



外语教学指导与学术研究系列丛书

A Brief Analysis of British and American  
Celebrated Writers' Classical Works

# 英美文学 名家经典作品简析

© 刘赢南 张传宏 王建光 温泉 黄吟 编著

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BEIJING INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY PRESS

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# 前言

《英美文学名家经典作品赏析》是一本囊括英美近现代多位著名作家数篇著名作品、作家概述及作品简析的书籍。此书的编著旨在提高广大文学爱好者的文学鉴赏力，特别是英美文学鉴赏能力，把握英美文学发展脉络，提高文学分析与批评能力，进而了解现当代英美文化与社会。

《英美文学名家经典作品赏析》共分三个部分：①作家概述 ②作品导读与简析 ③作品原文。该书选自英美近现代的著名作品，它们内涵丰富，贴近生活，时代感强，语言通俗易懂，非常具有可读性。

作者

2015年8月

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## Edgar Allan Poe

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### 1.1 The Introductory Remarks of Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe is the celebrated American literary critic, famous romantic poet and forerunner of American detective story. His life is a tragic one, and thus such tragic life has formed his unique writing style and meditative theme. Poe's poetic theory exerts great influence on the poets and writers after him.

Edgar Allan Poe was born in a humble family. When he was about four years old, both his parents died. He became an orphan. Later a rich Diamond businessman adopted him. In Mr. Poe's family, Poe has lived a comfortable life for several years. Then he attended University of Virginia, but there appeared a severe quarrel between Mr. Allan and Poe, because Poe intended to major in literature, while Mr. Allan would like Poe to study law. This quarrel led to such outcome that Mr. Allan refused to pay tuition for Poe, so

that Poe was eliminated from university. The adopted son broke up any relation with Mr. Allan. Afterwards, Poe enrolled the American Army. Soon he was sent to The West Point. Because of his gambling and drinking behavior, Poe was sent away from The West Point, so he had to earn his living as a freelancer. In 1835, he worked for The American Southern Literary Message as an editor. He published his important collection of story, *The Tales of Grotesque and Arabiansque*. Also for the sake of his ill behavior, he was fired. After he married his thirteen-year-old cousin, he came back to The American Southern Literary Message again. In 1845, he published his important collection of poetry *The Raven*. In 1847, his young wife died. Two years later, he died and his body was found in a gutter.

Edgar Allan Poe creates a lot of beautiful, but rather sorrowful poems. His beautiful and emotional pattern of poetry fascinates many readers. His horrible and mysterious detective stories form a kind of horrible beauty which deeply attracts people.

## 1.2 Comment on *The Purloined Letter*

Edgar Allan Poe is viewed as not only the eminent romantic poet, but also an excellent short story teller. His short stories are featured with the complex plots, eccentric characterization, horrific scenes and mysterious hue. His detective story is thought of as the classics in the world literature. Poe's short story writing style is modelled by the late generation of writers after him. *The Purloined Letter* is one of his well-known detective stories. The story tells a



queer letter theft case which puzzled policemen. George, the director of police station in P city had to turn to Pain, his good friend, a private detective. After making the careful analysis of the case, Pain promised to take the purloined letter back.

The story was written in the first point of view. The narrator "I" tells the story as one of the protagonists. The conversations and dialogues among the protagonists are the main clue of the story. The story begins with the director of the police station, George's visit to the narrator and Pain, a private detective because he came across a tough trial, which is very simple superficially, but it is very difficult to deal with. The details of the case is like this: The princess received a love letter. She was going to read it when Mrs. Duwal, the Dutchess called on her. Having considered the Dutchess had a habbit of making a gossip, the princess put the letter back into the envelope, then placed it on the table. At the same time, Mr. Lerbelon, something important in the government came in. He caught sight of the letter with the capital letter S on the envelope. He guessed that it was the princess' secret in the letter. In order to co-erce the princess into supporting him in the government, Mr. Lerbelon changed her letter with his own letter. While the princess was talking with Mrs. Duwal, she found what Mr. Lerbelon had done. But she could not stop him because she was worried that Mrs. Duwal could make the news that the princess had a lover public. So she could do nothing when her letter was purloined. To find back this letter is a demanding work for George. If he could not get the letter back, he would lose his position at present. George had searched for Mr. Lerbelon's house thoroughly, but gained nothing, thus he



