The last several decades have witnessed an extraordinary expansion of the scope of literary studies. Often associated with methodological and interpretive narratives such as deconstruction; the new historicism; cultural studies; ethnic, race, gender and sexuality criticism; and the rapid formation of the subfield of postcolonial studies, this widening of the field imaginary goes well beyond such developments to encompass a reconfiguration of the object of literary study and something like a revolution in the kinds of questions we put to it.

— Giles Gunn, "Introduction: Globalizing Literary Studies"

What are we going to do with those older categories—nation, culture, and English—which function as the absent structure that shapes and yet haunts global culture and the idea of literature itself?

— Simon Gikandi, "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality"

I

This book brings into critical relation two fields of study, postcolonialism and pedagogy, and proposes to examine the Canadian literatures within that context. While I welcome the foregrounding of
pedagogical concerns, configuring the topic as *Postcolonialism and Pedagogy* raises three significant issues for me. In raising these issues, my desire is not to call into question either the topic itself or postcolonialism as a critique but to underscore the incredible change sweeping through the discipline of English—indeed, through the humanities and social sciences generally—the fluidity of the situation at present, and the confused nature of the debates those changes have engendered. I would, however, like to reconfigure and refocus our discussions.

The first two issues are inextricably related. The first concerns what, for want of a better term, I shall call the "big picture,” that is, whether it is possible, in this context, meaningfully to separate postcolonialism either from the historical formations of colonialism and modernity it critiques or from the theoretical developments such as postmodernism and global studies it seeks to displace in the classroom. Postcolonialism, like postmodernism, stages a rupture with the past—with colonialism and the nation—but it is haunted by that past and by those historical formations. “The postcolonial condition,” Simon Gikandi observes in “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” “is embedded, through colonialism and nationalism, in the politics of modernity”; thus, he argues, “postcolonial theorists may have sought to forget the nation in order to become global, but the nation has not forgotten them” (641, 639). These issues are themselves embedded in larger debates regarding our shifting understanding of the university and the repositioning of the humanities in relation to the social sciences, debates that shape both curriculum and pedagogy. If the focus of this book is postcolonialism and pedagogy, how do we meaningfully separate postcolonialism from the many other developments, such as postmodernism, cultural studies, critical race and critical legal studies, and globalization, that have transformed both the discipline of English and our teaching in the past several decades?—At a time when the humanities themselves are undergoing fundamental changes? How do we discuss the postcolonial from a pedagogical perspective without either reducing it to one or two issues—indigeneity, hybridity, or race, for example—or making it stand in for all of these other developments? Given these questions, it is misleading to speak either of postcolonialism and pedagogy or of something termed “postcolonial pedagogy”: to gather all of these other developments under the catchphrase “postcolonial” would, it seems to me, render that term meaningless.
The second, related issue is that the postcolonial itself is a highly contested and conflicted field of study.1 There is little agreement, for example, regarding either the meaning of the term or the scope of the field. What Diana Brydon wrote seven years ago, in the Introduction to *Testing the Limits: Postcolonial Theories and Canadian Literature*, still in many ways characterizes the situation:

Postcolonial theory is currently proliferating at a bewildering rate, so that it now seems preferable to substitute the plural form for the singular. To write of postcolonial theories is to recognize the multiplicity and fundamental incompatibility of much that now passes under the rubric of postcolonial. Debates about the proper definition of the field and its appropriate mission are charged with excitement and sometimes acrimony. A strong shared sense that these things matter and are worth contesting has resulted in little agreement as yet about the history, scope, and boundaries of the field. (2)

Nor was—or is—she alone in that assessment. In “Post-Colonial Critical Theories,” Stephen Slemmon describes *postcolonialism* as “a portmanteau word—an umbrella thrown up over many heads against a great deal of rain. Confusion,” he observes, “necessarily abounds in the area” (183). Much of that questioning comes from people within the emerging field. The confusion may be a sign of postcolonialism’s vigour, an indication that “it is still a field very much in the making,” or it may suggest, as Gaurav Desai fears, “that the ‘global’ is fast replacing the ‘postcolonial’ as a category of analysis” (536). (The issue of postcolonialism’s relation to globalization has come into the foreground in the years following publication of *Testing the Limits*.) In either event, the confusion makes meaningful discussion of postcolonialism and pedagogy difficult.

