

美国20世纪文学选读

Selected Readings

in

20th Century American Literature

—— 钱青 编 ——



外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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前 言

本书面向大学英语专业高年级学生及有一定英语基础的文学爱好者。目的是介绍美国文学的精粹，为理解、分析所选作家及其作品提供指导和帮助，提高读者的阅读水平和欣赏能力。丛书分为上、下两卷。上卷介绍了美国文学发展初期到19世纪末的美国文学；下卷介绍了20世纪的美国文学，侧重于小说和诗歌。本书共收入了26位美国作家的作品供读者欣赏，其中有七八位作家是当代的，一直写到20世纪后期。20世纪的美国文学，虽然只有200多年历史，已成为世界文学一个重要支流。美国共有12位诺贝尔文学奖获得者。这从一个侧面可以看出美国文学的生命力以及在世界上的地位。

20世纪的美国社会，对文学的影响是深刻的，尽管不一定是直接的。20世纪初，第一次世界大战结束时，美国已成为世界大国之一。这时的美国工业发展迅速，经济欣欣向荣，但经过了大战的青年思想空虚，精神烦恼，失去了理想，只追求物质生活。三十年代，美国经历了长达十年、历史上最严重一次经济危机，直到第二次世界大战爆发后才重新刺激美国经济的发展。战后的美国已成为世界上最强大的国家，五十年代是冷战年代，激进的作家无一不遭到迫害。六七十年代的美国是大动荡、大变革的年代——越南战争、美国黑人民权运动、美国妇女解放运动等此起彼伏。随着人民觉悟的提高和地位的改善，社会上掀起并繁荣了美国多元化文学的潮流（例如美国黑人文学、美国本土文学、美国亚裔文学）。这是20世纪美国文学的主要背景。

本书内容包括：作家生平简介、作品选篇、作品注释和讨论题四部分。选读以文学作品为中心；作家简介包括对于作家生平、创作生涯和文学地位的简略介绍；注释为读者理解作品中的难点提供帮助；讨论题以有助于读者理解作品的主题思想或语言风格为目的而设，并希望帮助读者在阅读作品之后进行更深层次的思考。为了提高读者的英语阅读水平，作者生平、作品注释和讨论题全部使用英语。

本书肯定有诸多欠完善之处，衷心希望读者批评指正。

钱 青

2009年10月于北京

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Edith Wharton

(1862–1937)

Edith Jones was born into a wealthy, upper-class family in New York City and was tutored at home as the only career for a girl of her class was marriage. In 1885 she married Edward Wharton from a similar background. Theirs was not a happy marriage but because of rigid social conventions, Edith Wharton did not sue for divorce till 1913. She began writing partly as a cure for her depression. From the 1890s till her death in 1937, she published over fifty novels, novellas, collections of short stories, poetry, an autobiography and various other works. Among her best-known works are *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), *Summer* (1917) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920), for which she received the Pulitzer Prize.

In her fiction, Wharton mainly deals with social relations between men and women and between women. These do not exist in a vacuum, however. She writes poignant dramas of individuals trapped in the conventions of patriarchal society who become their victims. In *The House of Mirth*, for instance, the central character, Lily Bart, who has good family but no money, cannot afford to marry the man she loves, yet cannot muster enough enthusiasm to capture a husband who has money but whom she doesn't love. As a result, she is doomed to poverty and an early death. Wharton sets a number of her novels in late nineteenth-century New York, dominated by its wealthy old families of Dutch and English origin. She vividly depicts the self-interest, materialism and conspicuous consumption of the upper classes in the "Gilded Age." In the background, we also see the conflicts between the *nouveau-riche*, who make money quickly, often through speculation, and the old aristocracy. There are not only conflicts but also compromises and reconciliation as the former buy their way into upper-class society by fair means or foul and are gradually assimilated. This is memorably portrayed in the *The House of Mirth*, at the beginning of which the upstart, Rosedale, is trying to recruit the help of Lily and her cousin to enter the conservative upper-class New York society. By the end, he has already bought his way in by means of gifts and tips about the stock market.

An example of her protagonist's hopeless struggle with social environment can be seen in *Ethan Frome*. Ethan is married to a dull, sickly woman much older than himself. His life is as bleak as the winters on his New England farm.

