

# Introduction: reading postcoloniality, reading Canada (Introduction to issue of Essays on Canadian Writing entitled Testing the Limits: Postcolonial Theories & Canadian Literature)

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In *Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967*, Frank Davey sees contemporary English-Canadian fiction as signalling the arrival of the postnational state. This collection seeks a larger context for what Davey calls the "postnational," trying to understand it within the context of Canadian literary culture's struggling with postcolonial dilemmas, including a colonial heritage insufficiently acknowledged in our national histories and criticism. Canada has not yet produced equivalents to Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra's postcolonial reading of Australian identity in *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, which reads the cultural productions of white settlers and Aboriginal peoples in terms of their cross-cultural contacts under colonialism, nor to Ross Gibson's more postmodern and discontinuously postcolonial reading of Australian culture in *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*. These important books situate current Australian cultural debates within larger postcolonial and postmodern contexts. This collection of essays makes no attempt to replicate their arguments by producing Canadian equivalents because the Australian debate is culturally specific to Australia. Canadian imperatives take us in different directions, and certainly away from grand phrases like the postcolonial moment, the postcolonial mind, or the postcolonial intellectual. It is useful, however, to consider why such initiatives have not happened in Canada, and to look at where our own scholarly interests have been concentrated instead. For example, Julia V. Emberley's *Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory* concentrates on the cross-illuminations of feminist and postcolonial theories, but leaves the problem of invader-settler postcolonialism unresolved to concentrate instead on what she (following Paul Tennant) terms the "internal colonialism" (131) of Native peoples. More problematically, she assumes that postcolonial theory is exclusively metropolitan and Third World in its origins, ignoring Canadian and Commonwealth contributions to its development.

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ALTHOUGH ALL LIVING CULTURES undergo recurrent reinvention, the contemporary rethinking of Canada has been exacerbated by constitutional negotiations around the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords and the recent referendum in Quebec, as well as by

challenges to official multiculturalism and its secondary status within Canada's bicultural model of nationhood, challenges launched by Quebec separatists, First Nations groups, and people of colour during the 1980s. This current renegotiating of Canada and Canadianness takes place within a postcolonial context not always fully understood or recognized by either participants or analysts. This issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* aims to make that context more visible so that its implications for our future can be more clearly seen. The following essays explore Canada's colonial history and intellectual heritage, its mapping of space, and its self-representations through language and image, in order to clarify what is at stake in current battles over the redefinition of Canada and the scope of postcolonial studies.

These debates about Canadian nationhood and the relevance of postcolonialism, though often seen as distinct, are in fact connected in ways that are important for Canadians to understand. The focus of this volume is academic and literary, but the range of discussion involves understanding how Canadians see themselves and their world and how they are equipped (by their education and their history) to deal with the difficult moral and practical problems posed by decolonization at the end of the twentieth century. These two academic disciplines--Canadian literary criticism and postcolonial literary studies--have both been made possible by decolonization, and they have been formed within its determining context, but their different trajectories have only occasionally crossed paths without establishing influential connections. Canadian literary history has been written and Canadian literary canons have been formed without extended attention to postcolonial issues. The history of Canadian contributions to postcolonial studies is now being erased from both Canadian literary history and current accounts of postcolonialism. The politics and implications of that double erasure are my concern here.

Postcolonial theory is currently proliferating at a bewildering rate, so that it now seems preferable to substitute the plural form for the singular. To write of postcolonial theories is to recognize the multiplicity and fundamental incompatibility of much that now passes under the rubric of postcolonial. Debates about the proper definition of the field and its appropriate mission are charged with excitement and sometimes acrimony. A strong shared sense that these things matter and are worth contesting has resulted in little agreement as yet about the history, scope, and boundaries of the field.

But many of the sharpest debates centre on the problem of how to situate and evaluate the cultural production of invader-settler colonies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.(f.1) This collection addresses that issue, simultaneously testing the limits of the discursive address of postcolonial theories and of Canadian literary histories, canons, and criticism. The volume has been shaped around the belief that postcolonial frames of interpretation are most enabling when they facilitate distinctions between different orders of colonial experience, rather than, on

the one hand, conflating Third World and invader-settler societies as equally victimized or, on the other, banishing settler colonies from the sphere of "properly" postcolonial subject matter.

