



美国文学简介

BY
FRED
MEDNICK


AN
INTRODUCTION
TO
AMERICAN
LITERATURE
FROM NEWCOMERS
TO NATURALISTS



上海大学出版社

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

美国文学简介:英文/(美)梅德尼克(Mednick, F.)

著. —开封:河南大学出版社, 1999.3 重印

高校教材

ISBN 7-81018-105-X

I. 美… II. 梅… III. 文学史-美国-英语-高等学校-教材 IV. H319.4: I

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(1999)第 06174 号

河南大学出版社出版

(开封市明伦街 85 号)

河南第一新华印刷厂印刷 河南省新华书店发行

1985 年 8 月第 1 版 1999 年 3 月第 7 次印刷

开本:850×1168 1/32 印张:12.125

字数:392 千字 印数:40 001—43 000 册

定价:14.00 元

出版者的话

本书原为执教于河南大学外语系的美籍专家 Fred Mednick 编写的一部美国文学教材,在使用中受到广大师生的一致欢迎。这次出版之前,又经作者作了必要的补充和认真的修改。

为了帮助读者了解美国文学的来龙去脉和主要成就,本书将移民时期至自然主义时期的美国文学划分为若干阶段。对每一阶段的哲学流派、社会思潮及文学理论均作了概要的介绍和深入的剖析,然后选取若干主要流派及代表作家,介绍其生平、文学成就和创作特点,并重点赏析其主要作品。章末还附有必要的选文。

本书可作为高等学校英语专业的美国文学教材,研究生及进修生的辅助教材,也可作为英语教师及一般英语工作者的参考书。

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of students and teachers have expressed an interest in information about American literature, which would provide perspective, biographical information, and analysis of selected works. Many had read an excellent volume *A Brief Introduction to Modern American Literature*, by Elisabeth Booz, a former foreign expert at Yunnan University in Kunming. No such introduction, however, had been written concerning early American works. In order to meet their demand, I have provided this book, using my own research and analysis of historical context, literary periods, themes, styles, and interpretations, along with what I determined were appropriate contributions of various scholars and literary critics. My intention is to provide a work which may be used by interested foreign language students desirous of a clear, conceptual framework of American literature. The objective of combining my own work with that of experts is to provide accurate and verifiable information so that students who wish to study American literature may be assured of high-level scholarship.

Special praise must be given to Comrades Zhai Shizhao and Zhou Li for their assistance and constructive criticism.

Life is not a spectacle or a
feast ; it is a predicament.

—*George Santayana*

I am an idealist. I don't
know where I'm going,
but I'm on my way.

—*Carl Sandburg*

CONTENTS

Foreword and Acknowledgments	
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Colonial America; A New Land/A New Literature; Bradford,Bradstreet,Edwards	5
Chapter 2 The Revolutionary Period; An Emergent National Literature	19
Chapter 3 Early National Period; Irving,Bryant,Cooper	38
Chapter 4 A National Literature and Romantic Individualism	68
Chapter 5 Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804—1864); Consummate Romantic	75
Chapter 6 Mid-Century Poets;Edgar Allan Poe (1809—1849) and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807—1882)	92
Chapter 7 Nature and the Individual; The Transcendentalism of Emerson (1803—82)and Thoreau (1817—62)	122
Chapter 8 The Anti-Slavery Impulse; Stowe,Douglass,Lowell,Whittier	143
Chapter 9 Herman Melville (1819—1891); Master of Philosophical Allegory	149
Chapter 10 An Experiment in Form; Walt Whitman (1819—1892)	174
Chapter 11 Emily Dickinson (1830—1886); The Recluse of Amherst	192
Chapter 12 From Civil War to New Century; Industrialism and the Rise of	

	Literary Realism; Introductions to Howells, O. Henry.....	204
Chapter 13	Mark Twain (1835—1910); The Man, The Humorist, The Social Critic, The Pessimist	220
Chapter 14	Psychological Realism; Henry James (1843—1916).....	276
Chapter 15	Inner Conflict; Edith Wharton (1862—1937)	304
Chapter 16	At the Turn of the Century; Muckraking and Reform, Naturalism	324
Chapter 17	Two Naturalists; Jack London and (1876—1916) Stephen Crane (1871—1900).....	332
Chapter 18	Theodore Dreiser (1871—1945); Naturalism and Moral Crisis in the Twentieth Century	358
	Selected Bibliography	376
	Index of Literary Works Used	379

