



## Re-Membering Colonialism: Tropes of Discovery in Settler-Society Texts

—Clare Bradford

A narrative pattern common in novels for children is a sequence of events involving a buried or concealed object whose discovery triggers a search for origins. Generally such narratives construct protagonists as young detectives, tracking when, by whom, and how these objects were hidden or buried. In former settler colonies such as Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, sequences such as I have described are charged with added significances, since the objects discovered are commonly associated with Indigenous cultures, colonial histories, and relations between colonizers and colonized. Moreover, the discovery of buried items (weapons, personal effects, human remains) functions in narrative terms as a catalyst for personal growth on the part of protagonists, resulting in enhanced understanding of national and local histories and an appreciation of the meanings of the past for the present. In texts such as Felice Holman's *Real*, New Zealand author

Lorraine Orman's *Cross Tides*, and two Australian texts, James Moloney's *Gracey* and Gary Crew's *No Such Country*, the uncovering of human remains brings to light colonial atrocities committed against Indigenous individuals and groups; while Andrea Spalding's *Finders Keepers* and Welwyn Wilton Katz's *False Face* broach questions concerning ownership of and responsibility for objects once produced and used by Indigenous people. Although these texts are by non-Indigenous authors, they often incorporate a pair of protagonists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, whose friendship is tested by cross-cultural negotiations over the discovery of objects from the past. Such narratives occur, for instance, in *Finders Keepers* and *False Face*, and in two New Zealand texts, Joanna Orwin's *Owl* and Joan de Hamel's *Take the Long Path*.

The fact that stories where children discover objects from the past occur so frequently in settler-society texts suggests that, rather than merely manifesting a

chance similarity, these narrative patterns constitute a postcolonial trope. The objects discovered are symbolic of the pre-colonial or colonial past and often of instances of brutality and conflict, which are difficult for contemporary societies to acknowledge; and the protagonists' actions of digging, searching, and unearthing constitute metaphors for processes whereby contemporary societies recover histories previously hidden from view. In Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, questions about the violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples jostle against myths of nationhood, such as the common assumption that the settlement of Canada, especially in comparison with that of the United States, was, to quote the historian Ken Coates, "the 'gentle' occupation" (141); or that New Zealand society is built on a "partnership of equals" between Maori and Pakeha;<sup>1</sup> or that Australia is the society of the "fair go," where hierarchies of class and race do not hold sway. The trope of discovery thus struggles with those strategies of forgetting and concealment which enable settler societies to invent myths of origin which hinge on the heroic deeds of explorers and settlers. Narratives built around this trope, like postcolonial narratives in general, are also

prone to recycling cultural assumptions, stereotypes, and beliefs so thoroughly naturalized as to seem normal and commonsense. Thus, it is not the case that the novels I discuss necessarily dismantle or resist colonial discourses.



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I first encountered the trope of discovery in children's literature during my research into colonial and postcolonial Australian texts (*Reading Race* 60–61). As I came across multiple examples of Australian texts involving the discovery of buried remains and ancient objects, I speculated about the extent to which such narrative patterns occurred in other settler culture texts; and my reading of contemporary New Zealand,

Canadian, and American texts has convinced me that, indeed, the trope of discovery is evident across these national literatures, as I argue in *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature*. My discussion in this essay is thus based on a wide reading of contemporary texts, enabling me to generalize about the ideologies and values which these texts have in common, even as I acknowledge the particular and specific circumstances which characterized colonial histories and which mark postcolonial societies. Despite the special pleading

of national mythologies, settler societies are always at risk of being unsettled by stories of their origins, which involve appropriation, colonization, and the destruction of Indigenous cultures.

