

高级实用英语系列教材



美国后现代小说导读

龙 云 编著

 中国人民大学出版社

高级实用英语系列教材

“北京第二外国语学院研究生教育质量提升促进计划”项目资助

*A Guide to
American
Postmodernist
Fictions*

美国

后现代

小说导读

龙云 编著

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A Guide to American Postmodernist Fictions

前言

在全球化时代，随着课程改革的国际化趋势的发展，我国对高等教育质量和人才培养模式提出了更高的要求，外国文学教学模式也面临着改革和创新的巨大要求和挑战。随着后现代主义文学的兴起，近些年来国内高校开始为英语专业本科生和研究生开设后现代小说相关课程，以拓宽学生的文学和文化视野。

一、使用对象

《美国后现代小说导读》是为提升高校英语专业学生阅读和赏析后现代小说的能力而编写的选修课教材。本教材适合高校英语专业高年级或研究生课程教学使用，也适合英语水平较高的自学者使用。

二、编写原则和特点

《美国后现代小说导读》的编写坚持“提升学习者理解和思辨能力”的原则，所选的文章都是能够彰显作家创作特色的代表性作品。问题设置上力争能够指导学习者把握理解重点，同时注重激发学习者进行深入思考，具有启发性和思辨性相结合的特点。

三、教材构成

《美国后现代小说导读》包含十二个单元，每个单元包括作家介绍、术语解释、作品选段和问题理解四个部分。通过对本教材的学习，学习者可以掌握不同阶段美国后现代作

家的生平、作品主题、创作特点和思想内涵，进而对美国后现代小说的发展和特色形成大致的了解。

教师和学习者可根据教学进度和兴趣特点对本教材的内容安排进行适当调整和选择性使用。在本教材的编写过程中，编者参考了国内外出版的相关书籍，这里对这些作者、编者表示深深的感谢。由于编者水平有限，书中不足之处在所难免，敬请大家不吝批评指正。

如需获取本教材的补充学习资料与教学课件，请联系：huangt@crup.com.cn，或010-62512737，010-62515576。

龙 云

2014年6月于北京



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Joseph Heller (1923-1999)

On May 1, 1923, Joseph Heller was born in Coney Island in Brooklyn, New York, the son of poor Jewish parents, Lena and Isaac Donald Heller from Russia. Since he was a child, he had been fond of writing. He wrote a story about the Russian invasion of Finland and sent it to *New York Daily News* when he was a teenager. Unfortunately, it was rejected. After graduating from Abraham Lincoln High School in 1941, Heller spent the next year working as a blacksmith's apprentice, a messenger boy, and a filing clerk. In 1942, at the age of nineteen, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps.



"I am one of those who benefited from war," said Heller. "If I had not gone to war, I would not have gone to college, and if had not gone to college, I would not have been a writer. I don't know what would have become of me." The war experience was especially precious for him when later he worked on *Catch-22*, which draws partially on his personal experience during the war and partially on his imagination. After the war, Heller studied English at the University of Southern California and New York University. In 1949, he received his M.A. in English from Columbia University. After graduation, Heller taught composition at Pennsylvania State University for two years. He also taught fiction and dramatic writing at Yale University. After the publication of *Catch-22*, Heller resumed a part-time academic career as a teacher of creative writing at Yale University and at the University of Pennsylvania. He died of a heart attack at his home in East Hampton, on Long Island, in December 1999.

As an American satirical novelist, short story writer, and playwright, Joseph Heller was a productive writer. He wrote one set of short stories, *Catch as Catch Can: The Collected Stories and Other Writings* (2003). Besides, he wrote a number of novels such as *Catch-22*, which was

a hit in 1961, *Something Happened* (1974), *Good as Gold* (1979), *God Knows* (1984), *Closing Time* (1994), and *Portrait of an Artist, as an Old Man* (2000). His plays include *We Bombed in New Haven* in 1967, *Catch-22* in 1973, and *Clevinger's Trial* in 1973 as well. He also wrote some screen plays such as *Sex and the Single Girl* in 1964, *Casino Royale* in 1967 and *Dirty Dingus Magee* in 1970. *Catch-22* was the first book in America to treat the absurdist theme with absurdist techniques. Heller's works are characterized by a satirical sense of the absurd, speaking out against the military-industrial complex and those organized institutions which seem to manipulate people's lives in the name of reason or morality. He was the most prominent American novelist of the absurd in the postwar period. Heller often managed to heighten the macabre obscenity of war much more effectively through its gruesome comic aspects than if he had written realistic descriptions. And thus, the most delicate pressure is enough to send us over the line from farce to phantasmagoria. In 1978, the *Wilson Quarterly* conducted a survey of professors of American literature to determine the most important novels published after World War II. Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* was ranked first. There exist a bunch of features which make it indeed famous all over the world. Its wild and truly hilarious humor, its broadly satiric portrait of the military, its savage characterization of the modern social order are so etched in every reader's mind. Many of them have helped to clarify the book's unusual structure, and at least several have understood the gist of Heller's fictional argument.

