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THE PLACE OF LITERARY THEORY IN A DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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1 INTRODUCTION

“Literary critics interpret texts. By and large they get on without worrying too much about the inexplicit theories or principles that underwrite their practice” (Norris, 1985:1).

“But there is no practice without theory, however much that theory is suppressed, unformulated or perceived as obvious. What we do when we read, however ‘natural’ it seems, presupposes a whole theoretical discourse, even if unspoken, about language and about meaning, about the relationships between meaning and the world, meaning and people, and finally about people themselves and their place in the world” (Belsey, 1980:4).

“What aims, claims and conceptions justify the importance we ascribe to ‘English’? We need to be able to answer” (Leavis).

There is at present a perception of a world-wide crisis in English studies, a crisis that some critics see as extending to the humanities as a whole. This is graphically expressed by John Mowitt in an article sub-titled *Critical Theory and the Twilight of the Humanities* as “The concrete experience of the humanities as a configuration of academic disciplines is one of crisis” (1984:121). Various perceptions exist as to the reasons for this, but when it comes to constructive suggestions for the amelioration of the situation there is no consensus. The abstract awareness of this situation elsewhere is concretely supported by the concerns expressed by South African academics in English studies about the relevance of syllabi, the modes of teaching and the products delivered by such institutions of higher learning as universities and colleges.

It is my contention, and the point which I would like to argue, that literary theory has an important role to play both in assessing the nature and the extent of the crisis and the eventual solution of an impasse that has serious implications for English studies, especially within the context of an English department in South Africa where one has to deal with traditionally first world and challenging third-world issues at one and the same time. Mowitt makes an urgent plea for the introduction of theory into the crisis situation, contending that "critical theory is capable of rewriting the social significance of the humanities and providing them with a self-understanding through which they can be defended from the forces actually threatening them" (1984:122). He comments rather harshly on such critics as Bate (1982) and Peyre (1981) whom he accuses of misrecognizing theory "in order to indulge in a protective form of historical amnesia" (122). He ends the article with the proposal that "critical theory is not simply something which should be added to the humanities curriculum. Instead, we should consider adopting it as a point of departure for a fundamental reassessment of the very purpose of our curriculum..." (140). Although the references here are to critical theory and the humanities in the broader sense of the term, the statements are acute and fully applicable to "literary theory" and "English studies" in particular.

The introduction of literary theory into a discussion of this kind, however, is fraught with traps and obstacles for the unwary and the innocent. It is also true that there is a profound distrust of theory among many critics working in the field — a distrust all too often based on fear and ignorance. A comment from the work of a prominent theoretician might suffice to underline this: Terence Hawkes has remarked that "To the average speaker of English, terms such as 'structure', 'structuralist' and 'structuralism' (terms often associated uncritically with 'theory') seem to have an abstract, complex, new-fangled and possibly French air about them: a condition traditionally offering uncontested grounds for the profoundest mistrust" (1977:11). This is supported by Malcolm Bowie, a London Professor of French, who said wryly, in the course of the Cambridge controversy, that "when the structuralists began to emerge, British academics in the relevant fields froze, read nothing and said nothing" (1981:136).

Terry Eagleton has stated baldly, however, that "hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion to one's own (1983:vii). This point about the oblivion will be

dealt with again in more detail later, as will Eagleton's contention that those who dislike theory or claim to be able to get along without it are simply in the grip of an older theory.

In dealing with literary theory in a field that has traditionally and notoriously been suspicious of the term one would therefore have to make certain premises clear at the outset. This is made possible because some critics offer admirably clear-out motivations for the enterprise, making it possible to proceed to the heart of the matter.

Cain has argued, in his impeccably crafted book called *The Crisis in Criticism* (sub-titled *Theory, Literature and Reform in English Studies*) that "a major task for theory at the present time is to initiate and encourage the re-examination of English Studies ... theory should force us to undertake acts of self-scrutiny and justification and should enable us to say precisely what we do, why it is important and what makes it cohere" (1984:xiii). He goes on to plead for the proper implementation of theory by stating that the most valuable direction for those in English studies to take is to relate theory and practice, resist compartmentalization of work, and see theory as a source of new terms and tools for teaching as well as for research" (xviii).

