Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts
An Introduction

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Acknowledgments

This book grew out of classes on modern theory that I taught at Kiel University in 1997 and Frankfurt University in 1999/2000. The idea of transforming this material into an introductory book was triggered by a (slightly tongue-in-cheek) remark by Heinz-Günter Nesselrath. Concentrated and continuous work was made possible by a scholarship of the German Research Foundation (DFG) which enabled me to spend the academic year 1997/8 at Harvard University, in a stimulating environment ideal for scholarly research, free from administrative or teaching obligations. A number of colleagues were generous with their time and provided intellectual stimuli; my thanks are due to Susan Suleiman, Albert Henrichs, and Richard F. Thomas.

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As always, my greatest debt is to my wife, untiring interlocutor, keen reader, model of scholarly zeal, and mother of our two sons; one was born just as I was finishing this manuscript. This book is dedicated to Thomas and Benjamin.

T. A. S.
Frankfurt, March 2002

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This is a translation of the German edition of 2002; I have made only minor changes to the original text in order to update references. I was able to do most of the bibliographical work at Butler Library during a stay in February 2006 and want to thank Columbia University for their hospitality. Working with the staff of Blackwell has been a pleasure throughout; my special thanks go out to Juanita Bullough, who has been an exemplary copy-editor. I would also like to thank Hans Hagen and Taco Hoekwater, the developers of ConTEXt, for their wonderful typesetting program and for their patient help with technical questions.

After five marvelous years, I want to renew the dedication of the original edition with even greater enthusiasm: this book is dedicated to Thomas and Benjamin.

T. A. S.
Bonn, March 2007

Introduction

There is no shortage of introductory books on literary theory and literary criticism on the market. Publishing yet another one needs justification: what is its purpose, which the audience is it attempting to address, what is its methodology and strategy? I will try to answer these questions before introducing the subject itself.

What Is, and To What End Do We Study, Literary Theory?

First encounters with literary theory tend to be frustrating and discouraging. This book proposes to counteract the impression that literary theory is a closed room, hermetically sealed and accessible only to initiates. It wants to help the reader avoid mental reservations and unnecessary fears; it aims to provide an Ariadne's thread through the maze of confusing and contradictory theoretical approaches. It is primarily targeted at students of the classics. I have taken most examples from ancient, especially Latin, literature, and I have favored well-known ancient texts wherever possible. I hope that in addition to students, colleagues teaching ancient languages and literatures at high-school, college, or university level will also profit from reading this book. Finally, this book is written for everybody with an interest in literature, regardless of period or culture, everybody who cares about texts and the fundamental problems their understanding raises, everybody who is open to new questions and answers about familiar books. This book does not presuppose any prior knowledge or skills; it can be read by the famous Greekless and Latinless reader; all quotations from the classical languages are translated.

The aim of this book is to provide a first encounter with the most important ideas and concepts of the main theoretical approaches, thus enabling readers to pursue their forays into this territory independently. To facilitate this, every chapter has a Further Reading section containing a number of publications that will enable readers to deepen and broaden their understanding of the position explained in the chapter. I have made a conscious decision to keep these lists

brief: I want to encourage readers to pursue their own way, not to browbeat them. I have only included works that I have read myself and found particularly helpful. If you want to do more serious work on a specific theoretical position, you will easily find further bibliographical hints in these works.

My optimistic assumption that it is possible to a give short and comprehensible account of a field as difficult as literary theory is based on the realization that most positions explained in this book, while they may be quite complex and intricate in their details, deal with a finite number of fundamental problems and questions. These fundamental problems may not allow for definitive and positive answers, but their core is most often easy to grasp. Some of the most important of these problems are:

- What *is* literature, and how can we distinguish it from non-literature?
- How does a literary text convey its meaning? Why is it that literary texts provoke a great number of different, often irreconcilable interpretations? How, then, can we guarantee that a text does not mean just anything or nothing at all?
- Who has the authority to interpret a text, and how do they obtain the right to claim validity for their interpretations?
- What is literature's relation to the world by which it is surrounded; how does it take its historical, social, political, or personal environment into account?