In an interview by George Plimpton, Heller said, "I begin with a first sentence that is independent of any conscious preparation. Most often nothing comes out of it: a sentence will come to mind that doesn't lead to a second sentence. Sometimes it will lead to thirty sentences which then come to a dead end." Joseph Heller enjoys high prestige in American literature history. People in his time commented his *Catch-22* as "a monumental artifact of contemporary American literature," and he is regarded as the most prominent novelist of the absurd. On hearing of Heller's death, his friend Kurt Vonnegut said, "Oh, God, how terrible. This is a calamity for American literature."

Term:

Black Humor: In contemporary literary criticism, black humor is a term applied to a large group of American novels in the 1950s. In these novels a common core of satire is directed against hypocrisy, materialism, racial prejudice, and above all, the dehumanization. The society is depicted to be full of institutionalized absurdity.

The protagonists always hold a cynical attitude toward society and conventional moral values. The despondency is not reflected by angry protest, but by the use of exaggeration as a vehicle for satire. The satire is based on the exposition and exaggeration of the abnormal and the seamy side of both people and society to the point of ridiculousness and absurdity. It is humor out of despair and laughter out of tears.

Excerpt:

Catch-22

31 Mrs. Daneeka

When Colonel Cathcart learned that Doc Daneeka too had been killed in McWatt's plane, he increased the number of missions to seventy.

The first person in the squadron to find out that Doc Daneeka was dead was Sergeant Towser, who had been informed earlier by the man in the control tower that Doc Daneeka's name was down as a passenger on the pilot's manifest McWatt had filed before taking off. Sergeant Towser brushed away a tear and struck Doc Daneeka's name from the roster of squadron personnel. With lips still quivering, he rose and trudged outside reluctantly to break the bad news to Gus and Wes, discreetly avoiding any conversation with Doc Daneeka himself as he moved by the flight surgeon's slight sepulchral figure roosting despondently on his stool in the late-afternoon sunlight between the orderly room and the medical tent. Sergeant Towser's heart was heavy; now he had *two* dead men on his hands—Mudd, the dead man in Yossarian's tent who wasn't even there, and Doc Daneeka, the new dead man in the squadron, who most certainly was there and gave every indication of proving a still thornier administrative problem for him.

Gus and Wes listened to Sergeant Towser with looks of stoic surprise and said not a word about their bereavement to anyone else until Doc Daneeka himself came in about an hour afterward to have his temperature taken for the third time that day and his blood pressure checked. The thermometer registered a half degree lower than his usual subnormal temperature of 96.8. Doc Daneeka was alarmed. The fixed, vacant, wooden stares of his two enlisted men were even more irritating than always.

"Goddammit," he expostulated politely in an uncommon excess of exasperation, "what's the

matter with you two men anyway? It just isn't right for a person to have a low temperature all the time and walk around with a stuffed nose." Doc Daneeka emitted a glum, self-pitying sniff and strolled disconsolately across the tent to help himself to some aspirin and sulphur pills and paint his own throat with Argyrol. His downcast face was fragile and forlorn as a swallow's, and he rubbed the back of his arms rhythmically. "Just look how cold I am right now. You're sure you're not holding anything back?"

"You're dead, sir," one of his two enlisted men explained.

Doc Daneeka jerked his head up quickly with resentful distrust. "What's that?"

"You're dead, sir," repeated the other. "That's probably the reason you always feel so cold."

"That's right, sir. You've probably been dead all this time and we just didn't detect it."

"What the *hell* are you both talking about?" Doc Daneeka cried shrilly with a surging, petrifying sensation of some onrushing unavoidable disaster.

"It's true, sir," said one of the enlisted men. "The records show that you went up in McWatt's plane to collect some flight time. You didn't come down in a parachute, so you must have been killed in the crash."

"That's right, sir," said the other. "You ought to be glad you've got any temperature at all."

Doc Daneeka's mind was reeling in confusion. "Have you both gone crazy?" he demanded. "I'm going to report this whole insubordinate incident to Sergeant Towser."

