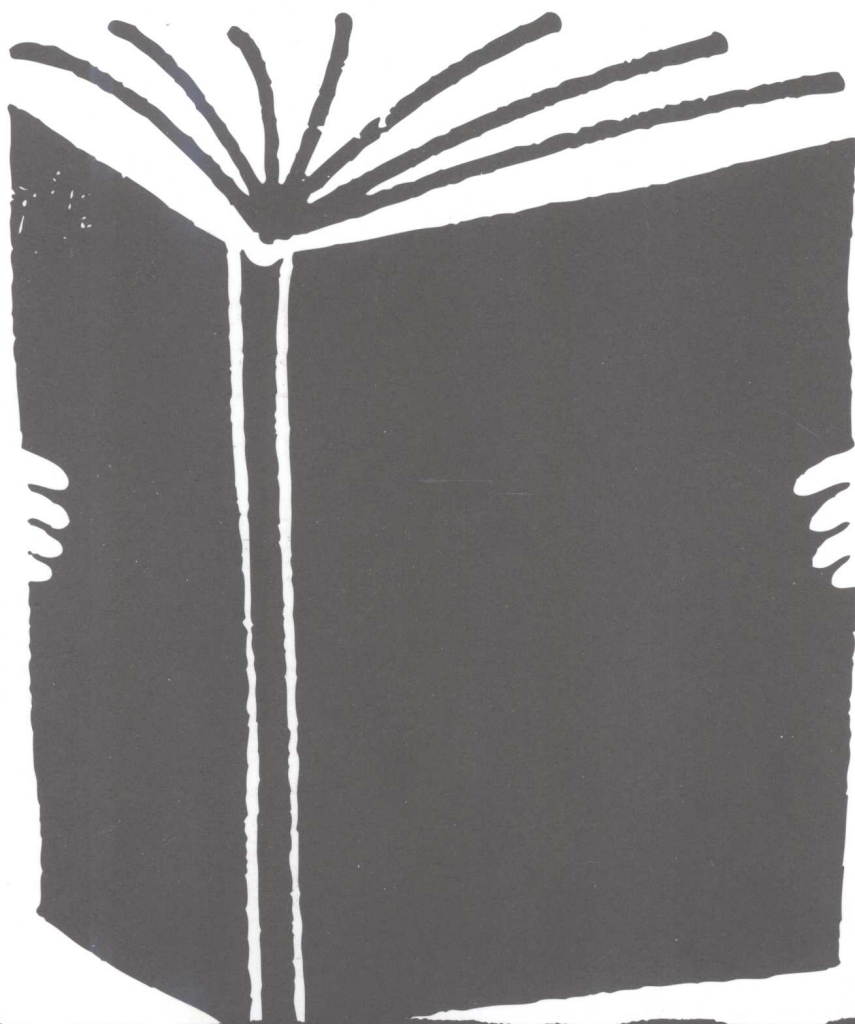


宋元康 | 编著

美国文学导读

A Study Guide to American Literature



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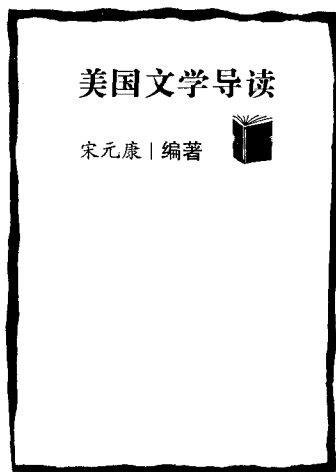
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前 言

文学是对人生体验的文化表征。文学作品隐含对生活的思考、价值取向和特定的意识形态。阅读英美文学作品,是了解西方文化的一条重要途径,可以接触到支撑表层文化的深层文化,即西方文化中带根本性的思想观点、价值评判、西方人经常使用的视角,以及对这些视角的批评。

美国文学是对时代生活的审美表现,是美国人民创造性使用英语语言的产物。英语表意功能强,文体风格变化多,或高雅、或通俗、或含蓄、或明快、或婉约、或粗犷,其丰富的表现力和独特的魅力在英美作家的作品里得到了淋漓尽致的发挥。阅读优秀的美国文学作品,可以感受到英语音乐性的语调和五光十色的语汇,回味其“弦外之音”。通过文本的学习提高文学阅读、理解与鉴赏能力以及口头与书面表达等语言技能,并且通过大量阅读加强对文学本质的意识,提高综合人文素质,增强对西方文学及文化的理解。