By their very nature, all these questions are infinite. But we must be aware that it is impossible *not* to give a preliminary answer to them: whether we like it or not, when we are reading literature (and especially when reading, interpreting, and teaching literature is our profession), we are bound to have more or less fixed ideas of why reading literature will enrich our life and what the right approach to literary texts should be, and during our reading, we cannot help interpreting the text. In fact, this might be the greatest advantage of studying literary theory: by forcing us to face these fundamental, seemingly trivial questions (as if anybody were unaware of what literature is!), it allows, even compels us to put our cards on the table and reflect upon our presuppositions. After studying literary theory for a while, you may still hold the same beliefs as before and make no changes about your attitude to and interpretation of literary texts – but your stance will be more self-conscious than it used to be, and this is a decisive advantage.

I am convinced that it is possible to explain most aspects of literary theory

in plain, ordinary language. Nevertheless, I do not wish to prevent readers from encountering ideas and hypotheses that may at first appear confusing, bewildering, or simply absurd. Many recent pedagogical theories emphasize that we need to adjust the subject matter to the mental horizon of our students so they can more easily grasp what is at stake. I find this principle unhelpful. Meeting strange concepts that may at first strike us as incomprehensible, not the eternal return of familiar concepts, is what helps us learn new things and educate ourselves.

Some of the theoretical positions explained in this book are more than likely to evoke strong reactions (ranging from mild irritation to utmost anger) with readers who have not had much experience with this kind of thinking. They go against what common sense and our everyday knowledge seem to tell us. Therefore, I would recommend an ounce of patience to those who are making their first encounter with literary theory: when hypotheses and formulations strike us as absurd or perverse, this should not be taken as a personal insult, but instead, as a welcome invitation to reflect upon everything we thought we knew. Sometimes, you will have the impression that some theorists are systematically trying to conceal their thoughts behind a thick wall of opaque and impenetrable language. This should neither make you doubt your own intellectual capacities nor provoke you into throwing their books (let alone this book) into the trash can out of sheer desperation. Instead, you should remember the wonderful aphorism that the German philosopher Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–99) wrote two centuries ago: "When a book and a head collide and there is a hollow sound, is it always from the book?"

Quite a few of the ideas that at first seem completely inaccessible will soon appear clear enough when you have understood the basic questions and assumptions upon which they rest. However, our patience should not be boundless, either: when I have read a book of literary theory carefully and with great attention, when I have made every effort to understand the issues and nevertheless am as unable to comprehend its basic ideas after reading as before, I have a moral right (maybe even a moral duty) to remember that life is just too short for such unfruitful endeavors – sometimes, the hollow sound comes from the book after all.

This introductory book wants to plead for a more composed attitude toward literary theory; it invites its readers to rid themselves of any inferiority complex they might feel toward literary theory and its adherents. This excludes a way of using theory that is unfortunately found all too often: in many academic debates, you will see scholars who consider literary theory as part of a

rhetorical strategy that enables you to one-up your interlocutors (be they students, colleagues, or teachers). Lavish name-dropping, superficial allusions to the buzzwords and concepts of theories that happen to be in vogue at the moment ("What's the flavor of the day?"), a theatrical display of disappointment that your interlocutor has not read this theorist, is unaware what this term means, these are the telltale symptoms of this attitude. A corollary of this tactical use of theory is an all too earnest zeal about certain theoretical positions. Adherents tend to insist that only this or that theory offers a true approach to all literary texts, that it is not merely one model in a great number, but so revolutionary that it will forever change the way we look at literature ("Thou shalt have no other gods before me"). Theory is not a stick to beat people up (even if a minimum of knowledge about theory is an excellent tool to defend yourself in this kind of situation), and literature is not an area that any theory could monopolize for itself. Much rather, this book wants to invite its readers to pursue an attitude that the German critic Heinrich Detering has called "cheerful pluralism" [82.12]. We should be ready to play with different approaches, to test how far they can take us, to short-circuit texts and theories, and we should accept that this may either produce illuminating sparks or blow all the fuses. If I had to choose between daring novel readings at the risk of proposing wrong interpretations on the one hand and forever repeating the same old truths on the other, I would not hesitate to pick the former.

