英文原版文学理论丛书 (1)

Key Concepts in Literary Theory

(Second Edition)

文学理论中的重要概念

(第2版)

Julian Wolfreys, Ruth Robbins and
Kenneth Womack

中国海洋大学出版社
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出版前言

经过一段时间的酝酿，这套“英文原版文学理论丛书”第一批书目终于和读者见面了。我们出版这套丛书的初衷主要有以下两个方面：(1)我国的外国文学研究有两条战线、两支队伍：一支在文学院，一支在外语学院。改革开放以来，由于国内外学术交流的推进和学科研究的发展，两支队伍逐渐靠拢，比较文学的队伍在渐渐扩大。高等院校外国文学专业不但有很多本科生，而且建设了许多硕士点和博士点。文学理论(通常叫西方文论)是该专业的主干课程之一，但国内过去引进的此类外文原版书很少，有的(包括某些教材)文字太难，师生普遍反映这方面的参考书太少，尤其是适合中文系该专业师生阅读的此类书更少。我们引进这套丛书，就是为了满足广大师生教学科研的这一迫切需要。(2)随着全球一体化的到来，国内外的学术交流越来越快地向深广发展。要进一步促进这种交流的发展，需要做好三个方面的工作：一要较快地提高广大师生的外语能力，达到用外语进行学术交流的水平；二要深入了解国外该学术领域的最新研究成果和发展动态与趋势；三要有目的、有计划地将国内的研究成果介绍给国外的同行。我们引进的这套丛书可以在以上三个方面发挥有效作用，尤其是在提高用外语撰写专业论文与学术著作的水平方面，最有效的方法就是

研读该专业国外原版著作，因为这样既能较深入地了解国外同行的研究成果，又能潜移默化地提高读者使用外语的水平。

在确定书目时，我们的原则是先介绍基础理论方面的著作和最新研究成果，再介绍专题研究，着重从国外主要学术出版社中进行选择。**丛书的读者对象是外语学院与文学院外国文学专业和比较文学专业的教师、研究生和相关领域研究者。**必须指出的是，我们介绍国外的文学理论，并不表明我们完全赞同其观点。有了解才有批判与继承。我们希望读者诸君在全面了解国外同行研究成果的基础上，吸收其有益的成分，摒弃其片面甚至错误的成分，促进文学理论研究在我国的健康发展。

在出版过程中，杨自俭教授从学科建设的高度提出了指导性意见，左金梅教授协助我们确定了部分出版书目，邓红风教授给予了宝贵的技术支持，在此谨致谢意。我们迫切希望更多的文学理论研究者加入到这套丛书的引进工作中来，使我们这套书的规模越来越大，质量越来越高。

Preface to Second Edition

The second, revised edition of *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* has been expanded in two of its three sections, 'Concepts and Terms', and 'Chronology of Critical Thinkers, with Bibliographies'. With the intention of providing a more comprehensive coverage, and so filling in what, in retrospect, now appear obvious omissions, more than eighty terms and their definitions have been added to the first part of the volume. It is hoped that the changes provide additional usefulness to the reader, while, equally, the volume has retained the accessibility, ease of reference, and 'portability' of the first volume. Of the inclusions, the majority are drawn from psychoanalysis, reflecting the continued and sustained interest in this particular approach to literary studies, even while the fortunes of other discourses appear to have waned somewhat. Of the remaining other inclusions, several are 'formalist' in nature, concerned with grammatical, linguistic, and rhetorical terminology that has found a renewed currency in particular areas of discursively focused literary theory. Finally, with regard to inclusion, those concepts or terms not covered obviously by a psychoanalytic or linguistic rubric are drawn from historically or sociologically inflected or influenced critical modes. In the third part, the chronology, around forty additional critics, philosophers, and historians have been added. To the existing entries, a couple of major publications have been included, which appeared subsequent to the original publication of *Key Concepts* in 2002. As with the first edition of *Key Concepts*, in most cases and whenever possible, I have sought to give in-print paperback editions of as many of the publications as possible. The other changes made to the chronology are, sadly, death dates for several of the thinkers listed there.

As ever, once more, and no less sincerely, I would like to thank Jackie Jones at Edinburgh University Press. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Ruth Robbins and Ken Womack for their work on the first edition. Any errors or infelicities, Austinian or otherwise, in the current edition are entirely my own.

