
From Colonial Superstition to the Hairyman: Aboriginality and the Politics of Race

By Juliet O'Connor

Australian children's books are both constitutive and reflective of the ideologies of the time and place in which they are produced. The history of social relations between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians during the twentieth century is embodied in the political ideologies of the colonial endeavour and later assimilationist, multicultural, self determination and reconciliation policies. Here I examine the changing representation of Aboriginality with particular focus on the characterization of Indigenous protagonists, in three twentieth century Australian texts from the legend genre. The colonial and assimilationist discourses which inform the earlier narratives are contrasted with a recent radical alternative.

My selection of texts comprises the *Legends of the Coochin Valley* [1946] by Enid Bell, illustrated by Marjorie de Winter, *Tales from the Dead Heart* (1944) by John Ewers, illustrated by Leo Porter and *My Girragundji* (1998) by Meme McDonald and Boori Pryor. The mid century texts are selected from a period in Australian literary history when narratives for children in the legend genre consisted wholly of non Indigenous representations. I have written elsewhere (O'Connor 2006, 2007) of the pivotal collection of traditional stories for children, *The Legends of Moonie Jarl* (1964), the first collection to be written and illustrated by the Indigenous owners of those stories. Here I examine some of the strategies employed to formulate the legend genre for child readers prior to the inclusion of an active Indigenous voice in Australian publishing for children. *Legends of the Coochin Valley* is a narrative reflecting upon the author's childhood on the colonial Coochin Coochin Station and Bell's friendship with her family's Indigenous Australian servant, Bunjoey. I will argue that these 'legends' are mediated by the author to create an imagined Aboriginality encompassed by colonial benevolence. *Tales from the Dead Heart* interprets traditional Indigenous story within parameters recognizable today as the exotic Other. In contrast the late twentieth century narrative *My Girragundji* is a collaboration between Indigenous author Boori Pryor and non Indigenous author Meme McDonald. This semi-biographical narrative incorporates Indigenous traditional story in contemporary fiction. I argue that the misconceptions of Indigenous incapacity and pastoral welfarism evident in the mid century texts are reversed by the end of the century in *My Girragundji*.

The legend genre is a broad literary field encompassing diverse elements from popular tales, myth, folklore, cultural fantasy, discourses of Indigenous sacredness and traditional stories. In Australian children's literature, the terms Aboriginal legend, Dreaming and Dreamtime stories are commonly used loosely to include various elements of the legend genre. To avoid this blurring of terms I use Aboriginal legend, Dreaming or Dreamtime stories only when quoting a source that uses those terms. I prefer to use the phrase traditional Indigenous story to mean story having a relationship with specific Indigenous Australian knowledge systems, communities and country. I will use cultural fantasy for generalised or unattributed versions of traditional Indigenous story rendered as fantasy.

My analysis examines visual, textual and paratextual elements of these narratives. Paratext occurs before and after the main body of the text and in this selection of books includes dust jacket blurbs, advertisements, the introduction, preface, foreword, acknowledgements, biographical notes and glossaries. The importance of the paratext lies in the framing strategy it offers readers as a means to interpret the book. Paratextual contributions may overtly or subtly promote authorial credibility. For example, glossaries are common paratextual elements in nineteenth and early twentieth century scientific reportage and collections of folklore. Barry Hill (2002, p. 11) observes that anthropologists like Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen who published works on central Australian Indigenous communities, assimilated evolutionary Darwinism into their methodology and made objects of the Indigenous peoples they studied. Theirs and other anthropological studies of this period objectified Indigenous Australian peoples, languages and sacredness in their observations of traditional culture and ceremonies. Through these associations, glossaries have the capacity to explain Indigenous or Creole terms, to infer authorial expertise as translator and observer of Indigenous peoples and to locate the narrative as culturally Other by objectifying Indigenous knowledge systems. It is significant that Penelope Davie's (2006) analysis of Indigenous authored children's books published in the last decades of the twentieth century found a marked change in the role played by paratextual elements. She observed that in Indigenous narratives the paratext had a mediating role in the syncretisation of diverse beliefs.

