

英美文学文库



The Columbia History of the American Novel

哥伦比亚美洲小说史

General Editor: Emory Elliott

Associate Editors: Cathy N. Davidson
Patrick O'Donnell
Valerie Smith
Christopher P. Wilson

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

哥伦比亚大学出版社

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

英美文学文库



The Columbia History of the American Novel

哥伦比亚美洲小说史

General Editor: Emory Elliott

Associate Editors: Cathy N. Davidson

Patrick O'Donnell

Valerie Smith

Christopher P. Wilson

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

哥伦比亚大学出版社

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

京权图字：01 - 2004 - 1542

THE COLUMBIA HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN NOVEL edited by Emory Elliott

Copyright © 1991 by Columbia University Press

This English reprint edition published by arrangement with Columbia University Press

For sales in the Mainland of China only

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

哥伦比亚美洲小说史/埃利奥特(Elliott, E.)主编. —北京:外语教学与研究出版社, 2005. 1

(英美文学文库)

ISBN 7-5600-4655-X

I. 哥… II. 埃… III. 小说史—美国—英文 IV. I712.074

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2005)第 000083 号

出 版 人: 李朋义

项目负责: 姚 虹

责任编辑: 徐 宁

封面设计: 牛茜茜

出版发行: 外语教学与研究出版社

社 址: 北京市西三环北路 19 号 (100089)

网 址: <http://www.fltrp.com>

印 刷: 北京大学印刷厂

开 本: 650×980 1/16

印 张: 58.5

版 次: 2005 年 2 月第 1 版 2005 年 2 月第 1 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 7-5600-4655-X

定 价: 79.90 元

* * *

如有印刷、装订质量问题出版社负责调换

制售盗版必究 举报查实奖励

版权保护办公室举报电话: (010)88817519

从书名可以看出,本书不是一部国别文学史,也不是一部综合性的文学史,而是一部洲别文学史,一部专讲文学中重要体裁之一的小说的发展史,一部不只是美国一国的小说史,而是整个美洲地区的小说史。本书的主编埃默里·埃利奥特也是《哥伦比亚美国文学史》一书的主编。两书在编写指导思想、结构体例和文字风格等方面都有许多相同之处。两者互为补充,相得益彰,堪称姐妹佳作。

“小说”与“小说史”,本身就说明了这部文学史的一大特点。那么,什么是“小说”呢?长期以来,对于“小说”的定义一直存在着争议,特别是随着这一文学体裁的发展,原先被公认的那些构成小说的元素及写作方法和技巧不断受到挑战,被颠覆,被遗弃,被新的元素、新的形式、新的写作方法和技巧扩展、充实,乃至取而代之。因此,要编写小说史,必须对“小说”作出一个界定,对小说的发展有一个较清晰的了解。埃利奥特正是这样做的。他在本书的“绪言”中开宗明义,对小说作了明确的界定:小说一般是有相当长度的文本,在通常的情况下用散文体撰写,叙述有关人物所经历的种种事件,而这些人物代表着各色人等。描述这些事件时既可以采用线性的方式,按时序说明由何种原因导致何等结果,也可以打乱时序,不时加进一些“插曲”,吸引读者的注意,激发读者的想象和兴趣。叙述的事件可以有结论,也可以悬而不决。所描写人类经验的种种情景,其中大多数读者觉得是可信的,但有的情景也可以是荒诞不经的,与人类的经验全无相似之处。有的小说要求读者注意情节和人物的发展与变化,有的则要求读者更多地去体察文本的语言,从精细微妙的表达中来解读作品。由此可见,埃利奥特给小说所作的界定相当宽泛,足以包容一切时下被称为“小说”的文本。

在对小说作了界定之后,埃利奥特提出了另一个重要问题:什么是好小说亦或经典名作?什么是坏小说亦或糟粕垃圾?作者认为我们不应该死抱住一些旧的标准,任意给作品贴上某种标签,全盘否定,打入冷宫,