A notable feature of novels drawing on the trope of discovery is that they are produced by non-Indigenous authors, even though the number of novels published by Indigenous authors has increased markedly over the last twenty years. It is not altogether surprising that this should be the case, for Indigenous authors tend to focus on the identity-formation of Indigenous protagonists, whose experiences of living within Indigenous cultures is presented as normal and usual. Rather than discovering or uncovering signs of the colonial past, these protagonists are typically enculturated as members of Indigenous families and kinship groups, whose histories they learn by hearing the stories of their parents and grandparents. In contrast, the non-Indigenous protagonists who feature in narratives of discovery are treated as representative settler descendants, whose acts of uncovering the past enable them imaginatively to conceive of national and local histories otherwise outside their knowledge.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha describes memory as the bridge between colonialism and national identities. He points out that remembering is “never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of

the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (63). The trope of discovery in children’s books engages in just such a process of re-membering; and, importantly, it is directed toward child readers who are assumed to be in the process of becoming citizens of complex postcolonial nations. The quality or “truth” of memories is variable and contingent; what is important is the cultural work carried out by the texts I describe. Drawing on the theories of Freud and Lacan, Leela Gandhi discusses the workings of memory in nations whose origins lie in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. She describes two strategies through which individuals and nations manage to forget the past: the repression of memory (*Verdrängung*); and the repudiation of the past (*Verwerfung*). Gandhi says that, “if the activity of *Verdrängung* censors and thereby disguises a vast reservoir of painful memories, the deceptions of *Verwerfung* tend to transform the troublesome past into a hostile delirium” (10), resulting in antagonism toward memories of colonial violence, and toward colonized peoples.

Just as the colonial aftermath in settler nations involves both *Verdrängung* and *Verwerfung*, so many children’s texts dealing with colonial events are similarly conflicted in their representations of the past. A striking instance of how repression and repudiation manifest in the trope of discovery is to be found in the novel *False Face*, and in the debates

which have surrounded its production, reception and interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Katz's representation of the Iroquois masks discovered by the protagonists Laney and Tom stresses the occult power of the masks, their capacity to control the thoughts and actions of those who possess them, and their propensity for evil. I would argue that the novel's treatment of the masks constitutes a form of *Verwerfung* in that the masks are floating signifiers which point to other signifiers: to the Mohawk man who created them; and to Native Americans in general, investing Indigenous people and cultures with associations of barbarism and savagery. In this case, then, the trope of discovery may involve Bhabha's "painful re-membering"; but this re-membering is deployed to justify colonization by demonstrating that those colonized were inferior to the colonizers.

Contemporary settler-society fiction utilizing tropes of discovery seeks (at least ostensibly) to engage readers in narratives which, to use Bhabha's term, re-member aspects of the past which have been repressed, and so model processes of reparation and reconciliation. As I have noted, however, the cultural discourses which inform texts are complex and often contradictory, and my discussion of texts seeks both to trace the significances produced by narrative strategies, and also to consider the subject positions constructed for readers. I have selected three novels: Canadian author Greg Jackson-Davis's *Digging*

*for Philip*; a New Zealand text, *Treasure Deep* by David Hill; and an Australian text, *The Last Muster* by Leonie Norrington. The three settler cultures in which these texts are produced share histories of British colonization. At the same time, the three novels do not adhere to a common template of colonialism, since they are inflected by historical, cultural, and geographical influences. I do not intend that these texts should be read as symptomatic of national literatures, but I have selected them because they demonstrate the purposes to which the trope is put, and the cultural ideologies which inform texts, irrespective of the intentions of their authors.

The protagonists of settler-society novels structured by tropes of discovery are more often than not males, in the time-honoured tradition of colonial narratives of discovery. Like many male protagonists in contemporary novels for adolescents, these boy figures tend to be troubled or confused, often about the models of masculinity presented to them by their culture, and during the course of the narrative they achieve a degree of self-knowledge and an enhanced capacity for interpersonal engagement. In their discussion of the binary logic of imperialism, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin suggest an analogy between cultural constructions of adolescence and colonial discourses: as adolescence constitutes an interstitial stage evoking "considerable suspicion and anxiety" (24), so too those in-

between spaces where colonizers and colonized meet manifest signs of ambivalence: “mimicry, cultural schizophrenia, or various kinds of obsession with identity” (24), which indicate the unease evoked when the binary is disrupted. The narratives I discuss thus traverse categories and cultural concepts of considerable complexity and force.

