

ESC: English Studies in Canada—
The Forty on Forty Project

Michael O’Driscoll
and Mark Simpson
Co-Editors
ESC: English Studies in Canada
English and Film Studies
University of Alberta

IN CELEBRATING FORTY YEARS OF PUBLISHING HISTORY, the Co-Editors of *ESC* decided to initiate what is either an exercise in free-form, collaborative narration or an inductive experiment with few controls. Approaching forty scholars in a diverse sampling, we have asked them to identify, in no more than 150 words, a work, idea, or event of the past forty years that has been key to the project of literary, cultural, and theoretical inquiry. The objective at stake in such invitation is arguably cartographic: to map the contours of the field we inhabit, with *ESC* as sextant. Or perhaps the journal plays the double role of thermometer and aneroid monitor, taking the discipline’s temperature and pulse all at once. Preferred metaphor notwithstanding, the resulting responses vividly capture the dynamic energies and complex torsions rippling through our discipline over the last four decades and impelling its future horizons. And they do so not least by ranging widely: our contributors point not only to creative endeavour, critical polemic, and theoretical sway, to landmark collectivities

and epochal events, but also to entanglements, tendencies, sentiments, and atmospherics, the seemingly less solid but no less real and material relations that produce tangible, long-reverberating effects. A decade ago, *ESC* celebrated its thirtieth anniversary by revisiting Raymond Williams's *Keywords* for a new disciplinary era. Ten years on, we look instead to galvanizing or groundbreaking occurrences during the journal's lifespan that, by setting terms or changing terms, forged keywords we did not know we needed yet could not, in retrospect, have done without. Perhaps what emerges emphatically here is the embrace of multiplicity—the entries indexing dynamic interplay and critical interanimation over mere preference. That, and the reminder that productive tensions and mutually enabling postures remain very much in play in what is a grand, collective, always unfolding project.

Walter Benn Michaels
Professor
English
University of Illinois at Chicago

An Interesting Scholarly Problem

If only *ESC* had been founded ten years earlier, identifying the scholarly event that has had the most impact on literary studies during its lifetime would be easy—the 1966 conference at Johns Hopkins that announced the arrival of “theory.” If only the event didn't have to be scholarly, it would be easier still. In the U.S., 1975 was the last year that the income growth of the top 5 percent didn't outpace everyone else's. Ever since then (with a pause for breath during the Great Recession) income inequality has grown (although in Canada, the 1970s didn't get started until the 1990s). If we put these two events together—the end of postwar equality and the beginning of poststructuralist theory—we don't exactly get a work or idea but we do get an interesting scholarly problem: understanding how literary studies (and the very idea of cultural studies) have played handmaiden to neoliberalism.

Diana Brydon
Canada Research Chair in Globalization and Cultural Studies
English, Film, and Theatre
University of Manitoba

Ngugi wa Thiong'o "On the Abolition of the English Department" (1972)

In 1972, Ngugi wa Thiong'o published "On the Abolition of the English Department." It inspired postcolonial students of English to rethink the practices of our discipline before Edward Said popularized attention to the geopolitics of the disciplines in *Orientalism* (1978). Ngugi offered a choice between an additive model of literary study centred on perpetuating the myths of empire and one that re-conceptualized curriculum from the ground up, starting from the place where readers are located and working outward toward the world and backward through history from there. For Canadians, Ngugi's challenge meant addressing the complicity of the disciplines in promoting Canadian settler colonialism in ways now being revisited through the challenge issued by the 2015 *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. In suggesting that Kenyans begin with the situatedness of their local condition and languages, Ngugi's call is linked to feminist and decolonizing initiatives around the globe.

Jo-Ann Wallace
Professor Emeritus / Past Editor, *ESC*
English and Film Studies, University of Alberta

Feminism

When I wrote my PhD field exams in Modernism, there were only two women writers on the list: Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein. I think now of Woolf, whose relationship with her father was ambivalent. On the one hand, she was clearly his intellectual heir and she had free run of his extensive library. But he also denied her the formal education that was the birthright of her brothers. In a diary entry written twenty-four years after her father's death, Woolf speculates that, had he not died, "His life would entirely have ended mine. What would have happened? No writing; no books;—inconceivable." I think of this when I think about what the last forty years of English Studies would have been like without the rise of second-wave feminism and its impact on the academy. Yes, women students would have had free access to the canon ... but: no Djuna Barnes? no Dorothy Richardson? no Jean Rhys? no Nella Larsen? Inconceivable.

