


Preface

PERRINE'S
LITERATURE
STRUCTURE, SOUND,
AND SENSE

Eighth Edition

Thomas R. Arp
Southern Methodist University

Greg Johnson
Kennesaw State University

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Perrine's Literature
Structure, Sound, and Sense/Eighth Edition
Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson

Publisher: Earl McPeck
Acquisitions Editor: Bill Hoffman
Market Strategist: John Meyers
Project Editor: Laura Webb
Art Director: Vicki Whistler
Product Manager: Linda McMillan

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Printed in the United States of America
4 6 7 8 9 10 06 05 04 03 02

For more information contact Heinle & Heinle,
25 Thomson Place, Boston, MA 02210 USA, or
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water-colour and gouache on paper;
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Dusseldorf

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Web: www.thomsonrights.com

ISBN: 0-15-507494-6

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number:
2001088994

Preface

This eighth edition of *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*, like the previous editions, is written for the student who is beginning a serious study of imaginative literature. It seeks to give that student a sufficient grasp of the nature and variety of fiction, poetry, and drama, some reasonable means for reading with appreciative understanding, and a few primary ideas of how to evaluate literature. The separate sections gradually introduce the student to the elements of the three genres, putting the emphasis always on *how* and *why*: *How* can the reader use these elements to get at the meaning of the work, to interpret it correctly, and to respond to it adequately? *Why* does the writer use these elements? What values have they for the writer and the reader?

The eighth edition of *Literature* maintains the balance between classic and modern writers, and continues to offer a wide sampling of vicarious experiences through the works of women as well as men, ethnic minorities as well as authors representing the varieties of American and "world" literature. Each section of the book begins with a simple discussion of the elements of the form and is illustrated, throughout, by carefully selected stories, poems, and plays. Each section also includes a compact anthology of additional selections for further reading, and each one provides enough examples to permit the comparative study by which literary merit is judged. To that end, the fiction section has a new part devoted to three stories each by three writers—a classic, a modern, and a contemporary—with whom the student can become comfortably familiar; this presentation of a generous sampling from three writers parallels the continued representation of multiple works by three poets in the poetry section. In the drama section, at the request of many readers, we have introduced a second Shakespeare play to illustrate his art in both tragic and comic forms. This edition also places a greater emphasis on writing about literature, offering pride of place as the first section to an updated and augmented guide to "Writing about Literature," and providing suggestions for writing at the ends of chapters throughout the book.

In matters of theory, some issues are undoubtedly simplified, but we hope none seriously, and some more sophisticated theoretical approaches have had to be excluded. The purpose has always been to give the beginning student something to understand and use. The first assumptions of this book

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County College of Morris

Bert Edelman
Glendale College

Catherine D. Farmer
Wallace State Community College

Joy A. Farmer
Reinhardt College

Laura Fasick
Moorhead State University

Deborah Kay Ferrell
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Lincoln Land Community College

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Jack Wood
Citrus College

Foreword to the Student

You've been reading stories ever since you learned to read; your first exposure to verse came with "Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man"; you've been watching dramatized life since your family planted you in front of the TV. You've developed your own tastes and your own attitudes toward what these varieties of "literature" can give you. In a sense, there's no need to take an introductory course in reading literature, because you've moved beyond the "introductory" phase. Let's say, then, that it's time to become familiar and friendly with the literary arts.

But let's take stock of where you stand. What have you been getting out of the things that you enjoy reading and watching? For most people, the first answer is "vicarious experience," the impression that you are temporarily able to live in some other world than your own private one—a world that may be as familiar as your own neighborhood or as alien to your experience as space travel in some future time or the adventures of explorers of the past. What you want is for the author to take you to where you have never been, so that you can imagine yourself as a person in a world other than your own.

You probably also want to be able to "relate" to the characters in the things you read or watch, discovering in them some features of yourself or some qualities that you would like to have. Or you like to share vicariously the excitements, joys, and sorrows of people who are not very much like you, but whose lives seem rich and interesting. Or you get a lift from watching some characters making major mistakes with their lives, and turning themselves around just in time—or maybe you are thrilled to see such people brought to justice and punished for misdeeds.

