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INTRODUCTION

Just as the development of publishing for children in Europe coincided with the heyday of European imperialism, so contemporary English-language children’s literature is produced in nations marked by their histories as imperial powers or former colonies. Moreover, the political instabilities of the post-Cold War period have given rise to mass migrations of refugee populations fleeing conflict, poverty and oppression. Given that children’s texts both reflect and promote cultural values and practices, it is inevitable that they disclose conceptions of and attitudes to race, ethnicity, colonialism and postcolonialism, responding to the discourses and practices of the societies where they are produced.

It is not, however, the case that when colonial regimes come to an end, or when ethnic conflicts are resolved, children’s texts are necessarily free of the ideological freight of those earlier times. Roald Dahl’s representation of the Oompa-Loompas in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), for instance, accords with colonial discourses informed by oppositions between civilized and savage. Whereas Willy Wonka is knowing, resourceful and powerful, the Oompa-Loompas are childlike and dependent, relying on Willy Wonka’s benevolence when they are transported from their homeland to work for cacao beans in his chocolate factory (Bradford, 2001a). At the time Dahl’s novel was published, immigration was a highly contested social issue in Britain: the ‘Notting Hill riots’ had occurred in 1958, and in 1962 the Conservative government passed the Commonwealth Immigration Act, which sought to limit the number of immigrants to Britain from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent. Dahl’s portrayal of the Oompa-Loompas is oblivious to the wider implications of its representation of a group of immigrant workers exploited by a factory owner. As anyone knows who lives in a postcolonial society or in a culture formerly marked by racialized inequality, habits of thought and valuing persist over many generations, even when they have been superseded by political and cultural change.

A commonly expressed fallacy in children’s literature criticism is that older texts, many of which accept that the value of human beings is determined by their racial origins, are merely works of their time, as though the authors of these texts were no more than conduits of prevailing cultural norms. As the historian Inga Clendinnen notes, ‘the “men of their time” fiction is always a fiction’ (1999, p. 86). For despite the potency of what Michel Foucault refers to as a
'régime of truth', the 'system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements' (Foucault, 1980, pp. 131, 133) whereby societies control and order what is deemed to be true, it is also the case that individuals and groups are not bound by dominant discourse as by a straitjacket but are capable of scepticism or resistance. For this reason, texts sharing a common provenance are liable to differ widely in relation to the thematics, representational modes and discursive features which characterize their treatment of race. Moreover, texts frequently manifest tensions between discursive regimes; for instance, discourses of Christianity which propounded the doctrine of the fatherhood of God were often at odds with colonial discourses which emphasized the inferiority of black races. Such tensions, which manifest themselves in textual contradictions, are indicative of anxieties which disturb the appearance of imperial certainty.

**Race and Children's Literature**

The concept of race – the classification of humans into distinct types ordered by physical appearance and genetics – emerged during the later Middle Ages and developed alongside the rise of European imperialism. Like 'race', 'racism' is a slippery and contested term. Graham Huggan (2007, p. 14) describes the connections between the two as follows:

race is a phantom theory, founded on the imagined existence of genetically 'deficient' human descent groupings; racism, by contrast, is an empirically verifiable practice, based on an attribution of ineradicable differences that justifies the exploitation, exclusions, or elimination of the people assigned to these 'inferior' groups.

As European powers established colonies in the New World, they sought to distinguish themselves from the various indigenous peoples who occupied territory appropriated to serve the various purposes of the imperial project. Discourses of race were also used to justify the institutionalization of slavery in the late sixteenth century as pseudo-scientific arguments were marshalled to demonstrate that there existed a 'natural' hierarchy of worth which held true across European powers and their colonies. By the nineteenth century it was generally accepted that this hierarchy comprised three major races: white, yellow and black, with white at the apex. After Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859, the concept of a hierarchy of races was complicated by the application of principles of natural selection, which implied that superior, white races might be contaminated through contact with black people or, conversely, that the inferiority of black races might be 'bred out' through intermarriage with white people. Another strand of race theory argued that 'primitive' races such as Australian Aborigines were doomed to extinction, being unable to compete with the 'civilized' white race.
Colonial texts for children are informed by these concepts and disclose the tensions which surround them. Emilia Marryat's *Jack Stanley; or, The Young Adventurers* (1882) relies on a storyline featuring a young Englishman who sails for New Zealand in search of the man who reduced his family to poverty. The novel's representation of Maori characters in New Zealand is shaped by unease about natives who adopt European practices:

> It seemed strange to [Jack Stanley] every now and then to meet face to face with a native New Zealander mixing with the English settlers. Some of these Maoris were dressed in their native mat, and looked picturesque though filthy, whilst others had quite destroyed all interest in their appearance by adopting European dress, in which they looked awkward and ridiculous.

(Marryat, 1882, pp. 68–9)

Jack's preference for 'picturesque' Maori who maintain their traditional practices ('dressed in their native mat') over those who adopt European clothing is based on a sense of the rightness of hierarchies of race, which are destabilized when, in Homi Bhabha's terms, the colonial subject is 'almost the same, but not quite' (1994, p. 86), as the colonizer. When Maori seek to become like white people, they disclose their inferiority, looking 'awkward and ridiculous'. A key property of civilized white society is that its members are capable of progressing toward prosperity and well-being; indeed, the novel's narrative is structured by such a progression as Jack experiences a transition from poverty to wealth. Like other native populations, the Maori of *Jack Stanley* are incapable of a similar shift, since they are consigned to the lower reaches of the hierarchy of races, condemned to remain forever in a position of inferiority.

> Within the category of black races as imagined in *Jack Stanley*, there exist degrees of blackness and hence of value. In this novel, as in many colonial texts, Australian Aborigines are regarded as only just human. Jack is told that Aborigines are quite different from Maori, being 'little removed from the lower animals – utterly mindless' (Marryat, 1882, p. 255), whereas Maori are said to exhibit similarities to white people in 'the formation of the skull; in other words, they show likeness to the Caucasians' (p. 256). The inconsistency of the text's treatment of natives is striking; on the one hand, those Maori who attempt to adopt European practices are exposed as inauthentic; on the other hand, Maori are more like Europeans than other black races according to the principles of phrenology. By projecting its unease onto the Maori and their 'awkward and ridiculous' appearance, the text covers over the epistemic awkwardness of its representation of 'native New Zealanders' who are like white people but who must not look like them.

Contemporary texts are not immune from a tendency to fall back on the racialized hierarchies they ostensibly contest. Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* sequence, which commenced with *Noughts & Crosses* (2001), thematizes race relationships through its depiction of a dystopian, near-future Britain...
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in which the dominant race, the Crosses, are black while the noughts, formerly slaves of the Crosses and now subsisting as an underclass excluded from economic and educational opportunities, are white (the distinction between upper-case for Crosses and lower for noughts denotes the value attributed to the former). The storyline of *Noughts & Crosses* is organized around a romantic relationship involving the novel's two first-person narrators: Sephy, a Cross girl who is the daughter of a prominent politician, and Callum, a nought boy.

In the world of *Noughts & Crosses* the colour divide between Crosses and noughts effects a reversal in which blacks are oppressors and whites are powerless. Characters who negotiate between the two groups, such as the mixed-race teacher Mr Jason, and Callum's older sister Lynette (who had a romantic relationship with a Cross and was beaten by nought men), are tortured, self-hating figures. By mapping the power relationships of Crosses and noughts onto practices and histories which have privileged Europeans over their non-white others, the novel reinstalls those relationships and normalizes them. In a further echo of colonial discourses Sephy and Callum are treated as exceptional figures, starkly different from their families and friends in their refusal to accede to cultural norms, and in this way they echo the exceptional figures who crop up in colonial texts: black characters who function as loyal servants and devoted protectors of their white employers or owners; white characters who 'go native', aligning themselves with their racialized others; and (importantly for this novel) characters involved in interracial relationships proscribed by dominant (white) cultures. The effect of the representation of Sephy and Callum as exceptional figures is to accentuate the normalcy of racist practices and attitudes and the fixity of cultural formations.

