

## Where is the Real Sheep? Exploring the Baahd and Good Sheep Voices in Five Australian Picturebooks

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### Abstract

Farmed animals, such as sheep, featured in children’s picturebooks usually lack their own voices. Since the emergence of the animal turn, there has been an increase in the examination of children’s animal stories from literary animal studies perspectives, which destabilises the human-animal binary by challenging the human domination of other species regarding human-animal relations depicted in literature. In relation to sheep, children’s stories often rely on tropes—such as counting/listing devices, sheep providing wool, or needing to belong to a flock—along with desentimentation to limit or omit sheep voices from the narratives, thus distancing young readers from empathising with sheep and reinforcing the human domination of sheep. In this paper, I draw on and expand upon Janae Dimick’s *And This Little Piggy Had None: Challenging the Dominant Discourse on Farmed Animals in Children’s Picturebooks* to analyse sheep in Australian picturebooks and engage with the ongoing debate regarding representing animal voices in literature. This article analyses the depiction of sheep in five Australian picturebooks and argues that sheep voices are represented mostly in conversation with humans, either on-page human characters or the implied reader, and thus deny sheep individual voices.

**Keywords:** sheep, Australian picturebooks, literary animal studies, empathy

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Australian settler-colonial history is intertwined with sheep, but sheep are often rendered invisible or overlooked in the lives of contemporary, urban-dwelling Australians. The nation’s long history of economic, political, and social relationships with sheep and sheep farming are explored in texts such as M.L. Ryder’s *Sheep & Man* (1983) and Guy Hull’s *The Ferals That Ate Australia* (2021), highlighting how Australia was shaped—economically and environmentally—by the introduction of the species. For myself, it was not until I became a

guardian of sheep and regularly interacted with them that I began to appreciate the complexity of their characters and to question the way they are depicted in media such as picturebooks. This paper analyses five Australian picturebooks to explore the dominance of human voices in farmed animal stories and to amplify sheep voices. Farmed animals, such as sheep, featured in children’s picturebooks usually lack their own voices. Children’s stories starring sheep often rely on tropes—such as counting/listing devices, sheep providing wool, or needing to belong to a flock—along with desentimentization to limit or omit sheep voices from the narratives, thus distancing young readers from empathising with sheep and reinforcing human domination over sheep.

In this article, I draw on and expand upon Janae Dimick’s *And This Little Piggy Had None: Challenging the Dominant Discourse on Farmed Animals in Children’s Picturebooks* (2018) to analyse sheep in Australian picturebooks and to engage with the ongoing debate regarding representing animal voices in literature. Although there are a number of scholars writing in this space, I draw upon Dimick’s work because it engages specifically with picturebooks featuring farmed animals, and her perspective informs my exploration of the selected texts. The terms *nonhuman animal*, *human animal*, and *farmed animal* are frequently used by animal studies academics such as Dimick; however, for the purpose of this paper I will be using the terms *human*, *animal*, and *farmed animal* for ease of understanding.

This article draws upon my larger project in which I analyse the representation of sheep in contemporary, Australian children’s picturebooks<sup>1</sup> but limits the discussion to five picturebooks that exemplify how sheep voices are represented mostly in conversation with humans, either on-page human characters or the implied reader. The selected texts are published between 2004 and 2022 because both *Where is the Green Sheep?* by Mem Fox and Judy Horacek and *Pete the Sheep* by Jackie French and Bruce Whatley—two books with enduring popularity—were published in 2004 and the most recent text at the time of writing this article is *Flocked* by Chren Byng and Andrew Joyner (2022). The other two selected texts are *Baa Baa*

*Blue Sheep* by Tony Wilson and Laura Wood (2019) and *Let Me Sleep, Sheep!* by Meg McKinlay and Leila Rudge (2019). The sheep voices in all five of these stories are contingent to the human, which reinforces the human-centric human-sheep power dynamics.

