

Help Yourself to Advanced English

高级英语自学系列教程

A reading companion to *English Through Literature*

A Gateway to Literature



文学自通

顾曰国 主编

蓝 纯 选注

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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Table of Contents

1. This companion: What, Why and How

<i>What's This Book about? And Why?</i>	2
<i>How to Use this Companion?</i>	3

2. Approaching Literature

<i>General Introduction to Literature</i> by Brooks, Purser and Warren	6
--	---

3. Reading Fiction — Textual Analysis

<i>Introduction to Fiction</i> by Brooks, Purser and Warren	24
<i>In Another Country</i> by Ernest Hemingway	65
<i>I'm a Fool</i> by Sherwood Anderson	74
<i>The Horse Dealer's Daughter</i> by D. H. Lawrence	85

4. Coming to Terms with Poetry

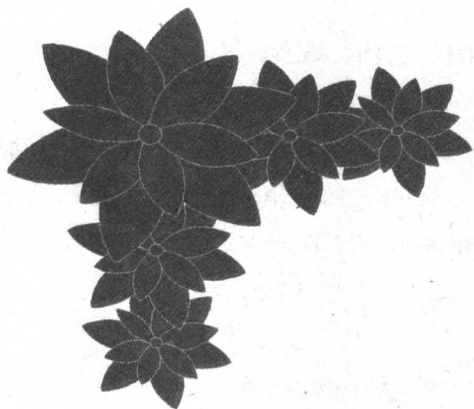
<i>Introduction to Poetry</i> by Brooks, Purser and Warren	108
Section I	122
<i>The True Lover</i> by A. E. Housman	122
Section II	126
<i>The Eagle</i> by Alfred, Lord Tennyson	127
<i>Silver</i> by Walter de la Mare	131
Section III	132
<i>That the Night Come</i> by William Butler Yeats	132
<i>Come Down, O Maid</i> by Alfred, Lord Tennyson	150
Section IV	152
<i>Neutral Tones</i> by Thomas Hardy	152

5. Dipping into Drama

<i>Introduction to Drama</i> by Brooks, Purser and Warren	156
<i>All My Sons</i> by Arthur Miller	170

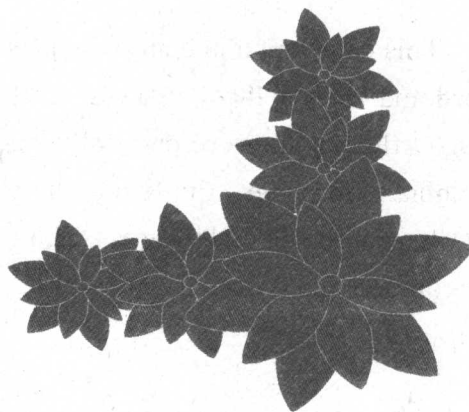
6. Imagination at Work

<i>A Closer Look at the Creative Process</i> — two versions of <i>London</i> compared ...	246
<i>Poetry Inside Out</i> — Jack Pritchard and Mary Willes at work	251



1

This Companion: What, Why and How



What's This Book about? And Why?

As its subtitle tells you, this book is a reading companion to *English Through Literature*. In other words, it is first a reading source for English literature. It is not, however, a source for English literature in general; It is a companion to your course book.

As we all know, your course book — *English Through Literature* — is not a book on literature in its ordinary sense. It is the way you learn English through literature. Literature there is treated as a creative use of English, that is, a variety among other varieties of English, such as English in daily life, English at leisure, English in mass media, and so on. For those learners who are “fans” of literature, they feel under-nourished and still hungry for more literature after they have completed the course. The present reading companion is specially prepared for them.

The companion differs from its “master” in that it is about literature. Of course, you also learn English by reading it, but this is not its purpose, as is with its master. It first invites you to see how literary critics, notably Brooks, Purser and Warren, approach literature, viz. their ways of reading literature. Armed with their insights, you do your own reading. The literary genres you are going to read include fiction, poetry, and drama.

This companion is honorably privileged to have the poems written by Jack Pritchard and Mary Willes, two currently practicing artists in England. Interestingly enough, the poems were originally composed either about China or during their stay in China. Moreover, the two authors are kind enough to annotate their own poems for Chinese readers. This gives Chinese readers a unique position of watching poetic imagination and creativity at work!

How to Use this Companion?