In *Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967*, Frank Davey sees contemporary English-Canadian fiction as signalling the arrival of the postnational state. This collection seeks a larger context for what Davey calls the "postnational," trying to understand it within the context of Canadian literary culture's struggling with postcolonial dilemmas, including a colonial heritage insufficiently acknowledged in our national histories and criticism. Canada has not yet produced equivalents to Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra's postcolonial reading of Australian identity in *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, which reads the cultural productions of white settlers and Aboriginal peoples in terms of their cross-cultural contacts under colonialism, nor to Ross Gibson's more postmodern and discontinuously postcolonial reading of Australian culture in *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*. These important books situate current Australian cultural debates within larger postcolonial and postmodern contexts. This collection of essays makes no attempt to replicate their arguments by producing Canadian equivalents because the Australian debate is culturally specific to Australia. Canadian imperatives take us in different directions, and certainly away from grand phrases like the postcolonial moment, the postcolonial mind, or the postcolonial intellectual. It is useful, however, to consider why such initiatives have not happened in Canada, and to look at where our own scholarly interests have been concentrated instead. For example, Julia V. Emberley's *Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory* concentrates on the cross-illuminations of feminist and postcolonial theories, but leaves the problem of invader-settler postcolonialism unresolved to concentrate instead on what she (following Paul Tennant) terms the "internal colonialism" (131) of Native peoples. More problematically, she assumes that postcolonial theory is exclusively metropolitan and Third World in its origins, ignoring Canadian and Commonwealth contributions to its development.

The focus of this collection falls on the mutual cross-interrogation of postcolonial and Canadian discursive formations, fields usually constructed as separate domains of investigation. Within Canadian literary studies, this kind of serious engagement with the implications of postcolonial theory for Canadian thinking has been rare. Yet there are antecedents for this volume that are in danger of being forgotten, as metropolitan critics rewrite the history of postcolonialism to designate metropolitan origins for a discipline that in fact had multiple heterogeneous beginnings within different colonial, postcolonial, and metropolitan locations.

## II. Postcolonialism in Canada

The history of postcolonial work in Canadian literary studies is discontinuous. It is marked by a series of aborted starts and little sustained dialogue in print, even though key transitional

figures, such as W.H. New, worked simultaneously within the two fields. That double placement, far from working as an advantage, may well have led to an underestimation of New's importance as an orienting figure in the shaping of both fields. His *Among Worlds: An Introduction to Modern Commonwealth and South African Fiction*, published in 1975, has not yet received due acknowledgement for its reorientation of the disciplinary orthodoxies of its time. Its originality and continued relevance seem to have been dismissed because of its Canadian origins and the modesty of its presentation.

Donna Bennett's article "English Canada's Postcolonial Complexities" begins to document a history of postcolonialism in Canada, but her account can only be partial partly because that history has been truncated and its documentation scattered. Too many gaps still remain in the historical record. In addition, there will inevitably be disagreements over the nuances of interpretation. I would take issue with her dating and her acceptance of foreign origins for postcolonial practices in Canada. She argues that "Use of a postcolonial perspective as a way of looking at literary studies began in the late 1970s among Australian critics," and that "its impact on Canadian literary studies was not felt much before the nineties" (165). My own experience in the field has been different. There were earlier initiatives, but they appeared to lead to dead ends, at least for a time, and now they are in danger of being forgotten.

Earlier accounts of these developments (which Bennett does not cite) provide different genealogies. In their introduction to *Australian/Canadian Literatures in English: Comparative Perspectives*, Russell McDougall and Gillian Whitlock identify an institutionalized beginning for postcolonial literary studies in the dialogue between Australian and Canadian critics that was originally encouraged by the establishment of the "Dominions Project" of the Humanities Research Council of Canada in the 1950s (4), and they locate discussions of literary affinities even earlier, in the late nineteenth century. Their narrative is closer to my own experience of developments in the field. They point out that after the comparative initiatives of the 1950s and early 1960s, "a monocultural perspective has been ascendant" (9), but that new challenges to that ascendancy were launched in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

