

Barbara Buchenau, Virginia Richter and Marijke Denger (eds.), *Post-Empire Imaginaries?: Anglophone Literature, History and the Demise of Empires* (Brill Rodopi Press, Cross/Cultures 182: ASNEL Papers 19, 2015)

The collection of essays collated by Barbara Buchenau, Virginia Richter and Marijke Denger in *Post Empire Imaginaries?: Anglophone Literature, History and the Demise of Empires* encapsulates an emerging critical theory that has come to be known as the Post-Empire. The term is less a commentary following the fall of Empire than a theoretic that seeks to establish the framework around which we now view the social, cultural, political and economic ramifications of empire on the contemporary consciousness. The introduction, by Buchenau and Richter, is an exposition dedicated to establishing the need for post-imperial criticism, they suggest that fictive literature provides a framework for an imaginative post-imperial position which allows a literary conceptualisation of empire which is at once playful and critical. However, Buchenau and Richter's conception of this post-empire imaginary has the tendency to romanticise the memory of empire. Furthermore, it is questionable as to how much of post-colonial criticism is consumed in the post-imperial approach and vice versa. Some of the collected essays suggest that the post-colonial is more keenly focused on the interplay between core and periphery, while others make little distinction between the post-colonial and the post-imperial.

Rainer Emig's essay, *The Hermeneutics of Empire: Imperialism as an Interpretation Strategy*, poses an excellent counterpoint to Buchenau and Richter's post-empire romantics. Emig is diligent in his treatment of the great propaganda mill of imperial institution. Identifying the subtle cultural production of patriotism and imperial spirit in literary forms, Emig takes the opportunity to illustrate how post-colonial criticism, particularly in literature and film, challenged British imperial traditions. Emig focuses directly on the film adaptation of Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth*, showing that the imperialistic and propagandistic tropes he exposes are prolific in the American film industry. Emig's essay gives consideration to the ways in which modern philosophy has forced us to reconsider the collective imagining of the imperial past.

In a similar fashion, Eva Maria Müller exposes the discursive empire-building practices of education. Invoking Louis Althusser and Benedict Anderson, she illustrates the ways in which the teacher figure was utilised to reinforce imperial didacticism and how schools of the empire became outposts in service to continuing the displacement of subaltern cultures and societies through the institution of empire. While this is not a new concept in imperial theorising, Müller's study of the teacher figure 'as metonyms for the Australian nation' (101) contributes to the framework for a post-imperial analysis of education as an imperial institution.

Kerstin Knopf takes a similar bent to Müller with regard to the moralising didacticism of the empire but manages to push the notion further through his exposition of imperial exploratory practice. Knopf establishes the mythologising of Arctic exploration in the collective British imperial consciousness as critical to its reputation as coloniser. Invoking Jen Hill, Knopf shows that the Arctic space represented the limit of both the British Empire and human experience and that the role of Arctic exploration was to 'break ... this limit and transform it from an empty into an imperial space' (72). Looking at the lost expedition of Sir John Franklin in 1845, Knopf highlights the similarities between the British stoicism inherent in the myth of Franklin's voyage and that which is espoused by Victorian literature. In doing so, Knopf re-evaluates the role of imperial

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memory in the transcription of history and how this affects post-colonial understanding of imperial action.

In the second part the compiled essays focus on the comparison and contrasting of instances of post-imperial analysis. While Furlanetto focuses on the cosmopolitan nature of the Ottoman Empire, Landy analyses the transcendent transnational, borderless and inclusionary nature of its political and social practices. Furlanetto contrasts the imperial Ottomanism, with the neo-Ottomanism of the 1980s wherein the 'imperial nostalgia in contemporary Turkish literature' represents 'a model for the identity and political unity questions of the present' (159-60). In this way, Furlanetto illustrates how the emergence of the modern nation-state eroded the imperial cosmopolitan tolerance of multi-ethnic culture; a strain of thought which is mirrored in many of the book's essays.

Silke Stroh utilises a comparison of race and racialisation in the British and Roman Empires to contrast the moral essentialism of both imperial rationales. Analysing Bernardine Evaristo's novel *The Emperor's Babe*, Stroh suggests that the shared geographic overlap of the two empires allows a temporal transcendence of Evaristo's work which permits it to comment on the nature of the racist nature of the British Empire using the Roman marginalisation of Pictish peoples. In this post-colonial 'reimagining' of the Roman Empire, Stroh draws on the concept of White Man's Burden in juxtaposition to the civilising mission of the Romans with regard to the Britons. Herein, Stroh shows that Roman power is a moral imperative and thus this post-imperial analysis of the Roman moralising mission is shown to reflect similar anxieties held by colonial Britain.

The third section of the collection comprises essays predicated on the projection of imperial narratives and imagery formed to further embed the core-periphery dialectic of empire. Judith Raiskin makes a particularly compelling case with respect to the American Caribbean. Raiskin initially explores how the dislocation of travel ads compel the reader/viewer to experience a sense of 'nostalgic re-enactment of colonial relations' (275). In this way, travel ads allow 'groups of people [to] solidify their class status and political location by feeling things that perpetuate relations of power' (272). In support of the imperialistic basis of her analysis, Raiskin uses visual media to illustrate how this colonial tourism is based on the imperialist victories of the Second World War, utilising contested sites of patriotism, such as national identity and attitudes toward government and war to entice the potential traveller.

The final section collates essays that focus on the representations of individual self within a prescriptive imperial space. Michael Meyer uses Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things*, to critique imperial space in India. Meyer makes it clear that the memory of Empire remains in the collective political Indian consciousness. In doing so he illustrates the transitory nature of Roy's India as representative of the notion that 'the perceived, remembered, and imagined space is as important as spatial practices' (398). To progress this assertion Meyer shows how the railway system of India embedded a British institution of transport and, much like books, education and motor vehicles, these represent imperial forms which allow the subaltern the opportunity to experience and participate in British culture vicariously.

The essays of *Post-Empire Imaginaries*, collected as they are, make a good case for emergent post-colonial discussions of representations of the imperial past. However, the question could be asked, where does the post-colonial end and the post-imperial begin, because certainly there is an element of re-imagining in post-colonial discourses. While this collection is not limited to literary analysis it is, at times, utilised to support the essays of *Post-Empire Imaginaries*. Regardless, this

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book would be useful for researchers concerned with understanding the impact of neo-colonialism on contemporary core-periphery relations and the correlation between imperial practices and post-colonial criticisms.

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