' was not a concern, that she chose books for their 'representative' features. I argue that this entirely begs the question of the method of text selection. I argue too that it suggests a focus on thematics and an avoidance of questions of discursivity and significance. Niall (1984:xi) refers readers to Saxby's literary histories for a 'detailed, inclusive work that allows later writers like myself [Niall] to choose a particular focus'. I reverse Niall's process. I identify those fictions that demonstrate a clear paradigmatic rupture with regard to the representation of childhood and this means avoiding Niall's criterion of typicality. To achieve this objective I read the Australian children's fictions available in the Macquarie University Library rather than relying on secondary sources for guidance. It also means that, unlike Niall (1984) and Saxby (2000), I reject encyclopedic comprehensiveness and instead pursue detailed analysis of a disruptive corpus of fictions. From where I read—as the second epigraph for this chapter argues—I narrate a different story from my scholarly antecedents.

The family-story genre, employing the social realist mode, was the predominant literary genre for Australian children in the post-war decades. This determined one parameter of the corpus as being a realist dimension to the fictions selected for the corpus. This eliminates fantasy, science fantasy and satirical modes and a genre such as historical fiction. In order to focus on conceptualisations of childhood, another parameter was that adult/child relations had to be a major discursive focus of the fictions and not just thematic

concern. This parameter eliminates genres such as ‘time-out’ fictions where children find themselves away from adult supervision or intervention. The fictions for the corpus selected from the doxic moment—the 1950s—have omniscient narrators, a convention of social realism, and so extradiegetic narration became another parameter for selection of the fictions for the corpus. As with other literary conventions in the fictions in the corpus, the function of diegesis shifts across the half century. Factors such as the historical context—outlined in the previous section—the age of the implied reader, and single address to the implied child reader (Wall 1991) were other significant parameters that influenced the selection process for the fictions in the corpus.

Problematics of childhood, and therefore of children’s literature, are steeped in matters of chronology. I examine fictions written and marketed for Hollindale’s (1995:84) class of ‘pre-adult’ readers (ten to thirteen year olds) who are independent readers of fiction. In the post-war period the fictions fitted the 8-15 CBCA Book of the Year category (Pownall 1980:13). In 1987 this CBCA Award was divided into two categories. My focus fictions then are the fictions for ‘younger readers’ who have ‘developed independent reading skills but are still developing in literary appreciation (Bennett 1998:257). Since 1970 publishers have expanded their categories further to include fictions for ‘newly independent readers’. By 1982, Saxby (1993:20) argues that there were sufficient numbers of quality titles to require the creation of the category of CBCA - Junior Book of the Year Award. Within this grouping, the category for older readers is the legitimate group of books for the purpose of my historical comparison. Thus the assumed audience for the fictions in the corpus—and the fiction’s implied readers—has been a reading public and market since the 1950s (Saxby 1993:196).

The ‘pre-adult’ classification (de)limits a text’s narrative elements, such as the storyline, text population, story existents and thematic concerns but does not delimit the sophistication of the literary discourse employed in such texts. The participants in the

fictions in the corpus, like the implied readers, are approximately between the ages of eleven and fourteen. They are young people still within the constraints of domestic households managed and financed by adults. Overt exercise of personal agency is contingent upon a parent/caregiver's authorisation. Outside the domestic household the participants' spatio-temporal frames are primary or early secondary school and peer group contexts rather than work. At the start of the period of the study sexuality is a taboo subject in children's fiction generally. *Bread and Honey* (1970) overtly ruptures this taboo and represents children as sexed subjects. By the end of the 1990s, child participants are shown as observing, imagining, comparing and judging the various heterosexual adult relationships around them. While participants are not sexually active, nor desiring to be so, from the 1980s onwards, they are represented as being aware of their sexual development and of being interpellated into peer sexed relationships. Sexuality is represented predominantly in terms of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality, homosexuality and transsexuality are represented as everyday knowledge for the participants in some of the fictions in the corpus by the *fin de siècle*.

My corpus, then, consists of fictions that rupture literary conventions in order to problematise socio-cultural representations of child subjectivity, intersubjectivity and lived experience in families, and thereby reconceptualise Australian childhood. The literary discourse of the fictions in the corpus, especially as narration, is often subversive even if the storyline is not. The fictions in the corpus are 'mainstream fictions', a term that stands in opposition to 'genre fictions'. For the purpose of distinguishing the mainstream fictions from genre fictions some literary analysts apply terms like 'experimental' to them, while others label them as avant-garde. Belsey (1980:91) employs the term, 'interrogative text' to draw a contrast between classic realist texts and other texts that deliberately undermine realist conventions while still invoking the realist mode. Belsey argues that the interrogative text 'disrupts the unity of the reader by discouraging identification with a

unified subject of the enunciation’ with the result that the reader is required ‘to produce answers to the questions it implicitly or explicitly raises’ (ibid).

In a socio-linguistic paradigm—such as Fairclough’s (1989:56) Critical Language Awareness—I examine fictions that demonstrate the capacity of discourses to change. He argues that such change is enabled by ‘the creative extension through combination of existing resources’ (ibid). Talbot’s (1994:33-4) gloss on Fairclough argues that ‘[t]he double use of the term discourse collapses the artificial division between an individual action and a conventional practice, since the one cannot exist without the other. Actions are only possible because of the conventions for enacting them’. Indeed, conventions only exist insofar as they are performed (ibid). But the plethora of discursive practices enables ‘the creative extension-through-combination of existing resources’ as Fairclough describes it (1989:31). In Hutcheon’s (1980:140) terms, the reader of fiction enters the fictive world at first using the external referents of public language to make meaning however ‘the cumulative effect of reading is to transform this transparency of language into an increasingly dense set of aesthetic entities, into the fictive heterocosm’. The fictions in my corpus are all examples of the ‘aesthetic entities’ Hutcheon describes.

Despite their aesthetic discursivity and cognitive complexity, the fictions in my corpus are accessible to child readers. They develop the narrative literacy of readers and induct them into the conventions of reading literary narratives and discourse. I argue that the fictions discussed engage in a project of ‘symbolic destruction and construction aimed at imposing new categories of ‘perception and appreciation’ (Bourdieu 1998:123) with regard to childhood. Across the period of the study, child participants are increasingly represented as rejecting ghettoisation in the traditional ‘secret gardens’ of idealised childhood where the attributes of innocence and dependence are of greatest value (Cunningham 1995:188-9). The purpose of a new vision is ‘... to destroy the very principle of division through which the stigmatising group and the stigmatised group are produced’

(Bourdieu 1996:123). Here I move beyond 'transgression' as a model of critique.

Transgression suggests the presence and imperviousness of the dominant culture. The texts I discuss show, in various realist modes, that notions of dominant cultures and codes are fictional and that a plethora of legitimised practices occurs across the social space at any time. Many of these practices concern everyday expectations about the lives of children.

My selection of the fictions for the corpus was ratified by an unsought dynamic, namely that of Bourdieu's 'consecrated writer' (1996:159). Author/writer status was not a parameter for selection of fictions in the corpus. However, as the corpus emerged, all the writers of the selected fictions proved to have invested seriously in the field of Australian children's literature. This is evidenced by the number of children's fictions each writer has produced and also by the time-span of each one's contributions to the field. All of the writers have received distinctions from the institutions of the field (Townsend 1983:283-4; Hunt 1994:153-4; Saxby 2002:2).

In Bourdieusienne (1996:159) terms, the fictions in the corpus are also 'consecrated' works. That is, the fictions have received recognition by the legitimising symbolic and economic forces of the children's literature field: CBCA wards, book sales, reprints, international prizes and awards, reviews, translations and critical attention. A significant factor in these fictions being approved by publishers and promoted by parents, librarians and teachers is the consensus of contemporary thematic approval and moral appropriateness ascribed to them, rather than ideas the literary merit. Nevertheless, these hallmark fictions rupture dominant conservative metanarratives and reconfigure the realist mode and thus envision socio-cultural shifts. That is, the fictions in my corpus represent story-worlds that endorse changing social attitudes and practices. Like Bourdieu (1996:248), I see epistemological ruptures as being implicated in social ruptures.

While I did not intend to examine fictions of a 'Great Tradition' of Australian children's fiction, my corpus contains many fictions already accorded socio-cultural



significance in fields related to literary and childhood studies. In Bourdieusienne terms, the corpus consists of the avant-garde texts of a particular historical context. This is evident in the social ruptures they signify with regard to conceptualising childhood, by their innovative use of literary form and conventions, and by their intertextual connections with the children's literature field. I agree with Orr's (2003:7) argument that '[a]mong intertextuality's most practical functions is (re-)evaluation by means of comparison, counter position and contrast'. Bourdieu (1996) argues that

[p]aradoxically, the presence of the specific past is most visible of all among the avant-garde producers who are controlled by the past when it comes to their intention to surpass it, an intention itself linked to the history of the field. (242).

It seems to me that Bourdieu's (1996) argument is correct and that what occurs in a particular field, at a certain time, is closely connected to the field's history and 'hence it becomes more difficult to *deduce* it directly from the state of the social world at the moment under consideration' (1996:243, original emphasis). That is, a casual reader of a children's literary text has no idea of the heritage or complexity of the field of children's texts and nor, therefore, of its intertextual dynamic. Bourdieu (1996:243) argues further that it is the 'very logic of the field which tends to select and consecrate all legitimate ruptures with the history objectified in the structure of the field ...' and thence, in its turn, an avant-garde fiction becomes integral to the field's heritage.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers in childhood studies and connected fields still widely agree with Ariès' (1962:7) argument that the concept of the family is inextricably linked to both the conceptualisations and the actuality of childhood as lived experience (Metcalf 1997:51; Cunningham 1998:1197). Initial parameters of my research hypothesised that the fictions from the family-story genre would be a major contributor to the corpus. This is the case in

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<sup>2</sup> I am not arguing 'the avant-garde notion of literature as a permanent opposition', a critical stance that Carter suggests many contemporary commentators adopt (2000:285).

the post-war fictions where the nuclear family is privileged (Niall 1984:252-272; Saxby 1993:365). In the family-story genre, the storyline, rather than discourse, is typically the narrative focus. However, this turns out not to be the case in the fictions that fitted the parameters of my study. I refined this parameter to require the selected fictions to have the family, and child/adult intersubjectivity, as a feature of the discourse as well as of the storyline. What emerges then is how the concept of 'family' is represented in mixed-genre fictions where the nuclear family is interrogated rather than naturalised conceptualisation.

Like Niall (1984), Saxby (1993:393) notes the decline in the number of happy family stories through the 1970s; however I argue that the avant-garde texts of this decade include signs of transformations in domestic life. Households of caring individuals appear where blood and formal marriage connections may or may not be significant.

Reconfigurations of conventional literary schemas are evident in the representation of the subjectivities and the attributes of carers. Perhaps Robin Klein's *The Listmaker* (1997:6) describes the *fin de siècle* domestic arrangements best when her child narrator self-reflexively refers to domestic households as consisting of 'people who belong together'.

The significance of literary genres in gender stereotyping is well established in children's literature criticism (Stephens 1996b; Pennell 1999, 2002, 2003). Genres, such as fiction, consist of widely endorsed discursual conventions and their most significant function is to establish the interpersonal tenor of a text (Talbot 1994:35). 'Genre fictions', the labels for specific marketing categories—adventure, romance, science fiction, and so on—share similar discourses, narrative formulae, and are often ideationally similar. They are typically ideologically conservative: they are 'closed texts' insofar as they represent dominant socio-cultural values (Talbot 1994:38).<sup>3</sup> Thus I argue that the fictions in my corpus are 'mainstream' fictions rather than 'genre fictions': they are distinctive because of their representation of ideational and socio-cultural shifts. These shifts are achieved by

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<sup>3</sup> See Stephens' discussion of closed texts: 'Signifying Strategies and Closed Texts in Australian Children's

such features as the reconfigurations of genres/genre-mixing, disruptive storylines, alteration of conventional participant attributes, the diversity of viewpoints represented in the text and open closures. Talbot's (1994:39) socio-linguistic critical paradigm only enables her to describe texts that rupture traditional literary configurations as 'giving the impression of greater originality'. I move beyond this by employing other tools that identify the significant discursive differences offered by mainstream fictions as they unsettle reader expectations. These discoursal features offer the cognitive and aesthetic pleasure many readers require from literary texts. The family story, as a genre, then, decreases in significance diachronically but is never irrelevant.<sup>4</sup>

The fictions in the corpus employ varieties of realism as genre or mode. This parameter of the study was imposed partly by the historical circumstances of the doxic moment, as described above. Researchers have examined the reasons for the success of social realism as a literary genre that thrived in its transplantation from Britain to the Australian colonies (Townsend 1983:261; Niall 1984:xi). This Australian trend contrasted with the British post-war trend to fantasy in children's literature as the pedagogically preferred genre (Hunt 1994:167). In the 1950s Australian literary criticism re-circulated and valorised the link between realism and democracy that had been promulgated originally in the criticism of the 1890s (Carter 2000:171).

Literary discourses and modes are understood here as being linguistically constituted. Bourdieu (1996:5) argues that the conventional realist literary discourse constructs story-worlds that are 'saturated with significant details, and therefore more signifying than true to life, as testified by the abundance of pertinent indices it offers to analysis'. Realist discourse typically signifies metonymically. O'Neill (1994:41) argues that a main aim of realist writing is to provoke the reader 'to pursue the potential development of the story-world', that is, to expand the metonymic implications of the

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Literature' (1994).

discourse. This is possible because of the existence of real world homologues for the fictional spaces and text populations (1994:36; also Stephens 1992:241-9; Bal 1997:177). Story-worlds are instantiated by narrative conventions, schematas, frames and scripts (Fairclough 1989:164; Talbot 1994:52-3). In fictions the constructions of story-worlds are combined with representations of participant subjectivity—intrapsychic worlds—and spatio-temporal frames. These elements are controlled by the implied author and narrator(s).

Social realism is the ideologically preferred genre in the 1950s fictions and is valued as a means to verisimilitude. After the 1960s counter culture, the realist mode diversifies and becomes self-reflexive. It demonstrates a capacity to shift ideologically and so represent relativistic views of human experience (Stephens 1992:287). Realism as mimesis was theoretically undermined by Barthes' (1970) argument that writing is only ever a representation of reality rather than a transcription of it. (See also Lodge 1981:23; Hume 1984:42 and Stephens 1992:248). The capacity of literary texts to represent a transparent, universal 'reality' was problematised. In its new guise realism positioned readers to interrogate social norms and thus engage with a world where formerly fixed values were unsettled. Even in the immediate post-war era, I argue that it is discourse rather than storyline that is subversive in Australian children's fictions.

O'Neill (1994:157) argues that traditionally readers of a realist fiction focused on reaching a definitive conclusion at the end of a fiction. However, 'the post-modern reader's ambition is rather to continue reading, to prolong the game of reading and the play of story and discourse of which he or she too is a unique and vital factor' (ibid). The shift in the realist mode since the 1970s foregrounds textual processes (O'Neill 1994:159; Meek 1996:4). The boundary between realism and fantasy modes also becomes fluid (Hume 1980; Matz 2004:144). All of the later fictions in my corpus employ discursive features

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<sup>4</sup> The Australian family story genre is examined in Kerry White's *Founded on Compromise – Australian*

that call attention to the text as literary discourse rather than as everyday communication and all use self-reflexive strategies to some extent. The fictions represent child subjectivities as fully implicated in, and constrained by, their social conditions. Many of the new millennial fictions in the corpus have open closures that suggest the contingent nature of participants' moments of personal agency.