The arrival of his wife's distant cousin, a pretty young girl, changes everything. They fall in love with each other. But since divorce or elopement is practically impossible, they make a suicide pact. Instead of dying outright, however, they are only crippled and are doomed to spend the rest of their lives nursed by the wife. The beautiful young girl is now an ugly, bitter, complaining old woman and Ethan a disillusioned cynic.

"Roman Fever" is one of Wharton's most frequently anthologized short stories and a good illustration of her careful craftsmanship, sharp observation, use of irony and delineation of character through dialogue and action. In the story, the rivalry of two women for the love of the same man leads one of them to do something despicable to get the other out of the way. She believes she has succeeded — until a day twenty-five years later, when she learns that her plot to get rid of her rival had the opposite result of bringing her rival and her lover together...Wharton's profound understanding of social forces and human character, her deep sympathy for frustrated and oppressed women in patriarchal society, combined with her brilliant craftsmanship, have brought her recognition as one of America's most outstanding writers of the early twentieth century.

Roman Fever

I

From the table at which they had been lunching two American ladies of ripe but well-cared-for middle age moved across the lofty terrace of the Roman restaurant and, leaning on its parapet, looked first at each other, and then down on the outspread glories of the Palatine and the Forum,¹ with the same expression of vague but benevolent approval.

As they leaned there a girlish voice echoed up gaily from the stairs leading to the court below. "Well, come along, then," it cried, not to them but to an invisible companion, "and let's leave the young things to their knitting"; and a voice as fresh laughed back: "Oh, look here, Babs, not actually *knitting*—" "Well, I mean figuratively," rejoined the first. "After all, we haven't left our poor parents much else to do..." and at that point the turn of the stairs engulfed the dialogue.

The two ladies looked at each other again, this time with a tinge of smiling embarrassment, and the smaller and paler one shook her head and coloured slightly.

"Barbara!" she murmured, sending an unheard rebuke after the mocking voice in the stairway.

The other lady, who was fuller, and higher in colour, with a small determined nose supported by vigorous black eyebrows, gave a good-humoured laugh. "That's what our daughters think of us!"

Her companion replied by a deprecating gesture. "Not of us individually. We must remember that. It's just the collective modern idea of Mothers. And you see—" Half guiltily she drew from her handsomely mounted black hand-bag a twist of crimson silk run through by two fine knitting needles. "One never knows,"

1. Palatine, chief of the seven Roman hills, site of ancient Roman palaces; Forum, ruins of imperial Rome's social and political center.

she murmured. "The new system has certainly given us a good deal of time to kill; and sometimes I get tired just looking—even at this." Her gesture was now addressed to the stupendous scene at their feet.

The dark lady laughed again, and they both relapsed upon the view, contemplating it in silence, with a sort of diffused serenity which might have been borrowed from the spring effulgence of the Roman skies. The luncheon-hour was long past, and the two had their end of the vast terrace to themselves. At its opposite extremity a few groups, detained by a lingering look at the outspread city, were gathering up guide-books and fumbling for tips. The last of them scattered, and the two ladies were alone on the air-washed height.

"Well, I don't see why we shouldn't just stay here," said Mrs. Slade, the lady of the high colour and energetic brows. Two derelict basket-chairs stood near, and she pushed them into the angle of the parapet, and settled herself in one, her gaze upon the Palatine. "After all, it's still the most beautiful view in the world."

"It always will be, to me," assented her friend Mrs. Ansley, with so slight a stress on the "me" that Mrs. Slade, though she noticed it, wondered if it were not merely accidental, like the random underlinings of old-fashioned letter-writers.

"Grace Ansley was always old-fashioned," she thought; and added aloud, with a retrospective smile: "It's a view we've both been familiar with for a good many years. When we first met here we were younger than our girls are now. You remember?"

"Oh, yes, I remember," murmured Mrs. Ansley, with the same undefinable stress.— "There's that head-waiter wondering," she interpolated. She was evidently far less sure than her companion of herself and of her rights in the world.

