two books here—a superficial primer on various film theories, languages, and technologies and a collection of twelve film summaries with filmmaker biographies.

Costanzo is giving English instructors a sampling of what is out there in the film discipline and forcing those instructors to investigate further on their own. This is fine, in fact, preferable to following a guide, as this book purports to be. The problem is that the title leads one to believe that this book will show the instructor “how to teach” film in an English class, but it does not. The instructor could use this book to get ideas of where to find material (it does have a suggested reading list and film list). But the instructor would be hard pressed to use this work as an instructor’s manual on how to teach film as a text.

—Susan Springfield
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Amid all the heat and arid prose of the countless political/theoretical arguments that make up today’s literary scholarship, Frederick Crews’ collection of essays The Critics Bear It Away comes as a pleasant oasis—a place where a reader can, if not escape, at least catch a breath and look for a new perspective on the surrounding wilderness.

Largely formed of articles recycled from The New York Review of Books, this volume seeks, as its title suggests, to ask what professional, academic readers have been doing to American literature. Crews’ answer, in summary, is too often reading it to accommodate our own prejudices and predilections. In his words, the literary professorate has become dominated in terms of influence, if not numbers—by “apriorists” for whom “a theory is worth exercising if it yields results that gratify the critic’s moral or ideological passions; no further demands need be placed on it” (14). Again and again, as he offers essays reviewing critical works on the American Renaissance, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Flannery O’Connor, Crews carefully dissects partisan arguments to show their faithfulness to the critic’s theory and their disregard for the literary work. For example, in his attack on Susan Gillman’s Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain’s America, Crews observes:
Precisely because *Huckleberry Finn* demands to be read as a work of conscious irony about race and caste, Gillman has little to say about it; she feels more at home with what she twice calls Twain's "ostentatiously incomplete" late fragments, which serve up morbid fantasies without the nuisance of ethical or aesthetic shaping. ... For her, not just the troubling conclusion [of *Huckleberry Finn*] but the entire novel amounts to an attempted cop-out; it illustrates Twain's supposedly typical quixotic attempt to flee from history... In this formulation, any elements in Twain's novel that complicate adolescent escapism are credited not to his moral intentions but to the unconscious pull of historical circumstance. (60)

Although such correction is clearly of importance to Crews, he does not limit himself to showing the flaws in this kind of predigested readings. He means in these essays to offer an alternative as well, what he calls the work of "empiricist" critics: "To an empiricist ... the justification for a theory must reside in its combination of logical coherence, epistemic scrupulousness, and capacity to explain relatively undisputed facts at once more parsimoniously and more comprehensively than its rivals do" (14-15). To this end, he seeks out works that exemplify this method—works such as Sherwood Cummings' *Mark Twain and Science: Adventures of a Mind*, Kenneth Lynn's *Hemingway*, and Richard C. Moreland's *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting*.

Of course, calls for such semi-objective criticism are nothing new, and given this stance, it will be easy, in some circles, to dismiss this book as merely more reaction from the right—another attack on theory and theorists by a traditional academic overshadowed by the rise of philosophically aware scholars. However, Crews seems to have anticipated attacks from this direction, and he counters them with his essay discussing Christian, conservative criticism of Flannery O'Connor's works ("critics who seek to justify her in postmodern terms would do well to cease evading her intellectual and emotional loyalty to a single value system" [151]) and in his recanting of what he sees as his own apriorist criticism, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes*, a book he acknowledges as arising from an unquestioning Freudian faith.

Clearly Crews recognizes that the ground he has staked out is largely a no-man's and no-woman's land, a territory with hostile eyes and pens on either side. But in his ever direct tone and his unwavering attempt to analyze and come to terms with each text he considers, he asserts that this, in fact, is the area the critic needs to claim and make his/her own. "It is not the business of criticism," he asserts in an essay on Twain's
Connecticut Yankee "to prejudge the success of [the writer’s] effort, either by invoking Derridean linguistic fatalism, by bulldozing all obstacles to ‘intended meaning,’ or by recasting perceived turbulence as irony. If we reverse the intentionalist protocol, beginning from fissures within the work and then seeing whether they correspond to what is known about the writer’s mind, we will find ourselves able to do without aprioristic certainties" (88). Such an understanding of the critic’s role demands that we not tie up all the loose ends of literature with our ornate philosophic packages and bows but rather that we point out the loose ends and seek to come to terms with their meanings.

In most of the essays, Crews is content to deride those who avoid this practice and praise those who follow it. But in two essays—his examination of Twain’s Connecticut Yankee and the volume’s final essay, a consideration of John Updike’s Roger’s Version—he tries his hand at practicing his preachments. The results are mixed but worth any reader’s time. For if in these short pieces he remains unable to offer a full account of his subjects, he demonstrates that his method can produce surprising insights. And he does so in an informed but jargon-free prose only the most jaded deconstructionist could fail to appreciate.

At a time of confusion in our profession, a time when many of us enter our classrooms or sit down to our writings with a hodgepodge of theories drawn from all the sources we’ve been too intimidated by to ignore, Crews labors to convince us that an independent study of texts is still possible and fruitful—possible, not by abandoning theoretical perceptions, but by using them honestly and critically; fruitful for readers who want more from literature than proofs of their philosophies. In doing so, this slim volume may well remind many of us why we found American literature meaningful in the first place.

—Robert Donahoo
Sam Houston State University

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In Released Into Language (NCTE 1990), Wendy Bishop challenged instructors “to develop a fuller view of the creative writing workshop” by considering the many options for teaching creative writing provided in her model of the “transactional workshop” (xvii). Now, through her most recent textbook, Working Words: The Process of Creative Writing, she places