IDENTITY OF THE LITERARY TEXT

Literary criticism today is dominated by the debate about whether texts have a fixed identity with established meaning or a variable identity with changing meaning. The very nature of what the critic does and what he can provide for his readers is being questioned; the challenge to the traditional view comes especially from the various theoretical formulations which, agreeing on the need to go beyond formal analysis, have been called post-structuralism. At the core is the fundamental question of what a literary text is. Identity of the Literary Text addresses this question.

In five sections – textuality and intertextuality, textual deconstruction, hermeneutics, analytical construction, and ideological perspective – fifteen scholars, many with world-wide reputations, consider such key aspects of literary criticism as the structure of texts, the relationship between text, author, and reader, the psychological and sociological implications of literary texts, and whether or not a general theory of literary criticism is possible.

This book brings together, in the spirit of dialogue, the arguments on both sides of the most important issue in literary criticism today. It will be of interest to all concerned with textual theory, regardless of which literatures are considered.

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For Wolfgang Iser, friend and colleague, whose idea of critical dialogue on texts was the genesis of this book.

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