



高·校·英·语·专·业·教·材

A Guide to Appreciating English Literature

英美文学鉴赏导读

■ 主 编 魏 健

副主编 温中兰

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前言

通过基础阶段的英语学习,英语专业的学生虽然掌握了一定的听说读写能力,但他们的文学基本知识仍相对薄弱,要真正理解和透彻赏析英美文学作品的精华所在,仍不同程度地存在一定的困难。即使他们有时能在文字层面上读懂原文,但要对作品的文学价值进行真正有效的把握,不免会有“老虎吃天、无从下手”之感。《英美文学鉴赏导读》的编写遵循文学赏析教学应坚持“掌握方法为手段、文本阅读为载体、有效赏析为目标”的宗旨,努力帮助学习者克服上述困难。

《导读》的突出特点是,编者从介绍文学原理和鉴赏方法切入,紧密结合文本分析,力图解决传统文学教学中文本阅读与鉴赏实践严重脱节的突出矛盾。古人云:“授之以鱼,不如授之以渔。”授之以“鱼”,数量再多,终会穷尽;授之以“渔”,学生掌握了捕鱼的本领,固化了审美意识,必将受用终生。笔者认为,“授之以渔”不仅是《导读》编写的指导性纲领,更是一种行之有效的教学方法和一种崭新的教育理念,对教师在文学教学过程中培养学生创造性的思维能力以及提高学生分析问题和解决问题的水平具有普遍的指导意义。

鉴于“文学作品浩如烟海、文学教学课时有限”这一客观现实,本教材对文学作品的遴选不求面面俱到,而是把重点放在对各类文学作品的鉴赏方法上。换言之,教材的设计没有将文学教学仅仅停留在字、词、句乃至篇章结构的讲解上,而是着重引导学生把握鉴赏方法,深入感受和理解不同文体的文学作品,深刻领悟作品艺术形象的本质意义和作家的真实意图,最终有效摄取作品中真正有价值的东西。

综上所述,《导读》的整体设计不但能够满足教师英美文学课堂教学的基本需要,同时又能为学生自主学习提供便捷有效的帮助,使之在学习过程中逐步掌握鉴赏方法,整体把握作品实质,最终实现有效鉴赏作品的目标。

《导读》是浙江大学宁波理工学院2005年科研基金重点资助项目的成果,项目组其他成员还有宁波大学的李其金和吴秀琼老师,本学院的胡海鹏老师。在编著本书的过程中,我们得到了学院以及外国语学院领导自始至终的大力支持和帮助,在此深表谢忱,并希望该书能在英语专业的学科建设和文学课程的教学发挥应有的积极作用。

在编著本书的过程中,我们查阅了大量相关资料,并借鉴了不少作者的思想观点。也正因如此,《导读》才有了更高的可读性和更强的实用性,我们在此表示由衷的感激和谢意。

由于我们的学识水平有限,书中难免会出现疏漏和不足之处,恳请使用不吝赐教与斧正,以便我们及时修改与订正。

编者

2008年夏

Contents

Part 1 An Overall Guide to Appreciating Literature

1 What Is Literature?	1
1.1 Types of literature	
1.2 Literature is language	
1.3 Literature is fictional	
1.4 Literature is true	
1.5 Literature is aesthetic	
2 Why Do We Read Literature?	3
2.1 To acquire knowledge and wisdom	
2.2 To consolidate language competence	
2.3 To read for pleasure	
2.4 To improve understanding about life	
2.5 To cultivate capacity of artistic appreciation	
3 How to Learn Literary Texts?	5
3.1 Copying	
3.2 Paraphrase	
3.3 Summary	
3.4 Description	
3.5 Analysis	
4 How to Write About Literature?	8
4.1 Having something to say	
4.2 Choosing a topic	
4.3 Considering your audience	
4.4 Collecting evidence	
4.5 Developing argument	
4.6 Writing the first draft	
4.7 Revising	
4.8 Documentation	
4.9 The "Works Cited" page	
4.10 Sample Essay 1	
4.11 Sample Essay 2	

