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THE IMAGE OF THE ABORIGINAL
IN MODERN AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FICTION :
A SURVEY OF THE WRITING IN THE LAST TEN YEARS.

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No person can grow up in Australian society without having learned the stereotypes assigned to the major ethnic groups. Such stereotypes appear part of the social heritage. They are an economical means of ascribing certain characteristics to groups with whom one rarely comes into close contact. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that stereotype attitudes show marked stability over time. In particular, stereotyping has been a feature of the contacts of white Australians with Aboriginal Australians. The effects that such stereotyping and associated attitudes of prejudice have had on the aspirations, motivation, and achievement of Aborigines in the past are no less real because they were not able to be measured.

This article is concerned with the role of literature in the development of attitudes. It asks what kind of image would children gain of Aborigines from reading recent Australian children's books? What effect is this image likely to have on white attitudes towards Aborigines? What effect is it likely to have on an Aboriginal reader's attitudes towards himself? The argument draws on insights from the fields of sociology and psychology in its analysis of the effects of stereotyping on attitude development, and from the findings of a survey of the portrayal of Aborigines in modern Australian children's fiction. The implications of the study are pertinent to teachers and librarians, concerned as they are with influences on the personality development of children.

A survey was made of the content of 60 children's books written by Australian authors for children aged ten to fourteen years, and published within the last ten years.* A more detailed analysis was

* A list of titles is provided in the Appendix. An exception as far as publishing date is concerned is *The Rocks of Honey*, by Patricia Wrightson, first published 1960. It is too important a book to omit.

made of those books which contained Aboriginal characters; 20 were reviewed in the sample. Children's fiction was chosen for analysis because, as several writers have shown,* children's fiction "has been a more flexible, up-to-date vehicle for mirroring social reality than the media of textbooks." (1) The survey was restricted to the last ten years because of the awakening in the early 1960's of people in America, and more recently in Australia, to issues relating to the treatment of racially different groups. It was thought that books written since these issues were raised would be most likely to reflect the changing views. Several articles have appeared in recent years(2) in Australia, which have discussed the issues of racism and the image of the Aboriginal in school textbooks and non-fiction, but apart from a recent article by Parish,(3) there has been no detailed analysis of children's fiction.

That stereotypes exist about Aboriginals in modern Australian society is undeniable. Research investigations provide documentation on views of white Australians. (4) Taft's survey of the attitudes of people in three West Australian towns, one of which was Perth, concluded that the general stereotype of Aboriginals is that of "an irresponsible, lazy, and dirty slob who has the redeeming features of being a good parent and a friendly, respectful and generous person." (5) Lippman (6) referred to the readiness of people to volunteer opinions of a derogatory kind, and put the figure at 52% of the respondents in her survey. Perhaps more surprising was her report that between 92% and 99% of the respondents were willing to generalize on all questions to do with Aboriginals - nearly twice the figure reported for respondents on similar racial attitudes questions in Britain.

The relationship between contact and attitudes has been explored to some extent by Taft and by Western, (4) following extensive overseas research on prejudice,** that certain properties of the contact situation between members of different groups are important in determining the stability or change in an attitude. Taft found that greater contact by whites with Aboriginals was associated with

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* See among others, A.C.Purves and R.Beach: *Literature and the Reader*, NCTE, Illinois, 1972; F.L.Shirley: The influence of reading on adolescents, *Wilson Library Journal Bulletin* 43, 1968, p.256-260; D.K.Gast: The dawning of the age of Aquarius for multi-ethnic children's literature, *Elementary English*, 47, May 1970, p.661-665.

** See, for example, Ehrlich, H.J., *The Social Psychology of Prejudice*, Wiley, 1973.

slightly more favourable attitudes. Western's results pointed more strongly to the positive effect of knowledge of Aboriginals and contact with them on a person's image of Aboriginals. However, in the rural town in Western's sample, increased (but casual) contact worsened racial attitudes. Western suggested that merely increasing the degree of contact does not appear to improve attitudes where statuses are defined from different *base lines*.

The realities of the educational and occupational standing of Aboriginals show the extent of these differences. From a survey of almost 1000 adults and young people of Aboriginal descent in Brisbane in 1965-66, 87.6% had not proceeded beyond Primary school.(7) Beasley's Sydney survey showed a similar, (8) but less dramatic low educational level in Aboriginals over the age of fifteen. From his analysis of the 1966 figures on Aboriginal employment, Broom (9) noted that 7% of Aboriginals were unemployed, and an unknown additional percentage underemployed, and that only 2% of Aboriginal workers enter the occupational categories above the lowest levels of skill, compared with 35% of the workforce generally.

