Summer Holidays and Landscapes of Fear: Toward a Comparative Study of "Mainstream" Canadian and Australian Children's Novels

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Résumé *: Cet article analyse la littérature pour la jeunesse australienne à la lumière de la liste des traits communs des romans de facture et d'esprit traditionnels pour la jeunesse canadienne. L'auteure s'intéresse en particulier au thème de la peur, en soi et dans les contextes nationaux. À cet égard, si la situation géographique est une constante dans les deux littératures, les raisons en sont cependant opposées : à la peur liée à la proximité (Canada) répond la peur rattachée à l'isolement (Australie). En revanche, malgré les différences évidentes dans le rythme des saisons, les deux littératures nationales partagent une vision esthétique et culturell semblable en ce qui concerne la valorisation du paysage comme capital symbolique. La série «Tomorrow, When the War Began» de l'Australien John Marsden occupe une position privilégiée dans cette problématique. En dernière partie, l'auteure plaide en faveur d'une nouvelle approche culturelle fondée sur la différence dans la similitude ainsi que de l'unité dans la différence.*

Summary*: This paper considers Australian children's literature against the list of shared characteristics of "mainstream" Canadian children's novels, with particular reference to ideas about fear and about national contexts of fear. It notes that while geographical location is a concern of both countries, it is for opposite reasons: fears of proximity (Canada) versus fears of isolation (Australia). It also notes that, despite the obvious seasonal differences between Australia and Canada, the novels of both countries are characterized by a similar artistic and cultural idea of landscape as symbolic capital. It discusses the* ***Tomorrow, When the War Began*** *series by John Marsden as one way of reading Australian national fears and concerns relating to geography and history and of interrogating the nature of fear and the problematical nature of human response to it. It concludes by arguing for a new cultural focus, past assimilation, past multiculturalism, past guilt, and past*

blame, one that emphasizes a sense of being "different-but-similar," of oneness within difference.

At first glance, the list of characteristics of "mainstream" Canadian children's novels developed by students of Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer presents very little that seems different from characteristics of what could be called "mainstream" Australian children's novels. In a way, that is not surprising; I have noted before that there are many obvious similarities between the two countries, geographical, historical and literary ("What's Canadian"). In 2003, we are countries that sometimes feel overwhelmed by our physical location in the world — Canadians by a vocal and powerful neighbour, Australia by what one of our historians has called the tyranny of distance (Blainey), and both by neighbours that have populations many times our size. Historically, we share a colonial past and we also share our lands with indigenous peoples. In a literary sense, we have been consumed — and continue to be consumed — by the search for our own identity.

Here, however, I think there are real differences. Canada has increasingly produced fine novelists such as Margaret Atwood and, most recently, Yann Martel, who are able to present a literary vision that is accessible to non-Canadians. Australia also produces fine novelists, but their vision is sometimes so peculiarly Australian that a non-Australian may not be able to grasp or even see it. I am thinking here of a novelist such as Tim Winton, who creates a picture that is achingly real to Australians, but that, while it appears accessible to others, may only compound superficial stereotypes to outsiders.[1] The opening sentence of Winton's *Cloudstreet* (1991) provides an apposite example. For Australians, these lines reflexively capture the image and smell of childhoods that we recognize even though they may not have been our own:

> Will you look at us by the river? The whole restless mob of us on spread blankets in the dreamy briny sunshine skylarking and chiacking about for one day, one clear, clean, sweet day in a good world in the midst of our living. (1)

This is a summer image, and if, as the Canadian list suggests, Canadian children's books are characteristically concerned with "Winter and/or the harshness of the climate or the landscape" (35), then Australian children's novels are characteristically concerned with summer and with an associated landscape and climate that may be harsh, potentially hostile even, but that offers something special for those "in the know." Perhaps both countries — all countries? — want to emphasize what most distinguishes them from others; again reflexively, perhaps we all have pleasure in living out a national stereotype.

Summer is the season where Australia is "most different" from the powerful and long-historied cultural traditions of the Northern Hemisphere. Because the Australian school year ends around the second or third week in December and resumes around the beginning of February, summer includes Christmas, New Year, and family holidays, which are commonly spent near water — the beach or sometimes, as in *Cloudstreet*, the river. This is despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that Australia is now a nation of coast-dwellers, with 90 percent of the population living within an hour's drive of the ocean ("Spectrum"). Thus the smells and images of the Australian Christmas are very different to those of the Northern Hemisphere (even though many traditions have been imported) and this has been much celebrated in our children's literature. The Australian Christmas smells of summer:

> Faith suddenly stood quite still in the middle of the road, threw back her head, and sniffed.
>
> 'It smells like Christmas,' she said.
>
> 'If you mean roast chook and stuffing and pudding then I can't smell anything,' said her friend Betsey. 'I wish I could.'
>
> 'I don't mean that at all,' said Faith impatiently. 'I mean a sort of summery smell — all hot and dusty and smokey. It makes me think of picnics and swimming and eating Christmas dinner on a hot day.' (Spence 8)

It is also significant that the Christmas holidays represent for Australian children the end of one school year and the beginning of another; they are a time of overt change and development (the common ritual of new school shoes at the end of January is an obvious signifier to children of their own physical growth). That summer is so often the timespace for story also reflects the fact that summer is the time when children and adolescents are most free and able to participate in their environment — go bushwalking and camping and / or go to the beach. This reflects more than obvious seasonal differences between the two countries; it highlights what appears to be another more interesting distinction. Nodelman and Reimer's list notes that there "is *eventually* a love of nature evident in the novels" (35). Australian children's books, from their very beginning with *A Mother's Offering to Her Children* (1851), reflect a great love of nature, through authorial voice as well as through characters, plots, and thematic structures. What some of the books *do* come to more eventually is a love of specifically *Australian* nature. In other words, there is a move toward a reconciliation of the remembered (imagined?) and much-loved nature of the distant "home" place (sometimes only dimly experienced as a very young child) and of the present realities of Australian climate, landscape, flora, and fauna. The adventure stories of the late nineteenth century and the immigrant stories through the twentieth century all demonstrate an absorption with "nature" and a coming to terms with the distinctive Aus-

tralian experience of it, often as a rite of passage. This nature is loved, but it is also challenging. Thus, for example, water — lack of it as in droughts, dams of it as in the bush, floods of it, rivers and oceans of it — is a pervasive image, both as something to be feared and something to be enjoyed:

> Lockie Leonard shook the spray from his eyes, adjusted himself on the board and kept paddling as the wave rolled past and collapsed with a bum-tingling thud on the sand-bar. Out of the cool mist another swell rose all seething and motley green and shot six glistening, giggling missiles into the sky. . . . They surrounded him, mischievously teasing and skiting like a bunch of little brothers lit up on red Smarties and Coke.
>
> In the end they came back and lazed around, cheeping and clicking so close that he ran his hands down their slick flanks and began to laugh in amazement. It was just plain *inspiring*. There was no other word he could think of to describe it. In a brilliant, glassy swell, out on his own with a mob of mad dolphins. Did it get any better than this? (Winton, *Lockie Leonard* 1, 3)

This distinctive climate and geography offer a special type of "solitude" (Lockie is "out on his own," "[i]n a brilliant, glassy swell" of ocean), but it is always edged with danger and must therefore be respected and feared; Lockie's encounter with dolphins is immediately followed by a less pleasant meeting with a shark:

> Lockie pulled himself onto his board, aimed himself at dry land and tried not to think about life with a wooden leg. Or worse: life with only one buttock. Lockie Leonard, Halfbum. No, it didn't exactly ring in his ears like music. He stopped thinking altogether and went like hellfire. (6)

Summer is the time when the climate is most ferociously different, often the time of disasters, such as bushfires and the most vicious droughts. However, as I have noted in an earlier paper ("The Sense of 'Before-Us'"), there is a strong Australian literary tradition of the very harshest of landscapes — bush and desert (and, we could arguably add, ocean) — becoming a source of spiritual strength, hope, renewal, and redemption for those who experience them. In landscapes that themselves are fearful, fear is confronted and overcome. Here, there is both comparative divergence from and comparative convergence with the Canadian list: despite the obvious seasonal and landscape differences between Australian and Canadian novels, they are undergirt by a similar artistic impulse that sees landscape as symbolic capital. Landscapes are cultural and spiritual as well as physical. In *Lockie Leonard, Legend*, the sea represents hope for Lockie's mother, who has suffered a nervous breakdown: "Mrs Leonard saw her family every day and watched the bit of ocean she saw from her window as if it was a chink of light in the darkness" (183).

While national fears relating to geographical location are a concern of both countries, these fears are quite opposite: fears of proximity (Canada) versus fears of isolation (Australia). Whilst Canada may, as Perry Nodelman's essay in this issue of *Canadian Children's Literature* points out, perceive itself in terms of boundaries, borders, and divisions, Australia's deepest national concerns relate to its "far awayness" from traditional friends and allies. Blainey notes, with reservations, that "distance and isolation, while somewhat tamed, remain influential in Australia" (xi). Part of the nation's concern with climate and landscape relates not only to its internal distances and isolation — its land mass "encloses as much land as the USA, excluding Alaska" (Blainey ix) — but also to fear pertaining to its distance and isolation from the rest of the world, particularly from Europe and the West (12,000 miles). This fear, which has coloured national policies, lives on in 2003: for example, the infamous "All the way with LBJ" slogan that supported involvement in the Vietnam War[2] has an eerie echo in the pro-Bush stance of the current prime minister.

