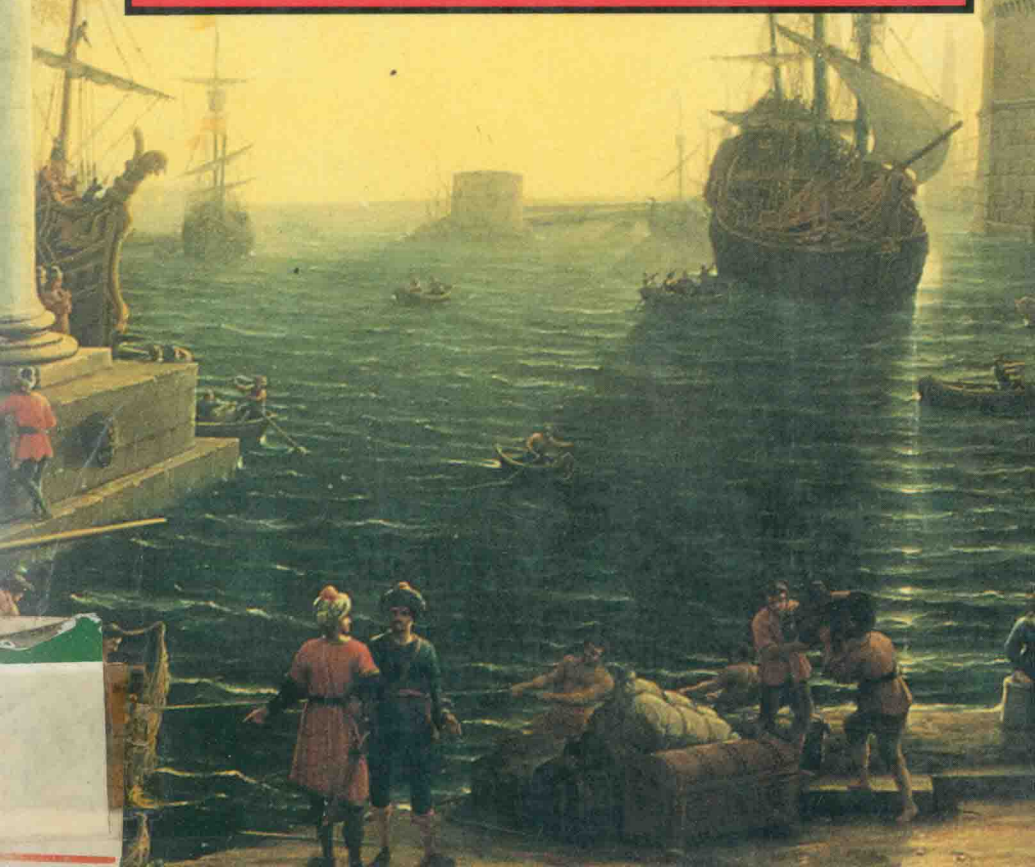


The McGraw-Hill Guide to
**WORLD
LITERATURE**

VOLUME ONE

Homer to Cervantes

**DAVID ENGEL, RUTH HOBERMAN,
AND FRANK PALMERI**



The McGraw-Hill Guide to

WORLD
LITERATURE

Volume One
Homer to Cervantes



DAVID ENGEL
RUTH HOBERMAN
FRANK PALMERI

~~McGraw-Hill Book Company~~

New York · St. Louis · San Francisco · Auckland · Bogotá
Guatemala · Hamburg · Johannesburg · Lisbon · London · Madrid
Mexico · Montreal · New Delhi · Panama · Paris · San Juan
São Paulo · Singapore · Sydney · Tokyo · Toronto

THE MCGRAW-HILL GUIDE TO WORLD LITERATURE

Copyright © 1985 by McGraw-Hill, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a data base or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 DOC DOC 8 7 6 5

ISBN 0-07-019525-0

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Engel, David, (date)

The McGraw-Hill guide to world literature.

Includes bibliographies and index.

Contents: v. 1. Homer to Cervantes.