Since the emergence of the ‘animal turn’, there has been an increase in the examination of children’s animal stories from literary animal studies perspectives, which destabilises the human-animal binary by challenging the human domination of other species regarding human-animal relations depicted in literature. The animal turn, as explained by Sabina Magliocco in ‘Folklore and the Animal Turn’ (2018), evolved as academics from various disciplines investigated the ethical implications of human-animal relationships. The acknowledgement of the animal turn and how human-animal lives are interconnected helps highlight the role of animals culturally and economically (Cederholm et al. 2014, p. 5). Literary animal studies—the intersection of animal stories and animal studies via literature—allows us to examine how animals’ voices are represented in children’s animal stories and how this representation may influence young readers’ perceptions of such species.

Dimick’s term ‘desentientization’ refers to the ‘process of objectifying nonhuman animals’ (2018, p. 86), which in turn erases their voice, agency, and sentience, as well as frees humans of the responsibility of what happens to them, such as slaughter and by-product production (Dimick 2018, p. 87). Desentientization can be applied when analysing picturebooks containing sheep characters through examining how they are positioned within the narrative and the subsequent impact of human-sheep power dynamics. While desentientization also encompasses agency and sentience, for this special issue about own voices I primarily focus on sheep voices. I approach the concept of sheep voices from the position of whether the sheep appear to engage in verbal communication with other on-page characters or directly with the implied reader, and whether they have individual and identifiable voices that are acknowledged—heard—throughout the narrative.

There is deliberation among literary animal studies scholars, such as Margo DeMello (2013; 2012) and Susan McHugh (2011), regarding the ability of writers to speak for animals since humans lack a shared language with animals and rely on anthropomorphism, along with scientific hypotheses, to portray other species in literature. As discussed by Maria Nikolajeva in *Power, Voice and Subjectivity for Young Readers*, animal literary characters are usually assigned human traits, such as their emotions and thoughts replicating humans even if the story is set in the species' natural environment (2010, p. 155). The anthology text *Writing for Animals: New Perspectives for Writers and Instructors to Educate and Inspire* (2018) also highlights the challenges of writing about and for animals, particularly when deviating from social conventions within animal narratives. The dominant conventions surrounding the representation of animal voices could possibly explain why writers favour anthropomorphism, reinforce tropes, or use animals in place of humans when writing stories for young readers. Such representations, however, could have an impact on how the implied reader perceives certain species and might influence whether or not young readers feel compassion for different species.

*Where is the Green Sheep?* written by Mem Fox and illustrated by Judy Horacek was published two decades ago and is ingrained in Australian children's literature, with its enduring popularity evident by repeatedly being in the top ten of Better Reading's Top 50 Kids' Books list, with the book rising from ninth place in 2022 to second place in 2023. The story guides readers through the search for a specific green sheep by utilising sheep as a listing device to count down to the reveal of the titular green sheep sleeping behind a bush on the final page. Rather than providing any insights into the characteristics and sentience of sheep, the story functions to teach children about adjectives through opposite pairs, such as the near sheep and far sheep, moon sheep and star sheep. The book's verbal elements are supported by corresponding visual elements that depict the anthropomorphised sheep performing activities, such as having a bubble bath, playing on a swing, dancing in the rain, and flying a kite. The

story is the weakest case of sheep voices among the texts I analyse in this article because the sheep are portrayed as completely voiceless since the narrative voice focuses on the implied reader as opposed to the sheep characters. While it is a playful book that revolves around the search for a particular sheep, it is not really about sheep.

