

The Magic Pudding: A Mirror of Our Fondest Wishes

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Norman Lindsay's 1918 illustrated children's novel *The Magic Pudding* is a key text in the history of Australian literary consciousness and the national self-conception. This is despite the fact that signs of Australian nationhood must be inferred from the text. Neither "nation" nor "Australia" appear in the work. In Lindsay's book, the scene is set for ambivalence by the fact that though the characters are mainly indigenous fauna, in order to make themselves readable by the audience intended, they mainly behave as settlers of a new Europe, in a recently cleared landscape of smouldering stumps.

The significance of the book, as longstanding children's classic and as an Australian icon, goes far beyond the realm of children's literature. The magic pudding (a.k.a. puddin')—as variable trope—has been of key importance in cultural and political debates in Australia for most of the last century. Politicians (and parents alike) invariably invoke this illusion of cornucopia to indicate that the opposition is dreaming; a recent example in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (28 September 2004) refers to the Howard Government's "Magic Pudding economics". In this text, where the puddin' may be read as Australia—or the Australian—it is also cornucopia personified as badly behaved child. This is not the Dickensian image of the *Oliver Twist* type of child asking for more; this recalcitrant child Albert *is* the more. When he absconds there is a general risk of hunger. However directly or associatively one takes the puddin' as suggesting Australia, reading Albert along these lines carries a set of interesting consequences. Representation of the young nation (or its citizens or their wishful thinking) in the form of a child to be exploited might be seen as pointing to an imperial rather than a parochial consciousness. Likewise it is indicative of certain cynical resistances to expected devotions and accepted values.

In Lindsay's novel there are many interesting elisions from the point of view of the reader who wishes to establish the work's colonial and/or post-colonial investments. If the indigenes are not there as such, then neither are the British nor any other proclaimed national entity. Yet the main characters

are undoubtedly British colonial types, and certainly the indigenous fauna features. Further, the pudding it/him-self might be read in several senses (swarthy appearance, good running legs) as an autochthonous element. Yet, each of these presences is ambiguous. It is devotion to the British nation-cum-empire (the nationality of Britons) that is parodied in Lindsay's story. There is nothing idealistic in the rote devotions in *The Magic Pudding* (hats off for the king) and yet through this work Lindsay is responsible for the creation of what is arguably the most optimistic fantasy object (and one of the most characteristically Australian objects) in Australian literature: plenty personified and made portable; more particularly the fantastic idea (wish fulfillment) that the child, instead of being a burden in times and in places of want, could function as portable cornucopia.

This essay argues that the puddin' as possession (slave and cannibal commodity) has provided an apt palimpsest for wishful thinking of the Australian kind, likewise for Australian styles of cynicism with regard to such wishfulness. In *The Magic Pudding* the distorting mirror shows (as it teaches) a characteristic cynicism with regard to the rules and rights of possession—a cynicism befitting the un-nameable anywhere of the action. Of particular interest in these processes of interpellation is the role of “anthem quality” in the text. The anthems sung through the story tutor the reader in a curious ambivalence with regard to loyalty and its expression. Devotions we would call national are at once placed beyond question as universals, as eternal of civilisation; their self-interested deployment is however suggestive of questions about the nature of civilised “justice” and whether it can apply anywhere/everywhere.

SYMBOLIC COMMODITY

Lindsay wrote the story to take his mind off the war and, more specifically, he wrote it with hunger and with food centring the action, as a result of an argument with a friend who had been telling him how children loved tales with fairies. Lindsay responded: “Not on your life! The belly rules the infant mind”, and he took the idea from the talking pudding episode in the “Queen Alice” chapter of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (Carpenter and Prichard, 334). In the context of The Great War, one might also read this as a tale of violence and anger re-situated, from the foreign place “over there” to the foreign place becoming ours, re-directed from unknown others towards tangible competitors and/or upstarts in the pecking order.