Literary Theory and Classics

There is no denying that this introduction is somewhat belated. During the 1970s and 1980s, literary theory was a field with a feverish pace, especially in the USA: hardly a week went by without some new contribution appearing, and every month brought a new fashion that ousted the previous month's favorite. Today, this fever has gone down; theory is no longer the most fashionable game in town. University bookstores still carry a "literary criticism" section, but it tends to be much smaller than it used to be, and most of the books date back to a period roughly from 1970 to 1990. Many of those who, in the 1980s or early 1990s, were climbing higher and higher into the unknown realms of theory, have now safely returned to the firm ground of the literary texts. The titles of some books and articles can serve to illustrate this change: as early as 1982, Paul de Man wrote an essay about "The Resistance to Theory" and another one about "The Return to Philology" (both reprinted in [74]). In the same year, Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels published the essay "Against Theory" which

led to a lengthy and intense debate in the scholarly journal *Critical Inquiry*. In one of the contributions, Stanley Fish flatly stated: "theory's day is dying; the hour is late; and the only thing left for a theorist to do is to say so" [108.341]. Since then, there has been a steady stream of books or articles with titles such as *The End of Literary Theory* [281] or "Beyond Theory" [103.200–23], and scholars wonder *What's Left of Theory?* [51]. Is theory dead (or a demon, as the French title of Antoine Compagnon's 1998 book *Le Démon de la Théorie* [58] has it)? Like Mark Twain, it might respond that all reports of its death are greatly exaggerated. And it continues to haunt departments of literature throughout the academic world.

Classics as a field has been rather slow to come to grips with modern literary theory (and this is especially true in Germany, where this book was written). This should not be too surprising; after all, our discipline has the longest tradition of scholarship in the entire field of humanities, and in the course of many centuries, it has developed its own methodology. It could be argued that this belatedness is an advantage rather than a drawback: while the turmoil of the last century has subsided and given way to a more dispassionate view, the fundamental questions that literary theory has raised remain with us. This is a turn of events that can be observed quite often in the humanities: basic problems appear to go away not because the ultimate solution has been found and everybody is happy with it, but because more interesting and novel debates seem to be taking place in other areas. But often, the same fundamental questions will crop up again after a short while (albeit in a slightly different outward appearance).

This situation should be considered an opportunity to take a calmer look at all these questions and problems, at a safe distance from the sound and the fury of earlier times. We may not be able to remain completely neutral and *sine ira et studio*, but we can now examine the contributions of the theoretical positions and the individual theorists with a less polemical eye – you no longer have to surf the latest theoretical wave to be considered hip. The historical distance has a liberating force, and we can now see the (sometimes exaggerated) pretensions that some theorists formulated for what they really were: there is so much noise and ballyhoo in the academic marketplace that some literary theorists thought it necessary to crank up their advertising to the highest volume in order to be heard at all. Every new approach could be nothing less than "revolutionary" and "groundbreaking," not only an innovative way of reading literature, but a new philosophy that changed our way of seeing the world.

In the last few years, a number of classicists have become aware of the chances and opportunities that literary theory offers and have developed fascinating new

vistas on our ancient texts. But the acknowledgment that a basic understanding of the main streams of literary theory should be an integral part of the classics syllabus at our universities has been slow to gain acceptance. We have to catch up with most other disciplines in the humanities. The scathing words of a journalist in the leading German newspaper were not undeserved [31]: "If for classicists, literary theory ends with Emil Staiger ..., they should not be surprised that their field, which used to be the model of philology in general, is just the laughing stock of the other disciplines." In other words: a minimum of knowledge about the development, problems, and results of modern literary theory is necessary for classicists if they want to be able to communicate with members of the other disciplines, if they want to have a common language with the rest of the humanities. It is the only way we can argue successfully for our claims that without knowledge of the classical tradition, large areas of vernacular literatures and Western civilization in general cannot be appreciated and understood. It is the only way that interdisciplinary work in which each partner takes the other side seriously can function.

Objections Raised against Literary Theory

The study of literary theory has intensified in literature departments since the 1960s, and for the same period of time, arguments against studying theory have been around. Let us have a look at some of these arguments that are most frequently proposed.

