

Book Review

Re-mapping Literary Worlds: Postcolonial Pedagogy in Practice.
Ingrid Johnston. New York: Peter Lang, 2003, 176 pages,
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Reviewed by: *Lynne Wiltse*
University College of the Cariboo, Kamloops

In *Re-mapping Literary Worlds: Postcolonial Pedagogy in Practice*, Ingrid Johnston takes the reader on a literary journey into the world of postcolonial literature and its role in expanding the traditional canon in secondary school English classrooms. The text is thoroughly researched, grounded in practice, and beautifully written. She skillfully blends personal narrative, literary theory and selections, descriptions of pedagogical practice, and teachers' and students' voices to create a "postmodern, reflexive narrative that seeks to carve out new conceptual routes" (p. 3). Along the way she offers the reader many views: literary, theoretical, philosophical, practical, and political.

Although based on her doctoral study, Johnston's book does not follow the traditional format: theoretical framework, research methodology, findings, conclusions. Drawing on the power of story and narrative inquiry, Johnston uses the metaphor of a journey to describe her research. As a reader this allowed me to join Johnston and her research participants as they left the confines of familiar territory to "become migrants, crossing borders of thought and experience with a new restless interrogation" (p. 123). In keeping with the travel metaphor, her book is structured in miles rather than the usual chapters; mile titles effectively accentuate the travel metaphor. Each chapter begins with two carefully selected quotations that further the travel theme, introduce the topic of the mile, or highlight the works of postcolonial authors.

In the introduction to the book Johnston "maps the territory" of her journey. The following research questions frame her study.

- What are the positive values for students from diverse cultures of engaging with literary texts that resonate with their own histories, traditions, and cross-cultural experiences? What are the attendant drawbacks?
- How might reading and deconstructing postcolonial literature in the context of a classroom enable students and teachers to problematize representations of self, place, and the other in literary texts?
- What challenges and difficulties does one teacher face as she attempts to introduce postcolonial literature to students and to engage them in deconstructive reading strategies?

After presenting a concise description of narrative inquiry, the author provides an overview of the miles to follow.

Lynne Wiltse completed her doctorate in secondary education at the University of Alberta. She currently teaches language and literacy courses in the School of Education.

Mile One is set in South Africa in the 1970s, where as a young white high school English teacher Johnston faced challenges and constraints as she struggled to select literature for her white, female, middle-class students who were living isolated lives in a politically unstable society. Although she did not question the universality of the Western literary canon at the time, Johnston later considers the implication of texts her students read that completely ignored the rich legacy and oral traditions of indigenous Africans. The awareness that the literature her students were offered did not reflect the multicultural society in which they lived has since motivated much of Johnston's work.

In Mile Two Johnston outlines the development of education policies in major Western countries established in response to the diverse needs of increasing immigrant populations. In particular she presents an explanation of the new reading practices and multicultural literary canons implemented in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Johnston compares the models explored in each of these countries, providing the background necessary for the reader to appreciate fully the context in which her own study was situated.

The major theoretical perspectives from which Johnston drew are presented in Miles Three to Six. Mile Three extends the discussion of national policies by calling attention to the gap that exists between multiculturalism and anti-racism policies and teachers' understanding of what it means to implement new reading practices in their classrooms. Although teachers may understand the need for change, many are at a loss as to how to make sense of the complex ways that questions of representation are interconnected with those of culture, race, gender, and ethnicity. Recognizing the complexity of these issues, Johnston calls for a dialogic approach (Bakhtin, 1981) that encourages plurality and diversity rather than a romanticized view of culture.

Mile Four highlights the many tensions in postcolonial literary studies, in particular "between a temporal dimension of postcolonialism that focuses on the changing literary scene in a postcolonial world and a theoretical dimension of postcolonial studies that links with poststructuralist critiques of essentialism and authenticity" (p. 5). The author offers competing definitions of the term *postcolonial*, problematizes the nature of postcolonial discourse, and explains how postcolonial pedagogy differs from multicultural education.

The next stop on the journey, Mile Five, takes the reader into the literary canon debate in which Johnston compares the views of contemporary "canon-busters" with right-wing conservatists. Teachers wishing to introduce new ways of reading into their classrooms will find Johnston's idea of a "nomadic" canon (which values the potential over the institutional) helpful. She illuminates how theoretical frameworks influence the reading experience, challenging readers to examine their own theoretical perspectives.

This discussion leads well into Mile Six, where Johnston explores literary theory at the crossroads. She traces the history of literary theory: new critical theory; structuralism; poststructuralist theories; feminist criticism; and reader-response theories. The journey theme is used to full advantage in her depiction of travel as a metaphor for teaching literature. Rejecting the pedagogical version of the two-week package tour to Europe, Johnston argues for a more daunting approach to travel and reading texts that allows the reader opportu-

nities to reflect on theoretical assumptions. The reader gets a clear image as to how the “constructed map of the Western world has shifted” (p. 47) making way for a new “World Literature” in which long-silenced voices are heard.

