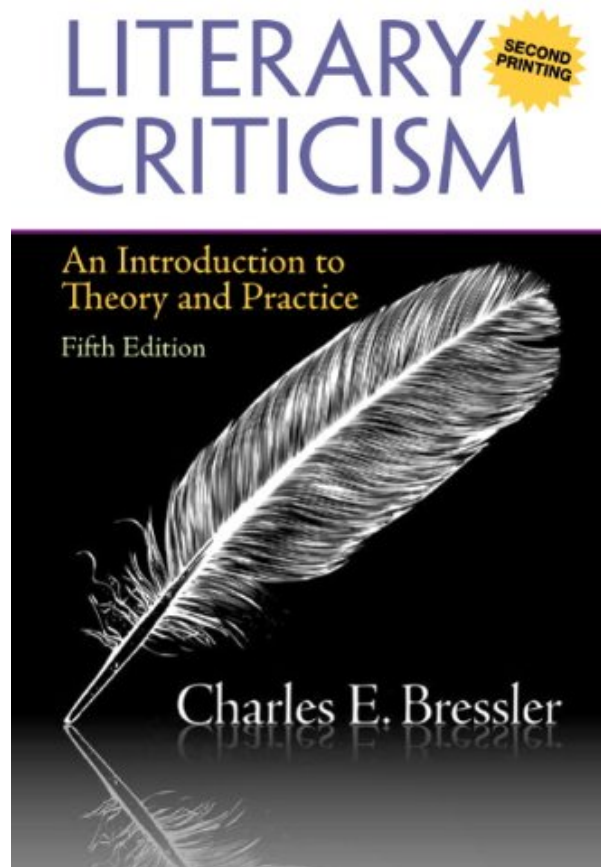


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An Introduction to
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Fifth Edition



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Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice, 5/e presents the thirteen basic schools of twentieth-century literary theory and criticism in their historical and philosophical contexts. Unlike other introductions to literary criticism, this book explores the philosophical assumptions of each school of criticism and provides a clear methodology for writing essays according to each school's beliefs and tenets.

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More propaganda than introduction

By Shagbark

I haven't gotten more than a third of the way through the book yet, but this is more of a propaganda piece for reader response theory than a balanced introduction. The author presents reader response theory in the introductory chapter as the "correct" theory, though not by name, and cites reader response theorists as authorities without noting that fact. He slanders the New Critics with the usual lies.

But that's par for the course, since New Historicism and Cultural Poetics are both routinely presented as if they were theories developed in response to New Criticism, where in fact "New Criticism" (which is not really a theory or movement at all except as a movement back to poetry and literature) was developed in response to the same ideas that New Historicism and Cultural Poetics reverted to. See, for example, *The Well Wrought Urn* by Cleanth Brooks, 1942, p. x-xi: "If literary history has not been emphasized in the pages that follow, it is not because I discount its importance, or because I have failed to take it into account. It is rather that I have been anxious to see what residuum, if any, is left after we have referred the poem to its cultural matrix... We tend to say that every poem is an expression of its age; that we must be careful to ask of it only what its own age asked... Any attempt to view it sub specie aeternitatis, we feel, must result in illusion. Perhaps it must. Yet, if poetry exists as poetry in any meaningful sense, the attempt must be made. Otherwise the poetry of the past becomes significant merely as cultural anthropology, and the poetry of the present, merely as a political, or religious, or moral instrument." A concise description of the values of New Historicism and Cultural Poetics, which New Criticism was formed /in response to/.

Bressler either doesn't understand where the true disagreement is, or doesn't want students to know. Given all the political ideology in literary theory these days, I'm not ruling out deliberate obfuscation. The

disagreement is over the idea that the division of knowledge into academic disciplines is valid and useful. The real war being fought in literary theory is between the "New Critics" who think that the funding for literature chairs and literature programs and so on should be spent studying literature, and the continental cast-offs from other departments--economics, sociology, philosophy--who've been successfully parasitizing literature, as they can't hack it in their actual disciplines because their devotion to Hegel has obliterated their capacity for rational thought.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Clear and Simple

By ben

This book would have save me a whole lot of time few months ago when I took my first literature course. What I have learn in one afternoon reading the first chapter is 10 times more than the professor circumvented in an entire semester, saying mystical words and concepts that did not say a whole lot of anything! I'm a foreign student and learning English as a forth language, and not being vulgar to criticize the teacher, just being honest in assessment of a recent learning experience (Eng 110 intro to literature - lower div). It does not do the work for you, only give a definitive methodology, as what is, i.e. an academic essay consists of 5 paragraphs, or "stop" is a type word that can be used as a very short sentence because conveying a complete thought when properly punctuated. VSS is used as one of the tools to control rhythm, pace, or flow of the writings / passages, and how to apply it. It is a type of book that does not have an extra comma or period. Not saying that it's about basic mechanic of writing essay, only giving simile of how it demystifies the process into A-B-C of understanding. Literature hasn't changed in the last 15 years and won't in the next 15, so this 1999's version won't be out dated any time soon. Newer and costly book can be nice, however, it is a great bargain; not to mention, for a book under 10 bucks (including shipping cost), it is a much better educator than a \$75/hr college professor (sorry to be harsh and perhaps a bit vulgar). I highly recommend this book for everyone how is planing to learn about literature and its essay.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

An Extraordinarily Useful Text On Theory

By Martin Asiner

The number of user-friendly guides for introductory level literary theory is no more than three or four. LITERARY THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THEORY AND PRACTICE by Charles E. Bressler is happily one of them. For a text on theory designed for the novice, the author must include a number of basic concepts. First, the text must minimize the inevitable influx of dense jargon while maximizing a clear explication of that jargon. Second, the author must set his survey of theory in a meaningful context that allows the uninitiated to trace the evolution of theory from its starting point--usually with the Greeks--up to the present day. Third, the author must define the nature of theory--no easy task there--so that the reader can connect the various strands of allied disciplines like linguistics, psychology, and economics into a coherent whole. Fourth, the text must include close analyses and summaries of the major schools of theory--again no easy task since there is considerable disagreement even among those who are recognized experts as to which strands of the web of theory deserve inclusion. And finally, that author ought to show the reader how to make the transcendent leap from the abstruseness that is theory to the concretization of the use of that theory by providing real-life examples of writing that illustrate that theory in action. Bressler does all this and does so with a flair that puts most of his academic competitors to shame.

Part of the reason for his success is his simple yet not simplistic methodology that accompanies each school of theory. He begins each school with an introduction that foregrounds his analyses in a real-world application that makes sense even to the rank novice. He follows with an erudite historical development, which includes assumptions that proponents of that school hold. He then considers the methodology by which that proponent translates abstract assumption to concrete reality. What I found especially useful were his concluding questions for analyses and student-derived essays that examined a specific text under a

designated literary lens.

There are other introductory guides that do much of the preceding but only Bressler does it all so well. This text has use beyond the introductory undergraduate course in theory. For those in graduate seminars who need a refresher in the basics or wish to see theory reflected in the reality of everyday literary texts, *LITERARY THEORY* is a work that ought to achieve frequent perusal during a lifetime of reading that extends far beyond the requirements of a college course.

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