That monocultural perspective ensured that few Canadianists read beyond a narrow definition of their discipline, often ignoring work published overseas or in journals devoted to comparative perspectives or to other national literatures dealing with colonialism and its aftermath. The result has been limiting in many ways. Bennett's article is timely in reiterating the argument for Canada's suitability as "an ideal laboratory for the study of postcolonial writing" (172), a point she appears to have derived from Sylvia Soderlind. But we need to ask why earlier statements of this position, such as R.T. Robertson's "Another Preface to an Uncollected Anthology: Canadian Criticism in a Commonwealth Context" (1973), John Moss's 1975 editorial in the *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, or my article "Australian Literature and the Canadian Comparison"

(1979), appear to have led nowhere. Bennett provides a preliminary narrative of Canadian work in this field and a justification for it, but she cannot provide a full account of the range of debate that animated thinking about postcolonialism in Canada before the "postcolonial" became internationally recognized by metropolitan centres because the relevant material is scattered, sometimes out of print, and demands a fuller history than an article can accomplish.

Bennett argues that postcolonialism entered Canadian awareness only in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This is true of the term in its present expanded usage, but not of the concept, nor of an analysis attentive to identifying colonial mentalities and complicities as well as resistant and alternative, nonrepressive agendas. These were alive much earlier. Several Canadian critics describe their personal introductions to the field through Commonwealth criticism in *A Shaping of Connections: Commonwealth Literature Studies--Then and Now* (1989), a collection edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek, Kirsten Holst Petersen, and Anna Rutherford. In "Reading for Resistance in the Post-Colonial Literature," an essay in that volume, Stephen Slemon presents a sophisticated history of how Commonwealth literary criticism became postcolonial, describing convincingly the ways in which an "enabling 'disobedience'" (113) to New Criticism led Commonwealth practitioners into postcolonialism and arguing that "what has changed here is the modality of our critical practice, not its Key signature" (113).

Arun Mukherjee, in her introduction to her important book *Towards an Aesthetic of Opposition: Essays on Literature, Criticism, and Cultural Imperialism* (1988), a collection of articles published between 1984 and 1987, argues yet another postcolonial position from a location loosely within the Commonwealth field, which affords her what she terms "space for an alternative point of view" (8). This article has now been reprinted in an expanded form as part of her new book entitled *Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space* (1994). Another theoretically inflected trajectory brought Tony Wilden to postcolonialism, a journey he narrates in his unjustly neglected analysis of Canadian colonialism entitled *The Imaginary Canadian* (1980). Both Mukherjee and Wilden interrogate the institution of English studies, Mukherjee from a Third World position and Wilden from a poststructuralist one. My point here is that the debate not only began earlier but was more fully developed, and expressed a wider range of options, than Bennett's account, which assumes a foreign origin for postcolonial thinking, acknowledges.

My own first encounter with postcolonial theory came in 1968, when I read Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in my first-year history class at the University of Toronto. In a 1972 graduate class in Commonwealth literature at the University of Toronto, taught by Jim Howard, we used Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* to provide our interpretive frame for theoretical analysis. This would still be considered an impeccably postcolonial approach. Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized and Dominated Man*, available in English in 1965 and 1968,

were also read during this period in Quebec and English Canada as speaking directly to Canadian experiences. They were part of the Canadian discursive framework for understanding the world during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Histories that identify Edward Said as the initiator of postcolonial analysis engage in a dangerous forgetting of these precursors. To suggest, as Linda Hutcheon does in "Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological," that Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) "offered a vision of what (twenty-five years later) postcolonial theorists call the complexities of the interdependence of colonizer and colonized" (158) is to forget how central such issues were to the climate in which Cohen wrote. Postcolonial theorizing did not begin twenty-five years later. Although Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, the authors of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, argue that post-colonial thinking, in terms of resistance to imperialism and imperial discursive structures, began with the imposition of colonialism, such postcolonial resistance began to attract metropolitan attention in the period after the end of World War II, as formerly colonized countries regained or first established their formal independence. Certainly Memmi spoke of the "implacable dependence" (ix) of colonizer and colonized in the preface to *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, published in French in 1957 (possibly echoing Sartre's account of anti-Semite and Jew), and Fanon exhaustively psychoanalysed the condition in *Black Skin, White Masks*, published in French in 1952. Cohen brought such analysis into dialogue with Canadian concerns in *Beautiful Losers* in a way that some literary critics of the time were able to recognize, even if, as Hutcheon argues, disciplinary orthodoxies steered them away from such insights.

