



# Literary Theory From Plato To Barthes: An Introductory History

*By Richard Harland*

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**Literary Theory From Plato To Barthes: An Introductory History** By Richard Harland

Richard Harland provides a lucid account of all the major movements in literary theory up to the late 1960s. In a lucid and accessible style, he unfolds a comprehensive "story" of literary theory in all its manifestations. Because contemporary literary theory depends heavily upon European thinkers, the book has an international focus, and its coverage extends from philosophers to social theorists to linguists. Harland explains the essential principles of each theoretical position, looking behind particular critical judgments and interpretations in order to convey a core grasp of underlying positions.

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#### Review

'Absorbing and illuminating...Literary Theory is ideal for students and lecturers who want to learn, or be reminded, that criticism was not invented sometime in the 1960s. Harland has included a time chart covering the major periods of criticism and a glossary. He ends his account with structuralism but promises a second volume that will cover 'the last 30 years'. I look forward to it.' - Times Higher Education Supplement

'Richard Harland's absorbing and illuminating Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes...draws frequent parallels between the past and the present...Literary Theory is ideal for students and lecturers who want to learn, or be reminded, that criticism was not invented, like sexual intercourse, sometime in the 1960s.' - Gary Day, Times Higher Education Supplement

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#### From the Back Cover

Where does the current explosion in literary theory come from? What earlier theoretical movements does it grow out of, bounce off, react against?

This introductory history homes in on the essential principles governing the major movements in literary theory, unfolding a comprehensive 'story' in all its jumps and swings and switches.

Because contemporary literary theory depends heavily upon European thinkers, the focus here is international; and because contemporary theory draws from many sources outside traditional 'literary criticism', the coverage also extends to philosophers, social theorists and linguists.

Harland looks behind particular critical judgements and interpretations in order to convey a core grasp of underlying positions. He explains the internal rationale of each position, along with its derivation and repercussions. At the same time, he shows how literary theory has taken on very different roles in different periods. He relates these different roles to particular socio-political settings, institutional contexts and creative practices.

Lucid and accessible, *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes* is an invaluable aid for students seeking to make sense of contemporary literary theory.

**Richard Harland** is a Senior Fellow on the English Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia.

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