Julian Wolfreys, London and Los Angeles July 2005

Foreword

Key Concepts in Literary Theory addresses the evolving nature of critical thinking within literary studies, particularly during the closing decades of the twentieth century – an era that saw a dramatic and highly diverse reconceptualisation of the theoretical project. During this period, literary studies reimagined itself along a number of philosophical, political and cultural axes. The questions asked of the literary text, questions which are still in the process of being articulated and reoriented, brought to bear upon the text interests and concerns from a number of disciplines, discourses and areas of study. In addition to canon expansion and redrawing the boundaries of critical theory regarding a variety of sociological fronts, scholars refined a host of new terms and concepts for examining the minute particulars inherent in gender studies, queer theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism, historical studies and cultural criticism, among a host of other theoretical worlds.

Key Concepts in Literary Theory is then a reference work which arises as a response to the transitions in literary studies. As such, it provides readers with an array of traditional and essential literary concepts and period terms – including *irony*, *existentialism*, *symbolism* and *modernism* – while also enumerating a wide variety of concepts associated with the advent of 'high theory' and the emergence of poststructuralist and postmodernist thought. From *aporia* and *liminality* to *phallocentrism* and *simulacra*, critical theory's increasingly hybrid and endlessly fecundating terminology confronts novice and advanced scholars alike with a host of linguistic and intellectual challenges. How, for example, does one situate his or her own notions of contemporary literary theory within the textual practices of a widely dispersed and vastly changing discipline? How, moreover, do

students troll the often complicated shoals of literary scholarship and decode what they perceive and often resist as its specialised jargon and web of competing terms? How do students intervene in increasingly hybrid discourses so as to gain critical purchase and agency? Conventional dictionaries hardly begin to explain or account for the theoretical project's fluctuating and often chameleon-like lexicon. As a student recently put it to one of the authors of this glossary in response to an assigned reading on a 'theory' course, 'I looked up every word I didn't know in the dictionary and none of them were there!' It is even the case that traditional rhetorical terms or concepts drawn from other disciplines undergo the effects of tropological torque, so that, arguably, knowledge of the 'original' meaning, so called, is of limited use to the student reader.

Of course, in proposing a volume such as this and, moreover, a volume such as this which aims at once to be comprehensive *and* relatively small, we are leaving ourselves hostage to fortune, if not to reviewers. How do we justify inclusions or exclusions? One always wants to ask, especially of the more recent terms, why this and not this? How is the length of a definition to be determined? Which critical vocabularies are to be valued over others? Such questions, while valid, are unanswerable and no short reference work can truly be authoritative and inclusive; yet it seems, more than ever, a small, manageable reference work pertaining to what is called 'literary' or 'critical theory' is needed. Thus it is our intention to provide a succinct and reliable map to the terrain of critical discourse. In doing this, we are seeking not to provide a route map so much as to identify landmarks in an all too frequently difficult terrain. Of course, we run the risk of perhaps intimidating the occasional reader as much as seeking to help them. With this in mind, this volume should be seen as being conceived as much for discussion as it is for definition. This book is intended as a classroom aid, and with that in mind many entries will require further clarification, comment, discussion or elucidation, often with reference to further research, on the part of the professor. It is this work which *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* seeks to open, and to provide the means for inquiry, exploration and engagement.

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While not being able to provide definitions for every possible term in the constellation of theoretically oriented discourse, this volume seeks to afford readers with a guide to critical theory's multifarious, rapidly shifting vocabulary, especially as a response and a responsibility to the student whose dictionary remains silent. In addition to devoting attention to the significant historical nuances of Russian formalism, reader-response theory and psychoanalytic criticism, the concepts explored in this glossary hint at the shape of literary theory's intellectual future. From *technoscience* and *cyberwar*, to *mnemotechnic* and *digitality*, the parlance of contemporary critical theory continues to develop concomitantly with the rhythms and moods of mass culture and technology. What is called, with ever greater potential vagueness, 'literary theory' has enjoyed a similar relationship with gender studies' larger connections with media and popular culture. Drawing upon such terms as *gender parody*, *cyborg*, *masquerade* and *avant-garde*, gender studies – as with other theoretical communities – continues to seek language forms that most precisely express, however strategically or provisionally, various aspects and manifestations of gender in contemporary life. By examining the recent emergence of theoretical terminology in concert with similar developments in contemporary science, technology, literature and culture, *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* underscores critical thinking's remarkable capacity not only for providing critique of literary texts, but also their synergy with the apparently *non*-theoretical issues that mark our lives (which is to suggest nothing other than the fact that these are the issues which resolutely reify or otherwise maintain an invisibility of the theoretical, epistemological and ideological interests which underpin the very idea that we live and think without 'theory', that is to say without forms of reflective, analytical or interpretative processes).

