Xu Daozhi. *Indigenous Cultural Capital: Postcolonial Narratives in Australian Children's Literature*. English Literature and Culture. Peter Lang, 2018. 238 pp.
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Part history, part theory, and part examination of children's literature focused on Indigenous experience, *Indigenous Cultural Capital* explores efforts to bring First Nations life and culture into the mainstream through books aimed at young readers. Xu Daozhi begins her work with this assertion: "The representations of Aboriginal life and cultures in Australian children's books, throughout much of Australia's post-contact history, have been plagued by racial stereotypes and prejudice" (1). (The author includes Torres Strait Islanders under the term "Aboriginal.") To develop her ideas, she employs Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital": "Cultural capital, in such forms as knowledge, skills, and educational qualifications, refers to cognitive acquisition and competence in deciphering cultural codes" (13). Family, to Bourdieu, is the foundational point for such capital; children from middle- or upper-class families enter the educational system with resources that ready them to acquire cultural capital successfully and thus achieve "scholastic success" (13) and an adult life of power and privilege. She identifies the longstanding absence of Indigenous knowledge and cultures from Australian education as a key factor in enduring racial discrimination in schools and society at large and "the widening gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in academic performance" (17). Introducing the concept of "Indigenous cultural capital" and applying it to children's literature, the author contends that the dissemination of narratives to young readers centred on the Aboriginal experience and the corresponding apparatus of curricular changes, prizes, reviews, and appropriate paratextual matter has the potential to transform Australian society. Indigenous cultural capital can shape young readers' "worldview, opinions, and behaviour" (18) and guide them toward a more racially inclusive social structure.

In terms of history, Xu grounds her discussion in aspects of the race wars that are probably familiar to readers. She writes of the enduring tensions between the settler and First Nations populations over the land—"empty space" to the colonisers, prized "Country" to Indigenous peoples. She refers to the 1967 Referendum, the passing of which made Aboriginal Australians citizens of the nation, and the 1992 Mabo decision—*Mabo v. Queensland*—which "[acknowledged] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' possession of the land prior to European settlement" (4). Beyond these, the author addresses aspects of history less familiar or less frequently acknowledged. She comments on the absence of Aboriginal Australians from standard historical texts—or their treatment as exotics remote from lived ordinary experience. She highlights public ignorance of the Stolen Generations, of the policy dominating much of twentieth-century Australia which allowed for the removal of Aboriginal children from families and their placement in institutions as a supposed pathway to assimilation into Australian society. Directly to her purpose, Xu traces the rise of books centred on First Nations culture and featuring Indigenous persons or characters, books that have increasingly claimed a space in school curricula and required reading lists.

Xu devotes a chapter to "Narratives of Child Separation," or what have become known popularly as Stolen Generations narratives. She covers the history of child removal and the stories that emerged late in the twentieth century recounting the trauma ensuing from children being taken from their parents, placed in an institution or growing up in a foster home, where many suffered

abuse. She coins the phrase "colonisers' amnesia" (67) to describe a long-term settler practice of refusing to recognise their part in the dispossession of Aboriginal inhabitants or in the continuing suffering many endure. "Forgetting" is a more encompassing term involving various approaches taken by coloniser and colonised in order not to confront, not to remember the trauma caused by lifelong separation of child from parents. Noting the emergence of these narratives in the 1970s, she follows the development of such stories into a "profusion of autobiographies" (84) that by the late 1990s, after the release of the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997), had gained the stature of collective memory. She states that children enjoy reading stories of other children growing up and "learning the process of socialization" (64); these autobiographical accounts can make, have made, a strong impact as several have claimed a space in secondary school curricula. Consequent classroom debates on the treatment of First Nations people generally and Indigenous children particularly have arisen as students see Stolen Generations narratives as part of national history. The author claims as a lasting effect of this exposure through required reading assignments, that "Indigenous cultural capital expands in its capacity to propel more redress for past wrongs" (84).

