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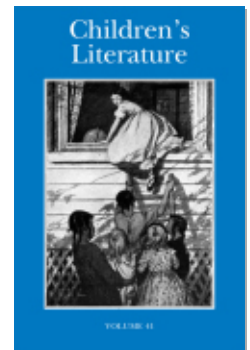
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## The Sturdy Fabric of Cultural Imperialism: Tracing Its Patterns in Contemporary Children's Novels

Donnarae MacCann

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*The Sturdy Fabric of Cultural Imperialism:  
Tracing Its Patterns in Contemporary Children's Novels*

Donnarae MacCann

*[T]he “afterlife” of colonial discourse is very different for the colonizer  
and for the colonized.*

—Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani

*[T]he recognition of empire's determinate place within modern western  
culture . . . invites the appraisal of our own times as still implicated in  
the worlds imperialism made.*

—Keith Ansell-Pearson, et al.

Protest movements are born to confront trauma.<sup>1</sup> The Black Power movement is a case in point, an organized challenge to internal colonization.<sup>2</sup> This movement recognized multiple centers of power, but defied the white power structure for its monolithic and exploitive character regarding matters of race (Carmichael and Hamilton 7). In a similar way, Africans have formed liberation movements in response to the traumas of slavery, the Middle Passage, and imperial oppression. In short, Blacks are hardly newcomers in analyzing and opposing traumatic experiences. The same applies to Native American, Asian, and Latino/Latina groups—populations seriously victimized by conquests, land thefts, slavery, forced migration, and cultural denigration. Moreover, children have often been key players in such struggles—pivotal in their inspirational role and sometimes important in the frontlines, as in the overthrow of apartheid.<sup>3</sup>

Ironically, in children's literature the battle against imperialist influence has not been won, since many children's books still function as instruments of a colonial mentality. In fact, children's literature has a special connection with imperialist policies, since the ideal imperial strategy is to impel the young to colonize and marginalize themselves. To some degree, children are not intellectually autonomous and can be led to embrace prejudice against their own identity. Psychologist Kenneth Clark says it this way: “children who are consistently rejected understandably begin to question and doubt whether

they, their family, and their group really deserve no more respect from the larger society than they receive. These doubts become the seeds of a pernicious self-and group-hatred. . . ." (63). Children's literature is one means of sending these messages of rejection, underscoring the role of the writer in society's perpetuation of itself. Accordingly, novelist Toni Morrison makes a connection between writers and social responsibility:

Living in a nation of people who *decided* that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom *and* the mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer. . . . How compelling is the study of those writers who take responsibility for *all* of the values they bring to their art.  
(xiii)

Colonialist children's books are agents of art that help produce a colonial-based socialization. Colonialism operates to dehumanize, and the power of imperialist discourse only makes this condition more intractable. Authors, publishers, critics, and educators have all had roles on this imperialist stage, moving a culturally hegemonic literature through the schools and channels of entertainment. Complicating this dynamic is the way "the readers of all American fiction," as Morrison notes, "have been positioned as white," regardless of the actual race of the author (xii). The most grotesque extremes in colonialist literature may be partially explained by this construction of a white-only audience and the effect it may have on the literary imagination. At the end of the day, this complex mix points to unfinished tasks in literary scholarship. At this juncture, trauma study programs have not taken sufficient account of the wounds inflicted by imperialism. Researchers are not keeping abreast of the latest colonialist children's books,<sup>4</sup> and there is a need for historically-informed methods in critical literary practice, a topic I will address later.

Admittedly, these matters have social/political as well as aesthetic dimensions. In the novels featured here, racism and colonialism can be seen in partnership, as when racist laws underpin the movement of Native Americans farther and farther from their homelands in the Ohio Valley<sup>5</sup>—a resettlement program played out in Ann Rinaldi's *The Second Bend in the River* (1997). Race-based segregation is an issue in Anton Ferreira's *Zulu Dog* (2002), in which post-apartheid whites still conceptualize their existence as either separate from Blacks or within apartheid's master/servant relationship. In Julia Holland's

*Nothing to Remember* (1998), Indian immigrants in Australia sometimes segregate themselves from their ethnic compatriots, as when the protagonist distances himself from his parents' traditions. The authors, in each case, do not portray exclusionist policies or their psychological internalization as traumatic and stigmatizing. On the contrary, the novelists make it appear as almost inevitable that the colonized should be completely unrelated to the colonizer and treated as lesser beings. For example, opposition to colonialist policies (as when Native Americans oppose white land theft) is characterized as "savage" behavior; desegregation plans for South Africa are scorned as chaotic and counterproductive; and the "modern" Indians in Australia are only respected if they exchange Hinduism for Western-based beliefs. These reactions to "outsiders" are typical, since the colonized are consciously positioned to experience and endure social isolation, political powerlessness, and economic dependence.

Taken as a whole, the books reveal imperialism's sprawling outreach across centuries and continents, illustrating a mobile colonialist/imperialist mentality.<sup>6</sup> Indian critic Lata Mani discovered in her daily round "the extent to which modes of racialization specific to the history of certain Others are available for extension to other Others" (Frankenberg and Mani 297). Likewise, features in colonialist fiction extend across borders. One finds a repudiation of non-Anglo religions, sciences, art forms, and customs—a rejection of the realities evolving from non-European histories and priorities. The novels analyzed here follow a formula that extracts one Other from his/her traditional community, acculturates that character in Anglo ways, and implies that cultural "hybridization"<sup>7</sup> has been achieved. In the narrative details, it is largely non-Westerners who are associated with glaring failures. Their societies are brimming with violence, graft, irrational belief systems, an inferior use of language, dangerous medical practices, tyrannical governments, and dysfunctional "tribalism."

