

**UNHOMELY STATES**  
**THEORIZING ENGLISH-CANADIAN POSTCOLONIALISM**

edited by  
**CYNTHIA SUGARS**



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## "ENGLISH CANADA'S POSTCOLONIAL COMPLEXITIES"\*

Donna Bennett

By Canadian history also is to be understood one history, not one French and one British, but the entire history of all Canada. There are not two histories, but one history, as there are not two Canadas, or any greater number, but one only. Nor are there two ways of life, but one common response to land and history expressed in many strong variants of the one, it is true, but still one in central substance. The reason for this is that the history of Canada after 1760 is only a continuation and extension of the history of Canada before 1760. There is but one narrative line in Canadian history.

—W.L. Morton, "The Relevance of Canadian History" (88-89)

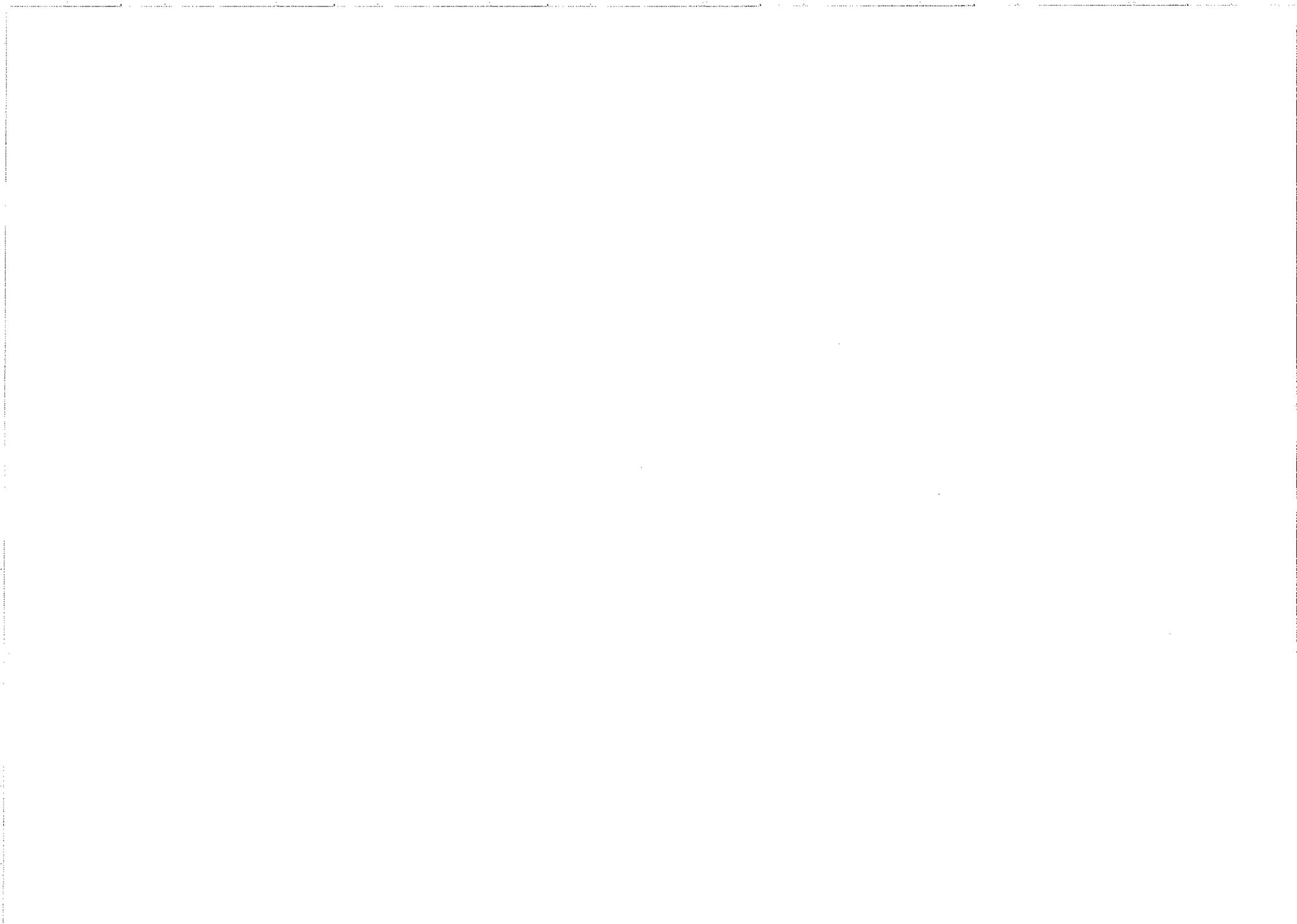
## I: CANADIAN LITERATURE AND THE POSTCOLONIAL MODEL

Conversations about Canadian politics, society and culture, if not saccharine accounts of the joys of multiculturalism, are full of complaint about the divisive nature of certain policies; they seem to begin and end as a "lament for a slain chieftain," the postcolonial dream of a unified, perhaps dualist, Canadian nation felled by the intrigue or ambitions of warring clans—the "French," the "ethnics," the "westerners," the "Anglo-Celts."

—Robert F. Harney, "So Great a Heritage as Ours" (228)

Discussions of literature in terms of a colonial mentality, colonial discourse, and the need for decolonization have lately been gathered together into a field of critical inquiry that has come to be known as postcolonialism.<sup>1</sup> Although *postcolonial* has been around as a convenient period term (especially for such things as American furniture and architecture) since early in the century, a more general postcolonial dialogue, arising out of the massive wave of colonies coming to independence after World War II, is a recent development. Use of a postcolonial perspective as a way of looking at literary studies began in the late 1970s among Australian critics.<sup>2</sup> An early example of this postcolonial approach to literary and cultural criticism can be seen in the spe-

\* *Essays on Canadian Writing* 51/52 (1993/94): 164-210.



cial 1977 postcolonial literature issue of the Australian journal *New Literature Review*, which "grew out of a series of postgraduate seminars held at the Australian National University in 1976" (Ashcroft 4). The emphases that have come to characterize postcolonial criticism are evident there; the editor of the journal, W.D. Ashcroft, writes:

Through an ability to write in a common language, albeit the language of an oppressor, writers of vastly disparate cultures have demonstrated the universality of an impulse for liberation that Westerners have usually only recognised in their own intellectual revolutions.

In colonial and post-colonial literature in English we see how the amorphous political concept of imperialism has revealed itself in the quite specific concerns of individual freedom. . . . [T]he historical experience [of oppression] has proved a vital catalyst in post-colonial literature's considerations of the nature of human experience. (3)

Postcolonial criticism moved more generally into critical discourse in the mid-eighties and gained wider attention after the 1989 publication of Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's survey *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989). But its impact on Canadian literary studies was not felt much before the nineties. In 1990, Balachandra Rajan concluded a survey article, "Scholarship and Criticism," for a new volume of *Literary History of Canada*, by calling for the practice of such a criticism:

Commonwealth scholarship [in Canada] also has not as yet responded sufficiently to studies of the relationship between dominance and discourse, of which Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a pioneering example. Exploration of this relationship has made it evident that freeing itself within the imposed discourse is only the first stage in the emancipation of the subjected voice. The second is to free itself from that discourse. Post-colonial literature may now be at the second stage. If so, a different and less familiar kind of scholarship may be required to address its problems. (151)<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Terry Goldie concluded his 1991 review of *The Empire Writes Back* by describing the work as a good introduction to postcolonial practice and adding, "I hope more Canadians—and more important, Canadianists—will join" (204).

In fact, the practice of postcolonial criticism had already begun in Canada. Although the papers presented at a 1986 conference in Ottawa on literary theory in Canada (subsequently published as *Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature*) show no impact of either Said or postcolonial theo-

terminus a quo = starting point or origin  
terminus ad quem = goal or finishing point

ry, beginning around 1988, and increasing sharply after the publication of *The Empire Writes Back*, there has been a growing use of a postcolonial model as a context for Canadian writing.<sup>4</sup> In 1991 and 1992, postcolonial approaches were frequently employed in Canadian criticism.<sup>5</sup> Postcolonialism offers a powerful and attractive model for Canadian criticism, one that will undoubtedly have an impact on the future of our critical discourse.