In addition, Aboriginals are hampered in developing beyond the stereotype by a number of general problems, geographical, cultural and social. They are located, more than white people, in rural areas where there is a smaller range of occupations available to them. Because they hold to a different set of cultural values which places less emphasis on competition and acquisition, there is a lack of congruence with mainstream values. They are ascribed a low social status in the hierarchical social structure, and must restrict their aspirations to accord with the statuses and roles ascribed them, or suffer the uncertainties of attempting to overcome the majority concept of their proper place in society.* Those with ambition have a crucially limited choice of advantageous reference models among their own people, the most rewarded ideals being set by white models.

Triandis has discussed the intergroup attitudes of people of different subjective cultures. When we observe people of a culture different from our own, the motives we attribute to their behaviour are likely to differ from those which the actors themselves would attribute. These beliefs, he argues, about the causes of the behaviour of others are "crucial to our liking of those others".(10) For a large number of Australians, the beliefs obtained about Aboriginal behaviour come from the folklore and from literature and the media.

* Compare Young, D.R., The socialization of American minority peoples, in D.A. Goslin (ed) *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research*, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1969, p.1103-1140.

The image presented of the Aboriginal in literature (and in the media) is of tremendous importance. Brash has noted that (11)

"The active part played by Australian writers in the demeaning of the Aborigine and in the justification of prejudices against him is not generally realized or admitted."

A crucial attitude of concern to educators is a child's attitude to himself. It is a major component of his self-concept - the totality of meanings, attitudes, and feelings a person has about himself. Perceptive teachers have long been aware that how a child sees himself is significantly related to his achievement in school. In his review of research on the matter, Purkey noted a strong reciprocal relationship between self-concept and school success or failure, which "gives us reason to assume that enhancing the self-concept is a vital influence on academic performance." (12)

Studies of disadvantaged children report that many effects of low self-esteem occur among the poor, particularly those likely to suffer prejudice and repudiation. (13) The members of the National Workshop on Aboriginal Education (14) considered that many Aboriginals held themselves in relatively low esteem. As David Kirk declared in the press, "We have a massive inferiority complex. If we think inferior, we are inferior. Aborigines must snap out of their apathy and stand up for themselves." (15)

LITERATURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ATTITUDES

Fictional literature allows a reader to explore in imagination all kinds of emotions, attitudes, and roles. It increases the opportunities a person has to observe and to imitate the behaviour, and adopt the values of others. By its provision of vicarious experience and *symbolic models* with whom a reader may identify, literature is important in attitude development.

There has been little research on how the content of books influences children's attitudes. As Grambs recently observed of the American scene, "While everyone seems to assume that children learn more from a reading textbook than just the words", most of what is said about the effect of reading materials on children "is based on inference and logic". (16)

Attempts have been made for fifty years to understand the complexities of a reader's response to literature. What has emerged is an appreciation of literature as a psychological field.

As Purves and Beach observe,

"It is what the reader brings to the text as much as the text itself that determines the nature of (his) response... The reader takes as active a role in determining the message as does the sender." (17)

What is presumed is an identification of the reader with the personal attributes and roles of one or more characters in a work of fiction, leading to possible attitude change.

Literature can be an important source for observational learning for children who see the need to draw on extra-familial sources for models, as they attempt to prepare themselves for new social and vocational roles which lie beyond the resources of the family to transmit. Faust comments, (18)

"A child's faith in himself and his future is a matter of feeling which grows out of knowing that others have this kind of belief in him and from identifying himself voluntarily with ideals or models. Reading or having read to him, interesting, lively stories about other children like himself in some ways can strengthen the growth of such feeling."

With our increasing awareness of the narrowness of the ethnic attitudes pervading many books, the question we must ask is whether modern Australian children's fiction is providing meaningful identification for Aboriginal children, as well as real insight for white children into the historical and cultural characteristics of Aboriginal groups.

THE SURVEY

Three headings were used in the survey which were considered to be related to the development of attitudes towards others and towards the self. The aspect of contact, shown to be important in the determination of attitude change, is examined from the viewpoint of the *settings* and the *roles* of the novels. Triandis' references to the cross-cultural attributions of motives are followed up by means of a study of the author's narrative *point of view*.

Analysis of an author's use of setting can be extremely informative. Most novelists, more so children's novelists, draw

character 'from the outside'. They use the physical surroundings and the social situation to communicate economically a set of expectancies to the reader about the kinds of values and attitudes that prevail in such a period at such a locality, and the kinds of roles and relationships which one can reasonably expect to find there. For example, a setting of Sydney in 1800 immediately circumscribes a reader's expectations about the likely roles and relationships and the social attitudes to be uncovered in the course of the story, just as a reader 'knows what to expect' of a story set on a Queensland Gulf cattle property in the 1970's.