Literary theorists are not mere observers of such aspersions on non-Western people. They have the opportunity to analyze cultural systems of representation and can unearth the histories and formative stages of such systems. However, neither theorists nor children's book reviewers typically challenge stereotypic characterization, so one can't help wondering what literary theories are circulating and being put to use. What questions are being asked (or not asked) about a novel's misrepresentations of history? What lies behind a writer's assaults upon a group's values and identity? These concerns will be taken up in an-

other section, but first I think it is important to start with a novelist's own imaginative universe. Especially in trauma-producing narratives (such as racist tales passing as hybrid), a carefully-designed edifice invites the reader to enter. An author's tone and thematic interests need exposure, not just the critic's.<sup>8</sup>

### *Zulu Dog and the South African Friendship Theme*

Anton Ferreira's *Zulu Dog* is a recent example of an imperialist subtext in an interracial friendship narrative. I use it here as my primary case study on friendship and white redemption. Typically in South African fiction, interracial camaraderie has revolved around either converting and redeeming a racist person, or presenting a commentary on a so-called "lost race." In the latter case, the friendship will usually end in tragedy for a Black character, and by extension, the whole African population is presumed "lost" (read: "primitive").

*Zulu Dog* provokes the same ominous question we connect with Nazi history: How did an unfathomably inhuman mass consciousness come about? Taking a long view of apartheid (meaning, ironically, "separate *development*"), we find a more structured racist program after the National Party's success in the 1948 election. But apartheid's essential elements were already ingrained in the South African colonized world. From the first Dutch settlers in 1652 to the mounting British presence after 1805, the rapid takeover left indigenous Africans with little chance of remaining autonomous. They were seen as primitive, forever outside any conceivable connection with civic society (with property ownership, enfranchisement, education, and even the details of family life). However, as slaves, peons, and servants, Blacks were more valuable than agricultural and mineral resources. Absolute control over the indigenes was never in doubt after South Africa's considerable "valuables" came into view.

In some ways, *Zulu Dog* echoes this long history. It downgrades Blacks to the point where their participation in modern society seems unimaginable. Structurally, the novel's depiction of racist attitudes builds to a dramatic point, and then those biases are regretted by the anti-Zulu characters. This change of heart signals an impending antiracist theme: apartheid supporters renounce their hostility and Zulus accept the belated signs of white contrition. However, within the plotline, we find continuous white-over-Black assumptions. A reader can anticipate a noble conversion, but a skewed treatment of postapartheid

history undercuts the veracity of that conversion. According to Ferreira's story, the postapartheid police demand bribes, officials turn a blind eye on drug trafficking, the legal system is largely helpless, and school budgets are looted for the exclusive benefit of lawmakers' children. The most overt racist statements (e.g., Mandela's appointees described as a "lazy, corrupt bunch of thieves and idiots" [94]) are voiced by an "unreliable" narrator, but the narrative line itself functions as an accurate report, and that line presents a picture of perpetual Black malfeasance.

A journalist with the Reuters news service for the last twenty years,<sup>9</sup> Anton Ferreira makes an explicit point in *Zulu Dog* about the importance of friendship, but builds the case for conflict and white supremacy by maligning traditional African culture and self-rule. "Granny," a spirit medium, represents the traditional "African mind." She talks with ancestors, fears dwarfs, and concocts medicinal remedies from herbs and decaying animal parts (147-8). She is kind to her youngest grandson, Vusi Ngugu, but he avoids her "hut" because of the "gray bones clinking softly, . . . [the] empty eye sockets, strips of dried animal skin curling in weird spirals, . . . [and] the array of monkey skulls" (25-6). Granny's spiritualism, according to the text, is used on behalf of both "healing and hexing" (27), and the family shares most of her beliefs.

The novel also describes Zulu hunting practices, with Vusi explaining their importance to the twelve-year-old white protagonist, Shirley Montgomery:

If you are a man, you hunt. To be a real Zulu, like my father, like my brother Petrus, you hunt. If you are not a good hunter, there's something wrong with you. . . . The very first Zulus were hunters, and we have to keep the old ways. We have always lived by hunting. You know, if a man is not a good hunter, he can't find a good wife. (135-6)

Vusi has learned all this from his father, who comments on his son's rescue of a wounded pup: "Maybe a three-legged dog is useless, but at least Vusi is showing the right Zulu instincts. Keeping the dog shows that he must be keen to start hunting" (64). Father's hunting, however, turns to poaching, a sign that "old ways" and illegal ways are not always differentiated. And if "Zulu instinct" has produced this lawlessness, then Zulus *are* a threat to their neighbors—the very argument used by apartheid supporters. But a serious implication lurks in these

scenes, the insinuation that “primitive” retentions characterize modern African communities.

Political commentary is quite explicit when the novel depicts Vusi’s formal education. The schoolhouse is a two-room shack with children on the floor, rat holes in the walls, and leaks in the roof (66, 68). As for Black school officials, they are a self-serving lot:

Not much government spending has reached Msinga, she [the teacher] thinks. The educational budget is all spent in the cities, where the children of the government officials go to school. The people in the countryside have to make do with what’s left over, if anything. (70)

In this passage the longstanding practice of white bureaucratic privilege has been arbitrarily superimposed upon a new Black government. Under apartheid, Black children were specifically deprived of their rightful schooling, and now we are to believe that the Black majority will follow a similar path. Is the author suggesting that political corruption is universal, or that apartheid’s abuses should simply be absolved?

Black officialdom not only takes unfair advantage in this story; it also fosters criminality. The police protect marijuana growers who kill each other and “think nothing of [it]” (72) and shield lawbreakers who force taxi drivers (like Vusi’s father) to shut down their taxi routes or face death. Such troubles pile up in Vusi’s family while Shirley Montgomery’s father rails against the Black government’s failures: “We give Mandela the country, and now he wants to murder us all” (54); “Look what a mess they’ve made since 1994. The hospitals don’t work, the standard of schooling is appalling, there’s no law and order whatsoever. They’re not like us” (94). Mr. Montgomery changes his tune when Vusi’s dog rescues Shirley from a leopard, but the novel’s allegations of systemic evils in Black officialdom are never contradicted. Nor are the white farmer’s boasts called into question: “We whites brought civilization to Africa . . . [We] earned this land. We brought the railways, the roads, the gold mines. If it wasn’t for us, . . . this would still be a continent of peasants” (123).

