Decolonizing the Theory Canon: Literary Theory Outside the *Norton Anthology*

The literary ‘canon’, an ever-popular topic for discussion among academics, is experienced most tangibly in the various Norton anthologies of English Literature. But what about the canon of literary theory? This has been defined through successive anthologies used for teaching—such as Hazard Adams’ *Critical Theory Since Plato*, and more recently the *Norton Anthology of Literary Theory*, now in its third edition (current contents are listed pp.3-12 below; essays added to the 3rd edition are listed in bold font). The *Norton Anthology*, which is edited by six academics from the USA, describes itself as follows:

The gold standard anthology for anyone who wants to understand the development and current state of literary theory. Offering 191 pieces by 157 authors, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Third Edition, is more comprehensive and more varied in its selection than any other anthology. Forty-eight NEW selections—concentrated mostly on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—make the book not only the best overview of the history of theory, but also a remarkably up-to-date portrait of the state of theory today.¹

A glance through its contents reveals that the historical stretch of the anthology, beginning with Gorgias, Plato and Aristotle, presents literary theory as an almost exclusively European, or later Western, continuous domain from the fourth century BC to the present. We wait until the foot of the sixth page of contents before we encounter a non-Western theorist—C. D. Narasimhaiah, after which the anthology then presents us with single token essays discussing Chinese, Arab and Japanese poetics. This route to opening the canon installs each non-Western tradition as a unified and internally adequate niche. Despite the meaning of “canon” as “The list of works considered to be permanently established as being of the highest quality” (Oxford English Dictionary) theory, it seems, is a rapidly changing field, though not one that is taking on any kind of global perspective: while 25% of the material in the third edition is “NEW”, just four of the 191 essays, or 2%, consider non-western contributions. Of course, the tradition of “literary theory” presented in the volume is itself an invented tradition, since the majority of the writers, from Plato to David Hume to Marx, are unlikely to have described themselves as literary theorists or indeed to have thought they were writing “literary theory” in the material included under their name. As a result “literary theory” consists of a somewhat random selection of Western texts of different kinds, the majority of them originally written in English. The anthology thus raises not only the question of why literary theory—much of which to judge from the essays does not address literature itself directly—is so exclusively a western concept, but also what its concept is as such and why it should have a canon, characterised as it is by both stasis and selection. As the demands of decolonization confront not only literature but also philosophy and science, the relation between disciplinarities and canon has to be considered. Should decolonization involve a decanonization or only a rearrangement of the canon, and if so, then under which principles of selection? The question of *who speaks for the alternative decolonized canons* grows in urgency with the increasing recognition that national/high/classical traditions within the non-Western realms themselves are analogous to western canons as they exclude, suppress and destroy the literary and cultural expressions of minority groups and languages.

For our 21st annual workshop we invite members of the ICLA theory committee to present papers that address the questions raised by the concept and corpus of “literary theory”. These

¹ http://books.wwnorton.com/books/webad.aspx?id=4294994930
may include:

- How can we conceptualise literary theory outside the Norton? What would an alternative literary theory, not dominated by the usual texts found in such anthologies, look like?
- How could such literary theory go both beyond the West and beyond the canonical image of the West?
- What is a canon and is it a necessary condition for ‘doing’ literary theory?
- What are the languages of literary theory, and how translatable or untranslatable is it?
- Why was “literary theory” invented and for whom?
- What in fact is “literary theory”?
- Where is “the state of literary theory today”?
- Can we imagine literary theory today outside the politics of nationalism and ethnocentrisms of both the West and the non-West?

The ground rule for all papers is that in deliberating on the question of literary theory participants are not allowed to discuss in any detail any texts contained in the Norton.
INTRODUCTION TO THEORY AND CRITICISM

GORGIAS OF LEONTINI (ca. 483–376 B.C.E.)

From Encomium of Helen

PLATO (ca. 427–ca. 347 B.C.E.)

Ion

Republic

From Book II

From Book III

From Book VII

From Book X

From Phaedrus

ARISTOTLE (384–322 B.C.E.)

Poetics

On Rhetoric

Book I

From Chapter 2

From Chapter 3

Book II

From Chapter 1

Book III

From Chapter 2

HORACE (65–8 B.C.E.)

Ars Poetica

LONGINUS (first century C.E.)

