

5 January 2008

Parallel Importation of Books
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 3601

Re: Reform of Parallel Import Provisions

I write as a children's writer, a teacher, and a parent to add my voice in opposition to allowing parallel importation of books. My colleagues have explained the detrimental effects parallel importation will have on Australian publishers and local authors. I would like to emphasise the detrimental impact parallel importing could ultimately have on young readers.

Children need to read books they identify with, books written in Australian voices, with Australian humour and set in Australian landscapes. A nation's literature has traditionally been seen as a reflection of the values, tension, myths and psychology of that culture. These books cannot be replaced by books written for another culture.

Children enjoy reading books where they can empathise with the main character. Children who enjoy reading become children who find learning easier. In order to teach children well, they need to have access to books they enjoy reading. For young readers, national literatures play a crucial role in developing a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, of knowing who they are.

I recently read the children's book, *Un Lun Dun*, by China Mieville, an English writer. The characters in the book spoke with a typical London accent. Letters were left out of words, f often replaced th, and random "innits" were tacked onto the end of lines of dialogue. Children in the UK enjoyed reading a book with characters who spoke the way they do, but what does an Australian child make of it? If they haven't heard an English child using the word, "innit", will it sound stupid to them? How can they identify with that character?

The US has long spurned books about wizardry and the occult, and their characters generally have an altogether holier outlook on life. In addition the "No Child Left Behind" policies seem to have created "dumbed-down classrooms" and "narrowed curriculum" according to an article by Linda Darling-Hammon which appeared in *The Nation*, May 2, 2007. If parallel importing means a future of only imported books and a flood of children's books from the US, then what exactly will our children be reading in the future?

Parallel importation is not a commercial argument. If the Commission finds that parallel importation of books is detrimental to Australian publishing or Australian authors in any way, it must be stopped. Our fragile industry deserves protection. Our children deserve

to read Australian stories. Don't let reading become an act of consuming and nothing more. Miles Franklin argued that 'without an indigenous literature, people can remain alien in their own soil'.

Yours faithfully,

Bren MacDibble.