In this survey of Australian children's fiction, as the following table shows, a sense of place and of period is generally established by the author locating the action in a country setting, or by choosing a pioneering or colonial period. When Aboriginal characters are included in the stories, the tendency is even more marked. Commonly, the setting is an outback area or property or rural town: where Aboriginal characters appear in the books, they are presented in a semi-tribalized state, or as town fringe-dwellers in the great majority of examples.

TABLE 1 - SETTINGS UTILIZED BY THE SAMPLE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Settings	The Past	Rural	Country Town	City	City Suburb	Other	Total
All novels surveyed	10	29	7	2	6	5	60
Novels with Aboriginals	7	10	3	-	-	-	20
Novels without	3	19	4	2	6	5	40

In novels such as *The Min Min*, *A Spark of Opal*, *The Fire in the Stone*,* the small town or siding provides an authentic background for encountering Aboriginals in a fringe-dwelling kind of existence. Other novels locate Aboriginal groups camping on the creek (*The White Dingo*; *The River and the Road*; *Hughie*) or on the salt flats (*An Eagle for Pidgin*), or on station properties near the homestead (*Daughter of the Worlds*; *The Morning Glory*). Such settings maintain a sense of cultural otherness and social distance, establish

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* References to all novels in the survey are given in the Appendix.

the social status of Aborigines, and restrict relationships between black and white to functional and complementary levels which have little personal and mutual dimensions.

One third of the novels with Aboriginal characters are set in the past, more than four times the incidence in the non-Aboriginal sample. Several of these novels describe the traditional way of life of Aboriginal people. In *Longtime Passing*, H.F. Brinsmead introduces her account of the white pioneers of Longtime with a tale of the Daruk girl who accidentally revealed the path across the Blue Mountain ridges to a white settler. The tale creates a sense of timelessness and a spiritual presence in the story. It could be argued that the setting of Nan Chauncy's powerful chronicle of the Tasmanian Aborigines, *Mathinna's People*, is somewhat romanticized. However, such care is taken in her descriptions of the land and customs of the people that she achieves an authenticity of setting against which a number of credible situations and characters are developed. By detailing the tribal ceremonies and social relations, and a world-view where natural events have deep spiritual origins, she establishes in the reader a sense of the oneness of the Aborigines with the land, which makes her narrative both more powerful and more tragic. In contrast to the work of Chauncy, Bunker's *Millingi* lacks authenticity and originality precisely because of the author's understatement of setting and situation. The novel is no more than an idealized account of tribal life last century, which though well-meaning, serves no real advantage for a child's understanding the Aboriginal experience. As Dorothy Broderick reminds us,

"Good books whether labelled realism or fantasy, are good precisely to the degree they offer insight into the human condition; neither ignorance nor good intentions are renowned for their contributions to mankind." (1973:182)

The strong tradition of the historical novel in Australian fiction finds current support in several books for children. In *Johnny Neptune*, set in Sydney about the year 1800, the encounter with a hungry 'native' by the pioneer Parramatta family underlines the contrast between purposeful hard-working settlers and the poor dispossessed remnants of Aboriginal tribes. But no indication is given in the novel of the author's awareness of the effects of colonization on Aboriginal tribal life. There is also some sense of this contrast between the civilized Englishman and primitive man in *Bass and Billy Martin*. Flinders said :

"I should like them to think us sent to help them. But I fear it will not be like that. The truth is we have not come to help them... We can only do our best, and show them Christian charity when we have the opportunity."
(p.47)

Whether or not the author has been successful in her attempt to avoid a patronising tone and to portray a noble tolerance in *Bass and Flinders*, it is well to record Broderick's caution that "Tolerance is a placid attitude that reeks of superior-inferior relationships." (19) The author's choice of setting precludes development of racial understanding or of an Aboriginal child's pride in his racial heritage.

Where a writer may be said to exceed the bounds of the conventional settings, he has attracted criticism. For example, David Martin in *Hughie*, sets his story in a typical country town, where the blacks live on the reserve and swim in the swimming-hole, while the town pool is reserved for whites. Against this background, the author develops a complex plot climaxed in a riot and a shattered friendship; in each of these incidents Hughie is the main figure. Though a strong and moving story, the author reverses the Aboriginal stereotype too vigorously without sufficient support from the social setting he outlines.