《美国文学导读》是根据外语教学与研究出版社出版、吴伟仁教授主编的《美国文学史及选读》(第1、2册)而编写的学习指导用书。该书每章由美国文学各个时期背景知识、作家创作生涯、主要作品的概要和点评、代表作品艺术特色分析四个部分构成。该书分别从《美国文学史及选读》(第1、2册)涉及的背景知识、主要作家代表作的主题思想、人物性格刻画、象征与隐喻、写作风格、作品章节等方面进行了全面的分析和解读,为跨进美国文学殿堂的人们提供快捷的通道,使他们在较短的时间内了解美国文学的精华。通过阅读该书,学生不仅能了解和认识美国文学史上一些较有影响的作家的创作倾向、思想方法、在文学史上的地位和成就以及对本国文学乃至世界文学所产生的影响等等,而且能初步掌握一些名家的代表作品的思想意义、文学价值、写作手法、语言技巧等,为他们毕业后的考研、教学、研究打下一定的基础。

该书在编写过程中得到大理学院领导鼓励和云南大学出版社编辑们的帮助,在此表示衷心的感谢。由于时间较紧,加上本人水平有限,各种错误一定会有,请广大的读者和师生批评赐教。

、 宋元康

2007年8月于大理

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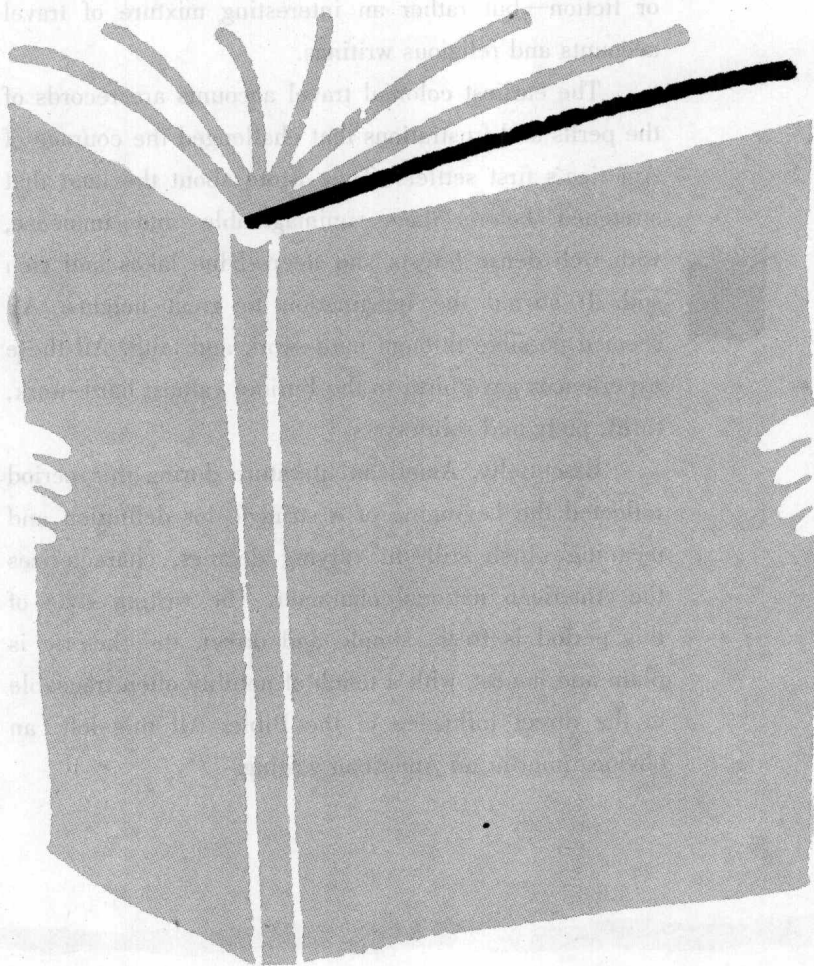
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Chapter One

The Literature of Colonial America





The first American literature was neither American nor really literature. It was not American because it was the work mainly of immigrants from England. It was not literature as we know it—in the form of poetry, essays, or fiction—but rather an interesting mixture of travel accounts and religious writings.