2 DEFINITION OF TERMS AND OUTLINE OF PAPER

The term *literary theory* will be used in this paper to represent the reflective activity of the literary critic — his abstract speculation and generalization about concrete literary phenomena. This definition will be deemed sufficient as a working definition even though it has been radically questioned by Eagleton (1983:197).

The paper will centre on the following main sections:

- * A brief overview of developments in the literary theoretical field in this century, especially since the inception of English studies proper in British and other universities. Continental theories will be brought into the discussion in contrast to and in complementation of theories originating in the Anglo-American world of letters.
- * The present state of affairs in English departments will be looked at briefly, and this will be followed by a look at the gains made in terms of the application of various literary theories.

- * The pedagogical implications of this will be considered in some detail, especially insofar as these apply to curriculum and teaching practice.

3 LITERARY THEORY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW

One could very roughly periodize the history of modern literary theory in three stages:

- 3.1 A pre-occupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century), a period during which the literary work was largely used as a "document" to impart information or to be used for certain specific (didactic) purposes, as in the work of a critic like Matthew Arnold.
- 3.2 This shifted to an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism) and related practices (the text as monument).
- 3.3 Finally there has been a shift to a marked concern with the reader over recent years. This has also involved the whole concept of the text being seen as a sign system encoded within a complex set of systems, which will then be decoded by the reader.

The above outline of necessity is a simplification, but it is a useful division.

Attention will be given to the latter two of these, with critical movements in both the Anglo-American world and Europe being considered.

3.2 The text as monument

Two parallel movements were under way in the twentieth century, but by all appearances the practitioners were oblivious of each other. On the one hand there was I.A. Richards in Cambridge, who developed the concept of Practical Criticism, based on readers's responses to specific texts (poems), and who developed a style of looking at the literary text as an artefact, a style that would be perfected by the American New Critics (close readers) in the course of the next few decades. This form of criticism became the dominant mode of critical discourse in the Anglo-American world, not least because it was an eminently teachable approach. (A more detailed

critique of the method will follow in a subsequent section.) These developments grew out of the establishment of English Studies as an independent discipline for university study.

The concern with the text manifested itself lastingly in the movement that has since become known as Russian Formalism and which has had a profound influence on literary criticism in the twentieth century — it has in fact been called the single most important event in literary theory in this century. Russian Formalism examined the qualities of the language of the literary work of art, the formal devices used in literary expression, and insisted on the autonomous nature of the work of literary art. It died a premature death in Russia in 1930 because of specific political reasons, but has continued to exert great influence throughout the literary world.

A subsequent important development had linguistics at its centre and was indeed given its shape and structure by the linguist Roman Jakobson, who had been involved with the Formalists as well. In the work of the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure certain old and comfortable verities were for ever overturned. In his now familiar contention that the relation between the linguistic sign and its external referent is arbitrary and dependent on certain relations founded in convention, he laid the groundwork for a great deal of subsequent theoretical work in this century. Structuralism developed to sophisticated heights out of these and related insights. Structuralism flourished especially in France in the 1960's, developing into all branches of literary studies, and giving rise to the development, amongst others, of the literary theoretical field of narratology, the first really sustained poetics of fiction.

Gradually in the course of the sixties and seventies other forms of literary theory began to manifest themselves, and an intricate interaction could be discerned. One of the most important of these has been the formal attention given to the reader of literature, and theories of this kind manifested themselves in both Germany and France and would have far-reaching implications for future developments. German theorists like Iser and Jauss developed theories depending on the input of the reader, and the New Critical and Formalist insistence on the text as independent artefact underwent a subtle transformation — in the most general terms one could typify this by saying that the artefact, in interaction with and realised by the co-constitutive reader, had by now become an aesthetic object, a

complex entity created by both writer and reader and realised within a cultural and historical context in which concepts like horizon of expectation and open and closed texts would operate.

The co-constitutive role of the reader would also enter the work of a French critic like Roland Barthes, who extended the role of the reader into the realm where one can talk of readerly (or closed, easy) texts and writerly (or open, difficult, but enticing) texts.

The co-constitutive role of the reader would depend on the use of codes on various levels — the work of literature had by now come to be regarded as a complex set or system of signs operating within wider systems — culturally and historically defined. This approach, of the text within its various contexts, realised by the reader because of his greater or lesser accessibility to the relevant codes, goes by the name of semiotics or semiology. Leitch (1983:259-160) states that “by the middle 1970s it became clear that semiotics was a global discipline, a new megascience, with ambitions Faustian enough to encompass not only the fine arts and social sciences, but also several areas of the natural and physical sciences”.

