Do We Need New Method Names? Descriptions of Method in Scholarship on Canadian Literature

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> Maybe there is no point in having a thesis. Maybe it's too partial an experience. Maybe a conclusion is a delusion. Maybe "research" and "support" are themselves chimeras dreamed into being by the questions asked.
>
> ***Tamas Dobozy***

Literary studies are often seen as a discipline without method. Research articles in literature do not have method sections, nor do they list what type of evidence has been included in a particular project or by what procedures primary material was analyzed. Among literary scholars, there is a powerful assumption that this kind of knowledge—which materials to look at and what to do with them—goes with the territory: it is both too obvious to speak about and too hidden to be fully known (Fahnestock and Secor; MacDonald, *Professional*; Wilder and Wolfe; Wilder, *Rhetorical Strategies*; Banting, "Uncomfortable Lessons"; Fee). Because of implicitness of questions of method and research design, writing in literary studies is difficult to teach and often relies on students' abilities to infer their own strategies for reading and writing (Herrington). And yet, like all disciplinary discourses, writing in literary studies does have its own range of analytical approaches, its ways of collecting and analyzing evidence, its sense of the validity of certain research questions over others.

ESC 43.4/44.1 (December 2017/March 2018): 91–110

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Sarah Banting's research on Canadian literary studies demonstrates how much the field of English studies in Canada favours the values of social justice as it makes decisions about research questions and methods ("If What We Do Matters"). Expanding on Banting's work, this project asks: What are common language practices when presenting methods in Canadian literary scholarship? What difficulties do these practices pose for student writers? And how could literature instructors better guide student writers by teaching current methodological conventions more explicitly? I analyze a textual corpus of recent research articles from *Canadian Literature* and *Studies in Canadian Literature* in order to clarify typical discursive patterns that are used when discussing methods of literary scholarship. On the basis of these findings, we can ask: How can teaching in literary studies be adjusted in order to demystify the methodological practices of the discipline?

What is method in literary studies?

The status of literary studies as being without named methods has been widely discussed; in the tradition of rhetorical and language studies in the United States authors include Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor (1991), Susan Peck MacDonald (1994), and Laura Wilder (2012). From a Canadian perspective, Heather Murray has described the dominant process of becoming a literary scholar as learning to adopt, through mimesis, the appropriate styles of literary analysis through close study of literary texts, a long tradition that relies on instructors repeatedly performing close readings in the hopes that students will not only discern the motivations and techniques underlying this reading but also know how to translate the right elements of this oral performance into their written work ("Close Reading, Closed Writing," "Equal"). More recently, Banting has written about literary scholarship's "elegant silence about its own rules" and likened the teaching of literary scholarship to a game of "I'm going camping" where only the game leader knows by which rules certain items are to be ruled in or out of the game ("Uncomfortable Lessons" 4).

In this project, I speak from my perspective as both a teacher of literary courses and a researcher in writing studies. Having a foot in each field allows for productive bridging of discussions which, according to Nancy Chick, have tended in different directions: where pedagogical research in literary studies is primarily concerned with issues of reading and writing and composition studies has its eyes trained on writing (39). While as teachers of literature we might have frequent chats about strategies for classroom discussion, we do not always give equal conversational attention

to the way we guide students through and assess their written assignments. In fact, some of my informal conversations with colleagues indicate that we often expect students to surprise us with their writing, that there is an as-yet-unimagined, illusory quality to what we want in their work. In the process of assignment instruction, we like to conjure papers that are more stunning and brilliant than any step-by-step guideline could produce. As ambitious teachers, we might dismiss or feel bored about the utility of such a step-by-step guideline because we imagine that so many potentially excellent papers can fall outside those steps. In fact, the largely imaginary—but sometimes real—presence of such outstanding papers can lead us to throw up our professorial hands when some of the perhaps-not-quite-so-brilliant students insistently request precise instructions and repeatedly ask how exactly to go about designing their projects. And although we may resist providing more direct guidelines—perhaps because we do not believe they could produce the fully self-motivated student projects we yearn for—we still feel confident that we will, as the phrase goes, "recognize a good student essay when we see it." However, I suggest that despite this feeling that we do not always fully know what we want in a good paper, as experienced teachers we nevertheless have quite precise expectations of what successful submissions look like for the assignments we design. Particularly when we reach the point of a course where we have to read and assess a stack of papers with great efficiency, such efficiency demands that we clarify our expectations to ourselves, that we know what we are looking for so as not to get lost in thought and time. Why do we sometimes resist making those expectations clearer to ourselves and our students, well ahead of submission deadlines?

