胡全生 林玉珍 胡开宝 索字环 编著

SELECTED READINGS IN 20TH-CENTURY BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE — POSTMODERNISM

20世纪英美文学选读 ——后现代主义卷

上海交通大学出版社

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#### 内 容 提 要

本书是上海交通大学 985 重点教材之一。共分两册,即"现代主义卷"和"后现代主义卷"。后现代主义卷选有 22 位 20 世纪后现代主义代表作家的代表作品或其节选,每位作家及其作品为一个章节,内容包括:作家生平与创作介绍;其主要作品名称、创作主题和技巧;理解作品须通晓的术语解释;选文以及就选文提出问题所作的评点。本书可作为高校英语专业高年级学生和硕士研究生的英美现代和当代文学选读课程的教学用书或参考书,也可供社会上具有相当英语基础的英美文学爱好者作进修读物。

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## 前言

本书分上、下二册:上册选有 23 位英、美作家的作品,他(她)们大部分是二次大战前的著名现代派作家;下册选有 22 位,多为著名的英、美后现代派作家。其实,称某位作家为现代派或后现代派或写实派,是非常非常难的,甚至有点荒唐,至少有失偏颇。如在詹姆斯身上,我们也可以看到现代派的东西;在乔伊斯身上,我们既可看到现代派的又可看到后现代派的东西;然而人们通常照样称前者为写实派,后者为现代派。所以这种标签式的称谓,有时实在是种无奈之举——不可为而为之。读者还会看到,45 位作家中有些就是典型的写实派,之所以这么做,乃是考虑到他(她)们是20 世纪的作家,而且 20 世纪毕竟还存在着现实主义的文学。然而偏重的,自然是现代主义和后现代主义的文学作品。

本书可作为高校英语专业高年级学生和硕士研究生的英美现代和当代文学选读课程的教学用书或参考书,也可供社会上具有相当英语基础的英美文学爱好者作进修读物。

本书的编写体例如下:1)作家生平与创作介绍;2)其主要作品名称、创作主题和技巧;3)理解作品须通晓的术语解释;4)选文;5)就选文提的问题作评点。

在编写本书时,我们参考了国内外出版的相关书籍,对这些作者,我们表示深深的感谢。有的资料是来自网上的,由于涉及面较广,未能在此——注明,特此说明,并向所有相关人士谨表谢忱。

由于我们水平有限,书中错误、缺点和考虑不周之处在所难免,敬请大家批评指正。

编者

2003年5月

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### Introduction: About Postmodernism and Volume I

As the subtitle suggests, the selections here are from works of postmodernism. But before we begin our reading, let us try to answer some questions about postmodernism.

#### What Is Postmodernism?

Many can answer this question — it seems — but few can give the term a definite definition acceptable to all. The difficulty of defining the term probably lies in the fact that the term itself is, first of all, elusive and comprehensive; and second, a sort of hybrid bred from modernism and something beyond modernism. It is, in Derrida's term, a différence.

According to Chris Baldick, the term postmodernism is suggestive in two senses. On the one hand, it is "a disputed term that has occupied much recent debate about contemporary culture since the early 1980s. In its simplest and least satisfactory sense it refers generally to the phase of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Western culture that succeeded the reign of high modernism, thus indicating the products of the 'space age' after some time in the 1950s." On the other hand, "(a)s applied to literature and other arts, the term is notoriously ambiguous, implying either that modernism has been superseded or that it has continued into a new phrase. "O In other words, the term postmodernism may refer either to a cultural phenomenon or to a literary movement.

Perhaps "movement" is not the proper word, for there is no clear demarcation line between modernism and postmodernism. We just know that the term "postmodernism" began when the term of "modernism" became popular, and that "postmodernism" originated not in Europe or the United States but in Latin America, just like the term "modernism" which appeared in the year of 1890, 30 years earlier than it did in the language of English. The term "postmodernism" first appeared in the Spanish-speaking countries in the 1930s, also 30 years earlier than it did in England or America. Some scholars believe that the term "postmodernism"

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① Chris Baldick (2000). Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 174-5.

was coined by Federico de Onis. <sup>①</sup> This is the story shared by many professors and scholars about the date of birth of the term of "postmodernism". Larry McCaffery even suggests the exact date: "November 22, 1963 (the day John Kennedy died) as the day postmodernism was officially ushered in—at least in the United States—since that was the day that symbolically signaled the end of a certain kind of optimism and naivete in our collective consciousness, the end of certain verities and assurances that had helped shape our notion of what fiction should be." <sup>②</sup>

When used to describe the cultural phenomenon which may be termed "counter-culture" or "cultural revolution" that appeared in the late 1950s and prevailed in the 60s, "postmodernism", at its very start, involved itself with arts, architecture, dance, music, etc., that are against and/or beyond modern arts, architecture, dance, music, etc. It may include such social theories as Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, Aesthetics of Reception, or Reception Theory, Reader's Response Theory, New Historicism, Feminism, New Marxism, Orientalism, Postcolonialism, etc., almost all of which appeared and developed in the 1960s to 80s. However, as this selection is concerned, we are mainly interested in the "postmodernism" that is used to describe the literary phenomenon that took place in the late 1950s and developed in the 1960s to 80s and beyond.

