

# “Literary Theory: An Anthology”

## Excerpts Rivkin/Ryan

“The words “No Radio” refer to a sign people put in their cars in New York City. It means “don’t bother breaking into the body of this car; the radio has already been either stolen or else removed by the owner.”... this image because it speaks to the reservations many still feel about “theory” and about its association with the ideology of mastery through critical analysis that murders to dissect... We would not summon the image if we did not feel that “theory” is itself filled with doubt regarding the objectivist ideal the image so carefully mocks. Some theories do indeed fulfil the aspirations of the man with the heart in his hand, but we hope you will feel that there are many others in this book that adopt the perspective of the woman on the table.”

Formalisms: Russian Formalisms and New Criticisms

“If the author emerges by addressing the reader, by commenting on the action, by reflections, etc., the reader will bridge the gap between his own world and fictional reality under the guidance, so to speak, of the author. This is authorial narration. If the reader has the illusion of being present on the scene in one of the figures (characters), then figural narration is taking place. If the point of observation does not lie in any of the novel’s figures, although the perspective gives the reader the feeling of being present as an imaginary witness of the events then the presentation can be called neutral.”

Structuralism, Linguistics, Narratology

“There is the notion of “spirit,” which enables us to establish between the simultaneous or successive phenomena of a given period a community of meanings, symbolic links, an interplay of resemblance and reflexion, or which allows the sovereignty of collective consciousness to emerge as the principle of unity and explanation. We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset. We must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign. And instead of giving them unqualified, spontaneous value, we must accept, in the name of methodological rigor, that, in the first instance, they concern only a population of dispersed events.”

“1) Language is a well-defined object in the heterogeneous mass of speech facts. It can be localized in the limited segment of the speaking-circuit where an auditory image becomes associated with a concept. It is the social side of speech, outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community. Moreover, the individual must always serve an apprenticeship to learn the functioning of language; a child assimilates it only gradually. It is such a distinct thing that a man deprived of the use of speaking retains it if he understands the vocal signs that he hears. (2) Language, unlike speaking, is something that we can study separately. Although dead languages are no longer spoken, we can easily assimilate their linguistic organisms. We can dispense with the other elements of speech; indeed, the science of language is possible only if the other elements are excluded. (3) Whereas speech is heterogeneous, language, as

defined, is homogeneous. It is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound- images, and in which both parts of the sign are psychological.<sup>4</sup>) Language is concrete, no less so than speaking; and this is a help in our study of it. Linguistic signs, though basically psychological, are not abstractions; associations which bear the stamp of collective approval - and which added together constitute language - are realities that have their seat in the brain.”

Rhetoric, Phenomenology, Reader-Response

“Metaphor: implied comparison for two things of unlike nature to have something in common. Simile is explicit metaphor. Chiasmus. The order in the second half of an expression reverses that of the first. Metonymy. Substitution of some attributive word for what is meant. Example: crown for royalty. Synecdoche. Substitution of part for whole, example: silver for money. Irony. Use of word to convey meaning opposite to the word.”

Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, Postmodernism

“Only, on the one hand, the process of limitation and, on the other, the study of the violently alternating reactions of antagonism (expulsion) and love (reabsorption) obtained by positing the heterogeneous element, lie within the province of heterology as science. This element itself remains indefinable and can only be determined through negation.”

“Differance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive (the a of Differance indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition) production of the intervals without which the “full” terms would not signify, would not function. It is also the becoming-space of the spoken chain - which has been called temporal or linear; a becoming-space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing, every passage from one to the other.”

