

Canadian Literatures

edited and introduced by
Konrad Gross and Jutta Zimmermann

POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Edited by

Tobias Döring, Frank Schulze-Engler and Gerhard Stilz

VOL. IV

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 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

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Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2012

(Postcolonial Literatures in English – Sources and Resources; Vol. 4)

ISBN 978-3-86821-347-8

Cover Design: Brigitta Disseldorf

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ISBN 978-3-86821-347-8

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WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

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General Preface

Postcolonial Literatures in English have become a central field of research and study. If studying 'English' was once synonymous with studying literature from Britain, and later with looking into a bipolar literary world comprising Britain and the USA, it is today a critical engagement with a global network of English-language literatures and cultures. This engagement encompasses a broad spectrum of linguistic varieties, including speakers or writers who may use English (or a variety of English) as only one of the options available to them in their specific socio-cultural context.

The six volumes of *Postcolonial Literatures in English: Sources and Resources* aim to help students and teachers of literature in exploring the diversity of this global network. Postcolonial Literatures in English are linked through a common history of colonisation and decolonisation, but also through current transnational connections in an increasingly globalized world and by transcultural lifeworlds established by large-scale migration and diasporic populations. At the same time, these literatures are very specific engagements with widely diverging experiences of colonisation and decolonisation, local histories and entangled modernities. The volumes in this series on (1) *South Asian Literatures*, (2) *Australian, New Zealand and Pacific Literatures*, (3) *African Literatures*, (4) *Canadian Literatures*, (5) *Caribbean Literatures*, and (6) *Black and Asian British Literatures* address both the local, regional or national contexts in which these literatures have emerged and the transnational and transcultural connections that link them to each other and the wider 'English-speaking world.'

The volumes bring together fully annotated original historical and critical texts documenting the material, political and cultural conditions from which anglophone writing has emerged and continues to operate in the specific regions. Each volume contains an introduction setting out major trends and developments in the region, provides recommendations for further reading and explores the specificities of the region within a general framework focussing on histories, identities, language, education, movements and genres as well as transcultural perspectives. The book series allows easy access to helpful background knowledge on the broad range of postcolonial literatures, aims at facilitating critical dialogues with literary and intellectual voices from relevant regions, and hopes to generate further insights into the interconnectedness of anglophone literatures around the world.

Tobias Döring, Frank Schulze-Engler and Gerhard Stilz

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Introduction

Canada, the subject of the fourth volume of the series *Postcolonial Literatures in English: Sources and Resources*, has not always qualified as postcolonial in academic debates. Critics denying the country's postcoloniality have been guided chiefly by two arguments.¹ First, only Third and Fourth World societies and their literatures can be legitimately apostrophized as postcolonial, a view that is based mainly on the opposition of colonizer/victimizer – colonized/victim and subsequently on political, economic, and social conditions characterized by dominance, exploitation, subordination, and finally anti-colonial resistance and liberation. As such, the term 'postcolonial' is reserved for the non-white colonial territories of the former British Empire. Second, Canada emerges as the result of first French and then British imperial expansion. As a "white invader society," so the reasoning, the country does not qualify as a postcolonial nation. The term should be reserved for 'authentic' or 'real' former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, or on the Indian subcontinent and in other parts of South East Asia. In her introduction to *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature* (2003), Laura Moss quotes a statement by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman: Settler colonies (or Second World societies)

were not subject to the sort of coercive measures which 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 the metropolitan mode rather than a (post)-colonial one.²

While one must not ignore fundamental differences between white settler and conqueror colonies, Williams' and Chrisman's view betrays a somewhat myopic understanding of both Canada's colonial past and its more recent pluricultural development in the wake of global migrations. It also risks to limit the scope of postcolonial inquiry to issues relating to the 'proper' postcolonial societies and their cultures. Laura Moss' ironic summing-up of Williams'/Chrisman's position, namely that "Canada is simply too rich, too white, and too strong to be considered beside other postcolonial locations,"³ is followed by a sketch of historical features which no longer justify the retelling of the old tale "from colony to nation" with its ideological erasure or distortions of uncomfortable historical truths. An earlier

¹ See, for example, Linda Hutcheon, "'Circling the Downspout of Empire': Postcolonialism and Postmodernism," *Ariel*, 20:4 (1989), 149-175.