Legends of the Coochin Valley is a reflective narrative recalling the author's childhood on Coochin Coochin Station in north east Queensland. Bell (1881-1965) was a member of a leading Queensland family who settled the area in the nineteenth century. The narrative mediates a path between the colonizer and the colonized and in doing so creates an imagined Aboriginality that Bell offers to readers as local 'Aboriginal legends'. Much of the text is skewed to privilege the colonial purpose where settlement marks the beginning of civilization and misconceptions of Indigenous incapacity are numerous.

The portrayal of the Indigenous Australian character Bunjoey, or Susan as the reader learns she is renamed on Coochin Coochin Station, begins in the frontispiece (Figure 1). There Bunjoey sits compliantly at the base of a flagpole looking to the top where a kookaburra perches. This welcoming scene includes a corner of an attractive homestead in the background, supporting the sense of colonial benevolence. A demure Bunjoey in western clothing shares the foreground with

the object of her gaze, the kookaburra, and a number of birds splashing in their birdbath. Framed within the flagpole-birdbath triangle Bunjoey sits on the ground. The significance of totemic associations for Indigenous people with specific animals is an important part of Indigenous knowledge systems. However Bunjoey in this image is removed from her cultural homeland through the colonial transformation of her land and is positioned at one corner of the triangle of wildlife around her. This image gives effect to the tension between Bunjoey's primitivity and the colonial endeavour. Bunjoey's smile is her only distinguishable facial feature, together with her clothing and compliant pose suggests to the reader that she is the recipient of the benevolence of the wealth of colonial patronage surrounding her. This image is crafted to imply the potential to transform Bunjoey's instinctive primitivity into a dutiful servant of the homestead.

