

IN WHAT DIRECTION IS LITERARY THEORY EVOLVING?

This first issue of the *Journal of Literary Theory* is being published at a time when the position of literary theory is not an enviable one. Since the early 1990s, the humanities have seen the rise of the belief that theory is useless, if not to say damaging, when it comes to dealing with literature. It is high time, we read, for a fresh awareness of the literal dimension,¹ a turn away from theory and a return to practice. The significance that has come to be attached to the idea of the ›end‹ or even ›death‹ of literary theory is demonstrated by the many intense ›after theory‹ and ›post-theory‹ discussions involving well-known thinkers that have been particularly prominent in the humanities in the English-speaking world in recent years.²

Against this background, the editors of *JLT* decided to undertake a modest survey of views on the future of literary theory. We presented scholars working on literature, philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, and media studies with two questions:

- In what direction is literary theory evolving?
- Where do you think the most important questions for literary theory lie?

The responses we have received to these questions are printed in this issue and in those to come.

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¹ See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Die neue Wörtlichkeit: Leise verabschiedet sich die ehrgeizige Literaturtheorie, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (February 16th, 2005), Geisteswissenschaften, 3.

² See most recently the winter 2004 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, in which Homi Bhabha, Wayne C. Booth, Stanley Fish, J. Hillis Miller, Fredric Jameson, and others set out their views on the future of theory after its end.

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