

## P R E F A C E

To the laborers in this hard and immense field  
in the twentieth century: philosophers, theoreticians,  
literary critics, poets, students and colleagues,  
I dedicate this book.

The essays collected in this book aim at developing a systematic, comprehensive theory of the work of literature. No matter what the interests of literary scholars today may be—political, cultural, ideological, national or thematic—we must be able to understand and rationally describe the basic unit of literary communication: the work of literature. Otherwise, the study of literature becomes the study of the world.

These chapters have been written at different times, yet they come together in one coherent perception of the literary text. I have now edited them thoroughly and agree with most of the ideas. I am trying to present an argument about the topics, as I see them today, to offer a model of the literary text and its major aspects, without burdening my essays with discussions of other theories and endless lists of references. I have read extensively in the philosophy of language, linguistics, literary theory and criticism of several generations. I looked into more, and, I am sure, overlooked much more. I benefited from many of those writings, and was influenced by phenomenology more than by structuralism, yet I believe that the science of literature, like any discipline in the humanities, must not be an applied philosophy or ideology, but must develop its own system of theory and research. Indeed, I learned mostly from carefully looking at how literary texts are made.

The chapters are arranged in a thematic rather than a chronological order. In several cases, there are considerable repetitions. I have left those as they were, because I needed the same conceptual framework for different purposes

(e.g., fictionality, representation, and metaphor). Each essay can be read independent of the rest. A list of sources at the end of the book indicates the latest printed version of the collected articles. Some essays were written in Hebrew years ago and published in several versions in English. I stand behind the text as it is today.

The last section, “Frameworks,” clarifies the assumptions underlying the specific studies. Chapter 9 discusses the pluralistic nature of the study of literature and was published first in 1968. Chapter 10 formulates the basic notions of my theory, as developed in seminars at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and at the new Department of Poetics and Comparative Literature at Tel Aviv University, first presented outside of Israel in a Semiotics Seminar at Urbino, 1969, and summarized in English at Berkeley in 1972.

Some of the chapters refer to scholars of that time—it was a shorthand way of talking to my contemporaries about the issues. There is no intention to promote those names above others. The book is about ideas, no matter who articulated them first.

*Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovski)*

*Professor of Comparative Literature, J.&H. Blaustein Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature and Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Yale University  
L.&S. Porter Professor Emeritus of Poetics and Literary Theory, Tel Aviv University*