

美国文学教程



胡荫桐

刘树森

主编

● 南开大学出版社

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PREFACE

American literature may be among the youngest national literatures in the world. Its real history, if calculating roughly from the end of the Revolutionary War (October 1781), is only about two hundred years or more. Within such a short period, American literature swiftly developed, well matured, began to receive international recognition, and has exercised an impactful effect upon world literature. In fact, American writers have brought out some of the world's best literature.

During the short history of literary development of more than two hundred years which can be divided into several stages such as the colonial period, the period of enlightenment, New England transcendentalism and the romantic age, the age of realism, American naturalism, American modernism, there emerged in the American literary world two spectacular literary renaissances, which, as a result, demonstrated the brilliance of American literature and made it stand erect in the arena of world literature.

It was after American independence that American literature began to take shape. In the colonial period, writers did not turn up with real American style basically, and American literature, by and large, followed the English tradition and did not give rise to the works of great literary value.

Between 1840 and 1850, American literature reached its first peak called New England Renaissance. Transcendentalism, according to Emerson, in which each individual finds his or her own way to transcendence through self-knowledge, self-reliance, and the contemplation of nature, fanned the flame and played a motivating role. This first American renaissance began with the maturing of American literature in the 1830s and ended with its

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flowering in the 1850s. A considerable number of writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Walt Whitman fully displayed their talents. They freed themselves from the hindrance of the tradition of English literature, discolored the brand of the English literature shown in the works by the former writers, and created a great number of literary works, brilliant, really American and original in style, in which "Nature", *Walden*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick*, "Song of Myself", etc., exert a far-reaching influence.

The first American renaissance, however, was limited in the light of its extent and influence since there was no playwright in the group of writers and only Walt Whitman had remarkable talent among the poets. Definitely, before 1920 only a few writers enjoyed high international reputation. For example, James Fenimore Cooper who was the first important American novelist to succeed with subjects and settings that were largely American had been widely read in the whole of Europe; Washington Irving gained European recognition as America's first genuine man of letters; Edgar Allan Poe, whose often technically complex poetry used commonplace, romantic themes and Walt Whitman were welcomed in France; and in Britain, Mark Twain who produced equivalents of American speech in his dialogue never before attempted was favorably received. Moreover, Whitman, as a matter of fact, who celebrated an untrammelled communion with nature with overtones of sensuality that appeared shocking even though his poetry expressed sound transcendental doctrine, gave an important impetus to China's new poetry movement which initiated free verse written in the vernacular. Nevertheless, New England Renaissance or New England Transcendentalism, which began in the 40s of the nineteenth century, was a brilliant milestone in literary history, and American literature attained maturity, henceforth.

Compared with the literary history of any European coun-

try, the American one is short but develops fast. About one hundred years after the first renaissance, there arose the second one. From 1912 to the end of World War II came forth, in large numbers, in the American literary circles, the writers of talent, who achieved remarkable successes in all spheres of fiction, poetry, drama and literary criticism. A scene of literary prosperity, therefore, was presented.

Between World War I and the end of the 1930s was the period when "the Lost Generation" with Ernest Hemingway, whose *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* are the collective portrait of "the Lost Generation" and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who himself and whose *The Great Gatsby*, portraying how American wealthy men spent money like water and led a life of luxury and dissipation in the sumptuous night feast, are the product of "the Jazz Age", as its important representatives dominated the American literary world. Though several writers in the first renaissance occupied a unique position in the history of American literature, the literature between the two world wars or the second renaissance surpassed the previous literature, by a great deal, in the light of the numerical superiority of the emerging brilliant writers and works, in the light of the range of life reflected, richness of theme and contents, and the originality of style.

The second renaissance which was characterized by disillusionment to the war, adopted the despairing tone of *The Waste Land* and reached its summit in 1930. That year saw the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to the first American writer, Sinclair Lewis, who attacked provincialism in *Main Street* (1920). From this time on, American writers carried off this unusual honor one after another. For example, Eugene O'Neill (1936), whose means of artistic expression is an agglomeration of naturalism, realism, expressionism, symbolism, etc., particularly, whose later works touched on some basic problems of American society and were given much attention by the press. This outstanding dramatist of the second renaissance set a new standard for American

playwrights, shocked the international literary world, and opened the golden age of American drama. O'Neill was joined by a host of talented dramatists, including Maxwell, Anderson, Philip Barry, Lillian Hellman, Elmer Rice, Thornton Wilder, and later by Edward Albee, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams.

The other Prize winners are in order, Pearl Sydenstricker Buck (1938), T. S. Eliot (1948), William Faulkner (1950), Ernest Hemingway (1954), John Steinbeck (1962), etc. Although the standard adopted by the Nobel committee of Sweden, as is known to all, may not be objective, just and fair and contained regional prejudice, it is, after all, a criterion to measure the positions of most writers. The winning of the Nobel Prize, anyway, is one of the highest honors as an author can achieve. The increasingly important status American literature occupies in world literature can still be mirrored in the awarding of the Prize.