Most of the fictions in the corpus have overt omniscient narrators whose narratorial perspective may differ from that of the focalising character(s). Historical factors first imposed this parameter but there were also concerns to do with reading pedagogy and these are discussed below. Conventionally omniscient narrators are the 'complete authority' and possess 'complete objectivity' (O'Neill 1994:62). The degree of didactic narratorial intervention lessens diachronically fictions and even in earlier fictions didacticism is often represented via character focalisation or by free indirect speech. In the post-war fictions the narrator is often elided and dialogue is the reader's main access to participants' subjectivities. Movement away from this pattern is clear so that by the *fin de siècle*, metafictional texts offer more character focalisation and admit more focalisers. Obtrusive narrators also become more common and engage the reader directly. Often the narrators' viewpoints are opposed to those of the participants but this narratorial power is balanced by the maintenance of character focalisation and extensive use of free indirect thought. Blurred genre boundaries are evident well before the arrival of the postmodernist literary tendency to foreground genre-mixing as a ludic textual strategy.

*The Listmaker* (1997) is the only fiction employing first person narration included in the corpus. Typically first person narration attempts to engage the readers' interest and empathy by an alignment with one point of view. Fairclough (1989:62) employs the term 'synthetic personalisation' to describe the apparent familiarity writers construct by employing first person narrators. The resulting tenor maintains unequal power relations

between narrator and reader. This potential for the effacement of child-reader subjectivity has been an area of pedagogical interest since being formally elaborated by Stephens (1992). First person fictions were not automatically eliminated from the corpus but they had to meet the criteria of '[t]he optimum enabling state for the reader' described by Stephens (1992:70). He argues that '[u]nqualified identification with focalisers attributes coherent reality and objectivity to the world constructed by the text' with the result that the reader constructs 'a false subjectivity and a selfhood which is actually mimetic of the focalizing selfhood constructed in the text' (1992:69). Here Stephens (1992:70) requires that the text make 'a number of reading strategies available, including an interrogative engagement with the implied reader'. This is a view I share and so a parameter for text selection required that the fictions selected for the corpus demonstrate some strategy for distancing the reader.<sup>5</sup> *The Listmaker* qualified for the corpus because of its unreliable first person narrator with whom reader identification is unlikely. Fictive child participants, then, apart from those in *The Listmaker*, are subjected to similar power relations as with an extradiegetic narrator.

Nodelman (1984:98) argues, the word 'children' in the term 'children's literature' refers, not to 'real children' at all, but rather to 'artificial constructs of writers; as is true of all works of literature, each story implies its audience; and thus each story reveals its author's assumptions about childhood'. Variations in the deployment of narrative strategies reflect shifts in the construction of the child as subject and the conceptualisations of childhood in the society. Grenz (1997:141-51) examined the transformations in the conceptualisations of literary childhood in German children's literature after World War II and I find similar shifts occur in Australian children's fictions. This is another confirmation of the transnational nature of the reconceptualisations of childhood found in the Australian children's fictions in my corpus. The fictions in my corpus employ the discursive practices

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<sup>5</sup> Stephens (1992:251-5) examines examples of first person narration in children's literary fiction.

of literature to give children an entrée to debates about the power structures operating in Australian society and so enable child readers to participate intellectually in debates about childhood as both a concept and as lived experience. This parameter requires that the fictions demonstrate ‘single address’ to the child reader (Wall 1991:35). That is, I argue that all the fictions in the corpus consistently construct child readers.

The construction of the implied child reader is a central focus of the analysis of the fictions in this study and this has clearly shifted over the half century. A significant site of ideological power in fictions is the positioning of the implied reader, ‘a role implicit in the text which is equivalent to conventional social roles in the actual world’ (Stephens 1992:80). Implied reading positions are the result of the narrative techniques employed in the literary work (McCallum 1999:259). The corpus of fictions in the study show the diachronic shifts in implied reading positions constructed from post-war fictions to the 1960-70s progressive texts and to the 1990s transformative texts. The fictions reveal transformations from homogeneous dominant culture to a culture of plurality and inclusiveness in new millennial texts. The degree of importance placed on the reader—child or otherwise—raises the concerns of semiotic and poststructuralist critique with macrotextual interactivity. That is, a concern the simultaneous ‘communicative interactivity of authorial, textual, and readerly intentionality’ where ‘reading becomes a potentially three way game of tag between the reader, the author and text, infinitely deferring’ who is in control (O’Neill 1994:122-3). Stephens (1992:70) also argues that foregrounding textuality involves ‘drawing attention both to authorial manipulation and the processes by which readers interpret the fictive world in terms of the actual world’. Writers, then, may employ distancing strategies to ‘encourage the constitution of a reading self in interaction with the other constituted in and by the text’ and Stephens (1992) argues

[w]ithin a fuller dialectic, therefore, readers will be engaging with a structured form of the larger intersubjective process whereby the self negotiates its own coming into

This understanding of textuality becomes more prevalent in the *fin de siècle* fictions where there is a dispersal of textual authority (O'Neill 1994:70). The reading game often continues rather than reaching closure (O'Neill 1994:125). This reconfiguration moves beyond Linda Hutcheon's (1980:141) descriptions of postmodern metafiction as having the reader 'both trapped in the looking glass and looking through it'.

Of Australian adult mainstream fiction since 1965 Susan Lever (1998:330) comments that '[i]n a diverse, multicultural, fragmented society there can be no complete and all-encompassing visions'. She argues that post-1960s adult fiction problematises notions of literature and art as constructing 'reality' (1998:311) and notes 'a common tendency to undermine the authority of fiction' (1998:313). Lever argues that there is a sense in *fin de siècle* fiction 'that only a panoramic vision can do justice to the contradictions of the human condition, and that such a vision cannot take itself seriously' (1998:331). While children's literature is slower to exhibit these tendencies they are clearly present by the *fin de siècle*. Transformative children's fictions are thematically concerned with issues of inclusivity in a fragmented society. Child subjects/participants are represented as semioticians and discourse analysts, demonstrating agency as they decide what they will make of what the world makes of them.

The final selections for the corpus of fictions in the study includes the following 1950s fictions: Patricia Wrightson's *The Crooked Snake* (1953), Joan Phipson's *Good Luck to the Rider* (1955) and Nan Chauncy's *Tiger in the Bush* (1957). These are the fictions that, in Bourdieusienne terms, represent the 'doxic moment' of this study. The second group of texts I have termed 'progressive' fictions as they reflect the milieu of the counter culture period of the 1960s and 1970s. The groups includes L H Evers' *The Racketty Street Gang* (1960), Mavis Thorpe Clark's *The Min-Min* (1966), Ivan Southall's *Bread and Honey* (1970) and Simon French's *All We Know* (1986). The transformative *fin de siècle*



fictions include Joanne Horniman's *Sand Monkeys* (1991) and Ursula Dubosarsky's *Bruno and the Crumhorn* (1996), Allan Baillie's *Secrets of Walden Rising* (1996) and Odo Hirsch's *Hazel Green, Something's Fishy, Hazel Green, and Have Courage, Hazel Green*. The term 'transformative' is employed from the paradigm of New Learning in the field of Education. Here 'transformative' is defined as those experiences—reading experiences in this case—that 'occur with sufficient emotional intensity to be meaningful, and with sufficient cognitive patterning to organise thinking and learning in deeply significant ways' (Arnold and Ryan 2003:5).

## **Outline of Chapters**

Subjectivity, agency and intersubjectivity increasingly become the focus of children's realist fictions in the late twentieth century so Chapter 2 analyses the paradigmatic shift in the literary representations of the intrapsychic states of child participants. There is extensive representation of their responses to intersubjective relationships with adults and children and assessment of their varied experiences of socio-cultural positionings. In 1950s fictions the desirable values and attributes of the child participants are explicit and absolute whereas the new millennial transformative fictions argue beyond the counter-culture messages of progressive fictions, to assert the possibility of recognising socially just outcomes in a specific socio-cultural context. Contingency remains a central dynamic in determining whether or not child subjects achieve/receive just outcomes in issues dependent upon adult/child relations. I argue that to achieve the discursive reconfiguration of adult/child relations in narratives, attention must be paid to the representations of the relational dimension of adult/child interactions.

Despite poststructuralism and postmodernism's exhortations to resist all totalising discourses, Bourdieu, feminist and masculinity scholars argue that Western social structures and practices—such as literary metanarratives—remain underpinned by the

intersecting mythologies of 'patriarchy' (masculinist social structure), 'Man', (masculinity) and 'Woman' (femininity) and the 'family' (conjugal couple as breadwinner/dependent homemaker, biological kin). Thus narrative reconfigurations of gendered sociality are the focus of Chapters 3, 4 and 5. My research began with an expectation that I would find social transformations in gender representations impacting on both the concept of 'family' and ideas about 'childhood'. This seemed a safe hypothesis for a timeframe that spans the Women's Liberation Movement, second-wave feminism, various mythopoetic 'Men's Movements', third-wave feminism and the emergence of queer theory. Extensive change is evident in the literary representations of concepts of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' and masculine and feminine subjectivity. As the historical shifts in these concepts emerge, I hypothesised that a significant outcome of my research would be a socio-cultural map of the shifting literary paradigms of gendered social relations in Australian society.

Chapters 3 and 4 concern the paradigmatic transformation in gender relations that result from reconfigurations of 'hegemonic masculinity', the version of masculinity which at any time sanctions male dominance in social relations (Connell 1995:77). The great shifts evident in the representations of men, boys, fathers and male authority figures over the period 1953-2003 made it clear that second-wave feminism would not provide a suitable theoretical framework for my study as this paradigm constructed gender as oppositional categories. Indeed, second-wave feminism is responsible for negative literary representations of men and boys and for fictions that efface+ masculine viewpoints. The transformation of storylines for men and boys proves difficult because the masculine has been the 'natural' voice of literary discourse. Ursula Dubosarsky's metafictional novel, *Bruno and the Crumhorn*, is a postmodernist reversion of Lewis Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno* (1890). It allows parodic display of the regulatory function of gendered identities of patriarchy and feminism.

Women, on the other hand, continue to be pejorated by the public discourses of

moral panics surrounding an imagined dissolution of idealised family life as they insist on claims to full individualisation within the society. Chapter 5 examines the shifts in literary representations of girls and girlhood and of adult feminine subjects. The perceived threat to the social structure from second- and third-wave feminism's potential alteration of the structure of the 'basic unit of society' and the public sphere is powerfully countered by the re-assertion of 'family values', as mentioned above (Warner 1993:9; Chambers 2001:129). Not only must the battle of 'the personal is political' be recognised so too must the implications of the corollary that 'the political is personal'.

In Chapter 6 I examine literary reconfigurations of the nation. Turner (1996:13), among others, argues that the concepts of the nation 'are the product of culturally, rather than naturally determined acts of the imagination; that nations are 'invented'. The nationalism that underpins the 1950s mythology of the 'Australian Way of Life' is scrutinised as a divisive anti-egalitarian rhetoric under the rubric of postmodernism so that by the century's end the narrative of Australian social life constructs the nation as one of 'plural social orientations'. Murphy (2000) revises the view of the 1950s as bland and conformist and demonstrates various ways in which it was complex and conflicted even though the Australian literary preference continued to be for representations that were mythic and rural rather than contemporary and urban (Niall 1984:216; Turner 1993:32). Transformative fictions like Allan Baillie's *Secrets of Walden Rising* (1996) critique such national mythologising. These *fin de siècle* fictions adopt the Bourdieusienne strategy of imagining alternative possibilities by a 'reconstruction of genesis', that is, by a reconceptualisation of the originary moments of the traditional metanarratives of Australia.

In Chapter 2 I focus on the ways that Australian children's fictions, in their storylines and literary discourse, represent the struggle to decolonise the space of childhood. Post-war fictions like Joan Phipson's *Good Luck to the Rider* (1953), Patricia Wrightson's *The Crooked Snake* (1955) and Nan Chauncy's *Tiger in the Bush* (1957)

represent both child and adult participants patrolling the borders of separate adult/child territories. The conceptualisation of childhood subjectivity here represents children's tacit submission to domination by adults in the private sphere of the family. This conceptualisation of childhood as a place apart and the concomitant separation of children and adults is challenged as unjust in progressive fictions such as Ivan Southall's *Bread and Honey* (1970) and there is a repudiation of the child subject's sexual innocence.

The *fin de siècle* reconceptualisations represent child subjects who refuse the limitations—physical or psychological—of adult jurisdiction and who assert their rights to participate in the public sphere when competence is clearly displayed. The transformative fiction I examine which problematises the child's participation in the public space is Joanne Horniman's *Sand Monkeys* (1991). Odo Hirsch's *Hazel Green* series (1999-2003) exemplifies fictions that celebrate children's abilities to escape the 'ghetto of dependency in home and school' (Cunningham 1995:188-9). This corpus of Australian children's fictions represents ontological changes in the state of childhood and across the half century and advocates that adults and children inhabit the same socio-cultural spaces: democratic social spaces where difference does not legitimate separation or domination.

## Chapter 2

### **Ozzie kids flee the garden of delight: reconfigurations of childhood subjectivities in Australian children's fiction**

The house called *Children* squatted slap up against the big, two-storeyed terrace called *Anarchy*: narrower, and without an upstairs. They stood in a pleasant tree-filled street in inner Sydney that ran between two busy roads.

The houses looked separate, and once they had been, but a door had been made in their common wall. The door was in the living room of the children's house and led into the adult house in the hallway just before the stairs ... . The beam and posts had been carved in relief with a pattern of large triangles. Someone had written the word DOORWAY on the wall above the door on the children's side.

*Joanne Horniman Sand Monkeys (1991:3)*

The author's textual negotiations with the child about the meaning and nature of childhood are a distinguishing feature of children's books, and an intrinsic part of the critic's terms of reference.

*Peter Hollindale Signs of Childness in Children's Books (1997:12)*

Australian children's literary fictions forthrightly represent and interrogate the various reconceptualisations of the 'child' and 'childhood' that have occurred in the Western world in the late twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Fictions by Nan Chauncy, Patricia Wrightson, Joan Phipson, Ivan Southall, Simon French, Ursula Dubosarsky, Joanne Horniman and Odo Hirsch demonstrate how realist children's texts are potentially a part of the process of cultural transformation and theorising that offers reconfigurations of childhood. In their attempts to dismantle the boundary between adulthood and childhood by representing understandings

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter are published in *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, 13 (2), August, 2003,

of the child as having a contingent agency, children's fictions subvert the conceptualisations of a universal 'proper childhood' as a place apart from adults and the adult world (Cunningham 1995:69). This conceptualisation of childhood is one that, from the eighteenth century onwards, children's literature helped to create (Cunningham 1995:69).

This chapter's second epigraph offers Peter Hollindale's argument that the construction of implied reading positions for children is integral to children's fictions (1997:12). I argue from this that children's literary fictions, that is, writing for children, are potentially a more powerful change agent than the texts produced in the other fields connected to childhood culture where the implied readers are adults. The fictions I discuss here employ the discursive practices of literature to give children access to debates about the power structures operating in Australian society and thus offer child readers an opportunity to participate in debates about childhood both as an idea and as lived experience. The texts I discuss here are for the middle group of readers, a target market aged between ten and fourteen and competent readers of literature. This is the age group referred to as 'children' by Wall (1991:1) and by Kociumbas (1997:ix).

