

Three Unspeakable Things: Looking Through English's Family Album

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Briefly surveying some of the reasons for current rhetorics of crisis within English studies, the article explores some of the problematic historical commitments of this disciplinary area. Considered as a discursive formation constituting its objects of knowledge in a print-centric manner while defining its subject of knowing in individualist/nationalist terms, the author argues that a move from an English to a Cultural Studies perspective is overdue within schooling. Several features of the latter approach are described.

Tout en faisant une brève revue des raisons de la crise actuelle dans le domaine des "English Studies," cet article explore quelques implications historiques qui soulèvent des problèmes dans cette discipline. En tenant compte du fait que cette discipline est une formation discursive qui forme les objets de connaissance d'une manière centrée alors qu'elle définit les sujets du savoir en termes individualistes/nationalistes, l'auteur croit, qu'en éducation, on devrait immédiatement passer d'une perspective des "English Studies" à celle des "Culture Studies." Plusieurs exemples de cette approche sont présentés dans cet article.

What shall we do, what shall we do
With all this useless beauty
All this useless beauty?

Elvis Costello (1992)

There is not ... any opposition between culture's aestheticization and its being rendered useful as an instrument for governmental programmes of social and cultural management.

Tony Bennett (1992, p. 403).

What I offer below is a highly selective tour through a family album so to speak. By family album I mean to indicate a set of images culled from past as well as present versions of English, a school subject just over a

century old. At the end of this survey, I make a proposal concerning one possible future for the area many of us spend our time laboring in, that is the domain of language, representation and cultural identity. Some English teachers may protest that the portrait I paint is an unfair one, running counter, for example, to long-standing self-depictions of English as an area that cultivates imaginative response and critical, resistant knowledge. Given the scope of my survey, I have also glossed over more recent movements such as the stress on *language processes* writing across the curriculum or the *whole language* movement. While these interventions represent important revisions of English and suggest the need for a much larger canvas, I would argue they do not fundamentally alter the concerns raised in this article. Finally, there is nothing inevitable about the future I propose for the area we know today as English; if it was, I would not need to advocate it. In the context of the current recession, for example, economic rationales are a potent means of blocking curricular change and maintaining the status quo, even if some alternatives make fewer demands on resources. So, while I briefly sketch in my preferred future for English at the end of the article, this should not be taken as in any way predictive.

Before we look at the family snaps, however, I want to address some of the reasons we need at this moment to reconsider who the subject of the family album is, and whether, in calling ourselves *English* teachers, we mean anything like the same thing; in other words, whether there is a simple *we* sharing an overlapping project. One indication that we are in the midst of an identity crisis is provided, for example, by the fact that English teachers in Ontario have twice renamed their professional organization during the past year: from the Ontario Council of Teachers of English (OCTE) to Ontario Teachers of English and Language Arts (OCTELA), and finally to Ontario Teachers of English, Communications and Language Arts (OCTECLA). While this appears to be a minor shift in terminology, it also represents an attempt to bring into provisional coalition diverse interests and approaches. Speaking as a member of the executive of this organization, such a project is not without its tensions and requires that differences, not only of method and text but of the constitution of objects of knowledge, be confronted. Such differences too often sit comfortably inert and uninterrogated in conference formats or within school calendars. On the other hand, the active and reflective renomination of a group can be read as a symptom that a new formation

of knowledge is emergent, one indicative of a shift in teachers' perceptions of their curricular mandate.

A second prompt for asking who we are and what "doing English" is about comes from the explosion of theoretical writing about culture and language over the past two decades. While these theory wars seemed initially of remote academic interest, and thus distant from the daily practical concerns of English teachers, their conceptual legacy and the nascent paradigms they suggest are starting to challenge many of our taken-for-granted teaching categories (e.g., genre and authorship) as well as the viability of objectives like producing critically autonomous learners. Yet the impact of the best theoretical writing has done more than simply renovate our conceptual tool kit, supplying us with still another interpretive method for rereading texts. Its deeper import has been to problematize the traditional boundaries of our discipline, raising questions not only about canons, but about English studies as a technology of legitimate culture, a discipline generative of strategic "assertions of difference" (Bhabha, 1988) and a central site within schooling for the circulation of some meanings and values over others (Fiske, 1991). It is this sense of culture as the terrain of the inscription and enactment of social differences (Hartley, 1992), and of English as an "order of discourse" with variable uses/effects and unstable "interdiscursive" relations to other socio-historical discourses (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 34, 59) that I hope emerges in the following sections.

Another pressure at work has been the salience for English of a contemporary "decoupling of curriculum and schooling" (Green & Bigum, 1993, p. 123) under postmodern conditions. Starkly posed, these conditions cast English teachers as "liv[ing] within the envelope of the dying (or marginalizing) print cultures ... brainwashed by print" (p. 132), while their students live within televisual topographies and the matrix of electronic media. Alison Light (1987), for example, argues that "the centrality of literary culture" has been superseded since for "most students the study of novels and poetry is, increasingly in this century, the study of an alien culture with all the pleasures and pitfalls of an historical object" (p. 36). This sense of English as a marginal, even archaic cultural practice is tied to an awareness that the central concerns of English teaching — developing students' understanding of the relations between culture and community, past and present, language and power, semiosis and identity — are now

fostered by a host of other forms of "cultural pedagogy" which compete for students' attention (Trend, 1992).

Recent theoretical writing and historical contexts, then, have posed important questions for English teachers about their knowledge practices, the fissures and connections of their field to other forms of knowing. One result is that the lines between English, history, politics, media, and popular culture have become blurred. In this context *theory* is a metonym for "a broader and deeper engagement" with the issue of how any isolated practice, such as English teaching, articulates with "the shape and texture of a whole culture" (Eagleton, 1991, p. 8). The attempt to reconnect English to more general questions about representation, cultural politics and postmodernity is superficially evident, for example, in the currently omnipresent separatrix of book titles like *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics: Texts for Change* (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1991), or *Place/Culture/Representation* (Duncan & Ley, 1993). This apparently trivial detail, the separatrix, is a symptom of deeper shifts in cultural perspective and significant reformations of knowledge (Joyrich, 1993, pp. 183-184).