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In this project, I proceed from the claim that as readers of student papers we tend to value the detailed genre conventions of our own professional writing. However, while we know those genre conventions from our own reading and writing of scholarship, we do not always know how best to teach them. This is a claim shared by several North American scholars who have recently discussed pedagogy in English studies. Laura Wilder has observed how literary instructors want students to work through difficulties they experience in as productive a way as professional scholars do, but she also notes that these disciplinary values of difficulty and complexity are often taught tacitly ("'Get Comfortable'"). Others echo Wilder's call that disciplinary values are best taught explicitly so that we do not "simply reward students who have already internalized these disciplinary moves and punish students who have been trained to value one correct answer" (Chick, Hassel, and Haynie 401). Gerald Graff suggests that as we teach

writing about literature we should attempt to bridge the gap between on the one hand the discussions that happen in our undergraduate classrooms and on the other hand current scholarly practice, particularly the conflicts which drive it (Graff). As a proponent of genre-based pedagogy (Hyland; Bawarshi and Reiff), I propose an approach more detailed and more focused on applied language studies than Graff's. Indeed, some of Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's suggestions in their prominent textbook *They Say/I Say* have been criticized with the help of applied language analysis: Zak Lancaster points out that what the textbook claims are typical argumentative structures and phrases are not actually typical when one looks through a corpus of literary articles ("Do Academics Really Write This Way?"). Like Lancaster, I propose that we carefully analyze literary scholarship in order to understand its genre structures and conventions more clearly and to help demystify how literary research is produced (see Harwood and Hadley). Only with a genre-based understanding can we more accurately teach disciplinary conventions through tasks and strategies that are productive and manageable in the time frame of a university semester.

A question many literature instructors might ask here is: Why should our goal be that students in literature courses learn to write like literary scholars?[1] Should we not rather teach them how to write in more public or more popular or more creative genres instead? My response to that question is twofold. The first half of my response is that if we have more public or more popular or more creative genres in mind for our courses, then we must also teach those genres in a conscious way throughout the course—providing models for writing in such genres, analyzing different iterations, letting students practice before they get assessed on a final version. Before we do that, however, we should consider this second half of the response to the question of why should we want to teach our students to write like literary scholars. In her book *Rhetorical Strategies and Genre Conventions in Literary Studies*, Laura Wilder writes incisively about her observations of first-year literature classrooms, her interviews with instructors, and her survey of students who were taking those classes. One of the key findings of her study is the "profound hesitancy" of these

1 Such skepticism is well captured in the special panel organized by Stephen Slemon for the 2007 ACCUTE conference in Saskatoon, called "Why Do I Have to Write Like That?" In the call for proposals, Slemon laments that literary scholars train students in "the manufacture of tortured analytical documents" while also deceiving themselves in that "our careers depend on our ability to write the kinds of books and articles that we would never willingly read" (2).

instructors to introduce literary studies as a discipline (65). This profound hesitancy takes the form of instructors not wanting to use disciplinary terms and questions when they are discussing literature, trying to preserve their classrooms as "a space for 'direct' engagement with domain knowledge unfettered by disciplinary rhetorical practices and methods" (65). Wilder here puts "direct" in quotation marks because despite instructors' classroom performance of non-disciplinarity, when it comes to assessing and grading students, instructors insist on disciplinary practices—practices, we might add, which they have not explicitly mentioned, taught, or scaffolded in their course but expect their students to produce. As another example, in an ethnographic study of an introductory literature course, Anne Herrington noticed that the higher graded papers were the ones that performed the more disciplinary analyses of literary meaning, technique, and dissonance; however, the instructor in that course was unaware how much these evaluations were related to discipline-specific rhetorical practices (Herrington). Clearly, we can teach more effectively if we have a more detailed awareness of what we want students to learn. In relation to other disciplines as well, applied language research has repeatedly shown that instructors' grading practices favour student writing that meets disciplinary genre expectations: higher grades are given to students whose texts sound more like the discipline's research publications (North; Petrić; Hardy and Römer; Lancaster, "Expressing Stance"; Aull, Bandarage, and Richardson Miller)

