Magic, Spels and Gramarye

Studying English literature at school was my first, and probably my biggest, step towards mental freedom and independence. It was like falling in love with life.

(Ian McEwan, novelist)

Spel (Anglo-Saxon) = to write, to read, to work magic

Gramarye (Anglo-Saxon) = to cast a spell, to cast a 'glamour' (said to be used by witches)

'Grammar' derives from *graphein* (Greek) = the art of reading and writing.

'Glamour' is a corruption of 'grammar'.

The Literature strand aims to engage students in the study of literary texts of personal, cultural, social and aesthetic value … Texts are chosen because they are judged to have potential for enriching the lives of students [and] expanding the scope of their experience … Learning to appreciate literary texts … builds students' knowledge about how language can be used for aesthetic ends, to create particular emotional, intellectual or philosophical effects.

(http://v7-5.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/content-structure/literature) **AC**

The magic and glamour of reading and writing

Writing consists of marks of what we call *language* on a page: in the English language these marks consist of only 26 letters—ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ—and punctuation protocols (such as commas, full stops, question marks and so on).

Reading makes sense of those marks of language: it creates mind-pictures of characters and what they look like; of places, time and events; of voices and sounds; and of touch and smell. The reading of writing is a sort of magic: there is no soundtrack, although we hear sounds; there is no image on a screen, although we see mental images.

Writing, and the reading of writing, create the powerful spell of story. Stories model, inspire and teach language. Books offer one of the most significant and accessible ways of introducing children to language through the multiple modes of story. Because books are read to very young children, children become aware that print marks and sounds match in some way so as to express meaning; they become aware of what sentences sound like and the coherence of narrative.

Books are part of national and social cultures and are profoundly influenced by the worlds that produce them. Through books young people learn, both explicitly and implicitly, about those worlds and about how stories and language not only form part of worlds but help construct them. Through books children learn about worlds other than their own and how such worlds may have not only different languages, but also different ways of telling and different ways of reading.

Books reveal how ideas and motivations and values and attitudes—both of wider worlds and of the personal worlds of authors—can influence the telling of story and the language choices that are made in the telling. Similarly, through reading books children learn how both wider worlds and the personal worlds of readers can influence how books are read, interpreted and remembered. Through books they are exposed to and learn, again both implicitly and explicitly, how simple narratives—amazingly carried through those black marks on pages—can almost magically convey character and event, time and place, sometimes specifically, sometimes in more universal and folkloric 'Once upon a times'.

Because of their accessibility, because they can be read both collaboratively and individually, because pages can be turned and returned to at will (or scrolled and rescrolled—books can be read in many formats) and most of all because of the enchantment of language turned into story, books provide both the means and the motivation to lead young people into understandings of how language works and how it can be made to serve particular audiences and particular purposes. This has implications far beyond the literary and the aesthetic, as important and life-enhancing as both of these are. Through developing understandings of how time and place are represented, of how character is depicted and of how plot and event are given sequence and attributed meaning, young people learn that not all language is reliable, not all sequences are necessarily accurate or exclusive, and that there may be other ways not only of telling story but also of interpreting story.

In other words, children learn that not all stories should be read at face value, language can manipulate in many ways, and all language and stories emerge from certain ideas and intentions (to tell, to argue, to describe, to persuade, to question). Discernment of these is a lifelong critical and evaluative skill, in relation not only to literature but also to the modes of multimedia, including film, advertising, real estate and political discourse.

In a world where the Oxford Dictionaries 2016 word of the year is 'post-truth', it has never been more important for young people to learn discernment. As Nietzche writes at the end of his book *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887):

> The more eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our 'concept' of this matter, our 'objectivity' be.

This chapter introduces children's and youth literature as part of life knowledge and of lifetime reading pleasure, and asserts its continuing importance in a national artistic continuum. It briefly introduces literary concepts and ideas, and sets the study of literature in both theoretical and practical contexts.

Literature for young people

The books for young people that may be referred to as *children's literature* or *youth literature*

- *are* literature
- are an influential literature, because they relate so intimately to the social cultures and world views that have produced them
- if uninterrogated, can be a dangerous literature, because of the implicit and explicit values and ideologies they may instil
- constitute a rich and intimate part of the national and international literary and artistic continuum (see Johnston 2004: 310)
- make a vital contribution both to that continuum and to engagement with it.

Note: the Australian Curriculum now incorporates the idea of a *continuum*: a continuous sequence in which elements close to each other are not perceptibly different, but the extremes are quite distinct.

Why informed understanding is so important

Primary and secondary teachers, parents, and pre-service education students need to understand the very significant role they play in encouraging children not only in reading, but also in helping them understand the structures and aesthetics of literature. It is notable that the literature strand sits between the other two strands—language and literacy—in the Australian English Curriculum. Literature is language given form and creative life; engaging with it, as readers or writers, is a high-level literacy.