Although the narration alternates between the perspectives of Sephy and Callum, this strategy does not enable dialogue between cultures, histories or identities because such factors are subordinated to the novel's focus on the romantic relationship between the two and on their status as 'star-crossed lovers'. The broadly drawn contrasts between the two characters and their families are metonymic of the divided society which comprises the novel's setting. Thus, Callum and his family - his embittered parents, radicalized brother and traumatized sister - are set against Sephy's wealthy and materialistic family, where her father is unfaithful to her alcoholic mother and Sephy and her sister bicker incessantly. When Callum's father and brother join a terrorist group known as the Liberation Militia, their actions are attributed to their experience of oppression and hopelessness; on the other hand, most of the Crosses in the novel - in particular Sephy's parents and sister - are mere ciphers, their racist attitudes and practices entrenched within a fixed, immutable system. In its focus on a tragic relationship which crosses racial boundaries, *Noughts & Crosses* recapitulates innumerable stories of doomed interracial romances, but the absolutism of its contrast between black and white is not far removed from that of *Jack Stanley*; and its strategy of reversal does nothing to address this contrast.

Canonical texts produced during the colonial period or informed by racist discourses often present a dilemma for publishers and other gatekeepers when
they are republished for contemporary audiences. Many such texts – including Helen Bannerman’s *Little Black Sambo* (1899), Mary Grant Bruce’s ‘Billabong’ books (1910–42) and Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) – have been subjected to revisions which typically involve the removal of offensive descriptions of colonized or enslaved groups and individuals. What tends to be overlooked in such revisions, however, is that colonial and racist ideologies are commonly encoded in structural, semantic and narrative features which are not ameliorated merely through the removal of words or phrases.

Hugh Lofting’s ‘Doctor Dolittle’ novels, published from 1920, involve episodes during which Doctor Dolittle travels to Africa and other countries in order to act as an animal doctor (he is skilled at communicating with animals and has a vast global network of animal contacts). When Dell reissued the novels in 1988, references to characters’ skin colour were removed, so that in the revised version of *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* (Lofting, 1998 [rev. 1988]) Doctor Dolittle is no longer described as a white man, or the King of Golliwog as a black man. Explicit references to skin colour are, however, superfluous in the novel’s narrative, in which Doctor Dolittle travels to Africa to cure the monkeys who are dying of a terrible disease; that is, knowledge and expertise are located in the figure of Doctor Dolittle, while Africans are oblivious to the monkeys’ plight. The comically threatening figure of the King of Golliwog, too, accords with colonial descriptions of black kings and potentates who must be brought into line by their colonial rulers. The original text (Lofting, 1920) includes an episode in which Prince Bumpo, the son of the King of Golliwog, is tricked into believing that Doctor Dolittle can grant him his greatest wish: that he should be a white prince rather than a black one. The Dell version omits this story element but, instead, incorporates a sequence in which Polynesia the parrot hypnotizes Bumpo into releasing Doctor Dolittle from the dungeon where the king has imprisoned him. What is unaffected by this change is that power lies with Doctor Dolittle, who benefits from an act of trickery of which Bumpo is the dupe. When publishers sanitize older texts in this way through the removal of surface features – words such as ‘black’ and ‘nigger’ – they leave intact hierarchies of race and maintain narrative outcomes which promote the superiority of European culture.

**Postcolonialism and Orientalism**

The field of postcolonial studies developed as ‘a way of addressing the cultural production of those societies affected by the historical phenomenon of colonialism’ (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 7). Despite the fact that children’s texts are both implicated in colonial processes and frequently engage with ideas and values about colonialism and its consequences in modernity, they are rarely included in discussions of postcolonial textuality, and postcolonial theory is itself relatively new to children’s literature studies (Bradford, 2008, pp. 6–8).

Cultural production for children in colonial settings generally promoted the virtues of progress and modernity, representing indigenous characters according to the stereotypes which held sway in different cultural contexts. The figure of
the noble savage was, for instance, frequently invoked in descriptions of Native Americans, notably in James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans (1826). Australian Aborigines, on the other hand, were more often represented as cannibals and savages. The pathetic figure of ‘the last of’ various indigenous groups (the Mohicans in North America, the Beothuk in Newfoundland, the Tasmanians in Australia) was marshalled to demonstrate that black races were destined to fade away, incapable of keeping up with the drive to modernity exemplified by European colonists.

