

Preface

This text-book is conceived for *High school, College* and first-year *University* students who need or wish to have a complete, useful and up-to-date abridgement of the fundamentals of English and American Literature (from the origins to the present) through an effective and easy-learning approach. The book is also designed for teachers and professors who wish to rely on a guide which offers a general, all-round survey on English-language writers and their literary works described in a current, select and communicative style; and for those of them who need at the same time a trained and practical tool supplying useful materials for classroom activities.

Frequently students of low or intermediate levels have indeed difficulties, or feel uninspired, when they are called to tackle literary studies and have to interpret texts of which they know nothing or very little. The didactic principles and methodology followed by the author in this *Guide* allow the students a self-study approach thanks to a clear, polished exposition enclosing precious syntheses and critical insights, which are of great help to empower them to fill their gaps of knowledge.

Thought as a collection of biographical outlines, summaries and critical comments on novels, plays and poems of English-language writers, this text-book meets their need for theoretical frameworks, detailed forewords, wide and rich comments on literary works. All these features allow the students to understand and appreciate better the contents and the forms that typify the texts as literary models inside the tradition they belong to, or which (on the contrary) contribute to make them original and well-distinguished outcomes in the mainstream literary production of their age.

If Histories of Literature do usually offer a chronological and critical presentation of writers and works by setting them in their historical, social, political and cultural backgrounds, this *Guide*, although attentive to offer a complete and condensed profile of the writers through an introductory presentation and a detailed biography card, aims at presenting the full list of their works with the summarized plots, an aspect which makes this book unique in its *genre* for the quantity of texts examined. It also comprises analytical interpretations of the major and most significant texts, when deemed necessary to outline their literary quality, either as representative examples of a particular style, mood, trend, or as case studies of relevant interest from the cultural point of view.

The choice and selection of writers (here presented chronologically by the author) has not been guided, nor influenced by any personal preference, but it was driven by a twofold orientation: many of the chosen writers of the past centuries are generally considered as the most representative of their time or literary season by the most recent and updated criticism; conversely, others (the modernists, post-modernists and contemporaries - both British and American) have been widely anthologized in the most adopted text-books as literary models for the present generation of students. These writers are certainly not "the only pebbles on the beach" but merely a significant though restricted, confined representation of the plurality of voices, thoughts, ideas of the time in which they lived and worked, and of the literary, social and cultural trends which marked out significantly their historical age.

Giuseppe Gorruso's reading of the writers and the works selected fully respects the requirements of impartiality and distance of thought, which a didactic text should have in order to avoid any kind of influence on the readers and to present the subject-matter under a neutral light without forcing interpretation.

The framework which underlies the writing of each chapter of this *Guide* foresees a suitable introduction and a "biography card" for each writer: their function is to point out the steps that have dotted the writer's life, the literary influences and education received, the stylistic peculiarities of his (or her) works, and the *Fortleben*. In the same way, the summaries and comments on the novels, plays and poems are always preceded by an "introductory card" that includes the date of publication, the *genre*, the plot, the setting, a brief outline of the characters involved in the stories, and (when possible) also the original sources of the text. Each volume ends with a copious fill in the blanks test with keys.

From a certain point of view this experienced and qualified handbook can be regarded as a text unique in the current publishing world for the richness of its materials, for the completeness of its observations and the easiness of its consultation. A thought of gratitude is then to be bestowed on the author for the demanding work and the overall approach to the mainstream of the English literary world he afforded in so many years and has recently and successfully brought to an end.

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