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## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Racialising the Australian Landscape and Fauna in  
Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* and Dick Roughsey's  
*The Rainbow Serpent*

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# Abstract

This dissertation examines two instances of twentieth century Australian children's literature focusing on the issue of race through the analysis of the Australian landscape and fauna and how they are depicted, particularly in Australian bush fantasy books —written by white Australian authors— and in Aboriginal Literature for children. The dissertation analyses Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1918) and Dick Roughsey's *The Rainbow Serpent* (1976) and explores the implications of colonialism and the role of picture books in Australian children's literature. Through the use of anthropomorphised animals and plants, authors are able to convey different meanings depending on their target audience and whether the author is an Aboriginal person or a white Australian.

# I. Introduction

There have been many attempts in Australia to forge a national literature, all marked by the conflict between the white colonizers and their descendants, who have dominated the literary production from its beginning, and the Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> authors, who have been given voice only in the very late twentieth century and claim their right to tell their own story. It is important to go back in time, to the arrival of James Cook in 1770 in Botany Bay, for a better understanding of the Australian literary and cultural history. The Australian land had formed part of the Europeans' imagination since the second century as the 'dream land', but, although the territory of Australia had been the destination of different European expeditions, it was not until 1770, when Captain James Cook claimed the eastern part of the continent as part of the British Crown and named it New South Wales, that Australia was officially settled under the assumption that it was "terra nullius", land of no one (Webby 2000:5).

This territory was used as a new location for the convicts who were transported from overseas, especially Britain, as a replacement for the lost American colonies. In 1788, The 'First Fleet' of convicts and their guards arrived at Botany Bay. Soon, the first conflicts arose between settlers and natives, who suffered constant persecutions, especially those on the island of Tasmania, who were exterminated. Among the most cruel mistreatments perpetrated on the defenceless Aborigines by the self-proclaimed representatives of the British Crown were the rape of women, the over-exploitation of Australian natural resources, the dispossession of the Indigenous lands, the imposition of the British customs and, above all, the consequent distinct decrease of the Aboriginal population by massacring and relegating them to ghettos. Those Indigenous peoples who were not killed were separated from their mixed-blood children as part of an attempt to "breed out" the race.

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<sup>1</sup> A note on terminology: In this paper I am going to refer to the Indigenous Australians as "Aboriginal peoples" or "Indigenous peoples" indistinctly. Many refer to themselves as "Aboriginal people", especially when invoking their common past. However, some of them reject the term "Aboriginal" as a colonial term that refers to the collective name given to the first peoples of Australia and it does not recognise the diversity of the many distinct nations and cultures that have different languages, spiritual beliefs and customs. Adding an 's' to 'Aboriginal people' attempts to recognise this diversity. Although I am aware of the fact that Australia is a multicultural country which has received immigrants from all over the world, I am here primarily concerned with a second group, that of the descendants of the first white settlers.

These children were taken from their families to purposefully-built camps and institutions where they were brought up and educated according to the British standards and the Christian faith transforming them from ‘animals’ into ‘civilised individuals’ (Webby 2000:7-10). Discrimination will continue until the late twentieth century by depriving the Indigenous peoples of, not only, their right to vote, but also of the possibility of offering their own version of history.

This ‘white supremacy’ was also visible in literature. The first works were written by explorers who wanted to leave an account of their expeditions in which landscape, fauna and flora were described as disappointing, and the Indigenous population was portrayed as villains and primitive ‘others’ in need of civilising, probably a sort of justification for all the atrocities the ‘whites’ were inflicting upon the original owners of the land. Once the transportation of convicts to the Australian coasts ceased, Australian authors felt the need to change their works from a descriptive form to a more lively writing with the form of a tale or adventure in order to attract new immigrants to this inhospitable land. Along with this new writing, the figure of the ‘native’ (white Australian-born) bushman hero was introduced forging the legend of Australian mateship and manhood that is still being internationally sold by the Australian government (Webby 2000:52). This new type of hero replaced the traditional ‘Prince Charming’ of Western societies making way to new types of fairy tales located in the Australian landscape. Bushman heroes who save lives, damsels in distress together with the presence of the Indigenous population portrayed as villains, are the main ingredients of a new type of literature whose aim is to attract new readers as well as to teach children how to become a ‘real’ Australian.

