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This book, now in its sixth edition, has been from the first the product of our shared conviction that the richness of great literature merits correspondingly rich responses—responses that may be reasoned as well as felt. These happen most readily when the reader approaches a great work from as many perspectives as it legitimately opens itself to. Nothing, of course, replaces the reader's initial felt responses, the sound of poetry or the visions of fiction in the mind's eye. But human responses seldom remain dead-level; they reverberate through multiple planes of sensibility, impelled toward articulation—in short, toward criticism. In response to the inevitable classroom question, "Why can't we simply enjoy this poem (story, novel, play) instead of criticizing?" we would answer, "The greatest enjoyment of literary art is never simple." T. S. Eliot observed that "criticism is as inevitable as breathing," and that we should become the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it.

Eliot's observation was instrumental in the genesis of the first edition of the *Handbook*. At that time the four original coauthors, colleagues in the English Department at Centenary College of Louisiana, had become sensitive to the problems of teaching literary analysis to college students in the absence of a comprehensive yet elementary guide to some of the major critical approaches to works of literature. No work of that sort existed, yet students clearly could have profited from a more formalized and contemporary introduction to the serious study of literature than they generally had received at lower levels of education. Even for those whose exposure to literature had been extensive, often possessed only a narrow and fragmented concept of such interpretive approaches. Consequently, one of our first aims—then and now—has been to help establish a healthy balance in the student's critical outlook through offering the most useful approaches to literary criticism.

We have been gratified with the success of this aim, indicated by the acceptance of the book by our colleagues and by hundreds of thousands of students, now