With regard to the choices which determine the content of the present volume, it is, we know, a source of profound irritation when writers and critics insistently refuse to write in words that we understand easily, especially when that comprehension is challenged concerning something apparently so much 'ours' as literature. Transparency is thought of as a great virtue; keeping it simple is propounded as an ideal. To describe someone's language

as laden with jargon is a real insult, as is the suggestion that a scholar wraps up an otherwise straightforward point in a 'needlessly' dense, 'over-intellectualised' discourse (which process has also been described to us as 'pretentious'). But these are views which imply that difficult concepts should be laid out on a plate – anything that's too hard shouldn't be thought at all. That which is difficult is therefore immediately translated, without the reader being aware of the translation process as being in his or her hands, and being not so much a translation as it is an act of resistance – calling a halt to reading – in response to the allergen that is critical discourse. The student is, of course, not to blame for this: he or she is simply exhibiting the symptoms of reading propagated often outside, but also, dangerously, inside the university: a kind of journalistic facility determined institutionally as necessary to the pragmatics of learning which assumes the right to determine the velocity of reading, along with the fallacious assumption of a relationship between the visibility of the text and the transparency of the writing which composes the text. Visibility of meaning (that which, of course, is never simply *there*) somehow must assume a specific oscillation within the written word (which, of course, is resolutely *there* but which somehow is determined as acting as though it weren't) which, as a result, begins to vanish, to reveal what is being said, or should have been said, all along.

Literary and cultural theories problematise the tricky negotiation between visibility and transparency, and are particularly prone to coining new words – coining itself, of course, being a word that has to do with forgery, fakery, inauthenticity and the obfuscation of true value. But we suggest that you imagine for a moment a world in which there are no neologisms – no new words at all. Imagine our vocabularies frozen at a given point in history, with stringent laws that say there must be no more words. What point in history would be ideal, I wonder? The language of Shakespeare, maybe, except that would mean that we would have no vocabulary to cover modern technologies like cars, microwave ovens, speedy printing. Imagine the scenario where a student – not you but someone you know – is heard to say that the language of theory is unnecessarily difficult; then imagine, as part of this

hypothetical scene, the same student remarking that the language of Shakespeare (or the eighteenth-century novel) is too difficult. Are we to do away with both 'languages'? Are the difficulties of the same order? And, if not, should we consider the difficulty not in the text but in the apprehension? And if we don't have the words, would we have the concepts, or the objects? Would it be possible to imagine new inventions, new ideas of any kind?

You will not, of course, be the first people to imagine such a world. George Orwell's 1949 dystopian vision of the future (ironically now in the past), *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is an extended meditation on language frozen, on thought congealed. A particularly chilling moment is Winston Smith's conversation with a Newspeak dictionary maker named Syme who describes a sadistic pleasure in destroying language. 'Don't you see,' he says to Winston, 'that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller . . . there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.' Winston looks in horror at Syme, realising not only the horrible nature of his project, but also that Syme himself, who 'sees too clearly and speaks too plainly' is ironically doomed despite his enthusiasm for Big Brother's project. Anyone who thinks like Syme will not survive in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

But Orwell's novel makes the reverse point as well. If we have lots of new words, we are able to think lots of new thoughts. Unorthodoxy is consciousness, and consciousness takes place in a rich sea of words. We need the new words if critical thinking is not simply to become a repeated gesture, where students and teachers endlessly recycle the same old ideas about the same old texts. I don't want to be part of a project which merely rewards those who repeat what has been said before. Traditionalists are always talking about the 'dumbing-down' of culture; but there are few dumber things than a person who refuses to speak or write because the language is too difficult and too new.

This collection of words is not the last word: there will be other words you need to learn, and you will want to deepen your understanding of some of the terms that are only briefly glossed

here. But this collection of words aims to get you to think new thoughts – thoughts you cannot have without the vocabulary in which to express them. Of course, slavishly using the words without thinking about them would simply make a new unconscious orthodoxy. But using the words creatively, pushing them to their limits: there is something to be said – and it is not a dumb something – in favour of that.

