The Sense of "Before-Us": Landscape and the Making of Mindscapes in Recent Australian Children's Books

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Résumé: À la lumière de quatre albums illustrés récents, l'auteure soutient que la littérature pour la jeunesse australienne propose une phénoménologie du paysage national. Fondée sur le concept de «chronotope visuel» d'inspiration bakhtinienne, l'analyse examine le rapport particulier entre les personnages, les événements et l'espace-temps qui se dégage des illustrations. La construction de cet espace-temps répond à un codage idéologique, perceptible dans le jeu entre le temps présent et celui du mythe. Ce jeu s'inscrit au coeur de la relation entre les chronotopes visuels et narratifs. Les oeuvres étudiées ici suggèrent l'existence d'une relation métaphysique aux paysages sauvages caractéristiques de l'Australie : la brousse et le désert.

Summary: Referring to four recent Australian children's books, this paper argues that children's literature contributes to a phenomenology of landscape. Using Bakhtinian theory as a starting point and developing an idea of the "visual chronotope" to describe the relationship of people and events to time and space in the pictures of picturebooks, it notes that the construction of time-space in narrative is ideologically encoded. It proposes that there is a characteristic interplay in picturebooks between "present" and what Bakhtin called "great time," and that this interplay emerges out of the relationship between verbal and visual chronotopes. The Australian texts studied here suggest a significant metaphysical relationship with the bush/desert/wild place of Australian landscapes.

*I*n *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard notes the "before-us" essence of certain landscapes; Simon Schama's book *Landscape and Memory* makes explicit the idea of geographical space as culturally encoded, if not as cultural construct. For Bachelard, it is the forests that express this "beforeness" and sense of recognition of a loaded past; for Schama, it is water, woods, and rocks. Discussing both in relation to Australia, Roslynn D. Haynes writes:

> In Australia it is the desert that epitomises this 'before-us' quality. In our collective imagination the site of ancient myth, of spiritual dimension and cultural rebirth is peculiarly the desert.... (1)

2002 has been proclaimed the "Year of the Outback" in Australia. The concept of the outback — "the bush," the "desert," the "Red Centre" — is fundamental to images of this country; as the 2000 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony demonstrated, it is an integral part of how Australians see themselves and represent themselves to others. The bush and its landscapes and icons are the marks of Australianness. During the ceremony, Olympic officials wore Drizabone riding coats and Akubra hats — sanitized versions of the bush clothes that were intended to signify Australia to the watching world. Yet Australia is overwhelmingly an urban nation, with most of its population living in large city clusters along the coast; for many of us, Drizabones and Akubras are more likely to be what we buy to wear on overseas trips than what we wear around the place at home.

Schama writes that folktales and stories told to children are a significant part of such cultural and national conditioning. European forests and woods have become densely populated by the fairytale adventures of Hansel and Gretel, Snow White, and Little Red Riding Hood among numerous others, and thus are perceived as more than geographical features; they become part of the landscape of the mind. This gives another edge to us as children's literature researchers; clearly, children's books contribute to a phenomenology of landscape — to the making of mindscapes. Because children's literature is culturally endorsed and mediated (by editors, teachers, parents, and awards committees as well as by market, ideological, and sociocultural forces that influence writers and illustrators), its texts are revealing in two connected but slightly different ways: first, in how they choose to signify "own space" and what can loosely be called "national space," and second, in what this demonstrates about how societies want to see themselves or have themselves seen. Children's literature thus holds up a mirror, which, while it clearly reflects current concerns, agendas and advocacies (in 2002, of issues such as the changing shape of families, indigenous experience, the environment, etc.), just as clearly reflects a culturally-encoded version of landscape (that may be "realistic," idyllic, pastoral, contrived, surreal, fantastic, partial, or refracted). The physical look (described in words and/or pictures) of the stage constructed for story (that is, the look of the book) is part of how the text addresses itself to children. I have noted elsewhere the Bakhtinian concept of the *superaddressee*, that is, the addressee who is subtly part of the organizing structure of any text as "a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance," whose "absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 126). I argued that one way of conceiving of this superaddressee in children's literature is as *the adult the child will become* ("Childhood"). If this is so, perhaps we can argue that children's writers,

illustrators, and publishers create and perpetuate landscapes that will reinforce, either implicitly or explicitly, pedagogical, national or ideological ideals. This would seem to agree with the notion of the cultural construction of geography and with Schama's ideas about landscapes carrying the "freight of history" (5).