Jason Haslam
Associate Professor / President, ACCUTE
English
Dalhousie University

Warping 1975, or, Critical Play

Being a creature of milestones, I turn to the year whose anniversary this project marks. Beyond the beginnings of *ESC* (an event deserving more study), 1975 saw the publication of Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren*, an experimental dystopia about circuits of power at society's margins; Hélène Cixous's introduction of *écriture féminine* in "The Laugh of the Medusa"; and the release of Richard O'Brien's *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. This wholly queer trinity of African American science fiction author, French feminist, and English–New Zealander filmmaker marks a moment of collective cultural, social, and critical motion, spinning away from the rigid codes and salt-lines that circumscribe us, and toward, if not freedom, at least radical play. But, as José Esteban Muñoz reminds us, the desire for freedom hinted at by the back row of the late-night, double-feature picture show—the back row of culture itself—lingers. Critically, maybe it's time to do the "Time Warp." Again.

Juliet McMaster
Professor Emeritus
English
University of Alberta

ESC: English Studies in Canada *and All-Inclusiveness*

I too was "in on the creation" of *English Studies in Canada*, although at second hand, being married to Rowland McMaster: he chaired the ACCUTE committee that set up *ESC* in 1972, invited Lauriat Lane to take on the job as first editor, and became editor himself in 1985. So inevitably I look at *ESC* historically, and to some extent through Rowland's eyes. What single aspect of *ESC* has had the greatest impact over its forty years? I follow Rowland in believing that the great strength of ACCUTE's journal is its all-inclusiveness. It still provides "a forum where the Canadian scholarly community working in English can be identified, can become conscious of itself, recognize its newcomers, its stars, trends, and compartments, and therefore develop its own scholarly discourse" (R.D. McMaster, *ESC* 15:1, 7). If anything, it has become *more* inclusive, as our literary discipline embraces interdisciplinarity and cultural studies.

Lee Edelman
Fletcher Professor of English Literature
English
Tufts University

The Yale School

In 1975, Jacques Derrida began a series of annual stints as a visiting professor at Yale that catalyzed the “Yale School” of critics. Their work not only transformed the practice of theory in the English-language academy (and beyond) but also provoked political and cultural battles that affected the status of the academy itself. Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson, and Harold Bloom (different as they were) joined Derrida in awakening anglophone criticism to the intersections of rhetoric, philosophy, literature, and politics. In the process, they made deconstruction as inevitable a point of reference as the New Criticism once had been. But deconstruction was not the Yale School’s sole legacy; by making theory central to the humanities for the next forty years, it decisively influenced the shape and direction of feminist, African American, queer, and psychoanalytic theory as well. We are all its heirs.

Judith Scherer Herz
Professor Emeritus
English
Concordia University

Gardens of the Forking Paths

What is most critical is less a single text than the productive confluence of multiple ways of thinking within our discipline and making them function together. Not long before 1975 work was more compartmentalized despite some crossovers. It was mostly thematic, historicizing or new critical with just some glimmers of the future. One might mark the change with Spivak’s 1976 translation of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* followed by her work in postcolonial studies with its Marxist and feminist currents. Or with Gubar’s 1975 *Madwoman in the Attic* coming soon before Butler’s and Sedgwick’s groundbreaking gender work. Perhaps for me Derrida or early Todorov or Lacan or Barthes have often been more useful than Foucault or Deleuze, but for the discipline? And what about Williams and Eagleton? Is Žižek more important now than they? Rather, it is the many intersecting engagements that matter most; it’s the critic’s willingness to come to a fork in the road and take it.

George Elliott Clarke
Professor
English
University of Toronto

Multiculturalism

The publication of *Canada In Us Now: The First Anthology of Black Poetry and Prose in Canada* (1976), edited by Harold Head, followed by *Roman Candles: An Anthology of Poems by Seventeen Italo-Canadian Poets* (1978), edited by Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, served notice that Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's promulgation of a statist multiculturalism policy (1971) was already shifting—seismically—the conception of “Canadianness.” True: Head's writers were explicitly “black,” not Canadian, while Di Cicco writer's were self-consciously “hyphenated,” so as to spurn the “either/or” of an “Anglo” or “Gallic” identity. Still, these works spearheaded the revolutionary understanding that the “two founding” white Euro “peoples”—the “two solitudes”—pseudo-apartheid notion of Canada was now splintering—or flowering—into the realization that we're a polyphony, a mosaic, of multitudinous “solitudes” and “societies” (not subcultures). We went from black-and-white to technicolour. None of our art—or culture—has looked the same since.