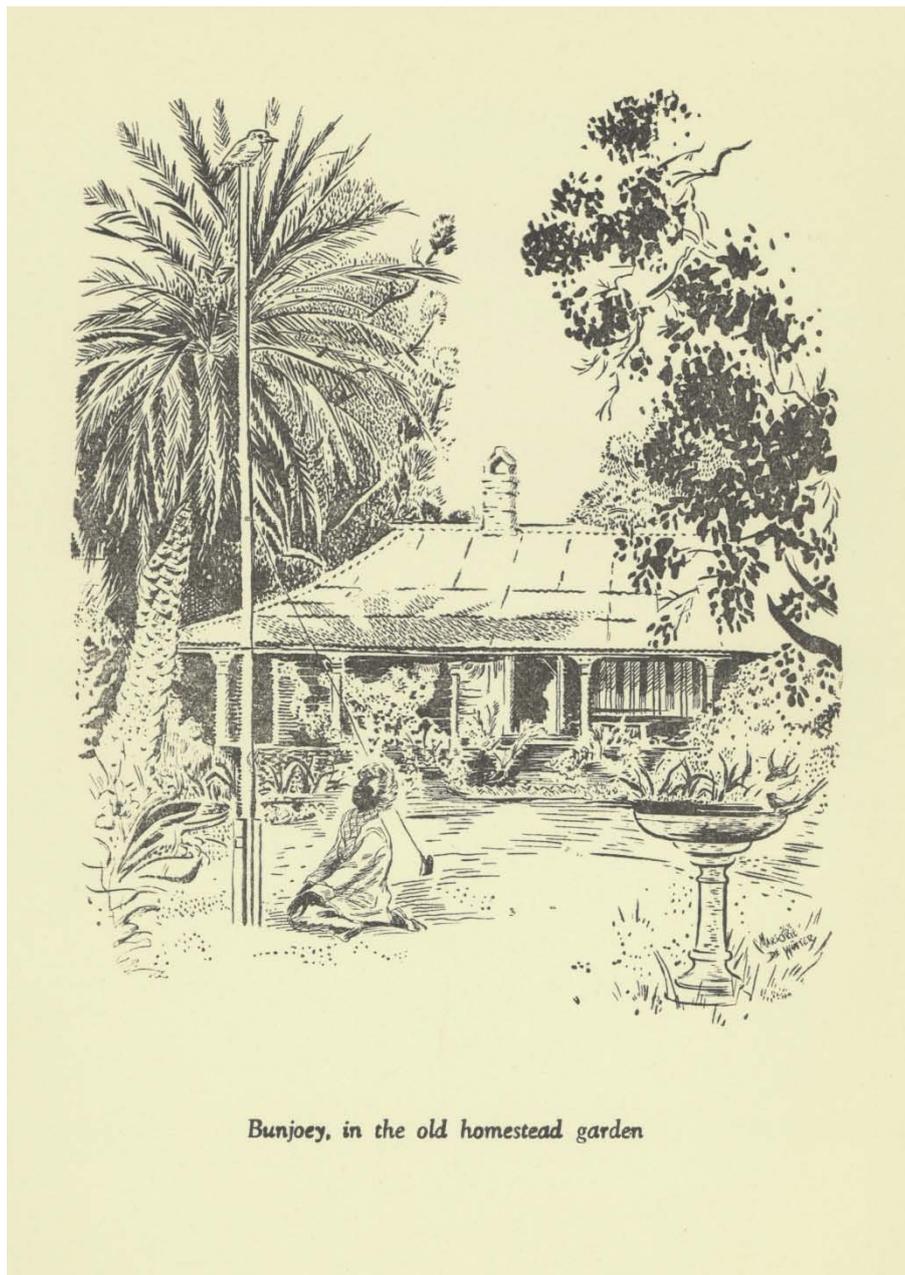


Figure 1. From: *Legends of the Coochin Valley* [1946] by Enid Bell, illustrated by Marjorie de Winter, unnumbered frontispiece.

In the narrative, Bell establishes a value system linked to the colonial purpose where settlement marks the beginning of civilization. Causal suggestions are implied about the idyllic natural life ‘In a land of interminable sunshine, rich with animal life and vegetation, they [Indigenous Australian people] lived an effortless and leisured life.’ (unnumbered p. 1) By positioning colonized people as idle and careless about their country, the author explicitly negates the values the Ugarapul people hold for country. Simultaneously Bell privileges settler intervention by the implication that the industriousness of the colonizers necessitates responsible intentions for the land. Bell’s strategy serves to support the power imbalance between the colonized and the colonizer. This is one of a number of strategies recognized in Franz Fanon’s (1990) treatise of the dispossessed of Algeria. He describes the process of domination where colonizers initially complain of the natives’ slowness, their laziness and their fatalism (p. 59). Bell’s narrative employs descriptions that give effect to Fanon’s observations.

The aboriginals were not a cowardly race, but the white invaders, with their scientific implements and weapons, were to them supernatural.... Wider and wider unresisted conquest spread, and before it, utterly unable to fit themselves to a new code of existence under the laws of their conquerors, the native race rapidly dwindled and dissolved into the shadows of an unknown and forgotten past.

(unnumbered p. 11)

Bell constructs an Aboriginality which drifts helplessly, implying an aimless, stumbling physical pace. An unmotivated, idyllic life equates with laziness. Bell’s repeated description of an almost vanished race, affects a fatalistic voice-over. The narrative suggests that progress, distinct from settler accountability for the slaughter of Indigenous Australians, swept away the remnants of what she establishes is a primitive Indigenous Australian culture.

Paratextual components support the colonial project. There are three independent newspaper recommendations and a Preface by Lady Gowrie, the then Governor General’s wife and family friend who had enjoyed the hospitality of the Coochin Homestead. Much is made of Bell’s colonial heritage as a member of a leading Queensland family and her vice royal guest Lady Gowrie in the advertisements. In addition *The Bulletin*, Jan 1, 1947 suggests ‘The spears and shields of the Ugarapul warriors lie crumbled into dust...’ (front fold of dustjacket) of a culture now lost. *The Telegraph*, Nov 18, 1946 suggests the now extinguished primitive culture is fortunately saved by Bell in ‘The fascinating legends of these mysterious and interesting people are brought to life in all their primitive beauty by Enid Bell—her delightful prose makes pleasant reading’ (back fold of dustjacket). Lady Gowrie’s Preface personalizes Bell’s endeavour ‘Susan, the daughter of Moonpago, the last chief of the Ugarapuls, has followed them into oblivion. But in her enchanting legends Enid Bell brings their primitive beauty once again before us.’ (unnumbered Preface) The paratext addresses the reader in ways that supports Bell’s project of speaking on behalf of the Ugarapul people. A similar mode of power manipulation is described by Edward Said (2003) in his exploration of how Orientalists locate themselves in writing about the Orient. Said notes (p. 20) that the Orientalist manipulates knowledge and power by ‘... the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes motifs that circulate in the text—all of

which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf.' Thus the paratext in *Legends of the Coochin Valley* reinforces the means by which Bell's narrative employs knowledge and power to dominate colonized people.

