

英文原版文学理论丛书 (4)

Modern North American Criticism and Theory A Critical Guide

当代北美批评和理论导读

Edited by Julian Wolfreys



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。有了了解才有批判与借鉴。我们希望读者诸君在全面了解国外同行研究的基础上,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,邓红风教授提供了宝贵的技术支持,丛书诸位学术顾问给予了无私的帮助和鼓励,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。

Modern North American Criticism and Theory

Also available:

Modern British and Irish Criticism and Theory
Modern European Criticism and Theory

Preface

Modern North American Criticism and Theory presents the reader with a comprehensive and critical introduction to the development and institutionalization of literary and cultural studies throughout the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first in North American universities. Focusing on the growth and expansion of critical trends and methodologies, with particular essays addressing key figures in their historical and cultural contexts, the present volume offers a narrative of change, transformation and the continuous quest for and affirmation of multiple cultural voices and identities. It is a narrative on the one hand that traces the movements, schools of thought and institutional allegiances that have emerged, while, on the other hand, it considers the ways in which the close reading and formal analysis of works of literature have given way to more politicized and theorized accounts. From semiotics and the New Criticism to the identity politics of Whiteness Studies, the cultural study of masculinity and the challenge presented to assumptions of cultural value by Comics Studies, *Modern North American Criticism and Theory* provides an overview of literary and cultural study in North America as a history of questioning, debate and exploration.

While emphasizing the practice and theory of literary and cultural criticism in many of its historically specific guises, the present volume also provides extensive critical coverage of related cultural issues in the articles, and the contextual discourses that inform those issues. Clearly the focus is on the institutional practice of criticism and, with that, an implicit narrative develops concerning acts of institutionalization. Another way to understand this is that there takes place repeatedly instances of accommodation, domestication and, in some cases, normalization of currents of thought imported or translated from other disciplines, other fields of thought, and, in the case of so-called high theory from the late 1960s to the 1980s, other cultures of critical thinking.

This is inevitable in any process of institutionalization. It is a matter of what Jacques Derrida has referred to as auto-immunization. Any institution – but it has to be said the university is particularly good at this, and thus exemplifies the means by which institutionalization maintains itself – takes in and makes over just enough of some *other* in order to keep it going. In that act of self-interested maintenance there is also an act of hospitality. Such reciprocity is an inescapable feature of any accommodation. One welcomes the other into one's home, across the threshold, boundary or border as a gesture of hospitality and welcome. But intrinsic to this welcome, inextricably tied up with any such act, is a desire to render the foreign, the other, that which is different, less other, less strange or threatening perhaps. Hospitality assumes both tolerance and neutralization, and it seeks to maintain a

degree of mastery through taking in just enough of the other into its system, immunizing itself if you will, in order to allow it to carry on with business as usual. Again, the university is wonderfully effective in such processes, and nowhere has this appeared to be more the case than in institutions of higher education in North America.

Such incorporations are not without consequences, without the rise of contest and conflict; and also, not inconsequent to the encounters between a more or less idealized notion of community such as the 'university' are the misreadings and misperceptions, the avoidances, the non-reception and even occasionally the hostilities that provide some of the more visible punctuations within the history of criticism and theory. (Hostility, after all, shares its roots, at least etymologically, with *hospitality*.) The articles in the present volume chart and reflect on the accommodations and resistances, the tolerances and intolerances. In this, each article concerns itself not only with the formalist contours and epistemological parameters of a particular discourse or movement, it also acknowledges the cultural, historical and ideological specificities of the emergence and transformation of criticism. Together and individually, the essays offer to the reader a view of the extent to which philosophy, poetics, politics, aesthetics, linguistics and psychoanalysis are part of the densely imbricated textures of critical practice. Furthermore, while remaining aware of the importance of the various contexts within and out of which criticism has grown, the essays herein also concern themselves with the equally important issue of cross-fertilization between the various academic and intellectual cultures under consideration. *Modern North American Criticism and Theory* thus provides the reader with a comprehension of the key issues with the intention of demonstrating that those issues and the fields into which they are woven are marked by, even as they themselves re-mark, an unending and vital process of hybridization – of methodologies, disciplines, discourses and interests. In this, taken together the essays comprising the present volume interrogate implicitly the very condition of the practice and theory of criticism itself.