The final issue the configuration of this book’s topic raises for me is the positioning of the Canadian literatures in the issues at stake here. In linking the postcolonial and pedagogy, the book pushes into the background the issue of postcolonialism’s relation to the national literature. I do not want to be misunderstood on this issue: I have no interest in debating whether the Canadian literatures are postcolonial. That question, it seems to me, is both wrong-headed and unproductive. Postcolonialism and the Canadian literatures are two very different projects. What is
productive is the tension between them. Postcolonialism has been so intent on announcing "the end of the nation-state and the proliferation of cultural relationships characterized by difference and hybridity" (O'Brien and Szeman 612) that it has not adequately addressed its relation to the nation-state or its culture. In this paper I explore these three issues and focus my analysis on the place of the Canadian literatures in globalized literary studies. My argument is that postcolonial critique is not well served by its disavowal of the nation-state.

II

The first issue regarding the configuration of the topic is postcolonialism's problematic relation to modernity, on the one hand, and to competing critiques of it, such as postmodernism and global studies, on the other. In a discussion of classroom practices, is it possible meaningfully to separate postcolonialism from the many other movements that have shaped the discipline and our teaching in the past two decades? The problematic relationship of postcolonialism to modernity, postmodernism, and globalization has been analyzed by a number of theorists and critics, some of them postcolonialists who are interrogating the issues from within. Since this book is concerned with pedagogy I want to develop this issue not by addressing these debates here—though I shall take up some of them later in the essay—but by reporting upon the way those debates have helped to shape the curriculum where I teach. For the past three years (1999–2002), the Department of English at the University of Alberta has been engaged in a comprehensive review of its undergraduate curriculum, a review which I organized and led. The review was not conducted by a small committee working in isolation but by the department as a whole via panels, area group meetings, surveys, workshops, e-mail, and retreats. Last spring the department voted by an overwhelming majority to adopt new program requirements and a new slate of courses we developed as a result of that process. Postcolonialism had a significant role to play in those changes but it was neither the only nor the dominant force shaping the new curriculum. The dominant forces were the repositioning of the humanities in relation to the social sciences; related to that repositioning, the emergence of theory generally as a structuring force in English; the move
to cultural studies; and, in keeping with the above, a significant re-conceptualization of the object of study itself.\(^2\) I do not have time here to discuss the new curriculum in detail but I want briefly to comment on two developments.

The first involves the department’s desire to move beyond national literatures and periodization as the structuring forces of the discipline and, balanced with that, the recognition that both nations and the use of national categories to organize literary studies were unlikely to disappear any time soon.\(^3\) The new curriculum creates space for faculty and students to engage texts outside the constraints of national categories and periods. Although we have attempted to create this space throughout the curriculum, it emerges most clearly in the 200-level courses and these were unquestionably the focus of the most intense debates regarding curricular change. The organizing committee for the review developed the following rationale for these courses, all of which are single-term:

Courses at the 200 level are intended to do two things: introduce students to methods and paradigms central to the discipline, and provide them with “windows” onto literary study (with perspectives, that is, on how specific methodologies ask questions of texts, why such questions have come to be asked, and what their asking can achieve and/or foreclose). These courses will perform two equally important functions: to preparehonours and majors students for further study in English; and to serve students from outside the department who desire to read and discuss literary texts. Each course presents a set of key texts from a particular critical methodology or paradigm, and a selection of literary, cultural, and/or social texts on which to put the strategies or moves from the critical material into practice. This second selection of texts might be tightly focussed (historically, geographically, generically, thematically) or more diverse in its scope. Expect a 200-level course to offer a dynamic interplay between these two groups of texts. (Hjartarson, et al. 3)