Following Said's thesis on *Orientalism*, Clare Bradford (2001, p. 110) says 'In Australian children's literature, the dynamics of Aboriginalism, knowledge and power operate by positioning child readers to assent to the versions of Aboriginality proposed by knowledgeable and sympathetic experts, who speak about and for Aborigines.' Bradford's example referred to Kate Langloh Parker's (1896, 1898) versions of the Noongahburrah peoples stories collected on Bangate, the Parker's northern NSW property. Like Parker, Bell is promoted in the paratext as the 'knowledgeable and sympathetic' expert through her friendship with the Coochin Homestead's Indigenous servant. In turn the child reader is encouraged to assent to the hierarchy in the colonial endeavour which enabled colonizers to speak about and for Indigenous Australians that they displaced. The paratext in *Legends of the Coochin Valley* defines white-black relations for the intended white reader and positions Bell as an altruistic authorized narrator.

The pivot in Bell's narrative is Bunjoey, or Susan as she is known on the homestead. The Bunjoey-Susan character reflects a primitive-civilised binary. Bunjoey is the last survivor of the local Ugarapul people, while the homestead's Susan becomes the author's personal friend (unnumbered p. 7). This authorial device reconciles Bunjoey's importance with Bell's authority as reteller of the stories. The renaming of Bunjoey by colonists codes imperialist ideology by affirming imaginative control over the colonized people. Marjorie de Winter's illustrations depict two sides to the Bunjoey-Susan character. The semi-naked, adolescent Bunjoey on walkabout is drawn with darkened face in a way that obscures her individuality. When clothed, Susan is seen as the recipient of western benevolence, symbolizing her imagined aspirations of self improvement. The portrayal of Susan is tinged with ridicule in descriptions of her amusing antics '...arrayed in someone's cast off habit which she would wear with the smart jaunty air she gave to all her clothes' (unnumbered p. 11). The 'cast off' nature of her clothing positions Susan as the recipient of pastoral welfarism. Furthermore, the fully clothed Susan usefully employed around the homestead encourages the reader to see her as having graduated to an enhanced way of being human. The contrast between the semi-naked Bunjoey on walkabout with the smiling fully clothed Susan signals preferred positioning to the reader.

To reconcile the binary that Bell has created in her protagonist, the author then cleaves the Bunjoey-Susan character by mythologizing Bunjoey and civilizing Susan. Bunjoey's knowledge of Ugarapul people's traditional stories is retold by Bell, suggesting Bunjoey

... remembered and understood from her earlier life all the customs and superstitions of her own primitive people, and she had learnt, with an extraordinary understanding, the customs and religion of the white conquerors of her own race.

(unnumbered p. 9)

Bell's [1946] description diminishes Indigenous knowledge systems of spirituality as superstition while promoting the Christian beliefs of the conquerors. This diminution of Indigenous spirituality is a colonizer strategy recognized in Fanon's treatise where he notes 'The customs of the colonized people, their traditions, their myths-above all, their myths-are the very sign of that poverty of spirit and of their constitutional depravity' (p. 32).

Bradford (2001, p. 48) argues that 'The religious discourses that most powerfully inform representations of Aboriginality in children's books are those of Aboriginal sacredness, and of Christianity.' In *Legends of the Coochin Valley* Bell privileges Christianity as an enlightened form of understanding which Bunjoey is able to achieve despite her suggested background of primitive superstitions. Coded into this representation of Aboriginality is supremacy of the colonizer over the colonized. The narrative suggests that when separated from her former superstitious beliefs, Susan becomes useful in later life as a person to provide amusement for the homestead children. The reader is encouraged to view Susan's character development as a direct response to colonial benevolence and her people's demise as Indigenous incapacity to adjust to the tide of western civilization.