Theory for theory's sake

A criticism that has been raised very often is the statement that some scholars have lost all contact with the literary texts themselves and are doing theory for theory's sake (see Karl Galinsky in [128.31]; a particularly silly formulation by Joachim Latacz can be found in [232.85]). In general, such an accusation is little more than a bogeyman to frighten the inexperienced: the percentage of studies that really do theory for its own sake is probably very low. And in a discipline like classics where theory has been neglected for such a long time, where numerous books on literary texts have been written without any knowledge of and regard for the theoretical foundations of interpretation, it would not be too disastrous if we were to err on the other extreme for a while.

Modern theories are inappropriate to ancient texts

Another frequent objection against literary theory is the criticism that these modern ideas are fundamentally incommensurable with texts from which they are separated by two millennia. For instance, Gregor Maurach, in his book on the "Methodology of Latin Studies," expresses as an iron rule that the interpreter of classical texts has to avoid "any form of modernity (e.g., contemporary sociology)" [249.7]. Even if we disregard the fact that this sentence demands something which is patently impossible (how can you avoid "any form of modernity" when you're using a computer to write your interpretation?), it is not even tenable as an ideal to aspire to. This would amount to the same thing as if we ordered archeologists to eschew the methods developed by modern engineering for analyzing ancient material. Literary theory claims to speak for literature in general, for all periods and cultures. It behooves the specialists of every literature to examine whether this claim holds water. Undoubtedly, the dicussion about literary theory has been dominated to an unhealthy degree by students of modern Western literatures who have had a tendency to draw untenable generalizations from the restricted corpus of texts they know. Hence, we classicists may and will come to the conclusion that some of these generalizations of modern theory rest upon special qualities of modern literature and cannot be applied to ancient literature – but this is an important realization that only classicists will be able to make. To put it bluntly: those who are skeptical about the (too) sweeping generalizations of modern theory will have to be particularly knowledgeable about it. A broad refusal to deal with it will be unfruitful and pointless, for it would isolate classics. And this is true not only for the status of classical scholars within the other humanities; it would also have negative effects for the subject itself: if it were true (as I firmly believe it is not) that classical texts cannot be understood in modern terms, if modern eyes and modern methodologies had no business looking into these texts, they would be dead for our time, and their existence would have to be considered a mere museum of leftovers from a long defunct culture. In that case, how could we possibly justify that students should still read these classical texts?

New wine in old wineskins

Another criticism takes the opposite direction, and yet, in a paradoxical manner, it is often raised by the same opponents of modern theory as the one just mentioned. It claims that all modern theories are, at a closer look, just repeti-

tions of ideas that can be found in the scholars of the nineteenth century (or even in antiquity, in Aristotle and the ancient rhetoricians): "that's something we have always known and done!" Again, there's no denying that there is a certain amount of truth in this objection: some ideas that are promoted as being completely novel and unheard of are indeed just a slick version of old concepts, and we have already seen that literary theory is really about fundamental and primeval questions. It is also true that some concepts and problems in modern literary theory have antecedents in ancient rhetoric and philosophy (as George A. Kennedy pointed out in an article published in 1989 [214]). But if this criticism is generalized, it is certainly unjustified: concepts such as those developed by structuralism (Chapter 2) are really unprecedented. And every period of human history cannot but reformulate the old questions and search its own answers to them.

Literary theory is too fashionable

A variation on the objections just mentioned is the criticism that using modern theory in your scholarly research is just a fad, something that scholars will do just to embrace the *Zeitgeist* and have an edge in the ever intensifying race for academic positions and reputation; "traditional" scholars, on the other hand, are said to care about nothing but the beauty of the texts they treat and the truth of their interpretations. This may be right in some cases: some scholarly papers propose rather banal interpretations, bolstered by a plethora of quotations from modern theories and references to fashionable theorists, and one often cannot resist the impression that the same result could have been achieved by much simpler means. It cannot be denied that such quotations may be merely ornamental and be used to give a rather ostentatious display of scholarly credentials. On the other hand, a refusal to take literary theory into account can be just as ostentatious; pretending that you stay aloof from all this theoretical nonsense and the corruptions of modernity can also be just a strategy that is meant to reap benefits in certain academic quarters. Above all, we need to remember that the interpretive methodologies employed by traditional scholarship have not existed without a change forever; instead, they have a history, and, at one point in time, they were in turn the most recent methodology that was debated and bitterly fought over. And it is certainly open to question whether following the fashions of yesteryear is by definition morally superior to wearing the fashion of today.