Stephens' (1992) argument that 'the discourse of realism represents significance as frail, contingent, and constructed within social practice' (1992:265) is a pertinent summation of the operation of the realist mode in the 1970s and early 1980s fictions in the corpus that are discussed in this chapter. The historical contextualisation in this study allows for discussion of shifts in realist the modes to be made over the half century. Even in the 1950s social realist fictions distinctions can be made between the way writers use realist conventions. Despite some variations, in these fictions the values espoused are explicit and absolute in closure. 1960s and 1970s fictions reject neat closures that imply resolutions are possible for all situations. New millennial fictions move assert the

possibility of achieving socially just outcomes in a specific socio-cultural context.

However, even in this latest configuration of realism, contingency remains a central dynamic in whether or not child subjects receive just outcomes in issues of adult/child relations.

Bourdieu (2001) argues that a confounding fact for all liberatory movements is that they must confront issues of structural power. This pertains whether the group is an ethnic or religious minority or whether it is a matter of the individual subject positioned as subaltern on account of race, gender, sexuality, disability or age. All such subjects are disempowered and (dis)placed by structures of social life that legitimate certain hierarchies of people as ‘natural’ (Bourdieu 2001:102-6). Bourdieu (2001:119) argues that there is commonly an acceptance by the dominated of the rationale for their subjugation. Bourdieu’s discussion of masculinist societies acknowledges that the ‘[t]heoretical universalism’ (2001:117) of liberal humanist epistemologies structurally disempowers not only women but many social groups (2001:106), among which, I argue, children are a natural inclusion. As with the possibility of narrative reconceptualisations of gender relations (Pennell 2002) so too with the discursive reconfiguration of adult/child relations, attention must be paid to the representations of the relational dimension of adult/child interactions. Effective power shifts in any social space are achieved by altering the structures of relations and not just by subjective change on the part of dominated individuals or groups. Negotiating personal agency and interpersonal connections—intersubjectivity—becomes the challenge. Narrativising this becomes the concern of children’s literary fictions that disrupt the dominant metanarratives of childhood.

The shifting power differential in adult-child relationships is a focus for Davies (1989) where poststructuralist arguments frame her research with preschoolers’ responses to reading pro-feminist picture books. Davies (1989) argues that ‘[m]uch of the adult world

is not consciously taught to children, is not contained in the content of their talk, but is embedded in the language, in the discursive practices and the social and narrative structures through which the child is constituted as a person, as a child and as male or female' (1989:4). Unlike these unconscious processes by which the child's habitus (Bourdieu 2001:55-6) is acquired from the adult world, literary fictions are narrative structures, intentionally representing the interactions and intersubjective relationships of adults and children. The fictions in the corpus increasingly draw the child reader's attention to the structure, and discursive practices, of narratives and thereby invite an interrogation of fictive child subjectivities and the metanarratives of childhood. Diverse viewpoints are constructed in these fictions. This is important because a part of the shift is the reconceptualisation of 'childhood' from a monologic idealisation, mainly of privileged children, to an acknowledgement of all children's rights to be agential in determining significant aspects of their lives and to the concomitant recognition of their competencies.

Historical, educational, legal and sociological research demonstrates that children hold their own views about childhood (Cleverley 1987:146; Cunningham 1995:190; Hollindale 1997:14-5, 47-8; Kirby 2002:268-70). Davies (1989:140) argues that '[c]hildren display an ease in moving from one discursive framework to another and are not affronted by others doing so, though they do recognise the need for reciprocity of perspectives, that is, that people who are interacting with each other need to be adopting the same discursive structure'. While literary texts engage with conceptualisations of childhood rather than with lived experience, the intention of fictions that employ the realist mode is to admit child readers to a discursive interrogation of lived experience (Stephens 1992:242). That such understandings are available in literary texts reinforces the importance of enabling children's narrative literacy. Representations in Australian children's fictions of a 'proper childhood' in a space separate from adults indicate that children constantly seek to escape from childhood containment. The realist fictions of the post-war era like Joan Phipson's



*Good Luck to the Rider* (1953) and Nan Chauncy's *Tiger in the Bush* (1957) demonstrate this, as does the 1950s focus text for this chapter, Patricia Wrightson's *The Crooked Snake* (1955). The conceptualisation of childhood subjectivity here represents children's tacit submission to domination by adults in the private sphere of the family. Children's unsupervised access to public spaces requires constant negotiation with parents. Ivan Southall's *Bread and Honey* (1970) marks a clear rupture as the separation of the child and adult is challenged as unjust. The child subject's sexual innocence is also repudiated.

*Fin de siècle* reconceptualisations represent child subjects who refuse the limitations—physical or psychological—of adult jurisdiction and who assert rights to participate in the public sphere. The problematising of participation is discussed in Joanne Horniman's *Sand Monkeys* (1991). Odo Hirsch's *Hazel Green* series (1999-2003) exemplifies Bourdieu's (2001:119) 'subversive revolt leading to inversion of the categories of perception and appreciation' in the case of children. These fictions celebrate children's abilities to escape the 'ghetto of dependency in home and school' (Cunningham 1995:188-9). They also articulate the extent to which child containment remains dependent upon the determination of adults to circumscribe the territory of childhood: adults are represented as maintaining the traditional paradigm of adult/child separation fiercely, often with explicit strategies of domination; others assume it unthinkingly. However, there are many adults represented who promote the competence and independence of the young, valuing them as contributors to the life of the community.

## **Reconceptualisations of childhood**

The convergence of arguments from very different scholarly fields in the new millennial moment suggests the gradual dismantling of the boundary separating childhood from adulthood. Hugh Cunningham (1991, 1995) examines the transformations of both the lived experiences and the conceptualisations of childhood through to the *fin de siècle*. By the

beginning of the twentieth century childhood was conceptualised as a 'universal value' (1991:233). The most prized attributes of the child, Cunningham (1991:233) argues, were 'the mirror-image of those held to be desirable in the adult world' so that 'childhood should be properly happy and free while protected and dependent' (1991:6-7). Throughout the twentieth century the conceptualisation of a 'proper childhood' became increasingly politicised and children in the Western world were represented as 'the most valuable asset a nation had' (Cunningham 1995:172). In Australia, as in the Western world generally, the realisation of this ideal of childhood as a 'universal experience' came closest to being achieved in the immediate post-war period. However, Kociumbas (1997:194, 215) argues that in Australia the experience was strongly gender differentiated.

Cunningham (1995:190) argues of the *fin de siècle* period that 'to a much greater extent than in previous centuries, child-rearing has become a matter of negotiation between parent and child, with the state and other agencies monitoring the process'. He argues that early twentieth-century reformers envisioned 'the century of the child' this way:

[t]heir overriding aim was to map out a territory called 'childhood' and put in place frontier posts which would prevent too early an escape from what was seen as desirably a garden of delight. Within this garden children would be cared for and would 'acquire the habit of happiness'. In the second half of the century, it has been the sense of an erosion or even disappearance of childhood which has dominated discussion, mostly related to the power of the media and to the forces turning children into consumers. (1995:164)

Cunningham, then, finds significant change to the extent that he suggests that 'child' and 'childhood' have been reconceptualised. This reconceptualisation shifts away from monologic idealisations of childhood. The latter typically employs tropes that represent the child as either a pampered pet or a plant to be cultivated (1995:188; also Aronson & Bengt:194-200; Franklin 2002:17). The implications of these tropes are that adult

interactions with children resemble those of either a gardener or an animal trainer. Both tropes imply a hierarchical relationship where adults hold power and have full responsibility for children until they reach 'maturity'.

Like Cunningham (1995:185), Bailey (1993:151-66) argues that the reconceptualisation of the global community's definition of childhood was formalised with the United Nations' *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990), which quickly received widespread endorsement. Article 5 of the Convention enjoins all lawful authorities with duty of care for a child to assist her or him in 'the exercise' of her or his rights. It also requires that both the state and parents acknowledge the 'evolving capacities' of the child. While acknowledgement of the rights of the child in terms of 'provision' and 'protection' are unproblematic, the child's right to 'participation' remains unrealised and even contested (Wringe 1995:19). That is, there is no opportunity for children to be agential in their relationships with adults nor to function as autonomous, equal subjects with entitlements to participate in the society's public sphere. Thus, contemporary reconceptualisations of childhood imply subversions of the traditional hierarchical power relations between adults and children and this causes alarm (Cunningham 1995:182). Little wonder that Cunningham's (1998:1195) review of the histories of childhood wryly describes the field of childhood studies as 'lively'. Cunningham (1998:1196) delineates three divergent trajectories that historians of childhood follow. Two of these, the recording of contextualised lived experiences of children in specific temporal frameworks and the family strategy research, are of less significance to children's literary studies than the third trajectory. This concerns the cultural construction of images, perceptions, conceptions, ideas and idealisations of childhood; literature is a major source of these (also Galbraith 2001:194).

Across Western society generally Cunningham (1995) argues that

the root cause of much present concern and angst about childhood is that a public

discourse which argues that children are persons with rights to a degree of autonomy is at odds with the remnants of the romantic view that the right of the child is to be a child. The implication of the first is a fusing of the worlds of the adult and the child, and of the second the maintenance of separation. (190)

So while many regard the ‘demythification and democratisation’ of childhood (Metcalf 1997:50), especially since the 1960s, as a progressive and socially just change, others vehemently oppose it. Any advocacy of children escaping from the ‘garden of delight’ — where ‘the right of the child is to be a child’ — threatens the concept of a ‘proper childhood’ of dependence, innocence (especially sexual), play and education (Cunningham 1995:188; Franklin 2002:17). Both the ‘angst’ and assumptions of the ‘maintenance of separation’ are certainly evident in academic texts, from Neil Postman’s ubiquitous *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982) to Henry A. Giroux’s *Stealing Innocence: Corporate Culture’s War on Children* (2000), both of which deal with the lived experiences of children. Postman’s text introduces the trope of ‘disappearance’ to discussions and blames ‘the power of the media’, particularly television, for the erosion of adult/child boundaries and the corruption of childhood innocence. Giroux’s concern is with globalisation and corporatism that, he argues are, as Cunningham stated, ‘the forces turning children into consumers’. Postman does not regard the idea of childhood innocence as problematic whereas in the *fin de siècle* historical context Giroux (2002:2) does. These texts demonstrate the contemporary paradigmatic shift from Postman’s advocacy of the maintenance of the boundary between adulthood and childhood as implicitly and explicitly a ‘natural’ and ‘proper’ separation—a view that is evident in many disciplines concerned with children’s culture—to Giroux’s (2002:2) argument that the adult/child power hierarchy is a social construction and that the assumptions of separation may in fact be undermining children’s welfare. Even research that argues for less oppressive childhood practices remains wedded to the adult/child binary with the power balance continuing to be

with the adult.

The title of Galbraith's 'Hear My Cry: A Manifesto for an Emancipatory Childhood Studies Approach to Children's Literature' (2001) expresses the angst that Cunningham mentions. For Galbraith, childhood is a fixed signifier, as the phrase 'the truth of childhood' indicates (191), and this reifies and naturalises rather than problematises conceptualisations of childhood. By invoking Habermas (1968) and de Mause (1974) Galbraith employs paradigms that I find inadequate for the investigation of the contemporary social structures impinging upon children. Galbraith's paper demonstrates that in discussions of childhood theory and practice it is essential to acknowledge the historicity of conceptualisations of childhood and also their socio-cultural specificity. Galbraith (2001:192) acknowledges her confusion when she describes her position as 'cobbled together'.

Cunningham's (1995:189) conclusion is that from their mid-twentieth century perspective, scholars like Phillipe Ariès (1962) were quite correct to trace a history of childhood over centuries that shows 'an increasing differentiation between adults and children'. He finds that Ariès' rhetoric of childhood as a period of 'quarantine' (1962:397) is justified over that period of time. However from a *fin de siècle* perspective Cunningham (1995:189) finds this trend of separation 'has gone into reverse' and that there is 'an increasing disjuncture between the romantic ideal and the lived reality' (1995:190). Some aspects of this trend result from changes in adult life-patterns while others devolve from shifts in socio-cultural policies that impact on family life. Of equal importance is that children themselves 'have begun to break out of the ghetto of dependency in home and school to which they had been assigned' (Cunningham 1995:188-9; also Kociumbas 1997:194, 230-1).

Like Cunningham's history of Western childhood, Kociumbas' (1997) Australian study discusses the trend that leads to the fusion of the worlds of adults and children.

Where Cunningham employs the discourse of colonialism—‘territory’, ‘frontier posts’—to describe the early twentieth century childhood conceptualisations, Kociumbas (1997:194-215) uses the postcolonial trope of ‘decolonisation’ to describe the shifts in childhood paradigms in Australia since World War II. She uses the term’s denotation to describe the changes in the lived experiences of Australian girls and boys and the term’s connotations to map the influence of changing conceptualisations of childhood on Australian sociological, educational and cultural policies. These impinge upon matters such as the contexts of family life and income levels, schooling and the public/private boundary that (de)limits the life experiences of children in a community (also Cunningham 1998:1198).

Mackay’s study (1993:74-7) mentions childhood briefly but his arguments concur with Kociumbas’s (1997) study and with Cunningham’s findings (1995, 1998): conceptualisations of childhood are bound to change with ‘redefinitions of gender roles, marriage and the family’ (Mackay 1993:74). Children are increasingly significant to the family and ‘parenting’ seems to be one area of social life where the necessity of emotional commitment is uncontentious. Who should be required to provide this emotional commitment remains an open question.

Significant critical works in the field of children’s literature published in the mid-1990s tend to the maintenance of adult/child separation. Typifying the British empiricist approach to children’s literature, Peter Hunt (1994:5) adheres to a liberal humanist paradigm when he writes that ‘Perhaps the most satisfactory generalization is that childhood is the period of life which the immediate culture thinks of as being free of responsibility and susceptible to education’. This monologic conception of the dependent child subject places Hunt’s criticism in the conservative, separatist camp. The child is denied any productive capacity and this conception of childhood, devolving from Jean Jacques Rousseau, belies the lived experiences of many children. For Hunt, the unitary reading child subject is someone who ‘in terms of life and books’ has ‘not reached the

theoretical plateau upon which mature readers can be said to operate in mutual understanding'. There is no recognition that such a definition offers a deficit view of child subjectivity that assumes childhood is a time of incompetence (Franklin 2002:19). Hunt's argument employs an outdated Piagetian developmental framework, a model that Nodelman (1992:30-1) critiques, summarising the various limitations of Piaget's experimental strategies, intellectual foundations and hermeneutics.

Peter Hollindale (1997) offers an extended empiricist argument for the maintenance of 'proper childhood'. He attempts to move beyond the problem of the construction of the 'child' as 'other' to the adult by the introduction of the term 'childness' into discussions. Despite Hollindale's innovative intention, this maintains both 'child' and 'childhood' as monologic, homogeneous essence and argues for an essence or 'natural' state of childhood rather than seeing it as a shifting social construction.<sup>2</sup> It assumes and maintains the separation of children and adults. The perceived need for a text such as Hollindale's in fact suggests that the reconceptualisation has already taken hold. Unitary descriptions of childhood as lived experience or as conceptualisation are of course mythic and Cunningham (1995:2) argues that it is necessary to look at 'country, social classes and both genders' to examine actual childhood experiences in specific historical contexts. Literary representations of gendered childhood experience, about which Cunningham asserts the need for more work (1998:1202), is examined in the national context in the chapters that follow. Boyhood is the focus in Chapter 4 and girlhood is the focus of Chapter 5.

