

20

20th Century  
Literary  
Criticism

A READER • EDITED BY DAVID LODGE

# 20th Century Literary Criticism

**A READER**

Edited by David Lodge



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# Foreword

## The uses of this book

The compilation of this Reader has grown out of the editor's experience of teaching a course in the history, theory, and practice of literary criticism at Birmingham University, and it has been designed, in the first instance, for use as a textbook in such courses in colleges and universities. The arrangement of contents and the apparatus of introductory and explanatory notes will also enable the individual student who is not pursuing a formal course in the subject to acquaint himself with the basic map of modern literary criticism and to pursue more detailed investigation into authors and topics of particular interest to him. Finally, by referring to the index, the student may use the Reader as an anthology of critical comment by the most distinguished critics of this century upon a good deal of the world's great literature, past and present. Although it is intended primarily for students of English and American literature, the Reader should also be of interest and value to students of other literatures, since the problems discussed and the methods displayed in most of the pieces collected here are relevant to literature in general.

There are, of course, teachers of literature who believe that students should be discouraged from reading criticism, on the grounds that such reading blunts their capacity for independent response and judgment. While respecting the educational motives behind this argument, I do not think it will survive scrutiny. A moment's reflection will reveal that there is no such thing as a completely independent, unconditioned response to a literary text. Works of literature have their meaning, and their very existence, in a continual stream of human conversation *about* them, which at its most formalized and articulate we call literary criticism. The main point of studying literature in an academic context is to get into this conversation at its highest levels, to listen and to participate; and it is a conversation, one should remember, not only about individual works and individual authors, but also about larger blocks of literary materials, and about theoretical problems of intellectual method, aesthetics, communication, and epistemology. To offer students instruction and guidance in this regard seems self-evidently useful and desirable. In this way they will learn discrimination in the use of secondary materials and extend their own critical potentialities. They will learn, too, that no single method or approach can answer all the questions that may legitimately be asked about a work of literature, nor exhaust the sources of possible interest within it.



It is something of a commonplace that the modern era is particularly rich in literary criticism—that, indeed, many men who in other periods might have distinguished themselves as creative writers, or as moralists, philosophers, and men of affairs, have in our century communicated their ideas or expressed themselves in one form or another of literary criticism. We are often told that most of the scientists in the history of the world are living at this moment; very nearly the same ratio probably obtains in the field of criticism. This seems to be partly the consequence of the spectacular expansion of university education in this century, which has made academe the natural habitat of the literary intellectual; and partly a more mysterious manifestation of the *Zeitgeist*, implying some widespread distrust or disablement of the fictive imagination, and a corresponding tendency to fall back upon the creative monuments of the past, suitably reinterpreted to fit our needs and preoccupations. Such an emphasis on criticism can certainly be invoked easily enough as evidence of cultural decadence, but whether it is welcomed or deplored, it is a fact that must be faced by students and teachers of literature. In our era, criticism is not merely a library of secondary aids to the understanding and appreciation of literary texts, but also a rapidly increasing body of knowledge in its own right, and a primary vehicle for the values and ideas of the literary imagination. The sheer quantity and diversity of modern criticism, however, makes it a daunting area for exploration. Where does one begin? What are the main landmarks, the useful trails, the crucial difficulties and dangers? It is hoped that this Reader will serve as a useful map or guide to this difficult, problematical territory.

### Scope and criteria of selection

The chronological span of the Reader is the twentieth century. The aim has been to represent the varieties, achievements, and developments of literary criticism in this period as fully as possible in the space available. Since the Reader is designed in the first place for students of literature in English, the selection is heavily biased towards English and American criticism, but European writers whose work has entered into the mainstream of Anglo-American critical debate, or significantly impinged on it, have also been included. Some of these writers—e.g. Freud and Jung—are not, strictly speaking, literary critics, but thinkers whose ideas have profoundly affected literary critics. Inevitably the selection reflects the editor's own conscious and unconscious preferences, but I have tried as far as possible to include all the critics of universally recognized originality and distinction who come within the above terms of reference. I very much regret that Dr F. R. Leavis was unwilling to allow any of his criticism to be included: fortunately, it is widely available, and the appraisal by George Steiner reprinted below (see pp. 622-35) provides a basis for studying and discussing it.

In no other case was the editor prevented from including an author of his choice. Individual distinction of the critic was not, however, the only criterion.

The aim of the Reader is also to display as fully as possible the varieties of method and approach exhibited by modern literary criticism. This desideratum has conditioned the selection of authors and in many cases the choice of a particular item from a writer's *oeuvre*. I have also tried to keep a reasonable balance between the following categories: English and American criticism; academic criticism and the criticism of practising writers; descriptive and theoretical criticism; criticism that has already acquired a kind of classical status, and criticism that is still the subject of lively interest and controversy. Finally, I have, where possible, selected items that naturally invite comparison and cross reference in pairs, or in larger groups, because they are concerned with the same texts, or similar issues, or directly refer to each other.

### Arrangement of contents, apparatus, and editorial conventions

The essays and extracts are arranged in chronological order of first publication. Where two or more items by any one critic are included, they are grouped together and placed according to the first publication of the earliest item. The text of any item is not, however, necessarily that of the first published version. For example, in the case of periodical essays subsequently collected in book form, the text has usually been taken from the book. In every case, the source of the text is given in the introductory notes.

There is one exception to the chronological arrangement of contents: M. H. Abrams's 'Orientation of critical theories', first published as the opening chapter of *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), is placed at the beginning of the Reader to serve as a general introduction. It surveys the historical development of literary criticism up to the modern period and provides a useful conceptual scheme for distinguishing between different kinds of critical principles and practice.

Read through in the order presented (A), the contents of the Reader should convey a sense of the historical development of modern literary criticism (allowing for the fact that individual critics may be represented by their early, middle, or late work). There are, however, other and equally useful ways of studying the same materials, and to this end two alternative lists of contents have been provided which group the essays and extracts (B) according to the subject matter discussed and (C) according to the approach or orientation of the critic. Furthermore, at the end of each introductory note, under the heading 'Cross reference', the student's attention is directed to other closely related items in the Reader for comparison and contrast. Finally, by using the index, the student may compare all the comments which occur in the Reader on any particular text or writer.

The introductory note on each critic gives essential biographical and bibliographical information, and attempts to place the selected specimen of his work in its immediate and wider contexts. In addition to the cross references mentioned above, the editor has, where appropriate, listed, under the heading 'Commentary', one or two books or articles in which the critic concerned is

discussed. In these ways the student is helped to extend and deepen his knowledge of the critics represented in the Reader by further independent study.

Authors' notes and references are keyed by numerals and are in all cases gathered at the end of the relevant essay or extract. Footnotes keyed by letters of the alphabet are the editor's. In writing these explanatory notes I have borne in mind that references and allusions which are familiar to professional scholars and critics may be puzzling to students, and I have tried to clarify any ambiguities or obscurities caused by extracting a piece of criticism from its original context. In those cases where only a few words seemed required (for example, when translating a foreign phrase) I have interpolated them in the text in square brackets. All matter within square brackets is editorial, including titles, when the latter have been supplied or amended for the purposes of this Reader.

The dates given for books mentioned in the editorial matter are dates of first publication, and the place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated.

In compiling this book I have gratefully received advice and information from sources too numerous to name; but I should like to acknowledge a special indebtedness to two friends with whom it has been my pleasure and privilege to collaborate in teaching courses in criticism: Malcolm Bradbury and Michael Green.

D.L.

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