5 How to Take Essay Tests?	17
5.1 Prepare thoroughly	
5.2 Plan your answer wisely	
5.3 Respond directly to the assignment	
5.4 Add inserts when necessary	
5.5 Write clear, simple, and correct prose	
5.6 Be creative	
5.7 Sample Test Essays	
6 Major Critical Approaches	21
6.1 Formalistic criticism	
6.2 Biographical criticism	
6.3 Historical criticism	
6.4 Psychological criticism	
6.5 Sociological criticism	
6.6 Feminist criticism	
6.7 Reader-response criticism	
6.8 Cultural studies criticism	
6.9 Practical criticism	
6.10 Some tips on applying critical approaches	
7 Major Literary Schools	26
7.1 Classicism and neoclassicism	
7.2 Romanticism	
7.3 Realism	
7.4 Naturalism	
7.5 Modernism	
7.6 Postmodernism	

Part 2 A Guide to Appreciating English Poetry

1 Introduction	32
1.1 Nature of poetry	
1.2 Various descriptions about poetry	
1.3 Value of learning poetry	
2 Scansion of Poetry	35
2.1 Rhythm	
2.2 Meter and foot	
2.3 Rhythmic patterns	
2.4 Metrical mutations	

3 Poetic Lines	38
3.1 Monometer	
3.2 Dimeter	
3.3 Trimeter	
3.4 Tetrameter	
3.5 Pentameter	
3.6 Hexameter	
4 Rhyme Schemes	39
4.1 Full rhyme	
4.2 Imperfect rhyme	
4.3 Positional types of rhyme	
4.4 Numeral types of rhyme	
4.5 Other special sound effects	
5 Stanza Forms	42
5.1 Couplet	
5.2 Triplet	
5.3 Quatrain	
5.4 Quintet	
5.5 Sestet	
5.6 Octet	
5.7 Spenserian stanza	
6 Classification of English Poetry	46
6.1 Epic	
6.2 Ballad	
6.3 Lyric	
6.4 Heroic couplet	
6.5 Elegy	
6.6 Ode	
6.7 Sonnet	
6.8 Villanelle	
6.9 Dramatic monologue	
6.10 Blank verse	
6.11 Free verse	
7 Major Figures of Speech in Poetry	52
7.1 Allegory	
7.2 Ambiguity	
7.3 Apostrophe	
7.4 Conceit	

7.5 Contrast	38
7.6 Hyperbole	
7.7 Irony	
7.8 Oxymoron	
7.9 Personification	
7.10 Symbolism	
7.11 Imagery	
7.12 Simile and metaphor	39
8 Effective Steps to Read a Poem	58
8.1 Read through for main ideas	
8.2 Identify the speaker	
8.3 Decide the tone of the poem	
8.4 Try to follow the punctuation	
8.5 Read the poem naturally	42
 Selected Readings of English Poetry	
Christopher Marlowe	61
The Passionate Shepherd to His Love	
William Shakespeare	64
Sonnet 2	
Sonnet 18	
Thomas Nashe	68
Spring	
The King James Bible	69
Psalms 8	
Psalms 23	
Ben Jonson	72
Song: To Celia	
It Is Not Growing Like a Tree	
John Donne	74
Song	
A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning	
Death, Be Not Proud	
Robert Herrick	81
To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time	
George Herbert	82
Virtue	