In Mile Seven Johnston ventures from the theoretical to the pedagogical as she revisits the UK, the US, and Canada to consider what theory looks like in practice. She explores the successes and limitations of studies in which postcolonial pedagogies have been introduced. From here we travel with the author to the next destination: Johnston’s research site. As an educator I was eager to get to the heart of the study. The earlier miles prepare the reader well for the actual study described in Miles Eight through Eleven.

In Mile Eight we meet Meg, Johnston’s traveling companion, fellow English teacher, and co-researcher. One of the strengths of the book is the author’s account of the collaborative aspect of the research process. Readers hoping for a detailed description of the research methodology (e.g., graduate students), though, will be disappointed. However, Johnston raises many questions about the nature of curriculum development in progress: What dilemmas does Meg encounter as she reinvents her curriculum? How much background knowledge is needed for canon expansion? How do we avoid stereotyping students from particular cultural backgrounds? How do we challenge students to confront the (mis)representations of Others in literary texts? Although these and other questions addressed in this mile point to the challenging nature of curriculum reform, at the same time they provide direction for others who wish to embark on a comparable journey.

Johnston introduces us to the high school students involved in her research study in Miles Nine through Eleven. To convey “re-presentation as an active process of creation rather than a passive mirroring of a research situation” (p. 82), Johnston employs three lenses to re-present the research data. The result works well, and the analysis presented is insightful. In Mile Nine grade 12 students were introduced to cross-cultural texts; their engagements with the multicultural texts created the kind of dialogic relationships discussed by Bakhtin (1984). Accordingly, Johnston juxtaposes excerpts from works read with students’ responses to these texts in a dialogic format. Naturally, responses were varied, but show that all students were affected by reading the new texts and had begun to make connections to issues of race, class, and gender in their own lives.

At Mile Ten Johnston offers a close-up view of a grade 10 class, re-created through “photo/graphs” comprising research journal entries, notes on classroom observations, students’ writing and students’ oral responses from tape-recorded interviews. During the two terms Johnston spent in this class as a participant observer, she and Meg attempted to raise students’ consciousness about various types of discrimination by introducing them to a variety of postcolonial literature. Reflecting on the experience, Johnston makes the point that it is not enough for teachers to experiment with canon expansion without also considering the importance of reading strategies that will assist students in critically examining the texts.

In Mile Eleven the co-researchers and students from a grade 11 advanced placement class move into Homi Bhabha’s (1994) “third space” as they engage with the novel *Obasan* (Kogawa, 1983). Johnston considers how the tensions of

this third space allow students to interrogate issues such as race, class, and gender in a particular text. The discussion here shows how texts such as *Obasan* provide students with opportunities to participate in discussions about knowledge, identity, and social relations, creating the type of spaces necessary to engage students in cultural remapping. In describing each of the research sites, Johnston makes a point of presenting the negative aspects of the research as well, for example, how students who resist the new texts and ideas may have their voices silenced rather than heard.

Mile Twelve has much to say about teaching. In this section Johnston proposes practical strategies for linking theory, policy, and practice in the quest to remap the literary canon. Johnston begins by acknowledging that the daily constraints of teaching can make implementing change difficult for teachers. She suggests that what is needed

in order to understand the complex interactions among students, teachers, texts, and theories are studies and writing that acknowledge the links between theory, interpretation, and the art of teaching and also accept that classrooms are messy places, lacking the utopian tidiness that characterizes much writing about teaching. (p. 126)

Johnston makes no attempt to hide the messiness in her study, as evidenced in the excerpts from interviews with Meg that highlight problems faced as well as successes experienced.

At Mile Thirteen Johnston's journey ends as she reflects on her study. The research suggests that there are potential advantages to reading postcolonial literature for students from minority backgrounds as well as those from mainstream backgrounds. The author recognizes that her study is able to offer only partial insight into the questions that framed her research. This is in keeping with a postcolonial narrative where travel "is winding and heterogeneous with hybrid elements interrupting the passage" (p. 135). Johnston also makes suggestions for future research and classroom practice. I hope that other researchers will take up her challenge to find ways to encourage teachers to introduce postcolonial pedagogy. In this vein the appendixes should be of assistance to teachers who wish to implement postcolonial literature into their classrooms. Text selections for all classes involved in the study (grade 10, grade 11 advanced placement, preliminary and final selections for grade 12) are listed. Selections include short stories, poetry, essays, novels, nonfiction, drama, and film. The reference list provides a beginning repertoire of resources in the field of postcolonial pedagogy.

Re-mapping Literary Worlds is a powerful example of interdisciplinary research. There is much to recommend in this book to both English teachers and academics. Johnston's study makes a significant contribution in offering a conceptual model that can be adopted in practice by educational practitioners and scholars of literary theory. The author asks,

How can teachers be encouraged to make a transition into a practice of postcolonial pedagogy, implementing strategies of poststructuralist, postmodern, and critical literary theories combined with a reader-response philosophy that also values students' personal and idiosyncratic responses to literary texts? (p. 59)

Johnston not only answers this question: she makes it clear why it is imperative for educators to do so.

References

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