While Hutcheon is certainly correct in recognizing that Northrop Frye's formalist theories carried more academic prestige in the 1960s than did postcolonial reading strategies, these other theoretical options were being offered at the University of Toronto even in those years of Frye's ascendancy, if only in courses in history and Commonwealth literature. Influenced by them, I travelled to Australia in 1973 to begin my Ph.D. in a deliberate search for an expanded comparative framework that could adapt Fanon's and Memmi's insights to the Canadian settler-society context. I was inspired as well by John Pengwerne Matthews's careful historical and comparative work in *Tradition in Exile*, and I knew that other Canadians, such as Jack Healy and Bruce Nesbitt, had preceded me.

The continuity I am identifying between earlier criticism of Canadian colonialism and current postcolonial critiques is largely an English-Canadian phenomenon. Jonathan Hart points out that "'Postcolonial theory' is a term now taken for granted in English but not used in other languages such as French" (71). Little dialogue has ensued between the English-Canadian postcolonialism identified here and the anticolonial struggles of Quebec. As Caroline Bayard argues in presenting her reasons for producing "a book about critical discourse in both

Canadas" ("Languages" 9), "by and large each critical discourse has been smugly turned towards its own sources of methodological vitality, its own developments, rather than exploring one another's sources or which features it might share with others" (9). She herself has shown, in her article "From *Negres blancs d'Amerique* (1968) to *Kanesatake* (1990): A Look at the Tensions of Postmodern Quebec," how analyses of intersections of postmodernism and postcolonialism could bridge this gap. Investigations of shared Eurocentric and Orientalist inheritances may also help bridge this critical divide between Quebec and the rest of Canada. One such promising collaborative venture is Jocelyne Doray and Julian Samuel's coedited book *The Raft of the Medusa: Five Voices on Colonies, Nations and Histories*, which explicitly addresses the implications of postcolonial analysis for understanding Quebec and English Canada.

In arguing for a more expanded historical record of postcolonialism in Canada, one that can account for the work of these earlier critics and teachers, I am asserting that there is a specifically English-Canadian mode of reading Canada and postcoloniality against one another that has formed a kind of "subjugated knowledge" (to put it in Foucauldian terms) that runs throughout our literary history despite our repeated forgettings. R. Radhakrishnan describes the contradictory formation of such subjugated knowledges: "they have always existed in history, but in the domain of theory they have been written out of effective existence. Within the auspices of the dominant theory their very historical and material reality has been dehistoricized and rendered nonexistent" (63-64). I have engaged here with Bennett's and Hutcheon's articles because by beginning to retrieve these knowledges, they have initiated a dialogue I hope this volume can continue. Their work in remembering histories that had been rendered nonexistent now enables us to ask what investment Canadianists might have had in furthering a process of forgetting.

The answer may lie in part in the unresolved contradictions of Canada's invader-settler inheritance. Non-Native Canadians have moved from denying to acknowledging guilt for the invasion and theft of First Nations lands, but that move is easier than recognizing current, continued complicity in imperialist patterns of domination, both epistemological and economic. Guilt is a paralysing and self-indulgent emotion. It excuses inaction and creates a paradoxical kind of pleasure in self-recrimination. To acknowledge complicity, in contrast, is far more threatening. It is easy to cast oneself as the victim of one's identity as an oppressor and to use that new identity as an excuse for continued inaction and even self-congratulation for one's inaction. Paradoxically, guilt allows some English Canadians to continue to feel like victims even when they have decided that they are no longer the colonized (as Margaret Atwood assumes English Canadians are in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*) but are now the colonizer (from the Native perspective). It is much harder to imagine oneself outside the binary of oppressor versus oppressed, as complicit in a system that can be analysed and

changed, in which it is not too late to make a difference.(f.2) Postcolonial criticism in Canada has approached this awareness of complicity several times, but we have always drawn back from the precipice it has revealed before us: the possibility, indeed the necessity, of initiating a radical change in the way our society is organized and understood. This kind of postcolonialism does not allow Canadians to be merely observers, academic students of a phenomenon that happens elsewhere. This kind of postcolonialism is about all of us: whether we have inherited identities as First Nations, Metis, Quebecois, invader-settler, immigrant, or "ethnic." If we wish to understand the complexities of these emerging postcolonialisms, then we must proceed with the post-colonial analysis of invader-settler societies.

