

Hoeppner, A. Kenneth. *The Political Implications of Literature: Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives and Their Applications to Some Novels by Atwood, Kroetsch, and Wiebe*. Thesis (PhD [English]), University of Calgary. Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1984. (Publication No. 0555255)

Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which some contemporary critical theories suggest literature influences society. The first part considers the political implications of three theories which are representative of contemporary ways of reading literature: Frye's mythopoeic structuralism, Derridean deconstruction, and mimeticist-historical criticism. The second part examines the political implications of applying these three models to three novels by Canadian writers: *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood, *The Scorched-Wood People* by Rudy Wiebe, and *What the Crow Said* by Robert Kroetsch.

Both mythopoeic structuralists like Frye and deconstructionists like Derrida believe that the literary text creates a response in the reader which is an analogue of the text's form. The Frygian reader experiences the unity and resonance of the literary work and this experience leads to vision or anagogy. This vision of the "limit of desire" then forms the basis for a program of social action. The deconstructionists hold that reading creates an awareness of the text's lack of unity, its gaps and self-contradictions, and that these ruptures and absences are paradigmatic of the social structure in which the text is produced. Mimeticists maintain that some form of thematic criticism is required if these analogues are to be made explicit.

The second part considers the political implications of the novels by reading each in the context of critical theory most appropriate to it: *Surfacing* from a Frygian approach, *The Scorched-Wood People* from a mimeticist-historical perspective, and *What the Crow Said* from deconstructionist assumptions. These readings lead to the conclusion that each critical approach opens possibilities for political and social change.

Each way of reading inputs issues into question which other critical models do not consider necessary to question and also acts as a check on the others. Thus mythopoeic structuralism's concept of anagogy questions deconstructionist or mimeticist rationalism, deconstruction questions the verifiability of the anagogic response and the possibility of meaning, and mimeticist-historical criticism questions the concept of literature's autonomy and asks how any social structure can exist if deconstruction proceeds without limits.