### **Un/Discovering the Past**

All three novels begin with episodes in which protagonists find or uncover objects which derive from pre-colonial or colonial times. In *The Last Muster*, fourteen-year-old Shane discovers a cache of old bullet heads, intact and unmarked as though “dug out of something. A body?” (4). *Digging for Philip* opens with the eponymous protagonist discovering a human skull as he excavates at the site of a burial mound in the Lake of the Woods area of Ontario. And in *Treasure Deep*, Glyn and Api discover a piece of shell, polished and worked, which turns out to be the cloak pin of Patara Te Haho, a renowned pre-colonial leader of the Pukehai *iwi*.<sup>3</sup>

In *Treasure Deep* and *The Last Muster*, readers are positioned as onlookers to cross-cultural negotiations which occur between Indigenous and

non-Indigenous protagonists: Glyn and Api, Pakeha and Maori, are friends whose relationship is tested when they discover objects of considerable importance to Api’s grandmother and the elders of the *iwi*; and *The Last Muster*, set on a cattle station



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in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia, involves an Aboriginal protagonist, Red, whose grandfather, Lofty, has lived on the station for many years as its head stockman, and Shane, the son of the station manager. When Philip digs up the mound in *Digging for Philip*, he disturbs the spirit of an Anishinabe man, Manido, buried two centuries earlier, who exacts punishment by requiring that Philip perform the last rites for Anishinabe killed by

settlers and buried without the ceremonies which would have allowed their spirits to enter the Land of Souls (78).<sup>4</sup> The narrative incorporates time-travel sequences during which Philip observes episodes of colonial violence.

I have suggested that the narratives of the three novels traverse two varieties of interstitial space: the in-between condition of adolescence and cross-cultural negotiations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. A figure common to the three

texts is that of the Indigenous elder and sage: Nana Kopu in *Treasure Deep*, Lofty in *The Last Muster*, and Manido in *Digging for Philip*. All three are custodians of Indigenous histories particular to the settings of the novels. In *Treasure Deep* and *The Last Muster*, contemporary protagonists engage with these histories and enter into a “painful re-membering,” which promises new and transformed modes of being. In *Digging for Philip*, the consequences of “re-membering” are individual and personal, revolving around Philip’s growth in self-confidence, manifested in his capacity to face up to the three bullies who torment him.

In *Treasure Deep*, Api lives with his great-grandmother, Nana Kopu, and the boys’ discovery of objects owned by Patara Te Haho—first his cloak pin and, later in the novel, a “feather box”<sup>5</sup> ornately carved by Te Haho himself—at once affords a link between the present and the past and evokes memories of the clan at the height of its power, as the prosperous inhabitants of rich coastal territory. In the contemporary world of Api and Glyn, the *iwi* has long been dispossessed of most of its land by the British, and its younger members, including Api’s parents, must search for work in distant parts of New Zealand. Nana Kopu worries that her descendants, especially Api’s cousin Buck, have lost their respect for traditional Maori values and are seduced by the superficial, consumerist imperatives of Western

culture. Although their discovery is a cause for joy, the box and cloak pin hence also signify negative meanings: the loss of land and identity and the prospect of a future in which the young members of the *iwi* abandon their associations with Maori culture.