Whatever the sources of your pleasure and enjoyment from reading, you may now be ready to find both broader and deeper reasons for continuing that pastime. No matter how much experience you bring to the study of these works, you're in for a few surprises. Some of them will be the surprises that come from broadening your vicarious experience, from "traveling" with us to India and Russia and Nigeria, to Harlem and Pittsburgh and Dublin, to sixteenth-century London and seventeenth-century Massachusetts and nineteenth-century Wall Street. Some will be the surprises that come from penetrating to the secret recesses of the human mind and soul in joys and agonies, from observing people whom you have never met or imagined and with whom you have nothing in common but your humanness.

And, we hope, there will be the surprises and pleasures that come from feeling yourself growing in control or even mastery of your responses and reactions as you learn *how* literature does what it does. This, of course, is what the formal study of literature can bring you. We all know how we *feel* when we first read through a work. We probably start by thinking “I like this” or “it doesn’t say much to me” or “what in the world is that supposed to mean?” If you could, you’d act on your first reaction and read the work again, or try to see what it’s trying to say, or drop it and go on to do something more pleasurable.

But you’re in a special situation. You’re taking a course (either by your own choice or because you’re required to), and one of the rules of the game is that you’re supposed to move from your initial reaction to some sort of “serious” response that will satisfy your teacher. If you like something and want to reread it, your teacher will pester you with wanting to know *why* you liked it, and might even insist that you offer reasons why other people should like it too. If you are only a little bit curious about it, or think that it is a waste of time, your teacher will lead (or nudge, or bash) you into finding things in it that might change your first opinion. In any case, the terms of your special situation, as a student in a course with a grade on the horizon, make it necessary for you to have more than an initial reaction. You’ll need to have a developing understanding of the work, and you’ll need to show in discussion or writing both what you understand and how the work itself led to that understanding.

That’s where this book will help. In addition to a systematic guide for discovering how and what a literary work means, we’ve provided you with suggestions for writing at the ends of the chapters and standards for your written work in the first section of the book.

Why is writing so important? It’s the most straightforward way of sorting out your feelings and ideas, putting them into shape, nailing down your own experience. All writing about literature has a double motive—it sharpens your grasp of the work, and it helps you to lead other people to share your experience. Writing about literature is writing persuasively, and persuading others to see what you see helps you to see it more clearly.

So in the barest sense, this book (and your course) want to help you with reading and writing. But you have every right to ask, “Why literature?” That’s a good question, because in our world there are so many ways of gaining experience and insight into our lives and the lives of others that focusing on one resource based on the spoken and written word may seem narrow and old-fashioned. We’re willing to grant that, and we’ll go even further: in a sense, it is also elitist, and turning to literature as a source of expe-

rience will set you apart from the majority of people. Thus, literature provides not only vicarious experience and opportunities to relate to others' lives, but it also permits you to join a special group of scholars, instructors, critics, and other students who share in the wealth of enjoyment and intellectual challenge that it has to offer.

Preface

WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

- I. Why Write about Literature? 1
- II. For Whom Do You Write? 2
- III. Choosing a Topic 3
 1. Express that Focus on a Single Literary Work 3
 2. Papers of Comparison and Contrast 4
 3. Papers on a Number of Works by a Single Author 5
 4. Papers on a Number of Works with Some Focus on a Single Authorship or Character 5
- IV. Proving Your Point 11
- V. Writing the Paper 14
- VI. Introducing Quotations (Q1-Q10) 15
- VII. Documentation 22
 1. Textual Documentation (Q1-Q10) 22
 2. Paraphrased Documentation (Q1-Q10) 24
- VIII. Stance and Style (S) 26
- IX. Grammar, Punctuation, and Usage (G1-G10) 26
 1. Grammar (G1-G10) 26
 2. Punctuation (P1-P10) 26
 3. Usage (U1-U10) 26
- X. Writing Samples 26
 1. Fiction Analysis: "The Boy in the Blue-Overalls" by Tiger 26
 2. Fiction Analysis: "The Boy in the Blue-Overalls" by Tiger 26
 3. Poetry Analysis: "The Boy in the Blue-Overalls" by Tiger 26
 4. Poetry Analysis: "The Boy in the Blue-Overalls" by Tiger 26
 5. Drama Analysis: "The Boy in the Blue-Overalls" by Tiger 26
 6. Drama Analysis: "The Boy in the Blue-Overalls" by Tiger 26