In presenting the various facets of critical activity across one century approximately, there have been omissions, doubtless. This is true of the shaping of any narrative. Even so, it is hoped that the overall contours of critical practice in North America are not misrepresented, and that, concomitantly, the dominant hegemonies of thought in their particular historical and cultural moments are neither distorted nor in some other manner misrepresented. It has to be said that if there is no such thing as a pure discourse, self-sufficient and closed off from influences, confluences and even contaminations, there is also no such thing as a finite context or group of contexts. One obviously cannot speak of either purely national or universal determinations; equally one cannot ascribe to critical thinking a finite or unchanging condition. The very definition of literary criticism and its institutional manifestations is as an identity always in crisis, and always accommodated as such in its mutability. Intellectual cultures, like literary genres, have moments of historical ascendancy, ideological transformation and hegemonic dominance. Appearing to lose that dominance, going 'out of fashion' as is sometimes perceived in the more journalistic of interpretations, traces, influences, remain, continuing to be transformed, and so to effect the cultures of criticism in which the reader is presently situated. It is with such issues, such processes and cultures of transformation and translation that *Modern North American Criticism and Theory* is purposely involved.

Julian Wolfreys

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1. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and Semiotics

Coined by American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, the concept of semiotics involved, at least initially, the examination of various signs and signifiers in relation to one another. Peirce's linguistic theories underscored the significance of social and cultural interaction as fundamental aspects of language. Peirce's discoveries regarding the three classes of signs and the notion of pluralism, moreover, continue to impact the direction of contemporary linguistics and literary criticism.

As a foundational philosopher and exponent of pragmatism, Peirce would seem, at least on the scholarly surface, to be an unlikely proponent of semiotics and its remarkable impact upon twentieth-century linguistics. Nevertheless, he shared in the establishment of several basic principles of modern linguistics. In 1906, Peirce identified the nature and study of signs as a kind of semiosis. Peirce recognized that the emergence of semiotics as a science in its own right required a more dynamic understanding of signification as a linguistic process. As John Deely observes, Peirce realized that 'semiotics could not be merely a response to the question of the being proper to signs ontologically considered'. Rather, 'response must also be made to the further question of the becoming this peculiar type of being enables and sustains itself by. Symbols do not just exist', Deely adds, '[t]hey also grow' (1990, 23). Understanding the social organicism inherent in signs and symbols, Peirce approached semiotics as a distinctive activity in itself and referred to the relationship between such linguistic components as the product of 'brute force' and 'dynamical interaction'. Peirce defined the actions and relationships of signs in terms of their objectivity, while intuitively comprehending the subjectivity that they take on when considered in regard to the present, to the social and cultural forces that exist in the here and now. Simply put, given historical and cultural moments imbue signs and symbols with variant degrees of meaning dependent purely upon the function of time and place.

Having established the interactional and temporal properties of signs, Peirce demonstrated the nature of their action via the concepts of mediation and triadicity. First, signs are invariably mediated by external forces – history, culture, time – and these mediating entities characterize the ways in which we interpret signs and symbols. The second concept, the process of triadicity, finds its origins in the dyadic relationship between the sign itself and the signified, which refers to the idea that constitutes the sign's meaning. Peirce furthered this notion in terms of a more complex, triadic relationship between the sign and the signified, as well as between the sign and the interpretant, which Peirce

described as 'all that is explicit in the sign itself apart from its context and circumstances of utterance' (cit. Deely 1990, 26). For Peirce, signs become actualized when they represent something other than themselves. Signs exist as mere objects when standing on their own. In other words, signs always depend upon something other than themselves to establish their uniqueness. In Peirce's philosophy, then, signs are inevitably subordinate to their qualities of representation. As Deely notes, 'the key to understanding what is proper to the sign is the notion of relativity, relation, or relative being. Without this content, the sign ceases to be a sign, whatever else it may happen to be' (35). Essentially, signs can only be recognized in a relational context with something other than themselves; hence, signs take on their unique characteristics of being when interpreted in terms of their historical or cultural antecedents.