The bullet heads discovered by Shane in *The Last Muster* are directly implicated in colonial violence. Like Nana Kopu, the old stockman Lofty is the custodian of ancient knowledge; like her, he is intensely protective of that knowledge lest it pass to those who do not respect it. In this text, the “painful re-membering” foregrounded by the act of discovery concerns the figure of Jandamarra, a warrior and leader of the Bunuba people, who led Aboriginal resistance to the settlers when they appropriated land, filled it with cattle, and massacred Bunuba women and children. The bullet heads which killed Jandamarra were placed in a cave in the mountain country sacred to his people, along with what was left of his body after his head was removed and retained as a trophy by the settlers. It is these bullet heads which Shane has discovered, and to Lofty they represent both the violent appropriation of Bunuba land and also a re-membering of Jandamarra’s importance as a “clever man, a business man” (164) with magical powers which enabled him to survive as a fugitive in the mountains for years before he was killed.<sup>6</sup>

### **Digging for Selfhood**

Whereas the Indigenous protagonists of *The Last Muster* and *Treasure Deep* retain (even if precariously) their connections with place and culture in the novels' contemporary settings, in *Digging for Philip* the implication of the novel's time-shift sequences is that the Indigenous presence is obliterated from the places which feature in the narrative, except in the form of unquiet spirits whom Philip alone can free by conducting the rituals required by Manido. When Philip encounters Aboriginal people during a shopping excursion to the town of Kenora, his perceptions are shaped by the insights he has gained during his time-shift excursions to colonial times, when he has observed the brutal killings of adults and children, and individual Anishinabe behaving with courage and dignity. Thus, instead of viewing contemporary Aboriginal people as pathetic drunks and vagrants, outsiders to his middle-class world, he now sees them as individuals. Nevertheless, the novel's language constructs contemporary Aboriginal people within a narrow frame of reference, as "sad-looking" (145), impoverished, and aimless. Thus, the contrast between a "white family . . . , chipper and well-dressed" (138) and a Native family whose mother "was kind of fat and soft" and whose children "looked like their clothes came from the Salvation Army" (138) enforces a starkly binary opposition. As well as this opposition between contemporary white

and Aboriginal people, the novel makes a distinction between Indigenous people then and now: in a time-shift sequence, Philip observes an Anishinabe woman and compares her with Aboriginal people he has seen "usually drunk downtown in Winnipeg along Portage or around Langside and Broadway. But she seemed somehow different. Beautiful. Most of the ones he had seen were ugly to him" (47).

While *Digging for Philip* re-members the violence of colonialism, it thus positions readers in a contradictory way: to repudiate (Gandhi's *Verwerfung*) the contemporary descendants of the Anishinabe; and to revere the heroic, doomed figures of the novel's time-shift episodes. As Philip carries out Manido's orders—gathering foodstuffs and tobacco with which to honour those denied proper burials, learning ritual chants, digging holes in which to bury the *mide* bags he prepares to memorialize the dead—he is indigenized, transformed into a white Anishinabe, taking possession not merely of the land (as the putative owner of the island which has belonged to his family for three generations), but also of the ancient traditions and knowledges which he learns from Manido. At the end of the novel, Manido passes on to the Land of Souls, having made atonement for his acts of disloyalty to his people while alive. That Philip is the intermediary through whom this atonement has been possible further enshrines Philip as quasi-Indigenous. In this text, then, the trope of

discovery is directed toward the self-actualization of the white protagonist, constructing him as the rightful inheritor of Anishinabe traditions and land.

### Re-Membering and Cross-Cultural Relationships

Colonial histories were never merely a matter of oppositional forces clashing and contesting; rather, colonizers and colonized met and engaged with one another across a spectrum of modes, from friendship to violent conflict. As Gandhi puts it, “the forgotten content of post-coloniality effectively reveals the story of an ambivalent and symbiotic *relationship* between coloniser and colonised” (11). It follows that, if the trope of recovery engages in a “painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha 63), it should suggest how contemporary relationships might transform the “ambivalent and symbiotic” relationships of colonialism. Indeed, all three novels model and thematize intersubjective relations between Indig-

enous and non-Indigenous protagonists, through narrative and representational strategies which engage with specific, localized histories.