Such local and national fears — of climate and landscape, of geographical and international context — have, I believe, been complicated in the latter part of the twentieth century and the early years of the new century by a more subtle and complex set of fears. These are politically sensitive and seldom articulated, as they can so easily be misinterpreted, but the interesting thing is that they have found an expression in children's literature. First of these is a sense of vulnerability in being held accountable for the actions of past generations (while not denying the injustices that were done and the responsibility to right them). Second is a fear and even resentment on the part of some non-Indigenous Australians that they cannot claim a physical and spiritual "belonging" in a land where they feel, deeply and intimately and profoundly, that they belong. This appears to echo a similar uncertainty in Canada implied in the list item: "Whether or not the books have the home/away/home plot pattern, they do tend to focus on questions of what home is, or where it is, or what it should be and how you should feel about it" (35). Indeed, the idea of "home" — and the dissonances between home *away* (perhaps only ever experienced through family anecdote) and home *here* — is at the heart of much Australian literature in general. This is a postcolonial concern and accords with the point on the Canadian list that "The initial or originary home often is only remembered or recollected in the text and not seen" (34). It represents a pivotal and crucial factor in Australian literature.[3] In children's books in particular, home and the ideal of home — that "realm without alienating conditions" (Zipes 148) — powerfully and profoundly help to construct subjectivity: as a construction of the self as someone in relation to other someones, as a composition of the "I" in a world of other "I"s, and as a performativity of identity, community, and belonging. The Canadian point about "various homes and 'aways'" (34) is interesting because *Home and Away* is the name of a popu-

lar Australian teenage television soapie and is also the title of a recent book exploring Australian themes of "belonging and alienation":

> Where — or what — is home has long been a preoccupation of Australian literature, politics and society. How is "home" defined if your origins lie in Europe or Asia or if you are now in a minority in what was once your country? And what does 'home' mean if you were removed from your parents and brought up in someone else's home. . . ? In these contexts . . . we can see a shifting of boundaries, where the margin may challenge the centre, and even displace it. (Bennett and Hayes vii-viii)

It is interesting indeed that, when these fears appear in children's literature, they are often interpreted at a rather simplistic environmental level rather than as what they really are: interrogations of Australian identity, birthrights, indigeneity, and the idea of connection to place. Jeannie Baker's *The Story of Rosy Dock* explicitly prosecutes the introduction of a noxious plant into an ancient landscape and implicitly prosecutes the colonizers themselves as another type of noxious invader.

A further complication is definition in terms of region ("Australasia," "Pacific Rim," "Oceania"); as Stephen Fitzgerald notes in *Is Australia an Asian Country?*, one of our national fears is how we fit into the future of the region. Australia is a sparsely-populated country set in a densely-populated area. That it has both feared and valued its isolation and its land led in the past to immigration policies that reflected ideologies of the times but that were unfortunate and unsupportable. Ideas about place and ownership — who is welcome to enter and who isn't — are represented in Jenny Wagner and Ron Brooks's picture book *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat*, which is a story of possessiveness and possession, of protecting boundaries, and of guarding the status quo; in the end, though, John Brown (a very British English sheepdog) has to let the Midnight (black) Cat in to share the comfortable interior of Rose's cosy cottage.

It is in the work of John Marsden, a former teacher and one of Australia's most significant writers of junior/adolescent fiction, that these ideas find some of their strongest expression. His picture book *The Rabbits*, illustrated by Shaun Tan, functions at several levels to tell a story of invasion and environmental degradation, but the real story, or *understory*, is all about fear — fear *for* the environment, fear *of* the environment, fear for the fate of indigenous peoples faced with Western colonization, fear for the colonizers, fear of the past and fear of the future. At its deepest level, *The Rabbits* tells many Australians that they do not belong — they, like the rabbits, are an introduced species.

The Rabbits has met with general critical acclaim, and teachers in my postgraduate classes report that most children also respond positively. Children have also responded very positively to Marsden's most popular books, the *Tomorrow, When the War Began* series, each one of which (after

the first) has been awaited with Potteresque eagerness by both girls and boys. But these novels have not met with critical acclaim because, I think, that they have likewise been interpreted on a simplistic level and through a lens of careful political correctness. The series has been criticized for playing up national prejudices. In a sense it does, but it also interrogates them and tips them into other contexts, tackling questions about belonging and not belonging, ownership, responsibility for others, and even about guerilla warfare and, by implication, terrorism. The books do not name all these questions, nor do they answer them. The series is patchy; the first three novels are the strongest, but the final book is disappointing (there is, of course, no easy resolution to the overall story). Nonetheless, these books are all about national and local fears, conscious and unconscious; it is in this context, as well as in the context of landscapes of fear in children's literature, that I will now consider them.