In winding down the novel, the author contrives a paternalistic plot resolution. As a reward for Shirley’s rescue, the Ngugus receive jobs and lodgings on the Montgomerys’ land, ensuring their safety from murderous Black entrepreneurs and providing the farmer with a fresh group of laborers. But is this renewed dependency for Blacks a pro-

gressive change? The seeming reciprocity demands little of Mr. Montgomery. It means for the Ngugus serious losses: their economic autonomy, self-reliance, entrepreneurial opportunity, community ties, and family unity (Granny is left behind in the old location). In this novel, neither safety nor civil rights abides in the “New” South Africa—a nation where there is virtually no law to which to appeal. Images of a dysfunctional Black government are presented without any contrasting facts or accurate context, cultural negatives have no explanation, spiritualism is deemed foolish and barbarous, and marriage is “slavery” (as Shirley assumes in reaction to the bride price custom [137]). Hunting is contributing to the decimation of elephant herds, and guns are a mounting danger since so many were “left over from southern Africa’s decades of guerrilla war” (151). That this war was a liberation struggle—a challenge to apartheid’s tyranny and persecution of Blacks—is never even implied. Such an omission leaves readers with a blame-the-victim storyline.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the Ngugus end up with what is essentially recolonized status. The family has no real option but to come under the authority of those who have despised the democratically elected Black government. The landlord will control the details of the family’s survival, and their active role in economic and civic life will likely be reduced. In psychological terms, this resembles an “adaptive inferiority” response—a chronic submissiveness that is often seen after repeated injustices. The transfer to the Montgomery farm suggests a self-defeating solution; the offers made by Shirley’s father will require adjustments that cannot be expected to facilitate independent living or advancement; and the forces underlying poverty and crime will be ill-defined and, consequently, not resisted. The climax in *Zulu Dog* reinforces the colonialist propaganda that says passivity and acquiescence are the best Blacks can expect from themselves. But the Black child, writes Adelbert Jenkins, needs institutions having “the specific value of helping a child become more self-aware—as someone who is an active, choosing being” (47). With such an education, the child finds “ways of interacting with the world that will enable the child to throw off the negative connotations offered by a racist society” (47). In contrast, the retrogressive scheme of the white landowner represents submission on the part of the parents rather than freedom of choice and an assertive expression of equality.

This paternalistic resolution is inherently political, since paternalism uses a model of benign familial relations to mask political and



economic inequality. With unequal relations of power, exploitation is readily achievable but needs a face-saving tactic. Thus, the dominant group insists that all is done in the best interests of the dependent group, a process that invokes a familiar myth: the “white man’s burden.”

Another instance of white atonement is embedded in Elana Bregin’s *The Red-Haired Khumalo* (1994). This novel also features a change-of-heart scenario in a postapartheid setting, but there are few signs that the author has “moved on.” Instead she contrives Black characters to use as her apartheid-driven mouthpiece. On the surface, various characters atone for former racist statements, but Bregin’s notion of a New South Africa includes *equal* Black and white complicity in the horrors of apartheid, plus an insistence that Blacks relinquish any bitterness about the murder of their children at the hands of the government. To me it is unfathomable that friendship or reconciliation could spring from these premises. Yet Bregin’s prize-winning book attracts American critics as enthusiastic as those in South Africa. (This provocative assessment may be correct: “Although America’s apartheid may not be rooted in the legal strictures of its South African relative, it is no less effective in perpetuating racial inequality . . .” [Massey, qtd. in Schutte 336]).

Turning to the “lost race” version of friendship stories, Lesley Beake’s *A Cageful of Butterflies* (1989, 1995) is a revealing example. It pairs a young deaf-mute (Mponyane) with a sickly, prejudiced white child. Although a tolerable relationship slowly evolves, it is not lasting since Mponyane surrenders his own life to save his drowning companion. This loss of life is depicted as a great joy and triumph, a newborn freedom for Mponyane since he won’t be pestered any longer with his traumatic deaf-muteness. Mponyane’s story conforms to the Darwinian principle that some folks are fit for survival and some unfit. In fact the novel as a whole conforms to this principle, inferring that Blacks in general are unfit for the fast track.

Starting with this survival-of-the-fittest conception, the author then spins out various strands of apartheid mythology. For example, people from the Black “Homeland” love their servitude as workers on white-owned farms and have no inkling that an organized Black farm movement is agitating for a change in the system. Additionally, the author works with symbols to suggest a dying, completely dysfunctional Black community. Mponyane’s mother is dead, his father is dead, and the child sees everyone in his community as “left-overs” (90). Accordingly,

their tragic lives mean that “nature” has ordained their troubles, just as “nature” has ordained their ongoing colonized status. Admittedly, the white family has problems too, but a white-over-Black hierarchy is never questioned. By featuring a Black, sacrificial, child-saint, the tale masks the injustices that call for exposure and protest: the discriminatory farm labor policies, the lack of health care for Mponyane, the lack of education, the government’s wholesale removal of Blacks to a group of bleak, infertile wastelands (“Homelands”). Even if child readers have some information about these pressing issues, it is doubtful they will escape the narrative’s heavy, emotional manipulation.

All these exercises in friendship are as traumatic as the apartheid history and consciousness they illustrate. The books are replete with “Black Peril” and “Lost World” myths, and serve as apologists for a system that unequivocally rejects citizenship rights for indigenous Africans. In a similar way, the American “frontier” story represents a mass approval of imperialist storytelling; as in Africa, the basic conflict involves land.

*The American “Frontier”:*

*The Second Bend in the River and Other Western Yarns*

Ann Rinaldi’s novel about the Shawnee chief Tecumseh, *The Second Bend in the River*, is my main focus as I consider imperialism and the “Westward Movement.” The novel’s extreme misuse of history is perhaps unique in the pioneer genre, unless we count the nineteenth-century dime novel. In fact, pulp fiction from the past—including its casts of savage, scalping Indians—has converged with modern literature without many dissenters. *The Second Bend* is an account of a bogus relationship between Rebecca Galloway and Tecumseh prior to the War of 1812. In her authors’s note, Rinaldi relates how her research led her to believe there was a romantic affair, but few scholars after the mid-1950s have given the tale any credence. Their research shows that Rebecca Galloway, in her eightieth year, contrived the story for her grandson.

