

Modern Western Literary Theory and Criticism

当代西方文论

左金梅 申富英 张德玉 编著

中国海洋大学出版社

当代西方文论

**Modern Western Literary
Theory and Criticism**



中国海洋大学出版社

China Ocean University Press

青岛 · Qingdao

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

当代西方文论/左金梅,申富英,张德玉编著. —青岛:中国海洋大学出版社,2005.9

ISBN 7-81067-727-6

I. 当… II. ①左…②申…③张… III. 文艺理论—西方国家—现代—英文 IV. I0

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2005)第 068892 号

中国海洋大学出版社出版发行

(青岛市鱼山路 5 号 邮政编码:266003)

出版人:王曙光

发行部电话:0532-82032573,82032644(传真)

编辑室电话:0532-88661615,82032122

网址:www.buc.edu.cn

日照报业印刷有限公司印刷

新华书店经销

开本:850mm×1168mm 1/32 印张:11.25 字数:450 千字

2005 年 9 月第 1 版 2005 年 9 月第 1 次印刷

印数:1~2 100 定价:22.00 元

前言

《当代西方文论》是英语专业语言文学研究生和英语专业本科高年级学生学习西方文艺理论与批评方面的知识的一本专业教材。本书根据目前高等院校英语专业教学的实际需要和我们近几年来编写出版受到广大读者好评的《美国文学》、《英国文学》、《西方文学纲要及选读》的经验,在教学实践中不断完善的基础上编写而成。本书的特点是内容新颖,资料翔实,理论与实践相结合,实用性强,层次、条理分明,对于从事文艺理论、文艺批评研究的专业工作者也有重要参考价值。

本书内容包括 Introduction 和十二个章节。Introduction 介绍了文艺批评和文艺理论的界定。第一章是西方文艺理论与批评的历史简介,其余章节从历史背景、理论原则、代表批评家、批评实例、实践阅读等方面对当代西方文论流派(俄国形式主义、新批评、心理分析、马克思主义、读者反应、结构主义、后结构主义和解构主义、新历史主义、女权主义、“怪异”理论、后殖民主义)作了详细的阐述。

在本书的编写过程中,李方木、于洁、丁莹莹、侯霞、叶建新、于利华、李任卿、王艳艳、渠红丽、任丽丽等在文字输入等方面给予了一定的帮助,刘冬萌、李方木、于洁在资料收集和校对上也做了大量的工作。在此谨向他们表示衷心的感谢。

由于资料有限,书中难免有疏误之处,恳请读者予以谅解、指正。

左金梅

2005年3月8日

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 The History of Western Literary Theory and Criticism	3
Chapter 2 Russian Formalism	25
Chapter 3 New Criticism	57
Chapter 4 Psychoanalytic Criticism	96
Chapter 5 Marxist Criticism	140
Chapter 6 Reader-Response Criticism	171
Chapter 7 Structuralism	199
Chapter 8 Poststructuralism and Deconstruction	230
Chapter 9 New Historical and Cultural Criticism	255
Chapter 10 Feminist Criticism	278
Chapter 11 Queer Theory and Criticism	312
Chapter 12 Postcolonial Criticism	336
Selected References	354

Introduction

What Is Literary Theory

Literary theory and literary criticism are areas of potential confusion. Generally speaking, **literary theory** is the study of the principles of literature, its categories, criteria, and the like. It should do two things. It ought to provide us with a range of criteria of identifying literature in the first place, and an awareness of these criteria should inform our critical practice. Secondly, it should make us aware of the methods and procedures which we employ in the practice of literary criticism, so that we not only interrogate the text but also the ways in which we read and interpret the text. Strictly speaking, we should make a further distinction between “literary theory” and “critical theory”, in that literary theory is primarily concerned with what “literature” and the “literary” are, whereas critical theory is concerned with the nature of criticism and critical practice. The two aspects tend to be subsumed under the general category of “literary theory” and indeed some theorists are more often discussing critical theory than literary theory, which points to the flexibility, or perhaps imprecision, of terminology which has constantly dogged literary studies in unfortunate ways. Clearly, though, the two areas of theory are not mutually exclusive in the same way that literary criticism and literary theory are not totally separate: indeed they should inform each other and so have an interdependent relationship. In English, “literary criticism” is frequently used in such a way as to include literary theory.

