

**INTERPRETING LITERATURE:
A SELECTION OF WORLD READINGS, FROM ANTIQUITY TO 1949**

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I. DESCRIPTION

This reading list presents a suggested collection of essays and excerpts addressing central issues of literary interpretation, from antiquity to the middle of the twentieth century. Along with a full selection of readings from the Western tradition, this list also reflects a global scope with readings drawn from sources not widely available in critical anthologies, such as major Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian criticism, Latin American critical movements, African interpretive traditions, and influential perspectives offered by Christian exegesis, Midrashic interpretation, and Islamic approaches to literature.

Many of the excerpts will be found in existing anthologies. For example, when the list includes "Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), from *Biographia Literaria*," you can find an appropriately chosen excerpt from this work in any good collection of criticism. Other selections may take some digging and specialized knowledge, but what with the increasing availability of texts on the web, almost all of the following texts can be obtained with a bit of work.

An alternative to existing volumes that range "from Plato to the present," these selections offer students readings specifically designed for courses in the history of literary criticism, world literature, and "pre-contemporary" literary theory. The readings not only provide students with a view of the perspectives that link Plato to Sidney to Sartre, but also allow students to trace the concerns that connect the fifth-century Chinese critic Liu Xie with the burst of literary scholarship in China during the 1920s, or the approaches that complement the *Ramayana* of south Asian antiquity with the Sanskrit literary criticism of a millennium later. Just as important, the readings show students how literary interpretation, like literature itself, is a dialogic, collaborative art in which conversations span nation, era, and language.

I've also included samples of the three tables of contents originally envisioned for this volume, in order to facilitate the global conversation of literary criticism. The first reflects the chronological arrangement of the readings in the volume, while the second table of contents presents readings emerging from a particular region or tradition. A third table allows students to compare readings that address specific shared interests, such as the value of mimesis, the role of imagination, or the nature of truth in poetry. Feel free to create your own versions of these tables of contents to suit your own needs and goals.

II. RATIONALE

Theory courses often beg two provocative questions. In the contemporary theory classroom, students ask, "What did critics do before the twentieth century?" Meanwhile, students of "classic texts" that precede the mid-twentieth century wonder aloud if any critical work was being done

outside the Western tradition. This list responds to both questions by recommending the most significant reflections on literature from around the world and offering them in one resource.

For readers interested in contemporary theory in a global context, take a look at the recently published volume, *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Richard Lane (Routledge, April 2013). This book's table of contents can be found at the publisher's website.

My own world theory list presents an earlier picture of theory and criticism. In it, the Western tradition appears much as it is reflected in the major competing volumes, but it is complemented by important non-Western readings. These readings, ranging from essays on Yoruba divination and Biblical exegesis to Japanese *No* theater and Latin American *modernismo*, are currently scattered through separate volumes on world literature, national literatures, or philosophy, yet when brought together in one text they respond to the demand for a broader view of literary criticism as such. Simply put, this list allows students access to the critics, traditions, and dialogues that both support and interrogate the global fascination with literary art.

III. ORGANIZATION AND USE

I've provided three tables of contents so far. The first reflects the chronological arrangement of the readings, while the second allows readers to easily link the readings of the various regions and traditions covered. The third table of contents (a growing and customizable set) arranges the readings by topics important in the history of criticism.

A) Readings in Chronological Order

The chronological arrangement of readings allows students to consider the global sweep of literary criticism. Readings in both the Norton and the Bedford/St. Martin anthologies, by concentrating solely on the Western tradition, skip from the third and fourth century to the fourteenth and eleventh century, respectively. Readers of *Interpreting Literature* will discover that these “blank spots” actually occur at times of a flourishing global literary scene, particularly in India and the Arab world.