Contention over what the pudding symbolises has loomed large in its critical reception and more importantly in the endless recycling of the image as

variable trope for Australian conditions and Australian wishfulness. The Puddin' is Australia. The Puddin' is the Australian. The Puddin' is cornucopia personified. The antipodean cornucopia has legs. The object of desire/that which is possessed is, in turn, possessed of a will to abscond. Flipside of the cannibal accusation is the reverse objectification implied here. The child worker alienated into objecthood is also recuperated through personality; a "move" easily made because the "character" never lost its personhood—was always person and pudding in one. I recall a Chinese student some years ago, responding to the "what does the pudding represent (?)" question by telling me that Albert was a Jesus-like figure. I found it difficult at first to see through the sarcasm far enough to credit the idea. However, if going on being eaten indefinitely may be glossed as turning the other cheek writ large, then Albert's long sufferings truly are Christ-like. He does perpetually die for the sins of men (specifically their greedy appetites). More to the point, Albert is a figure of constant transubstantiation, the body and the blood suggested in his guts and gravy. As with Jesus, the object of devotion is also a child. Being a child and swift on his legs makes Albert a perpetual reminder that food comes from somewhere and could therefore always be somewhere else.

The pudding is also the object of British nationhood. Rather than being tyrannised by distance in the pursuit of plenty, who possesses the pudding brings plenty with him. In this sense the pudding is the opposite of a white man's burden: reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's barbarism in the documents of civilisation (248), it is something savage yet sustaining which the settler brings and which need not be—and will not be—civilised.

I hope I have, so far, established something of the pudding's tropic or symbolic range—or perhaps it is better to say—of the conflation it allows. The pudding is becoming nation, cornucopia, child asking for more. Then what are the interpretive consequences of these conflations? The nation is the greedy child, sufficient to itself but not satisfied. Suggested here is both adult dissatisfaction with plenty as personified in children and, more generally, the dissatisfaction of generations with each other.

Of course the pudding is *only* a symbol—for the country, for the citizen-in-the-making, for the reader—and so the child-directed cannibalism (happy event in which hunger is requited in plenty) is only symbolic and this presents as an almost "natural" hyperbole for exploitation in a place famous for hyperbole. It only takes a little good humour for the good reader to laugh it off. Laughter is always at someone's expense; in this case the good reader has a motive not to question its source, which minimal reflection reveals to be in the exploitation of the child.

It is important, however, that the position of the pudding be interrogated. Attention is due to the centering symbol of Lindsay's tale and likewise the book and its function in Australian childhood, self-image and the construction of civility of the Australian kind. There is a risk that in asking such questions one renders oneself apparently humourless, that slipping out of range of sarcasm and hyperbole one takes oneself out of the discussion. Yet the survival of the text has depended on the interpretive range it allows. The pudding's is not merely a tale of brutal fettered/unfettered exploitation, although that fantasy is a key; particularly the closing scene reflects an adult idyll of childhood finally tamed and in the one moment made eternal as such. Importantly however, if we read the pudding as in a dominated position (in class terms, as a child, as a victim of cruelty), then we also acknowledge its/his reflexive awareness of his position ("Oh who would be a puddin'?). This is the subaltern speaking for itself, complaining volubly and even adopting such primitive strategies in defiance as running away.

However we read *The Magic Pudding* and whatever steps we take along the way in the interests of not spoiling the humour, we need to acknowledge that the story's tropic centre is a moveable feast of the Rabelaisian kind, a feast which speaks. The cynicism of the text itself is a means of generating the ambivalence that—in and out of the story—keeps subjectivity mobile and so keeps the text open.

