

英文原版文学理论丛书 (5)

Modern British and Irish Criticism and Theory A Critical Guide

当代英国和爱尔兰 批评和理论导读

Edited by 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 British and Irish Criticism and Theory

Also available:

Modern European Criticism and Theory
Modern North American Criticism and Theory

Preface

Modern British and Irish Criticism and Theory offers the reader a comprehensive, critically informed overview of the development of literary and cultural studies from the nineteenth century to the present day. Beginning with Coleridge and Arnold, examining the contributions of cultural commentators, aestheticians and novelists, and considering the institutionalisation of literary criticism in the universities of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the book addresses in detailed, accessible and rigorous essays the significance of poetics, literary and cultural studies. Over twenty essays contribute to an understanding of the practice of literary studies, providing a perceptive and often provocative series of critical interventions, which, themselves, engage in the very locations from which criticism and theory have emerged. Roughly, though fairly evenly, divided between studies of the work of particular critics, whose texts have produced sea changes in critical attitude and practice, and analysis of the development and institutionalization of literary and cultural studies throughout the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first, the critics included here focus on, even as they challenge the assumptions behind, the growth and expansion of critical trends and methodologies. The present volume follows therefore a narrative of cultural change and transformation, even as it determines and foregrounds particular contours in that narrative.

Modern British and Irish Criticism and Theory also opens up the continuous quest for, and affirmation of, multiple cultural voices and identities, often incommensurate with one another, within the study of literature and culture at institutions of higher education. It is a narrative that on the one hand traces the movements, schools of thought and institutional allegiances that have unfolded, often though not exclusively along ideological lines. On the other hand, it considers the ways in which close reading and formal analysis of works of literature have given way historically to more politicized and theorized accounts, only to see certain signs of a return to depoliticized formalism. Involved in this is an implicit investigation, from essay to essay and across the collection of the contest for critical position and articulation of that position through successive generations of literary scholars.

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, in order to allow it to carry on with business as usual. The university is wonderfully effective in these processes.

One such place where accommodation might be signalled as also the *sign of neutralization* is addressed in the present volume, in an essay by Martin McQuillan. McQuillan's essay, 'British Poststructuralism since 1968', rightly points up the ironies in not only its own title but also in the very idea of 'British' as an illusory signifier of ideological and historical neutralization, homogenization and the erasure, discursively and materially, of the other – and of many others. One of the many ironies is in the fact that while so-called poststructuralism – in truth not a movement but merely a convenient term for accommodating and so domesticating the multiple and heterogeneous discourses of critical thinking from continental Europe as these have been translated both into English and into English and North American critical practice – has found a few homes in universities, the radicalism assumed in the name 'poststructuralism' has not extended to a self-reflective caution over the terms 'Britain' or 'British'. Those critics who otherwise would see themselves as champions of otherness, difference, alterity, heterogeneity and so on, can be seen as having fallen into some unthinking cultural hole by assuming a notion of undifferentiated Britishness.

That very risk is run in the title of a volume such as the one you are holding, and the history of the kinds of academic accommodation and questioning in which the present volume is involved, as a collection and through the singular voices of each of the critics who constitute that collection, is given no more acute focus than in the title: *Modern British and Irish Criticism and Theory*. Although a distinction between 'British' and 'Irish' is made in the title, whereby a difference, if not a dissimilarity, is advertised between two cultural practices of criticism and the institutions in which such practices are carried on, the title might be read as presupposing, as Martin McQuillan puts it, ideas of 'continuity, stability and exclusion'. The title does not acknowledge difference, dissimilarity or singularity in culture or practice as these might be or are hypothetically voiced in the universities of Scotland or Wales. In this case, it might be argued, such exclusion, such silencing, is a form of colonialism or imperialism because – and again I cite McQuillan – 'Britain' is a concept involving 'ideological union of heterogeneous identities, around an idea of sovereignty derived from a colonial identity'. As he goes on to add, the only identity that critics working in the universities of Wales, Scotland, Ireland and England *might* share 'might be the nomadic internationalism of the professional academic'. (Seen from another aspect, that internationalism could also be read as a privilege of globalization.)

Of course, to a small extent – and this has not been taken far enough – constitutional

reform in 'Britain', so-called, and of 'Britain', has sought to redefine the various cultural identities and their relationships. For many reasons, though, unfortunately too numerous and complex to be investigated here, there is an inescapable ambivalence concerning the terms 'Britain' and 'Britishness', due in no small part to the ideological overdetermination at work in those words. Here, then, is the final irony for now: the title has arrived as an accommodation, however uncomfortable, however problematic, between an English editor and a Scottish academic press. And this has been done in order to accommodate and incorporate in the place of the title those very problematic engagements that, in most if not all of the essays presented herein, are taken up by each of the critics who have contributed, not only in their contributions, but every day, in their teaching and in their research. It remains the responsibility of the reader to perceive in the use of the term 'British' not a coercive or homogenizing imposition but a signal intended to draw attention to the interrogation of the limits of such a cultural and historical denomination, as that analysis takes place directly or otherwise in the practice of criticism in recent decades.