Having constructed separate characters and multiple worlds, Bell prioritizes imperial ideology by gradually adding substance to Susan of the homestead while Bunjoey becomes less tangible. Bell invokes the timelessness of the country occupied by the Ugarapul people in anticipating their demise as Bunjoey is the last of her tribe, gradually transforming Bunjoey, her people and their stories into local mythology. She generalizes that Indigenous people though not cowardly were helplessly superstitious and their inability to adjust to laws that privilege settlers led to their dissolution into shadow. Conveniently avoiding the atrocities of the colonial phase in Australia's history, Bell creates a palatable revision of history for the reader which simply makes the 'Aboriginal problem' fade into shadow and disappear.

Tales from the Dead Heart is written by John Ewers, a West Australian schoolteacher, author and poet and illustrated by Leo Porter. First published in Sydney in 1944, an American edition followed in 1947 called *Written in Sand* illustrated by American artist Avery Johnson. Both editions have the same text and the American edition reinforces the intention that this narrative is intended for white readers in addressing white-black relations in the Australian setting. The inclusion of a glossary provides translation of Indigenous words and explanation of places, 'tribal' names, implements, specific topographical features and common names for Australian animals. The inclusion of a glossary in this narrative functions to promote the author as a knowledgeable authority on life in the 'Dead Heart' of the title.

My analysis is based on the original Australian edition which I suggest is a cultural fantasy, illustrated with black and white images at times effecting semi-photographic imagery. *Tales of the Dead Heart* is framed as a quest for knowledge where Ngangan, an orphaned Indigenous boy journeys through central Australia following the course of the Finke River. Ngangan is accompanied by Woma, a carpet snake with special magical powers who explains the significance of place to the young boy. Clare Bradford (2001, p. 48) argues that Aboriginal sacredness can

manifest in a variety of genres as a locus of desire and that representations of Indigenous spirituality in fantastic discourses may suggest a mythical significance that transcends human life. Throughout Ngangan's quest the carpet snake is positioned as keeper and giver of Indigenous knowledge. Potential lies in this narrative strategy to develop the notion of the totemic significance of certain animals to specific Indigenous systems of knowledge. At each of four camp sites Ngangan seeks a story about the significance of place. Most often Woma supplies that information but sometimes other animals tell Ngangan a story. For example in the chapter 'Yerumba, the Honey Ant' an ant keen to escape Ngangan's consumption, tells a humorous story of a wise mopoke named Kore-gore. This dissipates the potential for totemic significance in the carpet snake and instead suggests the Indigenous protagonist possesses an order of understanding the language of many animals that transcends human possibility and enters the realm of fantasy.

Each of Leo Porter's illustrations of Ngangan avoids a direct gaze with the reader. Ngangan is always drawn turned away or with facial detail obscured. The frontispiece reveals Ngangan naked with his back to the reader, bent over his fire stick with Woma coiled by his side. The broad shouldered physique of Ngangan resembles that of a man seated, making fire and accompanied by a serpent. This imagery signifies a means of containing Aboriginality in a primitive Other modality; that is a naked man using a primitive means of making fire and having an affinity with a wild animal. In *Orientalism* Edward Said describes the motif of the primitive Other as one of the discursive practices through which the West ideologically structures an imagined East. Bradford also observes this as a recurring motif in her analysis of Aboriginalism (p. 15). In *Tales from the Dead Heart* Aboriginality is repeatedly drawn as a form of primitive Other that maintains anonymity and employs a semi-photographic effect to create a tension between fantasy and reality.

Ewers (1944) opening chapter describes Ngangan as 'blackier than the blackest night, for there were no stars or moon shining in his ebony skin. There was only a dull shimmering all over him where he had rubbed his body with the fat of the Illa-Pilla, the old goanna he had killed the day before.' (pp. 5-6) The narrator describes how Ngangan's keen hearing alerts him to Woma's approach and that Ngangan invites Woma to join him as he makes fire. Ewers continues the sensual description 'Woma rubbed his body along the boy's leg and thrust his blue tongue against the boy's face. Then, curling himself like a coil of rope, he rested by Ngangan and watched him with bright green eyes.' (p. 6) Ngangan joins Woma singing his snake song while continuing to focus on twirling his fire stick. The snake song, about hunting great kangaroos and spirits making magic, is the first of a number of songs celebrating masculinity in this narrative. As the pair sing the fire stick becomes hotter, the singing louder until a spark flies out and lights the bark prepared by Ngangan. Soon a roaring fire warms the companions. This opening scene and sensual crescendo recalls colonial portraiture of Indigenous Australians that promote the sexualization of the black figure. It is therefore surprising that the text reveals Ngangan is a seven year old boy who has fended for himself since he was orphaned at the age of two. This sensualized exotic Other is Ewers' Aboriginalist formulation in the same modality that Said describes the Orientalist's subject created not so much of the East itself as the East made known, and therefore less fearsome to the Western reading public (p. 60).