而应该谨慎从事,对于少数族裔作家与女性作家,更应该慎之又慎,要充分考虑他们的文化传统和不同的经历,不要漠然处置,更不要轻率否定。

随着文学国际化进程的加快、比较文学研究的兴起和发展、加拿大、加勒比海地区和拉丁美洲文学影响的扩大,以及它们与美国文学乃至与全球文学之间日益增强的互动,编者认为有必要编写一本“美洲小说史”,而不是“美国小说史”,更为全面地反映整个美洲地区小说的起始、发展和相互影响。书中除专辟章节分别论述加拿大、加勒比海地区和拉丁美洲的小说之外,在“殖民主义、帝国主义和想象的家园”一章中还论及一些既非出生又非生活在美洲的小说家,因为他们的作品和经验对于美洲的文学或文化起到了举足轻重的作用。本书在这方面别开生面,拾遗补阙,值得称许。

《哥伦比亚美国文学史》(以下简称《文学史》)策划于1982年,而《哥伦比亚美洲小说史》(以下简称《小说史》)的出版则在其后整整十年。众所周知,在20世纪最后的30多年里,文学理论和批评发生了可谓波谲云诡的变化。60年代末开始的“理论热”到了90年代渐渐消退,原先层出不穷的各种理论和方法戛然而止,理论家和批评家开始对形形色色的各种流派、观点和思潮重新进行考察和评估。他们变得开明宽容,广开思路,博采众长,不再坚持己见,各立门户,唯我独尊。这种变化也反映到文学史的编写中来。正如埃利奥特说的那样,他们在编写《文学史》时必须承受20世纪60至70年代美国政治和思想生活的紧张氛围所带来的种种压力、冲突和矛盾,阶级、种族、性别成为争论的焦点,并由此产生了众多新的批评理论和观点。反映在《文学史》的编写中,则最明显的例子是关于女性作家。几乎全书各个部分都专辟章节对她们予以评述,以示重视,因为当时女权主义思想盛极一时,不可怠慢。编写《小说史》时情况已发生了变化,这方面的压力、冲突和矛盾显然要减缓一些。其次,编者此时有意识地模糊“主要作家”和“次要作家”之间的界线,按不同时期的文学流派、代表作品的主题、艺术特点等对作家进行归类并分析研究,又将对作家的生平介绍集中置于书后的附录里。它突破了一般文学史常用的编写模式:时代背景、文学思潮、主要作家、代表作品、写作方法和艺术特色。书中见不到冗长的脚注和尾注,各章后面也没有列出长长的参考书目,只是在书后附上一份精选的评论著作目录。表面上看这种编写方法似乎削弱了其学术性,实际上是将叙述、考据和论证融为一体,使主题更突出,使行文挥洒自如,一气呵成,也使读者在阅读时感到目的明确,高屋建瓴,紧凑充实。这种编写方法是出于《小说史》的编写初衷,即通过

有理有据和发人深思的讨论让读者对于美洲小说史上的一些重要问题、重要流派,从主流到变体,从一个专题到一个专题,有更明晰的了解。

就以小说的变体之一“自传”为例,《小说史》在第一部分专辟一章“自传与早期小说”,对作为早期小说中一种重要形式的自传作了全面的探讨。该章一开始简要地回顾了自传在西方文学中的起源与发展,然后切入主题谈自传为什么在美国成为一个始终颇受读者喜爱的文学体裁。美国小说家、评论家威廉·迪安·豪威尔斯曾形象地说过自传是“文学这个共和国里最民主的一个省份。”它跟美国人的性格十分吻合,因为其表现了一个成功人士如何出人头地,飞黄腾达,使人的个性得到充分的张扬。自传用第一人称来叙述,使读者对之更信任,相信其价值观念,激起人们对名人的好奇心。因此,自传这一文学形式在美国一直很繁荣。据统计,美国1945年以前共出版了6000多部自传,而1945年至1980年的短短35年间又增加了5000多部,涨幅惊人。本章撰稿人内莉·麦凯认为自传在美国各个历史时期都有不同的表现和特点,并挑选出一些代表作品逐一作了较深入的讨论。除了对本杰明·富兰克林等人写的自传给予较充分的论述外,作者也对妇女、黑人以及印第安人写的传记破例作了较多的评述。这样,读完这一章,对于自传这一体裁可以获得一个较清晰的了解。它既有历史的概述,又有建立在对代表作品分析基础上的论述,堪称一篇关于美国早期小说中自传体裁的专论。对于学习和研究美国文学史中自传体小说的读者,无疑会大有裨益。