Another reason for embarking on a family history is provided by a glance at current journal articles. They appear to fall into five genres. The first set can be characterized by their reliance on common sense perceptions of English as a coherent subject focused on language processes and literature, writing and reading, expository essays and textual analysis. For this approach, the future of English is a gradual evolutionary refinement of what has gone before. It remains the core subject of the humanities curriculum. Due to this taken-for-granted centrality and stability, the focus of such articles is generally on questions of method, and, since the 1960s, particularly on how to promote individual growth and group cooperation in an engagement with language processes. This discourse is evident in the current crop of text-books and ministry guidelines which convey an impression that English is an unproblematic good, the focus of mastery of *language skills*, the cultivation of a literary sensibility, personal expressivity, and a socialization into national imaginaries. While the consensus on Socratic method, whole-class discussion and close reading may have given way to group work and reader-response, or grammar drills having been eclipsed by purpose-driven language activities, the dominant impression remains that of a self-evident, integral subject area.

The second mode of writing about English could be called a panic discourse, one marked by a rhetoric of crisis. This genre is preoccupied with what it perceives to be the disintegration of the liberal humanist paradigm of literary studies (Davies, 1991). The anxiety here is to defend an older literary aesthetic along with its privileged object, a canonic literary heritage. This is felt to be simultaneously under attack from several different directions: zealots of political correctness; the proliferation of contaminating sub-specialties such as drama, media education, or popular culture; the philistinism of those who would replace literary study with a reductive, back to basics agenda; the politicization of socio-logic approaches such as feminist criticism or multiculturalism. Here I would cite Bernard Bergonzi, a former Cambridge professor of English. While he notes that English studies' gradually evolved from the nationalistic, religious, ethical, aesthetic, and rhetorical elements which preceded it until it became the apparently unified, organic subject he inherited at the time he entered the professorate, his aptly titled biography, *Exploding English*, laments its gradual dissolution over the 1970s. It became in his words a "diffuse" and "uneasy pluralism," an irrevocably "fissured" and confused part of the curriculum by the end of his career (Bergonzi, 1990). We can also register E.D. Hirsch (1987) and Alan Bloom (1987) in this column.

The third genre of writing about the future of English could be called the new vocationalism. Here a genteel liberal arts and "the cuddly body of progressivism" meet "the sharp teeth of capitalism," (Kean, 1993, p. 22) in its economic panic mode. This vision of English, one familiar to any reader of Andrew Nikiforuk (1993), also a columnist in the *Globe and Mail* for a number of years, recommits itself to standardized national curricula (England), and a "SCANS Know-How" ethic (i.e., the *Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills* (1991) in the United States). In this approach students are taught and tested on a range of personal, academic, and workplace-friendly skills. This stress upon discipline and decontextualized language skills or competencies is designed to make for a "seamless school-to-work transition" in the words of one of its advocates, the former United States Secretary of Education, Richard Riley (Kean, 1993, p. 25). A more benign but ultimately no less instrumentalist redefinition of English currently has its foot in the door in Canada under the banners of learning outcomes and benchmark testing.

A fourth group of writers on English I will call the "Post-Humpty Dumptiests." This group, like Bergonzi (1990), acknowledges the cracks in English's curricular mandate, but unlike him they feel it can be put back together. Noting the area has become "so radically problematized as to be rationally indefensible" (Widdowson, 1988, p. 5) in its present format, they offer a more progressive gloss on our current identity crisis, proposing English's reunification via language theory, semiotics or an expanded definition of literacy. Hodge (1990), for example, presents the concept of social semiotics as a successor to English since it will, according to him, "restore the unity of the subject at all levels" (p. 1) in an updated practical criticism. It is important to note that he finds the term English an embarrassing descriptor for his enterprise, exerting as it does a "reactionary semantic-ideological pull" (Hodge, 1990, p. x) reminding us of a "confused and unstable area of the curriculum" (p. x). Other theoretically informed attempts at revising English are evident in recent texts on rewriting English (Batsleer, Davies, O'Rourke & Weedon, 1985), teaching it against the grain (Green, 1990), reunifying it as whole language (Goodman, Bird & Goodman, 1991), language arts, new literacies, or, in a return to a much older tradition, rhetoric (Eagleton, 1983; Bialostosky, 1990).

From my perspective, post-humpty dumptiests retain much of the communicational, representational, and textual baggage that has brought about English's current dilemma. Let me elaborate on this a little. I mean that they fail to address basic discrepancies between print analytic objects and contemporary cultural processes, ignoring fundamental shifts in our cultural experience due to the hybrid, "critical socializing context" the media currently provide (Green and Bigum, 1993, p. 120). Literary and linguistic metaphors conceal as much as they reveal to the extent that they narrativize and flatten what were originally also visual, tactile, and embodied experiences (Stock, 1993). As Baudrillard (1983) puts it, "we must think of the media as if they were ... a sort of genetic code" (pp. 54-55) which has precipitated a fundamental mutation in our social space so that we can no longer speak of seeing and being, text and context, subject and object as discrete entities. Students inhabit this mediated environment from birth, one that is profoundly different from the print universe most educators were formed and thrived within. Today in developed countries, the televisual is in effect a new environment, a modality in which the world comes to be known, a generalized cultural matrix to a greater extent than print ever was, so that "we do not just live with television [but] it lives in

us" (Fry, 1993, p. 27). This modern ground of becoming is "no longer managed by flicking off a switch" (p. 13). It rewrites our rites of passage, converts distinctions between the near and far into the over- or under-exposed (Virilio, 1991), and transforms our sense of time (Schwoch, White & Riley, 1992). In the attempt to reaffirm English as a vital and elastic disciplinary form, then, the post-humpty dumptiests respond to the erosion of a literate world and the aura surrounding its forms of cultural value by attempting to extend the notion of literacy and broaden/pluralize literary values (so that now we have Women's Literature, Black Literature, and so on). Yet, in annexing new cultural technologies onto literary/linguistic metaphors, they fail to acknowledge that postmodern conditions have fundamentally displaced the conceptual purchase of such models. In this sense, such revolutions remain securely inhouse: rooted within English, they sustain the problematics of reading, rhetoric, and representation.

