This new anthology edited by the literary scholars Daphne Patai and Will Corral is definitely not the shortest way with dissenters but probably the most accessible. Instead of covering the broad range of literary theory that evolved since the end of the 19th century, the editors' intention has been to reflect the dialogue about theory that has been going on over the past decades. This discussion of the various theoretical approaches has often been omitted in anthologies of literary theory such as the recent Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism which eliminated any reference to literature out of its title, or in Julie Rivkin's and Michael Ryan's Literary Theory: An Anthology, now in its second edition. Whereas these traditional anthologies try to represent the full scale of literary theory, they fail to provide any critique of these theoretical approaches as to their value and usefulness for the interpretation of literature. The editors carefully distinguish between "a theory" as a particular approach to a literary work, "theory" as a system of concepts, and "Theory" as the dominant practice in departments of literature all over the world claiming a superior status. The major problem of Theory, the authors claim, is that instead of revitalizing literary studies, sceptical voices were either marginalised or ignored completely. To provide a collection of these 'dissenting' positions and hence to make them more easily available to students and teachers of literary theory is the purpose of this anthology.

Among the authors who contributed to this anthology are not only such well-known literary scholars as René Wellek, Frederic Crews or Richard Levin, but also philosophers such as K.A. Appiah, S. Haack, P. Lamarque, P. Livingston and R. Searle, the sociologists N. Kauppi and J.G. Merquior, historians, journalists, cultural critics and natural scientists such as A. Sokal, J. Bricmont and M. Nanda, all of whom express their growing scepticism with regard to Theory as the non-plus-ultra of literary studies. Whereas some of these authors provide historical and cultural explanations for the dominance of Theory, others question the philosophical bases of the various approaches by pointing out contradictions and inconsistencies. The essays collected in this anthology date from the 1970s to 2004 and their focus ranges from structuralism to the most recent developments in the theory of cultural studies.

The first chapter sets off by focusing on the rise of the theoretical Empire slowly taking over the place formerly ascribed to literature itself and thus, as René Wellek puts it in the title of his essay, "Destroying Literary Studies". The "practical" application of literary theory to interpretation is shown to have been declining with the rise of postmodernist theories in the essay by Morris Dickstein. Other essays in this
chapter point out the limits of literary theory while at the same time revealing its power and appeal for many literary scholars and philosophers.

The second chapter deals with the linguistic approaches evolving from the 1920s onwards, which were mostly based on Ferdinand de Saussure's writings and strongly focussed on the linguistic potential of literature. During the 1960s the notion of literature as language was put to extremes by the deconstructionalists' treatment of literature as mere "marks" on a paper and by the consequent negation of fixed meaning. By denying literature its extra-linguistic reality, post-structuralist criticism is shown to neglect literature's vital communicative powers.

In a third chapter, the consolidation of the status of Theory is ascribed to a group of predominantly French scholars, among them such prominent figures as Derrida, Bourdieu or Foucault, who still enjoy a quasi-absolute status among many of their followers. A decisive role in this rise to stardom of some of these theorists is ascribed to the French intellectual hierarchy and university policy, which has been taken over by English and American scholars together with the theory itself. The essays assembled in this chapter therefore argue for a critical position towards any rigorous application of Theory by revealing the close relation of theories with the politics of their time and country of origin.

Chapter four then draws attention to the growing professionalisation of Theory and the development of a distinctly theoretical rhetoric rarely suitable and often detached from an interpretation of literature for which it had originally been created. French culture again provides the background for the first two essays of this chapter. Thus Clara C. Park critically analyses Roland Barthes' famous essay on the death of the author while Niilo Kauppi focuses on French Literary Culture during the 1950s and 60s. The following essays in this section succeed in unmasking Theory as a play of rhetoric and speculation of which the so-called branch of "cultural studies" serves as the most prominent example.