Contents



Preface v

WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE	1
I. Why Write about Literature?	3
II. For Whom Do You Write?	3
III. Choosing A Topic	5
1. Papers that Focus on a Single Literary Work	5
2. Papers of Comparison and Contrast	8
3. Papers on a Number of Works by a Single Author	8
4. Papers on a Number of Works with Some Feature Other than Authorship in Common	10
IV. Proving Your Point	11
V. Writing the Paper	12
VI. Introducing Quotations (Q1–Q11)	15
VII. Documentation	22
1. Textual Documentation (TD1–TD5)	23
2. Parenthetical Documentation (PD1–PD6)	24
VIII. Stance and Style (S1–S6)	27
IX. Grammar, Punctuation, and Usage: Common Problems	30
1. Grammar (G1–G2)	30
2. Punctuation (P1–P5)	31
3. Usage (U1–U2)	33
X. Writing Samples	36
1. Fiction Explication: “Darkness” in the Conclusion of “The Child by Tiger”	36
2. Fiction Analysis: The Function of the Frame Story in “Once upon a Time”	38
3. Poetry Explication: “A Study of Reading Habits”	40
4. Poetry Analysis: Diction in “Pathedy of Manners”	42
5. Drama Explication: Theseus’s “Cool Reason” vs. Poetic Truth	44
6. Drama Analysis: Place Names in “Mind the Gap”	46

FICTION	THE ELEMENTS OF FICTION	49
CHAPTER ONE	READING THE STORY	51
<i>Richard Connell</i>	The Most Dangerous Game	57
<i>Ernest Hemingway</i>	The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber	77
	Suggestions for Writing	106
CHAPTER TWO	PLOT AND STRUCTURE	107
<i>Graham Greene</i>	The Destructors	115
<i>Alice Munro</i>	How I Met My Husband	130
<i>Jhumpa Lahiri</i>	Interpreter of Maladies	147
	Suggestions for Writing	167
CHAPTER THREE	CHARACTERIZATION	168
<i>Alice Walker</i>	Everyday Use	173
<i>Katherine Mansfield</i>	Miss Brill	182
<i>Tobias Wolff</i>	Hunters in the Snow	187
	Suggestions for Writing	202
CHAPTER FOUR	THEME	203
<i>Toni Cade Bambara</i>	The Lesson	210
<i>James Joyce</i>	Eveline	218
<i>Eudora Welty</i>	A Worn Path	223
<i>Nadine Gordimer</i>	Once upon a Time	231
	Suggestions for Writing	237
CHAPTER FIVE	POINT OF VIEW	238
<i>Willa Cather</i>	Paul's Case	245
<i>Shirley Jackson</i>	The Lottery	263
<i>Katherine Anne Porter</i>	The Jilting of Granny Weatherall	272
<i>William Faulkner</i>	A Rose for Emily	281
	Suggestions for Writing	290
CHAPTER SIX	SYMBOL, ALLEGORY, AND FANTASY	291
<i>D. H. Lawrence</i>	The Rocking-Horse Winner	302
<i>Nathaniel Hawthorne</i>	Young Goodman Brown	316
<i>Gabriel García Márquez</i>	A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings	
	Translated by Gregory Rabassa	329
	Suggestions for Writing	335