Andrew Marvell	84
To His Coy Mistress.....	
John Milton	87
On His Blindness.....	
John Dryden	89
A Song for St. Cecilia's Day.....	
Alexander Pope	93
An Essay on Criticism.....	
William Blake	95
The Chimney Sweeper.....	
The Tiger.....	
Robert Burns	101
A Red, Red Rose.....	
To a Mouse.....	
William Wordsworth	105
I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.....	
Composed Upon Westminster Bridge.....	
The Solitary Reaper.....	
George Gordon Byron	111
Don Juan.....	
She Walks in Beauty.....	
Percy Bysshe Shelley	118
A Song: "Men of England".....	
Ode to the West Wind.....	
John Keats	126
Ode to a Nightingale.....	
Matthew Arnold	131
Dover Beach.....	
Robert Browning	134
My Last Duchess.....	
William Butler Yeats	138
The Lake Isle of Innisfree.....	
Sailing to Byzantium.....	
Dylan Thomas	142
Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night.....	
Edgar Allan Poe	144
Annabel Lee.....	
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	147

A Psalm of Life	147
Walt Whitman	149
I Hear America Singing	
O Captain! My Captain!	
Emily Dickinson	153
67	
712	
Robert Frost	157
The Road Not Taken	
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening	

Part 3 A Guide to Appreciating English Drama

1 Nature of Drama	161
2 Main Elements of Drama	161
2.1 Plot	
2.2 Character	
2.3 Dialogue	
2.4 Staging	
2.5 Music	
2.6 Theme	
3 How to Read Drama	164
3.1 Determine the setting	
3.2 Familiarize the cast	
3.3 Follow the action	
3.4 Identify the theme	
3.5 Reach a conclusion	
4 Categories of Drama	166
4.1 Tragedy	
4.2 Comedy	
4.3 Tragicomedy	
4.4 Domestic drama and melodrama	

Selected Readings of English Drama

William Shakespeare	170
Julius Caesar	
Hamlet, Prince of Denmark	
Oscar Wilde	183

The Importance of Being Earnest	190
George Bernard Shaw	190
Pygmalion	196
Eugene O'Neill	204
The Hairy Ape	204
Arthur Miller	204
Death of a Salesman	204

Part 4 A Guide to Appreciating English Fiction

1 Introduction	218
1.1 Essence of fiction	
1.2 Novel and novelette	
1.3 Short story	
2 Chief Elements of Fiction	220
2.1 Plot	
2.2 Two major types of characters	
2.3 Methods of characterization	
2.4 Setting	
2.5 Point of view	
2.6 Theme	
2.7 Tone	
2.8 Irony	
2.9 Style	
3 How to Read Fiction?	231
3.1 Look at the plot	
3.2 Analyze the characters	
3.3 Identify the setting	
3.4 Examine the narrative point of view	
3.5 Analyze the style, tone, and language	
3.6 Focus on symbolism and allegory	
3.7 Identify the themes	

Selected Readings of English Fiction

Jonathan Swift	234
Gulliver's Travels	
Charles Dickens	240
Oliver Twist	

Jane Austen	243
Pride and Prejudice.....	
Emily Brontë	251
Wuthering Heights.....	
Thomas Hardy	259
Tess of the D'Urbervilles.....	
Oscar Wilde	266
The Nightingale and the Rose.....	
James Joyce	273
Eveline.....	
Katherine Mansfield	278
A Dill Pickle.....	
Edward Morgan Forster	284
Mr. Andrews.....	
David Herbert Lawrence	290
The Rocking-Horse Winner.....	
Doris Lessing	304
A Road to the Big City.....	
Nathaniel Hawthorne	311
The Scarlet Letter.....	
Francis Scott Fitzgerald	321
The Great Gatsby.....	
Sherwood Anderson	336
The Egg.....	
William Faulkner	346
A Rose for Emily.....	
Ernest Hemingway	355
A Clean Well-Lighted Place.....	
Isaac Bashevis Singer	362
The Son from America.....	
John Updike	369
A & P.....	
John Cheever	376
The Enormous Radio.....	