The Canadian list notes a number of characteristics that relate to fear and to the structure of the Marsden books, but from an Australian viewpoint there are substantial differences — in characters, plots, and thematic structures rather than in symbolic resonances. Parents themselves "may be quite peripheral to the central events of the plot" (32), but concern for their safety and rescue is the reason the children begin their guerilla activities. The home lives of the major characters are happy; it is an outside, national event that has disrupted their carefree summer holidays. The children move toward greater and greater independence, becoming national heroes in the process. They basically only have each other for support. Communication is valued among themselves but, contrary to the Canadian list, these children must also learn to dissemble. The series of books does not have a "happy ending" as such, perhaps indicating the continued challenge of national fears. The main characters are not "unusual" young people but rather ordinary, intentionally and pointedly culturally representative. They do become "adventurous people, willing to take chances and undergo danger" (33), but while their actions are important, their thoughts — or at least the narrator's thoughts — are given equal billing. They serve in the role of multiple protagonists, who, as in the Canadian books, "must conquer fear" (34), but the move to self-discovery is related not so much to "the move past fearfulness" (34) as to the move *despite* fearfulness.

The life-world of children is obviously in a continuous state of what Montaigne called *becoming*. Jürgen Habermas argues that life-world is "the horizon-forming context of processes of reaching understanding" (135). Fear is very much a part of the horizon of a child's world, if not so much part of the context of processes then certainly a part of the understanding itself — understanding that moves from innocence to knowledge of evil, pain, moral vulnerability, personal mortality, and inevitable death. At the bottom line, fear is almost always the fear of death and of the annihilation of the authentic "I," of self, or of loved others. Paradoxically, fear — of the

dark, of the monster behind the door, of the unknown, of change, of the bizarre and the grotesque, of the end of the world, of dangers and evil strangers, of loss, of aliens, of natural and unnatural disasters — is the very stuff of story, of the folktales and fairy tales of the past and of the present. As Marina Warner notes in *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock*, "Fear has probably always played some part in amusement, but its peculiar pleasures have increasingly become an end in themselves" (4). In temporal terms, fear is usually fear for the *future* (frequently because of events of the past) — fear of the end or change of the perpetual present. In the spatial culture of postmodernism, it is the ultimate situation of unknowingness. Contemporary film stories have developed fear into an art form: the oft-repeated (especially on cable television in Australia) *Air Force One* is one example of a fairytale of fear, with President Harrison Ford as the Prince Charming warrior prince on his trusty steed (Air Force One), awaking the world from its inertia with his proclamations about terrorism, fighting past all the monsters of corruption and deceit in the forest, and triumphantly saving not only Snow White (the USA) but the moral conscience of the world from the power of the Wicked Witch of communism.

Warner explores three ways of coping with fear: uttering the fear and describing it (fear as a pleasurable state, as an end in itself); confronting its possibilities (as in nursery rhymes and lullabies where the "singer keeps vigil as well as hushing the baby to sleep" [16]); and using laughter as a defensive tactic. Because children's literature is a dynamic locus of cultural practice where the discussions that are part of Habermas's "public sphere" congeal into story and where what Bakhtin calls the "surface upheavals of the untamed elements of social heterroglossia" (326) are shaped, sometimes censored and sometimes tamed, into narrative representations of subjectivities and intersubjective relationships, it both dialogues with and reproduces these generic and regional cultural concerns and fears. The Marsden series tangles regional fears with the vertical and horizontal spaces of Australian histories and geographies; it utters them, it confronts them (with the author arguably playing the role of keeper of the vigil — not of nursing the fear but of accompanying those facing the fear), and it uses as a defensive tactic not so much laughter but a wrap of personal story, personal becoming, personal *bildüng*.

Tomorrow, When the War Began was the first book in what would become a series of seven, with the seventh strategically published in the last year of the old millennium. The titles of the books themselves are revealing: *Tomorrow, When the War Began* is followed by *The Dead of the Night*; *The Third Day, The Frost*; *Darkness, Be My Friend*; *Burning for Revenge*; *The Night is for Hunting*; and *The Other Side of Dawn*. Here is an ongoing story about war expressed in images of darkness, night, cold, revenge, and hunting. However, the story opens in familiar summer landscapes:

> So it all began when Corrie and I said we wanted to go bush, go feral for a few days over the Christmas holidays. . . . We'd camped out quite often, been doing it since we were kids, taking the motorbikes all loaded with gear and going down to the river, sleeping under the stars, or slinging a bit of canvas between two trees on cold nights. (3)