² "Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1-20, here 4; quoted in: *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*, ed. Laura Moss (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2003), 1-23, here 14.

³ *Ibid.*

version of this reader on Canada⁴ reflects the beginning stage of Canadian Studies at which critics were still fixated on the evolution of Canadian literature as a national literature and on the shedding of its colonial fetters (through its contribution to the articulation of a national identity and through the modernization of literary forms). While in the early stages of Canadian Studies in Europe such an approach was helpful, it seems outdated from today's perspective. Dramatic changes in the racial composition of Canadian society since the end of the 1960s have left their indelible mark on Canadian culture, literature, and criticism. Since the late 1980s, the canon of Canadian literature has been considerably expanded. While women writers (of European origin) from the beginnings had played a prominent role, ethnic writers and writers of color have entered the canon more recently. The heterogeneity of cultures represented by contemporary Canadian writers challenges the Herderian concept of nation as a homogeneous collective. Debates on power relations, hegemony, race, resistance, diaspora, and hybridity in the Canadian context suggest that postcolonial issues have reached the shores of the country and that Canada can no longer be treated as simply the unrepenting white offspring of an imperialist mother whose teats she is still suckling.

This volume is meant to introduce European readers to the historical and cultural context from which Canadian literature has emerged. Over the course of more than a century, Canadian literature has not only stepped out of the British and American ambit, but has also left behind the frame of nation thought of as a homogeneous and stable entity. The historical, political, literary, legal, and critical texts collected here are meant to illustrate the formative processes which have shaped Canada's imperial and colonial past. The specific focus is on the ruptures and bleak spots that have been lifted into the country's consciousness over the last four decades. Whereas the traditional narrative of nation has focused on Canada's colonial relation to Britain and to its neo-colonial ties to the United States, a number of factors have drawn attention to the forms of internal colonization that are manifest in the relation between the political and economic center in East Central Canada and the 'rest' of Canada: the strengthening of French Canadian nationalism and the emergence of regionalist movements in, for example, the Canadian West, the indigenous land claims movement, and the immense ethno-cultural diversification in the wake of Canada's policy of multiculturalism.

The "invasion" of Canada by postcolonial inquiries has allowed for challenging perspectives on the country's history, self-perception, and the not always untroubled transcultural exchanges. In order to determine in which areas of the cultural arena postcolonial inquiries can be most profitably conducted, it is necessary to take a closer look at Canada's colonial past as well as at the political developments that have led to Canada's postcolonial status in the present. Subsequently, current misgivings articulated predominantly, though not exclusively, by non-white critics and writers about continuing imperialist/colonialist mind patterns and practices (assigned to racism, inequality, discrimination, hegemonic power structures etc.) are better understood when seen against the backdrop of historical developments.

⁴ Konrad Gross and Walter Pache, *Grundlagen zur Literatur in englischer Sprache*. Vol. 1: *Kanada* (München: Fink, 1987).

Any postcolonial examination of Canada and Canadian culture has to be wary of untroubled linear concepts of Canada's history as the bringing of civilization, nation-building, the road to progress etc. Such linear readings have to be placed between two poles, first, the annihilation and enforced change of First Nations cultures brought about by European colonial expansion after the French founding of Quebec in 1608 and, second, the building of a white and English-dominated nation in the latter half of the 19th century. The internal colonization of the aboriginals began with the 16th-century Jesuit missions among the Hurons, continued with the economic dependence of the indigenes on the capitalist fur trading companies (both French and English), and was completed with their territorial displacement during the white settlement of the Canadian West after 1870. European colonization has been responsible for the often disastrous material, social, and economic situation which led Shushwap Chief George Manuel, the first president of the National Indian Brotherhood, in 1974 to speak of the Fourth World in a Second World country.⁵

For the First Nations, the British conquest of New France in 1763 meant nothing more than the replacement of one colonial master with another. A little bit more than a decade later, Britain's greatest triumph in North America was followed by the successful anti-colonial rebellion of the thirteen American colonies. Interpreting the Revolutionary War as an act of decolonization, critics have subsumed the United States under the 'postcolonial' nations. Whether such a use of the term 'postcolonial' is justified – considering the States' current status as a superpower – is beyond the scope of this volume. The American Revolution, however, is relevant insofar as it marks the beginning of a development which would ultimately lead to the foundation of the Canadian nation in 1867. On the eve of the War of Independence Britain lured French Canada away from joining the rebels by passing the *Quebec Act* (1774), which left the social structures, the civil jurisdiction, and the position of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec untouched, thereby making possible the survival of French culture in North America. Granting Quebec cultural autonomy laid the groundwork for the future dualism between what came to be known as the two founding nations. The *Quebec Act* also did forge, in opposition to American republicanism and individualism, a conservative self-image for British North America, which was reinforced by the arrival of thousands of Loyalist refugee settlers from republican America.