Landscape in children's books is a background to action and activity, the time-space in which things happen. Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope highlights the significance of the time-space in narrative:

> Chronotopes are the organising centres for the fundamental narrative events of a novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 250)

I began working with Bakhtinian ideas in 1992 in a thesis that applied the idea of *napravlennost* (the "impulse that reaches out beyond the word") to the *Anne* books of L.M. Montgomery ("Reading Beyond the Word"). *Napravlennost* is another way of thinking about "before-us"; words describing landscapes (in this case) are "thickened" with time and "take on flesh," crammed with "living impulses" that reach beyond themselves into memory and intertextual associations (*Speech Genres* 84). They may also reach into different time perspectives: Bakhtin describes narrative time-space as marked not only by the *presentness* of each moment but also, potentially, by the perspectives of centuries, a concept he called *"great time"* (84). Words convey moments of presentness that are time-specific, but that also, simultaneously, carry an accumulation of meanings that go far beyond specific presentness and include the past utterances of others.[1]

Bakhtin borrowed the term "chronotope" from Einstein's theory of the relative rather than the absolute character of motion and mass, which stated that the properties of space-time can be modified by the presence of bodies with mass—that is, perceptions of time and space are changeable and dependent on the position of the observer. The narrative chronotope (Greek *chronos* = time + *topos* = place) refers to the complex relationships between people and events on the one hand and time and space (landscape) on the other. Context — and, for the purposes of my argument, "context" is a broad synonym for "landscape" — is moulded by ideology, which gives the context its particular form; Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson note that "all contexts are shaped fundamentally by the kind of time and space that operate within them" (367). Again, in broad terms, ways of representing landscape/context/time-space are shaped not only by their *space* component but also by the way their time component is represented. The construction of the time-space is coloured by what we think (and have been conditioned to think) about what we see. How we reproduce it will be similarly

coloured. Thus, in Michael Holquist's words, the chronotope provides "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (425-26).

If we apply the idea of the chronotope to picture books, it is clear that there are two possible ways of identifying chronotopes or time-spaces; through the words, as explained at length by Bakhtin, and through the pictures— what can be called a *visual chronotope* (see Johnston, "Theory Informing Practice" 347-49, "Picturebooks: The Third Space" 408-09). The visual chronotope is the depiction of the relationship of time and space to people and events in the pictures of a picture book. It is often through the juxtaposition — or nexus — of verbal and visual chronotopes that complex and abstract ideas are made seeable — given what Ernst Cassirer calls "seeability" (83) — and that landscape is imbued with the sense of "before-us." Further, there is a characteristic interplay in picture books between *presentness* and *great time* that emerges out of this juxtaposition and that contributes to the making of mindscapes. I am proposing that this framework of ideas can help us toward an understanding of the construction of Australian space in narrative and of the nature of human relationships to it.

In the light of the foregoing comments, I want to consider four recent and very successful Australian picture books that each tell their story against a bush landscape — bushscapes. The books are *Fox* by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks (2000), which won the Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year Award in 2001 and the Kate Greenaway Medal for Illustration in 2000; *A is for Aunty* by Elaine Russell (2000), a Children's Book Council of Australia Honour Book in 2001; *Rain Dance* by Cathy Applegate and Dee Huxley (2000); and *Hello Baby* by Jenni Overend and Julie Vivas (1999), which was the Children's Book Council Picture Book of the year for 2000. The bushscapes are different in each of the books, but with the exception of *Hello Baby* they are all pivotal to the story.

Fox is a fable with animal characters and actions that grow out of "human" emotions: despair, fear, grief, pain, envy, jealousy, loneliness, trust, loyalty, hope, acceptance, and love. The verbal chronotope is set in the space of a "charred forest" — there has been a bushfire, and Dog and Magpie have escaped but both are injured: Dog is blind in one eye and Magpie's wing is badly burnt. The bush regenerates with the passing of the seasons, but it also brings a new danger:

> And so Dog runs, with Magpie
> on his back, every day,
> through Summer, through Winter.
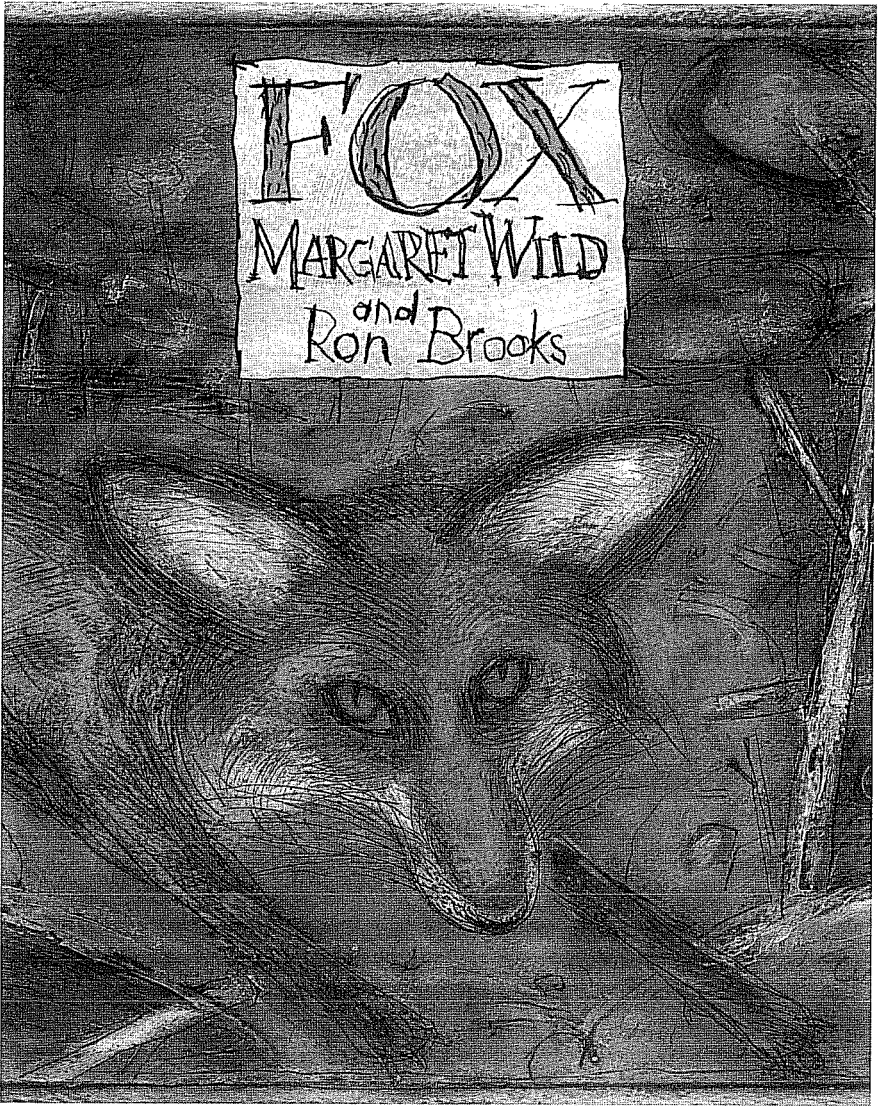>
> After the rains,

Illustration by Ron Brooks from **Fox**

when saplings are springing up everywhere,

a fox comes in to the bush;

Fox with his haunted eyes and rich red coat.

He flickers through the trees

like a tongue of fire,

and Magpie trembles.

The climax comes when Fox entices Magpie onto his back while Dog is sleeping. For some young readers, intertextual associations with the story of the Gingerbread Man will add a fearful anticipation of Magpie's fate.

While Dog sleeps, Magpie and Fox streak past

coolibah trees, rip through long grass, pelt over rocks.

Fox runs so fast that his feet scarcely touch the ground,

and Magpie exults, 'At last I am flying, Really flying!'

Fox scorches through woodlands,

through dusty plains, through salt pans,

and out into the hot red desert.

This is a motif familiar to Australian literature: in Haynes' words, the desert provides "a springboard for a spiritual rebirth, for 'finding one-self'" (289). Abandoned in the desert, Magpie finds inner strength out of love for Dog. In just the same way, Australian poet Judith Wright describes the desert as a redemptive force:

Wounded we cross the desert's emptiness,

and must be false to what would make us whole.

For only change and distance shape for us

some new tremendous symbol for the soul. ("The Two Fires")

The verbal description is of a clearly Australian space, with "stringybarks," "yellow box trees," and "coolibah trees." The living impulse that reaches out beyond the words is nationally marked: the coolibah tree is a culturally loaded bush icon that appears in the well-known song "Waltz-ing Matilda":

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong

Under the shade of a coolibah tree....

The visual chronotope accentuates the fable genre: the animals dominate each page, connecting through touch and eye contact, and represent human

Illustration by Ron Brooks from **Fox**

qualities and dilemmas. These characters are dependent on each other, and on their own inner resources, to survive.

But survival in *Fox* is both physical and psychological ("I am blind in one eye," Dog says to Magpie, "but life is still good"). Physically, they must survive their environment, represented here in ochres and greys and blazing desert colours. The time element of the chronotope is, appropriately for a fable, non-specific; it is the type of folkloric time that Bakhtin identifies as "the perspectives of centuries" (*Speech Genres* 4). There is a sense of unchanging timelessness in the bush and desert landscapes, and in the story that is told. As Jack Zipes points out, folktales "are marks that leave traces of the human struggle for immortality" (2).