Eight children (a politically-correct assortment with one rich and one poor, one Greek and one of Thai-Vietnamese background) who live in a very typical small country town go camping in the bush over a period that includes an imaginary holiday called Commemoration Day and the event of the local Show. This show is held at the Showground, a large fenced oval used for activities from riding events and cricket to school sports carnivals; it is a focal point of most Australian country towns. The children camp in a place, both isolated and wild, called "Hell." Ellie, the female narrator of the series, describes it as follows:

> Hell is what's on the other side of Tailors [Stitch], a cauldron of boulders and trees and blackberries and feral dogs and wombats and undergrowth. It's a wild place and I didn't know anyone who'd been there, though I stood on the edge and looked down at it quite often. For one thing I didn't see how you'd get in there. The cliffs all around it are spectacular, hundreds of metres high in places. There's a series of small cliffs called Satan's Steps that drop into it, but believe me, if these are steps, the Great Wall of China is our back fence. (4)

During the night of Commemoration Day, they see and hear jets overhead "like black bats screaming out of the sky, blotting out the stars" (38). When the children return home, they discover that Australia has been invaded, their families are all locked up with the rest of the town in a compound at the Showground, and the old "kind of world we were used to" (14) has disappeared.

This typical Australian country town — the wild bush, the weird animals, the local show, the showground — functions not just as a microcosm but as a metonym for Australia itself: isolated pockets of "civilisation" edged by wildness. The monster is both within and without the door. Within, it is the landscape itself — the bush — which in the early days also harboured social outcasts and the lawless, bushrangers such as Captain Starlight, Ben Hall, and Ned Kelly. Many of these were originally bolters, escaped convicts who lived by robbing settlers. The gold rushes of the 1850s brought another type of bushranger, criminals who stuck up mail coaches for gold and cash as they travelled long distances in isolated places. The bush was also dangerous to children; art and literature have many pervasive images of the lost child (see Pierce).

The fearful situation and events which Marsden's books describe — the end of twentieth-century Australia — emerge out of Australia's cul-

tural history and are very much related to contemporary concerns about her geographical location and about being a small country in a large land: "We were such a small school," writes Ellie (10). It is very significant that these are not stories of a nuclear holocaust, like other books about the end of the world, nor are they apocalyptic in a traditional sense. The rest of the world is going on quite nicely, thank you. In a representation of one of the nation's traditional fears (of being isolated and alone, betrayed by distance), it is only Australia that is invaded and taken over, as the world sits back and watches. Listening on a short wave radio, the children overhear a broadcast about the invasion:

> The General said that America would find herself in the longest, costliest and bloodiest war in her history if she tried to intervene. . . . He said his forces have occupied several major coastal cities. Much of the island has been taken already. . . . The General repeated his claim that the invasion was aimed at 'reducing imbalances within the region.' (168-69)

The children's subsequent discussions reflect Australia's historical and geographical predicament:

> 'For one thing,' said Homer, sitting back on his heels, 'we can tell it's not World War Three. Not yet anyway. It sounds like it's just us.' . . .
>
> 'International outrage sounds promising,' Robyn said.
>
> 'That's probably our biggest hope. But I can't imagine too many other countries rushing in to spill their blood for us,' I said. . . .
>
> 'What does it mean "reducing imbalances within the region"?' Kevin asked.
>
> 'I guess he's talking about sharing things more equally,' Robyn said. 'We've got all this land and all these resources, and yet there's countries a crow's spit away that have people packed in like battery hens. You can't blame them for resenting it, and we haven't done much to reduce any imbalances, just sat on our fat backsides, enjoyed our money and felt smug.'
>
> 'Well, that's the way the cookie crumbles,' Kevin said uncomfortably.
>
> 'And now they've taken the cookie and crumbled it in a whole new way,' Robyn said. 'In fact it looks like they've taken the whole packet.' (169-70)

Marsden's books are overtly about fear: about themes of fear, about responses to fear, about the depiction of fear, and about the problematical issues of how fear changes behaviour and interrogates concepts of morality. They are about the fear of change, the fear of being left alone, the fear of death, and the fear of growing up, which, as I have argued elsewhere, can be seen as a type of death ("*Thisness* and *Everydayness*"). As the series develops, they are also about how fear turns into hatred and revenge.

The invasion of *Tomorrow, When the War Began* complicates the depiction of fear by making the notion of "the enemy" problematic. It initially

configures Ellie's responses with intellectual questions of social equity and justice: should one country be so comfortable and complacent and ignore the plight of crowded and hungry neighbours? The invaders are never specifically identified, but they appear to be from a nearby country with a large population. The hatred that grows is made more powerful and more deadly because it develops as a response to fear; the relationship between fear and hatred is one of the thematic concerns of the series.

