

FICTION

An Introduction to Reading and Writing

SECOND EDITION

EDGAR V. ROBERTS

HENRY E. JACOBS

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*Lehman College,
The City University of New York*

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Preface

The second edition of *Fiction: An Introduction to Reading and Writing* is a unique book. Not only an excellent anthology, the book is also a comprehensive guide to writing essays about stories. It therefore has a broader sense of mission than most anthologies. Indeed, we began with the aim of incorporating selections of prose fiction within a context of writing, and we now reaffirm this aim.

The integration of reading stories and writing essays begins in Chapter 1, which has been revised to highlight this goal. Guy de Maupassant's famous story "The Necklace" is printed along with sample marginal comments to illustrate the process of active reading. These active reading notes guide students toward further thinking, and therefore toward writing. The notes are embodied within an expanding set of prewriting activities: general observations, selected details focusing on one major aspect for consideration in an essay, an essay outline, and finally, two versions of a sample essay based on the foregoing planning and drafting. The first essay is finished but in need of more work, while the second is revised, expanded, and more sharply pointed. The chapter concludes with general principles about focus, evidence, and language. Thus Chapter 1 emphasizes the principle on which the book is based: the integration of reading, drafting, writing, and revising.

Organization

The chapters cover elements such as point of view, character, setting, tone, and symbolism. We have chosen this approach, rather than thematic or historical arrangements, because it permits students to analyze various aspects of fiction one at a time and in depth. Each chapter begins with a general discussion of the particular elements or techniques, and includes

analyses—some brief, some more extensive—of stories selected for the chapter. References are also freely made to relevant stories in other chapters. The intention of these analyses is not to preempt the student's own reading, but rather to provide specimens, or models, of how the precepts in the chapter may be realized in reading and analysis. Key terms and concepts are highlighted in boldface type, and are all gathered together in a comprehensive Glossary/Index at the back of the book.

The introductory material in each chapter is followed by stories to be read and studied in the context of the chapter, and also to be considered fully and independently for their content, mode, and style. When necessary for understanding, we have provided explanatory footnotes. Words that are defined or explained are highlighted by a small degree sign (°) in the text. Following each selection are study questions designed to help students explore and understand the selection. Some questions are factual and may be easily answered; others provoke extended thought, classroom discussion, and shorter or longer writing assignments.

The Selections and the Reading Apparatus

The number of stories has been expanded to a total of 48, compared with 39 in the first edition; 17 of the stories are entirely new. Most of the stories are by authors from the United States, England, and Canada, but there are also stories from South America, France, and Russia. In addition, we have selected stories by 20 women writers, making this anthology one of the most balanced to be found in a brief anthology of fiction.

Our selections represent a broad range of cultural and ethnic groups, reflecting the current critical trends of reexamining and widening the literary canon. Thus, there are works by whites and blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans, conservatives and liberals, people with strong religious convictions, and others who are indifferent. We have included works by writers with secure places in the history of literature as well as by writers who are less well known.

Of particular note, to strengthen the connection between reading and dramatization, we have selected a number of stories not only because they are good, but also because they are available on videocassettes which may be used in the classroom as teaching tools for support and interpretation (but not as substitutes for reading). The result of these changes is to provide a wide, interesting, and challenging selection of fiction for both beginning and also more advanced students. As in the first edition, the last chapter contains additional stories for further study. Also, as in the first edition, the paragraphs are numbered for easy reference.

To place the various stories in their historical context, we include life dates for all authors, together with a chronological list on the inside

front covers. In addition, we give the date of publication for each story, along with a date of composition, when known, in parentheses.

Writing as a Major Goal of the Second Edition

For us, writing about literature is not a minor topic that can be addressed in a separate section at the back of the book. It is a coequal concern, and therefore we stress the study and preparation needed for good writing about the topics of all chapters. These approaches to writing, developed from tested principles of studying literature together with our own classroom experience, have been presented for more than twenty-five years in *Writing Themes About Literature* by Edgar V. Roberts.

The skills needed for writing effective essays about literature do not represent a distinct body of knowledge. Rather, careful reading and effective writing are integrated. Both ask that students make important discoveries and decisions about the story being considered, and both require that students be able to point to specific features in the literary work at hand to justify their conclusions.

To this end, we have supplied “road maps” that show the way to move from reading, to responding and thinking, and then to planning and writing. These extensive discussions on writing about short stories focus on the topic or element of fiction presented in each chapter. They are carefully designed to help students write confidently. Each writing section contains suggestions and questions for planning an essay, developing a central idea, selecting supporting details from the story, organizing thoughts effectively, and beginning the writing process and bringing it to a conclusion.

In these writing sections we do not simply *say* what can be done with a topic of literary study, but we also *show* ways in which it might be done. Each writing section concludes with a sample essay (sometimes more than one) to exemplify the methods and strategies discussed. Thus, the general guidelines are combined with specific essay-length examples to make the writing process as open and clear as possible. Following each essay is a brief commentary showing how the principles of writing presented in the discussion have been carried out. Thus, the sample essays may be combined with the brief exemplary discussions in the introductory sections to provide comprehensive guidance for students with papers to write.

