

## PREFACE

This textbook was compiled at the request of SAMT, after consultation with a number of outstanding university lecturers. It consists of three sections devoted to short story, poetry and drama. Each section is provided with a brief introductory discussion to support and guide students' reading. In addition, the sections are accompanied by glossaries and study questions to encourage careful and thoughtful reading of the material.

The short story section begins with a sample analysis of a story and concludes with an outline of another story. A novella has also been included.

The poetry section contains a variety of poems representing different time periods and kinds of poetic experience.

The drama section includes a classical play. This is followed by a modern play, the purpose of which is to introduce students to this genre and show how proper emphasis on materialistic values creates a dilemma which touches moral and spiritual behaviour.

It is hoped that the text will prove useful to university students of various fields, especially those majoring in English.

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## Introduction

The Roman Poet Horace once said that the aim of literature is to delight and instruct. He meant that literature provides pleasure during the reading experience and teaches the reader something at the same time. Since Horace, many readers have suggested more specific theories about the way literature affects us; it is doubtful, though, that anyone has offered a sounder basis for the continuing vitality and attraction of the literary art. Reading good literature continues to yield these two complementary results: pleasure and understanding. This belief lies behind the selections in this text and the introductory comments to fiction, drama and poetry.

Precisely what kind of pleasure and what kind of understanding are large and complex questions. Each of the separate introductions suggests some answers appropriate to the genre with which it is concerned. Nonetheless, some initial comments are perhaps in order here.

The focus on pleasure does not mean, of course, that literature emphasizes amusement or comedy or only the fortunate side of life. Horace was well aware of tragedies, both in life and in literature, as are we all. Literature deals with the tragic experience—in fact, it deals with all kinds of experiences which evoke many different reactions from us. We may be amused, angered, enlightened, or disturbed, yet, in each instance, we respond to the lives and emotions of the human characters and the human situations revealed to us in literature. This; surely, is the key to the fundamental pleasure which literature as a whole—whatever its form, themes, or techniques—can be said to provide, it remains human throughout.

In defining the pleasurable quality of literature, we cannot afford to neglect, at the same time, its importance as art. Other kinds of writing focus on human

beings; literature is not at all unique in that regard. What is unique is the sense of wholeness, of purpose, of order, in a creative framework which literature—and only literature—offers. Most of us are governed by a search for order rather than chaos, integration rather than fragmentation. Literature is an expression of what Wallace Stevens called the "rage for order" which human beings experience. That, too, brings satisfaction and enjoyment.

The second part of our focus, that literature is instructive, may be initially unexpected, since we have been taught that literature is far removed from those disciplines which emphasize more formal instruction and which focus on procedures, information, and facts. In reading literature, we do not expect to be informed in the way that we are when we read a history book or a newspaper. One is fictional, a representation of an imaginative life, the others are factual, dealing with historical or contemporary people or actions in "real life." Information as such may occasionally be provided. If we read a novel set in Spain or a poem about the Civil War, we may, incidentally, learn more about Spanish culture or about certain Civil War battles. A contemporary novelist, Ralph Ellison, even asserted once that he learned to shoot birds by reading Hemingway. But that kind of information is surely rare and, at best, tangential to a larger purpose. If we specifically set out to learn more about Spain or the Civil War or about bird-hunting, we will more likely go to books on culture, history, or hunting. What literature does teach is surely tied to what makes it enjoyable. That is, literature is enjoyable because it is about human beings, and it teaches us more about humanity and thus, in an important sense, more about ourselves. Horace's original phrase indicates that literature is "applicable to life"; the caution inherent in the wording is important. Literature does not tell us *how* to live in any explicit form. It seldom proposes solutions to sociological or political problems, nor is it like a moral treatise which dictates the best way to live. However, it remains applicable to life. We read it, and if we understand it, we understand more about our experiences and those of others.

Just as the artistic form of literature offers pleasure, so the artistic techniques of the author promote our understanding. If we read a newspaper account of an airplane crash we seldom have to ask why the author chose a particular point of view, or why a certain tone was developed, or why a particular setting was chosen, or why various people were described. All of that is essentially dictated by the factual event itself. The literary artist, though, has more freedom to effect a particular aim. It is appropriate, indeed often necessary, that we single out the components of a story in order to understand better, not only the literary techniques, but also the human experiences described.

The foregoing discussion is deceptively analytical. We do not react to a story by dividing it into those parts which provide pleasure and those which provide understanding, or by dividing our satisfaction into that produced by the human subjects and that produced by the artistic form. Furthermore, our enjoyment often leads to increased understanding, and understanding may in itself be an enjoyable experience. These several responses exist, but not in isolation. They are; finally, complementary parts of the whole, which is the total experience of reading and appreciating literature.