

Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory Study Guide

**Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and
Cultural Theory by Peter Barry**

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Contents

Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Theory before theory - liberal humanism.....	5
Structuralism.....	7
Post-structuralism and deconstruction.....	8
Postmodernism.....	9
Psychoanalytic criticism.....	10
Feminist criticism.....	12
Lesbian/gay criticism.....	14
Marxist criticism.....	15
New historicism and cultural materialism.....	17
Postcolonial criticism.....	19
Stylistics.....	20
Narratology.....	21
Ecocriticism.....	23
Characters.....	24
Objects/Places.....	27
Themes.....	32
Style.....	35
Quotes.....	37
Topics for Discussion.....	39

Plot Summary

Peter Barry's 290 page "Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory" is first published in 1995 with a Second Edition in 2002. This non-fiction and quasi-historical text provides an introduction to more than a dozen literary and cultural theories from liberal humanism to twentieth century ecocriticism. The author is an English Professor at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, Wales, UK where he teaches several theory courses. Barry becomes aware as an undergraduate at London University in the 1960s that instruction in literary theory is deficient. The first course in literature then is "Beowulf to Virginia Woolf." He writes this book to cure a deficiency from his undergraduate studies and to close that gap for new students of literature.

As a result, Peter Barry writes this introductory book to satisfy student learning needs rather than to exhibit novelists' writing styles. Since his undergraduate study of the "wolves" left him uninspired he writes "Beginning Theory" to inspire today's students to explore and find interest in literature of all types. One way Barry accomplishes this goal is with practical activities like regular "STOP and THINK" sections for readers to make "some personal sense of theory." His style of writing is subjective to offer a friendly, understanding and straightforward presentation of literary and cultural theory. He writes as if he is speaking to a small group of students on a subject he thoroughly understands, participates in and enjoys.

"Beginning Theory" is detailed and specific enough to provide ready reference to the subject matter. For example, a reader who wants to know how a stylistic critic differs from a post-structuralist critic can find both identified by name and page number on the Contents page. Barry's literary critiques at the end of each chapter illustrate specific, practical examples of how that literary theory can be applied. This text is an excellent learning tool for a beginning or advanced student of literary and cultural theory. It is presented in an organized and well-defined manner. Barry's writing is clear, concise and informative, providing useful, relevant, yet not excessive or extraneous knowledge about the history and styles of literary criticism.

Barry shares the enthusiasm he has for literature with his readers. He uses layman's words where possible to help the reader understand difficult concepts. The reader is reassured by his writing style, approach and terminology that concepts can be understood and interesting. For example, Barry's goal in writing this book is clear in his statement, "Above all, it aims to interest you in theory."

Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

Peter Barry's 290-page "Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory" is first published in 1995 with a Second Edition in 2002. This non-fiction and quasi-historical text provides an introduction to more than a dozen literary and cultural theories from liberal humanism to twentieth-century ecocriticism. The author is an English Professor at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, Wales, UK where he teaches several theory courses. Barry becomes aware as an undergraduate at London University in the 1960s that instruction in literary theory is deficient. The first course in literature then is "Beowulf to Virginia Woolf." He writes this book to cure a deficiency from his undergraduate studies and to close that gap for new students of literature.

Literary theory becomes fashionable and controversial in the 1980s and remains so until the 1990s when it becomes a standard course in school curriculum. With glamor and fashion lessens, students can learn by clear explanation and demonstration. Barry offers participation in practical application activities with regular "STOP and THINK" sections to make "some personal sense of theory." Each theory is presented in relation to other earlier theory that illustrates variation for closer review. The author's approach is based on student learning needs rather than novelists' writing styles. "Liberal humanism" is popular in the 1970s as a catchall term to describe the lack of any other type of literary criticism used by a critic. For example, if a critic does not claim a style he is a "liberal humanist." Barry claims reading intensely is better than reading a lot. He considers slow reading as meditative, reflective and personal. Barry promotes a method called "SQ3R." Five stages of reading are used including Survey, Question, Read, Recall, and Review.

Any difficulties a reader has understanding literary theory may result from the way it is written. Theory is formulated on twelve straightforward ideas that are not difficult or complex. The writing is frequently in French with a poorly translated English version. Understanding requires patience, intellectual confidence and ability to use information presented. The "STOP and THINK" section recommends the reader develop a personal perspective on literature. Barry notes his own experience at London University begins with "Beowulf to Virginia Woolf," American literature but no literary theory until 1981.



Theory before theory - liberal humanism

Theory before theory - liberal humanism Summary and Analysis

The Church of England monopolizes English studies through Oxford and Cambridge Universities where only men attend and the teachers are unmarried ordained ministers. Until the 1820s education includes classics, divinity and mathematics, and is unchanged since the Middle Ages. In 1826 a charter is granted to award degrees to men and women. By 1828 English becomes a school subject and in 1829 the first Professor of English is appointed. English teaching is proposed at first to maintain political status and substitute for religion. In the 1920s Cambridge teaching adapts to teachers like Richards, Empson and Leavis. I.A Richards teaches "Practical Criticism" that isolates literary text from the context of history and is used as a current standard. William Empson identifies seven difficulties in poetry and F.R. Leavis takes a moral approach that literature teaches about life and values. This literary consensus prevails from the 1930s until the 1960s.

Barry proposes ten principles of liberal humanism that are summarized in the following short statements. Liberal humanism is an approach to literature and its text that is its own meaning within itself. The text must be isolated from its context. Human nature is the same throughout history. Each individual is his or her own essence. Literature enhances life and promotes humane values. Form and content in literature must be integrated in an organic way that is honest. Literature illustrates rather than explains. Literary criticism interprets text to mediate for a reader. This grouping of ideas is called liberal humanism.

Aristotle is the first critic using a reader-centered approach to literature in his "Poetics." Other critics follow him including Sidney in 1580, Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century and the Romantic poets in the 1800s with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley. T.S. Eliot joins Cambridge thought with his ideas of dissociation, impersonality and objective correlative. Two tracks develop in literary criticism. One track is practical and writer-focused on particular authors. The other track is idea-focused on more general issues of literature. For example, a liberal humanist critic looks at values that conflict in a story. A general theory critic examines "true" or objective values an individual lives by instead. Literary theory undergoes substantial transition from the 1930s to the 1990s.

Recurrent themes in critical theory include socially constructed and contingent rather than absolute categories. Thinking and research is assumed to be based on the previous ideological conviction of the investigator. The practical use of language shapes and creates language rather than just records it. Meaning within a literary work is always shifting and never definitive. Books originate in a specific situation and are never "great" for all time. Barry summarizes five points of theory by claiming politics is

everywhere, language is essential, truth is conditional, meaning depends and human nature is a belief.



Structuralism

Structuralism Summary and Analysis

Structuralism begins in 1950 France with the proposition that things cannot be isolated from each other. They can only be understood within the context of larger structures. Specifically, meaning is a characteristic of things that human perception and organization imposes. The meaning of things does not originate from within them. For example, Donne's poem of the twelfth-century style named "dawn song" highlights the individual and the structure. Barry compares style to the "chicken" and Donne's poem the "egg." A liberal humanist considers the egg first compared to a structuralist who determines nature of the chicken first. The 1920s Cambridge emphasis on "text-based" analysis isolated from context is reversed by structuralist emphasis in 1970s Britain and USA on the large, wider issues of structures, contexts and ideas.