War between nations demands absolutes of right and wrong, absolutes of "them" and "us." But the children learn that there are no longer any absolutes and that constructions of ally and foe may be ambiguous. The moral fear that the children engage with at a number of levels is that of no longer being able to distinguish right from wrong: "There doesn't have to be a right side and a wrong side" (171). Is a particular act "an act of great love or of great evil" (216)? From the perspectives of survival, Ellie notes that "even life and death weren't opposites of each other in Nature: one was merely an extension of the other" (217).

These books are about the loss of innocence, the end of the garden of Eden (a specific image in the first book), the fear of aliens and alienation, and the rite of passage not just into adulthood but also into confrontation with the effects of fear (confrontations that may result in killing the enemy); they are about survival at its most primitive level, about territorialism, and about the wilderness experience of "going bush." The books are notable in that there is no happy ending: the characters may temporarily sort out relationships with each other but the invasion and war situation continue, with no comfortable recuperation.

Yet the books are not without hope. This is not a collapsed world but a world that can still be fought for. Marsden's world of disorder is constructed against a privileged reader perspective which focuses almost as much on Ellie's status as an adolescent as on her status as a guerilla fighting for her country against the enemy invader. The external environment beyond the immediate location continues to sustain some sort of recognizable order (even though they don't intervene, the U.N. and the U.S. are still there). The inner environment, while it may contain "cerebral chasms" (Schama 463), represents adolescence as part of a growing cycle. Fear and suffering are represented in the private context of Ellie's thoughts, but they jostle there against a lot of other ideas about which boy she likes most and what she should do about it.

I noted earlier that the plot of the novels — Australia's invasion — has been criticized for playing into national fears and contributing toward prejudiced images of monster countries waiting to pounce. This is a valid objection, but Marsden handles the issues sensitively by undercutting the obvious with another seam of story relating to earlier invasions by other colonizers. This layer of indigenous perspectives opens up deliberately provocative ideas about ownership of land and mapping space, about

boundaries and strategies of resistance, about fear and deracination. In the second novel, Ellie writes: "There was something else too, an atmosphere, a change in the feel of the land. It felt wilder, stranger, more ancient" (11). There is clearly an implicit authorial agenda questioning concepts of imperialism and colonization: "He said they're going to colonise the whole country with their own people," one of the children reports in the same text. Again in the second book, *The Dead of the Night*, Ellie writes (and for me at least this could be a paraphrase of some of the verbal and visual accounts of Australian Aborigines watching the arrival of the First Fleet):

> We saw our first colonists only two days later. . . . We went and inspected what they'd done: the house was clean and tidy and the beds made. It was all ready for strangers, aliens, to move in and take over. It scared and upset me, trying to imagine those people sleeping in the Holmes' beds, eating in their kitchen, walking their paddocks and sowing their seeds in the Holmes' earth. (197)

Running away after blowing up a bridge, Ellie defends her ownership and her belongingness in a language that becomes suddenly grand and almost archaic, evoking an epic type of rhetoric mythologizing the Australian landscape with which she is suddenly one: "I ran on. I wasn't too frightened though. I knew that they could never and would never follow us through the bush. This was our natural environment. I felt as much home here as the possums and wombats and galahs. This was ours, and this we would defend" (63).

"Every work," writes Tzvetan Todorov, "every novel, recounts, through a series of events, the story of its own creation, of its own story . . . for the very existence of a novel is the last link in the chain of its own intrigue" (49). The teenage Ellie overtly describes her reasons for writing down this history as being the necessity to record events. Marsden's authorial voice pointing throughout the series to the power of language is equally clear:

> Recording what we've done, in words, on paper, it's got to be our way of telling ourselves that we mean something, that we matter. That the things we've done made a difference. I don't know how big a difference, but a difference. Writing it down means we might be remembered. And by God that matters to us. None of us wants to end up a pile of dead white bones, unnoticed, unknown, and worst of all, with no one appreciating the risks we've run. (*Tomorrow, When the War Began* 2)

The books are deliberately constructed in the voice of the teenage narrator; as such, they have certainly struck a chord with many young Australians. There are overt references, made by the protagonists themselves, to the Famous Five and Secret Seven; these are obvious analogies and ring true in the slightly tongue-in-cheek early teenage context. More interesting

are the cultural analogies; the band of children has something in common with bushrangers, who were also mostly very young and who in some cases were seen as symbols of defiance against unfair authority.

