

'It was good to be home':

Nostalgia in Australian Picture Books 1970–1997

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Thesis submitted for degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 2003

## **Certificate of Authorship/Originality**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin Moncrieff Morrow". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

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## Abstract

'It was good to be home': Nostalgia in Australian Picture Books  
1970–1997

The initial aim of this thesis was to uncover representations of societal ideologies in Australian picture books. As a close study of the books proceeded, the key ideology to emerge was *nostalgia*. While nostalgia has generally negative connotations, the concept of reflective nostalgia (Boym 2001), introduced to the study of children's books by McGillis (2001), provides a positive base on which to build the production and study of children's books.

A sample of thirty picture books, successful in the Children's Book Council awards system between 1970 and 1997, and apparently revealing contemporary Australian life, was selected. A framework of critical strategies from a range of sources was employed, paying particular attention to the analysis of the illustrations.

In shaping the study, two images were extremely influential, those of *maps of meaning* and '*homes*' in the world (Watkins 1992); together with an examination of the concept of *home*, they led to analyses of the two elements of *time* and *space* and their representations in the picture books. Nikolajeva's (2000) concept of the importance of *kairos* or circular time in children's books was applied, and was found to be the prevalent time in the majority of the books. The rural and Arcadian, associated with *kairos*, were also found to characterise picture book *space*, which is predominantly benign, often perfectible. The traditional Australian cottage, with its semiotic features referring

nostalgically to a national past, was significant in many of the books. Families of the 'golden age', community and neighbourhood were all pervasive concepts; and many visual details, including those of food and clothing, revealed the characters' *cultural embeddedness*. Some societal groups (mothers, Aboriginal people, other ethnic groups) were present only in the form of a trace.

The study concluded that most Australian picture books of the period reveal, especially through their illustrations, a secure, nostalgic world.