Teachers of classes from the earliest years (Foundation) onwards must prepare students for the literature and texts that they will meet in secondary school and that will play such a significant role in their final examinations. In Australia, English is a compulsory subject and literature is a fundamental part of senior English. Texts may change and critical stances alter, but literary preparedness grows out of years of reading and developing explicit and implicit knowledge and understandings about words and books, what they do and how they do it.

Texts to be studied in New South Wales 2015–2020 (NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards, currently called 'Prescriptions') include for the Standard course:

Prose fiction and non-fiction

1 Bradley, James, *Wrack*
2 Bryson, Bill, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*
3 Chopin, Kate, *The Awakening*
4 Day, Marele, *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender*
5 Guevara, Ernesto 'Che', *The Motorcycle Diaries*
6 Haddon, Mark, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*
7 Levy, Andrea, *Small Island*
8 Winch, Tara June, *Swallow the Air*

Drama, Shakespeare and film

1 Gow, Michael, *Away*
2 Harrison, Jane, *Rainbow's End* from Cleven, Vivienne et al., *Contemporary Indigenous Plays*
3 Lawler, Ray, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*
4 Lee, Ang, *Life of Pi*
5 Shakespeare, William, *The Tempest*

Poetry

1 Dobson, Rosemary, 'Cock Crow', 'Ghost Town: New England', 'Painter of Antwerp', 'The Tiger', 'Traveller's Tale', 'Wonder', 'Young Girl at a Window'
2 Gray, Robert, 'Diptych', 'Flames and Dangling Wire', 'Journey: the North Coast', 'Late Ferry', 'North Coast Town', 'The Meatworks'
3 Komninos, 'back to melbourne', 'cobar, july 1993', 'eat', 'hillston welcome', 'noura from narooma', 'thomastown talk'
4 Noonuccal, Oodgeroo, 'Artist Son', 'China …Woman', 'Entombed Warriors', 'Municipal Gum', 'Reed Flute Cave', 'The Past', 'Visit to Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall'
5 Owen, Wilfred, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', 'Dulce et Decorum Est', 'Futility', 'Insensibility', 'Strange Meeting', 'The Next War'
6 Paterson, AB 'Banjo', 'A Bush Christening', 'Clancy of the Overflow', 'In Defence of the Bush', 'Mulga Bill's Bicycle', 'Old Pardon, the Son of Reprieve', 'Saltbush Bill, J.P.'

Media

1 Nasht, Simon, *Frank Hurley—The Man Who Made History*
2 O'Mahoney, Ivan, *Go Back to Where You Came From*—Series 1, Episodes 1, 2 and 3—and *The Response*

Speeches

1 Cullis-Suzuki, Severn, Address to the Plenary Session, Earth Summit, 1992
2 Gandhi, Indira, 'The True Liberation of Women', 1980
3 Keating, Paul, Funeral Service of the Unknown Australian Soldier, 1993
4 Kennedy, John F, Inaugural Address, 1961
5 Obama, Barack, Inaugural Address, 2013
6 Suu Kyi, Aung San, Nobel Lecture, 2012

This short sample indicates the range of responsibility of primary and early secondary teachers in developing the familiarity with literature that will not only equip students for the intensive demands of senior years study, but also enhance lifetime reading pleasure.

Priorities of study across the Curriculum

This book particularly notes the three cross-curriculum priorities stressed in the Curriculum:

> The Australian Curriculum has been written to equip young Australians with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will enable them to engage effectively with and prosper in a globalised world. Students will gain personal and social benefits, be better equipped to make sense of the world in which they live and make an important contribution to building the social, intellectual and creative capital of our nation.
>
> Accordingly, the Australian Curriculum must be both relevant to the lives of students and address the contemporary issues they face. With these considerations and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians in mind, the curriculum gives special attention to these three priorities:
>
> - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
> - Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
> - Sustainability.
>
> (http://v7-5.australiancurriculum.edu.au/crosscurriculumpriorities) **AC**

The perspectives of this book include Australia's Anglo-European and Indigenous histories as well as the significance of its geographical region, with particular reference to China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore (as part of the Asian context). The curricula of some of these countries may express different purposes, such as 'moral political education' in China, but these only serve to highlight the significance of the literature that cultures choose to offer their young and the power that is ascribed to that literature.

It is important to note that, in various expressions, these are also the priorities of education cultures across the world. Indeed, sustainability—concern for the environment and for the wise handling of world resources—is a pressing global concern.

General capabilities across the Curriculum

The Curriculum also notes the importance of 'general capabilities', which, as the next chapter demonstrates, are usually related to the idea of twenty-first-century future-focused learning skills:

> In the Australian Curriculum, the general capabilities encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that, together with curriculum content in each learning area and the cross-curriculum priorities, will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century.
>
> There are seven general capabilities:
>
> - Literacy
> - Numeracy
> - Information and communication technology (ICT) capability
> - Critical and creative thinking
> - Personal and social capability

- Ethical understanding
- Intercultural understanding.

