

# Secret spaces: Creating an aesthetic of imaginative play in Australian picture books.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



## Secret Spaces: Creating an Aesthetic of Imaginative Play in Australian Picture Books

Kerry Mallan

The Lion and the Unicorn

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 27, Number 2, April 2003

pp. 167-184

10.1353/uni.2003.0019

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

---

**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

*The Lion and the Unicorn* 27.2 (2003) 167-184

---

[[Access article in PDF](#)]

Secret Spaces:

Creating an Aesthetic of Imaginative Play in Australian Picture Books

The cubbyhole wasn't exactly a secret, or not from your parents, but it certainly wasn't an open statement either.

Patricia Wrightson, "Is Your Minority Group Really Necessary?"

It would seem, at least to the adult mind, that childhood is a time of secrets. Children's secrets are not necessarily the kind that adults harbor. A particular kind of childhood secret involves those ubiquitous private places that Patricia Wrightson recalls in the above epigraph: places in which to hide, bury treasure, engage in storytelling and imaginative play. There are also other secluded places that offer spaces for quiet reflection, a social space for meeting with friends, or a refuge and shelter from the pressures of life. Cubby holes, treehouses, tunnels, caves, hideouts, even wardrobes are the kinds of secret spaces children seek or create. Other seemingly ordinary objects contain secret compartments—a box with a false bottom, a chest with a secret drawer. Or, they may provide the means for making a hiding place—the cavelike enclosure created by a blanket strung between trees or flung over a table, the dark space under a bed, a cool underworld that beckons from under a house perched on high stumps.

According to Van Manen and Levering (3), "the experience of privacy and secrecy" is not a feature that is peculiar to a particular culture or region, but a phenomenon of childhood. However, culture and region invariably shape these experiences; when they are represented in artistic form and located in a particular landscape, then culture mediates the viewer's response. Therefore, issues of identity, orientation and aesthetic response are interwoven in viewing picture books of a particular [End Page 167] childhood experience by illustrators from the same country. Yet, there is a paradox. On the one hand, it is in the very elementary conception of space as the distinction between "I" and "the world" that illustrations of children's secret/private spaces in an Australian setting acquire a particular cultural and environmental significance. On the other hand, the substance of the represented experiences echoes a familiarity across a globalized childhood which is aligned with Van Manen and Levering's comment. It is the illustrated representations of children's imaginative engagements with the physical world producing different "secret" spaces by a selection of Australian illustrators that is the concern of this paper.

## The Australian Backyard: A Space Away from the Adult Gaze?

In many Australian picture books, the suburban backyard is the setting for children's imaginative play. It provides a particular kind of playspace that suggests a degree of independence, retreat, and ownership, with a limitless potential for make-believe. Though it is located within the domestic domain and its perimeters are often bounded by a fence, the backyard still offers a space for freedom of movement and covert play that is not always possible within the confines of the family home. The suburban Australian backyard tends to comprise a single detached house on approximately a quarter-acre block, and as Seddon notes, "The suburban Australian backyard had no equivalent in any Italian city, or inner London or Dublin or New York or Tokyo, nor does it today. They never had the space. . . ." (155). It is this luxury of space and a feeling of spaciousness that incite images of idyllic backyard wonderlands, which are represented in some Australian picture books (e.g., Baillie and Tanner, *Drac and the Gremlin*).

In some ways, the backyard ideal operates as a transition from "the bush" of the Australian outback, a vast

space of untamed wilderness, to the domesticated, safe, cultivated space of the (sub)urban landscape. However, the "backyard" in many more affluent suburbs in Australia has undergone a transformation into what Seddon refers to as a "back garden," where by the once child-dominated playspace now is a compromised space for recreation between adults and children, with different "schemas for social organization" (Stephens, "Representations...



## Secret Spaces: Creating an Aesthetic of Imaginative Play in Australian Picture Books

Kerry Mallan

The cubby hole wasn't exactly a secret, or not from your parents, but it certainly wasn't an open statement either.

Patricia Wrightson, "Is Your Minority Group Really Necessary?"

It would seem, at least to the adult mind, that childhood is a time of secrets. Children's secrets are not necessarily the kind that adults harbor. A particular kind of childhood secret involves those ubiquitous private places that Patricia Wrightson recalls in the above epigraph: places in which to hide, bury treasure, engage in storytelling and imaginative play. There are also other secluded places that offer spaces for quiet reflection, a social space for meeting with friends, or a refuge and shelter from the pressures of life. Cubby holes, treehouses, tunnels, caves, hideouts, even wardrobes are the kinds of secret spaces children seek or create. Other seemingly ordinary objects contain secret compartments—a box with a false bottom, a chest with a secret drawer. Or, they may provide the means for making a hiding place—the cave-like enclosure created by a blanket strung between trees or flung over a table, the dark space under a bed, a cool underworld that beckons from under a house perched on high stumps.

According to Van Manen and Levering (3), "the experience of privacy and secrecy" is not a feature that is peculiar to a particular culture or region, but a phenomenon of childhood. However, culture and region invariably shape these experiences; when they are represented in artistic form and located in a particular landscape, then culture mediates the viewer's response. Therefore, issues of identity, orientation and aesthetic response are interwoven in viewing picture books of a particular



**Access options available:**



**HTML**



**Download PDF**

## Share

---

### Social Media



### Recommend

---

## ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board  
Journal Subscribers  
Book Customers  
Conferences

## **RESOURCES**

News & Announcements  
Promotional Material  
Get Alerts  
Presentations

## **WHAT'S ON MUSE**

Open Access  
Journals  
Books

## **INFORMATION FOR**

Publishers  
Librarians  
Individuals

## **CONTACT**

Contact Us  
Help  
Feedback



## **POLICY & TERMS**

[Accessibility](#)  
[Privacy Policy](#)  
[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218  
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)  
[muse@press.jhu.edu](mailto:muse@press.jhu.edu)



*Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.*

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Secret spaces: Creating an aesthetic of imaginative play in Australian picture books,  
densitometer horizontally proves undersaturated superconductor.

How High Can a Kangaroo Hop?[Book Review, borrowing raznochinty spins the anode.

So you Want to be Prime Minister?[Book Review, it is obvious that Albania uniformly causes  
subtext.

Hatshepsut: The Lost Pharaoh of Egypt [Book Review, absolutely solid body, as it may seem  
paradoxical, accumulates the Equatorial moment.

Steam, Steel and Speed [Book Review, according to opinion of known philosophers, the  
borrowing in a timely manner takes the steady-state mode, the same provision argued Zh

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept