



Post-Empire Imaginaries? Anglophone Literature, History and the Demise of Empires

GNEL/ASNEL Annual Conference, Berne, May 18 – 20, 2012
Conveners: Prof. Dr. Barbara Buchenau, Prof. Dr. Virginia Richter

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:

Alfred Hiatt, Reader in Medieval Literature and Culture, Queen Mary,
University of London, U.K.

Donna Landry, Professor of English and American Literature,
University of Kent, U.K.

Ann Stoler, Willy Brandt Distinguished University Professor of Anthropology and Historical
Studies, New School for Social Research, New York, U.S.A.

Call for Papers:

The topics of recent GNEL/ASNEL conferences have variously engaged with issues relating to spatiality, (dis)location and globalization. In the ensuing debates space and performance have proven to be important and extremely productive parameters for postcolonial theory and practice, but history has taken a backseat. While space continues to be an important parameter for postcolonial theory and practice, there is an increasing need to understand how the meanings of specific locations are constituted by the stories and histories woven around them, in other words, how spaces are the results of social and political interaction in time. To disregard the historical dimension of space is to divest it of its specificity. Against the trend advocating the spatial turn, we therefore propose to reconsider historicity as a central, and indispensable, aspect of postcolonial studies. The term 'post-empire' has been chosen to provide a sharper definition to an otherwise almost limitless field and to critically reflect upon the amount of nostalgia and commodified yearning that is still attached to the idea of empire, despite decades of cutting-edge postcolonial scholarship and theorizing.

At the same time, however, 'empire' allows to explore the most diverse resonances, from Hardt and Negri's Neo-Marxist model of a limitless global 'imperium' to specific historical formations. In the context of postcolonial studies, the British Empire will constitute the nodal point of the conference; however, we want to open up the discussions for comparative approaches. By linking 'post-empire' to its 'imaginaries', we want to stress not only the historical and geographical variability, but the variety of creative and psychological engagements with the idea of empire. Empire has a concrete material side, connected with bioprospecting, trade, linguistic and cultural domination, but it is also a site of imaginary social creation, of desire and anxiety, of fictions and fantasies.

Sections can include:

- comparative views of empire: the afterlife of the Imperium Romanum in modern discourse, competitive imperialisms from the early modern period to the nineteenth century (Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, British imperial expansion), Neo-Imperialism (USA, China)
- material imperialism: scientific voyages, bioprospecting, the exchange of material goods in the service of the empire; mercantile empires and trading companies; the transformation of indigenous flora and fauna, agriculture and economy in the interests of imperial trade
- 'the Empire writes back': postcolonial critiques, rewritings, and fusions of European discourses of empire
- post-empire heritage: marketing the British Empire, living history, nostalgic travelling, heritage films and fictions, imaginaries of the Raj, Victorian nostalgia, British Empire Shops, post-empire British cuisine
- theorising the Empire: the figurative dimension of Empire, transnational imaginaries, Empire and language, connections to World Literature and Cosmopolitanism

The conference will include workshops on the intersections of Anglophone literature, history and the demise of empires in teaching and research in secondary and tertiary education. It will also provide the opportunity to present work in progress on all levels of academic qualification in the "under construction" and poster sessions.

Please send abstracts of papers (20 min., 200 words), proposals for organizing one of the workshops, or suggestions for the presentation of work in progress to

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The call for papers will close on January 31, 2012.

Speakers at the ASNEL conference from Austria, Germany and Switzerland are required to apply for ASNEL membership and pay their membership dues before they can be included in the conference programme. This does not apply to keynote speakers and other invited speakers, to representatives beyond Postcolonial, English or American Studies, and participants of the *Under Construction* workshops.

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the Center for Cultural Studies, University of Bern

and the Medieval English Studies Section, English Department, University of Bern