The earliest colonial travel accounts are records of the perils and frustrations that challenged the courage of America's first settlers. They wrote about the land that stretched before them—unimaginable and immense, with rich dense forests and deep-blue lakes and rich soil. It stirred the imagination to great heights. All seemed possible through hard-work and faith. All these experiences gave birth to the Puritan values: hard-work, thrift, piety and sobriety.

Essentially, American literature during this period reflected the beginning of a struggle for definition and meaning which still, in varying degrees, characterizes the American national character. The writing style of this period is fresh, simple and direct; the rhetoric is plain and honest, with a touch of nobility often traceable to the direct influence of the Bible. All this left an obvious imprint on American writing.

I . Early American and Colonial Period to 1776

1. 1 Introduction

American literature begins with the orally transmitted myths, legends, tales, and lyrics (always songs) of Indian cultures. There was no written literature among the more than 500 different Indian languages and tribal cultures that existed in North America before the first Europeans arrived. As a result, Native American oral literature is quite diverse. Narratives from quasi-nomadic hunting cultures like the Navajo are different from stories of settled agricultural tribes such as the pueblo-dwelling Acoma; the stories of northern lakeside dwellers such as the Ojibwa often differ radically from stories of desert tribes like the Hopi.

Tribes maintained their own religions—worshipping gods, animals, plants, or sacred persons. Systems of government ranged from democracies to councils of elders to theocracies. These tribal variations enter into the oral literature as well.

Still, it is possible to make a few generalizations. Indian stories, for example, glow with reverence for nature as a spiritual as well as physical mother. Nature is alive and endowed with spiritual forces; main characters may be animals or plants, often totems associated with a tribe, group, or individual. The closest to the Indian sense of holiness in later American literature is Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendental "Over-Soul", which pervades all of life.

The Mexican tribes revered the divine Quetzalcoatl, a god of the Toltecs and Aztecs, and some tales of a high god or culture were told elsewhere. However, there are no long, standardized religious cycles about one supreme divinity. The closest equivalents to Old World spiritual narratives are often accounts of shamans' initiations and voyages. Apart from these, there are stories about culture heroes such as the Ojibwa tribe's Manabozho or the Navajo tribe's Coyote. These tricksters are treated with varying degrees of respect. In one tale they may act like heroes, while in another they may seem selfish or foolish. Although past authorities, such as the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, have deprecated trickster tales as expressing the inferior, amoral side of the psyche, contemporary scho

lars—some of them Native Americans—point out that Odysseus and Prometheus, the revered Greek heroes, are essentially tricksters as well.

Examples of almost every oral genre can be found in American Indian literature: lyrics, chants, myths, fairy tales, humorous anecdotes, incantations, riddles, proverbs, epics, and legendary histories. Accounts of migrations and ancestors abound, as do vision or healing songs and tricksters' tales. Certain creation stories are particularly popular. In one well-known creation story, told with variations among many tribes, a turtle holds up the world. In a Cheyenne version, the creator, Maheo, has four chances to fashion the world from a watery universe. He sends four water birds diving to try to bring up earth from the bottom. The snow goose, loon, and mallard soar high into the sky and sweep down in a dive, but cannot reach bottom; but the little coot, who cannot fly, succeeds in bringing up some mud in his bill. Only one creature, humble Grandmother Turtle, is the right shape to support the mud world Maheo shapes on her shell—hence the Indian name for America, "Turtle Island".

The songs or poetry, like the narratives, range from the sacred to the light and humorous: There are lullabies, war chants, love songs, and special songs for children's games, gambling, various chores, magic, or dance ceremonies. Generally the songs are repetitive. Short poem-songs given in dreams sometimes have the clear imagery and subtle mood associated with Japanese haiku or Eastern-influenced imagistic poetry. A Chippewa song runs:

A loon I thought it was
But it was
My love's
splashing oar.