Human characters are absent from the pages of *Where is the Green Sheep?* and are not depicted as controlling the dialogue or directly influencing the sheep characters. However, some stories omit human characters to remove responsibility for the treatment or objectification of farmed species (Dimick 2018, p. 88). Through the omission of sheep voices, the human-sheep power dynamics are demonstrated through the presence of a human voice when the omniscient narrator guides readers through the search for the titular green sheep by listing each sheep and their assigned role, which is highlighted by the colourful illustrations of the sheep undertaking a certain activity. The human-centred position of the book is reinforced by referring to the green sheep as 'our green sheep,' which contributes to the objectification of the sheep. The inclusion of the implied child reader in the search for 'our' green sheep, suggests the reader is the owner of the sheep and therein privileges human over sheep. While another version of this reading could entail a shared sense of belonging between the sheep and young reader, sheep are historically considered property of humans, thus the 'our' in this case assigns ownership to the readers. In other words, the story is not about sheep—or their voices—at all.

It is not unusual for animal stories to feature animal characters who perform a narrative function that emphasises their supporting—and often subordinate—role in western society (Parry 2017, pp. 111-112), but as a result they could be substituted with another species or object. Through the process of desentimentization, the sheep in *Where is the Green Sheep?* are devoid of any voice as they are merely performing activities for human entertainment, which is highlighted on the penultimate double-page spread of illustrations where sheep are seen participating in various activities such as playing in a sandpit, snorkelling, riding a bicycle, and flying while the corresponding verbal elements query, 'But where is the green sheep?'. If the

story's verbal elements were eliminated, readers could still identify which activity the sheep represent through the visual elements. However, the sheep could be replaced by another species or object which would perform the same role in the narrative as the story does not rely upon sheep voices to function. For example, the narrative could focus on searching for a ball, kite, flower, or even a dog. Unlike in the other selected sheep stories, the sheep do not exhibit the ability to respond to human dialogue or find their voice as the narrative progresses. During the narrative, the sheep do not engage in dialogue with each other or speak directly to the reader. Instead, they simply exist voiceless on the page while the narrator repeatedly poses the question to readers: Where is the green sheep? My query to the text shifts this question to: Where are the—real—sheep?

Unlike in *Where is the Green Sheep?*, human-sheep power dynamics and how they influence sheep voices are more apparent throughout the picturebook *Baa Baa Blue Sheep*, written by Tony Wilson and illustrated by Laura Wood, as humans and sheep feature on the pages. The sheep as wool providers trope is at the heart of the story as the narrative follows the human characters fighting over the different coloured wool, while the sheep are further subordinated through the lack of voice. The narrative is a clear example of how sheep voices are developed in relation to humans as they respond to human demands, which reflects power imbalances and structures often found in children's literature (Nikolajeva 2010, p. 8).

With the reliance on the intertextual reference to the nurse rhyme *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, the story's human characters—the master, the dame, and the little boy who lives down the lane—reinforce human superiority and sheep subordination through having the dominant voices vocalising their demands for wool to the sheep. The power dynamic is reiterated throughout the story through the control of the dialogue with the human characters stating why they should have the right to claim each different coloured wool. This power dynamic is further strengthened through the positioning of the human characters in the foreground or centre of the pages, along with the bags of sought-after wool, while the sheep are often relegated to the

background or edges of the pages. Throughout these interactions, the sheep are voiceless apart from when they are positioned to respond to the humans’ requests and are visually portrayed as diminutive in size compared to all the human characters. The sheep lack individual and identifiable voices as they all respond in kind, with the number of bags of wool they can offer to the humans:

‘Baa, baa, purple sheep,  
have you any wool?’  
‘Yes ma’am, yes ‘ma’am,  
eight bags full.’  
‘I WANT IT ALL!’  
said the dame in a huff. (np)

The intertextuality of this narrative and the nursery rhyme could have granted the sheep individual voices to educate readers about wool and offered them a voice beyond replying with the number of bags of wool they have available. However, since the story represents sheep as wool providers whose sole purpose is to provide humans wool, they are—as Dimick highlights in children’s farmed animal stories—denied individual personalities and identified by physical differences (Dimick 2018, p. 113), which contributes to their lack of voice.