More cautious attempts to develop viable Aboriginal characters within a conventional setting are Patricia Wrightson's *Eustace*, and Pat Slater's *Pidgin*. *Pidgin* is introduced as the town tough kid, who lives on the salt flats, whose father is in jail, and whose school exploits are "wagging school all the time, and chucking rocks at our last teacher". The author develops his character beyond the stereotype by means of a naturally developed school friendship with the main white character, Ned, against a climate of admonition from the townsfolk. However, her lack of sureness with the character of an Aboriginal boy is suggested by her failure to develop him any further. Instead she directs her energies to narrating a series of adventures which generate a reader's interest, but to which Ned and *Pidgin* are rather minor contributors. It seems that deeper characterization is sacrificed to the plot potential to be found in a modern frontier setting.

Wrightson's *Eustace* appears in the classroom of the small country school in *The Rocks of Honey*, as a quiet onlooker who gains acceptance with the other boys when his cricket skill is recognized. The pranks of the boys in the class, and their scorn

of girls, are natural boy behaviour in such a country setting. Barney's offer of friendship to Eustace, in the form of a doubler on his bike, reflects the white boy's deliberate weighing of his loneliness and desire for a friend against his reticence to be mates with an Aboriginal. Accustomed to changing schools and to being "the only one of his kind", Eustace is nevertheless presented as a character with stability and a quiet assurance. The rural setting allows the author to link in a natural way the story of the stone axe and its curse, with Eustace's assumption of responsibility for its return.

ROLES

In the evolution of personality, the self is closely related to the statuses of the individual and the roles he plays. A status is the position an individual occupies in a social group; a role is the behaviour expected by virtue of this position. From the survey, the close relation between a novel's setting and roles becomes apparent: choice of setting involves choice of social structure, with its array of status positions and the roles available within such social structure.

Australian authors use the settings to structure social situations and to develop within them predictable roles for Aboriginal characters to such an extent that one suspects a lack of sureness about portraying Aboriginal identity and personality. The implications of this state of affairs for Aboriginal readers identifying with such characters and roles are serious. White children who only encounter Aboriginals in books, are likely to develop a set of expectations about the personality of Aboriginals which is limited to a stereotype. As the following argument will show, writers tend to see rather circumscribed roles for Aboriginals in their plots, and to assign to them role behaviour derived from preconceptions of, or generalizations about their racial characteristics and ways of behaving.

TABLE 2. ROLES OF ABORIGINALS IN THOSE CHILDREN'S NOVELS WHICH CONTAIN ABORIGINAL CHARACTERS.

Major/Central			Minor/Supporting				Incid- ental	Total
8			8				4	20
Leader	Follower	Un- certain	Helper	Passive	Follower	Other		
5	2	1	5	1	1	1		

In the Table, major roles are those in which Aboriginal characters are central to the plot; minor roles are those in which their part in the plot necessitates their being identified by name; incidental roles include very minor parts and parts too minor to really qualify as roles, but where some identification is made of the persons as Aboriginals. A number of the novels in the Table place Aboriginals in supportive roles, as domestic helpers, farm workers, and trackers. Many also make incidental reference to the camp relatives as a kind of back-drop, as if their presence is necessary for an Australian flavour, much the same way as one refers to Australian flora and fauna. Perhaps where an Aboriginal occupies a major role, authors deem it necessary to provide a back-drop of Aboriginal society, as if the personality traits of the main character can then be more easily understood by non-Aboriginal readers.

For the most part, independent action and initiating behaviour by Aboriginal characters, even major ones, are rare. Where a leadership role is played by an Aboriginal, novels still stress his partnership with a white boy: the general picture is for the white boy to be the leader and the Aboriginal boy to be the follower. In a number of novels, white children receive help or support from adult Aboriginals rather than from age mates. For example, the old man, Knobby, helps Sylvie and Reg when they run away from the siding (*The Min Min*): Uncle Tom informs Barney rather than his nephew Eustace about the stone axe (*The Rocks of Honey*): Nunganee gives hospitality to Jarl (*The Spirit Wind*).

The historical novels, being largely written from the white view point of history, relegate Aboriginals to very minor supportive roles. In *Bass and Billy Martin*, they are curious children, exhibiting little purposefulness in their behaviour, in contrast with the broader and more insistent purpose of the explorers. Even their aid is not regarded by the explorers as necessary.

"It was understood that the natives would guide them to the river in Tom Thumb. 'No harm can come of it as they are unarmed', said Flinders, 'and in thisway we may save some hours.'.. they climbed aboard eagerly, as if, Billy thought, they were children off for a picnic." (*Bass and Billy Martin*, p. 79)

The abrupt appearance of an Aboriginal in *Johnny Neptune*, when no prior reference has been made to these people, is startling to the reader. The role of primitive highwayman in which he appears seems

unrealistic, and the foiling of his attempted hold-up of the dray evokes a mixture of pity and amusement. The impression gained from this and later appearances is of a childlike nature, an impression not given to creating respect for Aboriginals or pride in their achievement.