Texts must be approached unprejudiced

Another criticism that is quite similar to the two objections just mentioned is the reproach that studying literary theory prevents us from being unprejudiced when we approach the literary texts about which we really care in our studies. Proponents of this position state that following the latest fad in literary theory will inevitably turn our head and seduce us into regarding these texts as mere playgrounds on which to build our theoretical sandcastles. However, I am absolutely convinced that there is no such thing as an unprejudiced approach to literary texts – in Terry Eagleton's wonderfully sarcastic words [90.x]: "Hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own." As we have already seen (above, p. 2), when we read a text, we do not have the choice whether to hold certain opinions and presuppositions or not – whether we like it or not, we have already answered certain questions and thus accepted certain prejudices before we read the first word on the page. The choice we do have is whether we want to be aware of these prejudices, whether we want to be able to consciously examine the arguments for and against a certain position. This will enable us to read our texts in the full knowledge that our position will always be provisional since we cannot expect to give final answers to the fundamental questions raised by literature. Indeed, the opinion (implied in the objection that theory will make us prejudiced and held by many traditional critics) that the only end of any form of literary criticism must be the interpretation of individual texts is such an unconscious and ill-considered prejudice. As early as 1964, the American critic Susan Sontag (1933–2004) wrote against it a poignant and well-known essay "Against Criticism" (reprinted in [334.3–14]). Sontag explains that every interpretation aims to translate a work of art and tell us what it "really" means. For her, this amounts to "a dissatisfaction (conscious or unconscious) with the work, a wish to replace it by something else" [334.10]. But even if we do not accept her position and hold that interpretation is indeed a legitimate aim of the study of literature, there can be no doubt that it is equally legitimate to attempt to grasp general principles of and in literature, such as the rules of epic narrative or even the rules of poetic style. Such studies do not have to be justified by the argument that they will help us interpret individual texts; they are important and fruitful in themselves.

Literary theory uses incomprehensible jargon

This is another objection which is not entirely unfounded. From everyday life,

we all know that secret languages are a frequent phenomenon. They are an ideal means of establishing the togetherness of a group and giving it a sense of identity by excluding outsiders. A similar mechanism can sometimes be seen at work in literary criticism. An unnecessarily complex style, packed with neologisms and unusual words, can often be seen to serve no other purpose than to make all outsiders feel how stupid and ignorant they are. If you probe the real meaning of this pretentious jargon, you'll often find that the ideas behind it could very well have been expressed in a much easier way (a phenomenon that is by no means unique to literary criticism; intellectual mediocrity has always and in all fields had a tendency to hide behind walls made of impenetrable words). But this is only one side of the coin: every trade has its own specialized language which allows it to express (sometimes complex) ideas in a precise and succinct manner. Classics is no exeption to this rule, and most scholars have no qualms using terms such as "hyparchetype" or "anaclasis" to describe precise details in their field. We should thus not pretend that equally precise terms such as "heterodiegetic" or "signifier" are against human nature. Moreover, we should be ready to admit that some thoughts indeed *are* unusual and unorthodox and cannot be couched in a style that is immediately accessible. They may even strike "common sense" as being completely absurd. However, this does not mean that they are necessarily wrong – such apparent absurdities should be no more surprising or revolting in modern philosophy or literary theory than they are in modern physics. If you refuse to consider anything that is expressed in perplexing and difficult language as being empty jargon, without actually exploring and examining it, you would be forced to condemn classical texts such as Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or most of what the Neo-Platonist Plotinus has written.

All the objections raised against modern theory, then, contain a grain of truth, but they are by no means a sufficient reason for flatly condemning the study of theory. Above all, they often seem to spring from some sort of defense mechanism that has its origin in a lack of self-confidence: we, who have the privilege of a regular and easy access to the rich and enriching cultural heritage of antiquity, should view opinions that differ from our own not as a threat, but as a supplementation and a challenge, in the spirit of cheerful pluralism quoted above. My wish is that all those who teach and study classics adopt at least some of the attitude that Michel Foucault described, shortly before his death, in these words [117.8]: "There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all."