In her essay in this volume, Sylvia Soderlind's assessment that Canada's claim to postcoloniality constitutes our "moral luck" addresses a self-congratulatory tone inherent in some postcolonial rhetoric, but conflates the tone with the substance of the argument. Postcolonial reading strategies confer neither moral superiority nor inferiority on either the critic or the subject matter; rather, post-colonial reading strategies attend to the material conditions in which the critic finds herself, conditions that are seldom morally clear cut. Like political correctness, postcolonialism is being characterized as a humourless, vanguardist "belief system" (Bennett 196) in ways that delegitimize its justifiable demands for change. This kind of oversimplification of a complex phenomenon, like Bennett's assertions that "postcolonial criticism has become profoundly anti-nationalistic" and that "Postcolonialism internalizes an evolutionary model ..." (195), strikes me as a misrepresentation that fails to recognize the genuinely different assumptions and values, starting points and goals, that postcolonial criticism is employing.

On the contrary, much postcolonial criticism identifies such evolutionary models with colonialist habits of mind, seeing decolonization as a process of rupture with imperialist oppositions between tradition and modernity and with imperialist assumptions about progress, the nature of change, and the meaning of cultural maturity. While it is true that a certain strain of cosmopolitan postcolonialism remains suspicious of nationalisms of any kind, many more post-colonial critics, perhaps best represented by Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, are insisting that there are many different kinds of nationalisms, all of which need to be understood in context. My understanding of postcolonial theory is that it requires us to pay very careful attention to the category of nation and the many different kinds of nationalism to which the nation may call us at different times. Such an interpellation may be especially fraught in a country such as Canada, where it has never been possible to forget that our national identity is neither unified nor natural but something we work at reinventing and protecting every day. The implications for Quebec, as Marvan Hassan notes, are equally complex (90-93).

### III. Settler-Colony Postcolonialism



The most extended arguments for the inclusion of invader-settler societies within the postcolonial field have appeared in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back*, in Slemon and Tiffin's *After Europe*, in Brydon and Tiffin's *Decolonising Fictions*, and in key articles by Alan Lawson and Stephen Slemon. Arguments against their inclusion appear as throwaway remarks in many places but receive consolidated expression in some of the introductory material to the selections in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman.

These objections deserve close scrutiny. Williams and Chrisman list two major obstacles to describing countries such as Canada as postcolonial: first, because of "their implication in contemporary capitalism," and second, because of their "historical relation" to colonialism (4). From my perspective, these two conditions provide compelling reasons for including the analysis of Canadian culture within postcolonial studies. Colonialism and imperialism fuelled the development of capitalism; their relation requires examination to be understood. Similarly, if postcolonialism does not investigate the range of historical relations of colonies to colonialism, it will never gain a full perspective on colonialism and how to counter its negative effects. I believe that postcolonialism proves itself most useful as a locally situated, provisional, and strategic attempt to think through the consequences of colonialism and to imagine nonrepressive alternatives to its discursive regime. To me, it is an activist and interventionary politics and a thinking process more than a static object of inquiry. To argue, as do Soderlind and Bennett, that postcolonialism must always be "subversive" and limited to adopting a "position of resistance to the metropolis" (Bennett 198, 199) is, however, to oversimplify potentially more complex relations.