A sincere attempt to come to terms with what it means to be an Aboriginal in modern Australian society can be traced in several children's novels. *The Rocks of Honey*, first published 1960, reveals the struggle of a sensitive author to develop a valid role for the Aboriginal boy, Eustace. In the earlier part of the story, Eustace is clearly a follower, quiet and reserved, and it is Barney, the white boy who initiates the action. Barney fires the pellets from the peashooter at the school window; offers his friendship to Eustace; doubles him on his bike to the bus stop; suggests exploring the gorge. But Eustace's role in the partnership slowly develops, from suggesting how they might find out about the legend of the stone axe, to accepting responsibility, in the last chapter, for returning the axe to the mountains. That there is a clear intention on Patricia Wrightson's part to develop a viable role for an Aboriginal boy in white society is evident from the comment she inserts, in the novel's conclusion, about the boy's development of assurance and self-esteem.

"(Eustace) knew that no-one must be afraid of himself or his past. He must take what the past had given him and use it with pride and care to make something good. No one could hinder him in this, or help him much, for a man is his own responsibility and no one else's." (*The Rocks of Honey*, p.184)

Though restricting her Aboriginal character Peter to a rescuer role in a survival situation where Aboriginals have acknowledged competence, Joan Woodberry in *Come Back Peter*, goes beyond the stereotype in her characterization. She explores the significance that acceptance of the responsibility of rescuer holds for Peter. In so doing, she invests the boy's character with the powerful dimension of choice.

"He knew now that he would never be shown the tribal secrets... but in this new life it all depended on him. He did not think what looking after a sick woman, a baby, a little girl and a small boy nearly mad with fear would mean. Just now he knew he had to do it. What does it matter, he thought, what colour you are if you are a man?" (*Come Back Peter*, p.72)

In *The Fire in the Stone*, Ernie's Aboriginal friend Willie, acts with more assurance than Patricia Wrightson's Eustace in similar circumstances, and Thiele manages to invest his main character, the white boy Ernie, through whom the story unfolds, with a certain dullness and hesitancy which adds a depth to Willie's quick insight, decisiveness and sensitivity. As the crisis builds up, the author interposes a comment to underline Willie's assumption of a leadership role, but the character Thiele has already established is latent with the resourcefulness and initiative the crisis requires. The author cleverly utilizes the thoughts of Nick, the Greek member of the trio, to present the stereotype Aboriginal boy:

"Nick was vaguely aware that Willie was giving the orders. If he hadn't been numb with fear he would have been amazed. Willie was always the one who said least and followed most, who waited for someone else to make the suggestions and take the lead. A follower, not a leader. But Nick was too dazed to take in the significance of what was happening to Willie". (*The Fire in the Stone*, p.161)

Thus Thiele creates a context in which Willie's competence is thrown into sharp contrast with his social status and worth in the eyes of others in the community. Later in the novel, Thiele uses Willie's injury and impending death to capture in a few lines the paradox of Aboriginal experience and identity:

"For in his heart Ernie knew what would be in the paper if Willie died. An inch of space on a back page saying Willie Winowie, the Aboriginal boy who had lain in a coma for two weeks after an explosion on the opal fields, had died this morning. There would be bigger headlines for a dead racehorse". (*The Fire in the Stone*, p.200)

Most children's novels prefer to ignore the realities of racial prejudice as if they do not exist. The location of most novels in the traditional and enduring settings of "the outback" reduces the necessity for authors to raise such issues. However, a few of the novels containing major Aboriginal roles, do explore modern issues to do with race and colour. Most prominent is *Hughie*. Unfortunately, David Martin develops the role of Hughie by recourse to several incidents which do not ring true for an Aboriginal boy. At times, Hughie seems too perfect, and the racial element in the situations over-charged with prejudice.

