

*Selected Readings
in American Literature*



美国文学
经典名作选读

胡阶娜 编著

南开大学出版社

New

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Preface

American literature has a relatively short history. It started from the colonial times when the first settlement Jamestown was set up in the New World in 1607. At first American literature was promotional travel literature trying to attract more people to America. The selection of Captain John Smith's *A Description of New England* in Chapter One deals with this subject. Moreover, sermons, captive narratives, travel logs and diaries are common genres in American literature of this era. It focused on the issue of survival when the immigrants first arrived.

The American Enlightenment (1750-1820) movement in the 18th century was influenced by the English Age of Reason and American thinkers and writers of this time embraced liberty, equality and justice as natural rights of man. It was also a time when the United States of America gained its independence from the colonial rule of Great Britain. Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards were representative voices of this era.

American literature flourished in mid-19th century forming an American Renaissance period with the emergence of great scholars such as Emerson and Thoreau, talented novelists like Hawthorne and Melville, and excellent poets as Whitman and Dickinson. American literature was gaining its unique identity in this blooming period of time.

American Realism appeared as a reaction to Romanticism during the Civil War time. Writers started to pay more attention to everyday life of plain folks and try to reflect that life in their writings. People also realized the necessity to keep local flavors in literature, which resulted in Regionalism. In addition, Naturalism gained prominence as a sub-branch of Realism.

The First World War changed American people's traditional values with new forms of art came into being. Pound established Imagism school with a bunch of poets and re-defined poetry. Modern novelists tried to use new techniques like "stream of consciousness" and Modern playwrights broke away from traditional skills and established new sense of time and space.

Postmodernism is built upon Modernism providing and sometimes it simply refers to literature after the Modern period. Writers did not try to find the New as the Moderns did. Instead, they employed in their works the ready forms and techniques.

This book tries to cover each of these major periods in American literary history and selected the most representative writers and interesting pieces for the readers to study and enjoy.

Special thanks go to the Nobel Foundation for permitting me to use copyrighted material free of charge.

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[Chapter One]

Early Settlements and Puritanism

The English went to the New World in the early seventeenth century and established their first settlement at Jamestown in Virginia in 1607. In September 1620, a group of Pilgrims¹ sailed across the Atlantic and arrived in America in the winter. They set up the second settlement at Plymouth which was the name of the port they departed from England. They brought from their homeland their old customs, traditions, laws and literature.

However, Early American literature was not imaginative literature, but some history, annals, travel records, scientific observations, etc. The diary, the sermon, the meditation and the elegy were the central expressions of the American Puritan² mind.

¹ Pilgrims: The Pilgrims were a congregation of "Separatists" or non-conformists. They disagreed with the English King (James I) and the Anglican Church he led. Under the leadership of the Rev. John Robinson and Elder William Brewster, they had fled to Holland in 1608 and lived there for ten years. They enjoyed the religious liberty they craved; but they felt alien to the Dutch ways and were afraid that their children would lose their English identity. Therefore, they decided to go to the American Continent to establish a community there so that they could enjoy religious freedom and live according to their own customs and traditions.

Puritan: A religious sect of Christianity. The Pilgrims on board the Mayflower ship were Puritans. Their belief in predestination (by God) dominated their theology, and the concept of covenant between God and His chosen people pervaded their social relationships.

Historically, Puritanism began as a religious movement in England under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The early Puritans intended to purify the Anglican Church, not to separate from it. The Puritans had been greatly influenced by reformists Martin Luther and John Calvin. During the reign of James I, they were persecuted, which resulted in Puritans' emigration to Europe and America.

The Puritans wanted to restore the Garden of Eden on earth in the New World. Their writers followed simple style and the Puritan sermons consist of three parts: doctrines, reasons and uses. American Puritanism has been a shaping force for American literature and culture, even America itself.

Major authors of this period include Captain John Smith (1580-1631), Cotton Mather (1663-1728), William Bradford (1590-1657), Anne Bradstreet (1612?-1672), Edward Taylor (1644-1729), Edward Winslow, John Winthrop (1588-1649), Mary Rowlandson (1635-1710/11), etc.