In *Treasure Deep*, Glyn and Api live in a small seaside town where relations between Maori and

Pakeha are strained: Colin, the local policeman, makes racist comments about Maori; and in the supermarket Glyn overhears shoppers criticizing Nana Kopu for her overflowing trolley of supplies, which, they say, is funded by taxpayers (that is, by themselves). These signifiers of resentment and suspicion on the part of non-Indigenous people correspond to what Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs, referring to the Australian setting, call “postcolonial racism” (17)

—a form of racism which is critical of Indigenous people for, on one hand, suffering deprivation (in the form of low incomes, poor standards of health, high unemployment, etc.), and on the other, as being given too much in the form of state support, sympathy, and acknowledgement as the original inhabitants.



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The fact that narration is filtered through the focalizing perspective of Glyn constructs Pakeha as the novel's implied readers, so that representations of Api and his family are mediated through Glyn's world view. The emotional trajectory of the novel incorporates Glyn's groping for meaning as an outsider to Maori culture and, more specifically, to Api's feelings and values. Thus, an argument between the two boys over their attempts to find the feather box is prompted by a hostile exchange between Colin and Api, and by Api's sense that perhaps, after all, there is nothing to find; that Maori have nothing that might be regarded as treasure by Pakeha. For his part, Glyn recognizes that he will always be an outsider, no matter how sympathetic and informed, to Maori traditions: on the last day of the school term, the Maori Culture Group sings a *waiata*: "Api was in the back row, feet slapping the stage, hands lifted, head turning. He's in a special world, Glyn knew. A stir of envy touched him" (17).<sup>7</sup>

While the novel here constructs Maori culture as having value and meaning, a darker strand of cross-cultural relations plays out in the attitude of the policeman, Colin, toward Api's cousin Buck. Colin is romantically attached to Glyn's mother; Buck is an unemployed young man with an anti-authoritarian attitude and a history of petty crime. Colin's antagonistic attitude to Buck and Buck's hostility to him are, however, drawn into a melioristic view of race

relations: by the end of the novel, after Colin has wrongly suspected Buck of assaulting Nana Kopu and stealing the feather box, the *rapprochement* between the two is represented by Colin's offer of accommodation, and Buck's response, "Appreciate it, bro" (106), a phrase which nicely suggests Buck's negotiations between discourses. The relationships between Glyn and Api, and between Buck and Colin, speak back to the "ambivalent and symbiotic" (Gandhi 11) relationships of colonialism, advocating attitudes of mutuality and openness. At the same time, the difficulty of these contemporary relations hinges on the colonial dispossession which is sustained in the disadvantage of Maori in postcolonial New Zealand.

*The Last Muster* engages more directly than does *Treasure Deep* with the politics of land rights, and specifically with Australian legislation in the decade before the novel was published, when the gains to Indigenous people effected through the landmark Mabo decision were whittled away by the conservative government of John Howard.<sup>8</sup> Shane's father manages a remote cattle station which his family once owned, and which has been taken over by "the Company," a multinational corporation with vast pastoral holdings. To Lofty, who has lived on the station since boyhood, this is his ancestral land no matter who "owns" it. Red, Old Lofty's granddaughter, lives with Lofty on the station and

shares correspondence school lessons with Shane, supervised by Shane's mother.

In *The Last Muster*, focalization shifts among several characters: Red, Shane, Lofty, and Shane's father, varied by narrator-focalized stretches. The narrative is predominantly in the present tense, which has the effect of bringing together past and present, re-memorizing colonial events in a way which emphasizes their real and immediate consequences for the contemporary protagonists. Added to this, the novel deploys a variety of dialects and languages in conversational exchanges, achieving a dialogical effect whereby cultural differences and memories play off against one another. An example of some of these techniques occurs in an episode when Shane and Red, pursuing a wild stallion in the mountainous area where Shane discovered the bullet heads, find themselves suddenly hemmed in by great towers of rock:

The silence leaves a vacuum so deep they have to listen hard to hear the soft sounds of insects in the trees.

