

gender. Especially instructive is Merritt's reading of *Love in Excess*, a text published the same year as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and essential to our comprehension of texts about marginality and colonization. The difference between the two works is that Haywood's women are colonized in England within the societal structures they must navigate each day. Whether by rejecting masculinized scientific discourse and destabilizing common binaries, appropriating masquerade, inspecting the link between language and visibility, or allowing the spy a measure of power at the margins of society, Haywood's characters constantly undermine the patriarchal power structure that controls their lives. Merritt's work provides innovative ways to think about gender and class structures of eighteenth-century England and the ways in which those at the margins worked against them in subtle but important ways.

Sarah Skoronski

Cynthia Sugars, ed. *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy & Canadian Literature*. Reappraisals: Canadian Writers ser. 28. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 2004. pp 1, 530. \$39.95

The essays collected in *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy & Canadian Literature* engage some of the most interesting and important issues that currently circulate in Canadian literary studies. These include (but are not limited to) questions such as: is a nationalist approach to teaching literature still relevant in an increasingly globalized world? Is Canadian literature really a postcolonial literature, and if so, what does postcolonial theory have to contribute to the study and teaching of works produced in Canada both now and in the past? What use (if any) is a postcolonial approach to teaching various ethnic and First Nations literatures? How does one actually “do postcolonialism” in the Canadian literature classroom? And what are the relationships between an anti-racist and anti-elitist pedagogy in the literature classroom (which a postcolonial approach claims to foster) to other kinds of social and political work outside of it?

As Cynthia Sugars remarks in her very useful and comprehensive introduction, the struggles between colonialist loyalties and nationalist longings, and the tension between those same nationalist longings and the claims that various minority groups have made for recognition and respect, have shaped the institutionalized study of Canadian literature from its beginnings. Tracing

that story from the 1950s, when Canadian literature was still very much on the margins of English studies, through to the present moment when Canadian authors and their works enjoy unprecedented public and critical attention both at home and abroad, Sugars emphasizes how teaching Canadian literature is inherently a political act. Framing Canadian literature as a post-colonial literature—a move that has been most evident over the last three decades—has meant foregrounding that politics. It has meant highlighting the cultural and ideological work that Canadian literatures do.

Several contributors to *Home-Work* are the same critics who first brought postcolonial theoretical insights and methods to Canadian literary. Readers will welcome engaging with recent writings by well-known Canadian postcolonialists such as Diana Brydon, Terry Goldie, Arun Mukherjee, Gary Boire, and Leslie Monkman, among others. Informed readers will no doubt miss W.H. New, Margery Fee, Ajay Heble, Aruna Srivastava, Susie O'Brien, Laura Moss, and other critics interested in postcolonial approaches to teaching Canadian literatures, but such are the inevitable gaps in any collection. Nevertheless, there is a cohesiveness to (if not necessarily consensus in) this collection that is rare in books that originate from conferences.¹ Critics are talking to one another here. Indeed, in reading this book I was struck by how often words and terms recur, including the various forms of pedagogical practice advocated by many of the authors. A small sampling would include: critical and/or transnational literacy, critical citizenship, critical self-reflection, critical humanism, methodological humility, unlearning, demystifying, and dismantling. Postcolonialism itself is seen variously as a set of topics, a reading strategy, a process, and a practice. Sometimes it is akin to other concepts that have considerable cultural capital in the Canadian cultural sphere: diaspora, multiculturalism, ethnicity, and globalization. Always postcolonialism is seen as a way of thinking about and doing Canadian literary studies.

This book is an example of what Diana Brydon in her chapter calls “cross-talk,” in that critics here discuss issues that can sometimes initiate vigorous debate, disagreement, and even anger. Certainly, there is no particular consensus about the relationship between the three terms of the subtitle—postcolonialism, pedagogy, and Canadian literature—though most would likely agree that a postcolonial pedagogy draws attention to difference within the “Canadian.” However, the achievements of that theoretical and pedagogical maneuver remain uneven, and the conflicting views about what should be taught and how continue to spark intense discussion among pedagogues. Paul Hjartarson tells the story of the University of Alberta English department’s curriculum review and the role postcolonial theory (among other contemporary theories) had in reshaping English studies in that department. He

