

Literature

Reading Fiction, Poetry,
Drama, and the Essay

Second Edition



Robert DiYanni

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Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and the Essay



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Preface



Literature presents an approach to literary works that emphasizes reading as an active enterprise involving thought and feeling. It encourages students to value their emotional reactions and their previous experience with life and with language. Students are introduced to interpretation through illustrated discussions of the elements of literature. They are also invited to consider why they respond as they do and how their responses change during subsequent readings of a work; they are asked, in short, to relate their experience in reading literature to their experience in living. They are encouraged to see literature as a significant reflection of life and an imaginative extension of its possibilities.

From first page to last, *Literature* is designed to involve students in the twin acts of reading and analysis. Each of the four genres is introduced by a three-part explanatory overview of the reading process. The introductions are organized around the approach to texts outlined in Robert Scholes's *Textual Power* (Yale University Press, 1985), modified and adapted to my own approach to teaching literature. Scholes identifies three aspects of literary response: reading, interpretation, and criticism. The three-part structure of the introductions breaks down as follows:

- the experience of literature
- the interpretation of literature
- the evaluation of literature

Our *experience* of literature concerns our impressions of a work, especially our subjective impressions and emotional responses. Interpretation involves more intellectual and analytical thinking. And the *evaluation* of literature involves an assessment of aesthetic distinction along with a consideration of a work's social, moral, and cultural values.

Paralleling this schema for the introductory genre discussions is a similarly organized introduction to writing about literature. This chapter, which concludes the book, describes how to apply and adapt the approaches presented in the genre introductions. The writing chapter includes examples of student writing, sample topics, documentation procedures, and a general review of the writing process. Additional writing topics (more than a hundred of them) appear in the four chapters devoted to approaching literary works, subtitled "Guides for Reading and Suggestions for Writing."

For each of the genre introductions, I have also provided a separate illustration of "the act of reading." The fiction section includes an interpolated reading of Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." The poetry section offers a set of annotations for Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz." The drama section provides a set of questions in response to the opening scene of Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*. And the essay section presents an imaginary dialogue with Gretel Ehrlich, the author of "About Men." Taken together, the four demonstrations suggest specific strategies for the critical reading of literary works.

In addition to emphasizing the subjective, analytical, and evaluative aspects of reading literature, *Literature* introduces the traditional elements through discussions tied to works in each of the four genres: fiction, poetry, drama, and essay. Throughout these discussions, students are asked to return to certain works and reconsider them from different perspectives. In Chapter 8, Elements of Poetry, for example, students are encouraged to reread particular poems as they study a different element or technique. The repetition reinforces the recursive aspect of reading described in the opening chapters on each genre and demonstrates the need to reread literary works for the fullest possible intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic enjoyment.

The poetry section of *Literature* attempts to broaden the study of the genre with two special features: a substantial number of poems in translation and a special selection of poetic transformations. In addition to more than three hundred English and American poems, this edition of *Literature* includes more than thirty-five poems translated from eight languages. Goethe and Rilke, Borges and Lorca, Mandelstam and Akhmatova are among the poets represented. Included in Chapter 10, Transformations, are alternative translations of poems by Rilke, Jimenez, and Apollinaire. Also included in this chapter are ways in which poets have modified their own and other artists' work by means of revision, parody, and adaptation. Of particular interest are the transformations from one genre to another: poems recast as songs and poems inspired by paintings.

Finally, a word about the choice of works. The classic and contemporary selections presented reflect a wide range of styles, voices, subjects, and points of view. Complex and challenging works appear alongside more readily approach-

able and accessible ones. *Literature*, moreover, contains both types of works in sufficient variety for instructors to assign the more accessible ones for students to read and write about on their own, while reserving the more ambitious selections for class discussion.

Changes in This Edition

This second edition of *Literature* features three significant changes: (1) the refined and expanded process-of-reading chapters for each genre; (2) an expanded and reworked chapter on writing about literature; (3) fresh selections of works for the four genre anthologies.