The story is about the by-product sheep provide humans, which continues the erasure of their voices. The trope of sheep being wool providers is further exemplified through the visual elements. Throughout the story, a single colourful sheep is only central to the pages if directly addressed by the humans. They are then relegated to the peripherals, background, or even omitted, after the by-product is obtained and fought over by the humans, with at least one of the humans visible on every double-page spread. The first page features the blue sheep in the spotlight alongside their nine bags of wool as the master speaks, while seven white sheep are behind a fence in the background. In contrast, the final page repositions the seven colourful sheep from throughout the story silently in the background, scattered across the rolling, green fields. The human characters are foregrounded alongside the by-product—bags and balls of wool—with the master and dame depicted as knitting. The little boy who lives down the lane wears a colourful, knitted jumper, and the master has a knitted beanie, signifying the by-

product’s purpose: to be made into garments for humans. The irony of obtaining ownership of the sheep’s wool to make human clothes may not be apparent to young readers, but it further normalises the desentimentization of sheep as opposed to using the story as an opportunity—potentially through the little boy who lives down the lane—to promote more equitable human-sheep power dynamics. The story reinforces the dominant discourse surrounding sheep as it encourages young readers to believe sheep exist as wool providers to produce the by-products for humans, thus reinforcing human-sheep power dynamics.

A well-known Australian sheep picturebook that demonstrates how a sheep character can gain an individual voice through their association with a human character is *Pete the Sheep*, written by Jackie French and illustrated by Bruce Whatley. The story revolves around shearing, but instead of being about the number of bags of wool the sheep can produce, the narrative focuses on Pete the sheep and Shaun the shearer’s partnership. Pete and Shaun encounter discrimination in the shearing shed, which leads to Pete’s idea they should start a salon in town to cater for sheep who desire cool wool cuts. While the sheep in *Baa Baa Blue Sheep* have limited voices through only responding to human demands, Pete is provided an individual voice through his association with Shaun and is able to converse with Shaun and the other sheep characters. In this scenario, sheep voices are developed in relation to the on-page human character and their role in the story. Pete is the titular character, but the other sheep gain voices—regarding their wishes for cool wool cuts—through Pete’s acquaintanceship. Hence, Pete’s voice is utilised to amplify the voices of the other sheep characters, thus reducing the overall depiction of sheep desentimentization as seen in other sheep texts.

Pete’s role as a sheep-sheep—a sheep who assists Shaun similar to how the sheep-dogs help the other shearers—showcases him conversing in translated baas. Throughout the story, Pete’s voice is depicted on-page as baas with a translation provided, or Shaun responds as if he understands exactly what Pete says. For example, Pete is portrayed as speaking after Shaun introduces him to the rest of the shearers and the other sheep are entering the shearing shed:

'baa!' said Pete politely,  
which in sheep talk means,  
'Hello, delighted to meet you.  
Madam, please step this way.' (np)

Pete's individual voice and his ability to provide directions to other characters challenge the typical human-sheep power dynamics where sheep are positioned to respond to humans. Moreover, Pete's voice is heard throughout the narrative without being interrupted by Shaun. However, the other shearers do not address Pete directly or appear to heed what he says. Instead, they insult Pete while speaking to Shaun, thus indicating how the other shearers perceive human-sheep power dynamics.

The alliance between Pete and Shaun demonstrates more equitable power dynamics than those relationships depicted in *Baa Baa Blue Sheep*. These power dynamics can be seen throughout the story through the interactions and dialogue. The verbal elements are supported by the anthropomorphised illustrations where Pete emulates Shaun's body language and posture and undertakes human-like activities, such as holding up a mirror, thus at times suggesting Pete is different from an average sheep owing to his bond with Shaun. The visual elements further support Pete's individualism, with him depicted as wearing a wide-brimmed hat like the shearers prior to obtaining his cool cut, which Shaun then wears post-cool cut. Additionally, Shaun's attire can be contrasted with the other shearers in the story—Ratso, Big Bob, and Bungo—as they wear identical singlets, shorts, and boots, along with similar hats. These outfits act as uniforms which, along with their parallel body language and on-page proximity, generates a 'flock-like' identity that further situates them apart from Pete and Shaun. Meanwhile, Shaun wears a lighter colour singlet and blue shorts, and only acquires a hat after Pete has his cool cut, thus again demonstrating how he and Pete are aligned and different from the other shearers.