My work in this project builds on the premise that published scholarship is a site where the discipline's "identifiable material practice" can be witnessed (Grobman and Garner 49; Lancaster, "Do Academics Really Write This Way?"). As such, it is an excellent place to look for the clues we need to improve our teaching of the genres by which we assess students. Therefore, this is a corpus-based project where I look at twenty research articles in search for language strategies that can be translated into improved instructions for student writing; specifically, I analyze the first articles in each issue of *Canadian Literature* and *Studies in Canadian Literature* from 2012 to 2015. I use a simple, inclusive form of coding: I tag each part of the text that could be seen as naming an approach and method or as describing decisions the author made in the design of the research project.

What applied language research knows about literary studies

Over the past twenty years, scholars in writing and discourse studies have already produced a range of interesting findings about the specific discur-

sive practices that characterize published scholarship in literary studies. In a path-breaking 1991 chapter, Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor have identified a set of rhetorical commonplaces or, as they call it, special topoi, that structure literary arguments. In their analysis of a corpus of twenty articles published from 1978 to 1982, they found the following five dominant topoi: 1) appearance/reality, 2) ubiquity, 3) paradox, 4) *contemptus mundi*, 5) paradigm. Following up on Fahnestock and Secor ten years later, Wilder found that the topoi had shifted in that decade and now also include 6) context, 7) mistaken critic, 8) social justice (see figure 1). Other scholars, too, have continued to develop this kind of topos analysis (Wolfe). In his topos study, James E. Warren asked nine literature instructors to process a set of poems out loud and by doing so produce on-the-spot suggestions for conference-style arguments. His study illustrates how, as they build conceptual layers around the poems, individual scholars can diverge quite widely in their arguments. Thus, while talking about the same poems they are not talking very much with each other.

While my study deviates from a topos-focused way of looking at literary scholarship, I want to repeat some relevant points from these previous studies. One key observation is that in comparison to other disciplines, writing in literary studies is not premised on the idea of knowledge building or knowledge accumulation the way that Tony Becher has observed in science and social science disciplines. In other words, knowledge in literary studies is not as communally and collaboratively constructed as in other disciplines; instead, it is more likely developed through ongoing reinterpretation, revision, and critique not only of literary texts but also of previous scholarship. Susan Peck MacDonald contrasts humanities against social science research by describing how a field like literary studies starts from the primary texts and then moves toward abstraction, whereas social science research starts from communally defined concepts and then moves to the selection and discussion of primary data ("Data-Driven and Conceptually Driven"). As a result of this process, there is not as much of a shared set of analytical concepts and questions that literary scholars can present to newcomers and outsiders as central. Add a lack of explicitly articulated methods, and literary research projects seem difficult to break into smaller-scale tasks that could then be distributed among collaborators, research assistants, or students in a class.

It is not a surprise, then, that each of the twenty articles of my corpus was written by a single author. Literary scholars work mostly individually. Where other disciplines put emphasis on the collaborative building of shared knowledge constructs—textually visible not only through co-

Fahnestock and Secor (1991)	**Appearance/reality**	Latent meanings lurk beneath the surface
	Ubiquity	A previously unnoticed literary device appears everywhere and warrants an alternative interpretation
	Paradox	A text contains irreconcilable opposites, no single interpretation is possible
	Contemptus mundi	A text expresses despair regarding the modern state of society
	Paradigm	A conceptual template (Marxism, feminism…) helps produce alternative readings
Wilder (2005)	**Context**	A contextual historical template is placed over the details of the text
	Mistaken critic	Latent meanings have been missed or misread by previous critics
	Social justice	Literary interpretation is used to advocate social change

Figure 1. Special topoi of literary scholarship.