Clearly Canada does emerge out of a history that allows it and its literature to be thought of as postcolonial. Compared to a country such as the United States, which has sometimes been called the world's first postcolonial nation, Canada seems newly postcolonial; because it remained a colony during the height of nineteenth-century nation building and imperial expansion, it has had a longer and more intense experience of the colonial condition. But as soon as we identify Canada as *postcolonial*, we realize that the exact application of the term is unclear. *Postcolonial* suggests a historical period, but in current use the term lacks a clear terminus a quo and terminus ad quem.<sup>6</sup> Since most postcolonial critics make assumptions about resistance to inherited discourse,<sup>7</sup> is what we are now calling the postcolonial condition something built into the first moment of colonization—brought about by the colonists' inherent resistance to thinking of their land, and themselves, as ruled by distant others?<sup>8</sup> Or does a country become postcolonial only at the moment of political independence? Indeed, can a country or a people ever completely throw off past coloniality and claim to have become—or to have recovered—an authentic and essential self? And if so, when?

In postcolonial discussions, this problem of period is often seen as an aspect of a larger and perhaps irresolvable paradox: Does resistance to a dominant external discourse mean a continuing acknowledgement of the superior power of that discourse?<sup>9</sup> But even in the literal terms of political history the independence of Canada as a colony is particularly difficult to date. Officially Canada ceased to be a British colony in 1867, but its complete independence has only been achieved since that time and by increments.<sup>10</sup> It is this problem of transition from imperial subject to autonomous state that Pelham Edgar referred to in 1912 when he wrote: "The problems affecting Canadian literature are peculiar to all the outlying dependencies of our Empire, and are in part shared by the United States, though our neighbours have the advantage of being a distinct nation, whereas we are neither, as yet, a nation nor quite an empire" (111).

Period is not the only problem. Place can also be ambiguous in discussions of postcoloniality. In English studies, *postcolonial* has become a more acceptable way of describing the former colonies of England—that is, it is a desirable replacement for the adjective *commonwealth*. More generally, the term is being employed to refer to all of the former colonies of European nations. (But this usage is not uniform; it has not been widely accepted in Latin American studies, for example.)<sup>11</sup> As well—and we will explore this in some detail

later—the term can also be used internally, as a way of discussing a group of people *within* a country who have a sense of a separate identity and cohesion. Linda Hutcheon pointed out one such group when she observed that “when Canadian culture is called post-colonial today the reference is very rarely to the Native culture, which might be the more accurate historical use of the term” (76). More than a way of specifying time and place, postcolonialism has become a loose conceptual field, or an attitude.<sup>12</sup>

The larger ideas shaping postcolonialism have themselves not been stable. In particular, the idea of nation (and therefore of nationalism) causes a problem. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* argued that “all post-colonial studies continue to depend upon national literatures and criticism. The study of national traditions is the first and most vital stage of the process of rejecting the claims of the centre to exclusivity” (17). But *nation* has come under attack from other critical schools. In Canada, Frye spoke as early as 1965 about our writers as having entered “a world which is post-Canadian, as it is post-American, post-British, and post everything except the world itself” (18); and discussions of going beyond nationalism in Canadian literature have been frequent since the beginning of the eighties.<sup>13</sup> Recently Diana Brydon has spoken of using postcolonial theory in the teaching of Canadian poetry as a way to break down a national approach: “Such a focus can change our understanding of Canadian poetic traditions, shifting attention from continuity to disruption and from homogeneity to heterogeneities” (81).

*Postcolonialism*, therefore, does not seem to define a precise field of inquiry. Various historical, political, and ideological, more prescriptive than descriptive, *postcolonial* assumes its meaning and function as a term inside larger fields of discourse. Perhaps what we can most safely say at the outset is the following. Postcolonialism is a point of view that contains within it a basic binarism: it divides our way of thinking about a people into two parts, as colonial opposed to postcolonial.<sup>14</sup> *Colonial* denotes a way of seeing that accepts the imperial point of view, while *postcolonial* is a viewpoint that resists imperialism—or relationships that seem imperialistic. The people of a colony (or even of a former colony) are the mother country's possessions so long as they are colonials; the system for appropriating and maintaining the colony is colonialism. Thus, to speak of postcolonialism is to focus attention on those who have sought independence and who view the imperial country's proprietary claims as invalid.

As a body of theoretical statements, postcolonial concerns have from the beginning been shaped by, and have interacted with, deconstructive and post-structuralist theory and with theories of resistance writing. The most significant debate within postcolonialism has been about the role of poststructuralism (often treated as equivalent to postmodernism); while poststructuralism has been seen by some as threatening to the emergence of a postcolonial identity, almost all postcolonial studies have shown awareness of, and bene-

fited from, poststructuralist (and other contemporary) critiques of race, class, and gender. Theory and writing that identifies itself as postcolonial, therefore, have often emphasized the view that, before authentic native expressions can be glimpsed, much less put in place, externally imposed narratives, mythologies, values, and perspectives need to be stripped away. Colonial identity has to be decreated in order for postcolonial identity to flourish. However, in constructing their field of inquiry, many postcolonial critics—especially those who, like the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, emphasize the linkage of postcolonialism with national identity—have implicitly created a history for their enterprise that assumes that though the term *postcolonialism* may be relatively new the pattern of thinking it expresses is not; *postcolonial* is thus a description that can be applied to a body of already existing literary responses to, and critical dialogues about, colonialism and its cultural effects. Hidden in such historicizing presumptions is the assumption that at some point postcolonial attitudes existed in more limited (less deconstructive) ways than they do in the current era—and that postcolonial writing is therefore also a way of referring to the political, social, and cultural developments characteristic of previously colonized regions as they sought for, and took on, varying degrees of self-recognition and an autonomous status.

Conceived that way, postcolonialism allows one to focus on the cultural work those nations have done, or needed to do, in order to give birth to, or revitalize, autonomous cultures in regions previously dominated by externally imposed ways of perceiving, understanding, and responding. To describe a country as postcolonial in this sense could simply be to imply a coming of age, or a coming into identity. Thus, early stages in postcolonial criticism (or what can retrospectively be identified as postcolonial criticism) might be those that emphasized the telling of previously neglected or suppressed narratives—especially those that affirmed a distinct cultural identity (often understood as arising out of the narratives of personal identity told within the newly emerging culture)—and the depiction in poetry, drama, and fiction of unrecorded details, as a way of showing the local as it once existed or as it actually exists. This is the kind of postcolonialism emphasized by Stephen Slemon in “Modernism's Last Post”:

Whereas a post-modernist criticism would want to argue that literary practices such as these expose the constructedness of *all* textuality . . . an *interested* post-colonial critical practice would want to allow for the positive production of oppositional truth-claims in these texts. It would retain for post-colonial writing, that is, a mimetic or referential purchase to textuality, and it would recognize in this referential drive the operations of a crucial strategy for survival in marginalized social groups. (5)

Aware of the divergence of this statement from the frequent emphasis on the postcolonial task as resisting or deconstructing a prior hegemonic discourse, Slemmon continues:

This referential assumption would appear to make what I am calling a post-colonial criticism radically fractured and contradictory, for such a criticism would draw on post-structuralism's suspension of the referent in order to read the social "text" of colonialist power and at the same time would reinstall the referent in the service of colonized and post-colonial societies. (5)

In his 1987 essay "Canadian (Tw)ink: Surviving the White-Outs," Gary Boire begins by outlining this kind of constructive postcolonialism—but it serves in that piece as a straw man, a target for the doubled postcolonial resistance that is described in the second part of his paper.

*The Empire Writes Back* finds Canadian postcolonialism implicit in statements made by Robert Kroetsch and Dennis Lee in the first half of the seventies. In fact, one could read an inchoate postcolonialism out of the whole history of the Canadian literary and cultural dialogue. Canada's first novel, Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), provides a critique of the inhibiting effects of colonialism in its ironic treatment of Captain William Fermor's procolonialism. The limits a colonial mentality imposes on literary production are reflected upon in critical statements as early as Sir Daniel Wilson's 1858 review of Charles Sangster's *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay* ("However much taste and refinement may be displayed in such echoes of the old thought and fancy of Europe, the path to success lies not in this direction for the poet of the new world" [134]) and Edward Hartley Dewart's 1864 introductory essay to his anthology of Canadian poetry ("Our colonial position, whatever may be its political advantages, is not favourable to the growth of an indigenous literature" [xiv]). By the mid-twentieth century, E.K. Brown's *On Canadian Poetry* (1943) and Northrop Frye's Canadian essays had given such prominence to discussions of the colonial mentality as a stultifying aspect of Canada's inheritance that the topic almost became a critical trope.