At the outset, we learn that “[Indians] smashed babies against the trees” (3, 109, 110), and Rebecca wonders whether her four-year-old brother will “get to keep his brains” (4). We hear about Rebecca’s great-grandmother dying at Indian hands; about burned-out towns and men “all bloody and shot up” (3). We see First Nation converts to Christianity burned to death by their leaders (187). Besides the grisly

descriptions, Rinaldi offers impressions of settler attitudes vis-à-vis the land. She explains how the settlements were “improvements” because anything done by settlers “was an improvement over the wildness of the land” (2). According to Rebecca’s mother, her “father fought for this country in a most perilous way. It’s ours, every rock and stream of it” (24). But the fight referred to here is the Revolutionary War. So it is the British who are first perceived as owning the land, followed by the winners of the war, the Americans. If Native Americans ever resided in the Western Hemisphere, no one seems aware of it. “The Indians weren’t treated fairlike,” says Rebecca’s father (33), but this fairness issue is not supported by facts in the novel. Instead, Native Americans are the ones who are unfair, reneging on their promise to stop clubbing to death their prisoners of war.

Even after Rebecca has changed from a six-year-old Indian-hater to Tecumseh’s sixteen-year-old girlfriend, the novel’s historical validity does not improve. Unlike the actual record of Tecumseh’s policies, the account in the novel makes the Shawnee chief a promoter of white interests. He typically preaches nonresistance. He urges Indians to unite so the “[the whites] will negotiate with us in an honorable way” (107). This account is at odds with Tecumseh’s statement to his nephew, who by 1806 had become an agent of the Americans: “Indians and whites can *never* live in peace. They can only live close to one another if the Indian does what the white man wishes and moves aside when the white man stretches” (qtd. in Eckert 463). What the novel presents is not a credible picture of First Nations, but only familiar stereotypes, as when the Indiana governor has his aides “get five chiefs of the Sacs drunk” and hand over their land (155). When Tecumseh speaks of one specific treaty as destroying his people, the novelist assures readers that he had “no bitterness” on that account (64). Tecumseh’s appeasement has no explanation except his desire to “teach his people to be different” (110).

The alleged marriage proposal fizzles after Rebecca refuses to live with Tecumseh’s people, and he with hers. In explanation, Tecumseh recounts his obligations as a chief (256), while Rebecca is obsessed with Indian-hating: “Will my children be raised as little savages?” (245). “Will I have to become an Indian woman? Uncivilized?” (246). “I could not live like that” (253). So Rebecca marries her cousin and Tecumseh promises to “stay like the French black robes,” meaning celibate (257). Considering his two Shawnee ex-wives, this is an unlikely promise.

Rinaldi's Tecumseh is at variance with history, but quite in line with white popular culture. Following his actual death in the War of 1812, Tecumseh's popularity with whites rose dramatically. According R. David Edmunds,

[Tecumseh fit] the American conception of the noble savage . . . [And] like other American folk heroes much of the image is apocryphal. Contrary to popular belief, he was not a tall, lean man and his skin was not a lighter color than other Shawnees. Neither did he have a love affair with a frontier maiden, Rebecca Galloway. Yet all of the above have been attributed to him. . . . (Edmunds 189, 190)<sup>11</sup>

Such misrepresentations of Tecumseh and the Shawnees in general were apparently no problem for book reviewers, as they also saw no traumatic side effects in Kristiana Gregory's *The Legend of Jimmy Spoon* (1990).<sup>12</sup> Here Native Americans are again positioned as murderers and kidnappers of innocent whites. Specifically, Shoshonis lure a helpless pioneering child from his home and force him to serve as a replacement for a Shoshoni woman's dead son. The surrogate mother treats Jimmy kindly, but all the other Shoshonis are so consumed with race prejudice they can barely resist murdering him. In fact, the medicine man tries to kill him by treating his wounds with a method that will induce infection. As is typically the case in these frontier stories, few misdeeds are attached to the colonists. Readers will find nothing in Gregory's work about colonial soldiers throwing Native children into rivers, or chasing them into forests and shooting them when they return to beg for bread (Ferling 46). Instead, it is Shoshoni culture that is replete with cruel and cowardly features. It is standard policy, according to this novel, to abandon rather than assist people in trouble. It is true that the settlers also receive some criticism (e.g., they sell firearms), but the Shoshonis come across as utterly self-destructive and violence-prone.

To so malign an entire population's identity, and then expect the children of that group to be emotionally unaffected, is to deny the children as well as the group their humanity. There is the underlying assumption that all child readers are white, implying that children per se are white. Native children are erased, while at the same time they are the sworn enemies of the children in the mainstream society. This is a double-edged psychological assault.

In addition to the savage Indian, another popular stereotype is the notion of the vanishing Indian. William O. Steele was one of many

fiction writers who extolled the disappearance of First Nation peoples, as in his novel *The Buffalo Knife* (1952, 1990). Steele makes his point by letting a pioneer child speculate about the future:

Some day Americans would live there though. They had already run the British out of this country, just about, and some day the Indians would leave, too. Then men like his Uncle Az, the brave and reckless Long Hunters, would range all through that land and find the best places for people to settle and start new towns. (16)

Just where does Steele think the Indians will go? Apparently this is not to be fretted about. On the contrary, Steele's vanishing Indian scenario had apparently lost none of its appeal in 1990, when Harcourt Brace Jovanovich reissued the novel. Yet, what this author has suggested is essentially a human extermination program, one even less subtle than Rinaldi's forced removals of Native people in the early 1800s. For Native children, both the dispersals and the outright liquidations must constitute a veritable holocaust. For Euro-American readers, it's all a pleasurable adjunct to their games about cowboys and Indians. To so trivialize and misstate the historical record serves to displace actual Indianness, and this is, according to Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, the purpose of anti-Indianism: "To socially isolate, to expunge and expel, to fear and menace, to defame, and to repulse indigenous people" (*Anti-Indianism* 4). What Steele, Gregory, and Rinaldi circulate as fact-based history is really America congratulating itself. And to this end, Native tribal history is translated into a demonization of Native identity. Thus identity per se becomes "antithetical to the well-touted democratic ideals of the Founding Fathers . . . , in other words, Anti-American" (Cook-Lynn, *Anti-Indianism* 4).

