

MASTERS OF
AMERICAN
LITERATURE



VOLUME TWO



EDITORS

Leon Edel, New York University

Thomas H. Johnson, The Lawrenceville School

Sherman Paul, The University of Illinois

Claude Simpson, The Ohio State University

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*Whitman, Dickinson, Twain, Adams, James,
Crane, O'Neill, Frost, Eliot, Faulkner*



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PREFATORY NOTE

THIS BOOK OFFERS EXTENSIVE SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF eighteen master authors of our native tradition. Like Houghton Mifflin's companion *Masters of British Literature*, it reflects in its plan three convictions which are coming to be increasingly accepted by American teachers of literature: that the student is better introduced to their subject through close familiarity with a few writers than through superficial acquaintance with many, that he will profit more from regarding the works he reads to be studied and enjoyed on their own terms than he will from viewing them as illustrations of the course of literary or cultural history, and that at the same time he must have a competent knowledge of the historical setting from which these authors and their works emerged if he is to see them as they really are.

In choosing authors up to the present century, the editors were of one mind, even though Edward Taylor here appears for the first time in an anthology of major American writers. Our own age offered more difficult problems of choice, but Frost and Eliot, O'Neill and Faulkner were at length selected as its greatest and most representative figures. It should be mentioned, however, that the claims of Hemingway had to be dismissed without a hearing, since copyright restrictions precluded the possibility of representing him adequately.

The task of making selections from the novelists was simplified by the assumption that teachers would choose to supplement this book by a choice from among the classic American novels available in several well-edited and inexpensive paperback series. So Hawthorne and Melville are represented by the shorter narratives which best complement *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*. Similarly several of the selections from Mark Twain are relevant to *Huckleberry Finn*. The excerpts from his *Autobiography* concern Twain's boyhood memories of Hannibal. The chapters from *Life on the Mississippi* include the celebrated "raftsmen" passage which Twain removed from his novel along with the account of the Watkins-Darnell feud, an analogue to the Shepherdson-Grangerford episode in *Huckleberry Finn*. Such stories as *Daisy Miller*, in which the "international theme" is explored, and "The Pupil," with its delicate probing of human relationships, prepare the student for *The Portrait of a Lady* and James's other longer fictions. With Faulkner "Red Leaves" leads to "The Bear" and "That Evening Sun" to *The Sound and the Fury*, while "My Grandmother Millard" gives the student a sense of the Civil War South and prepares him for the legendary Snopeses.

Our remaining writers of fiction concerned themselves primarily with the short story. The tales by Poe illustrate his main themes and interests in familiar and unfamiliar works. Crane's major shorter narratives are

here as well as an early Bowery piece and a Civil War tale. Again it is possible to supplement with a paperback *Red Badge of Courage*.

Except for T. S. Eliot, in choosing from whose verse we have been restricted, like other editors, to a thousand lines, the poets are represented with unusual fullness. The several phases of Edward Taylor's work are exemplified. All of Poe's best poems are here. The best and most significant poems of Whitman are given in the order of their first appearance in the successive editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Thus the student is enabled to comprehend Whitman's development as well as his variety. Not only do we provide the best of Emily Dickinson but also far more of her poems than are available in trustworthy texts in any other volume. The many moods and poetic forms that have marked Frost's long career are generously sampled, and his notable essay on the art of poetry, "The Figure a Poem Makes," is included.

Desire Under the Elms was chosen from the works of O'Neill, our one dramatist, because it embodies better than any other piece the theme of conflict within the family basic to *Mourning Becomes Electra* and to his posthumous plays.

The remaining writers of prose have been presented not only through familiar, indeed inevitable, selections but also through some fresh and unhackneyed passages. Over against Franklin, the type of the wisely worldly man and a famous American worthy, is placed Edwards, a deeply understanding philosopher. With Adams the stress is on his ability to think historically and his grace in reviving past relationships. Emerson and Thoreau are too varied to be adequately displayed in terms of a single theme. Hence the development of their thought has been emphasized.

Particular care has been taken to provide the text most appropriate to each author. In the cases of Edward Taylor and Emily Dickinson, whose work was published posthumously, we have used the definitive texts established from the manuscripts by Mr. Johnson. Mark Twain is printed from first-edition texts throughout, since later editions incorporate many minor unauthorized changes. Elsewhere the usual practice has been to follow the last text which the author can be presumed to have seen.

The editors have written illuminating essays introducing the work of each author. Headnotes and discreet annotation have been provided where necessary. (Contrary to recent editorial fashion, Mr. Edel has elected to leave *The Waste Land* unannotated, a decision which Eliot would presumably approve.) Each volume concludes with a highly selective bibliography. It may also be noted that certain selections from Eliot and Faulkner parallel these authors' recorded readings from their own works, a hint which students and perhaps some instructors may wish to follow up.

