

高级英语选修课系列教材

# 当代西方文艺 批评理论要义

*Main Ideas of  
Contemporary Western  
Literary Critical Theories*

陈世丹 等著

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**Main Ideas of Contemporary Western Literary  
Critical Theories**

陈世丹 等著

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Dangdai Xifang Wenyi Piping Lilun Yaoyi

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## 本书作者简介



**陈世丹**，文学博士，中国人民大学外国语学院教授，外国语言文学学科带头人，英语系主任，英美文学、西方文艺批评理论研究方向博士生导师、博士后合作导师。国际文学伦理学批评研究会常务理事、全国美国文学研究会常务理事、全国英国文学学会常务理事。完成和在研国家社会科学基金项目3项：“美国后现代主义小说主题与艺术手法论”（97CWW004）、“美国作家库尔特·冯内古特研究”（06BWW017）和“多克特罗小说艺术研究”（13BWW038）。在研中国人民大学重大规划项目1项：“西方后现代主义小说总论”（16XNLG01）。出版学术专著《美国后现代主义小说艺术论》（2002）、《虚构亦真实》（2005）、《美国后现代主义小说详解》（中、英文版，2010）、《英国后现代主义小说详解》（2013）、《后现代人道主义小说家冯内古特》（2014）等10部；主编教材《美国文学史》（英文版，上、下册，2013）和《21世纪新编美国文学选读》（英文版，上、下册，2013）等6部。发表核心期刊学术论文《论后现代主义小说之存在》（2005）、《代码》（2005）、《〈五号屠场〉：一种诗性的语言结构》（2009）、《论后现代主义的排比构成的特殊文本》（2010）、《多克特罗的创伤叙事解构美国神话》（2014）、《在虚幻世界反思人类认知能力》（2016）等70多篇。



**史岩林**，文学博士，北京工商大学外国语学院副教授，英语系副主任，英美文学、西方文化、文艺理论研究方向，出版学术专著《论唐·德里罗小说的空间政治》（2017）、译著《新前卫与文化工业》（合译，2014），发表核心期刊论文《〈指向终点〉：论唐·德里罗小说的空间政治》（2011）、《自由的幻像》（2014）等14篇。



**张东芹**，文学博士，首都经济贸易大学外国语学院讲师，英美文学、比较文学研究方向，发表核心期刊论文《加拿大作家道格拉斯·库普兰德评介》（2014）、《美国后现代反叙事小说的政治寓意》（2013）等多篇。



**王小会**，文学博士，河北师范大学外国语学院讲师，英美文学、西方文论研究方向，发表核心期刊论文《〈金钱绝命书〉：从超真实向真实回归》（2017）、《生态后现代主义理论再审视》（2017）等5篇。



**黄贺**，文学博士，中国劳动关系学院外语教学部讲师，英美文学、西方文论研究方向，发表核心期刊论文《〈欧洲中心〉的后现代主义历史书写》（2011）、《华盛顿·欧文〈纽约外史〉中的反启蒙思想》（2016）等6篇。

上卷陈世丹、史岩林、张东芹著；下卷陈世丹、王小会、黄贺著。

## 前言

*Main Ideas of Contemporary Western Literary Critical Theories* (《当代西方文艺批评理论要义》) 是对 20 世纪和 21 世纪初以来陆续出现的每一种西方文艺批评理论的主要思想意义、主要理论主张、主要学术价值的梳理和概述。本书分为上、下两卷, 共讨论了 18 种西方文艺批评理论。上卷包括: 1) 俄国形式主义; 2) 英美新批评; 3) 马克思主义批评; 4) 心理与精神分析批评; 5) 神话与原型批评; 6) 结构主义批评; 7) 接受美学与读者反应理论; 8) 后结构主义。9) 后现代主义。下卷包括: 10) 女性主义批评; 11) 新历史主义; 12) 后殖民主义研究; 13) 性别研究; 14) 文化研究; 15) 生态文学批评; 16) 生态后现代主义; 17) 后人文主义; 18) 后现代文学伦理学批评。