What Is Literary Criticism

Literary criticism involves the reading, interpretation and commentary of a specific text or texts which have been designed as literature. This tends to be the predominant activity associated with literary study; it is practiced by professional critics and circulated in published form from books to journals, and it is also practiced by all students of literature in essays, examination answers or dissertations. The rise of "English" over the last century involved the pursuit of literary criticism as its main activity. The term "criticism" begins to achieve a significant prominence in association with "English" and literary studies from the late nineteenth century and continues to develop in usage in various ways in the twentieth century. The nineteenth-century poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold began to use the term "criticism" with particular emphasis, for example, in his essay on "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1876). The term "practical criticism" introduced by the twentieth-century literary critic L. A. Richards, and its subsequent formal teaching and assessment activities, are an example of how it became a central feature of English studies. Prominent critics, such as F. R. Leavis, became identified as the key practitioners of criticism; it is worth noting that several authors of literary works also wrote literary criticism, for example, Henry James or T. S. Eliot.

Chapter 1 The History of Western Literary Theory and Criticism

The history of Western literary theory and criticism can be roughly divided into four periods: Classical Criticism, Neo-classical Criticism, Romantic Criticism and Modern Criticism.

Classical Criticism

Nothing is more remarkable in the history of literary criticism than the way in which theories launched in the classical age have kept a grip on people's mind. The outstanding critics in the classical age were Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus.

Plato (427-348 B.C.)

Plato, the great ancient Greek philosopher and thinker of idealism, was also a great critic. He presents his teaching in dialogues, using his teacher Socrates as the central spokesman. Socrates lures his listeners into expression of opinion, then dissects them, and brings to light contradiction, absurdity, or shallowness inherent in what they have said. Plato wrote more than forty dialogues, which were collected in one book entitled *The Dialogue of Plato*. His dialogues cover many aspects — politics, philosophy, law, ethics, education, and artistic criticism. His critical ideas of art mainly center in such pieces as *The Republic* and *The Ion*, in which he formed a rather dismissive attitude towards imaginative literature.

For Plato, literature is all a kind of imitation of the real thing. However, that "real thing" — the chariot or the medicine or the

fishing — is not the real thing. He formulated a doctrine of **Ideas**, or **Forms**, which has had a seminal influence on Western thinking because it tackled questions of the nature of reality and of temporal existence which press upon human beings in all ages. Plato recognized that prior to this circle I draw or that circle you draw (with whatever defects they may have as a result of our being unskillful) is a notion or idea of circularity which is perfect, and against which the defects, however microscopic, of any given circle must be judged. Similarly milk or paper is judged to be “white” by reference to a prior mental idea of “whiteness” to which the color of milk or paper approximates. What applies to “circularity” or “whiteness” applies to abstractions such as “justice” and “beauty”. We are continually defining acts as just, or objects as beautiful by reference to standards of perfect justice and perfect beauty excelling anything we can point to in our environment. The priority of the perfect form which is eternal to the imperfect manifestations of it which pass away with time is the keystone of the philosophy which came to be called “Realism” as opposed to “Nominalism”. The collision between these two doctrines was a dominant issue in the Middle Ages. For the “realist” the concept “beauty” is prior to any instance of the beautiful. For the “nominalist” the universal concept “beauty” is merely a name for what is recognized as common to all instances of the beautiful.

Now Plato's doctrine of forms reduces the status of what is around us, in that it is but an inadequate and ephemeral representation of what is perfect and eternal. The poet's representation or imitation of our world is thus a representation of what is itself an inadequate and ephemeral representation of the truly real. Literature stands, in other words, not at one remove from reality, but at two removes. The philosopher will try to discern through the world of phenomena that reality of which those phenomena are the reflection. The poet, on the other hand, by his imitation of the world of phenomena, moves in the opposite direction further

away from the reality. Thus art becomes the shadow's shadow.