From On Sublimity

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354–430)

On Christian Teaching

From Book Two

From Book Three

MOSES MAIMONIDES (1135–1204)

The Guide of the Perplexed

From [Introduction to The First Part]

THOMAS AQUINAS (1225–1274)

Summa Theologica

From Question I

DANTE ALIGHIERI (1265–1321)

Il Convivio

Book Two

Chapter 1

From The Letter to Can Grande

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO (1313–1375)

Genealogy of the Gentile Gods

From Book 14

V. Other Cavillers at the Poets and Their Imputations

Vii. The Definition of Poetry, Its Origin, And Function

Xii. The Obscurity of Poetry Is Not Just Cause For Condeming

It

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN (ca. 1365–ca. 1429)
Christine’s Reaction to Jean de Montreuil’s Treatise on the *Roman de la Rose*

**The Book of the City of Ladies**
*From Part One*

*From Part Two*

**JOACHIM DU BELLAY (ca. 1522–1560)**
The Defense and Enrichment of the French Language
  *First Book*
  Chapters 1-7
  *Second Book*
  Chapters 3-4

**GIACOPO MAZZONI (1548–1598)**
On the Defense of the *Comedy* of Dante
  *From* Introduction and Summary

**SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1554–1586)**
*From* The Defence of Poesy

**PIERRE CORNEILLE (1606–1684)**
Of the Three Unities of Action, Time, and Place

**JOHN DRYDEN (1631–1700)**
*From* An Essay of Dramatic Poesy

**BARUCH SPINOZA (1632-1677)**
Theologico-Political Treatise
  *Chapter 7. Of the Interpretation of Scripture*

**APHRA BEHN (1640–1689)**
The Dutch Lover
  Epistle to the Reader
  Preface to *The Lucky Chance*

**GIAMBATTISTA VICO (1668–1744)**
*From* New Science

**JOSEPH ADDISON (1672–1719)**
The Spectator, No. 62
  [True and False Wit]
  The Spectator, No 412
  [On the Sublime]

**ALEXANDER POPE (1688–1744)**
*From* An Essay on Criticism

**SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-1784)**
The Rambler, No. 4
  [On Fiction]
  The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia
    Chapter X. Imlac’s History Continued. A Dissertation upon Poetry
  *From* Preface to Shakespeare
  Lives of the English Poets
    *From* Cowley
    [On Metaphysical Wit]

**DAVID HUME (1711–1776)**
Of the Standard of Taste
IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804)
Critique of Judgment
  From Introduction
  From First Book. Analytic of the Beautiful
  From Second Book. Analytic of the Sublime

EDMUND BURKE (1729–1797)
  A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful
    From Part I. Sections I–VIII
    From Part III. Section XXVII

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING (1729–1781)
  From Laocoön

FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER (1759–1805)
  On the Aesthetic Education of Man
    Second Letter
    Sixth Letter
    Ninth Letter

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759–1797)
  A Vindication of the Rights of Woman
    From Chapter II. The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed

GERMAINE NECKER DE STAËL (1766–1817)
  From Essay on Fictions
  On Literature Considered in Its Relationship to Social Institutions
    On Women Writers (2.4)

FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER (1768–1834)
  Hermeneutics
    Outline of the 1819 Lectures
      Introduction
      Part Two. The Technical Interpretation

GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770–1831)
  Phenomenology of Spirit
    [The Master-Slave Dialectic]
  Lectures on Fine Art
    From Introduction

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850)
  Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772–1834)
  Biographia Literaria
    Volume 1
      From Chapter 1
      From Chapter 4
      From Chapter 13
    Volume 2
      Chapter 14

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792–1822)
  From A Defence of Poetry

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803–1882)
  From The American Scholar
    The Poet
EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809–1849)
The Philosophy of Composition

KARL MARX (1818-1883) and FRIEDRICH ENGELS (1820–1895)
From Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844
From The German Ideology
From The Communist Manifesto
From Grundrisse
From Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy
Capital, Volume 1
From Chapter 1. Commodities
From Chapter 10. The Working-Day
From Letter from Friedrich Engels to Joseph Bloch

MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822–1888)
The Function of Criticism at the Present Time
Culture and Anarchy
From Chapter 1. Sweetness and Light

WALTER PATER (1839–1894)
Studies in the History of the Renaissance
Preface
Conclusion