The seventies saw a shift within Canada from one kind of postcoloniality—the belief that the values and topics of the new land must be recognized to help affirm its independent existence and indigenous ways of being—to the more resisting response that has been central in recent postcolonial theory. This change is apparent in two statements made by Robert Kroetsch. Talking with Margaret Laurence in 1970, he said: "In a sense, we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real" ("Conversation" 63). But in the opening of his 1974 essay "Unhiding the Hidden"—written after extended contact with American theorist William Spanos's Heidegger-

ian "destructive" criticism<sup>15</sup>—Kroetsch wrote: "At one time I considered it the task of the Canadian writer to give names to his experience, to be the namer. I now suspect that on the contrary, it is his task to un-name" (17).

However, this more deconstructive kind of postcolonialism is not entirely new to Canada. Though it may not have been fully articulated before Dennis Lee's important 1972 essay "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space,"<sup>16</sup> the need for members of the settlement culture to resist—and especially to silence or deconstruct—the pull of empire is dramatized in fiction as early as Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* (1941). In that novel, the disastrous 1917 Halifax explosion opens a cultural space in much the same way as a psychological breakdown in Margaret Atwood's 1972 novel *Surfacing* "clear[s] a space" for the protagonist (177). But the need to name into existence should not be opposed to the need for un-naming: it is better to understand these as complementary sides of any postcolonial development.<sup>17</sup> Each describes something about today's complex world in which no culture is ever pure and in which the arrival of political autonomy means neither an automatic erasure of old colonial structures nor an immediate understanding of the former colony's innate characteristics.

## II: POSTCOLONIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The complication of time meeting space in literary theory and historiography, with its attendant clash of the "pure" and the "hybrid," is well illustrated by the contradictions that have arisen in the Canadian situation. In Canada, where the model of the "mosaic" has been an important cultural determinant, Canadian literary theory has, in breaking away from European domination, generally retained a nationalist stance, arguing for the mosaic as characteristically Canadian in contrast to the "melting-pot" of the U.S.A. But the internal perception of a mosaic has not generated corresponding theories of literary hybridity to replace the nationalist approach. Canadian literature, perceived internally as a mosaic, remains generally monolithic in its assertion of Canadian difference from the canonical British or the more recently threatening neo-colonialism of American culture.

—Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin,  
*The Empire Writes Back* (36)

What I would like to do is consider the range of possibilities, historically as well as in the present, that emerge when we ask questions about the postcolonial history of Canadian literature. If we attempt to dilate and unpack the model of postcolonialism, with reference to some of the literature's historical specifics, we might be able to see just where it is useful and where it is limited. After all, Canada seems an ideal laboratory for the study of postcolonial

writing: it was formed by the interactions of three distinct cultures—the aboriginal, the French, and the English. Each of these cultures was deeply affected by colonialism, and each has writers who identify themselves as members of these ordinary groups and who explicitly deal with the problems of colonial dominance and the difficulties of finding identity after having been subordinated to another culture. But Canada's postcolonial relationships are not simply defined by its founding history or even confined to its borders. Canadians have also examined another de facto colonial or postcolonial relationship: Canada's interaction with the United States. Discussing the way Canadian writers and critics have, over a period of time, brought Canadian literature into existence and learned to conceive of it as having autonomy is hardly new. And such exploration is still neither exhausted nor unprofitable. But when we frame the coming into being of Canadian writing as a postcolonial topic it does look somewhat different. At the same time, we must be cautious with our use of postcolonial approaches: as we shall see, it is important that we not lose sight of the range of postcolonial choices in a nation as diversified as Canada. Because of this complexity, Canada not only provides material for postcolonial analysis, it also supplies a site on which the postcolonial model itself can be tested and refined.

\* \* \*

As an organized polity, Canada began as New France, a settlement colony established by France. When, with the Treaty of Paris of 1763, France ceded the colony to the English, it became part of British North America, a colony inside an alien colonial structure. Although French Canada has now been adrift from its mother country for well over two centuries, it still has a habit of looking to France for validation, and it may, therefore, be thought of as existing in that uneasy relationship with an original European parent that often characterizes postcolonialism. Yet an identification of French Canada as postcolonial in its relationship to France is obviously misleading and becomes the first point at which we encounter the problems of applying a postcolonial model in Canadian studies. The "postness" of its colonial experience dates, more than anything else, from its first resistance to the imposition of British colonial status, a resistance that, as long as French Canada remains inside Canada, may never be completely successful. Because it is by means of its relationship first to England and then to English Canada that French Canada has defined itself as a society refusing colonial dominance, the affirmation of a Euro-French heritage may actually be an anticolonial act of resistance for a French-Canadian writer, rather than one of lingering coloniality. In fact, because French-Canadian literature celebrates a heritage that has roots in New France and in France and that resists the power and influence of English Canada, with its British heritage, French Canada combines

the features of a postcolonial culture that was once politically connected to an imperial power, but is now free to define its own nature, with those of a subaltern culture that is constrained by the ongoing presence of an occupying power.<sup>18</sup>

The divided nature of the Canadian national literary canon is one reflection of the depth of the political and linguistic separation of French and English Canada. Few writers and their works are known widely enough by members of both literary communities—or by general readers—for there to be an identifiably national or corporate Canadian literature. A few critics do comfortably bridge the two cultures, but most of these tend to refrain from statements that explicitly—or even implicitly—suggest the existence of a unified bicultural (or transcultural) Canadian canon.

This separation between French and English literatures is only one of many fractures that characterize the nation's literature. Canada has now seen the emergence of a substantial body of literature by the third of Canada's three founding peoples, writers who identify themselves as descendants of Canada's Native population—a group without memory of any other home country. In their desire to maintain or recover a sense of self-identity, members of this group may have less in common with French-and English-Canadian writers than with writers from indigenous postcolonial societies, such as India or Nigeria, that were formally occupied by imperial nations. However, Canadian Native cultures (there is, of course, no single Native culture) also share some concerns with the culture of French Canada, for they are not postcolonial in the sense of having clearly passed from a period of being dominated to one of being free of the dominant culture. At the same time, both French and English Canada, while they may be postcolonial to a dominant Other, have played, and continue to play, the role of imperial power to Native culture.<sup>19</sup> This is Boire's point in "Canadian (Tw)ink." Taking for granted the postcoloniality of the settler culture in Canada, he argues that both its literature and criticism have ignored the erasure of the Native that its colonization depended upon:

Most striking in [F.R.] Scott's poem ["Laurentian Shield"], in much nationalist writing of the period, and especially in academic commentaries on this writing, is what may be termed the "Boer syndrome" of Canadian decolonization. The liberating dialectic formulated by the modernists in Canada has but one essential focus: the interaction of colonialist and empire. It is a dialectic that concentrates not so much on the colonized at the hands of the colonizer, but on the experience the recolonizer enjoys at the expense of the twice-colonized. There is little awareness of the colonialist's own colonization of indigenous peoples, virtually no guilt at rendering entire cultures invisible through the heroic act of naming a found land. (224)

Though Natives and their cultures have long been subject matter in Canadian literature,<sup>20</sup> Native literature was chiefly oral for most of its history, and until recently little written work by Natives has been gathered into a literary canon. Today the vitality of Native literature, much of it contemporary, is apparent in collections such as *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*, edited by Thomas King for McClelland and Stewart in 1990, and *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*, edited by Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie for Oxford University Press in 1992.<sup>21</sup> If not yet canonical, recent literary works by Native Canadians—such as the extraordinary plays by Tomson Highway—are beginning to be read or seen by a wide national audience. As most of it is in English, Canadian Native writing becomes the kind of postcolonial literature that is created by an invaded people and written in the language of the invaders, a literature that must find a way to create within that language an authentic alternative discourse.<sup>22</sup>

But is the relationship of Native culture to those of French and English Canada, or even the relationship of Canadian Francophone culture to Anglophone culture, truly postcolonial? When the imperial relationship is no longer defined by distance—by the tension between imperial centre and colonial margin—is it truly imperial, even though it emerges out of colonial practices and thus may be thought of as postcolonial in some sense? Is exploitation by a government seated elsewhere the same as suppression by a dominant group that finds itself occupying the same territory as the exploited peoples? Or is this second conflict better understood as an unequal competition for a home ground, a civil rather than a colonial struggle? While the answers are not simple, for the purposes of my argument, I will rely on the fact that at least one of the groups in each relationship conceives of it in ways that make a postcolonial approach usable. And because both French Canadians and Natives hold English Canada at least partially responsible for their colonial subjugation, English Canada has played an oddly doubled role: subjected to an imperial power, it has also been an agent of that power in the control it has exercised over populations within Canada's boundaries. That double agency of English Canada—the way it has been both dominant and subaltern—suggests just how radically the ground begins to shift whenever we approach English-Canadian literature as the product of a postcolonial people.<sup>23</sup> [ . . . ]

#### IV: NO ONE CULTURE

It was the view of the royal commission, shared by the government and, I am sure, by all Canadians, that there cannot be one cultural policy for Canadians of British and French origin, another for the original peoples and yet a third for all others. For although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take

precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian. . . . [A]dherence to one's ethnic group is influenced not so much by one's origin or mother tongue as by one's sense of belonging to the group, and by what the commission calls the group's "collective will to exist."