Probably people may think that it is easy to understand the meaning of the word "postmodernist" or "postmodern" because they have met and been quite familiar with the term "modernist" or "modern" and because the word "postmodernist" or "postmodern" has the prefix "post" which literally means "after". So they say that "postmodernist" or "postmodern" means "after modernist" or "after modern", and that postmodernist or postmodern fiction simply refers to the "fiction in the postmodern age." This is absolutely a misconception. Brian McHale realizes this problem. In his influential book Postmodernist Fiction, he mimics some arguments:

"'Postmodernist?' The terms does not even make sense. For it 'modern' means 'pertaining to the present', then 'post-modern' can only means 'pertaining to the future', and in that case what could postmodernist fiction be except fiction

① 参见(英)佩里·安德森、《现代的由来》(张子清译)、载《当代外国文学》1999年1期。

<sup>2</sup> Larry McCaffery (1986): Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide. New York: Greenwood Press, p. xii.

that has not yet been written?" 1

As a matter of fact, the prefix "post" is the cause of many arguments and debates, many of which come to one point. In what sense is a story, novel, drama, or poem postmodernist? Here let us lend an ear to some writers talking about the meaning of "postmodern":

John Gardiner: "'Postmodern' in fact means New! Improved!"

Christine Rooke-Rose: "It merely means moderner modern (most-modernism)."

Frank Kernode: (Postmodernism is) "New-modernism."

Description:

Obviously, these explanations are not so informative as Ihab Hassan's. Hassan spells postmodernism as POSTmodernISM. For this spelling, which obviously stresses the prefix and suffix, Brian McHale gives the following explanation:

"This ISM (to begin at the end) does double duty. It announces that the referent here is not merely a chronological division but an organized system—a poetics, in fact—while at the same time properly identifying what exactly it is that postmodernism is post. Postmodernism is not post modern, whatever that might mean, but post modernism; it does not come after the present (a solecism), but after the modernist movement. Thus the term 'postmodernism,' if we take it literally enough, à la lettre, signifies a poetics which is the successor of, or possibly a reaction against, the poetics of early twentieth-century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future."

#### McHale goes on:

"As for the prefix POST, here I want to emphasize the element of logical and historical consequence rather than sheer temporal posteriority. Postmodernism follows from modernism, in some sense, more than it follows after modernism." 3

So obviously, from what these critics say, we may conclude that the prefix "post" here not only means "after" but also implies much greatly "beyond". That is to say, postmodernism is not only the successor of but also the rebel against modernism — a continuation of and reaction against modernism. The relationship between modernism and postmodernism is the relationship between father and son; they look alike in appearance but differ in nature.

D Brian McHale (1987). Postmodernist Fiction. New York and London: Methuen. p. 4.

② Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

#### **How Did Postmodernism Come About?**

It is not exaggerated to say that postmodernism is the result of the influences from modern philosophy, modern linguistics, modern science and technology, modern psychology, modern aesthetics, the counter-culture in the 1950s, and the cultural revolution in the 1960s. In a sense, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Satre, Wittgenstein, Saussure, Lacan, Einstein, Gödel, Planck, Heisenberg, Borges, and Robbe-Grillet—all play a part in the breeding of postmodernism.

Philosophically, existentialism, which attained its zenith following the disenchantments of the Second World War, is the main philosophy that exercised a great influence on postmodernist writers. (For example, the British postmodernist fiction writer John Fowles himself admitted this influence on him. (1) Existentialism emphasizes such themes as individualism, the experience of choice, and the absence of rational understanding of the universe with a consequent dread or sense of absurdity in human life. Its fundamental premise, that "existence precedes essence", implies that we as human beings have no given essence or nature but must forge our own values and meanings in an inherently meaningless or absurd world of existence and act in the light of the open space of possibilities that the world allows. Existentialist writing both reacts against the view that the universe is a closed, coherent, intelligible system, and finds the resulting contingency a cause for lamentation.