Part 5 A Guide to Appreciating English Essays

1 Introduction	386
-----------------------------	-----

2 Main Types of English Essays	387
2.1 The classic essay	
2.2 The periodical essay	
2.3 The philosophical essay	
2.4 The biographical essay	
2.5 Literary criticism	
3 Main Techniques in Essay Writing	389
3.1 Argumentation	
3.2 Exposition	
3.3 Characterization	
3.4 Narration	
3.5 Description	
3.6 Cause-and-effect	

Selected Readings of English Essays

Francis Bacon	392
Of Studies	
Samuel Johnson	395
On Idleness	
Henry David Thoreau	399
Civil Disobedience	
Aldous Huxley	403
The Beauty Industry	
Mark Twain	408
On the Damned Human Race	
Helen Keller	414
Three Days to See	

Part 6 Short Glossary of Literary Terms

.....	425
-------	-----

References

.....	437
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Part 1

An Overall Guide to Appreciating Literature

Before we begin our discussions on any specific topics about English literature, let us first deal with some basic issues concerning literature at large so as to prepare our minds for specific studies of English literature.

The original source of literature arises from human interest in telling a story about some aspects of human experiences by arranging words in artistic forms. Initially, the literary impulse exists only in one's mind. It is the writer who turns this impulse of experience into literature, by means of language, and in such forms as fiction, poetry, drama, or essay. To a certain extent, literature may be briefly defined as fictional texts in the form of language artistically employed to achieve identifiable literary qualities and convey meaningful messages.

The word "literature" came into English from the 14th century in the sense of polite learning through reading. Thus a man of literature, or a man of letters, referred to what we would now describe as a man of wide reading, somewhat like the modern meaning of the word "literacy". From the mid-18th century, literature referred to the practice and profession of writing. And since the 19th century, literature has been the high skills of writing with exuberant imagination.

1 What Is Literature?

1.1 Types of literature

Literature may be classified into four categories or genres: prose fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction prose.

Prose fiction, or narrative fiction, includes myths, parables, romances, novels and short stories. The essence of prose fiction is narration, the relating of a sequence of events or actions. Fictional works usually focus on one or a few major characters who change and grow as a result of how they deal with other characters and how they attempt to solve their problems.

If prose is expansive in the use of language, poetry strives towards brevity. It offers

the reader high points of emotion, reflection, thought, and feeling with highly compacted syntax. Very often, poetry expresses the most powerful and deeply felt experiences of human beings. Many exquisite poems become our lifelong friends, and we visit them over and over again for insight, understanding, and peaceful reflection about our life.

Drama is literature designed for stage or film presentation by actors for the benefit and delight of the audience. The essence of drama is the development of character and situation through speech and action. Although most modern plays use prose dialogue, on the principle that the language of drama should resemble the language of everyday speech, many plays from the past are in poetic form.

Usually, the first three are regarded as imaginative literature, while nonfiction prose consists of essays, news reports, feature articles, historical and biographical works, and the like. The main purpose of nonfiction prose is to present truths and make logical conclusions about the factual world of history, science, and current events.

Roughly speaking, the essential qualities of literature are characterized by the following four features.

1.2 Literature is language

As we all know, authors of literature use language in special ways. Most importantly, literary language emphasizes connotative rather than denotative meanings of words. Unlike scientific language which mainly emphasizes the denotative value of language, writers of literature use language in a more subtle manner—to bring into full play all the emotional associations that words may carry. A good case in point is the word *mother*, whose denotation is simply the female parent, but the connotation may include such meanings as protection, warmth, care, love, devotion, home, and a happy memory of one's childhood. Thus, literature is inseparably associated with language in terms of linguistic application.

1.3 Literature is fictional

A work of literature is fictional in two ways. On the one hand, authors make up or imagine some or all the materials. This is perhaps why literature is often thought of as imaginative literature. Even historical fiction, which chiefly relies on factual events, is also fictional, as it includes characters, dialogues, events, and settings that never existed in history.

On the other hand, the fictional quality of literature also lies in the artistic control that writers exercise over the work. This artistic control produces the effect of stylizing the materials of the work, thus setting it apart from the real. This occurs simply because there always exists an obvious disparity between literary phenomena and real life. Compare how a newspaperman and a poet describe the same event respectively, and we

will see the distinction. The scientist would try to present his account as exactly as possible about the event; the poet, in contrast, would most probably manages to make his poem the object of experiencing profound emotion. In other words, the poet would adopt such literary techniques as metaphor, irony, or imagery to make his work more of an artifact.

