



# Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice

*By Charles E. Bressler*

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Presents the eleven basic schools of twentieth-century literary theory and criticism in their historical and philosophical contexts. Unlike other introductions to literary criticism, this text explores the philosophical assumptions of each school of criticism, provides a clear methodology for writing essays according to each school's beliefs and tenets, and features accessible student-generated sample essays.

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## **Editorial Review**

From the Back Cover

The fourth edition of the bestselling **Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice** showcases various schools of 20th century criticism in historical and philosophical contexts.

New features include:

- A new chapter on queer theory.
- Every chapter has been revised with new introductions with appropriate new critical vocabulary, critical terms, further readings sections, and web sites.
- New student essays
- Structuralism and Deconstruction have been combined into one section to make the material clearer and more streamlined.
- The addition of Plotinus, Giovanni Boccaccio, Joseph Addison, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mikhail Bakhtin.

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## **To the Reader**

Like the first two editions, this new edition of *Literary Criticism* is designed as a supplemental text for introductory courses in both literature and literary criticism. In all three editions, the purpose of this text has always remained the same: to enable students to approach literature from a variety of practical and theoretical perspectives and to equip them with a theoretical and a practical understanding of how critics develop their interpretations. Its overall aim is to take the mystery out of working with and interpreting texts.

Like the first and second editions, the third edition holds to several key premises. First, I assume that there is no such thing as an "innocent" reading of a text. Whether our responses to a text are emotional and spontaneous or well reasoned and highly structured, all of our interpretations are based on underlying factors that cause us to respond in a particular way. What elicits these responses, and how a reader makes sense out of a text, is what really matters. It is the domain of literary theory to question our initial and all our further responses, our beliefs, our values, our feelings, and our eventual, overall interpretation. To understand why we respond to a text in a certain way, we must first understand literary theory and criticism.

Second, since our responses to any text have theoretical bases, I presume that all readers have a literary theory. Consciously or unconsciously, as readers we have developed a mind-set that fits or encompasses our expectations when reading any text. Somehow we all seem able to make sense of a text. The methods we use

to frame our personal and public interpretations directly involve us in the process of literary criticism and theory and automatically make us practicing literary critics, whether we know it or not!

My third assumption rests on the observation that each reader's literary theory and accompanying methodology is either conscious or unconscious, complete or incomplete, informed or ill-informed, eclectic or unified. Since an unconscious, incomplete, ill-informed, and eclectic literary theory more frequently than not leads to illogical, unsound, and haphazard interpretations, I believe that a well-defined, logical, and clearly articulated theory will enable readers to develop their own methods of interpretation, permitting readers, in fact, to order, clarify, and justify their appraisals of a text in a consistent and rational manner.

Unfortunately, many readers cannot articulate their own literary theory and have little knowledge of the history and development of the ever-evolving principles of literary criticism. It is the goal of this book to introduce such students to literary theory and criticism, its historical development, and the various theoretical positions or schools of criticism that will enable them as readers to make conscious, informed, and intelligent choices about their own methods of interpretation.

Like the first two editions, this new edition introduces students to the basic concerns of literary theory in Chapter 1, which now includes a more expansive definition of *literature* itself. Chapter 2 places literary theory and criticism in historical perspective, starting with Plato and ending with modern-day theorists. Chapters 3 to 11 have all been revised, adding new terminology where appropriate. These chapters present the eleven major schools of criticism that have been developed in the twentieth century: New Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Structuralism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Feminism, Marxism, Cultural Poetics or New Historicism, and Cultural Studies, with an expanded discussion of Postcolonialism, including African American and Gender Studies. To maintain consistency and for ease of study, each of these chapters is identically organized. We begin with a brief **Introduction** followed by the **Historical Development** of each school of criticism. The **Assumptions** section, which sets forth the philosophical principles on which each school of criticism is based, is next. The **Methodology** section follows and serves as a "how-to" manual for explaining the techniques used by the various schools of criticism to formulate their interpretations of a text based upon their philosophical assumptions. All chapters in the third edition have received careful editing, with added terminology and scope of coverage. Throughout each of these sections, all **key terms** are in boldface type and are included in the new **Glossary** that appears at the back of this edition.

After the Methodology section, there is an expanded **Questions for Analysis** section in 'Chapters 3 through 11. This feature provides students with key questions to ask of a text in order to view that text from the perspective of the school of criticism under discussion. Some of the questions also ask students to apply their new-found knowledge to a particular text. Following this section is the **Student Essay** introduction, which poses critical questions to prepare students to read the example essay at the end of the Chapter. As in the first two editions, this undergraduate **Student Essay** provides an example for analysis, in which a student applies the principles and methods of interpretation of the school of criticism under discussion to one of nine primary texts in the **Literary Selections**. All of these primary texts can be found at the back of this edition.

Following the Student Essay warm-up is an updated **Further Reading** section. More comprehensive than in the first two editions, these selected references complement the more extensive **References** section found at the end of the text. After the Further Reading section, an updated **Web Sites** section appears that provides additional avenues of exploration for each of the schools of criticism. It is often the case that these World Wide Web addresses include links to other sites, thus providing opportunities to venture into the ever-expanding world of literary theory.

Since *Literary Criticism* is an introductory text, the explanations of the various schools of criticism should

not be viewed as exhaustive but as a first step toward an understanding of some rather difficult concepts, principles, and methodologies. Similarly, the student essays should not be viewed as literary masterpieces but as undergraduate attempts to employ differing literary theories. Instructors and students alike should feel free to critique these essays and explore both their strengths and weaknesses. After reading each of the chapters in this new edition, it is hoped that readers will continue their own investigations of literary theory by exploring advanced theoretical texts and the primary works of both theoretical and practical critics.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Nathaniel Thomas:**

Nowadays reading books be a little more than want or need but also be a life style. This reading addiction give you lot of advantages. Advantages you got of course the knowledge the rest of the information inside the book that will improve your knowledge and information. The data you get based on what kind of e-book you read, if you want send more knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want experience happy read one along with theme for entertaining such as comic or novel. The Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice is kind of publication which is giving the reader unstable experience.

#### **Nicole Dilbeck:**

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#### **Katherine Adkins:**

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