Contemporary Literary Theory

Edited by
G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow

THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSA
Amherst 1989

Copyright © 1989 by The University of Massachusetts Press
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
LC 88–14692
ISBN 0–87023–641–5 (cloth); 642–3 (pbk.)
Designed by Patricia Douglas Crowder
Set in Linotron Garamond #3 at Keystone Typesetting, Inc.
Printed by Thomson-Shore and bound by John Dekker & Sons
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Contemporary literary theory / edited by G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow.
p. cm.
Bibliography: p.
ISBN 0–87023–641–5 (alk. paper) ISBN 0–87023–642–3 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Criticism—20th century. I. Atkins, G. Douglas (George Douglas), 1943– . II. Morrow, Laura, 1953– .
PN94.C69 1989
801'.95'0904—dc19 88–14692
CIP
British Library Cataloguing in Publication data are available.

Poem #1670 from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson,* edited by Thomas H. Johnson, Copyright 1914, 1942 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi is reprinted by permission of Little, Brown and Company. Poems #986 and #1670 are reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Trustees of Amherst College from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson,* edited by Thomas H. Johnson, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright 1951, © 1955, 1979, 1983 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Preface

This book relates contemporary theory to critical and pedagogical practice. That it has no single identifiable origin suggests (better, allegorizes) the way theory and practice are intertwined and interimplicated. The joint labor of two editors and twelve (amazingly cooperative) contributors, *Contemporary Literary Theory* is actually a creature of multiple origins. In one sense, it derives from several years of teaching graduate courses in criticism and theory by one of the editors, me, who came late but happily to this burgeoning subdiscipline, and from the recent—and equally happy—discovery of the "field" by my coeditor. Laura, who remains, she insists, a close reader rather than a theorist, convinced me of the need for such a textbook—for herself as teacher and for the students she and so many others encounter. In another sense, this text derives from a semester-long symposium held at the University of Kansas in fall 1985 on literary theory, critical practice, and the classroom, which week in and week out attracted dozens of teachers and students from English and the other languages and literatures as well as from history, philosophy, anthropology, and various other (sometimes surprising) disciplines. In still another sense, *Contemporary Literary Theory* derives from the dawning recognition, abetted by the experience of codirecting that symposium and team-teaching a seminar offered in conjunction with it (a recognition now shared by many other critics and theorists), that, as prominent, influential, and important as theory has become in the last few years, it has not significantly affected classroom teaching, particularly at the undergraduate level. This is so for a number of reasons, one of which has to do with an

expressed and powerful resistance to theory, particularly by those ill informed about its work. Another reason involves the proliferation of theories, with which even the growing number of specialists in criticism and theory are hard-pressed to keep up. If even the specialists find the array of competing theories bewildering, what of the "general reader," who often is a teacher at the college and university level? And even worse, what of the student, graduate or undergraduate, confronted with so many theoretical positions, strategies, and terminologies, some of them (at least) certain to appear alien if not alienating, many being foreign imports?

Let us not mislead, however: As much as one may be desirable, ours does not seek, or pretend, to be a contemporary, or poststructuralist, counterpart to the widely influential textbooks *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Fiction*, written by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, and *Understanding Drama*, by Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, which, with admirable clarity and enviable success, taught hundreds of thousands of students the principles and practices of close reading characteristic of New Criticism. As William E. Cain pointedly observes in *The Crisis in Criticism*, "the New Critics succeeded in revolutionizing English studies" in large part "because they devoted themselves as much to pedagogy as to criticism and scholarship." Though it certainly hopes to direct attention to pedagogy, *Contemporary Literary Theory* is a different kind of (text)book from those mentioned. Nor is it a handbook of theories (often called "approaches" or, worse, "methods"), providing step-by-step directions for the *application* of one or more of them to the task of interpreting particular texts, in the (vain) hope of soliciting them to yield up their meanings. Instead, our text is a series of essays, individual though related, on the twelve most prominent, influential, and far-reaching theoretical positions currently available: each is written by a different author, who is not only an expert on the theory discussed but also an experienced and successful classroom teacher. We offer these essays not as a substitute for reading the theorists themselves but as an aid in doing so. Though the discussions contain much of interest and value to specialists in criticism and theory, few of whom can claim to be deeply read in all twelve positions represented, our essays are directed to and written expressly for the non-specialist, teacher, student, and "general reader," still in need of succinct but detailed, clear, and accessible introductions to the theoretical positions that clamor for attention and claim privilege—and that have so much to offer. Our effort was prompted by the desire to provide discussions that straightforwardly describe the primary features, background, strategies, and implications of the theories most influential now and likely to remain so for some

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com

time. We elected to leave our contributors free to present their accounts in the form each thought most appropriate given inherent differences among the theories included.

