

POETRY

An Introduction

Ruth Miller
Robert A. Greenberg

Poetry

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To T.V.B.

Preface

This book provides an introduction to the elements of poetry, formulates a series of contexts for the interpretation of poems, and offers a substantial anthology. Our purpose throughout is to enable students to read poems with understanding and pleasure and to provide them with a basic vocabulary for analyzing and talking about poems.

Part One comprises a full discussion of the elements of poetry. After a brief opening chapter, we introduce the basic concepts of speaker or persona, setting, subject, and theme and then progress from the particular uses of language and devices of prosody to more general considerations of structure, genre, and tone. The inclusion of a chapter on genre is perhaps unusual in an introductory book on poetry, but we think it is important for the student to see how poems often depend for a part of their meaning on the ways in which they are related to a particular tradition. The larger sense of Part One is of the interplay of all the elements; we repeatedly emphasize the integrative, organic nature of the poem. As much as possible we have avoided the abstract, seeking always to keep particular poems in the forefront of our discussion.

Part Two, "Perspectives," shows how poems may be illuminated when they are considered from various, often complementary, points of view. Its seven chapters take up successively the perspectives of biography, history, society, philosophy, religion, psychology, and myth. Our interest here is in the kinds of new insights and perceptions, the fresh meanings and implications, each perspective makes possible. We

are deliberately pluralistic in our treatment, favoring no one approach over another, although we do emphasize that any single approach has its limitations and we point these out as they arise in the course of our discussions. Our aim is to set forth the premises of each approach, to show it in practice, and thus to generate the kind of exciting discussion that results when diverse points of view collide in the give and take of the classroom.

About 350 poems are included in the discussions and exercises in Parts One and Two. Part Three, the anthology, provides some 150 additional poems for further exploration, presented without editorial comment but with occasional glosses and explanatory footnotes. Taken all together, the nearly 500 poems in this book represent every major style, voice, and genre in English and American poetry, beginning with Cædmon and Chaucer and extending to poets whose first significant work has appeared within the past two decades. As a glance through the index of authors and titles will show, many poets are represented by several poems, and quite a few are represented by ten or more. Among the poets who could be studied in some depth are Auden, Blake, Cummings, Dickinson, Donne, Frost, Hardy, Herbert, Hopkins, Housman, Keats, Shakespeare, Whitman, Williams, Wordsworth, and Yeats. Poems in translation appear throughout the volume.

The book incorporates a number of other features that should be mentioned here. A brief chapter, "Writing About Poetry," though not extensive, should be enough to enable students to get started on the kinds of papers they are most likely to be assigned. The listings we have called "Some Groupings of Poems for Comparison" should prove useful not only as a source of writing topics but also generally as a stimulant to exploration and classroom discussion. We especially enjoyed gathering the photographs for "A Gallery of Poets" and believe that students will find it fascinating to see some of the poets who wrote the poems. The "Index of Terms" lists alphabetically all of the important literary terms used in the text, with a reference to the page where each is first introduced and defined.

Except in a few instances—e.g., "Westron Wynde"—where we wanted to give students a sense of the older text, we have modernized spelling and punctuation.

We wish to express our indebtedness to Thomas Broadbent and Nancy Perry of St. Martin's Press, whose skills and guidance have been decisive throughout the planning and evolution of this book.

R. M.
R. A. G.

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