1. Literature—History and criticism—Miscellanea.

I. Hoberman, Ruth. II. Palmeri, Frank. III. Title.

IV. Title: Guide to world literature.

PN524.E54 1985 809 85-240

ISBN 0-07-019525-0 (pbk. : v. 1)

The editors for this book were Karl Weber and Barbara Brooks; the editing supervisor was Marthe Grice.

BOOK DESIGN BY PATRICE FODERO

PREFACE

The McGraw-Hill Guide to World Literature is a reader's companion to continental European literature, intended for students, teachers, and the general reader. It appears in two volumes and follows the historical plan of most year-long college survey courses in world literature. Volume One, which covers authors from Homer through Cervantes, is divided into three parts: the Classical World, the Judeo-Christian Heritage, and the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Volume Two, from Molière through Samuel Beckett, also is divided into three parts: the Neoclassical Age, Romantic and Realist, and the Modern World. Each chapter focuses on a single author. The centerpiece of each chapter is a discussion in question and answer format of a significant text. Also included are a biographical introduction to the author and suggestions for further reading. Each literary period is introduced with an essay that discusses the historical and cultural background of the literary works.

What is unique about *The McGraw-Hill Guide* is that it is, in large part, a "how-to" book. It attempts to teach a strategy for reading and enjoying some of the classics of western literature. Such a strategy is made necessary, the authors feel, by the very idea of classic literature.

It is probably safe to say that nobody approaches a classic without some reluctance. The classics, we are told, are the best that has been thought and written. They have enriched numberless readers through the ages, and, if we will only give them a chance, we, too, will be enlarged by the experience of reading them. As a consequence, most of us are likely to approach the classics, if we do so at all, with the grim dutifulness we reserve for doing what is "good for us." And if we do not like a classic novel, play, or poem, we are likely to think there is something wrong with us. While other books have readers, the classics, it sometimes seems, have victims.

We have attempted to make the classics less intimidating by using the question and answer format. Each question is intended as an occasion for the

reader to think independently about the text under discussion. Our hope is that these questions will encourage you to encounter these texts more actively and spontaneously and to feel greater freedom to make up your own mind about them.

The best time to turn to the questions is after you have read the text once and want to consider more fully what you have read. The answers we have provided should not be thought of as the only “right” answers, but merely as one way in which the authors, as informed readers, have tried to understand and organize their own experience of these texts. We hope you will formulate your own answers to the questions, and we fully expect that you will sometimes prefer your answers to ours. Furthermore, the questions we have asked are by no means the only ones that could be asked. We expect the answers, both ours and yours, to lead to further questions, and you are very much encouraged to ask them.

The process of question, answer, and further question is our strategy for reading the classics. While our application of this method may be unique, as a method it is by no means original. It is the way in which a demanding reader will read any book that is worth a second thought. It is, however, particularly useful when applied to authors of such intimidating renown as Aristotle, Dante, Dostoevsky, and Proust, because it helps put us on a par with them. After all, an author is essentially someone who is skilled at interrogating his or her own experience, and the books that result may be considered the author’s personal answers—although these answers are often complex, provisional, and ambiguous. When we, in turn, interrogate a book, we join the author in a common interpretive enterprise. We may adopt the author’s questions as our own and test the answers the author suggests against both the experience represented in the text and our own experience of the world. Or we may find that our experience of the book troubles our own conclusions. When we cycle back and forth like this between reading the text and thoughtfully examining it, we are, like the author, moving back and forth between experience and the effort to represent it. Reading actively like this allows us to meet our authors, classic and otherwise, on common ground, where we are free to determine for ourselves the particular merits and pleasures of each.

There is one further thing that is special about the context in which we encounter classic literature. Classics are, by definition, books which successive generations of readers have found meaningful. Thus they have a history, in two senses. First, they were written in the more or less distant past, and they take their distinctive qualities from the time and place of their writing. Second, they have a history as texts. They have been appreciated and criticized through the

years; they have been influenced by earlier books and have themselves influenced later books; their reputations have risen and fallen. Both these histories are described in the biographical introductions and period headnotes in *The McGraw-Hill Guide to World Literature*. Some readers will find this information useful and interesting. Those who do not should not be dismayed. These materials are intended as adjuncts, not prerequisites, to the interpretive experience we have been eager to recommend.