The paradigm courses at this level are organized into three broad categories titled, respectively, “Histories,” “Textualities,” and “Politics.” Under “Histories,” we developed three variable-content courses: “Making Books,” “Making Readers,” and “Histories in Texts.” Under “Textualities,” we also developed three variable-content courses: “Signs and Texts,” “Reading and
Interpretation," and "Narrative Theory and Poetics." Under "Politics," we developed four variable-content courses: "Class and Ideology," "Gender and Sexuality," "Race and Ethnicity," and "Empire and the Postcolonial." The courses in the Politics category undoubtedly generated the most debate. There is no denying either the interplay of these categories—that is, of the three larger categories and of the paradigms organized within them—or the exclusions that any one configuration of them might imply. Ultimately, the department accepted the organizing committee's view that each course should be seen as foregrounding one or more categories without treating them in isolation from the others. We also developed a course titled "The Literary Institution." Because that course examines the discourse that produces, among other things, the paradigms structuring our 200-level offerings, we placed it outside those categories. The titles of these courses, we believe, reflect the paradigms shaping the discipline and informing our teaching in the classroom. Instructors assigned to any of the "Politics" courses might well approach them under the banner of the postcolonial but they might also teach them as, for example, feminists or historical materialists.

The second point about the new curriculum concerns the Canadian literature courses. The Canadianists made two significant, structuring decisions. One was to move away from genre/period/nation survey to a concern with the concepts and issues involved in reading Canadian cultures (the title of one of the new courses), a decision that led rather than simply followed the path eventually taken by the department as a whole. The other was strongly to support the development of courses in Aboriginal literature—including one at the first-year level—and to have the department offer these courses independently of either Canadian or American literature, on the one hand, or of the postcolonial, on the other. The reason for this relative positioning of Canadian, Aboriginal, and postcolonial literatures is, I hope, clear: the more immediate issue for Aboriginal literature courses is perhaps less their relation to the national and postcolonial literatures than whether they should be developed within English or elsewhere within the university—in Native Studies, for example—or by English and Native Studies working together. (That is how our first-year Aboriginal Literature and Culture course was developed.)
The second issue concerns the definition and scope of postcolonialism as a field. In Alan Lawson’s view, postcolonialism is a conflicted field. In “Postcolonial Theory and the ‘Settler’ Subject” he writes:

As I see it, postcolonial theory manifests two quite different impulses that remain in perpetual tension within its strategies and its trajectories. As, “essentially,” a theory of difference, postcolonialism articulates itself through an insistence on the representation, inscription, and interpretation of the particular, the local, that which is not the same. It resists universals. But as a mode of analysis and historicocultural [sic] explanation, as a heuristic polemic, postcolonialism forever desires to become another grand narrative, another of the Great Explanations. (20)

It is at the level of “grand narrative” and “Great Explanation” that postcolonialism has generated most debate. I personally am more interested in postcolonialism as a reading strategy and critique rather than as narrative and Great Explanation. Although many postcolonial theorists argue that the term names not only a reading strategy but literatures and critical practices that highlight certain kinds of commitments, politics, and identities, the term itself serves, in the first instance, as a spatiotemporal marker (O’Brien and Szeman 610). In “Post-Colonial Critical Theories” Slemon observes that “One of the most vexed areas of debate within the field of post-colonial theory has to do with the term ‘post-colonial’ itself” (179), and, as he notes, the problem involves the meaning of both "post" and "colonial." “The term ‘post-colonial’ or ‘post-colonialism,’” he writes,

has to be seen as problematized at the outset by lack of consensus on what it is that makes the term “colonial” meaningful—that is, by a lack of consensus . . . over what it might mean to be “post” the “colonial” moment. If neo-colonial relations still prevail between and within modern nations, if the “practices, theories and attitudes of dominating metropolitan centres” (to re-employ Said’s words) remain in place after European colonialism has formally ended, then at some level contemporary “post-
colonialisms," however they are conceived, must take place within a structure of contemporary and continuing imperial relations. (183)