1700 B.C.E – 2nd Century C.E.

Rig Veda (1700-1000 BCE), Hymns to Vāc (on speech and language)

Hesiod (c. 700 BCE), from *Theogony* (on lies and truth)

Confucius (551-479 BCE.), from *Analects*

Laozi (4th-3rd BCE.), from *Daodejing* (“truthful words are not beautiful”)

Plato (427-347 BCE), from *Ion*, *Republic*

Aristotle (384-322 BCE), from *Poetics*

Valmiki (c. 200 BCE), from *Ramayana* (“invention of poetry”)

Horace (65-8 BCE), from *Ars Poetica*

Longinus (1stC), from *On the Sublime*

Bharata (2ndC), from *Natyasastra*

4th – 9th Centuries

Augustine (354-430), from *On Christian Doctrine*

Macrobius (c. 400), from *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*

Liu Xie (465-520), from *Wenxin Xiaolong (The Book of Literary Design, aka The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons)*

Bede (673–735), from *Concerning Figures and Tropes* (on allegory)

Ruth Rabbah (600-700), later classic rabbinic midrash (Neusner's discussion)

Dandin (8thC), from *Kavyadarsa*

Anandavardhana (855-85), from *Light on Suggestion*

10th – 14th Centuries

Ibn Sīnā (980–1037, aka Avicenna), selections (on truth and falsity of poetry)

Murasaki Shikibu (978–1016?), from *The Tale of Genji*

Abhinavagupta (9-11C?), on the theory of *rasadhvani* (socio-moral value of poetry)

al Niffari (d. 976), from *The Book of Spiritual Stayings* (on the ineffable)

al Jurjani (d. 1078, Arabic), on the faculty of imagination

Ibn Rushd (1126–98, aka Averroes), selections (on mimesis and figurative language)

Maimonides (1135–1204), from *The Guide to the Perplexed* (or from *Commentary on the Mishna*)

Ifa divination and Esu Elegbara trickster figure(11thC), from Gleason and Ogundipe, and/or Gates's discussion of same

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), from *Summa Theologica*

Christine de Pizan (1365-1429), from *The Book of the City of Ladies*

Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443, Japanese), from *On the Art of No*

16th – 17th Centuries

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), from “An Apology for Poetry”

Yong Yuze, preface to *Sanguo zhi tongsu yanyi (Romance of the Three Kingdoms)* (on historiography)

Li Zhi (1527–1602), from *Fenshu (A Book to be Burned)*

Popol Vuh (1550), (on shared language)

Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), “Of the Three Unities of Action, Time, and Place”

Jin Shengtan (1610–61), from his edition of *Shuihu zhuan (Water Margin)*

John Dryden (1631-1700), from An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, from Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*

Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), from *The New Science*

Alexander Pope (1688-1744), “An Essay on Criticism”

18th Century

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), from *The Rambler* (on fiction), from Preface to Shakespeare

David Hume (1711-1776), “Of the Standard of Taste”

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), from *Critique of Judgment*

Edmund Burke (1729-1797), from *Enquiry into the Sublime*

Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), selections

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), from *Conversations with Eckermann*

Germaine Necker de Stael (1766-1817), from *Literature in its Relations to Social Institutions*

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), from *The Philosophy of Fine Art*

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), from *Biographia Literaria*

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), from *A Defence of Poetry*

19th Century

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), from *The Poet*

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), selected writings

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), from *The Painter of Modern Life*

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” and from
Culture and Anarchy

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), from *What is Art?*

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), on the hermeneutic circle (and Schleiermacher)

Altaf Hussain Hali (1837-1914), from *Muqaddama-e-Sher-o-Shaeri*

Henry James (1843-1916), from “The Art of Fiction”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), “On Truth and Lying in a Nonmoral Sense”

Manuel González Prada (1848-1918), on indigenous writing

José Martí (1853-95), “Nuestro America”

Rubén Darío (1867-1916), from “La literatura en Centroamérica” and/or another on modernismo

Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), from *The Essence of the Novel* (1885–86)

Shimamura Hōgetsu (1871–1918), on poetry and naturalism vs. modernity

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), from “The Critic as Artist”

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” and/or from *The Interpretation of Dreams*

20th Century

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), from *Course in General Linguistics*

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), selection

Kuppuswami Sastri (1885–1980), from lectures of 1919

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), from “Criteria of Negro Art”

Liang Qichao (1873–1929), selection

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), from “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”

Wang Guowei (1877–1927), from *Honglou meng pinglun* (A critique of *Dream of the Red Chamber*)