Writing for children started in Australia in the late nineteenth century in the form of spelling and grammar books, but soon, children’s writers began to write about the distinctiveness of the flora and fauna and the life in the bush, as well as to praise the uniqueness of an Australian childhood. These books, as Clare Bradford asserts, “both reflect and promote cultural values and practices, it is inevitable that they disclose conceptions of and attitudes to race, ethnicity, colonialism and postcolonialism, responding to the discourses and practices of the societies where they are

produced" (Bradford 2010:39). Thus, "cultural production for children in colonial settings" represented "indigenous characters according to the stereotypes which held sway in different cultural contexts" (Bradford 2010:43), that is to say, "either as enemies or as foils or sidekicks to the brave adventurers who had gone out from the old world to conquer the new" (Paul 2009:91). This issue of race, which remained for many decades on the margins of children's literature, was moved to the mainstream after fighting against those who considered it too painful to be focused on. Finally, after a long process, by the 1970s and 1980s, children's books in which the main character was not white, nor portrayed Aboriginal peoples as animals or comical characters, started to appear (Paul 2009:90).

Although, it was not until 2008 that Australia made formal apologies to the Aboriginal peoples (Paul 2009:86), Indigenous groups found different ways to bring children closer to their history and culture, mainly represented by the Dreaming or Dream Time, by allowing white authors to tell their stories for them. Most of these white authors collected the narratives of the Indigenous peoples changing them according to European practices in order to publish them as children's narratives and to attract wider audiences. In most cases, the story ended having little to do with the original one. In other cases, these stories were presented and sold as the last remains of an almost, if not already, dead culture. There was then, a progressive change in the way Aboriginal peoples were being portrayed thanks to the incorporation of Indigenous authors to the lists of publications. These Indigenous writers had to fight for many years in order to be part of the Australian society and to be given the possibility to have a say in what had happened to their group for so many years. Since the 1960s, the literary production by Indigenous authors has increased dramatically. For these authors, children's books are a priority as they seek to engage children, especially non-Indigenous ones, with their culture so that they can understand and respect it better.

This dissertation explores how Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors of children's literature have made use of the Australian landscape and fauna in their works for two different aims. While white authors, especially in fantasy and fairy narratives, make use of anthropomorphised

animals and plants mainly to reach a wide readership in Australia and abroad, in Aboriginal narratives Australian animals and plants play an essential role in the transmission of the Dreaming, that is, the Indigenous peoples' knowledge of the countryside, their beliefs, language, kinship and history. I will focus on two texts, one work by a non-Aboriginal author, Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1918) and another one by an Aboriginal author, Dick Roughsey's *The Rainbow Serpent* (Australian Picture Book of the Year 1976). Norman's book is a fairy and fantasy narrative, a genre which has tried to bring children, mainly non-Aboriginal ones, closer to the landscape of Australia by showing them new ways of feeling and belonging.

Contrary to non-Indigenous, Indigenous narratives require different readings. They cannot be assumed to represent all the Aboriginal peoples, for each tribe has its own Dreaming, that is, their own stories, and each of these stories are subject to custodianship which will determine the clans as well as the territory and language group they belong to. Aboriginal literary production for children is quite recognizable, for they normally make use of visual representations of the stories (characters are represented by means of Aboriginal art) and provide paratextual material such as maps, glossaries with translation of some of their words and information about the author, also referred to as 'storyteller' (Bradford 2010: 45-46). Graphic representations of the stories are essential for Aboriginal authors in order to convey the meaning and knowledge to their readership. This is the reason why children's books by Aboriginal authors always have the form of picture books, for drawings and forms are also one way for them of sharing their knowledge. In my introduction to the use of the landscape in Australian Children's literature, special attention will be paid to the use of Indigenous animals, which have been endowed with human characteristics, as main or secondary characters in the works of both groups of authors in order to understand the different perspectives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors. An analysis of the connection of fairy and fantasy narrative with colonialism is also necessary before I undertake the study of the two tales.

## **I. 1. Landscape and Fauna in Australian Children's Literature**

Human beings, from the beginnings, have managed to subjugate both their immediate and distant environment. Man's ambition, curiosity and knowledge, together with his understanding, have led man to move around the earth looking for new places, overcoming different environmental conditions and pushing back frontiers, no matter what its inhabitants or vegetation are, in order to satisfy their growing needs. This search and discovery has been celebrated in song, painting and literature and Australia is no exception. There are many accounts of the discovery, settlement, exploration and exploitation of the land, and in all of them the landscape plays a central role. There are countless of novels and poems that deal with the Australian landscape directly or indirectly. From breath-taking landscapes or primeval sunsets, to the difficulties it offers to those who want to change it for their own benefit. The first in doing so were the settlers and explorers who were captivated by both the hostility and special beauty of the country and its exotic vegetation and animals. Each author approaches the Australian land according to his needs and his readers', for poets will not perceive nature in the same way as scientists or children's writers do.