Swiss linguist de Saussure develops the root of structuralism in the 1950s. Structuralism is based on his three ideas that the meaning of words is arbitrary, words are relational and language constitutes the world. He adds another dimension by distinguishing language as a system or structure from an individual expression. For example, a French word makes sense only to someone who knows the French language. The structuralist approach is assumed to be transferable into any other signifying system like myths or other tales with cultural meaning. Each particular incidence is positioned in a broader system of values and beliefs to enable understanding. Other proponents of structuralism include Roland Barthes, Jonathan Culler and David Lodge.

The author identifies specific functions that structuralist critics do. Structuralist critics analyze prose in comparison to larger genres, interpret parallels in literature and apply systematic patterns and structures to Western and other cultures. Barry describes five codes of analysis Barthes defines and uses to identify expressions including proairetic, hermeneutic, cultural, semic or connotative and symbolic codes. For example "ship sailed" is proairetic or action related, whereas hermeneutic asks questions to create suspense. The analysis of structuralist criticism uses a verbal diagram to identify factors, like parallel or contrast and highlights those parts of a work, like plot or character where factors appear. The "STOP and THINK" exercise on page 57 is a practical application of codes and their relative significance that can enhance the understanding of structuralism.



Post-structuralism and deconstruction

Post-structuralism and deconstruction Summary and Analysis

The dilemma of post-structuralism is based on the rule of structuralism that language shapes the world perception. Consequently any difference with structuralism conflicts with a moving standard. For example, sitting in a non-moving train when an adjoining train begins to move makes one wonder which train is moving. When post-structuralists speak the moving points of structuralism are referenced. Barry notes specific differences between them. Structuralism's origin is linguistics while post-structuralism comes from philosophy and is skeptical of its method, system and reason. Structuralist writing is detached and scientific. Post-structuralist writing is emotive and engaged. Structuralists see language as real but post-structuralists see language as fluid in context. Structuralism wants a more reliable view whereas post-structuralism relies on the more fluid view in context.

Ironically Roland Barthes is a significant post-structuralist with Jacques Derrida. Barthes' 1968 essay "The Death of the Author" is the work that changes him from structuralist to post-structuralist. His "death" as author "births" the reader insofar as author-produced text transforms into reader-produced meaning beyond textual authority. Derrida adds to post-structuralism by embracing an inherently relativistic universe. There are no facts guaranteed, but only interpretations without authority to validate them. Derrida uses the methods of deconstructive reading that demonstrates apparently unified works to be in fact fragmented, self-divided and lacking core. Derrida's "Of Grammatology" is the key text of post-structuralism in "STOP and THINK" on page 68.

A tool of post-structuralism, which is an attitude of mind, is the "deconstruction" process. This tool uncovers an unconscious dimension that the text ignores. For example, root of the word "guest" is the same as "host" that originates from the Latin "hostis." Ironically, "hostis" means enemy and reveals the unconscious text. Deconstructive reading exposes contradictions and inconsistencies underlying apparent unity. Where structuralists seek parallels, deconstructionists seek contradictions and discontinuities. Post-structuralists expose the textual subconscious, examine surface features, expose disunity, create many meanings and look for discontinuities, called "fault-lines." The deconstruction example offers a practical review of the verbal, textual and linguistic stages of the process.



Postmodernism

Postmodernism Summary and Analysis

Modernism dominates art and culture through the first part of the twentieth century until postmodernism develops in the 1980s. Modernism originates in Vienna to counter the structuralism in painting, music, literature and architecture and spreads to all of Europe and England. Modernist trends appear in painting styles like Cubism and Surrealism. A key element of modernism rejects fundamentals for abstraction. For example, the use of pitched roofs, wood and domes is replaced architecturally with simple geometrical forms of glass and concrete. Writers like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf represent modernism in literature from 1910 to 1930. Five features of modernist writing includes an emphasis on how rather than what is seen, trends away from objectivity, the tendency towards mixing poetry and prose in a work, and the fragmentary forms and reflexivity about nature, status and role of poems, drama and novels. These facets promote experimental, innovative literature through its peak in the 1920s. Modernist themes are melancholic, pessimistic and despairing about the world in its use of fragmented forms. In contrast, however, eclectic postmodernism celebrates the use of fragmentation.

Modernism begins in 1980 with Jurgen Habermas' commentary about Enlightenment for the hundred years between mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The use of reason is assumed to improve society and is characterized as modernity.

Postmodernism begins with Jean-Francois Lyotard's commentary in 1982, which critiques Habermas' goal of Enlightenment as "the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject." French writer Jean Baudrillard suggests the sign is at one time indicative of underlying reality. Later it is indicative of other signs that he calls a simulacrum. He lists four stages contributing to the emptiness of any sign. Initially the sign represents a reality, i.e., a painting of a city. Subsequently the sign or painting becomes a romantic representation, then degenerates into disguise and finally bears no relation to the initial or any reality. Baudrillard claims postmodernism collapses the real and simulated to make everything surface without any depth, i.e., "hyperreal." Barry calls Disneyland "a sign which conceals an absence."

A postmodernist critic searches for like themes in twentieth century literature to explore their implications. Postmodernist critics focus on fiction that promotes the idea that the real disappears through shifting identities. "Intertextual elements" like parody and allusion are highlighted to reflect similarities between texts rather than between text and objective reality. A postmodernist sees the past ironically compared to the modernist who tries to destroy the past. Narcissism is highlighted. Finally, the distinctions of cultural levels are challenged to favor a blend. Jeffrey Nealon uses Lyotard's analytic approach as example of postmodern criticism with Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot."



Psychoanalytic criticism

Psychoanalytic criticism Summary and Analysis

Psychoanalytic criticism uses the techniques and concepts of psychoanalysis to interpret literature. Psychoanalysis examines the interaction of conscious and unconscious parts of the mind as a method of therapy to cure mental disorder. Sigmund Freud is the major proponent of psychoanalysis. His clinical method encourages patients to speak freely, which releases subconscious fears into the conscious. Freud develops concepts about the unconscious, repression of unresolved conflicts and the sublimation of repressed conflicts into grander or disguised notions. He further categorizes the psyche into ego, super-ego and id that refines the mind into consciousness, conscience and unconscious. Sexuality is a major factor in Freudian thought. Freud relates sexuality and its expression to infantile sexuality, the Oedipus complex and libido, which is the energy that drives sexual desire. The classic focus of sexual development includes oral, anal and phallic stages. Freud uses a term Eros for love and Thanatos for death. He analyzes psychic tools that include transference and projection to shift emotions away from a subject, defense mechanisms to avoid recognition and pain, the memory screen, Freudian slip and terminology of dream work, displacement and condensation.

Freudian interpretation is generally considered to attribute sexual meaning to objects. Typically this interpretation is based on a dream about an object that represents re-focused sexual association. By refocusing in a dream the subject can disguise repressed fears and their occurrence, which makes fear visual rather than spoken. To this extent, dreams are like literature that is subject to the tools of psychoanalytic interpretation. Literature uses images, symbols and metaphors with indirect expression just like dreams use visual imagery for indirect expression. Freud is known to have negative views on women that are now assumed to affect the objectivity and viability of his dream analysis. Freudian literary critics distinguish conscious from unconscious motives and feelings. Classical symptomatic analysis of literature is based on Freudian principles and applied concepts. Literary work is identified in a psychic context without social or historical significance.