Psychoanalysis and Psychology

“Freud’s account of the boy’s Oedipus complex is relatively simple and straightforward.<sup>2</sup> In response to, or in collaboration with, his heterosexual mother, a boy’s pre-oedipal attachment to her becomes charged with phallic/sexual overtones. He comes to see his father as a rival for his mother’s love and wishes to replace him. He fantasizes taking his father’s penis, murdering, or castrating him. He fears retaliation, and specifically castration, by his father for these wishes; thus, he experiences a conflict between his self- love (narcissistic interest in his penis and body integrity) and his love for his mother (libidinal cathexis). As a result, he gives up his heterosexual attachment to his mother, radically repressing and denying his feelings toward her. (These feelings are not only repressed, but also are partly expressed in “aim-inhibited” modes, in affectionate feelings and sublimated activities.) At the same time, a “successful” resolution of his Oedipus complex requires that he remain heterosexual. Therefore, he is supposed to detach his heterosexual orientation from his mother, so that when he grows up, he can reattach it to some other woman. He receives a reward for his self-sacrifice, in addition to his avoidance of punishment. The carrot of the masculine Oedipus complex is identification with his father, and the superiority of masculine identification and prerogatives over feminine (if the threat of castration is the stick). A new psychic integration appears in place of the Oedipus complex, as the boy’s ego is modified and transformed through the incorporation of paternal prohibitions to form his superego, and as he substitutes a general sexual orientation for the specific attachment to his mother

(this attachment is composed of both the remainders of his infantile love and his newer sexualized and genitalized attachment).”

#### Historicisms

“For a long time, the prevailing model for the study of literary sources, a model in effect parcelled out between the old historicism and the new criticism, blocked such a question. As a freestanding, self-sufficient, disinterested artwork produced by a solitary genius, King Lear has only an accidental relation to its sources: they provide a glimpse of the “raw material” that the artist fashioned. Insofar as this “material” is taken seriously at all, it is as part of the work’s “historical background,” a phrase that reduces history to a decorative setting or a convenient, well-lighted pigeonhole. But once the differentiations on which this model is based begin to crumble, then source study is compelled to change its character: history cannot simply be set against literary texts as either stable antithesis or stable background, and the protective isolation of those texts gives way to a sense of their interaction with other texts and hence of the permeability of their boundaries.”

#### Political Criticism: Marxism to Cultural Materialism

“Let me summarize what we have discovered about ideology in general. The duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures simultaneously: 1 the interpellation of “individuals” as subjects; 2 their subjection to the Subject; 3 the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects’ recognition of each other, and finally the subject’s recognition of himself; 4 the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen - “So be it.””

“The usual interpretation of this dream is based on a thesis that one of the functions of the dream is to enable the dreamer to prolong his sleep. The sleeper is suddenly exposed to an exterior irritation, a stimulus coming from reality (the ringing of an alarm clock, knocking on the door, or, in this case, the smell of smoke), and to prolong his sleep he quickly, on the spot, constructs a dream: a little scene, a small story, which includes this irritating element. However, the external irritation soon becomes too strong, and the subject is awakened. The Lacanian reading is directly opposed to this. The subject does not awake himself when the external irritation becomes too strong; the logic of his awakening is quite different. First, he constructs a dream, a story which enables him to prolong his sleep, to avoid awakening into reality. But the thing that he encounters in the dream, the reality of his desire, the Lacanian Real - in our case, the reality of the child’s reproach to his father, “Can’t you see that I am burning?,” implying the father’s fundamental guilt - is more terrifying than so-called external reality itself, and that is why he awakens: to escape the Real of his desire, which announces itself in the terrifying dream. He escapes into so-called reality to be able to continue to sleep, to maintain his blindness, to elude awakening into the Real of his desire. We can rephrase here the old “hippy” motto of the 1960s: reality is for those who cannot support [tolerate] the dream. “Reality” is a fantasy- construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire.”

“The Lacanian thesis is, on the contrary, that there is always a hard kernel, a leftover which persists and cannot be reduced to a universal play of illusory mirroring. The difference between Lacan and “naïve realism” is that for Lacan, the only point at which we approach this hard kernel of the Real is indeed the dream. When we awaken into reality after a dream, we usually say to ourselves “it was just a dream,” thereby blinding ourselves to the fact that in our everyday, wakening reality we are nothing but a

consciousness of this dream. It was only in the dream that we approached the fantasy- framework which determines our activity, our mode of acting in reality itself. It is the same with the ideological dream, with the determination of ideology as a dreamlike construction hindering us from seeing the real state of things, reality as such. In vain do we try to break out of the ideological dream by “opening our eyes and trying to see reality as it is,” by throwing away the ideological spectacles as the subjects of such a post-ideological, objective, sober look, free of so-called ideological prejudices, as the subjects of a look which views the facts as they are, we remain throughout “the consciousness of our ideological dream.” The only way to break the power of our ideological dream is to confront the Real of our desire which announces itself in this dream.”

