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英美文学作品赏析

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of Masterpieces in English and American Literature

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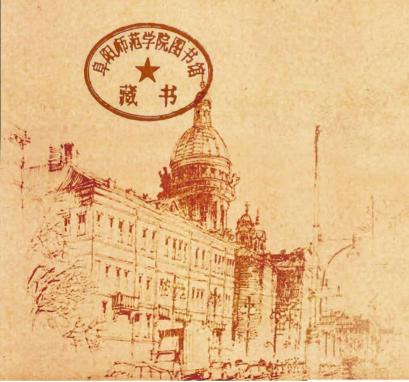
敦煌文艺出版社

Appreciation of Masterpieces in English and American Literature

Literature is written in prose or verse. Literature contains complex but coherent ideas and meanings and deals with universal issues in an original and imaginative way. Literature can be divided into types which are called genres—fiction, poetry, drama and essay. The imaginative literature of different cultures can have similar characteristics, for example, memorable characters, vivid descriptions, imaginative use of language and so on.

前　言

　　学好英语需要不断地积累语言知识,而获取语言知识的最根本、最有效的途径是阅读。经典文学作品具有旺盛的艺术生命力和永不衰竭的精神魅力。阅读经典文学作品如同与智者对话,智慧之光顿时映射身心。通过阅读和欣赏英美文学中的经典作品,从文学作品的构成要素,如情节、结构、人物、叙事技巧等方面分析入手挖掘作品的丰富内涵,读者不仅可以充分地理解和阐释作品的意义,提高英语语言文学水平,还可以开阔视野、陶冶情操、领悟人生、提升文学素养和文化修养。

　　文学作品通常分为小说、诗歌、戏剧和散文四种体裁。由此,本书共分为四个部分。第一部分为小说部分,首先简要地介绍了英美小说的构成要素以及阅读和分析英美文学作品的基本知识,然后是英美文学史中的经典作品的选段,每部作品后都有几个问题供读者阅读后思考,并藉此来指引读者分析和欣赏作品。第二部分是诗歌部分,介绍了英美诗歌的类型、构成要素以及阅读和分析英美诗歌的基本知识,并通过具体的作品及其后的问题来指引读者阅读和分析英美诗歌。第三部分为戏剧部分,介绍了英美戏剧的发展渊源、类型、构成要素及阅读和分析英美戏剧的基本知识,并通过具体作品来指导读者阅读和欣赏英美戏本。第四部分是散文部分,简单地介绍了英美散文的流变、分类及构成要素,并通过英美文学中经典的散文作品来指导读者阅读和欣赏英美散文。对于这四种文体来说,读者最为感兴趣的可能是小说部分,由于在小说部分只安排了长篇小说的选段,不便于读者从整体上掌握阅读和欣赏英美文学作品。为了方便读者的阅读本书还在这四个主要部分之后附了几篇英美文学中的经典短篇小说,以供读者从英美小说的各个层面对作品进行深入地分析。由于编此书的目的是作为大专院校英美文学作品赏析的教材来

用,编者在最后还附了一些基本的文学术语和英美文学史中的一些重要的术语,为读者进一步学习英美文学提供帮助。本书既是一本指导大学生阅读和欣赏英美文学中经典作品方面的教材,也是英语学习爱好者、文学爱好者的必备读物。

在此书的编写过程中,编者参阅了多种国内外相关书籍和文选读本,都收录在参考书目中了,在此一并致谢。

由于编者的学识和水平有限,虽经努力,难免有疏漏之处,请读者不吝指教。

编者

2009 年 8 月

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Part One

Fiction

I. Introduction

Fiction is a general term for an imaginative work in prose. In a broader sense, fiction refers to any literary narrative, no matter it is in prose or verse, and it is invented instead of being an account of events which happened in reality. A narrative tells a story by presenting events in certain logical or orderly way. Yet in a narrower sense, fiction signifies only narratives that are written in prose, the novel and short story for example.

The earliest forms of narrative fiction are stories and songs, which usually embody the history, the myths, and the religious beliefs, in a prehistoric oral tradition. These narratives were later developed into epic. Epic denotes long narrative poems about heroic figures whose actions determine the fate of a nation or an entire race. Folktales and fairy tales were also developed out of an oral tradition. During the Middle Ages, the romance, initially written in verse but later in prose, replaced the epic and knights, kings, and damsels in distress in romance in which events are controlled by the enchantments, supplanted gods, goddesses, and central heroic figures in the epic. With time went on, the romance gave way to other types of narratives from which the novel emerged. The novel was developed very quickly because it can present a wide range of characters and develop them in depth, and it continued to develop. In English literature, the novel emerged in the eighteenth century. Robinson Crusoe, written by Daniel Defoe, is commonly regarded as the first English novel. The short story developed out of the various narrative forms as well. Being limited in length and scope, the short story usually begins close to or at the height of action and develops only one character by showing his or her responses to events.