Though Ngangan is a member of the Wonkonguru people of the Lake Eyre district, he is portrayed as operating as a loner, as a hero with a magical companion. At the companions last camp Ngangan breaks tribal law and secretly watches a rain making corroboree. Woma foreshadows the mortal consequences of disobeying the law but Ngangan goes further by stealing the 'witch doctor's' rain stick and is nearly killed by a rock python. In a spectacular battle Woma saves Ngangan and kills the rock python. Though the carpet snake warns Ngangan of the trouble he will cause by breaking tribal law, Woma nevertheless gives Ngangan the secret to making rain. In a reversal of the teaching role traditionally attributed to Indigenous Elders of their community, the carpet snake Woma functions as transcendental magus. The potential for totemic association reflecting Indigenous knowledge systems is instead shaped as a hero quest.

The syncretic opportunity is subsumed into the trope of the hero quest in the last chapter, 'Ngangan Makes a Great Flood'. Saved from the deadly grip of the rock python, Ngangan regains consciousness in the cave where Woma initially admonishes him for disobeying traditional law. Woma warns him that because of his transgression all the Wonkonguru people have taken up the search to kill the boy. Ngangan again defies traditional law and uses the stolen rain stick with the secret knowledge Woma gave him to make rain for his people. The boy is warned that this is inappropriate without a fuller understanding of the spiritual implications but Ngangan's protests "If I made a great rain it will make everyone happy." (Ewers 1944, p. 70) The simplicity of this response lessens the implications of Ngangan's transgression as does Woma's subsequent quip about a snake's discomfort at getting wet. Ngangan's successful defiance of traditional law positions Indigenous knowledge as a form of superstition that simple common sense can overcome. The quest concludes with the seven year old Ngangan pronounced a revered 'medicine man' for resolving the water crisis despite his lack of understanding of the full spiritual implications of his actions.

In 1998 Boori Pryor and Meme McDonald published a radical alternative to these earlier narratives. Written in the voice of an Indigenous boy, *My Girragundji* integrates Indigenous tradition in contemporary fiction reshaping reader perceptions of the ongoing nature of Indigenous culture and the complexity of Indigenous knowledge systems.

The oral genesis of this narrative is supplied in the paratext placed at the end of the book. The stories Pryor told to McDonald's daughter, about his childhood in northern Queensland were recorded by McDonald, locating McDonald as listener, recorder and collaborator. Photographs of Queensland mangroves support the narrative setting and permission to use photographs of the authors' extended families to illustrate the story is acknowledged in the paratext. Explanation of Indigenous terms, locations and vernacular are incorporated into the narrative rather than supplied in a glossary. The paratext also identifies Pryor as mediator of personal experience as fiction rather than autobiography. Enriched with family jokes and yarns the authors acknowledge the collaboration and approval of family as essential to the narrative. Here the paratext underlines the complexities of ownership, authority, authorship and audience relationship within Indigenous cultural production.

My Girragundji is a story about a young Indigenous boy's fear of the Hairyman, a bad spirit in his family home, and how a green frog, or girragundji, is sent by the old people to protect the boy's spirit. Indigenous knowledge systems interplay between daily practice and understanding. The first person narration addresses both black and white readers with anecdotes about fighting parents, getting into trouble, sibling rivalry and reference to the effects of alcohol on family life. The boy's concerns in everyday life include being bullied, being bitten by snakes, bed wetting and how to develop friendships.

The narrative opens with a signifier of Indigenous belief, the Hairyman, which can manifest as a good or bad spirit. In the boy's house the Hairyman is a bad spirit and becomes the focus of his night-time fears. His personal confrontation with this fear is initiated through his belief in the spiritual significance of his girragundji. The physical presence of the girragundji in the boy's room at night gives him confidence, 'I never used to lie with my head up this end. Now my girragundji's with me, I sleep with my head up the louvre end all the time.' (McDonald & Pryor 1998, p. 41) As the boy's increasing confidence enables him to confront his daytime fears, his relationship with the girragundji deepens.