Captain John Smith (1580-1631) was a famous English colonist, an explorer and early leader of the Jamestown settlement. He was also a trader, a sailor, an admiral, a mapmaker, a writer and compiler, and a governor. He was born into an English farmer's family in Willoughby, Lincolnshire, England. After a series of adventures in Europe and the Middle East, he went to Virginia with the first colonists in 1607. There he was named a member of the governing council of the Jamestown settlement. He explored the surrounding territory and drew a map of Virginia. Later he was caught by the Native American chief Powhatan and saved by his daughter Pocahontas, the Native American princess. He returned England for medical aid afterwards but went back to explore New England³ in 1615 and 1617. This trip was supported by some London merchants and he brought back to England cargo of fish and furs. After that, he volunteered to go to the New World with the Pilgrims. He spent the rest of his life writing about America, his adventures and colonizing

³ New England: This name was given by John Smith.

experience. His story has been converted into a Hollywood movie serial called *Pocahontas*. His major works include *A True Relation of ... Virginia* (1608), *A Map of Virginia* (1612), *A Description of New England* (1616), *New England's Trials* (1620, 2nd ed. 1622), *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (1624), *An Accidence; or, The Path-Way to Experience* (1626; enl. and repub. as *A Sea Grammer*, 1627), *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine John Smith* (1630), and *Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters of New England, or Anywhere* (1631).

Reading

A Description of New England⁴

By Captain John Smith

A good

Countrie.

The landmarkes.

The cheefe⁵ mountaines⁶, them of *Pennobscot*: the twinkling mountaine of *Aucocisco*; the greate mountaine of *Sasanon*; and the high mountaine of *Massachusit*⁷: each of which you shall finde in the Mapped; their places,

⁴ *A Description of New England* is a detailed record of the fauna, flora and climate of the area, providing valuable resources for early American history.

⁵ cheefe: chief

⁶ mountaines: mountains. Some spellings in this excerpt were earlier versions which are different from present ones. For example, in the past, the letter "u" spelt as "v" today and the letter "i" means today's "j". Moreover, the letter "e" at the end of some words does not appear at present anymore.

⁷ Massachusit: Massachusetts, 马萨诸塞州

formes, and altitude⁸. The waters are most pure, proceeding from the intrals of rockie mountaines; the hearbes and fruits are of many sorts and kindes: as alkermes, currans, or a fruit like currans, mulberries, vines, respices, goosberries, plummes, walnuts⁹, chesnuds¹⁰, small nuts, etc., pumpions, gourds, strawberries, beans, pease, and mayze; a kinde or two of flax, wherewith they make nets, lines and ropes both small and great, verie strong for their quantities. Oke¹¹, is the chiefe wood; of which there is great difference in regard of the soyle where it groweth. Firre, pyne, walnut, chesnut, birch¹², ash¹³, elme, cypresse, ceder, mulberrie, plumbtree, hazell, saxefrage, and many other sorts. Eagles, Gripes, diuerse¹⁴ sorts of Haukes¹⁵, Cranes, Geese, Brants, Cormorants, Ducks, Sheldrakes¹⁶, Teale, Meawes, Guls, Turkie, Diue-doppers, and many other sorts, whose names I knowe not. Whales, Grampus, Porkpisces, Turbut, Sturgeon, Cod¹⁷, Hake, Haddock, Cole, Cusk, or small Ling, Shark, Mackerell, Herring, Mullet¹⁸, Base, Pinacks, Cunners, Peach, Eels¹⁹, Crabs, Lobsters, Muskles, Wilkes, Oysters, and diuerse others etc. Moos, a beast bigger then a Stagge; deere, red, and Fallow; Beuers, Wolues, Foxes, both blacke and other; Aroughconds, Wild-cats²⁰, Beares, Otters²¹, Martins²², Fitches²³, Musquassus, and diuerse sorts of vermine, whose names I

⁸ altitude: *n.* (尤指海拔)高度

⁹ walnut: *n.* 胡桃, 胡桃木

¹⁰ chesnut: chestnut, 栗子

¹¹ oke: oak, 橡树

¹² birch: *n.* 桦树, 白桦

¹³ ash: *n.* 岑树

¹⁴ diuerse: diverse, different kinds of

¹⁵ hauke: hawk, 鹰

¹⁶ sheldrake: *n.* 秋沙鸭

¹⁷ cod: *n.* 鳕

¹⁸ mullet: *n.* 胭脂鱼, 鲻鱼

¹⁹ eel: *n.* 美洲鳗

²⁰ wild-cat: *n.* 野猫

²¹ otter: *n.* 水獭, 水獭皮

²² martin: *n.* 燕子

²³ fitch: *n.* 臭猫

know not.