这种编写方法贯穿全书。全书共分为四大部分,按时间顺序排列,在每一部分开始有一个简短的引言,然后根据每个时期出现的主要体裁、流派、题材、市场等分成若干章。全书共30多章。各章相对独立,又前后衔接。

第一部分“起始至19世纪中叶”论述了美国早期小说的发展,由七章组成,重点讨论的是对小说的界定与其作用。在1790年以前,即是在英国,许多现在我们称为小说的作品,如亨利·菲尔丁的《约瑟夫·安德鲁》,常常被叫做“叙事”或“个人历史”,而1790年以后,自传、传记、牧师的布道书、宗教论文、宗教皈依故事等书籍都被归在小说类里出售。同时,根据不同读者的需要还应运产生了诸如言情小说、色情与暴力小说、历险小说、报刊连载小说、社会改革小说等等,五花八门,良莠不齐。因此,究竟何谓小说引起了很大的争议。无怪乎《红字》的作者霍桑要把自己的小说称作“传奇”或“罗曼史”,他本人也不愿被人叫做“小说家”。小说的真正作用问题,即其道德意义和社会价值也成为讨论的焦点。除了上面

提到的“自传”一章之外,第一部分还重点讨论了传奇、家庭小说和社会改革小说等不同类型的早期小说。值得注意的还有“图书市场”这一章。一般文学史很少设立专门章节论述图书市场问题,本书则独辟蹊径,从一个崭新的角度说明经济发展和市场经济对于小说创作的影响。有的小说作者使用向印刷厂和书商送回扣的策略,成功地帮助自己的作品进入市场,而出版商则采用出丛书、编全集或选集,以及利用广告和名人效应等手段推销小说家的“产品”。这些措施都有效地促进了美国小说的早期发育。有的作家为了获得更多的物质利益,赢得某些读者的青睐,不惜降低作品的格调,甚至粗制滥造,让人们看到市场对文学创作的负面影响。然而,也有一些严肃的作家,如霍桑、坡、梅尔维尔等,坚持自己的创作理念,不为市场所动。虽然他们的作品的销量一时比不上那些畅销书,但是终究成了经典,时至今日仍为读者所喜爱。这些论述耐人寻味。

第二部分“19世纪后期”由六章组成,其时间跨度不长,仅仅50年左右,但这段时间在美国小说的发展进程中占有重要的地位,涌现了一批重要的小说家和作品。期间美国经历了“南北战争”。这场内战不仅是美国政治和经济上最严重的一次冲突与决裂,也是美国文学史上的一个分水岭。战争摧垮了旧的奴隶制,但工业和市场经济产生了新的“奴隶制”——雇佣劳动。贫富两极分化加剧,种族歧视和种族隔离继续肆虐。战争的震荡必然会波及与反映到文学中来。一些小说家开始摆脱对美国民主、自由的幻想,加强忧患意识和批判精神。他们力图真实、典型地反映社会现实和普通人命运。普通美国人成为变化后的社会条件的象征,成了小说里的主人公,甚至成了书名。丽贝卡·哈丁·戴维斯的《炼铁厂的生活》、亨利·亚当斯的《民主》、威廉·迪安·豪威尔斯的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹史》以及马克·吐温的《傻瓜威尔逊》等小说从不同角度反映了战后美国社会的现实。他们的创作理念和创作方法形成了被称为“现实主义”及衍生的“自然主义”的文学流派。现实主义是这个时期小说的主流和中心,也顺理成章成为本书第二部分的重点。

