

A Token to the Future:

A Digital 'Archive' of Early Australian Children's Literature

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The archive has always been a *pledge*, and like every pledge [*gage*], a token of the future. To put it more trivially: what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way. Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives. It begins with the printer.

(Derrida 1995, p.18)

As Derrida notes the printer is the originary source that enables the production of an archive whether it is a rare or special book collection, or a digital archive. The scope and purpose of any archive or special collection vary according to institutional or personal reasons, and budget. In his article, 'The Child, the Scholar, and the Children's Literature Archive' (2011), Kenneth Kidd writes that 'like the canon, the archive promises coherence and totality, reinforces the idea of a literary heritage... For scholars, the archive is primarily a site for research' (p.2). Kidd is quite right to imply that what an archive promises may not be achievable. An archive is always incomplete, never a totality. It also offers a partial account of a literary heritage; it can never offer the complete picture as history is always marked by silences and absences, and the literature of any country is similarly never fully accounted. Previously unknown writers of the past and forgotten stories continually emerge as historians and literary scholars undertake their own specialised archaeological digs as these texts 'burrow into the past' separating readers from them at an astonishing rate (Derrida, 1995, p.18).

This essay considers a specific digital ‘archive’ of early Australian children’s literature, known as the *Children’s Literature Digital Resources* (CLDR), which is located in AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource (<http://www.austlit.edu.au>). Another essay in this special issue of *Papers* also writes about this collection (see Dicoski). Despite our use of the label ‘archive’ to describe the CLDR, it is not strictly an archive, as it does not generally contain manuscripts, letters, and other archival memorabilia. Rather, it is primarily a digital repository of early Australian children’s literature: materials that were out of print and scattered in libraries around Australia. Some of the texts were donations, others had been purchased or acquired through library funds, or by passionate collectors. The CLDR contains a wide selection of novels, short stories, and poems, covering the period 1851-1945. This includes approximately 600 items digitised for AustLit at a high quality archival standard. It also has pre-existing full-text items discovered through external archives such as Internet Archive and Project Gutenberg, and a number of scholarly articles written about Australian children’s literature as a research complement to the primary sources. Kidd notes in relation to the Seven Stories museum and archive in Newcastle upon Tyne, that the books in that archive are ‘valuable ostensibly because they are “historical” or have the potential to be so – they can tell us about history’ (p.8). A similar claim can be made about the CLDR archive.

Our discussion responds to Derrida’s notion of ‘acts’ in the archiving process, and how these acts designate ‘the content of what is to be archived *and* the archive itself, the archivable and the archiving of the archive’ (p.16). To examine the *acts* associated with the CLDR we turn our attention to its technical structure, and how this structure supports and determines the archival content and its possible usage: ‘the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and

in its relationship to the future' (Derrida 1995, p.17). We then examine what the CLDR collection can tell us about Australia's history. To narrow the scope, we focus on how Australia was constructing itself as a nation with its own character, or national identity, in texts written for children from the latter part of the nineteenth century up until the end of World War II. Our approach is to consider how early Australian children's literature included in the CLDR collection rhetorically constructs nation and place, and in so doing constructs an Australian identity for its implied readers. We examine how the texts in the CLDR collection, which covers the period before and after Australia became a Federation, variously instruct its implied child readers about nationhood and place: what it means to be not only Australian, but a loyal and good British colonial subject; and how place shapes a perception of the land and its people.

Archiving the archivable

Derrida's argument that 'archivable meaning' is 'codetermined by the structure that archives' was made with reference to the printed page. He ponders if it is possible to dream of something beyond the 'ponderous archiving machine' of print, an archive that erases itself 'so as to let the *origin* present itself ...without mediation and without delay' (p.93). In his discussion of the works of Freud and his collaborators, Derrida considers what the archive of those works would look like if Freud and his contemporaries had access to electronic communication such as email, computers, even printers and faxes; we could now add to this list scanners, Twitter, Facebook, and SMS.

A digital collection might seem like an unmediated, archival reproduction: unmediated in the sense that the texts that have been digitised have not been translated or edited through the

archiving process, and that the digital process has faithfully copied the ‘original’ source. However, as Dicoski notes in her essay in this issue, many of the texts in the CLDR collection contain inscriptions, marginalia and other extra-textual material that invariably mediates the text and the reading experience. This additional archivable content illustrates Derrida’s point that ‘the archivization produces as much as it records’ (p.17). Mediation also occurred when the research team made decisions about what texts to include and thereby what to exclude in the collection. These decisions about selection were based on availability of resources, copyright implications, and technical parameters. (These are discussed in more detail subsequently.) The digitisation process attempts an illusion of unmediated access and transition from print to digital copy. However, the printed page sometimes resists this technological intervention with the result that words are mis-spelt or letters transposed through the Optical Character Recognition (OCR) process. This occurred with many of the texts in the CLDR. In other instances, when ephemera obscured text, intervention (where possible) occurred by way of a simple removal of the matter from the physical item itself. A re-scan then provided a clean digital copy of the original item as it was physically housed in the library¹. If the OCR-ing process was disrupted by hand-written or elaborately illustrated introductions, garbled text or mis-spelt words would then appear in the supplementary text file. This required intervention on our part to correct the mistakes.

