



Truth and Consequences: Intentions, Conventions, and the New Thematics (Literature and Philosophy)

Reed Way Dasenbrock

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Contemporary literary theory takes truth and meaning to be dependent on shared conventions in a community of discourse and views authors' intentions as irrelevant to interpretation. This view, argues Reed Way Dasenbrock, owes much to Anglo-American analytic philosophy as developed in the 1950s and 1960s by such thinkers as Austin and Kuhn, but it ignores more recent work by philosophers like Davidson and Putnam, who have mounted a counterattack on this earlier conventionalism.

This book draws on current analytic philosophy to resuscitate the notion of objective truth and intentionalist models of meaning and interpretation, thereby moving beyond the antifoundationalism of postmodern theory. It addresses the work of Rorty and Fish as representative of literary conventionalism, discusses the futility of Derrida's anti-intentionalism, and shows how poststructuralist thinkers like Althusser and Foucault have contributed to the "new thematics" of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation that dominates literary theory today. Examining the counter-arguments of conventionalists to have their theory judged by its consequences, Dasenbrock shows how damaging this antiobjectivism and anti-intentionalism have been for literary studies.

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