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Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century 21世纪批评理论导读

Edited by Julian Wolfreys

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Julian Wolfreys

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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。

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INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPMENTS, DEBATES, DEPARTURES, DIFFERENCES, DIRECTIONS

Julian Wolfreys

INTRODUCTION? WHAT INTRODUCTION?

Any volume announcing itself as ‘introducing criticism at the twenty-first century’, whether directly or indirectly, immediately falls foul of its own, perhaps hubristic, project. After all, in the most basic sense the century in question can hardly be said in purely chronological terms to have got underway, let alone be near its conclusion (there might be philosophical arguments otherwise, but I cannot address those here, as interesting as these might be). The implications of a volume such as this would appear, therefore, to generate certain questions: Can the shape of criticism to come be predicted? Who would be so foolhardy? Does not the act of prediction suppose the eventual arrival of a particular form? Will there be criticism, either as such, or as we know it? Will there be universities and institutions of higher education in one hundred years’ time? If there are, will there still be Departments of English and Cultural Studies or, more generally, studies in what we call the humanities? As much as such questions might sound like idle sophistry, there are very real concerns behind them. Even a cursory knowledge of the history of the development of literary studies, studies having to do with vernacular rather than ‘classical’ literature, will indicate a life of just over one hundred years, with cultural studies being much younger.

It has to be remarked, then, from the outset or, if at all possible, slightly before beginning, that *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century* does not endeavour to be predictive. The present collection of essays does not attempt any form of

proleptic gesture. Rather the reverse is the case, in fact, each of the essays here being in some measure, if not retrospective exactly (they are not in any straightforward sense surveys of 'where we are', or 'how we got to be here'), then *interruptive*: the various chapters of the present volume situate themselves within current aspects of critical discourse, gathering the discourses which come to inform the positions and interests under discussion as so many incisions or, to think this another way, intensities – instants of a provisional gathering of flows and forces. Each essay addresses the fluidity of various 'states of criticism' at the beginning of the century, taking into account how the different, yet occasionally overlapping critical discourses have come to assume their present identities. At the same time, however, of the thirteen essays presented here, not one is content simply to offer a disinterested survey. These are not, to use the language of speech-act theorists, extended constative utterances. Having something of the performative of them, they not only traverse their respective fields, they also transform. And more than this, the essays of this collection not only engage in discrete ways with the particular critical 'lines of flight' that come to inform their own singular articulations, they also overflow any arbitrarily imposed boundaries of a particular field of interest, in many cases touching upon implicitly or otherwise more directly addressing concerns and issues raised by other essays in this volume.

INTRODUCING INTRODUCTIONS

Consider the following definitions of 'introduction', taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

1. a. The action of introducing; a leading or bringing in; a bringing into use or practice, bringing in in speech or writing, insertion, etc.
b. Something introduced; a practice or thing newly brought in, etc.
c. An inference. *Obs. rare.*
2. The action or process of leading to or preparing the way for something; that which leads on to some result; a preliminary or initiatory step or stage. *Obs.*
3. Initiation in the knowledge of a subject; instruction in rudiments, elementary teaching. *Obs.*
4. That which leads to the knowledge or understanding of something. a. In early use, that which initiates in a subject, a first lesson; in *pl.*, rudiments, elements (*obs.*).
b. A preliminary explanation prefixed to or included in a book or other writing; the part of a book which leads up to the subject treated, or explains the author's design or purpose. Also, the corresponding part of a speech, lecture, etc.
c. A text-book or treatise intended as a manual for beginners, or explaining the elementary principles of a subject.
d. A course of study preliminary and preparatory to some special

- study; matter introductory to the special study of some subject, e.g. of a book or document of the Bible.
5. a. The action of introducing or making known personally; *esp.* the formal presentation of one person to another, or of persons to each other, with communication of names, titles, etc.
c. The process of becoming acquainted, or that makes one acquainted, with a thing.
 6. *Mus.* A preparatory passage or movement at the beginning of a piece of music.