(http://v7-5.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/general-capabilities) **AC**

The role of literature in helping to develop these skills is invaluable and is explored in the following chapters, with a focus on literacy, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethics and intercultural understanding.

## Information and communication technology (ICT) capability

This capability is related to *digital literacy*—the everyday capacity to engage with technology for a wide range of meaning-making purposes. These go from checking sales figures and sporting averages to creating multimedia performances that shift from familiar modes of adaptation and extend through the use of image, moving image and graphics, sound and music.

The digital age has expanded the ways children interact with text and story worlds. Websites and multimodal apps now augment print books and offer an increasing array of resources: access to audio, music, static and moving images; online contexts that explore behind the scenes of texts; hearing and watching authors speak about their books and decisions they made about characters and plot; where sample chapters can be read (for example, www.morrisgleitzman.com) and free books downloaded (as above and also http://pauljennings.com.au); and where they themselves can contribute to the discussion as fans and even write their own digital narratives, add chapters and create new characters and new twists in the plot.

Further, authors are finding creative ways to tell and extend their stories. Consider, for example, the progression of media used by popular author and illustrator Graeme Base:

- *The Sign of the Seahorse* (1992) was adapted as an opera with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (2001)
- *The Waterhole* (2001) inspired an exhibition at the National Museum of Australia (2005)
- *My Grandma Lived in Gooligulch* (1983) was adapted as a play by Gooligulch Productions (2006)
- *Animalia* (1986) was made into a television series (*Animalia*) from 2007 and also into an iPhone and iPad app in 2010, published on the iTunes app store by AppBooks and produced by the Base Factory
- An iPhone app of *Jungle Drums* (2006) was released by InyerPocket Software

Consider also the work of John Marsden and the successful adaptation of his *Tomorrow, When the War Began* series (1993 onwards) into film. In 2014, Opera Australia announced it had commissioned an opera based on *The Rabbits* (1998, a picturebook written by Marsden and illustrated by Shaun Tan); this multimedia opera premiered in 2016. And the digital adaptation of Shaun Tan's picturebook *The Lost Thing* (2000) won the 2010 Oscar for Best Short Film.
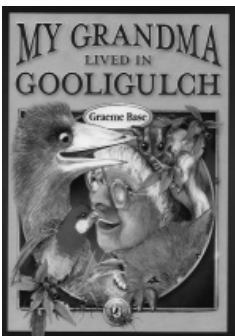
Digital technology—for those, of course, who have access to it—offers a whole range of new resources: traditional literature re-presented online; animated versions of well-known books; author studies and websites; publishing websites and associated resources. It also offers freedom and potential for children and young people to create their own stories and share and edit them collaboratively (on Google Docs, for example). In the words of the Curriculum, they are 'creating literature': blending, hybridising and experimenting not only with story, but also with ways of telling and ways of presenting. Compositions and poetry, short stories and texts for specific purposes are no longer confined to print only. They can be created and produced as a simultaneous creative product, through photographs and moving images, print, graphics, music, sounds and symbols, and insertion of social media and hyperlinks to other websites, all of which not only reinforce, but also form part of the carriage of narrative.

Social networks and register

Social networking sites and other online story experiences demonstrate that there are now many 'contexts for text' (Johnston 2014: 536): search engines and the internet, email, creative compositions, factual research exercises, text messages, tweets, Instagram and Facebook. Such different contexts represent multimedia multimodes and stimulate new 'literate' behaviours, languages and, importantly, registers: that is, varieties of language used in different social situations (contexts). The concept of *register* was introduced into linguistics in the mid-twentieth century to describe how speakers and writers fit the language they use to context, audience, time, place and purposes (just like dressing differently for different occasions). Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (1976: 22) describe register as 'the linguistic features which are typically associated with a configuration of situational features'. These situational features include *field*—the subject matter or setting; *tenor*—the participants and their relationships; and *mode*—how a text is communicated, that is, spoken or written or (in relation to picturebooks) illustrated.

Consider the opening lines of the following picturebooks:

Woohoo! I'm going to Antarctica!

That's right, me, Sophie Scott.

(*Sophie Scott Goes South* 2012 by Alison Lester)

Once there was a bear.

A circus bear.

(*The Great Bear* 1999 by Libby Gleeson & Armin Greder)

Early on Christmas morning the guns stop firing. A deathly silence creeps over the pitted and ruined landscape.

(*In Flanders Fields* 2002 by Norman Jorgensen & Brian Harrison-Lever)

It was a wild night.

The wind, dashing along the sea, whipped it into angry waves, and swept along the streets of Watsons Bay as though it would lift the roofs off the humble cottages which edged the bay.

