



# **Imperial Affliction: Eighteenth-Century British Poets and Their Twentieth-Century Lives (Postcolonial Studies)**

*Thomas Simmons*

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«In many ways», Robert J.C. Young writes, «colonization from the very first carried with it the seeds of its own destruction.» *Imperial Affliction* examines some ways in which Young's observation could be applied to problems of subjectivity and influence within the colonizing nations themselves, particularly eighteenth-century Britain. How might these «seeds of destruction» manifest themselves as problems of identity? How might the very selves with greatest access to self-affirmation - the idea of the empire, the idea of British citizenry, the idea of the British self - actually find themselves vulnerable, confused, or damaged?

Using multiple forms of postcolonial critique, this book turns back to salient eighteenth-century British lives and work for a different kind of enlightenment. Among its central subjects are the elusive subjectivity of William Collins; the exilic religious experience of William Cowper and its multiple readings in the twentieth century by a self-fashioned exilic, Donald Davie; the «missed encounter» between Christopher Smart and Samuel Johnson, and the ways in which that problem was re-inscribed in the work of W. Jackson Bate and Lionel Trilling; the problem of imperial fixity in James Cook's journals with a view to Gray's «Elegy» and Goldsmith's «Deserted Village»; and the problem of purity as a paradoxically privileged and exilic force in the work of John Newton and Christopher Smart. In these explorations, this book illustrates both an expanded view of eighteenth-century colonial liabilities and a new emphasis on postcolonial critique as a means of exploring the fissures always present in imperial ambition.

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