Continuing Literary Theory

in the classroom and beyond

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'After' Theory

- **David Scott Kastan: *Shakespeare After Theory,* 1999**

- **Valentine Cunningham, *Reading After Theory* , 2001**

- **Terry Eagleton, *After Theory,* 2003**

- **Michael Payne & John Shad, eds. *Life After Theory,* 2003**

The Trials of Theory

1987: The Paul de Man Scandal
See*: Paul de Man: Wartime Journalism, 1939-43*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Tom Keenan, University of Nebraska Press, 1988

1991: Controversy over 'The Gulf War Never Happened'
See: Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf war did not take place,* Power Publications, Sydney, 1995. Christopher Norris, *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals, and the Gulf War* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1992).

1996: The Sokal Affair
See*: Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers' Abuse of Science* (Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, Profile Books, 2nd edition, 2003.

Changing mood in the USA since the 1980s

Theory in the classroom ....

. . . is difficult

The Growth of the Theory Readers

- **Rick Rylance's** *Debating Texts,* **Open University, 1987, 288 pages**

- **David Lodge's** *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, **Longman, 1988, 480 pages**

- **Rivkin/Ryan's 1ˢᵗ edition, 1997, 1100 pages**

- *Norton Anthology of Criticism and Theory* **, 2001, 2600 pages**

Theory after 'The Death of Theory' – more of the same?

Alain Badiou   (b.1937)   the new Derrida
   Being and Event, 2005

Jacques Rancière   (b.1940)   the new Althusser
   The Politics of Aesthetics, 2006

Giorgio Agamben   (b. 1942)   the new Foucault
   Homo Sacer, 1998

Slavoj Žižek   (b. 1949)   the new Lacan
   Interrogating the Real, 2005

'Theory 2.0'

Enhanced creativity

Information- sharing

Collaboration

Open-access

Theory meets text

- **The solar body of the text is obscured by the lunar shadow of theory**

Patrick Kavanagh, 1904 – 1967

Statue of Kavanagh in Dublin

'To the Man After the Harrow'
(last stanza)

Forget the worm's opinion too
Of hooves and pointed harrow pins
For you are driving your horses through

The mist where Genesis begins.

Don't 'apply' theory, 'use' theory

Former means . .

- play it 'straight'

- make the text 'reflect' the theory

- working on *the whole* text

Latter means . . .

- 'bend it like Beckham'

- make the text 'refract' the theory

- working on *parts of* the text
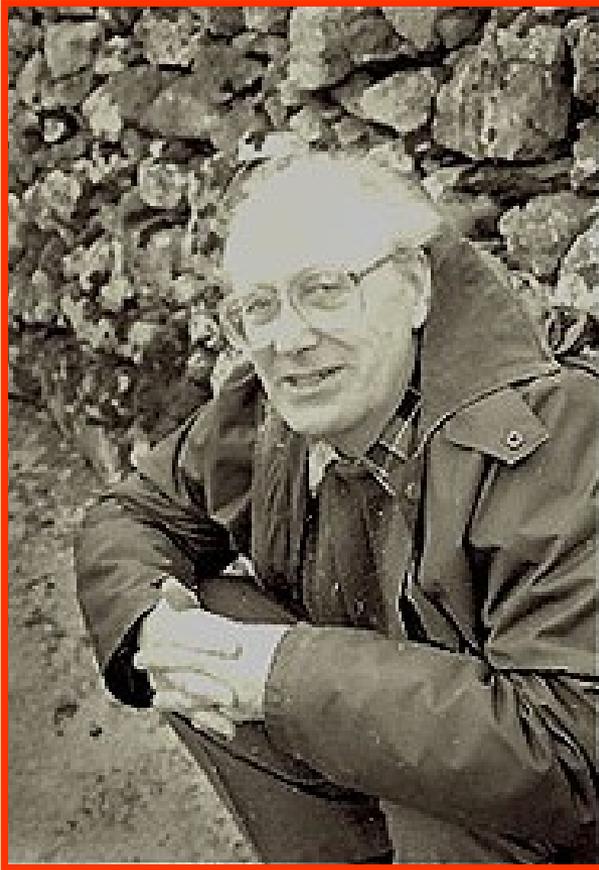
Don't teach theory, teach theorising

Former is . . .

