

THE PRACTICAL IMAGINATION

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS

REVISED COMPACT EDITION (PART ONE)

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PREFACE



In revising *The Practical Imagination* for this new and compact edition, we have kept most of the original features and added others. The new anthology is lighter, more attractive, and easier to handle—and at the same time more effective as a tool for teaching, both because of our own second thoughts and the helpful suggestions of users.

As we observe recent trends toward “practical” education in our colleges and universities—which means, more often than not, narrowly vocational education—it seems to us more important than ever to introduce students to the idea that the imagination is practical, and that literature is uniquely valuable in its capacity to widen vision and clarify perspectives. To support this point, we have made this book both an anthology and an introduction to literature. As an anthology, it includes many forms and varieties of fiction, poetry, and drama. As an introduction to literary study, it moves from simple to more subtle and complex elements. At each step of the way, explanations, discussions, and questions inform students of the principles under consideration and help them to engage in imaginative and intellectual dialogue with the literary texts. Each section begins with an introduction to the genre, broadly surveying the ground to be covered. At the end of the first chapter of the fiction section, we provide students with a few brief suggestions to help them frame their thoughts into essays. At the end of the book, we provide a glossary as a ready reference to terminology.

Our generic survey introducing fiction emphasizes the relationship between oral and written traditions. In Chapter 1, “The Narrative Impulse,” we begin with the oral tale—“Rumpelstiltskin” and “Stone Soup”—and examine the ways the ancient theme of wish-fulfillment has been shaped by three sophisticated mod-

ern storytellers, ending with the narrative complexities of Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner." In the next three chapters, we explore narrative perspective, discussing concepts much more fully in this edition than in the earlier one, and enriching the discussion with four newly selected stories: Alice Munro's "An Ounce of Cure," George Garrett's "King of the Mountain," Gail Godwin's "A Sorrowful Woman," and Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants." Chapters 5 and 6, divisions new to this edition, treat "Character" and "Setting," with Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl," E. L. Doctorow's "The Hunter," and John Cheever's "The Swimmer" newly selected as examples for discussion. Chapter 7 discusses "Metaphor, Symbol, Allegory," and includes for the first time Ann Beattie's "Janus." In Chapter 8, "Theme," we now begin with Margaret Atwood's "When It Happens" and end with Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy." As before, the last chapter, "Longer Fiction," includes Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and Conrad's "The Secret Sharer," but with questions newly added to each and diagrams supplied to assist students toward understanding the Conrad story.

Poetry follows fiction because beginning students generally do best when armed with a confidence, a vocabulary, and a strategy of criticism won through successful study of short stories. Nevertheless, because poetry still strikes some as an alien form, we begin slowly, with assistance in definition, discussion, and footnotes. After the introductory overview, we divide the field into "lyric" and "narrative," before considering the elements of dramatic situation and character fundamental to poetry. Then comes a chapter on language, followed by one on images, metaphors, and symbols. In Chapter 5, we explore sound patterns, including rhyme and meter, and in Chapter 6 the traditional forms of ballad, sonnet, villanelle, and sestina. Chapter 7, much expanded from the earlier edition, introduces the forms of free verse, with examples newly added from Walt Whitman, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Margaret Atwood, and A. R. Ammons. In Chapter 8, our discussion of time and place includes two new poems, Walt Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus." In Chapter 9, poems are grouped according to timeless human themes. The last chapter, "Poems for Study," presents chronologically some valuable poems not otherwise represented.

Our plays represent the Western tradition, from the Greeks to the present. We begin with tragedy and comedy, with Sophocles, Shakespeare, Aristophanes, and Congreve as examples against which students may measure the plays from later times. A chapter on "Social Drama" directs attention to theme. In "Plays for Study," we print and discuss Beckett's *Not I* as a paradigm of how difficulties in interpretation may be met and surmounted. We conclude our consideration of drama with two modern masterpieces, Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Of the eleven plays that now constitute our introduction to drama, four are new to this edition: *Hamlet*, *The Way of the World*, *Suppressed Desires*, and *The Glass Menagerie*.

Finally, at the request of users of the earlier edition, we have added to this one a complete glossary, drawn from *The Harper Handbook to Literature* and cross-referenced to the pages in the text where the terms are most fully treated.

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THE PRACTICAL IMAGINATION

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