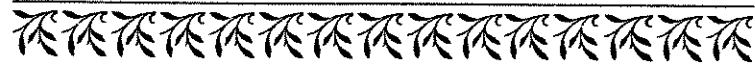




The Norton Anthology of English Literature

FOURTH EDITION



M. H. Abrams, *General Editor*

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VOLUME 1

W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • NEW YORK • LONDON

END PAPER MAP BY A. KARL/H. GEORGE

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110

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Limited, Toronto. Printed in the United States of America.

BOOK DESIGN BY JOHN WOODLOCK

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Abrams, Meyer Howard, ed.

The Norton anthology of English literature.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. English literature. I. Title.

PR1109.Az 1979 820'.8 78-27117

7 8 9 0

ISBN 0-393-95039-5 CL

ISBN 0-393-95048-4 PBK

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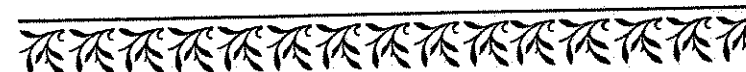
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Preface to the Fourth Edition



The intention of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* from the beginning has been to maintain continuity, yet to allow for change. Its continuing aim is to provide, for the indispensable courses which introduce students to the greatness and variety of English literature, the major works in verse and prose from *Beowulf* to the present day, ordered chronologically, and presented in accurate and readable texts. A vital literary culture, however, is always on the move. The interests of readers change; new texts are discovered; old texts are better edited; new scholarly information and critical viewpoints become available; teachers and students want fresh materials that invite experimentation in the way literature is to be presented and studied. The policy, accordingly, has been to issue periodic revisions which, without violating the principle that only major writings be represented, are designed to keep the anthology in the mainstream of contemporary literary, cultural, and intellectual knowledge and concerns.

The strength of this collection is that its contents and editorial matter are grounded, not on theoretical views of what might be taught in an introduction to English literature, but on long experience in actually teaching such a course. The first edition in 1962 was the product of a decade of experimentation by several of its editors, and some of them (including the general editor) have proceeded to test each new edition by using it in the classroom. And ever since 1962 we have received a steady flow of voluntary suggestions from hundreds of users; students as well as teachers, who view the anthology with a loyal but critical eye. For this edition, we have also solicited detailed judgments about the utility of materials in the last version, together with recommendations for new materials, from almost one hundred critics—some of them experts in individual periods, but most of them instructors who use the book in a course. With each new edition, *The Norton Anthology* thus becomes more and more the product of a sustained collaboration between editors, teachers, and students.