(*The Fortunes of Poppy Treloar* 1941 by Pixie O'Harris)

Typically register is described in terms of being formal and informal. Such a distinction is valid, but not sufficient; it does not embrace the whole concept of situation (as in the nuances of 'casual' and 'smart casual', 'semi-formal' and 'formal'). These examples have been chosen because in a sense none are openly colloquial and none are really formal. But they are different and they set up different expectations of the text that follows. The first excerpt is conversational, expressing close social relationships, probably with other children or with family—a friendly situation inviting response. The register of the second excerpt is more distant, more heroic, a dramatic but simple style with short sentences; this is a storytelling situation, a retelling in a folkloric genre of something that happened in the past, a telling that does not invite oral response. The third is also a narrative but in a nuanced present (we sense the continuous), and invites an uncomfortable relationship with the field or the event, especially as readers may be all too aware of context. And the fourth is in a literary descriptive register, postioning readers in a specific Sydney context and a comfortable and expectant situation.

The doubled text of picturebooks lends itself to wonderful conjunctions and disjunctions of register. Consider *Drac and the Gremlin* (1988) by Allan Baillie and Jane Tanner—the language is in a mock-heroic style and the images are casual, everyday, informal, and it is in this disjunction that the lovely story of the imagination and magic of children's play emerges.

The miracle of access

Classrooms and creative projects are enhanced by the miracle of ready access—through mobile phones, tablets and no doubt other devices yet to be produced—to quality resources across the world. Science teaching and learning can be enriched by investigating the NASA webpage: <www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/#. VManbqw4J8E> (and indeed watching the NASA television channel) and the CSIRO webpage: <www.csiro.au/Portals/Education.aspx>. History teaching and learning can be informed by access to a huge range of resources through digital libraries, including actual parliamentary documents and records of debate: <www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard>.

Literature study can be enriched by the resources noted above and also through access to texts through Project Gutenberg, a digital library of cultural works that offers free downloads. Thus we can open our own device and read the story, written in 1796 (eight years after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788), that makes the first reference to the new colony in a fictional story for children. Maria Edgeworth's 'Lazy Lawrence' in *The Parent's Assistant; or, Stories for Children* is a moral tale that contrasts the honesty of Jem, the idleness of Lazy Lawrence and the wickedness of a stable boy, and introduces Botany Bay as a place of exile and punishment:

> As for the hardened wretch, his accomplice, every one was impatient to have him sent to gaol. He put on a bold, insolent countenance, till he heard Lawrence's confession; till the money was found upon him; and he heard the milk-woman declare that she would swear to the silver penny which he had dropped. Then he turned pale, and betrayed the strongest signs of fear.

'We must take him before the justice,' said the farmer, 'and he'll be lodged in Bristol gaol.' 'Oh!' said Jem, springing forwards when Lawrence's hands were going to be tied, 'let him go—won't you?—can't you let him go?' 'Yes, madam, for mercy's sake,' said Jem's mother to the lady; 'think what a disgrace to his family to be sent to gaol.'

His father stood by wringing his hands in an agony of despair. 'It's all my fault,' cried he; 'I brought him up in idleness.' 'But he'll never be idle any more,' said Jem; 'won't you speak for him, ma'am?' 'Don't ask the lady to speak for him,' said the farmer; 'it's better he should go to Bridewell now, than to the gallows by and by.'

Nothing more was said; for everybody felt the truth of the farmer's speech.

Lawrence was eventually sent to Bridewell for a month, and the stable-boy was sent for trial, convicted, and transported to Botany Bay.

(www.gutenberg.org/files/36132/36132-h/36132-h.htm)

Oxford University's famous Bodleian Library is another wonderful resource; go online to see and read the plays from Shakespeare's *First Folio*:

A MIDSOMMER Nights Dreame.

Actus primus. [Act 1, Scene 1] Enter Theseus, Hippolita, with others.

Theseus.

Now faire Hippolita, our nuptiall houre

Drawes on apace: foure happy daies bring in

Another Moon: but oh, me thinkes, how slow

This old Moon wanes; She lingers my desires

Like to a Step-dame, or a Dowager,

Long withering out a yong mans reuennew.

Hip.

Foure daies wil quickly steep theēselues themselues in nights

Foure nights wil quickly dreame away the time:

And then the Moone, like to a siluer bow,

Now bent in heauen, shal behold the night

Of our solemnities.

(http://firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/text/)

The National Library of Australia also has rich resources; search for the first book published for children in the colony of New South Wales, *A Mother's Offering to Her Children* (1841, generally accepted as written by Charlotte Barton), and scroll through the multiple copies, which not only contain the full text but also tell stories, through inscriptions, about themselves and the children to whom and by whom these stories were read.