authorship but also via comprehensive citations and repeated definitions—literary scholars are more likely to showcase their rhetorical and stylistic skill as they work individually, cite eclectically, and creatively connect divergent areas of discussion in their citational practice (Warren 203). Sarah Banting observes that with the pressure to be original and creative in one's literary research, there persists a "looseness of argumentative logic and a tendency to build arguments that shift or twist on themselves according to the peculiar minds of the individual scholar" ("If What We Do Matters" zz6). Banting asks, "What are we making knowledge about, then, if our concerns range so widely beyond our discipline and coalesce around so few—and such diverse and non-disciplinary—abstract concepts?" ("If What We Do Matters" zz3). This situation—literary research as mostly lonely, individual work coupled with expectation of highly original arguments—makes it hard for novice researchers to find their place in the discipline. With much dismay, Katie Davison has described her quest of writing a dissertation in literary studies as "years of *minutely, singularly focused* elite conversation" with nobody but herself. Brendan McCormack, reflecting on his experience as a graduate student, warns how "emerging scholars may interpret expectations of novelty as pressure to position our work in terms of radical departures," and describes the often inhibitive "anxiety of influence" that follows from this expectation (Giffen and McCormack 10).

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a particular set of literary texts. Susan Peck MacDonald notes that, in literary studies, how to define and solve a problem is not a "regularized or conventionalized" process ("Problem Definition" 319). Even when reading published literary scholarship, it is surprisingly tricky to grasp the particular problem as well as the broad, central goals of the research. In addition, much literary research today has been reconfigured into forms of cultural studies by active incorporation of select theories and concepts from other disciplines, and that means that central values of literary scholarship today are (a) rarely literary values, to the point that it is hard to see why it is literature that is being investigated while thinking about these values, and that these values are (b) deeply implied rather than explicitly stated in written literary scholarship or in course documents. For instance, in a lecture I taught called "Literature in Canada" many students seemed to assume from the calendar title that the question of the course was "What makes Canadian literature Canadian?," while the key questions I actually asked as I developed lectures and activities were in fact not articulated either in the syllabus or the assignment descriptions I produced. I am not alone in having made this pedagogical faux pas. In an analysis of how learning outcomes are stated and assessed in several sections of a course that fulfills both a literature and academic writing requirement, Kathryn Grafton, Laurie McNeill, and Evan Mauro find that while syllabi and assignments both stated and assessed the academic writing goals of the course, the literary studies outcomes remained unexpressed but were nevertheless assessed. They point out that the absence of explicitly articulated literary methods and frameworks is surprising given that the instructors' graduate degrees are in literary studies (rather than writing studies), and that the course is designed to teach literary studies *as a discipline* vis-à-vis the other disciplines.

One of the reasons behind literary instructors' difficulty in articulating disciplinary course goals is that many of the values that are central to literary scholarship are of an extra-disciplinary nature; they are not specific to literary studies. Sarah Banting highlights the way in which Canadian literary scholarship produces the "performance of scrupulously vigilant conscientiousness" as it pursues values like social and environmental justice, decolonization, and critique of neoliberalism and patriarchal structures ("If What We Do Matters" Z21). These kinds of broad, social values are the values that rightfully guide the research questions and arguments of current literary scholarship. However, they are not the disciplinary values that best explain decisions related to research design and analytical methods. Consider, for instance, how the above social values can be

shared between work in literary studies and sociology but how different the disciplinary values are that determine questions of method: decisions about what type of data or primary material goes with what research questions, what amount of primary material is too small or just right for providing evidence, how findings will differ between different methods of analyses, and how the primary materials that have been collected are to be analyzed and interpreted. The step-by-step presentation of this kind of disciplinary thinking is non-existent in literary studies publications and therefore not visible to the students in our courses. For literary scholars, the detailed method sections in social science articles might feel like tedious and redundant reading. Consider, though, how much they can reveal to novice writers about how social scientists develop (or claim to develop) their research projects and how they choose research questions and produce and interpret evidence. Consider how much novice writers can learn from these method sections about making good decisions in their own smaller-scale course projects.

