



美国文学简史

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

常耀信 著

南开大学出版社

高等院校文科教材

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Prefatory Note

This book is a condensation of the teaching notes for the course, *A Survey of American Literature*, which this department has compiled and taught as a companion to *The Selected Readings in American Literature* (Tianjin: Nankai Univ. Press, 1987). It does not intend to be all-inclusive, being in fact a mere sketch accommodated in a work taught over a semester of some twenty weeks. Although we exercised a measure of discretion in the choice of the primary and secondary materials for the course, we claim little or no originality. All we hope to accomplish is to help Chinese students of English to acquire some acquaintance with the modern and contemporary critical climate in which a certain author has been evaluated. The works of major American literary critics, from which we have gleaned, are introduced as much as space permits and acknowledged in the endnotes and the "Bibliography" in detail. For those who take a genuine interest in American literature, this book may serve as a brief introduction to further study. And for those who are less literary in temperament and taste, these pages may give them some background knowledge without which they will find themselves at a disadvantage in their future work as language workers. If the book might by any chance render any help to

Chinese teachers of American literature in any way, I would feel more than gratified.

In writing the book I have benefited from the presence of our foreign faculty, especially Dr. R. C. Cosbey and Dr. Carl Englehart, who taught English and American literature in this department. I should like to thank them for the loan of materials and help of other kinds, without which the book would not have been what it is. Naturally, I have converted the substance of other scholars, Chinese as well as foreign, to my own use; some of the debts are obvious and specified, but many may not have been duly discharged. My gratitude is genuine, however, and nothing like a neglect is intentional. Also among my creditors are the students who have taken this course and whose responses have helped, in no small way, to revise my method and priority of presentation.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Qian Qing, professor of English of Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, who read the whole manuscript on behalf of the Textbook Evaluation Committee of the State Commission for Education, and offered painstaking and invaluable criticism. Her standards of academic excellence have made my revision an exciting and gratifying experience. I wish to thank Professor Rong Yi-lun of the Northeast Normal University, who read the manuscript also on behalf of the Textbook Evaluation Committee and whose perceptive observations have proved immensely valuable.

I want to thank Professor Wu Fu-heng, President of the Chinese Association for the Study of American Literature and ex-President of Shandong University, for the gracious "Fore-

word” which he kindly found time, out of his tight schedule, to write for this book.

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序

文学史是文学史料、哲学思想、文学理论缺一不可的统一体。没有充足的史料会流于教条，空疏。没有哲学思想则会成为现象的罗列。没有文学理论则无法对一切材料，一切现象加以分析。美国文学史当然也不例外。我们欢迎的是以马克思主义哲学思想和文学理论为指导思想与分析准则，把美国文学简短的历史产生的并不贫乏的诸多现象按发展顺序加以分析、介绍的文学史。这样一本美国文学史做为大专院校教材或是作为美国文学爱好者的读物都是佳作。

常耀信同志编写的《美国文学简史》恰是这样的佳作。在全书有限的篇幅中包含着丰富的内容。它与美国的历史文化发展联系起来，从殖民地时期写到本世纪七十年代。

这本简史对十九世纪以前的美国文学从略介绍，突出地介绍清教文学及其代表人物——乔纳桑·爱德华兹和本杰明·富兰克林。从多方面看，这两人都是清教思想的代表人物。前者憧憬来生，后者着眼今世。

从十九世纪以后对文学的概念来看，有许多殖民地时期的作品不能说是文学。它们有的只是一些信息的报导和宗教的或政治的宣传。但是正如作者在“前言”中说的，清教思想对美国文学产生过持久的影响。可以这样说，殖民地时期许多作品尽管文学性不强，但它们都为十九世纪的美国文学奠定了基础。美国文学的主题、美国文学的形式都有从那时起的历史根源。例如爱默生的自立自强哲学可以追溯到殖民地时期的司多达牧师的某些著作。梭罗的个人主义也不能说与殖民地时代的约翰·吴勒门没有联系。新英格兰的后代，一条线从爱默生、梭罗一直到弗罗斯特，另一条线从霍桑、麦尔维尔到詹姆斯等；所有这两条线上各个时

期的人都不同地在个人性格中再现出清教心理。

至于说到浪漫主义时期则更为整个美国文学开辟了丰富的源泉。就拿近代的短篇小说看，也可以追溯到欧文首创，艾德加·爱伦·坡丰富了它的理论和技巧，霍桑则寓教于故事之中。短篇小说乃是美国民族文化发展中产生的特定形式。