- a *passive* activity [sic]

- in which theory does *you*,

- and always 'by-the-book'

Latter is . . .

- an *active* activity [sic]

- in which *you* do theory,

- and always 'improvised' (Oi! Fisher!)

Thom Gunn's Comment on Roy Fisher

Roy Fisher (b. 1930)

- The one time I met Roy Fisher, he told me the following story. One day in his early teens he was standing at a bus-stop with another boy I shall call Smith. Smith was 'a pompous, jolly boy', destined to be a metallurgist. Roy Fisher, who was destined to be a jazz pianist from the age of sixteen, started whistling an improvised tune, whereupon Smith stopped him, saying 'Fisher, you can't do that'. 'Why not?' asked Fisher. And Smith said: *'Because it doesn't exist'.*

- Source: *News for the Ear: a Homage to Roy Fisher*, ed. Peter Sheppard and Peter Robinson, Stride, 2000

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New Aestheticism

- **Isobel Armstrong,** *The Radical Aesthetic,* **Oxford, 2000**

- **John Joughin & Simon Malpas, eds.,** *The New Aestheticism***, Manchester U. P., 2003**

- **Nicholas Shrimpton, 'The Old Aestheticism and the New' in** *Literature Compass,* **2.1, Jan. 2005**

Terms in New Aestheticism

- Concepts of 'bifurcation' and 'erasure' (via Levinas from French ethnographer Michel Leiris, 1901-1990):

- 'Bifurcation', choice of one option or reading rather than another brings both into play. 'Erasure' connotes 'over-writing', as in the palimpsest, erasing done by re-writing, new words over old ones.

- Example: In Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey': 'hardly hedge-rows, little lines/ Of sportive woods run wild' . . . 'some uncertain notice, as might seem,/ Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods'

- Both words suggest that literature always contains an unsettled element, an internal argument which we are invited to join in, and inviting us to join – literature has something to *ask* us, rather than something to *tell* us.

From the opening page
of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

- The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

Same passage (colour-coded)

- The *sea-reach* of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In *the offing* the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of *varnished sprits*. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

Cognitive Poetics

- **Peter Stockwell,** *Cognitive Poetics: an Introduction,* **Routledge, 2002**

- **Joanna Gavins &** *Cognitive Poetics in Practice,* **Gerard Steen, eds Routledge, 2003**

- *Literature and the cognitive Revolution,* **special issue of** *Poetics Today,* **23.1, Spring 2002.**

- **Response to previous item, pp. 1 – 26,** *Poetics Today,* **23.2, summer, 2002**

Terms in Cognitive Poetics

- 'Figure' and 'Ground' (e.g. moving figure against static ground)

- Attractor – device which draws attention to a particular element in the text (e.g. 'linguistic deviance')

- Attraction – the result – making a particular aspect prominent, while other are correspondingly 'occluded' or 'recede' - recession, occlusion

- Profiling (interface between figure and ground)

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Marlow's visit to 'The Intended'

- **The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and be-draped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened -- closed. I rose.**

Superimposition technique
– the same two passages

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and be-draped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened -- closed. I rose.

'Zoned' version of the passage

HIGH

The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and be-draped columns.

MIDDLE RANGE, ELEPHANTINE/MONUMENTALISED/FUNEREALISED

The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus.

HIGH AGAIN

A high door opened -- closed. I rose.

Continuation

- **She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. It was more than a year since his death, more than a year since the news came; she seemed as though she would remember and mourn forever. . . . . I noticed she was not very young -- I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful.**₂₃

Robert Service (1874-1958)
from 'The Spell of the Yukon'

There's gold, and it's haunting and haunting;
  It's luring me on as of old;
Yet it isn't the gold that I'm wanting
  So much as just finding the gold.