Clearly, then, incorporations are not without consequences. The contributors to the present volume understand this. In such accommodations there also occur the rise of contest and conflict, dialectic and engagement as is implied through my brief reflection on the politics of the title. 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. So, to reiterate: the articles in *Modern British and Irish Criticism and Theory* 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 British and Irish 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 question implicitly the very condition of the practice and theory of criticism itself.

In presenting the various facets of critical activity, there have been, necessarily, omissions. This is true of the shaping of any narrative. Even so, it is hoped that the overall contours of critical practice as staged here 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 enclosed 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 here supposes an identity always in crisis, and always accommodated as such in its mutability. Intellectual cultures, like literary genres, have moments of historical ascendance, 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 British and Irish Criticism and Theory* is purposely involved.

Julian Wolfreys

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Matthew Arnold <i>Ortwin de Graef</i>	1
2. John Ruskin and Walter Pater: Aesthetics and the State <i>Jonathan Loesberg</i>	8
3. Oscar Wilde: Aesthetics and Criticism <i>Megan Becker-Leckrone</i>	16
4. The Cambridge School: Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, I. A. Richards and William Empson <i>Jeremy Tambling</i>	23
5. James Joyce: Theories of Literature <i>Jean-Michel Rabaté</i>	31
6. Virginia Woolf: Aesthetics <i>Jane Goldman</i>	38
7. T. S. Eliot <i>K. M. Newton</i>	49
8. After the 'Cambridge School': F. R. Leavis, <i>Scrutiny</i> and Literary Studies in Britain <i>Jeremy Tambling</i>	56
9. J. L. Austin and Speech-Act Theory <i>William Flesch</i>	61
10. Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and the Emergence of Cultural Studies <i>David Alderson</i>	67
11. Raymond Williams <i>Andrew Milner</i>	75
12. Stuart Hall <i>John Brannigan</i>	84
13. Terry Eagleton <i>Moyra Haslett</i>	89
14. Screen <i>Antony Easthope</i>	94
15. Structuralism and the Structuralist Controversy <i>Niall Lucy</i>	101

16. The Spread of Literary Theory in Britain	108
<i>Peter Barry</i>	
17. Feminism and Poststructuralism	116
<i>Ashley Tauchert</i>	
18. Cultural Studies	126
<i>Ian Baucom</i>	
19. Cultural Materialism	135
<i>John Brannigan</i>	
20. Postcolonial Studies	142
<i>Gail Ching-Liang Low</i>	
21. Gay/Queer and Lesbian Studies, Criticism and Theory	150
<i>John M. Clum</i>	
22. Psychoanalysis in Literary and Cultural Studies	157
<i>Leigh Wilson</i>	
23. Feminism, Materialism and the Debate on Postmodernism in British Universities	166
<i>Gillian Howie</i>	
24. British Poststructuralism since 1968	175
<i>Martin McQuillan</i>	
25. Developments in Literary Theory since 1995	180
<i>Peter Barry</i>	
<i>Contributors</i>	188
<i>Index</i>	189

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and Matthew Arnold (1822–1888)

In 'The Perfect Critic' (1920), T. S. Eliot performs an early critical variation on the commonplace recognition of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Matthew Arnold as foundational figures in the history of modern criticism in English: 'Coleridge was perhaps the greatest of English critics, and in a sense the last. After Coleridge we have Matthew Arnold; but Arnold – I think it will be conceded – was rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic, a popularizer rather than a creator of ideas' (Eliot 1957, 1). If this characterization of Arnold does not quite inspire confidence, the tell-tale 'perhaps' in the praise for his predecessor suggests that Coleridge, too, somehow fails to satisfy Eliot's requirements. A remark later on in the same essay confirms this suspicion:

Coleridge is apt to take leave of the data of criticism, and arouse the suspicion that he has been diverted into a metaphysical hare-and-hounds. His end does not always appear to be the return to the work of art with improved perception and intensified, because more conscious, enjoyment; his centre of interest changes, his feelings are impure. (Eliot 1957, 13)

In the 'Introduction' to *The Sacred Wood*, Arnold's failure to live up to Eliot's definition of a true critic is diagnosed in remarkably similar terms as a swerving from 'the centre of interest and activity of the critical intelligence' (1957, xii) in pursuit of 'game outside of the literary preserve altogether, much of it political game untouched and inviolable by ideas' (1957, xiii). In hindsight, Eliot's observation that both Coleridge and Arnold had trouble keeping the 'centre of interest' of criticism proper firmly in focus would seem to strengthen rather than diminish their claim to foundational status for twentieth-century criticism. For diversions into philosophical hare-and-hounds and the pursuit of political game are hardly exceptional features of contemporary criticism – if anything, they figure prominently among criticism's multiple centres of interest today.

It is tempting to celebrate this apparent decentring of critical practice deplored by Eliot as a welcome turn to impurity, away from what appears as a rigid obsession with the canonical literary artefact as an object of disinterested aesthetic contemplation. Yet such celebration is in danger of repeating the purist obsession it decries. It risks foreclosing the double challenge of literature's constitutive impurity: its resistance not only to the confinement of 'Literature' (or, worse, 'Poetry') to itself as its own self-sufficient 'centre of interest', but also to the programmatic release of literature into the healthy outdoors of philosophico-political relevance. The task of criticism is to monitor this double resistance