《简史》以较大的篇幅写十九世纪和二十世纪前期。这阶段是美国文学作为独立的民族文学形成和发展的阶段。书中介绍的作家都是在世界上知名，也为我国读者比较熟悉。全书的章节安排既是符合美国文学发展实况的，也符合西方文化一般的发展规律。从天真纯朴的浪漫主义到富有喜剧精神的现实主义和悲剧精神的自然主义；然后到成熟老练的嘲讽、幽默精神。就美国文学而言，当前又趋向于返回更高阶段超验主义思想，出现了超验文学。本书作者在详述美国民族文学发展的几十年中列举和分析了不少巨匠。

《美国文学简史》对第二次世界大战后的文学虽然只给了一章的篇幅，但内容还是充实的。而且由于前面的介绍很详尽，对于了解当代文学也是十分重要的。作为教材，我们在讲课时必然要通古才能解今，而从解今中加深通古。一个民族文学史是不能割断其渊源的。例如在第二次世界大战刚刚结束，早期的第一次浪潮中的两个次文化：一是南方文学，它可以追溯到不仅福克纳，甚至于爱伦·坡，更乃至于伯克纳·布朗；二是犹太文学，它继承欧州的旧文化和美国的新文化，也可以追溯到十九世纪的犹太文学。而且在这个浪潮中的两条线上的作家，都有要脱离他们的父辈如海明威、福克纳的趋向。不联系过去则无法深刻地了解如索尔·贝娄、诺曼·梅勒等人的特点。

在五十年代后期到六十年代前期的第二次浪潮中的两个次文化，其一是黑人文学。黑人是奴隶的后代、他们的文学与他们政治运动要联系看。二是垮掉派作家，他们则是中层阶段的白人子

弟。他们不满意时代的社会生活，要脱离那些衣冠楚楚的商人而鬻畜须、少浴、不修边幅、到处流浪，吸毒、群居。他们从过去的超验主义作家如爱默森、梭罗的世界中寻找；他们从东方的宗教思想中寻找，企图找到可以与他们生存于其中的社会相对抗的力量。

这次叛行失败了。于是不少人趋向保守。第三次浪潮的特点是注意作品的语言，要表达意识的复杂性，要分析语言的复杂性。于是乃产生了实验小说家如罗纳德·苏克尼克，雷蒙德·费德曼和约翰·巴斯等人。只有通晓美国过去的文学，才能对当代文学的许多现象了解和分析得深刻。

中国美国文学研究会会长 梁衡

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Introduction

This course of twenty lectures is an outline of American literature. It intends to cover the whole range of the literary history of the United States of America from the early Colonial Period through the 1970s, and offer a brief account of the major authors and their masterworks and of the major literary trends and currents of thought which dominated the American literary scene at one time or another and became the thematic or formal concern of some major authors in their literary endeavors.

Before we begin our series of discussions on American literature, a simple statement about the plan of the course is in order. It is now a critical commonplace that American literature *per se* did not begin until the nineteenth century. Therefore we shall be brief about the Colonial Period, the period stretching roughly from the settlement of America in the early seventeenth century through the end of the eighteenth. The major topic here will be about American Puritanism, the one enduring influence in American literature, and the major figures to mention will be

Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin who, between them, represent the heritage of American Puritanism.

The Romantic Period that follows covers the first half of the nineteenth century. A rising America with its ideals of democracy and equality, its industrialization, its westward expansion, and a variety of foreign influences such as Sir Walter Scott were among the important factors which made literary expansion and expression not only possible but also inevitable in the period immediately following the nation's political independence. Washington Irving (1783–1859) and James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) will be our first concern. The first important writer in American literature, Irving deserves credit for the part he played in inspiring the American romantic imagination. His fascinating *The Sketch Book* with two of his most famous stories, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," will be placed at the top of any reading list for a course on American literature. We will be also reading James Fenimore Cooper and his *Leatherstocking Tales* which offers some fictional version of the American national experience of adventure into the wilderness of the American West. The importance of the frontier and the wilderness in American literature is for the first time well-illustrated in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and was to remain a major concern for many later authors. Quite a few eminent literary critics like Henry Nash Smith and Edwin S. Fussell have written on the subject for the simple reason that the history of the formation of the United States of America is, in a sense, a process in which the settlers moved continuously westward, pushing the frontier with them.¹

American Romanticism culminated around the 1840s in

what has come to be known as "New England Transcendentalism" or "American Renaissance" (1836–1855). One of the major literary figures in this period is Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), the leading New England Transcendentalist, whose *Nature* (1836) has been called "the Manifesto of American Transcendentalism," and whose "The American Scholar" (1837) has been rightly regarded as America's "Declaration of Intellectual Independence." We are now entering the formative period of indigenous American literature. Calling for the creation of a native literature rather than always learning from other cultures, Emerson exercised a most seminal influence on the development of an independent American culture. Many of his contemporaries either drew from or reacted against his doctrine, thus either way benefiting from it. Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was at first a faithful follower of Emerson, but alienated himself somewhat from the master later on. Thoreau built and went to live in a small cottage on Walden Pond for a little over two years and then came back to write about his experience there in his famous book, *Walden*.