INTRODUCTION

The history of American literature from colonial times to World War I reflects the history of a search for an American way of expression. For much of its early history, America had been a busy, restless land trying to discover its national identity. Great faith was placed on individuals, from the very beginning, to adapt and grow amidst foreign social and environmental conditions of life on the new American continent. The American, under the influence of the frontier, and the seemingly limitless space of the new continent, and faced with its hazards and dangers, became self-reliant and self-confident, leading to the continued development of the American Dream, begun by the Puritans, to be self-made, to strive for greatness, to succeed, to move from rags to riches.

Therefore, the common thread throughout American literature has been the emphasis on the individual. It is the individualism of the Pilgrim, inspired by a belief in God to pursue the American experience. It is the individual colonists who, instilled with revolutionary fervor, took the concept of the self-made man and developed it in an age of scientific development. There is the individualism of the western expansion and even of the Rip Van Winkles who sleep through history and are afraid of meeting the demands of a rigorous new society. It is the individualism of the romantic writers, especially Hawthorne, who plunged into the souls of their characters, searching for meaning. There is the individualism of the transcendentalists who, fearing a loss of individualism amidst the growth of industrialism, cried for self-reliance and civil disobedience and active dissociation from the con-

stant struggle for economic and social distinction. There is the call for freedom from slavery and the right to individual liberty expressed by the Abolitionist writers. Melville explored the good and evil impulses and contradictions in individuals. Whitman, the ultimate individualist, celebrated the self. Dickinson found meaning in a microscopic vision of her personal world. Twain's personal search for wealth was an expression and reflection of America's dream. His Huck, though, was more concerned with his personal love for Jim, and his loyalty for a friend, than going to hell. The realists promoted the cause of morality amongst individuals and the problem of capitalism's suppression of full individual expression. James and Wharton plumbed the depths of characters whose concept of reality was expressed in terms of psychological and spiritual motivations. Finally, the naturalists, deeply concerned with the devastating experience of society on the little man, nevertheless presented the individual as the underdog, inspiring our pity.

At times, the American writer has expressed himself as the spokesman for current political and historical movements. Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, a powerfully written document, can be seen as a true, literary work, inseparable from the fervor of revolutionary America, and the ideals and values for which it stood. Other writers refused to keep intimate ties with the mainstream of American thought. For many, society posed great problems. When high expectations were not to be realized, the confident individual became the blackest pessimist. Some were impelled to express themselves by leaving society altogether; some just addressed large issues of good versus evil; some became non-conformists; others spokespersons for a resurgence of democratic principles; others cynics; still others revolutionaries. In many ways, their choice of styles and subjects was truly American and constitutes the multi-faceted nature of America herself. Without a forced obligation to write *for* society, they

wrote about it, and about themselves, creating a national literature borne of the struggle for personal and national meaning.

Certainly, I have stressed the element of individual freedom and integrity as one of the most important guiding principles of the American literary scene, but freedom, escape, the conflict of the head (one's rational mind) and the heart (one's romantic impulse), of the loss of spirit in a materially-dominated age, of the move from innocence to experience, of America's relationship with Europe and of people with each other are all other themes which these writers have explored in each of their characteristic works.

This book is an introduction to American Literature from its puritan beginnings to World War I. I have chosen to include those authors whose works are representative of historical and/or literary periods and because of their own greatness as contributors to the literary treasures America holds dear. Ms. Booz has excluded Edith Wharton and Theodore Dreiser from her book, deeming them characteristic of an earlier age. Therefore, they have been included in this volume. The selections and analyses, as well as the biographies, provide an outline of what one may call the American character, a character as diverse as the diversity found amongst individuals. Each author and his work is treated in such a way as to give full expression to his/her role in the picture of American literature. For this reason, some works are analyzed in more depth than others; some biographies are longer; some literary trends are more detailed. The literary movements are discussed in a general framework and are extremely fluid. The student must not consider them comprehensive nor cast as solid outlines. Nor should the analyses provided be considered the "correct" approach. This could never be the case in a society so enamored of the individual. It is important to note, too, that the selections included are often excerpted for the sake of brevity. They reflect only a small sampling of the works by the authors dis-

cussed. The selections cannot possibly contain the depth provided by a wider and more extensive reading.