Plato's concept of imitation determines certain emphases by which he manages to give a questionable status to literature. The first is the emphasis which stresses that literature is a second-hand version of life. The second is the emphasis which regards writers as impersonators (persons who imitate the behaviors of others). The third is the emphasis on the unreliability of the writer's presentation of life. In all these respects Plato sheds around the world of imaginative literature an aura of falsity.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

Aristotle was the Western world's first literary critic to produce a work of literary criticism, the *Poetics*, a work which has influenced theorizing about literature ever since it was written. Aristotle's philosophical thinking diverged crucially from that of Plato. Where Plato's doctrine of universal Forms focuses primary significance onto the eternal, of which the natural is but a reflection or copy, Aristotle's thinking concentrates on the reality to be discerned in individual things. He sees a coming together in them of matter and universal form. Where Plato's thinking is poetic to the extent that his idealistic flights verge on mysticism, Aristotle's bent is scientific, and he endows natural phenomena with a validity that Plato transferred to the timeless.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle sought not only to define the nature of the forms of epic, tragedy and comedy, but also to produce a kind of manual for writers who wished to write in these forms. The central bulk of the *Poetics* concentrates on **tragedy**. His definition of a tragedy is:

A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, . . . in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.

Aristotle explains that in focusing upon tragedy, what he has to say will apply to epic, too, because whatever is found in epic can also be found in tragedy. He spells out the six formative elements of tragedy: Spectacle (the appearance of the actors); Diction (the verse they speak); Melody (the chanting of the verse); Character (the personalities of the *dramatis personae*); Thought (the reasoning and motivation which determine their actions); and Plot (the combination of incidents).

For Aristotle, plot is the most important formative element of the six. His emphasis on plot makes selection and organization of material crucial in a work of art. A plot must have a beginning, a middle and an end. That is to say, a haphazard or arbitrary arrangement of incidents will not do. There must be cogency (quality of being convincing) and naturalness in the placing and sequence of events. His definition of a good plot is:

The story... must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole.

Turning to a more technical aspect of what makes a good plot, Aristotle further elaborates what he meant by "Peripety" and "Discovery". The incidents in a tragedy must arouse "pity" and "fear", and they will do so most effectively when there is a combination in them of what is unexpected and yet occurs in the logical sequence of things. The reversal of fortune (**Peripety**) and the change from ignorance to knowledge (**Discovery**) may occur in various forms. The most powerful dramatic effects are produced when a Discovery is itself attended by Peripeties. (We might reflect on Othello's discovery that Iago is a villain and that he has murdered an innocent wife.)

Two of Aristotle's terms require special emphasis. One is **mimesis** which is translated as "imitation". It is evident from Aristotle's attention to plotting that he does not by "mimesis"

mean that art should be a "literal" or "photographic" representation of reality. Material from life should be selected and carefully organized. With this proviso, it is obvious that imaginative literature will inevitably be imitative of real life. In Hamlet's advice to the players, he defines the purpose of drama as being at all times to hold the mirror up to nature, "to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure". Aristotle's term **catharsis** has become as much a part of critical vocabulary as has "mimesis". A catharsis is a purgation. Aristotle appears to regard it as a beneficial effect of tragedy that the emotions of pity and fear are aroused, expressed, and yet contained in such a way that the spectator is left in a more balanced and disciplined emotional state as a result of the experience. The notion of purgation seems to be the nearest Aristotle comes towards a moral justification of imaginative literature which would refute Plato's criticism of poetry for its tendency to arouse feelings irresponsibly and perturb the heart to no rational end.

Horace (65-8 B. C.)

In turning from Plato and Aristotle to Horace, we move from the 4th century Athens to Rome in the 1st century B. C. ; moreover, we turn our attention from two philosophers to a practicing poet. As one of the great poets of the Augustan Age (the reign of the Emperor Augustus Caesar of Rome from 27 B. C. to 14 A. D.), Horace produced satires, odes and epistles of high quality and notable sophistication. One of his epistles was addressed to a father and two sons, and it gives advice on the art of writing. This epistle was later labeled "Ars Poetica" (**The Art of Poetry**).