All these and diuerse other good things do heere, for want of vse²⁴, still increase, and decrease with little diminution²⁵, whereby they growe to that abundance. You shall scarce finde any Baye, shallow shore, or Coue of sand, where you may not take many Clampes, or Lobsters, or both at your pleasure, and in many places lode your boat if you please; Nor Iles where you finde not fruits, birds, crabs, and muskles, or all of them, for taking, at a lowe water. And in the harbors we frequented, a little boye might take of Cunners, and Pinacks, and such delicate fish, at the ships sterne, more then sixe or tenne can eate in a daie; but with a castingnet, thousands when wee pleased: and scarce any place, but Cod, Cuske, Holybut, Mackerell, Scate, or such like, a man may take with a hooke or line what he will. And, in diuerse sandy Baies, a man may draw with a net great store of Mulletts, Bases, and diuerse other sorts of such excellent fish, as many as his Net can drawe on shore: no Riuer where there is not plentie of Sturgion, or Salmon²⁶, or both; all which are to be had in abundance obseruing but their seasons. But if a man will goe at Christmasse to gather Cherries in *Kent*, he may be deceiued; though there be plentie in Summer: so, heere these plenties haue each their seasons, as I haue expressed.

We for the most part had little but bread and vineger: and though the most part of Iuly when the fishing decayed they wrought all day, laie abroade in the Iles all night, and liued on what they found, yet were not sicke: But I would wish none put himself long to such plunges; except necessitie constraine it: yet worthy is that person to starue that heere cannot liue; if he haue sense, strength and health: for, there is no such penury²⁷ of these blessings in any place, but that a hundred men may, in one houre or two, make

²⁴ vse: use

²⁵ diminution: *n.* 减少, 减低, 缩小

²⁶ salmon: *n.* 鲑鱼, 大麻哈鱼

²⁷ penury: *n.* 贫困, 贫穷

their prouisions²⁸ for a day: and hee²⁹ that hath experience to mannage well these affaires, with fortie or thirtie honest industrious men, might well vndertake³⁰ (if they dwell in these parts) to subiect the Saluages³¹, and feed daily two or three hundred men, with as good corne³², fish, and flesh, as the earth hath of those kindes, and yet make that labor but their pleasure: provided that they haue engins, that be proper for their purposes.

A note for men
That haue great
Spirits, and small
Meanes.

Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes³³; or but only his merit to aduance his fortune, then to tread, and plant that ground hee hath purchased by the hazard of his life? If he haue but the taste of virtue, and magnanimitie, what to such a minde can bee more pleasant, then planting and building a foundation for his Posteritie, gotte from the rude earth, by Gods blessing and his owne industrie, without preiudice³⁴ to any? If hee haue any graine of faith or zeale in Religion, what can hee doe lesse hurtfull to any; or more agreeable to God, then to seeke to conuert³⁵ those poore Saluages to know Christ³⁶, and humanitie, whose labors with discretion³⁷ will triple requite thy charge and paines? What so truely suites with honour and honestie,

²⁸ prouision: provision, 供应

²⁹ hee: he

³⁰ vndertake: undertake

³¹ Saluages: Savages, 野蛮的人, 未开化的人, 原始的人, 这里指美洲土著印第安人。

³² corne: corn, [美]玉米

³³ meanes: means, 手段, 方法

³⁴ preiudice: prejudice

³⁵ conuert: convert, 使……改变信仰

³⁶ Christ: *n.* [基督教]救世主(特指耶稣基督)

³⁷ discretion: *n.* 判断力

as the discovering things vnknowne? erecting³⁸ Townes, peopling Countries, informing the ignorant, reforming things vniust³⁹, teaching virtue; & gaine to our Natiue mother-countrie a kingdom to attend her; finde employment for those that are idle, because they know not what to doe: so farre from wronging any, as to cause Posteritie to remember thee; and remembering thee, euer honour that remembrance with praise?

