

A Dictionary of Critical Theory

Leonar



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A Dictionary of Critical Theory

Preface

Leaf through a dictionary, or try to make one, and you will find that every word covers and masks a well so bottomless that the questions you toss into it arouse no more than an echo.

--Paul Valéry

Writing *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* has taken a little over six years of continuous work; it has been a strange and difficult project, in part because it can be infinitely extended. I estimate that I have used only about 5 percent of the material in the history of criticism and contemporary critical theory that I have amassed during this time period. While there was a certain amount of necessary tedium, as there always will be in research, I discovered that it was often fascinating to track the varied fortunes of the words I chose to define; the appearances and disappearances, the clusters of word usage, the changes in meaning or emphasis, were in themselves compelling. I discovered very early in this work, however, that the excitement and adventures involved in writing a dictionary were not readily communicated to anyone else. I am afraid that if you wish to savor the pleasures of dictionary making, you must write a dictionary yourself.

This preface is not the place to discuss the burgeoning interest in critical theory since the end of the 1960s (I have discussed the controversial nature of this new emphasis in the preface to

Research in Critical Theory Since 1965: A Classified Bibliography [Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989]). Despite rumors of the "death of theory," the "crisis in criticism," and other such apocalyptic pronouncements, critical theory seems to have been fully integrated into most university programs and informs the teaching in all areas of literature departments, from Freshman Composition through doctoral work. While I know my own enthusiasm for this development is not shared by all of my colleagues, theory nevertheless enjoys wide support both as a subdiscipline and as a foundation for any other literary study. "The death of theory" has as much basis in practice as "the death of the novel" had during the several decades that phrase was reintroduced.

We have only to look at the various methodological guides and surveys published in the 1980s: Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch, *Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century* (1978); Ann Jefferson and David Robey, eds., *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction* (1982); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983); Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (1985); Cary Nelson, ed., *Theory in the Classroom* (1986); Joseph Natoli, ed., *Tracing Literary Theory* (1987); G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow, eds., *Contemporary Literary Theory* (1989); and Ralph Cohen, ed., *The Future of Literary Theory* (1989).

These metacritical works were accompanied by numerous anthologies of critical theory and a renewed interest in the history of criticism. When Hazard Adams published his excellent anthology *Critical Theory Since Plato*, in 1971, most other anthologies for the history of criticism were out of print, or else were expensive library editions of collections originally published from the 1920s to the 1940s. Many literature departments had dropped the "history of criticism" course from their requirements for graduate students, or else taught it merely to uphold a tradition in which the current faculty had long lost interest. Courses for undergraduates in "practical criticism," "literary analysis," or "introduction to criticism," were usually courses in New Criticism.

The situation now is quite different. We might list some of the general and historical anthologies published since *Critical Theory Since Plato*: D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, eds., *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations* (1972); Alex Preminger et al, eds., *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations* (1974); Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds., *Critical Theory Since 1965* (1986); Rick

Rylance, ed., *Debating Texts: Readings in Twentieth Century Literary Theory and Method* (1987); Donald Keeseey, ed., *Contexts for Criticism* (1987); David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (1988); K. M. Newton, ed., *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader* (1988); A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-c. 1375: The Commentary-Tradition* (1988); Raman Selden, ed., *The Theory of Criticism: From Plato to the Present* (1988); Robert Con Davis and Laurie Finke, eds., *Literary Criticism and Theory: The Greeks to the Present* (1989); Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, eds., *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed. (1989); Dan Latimer, ed., *Contemporary Critical Theory* (1989); and David H. Richter, ed., *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends* (1989). Specialized anthologies for each type of criticism (feminist, Marxist, semiotic, reader-response, and so on) were also being published at a dizzying pace.

The new availability of texts in critical theory made accessibility much easier, while at the same time it made the creation of a dictionary for this field much more complex. My editors wanted this dictionary to be as "historical and international" as possible. There were no earlier dictionaries which were specifically of critical theory, as opposed to general literary terminology, which might have acted as a guide.