本书旨在帮助青年读者、学者, 特别是高校文学院、外国语学院从事文学批评、理论研究的硕士生、博士生系统地熟悉和把握这 18 种文艺批评理论的核心观念和重要思想, 恰当地选择理论作为自己学术研究立论的依据、观点的支撑和批判的武器, 有助于青年学者在人文社会科学研究中处在学科前沿, 不断探索, 不断创新。

本书除了对每种文艺批评理论做了梳理和概述外, 还精选、编辑了每个理论学派代表人物的代表作(论文或专著)作为选读材料(**Selected Readings**), 供学者们自主阅读。书中每章后列有选读材料题目, 读者可登录中国人民大学出版社外语分社主页(<http://www.crup.com.cn/wy>), 搜索选读文献电子版, 自行下载或网上阅读。

本书以专著的形式呈献给读者, 但实际上它是以我在中国人民大学英语专业自 2004 年秋季学期开始到现在一直承担的研究生课程“当代西方文艺批评理论”讲义的基础上, 经过 14 年的不断修改、不断扩展、不断充实而形成的, 由最初的 11 种理论逐步扩展为现在的 18 种理论。增加的理论包括: 第九章 后现代主义; 第十一章 新历史主义; 第十二章 后殖民主义; 第十五章 生态文学批评; 第十六章 生态后现代主义; 第十七章 后人文主义; 第十八章 后现代文学伦理学批评。



此处要对第十八章 后现代文学伦理学批评做一个特殊的说明。对后现代主义文学的批评，国外学者多是从语言、叙事、哲学、政治学、社会学、文化、马克思主义、新历史主义、后殖民主义、女性主义、生态批评等理论视角展开，也有少数学者从伦理学视角讨论后现代主义文学作品。自 20 世纪 90 年代以来，国外虽也出现了齐格蒙·鲍曼、伊曼纽尔·列维纳斯、雅克·德里达、让-吕克·南希等哲学家提出的后现代伦理学或后现代伦理思想，但一直未见有后现代文学伦理学批评的理论建构。我国学者聂珍钊教授在 2004 年首次提出了文学伦理学批评的理论构想，指出文学的价值就在于它的伦理教诲功能，文学批评不应该有伦理的缺失。他在 2014 年出版了专著《文学伦理学批评导论》，完成了文学伦理学批评理论的建构，产生了巨大影响。该书对我启发很大。我自 1997 年获得第一个国家社科基金项目“美国后现代主义小说主题与艺术手法论”（青年项目，97CWW004）以来，一直在从事英美后现代主义小说研究，出版了专著《美国后现代主义小说艺术论》（2002）、《虚构亦真实》（2005）、《英美后现代主义小说中的历史与现实》（2017）等 10 部，发表核心期刊论文《论后现代主义小说之存在》（2005）、《代码》（2005）《后现代文学中的媒介与“再现”和建构》（2012）、《在虚幻世界反思人类认知能力》（2016）等 70 多篇。我在多年的研究过程中发现，作为现代主义思想基础的现代性排斥、拒绝和否定差异，使一切“他者”成为不合法，通过不可能的真理、纯艺术、人性的普遍性来使本来不存在的形而上学的东西在场，把它强加给人们，从而使自己成为可能。现代性对统一性、整体性、一元性和排他性的追求和强调，导致了普遍主义、绝对主义、一元主义和中心主义的膨胀。而后现代性意指一种强大的变革冲动和创新精神，它要革除现代性对权威、中心和等级的维护，强调承认差异、尊重他者、主张多元性和包容性，是对现代性的批判、否定和颠覆。后现代性试图通过弘扬革新的思想观念，改变和超越现代性或现代精神，建立承认差异、尊重他者、主张多元性和包容性的合理的后现代社会秩序和后现代精神。后现代性是后现代主义的思想基础，也是后现代西方伦理学的思想基础。后现代主义文学消除作者的叙述权威、叙述中心，采用多角度观察、多叙述者、多声音（或复调）、多样杂糅的结构、多元变化的叙事技巧等构成的狂欢化叙事；用平行结构、戏仿、直接引用等构成的互文叙事，即用这种与承认差异、尊重他者、主张多元性和包容性的后现代伦理学一致的后现代伦理的叙事，来表现文学文本中所表现的后现代伦理关系和道德秩序的变化及其引发的各种问题和导致的不同结果，为后现代人类文明进