Of particular interest in this book is the way the words of the text are written. While actual print is not generally considered part of the visual chronotope, in this case we can argue that it makes a definite contribution to the construction of story space and adds to the idea of retelling that is so integral to folktales, which, in Zipes' words, "facilitate recall for tellers and listeners. They enable us to store, remember, and reproduce the…spirit of the tale and to change it to fit our experiences and desires" (4). Any script is part of the visuality and look of the book, but in this particular text the script draws attention to itself and is obviously intended to imitate the writing of a child. The hand-lettered printing runs in all directions — horizontal, vertical, sideways. This unusual device is very effective and compounds the sense of folkloric time: here is an old story being made new again by a child writing it into her or his own life, from a variety of liberated perspectives, and in the iterative frequency (Fox "comes into the bush," Magpie "trembles"). It also addresses the story to children. *Fox* is not intended to appear as an original story written by a child; for one thing, it is rich with sophisticated intertextual play (such as the three times of Fox tempting Magpie, which evokes both the temptation of Jesus and Peter's denial and compounds issues of fear and betrayal). The page containing publishing information is typed on what appears to be an old typewriter and has crossed out "corrections," again suggesting re-writing. One way (not necessarily preferred) of reading the text is from a postcolonial perspective of "Australian story": a former colony taking a traditional genre and rewriting it for a different hemisphere. This can be expanded into ideas of being stranded in the desert/colony a long way from home and of having to find one's own way.

The second book, *Rain Dance*, is narrated in the first person by a child. Here the verbal chronotope (again using the iterative) stresses the dependence of the human characters on the land and their absolute lack of control over it. In fact, it is the land that controls them and their fortunes by their dependence on it for their livelihood:
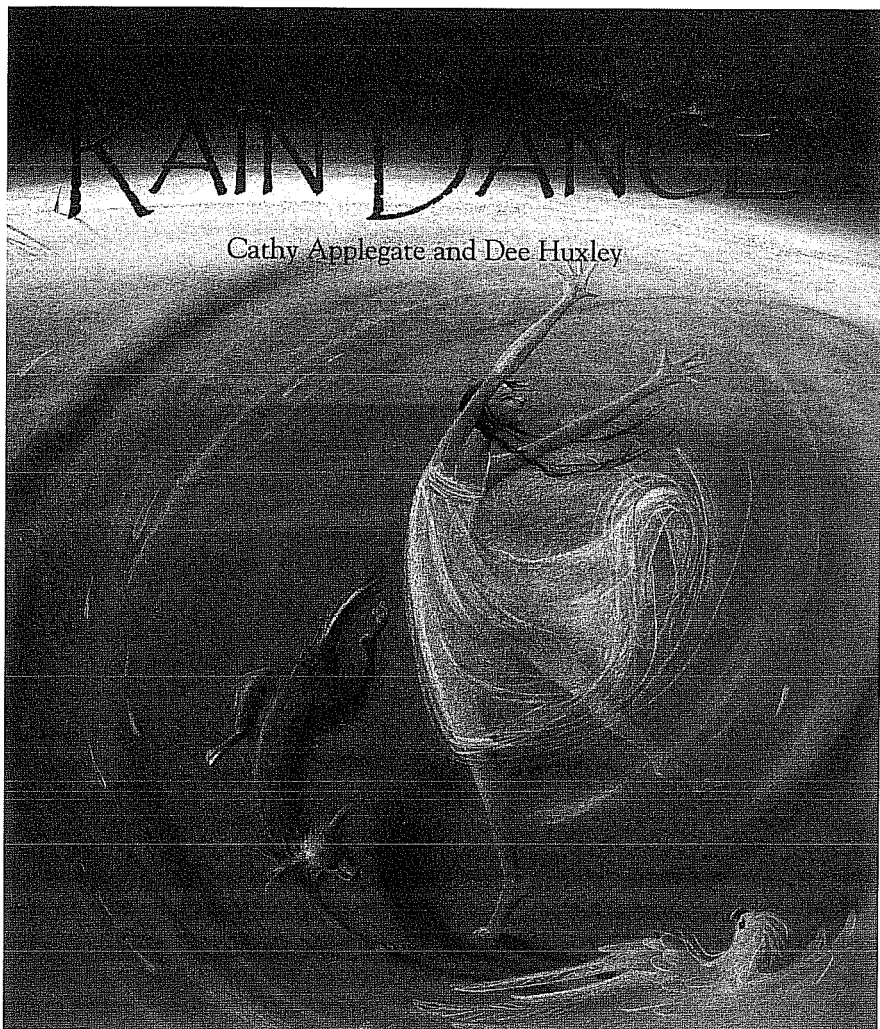
Everything is quiet. Everything is still.

Illustration by Dee Huxley from **Rain Dance**

It hasn't rained for two whole years.