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan develops a theory of "mirror stage" that influences a more basic approach to Freudianism. His theory re-emphasizes unconscious as a primary driver of being. This emphasis causes his expulsion from the World Congress but ironically establishes his own prominence as a Parisian intellectual. Lacan emphasizes associations that are of primary literary interest in his ideas about Edgar Allen Poe and Hamlet. Barry claims Lacan's work is obscure and requires several readings to understand. Specifically, Freud's condensation and displacement notions correspond to the linguistic metonymy and metaphor of Roman Jakobson. Metonymy and displacement both refer to a part that represents a whole. For example "twenty sail" means twenty ships. Likewise metaphor and condensation both compress elements into one image. For example, a ship plowing the waves is one image from both sea and soil.



Lacan claims the unconscious works like a language. Lacan critics seek the subconscious in a text they believe is sovereign. The text is a series of broader focus in a demonstration of language and the unconscious.



Feminist criticism

Feminist criticism Summary and Analysis

Feminism is renewed in the 1960s by the women's movement using works of female writers dating back to 1792 and male writers to 1869. Some notable names associated with the movement include Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, John Stuart Mills and Friedrich Engels. Current feminist literary criticism results from that movement and is concerned with literature as a practical way to influence attitudes and behavior. Nineteenth-century fiction focuses on a woman's marital partner for her social position and happiness. Late-twentieth-century feminist critics expose this sexual inequality. By the 1980s, feminist criticism becomes eclectic by considering other forms of criticism, opens to exploring the female world's nature and outlook, and finds interest in neglected female writers. Elaine Showalter calls the change in male to female writers from "androtexs" to "gynotexs." She identifies three historical stages starting with a feminine phase in which women imitate a dominant male standard, progressing to a feminist phase in which radical, separatist positions are promoted, and resolving into a female phase focused on female writing and experience. Since 1970 feminist criticism relies on theory, nature of language and psychoanalysis.

Anglo-American feminist critics emphasize theme, motif and characterization compared to French feminist critics who focus on language, representation and psychology. Elaine Showalter and Sandra Gilbert present an Anglo-American view while Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous represent a French style. Anglo-American criticism is similar to a liberal humanist approach where close reading of the individual text is the main focus. French critics use a poststructuralist approach by relying on ideas of Lacan and Derrida as the main focus of their philosophical framework before reading the text. Language is gender-based according to Virginia Woolf. She assumes a "man's sentence" is balanced and patterned like prose compared to a "woman's sentence" that is loosely linked. As a result the woman writer of prose is handicapped with a man's language. French critic, Helene Cixous claims the need for a female language, "écriture feminine" with freer use of meaning and looser grammatical structure. Julia Kristeva uses symbolic to mean fixed and unified and semiotic to mean loose and randomized. She further identifies symbolic as prosaic and semiotic as poetic with neither term being gender-based. Psychoanalysis causes other distinctions in feminist criticism as well. For example, Freud's idea of penis envy is extended to symbolize a desire for social power and advantage that women may lack. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar use the term "social castration" in their work.

Barry proposes eleven tasks feminist critics do to analyze literature that are summarized in the following statements. Feminist critics attempt to rediscover the written work of women. They revalue their experience by examining the representations of women in literature produced by men and women. Feminist critics challenge negative or inadequate representations of women and attempt to examine and break down power relations. They recognize the role of language in making distinctions. They question any

essential biological or social differences between sexes. They explore the use of a female language and rediscover male and female issues in psychoanalysis. Critics clarify the ideological basis of neutral or mainstream literary interpretations. "Wuthering Heights" is excerpted as an example of feminist criticism by Gilbert and Gubar.



Lesbian/gay criticism

Lesbian/gay criticism Summary and Analysis

Lesbian/gay literary theory does not appear until the 1990s. It appears initially in lesbian and gay studies sections of mainstream bookstores, academic catalogs and undergraduate courses. The field is multi-disciplinary but cultural issues predominate. Its defining trait of sexual orientation is the basis for a "fundamental category of analysis and understanding." Its social and political purpose resists homophobia, heterosexism and socially acceptable heterosexual primacy. Two trends of thought develop into either lesbian feminism or libertarian lesbianism. Lesbian feminism becomes a subset of feminist criticism in the 1980s before developing independently. Classic feminism transcends race, class and sexual orientation which diminish lesbianism. In reaction, lesbian feminists claim lesbianism is essential to feminism. They claim any other position encourages male exploitation. To bridge a gap between lesbian and heterosexual feminists Adrienne Rich prefers a "lesbian continuum" that tolerates a range of female action. Paulina Palmer claims it desexualizes lesbianism.

The second trend develops in the 1990s as libertarian lesbianism, or "queer theory" since it admits lesbian alliances with gay men rather than other women. This approach is not woman-centered and separatist like lesbian feminism. It recognizes political and social alliances with gay men. Lesbian/gay studies rely on poststructuralism of the 1980s that deconstructs differences between paired opposites. This trend attempts to improve understanding of the one in opposition to the other. For example, film star Rock Hudson is "safe" to straight women because his attractive male gay image does not demand male domination. Hudson is non-threatening to male viewers because gay maleness makes no demand on their masculinity. Hudson's "hetero/homo" image is a postmodern example of distinguishing between himself and others that exhibits fluid identity. According to the post-structuralist Saussure, categories are not fixed but are interacting differences like shifting signifiers. This anti-essentialism is significant to classifying literary criticism. Zimmerman classifies lesbian/gay literature as written by a lesbian or gay person, about lesbian or gay persons and express lesbian or gay vision. Paulina Palmer considers the anti-realist leanings of lesbian/gay literary criticism to be typical.

Lesbian/gay critics identify a body of classic writers with characteristics that differentiate them from other writers. Critics identify events and occurrences in mainstream literature that are lesbian/gay in nature to discuss them. Lesbian/gay critics establish standards and criteria of lesbian/gay categories that can be used to identify the classification. Critics expose homophobia in mainstream literature and highlight incidents that are previously ignored. Finally, lesbian/gay critics highlight neglected types of literature that illustrate how and when ideas of male and female are influenced. Barry uses an example of Mark Lilly's essay on First World War poetry to demonstrate lesbian/gay criticism.



Marxist criticism

Marxist criticism Summary and Analysis

German philosopher Karl Marx and sociologist Friedrich Engels are co-founders of the communist school of thought. They present their ideas in the "Communist Manifesto" written by them in 1848. Marxism is a materialist philosophy that disregards any force beyond the natural world of observable fact. The Marxist goal is a classless society where the means of production, distribution and exchange is owned in common. The Marxist philosophy seeks to change the world unlike other philosophies that seek to understand it. The mechanism for change is "competition for economic, social and political advantage" exhibited in the struggle for power among social classes. That class struggle is shown in nineteenth century industrial capitalism. Pre-industrial, cottage-industry workers perform the entire production and sales process. Industrial capitalists exploit workers by making them perform separate, repetitive tasks as part of an assembly line. Marxist philosophy claims exploitation alienates them from their humanity to make them into a "labor force." The central model of Marxist thinking is economic determinism where material means of production, distribution and exchange shapes the cultural world of art, religion and law.

The literary criticism of Marx and Engels is not comprehensive because it criticizes the conflicts in social class and historical force but does not comment on specific historical situations. There is an enlightened, encouraging and experimental attitude to literature from the Russian revolution to the 1920s. However, the first Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934 bans liberal views and imposes Lenin orthodoxy on writing as an "instrument of the party." This "Vulgar Marxism" demands "sound-bite" literature for political argument. "Engelsian" Marxist criticism thrives with Russian Formalists who promote the careful formal analysis of literature and defamiliarization after the 1930s. By 1950s and 1960s Formalist ideas interest structuralists for their systematic approach. Formalists include Mikhail Bakhtin in Russia and Prague's Roman Jakobson. Other well-known German Formalists that integrate their work with Freud and Marx are Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and Bertolt Brecht. For example, Brecht's drama "Galileo" positions a "script-reading director" at stage-side during performance to illustrate "defamiliarization" as a shift from literature to life.