步提供经验和教诲。自2014年起,我根据聂珍钊教授文学伦理学批评的基本原理,系统研究了齐格蒙·鲍曼、伊曼纽尔·列维纳斯、雅克·德里达、让-吕克·南希等哲学家提出的后现代西方伦理思想,在后现代主义文学研究的基础上,尝试建构了“后现代文学伦理学批评理论”。从2015年开始,我在中国人民大学英语专业研究生“当代西方文艺批评理论”课程中增加了“后现代文学伦理学批评”一章。仅在2015—2016、2016—2017两学年内,就有20多名本科生、10多名硕士生和6名博士生用后现代文学伦理学批评理论为立论依据和批判的武器,展开对英美后现代主义小说和戏剧的研究,撰写学位论文并在学术刊物上发表论文。

因此, *Main Ideas of Contemporary Western Literary Critical Theories* (《当代西方文艺批评理论要义》) 完全可以用作高校文学专业研究生文学批评和理论研究课程教材,亦可作为文学、文化、文艺学研究生及从事文学批评和理论研究学者的工具书或参考书。

本书工作量较大,除了对每章的理论概述进行系统、全面的修改、充实外,还要从大量的理论文献中精选、编辑作为学者自主阅读的文献材料。此项工作十分繁重,为了使本书尽早出版,我邀请了史岩林、张东芹、王小会和黄贺4名英美文学批评、文论研究方向的博士来协助我完成材料的精选和编辑工作。虽然他们各自都很忙,但他们都欣然加入我的工作团队,给予大力支持。如果没有他们的加盟,这部书是不可能在今年就得以出版的。因此,我要衷心地感谢他们!

本书写作分工如下:

上卷 陈世丹、史岩林、张东芹著。

下卷 陈世丹、王小会、黄贺著。

本书得到中国人民大学“中央高校建设世界一流大学(学科)和特色发展引导专项资金”经费支持,特向中国人民大学和中国人民大学外国语学院表示衷心的感谢!本书还得到了中国人民大学出版社外语分社的大力支持,也特向各位编辑表示衷心的感谢!

陈世丹

2017年8月24日

# Contents



Introduction / 1

## Volume 1

- Chapter One Russian Formalism / 13
- Chapter Two The Anglo-American New Criticism / 20
- Chapter Three Marxist Criticism / 26
- Chapter Four Psychological and Psychoanalytic Criticism / 37
- Chapter Five Myth and Archetypal Criticism / 46
- Chapter Six Structuralist Criticism / 53
- Chapter Seven Reception-Aesthetics and Reader-Response Theory / 60
- Chapter Eight Post-structuralism / 68
- Chapter Nine Postmodernism / 77

## Volume 2

- Chapter Ten Feminist Criticism / 89
  - Chapter Eleven New Historicism / 97
  - Chapter Twelve Post-Colonialist Studies / 109
  - Chapter Thirteen Gender Studies / 119
  - Chapter Fourteen Cultural Studies / 137
  - Chapter Fifteen Ecological Literary Criticism / 152
  - Chapter Sixteen Ecological Postmodernism / 173
  - Chapter Seventeen Post-humanism / 190
  - Chapter Eighteen Postmodern Ethical Literary Criticism / 202
- Bibliography / 249



