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**Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, eds. Critique and Postcritique. Duke UP, 2017.**

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Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, eds. *Critique and Postcritique*. Duke UP, 2017.

**Abstract**

Review of Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, eds. *Critique and Postcritique*. Duke UP, 2017. 329 pp.

**Keywords**

Critique, postcritique

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Paul Ricoeur's notion of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," introduced in *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation* (1970) and largely understood as a way of reading that seeks to unmask the hidden meaning of a text, continues to trigger debates on reading practices and the role of critique in literary studies. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski's edited volume *Critique and Postcritique* is a milestone that contributes to this discussion by bringing together essays from preeminent scholars to reflect specifically on postcritique and, more broadly, to "reimagine the aims and practices of literary and cultural studies" (2). Postcritique, as Felski has forcefully shown in *The Limits of Critique* (2015), is not a disavowal of critique altogether, but is instead meant to open up a space to rethink critique and examine prevailing methods of reading. This volume does not provide a unified position; rather, it demonstrates that the strength of the "post" in postcritique lies in its openness as it holds contrasting views together.

The volume is composed of eleven essays and is divided into three parts: "Countertraditions of Critique," "Styles of Reading," and "Affects, Politics, Institutions." In their introduction, Anker and Felski provide a rich typology of critique and contextualize the "postcritical" turn. They contend that postcritique is not apolitical, but rather, can be linked to progressive political and social commitments. Indeed, they suggest that the reassessment of critique must involve crafting fresh positive rationales to advocate for the value of the humanities and the arts as well as influence conversations in the public sphere. In addition to finding fresh ways of interpreting literary texts, what is at stake with the postcritical turn is countering and finding new solutions to the current crisis faced by the humanities and the divide between academic life and the non-academic world. In other words, for Anker and Felski, postcritique ought to enable a bridge reaching beyond the humanities.

The first section offers productive ways to consider our role as critics outside of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Toril Moi challenges the view that the literary critic should look either beneath or at the surface of the text. She builds on Stanley Cavell and Ludwig Wittgenstein to argue that the critic should consider a text as an utterance, an action, and begin with our "sense of confusion," asking: "why this?" Heather Love suggests that Donna Haraway's mixed method—her concept of feminist objectivity and her combination of critique and care—offers resources for bridging current methodological divides. Simon During departs from Friedrich Nietzsche's self-criticism in the preface of the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886) to trace a different genealogy outside the Enlightenment's traditional association of critique with progress and reason. He provides an

alternative historical formation of critique understood as irony, abuse, and laughter that focuses on Jonathan Swift and John Brown.

The second part engages more directly with literary texts. Jennifer L. Fleissner asks whether the turn towards postcritique is a turn away from romanticism and toward science. She identifies a parallel between Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love* (1997) and Bruno Latour's portrayal of the divide between humanities and science, suggesting that both see the future of the humanities emerging in the common ground between science and literature, realism and romance. Ellen Rooney defends "symptomatic reading" with a return to Louis Althusser's reading of Karl Marx's method. She shows how interpreting form, understood in a general sense, will necessarily surprise the reader. It is the form of criticism and its intersection with cliché that is at the heart of C. Namwali Serpell's chapter in which she also suggests a phenomenology of reading inspired by Roland Barthes. Finally, Anker analyzes how J. M. Coetzee's work, in particular *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), exemplifies the seductions of and reliance on theory.

The last section addresses the political aspect of critique and postcritique. Christopher Castiglia's essay "Hope for Critique" resonates with the others by advancing an alternative way to reimagine what critique might offer. In order to revitalize critique, Castiglia distinguishes it from "critiquiness," a contemporary "frame of mind" (213) or disposition that he traces back to the Cold War era. Drawing on a variety of writers from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Jacques Rancière, Castiglia proposes instead a "dispositional hopefulness" that combines idealism and imagination. Russ Castronovo investigates the political function of critique. He explores the tension between critical views of state practices and readings of literary texts building on Matthew Arnold and Edward Said's statements on the function of criticism. While Castronovo shows that critique is necessarily bound to fail in the present, he also suggests that missing the critical mark is what enables critique to "acquire political possibility" (248). John Michael, inspired by Walt Whitman's conception of modern poetry, proposes to redefine the work of criticism in a secular age as an act of translation, meaning a practice, a "performance, always aware of its own limitations" (268). The volume concludes with Eric Hayot's essay "Then and Now," in which he returns to his experience with and his disappointment in theory in order to make sense of this era "after theory." He contends that we should account for a series of "interlocking historical structures" (292), including the "psycho-biographical dimension" (293), to understand our current moment and ultimately move beyond critique.

This book successfully presents an array of different practices of reading, offering new directions to explore the ethos, affects, and politics of postcritique. More essays that focus on other parts of the world and on how the digital humanities impact methods of readings would have been welcome additions; however, this volume will be a crucial reference for scholars in literary studies (especially those

in American Studies), cultural studies, and more generally those interested in getting a sense of the state of the humanities. In addition to opening up promising horizons for new ways of readings and theories to emerge, *Critique and Postcritique* urges us to take responsibility for these disciplines under threat and is a timely source of inspiration to imagine the future of the humanities in conversation with the world.

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