Abstract of Graff


Gerald Graff argues the importance of teaching literary theory in partnership with literature, and aims to reform these teaching injustices. Graff suggests that the teaching of literary theory has been lost as a result of trying to compartmentalize literature into teaching genres using the “field-coverage model,” rather than being taught as co-dependents. As a result, students fail to receive the educational benefits from entering into an intellectual debate about a piece of literature. Graff desires for literature and literary theory to be intermingled because theory will give students a foundation for which to discuss literature, and help students think about a piece in a specific context. Therefore, higher-order learning will be taking place because students will be synthesizing the theory and text in order to critically evaluate the text as a whole. Graff proposes literature becoming an interdisciplinary study, and ridding academia of the “English department” altogether in order to get a well-rounded educational approach.
Keyword Search of Iser


Summary of Eagleton


In the English discipline the topic of canonical texts is highly debated among literary scholars. The questions of what works of literature are of high enough quality, meaning, and aesthetics is constantly contested alongside the concept of whether or not a specific literary text is relevant to our current date. Inevitably, one is forced to determine a definition of “literature” when having this discussion. Terry Eagleton asserts in his article What is Literature? that because scholars study literary theory, there are texts called “literature” that are worth studying. Eagleton argues that there is no factual definition of “literature,” in the sense that “literature” is based on society’s ideology. Eagleton defines ideology as “…the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in,” (Eagleton 13).

Eagleton first examines literature as imaginative writing. He claims that those who classify literature as imaginative and fictional are semi-reasonable until once considers that the term “fact” varies across cultures, time periods, and social
classes, prompting readers to question if the Bible is considered fact or fiction. Additionally, he reminds readers that obviously imaginative writing is not typically accepted as true literature. For example, comic books are literary in the sense that adolescent read them, and this will help to maintain basic literary skills, but they are not considered "literature."

Eagleton then suggests that literature is a type of extraordinary language by claiming literature transforms the use of language. Formalists are the group of scholars who applied the study of linguistics to literature: content was the pure motivation of the author’s form. However, Eagleton found flaws in this logic as well. Language cannot be considered “normal” and “abnormal” because it is highly dependent on context and content. Highly specialized content specific jargon is not considered "literary," but not considered "ordinary" either. Also, there are examples of words used in regional dialects that are not considered literary, but are technically metaphorical.

As a third view Eagleton looks at literature as serving no useful purpose: non-pragmatic. He offers that yes, there are in fact forms of literature that are meant to be non-pragmatic. Poems, fictional novels, and plays are not meant to be taken seriously; rather, more artistically. However, this theory then leaves the definition of literature to how the reader decides to read the piece, which also fluctuates, meaning any piece of literature could be read non-pragmatically.

Finally, Eagleton poses a simplistic theory of literature. What is defined as “literature” is merely good writing. Literature serves as a model for others to use as an example of what fine writing should look like. Unfortunately, this is fluid as well,
as people have differing views of what constitutes "good" writing. Also, literature would fail to be “objective;” a work could suddenly stop being literature because someone deems it “bad.” Eagleton startles readers by suggesting Shakespeare could just stop being considered literature. Readers are then brought full circle to the idea that the literary cannon is a construct, value is a transitive term, and therefore literature is highly subjective to societal ideologies of the time.

**Evaluation of Eagleton**

In Terry Eagleton’s *Introduction: What is Literature?* he takes a controversial stand on the highly debated question of how society defines literature. Eagleton argues that there cannot be a concrete definition of literature because society defines literature based on value judgments, which are influenced by ideology – the power structures of society (Eagleton 14). As a result of the never-ceasing hierarchical battle that encapsulates our society, Eagleton’s argument holds validity because societal ideologies will change, those in power will change, and the value judgments being made will change; therefore, the definition of “literature” is fluid.