CHAPTER SEVEN	HUMOR AND IRONY	337
<i>Frank O'Connor</i>	The Drunkard	342
<i>Lorrie Moore</i>	You're Ugly, Too	352
<i>Albert Camus</i>	The Guest	
	<i>Translated by Justin O'Brien</i>	371
	Suggestions for Writing	384
CHAPTER EIGHT	EVALUATING FICTION	385
	General Exercises for Analysis and Evaluation	389
	Exercise	390
<i>O. Henry</i>	A Municipal Report	391
<i>Susan Glaspell</i>	A Jury of Her Peers	406
	Exercise	426
<i>Edith Wharton</i>	Roman Fever	427
<i>F. Scott Fitzgerald</i>	A New Leaf	439
	Suggestions for Writing	453
THREE WRITERS	ANTON CHEKHOV, FLANNERY O'CONNOR, AND JOYCE CAROL OATES	455
<i>Anton Chekhov</i>	Gooseberries	
	<i>Translated by Constance Garnett</i>	457
	The Lady with the Dog	
	<i>Translated by Constance Garnett</i>	467
	The Darling	
	<i>Translated by Constance Garnett</i>	483
<i>Flannery O'Connor</i>	A Good Man Is Hard to Find	495
	A Late Encounter with the Enemy	510
	Greenleaf	520
<i>Joyce Carol Oates</i>	Heat	543
	The Lady with the Pet Dog	555
	Life after High School	572
	Suggestions for Writing	588
STORIES FOR FURTHER READING		589
<i>Chinua Achebe</i>	Civil Peace	591
<i>Raymond Carver</i>	Errand	596
<i>John Cheever</i>	The Swimmer	607
<i>Stephen Crane</i>	The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky	617
<i>Dagoberto Gilb</i>	Love in L.A.	628

<i>Zora Neale Hurston</i>	The Gilded Six-Bits	631
<i>Herman Melville</i>	Bartleby the Scrivener	642
<i>Cynthia Ozick</i>	The Shawl	675
<i>Edgar Allan Poe</i>	The Cask of Amontillado	680
<i>Katherine Anne Porter</i>	He	686
<i>Thomas Wolfe</i>	The Child by Tiger	695

POETRY THE ELEMENTS OF POETRY 715

CHAPTER ONE WHAT IS POETRY? 717

<i>Alfred, Lord Tennyson</i>	The Eagle	719
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	Winter	720
<i>Wilfred Owen</i>	Dulce et Decorum Est	722
<hr/>		
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	Spring	725
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	How many times these low feet staggered	726
<i>Robert Hayden</i>	The Whipping	727
<i>Dudley Randall</i>	Ballad of Birmingham	728
<i>Gwendolyn Brooks</i>	Kitchenette Burning	729
<i>William Carlos Williams</i>	The Red Wheelbarrow	730
<i>Ezra Pound</i>	In a Station of the Métro	731
<i>Langston Hughes</i>	Suicide's Note	731
<i>A. E. Housman</i>	Terence, this is stupid stuff	732
<i>Archibald MacLeish</i>	Ars Poetica	734
	Suggestions for Writing	735

CHAPTER TWO READING THE POEM 737

<i>Thomas Hardy</i>	The Man He Killed	739
<i>Philip Larkin</i>	A Study of Reading Habits	740
<i>A. E. Housman</i>	Is my team plowing	744
	General Exercises for Analysis and Evaluation	746

<i>John Donne</i>	Break of Day	747
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	There's been a Death, in the Opposite House	748
<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	Mirror	749
<i>Carter Revard</i>	Discovery of the New World	750
<i>Edwin Arlington Robinson</i>	Eros Turannos	752
<i>Katherine Philips</i>	Against Love	754
<i>Dabney Stuart</i>	Hidden Meanings	754
	Suggestions for Writing	755

CHAPTER THREE DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION 757

- Emily Dickinson* There is no Frigate like a Book 758
William Shakespeare When my love swears that she is made of
truth 759
Ellen Kay Pathedy of Manners 761
Exercises 763
-

- Ben Jonson* On My First Son 764
Henry Reed Naming of Parts 764
Langston Hughes Cross 766
William Wordsworth The world is too much with us 766
Robert Frost Desert Places 767
John Donne A Hymn to God the Father 768
Elizabeth Bishop One Art 769
Suggestions for Writing 770