Given in roughly the chronological order of their appearance on the critical scene, British as well as American, the theories represented are New Criticism, archetypal criticism, structuralism/semiotics, reader response, phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, feminism, political, dialogical criticism (inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin), and the work associated with Michel Foucault and the so-called New Historicism. These theories vary, of course, in degree of current and likely influence and importance, and there is inevitably some overlap among them, most notably between phenomenology and hermeneutics. Though we have tried to present a comprehensive survey of the contemporary theoretical field, we grant certain omissions: for example, the (quite different) work of Harold Bloom, Kenneth Burke, René Girard, and Geoffrey Hartman. Important as the work of each of these has proven, none has developed into anything like a school or tradition. Whereas most other major contemporary theorists are assimilable within the theories represented here, Bloom, Burke, Girard, and Hartman are, each of them, *sui generis*. Arguably, their individuality constitutes their undeniable importance, but it makes it impossible for us to consider them here, beyond certain "uses" in the Introduction.

A few words more may be in order concerning the mode of presentation we have adopted: "Farming out" the discussions, we agreed from the beginning, has far more advantages than disadvantages. Neither of us—nor both of us together—possesses the knowledge to treat all twelve positions with the informed awareness, breadth of reading, and depth of (sympathetic) understanding displayed by our contributors. Thus we invited an expert—though not always a specialist—on each theory to join in our effort. We are convinced that the achieved diversity of viewpoint and degree of expertise represented more than compensate for any loss of consistency or singleness of perspective. As a matter of fact, we assert the value of precisely this diversity of perspective. Of course, our strategy and that result may suggest to some a certain pluralism, a laissez-faire attitude, or the appearance that all theories are equally valid. Such an interpretation of our procedure would be unfortunate, for we in fact believe that the theories represented here differ considerably in conceptual rigor and consistency, power, self-consciousness, and value for literary studies, as well as for contemporary thought generally. Rather than embrace an easy pluralism, whose hegemony over college and university curricula remains virtually unchallenged, I for one subscribe in general to

Frank Lentricchia's combative and unfortunately polarizing distinction between "the debased humanist sentiment that all points of view are valid, [and] the historical consciousness that any point of view—opinion, belief, theory—about literature and literature itself are [*sic*] alike in this crucial way: both are bound over to contexts and forces not in their autonomous control; both express something else besides themselves; neither is freely originary."

Still the question imposes itself: Confronted by the bewildering array of theoretical possibilities (options? opportunities?), what is a reader to do? Even if *we* do not advance an argument for any of the theories represented here, *you* will ultimately have to make some choices, and choices entail consequences. And even if we choose not to *advance* here an argument for deconstruction or psychoanalysis, each of us has, in our own life and work, made a choice, and we may as well divulge our theoretical investments: One of us was brought up on New Criticism, became attracted to poststructuralist thinking, but holds many reservations about theory and the teaching of theory, whereas the other (I) was weaned on New Criticism, imbibed Hirschian hermeneutics in graduate school, later became a card-carrying deconstructionist, and now finds himself drawn to Hartman's style of literary work. Such shifts, developments, and evolving consciousness probably represent the careers of most professional students of literature. In providing under one cover access to the major contemporary theories, our text will, we hope, enhance the evolutionary process of understanding and foster critical growth. It is not, in any case, far from Gerald Graff's recent call, in *Professing Literature*, for openness regarding the disagreements and disputes that activate us, indeed for making public the conflicts and controversies that we all too often hide from students. Presenting theories in open conflict, as we do here, can—and, we hope, will—have a stimulating and productive pedagogical effect.

A couple of related points: In order to make clear that theories inhabit a richly integumented field, forming an intricately woven text(ile), rather than function as self-contained, autonomous, and isolated entities, we have asked our contributors to discuss both internecine disagreements (for example, the way the New Critic John Crowe Ransom differs from the New Critic Cleanth Brooks) and some of the differences from other theories. In addition, we have asked contributors to situate themselves within the particular theoretical framework discussed, indicating the specific slant given to the theory, the position taken vis-à-vis the internecine struggles, and the stance assumed in the heterogeneous thinking that parades under the umbrella of, for example, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and feminism. Far from being an ethereal or transcendent matter, safely isolated from the contingencies of

human existence, theory is mottled through and through with history, context, and personal preference and prejudice. Theory is, in short, a matter of practice.