Drawing on Derrida’s ideas in *Archive Fever*, Paulus (2011) notes that one of the major characteristics of the archive is that ‘the archive must be curated: i.e., selected, controlled and preserved’ (2011, pp.943-944). As noted earlier, CLDR was envisioned to be an unmediated resource. However in order to create a resource within temporal and financial frameworks the scope, selection process, housing of the resource and preservation methods needed to be examined before curation could begin. The CLDR project was driven by a desire to preserve

and provide access to the nation's earliest works of children's literature. Four key aims of the project were to: establish a digital facility for research, teaching, and information provision around Australian children's literature; provide access to a wide range of high-quality full text primary and secondary sources; provide access to essential library and research infrastructure and facilities for researchers; and, to enable research while preserving important heritage material. The first step to achieving this was to identify existing online material and collections on Australian children's literature. Several bibliographies and websites existed (see Muir 1992; White 1992, 2004) and some sample materials had been digitised to represent Australian children's literature in international collections, such as National Library of Australia's contribution to Project Gutenberg that included *Blinky Bill, the Quaint Little Australian* (Wall 1933). While some resources were freely available online, a large portion of these were representative only of well-known authors or made available through access to the original item. A need was then identified to collate and make available full text resources of early Australian children's literature through a single access point.

The digitisation process itself functioned as a method of selection and control. Firstly, transposing an original creative work to a different format has legal implications. While the project team's purpose was to 'copy' the work in order to preserve it, any reproduction is considered a new version (including digital copies) and copyright of the item needed to be examined. As such, the vast majority of CLDR texts were selected because they were no longer in copyright, or were declared 'orphan' texts, that is, the copyright holder could not be contacted and ownership remained undetermined. In some cases, copyright was sought and granted; in other cases, usually where international publishing companies were contacted, permission was denied. Secondly, by definition the resources had to be present to be digitised. Availability and accessibility of library collections therefore played a large part in the

selection process and allowed for a selection of items unbiased towards theme or content. Although, library selection and curatorial policies to an extent will have impacted upon the resources housed in individual collections, particularly National Library of Australia where a collection development policy ensures it fulfills the role of documenting national heritage (National Library of Australia 2008). Lastly, the selection process was governed by the scope policy outlined by AustLit to control input into the databaseⁱⁱ.

One of the ongoing concerns about digital reproduction is that digital texts lack many of the features of print texts such as tactility, and the ability to be inscribed, and handled. Coupled with this concern is that the item loses its 'aura', to use Benjamin's word (1968, p.221). However, a counter argument is that while the print aura is lost, the digital offers a different kind of aura, one that is tied to its presence in an online environment. We argue that the ability to literally 'open up' a text and read it on screen, to view illustrations in their full colour or monochromatic 'original' state, brings a certain aura to the reading experience. The content of the 'original' story remains the same, but the full text digitised process results in a work of a different aura, particularly in CLDR where PDFs serve as exact replicas (not necessarily of the 'original' but of a print edition of the original which may include inscriptions and so forth). The digital object, while transposed to a different medium, becomes a locative item allowing multiple user access and prolonged availability. We now examine in detail how the CLDR can provide readers with access to early Australian children's literature that offers insights into how Australia was imagined by writers and illustratorsⁱⁱⁱ.

Imagining Australia

In his influential work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson argues that nations can be described as imagined political communities. 'Imagined' because the people who comprise a nation have to identify themselves with one another as belonging to the same community without really 'knowing' each other. However, Anderson concedes that defining 'nation', and related concepts of nationalism and nationality, is 'notoriously difficult' (p.3). To imagine a nation, one draws on the rhetorical and symbolic discourses that shape a perception or narrative of a people and a place. As Anderson notes, one of the major developments leading up to the age of nationalism was the printing revolution that began in Western Europe in the fifteenth century. In the context of the Australian nationalism, Richard White sees national identity also as being 'an invention', and reinforces the significance of the printed document: 'throughout its white history, there have been countless attempts to get Australia down on paper and to catch its essence' (1992, p.23). Print and electronic sources serve as a conduit whereby 'daily, the nation is indicated, or "flagged", in the lives of its citizenry' (Billig 1995, p.6). Children's books along with other cultural products are a continual reminder of the nation, of its place in the world, and of the place that is the nation. These and other material artefacts circulate a rhetoric that is absorbed into public and institutional discourses.

