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VOLUME 2

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Preface



The plan of this anthology has emerged from two decades of experimentation with that indispensable course which is designed to introduce students to the greatness and variety of English literature. A number of the editors began with the scattergun survey, which represented almost every notable writer in relatively brief selections; later, like so many of our contemporaries, we turned to the intensive teaching of selected major writers, considered outside of their historical and literary contexts. Each approach proved to have its particular merits and its corresponding defects. The broad survey achieved inclusiveness by description, at the expense of proper emphases and of study in depth. The close study of relatively few writers, on the other hand, was arbitrarily selective, and gave the student few points of historical and literary reference; it left him with embarrassing gaps in literary knowledge, very little sense of chronology, and almost no experience of the way that the works of even the most original writers are rooted in tradition and share the characteristic qualities and preoccupations of their age.

The Norton Anthology is designed to provide the texts and materials for a course which will combine the values of emphasis and range by presenting major authors in the context of the major literary traditions of their times. It includes the best and most characteristic writings of the great writers—not of some, but of *all* the great writers (other than novelists), and in sufficient quantity to allow the instructor considerable latitude of choice while still achieving a study in depth. It also supplies the literary settings of the major authors by including copious examples of other writers and writings, excellent in themselves and also representative, in each age, of the reigning literary forms and the chief movements of convention and revolt, tradition and innovation.

In both format and editorial procedure, the editors' primary aim has been to enhance the intelligent delight of students in literature as literature. The book has been printed on paper of such quality that its massive contents are reduced to the bulk and weight of one of the longer modern novels, while its pages