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PREFACE TO THE SERIES

In *The Art of Teaching* Gilbert Highet wrote, "Bad teaching wastes a great deal of effort, and spoils many lives which might have been full of energy and happiness." All too many teachers have failed in their work, Highet argued, simply "because they have not thought about it." We hope that the Approaches to Teaching World Literature series, sponsored by the Modern Language Association's Publications Committee, will not only improve the craft—as well as the art—of teaching but also encourage serious and continuing discussion of the aims and methods of teaching literature.

The principal objective of the series is to collect within each volume different points of view on teaching a specific literary work, a literary tradition, or a writer widely taught at the undergraduate level. The preparation of each volume begins with a wide-ranging survey of instructors, thus enabling us to include in the volume the philosophies and approaches, thoughts and methods of scores of experienced teachers. The result is a sourcebook of material, information, and ideas on teaching the subject of the volume to undergraduates.

The series is intended to serve nonspecialists as well as specialists, inexperienced as well as experienced teachers, graduate students who wish to learn effective ways of teaching as well as senior professors who wish to compare their own approaches with the approaches of colleagues in other schools. Of course, no volume in the series can ever substitute for erudition, intelligence, creativity, and sensitivity in teaching. We hope merely that each book will point readers in useful directions; at most each will offer only a first step in the long journey to successful teaching.

Joseph Gibaldi
Series Editor

PREFACE TO THE VOLUME

Unlike all previous volumes in the Modern Language Association series *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, this one focuses on a group of writers, not a single author or work. Perhaps a strong argument could be made for devoting a volume to Donne alone or even to Herbert. But it seems more important and useful to teachers to broaden the focus and consider Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, and Marvell as they are most often examined in the classroom: as a group.

We should not underestimate the differences that separate and distinguish those writers. Nor should we be totally happy with that troublesome designation *metaphysical*. One of the first completed questionnaires I received at the beginning of my work on this project queried, "Do we still use that obsolete term?" It seems to me that we do, and perhaps we should, but we should use it as a term to be debated or dissected, rather than as a critical straitjacket. The intention of this book is not to perpetuate a lazy, uncritical use of the term *metaphysical poets*; rather, it aims to aid in the classroom process of discriminating among the varieties of poetry, metaphysical and otherwise, practiced by five important seventeenth-century poets.

The first section of the volume, "Materials," is a descriptive (rather than consciously evaluative) review of sources relevant to teaching the poets: editions, anthologies, reference and critical works, and audiovisual aids. I have tried to be as thorough as space allows, but part of the purpose of the review section is to be focused and selective in order to give instructors a manageable overview of textbook options and preferred critical works. Whenever possible, I include references to comprehensive bibliographies to facilitate further research.

The heart of the volume is "Approaches," eighteen essays on a variety of topics. Like Herbert's poems in *The Temple*, stars that set up constellations as they shine and reflect on one another, the essays fall into shimmering patterns as they take up common themes, often from divergent perspectives. Annabel Patterson's essay, which serves as an introduction, proposes that we teach *against* the traditional Dryden-Johnson-Eliot approach to the metaphysical poets. In one way or another, nearly every essay that follows comments on that issue. It is impossible to cover all the important backgrounds necessary for a full understanding of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, and Marvell, but the essays in the next section, "General Discussions and Backgrounds," focus on such important topics as seventeenth-century love poetry, religion, iconography, and representations of and addresses to women in metaphysical poetry. The attention throughout the

essays to detailed scholarship, concrete pedagogical methods, and class assignments makes the section particularly useful to instructors who worry about what is often a great gap between research and undergraduate teaching. Next, five essays explore various course contexts in which the metaphysical poets appear, including not only the ubiquitous survey course but also a humanities-based composition course. Finally, in "Approaches to Specific Poets" each of the five poets is discussed in a separate essay. That there is not room for several essays on each is partially compensated for by the suggestions and the techniques for teaching each of the poets that are included in nearly all the preceding essays.

The list of participants in the survey of instructors inadequately acknowledges my gratitude to those who not only filled out questionnaires but also sent in syllabi, course materials, bibliographies, examinations, and generous letters describing classroom experiences and techniques. I especially thank the teacher-scholars who contributed essays to this volume for their patience, goodwill, and wisdom as we advised and instructed each other through the long process of composing and revising this book.

The Sacred Heart University Research and Creativity Council generously supported this project by granting funds for release-time and research-related expenses. On a personal level, I have benefited a great deal from constant discussions about undergraduate education with my friends and colleagues Ralph Corrigan and David Curtis, English department chairperson *extraordinaire*.

Finally, I am fortunate to come from a family of teachers—not academics but wise teachers nonetheless—and it is to my mother, father, sister, and brother that I owe much of my continuing interest in the process of seeking and sharing knowledge. And I am also joyfully indebted to Becky Abbott, whose knowledge of things physical and metaphysical is perpetually wonderful.