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RAMAZANI

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF
ENGLISH
LITERATURE

TENTH EDITION

VOLUME F

THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

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Contents*

PREFACE TO THE TENTH EDITION xvii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS xxvii

The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

INTRODUCTION 3

TIMELINE 31

THOMAS HARDY (1840–1928) 34

On the Western Circuit 36

Hap 52

Neutral Tones 52

Drummer Hodge 53

The Darkling Thrush 53

The Ruined Maid 54

A Trampwoman's Tragedy 55

One We Knew 58

Channel Firing 59

The Convergence of the Twain 60

Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave? 62

Under the Waterfall 63

The Walk 64

The Voice 64

During Wind and Rain 65

In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations' 66

He Never Expected Much 66

JOSEPH CONRAD (1857–1924) 67

Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* 69

[The Task of the Artist] 69

Heart of Darkness 71

A. E. HOUSMAN (1859–1936) 131

Loveliest of Trees 132

When I Was One-and-Twenty 132

* Additional readings are available on the NAEL Archive (digital.wwnorton.com/englishlit10def).

To an Athlete Dying Young	133
Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff	134
Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries	135

VOICES FROM WORLD WAR I 136

RUPERT BROOKE	139
The Soldier	139
ROBERT SERVICE	140
Only a Boche	140
EDWARD THOMAS	142
Adlestrop	142
The Owl	143
Rain	143
The Cherry Trees	144
As the Team's Head Brass	144
MARY BORDEN	145
Belgium	145
The Song of the Mud	147
SIEGFRIED SASSOON	148
'They'	149
The Rear-Guard	150
The General	150
Glory of Women	151
Everyone Sang	151
On Passing the New Menin Gate	151
Memoirs of an Infantry Officer	152
[The Opening of the Battle of the Somme]	152
IVOR GURNEY	153
To His Love	154
The Silent One	155
ISAAC ROSENBERG	155
Break of Day in the Trenches	156
Louse Hunting	158
Returning, We Hear the Larks	158
Dead Man's Dump	159
WILFRED OWEN	161
Anthem for Doomed Youth	161
Apologia Pro Poemate Meo	162
Miners	163
Dulce Et Decorum Est	164
Strange Meeting	166
Futility	167
Disabled	167
From Owen's Letters to His Mother	168
Preface	170

MAY WEDDERBURN CANNAN	170
Rouen 171	
ROBERT GRAVES	172
Goodbye to All That 173	
[The Attack on High Wood] 173	
Recalling War 176	
DAVID JONES	177
In Parenthesis 178	
<i>From</i> Preface 178	
<i>From</i> Part 7: The Five Unmistakable Marks 179	
<hr/>	
MODERNIST MANIFESTOS	183
T. E. HULME: <i>From</i> Romanticism and Classicism (w. 1911–12)	185
F. S. FLINT AND EZRA POUND: Imagisme (1913)	191
A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste (1913) 192	
AN IMAGIST CLUSTER	195
T. E. Hulme: Autumn 196	
Ezra Pound: In a Station of the Metro 196	
H.D.: Oread 196	
Sea Rose 197	
BLAST	197
Long Live the Vortex! (1914) 199	
<i>Blast</i> 6 (1914) 201	
MINA LOY	204
Feminist Manifesto (w. 1914) 205	
Songs to Joannes 208	
I 208	
III 208	
XIV 208	
XXVI 209	
<hr/>	
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865–1939)	209
The Stolen Child 212	
Down by the Salley Gardens 214	
The Rose of the World 214	
The Lake Isle of Innisfree 215	
The Sorrow of Love 215	
When You Are Old 216	
Who Goes with Fergus? 216	
The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland 216	
Adam's Curse 218	
No Second Troy 219	
The Fascination of What's Difficult 219	

A Coat	219
September 1913	220
Easter, 1916	221
The Wild Swans at Coole	223
In Memory of Major Robert Gregory	223
An Irish Airman Foresees His Death	226
The Second Coming	227
A Prayer for My Daughter	227
Leda and the Swan	229
Sailing to Byzantium	230
Among School Children	231
A Dialogue of Self and Soul	233
Byzantium	234
Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop	235
Lapis Lazuli	236
Under Ben Bulbin	237
Man and the Echo	240
The Circus Animals' Desertion	241
<i>From</i> Introduction [A General Introduction for My Work]	242
E. M. FORSTER (1879–1970)	248
The Other Boat	249
VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882–1941)	270
The Mark on the Wall	272
Modern Fiction	277
Mrs. Dalloway	282
A Room of One's Own	392
[Shakespeare's Sister]	392
Professions for Women	400
JAMES JOYCE (1882–1941)	404
Araby	407
The Dead	411
A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man	440
Ulysses	602
[<i>From</i> Penelope]	604
D. H. LAWRENCE (1885–1930)	611
Odour of Chrysanthemums	611
The Horse Dealer's Daughter	626
Why the Novel Matters	637
Love on the Farm	642
Piano	643
Bavarian Gentians	644
Snake	644

