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The Postcolonial Turn

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Difference

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

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The Postcolonial Turn

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