Karyn Ball
Professor
English and Film Studies
University of Alberta

Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1 (1978)

The most centrifugal event from the last forty years was Robert Hurley's English translation of Michel Foucault's *La Volénté de savoir* as *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, volume 1 published by Pantheon books, a division of Random House, Inc., in 1978. This translation made Foucault's groundbreaking theses regarding the subject forming effects of discourse about sex, sexuality, and perversion available to English speakers at a time when English was becoming an increasingly hegemonic international language. In modeling a genealogical approach to discourse analysis, the introduction to *The History of Sexuality* also transformed the historiography of sociocultural forms while casting self-conscious light on the constitution of scientific objects as objects of discourse. Because its intensifying influence coincided with the institutional rise of feminist and postcolonial criticism, Foucault's introduction profoundly shaped their questions, methods, and archives while spurring a crucial critique of normativity that facilitated the emergence of queer studies.

Tilottama Rajan
Canada Research Chair and Distinguished University Professor
English, University of Western Ontario

Deconstruction

Exploding onto the critical scene in the sixties and seventies, Deconstruction rather than poststructuralism (which Derrida calls a “purely American notion”) may seem to be in the past. Following the casting out of De Man, it has become convenient to esotericize it by aligning it with the radical passivity of post-Heideggerian thought, thus reducing its inter-disciplinary force within continental philosophy. But Deconstruction was neither a purely philosophical nor literary-critical method. Reaching beyond French academic philosophy to the margins of philosophy, it had to do, Derrida tells us, with “systems,” their “architecture,” and the way dislodging one part in a whole (whether a text or an organization of knowledge) can unsettle discourse so as to allow other “possibilities of ... assembling” to appear. If we think Deconstruction outside its initial deployment of and capture by the linguistic turn, and if we give it a genealogy that includes Foucault’s *Order of Things* as well as Derrida, thus also putting its arrival in North America as “Yale Deconstruction” back into a broader assemblage, Deconstruction still speaks with urgency to a world in which the structures of disciplinarity and the resistant place of the Humanities in systemizations of knowledge are vital issues.

Mary Chapman
Professor
English, University of British Columbia

Deconstruction

To paraphrase Virginia Woolf, the literary field changed (for me) “on or about” September 1982. I was finishing my BA and taking a literary criticism survey with the recently hired Tilottama Rajan. Trained in the comfortable paradoxes of New Criticism’s “well wrought urn,” I felt the ground shift under me when I learned about Deconstruction. The idea that representation was an equivocal process, that *différance* was endemic to language, was terrifying. It was hard not to consider Derrida’s “unworking of language” nihilist. And yet years later, it is exciting to see the productive impact on literary study that deconstruction has had, particularly on inherited concepts like gender, race, class, nation, and sexuality. The methodological tools Deconstruction gave us have renewed entire subfields of literary study because, as Dana Luciano and Ivy G. Wilson suggest in *Unsettled States: Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies*, even the temporal, national, spatial, and disciplinary terms by which we understand our work have come under interrogation.

Linda Hutcheon
University Professor Emeritus
English and Comparative Literature
University of Toronto

The ACUTE (sic) Theory Group

In the early 1980s—a time when English departments (everywhere) were not exactly welcoming to the continental critical theory that had earlier found a home in Comparative Literature and French departments—a number of members of what was then ACUTE set up an informal “theory group.” Annually, at the “Learneds,” as they were known, grad students and faculty from across the country met together, read together, talked and talked and talked together (ok ... and also drank a few beers together), learning as much from each other as from the theorists studied. An eventually welcoming ACUTE gave the group a slot in the annual program, and several generations of Canadian theorists—working in all periods and genres—were launched: the classroom and the library shelves bear witness to the result of the integration of theory into our discipline. And perhaps just as importantly for the lasting legacy of the “theory group,” many close intellectual and personal friendships were made.

Len Findlay
Professor
English
University of Saskatchewan

Theory

For me, the notion of “the discipline” was simultaneously remade and refused by my turn to theory after moving from the UK to Canada. I arrived here with massive and largely unsuspected colonial baggage. Taking my theoretical interests into ACUTE (sic), with its distinctive sociability and cast of characters, both encouraged and required me to understand national determinations, and overdeterminations, produced by the seismic shifts of Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, and postcolonialism. I was interpellated increasingly as a Canadian and responding to that call drove everything I did then and still do in post-Harperland. Living the contradictions of the nation and the national as a critical immigrant permitted me, eventually, to “Always indigenise!” while benefiting from the wry fellowship of colleagues like those in Kamloops who bought me my first pint of “Imperialist Pig IPA” and then sat back to enjoy my reflections on the implications of that brand, for them and me.

