

# Translation Theory

LES Membership Forum

June 30, 2008

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Translation Theory is the theoretical engine of Translation Studies, which examines the process and products of interlingual translation in all its aspects. As such, it borrows freely from other theoretical traditions.

In the following I offer only some brief suggestions to those seeking to get their feet wet rather than go for total immersion.

Subject Headings:

LC: **Translating and Interpreting**. (Does not single out theory. Keyword searches in WorldCat of this heading in the descriptor search together with theory will sometimes yield relevant results, with "theory" belonging to a different subject heading.)

MLA: **Translation Theory** (MLA does offer this heading)

(Very) Selected Bibliography.

Venuti, Lawrence, ed. *The Translation Studies Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York, Routledge, 2004)

This collection, arranged in chronological order, includes most seminal essays in the field. Venuti's introduction has a useful section addressing "What is a translation Theory?" My recommended sampling of its essays illustrating a few different approaches follows:

**Philosophical approaches:**

Most cited by other scholars: Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator"

Is translation really possible? W.V.O. Quine, "Meaning and Translation."

Hermeneutics. George Steiner, "The Hermeneutic Motion."

Translation as recodification. William Frawley, "Prolegomenon to a Theory of Translation"

**Polysystems Theory – Descriptive Translation Studies**

Itamar Even-Zohar. "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem."

Andre Lefevere, "Mother Courage's Cucumbers: Text, system and refraction in a theory of literature."

Gideon Toury. "The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation."

**Postcolonial Theory**

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "The Politics of Translation"

**Skopos Theory** – the idea that works should be translated according to the purpose of the translation. Hans J. Vermeer. "Skopos and Commission in Translational Action."

Baker, Mona, ed. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1998). Also contains useful overviews of theoretical approaches.

# READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

Reader-response criticism maintains that the interpretive activities of readers, rather than the author's intention or the text's structure, explain a text's significance and aesthetic value....The modern versions include psychological and theoretical accounts of the reader's activity and sociohistorical accounts of a text's interpretations or an author's reception.

(excerpted from The Online John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism)

**Keywords: reader-response approach, reception theory, aesthetic experience, interpretative communities, women readers (or other specific groups of readers)**

## Bibliography

Bennett, Andrew, ed. Readers and Reading. New York: Longman, 1995.

Brenner, Gerry. Performative Criticism: Experiments in Reader Response. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Donoghue, Denis. The Practice of Reading. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Fish, Stanley. Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Freund, Elizabeth. The Return of the Reader: Reader Response Criticism. New York: Methuen, 1987.

Goldstein, Philip, and James L. Machor, eds. New Directions in American Reception Study. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Hunsberger, Margaret, and George Labercane, eds. Making Meaning in the Response-based Classroom. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002.

Iser, Wolfgang. The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Marshall, Donald G., ed. "Chapter Seven: Reader Response Theory." Contemporary Critical Theory: A Selective Bibliography. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1993.

Scholes, Robert. The Crafty Reader. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Tompkins, Jane P., ed. Reader-Response Criticism from Formalism to Post-Structuralism. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980.

# Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a method or practice of reading developed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida to uncover that which is forgotten, hidden or repressed in texts. It thus interrogates key concepts in the philosophical tradition, and questions the dualisms or binary oppositions that undergird Western thought (presence/absence, nature/culture, speech/writing, etc). In literary studies, deconstructionists do not seek to find a single meaning for a work or works, but rather uncover the multiplicity of meanings, often unacknowledged and even contradictory, that exist in literary texts. Yet they do not attempt to reconcile those meanings into a single, coherent structure. Instead, they explore how those meanings are ultimately irreconcilable and proliferate in ways that call into question received assumptions or "truths."

**Keywords:** Derrida, Jacques; Deconstruction; Deconstructionism; Deconstructionist Approach, Poststructuralism; Semiotics; Trace; Supplement; Aporia (irreconcilable conundrum in interpretation)

## Selected Works by Jacques Derrida

- Derrida, Jacques. Glas. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986.
- . Margins of Philosophy. Brighton: Harvester P, 1982.
- . Of Grammatology. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.
- . Positions. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982.
- . "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In Writing and Difference. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1979. 278-293.
- . The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