Familiar coinages such as 'An Australian way of life', 'A lucky country', 'The land down under', are intended to provide Australians, and the outside world, with a shorthand for imagining and describing Australia. However, as many critics and commentators have noted, the rhetoric may be of 'the nation', but the impulse behind these and other epithets is unity (Walter 1992). A recurring impulse to unity is the annual celebration of Australia Day (January 26), a day that is intended to serve as one of national celebration commemorating the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788. On that day, Captain Arthur Phillip arrived

at Sydney Cove and duly took possession of the whole of the eastern seaboard of New Holland under the name of King George III. It was not until 1824 that the British Admiralty officially adopted the name 'Australia'. The rhetoric and celebration that surrounds Australia Day elude the fact that in taking possession, there was a corresponding dispossession of the land of the original inhabitants. James Walter notes the differing viewpoints of Australia between the Aborigines and white European settlers:

Taking a historical viewpoint, it is evident that the Australia of the Aborigines (with their unique visions of country and society) was a different Australia from that understood by predominantly British settlers (with their European visions of country and society) between 1788 and 1988. (1992, p.8)

Australia became an independent nation during this period on January 1, 1901 whereby the British Parliament passed legislation allowing the six Australian colonies to govern in their own right as part of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Commonwealth of Australia was established as a constitutional monarchy, with Queen Victoria as Australia's head of state.

One significant feature of the Commonwealth period that impacted on many school-aged children was the establishment of the Commonwealth Savings Bank of Australia. Children were encouraged to put money in the bank every week, using the little brown envelopes supplied by the Commonwealth Bank, which were collected from schools by a bank employee. While banks were established early in the nineteenth century, either as private companies or as partnerships, in 1911, a decade after Federation, the then Labor Government led by Prime Minister Andrew Fisher decided to establish a government bank for the new nation^{iv}. Several children's books were published by the Commonwealth Bank as 'gifts', and

in the case of *Mickles and Muckles*' (1933) by Dorothy Mellor, written by a Commonwealth Bank employee. Mellor wrote two other books that did not carry the banking theme.

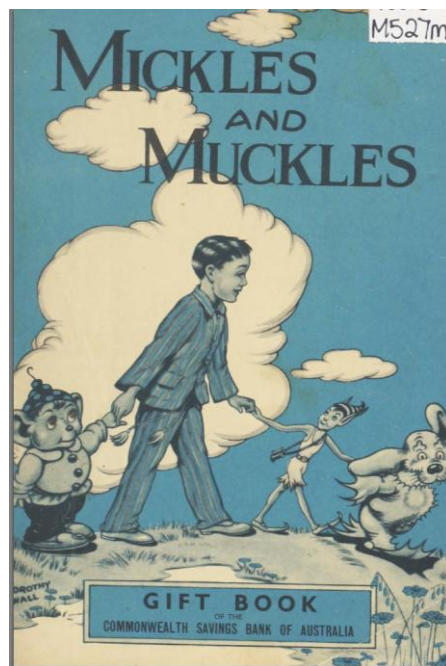


Figure 1: *Mickles and Muckles*

In this whimsical story, seven-year-old Dicky Dan awakes to find his new shilling has gone missing from under his pillow. After a quick search of his room, Dicky Dan enlists the help of a gnome to fly him (in an aeroplane) to the desert Heart of Australia. Having no luck there they adventure further to 'Jungle Land', the Arctic, and North America, and finally return to Australia. However, like many stories written at this time, the device of the dream is used as a way to bring closure. Dicky Dan awakes to find that his mother has found his missing shilling. She then proceeds to offer her son a bit of advice for his future economic prosperity:

Dicky Dan set off for school, his pennies and shillings and sixpences all folded in a brown paper bag, packed carefully in his coat pocket. Mummy fastened it for him with a large safety-pin.

"Put them all in the Bank, Dicky," she said. "Then you can't lose them. They are your 'mickle,' you see, which the Bank makes into a great big 'muckle' for you."

(unpaged)

However, to ensure that young readers really did get the message from the sponsor (The Commonwealth Savings Bank of Australia), the final page serves as a further reminder:

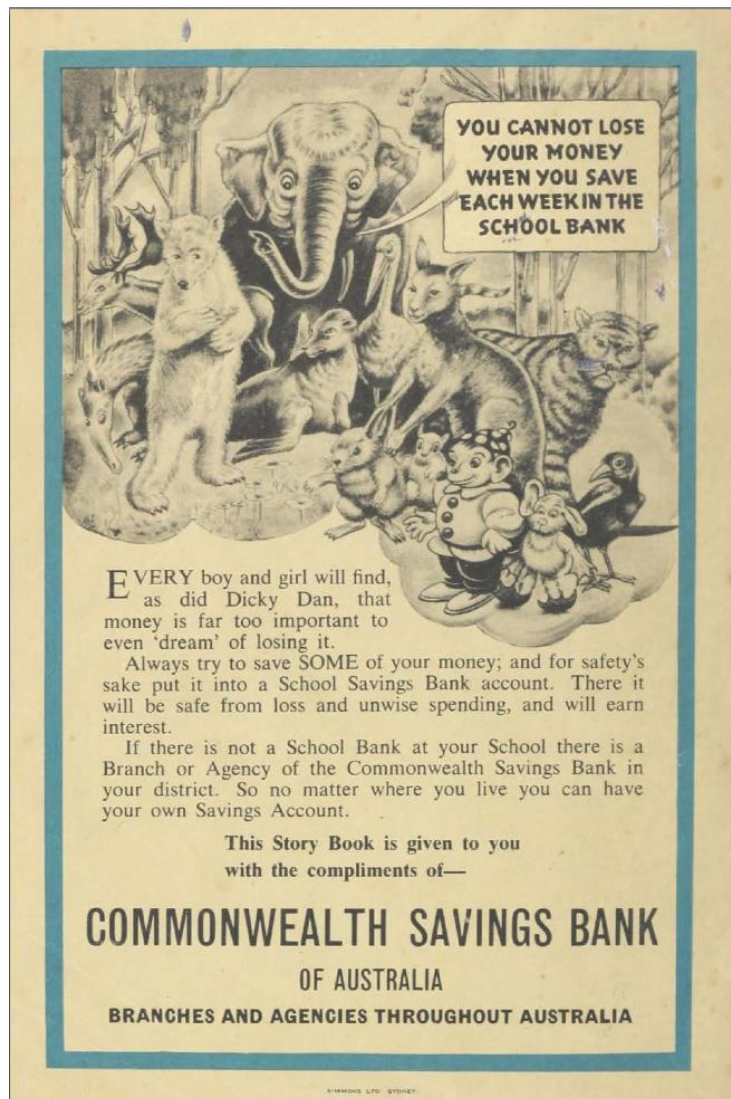


Figure 2: from *Mickles and Muckles*

Another example is *The Rainy Day* (1925) by Dorothy Wall.

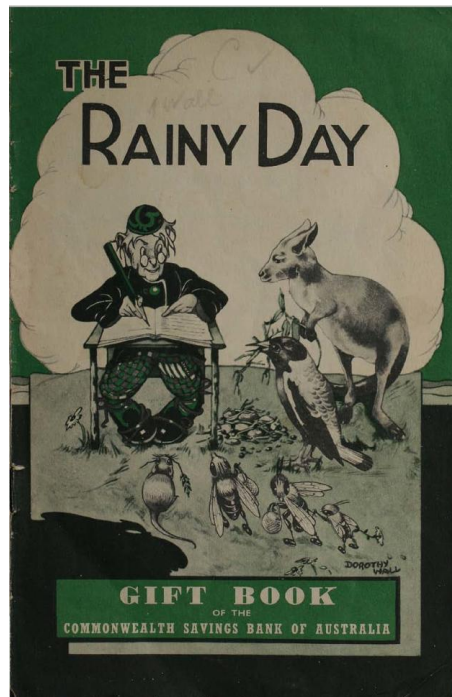


Figure 3: *The Rainy Day*

This book also was a ‘Gift Book of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia’ and similarly carried a fanciful tale of thrift with European goblins and fairies mixing with native Australian fauna. The paratext at the end of the book similarly carries the message for children to put their money in the Commonwealth Savings Bank of Australia to save it for a ‘rainy day’.

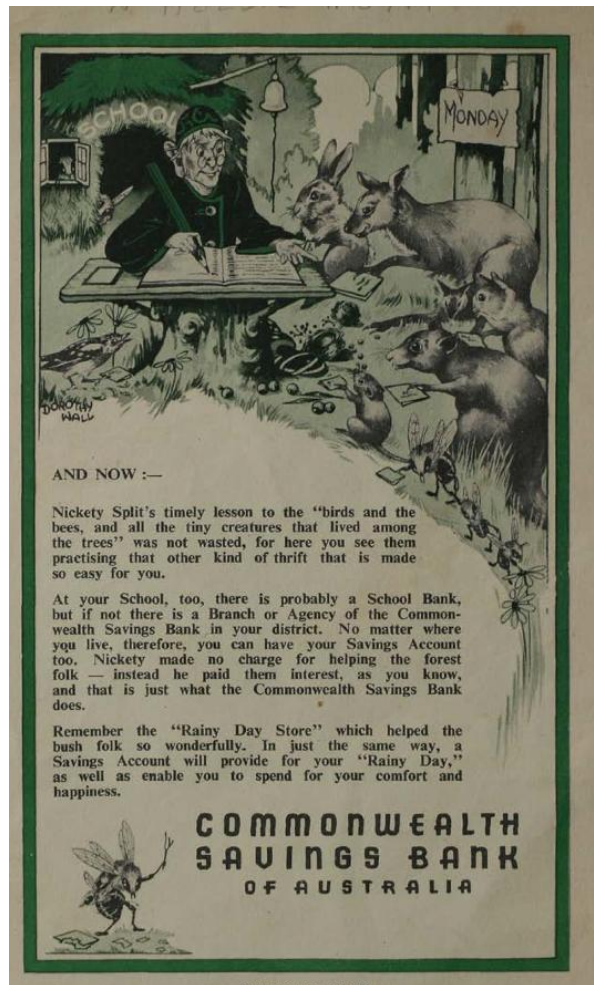


Figure 4: from *The Rainy Day*

These and other stories in the CLDR rhetorically position child readers to ‘do their part’ for Australia. By investing in a Commonwealth Savings Bank of Australia, young Australians are playing a part in investing not only in their own financial futures, but in the future economic health of the nation.