在“现实主义”这一章中,撰稿人罗伯特·舒尔曼从美国第一代现实主义作家中选取了五位代表性人物:亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·迪安·豪威尔斯、马克·吐温、丽贝卡·哈丁·戴维斯和查尔斯·切斯纳特。通过对他们的代表作品深入细致的分析,作者向读者阐明了美国现实主义小说的共同之处与各人的独特之处。尤其值得注意的是作者对戴维斯和切斯纳特两位小说家的评价,前者是一位女性作家,后者是一位黑人作家,选择他们作为代表显示出作者对于种族和性别问题的重视。随后的四章“小说与社会科学”、“小说与社会改革之二”、“民族、地区和帝国”以及“性别小说”都是

对美国 19 世纪后期现实主义和自然主义小说的发展作进一步的论述,涉及的面很广,含有不少独到的见解。

第二部分的最后一章“通俗小说之一”颇具特色。撰稿人从历史、意识形态和商业三个方面,对美国 19 世纪后半叶至 20 世纪初的通俗小说或大众文化的发展作了较透彻的分析。作者着重论述的是一般文学史家不屑提及的小报故事、廉价小说和低俗书刊。作者认为它们之所以能滋生繁衍,是因为有其赖以生存的土壤——商业利益和读者群。出版业者利用各种营销手段,把读者和作者结合起来,组成一个强大的文化产业王国。本章和后面第三部分的“通俗小说之二”构成一个整体,使我们对美国的通俗小说有一个较全面的了解,扩大了我们的视野。两文都写得趣味横生,值得一读。

第三部分“20 世纪前半叶”,从 20 世纪初到第二次世界大战及随后爆发的朝鲜战争为止。这个时期可谓美国的“多事之秋”,发生了许多重大事件。两次世界大战和朝鲜战争、经济大萧条和罗斯福“新政”、新的移民潮和国内的大迁徙、科技的迅猛发展,以及电影和电视业的崛起等等,都不可阻挡地改变了人们的传统观念与行为习惯,甚至“美国人”一词的意义也受到了质疑。这期间,美国的一些小说家对于已为人们所接受的许多流派或创作方法,诸如现实主义、自然主义、传奇、西部小说、侦探小说等都提出了挑战,试图采用新的角度或叙事方法来创作。再者,从欧洲传来的一些新的思潮进一步促进了实验和创新。在新的文学流派中,“现代主义”是这个时期最重要的一个流派。

这部分的首篇“现代主义的爆发”写得深入浅出。该章撰稿人马戈特·诺里斯把美国现代主义的奠基人格特鲁德·斯坦在 1936 年从欧洲将法国现代派画家马蒂斯的三幅绘画带回美国比喻为火山爆发,其震撼力犹如 1906 年的旧金山大地震。这一比喻清楚地表明美国现代主义的缘起,以及它与欧洲文艺思潮的关系。

该章着重介绍了美国现代主义小说家中的几位代表人物,除斯坦之外,还有“迷惘的一代”的欧内斯特·海明威、弗朗西斯·斯科特·菲茨杰拉德,以及被称为文坛奇女的狄琼纳·巴尼斯。后者长期以来没有得到应有的重视,但她受到了现代主义大师乔伊斯和艾略特的赞誉。艾略特在为巴尼斯的小说《奈特伍德》写的前言中这样写道:“读者在书中将会看到一种了不起的风格、优美的措辞、超凡的机智和绝妙的人物塑造,还有几乎跟伊丽莎白时代悲剧相当品质的恐惧和厄运。”基于对上述几位美国现代主义小说家的分析和评论,作者在结尾处这样写道:现代主义像历史上的其他文学流派一样,是一个批评的概念。美国的现代主义是一些作家,特别是那些移居国外的作家,对一个在精神上破产的现代社会的自我意识反应。他们力图创造一种

新的、奇特的形式来表达、批评和拯救他们的时代。美国现代派诗人庞德一语中的,是要“使之焕然一新。”