This is off-set, however, by a much more troublesome *enfant terrible* of the literary critical world, a phenomenon since dubbed deconstruction. In an authoritative critical work on Deconstruction in the Anglo-American world, Vincent B. Leitch has stated provisionally that “the history of contemporary deconstruction opens with Jacques Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* - 1967. ... semiology is here framed as a final gasp of Western philosophy ... by Derrida this system is called ‘logocentric’, meant as a critical and unkind epithet” (1983:24). This mode of dealing with literature (not to be called a method, which would constrict it too much in its project) presents one with several difficulties, the most crucial being its denial of the logocentrism of the West. As portrayed by Derrida, the logocentric system always assigns the origin of truth to the *logos* — to the spoken word, to the voice of reason, or to the Word of God (1983:25) and his denial of this logos or origin is troublesome in the extreme. The referent has disappeared — “rumor says it got dissolved in a bath of atheistic acid. (Some believe it’s indestructible) (Leitch:116). This has had several consequences for literary theory and criticism, for in deconstruction criticism is going beyond pedagogical and academic functions toward a separate literary-philosophical realm of its own — a realm where everything has now become text, where the author has disappeared, where, “instead of literature we have textuality, in place of tradition, intertextuality ... the truth of the text ... a random flight of signifiers

across the textual surface, the disseminations of meaning, offer truth under one condition: that the chaotic processes of textuality be wilfully regulated, controlled, or stopped" (122).

The radical nature of the project is illustrated in Leitch's statement that "intertextuality posits both an uncentered historical enclosure and an abysmal decentered foundation for language and textuality; in so doing, it exposes all contextualizations as limited and limiting, arbitrary and confining, self-serving and authoritarian, theological and political" (1983:162).

In a more positive vein one could say that deconstructive practice alerts one to certain aspects of a work of art, for example, in a wholly novel way, for to read closely in the deconstructive manner produces more reliable history than the history of historicists and archaeologists, who, in Leitch's terms, "champion carefully forged lies of order and continuity" (1983:189). In the work of a critic like J. Hillis Miller, too, "deconstruction as a mode of interpretation works by a careful and circumspect entering of each textual labyrinth ..." (190).

Historically speaking, deconstruction emerges in our time as a severe critique of and an 'alternative' to both phenomenology and structuralism. There is also a further implication in this, for Leitch contends that "when we consider Roland Barthes as deconstructor, we shall come upon an urban and lucid former structuralist, who practices an agile 'Marxism' and psychoanalysis, both of which condition his theories of textuality and intertextuality" (1983:102). It is within this framework too that one can describe deconstruction as production—with all the attendant ideological connotations. Psychoanalysis, starting with Freud and tortuously elaborated by, especially, Jacques Lacan, have added their voices to this debate.

Contemporary literary criticism, and notably certain forms of structuralism, have revealed an unparalleled concern with ideology. An influential critic like Eagleton has written persuasively and at length about this and concludes his comprehensive book on Literary Theory with a chapter called *Political Criticism*, and insists that "the idea that there are non-political forms of criticism is simply a myth which furthers certain political uses of literature all the more effectively" (1983:209), and he accordingly proposes that the title of the final chapter is not intended to show that this is just another form of criticism, but that this is indeed, Conclusion: Political Criticism. This closely involves another form of criticism which is increasingly

demanding attention as a legitimate form, viz. feminist criticism, which has succeeded in showing up certain very definite ideological biases in literary practice in a most convincing manner, both in terms of literary works and prevalent critical practices. A point with important possibilities for application to be made here was made by Durant in response to Eagleton's political concern, for he maintains that "the politics of literary theory needs to be argued in terms of actual teaching/learning and publishing practices as much as in terms of global social imperatives, with some explicit and argued linkage between the various levels that will have to be far more flexible and responsive to circumstance than anything predicted by Marxist models of analysis developed so far" (1985:65).