tried to get some advice from Pain. Pain asked him the content of the letter and told him someone could give him a hand for the case. Three weeks later, George came to meet the narrator and Pain again. Pain said that he would return the purloined letter to George if he presented a prize of 50,000 francs. George agreed with him. Soon Pain took a letter from one of his drawers, which was the letter that the princess had lost. George grasped the letter with his shaking hands, reading it. Then he rose up from his seat and rushed out of the door.

Then Pain began to tell the narrator the process of how he gained the purloined letter from Mr. Lerbelon's house. One morning, Pain was wearing dark glasses to pay a visit to Mr. Lerbelon. During their talk, he was examining the room, taking notice of an ordinary shelf inserted letters. From there he saw a dirty envelope. He believed that was the princess' letter. He played a trick to get the letter from the shelf and then placed a similar letter back to the original place.

### 1.3 The Text of *The Purloined Letter*

*Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio.*

*Seneca.*

AT Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschäum, in company with my friend C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet, au troisieme, No. 33, Rue Dunot, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a

profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Roget. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G—, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G.'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forbore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling every thing "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visitor with a pipe, and rolled towards him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

“Oh no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively odd.”

“Simple and odd,” said Dupin.

“Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether.”

“Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault,” said my friend.

“What nonsense you do talk!” replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

“Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain,” said Dupin.

“Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?”

“A little too self-evident.”

“Ha! ha! ha! —ha! ha! ha! —ho! ho! ho!” —roared our visitor, profoundly amused, “oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!”

“And what, after all, is the matter on hand?” I asked.

“Why, I will tell you,” replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. “I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confided it to any one.”

“Proceed,” said I.

“Or not,” said Dupin.

"Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance, has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the Prefect, "from the nature of the document, and from the nonappearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber's possession; —that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable." The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? Well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendancy," I interposed, "would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare—"

"The thief," said G. , "is the Minister D—, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document

in question —a letter, to be frank —had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal boudoir. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D—. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognises the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses, for some fifteen minutes, upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage who stood at her elbow. The minister decamped; leaving his own letter —one of no importance —upon the table.”

“Here, then,” said Dupin to me, “you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete —the robber’s knowledge of the loser’s knowledge of the robber.”

“Yes,” replied the Prefect; “and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But

this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me. ”

“Than whom,” said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, “no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined. ”

“You flatter me,” replied the Prefect; “but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained. ”

“It is clear,” said I, “as you observe, that the letter is still in possession of the minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs. ”

“True,” said G. “and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the minister’s hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design. ”

“But,” said I, “you are quite au fait in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before. ”

“Oh yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master’s apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D—

Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed. ”

“But is it not possible,” I suggested, “that although the letter may be in possession of the minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?”

“This is barely possible,” said Dupin. “The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D—is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document —its susceptibility of being produced at a moment’s notice —a point of nearly equal importance with its possession. ”

“Its susceptibility of being produced?” said I.

“That is to say, of being destroyed,” said Dupin.

“True,” I observed; “the paper is clearly then upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the minister, we may consider that as out of the question. ”

“Entirely,” said the Prefect. “He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched under my own inspection. ”

“You might have spared yourself this trouble,” said Dupin. “D—, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course. ”

“Not altogether a fool,” said G. , “but then he’s a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool. ”



"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggerel myself."

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."

"Why the fact is, we took our time, and we searched every where. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room; devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police agent, such a thing as a secret drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is so plain. There is a certain amount of bulk —of space —to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way."

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked.

"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case, we

were obliged to proceed without noise. ”

“But you could not have removed —you could not have taken to pieces all articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?”

“Certainly not; but we did better —we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed, the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the glueing —any unusual gaping in the joints —would have sufficed to insure detection.”

“I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bed-clothes, as well as the curtains and carpets.”

“That of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before.”

“The two houses adjoining!” I exclaimed; “you must have had a great deal of trouble.”