We wait and wait and wait, until we are no longer sure what we are waiting for and whether it will ever come.

Beyond our desolate farm I can see the horizon where a few dark clouds cruelly taunt us with promises of rain.

It never comes, and now our dam is a patch of dry cracked mud surrounded by parched brown land.

The visual chronotope accentuates and reiterates the nature of the dry barrenness of the landscape, and the solitary state of the human and animal figures is elongated by the use of shadow. A feminist perspective would stress that these are waiting women, a familiar image in Australian art and literature (Henry Lawson's story of "The Drover's Wife" is a notable example of this archetype). Time has almost ceased to have meaning; space is unchanging. Then it rains. The view of the child in the swirling rain dance is an overhead one, a perspective that gives not only circularity but turns the dancing child and animals into a oneness with the land, maximizes the significance of the raindrops, and evokes an indigenous perspective — an aerial view of landscape and the symbolic use of circles and dots. Here, external landscapes are internalized into mindscape.

Chronotopes, Bakhtin writes, are "mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex relationships" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 252). Two chronotopes he identifies are of specific significance to this discussion. The *intervalic chronotope* describes a text where, as part of the narrative, two different perspectives of time and space play out against each other and action is perceived from two different chronotopical perspectives. One of these may be "hidden," but the interaction between the two perspectives means that "both of them take on metaphoric significance" (165).

Bakhtin's definition provides a helpful optic through which to consider the third book, *A is for Aunty*, which uses the traditional form of the alphabet book genre to reconstruct personal history into autobiography: Russell uses the sequential letters of the alphabet to give narrative shape to her memories of an indigenous childhood (Johnston, "Picturebooks: The Third Space"). In the words of the text, people and events are related to time and space through a life chronology; random memories of that life are hung together by the letters of the alphabet.

S is for Suppertime.

This was my favorite time of the day — especially if I was hungry. Instead of using the fuel stove in the kitchen, my mother sometimes cooked supper on an open fire under an old gum tree. All the kids in my family and the Manager's youngest son, John, would sit around the
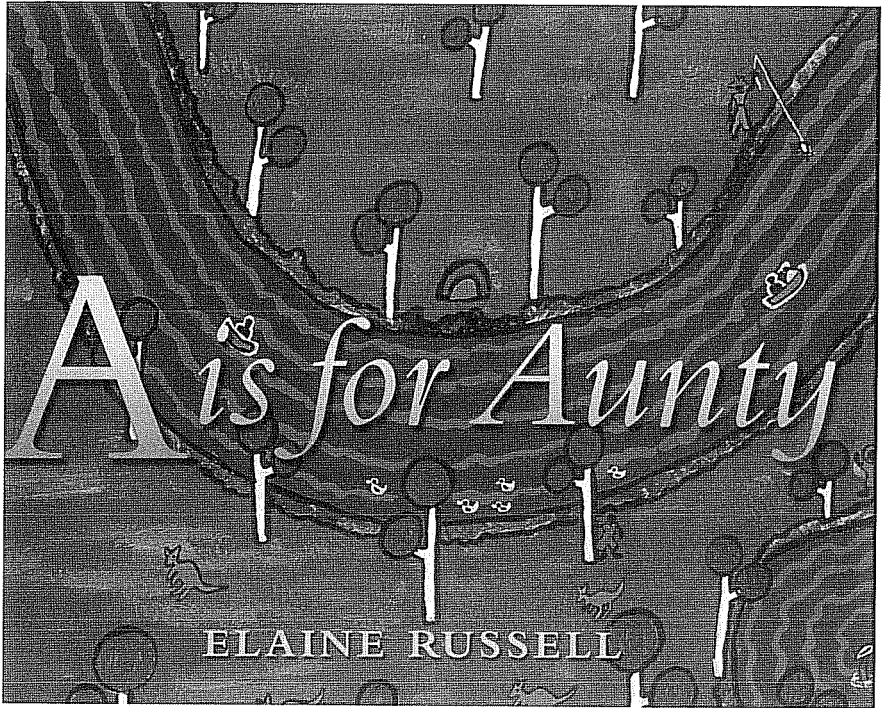
Illustration by Elaine Russell from A is for Aunty

campfire, waiting patiently for our supper — this included Ashes Damper, which was cooked in the hot coals. It was yummy!

The verbal chronotope is of a retrospective, the remembered past of an individual lifetime. However, the visual chronotope — how the people and events are portrayed in relation to time and space in the *pictures* of the text — makes visible not only the interaction between time *now* and time *then*, but also most important of all an interaction between time then and now with a past and heritage that is beyond the experience of the individual. The past is a dense Indigenous past/present that could be called a Dreaming chronotope. This is a reconstruction of past into present that defies Paul Ricoeur's classification of past as Other; rather, it is a visual representation in picture book form of past as present continuous, of relationships between people and events and time and space that have been, and that *are*. The pictures construct multiple references to totemic figures, and, like the illustration of the rain dance, to the circles of sites, camps, waterholes, campfires. The roads present an imagery of paths and movement, while the river that dominates most of the illustrations reminds us of Water Dreamings and/or of a snake or Rainbow serpent — of a type of genesis, life-giving and connecting.