The effect of this anti-American reputation on Native schoolchildren can only be imagined, but since students are encountering American history as a morality play, its imperialist insinuations are all the more insidious. This seems especially evident in *Zulu Dog* and *The Second Bend in the River* when their different characters speak essentially the same lines. "We earned this land. We brought the railways, the roads, the gold mines"; "[This] country . . . it's ours, every rock and stream of it." Wherever situated, colonists make mythical, self-congratulatory connections between themselves and the places they invade. They recognize only their own law as law. Moving to a different group of imperialist players, I turn now to British imperialism in one of its many guises in the Commonwealth: its denigrations of Indian history and culture.

*British Anti-Indian Traditions in Nothing to Remember*

Carry-overs from earlier British literary traditions are suggested in this tale of Indian immigrants and the Australian settler population. Author Julia Holland features a traumatized amnesia victim, a white Australian fourteen-year-old, and uses her experiences to mask a deeper and less obvious type of trauma: the effects that ensue from maligning an entire national culture (in this case Indian). By the author's attaching deep psychological wounds to the Euro-Australian character, the readers' sympathies easily build up around this sufferer, and her usefulness as a foil is barely noticed—her function as a distinct opposite to the allegedly “filthy,” “corrupt,” and “superstitious” people of India.

Holland mixes together her jaundiced view of India with a budding interracial romance. The White Australian (Lara) and the Indian immigrant (Rajiv) are teenagers acting out an essentially Eurocentric tale. The couple finds togetherness because Lara's amnesia makes her act “foreign,” while Rajiv seems less “foreign” as the result of Australian schooling and a professional biologist father. Lara expresses her isolation from white schoolmates: “Strangely enough they're more foreign to me than Sudarshan [Rajiv's sister]” (22). The Indian mother is a traditional religionist (read: superstitious), as well as a parent raising offspring in the allegedly sexist traditions of India. Rajiv refers to himself as “Westernized,” but at home he behaves with “Indian-style” arrogance, while Sudarshan avoids anything mentally challenging and worships her “superior” sibling.

We meet Lara four years after her amnesia-producing bicycle accident. The driver who ran over her is faking an identity as her aunt and keeping her largely confined to her living quarters (a way to prevent some passing image from jarring her memory and disrupting “Aunt Vee's” scam). Problems for the “Aunt” and the child become more and more complicated, but Holland is using this ingenious plot as a channel for both entertainment and her perceptions of Indian immigrants. Indian customs and ill-managed urbanization are among her targets, with incense-burning and the worship of Hindu gods being sure signs of superstition. Bombay represents homelessness, urban squalor, and political corruption. Rajiv explains for Lara that “India is crazy,” and while there is “colour and movement and noise” in this city, it is primarily a place full of “dirt, smells, poverty,” and “garbage in the gutters” (43). Moreover, “Indian politics is crazy.

There's still a lot of corruption'" (44). Rajiv assures Lara that his "future is definitely here [in Australia]," but sometime he will favor India with his presence. He will make "a difference somewhere it would really count" (120). India, it seems, has little to offer in return. The intercultural scenes are one-sided in their portraiture, especially in the way they emphasize (as colonizers often do) the uppityness of the colonized. Rajiv has a "formal and arrogant manner" (31); his "attitude makes me [Lara] feel like a mentally retarded beggar that has stumbled into the palace" (31); "he is regally dismissive of Sudarshan and me" (34). But despite these flaws, Lara helps her "Bird of Paradise" (92) unlearn his male chauvinism. Sudarshan and her mother remain in their predestined roles: laughing and gossiping with schoolmates or keeping watch over the apartment Lara dubs "an elegant Indian palace" (91). This lavishly decorated "palace" and its celebrations strike Lara as "exotic," "tantalizing," "mesmeri[c] to all my senses" (90).

Ironically, Holland includes a full-page lecture by Rajiv about the evils of stereotyping (64), yet India is seldom in the foreground without contradicting that lecture. Also, Rajiv explains ceremonies and symbols, but never seems to relate to them as if they were reasonable. Rather than expanding his cultural and intellectual life, his dual cultural experiences leave him with little more than Western preconceptions. Edward Said notes: "The written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of having excluded, displaced, and made supererogatory any such *real thing* as the 'Orient'" (qtd. in Childs/Williams 106).

But given Britain's long presence in India, it is not surprising that British grievances became quite specific. They included child-marriage, polygamy, purdah (the veiling and concealment of women), erotic art, religious festivals deemed licentious, and caste immobility (Parry 60). With this many culture shocks, Indians became (in common parlance) "niggers," a label attached to Africans as well. This hate-list may have something to do with the way British imperialist history lurks in the background of the novel. Holland apparently taps into the way "the British seem to have found Hinduism uniquely repugnant" (Parry 65), since she doesn't use her many references to Hinduism as an opportunity to introduce a more relativistic cultural perspective. Nor does she let her pair of cross-cultural lovers be mutually respectful of their cultural differences.

In the end, by cloaking her imperialist perspective Holland does not ease or erase the potential for trauma facing her Indian readers.

They may well conclude that visibility for an Indian is risky in European-controlled surroundings, and therefore “passing” (at least at a cultural level) is necessary. Like other kinds of deception, however, this one will likely spark anxiety, guilt, and alienation—the by-products of self-repudiation. Rajiv’s resolve to make his future “definitely here [in Australia]” is an assurance to his girlfriend that he will remain an invisible Indian. Then he expands on his ties with Australia by claiming that this is where one is no longer a stereotyped person. He rejoices in now being free to be an individual (63). These unctuous phrases suggest European narcissism behind a convenient Indian facade.

In choosing Indian culture as part of her subject matter, and failing to respect a self-contained India, Holland (who moved to Australia from England in 1990) lets her own East/West biases become transparent. In fact, colonialist authors are often saying more about themselves than about their targets: “What they did not know about India—and they knew very little—these writers guessed, and these guesses and half-truths uncover their obsessions . . .” (Parry 6). While such “half-truths” may resist correction, those who would unlearn them have this signpost: cultural practices and productions are “comprehensible only within the context of the economic, behavioral, and political forces of the culture from which they emerge . . .” (Cook-Lynn, *Why I Can’t* 77).

