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## ABSTRACT

*Lectures on Classical English Literature* is a textbook specially devised for the first- and second-year undergraduates who study English language and literature at the Spiru Haret University of Bucharest. It covers the first-term syllabus of English literature, which focuses on the earlier phases of English (and American) drama and fiction, respectively.

This handbook is one of the several textbooks produced by the English Language and Literature Department that aims at teaching English literature by using a genre-based approach. This does not mean that chronology has been completely discarded. On the contrary, the book presents, chronologically, some of the most significant moments in the development of the English language drama and fiction along the centuries. Moreover, the last section of the book provides undergraduates with a chronology that will help them to contextualize the moment when certain major literary works were produced.

Speaking of a genre-based approach, the authors of the handbook emphasize the importance of the specific constituents of each genre presented in this book. Part One, which deals with English drama up to 1625, provides undergraduates with the discussion of key concepts like drama as a performance art, elements of construction (plot, characters, symbols, themes, conventions, imagery), and types of drama. Several lectures present the historical evolution of drama in England, the social, political and economic context in which it evolved, and critical interpretations of important works. However, undergraduates are not encouraged to bow to well-established critical opinions; they ought to use the theoretical elements in the course in an attempt to reach a personal interpretation of the texts included in the mandatory bibliography. Needless to say, the course is not only genre-oriented but also text-oriented. That is why, several brief chapters of

Part One are about how we should try to analyze a comedy or a tragedy, a chronicle play or a domestic tragedy by authors ranging from Shakespeare to Webster and Heywood.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century and its development up to the end of the nineteenth century. It includes chapters dedicated to the most important novelists that contributed to the American novel as well. The genre-oriented approach is obvious in the discussion of the novel as a distinct genre from several viewpoints (literary, social, etc.). The chapter on narrative strategies provides undergraduates with a number of theoretical elements without which one cannot understand the distinctive features of the authors and novels selected for discussion.

The third part of the book combines pure theory with applied criticism: key concepts of narratology such as point of view, types of narrators (omniscient, obtrusive, reliable, etc.), symbols, setting, characters (round and flat ones), beginnings and endings, are all discussed with concrete reference to the works of canonical novelists such as Defoe, Fielding, Jane Austen, Dickens, and so on. This part is extremely useful for seminar activities, for individual work during the reading of the novels in the mandatory bibliography, and, in the long run, for the undergraduates' training with a view to the licence examination.

All in all, this handbook combines literary history and literary theory in an attempt to arm the diligent, self-conscious undergraduate with essential clues that must enable him to provide a logical and coherent interpretation of any literary work belonging to one genre or another.