

# The Literary in Theory (Cultural Memory in the Present)

By Jonathan Culler

Has *theory* neglected literature? Often literary and cultural theory, which goes by the nickname "Theory," has seemed to be the theory of everything except literature: theory of language, of sexuality, of history, of the body, of the psyche, of meaning (or meaninglessness), of politics, but not theory of literature. In this timely and wide-ranging book, Jonathan Culler, whose lucid analyses of structuralism, semiotics, and deconstruction have been prized by generations of readers, explores the place of the literary in theory. If theory has sometimes neglected literature, the literary has, Culler argues, retained a crucial if misunderstood role. Culler's account of the fortunes of the literary in theory, of the resistance to theory, and of key theoretical concepts—text, sign, interpretation, performative, and omniscience—provides valuable insight into today's theoretical debates; and his analysis of various disciplinary practices explores the possibilities of theory for the present and the future.

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Review

"*The Literary in Theory* takes up questions that have been basic to the enterprise known as 'theory' with a fine mix of historical awareness, lively critical sense, and thoughtful advocacy. Culler's vision of literary studies is inclusive and cumulative: it reminds us that 'learning' is both a noun and a verb, both a result and a process. Is theory dead? This book shows that it has a pulse and a sense of humor." (Haun Saussy)

"[Jonathan Culler's] ultimate aim, as his title suggests, is to make his readers aware of the literary (i.e., the special self-reflexive, questioning, skeptical attitude and practice which seeks to understand the conditions of its own possibility) within theory or Theory, which is an interdisciplinary undertaking informed by this attitude or practice. I would recommend this book to teachers and to students of literature for its clarity, excellent analyses and exemplifications, as well as for its critical attitude, in the sense of critique, of central issues confronting the humanities today." (Walter De Gruyter)

"In this wide-ranging study, Jonathan Culler gives us an engaging overview of the interdependency of 'literature' and 'theory' that configures the contemporary academic scene . . . I love this book, and highly recommend it to anyone interested in the literary and theoretical landscape of contemporary academia." (John Dolis *Comparative Literature Studies*)

"This difficult yet interesting book asserts that theory is not dead, that theory *is* literature and literature theory . . . The book is throughout provocative in these and other defences of theory, and of literature." (*Modern Language Review*)

From the Inside Flap

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From the Back Cover

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