These two renaissances made American literature flower without precedence and marked the maturity of American literature. Up to now, though thousands of literary works are published in the U. S. A. every year, only a small part of them, in reality, could stand up to the test of time and become masterpieces. American literature, nevertheless, has already occupied an important place in world literature, and its impact allows no neglect.

In respect to the structure of this book, we integrated the history of American literature and the selected readings organically, in accordance with the teaching programme issued by the State Education Commission so as to (1) help students to appreciate and analyze, as much as possible, representative works of the important writers from the various periods of American literature, and (2) help them to form a deep and comprehensive understanding of that literature. This was done after a conscientious study of the characteristics of Chinese students in learning American literature and a careful study of relevant textbooks used in American colleges and universities. In the book, every effort has been made to attain a concise, distinct account of literary history,

and to attain wide representation of the selected literary works, which must be in the original, and cover the most possible modern and contemporary literary works. We strove for specific and exhaustive annotations of the selected works in order to extend help to students for an initiative study, and tried to inspire them to look for the main points and central idea of a work by appending "Questions to Study". Aside from being used as a textbook of American literature for English majors of the university, *A Course in American Literature* may benefit the broad masses of English learners, considerably, in their advanced studies.

To the following persons grateful acknowledgment is made for their assistance in the preparation of this book; to Prof. Beverly J. Kinney, and Prof. Susanne M. Fantini for a thorough reading of part of the manuscript and for many helpful suggestions; to Dr. Judith P. Stelboun and Dr. Teresa O'Connor of the City University of New York, two directors of the Chinese-American Educational Exchange, for their substantive support and constant solicitude; to Dr. Herbert Leibowitz, publisher and editor of the *Parnassus Journal*, for the valuable reference material he supplied.

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HU Yintong

June 14th, 1994

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CHAPTER I

THE COLONIAL PERIOD AND 17TH CENTURY LITERATURE OF PURITANISM

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Modern archaeology and anthropology have confirmed that the first settlers in America were the Asians known as the ancestors of American Indians or Native Americans, who crossed the Bering Strait and immigrated into America between 25,000 and 40,000 years ago. The first immigrants infused new life to the uninhabited continent, but the later changes of the North American glaciers during the Ice Age destroyed the path by which the Asians came to America, and thereafter America became isolated from the other continents until Christopher Columbus arrived with his three ships in 1492. The discovery of America by Columbus led to the rush of European immigrants into this fascinating and strange continent and brought the rise of the New World.

The English settlement in America began in 1607, when Captain Christopher Newport anchored his three storm-beaten ships near the mouth of Chesapeake Bay. The English settlers laid out Jamestown as their first permanent settlement in America, and then in rapid succession other English colonies emerged one after another, especially after the arrival of the Mayflower in 1620. The early settlers were so-called Separatists and Puritans, who managed to escape to the New World to avoid the religious persecution. The Puritans were members of the Church of England who at first wished to reform or "purify" its doctrines, however, their own firm belief and disconformity with the Church finally led to their withdrawal from it and a great Puritan exodus. Under the influence of John Calvin (1509—1564) and Martin Luther (1483—1546), the Puritans, no matter whether they were in England or America, kept in common with all advocates of

strict Christian orthodoxy, insisting that the omnipotent and omniscient God had created Adam, the first man, in his own perfect image, and that Adam in his wilfulness had broken God's covenant. They subscribed to Calvin's belief in original sin as well as in original depravity, and to them the children of Adam were not mere automatons of evil impulse, as a limited freedom of the will, which they possessed as Adam had, would enable them to make the good or evil choice. However, the original sinfulness of a man's nature could not be mitigated by nothing in his personal power, thus his redemption must be a free gift of God's grace. This doctrine 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. Mindful of their outward behavior, they held the belief that good works were the natural evidences of the possession of faith and salvation, although they could not secure redemption. To be a Puritan, one had to give sufficient evidence of conversion and then continue to lead a good life.

Although Puritanism was originally a movement in England which rose in the sixteenth century within the Church of England, aiming at reforms in its doctrines and greater strictness in religious disciplines, and contending that religion should be a matter of personal faith rather than of ritual, with simpler forms of worship (no bishops, no robes, no set prayers, etc.) instead of those established by tradition and law within the Church of England, it was more than a religious creed to American Puritans, for their hard life and grim struggle for survival helped them comprehend that it should encompass and unify all aspects of man's life, spiritual and material, public and private. A perfect unity could not be achieved by a preoccupation with theology to the exclusion of other interests, but by a synthesis of all phases of human experience in relation to theology. In one word, American Puritans grew more practical, as they had to be when living in the severity of the frontier conditions, in comparison with their counterparts in England. Lovers of a creative life as they were, American Puri-

tans were blamed at sometimes for their religious intolerance and austere way of life, but in their influence on American life, there should be much more to bless them for than to condemn.