The significance of the Marsden books is that they recognize and articulate national fears and prejudices and that they represent, as part of their "chain of intrigue," a dialogical engagement not only with ideologies of fear but also with ideologies of its antidotes or responses, explicitly stated as "loyalty, courage and goodness" (*Tomorrow, When the War Began* 284). Courage is something new to the children; it is self-discovery and armament in the face of their fear:

> I had to search my mind and body and find if there was a new part of me somewhere. I felt that there was a spirit in me that could do this thing, but it was a spirit I hadn't known about. If I could only find it I could connect with it and then maybe, just maybe, I could defrost the fear that had frozen my body. Maybe I could do this dangerous and terrible thing. (81)

The Canadian list notes that "'fear' is often represented by 'the dark': shadows, death, the wilderness, and bad weather" (34). For the teenage characters of the Marsden books, "the dark" is not so much a symbol of the fear that must be confronted and worked through as a literal ally to its working out; as one of the book titles explicitly states, darkness is a friend that offers cover and protection. The emphasis in the Australian series is just different enough to be potentially significant. As I previously noted, fear is almost always the fear of death, the annihilation of the authentic "I." But in the *Tomorrow* series, fear is not at first fear for the protagonists themselves but for their loved ones and their world; the fear is located outside themselves, in their intersubjective relationships. Ironically, they are safely hidden in a place that is called by the most fearful name of all — "Hell." Fear, at least at first, is not an intimate possession, an aspect of memory, as it is in the Canadian texts; rather, it blows up into something more than this as it becomes a parable of colonial history.

Marsden's themes are intertextually expanded by the selection of books referred to by the children. They find a copy of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a story of journeying into a dark kingdom of fear. They read *Red Shift*, Alan Garner's tri-layered story of past-present massacre, Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*, a story about the fears and frustrations of growing up, and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, an exploration of moral fear. At one point, Robyn tells the story of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego, the three Hebrews, friends of the prophet Daniel, who were miraculously saved through their faith from the fiery furnace. These are books about violent death and killing. Several of the children die, including Robyn, the "religious" voice. The story encourages revisiting history: at one point, the children remember with a new understanding the old-fashioned words on the town's War Memorial:

War is our scourge yet war has made us wise
and fighting for our freedom we are free. (*The Dead of the Night* 217)

The children resist the stereotype of the hero (255), but as the series progresses they find themselves being perceived as heroic. The bifurcation between heroism and fear, between good and evil continues, and there is horror as the children come to realize that "evil was a human invention" (243), that it is humans who are hell, and that fear is a spiral that quickly turns to hate and that will make them do things they never thought possible:

> For the first time I felt real hatred for the soldiers. It was such a dark evil force that it frightened me. It was as though black vomit was filling me — as though a demon inside was spewing black stuff into my guts. I was frightened, frightened of every thing: the hatred I felt, the state Corrie was in, the risks Lee and I were running by being there. (*The Dead of the Night* 34)

After they kill the soldier pursuing Fi (one of the girls), Homer presses his face into a tree, "having his own private meeting with the devil" (*The Dead of the Night* 145); later, however, he is caught by Ellie notching up his kills (177). This is reminiscent of *Lord of the Flies*, but Marsden's books, because of Ellie's focalization and because of her preoccupations with (amongst other things) sex, are much less a fable and much more a teenage novel.

Bakhtin notes that double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized: "It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" (324). These texts represent a diversity of internally-dialogized discourses and, through the many voices (*heterroglossia*) of their teenage subjects set up a number of openly declared and contesting subject positions. However, most significantly, they also clearly serve the refracted intentions of Marsden, arguably commercially acute and politically correct, but also, I believe, sincerely committed to his moral purposes: promoting intelligent and critical examination of contemporary Australian cultural assumptions, ideologies, and fears. In thematically engaging with the specific fears that have long been enmeshed in the cultural currency of Australia and that continue to reshape themselves in a twenty-first-century context, he interrogates within an evolutionary perspective the very nature of fear and the problematic nature of human response to it.

If Marsden can be read this way in terms both of specific Australian fears and a wider human perspective, the same ought to be true of Canadian books that do, as the Canadian list suggests, often centre on questions of fear. That fear, also, would surely represent not only a specific Canadian cultural fear but also deeper and more universal ones. As in any compara-

tive study, it is necessary for me to leave it to Canadians to test this through the specifically Canadian resonances of Canadian texts.

To conclude, it is interesting indeed that deep national fears — tacit, unspoken, and sensitive — nonetheless are "uttered" in literary works for children. Does children's literature provide a particular sort of freedom to address these difficult issues? (James Maloney's trilogy *Dougie, Gracey,* and *Angela,* in which the author articulates racial attitudes and prejudices, is another Australian example.) Is this why increasing numbers of Australian Aboriginal writers are choosing to life-write in picture book form, as, for example, in Elaine Russell's *A is for Aunty,* Daisy Utemorrah and Pat Torres's *Do Not Go Around the Edges,* Ian Abdullah's *As I Grew Older,* and Edna Tantjingu Williams and Eileen Wani Wingfield's *Down the Hole, Up the Tree, Across the Sandhills*? I would be surprised if there were not Canadian examples of children's books that, against different backdrops, engage with similar issues and fears.