Walter poses the question – ‘Does “Australia” mean “the nation”?’ (p.9). In attempting to answer this question, he considers the birth of ‘the Australian legend’. This legend constructs an ‘imaginary community’ much along the lines of Anderson’s argument and which was widespread in the 1890s. This same construction of an ‘imagined community’ is prevalent in

the CLDR texts that attempt to define Australia and Australians in essentialist terms. For example, the poem ‘Australia and Her Sons’ by Edward A. Austin (1927) conceives the nation as not only being a land of plenty and a land of freedom, but exhorts its allegiance to the British Commonwealth:

Possessed of resources unbounded,
And free as the ocean is wide,
Thy sons with devotion have founded
A nation in which they take pride,
A nation, whilst loyally giving
Allegiance to temperate kings,
Rejoices at heart, and in living,
Of dear Freedom sings. (p.102)

The poem’s title also carries the explicit association between the nation and the masculine subject. The gender stereotyping in many of the texts for children reflects the cultural assumptions and patriarchal governance of its time. Not only were boys (and men) considered to be physically and intellectually suited to the task of nation building, but as the following example shows, they also were considered to be more imaginative. In *The Mystery of Diamond Creek* (Macdonald 1927) a young boy named Stuart laments his younger sister’s inability to sustain imaginative play: ‘It’s such a pity she’s only a girl’. However, this idle comment is given gravitas from his mother who sees femaleness as a liability when it comes to being adventurous. As she explains to her son:

‘Of course girls can’t do things like boys, Stuart, and even when they grow up—like us—they are not nearly so clever as a great big boy, for they cannot climb trees and

precipices, and kill lions and tigers and—and—crocodiles; they just stay at home and wait—wait for the big boy to come back’ (p.10)

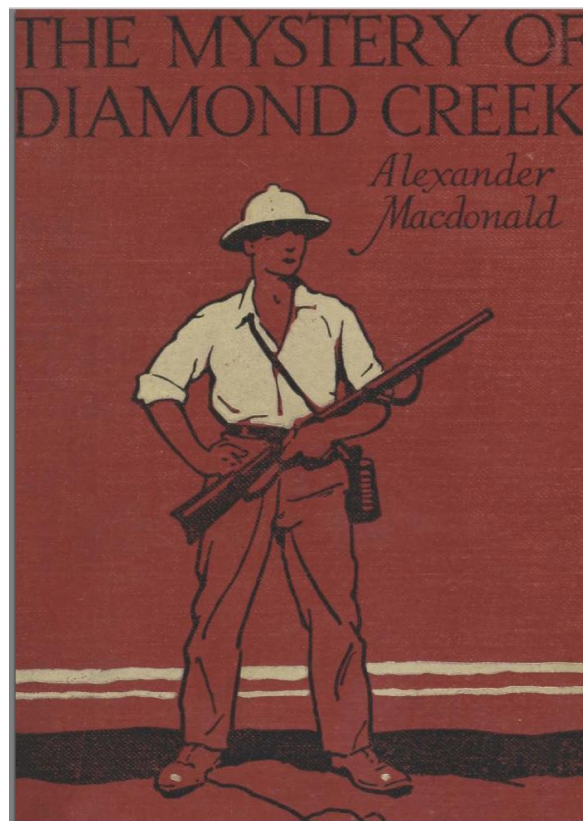


Figure 5: *The Mystery of Diamond Creek*

The comment from our current point in time could be seen as ludicrous, or at best, sarcastic. Macdonald was a Scot, and like many of the writers of early Australia children’s literature, wrote about an imagined Australia, a country he had never visited, hence, the reference to lions and tigers which are not native to Australia, and the cover illustration which looks very much like an English or European explorer. A similar kind of European intervention occurred in the earlier examples (*Mickles and Muckles* and *A Rainy Day*), which blended fairies, gnomes, and goblins with Australian fauna (and in the case of the latter text the mythical Australian bunyip) into the storylines.

Walter contends that many radical-nationalist historians and literary critics who took a pro-Australian stance constructed what they saw as ‘an “essentially” Australian character, and that truly Australian literature was that which gave expression to this character’ (p.13). The rhetoric that imbued this distinctly Australian character ensured an easy slide from legend to national identity, which enabled a way of talking about nationhood. As Billig says of national identity more generally, it ‘involves being situated physically, legally, socially, as well as emotionally: typically, it means being situated within a homeland, which itself is situated within the world of nations’ (p.8). The radical nationalism of the past in Australia was a selective story of Australians and of the place, the homeland, with the pervasiveness of stories about the bush tradition and the digger^{vi} at the expense of women, Aborigines, and urban dwellers. The period from Federation to 1945 saw Australian soldiers (‘diggers’) fight in several overseas wars: the South African War (Boer War) (1899-1902), China (Boxer Rebellion) (1900-1901), World War I (1914-1918), and World War II (1939-1945). The call to support Britain in these wars was also heard in texts written for Australian children.

