

Foreword

The *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia of Modern Criticism and Theory* offers the student of literary and cultural studies a comprehensive, single-volume guide to the history and development of criticism in the humanities as the twenty-first century opens. While emphasizing the theory and practice of literary and cultural criticism, it provides extensive coverage of related and contextual discourses, as well as critical overviews of the work and reception of major figures responsible, directly or indirectly, for the development of those discourses in the now-related areas of philosophy, poetics, politics, aesthetics, linguistics and psychoanalysis. It does so acknowledging in the process the cultural, historical, ideological and epistemological specificities of the emergence and subsequent transformation of critical and discursive concerns, debates and transformations. The encyclopaedia takes the reader through introductions to historically influential philosophers, literary critics, schools of thought and movements from Spinoza and Descartes to phenomenology and Heidegger, from Coleridge and Arnold to contemporary debates in the areas of cultural studies and post-marxism, through its three principal areas of critical attention, Europe, the USA and Great Britain. Furthermore, while remaining aware of the importance of various contexts within and out of which criticism has grown, the essays contained herein also concern themselves with the equally important issue of cross-fertilization between the various academic and intellectual cultures under consideration.

Having said this, it has to be acknowledged that all encyclopaedias and guides to criticism, whether literary, cultural or, as in the case of this volume, inter- and trans-disciplinary, invariably fall between two stools: aiming at a kind of universality, they become shaped, often inadvertently, by the cultural contexts within which they are produced, whether they recognize this or not. Comprehending this situation and understanding that it is impossible to escape what is perhaps the central problematic of developing a project such as the present volume, the essays which comprise this encyclopaedia have been commissioned with the idea of acknowledging matters of historical and cultural specificity, and speaking to the limits, the parameters of both the immediate project and the situation of institutional criticism at the beginning of the twenty-first century, from the outset.

Thus the volume and its contributors attempt to deal with an explicitly limited, yet arguably comprehensive, range of topics, figures, subjects and schools of thought (whether the question of the school comes down to a misperception from some other place in the academy or beyond, or the movement has, on occasion, been consciously generated). The *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* thus provides the reader with essays which address key issues in the

history and development of institutional critical practice as these are principally embedded within particular cultures and as these issues have been translated historically as the study of literature and culture has grown and changed, or from culture to culture. In the main, the volume addresses principally literary and cultural areas of critical study, as already stated, but with the intention of demonstrating that these fields, loosely defined, are marked by a constant hybridization of methodologies, disciplines and interests, as often from within as the result of the critical importation of a discourse or epistemology ostensibly alien to the field in question. The volume therefore, and in addition to the already stated goals, sets out to establish the philosophical and ideological parameters and systems or, perhaps better, structures of thought which have come to inform critical practice, and subsequently, though not without resistance, broadened critical practice from interests in purely formal, philological or historically grounded literary study.

While certain essays in the volume are concerned with schools of thought, others deal with more nebulous and general interests in the history of critical thinking and literary study, at the same time seeking to ground development, challenge, debate and change historically and culturally, albeit in a provisional manner in an effort to provide for the student reader a sense of complexity within given cultural moments. Such a practice is of course open to selectivity, but we recognize the limits and problems from the beginning and choose to try to counter these, albeit partially, rather than carrying on as though such issues were not a problem. This will mean that, inevitably for some readers (particularly those who have strong readings of the history of critical development), there will always be something missing: for example, an entry on a beloved figure, or inadequate coverage of a particular moment or movement. More individual entries might be added, and the table of contents could be expanded endlessly. How though does one gauge such things? Include one person, and someone else immediately springs to mind. Ultimately a balance has to be reached, between specificity, detail, singularity and a comprehension of what might best be described as broad trends, persistences, the genealogy of interests and so on.

The volume's division into loosely assumed cultural areas is in no way an attempt to impose order in a procrustean fashion. Inevitably, again, there will be a perceived sense of exclusivity: all encyclopaedias run this risk and, indeed, might be said to be governed by the effort to negotiate and respond to this risk. The very idea of the encyclopaedia calls its editors and contributors to take responsibility for that risk. As the reader will note, several of the contributors choose to address the very idea of the limit, exposing it as arbitrary and artificial, yet something which it is necessary to consider, as part of their broader response to a particular critical issue. As already suggested, it is the contention of this volume that criticism has been shaped by dominant hegemonies of thought, that thought has a cultural history, if not several, and that the theory and practice of criticism as it has developed in the twentieth century within particular university cultures throughout the English-speaking world has been dominated and shaped in particular ways, specifically in North American (particularly US), French and, to a lesser extent, German and British academic milieus and beyond (although one must recognize immediately that this particular term, 'British', is itself problematic, as the final article on so-called British poststructuralism makes clear).

We might thus suggest that despite the necessity of understanding the biographical and personal historical backgrounds of, say, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, among so many others, it is equally if not more significant to understand that thought and the texts which mediate thought do not develop in isolation,

but are the historically determined product of specific cultures at particular times. Derrida, for example, not only refers to himself repeatedly as only ever being able to express himself in French, but also interprets and reads Hegel and Heidegger in ways that are arguably marked by what may be schematically defined as certain Parisian intellectual contexts, as those contexts have determined and been determined by the reception of Freud, Hegel, Heidegger (to indicate only the most visible, obvious figures) throughout the twentieth century. Similarly, Gayatri Spivak's work is as much indebted to a certain antagonistic relationship with what American and British critics conventionally term poststructuralism as it is to the North American education system in which she was educated as a postgraduate and in which she has taught for a number of years now.

There is, then, no such thing as a pure discourse. Yet, on the other hand, there is no such thing as a finite context or contexts. One cannot speak of either purely national or universal determinations, and, equally, nor can one ascribe to critical thinking either a finite or unchanging condition. Intellectual cultures, like literary genres, have moments of historical ascendance and hegemonic dominance; it is with such issues that this volume is purposely involved and in which it hopes to engage its readers.

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Note on bibliographical references

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