Jennifer Henderson
Associate Professor
English Language and Literature
Carleton University

Joy Kogawa, Obasan (1981)

The publication of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* in 1981. And not just because passages from the novel would be read in Parliament on the day of the signing of the Japanese-Canadian Redress Agreement seven years later, or because the novel helped to galvanize a public around collective historical injustice. It was the novel's particular figuration of historical injury that would reverberate for decades. *Obasan's* appearance was itself a ripple effect of the second-wave feminist thematization of child abuse, the early circulation of trauma theory, and the rise of the child as the emblem of a cosmopolitan humanitarian imaginary. The novel's condensation of these elements into a narrative of the intimate impact of state-directed violence laid the conventions of a whole discursive field stretching from English departments to state apologies. It may be that neuroscientific positivism now reigns supreme, but politicians (at certain moments) and literary theorists still speak of unconscious memory.

Uzoma Esonwanne
Associate Professor
Department of English and the Centre for Comparative Literature
University of Toronto

Where Signifiers "Dance Forever"

More than three decades ago criticism began to concede, rather reluctantly, that texts "are worldly" phenomena. To ascribe this welcome development to any individual scholarly work, idea, or event would be to misrepresent the history of postcolonial criticism. Nonetheless, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that works like *Orientalism* (1978) and, especially, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1982) cleared the space out of which they could emerge. In the latter work, Edward W. Said made a seminal contribution to the discipline by demonstrating precisely *how* texts are worldly and *why* criticism that overlooks this impoverishes rather than ennobles texts. Thanks to such timely interventions, memories of the pall that an agnostic poststructuralism cast over criticism have faded. However, they have not died. It is unlikely that the discipline will ever again inter texts in a linguistic echo chamber where signifiers, like mythic sands, "dance forever" (*Things Fall Apart* 27). Ensuring this requires that we always use seminal interventions such as Said's as reference points by which we can keep our concern over all threats to the literary aesthetic in perspective.

Eli MacLaren
Assistant Professor
English
McGill University

“What is the History of Books?”

Every time it is read, Robert Darnton’s 1982 essay “What is the History of Books?” challenges literary studies to move beyond egocentric criticism. If literature has a diverse social existence, Darnton’s model of the communications circuit provides a method to discover it, in a way that sweeps up one’s own judgment of a text into the historical project of knowing how others have made and used it. Combining the reading of texts with the study of their materiality (bibliography) and with sociology, Darnton has done as much as any other single person to generate the broad current of scholarship known today as the history of the book. Canadian literary studies has especially benefited from the advent of his model, not least because it offered concrete ways to analyze the nationality of literature—studies of copyright and publishing, the formation of authors, educational books, prize culture, the sociality of reading, etc.—that specify not only the limits but also the reality of the nation in its intersections with literature. I continue to take inspiration from Robert Darnton’s plain style, complex imagination, and drive for representativeness.

Scott McCracken
Professor of English Literature
English
Keele University

The Centre for Cultural Studies, Birmingham

At university in 1983, I wanted to be a Marxist. In retrospect it is not hard to see why. In Britain Margaret Thatcher was tearing up the postwar consensus. It was the moment of high theory. If you didn’t have an ’ism, well ... So I read Eagleton, Jameson etc. But there was a problem. “Cultural Marxism” had little to say about two pressing social injustices: gender and “race.” Then I discovered the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, which was asking all the right questions. Of the publications that emerged from the Centre, the one that made the deepest impression on me was *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, which contained brilliant chapters by Paul Gilroy and Hazel Carby. I have tried in vain to match the Centre’s work and failed, but I still think the questions it posed are the ones we need to answer.

Clint Burnham
Associate Professor
English
Simon Fraser University

Cultural Studies

The most exciting change in literary studies over the past forty years is that which challenges the very concept of the “literary”—by this I mean the development of cultural studies. As a methodology, cultural studies challenges the hegemony of Literature both in terms of the canon—and so inquiring into mass or popular culture, pulp fiction, fanfic, and the like—and as medium—and so including among its objects visual culture, music, film, and the digital. But cultural studies also means the incorporation of theory, from structuralism and Marxism to feminism and queer theory, from postcolonialism and settler-colonialism to disability studies, psychoanalysis, and critiques of institutionality. With these methodological and theoretical tendencies, cultural studies reveals traditional literary studies, with its emphasis on the text and the author, to be inadequate, out of date, and, frankly, kinda boring.

Danielle Fuller
Reader in Canadian Studies and Cultures of Reading
Department of English Literature and American
and Canadian Studies Centre
University of Birmingham

Cultural Studies and Book History

In the past forty years these two fields have sat alongside but also intersected with English studies. In the late twentieth-century, cultural studies displaced texts and textualities from the centre of study for literary-trained scholars like Janice Radway, re-orienting investigations toward social communities of practice and their location in wider histories, political, and economic systems. Simultaneously, questions about why, where, and when people read and how various types of reading material get into peoples’ hands were articulated by book historians. In Canada, scholars such as Barbara Godard and Carole Gerson took up issues of production, circulation, and reception as they interrogated the politics of publishing, journalism, and the funding of culture. The methods and methodologies from both fields equip us well for the “new media” turn that is already underway, propelled by the realities of living in a time of transition and exchange between print and digital cultures.