在第三部分中值得我们注意的另一章是“美国的无产阶级主义”。所谓“无产阶级主义文学”是美国文化话语中的一个特殊术语,通常被称作“左翼文学”或“左派文学”。它与20世纪30年代前苏联或马克思主义政治思潮相关联。该章撰稿人保罗·劳特认为他在写这个题目时比以往的文学史家具有更优越的条件。现在可供参考的文献资料更丰富了,许多过去没能发表的作品出版了;对“左翼”作家的评论和传记也越来越多,研究更深入了;“冷战”的结束削弱了意识形态带来的思维方式和叙述方法的制约;过去被忽视的“左翼”作家中的白人女作家和少数族裔作家重新得到了重视。因此,作者的论述资料翔实,观点新颖,令人耳目一新。

本部分的其他各章在前面两部分有关章节的基础上,对种族、性别、地区、科学技术发展、通俗文学和图书市场等问题作了进一步的阐述。

第四部分“20世纪后叶”是本书颇具特色的部分。20世纪的后40年,美洲(国)小说的发展错综复杂、精彩纷呈,如帕特里克·奥唐奈教授生动描述的那样,像一株蔓生的植物,盘根错节,枝繁叶茂。这部分的特色之一是对后现代主义思潮及其对小说创作影响的讨论。十章中有四章——“后现代文化”、“后现代现实主义”、“后现代主义小说”、“先锋派小说”——是与这个思潮直接相关的。特色之二是对美洲的加拿大、加勒比海地区、拉丁美洲地区的小说分章作了概述。正是这三章才使本书在某种意义上不负虚名。它们不仅使读者对这三个地区(国家)的小说发展有一个简明扼要的了解,同时也使我们认识到它们各自存在的问题,以及它们与美国小说之间千丝万缕的联系和依存关系。

关于后现代主义,这是一个相当复杂的问题。“后现代主义”是一个“言人人殊”的词,不易把握其确切的含义。本书编者用了大量的篇幅来说明这一思潮对当代美国小说的影响。“后现代文化”一章的作者从文化这一视角分析了后现代主义产生的背景,指出文化的商品化和艺术的商业化是我们这个时代的“罪魁祸首”。受利益驱动的大公司与追求快乐的消费者之间的互动成了这两大社会进程的特征。人们为了逃避厌倦和恐慌,疯狂地寻求刺激,从而必然引起无所不在的暴力和对暴力的恐惧。当代的一些小说家用不同的方法在他们的作品中惟妙惟肖地反映了形形色色的暴力和恐惧感。在“后现代现实主义”一章里,作者较详细地讲述了后现代主义小说中的一个重要流派“魔幻现实主义”,对其产生的缘由、特点和代表作家都作了要言不烦的介绍。“后现代主义小说”与“先锋派小说”这两章可谓这部分的重头戏。莫莉·海特认为后现代主义是当代美国先锋小说

中的主流,她从中挑选了 12 位具有较大影响的后现代主义小说家逐一进行了评述。而“先锋派小说”实际上讲的是后现代主义小说中的“实验小说”,在时间上更靠近 20 世纪最后 20 多年,在创作思想和方法上更富有“实验性”,远离一般读者的艺术欣赏水平,曲高和寡。但作为后现代主义小说中一个有机的组成部分,我们必须对它有所了解。由此可见,本书对后现代主义小说的阐述较充分,具体而微,深中肯綮。

最后,我们必须提出“殖民主义、帝国主义和想象的家园”这一章。它讲的是后殖民主义作家,也就是指当代从第三世界国家流放或移居到北美或英国大城市生活的少数族裔作家(限用英语写作)。他们复杂的身份、特殊的生活阅历、多元化的教育和文化背景使他们的创作带有非同寻常的色彩。这一章对于我们了解和研究后殖民主义是十分有帮助的。