CHAPTER FOUR IMAGERY 771

- Robert Browning* Meeting at Night 772
Robert Browning Parting at Morning 773
-

- Gerard Manley Hopkins* Spring 774
William Carlos Williams The Widow's Lament in Springtime 775
Emily Dickinson I felt a Funeral, in my Brain 776
Seamus Heaney The Forge 777
Thomas Hardy The Convergence of the Twain 778
Robert Frost After Apple-Picking 780
Robert Hayden Those Winter Sundays 781
Jean Toomer Reapers 782
John Keats To Autumn 783
Suggestions for Writing 784

CHAPTER FIVE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE 1
SIMILE, METAPHOR, PERSONIFICATION,
APOSTROPHE, METONYMY 785

- Frances Cornford* The Guitarist Tunes Up 786
Robert Francis The Hound 787
Robert Frost Bereft 787
Emily Dickinson It sifts from Leaden Sieves 788
Thomas Hardy The Subalterns 791
John Keats Bright Star 792
Exercise 796
-

<i>John Donne</i>	Batter my heart, three-personed God	840
<i>Elisavietta Ritchie</i>	Sorting Laundry	841
<i>W. H. Auden</i>	The Unknown Citizen	843
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Departmental	844
<i>Larry Rottmann</i>	APO 96225	846
<i>Lucille Clifton</i>	in the inner city	847
<i>M. Carl Holman</i>	Mr. Z	848
<i>Robert Browning</i>	My Last Duchess	849
	Suggestions for Writing	851
CHAPTER EIGHT	ALLUSION	852
<i>Robert Frost</i>	"Out, Out—"	853
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	From <i>Macbeth</i> : She should have died hereafter	855
<hr/>		
<i>e. e. cummings</i>	in Just-	856
<i>John Milton</i>	On His Blindness	857
<i>Edwin Arlington Robinson</i>	Miniver Cheevy	858
<i>William Butler Yeats</i>	Leda and the Swan	859
<i>Katharyn Howd Machan</i>	Leda's Sister and the Geese	860
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	Abraham to kill him	861
<i>Walter McDonald</i>	Life with Father	862
<i>Laurence Perrine</i>	A monkey sprang down from a tree	863
<i>Laurence Perrine</i>	Two brothers devised what at sight	863
	Suggestions for Writing	864
CHAPTER NINE	MEANING AND IDEA	865
<i>Anonymous</i>	Little Jack Horner	865
<i>A. E. Housman</i>	Loveliest of Trees	867
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening	867
<hr/>		
<i>William Cullen Bryant</i>	To a Waterfowl	869
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Design	870
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	I never saw a Moor	871
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	"Faith" is a fine invention	872
<i>John Donne</i>	The Indifferent	872
<i>John Donne</i>	Love's Deity	873
<i>Dudley Randall</i>	To the Mercy Killers	875
<i>Edwin Arlington Robinson</i>	How Annandale Went Out	876
<i>Gerard Manley Hopkins</i>	The Caged Skylark	877
<i>Gerard Manley Hopkins</i>	No worst, there is none	878
	Suggestions for Writing	878

CHAPTER TEN	TONE	880
<i>Richard Eberhart</i>	For a Lamb	882
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	Apparently with no surprise	882
<i>Michael Drayton</i>	Since there's no help	884
<hr/>		
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	My mistress' eyes	885
<i>Alfred, Lord Tennyson</i>	Crossing the Bar	886
<i>Thomas Hardy</i>	The Oxen	887
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	One dignity delays for all	888
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	'Twas warm — at first — like Us	888
<i>John Donne</i>	The Apparition	889
<i>John Donne</i>	The Flea	890
<i>Matthew Arnold</i>	Dover Beach	892
<i>Philip Larkin</i>	Church Going	893
<i>Cleopatra Mathis</i>	Getting Out	896
<i>Anonymous</i>	Love	897
Suggestions for Writing		897
CHAPTER ELEVEN	MUSICAL DEVICES	899
<i>Ogden Nash</i>	The Turtle	900
<i>W. H. Auden</i>	That night when joy began	902
<i>Theodore Roethke</i>	The Waking	903
<i>Gerard Manley Hopkins</i>	God's Grandeur	905
<hr/>		
<i>Gwendolyn Brooks</i>	We Real Cool	907
<i>Dudley Randall</i>	Blackberry Sweet	907
<i>Maya Angelou</i>	Woman Work	908
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson</i>	The Snowstorm	909
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	As imperceptibly as Grief	910
<i>William Stafford</i>	Traveling through the dark	911
<i>Joshua Sylvester</i>	Autumnus	912
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Nothing Gold Can Stay	913
Exercise		913
Suggestions for Writing		913
CHAPTER TWELVE	RHYTHM AND METER	915
<i>George Herbert</i>	Virtue	920
Exercises		929
<hr/>		
<i>William Blake</i>	"Introduction" to <i>Songs of Innocence</i>	930
<i>A. E. Housman</i>	Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries	931