Across colonial settings, ethnographers and folklorists collected the narratives of indigenous peoples, altering them to accord with European narrative practices and publishing them as children’s stories; often they were styled as the last remnants of traditional stories saved from extinction by their assiduous collectors. Detached from the cultures from which they originated, such stories were incorporated into Western frames of reference. Indeed, such stories continue to appear as ‘West Indian’, ‘Native American’ or ‘African’ stories in anthologies, where readers can have little or no understanding of how these stories are woven into the values and beliefs of the cultures from which they derive.

While many children’s texts deal directly with questions of colonialism, others do so indirectly. Jean de Brunhoff’s ‘Babar’ series is, for instance, riddled with assumptions about the superiority of European culture over the primitive world into which Babar is born in ‘the Great Forest’. When his mother is shot by a hunter in The Story of Babar the Little Elephant (1934), Babar runs away to a town where he is rescued by a very rich old lady who understood little elephants, and knew at once that he was longing for a smart suit’ (1955, n.p.). The anthropomorphized figure of Babar functions as a metaphor for the colonized ‘other’, and his desire to wear the smart clothes of the bourgeoisie demonstrates his subjection to the charms of civilization. When he returns to his childhood home, he gains status from the signifiers of wealth and European culture which surround him, and, on the sudden death of the king of the elephants, he is offered the throne. The subjection of the elephants is as complete as that of Babar himself, since their argument for making him king is based solely on his acquisition of European knowledge and the signs of wealth.

In Babar the King (1936), Babar himself becomes a colonizer, recruiting his fellow elephants as labourers and craftsmen by offering them rewards which evoke the beads and baubles distributed to indigenous peoples: ‘My friends, in these trunks and bales and cases I have presents for all of you – dresses, hats, silks, paint-boxes, drums, tins of peaches, feathers, racquets, and many other things’ (Brunhoff, 1953, p. 8). The town of Celesteville – named after Celeste, Babar’s queen – is built by the elephants, who (like Dahl’s Oompa-Loompas) delight in their subjection and work assiduously. Like the colonized others of innumerable missions, reserves and reservations, they are consigned to dwellings constructed on European models but differentiated from the large, important homes of their superiors, which occupy a position offering a panoptic view of the elephants as they perform their duties as docile subjects.
An important component of postcolonial studies is discourse analysis, a strategy which examines how colonial discourse maintains power and determines what counts as knowledge. Edward Said's celebrated study *Orientalism* (1978), which examines the processes whereby the 'Orient' was, and continues to be, constructed by European thought, is the foundational text in this field. While Said's examples of Orientalist discourse drew upon the many European scholars who studied Eastern languages, history and cultures, he viewed Orientalism in broader terms as an epistemological and institutional system which served to distinguish the Orient from the Occident and to exercise power over the Orient.

Orientalist discourses inform a variety of children's texts, including retellings and reworkings of *Arabian Nights* stories, collections of *folktales*, colonial fiction and contemporary fiction either set in Asian cultures or tracing the experience of young protagonists who move from Asian countries to resettle in countries such as Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia (Stephens and McCallum, 1998, p. 229). In line with the neo-Orientalist doctrines which have dominated political and popular discourses over the past two decades (Tuastad, 2003), contemporary texts dealing with Middle Eastern settings or characters are apt to lump together all such societies under the sign of Islam. Suzanne Fisher Staples' novels *Shabana: Daughter of the Wind* (1989), *Haveli* (1993) and *Under the Persimmon Tree* (2005) accord with the tenets of neo-Orientalism in their representations of a homogenized Muslim culture characterized by barbarism, the oppression of women and girls and sociopolitical systems based on tribalism rather than loyalty to the nation-state (Bradford, 2007). The protagonists of these novels are exceptional Muslim girls whose aspirations and values are readily aligned with those of their implied Western readers.