Consider: What were the beginnings and endings of the Monarkies of the *Chaldeans*⁴⁰, the *Syrians*, the *Grecians*⁴¹, and *Romanes*, but this one rule; What was it they would not doe, for the good of the commonwealth⁴², or their Mother-citie? For example: *Rome*, What made her such a Monarchesse, but onely the aduentures of her youth, not in riots at home; but in dangers abroad? and the iustice and iudgement out of their experience, when they grewe aged. What was their ruine and hurt, but this; The excesse⁴³ of idlenesse⁴⁴, the fondnesse⁴⁵ of Parents, the want of experience in Magistrates⁴⁶, the admiration of their vnderdesued honours, the contempt of true merit, their vniust iealousies, their politicke incredulities, their hypocriticall seeming goodnesse, and their deeds of secrèt lewdnesse? finally, in fine, growing onely formall temporists, all that their predecessors⁴⁷ got in many years, they lost in few daies. Those by their pains and vertues became Lords of the world; they by their ease and vices became slaues to their seruants. This is the difference betwixt the vse of Armes in the field, and on the monuments of stones; the

³⁸ erecting: establishing

³⁹ uniuist: unjust, 不公平的

⁴⁰ Monarkies of the Chaldeans: Monarchies of the Chaldeans. Monarchy: *n.* 君主政体, 君主政治, 君主国。Chaldea: 卡尔迪亚王国(古巴比伦人的一个王国)。

⁴¹ Grecian: *n.* 希腊人

⁴² commonwealth: *n.* 国民整体, 共和国, 联邦

⁴³ excesse: excess, 过度, 无节制, 超额

⁴⁴ idlenesse: idleness, 闲散, 懒惰, 赋闲无事

⁴⁵ fondnesse: fondness, 爱好, 溺爱

⁴⁶ magistrate: *n.* 文职官员, 地方官员

⁴⁷ predecessor: *n.* 前辈, 前任

golden age and the leaden age, prosperity and miserie, iustice and corruption, substance and shadowes, words and deeds, experience and imagination, making Commonwealths and marring Commonwealths, the fruits of vertue and the conclusions of vice.

Then, who would liue at home idly (or thinke in himselfe any worth to liue) onely to eate, drink, and sleepe, and so die? Or by consuming that carelesly, his friends got worthily? Or by vsing that miserably, that maintained vertue honestly? Or, for being descended nobly, pine with the vaine vaunt of great kindred, in penurie? Or (to maintaine a silly shewe of brauery) toyle out thy heart, soule, and time, basely, by shifts, tricks, cards, and dice? Or by relating newes of others actions, sharke here or there for a dinner, or supper; deceiue thy friends, by faire promises, and dissimulation, in borrowing where thou neuer intendest to pay; offend the lawes, surfeit with excesse, burden thy Country, abuse thy selfe, despaire in want, and then couzen thy kindred, yea euen thine owne brother, and wish thy parents death (I will not say damnation) to haue their estates? though thou seest what honours, and rewards, the world yet hath for them will seeke them and worthily deserue them.

I would be sor[r]y to offend, or that any should mistake my honest meaning: for I wish good to all, hurt to none. But rich men for the most part are growne to that dotage⁴⁸, through their pride in their wealth, as though there were no accident could end it, or their life. And what hellish care do such take to make it their owne miserie, and their Countries spoile⁴⁹, especially when there is most neede of their imployment? drawing by all manner of inuentions⁵⁰, from the Prince and his honest subiects⁵¹, euen the vitall⁵² spirits of their powers and estates: as if their Bagges, or Bragges, were so powerfull a

⁴⁸ dotage: *n.* 老朽, 老迷糊

⁴⁹ spoile: spoil, 损坏, 搞糟

⁵⁰ inuention: invention

⁵¹ subiect: subject

⁵² vitall: vital, 生死攸关的, 重大的

defence, the malicious could not assault them; when they are the onely baite, to cause vs⁵³ not to be onely assaulted; but betrayed and murdered in our owne security, ere⁵⁴ we well perceiue⁵⁵ it.

An example
of secure
couetousness⁵⁶.