The contemporary French Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser introduces several key terms like "overdeterminism" or several causes acting together, the "relative autonomy" of art from economic forces and "ideology as a system of representations at the heart of a society." "Decentering" refers to structures with no essence, "repressive structures" maintain state power with the assistance of "State ideological apparatuses." The reality underlying these notions lets the citizen believe he chooses freely what is really imposed by the state culture. "Hegemony" is shared by Althusser, Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams "like an internalized form of social control which makes certain views seem 'natural' or invisible so that they hardly seem like views at all." Simply put, hegemony makes one believe that's just "the way things are." Marxist critics determine

covert and overt text content and relate covert content to Marxist themes. Marxist critics relate the context of a work to social class of the author, the social period or the social and political assumptions and circumstances. Elliot Krieger's "A Marxist Study of Shakespeare's Comedies" is used as an example of Marxist criticism.



New historicism and cultural materialism

New historicism and cultural materialism Summary and Analysis

Stephen Greenblatt uses "new historicism" in 1980 to mean giving equal significance to reading literary and non-literary texts from the same period. The literary text receives no special treatment over non-literary texts about the same historical period. For example, Greenblatt's new historicism typically uses an historical document, called "anecdote" to introduce historicist essays rather than prior academic work. The essential difference between new and old historicism is parallel study of "equal weighting." Old historicism highlights a literary text as focus of an historical text as merely background setting. New historicism treats both literary and historical texts with equal importance. Secondly, new historicism stresses the archive value of "history-as-text." The historical event is past and only its writing remains. History writing, according to new historicism is subject to close analysis just like literary writing.

New historicism acknowledges Derrida's notion that only text remains. A word from the past is all that is left from the world of the past. Furthermore that word is processed by views of its own time, current times and language used. Each new historicist essay is a new reality in its writing. New historicism is biased toward anti-establishment notions in acceptance of liberal ideals and personal freedom. One essay can show change, or "doing history" in new historicism that may offend historians. New historicism however is more accessible, fascinating and distinctive, and has a sharper political edge. New historicist critics read literary texts relative to non-literary texts. They read classic literary text apart from its related academic scholarship. New historicists focus on issues of State power and its accompanying mind-set. New historicists rely on a post-structuralist viewpoint that accepts Derrida's notion of textualized reality and discursive practices. Montrose's essay that the play "creates the culture" is analyzed as an example of new historicism.

Cultural materialism is described by Graham Holderness as the study of history within a political framework. The term is used for a method that combines the characteristics of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis. For example, historical context is illustrated by a current reading of Shakespeare's plays that demonstrates their timelessness. Marxist and feminist literary criticism informs their political commitment. Textual analysis refocuses the analysis of any text. The term cultural means all cultural ideas in a society not just elitist art. Materialism contrasts with idealism in a material rather than spiritual world-view. Cultural materialism is optimistic about change with literature as the source of values to oppose the status quo. Raymond Williams is a British left-wing critic who promotes cultural materialism.

Cultural materialism is optimistic whereas new historicism is politically pessimistic. New historicists place the literary text in its own political time but cultural materialists place the text within a current political time. Cultural materialist critics read texts to "recover its

histories" and highlight the reasons the history is lost. Marxist and feminist approaches are combined for expedience. Close textual analysis is used as a technique and classical writing is preferable to more obscure texts. Terence Hawkes' essay is presented as an example of cultural materialist analysis.

Postcolonial criticism

Postcolonial criticism Summary and Analysis

Post-colonial criticism emerges in the 1990s by undermining the timeless and universal significance of literature made by liberal humanist critics. Specifically, if great literature is claimed timeless and universal, then cultural, social, regional and national differences are made less significant. Post-colonial criticism rejects universalism. Frantz Fanon is a Martinique psychiatrist in 1961. He claims post-colonial perspective begins by reclaiming the past and diminishing the ideology that devalues it. For example, Yeats is Eurocentric in his "Byzantium" poems by identifying Istanbul, previously called Constantinople with "torpor, sensuality, and exotic mysticism." A first characteristic of post-colonial criticism recognizes non-European as "exotic or immoral Other." The second characteristic uses language that is permanently tainted to require compliance with the colonial effect. The colonizer participates in the double identity of the colonized as well, which leads to the "cross-cultural" interaction of post-colonial criticism's fourth characterization.

The three stages of post-colonial criticism, i.e., adopt, adapt and adept, parallel feminist criticism's developmental stages. The first stage of post-colonial criticism addresses limitations and biases similar to male writers representing women. The second stage involves society and self-exploration which celebrates diverse, hybrid and different understandings, comparable to the "gynotext" phase. Finally post-colonial criticism and feminist criticism becomes more accessible and politically involved. Post-colonial critics approach their analytic work with six specific functions. Post-colonial critics reject claims of universalism. They point out deficiencies of Western literature especially with regard to cross cultural differences. Other cultural differences are examined and considered. Post-colonial critics point out the areas of silence and evasion within imperialism and colonialism. They highlight cultural differences and diversity and celebrate the expression of "cultural polyvalency." Finally post-colonial critics develop a perspective to encourage "Otherness" as a source of energy and change. Said's critique of Jane Austen's "Mansfield Park" is presented as an example of post-colonial criticism.



Stylistics

Stylistics Summary and Analysis

Stylistics is a system of approach to literature that relies on the science of linguistics for its methods and application. Linguistics studies language and structures to analyze how elements of a literary work give it meaning and effect. Liberal humanism and stylistics share an empirical bias, non-eclectic style and non-fluid meaning. Specifically, stylistics emphasizes specific texts not general theories, does not add theories to its analysis, and relies on firm meaning in language, i.e., not "innately fluid, indeterminate, and shifting." Stylistic methods can be used to analyze any written document including prose, political speeches and advertisements. Stylistics theory does not consider literary text as special. Stylistics develops through rhetoric which teaches structuring an argument, using figures of speech and making the greatest impact with writing or speech. Rhetoric is used in the medieval period for Church, law and political life until the nineteenth century when it joins linguistics to become historical "philology." The twentieth century brings revision from the historical to the use of rhetoric in structuring language.

Stylistics and close reading are different for three reasons identified by Barry. Literary language and general speech differences are highlighted by close reading compared to stylistics which highlights their similarities. In addition close reading isolates literary text as an aesthetic expression unlike stylistics that considers them equivalent. Technical terms and ideas are used in stylistic analysis relative to close reading that uses layman's terms used in the casual conversation of everyday life. Finally stylistics purports to be scientifically based and objective that anyone can learn compared to close reading which is assumed to require tact and sensitivity, i.e., an artful skill, not accessible by analysis.

Barry claims stylist practitioners pursue three ambitions. The primary goal is to support their opinions and ideas about a literary work with objective or "hard" data. Secondly, stylists use linguistic evidence and specialized knowledge to introduce interpretations of literary works that may be new or innovative. For example, some words used in a work may be undergoing semantic change like Falstaff's "womb." Finally, stylists develop literary meanings by trying to establish general points. Specifically, stylists make general observations about how literature works. Stylist critics generally follow six procedural practices in their analysis. They describe the technical aspects of a language that is then used in their interpretation to provide apparent objectivity to the analysis. A new reading may be established that can be used to challenge existing readings. The technical account of meaning in literature is designed to demonstrate the lack of an ineffable and mystical element of literature that is beyond analysis. Stylistics compares all other forms of literature using the same methodology and devices. Finally, stylistics considers the text as a whole rather than sentence by sentence analysis. Barry proposes three examples to demonstrate how a stylistic interpretation is developed.