While some of the first narratives of exploration held that this continent was a land of richness; others reported the land as arid and "unlikely to sustain or nourish human habitation" (Schaffer 1988:1). What began as a disappointment or deception, with the passing of time became an exceptional source of interest for readers who, from both inside Australia and overseas, felt the necessity to know more about this new land full of landscapes and animals that no one could have ever dreamt about, making of Australia the land of desire. Since then, the bush has been continuously celebrated not only in novels but also in poetry, drama and children's literature. Local settings became crucial in literature as an indicator of Australianness. This portrait of Australia was the beginning of a landscape which has been shaped according to Western values and from which the characteristic Australian identity has emerged.

Children's literature is a unique world, where the flora and the fauna have been used for a great variety of objectives. Some naturalists made use of children's literature to bring children closer to the, by then, unknown world and instruct them in natural science with lessons about bushcraft, birds, or animals: "A Wombat is a square animal with thick hair like a door-at, stumpy legs, and no tail to speak of. He has brown eyes and a comfortable, leathery flat nose like a koala" (Park 1962:10). Nevertheless, these narratives lack a proper story line and are full of data making the reading a bit difficult for those who have not a natural love for nature (Saxby 1971:156). With the passing of time this 'factual' books were further adapted by tandems composed by a children's writer and a scientist. As a result, some stories about Australian animals started to appear in which narrative was blended with dialogue and explanation, making some of the animals talk among themselves. These creatures were endowed with human characteristics (including speech, clothes, etc.) but could choose either to continue with their own animal lives or mix with some of the humans. Some animal characters enabled children to easily identify themselves with them without making these animals unfaithful to their kind; in other cases, these characters are too close to human personalities and behaviour. The proper animal story in which a creature assumes a clearly defined character slowly developed in Australia. As Saxby points out in *A History of Australian Children's Literature*, "Humanized animals are relevant at that stage of a child's growth when he can explore reality indirectly through such inventions" (1971:166). One of the Australian children's authors who has been able to successfully blend all these ingredients in order to create an original and dignified story is Norman Lindsay, whose book *The Magic Pudding* I will analyse in detail later on. In fact, it is fair to say that there are no tales about animal life as such, but rather narratives that exploit the Australian landscape and animals in a mix of fantasy, action and surprise which engage the young reader who grows in knowledge and experience.

The conception of land for the Aboriginal peoples is completely different to what we have seen until now. The concept of 'country' is very complex. For them, country is multidimensional, that is, it is a compound of people, animals, plants, Dreaming, land, water and air. And it is in all

these elements that knowledge is embedded. This knowledge is accumulated over generations of living in a particular environment and enables the community to connect with their environment. The relationship between the land and the Aboriginal peoples of that land is very intricate. Land is regarded as a source of life. Land takes care of the Aboriginal tribes and, at the same time, they take care of the land by keeping it clean, protecting the species related to that land and protecting its integrity by not allowing other people to trespass particular sites or mistreat it. Nevertheless, as history has proved, Aboriginal peoples have not been able to achieve their aim of protecting the land, as they were dispossessed of their countries. With this dispossession, the Aboriginal peoples were not only repressed but also separated from their land, their Aboriginality. It is impossible for them to create or narrate a story in which the land is not presented as the main character because for them, it is impossible to conceive the idea of life and Aboriginality without reference to the land.

## **I. 2. Race in Australian Fantasy and Fairy Literature for Children**

Narratives written for children by white Australian authors are influenced by Western society and its values together with certain genres such as Fantasy and Fairy in their representation of Indigenous cultures and peoples. Children are addressed as readers through descriptions of fantastic Indigenous characters and discourses about race and social hierarchy (Collins-Gearing 2003:32). As Brooke Collins-Gearing affirms, “Australian children’s literature has traditionally provided a space for colonial Australia to perpetuate ideas about segregation, assimilation, and reconciliation. Children’s literature offers a complex medium for readers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to question and challenge prevalent attitudes” (Collins-Gearing 2007:27). What is more important, non-Aboriginal writers often make use of the fantasy and fairy genres to spread the idea that this ‘other’ race is dying and belongs to the past. Therefore, in these genres, Aboriginal peoples and their culture play a secondary role in narrations recounted from a non-Indigenous perspective. If there are no Indigenous characters, topics of invasion, genocide and assimilation disappear, since these authors only use those aspects of Indigenous culture that meet their purposes. “In the fantasy literature of the nineteenth century —which influenced fantasy literature of the twentieth century— the image of the Aborigine becomes a symbol dissociated from the realities of dispossession and poverty as well as of urban life” (Collins-Gearing 2003:33).