This companion can be used in three ways. One is that you finish your course work first, using the companion as a follow-up reading material. Or you read the companion while you are doing your course work. This is a recommended way of using it, for the companion follows the same critical tradition of new criticism as the course book, and also focuses on aspects of literary creation as approaches to literary reading. In your course book, you come across terms such as characterization, tension, climax, points of view and so on. The comprehension of these terms in your course book is achieved mainly through doing specific tasks in a non-academic way. They are dealt with more formally and systematically in the companion. In this sense you can use the companion as a reference source as well as a reading material.

The third way of using the companion is to read it as an independent source of material. This can be done because it is designed to be self-contained, and self-complete. One does not have to consult the course book for comprehension of the companion.

The excerpts selected in the companion are all original. Annotations are added to places which may prove to be difficult to Chinese learners. Questions and discussions are made to enhance your comprehension as well as your appreciation of the texts. A list of difficult and unknown words is also attached at the end of the book for your reference.

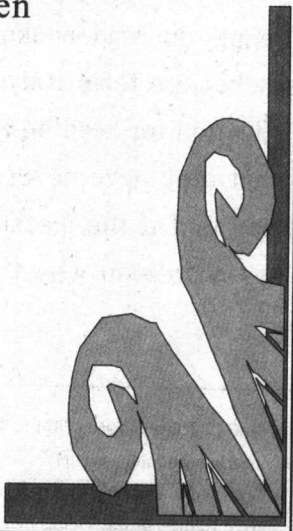
Finally the companion is not intended to be credit-bearing. If your college authority decides to do so, it is their decision and you should follow their advice.

Enjoy your reading. Good luck!



2

Approaching Literature

- *General Introduction to Literature*
by Brooks, Purser and Warren
- 

General Introduction to Literature

Brooks, Purser, and Warren

WHY DO PEOPLE READ? The usual answer to such a question would be: "For information and for amusement." But does this reply really answer the further question: "Why do people read literature?"

People do read *Who's Who*, or *The Boston Cook Book*, or *A History of France* for information. But what sort of information is contained in Keats'^①"Ode on a Grecian Urn"? Or what sort in Tennyson's^② *Idylls of the King*? If any information at all is contained, it surely is not the sort of information that one finds in a book of chemistry. Literature in general does contain, incidentally, much information, especially much historical information; and it is possible to derive from it a great many facts dealing with customs, beliefs, or events of the past; but even the inclusion of this sort of information will hardly in itself justify literature. The sceptical student would be quite right in pointing out that to justify the reading of literature because it accidentally contains history is to miss the point. And he might add that he preferred to take his history straight — not cluttered up with something else.

People do read books and magazines, novels and stories for amusement, of course, but the term *amusement* is entirely too vague. It in itself will not furnish a justification for reading literature either. Many people are able to state quite honestly that they have never found literature very amusing, and presumably might go on to say that if the pleasure derived from reading is the justification of literature, they see no reason why they should not continue to read the confession magazines

① **Keats, John** (1795~1821), English poet, one of the most gifted and appealing of the 19th century and an influential figure of the romantic movement.

② **Tennyson, Alfred, Lord or Alfred Tennyson, 1st Baron Tennyson** (1809~1892), English poet, one of the great representative figures of the Victorian age. His writing encompasses many poetic styles and includes some of the finest idyllic poetry in the language.

and westerns^① which they really enjoy, or, if they don't like to read anything at all, why they should not do something else which gives them pleasure.

Clearly the point here is that there is enjoyment *and* enjoyment — that there are certain pleasures to be had from reading literature which may be obtained in no other way, pleasures which the person who does not know literature will simply have to do without. All this is very true. The reading of good literature is not after all a stodgy and solemn matter. Such reading gives a great deal of pleasure, but the people who argue for literature do not always go about making their points in the best way. For example, to say that literature gives a “higher” pleasure is not very convincing unless one can point out just what this higher pleasure is. Furthermore, such a term, as a term, is unfortunate in its implications of intellectual snobbery.

There is such a snobbery often hidden in the statement that literature is “cultural” or that it is “uplifting”. But what is “culture”, anyway? There is such a thing; it exists (sometimes, one feels, in spite of its most vocal proponents) but the statement that one should read good literature because it is cultural is simply another way of begging the question.

The appeal to authority evades the question also. One ought to be impressed with the fact that the men whom we remember in all ages have loved literature, and it is an argument of force that the people¹ whom we regard as cultured today are those who know literature. But it is always possible that these people are wrong, after all; and at any rate the sceptical student will be quick to point out that the statement that other people have found literature valuable is not quite the same thing as a clear statement of its value for him. Moreover, if the case for literature is so strong, why can't it be stated in so many words, clearly and positively? It can be stated, but not briefly, for an understanding of the meaning of literature can come only from a study of literature itself.