The cover of *Blinky Bill Joins the Army* (Wall, 1940) is emblematic of the patriotic fervor that overlays the rhetoric of the bush and the digger on to a well-known Australian literary character, Blinky Bill, the koala (although Wall incorrectly uses a ‘Koala Bear’).

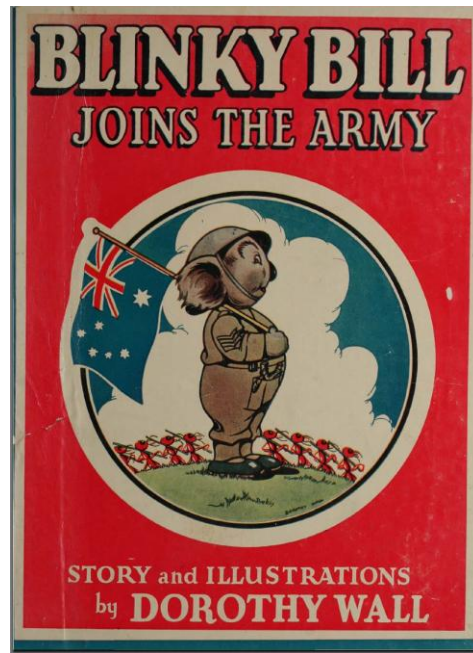


Figure 6: *Blinky Bill Joins the Army*

The story reinforces the connection between place and nationalism, and includes a lesson about preservation of Australian native fauna: it begins: ‘Once again the bushland was filled with excitement and chatter’ and follows with a second person address:

And what do you think it is all about? You'd never guess. He's [Blinky Bill] been chosen as the mascot for the Australian soldiers—not to go overseas of course, as that would never be permitted. All koala bears are protected as no doubt you know, and no one, not even Royalty, is allowed to have one.

Why? I can hear you asking. I'll tell you in a few words the reason.

These dear little creatures are very delicate. They catch cold very easily. So just imagine how quickly they'd die if sent from warm sunny Australia to a cold climate with snow and ice in the winter; and think of the bitter winds. Although the koalas

have furry coats and look very cosy in the winter time, their coats would not be nearly warm enough to keep out the cold as a big ground bear's does. (p.1)

The popular Blinky Bill character combines the mischievous child, the protected species, and the loyal Australian subject: these are qualities which reflect a certain kind of larrikin Australian character. If we look closely at the cover of *Blinky Bill Joins the Army* a similar kind of playfulness is apparent with the iconic image of the digger holding the Australian flag given an ironic twist: not only is a protected species, a koala, dressed as an Australian soldier, but in the background an army of red ants marches in single file with rifles at the ready. The playfulness is first signalled in the frontispiece, which shows a variant of the Australian Army insignia that replaces the crossed rifles with a slingshot and stones, and the motto of 'Duty First' with a more animal appropriate one – 'Scratch & Kick'.

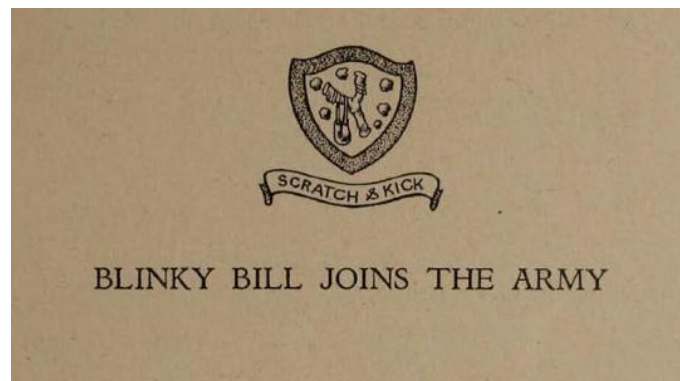


Figure 7: From *Bilky Bill Joins the Army*



Figure 8: Royal Australian Regiment insignia

However, the playful debunking on the cover is not of the serious soldier, but of the incompetent though eager Blinky Bill, who becomes a safe ‘mascot’ for the army, and not a fighting soldier. Blinky’s final words see no distinction between his animal nature and his human desires:

“Gee! This is good,” Blinky grunted as he climbed up a gum-tree especially reserved for him at the camp. "I'm glad I'm a boy and a soldier, and I'm never going to get married ‘cause I think girls are silly.” (p.130)

While certain characters like the digger, the bushranger, and the bushman, can quite rightly be said to have dominated the literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Clare Bradford cautions that there is always a danger of seeing texts of any period as a homogenous group (2001, p.5). In her book *Reading Race: Aboriginality in Australian Children’s Literature* (2001), Bradford addresses the often overlooked participation of children’s literature in colonial discourses that inform historical and literary accounts of Australia’s past,

noting the struggle between national identity and history: 'Children's texts are caught up in this very tension: on the one hand, they seek to position child readers as young Australians; and on the other, they must in some way "manage" the colonial past for children' (2001, p. 15). Bradford notes that one way of managing this dilemma was through strategies of silence and concealment, particularly with respect to Aboriginal people.