Will Straw
Professor
Department of Art History and Communications Studies
McGill University

Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction (1979; English Translation 1984)

Distinction gave me a way of thinking about the politics of culture that broke through exhausted debates about whether the political rested in the form or content of works. Some books alter the way you think; others systematize what you were already thinking. *Distinction*, which hardly talks about popular music, hit me at a time when I was immersed in clubs and music scenes and gave me a vocabulary with which to express unformed intuitions. Few works have been criticized on such weak grounds (that it is too French, or only about the 1960s, or that it cannot account for the struggle over meaning). In France, where the legacy of Bourdieu is oppressive, it may well be time to move on. In Canada, where we are still reluctant to think of our tastes as having a social location, it still has much to teach us.

Ann Cvetkovich
Ellen C. Garwood Centennial Professor of English
English and Women's and Gender Studies
University of Texas at Austin

Feminism

The Lesbian Herstory Archives and the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, two radical lesbian feminist organizations that have become crucial to my intellectual life, recently celebrated fortieth anniversaries. In 1976, when I left Canada in search of radical politics and knowledge at a college in the U.S., I had no idea they existed. Although feminism was a forceful cultural and political movement, it didn't reach my academic life until the 1980s, when a potent fusion of poststructuralist theory and feminist canon-busting produced critiques of radical feminism. Today when critique finds itself in a state of fatigue and feminisms can sometimes be taken for granted, I can nonetheless trace the latest keywords in literary studies—*affect*, *materialism*, *posthumanism*, *environmentalism*—back to feminist attention to the body. Returning to the archive of radical feminist literature, including writers such as Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, as well as others whose names I'm still learning, I have come to a new appreciation for this history, with its contentious relation to the present, and for what we can't know about what will be important forty years later.

Joseph Boone
Professor
English
University of Southern California

Difference

Even more than French deconstruction's promotion of the concept of *différance*, its iteration by feminists in the States as "difference" in the early 1980s marked a transformational moment whose consequences, to my mind, have been monumental, acknowledging the possibility of heterogeneous viewpoints and accepting challenges from within its own structures. Embracing the concept of "difference" in terms of gender and sexuality not only helped feminist criticism break out of the straightjacket of binaristic or oppositional notions of male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexuality and homosexuality, and so on, but also paved the way for the evolution of queer theory and, more recently, the emergence of the entire "trans" movement. And the application of the concept of "difference" quickly became a lens enabling a revision of the differentials marking race, ethnicity, class, and postcolonial relations in these emergent areas of scholarship. With the embrace of "difference" as a mode of seeing the world, the world itself has seismically changed—and, along with it, the goals and methods of our discipline.

Stephen Slemon
Professor
English and Film Studies
University of Alberta

The Postcolonial Turn

The event that rocked my disciplinary world was the 1989 publication of the Routledge handbook *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. That book inspired a subdisciplinary blow-up over critical methodology, but where it really "wrote back" was to the discipline of English Studies as a whole. This wasn't the only work to show that the so-called "new" global literatures, fashioned as they were in partial response to British imperial expansion, carried an inalienable political project. Earlier books and articles had already made the claim that the "other" literatures in "english," relegated as they then were to the curricular margins, actually ran straight down the centre of the English Studies' page. But *The Empire Writes Back* persuaded the global English Department that its object of study was foundationally cross-cultural and that this entailed a commitment to meaningful social change. Further disciplinary inclusions were bound to follow.

Gillian Whitlock
Professor
School of Communication and Arts
University of Queensland

Postcolonialism

Who would have thought that the benign commonwealth literature project would break out into such a confronting and necessary critical practice in the 1980s, drawing Canadian, Australian, African, Indian, and Caribbean writing into a dynamic comparative framework? Too often this is characterized in terms of its starry trio of critics—Bhabha, Said, and Spivak—and the compelling logic of “writing back” to empire. But what really changed the discipline was the enduring necessity to read more expansively beyond the nation, to pursue a critical literacy where the imprints of colonization could be read across new literatures and a new transnational literary scene. Specialist journals, curricula, and an infrastructure of publishers and bookshops rapidly expanded and, of course, numerous reading groups tussled with the new critical language of hybridity, orientalism, and syncretism. The legacy of this is now diverse, dispersed, and contested. Nevertheless postcolonialism changed the subject, and decisively.