In spite of the displacement of Native cultures, the umbrella term "white invader colony" is imprecise insofar as it presses the colonization process into a pattern homogenizing diverse settler experiences. To call all settlers simply invaders is to ignore the differences of class, wealth, ethnicity, and power. The invaders were the ruling authorities in France (up to 1763) and in Great Britain who moved, planted, and removed population groups for economic, political and other reasons. The settlement of Protestant Lunenburg Germans in Nova Scotia in 1743 and the deportation of the French-speaking Acadians also from Nova Scotia in 1755 (known as 'Le Grand Dérangement' or 'the Great Upheaval') resulted from the colonial struggle of Britain with France over North America. In addition, the

⁵ George Manuel and Michael Poslun, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills: Collier-Macmillan Canada, 1974).

arrival of Black Loyalists in 1783 from the United States (some free, some slaves) and the enforced removal of “unruly” maroons from colonial Jamaica to Nova Scotia in 1796 mark the entry of “Africadians” (a term coined by African Canadian writer George Elliott Clarke in 1991⁶) into Canadian colonial history.

It was particularly after 1815 that Britain began to shove what she regarded as her “excess” population to the colonies. The majority of the 500,000 immigrants to Canada up to the mid-19th century⁷ was made up of poor people, i.e. disbanded soldiers after the Napoleonic Wars, victims of the Highland Clearances in Scotland, the Industrial Revolution, and the Great Famine in Ireland. To consider all newcomers as accomplices in the appropriation of First Nations lands is to blur class lines, disregard power relations, and overlook the socio-economic hardships, which forced many to leave their homes. Many were not more than pawns in the hands of British authorities, i.e. landlords, parishes, workhouses, charities etc. which wanted to rid the mother country of the problems of poverty, hunger, unemployment, overpopulation, and unrest by sending the demographical “surplus” off to the “underpopulated” colonial territories of British North America. The term “white settler colony” comprises both settlement and power structures. Many immigrants who crossed the Atlantic under dreadful conditions (“going steerage”) and who were forced to undergo a quarantine on arrival in Quebec were not agents of their own destiny but an army of unwanted people spewed out by the mother country. Most of the poor probably did not waste any time to think about the fate of the aboriginals, as they just hoped to better their lives unimpeded by the socio-economic conditions which they had left behind. Factually, they were part of the white colonial invasion, yet it remains questionable if all of them were, at least in the beginning, also mentally partisans of the colonization ideology. In this respect, settlers from different groups (such as the “colonized” Irish) arrived with different attitudes, though in the course of time they and their offspring must have identified with the colonial project. The privileged among the newcomers from the upper and upper middle classes (gentlemen, ex-officers, professional and business people etc.), who had been lured into the colonial project by the prospect of acquiring wealth and the status of a colonial aristocracy, never doubted the legitimacy of colonial expansion.

By contrast, French emigration to Quebec had ceased after the conquest, a fact which together with the political and economic dominance of the British created a wide-spread feeling among French Canadians of being not more than a subordinate community/nationality within British North America. The assimilationist pressures on French-Canada, in particular since the merger of Lower (French) and Upper Canada (English) through the *Act of Union* (1840), made members of the Quebec elites emphasize the national distinctness of French Canada and work out a definition of the French Canadian identity that was to dominate Quebec’s public self-image until the 1950s. The recollection of the conquest cast its long shadow on the collective memory in which the Roman Catholic religion, the French language, and an agriculturalist ideal were molten into a powerful ideology of French

⁶ George Elliott Clarke, ed., *Fire on Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*, Vol. 1 (Lawrencetown Beach: Pottersfield Press, 1991).

⁷ John Saywell, *Canada: Pathways to the Present* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1994), 28.