The next question, then, given half-truths and assaults on identity, concerns the role critical literary theory may be playing in their perpetuation. When Ansell-Pearson writes about the “worlds imperialism made,” he is indirectly posing this question: *Who* made them? Considering the output of today’s writers, one must wonder whether the theoretical side of literary criticism has provided faulty bearings.

### *Credible Theory or Premature Celebration?*

Can effective theory be ahistorical? Can lived experience be disregarded? Is “postcolonialism” misleading when it only serves to universalize European parochialism? Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s concern is with postcolonialism as a misnomer:

Naming the world as “post-colonial” is, from indigenous perspective, to name colonialism as finished business . . . [E]ven when they [the colonizers] have left formally, the institutions and legacy of colonialism have remained. Decolonization . . . involve[s] the



bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power. (98)

By adopting such a multidimensional conception of power and colonialism, one might hope that Eurocentric image-making would decline. But in the novels under discussion here, this has not occurred. And even an emphasis on transcultural friendship has not reduced the novelists' basic colonialist mindset. Instead, indigenous colonized groups have been continually portrayed as hugely inferior. Rinaldi sustains the notion that Native Americans were generally motivated by hostility, when in fact they were confronting systematic extermination and the vacant land myth. In the seventeenth century, John Locke had offered a colony-promoting definition of vacancy. One could equate, he said, "a rational way of life with industry and the system of private property, conditions which were not satisfied by the populations of the Americas, thereby rendering their land liable for classification as vacant" (qtd. in Ansell-Pearson, et al. 14).

When today's novelists still invoke this "vacant land" myth, they find support not in history, but in "historicism." Hayden White charges New Historicism with "leav[ing] intact no theoretical basis on which to call to account even the most spurious historical revisions" (qtd in Veese, x). New Historicists sometimes go so far as to make historicity itself an open question, but Anne McClintock sees historical specificity as vital, noting how the "panorama of the horizon [can] become . . . so expansive that international imbalances in power remain effectively blurred" (86). Nyi Osundare is sardonic as he describes New Historicists: theorists seeing only "ruptured continuities in which cause may be effect, effect cause . . . [and] the present derives its force from the unpastness of the past" (2). In its defense, H. Aram Veese points to the way New Historicism encourages attention to "the sheer intricacy and unavailability of exchanges between culture and power" (xi). But this could be said about well-wrought historical projects in general.

What can reasonably pass for history is a continuing subject of debate among novel writers and critics. In Rinaldi's project, the author's note is used to explain how the novelist handles the past. But what actually surfaces is the way she has anglicized the record. For material about the Tecumseh/Rebecca ties, she leans heavily upon *Old Chillicothe*, a book by Rebecca's myth-spreading relative, William Galloway. Rinaldi mentions the adult novel, *Panther in the Sky*, but ignores the author's warning that the Galloway account of a romance is a report he has "long found suspect" (Thom 655). Although Rinaldi claims

that “Everything about Tecumseh [is taken from history]” (271), she is producing primarily a pseudohistory. Even the Galloways’ own chronicle shows Tecumseh’s alleged visits as not occurring until Rebecca’s sixteenth year (Gilbert 194); this makes the childhood interactions with Tecumseh (the first two hundred pages of Rinaldi’s novel) pure fantasy.<sup>13</sup>

Besides the history/historicism debate, there are also arguments about the viability of binarism as a category of inquiry. In a world of shifting power relations, binaries remind us that certain conditions are more salient than others. In particular, politically important binaries (Black/white, colonizer/colonized, male/female) are often essential to group-specific arguments. They help one avoid trivializing a people’s history, locale, aesthetics, and relationships. No matter how thorough one’s attempted homogenization of human history, circumstances that overlap do not all carry the same weight or stem from the same material conditions. In *Zulu Dog* the handling of school budgets by the pre- and post-1994 regimes is presented as the same, whereas the actual difference in scale was enormous. By precluding a discussion of binaries (the way difference is particularized), one may end up precluding an examination of sites of struggle (Quayson 86).

Similarly, essentialism is defined and valued differently in the colonized and noncolonized worlds. To the colonized, it does not imply an absolute, unchanging status, but refers to developing a self-contained culture, a group consciousness, a strategy for enhancing the prospects for self-determination. Essential characteristics are the details of identity and shared experience, communicating group interests and communal histories (Smith 73-4). There is also a spiritual factor:

The significance of place, of land, of landscape, of other things in the universe, in defining the very essence of a people, makes for a very different rendering of the term essentialism as used by indigenous peoples. (Smith 74)

This indigenous perspective contradicts the assertion that essentialism is a self-defeating “political trap,” as claimed by Bill Ashcroft in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (214). Or that the colonizer/colonized binary encourages “cultural schizophrenia . . . [an] obsession with identity . . . and nationalism” (Ashcroft, et al., *Key Concepts* 24). Such put-downs only reinforce the *need* for “essentialism” if self-definition is to be sustained.<sup>14</sup>

In children's literature, the meanings attached to this terminology are highly varied. Some writers see the term postcolonialism as practically the same as anticolonialism, "anti" being used to mean that a European-derived perspective is rejected as the one, all-important worldview. At the other end of the spectrum, postcolonialism points to the virtual erasure of such opposing forces as the colonizer and colonized, and politically-resonant categories are seen as irrelevant. Victor Ramraj admits that in an apartheid-ruled society practically everything has a political meaning, but he nonetheless feels that conceptualizing an imperial-colonial past leads to a simplistic interpretation of the postcolonial situation. It overlooks reciprocal relationships (256).

As already suggested, this attempt to eclipse an imperialistic, material past takes too little notice of differences in scale. While the human condition looks quite uniform across a vast mortal landscape, history has not shown political realities to be consistently reciprocal, mutual, or fair. The "commonalities" that Ramraj foregrounds are hardly common under wartime conditions. "Colonial" is still a relevant concept in the United States because groups that were both exploited and warred against (e.g., Blacks, Native Americans, Asians, and Latino/as) are still inhibited or incapacitated by internal colonization. With this in mind, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn calls "postcolonial" a term that is "simplistic and incongruous." While it connotes a newborn independence for legally-defined colonies, "such independence has not occurred for Indian tribal people." Their lands, says Cook-Lynn, "are still held in colonial 'trust' status by the U.S. government, and this contributes to economic dysfunction" (*Anti-Indianism* 181). Postcolonialism's emphasis on "ambivalent" or "liminal" spaces (where cultural conditions change) hardly applies to First Nations and their long experience of persecution.