The critical tradition of Australian children's literature in the post-war decades assumes the monologic 'truth of childhood', often with no recognition of the conflation of the differing ideological traditions of childhood so that all are discussed as 'natural' rather than as social constructions. Saxby's *A History of Australian Children's Literature 1941-1970* captures this when he writes of 'the ongoing and changeless inner life of childhood'

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<sup>2</sup> Mike Cadden notes this confusion in Hollindale's argument in 'Speaking to both Children and to Genre: Le

(1971:90). Saxby's (1971:3) romanticism is evident when he argues that successful children's writers '... write primarily for children alive, yet fully developed within themselves'. Romanticism's assumption of separation is evident here: '[t]he writer that will speak to all generations is the one who has kept intact his own youth and yet who can, by perceptive observation, get beneath the skin of the child today' (1971:66). No equivocation about childhood as a separate state is evident even in Saxby's (1971) description of the individual's social development in family and community. Themes of separation, romanticism and Lockean training model of childhood are evident in the following:

At their best family stories re-create the unsophisticated pleasures of childhood so that children can recognise their own worlds and adults can look back with satisfaction to their past. By sharing secrets among themselves, and by keeping their society a closed one exclusive of adults, children establish their personalities and tentatively try out roles they will later assume in reality. (1971:89)

This argues that the separation of the worlds of child and adult is absolute and that the boundary between them is maintained by both adults and child story participants. The examination of *The Crooked Snake*, below, validates Saxby's argument in the post-war period. The study of the 1950s and 1960s fictions undertaken here indicates that child participants are represented as involved in a great range of sophisticated activities, yet implicit in both the fictions and the critical discussions is the idea that there is something inauthentic about childhood experiences and that children cannot effect material and structural change in the social order. The 1960s fictions that show childhood as no longer 'a garden of delight' are described in derogatory terms as failing to represent the 'truth of childhood' and its learned habit of 'happiness'. In the last decade of the century Saxby (1993) records a different world where he admits that there are 'those adults who fear the



disappearance of childhood' and who 'see a breaking down of the differences between child and adult' (1993:9) but this issue is not pursued. The sentence implies that Saxby is not one of those who sees that childhood as a separate space is disappearing.

Adult/child power is also represented this way in children's fictions of the 1970s and 1980s (Metcalf 1997:52). Stephens (1992:255) examines a corpus of texts from this period that includes Australian fictions, and he finds that for child participants 'the struggles against adult power will not eventuate in structural change'. Metcalf (1997:50) argues similarly of the 1970s that 'children's literature constituted an arena for assertiveness training of both author and reader. Authors assumed the role of children's advocates and spoke largely *for* children as they let children speak up in their fiction. Children's literature simply modelled behaviour to be emulated'. The discursive strategies of these fictions make child disempowerment clear to readers and advocate that personal growth comes from the child's changing subjectivity as she or he gains knowledge about the operations of adult power and how to conform to its structures. My assumption here is that subjectivity is the focus of Western narratives (Bal 1997:178; Rimmon-Kenan 1996:2). McCallum (1999:7) also examines a large number of literary fictions from the 1980s and early 1990s, including some Australian fictions and some for younger readers, and finds that the fictions of childhood continue to represent it as a separate space and that

insofar as childhood and adolescence are typically seen as transitional stages leading (ideally) from a solipsistic childhood to an intersubjective adulthood, narrative representations of maturation are inscribed with ideological assumptions about the nature and possibilities of subjectivity. (1999:8-9)

So childhood and adolescence remain separate spaces from adulthood with a presumption of adult maturity and of deficient child subjectivities. From this then it seems that the literary dissolution of the relation of domination means that there is a need for the deployment of narrative strategies that reconfigure child subjectivity so that it is not a

deficit model and to transform representations of adult /child relations so that empowerment of the child occurs. Further, there is a need to represent the possibility of mutuality and reciprocity in intersubjective relationships between adults and children. Stephens (1992:286) writes that 'The effect is to advocate an ideological perspective deeply embedded in Western social practice: the self is an amalgam of all its experiences and of every other with which it has significant contact, but essential selfhood is a negotiated separateness'. This position is problematised in children's fictions by the *fin de siècle*. Postmodernism's narcissistic and fragmented subjectivities and quests for identity supplant the 'progressive' fictions of the 1960s and early 1970s counter-culture. By the 1990s representations of multifaceted subjectivities in 'transformative' fictions where individual participants struggle for consistency in the ways they are valued by others: here the subject's awareness of his or her separation from others leads to a valuing of connections that supersedes the desire for 'negotiated separateness' (Touraine 1995:233-5).

Of later fictions Metcalf (1997:52-3) writes that '[b]ehind the open problematisation of the authorial position lies the democratic idea of the empowerment and power sharing ... authors let readers find their own temporary and unstable solutions in multivalent texts'. Metcalf (1997:52) regards 'multi-voicedness' positively, and regards 'voicelessness' as leaving readers without certainty and hope. The fictions in this corpus are multivoiced and 'frequently elliptical', requiring 'profound attention and cooperation on the part of the reader' (Metcalf 1997:54). The possibilities of social change in the ways that children live in Australia are fictively reconfigured in such transformative fictions. Child participants are aware of diverse interpellations; their intellectual capacities and knowledge of social structures are sophisticated. Increased use of focalisation strategies remains important for effecting ideological change in the representation of subjectivity. S

eparation is not advocated as the ideal way of being in the world for either children or adults. The fictions in the corpus show some child participants have full intersubjectivity

with adults who regard them as competent subjects. Conversely, child participants develop strategies for dealing with adults who hold a deficit model of child subjectivity.

### **Transformative fictions of the *fin de siècle***

Transformative fictions represent the operation of power as the major factor that needs to be addressed in adult/child interactions. Such fictions successfully represent the transformation of the adult/children power hierarchy by foregrounding the relational dimension of children's interactions with adults. This is not only a concern with the representation of the subjectivity of the main child participant(s) but also as central to the primary level storyline. Fictions use narrative strategies such as dialogue to represent child subjects with an evolving capacity for democratic intersubjective relations with adults. This is contingent upon the representation of adult participants who regard children as competent subjects and acknowledge the need for mutuality and reciprocity in their relationships as '[c]onversation becomes the site on which self and other meet, negotiate and embrace ...' (Stephens 1992:269). The fictions that achieve these reconfigurations offer a broad range of participants represented in complex matrices of social values and practices. These narratives typically offer double articulations, that is, representations of the 'normal' or traditional social structures as well as the envisioned new possibilities: that is, they employ the kind of double articulation familiar from feminist fictions (Cranny-Francis 1992:176). The effect is strengthened if many implied reader positions are offered by the text, and readers are assumed to be both boys and girls in an ethnically and culturally diverse community as happens in the *Hazel Green* series as discussions below show.

An examination of Joanne Horniman's *Sand Monkeys* illuminates the literary contestations around the conceptualisation of childhood and adult/child power relations in the new millennial moment. Horniman's fictions typically privilege alternative lifestyles

and non-traditional domestic patterns as their spatio-temporal frameworks. Her fictions undermine traditional idealised arrangements such as nuclear families, often representing them as lonely and isolating (26). There is an advocacy of more open, inclusive, community-oriented domestic organisations that acknowledge the evolving cognitive and practical capacities of children. The limited agency of children is thematically represented in *Sand Monkeys* by the emotional disruption that the child participants experience because of parental decisions about moving house, shifting family homes—only five streets in one case, but in others its intra- or inter-state (1, 11, 14). Max’s family moves the short distance to live in a group home where the family lived when he was a toddler, when he was one of the ‘sand monkeys’ from which the title comes. Although he is not told at the time, his mother wants him to have the chance to know the other ‘sand monkey’, Emma, whose image appears in his childhood photo. Emma has been raised by her devoted father once they leave the group home. Emma remembers losing her surrogate mother—Max’s mother—but Max remains oblivious to their childhood connection for most of the fiction.

Thematically *Sand Monkeys* exhibits a postmodern concern with memory—childhood memories, in this case—and also uses postmodernist literary strategies such as multiple participant focalisers and genre-mixing. As Degli-Esposti (1998:5) writes ‘[m]emory, the archival site of the past, and intertextuality work together to reproduce a collective recollection of the past into the present. A memory game calls into question the attention/participation of the spectator’. Readers take part in such a memory game, as they observe the story participants also engaged in a similar process of unravelling connections and their implications, and discovering which children are the ‘sand monkeys’, photographed playing together in the sand pit. In some respects Emma plays the game more successfully than Max although they need to combine their memories, and involve Monica and Ted, to understand all that happened to them in their pre-school years. The fiction articulates the problems inherent in the ‘intensively privatised

shape' of the Australian social space in the post-war era, as the discussion of the doxic moment, below, shows (Murphy 2000:216). There is an advocacy of more open, inclusive, community-oriented domestic organisations that acknowledge the evolving cognitive and practical capacities of children.

*Sand Monkeys'* concern with the reconceptualisation of childhood is signalled by the metafictional nomenclature of the main participants and, as we will see below, by the symbolic dimension of the fiction's spatial framework. The main participant is named for that most (in)famous fictive child participant, Max, in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), a canonical but originally controversial 1960s picture book. If the reader misses this intertextuality early in the story, it is made explicit later in the fiction (106). Thus alerted to intertextual play, readers may then pick up the fact that Emma and Olivia also have their literary forebears and that they offer contemporary representations of their antecedents' youthful foibles and dilemmas. Emma who knows she has been named after the feminist anarchist Emma Goldman (59) nevertheless is motherless like Jane Austen's Emma and like her must learn that 'The fantasies you weave around people can burden them and hurt you' (107). Max, in the ambiguous Mr. Knightley role, writes to Socrates that he had better not trifle with Emma 'Because although she is not my sister, she is, sort of' (120). Olivia, economically privileged, world traveller, derives from Shakespeare's duchess in *Twelfth Night* even to the disruption of heterosexual norms (101-3).

Jane Doonan (2001:751-2) writes that *Where the Wild Things Are* was responsible for 'provoking a major debate about the content of children's books in the 1960s' as it 'was thoroughly subversive in depicting behaviour and expressing feelings not generally approved of by adults' as appropriate fictive representations of child subjectivity. The primary participant is a naughty child who spends his 'time out' punishment in his bedroom becoming the 'king of all the wild things' as Emma recalls (106). After his time-

out, 'on his own terms, [Max] returns to the real world, sleepy, hungry and at peace with himself' (Doonan 2001:752) so that he is once again contained in his family's regulatory social structure. The Max in *Sand Monkeys* subverts the containment of the original story's closure.

Significantly, Max chooses his literary name for himself (106). The implication is that the wildness he experiences is frustration at the loneliness, boredom and restraint of the traditional nuclear household where even the presence of siblings is increasingly unlikely.<sup>3</sup> Only after his decision to live independently from his parents does he decide to return to his given name of Sasha. The closure subverts the traditional paradigms of familial ties and dependence and asserts the child's desire for autonomy and connections with many people. Unlike Sendak's Max, this Max/Sasha flees—when Monica and Brian decide, once again, to leave the shared household and return to their own private house (117), he decides that he will stay behind. He wants release from the restrictions and isolation of the traditional nuclear family household in order to maintain his connections with the people of differing ages and interests in the shared household. He enjoys the company of younger children and discovers 'what it was like to have a sibling' (48). He also has access to numerous adults with disparate social, political, intellectual and artistic pursuits.

In Max the reader sees the literary representation of Cunningham's (1995:185) claim that in the late twentieth century 'children have demanded and received an earlier access to the adult world; they have not been willing to accept the attempt to prolong childhood to the late teenage years'. He argues that this posits a return to the historical norm of childhood ending at about fourteen years. Difference is asserted even here as

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<sup>3</sup> The representation of single child families is a literary strategy that allows for a greater range of representations of contrasting familial contexts and of adult/child interactions. Generally this enables the representation of diversity and plurality in the community or neighbourhood. It enhances the possible dialogism of the fiction with regard to childhood ideologies. While a decline in the number of children in a family reflects actual social change in Australian social life, the depiction of single children in literature overstates the case so it is a significant literary convention.

Emma insists that she wants to relocate yet again with her father, despite Max's urging her to stay in the shared household because having a sibling relationship has proved emotionally satisfying, at the same time that it has expanded (94).

In *Sand Monkeys* the limited agency of children is thematically represented by the emotional disruption that the child participants experience due to parental decisions about relocating, whether this involves moving five streets or inter-state (1,11,14). Max perceives a sense of oppression and the move at first seems a pointless exercise (8). His parents have an ulterior motive that they believe is in Max's best interests, but exercise their power over him by withholding information. The primary storyline represents secrecy and the lack of democratic decision-making as poor strategies in intersubjective relationships with children as well as adults. Max's parents, Monica and Brian, return to live in an inner city terrace house that is 'really two houses side-by-side' in Sydney: 'One is a children's house, and the other is an adult house' (1) and it is 'a kind of shared household' (36). This alternative domestic arrangement is given historical legitimacy when Max tells his intrigued friend Olivia that it has 'been here like this for years' because he and his parents first lived there when he was only a baby (36). The reader is told of the move in an embedded text that opens the fiction, a letter that Max writes to his friend Socrates. His parents have relocated him to Brisbane and thus interfered with his friendship with Max (1). The story of the shared household then moves to the extradiegetic level of narration in the description of the fiction's spatial framework, as a part of the narrative's orientation. The peculiarity of these houses wearing labels—'Children', 'Anarchy' and 'DOORWAY'—and the penumbra of associations for each of these labels, cue readers to the symbolism and intertextuality implicit in the description. It reflects the 'ever increasing surplus of texts' typical of postmodern productions (Kraidy 1998:57). If the reader misses the cues here, this level of meaning is understood retrospectively when the spatial framework becomes an explicit part of another embedded text, a dialogue between Max

and Olivia (36-7).

The paragraphs in the first epigraph to this chapter contain the description of the houses that symbolically represents the traditional conceptualisations of childhood. These are constructed to allow their subversion as the storylines develop, so are the first part of the fiction's double articulation of childhood. Here the adjacent houses suggest the explicit boundaries that traditionally separate the space of the child and the adult. The public discourses of oppositionally constructed childhood and adulthood are signified by 'The houses looked separate, and once they had been'. This refers to the advocacy of separation of the child in the traditions of Locke, Rousseau and the Puritans, although each of these models conceives different educative purposes and processes for the separate space of the child (Cunningham 1995:62-5). Significantly the children's space is labelled in an explicit way that suggests its meaning is uncomplicated and unitary. This is denied in the storylines of all the child participants in the fiction. It indicates the need to speak of 'childhoods' within a culture as well as across cultures. Traditionally the child is always deficient, incompetent and limited and so is denied autonomy and participation in social life. In everyday life the physical differences between the adult and child are usually the clearest markers of difference. The space in *Children* is 'much smaller' than that of the adults and the discourse represents it as being more confined and less elegant because it 'squatted' next to the adult house. The implications of 'narrower, and without an upstairs' suggest the regulation and surveillance to which children are subject and the general sense of childhood as a deficient state. The phrase 'just before the stairs' suggests that choices and opportunities and autonomy only come after exiting childhood and ascending into the adult world of infinite possibilities. The adult space being labelled *Anarchy* connotes the heterogeneous and contested nature that is legitimate for adults who are implicitly powerful and agential. Max later tells Olivia that the word does not mean 'chaos' or 'a bold social experiment' in the context of this household but rather 'youthful idealism' (36).