4 ENGLISH STUDIES: ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

4.1 English studies in England itself developed out of a perceived crisis, a crisis described by Matthew Arnold and others, who felt that education was desperately needed to educate and uplift the lower and middle classes for a certain express purpose, rather acidly described by Eagleton in the following terms: "If the masses are not thrown a few novels, they may react by throwing up a few barricades ... since literature, as we know, deals in universal human values rather than in such historical trivia as civil wars, the oppression of women or the dispossession of the English peasantry" (1983:25). In 1891 it was declared that the people "need political culture, instruction, ... and they need to be impressed sentimentally by having the presentation in legend and history of heroic and patriotic examples brought vividly and attractively before them" (Eagleton:25). It is significant that English as a field of study had humble beginnings in other institutes, before being deemed fit, as a poor replacement for the Classics, to be taught at University. A Royal Commission in 1877 also decided that "English literature might be considered a suitable subject for women ... and the second- and third-rate men who ... become schoolmasters" (*in* Eagleton, 1983:27).

At first English literature was an upstart, amateurish affair as academic subjects went, hardly able to compete on equal terms with the rigours of the Greats or Philology, but English literature came into its own in the aftermath of the Great War, when German philology had taken a distinct knock, and English Literature represented a search for spiritual solutions on the part of the English ruling class whose sense of identity had been badly shaken. English came to represent something of enduring value to be used as a bulwark

against trivializing influences and the enterprise gained greatly in importance and popularity, to the extent that one commentator has made the wry remark that "the Decline of the West was felt to be avertible by close reading" (Eagleton:34). This of course indicates the direction that such departments inevitably took and that is still the structuring principle of most English departments in the Anglo-American world.

There is much troubled soul-searching about the stature and relevance of English studies today still, and between traditional liberal humanists and radical ideologists a battle is still raging which leaves scars of anxiety on English departments, reflected in a statement like the following: "... the frustration that is created in English studies by the unresolved jostling of Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism and the rest with the many variants of traditional 'Eng. Lit' conceals a deeper anxiety: the possibility that the subject is not really an academic discipline at all" (Ball, 1981:136).

4.2 Critique of New Criticism

As has been pointed out, New Criticism has been the dominant if not the exclusive mode of critical practice in English departments in the Anglo-American world, not least, as has been indicated, because of the teachability of this style of criticism. Some rather harsh criticism has been levelled at New Criticism, however, much of it with good reason, some of it unnecessarily harsh.

"The New Critical stress on 'close reading' of the text managed ... to 'democratize' the 'literary transaction'. Students did not require background information ... in order to respond to and be articulate about the text ... But localizing the 'literary transaction', making it a matter of the 'close reader' and the text, led to a confining and narrowing of the aims of criticism. The New Critics, Brooks in particular, maintained that historical, political, and social materials, though not primary, were relevant to critical understanding.

Inevitably, however, as 'close reading' lodged itself in the academy, knowledge about what was 'outside' or 'external' to the text faded from view altogether ... the New Critics 'stripped down' criticism to the essentials ... and once history was de-emphasized it could not help but become devalued, or, at best, transformed into the 'history of poetic styles such as paradox and ambiguity'" (Cain, 1984:2). Thus, although New Criticism had been intended to be an orderly inquiry,

the standards for judgment were inevitably loose and invited the play of subjectivity from the start, and far from becoming a stream-lined, modern discipline, English studies appeared to be falling back into impressionism and incoherence. Yet in spite of these shortcomings, the momentum of the movement was impossible to stop. The New Criticism was teachable, the others were not.

