

Selden (Raman). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*

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entend sortir de l'oubli un texte qui est, d'après lui, une « mosaïque de *topoi* ». Cet assemblage « des idées qui eurent cours sur la caractérologie théophrastienne » cependant, constitue, selon l'auteur, un document très important pour l'étude de l'anthropologie classique.

Le fascicule se complète par une note de Marek Tomaszewski, « L'univers héroïque polonais dans *Les amours du chevalier de Faublas* et son impact sur l'imaginaire social à la fin du XVIII^e siècle », et par l'étude critique de Robert Pageard : « Quelques études et sources d'information sur les littératures de l'Afrique francophone ».

Viennent ensuite les sections « Comptes rendus », « Revue des revues », « Communiqué » et « Résumés analytiques » des articles qui composent le numéro, en français et en anglais. — Mónica ZAPATA.

SELDEN (Raman). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Brighton, Harvester, 1985 ; second edition: Hemel Hempstead, Harvester, 1989 ; one vol., VI-153 pp. Price: \$ 12.30 paper. SELDEN (Raman). *Practising Theory and Reading Literature: An Introduction*. Hemel Hempstead, Harvester, 1989 ; one vol., XII-206 pp. Price: \$ 12.30 paper. — The blurb to the new edition of Selden's book is right to quote Christopher Norris on the original guide's « [r]emarkably concise but informative summaries of just about every major critical movement. » (see also my review in *BTFG*, 44 (1986), p. 587). The publishers claim too much for this second edition, though, when they predict that it « will be invaluable to all those... who having used the first edition want to keep pace with the rapidly developing field of literary theory... [since] the very latest ideas and new bearings have been taken into account in the revision of each chapter ». While Selden has made some substantial additions to his chapters on poststructuralist and feminist criticism, he has wisely refrained from revising his excellent discussions of « Russian Formalism » and « Structuralist Theories » to any serious extent. What he has consistently done is to expand the bibliographical appendices to each chapter to include not only more recent publications but also older works that did not appear in the oversuccinct reading lists which accompanied the first edition.

Conciseness is still Selden's hallmark. In a mere 160 pages he provides an acute account of twentieth-century literary theory which does not content itself with an overview of established figures like Bakhtin, Derrida, and Lacan but engages too with a lot of important work that is still carving out a space for itself in the theoretical spectrum. The new edition thus for instance devotes space not only to Gilbert and Gubar but also to the materialist-feminist criticism of their *The Madwoman in the Attic*. It also discusses in some depth the American New Historicists and their more optimistically radical British counterparts the Cultural Materialists.

While the succinctness of Raman Selden's book is undoubtedly its main strength, its brevity may prove demanding for students without any previous knowledge of the field. Novices may therefore still find Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell) the better choice. Indeed, Selden's

survey is aptly entitled *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. As such, it provides a reliable and up-to-date synthesis which will prove especially valuable to those who wish to grasp the genesis and the context of theoretical texts they want to explore themselves.

Practising Theory and Reading Literature is a companion volume to the *Reader's Guide*. It is made up of 24 sections, each of which looks at one or two literary texts from a particular critical angle (or two related ones). The book concludes with some 20 pages of exercises: individual passages are offered for analysis along carefully suggested lines.

Selden has organized his material in six broadly-conceived chapters (« Anglo-American Criticism », « Russian Formalism », « Structuralism », « Poststructuralism », « Reader-Response Criticism », and « Marxist and Feminist Criticism ») that are, at first sight, conventional enough. Refreshingly, however, critical theories are not strictly confined within the boundaries of these domains: deconstruction, for instance, occurs not only under the predictable heading of Poststructuralism but is also, and somewhat subversively, presented as a mode of reader-response criticism: « ... Derrida's [reader] follows and facilitates the text's self-undoing » (p. 108).

This is an enjoyable and thought-provoking book. Selden's approach to his material is consistently intelligent and enlightening. While he is at pains to admit his own « commitment... to a materialist and historical form of theory which draws upon the new concepts [of poststructuralism] for support », Selden manages to provide thoroughly congenial readings in a Russian Formalist or Structuralist vein. Each section points out the strengths and weaknesses of the approach it discusses — each invariably concludes with an excellent short summary.

My only criticism of *Practising Theory and Reading Literature* is intimately linked to the admiration I feel for the work. Selden's incisive practical analyses very often draw on a rich cultural reservoir. For example, his reading of Fleur Adcock's *The Ex-Queen Among the Astronomers* revolves around the poem's « ironical allusion to the famous opening of George Herbert's "Vanitie" » (p. 151). I wonder how many of the students that Selden's book is aimed at will be familiar with that poem. The author's extensive cultural literacy is, in fact, an essential component of the success of his own critical strategy. In a work dedicated to the « liberation of readers from hidebound and unexamined critical conventions », it is all the stranger to see this theoretical concept go unacknowledged. — Gert BUELENS.

WEISGERBER (Jean et coll.). *Le réalisme magique. Roman-peinture-cinéma*. Éditions L'Âge d'Homme, 1987, 301 p. (CAHIERS DES AVANT-GARDES). — Le réalisme magique, surtout vu sous un angle international, est sans aucun doute un phénomène beaucoup moins important et certainement moins établi que, par exemple, le surréalisme ; ce n'est que dans quelques littératures qu'il a effectivement acquis un profil plus ou moins reconnaissable. Il est vrai cependant que le concept et le terme, malgré ou, peut-être, grâce à leur manque de précision, tendent à se