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Poetry

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GREG
JOHNSON
&
THOMAS
R. ARP

Perrine's

LITERATURE

STRUCTURE, SOUND & SENSE

Thirteenth
EDITION

POETRY

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PREFACE

In preparing this thirteenth edition of *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*, I have striven to be faithful to the principles established by Laurence Perrine more than sixty years ago while also acknowledging the evolving nature of literature. Not only have I been guided by my own experience but also by the rich legacy of Thomas R. Arp, who joined Perrine in 1979, and by the helpful suggestions of many teachers who have contributed the results of their classroom experience. Many of them are identified in the "Professional Acknowledgments" pages. Their insights have been invaluable in helping me replace more than 25 percent of the literature printed in the previous edition.

Here I must expand briefly on the contribution of Thomas R. Arp, who passed away in 2015 but whose work on *Literature* for more than thirty-five years has left an indelible imprint. Professor Arp's depth of knowledge and experience with the book as a whole, combined with his perspicacity in choosing stories to illustrate the principles of each chapter, has been a source of inspiration to me during the many years I worked with him, and here I wish to salute his achievement. Although any faults in this new edition are mine alone, I continued to benefit from his wisdom and insight in his last years, since he graciously consented to serve in a consulting role as we revised the book. Thus his name, I'm happy to say, continues to grace the cover of the book, a fitting reminder of his past contributions.

In keeping with Perrine's and Arp's shared principles, the book works to balance the classic with the contemporary, to represent a wide diversity of writers, and to emphasize the importance of understanding the elements of literature as the avenue to enjoy and appreciate it. Although there are many flourishing approaches to literature and its effects, all three of us have always believed that the initial step must be understanding the major elements of fiction, poetry, and drama.

This book is written for the student who is beginning a serious study of 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 on how to evaluate literature. The separate chapters gradually introduce the student to the elements of literature, 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?

In matters of theory, some issues are undoubtedly simplified, but I 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 assumption of *Literature* is that literature needs to be read carefully and considered thoughtfully, and that, when so read, it gives readers continuing rewards in experience and understanding. I also assume that some works repay more richly than others the trouble and effort expended in reading them, and my objective is to help the student identify, understand, enjoy, and prefer such works. To this end, the book examines the major elements of literature and suggests some criteria for judgment.

The organization and structure of the book reinforce the step-by-step approach to understanding literature. Each chapter contains two parts: (1) a discussion of the topic indicated by the chapter title, with illustrative works, and (2) a relevant selection of additional works with study questions for further illustration of the topic. Also, in each chapter I include a list of review topics for the materials, and a list of Suggestions for Writing about those materials as they are illustrated elsewhere in the book.

The book opens with a section on "Writing about Literature," which embraces the important assumption that the fullest understanding and appreciation of a literary work arises from the reader's ability to express in language its meaning and emotional effects. The process of finding the right words to make these clear, and the additional clarity that results from the correct and effective presentation of these materials, is a significant part of making a work part of one's experience.

Although the book emphasizes the study of literature, not writers, I have continued the practice of representing some authors with a sufficient number of works to support the study of them as individual artists. In the fiction section, I include three stories each by a great nineteenth-century writer (Nathaniel Hawthorne), by a important modernist writer (Flannery O'Connor), and by a major contemporary author (Joyce Carol Oates). In this edition, there are also five poets amply represented as "Featured Poets": John Donne from the Renaissance, John Keats and Emily Dickinson from the nineteenth century, and Robert Frost and Sylvia Plath from the modern era. The table of contents gathers the titles of their poems in a boxed format for easy reference.

This edition also presents "A Contemporary Collection," five poets represented by six or more poems each, placed throughout the text: Billy Collins, Louise Glück, Seamus Heaney, Sharon Olds, and Natasha Trethewey. These too are identified in a boxed format in the table of contents.

Finally, to provide an introduction to the further works of individual poets, the book contains at least three poems each by more than two dozen writers, both classic and modern. These poems can easily be referenced in the index of the book.

In the drama section, I have maintained the practice of including a number of one-act plays, both within the section's chapters and the additional "Plays for Further Reading," so as to provide a wider range of dramatic styles and approaches, and to include contemporary playwrights of diverse backgrounds.

An *Instructor's Manual* has again been prepared to accompany this book. It is available to all teachers who adopt the book for their classes. The manual contains an analytical article on every selection, suggesting approaches to interpretation and providing information that places the works in their contexts. These articles are the work of the author who prepared this edition as well as the man who created the first edition, Laurence Perrine, and the man who worked on the series for several decades, Thomas R. Arp. In the interests of space, the main text does not provide extended biographical information about the writers, but instructors and students who feel the need for such material are urged to consult Wadsworth's valuable Literature resource Center at <http://trials.galegroup.com/thomson>.

