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剑桥美国小说新论·8
(英文影印版)

New Essays on

Song of Solomon

《所罗门之歌》新论

Valerie Smith 编



北京大学出版社
PEKING UNIVERSITY PRESS

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导 读

北京大学英语系教授 陶洁

近年来,美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课,学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此,在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面,学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而,我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则,然后罗列一些例证,不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通,恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下,我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授,并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪 80 年代中期开始陆续出书,至今仍在发行并出版新书,目前已有五十多种,不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力,估计还会继续发行,主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发,深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则,每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说,论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述,主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述,从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐



释。这些文章并非信手拈来,而是专门为这套丛书撰写的,运用的理论都比较新,其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见,编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心,努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》,也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子,跑吧!》;有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》,也有我们还不太了解的他的《漂亮水手》;有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了,武器》,令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两三本作品入选,但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家,包括黑人和白人作家(可惜还没有华裔作家的作品),但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》,甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国,在全世界都有一定的影响,后来被贬为“政治宣传”作品,从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨,人们才开始重新评价这部作品,分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造,甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多,例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献,对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战,强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式,又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家,现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枫树之乡》对美国文学的贡献,分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说,这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在20世纪30年代曾经风靡一时,此后长期销声匿迹,60年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志100部优秀小说中的一部,被认为是上个世纪头50年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里,作者通过分析《在密执安北部》,令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此,这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而,作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词,所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础,又对文本进行深入的分析;既把理论阐述得深入浅出,又把作品分析得丝丝入扣,让人不由得信服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权,出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to

American novels now widely read and studied. Each volume is devoted to a single novel and begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the novel's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of the American novel, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott

University of California, Riverside

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Introduction

VALERIE SMITH

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AFRICAN American cultural workers – writers, artists, filmmakers, etc. – are often granted the dubious accolade of “universal” or “more than black.” Such designations are meant to suggest that their accomplishments appeal to an audience larger than the African American community. Unfortunately, they suggest as well that the category of “the universal” transcends the particularities and contingencies of cultural specificity and that racial specificity is less desirable than putative universality.

Recent debates about the literary canon (the body of works historically and commonly considered great) have held the notion of universality up to heightened scrutiny. Defenders of the traditional canon typically argue that texts historically judged as great meet timeless artistic criteria, standards that transcend constructions of race, gender or ethnicity. When challenged to defend the practice of largely excluding literature written by people of color and by white women, they accuse revisionists of confusing politics or demographics with literary standards. Those who would enshrine U.S. literary history as it has commonly been written thus deny that the predominance of white male writers bespeaks a set of class or political interests.

In contrast, critics who seek to expand the canon of U.S. letters are likely to argue that all literary judgments are ideologically grounded; by this light, the denial of political interests reflects a desire to maintain the status quo. They posit as well that it is in the very nature of power to obscure its own agency and contingencies. Traditionalists thus would accuse works by African American writers, for instance, of being about race while works by white writers

are not. Likewise, they would argue that works by women are about gender while texts by men are not. Revisionists would respond that that logic works only if one assumes that blackness is a racial category while whiteness is not, or that womanhood is a gender issue while manhood is not.

Toni Morrison ranks among the most highly regarded and widely read fiction writers and cultural critics in the history of U.S. literature. Novelist, editor, playwright, and essayist, Morrison enjoys such high regard and general esteem both in this country and internationally that she invites frequent comparison with the best-known writers of the American and European literary canons: William Faulkner, James Joyce, Thomas Hardy, and others. Indeed, certain critics would seek to compliment Morrison by describing her as something more than an African American, or woman, or black woman writer.

However, Morrison is a leading voice in current debates about constructions of race and gender in U.S. literature and culture. As a critic of both her own fiction and the work of other writers, she refuses to allow race to be relegated to the margins of literary discourse. Moreover, throughout her fiction she uses narrative forms both to express the nuances of African American oral and musical culture and to reclaim black historical experience.

In an interview with Nellie McKay, Morrison explains her reluctance to being compared primarily with classic white authors:

I am not *like* James Joyce; I am not *like* Thomas Hardy; I am not *like* Faulkner. I am not *like* in that sense. I do not have objections to being compared to such extraordinarily gifted and facile writers, but it does leave me sort of hanging there when I know that my effort is to be *like* something that has probably only been fully expressed in music, or in some other culture-gen that survives almost in isolation because the community manages to hold on to it.¹

Morrison expands upon this position in a profoundly persuasive and influential essay entitled "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." Here she explores the significance of the silence surrounding the topic of race in the construction of American literary history.