A further nation-building effort came from advertising and particularly Australian-owned industries and manufacturers which endeavoured to 'sell' an Australian product, made especially for Australians. Australia up to Federation and into the 1980s 'embraced an insular attitude towards the outside world and particularly towards the Asian region' (Conley 2009, p.1). Conley contends that Australia's protectionist policy especially with respect to trade, industry, labour market centralisation, financial restriction, and immigration was part of a strategy to cope with vulnerability. Children's texts became the vehicle for blatant Australian product promotion thinly disguised with nationalistic values. An example is the *Sun-Rayseed Children's Fairy Story Book* (ca1919) whose title plays on Australia as a place of sunshine where wholesome foods are grown and produced by Australian industry.

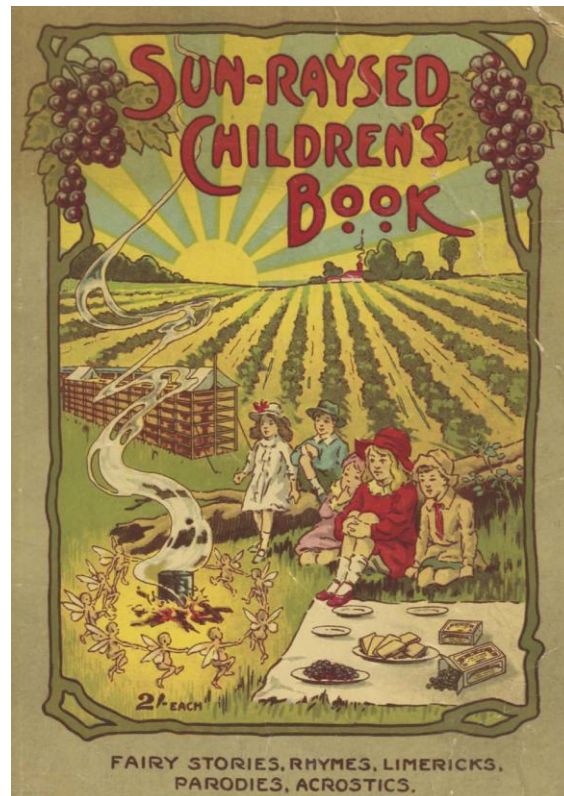


Figure 9: *Sun-Raysed Children's Fairy Story Book*

The collection comprises 'fairy stories, rhymes, limericks, parodies, acrostics', which were selected as the 94 prize-winning entries in the Sun-Raysed competitions of January 1919.

Sun-Raysed was an Australian company that produced dried fruits such as sultanas, raisins, and peaches. The 'About the Book' preface to the collection ensures that readers are given a clear message about the importance of reading books produced by Australians:

'AUSTRALIAN children should be taught to read Australian books'. It also extols the benefits of Australian industry. Its discourse incorporates both bold advertising (literally conveyed through capitalization of the company name SUN-RAYSED appearing five times in the short preface) and a rhetoric that combines product promotion with healthy, wholesome Australian childhood, with its stated purpose as: 'to appeal to the imagination of Australian children, and to provide them with wholesome, enjoyable reading matter: at a price so low

that it would be impossible under ordinary conditions', and ends with: 'Thus the "growing Australian" will have the advantage of the "matured Australian" of the present day: for he or she will realise from boyhood or girlhood what an important Australian Industry is represented by SUN-RAYSED FRUITS' (unpaged).

The Sun-Raysed company was part of an Australian industrial association – the Australian Dried Fruits Association (ADFA), which claimed its part in shaping the health of the nation by transforming the land from a 'dreary' desert to a well-watered and flourishing garden capable of supporting the growing of fruit which could be later dried and sold to suit the 'Housewife's purse'. The following advertisement from the Melbourne newspaper *The Age* tells the story:

Once a Desert—Now a Garden

PRODUCING FOOD and HEALTH
⊗ ⊗ for MILLIONS ⊗ ⊗

SAND, Salt-bush, and Mallee Scrub—such was the dreary mile-after-mile vista that greeted the pioneers of 30 years ago, who braved fortune on the spaces now graced by the A.D.F.A. Settlements.

To-day, the scene is changed to mile-after-mile of the Glorious Green of Vine, Palm-tree, and Orchard, threaded through with the heartening gleam of running water paying willing ransom to the thirsty soil, for the Wealth it readily releases in FOOD and HEALTH, through the Fruit it produces, for the benefit of Millions.

IRRIGATION has worked the miracle, has caused apparently barren soil to yield bumper crops of Grapes and Peaches, Pears and Plums, Apricots, Nectarines, and Figs, but it is ORGANISATION that has made possible the permanent supply of those fruits in even quality, all the year round, in every home throughout Australasia, and even as far as distant Britain.

For not only must the Rainfall be harnessed to secure production, but FRUIT MUST BE DRIED, it must be Carefully Graded, Properly Packed, and Efficiently Distributed if its benefits are to be enjoyed, in Season and out, at a cost within reach of every Housewife's Purse.