Yet despite their differences the houses have ‘their common wall’ and a doorway has been put in place. The doorway, as used in the second paragraph of the epigraph above, is a conventional motif for access, opportunity and demystification. Here of course the word ‘DOORWAY’ functions metonymically to suggest the need for children to find the door, the entry into adulthood. Intertextually, the capitalisation of the word recalls *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* with its bottle with ‘DRINK ME beautifully printed on it in large letters’ (1865/1998:17). In the same episode there is a hall with locked doors all around which reminds readers of the hallway in *Children* whose doorways lead off to all of the children’s bedrooms. Alice drinks the potion that changes her size in an attempt to escape ‘the dark hall’ through the door that is only fifteen inches and enter ‘the loveliest garden you ever saw’ (17). The garden remains unattainable for Alice as it does for the children of varying ages represented in *Sand Monkeys*. Olivia’s curiosity about the household’s organisation, its members and its architecture lead to her offering Max information about the wooden carvings around the interconnecting doorway between the two houses. In the dialogue between them, mentioned above, the doorway is foregrounded and the territory of childhood is represented as marked by aesthetically appealing frontier posts. These posts are substantial and not meant to be removed as the repetition of the word ‘thick’ suggests, but the ‘beam and posts had been carved in relief with a pattern of large triangles’. The posts of the doorway function in the metadiegetic narration as an intertextual link in the secondary story level. Olivia who has been to Paris recognises the ornamental style as imitative of the sculptor, Constantin Brancusi (37). Brancusi’s romantic inclination with regard to childhood is well known from his statement that ‘When we are no longer children we are already dead’. The fact that the artistic façade is on the children’s side reminds the reader of romanticism’s childhood which always had more to say about conceptualisations than lived experience (Cunningham 1995:77). In contrast to the other traditional deficit models of childhood, romanticism constructs this period as the

best time of life and ideally as a time of happiness. The child is imbued with special qualities and attributes that make its sensibilities superior to those of adults. It argues that we must keep this time alive within us so that childhood is a 'spring for the whole of life' (Cunningham 1995:73). The child is seen as 'a force of innate goodness which could rescue embittered adults' (Cunningham 1995:74) and '[a]t its heart was a reverence for, and a sanctification of childhood' (ibid). The child is attributed with superior imaginative powers and a 'perception of beauty and of truth' superior to that of adults (Cunningham 1995:73). The stories of Emma's disrupted childhood (14, 64) and Sunny's separation from his father (62) give the lie to romanticism's sentimental 'child-life' of the closure in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* where childhood's emotional experiences are reductively typified as 'simple sorrows and simple joys' (1865/1998:137).

The individual's negotiations with the public discourses of childhood and the private experiences of domestic life are symbolically represented in the third paragraph that follows the two quoted in the epigraph and offer closure to this spatial orientation. Door locks and keys again signal intertextual links with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

The front door lock of *Children* stuck: you had to jiggle the key to get it to open, until it suddenly swung inward with ease. And then the lock didn't like to give up the key without a struggle, so that by the time you'd managed to wrest it away you felt as though you'd done battle. It was typical that it never occurred to anyone simply to fix the lock. (3)

Conventionally the key symbolises power, mastery and dominion but this is not the case with the house. There is no 'golden key' waiting on a glass table, and if there is, as Alice found, it will always be just out of reach (1865/1998:16). Children 'jiggle the key' when they negotiate the 'social and narrative structures', as Davies says, that fence the space of childhood. The door lock is so poorly maintained that even having the key is no guarantee of easy access. The inference is that the inevitable passing from the state of childhood into

adulthood occurs with more rather than less pain but as the transition is inevitable, so 'it never occurred to anyone simply to fix the lock'. Children remain separate, in a place of 'quarantine' or for a privileged few, 'a garden of delight'. Max becomes Sasha/Alexander (the Great) as he escapes the territory of childhood, no longer accepting his agency as contingent upon parental decisions. The need for structural change is argued in 'It was typical that it never occurred to anyone simply to fix the lock' but using the door and jiggling the keys is what matters.

The literary space of childhood that *Sand Monkeys* constructs for Max, Emma, Olivia, Sunny and Mango is 'unthinkable' in terms of the doxic moment of this study. The fiction's representations of the possibilities of adult/child intersubjectivity, the setting for family life, the parenting arrangements, the experiences of the child participants in the storylines and the narrative modes too, are a far cry from the literary childhood spaces in the post-war fictions. In the next section of this chapter I will demonstrate that, where in *Sand Monkeys* the separation of the space of the child and the adult is clearly under attack, in Australian post-war children's fictions the dominant 'climate of belief' represents proper childhood being a separate space from adulthood. This is the case for *Good Luck to the Rider* (1953), *The Crooked Snake* (1955) and *Tiger in the Bush* (1957).

## **Doxic moments embracing difference**

Each of the fictions, *Good Luck to the Rider*, *The Crooked Snake* and *Tiger in the Bush*, offers variations on the model of the family story genre, of childhood and family habitus. They suggest the diversity of lived childhood experiences and the different views about the nature and purpose of adult/child separation. For instance, in *Good Luck to the Rider* and *The Crooked Snake* there is no possibility of democratic intersubjective relations between adults and children. However *Tiger in the Bush* represents limited intersubjective possibilities in the Romantic tradition with the parents' enjoyment of taking part in the

mutually satisfying activities, the singing, the playing, the exploring. They also fulfil the child's need, at times, for the parent to be the 'significant other', the confidante (33-4, 78). Complexity is indicated by the differing literary constructions of the Australian socio-cultural context. Children effect material change—and even structural change in *The Crooked Snake*—but generally plans and activities are devised and executed secretly, in deference to the adults' limited belief in the right of the child to be independent and competent in the public realm. The contrasts they offer suggest difference in families' socio-economic status that impacts upon attitudes to the environment and on parental aspirations for their children. Despite the different attitudes to parent/child interactions, separation is 'natural', the doxic ideology of the child's right to be free of responsibility is observed in prosperous families but poorer children are not as free; play and school are the key markers of this childhood space. The rigid separation is not only imposed by adults but accepted unquestioningly by children who understand that they manage their everyday experiences within their garden or place of quarantine.

The contrasts between these three fictive representations of childhood ideologies and practices validate John Murphy's (2000) revisionist historiography. Murphy (2000:5) critiques earlier assessments of the post-war era in Australia as a 'seamless experience of prosperity and complacency'. This denies the 'complexity and turbulence' prevalent especially until 1955, the time of the greatest Cold War fears (2000:219). Murphy (2000:221) argues that the citizenry withdrew from 'a world understandably seen as uncertain, complex and often frightening'. His interest is the discourses that shape the middle-classes during the Prime Ministership of Sir Robert Menzies (2000:6). This study supports Murphy's findings, adding evidence from another relevant discursive field, especially as the implied child reader forms part of a middle-class audience. Murphy (2000:6) argues that at this time the 'middle class' was a very broad group achieved by the possibility of self-inclusiveness because the only requirement for membership was

adherence to an ideology of 'respectability, self-reliance and responsibility'. Australian citizenship adopted 'an intensely privatised shape' (2000:216) as the post-war marriage 'boom' meant 'a profound shift in which men and women made substantial investment—both emotional and material—in the idea of domesticity' (2000:21). This hopeful investment in the nuclear family is clear in the children's fictions, in the representations of childhood space and child subjectivity. Saxby (2002:789) describes the fictive social spaces of that time: 'almost invariably the family are not only middle-class, happy and united, but they are nuclear, ... Traditional patriarchal and maternal roles are maintained, with the children being shown as in the process of acquiring autonomy'. This unitary representation reflects the contemporary mythology of post-war period stability and financial self-sufficiency (Murphy 2000:2-3). Murphy (2000:54) argues that the insularity of family groups is a political and personal strategy and that 'For both men and women, citizenship was defined less by being assertive than by being self-regulating, less by rights than by responsibilities. Citizenship ultimately had its roots in the pursuit of private happiness in their domestic commitments'. Murphy (2000:25) argues further that '[c]ivility was predicated on a limited idea of the public realm, giving greater emphasis to the freedom of individuals to act without constraint, so long as they did so with a civility regulated from within ... the tenor of restrained communities of self-help, but also the social distance represented by the insistence on privacy, in which strangers could be tolerated, if not respected'.

Among the shared commitments that Australian citizens publicly advocated was a concern for the 'future welfare and happiness' of children (Murphy 2000:24-5). While Murphy (2002:22) argues that the 'Australian way of life' was largely about suburban living, the children's fictions uniformly represent rural spatiality in a literary tradition already well established as a marketable product in Great Britain as well as in Australia (Niall 1984:216). Despite this conservatism these literary fictions reflect the social and

political tensions of the public sphere. Saxby (1988:492) cites Manyweather's (1982) view that links *The Crooked Snake* to 'the English holiday novel' with the implications of a genre fiction specifically designed to a formula and for entertainment. I argue against such a reading and find that it exemplifies the Australian post-war ideology that Murphy (2000) delineates.

*The Crooked Snake* articulates and ironises the boundaries between the space of adulthood and childhood. It is a significant fiction because the separation is drawn to the reader's attention by the child participants rather than by the narrator or the adult participants. Irony distances competent readers from the reading position of the 'good' child, allowing them to question the representations of childhood's normative truths in the post-war context. The fiction highlights the necessary deceptions of child subjects if they wish to appear as exemplars of the normative idealisations of the child. A major problem for the children is gaining parental approval: 'The members turned their minds to the job ahead—the job of managing their parents' (54). For instance, the secret Society of the Crooked Snake's fourth rule is 'No member is allowed to do anything to cause trouble with Parents and Citizens' (23-4). The classification of adults into either 'Parents' or 'Citizens' positions adults as 'other', and exemplifies the child's construction of the adult/child separation. The categories derive from the name of the community support groups for public schools in New South Wales, the 'Parents and Citizens' Associations'. The local Tarrawong Central School Association features in the orientation and closure of the fiction (1, 153) and provides the narrative frame for the story: the fiction opens with the school's students writing notes to inform parents about the next meeting (1) and the closure has the President of the P & C rewarding the society members at the school's annual prize-giving night (152). Respect for authority and the right to exert authority are the unchallenged doxa of *The Crooked Snake* so the children's agency is contingent upon an appearance of compliance.

The fear of loss of independence operates as a constant call to order for them. This means that both Parents and Citizens need to be 'managed' (23-4). Attributes that aid in management, by gaining adult cooperation and trust, are valued: 'Jenny herself had big blue eyes and sleek hair, and a smile which, when she liked, had a useful effect on Parents and Citizens' (4). And they are not above mocking the farming people's tendency to use the phrase 'Starve the crows' (60, 63, 120). The relationships with citizens often first occur outside parental knowledge. The represented gravitas of masculine Citizens is intimidating, they growl and are gruff and surprise the children if they smile (149). The legitimate photographic project of a survey of the district's industries requires genuine connections with local adults who advise and cooperate to enable the best information and access to all the places and sites that interest the society members:

'Deserted country,' sighed Squeak with satisfaction.

'Not quite,' said Jenny softly. She was looking across the paddock. 'There's a Parent or Citizen on a horse.'...

'Citizen, I'd say,' muttered Pete. 'Looks too craggy to be a Parent.' (22)

Mr. Ferguson's craginess refers euphemistically to his age and he, in his turn, refers to the children in ageist terms when he asks why Dad 'cannot keep his pups at home instead of letting them wander around the country leaving people's gates open' (40). Age is used against the children by their enemy, a gang of transgressive masculine subjects, that is, 'Miller's mob', teenage boys who insult the Society members by referring to them as 'the kindergarten' and 'kiddies' (111, 113). There is an expectation of disempowerment, if not abjection in any dealings with adults. Thus, the children display a subaltern bodily hexis: lowered eyes (153), embarrassment (95), timidity (153) and a general lack of confidence. For instance, they are 'startled and confused' when Mr. Robertson speaks to them and are then surprised to be offered help in the form of a trip on the cream collection lorry (52-3). Children and adults both employ separation tactics and thus maintain the adult/child

boundary. There is also the sense that there is panoptic surveillance of activities even in apparently isolated places. The children, to their chagrin, are observed unawares a number of times by 'Citizens' who are working or pursuing leisure activities nearby. For instance, there is Mr. Ferguson's accusation that they left a paddock gate unlocked (40). Another unseen Citizen, trapping rabbits nearby, confirms that he saw them secure the gate (96-7). Another time Miller's mob overhear their conversation about the location of the sanctuary (63). Nevertheless there is the representation of the concomitant expectation on the children's part that authorities will be available to maintain order, that stability will be reestablished when adults arrive whether they are parents, citizens, police or forestry officers (148) or even the Minister for Lands (100).

The 'good child' is ironised as someone who, as aware of his/her subaltern positioning, lives as if he/she is the compliant subject of domination. In fact the child operates agentially beyond surveillance as far as possible. Thus activities and movements are constantly negotiated with parents and extraordinary activities need extraordinary pleading:

... But when all of this was done there was still a lot of time to pass.

They used some of it on the Parents. 'Before daylight, Spike!' said Mrs.

Kemp. 'But I don't think I want you riding about the country in the dark.'

'Just this once Mummy. And after that we'll stay in all holidays, if you want us to.'

'At five o'clock, Jenny!' cried Mrs. Conway. 'Isn't that too much of a good thing? Why must it be so early?'

'I can't tell you, Mother, but you'll know when it's over. And the others'll all be there.'

'You'd do it yourself, Dad,' John promised steadily.

'Yes, but would I want you to do it?' (133)



The reader sees each child demonstrate a different form of parental management strategy: cajoling, reassuring or bargaining. John, the oldest member of the group and a boy, makes the most sincere and apparently high minded argument in his assurance that in what he desires to do, the son seeks to emulate the father. The tactic fails and his father is entirely unimpressed because John's argument assumes that his father approves of a child acting like an adult male when John is a child. The final line of the dialogue asserts both separation and adult/child difference: what is appropriate for adults is not generally appropriate for children. Interestingly this episode constructs the adult/child hierarchy as more significant than the gender hierarchy. Usually the children are aware of this as the dominant hierarchy and rarely transgress it: 'The important thing now,' John warned them, 'is to keep out of any more trouble. Any more of this and the Parents and Citizens will bust the society just when we're getting it organised.' (44). Being 'organised' suggests competence and independence so again John says of their photography project, '... If we're going to do this record we don't want Parents getting into rows with Citizens and keeping us at home' (46). Loss of independence is a powerful incentive for care and submission. All of the children's favourite activities require explicit parental approval:

'There are rules and things to tell you yet,' Jenny pointed out, 'but it's pretty late and we have to be home before dark. We'll have to leave the rest till tomorrow. We're having a field day, going out to the Gorge all day and cooking steaks. You'll be able to come, won't you?'

'I'm pretty sure we can. We'll find out tonight and let you know.' (19)

Typical of its time, the literary discourse—despite the use of contractions in the quoted speech—here seeks to offer models of formal language as well as models of best behaviour. The attributes displayed by the children are the 'post-war shibboleths' of deference towards age and authority, a sense of personal responsibility to community values and respectability (Murphy 2000:219). The private sphere of the 'good' home

ideally produces good citizens for whom the test of maturity is successfully 'becoming one's own policeman' (Murphy 2000:23). By observing rules and seeking permission the children show that they are practising to become good citizens.

