

英语诗歌导读



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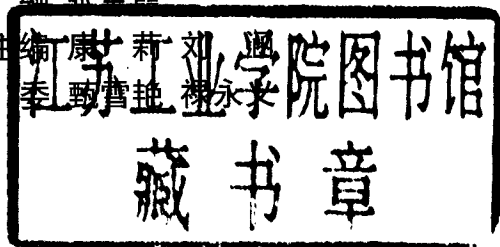
An Introduction to English Poetry

河北大学出版社
Hebei University Press

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河北大学出版社
Hebei University Press

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英语诗歌导读/张金霞等编著. —保定: 河北大学出版社, 2008.8

ISBN 978-7-81097-263-5

I. 英… II. 张… III. ①英语—教材②英语—诗歌—文学欣赏 IV. H319.4: I

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2008)第058328号

责任编辑: 臧燕阳 Tel: 0312-5921826 E-mail: zyyzmq@yahoo.com.cn

装帧设计: 王占梅

责任印制: 蔡进建

出版: 河北大学出版社 (保定市五四东路180号)

经销: 全国新华书店

印制: 河北天普润印刷厂

规格: 1/32(880mm×1230mm)

印张: 7.5

字数: 245千字

印数: 0001~3000册

版次: 2008年8月第1版

印次: 2008年8月第1次

书号: ISBN 978-7-81097-263-5/I·212

定价: 15.00元

前 言

英语诗歌是我国高校英语专业高年级文学课程中的一个重要内容。学习英语诗歌不仅可以提高学生对英语语言的敏感性和综合运用语言的能力,还可以陶冶情操,提高人文素养和审美情趣。学习英语诗歌除了需要具备一定的语言功底外,还需要掌握一些英语诗歌的基本知识和文体特点。只有了解和把握了英语诗歌的基本特征和写作风格,才能更好地理解和鉴赏英诗。《英语诗歌导读》是一部英语诗歌学习入门教材,旨在帮助初学者认识诗歌、理解诗歌、鉴赏诗歌。它将领你进入诗歌的意境,领略英诗的风采,获得美的享受。

本书的编写体例是以英语诗歌的基本知识为主线,以英语诗歌为范例,理论知识和阅读实践紧密结合,做到学以致用。全书共分为五章。第一章介绍英语诗歌的语言特征,包括诗歌语言的涵义、修辞语言、意象、象征和典故。第二章介绍英语诗歌的音韵,包括英语诗歌的音律、格律和韵式。第三章介绍英语诗歌的题材和主题,包括自然、爱情、生与死、战争与和平、道德与哲理。第四章介绍英语诗歌的体式,包括叙事诗、抒情诗和说教诗。第五章是英诗鉴赏,介绍十首英美作家的名篇佳作。

本书所选诗歌题材广泛,数量丰富,共选入 49 位诗人的 79 篇作品,其中有英美著名诗人的名篇,也有名不见经传诗人的佳作,为学习者提供了丰富的阅读材料。本书所选诗歌都极具代表性、欣赏性和可读性。大部分诗歌后附有注释和思考题,部分诗歌没有提供思考题,目的是为学习者提供一个想象的空间,学习者可以尝试运用所

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学知识,分析和鉴赏这些诗歌。

本书具有知识性、实用性和趣味性等特点。内容深入浅出,语言浅显易懂,适合作为高校英语专业诗歌教程的教材,也可作为英美文学课程的补充教材和广大英美文学爱好者的自学教材。

本书在编写过程中参考了国内外许多相关的书籍和注释,在此深表感谢,我们在参考文献中都已一一列出。

由于我们水平有限,在编写过程中难免有错误和疏漏,恳请广大读者和专家批评指正。

编者

2007年3月

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Introduction

What is Poetry?

“Poetry is the imaginative expression of strong feeling... the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity.”

—William Wordsworth

“... prose; words in their best order; poetry; the best words in the best order.”

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

“Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best.”

—P.B. Shelly

“...poetry (is) the immediate offspring of a vigorous imagination and quick sensibility... the language of fancy and passion.”

—William Enfield

“Poetry is language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said. All poetry, great or small, does this.”

—Edwin Arlington Robinson

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These definitions are given by some of the most renowned poets or authors in history. Their views represent the so well-accepted thoughts concerning poetry as a distinguished form of literature.

Poetry is a compressed and often highly emotional form of expression. There are three basic elements that characterize poetry and which make it different from prose.