With this last sentence at least my own particular position on theory begins to emerge. That position, which the Introduction tries to make clear, is but one of several possible, and in the Introduction I take up questions of theory as such, consider some of the different meanings now being given to theory, and ask how particular theories relate both to a possible common enterprise and to each other. In arguing that *theory* functions as more than a set of directions or principles for the (presumably better) interpreting of particular texts, I offer something like a counterpoint to the discussions of *theories*. The *unsettling* nature of such a juxtaposition is, I maintain, characteristic of the theoretical.

G. Douglas Atkins

Acknowledgments

More often than not, we hear, coeditors of essay collections must contend with disregard for deadlines, resistance to criticism, and illness of temper. Of such experience we can tell you little. Manuscripts of impressive grace and clarity came promptly from Minnesota, from Texas, from Taiwan. We had no differences with our deconstruction worker, nor did we experience oral sadistic behavior from our psychoanalytic reader, and our phenomenologist fulfilled the horizon of our greatest expectations. Others may have lost friends in such projects; we have gained many and are most grateful to them.

Bruce Wilcox, Director of the University of Massachusetts Press, deserves our sincere thanks: he has been supportive of our efforts from the day we approached him with the idea of such a textbook. We are grateful for his wisdom, his encouragement, and his genuine kindness.

We wish to extend special thanks to Beth Ridenour and Pam Lerow, gracious and expert processors of words at the University of Kansas, and to Mary Pate and Susan Jusselin of Louisiana State University in Shreveport, for the skill and good humor with which they typed our correspondence and assembled our manuscript.

Doug would like to indicate other debts as well: to those at the University of Kansas, especially Michael L. Johnson, chair of the English department, who supported, in various ways, a semester-long symposium in 1985 on literary theory, critical practice, and the classroom; to an appreciative audience at the University of South Florida who responded helpfully to a version of the Introduction; and to Patricia L. Douglass, who brought to the project—and to his life—new meaning, purpose, and joy.

My own debts are few but substantial: to my father, Harry Rutherford Powers, whose loving wisdom sustains me still; to my mother, Helen Smith Powers, whose wit is exceeded only by the generosity of her spirit; and to my husband, Edward Morrow, "susceptor meus . . . / Gloria mea et exaltans caput meum."

L.P.M.

Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xiii

G. DOUGLAS ATKINS
Introduction: Literary Theory, Critical Practice, and the Classroom 1

JOHN R. WILLINGHAM
The New Criticism: Then and Now 24

RICHARD F. HARDIN
Archetypal Criticism 42

LORI HOPE LEFKOVITZ
Creating the World: Structuralism and Semiotics 60

PETER J. RABINOWITZ
Whirl without End: Audience-Oriented Criticism 81

ROBERT MAGLIOLA
Like the Glaze on a Katydid-Wing: Phenomenological Criticism 101

JOEL WEINSHEIMER
Hermeneutics 117

DANNY J. ANDERSON
Deconstruction: Critical Strategy/Strategic Criticism 137

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com

DAVID WILLBERN
Reading after Freud 158

CHERYL B. TORSNEY
The Critical Quilt: Alternative Authority in Feminist Criticism 180

MICHAEL RYAN
Political Criticism 200

DON BIALOSTOSKY
Dialogic Criticism 214

KARLIS RACEVSKIS
Genealogical Critique: Michel Foucault and the Systems of Thought 229

Notes on Contributors 247

G. DOUGLAS ATKINS

Introduction: Literary Theory, Critical Practice, and the Classroom

> The good critic cannot stop with studying poetry, he must also study poetics. If he thinks he must puritanically abstain from all indulgence in the theory, the good critic may have to be a good little critic. . . . Theory, which is expectation, always determines criticism, and never more than when it is unconscious. The reputed condition of no-theory in the critic's mind is illusory.
>
> John Crowe Ransom, *The World's Body*

> One would expect that our libraries would be full of works on the theory of interpretation, the diagnosis of linguistic situations, systematic ambiguity and the function of symbols. . . . [But] there is no other human activity for which theory bears so small a proportion to practice. Even the theory of football has been more thoroughly inquired into.
>
> I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*

> Mere reading, it turns out, prior to any theory, is able to transform critical discourse in a manner that would appear deeply subversive to those who think of the teaching of literature as a substitute for the teaching of theology, ethics, psychology, or intellectual history.
>
> Paul de Man, "The Return to Philology"

