

大学英语素质教育拓展教材



英美文学

BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

总主编 江滨
主编 张佩 方映 范成功

 天津大学出版社
TIANJIN UNIVERSITY PRESS

大学英

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英美文学/张佩,方映,范成功主编. —天津:
天津大学出版社,2011.7

大学英语素质教育拓展教材/江滨总主编

ISBN 978-7-5618-4020-7

I. ①英… II. ①张…②方…③范… III. ①英语-阅读教学-高等学校-教材②文学欣赏-英国③文学欣赏-美国 IV. ①H319.4:I

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2011)第139080号

出版发行 天津大学出版社

出版人 杨欢

地址 天津市卫津路92号天津大学内(邮编:300072)

电话 发行部:022-27403647 邮购部:022-27402742

网址 www.tjup.com

印刷 昌黎太阳红彩色印刷有限责任公司

经销 全国各地新华书店

开本 148mm×210mm

印张 3.625

字数 140千

版次 2011年8月第1版

印次 2011年8月第1次

印数 1-4000

定价 15.00元

凡购本书,如有缺页、倒页、脱页等质量问题,烦请向我社发行部门联系调换

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前 言

近年来,随着我国大学英语教学改革的逐步深化,英语教学已成为英语教育,其功能已由单一传授知识向传播文化、训练语言技能、培养交流能力、提高文化素养和思想品德的多元化功能转化。为此,我们为非英语专业本科生开设了大学英语素质教育拓展课程——大学英语系列选修课,包括语言技能类、文化类、文学类以及应用类,旨在实现大学英语教学的个性化教育与综合素质培养的目标,结合语言学习,综合提高学生语言文化能力和应用能力,使大学英语教学能够全面提升学生的语言素质、心理素质和文化素质,发掘大学英语课程的隐性功能。经过改革、创新从而形成新层次的教学实践,为素质教育提供更宽广的发展空间。

本书在对文学的总体特点进行简单阐述之后,按照历史时期的先后顺序分别对英国文学和美国文学作了概括性的介绍,每一章均涵盖每个时期的历史背景、文学思潮以及主要的作家及作品。本书共十章,每章包含知识预测、知识概述、知识复习和知识拓展四个板块,旨在满足学生对文学的审美需求,激发其对文学的兴趣,提高其文学鉴赏力,培养其独立思考的习惯,使他们最终能更深刻地认识自身和社会。

此教材的出版是编者多年教学积累和资料梳理的成果。在此出版之际,我们向提供大量支持及建设性意见的张纹祯老师及各位同仁们,向对知识孜孜追求、给予我们动力出版此教材的学生们,向始终在默默地支持和奉献着的编者家属们表示由衷的敬意。感谢你们!

大学英语素质教育拓展教材编写组

2011年春于天津大学

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Chapter 1 Introduction to Literature as a Whole



Preview 知识预测

1. How did literature come into being?
2. What does literature offer us?
3. What is literature made of?
4. What makes a piece of writing qualified as literature?
5. Is literature a mirror of or a lamp upon reality?
6. How does literature function, to educate or entertain?



Overview 知识概述

Definition of Literature

What is literature? How do we know some writing is literature and some other writing is not? What are the boundaries? It is so difficult to give a definition that some people just say maybe there is no need to define it because we will recognize it as soon as we see it. If we turn to dictionaries for the meaning of the word “literature”, we may find two or three items. But the first one never goes too far from “written artistic works, particularly those with a high and lasting artistic value”, as is given by the first edition of *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. The sixth edition of *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* defines “literature”

as “pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays and poems (in contrast to technical books and newspapers, magazines, etc.)”. A combination of these two definitions can help us reach a fuller understanding of “literature”. We can see that literature in the first place should be artistic but not some technical writing. Secondly, it usually has a lasting value, which means it has stood the test of time. Thirdly, novels, plays and poems are the common forms of literature. For the convenience of discussion, let us settle for the definition of literature as “written works with high and lasting artistic values” for the moment.

Necessity of Literature

In this material-oriented society, which places a high value upon speed, people tend to be suspicious and impatient with literature. Why do we need literature? What is the use of it? Literature takes too much time to read but it doesn't seem to fulfill any practical need. Teachers of literature are often troubled by these questions and complaints from their students. In fact, literature is very necessary and important.

