

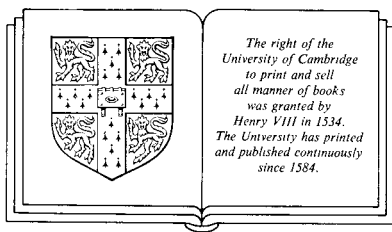
Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-31631-6 - The Structure of Literary Understanding
Stein Haugom Olsen
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STEIN HAUGOM OLSEN



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

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[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521217316

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First published 1978
First paperback edition 1985
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2008

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Olsen, Stein Haugom, 1946–
The structure of literary understanding.
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Literature – Philosophy. 2. Literature – Aesthetics.
3. Criticism. I. Title.
PN45.047 801'.93 77–777719

ISBN 978-0-521-21731-6 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-31631-6 paperback

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For
LEIF KRISTIANSEN
teacher and friend

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Preface

Literature is an accepted cultural value. As a consequence of this, people are not only interested in literature itself and what it can offer. Philosophers, rhetoricians, and literary critics of all times have also been interested in *how* the reader thinks *about* literature and *why* he values it highly. Explanations of this *how* and *why* have appeared as theories constituting a separate branch of aesthetics: poetics or literary theory. When a reader takes up a literary work he will make an attempt to understand and appreciate it. It has always been acknowledged by those who have cared for literature that at least a part of the reader's judgements on a work, provided he reads it as a literary work, will be concerned with its aesthetic qualities. Literary theorists have tried to set out the 'principles' or 'elements' of these aesthetically relevant judgements. They have tried to construct an 'anatomy' of criticism or literary understanding.

The present book is another attempt to explain the nature of the reader's response to the literary work. Its argument falls in two parts. Chs. 1 to 3 deal critically with three established theories. The views that literature is distinguished by a special type of language, that it expresses and arouses (or gives insight into) emotion, and that it provides a special type of truth are all found unacceptable for various reasons. The second part of the argument is constructive: an attempt is made to set out the 'anatomy' of literary judgements. Literary understanding can be seen as having two stages: judgements about the author's aesthetic intentions (interpretation) and appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the work (evaluation). The former type of judgement is a prerequisite of the latter and the latter complements the former. In ch. 4 interpretative judgements are discussed: the premises involved, the vocabulary used, and the assumptions necessary to draw conclusions. In ch. 5 the possibility of validating and challenging interpretations is debated and five predicates for use in evaluation of interpretative judgements are developed. Evaluative judgements are

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looked at in ch. 6 and a range of predicates defining the area of critically relevant judgements is discussed. These predicates enable the reader to place the work on a value-scale relative to other works. However, the problem of evaluation in literature is not entirely resolved. There is the further question why literature should take its place among our highly valued cultural goods; why literature, as such, is worth bothering about. The answer to this question really takes us beyond the analysis of literary understanding and into a debate about the value of literature considered in relation to such other values as our civilization has to offer. The book closes with some tentative remarks on the possible reasons for accepting literature as one of the highly valued cultural goods.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr Stuart Hampshire of Wadham College, Oxford, and Mr Christopher Butler of Christ Church College, Oxford, for reading and commenting on every chapter both in draft and final form; Mr Michael Walton of the University of Oslo for helping me with linguistic difficulties; the Anderson Foundation for supporting me for three years as an Anderson Scholar at Balliol College, Oxford; and the British Council for a scholarship in my third year at Balliol.