To understand and appreciate a story, we should evaluate it from key elements of fiction, namely, plot, character, setting, point of view, style, theme and symbol

etc. These elements will be talked about in the following part：

1. Plot

Plot refers to the pattern of events and situations in a narrative or dramatic work, as selected and arranged to emphasize relationships, usually of cause and ef-fect, between incidents. Simply speaking, plot is how what happens is presented. Plot consists of three things. First, it is the work itself, the author's arrangement of events (Events are things that happen in a narrative—actions, statements, thoughts, and feelings.) from the first page to the last. Second, plot includes the linkage of events by cause and effect. Third, plot is the author's presentation of events so as to engage readers intellectually and emotionally, through such devices as pacing, in-tense conflict, surprise, rising action, climax, withheld information, and foreshad-owing of later events.

Plotting a story is the ordering of a world and the lives of the characters, which is shaped by causal historical, social or personal connections, by the interaction be-tween characters, and by juxtaposition of events. To enrich the plot of a work of short fiction, elements such as unexpected events, conflict, suspense, flashbacks, foreshadowing and so forth are often employed. Conflict denotes a clash between the protagonist and an antagonist. Flashback refers to narrating an event or situation oc-curred before the time of the story's action. Foreshadowing is the introduction of sit-uations, events, characters, or objects early in a story to hint at things which are to come.

Aristotle in his *Poetics* regards plot as the first element of drama or epic, which is composed of three elements: a beginning, a middle, and an end. Later Aristotle's three elements have been increased to five more clearly-stated fundamentals of plot. The first is the beginning and exposition which set the plot (or plots) in motion; the second is rising action, referring to a series of actions, each of which causes another to begin and which shows the importance of tension and conflict; the third is the climax which is the most critical section of the narrative; the fourth one is falling action, a lessening of tension, during which some degree of tension (or suspension) is still maintained together with the explanation of the related events, sometimes

called the denouement; and the last is the resolution of the conflict, the happy or unhappy ending.

A story's events may be presented in strict chronological order, that is, by presenting each event in time sequence, or in nonchronological order by manipulating events to create interest, suspense, confusion, wonder and the other effects, for example, by presenting incidents out of expected order, or in no apparent order through using such techniques as flashbacks and foreshadowing and so on.

2. Character

Characters are the people in a story. They are fictional representation of people and create action in the narrative. Characters may be portrayed through their physical appearance, speech, gestures and expression and so on. Sometimes, even their names can reveal their traits. Alternatively, a character's personality traits and motivation may be revealed through actions, dialogue, or thoughts. Generally speaking, characters are developed in two ways, that is, by using first-person narrators or third-person narrators. First-person narrators are usually participants in the events telling about themselves or about other characters. While third-person narrators are non-participants in the events telling about characters as to characters' appearance, their action and thoughts at present, their former experiences and the like. Sometimes, third-person narrators may offer analysis of and judgments about a character's behavior as well.

There are two broad categories of character development: simple or complex. According to E. M. Forster, an English novelist, characters can be classified into a round (complex) character, that is a well-developed character closely involved in and responsive to the action, or a flat (simple) character, that is a barely-developed or stereotypical character. Generally speaking, a flat character has one obvious trait or feature, seldom surprises readers, can be easily recognized and may be represented by a few distinct marks, or even by single sentence. While a round character has multiple personality traits, is revealed from many aspects and harder to undertand and describe than flat characters, and is able to surprise readers without losing credibility.

Characters may also be classified into static or dynamic. Characters who remain the same throughout a work is static.Those who grow and change in the course of a story, and develop as they react to events and to other characters are dynamic. Round characters tend to be dynamic, while flat characters static.

Good characters must have dimension—that is, not merely inhabit the narrative for the sake of being there. The character must function; plot must turn on the character's actions; dialogue between characters must move plot as well as enlarge the character.

3. Setting

Setting is the physical place where action may occur in a narrative. Setting includes several closely related aspects of a work of fiction, the physical, sensuous world of the work, the time in which the action takes places, and the social environment of the characters: the manners, customs, moral values governing the character's society, and atmosphere which is largely, but not entirely, an effect of setting. The setting of a work of fiction establishes the historical, geographical, and physical location in which the action takes place. Setting not only refers to the approximate time and place in which the work is set, but also encompasses a wide variety of physical and cultural elements. Historical context often establishing a social, cultural, economic, and political environment, may determine or help to explain character's actions.

4. Point of view

Point of view is the position in which the writer places the character, around whom move all the elements of fiction. Simply speaking, it is the angle or perspective from which events are presented. Point of view, like the defined area seen through a camera lens, is the frame or boundary of a work of fiction.

Traditionally, there are three basic points of view: the first person ("I"); the second person ("you"); and the third person ("he", "she", "it" or "they"). A narrator is someone who tells the story. Sometimes the narrator is a character who uses the first person ("I" or sometimes "we") to tell the story. First-person point of view is the method by which the author positions one person centrally through whom the

story is told. Every detail is filtered through that character who cannot intimately know others. In the third-person narration, third-person narrators, "he" or "she", are not characters in the story, focusing not on several characters, but one.Third person can be compared to a camera that has been focused between closeup and wide-angle. Once the intrusive authorial voice of past use of the point of view, which is often opinionated, or editorializing and addressing readers directly by the pronoun "you", was employed. In modern fiction only the characters speak and no authors are allowed. It is third-person point of view that many authors use to make readers see a resemblance between fiction and the real world.Third-person narrators fall into three categories, that is, omniscient (all-knowing) narrators, limited omni-science narrators and objective narrators.