综上所述,本书的内容是非常丰富的,史论兼有,重在评论,阐发观点,启迪思想。这样的小说史对具有一定文学理论基础知识、阅读过较多文学作品的读者来说,无疑是一本极好的参考书。但是,对于初学者来说,若对书中提到的一些作家、作品以及文学理论上的一些重要问题不很熟悉的话,就难免会感到有些艰深。本书“带有后现代派色彩的”编写方法,以专题分章论述,虽按历史顺序编排,但各章之间的联系难免不够紧密,有些读者可能会感到头绪较多,不甚习惯。此外,本书名为“美洲小说史”,但对美国之外的其他地区的论述略嫌不足,体例上也没有融合成一体。

本书的主编埃默里·埃利奥特是美国加利福尼亚大学的著名英语教授、思想与社会中心主任,研究成果颇丰。除本书和《哥伦比亚美国文学史》之外,他还主持编写过多部文学史和文学理论著作,并曾多次应邀来我国进行学术访问,被多所著名学府聘为客座教授。他为本书延聘的 30 多位撰稿人几乎全部是美国大学从事文学教学的专家,精英荟萃,各显神通。他们的殚心之作保证了本书很高的学术质量,使其成为一本值得推荐的必备参考书。

姚乃强

解放军外国语学院

哥伦比亚美洲小说史

英美文学文库

导 读

专家委员会

主 任 钱 青

委 员 (按姓氏笔画排列)

| | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 王 宁 | 王守仁 | 王逢振 | 区 钨 |
| 毛思慧 | 石 坚 | 申 丹 | 宁一中 |
| 吕大年 | 朱 刚 | 刘建华 | 刘象愚 |
| 刘意青 | 阮 炜 | 苏耕欣 | 杜瑞清 |
| 李公昭 | 李文俊 | 杨仁敬 | 肖明翰 |
| 吴 冰 | 何其莘 | 张子清 | 张在新 |
| 张 冲 | 张伯香 | 张 剑 | 张 耘 |
| 陆建德 | 金 莉 | 周小仪 | 胡家峦 |
| 侯毅凌 | 姚乃强 | 殷企平 | 郭棲庆 |
| 陶 洁 | 黄 梅 | 戚 宁 | 董衡巽 |
| 韩敏中 | 程锡麟 | 虞建华 | |

Introduction

The Novel"; "The American Novel": there was a time not long ago when most literary critics and scholars were confident that they had a solid understanding of these terms and had a fair idea of what a book devoted to the "American Novel" would contain. After an introduction that would acknowledge the debt American novelists owe to European predecessors such as Cervantes, Defoe, Swift, Richardson, and Fielding (some might include Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton), the chapters would follow a chronology beginning with some late eighteenth-century fictions by fledgling American imitators of the English prose giants.

In a chapter entitled "At the Beginning," Alexander Cowie opened his *The Rise of the American Novel* (1951) in this way: "For the dearth of good American literature during the first 150 or 200 years of the white history of the country, apology is needed less than explanation. A new nation, like a new-born baby, requires time before its special characteristics become discernible." Without even bothering to define the "novel" since he assumed everyone knew what that meant, Cowie quotes Julian Hawthorne's definition of "an American novel": "a novel treating of persons, places, and ideas from an American point of view." Presumably everyone then knew what "American" meant as well.

In our own time, scholars, critics, and teachers of the literature of the United States have come to recognize that narrative—storytelling—which forms an essential element of the "novel," began

in every corner of the world at a very early point in the development of civilizations. On every continent, including the two to be named “the Americas,” stories that began as oral narratives in families and tribes became folk tales, songs, chants, and eventually complex national and regional oral epics. Before the invention of alphabets, stories about the adventures of hunting and war were inscribed as drawings on walls and inside caves and may still be viewed today in the Southwestern United States, Central China, and elsewhere. As a reminder of this long literary history, the contemporary Native American novelist N. Scott Momaday includes in his novella *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) a sketch of a hunter in action drawn by his father.