—Pierre E. Trudeau,  
"Announcement of Implementation of Policy of Multiculturalism  
within Bilingual Framework" (House of Commons, 8 Oct. 1971)

Another way in which postcolonial concerns are reproduced within Canada becomes apparent when we look at the individuals of non-British origins who came from their homelands into English Canada between Confederation and World War II. During the first big wave of post-Confederation immigration, between the 1890s and World War I, groups of northern and eastern Europeans settled the Canadian Prairies,<sup>24</sup> an area that had, up to this time, remained largely undeveloped agriculturally. The rural European immigrants—many were German speakers, Ukrainians, or Scandinavians—tended to establish whole rural communities. They were, initially, cut off linguistically from Canadian culture, and remained so for generations. Unlike the Celtic and American settlers in Ontario, these Europeans were also generally excluded from the English power structures that grew up around the larger towns and cities where the new arrivals from Eastern Canada and the United Kingdom tended to settle during this period.

Those attitudes we have been identifying with postcoloniality usually arise out of claims upon the land; that is, postcolonial groups either see themselves as indigenous, as is the case with Native Canadians, or else, like the French and English Canadians, they view themselves as a founding settlement people with claims based on their development, usually through agriculture, of a geographically defined area. Those who settled the Prairies—regardless of their national origin—felt this second kind of claim. They saw themselves as no less a founding people than the French, the English, and the Natives. Thus, while there is, as I have already suggested, something like an internal postcolonialism arising from regional anxieties about cultural and political exclusion, its sources ought to be understood as more than a sense of regional otherness. The differences felt by Prairie Westerners are produced by the fact that so many residents had ancestors who came to the area neither directly from Britain nor from Eastern Canada. In the three Prairie provinces, between twenty and thirty-seven percent of the population are descended northern and eastern Europeans, and they share this area with a large number of people who came to settle there directly from America. These settlers brought a new kind of postcolonialism into English-language Canada because they eventually asserted a kind of separatist claim on cultural identity different from that of the Québécois or even the Natives. These differences in

background affect this region both politically and culturally, and they have prompted, in concert with the changes taking place in Ontario in the first decades of the twentieth century, a reconsideration of what the Canadian identity should be.

In the aftermath of World War I, and following various disputes over diplomatic sovereignty, many English Canadians had grown disillusioned with the idea of an identity to be found inside anything like a "Vaster Britain," and longed instead for a more independent—a more postcolonial—sense of Canada. The increased need for this Canadian sense of self was exacerbated by the new, cheap American media that began to flood Canada just after the war.<sup>25</sup> In the 1920s, the recently arrived non-British immigrants appeared to offer one way of creating this postcolonial, particularly Canadian, identity. Although the established policy of Anglo-conformity<sup>26</sup> did not really abate, a modifying idea did emerge: Canadian identity would be a hybrid of British and European culture, and the older English sense of self would be enriched by the perspectives that these Europeans now imported with them.<sup>27</sup>

This idea brought into existence another—albeit temporary—kind of internal postcoloniality. New immigrants were encouraged to contribute something of their heritage as a way of creating the new national culture. Thus the postcolonial needs of the society as a whole invited at least a limited expression of the differences that these new citizens from non-English cultures brought with them. This opportunity for immigrants to shape the culture was, however, conceived of as a transitory phase, because newcomers would not only modify the culture of Canada but would also themselves be modified and Canadianized—both by the settlement experience itself and by their exposure to the culture already in place in the new country.

The result for Canadian literature of this new openness to European settlers is evident with the appearance, in the twenties, of the first important books in English from writers such as Frederick Philip Grove (an emigrant from Germany), Martha Ostenso (who was born in Norway), and Laura Goodman Salverson (who was born in Canada but spoke only Icelandic until she was ten). These were works that not only revealed the realities of contemporary settlement life but also recorded new ways of experiencing a frontier. Widely read by British Canadians, these new writers were not perceived as concerned with questions of immigrant or ethnic identity but accepted into the mainstream because they were recording a settlement experience common to all Canadian immigrants—an experience that may have been increasingly distant to many English-Canadian readers from southern Ontario and farther east, but one that seemed, nonetheless, to help articulate what it meant to be Canadian. Even though English Canadians accepted them as Canadian, these writers had a distinct approach to storytelling that has in turn shaped the development of English-Canadian fiction and poetry. In particular, because they drew on a Continental realist tradition, Grove and

Ostenso created powerful novels of pioneer life on the Prairies that captured distinctively Canadian settings and situations while employing an aesthetics that increased the gulf between Canadian literary writing and the works then coming out of British and international modernism.

Thus this postcolonial longing for a distinct Canadian identity and culture that would blend Continental European and British characteristics was in fact realized in Canadian literature at this time, even though it was not recognized as such; the distinct kind of Prairie realism that emerged was influenced by writing that had its origins in Europe as well as by the starkness of Prairie life. Prairie realism and the writing that evolved out of it is indicative of a postcolonial development in which region becomes so distinctive that it asserts proprietary rights to a part of national identity and also affects canonical standards, in this case playing a role in displacing poetry from the centre of the Canadian canon.<sup>28</sup>

\* \* \*

Though the writing of English-speaking Canadians of non-British origins became visible in the 1920s, ethnically identified writers and works did not really emerge until the poetry of A.M. Klein began to appear in the thirties. Critics who write about Klein's poetry often quote Ludwig Lewisohn, who called Klein both "the first contributor of authentic Jewish poetry to the English language," and "the first Jew to contribute authentic poetry to the literatures of English speech" (v). But it is worth noticing how these statements each locate Klein outside the Canadian canon. Should we think of Klein as a Jewish poet? Or as an English poet? Or can we claim him, after all, as a Canadian poet? And does it matter? European born and American based, Lewisohn undoubtedly saw his locating Klein in the larger English tradition as a claim on universal standards and therefore a validation of Klein's worth—but it is against the need for such validations that postcolonialism defines itself. However, for Lewisohn to describe Klein as one who has broken free in a way that permits him to write an "authentic Jewish poetry" in the non-Jewish language of English is to see Klein as a poet capable of finding an authentic voice within an alien discourse, a project that has been understood as central to postcolonial writing.

Still, that description of Klein also directs our attention to an identity that is external to the postcolonial nation—and at the same time, internal to it. Klein's move from the "Jewish poetry" of his earlier books to the "Canadian poetry" he wrote after 1945—which, when collected in *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems* (1948), won him the Governor General's Award—is therefore an act with larger cultural significance. On one hand, Klein may have felt, after the shocks of World War II, that he wanted to write with less ethnic affiliation. But, on the other hand, as he made plain at the time, he saw his new subject

matter as a way of connecting Jewish identity with what we would now understand as the postcolonial dimensions of his society:

For an interval I have abdicated from the Hebrew theme which is my prime mover to look upon the French Canadian in this province: we have many things in common: a minority position; ancient memories; and a desire for group survival. Moreover the French Canadian enjoys much—a continuing and distinctive culture, solidarity, *land*—which I would wish for my own people. (qtd. in Caplan 149)

In any case, Klein's claiming of a literary space within Canadian writing for identifiably ethnic writing helped to create room for other Jewish writers—the poet Irving Layton in the forties and after, and the novelists Henry Kreisel (*The Rich Man* [1948]), Mordecai Richler (*Son of a Smaller Hero* [1955]), and Adele Wiseman (*The Sacrifice* [1956])—as well as for writers, such as Hungarian-born John Marlyn (*Under the Ribs of Death* [1957]), who produced literary works that recorded perceptions and perspectives from outside the Anglo-Celt and Jewish traditions. The work of such explicitly ethnic writers, along with the appearance of autobiographical narratives that called attention to the ethnicity of already established writers (in particular, Salverson's *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* [1939]), opened up to Canadian readers a detailed sense of non-British life in Canada for the first time.

Perhaps because of the way such writing prepared the ground, and because of the changed cultural atmosphere in Canada after World War II, the literary contributions of the most recent wave of immigrants to Canada have been considerable. Although Anglo-conformity has never been completely abandoned, Canada's official policy of multiculturalism, instituted in 1971, has provided immigrants with a great deal more cultural autonomy. Unlike the earliest non-British settlers, who learned, with respect to the dominant English-Canadian culture, to repress or hide their distinct cultures, and unlike those in the first half of the twentieth century, who found that they could express their differences carefully, recent immigrants have been encouraged to see culture and individual expression as distinct from, but not threatening to, the preexisting politics and economic practices of English Canada. Officially, so long as these new immigrants adapt to Canadian law and commerce and gain enough facility in English to function in everyday transactions, they are allowed to maintain—and even to encourage the growth of—their old culture, which is now referred to by such terms as *heritage*.