## Introduction



When analyzing a literary text, literary critics ask basic questions such as these about the philosophical, psychological, functional, and descriptive natures of the text itself: 1) Does a text have only one correct meaning? 2) Is a text always didactic; that is, must a reader learn something from every text? 3) Does a text affect each reader in the same way? 4) How is a text influenced by the culture of its author and the culture in which it is written? 5) Can a text become a catalyst for change in a given culture? No matter what question we may ask concerning a literary text, we are participating in an ongoing discussion of the value and enjoyment of a literary work while simultaneously engaging in literary criticism and functioning as practical literary critics. Traditionally, literary critics involve themselves in either theoretical or practical criticism. Theoretical criticism formulates the theories, principles, and tenets of the nature and value of art. By citing general aesthetic and moral principles of art, theoretical criticism provides the necessary framework for practical criticism. Practical criticism (also known as applied criticism) applies the theories and tenets of theoretical criticism to a particular work. Using the theories and principles of theoretical criticism, the practical critic defines the standards of taste and explains, evaluates, or justifies a particular piece of literature. A further distinction is made between the practical critic who posits that there is one theory or set of principles a critic may use when evaluating a literary work—the absolutist critic—and the relativistic critic, one who uses various or even contradictory theories in critiquing a text. The basis for either kind of critic, or any form of criticism, is literary theory. Without theory, practical criticism could not exist. The theories that we are going to study in this course of ours will include “critical theories,” “literary theories,” and “cultural theories” in a general sense.



**Literary theory** in a strict sense is the systematic study of the nature of literature and of the methods for analyzing literature. However, literary scholarship since the 19th century often includes—in addition to, or even instead of literary theory in the strict sense—considerations of intellectual history, moral philosophy, social prophecy, and other interdisciplinary themes which are of relevance to the way humans interpret meaning. In humanities in modern academia, the latter style of scholarship is an outgrowth of critical theory and is often called simply “theory.” As a consequence, the word “theory” has become an umbrella term for a variety of scholarly approaches to reading texts. Many of these approaches are informed by various strands of continental philosophy and sociology.

**Critical theory** (or “**social critical theory**”) describes the neo-Marxist philosophy of the Frankfurt School, which was developed in Germany in the 1930s. Critical theory maintains that ideology is the principal obstacle to human liberation. Martin Jay has stated that the first generation of critical theory is best understood as not promoting a specific philosophical agenda or a specific ideology, but as “a gadfly of other systems.” Critical theory was established as a school of thought primarily by five Frankfurt School theoreticians, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Fromm, drawing on the critical methods of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Modern critical theory has additionally been influenced by György Lukács and Antonio Gramsci, as well as the second generation Frankfurt School scholars, such as Jürgen Habermas. Concern for economic base and superstructure is one of the remaining Marxist philosophical concepts in much of the contemporary critical theory. While critical theorists have been frequently defined as Marxist intellectuals, their tendency to denounce some Marxist concepts and to combine Marxian analysis with other sociological and philosophical traditions has resulted in accusations of revisionism by Classical, Orthodox, and Analytical Marxists, and by Marxist-Leninist philosophers.

**Culture theory** is the branch of comparative anthropology and semiotics (not to be confused with cultural sociology or cultural studies) that seeks to define the heuristic concept of culture in operational and/or scientific terms.

In the 19th century, “culture” was used by some to refer to a wide array of hu-

man activities, and by others as a synonym for “civilization.” In the 20th century, anthropologists began theorizing about culture as an object of scientific analysis. Some used it to distinguish human adaptive strategies from the largely instinctive adaptive strategies of animals, including the adaptive strategies of other primates and non-human hominids, whereas others used it to refer to symbolic representations and expressions of human experience, with no direct adaptive value. Both groups understood culture as being definitive of human nature.

According to many theories that have gained wide acceptance among anthropologists, culture exhibits the way that humans interpret their biology and their environment. According to this point of view, culture becomes such an integral part of human existence that it *is* the human environment, and most cultural change can be attributed to human adaptation to historical events. Moreover, given that culture is seen as the primary adaptive mechanism of humans and takes place much faster than human biological evolution, most cultural change can be viewed as culture adapting to itself.