A similar equating of postcolonialism with resistance to the metropolis appears to inform the generalizations that Williams and Chrisman provide to support their exclusion of Canada from the postcolonial field. Of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which they describe in a racialized discourse as "the former white settler colonies," they write:

That these were not simply colonies was formally recognised at the time by Britain in granting them Dominion status. Economically and politically, their relation to the metropolitan centre bore little resemblance to that of the actual colonies. They were not subject to the sort of coercive measures that were the lot of the colonies, and their ethnic stratification was fundamentally different. Their subsequent history and economic development, and current location within global capitalist relations, have been very much in a metropolitan mode, rather than a (post-)colonial one. (4)

In this passage, the nominating of authentic and inauthentic colonies is central to the editors' designation of an authentic postcolonial project. (Soderlind's *Margin/Alias: Language and Colonization in Canadian and Quebecois Fiction* employs a similar opposition between what

she terms "a real postcolonial situation--in Africa" [7] and the Canadian adoption of the marginalized position of the postcolonial as a postmodern "alias.") In Williams and Chrisman's naming, the authentic colony is implicitly defined as poor, nonwhite, and resistant, and the inauthentic as rich, white, and complicit. They define the Canadian kind of colony out of existence by characterizing its development as the opposite of that presumed for those unnamed colonies that they term "the actual colonies" (4). Ironically, withholding the status of "authentic" colonialism from countries such as Canada makes the editors complicit in the continuing denial and marginalization of Native people's experience of colonialism as well as of the invader-settler and immigrant experiences. This disqualification of Canadian colonialism seems to contradict the editors' earlier definition of colonialism as "the conquest and direct control of other people's land" (2). It also makes it harder for all Canadians to identify and combat the particular kinds of postcolonial experience they are currently undergoing as they watch their economy shrink, jobs disappear, and cultural sovereignty erode.

The generalizations that Williams and Chrisman employ to disqualify settler colonies from the postcolonial domain are disconcertingly vague. The grounds of their argument shift quickly, so that dominion status slides into metropolitan before our eyes. Yet clearly, if dominion status means anything, it marks a colonial, that is a nonmetropolitan, positioning that is historically specific to the invader-settler societies, and it marks not their founding (as Williams and Chrisman imply) but their first step toward postcolonial status.

The ahistorical bias of using Canada's dominion status, a temporary state, to freeze it forever outside the postcolonial is a tactic that this volume seeks particularly to challenge.

Postcolonialism is neither a thing nor an essentialized state; rather, it is a complex of processes designed to circumvent imperial and colonial habits of mind. If we can reclaim the specificity and historical situatedness of the dominion model, however, it could prove helpful in distinguishing settler-colonial patterns of decolonization from those achieved in other kinds of colonies. Jim Davidson's coining of the term "de-dominionisation" for distinguishing Australian and Canadian moves to independence seems helpful in refining the terminology we need to distinguish these different types of development.

The problem with Williams and Chrisman's formulation of the postcolonial, in contrast, is its ahistorical assignment of absolute difference and its rigid exclusivity. They can imagine only one kind of colony and one pattern of colonization. It may be that colonial discourse theory's reliance on self/other distinctions makes such exclusivity almost inevitable. An unresolvable opposition is developing between those postcolonialisms that seek to challenge binary modes of thinking as implicitly imperialist and those postcolonialisms that continue to operate within binary models. Again and again in this latter criticism, one finds two recurring claims: an insistence on clinging to the binary of colonizer/colonized and the naming of a resistant

postcolonialism as postcolonialism's only authentic expression. Complicit forms of colonialism become almost unthinkable within this model. As Slemon argues,

the new binaristic absolutism which seems to come in the wake of First-World accommodation to the fact of post-colonial literary and cultural criticism seems to be working in several ways to drive that trans-national region of ex-colonial settler cultures away from the field of post-colonial literary representation. The Second World of writing within the ambit of colonialism is in danger of disappearing ... because it does not offer up an experiential grounding in a common "Third World" aesthetics, because its modalities of post-coloniality are too ambivalent, too occasional and uncommon, for inclusion within the field. ("Unsettling the Empire" 35)