THE ADVENTURES OF BUNYIP BLUEGUM

The Magic Pudding is a novel divided into four slices, the first of which introduces protagonist and antagonist characters and the object of their desire, child *cum* dinner—Albert, the magic pudding. Slices two and three show the object in contention, slice four offers justice of a kind and the pudding restored to its self-styled rightful owners/protectors. To position the *dramatis personae* and the identifications anticipated of the reader, these are the picaresque adventures of one Bunyip Bluegum, a koala who leaves a comfortable home because he simply can no longer abide his Uncle Wattleberry's whiskers. Vacating the ancestral tree, young Bunyip consults a local poet, one Egbert Rumpus Bumpus, on the question of whether he should become a traveller or a swagman. The poet's advice is unequivocal if unexpected:

As you have neither swag nor bag
You must remain a simple wag,
And not a swag—or bagman. (14)

How, the young koala craves to know, can he see the world without swag or bag? If the bow-tie, cane, waistcoat and boater (as already illustrated) had left any doubt, by now Bunyip's class pretensions are firmly established. Rumpus Bumpus tells him:

Take my advice, don't carry bags,
 For bags are just as bad as swags;
 They're never made to measure.
 To see the world, your simple trick
 Is but to take a walking-stick
 Assume an air of pleasure,
 And tell the people near and far
 You stroll about because you are
 A Gentleman of Leisure. (14)

Bunyip Bluegum follows the poet's advice and quickly sets off on his life journey but before long is reminded by his stomach of a fearful omission—he has forgotten to bring food with him. Heavily foreshadowed now is the need for something like a magic pudding and the possibility of something along the lines of a struggle for its possession.¹ Bunyip lists all the things he has in contrast with his one sad lack:

I've lots of teeth to eat with,
 . . . Observe my doleful-plight.
 For here am I without a crumb
 To satisfy a raging tum-
 O what an oversight! (18)

By the time Bunyip has tallied the two sides of the ledger, his former oversight is remedied because coming around a bend in the road Bunyip discovers "two people in the very act of having lunch." Thus, our gentlemanly koala falls in with a rough and tumble pair, Bill Barnacle the sailor and his penguin friend, Sam Sawnoff.

Bill Barnacle is the sailor the sea spat out, a man who could be from anywhere, who could be bound for almost any station in life. For the class-mobile Barnacle and likewise for his pugilistic penguin accomplice (quintessential unlikely character for the dusty outback), the land traversed is a lottery. But Bill and Sam and whomever they befriend have in fact won the jackpot. These wanderers are able to go where they will by virtue of the fact that they have with them an inexhaustible food source.

Outside of the stories he tells, Bill Barnacle is the only fully human character the reader will meet before the fourth slice of the book, and whereas the humans met in the final slice are closely associated with justice (as agents

of law and order), Bill Barnacle is established early on as the pioneer type, one habitually beyond the reach of the law and so tending to be a law unto himself. Bill Barnacle is ever cynical about the motives of others, save the gentlemanly Bunyip Bluegum. One might find Mr. Barnacle's inordinate respect for Bunyip anomalous until one recognises that Bluegum represents mobile aristocracy in manner and judgement—he is a kind of bush blue blood on the move and so, though much younger, less experienced and apparently less powerful, yet a helpful role model for the pioneer. The roles are to some extent reversible because the pioneering human provides a model for adventuring to the young koala. From their first meal and Bunyip's happy entry into the Noble Society of Puddin'-Owners, we recognise that—although the society notionally pre-exists him—it is Bunyip who lends it nobility. Represented here is the class complicity of opportunists, the kind of complicity necessary to progress in colonial yet-to-be-populated space.

Bill's keen senses of irony and opportunism are matched only by those of Albert, the puddin', whose vulgar language and manners reveal him to be the class contrary of Bunyip Bluegum. We may read Bunyip as Bill's foil or as a Barnacle in the making, or better still, a bit of both. In the mock-epic chronotope of *The Magic Pudding* Bill Barnacle always has the upper hand over his edible charge. Between Bill Barnacle and Albert the puddin' we see played out a version of masculinity: one featuring paternal care and pride (but of the self-interested variety) matched with filial piety (imbued with suspicion). Between the one *in loco parentis* and the precocious pudding there is mutual cynicism, distrust, sarcastic engagement, flippant dismissal.