Pete's role as the focal sheep character is further demonstrated through his socialisation with the other sheep. The sheep in *Baa Baa Blue Sheep*—as well as *Where is the Green Sheep?*—are not represented as actively conversing among themselves; however, Pete is

depicted as verbally communicating with the other sheep, both as a sheep-sheep and later when showing off his cool wool cut. The secondary sheep characters subsequently visit Shaun’s salon in town instead of the shearing shed, which gains popularity quickly as demonstrated by the verbal elements, ‘Soon, everyone was talking about Shaun’s Sheep Salon’. Accompanying this statement are anthropomorphised images of sheep chatting among themselves and showing off their various new wool styles. These illustrations offer a visual example of how the sheep are embracing individualism—as opposed to the identical wool cuts they would have received at the shearing shed—and helps the story counter potential desentimentization. The mention of news spreading among the sheep suggests Pete has provided the means for the sheep to showcase their active social lives and communicate among themselves without deference to a human. The sheep’s agency can be further seen by how they are waiting outside the salon to get a cool cut instead of being directed into the shearing shed by the shearers and sheep-dogs.

While Pete enjoys his interactions with Shaun, *Let Me Sleep, Sheep!*, written by Meg McKinlay and illustrated by Leila Rudge, is an example of a narrative where sheep are empowered with voices to engage an adolescent human character in dialogue and direct conversations. The story subverts the counting sheep trope with the sheep characters explaining to the child, Amos, they have names and do not exist merely for him to count to sleep. The sheep hoodwink Amos by claiming if he wants to count them then he must build them a fence to jump while being counted. Since the story relies on the subversion of the counting sheep trope, the sheep cannot be exchanged with another species or an object and thus are important to the story, which helps counter potential desentimentization.

Throughout the story, the sheep characters are engaged in the narrative and granted voices through anthropomorphism. After being summoned, the sheep question Amos while the visual elements position the sheep as towering over Amos, who is in bed, with one of the sheep standing upon the bed on their hind legs while wearing an apron and holding a whisk. The other sheep, who wears a vest, leans over Amos’ bed to adjust a lamp. When Amos suggests they

jump the cupboard instead of him building a fence, they continue to control the conversation by disclosing their names and unique facts about each individual sheep, including those who are off page:

'The *cupboard*?' Felix shook his head. 'Impossible!  
Walter here has a bad knee. And Judith is afraid of heights. They'd never make it.'  
'Judith?' said Amos. 'Who's Judith?' (np)

With this conversation, it is revealed there are more sheep than the two seen on-page and it offers insight into an absent sheep's personality. These conversations between the sheep and with Amos propel the narrative and do not rely on rhyming or repetition like in *Where is the Green Sheep?* and *Baa Baa Blue Sheep* or being in a partnership with a human, as in *Pete the Sheep*.

The human-sheep power dynamics in the story are further subverted when Felix and Walter—the two on-page sheep—offer Amos feedback on his fence-building efforts. In the following exchange, Amos partakes in the dialogue without trying to silence or limit the sheep's voices:

'Too wobbly!' said Walter.  
'One bump and that'll collapse,' said Felix.  
'Okay,' said Amos. And he made it more stable.  
'Too hard!' said Walter.  
'We need a gentle landing,' said Felix.  
'Okay,' said Amos. And he made it softer. (np)

These playful, but important, interactions invite young readers to recognise sheep as sentient creatures because Amos acknowledges their voices and accepts the sheep's feedback. Amos accommodating the sheep's requests without argument, while the sheep are visually portrayed as supervising him with their forelegs crossed or relaxing on cushions, offers a contrasting power dynamic from other narratives, such as *Baa Baa Blue Sheep*, where the sheep automatically comply with human requests or are frequently relegated to the background and edges of the pages when the human characters are speaking.