This book can be of best use for one who has read some literature, preferably American, before. Some terms and literary abstractions may be difficult for the beginner, so this familiarity is quite important. The book therefore, will provide the basic tools for the serious student to go into depth independently or in the setting of a class. It can also be used by an instructor to design a course of study. Therefore, I must emphasize again that the book is a foundation from which the reader may draw his/her own conclusions. As the ancient saying goes, "If you give a man a fish he can eat for a day; if you teach him how to fish, he will eat for ever." It is my hope that, armed with this humble volume, the reader may begin to taste of the food of American literature, on his/her own, for many years.

Fred Mednick

Kaifeng, 1985

CHAPTER ONE

COLONIAL AMERICA:

A NEW LAND / A NEW LITERATURE:

BRADFORD, BRADSTREET, EDWARDS

As soon as the colonists arrived in the early sixteenth century, they began to write. They wrote about their voyage to the new land, about adapting themselves to unfamiliar climates and crops, about dealing with Indians. They wrote in diaries and in journals. They wrote letters and contracts and government charters and religious and political statements. They wrote about the land which stretched before them—unimaginable and immense, with rich dense forests and deep-blue lakes and rich soil. It stirred the imagination to great heights. All seemed possible through hard-work and faith.

Initially, the first settlers from the Virginia Company promoted the Jamestown Colony (1607), not for religious but for mercantile purposes. English settlers expected that the Virginia plantations would provide goods for the British trade and would provide homes and land for the British. They counted on the Indians for cheap labor, many of whom refused to be enslaved or even to work, and who resented these settlers. Somehow, however, the settlers prospered.

In fact, Southern plantation wealth grew steadily, despite the restrictions placed on them by England. The colonists had to sell raw materials and agricultural exports for British manufactured goods. British shipping had a monopoly over the goods, so Britain made much money. However, a landed aristocracy rose in the South, becoming self-sufficient and internally managed, establish-

ing an intelligentsia and a few fine universities.

In the North, life was much different. At Plymouth (1620), Salem (1628), Massachusetts Bay (1630), more than 20,000 Englishmen found their homes. Many were learned and produced a considerable body of writing. Many scholars debated the validity of their works as literature in a professional sense, as the original colonists just catalogued their experience, intent on making homes and dealing with the harshness of nature and of Indian resistance. They did establish a government, complete with town meetings, popular elections, and official policies. They also established Harvard College in 1636, with a printing press set up nearby in 1639.

Within the first ten years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, sixty-five preachers arrived, and the development of a theocracy took place as a consequence of its leaders' deep convictions. In theory, church and state were separate, but actually they were one, all institutions subordinated to religion. The government was theocratic and authoritarian. Towns developed around the church organization, directing the activities of the frontier. They resisted British attempts at control, and maintained self-government.

In the case of New England, the term "Puritan" has been applied to those settlers who originally were devout members of the Church of England. By the time of Elizabeth's reign, the Church of England was clearly Protestant in respect to its separation from Rome. However, the Puritans wished to "purify" the rituals and to lessen the authority of bishops. Eventually, these "reformers" were so suppressed that they sought escape. Therefore, the theocracy created in the New World was such that their point of view would be held supreme.

Nothing was written for mere amusement. Many writers regarded the settlers as God's agents, sent under His "wonder working providence" to make homes for His chosen and to con-

vert or destroy the Indians whom they felt were sent by the Devil to disturb their progress. The early literature that emerged from such a God-centered world was heavily weighted, in subject and style, by religious considerations. The writing brought home to the average church member a fear and wonder for God's workings. A plain style existed, without unnecessary ornament and without references which the common person would not understand. They relied on the Bible. Not only did they argue by quoting the Bible, but they saw their whole situation in Biblical terms, and therefore all events, however small, were created by God, or else the Devil. The writing, therefore, held the sermon as one of its highest forms.