*Don't panic. Panic's what gets people killed. Shane hears his father's voice. If you're in a car, stay with it. Someone will find you. If you have to move, think clearly before you do and stay on the track. His body's suddenly weak, heavy, pressing him down, his legs jittering so much he has to*

crouch down and gammon check the ground for footprints before he falls.

Red leans her leg against Shane's arm. She pulls herself up tall and, looking out at the country, says softly in language, "I'm Redeleenia. Granddaughter for that old man Lofty, working station long time. Head stockman. Law man. Countryman. I come here by mistake. I mean no offence." (26–27)

The narrator-focalized sentence at the beginning of this excerpt focuses on the shared experience of Shane and Red as they take in the eerie quiet of the rocky space where they find themselves, and from which they can find no exit. Shane's thoughts recall his father's voice, authoritatively advising Shane as to what to do if he is lost in the vast spaces of the Kimberley region. With "His body's suddenly weak," the narrative modulates into a description of Shane's panic and awe, suggesting his idiolect in "he has to crouch down and gammon check the ground." The term "gammon" is an Aboriginal-English word which means "pretend," and its use by Shane (or, more accurately, in a narrator-focalized account of his language) constructs him as familiar, and indeed intimate, with Aboriginal culture.

Whereas Shane relies on his father's pragmatic and material approach to the strangeness of his surroundings, Red's response is to address the land and

its spirits directly, introducing herself in relation to her kinship with Lofty, whom she describes in relation to his status in white and Aboriginal worlds: in the world of the cattle station as one who has been “working station long time” and is “head stockman”; but, more significantly, as “law man” and “countryman.” In describing Lofty in this way she claims kinship with one who is an elder, a fully initiated man with access to sacred and secret knowledge of the laws established by the ancestors of the Dreaming; and a traditional owner of Bunuba country, hence “countryman.” Red’s behaviour here is that of a person who (whether for reasons of gender, lack of standing as an initiated member of the clan, or because of the sacredness of the place) does not have the right to enter this region of her country. Her apologetic “I come here by mistake. I mean no offence,” together with her declaration of kinship with Lofty, serves to placate the spirits and seek safe passage.<sup>9</sup> Discoursal features characteristic of Aboriginal English, such as the use of the preposition “for” rather than “of” in “granddaughter for,” and Red’s use of the demonstrative pronoun “that” in “that old man Lofty,” distinguishes her language from Shane’s, so foregrounding difference even as the episode constructs the two as close and empathetic friends.

The process of “putting together . . . the dismembered past” in *The Last Muster* incorporates a re-membering of Bunuba and white histories and, as Gandhi suggests, of “an ambivalent and symbiotic

*relationship* between coloniser and colonised,” instantiated in the interplay of languages and world views in the excerpt I have just discussed. Shane comes to realize that the bullet heads he has discovered are a reminder of colonial brutality meted out to a revered ancestor of Lofty and Red, brutality from which he benefits as a descendant of colonizers. When Shane and Red, searching for evidence to support Lofty’s claim for rights to the mountain country of his clan, investigate the station’s old records, which name the children born to Aboriginal servants, a more intimate and complicated history of interracial relations comes to light. Shane’s father discovers that his great-grandfather fathered a child by Doris, one of the station’s Aboriginal servants, so that Lofty is in fact his uncle. Like many such liaisons between Aboriginal women and white men, this story has been repressed by Shane’s family, banned from memory. Its re-membering prompts a revisioning of concepts and assumptions previously accepted as natural. For instance, Shane’s father reflects on settler attitudes to land regarded as wilderness: “this station our family carved from a wilderness. But was it a wilderness? Or was it someone’s home?” (168).

Whereas in *Treasure Deep* and *The Last Muster* the trope of discovery connects the past with the present, tracing the recovery of memory and its capacity to re-shape contemporary identities, in *Digging for Philip* the re-membering of colonial events has no

effect upon relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous protagonists. Philip gains self-respect and physical strength from his achievement of performing funeral rites for the dead; but wider questions of ownership and responsibility in the contemporary setting do not flow from his actions or from his relationship with Manido. While he possesses a greater degree of insight into the historical events which have effected the dispossession of Indigenous people, Philip's perception of contemporary Aboriginies is fatalistic, accepting as inevitable the decline of Indigenous cultures. Thus, the family he observes in Kenora includes a small child who "seemed playful, picking up stones off the sidewalk. It was like the little kid didn't seem to get it yet" (138). The implication here is that the child will ultimately "get" and accept his marginality.