In the late nineteenth century, new characters taken from the Australian landscape were introduced in fantasy and fairy narratives. Until that moment, fairy and fantasy narratives in Australia were inspired by the English literary tradition where giants and other magic creatures were the basic features. However, white Australian authors saw the difficulty of adapting these characters from the English literary tradition to the Australia landscape and fauna as creatures such as giants or fairies did not fit in this new setting. Thus, they decided to include Australian native fauna and fantastic Indigenous characters. These new fantastic native characters appeared until the

late twentieth century in fairy and fantasy narratives together with binary oppositions, i.e. black vs. white, rural vs. urban, etc. revealing a white sense of place and community (Collins-Gearing 2003:33). Later on, the figure of the ‘real’ Aboriginal person appeared in some books as part of the landscape and as a sign of exoticism. It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that the idea of the Aboriginal person as “pastoral and unspoilt” (Collins-Gearing 2003:35) emerged, leaving behind the image of the black as a savage, and of an inferior race. Nevertheless, although the image of the Aboriginal peoples improved, this ‘pastoral’ image of them was not a real portrait. Once again, it was manipulated and transformed leading to a misconception of Aboriginality together with the degradation and appropriation of their culture.

It is clear that the concept of race depends totally on the society and values of the time in which race is observed and measured. Until the late twentieth century, the Indigenous peoples of Australia were ignored and lived under white Australian assimilation policies. Nevertheless, white writers kept on focusing on a manipulated and idealised image of Indigenality as free and not suffering from the abuses of the white people in general and their Government in particular. Once Indigenous rights were recognised worldly and Aboriginal peoples had a more prominent role in Australian society, the concept of race in fairy and fantasy narratives changed helping to position and more faithfully define Indigenality in these narratives (Collins-Gearing 2003:38).

## II. Australian Bush Fantasy: Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding*

The main objective of fantasy in children's literature is to bring children closer to the unknown, the invisible and the mystical. The same could be said about fairy tales, developed by writers such as Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. Both have recurrent themes and characters in common; in both it is very easy to find talking animals, nature presented as one more character and the use of a lively narrative. In the case of Australian children's literature, there is no clear-cut distinction between these genres.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a group of non-Aboriginal writers tried to adapt European fairy tales to the Australian landscape in order to help the children of the emigrants develop a sense of belonging (Floyd 2010:1). This attempt to form a new genre will be subsequently referred to as the 'Australian bush fantasy'. What began as a desire to bring the familiarity of the European landscape to the new Australian one by means of local settings and colour ended up drawing writers "to the challenge of imagining an Australianised fairyland believing it was the right of all children to have their own fairies" (Floyd 2010:1). Thus, writers enabled children to find fairies in a familiar bush track rather than in an English garden, for example. These bush stories embodied a strong nationalistic sentiment showing affection towards the Australian landscape (Floyd 2010:2). However, at the beginning of this new genre, authors reflected in their works their own cultural values and their sense of Britishness. As Floyd (2010: 4) explains

While traditional magical creatures formed the basis of their stories, [...] these fairylands mirrored the cultural beliefs of the era unconsciously commenting on gender, race and power. Common themes of identity, alienation in a strange world and relationship with place were explored under a layer of fantasy.

The staples of Australian bush fantasy are detailed descriptions of the Australian flora and fauna together with some local geology. Writers replaced the ‘old’ European fairies with Australian talking animals and new plants and landscapes to create a distinctive Australian identity. Most authors made, and still make, use of pictures in order to reinforce their story and to make it easier for the child to engage with it. One of the best examples of this genre is *The Magic Pudding* by Norman Lindsay.

Lindsay (1879-1969) was born in Creswick, Victoria in a middle-class family. He is widely considered one of Australia’s most prolific artists. His passion for art made him experiment with different types of art and styles, from essays and articles to drawings, sculptures, cartoons, and literature for children (Smith 1986). His best-known book for children is his classic *The Magic Pudding* (1918), which he wrote and illustrated.

*The Magic Pudding* was first published in 1918 but it was written in the middle of the First World War as a way to escape from an atmosphere of war and conflict. Lindsay wrote the book to settle an argument with a friend as he was sure that children preferred to read about food and fighting than about fairies.<sup>2</sup> Lindsay wrote a comic fantasy adventure about Albert, a magic pudding who does not get smaller when eaten, and three mates —Bunyip Bluegum, Sam Sawnoff and Bill Barnacle— who have the custodianship of the pudding and have to fight the two pudding thieves who want to steal Albert. The book is divided into four “slices” instead of chapters and is addressed to eight-year olds and older because it is quite long and too complex for younger readers.