More than this, the dialogue shows that in requiring rules for their society the children's habitus values normative codes of behaviour and the ability to be self disciplined. John is the 'captain' of the society (4) and even Roy, just a year younger expects him to have all the answers and to 'lead' (5). Squeak accuses him of 'turning into a Citizen' with his patronising attitude to the welfare of the girls in the fort during the battle with the Dangerous Persons (130). Pete, the youngest, 'proves' himself at the fort and is thrilled to be in cahoots with John in his secret role as the girls' protector (146).

The enemy that confronts the secret society is a 'gang' of older boys, 'Miller's mob'. Avoidance is not enough as these transgressive masculine subjects provoke trouble. They are 'pretty big chaps and rough as bags' (75)—older, bigger, stronger, delinquent (28-9). Social class issues are mobilised as well as literary and sociological stereotypes (33) in the contrasts represented between the children of the society and the boys of the gang. They are not clever enough for high school but are in the 'super primary class' (29). They have a 'lair' (80), rather than a 'headquarters' like the society. The society members read the *Guide to Photography* (78), print and develop photographs while Miller's mob have holiday jobs (79-80), read 'comics' and 'wild west books' (80), smoke cigarettes (82) and kill protected wild life in the nature reserve (103-4). The serious transgressive inclinations are revealed when they shoot at the society members just for fun (29-30). Miller's mob commit two crimes: shooting in the sanctuary and also possessing and using weapons under age (148). They engage in adult behaviours without adult sanction or supervision, and John is quite happy to call their attention to the fact that neither parents nor police will approve of their behaviours (31). These boy participants clearly fail the tests of respectability and 'being one's own policeman'.

Irony lies in the fact that a meaningful and genuinely useful purpose for the Society of the Crooked Snake involves autonomy and displays of competencies and attributes that adults assume children do not possess. The closure of the primary level storyline indicates parental disapproval of many of the society's activities. The rule that the children are made to add to the Society's code states: 'Rule number nine: the society shall not declare war against anyone older than themselves, or armed with dangerous weapons, without the permission of their parents' (150). This is the attempt at containment that the society members predicted and feared. The closure is the children's public recognition by the school for their photographic survey. The principal's speech emphasises that the remarkable feature of the project is that it has been completed 'without any advice or help' from adults (153). The attributes for which the children are being rewarded with new cameras are those of mature persons: initiative, competence and care, creativity, intelligence and photographic skills (153). Metonymically this closure reasserts adult domination throughout the social space. However, in terms of child subjectivity this double exercise in containment is undermined by one of the Kemp twins being given the last word. Thematic closure is privileged rather than primary storyline closure; Squeak 'crowed', 'Just wait till the next holidays' (153). Once again resistance to domination is enunciated but still from the subaltern position. The complexity of the social and subjective implications of the conceptualisation of childhood as a separate space are narratively schematised so that the circularity of attempts to escape the garden of delight are clear to readers. Escape depends upon maturity—that is, competent independent behaviour—but displays of these attributes violate the space of childhood and potentially undermine the adult/child power relation.

The most significant interrogation of the conceptualisation of childhood and adulthood as separate spaces occurs because the Kemp twins, Isabel and Caroline—Squeak and Spike to their peers—are 'a pretty sharp pair' (3) whose impressive capacities are

regularly applied to the subversion of their subaltern position. The convention of twins as 'double trouble' is fairly obviously invoked but also narratively patterns Bourdieu's (2001:119) argument above, that a 'case of subversive revolt leading to inversion of the categories of perception and appreciation' requires the subaltern to reject 'the dominant point of view on themselves'. *The Crooked Snake* is not an interrogative text by any means but it does have an interrogative dimension. Stephens (1992:154) writes that 'The aim of the interrogative text is to focus attention back not just on the relationship of sign to thing but on the social forces which determine what that relationship will be'. To subvert the doxic order, requires that the twins are not sincerely 'good', innocent, deferential or dependent: they understand and manipulate conventional discursive practices and circumvent the operations of adult power. Most importantly, they have confidence in their capacities. For instance, they manage their mother in the town so that they escape her presence in order to buy photographic printing paper and then get to the forestry commission office. They want to enquire about the procedures that regulate the classifications of nature reserves. While at first obediently accompanying their mother, they surreptitiously find out the information they need, until they 'parked Mummy in a frock shop' (96) and then quickly ask permission to do some jobs on their own (88). They manage the Citizen at the Forestry Office with equal skill. Their performance is rehearsed—'Shy and polite, remember'—and Squeak gives the officer 'a pleading look like a lost puppy' (89). The officer assumes that the enquiries are for school exams so they are thereby legitimised as acting within childhood's space. The twins, against the advice of the other members of their society, determine to go to public authorities to have environmental legislation correctly applied to their local sanctuary (99-101). The preservation and re-classification of a nature reserve is the thematic issue and here closure involves the success of their application to the Minister for Lands (100) for a reclassification of the nature reserve that will prevent timber logging. This represents the

children's activism as achieving structural change. Regional environmental concerns are as important here as the Tasmanian landscape is in Chauncy's fictions especially *Tiger in the Bush*, (see in Chapter 5) and indicates Niall's identifying literary spatiality as significant in the Australian children's fictions of this period.

Despite its ironic treatment throughout the text, the separation of the territory of childhood and adulthood underpins the ideological conceptualisation of childhood in *The Crooked Snake*. Assumptions of the 'rightful authority' of patriarchal and parental domination (Murphy 2000:29) inform the social practice of 'good' children who live cognisant of the habitus of their family and community and its demands for self-regulation. They learn that adults in the public and private space will regard independent and competent behaviour with suspicion. While competent readers of literary fiction recognise that the use of irony invites readers to question these normative 'truths of childhood' and highlights the artificiality and hypocrisy often involved in order for child subjects to appear as exemplars of the normative ideals, they will also understand the implication that such an appearance of conformity is pragmatic. The next section of this chapter examines *Bread and Honey*, a progressive fiction of the counter culture of the 1960s and early 1970s. The dangerous disempowerment of the 'good' child subject is under challenge as dependence, submission and naiveté are represented as marks of an unwarranted oppression.

### **Progressive fiction of the counter culture**

In *Bread and Honey* child subjects are represented as interrogating their positionings by adults, as well as by other children. They must decide, often as a result of painful experiences, how they will respond to subaltern positionings and whether or not they will contest adult authority and challenge disempowering social structures. Critical acknowledgement of *Bread and Honey*'s thematic and discursive innovation in the field of children's literature was immediate both internationally and nationally (ABR 1971:123;

Saxby 1971:12; Townsend 1979:186). At the end of the twentieth century, Saxby still describes it as a 'landmark' fiction in Australian children's fiction (1998:158) although the exact nature of its literary achievement remains unexamined, with its paradigmatic shifts only noted in general terms, presumably because the reconceptualisation of childhood subjectivity as sexed remains 'unthinkable'. Narratively the extensive deployment of focalisation strategies, the non-linear narrative development, the non-traditional story existents and outcomes were groundbreaking. Saxby's (1971) contemporary observation was that 'Southall extended the novel form to include mental monologue ...' (12-3) or 'literary selfhood', or the representation of subjectivity. Townsend (1979:186) records the paradigm shift for children's fiction in the relationship between Michael and nine year old Margaret. Saxby (2002:314) assures that there is nothing 'prurient in the encounter' between the children but indicates that the text represents the boy's sexual arousal in the girl's presence. The Children's Book Council Awards judges' report also downplays the sexual significance of the fiction with the assurance that 'the boy's awareness of his own body ... is made in indirect rather than direct statement' (ABR 1971:123). Margaret's interest in sexuality is elided by all commentators. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, fictions like Simon French's *All We Know* and Ursula Dubosarsky's *Bruno and the Crumhorn*, discussed in later chapters, assume that sexual knowledge is a variable part of the socio-cultural space of Australian children. Children are represented as aware of the sex and gender regimes of the family, of the community, and of the traditional metanarratives such as fairy tales. In the Odo Hirsch *Hazel Green* series heterosexual desiring is a factor in the relationships of the children of the Moodey Building.

Sexuality does not enter any children's fictions in the post-war period even though the child participants are finishing primary school; the storyline carefully includes equal numbers of feminine and masculine participants and the thematics emphasise the degendering of the children's activities. Davies (1993) argues that 'Ignorance/innocence in

relation to sexuality has long been one of the primary defining features of childhood, in particular of female childhood' (121) and in the new millennium+ sexual innocence of children is still assumed to be absolute by many adults. Cunningham (1995) argues that while Freud's studies demonstrate that the child is not asexual they make the parenting task more confusing because 'mishandling' childhood sexuality is understood to lead to adult traumas (170). *Bread and Honey's* representation of the literary child as a sexed subject indicates the obfuscation that surrounds embodied pleasures and sexuality for children in Australian society. Michael's emotional conflicts reflect the prohibitions of his time as *Bread and Honey* is part of the testament to the 'iconoclasm of the counter culture' of the 1960s and early 1970s as Gerster and Bassett argue (1991:35-6). The concern of the era with sexual 'permissiveness' is reflected in the fiction's problematising of nudity and sexuality as discussion below demonstrates (Gerster and Bassett 1991:186-7). Townsend (1979) suggests that in *Bread and Honey* 'a recurrent preoccupation with nakedness may also give rise to unease ... Nakedness has strong sexual connotations, and the subject does seem to come up rather frequently. It should be pointed out, however, that another issue is involved in these incidents: that of what is 'natural' and what is stuffily conventional' (1979:187). Southall (1975:9-16) also discusses the importance of the sexuality theme in the fiction.

The spatio-temporal frame for *Bread and Honey's* storyline is the national war commemoration day, Anzac Day, in the township of Deakin Beach. Three families offer social microcosms with contrasting family habitus that represent different socio-economic sites in the social space. Michael is the main focalising participant, the youngest of three brothers in the economically advantaged Cameron family. They possess large symbolic capital in the form of educational achievement and political and scientific connections. Dr Cameron's professional commitments keep him away from caregiving responsibilities which devolve to Michael's eighty-three year old grandmother. Their neighbours, the

Farlows, are a traditional nuclear family and Mrs. Farlow in particular believes that her children are being given a 'proper childhood'. In her opinion Michael's household organisation means that surveillance of health, welfare, personal habits, tidiness and modesty are lax (5, 36-7, 107). This makes her complicit in patriarchal social structures and gender regimes. Michael's Gran, on the other hand, resists aspects of patriarchy's totalising discourses and a subordinated subject position. Michael meets Margaret for the first time quite unexpectedly on the beach that Anzac morning. This meeting of boy and girl alone on the deserted beach enables *Bread and Honey* to challenge the conceptualisation of the 'good child' as sexually innocent and ignorant. Sexual innocence is represented as a harmful fiction and the limited (mis)information many children are given by their families causes anxiety. The narrative processes employed in *Bread and Honey* direct the reader's attention to the regulation of sexual desire in a social order dominated by patriarchal heterosexist metanarratives.

The discussion of the *The Crooked Snake* undertaken in Chapter 3 demonstrates that the fiction explicitly resists many of the traditional gendering expectations for feminine child subjects and thereby constructs an interrogative dynamic with regard to gender. *Bread and Honey* adopts a different strategy in its painstaking representation of the full physical and psychological burden placed on children by the processes of engendered, heterosexist acculturation. Issues of embodiment are the point of departure for this discussion. Children learn very early that the naked body signifies differently in different contexts. Nudity is legitimate in some places, particularly in the private sphere, in the asexual construction of siblings' bodies and of the child's body to the adult carer. For instance, Michael's grandmother will 'barge in on him in the bathroom as if he weren't there' (7) and Margaret and her brother, Phil, regularly see one another naked (82). In public spaces nakedness is 'rude', that is, taboo (7). Michael celebrates the pleasures he derives from the establishment of covert places away from adult scrutiny where he can



explore the sensuality of embodiment. *Bread and Honey* deploys the traditional Australian spatiality of the backyard and the beach as heterotopic spaces. Michel Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia involves spaces that defy fixity and may escape regulation at least temporarily. In the fiction these spaces foreground the (de)regulation of the body and childhood sensuality and sexuality.<sup>4</sup> The potential for pleasure offered by heterotopic spaces is fraught because adult scrutiny is never far away and fear of public shame is a potent repressive force although, of course, transgression is exhilarating:

Rolling over and over in the rain, driving out all unhappy feelings he didn't want ... even shivering deliciously with nerves because it was not like being down on Deakin Beach after dark. There was danger here that was hardly ever there; Grandma's window not fifteen feet away, the Farlows' fence not twenty feet away, the street not sixty feet away. *Anyone* could walk by now; *anyone* could see. It was like hanging by the fingertips over a hundred foot drop. (9-10)

The beach after dark and the backyard early in the morning have the potential to be illicit sensual playgrounds. Readers are alerted to the ways children negotiate the regulatory mechanisms that contain bodily pleasure. The extent of the repression Michael experiences is reflected in the thrill of his successful transgression of the innocent space of the backyard. Michael knows that in crossing the boundary that defines legitimate and illegitimate nudity, he risks being demonised by the community in general and by Mrs. Farlow in the first instance. Mrs. Farlow is irate about her daughter seeing Michael naked in his backyard on a previous occasion and informs Michael's father that 'I warn you. It's not good enough any more. He's not a baby now. There's something wrong with that boy' (5). After this incident Michael's father makes an explicit link between illegitimate nudity and sexuality when he tells Michael that 'Perhaps girls can get excited and not show it, but

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<sup>4</sup> Cristina Degli-Esposti (1998:9) writes of heterotopic spaces that 'these centreless spaces bear a disruptive quality embedded within them for they contain innumerable parallel stories that connect to each other but also potentially diverge from one another'. In *Bread and Honey* Deakin Beach is used extensively as an

that's not the way it is for boys' (6). The Farlow family's view of nudity is so rigid that Michael's swimming nude at night at the beach causes Ray to end their friendship. Michael's nudity here becomes an illicit activity once Ray shows his abhorrence at the behaviour (13). Michael focalises: 'It was a shame. Ray must have thought the same way as his mum' (13). The beach is also the place that his friendship with Margaret begins. *Bread and Honey* employs heterotopic spaces to represent the high emotional cost to children and adults when such spaces are denied because close neighbours in small communities serve a regulatory function. Still, heterotopic spaces and their potential for private pleasure only ever evade public scrutiny temporarily.

Southall's predominant discursive strategy of participant focalisation through the masculine child subject allows the subversion of gender dualism by its advocacy of the sex/gender connections of intimacy and the pleasures of intersubjectivity against a cynical masculinist world view expressed by his father (68,71). In the extract above Michael's focalisation details the everyday schemas of perception and the practices that instantiate the male/female dualism and legitimate masculine domination. All feminine subjects are focalised by Michael at some stage as operating within traditional feminine paradigms—mothering, particularly—designed to thwart masculine authority or autonomy, indeed to emasculate them. The gendered acculturation processes are schematically represented so that misogyny seems rational: Margaret 'giggled, confirming in him the fear that, in some female way that had nothing to do with age, she was making a monkey out of him. What with Grandma and Mrs. Farlow and crummy Jillian and her he had had enough of females for one day ...' (45-6). Michael's dialogues with Margaret and his internal scripts (free indirect thought) demonstrate the ways that gendered discourses disrupt the possibility of honest communication because the hierarchical power relations inform storylines and discursive practices. Davies (1989:20) finds that 'Once having taken on the

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example of a heterotopic space for the community.

bodily, emotional and cognitive patterns which give substance to the dominance-subordination forms of gender relations, it is difficult for individuals to imagine any alternative to that social structure'. These 'processes of configuring gender practices' (Connell 2000:28) are made visible in the dialogues in *Bread and Honey*, and so too are the processes for resistance so that as the storyline develops Michael's prejudices are gradually reversed and are finally disavowed. This happens as Michael struggles successfully to articulate for himself counter-scripts to those of traditional masculinist discourse.