May not the miserable ruine⁵⁷ of *Constantinople*⁵⁸, their impregnable⁵⁹ walles⁶⁰, riches, and pleasures last taken by the *Turke*⁶¹ (which are but a bit, in comparison of their now mightines) remember vs, of the effects of priuate couetousnesse? at which time the good *Emperour* held himselfe rich enough, to haue such rich subiects, so formall in all excesse of vanity, all kinde of delicacie, and prodigalitie⁶². His pouertie⁶³ when the *Turke* besieged, the citizens (whose marchandizing thoughts were onely to get wealth, little conceiuing the desperate resolution of a valiant⁶⁴ expert enemy) left the Emp. so long to his conclusions, hauing spent all he had to pay his young, raw, discontented Souldiers; that sodainly he, they, and their citie were all a prey to the deuouring *Turke*. And what they would not spare for the maintenance of

⁵³ vs: us

⁵⁴ ere: *conj.* 在……以前

⁵⁵ perceiue: perceive, 察觉, 感知, 感到, 认识到

⁵⁶ couetousnesse: covetousness, 贪婪

⁵⁷ ruine: ruin, 毁灭, 崩溃, 废墟, 遗迹

⁵⁸ Constantinople: 君士坦丁堡, 原为古希腊城市拜占庭, 罗马国王君士坦丁于公元四世纪将其建成一座不可攻破的城, 并命名为君士坦丁堡, 并从罗马迁都于此, 史称东罗马帝国。1448年, 君士坦丁十一世即位, 成为拜占庭王朝最后一位国王, 1453年这座坚固的城被土耳其人攻陷, 拜占庭帝国结束。

⁵⁹ impregnable: *adj.* 无法攻取的, 坚固的

⁶⁰ walle: wall

⁶¹ Turke: Turk, 土耳其人

⁶² prodigalitie: prodigality, 浪费, 挥霍

⁶³ pouertie: poverty, 贫穷, 贫困

⁶⁴ valiant: *adj.* 勇敢的, 英勇的

them who aduentured their liues⁶⁵ to defend them, did serue⁶⁶ onely their enemies to torment them, their friends, and country, and all Christendome to this present day. Let this lamentable example remember you that are rich (seeing there are such great theeues in the world to robbe you) not grudge to lend some proportion, to breed them that haue little, yet willing to learne how to defend you: for, it is too late when the deede is a-doing.

The *Romanes* estate hath beene worse then this: for, the meere couetousnesse and extortion of a few of them, so mooued the rest, that not hauing any imployment, but contemplation; their great iudgements⁶⁷ grew to so great malice⁶⁸, as themselues were sufficient to destroy themselues by faction: Let this moouie you to embrace imployment, for those whose educations, spirits, and iudgements, want but your purses; not onely to preuent⁶⁹ such accustomed dangers, but also to gaine more thereby then you haue.

And you fathers that are either so foolishly fond, or so miserably couetous, or so willfully ignorant, or so negligently carelesse, as that you will rather maintaine your children in idle wantonness⁷⁰, till they growe your masters; or become so basely vnkinde, as they wish nothing but your deaths; so that both sorts growe dissolute⁷¹: and although you would wish them any where to escape the gallowes⁷², and ease your cares; though they spend you here one, two, or three hundred pound a yeer; you would grudge to giue halfe so much in aduventure with them, to obtaine an estate, which in a small time but with a little assistance of your prouidence, might bee better then your

⁶⁵ liues: lives

⁶⁶ serue: serve

⁶⁷ iudgements: judgements, 审判, 判断力, 看法, 评价

⁶⁸ malice: *n.* 恶意, 怨恨

⁶⁹ preuent: prevent

⁷⁰ wantonness: *n.* 嬉戏

⁷¹ dissolute: *adj.* 肆意挥霍的

⁷² gallowe: gallow, 恐吓, 害怕

owne. But if an Angell should tell you, that any place yet vnknowne can afford such fortunes; you would not beleeeue him, no more then *Columbus*⁷³ was beleeeued there was any such Land as is now the well knowne abounding *America*; much lesse such large Regions as are yet vnknowne, as well in *America*, as in *Affrica*, and *Asia*, and *Terra incognita*⁷⁴; where were courses for gentlemen (and them that would be so reputed) more suiting their qualities, then begging from their Princes generous disposition, the labours of his subiects, and the very marrow⁷⁵ of his maintenance.

Exercises

1. Search infomation about the first settlement Jamestown and write a report on what life was like in the early colony.
2. In the part of “a note to men who have great spirits but small means”, Captain Smith encouraged more people from England to come to America for prosperity. Read this part again and find out what beliefs he cherished judging from his writing.

Further Reading

A Modell of Christian Charity
(1630)

By John Winthrop

John Winthrop was the first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony and he

⁷³ Columbus: Christopher Columbus 哥伦布

⁷⁴ terra incognita: [拉]未发现的地域, (知识上的)未知领域

⁷⁵ marrow: *n.* 精华