When I get angry, I think of my gundji. I watch how she pushes down with her legs and leaps so high. I take that anger and I push him down into my legs. I run with that anger. I run so hard I beat the lot of them. I kick further than anyone, even with no boots on. I climb higher into the air. No one can catch me now. Not even with their curses. And I laugh and call to my girragundji to take me higher.

(p. 36)

Two photographs illustrate this scene (Figures 2 and 3). The smiling boy is shown jumping to catch a football with arms up stretched and fingers splayed, the curve of his torso showing his ribs. A leaping frog in the next photograph has a similar orientation with splayed digits on its front legs and the skeletal framework of its torso evident. The sequential placement of these photographs contests colonial misrepresentations of Indigenous Australians as equivalent to animals. The text and the first image focus on the boy's aspirations in a game of football. The orientation of the girragundji on the next page links aspiration with the boy's belief system. In combination the text and photographs focus on aspirations on a spiritual level, foreshadowing the totemic significance of his girragundji, fully revealed later when the boy loses her. Concerned his girragundji has been taken by a snake, the boy attempts her rescue and says:

I freeze in the dark. My mind leaves me and goes to her. I stroke her gently as a cool breeze. I whisper I love her. I can hear her. 'Our spirits... always... together... you are strong... no matter what.' Then she is gone. I lie in the mud crying like a rainstorm.

(p. 70)

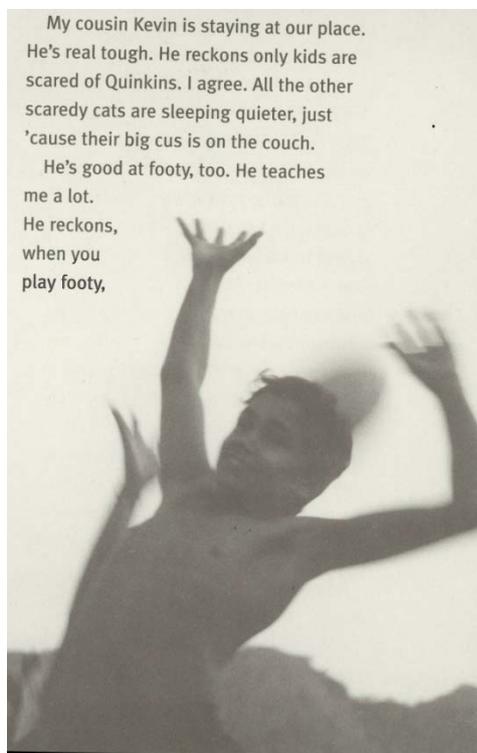


Figure 2. From: *My Girragundji* (1998) by Meme McDonald & Boori Pryor, p. 35. Photograph by Meme McDonald.



Figure 3. From: *My Girragundji* (1998) by Meme McDonald & Boori Pryor, p. 37. Photograph by Meme McDonald.

The physical loss of his girragundji completes the formation of her totemic significance within Indigenous knowledge systems. An integral element of this scene is the boy's empowerment through Indigenous spirituality.

The smoking ceremony in *My Girragundji* interrupts the colonial discourse by focusing on Indigenous subjectivity. To rid the family home of the Hairyman, the narrative introduces the smoking ceremony, a traditional Indigenous means of removing bad spirits. The hierarchical nature of Indigenous knowledge enlists the authority of Indigenous Elder grandad Popeye to conduct the smoking ceremony. The narrator explains that because the Hairyman is a bad white spirit 'My Dad reckons we gotta get that church fella in to do his business, too, just in case this Hairyman only knows Whitefella language.' (McDonald & Pryor, p. 55) Rather than opposing religious discourses, the smoking ceremony aligns Indigenous and Christian belief systems to a common purpose and maximizes the syncretic potential of this scene. Unlike *Legends of the Coochin Valley* which seeks to replace the Indigenous protagonist's 'superstitions' with Christianity, *My Girragundji* reverses the power relationship by prioritizing Indigenous sacredness and inviting Christian participation.