How Beastly the Bourgeois Is	646
The Ship of Death	647
T. S. ELIOT (1888–1965)	651
The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock	654
Sweeney among the Nightingales	657
The Waste Land	659
The Hollow Men	673
Journey of the Magi	676
Four Quartets	677
Little Gidding	677
Tradition and the Individual Talent	684
The Metaphysical Poets	690
KATHERINE MANSFIELD (1888–1923)	697
The Daughters of the Late Colonel	698
The Garden Party	711
JEAN RHYS (1890–1979)	721
The Day They Burned the Books	722
On Not Shooting Sitting Birds	726
STEVIE SMITH (1902–1971)	728
Sunt Leones	729
Our Bog Is Dood	730
Not Waving but Drowning	731
Thoughts About the Person from Porlock	732
Pretty	733
GEORGE ORWELL (1903–1950)	734
Shooting an Elephant	735
Politics and the English Language	740
SAMUEL BECKETT (1906–1989)	749
Waiting for Godot	751
W. H. AUDEN (1907–1973)	807
Petition	808
On This Island	809
Lullaby	809
Spain	810
As I Walked Out One Evening	813
Musée des Beaux Arts	815
In Memory of W. B. Yeats	815
The Unknown Citizen	818
September 1, 1939	818

In Praise of Limestone	821
The Shield of Achilles	823
[Poetry as Memorable Speech]	825
DYLAN THOMAS (1914–1953)	827
The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower	828
The Hunchback in the Park	829
Poem in October	830
Fern Hill	832
Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night	833
VOICES FROM WORLD WAR II	834
VIRGINIA WOOLF	836
Three Guineas	836
[As a Woman I Have No Country]	836
PABLO PICASSO	841
Guernica	842
EDITH SITWELL	843
Still Falls the Rain	843
HENRY REED	844
Lessons of the War	845
1. Naming of Parts	845
KEITH DOUGLAS	846
Vergissmeinnicht	846
Aristocrats	847
NATION, RACE, AND LANGUAGE	848
CLAUDE McKAY	853
Old England	854
If We Must Die	855
LOUISE BENNETT	855
Jamaica Language	856
Dry-Foot Bwoy	857
Colonization in Reverse	858
Jamaica Oman	859
KAMAU BRATHWAITE	861
[Nation Language]	861
Calypso	866
NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O	867
Decolonising the Mind	868
<i>From The Language of African Literature</i>	868
M. NOURBESE PHILIP	872
Discourse on the Logic of Language	873

SALMAN RUSHDIE	876
[The British Indian Writer and a Dream-England] 877	
[English Is an Indian Literary Language] 880	
GRACE NICHOLS	882
Epilogue 882	
The Fat Black Woman Goes Shopping 882	
Wherever I Hang 883	
LINTON KWESI JOHNSON	885
Inglan Is a Bitch 885	
HANIF KUREISHI	887
[You Will Always Be a Paki] 887	
BERNARDINE EVARISTO	891
The Emperor's Babe 891	
Amo Amas Amat 891	
PATIENCE AGBABI	893
Prologue 894	
DALJIT NAGRA	896
A Black History of the English-Speaking Peoples 896	
<hr/>	
DORIS LESSING (1919–2013)	900
To Room Nineteen 901	
PHILIP LARKIN (1922–1985)	923
Church Going 924	
MCMXIV 925	
Talking in Bed 926	
Ambulances 926	
High Windows 927	
Sad Steps 928	
Homage to a Government 928	
The Explosion 929	
This Be The Verse 930	
Aubade 930	
NADINE GORDIMER (1923–2014)	931
The Moment before the Gun Went Off 932	
A. K. RAMANUJAN (1929–1993)	936
Self-Portrait 936	
Elements of Composition 936	
THOM GUNN (1929–2004)	938
Black Jackets 939	
My Sad Captains 940	

From the Wave	940
Still Life	941
The Missing	942
DEREK WALCOTT (1930–2017)	942
A Far Cry from Africa	943
The Schooner <i>Flight</i>	944
1 Adios, Carenage	944
The Season of Phantasmal Peace	946
Omeros	947
1.3.3 (“ <i>Mais qui ça qui rivait-’ous, Philoctete?</i> ”)	947
6.49.1–2 (“She bathed him in the brew of the root. The basin”)	948
TED HUGHES (1930–1998)	950
Wind	951
Relic	951
Pike	952
Out	953
Theology	954
Crow’s Last Stand	955
Daffodils	955
HAROLD PINTER (1930–2008)	957
The Dumb Waiter	958
CHINUA ACHEBE (1930–2013)	978
Civil Peace	980
ALICE MUNRO (b. 1931)	984
Walker Brothers Cowboy	985
GEOFFREY HILL (1932–2016)	995
In Memory of Jane Fraser	995
Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings	996
September Song	996
Broken Hierarchies	997
V. S. NAIPAUL (1932–2018)	998
One Out of Many	999
TOM STOPPARD (b. 1937)	1021
Arcadia	1022
LES MURRAY (1938–2019)	1090
Morse	1091
Corniche	1092
The Kitchen Grammars	1092