Narratology

Narratology Summary and Analysis

Narratology is a study of narrative structures that combines characteristics and is derived from structuralism and linguistic theory. Narratology studies how narratives, or stories, make meaning. Basic mechanisms and procedures common to all story-telling is the subject of narratology. The story is an actual series of events that happen whereas the plot is those same events after being edited, packaged and presented as a narrative. The plot is in the order a narrator uses to bring about the effect his version warrants. Barry uses "discourse" rather than "plot" to incorporate style, pace and viewpoint packaged to cause the desired effect. Equivalent terms are used by Gerard Genette and other authors.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle identifies three elements in a plot including fault or character-defect, recognition and reversal that are all incumbent on the hero or heroine. Barry's cartoon on page 225 illustrates Aristotle's use of these elements. A key part is timing information presented to cause a reversal of fortune most effectively. "Russian Formalist" Vladimir Propp identifies 31 actions in a tale with seven spheres of action to animate. Aristotle and Propp design a complete narrative system except for presentation.

Presentation is provided by Gerard Genette whose work focuses on the telling of a tale. Barry structures the work of Genette on a range of six questions to detail the process of telling. "Mimesis" means slow telling where an author stages a tale for readers whereas "diegesis" means relating where the narrator summarizes events without trying to create an illusion. Generally a work uses a blend of modes paced to move a plot along with effective timing. The next question is focalization which addresses the point of view a narrator uses to present the story. External focalization presents from outside a character whereas internal focalization presents what characters think and feel. Zero focalization is classic narrative called omniscient narration. A story-teller may or may not be an author identified with a character or abstract as "telling medium" who is neutral and transparent. Narrators are "dramatized" or "non-dramatized" where a "dramatized" narrator may be a character in the work with a personal set of biases, characteristics and moralities. First person storytellers may be heterodiegetic or homodiegetic but an omniscient narrator is heterodiegetic by his very nature. The time of telling a story can be forward or backward as "flashbacks" or "flash forwards." Tales may be proleptic or analeptic or start in the middle, i.e., "in media res." Packaging can be "frame narrative" or "embedded narrative" and some are "meta-narrative" as a tale within a tale. Finally, speech and thought may be presented as "direct and tagged" with identification or untagged without. Some speech is reported while other speech is mimetic, transposed or narratized according to Genette.

This combination of analytics is an initial set of tools to analyze narrative with story and plot. Aristotle offers types of psychic narrative with Propp's plot specifics and Genette's



tools to tell the story. Narratology critics look for repeat structures among narratives that shift from content to the teller and telling. Categories are derived from short stories and are developed for novel-length narratives. Action and structure is highlighted instead of character and motive. Narratology critics enjoy all narratives rather than a few examples. Barry uses an excerpt from Edgar Allan Poe to illustrate the analysis of narratologists.

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism Summary and Analysis

Ecocriticism studies the relationship between literature and physical environment that may also be called "green studies." Cheryl Glotfelty is a co-founder with Harold Fromm in the USA that develops in the early-1990s. The movement is not yet widely developed with its own assumptions, doctrines and procedures. The term is applied to the work previously known as nature writing. Major proponents include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau. Four areas are identified as "outdoor environment" including wilderness, scenic sublime, countryside and domestic picturesque. One example of each area identified in the same order includes deserts, forests, hills and parks.

Ecocritics read major works from an ecocritic point of view and extend the application of concepts to areas other than the natural world. They emphasize writers who highlight nature as their subject matter. Ecocritics expand literary practice to emphasize factual writing with topographical work like travel writing and regional literature. Ecocritics emphasize ecocentric values of observation, ethical responsibility and broader world claims. A poem of Thomas Hardy is provided by Barry as an example of ecocriticism.

Characters

Peter Barry

Peter Barry is the name of the author of "Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory." He is an English Professor at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, Wales, UK where he and his colleagues teach several theory courses. Barry is an undergraduate at London University in the 1960s where he receives no exposure to any coursework in literary theory. His literary career begins as an undergraduate with an introductory course called "Beowulf to Virginia Woolf." Barry's first exposure to formal literary theory is not until 1981.

Barry is the principal character throughout this book because the literary and cultural theories presented are researched, interpreted and presented by him to represent the body of knowledge nicknamed "lit crit." Barry presents this survey of literary criticism as an introduction to readers new to the field. His research is substantial and documented to provide students of the field with a useful path to further independent study and research. Barry's style based on student learning needs makes his writing clear. This text appears to fill a deficiency in academic background from his lack of formal literary theory training until 1981.

Cambridge University group

Cambridge University group is an informal grouping of four influential contributors to development of English literature at Cambridge University from its Middle Ages traditions to twentieth century relevance. Three instructors and a poet play significant roles in developing English literary theory and criticism. They include 1920s Cambridge instructors I. A. Richards, William Empson and F.R. Leavis. I. A. Richards develops and teaches a method called "Practical Criticism" that is used as a standard today. William Empson identifies seven difficulties in poetry. F.R. Leavis proposes a moral approach to literature as a vehicle to teach about life and values. Poet T.S. Eliot adds to the Cambridge literary body of knowledge with his ideas of dissociation, impersonality and objective correlative.

Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf is important to "Beginning Theory" because she is included in an English survey course that introduces Barry to English literature. Subsequently she makes significant contributions to contemporary literary criticism. Virginia Woolf is a female writer who is a proponent of the women's movement in the 1960s. She is now associated with feminist literary criticism. She proposes that language is gender-based because she assumes a "man's sentence" is balanced and patterned but a "woman's sentence" is loosely linked. Therefore, a woman writer of prose is handicapped by



writing in "man's language." Writers like T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf represent modernism in literature from 1910 to 1930.

Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud is the main proponent and founder of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud is important because his concepts underlie elements in many forms of literary and cultural theory. For example, linguist Roman Jakobson relates the literary terms metonymy and metaphor to Freud's condensation and displacement. Sexuality is a major factor in Freudian thought that relates sexual meaning to objects and dreams. Feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar use "social castration" to reference Freudian penis envy that symbolizes the lack of power and social advantage a woman experiences. Freud is thought to have negative female views that affect the objectivity and viability of his dream analyses.

Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard is the name of a French postmodernist who develops a theory of four stages that a sign/reality undergoes that he calls a simulacrum. He claims the real and simulated collapse with postmodernism to make everything surface without any depth that he coins the term "hyperreal" to denote.

Jacque Lacan

Jacque Lacan is the name of a French psychoanalyst who provides a more basic approach to Freud's psychoanalysis. Lacan is expelled from the World Congress for his controversial ideas despite their popularity with Parisian intellectuals. Lacan emphasizes associations of primary interest in his essays and seminars on Poe and Hamlet.

Elaine Showalter

Elaine Showalter is the name of an Anglo-American feminist critic who introduces the terms androtext and gynotext to the literature of feminist criticism. She classifies historical stages of the women's movement into feminine, feminist and female phases of women writers.

Helene Cixous

Helene Cixous is the name of a French feminist critic who introduces the need for a female language, i.e., *écriture féminine* which provides for a freer use of meaning and looser grammatical structure.



Julia Kristeva

Julia Kristeva is the name of a French feminist who introduces the terminology symbolic to mean fixed which she identifies as prosaic and semiotic as poetic meaning loose and randomized. Kristeva claims neither term is gender-based.