Additionally, the sheep are individually distinct with the visual elements portraying them with various shades of wool colours or textures and accessories to represent their

personalities. However, unlike in *Where is the Green Sheep?* and *Baa Baa Blue Sheep* the colour of wool or activity the sheep undertake is not their assigned role or imperative to the narrative. The story also demonstrates how Amos summoning the sheep results in them utilising their voices to converse with him, as opposed to being portrayed with translated baas or only responding to human queries. On the final page, Felix remarks about the fence to a group of partying sheep while Amos sleeps on the bedroom floor.

By having the sheep characters direct the conversation, and not just respond, the story highlights the importance of representing the voices of farmed animal characters. As previously mentioned, young readers learn about animals through stories (Dimick 2018, p. 56), and they may also gain greater empathy for animals through literature (Małecki et al. 2019; Beierl 2008; Copeland and O’Brien 2003). By representing sheep in a positive and engaging manner in *Let Me Sleep, Sheep!*, young readers are challenged to reconsider any preconceptions they may hold about sheep, which they might have learned from other stories—such as that sheep exist to supply wool or to be counted by humans as a way to fall asleep.

Sheep belonging to a flock as their default existence is the driver of the most recently published sheep picturebook, *Flocked*, written by Chren Byng and illustrated by Andrew Joyner, with flock identity influencing how sheep voices are depicted throughout the story. The narrative follows a lamb being inducted into the flock and informed of the flock rules before the lamb ultimately leaves the flock to work as a florist in an anthropomorphised metropolis. As the verbal elements of the story evolve with the lead sheep’s voice embodying a more cautionary rhetoric about the obligation to assimilate, readers can observe the lamb’s initial enthusiasm for the flock dissipating through the corresponding visual elements, such as their downcast facial expression, nervous body language, and concealment of a red flower they find. Furthermore, the visual elements position young readers to be focalised through the perspective of the quietly rebellious lamb, potentially promoting independence and individuality. This focalisation is complicated as it reinforces the sheep stereotype as belonging to a flock who

think and do the same thing while simultaneously challenging that notion by having a lamb who is an individual and willing to leave the flock to pursue their own interests.

Sheep voices are the only voices on-page in the story but, as Copeland and O’Brien discuss, awareness regarding the use of animals as agents to deliver moral lessons to young readers generates ambiguity (2003, pp. 51-53) and raises the possibility that the voice of the sheep represents adult humans. Sheep are usually seen as a mass of units (Armstrong 2016), which is referred to as a flock, and the characters in *Flocked* do embody many stereotypical sheep qualities. Positioning sheep as a flock is required for the story’s message to function: the world outside one’s comfort zone is not scary or bad but new, and anyone can embrace their individual desires as opposed to conforming to fit in with the crowd. By this reading, the book utilises a flock of sheep as agents to teach implied young readers this moral lesson.

The voice of one adult sheep—the leader, who is highlighted through the illustrations where they are depicted as standing tall on their hindlegs while gesturing and confidently addressing the flock—speaks on behalf of the flock to the new, voiceless lamb. Call-and-response is utilised at the beginning of the narrative to emphasise certain sentiments, with the lead sheep declaring the flock’s commandments and the rest of the flock repeating the final word:

In the flock, everything is good.  
*Goooooooood*  
In the flock, everything is warm.  
*Waaaaaaaaaarm*  
In the flock, everything is safe.  
*Saaaaaaaaaafe*  
Everything is flock.  
*Floooooooooock.* (np)

The flock repeating the final word of each sentence is reminiscent of how students may repeat what a teacher says in class or how a congregation responds to a preacher in church, with the repeated words drawn out and emphasis placed on the middle vowel sounds thus suggesting a potential power imbalance between the lead sheep and the rest of the flock. This call-and-

response morphs to a more cautionary message with the illustrations showcasing banners declaring ‘The flock is always right and true, and true and right,’ with the lead sheep depicted with one foreleg raised and another on their chest while yelling, ‘Do not question the flock,’ as the lamb silently watches.