We have arrived, then, at the first of the unspeakable things my title promises. This is the possibility we are witnessing, not just a crisis *in* English, but a crisis *of* English as a curricular form. Consider for a moment that, like radio, English was a late 19th century invention. As a new curricular form, it spoke to and through a particular culture, arising in part as a response to the rapid expansion of the technological means for producing and distributing cheap forms of print along with the modes of middle and working class literacy that grew out these changes. Coinciding with the final phase of British imperialism (Viswanathan, 1988), English gradually became "the only universally required course in secondary schooling" (Watkins, 1989, p. 5). Here it came to function as an enveloping discourse within mass schooling, one constituting a new secular center of value in education (Watkins, 1989) by providing language activities that simultaneously fostered an ethical and "endless career of the self" (Bennett, 1990, p. 187) as well as nationalist orientations to cultural life (Doyle, 1989). Nevertheless, by the mid 20th century, many of its techniques for understanding culture were eclipsed. Following the Second World War, as Patrick Parrinder (1979) argues, English failed to make sense of "the vast cultural, political and economic changes both within and outside the English-speaking world" (p. 12), thus participating in the wider breakdown of western liberal humanism. Similarly, its longstanding Arnoldian mandate — a belief in literacy/literature as civilizing agencies that broaden our sympathies, releasing us from parochial blindness by putting us in touch with timeless and universal human values — was not

such an easy a truism for post-Holocaust generations, nor for those faced with declining expectations (Ohmann, 1994). As Vincent Leitch (1992) notes, the Arnoldian paradigm largely functioned as a way of "initiat[ing] students into accepted mainstream middle-class values and practices" (p. 167). And in spite of its paradoxical claims to foster both disinterested, critical thought and empathetic understanding, humanist literary studies have always been complicit with the "rigorous sorting out of those who will have from those who will not" (Ohmann, 1994, p. 104).

In addition to changing student populations, the reconfiguring of our social space by successive waves of electronic media, and the rise of social groups challenging English's conceptual reach and cultural mandate, there have been other intellectual shifts over the past 40 years. Attention to the practices of everyday life and an anthropological turn to the practical, grounded, and plural contexts of appropriation and use have altered both our sense of what counts as culture and the nature of its meanings. These developments have undercut the explanatory power of the exclusively intra- or inter-textual models of meaning English has relied upon. Is it so outrageous to suggest in this context that English, born and enmeshed in the circumstances and ways of knowing of the past century, has outlived its usefulness and might productively be supplanted by another form of knowledge? John Fekete (1990) has pointed out that English was founded upon a bifurcating view of culture: first, the severance of a problematics of language or a conception of words as dematerialized signifiers separable from other social processes. Second, within language itself, a further segregation was instituted between literature as a category of superior writing and everyday speech and writing (Williams, 1977). In part, then, English's current legitimacy crisis arises from some of the dichotomies it was founded upon — aesthetic bracketings of cultural experience, separations between text and context, distinctions between language or literature, and other forms of semiotic experience. It is precisely the collapse of such distinctions that threatens the borders of English. There has been a demand in a number of universities for "an intermediate space where a less compromised cultural politics might take conceptual and practical shape" (Fekete, 1990, p. 185). This "trans" or "dedisciplinary" space (West, 1987, p. 200) would recompose curricular knowledge from the perspective of the intrication of cultural processes. What I am suggesting is that English's current disintegration is due in part to many of the same pressures and modernizing forces that it was intended to regulate at the

moment of its inception. As Mark Poster (1990) puts it, we need to recognize

the emergence of a certain 'new' ... [and] a discontinuity with current paradigms ... [and to] do so knowing full well that this 'new' electronically mediated communication or mode of information is in many ways not new at all, but has been anticipated in social developments and theoretical initiatives for decades, even centuries. (p. 19).

As you no doubt realize, I have already embarked on my final genre of writing about English studies, a cultural studies discourse. This is my preferred approach to understanding English's past as a secondary school subject. I return to it in the last section of the article, exploring some of its implications for a reformation of English.

Family Portraits

One way of answering the question, "What is English?" is to ask "What was English?" That is, in exploring how the past has left its marks in subtle or blatant ways upon the present, we often reveal what is taken for granted within a subject area. It is particularly useful, I think, to inquire about the foundational moments of a discipline since here we often see magnified conceptual settlements or curricular arrangements that have become tacit at a later stage.

It is in this light that I conjure up George Paxton Young (1865-1868/1911), professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at Knox College in Toronto during the middle decades of the last century. Young's claim to being one of our ancestors is due to the fact that, as principal inspector of Grammar Schools in Upper Canada between 1864-1868, he perhaps more than anyone, helped to define the initial boundaries of English studies in Ontario. The reports he wrote for Egerton Ryerson over these four years fundamentally reshaped secondary education in the province. I want to highlight three aspects of these reports. First, he proposes that secondary education be reconstituted around the higher study of the vernacular classics. He calls for "a thorough reformation ... in the teaching of English" (Young, 1868/1911, Vol. 20, p. 116) which up until that time had been largely the province of the philologist and grammarian. Like the English intellectuals he drew upon, John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold, and John

Seeley, he recommends a turn away from the direct moral indoctrination of students and towards more indirect and "natural" ways of learning which emphasize the pleasurable participation of students. His focus is principally on middle and working class students for whom the study of English classics is to exercise a civilizing function. Second, his reports inscribe a gendered literacy: the traditional ghetto of a sentimental and domestic literacy for women is now officially endorsed by the state. English as a secondary subject is thus instituted in a way that marks it up to the present: a feminized literary sphere of aesthetic-intuitive knowledge characterized by the passive appreciation of male genius in the interests of the moral formation of students. Young was not original in stressing that the main purpose of vernacular literacy at the secondary level was moral inculcation. What is enduring about his contribution, however, is his sense that English provides an indirect method of subject formation. As he puts it, poetry and plays will work "insensibly" and "naturally" upon the pupils imbuing them with a "sympathetic admiration" for "proper virtue" (Young, 1865/1911, Vol. 19, p. 101). English literature will supply narrativized forms of "virtue in living concrete embodiment[s]" (p. 102). To quote him at length:

I should rely more for purposes of moral training on the English than on the Classical [languages] English reading may naturally and easily be made occasions of instruction in Morals, the English books used in schools should contain a considerable number of interesting selections, exhibiting human character in all its phases, recording in particular those actions of great and good men. (Young, 1865/1911, Vol. 19, p. 101)

Part of the attraction of literary selections, then, is that they provide a practical field where character can come into view (Hunter, 1982). Teachers are to set weekly compositions in which pupils comment upon character and those features of a text that foster judgment.