SEAMUS HEANEY (1939–2013)	1093
Digging 1095	
The Forge 1095	
The Grauballe Man 1096	
Punishment 1097	
Casualty 1099	
The Skunk 1101	
Station Island 1102	
12 (“Like a convalescent, I took the hand”) 1102	
Clearances 1104	
The Sharping Stone 1107	
Anything Can Happen 1109	
A Kite for Aibhín 1109	
MARGARET ATWOOD (b. 1939)	1110
Death by Landscape 1111	
Miss July Grows Older 1123	
J. M. COETZEE (b. 1940)	1124
<i>From</i> Waiting for the Barbarians 1126	
EAVAN BOLAND (1944–2020)	1139
Fond Memory 1139	
The Dolls Museum in Dublin 1140	
The Lost Land 1141	
SALMAN RUSHDIE (b. 1947)	1142
The Prophet’s Hair 1144	
IAN MCEWAN (b. 1948)	1154
<i>From</i> Enduring Love 1155	
ANNE CARSON (b. 1950)	1168
<i>From</i> The Glass Essay 1169	
PAUL MULDOON (b. 1951)	1173
Anseo 1174	
Meeting the British 1175	
7, Middagh Street 1176	
(“And were Yeats living at this hour”) 1176	
Milkweed and Monarch 1177	
The Loaf 1178	
Turtles 1179	
HILARY MANTEL (b. 1952)	1179
Sorry to Disturb 1181	

KAZUO ISHIGURO (b. 1954)	1192
A Village after Dark 1193	
HANIF KUREISHI (b. 1954)	1200
My Son the Fanatic 1202	
CAROL ANN DUFFY (b. 1955)	1209
Warming Her Pearls 1210	
Valentine 1211	
Medusa 1211	
Mrs Lazarus 1212	
The Christmas Truce 1213	
CARYL PHILLIPS (b. 1958)	1216
Growing Pains 1217	
SIMON ARMITAGE (b. 1963)	1221
The Tyre 1221	
Horses, M62 1223	
The English Astronaut 1224	
Beck 1225	
KIRAN DESAI (b. 1971)	1225
The Sermon in the Guava Tree 1227	
ZADIE SMITH (b. 1975)	1236
The Waiter's Wife 1238	
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE (b. 1977)	1249
Checking Out 1250	
APPENDIXES	A1
General Bibliography A3	
Literary Terminology A11	
Geographic Nomenclature A32	
MAP: London in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries A34	
British Money A35	
The British Baronage A40	
The Royal Lines of England and Great Britain A43	
Religions in Great Britain A46	

Preface to the Tenth Edition

For centuries the study of literature has occupied a central place in the Humanities curriculum. The power of great literature to reach across time and space, its exploration of the expressive potential of language, and its ability to capture the whole range of experiences from the most exalted to the everyday have made it an essential part of education. But there are significant challenges to any attempt to derive the full measure of enlightenment and pleasure from this precious resource. In a world in which distraction reigns, savoring works of literature requires quiet focus. In a society in which new media clamor for attention, attending to words on the page can prove difficult. And in a period obsessed with the present at its most instantaneous, it takes a certain effort to look at anything penned earlier than late last night.

The Norton Anthology of English Literature is designed to meet these challenges. It is deeply rewarding to enter the sensibility of a different place, to hear a new voice, to be touched by an unfamiliar era. It is critically important to escape the narrow boundaries of our immediate preoccupations and to respond with empathy to lives other than our own. It is moving, even astonishing, to feel that someone you never met is speaking directly to you. But for any of this to happen requires help. The overarching goal of the Norton Anthology—as it has been for over fifty-five years and ten editions—is to help instructors energize their classrooms, engage their students, and bring literature to life.* At a time when the Humanities are under great pressure, we are committed to facilitating the special joy that comes with encountering significant works of art.

The works anthologized in these six volumes generally form the core of courses designed to introduce students to English literature. The selections reach back to the earliest moments of literary creativity in English, when the language itself was still molten, and extend to some of the most recent experiments, when, once again, English seems remarkably fluid and open. That openness—a recurrent characteristic of a language that has never been officially regulated and that has constantly renewed itself—helps to account for the sense of freshness that characterizes the works brought together here.

One of the joys of literature in English is its spectacular abundance. Even within the geographical confines of England, Scotland, Wales, and

* For more on the help we offer and how to access it, see “Additional Resources for Instructors and Students,” p. xxiv.