Across two-thirds of this double spread the rest of the sheep are shown standing in formation on their hindlegs, with rows of them going beyond the edge of the page, while mirroring the lead sheep’s posture of foreleg on their chest. The flock focuses on the lead sheep, with identical facial expressions as if they are awaiting commands. The following double spread reinforces the expectation they do not question the flock as the rows of sheep are now seen from a front view where they all exhibit the same strained smile, which the lamb timidly returns as the flock leader leans over them. Importantly, the sheep voices in the story require the support of these visual elements in order to help generate the story and demonstrate the voiceless lamb’s situation: they are expected to follow the flock’s rules without question.

The lead sheep’s commanding vocalisations are depicted as the voice of normativity by reinforcing the flock’s perspective to the young lamb throughout the narrative, which continues as a voiceover as the young lamb leaves. The young lamb is subjected to directives, such as:

You are happy in the flock.

We said, you are HAPPY in the flock. (np)

The use of ‘we said’ and emphasis on ‘happy’—with ‘happy’ being capitalised the second time—implies being happy is non-negotiable, and it is a command the lamb must follow without question. These types of declarations suggest conforming to the flock is the only option. Being part of the flock is further emphasised a few pages later when the lamb is told ‘No one ever leaves the flock’ while the visual elements showcase the sheep asleep on top of each other like a pile of wool while the lamb challenges this statement by sneaking away.

The lamb asserts their own agency by escaping during the night, which counters the notion that sheep are mindless followers who must belong to a flock. Throughout the young

lamb’s journey from the flock to the metropolis, the narrator refers to places beyond the flock as ‘outside’ to reinforce the benefits of remaining with the flock:

Because outside, everything is wild.  
Outside, everything is chaos.  
Outside, everything is strange. (np)

‘Outside’ is positioned as the other and is described as unpleasant, with the illustrations supporting this sentiment through darker toned imagery when the lamb is creeping through the jungle with their red flower and walking stick while eyes watch them, and with a shark lurking beneath the water as the lamb paddles toward the metropolis in the distance. The repetition of ‘outside’ and ‘everything is’ functions as a reminder that members of the flock should not leave. However, in the corresponding visual elements upon arriving at the metropolis, the lamb evolves from looking sad and unable to speak among the flock to cheerfully strolling through the vibrant metropolis where various anthropomorphised species live. The lamb joyfully works as a florist, as seen by how they are smiling while wearing an apron and their walking stick is resting nearby. The lamb admires a bouquet they have created while holding the red flower they carried throughout their journey, with the visual elements suggesting ‘outside’ is the place the lamb can finally be their true self.

The dominant voice throughout the narrative initially attempts to convince the lamb—and by extension the implied young reader—that the flock knows best and works to suppress the lamb’s voice. The implication that the flock—and potentially the adult human voice—knows best but may sometimes be proven incorrect is demonstrated through the later verbal elements and the corresponding visual elements once the lamb has ventured into the anthropomorphised world beyond the flock. The narrative voice shifts to acknowledge an alternative perspective, with ellipses utilised to represent a pause as the narrator recognises the alternate outlook over the next few pages:

And even though the flock will always be your home...  
outside the flock,  
everything is...  
NEW. (np)

The capitalisation of ‘NEW’ emphasises the importance of viewing everything outside in a positive manner as opposed to the negative connotations of ‘wild’, ‘chaos’, and ‘strange’ earlier in the narrative. The shift is supported through the subsequent illustrations of the flock reading a postcard from the lamb in the metropolis, with the lead sheep holding the bouquet the lamb created—featuring the red flower they took to the metropolis—while the flock gather around. The flock’s body language, softer facial expressions, and relaxed gathering contrast with how they were depicted earlier in the story. This shift in the flock’s visual representation signifies the moral lesson of the story is complete, and the flock accept the young lamb’s decision. Even though the lamb is not portrayed as speaking throughout the narrative, young readers are positioned to see how the lamb feels based on the supporting visual elements and the evolution of the narrative voice, which is channelled through the lead sheep.

