

Editorial: Viewing Imperialism through the Postcolonial Lens

Our last issue showed how Canadian writers contributed to internationally distributed English-language magazines during the “golden age” of print. This issue follows a related theme: it looks at how British “imperialism” has affected both Canadian educational theory and writing for young people. Such analysis is appropriate today because Canada has been assimilating increasingly large numbers of immigrants from non-British countries. This issue of *CCL* calls for a critical examination of some of our present cultural formations.

The postcolonial lens provides a paradigm for exploring the larger question of how we assign value to literary representation. The cultural spaces first mapped in literature, and then reinterpreted by readers, provide sites for examining the ideological agenda in the interconnected discourses of gender, race, religion, and nationhood. In focusing on literary texts as a location for power struggles over ideological differences, postcolonial theory has asked (1) what kinds of experiences do we privilege in literature, and why? (2) how do we authenticate categories of experience? (3) to what extent and in what ways do the powers inherent in language, and representation effect intentional or unintentional “colonization”?

“Those who are in positions to edit anthologies and prepare reading lists are obviously those who occupy positions of some cultural power,” writes Barbara Herrnstein Smith in *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Harvard UP, 1988). We present a number of educators reflecting on various ways that imperialism has affected and continues to affect our school systems. Awareness of naturalized attitudes is a prerequisite to discarding any that no longer serve our evolving society.

John Willinsky, Director of the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction at UBC and author of the recent *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED* (Princeton UP), writes about the legacy of nineteenth century British philosophy on our thinking. James Greenlaw, of the University of Regina, drawing on Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, discusses how notions of race, culture, and nation appear in Chinese-Canadian texts read in secondary schools. Gillian Siddall revisits Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners* as a high school text which can open up questions about race and imperial attitudes. Finally, Ilian Goodall, a museum educator, looks at texts which Canadian children actually read between 1880-90, demonstrating how Africa and its peoples were depicted in adventure novels. Our cover shows “Coyote” meeting Columbus as Europeans “discover” North America.

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