In prose (without its pictures), *A is for Aunty* is a charming story of random memories with a deep but not bitter subtext that implicates sociocultural attitudes, practices, and policies in relation to indigenous people. In pictures (without its prose), the story depicts a "modern" Australia by reaching back into an Australia before white settlement. In the form of a picturebook, with both prose and pictures carrying narrative and coming together in story, the visual chronotope amplifies the verbal chronotope into a type of intervalic chronotope, with perspectives that are at once personal and national. The relationship of people to the time-spaces of the illustrations is different from the relationship of people to the time-spaces of the verbal narrative. The text is profoundly heteroglossic, dialogized with different versions of Australian histories and a different shaping of landscapes.

The other Bakhtinian chronotope that is helpful here is what he calls the *adventure novel of everyday life*, where time-space is organized as "a new type of adventure time" that is a "special sort of everyday time" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 111). The essence of this chronotope is a temporal sequence of "metamorphosis" or "transformation" linked with "identity" as part of an "idea of development" (113); it presents moments of "crisis" — that is, critical points of a development that "unfolds not so much in a straight line as spasmodically, a line with 'knots' in it" (113). This is the chronotope of the early Christian "crisis hagiographies," where there are "as a rule only two images of an individual" — a sort of "before" and "after" that are both "separated and reunited through crisis and rebirth" (115). This type of narrative, Bakhtin goes on to suggest, "does not, strictly speaking, unfold in

L
is for Lagoon

A lagoon is a great big pond way out in the bush. Wild ducks, swans, cranes and other animals gather there, mainly in the mornings or late in the evenings, to drink the water. We Aboriginal people would say this is the animals' Meeting Place, where they can rest and get together.
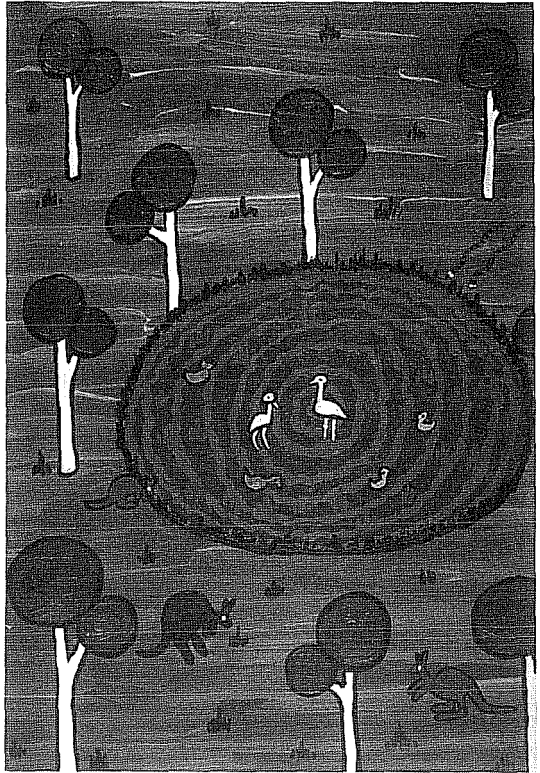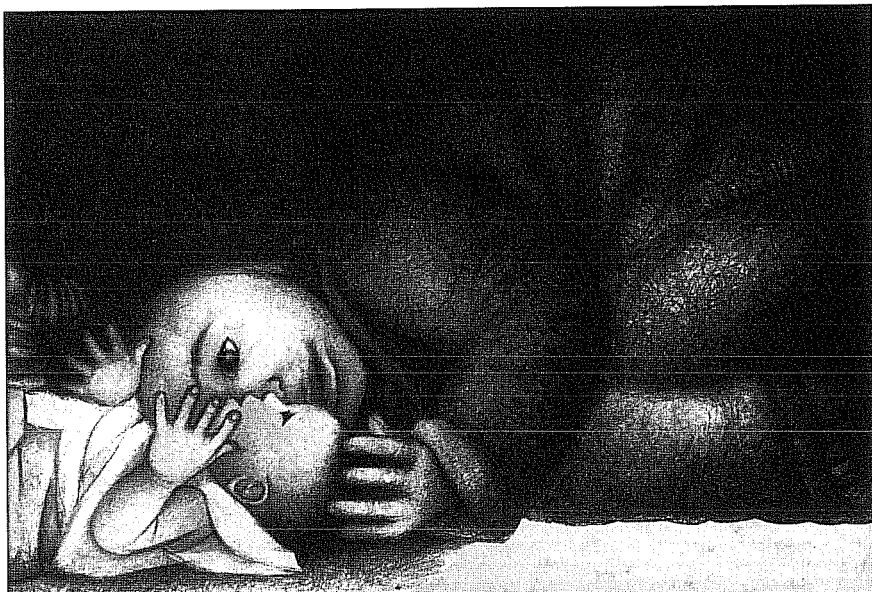