Content: what poetry is about

Form: how poetry is designed

Effect or Purpose: what poetry does

The content of poetry can be described in several ways. Poems are about emotion. The poet is moved by a scene or a thought or an experience of some kind to write a poem. This emotion is expressed in imaginative language. The poet chooses words that create pictures in the reader's mind to help the reader experience a similar emotion, the poet creates the poem because he or she believes that the experience is important or significant, that it will give us an insight into the human experience that we all share. Finally, the poet is sensitive to and writes about beauty in all its various forms. The content of poetry might be summarized as emotion expressed in imaginative language conveying a message of importance and beauty. The topic material of poetry can be just about anything: love, friendship, personal meditations, psychological studies, religious worship, funeral occasions, celebrations of the seasons and observations on life.

The second element of poetry is its form. The design of a poem as it is printed on the page shows that it is different from prose. The basic arrangement of a poem is separate lines rather than paragraphs, al-

though stanzas correspond to paragraphs, and cantos correspond to chapters. More importantly, poems contain rhythm which is much more regular than that of prose. The delight of rhythm is in its relation to the meaning of the poem, in its uniformity and in its variations. The order of the words is a second feature of poetic form. Closed forms often demand a “poetic” arrangement of words and phrases. In open forms the poet carefully arranges words by themselves or in groups so that they will stand out for emphasis. Poems are also concise and compact and show an intense unity of thought and expression. That is, each word and phrase is rich in meanings. Finally, poems are concrete. The language of poems enables them to make abstract feelings concrete and substantial. The poet chooses specific words which are rich in connotation and which suggest meanings by their sound and color as well as by their sense.

The third element of poetry is its purpose or effect. Poetry has many subjects, many themes, many tones, and it uses a great variety of devices and strategies to affect us in a great variety of ways. Here are some things that all poems are often said to do:

- Describe something beautiful
- State a universal truth
- Elevate our thoughts
- Teach us something
- Give us a broader perspective on ourselves and our world
- Give us aesthetic pleasure

As Paul Valéry pointed out: “Poetry is to prose as dancing to

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walking”. Poems carry a more sensual and emotional meaning than prose, and this meaning is conveyed in a more concise form.

Poetry can be enjoyed and appreciated by everyone. The application of certain knowledge about poetry will no doubt enrich your experience of a poem. The more detailed your knowledge about poetry the more heightened the pleasure your experience.

Chapter I

The Language of Poetry

1.1 Introduction

The words of the poet and the words people use in everyday conversation are alike in many ways. We often use words to mean something different from their literal, dictionary meanings. For examples, we say, “the sun rises in the east.” But we know that the sun does not rise or set. The earth rotates on its axis and turns our part of the world into the sun’s rays or out of them. We also speak of such things as “rich” farmland, of a ship “threading” its way through an ice “field” and so on.

We often want to express an emotion or to give special emphasis to our words. We might use slang for this purpose. For example, “These kids are driving me up the wall!” is more emphatic than, “The children are misbehaving.” We use language, then, to suggest more meanings than the literal or dictionary meanings of the words. The poet makes frequent use of language for such purposes, but the poet’s language is fresher, more original and more forceful than most slang.

The most ordinary words can be used effectively in poems. In this chapter we will examine several of the factors which influence the poet’s choice of words: connotation and denotation, figurative lan-

guage, irony, imagery and symbol and allusion.

1.2 Connotation and Denotation

What are the differences between the following descriptions about Tim and Lily?

Tim is ambitious; Lily is pushy.

Tim is foresighted; Lily is calculating.

Tim is tough-minded; Lily is ruthless.

Tim is firm; Lily is stubborn.

In each pair of descriptions the same qualities of Tim and Lily are described by adjectives with the same denotation. But the adjectives used in each pair create different reactions or carry different meanings. Each description has a different connotation. What suggestions are there in each description about the man and the woman, the speaker, the audience (i. e. the person(s) spoken to) and the situation in which the words are spoken?

The words describing Tim are positive and complimentary, making him seem ideally suited for high responsibility in business or government. On the otherhand, the words describing Lily are loaded with negative connotations, making her seem almost disqualified for any responsibility at all.

Poets use ordinary language, but they use it with precision and choose words with multiple meanings to suggest not only literal meanings (sense) but also emotion. Because poets are limited in the number of words they can use in a given poem, each word must be carefully