The approach taken in this analysis, however, is to recognize the strengths of this novel in its exploration of prejudice. At one

point in the novel, for example, the author attempts to utilize the reader's appreciation of Hughie's role as an initiator of action as a kind of touchstone, against which the role assigned him by a prejudiced white man can be contrasted. Hughie calls on Kaufman, the donor of the land for the town swimming pool, to ask his support in opening the pool to black people. He is lectured by Kaufman on the importance of the racial status-quo, and subjected to the patronage and condescension of Kaufman's payoff :

"Here's ten, twenty, no here are thirty cents for you. Is that stingy? Forty. And here is another - fifty! Fifty cents, because you are a brave lad who speaks his mind and who trusts his friends who have his interest at heart. Run along now, and remember what I said. Olympic Pool? No. In the soup. Swimming hole? Yes....." (*Hughie*, p.50)

Later, the author exposes the shallowness of a retreat into stereotypes by black or white people when relationships are in tension. Clancy's sister explains to Hughie why her father needs his help in finding Clancy, defending her father's faults by saying :

".. He can't help it. And he's got his pride."

"And I haven't. I'm just the Abo kid that must keep off his little boy. Got to stay where I belong."

"How can you be so mean? Shall I tell you what he really said?"

"Can't stop you."

"He said he thought you'd help us, because you wouldn't have forgotten that Clancy saved your life. So long, Hughie. I'll go and tell him you have, and that you're even prouder than he is."
(*Hughie*, p.152-153)

POINT OF VIEW

Point of view is a term used by students of literature to refer to the author's method of narration, his method of mediating the action of his story. Most commonly, authors adopt an omniscient point of view, which enables them to recount the actions, thoughts and feelings of all the characters with equal emphasis and objectivity.

Though the authors of the books surveyed adopt for the most part a third-person point of view, it is not truly omniscient: it is through the white characters that the reader participates in the action: the Aboriginal characters remain largely unknown and inscrutable. It would be a considerable intellectual feat for an Aboriginal reader to identify with the Aboriginal characters by responsively reading the stories, because their thoughts and emotions are not mediated. The closest many authors come to "getting inside the skins of" Aboriginal characters is in such lines as :

"The old man watched them drink with a pleased grin. He knew what it was to be thirsty." (*The Min Min* p.86)

Where the setting is an historical one, writers deliverately choose a restricted point of view, as Joan Phipson does through the character of Billy in *Bass and Billy Martin*, and Barbara Ker Wilson with Debbie Pratt and Celendine in *A Family Likeness*, and Nance Donkin with Johnny in *Johnny Neptune*. (On the other hand, *Mathinna's People* is told from the point of view of the Aboriginal people.) The effect of such a choice by a writer may be the paternalism of the following :

"She thought of the few Aborigines they had seen, with their dark skins and matted hair. They looked savages - yet Papa said they weren't really savages, but a race of hunters who belonged to different tribes, rather like the Red Indians..." (*A Family Likeness*, p.40)

or the presentation of Aborigines as objects, the motives for whose behaviour are interpreted by the white characters.

"They think I am most like a god", said Bass complacently. (p.83)

"They may have brought us simply to show us off", said Flinders (p.86) (*Bass and Billy Martin*)

The limitations imposed by the author's choice of point of view become apparent when attempts are made to instil pride in Aboriginal skills :

"The boy watched, awestruck by their sure dusty feet. 'They're like flies,' he thought, 'climbin' up some winder.'" (*Roan Colt of Yamboorah*, p.27)

"A handful of Aborigines on walkabout had spent what to any other race would have been a wretched few days, but to them was all a part of everyday life." (*The White Dingo*, p.10)

In some stories, the point of view employed makes the Aboriginal characters appear to retreat from questions into intransigence, as Eustace does when Barney asks over their campfire :

"Don't you get fed up shifting about all the time, and starting new schools and ... being the only one of your own kind?"

The quiet of the hills spread over the little noises of the creek.

"Lots of times there's others", Eustace replied. It's all right if you can run good and jump a bit." (*The Rocks of Honey*, p.75-77)

The recently published children's novel, *The Spirit Wind*, has attempted the more difficult task of alternating the point of view, notably in the initial encounter of the boy Jarl with the old Aboriginal, Nunganee, (see later). The author's feeling for his major characters is evident, and a sense of mutual respect and independence is achieved.

"Nunganee, you talk like a white man. Have you a language of your own?"

"More questions", thought old Nunganee... "Yes, boy, but I bin living like a white man, boy, that's why. You don't talk bad yourself. Now help me pull the boat up on the beach." (*The Spirit Wind*, p.43)

Analysis of point of view in novels which contain Aboriginal characters has more general significance than as a discussion of the author's method of portraying thoughts and feelings. When the point of view is distinctly ethnocentric, writers rely on the description of physical features as their main basis for character delineation; often the effect is derogatory.