Morrison begins the essay by questioning the idea of a canon and interrogating the presupposition of whiteness that the Ameri-

can canon inscribes. The fact that certain critics continue to deny that black writers are excluded from the U.S. literary canon on the basis of race, she argues, demonstrates that race remains an unspeakable topic in American culture.

For three hundred years black Americans insisted that "race" was no usefully distinguishing factor in human relationships. During those same three centuries every academic discipline, including theology, history, and natural science, insisted "race" was *the* determining factor in human development. When blacks discovered they had shaped or become a culturally formed race, and that it had specific and revered difference, suddenly they were told there is no such thing as "race," biological or cultural, that matters and that genuinely intellectual exchange cannot accommodate it.²

To her mind, the custodians of the canon retreat into specious arguments about quality and the irrelevance of ideology when defending the critical status quo against charges of being exclusionary. Morrison is, in addition, skeptical about arguments based on the notion of critical quality, since the term is so frequently self-justifying and contested.

She then considers the ways that recent approaches to African American literary study respond to critical attempts to delegitimize black literary traditions. While some critics deny that African American art exists, Afro-Americanists have rediscovered texts that have long been suppressed or ignored, have sought to make places for African American writing within the canon, and have developed ways of interpreting these works. There are also critics who would argue that African American art is inferior – "imitative, excessive, sensational, mimetic . . . , and unintellectual, though very often 'moving,' 'passionate,' 'naturalistic,' 'realistic' or sociologically 'revealing.'"³ Those critics, Morrison notes, often lack the acumen or commitment to understand the works' complexity. In response to such labels, Afro-Americanists have devised such strategies as applying recent literary theories to black literature so that these noncanonical texts can participate in the formation of current critical discourse and debate.

Morrison problematizes most fully those who seek to ennoble African American art by measuring it in relation to the ostensibly universal criteria of Western art. She remarks that such compari-

sons fail to do justice both to the indigenous qualities of the texts and to the traditions of which they are a part.

Morrison describes three subversive strategies that critics can utilize in order to undermine these attempts to marginalize African American art and literature. To counteract such assaults, she first proposes that critics develop a theory of literature that responds to the tradition's indigenous qualities: "one that is based on its culture, its history, and the artistic strategies the works employ to negotiate the world it inhabits."⁴ Second, she suggests that the canon of classic, nineteenth-century literature be reexamined to reveal the ways in which the African American cultural presence makes itself felt in these ostensibly white texts. Third, she recommends that contemporary mainstream and minority literary texts be studied for evidence of this presence.

Morrison's essay centers on the second and third strategies, because of her apparent fascination with the meanings that attach to the idea of absence:

We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily "not-there"; that a void may be empty, but it is not a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighborhoods that are defined by the population held away from them. Looking at the scope of American literature, I can't help thinking that the question should never have been "Why am I, an Afro-American, absent from it?" It is not a particularly interesting query anyway. The spectacularly interesting question is "What intellectual feats had to be performed by the author or his critic to erase me from a society seething with my presence, and what effect has that performance had on the work?" What are the strategies of escape from knowledge? Of willful oblivion?⁵

Her incisive reading of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* as a critique of the power of whiteness exemplifies the second strategy she outlines and indicates the subtext of race that critics of that classic text have long ignored. She demonstrates the third strategy by discussing the opening sentences of each of her novels to suggest ways in which African American culture inscribes itself in black texts. Morrison's analyses of her own prose reverberate and shimmer. They display the acuity of her critical sensibility and her uses

of language to reveal the subtleties of African American cultural life.

Morrison's critical study *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* expands upon the enterprise of "Unspeakable Things" and explores the impact of constructions of whiteness and blackness upon a range of key texts in the American literary tradition. To the extent that race has remained an almost unutterable subject in U.S. culture, her project is especially bold and necessary to our understanding of our national literature. As she writes:

It has occurred to me that the very manner by which American literature distinguishes itself as a coherent entity exists because of this unsettled and unsettling population [Africans and African Americans]. Just as the formation of the nation necessitated coded language and purposeful restriction to deal with the racial disingenuousness and moral frailty at its heart, so too did the literature, whose founding characteristics extend into the twentieth century, reproduce the necessity for codes and restriction. Through significant and underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this presence — one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness.⁶

As part of the complex project of this work, Morrison establishes the discourses of race within which texts by Willa Cather, Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Ernest Hemingway, and others participate. By making explicit the assumptions about race inscribed within the texts upon which she focuses, Morrison reveals the centrality of ideas of whiteness and blackness to the idea of America.