A third aspect of Young's approach is evident in his final report for Ryerson in 1868. Here, he suggests that the "harvest of English literature" is a vehicle for an "education of the discursive faculties," (Young, 1868/1911, Vol. 20, p. 117) and explicitly sets this education against popular reading and fiction. Only "the select words of good English Authors" are to be intensively studied in order to combat the natural "appetite for vulgar sensation" (p. 126) displayed by the young. Teachers will develop routines

that train pupils in the "intelligent reading" of "ordinary English author[s]" (p. 113). By an intelligent reading, Young means that pupils start by ascertaining the correct meaning of words, experience the "meaning of the Writer," and finally enter "into his spirit," (p. 116) grasping the "whole thought and sentiment" of a passage (p. 114). He states pupils do not understand the English language properly "owing to the fact that they had never been taught English" (p. 115). This is not as absurd a claim as it first sounds if we understand that Young, like his contemporaries, was interested in a particular notion of language and reading, one which encourages students to harvest texts for specific values and meanings. In the last section of this report entitled, "Ways in Which Morality Might Be Taught in the English High Schools," he pulls together a number of these themes in describing a strategy of indirect moral formation via literature that spans the remainder of his century and beyond it to our own moment; in short, the precursor of the liberal humanist version of English studies.

The fact is, that to teach morality in Schools in an efficient manner is extremely difficult. I do not think that classes, specially devoted to lectures, or examinations on moral subjects, are desirable. It seems to me that the best means of making our Schools fields of moral as well as intellectual education, is for teachers to avail themselves of the opportunities of conveying moral lessons that may occur in the course of the ordinary English studies with which the pupils are engaged. (Young, 1868/1911, Vol. 20, pp. 118-119).

Young cites a lesson he has taught on Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* to a class of adolescent girls:

Here was a lesson in practical Christian Ethics, given incidentally, in no dry dogmatic fashion, but in connection with words of such singular sweetness that they can scarcely be read intelligently without entering into the soul and becoming part of its convictions for ever. Why should not such lessons be a regular feature of the classes of English literature in our Schools? (1868/1911, Vol. 20, p. 119).

The advantage of this oblique technique is that it forms moral character, incidentally, and most impressively, through the concrete, actual circumstances met with in canonic poetry and prose. While Young's successors praised him over the next 30 years for his liberalization of the curriculum ("George Paxton Young," 1877) and his reliance on narrative as

pleasurable, participatory vehicles of identity formation, we can also detect the outlines of English as hegemonic cultural politics and the use of the vernacular, in the words of Young's mentor, John Seeley, as a cunning instrument of state policy.

English as Reading

To return then to my initial question, "What was English?" The answer that emerges from examining Young's reports is that it was a form of reading, that is, carefully fashioned ways of relating to a restricted range of print artifacts. Support for this interpretation of English comes from a number of sources. Martha Woodmansee (1988-1989), for example, has traced how early 18th century concerns to promote reading changed dramatically by the end of century. Instead of mourning the dearth of reading, as we appear to be doing once again, intellectual elites conducted a "veritable war" on the "wretched and tasteless novels," the "reading epidemic" which they felt was overwhelming an interest in "good books filled with healthy principles and tested truths" (Woodmansee, 1988-89, pp. 207-208). It is against this background that libraries, reading societies and indeed secondary English emerge. All of these institutions can be seen as attempts to influence both what and the manner in which people read. Woodmansee argues that texts like Johann Bergk's *The Art of Reading Books* (1799) are ancestors of later handbooks on reading such as Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938). They all elaborate a reading propaedeutic, constructing a delimited set of procedures for constituting and harvesting some texts as literary. In Woodmansee's terms, such works attempted "to revive ... older reading strategies in order to direct them towards a limited body of secular texts capable of playing the same role in the lives of ... readers that ... sacred texts once played" (1988-89, p. 218). They thus generated distinctions like intensive versus extensive reading, the repeated or close reading, and an ideology of the organically unified work, the essence of which it was the reader's duty to extract (pp. 216-218). Woodmansee's point is that aesthetic categories such as the "literary" are themselves "radically historical," political demarcations with "an essentially pedagogical project from [their] inception" (1988-1989, p. 220).

Not only did the texts which appeared within the institutional context of English radically determine the kinds of topics and perspectives you engaged with, but also how these materials were constituted as

texts-to-be-read resulting from their insertion within carefully constructed decoding technologies. As Bennett and Woollacott note, we need to abandon the fiction that "texts, in themselves, constitute the place where the business of culture is conducted" (1987, p. 59). Rather, they suggest, texts are sites upon which various struggles for meaning are conducted, struggles which are always articulated differently according to the discursive resources put into play (p. 60). This conception is especially pertinent to educators since discursive shifters in the form of state-sponsored guidelines, other books on an English course, hagiological curricular traditions (e.g., the mandatory Shakespeare selection), local orders of discourse of teacher and school, and so on, always draw a given text into a particular ideological orbit, making it speak to and through a specific set of cultural concerns. As such, these comprise a means of organizing the preferred reading relations within schooling, priming a book for one kind of reception (literal, moralistic, reader-response) against other possible groundings of the same text. There is a need, therefore, to acknowledge the inherently relational nature of reading practices, the fact that officially endorsed reading protocols always exist in tension with other, often tacit, methods of producing meaning.

Ian Hunter (1983) extends our knowledge of the way this works within schooling, that is how an institutional matrix constitutes both the text as a literary object of knowledge and students as activators of this text. He foregrounds late 19th century pedagogical protocols students were to emulate under the heading, *reading* (Hunter, 1983). The particular discursive technology which most interests him is the *reading for character* that emerged by the end of century and which was embodied in mandatory exercises, homework questions, classroom discussions, and examinations—in short, all the practical routines that exemplify a discourse at the classroom level. This new reading for character indicates *character* was not an inherent property within texts, one they merely represented. Rather, it was the orchestration of a set of psychological, moral discourses systematized within schooling in the form of character sketches, responses demonstrating identification with a particular character, biographical studies of authors, personal testimonials of affect, and so on. Therefore, instead of releasing a subjective essence lodged either within literary texts or the psyche of students, the discursive system centered on the study and appreciation of character illustrated the implementation of an educational policy, a mandatory discourse promoting character as an element in a

regime of moral training authorized by the state for the expending, urban, industrial working and middle classes. Hunter (1983) concludes that reading for character was in fact a practice of writing:

To speak of reading here is to speak of a definite set of operations performed upon the text. What we have to come to terms with is that to read a character in the late nineteenth century ... means to go through a series of practical operations and to employ a definite set of techniques ... by which readers construct the characters' point of view as part of the technique of identification. (pp. 231-232)

One of the props for this reading practice was the new bond of sympathy to be cultivated between teacher and student: part friend, part pastor, part authority. Another support was supplied by what he calls the limitless text produced within a literary aesthetic. The literary text was an ideal space of supervised freedom, and thus moral formation, precisely because it was at once

immediately accessible to the reader yet finally beyond his ethical reach, governed as it was by the recessive norms of correction through self-discovery ... [an] unprecedented text, with its surfaces so close to the world of spontaneous play and depths always withdrawing ... never quite grasped. (Hunter, 1988, p. 67).