D.E.

R.H.

F.P.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have assisted us in the preparation of this book for publication. In particular, we would like to express our thanks to three individuals. We are grateful to Israel Burshatin for his contribution of the chapter on *The Song of Roland*. Our thanks to Mihoko Suzuki for valuable suggestions on a number of chapters. Finally, we wish to thank Karl Weber for his thorough and helpful editing of the manuscript.

D.E.

R.H.

F.P.

CONTENTS

PART ONE	The Classical World	1
	Introduction	3
Chapter 1	Homer	7
Chapter 2	Aeschylus	36
Chapter 3	Sophocles	50
Chapter 4	Euripides	64
Chapter 5	Aristophanes	80
Chapter 6	Plato	93
Chapter 7	Aristotle	118
Chapter 8	Virgil	132
<hr/>		
PART TWO	The Judeo-Christian Heritage	149
	Introduction	151
Chapter 9	The Book of Genesis	155
Chapter 10	The Gospel According to Matthew	172
Chapter 11	St. Augustine	186
<hr/>		
PART THREE	The Middle Ages and the Renaissance	201
	Introduction	203
Chapter 12	<i>The Song of Roland</i>	209
Chapter 13	Dante	222
Chapter 14	Boccaccio	240
Chapter 15	Petrarch	256
Chapter 16	Rabelais	272
Chapter 17	Montaigne	288
Chapter 18	Cervantes	301
<hr/>		
	INDEX	315

Part One

THE CLASSICAL WORLD





I N T R O D U C T I O N

The cultural achievements of ancient Greece and Rome, the “classical world,” have formed the basis for much of western civilization’s science, philosophy, literature, architecture, government, and history. To speak of a single classical world, however, is misleading. Ancient Greece and Rome were geographically and chronologically distinct: Greece’s greatest thinkers lived between the eighth and fourth centuries B.C., while Rome’s cultural peak spanned the two centuries just before and after the time of Christ. Greek and Roman thinkers worked in different languages and had vastly different temperaments and aims. But from the Renaissance until the twentieth century, Greek and Roman works were together known as the “classics”—the term suggesting timeless significance and a relatively coherent world view.

To the Renaissance humanists, what was most striking about ancient learning was its practicality. The Greeks (and the Romans, who followed them in this, as in architecture, sculpture, and literature) sought to educate the “whole man,” physically and mentally, with a view toward his effective functioning in society. Their emphasis, as their literature suggests, was on the fullest and best life possible and on the inherent dignity of man. Epic and drama alike exalt the highest of human achievements, while they recognize the limits set by human frailty and fate. In Akhilleus, human prowess reaches incredible proportions; in Oedipus, human suffering; in Aeneas, the human sense of responsibility. All three heroes, larger than life though they are, are entirely human, and those who learn from them learn how to act rightly in human affairs.

If there is any underlying unity in classical culture, it lies in this respect for and concern with human dignity and action. Both oral and written epic depict a courageous man facing great difficulties, even choosing glorious death, at times, over life. But never is life itself devalued. Hektor playing with his child as he visits with Andromache; Odysseus yearning for home; Aeneas mourning Troy with "tears for passing things"—all suggest the deepest appreciation of human pleasures and the deepest understanding of what their loss means. The fact that, for all their love of life, these epic heroes nonetheless risk death only underscores the tremendous grandeur to which man can aspire.

Related to the idea of man's potential greatness was an assumption that he was essentially outward-directed: that action, not contemplation, was man's aim and impulse, and that he acted in relation to a community, not in solitude. Similarly, ancient epic and drama were meant to be shared. Based on legends well known to the community, they were presented in public for the public good: to establish a shared past and to reaffirm shared values. The Greek glorification of individual prowess and concern for communal survival sometimes clashed, as when Akhilleus's wrath endangers the entire Greek army; the Romans were more definitive in valuing social order above individuality. But for both peoples the central question asked by literature is, how is man to live?