The fifth chapter of the anthology is dedicated to the question of identity and its often contradictory treatment in the various theoretical approaches. It is here that the influence of modern politics has become most obvious. As most western countries were rethinking their positions concerning the roles of women and homosexuality, literary theory welcomed the new focus on issues of race, class and gender. The essays collected in this chapter reveal how former oppression and marginalisation serve as the major argument for the validity of an approach. However, by focussing on difference as the guiding principle of interpretation, new lines are drawn between outsiders and insiders on the "battlefield" of the humanities. At the same time, a limitation of reading on identity issues only is shown to be bound to miss most other aspects of a literary work.

The collection of essays in chapter six again criticises the general drive towards politicization among literary scholars during the last two decades of the twentieth century in the hope of increasing the appeal of literary studies. Although history has shown the consequences resulting from strong links between politics

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and intellectual life, literary scholarship has more than once taken part in the social and political discussion of the time. The essays collected in this chapter critically question the purpose of this involvement and its possible outcomes. They point out the dangers of reading texts in a rigid ideological framework while at the same time recognising the importance of political, social or moral considerations in literary criticism.

Chapter seven aims at recovering rationality for literary theory by assembling essays which focus on the misuse of scientific terminology, the negation of truth and facts based on a general scepticism about knowledge, and the resulting relativism of many theories. The mathematical physicists Jean Bricmont and Alan Sokal thus join Noam Chomsky and Meera Nanda in pointing out the dangers of the self-destructive assaults on science while Susan Haack argues for rational enquiry despite the fallibility of knowledge and the subjective nature of facts.

The essays of chapter eight finally focus on the consequences of Theory for interpretation. Their main concern is what remains after the theoretical assault on traditional interpretive tools, the negation of meaning and the undermining of the aesthetics of literature. The scenario David Bromwich paints would be the reading of culture as a "seamless general text" denying it any individual value and creative potential. Instead, as the essay by Peter Lamarque and Stein H. Olsen argues, it is the richness in human values that gives literature its meaning. By being more than a mere "text", by representing life itself, literature conveys issues of lasting human interest. To get to the core of this uniqueness of literature, it has again to be appreciated as art, something which Paisley Livingston claims to be often hindered by contemporary literary criticism.

The conclusive word in this anthology is given to the American literary scholar Wayne C. Booth's Hippocratic Oath for the Pluralist in which he sums up the issues of the previous essays by calling for plurality and integrity in literary scholarship and interpretation, insisting on a coherent but nevertheless clear terminology paired with a respect for literature as a creative achievement valuable in itself.

For the collection of material for this Anthology of Dissent the editors have drawn on their experience of teaching both literary theory and fiction in an academic environment. Daphne Patai is professor of Brazilian literature at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst while Will H. Corral is currently teaching Latin American Literature at California State University Sacramento. The result is a highly balanced and multifaceted anthology which successfully detects the problematic areas of literary theory. Its overall aim is to rescue literature from the claims of contemporary theory and to encourage the necessary debate about the purpose and achievements of literary and cultural theory for the interpretation of literary works.

Despite the valuable effort to provide a critical reader of Theory, the major problem of this attempt - long since overdue - to bridge the increasing gap between literary theory and the practice of literary criticism lies in the anthology's very conception. To confront the needs of students of literary theory, the anthology provides its readers with a well-chosen selection of critical material in order to balance Theory's claim to
absoluteness. However, by presenting criticism only, those interested in literary theory will require another (more traditional) anthology that provides the original texts to which the critical essays refer in order to be able to understand their shortcomings.

Furthermore, although this anthology is the first collection of critical positions on theory in one single volume and thus makes these essays easily available for students and teachers of literary theory alike, it collects rather old arguments which have long since been discussed during the battles about the status of theory in the 1990s. Additionally, by reducing most theories to their deficiencies, many of the essays collected in this anthology fall into the trap of that same reductiveness. A focus on the shortcomings only prevents a constructive critique and fails to estimate the stimulating potential of the various literary theories for the interpretation of literature. By denying the value of theoretical approaches in general, literary scholarship is more or less limited to close readings. However, the close analysis of literature does not and never did exclude other ways of reading. Rather on the contrary, any interpretation will profit from being based on a clear and coherent theoretical basis.

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