Not only meanings, but the very status of a text as literature was endowed by such reading technologies since often the same text was read by a prior generation as history, or a later one as sociology (Hunter, 1982). Moreover to speak of meanings simply found or felt, as English teachers often do, reveals a powerful myth at the center of English teaching: the idea that our methods merely facilitate natural identifications and intuitive responses. The modern valorization of reading for individual response is complicit with this gradual development of a literary pedagogy focused on the narrow circuit of text, identity, and normative response. As Nick Peim suggests, "to go beyond the privileged notion of discrete texts, to address language, textuality and subjectivity within the nexus of the social, the political and the cultural, may well mean changing the subject beyond all recognition" (Peim, 1990, p. 58).

Poems to Forget: Identity and Otherness in English Studies

Since the end of the Second World War, schools in urban North American context have witnessed a changing student population, one whose class, gender, racial, and ethnic make-up often differed radically from that of students of the prewar era. These new constituencies frequently experienced the forms of culture valued by schooling, not as some humane and transcendental realm where fundamental differences were reconciled, but as an arena where tensions were created and engaged. The result, Eagleton (1993) notes, was a politicization of the cultural forms schooling had always taken for granted as natural, neutral and universal. Culture became "part of the problem rather than the solution" (Eagleton, 1993, p. 8) as it had been for Matthew Arnold (1931) and "questions of language, value, identity ... experience" (Eagleton, 1993, p. 9) as well as cultural disparity were now on the agenda. Likewise, for Homi Bhabha (1993) culture is just as frequently "an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival" and exclusion, as it is a site of "pleasure, enlightenment, or liberation" (p. 441). Or, as Eagleton states,

for these political currents, culture is that which refuses or reinforces, celebrates or intimidates, defines or denies; it is brandished as a weapon or spurned as insolent imposition, cherished as a badge of identity or resisted as that which can do no more than tell you that you don't belong, never did and never will. (Eagleton, 1993, p. 9).

Relevant, then, is Edward Said's (1983) reconceptualization of culture as a dynamic relationship, an ongoing dividing operation where identity is constructed through a process of alterity.

Culture must be seen as much for what it is not and for what it triumphs over when it is consecrated by the State as for what it positively is. This means that culture is a system of discriminations and evaluations ... for a particular class in the State able to identify with it; and it also means that culture is a system of exclusions legislated from above but enacted throughout its polity, by which such things as anarchy, disorder, irrationality, inferiority, bad taste, and immorality are identified, then deposited outside the culture

and kept there by the power of the State and its institutions (Said, 1983, p. 11).

It is important to recall that while a humanitarian English studies advertised itself as a generous, all-encompassing, liberalizing culture of the feelings, a more historically self-conscious version of the subject involves an awareness that it was thoroughly implicated in exclusionary practices. It is impossible to divorce the rise of an aesthetically and racially organized English studies from the narrative of British imperialism and whose school editions of Standard Authors served as a kind of literary wing. In this light the expansiveness of the claim that English literature embodied the essential truths of the human condition is no more than the cultural counterpart to the military domination of a global empire, part of a trajectory of westernization.

I have dwelt at some length on this point because it leads directly to the second of my unspeakable things: the Englishness of English studies. Let me approach this unspeakability through two figures, one English, poet Henry Newbolt (1922), the other local, E.F. Kingston (1959), editor of a poetry anthology I used as a high school student, entitled *Poems to Remember*. Apart from jingoistic poetry, Newbolt is best known for chairing an influential committee in 1920 that defined English as a school subject for several generations. The committee's report, *The Teaching of English in England* (1921), was commonly known as "The Newbolt Report." Consistent with George Paxton Young's version of English, its project was the formation of the "good citizen" through the provision of a common culture, now simply called "the new humanism" (King, 1987). Newbolt exported English as Englishness through his editions of school poetry anthologies such as *A Book of Verse Chosen for Students at Home and Abroad* (1922) which was published continuously over the decade. Its preface illustrates a strategy pervasive in English studies in this period and is worth quoting at length.

The anthology now offered was first designed as a book to be used by students in India or the Dominions, where a knowledge of English Literature is, in a sense, almost more necessary than it has hitherto been considered in our own country. This is natural enough, for English the language of the Empire is an old and rich language, whose every word is laden with associations; ... to a home-born Englishman they come in some degree by use, by

tradition, and by easy education: by one of another continent or another race they must be carefully acquired, and this can only be done by familiarity with the writings where they are exemplified. Even more than this is involved: it is of importance for every citizen of the Empire to understand the working of the historic English mind, and the English mind cannot be studied with any depth or certainty unless in the field of English Literature, and especially of English Poetry. It was desired, then, to furnish an introduction to English thought and language ... [for those] who meet in it the ideas and associations of a culture from which their own has diverged or which their race has not yet accepted. (Newbolt, 1922, pp. v-vi)

What I want to highlight from this excerpt is Newbolt's linkage of race, language, and the literary imagination. His notion of a historic Englishness embodied in canonic literary texts and implicitly posed against other languages and traditions is not of merely antiquarian interest. The alternatives on offer in Newbolt's final line, deviation or assimilation, I would argue still haunt the current practice of English. That is, one of the legacies of this phase of humanist English studies is that racial features were systematically built into curricula and have been taken for granted until recently. Current objections to the representation of Jews in *Merchant of Venice* or of blacks in *Huckleberry Finn*, texts frequently taught in Ontario schools, can only be met therefore with indignant surprise if we ignore the way literary works were initially formed and later refunctioned within specific relations of power and domination. Generally the so-called Third World has been misrepresented and exoticized in English courses — that is, when it's visible at all — as in that standard of secondary curricula, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (JanMohamed, 1985). School anthologies are inscribed with imperial relations in part because ethnocentricity works at profound levels within culture: in the comfortable dichotomies, metaphors and clichés of its language and fictions. In this manner, unfamiliar peoples map onto the taken-for-granted polarities of a discourse. Yet even this notion of a linguistic unconsciousness does not fully account for the latent racism of English studies.