Jesse Archibald-Barber
Associate Professor
Department of Indigenous Languages, Arts, and Cultures
First Nations University of Canada

Native Literature is Not Postcolonial

The scholarly idea that has had the greatest impact on English studies in Canada is Thomas King’s argument that Native literature is not postcolonial (“Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial”). Over the past forty years, First Nations literature has often been included within Canadian literature and interpreted through the lenses of Western critical theory. While this had positive effects, it also became another form of appropriation and colonizing practice. However, King’s argument liberated the field from Western criticism. It helped establish First Nations literature as its own discipline, with a focus on decolonization, requiring that First Nations critical theories must emerge from the literature itself. This is key to ongoing literary inquiry, for while First Nations works are still a part of English studies in Canada, one must recognize that the literature is also distinct from Canadian literature: its literary sovereignty flows from recognition of First Nations as distinct nations with distinct histories.

Eric Savoy
Professeur agrégé, Département de littératures et de langues du monde
Université de Montréal

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet (1990)

No mere summary of Eve Sedgwick's theoretical modeling can convey adequately the witty playfulness of her *writerly* writing, the warm personality of her critical voice, or the sheer contagious joy that she found in the literary. It is the openness to pleasures—of abstract thought and political engagement, of style, of words and books and ideas—that, more than anything else, defined Sedgwick's mode of practicing criticism. Accustomed as one was in 1990 to the dry, expository mode of Anglo-American academic discourse—the approach to literary criticism as though it were (as Oscar Wilde said of Henry James) a painful duty—Sedgwick opened up the very scene of her literary predilections and, in a sense, came out of the closet of scholarly impersonality. Here she writes about Proust and the pleasures of the difficult, labyrinthine sentence: “I can only report here on my own reading life, but with Proust and my word processor in front of me what I most feel are Talmudic desires, to reproduce or unfold the text and to giggle. Who hasn't dreamt that *À la recherche* remained untranslated, simply so that one could (at least if one knew French) by undertaking the job justify spending one's own productive life afloat within that blissful and hilarious atmosphere of truth-telling.”

Nat Hurley
Associate Professor
English and Film Studies
University of Alberta

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990)

No concept has been more central to literary analysis of gender and sexuality over the past forty years than Judith Butler's concept of “gender performativity”—even where that concept has come to be contested. As I contemplated my selection for the “Forty on Forty,” I asked myself which moments of cultural critique have most shaped the terms of analysis that remain most urgent for the cultural study of gender and sexuality today. *Gender Trouble* rose to the top for me. But I would like to devote my remaining word space here to recognizing several other top contenders: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1 (1976; English translation 1978); editors Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981); the 1982 Barnard Conference (originally called *The Scholar and the Feminist IX*); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985); and the Montreal Massacre at L' Ecole Polytechnique in 1989.

Herb Wyile
Professor
English and Theatre
Acadia University

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990)

Judith Butler's 1990 book *Gender Trouble* gets my nod for the work that has had the greatest impact on the discipline of English in the last forty years. Although not without its detractors, Butler's book, with its anti-essentialist emphasis on gender as a kind of performed, rather than inherent, identity profoundly reshaped people's thinking about gender relations, gender identity, and sexuality, within the academy and beyond. Widely cited in theoretical debates and in literary criticism, Butler's work also made a profound contribution to greater understanding of the fluidity of gender and sexuality and to the reconfiguration of broader social attitudes toward gender and sexual relations and identities. In an academic milieu increasingly inclined to stress the public impact of theoretical and critical pursuits, Butler's book was, and continues to be, widely influential, and Butler herself, for better or worse, has become a prominent public intellectual and even academic celebrity.

Terry Goldie
Professor
English
York University

Jonathan Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence (1991)

In what might be called "Gay Literary Studies" there have been many central documents and many central scholars. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is of course key but also Lee Edelman and others. I could have chosen the sensitivity of late Sedgwick or the deconstruction of early Edelman but instead I have chosen *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (1991) by Jonathan Dollimore. This book established the possibility that literature, including literature from before the homosexual, could be inherently disruptive in its sexualities. At its centre is a depiction of Oscar Wilde that goes well beyond the homosexual saint of *De Profundis* to find texts that shook and continue to shake various foundations. *Sexual Dissidence* remains deeply relevant in the age of queer studies.

