

BOOK REVIEW

Literary Theory: A Complete Introduction

Sara Upstone, London: John Murray Learning, 2017, pp. 304

“Ideas that give our reading purpose and frameworks that offer us variety in how and why we read will be useful for as long as we are looking to engage the literary text in new ways and explore it in more depth.”

(Upstone, 2017, 277)

Literary studies require dedication and willingness to delve into the history of literary theory and its various subsequent periods to understand their interconnectedness. A significant number of publications offer readers ways to get acquainted with the rich and lengthy history of literary theory. However, such sources are oftentimes incomprehensible to, for example, a regular first-year university student of literature. They are simply too difficult to read through, differing greatly from the clear textbook-like sources of knowledge that many students are used to. This difficulty however, does not apply to *Literary Theory: A Complete Introduction* (2017) by Sara Upstone.

The content of this book is undoubtedly faithful to its title. In nineteen chapters and their corresponding subchapters, this book does indeed manage to provide a complete introduction to the core concepts of major literary theories, ranging from Aestheticism to Ecocriticism. The outline of the book is well-structured and coherent. The chapters containing individual literary theories and their respective historical periods are organized in a logical sequence with clear and structured references to previous parts of the book. Each chapter is relatively short, usually around fifteen pages, and therefore provides only a concise summary of the necessary points. The whole book is visually compelling because each chapter is divided into several sections, including *key ideas*, *spotlights*, *quotations*, *case studies*, *fact checks* and *dig deeper*, that help students to absorb information about the discussed school of theory. All these specific features are properly explained at the beginning of the book in a section called “How to use this book” which ensures efficient further reading. The divisions of individual chapters into smaller units encourages higher interest and longer attentiveness of students since it makes reading less monotonous. The monotony of reading is also reduced with the help of interesting or humorous facts offered in *spotlights*. On the other hand, the *case studies* help readers see how theory can be used in practice and thus help them acquire a more in-depth insight into the explained concepts. In addition, the inclusion of a *fact check* section, which essentially works as a quick test consisting of ten multiple-choice questions, provides further support to comprehensive reading.

The title claiming the book to only be an introduction to literary theory is indeed accurate. Since the book attempts to cover major schools of literary theory in only 304 pages, it understandably does not have enough space to focus on details. However, the book provides readers whose interest was sparked by one of its chapters with appropriate ways to expand their knowledge. The *dig deeper* section of each chapter contains a short bibliography of academic sources that offer more in-depth discussions of the given theoretical framework of literary studies.

In conclusion, *Literary Theory: A Complete Introduction* (2017) by Sara Upstone represents a valuable resource for students of literature who need to acquire the necessary

knowledge of literary theory basics. It can be read as a whole in order to gain a general overview of the matter, or readers can focus only on individual chapters relevant to them. The book is especially noteworthy for younger students since it reads well, is full of valuable information and is much more engaging than many other theoretical sources. It represents an efficient learning tool, but students need to bear in mind that this book must be accompanied by other detailed-oriented sources on specific theories that will help them move beyond the introductory stage of literary theory studies.

Mária Lujza Csorba

*Mgr. Mária Lujza Csorba
Department of British and American Studies
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice
Moyzesova 9, 04001 Košice
e-mail: maria.lujza.csorba@student.upjs.sk*

In SKASE Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies [online]. 2023, vol. 5, no. 2 [cit. 2023-12-29]. Available on web page <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/SJLCS11/06.pdf>. ISSN 2644-5506