It is equally important to stress that the formalist preoccupations of mid 20th century English studies, that is, approaches in vogue when today's teachers were being formed, only bracketed or suspended a legacy of racism within the subject. As Henry Louis Gates (1985) puts it, "there was

no need to speak of matters of race, since the race of the authors was "the same" (p. 4). The approved text I used as a high school student helps illustrate Gates's claim. Its preface explains that the selections are

necessarily almost entirely English. Yet this is not a serious disadvantage, for English literature is representative of western-European culture in general. All culture is to some extent racial, for the thought-experience of a people is conditioned by its own national heritage. But there is sufficient contact with other races and other cultures to provide a refreshing stimulus to literature without displacing its essential qualities (Kingston, 1959, pp. v-vi).

Looking carefully through this text, I find only Edward Fitzgerald's exoticizing "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" (Kingston, 1959, pp. 54-55) and James Flecker's aestheticized "Golden Journey to Samarkand" (Kingston, 1959, pp. 362-363) as evidence of "sufficient contact." These amount to little more than versions of the "Orient as stereotype and phantasm" (Alloula, 1986, p. 3). In other words, a racialist discourse was very much alive and well in English studies while I was a high school student.

But there are important reasons why we should consider racialism still active today in many English department programs. Toni Morrison's (1992) *Playing in the Dark* reveals in detail how a fabricated unfree blackness was the necessary dialectical counterpart to American literary celebrations of freedom, the new man, and self-sufficient identity.

I came to realize the obvious: the subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work not to see this What became transparent were the self-evident ways that Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence. (Morrison, 1992, p. 17)

In Canada, we have also been engaged in the hard work of not seeing, displaying a literary blindness to and encapsulation of First Peoples,

immigrants, and minority populations. Here too, "in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse" (Morrison, 1992, p. 9). Morrison, like Gates (1985), notes how this "habit of ignoring race" is taken as "a graceful, even generous liberal gesture" (Morrison, 1992, pp. 9-10), bracketing off such issues as irrelevant since what great literature deals in is, by definition, "universal." Indeed, a racially unconscious English curriculum is, according to Robert Owens (1992), an ideal space for "the white middle-class [to] audition members of other cultural groups for parts in its cultural scene" (p. 108). Patrick McGee suggests multicultural versions of the subject do not escape these limitations, since, although it may "no longer be possible to keep politics out of the English department," (1993, p. 281) new strategies of containment have emerged in the pluralist curriculum. What was previously excluded may be included in a peripheral, essentialist, and uninterrogated manner. In the process, we do not confront the fundamental racial organization of English simply by adding new texts or courses (McGee, 1993, p. 281). We can only do this by questioning persistent assumptions within most English programs, for example, the idea that English addresses itself to unique individuals with unitary cultural identities, or that simple exposure to monological literary traditions results in critical consciousness.

Teaching/Learning the Unspeakable: English After Cultural Studies

If official literacy is thought of as historically variable and interested ways of establishing relationships between social subjectivity and delimited sets of signifying practices (Giroux, 1994, p. 119), then my preferred definition of English is this: an order of discourse which constituted its objects of knowledge and subjects of knowing in relation to selected print artifacts. Foucault's (1972) work illustrates how any order of discourse is internally heterogeneous and constantly in the process of being disarticulated from and rearticulated to other forms of discourse active within a social formation (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 124-136). While this inherent instability and polyvalence of English makes it open to change and transformation, we still need to ask, on the one hand, about the limits of this order of discourse as a way of structuring knowledge, and, on the other, what the most useful cultural capital is for the present and future (Pratt, 1994, p. 56), that is, for a context in which the social matrix of discursive practice is media-saturated, heteroglossic, and globalized.

Some of the reasons why English is too circumscribed a pedagogical discourse for our moment have already been suggested. Certainly many of the assumptions formed at English's inception are still active within current practice, for example "that literature reflects life; that only texts of high culture constitute literature; that one reads to identify with characters; that the meaning of great texts is universal" (McCormick, 1992, p. 120). Catherine Belsey (1980) has identified the ideology at work here as "expressive realism," an orientation to literary representations as transparent reflections of Life. Mary Louise Pratt (1994) faults English curricula for their cultivation of monumentalist attitudes to literary texts. She suggests that the repeated reading of the same text, a common educational practice, not only fosters canonic value, it also tends to present "a book or an entire cultural tradition as if it were a self-contained whole," thus blocking "relational approaches to culture ... like listening to one side of a phone conversation" (Pratt, 1994, p. 58). Similarly, Rabinowitz (1992) and Britzman (1991) decry the tyranny of close reading within English. The latter argues that the obsessive focus on plot, character, and isolate reader-response amounts to little more than institutionally-sustained cultural claustrophobia. Instead, we require

practices of reading and interpreting that help students and teachers rethink the beckonings of desire and power. This requires the deconstruction of obvious reading strategies like practical criticism ... [which] works to legitimate fixed and essential meanings. Through the myth of attentiveness, it couples textual authority with the teacher's authority. (Britzman, 1991, p. 64)

In short, we need interpretive strategies which enable students to read across a whole culture.