In addition, at the end of each chapter is a set of questions, new in this edition, designed for writing assignments. Most of these questions are broad in scope, and they often require a comparison-contrast technique. Help for the student with such an assignment may be found in the section on comparison-contrast in Appendix B, which has been expanded in this edition. In addition, some of these end-of-chapter assignments provide students with ideas with which to write their own stories or parts of stories.

The objective of these is not to require superb works of fiction, but rather to give students a “hands on” experience with the literary techniques discussed in the chapters. The assignments are hence designed to help students understand through their own experiences as writers.

Major Goals of This Book

Reading and writing skills are useful not only in literature courses. Effective techniques acquired in the methodical use of this book will help students in virtually every course they ever take, and in whatever profession they follow when they leave school. Though students may not have many future occasions to read the authors anthologized here, they will always *read*—if not these authors, then other authors, and certainly, always, newspapers, legal documents, magazine articles, technical reports, business proposals, and much more. Similarly, we concede that students may never need to write again about specific literary topics like setting, structure, or symbolism, but they will certainly find future situations requiring them to *write*. Indeed, the more effectively students learn to write about fiction specifically and literature generally during their introduction to literature courses, the better they will be able to write—no matter what the topic—in later days. And, we may add, it is increasingly clear that the power to analyze problems and make convincing written and oral presentations is a major quality of excellence and leadership.

While we stress the value of our book as a teaching tool, we also emphasize that fiction, like all literature, is to be *enjoyed*. Sometimes we overlook the truth that study and delight are complementary processes, and that intellectual and emotional enjoyment develops not only from the immediate responses of amusement, involvement, and sympathy, but also from increasing depths of understanding, assimilation, and contemplation. We therefore hope that the selections will teach students about humanity, about their own lives, perceptions, and feelings, and about the timeless patterns of human existence. We hope they will take delight in such discoveries, and grow as they make them. We see the book, then, not as an end, but rather as the beginning of lifelong understanding and joy in great works of fiction.

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EDGAR V. ROBERTS



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1

Introduction: Reading, Responding, and Writing about Literature

WHAT IS LITERATURE?

Literature, broadly defined, can refer to just about everything written, from a grocery list to a Shakespearean sonnet. In this book when we use the word *literature*, we exclude things like grocery lists, and confine ourselves to *imaginative literature*. Imaginative literature, which we will call simply *literature*, refers to written (and also spoken) compositions designed to tell stories, dramatize situations, and reveal thoughts and emotions, and also, more importantly, to interest, entertain, stimulate, broaden, and ennoble readers.

There are many ways in which these ends are gained. Some writers, wishing to move us deeply, may describe a great person undergoing misfortune; or more happily may show us people becoming successful in forming human relationships. Other writers, wishing to tell us about new ways of thought and feeling, may speak about wide ranges of experience and emotion. Still other writers, to involve us in some kind of action, may inform us and also try to inspire us to copy the examples which they tell us about. Much literature is designed only for the printed page and is assimilated by readers reading silently, but a great deal of literature is also designed to be read aloud, and some is designed to be spoken and acted out by live actors.

Whatever the form, all literature has much to offer, and the final word on the value of literary study has not been written. Often, in fact, people read books and poems without explaining, even to themselves, why they enjoy it, because goals and ideals are not easily articulated. There are, however, areas of general agreement about some of the things that reading great literature can do, if it is done systematically over a long period of time.

Literature helps us grow, both personally and intellectually; it provides an objective base for our knowledge and understanding; it helps us connect ourselves to the broader cultural, philosophic, and religious world of which we are a part; it enables us to recognize human dreams and struggles in different places and times that we would never otherwise know. Literature helps us develop mature sensibility and compassion for the condition of *all* living things—human, animal, and vegetable; it gives us the knowledge and perception needed to appreciate the beauty of order and arrangement, just as a well-structured song or a beautifully done painting can; it provides the comparative basis from which we can see worthiness in the aims of all people, and it therefore helps us see beauty in the world around us; it exercises our emotions through interest, concern, tension, excitement, hope, fear, regret, laughter, and sympathy. Through cumulative experience in reading, great literature shapes our goals and values by helping us clarify our own identities, both positively, through acceptance of the admirable in human beings, and negatively, through rejection of the sinister. It helps us shape our judgments through the comparison of the good and the bad. Literature enables us to develop a perspective on the events that occur around us and in the world at large, and thereby it enables us to gain understanding and control. It is one of the shaping influences of life. It helps to make us human.

TYPES OF LITERATURE: THE GENRES

We usually classify literature—imaginative literature (excluding nonfiction prose)—into the following genres or classes: (1) prose fiction, (2) poetry, and (3) drama. These three genres have many common characteristics. All are art forms, each with its own requirements of structure and style. In varying degrees, all the genres are dramatic and imaginative; they have at least some degree of action, or are based in part on dramatic situations.

Imaginative literature differs from textbooks, historical and biographical works, and news articles, all of which describe or interpret facts. While literature is related to the truths of human life, it may be based on situations that have never occurred, and which may never occur. This is not to say that imaginative literature is not truthful, but rather that its truth is to life and human nature, not necessarily to the detailed world of reportorial, scientific, and historical facts in which we all live.