Hence the construction of ethnic identity increasingly comes to play a role within Canada that resembles the role Canada plays as a postcolonial nation. This freedom to continue in the cultural traditions of one's homeland has not resulted in the continued development of a blended culture that English Canadians once envisioned. One result has been that since the 1960s recent

immigrants have powerfully influenced English-Canadian literature, not by becoming assimilated, nor by creating some slight modification of English-Canadian culture, but by producing major literary works that have challenged the traditional shape of the Canadian canon. A measure of the role being played by these new writers in Canadian literary culture may be seen in the fact that in 1991 and 1992 the winners of the fiction category of the Governor General's Awards came from their midst: Rohinton Mistry for *Such a Long Journey* and Michael Ondaatje for *The English Patient*. (Perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that the English translation of a novel previously published in Czech, Josef Škvorecký's *The Engineer of Human Souls*, won the award in 1984.) The effect of the appearance of such books was touched upon in a recent statement made by Ven Begamudré:

Among my contemporaries, Rohinton Mistry holds a special place. His short-story collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag* [1987] marked a turning point in Canadian literature precisely because most of it is not set in Canada. Without meaning to, he gave other writers of our generation permission: not to write about Canada yet be Canadian writers. (11)<sup>29</sup>

The new multiethnic writing that has emerged in contemporary Canada is a rich mix that not only includes the Italian-Canadian poetry of Mary di Michele and Pier Giorgio Di Cicco and fiction of Nino Ricci, and the work of writers with roots in the Caribbean community such as Austin Clarke, Dionne Brand, and Neil Bissoondath, but has also made room for, and celebrated, the work of refugee writers such as George Faludy and Škvorecký. This is a literature that, in its accounts of immigrant experience and cultural otherness, may resonate with Canada's preexisting postcolonial condition partly because the ethnic writers' backgrounds are often already postcolonial. These writers from other postcolonial countries now find themselves relocated within a new postcolonial society. As well, there are parallels to the narratives of writers from countries that were once official colonies in the work of writers, such as Faludy and Škvorecký, who have been displaced from Eastern Europe and who write about resistance to Nazi and Soviet dominance.

The poems and narratives produced by recent immigrants to Canada speak to the culture at large because these individuals are both settlers full of hope and refugees in an alien environment. Their stories may therefore be seen as having continuity in a cultural fabric begun by the early English settlers, who had come to Canada because they lacked money; and the Scots, who had been thrown off their lands; and the Irish, forced to find another country or starve; and the Chinese, indentured by necessity to a life in another country. In 1970, Margaret Atwood created, in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, a poetic sequence that makes Susanna Moodie a central figure in what we now understand to be one kind of postcolonial struggle—to feel at one with a new

place and to find an adequate means of expressing that relationship. In an often cited remark from the afterword, Atwood describes Moodie's personal history as an image of a generalizable Canadian displacement, observing: "We are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here . . . we move in fear, exiles and invaders" (62). The immigrant's story of exile and loss (found in such works as *Running in the Family*, Michael Ondaatje's 1982 chronicle of his family history in Ceylon) can be transformed into a postcolonial myth as exile is turned into belonging and loss into gain (this process takes place in works such as Ondaatje's 1987 novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, where the nearly forgotten story of immigrants becomes that of the synthesis that created twentieth-century Toronto). In the larger context of Canadian literature, readers may feel that the exploration of otherness in such stories, often part of an examination of a master-servant relationship in which struggle is always necessary to stave off a loss of self-identity, becomes almost allegorical because it offers so many parallels to the struggles that have long existed within Canada and that Canada faces as a postcolonial nation.

Some immigrant writers, such as those whose origins are in Italy or elsewhere in western Europe, may not have the postcolonial perspective of writers from former colonies (or from the former Soviet bloc), but they contribute in their own way to something that resembles a postcolonial dialogue, because they tell us of the struggle faced by all immigrants to another country, and of how, even in an officially multicultural country, one's old culture, and thus one's identity, is always marginalized or under threat. Another language shuts out an original one, new ways of living wear away the old, and one's children no longer understand the claims of a home that lies elsewhere. To become an immigrant is thus always to become in some way colonized. The condition of being engaged in a struggle to keep an established identity in the ocean of a new culture may not be a truly postcolonial one,<sup>30</sup> but it is often spoken of in terms that are congruent with postcolonial concerns. For example, William Boelhower observed, in *Canadian Literature* in 1988, that ethnic writing in Canada sees itself as searching for space for its own discourse in competition with "a cultural politics shaped by the internal dynamics of a centring and centralized order of official discourse" (172).

The disorientation of the western European immigrant in North America contributes to the larger narratives of alterity being told in Canada today.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the last twenty years have seen the emergence of other groups of writers who, though they are not immigrants, are not of British origin. Canada's multiculturalism policy, as well as enabling newly arrived immigrants to maintain external cultural ties, has encouraged the literary expression of those groups who have maintained separate ethnic identities although their ancestors arrived in Canada before mid-century, Canadians whose cultures have long been present, though relatively silent. Books from these groups are also rapidly entering the Canadian canon: novels such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*

(1981), about the World War II displacement of Japanese Canadians, and Sky Lee's 1990 reconstruction of four generations of life in Vancouver's Chinatown, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, are now frequently taught in surveys of English-Canadian fiction and written about in critical journals. In contrast to narratives by non-British immigrants, theirs is a kind of ethnic writing that focuses on the postcolonial condition of belonging to two cultures *within* the same country—that is, on what it means to identify oneself both as Canadian and as a person from a culture that exists as a de facto colony, a marginal group that is no longer as closely related to the mother country as it would appear to be to outsiders, or even as it might claim.

In describing how successfully these ethnic works of literature have, in the current generation, found a broader readership, I do not mean to suggest that English-Canadian writing has become the blended culture idealized earlier in the century. Difference is still important and, for some ethnic writers, endangered by contact with Anglo Canada, difference is a necessity. Because differentiation is so much a part of this ethnic writing, it may actually act as a countervailing force to English Canada's conceiving of itself as a postcolonial culture. The texts produced by members of these groups may direct our attention, on one hand, to postcolonial experiences that lie outside of Canada (as Mistry's do), or, on the other hand, call our attention to the need to come to terms with old identities within the Canadian milieu (as Lee's do), with the result that the dynamic in which the emerging *nation* seeks definition apart from its imperial parent becomes relatively unimportant. Because the cultural references of these newest writers are often larger than national, they are producing work that challenges the nationalist assumptions built into the earliest form of the postcolonial model, and they may be moving Canada a step beyond the postcolonial to a true postnationalism.

One would not, however, want to overstate this case. Some ethnic writers (such as Kogawa and Bissoondath) have reservations about multiculturalism, and their narratives focus on the individual's desire for a place within the emerging postcolonial Canadian identity rather than on its margins, challenging its existence: *Obasan* dramatizes the error made by a Canadian wartime government that resulted in the internment or relocation of *Canadians*, and shows the reader how that error arose from the persistent misperception of Japanese-Canadians as Japanese. *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is told from the perspective of a fourth-generation Chinese Canadian who seeks to escape a community that has become too turned in on itself and who is ready to take her place within (but not simply be assimilated into) the larger web of Canadian society, largely by articulating the forces that restricted the previous generations from doing so. Ondaatje has gone out of his way to call attention to his sense that his writing is a product of Canadian experience, education, and background and, in his *In the Skin of a Lion*, has given to Toronto and to the rural Ontario landscape a quality of heroic myth not previously found in

the work of any other Canadian writer. Perhaps what we need to recognize is that the history of Canadian literature and criticism tells us that Canada has become—and perhaps it always was, in its own way—a more individualistic country than the United States. Frye's famous question—"Where is here?"—is no longer a geographical question (it never really was) but one of group identity: "Who is here?"

In the history of Canadian writing, that question has had no single answer.

V: THE CENTRE THAT DID NOT HOLD:  
ENGLISH-CANADIAN LITERATURE IN FRAGMENTS?

Canada . . . has become a place where the demise of meta-narratives has brought out the relevance of the marginal, the local, and the heteroglossia of texts that do not privilege master narratives. The issue of appropriation of an other's story in the literary work, which has stirred such recent controversy, is part of this mistrust for national unity and identity. Unity and identity at whose expense? is one of many questions being asked by writers who reject any definition of "Canadian" that cannot accommodate the multiplicity and plurality of voices, texts, and readers that do not merge into a unified whole.