Turning to the input of political philosophers, we find a different set of "universalist" versus "particularist" arguments. Taking an absolutist position on "the good life," scholars such as Steven C. Rockefeller and Michael Walzer see as inimical to democracy the "minority" demand for recognition. They regard such demands as casting doubt upon "liberalism . . . [as] a universal culture," one based upon a "universal human identity" (Rockefeller 90, 88). Rockefeller explains that "to elevate ethnic identity . . . to a position equal in significance to, or above, a person's universal identity is to weaken the foundations of liberalism and to open the door to intolerance" (88). What he fails to

acknowledge is the four hundred years of *non*recognition and *mis*recognition that still call for correction. Europeans and Americans have had centuries to do that corrective work, but instead they worry about how minorities may be capitalizing on their disadvantages, pressing their vested interests, or seeking cultural survival. “The democratic way,” writes Rockefeller, “conflicts with any . . . absolute right to cultural survival.” Groups must avoid “directionless relativism.” They must abandon whatever is inconsistent with “equality and the . . . experimental search for truth” (92). This is impressive rhetoric, but how can survival be so easily trivialized? And how is “equality” represented by an arbitrary dismissal of someone else’s “relativism”? Yet Rockefeller views his liberal culture as neutral: “It promotes tolerance . . . in a way that no other culture does” (90). Ironically, only the feeblest hint of “tolerance” is visible in this concession: “self-determination” is allowable for a “group such as a Stone Age tribal people in New Guinea” (Rockefeller 89)!

Michael Walzer views multiculturalism as acceptable in some spheres (e.g., where schoolchildren study Others), but he also worries about ethnic separatism. “We would have to curtail [individual] rights in crucial ways . . . if we were to treat our minorities as endangered species in need of official sponsorship and protection” (103). What’s missing in this argument is some awareness of how the Fourteenth Amendment was *designed* to provide official protection for minorities. When these political commentators speak of threats to “crucial rights,” they seem oblivious to a basic means for reconciling social rights and social realities—namely, the Constitution’s “equal protection of the laws.” For our purposes, the point about equal protection resides in its potential protection of schoolchildren. Monocultural schooling, with its implicit biases, interferes with such protection.<sup>15</sup> When a teaching mode is familiar to children with cultural capital, and unfamiliar to the rest, the disproportionate progress of one group is assured. In other words, the school becomes the instrument of social reproduction (Myhill 21).

Critical social theory takes up this important business, distinguishing commonalities from highly uncommon conditions. While it recognizes how postcolonial theorists have made some inroads in dismantling old certainties (e.g., white supremacy and male domination), critical social theory questions postcolonialism’s effectiveness in promoting transcultural environments. Critical social theory takes an unambiguous stance in its opposition to Eurocentrism and aligns it-

self with the sociology of knowledge—the role power plays in defining whose “knowledge” will be counted. Patricia Hill Collins explains how critical social theory “grapple[s] with the central questions facing groups of people differently placed in specific political, social, and historic contexts [characterized by injustice]” (xiv). The reference to “groups” is a key point, since groups consistently encounter discrimination. In the novels by Holland, Rinaldi, and Ferreira, individuals are central to plot development, but the authors *generalize* about groups. “Rajiv has been brought up as a typical Indian male” (Holland 38). “[Tecumseh] is civilized and friendly [in contrast to other Shawnees]” (Rinaldi 8). “Vusi is showing the right Zulu instincts [related to hunting]” (Ferreira 64). In *Zulu Dog*, shooting every creature in sight is a Zulu’s passion.

In addition to inquiring into definitions of knowledge, Collins suggests that separating epistemology from issues of power will only privilege elites (xii). Children’s authors enjoy that knowledge-producing privilege and power. Critics and academics occupy a favored position as they disseminate knowledge. Their choices will either expand or contract a child’s chances for a multicultural, anti-imperialist heritage. “If colonialism survives in the fiction,” write Hunt and Sands, “it could also be argued that colonial blindness is still with us in the criticism of children’s literature” (48).

Centuries of misreporting about group identity have left their mark. Imperialistic texts are jazzed up to look like art, when actually they border on xenophobia, and white supremacy and the appropriation of lands and labor are nonchalantly accepted as the West’s proper legacy. When presented in books in their nineteenth-century guise, these insidious notions are sometimes examined by scholars. However, the new imperialistic stories continue to pile up and receive surprisingly little attention. Perhaps one key to this problem is to recognize that literary criticism, trauma studies, and social/political history are part of the same intellectual tapestry. Blending these elements in our practice, we may produce surprising results. In any case, Robert Coles forewarns us that children know when we fail them: “Why do we so often assume that it takes ten or twenty years for children to begin to understand exactly what it is that works for or against them in the world?” Children know whether or not “the political order is just or fearful or harmful or crooked to the core”—whether people “can be counted on” (27).

## Notes

I am indebted to Melissa Thompson and Mahoumbah Klobah for helpful feedback on this essay.

<sup>1</sup>The term “trauma” is used here to denote a long-lasting and damaging psychological condition. In particular it connects with problems in identity formation, since children subjected to hostile cultural environments or the white supremacy myth face severe identity challenges. Traumatization is a possible result since nonwhite identity is being inherently threatened.

<sup>2</sup>The term “internal colony” denotes a forced subordination that includes bureaucratic control. Through arranging and maintaining segregated spaces for the subordinate group, bureaucratic control becomes easier. This dynamic is especially noticeable in the current number of segregated schools. In 1998, 75.6 percent of Latinos/Latinas attended predominantly segregated schools; in 2004, more than 70 percent of Black students attended such schools. Both groups live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (44% and 33% respectively), and they study in substandard schools (in terms of class size, curriculum, building safety, student health, and more). (See Goode 4, 5). Additionally, “tracking” arrangements (grouping students to reduce the range of achievement in any one group) signal internal colonization, since the tracks are racially disproportional. Studies show the lowest social and economic groups placed on the lowest track, although this type of discrimination is unconstitutional. (See Wheelock x; Goodlad 152.) The 1954 *Brown* decision makes segregation illegal on the grounds that it “may affect [children’s] minds and hearts in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”

<sup>3</sup>Thousands of Black schoolchildren marched, boycotted, and otherwise agitated against the apartheid government. In Soweto in 1976, police killed a thirteen-year-old; by February 1977, 575 protesters had been killed, including 134 young people under the age of eighteen. By 1987, the government admitted that 13,300 people had been detained under emergency regulations, a high proportion of whom were children.