Morrison's commitment to representing and preserving the qualities of African American cultural life in her own prose and to identifying the impact of race in the work of others may be traced at least partly to the circumstances of her early life. She was born Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, a multiracial steel town. From her parents and other relatives, she received a legacy of resistance to oppression and exploitation and an appreciation of African American folklore and cultural practices. Her maternal grandparents emigrated from Alabama to Ohio in hopes of leaving racism and poverty behind and finding greater

opportunities for their children. Her father, likewise, left Georgia to escape the racial violence that was rampant there.

Morrison recalls the ubiquitousness of African American cultural rituals in her childhood and adolescence; the music, folklore, ghost stories, dreams, signs, and visitations that are so vividly evoked in her fiction have been shaping and empowering presences in her life as well.

The impact of these forces in her life has inspired her to capture the qualities of African American cultural expression in her prose. Indeed, Morrison and her critics alike have described the influence of orality, call and response, jazz, and dance in her narratives. Yet the presence of myth, enchantment, and folk practices in her work never offers an escape from the sociopolitical conditions that have shaped the lives of African Americans. Cultural dislocation, migration, and urbanization provide the inescapable contexts within which her explorations of the African American past are located.

In an essay entitled "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Morrison describes the importance of orality and call and response in her fiction:

[Literature] should try deliberately to make you stand up and make you feel something profoundly in the same way that a Black preacher requires his congregation to speak, to join him in the sermon . . . that is being delivered. In the same way that a musician's music is enhanced when there is a response from the audience. Now in a book, which closes, after all – it's of some importance to me to try to make that connection – to try to make that happen also. And, having at my disposal only the letters of the alphabet and some punctuation, I have to provide the places and spaces so that the reader can participate. Because it is the affective and participatory relationship between the artist or the speaker and the audience that is of primary importance, as it is in these other art forms I have described.⁷

Literature also played an important role in Morrison's childhood and youth. She was the only child in her first-grade class who was able to read when she entered school. As an adolescent she read widely across a variety of literary traditions, counting the classic Russian novelists, Flaubert, and Jane Austen among her favorites.

She was not exposed to the work of previous generations of black women writers until her adulthood. Her delayed introduction to the work of earlier black women writers does not, to her mind, mean that she writes outside that tradition. Rather, the connections between her work and theirs confirm her notion that African American women writers represent character and circumstance in specific, identifiable ways. As she remarks in a conversation with Gloria Naylor:

[People] who are trying to show certain kinds of connections between myself and Zora Neale Hurston are always dismayed and disappointed in me because I hadn't read Zora Neale Hurston except for one little short story before I began to write. . . . [The] fact that I had never read Zora Neale Hurston and wrote *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* anyway means that the tradition really exists. You know, if I had read her, then you could say that I consciously was following in the footsteps of her, but the fact that I never read her and still there may be whatever they're finding, similarities and dissimilarities, whatever such critics do, makes the cheese more binding, not less, because it means that the world as perceived by black women at certain times does exist[;] however they treat it and whatever they select out of it to record, there is that.⁸

Susan L. Blake quotes Morrison's remark that although the works she read in her youth "were not written for a little black girl in Lorain, Ohio . . . they spoke to [her] out of their own specificity." During those years Morrison had hopes of becoming a dancer; nevertheless, her early reading inspired her later "to capture that same specificity about the nature and feeling of the culture [she] grew up in."⁹

Morrison graduated with honors from Lorain High School and then attended Howard University, where she majored in English and minored in classics and from which she graduated in 1953. She describes the Howard years with some measure of ambivalence. Evidently, she was disappointed with the atmosphere at the university, which, she has said, "was about getting married, buying clothes and going to parties. It was also about being cool, loving Sarah Vaughan (who only moved her hand a little when she sang) and MJQ [the Modern Jazz Quartet]."¹⁰ To offset the influ-