The Peircean philosophy of triadicity provided the basis for his postulation of the three classes of signs, which Peirce identified in terms of the relationship between the sign and the signified. The first class of signs, the icon, operates by virtue of its shared features and similarities with that which it signifies. In his work, Peirce referred to the icon rather opaquely as a 'possibility involving a possibility, and thus the possibility of its being represented as a possibility' (cit. Merrell 1997, 53). In *Peirce, Signs, and Meaning* (1997), Floyd Merrell describes icons in regard to their inherent self-referentiality as 'signs of themselves and themselves only' (54). The notion of the index, Peirce's second class of signs, denotes a kind of sign that enjoys a natural relationship with the cause and effect of what it signifies. As Merrell explains, 'Indices, by nature binary in character, ordinarily relate to some *other*' (54). The third class of signs, the symbol or 'sign proper', refers to the unnatural relationship between the sign and its signifier. These symbols ultimately function as the words that constitute the nature of a given language. Peirce described the concept of the symbol as 'a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant' (cit. Lidov 1999, 93). David Lidov usefully recognizes the dependent relationship that exists between Peirce's three classes of signs. While the notion of the symbol has since come to refer to a broader range of textual and linguistic referents in literary studies, Peirce's classification schema continues to impact on the ways in which we understand the interrelationships – indeed, the dependency that exists – between language and the objective reality of a given historical or cultural moment (1999, 93–4).

Peirce's contributions to semiotics also include his expansive philosophies of pragmatism and pluralism, schools of intellectual thought that continue to impact on the course and direction of scholarship in the humanities. Peirce introduced his ground-breaking philosophy of pragmatism during a 1903 lecture at Harvard University. His concept of pragmatism finds its roots, moreover, in our collective understanding of the larger ethical and communal matrix of human behaviour. More than a simple practical approach to life and human discourse, Peirce's pragmatism involves a recognition of the highest form of good, which he describes as the ways in which communities search for forms of higher truth. Peirce ascribes a given person's capacity for accomplishing a higher sense of goodness to their ability to achieve what he refers to as self-control. 'In its higher stages', Peirce writes, 'evolution takes place more and more largely through self-control, and this gives the pragmatist a sort of justification for making the rational purport to be general' (cit. Corrington 1993, 53). By entering into the development and community of the world, then, the pragmatist in Peirce's formulation evolves toward ideal states of being that imbue life with more rational and objective senses of reality. In a 1905 essay on 'Issues of Pragmatism', Peirce attributes his philosophy of pragmatism to a kind of critical common-

sensism, which, in the words of Robert S. Corrington, 'applies evolutionary thinking to the unconscious and foundational propositions of our moral and scientific life' (1993, 54). Honouring the strictures of critical common-sensism affords pragmatists with the capacity for enjoying greater possibilities for self-control and rationalism.

The seemingly logical intellectual result of his notion of a pragmatic philosophy, Peirce's concept of pluralism finds its origins in the multifarious ways in which we perceive the worlds in which we live. In Peirce's philosophical purview, our sensory perceptions of the world are contingent upon the interdependence between our experiences – however divergent they may be – of reality and the facticity inherent in the perceived worlds of our human others. 'The real world is the world of sensible experiences', Peirce writes, and 'the sensory world is but a fragment of the ideal world' (cit. Rosenthal 1994, 3). The notion of possibility – in fact, the very same concept of possibility inherent in the vague spaces of reality that exist between our real worlds and our sensory worlds – operates as the foundation for Peirce's philosophy of pluralism. Sandra B. Rosenthal ascribes the philosopher's ultimate vision of plurality to a comprehension of the power inherent in our creative selves:

Human creativity can be understood as a uniquely specialized, highly intensified instance of the free creative activity characteristic of the universe within which it functions, and the conditions of possibility of human freedom in general, as self-directedness rooted in rationality, are to be found in the conditions that constitute the universe at large and within which rationality emerges. (Rosenthal 1994, 126)

Clearly, Peirce's ideas of possibility and pluralism – rooted, as they are, in notions of freedom and rationality – offer a fertile intellectual background for the analysis of signs, symbols and signifiers, open-ended concepts that are invariably contingent upon the infinitely more powerful social forces of a given historical and cultural moment.

Kenneth Womack

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