To deal with the necessity of literature, maybe it is a good idea to start with the origin of literature, which is what made literature happen in the very beginning. Literature is first of all specific to mankind. When human beings were fed and seated by the fire, they started to brood about life. They were capable of distancing themselves from their own life and gaining a relatively objective perspective about it. They started to ask questions and also tried to find answers to them from their observation and experience of the world. Somebody perhaps started to tell a joke or a story to amuse others. That perhaps is how literature came into being. It originated from a human curiosity about themselves and the world. It serves as a food for human spiritual or psychological hunger.

Literature most likely started with an oral tradition since speech

appeared much earlier than written language. As written language was developed, oral literature gradually settled down in manuscripts, which helped it to pass all the way down to us, human beings one or two thousand years ago. Therefore, literature is a historical record of what life used to be and what our ancestors felt important enough to be written down. Human beings develop from one generation to another and the individual life is very short in comparison to the human history. To know literature is to know our past, where we come from and what makes us become the kind of people we are. Literature helps the individual to know his or her position in history and recognize what he or she can do to history. It offers us guidance in understanding ourselves and helps us make better decisions. Though literature is mostly about some unreal people or legendary figures in the past, it addresses the fundamental issues of human existence, such as life, death, nature, society, emotions, which have puzzled mankind from two thousand years ago to today. Questions raised in those ancient literary works seem never to be able to find final answers but people's interest in finding them seems to never die out but to grow even stronger. Literature is pointing directly at us and it is what ancient people wanted to say to us. It can help us decide what we are going to say to our children, and that is the way tradition or history is formed. So we should never turn away from literature because we, the individuals in history, are actually the links of history and tradition. Literature can stimulate us to find those answers by ourselves and our search for them will also bring meaning to our own existence.

Forms of Literature

In terms of forms, literature is usually classified into poetry, drama, prose fiction and essays.

Poetry refers to poems in general and a poem is a composition with words arranged in separate lines and chosen for their particular effects in

sound and images. In another word, poems are written in verse with a regular rhythm or pattern of rhyme in the lines. Poetry, with its particular musical properties in language, is pleasant to the ear, easy to memorize and therefore easy to be spread from mouth to mouth. As a result, poetry becomes the oldest form of literature since literature started with an oral tradition, such as *Beowulf*, the epic poem of Old English, and *The Book of Songs*, the earliest existing collection of Chinese poems. They are probably intended to be chanted or sung to accompaniment by some musical instruments.

Drama is a special form of literature, which is intended for performance. A large part of drama belongs to theatre, such as actors, movement, gestures and stage. The literary part of drama is mainly made up of dialogues between characters.

Prose fiction literally means something unreal or made up in the form of prose. Prose is the opposite of verse, which means it is written in continuity not in broken lines with a regular rhythm or pattern of rhyme. Fiction, in opposition to non-fiction, refers to a narrative form which is largely based on the imagination of the author instead of actual happenings. It includes myths, parables, romances, novels and short stories.

An essay is a short composition in prose discussing a topic from the author's point of view, such as Francis Bacon's essays "Of Truth" and "Of Death". In the early 19th century, the appearance and growth of new types of magazines brought a group of essayists onto stage, such as Charles Lamb and Thomas De Quincey. Since then, essay-writing has become a significant vehicle and a major form for writers to express their thoughts about anything they feel interesting enough.

Literariness of Literature

How is a literary work different from other pieces of writing? What

makes literature qualified as literature? The literariness of literature first of all consists in the language. Fine literary language is usually produced by writers with sensitive feelings, acute observation and powerful imagination. Great writers are artists of language, who are extremely good at bringing the readers into the world of their works by manipulating the language to that effect. They are usually very particular and careful with word choice when describing a scene or creating a mood. So, to many people, the pleasure derived from reading great literary works far exceeds that from reading newspapers. We read for different purposes. For information and news, we read newspaper, while for real pleasure and enjoyment, we go to literature. News report, a matter-of-fact statement about some event in an impersonal tone, provides the accurate facts about some event with few adjectives. Literature relies heavily upon the rhetorical and figurative aspects of language to arouse the intended feelings in the readers. Therefore, non-literary language is usually denotative, which means a one-to-one correspondence between the language and what it refers to. It aims at accuracy and allows little space for free association or interpretation. While literary language is connotative, which means the language is hidden with other meanings or suggestive of other implications. As a result, it has strong potential for free association, interpretation and ambiguous understanding.

Of course, literature is much more than connotative language. It has other elements to make it outlive its age and pass down to later generations. It even spreads to other countries and gets translated to be read by people from other cultures. Theme, setting, characters, plot, and point of view, are commonly considered to be the major elements.

