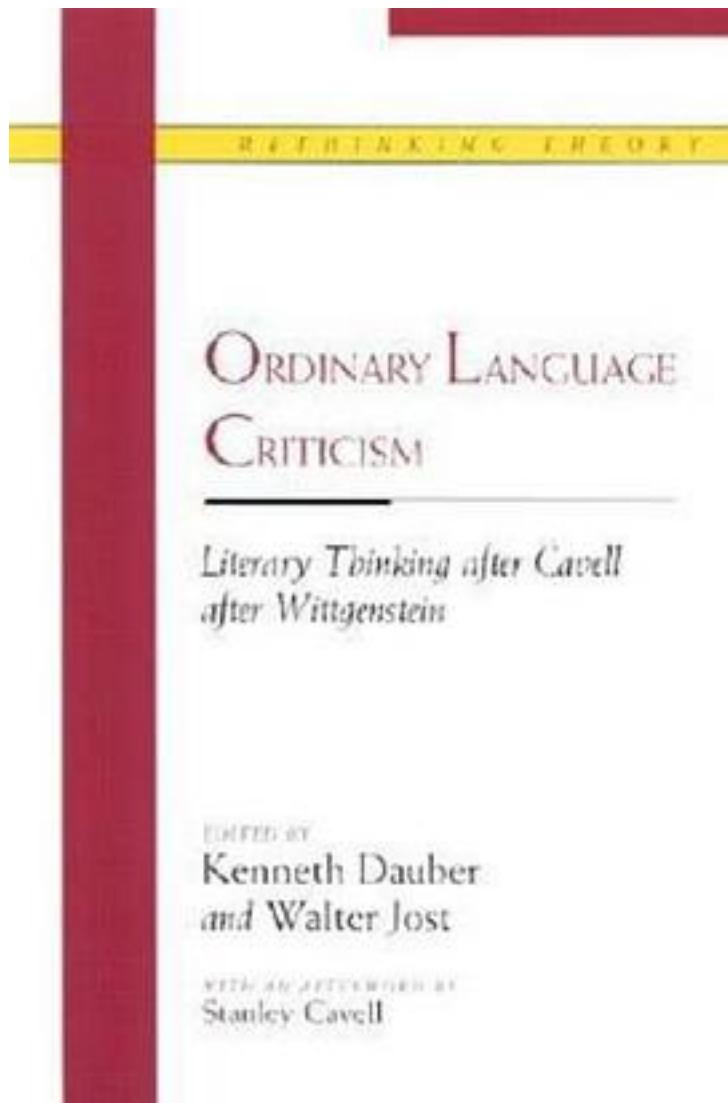


Ordinary Language Criticism



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著者:Dauber, Kenneth (EDT)/ Jost, Walter (EDT)

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Marking a return of literary study from the remote reaches of abstraction to the realm of the immediate, the particular, and the real in which language and literature truly live, the essays in this volume articulate a productive, new critical approach: ordinary language criticism. With roots in the ordinary language philosophy derived especially from Wittgenstein in the early twentieth century, and in the ideas of American pragmatic philosophy propounded and extended by Stanley Cavell, this approach seeks to return criticism to its grounds in the natural language we all speak; to expose the terms of our engagement with narratives, arguments, and concepts--what Wittgenstein and Cavell call the "criteria" of our writing and reading.

Resisting master formulations and overarching theories, "Ordinary Language Criticism" does not so much dismiss the excitement of the last two decades of literary theorizing as it reminds us of the excitement of the shared common enterprises to which theory may still contribute. In this, the volume and the model it offers have wide implications for the academy, in which a widespread ersatz-sophistication has shorted the circuit between literary works and the real lives of those reading and teaching them.

With a definitive introduction by editors Kenneth Dauber and Walter Jost, and elaborations and practical examples by major figures such as Cavell himself, Martha Nussbaum, Marjorie Perloff, Anthony Cascardi, and Charles Altieri, among others, this volume clearly shows and explains how ordinary language criticism differs from current trends and what it exactly it can accomplish in theory and practice. These essays prove that by attending more faithfully to what we actually do when we read, we can make reading more productive--can reveal how extraordinary and rich, how really sophisticated, the ordinary actually is.

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