As colonized peoples have struggled for recognition, human rights and restitution of land, cultural production by indigenous authors and artists has increased markedly since the 1960s. Children's texts have been a high priority for indigenous publishing houses, which seek to offer indigenous children experiences of narrative *subjectivity* while enabling non-indigenous children to engage with cultural difference. It would be unsound to argue that indigenous texts produce 'better' representations of indigeneity than non-indigenous texts, or that they are more 'authentic', a term which generally implies adherence to an originary cultural identity. Indigenous identities are multifarious, inflected by factors including gender, class, sexuality and access to education, so that no text can speak for or about all indigenous people. Nevertheless, it is the case that non-indigenous texts are much more likely than indigenous texts to recycle the assumptions of dominant cultures.

Since indigenous texts proceed from narrative practices different from those of European cultures, they require different kinds of reading. For instance, Australian Aboriginal stories are produced within regimes of custodianship which determine the territory from which they come, the clans and individuals to whom they belong and the audiences which are entitled to receive them (Bradford, 2001b). Thus they are always presented by Aboriginal — and increasingly,
mainstream – publishers in relation to particular places and cultures, through the provision of paratextual material such as maps, glossaries and information about storytellers. Such information is crucial to an understanding of the localised nature of these stories. It is common for European readers to experience a sense of apprehending only part of indigenous stories; this is because they are cultural outsiders to texts which are highly selective about what they include and omit. In addition, ancient modes of storytelling inform contemporary texts; thus, Australian Aboriginal stories rarely incorporate the openings and closures which European readers are accustomed to, since most such stories relate to complex narrative systems rather than existing as individual works. Similarly, many Maori stories include genealogical information about characters in sequences which may, to European readers, appear to interrupt or slow down the progress of stories, but which are included because of the high importance placed on ancestry in Maori culture. Again, many Native American stories are organized around a sequence of four events, characters or places, whereas sequences based on the number three are more usual in European narratives (Bradford, 2008).

Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) follows a narrative trope common in contemporary Native American children’s literature: the process whereby a child or teenager who has lived on a reservation (‘the rez’) is introduced to mainstream schooling and the practices and values of the majority culture. As the novel’s title suggests, Alexie plays with notions of the hybrid ‘part-time Indian’ subject: at home the protagonist is known as ‘Junior’, in common with many of the men and some of the women on the reservation; at his new school he is known by his full name, Arthur Spirit Jr. However, the novel resists casting Junior/Arthur as a tragic figure caught between cultures, the flip-side of notions of hybridity. Rather, the narrative tracks his formation as an Indian subject who expresses his identity in unconventional ways, going against the norms of the rez where poverty and hopelessness engender a deep pessimism about the future (‘Indian’, a term reappropriated by many indigenous Americans, is used throughout this novel). The first-person narration addresses white readers, providing explanations of Indian humour, cultural practices and values to a narrator who knows little of Indian culture. For instance, before his first fistfight at his new school Arthur outlines ‘The Unofficial and Unwritten (but you better follow them or you’re going to get beaten twice as hard) Spokane Indian Rules of Fisticuffs’ (Alexie, 2007, pp. 61–2) as the prelude to his account of a fight in which his adversary Roger, a much larger boy, adheres to none of these rules but relies on racial taunts rather than physical action. By foregrounding Arthur’s perplexity at the fact that different rules operate in the two cultures, the narrative positions readers as observers of white culture from the ‘other’ side. The reflexivity of the novel powerfully conveys a sense of the complexity of intersubjective negotiations across cultures through its focus on Arthur’s relationships with Rowdy, his childhood friend from the rez, and with Gordy, a white boy from his new school. As a postcolonial text *The Absolutely True Diary* addresses the effects of colonial
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history on Native Americans even as it interrogates the assumptions which shape relations between Indians and whites in the novel.