This, then, is the context of the turn to cultural studies. Although there is no simple answer to the question, "What is cultural studies?" a tentative, working definition can be extrapolated from various writers. It can be characterized as a form of inquiry committed to a historically aware and "theoretically-informed concrete analysis of contemporary culture" (Schulman, 1993, p. 62) an engagement with the whole range of signifying practices as these are embodied in language, institutional structures, and the forms of subjectivity of a society. It is "an interdisciplinary,

transdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary field [which] rejects the exclusive equation of culture with high culture" (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992, p. 4). Three aspects of this approach to renewing the work of cultural criticism are particularly worth consideration with respect to the future of English. First, culture is viewed relationally: any text, genre, behavior, or object is "analyzed ... in terms of its competitive, reinforcing, and determining relations with other objects and cultural forces" (Nelson, 1991, p. 32). This also entails that culture is thought of as a site of struggle between differentially situated groups drawing upon a diverse range of discourses, instead of English's reliance on conceptions of standard language and consensual, homogeneous traditions. Discursive clashes are struggles over common sense, over the power to define, represent, maintain, or alter social meanings (Schulman, 1993, p. 70). They also determine hierarchies of discourse for a given historical juncture — which discourses are legitimate, forbidden, even unspeakable (Schostak, 1993, Foucault, 1972). The result of such conflicts over meaning are never predetermined, nor can they be read off from the surfaces of texts, but require a messy calculation of several interacting layers of meaning. Second, and following from this, cultural studies establishes a new version of meaning as strategic, adventurous, and conjunctural (Derrida, 1982; Hall, 1986). "Adventurous" here points to the position of the interpreter, the effective and interested cut made by an analyst's discourse. "Conjunctural" references a notion fundamental to cultural studies' approaches, protocols of entanglement, that is, methods of constituting objects of analysis in terms of linked temporal and spatial networks (Leitch, 1992, p. 146). In contrast to English with its focus on individual text, isolate reader and correct decipherment, attention shifts to intricately cultural practices, institutional relays, and interpretation as a series of perspectival never-ending stories (Mercer, 1991). This conception of culture as intersecting lines of force between texts, orders of discourse, modes of subjectivity, situated communities, and material conditions of possibility requires models of culture as a whole (Greenblatt, 1988) so that the analyst or cultural worker can adequately respond to any single aspect of cultural experience. In this manner, cultural studies views textual experience as a contingent social practice within an overall geography of culture and politics of interpretation. There is no such thing as the absolute autonomy of the literary artifact for this perspective; it is "an aestheticist fiction" (Leitch, 1992, p. 146). In its quest for relational, articulated accounts (Hall, 1986, pp. 53-54), inquiry within cultural studies relies on a diversity

of methods: textual explication, discourse analysis, institutional and historical research, ethnographic, and autobiographic studies (Stacey, 1993). The always provisional significance assigned to any object/practice is contingent upon a sense of the totality of these operations, privileging neither the moment of production, formal textual analysis, nor reception.

Yet, I may have left the impression that this shift from a scriptural to a general economy of culture, from singular texts to discursive-institutional networks, is simply and mysteriously the result of our having fallen into theory (Richter, 1994). To counterbalance the contributions of theory we need a more historically nuanced account of the origins of cultural studies. If the disciplinary borders of English have now become permeable, this is due in no small measure to the development of cultural studies itself. It arose in response to, and in turn further provoked, a deepening identity crisis in English. Schulman states that Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart "implicitly address[ed] an antagonist," (Schulman, 1993, p. 52) Leavisite criticism. Williams's work in particular can be read as an attempt to extricate himself from the claustrophobic construction of culture sustained by the English studies he encountered in the 1940s. Exploring the texts of Bhaktin, Volsinov and Medvedev, he found a way out of formalist textuality and a hermetic problematics of language, that is a conception of language as a dematerialized process detached from the lived, "specific relations through and within which [it was] made and move[d]" (Williams, 1989, p. 173). It is also pertinent that Hoggart and Williams worked as extension lecturers, in the evening teaching adults marginalized by the elite English universities. This meant they debated texts with students who insisted courses speak to their lived experience and local situations. It also entailed that disciplinary boundaries had to be crossed in the search for answers. In short, pedagogical issues were basic to the founding of cultural studies — not only in its trans or dedisciplinary moves — but in making high theory speak to popular experience and in its commitment to democratic, interactive classrooms.

In a recent address to teachers, Richard Johnson (1989) has suggested cultural studies has an "educational presence" (p. 11) in at least three ways. First, it is a critical recutting of educational space, a symptom of discontent with traditional subject boundaries. As Nelson (1991) puts it, "cultural studies within the academy is inescapably concerned with and critical of the politics of disciplinary knowledge" (p. 34). While cultural studies borrows

extensively from older disciplinary frameworks, it puts their concepts to use in the service of a different agenda, renegotiating ideological assumptions embedded in habitual categories (Hall, 1990). Second, it functions "as an irritant in and against conventional academic disciplines or school subjects," (Johnson, 1989, p. 11) by its presence within existing departments. Here it abides by most of the disciplinary rules but enacts "an internal critique of them" (p. 11). Thus new areas like media, women's, and native studies have sprung up within English departments and partially transform them. They may begin from categories like text or language, but apply them to new objects, modifying their meaning in the process. Finally, this approach regards education as an aspect of all cultural processes rather than just the preserve of formal schooling. Any form of cultural production is seen as pedagogical to the extent it rewrites our sense of legitimate knowledge, subjectivity, and social relations (Giroux, 1992, p. viii). From this perspective, English is one form of cultural work among others attempting to reconfigure the relations between culture and power, past and present.

This point leads directly to my final "unspeakable" in current English practice, perhaps the one hardest to articulate, but approached via a paradox: although English typically presents itself as disinterested knowledge of language and literature, it is a vigorous form of cultural politics. Green (1990), for instance, asks of the everyday routines of English teaching, "How political is the practical? How is the divisiveness at the heart of the concept of 'literature' actively (re)produced in our everyday practice?" (p. 153). In contrast, cultural studies is a politicized approach to discourse which insists that signifying practices constitute disciplinary objects and forms of subjectivity. Its practitioners regard pedagogy, curricula, and educational research as more than the work of disinterested commentary; rather, they actively construct what they appear to describe (Hodge & McHoul, 1992).

