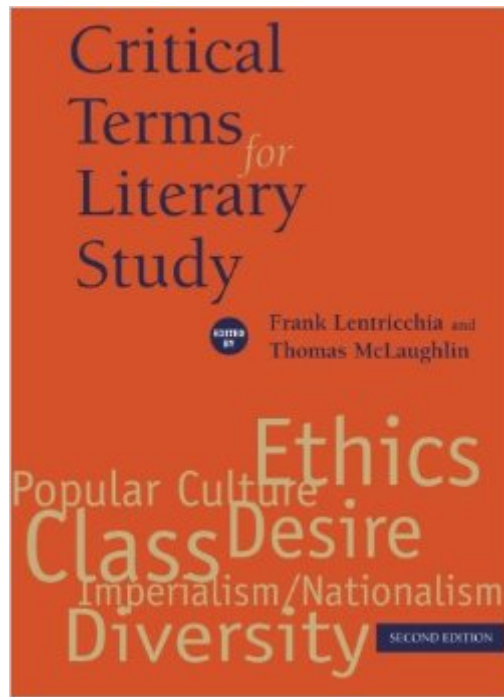


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# Critical Terms For Literary Study



## Synopsis

Since its publication in 1990, *Critical Terms for Literary Study* has become a landmark introduction to the work of literary theory, giving tens of thousands of students an unparalleled encounter with what it means to do theory and criticism. Significantly expanded, this new edition features six new chapters that confront, in different ways, the growing understanding of literary works as cultural practices. These six new chapters are "Popular Culture," "Diversity," "Imperialism/Nationalism," "Desire," "Ethics," and "Class," by John Fiske, Louis Menand, Seamus Deane, Judith Butler, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, and Daniel T. O'Hara, respectively. Each new essay adopts the approach that has won this book such widespread acclaim: each provides a concise history of a literary term, critically explores the issues and questions the term raises, and then puts theory into practice by showing the reading strategies the term permits. Exploring the concepts that shape the way we read, the essays combine to provide an extraordinary introduction to the work of literature and literary study, as the nation's most distinguished scholars put the tools of critical practice vividly to use.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The book provides a very useful guide to terms ranging from Lacanian desire to narrative. Each author discusses the history of the term and its current use and then goes on to use the term to inform their own critical reading of a specific text or texts, providing a very useful illustration of the term's implications.

I am impressed by this text, with one caveat. At my school it is used as a graduate level textbook and that is probably the appropriate level. I am an undergrad and I enjoy this book immensely. I'm constantly finding explanations (finally!) for most of the indecipherable ideas embedded in the critical articles I have to use for literature papers. It's giving me the language to interrogate texts and making my reading experiences much more meaningful. This book gives me food for thought for days. But if it's brain food, it's definitely health food, maybe even crunchy and vegan. There is some truth in the other reviewers' impression that the essays can come out on the pretentious side. This stuff is hard on the modern entertainment-loving brain, unless your brain is entertained by a challenge. I love this book, but I pace myself to about a chapter a month. Since there are 28 chapters, it's going to take me about 2 years to get through it! The book is an excellent compendium of complex ideas. The ideas are never cheated of their complexity and their originators are never given short shrift. It can be gotten through in a semester, but only by using selections. Don't be afraid of this book. It's even reasonably priced. But if you try to foist it on undergrads, you might be buying a rebellion. A better text for a fast and dirty overview could be Peter Barry's "Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory." ISBN: 0719062683. I was taught this book at another school and it's great if you're looking for conversational, succinct, 12-page chapters on all the major schools, in chronological order. But you won't get a deep understanding from Barry's book, and it will only frustrate those who actually want an understanding they can take away long after they put the book down.

While I agree that this is not a text that delves deep into the theories of Lacan or Derrida or Fish or any of the others, it is not intended to do so. I have found it to be an excellent tool for introducing my high school Advanced Placement students to the world of literary criticism. Certainly some of the articles can get wordy or bogged down in "technical" detail, but literary criticism has never been for the reader who wants to skim and get the assignment "over with." Any critical theory takes time and patience to work through; critical theory questions ideas and requires a commitment on the part of the reader to think, question, and engage with the text. There are some essays that younger students simply do not have the skills for yet but there are others that are quite accessible to them. In particular, my students found the essays on Representation, Structure, Race, and Canon very interesting. This source has one significant advantage over many other texts. For each article, there is an immediate application of the technique to a well-known piece of literature. I know that my students reading of Appiah's essay on race dramatically impacted how they interpreted Shakespeare's play Othello and then later Schuyler's novel Black No More. While neither my

students nor I always agree with what the critics are saying, I have found the book a great starting point for discussion.

My first encounter with this text was as an undergrad, and I, like a couple of other reviewers found it baffling, and I held it with disdain. Later, as a graduate student, I actually dropped a course because when I purchased my texts, this was one of them. Now, fifteen years later, with higher education degrees and ten years of teaching experience under my belt, I actually find the essays interesting because I can relate to several of the points. They are very deep theoretically, and often philosophical, and I certainly would not recommend this to anyone for a bit of light reading. However, I must finally admit that, for the proper audience, this text is quite useful and even enjoyable in the sense that it presents and discusses complex aspects and quandaries of not only literature, but life. Fifteen years ago, even the essays I could almost comprehend left me asking "who cares?" but now I look at them and say "how interesting!"

On time and as stated.

Wonderful book.

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