Throughout the narrative, Manido is represented as a manipulative and often hostile presence, punishing Philip for his lack of strength and his timidity, and hectoring him over his mistakes. Across settler societies, contemporary stereotypes of Indigenous people include stock figures: the sage, the angry radical, the confused young person "torn" between

cultures, and so on, which play out the repudiation of the colonized identified by Gandhi as *Verwerfung* (even apparently benign figures such as wise old men and women are often romanticized and relegated to a stage or state prior to history). Something of this repudiation permeates the novel's treatment of Manido, whose anger seems often unreasonable and extravagant—as, for instance, when he accuses Philip of promulgating Nazi propaganda (101); or when he tells him that the same evil "lurks in [his] blood" (114) as in that of the men who murdered an Anishinabe elder in the seventeenth century. It must be said

that Philip, querulous and self-centered, is far from a likeable figure at first, a fact which might tend to work against the reader-identification which is a common effect of character-focalization. Nevertheless, readers are provided with many cues as to the reasons for Philip's sense of alienation: his father's death, his strained relationship with his mother, and the fact that he is a victim of bullying. Thus, unlike Manido, an entry is provided into Philip's interior world, and readers are positioned to sympathize with his situation.



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## Conclusion

It is very often the case in children's texts that their ideologies and agendas are most clearly realized in sequences of narrative closure. *Digging for Philip* turns out to centre principally on Philip's maturation and enhanced sense of self-worth, thus adhering both to the dominant narrative schema of children's literature and also to a narrative outcome, common in settler-society texts, in which non-Indigenous protagonists derive psychological and psychic benefits from associations with Indigenous characters or cultures. A significant aspect of Philip's maturation is his formation as a masculine subject, and in *Digging for Philip* the trope of discovery involves the valorization of a particular way of being male: that of the aggressive, active, and potentially violent subject of hegemonic masculinity. Manido is scornful of Philip when he is physically and emotionally abused by the three teenagers who bully him, but in a showdown toward the end of the novel, Philip feels "the power of Manido inside him" (234) and attacks the two boys, reducing them to "badly beaten losers" while the girl in the group, Franny, is disgusted by their defeat. Later, Manido commends Philip for his actions and likens him to an Ojibwa figure, a dwarf who becomes a giant-killer: "You were like Chekaubaewiss and finally beat your Mishi-naubae" (245). The implications of this episode are, first, that violence is the best mode

of countering violence, and second, that Anishinabe cultural traditions support a version of masculinity privileging physical strength and aggression.

*Treasure Deep* closes optimistically: the treasures found by Glyn and Api are examined by archeologists and installed in the meeting house on the Pukewai Marae,<sup>10</sup> and Buck is given work organizing the new Display and Craft Centre established there. Colin has learned respect for Maori traditions; Nana Kopu is on the way back to health; and Api and Glyn are confirmed in their friendship. The very neatness of the novel's closure, however, draws attention to those untidy threads which cannot be drawn into these narrative arrangements—the facts of colonialism and the inequalities of Maori and Pakeha in contemporary New Zealand.

*The Last Muster* ends with far more explicit reference to the unfinishedness of the postcolonial state:

For a time their history cuts a gash in Red and Shane's relationship, but then the rawness fades and the stories settle into their minds, acknowledged in the vast dark sky lit with stars, the massive towers of stone, and the stories and songs of all the people who live in the stone country. (168)

Here, the "rawness" caused by re-membering is

balanced by the possibility that “all the people who live in the stone country” (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) might share stories and songs.

