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美国文学新编

AMERICAN LITERATURE

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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前 言

至今已有三百多年历史的美国文学,在世界文学的范畴中,已然异军突起,成为世界文学一个不可忽视的组成部分。它所表现出来的民族性、时代性、社会性和独特的风格,对世界文学产生了一定的影响。众所周之,埃德加·爱伦·坡被 19 世纪法国象征派诗人波德莱尔、马拉梅、瓦莱里奉为至圣。惠特曼奔放无羁的自由体诗歌成为 20 世纪初叶意象派诗歌的源头,对现代英语诗歌以及我国的新诗运动都产生过深刻的影响。马克·吐温、海明威、福克纳的小说,庞德、弗罗斯特的诗歌,奥尼尔的戏剧都是蜚声世界文坛、广大读者熟悉的作品。

《美国文学新编》一书系根据我国高等院校英语专业高年级教学大纲编写而成的美国文学课教材,面向我国大量的英语专科毕业生,或具有英语大学专科程度、继而进行专升本学习的广大中学教师,以及社会上具有一定英语语言基础的美国文学爱好者。

在体例设计上,本书将介绍文学发展史与经典作品选读融为一体。以史带文,文史结合,二者相辅相成。简明扼要、重点突出是本书的编写原则;每章包括该时期的文学史,作家介绍,作品简介,代表作品选,注释,以及部分选文的评论六个部分。本书在编写过程中力求观点客观全面,论述深入浅出,注意吸收近年来国内外有关美国文学的研究成果,文字浅显流畅。然而,由于水平所限,错误与考虑不周之处在所难免,恳请专家学者及广大读者不吝指正。

编 者

2001 年 2 月

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Part I The Early American Literature (1620—1781)

Chapter I The Seventeenth Century Literature

Puritanism in American Literature

American literature may be among the youngest national literatures in the world. Although the continent of North America was discovered about 500 years ago, its real history, if calculating roughly from the end of the Independence War (October 1781), is only about two hundred and twenty years. Within such a short period, American literature swiftly developed, well matured, began to receive international recognition, and has exercised a marked effect upon world literature. In fact, American writers have brought out some of the world's best literature.

The first settlers in America were the Asians known as the ancestors of American Indians or Native Americans. The discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, however, led to the rush of European immigrants into this fascinating and strange continent and brought the rise of the New World. The English settlement in America emerged especially after the arrival of the ship of the Mayflower in 1620. The early settlers were so-called Separatists or Puritans, who managed to escape to the New World to avoid the religious persecution of the Church of England. They at first wished to reform or "purify" their religious beliefs and practices. To them religion should be a matter of personal faith rather than of ritual.

The 17th century American Puritans included two parts: one part of them were the creators of the Plymouth colony, called "Separatists." They were so suppressed by the Church of England that they sought escape. Those Separatists first went into exile to Holland, then were aboard "Mayflower" in 1620 and settled down in Plymouth. America, therefore, as an infant was born. They considered that the Church of England had become hopeless and advocated to separate from it since general reform would be useless. The other part was the Englishmen in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Though they came later than those of Plymouth colony, they were richer and better-educated. They devoted themselves to the reform of the Church of England and meant to clear away the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church in it. In reality, only this part of them were true Puritans. They accepted the doctrine of original sin and total depravity, and predestination, and limited atonement through a special infusion of grace from God.

The main doctrine of Calvinism Puritans believed in was first shown in "total depravity." They believed in the "original sin" in which Adam the first man God created sinned and which led to the conclusion that "in Adam's fall, we sinned all." They considered that man was born sinful, was a sinner and could not redeem his original sinfulness. Moreover, they could not save themselves. Secondly Puritans underscored that man would be chosen by God unconditionally. They thought that God occupied a dominant position. He could save a part of people willfully, made them rise to the Heaven after death, and could also destroy some other part of people wantonly, made fall into the hell after death. Therefore, determinism took firm root in their minds. They believed in man's destiny, everything of man was disposed in the hands of God, only God knew who were

“chosen people” after they died. Man himself was predestined and could not master his own destiny. They thought that God willfully granted people the favor that man could neither strive to gain, nor refuse to accept. The obtaining of the God’s special kindness or God’s providence for him meant his “rebirth” or “being sainted.” In this sense, they strived to be saints while they were still alive. Man did not know whether they could be God’s chosen people, but should live a saint-like life at ordinary times according to God’s will. The Holy Bible was the guidebook to man’s behaviors.