Although most anthropologists try to define culture in such a way that it separates human beings from other animals, many human traits are similar to those of other animals, particularly the traits of other primates. For example, chimpanzees have big brains, but human brains are bigger. Similarly, bonobos exhibit complex sexual behaviour, but human beings exhibit much more complex sexual behaviours. As such, anthropologists often debate whether human behaviour is different from animal behaviour in degree rather than in kind; they must also find ways to distinguish cultural behavior from sociological behavior and psychological behavior.

W. Brian Arthur, economist of complexity economics, explored acceleration and amplification of the various aspects of culture change. In his book, *The Nature of Technology* (2009), Arthur attempts to articulate a theory of change that considers that existing technologies (or material culture) are combined in unique ways that lead to novel new technologies. Behind that novel combination is a purposeful effort arising in human motivation. This articulation would suggest that we are just beginning to understand what might be required for a more robust theory of culture and culture change, one that brings coherence across many disciplines and reflects an integrating elegance.

To speak briefly, critical theories are the theories about the written language



(including all kinds of signs) and texts (including social texts). The emergence and application of these theories are closely related to “the language turn” in the 20th century.

Observing in a whole, literary theories in the past were based on “the modes of expression” of language, namely, on the concept that language was used to imitate, reproduce or reflect reality. That is to say, literature could reflect the truth and essence of reality through language’s imitation and reproduction of reality. In other words, there was a transcendental existence that was prior to man and independent of man’s consciousness outside language. What literature reflected was the truth and essence of this existence. Yet this kind of truth and essence that are imagined prior to language does not exist. Before the imitation and reproduction of language take place, this kind of truth and essence cannot automatically and directly appear before man because any truth or essence cannot be tenable without the expression of language. In the final analysis, the so-called objective truth can only be a subjective hypothesis because man’s thinking can not go without language and man enters “the prison-house of language”—a language that exists prior to him once he was born. This language is a relation web of a fixed meaning that determines man’s position of existence, his relation to nature, society, history, the other, himself, and the ways by which he acts and associates with the others. Therefore, man does not freely control language but is controlled by language. Language is not an instrument that is dead and handy to be used.

In the light of this view of language, Contemporary Western Critical Theories, especially the theories of post-structuralism, have generally abandoned the modes of expression of language. Language is no longer the imitation of the outside reality and does not reflect the truth and essence any more. The so-called truth is only an unreal image constructed by language. The so-called meaning can only be produced in the language itself. Meaning is produced in the process that language is used and is the outcome of the permutations and combinations of language signs. Thus, reading and interpretation do no longer “find” truth and meaning but “invent and create” truth and meaning. Therefore, all texts do not have absolute meanings any more and have lost the center of unity. Interpretation has become a free personal activity.

Why did such “a language turn” emerge in the 20th century? This should be

examined through the development of the human society. As it has entered the post-modern times or the computer era from the modern times, the whole society has changed tremendously. The computerized electronic structure, the huge commercial web, and the great invisible systems have given rise to the fearful prospect of new totalitarianism. The few people in the dominant position will make a unified, all-embracing, extra-interplanetary organizational structure designed for automation. People will not actively play their roles as autonomous persons but will be turned into passive and aimless creatures controlled by machines. Their proper roles will either be devoured by machines or rigorously limited and controlled because the interests of the individuals and collective organizations have been lost. In such a situation, they as individuals do not know where to go. They are vacillating and hesitating, confused and irresolute in giving opinions, and dispersed and inconsistent in actions. They fear and doubt but cannot focus on the object that they fear and doubt. It is just this terrible prospect that causes the rising of the critical theories that are grounded on the philosophy of skepticism, especially of the theories of post-structuralism that reached its peak in the 1970s and the 1980s. Meanwhile, the theories on the basis of the ideas of humanism, such as Reception Aesthetics and Reader-Response Criticism, have been admitted and developed in this period, which stress the role of the individual consciousness and resist the monopoly and control of the great systems.