Another of Emerson's contemporaries, Walt Whitman (1819–1896), tried to write poetry describing the native American experience. Emerson read with such delight the first edition of his *Leaves of Grass* (1855) that he wrote to Whitman, calling his work "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed." No less indebted to Emerson was Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), another American poet, who wrote about the life of her time in her completely original way. Shaping an American poetry out of the native elements of the

New World, Whitman and Dickinson were the two major American poets of the nineteenth century.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) did not feel comfortable with Emerson's buoyant sense of optimism about man and his nature, and kept a respectable distance from Emerson and his ideas. His *The Scarlet Letter* and other works reveal a blackness of vision of which Emerson was not capable. Herman Melville (1819–1891) was critical of Emerson's optimistic view of life, as is, for instance, clearly shown in some portions of his famous work, *Moby-Dick*. He was against the optimistic trend of his times: his life did not corroborate that hopeful view. As he was, apparently, ahead of his time, *Moby-Dick* and his other works all fell into obscurity and oblivion from which they were resurrected only in the present century.

Also contributing to this New England Renaissance was a group of poets, now generally known in American literary history as the "New England poets" or "schoolroom poets." These include William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882), James Russell Lowell (1819–1891), Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894), and John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892). All of them wrote with extraordinary facility; but they were conservative and imitative, all spokesmen for the culture of Europe transplanted to America. They formed a different school from the group of liberal and nationalistic writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849). Idols of their countrymen in their own day, they fell in the present century from the height which their reputation had reached. However, their contribution to the development of

American poetry deserves appreciative recognition.

Standing apart from his contemporaries but no less important in the history of American literature is Edgar Allan Poe, who was for a long time perhaps the most controversial and the most misunderstood of American writers. From the very outset he was not appreciated in his own country, but he was well received in Europe—in England, in Spain, and especially in France where he first acquired greatness. Eventually, he won recognition in America.

The Civil War (1861–65) brought the Romantic Period to an end. The Age of Realism came into existence. It came as a reaction against “the lie of romanticism and sentimentalism,” as Everett Carter put it.² It expresses the concern for the commonplace and the low, and offers an objective rather than an idealistic view of human nature and human experience. A fearless and enthusiastic champion of the new school was William Dean Howells (1837–1920) who, by virtue of his powerful critical writings and of his generous patronage as senior editor of the influential journal *Atlantic Monthly*, made for the triumph of realism over romanticism and thus remained for over three decades the *de facto* dean of American literature, as his name inadvertently suggested. His reputation fell in the first years of this century, but has, in recent years, begun to rise.

Two other staunch fighters for realism were Mark Twain (1835–1910) and Henry James (1843–1916) with both of whom William Dean Howells sustained a personal friendship. Beginning as a local colorist, Mark Twain wrote works which have become part of the American cultural tradition. *The Adventures of*

Huckleberry Finn, his masterwork, has, in the opinion of Ernest Hemingway, fathered modern American literature. Henry James, with his "international theme," and his psychological realism, is now considered as one of the most—if not *the most*—important literary figures coming out of the nineteenth century. For the moment, suffice it to say that his critical theory on the art of fiction, contributing as it does so much to the literary critical idiom, has made him exceptionally popular in the world of literary criticism.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, with the development of industry and modern science, intelligent minds began to see that man was no longer a free ethical being in a cold, indifferent and essentially Godless universe. In this chance world he was both helpless and hopeless. European writers like Emile Zola had already developed this acute social consciousness. They saw man's life as governed by the two forces of heredity and environment, forces absolutely beyond man's control. Literary naturalism came into being. Three American writers who wrote in this tradition deserve special treatment: Stephen Crane (1871–1900), Frank Norris (1870–1902), and Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945). Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is the first American naturalistic work, Norris' *McTeague* the manifesto of American naturalism, and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* the work in which naturalism attained maturity. Hamlin Garland (1860–1940) and Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941) are also names meriting notice in this connection. Of this period or a little later are O. Henry's short stories which brought him overwhelming success and made him a central figure in the peak peri-