

美国文学

A Brief Introduction to American Literature

左金梅 主编

馆

青岛海洋大学出版社

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前 言

《美国文学》是我国高等院校英语专业的必修课程,也是我国英语本科成人自学考试的必考科目。但是,目前这方面的教材缺乏多样性,使学生的学习与应考中不免有点“巧妇难为无米之炊”之感。为此,笔者整理了几年来讲授《美国文学》课的讲义,并根据有关专家的建议编写了《美国文学》(包括美国文学史及美国文学选读)一书。

本书分五部分:殖民地时期、美国革命时期、浪漫主义时期、现实主义时期及现代主义时期。19世纪以前的美国文学只是一些信息的报道和宗教的或政治的宣传,算不上真正意义上的文学,19世纪和20世纪才是美国文学作为独立的民族文学形成和发展的鼎盛阶段。所以,本书简略介绍了前两个时期的文学,用较大篇幅论述了后三个时期的文学。每个时期分为历史背景、文学及流派特点、作者简介及重要作品的文体风格和主题思想、重点选文等若干章节,选文后附有注释和思考题。

在编写本书过程中,力求达到:章节条理、层次分明、文字通俗易懂,重点突出,以便于读者在较短的时间内掌握有关的知识。

本书可作为高校英语专业教学用书或参考用书,也可作为英语研究生入学考试和英语自学考生的备考读物。

因编者水平所限,书中定有缺点和漏误,恳请各位专家和广大读者批评指正。

编者

2000年8月

Contents

Part One	Colonial America	(1)
Chapter I	American Puritanism	(1)
	1. The New World	(1)
	2. Puritan Fathers	(1)
	3. The Puritan Principles	(2)
	4. Characteristics of American Puritans	(2)
	5. The Puritan Heritage	(3)
Chapter II	The Colonial Literature	(4)
	1. Characteristics of the Colonial Literature	(4)
	2. William Bradford	(4)
	3. Anne Bradstreet	(5)
	4. Edward Taylor	(6)
	5. Jonathan Edwards	(6)
Part Two	America Independence	(8)
Chapter I	American Revolution and Enlightenment	(8)

	1. American Revolution	(8)
	2. Enlightenment	(8)
Chapter II	The Literature of Revolution and Enlightenment	(9)
	1. The Literary Features	(9)
	2. Thomas Paine	(10)
	3. Thomas Jefferson	(11)
	4. Philip Freneau	(12)
Chapter III	Benjamin Franklin	(16)
Part Three	The Age of Romanticism	(28)
Chapter I	The Rise of American Romanticism	(28)
	1. Historical Background	(28)
	2. Characteristics of Romanticism	(28)
	3. Features of American Romanticism	(29)
Chapter II	Early Romanticism	(30)
	1. Characteristics of Early Romanticism	(30)
	2. Early Romantic Novelists	(31)
	3. Early Romantic Poets	(54)
Chapter III	Late Romanticism	(59)
	1. Characteristics of Late Romanticism and the Flowering of American Literature ...	(59)
	2. Late Romantic Poets—Whitman,	

Dickinson, Poe	(60)
3. Late Romantic Essayists—Emerson and Thoreau	(80)
4. Late Romantic Novelists—Hawthorne and Melville	(98)
Part Four The Age of Realism	(124)
Chapter I The Rise of Realism	(124)
1. Realism	(124)
2. Features of Critical Realism	(125)
3. Historical Background of American Realism	(125)
4. Features of American Realism	(127)
Chapter II Three Major Novelists of Realism	(128)
Chapter III Four Novelists of Naturalism	(174)
Chapter IV Other Writers of Social Criticism	(210)
Part Five The Age of Modernism	(221)
Chapter I The Rise of Modernism	(221)
1. Modernism	(221)
2. Features of Modernism	(222)
3. Historical Introduction of American Modernism	(223)

	4. Modern American Poetry	(224)
	5. Modern American Drama	(227)
	6. Modern American Fiction	(228)
Chapter II	Modern Poets	(231)
	Poets of Native Traditions	(231)
Chapter III	Imagist and Symbolist Poets	(252)
Chapter IV	Modern Novelists	(281)
Chapter V	Modern Playwrights	(353)
Chapter VI	Some Contemporary Writers	(370)
Appendix	Glossary of Literary Terms	(379)
References	(385)

Part One Colonial America

Chapter I American Puritanism

1. *The New World*

America was isolated from the other continents until Christopher Columbus discovered it in 1492. The discovery stimulated the Europeans into this fascinating and strange continent in rapid succession. These Europeans—the Spanish, the Dutch, the Swedes, the French, and the English—pushed the aboriginal inhabitants (American Indians) westward and established their own colonies respectively. Thus arose the New World.