Adrienne Rich

Adrienne Rich is the name of a feminist critic who proposes the term "lesbian continuum" to free up a wide range of feminine behavior. The lesbian feminist posture makes lesbianism central to feminism to avoid any sense of collusion in male exploitation. Rich proposes this term to mend the gap between lesbians and heterosexual feminists.



Objects/Places

Liberal humanism

Liberal humanism is the name of an approach to literary criticism popular in the 1970s. The method is used as a catchall term to describe the absence of any other category of literary criticism that a practitioner applies to a literary text.

London University

London University is the name of the school in the 1960s where Barry does his undergraduate work in English literature. He studies the traditional "Beowulf to Virginia Woolf" course and American literature but no literary theory courses.

Church of England

Church of England is the name of the official state church that monopolizes English studies taught in Oxford and Cambridge Universities through the 1820s

Practical Criticism

"Practical Criticism" is the name of a literary theory developed by I.A. Richards at Cambridge University in the 1920s. This method isolates literary text from the context of history and is a current standard used today.

Structuralism

Structuralism is the name of a literary theory that begins in 1950 France. Its underlying proposition is that things cannot be isolated but can be understood only in the context of larger structures. Frederick de Saussure is the name of a 1950s Swiss linguist who develops roots of structuralism with his ideas about the meaning of words and language. He makes a distinction between language as a system and an individual expression.

Code of analysis

Code of analysis is the name applied to literary action described by Roland Barthes. He identifies five codes of analysis to indicate conditions including proairetic, hermeneutic, cultural, semic or connotative and symbolic codes. Subsequently he writes an essay in 1968 titled "The Death of the Author" that reveals a change in his approach to post-structuralism which admits to the role a reader plays in determining textual meaning.



Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism is the name of a literary theory that opposes structuralism and is derived from philosophy. Post-structuralism is skeptical of structuralism's method, system and reason. The primary tool of post-structuralism, which is claimed to be an attitude of mind, is the process of "deconstruction." Jacques Derrida is the name of a post-structuralist who along with Roland Barthes introduces the notion of deconstructive reading in the interpretation of a work. Derrida writes an essay called "Of Grammatology" that demonstrates fragmented, self-divided and diffuse center in the nature of interpretation.

Modernism

Modernism is the name of a cultural trend which dominates art and culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Modernism originates in Vienna to oppose structuralism in painting, music, literature and architecture. The trend eventually spreads throughout Europe and England. Modernism appears in painting styles like Cubism and Surrealism. A key element of modernism rejects fundamentals in favor of abstraction. Jurgen Habermas is the name of a writer who formulates modernism in 1980 with his commentary about the Enlightenment that occurs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is the name of a literary theory that begins with Jean-Francois Lyotard's commentary in 1982. He critiques Habermas' goal of Enlightenment, which is "the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject." French writer Jean Baudrillard claims a sign is indicative of underlying reality but becomes indicative of other signs that he calls simulacrum. He claims postmodernism collapses the difference between real and simulated so that everything is surface without depth that he calls "hyperreal."

Simulacrum

Simulacrum is the name of a term derived by Baudrillard to denote the changing nature of a sign. He proposes four stages that contribute to emptiness of any sign. Initially a sign represents a reality, i.e., painting of a city. Later the sign/painting becomes a romantic representation then degenerates into disguise. Finally it bears no relation to the initial or any reality so that everything is surface without depth or "hyperreal." For example, Disneyland is a sign which conceals an absence.



Psychoanalytic criticism

Psychoanalytic criticism is the name of a literary theory that uses techniques of psychoanalysis to interpret literature. The therapy of psychoanalysis examines interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind as a mechanism to cure mental disorder. Psychoanalytic criticism applies the techniques to literature.

Feminist literary criticism

Feminist literary criticism is the name of a literary theory originating from the women's movement and concerned with literature as a practical way to influence attitudes and behavior. Nineteenth century fiction focuses on a woman's marital partner to facilitate her social position and happiness that 1970s feminist criticism exposes as sexual inequality. Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir are female writers who are proponents of the women's movement in the 1960s and are now associated with feminist literary criticism. By the 1980s, feminist criticism becomes eclectic by considering other forms of criticism, begins to explore the female world's nature and outlook and finds interest in neglected female writers. Elaine Showalter uses the term "androtexs" to "gynotexs" to reflect a transition in literary texts from writing by men to writing by women.

Lesbian/gay criticism

Lesbian/gay criticism is the name of a theory of literary criticism that appears in the 1990s in lesbian and gay studies sections of bookstores, academic catalogs and undergraduate courses. Multi-disciplinary cultural issues predominate with the defining characteristic of sexual orientation as a "fundamental category of analysis and understanding." Its social and political purpose resists homophobia, heterosexism and the socially acceptable culture of heterosexual primacy. Two trends of thought appear as lesbian feminism and libertarian lesbianism. "Lesbian continuum" is a descriptive concept devised by Adrienne Rich to facilitate a wide range of female behavior as lesbian feminism. Paulina Palmer challenges Rich's notion for desexualizing lesbianism. Libertarian lesbianism is also called "queer theory" because it encourages alliances with gay men rather than other women.

Communist school of thought

Communist school of thought is the name of the cultural theory developed by German philosopher Karl Marx and sociologist Friedrich Engels. They present their Marxist ideas in the 1848 "Communist Manifesto." Marxism is a materialist philosophy that disregards any force beyond the natural world of observable fact. Marxist philosophy claims capitalist exploitation alienates workers from their own humanity to make them into a "labor force." The central model of Marxist thinking is economic determinism in which the material means of production, distribution and exchange shapes the cultural world of



art, religion and law. The first Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934 bans liberal views and imposes Leninism on all literature as an "instrument of the party." This "Vulgar Marxism" of the 1930s results in "sound-bite" literature for political argument.

Russian Formalists

Russian Formalists is the name applied to a group of critics who promote careful formal analysis of literature and encourage defamiliarization among other ideas and distinctions. Mikhail Bakhtin in Russia and Prague's Roman Jakobson are considered Russian Formalists of the period. Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and Bertolt Brecht are other well-known German Formalists that integrate their work with Freud and Marx. By the 1950s and 1960s, Formalist ideas become interesting to structuralists because of their systematic approach to literature.

New historicism

New historicism is the name of a literary theory that typically uses an historical document, called "anecdote" to introduce essays rather than prior academic work. The essential difference between new and old historicism is the parallel study of literary and historical texts with "equal weighting." Stephen Greenblatt is a proponent of "new historicism" in 1980 to mean giving equal significance to reading of literary and non-literary texts from the same period. History and literary writing both are subject to close analysis of their respective texts.

Cultural materialism

Cultural materialism is the name of the cultural theory described by Graham Holderness as the study of history within a political framework. The term is used for a method that combines the characteristics of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis. Raymond Williams is a British left-wing critic who promotes the outlook and name of cultural materialism

Postcolonial criticism

Post-colonial criticism is the name of the literary theory that emerges in the 1990s by undermining the timeless and universal significance of literature claimed by liberal humanists. Specifically, if great literature is timeless and universal, then cultural, social, regional and national differences of the time in which they occur is less significant. Post-colonial criticism rejects universalism. As an example, Byzantium is the name Eurocentric poet Yeats uses to identify Istanbul in his "Byzantium" poems as Constantinople the Eastern capital of the Roman Empire associated with "torpor, sensuality, and exotic mysticism." The first aspect of post-colonial criticism recognizes non-European as the "exotic or immoral Other."