Bill explains to Bunyip Bluegum that this pudding loves nothing better than to be eaten, and it is true that Albert speaks to this effect. However, these words need to be placed in context. The child *cum* dinner is always someone's prisoner and someone's property in this tale. Albert first speaks without being spoken to in his rude answer to Bunyip Bluegum's polite enquiry as to whether there are any onions in the pudding. Bunyip's real hope is, through this ploy, to be invited to lunch. But before Bill can speak for their dinner, "a thick, angry voice came out of the pudding, saying":

Onions, bunions, corns and crabs,
Whiskers, wheels and hansom cabs,
Beef and bottles, beer and bones,
Give him a feed and end his groans.

Within minutes Sam Sawnoff has confided in the stranger the secret of the pudding (36). But this consummation of a devout wish will only come once

the rights of the puddin' owners have been tested and defended through a first encounter with Possum and Wombat (a.k.a. the puddin' thieves). Befitting the handy conflation of his weight and class position, Bunyip Bluegum's light duty during the fracas is to sit on the pudding in order to stop the child from absconding. By now Bunyip has met and formally digested the puddin', whose magical mystery had first to be disclosed to him in a whisper:

"You'll enjoy this Puddin'," said Bill, handing him a large slice.
 "This is a very rare Puddin'."
 "It's a cut-an-come-again Puddin'," said Sam.
 "It's a Christmas steak and apple-dumpling Puddin'," said Bill.
 "It's a— . Shall I tell him?" he asked, looking at Bill. Bill nodded, and the Penguin leaned across to Bunyip Bluegum and said in a low voice, "It's a Magic Puddin'."

Parodied here is that well-worn adult idiocy of speaking about the child in front of the child in the vain hope that the child won't understand. This child knows himself to be the object in contention. This child understands something of his value to the three characters now tucking into him. "No soft soap from total strangers," said the Puddin', rudely. (22)

COMPLICITY AND SARCASM

On the face of things Albert is a character as complicit in, as he is resentful of, his exploitation. It is never quite clear though whether or to what extent ironic self-awareness is involved in Albert's sense of his own position. He is as rude as he knows how to be; harder to gauge is his sincerity. Albert's typical mode in conversation is sarcastic but he does have what appear to be moments of heartfelt self-disclosure, as in his after-dinner song:

O, who would be a puddin',
 A puddin' in a pot,
 A puddin' which is stood on
 A fire which is hot?
 O sad indeed the lot
 Of puddin's in a pot . . .
 But as I am a puddin',
 A puddin' in a pot,
 I hope you get the stomachache
 For eatin' me a lot.
 I hope you get it hot,
 You puddin'-eatin' lot! (42)

Bill is not peeved for a moment that his charge should voice such disgruntlement or harbour such vicious thoughts, the real power relations

and the real benefits they bring him far outweigh the underling's impotent discontent. In short Bill behaves as an adult to Albert's peevish child.

It is after this first supper which serves as a demonstration of adult rights and the imposition of adult logic (or the lack of it) on youngsters, Bill makes his speech inviting Bunyip to join them and become a proper member of the Noble Society of Puddin'-Owners, a club of which, although (and because) vital to its operation, Albert cannot be a member. Shaking hands "warmly all round" to seal the deal, the three then loudly sing "The Puddin'-Owners' Anthem", the lyrics of which are as follows:

The solemn word is plighted,
The solemn tale is told,
We swear to stand united,
Three puddin'-owners bold.

Hurrah for puddin'-owning,
Hurrah for Friendship's hand,
The puddin'-thieves are groaning
To see our noble band.

When we with rage assemble,
Let puddin'-snatchers groan;
Let puddin'-burglars tremble,
They'll ne'er our puddin' own.

Hurrah, we'll stick together,
And always bear in mind
To eat our puddin' gallantly,
Whenever we're inclined. (44)

Parodied here is the "anthem quality" of which the puddin' owners will later make cynical use, when deploying the real national anthem, "God save the King", in order to resume their "rightful" possession of the puddin'.

