



A Biocultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation

By 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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Editorial Review

Review

A thoughtful, authoritative, original work, striking out in a new direction that takes up several leading modes of inquiry along evolutionary and cognitive theoretical lines but arrives at a productive synthetic position of its own.

(Alan Richardson, Boston College, author of *The Neural Sublime*)

Easterlin gives full-scale and valuable accounts of exemplary works.

(William Flesch *Times Literary Supplement*)

Easterlin offers scholars much food for thought.

(*Choice*)

Easterlin has produced a masterful work that will guide a great deal of future work in and around these literary fields.

(Ashton Nichols *Wordsworth Circle*)

This engaged and thoughtful book contributes vitally to current thinking about the place of science, particularly cognitive studies and evolutionary psychology, in the study of literature. Easterlin's principles and critical practice achieve luminous clarity in her reading of Wordsworth.

(John Sitter *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*)

There is much to admire in Easterlin's extraordinary synthesis of biocultural literary approaches; anyone working in the field as student or researcher will get a great deal of intellectual stimulation from her text.

(Gavin Miller *Modern Language Review*)

About the Author

Nancy Easterlin is a University Research Professor and director of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of New Orleans and author of *Wordsworth and the Question of "Romantic Religion."*

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