

Lost and Invisible: The Representation of  
Indigeneity in Children's Literature in Tasmania  
1950-2001

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the ways in which Tasmanian Indigeneity is constructed by children's writers for their readers. The colonialist ideologies engendered by writers and illustrators of this literature demonstrate a conservative approach to representations through the roles, characterisations and cultural contexts of Indigenous peoples and their life experiences.

Between 1950 and 2001 a small number of children's writers used Tasmania as a setting and subject for their novels. Physically isolated and unspoilt, Tasmania has a complex and dark past involving convict hardships and atrocities carried out by coloniser settlers against its Indigenous people. Tasmanian children's literature engages with that history, and its intersection with Indigeneity. This thesis centres on Tasmanian writers Jane Ada Fletcher, Nan Chauncy, Beth Roberts, Pat Peatfield Price and Nora Dugon, as well as mainland writers Fitzmaurice Hill, Gary Crew, Mary Small and Elizabeth Stanley who drew on Tasmanian subjects for their novels. Many of these works were highly recognised through the Australian Children's Book of the Year Awards.

Taking a broadly chronological approach, this thesis shows how child readers were protected from the harshness of the historical truths of the massacre and dispossession of the Tasmanian Aborigines. Through its reiteration of doomed race theory, the mythology regarding the demise of the Tasmanian Aborigines is perpetuated either explicitly or symbolically in these works, except those of Dugon and Small, who, rather timidly, go some way towards depicting and acknowledging the identity of Tasmanian Aborigines.

This is the first full scale study of its kind; its significance lies in its demonstration of how children's literature from Tasmania transmitted discriminatory attitudes that were deeply embedded and implicitly assumed for several generations of child readers. In their constructions of the world and its peoples these writers ensured that their child readers remained 'the most colonised persons on the globe' in their appropriation of colonialist attitudes towards Tasmanian Indigeneity.

This thesis shows how, textually, the past continues to inform and shape meaning to the present, as representations of Tasmanian Aborigines in children's literature sees them as lost and invisible. Moreover, as an audience, Tasmanian Aboriginal children are treated as invisible.



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