

## James (2–3)

### CHARACTER (REDUX)

- 4.1 The status of characters as types, symbols, individuals, group representatives, minds, or textual effects, is a matter for investigation.
- 4.2 Our cognitive capacity to mentally represent the beliefs, intentions, and feelings of others (called *theory of mind* or *metarepresentation* by cognitive scientists) is the stuff of character.

### USING THEORIES

- 2.5 Literary studies makes use of *theories* that attempt to explain the foundations of the interpretive arguments about texts that constitute the bulk of literary scholarship.
  - 2.5.1 Theories are not so much *applied* as they are *appropriated*: their terms are put to work in new contexts, or their claims are used to raise new problems or questions. In literary studies, texts talk back to theories.
- 2.6 Literary studies pays attention to the *way* scholars analyze their material (“the way they read”).

Theory—the word itself says so—is a spectacle, which can only be understood from a viewpoint away from the stage on which the action is played out.

Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990), 14.

Etymology: ...post-classical Latin *theoria* speculation, contemplation, the contemplative, speculative, or theoretical approach as opposed to the practical (4th cent.), intellectual concept, view, conception, idea (from 12th cent. in British sources) < ancient Greek *θεωρία* action of viewing, contemplation, sight, spectacle.

*OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. “theory, *n.*”

These setbacks, disappointing at first, are actually the sign of a method still in touch with reality: geography is a useful tool, yes, but does not explain *everything*. For that, we have astrology and ‘Theory.’

Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), 53.

## FICTION AND SOCIETY

- 5.1 Fictions are also made out of social conventions: they both *use* and *represent* them. More generally, the meanings of fictions are social through and through.
- 5.2 The most surprising and meaningful engagements with social convention often happen when those conventions are *just* made visible but do not rise to narrative centrality.
  - 5.2.1 One way (not the only way) to discover the social bearings of a text is to read for the traces of what has been excluded.

the black woman who lubricates the turn of the plot and becomes the agency of moral choice and meaning in *What Maisie Knew*

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 13.