With the coming of writing, the problem of defining the genres of narratives became even more complex. Are the sacred scriptures of ancient people, such as the Bible and the Koran, histories exactly? Did human imagination play a role in their creations? If so, are they to some degree or in part fictional narratives? By the time Cervantes composed *Don Quixote*, often considered to be the first true novel, people had been writing fictional or semifictional stories with plots, characters, settings, suspense, humor, irony, narrative twists, and surprise endings for centuries. The point at which we can say “there is the first novel in English” is no longer a simple matter.

Defining the novel as a genre even in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries is difficult because, from the first, experimentation and innovation prevailed: the epistolary form of Richardson, the journal narrative of Defoe, the fantastical tales of Swift, the picaresques of Fielding, the tales of seduction of Susanna Rowson, the domestic intrigues of Austen, the gothics of Mary Shelley and the Brontës. Then, what are we to make of texts of the twentieth century called novels by their authors but that often consist of many elements of writing that would have baffled earlier novel readers, such as fragments of poems, mixed with letters, song lyrics, and pieces of prose narrative that do not appear to connect in any sequential or logical way with other prose in the text? Is a work a novel if the author intentionally refuses to provide a plot or an ending? Who decides these things? The authors, critics, readers, the National Book Awards Committee, English professors?

Certainly, when writers themselves attempt to "advance the form," in John Barth's words, of the novel through experimentation, they have a good idea of what the form of the novel is that they have inherited; it must be for them, at least, a known entity in order for them to change it. But change has always been inherent to the novel, and the literary record is littered with critics who have roasted certain novelists for breaking the rules only to be burned themselves with the discovery that a literary genius was revising the conventions.

For the sake of this literary history, we might define the novel as a text usually of substantial length that is normally written in prose and presents a narrative of events involving experiences of characters who are representative of human agents. It may present events in a fairly linear manner as though cause leads to effect, or it may interrupt time sequences, demanding of readers careful attention to fragmented episodes. The events of the narrative may lead to a conclusion or may be left suspended in seeming inconclusiveness. Most novels depict situations that represent human experiences that readers find believable, but some others may present absurd, tangled situations that bear little apparent resemblance to recognizable human experiences. While some novels allow readers to focus upon action and characters, others require the reader's close attention to nuances of language in order to formulate an interpretation. This definition probably does not account for every text now accepted as a novel—and will account for fewer with the appearance of every new experimental work—but it is broad enough to include most texts called "novels" at the moment.

Some would demand that we not only try to define the novel but that we also provide criteria for distinguishing "good" or even "great" novels from "poor" ones. Which are works of art and which are artistic failures or make no pretense at art? Not long ago, the editor of a book like ours would proclaim that we might recognize a great novel by comparing it to the late works of Henry James or those of Faulkner's great phase in the 1930s or *Moby-Dick*. The criteria for the greatness would have been the intricate but orderly structure, the details of characterization, the profundity of themes, the complexity of the imagery, symbolism, and allusions, and perhaps the power of the setting to evoke particular places, eras, or subtleties of human

speech. The persistence of such prescriptive judgments accounts for why great innovators such as Melville or Hurston were initially misjudged.

In casting other novels into the dustbin of "poor" or "trash" novels, critics could simply point to their lack of these refinements and/or their blatant use of sentimentality or gothic horror or to their representations of human situations and conditions of life deemed unfitting for the dominant reading public. Such outcasts were rejected under several labels, such as "popular fiction," "dime novels," "pulp fiction," "agitprop," "muckraking," "women's stories," and "sentimental romances." In short, they were condemned for being "not serious" and "too simple." Most critics felt that men wrote the best fiction because they had the richest experiences to draw upon and because they possessed the complexity of mind to create challenging works of philosophical and psychological complexity. Regretfully, too, many works written by members of racial and ethnic minority groups, especially about experiences within those groups, were slighted and ignored because the subject matter was viewed as marginal and/or the literary techniques, often incorporating elements from non-Anglo cultural traditions, were misunderstood.