The story begins with the narrator addressing the reader directly and introducing the characters of Bunyip Bluegum, a koala, and his uncle, referring to the pictures that accompany the story: “At a glance you can see what a fine, round, splendid fellow Bunyip Bluegum is, without me telling you” (page 6). One day, Bunyip decides to leave his home

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2 “Australian Children’s Books”

looking for new experiences because he can no longer stand his uncles' whiskers. What these whiskers represent is wisdom, power and superiority towards the rest of animals who do not have them. Just by looking at the illustrations, we learn that Bunyip and his uncle belong to the upper class and they are learned people, as they are dressed in a very formal way with top hats, a walking stick and an umbrella. This idea is confirmed as soon as the characters talk in verse: "As noble thoughts the inward being grace, / So noble whiskers dignify the face" (page 9). But these two characters are not the only ones who use rhyme when talking. Throughout the book the reader encounters many short songs interspersed, stories told in rhyme together with descriptions of characters and their behaviour, and conversations in verse. During Bunyip's first journey around the country he meets Bill Barnacle, a human sailor, and Sam Sawnoff, a penguin, both members of the Noble Society of Pudding Owners, whose "members are required to wander along the roads, indulgin' in conversation, song and story, and eatin' at regular intervals from the Pudding" (page 35) and who have the custodianship of "a cut-an'-come-again Puddin'" (page 17) that never ends. That is, people can eat as much as they want and the pudding never runs out. The Magic Pudding is also alive. His name is Albert and he walks, talks and has a strong personality: he is mean, sulky, malicious, snappy: "'No whispering,' shouted the Puddin' angrily. 'Speak up. Don't strain a Puddin's ears at the meal table'" (page 17). Albert enjoys to be eaten; in fact, it even pleads to be eaten. The koala Bunyip is invited to join their society and since that moment they start their adventure and constant fight against pudding thieves. There are two thieves, a possum and a wombat, who keep on trying to steal Albert always unsuccessfully thanks to Bunyip's wit. Both thieves are portrayed, both in the story and in the illustrations, as nasty varmints from the lowest classes and not very brilliant. After several attempts, the two thieves, dressed in suits and top hats, approach Bunyip and his friends in the city of Tooraloo claiming to be the real owners of the pudding. The conflict calls the attention of the Mayor and the coward local Constable, who ends up arresting Albert for insulting the Mayor. Finally, Bunyip's cleverness, once again,

makes the pudding owners recover the pudding successfully. They decide that the best way to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts is to settle down at Benjamin's garden, where they can live a life of ease together. Benjamin is the farmer dog who helps the pudding owners to find the thieves.

It is important to pay attention to the different characters that appear in the book but first, it is necessary to observe how Lindsay acknowledges the presence of natives in Australia. Although natives form part of the background of the story, they are briefly mentioned once in the story; their presence is virtually nil and when they are present, the image we get is one of savages: "It's worse than being chased by natives on the Limpopo River, said Sam" (page 82). Two groups of characters can be distinguished: the humans and the animals. While humans are portrayed as cowards and represented in the illustrations with animal features, animals are dressed in the fashions of the time and behave like humans adopting human personalities and habits —they work, smoke, have tea, etc. As Saxby claims "talking animal stories ranged from the informative to the humorous and some owed allegiance to the fable and folk-tale in their comment on the world of men" (1971:256). Lindsay explores the relationship to the land and an older culture by portraying what everybody has assumed to be uniquely Australian features such as the characteristic flora and fauna and independence of mind: "Rough, good-humoured fellers like us don't need apologies, or any social fal-lals at all" (page 135). This portrait is taken to the extreme by means of satirising some aspects of Australian life such as the mateship and manhood of the characters, and even the narrator, who use Australian expressions such as 'feller', 'mate', 'larrikin' etc.: "'Here you are, a young intelligent feller, goin' about seein' the world by yourself. Here is Sam an' me, two as fine fellers as ever walked, goin' about the world with a Puddin'" (page 35). Lindsay also attacks, in an indirect way, the colonizer by mocking authority figures. The Mayor and the coward Constable are described as

a little, fat, breathless, beetle-shaped man, who hastened with difficulty owing to his robe of office being trodden on by the Constable, who ran close behind him in order to finish eating a banana in secret. He had some more bananas in a paper bag, and his face was one of those feeble faces that make one think of eggs and carrots and feathers, if you take my meaning. (page 108)