These resources, the apps we can use, the devices we carry with us are all evolving increasingly rapidly and constant vigilance is needed to keep in touch. The proliferation of digital devices and social media has led to an almost unimaginable worldwide educational and cultural plenitude both for research and for use in creating new material. Don Ihde (1993: 51) notes that technology (and its affordances) 'anthropologically and philosophically, revolves around human beings relating to their environment'. Technology also relates to environmental ecologies;

consider the history of writing and the early use of tools such as those made from readily accessible papyrus and clay.

Digital devices have become an extension of possibility—an affordance—of self and practice.

The Curriculum states:

> Creating literature: Students learn how to use personal knowledge and literary texts as starting points to create imaginative writing in different forms and genres and for particular audiences. Using print, digital and online media, students develop skills that allow them to convey meaning, address significant issues and heighten engagement and impact.

(http://v7-5.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/content-structure/literature) **AC**

This book does not separate such resources into a different category—such as ICT or digital resources—any more than it suggests using pens (or pencils or keyboards) to write or to research a topic by reading about it, or to find information in a library using the Dewey catalogue system or on a digital device using a search engine.

To these children—almost all of them, these digital natives—technology is a given; this is their world and they have grown up in an environment of readily accessible information and pervasive social media. These technologies are now intimately part of both daily lives and pedagogical practice, like writing on a slate once was or, more recently, listening to a radio broadcast or watching a television program. They excite the art of the possible and both challenge and enrich teaching and learning practices.

Critical appreciation of literature in English classes: a sprint through literary theory

This book is a rationale for the critical study of literature. No matter what critical approach we take, literature is revelatory; reading a book is a vicarious experience of adventure, romance, mystery, domestic life, school, growing up, moving house or learning about different ways of being. The Curriculum says—and the quote at the beginning of this chapter says—that literature enhances and enriches life experience. It does so through the reader's intensive exposure to the thoughts and ideas and experiences of fictional characters and events and places that enter the most intimate part of us—our minds.

But how we talk about and analyse this process depends on what ideas (theories) we ourselves bring to the study of literature and how we explain what happens when we read a book or a poem. We need to be aware of reader response theory (see Chapter 5) and the vulnerability of child readers—and the susceptibilities of adult readers. We need to be informed and aware of the critical approaches to any writing. Feminism, for example, alerts us to how women are presented (or not) in texts, how feminine identity is constructed, what social and cultural constraints and limitations are imposed both implicitly and/or explicitly, how much agency (power) women have in speaking and being listened to, and how they are spoken about (or not). Henry Lawson's short story 'The Drover's Wife' (1892) is an insight into the

loneliness of outback women, but 'Squeaker's Mate' by Barbara Baynton (1857–1929, from *Bush Studies* 1902, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100141.txt) is a stark metaphor of the unrepresented woman with no physical agency, no voice; her only power is to hold and look: 'as a wounded, robbed tigress might hold and look, she held and looked'.

Twentieth-century literary theory is a fascinating field and I urge you to follow your interests; there is so much more than can be included here. But a précis will help you on your way. And note that 'literary theory' is a philosophy with broad influence that is not confined to literature and literariness, but spreads into cultural studies and many other domains.

Plato (c. 427–347 BC) distrusted the power of literature, which he felt appealed to the emotions rather than to reason; in Ancient Greece, literature—epic poetry, comedy and tragedy—was always acted out and so for Plato it was a distraction from rational philosophical thought. Further, he thought the real world perceived by humans to be only a poor imitation of another 'ideal' world, where things exist in their most perfect and eternal form. Plato influenced later theorists: first through his ideas about literary and other arts as always being representational of a world that itself is only a copy of that ideal world; second about the significance of the *content* of literature, rather than its *forms* (what it says, rather than how it says it); third about binary opposites (good/bad, rational/irrational, reason/unreason); and fourth about the idea that literature is important (and dangerous) because of the (unreasoning) power it has over human senses and emotions.

On the other hand, Aristotle (384–322 BC) did not necessarily see reality in a static ideal world and for him art was not representational; rather, it is a way of putting into focus and presenting the truth of the natural world as perceived by humans (poets and artists) and even improving on it. Aristotle was interested in the *forms* of art, observing and then deducing from examples an idea of what today we may call 'genre'; working out what a poem for example *is*, rather than what it *does*. For him, art was not dangerous but edifying; it attributes meanings not found in nature and the vision of the artist helps people discover that meaning. Aristotle's concern was not so much moral, like Plato's, but aesthetic.

These two approaches to literature—reason versus imagination, rational versus aesthetic—continued to influence writers and artists and critics of later times as they sought to explain how and why literature does what it does. Centuries later, the great painter Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), writing in the Age of Enlightenment (roughly 1620s to 1790s, when cultural theorists and philosophers in Western Europe emphasised reason and individualism), argued that the artificial structures of poetry, for example using iambic pentameter and so on, actually improved on nature and natural speech, and that the goal of art 'is to produce a pleasing effect upon the mind' (Adams 1971: 375).