A prime example of changing societal ideologies rears its head when examining the Civil Rights movement. The Civil Rights movement and its soldiers fought the social justice of equality amongst people of color. As Martin Luther King Jr. said in his speech at the March on Washington, that people “will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” After many societal changes via court rulings, such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, where the Supreme Court decided that separate was inherently unequal, protests, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and speeches from “freedom fighters,” such as
Malcolm X and Dr. King, the United States has come a long way from its de jure segregation lifestyles. However, alongside the changing ideas equality, people began looking at Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and calling into question the language used in the novels. Specifically, the derogatory “N-word” is used in Twain’s novels quite religiously, and because society is now more aware of racial injustices, academia was sent into frenzy. Twain's novels have been banned in many school districts nation wide due to, “its consistent use of ‘the N-word’ and for the racism that, its opponents charge, It either implicitly or explicitly endorses,” (Howard). Many argue that it is not simply the use of this degrading word, but the emotional responses and events it reminds readers of.

Contrarily, as Douglas Howard, professor of English and Suffolk County Community College, reminds his readers, “Hemingway...once called it ‘the best book we’ve had.’” Some aggressive critics say that the books are “trash” and should be banned from all school classrooms and libraries. Clearly, the simple fact that Twain's novels are being questioned on the basis of if they should be banned shows Eagleton's argument in action because it was not until societal ideologies changed that the value judgments being made upon Twain’s novels began to be questioned. In fact, in 2011 a *People* Magazine article was released stating, “For a new edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain scholar Alan Gribben has removed all 219 instances of the N-word, replacing it with ‘slave,’” (Hallett). Over a period of sixty years, clearly the question of *Twain's Huckle Finn* literature has changed greatly.
Readers may argue that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Twain's other questionable works are not worth reading because they are not considered “canonical.” The cannon centers upon the idea that there should be a list of the absolute greatest literary works of time, and all academics in the world of literature should read them. However, one teacher battled on behalf on the book *Grendel* by John Gardner. Carmelita Seufert, a ninth-grade honors teachers taught the text alongside her fellow teacher to show students an alternative view to the epic poem *Beowulf*, allowing for students to determine is Grendel, the villain in *Beowulf*, is truly evil (Seufert 14). However, the parents challenging the book argued there was enough evil in the world, and rather than dwelling on it schools should be teaching students uplifting pieces of literature. After a long process of defending the work, including letters written by students who've read the book and want it to stay as part of their school's curriculum, *Grendel* was allowed to stay as part of the school district’s curriculum (Seufert, 15). This situation presents a text that could be considered as highly canonical, as it directly relates to the all-time classic poem of *Beowulf*. Eagleton’s thesis holds true in this context because one parent’s definition of literature differed from a school district’s. The measure of good and evil in the world is a person's opinion; there is no concrete form of measure, but it does influence societal ideologies. In both contexts, the definition of literature is judged, coming to differing final conclusions. However, both situations uphold Eagleton’s argument: the definition of literature is fluid.
Works Cited


Welcome to the Purdue OWL. This page is brought to you by the OWL at Purdue University. A very basic way of thinking about literary theory is that these ideas act as different lenses critics use to view and talk about art, literature, and even culture. These different lenses allow critics to consider works of art based on certain assumptions within that school of theory. The different lenses also allow critics to focus on particular aspects of a work they consider important. Literary Theory genre: new releases and popular books, including Literary Theory: An Introduction by Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: A Very Short Introd... As a consequence, literary theory in a strict sense is the systematic study of the nature of literature and of the methods for analyzing literature.[1] However, literary scholarship since the 19th century often includes in addition to, or even instead of literary theory in the strict sense, considerations of intellectual history, moral philosophy, social prophecy, and other interdisciplinary themes which. 11 Literary Theory. Uploaded by Dr-Mubashar Altaf. 100%(2)100% found this document useful (2 votes). 3K views. Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: An Introductory Anthology David Lodge, 20th century literary criticism: a reader (1972). http://www.sunypress.edu/p-861-twentieth-century-literary-theo.aspx http://books.google.com/books/about/20th_century_literary_criticism.html?id=WSMaAQAAIAAJ. Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (1983). New Criticism was a movement in literary theory that dominated American and had an impact on English literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century. Literary theory is the systematic study of the nature of literature and of the methods for literary analysis. Since the 19th century, literary scholarship includes literary theory and considerations of intellectual history, moral philosophy, social prophecy, and interdisciplinary themes relevant to how people interpret meaning. In the humanities in modern academia, the latter style of literary scholarship is a development of critical theory. Consequently, the word theory became an umbrella term for