Taken together, the three quotations above are meant to suggest the *unsettling* nature of theory. That is, unlike the "cold pastoral" of Keats's Grecian urn, which "teases us out of thought," theory makes us think, forcing us to examine our assumptions; it thus constitutes, contrary to our

expectations, fun as well as an effort of potentially the highest value. In the quoted passages the unsettling or at least the unexpected, appears in the following way: That Ransom and Richards extol the virtues, indeed admit the inescapability, of theory is as important as it may be surprising. Begetters of the (now old) New Criticism, frequently cited as antithetical to the work of theory, or at best unself-conscious in its reputed claims that close reading, aided only by a good dictionary, will unlock a text's secrets, Ransom and Richards upset our assumptions and expectations, perhaps deflating a myth or at least problematizing our understanding. No less surprising is the way that, in the third quotation I provided, Paul de Man, the major American deconstructionist and one of the most distinguished and influential theorists of the twentieth century, claims that close reading, virtually synonymous with the New Criticism that Ransom and Richards promulgated, (in every sense) precedes theory. A baffling situation is thus traced in these brief passages, an allegory, in other words, of the bewildering turn of events in which one side to a dispute seems to occupy the position of the other, exchanging places with its apparent opposite. Unsettling, to be sure, this structure (re)calls us to thought and a more rigorous examination of what we thought we knew. Truth thus *turns* out to be more complex than we assumed. 'Twas ever thus, and it is theory that helps us to see that it is so.

Surprisingly, theory can be fun. In the hands of writers as different as William H. Gass, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, Barbara Johnson, and Jane Gallop, theory may actually *become* literature, self-consciously displaying its fictive nature and exploiting an impressive arsenal of stylistic devices.[1] But no matter how self-conscious or mannered the writing, crucial is the attitude we as readers bring to theory. Pleasure derives not just from the skillful writing of the more artful critics and theorists but also from the decision readers are free to make to regard "criticism informed or motivated by theory [as] part of literary criticism (rather than of philosophy or an unknown science) and . . . literary criticism [as] within literature, not outside it."[2] Read as we do *other* literary forms and texts, theory offers many pleasures as well as insights, themselves pleasurable, of course.

Implicit here is the important theoretical point that, contrary to assumptions still prevalent in classroom practice, "there really is no way to read a text in and for itself":

> Only a repetition of every word in its "original" sequence could represent the work in its purity, and even then, as Borges's Pierre Menard learned, the act of writing and its local circumstances alter what the text signifies. Every critical reading, then, neces-

sarily casts the work within another narrative: in a story of moral values, psychologies, societies, religious and philosophical truths, editorial procedures, political conflicts, or aesthetic techniques. Many have pointed out that the very quality of "literariness," that essence we need in order to say what is or is not literature, depends on a framework of presuppositions that cannot (without going in circles) be construed as simply literary.[3]

Rather than free-standing, every reading is thus framed. And theories are among the most important frameworks, allowing us to *see* the "meaning" of/in texts—including the texts of theory.[4] Etymologically, there is a crucial link "between 'theory' and 'seeing' (Greek *thea* = spectacle)," a link that "becomes a forgotten or sublimated metaphor underlying the certitudes of science."[5]

Though the notorious Hellene Ezra Pound thought, in more or less New Critical fashion, that literature gives us eyes to see with, it is actually theory that does so.[6] That some theory is always in place and at work, whether we know it or grant it or not, raises at least two major questions. One concerns the relation of theory to practice, and my argument will be that not only does practice always imply its own theory but "theory exists only as a form of practice."[7] The other major question concerns *theory* itself: what it is and how it relates to the various competing *theories* regarding texts.

The Function of Theory at the Present Time

The emergence of theory has been frequently and well chronicled, and so there is no need to repeat here the story of its meteoric rise to prominence in the academic community, in this country as well as abroad.[8] If there is not yet the situation I. A. Richards expected, whereby our libraries "would be full of works on the theory of interpretation," the past ten or fifteen years have certainly witnessed an outpouring of books on theory and its relation to various "primary" texts, the establishment of major journals devoted to theoretical issues, and the creation of jobs for theorists, in all kinds of institutions, from the Ivy League to small colleges and regional universities. Noting the intensity associated with theory as well as its invigorating features, William E. Cain writes in *The Crisis in Criticism: Theory, Literature, and Reform in English Studies* of the way theory has succeeded in becoming a subdiscipline of considerable power and promise, whose major practitioners, who are eagerly sought for lectures, conferences, and positions and whose books actually sell, enjoy a remarkable "degree of privilege."[9]

