

Christa Knellwolf King, Margarete Rubik (Eds.)

Stories of Empire

Narrative Strategies for the Legitimation
of an Imperial World Order

Ansgar Nünning und Vera Nünning (Hg.)

ELCH

Studies in English Literary and Cultural History

ELK

Studien zur Englischen Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft

Band 33

Christa Knellwolf King, Margarete Rubik (Eds.)

Stories of Empire

Narrative Strategies for the Legitimation
of an Imperial World Order

 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

**Stories of Empire: Narrative Strategies
for the Legitimation of an Imperial World Order.**

Christa Knellwolf King, Margarete Rubik (Eds.)

Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009

(ELCH; Band 33)

ISBN 978-3-86821-074-3

Umschlaggestaltung: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009

ISBN 978-3-86821-074-3

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Nachdruck oder Vervielfältigung nur mit
ausdrücklicher Genehmigung des Verlags

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier

Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier

Tel.: (0651) 41503 / 9943344, Fax: 41504

Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>

E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This collection of essays has benefited from the goodwill and support of colleagues and institutions from all over the world. The value of our joint research was recognised by the English Department, the Faculty of the Humanities and the Chancellery of the University of Vienna when they generously supported our conference “Stories of Empire” in September 2007. Additional support from the City of Vienna enabled us to invite international speakers so that we were able to pitch our discussions at the cutting edge of recent developments. We wish to thank Christine Klein for her untiring efforts to ensure the success of the conference and Bernhard Schubert for his organisational skills on behalf of the conference and his dedication to the formatting of the volume. A Discovery Grant from the Australian Research Council provided invaluable assistance for the research of Christa Knellwolf King. The same grant from the Australian Research Council also supported Neil Ramsey’s editorial advice as well as enabling him to contribute a chapter of his own. Special thanks are owing to Kathleen Olive for the compilation of a very detailed index. The editors’ quest for a suitable publisher was spontaneously supported by Ansgar Nünning’s generous offer to include this collection of essays in the Series “Studies in English Literary and Cultural History” with Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier. Special thanks are due to Erwin Otto at WVT, who allowed us to negotiate the usual publication subsidy and who accompanied this special issue with encouragement and enthusiasm.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
<i>Christa Knellwolf King and Margarete Rubik</i>	
Formulae for Imperial Story Telling: The Formation and Dissemination of Imperial Values in Victorian Narratives	13
<i>Vera Nünning</i>	
“The spoiled adopted child of Great Britain and even of the Empire”: A Symptomatic Reading of <i>Heart of Darkness</i>	37
<i>John Storey</i>	
“A Question of Literature”: The Romantic Writer and Modern Wars of Empire	49
<i>Neil Ramsey</i>	
Reverse Imperialism: Invasion Narratives in English Turn-of-the-Century Fiction	69
<i>Michael C. Frank</i>	
Metaphors as Mini-Stories of Empire: On the Dissemination of Imperialist Mentalities and Values through Metaphors	93
<i>Ansgar Nünning</i>	
Making Babies in the South Seas: Captain Cook’s Problematic Properties	121
<i>Jonathan Lamb</i>	
Adventurer, Western Observer and Female Scientist: The Conflicting Interests of Ida Pfeiffer’s Travelogues	137
<i>Margarete Rubik</i>	

The <i>Novara</i> Expedition and the Imperialist Messages of Exploration Literature <i>Christa Knellwolf King</i>	157
Ancient Historiography as Imperial Narrative: The Case of Macedonia and the Second British Empire <i>C. Akça Ataç</i>	177
Strategies of Subversion in the Work of Lessing, Achebe, and Ngūgī <i>Linda Lang-Peralta</i>	189
“[A] good disaster”: John Franklin as Imperial (Anti-)Hero in Rudy Wiebe’s <i>A Discovery of Strangers</i> (1994), Mordecai Richler’s <i>Solomon Gursky Was Here</i> (1989) and Sten Nadolny’s <i>Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit</i> (1983) <i>Martin Löschnigg</i>	203
Magic Realism and the Illegitimate Empire <i>Ursula Kluwick</i>	219
Notes on Contributors	233
Index	237

INTRODUCTION

CHRISTA KNELLWOLF KING AND MARGARETE RUBIK

Ever since Salman Rushdie employed the phrase “the empire writes back to the centre” to explain the larger purpose behind his novel *Midnight’s Children*,¹ the resistance of postcolonial fiction to the perpetuation of imperial beliefs and attitudes has been encapsulated in the concept of “writing back”. In the words of Ashcroft et al., literature seeks to subvert imperial superiority “not only through nationalist assertion, proclaiming itself central and self-determining, but even more radically by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarise centre and periphery in the first place.” (2002: 32) While western claims to a superior understanding of the world have generally been ridiculed and rejected, the insidious processes that established and continue to sustain imperial ideology have still not been understood sufficiently. As with all ideology, the enduring legacy of imperial mentalities (Mangan 1990) depends on mystification and obfuscation. Modes of thought that underpinned imperialism are deeply engrained in contemporary habits of reasoning, and are capable of being reinforced in the very attempt to expunge them. Analysis of their logical structures therefore is an urgent task.