Method descriptions, in their shorter as well as their longer instantiations, are important resources for novice researchers because they express shared practices and thus help create not only procedural knowledge (or, in Sherry Linkon's words, "strategic thinking") but also disciplinary identification and community (Linkon). As Katja Thieme and Shurli Makmillen have written: method names, like genre names, help us relate to each other as researchers within and across fields. They are the cultural tools of research communities. Shorthand phrases—such as, comparative study, case study, field notes, corpus analysis, community-based research, discourse-based interviews, ethnographic work—serve as indicators of community practices and allegiances not only among researchers in one discipline but also across disciplines and beyond academia. I suspect that the easy presence of method descriptions and method shorthands in social science research is part of what enables the prolific uptake of such research outside its disciplinary boundaries, a level of uptake that literary scholarship is often yearning to have. Where social science writers tend to "compact" their critical and method terms (MacDonald, *Professional*), literary scholars are more likely to work with a "diffusion of terms" in order to engage in "expansive and shifty reasoning" (Banting, "If What We Do Matters" 27–8). As the cultural tools of particular research communities, compacted critical terms and method shorthands "do their part in representing these communities' histories and values" (Thieme and Makmillen 470). At the same time, Thieme and Makmillen also point out that when researchers rely on the ease of the method shorthand in their writing, they

"leave out the details, and assume underlying histories and values to be shared"—an unavoidable part of the process of compacting (470). What does it mean, then, if a discipline does not even use shorthand method descriptions in its research publications? How much more are underlying histories and values obscured under those conditions?

Current method descriptions in Canadian literary scholarship

My analysis of the corpus reveals that each of the twenty articles uses some form of method reference; however, these method references rarely appear in the form of noun phrases that are used with some consistency and could thus be called the method shorthands of the discipline. Browsing through all the instances of method references in the table (figure 2), there are no strong trends or obvious similarities between these brief method descriptions. In other words, in this set of method descriptions there is not a set of references that appear as central to literary study through the repetition of the noun phrases used to summarize them. The only method term that several articles in this corpus can lay claim to is the rather general term "reading." The corpus has: "a reading," "'red reading,'" "close readings," "historical readings," "these readings," "this reading," "empathetic reading," and "active reading." I should note that four of the above five instances of "reading" with an adjective come as part of a pair. In each pair, "reading" is modified because these phrases are played against each other: in contrast to the close reading attributed to other projects, article 4 sets out to perform a "red reading"; in counterpoint to the possibility of empathetic readings of the texts analyzed in article 20, where the author wants readers to engage in active reading instead. In most other occurrences of the term, the authors use the rather vague "reading" without any further modification.

Article	References to the article's own method	#	References to cited authors' methods	#
1	analysis of selected literary depictions by residential school survivors that focus on gender segregation and the shaming of the body	1		
	a reading of Cree poet Louise Bernice Halfe's "Nitotem"	2		
	considering the potential for what Maoli scholar Ty P. Kàwika Tengan calls "embodied discursive action"	3		
	the paper examines a variety of Indigenous contexts—including Gwich'in, Mi'kmaq, Inuvialuit, Maori, and Maoli—to demonstrate the widespread and systematic nature of colonial technologies of disembodiment	4		
	I recorded recollections of the day: documentation, field notes, emotional debriefing	5		
	ethical witnessing of trauma	6		
2	I consider her publishing history and its current Canadian industrial context, the media discourses that construct questionable celebrity narratives about that history, and Edugyan's own narratives of success and celebrity in *Half-Blood Blues*	7	renewed attention to literary production conceived as operating within and not necessarily against celebrity culture	1
			de-articulating the old narrative of modernisms antagonistic relationship with popular culture	2
			appreciation of the transnational reach of national culture	3
			renewed awareness that the material aspects of literary culture matter	4
			studies of individual Canadian literary celebrities	5
3			they are exploratory (which means they offer at once discovery and disorientation), never quite sure what they are	6
			the coincidental nature of much scholarship, of its meandering, is here openly acknowledged	7
			ecocritical examination	8