In this light, Homi Bhabha (1993) defines cultural studies as an enunciative practice attempting "to institutionalize a range of transgressive discourses whose strategies are elaborated around nonequivalent sites of representation ... such as race, class and gender" (p. 441). The task of a cultural studies pedagogy is to become a self-conscious player in the field, while remaining wary of any totalizing method, including its own. This explicit concern "with the social and political meaning of its own analysis" (Nelson, 1991, p. 33) makes it necessary for the cultural studies teacher to

be more self-reflexive about her or his pedagogical practice, locating the commitments of their discourses and material interests — to the extent that it is possible to do this (Alcoff, 1991-92). Self-reflexive cultural pedagogies are conscious of the fact that they are institutionally grounded, finite ways of knowing, regimes of (un)reason with uneven effects for various communities (Leitch, 1992, Borradori, 1987-88). More than an attempt at transcending the staid dichotomies of literary analysis (e.g., text/context, symbolic/real, culture/economy) cultural studies seeks to move beyond English's disciplinary unconscious and formulate more self-reflexive forms of cultural pedagogy. While "each version of English contains and informs a particular political epistemology, [and] the learner is placed differently in relation to subject knowledge, their teachers and the state" (Ball, Kenny & Gardiner, 1990, p. 80) this is rarely raised to the level of articulated awareness in English classrooms.

How might English be transformed in light of these considerations? First, there is a need for a more historically informed, theoretically self-conscious understanding of English as an institutional discourse. The contending methods and dominant curricular approaches of English become fair game for analysis. This foregrounding of pedagogical practice, of English as a set of motivated discourses, provides teachers with a view of their field as a mode of cultural production. Too often in the past to study great Literature or the intricacies of pupils' language was one thing, while acknowledging the material history of the pedagogical language games that staged forms of student awareness was quite another. This also means that, for senior high school students at least, it is time to introduce the scandal of theory into secondary schooling. Not only texts, but the interpretive protocols that put them into play must share the spotlight. Particularly of interest are those interpretive routines and textual ideologies students were exposed to over the course of their studies, but which were left largely untheorized (Graff, 1993). These found artifacts for a cultural studies approach are an ideal way for English to become more self-conscious of itself as an institutional form of rhetoric and help initiate theoretical dialogue within English classrooms. Clearly students move between classrooms that reproduce conflicting interpretive techniques. These are frequently presented as the sole, natural way of experiencing text. Tensions, for instance, between New Critical, neo-Diltzian, archetypal, and reader-response methods are rarely directly addressed in high school. Yet, as McCormick (1992) notes, "we are all always already theorists" (p.

114) since theory is inscribed in habitual ways of asking questions, in assumptions about what makes for a good answer or a worthwhile curriculum. The only choice is "whether we and our students will be self-conscious ... about the theories that guide our perceptions," (p. 114) or not. She also makes a useful distinction between teaching theory and teaching theorizing. The former often results in a view of theory as clever, elite discourse; the latter is the integrated practice of theorizing in situ, that is, enabling students to realize what is at stake in a specific set of intertextual relations, an interpretive technology, or the discursive resources they draw upon while reading. To a greater extent than ever before, what goes without saying must be argued for in relation to competing approaches, including the value and nature of English itself.

The dominant interpretive protocol in English at present is reader-response. Even at its most personal, this method consists of institutional routines which provoke and shape response, rather than simply accessing raw, unmediated reactions (Gilbert, 1989, Hunter, 1982). In focusing on the autonomous reader's encounter with imaginative texts, English typically fails to provide students with a means of understanding the manner in which their classed, raced, and gendered biographies frame every act of reading, interpretation, and writing — that is, their relation to a whole culture remains largely invisible (McGee, 1993, p. 283). It becomes difficult in classrooms emphasizing personal, empathetic response to answer the following questions: "How are these readings constructed? Where do they come from? and, What interests do they support?" (Mellor and Patterson, 1991, p. 17). Two researchers working to overcome this blindness within current versions of reader-response are Pam Gilbert (1989, 1992) and Gemma Moss (1993). The former stresses the way in which specific genres and communities construct grids of intelligibility for student readers, along with structured silences/absences within the parameters of a given discourse. It is the job of teachers and students to interpret, via both analysis and play, what goes unsaid in any text, genre, or intuitive response (Gilbert, 1992). Likewise, Gemma Moss examines the manner in which pupils' "talk about the text actively constructs the object of their attention" (1993, p. 170). In exploring how texts are circulated and used by students, she demonstrates how important it is for teachers to theorize two coexistent but often antagonistic reading practices. The first consists of those interpretive processes anchored in a specific community. Here reading is a social performance drawing upon particular discursive

resources, for example, in the performance of masculinity among adolescent males. Paralleling this appropriation of text is the site of the classroom with its officially sanctioned reading protocols. Here too meanings do not so much reside in texts as in "the actual practices of the lesson," for instance, the differing receptions accorded to student answers, the teacher's preferred discourse, competing subcultures within that classroom, and so on — all these factors "are instrumental in the creation and maintenance" (Griffith, 1992, p. 32) of what a text comes to mean for students. It is important, in other words, to grasp the social dimensions of asymmetrical interpretive practices if we are to avoid the dead-end road of reader-response.

In conclusion, then, we need to think of the boundaries dividing curricular areas as historically sedimented, discursive accomplishments. Currently, the borders of English are more permeable, fragmented, and subject to reevaluation than they have been since its birth. Cultural studies offers one way of renegotiating the terrain addressed by this century-old subject. It does this by postulating culture as the sphere of the inscription and enactment of social differences across a motley range of signifying practices. It requires that we locate specific micro-practices of culture in relation to the circulation of social discourses across distinct yet overlapping zones of culture: schooling, family life, the image repertoires of the media, peer culture, the state, and so on, each with its own dynamics of interchange and production. Culture thus works simultaneously at the level of mundane, local practices of power and desire, and is linked to a larger social geography that, at its limit, is global in scope. This perspective is bicameral in another respect: it apprehends culture as both product and process. Any object or sign (e.g., text) is viewed in both its substantial, reified form and as a contingent social practice. In connecting artifacts studied in the English classroom to the discursive practices of a culture, cultural studies constitutes learners as "theorizing subjects" (Giroux, 1993) and not simply as students of language and literature. It demands of teachers an unprecedented degree of reflexivity about their pedagogical practices. This multifocal attention to "the social roots, institutional relays, and ideological ramifications of communal events, institutions and texts" (Leitch, 1992, p. 167) is no doubt a lot to ask of English teachers. It is also a means of reformulating long-standing concerns of the English classroom for cultural literacy and critical response. These are only adequately addressed by a cultural pedagogy that explores the full range of

contemporary semiotic processes, troubled pleasures, and convergent effects students now experience.

NOTE: I have borrowed the phrase "unspeakable things" from Toni Morrison's (1989) essay on race in literary studies.

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