Access Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama.
Edited by Barbara Barnard & David F. Winn (2005).
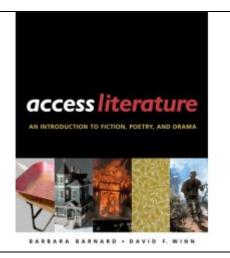**Boston: Thomson Wadsworth**
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The informing assumption of Access Literature is that "helping students to read, think, and write well" prepares them to take an active part in their world (xix). Barnard and Winn also believe, rightly, that while most students are interested in storytelling and music, they find formal analysis of poetry, characterization in fiction or dialogue in drama difficult. The massive volume that the two have put together seeks to remedy this problem by using what the students already possess – an awareness of everyday use of plot, rhythm or symbolism in advertisements, pop music or movie posters – in order to refine their skills in reading literature.

These assumptions enable the authors to organize their very practical 'guide' to literature differently from other works. Every chapter therefore opens with images from everyday life: movie posters, advertisements or commercials. They are then analysed for particular aspects like plot or style. This is an interesting strategy, for it asks (and facilitates) the student to make the move from a feature of everyday genres to a literary text. The strategy works effectively because the authors are able to show how both genres are ultimately exercises in language. A good example would be the chapter on "Style, Tone of Voice, and Irony." It opens with a collage of menus from various establishments. The preliminary analysis focuses on the language of the menu, pointing out the use of catchy phrases, the ironic tone and the playfulness. From this everyday genre, the focus shifts to the use of irony, tone and diction in short stories by Alice Munro, Junot Díaz, and others. Or in the chapter on metaphor and symbol, Barnard and Winn open with the ubiquitous symbols of electronic communication – the icons on word processing programs and email – before shifting to the imagery and symbols in the fiction of Alice Walker and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The choice of literary texts is interesting. It caters to the purveyor of canonical 'Eng. Lit' with its Shakespeares and Tennysons. But it also expands the canon to take in the multicultural worlds (and college/university campuses we live and work in today). Thus African American and immigrant writing share the space with the canon. The literary

texts are carefully chosen – any such Introduction to literature has to be programmatic – for particular features like the use of irony in one or the employment of typical generic conventions in another. This enables the authors to focus on culture-specific issues in literary texts also. For example, in the questions following Hawthorne's famous tale, "The Birthmark," Barnard and Winn ask the student reader to explain how the historical setting of the story helps her/him understand the characters and plot better. The exercise shows how 'context' and 'history' are not simply spatial or temporal information: They frame a text's theme.

The choice of texts is also appropriate for another reason: They are extremely illustrative of the literary concept being elaborated. Thus, for symbolism, Barnard and Winn use poems by Frost, Ginsberg, Paz, Blake and others. The poems are arranged in such a way that there is a gradient of comprehensibility: from the easy to the esoteric. This is a good strategy because by the time the student comes to Blake's "London" she is more or less acclimatized to the way symbolism works. As an example of instructional methodology, the order of texts in the entire volume is worthy of commendation.

An entire chapter devoted to protest and performance poetry breaks the confines of the genre. Poems range across Ginsberg's uncharitable commentary on America through Ishmael Reed's evocative poem that recalls slavery to Denise Levertov's work on protests about the Vietnam war. Short notes from essays enable the reader to situate the new genre in a context. Thus extracts from Jerome Rothenberg's "New Models, New Visions" (1977) speak of the significance of performance poetry (pp. 929-931) in the chapter on "protest and performance poetry." These juxtapositions of literary works with their contemporary commentators is an interesting mode of introducing the genre to the student, by ensuring that she gets a feel of not simply the text but, quite often, the movement, reception and theoretical positions on them.

Author biographies have been a standard component of most such Introductions to literature. Barnard and Winn provide short, terse sketches of the selected authors, preferring to focus on their literary lives and works (Shakespeare gets a marginally larger write-up).

Sample student essays, included as boxed items, provide case-studies: of how literary appreciation – to invoke an old-fashioned term – is done in the term-paper or assignment. These short, analytical pieces are marked by a definite change in the prose style and diction – they do read like student essays! – but are also programmatic in that they illustrate the modes of analysis and writing discussed in the book.

Barnard and Winn have put together an accomplished, comprehensive Introduction to literary studies. The volume is theoretically wide-ranging, eclectic in its selection of texts and rigorous in the analysis of literary forms/themes. The "lives of poets" section is a useful guide to biography and major works. Of particular interest is the section on MLA documentation guidelines and 'notes' on critical approaches to literature and culture.

Access Literature is precisely that: a ready, easy-to-read, entertaining mode of access to literary genres, styles, techniques and modes. Barnard and Winn's work is a really useful introductory text for students and instructors.

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