Others have advanced similar arguments. I will not rehearse here Anne McClintock's argument that the term postcolonial "is haunted by the very figure of linear development that it sets out to dismantle" (Imperial Leather 10–11), but what she says about colonialism "return[ing] at the moment of its disappearance" might well also be said about the nation.4

Another vexed area of debate within the postcolonial is the scope of the field. The authors of The Empire Writes Back define the postcolonial as "cover[ing] all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). A recently published issue of South Atlantic Quarterly entitled The Globalization of Fiction/The Fiction of Globalization advances a similar view, arguing that "from the high point of European imperialism to the end of the Cold War, all literature was postcolonial literature" (611; emphasis in original). Interestingly, the editors of that volume, Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman, also argue that "all literature is now global, all literature is a literature of globalization" (611; emphasis in original). As Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge pointed out over ten years ago, the problem with defining the postcolonial with the breathtaking spatial and temporal sweep advanced in The Empire Writes Back and in the South Atlantic Quarterly volume is that it erases difference. This is postcolonialism as totalizing narrative and Great Explanation. In their critique of The Empire Writes Back, Mishra and Hodge recall Edward Said's "well-known warning that even with the best of intentions one might, and sometimes does, give the impression that through one's own discourses the Other is now representable without due regard to its bewildering complexity" (402). Other theorists have defined postcolonialism narrowly to designate the decolonization following World War II—often focused on South Asia—and tend to conceive postcolonial as a replacement for the now infrequently used term Third World. This use is historically more defensible—though not without its own homogenizing tendencies—but it problematizes Canada's participation in the postcolonialism thus defined. Another reaction to the problems with the postcolonial as a spatiotemporal marker is to focus on postcolonialism as a reading strategy and as a political movement and to push the historical issues into the background. The problem with that response, ultimately, is the need to historicize the critique itself.
The final issue I raised concerning the configuration of the topic is the way it seems to finesse postcolonialism’s relation to the national literatures. Responding to what he perceives as the growing tendency in postcolonialism to frame issues in terms of a First World/Third World, the-West-and-the-rest binary, Lawson seeks in “Postcolonial Theory and the ‘Settler’ Subject” to theorize the settler-invader subject. He recently redeveloped those ideas for a sixteen-page entry on “Settler Colonies” he co-authored with Anna Johnston and published in *The Companion to Postcolonial Studies.* According to Johnston and Lawson,

> The crucial theoretical move...is to see the “settler” as uneasily occupying a place caught between two First Worlds, two origins of authority and authenticity. One of these is the originating world of Europe, the Imperium—the source of its principal cultural authority. Its “other” First World is that of the First Nations whose authority they not only replaced and effaced but also desired. . . . To each of these First Worlds, the settlers are secondary—indeed, supplementary. That secondariness makes it clear that the settler was also the “go-between” for the European First World with that which it has strategically named the Third. The “settler” acted as a mediator rather than as a simple transmitter of Imperialism’s uncomfortable mirroring of itself. (370)

In the earlier essay Lawson spoke of Canada as part of the “Second World,” a concept he and Slemon had developed in other contexts. In the Companion entry all references to the “Second World” disappear. There is, however, another, more perplexing change. Although Johnston and Lawson critique the cultural politics of the representation of settlement and argue that the displacement of First Nations people is cultural and symbolic as well as physical, they choose to designate the European colonists as “settlers” rather than as “settler-invaders” or simply as “invaders,” a strategy favoured by some of my students. Here is the rationale they offer:

> In the 1980s, analysts of colonialism and postcolonialism began to re-examine the implications of “settler colonies,” often starting by reinstating the more historically accurate term “settler-invader” to emphasize the
violence that the single, ostensibly benign, term “settler” concealed. This essay uses the term “settler” for reasons of brevity, but the “invader” rider should always be kept in mind, as it is in the theory. (362)

You can see the problem here: if the displacement of First Nations peoples is cultural and symbolic as well as physical, the continued use of the “ostensibly benign” term settler is, at best, problematic.