This book attempts to survey the conglomerate of beliefs, metaphoric projections, values and habits of mind that formed the mental framework of British imperialism. It aims to offer new perspectives on how the empire was perceived, conceptualised and narrated during its heyday and its aftermath, explaining the conditions of possibility for the emergence of imperial fictions and the continuous efforts by post-colonial writing to challenge and dismantle them.

Although there were explicit attempts to demonstrate the benefits and dangers of empire, the most effective persuasive strategies were unconscious. In particular, the aspirations and desires informing colonial mentalities were superscribed on a set of narratives that influenced the development of individual and collective identities. One of the principles of cognitive psychology explains that the most basic human cravings for power, success, love and security can only turn into motors for action if they are re-configured in concrete terms. As has long been recognised by the experts in advertising, human motivation is preceded by fantasies that render concrete, and therefore tangible and attainable, what the imagination can portray.² These fantasies are

¹ Rushdie formulated the phrase “the empire writes back to the centre” in an attempt to explain the political significance of the Indian “national longing for form” portrayed in his ground-breaking novel *Midnight’s Children* (1980: 359). Compare Rushdie 1985; also compare John J. Su 2001.

² Compare, for example, Roger Fowler’s (1991) discussion of the ideological backdrop to the language of advertising.

modelled on narrative patterns that can be reduced to simple formulae, such as “you will be generally admired, if you convert the unbelievers to Christianity”. Imperial fantasies are hence not simply discursive constructs but narratives projecting certain types of agents and activities. The systematic repetition of fantasies, for example, about the exciting adventures and glorious rewards of the intrepid traveller or the fearless missionary, habituated Victorian audiences to the (supposed) rationality of interfering in a village community on the imperial periphery. As a result the import of these fantasies is deeply engrained, or naturalised, in popular consciousness and by indirect routes influences the decision-making processes of their recipients. By encouraging them to aspire to the life of a traveller or explorer, a missionary or teacher, a doctor or nurse, an imperial officer or soldier, large numbers of books that described the experience of the imperial peripheries (both in imaginative and realistic mode) recruited the agents of empire.

As the chapters by Vera Nünning and Margarete Rubik demonstrate, adventure stories were such an important vehicle for the dissemination of imperial mentalities because they foregrounded a certain type of reader. This means that adventure stories do not simply project an implied reader but on the contrary actively forge an audience that shares a fascination for the dangers of unfamiliar spaces and enthusiastically follows the adventurous quests for their mysterious secrets. Adventure is always concerned with the act of crossing boundaries. And curiosity, regardless of whether it is informed by a desire for scientific knowledge or a mere craving for exotic sights, is the motor behind courageous forages into unexplored terrain. As Nicholas Thomas has shown, the act of appropriation is always preceded by a “harmless” desire to see and experience the physical appearance, customs and life style of foreign peoples (Thomas 1991: 126-151). In both stories and non-fictional descriptions of imperial subject matter, the attempt to reduce cultural difference to the homogeneous standards of western civilisation features as the dark side of a healthy curiosity for otherness.

This collection of essays examines the narrative transformation of collective fantasies about imperial activities as sources of progress, prosperity, and (global) liberty. Contributors from disciplinary backgrounds in cultural theory and literary history, working on colonial and postcolonial topics, came together in Vienna in September 2007 to discuss the discursive strategies which were used to form and disseminate arguments both in favour and critical of an imperial world view. The conference, also entitled “Stories of Empire”, invited its participants to reflect on the conditions attendant on the narrativisation of imperial topics. The papers resulting from this conference concentrate on the genres, narrative modes, typologies and strategies of emplotment that became particularly important for the dissemination of imperial ideology. Many contributors pay special attention to the means by which values and moral standards are woven into narrative structures, contrasting explicit propaganda with indirect appeals to their readers’ sympathies, which are enmeshed with certain generic conventions.