There is, clearly, more than one 'introduction'. We appear to have a family of introductions, allowing for the moment the figure of the family as the appropriate collective noun for introductions, while still allowing for the fact that difference, as much as any resemblance, is vital in the production of any identity or meaning. Each shares elements in common, while some are more familiar than others; certain of these definitions alert us to a fall into disuse. In what ways do these determinations of the notion of introduction and the introductory apply to *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*? In what manner, if at all, are they 'appropriate'? Can they be appropriated, is it proper to do so? Or is it improper to assume that an 'introduction' can ever truly be so, whether in some propaedeutic or apodictic fashion?

There are six principal definitions for introduction, and, in each of these, further subdivisions for the purpose of determination. Introduction is introduced, but never simply for the first time. There is something excessive at work in the very idea of the introductory, so much so in fact, that the dictionary feels the need to keep reintroducing it, as though it somehow knew that the very work of introduction will always and in some fashion overflow its own boundaries, that it will disseminate itself in excess of the very contours assumed for the so-called concept that goes by the name of introduction. Introduction exceeds its parameters in the very act of speaking of itself. Despite the desire to remain constant in its constative constitution – there's that speech-act theory creeping in again – there appears to be some kind of disruptive performative at work here. Every time introduction is introduced, something different, some sign of difference incommensurable with or irreducible to the confines of the introductory, takes place in the very gesture of preamble or overture. This, I would contend, is precisely what takes place, again and again, in each of the chapters presented here. Each chapter is supposedly 'introductory' in its own right, and yet each disrupts the introductory in its critical interventions, its epistemological interests. In doing so, the propaedeutic function of the 'introduction' is left in ruins.

Or, rather, say that criticism which is transformative does not so much point out, desire or attempt to bring about the ruination of any pedagogical work grounded in the belief of preliminary work, often, in the case of criticism, having to do with methods or theories which, once learnt, can then be put into practice;

instead, the kind of criticism envisioned in this volume makes it possible to understand how the imperative towards knowing the fundamentals that is implied in both the general conceptualization of 'introduction' and in the specific institutional drive to separate the introductory from the supposedly more 'advanced' work is always, in its very processes, already in ruins. Like the phenomenon which becomes available to our view through a consideration of the nature of multiple definitions concerning 'introduction', *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century* stresses the impossibility of any simple introduction; it keeps 'introducing' and, in doing so, keeps on exceeding introduction, recognizing as it does that the notion of introduction is fallacious, to the extent that no entry onto a subject can ever be *for the first time*. No beginning gesture ever takes place which does not imply or otherwise orientate itself with regard to other forms of knowledge. Even a 'rudimentary teaching' operates through the possibility of relation and orientation, the principle being that something new can be shown only because the 'new' can be explained with reference to something not new. Every introduction fails, therefore, inasmuch as it is impossible to state first principles, and this failure is the sign not so much of what is lacking as it is of that excess within the introductory of which I have already spoken.

ORIENTATIONS

Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century is organized around five themes or motifs: *identities, dialogues, space and place, critical voices, materiality and the immaterial*. As will be understood immediately, none of these 'orientations' of the act of criticism implies methodologies, approaches, schools of thought. Instead, each operates, in a more or less oblique way, by naming certain interests of criticism having emerged in recent years, and which continue to provide different epistemological foci in the humanities, largely as a result of the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of critical and cultural studies.

The first three chapters address the question of how our identities are understood, how they are constructed, and how they are projected, both by ourselves and by others. Each of the chapters stresses how manifestations of identity, often imposed from without, either strive to determine particular social and cultural groups, frequently in negative or limiting ways, or alternatively, in being engaged from within those groups in a self-reflexive fashion, come to affirm alternative ideologies of identity. Acts of criticism and critical articulation offer ways of reading such alternative affirmations.