The questions just raised are taken seriously in the work that follows. We shall try not to quibble or side-step the real question, or to retreat into some vague statement that literature is “cultural” and that all the “best people” have always enjoyed

① **Westerns**, stories or motion pictures describing the lives and times of cowboys, Native Americans, and settlers in the western United States.

A Gateway to Literature

it. We shall try to answer these questions directly and frankly. They surely deserve no less than this in the preface of a book which frankly proclaims itself a gateway to "literature".

The question of the value of literature is, as a matter of fact, not very hard to answer provided one understands what literature essentially is: that is, what sort of information it gives, and how it is related to, and how it differs from, scientific information. And these points can perhaps best be made by examining a concrete case.

Suppose that we take an incident, a fairly sensational one and yet the sort of thing which appears in the newspapers every day, and compare the various sorts of accounts of it which one finds, including the one contained in the newspaper. A man murders a girl with whom he is in love. How do the various accounts of this situation differ? What is the purpose of each of them? How do the literary accounts differ from the practical and factual accounts? Where does literature as literature begin?

Let us consider first the report that the autopsy surgeon would make on the situation; second, the indictment based on the murder; and third, the account which would appear in the daily newspaper.

From the Autopsy Surgeon's Report

Death occurred from the effects of asphyxia, cerebral anemia, and shock. The victim's hair was used for the constricting ligature. Local marks of the ligature were readily discernible; there was some abrasion and a slight ecchymosis in the skin. But I found no obvious lesions in the blood vessels of the neck.

Cyanosis of the head was very slight and there were no pronounced hemorrhages in the galea of the scalp. I should judge that very great compression was effected almost immediately, with compression of the arteries as well as of the veins, and that the superior laryngeal nerve was traumatized with the effect of throwing the victim into profound shock. . .

The lungs revealed cyanosis, congestion, over-aeration, and sub-pleural petechial hemorrhages. . .

Legal Indictment

State of _____

_____ County

TWENTY-FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT

THE GRAND JURORS of the State of _____, duly impanelled and sworn, in and for _____ County in the name and by the authority of the said State upon their oath, find and present:

THAT ONE John Doe late of _____ County, on the 23rd day of January in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Twenty-Four, with force and arms, in _____ County, aforesaid, and within the jurisdiction of the Twenty-First Judicial District Court of _____, for the _____ County, did unlawfully, feloniously, with malice aforethought kill and slay one Porphyria Blank by strangulation.

Contrary to the form and the Statutes of the State of _____, in such cases made and provided and against the peace and dignity of the same.

District Attorney for the 21st

Judicial District of _____

NEWSPAPER ACCOUNT:

Local Girl Found Slain by Rejected Lover

Miss Porphyria Blank, 21, daughter of Mr. And Mrs. R. J. Blank, of Barton Park, was found strangled this morning in the cottage owned by John Doe, 25, who was apprehended on the scene of the crime by officers Bailey and Hodge. Doe was found holding the body in his arms, and appeared to be in a stupor, his only reply to repeated questioning being, "I killed her because I loved her."

According to members of the Blank family, Doe had paid attentions to Miss Blank for the last several months, though it was strenuously denied that his regard for Miss Blank was returned. Miss Blank's engagement to Mr. Roger Weston was announced last month. Mr. Weston could not be reached for a statement. Mrs. Blank was prostrated by the news of her daughter's death.

The slain girl disappeared last evening at approximately eleven o'clock from a dinner party given at her parents' home in honor of the approaching wedding. The family became alarmed when it was discovered that she was not in her room, and instituted a search for her about midnight. The police, who were promptly notified, in the course of their search knocked at Mr. Doe's cottage, a building some quarter of a

A Gateway to Literature

mile from the Blank estate, at five in the morning. Receiving no answer, they forced the door and discovered Doe sitting with the dead girl in his lap. She had apparently been strangled; Dr. A. P. Reynolds, Autopsy Surgeon for the county, stated that, from the condition of the body, death must have occurred at about midnight.

Doe, who has been charged with murder, could give no coherent account of what happened.

All three of these accounts are concerned with facts, and *only* with facts. But they are concerned with the facts as viewed from three different standpoints. The first is a scientific standpoint, the second legal, and the third journalistic. The language of each of these is different, for each of these three professions, in trying to attain the special kind of accuracy it needs in dealing with its subject, has developed a vocabulary and a form of expression of its own. The primary purpose of each of these accounts is to give information. But they are not literature.