Only an Organisation such as the A.D.F.A. (the Australian Dried Fruits Association) could have successfully accomplished this, and it is because of the A.D.F.A. that Summer Fruits may now brighten Winter Menus, and the Healthful blessing of Fruit 365 Days in the year may be enjoyed by all.

Figure 10 from 'Once a Desert – Now a Garden'

The advertisement plays on the popular notion that Australia was transformed from *terra nullius* (an empty space) by early explorers and later Australian industry. The transformation of place was akin to a religious conversion – ‘the Healthful blessing of Fruit’. In taking possession of Australia, Captain Cook mistakenly believed that Aborigines as a whole ‘lived mainly on shellfish and did not cultivate the land or erect permanent habitations upon it’ (Day 1997, p.26). He described the land as being in ‘a pure state of nature’ and that there was not ‘one inch of Cultivated Land in the Whole Country’ (Cook qtd. in Day, p.26).

These examples of marginalisation, containment, and transformation speak also to an underlying issue, namely, European influence on shaping Australian identity. The idea of national identity is a product of European history at a particular time, as Billig notes. However, the ‘inventing’ (to use White’s term), of an Australian national identity could also be attributable to the writers, artists, historians, and journalists of the nineteenth century and mid-twentieth century. These artists created ‘Australia’ in their writing, art, and other visual and print materials. The texts in the CLDR archive would have been read by children, their parents and teachers, both in the home and in the classroom. Indeed, many texts explicitly address the adult reader. For example, the title page of *The Common Sense Nursery Rhymes* (1932) states that it is ‘A series of stories that will help overtaxed Mothers of today’. Neither home nor school is a neutral space, and as Rutten et al. note: ‘traditionally, schools are sites for nation-building, and places where national identity is constructed and an “imagined community” is formed’ (2010, p.777). As these authors observe, history in schools tells the story of the nation as one of success and achievement. Australian children’s literature played an important part in contributing to this story.

The CLDR is one example of how a digital ‘archive’, or special digital collection, of early children’s literature is more than a repository of quaint nostalgia, but brings the past into a relationship with the future. In this paper we have attempted to demonstrate that the CLDR is not an assemblage of seemingly heterogeneous materials of the past, but contains and records rhetorical constructions of Australian identity and early nationhood through children’s literature. Each of the digitised texts in the CLDR collection is an artefact from the past, written and published within a particular historical and social context. These contexts influence both the discourses and ideologies privileged within the texts and impact upon the ways in which readers engage with the texts. The CLDR texts offer insights into how early writers imagined Australia and Australians, through stories that constructed a specific kind of Australian identity, nationalist rhetoric, and a sense of place.

National identity, a concept with both political and social meaning, often competes with the realities of cultural diversity and globalisation, which impact many countries, including Australia. Today, a nation such as Australia cannot be understood from a narrow nationalistic perspective but needs to be located within its broader geographical location, global context, and diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural population. From a theoretical perspective we could argue, as Lyotard (1984) has, that Nationalism is no longer a Grand Narrative (along with other Grand Narratives such as Religion, Ideology and so on) and the turn is towards small narratives (*petits récits*) for making meaning or sense of who ‘we’ are. In sharing some of the small narratives of the past in this paper, we may come to appreciate how the CLDR is ‘a token of the future’.

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Notes:

ⁱ Where items were sourced from a library, they are adorned with library stamps, book plates and call numbers.

ⁱⁱ AustLit's definition of 'Australian literature' responds to changing research, reading and teaching patterns over time. Scope is broad and encompassing allowing for inclusions of literature which demonstrate how Australia's nationhood and peoples were viewed in other countries; how 'Australians' changed over time; and how the country was represented by authors and illustrators who had never visited Australia. James Borlase, for example, is included in AustLit due to his five year stay from 1864-1869. A large number of his works are included in CLDR via external links and AustLit digitisation. Though his stay was short, many of his works were influenced by Australia and attempted to represent Australian peoples and culture. See for example, the preface to *The Night Fossickers and Other Australian Tales of Peril and Adventure* (1867).

ⁱⁱⁱ A significant feature of a digital archive is access. The CLDR and other projects that are part of the AustLit digital resource are moving towards free open access, but the collection is available to state, academic and public libraries, and other national and international spheres through subscriptions. The advantage of free open access will be that readers will be able to freely use the materials without going through the usual restrictions that govern special or rare book collections housed in libraries or museums. The search facilities of AustLit enable an additional kind of access. The database incorporates federated search facilities, which allow users to search beyond AustLit records to discover external results across search engines or collections such as Google Books, Picture Australia and AusStage. These results appear in conjunction with bibliographic records, allowing researchers to see networks of content and to envision pathways across databases that house nationally and culturally significant data.

^{iv} For a full discussion refer to the Commonwealth Bank website:

<http://www.commbank.com.au/about-us/our-company/history/the-beginnings.aspx> Accessed 05/04/12

^v The expression means many small amounts accumulate to make a large amount. However, mickle and muckle mean the same thing.

^{vi} The term 'digger' is an Australian and New Zealand military slang term for soldiers. It originated during World War I.