This type of comment is representative of the concerned but non-radical critic. A much more radical and harsh stance is taken by other critics, represented by Belsey, who refers to what is obviously the status quo in English departments and insists that "only by closing the doors of the English departments against theoretical challenges from outside can we continue to ignore the 'Copernican' revolution which is currently taking place, and which is radically undermining traditional ways of perceiving both the world and the text" (1980:130). The task of criticism, then, as she sees it, is to establish the unspoken in the text, to decentre it in order to produce a real knowledge of history (Belsey:136) — and the decentring process involves the dethroning of an authority, the medieval God, the transcendent cogito, the instincts. In literature, the same Copernican revolution has dethroned the author (134). This leads to the conclusion that criticism can no longer be isolated from other areas of knowledge, for the new critical practice requires us to come to terms with concepts of ideology and subjectivity drawn from fields which have no relation to a theory or practice of literary criticism *conceived as self-contained* — the essential quality of New Criticism. Belsey ultimately sees this very open mode as "the source and evidence" of its vitality, but in its ideological implications this position is not tenable at a University which espouses a Christian world view, and so, while some of the insights of these critics are useful (Lerner has stated that "we can respond to the evocative insights and shrug the dogmatism aside" [1983:11]) one cannot buy the entire position. Lerner has suggested a position which must seem supremely sensible: "Between the two simple extremes, that all meaning is subjective and that every text has one fixed meaning, it is necessary to work out a tenable and (no doubt) complex position" (1983:14). He also cautions against a too simplistic division of these procedures, for "the value of a commentator's work depends far less on his ideological premises than on his acumen. If the diehard traditionalists regard [*Reconstructing Literature*] as a *trahison des clercs*, and if the deconstructionist regards it as a desperate act of self-deception by a doomed bourgeois Establishment, we can only step out of the confrontation and wait for the heat and dust to die down" (Lerner:15). This stance is ably supported by a

South African view. Potter (1986:18) has referred graphically to the tendency towards self-dramatization revealed by many radicalist critics, and he quotes Steiner in support of the idea that “these are simple truths (and the honest critic says them to himself in the grey of the morning). But we are in danger of forgetting them, because the present time is peculiarly charged with autonomous critical energy and prestige” (1986:11).

5 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Basic premises

My stance regarding literary theory and its inclusion in a department of English possibly stops short of radical proposals and revolutionary practice. Lerner (1983:4) has cautioned against a situation of radicalism in saying that in such a situation “tradition will be dead and the new will be lunatic”. I therefore join with William Cain when he concludes that “the most notable of [my limitations] is that I preserve departmental structure: I focus on ‘English studies’ and do not call for the abolition of ‘departments’ and ‘disciplines’ as such. This may signal a failure of vision, but I believe that it does acknowledge the facts of academic life today. We might wish that departments would dissolve or waste away; we might sometimes judge that they impede, rather than stimulate, real progress in the formation of social, cultural and historical thought. But to call for the end of departments and disciplines is to indulge in an unreal and irrelevant gesture. Before we leap to the conclusion that we can get along without the institutional structures now in place and in force, we should first seek to remake and revitalize them. Surely this task will require as much energy and endurance as we can muster” (1984:277).

Working within these parameters, then, and thinking always in terms of the ultimate aims and objectives of an English course in the eighties, I would like to comment as follows:

5.2 Aims and objectives

In working out our aims and objectives, we have to keep in mind the students that we will be confronting, and if a Professor of English in Britain (Colin McCabe, 1981:137) has to concede that teaching English literature may well consist of teaching the parts of speech, that is even more true of the South African situation. In a typical

third-year class-room we have students capable of expressing themselves elegantly and well on a variety of sophisticated literary and theoretical topics while at the same time there are students capable of awesomely naïve expression, almost complete cultural deprivation and truly stunning linguistic invention born from abysmal ignorance of basic language structures. Thus we have to structure and tailor courses to meet all challenges, challenges which will become more demanding in the future as the composition of the student body will inevitably change. Alan Durant (1985), in an article entitled *Modern Literary Theory in the Teaching of Literature*, has pointed out the sobering truth that the present secondary education in Britain (and this is widely applicable to the South African situation) leaves students with the following equipment (or lack of it):

- 1 There has been a relative move away from classical education and study of the Bible, and this calls in question traditional methods and approaches based on a high degree of student familiarity with classical and Biblical allusion;
- 2 there has been a fundamental move away from the formal study of English grammar, and this creates the situation that students lack terminology in which to capture views about texts which are based on intuitions about linguistic features;
- 3 there has been a reduction in the number and range — especially historical range — of prescribed texts in English literature — this leads to the situation where no assumptions can be made about wider reading, and allusive practices, for example, are largely lost on students;
- 4 there has been a shift in history teaching, so that there is always the need for checking familiarity with previously accepted notions about what students know. (English history is of course something that has to be taught from the beginning in South African university departments of English.)

Durant believes that this discontinuity between tertiary and secondary education lies at the heart of the current problem, and is one reason for the preference of textual analysis of whatever colour in preference to recontextualised study. We are teaching English literature and language to students who come to us impelled by their curiosity about literature, by their love of reading, by their ambition to have a degree, by their TED bursaries, which will enable them to become teachers of

English and so perpetuate the practices we indulge in, and in so doing we are perpetuating the discontinuity.