1.4 Literature is true

Despite that literature is mostly “fictional”, it has the innate nature of being true. Thus, there exists a paradox in literature—its imaginative properties against its representation of actual human conditions. In other words, we can find in literature a paradox between fictionality and truth. There are mainly three ways for literature to be true.

First of all, literature is true to the facts of real life. It directly states the depictions of real people, actual places, and existing events; more importantly, literature is true in the sense of its power of communicating truthful ideas of human life.

Then, literature is true because of the indirectly stated ideas that the authors present in literary works. Though all the details of a literary work make up an imaginary world, such a world is based on the author’s ideas about the real world.

Finally, what we readers usually encounter in literary works are the typical characters and probable actions. By imposing order on the chaos of real life, authors present characters who typify real people, and they recount actions that would probably happen in real life. Because of this, we are often be able to find characters who represent recognizable types of people in real life.

1.5 Literature is aesthetic

The aesthetic property of literature lies in its artistic beauty. Like any other art forms—music, painting, photography, and dance, literature is an end in itself. The pleasure we get from literature can be found in the way authors use literary techniques, such as metaphor, plot, character, symbolism, irony, suspense, theme, and rhythmic language. All such literary elements combine together to form an organic coherence of artistic beauty.

Moreover, while experiencing beauty of literature, we can trace the profound meanings in literature. Great authors are undoubtedly very competent to make the aesthetic qualities of literature inextricably bound up with the ideas conveyed by their works. They use pleasurable conventions to enhance and communicate their themes.

2 Why Do We Read Literature?

Literature serves quite a few purposes. Sometimes we read for pleasure only, just as sometimes we listen to music for relaxation or go to a movie for entertainment. Good and great literature, however, makes us work a little harder. It demands more because in the

end it has more to give. It compels us to read actively and alertly, and insists that while reading we have to question and think hard in order to gain any profit. In short, good literature asks us to read *critically* so as to procure what we wish to get. There are at least the following five advantages in reading literature.

2.1 To acquire knowledge and wisdom

Literature is a cultural heritage and a key to acquire social knowledge and human wisdom. By learning literature, we learn fresh ideas and new concepts. Literature brings readers insight about the nature of reality. Through literature, we know more about traditions, customs, beliefs, attitudes, folklore, and the values of the era in which it is written. Whether in the form of fiction, poetry, drama, or essay, literature always furnishes us readers with some new information that broadens our knowledge of the world.

2.2 To consolidate language competence

To master the English language, to improve our understanding of its culture, or to consolidate our language competence, it is unarguably indispensable to study at least some of the great works written by outstanding authors of the language. As is widely known, as English majors, for instance, literature can serve the English learners as a useful tool for increasing vocabulary, mastering idiomatic expressions, enhancing cultural awareness, and raising communicating ability. Therefore, literature, when properly used in language classes, will undoubtedly achieve these purposes in the process of language acquisition.

2.3 To read for pleasure

Apart from its role of education, literature can bring pleasure by entertaining those who voluntarily attend to it. Generally speaking, literature offers readers narratives with an exciting world of experiences that is different from their own. One may argue that there are a variety of other ways of giving pleasure or entertainment to people, yet we discover that literature enables people to find the greatest pleasure and satisfaction when we are ultimately brought back to some sober-minded realities of human problems, feelings, and relationships. The reason lies in the fact that literature is not simply a copy of what is obviously seen by our bare eyes; we are, in fact, furnished with an imaginative and interpretative reflection upon special views of human existence and social reality.

2.4 To improve understanding about life

Literature is appealing to us also because of its intimate relationship and relevant association with human existence. It sheds light on the complexity of human experiences and thus broadens the awareness of our own understanding about life. While observing