<i>Walt Whitman</i>	Had I the Choice	932
<i>Robert Frost</i>	The Aim Was Song	932
<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	Old Ladies' Home	933
<i>Linda Pastan</i>	To a Daughter Leaving Home	934
<i>Lawrence Ferlinghetti</i>	Constantly risking absurdity	935
<i>James Merrill</i>	The Fifteenth Summer	937
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	Because I could not stop for Death	938
<i>Alfred, Lord Tennyson</i>	Break, break, break	939
	Suggestions for Writing	940

CHAPTER THIRTEEN SOUND AND MEANING 941

<i>Anonymous</i>	Pease Porridge Hot	941
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	Song: Come unto these yellow sands	942
<i>A. E. Housman</i>	Eight O'Clock	943
<i>Alexander Pope</i>	Sound and Sense	944
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	I heard a Fly buzz — when I died	948
	Exercise	951

<i>Gerard Manley Hopkins</i>	Heaven-Haven	952
<i>Wilfred Owen</i>	Anthem for Doomed Youth	953
<i>Margaret Atwood</i>	Landcrab	954
<i>Maxine Kumin</i>	Nurture	955
<i>John Donne</i>	At the round earth's imagined corners	956
<i>Galway Kinnell</i>	Blackberry Eating	957
<i>Richard Wilbur</i>	A Fire-Truck	958
<i>William Carlos Williams</i>	The Dance	959
	Suggestions for Writing	959

CHAPTER FOURTEEN PATTERN 961

<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	These are the days when Birds come back	963
<i>Anonymous</i>	An epicure dining at Crewe	964
<i>John Keats</i>	On First Looking into Chapman's Homer	965
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	That time of year	966
<i>Dylan Thomas</i>	Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night	968

A Smattering of Limericks 970

<i>Carolyn Wells</i>	A tutor who tooted the flute	970
<i>Anonymous</i>	There was a young fellow named Hall	970
<i>Martin Bristow Smith</i>	A goat on a stroll near a brook	970
<i>Laurence Perrine</i>	The limerick's never averse	970
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	From <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	970

<i>John Donne</i>	Death, be not proud	971
<i>Martha Collins</i>	The Story We Know	972
<i>Wendy Cope</i>	Lonely Hearts	973
<i>George Gascoigne</i>	Gascoigne's Lullaby	974
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Acquainted with the Night	976
<i>Anonymous</i>	Edward	977
<i>Robert Herrick</i>	Delight in Disorder	979
<i>Michael McFee</i>	In Medias Res	980
Exercise		981
Suggestions for Writing		981

CHAPTER FIFTEEN EVALUATING POETRY 1
 SENTIMENTAL, RHETORICAL,
 DIDACTIC VERSE 982

God's Will for You and Me	985
Pied Beauty	986
A Poison Tree	986
The Most Vital Thing in Life	987
Longing	988
To Marguerite	988
Pitcher	989
The Old-Fashioned Pitcher	990
The Long Voyage	990
Breathes there the man	991
The Engine	991
I like to see it lap the Miles	992
The Toys	993
Little Boy Blue	994
When I have fears that I may cease to be	995
O Solitude!	995
Do not stand by my grave and weep	996
Song	996
Suggestions for Writing	997

CHAPTER SIXTEEN EVALUATING POETRY 2
 POETIC EXCELLENCE 998

<i>John Donne</i>	The Canonization	1000
<i>John Keats</i>	Ode on a Grecian Urn	1002