Indigenous Cultural Capital is comprehensive in its treatment of book culture. Referring again to Bourdieu, the author asserts: "[B]ook reviews, literary prizes, and paratextual devices (such as a preface) are conventional means of consecration to confer recognition on writers and works" (100), but notes "the ambivalent role" these entities play in "institutional legitimation" (101). Xu claims that Indigenous writers often approach these conventions in a resistant manner, seeing them as an opportunity to "unsettle racialized dominance" (102). She draws this conclusion from a convincing case study of *Moonie Jarl*, a retelling of twelve traditional stories written by Wilf Reeves and illustrated by his sister Olga Miller, both of Aboriginal and European descent, and published in 1964. This book lacked authority at a time when non-Indigenous readers discriminated against those of mixed heritage. Mary Durack, a celebrated white writer who sometimes used Aboriginal subject matter in her work, reviewed it with little enthusiasm, paying no heed to "the book's distinctive storytelling technique" and lumping Indigenous populations together as one culture. Xu shares highlights however from a 1971 review and praises as a milestone a 2014 review by the Indigenous Literacy Foundation that promotes *Moonie Jarl* as "Australia's first Aboriginal children's book" (113) and no longer categorises the creators as "part-Aboriginal": "Not only is the value of *Moonie Jarl* redefined, it has the potential to reach a wider pool of new readers" (113). In discussing prizes, reviews, and the paratextual, however, the author's argument is at times less than convincing. Writers and publishers generally seek means of drawing the attention of potential readers. Winning a prize, even an obscure one, or securing a review or preface by an established writer are accepted tactics used to spark reader-buyer interest; Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers alike must contend with this reality. The point that by now that a review or preface would be written by an Indigenous writer of note—rather than a Mary Durack—is well taken.

Indigenous Cultural Capital is liveliest in its focus on individual texts, identifying what they achieve or how they fall short. The chapter focused on the landscape, on *Country*, explores in detail two texts: James Moloney's *Gracey* and Kate Constable's *Crow Country*. In *Gracey*, six skeletons of Murri people are discovered as a local Community Hall is being constructed. The First Nations residents of the area want the massacre site to become a sacred memorial for the six, even though the Hall is halfway completed. The settler population unsurprisingly resists, with some expressing their frustration that the First Nations people do not understand the economic cost of halting the project and starting anew elsewhere. *Crow Country* depicts another tense situation—Pastoralist Mr Mortlock wants to build a dam on his property, a plan objected to by Jimmy, his

Aboriginal stockman: the chosen site was a sacred gathering place. The conflict escalates, and Jimmy is murdered. Each narrative poses an essential question among the dramatic particulars: Whose land is it? Xu applauds both books for showing the complexity of land disputes, for offering no easy solutions, and for helping "young readers to develop an understanding of the rich cultural heritage of land and country" (61). A striking aspect of *Indigenous Cultural Capital* is the author's statement that non-Aboriginal writers can pen a worthy book on Aboriginal themes. Indeed, I found it a bit startling that the works singled out concerning First Nations peoples' attachment to Country were written by non-Indigenous writers. Focus on a text by an Indigenous author could have enriched her discussion. (In the same vein she details relevant features of Pate Lowe's *Jimmy and Pat Meet the Queen* [1997]). That said, she mounts a convincing case for their value to intended readers.

Xu takes up other pertinent topics. She surveys school readers and required texts over time revealing the movement from "silent apartheid," in which British-based texts rarely acknowledged Aboriginality except in some stereotyped manner, to "cross-curriculum priority" (151)—the contemporary era that has welcomed such texts as *Indij Readers*, which include Dreaming stories, musical lyrics, fiction, biographies, and a regular use of Aboriginal English. She discusses the ethics of Aboriginal representation, citing instances of those who have abrogated or flouted Indigenous protocols as well as those who have adhered to them with success. She cites examples of "exchange of knowledge" between settler and Aboriginal populations (203), using as a model the 1840 encounters between British explorer Edward Eyre and the Aboriginal people who shared their water and knowledge of watering holes with Eyre and his company and received food and "a knife as reward" (174). She expresses hope that the future can hold more of such collaboration and sees children's literature as a means to "nurture, inspire and disseminate [that] hope" (209). I think of my own childhood reading and the eagerness with which I approached stories of kids who lived lives different from mine—kids on farms, in urban centres, in Revolutionary or Victorian times—and all I learned from those narratives. Surely, I as a non-Aboriginal reader, would have relished stories exploring the experiences of Indigenous boys and girls. Xu Daozhi impresses on us the larger cultural payoff to the nation if schools, educational leaders, and adults generally persist in stressing that knowledge of Indigenous Australia is essential for the country's youth. As Indigenous cultural capital becomes integral to academic and professional success, Australia and Australians will be the beneficiaries.

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