

LITERARY THEORY: AN ANTHOLOGY

Second Edition

Edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan



Blackwell
Publishing

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SECOND EDITION

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BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
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108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

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First published 1998 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd
Second edition published 2004 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Literary theory, an anthology / edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. – 2nd ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-4051-0695-6 (alk. paper) – ISBN 1-4051-0696-4 (pb : alk. paper)

1. Literature–Philosophy. 2. Literature–History and criticism–
Theory, etc. I. Rivkin, Julie. II. Ryan, Michael, 1951–

PN45.L512 2004
801–dc22

2003060354

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10.5/12.5pt Ehrhardt
by Kolam Information Services Pvt. Ltd, Pondicherry, India
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom
by T.J. International, Padstow, Cornwall

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Preface

This book began, as one might guess, in the classroom. We have been teaching courses in contemporary literary theory for the past two decades, and we have each had the familiar experience of not being able to match the design of our courses to any anthology currently available. The move from awkwardly assembled xerox packets to an actual anthology has been both a natural outgrowth of our teaching and an astonishingly complex process of research, selection, and projection. For although the germ of the book was our own classroom(s), its destination has always been many classrooms, courses no doubt much different than any we ourselves might teach, and yet ones that our selections would ideally work both to accommodate and to enrich.

The scale of the volume is one expression of its projected flexibility; we felt that an anthology of literary theory needed not only to cover the range of theoretical perspectives or approaches that characterize the era “after the New Criticism,” the era that we take to be that of contemporary literary theory, but also to represent those perspectives with reasonable depth and range. The effect of such a decision, we hope, is that many kinds of courses will find a home in these selections, that a course that takes as its focus Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Post-colonialism, or Psychoanalysis and Gender Studies will find this anthology as useful as one that makes a more extensive survey of theoretical perspectives.

The anthology opens with formalisms – both Russian and American – in a gesture that marks its organization as partly chronological and partly heuristic. That is, we take formalism – at least in its American avatar of New Criticism – to mark the condition of students’ theoretical awareness before beginning the journey into “theory.” To the degree that they have been taught a form of “close reading” as the basic task of literary analysis, they are practicing formalists, though the practice may be, like that of the prose-speaking M. Jourdain in Molière’s *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, an unself-conscious one. Exploring the theoretical premises of a New Critical practice, placing those in conjunction with a historically unrelated yet theoretically cognate predecessor, Russian Formalism, seems like an appropriate way to initiate an exposure to “theory” in its less familiar guises.

The parts themselves have undergone many evolutions; the issue of where to draw the lines, what denomination to use, and where to locate certain selections has been as theoretically complex as it has been practically consequential. While “Deconstruction,” for example, enjoyed a separate life in literary critical history in the US in the 1970s and 1980s, we felt it more appropriate to place it within its historical and intellectual French context, and so you will find Derrida amongst Deleuze and Guattari, and Baudrillard under “Post-structuralism, Deconstruction,

and Post-modernism.” The question of how to categorize some of the more recent kinds of theory, regarding gender and post-coloniality especially, was also difficult, and we opted for big tents in both instances: “Gender Studies,” “Ethnic Literary and Cultural Studies,” and “Post-colonial and Trans-national Studies.” A separate section could easily have been devoted to any of these theoretical projects, each of which has already produced its own “classic” texts, and while attending to these developments has been one goal of the anthology, we wished as well to embrace both the heterodox and the newly canonical. Some of the names in our table of contents may not be readily recognizable for this reason, and our inclusion of these texts is less a sign of presumption regarding future canonicity than it is an indicator of our desire to locate the anthology as much in the contemporary realm as possible. That has meant guessing, and we based our guesses on what we felt would be exciting or helpful in the classroom.

In a desire both to be as inclusive as possible and to represent works not commonly anthologized, we have done a certain amount of excerpting. Our principle has been to represent the core of a given work, and if, to that end, we have sacrificed portions of texts that readers will deem necessary, we can only suggest that our selections constitute a useful beginning to a more extensive acquaintance. We apologize in advance for any such textual editing deemed brutal.

One anomaly of this anthology – though we feel a motivated one – comes in the form of introductions to the parts. Recognizing the pedagogical importance of introductions, we initially selected works that could serve this purpose from the wide range of what has been published. But in certain cases, we found that no one framed the theoretical project in quite the way that our own selections required, and thus found it necessary to write out, in a sense, the logic of our own selection. Thus, while our initial plan was always to let the editorial task be one of selection, to let the theorists speak for themselves, we found that in certain cases our work of selection would not be well served unless accompanied by an appropriate introduction. In some cases we were able to perform this task with relative brevity; in other cases we found a longer exposition required. So although the parts are variously introduced, our hope is that in each case the job is done in such a way that the selections that follow make sense to students encountering the material for the first time.

In making an anthology of this kind, one cannot help but be aware of one’s location in the “canon wars,” those struggles in recent years over who or what shall be taught in general literature or cultural history courses on the undergraduate level. To the degree that it at all self-consciously engages with those debates, this book is an effort to bring together from a variety of heterogeneous origins some of the literary theories that have helped inspire those debates, in as much as they are about new methods of literary, cultural, and social analysis.

A final word about our cover illustration. The words “No Radio” refer to a sign people put in their cars in New York City. It means “don’t bother breaking into the body of this car; the radio has already been either stolen or else removed by the owner.” We asked Blackwell to use this image because it speaks to the reservations many still feel about “theory” and about its association with the ideology of mastery through critical analysis that murders to dissect. It also speaks, of course, to our hesitations as editors engaged in the compilation and dissemination of such theories. We would not summon the image (and we would not engage in the work) if we did not feel that “theory” is itself filled with doubt regarding the objectivist ideal the

image so carefully mocks. Some theories do indeed fulfill the aspirations of the man with the heart in his hand, but we hope you will feel that there are many others in this book that adopt the perspective of the woman on the table.

Preface to the Second Edition

This second edition of *Literary Theory: An Anthology* records in its arrangement changes that have occurred since we did the first edition. Post-Colonial Studies has emerged as a distinct enough area from Ethnic Studies to merit a section of its own. And Ethnic Studies has been deepened and broadened by the emergence of new scholarly voices in Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic American literary studies. We have added a new section entitled “Rhetoric, Phenomenology, Reader Response” to make up for an absence in the first edition. We have also extended the reach of the sections on Psychoanalysis, History, Structuralism, Marxism, and Cultural Studies by including new selections. Our aim, as in the first edition, has been to combine a sense of the intellectual background of a critical or theoretical approach with a representative sampling of voices in the contemporary critical scene. We have designed this edition to be used on its own, but it can also be used in tandem with *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*, which conducts readings of a small selection of literary works from the theoretical perspectives represented in this anthology.

Acknowledgments

We have occasionally modified translations.

Without Asha Nadkarny and Chi Chan, this book would not exist. We thank them, and we thank all the students in our introductory criticism courses over the years who helped shape our perceptions of what literary theory is and of what *Literary Theory* would have to be.

And thank you, Gabriel and Nathaniel, for being so patient.

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