The earlier narratives described here employ the dichotomy of the primitive and the civilized to fix Indigenous knowledge in a primitive Other category. The *Legends of the Coochin Valley* constructs Indigenous peoples and their stories as left behind by progress, a strategy reflecting social and political policies of colonial displacement. The dying culture motif of the mid century narratives is contested in *My Girragundji* by positioning Indigenous culture in a contemporary late twentieth century setting. The misconception that traditional Indigenous culture is exclusively connected with primitivity is interrupted in the more recent narrative. The smoking ceremony in *My Girragundji*

contests the colonial notion of primitive Indigenous belief systems and reverses the trajectory of imperial hegemony by prioritizing Indigenous spirituality and inviting Christian collaboration.

Characterization of the Indigenous protagonists in each publication reveals much about changing perceptions of Aboriginality. The Indigenous narrator in *My Girragundji* speaks directly to the reader about everyday concerns relevant to Indigenous and non Indigenous readers. Written in the first person, the authors enable an active Indigenous voice. In contrast *Legends of the Coochin Valley* is a reflective narrative whose Aboriginalist perspective privileges the colonist over the colonized. Bunjoey's transformation into Susan through mythologizing devices is a means of adjusting reader sensibilities to messages that the dislocation of Indigenous peoples was a necessary part of the civilizing process brought from Britain. Susan is assimilated into the settler narrative and positioned as the happy beneficiary of pastoral welfare in this discourse of white conqueror of the colonized black subject. Embedded in the narrative is the message for white readers of a culture now lost except for representations of 'legends' offered in publications such as this. Authorial voice shifts from 'authorized' confidante in *Legends of the Coochin Valley* to 'expert' narrator in *Tales from the Dead Heart*. Hicks' glossary suggests first hand knowledge of the central Australian setting and Indigenous culture of the Wonkonguru people. However his production of a cultural fantasy anticipates an acceptable literary form for a non Indigenous Australian and overseas readership in the subsequent American edition. In contrast *My Girragundji* is a combination of semi-autobiography and collaborative listener written in the first person with accessible motifs for both Indigenous and non Indigenous readers.

The Tales of the Dead Heart establishes a strongly gendered narrative employing the colonial stereotype of the exotic Other. The glossary encourages the reader to understand that the author is a knowledgeable expert on central Australian Indigenous culture. It is therefore significant that the potential of the totemic significance of the protagonist's companion, the carpet snake, is not addressed. Instead the literary strategies employed by Hicks imbue his Indigenous protagonist with abilities in excess of what can logically be construed establishing the narrative as a cultural fantasy. In contrast in *My Girragundji* the significance of the boy's totem develops from the physicality of his girragundji's presence in the everyday, developing through his increasing confidence to face his fears and ultimately gaining the knowledge that she would always hold a spiritual significance for the boy. The syncretic possibilities of reconciling Indigenous knowledge with western understanding is shaped as fantasy in the earlier narrative. In contrast *My Girragundji* introduces totemic associations as an accessible motif in self actualization.

The process of postcolonial transformation is perhaps most evident in the differing portrayal of the hierarchical nature of Indigenous knowledge systems, across these three narratives. Bunjoey in *Legends of the Coochin Valley* is notably the daughter of the last chief of the Ugarapul people. This confers western notions of hierarchical importance based on hereditary where Bunjoey, as the daughter of a leader, could be construed as a princess. In *Tales from the Dead Heart* the young Indigenous protagonist flagrantly disregards traditional law and is rewarded as a respected 'medicine man'. Central to Hicks theme in this narrative is the orphan status of Ngangan and how

he operates as a loner, with a magical companion. Ngangan does learn the significance of place through the stories he hears from various animals but he is ultimately rewarded for transgressing traditional law rather than respecting it. In contrast *My Girragundji* prioritizes knowledge passed through generations. The smoking ceremony must wait for the Elder grandad Popeye who has learnt from the old people the right way to perform the ceremony. The representation of Aboriginality in the mid century narratives is a cultural creation of the colonial project designed to legitimize the domination of subjugated people while *My Girragundji* contests the colonial discourse and the syncreticity of the smoking ceremony challenges imperial hegemony.

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