"A pat on his shoulder made him turn. Wahreena, an Aboriginal, stood close behind. 'Cor', the boy said, 'I never heard you.' Wahreena grinned. Sweat gleamed on his dark, pitted skin. 'I come', he chuckled, 'on feet without boots. No hear 'im sound or hush hush'. His spare, black body leaned side by side with the

boys...the boy smelt his strong, bitter sweat...
Heavy browed, he pursed his thick lips when
he said..."(*By the Sandhills of Yamboorah*, p.38)

In such novels, Aboriginal characters are depicted in a few brush strokes which emphasise their physical differences:

"Occasionally he saw two or three and found them tall and chocolate brown, and very thin, with long spindly legs and big splay feet." (*Bass and Billy Martin*, p.14)

"Like all the natives they had seen, these had wide, thick lips, flat noses and low foreheads..."
(*Bass and Billy Martin*, p.77)

Too rare is the novel which accepts physical differences incidentally, and places them, by alternation of point of view, in a context of appraisal, respect and understanding.

"For the first time he noticed, even in the dim light, the man was dark-skinned and had a small stubby beard..."

Nunganee found the boy was looking at him closely. To Jarl the face of the old man was unlike any he had ever seen - dark, flat-nosed, but dignified,..... and above all friendly. Old Nunganee saw the look. He knew what the boy was thinking. This would be a boy who wanted to know things.

'I'm an Aboriginal. I'm a full blood. It's good blood and old blood, boy - oldest around here.' "
(*The Spirit Wind*, p.40-41)

More surprising is the small number of authors who take advantage of point of view in their narration to explore Aboriginal identity and racial relationships. *Matthina's People* takes up these themes at length, and uses point of view to assist the reader's appreciation of the cultural gap between the tribal group and the white landing party. The author seems to ask what hope of co-existence is there when the gap is so wide and when no attempt is made by either group to understand the other.

"Lumrah introduced himself and his people; he showed the boughs of dry wood piled to mark their territory. 'We wish you to go away!' he said loudly and clearly, and pointed to the pile.

"The pale one smiled; he understood. He looked at his firestick, walked forward and thrust it under the boughs... The Loonty men looked on appalled. 'Do we kill them?' asked the Chief's young brother...

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to hold a shovel. Don't know what work is, them boongs.'

'He works at school.'

'Be just like the rest of them down at the Camp. Only get off their broads to collect Social Service, or.. when they're bustin' for a bottle..'

Ernie pushed his plate back angrily and got up. 'You don't even know them', he said. 'Willie's no different from Stan or Nick or Hoppy or me.'

'Well, why doesn't he get cracking and get the hell out of that Camp then? Enough to turn you up,

all those damned dogs and kids and relations
all cooped up down there.'

'Because that's where his parents are. That's
why the kids are there. Same as Nick lives
with his. Same as me.' " (*The Fire in the Stone*, p.53)

The irony in the last sentence of Ernie's reply is made acute by the reader's knowledge of the poor home life he suffers at his father's hands, in contrast with the warmth and security Willie knows in his home and family.

What is revealed from this survey of Australian children's fiction is the strong traditionalism in plot and setting and roles seen in the continuing popularity among writers, of outback and country town settings. The relative absence of modern themes and situations is a serious one if reading is considered as an exploration in imagination of roles and behaviour, rather than an escape into fantasy. It lessens the likelihood of identification occurring - for the white city child and for the urban Aboriginal child who has moved into white society.

Moreover, the relegation of Aborigines to "traditional" Australia is likely to maintain a stereotype image of them in the minds of white readers. An Aboriginal reader will not encounter blatant ethnocentrism, but he will have to look hard to find Aboriginal characters who emerge as real people rather than stereotypes. Use of a point of view which mediates the action through the mind of the white characters keeps Aboriginal characters at arm's length in remoteness. The opportunities for an Aboriginal reader to explore in books situations which promote self-esteem are further reduced by the tendency of authors to subordinate characterization to the demands of a fast moving and exciting action story. All in all, the Aboriginal reader's experience is similar to that of the black American, born into

"a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (20)

An attempt has been made in this paper to appreciate the difficulties that face the author who attempts to develop viable characters from a different cultural experience. Some efforts are commendable for the vigour and sensitivity they reflect. In fact, a new confidence and depth is apparent in a number of the books published since 1970, which is reflected in new settings, new themes, and characters that show development in authentic roles. It is to be hoped that more authors will follow this direction, and that Aboriginal writers will be encouraged to write for children in this same sort of way - not remembrances of their childhood, but a story that captures a modern Aboriginal child's life and experience - that states his self-consciousness.

What we need is for more writers to get to grips with Australian attitudes and the stereotypes, black and white, in life and art, and "tell it as it is", but with sensitivity.