—Roy Miki,

"The Future's Tense: Some Notes on Editing, Canadian Style" (189)

I began this essay with an epigraph from W.L. Morton, who insisted that there was only one Canada. But what a postcolonial perspective underlines is that at no point in its history has there been only one Canada—and therefore there has never been only one canon or tradition or literature. Although at times the influence of the British canon on education and criticism has been very strong, Canadian literature has always contained within it marginalized groups asserting perspectives that pull away from the centre.

Of the multiple Canadian postcolonialisms I have suggested, many arise from relationships in which groups seek to add to, and shape, Canada's national culture. But the anxiety that Roy Miki expresses—a fear that defining national culture may erase "the multiplicity and plurality of voices"—results in another kind of internal postcolonialism, one in which the whole must be resisted by its parts. Plurality has become important in Canada both because the government has de-emphasized culture as a source of Canadian identity and because Canada, like the United States, has countered the economic effects of a relatively low birthrate through a high level of immigration,<sup>32</sup> producing not only a plural culture but also one in which plurality is ever increasing. The pattern that characterizes today's constant influx of new immigrants is different from that created by the massive immigrations at earlier points in Canadian history (periods of high immigration followed by periods of relative demographic stability); high levels of immigration are now per-

ceived of as a permanent facet of Canadian cultural life. Given the continual cultural change that new immigration brings, and the fact that many of the new immigrants are not from western European backgrounds, Canada's policy of multiculturalism, combined with its destabilization of the relationship between culture, politics, and economics, has undoubtedly been a benign way of ensuring that these newcomers are accommodated.

However, multiculturalism has its limitations. For example, to understand it as an antiracist policy, as some have taken it to be, may be an error: multiculturalism does encourage some understanding between cultures, but it also keeps cultures separate and allows them to be identified as Other.<sup>33</sup> By institutionalizing multiculturalism, Canada has encouraged identity through alterity. In doing so, it has effectively institutionalized marginality, an action that is always associated with postcolonialism.<sup>34</sup> Do such developments mean that Canada no longer has, and no longer needs, a national culture? As a country that has been, and remains, subject to powerful decentring forces, Canada reflects the tension always present in postcolonialism, which, even as it sets up resistance to the imperial centre, begins to construct an identity that threatens to become a new centre.

The way these centripetal and centrifugal tendencies have interacted in English Canada can be seen in the long critical debate over thematicism. The thematic approach, which dominated Canadian criticism from the late sixties to the mid-seventies, can now be understood as part of Canada's postcolonial drive to construct an autonomous national identity by identifying a coherent culture that exists apart from (and, in a work such as *Survival*, as a counter to) the imperial centre, a centre that, from the end of World War II until the end of the seventies, was progressively redefined as America rather than Britain.<sup>35</sup> It is paradoxical, therefore, that Frank Davey, in "Surviving the Paraphrase," the 1976 essay that first brought thematic criticism into dis-favour, attacked the method under the banner of anticolonialism.<sup>36</sup> Miki now sees thematic criticism as part of "an insurgent nationalism that attempted to construct a 'usable tradition' to fill the void left by the loss of the centred structure called 'Canada'" (189):

[T]heme as a critical device displaying the apparent unity, or the sameness, of a diversity of works, provided a methodological tool for a nationalist criticism, and perhaps it was useful in a specific phase of Canadian literature. . . . [T]he demise of thematic criticism with its nationalist objective [was] an inevitability. (191)

Given this new antinationalism, which has replaced the earlier concern with colonialism, the dimension of postcolonial criticism that pulls towards cultural or national unity is now often regarded with suspicion—even though Canadian culture may remain endangered by the pervasiveness of American media, and even though nationalism still has its vigorous proponents.<sup>37</sup> But

writers and critics such as Miki, concerned about the erasure of regional and ethnic differences, feel more threatened today by a monolithic Canadian identity than by any external dominance:

The issue of open form extends beyond the historic frame of the "New American" poetics of Charles Olson and others. It includes, in contemporary writing, those writers who work within de-stabilized and ex-centric language forms which disrupt the centrality of the autonomous lyric voice in a great deal of CanLit. (184)

What statements such as these make clear is how rapidly things have changed in the three years since Balachandra Rajan described Canadian criticism as having "not as yet responded sufficiently to studies of the relationship between dominance and discourse," and called for "a different and less familiar kind of scholarship." Rajan, believing that there are two stages to postcoloniality—the first of which is "the emancipation of the subjected voice" within the discourse, while the second is the movement to the outside of, and the freeing of the voice from, that discourse—claimed that we needed a new approach if we were to take that second step (151). It is undoubtedly something like this second step that is envisioned by postcolonial critics such as Boire, who feels the solution to the erasure of Native history is to bring into existence a Canadian criticism that will respond to Michel Foucault's call for the systematic dismantling of "a comprehensive view of history and . . . [of any] retracing the past as a patient and continuous development" (qtd. in Boire 232). Or those such as Diana Brydon, who has moved from a conservative postcolonial view of the continuities of the relationship between the new nation and its European parent (in 1982), through a postcoloniality that accepts the idea of a hybrid literature (in 1988), to a desire to turn away from national "continuity to disruption and from homogeneity to heterogeneities." Thus, for many of its practitioners, despite its roots in the formative stages of new nations, and its interest in those stages, postcolonial criticism has become profoundly anti-nationalistic.

I would argue that what Rajan's statement is based on, and what underlies statements by many of these critics, is a conceptual framework that has its roots in those great nineteenth-and twentieth-century metanarratives of Darwinism, Marxism, and Freudianism. Postcolonialism internalizes an evolutionary model; it envisions a passing through progressive stages of unfreedom to freedom and of blindness to enlightenment. In consequence, many make the assumption that not only is a postcolonial perspective necessary—and superior to the less enlightened views it replaces—but that a newer kind of postcolonialism is also emerging that is superior to all others. The danger of such evolutionary assumptions is that they produce a doctrinaire criticism, one that resembles a belief system. (Of course, the temptation to testify to one's faith is not limited to critical essays conducted under the rubric of postcolonialism.)

Such criticism may seek to close down dialogue and to turn examinations of positions taken into attacks on the individuals who take those positions. But, having begun by seeking space within a dominant discourse, postcolonialism should not impose a new dominant discourse. Nor should it tell those who disagree with it (some of whom are among the formerly silenced) that they must be quiet. If we seek heterogeneity, we ought to guard against the new homogeneity.

Perhaps part of the problem with seeing postcolonialism as a progressive model stems from the fact that postcolonial approaches are more useful for identifying differences and tracing out the dynamics of power than for recognizing and valuing similarities and accommodations, whether they be those of groups or of individuals. At some level, postcolonial critics may, therefore, begin to assume that value comes from defining a force as hostile and responding to it: they may take contestation as the only valid methodology and practice. If we treat only some of the routes to autonomy as legitimate, if we make marginality and resistance our only measures of authenticity, then we limit the questions we can ask and predetermine the answers we will receive.

A postcolonial criticism can function in Canada in complex ways. Although the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* may have felt, writing in 1989, that Canada, and its literary culture, "remains generally monolithic in its assertion of Canadian difference from the canonical British or the more recently threatening neo-colonialism of American culture" (36), I would argue that theirs was a partial view of Canada's postcolonial aspect, and that a Canadian monolith has never really existed and certainly does not exist now. 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. The postcolonial model invites us to see—and gives us a new way of seeing—the play of tensions within Canadian culture as well as the tensions between Canada's culture and that of any external centre. Perhaps what it finally helps us to see is that here is a collection of cultures within the *idea* of English Canada, not so much a mosaic as a kaleidoscope, an arrangement of fragments whose interrelationships, while ever changing, nevertheless serve—by virtue of their container, we might say—not only to influence what we see when we look through the glass, but also to affect the placement of the other elements in the array.

#### Notes

1. I wish to thank the members of the Works in Progress in English group at the University of Toronto for their helpful comments on an early version of this essay.