How to Use This Book

When I first thought about planning and structuring this book, several options seemed feasible. It would have been possible to organize the material according to the main key concepts and have one chapter on the author, one chapter on the reader, one on interpretation, etc. The result would have been a useful work of reference, but not a readable book. Furthermore, the systematical arrangement would have been deceptive because it suggests that the system is a necessary or "natural" one while in fact, dividing the object "literature" in this way means accepting certain theoretical positions and rejecting others. On the other hand, a purely historical arrangement is difficult to maintain because there is no clear historical development in the course of literary theory: it would be misleading to pretend that all theoretical positions can be seen in a framework of argument and counter-argument; instead, several theoretical approaches are usually being elaborated at the same time, and it would be extremely artificial to construe a historical development or an image of progress out of this messy material.

There is one possible arrangement of such an introductory book which rests on a misunderstanding, and I want to be particularly clear about why I chose not to adopt it. When I was teaching classes on literary theory, students would time and again suggest that I should take one individual, well-known text and demonstrate the working of all main methods of literary interpretation: first, give a "structuralist analysis," then "deconstruct" it, and finally, give a "feminist" and "New Historicist" interpretation. What is at the core of such a suggestion is the view that literary theory is a toolbox which will always be ready to supply the right instrument for the job in hand. Moreover, it implies that all theoretical positions can somehow be harmonized and that the sum of all applied theories and methods will in some way supply a higher form of truth. In fact, many positions rest on completely divergent and mutually incompatible foundations, and they are interested in totally different aspects of literary texts; hence, such a procedure would be utterly impossible. Not every text lends itself to every theoretical approach; not every approach will aim to interpret texts at all.

It is thus obvious that there is no entirely satisfactory method of presentation. Hence, I have adopted an eclectic manner. In general, this book will provide a chronological account of the development of literary theory from the beginning of the twentieth century. However, I have taken the liberty of deviating from this course when objective or didactical reasons suggested close connections between positions whose historical place was wide apart. Classical literature is often referred to, both as a paradigm and for shorter examples to

make points clearer. Moreover, there is a section in (almost) every chapter that presents a case where approaches shaped by modern theory have furthered our understanding of ancient literature or can be expected to do so.

Almost every chapter of this book could begin with the sentence that the theoretical position which will be described on the following pages is so important and vast that it can be regarded a field of its own and that the bibliography of relevant contributions could fill an entire book. This explains why most books which have aspirations similar to this one are edited volumes written by a group of specialists in the various fields. Nevertheless, after due consideration, my conviction was strong that the advantages of having a book like this, written by one person and thus having a uniform and consistent conception, outweigh the disadvantages of having to write about subjects that I am not entirely familiar with. My decision to write about all these divergent positions myself is most certainly foolhardy, yet it is also meant as an encouragement to colleagues. Undoubtedly, nobody can claim to be, in every field presented here, on a par with experts who have sometimes been working on the subject for years. Yet it is possible to gain a sufficient point of departure so that one can recognize what is interesting and important in the various positions and methodologies and can then go on to delve deeper into the subject in question.

The succinctness of the account in this book has most likely necessitated some crude simplifications and inacceptable shortcuts. Moreover, personal preferences may explain why I have decided to pay more attention to some positions than to others. Nevertheless, I am convinced that it is better to have an albeit superficial knowledge of a theoretical approach than to have no knowledge at all. Therefore, I have attempted to keep the discussion as comprehensible and straightforward as possible. I have not balked at using significant anecdotes and stories if they help us gain a better view of the concepts and problems that we are dealing with.