Without diminishing any of the acclaim deserved by such writers as Melville, James, Twain, Faulkner, and Wharton for their many extraordinary works, contemporary critics are finding that many works previously rejected under the labels listed above need rereading and reevaluation upon their own terms. To cite one example, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) nearly slipped out of literary history in the twentieth century because it was condemned as immoral in its day and damned with faint praise some years later as a competent work of local color and women's fiction. Rediscovery and reevaluation have put this highly structured, imagistic study of psychic torment and sexual passion on the reading lists of hundreds of college courses and have generated many serious studies of Chopin's work.

The process of research and rediscovery is continuing, thus enabling those books that were previously undervalued because they were misread and judged by unsuitable standards or were rejected because of blind prejudice to take their rightful place in our literary history. If literary historians might seem to some to be leaning rather far in the direction of tolerance and inclusion, it is because for much

of this century the extreme opposite conditions prevailed, and much of the rich literary heritage of the nation was excluded from public appreciation by the decisions of a few.

The subject of history is change, and literary histories are part of history. Thus, it stands to reason that literary histories both examine change and change themselves with the passing of time. Every literary genre is dynamic, and literary history is no exception. A literary history of the novel in America published in 1991 will be and should be markedly different in many ways from such a work published ten or twenty years earlier. Indeed, this present work differs in many aspects of its approaches from the 1988 *Columbia Literary History of the United States* for which I was General Editor. Planning for that volume began in 1982, and the nine intervening years have brought substantial developments in the theories and methods of criticism and literary history. In fact, the nature and purpose of literary history and the literary canon it surveys have been subjects of much scholarly debate.

For example, consider the titles of the two histories. Because the scope of the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* was so broad, the literature examined was limited to that which had been produced in the part of the world that has become the United States. Since the United States does not constitute all of "America"—in spite of the common usage of the terms as synonymous—we did not use the term "American" in the title. With the present work focusing upon only one genre, there was room to broaden the geographic scope and include chapters on Canadian, Caribbean, and Latin American fiction.

The desire to make the space for these chapters, however, has come from the growing internationalization of literature and the study of it during the past decade. Scholars throughout the world have come to appreciate more fully the extent to which the literature of our various American nations are intertwined. The texts of South America and North America are in dialogue with each other. Novelists of Africa and the Caribbean have a profound effect upon writers in the United States and are affected by them in return. The rapid maturation of the fairly new field of comparative literary study and increasing scholarly interactions and exchanges among those who study these various literatures have deepened our understandings of

these cultural connections and made it compelling to the editors of this book to be more internationally inclusive. As evidence of how writing done all over the world has become part of our own culture, a chapter on “Colonialism, Imperialism, and Imagined Homes” rightly includes discussion of some figures who were neither born in nor lived in the Americas but whose works and experiences as novelists and public figures are a vital part of our larger literary culture.

Several other dimensions of this book spring from current critical attitudes. There are no chapters that are restricted to the fiction of women writers or of a particular racial or ethnic minority group. The works of women writers and of African American, Asian American, Chicano/a, and Jewish writers are taken up within chapters that address larger themes that are not limited by such categories. In 1982, the editors of the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* concluded, after extensive consultation with colleagues sensitive to the issues, that it was necessary to have specialists on women writers and on particular minority literatures write essays on those literatures because the large numbers of newly recognized writers of those groups were still not known to most critics who were nonspecialists. We wanted to be certain that the first collaborative literary history of the United States in forty years made the names and works of writers previously excluded from the canon better known so that other scholars and students could study their works. In this literary history we decided not to “ghettoize” the novels of minority writers in order to underscore the impact of minority cultures upon American culture as a whole and to problematize the boundary between “major” and “minor” literatures.

Another way in which this book differs from its Columbia University Press predecessor is that it was not driven by a desire to be comprehensive or to have chapters on single authors that would signal our assertions of who is “major” and who is “minor.” There is clearly a chronological progression in the book with four historically organized sections introduced by a specialist in each period, but we did not make an attempt to “cover” every novelist in every decade nor did we assign a certain number of pages to be given to each author according to our sense of an author’s relative importance in the canon. We asked each contributor to write an informative chapter about the topic we assigned. We welcomed them to focus closely