Through the thirteen editions of this book, which originated in the middle of the twentieth century, *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense* has evolved in many ways, responding to shifts in interest, concern, and taste expressed by its users. However, certain abiding principles remain as relevant in the current century as they were in the last. Among these are the conviction that the close reading of a text is basic to understanding and appreciating it; that to understand the means by which a work achieves its ends is an essential part of experiencing it fully; and that reading imaginative literature is important to the development of the whole person.

G. J.

FOREWORD TO STUDENTS

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, to Paris and Pittsburgh and Dublin, and to sixteenth-century London and seventeenth-century Massachusetts. 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 develop an 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 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 at the most basic level, we 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 experience 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.

CHAPTER ONE

What Is Poetry?

Poetry is as universal as language and almost as ancient. The most primitive peoples have used it, and the most civilized have cultivated it. In all ages and in all countries, poetry has been written, and eagerly read or listened to, by all kinds and conditions of people—by soldiers, legislators, lawyers, homemakers, farmers, doctors, scientists, clergy, philosophers, kings, and queens. In all ages, it has been especially the concern of the educated, the intelligent, and the sensitive, yet it has appealed, in its simpler forms, to the uneducated and to children. Why? Because it has given pleasure. People have read it, listened to it, or recited it because they liked it—because it gave them enjoyment. But this is not the whole answer. Poetry in all ages has been regarded as important, not simply as one of several alternative forms of amusement, as one person might choose video games, another chess, and another poetry. Rather, it has been regarded as something central to existence, something having unique value to the fully realized life, something that we are better off for having and without which we are spiritually impoverished. To understand the reasons for this, we need to have at least a provisional understanding of what poetry is—provisional, because people have always been more successful at appreciating poetry than at defining it.

Initially, poetry might be defined as a kind of language that says *more* and says it *more intensely* than does ordinary language. To understand this fully, we need to understand what poetry “says.” After all, language is employed on different occasions to say quite different kinds of things; in other words, language has different uses.

Perhaps the most common use of language is to communicate *information*. We say that it is nine o’clock, that we liked a certain movie, that George Washington was the first president of the United States, that bromine and iodine are members of the halogen group of chemical elements.

This we might call the *practical* use of language; it helps us with the ordinary business of living.

But it is not primarily to communicate information that novels, short stories, plays, and poems are written. These exist to bring us a sense and a perception of life, to widen and sharpen our contacts with existence. Their concern is with *experience*. We all have an inner need to live more deeply and fully and with greater awareness, to know the experience of others, and to understand our own experience better. Poets, from their own store of felt, observed, or imagined experiences, select, combine, and reorganize. They create significant new experiences for their readers—significant because the language is focused and formed—in which readers can participate and from which they may gain a greater awareness and understanding of their world. Literature, in other words, can be used as a function for stepping up the intensity and increasing the range of our experience, and as a glass for clarifying it. This is the *literary* use of language, for literature is not only an aid to living but a means of living.

In advertisements, sermons, political speeches, and even some poems, we find a third use of language: as an instrument of *persuasion*, or argument. But the distinctions among these three uses—the practical, the literary, and the argumentative—are not always clear-cut, since some written language simultaneously performs two or even all three functions. For example, an excellent poem we consider “literary” may convey information, and may also try to persuade us to share a particular point of view. Effectiveness in communicating experience, however, is the one essential criterion for any poem aspiring to the condition of literature.

Suppose, for instance, that we are interested in eagles. If we want simply to acquire information about eagles, we may turn to Google.com, a book of natural history, or Wikipedia. We would find that there are about fifty-five species of eagles and that most have hooked bills, curved claws, broad wings, and powerfully developed breast muscles. We would also learn that eagles vary in length from about sixteen inches to as long as forty inches; that most hunt while flying, though some await their prey on a high perch; that they nest in tall trees or on inaccessible cliffs; that they lay only one or two eggs; and that for human beings eagles “symbolize power, courage, freedom, and immortality and have long been used as national, military, and heraldic emblems and as symbols in religion.”*

But unless we are interested in this information only for practical purposes, we are likely to feel a little disappointed, as though we had grasped the feathers of the eagle but not its soul. True, we have learned many facts

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about the eagle, but we have missed somehow its lonely majesty, its power, and the wild grandeur of its surroundings that would make the eagle a living creature rather than a mere museum specimen, and that would inspire the potent symbolic image of eagles. For the living eagle we must turn to literature.

The Eagle

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

—ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON (1809–1892)

QUESTIONS

1. What is peculiarly effective about the expressions "crooked hands," "Close to the sun," "Ringed with the azure world," "wrinkled," "crawls," and "like a thunderbolt"?
2. Notice the formal pattern of the poem, particularly the contrast of "he stands" in the first stanza and "he falls" in the second. Is there any other contrast between the two stanzas?