Theme is the major point the writer is trying to make through his or her writing. It is usually implied rather than directly stated. It is not so obvious as character or plot and often meant for the readers to work out by

themselves.

Setting is the context in which a story takes place, which includes many things such as time, location and social environment. Setting is the background, which helps to create the mood or atmosphere and to reinforce characters and theme.

Characters are verbal delineation or representation of the human or human-like beings in a story. They are represented by their action and language to have particular qualities and dispositions. Some critics prefer to classify characters into flat and round ones. A flat character, also called a "type" or "two-dimensional", can be summarized by a single sentence. A round character is more complex in personality and motivation, and therefore more difficult to describe just in one single sentence. A flat character never changes throughout the whole story but a round one like real people in life is capable of surprising us.

Plot is the arrangement of events and actions to achieve intended effects, such as tragic or comic effects. It is not simply the narration of events in time order. It needs careful planning and calculation. Our life is accumulated with numerous incidents without a pattern. Plot means to select those meaningful events to make a pattern and to bring order out of life. So in our life, time moves forward at a constant pace, but the flow of time for a plot can be disrupted in many ways. Sometimes time seems to crawl at snail's pace, sometimes it seems to fly like an eagle.

Point of view or perspective is from whose consciousness the reader sees, hears and feels the story. There are usually first person, second person and third person points of view. It has been a very practical concern for writers to decide how to bring about the story before the readers. When the narrator is a main character of the story, the story has the first person perspective. The second person narration is seldom seen, perhaps because it

is rather inconvenient and strange for “you” to tell the story, unless the story is in the form of a letter. When the narrator is outside the story, then the third person point of view is adopted. It is the most frequently used and it can be divided into three kinds: limited, objective and omniscient. When the narrator is outside the story but can see into the mind of one of the main characters, the story has a third person limited perspective. When the narrator can not see through the mind of any characters and only what the narrator sees or hears is reported to the readers, we think the story has an objective perspective. When the narrator can see through the minds of all characters, the story has an omniscient perspective.

Reinforcement 知识复习

I Banked Cloze

Directions: Choose an appropriate word from the bank for each blank.

hasty, imaginative, performing, but, though, normally, doubt, whether, inclined, categories, performance, reading, imaginary, acting, public, distinguish, novels, rational, therefore, likely, open

Suppose you are reading Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, or Chekhov's *Ward Number Six*. What you are reading is a poem, a play, a novel, a short story. We would also say you are reading a work of literature, or of 1 literature — 2 in the case of *King Lear*, some might be 3 to deny that, wishing to 4 literature sharply from drama.

Why should we 5 whether drama is literature? One answer is that drama is a performing art, while literature is not. We do not perform 6 or poetry, it maybe said, while we do perform dances, plays and music. Hence drama must belong with the 7 arts, not with literature. This

conclusion is too 8. Why should not drama belong to both 9? Why should not some works of literature be performable? Indeed, we may wonder 10 someone giving a 11 of a novel (e. g. on the radio), or a 12 recital of some poetry, is not giving a 13 just as much as actors are in 14 a play. If they are, then novels and poetry are as performable as plays, although they may not “require” to be performed in the way plays 15 do.

II Questions for Consideration

1. Can you use some adjectives to describe literature? Why do you feel this way about literature? Can you give some examples to support your point?

2. Make a discussion about the differences and similarities between literary language and the language we use everyday and support your ideas with examples.

3. What is your favorite literary work? What makes you like it? What do you think qualifies it as literature?



Extension 知识拓展

Approaches to Literature

When does a literary text start? Does it start with an idea in the writer's mind or with a manuscript just completed by the writer? Is it a form of one-way expression or two-way communication? Some people say literary text doesn't exist until it is read, and what do they mean? Does literature have to teach us something or just to entertain us? Is literature imitation of reality or departure from it? Maybe we don't need to settle down to a final answer and the questions themselves count because they all help to direct our attention to one issue; the way we approach literature.

Though literature is something subjective produced out of human mind, it can be studied scientifically like some natural beings. Reading always involves attitude or point of view, which means it is still more or less a subjective activity. Reading always comes along with interpretation. So, literary theory or criticism started almost at the same time when literature began to be read, although the concept of "theory" appeared rather late, which is only a term for an advanced way of reading. As society develops and literature flourishes, its readership also grows. Gradually, some people are not satisfied with reading literature as common readers. They begin to ask deeper questions such as why some work makes them cry or laugh, or why, for example, the writer lets a small child tell the story. They start to form theory out of their reading, which is the starting point of critical reading. Critical reading means to read but not to accept whatever is written. When one questions what he or she reads and only accepts what he or she thinks is right, this person reads critically. This reading activity has undergone many changes through history from someone's random thought to literary movements to a branch of study for the academic circle. As it grows and expands, it becomes more and more objective by adopting scientific methods and theories from other fields. But still people differ in their way of interpretation from the age of Aristotle to today.

