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Tartuffe by Molière

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PREFACE

The fundamental objectives of the seven preceding editions of *College English* have guided the editors in the preparation of the eighth: to foster awareness of the broad range of ideas and attitudes in literature; to encourage the development of skill in critical reading; to make the connection between critical reading and writing; and to provide a source of ideas for writing and discussion. The basic premise of this book is that the competent writer must also be a skillful reader, able to apprehend and articulate the ideas and forms that writers use. More selections are included here than will probably be needed in any course, allowing instructors considerable flexibility. An *Instructor's Manual* offers teaching suggestions for most of the selections.

The eighth edition of *College English* has five parts: Parts One through Four contain essays, short stories, plays, and poems; Part Five presents the ninth edition of the *Harbrace College Handbook* in its entirety. Part One consists of 44 thematically arranged essays of varying length and difficulty, of which 26 are new to this edition. Similarly, nearly half the short stories and poems are new, and the drama section has been expanded to include Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Molière's *Tartuffe*, and Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.

The ninth edition of the *Harbrace College Handbook* has been thoroughly revised and expanded, especially Section 32, which presents the steps in planning and writing an essay, and Section 33, devoted to the research paper. These two sections use sample essays to demonstrate the importance of a writer's attitude toward subject and audience, how to gather and organize ideas, write a first draft, and revise the first and second drafts. In short, the *Harbrace College Handbook* and the essay section of *College English* make up a highly useful rhetoric-reader, and the five parts of *College English*, taken as a whole, present in one volume all the materials required in a freshman English class.

It is fitting to acknowledge the work and influence of our late senior co-editor, co-author, colleague, and friend, Alton C. Morris, who between 1940 and his death in 1979 saw twenty or more titles to press, including the first seven editions of *College English*.

Thanks are due Beverly Thomas, Santa Fe Community College, Gainesville, Florida, for her sound advice on the plays in the drama section, based on her extensive study, teaching, and direction. Also thanks to Linda Williams, English teacher and curricu-

lum and materials consultant, for her advice on the table of contents. And special thanks are due Stephen C. Williams, University of North Florida at Jacksonville, for his substantial contribution to this edition. His knowledge of literature, unique teaching experience, and high editorial competence have made him a virtual co-editor. We also wish to thank the following reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions: Christine E. Anderson, Miami-Dade Community College; Eileen Evans, Western Michigan University; Oliver Evans, Western Michigan University; Marjorie M. Kaiser, University of Louisville; Virginia J. Lovett, Cumberland College; Lowell Lynde, Louisiana Tech University; Jack Rucker, Northeastern Oklahoma Agriculture and Mechanical College; and C. E. Young, Northwood Institute, Midland, Michigan. Finally, to all our editors and friends of long standing at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich who have helped shape the eight editions of *College English*, we are indebted and grateful for their advice, guidance, expertise, and concern.

B. W.
P. B.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

On Reading (from *Walden*)

No wonder that Alexander carried the Iliad with him on his expeditions in a precious casket. A written word is the choicest of relics. It is something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself. It may be translated into every language, and not only be read but actually breathed from all human lips;—not be represented on canvas or in marble only, but be carved out of the breath of life itself. The symbol of an ancient man's thought becomes a modern man's speech. Two thousand summers have imparted to the monuments of Grecian literature, as to her marbles, only a maturer golden and autumnal tint, for they have carried their own serene and celestial atmosphere into all lands to protect them against the corrosion of time. Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations.

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE

The chief purpose in reading literature is to intensify our awareness of the variety and quality of other people's perceptions of human experience; and to see how variously writers use their art to communicate them. A literary work—essay, short story, novel, play, poem—therefore possesses greatness by virtue of the power it is able to exert, through means peculiar to its particular form, over the imaginative as well as the real life of attentive readers. Literary works have a wide range of complexity. At one end of the scale is a brief expression of personal emotion, such as Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Wild Swans" (p. 600). The middle reaches are represented by the contained fervor of E. M. Forster's familiar essay "What I Believe" (p. 150) and by the buoyance of Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" (p. 254). At the other end stands such accumulated force and complexity as in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigonê* (p. 323) or Shakespeare's *King Lear* (p. 347). But however modest or grand in scope an essay, short story, novel, or play may be, readers must participate actively and eagerly by contributing from their own experience and thinking to that of the author's as recorded in his or her writing to get the full realization of the presented experience. Persons who have read much with understanding have shared in many lives, places, and events, historical or imagined. Each life or place has been vividly different from the others and each has added to the richness and perspective of these readers' sum total of experience—to the outer and inner events of their lives.