A number of the terms included in *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* are being defined in this kind of reference work for the first time. One of the reasons perhaps for their previous omission from otherwise exemplary reference books is that, beyond or before any question of neologism or novelty, there is a real issue of the problematic of definition and, concomitantly, indefinability. Certain keywords or terms indicate what might best be defined as quasi-concepts, terms which cannot properly be defined in any positive fashion. In order to be true, for example, to the term 'deconstruction' and its appearance in the work of Jacques Derrida, one can say what it is not, how it does not operate, and so forth; yet one cannot say with any fidelity what it is or might be, and this is for the reason that what Derrida might term the ontological question, that is to say the question of definition based on the idea that there is a determinable or determinate identity for 'deconstruction', cannot be given because there is no identity as such, even though many critics have misunderstood Derrida's use of the word. In another example, postmodernism is notoriously difficult to define because there is little agreement about the definition of this slippery term.

An aspect of pushing words to their limits is that the very grounds on which meaning is assumed become, if not untenable, then, at the very least, precarious. This does not mean that critics employ words in any way they like, or that they empty words of meaning. Indeed, quite the opposite is often the case. If a word, after having resided invisibly in the pages of a few dictionaries for a number of years, or, on occasion, centuries, suddenly or gradually comes back into focus, it chances to do so because of what haunts its etymological and semantic structures, what disjoints it anachronistically from within, if we can put it like that. A word, term or concept, trope or other figural manifestation

returns precisely because in its etymology there remain various oscillations which, on the one hand, intimate an afterlife for the word, while, on the other, point up that something strange, something uncanny has always taken place within the structure of the word. Take a long forgotten term such as *deconstruction*, a supposedly familiar, supposedly accessible word such as *supplement*, or a term devoted to a specific discourse or scientific practice such as *anastomosis* – all are read and deployed in the field of criticism for the very reason that, within their structures, their histories or genealogies, there takes place even, or perhaps especially, at what we might provisionally call their 'origins' (and we can no longer assign such a notion unequivocally because this concept too has been complicated within the recent history of critical thinking) what might be termed an originary supplement: a doubting and/or division in the etymology of the word which, in displacing unequivocal meaning at the root, so to speak, disturbs the very idea of a discernible 'true' or unified starting point. Thus, it has been shown that there is not a single, simple origin or genesis *by the very multiplicity or excess of contradictory, if not paradoxical meanings or values inscribed in the structure of a word, and the radical undecideability which this puts to work.* (See the entry on *undecideability*.)

Thus it is not the case that critics are merely being modish in transforming words. Indeed, it is a case that, strictly speaking, the critic cannot be said to have transformed anything at all, other than (hopefully) the reader's comprehension by bringing into focus that which was there all along, albeit occluded, encrypted or repressed as the effect of either neglect or long familiarity. ('Accessibility' is the name we give to the language we have learnt so well that we have forgotten that we have had, at some time, to learn how to use it appropriately, in the proper contexts, and so on.) The transformation of words, as we imply above, is always already underway within particular terms and the critic, as the good reader (see *reader/reading*), has read what is taking place and not imposed something in the name of obscurity or pretension on an otherwise commonplace word.

Thus, it may be said, critical thinking involves itself, in some areas, with acts of 'remembering': remembering what has been

archived, remembering what has been buried, remembering what is in plain view but at the same time erased, worn away, through centuries of linguistic usury – for if so-called new words are 'coined', to recall an earlier term, it follows that, in use, their textures, their complexities, their details, can, in the frequency of exchange (and words *are* a commodity, like or, at least, quite like any other), be worn out, partially effaced, until only the most vestigial and ghostly traces remain, as the remains of linguistic, semantic and etymological complexity. Thus, if you recall the argument presented above concerning that imagined, yet unimaginable scenario where language might become frozen at certain prescribed levels of undemanding accessibility and appropriate facility, such an impossible condition would exist, *could* exist, only through an exorcism of all the ghosts of language. If, as German philosopher Martin Heidegger asserted, language *is* the house of being (see *being*), then it is a house which is inescapably haunted, and it is precisely the condition of haunting for which we are, as readers, responsible, to which we have to respond, and with which we have to deal, without seeking to exorcise that which takes place as the possible condition of all communication and interpretation.

Perhaps what this means is that we have to learn to live with ghosts. Negotiating meanings of terms suggests an activity of mediating between what is visible and invisible in any linguistic and semantic structure, while acknowledging that there will often be that which remains just beyond our grasp. The development of conceptual terminology in the study of literature might be said to operate in the space between the visible and invisible. Seeking to define terms without entombing them, turning them into a corpse language, is a risky business, but it is to be hoped that what takes place here, for the reader of *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*, is an effort to attend to the spirit of language, rather than its letter.

The glossary of critical concepts and terms is accompanied by two other reference sections. With regard to cross-references, recognising that no term operates in isolation but is part of a network from which meaning emerges, we have highlighted those concepts, words and terms which occur on several occasions and

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