2. Australian postcolonial criticism followed two developments in the Australian teaching curriculum—the reassessment, after 1959, of the place of Australian literature, and the decision, in the 1970s, to locate Australian literature within the context of South Pacific literatures (a development given impetus by the reaction against American and Australian involvement in Vietnam).
3. In his survey of recent Canadian criticism (through 1988), Peter Dale Scott, emphasizing marginality and emergence as central concerns for Canadian critics, also pointed out the lack of Said's impact, observing, "one might have expected that Edward Said would be one American critic whom Canadian critics would find especially congenial" (32).
4. Diana Brydon used the term earlier (she may have been the first Canadian critic to employ it), in her 1982 essay "Tradition and Post-Colonialism: Hugh Hood and Martin Boyd," published in the interdisciplinary journal *Mosaic* 15.3: 1-15—but in that essay *postcolonialism* doesn't carry the weight of associations with counterdiscourse and resistance that it later takes on. (Brydon's point is almost the obverse: she wants to emphasize the potential of European traditions for postcolonial writers.) The first extended analysis of Canadian literature in what has become the dominant postcolonial model seems to be Gary Boire's 1987 essay "Canadian (Tw)ink: Surviving the White-Outs." Other essays that appeared before *The Empire Writes Back* are Stephen Slemon's "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse," *Canadian Literature* 116 (1988): 9-24, Linda Hutcheon's "Circling the Downspout of Empire," and Diana Brydon's "The White Inuit Speaks"; these last two appeared in a 1988 special issue of *Ariel*, later expanded and reprinted as *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism* (1990) [Editor's note: Brydon's article did not appear in the 1988 *ARIEL* issue]. One indication of this transitional moment in the emergence of a postcolonial approach in Canadian criticism is the fact that W.H. New's 1987 study *Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand* makes some moves towards, but no explicit use of, postcolonial theory (the body of the book is made up of close textual discussions shaped by structuralist-influenced narratology); however, in a 1988 essay entitled "W.H. New: *Dreams of Speech and Violence* and Postcolonial Criticism in Canada," Leslie Monkman discussed *Dreams of Speech and Violence* as a demonstration of New's moving the field of Canadian criticism beyond "a narrow nationalism" and into postcolonial discourse (*World Literature Written in English* 28: 91-96), while in 1989 Helen Tiffin read New's text explicitly, and somewhat distortingly, as an example of postcolonial theory ("Subversion," *Canadian Literature* 121: 131-33).
5. See, for example, *Canadian Literature* 128 (1991), which contains Dorothy Seaton's essay "The Post-Colonial as Deconstruction: Land and Language in Kroetsch's 'Badlands,'" and a review by Boire ("Possible Storms") characterizing postcolonial societies as resistance cultures. *Canadian Literature* 132 (1992), a special issue entitled *South Asian Connections*, contains three (out of eleven) essays and at least two reviews that use postcolonial approaches. In one, Boire

- describes Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* as "the paradigmatic 'postcolonial' narrative; it is *the* story that 'tells' Euro- and Americo-centricity back into itself by reversing readerly (read Anglo-American) expectations, by including all that is usually excluded, by bringing inside what is usually left outside" (160). See also Neil Querengesser, "Canada's Own Dark Heart: F.R. Scott's 'Letters from the Mackenzie River,'" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 47 (1992): 90-104, and Diana Brydon, "Reading Dionne Brand's 'Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater.'" Sylvia Söderlind's 1991 book *Margin/Alias: Language and Colonization in Canadian and Québécois Fiction* is the first full-length study in Canada to make use of the postcolonial model (chiefly in its introduction and conclusion).
6. Social scientists and historians have tended to use *postcolonial* more strictly as a period term, for the era following independence. However, it is now coming to signify anticolonial sentiments prior to, as well as after, independence.
  7. Helen Tiffin describes postcolonialism as "a set of discursive practices, prominent among which is *resistance* to colonialism, colonialist ideologies, and their contemporary forms and subjectificatory legacies" (vii). Cf. Söderlind: "In current critical terminology, postcolonial writing is, or at least should be, subversive, and cultural marginality is often seen as a precondition for subversion. . . . A methodology attentive to the subversive potential of postcolonial literatures must by necessity subscribe to a view of language which allows for resistance" (4).
  8. This resistance could be assumed to be present whether the colonists were indigenous, on whom a colonial rule had been imposed, or settlers, who had brought the structures of empire with them, because it would arise from the bond with the land that superseded the claims of, and the ties to, the imperial country. Although the first or first few generations of settlers would not have a bond as strong as that of the Native peoples, over time, particularly if the settlers were not directly connected to the power structure of the mother country, this bond could become strong.
  9. Söderlind, for example, maintains that "The term postcolonialism may seem self-explanatory and neutral; its application is, in fact, here as in most criticism, limited to the literature produced in former colonies that assumes a position of resistance to the metropolis. Its use thus indicates a critical stance that probably overlooks a great deal and may well be based on an imperialist assumption that any writing of importance produced by former subjects must be focused on their contestatory relationship to the absent master" (6).
  10. For example, it was not until the Imperial Conference of 1926 that Canada and other dominions were recognized as equal in status to Britain; the Statute of Westminster (11 Dec. 1931) granted Canada's Parliament full legal freedom. The statute excepted certain areas, however, and in these Canada remained subordinate to Britain. It was only with the 1949 amendment to the Supreme Court Act that the Judicial Committee of the British Privy Council ceased to be Canada's last court of appeal. And it was not until 1982 that Canada brought

home its constitution. (It is significant that doing so necessitated an act of the British Parliament: the requirement it annulled—that approval of the British Parliament be obtained for any Canadian constitutional changes—may have been only pro forma, but it was a legal requirement nonetheless because, until this historical moment, the basis for all Canadian law and government remained a single piece of British legislation, the British North America Act of 1867.)

11. In Canada, the question of place is doubly complicated because there is also some confusion over the locus of empire. Do French Canadians exist in a post-colonial relationship to France and do English Canadians define themselves against England? I will turn to this question in part II.
12. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin address the problem of time and place by writing: "We use the term 'post-colonial' . . . to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). But, as W.H. New enquires, "If 'post' covers everything since European/non-European contact, then when, except conceptually, is 'pre'?" (3). Moreover, such a way of defining *postcolonial* fails to distinguish between what are usually understood as postcolonial cultural activities and those of individuals and groups whose sentiments are procolonial or neocolonial.
13. See, for example, the 1981 special issue (14.2) of *Mosaic* entitled *Beyond Nationalism: The Canadian Literary in Global Perspective*.
14. It is possible to think of *precolonial* as a third term—in the sense it is already used in history and art history, to refer to the societies of the indigene prior to the arrival of Europeans.
15. Kroetsch and Spanos founded *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature* in 1972, a point at which Spanos was just beginning to formulate his influential Heideggerian aesthetics (given full expression in the 1976 special Heidegger issue [4.2] of *Boundary 2*). Concerning Spanos's use of Heidegger, Vincent B. Leitch writes: "Understood as destructive interpretation, Heidegger's readings work to free texts of reified perspectives and canonical commentaries. . . . [They become] performances of unconcealing, of the happening of truth" (239).
16. Kroetsch may have also been influenced in his change of emphasis by this essay, which he reprinted in the special Canadian issue (3.1) of *Boundary 2* that he edited in 1974.
17. Dorothy Seaton suggests that there are actually *two* possible alternatives to post-colonial naming. As well as the construction of counterdiscourses, she argues that there is a more radically deconstructive possibility, a response that "embraces instead the endless strangeness of both land and discourse, interrogating the very capacity of discourse to constitute the land" (77). She notes, however, that this "distinction between counter-discursive and deconstructive efforts is somewhat artificial, each movement sharing strategics and effects with the other" (88).

18. For more discussion of the place of contemporary French-Canadian writing in the contexts I am raising, see Söderlind, especially her introduction and two concluding chapters.
19. See Barbara Godard for a discussion of Native literature in the context of "resistance literature . . . produced within a struggle for decolonization" (199).
20. See Leslie Monkman, *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981); the essays in *The Native in Literature*, ed. Thomas King, Cheryl Calver, and Helen Hoy (Toronto: ECW, 1987); and Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1989).
21. The title of that volume, however, suggests that it functions as a supplement to Oxford's earlier *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (1983), of which only the revised edition (1990) contains the work of a writer who emerged from Native culture (E. Pauline Johnson, a figure who was anthologized earlier in the century but subsequently dropped from the canon).
22. The argument was advanced by several postcolonial theorists in the eighties that the use of the language of empire (usually English) is one of the characteristics of, and problems for, postcolonial cultures. In Native literature, the question of language choice, and especially of the formation of an alternative discourse that is intended to exist inside a dominant one, is frequently signalled by the inclusion of passages in Native languages within English-language works.
23. This complexity becomes greater still when a Canadian such as Sara Jeannette Duncan comes to dwell in another, different sort of colony. Recently, both Misao Dean, in her book on Duncan, *A Different Point of View* (McGill-Queen's UP, 1991), and in an essay, "The Paintbrush and the Scalpel: Sara Jeannette Duncan Representing India" (*Canadian Literature* 132 [1992]: 82-93), and Jennifer Lawn, in "The Simple Adventures of Memsahib' and the Prisonhouse of Language" (*Canadian Literature* 132 [1992]: 16-30), have used postcolonial perspectives to look at the fiction Duncan produced while living in India. Each concludes that although Duncan occupied a position safely inside the imperial regime in India, she was to some degree able to define a position within her writing that was "consciously in opposition to the definitions imposed by imperialist culture" (Dean 89).
24. Although southern Europeans also immigrated to Canada during this period, in smaller numbers, they tended to locate themselves in the cities of eastern Canada and thus to join a large population. Their history of absorption into Canadian life is typical; living initially in city ghettos, they either had to remain isolated from their new culture or forgo Old World cultural support. Urban ghetto communities, however distinct, have tended to have less visible impact than ethnically coherent rural communities.
25. See Mary Vipond's essay "Canadian Nationalism and the Plight of Canadian Magazines in the 1920s." Regarding the metaphor I have used in the sentence to which this note is attached, Vipond remarks: "Canadians always seemed to