The first dialogue between Michael and Margaret where the issue of embodiment is relevant, follows Margaret seeing Michael crying on the beach. The development of the dialogue indicates the complex intertwining of embodiment, gender regimes and sexuality. Margaret asks why he is 'snivelling' and if he is a 'cry-baby' (42). The use of the question and the formal word 'snivelling' suggests the literary representations of the discourse of a mother/nurturer. This is undermined by the repetition of the question in the discourse of a childish taunt, 'cry baby'. This is another double stigmatisation because it combines connotations of immaturity and feminisation: 'the worst humiliation for a man is to be turned into a woman' (Bourdieu 2001:22). There is an inherent conflict in this mixed discourse. The 'mother/nurturer' model of discourse is a legitimate form of feminine power that Margaret practises on her younger brother (43) but which, in Michael's case, is an inversion of the ageist hierarchy. Margaret assumes authority to interfere in the boy-child's affairs but as a younger child she should be subordinate to Michael who will not be 'pushed around by a kid of nine' (45). There is a forceful reiteration of this protest in Michael's first line of the following dialogue. This time, however, Margaret's response articulates gender regimes and hierarchies as the root cause of the conflict:

... 'You take your hands off me you little twirp. You keep your hands to yourself. I'm a boy.'

She looked astonished. 'I hope so. My word I do. Because you don't behave

like a lady.’ (43-4)

When Michael protests, ‘You keep your hands to yourself’, he objects to the domineering tenor of Margaret’s talk and the presumption of practices that involve touching his body (Spender 1989:11). There is the fear of controlling feminine subjects—like Mrs. Farlow (36-7)—who are complicit in masculinist regimes in the enforcement of ‘difference/domination in the lives of children’ (Connell 1995:242). Authority extends from the surveillance of children’s bodies to their behaviours with an insistence, in this historical context, upon ‘decency’ and ‘conformity’ (Gerster and Bassett 1991:95, 143; also Summers 1975:469). But fear of feminisation is uppermost in Michael’s mind. He immediately asserts masculine authority by issuing his commands that Margaret must unhand him, and second he delivers his insult, (again name-calling) ‘twirp’, thereby impugning Margaret’s significance and intelligence. He then asserts the supremacy that foregoes justification in the declaration of his masculinity: ‘I’m a boy’. Margaret’s response invokes oppositional gender practices that are well known to both of them and that regulate interactions ‘especially what is appropriate with the opposite sex’ (Bourdieu 2001:25). Thus a litany of sex/gender regulations emerges in the dialogue as a result of ‘boy and ‘lady’, the latter with its social class implications: you must be polite to girls; you never swear at girls; you can kiss a girl like ‘you shouldn’t oughta’; girls shouldn’t be alone because it is ‘dangerous’. All such regulations maintain oppositions that prevent honest and empathetic communication across the gender boundary and make sexual knowledge transgressive and sexual contact taboo. The issues of masculine rapacity and feminine vulnerability are expanded below.

In *Bread and Honey* both the masculine and feminine child participants possess some sexual knowledge and experience numerous embodied pleasures, some of which are the outcomes of family habitus. The feminine child participant is represented as just as interested in embodied pleasure and sexual intimacy as the masculine participant. This is at

a time when 'to exchange sexual information with girls was heinous' (Gertser and Bassett 1991:95). Equally significant in this regard is Michael's ultimate rejection of the opportunities for domination in his interactions with Margaret. This is progressive when Gertser and Bassett (1991) affirm the generally masculinist nature of the 1960s sexual revolution as one 'aberration' that later received redress in literature as well as in theory (61-2). Margaret enjoys Michael's company and his physical closeness but her imaginings of him are informed by fairy tales and magic. She twists her magic ring hoping that Michael will be by her side in a 'trice' (80). She pretends to rescue Michael while he ironically constructs himself as the traditional hero, claiming to have rescued her (74). Humorously for the reader, Margaret secretly imagines Michael to be a fairy tale prince who will give her the 'kiss of life' that she initiates just to make sure that it happens (77). Michael, at first, rages against Margaret's kiss but focalises the experience as pleasurable: 'His temper was sitting on the top like a crust over something underneath that was nice' (78). The construction of female desire is explicit. Margaret is keen to see Michael's body but he is too aware of the interdictions against being naked with a girl. Taunting him, Margaret suggests some of the failures of the ideal masculine body that might make Michael afraid to undress: pimples, no muscles, too much body hair, the sexed body part:

'You're funny,' she said and giggled. 'Are you scared I'll look at it?'

'Look at what?' but with a horrible feeling of fright he knew. 'You're awful,'  
he yelled, outraged. 'Leave me alone.' (83)

The reference to genitalia is taboo, the penis can only be 'it'. The lexical set, 'horrible', 'fright', 'awful', 'outraged' and 'yelled', indicate Michael's surprise and alarm at Margaret's failure to be 'properly innocent' as a female and a child should be (Davies 1993:118). Michael learns to be honest about his feelings: '... For the first time in his life he saw the face of a girl as something he wanted to touch and saw his hand go out to her as if it were part of someone else and control over it had nothing to do with him ...' (67).

Townsend (1979:186) writes that 'In terms of children's fiction this is not normal behaviour'. This is still the case. Michael's erection causes him embarrassment and he wonders if he is 'sex mad or something' but then thinks: 'But what could be bad about wanting to kiss a girl? Why did it have to be bad when you were thirteen but all right when you were grown-up?' (78). And the question remains open. He wonders about the age at which sexual contact is permissible and is concerned about Margaret's age. He recalls how the men in his family seem to be considerably older than the women who are their partners; how his grandmother was married at sixteen to his grandfather who was ten years older than she was (78). Michael's conflicted subjectivity indicates the complexity and the confusion in the world of childhood with regard to sexuality and embodiment. His internal scripts indicate that conceptualisations of childhood as sexually innocent and lacking desire are residues of romanticism's sanctification of the child (Cunningham 1995:75) and that sexual practices are historically and socio-culturally contingent.

The burden of the narratives of transgressive masculinity shape Michael and Margaret's understandings of hegemonic gender dualism. The patriarchal regulation of men's sexuality and the representation of masculine sexuality as rapacious is already fixed in Michael's subjectivity both in the parental interdictions of Mrs. Farlow and his father about nudity and in Michael's concern about his being alone with a young female on the beach (67). However both Michael and Margaret's attitudes to the pleasure of the body, sexuality, taboos and transgressions are also informed by traditional storylines Margaret's story of being kidnapped by Michael reminds him of the implacable regulation of intersubjective relationships across the gender boundary (70). Narratives from all parts of the social space play an explicit part in this dialogue:

'Put your dress down,' he cried. 'do you want to get me run in?'

'There was a man called Spike and another called Michael. Michael had a patch over one eye. He was *nasty*. Now everyone will think you kidnapped me. When

they get the ransom note everyone will think its *you*, so it's best you pay the ransom before they come to get you. They *hang* you for kidnapping.'

'They do not.'

'They do too.'

'But I haven't kidnapped you.'

Her eyes turned into familiar huge circles. 'Who's going to believe that when they *all* come looking for me, blowing their sirens and throwing their tear gas bombs?'

He couldn't make a sound. His lips turned into a spout, his tongue poked out, but not a sound was there. He could feel his hair, strand by strand, prickling on his scalp.

'I'll tell them you tied me up and blindfolded me and gagged me and wouldn't give me a drink or anything. I'll tell them you barked at me and chased me up a tree.'

Then she plodded away with long strides, almost as if she still held his hand ... (70)

Sexuality rather than nudity is the issue when Michael commands Margaret to put her dress down. The speech tag, 'cried', indicates the strength of Michael's protestation as Margaret divests herself of her wet clothes. Michael's protest about being arrested, 'run in', invokes the notions of transgressive masculine sexual behaviour with a minor. Margaret's response shows that she not only understands Michael's implications but is knowledgeable about storylines that instantiate the feminine subject's physical vulnerability to men and boys. These narratives of transgressive masculinity—pirates (with a 'patch over one eye'), crime thriller ('kidnapping' and a 'ransom note')—confirm, if not legitimate, masculinity as 'naturally' violent and 'nasty'. In fact, Margaret demonstrates that she is not helpless as either child or girl because her use of these narratives is a powerful strategy for controlling Michael. Her emotional blackmail at first appears transgressive but the close of the dialogue excuses her with her sudden switch to fantasy mode—she pretends that she is a cat and Michael is a dog chasing her. This is understood by the reader as meaning that she

is 'playing' or 'pretending' and therefore distanced from the potential dire outcomes of her narratives. The strength of the reflex reactions of Michael's body to the pain of shame and punishment indicates the strength of his recognition of the real dimension of Margaret's threats. She appears to make herself vulnerable by not being appropriately innocent with a boy and Michael realises the implications of her claims about their situation on the beach. These arguments about the subversion of the idealised masculine patriarchal subject are examined further in Chapters 4 and 7.

The focalisation strategies in *Bread and Honey* enable extensive representation of the participants' subjectivity to facilitate the narrative's closure of its thematic concern with the regulation of children and sexuality. The individual subject, as a stable essential 'selfhood', is denied here and this partly explains why early commentators had difficulty enunciating its difference. At times the story distances readers from masculine subjects, positioning them to question the masculine behaviours, and there are episodes in the storyline where masculine readers are 'required to identify against' themselves (Stephens 1996:20b). The dialogues and interactions of the participants require interpretation by active readers who are skilled with literary discourse. Literary child subjects are represented as far from a 'garden of delight' but rather understand themselves as wanting to escape the 'ghetto' of submission, containment and mis-information. Although an essential self is still posited rather than a self dialogically constructed, the fiction nevertheless marks an assault on humanism's ideal of the individual's separateness and instead privileges connection, or intersubjectivity. For Michael separation is problematised as emotional denial which undermines the capacity for individual pleasure and the fulfillment of desire. This is examined further in Chapter 3 where the contrast between the representation of the subjectivity of Michael and his father's high modernist angst is examined. The challenge to authority and age so typical of the historical context is also a hallmark of *Bread and Honey*.



## Transformative fictions of the new millennial moment

The undesirability of the adult/child dualism is represented in the children's fictions in the focus texts in this corpus. There is a concomitant shift in the expectations of represented child subjects that their views and ideas should receive serious consideration alongside those of adults. These fictions do not speak to a homogeneous 'proper childhood' of dependence, limited competence, freedom from responsibility and innocence. They do, however, represent child subjects who recognise that their agency is contingent precisely because traditionally limiting ideologies of childhood re-circulate and have the endorsement of some parents and adults. As the discussion earlier in this chapter shows, *Sand Monkeys* problematises the separation of childhood from adulthood as a form of oppression in the private sphere incorporated in the familial habitus: narrative discussions focus on the aspects of the conceptualisations of childhood to do with the provision and protection of children. Hirsch's *Hazel Green* fictions shift the discussion of childhood to the issues of the child's participation in the wider society: adult/child relations move into the public sphere, to the social structures, policies and practices of Hazel's apartment block and her community. Ghettoisation of children is actively resisted by Hazel Green and by those adults who understand that child subjects have evolving capacities for democratic intersubjective relations with adults. The idea that lived experiences and personal attributes can be divided up between different periods of life is systematically exposed as a myth. The separation of the adult/child worlds disappears in many social contexts and a variety of different states of 'quarantine' are seen to exist in the community: for the sick, the disabled, the elderly, the migrant (2001:240). *Hazel Green* and *Something's Fishy*, *Hazel Green* represent child subjectivity as multi-faceted. The third fiction, *Have Courage*, *Hazel Green*, demonstrating evolving capacities both in Hazel and in readers' literary competencies, offers more complexity in the representation of subjectivity, in its narrative patterning, the use of intertextuality and genre-mixing. The text requires readers who are

more aware of their socio-cultural context, social structures and discursive practices, that is, the macrotextual operations of literary discourse.

In establishing the fiction of adult/child dualism and separation, much lighthearted fun is overtly made of such adult behaviors and assumptions in *Something's Fishy*, Hazel Green (2000). The storyline foregrounds how people of all ages continually have more to learn about one another and their capacities (10, 11, 13, 14). Hazel focalises:

*What was going on?* Did adults really do things like that—play pranks on each other and feel foolish when they didn't work? That was the kind of thing she did with her friends! *Adults* weren't meant to do it. And did they really have competitions like that, to get the biggest lobster or write the cleverest codes? And then there was Mr. Petrusca, of course, who had spent his whole life pretending to be able to do something that he couldn't. That was *another* thing adults were not supposed to do ...

. She was starting to feel more grown up than a number of the so-called grown-ups around her. (180)

Hazel shows that she understands that childhood is widely conceptualised as a time for play and pretending. Parallel stories—an exaggerated *mise en abyme*—are constructed for child and adult participants and these successfully undermine adult/child dualism and separation as 'natural' or just. The dissolution of the adult/child boundary does not demonise adults as typically happens in the fictions of the 1970s and 1980s like *Bread and Honey*.<sup>5</sup> It ironises the fallacy of ageist rhetoric like 'grown-ups'. The pejorative connotations of 'childish' can be appropriate to people of all ages (177). This paragraph repeats and expands Hazel's earlier amazement at Mr. Petrusca's 'having to pretend *all* the time!' (98). He is unable to read so has spent his adult life 'pretending' that he can. He is a successful fishmonger and hides the fact that his literacy skills are limited to necessary survival tactics within his business. Hazel accidentally discovers Mr. Petrusca's secret

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<sup>5</sup> See Metcalf's discussion of this tendency (1997:52).

‘shame’ that is the cause of his severe depression (92-3). As Marcus Bunn comments in *Have Courage, Hazel Green*, this knowledge places her in a position of absolute trust with an adult’s fragile self esteem and tests her loyalty (2001:177). From the storylines, then, adult concerns and knowledge become available to children so that ‘innocence’ connotes ‘ignorance’ and subjective limitations, while ‘experience’ leads to agency and empowerment. Hazel Green asks the implied reader to question the social justice of the imposition of the category of child on any person in the light of its connotations of incompetence, dependency, inability to impact on the social world; it is unfair that childhood subjectivity is constructed as solipsistic.

In the *Hazel Green* series resistance to the interpellations of the ‘good child’ is a rational choice for a child subject. Solipsism as definitive of childhood, a theoretical residue of religious and psychoanalytic conceptualisations of childhood, is now denied.<sup>6</sup> The orientation of each of the fictions represents Hazel in a solipsistic moment that is always brief and interrupted by the welcome discovery of an adult in close proximity also engaged in temporary solipsistic experience. The pleasure in mutuality and reciprocity of awareness of one another dissolves the solipsistic pleasure of a fantasy of domination (1999:7; 2000:7-8).