Socially, the late 1950s and 60s was an age of tumult and change. At the turn of the century, Nietzsche announced the death of God. Now, half a century later, God was not only dead but also definitely nailed in the coffin. Dead also were the beliefs in God, in rational thinking, in the moralities and ethics cultivated from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In place of these beliefs were the suspicion of history itself as an absurd fiction; the rejection of the sovereign autonomous individual with an emphasis upon anarchic collective, anonymous experience; the skepticism of the transparency of language and the determinacy of language meaning; and the beliefs in realities rather than the Reality, in relativism, and in the principle of uncertainty. Cultural phenomena in

Randall Stevenson thinks that John Fowles is influenced by existentialism when in The French Lieutenant's Woman Fowles mentions "the lessons of existentialist philosophy". See Randall Stevenson (1986): The British Novel since the Thirties: An Introduction. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd. p. 210.

the 1950s and 60s such as social radicalism reflected and demonstrated by the Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men, Black and Feminist movements, and the movement against Vietnam War-all of which may come under the term "counterculture" - speeded up these deaths and promoted the replacement. Beside these cultural movements, there were, of course, science and technology developments occurring before the 1960s that would influence the direction of postmodernism. One example is the rapid emergence of the cinema and television. As Larry McCaffery points out, "It is probably no accident that postmodern experimentalists were the first generation of writers who grew up immersed in television, or that many of these writers were as saturated with the cinema as the forefathers had been with literature. The specific influences of television and the movies on postmodern fiction are diffuse, generalized, difficult to pinpoint, but obviously an awareness of the process through which a movie is presented—its rapid cutting, its use of montage and juxtaposition, its reliance on close-ups, tracking shots, and other technical devices—is likely to create some deeply rooted effects on writers when they sit down at their collective typewriters. "OArtistically, the high development of modernism paved the way for the emergence of postmodernism. About this McCaffery mentions:

"Much of the groundwork for the so-called postmodern aesthetic revolution had already been established earlier in this century in such areas as the theoretical work being done in philosophy and science: the innovations made in painting (the rejection of mimesis and fixed point perspective, the emphasis on collage, self-exploration, abstract expressionism, and so on); in theater in the works of Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Genet, even Thornton Wilder; the increasing prominence of photography, the cinema, and eventually television, which cooped certain alternatives for writers while opening up other areas of emphasis. And if one looks carefully enough, there were many modernist literary figures who had called for a complete overhaul of the notion of representation in fiction. It is a commonplace to note that Tristram Shandy is a thoroughly postmodern work in every respect but the period in which it is written, and there are dozens of other examples of authors who explored many of the same avenues of experimentalism that postmodern writers were to take: for instance, the surreal, mechanically produced constructions of Raymond Roussel; the work of Alfred Jarry, with its black humor, its obscenity, its confounding of fact, fiction, and autobiography, its general sense of play and formal outrageousness; André Gide's The Counterfeiters, with its self-reflexiveness

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D Larry McCaffery: Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide. p. xviii.

and self-commentary; Franz Kafka's matter-of-fact surrealistic presentation of the self and its relationship to society (significantly, Kafka's impact on American writing was not strong until the 1950s); William Faulkner, with his multiple narrators and competing truths, and whose own voice is so insistently foregrounded throughout his fiction as to obliterate any real sense that he is transcribing anything but his own consciousness; and, looming over the entire literary landscape, is the figure of James Joyce, the Dead Father of postmodern fiction, who must be dealt with, slain, the pieces of his genius ritually eaten and digested. "①

The central of idea of McCaffery's is quite clear: Postmodernism develops not from vacuum but from modernism. Without modernism, there could be no postmodernism. It is the high development of modernism that makes it possible for the birth of postmodernism. And this is also the reason why there is no clear-cut demarcation line between the two and why some writers such as Beckett, Nobokov, and Vonnegut are labeled sometimes as modernists and sometimes as postmodernists.

In talking about the causes for the emergence of postmodernism, we cannot overlook the modern linguistic theories, especially the poststructuralists's, which exercise influences on postmodernists. As we know, poststructuralism is associated with writers such as Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, Lacan, and so on. These poststructuralists derive from Saussure the view that words mean what they do through their relations with each other rather through their relationship to an extralinguistic reality.

Saussure, the supposed father of modern linguistics, does not think that a word is a symbol, symbolizing a thing. Instead, he views a word as a sign—something like a coin that has two sides. One side is the sound image, the other is a concept. The former is a signifier, and the latter is a signified. His formula of sign goes like this:

$$Sign = \frac{signifier}{signified}$$

Between the signifier and the signified there is no necessary one-to-one relation. And for this Saussure announced that the relation between the two was arbitrary.