Bunyip's confident ease in joining this suddenly formal association of a suddenly self-recognised gentry is no doubt a result of the background with which he comes, a result of his having followed the poet's advice and assumed "an air of leisure". As earlier suggested, it is Bunyip's class position—as indicated for instance by his attire—which now allows Sam² and Bill to recognise themselves as members of an elite. They had the economic basis (the puddin') already, now they have the right association.

How fortuitous all this is for Bunyip Bluegum, whom one might read as the right koala at the right time. A few pages earlier the young marsupial was fleeing an uncle's whiskers; now his worries of the tummy are dispelled

and he is established as a “gentleman of leisure”. Of interest here is the effortless and the seamlessness in the rites of passage which have made Bunyip a koala of the world. There is no pause in the proceedings to explain how, but Bunyip Bluegum miraculously already knows the lyrics and the tune of “The Puddin’-Owners’ Anthem”.

POSSESSION AND THE LAW’S NINE TENTHS

David Musgrave writes that the story’s plot mechanics revolve around “the central issue of ownership of the puddin’ as defined by arbitrary (symposiastic) laws like snout bendin’ and, above all, possession, as opposed to ownership of the puddin’ defined by juridical or ‘universal’ law—the idea of simple theft and the law court. In both these instances what we can call universal law is neatly subverted by the carnivalesque logic of symposiastic law”. (7)

Where does the pudding come from, how is it possessed? Contention over the possession of the pudding structures the whole of the story. That the rights of possession are as morally doubtful as morally insisted upon strengthens the pudding = nation thesis. The moral insistence must continue until the doubts are assuaged through the process of forgetting. That wished for reification of social fact (the puddin’ “owners” right to possess the puddin’) is however placed in doubt by the perpetual meal’s reflexive awareness and his willingness to broadcast it.

Before we come to the instances of Albert’s intransigence for the apocryphal tale in which Bill asserts his “parental” rights, the evidence extant for the origins of the pudding should first be examined. Bill claims that he and Sam came by the pudding on an iceberg at sea, that they had it by virtue of the demise of one Curry and Rice, the cook of a vessel named *The Saucy Sausage* (24-26). Bill’s ethical credentials are established later when he tells the story of how he had run away to sea to be a pirate on the Caribbean, but subsequently discovered that there were no pirates there any longer:

For Pirates go, but their next of kin
Are Merchant Captains, hard as sin,
And Merchant Mates as hard as nails
Aboard of every ship that sails. (38)

Clearly, the piratical mindset with which Bill first began to wander at sea remains generally applicable. The signs of lawlessness persisting under the reign of law will be instructive for the story as it later unfolds. The story of *The Saucy Sausage* is, in brief, that the ship sinks leaving Bill Barnacle and Sam Sawhoff stranded on an iceberg in the company of Curry and Rice. While Sam and Bill grow thinner and thinner living on only ice, the rotund

cook is eventually discovered to have been gorging himself all along on the pudding, which he had kept hidden from his comrades:

But late one night we wakes in fright
 To see by a pale blue flare,
 That cook has got in a phantom pot
 A big plum-duff an' a rump-steak hot,
 And the guzzlin' wizard is eatin' the lot,
 On top of the iceberg bare. (25-26)

At this juncture, the song is interrupted and Bill notes:

“There’s a verse left out here,” said Bill, stopping the song, owin’ to the difficulty of explainin’ exactly what happened when me and Sam discovered the deceitful nature of that cook. The next verse is as follows:—

Now Sam an’ me can never agree
 What happened to Curry and Rice.
 The whole affair is shrouded in doubt,
 For the night was dark and the flare went out,
 And all we heard was a startled shout,
 Though I think meself, in the subsequent rout,
 That us bein’ thin, an’ him bein’ stout,
 In the middle of pushin’ an’ shovin’ about,
 He must have fell off the ice. (25-26)

