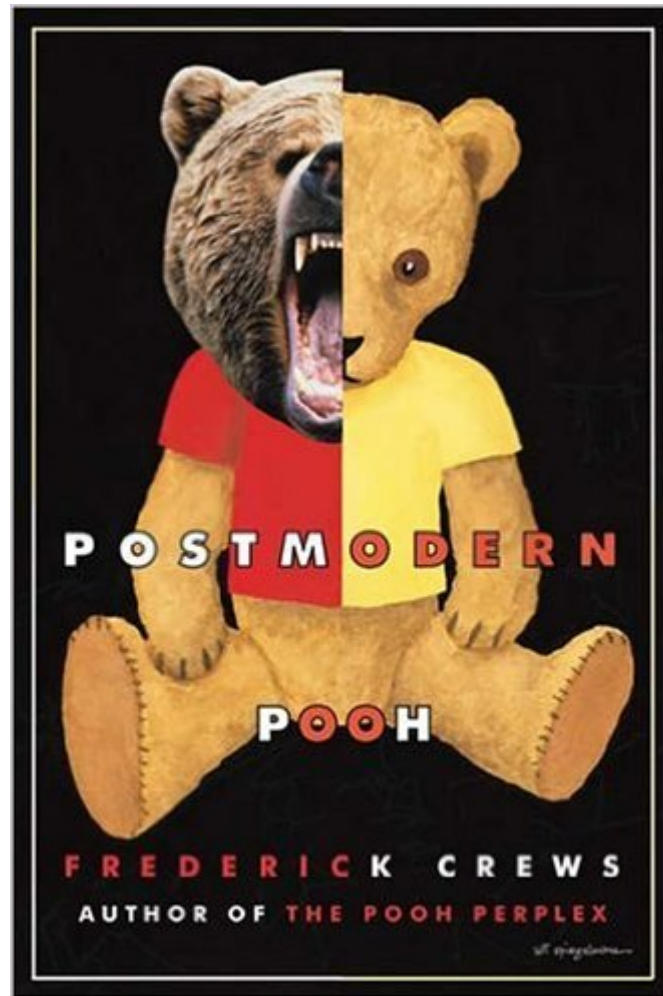


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Postmodern Pooh



Synopsis

A sequel of sorts to the classic (and bestselling) sendup of literary criticism, *The Pooh Perplex* Purporting to be the proceedings of a forum on Pooh convened at the Modern Language Association's annual convention, *Postmodern Pooh* brilliantly parodies the academic fads and figures that hold sway at the millennium. Deconstruction, poststructuralist Marxism, new historicism, radical feminism, cultural studies, recovered-memory theory, and postcolonialism, among other methods, take their shots at the poor teddy bear and Crews takes his shots at them. The fun lies in seeing just how much adulteration Pooh can stand.

Book Information

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: North Point Press (January 15, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0865476543

ISBN-13: 978-0865476547

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (18 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,146,654 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #242 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Books & Reading > History of Books](#) #1493 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Humor > Parodies](#) #145769 in [Books > History](#)

Customer Reviews

To be fair, let me say at the outset that the author has been my friend and colleague for many years. I am sure, however, that I would feel exactly as I do about this book if I had never laid eyes on Fred Crews. Thirty-eight years ago, when *The Pooh Perplex* was published, literary criticism was a harmless activity produced largely by academics with one intellectual obsession or another (such as Freudian analysis or Marxist world-views), or by followers of easily parodied methodologies such as the self-styled New Criticism. In the years since much has changed. The study of literature occupies a much smaller place in the colleges and universities than it did, but paradoxically, rather than banding together to save the humanities in a world less interested in their subject, academic critics have all too often split into warring camps of Taliban-like true believers, each coterie proclaiming its own often unintelligible, jargon-ridden, and preposterous ideology. What most of such schools of criticism share, under the name of what they agree to call "Theory," is a new sense that you can say

anything you want if it is outrageous and pretentious enough. Many of these writers argue that there is no real world anyway, just what one perceives, so the old limits are gone. An outraged sense of the culture-destroying impact of such nonsense underlies the parodies in Postmodern Pooh. The essays are--though it's almost impossible to believe anything could be--funnier than those in The Pooh Perplex. An example is Chapter Three, "The Fissured Subtext: Historical Problematics, the Absolute Cause, Transcoded Contradictions, and Late-Capitalist Metanarrative (in Pooh)", by a fire-eating revolutionary who holds "the cross-departmental chair. . .

Literary Criticism so long ago slipped over the edge into self parody that when I first found an old dog-eared copy of The Pooh Perplex at a book sale many years ago it took me more than a few pages to figure out whether it was meant to be serious or not. In a series of essays, various critics, of dubious but seemingly impressive pedigree, read the Pooh stories through the distorted lenses of their own literary/political/philosophical/psychological perspectives. It turned out of course that the book, published in 1964, had been the work of a young English professor at Berkeley (of all places) and was a parody, skewering several of the then current schools of criticism. Now, nearly forty years later, retired from academia, Professor Crews gives today's critics the satirical drubbing they so richly deserve in this manufactured set of lectures to the Modern Language Association convention. Happily, this second effort is just as funny as the first, though it is somewhat depressing to realize that his targets have become even easier to poke fun at because, one shudders at the thought, their theories are even more ridiculous than those of their predecessors. I'll not pretend to understand all the nuances of what Professor Crews has written; heck, I don't even recognize all the schools of thought he's sending up, nor all the specific people he seems to have targeted. Everyone will discern Harold Bloom in the person of Orpheus Bruno, whose lecture is titled The Importance of Being Portly, and whose last three books are titled : My Vico, My Shakespeare, My God!; What You Don't Know Hurts Me; and Read These Books.

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