I began work on *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* in 1984. It took almost two years to figure out how to proceed, what the entries should be, how to handle the schools of criticism or archaic terms and foreign languages. During this time I was assiduously gathering materials. My *Research in Critical Theory Since 1965* originally was part of the bibliography assembled for this *Dictionary*: it lists about 5,500 items. I collected hundreds of books in critical theory, four filing cabinets packed with terminological notes or photocopied materials, and nineteen overlarge looseleaf notebooks on schools of criticism. I read the few books that dealt with dictionary writing and tried to work out the best way to handle this vast amount of material within the (admittedly generous) page allowances.

Despite popular belief, one does not begin a dictionary by writing the letter "A" on a sheet of paper and typing away straight to "Z" (just as nonacademics react to English professors by saying that they must watch their grammar, English professors who discovered I was writing a dictionary often asked me what letter I was up to). A major difficulty was developing a research schedule of database searches, interlibrary loans, and books that were needed at particular times. But more difficult was the choice of headwords to be defined.

At first I naively attempted to get a working list through consensus, asking for lists and suggestions from friends who taught critical theory and the history of criticism, from foreign university professors and editors, and from specialists in different schools of criticism or historical periods. This proved more confusing than helpful since there was little agreement among the lists and a great deal of eccentricity. I know that this dictionary will seem eccentric to many readers, although I have tried to fulfill the general charge of a dictionary of critical theory (historical and international).

From 1985 to 1986, I developed what I called the "super-index." This was an "index of indexes" and a guide to terms and their use or history in all of my books of theory, all of the photocopied articles, to all my anthologies of critical theory and the history of criticism, and to all of the histories of criticism in English, French, and German. This original super-index contains about 4,000 5" x 8" index cards. I later added to this super-index a four-volume looseleaf collection of notes indicating terms from other sources (such as works on aesthetics). I frequently went through these terms removing items that seemed outside the parameters I set for this work and cross-referencing the terms so that I could rapidly find whatever I needed.

I have included in this dictionary definitions of the following sorts of terms: (1) terms that showed up with great frequency in the indexes to anthologies of critical theory, either general or specific to a period or school; (2) terms that appeared in the indexes to standard histories of criticism; (3) schools of criticism or broad types of criticism; (4) key terms from foreign-language critical theory (Chinese, French, German, Greek, Japanese, Latin, Russian, and Sanskrit; the foreign language headwords are listed in the appendix at the end of this *Dictionary*), that appeared with some frequency in the histories of criticism in those languages. All definitions are from the perspective of literary critical use even if the term is used by other disciplines.

I have excluded from this dictionary definitions of the following sorts of terms: (1) biographical entries; (2) literary terms rather than critical theory terms (i.e., genres, rhetorical figures, verse forms, schools of writing, period terms such as "Romanticism" or "Modernism"); (3) terms taken from other disciplines such as philosophy, psychoanalysis, or history (unless a specifically literary critical usage or emphasis for the term has developed); (4) terms that are in general usage, not related specifically to critical theory (i.e., Darwinism, medievalism, sentimentalism). Therefore, this

Dictionary excludes many of the headwords that readers can find in such useful works as Shipley's *Dictionary of World Literature*, Holman and Harmon's *A Handbook to Literature*, Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, or the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. In fact, if a term was defined in several of these places, I often eliminated it from this *Dictionary*.

I have attempted to make this *Dictionary* as useful as possible to anyone. I assume that the majority of readers of this work are faculty members or graduate students in English, foreign literatures, or comparative literature. But I hope that the definitions are accessible enough to be clear and useful for undergraduates and nonacademics. Some of the entries, especially for schools of criticism (deconstruction, feminism, formalism, semiotics, structuralism, textgrammars), are very long for this sort of reference work, but I was in this way able to nest numerous terms and cut down on repetition throughout the *Dictionary*. Usually the entries include source information or even lengthy bibliographies. Whenever possible, I have referred the reader to sources in English, and the dates refer to English translations. Cross-references are indicated by double-arrow signs (>>), which may occur within an entry, but are usually found after an entry and its references.