<sup>4</sup>Until its termination at the end of the 1980s, *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin* fulfilled the need for critiques on imperialist and racist books (as well as homophobic and sexist works). Since that time, no other publication has systematically filled this important role, although some anthologies have partially filled the gap (e.g., Violet J. Harris’s *Teaching Multicultural Literature in Grades K-8* [1993], and Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale’s *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children* [1992]). Such works, however, become inevitably outdated as the outpouring of new books continues.

<sup>5</sup>Incursions into the Ohio Valley were rationalized by the American government in specific terms. Being heavily in debt, the government “saw the lands in Ohio as a source of revenue. . . . [O]fficials hoped to sell parts of the Ohio to settlers and land speculators, and to use other sections as military bounty lands for veterans of the American Revolution. They argued that the Indians had no legitimate claims to the region. . . .” However, “[T]reaties were signed under extremely dubious circumstances. . . . [and] most Shawnees regarded them as a travesty” (Edmunds 27).

<sup>6</sup>Colonialism and imperialism are commonly used synonymously, although imperialism is the term often applied to the whole colonial structure—an empire’s array of countries, relationships, political controls, etc. Colonialism involves the domination of one group over another, or over culturally unrelated groups.

<sup>7</sup>Hybridity refers to a mutual, transcultural condition, but as Leela Ghandi notes, “to retain any seriously political meaning, it must first concede that for some oppressed peoples, in some circumstances, the fight is simply not over” (that is, the West is still “the privileged meeting ground for all ostensibly cross-cultural conversations”) (Ghandi 136).

<sup>8</sup>The selection of the Ferreira, Holland, and Rinaldi novels as my primary references is based in part on their common imperialistic perspective and the way they all utilize interracial couples to mask that perspective. The cross-cultural relationships serve to

contradict and soften plotlines that are a blend of hostility, disrespect, and condescension toward non-Westerners. Additionally, these books represent what I see as a publishing trend. That is, the sheer quantity of such narratives brings the white supremacy myth to a higher level of institutionalization. Moreover, the traumatic ramifications extend to a wide child audience—to children of African and Indian descent, whether in the US, the UK, the Caribbean, or other regions. Concerning the Rinaldi novel, it is a particularly good case study, representing as it does an extreme misrepresentation of history, plus a theme that is ubiquitous in historical fiction: First Nation peoples treated as brutal enemies in a so-called vacant land. Finally, these novels are not about the psychological violence that occurred in the past, violence that today's writers remember and reshape. They constitute an instance of psychological violence *right now*.

<sup>9</sup>Journalism would seem like a fruitful training ground for a novelist, but the biases in *Zulu Dog* raise doubts. Western journalists' depictions of Africa have been presented in Milton Allimadi's *The Hearts of Darkness*, a study pinpointing the way respected newspapers such as the *New York Times* have been apologists for the apartheid government and other imperialist strongholds.

<sup>10</sup>Ferreira's author's note extends his distorted historical coverage. For example, he speaks about "chaos in black-ruled countries to the north" (xi), but fails to mention the explicit government policy to destabilize those neighboring states. He refers to a Black-ruled nation with weapons in the "hands of criminals . . . [and] human life . . . regarded as cheap, expendable" (xi), but there is no mention of the apartheid regime's systematic assassinations, forced removals of whole communities, and the decimation of family life under pass laws and racial category rules. Book critics have, nonetheless, been well satisfied with Ferreira's "glorious description of, as well as valuable insight into, a part of the world that probably has never hit the radar screen of most young readers" (*Kirkus* 1127).

<sup>11</sup>Such misleading treatments of history have been common in textbooks. James Loewen notes that "American Indians have been the most lied-about subset of our population" (99). Even the Anglo/Indian wars are described in textbooks without the presence of the Indians! (119).

<sup>12</sup>Reviews typically praised Rinaldi's research skills. Writing in the *School Library Journal*, Carrie Schadle calls *The Second Bend in the River* "carefully researched" (126). Reacting to this claim, Melissa Kay Thompson takes Schadle to task for simply reiterating the novelist's attitudes: "[T]he critic is as patronizing and as lacking in integrity with respect to the historical record as the author" (366).

<sup>13</sup>In a biography by Allen W. Eckert that is cited by Rinaldi, Eckert disclaims his previous treatment of the romantic Galloway myth: "To [my] chagrin [I discovered] that the supposed romance . . . was a whole-cloth fabrication" (748). Other biographers take the same position. Bil Gilbert calls the myth "an awful example of a ridiculous fiction being treated as fact" (196). R. David Edmunds calls Rebecca's romantic fantasy "so patently fictitious that it taxes the credulity of all but the most gullible adherents of nineteenth-century romanticism . . ." (218).

<sup>14</sup>In land-rights litigation, courts have depended upon "essentialist" definitions of identity. Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani comment: "The integrity of the Subject may have been exposed as a ruse of bourgeois ideology . . . but law still operates as though this were not the case." They suggest that it's "not so much that anti-essentialist conceptions of identity are reactionary, as that, so long as other conceptions of identity . . . [are] in the world, we necessarily need to engage them" (301).

<sup>15</sup>Public schools have an obligation to create a culturally unbiased curriculum, since children are legally forced to attend school (or have equivalent schooling). The creation of "an appropriate and reasonable [educational] program" is therefore a necessity (Hughes and Hughes 152). One cannot require participation by children and then not act accountably toward them. Were it otherwise, a child would face a no-win situation.

Echoing the *Brown* decision, John and Mary Hughes note that an inappropriate curriculum may have consequences that neither schools nor parents can countervail (152). (A racist program would be an example.)

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