4	I wish to momentarily remove immigrant success stories from the mainstream (white) context	8	structural critiques of Asian North American success	9
	will work to complicate Asian North American critiques of success and … push for a more nuanced consideration of the complexity and heterogeneity of Asian North American subjectivities	9	unlike theories of postidentity that try to do away with the notion of subjectivity	10
	task at hand is to read the novel alongside the interpretation whereby the refugee's achievement of success and feelings of gratitude constitute a model minority discourse celebrating the goodness of liberal nationalism and multiculturalism	10		
5			studies in labour history	11
6			cultural critique of science	12
7	reading Connelly's books as a trilogy complicates critical understandings of how her work in particular, and literature in general, bears witness to distant suffering	11		
8	examine how these practices of medicalization estrange Demerson from her own body	12		
9	drawing on Deleuzian-inflected theories of assemblage, together with recent interventions in the field of affect studies, this article examines Goto's novel *Darkest Light* (2012) in terms of what I refer to as a multitude of necropolitical assemblages	13		
	my analysis of the novel in terms of assemblage theory	14		
10	elaborates the wider political resonances of Goulds contrapuntal technique by addressing his lesser-known radio documentary "The Search for Pet Clark" (1967) in relation to his journalistic work and personal letters	15	critical discussion	13
11	I consider the function of Crake and Jimmy's societal milieu as a literary manifestation of Sara Ahmed's "happiness dystopia"	16		

	I use the affective theories of Jonathan Flatley and Lauren Berlant as lenses through which to examine how the novel's dystopia is perpetuated by way of what Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feeling"	17		
12	to understand this shift in Wah's work, I look past Diamond Grill to a text from over a decade earlier, his Governor General's Award-winning 1985 book *Waiting for Saskatchewan*	18		
13	taking up middlebrow texts within the context of Canadian literature	19	the reclamation of many works of literature that might be categorized as middlebrow	14
14	I will perform what James Cox, writing in the context of American literary criticism, has called a "red reading," meaning a critical practice that takes its conceptual lead from the work of Indigenous thinkers and writers.	20	close readings of literary or cultural texts	15
15	consider OTL's important Canadian play and its contribution to Canadian theatre histories.	21		
16	textual and paratextual exploration of currency	22	examinations of the cultural logics of late capitalism in the context of literary production	16
	I want to explore the material and cultural capital generated by the novel's popularity	23		
	intertwine literary and economic analyses	24		
17	maintain this historical interest and to contextualize it with a specific focus on the relation between deforestation and agriculture	25	historical readings of *The Rising Village* have provided some of the more interesting reasons, if not predominated the critical scene, for returning to the text	17
			from a historical perspective	18
18	this paper adds an ecocritical dimension to these readings	26	has turned discussion of the novel toward its urban industrial themes and its images of mobility and immobility	19
	analysis of how complex pastoral relies on toxic discourse	27	this reading of *The Jungle*	20
	I want to nuance Hill's idea of marked rural/urban contrast, and extend his assertion	28		

	reading *Waste Heritage* for its ghetto-pastoralist elements	29		
19	this essay examines plays such as Sharon Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1976) as performative enactments that contribute to memorialization	30		
20	exploring how productive it can be to turn to works of fiction, particularly "what if" stories, to illuminate Osler's pedagogically difficult notion of medical variabilities	31	discussions of narrative competence in a clinical setting	21
	how stories that highlight the constraints of medicine and the problems of health care augment medical pedagogy	32	empathetic reading	22
	I turn to the patient-centred novels of Kathleen Winter (*Annabel*) and Emma Donoghue (*Room*) before returning to Lam's stories about physicians	33		
	possibilities of active reading	34		

Figure 2. Method descriptions in the corpus of twenty articles.

In the teaching of literature, close reading is probably the most commonly used method term (Bass and Linkon; Tinkle et al.; Howe). Yet, my corpus analysis demonstrates that "close reading" is not a term that is used with any frequency in publications. The forms of analysis present in my corpus use, in fact, a wider, more varied range of approaches that cannot be captured under the umbrella of "close reading." In fact, these articles read literary texts in a directed way as they consider publication history, use field notes, analyze media discourse, look for political resonances in artistic theories, test concepts of affect theory, explore paratextual elements, and perform ecocriticism. Even to the degree that they also engage in "close reading," the combination with the just named methods makes these into research processes that are more directed and structured than the terms "reading" or "close reading" would indicate. The range of approaches represented—if not always articulated—in these twenty articles highlights paths in which teaching can be taken. If we sharpen the concept of close reading with more precise method vocabulary and more intentional classroom analysis, we will get closer to teaching how research projects in literary studies are actually structured and carried out.