Sudesh Mishra explores how diaspora criticism, a genre of theoretical writing, marks itself off as a distinct domain by positing, circumscribing and specifying an object called 'diaspora'. Using the experiences of classical diasporic groups (Jews and Armenians) as a point of departure, diasporists, Mishra argues, attempt to account for the mass dispersal of various ethnic collectivities in the time of (late) modernity. The assumption is that transnational capital generates hypermobile populations that can be clearly distinguished from other

types of social formations. Emphasis is placed on hybrid identity formations, multiple identifications and double consciousness – in short, forms of subjectivity and subject constitution that define and describe such translocated clusters. Diasporic art, music, film, literature, architecture, clothing and cuisine are seen to furnish symptoms of this peculiar way of being and belonging.

Sarah Gamble's chapter looks at the rapidly expanding field of gender and transgender studies, beginning with Judith Butler's assertion that gender is not innate but 'performed' upon the surface of the body. It then moves on to the writings of transgender theorists such as Kate Bornstein and Ricki Ann Wilchins, who base their arguments on the idea that gender is a radically unstable category dependent upon personal experience. The chapter ends with an analysis of Angela Carter's novel *The Passion of New Eve*, a futuristic fable in which no gendered body is ever what it appears to be.

In their chapter, Tace Hedrick and Debra Walker King emphasize the work of women of color who seek to use the notion of love, and of mutual care, as epistemological frameworks designed to produce a 'knowledge' from which both a critical oeuvre and an activism can emerge. The chapter offers critiques of the value of current critical and analytical work produced by Black, Latina and Chicana feminist critics, and discusses the cultural activism of performers like Lil' Kim and Jennifer Lopez, aided by the critical work of writers such as bell hooks. Hedrick and King's purpose is to address current trends in pop culture in an attempt to reinvest representational analysis with notions of self-love and mutual care. The authors suggest that current manipulations of sexuality fail to do the work of recuperation and redefinition that they are intended to achieve. They suggest, instead, that the liberating movements of sexual healing enacted as loving confrontations with the self, the other and the past, provide a place for current constructions of social, personal and private realities to be successfully reformulated.

The second part of this volume concerns itself with dialogues – dialogues between literary and cultural criticism and other discourses and disciplines. Particularly, scientific, philosophical and psychoanalytic discourses are witnessed in communication with literary and cultural studies, as critics seek to explore what literature and textuality in general have always addressed, but which has remained relatively unexplored until recently. The question of dialogue is engaged, therefore, from the perspective of the critical act, in order to open the work of reading beyond its traditional confines.

Stuart Sim's chapter outlines the major features of chaos and complexity, scientific theories which challenge some of our most deeply held notions about the nature of reality. In particular, chaos and complexity problematize the notion of identity, a pressing concern of recent critical and cultural theory, as well as a major theme of authors from the early days of the novel to the present. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*, both narratives which self-consciously engage with the problem of identity in terms of the scientific theories of their time, are then analysed, to demonstrate that chaos and complexity inform both narrative and critical practice.

Questions about ethics continue to exert a significant influence upon the direction of contemporary literary criticism, as Kenneth Womack's contribution makes clear. In addition to addressing particularly striking aspects in continental philosophy's interest in matters of ethics alongside North American manifestations of ethical criticism, Womack examines the revealing differences that exist between each paradigm's approach to the ethical nature of human interrelationships. Drawing upon exemplary readings of George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich*, this chapter illustrates each movement's modes of ethical critique.

Julian Wolfreys' chapter also speaks to ethical concerns in relation to the question of reading, but it does so specifically to reflect on an ethics of reading in the wake of what a number of critics define as an age of trauma: the twentieth century. The chapter begins by asking what the responsibility of critical reading is, and what might be understood as the relation between literature and acts of bearing witness in response to traumatic events and its aftershocks. Engaging in dialogues with psychoanalysis, philosophically inflected debates concerning responsibility and testimony, the representation of history, and the question of the efficacy of history as a narrative discourse in the face of traumatic and catastrophic events, the chapter considers the necessity and the obligation of reading to exceed any formal calculation or programme of analysis, in order to respond appropriately to the idea that all literature is an act of bearing witness.