Although they hold the highest positions in the book, Mayor, Constable, Judge or Usher, behave in an irrational way and take advantage of their power, which reflects a considerable inferiority towards the rest of characters who are animals and do not have any political power. Therefore, animals in this story are on a superior level than the humans. Although animals do not hold any political power, these typical Australian males are noble and more intelligent than the humans who are portrayed as mere puppets. It is no surprise to find discourses about race, social hierarchy and class aspiration. This social hierarchy is visible among the animals. As the story goes along, the characters of Bill, Bunyip and Sam come across different animals —a dog, a kookaburra, a flying-fox or a crow among others— who portray a different social class marked by their use of language and the way they are dressed. The best example is the obvious difference that exists between Bunyip and Sam or the Flying-fox and the wombat. While Bunyip has an elevated style, a perfect use of the English grammar and expresses himself using verse and rhyme. Bill and Sam often make use of slang, abbreviations, insults and swearwords to communicate with people from both a higher and lower class.

As we can see, *The Magic Pudding* has all the necessary ingredients —talking animals, the Australian bush and detailed descriptions— to be classified as an Australian bush fantasy book. Nevertheless, as I have mentioned before, the book also deals in a humorous way with social and political issues. *The Magic Pudding* presents its own version of national identity, not an Australian Aboriginal one but the one sold by the British colonisers since their arrival in Australia. Following the tradition of depicting the Australian bushman as the archetype of the national figure, Lindsay presents his characters as the typical Australian males in an atmosphere of camaraderie, ready to have fun, and with a tendency to break the

law with the aim of having fun and not harm. These characters are mainly animals dressed in the fashions of the time and whose actions reinforce the image of mateship between men in Australia. The book also reflects a nationalistic sentiment by showing affection towards the Australian landscape, where fantastic Indigenous characters such as Koalas, Possums and Wombats, together with many other animals, live in harmony with humans and flora. The geographical locations in the story should be considered in detail. Even though we are constantly reminded of the Australian bush where the native animals hide and live, the story also presents us some landscapes that cannot be found in Australia, such as the river Limpopo in Africa, or makes up some of the names of the cities the characters pass by. Words like “Tooraloo” or “Bungledoo” do not have a meaning nor exist, but remind us of Aboriginal languages which use double consonants and vowels. Landscape in the book is explored and exploited by the animals who are adventurers, salesmen or farmers such as the farmer Benjamin, but not by humans. The book deals with the vast geography of Australia from the hot desert to the high hills and the coast line always highlighting its special beauty and contrasting with the cities the characters go by. This special beauty of the landscape is reinforced at the end of the book when the protagonists decide to stay at Benjamin’s far in the middle of the country and not in the city. However, in the last illustration of the book we can see how the group of pudding owners inhabit what could be described as the ‘Australian male heaven’ where there is unlimited food, plenty of free time, mateship, peace and endless nights of singing and telling stories, and where we can see a strong nationalistic sentiment by closing the story with an Australian idyll. The group of animals chatting and having fun in their house while, not very far away, at the back, we can see the silhouette of a city. The message Lindsay is trying to send to the readers is that it is important to take care of the Australian landscape and its uniqueness and to protect it from those who want to destroy it.

### **III. From Dreaming to Contemporary Aboriginal Literature for Children: Dick Roughsey's *The Rainbow Serpent***

Indigenous peoples of Australia have constructed their culture and identity around stories. Aboriginal oral cultures have survived to centuries of displacement and persecution by white settlers. Songs and narratives are a form of knowledge and represent the Dreaming. This knowledge is constantly changing, being transmitted orally from an older generation to the youngest. Narratives and songs are closely connected to place, as they explain how the landscape was formed by the Indigenous peoples' ancestors. It is important to bear in mind that this knowledge is only transmitted in ceremonial contexts and only the peoples of the tribe can have access to it. Therefore, we have to acknowledge the importance of Indigenous writers' decision to share their knowledge with the vast, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, readership from children to adults.

Indigenous Australian writers' aim completely differs from the white Australian author's as Aboriginal authors seek to educate the reader into the knowledge experience of the teller. As storytellers, Indigenous authors assume their responsibility to share their knowledge and Dreaming in order to preserve it and to teach other tribes and non-Indigenous peoples. All Indigenous authors appeal to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child and adult readers challenging the general assumption that picture books can only be addressed to children and that Aboriginal stories are better suited for children. As O'Neill explains "The picture book is the most easily recognizable form of children's literature and most often conforms to adult ideological expectations. Ideology is inscribed within the words, rule-systems and codes of every text" (O'Neill 2011:4). In the case of Indigenous authors, they have had to adapt to these expectations as they write in English and often follow Western patterns of presenting their works. Picture books successfully integrate both text and pictures

offering the perfect blend of oral and written tradition. This is possibly the reason why Aboriginal storytellers decide to make use of this genre not only for children but for adults too. However, it is often awkward for Western readers to engage with children's picture books even if they are challenged with questions in order to make the reading more interesting (O'Neill, 2011:5). A typical instance of a book written by an Indigenous author for a child and adult readership is *The Rainbow Snake* (1976) by Dick Roughsey.