ETHNICITY, MULTICULTURALISM, WHITENESS

Deeply invested in processes and ideologies of nation-building, children’s books both respond to, and are constitutive of, the cultural and political shifts which attend relationships between ethnic groups in modern nation states. Since the 1960s the term ‘ethnicity’ has been used as an alternative to the discredited genetically organized hierarchies of ‘race’, to describe populations distinguished by ancestry, traditions, religious affiliations, values and norms. However, it is also the case that concepts of ethnicity and the discourses of tolerance which conventionally surround them have been marshalled for racist purposes. Etienne Balibar (1991, p. 21) suggests that the dominant theme of the new racism is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but ‘only’ the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions.

Staples’ novels Shabanu and Haveli promote this version of ethnicity in the way they represent Muslim men as almost universally cruel and barbaric in their treatment of girls and women. In Haveli, only one male character stands out for his adherence to progressive attitudes towards women: Omar, the nephew of Shabanu’s elderly husband. The novel’s explanation for his different attitude is that he has been educated in the United States. Nevertheless, when Omar sets aside his romantic attachment to Shabanu to serve the interests of his family and conduct a violent attack on its enemies, the implication is that familial (tribal) loyalties are incompatible with Western values such as civil rights and democratic processes. Readers are thus positioned as members of a superior society from which they observe barbarism at work.

Concepts of ethnicity are closely associated with formulations of multicultural and discussions of ‘multicultural children’s literature’. Although multiculturalism is often treated as a feature of individual nations – and is conceptualized differently across national settings – it is, in David Bennett’s words, an ‘epiphenomenon of globalization’, the word itself ‘entering and inflecting numerous national debates about the politics of cultural difference, the “limits of tolerance”, and the future of the nation-state’ (1998, p. 2). It follows that, while children’s books circulate within a global market, their treatment of ethnicity and multiculturalism engages with national and local politics, addressing the questions of belonging and exclusion, nationhood and history, which have dominated debates in Western nations since the end of the Cold War (Bradford et al., 2007).

In the novel Falling (1997), by the Belgian author Anne Provoost, the young protagonist Lucas engages in the painful, complicated process of uncovering
the story of his dead grandfather, a Nazi sympathizer who was responsible for
the death or incarceration of Jewish children concealed in a local convent.
These past events intersect with the contemporary setting of the novel, where
‘Arab’ immigrants are subjected to negative stereotyping: they are said to be
dishonest, dirty and privileged over local people whose jobs they take. In a
somewhat similar way, the Australian novel Secrets of Walden Rising (1996),
by Allan Baille, involves the recuperation of history, presented through the
perspective of Brendan, a British migrant who discovers that the history of the
remote town of Jacks Marsh is riddled with incidents of racism and xenophobia
which bear upon his own experience as an outsider to the social life of the
town. Novels such as these take a critical approach to concepts of multicultural-
ism, exposing the faultlines which threaten national mythologies of tolerance
and equality and offering a corrective to the too-ready acceptance of these
mythologies as givens.

Cultural theorists working in the field of whiteness studies have developed
concepts and strategies which offer another approach to critical work in children’s
literature. An important early text in this area is Toni Morrison’s Playing in the
Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992), which analyses construc-
tions of Americanness in the work of early writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and
Willa Cather. Morrison points out that ideas of Americanness habitually depend
on the (implied) presence of the racialized other and that ‘American means
white’ (Morrison, 1992, p. 51). The effect of both the absence and the presence
of the other is similar: blackness is defined in relation to whiteness, which is
assumed to be a normal, natural state.