HENRY JAMES (1843–1916)
The Art of Fiction

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900)
From The Birth of Tragedy
On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense

OSCAR WILDE (1854–1900)
Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray
From The Decay of Lying: An Observation
From The Critic as Artist

SIGMUND FREUD (1856–1939)
The Interpretation of Dreams
From Chapter V. The Material and Sources Of Dreams
From Chapter VI. The Dream-Work
From The “Uncanny”
Fetishism

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE (1857–1913)
Course in General Linguistics
Introduction
From Chapter III. The Object of Linguistic
Part One. General Principles
Chapter I. Nature of The Linguistic Sign
Part Two. Synchronic Linguistics
Chapter IV. Linguistic Value
Chapter V. Syntagmatic and Associative Relations

W. E. B. DU BOIS (1868–1963)
The Souls of Black Folk
From Chapter 1. Of Our Spiritual Strivings
Criteria of Negro Art
VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882–1941)
A Room of One’s Own
[Shakespeare’s Sister]
[Chloe Liked Olivia]
[Androgyny]

GYÖRGY LUKÁCS (1885–1971)
The Historical Novel
From Chapter One. The Classical Form of the Historical Novel

T. S. ELIOT (1888–1965)
Tradition and the Individual Talent
The Metaphysical Poets

JOHN CROWE RANSOM (1888–1974)
Criticism, Inc.

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Language

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Characteristics of Negro Expression
What White Publishers Won’t Print

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From Discourse in the Novel

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Dialectic of Enlightenment
From The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception

F.R. LEAVIS (1895-1978)
The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad
From Chapter 1. The Great Tradition

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From Linguistics and Poetics
Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances
V. The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles

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The Constitution of Liberty
Chapter 6. Equality, Value, and Merit

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Chapter 1. What is Liberal Education?

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The Signification of the Phallus

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The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain

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*Beyond Culture*
Chapter 1. On the Teaching of Modern Literature

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The Human Condition
*From 24. The Disclosure of the Agent in Speech and Action*
25. The Web of Relationship and the Enacted Stories
*From Truth and Politics*

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The Intentional Fallacy

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The Second Sex
Part Three: Myths
Chapter 3

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS (1908–2009)
Tristes Tropiques
Chapter 28. A Writing Lesson

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Performative Utterances

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The Archetypes of Literature

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Photography and Electoral Appeal
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*From Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*

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Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature
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Chapter 2. The Perverse Implantation
Society Must Be Defended
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[Biopower]

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An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness

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From Chapter 1. Poetics and Orality in the Jahiliyya
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Part III. *From* Chapter 1

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*From Plato’s Pharmacy*
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2. The Father of Logos
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5. The Pharmakeus

*From* Play: From the Pharmakon to the Letter and from Blindness to the Supplement

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*From* Chapter 1. Injunctions of Marx
*From* Chapter 3. Wears and Tears

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*From* Chapter 1. The Animal That Therefore I Am (More To Follow)

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*From* Chapter 1. On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act
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*From* Chapter 6. Neoliberalism on Trial

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Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life
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[Can The Subaltern Speak?]

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Culture and the Death of God
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   The Companion Species Manifesto
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       From Chapter 3. The Narrative Imagination

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       From Visualizing the Disabled Body: The Classical Nude and the Fragmented Torso

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   The Commitment to Theory

GAYLE RUBIN (b. 1949)
   From Thinking Sex: Notes for A Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK (b. 1949)
   Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture
       Chapter 5. The Hitchcockian Blot

HENRY LOUIS GATES JR. (b. 1950)
   Talking Black: Critical Signs of the Times

FRANCO MORETTI (b. 1950)
   Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History
       Chapter 1. Graphs

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   Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire
       From Introduction
       Epistemology of the Closet
       From Introduction: Axiomatic

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   The World of Persian Literary Humanism
       From Conclusion: Literary Humanism as an Alternative Theory to Modernity

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   Subculture: The Meaning of Style
       Chapter 6. Subculture: The Unnatural Break
BELL HOOKS (b. Gloria Jean Watkins, 1952)
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From Introduction
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From Chapter 1. The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity

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Chapter 1. The Force of Things

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Empire
From Part 2. Section 4. Symptoms of Passage

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Female Masculinity
From An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity without Men

DAVID HERMAN (b. 1962)
Narrative Theory after the Second Cognitive Revolution

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