The trope of discovery is not a template producing pre-determined meanings, but is deployed by individual authors with various levels of skill and knowledge. If *The Last Muster* is the most self-reflexive of the three texts I have discussed, this does not imply that Australian texts are superior to Canadian or New Zealand texts, or that the Australian nation has overcome the legacy of its colonial origins. The effects of colonization in contemporary postcolonial nations cannot be ranked according to league tables which characterize them as “better” or “worse,” but are both alike and different in regard to historical, geographical, and cultural circumstances, having in common the continued dispossession and disadvantage of the Indigenous inhabitants of settler societies. In this discussion, I have touched upon the cultural work carried out by the trope of discovery in postcolonial texts, but several questions remain to be explored: among others, the history, range,

and variety of manifestations of the trope within individual settler societies; how texts engage with the historical and cultural contexts in which they are produced; and questions of regionalization within national literatures.

These three novels, all informed by the trope of discovery, confirm Bhabha’s assertion that remembering is “never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection” (63). The young characters in their narratives experience physical dangers as they seek to uncover aspects of the past. In *Digging for Philip*, the trope folds back into a narrative outcome where a non-Indigenous protagonist gains self-knowledge through access to Indigenous culture, and where acts of colonial violence are treated as discontinuous with contemporary Canadian politics. In *Treasure Deep* and, more particularly, in *The Last Muster*, the “trauma of the present” (Bhabha 63) in contemporary settler societies is alive and unresolved, but the possibility of reconciliation and cultural transformation is figured through close and empathetic relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous protagonists.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Pratt. The term “Pakeha” is applied to non-Maori New Zealanders.

<sup>2</sup> See Nodelman, for a telling discussion of *False Face* and its reception. See also the discussion of the motif of the mask in *False Face* in McGillis.

<sup>3</sup> Maori society is organized according to tribal affiliations (*iwi*), and extended family groups (*whanau*) associated with particular tracts of land.

<sup>4</sup> The Anishinabe of Manitoba are part of the Ojibwa nation and their language is closely related to the Algonquian languages spoken across North America. Burial rites observed by Algonquian peoples are directed toward enabling the spirit of the deceased to enter the Land of Souls, and include the construction of a spirit house, the provision of food for the spirit, the burial of the person’s possessions, including *mide* bags (medicine bundles), and the burning of a fire on the burial mound for four days.

<sup>5</sup> A feather box (*waka huia*) is an elaborately carved wooden box owned by chiefs or family groups and used to hold ceremonial items or valued objects. The name “feather box” derives from the fact that the feathers of the (now extinct) huia bird were among the treasure so stored.

<sup>6</sup> A “clever man” in Australian Aboriginal traditions is a person who has been entrusted with secret knowledge of spirits, sacred places, and rituals, and who possesses powers such as curing illnesses and carrying out malevolent magic.

<sup>7</sup> A *waiata* is a ceremonial chant, sung unaccompanied and in unison.

<sup>8</sup> The Australian High Court’s Mabo decision of 1992 reversed the principle, previously accepted by Australian law, that Australia was *terra nullius*, nobody’s land, at colonization. In 1998, through the Native Title Amendment Act, the Howard government retracted Indigenous rights and effected the extinguishment of native title in some instances, while the interests of non-Indigenous pastoralists and mining companies were greatly advantaged.

<sup>9</sup> Across Australian Aboriginal cultures, those without kinship or other associations with particular stretches of country (that is, ancestral lands) are expected to seek out someone with the correct associations who will introduce them to the spirits of the country.

<sup>10</sup> A *marae* is a meeting-place central to Maori community life, where important cultural events take place: greeting visitors, negotiations over land, performances of song and dance, etc.

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Clare Bradford is Professor of Literary Studies at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia, where she teaches literary studies and children's literature, and supervises students undertaking MA and PhD programmes. She has published widely on children's literature, with an emphasis on colonial and postcolonial texts and utopian discourses. Her most recent book is *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* (2007).