The Romantic poets William Wordsworth (1770–1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and John Keats (1795–1821) challenged Enlightenment ideas by insisting the natural is superior to the artificial. Wordsworth saw children as being able to see the world more clearly than adults and was concerned with the relationship between the poet and their poem, rather than the poem and its readers; the poem, he

wrote, is not the product of reason but of 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' (Adams 1971: 158). Coleridge shared this Romantic view, but whereas Wordsworth saw the poet as set apart from ordinary men and women, Coleridge expanded the role of the poet to that of a creator. He also picked up and refined Edmund Burke's (1729–1797) idea about 'primary' and 'secondary' imagination; for Coleridge, secondary imagination is the conscious act of creation, while primary imagination is unconscious (Kages 2006: 26):

> Primary imagination is the living power of human perception, the presence in each and every human soul of the divine spark of creative power which is the life force itself—or, as Coleridge describes it, 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am'.

Keats shared the Romantic viewpoint; further, in a letter to his brothers (21 December 1817), he wrote (Rollins 1958: i, 193–94):

> at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.

Keats prized the capacity for uncertainty over reason—I will comment later in this chapter about 'unknowing'. In this way he prefigured modernism, where 'everything had to be subjected to critique and rethought from scratch' (Harland 1999: 14) and which rejected nineteenth-century ideas and redefined what literature could be and do, emphasising the perceiving subject, spontaneity, and consciousness of self and subjectivity.

Structuralism challenged the humanist character of the preceding century of literary theory by taking the human out of the centre of analysis and replacing it with the significance of structure. The aim of the Structuralists was to analyse specific fields, such as language, objectively and scientifically in terms of being complex systems of interrelated parts within an underlying universal structure. Vladimir Propp studied folktales across the world in order to identify their core components, and Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) investigated the universal structure of language as a system of signs and signifiers. For example, the image of the 'For Sale' sign in Cathy Applegate and Dee Huxley's picturebook *Rain Dance* (2000) is the 'signified' of the word 'sign', which is the 'signifier' in the accompanying text: 'Propped up against the side of our old broken-down cart is a new *sign*. Its red paint is still wet: FARM FOR SALE'. The signifier is the word used to describe the thing and the sign is the actual thing being described, in this case a real 'For Sale' sign.

Twentieth-century post-structuralism questioned ideas about the self, the construction of reality and the idea of universal 'truth'—it posited that truth is relative, rather than absolute, that language shapes how we think about ourselves, our world and literary texts, and that, because there is no one 'truth', texts are 'undecidable' (which relates back to Keats' idea of 'negative capability').

All of this contributes to or conflates the movement of postmodernism, which affects not only literature but architecture, art, history, and music, rejects ideas about high and low culture, and embraces playfulness and discontinuity, bricolage and ambiguity. One of its most influential thinkers is Jean-François Lyotard, who wrote (1984: xxiv–v):
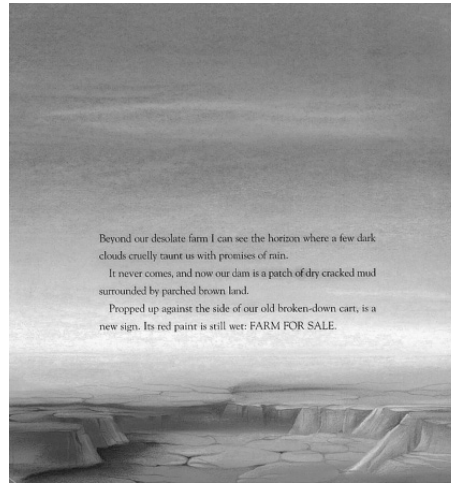
Rain Dance (2000, Cathy Applegate & Dee Huxley)

> Simplifying to the extreme, I define *Postmodern* as incredulity towards metanarratives … Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommeasurable.

Postmodernism has been a major influence on picturebooks, where the flexibility of the two modes (words and images) facilitates variety of layout, non-linearity and unconventional plot structure, as well as the use of metafictional devices (showing up the status of the text as a fictional construction, rather than establishing and maintaining a sense of its 'reality').

Metafiction

Metafiction is a reflexive device; it is fiction talking about itself—that is, contradicting the convention of reality or imitation of real life and openly drawing attention to the fact that this is a book and not 'real'. It is interesting that in Australia, Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1918) prefigured postmodern metafiction. In its closing pages Bill warns:

> 'Here we are pretty close up to the end of the book, and something will have to be done in a Tremendous Hurry, or else we'll be cut off short by the cover.'
>
> 'The solution is perfectly simple,' said Bunyip. 'We have merely to stop wandering along the road, and the story will stop wandering through the book.'