"Sergeant Towser's the one who told us about it," said either Gus or Wes. "The War Department's even going to notify your wife."

Doc Daneeka yelped and ran out of the medical tent to remonstrate with Sergeant Towser, who edged away from him with repugnance and advised Doc Daneeka to remain out of sight as much as possible until some decision could be reached relating to the disposition of his remains.

"Gee, I guess he really is dead," grieved one of his enlisted men in a low, respectful voice. "I'm going to miss him. He was a pretty wonderful guy, wasn't he?"

"Yeah, he sure was," mourned the other. "But I'm glad the little fuck is gone. I was getting sick and tired of taking his blood pressure all the time."

Mrs. Daneeka, Doc Daneeka's wife, was not glad that Doc Daneeka was gone and split the peaceful Staten Island night with woeful shrieks of lamentation when she learned by War Department telegram that her husband had been killed in action. Women came to comfort her, and their husbands paid condolence calls and hoped inwardly that she would soon move to another neighborhood and spare them the obligation of continuous sympathy. The poor woman was totally distraught for almost a full week. Slowly, heroically, she found the strength to contemplate

a future filled with dire problems for herself and her children. Just as she was growing resigned to her loss, the postman rang with a bolt from the blue—a letter from overseas that was signed with her husband's signature and urged her frantically to disregard any bad news concerning him. Mrs. Daneeka was dumbfounded. The date on the letter was illegible. The handwriting throughout was shaky and hurried, but the style resembled her husband's and the melancholy, self-pitying tone was familiar, although more dreary than usual. Mrs. Daneeka was overjoyed and wept irrepressibly with relief and kissed the crinkled, grubby tissue of V-mail stationery a thousand times. She dashed a grateful note off to her husband pressing him for details and sent a wire informing the War Department of its error. The War Department replied touchily that there had been no error and that she was undoubtedly the victim of some sadistic and psychotic forger in her husband's squadron. The letter to her husband was returned unopened, stamped KILLED IN ACTION.

Mrs. Daneeka had been widowed cruelly again, but this time her grief was mitigated somewhat by a notification from Washington that she was sole beneficiary of her husband's \$10,000 GI insurance policy, which amount was obtainable by her on demand. The realization that she and the children were not faced immediately with starvation brought a brave smile to her face and marked the turning point in her distress. The Veterans Administration informed her by mail the very next day that she would be entitled to pension benefits for the rest of her natural life because of her husband's demise, and to a burial allowance for him of \$250. A government check for \$250 was enclosed. Gradually, inexorably, her prospects brightened. A letter arrived that same week from the Social Security Administration stating that, under the provisions of the Old Age and Survivors Insurance Act of 1935, she would receive monthly support for herself and her dependent children until they reached the age of eighteen, and a burial allowance of \$250. With these government letters as proof of death, she applied for payment on three life insurance policies Doc Daneeka had carried, with a value of \$50,000 each; her claim was honored and processed swiftly. Each day brought new unexpected treasures. A key to a safe-deposit box led to a fourth life insurance policy with a face value of \$50,000, and to \$18,000 in cash on which income tax had never been paid and need never be paid. A fraternal lodge to which he had belonged gave her a cemetery plot. A second fraternal organization of which he had been a member sent her a burial allowance of \$250. His county medical association gave her a burial allowance of \$250.

The husbands of her closest friends began to flirt with her. Mrs. Daneeka was simply delighted with the way things were turning out and had her hair dyed. Her fantastic wealth just

kept piling up, and she had to remind herself daily that all the hundreds of thousands of dollars she was acquiring were not worth a single penny without her husband to share this good fortune with her. It astonished her that so many separate organizations were willing to do so much to bury Doc Daneeka, who, back in Pianosa, was having a terrible time trying to keep his head above the ground and wondered with dismal apprehension why his wife did not answer the letter he had written.

He found himself ostracized in the squadron by men who cursed his memory foully for having supplied Colonel Cathcart with provocation to raise the number of combat missions. Records attesting to his death were pullulating like insect eggs and verifying each other beyond all contention. He drew no pay or PX rations and depended for life on the charity of Sergeant Towser and Milo, who both knew he was dead. Colonel Cathcart refused to see him, and Colonel Korn sent word through Major Danby that he would have Doc Daneeka cremated on the spot if he ever showed up at Group Headquarters. Major Danby confided that Group was incensed with all flight surgeons because of Dr. Stubbs, the bushy-haired, baggy-chinned, slovenly flight surgeon in Dunbar's squadron who was deliberately and defiantly brewing insidious dissension there by grounding all men with sixty missions on proper forms that were rejected by Group indignantly with orders restoring the confused pilots, navigators, bombardiers and gunners to combat duty. Morale there was ebbing rapidly, and Dunbar was under surveillance. Group was glad Doc Daneeka had been killed and did not intend to ask for a replacement.