When "The Eagle" has been read well, readers will feel that they have enjoyed a significant experience and understand eagles better, though in a different way, than they did from the Wikipedia article alone. Although the article *analyzes* our experience of eagles, the poem in some sense *synthesizes* such an experience. Indeed, we may say the two approaches to experience—the scientific and the literary—complement each other, and we may contend that the kind of understanding we get from the second is at least as valuable as the kind we get from the first.

Literature, then, exists to communicate significant experience—significant because it is concentrated and organized. Its function is not to tell us *about* experience but to allow us imaginatively to *participate* in it. It is a means of allowing us, through the imagination, to live more fully, more deeply, more richly, and with greater awareness. It can do this in two ways: by *broadening* our experience—that is, by making us acquainted with a range of experience with which in the ordinary course of events we might have no contact—or by *deepening* our experience—that is, by making us feel more

poignantly and more understandingly the everyday experiences all of us have. It enlarges our perspectives and breaks down some of the limits we may feel.

We can avoid two limiting approaches to poetry if we keep this conception of literature firmly in mind. The first approach always looks for a lesson or a bit of moral instruction. The second expects to find poetry always beautiful. Let us consider one of the songs from Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost* (Act 5, scene 2).

Winter

When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipped and ways be foul, 5
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
"Tu-whit, tu-who!"

A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel^o the pot. skim

When all aloud the wind doth blow, 10
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs^o hiss in the bowl, crab apples
Then nightly sings the staring owl, 15
"Tu-whit, tu-who!"

A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

QUESTIONS

1. Vocabulary: saw (11), brooding (12).
2. Is the owl's cry really a "merry" note? How are this adjective and the verb "sings" employed?
3. In what way does the owl's cry contrast with the other details of the poem?

In this poem, Shakespeare communicates the quality of winter life around a sixteenth-century English country house. But he does not do so by telling us flatly that winter in such surroundings is cold and in many respects unpleasant, though with some pleasant features too (the adjectives

cold, unpleasant, and pleasant are not even used in the poem). Instead, he provides a series of concrete, rather dismal details that suggest these qualities and enable us, imaginatively, to experience this winter life ourselves. The shepherd blows on his fingernails to warm his hands; the milk freezes in the pail between the cowshed and the kitchen; the cook is slovenly and unclean, "greasy" either from spattered cooking fat or from her own sweat as she leans over the hot fire; the roads are muddy; the folk listening to the parson have colds; the birds "sit brooding in the snow"; and the servant girl's nose is raw from cold. But pleasant things are in prospect. Tom is bringing in logs for the fire, the hot cider or ale with its roasted crab apples is ready for drinking, and the soup or stew will soon be ready. In contrast to all these familiar details of country life is the mournful and eerie note of the owl.

Obviously the poem contains no moral. If we limit ourselves to looking in poetry for some lesson, message, or noble truth about life, we are bound to be disappointed. This limited approach sees poetry as a kind of sugarcoated pill—a wholesome truth or lesson made palatable by being put into pretty words. What this narrow approach really wants is a sermon—not a poem, but something inspirational. Yet "Winter," which has appealed to readers for more than four centuries, is not inspirational and contains no moral preachment.

Nor is the poem "Winter" beautiful. Though it is appealing in its way and contains elements of beauty, there is little that is really beautiful in red, raw noses, coughing in chapel, nipped blood, foul roads, and greasy cooks. Yet the second limiting approach may lead us to feel that poetry deals exclusively with beauty—with sunsets, flowers, butterflies, love, God—and that the one appropriate response to any poem is, after a moment of awed silence, "Isn't that beautiful!" But this narrow approach excludes a large proportion of poetry. The function of poetry is sometimes to be ugly rather than beautiful. And poetry may deal with common colds and greasy cooks as legitimately as with sunsets and flowers. Consider another example:

Dulce et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time, 10
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams before my helpless sight 15
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin, 20
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
Bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest 25
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

—WILFRED OWEN (1893–1918)

QUESTIONS

1. Vocabulary: *lime* (12).
2. The Latin quotation (27–28), from the Roman poet Horace, means "It is sweet and becoming to die for one's country." What is the poem's comment on this statement?
3. List the elements of the poem that seem not beautiful and therefore "unpoetic." Are there any elements of beauty in the poem?
4. How do the comparisons in lines 1, 14, 20, and 23–24 contribute to the effectiveness of the poem?
5. What does the poem gain by moving from plural pronouns and the past tense to singular pronouns and the present tense? What does the poem gain by moving from first person (plural, then singular) to second person?

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Poetry takes all life as its province. Its primary concern is not with beauty, not with philosophical truth, not with persuasion, but with experience. Beauty and philosophical truth are aspects of experience, and the poet is often engaged with them. But poetry as a whole is concerned with all kinds of experience—beautiful or ugly, strange or common, noble or ignoble, actual or imaginary. Paradoxically, an artist can transform even



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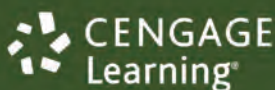
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