Illustration by Elaine Russell from **A is for Aunty**

Illustration by Julie Vivas from **Hello Baby**

biographical time. It depicts only the exceptional, utterly unusual moments of a man's life, moments that are very short compared to the whole length of a human life" (115).

Whereas *A is for Aunty* is a figuring of past and present through a retrospective of childhood memories (thus playing out action and event through two differing chronotopical perspectives), the verbal and visual chronotopes of *Hello Baby*, the fourth and last text to be considered here, fit more into the model of the adventure novel of everyday life. Here the emphasis is on development and on a notion of time that draws past *and future* into the experience of the present moment.

Hello Baby, the story of a home birth (apt in relation to the "rebirth" idea of this chronotope), is focalized through the eyes of Jack, the third child and youngest sibling. The verbal text is clearly organized by the chronological time-space of the labour — time is the essence of the events. The text locates the time-space of these events as being near a "town" more rural than urban (a neighbour drops off "a load of wood" as "a present for the baby") and reasonably contemporary: the midwife brings oxygen and "a special microphone for listening to the baby's heart"; there is a phone; and the family has sleeping bags. The illustrations of the visual text depict clothes of an indeterminately modern period and a similarly indeterminate house in an indeterminate landscape. The first of the two illustrations of the scene outside the house shows a water tank and a wind-blurred forest of tall trees; the second depicts part of a house and a woodheap, with Jack (the narrator) and his father collecting wood. Landscape here is not pivotal but, as I shall show, it is imbricated with ideas of refreshment and renewal.

The birth is clearly both an everyday event and a critical incident, "a knot," in the life of the mother, the family, and the child about to be born, one concentrated around the moment of birth, which becomes the threshold of the "before" and "after." Nothing will be the same again for any of them — and cutting (and knotting) the cord is both end and beginning. To help the baby along, the woman in labour goes outside for a "walk in the wild wind": "It's wild outside. There's a roaring wind and the clouds are racing madly." The wildness of the bush is a space for gathering together physical and emotional resources in preparation for the coming ordeal. The visual chronotope compounds the image of the pregnant woman as part of the forest, her colours and shape blurring and merging with the greens and browns of the huge trees.

Here also, as in *Rain Dance*, is a sense of an elongated period of waiting. However, the visual chronotope works from the beginning to interrogate conceptions of present as being able to hold the whole story, pushing beyond the everyday into a sense of adventure time, a folkloric conception that contains a sense of "time's fullness" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 4). Jack, the previous baby, holding up the jumpsuit on the title page, invites the reader-viewer

Illustration by Julie Vivas from **Hello Baby**

Illustration by Julie Vivas from **Hello Baby**

to engage with not only the comparative smallness of the coming baby and the transformational process of his own growing but also with the sure knowledge that this baby yet to be born will similarly transform and outgrow the space of this moment.

We enter the text *in medias res*: "We've been waiting a long time for this day, Mum, Dad, Bea, Janie and me." The preparations for birth become increasingly focused on the figures and their relationships, which are made visual in the representation of touch, overlap, and interconnection; most of the time, the space surrounding them is little more than a pinkish-red glow. Later, as they sleep around the fire after the baby's birth, in a visual image that is almost tribal, the background space becomes darker, and the fire, implicated, gives a golden light.

The time-space of this text is not marked as overtly Australian, but rather, landscape encloses and supports confident interior images of family — mindscapes — as community and connection. There is also the idea of shifting and accommodating others (Jack has to give up his place to make way for the new baby) and negotiating new space, which could also lend itself to an obvious postcolonial reading (again not necessarily preferred). That the visual chronotope has few space markers reaches the moment of climax in the picture of the newly-born baby on the white page, thrust into the present and the cord its only connection to the moment before. In a sense, this baby has become Every Baby, just as the illustration immediately following is another version of the iconic Madonna and Child.

