



A Biocultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation

Nancy Easterlin

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Combining cognitive and evolutionary research with traditional humanist methods, Nancy Easterlin demonstrates how a biocultural perspective in theory and criticism opens up new possibilities for literary interpretation.

Easterlin maintains that the practice of literary interpretation is still of central intellectual and social value. Taking an open yet judicious approach, she argues, however, that literary interpretation stands to gain dramatically from a fair-minded and creative application of cognitive and evolutionary research. This work does just that, expounding a biocultural method that charts a middle course between overly reductive approaches to literature and traditionalists who see the sciences as a threat to the humanities.

Easterlin develops her biocultural method by comparing it to four major subfields within literary studies: new historicism, ecocriticism, cognitive approaches, and evolutionary approaches. After a thorough review of each subfield, she reconsiders them in light of relevant research in cognitive and evolutionary psychology and provides a textual analysis of literary works from the romantic era to the present, including William Wordsworth's "Simon Lee" and the Lucy poems, Mary Robinson's "Old Barnard," Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Raymond Carver's "I Could See the Smallest Things."

A Biocultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation offers a fresh and reasoned approach to literary studies that at once preserves the central importance that interpretation plays in the humanities and embraces the exciting developments of the cognitive sciences.

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