The new selections include a dozen stories, among them works by Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Bobbie Ann Mason, Yukio Mishima, Stephen Crane, Franz Kafka, and Philip Roth. Two novellas are included this time rather than one. Complementing Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych" is Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." The poetry anthology has been expanded to include a number of longer classic narrative poems, such as Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* (in modern translation), Marie de France's *The Nightingale*, Poe's *The Raven*, and Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*, along with the fresh contemporary voices of Eavan Boland, Lucille Clifton, Mary Oliver, Kathleen Iddings, Cathy Appel, and Kraft Rompf. New selections in the Poems and Paintings section are complemented by reproductions of works by Sandro Botticelli and Giotto di Bondone. A new poetry unit has been added as well: Responses: Point-Counterpoint. Grouped here are poems that respond to and comment on earlier works. Additional changes in the poetry anthology account for approximately seventy-five poems new to this edition.

The drama anthology includes four new twentieth-century plays: Glaspell's *Trifles*, Yeats's *Purgatory*, Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, and Luce's *Slam the Door Softly*. Two twentieth-century plays have been retained from the first edition: Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*. Plays from earlier eras, from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to Ionesco's *The Lesson*, have been retained, along with their historical introductions. Two selections have been added to the Essay anthology: Montaigne's "Of Repentance" and Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman."

Literature represents the cooperative efforts of many people. Steve Pensinger—publisher, editor, and friend—encouraged me to develop the book and supported my work generously and graciously. His associates at Random House and McGraw-Hill brought enthusiasm and intelligence to their work on the project. Thanks in particular to Ed Maluf, Elisa Turner, Cynthia Ward, Suzanne Thibodeau, Lorraine Hohman, Stacey Alexander, Sheila Anderson, David Morris, and Jeannine Ciliotta, project editor for the second edition. And thanks especially to Carolyn Viola-John, who shepherded the first edition through the intricacies of production and who, as copyeditor for both editions, improved every page she touched, strengthening the book immeasurably.

From readers of various drafts of the manuscript I received thoughtful criticism along with helpful suggestions for improvement. Thanks to the following readers: Stephen Behrendt, Barbara Belson, Jon Burton, Cornelius Cronin, Charles Crow, Lois Cuddy, Robert Dell, Alan Ehmann, Ruth Eisenberg, Peter Evarts, Chris Farris, Paula Feldman, Elizabeth Flynn, Robert Fraser, Susan Gannon, Frank Garratt, Harold Gleason, John Hanes, Jacqueline Hartwich, J. G. Janssen, Michael Johnson, Leonard Leff, Barry Maid, William McIntosh, George Miller, Hugh Ruppensburg, Robert Sayre, Thomas Watson, A. K. Weatherhead, Joseph Zavadil, and Karl Zender.

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For the second edition I received lively and thoughtful advice from William McIntosh of the United States Military Academy, and also from: Bertha N. Booker, Virginia State University; Carl Brucker, Arkansas Tech University; Terre Burton, Laramie County Community College, Wyoming; James Bynum, Georgia Institute of Technology; Charles Dean, Middle Tennessee State University; William J. Everts, Jr., St. Michael's College, Vermont; John Hoey, SUNY—Genesee; Ted Johnston, El Paso Community College; Larry G. Mapp, Middle Tennessee State University; Sara M. Putzell, Georgia Institute of Technology; and Sharon Sellers, Clayton State College, Georgia.

Thanks are due Judith Stanford of Rivier College for providing an exceptionally useful instructor's manual to accompany the book. Professor Stanford has also assisted me in enlarging Chapter 27, *Writing About Literature*. Her collaboration on that chapter has been especially helpful, particularly for the discussion of responding to literary works.

I have had the additional pleasure of working with Richard D. Hathaway, who has prepared a two-disk computer program called TEXT to accompany *Literature*, second edition. The Dialogue disk focuses on analyzing poetry and fiction; the Discourse disk contains questions on all four genres. Discourse also includes a complete word processor, Plain Vanilla.

I would also like to thank the colleagues and friends who have taught me much about reading and teaching literature. Thanks to Ann E. Berthoff, Bob Boynton, Nancy Comley, Rosemary Deen, Robert M. Dell, Douglas Doty, Ruth Eisenberg, Susan Gannon, Pat Hoy, Richard Marotta, Edmund Miller, Marie Ponsot, Robert Scholes, Sandra Schor, and Peter Stillman.

And finally I would like to thank my wife Mary, whose prompting encouraged me to undertake this project in the first place and whose loving assistance has enabled me to complete it once again.

ROBERT DIYANNI

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