Although the three main genres have much in common, they also differ in many ways. **Prose fiction**, or **narrative fiction**, is in prose form and includes *novels*, *short stories*, *myths*, *parables*, *romances*, and *epics*. These works generally focus on one or a few major characters who undergo some kind of change as they meet other characters or deal with problems or difficulties in their lives. **Poetry**, in contrast to prose fiction, is much more economical in the use of words, and it relies heavily on *imagery*, *figurative language*, *rhythm*, and *sound*. **Drama** (or **plays**) is the form of litera-

ture designed to be performed by actors. Like fiction, drama may focus on a single character or a small number of characters, and it presents fictional events as if they were happening in the present, to be witnessed by a group of people composing an audience. Some dramas employ much of the imagery, rhythm, and sound of poetry.

READING A WORK AND RESPONDING TO IT ACTIVELY

Sometimes students confuse a cursory reading with an active reading. A quick reading of a work is little more than that; for example, you might read an entire story and not be able to say anything about it at all. A more careful, active reading, however, enables you to understand and respond to questions about meaning and organization. The reading we are encouraging here is this active sort—a reading in which we engage the work and interact with it. Obviously, we must first follow the work and understand its details. At the same time we must respond to the words, get at the ideas, understand the implications of what is happening, and apply our own experiences to verify the accuracy and truth of the situation and incidents, to appreciate the characters and their solutions to the problems they face, and to articulate our own emotional responses. In short, as active, participating readers, we should assimilate the work into our minds and spirits.

To illustrate the process of active reading, we present below “The Necklace,” a story by the French writer Guy de Maupassant, with marginal comments representing a possible set of reader responses. Many of these comments, particularly at the beginning, do no more than record the factual details of the story. But as the story progresses, a number of comments are responsive and interpretive; that is, they indicate reactions and observations about the meaning of the incidents. These comments reflect not just a first reading, but the fuller responses of second and third readings. The responses are general rather than specific. That is, they are not concentrated around a central point of inquiry, but rather are broad in scope, to show reading responses as an ongoing process.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT (1850–1893)

The Necklace

1884

Translated by Edgar V. Roberts

She was one of those pretty and charming women, born, as if by an error of destiny, into a family of clerks and copyists. She had no dowry, no prospects, no way of getting known, courted, loved, married by a rich and distinguished

“She” is pretty but poor. Apparently there is no other life for her than marriage. Without connections, she has no

man. She finally settled for a marriage with a minor clerk in the Ministry of Education.

She was a simple person, without the money to dress well, but she was as unhappy as if she had gone through bankruptcy, for women have neither rank nor race. In place of high birth or important family connections, they can rely only on their beauty, their grace, and their charm. Their inborn finesse, their elegant taste, their engaging personalities, which are their only power, make working-class women the equals of the grandest duchesses.

She suffered constantly, feeling herself destined for all delicacies and luxuries. She suffered because of her grim apartment with its drab walls, threadbare furniture, ugly curtains. All such things, which most other women in her situation would not even have noticed, tortured her and filled her with despair. The sight of the young country girl who did her simple housework awakened in her only a sense of desolation and lost hopes. She daydreamed of large, silent anterooms, decorated with oriental tapestries and lighted by high bronze floor lamps, with two elegant valets in short culottes dozing in large armchairs under the effects of forced-air heaters. She visualized large drawing rooms draped in the most expensive silks, with fine end tables on which were placed knickknacks of inestimable value. She dreamed of the perfume of dainty private rooms, which were designed only for intimate tête-à-têtes with the closest friends, who because of their achievements and fame would make her the envy of all other women.

When she sat down to dinner at her round little table covered with a cloth that had not been washed for three days, in front of her husband who opened the kettle while declaring ecstatically, "Oh boy, beef stew, my favorite," she dreamed of expensive banquets with shining place settings, and wall hangings depicting ancient heroes and exotic birds in an enchanted forest. She imagined a gourmet-prepared main course carried on the most exquisite trays and served on the most beautiful dishes, with whispered gallantries which she would hear with a sphinxlike smile as she dined on the pink meat of a trout or the delicate wing of a quail.

5 She had no decent dresses, no jewels, nothing. And she loved nothing but these; she believed herself born only for these. She burned with the desire to please, to be envied, to be attractive and sought after.

She had a rich friend, a comrade from convent days, whom she did not want to see anymore because she suffered so much when she returned home. She would weep for the entire day afterward with sorrow, regret, despair, and misery.

entry into high society, and marries an insignificant clerk.

She is unhappy.

A view of women that excludes the possibility of a career. In 1884, women had little else than their personalities to get ahead.

She suffers because of her cheap belongings, wanting expensive things. She dreams of wealth and of how other women would envy her if she had all these fine things. But these luxuries are unrealistic and unattainable for her.

Her husband's taste is for plain things, while she dreams of expensive gourmet food. He has adjusted to his status. She has not.

She lives for her unrealistic dreams, and these increase her frustration.

She even thinks of giving up a rich friend because she is so depressed after visiting her.