

CFP *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, Themed Issue (66.4, Fall 2028)

“Decolonizing Historical English Literary Studies”



This transhistorical themed issue of *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* (Fall 2028, 66.4) invites contributions from scholars working in the four centuries of *SEL*’s remit who share a desire to decolonize historical English literary studies. While Indigenous, Black, diasporic, postcolonial, anti-racist, feminist, queer, and trans scholarship have profoundly reshaped literary criticism over the last several decades, the field of historical English literary studies continues to rely upon disciplinary structures rooted in Eurocentric epistemologies and imperial narratives of civilization, progress, and historical development. These structures shape not only the canon but also the temporal frameworks, archival practices, institutional histories, and methodologies through which literary scholarship is organized and legitimized.

Following K. Wayne Yang (writing under the pseudonym la paperson), we approach decolonization as “the rematriation of land, the regeneration of relations, and the forwarding of Indigenous, Black, and queer futures—a process that requires countering what power seems to be up to” (2017). Taking up this capacious definition, we invite scholars who share this decolonizing desire to contribute projects that engage with decolonization as a literary, methodological, institutional, and social project across four centuries and beyond.

This conversation arrives at a critical moment. Across North America, renewed investments in “classical” education and the Western canon have coincided with attacks on Critical Race Theory, Gender Studies, diversity initiatives, and race-conscious institutional practices. At the same time, scholars working in literary studies continue to confront longstanding questions concerning the relationship between literary history and colonial power: whose histories become central to the field, which forms of knowledge count as legitimate, and how historical English literary studies might engage forms of relationality, temporality, and knowledge production beyond Eurocentric frameworks.

Historical periodization remains especially central to these questions. Organizing literary study through categories such as “Early Modern,” “Enlightenment,” “Romantic,” or “Victorian” often reproduces linear narratives of progress tied to imperialism and white epistemologies (Chatterjee, Christoff, Wong 2020). Such rigid temporalities specifically marginalize and create barriers to engaging Indigenous ways of knowing centered around land, kinship, and relationality (Binhammer 2021). Given *SEL*’s traditional structure reliant on periodicity, this transhistorical themed issue offers a deliberately reflexive opportunity to agitate such conventions in a journal that has been previously known for reinforcing those very structures. We seek work that not only interrogates the canon but also examines the structures that continue to organize the field itself.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Indigenous sovereignty, land rights, treaties, and cultural revitalization
- The relationship between literary periodization and imperial narratives of progress
- Indigenous, Black, diasporic, queer, and trans critiques of historical temporality
- The presence and erasure of Indigenous, Black, diasporic, queer, and trans intellectual and literary genealogies within English literature
- Archival silences, reading against the grain, and critical fabulation
- Oral traditions and unconventional forms of textuality
- Community-engaged and relational research methodologies
- Rematriation of Indigenous ancestors and belongings from colonial institutions, including universities, museums, churches, and archives
- Making empire, race, and colonialism visible within canonical English literary texts
- Institutional histories of English literary studies and the politics of disciplinarity
- Transhistorical and comparative approaches that challenge Eurocentric literary histories

Overall, this transhistorical themed issue welcomes contributions that reconsider how literary history is organized, narrated, and institutionalized, and that imagine new possibilities for the study of historical English literature beyond colonial frameworks.

Proposals of 250–500 words and a bio are due by February 1, 2027. Authors will be notified if their proposals have been accepted by March 1, 2027. Full essays of 7,000–8,000 words (inclusive of notes) will be due June 1, 2027 and conform to [SEL submission guidelines](#). This themed issue will be received for review, and submissions will undergo double-anonymized peer review. Inquiries and submissions should be sent to the themed issue’s editor: Willow White (Métis, Cree, settler), wdwhite@ualberta.ca

Works Cited

- Binhammer, Katherine. “Is the Eighteenth Century a Colonizing Temporality?” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 33, no. 2 (2021): 199–204. <https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.33.2.199>.
- Chatterjee, Ronjaunee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, and Amy R. Wong. “Introduction: Undisciplining Victorian Studies,” *Victorian Studies* 62, no. 3 (2020): 369–91. <https://doi.org/10.2979/victorianstudies.62.3.01>.
- la paperson. *A Third University Is Possible*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.