Dick Roughsey (1924-1985) was born near Mornington Island in Queensland, Australia. His Aboriginal name is Goobalathaldin (meaning 'water standing on end') which he also uses in some of his publications. He grew up as a member of the Lardil tribe living a traditional lifestyle. When he was eight he was taken to a Presbyterian mission school where he was named Dick and completed his primary education. Then, he went back with his tribe and it was not until 1962 that he travelled to the mainland and started painting and drawing successfully (Memmott 2012). He was one of the first Aboriginal authors to introduce Aboriginal culture to children with his traditional stories. In 1975, he wrote and illustrated his book *The Rainbow Snake*, a creation story awarded the Picture Book of the Year (1976) by The Children's Book Council of Australia and which provides an easy introduction to some aboriginal mythology, especially for younger readers.

Dick Roughsey is a Northern Australian Lardil elder and, as such, the myth of The Rainbow Serpent is his to tell. The book is briefly introduced by the editor, who explains that this is one of the innumerable stories associated to the Rainbow serpent. This is followed by the opening of the story itself: "Far off in Dreamtime there were only people, no animals; or birds".<sup>3</sup> With this introduction it is established that the story is being 'told', not written and it belongs to the Dreamtime. Roughsey transcribes an Indigenous legend for a children's book combining an oral story with written discourse. In this case, the written discourse is not, as

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<sup>3</sup> All the quotations belong to the audiobook version of the book available at <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vh6moD9ZOU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vh6moD9ZOU)>. It has not been possible to find a paginated copy of the book.

we might have expected, in standard English but in conventional Aboriginal English, which is easy to understand for both adults and children. The narrative explains the legend of Goorialla, the Rainbow Serpent, who created the landscape of the Cape York Peninsula which, as the story explains, many years ago was totally flat. The Rainbow Serpent decides to travel across Australia looking for his tribe. During his journey, he stops at Cape York — where he creates the mountain Narabullgan, some gorges, creeks and rivers— and at Fairview —where he makes the Minalinka lagoon. Finally, he finds his own people and shows them how to make headdresses of feathers, what to wear and how to dance in their ceremony. Then, there is a big storm and everybody builds shelters except the Bil-bil or Rainbow Lorikeet brothers. As nobody gives them shelter, they go to Goorialla's humpy and ask him if they could stay with him. He accepts and when they are coming in, he opens his mouth and swallows them. Then, he travels to Bora-bunaru, a natural mountain, so the people from the tribe cannot catch him, and falls asleep. When his people finds him, they cut him open and release the Bil-bil brothers who have turned into Rainbow Lorikeets. Once Goorialla wakes up and sees what has happened, he is enraged, tearing the mounting apart and hurling the parts across the country forming the hills and the mountains of today. Some of the peoples are killed by the stones; others run away “turning themselves into all kinds of animals, birds, insects and plant life that live in the country today”.

Using traditional Indigenous-influenced illustrations by himself, Roughsey presents two different narratives which complement each other successfully presenting magnificent illustrations that capture the ochres and reds of the Australian landscape together with the green of the trees, and an Aboriginal story, while also including elements without the connotations of ‘past’ and ‘present’ that we can find in many non-Indigenous works. The text combines knowledge from Indigenous cultures and Dreaming, with ‘contemporary’ meanings and realities. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, Aboriginal knowledge is embedded and emplaced in the stories and songs of a tribe; and stories such as the Rainbow

Serpent are no exception. The land, their country, gave Indigenous tribes their identity and helped them to embody all their knowledge in their specific landscape. This is a story from the Dreaming of the Lardil tribe that lives in the Northern territories of Australia. The story starts by locating the action in Cape York, and keeps on naming the different iconographies of the territory such as mountains, lagoons or creeks, in order to make it easier for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers to follow the story and to be able to locate it in nowadays' landscape. The territory is quite realistically depicted in the book's illustrations. It is important to highlight the fact that Roughsey has not completely fallen into the Western literary tradition of telling stories. Thus, although the beginning of the story might lead Western readers to think this story is one more tale to be told, the language in which it is written and the fact that some words remain Aboriginal and are not translated into English such as "Bora" (the Indigenous name to refer to the Rainbow ceremony) or "humpy" (shelter), make the reader realise that it is an Aboriginal legend. The text not only succeeds in showing how dynamic and resistant Aboriginal peoples and their knowledge are, but contributes to the continuation of these ideas too. The text reinforces Aboriginal knowledge for Aboriginal readers while also "instructs" non-Aboriginal readers in Indigenous traditions and culture.