Following Slemon's observations, this volume examines the "ambivalent," "occasional," and "uncommon" modalities of Canadian colonialism and postcolonialism. To ignore these, in my view, would be to misunderstand contemporary Canadian problems and consequently err in proposing solutions. This debate about terminology and the scope of the postcolonial involves more than skirmishing over professional turf. It has social-policy and political implications as well as specifically disciplinary repercussions within the university. Writing about national liberation and culture, Amilcar Cabral suggests that "it is much less difficult to dominate and continue dominating a people whose culture is similar or analogous to that of the conqueror" (60). "Conqueror" would strike many as an exaggeration of the status of the transnational corporations based mainly in the United States who currently dominate cultural production and transmission in Canada, yet the truth is that Canadian culture, despite its similarity in many ways to British and American cultures, does display many of the signs of a dominated culture. The few Canadian movies that manage to get produced seldom get necessary distribution and exposure to meet their costs; the Canadian radio, television, and book industries are foreign-dominated. Our understanding of these issues is obscured if we fail to recognize Canada's colonial history and its neocolonial present. If postcolonial analysis can foreground these, then it will serve an important purpose. But it can only illuminate Canadian histories and contradictory complicities if its range is extended beyond what the West finds exotic and entrancingly other.

Given such problems in defining the scope of the postcolonial, many have wondered if it is a term worth fighting for. Does it help critics understand current Canadian debates about multiculturalism, racism, postmodernism, and appropriation of voice, or does it obscure these issues through homogenizing and universalizing a metaphorized marginality to such an extent that these problems can be made to disappear, at least from the domain of theoretical discussion? To those who would equate the postcolonial simply with official decolonization or the end of the colonial, the term itself raises some new problems that seem to obscure our ability to make useful distinctions between types of colonialism, postcolonialism, and

decolonization, and impede our understanding of the roles of racism or continued forms of domination under neocolonialism. These objections are shrewdly rehearsed by Anne McClintock in "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism,'" yet she also points out that thinking around postcoloniality has inspired much valuable work and its usefulness is far from exhausted.

Debates about terminology provided material for an entire subfield within Commonwealth literary studies for decades before "post-colonial" emerged as the preferred term with the publication of *The Empire Writes Back*. Those discussions, like the newer ones around postcolonialism, serve more to clarify fissures and problems within the field than to lead to agreement around its focus and methodology. Part of the problem lies in the range of meanings assigned to "the postcolonial," which can designate a subject matter, a period, or a methodology, none of which has yet been satisfactorily established.

#### IV. Testing the Limits

In response to this currently fluid state of potential postcolonial applications, this issue has been organized to canvass the entire range of the field while zeroing in on particularly suggestive problems of context, text, or reading strategy. We begin with a general framing of the debates around postcolonialism and its Canadian manifestations in the articles by Alan Lawson, Sylvia Soderlind, Larry McDonald, Heather Murray, and Arun Mukherjee. The second section, with contributions by Richard Cavell, Chris Gittings, and W.H. New, resituates these debates through cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary comparisons. After these provisional framings, the collection concludes with a series of exemplary reading strategies designed to highlight the insights provided by attention to the post-colonial investments and participations of various texts throughout our history. John Thurston, Robert Fleming, and Carole Gerson address the intersections between nineteenth-century ideologies and narratives; Ajay Heble and Dee Horne direct our attention to contemporary debates. Stephen Slemon concludes the volume, summarizing its contribution and the directions for further work that its achievement now suggests.

It is possible to argue that the collection as a whole provides a flexible but ultimately bounded definition of what the postcolonial means (and could mean) within the specifically Canadian context. Whereas Williams and Chrisman argue that Canadian development has taken metropolitan forms, McClintock makes an opposite (and to me a more compelling) argument that Canada has not yet undergone decolonization and is unlikely to soon (295), though in Davidson's terms Canada has been "de-dominionised." If post-colonial analysis can help us understand this situation, then its value will be proved. More than fashionable lip service to "resistance" and "subversion," we need a historically grounded criticism that can help us understand contemporary inequities in order to combat them effectively. At the same time,

however, we must listen carefully to critics who see postcolonialism itself as a new form of imperialism, a new language for obscuring an understanding of racisms, or merely a form of postmodernism. These point to the potential within postcolonial studies to reinstall the very oppressions they are seeking to oppose.