Though Saussure made the distinction between the two and realized that the

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

signifier and the signified were two independent systems, he did not realize how the meaning of a language unit was basically unstable when the two systems came together. It is the poststructuralists who discovered that meaning is unstable in nature. For example, when you want to get the meaning (the signified) of a word (the signifier), you look it up in a dictionary, but the dictionary only confirms the "postponement" (différance) of the meaning. So you see for one word (signifier) you've got several meanings (signifieds). And what's more, each signified can be another signifier which refers to a series of signifieds. So in this process of looking for the meaning of a word you do not get one meaning but several. Therefore, the meaning is not stable, that is, it cannot be determined. And since the meaning cannot be determined, how can language be used to represent the reality? So the logic goes that between language and the world there is no one-to-one relation, and that therefore the reality reflected by language (- supposing language even has this function) is not reliable because it is absolutely made of words. Quite obviously, it is by following the linguistics of Saussure that the poststructuralists claim that meaning is undecidable and that reality is constructed in and through language, and thus favour a non-hierarchical plurality or "free play" of meanings, stressing the indeterminacy of texts. To these poststructuralists, meaning is assumed to be created by difference, not by "presence," (that is, identity with the object of meaning). For example, in the eyes of Lacan, a sign signals the absence of that which it signifies. Signs do not directly represent the reality to which they refer, but mean by difference from other words in a concept set. All meaning is only meaning in reference to, and in distinction from, other meanings; there is no meaning in any stable or absolute sense. Meanings are multiple, changing, contextual.

#### About the Term "Metafiction"

In Postmodern Fiction, McCaffery makes the following remark:

"At any rate, for whatever reasons in the United States from the period of 1930 until 1960 we do not find the emergence of a major innovator—someone equivalent to Beckett or Borges or Alain Robbe-Grille or Louis Ferdinand Céline—except in the person of perhaps postmodern fiction's most important precursor, Vladimir Nabokov, who labored in obscurity in this country for 25 years until the scandal of *Lolita* made him suddenly very visible indeed (though for all the wrong reasons). As a result, by the late 1950s the United States was just as ripe for an aesthetic revolution as it was for the

McCaffery is sharp and penetrating in his observation for the simple fact that it is only after the 1950s that such a postmodernist writer as John Barth realized that literature had come to an exhaustion ("The Literature of Exhaustion", 1967) and needed replenishment ("The Literature of Replenishment", 1980).

Beginning in the early 1960s, young writers in America such as John Barth, William Gass, Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, and Thomas Pynchon poured out their works. John Barth published The Sot-Weed Factor in 1960, Giles Goat-Boy in 1966; Thomas Pynchon V in 1963; Donald Barthelme Come Back, Dr. Caligari in 1964; Robert Coover The Origin of the Brunists in 1965, Pricksongs and Descants in 1968; and William Gass In the Heart of the Heart of the Country in 1968. But interesting enough, these writers were not referred to at that time as postmodernists but as absurdists, black humourists, experimentalists, and more often now, as metafictionists. The reason is that at that time the term "postmodernist" was not as quite popular. And for this same reason, their works were often referred to as experimental work, antifiction, surfiction, parafiction, or metafiction.

And of course, apart from experimental, "anti-", "sur-", and "para-", there are many other terms that hover around metafiction: avant-garde, new, neo, postrealistic, post-contemporary, areal or irrreal, surreal, disruptive, superfiction, ludic, the introverted novel, the self-begetting novel, self-cosncious, self-reflexive, and narcissistic. From these modifiers, we may find out the ways by which the critics try to define this kind of fiction. Some try to define it by time (e.g., postrealistic, post-contemporary, neo, new, and avant garde); some by form (areal, irreal, surreal, discruptive, and superfiction); and still some by content (ludic, introverted, self-begetting, narcissistic, self-conscious, and self-reflexive). All their definitions are successful to some degree, but not satisfactory to all. Now, as time goes by, some of the names disappeared, some remain. And the ones that become popular are self-conscious and self-reflexive fiction. Less often mentioned is narcissistic fiction, but the most popular is metafiction, when in place of postmodernist fiction. It is worth noting that some critics make a distinction between metafiction and postmodernist fiction. This is very constructive because there IS a difference between the two. Generally speaking, the latter is a broader

① Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.

term that includes the former. When we are talking about metafiction, we are referring to postmodernist fiction; but when we are talking about postmodernist fiction, we may not be referring to metafiction. In a word, metafiction is a special kind of postmodernist fiction, special in the sense that it is typical of postmodernist fiction.

