

Annual Report 2017: ICLA RESEARCH COMMITTEE ON LITERARY THEORY

1. Annual Workshop 2017

The theme of this year's workshop is '**Critique/Criticism.**' It will take place on 23-24 June at the Center for Literary and Cultural Research (Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung) in Berlin. Stefan Willer is the host to 16 participants, who will offer their analytic reflections on the techniques and theories of drawing distinctions. Our guest lecturer is Terry Eagleton.

CFP: The English language has a way of differentiating 'criticism' and 'critique' that is absent from other European languages. As is often explained, 'critique' rather refers to the philosophical tradition of critical thought—as in Critique of Pure Reason—whereas 'criticism' denotes its more down-to-earth applications, such as literary criticism. Even though this distinction obviously under-rates the complexities of literary evaluation, it has been and is being used to introduce value judgments with respect to literary criticism itself. To cite a blunt example: "criticism finds fault/critique looks at structure", "criticism is spoken with a cruel and sarcastic tone/critique's voice is kind, honest, and objective", "criticism is negative/critique is positive" (Judy Reeves, *Guide for Writers and Writing Groups*, 2002). As simplistic as these dichotomies may be, they address long-standing epistemological and ethical problems. On the one hand, according to Rodolphe Gasché, critique in the history of modern philosophy, starting with Descartes, "entails a new and radical negativity of thought". On the other, it can be labelled essentially positive, as in Heidegger, who states that the Greek verb 'krinein' means "to lift out that of special sort" and thus designates "the most positive of the positive" (cf. Gasché's introduction, *Honor of Thinking*, 2007). Between these extremes, a vast field of distinctions opens up, especially for literary and/or textual criticism. According to Friedrich Schleiermacher's reflections on Hermeneutik und Kritik (1810s–30s), criticism is both a judgment ("Gericht") and a comparison ("Vergleichung"); it can be doctrinal and historical, lower and higher, documentary and divinatory, referring both to letter and spirit. Ultimately, for Schleiermacher, every slip of the tongue is a critical case, given that thought and speech diverge. Criticism hence becomes relevant for finding 'faults' in the broadest sense, but in a highly differentiated manner. Thus, the English distinction of 'critique' and 'criticism' can induce some more specific research into the techniques and theories of drawing distinctions. Topics may include: the semantics of 'krinein' and 'krisis,' its consequences and alternatives; concepts of aesthetic judgment; methods of comparative criticism; criticism and (or: versus) scholarship ('Literaturkritik und Literaturwissenschaft'); the interconnections of textual criticism and psychoanalysis (cf. S. Timpanaro's 1974 study on the Freudian slip); the role of literature in critical theory (and vice versa); poets as critics (e.g. Pope, Poe, Pound); and, of course, poetical aversions to criticism (cf. the English version of Beckett's *Godot*, in which the word "Crritic!" is pronounced by Estragon "with finality" to decide his and Vladimir's exchange of insults).

2. Publications

-Papers from the **2015** Pécs workshop were edited by Yvonne Howell and Francoise Lavocat and published in a special issue of *Neohelicon* 43 no 2 (Dec 2016) under the title, *Fact vs Fiction*.

-Papers from the **2014** workshop, *Literature and Policing*, held at the University of Osaka were edited by Takayuki Yokota-Murakami and Calin Mihailescu, and will be published by Brill in 2017.

-Papers from the **2016** Vienna workshop on *Prismatic Translation* will be edited by Matthew Reynolds, Sowon Park and Adriana Jacobs, and published by Legenda Transcript (<http://www.mhra.org.uk/series/T>). We are aiming to submit the completed volume to the publisher at the start of 2018.

3. Membership of the Committee

Our members are, as of 20 April 2017, Sowon S. Park (President), Walid Hamarneh (Secretary), Jernej Habjan (Website Editor), Yvonne H. Howell, Françoise Lavocat, Kyohei Norimatsu, Matthew Reynolds, Stefan Willer and Robert Young. We failed to elect new members in Vienna last year. We have, however, four approved nominations this year. The committee members present in Berlin will discuss and vote on the candidacy of the nominated colleagues, who will have presented papers at the workshop. We seek to continue to elect new members until we reach a maximum size of 20, keeping our focus on the balance of the Committee, with particular reference to specialisation and regional representation.

4. Acknowledgement

Our members appreciate and celebrate the passing of the motion at the 2016 General Assembly to make the Research Committee on Literary Theory a voting member of the EC of the ICLA. We thank the support of the Executive Council for all our endeavors, not least of the maintenance of our website, <http://iclatheory.org/>.

Respectfully submitted,

Sowon S Park (President)
Santa Barbara, 10 May 2017