2. *Puritan Fathers*

The English made their first successful settlement at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, and then other English colonies emerged one after another, especially after the arrival of the “Mayflower” in Plymouth in 1620. The early British settlers were quite a few of them Puritans. Puritans were members of the Church of England, who had been dismayed by Elizabeth’s compromise church of 1563 (a mixture of Catholic structure and Protestant doctrine), sought the complete removal of all church rituals that had

overtones of Catholicism, aimed at reforms in its doctrines and great strictness in religious disciplines, and thus were directed against by state persecution. To avoid the religious persecution, some of them managed to escape to the New World and became known as Puritan Fathers or Pilgrim Fathers of the American nation.

3. *The Puritan Principles*

The principles and practices of puritans were popularly known as puritanism. Puritanism accepted the doctrines of Calvinism: the sovereignty of God, the supreme authority of the Bible, and the irresistibility of God's will for man in every act of his life from cradle to grave. These doctrines led the Puritans to examine their souls to find whether they were of the elect and to search the Bible to determine God's will. Thus piety, austerity of taste, diligence, thrift and introspection were common puritan traits.

4. *Characteristics of American Puritans*

On the one hand, the American Puritans, like their brothers back in England, were religious idealists who came to the wildness of this new land with the belief that they would restore the church to the purity of the first century church as established by Jesus Christ himself and the hope that they would build a new Garden of Eden in America enjoying God's blessings. On the other hand, the American Puritans became more practical, that is, they became more and more preoccupied with business and profits, as they had to be, for when they arrived in the wild land they had to struggle for survival. The very severity of the frontier conditions taught them to

be tougher, to be ever ready for any misfortune and tragic failures that might lie in wait for them. On the whole, in Perry Misler's words, the American Puritan was "a doctrinaire and an opportunist".

5. *The Puritan Heritage*

Early Puritanism has had continuous strong influence upon American thought and culture. Martins Day has summarized some of the most important elements of this puritan legacy as follows: ① rigid sense of morality; ② emphasis upon material success; ③ self-reliance; ④ feeling for democracy; ⑤ enthusiasm for education; ⑥ fervor for social reform; ⑦ conflict of conscience arising from an awareness that material success is not adequate as a major goal in life.

With regard to American literature, puritanism exerted its influence in three ways. ① Early Puritans dreamed of building a new Garden of Eden in America, (a perfect land) where they would live a free life. Fired with such a sense of mission, the Puritans looked even the worst of life in the face with a tremendous amount of optimism. Thus optimism characterised early American literature. ② The American Puritans tended to observe things in a metaphorical mode. To them the physical, phenomenal world was nothing but a symbol of God and physical life was simultaneously spiritual. Such a perception left symbolism as one chief feature of American literature. ③ As far as technique is concerned, the puritan style of writing is characterised by simplicity, which left an indelible imprint on American writing.

Chapter II The Colonial Literature

1. *Characteristics of the Colonial Literature*

American literature grew out of humble origins. There were no literal works in a real sense in the early colonial period. The early myths were personal literature in the forms of diaries, travel books, letters, journals, sermons, histories and prose. In content, they wrote about the voyage to the new land, about adapting themselves to unfamiliar climates and crops, about dealing with Indians, and especially about religion. In form, English literary traditions were imitated. The first American writer was Captain John Smith whose reports of exploration and settlement have been described as the first American literature written in English.

2. *William Bradford (1590—1657)*

William Bradford was one of the Puritan Fathers who came to America in 1620 and then the first governor of Plymouth. He has left us a priceless gift: *The History of Plymouth Plantation*. Bradford started the book of history in 1630, ten years after the Mayflower voyage. He covered the experiences of the small group of Puritans who were persecuted in England, migrated to Holland in 1608 and then to the New world in 1620. The plight of the Pilgrim Fathers, landing at Plymouth Rock, was outlined in the book:

Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation. . . , they had now no friends to welcome them, no inns to entertain or refresh their weather-beaten bodies, no houses or much less towns to repair or to seek for succour. . . . Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men? . . .