Some third-person narrators are omniscient (all-knowing) narrators, moving at will from one character's mind to another. Omniscient narrators are not characters in the story and their perception is not limited to what any one character can observe or comprehend. As a result, they can present a more inclusive overview of events and characters than first-person narrators can. Limited omniscience focuses on only what a single character experiences. So events are limited to one character's perspective, and events are through what the character sees, hears, feels, or thinks.

An objective (or dramatic) narrator remains entirely outside the characters' minds. Such narrators tell the story only by presenting dialogue and recounting events; they do not reveal the characters' (or their own) thoughts or attitudes. Thus, readers can interpret the actions of the characters without any interference.

5. Style

Style is found in the way a work of fiction is written and it generally refers to how the author uses language in his or her work, that is, the author's particular, habitual or customary ways of managing words. Just as Jonathan Swift remarked that "proper words in proper places, makes the true definition of a style", traditionally style has been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse, i.e. how speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say. The style of a particular work or writer has been analyzed in such terms as the rhetorical situation and aim;

characteristic diction, or choice words; type of sentence structure and syntax; and the density and kinds of imagery and figurative language.

Formal diction is characterized by elaborate, complex sentences; a learned vocabulary; and a serious, objective, detached tone. The speaker avoids contractions, shortened word forms, regional expression, and slang. Formal diction may indicate erudition, a high educational level, a superior social or professional position, or emotional detachment. Informal diction is characterized by slang, contractions, colloquial expressions, shortened word forms, incomplete sentences, and a casual, conversational tone. Informal diction, consistent with everyday speech, can range from the straightforward contemporary style to regionalisms and dialect.

In analyzing style, two types of sentence structure are often distinguished: the periodic sentence and the nonperiodic (or loose) sensentence. The former refers to a long sentence in which the completion of the syntax and sense is delayed until the end, usually after a sequence of balanced subordinate clauses; the effect tends to be formal or oratorical. Whereas the latter refers to a sentence in which the component members are continuous, but so loosely joined that the sentence would have been syntactically complete if a period had been inserted at one or more places before the actual close; the effects is more relaxed and conversational in effect.

Another distinction often made is that between parataxis and hypotaxis: A paratactic style is marked by the juxtaposition of clauses or sentences, without the use of connecting words. It has the effect of abruptness, because the relationship between one statement and the next is not made explicit. While a hypotactic style is one in which the temporal, causal, logical, and syntactic relations between members and sentences are specified by words (such as "when", "then", "because", "therefore") or by phrases (such as "in order to", "as a result") or by the use of subordinate phrases and clauses.

Imagery, that is, words and phrases describing what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched, can have a significant impact in a story. Figures of speech, such as similes, metaphors, personification, can enrich a story, subtly revealing information about characters and themes. Simile is an explicit comparison between two

different things, actions, or feelings, using the words "as" or "like". Metaphor is an implicit comparison, that is to say, referring to one thing, idea, or action by a word or expression normally denoting another thing, idea, or action, so as to suggest some common quality shared by the two. Personification endows inanimate objects or abstract ideas with life or with human characteristics. Other figures of speech can also enrich works of fiction. Allusions mean references to familiar historical or literary personages or events.

6. Symbol and Allegory

In the simplest sense, anything that stands for or represents something else beyond it, usually an idea conventionally associated with it. Objects like flags and crosses can function symbolically; and words are also symbols. In a word, a symbol is a person, object, action, place, or event that, in addition to its literal meaning, suggests a more complex meaning or range of meanings. There are two kinds of symbols: public and private. Public symbols are conventional, and are those that most people in a particular culture or community would recognize as meaning somethings fairly definite. For example, the cross, the American eagle, flags of countries, the color red (for "stop") and green (for "go"), and the skull and crossbones. Private symbols are unique to an individual or to a single work. Only from clues in the work itself can the symbolic value of the object be revealed. Symbols used in works of literature can enable writers to convey particular emotions or messages with a high degree of predictability. For example, spring can suggest rebirth and promise; autumn, declining years and powers; and summer, youth and beauty. Symbols can also enrich both the depiction of character and the story's theme.

Symbols aare most often associated with allegory. Allegory, a story or visual image with a second distinct meaning partially hidden behind its literal or visible meaning, has two levels of meaning, but the second meaning is to be read beneath and concurrent with the surface story and may well itself be an extended story. An allegory communicates doctrine, message, or moral principal by making it into a narrative in which the characters personify ideas, concepts, qualities, or other abstractions. Therefore, it is safe to say that an allegory is a story with two parallel and