Our aims and objectives vary from the very mundane and pragmatic inculcation of correct grammar to the much more encompassing, possibly liberal-humanist practice of sensitizing students to the subtleties of literature in order to make them more complete human beings, in terms of our vocation at a University which espouses a Christian world view, to be better able to function fully and responsibly in the Kingdom of God, as part of this process, to help them absorb the insights and perceptions expressed by generations of fine authors in one of the major literatures of the Western world. It is in this area that one's own personal sense of vocation is of paramount importance.

Certainly we have to avoid the situation graphically described by Eagleton (1983:191) in his comment on psychoanalytic theories of literature, and which I find particularly apt in this context: "The reason why the vast majority of people read poems, novels and plays is because they find them pleasurable. This fact is so obvious that it is hardly ever mentioned in universities. It is, admittedly, difficult to spend some years studying literature in most universities and still find it pleasurable at the end: many university literature courses seem to be constructed to prevent this happening, and those who emerge still able to enjoy literary works might be considered either heroic or perverse".

I shall confine myself explicitly for the purposes of this discussion to the literature dealt with at university level, for I implicitly involve language studies in the wider context in the sense that it is supportive and supplementary to any study of literature. When we discuss the choice of books to be read such issues as the student's level of language competence, cultural framework and general disposition towards the work in question are implicitly taken into account. The question of relevance also comes into consideration here. The question of relevance is in fact a very vexing one. A point raised at a recent conference springs to mind here: is it relevant to go on teasing out subtleties in the mannered novels of Jane Austen and Henry James when the country is burning? What relevance is there in Shakespeare, in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in Spenser, in Swift or Fielding, for English students in South Africa in the eighties?

5.3 Gains made from the field of literary theory

This question could be answered at least tentatively by looking first at

the gains made from literary-theoretical speculations, and then looking at the definition of the field of study.

When one looks at the possible gains made from various literary-theoretical fields, especially structuralist and post-structuralist theory, one could sum them up as follows:

- 5.3.1 Works of literature do not simply reflect life; they rather reflect themselves.
- 5.3.2 At the same time individual works of literature relate to other works as part of a system.
- 5.3.3 This system in any one genre, for example drama, intersects with other systems of literature, other art-forms (both high and low), and culture generally, creating a culture/literature complex.
- 5.3.4 It is ultimately through the culture/literature complex, rather than through individual works of literature, that we interpret life (derived and generalized from Hornby, 1986).
- 5.3.5 Ideological concerns come into this, for ultimately we do read from an ideological bias, be it Marxist, Christian or ostensibly neutral and objective.

Linda Hutcheon has provided a useful summarizing proposal in her book on parody in modern times, a proposal from which one could generalize, for she rejects the idea of being monolithic in terms of theory. "If many perspectives help us to understand, ... but if none is sufficient in itself, then how could we claim that a structuralist, semiotic, hermeneutic, or deconstructive approach was in itself totally adequate to the task? This is not so much an argument for critical pluralism as it is a plea for theory that is a response to aesthetic realities" (1985:116).

So, in borrowing from various fields of modern theory, one could create a curriculum and a teaching practice that would help us to deliver students who are capable of speaking the language, of reading perceptively the works of literature in the language, who have been able to contextualize them properly and thus to generalize from them, and who have in the process matured intellectually, emotionally and culturally, and become responsible human beings

capable of fulfilling their own vocations.

5.5 What does the new curriculum then look like? Keeping in mind that the field of study is English Literature and Language, the whole of the field should, properly speaking, be studied, but the selection of works should be such that the students' abilities and susceptibilities are kept in mind. What is chosen should be carefully contextualised in historical and socio-cultural, if not political, terms. The sound pedagogical principle of moving from the known towards the unknown should be kept in mind, so that the movement, in historical terms, is from the twentieth century back through the various years, until seventeenth and sixteenth century English literature can be dealt with in the third year, when the level of sophistication and maturity of the students should enable them to cope more fruitfully and rewardingly with the work. A sound historical and cultural basis has to be provided, and this is where hard work and solid teaching come in — it cannot be assumed that students will simply pick up this material — it has to be integrated functionally in all the segments of the literature courses. (In the course of the same Cambridge controversy referred to earlier, one respondent said with unerring accuracy that "All English dons tend to think that changing the course will solve all problems; all students believe that altering the examination arrangements will bring about the millennium. They are both wrong: it is teaching that matters. Good teachers not only know their subjects but set themselves clear and definite objectives and work out methods of evaluating their own success. Our task is to make it rigorous, without losing the exhilaration" (Ball, 1981:136). It is necessary to inculcate a keen historical awareness, as well as to indicate the continuing relevance of older literary works for present-day audiences.