The use of the term "man" here is not accidental; while powerful female figures appear in classical drama and epic, the average Greek or Roman woman had little impact on her world. Her role was entirely domestic and, in many ways, she had fewer rights than the slaves. The high value placed on male friendship in classical literature (in Plato, for example, as well as in Homer) is in part the result of the low status accorded women: denied education or experience of the world, they were not considered capable of providing companionship to their husbands. A wife's role was essentially that of bedmate and domestic servant. Even such prominent figures in classical literature as Dido (who is, after all, Queen of Carthage) and Penelope (who does manage to fend off her unwelcome suitors for twenty years) are seen primarily in relation to men, as temptation or goal, rather than in their own right.

If the Greek epic was concerned with man's greatness, Greek drama was perhaps more concerned with his limitations. The famous sayings engraved at Delphi—"Know thyself" and "In all things moderation"—suggested that man needed chastening. Plays like the *Oedipus* of Sophocles warn that human actions are not always fully understood and that the greatest of men had better be careful, since no man can always control what happens to him. But even in *Oedipus*, the emphasis is not on how to understand the unknowable, but on

how to live without knowing. What matters, in other words, is still how man chooses to live.

With the defeat of Athens by Sparta in 404 B.C. came the end of what is known as the Golden Age of Athens, the period during which that city's democratic government and cultural achievements laid much of the groundwork for western civilization. The work of Plato and Aristotle was still to come, but as a political power Greece was doomed; it fell in 338 B.C. to Philip of Macedon, was then ruled by his son Alexander the Great, and gradually lost its remaining military power until it was absorbed by Rome in 146 B.C.

In absorbing Greece, Rome absorbed the source of its own cultural achievements, which were in large part modeled on Greek sculpture, architecture, and epic. But Rome's talents and values differed from those of Athens; Roman culture placed the greatest value on self-control and the subjugation of personal desire to the public good. Rome's golden age was not a democracy but an empire, ruled by Augustus Caesar from 30 B.C. to A.D. 14. Virgil's epic and Seneca's drama provide a more psychologized view of man than that of the Greeks, and their message is that man's turbulent emotional life must be carefully controlled, not acted out.

Rome's version of "classicism" is closer in some ways to our own. Certainly Aeneas's thoughtfulness, his tendency to look back to better days, his awareness of a long history preceding him and defining his world, have more in common with the outlook of modern man than Akhilleus's anger or even Odysseus's single-minded determination to go home. In fact, the Romans' attitude toward Greek culture resembles our attitude toward the classical world as a whole. They found in a past body of work impressive artistic standards against which to measure their own achievement and a kind of vocabulary—of characters, of deeds, of situations, as well as of literary forms—which they could adapt to their own needs and values.

The achievements of the classical world have been respected for so long that they have become an intrinsic part of our culture, so much so that the word "classical" has come to describe any work of lasting significance. It also suggests work modeled on previously defined standards of excellence. Greek epic, philosophy, history, and science; and Roman art, history, and rhetoric still matter to us in two ways: in terms of their impact on the reader, and as models for artistic and intellectual emulation.



C H A P T E R 1

HOMER

The Homeric Question

Homer is the name traditionally given to the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Virtually nothing is known about him, including whether he existed at all, for many scholars contend that “Homer” was, in fact, two poets or more, who composed the epics over a space of many years. In the past, Homer was said to have been from Chios, in Ionia, on the western side of Asia Minor, though many cities in the Greek world claimed his birth. Today scholars believe that he came from either Aiolia or Ionia, both on the coast of Asia Minor, since the language of the poems is a combination of Aiolian and Ionian dialects, an artificial, literary mixture that seems never to have been spoken, but may have been the standard medium for oral poetry.

Tradition also makes Homer blind, perhaps because Demodokos, the bard described in the eighth book of the *Odyssey*, is blind. Like Demodokos, he may well have sung at feasts, accompanied by his harp, a glass of wine by his side:

Pontonoos fixed a studded chair for him
hard by a pillar amid the banqueters,
hanging the taut harp from a peg above him,
and guided up his hands upon the strings;
placed a bread basket at his side, and poured
wine in a cup, that he might drink his fill.
Now each man's hand went out upon the banquet.