Stylistics

Stylistics is the name of a literary theory for a system of approach to literature that relies on the science of linguistics for its methods and application. Linguistics studies language and structures to analyze how elements of a literary work give it meaning and effect. Liberal humanism and stylistics share the same empirical bias, non-eclectic style and non-fluid meaning. Specifically, stylistics emphasizes specific texts not general theories,

Narratology

Narratology is the name of a literary theory that studies narrative structures that combines characteristics and is derived from structuralism and linguistic theory. Narratology studies how narratives, or stories, make meaning. Basic mechanisms and procedures common to all story-telling in narratology include the actual series of events that happen called story and the edited, packaged and presented version of those events called plot or "discourse" which incorporates the style, pace and viewpoint to cause the desired effect.

Plot

Plot is the name of the edited, packaged and presented version of events in a story. Aristotle lists three elements in a plot including fault or character-defect, recognition and reversal of fortune incumbent on the hero or heroine. Vladimir Propp lists 31 actions in a story that can have seven spheres of action animation. Gerard Genette identifies six questions that detail the telling of a plot. Generally a work uses a blend of modes paced to move a plot along with effective timing.

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is the term applied to literary studies of the relationship between literature and physical environment that is also called "green studies." Cheryll Glotfelty co-founds the USA movement with Harold Fromm in the early-1990s. The movement is not widely developed with its own assumptions, doctrines and procedures. The work is also called nature writing. Major proponents include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau. The focus is on four areas named "outdoor environment." General property types of interest include wilderness, scenic sublime, countryside and domestic picturesque. For example, deserts are classified wilderness, and forests are typed scenic sublime.

Themes

Barry's Instructional Approach

The self-help instructional approach Peter Barry uses in "Beginning Theory" is pervasive throughout the literary and cultural theories presented. A casual reader can learn much about a school of literary criticism or cultural theory by simply reading through any chapter. Typically the first few pages of a chapter define and describe an historical period and comment on major concepts and writers within a literary theory. For example the second page of Chapter 4, Postmodernism states "The period of high modernism was the twenty years from 1910 to 1930 and some of the literary 'high priests' of the movement (writing in English) were T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound" and further on Barry writes "Some of the important characteristics of the literary modernism practiced by those writers include. . . ."

Second sections of a chapter generally present specific technical illustrations and more controversial issues associated with the chapter topic. For example, Chapter 4, Postmodernism notes "Landmarks" quoting "A major 'moment' in the history of postmodernism is the influential paper 'Modernity - an Incomplete Project'. . . ." A second section of Chapter 5, Psychoanalytic criticism states, "Freudian interpretation is popularly thought to be a matter of attributing sexual connotations to objects. . . ." and towards the end of that section "Freudian interpretation, then, has always been of considerable interest to literary critics. . . ."

Interspersed among second section topics is an evaluative learning tool. Barry offers an opportunity to participate in practical application activities with regular "STOP and THINK" sections to make "some personal sense of theory." For example, the Introduction recommends readers develop a personal perspective on literature and Barry notes his own experience at London University that begins with "Beowulf to Virginia Woolf," American literature but no exposure to literary theory until 1981. The author's approach is based on student learning rather than novelists' writing. In another example, the "STOP and THINK" section in Chapter 2, Structuralism, page 57, provides six multiple word choice examples for a student reader to learn how the different word choices affect the meaning of a novelist's sentence in context.

Final section of every chapter summarizes what a practitioner of one or another school of literary criticism does. That list is followed by an example of the approach applied to a specific literary text. For example, Chapter 6, Feminist criticism subtitled a section "What feminist critics do" and itemizes eleven elements of activity. The list is followed with literary analysis of "Wuthering Heights" implemented by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Each chapter closes with "Selected Reading" for additional study of research information about each literary and cultural theory. Barry's written style enables a casual reader to learn about literary and cultural theory by just reading chapters. Alternatively a student reader can expand and learn more by following his "reading intensely"



recommendation in performing "STOP and THINK" exercises, reviewing the practical examples and doing further research.

Propps' Props

The story is an actual series of events that happen whereas a plot is those same events after they are edited, packaged and presented as a narrative. Aristotle identifies three elements in a plot including fault or character-defect, recognition and reversal of fortune that are all incumbent on the hero or heroine. Gerard Genette focuses his work on the telling of a tale or presentation that Barry uses to develop a matrix of six questions whose answers detail the process of telling. Between Aristotle's three elements in a plot and Genette's six questions of presentation lie the ingredients of Vladimir Propp's 31 actions in a tale with seven spheres of action animation that he derives from 100 Russian folk tales. Combination of these 31 actions and 7 spheres are the ingredients of these tales. .

Propp's seven props in any plot are comprised of characters or roles that he identifies as "spheres of action" in the entire Russian body of folk tales. They include the villain, the donor (provider), the helper, the princess (a sought-for-person) and her father, the dispatcher, the hero (seeker or victim), and the false hero. Each of these roles can be selected to perform any of 31 actions appropriate to the tale. Some of those actions include a family member leaves home, the villain learns about his victim, the hero leaves home, the villain harms a family member, the false hero or villain is exposed, and the task is done. Each tale selects from a list of 31 numbered actions used as building blocks to tell a tale appropriate to the plot envisioned by the narrator. However actions selected must be in rational order or "due order" as Propp states according to number.

For example, Barry suggests a tale with action numbers 5, 7,14,18,30 and 31. This means 5-a villain receives information about the hero/victim, 7-to deceive him, 14-the hero receives help from a magical animal, 18-to defeat the villain, 30-has him punished, 31-marries and become king. Due order requires they follow in proper sequence because, for example the villain cannot be punished - 30, before he is defeated - 18. Vladimir Propp's "props" can be used in this manner to develop the ingredients for any story.

SQ3R Reading

Peter Barry claims reading literary texts intensely is preferable to reading a lot of material. Specifically, if a section of text or chapter does not make sense, the reader ought to spend more time reading the difficult section of theory for understanding. More reading without understanding is not helpful. According to him, slow reading allows one to be meditative, reflective and personal. He recommends intensive reading of difficult passages with the method he calls "SQ3R." This method incorporates five stages of reading that is abbreviated with the acronym SQRRR, which means Survey, Question, Read, Recall, and Review.



Initially the reader should SURVEY the section or chapter quickly to gain an overall sense of the scope and nature of its contents. Generally the more significant elements of an argument are included in opening and closing paragraphs. Consequently scanning or surveying the overall beginning and ending points in a text may offer useful information to work from. This initial survey should also stimulate QUESTION about the whole text that may give the reading a purpose. The reader's mind may be encouraged to wonder about one or another idea or topic that scanning the text initiates. As the reader becomes more active in questioning, the reading process becomes more purposeful and directed.

READ the entire section or chapter while highlighting, underlining or taking notes on key points, difficulties and memorable phrases. RECALL what is read after closing the book. Summarize significant points and revisit clarity of answers to the initial questions posed. If difficulties remain specify what and why. REVIEW after an appropriate interval but preferably the next day in reverse order. Recall from memory or notes any key points questions and phrases that appear important. Resurvey and reread excerpts or scan with notes if necessary to gain a further degree of understanding of the difficult text. This detailed reading technique combined with common sense or other similar methods should ensure some understanding of a theoretical text, no matter how difficult initially.



Style

Perspective

Peter Barry is the author of "Beginning Theory" and English Professor at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, Wales, UK where he teaches several theory courses. Barry receives no coursework in literary theory in his undergraduate work at London University in the 1960s. His first exposure to literary theory is in 1981. This book is first published in 1995 as an apparent way to cure a deficiency he recalls from his undergraduate studies. Barry's first exposure to literature begins with an introductory course named "Beowulf to Virginia Woolf." This book is written to close that gap for new students of literature.