It should be added that Hawthorne, James, O'Neill, Eliot, and Faulkner were edited by Mr. Edel; Edwards, Taylor, Franklin, Emily Dickinson, and Adams by Mr. Johnson; Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, and Whitman by Mr. Paul; and Poe, Crane, Twain, and Frost by Mr. Simpson.

GORDON N. RAY

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WALT WHITMAN

1819-1892

NO OTHER POET HAS BEEN SO GREAT A CENTER OF CONTROVERSY IN America as Whitman has. From the very beginning he was troublesome to the genteel critics who were offended by his "egotism," the unorthodoxies of his form, and his open treatment of sex. E. P. Whipple said that Whitman "had every leaf but the fig leaf," and E. C. Stedman spoke of his "repulsive exhibitionism" and his trespassing on "the consummate processes of nature." At the same time, Whitman had his champions: William O'Connor, who in *The Good Gray Poet, A Vindication* (1866) introduced Whitman-the-Messiah, and John Burroughs and Dr. Maurice Bucke, who, with Whitman's help, wrote his first biographies. Moreover, to later critics who were reassessing American literature before and after World War I, Whitman, because of his frankness, realism, and the democratic mission he had proposed for the writer, became a culture-hero and the starting point of the modern American literary tradition. Van Wyck Brooks, for example, wrote in *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915) that Whitman was the poet who gave the "nation a certain focal centre in the consciousness of its own character." And in *The Golden Day* (1926), Lewis Mumford wrote that "one might remove Longfellow without changing a single possibility of American life; had Whitman died in the cradle, however, the possibilities of American life would have been definitely impoverished. He created a new pattern of experience and character. The work he conceived still remains to be done: the America he evoked does not as yet exist." More recently, because of extensive scholarship, especially that of Emory Holloway, C. J. Furness, and F. O. Matthiessen in America, and Jean Catel and Frederick Schyberg in Europe, the contours of Whitman's life and art have been better understood; and in Gay Wilson Allen's definitive critical biography, *The Solitary Singer* (1955), the poet has finally been domesticated and normalized. And yet, as a culture-hero, Whitman still raises voices: in the inter-



est of poetic freedom and renewal in our time, William Carlos Williams has put Whitman against T. S. Eliot and claimed that "free verse was his great idea"; and others, reacting against Whitman's democratic program, like Richard Chase in *Walt Whitman Reconsidered* (1955), have stripped Whitman of his "poses" and reduced him to a comic poet and elegist.

When one considers that Whitman had to print and sell his own poems and often review them, that he lost a governmental clerkship because of his poetry, and that though unpopular and little read, *Leaves of Grass* grew in edition after edition, one can grant Whitman the pride with which he spoke of his "unkillable work!" But apart from the assertiveness and the freedom of the form, was there so much that was new to the reader in 1855 who had read Emerson or even periodicals like the *Democratic Review*? Wasn't the shock mainly one of recognition, that here at last was the actual fulfillment of what Emerson had called for, the native, original literature that critics and journalists had heralded for a generation? Whitman had found a form in which to realize the professed ideas of his age, but perhaps the fact that he had assumed the role of prophet of democracy and had begun to "tally" American experience in his own personality was an affront; an affront, because in his bold lines and in his identification with the common man the aspirations of democracy were put on record, gathered into a personality which was to be its witness and justification—and model.

Like Emerson, who, he said, had brought his simmering genius to a boil, Whitman subscribed to the faith in the divinity and infinitude of man. He proclaimed the individual—"One's-self I sing, a simple separate person"—and most important to him was "the great pride of man in himself." He too struck up for a new world, and envisaged the American, born anew, with no shackles, working out his destiny by facing the universe freshly. And he too knew something of that "history" which "is folded, folded inward and inward again, in the single word I." In fact, his poems were about the self (or the soul) and its relations to matter. Somehow the self of Emerson's essays came alive in Whitman's poems and began to speak "without check." This was the crudeness of which even Emerson and Thoreau spoke. And to many, undoubtedly, the lack of reticence was too much, not only on grounds of taste, but, one suspects, because the lack of reticence—the very daring of his frankness—implied as well a lack of qualification in the expression of one's democratic sentiments.

For Whitman carried the democratization of life to its deepest citadel—the personality. This was his achievement. Much of his program was announced in the inscription he added to *Leaves of Grass* in 1867, the opening poem of all subsequent editions:

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.