Experience, it is said, is a good but costly teacher. Direct experience is often desirable, despite its danger or cost, but not all experience can or need be participated in directly. It is possible to avoid disaster, for instance, and yet lay hold of the quality of character that disaster sometimes creates, or at least reveals. The imaginative projection of ourselves into the consciousness of others through literature yields experiences that would be too strenuous to endure without hazard in actual life, and yet these experiences can chasten and humanize us, bringing us to a better understanding of ourselves and others. The range of such indirect experiences is surprisingly large and varied—from the outrageous to the sublime—but they are most meaningful to readers when they complement their own experiences. Those who have even vaguely felt themselves beckoned by something beyond their daily lives, for example, or who regret not having greater experience and pleasure from living will find special meaning in

Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums" (p. 239), Yeat's "Down by the Salley Gardens" (p. 569), and Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (p. 579).

But literature, however closely allied to actual experience, is not an exact reproduction or transcript of lives, places, or events. That is, literature is not so much a photograph of life as it is a series of portraits or paintings. Life is so crowded with details as to seem nearly chaotic to most at times, but each work of literature is a selection from among the many details combined to suggest a coherent impression of a life, actual or historical, literary or imagined. Writers do not give masses of unassimilated experience but rather impose form upon the materials available and, through this form, suggest meanings. Organization, grammar, rhetoric, logic (sometimes a special logic peculiar to the writer or the kind of truth used), diction, and other components of writing give a sense of the meanings implied. An analysis of any one of the essays, short stories, or poems in this book will reveal how little in the way of details—of description or character or action—the author actually gives, and how much is only suggested or implied, thus leaving readers to add from their store of knowledge and experience to make full the meaning from their reading.

The central importance of the selection and organization of materials is especially well illustrated by the short story, because its brief limits require the author to select and order material with unusual care and skill. For example, when E. B. White in "The Door" (p. 236) wishes to show the disorienting effects of modern life upon human perception and psyche, he chooses a single stretch of stream-of-consciousness reaction by one character who spends a few minutes in a room of technological simulations of natural materials and objects. But selectivity goes beyond the simple limitation of character, incident, and setting; it involves also the choice of those personalities and events that most quickly and richly symbolize the theme of the story.

The meaning that emerges from organization and selection in any work of literature cannot be adequately conveyed in a summary. To perceive the full quality of the experience interpreted, we must become very sensitive to every part and its relationship, as if we were writer rather than only reader; and the comprehension finally achieved will depend in part on the scope of our own consciousness. As a critic has suggested, the effect of a work of art on the consciousness of the reader is like the effect of pebbles falling into a pool of water: the ripples always move out from the point of fall to the far edge of the pool, but some pools are larger than others. For example, in Chesterton's poem "The Donkey," (p. 575) the poet's meaning emerges only when the reader grasps the special connotation of one word, *palms*, rather than its usual denotation. Slowly we realize that the poet is not writing merely a humorous poem in which the donkey is praising himself despite his evolutionary history and unprepossessing appearance. Pondering the validity of this initial meaning, we suddenly realize that *palms* may have a special reference: to a Sabbath long ago when a religious leader entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Otherwise the poem has a different tone, one of humor and not of irony, and the donkey is only a ridiculous creature praising himself despite his ungainly and ugly being. It is a singular poem, because, unlike most poems, its full meaning turns on the full understanding the very special connotation of a single word.

Literature appeals to both the mind and the heart. Therefore, the whole consciousness of the reader must respond to it. Sometimes full comprehension of a piece of literature, for example, Maugham's "Appointment in Samarra" (p. 187), comes in the sudden insight generated by new connotation or ironic circumstances or other devices that enlarge our perception of an otherwise conventional experience. This lifts the reader to a different plane of being. Robert Frost records such an incident in the following lines:

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.*

The sudden insight communicated here yields a deep understanding, an unusual illumination, a discovery applicable to oneself. No doubt all of us have such moments of poetic or literary insight when past knowledge and present awareness come to focus upon a single point of understanding: these are among our most memorable experiences. Readers of literature may share these moments with the writer, and then determine to try to create these results in their own writing. Just as speaking and listening are directly related, because a speaker must have a listener and the listener a speaker, so the same relationship necessarily exists between a writer and reader. Creative reading at its best includes this awareness that reader and writer are inevitably linked: each must know the art of the other, and being actively and sensitively engaged in the one directly enhances competence in the other.

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