Smaro Kamboureli
Professor, Avie Bennett Chair in Canadian Literature
English
University of Toronto

Writing Thru Race—Vancouver, 1994

Writing Thru Race was a milestone event that has had a lingering impact on me and, as far as I am concerned, on my discipline, Canadian literature. Why? Because there was a coalition of Indigenous writers and writers of colour whose gathering in Vancouver in 1994 shook up the nation; because it exposed how racial politics is embedded in the state apparatus and in Canadian writing—its funding and production, its teaching and study; because it compelled many of us to recognize that we can no longer afford to “profess” by practising sedative politics, that is, continue with what we do as scholars and teachers by upholding the various mythologies of Canadian “civility”; because I felt, for once, that I had every reason to not leave the politics that shape CanLit outside the door of my classroom. Since then lots has changed, not enough has changed, but CanLit studies has never been the same.

Amber Dean
Assistant Professor
English and Cultural Studies
McMaster University

Haunting

Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* (1997) changed everything (for me). I was driven to write about women who had been disappeared from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, but I had no archive of texts to draw from; their lives and too often violent deaths left little in the way of textual evidence. *Ghostly Matters* prompted me to start looking not for what was present in a text but for what was absent, omitted, or barely traceable—ghostly. Tracing the absent but often still “seething presence” (8) of women disappeared through a complex convergence of colonial histories, ongoing state disavowal, and targeted forms of racialized, sexualized violence suddenly left me with a very large archive of texts to analyze. I began to write ghost stories, to produce “case studies of haunting and adjudicat[e] their consequences” (24). What I found was ample evidence of their (ongoing) refusal to be disappeared.

Emma LaRocque
Professor
Native Studies
University of Manitoba

Indigenous Literatures

One of the first classes I taught for the Department of Native Studies (in 1977) was a course called “Canadian Native Literature.” I well remember the Dean questioning whether we had sufficient literary material to justify teaching it. I argued then that it was just a matter of time before the field would blossom. It turns out that by the 1990s “the field” was bursting at the seams with new and seasoned Aboriginal authors producing novels, political commentaries, autobiographies, oral traditions, short stories, plays, poetry, and so forth. These works exuded indigeneity in their highly crafted resistance aesthetics, challenging old literary conventions and theorizing their own experiences and traditions, and inspiring a whole new generation of Aboriginal writers, as well as a whole new field of literary criticism, cultural production, and postcolonial theory-making. To understate a virtual literary revolution, Indigenous literatures have dramatically changed the literary, cultural, and theoretical landscape of English studies in Canada.

Niigaan Sinclair
Associate Professor and Department Head, Department of Native Studies
University of Manitoba

Indigenous Literary Nationalism: A Theory for All

While Indigenous intellectualism is hundreds of thousands of years old, the academy is only now catching up to Indigenous theories of Indigenous literatures. The most impactful work in recent memory has been in the field of Indigenous literary nationalism, a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional set of theories which posits that Indigenous literatures articulate, continue, and expand the cultural, political, and historical legacies of the Indigenous nation(s) they emerge from. One of the most influential texts to argue this is Muskogee Creek critic Craig Womack’s *Red on Red: Native Literary Separatism* (1999), a book that operates as a creative and critical call for Indigenous critics to pick up the work of their ancestral communities and participate in land struggles, governance, and cultural struggles crucial to their endurance. While this movement has been integral to Indigenous scholars across Turtle Island, theorists in this field have also influenced new waves of narrative and political concepts examining North American nationhood, aesthetics, and history—representing one of the most important literary and intellectual contributions of our time.

Christine Bold
Professor
School of English and Theatre Studies
University of Guelph

How to Be an Ally

This September, in a graduate class, we read *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg); forty years ago, as an undergraduate, I read *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart. Deeply embedded in very different cultures, both works expose the violence of state education. When read within English studies classrooms, their challenge—echoed by many critically engaged works over the decades—is: What is “English” as “discipline” good for? Forty years ago, an answer seemed to lie in the discipline embracing “the popular.” Now, Simpson and others reveal that the deeper lesson was always about allyship. Our discipline’s missteps have come when we responded with, quoting Simpson, “cognitive imperialism.” The best initiatives have started by listening to cultural specificities and refusals (in Simpson’s case, deeply grounded Nishnaabeg lessons about “the art of kindness in knowledge”) and working to change institutional, pedagogical, and scholarly priorities accordingly.

Arun Mukherjee
Professor
English
York University

The Internet

I regrettably forego major seismic moments in my scholarly life to celebrate the advent of the Internet, which multiplied not only my own ability to research in areas that our libraries are so deficient in—the non-Western regions of the world—but also enhanced my ability to explain the embedded cultural aspects of the texts from these areas to my students. It is wonderful to bring up the images of Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, the androgynous devotee of Krishna, when teaching Amitav Ghosh’s *The Sea of Poppies* to explain the metamorphosis of Nobokrishna Panda. It is exciting to hunt down an intertext, Swinburne’s “The Garden of Proserpine”—in a matter of minutes—that turns out to be so crucial to understanding Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day*. Or to find the significance of “padewar,” the meager share of the crop that Dalits were entitled to in Maharashtra, when researching on Dalit literature.