Vision songs, often very short, are another distinctive form. Appearing in dreams or visions, sometimes with no warning, they may be healing, hunting, or love songs. Often they are personal, as in this Modoc song:

I
the song
I walk here.

Indian oral tradition and its relation to American literature as a whole is one of the richest and least explored topics in American studies. The Indian contribution to America is greater than is often believed. The hundreds of Indian

words in everyday American English include "canoe", "tobacco", "potato", "moccasin", "moose", "persimmon", "raccoon", "tomahawk", and "totem". Contemporary Native American writing, also contains works of great beauty.

1. 2 The Literature of Exploration

Had history taken a different turn, the United States easily could have been a part of the great Spanish or French overseas empires. Its present inhabitants might speak Spanish and form one nation with Mexico, or speak French and be joined with Canadian Francophone Quebec and Montreal.

Yet the earliest explorers of America were not English, Spanish, or French. The first European record of exploration in America is in a Scandinavian language. The Old Norse Vinland Saga recounts how the adventurous Leif Eriksson and a band of wandering Norsemen settled briefly somewhere on the northeast coast of America—probably Nova Scotia, in Canada—in the first decade of the 11th century, almost 400 years before the next recorded European discovery of the New World.

The first known and sustained contact between the Americas and the rest of the world, however, began with the famous voyage of an Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus, funded by the Spanish rulers Ferdinand and Isabella.

Columbus's journal in his "Epistola", printed in 1493, recounts the trip's drama—the terror of the men, who feared monsters and thought they might fall off the edge of the world; the near-mutiny; how Columbus faked the ships' logs so the men would not know how much farther they had travelled than anyone had gone before; and the first sighting of land as they neared America.

Bartolomé de las Casas is the richest source of information about the early contact between American Indians and Europeans. As a young priest he helped conquer Cuba. He transcribed Columbus's journal, and late in life wrote a long, vivid History of the Indians criticizing their enslavement by the Spanish.

Initial English attempts at colonization were disasters. The first colony was set up in 1585 at Roanoke, off the coast of North Carolina; all its colonists disappeared, and to this day legends are told about blue-eyed Croatan Indians of the area. The second colony was more permanent; Jamestown, established in 1607. It endured starvation, brutality, and misrule. However, the literature of

the period paints America in glowing colors as the land of riches and opportunity. Accounts of the colonization became world-renowned. The exploration of Roanoke was carefully recorded by Thomas Hariot in *A Briefe and True Report of the New-Found Land of Virginia* (1588). Hariot's book was quickly translated into Latin, French, and German; the text and pictures were made into engravings and widely republished for over 200 years.

The Jamestown colony's main record, the writings of Captain John Smith, one of its leaders, is the exact opposite of Hariot's accurate, scientific account. Smith was an incurable romantic, and he seems to have embroidered his adventures. To him we owe the famous story of the Indian maiden, Pocahontas. Whether fact or fiction, the tale is ingrained in the American historical imagination. The story recounts how Pocahontas, favorite daughter of Chief Powhatan, saved Captain Smith's life when he was a prisoner of the chief. Later, when the English persuaded Powhatan to give Pocahontas to them as a hostage, her gentleness, intelligence, and beauty impressed the English, and, in 1614, she married John Rolfe, an English gentleman. The marriage initiated an eight-year peace between the colonists and the Indians, ensuring the survival of the struggling new colony.

In the 17th century, pirates, adventurers, and explorers opened the way to a second wave of permanent colonists, bringing their wives, children, farm implements, and craftsmen's tools. The early literature of exploration, made up of diaries, letters, travel journals, ships' logs, and reports to the explorers' financial backers—European rulers or, in mercantile England and Holland, joint stock companies—gradually was supplanted by records of the settled colonies. Because England eventually took possession of the North American colonies, the best-known and most-anthologized colonial literature is English. As American minority literature continues to flower in the 20th century and American life becomes increasingly multicultural, scholars are rediscovering the importance of the continent's mixed ethnic heritage. Although the story of literature now turns to the English accounts, it is important to recognize its richly cosmopolitan beginnings.

II. The Colonial Period in New England

It is likely that no other colonists in the history of the world were as intel-