3. Anne Bradstreet (1612—1672)

Anne Bradstreet was the first notable poet in America literature with an authentic puritan voice. Her poetry, together with that of Edward Taylor's, rose to professional level and are now regarded as the true poetry of 17th century New England. In her life, she wrote many poems of religious experience and domestic intimacy, some of which were collected by her brother-in-law under the title of "*The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*." Thus she was later known as the Tenth Muse. The poem for which Anne Bradstreet has been best known is her "Contemplations". This poem is her most independent and integral work which compares the life of mankind with that of nonhuman nature and offers the reader an insight into the symbolic mode of perception and the piety of the early puritans. In the ninth stanza, the poet wrote:

I heard the merry grasshopper then sing,
The black-clad cricket bear a second part;
They kept one tune and played on the same string,
seeming to glory in their little art.
Shall creatures abject thus their voices raise.
And in their kind resound their Maker's praise.
Whilst, I as mute, can warble forth no higher lays?

4. *Edward Taylor* (1642—1729)

Edward Taylor is popularly regarded as the best puritan poet of colonial America. He wrote metaphysical poems, in the tradition of Donne and Herbert, treating religious themes and burning with an intense love for God. In his poem "Huswifery", he saw religious significance in a simple daily incident like a housewife spinning:

Make me, O Lord, thy spinning wheel complete

The holy word my distaff make for me

Make mine affections thy swift flyers neat,

And make my soul thy holy spool to be.

My conversation make to be thy reel,

And reel the yarn thereon spun of thy wheel.

5. *Jonathan Edwards* (1703—1758)

Edwards was the country's greatest theologian and probably the last great voice that was ever been heard in America to reassert the Calvinist doctrines during the "Great Awakening". However, his faith was logical as well as mystical. On the one hand, he preached the power and mysterious God and the depravity of man. On the other hand, he accepted the new rationalism of Locke and Newton, who thought that man could be made good and that he could even understand the mysteries of the universe. That is probably why he is at once known as the first modern American and the country's last medieval man.

In his life time Edwards had published nine major works and numerous sermons. His greatest and most complete philosophical

works include *Freedom of the Will* (1754), *The Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758), and *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765). These works were strenuous efforts to show the relations between religious emotions and virtues and they attempted to solve the question of the existence of free will in a predestined universe. With regard to technique, they were characterised by closeness of texture and preciseness. This qualifies him as the most sensitive stylist in American puritanism. And he became, aside from Benjamin Franklin, the most influential of all colonial American writers.

Part Two American Independence

Chapter I American Revolution and Enlightenment

1. *American Revolution*

With the quick expansion of European colonies in North America, European colonists soon came into collision and wars with each other. As the result of a series of wars, the British colonies defeated the other European colonies and established its dominant position in America, with respect to the Great Britain. However as time went on, the British colonies came into revolt against the British government who had taken a series of measures to hamper the development of native colonial economy and to insure the colonies' dependence on it. In the seventies of the 18th century the British colonies rose in arms against their mother country and the war for independence began. The war lasted for eight years (1776—1783) and ended in the formation of a Federal bourgeois democratic republic—the United States of America.

2. *Enlightenment*

Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason, was an intellectual movement that originated in Europe in the 17th century and finally came to the English colonies in America in the 18th century. It

stressed the powers of human reason, the importance of scientific methods and discoveries instead of the omnipresence and omnipotence of God. Inspired and enlightened by Isaac Newton's new scientific idea that the universe is not a mystery moving at the whim of an inscrutable god but a mechanism operating by a rational formula that can be understood by any intelligent men and woman, the Enlighteners believed that human society must operate by natural laws and, that by discovering and approaching laws, mankind could achieve almost infinite progress. So the idea of progress became one of the dominant concepts of the age. In America, the Enlightenment contributed to freeing the Americans from the limitations of puritanism and stimulating them to strive for the establishment of their independent and democratic nation.

Chapter II The Literature of Revolution and Enlightenment

1. *The Literary Features*

The great historical events and the intellectual movement of the 17th century exerted influence upon and found expression in its literature. Theology that dominated the Puritan phase of American writing gave way to politics and common sense. Generally speaking, the 18th century American literature had the following principal features: ① The men of letters of the age were preoccupied with rationality and showed a profound love for the order and beauty of classical art. ② In form, American literature throughout the century was largely patterned on the writing of the 18th century English classical