One last point, which relates, I think, to the strong pedagogical concerns and intentions that are at the deep core of children's books (see Johnston, "Childhood"). Children's literature has played an overt advocatory role for multiculturalism in both Australia and Canada. Multiculturalism stresses cultural diversity and difference. In a society that desires to overcome fears and suspicions and to move forward, a different image of connection and community is now necessary. The many cultures of Australia, introduced at various times over 200 years, including its ancient Indigenous culture, which provides a solid and sacred core, must develop a focus past assimilation, past multiculturalism, past guilt, past blame, into a sense of oneness within difference that is well expressed (no matter what you think of the contextual source) in what could be called a Corinthian model:

> Your body has many parts — limbs, organs, cells — but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. . . . A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. . . . If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. (Peterson 424-25)

It is ideas such as these that are the creative impulse of *The Papunya School Book of Country and History,* produced by the children and staff of Papunya School, near Alice Springs in Central Australia. This book, arguably more an illustrated text than a picture book, uses landscape as a way of teaching, a way of learning, a way of seeing, and most of all in Papunya, ontologically as a *way of being.* Each page has a subtitle, a type of chapter heading, the first one being "Learning Country": "At Papunya School, *ngurra* — country — is at the centre of our learning. It is part of everything we need to know. . . . *Ngurra* is our word for home. It is also our word for

homeland or traditional country" (2). Country — land — home — *ngurra* — is close-focused as history in songs and paintings and Dreaming stories.

But the Papunya school curriculum is also about "two way learning": "But as well as learning in this traditional way, we can also find out about our country and our history by putting some of the pieces of the story into a book. That's two way learning: Anangu way, and Western way" (2). Here are the circles of beginnings, the tracks of humans and animals overlapping, contrasted within a collocation of visual history. The "new vision" for Papunya school is a visual one, with the Honey Ant Dreaming at its heart and as point of connection, and with *Tjulkura* and *Anangu* teachers working together on curricula and teaching. Western style maps cohabit with Indigenous aerial views; traditional borders tell stories of animal tracks next to photographs that tell other stories; the totemic honey ant metaphor and imagery bring together the two knowledge systems: "We want to see the children, after being educated at Papunya School, coming out like honey ants full of honey — nice and healthy honey — not poison inside. We want to see the children learning both ways, and coming out bright orange and yellow together, like honey ants" (45).

There are connections here also to the question of double-focalized books that Perry Nodelman's essay in this issue of *Canadian Children's Literature* focuses on, and to the ways in which they represent a doubleness and border mentality. This goes back to the following list item:

> the novels switch repeatedly between two contexts, or have two stories going at the same time. For example, the novel might be structured around two different points in a series of events (flashbacks), two different focalizing characters, or two different historical settings. The two contexts come together dramatically at the central moment of the plot. (34)

The two contexts of the *Papunya* book come together in a temporal frame of doubleness that reconciles rather than switches; that does not relate to past as much as future. This doubleness is deliberate, sensitive, and fragile. It recognizes different cultural, spiritual, and physical perspectives but sets them delicately alongside each other as an imaginative embryo of hope.

The Corinthian model is exactly the understory of *Cloudstreet*, which, while not a children's novel, illuminates much that is childlike in the story of Fish Lamb (who is seriously disabled after being rescued from near drowning and "grows up" as a child). Its deepest vein of narrative tells of two very different, flawed, idiosyncratic, injured, messy families beginning uneasily to share the same large house. At first they are suspicious, critical; they measure off individual spaces, erect divisions and barriers, watch each other secretly, but ultimately, after many trials, they not so much overcome their fears as decide to live with them, "different-but-similar," together. This is surely a way forward into a sustainable future, not just of Australia, or Canada, but of the world.

Notes

1 Winton's *Dirt Music* (2001) was, however, shortlisted for the 2002 Booker Prize, which was won by Martel's *A Life of Pi*. It is also important to note that Australians who read Atwood (just as Canadians who read Winton) may understand and interpret central issues differently and miss what Canadians (Australians) read as specifically national resonances. When a book achieves an international readership but is not set in the author's national context — for example, the work of Martel or Ondaatje or some of David Malouf — such national differences may be less apparent.

2 Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt (1966-67), who was later himself lost (his body was never found) while swimming on an isolated and rugged Victorian beach on 17 Dec. 1967, spoke these words during a White House visit. They were widely used to justify sending over 50,000 Australian troops to Vietnam, 500 of whom would never return. Australia was committed to the war in Vietnam by Holt's predecessor, Robert Gordon Menzies.

3 I have commented on this in an earlier paper ("Children's Literature Advancing Australia").

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