#### Feminism

“Mother, virgin, prostitute: these are the social roles imposed on women. The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorisation of reproduction and nursing; faithfulness; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men’s “activity”; seductiveness, to arouse the consumers’ desire while offering herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself... Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure.”

“But by submitting women’s bodies to a general equivalent, to a transcendent, supernatural value, men have drawn the social structure into an ever-greater process of abstraction, to the point where they themselves are produced in it as pure concepts: having surmounted all their “perceptible” qualities and individual differences, they are finally reduced to the average productivity of their labour. The power of this practical economy of the meta- physical comes from the fact that “physiological” energy is transformed into abstract value without the mediation of an intelligible elaboration.”

#### Gender Studies

“In actual fact, manifold sexualities - those which appear with the different ages (sexualities of the infant or the child), those which become fixated on particular tastes or practices (the sexuality of the invert, the gerontophile, the fetishist), those which, in a diffuse manner, invest relationships (the sexuality of doctor and patient, teacher and student, psychiatrist and mental patient), those which haunt spaces (the sexuality of the home, the school, the prison) - all form the correlate of exact procedures of power. We must not imagine these things that were formerly tolerated attracted notice and received a pejorative designation when the time came to give a regulative role to the one type of sexuality that was capable of reproducing labour power and the form of the family. These polymorphous conducts were extracted from people’s bodies and from their pleasures; or rather, they were solidified in them; they were drawn out, revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated, by multifarious power devices. The growth of perversions is not a moralizing theme that obsessed the scrupulous minds of the Victorians. It is the real product of the encroachment of a type of power on bodies and their pleasures. It is possible that the West has not been capable of inventing any new pleasures, and it has doubtless not discovered any original vices. But it has defined new rules for the game of powers and pleasures. The frozen countenance of the perversions is a fixture of this game.”

“Masculinity in this society inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege; it often symbolically refers to the power of the state and to uneven distributions of wealth. Masculinity seems to extend outward into patriarchy and inward into the family; masculinity represents the power

of inheritance, the consequences of the traffic in women, and the promise of social privilege. But, obviously, many other lines of identification traverse the terrain of masculinity, dividing its power into complicated differentials of class, race, sexuality, and gender.”

Ethnic Literary and Cultural Studies, Critical Race Theory

“Probing “the complex formation of white women’s constructions of racialized selves,” Frankenberg tries to re-historicize the categories of race and culture insisting on anti-essentialist conceptions of race, ethnicity, and culture, while at the same time emphasizing that these categories are made materially ‘real’ within matrices of power relations.”<sup>56</sup> “It is critical to think clearly and carefully about the parts white people play in the maintenance of the racial order,” Frankenberg believes, “and to ask how our locations in it - and our complicity with it - are marked by other dimensions of our privilege and oppression, including class, gender, and sexuality.””

“Meanwhile, the recent explosion of interest in understudied writing receives its impetus from urgent social motives, and for that reason some of its proponents have tried, with deliberation or obliviousness, to pry aesthetic questions away from criticism. But many of us who recognize the social imperatives driving us to read understudied writing also recognize aesthetic imperatives. We like this writing. We like the rhythms and resonances of its phrases, sentences, episodes, and ideas. The politics and the aesthetics of Indian writing (or any writing) are not the same, but they are not separable either. The new critics and their followers often masked their politics by posing their political judgments as aesthetic judgments and pretending to write politics out of criticism. They saw politics as the stuff of naive criticism, especially criticism from the left. By contrast, scholars and teachers devoted to noncanonical literature see no conflict in reading politically and reading aesthetically. We read for politics and aesthetics, and we read the rhythms and resonances of one as part of reading the rhythms and resonances of the other.”

Colonial, Postcolonial and Transnational Studies

“The exercise of colonialist authority, however, requires the production of differentiations, individuations, identity effects through which discriminatory practices can map out subject populations that are tarred with the visible and transparent mark of power. Such a mode of subjection is distinct from what Foucault describes as “power through transparency”: the reign of opinion, after the late eighteenth century, which could not tolerate areas of darkness and sought to exercise power through the mere fact of things being known and people seen in an immediate, collective gaze.”