Another very important aspect of the development of Contemporary Critical Theories is "the cultural turn." Along with the development of globalization and the appearance of the commercialization of knowledge, it is especially the development and the running ways of transnational corporations that have already made the economic power begin to endanger the governments of states, at least having caused that a part of the decision about investment has gone beyond the scope of states' control.

Besides, along with the development of the postmodern society or the computer society, the nature of knowledge has changed. The supply and use of knowledge have become a relation between production and consumption. Knowledge has also become commercialized. Thus, the productive force of knowledge has not only constituted a key for a country's development but also at the same time become an important factor of the rival for the world power. Some day the countries in the world will have strug-



gles to scramble for knowledge and control information as they had wars to control territories and plunder raw materials or cheap labor force in the past. Thus, on the one hand, knowledge has opened new areas for commerce, and on the other hand, it has brought about new challenges for political strategies. Consequently, in the West the tendency of knowledge to be politicalized has appeared, the governments and all kinds of institutions are competing in reinforcing the control of culture with the result that a wave of antimonopoly, antiauthority and anti-control has been surging high and with this cultural studies has been aroused and the theories of ideological studies that is carried out by countries, nationalities, races, sexes, classes, etc. have appeared.

Simply speaking, these theories are concerned with the social practices of human beings, the production and reproduction of human experiences, and the constitution of the human subject. Today, like the present situation of its development, cultural studies is a field in which all branches of learning are mixed and is hard to define like the theories themselves. It can be said that cultural studies and theories are not mutually exclusive: theories are the theories of culture and cultural studies is the practice of theories; or cultural studies is the practice of culture and theories are the theories about cultural practice. Therefore, critical theories must be considered in this sense and must not be limited to the theories about the written language or texts.

### **The Characteristics of Contemporary Western Critical Theories**

The present-day theories have two most important characteristics: 1) they are heterogeneous, that is, they do not seek homogeneity; 2) they unprecedentedly criticize the basis and hypotheses of traditional criticism. Jonathan Culler, American famous critic, has summed up four characteristics of the contemporary Western critical theories: 1) they go beyond the branches of learning—the effect of language lies outside its original branches of learning; 2) they are analytical and speculative—they seek to find out the connotations of many things such as sexes, language, meaning, works, the subject, etc.; 3) they take a critical attitude towards common sense—they criticize the concepts that are naturally accepted; 4) they are introspective—they investigate thoughts and explore the categories in which people make things produce meaning, which include not only literary practice but also the practice of other dis-

courses. <sup>①</sup>

Literary study is always a branch of learning with plural meaning. It constitutes all kinds of traditional practices, such as histories of literatures, literary biographies, moral-aesthetic criticism, new criticism, etc. They co-existed in a quite stable state of disequilibrium until the 1960s and shared the same or similar understanding of writers, the nature of literary works, and the aims of criticism. Critics might have controversies over whether a work could be accepted as one of classics but they had no doubt about the existence of the so-called “literature” itself, no doubt about the opinion that the author determines the meaning of a work, and no doubt about the view that criticism attaches itself to the literary object that it studies either. All these have been sternly queried and reevaluated by the present-day theoretical discourses.

The present-day critical theories think that they have already become an independent branch of learning and the day-to-day work that is indispensable to literary study. They refuse to accept the border position to depend on literature and do not acknowledge that they are an outside concern that is closer to philosophy for literature. They put themselves in the core of the critical cause and insist that all critical actions cannot overstep theories. As many theorists have pointed out, the traditional form of criticism that is used to study literature and the response to a famous literary work cannot work without theories and cannot be a purely academic endeavor. All forms of criticism are grounded on certain theories or a mixture of theories whether they are aware of this or not. The theoretical works have already shown that in literary study those ways that are regarded as “natural” and “common sense” rely actually on a set of theoretical instructions. For the part of critics, they have already melted these instructions in their blood and carried out them in their actions and so they need not prove this again in their own practice.