There are other problems as well. Although I am drawn to the idea of colonialism as negotiation, this model, with the settler-invader at its centre, grants interiority and psychological complexity to the invader-colonizer rather than to the colonized. The more basic issue for me is this: what is at stake for the Canadian literatures in being named postcolonial? The literatures within Canada that could most legitimately claim postcolonial status in the post–World War II era are arguably the First Nations literatures and the literatures of Canada’s minority cultures, not the national literature itself—and I’m not at all convinced that proponents of either literature seek recognition as postcolonial in the way proponents of English-Canadian literature sometimes do. In any event, as I indicated at the outset, the Canadian literatures and postcolonialism are very different projects. Both, however, are caught up in globalization and have a role to play in it. That the national and global are opposed is just one of the many fallacies of the globalization debate. As a number of theorists have argued, globalization is not opposed to nation-states but works through them and, in some ways, increases their power (Panitch, et al. 12–13). “Theorizing globalization without the state,” Martin Shaw argues, “is like playing Hamlet without the Prince.” Yet, that is precisely what many postcolonial theorists attempt. Now, more than ever, cultural critics and theorists need to understand not only culture’s relation to the nation-state or how nation-states are transforming themselves in the global era, but the changing place of national cultures and literatures in those developments. Some will argue that, in the contemporary world, culture is no longer tied to the nation, that, as a result of globalization, culture is a transnational phenomenon. But, as Gikandi points out in “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” “the argument that culture is the symptom of a new global order has to contend with a difficult question,” a question “embedded” in what Gikandi terms the “Leavis project”: “How could culture, an idea so powerfully embedded in national traditions, be transformed into a
transnational category?" (653). Gikandi’s question is one of many that needs to be addressed.

In “Beyond Discipline: Globalization and the Future of English,” Paul Jay argues that English departments should

move away from a traditional division of discrete national literatures into ossified literary-historical periods and give the history of global expansion, trade, and intercultural exchange precedence in our curriculum over the mapping of an essentially aestheticized national character. In this model the older paradigm for literary study would cease to stand at the center of the discipline and would become an object of study among others in a field that spent more time teaching its students about the history of the discipline, which after all has shifted remarkably since the late nineteenth century in ways that until recently we kept hidden from our students. (43)

While the nation/period paradigm may, at some point, cease to structure the discipline—a prospect that would not bother me—it is no more likely to disappear than the nation-state itself. To say that the nation-state is unlikely to disappear is not to endorse or celebrate the state: it is to acknowledge its material existence and the power it exerts, including its considerable resources in the cultural and literary fields of production (including funding for the conference that led to this book and for the research of many of its participants).

Will globalization mean the end of national cultures? My own premonition is that national cultures may take on more importance in a globalized world. Paradoxical as it may seem, the organizational categories of nation and period may be reinvigorated by the globalization of literary studies. Consider, for example, Jay’s own proposals regarding the study of literature organized in national categories. Arguing that English departments need to move beyond “the outmoded nationalist paradigm,” he adds:

This does not mean we should abandon the study of literary texts and cultural practices in relation to the modern nation-state. That study, however, ought to concentrate on the relation in historical and materialist terms. We ought to focus less on identifying what seems inherently English
Jay seems caught in a contradiction here: whereas throughout most of the essay he seems intent on decentring the nation/period paradigm, here he is apparently content simply to “complicate” it. Nevertheless, in the short term, the direction he sketches out for the study of literary and cultural texts and practices in relation to the state seems promising; it enables an understanding both of literature’s relation to the state and of its role in the transnational mediation of culture. In the long term, however, we need to theorize the changing relation between culture and the “global state.”

