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THE
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OF THE
UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

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TO NORA K. WALKER
AND IN MEMORY OF
HAROLD WALKER

This book is not written for the over-fed.
It is written for men who have not been able
to afford an university education or for young
men, whether or not threatened with universities,
who want to know more at the age of fifty than
I know today, and whom I might conceivably aid
to that object. I am fully aware of the dangers
inherent in attempting such utility to them.

Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*

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MARSHALL WALKER
Hamilton, April 1982

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Editor's Preface

THE study of literature requires knowledge of contexts as well as texts. What kind of person wrote the poem, the play, the novel, the essay? What forces acted upon them as they wrote? What was the historical, the political, the philosophical, the economic, the cultural background? Was the writer accepting or rejecting the literary conventions of the time, or developing them, or creating entirely new kinds of literary expression? Are there interactions between literature and the art, music or architecture of its period? Was the writer affected by contemporaries or isolated?

Such questions stress the need for students to go beyond the reading of set texts, to extend their knowledge by developing a sense of chronology, of action and reaction, and of the varying relationships between writers and society.

Histories of literature can encourage students to make comparisons, can aid in understanding the purposes of individual authors and in assessing the totality of their achievements. Their development can be better understood and appreciated with some knowledge of the background of their time. And histories of literature, apart from their valuable function as reference books, can demonstrate the great wealth of writing in English that is there to be enjoyed. They can guide the reader who wishes to explore it more fully and to gain in the process deeper insights into the rich diversity not only of literature but of human life itself.

A. NORMAN JEFFARES

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