In time, when hunger and thirst were turned away,
 the Muse brought to the minstrel's mind a song
 of heroes whose great fame rang under heaven . . . *

Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* deal with events related to the Trojan War, a conflict which may or may not have actually occurred. It is known that a walled city on the site of the Homeric Troy was destroyed by fire in the late thirteenth century B.C., lending some historic support to the legend. How closely the story related by Homer corresponds to historic fact is unknown; however, it seems likely that many distortions, additions, and omissions must have occurred as historic events were transformed into poetry.

It is generally agreed that the *Odyssey* was composed later than the *Iliad*, for it is the more complex poem, apparently less traditional in form and content; but exactly when either poem was created remains uncertain. Linguistic characteristics and references to tools and customs point to the latter half of the eighth century B.C. as the most probable time of their composition. The poems were almost certainly composed orally and written down only after the fact—possibly by Homer, but more probably by someone else a bit later, for from about 1200 to 800 B.C. the Greeks were without an alphabetic writing system. The two epics, then, were probably put into their present form about four or five hundred years after the historic events on which they are based. Homer was about as close in time to his material as we are to Columbus. And, like the story of the discovery and settling of America, the story of Troy had become legendary—a story known to an entire culture, exemplifying its values and providing a fertile source for both literature and art.

The Oral Tradition

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, then, are products of a nonliterate culture, which were transcribed when the Greeks adopted a writing system. But how can a poem be composed when there is no such thing as writing? The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, unlike such later epics as the Latin *Aeneid* or the Renaissance poetry of Tasso, Spenser, and Milton, are *oral* epics. They originated in live performances, sung to musical accompaniment before a listening audience. The poems were partly memorized and partly improvised, their content, form, and style determined in large part by the circumstances attending their composition.

Oral composition posed peculiar literary problems. The poet had to keep

*Translated by Robert Fitzgerald, New York, Anchor Press, 1963. All references to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in this chapter are to the Fitzgerald translations.

the audience's attention and ensure their understanding without the help of a written text. The poet had to create such new variations on familiar legendary material as would interest listeners without either overtaking their powers of concentration or violating the ethical and moral norms of the epic world. And the verses had to fit the metrical form of the dactylic hexameter, a flexible but regular pattern of long and short syllables with six feet to a line. (Note, incidentally, that the meters of Greek poetry are not based on patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables, as is natural in English poetry, but on patterns of long and short vowels. Thus, no English-language equivalent of the Greek hexameter can fully convey the rhythmic effects of the original.)

Modern scholars have discovered some of the literary techniques that enabled the Greek bard to perform the remarkable feats of oral composition embodied in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It was Milman Parry, an American scholar, who, in the early twentieth century, first pointed out how large a part the demands of oral composition had played in shaping the Homeric epics. Parry and his followers studied the characteristics of the oral epics still being recited in parts of eastern Europe and Asia and found that Serbian poet-singers used certain techniques also apparently used by Homer. These poet-singers could create lengthy poems on the spot by putting together previously memorized segments and formulas. Certain typical heroic actions could be described in set ways, as is the case with the donning of armor, for example, in the *Iliad*. A particular character might be accompanied by the same description each time he or she appeared. While the selection and arrangement of these ready-made elements might be improvised, much of the poem would consist of repeated material. About one-fifth of the lines of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* consist of such repeated sentences and phrases.

Parry noted, too, that Homer used *epithets*, phrases briefly characterizing or describing a person or thing, as a way of filling out the verses within the confines of the meter. Each god, goddess, or mortal character had a set of stock epithets, each with its own pattern of long and short syllables. Depending on the type of metrical unit he needed to complete his verse, the poet might decide to call Odysseus, for example, *brilliant*, or *resourceful*, or *long-suffering*. Such formulas allowed the bard to create a metrically regular poem even as he sang.

These formulas also rooted the poem in an ongoing tradition of oral poetry in a way that might seem strange at first to the twentieth-century reader. The ancient Greek poet-singer, unlike the modern artist, did not value originality. The stories the poet-singer told came from legends familiar to everyone, the formulas from a repertoire established by tradition. An individual poet's contribution would lie in selection, accumulation, variation, and arrangement,