What is the place of postcolonialism in all of this? As Slemon points out in “Post-Colonial Critical Theories,” the many projects arrayed under the umbrella of postcolonialism assume no common object of description, let alone a common theoretical or critical methodology. And just as obviously, these descriptive enterprises will not be grounded in a common political goal—indeed, much postcolonial critical work carries no political commitment whatsoever. (184)

Postcolonial critics and theorists with and without political commitments will, in the near future at least, increasingly find themselves negotiating...
postcolonialism’s relation to globalization. As this essay undoubtedly sug-
gests, I am drawn to Gikandi’s analysis. As he notes, “the discourse of
globalization seems to be perpetually caught between two competing
narratives, one of celebration, the other of crisis” (629), with postcolonialism
tending toward the celebratory narrative. Whatever its shortcomings,
Gikandi rightly argues, “the postcolonial perspective on globalization has
been the most salient attempt to question older forms of globalization
based on the centrality of the nation and theories of modernity” (636).
Like Gikandi, however, I am not convinced that postcolonial critique has
achieved the break with colonialism or the nation it announces. Unlike
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, however, I am not prepared to dismiss
the postcolonial altogether.

According to Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, “postcolonial studies is at
present beset by a melancholia induced paradoxically by its new-found
authority and incorporation into institutions of higher learning” (3). Its
melancholia, it has been said, “derives from a growing sense of the limits of
its politics and its thorough incorporation into the Western academy—
both arguably symptomatic of postcolonialism’s failure to address the
conditions of globalization that simultaneously enable its production and
erode its political purchase” (O’Brien and Szeman 607). With its focus on
pedagogy this book is itself, in part, yet another sign of postcolonialism’s
incorporation into the Western academy. Is it a sign of the waning of both
postcolonial studies and the national literatures? I think not. Postcolonial
studies are inextricably bound up in contemporary studies of the global
and have much to offer as a critique of earlier, social sciences–based
theories of globalization. At the same time, both postcolonial and global
studies are inextricably bound up in the nation-state and its cultures. For
more than a century now, theorists of various persuasions have predicted
the imminent demise of the nation-state. While the nation-state is undeni-
ably an historical formation that arose in a particular time and place and
that will just as undeniably give way, at some future date, to some other
political formation, it has proved remarkably resilient over the past century
and more. It has proved resilient because it has changed over time and, if
Panitch, Shaw, and others are right, it continues to change. In the final
analysis, it is impossible to theorize either the postcolonial or the global
adequately without taking nation-states and their cultures fully into
account.
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NOTES

1. My own analysis focuses on several moments in that ongoing debate, most notably Mishra and Hodge's review of The Empire Writes Back; Hall's reply to Shohat, McClintock, and Dirlik, in "When Was 'the Post-Colonial'?"; Slemon's "Post-Colonial Critical Theories"; and Brydon's Testing the Limits and "It's Time for a New Set of Questions."

2. Compare Gunn's analysis of the changing field of literary studies, particularly the passage quoted as an epigraph to this essay. In the English Department at the University of Alberta, as elsewhere, feminist analysis has played a significant role in rethinking the discipline.

3. This is, of course, a debatable issue. On the relevance of nation and period as categories in the organization of English studies and the analysis of literary texts, see Gikandi and Jay. On the impact of globalization on nation-states, see Panitch, "Globalisation and the State," and Shaw.

4. McClintock first advanced these arguments in "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Postcolonialism.'" For a critique of McClintock, see Hall.


6. In the Introduction to Testing the Limits, Brydon defends the use of
postcolonial to describe the literatures of Canada. For a recent critique of writing regarding settler-invader colonies, see O'Neill.

7. For a brief overview of the large and growing body of work on globalization, see Jay 34 ff. Although Jay rightly argues that globalization has a long history, my concern here, and the concern of many of the critics I cite, is with globalization in the post-World War II era and, particularly, the intersection of global studies, understood as a social sciences-based project, with literary studies, most notably postcolonialism. (The intersection of postcolonialism and globalization is one more manifestation of the changing relations—at once stimulating and troubled—between the humanities and social sciences.) For a very different view of globalization and postcolonialism, see Hardt and Negri.

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