I know in advance many readers will have favorite terms that I have inexplicably missed. I welcome comments, corrections, and suggestions from the readers of this work.

Acknowledgments

In the years I have spent researching and writing this *Dictionary* (together with the companion volume, *Research in Critical Theory Since 1965: A Classified Bibliography* [Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989]), I have received help from many individuals. Colleagues around the world have been generous with their time and resources. They have read sections, criticized drafts of definitions and attributions, made corrections, answered questions, recommended books and articles, sent me bibliographies, offprints, and copies of unpublished or forthcoming articles, or just argued with me.

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Professor Richard Palmer (MacMurray College); Professor Fred C. C. Peng (International Christian University, Tokyo); Professor Gerald Prince (University of Pennsylvania); Professor William A. Quinn (University of Arkansas); Dr. Rajnath (University of Allahabad); Professor A. K. Ramanujan (University of Chicago); Professor Luigi Romeo (University of Colorado--Boulder); Professor Mary Beth Rose (Director of the Renaissance Center, Newbery Library, Chicago); Professor Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (Istituto di Filosofia, Trieste); Professor Richard Salomon (University of Washington); Professor James Sosnoski (Miami University of Ohio); Professor Hugh Stimson (Yale University); Dr. Jan Sulowski (Warsaw, Poland); Dr. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Institute for Vico Studies, New York); Professor Isamu Taniguchi (Osaka, Japan); Professor Eero Tarasti (University of Jyvaskyla, Finland); Professor Gyorgy M. Vajda (Budapest); Professor David Vander Meulen (University of Virginia); Professor Manindra K. Verma (University of Wisconsin--Madison); Professor A. K. Warder (University of Toronto).

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This work is dedicated to my wife Sarah and my daughter Leah.

Abbreviations

- Adams* Hazard Adams, ed., *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).
- Adams & Searle* Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds. *Critical Theory Since 1965* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1986).
- ALC* D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, eds. *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).
- Aristotle-Else* Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957).
- Aristotle-Golden* Leon Golden, trans., and O. B. Hardison, Jr., commentary, *Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1981).

- Beardsley 1* Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: From Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).
- Beardsley 2* Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981).
- CESC* J. E. Spingarn, ed., *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908-9).
- Chapman* Gerard Wester Chapman, ed., *Literary Criticism in England, 1660-1800* (New York: Knopf, 1966).
- CM* Scott Elledge and Donald Schier, eds., *The Continental Model: Selected French Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).
- CMLC* Alex Preminger, O. B. Hardison, Jr., and Kevin Kerrane, eds., *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974).
- CPFR* Bernard Weinberg, ed., *Critical Prefaces of the French Renaissance* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1950).
- DENA* Henry Hitch Adams and Baxter Hathaway, eds., *Dramatic Essays of the Neoclassic Age* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965).
- DHI* Philip P. Wiener, ed., *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 5 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1968).

- DTC* Bernard F. Dukore, ed., *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).
- ECCE* Scott Elledge, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays*, 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961).
- ECE* G. Gregory Smith, ed., *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1904).
- ELC* Samuel Hynes, ed., *English Literary Criticism: Restoration and 18th Century* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).
- ELCR* O. B. Hardison, Jr., ed., *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).
- GALC-1* David Simpson, ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- GALC-2* Kathleen Wheeler, ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- GPT* F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York: New York University Press; London: University of London Press, 1967).

- Hathaway* Baxter Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).
- MCLC* O. B. Hardison, Jr., ed., *Modern Continental Literary Criticism* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).
- OCD* *Oxford Classical Dictionary*
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary*
- OLD* *Oxford Latin Dictionary*
- PEPP* Alex Preminger, ed., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, enl. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).
- Tatarkiewicz* Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 3 vols. (The Hague: Mouton; Warsaw: PWN/Polish Scientific Publishers, 1970).
- Taylor* Edward W. Taylor, ed., *Literary Criticism of Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Knopf, 1967).
- TOT* Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).
- WB* William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

Wellek 1-6

René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, 6 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955-86).

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