argues, however, that “Postcolonialism and the Canadian literatures are two very different projects” (103) and that although it can be an effective strategy of critique, postcolonialism is “not well served by its disavowal of the nation state” (104). Donna Palmateer Pennee also argues for the continued value of configuring Canadian literature as a national literature (rather than as one of many postcolonial global literatures). No matter how problematic the nationalist approach to literary study might be, in its tendency to defuse conflict and to promote hegemonic identification, the nation still matters as an organizing category. What Pennee and some other contributors, such as Gary Boire, Smaro Kamboureli, and Brenda Carr Vellino ask is how does literary study shape readers as citizens? This is no small or irrelevant question. Can postcolonialism as taught in academia transform social relations in Canada? Many remain skeptical: Boire bluntly states that “radical pedagogy cannot exist within the precincts of the university—and even if it tries to come into being, it does so within a state of siege” (230).

What, then, might a postcolonial approach to teaching Canadian literatures achieve? One possible answer is that such an approach requires readers to locate works of literature within historical and cultural contexts that are not necessarily readily known, accessible, or comfortable. To do so is to experience dissonance, and many of the contributors demonstrate what might be learned from that experience of dissonance. Heather Murray, for instance, proposes that literature teachers could profit from what she terms “micro-history.” Literary works, when put beside other kinds of documents, and literary methods of analysis, when combined with the methods of historiography, can produce a radically political postcolonial scholarship and teaching. How? By putting into concrete practice one of the foundational insights of postcolonial writers and thinkers: know your history. Local knowledges, cultural traditions and practices, particular histories—these are the stock in trade of postcolonialism. One aim, to quote Renée Hulan, is to get students in Canadian literature classrooms to “think postcolonial” (456). Readers interested in learning more about how others have grappled with that particular challenge will find a rich resource in this volume, for many contributors discuss their own experiences with curriculum design, course planning, and everyday pedagogical practice.

Thinking postcolonial in the Canadian context is especially important when teaching and producing scholarship about First Nations literatures. While there has been resistance to postcolonial theory—beginning with the term “postcolonial” itself—within the Native literary community, the essays that specifically address teaching Native literatures demonstrate a willingness on the part of literature teachers to consider very seriously what it means to

decolonize classrooms, course content, and critical approaches. There is much to be learned here, from Susan Gingell's thoughts on how to incorporate oral texts into literature courses to Laurie Kruk's negotiation of her own authority as a non-Native professor teaching First Nations literatures, and more.

Implicitly, *Home-Work* positions First Nations literatures under the rubric of Canadian literatures, which remains problematic as many readers will recognize. Another issue that continues to bother me after reading this collection is the continued reliance of so many critics on imported theory—not just Derrida and Foucault but also Spivak, Said, Bhabha, Willinsky, etc. I found myself scrutinizing everyone's lists of works cited for Canadian content. Canadians need more homegrown *theoretical* work that informs Canadian scholarship about Canadian materials, contexts and methods. To be sure, this collection provides some of that homegrown theory, but a fuller picture of the debates and the issues at stake in those debates can only emerge if one also reads other volumes. These would include Cynthia Sugars's earlier edited collection, *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Literatures*, which is a very important anthology of critical texts that form the foundation of what can broadly be called postcolonial approaches to Canadian literatures. Also related are Laura Moss's edited volume, *Is Canada Postcolonial?: Unsettling Canadian Literature*, which emerged from a conference of the same title, *Reconfigurations: Canadian Literatures and Postcolonial Identities/Littératures canadiennes et identités postcoloniales*, edited by Marc Maufort and Franca Bellarsi, another conference volume, and the special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing*, edited by Diana Brydon, not to mention the wealth of individual articles published in journals. One begins to wish for book-length monographs that are characterized by a narrowed topic focus, sustained argumentation, and consistent contextualization of the issues discussed. Can a book with a title such as *Canadian Literary Postcolonialism* be written? I don't know, but I'd love to read it. As with all edited collections, the voices here are diverse, the topics and fields of scholarship and teaching are wide ranging, the opinions and arguments disparate, and the claims (mostly) tempered. I know that I will be referring to this book—well, at least parts of it—often in my own work with Canadian and First Nations literatures. But the big questions with which I began this review remain.

Linda Warley

Notes

- 1 The Reappraisals: Canadian Writers series, of which this volume is a part, publishes papers that are delivered at an annual conference held at the University of Ottawa.

Works Cited

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