In New England where Puritanism was popular, one’s life was only the course of moral training and that of his struggle between God and devils. People had an austere and rigid way of life governed by the church. Therefore, clergymen were the dominant authorities. Puritans tended to suspect joy and laughter as symptoms of sin: they did not dance, did not go to theatre, but sang chant in church and listened to the music. However, they allowed drinking, smoking and putting on beautiful clothes. Puritanism encouraged people to struggle in their careers. If one’s business was booming, it proved that he had gained God’s providence.

In such a cultural background, the purpose of the literary creation could only be “pragmatic.” Over the years Puritans built a way of life that was in harmony with their somber religion, one that stressed hard work, thrift, piety, and sobriety. In people’s daily life, religious activities were a matter of first importance and all others should serve the religion. Their lives were disciplined and hard.

It was Puritanism that was most influential in the intellectual and economic life of the settlers. The early American literature started at the beginning of the 17th century, marked by that those headed by William Bradford on board the ship of Mayflower reached to the

new continent and set up the colony of Plymouth. The first of American literature was not written by an American, but by John Smith, a British captain, who thus became the first American writer. *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Note as Hath Happened in Virginia* was a long report recording what he saw and heard in the New World, which he sent back to England and was printed in 1608 without his knowledge.

The literature of this period, which is also called "Colonial Literature," is characterized by that most of the writers were born in Britain. Some were explorers, some immigrants, some colonialists. As their circumstances were hard and their life was difficult, the newcomers were very busy. Relying mainly on physical labor, they were not professional writers and did not mean to create a national literature, only the life of the new world was inspiring and encouraging them to write. Secondly, the time when American literature was born was just the period when the Modern English developed and took shape. The early American literary works, therefore, was not so difficult to understand as the early English literary works. Certainly, it had some distinctions from present-day English, particularly in the spelling and pronunciation of some words such as the article "ye" and the suffix "eth" in "maketh, holdth." The English of this period had long and loose sentences and a lot of conversions such as verbs used as nouns, adjectives as adverbs, and in many cases "double negation" was used. Thirdly, the principal ideological trend of this period was Puritanism besides the ideological influence of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, etc. Moreover, in early Puritan writers' works, English literary traditions were faithfully imitated and transplanted. The American poets of the 17th century adapted the style of established European poets. In addition, in

the categories of the literary works, there were "travel", "diary," and "poem," etc. , among which the poetry and prose gained most achievements in this period. The important literary figures were the first American writer John Smith, the first American woman poet Anne Bradstreet, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and Edward Taylor.

Chapter II The Eighteenth Century Literature

Enlightenment in American Literature

The eighteenth century American history witnessed two great revolutions: one was American Revolution which led eventually to the independence of the nation and the other was Enlightenment, an intellectual movement whose rationalistic spirit inspired American men of letters and brought them into a new horizon beyond the limitation of prevailing Puritanism. The two revolutions produced a number of outstanding political and literary figures, such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson, whose literary talent enabled them to be political leaders with more dynamic, and even made literature become part of the revolutions.

Enlightenment as an intellectual revolution originated in the European continent, and then its impact found expression in America through the efforts of such progressive and patriotic thinkers as Franklin. At the initial period the spread of ideas of the Enlightenment was largely due to journalism. The American reading public at the time displayed great interest in the works of English scientists, philosophers and writers such as Newton and Swift. The writers of

the French Enlightenment, particularly Voltaire, were widely read in America. With an unshakable belief in the power of reason, the Enlighteners regarded "enlightenment" or "education" as the principal means for the development of a society, moreover, they showed larger concerns for civil rights, a more comprehensive democracy in government, and general toleration rather than earlier religious mysticism. The Enlightenment began to reconsider, from the rationalistic conception of man, the relations among man, Nature and God, suggesting an extension of the principles of equality and social justice.

The Enlightenmenters advocated publicly to study "man" instead of "God", and pointed out that the "evils" in human civilization stemmed from the social injustice, not from "original sin." The Enlightenment emphasized on "reason," required people to pay attention to the social reality, advocated education and scientific research, and believed that man could "perfect himself" and man could decide his own destiny. Meanwhile, they energetically propagated the views of the social progress, humanism and the ideas of equality.