Finally, I intend to have a closer look at the different characters that appear in the book and what they represent. While in children's books by non-Indigenous authors we have encountered animals endowed with human characteristics, in this book, we find the character of Goorialla, the Rainbow Serpent, who, although referred to as "He" and having the ability to dance, walk and talk, keeps his animal form and habits. If we go back to the Dreaming, we learn that the first beings who inhabited the land of Australia and created its iconography and flora and fauna were the Indigenous ancestors. These ancestors lived in the land until they got tired and decided to ascend to the sky to contemplate what they had created and their tribes. This is the case with Goorialla: "That is how it all happened back in Dreamtime. When

Goorialla's anger was spent there was only a small hill remaining of the great mountain Bora-bunaru. He went down and disappeared into the sea, where he remains to this day. [...] The shooting star racing across the sky at night is the eye of Goorialla watching... everybody". Furthermore, the Rainbow Serpent represents the twisting of water across the land and the colours caused by sunlight hitting the water and nowadays, it is associated with abundance and ceremonies of fertility. It could be quite shocking for young readers to read what happened to the peoples of Goorialla tribe and how they turned into animals, plants, insects, etc. and those who did not "have to look after the remaining people, all the living things which were men and women in the beginning; but who were too afraid of Goorialla to remain as people." Children are not only taught a different 'version' of the Creation story, where humans called "Emu, Turkey, Brolga, Tortoise, Possum, Barramundi" or "Wangoo" become animals which now have these names, but are brought closer to the Aboriginal culture —the same culture that some decades ago was thought to be 'savage'— and their survival skills since time memorial.

## IV. Conclusion

The history of Australian children's literature was built on a non-Indigenous need to make sense of their place in Indigenous land. What white authors did was to adapt fairy and fantasy narratives to the Australian landscape by endowing native animals with the ability to talk, dress and behave as the non-Aboriginal people of the time. Unfortunately, there was no place for Aboriginal peoples; and when there was, they were represented as savages in need of being civilized. Indigenous peoples have also seen how the concept of Indigeneity and all it represents has been appropriated by non-Aboriginal authors. Nowadays, we have access to more faithful representations of what Indigeneity represents in children's books by Aboriginal authors. Indigenous authors of children's literature have a different concept of what children 'need' or 'want' to read about. While non-Indigenous authors seek to promote certain values and ideas of their culture such as mateship or 'fair play' —which have been present in Australian children's literature since its origin— and criticise others, non-Indigenous authors want to share their knowledge with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers and show their reality and culture in order to be respected and valued.

In this dissertation I have focused on two children's books in order to draw these differences between both types of authors. In Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1916) we have seen how children are addressed as readers through fantastic Indigenous characters and discourses of race and social hierarchy. The book shows a nationalistic sentiment showing affection towards the Australian landscape. The landscape turns for a while into a fantastic world where Australianness, represented by mateship and manhood, is praised and where Aboriginality becomes part of the background without ever having an important role. This fact makes us realize that although the figure of the Aboriginal peoples has been manipulated over the past two centuries in fantasy and fairy narratives, it is also true that non-Indigenous authors, such as Lindsay Norman in *The Magic Pudding*, have implicitly

recognised the constant presence and prior rights of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. I have also analysed Dick Roughsey's *The Rainbow Serpent* (1975), which is based on an Aboriginal myth from the Northern territory of Australia. The story perfectly combines orality with written discourse. Although it may seem to follow the Western literary conventions, it keeps its Aboriginal identity by using Aboriginal English and innovative literary techniques such as illustrations influenced by the Aboriginal picture tradition, and succeeds in addressing both adult and child readerships —something which is not very common in Western literature. What Aboriginal authors try to do in their books is to decolonize the idea of Indigenality by bringing the readers closer to their culture, and to show that the reader does not need to be an Aboriginal person to enjoy these type of stories. In order to consolidate this decolonization of Indigenality, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers should be addressed in Australian children's literature where there are representations of Aboriginality. Ideally, these representations should address readers avoiding dichotomies of 'black' vs. 'white', 'superior' vs. 'inferior' or 'civilised' vs. 'uncivilised', and portraying faithfully Aboriginal peoples and their Indigenality in order to change people's conceptions of what Aboriginality means and represents.

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