After they have transformed themselves into the routine work of literary study, theories have caused a series of heated disputes. Some critics consider that theories are deeply contained in the daily work of literary study and in the analysis of some concrete works; the others think that theories should not direct straight at the object of lit-

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<sup>①</sup> Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 15.



erary study but should operate in the abstract and abstruse fields. Thus, they separate themselves from the traditional ways such as close reading and direct study of works. Most theories are abstract, do not directly provide a method to discuss a literary text but possess a great significance to the ways of literary study. This significance cannot be abolished because theories are short of direct practical value. Criticism as a branch of learning is fundamentally based on its direct relation to the object of study, which is determined by history and is not inevitable or natural. A part of attack upon orthodox criticism involves the determination of the natural ways of literary study. If literary theories sneer at tradition, they attack it and make it seem to be single but not plural. That is because the object of their attack is not the variety that constitutes those traditional critical practices but the basis and a whole set of hypotheses of traditional criticism. Traditional criticism stubbornly insists that the basis or the set of hypotheses can only be “natural” and “perceptible.”

The basis of traditional criticism is a determinacy of epistemology and ontology, thinking that the relation between author, text and reader is determinate. Every form of criticism lays special emphasis on a different aspect. For example, the criticism on a biography stresses the author; the criticism on history or sociology, the background; new criticism, the text itself; moral-aesthetic criticism, the relation between the text and reality, etc. They all, however, accept the literary theory of mimesis in the broad sense. That is to say, literature always reflects and provides in this way or that way the so-called “truth” about life and the living situation of human beings. The task of literature is to depict life and describe experiences and feelings in a potential way. The work of criticism is to reveal the true value and the meaning of this description. Here is a paradox: this description is contained in literature but needs to be revealed by critical activity.

The theory of mimesis regards language as a transparent medium through which reality can be reproduced in an aesthetic way and go beyond the expression of the written language. This view of language is again related to a universal world outlook: man is the center of the world and cognition is the product of experiences. Experiences are prior to language that expresses them and language is only the instrument used to express them. According to this opinion, literature is the product of a collective of out-



standing individuals who can represent the universal and eternal truths by using language. In other words, literature is the action of a few excellent people.

What the present-day theories query and criticize is just this set of hypotheses and in their critical practice the present-day theories have formed multiple different theoretical viewpoints. Owing to their criticism, traditional common understanding around literary study and the ideology that supports it have now already disintegrated. For instance, Feminism has introduced culture and politics into literary study, reader-response theory has shifted its study center from the relation between author and text to the relation between text and reader, new Marxism lays emphasis on the proposition that culture should intervene and interfere society, post-structuralism subverts the traditional metaphysical cognition, post-colonial theory opposes cultural hegemony, postmodernism pushes forward diversity or pluralism, etc. The current cultural studies does more to recognize from many aspects the role and function of culture, especially the role and function of culture in the world today: in a world in which all kinds of social groups are mixed and in a world that is constructed by state powers, media industry, and transnational corporations, how does cultural production operate? How is the cultural identity of individuals and groups constituted? How are people influenced and controlled by cultural power and to what extent are they dominated by cultural forms? To what extent or in what ways can cultural forms be used for other purposes? To what extent can people become the subject that is responsible for their own actions? Again to what extent will people's choice be limited by the power beyond their control? Obviously, the answers to these questions go far beyond the limits of traditional criticism but will undoubtedly give great impetus to the development of the whole literary study.

As we have said, the new theories are produced and developed on a social basis. For nearly half a century, along with the development and the use of high and new science and technology and globalization coming with it, an unprecedented change has taken place in the whole structure of human society and international relations, along with which a tremendous change has also taken place in ideology, moral concepts, and the thinking manner of people. When they face the new situation, the problems that how people will understand society and how they will deal with the soci-