As a result, the author's approach to this introductory book is based on student learning needs rather than novelists' writing styles. Specifically, it is assumed his undergraduate study of the "wolves" left him uninspired but aware there is more to a study of literature than reading "novelist's writing." This text is written to satisfy the needs other students may have to explore and find interest in literature. One way Barry accomplishes this goal is by including practical application activities with regular "STOP and THINK" sections for readers to make "some personal sense of theory."

Tone

Peter Barry's style of writing uses a subjective tone that offers the reader a friendly, understanding and straightforward presentation about various types of literary and cultural theory. He writes as if he is speaking with a small group of students about a subject he thoroughly understands, participates in and enjoys. For example, discussing Gerard Genette and narratology Barry writes, ". . . I ask six basic questions about the act of narration, and sketch under each the range of possibilities identified by Genette, with some supplementary categories of my own."

The affect of his use of this tone on the reader is to make them share the enthusiasm Barry apparently has for his subject. His writing is simplified with laymen's words and terminology to encourage the reader to understand what in some cases may be a difficult concept. The reader is reassured by his writing that concepts can be understood and interesting. For example, Barry's goal of writing this book is clear in his statement, "Above all, it aims to interest you in theory."

Structure

Peter Barry's 290-page "Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory" is first published in 1995 with a Second Edition in 2002. This non-fiction and quasi-historical text includes Contents, Introduction, thirteen chapters, Appendices, Further Reading references and an Index. Chapter titles are the names of literary and



cultural theories from mid-1980s English Studies at Cambridge and liberal humanism to twentieth-century ecocriticism. Chapters generally range from 15 to 25 pages. Each chapter lists subchapter section titles relevant to the chapter subject. The Contents page outlines the subjects discussed in each form of literary or cultural theory. Each chapter has subchapter sections that detail short history and proponents of the theory, significant issues of the approach, practical application, summary of activities practitioners of the theory practice, an example of literary analysis and selected reading. Back matter includes Appendices with three excerpts of literary text, Further Reading classified by type and an Index listed by keywords, names and places.

The format used in "Beginning Theory" is detailed and specific to provide ready reference to the subject matter. For example, a reader who wants to know how the analytic activities of a stylistic critic differ from those of a post-structuralist critic can find both identified by name and page number on the Contents page, i.e., "What stylistic critics do" is under the chapter named Stylistics and discussed on page 214. Barry's STOP and THINK sections combined with the literary critiques at the end of each chapter illustrate specific, practical examples how that literary theory works or can be applied. The format of this text provides an excellent learning tool for the beginning or advanced student of literary and cultural theory in an organized and well-defined manner. Barry's writing is clear, concise and informative enough to give a reader useful, relevant, yet not excessive or extraneous knowledge about the history and styles of literary criticism.

Quotes

"The term 'liberal humanism' became current in the 1970s, as a shorthand (and mainly hostile) way of referring to the kind of criticism which held sway before theory. The word 'liberal' in this formulation roughly means not politically radical, and hence generally evasive and non-committal on political issues. 'Humanism' implies something similar; it suggests a range of negative attributes, such as 'non-Marxist' and 'non-feminist', and 'non-theoretical.'" Introduction, pg. 3

"This refusal to accept the liberal humanist method as simply the 'natural' and taken-for-granted way of 'doing' literature is the crux of theory's general response to it." Chapter 1, pg. 31

"The most basic difference between liberal humanist and structuralist reading is that the structuralist's comments on structure, symbol, and design, become paramount, and are the main focus of the commentary, while the emphasis on any wider moral significance, and indeed on interpretation itself in the broad sense, is very much reduced." Chapter 2, pg. 52

"A way of describing this would be to say that deconstructive reading uncovers the unconscious rather than the conscious dimension of the text, all the things which its overt textuality glosses over or fails to recognize." Chapter 3, pg. 71

"For the postmodernist, by contrast, fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon. symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief. In a word, the modernist laments fragmentation while the postmodernist celebrates it." Chapter 4, pg. 84

"The underlying assumption is that when some wish, fear, memory, or desire is difficult to face we may try to cope with it by repressing it, that is, eliminating it from the conscious mind. But this doesn't make it go away: it remains alive in the unconscious, like radioactive matter buried beneath the ocean, and constantly seeks a way back into the conscious mind, always succeeding eventually." Chapter 5, pg. 100

"The feminist literary criticism of today is the direct product of the 'women's movement' of the 1960s. This movement was, in important ways, literary from the start, in the sense that it realised the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority and their coherence." Chapter 6, pg. 121

"'Classic' feminism, then, had marginalised or ignored lesbianism. This state of affairs was countered by arguing that, on the contrary, lesbianism should be regarded as the most complete form of feminism." Chapter 7, pg. 141

"The overall result is to provide little more than 'sound-bites' on literature for use in political argument." Chapter 8, pg. 161



"A simple definition of the new historicism is that it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period." Chapter 9, pg. 172

"To put this another way; the new historicist situates the literary text in the political situation of its own day, while the cultural materialist situates it within that of ours." Chapter 9, pg. 186

"One significant effect of postcolonial criticism is to further undermine the universalist claims once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist critics." Chapter 10. pg. 192

"Stylistics is a critical approach which uses the methods and findings of the science of linguistics in the analysis of literary texts." Chapter 11, pg. 203

"Indeed, we might say that the key to story-telling is not the imparting, but the withholding of information - readers often know things that characters don't, and vice-versa, and narrators keep things back from both. The central mechanism in stories is delay, to be specific, delay in imparting this information - the Victorian novelist Wilkie Collins famously said that the formula for writing a successful novel is 'Make them laugh, make them cry - make them wait.'" Chapter 12, pg. 225

"It is obvious here that social inequality is being 'naturalised', that is, literally, disguised as nature, and viewed as a situation which is 'god-given' and inescapable, when actually it is the product of a specific politics and power structure." Chapter 13, pg. 253



Topics for Discussion

Identify, list and describe the five stages of slow, meditative, reflective and personal reading that Barry recommends a reader use.

Explain and discuss significance of the ten principles of liberal humanism that the author summarizes.

Identify, list and describe the specific functions structuralist critics perform in their analysis of literary text.

Identify and describe the fundamental dilemma of post-structuralism. Explain and discuss the significance of this dilemma in the analysis of literature.

Identify, describe and discuss how forms of art like Cubism and Surrealism are significant in the analysis of a modern writer like James Joyce.

Describe and discuss how and why Sigmund Freud is relevant to literary theory. Suggest five examples that indicate that relevance.

Describe and discuss how the women's movement is relevant to feminine criticism. Who are three female writers that express these relevant ideas?

Identify and describe the significance of lesbian feminism. How does it differ from libertarian lesbianism?

Describe and discuss the differences between Marxist literary criticism and "Vulgar Marxism."

Compare and contrast the essential differences between new historicism and cultural materialism.

Describe and discuss the cultural significance of Yeats poem "Byzantium" in relation to post-colonial criticism.

Compare and contrast the differences between stylistics and close reading that Barry identifies. Discuss whether you think they are relevant and provide an example that supports your opinion.

Identify, list and describe at least ten of the 31 actions described by Vladimir Propp. Describe how they relate to any one of his seven spheres of action.

Identify, list and describe at least one example for each of the four "outdoor environments" that ecocriticism specifies.