The selected texts highlight the difficulty in representing sheep voices on the page without anthropomorphising the sheep characters for young readers. Some of the stories are more anthropocentric than others, such as *Where is the Green Sheep?* and *Baa Baa Blue Sheep*, by focusing on the colour of the sheep and the wool they can provide to humans, and thus they promote greater desentimentation. These representations can be problematic as they encourage young readers simply to view sheep as objects that exist for the benefit of humans, whether to count or to provide wool. *Pete the Sheep* features a sheep with a voice while being subject to human-sheep power dynamics since the titular sheep speaks in translated baas and is granted a voice through his partnership with Shaun. This positioning raises the question whether Pete would still be represented in a positive light to young readers or simply become one of many sheep if his partnership with Shaun ended. Meanwhile, the narrative that presents more individual sheep with voices, *Let Me Sleep, Sheep!*, offers an example of where the sheep characters can make choices during their interactions with others—in this case a human—and direct the narrative by subverting the counting sheep trope. Although *Flocked* does not feature an on-page human, the narration being channelled through the lead sheep promotes the sheep

trope of a flock by using sheep as agents to convey a moral lesson to young readers. Since young readers gain knowledge about animals from picturebooks (Dimick 2018, p. 56), these stories have the power to impact young readers’ perspectives about animals—in this case sheep—both positively and negatively (Dimick 2018, p. 48). By reading more stories featuring sheep with individual voices, young readers could be encouraged to feel compassion for sheep and to examine how human-sheep power dynamics influence the popular forms of representation of sheep in picturebooks.

Animal stories offer the opportunity to grant voices to farmed animals, such as sheep, who are often voiceless in children’s narratives. These narratives provide examples of how sheep voices are positioned within popular children’s stories and how they are developed in relation to human-sheep power dynamics. As a sheep guardian, I interact with my sheepish family members—plus our sheep neighbours—daily. Sheep vocally greet humans, they vocally communicate among themselves, and they are especially skilled at advising you if breakfast is two minutes later than normal. Picturebooks are a lambtastic medium to introduce young readers to sheep and to encourage them to view sheep as individuals with unique voices and, by extension, with agency and sentience. Instead of positioning sheep as primarily gaining voices in relation to the other—whether responding to or channelling humans on or off the page—stories could empower sheep to direct the narrative, like in *Let Me Sleep, Sheep!*, and provide them with a more empathic, sentient portrayal. As appraisal studies (Veissier et al. 2009, pp. 347-354) and other scientific investigations (Kendrick 2019, pp. 1-3) have revealed, sheep possess far greater intelligence and cognitive capacity than they are often attributed by society and portrayed within books. It is time to transpose these lambtastic, on-fleece qualities to the page and to grant sheep individual, empowered voices to narrate their stories instead of simply existing as a number, colour, wool provider, or mass on the page.

## Notes

1. This paper draws upon my larger research project and focuses on mainstream titles. The titles from my larger project that were omitted from this discussion are three self-published or vanity-published titles—*George the Farmer Shears a Sheep* (2015) by Simone Kain and illustrated by Ben Hood; *Bucket Sheep* (2015) by Jemma Phillips; *Lambert Wants a Jumper* (2020) by Tracey Kruger and illustrated by Alyshia Mcinnes—and *Ten Sleepy Sheep* (2020) by Renee Treml, a bedtime story which uses sheep to foreground the narrative but features limited sheep within the text.

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### Biographical Note

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