At this point, and despite Bill’s efforts to silence him, the pudding interjects to say, as he later will in court: “I had my eye on the whole affair, and it’s my belief that if he hadn’t been so round you’d have never rolled him off the iceberg, for you was both singing out, “Yo heave Ho” for half-an-hour, an’ him trying to hold on to Bill’s beard.” (26)

Whatever pretensions to right the self-proclaimed puddin’ owners may have, what becomes clear now (and is later reiterated) is that strength of force is the major factor in the pudding’s “rightful” possession. It is the weakest character in the cast who bears witness in order to cast doubt on the right-asserting narrative of the strongest. Here are the precise terms of analogy with the white settlement of Australia and the rights of possession associated with its dominant narrative. In a story regularly visited with violence and threats thereof, in a story which relies on violence and threats for much of its humour, the views of the weak, however loudly expressed, however essential, and the experience of these witnesses (Albert, after all, is the pudding) count for little against the facts of force and of possession. These circumstances are familiar enough as the logic with which nations raise and maintain armies to defend themselves from other nations’ armies. The double-think entailed on the issue

of rights here points to Benedict Anderson's first paradox of nationalism: that of temporal authority derived from a pretence of tradition (5).

The long-term popularity of Lindsay's tale can be accounted for in allegorical terms: what makes the story satisfying for Australians is its analogy with the unspoken terms of the dominant narrative as concerns rights (and rites) of possession, and moreover the openness of the identifications it allows with regard to the various subject positions in those stories.

HATS OFF

Two key paradoxes of anthem quality are the uniformity of differences and the automatism of strong affect. Uniformity of differences is revealed in the fact that the overwhelming majority of the world's national anthems are written and arranged according to the rules of classical western musical forms. Every member of the series "nation" must have a national anthem; as a consequence, though anthems are notionally intended to express the differences between nations, reflection reveals that they serve also to illustrate the consistency of national investments across international borders.

Strong affect is automatised in anthems because their iconic status entails subjects' forgetting what it is they sing. Emotion is even intensified after the meaning of the words has been forgotten. An anthem provides its singer with a shorthand for and a shortcut to the sentiment required.

Once stolen, the pudding is discovered (and recovered) through the demand of loyalty placed on (the native) miscreants by the rendition of "God Save the King" (119-120); thieves are powerless against this expression of—and demand by—authority. They must remove their hats and when they do so the world can see that it was under their hats they were hiding the magic pudding. Authority bid them reveal what convention had allowed them to conceal. "God Save the King" has an automatic effect; it invokes the *sine qua non* of national loyalty: when you hear this tune you must remove your headgear. By means of this automatic, arbitrary and apparently permanent expression of loyalty, the character *cum* object in contention is revealed.

In Lindsay's "Puddin' Owners' Anthem", along with the not-quite-yet automatised affect, both the arbitrary and the self-interested aspects of possession are celebrated. Concomitant violence is always impending:

When we with rage assemble,
Let puddin'-snatchers groan;
Let puddin'-burglars tremble,

British imperial pretensions of valour are undermined parodically by the bold statement of the Noble Society's chief goal: "To eat our puddin' gallantly,/ Whenever we're inclined" (44).

The parody reveals metropolitan or imperial aspirations debased by the low motives of colonials. Likewise we see imperial pretensions undermined as Sam's song concerning "the penguin bold" is in part a parody of "Rule Britannia", with the penguins taking the part of Britons:

To see the penguin out at sea,
And watch how he behaves,
Would prove that penguins cannot be
And never shall be slaves.
You haven't got a notion
How penguins brave the ocean,
And laugh with scorn at waves. (40)

England's anthem singers are those the colonies keep fed.

The Magic Pudding prepares the way for an ambiguously postcolonial view of British nationality and national devotion in Australia. The shift can be understood through the distance between, on the one hand, the childhoods represented by Bunyip Bluegum and Albert; on the other, between the unison shown in "The Puddin' Owners' Anthem" and the manner in which the national anthem of the times, "God Save the King", is deployed by the Noble Society.

