

Q. How does Culler explain the role of a reader in literary theory?

Ans ----- Jonathan Culler is Class of 1916 Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cornell University. His published works are in the fields of structuralism, literary theory and criticism. Culler believes that the linguistic-structuralist model can help "formulate the rules of particular systems of convention rather than simply affirm their existence." He posits language and human culture as similar.

In Structuralist Poetics Culler warns against applying the technique of linguistics directly to literature. Rather, the "'grammar' of literature.

Culler proposes that we use literary theory not to try to understand a text but rather to investigate the activity of interpretation. In several of his works, he speaks of a reader who is particularly "competent." In order to understand how we make sense of a text, Culler identifies common elements that different readers treat differently in different texts. He suggests there are two classes of readers, "the readers as field of experience for the critic (himself a reader)" and the future readers who will benefit from the work the critic and previous readers have done. Culler opines that when the reader is able to identify with a character or circumstances, she/he will want to see the story to its conclusion.

To conclude, Jonathan Culler, an extremely lucid commentator and much admired in the field of literary theory, offers discerning insights into the role of reader in literary theory, and whether literature is a form of self-expression or a method of appeal to an audience.