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), from *Literature and Revolution* (on the formalists)

Lu Xun (1881-1936, Zhou Shuren), selection

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), from *A Room of One's Own*

Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984), from “Art as Technique”

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

John Crowe Ransom (1888-1974), from *The New Criticism*

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), selection

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), from “Characteristics of Negro Expression”

Hu Shi (1891-1962), “A Proposal for Reforming Literature”

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), from “On Language as Such and On the Language of Man”

Guo Morou (1892–1978), on the Creation Society

Mao Zedong (1893-1976), from “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts”

Edmund Wilson (1895-1975), from “Marxism and Literature”

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), from “Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel”

Mao Dun (1896-1981, Shen Yanbing), on the Literature Research Society
André Breton (1896-1966), from *Les pas perdus*
Yokomitsu Riichi (1898–1947), on New Sensualism
Nazım Hikmet (1901-1963), selection (letters)
Langston Hughes (1902-1967), “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”
Kobayashi Hideo (1902–83), selection (on creative imagination)
Jean-Paul Satre (1905-1980), “What is Literature?”
Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), from *The Second Sex*
Aimé Césaire (b.1913), selection from w *L'Étudiant Noir*

B) Readings Arranged by Region or Tradition

This table of contents allows students to link the readings of a single tradition.

Arabic

Ibn Sīnā (980–1037, aka Avicenna), selections (on truth and falsity of poetry)
al Niffari (d. 976), from *The Book of Spiritual Stayings* (on the ineffable)
al Jurjani (d. 1078, Arabic), on the faculty of imagination
Ibn Rushd (1126–98, aka Averroes), selections (on mimesis and figurative language)
Maimonides (1135–1204), from *The Guide to the Perplexed* (or from *Commentary on the Mishna*)

Africa & African diaspora

Ifa divination and Esu Elegbara trickster figure(11thC), from Gleason and Ogundipe, and/or Gates’s discussion
Aimé Césaire (b.1913), selection from w *L'Étudiant Noir*

Biblical interpretation & exegesis

Augustine (354-430), from *On Christian Doctrine*
Macrobius (c. 400), from *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*
Bede (673–735), from *Concerning Figures and Tropes* (on allegory)
Ruth Rabbah (600-700), later classic rabbinic midrash (Neusner’s discussion)
Maimonides (1135–1204), from *The Guide to the Perplexed* (or from *Commentary on the Mishna*)
Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), from *Summa Theologica*

China

Confucius (551-479 BCE.), from *Analects*
Laozi (4th-3rd BCE.), from *Daodejing* (“truthful words are not beautiful”) and *the Carving of Dragons*
Liu Xie (465-520), from *Wenxin Xiaolong* (*The Book of Literary Design*, aka *The Literary Mind*)
Li Zhi (1527–1602), from *Fenshu*(*A Book to be Burned*)
Yong Yuzi, preface to *Sanguo zhi tongsu yanyi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) (on historiography)
Jin Shengtan (1610–61), from his edition of *Shuihu zhuan* (*Water Margin*) (on the novel)
Liang Qichao (1873–1929), selection

Wang Guowei (1877–1927), from *Honglou meng pinglun* (A critique of *Dream of the Red Chamber*)

Lu Xun (1881-1936, Zhou Shuren), selection

Hu Shi (1891-1962), “A Proposal for Reforming Literature”

Guo Morou (1892–1978), on the Creation Society

Mao Zedong (1893-1976), from “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Arts”

Mao Dun (1896-1981, Shen Yanbing), on the Literature Research Society

India

Rig Veda (1700-1000 BCE), Hymns to Vāc (on speech and language)

Valmiki (c. 200 BCE), from *Ramayana* (“invention of poetry”)

Bharata (2ndC), from *Natyasastra*

Dandin (8thC), from *Kavyadarsa*

Anandavardhana (855-85), from *Light on Suggestion*

Abhinavagupta (9-11C?), on the theory of *rasadhvani* (socio-moral value of poetry)

Altaf Hussain Hali (1837-1914), from *Muqaddama-e-Sher-o-Shaeri*

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), selection

Kuppuswami Sastri (1885–1980), from lectures of 1919

Japan

Murasaki Shikibu (978–1016?), from *The Tale of Genji*

Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443, Japanese), from *On the Art of No*

Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), selections

Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), from *The Essence of the Novel* (1885–86)

Shimamura Hōgetsu (1871–1918), on poetry and naturalism vs. modernity

Yokomitsu Riichi (1898–1947), on New Sensualism

Kobayashi Hideo (1902–83), selection (on creative imagination)

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José Martí (1853-95), “Nuestro America”

Rubén Darío (1867-1916), from “La literatura en Centroamérica” and/or another on modernismo

Western tradition

Hesiod (c. 700 BCE), from *Theogony* (on lies and truth)

Plato (427-347 BCE), from *Ion*, *Republic*

Aristotle (384-322 BCE), from *Poetics*

Horace (65-8 BCE), from *Ars Poetica*

Longinus (1stC), from *On the Sublime*

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Edmund Burke (1729-1797), from *Enquiry into the Sublime*

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Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), from *The Philosophy of Fine Art*

Germaine Necker de Stael (1766-1817), from *Literature in its Relations to Social Institutions*

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), from *Biographia Literaria*

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), from *A Defence of Poetry*

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Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), from *The Painter of Modern Life*

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” from *Culture and Anarchy*

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), from *What is Art?*

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), on the hermeneutic circle (and Schleiermacher)

Henry James (1843-1916), from “The Art of Fiction”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), “On Truth and Lying in a Nonmoral Sense”

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), from “The Critic as Artist”

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” and/or from *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), from *Course in General Linguistics*

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), from “Criteria of Negro Art”

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), from “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), from *Literature and Revolution* (on the formalists)

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), from *A Room of One’s Own*

Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984), from “Art as Technique”

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

John Crowe Ransom (1888-1974), from *The New Criticism*

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), from “Characteristics of Negro Expression”

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), from “On Language as Such and On the Language of Man”

Edmund Wilson (1895-1975), from “Marxism and Literature”

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), from “Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel”

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), selection

André Breton (1896-1966), from *Les pas perdus*

Nazım Hikmet (1901-1963), selection (letters)

Langston Hughes (1902-1967), “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), “What is Literature?”

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), from *The Second Sex*

C) Examples of TOC Divisions by Topic

This table of contents allows students to focus on key topics shared by critics and traditions across the history of criticism. Specific thematic, formal, and generic issues are alphabetically arranged, followed by those works in which each concern is emphasized. A preliminary list of these concerns is below, followed by examples of selections gathered for three topics:

allegory	divinity	genius	nature	realism
author	drama	history	novel	society
class	emotion	imagination	perception	structure
consciousness	evaluation	mimesis	poetry	text
criticism	gender	morality	reader	truth

Allegory

Rig Veda (1700-1000 BCE), Hymns to Vāc (on speech and language)
 Macrobius (c. 400), from *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*
 Bede (673–735), from *Concerning Figures and Tropes* (on allegory)
Ruth Rabbah (600-700), later classic rabbinic midrash (Neusner’s discussion)
 Ibn Rushd (1126–98, aka Averroes), selections (on mimesis and figurative language)
 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), from *Conversations with Eckermann*
 Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), from *Biographia Literaria*
 Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” and/or from *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Imagination

al Jurjani (d. 1078, Arabic), on the faculty of imagination
 William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*
 Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), from *Biographia Literaria*
 Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), from *A Defence of Poetry*
 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), from *The Poet*
 Kobayashi Hideo (1902–83), selection (on creative imagination)

The Novel

Murasaki Shikibu (978–1016?), from *The Tale of Genji*
 Jin Shengtan (1610–61), from his edition of *Shuihu zhuan* (*Water Margin*)
 Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), from *What is Art?*
 Henry James (1843-1916), from “The Art of Fiction”
 Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), from *The Essence of the Novel* (1885–86)
 Rubén Darío (1867-1916), from “La literatura en Centroamérica” and/or another on modernismo
 W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), from “Criteria of Negro Art”
 Wang Guowei (1877–1927), from *Honglou meng pinglun* (*A critique of Dream of the Red Chamber*)
 Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), from “Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel”
 Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), “What is Literature?”