Not even the chaplain could bring Doc Daneeka back to life under the circumstances. Alarm changed to resignation, and more and more Doc Daneeka acquired the look of an ailing rodent. The sacks under his eyes turned hollow and black, and he padded through the shadows fruitlessly like a ubiquitous spook. Even Captain Flume recoiled when Doc Daneeka sought him out in the woods for help. Heartlessly, Gus and Wes turned him away from their medical tent without even a thermometer for comfort, and then, only then, did he realize that, to all intents and purposes, he really was dead, and that he had better do something damned fast if he ever hoped to save himself.

There was nowhere else to turn but to his wife, and he scribbled an impassioned letter begging her to bring his plight to the attention of the War Department and urging her to communicate at once with his group commander, Colonel Cathcart, for assurances that—no matter what else she might have heard—it was indeed he, her husband, Doc Daneeka, who was pleading with her, and not a corpse or some impostor. Mrs. Daneeka was stunned by the depth of emotion in the almost illegible appeal. She was torn with compunction and tempted to comply,

but the very next letter she opened that day was from that same Colonel Cathcart, her husband's group commander, and began:

Dear Mrs., Mr., Miss, or Mr. and Mrs. Daneeka:

Words cannot express the deep personal grief I experienced when your husband, son, father or brother was killed, wounded or reported missing in action.

Mrs. Daneeka moved with her children to Lansing, Michigan, and left no forwarding address.

(See Joseph Heller. *Catch-22*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks Rockefeller Center, 1955, pp.340-344.)

Questions:

1. How is the trick about Daneeka's death initiated in the first place?
2. Why does Doc Daneeka take his own temperature?
3. Why does Mrs. Daneeka move to a new place instead of having a thorough investigation?
4. Why does Colonel Cathcart raise the number of missions to seventy when he hears of Daneeka's death?
5. Why does everyone insist that Daneeka is dead?



Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007)

On November 11, 1922, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, the third-generation of German-Americans. His father was an architect and his mother was a noted beauty. Both spoke German fluently but declined to teach Kurt German owing to the widespread anti-German sentiment following World War I. The Great Depression hit hard in the 1930s, though, and the family placed Kurt in a public school while it moved to more modest accommodations. While in high school, Vonnegut edited the school's daily newspaper. Vonnegut graduated from Shortridge High School in Indianapolis in May 1940 and went to Cornell University that fall. Though majoring in chemistry, he was Assistant Managing Editor and Associate Editor of *The Cornell Daily Sun*. While at Cornell, Vonnegut enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1943. The Army transferred him to the Carnegie Institute of Technology and the University of Tennessee to study mechanical engineering. In 1944 Vonnegut was taken prisoner following the battle of the Bulge in Belgium. As a prisoner, he witnessed the fire bombing of Dresden in February 1945, which destroyed most of the city. Vonnegut said that the aftermath of the attack was "utter destruction" and "carnage unfathomable." This experience was the inspiration for his famous novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and is a central theme in at least six of his other books. After the war, Vonnegut also attended the University of Chicago as a graduate student in anthropology. Kurt Vonnegut married his childhood sweetheart Jane Marie Cox after returning from World War II. In the 1960s they lived in Barnstable, Massachusetts, where for a while Vonnegut worked at a Saab dealership. The couple separated in 1970; that same year, Vonnegut began living with a woman who later



became his second wife, photographer Jill Krementz, although he did not divorce Cox until 1979. Vonnegut died on April 11, 2007, after falling down a flight of stairs in his home and suffering massive head trauma.

