

**The Heaven I Swallowed**

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## Abstract

My novel *The Heaven I Swallowed* tells the story of Grace Teresa Mary McAllister, a World War II widow who decides to “save” a young Aboriginal girl, Mary, by adopting her into her home, believing she will be able to redeem the child by giving her all the benefits of white society. In Part I of the novel Mary arrives and it soon becomes obvious that her presence is bringing back the deceptions in Grace’s past. In Part II five years have passed and Grace is struggling to cope with the way she treated Mary. Exploring the myth of “for their own good” *The Heaven I Swallowed* is a tale of the Stolen Generations, told from the perspective of the white perpetrator.

The exegesis accompanying the novel, ‘Whose Shoes? Writing *The Heaven I Swallowed*’, is also divided into two parts. Part I traces my awareness of the Stolen Generation stories and the reasoning behind the decision to narratively take the perspective of a white woman who steals an Aboriginal child. In Part II, I turn to two contemporary literary texts – Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* and Gail Jones’s *Sorry* – to examine different strategies that the non-indigenous writer might employ to counter-act stereotypical representation of Aboriginality. Further analysis of the novel in the lead up to the final draft is then aided by another two texts: Elizabeth Jolley’s *The Well* and Joyce Carol Oates’s *Black Girl/ White Girl*. Using these as models – one in regards to a Gothic re-rendering of the work and the other in regards to the depiction of ambiguous race relations – I find a way to reconcile myself with the representation of Aboriginality in *The Heaven I Swallowed*. Finally, I come to the conclusion that the novelist might often travel a great deal away from their original intent but that these footsteps have to be taken to ensure motivations are justified and one’s conscience is at ease.

## **Declaration**

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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(Signed) Rachel Hennessy

BA (Hons), MA

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Finally, having dedicated my first novel to my mother, this work is for my father: eternal optimist, pillar of strength and general bringer of joy. Never let the turkeys get you down.

## **The Heaven I Swallowed**

*For my father, Lance*