These pieces are not literature, and were never intended to be literature; but a literary man, a writer of fiction, poems, plays, or even essays, might take one of these reports as a starting point for his own special kind of work. Assuming that a literary man should write his story, play, or poem about the situation described in these reports, what would he be trying to do? But it may be clearer to point out first what he would not be trying to do. In the first place, he would not try to give *merely* the facts — or if facts, another kind of facts or a kind which does not appear in the *practical* and *scientific* reports given above. If giving the practical and scientific facts were the primary interest, then he would be going to a great deal of trouble for nothing. A person anxious to arrive at the facts, a person wishing to get a resume of the news, would not turn to a story or poem based on the incident; he would quite properly turn to his newspaper.

Moreover, almost any poem or story or play based on the incident would probably leave out facts which the man of practical interests would want to know: e. g. , the address of the house where the dead girl lived or a technical description of the state of the dead girl's lungs and of the bruises on her throat.

In general, these factual accounts attempt to tell who was murdered and who was the murderer, and when and where and how and why. The man writing a story

or poem or play will be interested in going beyond these details. He will be interested in giving a human meaning to the bare facts — especially in dealing with the *why* of the story. This humanizing of the facts is one regard which distinguishes any literary account from the three accounts given above.

Someone may point out, however, that in saying this we are not being quite fair to the newspaper story; that if we had only read further in the newspaper's report of the murder, we should have found some human-interest material. He would go on to point out that the reporter, after having set the facts before us, would then have attempted to make us see and feel a little more vividly the whole situation involved in the murder. Certainly it is quite true that a few days after the murder, we should in all likelihood discover in the newspaper some feature story which would attempt to give us a sense of pathos or terror or sorrow — which would attempt to tell us how the dead girl looked, and what the murderer was thinking about, and how he could have been prevailed upon to kill her, etc.

All this is quite true. Human interest stories do appear in the newspapers, for people are not satisfied to live merely upon a diet of facts. They are hungry for color and humanity; they do want to *feel* as well as to *know*. But this only means that people, as a matter of fact, do have the sort of interest which literature attempts to satisfy — that a great many people who never actually read a poem, for instance, are interested in some of the effects which are best given by poetry. Literature, then, including poetry, is not a mysterious and strange sort of thing which can make its appeal only to a special class; on the other hand, everyone is interested in the artistic account of life as well as in the practical account. The question is not then: "Is literature necessary and important to human beings generally?" But rather: "Are people generally reading good literature or bad?" A "sob sister's" story, in its intention, is literature and appeals to a literary interest. We shall see this quite clearly if we compare a typical sob sister's account of the murder with a poem on the same subject; and in making this comparison we shall also see why the former is bad literature and the latter, good. (We might substitute a good story based on the situation for the poem, or for that matter a good play. The point made would be the same.)

The Sob Sister's Story

The dead girl, beautiful and peaceful in death, her scarlet lips slightly parted as though whispering a caress to her lover, her blue eyes gentle and unquestioning as a baby's, lay in the murderer's arms like a child who has been rocked to sleep. Her golden hair falling in profusion about her shoulders all but concealed the cruel welt of red about her throat. The murderer, clutching his still burden to him, like a mother holding an infant, appeared dazed. As the police came in, he rose to meet them, still carrying his precious burden in his arms. The officers had almost to force him to relinquish her. He could not answer questions — could merely clutch the closer to his breast all that remained of the girl he loved better than life, and mutter, "I loved her, I loved her," like a man in a dream. A few hours later when I saw him in the sordid surroundings of the 10th Precinct Station House, so different from the cozy cottage which had been the abode of a tragic love, he was still dry-eyed, though his face wore a ghastly pallor. But when I tried to question him, I became aware of the terrific strain under which he suffered, and he showed all the signs of a man on the verge of hysteria. When I tried to draw from him the motive for the pitiful tragedy, he could only reply, his pale boyish face like a mask: "I killed her, but God didn't say a word, a word."

At last he managed pitifully to say: "I killed her so that she would be mine alone for always!"

And this is the irony of fate! The very greatness of his love made him strangle her. Separated as they were by wealth, social position, and all that that implies, it was only in death that they could be united.

Who are we to pass judgment on such a love?

Compare this account with the following poem:

Porphyria's Lover^①

The rain set early in tonight,

^① This is a poem by Robert Browning (1812~1889), English poet, especially noted for perfecting the dramatic monologue (literary composition in which the speaker reveals his or her character).