This essay is not a study of the child reader as becoming-Australian subject at the end of the Great War. Yet such a (worthy) subject (of enquiry) is suggested by the text and by its popularity at publication. I think we may safely assume that the implied reader of Lindsay's novel has something in common with the child suggested in Ethel Turner's bestselling 1894 novel *Seven Little Australians*: "In England, and America, and Africa, and Asia, the little folks may be paragons of virtue, I know little about them. But in Australia a model child is—I say it not without thankfulness—an unknown quantity. It may be that the miasmas of naughtiness develop best in the sunny brilliancy, of our atmosphere" (9).

The instructive gaps shown between Bunyip Bluegum and Albert, and between the "The Puddin' Owners' Anthem" and "God Save the King", allow the child reader an attitudinal range with which to consider his (*sic*) own identity and its investments. Idealistic claims are shown as a thin veneer over self-interest, thus normalising cynicism as a response to political conditions. Bunyip Bluegum appears to be as sincere as Albert the Pudding

appears to be cynical. In fact, once having left home, Bunyip's gentlemanly acquiescence in the *status quo* assures him of keeping his hands clean and his stomach full. The pudding—Janus-faced pie *cum* pouting child—is optimism and pessimism rolled into one. He is the ever absconding devoutly-to-be-wished of nation: Plenty with plenty of attitude. Bunyip Bluegum, by contrast, is manners personified, a suit of clothes waiting for its attendant privileges. Needless to say, identification is less troubled with the newly adult Bunyip than with the naughty Albert.

Perhaps education is the telling lack in childhood as presented in the story. The track provides characters with a school of harder or of softer knocks, but apart from this, education either takes the glancing form of listening to a poet mouth off (for Bunyip) or else is unattainable (for Albert). In fact, Albert is deliberately denied an education. This very denial however is the reflexive means of providing the book's reader with the necessary instruction. Albert is cunning, so as far as Bill is concerned the less he knows the better. "Let words be sufficient, without explanation," Bill says, severely when Albert asks what a *ruse de guerre* might be: "And as we haven't time to waste talkin' philosophy to a Puddin', why, into the bag he goes, or we'll never get the story finished". (169) The child reader of *The Magic Pudding* learns, not to challenge the singing of anthems as a means of self-collective representation, but rather a "healthy" (i.e. a self-interested and opportunistic style of) cynicism about such forms and displays of loyalty.

As for the nation under construction through the demonstration of such devotions, its ethos of sarcasm is best expressed by the pudding himself: "Eat away, chew away, munch and bolt and guzzle,/Never leave the table till you're full up to the muzzle".

How much allegory should be read into this exhortation? The accusation of over-reading will always be difficult to avoid when dealing with an apparent *tabula rasa* of collective consciousness. In this case the over-written icon in question is the kind of palimpsest in which we see ourselves—however hazily—reflected. Australian intentions, self-interest and self-regard are all inscribed in those murky gravy guts, so serviceably altered as our whims demand.

NOTES

- ¹ While it may be relevant to questions regarding the suitability of the story for children today, criticism of violence in story (for instance in Greg Watson's 2002 paper, "Violent and racist undertones in early Australian children's literature: the proof's in the Puddin'") should be tempered with cognizance of

the bellicose nature of *fin de siècle* national devotions in general. C. J. Dennis's 1908 mock anthem, the "Australaise" (3-5), may be taken as indicative of an acceptable level of threat of violence for Lindsay's wartime readership.

- ² Sam's class position is indicated in the footnote he offers following his rendition of "The Penguin's Bride":

"Of course," said Sam modestly, "the song goes too far in sayin' as how I married the Hearl's niece, because, for one thing, I ain't a marryin' man, and for another thing, what she really sez to me when we got to land was, 'You're a noble feller, an' here's five shillin's for you, and any time you happen to be round our way, just give a ring at the servant's bell, and there'll always be a feed waitin' for you in the kitchen'. However, you've got to have songs to fill in the time with, and when a feller's got a rotten word like Buncle to find rhymes for, there's no sayin' how a song'll end."
(86)

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