I am deeply aware of my own prejudices and limitations (and I became more and more aware of these as I was writing this book). I consider it an act of honesty toward my readers to be frank about these limitations instead of trying to hide them behind a specious display of impartiality. Hence, I have decided to put my cards on the table and make clear where my interest and preferences are so readers can see themselves what to expect from this book. Because of my academic education, I am more familiar with theoretical approaches coming from a French and American background than with German scholarship. If a colleague were more interested in this German tradition, he would certainly have had different priorities in his account. Furthermore, I am more sympathetic to

positions that are "text-centered." This does not mean that I regard approaches which place particular emphasis on a text's wider context, perhaps with special regard to its social, cultural, or religious setting or to the foundations of literary activity in the human psyche, as unjustified or uninteresting; I can only say that my own preferences lie elsewhere. I have nonetheless attempted to be as clear and precise in presenting these positions as I could, but I prefer to be honest about my likes and dislikes and give reasons for them so readers can judge themselves whether they find these reasons convincing.

Let me briefly explain some of the conventions and practices used in this book: references to works quoted are given directly in the text itself. Numbers within square brackets such as [99] refer to the numbered bibliography on pp. 215–232. Readers who want to delve deeper into one of the theoretical approaches presented here will find suggested reading material at the end of each chapter. Moreover, I have given a few supplementary notes and further references to some questions raised in the text on pp. 209–214. It is a conscious decision not to have a symbol or footnote mark in the text itself flag these notes: I wanted to emphasize that this is additional material aimed to provide more in-depth information for those who are particularly interested in a topic, not "required reading." Whenever possible, quotations are taken from published English translations; where this was not possible, translations are my own.

Introductions to Literary Theory

The book market offers a wealth of reading matter for those who are curious to learn more about literary theory. The mass of introductions, handbooks, edited collections, encyclopedias, and historical accounts is difficult to survey, and an attempt to list them all would be fruitless and confusing. On the following pages, I will give a shortlist of some of the most well-known and useful titles, adding short commentaries as I go so readers can at least guess what they can expect from each book. After that, I add an unannotated list of a few further titles that I consulted while I was preparing this book. Since every reader has her or his own expectations, opinions, previous knowledge, and questions, I recommend that she or he browse as many of these books as (s)he can to find out which one will be most profitable for her or for him.

For those who, after reading this book, still feel the need to have some of the fundamental questions and concepts explained in a clear manner and in plain English, I recommend Peter Barry's 1995 book *Beginning Theory* [22]. In 11 chap-

ters, Barry provides a patient and lucid explanation of the most important positions of modern literary theory. What makes his book special is his (typically British) no-nonsense approach and his willingness to be critical toward the ideas and theorists he describes.

Eagleton's *Literary Theory* [90], of which a second edition appeared in 1996, is rightly regarded as the classic introduction to the subject. It is for more advanced students. Eagleton is brilliant in giving a vivid, comprehensible explanation of complex problems, and he keeps a critical distance from his subject. However, readers (especially those who do not have much experience) must know that Eagleton himself holds a political (Marxist) view of literary criticism and that he judges other theoretical positions accordingly. Another problem is that the second edition is just a reprint of the first edition, printed in 1983, with an "Afterword" added at the end of the volume, so the account itself reflects the status of literary theory at the beginning of the 1980s. The bibliography (which had never been especially helpful in the first place) has not been updated. Another concise and clear account can be found in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* by Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker [327]. Unlike Eagleton's books, the authors do not put much emphasis on the political and intellectual background of theory; their aim is not to explain why literary criticism developed in the directions we observe today. Yet they take the more recent developoments into account; every chapter contains a helpful bibliography which is subdivided into "basic texts" and "further reading."

These two books aim to give a continuous history of modern literary theory. The plan of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, especially volume 8 *From Formalism to Poststructuralism* (1995), edited by Raman Selden [326], is slightly different: here, a series of independent articles written by specialists in their respective field presents the various positions and theories. This volume is accordingly less homogeneous than the ones previously described, however, if read in succession, the articles give a history of twentieth-century literary theory. The volume is more thorough and comprehensive than the one mentioned before, and its bibliography aims to be fairly exhaustive and is hence immensely useful; on the other hand, it is meant more as a work of reference than as a readable account, and it might be a bit overwhelming for the beginner.

Another work of reference is the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, edited by Irena R. Makaryk in 1993 [246]. It does not aim at giving a historical account. Instead, it is a work of reference that offers short descriptive articles on different aspects of literary theory. There are three different parts: "Approaches" presents important developments and fields of theory; "Scholars"