Both by his own practice as a poet and through the advice given in "The Art of Poetry", Horace has had a continuing influence on European literature. Horace accepts that in human life and character the poet will find his material, and he must be faithful in

representing it. Horace is a **classicist**. He urges the would-be-poet to study accepted models, Homer and the Greek tragedians. The ambition to be original can lure the writer into flashy excrescences ill-adjusted to the overall pattern of his work, and inimical to clarity and directness. The poet's task is to work hard at his text in order to produce verse that is felicitous, lucid and well-ordered. The place of natural inspiration is allowed for, but there is no escape for the poet from disciplined critical examination of all that is written.

The prevailing emphasis throughout "The Art of Poetry" is on the need for consistency, coherence and seemliness. It is the writer's business to refine and polish his text so that the highest standards of propriety and artistry are maintained. Horace also presses home the need to blend instruction with delight. He declares, "The poet's aim is either to profit or to please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful. . . The man who mingles the useful with the sweet carries the day by charming his reader and at the same time instructing him. That's the book to enrich the publisher, to be posted overseas, and to prolong its author's fame."

Cassius Longinus(213-273)

Modern readers encounter in Longinus a writer far more akin to them than Plato and Aristotle, or even Horace. What for the modern reader differentiates Longinus from his predecessors is his eagerness to put his finger on those qualities of imaginative literature which resist codification by rule and precept, and which cannot be attained by technical expertise alone. He is sensitive to the need for individual genius in the poet. He addresses his subject in a way we find congenial. In his critical work "**On the Sublime**", faults of style are listed, and then a comprehensive analysis is made of those qualities which contribute to **sublimity**.

Longinus defines the ingredients of sublimity in turn. Firstly

there is grandeur of thought. "Excellence of Style is the concomitant accompanying of a great soul." He cites examples from Homer and elsewhere to show that when a poet is at his best in descriptive writing, what he lays before the reader could have been conceived only by a man of noble spirit. The second source of sublimity is powerful emotion. Nothing, he argues, can be so effective as strong emotion when it is appropriate to the material, for it fills what is said with the breath of a seemingly divine exultation. These two constituents of sublimity derive largely from native gifts. The other three constituents are acquired by art. The third is a mastery of many and various devices of style and methods of presentation. The fourth is acute sensitivity to the qualities of words and to the potentialities of imagery. And the fifth is the orderly placing of words, the ear for rhythm cadence, sonority and roundness, aural architecture and fluency. And the fifth constituent seems to comprehend also everything that Horace recommended in his emphasis upon consistency and coherence in overall structure. Yet Longinus has none of Horace's prudery about flashes of inspiration and bursts of purple rhetoric.

Neo-classical Criticism

Neo-classical criticism covers a long historical period, ranging from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance to the Enlightenment Movement of the 18th century. The Middle Ages was an age of theological thinking in a theologically-oriented and theocratic society. Such a society does not characteristically promote the essentially humanistic activity of literary criticism. It was an age of great literary creativity, not of literary criticism. However, the critics Augustine and Aquinas cannot be neglected. Literary theory and criticism received a new emphasis during the phases of the general Renaissance and the 18th century, and emerged a host of literary critics such as Dante, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Sir Philip Sidney, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Le-

ssing, Dryden, Pope and Johnson, all of whom were also great creative writers.

St. Augustine (354-430)

St Augustine can be taken as representative of the historical development which was to push literary criticism out of the domain of intellectual life for several centuries. Born in North Africa, Augustine was brought up by a devoutly Christian mother, but lost whatever faith he imbibed from her when he went to the university at Carthage. For many years he embraced Manichaeism, but as a professor at Milan he was greatly influenced by the preaching of St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and after a severe internal struggle was converted at the age of 32 to become one of the profoundest theological scholars of the Christian Church.