The chapters gathered under the motif of *space and place* all concern themselves with the development of critical interventions concerned with the identities of the locations we inhabit, and which, in turn, determine who we think we are.

Kate Rigby considers the burgeoning new area of 'ecocriticism' as entailing a remembering and revaluing of the earth in the context of global ecological imperilment. She argues that ecocriticism emphasizes the indebtedness of human culture to the more-than-human natural world, while also exploring critically the constructions of 'nature' that are frequently embedded in literary, philosophical and religious texts and traditions, noting that these views of 'nature' have implications for the treatment of subordinate humans as well as for the earth. She then proceeds to show how ecocriticism challenges earlier human-centred methods of literary and cultural analysis, practices of canon-formation, and understandings of language and textuality, before concluding with a model reading of Wordsworth's *Home at Grasmere*.

Phillip Wegner's chapter maps out what he terms the spatial turn in contemporary literary and cultural criticism. Beginning in the latter part of the 1960s and the early 1970s, thinkers from a number of different disciplines began to call into question dominant assumptions about space and spatiality that had come to prevail in the histories of western modernity. Against such presuppositions, the work of these diverse thinkers shows in a stunning variety of ways how space itself is both a production, shaped through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions, and a force that, in turn, influences,

directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human being in the world. This new attention to the productions of space has entered into literary studies from a number of different directions: from Marxism and critical theory, colonial and postcolonial studies, feminism and gender studies, popular culture and genre studies, and a rich and growing conversation with work being done in a broad range of other disciplines. At the same time, such a spatial turn calls into question the very constitution of the literary canon, as it helps the reader become more sensitive to the different kinds of work that is performed by various literary genres, modes and other forms of textuality. Finally, Wegner suggests that the examination of space and spatiality more generally converges with the burgeoning interest in the issue of 'globalization': for it is here that we can develop the tools that will enable us to 'think' a new kind of global cultural and social reality, as well as our place within it. Wegner concludes the chapter with an exploration of the spatial issues raised by Joseph Conrad's novel, *Lord Jim*.

Stacy Gillis' chapter provides a broad exploration of the auspices of the cybersubject and the nascent field of cybercriticism. Informed by a history of the computer, a study of cyberfiction and the problematics of the posthuman 'body' (again, a consideration of how one's identity is constituted today), it emphasizes the relevance of such terms as hypertext, technopoly and cybercritic to an analysis of contemporary culture. In doing so, it offers a critique of the formation of identity which has to become rewritten and reread, given the transformation of the politics of subjectivity brought about by the shift from the topoi of the land and the urban, as considered in the previous two essays, to the utopos of both virtual space and the 'place without place' of hypertextuality.

The fourth section of *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*, *critical voices*, concerns analytical reorientations having to do with dialogues between criticism and philosophy. While this extends in part the explorations of Chapters 4, 5 and 6, in the second part of the book, *dialogues*, the emphasis in the chapters by Colebrook and Young is on the engagement between critical language and the work of two philosophers in particular, Gilles Deleuze and Emmanuel Levinas. While literary and cultural criticism has been responding directly for some years now to a number of voices outside the discipline of literary and cultural study, it is arguably the case that Deleuze and Levinas offer what are among the most radical epistemological challenges presented to thought.

Claire Colebrook looks at the criticism of the whole notion of theory, through the work of Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze's philosophy was not committed to providing a metaperspective from which we might judge literature, Colebrook argues. Rather, he thought of philosophy as a different and distinct power which might encounter other powers, such as literature. The result of such an encounter, this chapter contends, would not be a 'reading' or 'interpretation' but an act of thought and a way of seeing the text and the world anew.

In 'Levinas and Criticism' Fredrick Young suggests that the crucial problem to be addressed after Levinas is that of relation. Traditional criticism is (unwit-