Many people believe that the term "metafiction" was coined by William H. Gass, who, when describing the fiction of Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth and Flann O'Brien, writes, "Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafictions".  $\Phi$  Since Gass, many critics have tried to define metafiction. Here are some examples:

Linda Hutcheon: "Metafiction," as is has now been named, is faction about fiction—that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity.

Hans Skei: Metafiction refers to other fictions, not to worlds outside or beyond, not to "reality."

Larry McCaffery: Metafictions—fiction which examines fictional systems, how they are created, and the way in which reality is transformed by and filtered through narrative assumptions and conventions.

Robert Alter: A self-conscious novel, briefly, is a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality.

Patricia Waugh:

In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.

Mas'ud Zavarzadeh: This intense self-reflexiveness of metafiction is caused by the fact that the only certain reality for the metafictionist is the reality of his own discourse; thus, his fiction turns in upon itself, transforming the process of writing into the subject of writing.

Michael Boyd: Because they do not seek to tell yet another story but to examine the story-telling process itself, reflexive novels must be seen as works of literary theory and criticism.

William H. Gass (1971); Fiction and the Figures of Life. Boston: Nonpareil Books. p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> All the definitions are cited from Wenche Ommundsen (1993): Metafictions? — Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts. Carlton: Melbourne University Press. p. ix.

Obviously, all these definitions come to one big point, that is, metafiction, or self-conscious (or self-reflexive) fiction is, as Hutcheon says, "fiction about fiction". It does not refer to the outside world but to the fictitious nature of fiction.

This is really a big difference. Traditionally, (it is said and we've been told that) fiction is about reality, about life, about the world, or about feelings of individuals. Now, the postmodernists, especially the metafictionists, say that fiction, if anything, is fiction about fiction. This fiction about fiction does, in fact, answer the question raised by many people: What does metafiction mean? or In what sense is a story metafictional? This is simply because fiction about fiction has, at least, the following two implications:

First, it means that the prime interest of metafiction is a world of ideas. That is to say, metafiction transcends an essentially mimetic status. Fiction about reality (or life, or the world) is, in its final analysis, mimetic, copying reality (or life, or the world), because writers of fiction about reality think that fiction can copy or reflect life, and in the way of copying or reflecting they present their understanding of life or reality (or the world). But can they really do that? Do they really understand the world? To the writers of fiction about friction (or metafiction), the answer is no. The metafictionists think that what they do, in copying or reflecting, is only part of the world or some aspects of life, and that therefore they cannot present a full picture of the world. If they reflect a world, that world is nothing but a world of distortion.

Second, it means that metafiction is utterly, perhaps maddeningly, self-conscious of its presence as a linguistic structure, an artifice, an object made of words. Metafiction writers cherish the view that all fictions exist only in words. To them, if a fiction copies or reflects a reality, it is only a reality that is made of words.

#### Some Features of Modernism and Postmodernism

Though, as we have mentioned before, there is no clear-cut demarcation line between modernism and postmodernism, many critics still make comparative studies of the two. The ones who are interesting to us are probably David Lodge, Ihab Hassan, and Brian McHale.

In his book The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature, David Lodge lists six characters of postmodernism:

contradiction, permutation, discontinuity, randomness, excess, and short circuit. Deliberation Lodge bases his discussion on the distinction made by Roman Jakobson and arrives at the conclusion that modernist writing is metaphoric while antimodernist writing is metaphoric.

Of course, Lodge's analysis is enlightening. But, to appropriate Hassan's question, "Can we distinguish postmodernism further?" To this question Hassan provides the following answer:

"Perhaps certain schematic differences from modernism will provide a start:

1

Modernism

Romanticism/Symbolism

Form (conjunctive, closed)

Purpose

Design

Hierarchy

Mastery/Logos

Art Object/Finished Work

Distance

Creation/Totalization

Synthesis

Presence

Centering

Genre/Boundary

Semantics

Paradigm

Hypotaxis

Metaphor Selection

Root/Depth

Interpretation/Reading

Signified

Lisible (Readerly)

Postmodernism

Pataphysics/Dadaism

Antiform (disjunctive, open)

Play

Chance

Anarchy

Exhaustion/Silencee

Process/Performance/Happening

Participation

Decreation/Deconstruction

Antithesis

Absence

Dispersal

Text/Intertext

·

Rhetoric

Syntagm

Parataxis

Metonymy

Combination

Rhizome/Surface

Against Interpretation/Misreading

Signifier

Scriptible (Writerly)

-----后现代主义卷

Tor details of his discussion, see David Lodge (1977) The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature. Edward Arnold. pp. 229-241. Or his (1981) Working with Structuralism. Routledge & Kegan Paul. pp. 13-16.