Augustine's intellectual development was a progress from Manichaeism to Christianity. The Manichees solved the intellectual problems posed by the power of evil in the world by postulating a divided supernatural authority. Good and evil reigned as equal opponents. There was unceasing cosmic conflict between the power of light and the power of darkness. It was against such a pessimistic dualism that Plotinus reacted in formulating the doctrine which projected evil in terms of negation of the ultimate reality. St. Augustine was the thinker who above all brought this kind of reasoning to bear on the Christian account of the human situation since the Fall.

Augustine wrote at a time when civilisation was in a state of decay and collapse. The new Christian Church was at war with paganism. Questions of aesthetic theory could but arise as footnotes to the immense programme of Christianising Western Europe. The old literature was inextricably tied up with the old polytheism, with the discreditable doings of unrighteous gods. Dramatists and poets, Augustine argued in *The City of God*, attribute vicious behaviour to gods to the end that might be sufficient au-

thority, deprived as it were from heaven and earth, for men to commit all filthiness by. The wickedness of gods implicitly authorised human wickedness. Their vices gave the spectators and readers imitable example. It was small wonder that Augustine cited with approval Plato's exclusion of poets from the well-governed city. His grounds are like Plato's, the question of moral influence. For crimes will no longer be crimes, he declares in his *Confessions*, when "whosoever commits them might seem to imitate not abandoned men, but the celestial gods". Pagan literature was thus sharply distinguished from the one literature necessary to the Christian, the *Scriptures*. In the first four books of his *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine lays down the procedure for proper interpretation of the Bible. Exploring how a text might be dealt with is, of course, the one route by which the Fathers trespassed into the field of literary criticism.

Yet there are no puritanical aridities in Augustine's address to God: "Too late loved I Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! Too late I loved Thee!" It is the divine "Beauty" that is the end of his search and his inspiration. And in reference elsewhere to the character of the beautiful, he speaks in a similar vein to Plotinus of the power of "integrity and unity": "Any beautiful object whatsoever is more worthy of praise in its totality as a whole than in any one of its parts." Man judges one object as more beautiful than another by referring to an eternal standard of beauty. This is an aspect of the God-given reason which lifts man above animal kind. When men go in search of what is immutable, Augustine declares, they arrive "at knowledge of God the creator by means of the things which He created".

In *Confessions*, Saint Augustine addressed himself eloquently and passionately to the enduring spiritual questions that have stirred the minds and hearts of thoughtful men since time began. Written 397 A. D., *Confessions* are a history of the young Augustine's fierce struggle to overcome his profligate ways and achieve a life of spiritual grace.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586)

Sir Philip Sidney was the great Renaissance English poet and critic. As a critic he wrote "**An Apology for Poetry**" (1580), the only major work of literary criticism produced in the English Renaissance. Sidney was intent on expanding the implications of the ancient definition of literature first formulated by the Latin poet Ovid, who had said that its mission is "*docere delectando*" — to teach by delighting. Sidney also quotes Horace, to the effect that a poem is a "speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight". Thus, the giving of pleasure is here allowed a central position in the reading of literature, unlike, say, philosophy, which is implicitly regarded as worthy and uplifting, but not much fun. The notion of literature giving pleasure will now seem an unremarkable sentiment, but Sidney's aim was the revolutionary one of distinguishing literature from other forms of writing, on the grounds that, uniquely, literature has as its primary aim the giving of pleasure to the reader, and any moral or didactic element is necessarily either subordinate to that, or at least, unlikely to succeed without it. In a religious age deeply suspicious of all forms of fiction, poetry, and representation, and always likely to denounce them as the work of the devil, this was a very great step to take. In English too, then, critical theory came before practical criticism, as Sidney is writing about literature in general, not about individual works or writers.

John Dryden (1631-1700)

John Dryden is an important figure in the history of prose writing, helping to establish what might be regarded as the modern style of prose, with its closeness to speech and an emphasis on plainness and clarity. His most shapely critical manifesto is **An Essay of Dramatic Poesy** (1668). It takes the form of a conversation between four characters in which the assertion of one is an-