From the very beginning, the movement of the European settlement in America followed in general east-to-west lines. From the Atlantic seaboard the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes waterway, which offered the readiest access to the interior land, ran roughly in an east-and-west direction. Wherever the European immigrants went, American Indians were too few and too backward to be a grave impediment to the advance and colonialization of newcomers. When the first Europeans arrived, the American Indians east of the Mississippi numbered not more than two hundred thousand; those of the whole continent north of Mexico did not exceed five hundred thousand. The Indians were in the tribal society. Armed only with such simple weapons as the bow and arrow, and ignorant of any military art save the ambush, they were ordinarily no match for the whites who were well-accounted and superior in number. It was impossible for them to stop the movement of the white settlement. Still, as the white immigrants advanced, seizing larger tracts of land, the Indians formed extensive tribal alliances for resistance. The stern and extensive struggles between the Indians and the settlers in the colonial period passed through several well-marked stages. The struggles caused the settlers severe losses in life and property, but often ended in the complete destruction of the Native Americans. As afterward the European settlers came into sharp conflict within themselves for their national interests in the New World, the Indians found European allies against their European enemy. Some of the Northern tribes got combined with the French in order to defeat the English-speaking settlers, and for the same aim some of the Southern tribes received arms and encouragement from the Spaniards. But none of these efforts could prevent the inevitable fall of the backward tribes.

The Puritan migration between 1620 and 1640 brought New

England a population of twenty-five thousand, large enough to assure the colony a long-enduring economic and cultural leadership among all the European colonies. Although the settlements of Swedes along the Delaware, of Dutch in the Hudson River Valley, of Quakers in Pennsylvania, and of Catholics in Maryland added colour and variety to the pattern of colonial culture, it was the Puritans who wrote most of the literature, and it was Puritanism that was most influential in the intellectual and economic life of the settlers. In the Massachusetts Bay colony, many of the Puritans had their own libraries that contained not only the theological volumes but also the classics and the works of leading contemporary English authors. Moreover, the geographical isolation of the American Puritans did not cut off their association with England; many books were imported, and at the same time, since the New England writers were widely read in their mother country, many of their manuscripts were sent to England to be printed. In addition, the first colleges in the colonies, such as Harvard University (1638), were established in the first half of the seventeenth century and gave evidences of a great stimulus that the Puritanism afforded to the intellectual life of the settlers.

However, the English immigration and settlement in America was not only the result of religious motives but also that of mercantile ones. Hence, when the Virginia Company promoted the Jamestown colony as the first permanent English settlement in 1607, they expected that its plantations would provide goods for the British trade and would attract Englishmen who needed homes and land. Driven by such ambition and hope, the settlers avariciously fenced and cultivated the hunting grounds of the American Indians who, though ignorant of the English concept of property, refused to be enslaved and retaliated with fire and blood to defend their own rights and interests. In order to solve the problem of labour, the settlers turned their attention to slaves. Slavery had existed in North America even before the Europeans arrived. Many Native-American tribes enslaved those

captured in battle from other tribes. In the middle of the fifteenth century the slave trade began, thousands of Africans were shipped as slaves to America where they were sold into captivity. In 1619, the first African slaves were brought to Jamestown and sold to the plantation owners. By 1775, there were about half a million slaves in the thirteen colonies in North America.

British mercantilism resulted in the eventual shift from an agricultural and tribal society to a slave-holding plantation economy in the South. Such a social transformation demanded a high price to pay for it. A number of laws, such as the Navigation Acts of the late seventeenth century, were intended to compel the settlers to sell to the mother country all their raw materials and agricultural exports, for which they were to receive in exchange British manufactured products. British shipping was given a monopoly of the carriage, at rates fixed in England, thus the mother country was assured of a credit balance. As to the policy, there was no exception to the northern colonies. The natural conditions in the northern area favored commerce and manufactures, which thrived at an unexampled speed, but British exploitation in time became intolerable, and provided one of the deep-rooted reasons for the Revolution.

As the colonies in America grew and expanded, a developing Americanism began to play a role in the social life. Although the European immigrants were an amalgamation of different national stocks and cultures, the English language as a common language and English institutions were dominant everywhere, so that this gave the country a general unity. Different from the French and Spanish colonies which did not possess a representative self-government, the British colonies had opportunities to erect popular assemblies and to establish governments in which both electors and representatives had real political responsibility. This respect paid to essential civil rights began to take root during the colonial period, and bring about increasing changes in the social structure, while breaking down many sorts of special privileges.