In summary, these four books — a small but representative sample of recent acclaimed texts — construct human (and/or animal) relationships with Australian landscape/time-space in the following ways:

i) In *Fox*, the bush is large, intractable, unforgiving, impervious to human and animal concerns, blazingly inhospitable but sometimes a protective shady hollow for those who know where and how to look (as reflected in the endpapers). Characters (human and animal) are part of this land but not necessarily at one with it; there is a need for them to depend on each other for survival — the ideal of "mateship." At times of crisis, however, the bush/desert can serve as a catalyst for the development of inner strength, as for Magpie both when she is abandoned by Fox and when she "drags her body into the shadow of the rocks, until she feels herself melting into blackness." The externalized third-person narration compounds a chronotopical distance: the relationship between people and events and time and space is impersonal. The visual chronotope is figured with marks of white-man occupation — there are just hints of fences, fenceposts, and barbed wire in some of the frames of the illustrations. There are also possible hints of rock drawings, reflecting two heritages within the one land.

ii) In *Rain Dance*, the humans have no control over the harsh and

difficult landscape upon which they depend for a precarious livelihood. However, in a very real sense they live in a symbiotic relationship with it, as is shown in the overhead illustration of the dance. This is a land that is watched, tended, loved, and feared. The power in the relationship is with the bush and the elements; the humans have little power. First-person narration by the young girl (although in mature words and concepts) accentuates lived landscape as immediate and personal. Space is unchanging, time elongated; the relationship between people and events and time and space is one of dependence, ambivalence, and uncertainty.

iii) In *A is for Aunty*, the landscape is remembered and recreated through a cultural mindscape that predates the events of the story. First-person narration from a different time-space complicates the text into a subtle retrospective that is both gain and loss. The visual chronotope is all about mindscapes as an intimate sense of "before-us" that shapes memory and ways of seeing.

iv) In *Hello Baby*, the landscape is less central and is not overtly "Australian." This is a nurturing landscape that provides both warmth (wood for the fire) and a sort of tamed wildness (which helps to sustain the woman about to give birth, whose body is caught up in an inexorable event that is beyond her control). The immediacy of the first-person narration of the youngest child is offset by the illustrations, which depict the relationship of people and events to time and space within a sense of "great time" that opens up not only past and present but future. From a postcolonial perspective, *Hello Baby* is a "grown-up" narrative that does not need to create a distinctively different landscape for the story it tells.

One general comment applies to all four texts: to a greater or lesser degree, all reach beyond the physical into a sense of the metaphysical. The understories all relate to human helplessness — in the face of drought, betrayal, and government policies on race, pain, birth, and change. The threshold between physical and metaphysical is symbolized in the landscapes of desert, drought, a mind map that reconciles two cultural heritages, and in the ever-present wildness of the "outside," which is beyond human control and can be both pain and healing. All four books contain folkloric elements; they are stories about the human condition rewritten into new contexts. In all the texts, there is a very real sense of mindscape shaped by a spiritual connection to land and a dependence on it for inner strength and sustenance.

That there are "national" ways of reading and depicting landscape is apparent in studies of Chinese landscapes. Daniel J. Boorstin suggests that a "vivid symptom of this contrast between West and East is the difference between two ways of thinking about man's place in the landscape.... In the Chinese landscape we must seek out man. When we do find him he is a speck, whether a fisherman, hermit, or a sage in contemplation" (17-18). The

illustrations in these (and other) picture books challenge traditional Western notions of perspective, which draw landscape as perceived from the position of the focalizing individual. Western ideals are caught up with the individual-centred universe; huge trees are drawn small not because they *are* small but because they *look* small from the distance of the viewing "I" (or eye). Indigenous perspectives interrogate such a notion by drawing pictures from an aerial perspective that conceives of the land as unchangeable and of the individual as part of it. Picture books are increasingly developing different perspectives of relational time-space.

The construction of time-space in narrative is, like thematic concerns and narrative itself, ideologically encoded. However, in the four books here discussed, this encoding goes beyond ideology into the realm of philosophy: it relates to profound frameworks of thinking that include spiritual and metaphysical conceptions of the relationship of humans to their time-space (personal and national). The temptation to draw wider conclusions about representations of Australian space is tantalizing, but in any case it is clear that exposure to picture books such as these — which work through their verbal and visual chronotopes to instill a sense of time that predates, outlasts and transcends individual moment and which conceive of untamed natural elements like the bush or desert as a source of spiritual strength, hope and renewal — helps to nurture a sense of "beforeness" that may well articulate into and sustain national mindscapes.

Note

1   This relates to, but is not the same as, the concept of "sacred time," *kairos*, found in the works of the Rumanian-born mythologist Mircea Eliade, quoted by Maria Nikolajeva in her study of linear and non-linear time in children's literature (5). Nikolajeva's goal is "not to discuss the concept of time or its general application to literary texts" (16), but rather, she offers an original investigation of children's literature as a whole corpus, which she organizes around three main categories: Utopia, Carnival, and Collapse (10).

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