The chilly air made her skin tingle, and the chirping song of the bird made her smile, and the empty street made her happy, because everything she could see from her balcony on the twelfth floor, the whole city was *hers*, and there wasn’t anyone to share it with.

Except, perhaps a bird. The bird sang again.

Suddenly a man appeared on the pavement below. He came out from a doorway, stopped, threw back his head, closed his eyes and turned his face up to feel the rays of the rising sun....

Mr. Volio opened his eyes. He looked up at Hazel’s balcony. He grinned.

Hazel waved.

Mr. Volio beckoned to her, gesturing with his hand ... (2001:7-8)

Solipsistic moments are enjoyed by everyone and are also usually only of brief duration for most people. Isolation and inclusion, fun and celebration, nonsense and seriousness are experienced by all. Hazel experiences democratic intersubjective relationships in the Volio's bakery shop and Mrs. Gluck's florist shop where mutuality and reciprocity are valued (2000:54-5) and where, as Cunningham argues, 'a fusing of the worlds of adult and child' occurs (1995:190). Children are represented as being both as wonderful and as reprehensible as adults: chronological age is not an indicator of attributes such as integrity, compassion, responsibility and loyalty nor are they allocated between oppositional states of childhood and adulthood.

The 'good' child is no longer one who is dependent, submissive or naive. Hazel Green is precocious: 'To put it bluntly, Hazel Green wasn't the kind of person whom other people ignore. It wasn't her fault, that's just how she was ... Everyone had an opinion about her' (2001:75). Hazel is aware of shifting interpellations, clear discursive positionings, being constructed either to empower or to disempower. Hazel does not pretend or perform the attributes of the good child in order to 'manage' adults as the child participants in *The Crooked Snake* understand to be necessary and appropriate. Hazel has a healthy skepticism with regard to social structures because she knows that 'Rules were often ridiculous and new rules were often more ridiculous than the rest' (2001:20). The operations of power in the adult world are manifest to Hazel. She is represented as just such a disruptive subject. Unlike the representation of adults in *The Crooked Snake*, in *Hazel Green* some adults confirm Hazel's skepticism and encourage her to act courageously on a 'matter of principle'. Mrs. Gluck tells Hazel that 'sometimes you have to go against the rules to prove your point' but that you must be prepared to accept the

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Stephens (1992:135, 202) and McCallum (1999:8, 99-100).

consequences of going outside the law (189).

The competence of the child subject is confirmed and respect is given to the autonomous decisions made by the child, like finding out how to help an adult learn to read (2000:198-9). These fictive child subjects also develop strategies for dealing with adults who assume a deficit model of childhood subjectivity. Importantly, the strategies are not just subjective adjustments but have practical outcomes. Hazel is represented as a master at interpreting how adults position her, and other children, and at deliberately undermining or confounding their expectations. Mr. Winkel, head of the Parade committee for the Moodey Building, is apprised of Hazel's capacities and so attempts to be the more dominating but he does not succeed:

'Hazel Green, you are quite as rude as I've heard!' cried Mr. Winkel, while Mr. McCulloch almost fell off the stool.

Hazel didn't know what this meant because she had no idea what he had been told.

'Children don't march on Frogg Day,' he said, as if that were that.

'They did,' said Hazel.

'That was years ago. Twenty years ago. Before I became head of the organising committee.'

'Mr. Winkel,' said Hazel, 'when did you become head of the organising committee?'

'Twenty years ago.'

Hazel nodded. She was beginning to understand ... (45)

Hazel is unimpressed by the unsubstantiated accusation of rudeness levelled against her. Her refusal of the subaltern position undermines the potential power of the disparagement. The assumption of authority in Mr. Winkel's tone is made visible in Hazel's focalised speech tag, 'as if that were that' identifies and resists subjection. But

Hazel's next strategy, as with Mr. Murray, is to enact the refusal of subjection and intimidation. This time the dialogue continues in order to demonstrate a lack of authority in Mr. Winkel's decrees (46-8). Humour is again a hallmark of the text and the sophisticated literary discourse teaches children about reading beyond the single strand narrative. Hirsch plays games overtly with the reader; Hazel is often in an estranged subject position herself and the reader is estranged from her estranged position as on this occasion. As Stephens (1992:71) argues, 'This "self-conscious" textuality—implies a reader whose role is that of the author's playmate, sharing a game of deducible rules, and being a little more conscious of the way meanings are linguistically and socially constructed'. Indeed Hazel's skilled recognition of the many interpellations constructed by the great range of discursive positionings she meets daily means that her main challenge is to be assured that she is valued consistently by those whom she most values and respects. She is, after all positioned as disloyal and dishonest by Mr. Volio (1999:98), a disrespectful 'troublemaker' by Mr. Davis (2001:84), and gleefully denigrated as racist by Mrs. Burston (68). Even Hazel's best friends, like Mrs. Gluck, Marcus and Yakov, call her to order with regard to her tendencies, as a brave and clever person, to be bossy and insensitive to others and dishonest about her own hurt and disappointments (209-10, 258). Being so widely and happily misunderstood and denigrated, in another extended dialogue with Mrs. Gluck, Hazel seeks confirmation of some consistent positive essence (109-12). This is not easy to represent without a return to liberal humanism and absolute values. The compromise offered by the text is that Hazel has the freedom to become her own person without hegemonic requirements for a good child and also to acknowledge Hazel's democratic intersubjective social practices and her unsentimental commitment to the welfare of others: 'I know you're not perfect. I know you get up to mischief. But I know the kind of mischief you would get up to, and the kind you wouldn't. ...' (109). Whereupon Hazel sardonically taunts Mrs. Gluck's shop assistant, the lazy and self-important Sophie. The relational

dimensions of interactions with adults represent the possibilities of decolonisation of childhood, with child participants recognizing—some much earlier than others—that lived experience is no ‘garden of delight’. Such a view can only be held by people not actually engaged in it, so that the alienated Yakov argues that life is ‘an *absolutely perfect* drop of honey’ (179). Against this, Hazel advances the view that life is ‘A thick, rich, chunky, swirly mixed up soup with a great dollop of cream added just to confuse things even more’ (178) and ‘you could never tell which chunk you were going to bump into next’ (179). In this text there is no universal conceptualisation of childhood, nor is there an idealisation of any child.

The social competence and intellectual capacities of children are explicitly represented as being as various as those of adults and any suppression of precocity is represented as an act of domination. Hazel is a girl with lots of bright ideas and leadership skills and she attempts to foster cooperation in enterprises without recourse to the operations of hierarchy in the manner of her rival, Leon Davis (1999:50). The narrator acknowledges the range of skills all children display and Hazel knows that many of her peers have capacities that she has not yet had the opportunity to acquire. Her new friend Yakov already possesses mathematical knowledge and skills that defy most adults in the community (147). Hazel believes that children should think for themselves as soon as they are able: she condemns Leon Davis because she knows that his opinions are those of his family (2000:31; 174) and Marcus, too, for his lack of everyday competence because his mother will not let him undertake domestic tasks—he is not allowed to boil water let alone cook a lobster (22). In *Have Courage, Hazel Green*, Marcus’s concern about doing only those things that adults allow (139) is focalised by Hazel as a debilitating attitude, one that limits the acquisition of life experiences like visiting antique markets at the Rum Warehouse (120-3) or attending fine art auctions at ‘Motheby’s’ and ‘Mistie’s’ (2001:146). It is also one that limits agency unnecessarily when complex situations, ‘matters of

principle' (55), are the concern: for instance, the hypocrisy and lies of powerful 'respectable' adults with regard to ethnic prejudice (189). The four fictions represent the evolving capacities of the child, with the thematic socio-cultural issues that involve Hazel's becoming more complex in each book: in *Hazel Green* Hazel names Mr. Volio's new Frogg Day pastry the 'Chocolate Dipper' (16-7) whereas in *Have Courage, Hazel Green* she names and confronts racism directed at the Moodey Building's caretaker, Mr. Egozian, and at Yakov by his school peers (51-3).

The *Hazel Green* series successfully transforms adult/children hierarchical power relations because the relational dimension of child interactions with adults is central to the primary level storyline and not just a matter of reconfiguring child subjectivity, as happens with the Kemp twins in *The Crooked Snake*. *Hazel Green* represents children as materially agential and desiring to participate in the public life of the community. It capitalises on contemporary Australian socio-cultural moments of national celebration and simultaneously addresses the predicament of the disenfranchisement of the nation's children. Despite Australia's being a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Moira Rayner's 'The State of Children's Rights in Australia' argues that children are not on the national agenda as we enter the new millennium (2002:347). The only significant policy document that might incorporate their needs, 'Stronger Families and Communities Strategies' hardly refers to them and Rayner writes that the policy 'makes no reference whatever to children's rights' (2002:350).<sup>7</sup> She argues that it is hard to see how the views of children can be considered if the socio-political structures give them no formal means of participation. In *Hazel Green*, then, Hazel decides to be proactive in having children enter the public domain by becoming part of the celebrations of the national day in the local procession:

Hazel thought about all the Frogg Day marches she had seen: the color and noise and

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<sup>7</sup> The policy is available at [www.facs.gov.au](http://www.facs.gov.au). accessed 19/03/04.



excitement. The crowds were so thick you could barely slip through them to get to the front...And until today it had never occurred to Hazel that anything was missing.

But something was missing, something important.

Children marching on Frogg Day? And *why* not? (20)

The name of the national day, Frogg Day, suggests a certain levity in the narrator's attitude to national celebrations: 'visitors from abroad, especially ones who couldn't spell, often wondered why the city made such a fuss over slimy little animals who jumped around. But it wasn't about frogs at all' (21). Indeed, it is about Victor Frogg, the 'Father of the Nation' (2001:82), 'who had brought peace again. And Union Day was proclaimed to celebrate it' (21). As Victor Frogg was born in the Moodey Building, the local celebration is especially significant and is even called Frogg Day rather than Union Day. Mrs. Gluck—the fairy godmother in realist mode who provides intellectual and political rather than material gifts, the Volios and the Coughlins encourage Hazel's decision to seek the children's participation in the parade but Hazel and Leon need the courage to face the 'terrifying Mr. Winkel' just to get permission to submit a design to the procession committee (49). Fortunately another committee member, Mr. McCulloch, is present when the children make their request and he mounts an argument about fairness that Mr. Winkel cannot discount (47). Even then Mr. Winkel imposes separation by decreeing that the children cannot simply join the Moodey Building's adult contingent arguing that the children must instead produce 'a separate display, something of their own', 'something interesting and exciting, to show your respect for the memory of Victor Frogg' (47). The implications of the tenor of the dialogue represent Mr. Winkel as sure that the children lack the organisational capacity, the creativity and intelligence and craft skills, to produce a display that will meet adult standards. The children's idea for the construction of a miniature replica of the Moodey Building proves him wrong. Parents and adult community members

support the project by providing space, materials and teaching some necessary skills but they do not interfere in the children's execution of the project. Even the problem of the model's stability is discovered by a child, the mathematical Yakov, and the necessary alterations are carried out by others. The shift in power differential in adult-child relationships is the focus of the storyline here as the children emerge from 'quarantine' to be seen and heard in the public sphere. Toleration rather than inclusiveness as the dominant power dynamic remains but child agency remains contingent.

## **Conclusion**

The corpus of Australian children's fictions discussed in this chapter indicates some of the ways that literary discourse takes up the challenge to envision reconceptualisations of the 'child' and 'childhood' that are more democratic than previous conceptualisations. They demonstrate that the socio-cultural indicators of the dissolution of the boundary between childhood and adulthood and the fusion of the worlds of adults and children are evident in literary texts just as they are in research undertaken in other fields implicated in childhood studies. There is a need then to move forward rather than continuing to work from older tropes and paradigms of childhood; a need to acknowledge the 'child' and 'childhood' as historically contingent social constructions. Specifically, these fictions challenge Romantic idealisations of the child as limited, dependent and naive. They show child subjectivities developing in a social context where multiple discourses of childhood circulate and where idealisations are misleading and regulatory. Cunningham (1995:190) argues that: 'to a much greater extent than in previous centuries, child-rearing has become a matter of negotiation between parent and child, with the state and other agencies monitoring and inspecting the process. In this process ideas about childhood which exist in the public domain act as a framework within which adults and children work out ways of living' (ibid). This suggests that many of the ideas in operation in Australian society are in fact

redundant.

All of the fictions discussed in this chapter use the discursive practices of literature to encourage debate about the way young readers understand their place in Australian society. The mapping of these socio-cultural shifts means the chapter also records concomitant shifts in the realist mode and its deployment of the literary strategies and conventions traditionally regarded as enabling representations of lived experiences. So there is a shift from the 1950s realism where covert narrators offer a mimetic representation of social and historical factors in Australian social life through to new millennial fiction where narrators are overt and are just one of the voices in multivoiced texts. Between these polarities is the post-modernist fiction with the metafictional interrogation of the ontological status of fiction where discursive practices make readers aware of its processes of production and reception (Hutcheon 1980:xiii). New millennial fictions continue these traditions but with the recognition that fiction is just one social practice among many that individuals may use to make sense of the world. Child subjects are represented as interrogating their positionings by adults, as well as by other children, and deciding, through more or less painful experiences, how they will respond and whether or not they will contest adult authority and disempowering social structures. Cunningham (1997) writes that ‘in the Western world in the late twentieth century there is considerable anxiety about how to bring up children, about the nature of children (angels or monsters?), about the forces, primarily commercialism, impinging upon them, and about the rights and responsibilities that should be accorded to them’ (1195). As for those adults who construct children as monsters—like the media—rather than angels, they may well be right as the fictions advocate that resistance and non-compliance are appropriate responses where fairness, mutuality and justice are not accorded to children.

Unlike postmodernity’s fragmented subjects (Belsey 1980:61; de Lauretis 1987:2) these child subjectivities are ‘multi-faceted’ as we see in the *Hazel Green* fictions. The

desirable outcome posited by the new millennial fictions in the corpus, is that young subjects are allowed the same multi-dimensionality and freedom to become as are older people in Australian society. The literary discourse in these fictions is complex and challenging. They cannot simply be read as 'transcriptions of reality' or as inviting complete identification with the main focalising participants. The child subjectivities represented in the fiction in the corpus recognise that the ideologies of childhood that circulate in their story-worlds regulate their lives in ways that are neither just nor even necessary. Given the diversity and historicity of the conceptualisations of childhood, as well as the current advocacy of the need for reconceptualisation, the search for 'the truth of childhood' seems not only doomed but actually undesirable.

In this chapter the concern has been with the challenges to the conceptualisations of universal childhood, the proper childhood of innocence and dependence, freedom from work and freedom to be educated, that became the right of all children in the twentieth century regardless of gender, socio-economic positioning or race. However the lived experience of children, as opposed to conceptualisations, is always an engendered actuality. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5 I examine how the representations of the everyday lives of children assume conceptualisations of childhood as gendered spaces of either boyhood or girlhood (Wall 1991:7). Historically Cunningham (1995) finds that by the late nineteenth century a gender free conceptualisation of childhood existed, devolving from Romanticism, but the lived reality of children projected into the adult life-course meant that ongoing engendering was the everyday experience of children (3, 75). Until the recent post-feminist period, boyhood and girlhood have been separate spaces and literary representations encode and promote this ideology. However the literature for children I discuss from the mid-1960s onwards increasingly contests and resists this gendering.