As Laurie Grobman and Joanna Garner's survey of literary studies instructors suggests, too many literature courses continue to focus on the somewhat outdated method of close reading or *explication de texte* as their only method for written assignments. Grobman and Garner asked

instructors to rate eleven possible influences on teaching the traditional literary essay and the top reasons were that instructors perceived this assignment to meet students' needs and that they themselves had been taught in this way during their undergraduate and graduate years. Nancy Chick has termed the power of instructors' past learning experiences a form of "pedagogical narcissism" (42). Notably, the instructors in Grobman and Garner's study ranked published research, pedagogy classes, and conference presentations as having the least influence on their teaching—an imbalance that research like my project is attempting to shift.

In the table of method descriptions above I have separated how authors describe their own research methods from how they refer to other scholars' approaches (figure 2). I identified twenty-two instances where method references are used to characterize cited work. Some of these method references are similar in density and function to noun method phrases used in other disciplines: "studies of individual Canadian literary celebrities," "structural critiques," "studies in labour history," "cultural critique of science," "reclamation," "close readings of literary or cultural texts," "empathetic reading." The thirty-three instances where authors refer to their own methods, however, involve longer phrases and clauses; these more descriptive method references have fewer shorthand noun phrases and are more particular to the project at hand, not easily shared with other projects. It seems that these longer phrases are intended to highlight the uniqueness of the article's approach rather than gesture to similarities with other research the way that common method shorthands do. How literary research is often conducted—with authors not usually setting out with a consciously chosen set of methods—might explain the nature of these descriptions. Research writing in literature is often heuristic in that authors rarely decide what their methods are at the planning stage and, instead, only discover them later, in the process of writing and revising. In the midst of that heuristic process authors might thus reach for lengthier, made-to-order descriptions of research methods rather than return to shared shorthands and method definitions that have already been developed by others.

Following Thieme and Makmillen's point that method names function akin to genre names, I note that such lengthier, made-to-order descriptions can deprive a project of links to other projects, of participating more visibly within a community of researchers. If there is not a set of names that help pinpoint methodological closeness or distance, how are readers—especially student readers—to tell of shared affiliations or contrasting approaches between different literary studies projects? If researchers do

not offer method names that can be lifted out of the context of a particular project and held up against a different project's research question, students miss the opportunity to test and question how these methods work in relation to changing sets of questions and primary materials. In both pedagogy and our scholarship, we as literary scholars should consider how we can better and more systematically show the methodological decisions that are part of every research project and discuss more explicitly what the principles are that underlie these decisions. We need to teach and write more about what Linkon calls the "strategic knowledge" of literary research and shift toward "making knowledge and critical practices visible and usable" in classes as well as publications (xi). This paper argues that more systematic discussion of literary methods is part of that process.

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Toward more visible critical practice

In the absence of a functional set of method names, some of the articles in this corpus make claims that appear to go far beyond what can be seen in the analyzed texts. When small selections of texts—sometimes just one text—are being discussed in relation to broad sets of theory or history (often from related humanities fields), method discussion can be the way to secure that tentative relation between one literary text and a big social question. While each of the articles in this corpus was written under particular material conditions as well as with specific limiting decisions made by the researchers, few of them sketch out how the project has been built, by what process a particular set of materials was collected, and what decisions were made about analytical approaches. While these authors' choices must have been guided and constrained in particular ways, they rarely present their path to knowledge-making as a process of research design. Evidence for arguments appears to arrive as if through an unlimited capacity for reading and observation. I suspect that this illusion of limitlessness is highly concerning to student writers who look to these articles for guidance as they devise their own projects. This sense of limitlessness should also be a concern to experienced writers, particularly in their capacities as teachers, supervisors, and peer reviewers. As a discipline, we need to resist more frequently the desire to obscure the practical decision-making that goes into each project and thus shapes the knowledge a certain approach is able to produce.

Acknowledgements

I thank organizers of the International Exchanges Workshop at CCCC 2017 in Portland, Christiane Donahue and Cinthia Gannett. I'm grateful to the workshop participants who provided insightful responses to this project: Christiane Donahue (Dartmouth College), Ann-Marie Eriksson (University of Gothenburg), Magnus Gustafsson (Chalmers University of Technology), Andrew Johnson (Monash University), Shurli Makmillen (Claflin University), Lucía Natale (Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento), and Michelle Riedlinger (University of the Fraser Valley). Thanks also go to Laura Moss for encouraging this work.

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