Vonnegut devoted to writing in 1951 and his works began to be accepted in the 1960s because of four distinctive novels: *Mother Night* (1961), *Cat's Cradle* (1963), *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965), and his masterpiece *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). His later novels include *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), *Slapstick, or Lonesome No More!* (1976), *Jailbird* (1979), *Deadeye Dick* (1982), *Galápagos* (1985), *Bluebeard* (1987), and *Hocus Pocus* (1990). *Slaughterhouse-Five* is essentially autobiographical. It is a supremely unconventional war novel based on the experiences of the author as a prisoner of war during the catastrophic fire-bombing of Dresden during World War II. Thus the novel is a war book, an antiwar novel. It is first a statement about war and man's inhumanity to man and about life and history. The war reveals man's savageness against man which makes life miserable. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a vehicle for Vonnegut to express his sadness for and indignation at the human race. After its publication, the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* became a best-seller for its magnificent theme, profound thought, and intriguing structure. Finished in the tide of protest against the Vietnam War, *Slaughterhouse-Five* deconstructed and reconstructed the world of novels with its novel and successful art experiment and profound reflections on history. It is regarded as the "milestone of the American postmodern literature." Vonnegut has not specified in his works the culprit responsible for the ills of the world, but viewed misfortunes as a part of our common nature or coming by change. The critical response to his works has also changed from enthusiasm to accusations of recycling essentially the same ideas. As a science fiction writer, Kurt applies time travel in his writing, which is one of the most unique styles and an extremely unique way to create a sense of perplexity. This non-chronological writing brings about flexibility and bewilderment. What's more, throughout his novels, Vonnegut uses various methods of portraying his many ideas. These include the use of similes, metaphors, the jumping from one subject to another, and irony.

Though an experimentalist, Vonnegut speaks for traditional American values. His agnosticism, pacifism, and debunking of patriotic jingoism have drawn fire but mark a bond with forbears like Mark Twain and with numerous contemporaries. His compassionate insight into the difficulties of sharp compression of his wit contributes to his continuing broad appeal in the United States and overseas. According to the British literary critic Henry Graham Greene (1904-1991), Kurt Vonnegut was "one of the best living American writers" at that time. Moreover, many writers have recognized Vonnegut as the father of modern science fiction in the United States because of his science fiction works.

Term:

Nonlinear Narrative: It opposes using the single and unchangeable logic, formula, principle, and universally applicable law to explain and rule the world, advocates change and innovation, stresses openness and pluralism, acknowledges and tolerates differences. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut makes bold changes and invocations by a nonlinear narrative pattern combining history with imagination, reality with fantasy, and the diachronic with the simultaneous. It is a rambling and fragmentary narrative which is often suddenly transient from one scene to another and has an unresolved ending.

Excerpt:

Slaughterhouse-Five

Chapter 5

Billy Pilgrim says that the Universe does not look like a lot of bright little dots to the creatures from Tralfamadore. The creatures can see where each star has been and where it is going, so that the heavens are filled with rarefied, luminous spaghetti. And Tralfamadorians don't see human beings as two-legged creatures, either. They see them as great millepedes—"with babies' legs at one end and old people's legs at the other," says Billy Pilgrim.

Billy asked for something to read on the trip to Tralfamadore. His captors had five million Earthling books on microfilm, but no way to project them in Billy's cabin. They had only one actual book in English, which would be placed in a Tralfamadorian museum. It was *Valley of the Dolls*, by Jacqueline Susann.

Billy read it, thought it was pretty good in spots. The people in it certainly had their ups and downs, ups and downs. But Billy didn't want to read about the same ups and downs over and over again. He asked if there wasn't, please, some other reading matters around.

"Only Tralfamadorian novels, which I'm afraid you couldn't begin to understand," said the speaker on the wall.

“Let me look at one anyway.”

So they sent him in several. They were little things. A dozen of them might have had the bulk of *Valley of the Dolls*—with all its ups and downs, ups and downs.

Billy couldn't read Tralfamadorian, of course, but he could at least see how the books were laid out—in brief clumps of symbols separated by stars. Billy commented that the clumps might be telegrams.

“Exactly,” said the voice.

“They *are* telegrams?”

“There are no telegrams on Tralfamadore. But you're right: each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message—describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time.”

Moments after that, the saucer entered a time warp, and Billy was flung back into his childhood. He was twelve years old, quaking as he stood with his mother and father on Bright Angel Point, at the rim of Grand Canyon. The little human family was staring at the floor of the canyon, one mile straight down.

“Well—” said Billy's father, manfully kicking a pebble into space, “there it *is*.” They had come to this famous place by automobile. They had had several blowouts on the way.

“It was worth the trip,” said Billy's mother raptly. “Oh, God—was it ever *worth* it.

Billy hated the canyon. He was sure that he was going to fall in. His mother touched him, and he wet his pants.

There were other tourists looking down into the canyon, too, and a ranger was there to answer questions. A Frenchman who had come all the way from France asked the ranger in broken English if many people committed suicide by jumping in.

“Yes, sir,” said the ranger. “About three folks a year.” So it goes.

And Billy took a very short trip through time, made a peewee jump of only ten days, so he