

## **Abstract: Literary Studies Needs an Epistemology, and Philosophy Can Help**

At the height of its disciplinary prowess in the 1980s-90s, literary studies was heavily influenced by continental philosophy, and in turn heavily influenced other disciplines--history, anthropology, gender studies, psychology, and linguistics--with its "linguistic turn." Language and interpretation assumed prominent roles in how several disciplines understood the social world, granting literature departments what many saw (and continue to see) as outsized institutional clout. Yet for all of this cross-disciplinary influence, arising from the fusion of certain areas of literary studies and certain areas of philosophy, analytic philosophy remains conspicuously absent from literary studies. This paper is an effort to describe how analytic philosophy offers a number of important tools for literary studies, specifically in the realm of epistemology. Among the lingering effects of the "linguistic turn" and the rise and decline of "theory" in literary studies is a preoccupation with methods of reading--"close reading," "distant reading," "surface reading," "suspicious reading," etc.--a series of debates that still dominate methodological considerations in literary studies. This paper argues that such a preoccupation with how we read crowds out important considerations of how we know. It argues further that how we read in literary studies is not tantamount to how we know, and that the discipline would be strengthened by the development of an epistemology of literary studies. This paper will trace the contours of what such an epistemology might look like.