Susan Brown
Professor and Canada Research Chair in Collaborative Digital Scholarship
School of English and Theatre Studies
University of Guelph, and University of Alberta

The Writeable Web

The Web was writeable from the start, prevailed thanks to its openness, although it required separate writing tools until “Web 2.0” made participation in digital textuality ubiquitous. The introduction of spellcheckers in browsers from 2006 indicates the increasing blurring of reading into writing. We are witness to multitudinous textual incunabula as creative and scholarly discourse is transformed through a process open to more people than have ever before participated in the emergence of a new medium. Authority and originality, location and relation, reading and analysis, attention and curation, transmission, publication, and archiving are all being profoundly disrupted by text technologies that manifest new forms of collectivity and new powers to harm. Writing was always already dialogical and scholarship already collaborative, but new streams of networked language challenge us, in ways we now only partially comprehend, with their massive shareability and mashable dynamic forms, to rethink the possibilities of writing and of scholarship.

Stephanie LeMenager
Professor
English
University of Oregon

The Center for Land Use Interpretation

The Center for Land Use Interpretation is a research hub and curatorial/performance space whose post office address is Culver City, California. The CLUI bus tour innovated critical tourism in the U.S. so as to encourage participants to aestheticize the complex systems of resource management that make the modern world. “Aestheticize” here means to know intimately, at the level of sensation, while I use “resource” with discomfort since what becomes clear when we aesthetically engage the world’s highest water lift (in the California State Water Project) is the obdurate liveliness of matter hailed into midcentury utopian systems now terribly stressed. CLUI modeled multi-modal archiving and open source thinking through online exhibits before such practices were fundamental to the Digital and Environmental Humanities. Although nation-based, its project converses internationally with Social Practice scholarship and art. Without explicit political commitment, CLUI inspires tactical *knowing* of capital’s multi-scalar naturecultures.

Adam Dickinson
Associate Professor
English Language and Literature
Brock University

Anthropocene

We move more sediment than all the rivers on all the continents on this planet. We fix more nitrogen than all the lightning and soil bacteria in the world. The Anthropocene is the current geological epoch in which the environment no longer simply writes us, we write and rewrite the environment. As if exploding some of the key theoretical distinctions of the last forty years, contingent social and historical forces have begun to actively denature ostensibly fixed biological and geophysical processes. We confront this on scales as massive as carbon cycles and as miniscule as hormones. What kind of thinking is adequate to this terraformal poetics? What bop prosody heaves forth from such metabolic rifts? Our reckoning with the Anthropocene requires renovated forms of thinking, shifted frames of cultural signification that must re-imagine technological and political capacities within an expanded sense of our biospheric, endocrine, and genetic instrumentality.

Imre Szeman
Professor and Canada Research Chair in Cultural Studies
English and Film Studies
University of Alberta

Energy Humanities

When asked to name the event or scholarly work that has shifted the ground of theoretico-critical studies, I expect that most people will cast their gaze backwards. I'd like instead to look ahead, and to think about what we're doing now that might have paradigm-altering consequences in coming years for critical work in the humanities. Studies of energy are just now blossoming within the greenhouse of the still-developing field called "energy humanities." I think a critical encounter with energy will reshape how and why we undertake critical analysis. It constitutes a missing element in our understanding of the development of culture and society, including the shape of literature and of literary studies. And energy also belongs to our political vocabulary. Alongside the energy richness of modernity has been a corresponding energy unevenness that underlies the socio-political divide between global North and South. As we enter an era no longer defined by easy access to energy, struggles over energy resources are likely to define politics in the twenty-first century; they need to be part of the century's literary and cultural studies, too.

Robyn Wiegman
Professor
Literature and Women's Studies
Duke University

Wearing Out Speculative Ambitions

What compels me most about the last forty years of critical inquiry is less a specific idea or event than the array of practices that have emerged to keep pace with the discipline's speculative ambitions. Postmodernism. Deconstruction. Feminism. Postcoloniality. Post Humanism. Transnationalism. Affect. Ecocriticism. Biopolitics. Afro Pessimism. The Digital Humanities. Neoliberalism. The Reparative Turn. These orientations, among numerous others, insist on countering university cultures increasingly infatuated with the government of number by valuing the lived atmospheres of interpretative worlds. While fluency in any of these critical orientations requires intimacy with their conceptual no less than political limits, it is the very process of wearing out what enlivens the discipline that helps sustain faith in the work we do.