<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	There's a certain Slant of light	1004
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Home Burial	1005
<i>T. S. Eliot</i>	The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock	1010
<i>Wallace Stevens</i>	Sunday Morning	1015
<i>Elizabeth Bishop</i>	The Fish	1019
<i>Derek Walcott</i>	The Virgins	1022
POEMS FOR FURTHER READING 1025		
<i>Margaret Atwood</i>	Siren Song	1027
<i>W. H. Auden</i>	Musée des Beaux Arts	1028
<i>D. C. Berry</i>	On Reading Poems to a Senior Class at South High	1028
<i>William Blake</i>	The Lamb	1029
<i>William Blake</i>	The Tiger	1030
<i>David Bottoms</i>	Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt	1031
<i>Rupert Brooke</i>	The Dead	1032
<i>Elizabeth Barrett Browning</i>	If thou must love me	1032
<i>Lucille Clifton</i>	good times	1033
<i>Lucille Clifton</i>	the lost baby poem	1033
<i>Samuel Taylor Coleridge</i>	Kubla Khan	1034
<i>Countee Cullen</i>	For a Lady I Know	1036
<i>Walter de la Mare</i>	Scholars	1036
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	A Light exists in Spring	1036
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	A narrow Fellow in the Grass	1037
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	I died for Beauty—but was scarce	1038
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	I like a look of Agony	1038
<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	What Inn is this	1039
<i>Tom Disch</i>	The Lipstick on the Mirror	1039
<i>John Donne</i>	The Good-Morrow	1040
<i>John Donne</i>	Song: Go and catch a falling star	1041
<i>John Donne</i>	Song: Sweetest love, I do not go	1042
<i>John Donne</i>	The Triple Fool	1043
<i>Keith Douglas</i>	Vergissmeinnicht	1044
<i>Stephen Dunn</i>	Tangier	1045
<i>Carolyn Forché</i>	The Colonel	1046
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Birches	1046
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Mending Wall	1048
<i>Robert Frost</i>	Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same	1049
<i>Robert Frost</i>	The Oven Bird	1050
<i>Nikki Giovanni</i>	Nikki-Rosa	1050
<i>Thom Gunn</i>	On the Move	1051
<i>R. S. Gwynn</i>	Snow White and the Seven Deadly Sins	1052

<i>Marilyn Hacker</i>	Fourteen	1054
<i>Rachel Hadas</i>	The Red Hat	1054
<i>Donald Hall</i>	My Son, My Executioner	1055
<i>Thomas Hardy</i>	Channel Firing	1056
<i>Thomas Hardy</i>	The Darkling Thrush	1057
<i>Thomas Hardy</i>	Hap	1058
<i>William Heyen</i>	Riddle	1059
<i>A. E. Housman</i>	To an Athlete Dying Young	1060
<i>A. E. Housman</i>	Bredon Hill	1061
<i>Langston Hughes</i>	Theme for English B	1062
<i>Ted Hughes</i>	Thistles	1063
<i>Randall Jarrell</i>	The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner	1064
<i>Ben Jonson</i>	Song: To Celia	1064
<i>Jenny Joseph</i>	Warning	1065
<i>Donald Justice</i>	In Memory of the Unknown Poet, Robert Boardman Vaughn	1066
<i>John Keats</i>	La Belle Dame sans Merci	1067
<i>John Keats</i>	Ode to a Nightingale	1068
<i>Maxine Kumin</i>	The Sound of Night	1071
<i>Philip Larkin</i>	Aubade	1072
<i>Marianne Moore</i>	What Are Years?	1073
<i>Sharon Olds</i>	The Victims	1074
<i>Mary Oliver</i>	The Summer Day	1075
<i>Simon J. Ortiz</i>	Speaking	1076
<i>Linda Pastan</i>	The Imperfect Paradise	1076
<i>Marge Piercy</i>	A Work of Artifice	1077
<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	Mad Girl's Love Song	1078
<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	Spinster	1078
<i>Deborah Pope</i>	Getting Through	1079
<i>John Crowe Ransom</i>	Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter	1080
<i>Adrienne Rich</i>	Aunt Jennifer's Tigers	1081
<i>Adrienne Rich</i>	Living in Sin	1081
<i>Adrienne Rich</i>	Storm Warnings	1082
<i>Alberto Ríos</i>	Nani	1083
<i>Edwin Arlington Robinson</i>	The Mill	1084
<i>Edwin Arlington Robinson</i>	Mr. Flood's Party	1085
<i>Edwin Arlington Robinson</i>	Richard Cory	1087
<i>Theodore Roethke</i>	I knew a woman	1088
<i>Theodore Roethke</i>	My Papa's Waltz	1089
<i>Anne Sexton</i>	The Abortion	1089
<i>Anne Sexton</i>	Her Kind	1090