According to M. H. Abrams, critical theories can be classified into four kinds: mimetic, pragmatic, expressive and objective theories. In the map of criticism, there are four basic elements: the work, the artist, the universe, and the audience, according to Abrams' observation. The work is the thing created by the maker, such as the poem produced by the poet. The artist refers to the poet, or the maker of the work. The universe refers to the natural and social world, anything that can be the material for creation. The audience is readers or listeners to whom the work is addressed.

Different literary theories focus on just one element as the major concern and develop around it. Abrams made his classification based on this idea.

Mimetic criticism is approaching art in terms of the universe, which considers art to be imitation of the world and human life. This way to approach literature is to see it as a truthful reflection of reality like a mirror. It first appeared in Plato and Aristotle's writing and remains to be a dominant idea adopted by some writers of realism.

Pragmatic criticism is focusing on the audience as the central element, which views the work to be constructed in order to achieve certain effects upon the audience, for example, to provide pleasure or to teach a lesson or to arouse certain emotions.

Expressive criticism views the work in the light of its relation to its author, the artist. It is a popular approach mainly developed by romantic poets and critics of the early 19th century. Poetry is the major literary form for the Romantics. Expressive criticism stresses poetry to be an expression of the poet's powerful feelings and the product of the poet's imagination. It emphasizes intuition, inspiration and individuality. It seems to make a point that poetry is an individual expression of the poet and seeks to find the individual self out of the work. Therefore, poetry is like a "lamp" instead of a "mirror", which throws light upon reality and helps people to see reality with new insights.

Objective criticism deals with the work itself as an independent being free from all the relations to the artist, audience and the universe. It tries to say that it is the work that really matters and only the world within the work should be studied in detail. We do not need anything else outside the work. The author's intention, background for creation, or reader's response should not interfere with our understanding and appreciation of the work.

Chapter 2 British Literature in the Old and Middle English Period



Preview 知识预测

1. When does British literature start, with *Beowulf* or *Canterbury Tales*?
2. What makes a language change?
3. How is Middle English different from Old English?
4. Why does literature often start with an oral tradition?
5. What kind of poetry are you familiar with? How many forms do you think poetry has?
6. How is religion dealt with in Old and Middle English literature?



Overview 知识概述

Old English Literature

The history of English literature has a lot to do with the development of English language, as literature is made up of language. The Old English period is commonly considered to extend from 450 A. D. to 1066, the year of Norman Conquest. The Anglo-Saxons are those Germanic groups who invaded the south and east of England in the early 5th century A. D. and whose language became the Oldest form of English. Therefore English has a Germanic origin, although later it also received a lot of influences from

other languages such as French and Latin.

This early stage of human life left us a very limited bulk of literary production, among which *Beowulf* is the most important work. *Beowulf* is regarded as a national epic in which the hero named Beowulf fought heroically to protect his country and people. As the major work of Old English literature, it was usually considered to be composed between the 8th century and the early 11th century. With an unknown author, it started in an oral form and later settled down in manuscript to 3,182 lines. It was first chanted by court poets known as scopos who are considered to be bearers of tribal tradition. The story is set in Sweden and Denmark of Scandinavia during the time from the late 5th century to the early 7th century. Here is the main story: Hrothgar, king of the Danes, was in trouble because his people were devoured by a creature named Grendel. Beowulf traveled from Geatland, his own country, to Denmark to help them. One night, Beowulf and Grendel had a fierce fight in Hrothgar's hall and Beowulf tore down Grendel's arm. Grendel went back to the lake he where lived and died there. His mother came to seek revenge and the second battle began. Beowulf and Grendel's mother had a fight at the bottom of the lake. Beowulf found his own weapon useless to hurt the demon and used Grendel's mother's own sword to kill her. After he succeeded in killing the demons and saving the Danes, he went back to his motherland and told his adventures to the king and queen. Later he became king of Geatland himself and his country grew stronger under his rule. However, a fire-breathing dragon began to disturb the whole country again when Beowulf was very old. He went to fight the dragon and managed to kill it but at the sacrifice of his own life. After he died, he was burned and later buried with a lot of treasure in a barrow overlooking the sea, according to his wish.

A definition of the term "epic" is needed here to facilitate further