## Works on Deconstruction in Literary Criticism

- Bloom, Harold, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. Deconstruction and Criticism. London: Routledge, 1979.
- Culler, Jonathan. On Deconstruction. London: Routledge, 1983.
- De Man, Paul. Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.
- Gasché, Rodolphe. "Deconstruction as Criticism." GLYPH 6 (1979): 177-215.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "Deconstructing the Deconstructors." Diacritics 5.2 (1975): 24-31.
- . "The Critic as Host." Critical Inquiry 3.3 (1977). Expanded version in Deconstruction and Criticism. New York: Seabury Press, 1979. Rpt. in Miller, Theory Now and Then. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. 143-70.
- . "Composition and Decomposition: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Writing." In Composition and Literature. Ed. Winifred B. Horner. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983. Rpt. In Miller, Theory Now and Then. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. 227-243.
- . "How Deconstruction Works." (Milton). New York Times Magazine 9 February 1986: 25. Rpt. in Miller, Theory Now and Then. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. 293-94
- Norris, Christopher. Deconstruction: Theory and Practice. London: Methuen, 1982.
- . The Deconstructive Turn. London: Methuen, 1983.
- . Derrida. London: Fontana, 1987.

# Psychoanalytic Criticism

Psychoanalytic criticism takes the techniques of psychoanalysis as initially developed by Sigmund Freud and applies them in an examination of literature.

For our purposes, analysis tends to be either about the author, the reader, the characters in the text, or the formal aspects of the work. For example, one can analyze a work to reveal the mind of the author, explore how a reader creates meaning, or explain the actions and motivations of characters in a work. Based on Lacan's famous dictum "the unconscious is structured like language," psychoanalytic critics also apply their techniques to examine the formal aspects of literature.

Below are some places to help you provide reference on psychoanalytic criticism. It is more of a starting point than an attempt at comprehensiveness.

Key terms: the self; the gaze; the Oedipus complex; desire; drives; projection; sublimation, fetish; uncanny; (return of) the repressed.

## Key figures associated with psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud; Carl Jung; Jacques Lacan; Slavoj Zizek; Melanie Klein; Ernest Jones; Simon Lesser; Julia Kristeva

## Library of Congress Subject Headings

Psychoanalysis and Literature  
Psychoanalysis

## MLA

Scholarly Approach – Psychoanalytic approach (3097 hits)

## Selective Bibliography of Works

### **For quick reference**

Abrams, M.H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005.

When answering reference questions about psychoanalytic criticism, I point students first to the entry entitled "Psychological and Psychoanalytic Criticism" (p. 256-262). In five pages, Abrams provides an overview of this school of criticism without overwhelming the student (or at least it simplifies the concept enough for a student to get started).

Briganti, Chiara, et al. "Psychoanalytic Theory and Criticism." The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism. Eds. Michael Groden, Martin Kriswirth and Imre Szeman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005. 777-87.

In three sections, entitled 1. Traditional Freudian Criticism; 2. Reconceptualizing Freud; 3. The Post-Lacanian. Combined, these sections provide a historical overview of psychoanalytic criticism, noting major players and movements within psychoanalysis. Each section ends with an excellent bibliography or primary texts.

# Psychoanalytic Criticism

## For lengthier explanations

Barry, Peter. Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory. 2nd ed. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995.

Contains a chapter on psychoanalytic criticism giving equal weight to Freud and Lacan. Also provides sample psychoanalytic literary analyses of works of fiction.

Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983.

Devotes an entire chapter to Psychoanalysis (p. 151-193) and makes Freud and Lacan understandable to the uninitiated. The latter part of the chapter, beginning on p.179, shows how their works operate in psychoanalytic literary criticism.

Holland, Norman N. "The Mind and the Book: A Long Look at Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies 2.1 (2000): 13-23.

Concise summary of psychoanalytic literary criticism and some suggestions for its future applications.

## For advanced readers

Freud, Sigmund. The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton, 1966.

A good entry into the works and analysis of Freud.

Lacan, Jacques. Ecrits: A Selection. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton, 1977.

Provides an introduction to the works of Lacan. Chapter one on the mirror stage and chapter five on the agency of the letter are good representatives of Lacan interpreting the oedipal stage and the relations of the unconscious to the ego.

Wright, Elizabeth. Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.

Provides detailed analysis and examples of psychoanalysis and its effects on different schools of criticism. Contains chapters devoted to the works of Freud, Klein, Jung, Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, and Zizek.

Zizek, Slavoj. Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.

Zizek, an influential thinker in his own right, demonstrates how psychoanalysis can be used to gain insights into pop culture productions like Hitchcock films.

## Electronic Resources & Bibliographies

Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishers. <http://www.p-e-p.org/index.htm>.

Contains the full text of 26 journals in psychoanalysis, 56 classic psychoanalytic books, and all 24 volumes of The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.

(Subscriber database, but searching for entries is free.)

Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory. <http://ywctt.oxfordjournals.org/archive/>

This bibliography has a chapter dedicated to psychoanalysis. The essays introducing that year's work are usually eight to ten pages long and provide the researcher with information about the current scholarship in psychoanalytic criticism. (Subscriber database)