In soliciting these essays, I was looking for debate more than consensus. My aim was to provide a cross section of the kind of work being done in and on Canada within postcolonial contexts right now. The contributors do not always agree with one another. In this context, such diversity of opinion is probably more a strength than a weakness. The volume as a whole reinforces McClintock's call for "a proliferation of historically nuanced theories and strategies ... which may enable us to engage more effectively in the politics of affiliation, and the currently calamitous dispensations of power" (303). In organizing this collection, I have proceeded on the assumption, articulated by Bennett, that "Asking postcolonial questions of English-Canadian literature can be productive so long as we do not impose a single kind of postcolonialism, and so long as we do not presume that the postcolonial perspective is the only way to frame one's vision" (196). There are limits to the postcolonial reading strategy, as with any other approach, including the Canadianist, but there are also strengths on which we are only beginning to draw. This volume begins to test those limits.

If there is a point of agreement among the contributors to this volume beyond this shared commitment to engagement in the debate, it probably lies in the belief that we need "to make a stronger distinction between the postcolonialism of settler and non-settler countries" (Mishra and Hodge, "What Is Post(-)Colonialism?" 288) if we are to hold the term at all and make it mean something particular to Canadians. To strengthen these distinctions about kinds of power relations within the postcolonial frame seems more helpful than to deny the participation of invader-settler colonies in these heterogeneous postcolonial formations.

There is not, however, a uniform commitment to postcolonialism itself as an organizing concept among the contributors to this volume. Mukherjee has argued elsewhere against employing the term at all ("Whose Post-Colonialism?"), and in *Margin/Alias*, Soderlind has suggested that "It may be argued that since the mid-sixties Canada has become more postmodern and cosmopolitan than postcolonial" (227). In this volume, also, Soderlind expresses strong reservations about the value of theorizing margins, arguably one of postcolonialism's energizing terms, at least in its postmodern variations. Certainly, almost every essay in this collection relies on the language of margins, if only to problematize, complicate, or dispute its undeniable centrality in discussions of the postcolonial. Soderlind's essay stands as a powerful reminder of the dangers of employing this metaphorization of experience, and of using its framework as the founding assumption of an argument that seeks to reaffirm rather than negate the values of difference. Similarly, the vexed relation of postmodernism to

postcolonialism arouses varied reactions, from Soderlind's and McDonald's distrust of their conflation to Cavell's tentative endorsement.

As a reflection of the current state of Canadian literary criticism's postcolonial participation, this collection shows an eclectic array of influences but also some important paths of divergence from the way the field is developing in Britain and the United States. The Australian-authored *The Empire Writes Back* is cited more often than metropolitan-based theorists, though as several articles show, its reception is far from uncritical. What we do have in this collection is a fundamental rethinking of the earlier pieties constructing English-Canadian settler nationalism and a questioning of the ways in which the traditional disciplinary structures of English, history, and geography participated in the construction of a Canadian nationalism that both occluded and celebrated its colonizing role. A salutary distrust of academic fashions accompanies a rigorous attention to what McDonald terms the "particularized contexts of English-Canadian culture."

McDonald's call for an investigation of specific historical contexts backed up by citations of archival materials, like Murray's for more attention to institutional analysis, cultural location, and a concrete attention to history, is answered in the papers within this volume. This refocusing of postcolonial critique away from metropolitan formulations enables a renewed attention to thinkers who worked or still work within Canadian contexts, such as W.J. Alexander, Donald Creighton, Northrop Frye, and Linda Hutcheon. Suspicions of moral vanguardism, imported rhetoric, "historically impoverished metanarratives" (McDonald), and trendy clichés lead to a privileging of a language of proofs and groundedness in the particularities of the Canadian, in full recognition of that entity's own constructed and disputed definition. The goal throughout is a commitment to establishing and sustaining difference: the differences that make Canada Canada, and the differences that continue to challenge that national formation of an immigrant, capitalist culture on usurped land.

Footnotes:

(f.1) For many years, Canada was described as a settler colony. In the late 1980s, postcolonial critics modified the description to "settler-invader" in order to remind readers that, from the point of view of indigenous peoples whose lands were taken, "settlement" was in fact an invasion. I have reversed the terms here, to "invader-settler," to shift the emphasis from two opposing historical narratives and to stress that the narrative of settlement in itself occludes and denies the prior fact of invasion. Instead of adding the modifier "invader" to the prior narrative of the victor, which celebrated settlement, priority should in fact be given to the initial fact of invasion.

(f.2) For a thorough analysis of this disabling guilt, see Perreault.

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