Intertextuality

This is another feature of postmodernism. *Intertextuality* refers to intercourse between texts; the traditional meaning of 'intercourse' is conversation and interaction. Intertextual relationships are more than touches and allusions and references; they are intimate connections that excite and provoke new significance. In picturebooks, intertextuality can pertain to images as well; Shaun Tan's illustration of the tree in *Memorial* (1999) reaches beyond Gary Crew's text into the art world and to the famous lithograph *The*

Cry by the artist Edward Munch. Also, complicated by well-known war images, it taps into, as part of understory, Munch's view of existence as tormented, isolated and without agency. Armin Greder's illustrations in *The Great Bear* tap into some of the paintings of Van Gogh and Bruegel.

Using creative arts with literature in English classes

The powerful resources of the creative arts give children the option of moving outside their own private worlds to try on other selves and roam in other subjectivities. 'Creative arts' is not, as some curricula suggest, a separate group of subjects that includes art, drama, music, dance (important as these are); rather, creative arts are a plurality of *interdisciplinary, core-disciplinary artistic practices and processes* that spill over, usually at the deepest point, into all disciplines.

Using creative arts to respond to books and ideas frees children from their inhibitions and fears of non-achievement, and provides different media for involvement and response. Through the processes of the creative arts, children can step out of self and respond in the safety of role. They can do so just by wearing masks (thus to hide, appear as other or assume another identity). They can bypass words altogether and paint responses and other selves or dance a different idea of being, or they can simply sit and think and imagine. They can disregard formal linguistic structures and create word pictures that bypass lack of grammatical knowledge and emerge as poetry (see Johnston 2014 for a long discussion of this with examples).

RESEARCH INFORMING PRACTICE

Sharing Creative Cultures

Sharing Creative Cultures is one of the major research projects of the International Research Centre for Youth Futures at the University of Technology Sydney. Using literature and creative arts, this project is carried out in several Sydney primary schools where there is a high proportion of students (sometimes 97%) from language backgrounds other than English, many—indeed most—of whom don't speak English at home.

The project begins with using literature and folktales—stories, settings, characters and themes—to find points of similarity between different cultures: it may be a shared *character* who is mischievous, like Loki (the shape-shifter god from Norse mythology and more latterly from the Marvel cinematic universe) and Xieng Meing (the rascal of Laotian folklore), or a shared *story* about making good or a shared *theme* of conflict and restoration. It then brings those points of similarity together as a springboard for exploring them through creative activities.

For example, in terms of characters, *Issunboshi* (Little One-Inch, of Japanese folklore) can be compared with *Tom Thumb* (of English folklore, first published in 1621),

Thumbelina (created in Denmark by Hans Christian Andersen in 1835), *Little Finger of the Watermelon Patch* (1982, emerging from Vietnam) and *Digit Dick* (1942 onwards, by Australian author Leslie Rees, with several illustrators but most notably the influential Walter Cunningham). Discussion and activities could include ideas about how these little characters are different, how they are the same and how their size influences what they do. Is being small like being invisible? Is smallness their main or most important characteristic?

The Centre team works with teachers and students, who may work individually or collaboratively or together as a class, to develop dramatic/artistic retellings and/or to plan and develop joint and individual constructions of new texts, scripts, artwork, music, dance, plays, radio plays or media clips. The team talks with students about what the main point (theme) of the story is going to be and where (setting) and when (time) it will happen. The mode of telling is the 'voice' of the story and can be liberated from limited English or lack of confidence by 'telling' through the creative arts, including prose and poetry. Team, teachers and class work together to create, perform or publish the telling. New characters and new adventures may be created; perhaps all the characters may jamboree together in some way.

General outcomes of Sharing Creative Cultures

Early outcomes of this project as reported by teaching staff and observed by team members include: increased student engagement and participation; improved confidence in speaking; significantly improved literacy; enthusiastic attendance; and increasing willingness to share cultural stories, both the students' own and those of others. Teachers also report the significance of the program, first, in terms of their own professional learning and development; and second, in encouraging their own creativity and confidence. An accredited professional learning and development component is now being incorporated into our action research programs. The activities and performances, and occasional subsequent audiences, have also helped to build bridges not only to the school community, but also to the very diverse parent community, another important area the team is working to develop.

The spell of literature

Never doubt the magic and glamour of language. We live in a world that believes in the seduction of words and how they can be used to aid and abet purposes: affecting the way we vote, what we buy, what we believe. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Act 3, Scene 1), Cassius warns Brutus not to let Mark Antony speak at Caesar's funeral:

> Know you how much the people may be moved
> > By that which he will utter?

Scheherazade

It is a world that increasingly values creativity and this book shows the ways that literature—including the verbal and visual texts of children's literature—can be used both to understand and describe the creative impulse, and to develop it.

Stories contribute to our sense of identity, to our construction of world and to the lives that we live. They captivate thoughts and ideas and do indeed cast spells.

Scheherazade spun her tales to Shahryar for one thousand and one nights كِتَاب أَلْف لَيْلَة وَلَيْلَة *Kitāb alf laylah wa-laylah*), using the power of story to keep herself alive. That is indeed the magic—and the glamour—of literature.