The object of study is then still the literary text, explicated according to the relevant methods, which will include, for example, a consideration of the role of the reader in realising the individual artefact as an aesthetic object, but then fully contextualised, not only in terms of its historical place, but also in terms of other concerns spelled out by theory, such as its relation to non-serious literature. It is a sad fact, recognized by the same Cambridge professors mentioned above, that *Dallas* is more likely to become a literary model for our students than *Hamlet* — but through responsible teaching of the models chosen one could inculcate the critical awareness of literary integrity which might help towards the creation of a more sophisticated reading public, for, as Cain has summed up very accurately, "By now serious literary activity, as well as most of the audience for literature, is

concentrated in the universities. Courses in literature provide almost the only markets for literary works, old and new; university presses, and a few small art presses, are the primary publishers of literary history and criticism, poetry, and perhaps soon, it seems likely, of serious novels ... Critical discussions of literature have by now almost entirely passed from the hands of public critics and men of letters to the scholars who teach in universities" (1984:7). This has implications both for our treatment and exploitation of the existing canon of literary works and for canon-formation. There are few more formidable arguments, I should think, for inclusion of a fairly recent literary work in the canon than consistent and enthusiastic University prescription. Our notions of what constitutes a respectable canon are important here, and theory has an important function in helping to keep these notions sharpened and, dread word, relevant.

Thus far I have only spoken of theory as being a structuring principle in the specifically English curriculum — thus, what has been at stake has been my notions of the importance of modern structuralist, semiotic and ideological assumptions in my curriculating practice and in my choice of works for study. It is also important, however, that a student should know the jargon, that he should be able, at least at a certain level of competence, to deal with the concepts bandied about in secondary source material on literary texts. Therefore the practice decided upon has been not simply to include little modules on theory into the individual courses, but to make it compulsory for students wishing to major in English to take at least one year of Literary Theory as a prerequisite — Literary Theory as taught in the department of that name. Part of the reason underlying this is the fact that the student will then begin to connect various subject, recognize their interrelatedness, become aware of cross-pollination, as it were, and be more of a *university* student, participating in an interdisciplinary enterprise. This would leave the English lecturer freer to guide the study of the relevant texts — the fond assumption then being that the lecturers should work according to an integrated and coherent literary-theoretical model themselves.

I conclude by quoting George Steiner when he refers to the essentially monoglot training in literature that most students (and lecturers) have had and pleads for openness and awareness: "It is just in this situation that planned parochialism may strike one as the last refuge of professional bankruptcy" (1981:135).

Durant has made a compelling concluding statement in this respect,

for he says of literary-theoretical work that "the aim of that work must be to examine concretely the practical methods and also the institutional management and planning of English Studies, not as an administrative activity complementary to literary theory, but as literary theory. Literary study is not one discipline but a conglomerate of practices, with differing objectives: reviewing, supporting and liaising with creative writing; instructing in literary and cultural history; encouraging general student reading; developing discourse-analytic skills; equipping students with bibliographical and research skills, and so a new degree of learning independence ... what is needed is not just a move from 'commonsense' to politics, but from transmission of a content to guided development of independent skills and acknowledgement of an overall *educational process* ... it is difficult to see how literary theory can be developed currently without there being simultaneously work on specific curriculum proposals and wider educational planning ... the list and order of texts, the forms of assessment and teaching, and the combinable options with other subjects are not just a backcloth to different interpretative methods, calling for secondary administrative reflexes ... the goal of the period of 'almost Renaissance brilliance' in literary theory must be new courses in literary studies, not new courses and course modules in literary theory" (1985:77).

Finally, then, I see the place of literary theory in a department of English as a formative foundation, a guiding principle, a responsible way for deciding on practice, and ultimately a way to give structure and meaning to a curriculum.

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