Many settlers relied on tenets of John Calvin, who believed that the state should be the servant of the Church. The result was that during the puritan period in New England, clergymen were the dominant authorities. Calvinists believed that God created the first man, Adam, in His own perfect image, but Adam sinned. Therefore, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." As a result, much emphasis was placed on "original depravity," the concept that man cannot redeem his original sinfulness. Redemption, therefore, must be a free gift from God. Only He and no-one else may decide who is to be saved and who is to go to hell. No person could earn grace by good works. When one is born, God has already determined whether he will be saved. This is Calvin's concept of "predestination." Christ, therefore did not die for all, but only for those who are to be saved. God is all, and man is nothing. Man looked toward the future praying for his selection for Heaven.

Since it was difficult to determine who was saved and who was not, puritans thought that the materially advantageous were saved. An ethic was developed around hard work. The drive for money and the acquisition of wealth through work may not be a step toward salvation (since there was no choice) but perhaps a

sign that one was saved. If life were a discovery of whether or not someone was saved, then every event was significant. If one acted in a way that was not consistent with this belief, then one was surely not saved and definitely a threat to the existing order.

Many zealots arose who persecuted the "witches," or those whom the community deemed "hellish." One of these "witches" was Anne Hutchinson, who refused to worship God in the manner demanded by the Puritan Church, which controlled the government of Massachusetts Bay Colony. She held religious meetings in her home where she discussed her belief that a person comes to know God through his or her own conscience, not by simply obeying the strict rules of the Puritan Church. An individualist, she was accused of having "promoted opinions that cause trouble." She was then tried and convicted by the Puritans for being a "seducer of the faithful." The Puritan court found her to be "under a devilish delusion" and she was banished from Massachusetts Bay in 1638. This and many other examples profoundly influenced later authors like Hawthorne, whose *The Scarlet Letter* is based upon the Puritan repression of free expression and Arthur Miller, whose mid-twentieth century play, *The Crucible* (an indirect criticism of the repressive anti-communist McCarthy period) was set in Puritan America from which the reader may draw parallels.

Of course the Puritans were not all zealots. Many were lovers of life instead of despisers of it. Some created pleasing architecture and crafts and even feared the excessive religiosity of their fellow colonists.

In the Middle Colonies, the seed of American toleration was sown. Dutch and Swedish colonies in New York and Pennsylvania were formed. These colonists enjoyed the best geographical location, greatest natural resources, and the best possibilities for commercial activity. The cultural institutions of the Middle Colonies, different from those of New England, played an

important role in the revolution of the 1770's.

Of the main groups in the Pennsylvania Colony, the Quakers were the most important. They were tradesmen and artisans and their greatest leader, William Penn (1644—1718) was less concerned with the original depravity of man than with the grace of God. For the Quakers (or Society of Friends) the ultimate authority was the "inner light" revealed to one's own soul. The Quaker worshipped in silence, waiting for "inward truth to reveal itself to him." Penn declared that a government must be such that involves the people in the formation of its laws. He stated that "Liberty without obedience is confusion, and obedience without liberty is slavery." These words are clearly echoed in the Declaration of Independence.

Under these conditions, the colony prospered. A press, public schools, the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Columbia, and Rutgers Universities were formed, and medicine, journalism, commerce, and government thrived.

Essentially, American literature during this period reflected the beginnings of a struggle for definition and meaning which still, in varying degrees, characterizes the American national character. One may see the struggle of the individual for expression, the belief in a future, the fight for civil rights, the constraints of factors (in this case religion and the severity of nature) sometimes beyond one's control, and the different, almost contradictory reasons for coming. Some for material and business advantage; others for religious freedom, still others for a religious life but an independent, politically democratic one. These impulses have, in a large sense, set the tone for the country and have reverberated throughout American history and literature, from Plymouth Rock to the recent election of the United States presidency. These original impulses found expression in the diaries, journals, poems and sermons of the day. Examining their authors and the works themselves will give substance to these