Whether or not Howard Felperin is right to locate a "paradigm-shift toward theory" and an "institutional turn toward theory as the new common

denominator of our activity,"[10] the (armed) resistance to it indicates well enough its achievement of power, place, and prestige. In an essay first published in the (London) *Times Literary Supplement*, Paul de Man grants that "the quarrelsome tone that hangs over the debates on the teaching of literature" stems from "the advent of contemporary literary theory." This, he writes, "is certainly not surprising. Whenever new approaches or techniques are being advocated, a very understandable ill-humor overcomes those who feel they may have to modify or to reconsider well-established pedagogical habits that served them well until the most recent troublemakers came along." But, de Man continues, "the polemical response in the case of contemporary theory, and especially of some of its aspects, runs deeper." The widespread polemic, he surmises,

> feeds not only on civilized conservatism but on moral indignation. It speaks with an anxiety that is not only that of a disturbed tranquillity but of a disturbed moral conscience. Nor is this mood confined to the opponents of theory. Its protagonists, in most cases, are just as nervous. When they appear not to be, their self-assurance often seems to be dependent on utopian schemes. The well-established rationale for the professing of literature has come under fire. Small wonder that it chooses to shoot back.[11]

Important, if not surprising, is de Man's criticism of the proponents of theory as well as its antagonists.

Perhaps more shrewdly than anyone else, de Man has written of "the resistance to theory," the title, in fact, of a posthumous volume of his essays. In the *TLS* discussion, de Man confronts one of the most strident and unfortunate polemics, an essay published in the *Harvard Magazine* by the distinguished scholar Walter Jackson Bate. According to Bate, joining a chorus of often shrill voices raised in anger in the popular media, the humanities are "in the weakest state they ever suffered—bent on a self-destructive course, through a combination of anger, fear and purblind defensiveness."[12] The main cause for this lamentable decline Bate attributes to "the increasing concentration on literary theory." That decline culminates, as de Man puts it, paraphrasing Bate, "in the final catastrophe of the post-structural era, the invasion of departments of English by French influences that advocate 'a nihilistic view of literature, of human communication, and of life itself.' "[13] Bate denounces Jacques Derrida as the ruthless, unprincipled antagonist in this tragedy, misidentifying him as a " 'puckish Parisian' (he is neither), 'who never turns to the really major philosophers except to snatch at stale pessimisms' (e.g., Nietzsche)." De Man adds that this strange remark "suggests that Professor Bate, a careful scholar and brilliant teacher, has this time

confined his sources of information to *Newsweek* magazine." Moreover, de Man reasons that "one must be feeling very threatened indeed to become so aggressively defensive."[14]

Much more interesting, de Man finds, than such "local manifestations" of the resistance movement are the systematic implications they reveal. He proposes that "resistance may be a built-in constituent" of theory's discourse.[15] Since "literary theory can be said to come into being when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non-linguistic, that is to say historical and aesthetic, considerations," the resistance to theory is "a resistance to language itself or to the possibility that language contains factors or functions that cannot be reduced to intuition."[16] More specifically, de Man continues, "the resistance to theory is a resistance to the rhetorical or tropological dimension of language, a dimension which is perhaps more explicitly in the foreground in literature (broadly conceived) than in other verbal manifestations or—to be somewhat less vague—which can be revealed in any verbal event when it is read textually."[17] The resistance to theory is, therefore, according to de Man, a resistance to reading, or at least to reading that attends to language's rhetorical or tropological features. That all means, de Man rather dazzlingly—or dizzyingly—concludes, that "nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory *is* itself the resistance. . . . Yet literary theory is not in danger of going under; it cannot help but flourish, and the more it is resisted, the more it flourishes, since the language it speaks is the language of self-resistance."[18]

The resistance to theory has, in any case, assumed many forms, some of it, like Bate's, deriving from a lack of understanding of what it is and what it does. There is, one feels sure, some nationalism, and parochialism, in this resistance movement, alarmed that the literary economy is being overrun by foreign imports, many of them from France (notably structuralism, deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis), some from Germany (including hermeneutics and forms of reader response), and at least one (God save us!) from Russia (Bahktinian dialogical criticism). In a conservative political climate and an age of retrenchment, with (at least until very recently) few jobs being available in the academy, professional anxiety is certainly understandable. After all, "student head count" is crucial to institutional and individual survival, and courses in criticism and theory do draw students away from *literature* courses (more interested in intellectual issues than professors often grant, students are attracted to theory because it transcends narrow disciplinary limits to raise large and important questions). Beleaguered, ill paid, often anxious about their work, its importance, and its lack of recognition, litera-

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com