<i>William Shakespeare</i>	Fear no more	1091	
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	Let me not to the marriage of true minds	1092	
<i>William Shakespeare</i>	Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	1092	
<i>Karl Shapiro</i>	The Fly	1093	
<i>Sir Philip Sidney</i>	Loving in truth	1094	
<i>Gary Soto</i>	Small Town with One Road	1095	
<i>Wallace Stevens</i>	The Death of a Soldier	1096	
<i>Wallace Stevens</i>	Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock	1096	
<i>Wallace Stevens</i>	The Snow Man	1097	
<i>Jonathan Swift</i>	A Description of the Morning	1097	
<i>Alfred, Lord Tennyson</i>	From <i>In Memoriam A. H. H.</i>	1098	
<i>Dylan Thomas</i>	Fern Hill	1099	
<i>John Updike</i>	Telephone Poles	1100	
<i>Edmund Waller</i>	Song: Go, lovely rose!	1101	
<i>Bruce Wieg</i>	Snowy Egret	1102	
<i>Walt Whitman</i>	When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer	1103	
<i>Richard Wilbur</i>	April 5, 1974	1103	
<i>William Carlos Williams</i>	Poem	1104	
<i>William Carlos Williams</i>	Spring and All	1105	
<i>William Wordsworth</i>	Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802	1106	
<i>William Wordsworth</i>	I wandered lonely as a cloud	1106	
<i>William Wordsworth</i>	The Solitary Reaper	1107	
<i>William Butler Yeats</i>	Sailing to Byzantium	1108	
<i>William Butler Yeats</i>	The Second Coming	1109	
<i>William Butler Yeats</i>	The Wild Swans at Coole	1110	

DRAMA THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA 1113

CHAPTER ONE	THE NATURE OF DRAMA	1115
	General Exercise for Analysis and Evaluation of Drama	1118
<i>Meredith Oakes</i>	Mind the Gap	1120
<i>Susan Glaspell</i>	Trifles	1132
<i>Edward Albee</i>	The Sandbox	1145
<i>Christopher Durang</i>	Naomi in the Living Room	1152
	Suggestions for Writing	1158

CHAPTER TWO REALISTIC AND NONREALISTIC DRAMA 1160

<i>Henrik Ibsen</i>	A Doll House	
	Translated by <i>Otto Reinert</i>	1165
<i>Tennessee Williams</i>	The Glass Menagerie	1234

<i>Luis Valdez</i> Los Vendidos	1291
Suggestions for Writing	1302
CHAPTER THREE TRAGEDY AND COMEDY	1303
<i>Sophocles</i> Oedipus Rex	
<i>Translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald</i>	1310
<i>William Shakespeare</i> Othello, the Moor of Venice	1361
<i>William Shakespeare</i> A Midsummer Night's Dream	1463
<i>Anton Chekhov</i> The Boor	
<i>Translated by Avrahm Yarmolinsky</i>	1530
Suggestions for Writing	1542
PLAYS FOR FURTHER READING	1543
<i>Arthur Miller</i> Death of a Salesman	1545
<i>Samuel Beckett</i> Krapp's Last Tape	1632
<i>August Wilson</i> Fences	1641
Glossary of Terms	1703
Copyrights and Acknowledgments	1717
Index of Authors, Titles, and First Lines	1731