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APPENDIX

P. Wrightson	<i>The Rocks of Honey</i> , A & R, 1960 *
R. Ottley	<i>By the Sandhills of Yamboorah</i> , Andre Deutsch, 1965*
M.C.Patchett	<i>The White Dingo</i> , Lutterworth, 1965*

* Include Aboriginal characters.

- E. Spence *The Year of the Currawong*, O.U.P., 1965
- M. Clark *The Min Min*, Lansdowne, 1966 *
- M. Fatchen *The River Kings*, Methuen, 1966
- E. Fitzgerald *Finders Keepers*, A & R, 1966
- R. Ottley *The Roan Colt of Yamboorah*, Andre Deutsch, 1966*
- B. Roland *The Bush Bandits*, Lansdowne, 1966
- I. Southall *Ash Road*, A & R, 1966
- C. Thiele *February Dragon*, Rigby, 1966
- J. Wright *The River and the Road*, Lansdowne, 1966 *
- H.F. Brinsmead *A Sapphire for September*, Oxford, 1967
- N. Chauncy *Mathinna's People*, Oxford, 1967 *
- M. Clark *Blue Above the Trees*, Lansdowne, 1967
- E. MacIntire *Ninji's Magic*, A & R, 1967
- E. Schurmann *No Trains on Sunday*, Ure Smith, 1967
- I. Southall *To the Wild Sky*, A & R, 1967
- B. Ker Wilson *A Family Likeness*, Constable, 1967 *
- M. Clark *A Spark of Opal*, Lansdowne, 1968 *
- M. Paice *The Bensens*, Collins, 1968
- R. Park *The Sixpenny Island*, A & R, 1968
- J. Preston *The Ring of the Axe*, Lansdowne, 1968
- J. Woodberry *Come Back Peter*, Rigby, 1968 *
- M. Paice *They Drowned a Valley*, Collins, 1969
- M. Clark *Nowhere to Hide*, Lansdowne, 1969
- C. Thiele *Blue Fin*, Rigby, 1969
- J. Spencer *Hustler's Gold*, Lansdowne, 1969
- I. Southall *Finn's Folly*, A & R, 1969
- L. Norman *Climb a Lonely Hill*, Collins, 1970
- A. Oldfield *A Daughter of Two Worlds*, Rigby, 1970 *
- P. Slater *An Eagle for Pidgin*, Jacaranda, 1970 *
- I. Southall *Bread and Honey*, A & R, 1970
- J. Woodberry *Little Black Swan*, Macmillan, 1970
- H.F. Brinsmead *Long Time Passing*, A & R, 1971 *
- N. Donkin *Johnny Neptune*, A & R, 1971 *
- D. Martin *Hughie*, Nelson, 1971 *
- C. Mattingley *The Windmill at Magpie Creek*, Brockhampton, 1971
- E. Mitchell *Light Horse to Damascus*, Hutchinson, 1971
- M. Paice *The Morning Glory*, Collins, 1971 *
- J. Rice *Robbie's Mob*, World's Work, 1971
- U. Rothwell *North to the Isa*, Rigby, 1971
- E. Wilton *Riverview Kids*, A & R, 1971
- G. Finkel *William Light*, A & R, 1972
- M. Paice *Run to the Mountains*, Collins, 1972

J. Phipson	<i>Bass and Billy Martin</i> , Macmillan, 1972 *
I. Southall	<i>Head in the Clouds</i> , A & R, 1972
E. Spence	<i>The Nothing Place</i> , Oxford, 1972
P. Wrightson	<i>An Older Kind of Magic</i> , Hutchinson, 1972
# A. Bunker	<i>Millingi</i> , Blackie, 1973 *
M. Clark	<i>New Golden Mountain</i> , Lansdowne, 1973
A. Farrell	<i>The Gift Wrapped Pony</i> , Brockhampton, 1973
M. Fatchen	<i>The Spirit Wind</i> , Hicks Smith, 1973 *
G. Finkel	<i>The Stranded Duck</i> , A & R, 1973
C. Mattingley	<i>Tiger's Milk</i> , A & R, (no date)
L. Norman	<i>The Flame Takers</i> , Collins, 1973
A. Oldfield	<i>Baroola and Us</i> , Hutchinson, 1973
R. Park	<i>Callie's Castle</i> , A & R, 1973
E. Spence	<i>Time to Go Home</i> , Oxford, 1973
C. Thiele	<i>The Fire in the Stone</i> , Rigby, 1973 *
F. Wrightson	<i>The Nargun and the Stars</i> , Hutchinson, 1973

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* *Include Aboriginal characters.*

Insert Broderick, D.M.: The Image of the Black in Children's Fiction, Bowker, N.Y., 1973

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