Enid Blyton’s ‘Noddy’ books offer a clear example of the textual operations
of whiteness. In Noddy and His Car (1951), Noddy decides to become a taxi dri-
ver. The toy cat carelessly leaves her tail hanging out of the car, whereupon it is
cought in the car’s wheel and comes off. Next, the teddy bear loses its hat when
Noddy brakes suddenly, and, finally, the golden-haired doll loses her bag, which
has been balancing on the back of the car. In all three cases these characters
refuse to pay their fares and in addition demand more money as financial re-
compense. What drives the story, then, is the fact that rich, white and powerful
figures (the cat, the teddy, the doll) exercise power by withholding capital.
When Noddy and Big-Ears go in search of the lost items they find that they have
been appropriated by a trio of minor villains: a golliwog, a clockwork mouse and
Sally Syl, a ‘naughty little doll’ (1951, p. 45), who are marked as not-white, in
the golliwog’s case; as not white enough (the mouse); and as working-class trash
(in the case of Sally Syl). Noddy returns the tail, the hat and the bag to their own-
ers and is endowed not only with the fare but with extra money as well. In the
world Blyton constructs, whiteness is invisible as a racial position for, as Richard
Dyer puts it in his seminal work White, ‘Other people are raced, we are just
people’ (1997, p. 1). If Noddy is a good little white boy aspiring to be ever whiter
(i.e. richer and more attractive to those with power and money), the golliwog is
far behind him in the whiteness stakes; he can perform whiteness, but he cannot take centre stage with Noddy and Big-Ears. Nevertheless, the smiling face which is his default expression confirms the rightness and normalcy of a world where whiteness is identified with success, prosperity and good order. In this way Blyton’s golliwogs (and other non-white and working-class figures) function as markers or signs of the legitimacy of a natural order where whiteness is preferred and rewarded.

CONCLUSION

Many of the lists of ‘multicultural children’s literature’ which feature on websites and in pedagogical material should be regarded with scepticism. Narratives which incorporate characters of various ethnicities do not necessarily engage with cultural difference, and it is important to consider not merely how many characters come from diverse ethnic backgrounds but how such characters and cultures are represented. Children’s books commonly trace the identity formation of protagonists and the development of such qualities as empathy and good judgement. Characters from minority cultures are often incorporated into such narrative trajectories. Sometimes children from mainstream culture who encounter cultural difference are shown to benefit from an enhanced understanding of others; sometimes the psychological or material progress of children from minority cultures is defined in terms of their access to mainstream culture. In both cases minority cultures are defined and valued according to a frame of reference in which white, middle-class culture is normative.

Although publishers seek to meet market demands for books featuring minority cultures, it remains the case that mainstream publishing houses cater principally to readers from the dominant culture. Texts by indigenous and minority authors, especially those produced by specialist publishing houses, must compete with the products of multinational publishers, distributed and promoted globally. When books by minority authors find white audiences, this is generally because they are not too different. Thus, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian deals with a conventional topic, the identity formation of its adolescent protagonist, and is set in part in a mainstream location.

Questions of race, ethnicity and colonialism are addressed most overtly in realistic texts for children and adolescents. Many such texts locate their narratives in the past, thus distancing readers from contemporary concerns refracted in historical events. Works of fantasy, too, engage with cultural difference: in science fiction narratives and in fiction dealing with posthuman subjects as well as in more traditional varieties of fantasy, protagonists are represented in relation to their affiliations and their experiences of exclusion. From the colonialist novels of the age of empire to contemporary works pointing to the faultlines which threaten to destabilize multicultural societies, children’s literature engages with and intervenes in the politics of race.
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FURTHER READING

This is an excellent introduction to postcolonial theory and its implications for textual analysis (historical and contemporary material), addressing topics such as canon formation and indigenous literatures.

A selection of contributions by key theorists on multiculturalism in various settings including India, the United States, South Africa and Britain. Particularly useful on relationships between multiculturalism and globalization.

This collection of essays by Bhabha gathers his most important writings up to 1994, including discussions of hybridity, colonial stereotypes, ambivalence and the instability of colonial constructions of ‘home’.

This is the first comparative study of children's literature from former British settler nations (Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand). It considers indigenous textuality and how indigenous peoples are represented by non-indigenous authors.

This is one of the foundational texts of whiteness studies. Focusing principally on films, Dyer outlines three ways in which whiteness maintains its power: the shifting discourses of colour, the treatment of white/black skin and the symbolism of whiteness.

In this collection of essays and interviews, Foucault outlines his theories about how power is exercised and how it is constituted as knowledge. An accessible introduction to key concepts including discourse and its normalizing effects in human societies.

This collection includes a stimulating introduction by Stuart Hall, leading into essays by renowned authors including Zygmunt Bauman, Homi Bhabha and Lawrence Grossberg, on questions of multiculturalism, identity and hybridity.