- use aquatic metaphors—deluge, flood, tidal waves—to describe the influx of American popular culture. Perhaps most expressive of all was W.L. Grant, who remarked that American influences seemed to ‘seep in underground like drainage’ (44).
26. English-Canadian Anglo-conformity is a species of that colonial normalization that shows up in every colony. The inheritance and standards of the mother country are presumed to be appropriate to the colonial culture. Although such conformity permeates the colony’s social, political, aesthetic, and economic spheres, it is most noticeable in the educational structure and curricula. (In English-Canadian schools, until relatively recently, most of the history and literature taught was British; Canadian history and literature were only a small element within these disciplines.) Anglo-conformity not only affects non-British immigrants but it is also a marker for all English Canadians, long after Confederation, of their coloniality.
  27. See Howard Palmer, “Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century,” *Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation*, ed. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Holt, 1986): 185-201.
  28. See Bennett 141-46.
  29. This question of whether Canadian literature must be set in, and therefore reflect, Canada is a typical feature of postcolonial dialogues and one that has been responded to in various ways, from Lighthall’s concerns about sacrificing quality in order to find poems that reflected Canadian circumstances to the nationalist grumblings over the 1972 Governor General’s Award going to a novel, Robertson Davies’s *The Manticore*, that takes place in Switzerland.
  30. It is worth remembering that the parallels can be distorting. It is a simplification to see the immigrant as existing in a postcolonial relationship to the nation because it treats the immigrant group (or even the individual immigrant) as a potentially autonomous colony unto itself. Where postcolonialism originally based its claims on the authenticity of indigenous experience, the culture left behind now becomes the only authentic one, and must be rescued from the imperial pressures of the place to which the immigrant has come.
  31. Of course, some writers resist definitions in terms of otherness by creating literary works that maintain the cultural perspective of their origins. Writers such as Faludy and Mistry do not write of their immigrant experience, or do so only occasionally; instead they tell of the life they knew before they immigrated. For such writers, Canada is not—or not yet—the place of the imagination but the safe haven from which they can record their narrative of displacement.
  32. This goal, first stated in 1947 by Mackenzie King (“The objective of Canada’s immigration policy must be to enlarge the population of the country”), was reiterated by John Diefenbaker in 1959 in his National Development Policy (in which he called for immigration at an annual rate of between 0.75 and 1.25%

- of Canada’s total population) and in the 1966 White Paper on Immigration formulated under Lester Pearson. For details see Chris Taylor, “Demography and Immigration in Canada: Challenge and Opportunity,” *Canadian Mosaic: Essays on Multiculturalism*, ed. A.J. Fry and Ch. Forceville (Amsterdam: Free UP, 1988): 45-63. Robert Harney’s essay “‘So Great a Heritage as Ours’: Immigration and the Survival of the Canadian Polity” provides a very useful general discussion of these policies, the purposes they have been asked to serve, and the myths that have sometimes driven them. Notice that, while Canada’s overall population has increased little during this period because of a large out-migration, the proportion of newcomers into society has grown substantially.
33. This warning has several times been sounded by writers (and others) in the multicultural community. See, for example, Arnold Harrichand Itwaru in the introduction to *The Invention of Canada: Literary Text and the Immigrant Imaginary* (Toronto: TSAR, 1990) especially 16-18, as well as the analysis of multicultural policies as texts in Smaro Kamboureli, “The Technology of Ethnicity: Law and Discourse,” *Open Letter* 8th ser. 5-6 (1993): 202-17. A rich discussion of the large questions surrounding multiculturalism as a concept can be found in the long essay by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, published, with commentaries by four American academics, as *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992).
  34. Tamara Palmer suggests that even though “the story, the Fiction” in ethnic writing “is a cathartic rite of adaptation, a means of linking old and new, past and present, its profound duality is never quite overcome; rather, it remains in the ironic tone and related metafictional self-awareness that are the product of marginality. Paradoxically, perhaps this very marginality is what ultimately makes this Fiction so much a part of the evolving Canadian literary tradition whose characteristic mode, as a number of critics have pointed out, is the ironic one—a mode that expresses a profound awareness, based in marginality, of emanating from a post-colonial cultural space in which reality is problematic because there are differing, hierarchical versions of it” (113). For further discussion of the interplay of marginality and ethnicity in Canadian writing, see Linda Hutcheon, “‘The Canadian Mosaic: A Melting Pot on Ice’: The Ironies of Ethnicity and Race,” *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1991): 47-68.
  35. I plan to consider this development of Canada’s postcolonial identity in the context of American-Canadian relations (in which resistance plays a more central role than previously) in another essay.
  36. Davey argued that the critics who practiced thematic criticism did so because they didn’t think Canadian literature could measure up to international standards: “The motivations of thematic criticism strike one as essentially defensive. . . . A declared motive has been to avoid evaluative criticism. . . . An even more important but undeclared motive appears to have been to avoid treating Canadian writing as serious literature” (6-7).

37. There is no sign of a return to the intense cultural nationalism of the sixties and seventies, but the renewed anxieties in the cultural communities resulting from the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (which has been replaced by the trilateral North American Free Trade Agreement) and the general neglect of the arts during the Mulroney years, have kept some cultural nationalists (such as Rick Salutin, columnist for the *Globe and Mail*) in the arena. As well, two recent books have returned to prominence the argument about Canada becoming a political and economic colony of America—Mel Hurtig's *The Betrayal of Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1991) and Lawrence Martin's *Pledge of Allegiance: The Americanization of Canada in the Mulroney Years* (Toronto: McClelland, 1993).

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PART IV  
SETTLER-INVADER  
POSTCOLONIALISM

"UNSETTLING THE EMPIRE:  
RESISTANCE THEORY FOR THE SECOND WORLD"\*

*Stephen Slemon*

My argument here comprises part of what I hope will become a larger meditation on the practice of "post-colonial criticism," and the problem it addresses is a phenomenon which twenty-five years ago would have seemed an embarrassment of riches. The sign of the "post-colonial" has become an especially valent one in academic life (there are even careers to be made out of it), and like feminist theory or women's studies programs a decade ago, the area is witnessing an enormous convergence within it of diverse critical practices and cultural forces. We are now undergoing an important process of sorting through those forces and tendencies, investigating where affiliations lie and where they cross, examining the political and pedagogical goals of the area, and re-negotiating basic issues such as where our primary "material" of study and of intervention lies. What I want to do in this paper is take a position within this process of questioning—but because this *is* a process, I want also to advance this position as provisional and temporary, a statement in search of that clarifying energy which emerges at the best of times out of friendly discussion and collegial exchange.

In specific terms, what I want to do in this paper is address two separate debates in critical theory, and then attempt to yoke them together into an argument for maintaining within a discourse of post-colonialism certain textual and critical practices which inhabit ex-colonial settler cultures and their literatures. The textual gestures I want to preserve for post-colonial theory and practice are various and dispersed, but the territory I want to reclaim for post-colonial pedagogy and research—and reclaim *not* as a unified and indivisible area but rather as a groundwork for certain modes of anti-colonial work—is that neither/nor territory of white settler-colonial writing which Alan Lawson has called the "Second World."

The first debate concerns the *field* of the "post-colonial." Is the "post-colonial" a synonym for what Wallersteinian world-systems theory calls the periphery in economic relations? Is it another way of naming what other discourses would call the Third and Fourth Worlds? Is it a name for a discursive and representational set of practices which are grounded in a politics of anti-colo-

\* *World Literature Written in English* 30.2 (1990): 30-41.