Muse point 1

THINKING ABOUT AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

As an introduction to thinking about Australian literature, its 'literariness' and how it reflects on history, geography, geology and culture (as well as social and cultural dilemmas, to be discussed later) and imbues them with a sense of myth and mystique, consider the opening sentence of Patricia Wrightson's *The Ice Is Coming* (1977, the first book in her *The Song of Wirrun* trilogy):

> The old south land lies across the world like an open hand, hollowed a little at the palm. High over it tumbles the wind, and all along its margin tumbles the sea— rolling in slow sweeps on long white beaches, beating with hammers of water at headlands of rock. Under and in this tumbling of wind and water the land lies quiet like a great hand at rest, all its power unknown.

Muse on what these first few sentences describe—if you were a geologist, what would you note? If you were a geographer, what would you note? If you were a historian, what would you note? If you were a sociocultural theorist, what would you note or perhaps be wary about?

From a literary perspective, this is a description of the main character in the story that is to come—the land itself. In the words of Brian Attebery (2014: 133):

> It sets the scene whilst introducing the primary player, the continent itself, which is not only shaped like a hand but also possesses the power of a hand to point and pound and shape, The natural world is primary here: on this scale human beings are tiny and trivial, while natural forces are vast and powerful. The speaker of these words adopts a continental point of view.

Later Attebery hops across to botany to pick up the idea of the node (a thickening on a stem that may produce a leaf, blossom, new branch or indeed nothing), which he uses as a metaphor to describe Wrightson's narrative techniques: 'Wrightson's nodes are moments of thickened narrative tension and possibility' (2014: 136).

Think about other books you know and where you may be able to discern such 'nodes'. Muse on how narrative is 'thickened' and how such thickening is created.

For example, in *Rain Dance*, the early double-page openings are dry and desolate; the sign 'Farm for Sale' is a node, a thickening of narrative tension and possibility. Is the farm going to be sold? Is the family going to be evicted? The silence described in the following pages adds to the thickened narrative tension, and the first images of the mother and children, looking into the empty distance, add to the drama. The change—the premonition, almost—first breeze, then animal responses, then shadows, reaches a climax with the rain and the protagonist's joyful dance. The dripping and fading 'For Sale' notice implies a happy ending—the farm now may not be sold. It is what could be called a *visual metonym* (a metonym, in simple terms, is a part standing for a whole; here the sign stands for the farm and indeed the family's future, and conveys a sense of a more optimistic resolution).

The book suggests related images, such as one of the verses in Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country' (1911):

> Core of my heart, my country!
> Her pitiless blue sky,
> When sick at heart, around us,
> We see the cattle die—
> But then the grey clouds gather,
> And we can bless again
> The drumming of an army,
> The steady, soaking rain.
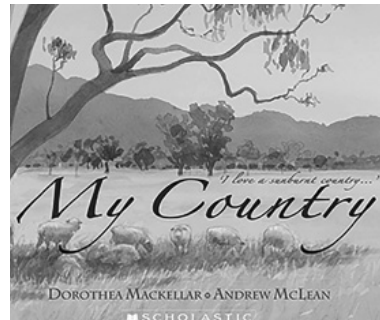
Note the picturebook of this lovely poem illustrated by Andrew McLean.

THINKING ABOUT ADAPTING SHARING CREATIVE CULTURES

Muse on how you could adapt a project such as Sharing Creative Cultures into classroom activity. Consider possibilities for collaboration: perhaps sharing it with another class and colleague. Remember that literacy involves speaking and listening, as well as reading and writing. But it is also an interactive, inter-arts activity, providing opportunities for different ways of engagement, different modes of communicating and different ways of learning. Muse on these differences and think of some small ways to start.

THINKING ABOUT STORYTELLING AND CULTURES

Consider the words of National Artist for Literature, Philippines, Virgilio Almario (Rio Alma) (in Garces-Bacsal & Hernandez 2013):

> Using the magic of storytelling, children's books offer personal landscapes and cultural roots, and address social issues as part of the value and aesthetics of history and heritage.

Then turn a few pages and refer to the subtitle of the following chapter—'Educating Rita—and Mehmet and Alinga and Chinh and …'. Think about how these two thoughts reflect on each other and the subsequent implications for educators. Does it simply mean introducing books about different cultures into classrooms or more than this? If so, muse on what this 'more' might be.

THINKING ABOUT MAKING LITERACY 'SPECIAL'

One of the findings of the project is that students most in need respond to being made to feel 'special'. Schools could do this by combining classes or swapping teaching so that a teacher with a special interest and skills in art, music, dance or drama teaches some English lessons. This has the added bonus of supporting and celebrating specialist teaching skills. Think about ways you could do this.

From *The Little Aussie Adventurers* (2007) by Natalie Jane Parker & Anita Forbes

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