When rationalism was applied to theology, it led to the appearance of Deism, the belief in natural religion, but the degrees of Deism ranged widely. They confirmed Deist held that first only one God was worth worshipping; secondly man could keep making progress by making use of his own moral sense and of his own intelligence and wisdom; thirdly man should love truth and do good; fourthly education and science was an important means to create man's happiness; fifthly the freedom of citizen's speech, action, and faith embodied man's basic benefits; and lastly to serve God best was to do good for the mankind.

Although the Enlightenmenters thought that social problems could not be solved by any religious doctrine or by the hand of God, most

of them did not reject Deism, but confined their logic to practical affairs, or like such enlightened rationalists as Franklin and Jefferson, entertained a mild Deism.

Compared with Puritanism, Deism made a great leap forward. In the past, God governed all – controlled man and all things on earth. Now, Deists considered that “the movement of the universe dates from God,” that all things in the nature were the embodiments of gods, and that why man lived in the world was not to suffer so as to exchange for the rebirth of the next generation, but to eliminate the inequality of race, sex and faith and to build up his own “paradise” in the human world. This ideology promoted American revolution and its final success, i. e. the American people launched the armed Independence War, freed themselves from the English Colonial rule, and founded their own independent country – “Earthly Paradise.”

By the time of the American Revolution there were also some score of poets who often published their poems in various periodicals. The prose of the great philosopher-statesmen makes up a prominent part of the 18th century American literature. The political events of the Revolution are of great concern because the literature of the time was largely political. Most of the writers in this period were active supporters or participants of the American revolution. Literarily American writers such as Franklin and Jefferson modeled themselves on Addison and other 18th English writers for a “plain and firm” style, adding a polish and rhythmical balance of phrase which gave it literary distinction. The categories of the literary works were mainly history, diary, political essay and articles about religion, besides poetry, satiric literature and stories of morality. At the end of the 18th century in America appeared fiction and drama. Besides Philip

Freneau's and Phillis Wheatley's poems, the significant prose works that come most often to mind include Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, and Thomas Jefferson's *The Declaration of Independence*. Particularly *The Declaration of Independence*, adopted July 4, 1776 and announcing the birth of a new nation, can be regarded as a typical embodiment of the literary preoccupation of the age with common sense as well as a clear, direct, and forceful expression. The author of this masterpiece, Thomas Jefferson, once wrote "Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind." These great works mentioned above served effectively for the philosophical or political purposes of their authors, and possessed such arresting literary values that some of them have been considered as the landmarks of American literature of the age.

Benjamin Franklin (1706—1790)

Biographical Note

Perhaps one of the most important American thinkers during the revolutionary period was Benjamin Franklin. He stood as the epitome of the Enlightenment and as the versatile, practical embodiment of rational man of the period.

Franklin was born in Boston, where he spent his early years. His father was a candlemaker and owner of a tallow shop, whose poverty failed to afford young Franklin an opportunity for regular school education. At the age of twelve Franklin stopped his sporadic learning at school, and became an apprentice to his brother James, a

printer. In 1722 Franklin, though only sixteen years old, took over the editorship of the paper *New England Courant* and wrote the editorials on various subjects ranging from an appeal to the freedom of the press, to the necessity of higher education. In the next year he went to Philadelphia, where he soon rose to prominence as master printer, newspaper publisher, scientist, and public man, as narrated realistically in his *Autobiography*. One year later he attracted the notice of the Governor of Pennsylvania, and it was through his influence that the young boy set out for England in 1757, where he stayed as the representative of the New England colonies. He spent the next two years mostly in London, and returned to Philadelphia in 1726. For the following twenty-two years he lived in that city. During this time he made a reputation for himself, and became wealthy enough to retire from business in 1748. He devoted himself to private study and research. In 1764 he returned to England on diplomatic mission, which was followed by his visit to France and Germany. When he served as colonial agent in Europe, he made full use of his talents in defense of the rights and interests of the colonies. The outbreak of the Revolution called him to return to attend the Second Continental Congress, then to be chosen a member of the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. During the Revolution he stayed in France for two years as agent of the Congress, and successfully negotiated a treaty of alliance in 1778, which gave timely support to American people in fighting for their independence. His last years were spent in Philadelphia, where he served as a member of the Constitutional Convention until his death came in 1790.

In his lifetime Franklin was well-known principally as an accomplished scientist, natural philosopher, statesman, and literary man, but not as a successful tradesman as depicted in his *Autobiography*.