"I'll cure him of wondering," said Mrs. Slade, stretching her hand toward a bag as discreetly opulent-looking as Mrs. Ansley's. Signing to the head-waiter, she explained that she and her friend were old lovers of Rome, and would like to spend the end of the afternoon looking down on the view—that is, if it did not disturb

the service? The head-waiter, bowing over her gratuity, assured her that the ladies were most welcome, and would be still more so if they would condescend to remain for dinner. A full-moon night, they would remember...

Mrs. Slade's black brows drew together, as though references to the moon were out-of-place and even unwelcome. But she smiled away her frown as the head-waiter retreated. "Well, why not? We might do worse. There's no knowing, I suppose, when the girls will be back. Do you even know back from *where*? I don't!"

Mrs. Ansley again coloured slightly. "I think those young Italian aviators we met at the Embassy invited them to fly to Tarquinia¹ for tea. I suppose they'll want to wait and fly back by moonlight."

"Moonlight—moonlight! What a part it still plays. Do you suppose they're as sentimental as we were?"

"I've come to the conclusion that I don't in the least know what they are," said Mrs. Ansley. "And perhaps we didn't know much more about each other."

"No; perhaps we didn't."

Her friend gave her a shy glance. "I never should have supposed you were sentimental, Alida."

"Well, perhaps I wasn't." Mrs. Slade drew her lids together in retrospect; and for a few moments the two ladies, who had been intimate since childhood, reflected how little they knew each other. Each one, of course, had a label ready to attach to the other's name; Mrs. Delphin Slade, for instance, would have told herself, or any one who asked her, that Mrs. Horace Ansley, twenty-five years ago, had been exquisitely lovely—no, you wouldn't believe it, would you? ... though, of course, still charming, distinguished... Well, as a girl she had been exquisite; far more beautiful than her daughter Barbara, though certainly Babs, according to the new standards at any rate, was more effective—had more *edge*,² as they say. Funny where she got it, with those two nullities as

1. Picturesque town in central Italy, dating back to the ancient Etruscans, containing medieval ruins and churches.

2. Keen, sharp.

parents. Yes; Horace Ansley was—well, just the duplicate of his wife. Museum specimens of old New York. Good-looking, irreproachable, exemplary. Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley had lived opposite each other—actually as well as figuratively—for years. When the drawing-room curtains in No. 20 East 73rd Street were renewed. No. 23, across the way, was always aware of it. And of all the movings, buyings, travels, anniversaries, illnesses—the tame chronicle of an estimable pair. Little of it escaped Mrs. Slade. But she had grown bored with it by the time her husband made his big *coup* in Wall Street, and when they bought in upper Park Avenue had already begun to think: “I’d rather live opposite a speak-easy¹ for a change; at least one might see it raided.” The idea of seeing Grace raided was so amusing that (before the move) she launched it at a woman’s lunch. It made a hit, and went the rounds—she sometimes wondered if it had crossed the street, and reached Mrs. Ansley. She hoped not, but didn’t much mind. Those were the days when respectability was at a discount, and it did the irreproachable no harm to laugh at them a little.

A few years later, and not many months apart, both ladies lost their husbands. There was an appropriate exchange of wreaths and condolences, and a brief renewal of intimacy in the half-shadow of their mourning; and now, after another interval, they had run across each other in Rome, at the same hotel, each of them the modest appendage of a salient daughter. The similarity of their lot had again drawn them together, lending itself to mild jokes, and the mutual confession that, if in old days it must have been tiring to “keep up” with daughters, it was now, at times, a little dull not to.

No doubt, Mrs. Slade reflected, she felt her unemployment more than poor Grace ever would. It was a big drop from being the wife of Delphin Slade to being his widow. She had always regarded herself (with a certain conjugal pride) as his equal in social gifts, as contributing her full share to the making of the

1. Place selling illegal liquor.

exceptional couple they were: but the difference after his death was irremediable. As the wife of the famous corporation lawyer, always with an international case or two on hand, every day brought its exciting and unexpected obligation: the impromptu entertaining of eminent colleagues from abroad, the hurried dashes on legal business to London, Paris or Rome, where the entertaining was so handsomely reciprocated; the amusement of hearing in her wake: "What, that handsome woman with the good clothes and the eyes is Mrs. Slade—the Slade's wife? Really? Generally the wives of celebrities are such frumps."

Yes; being *the* Slade's widow was a dullish business after that. In living up to such a husband all her faculties had been engaged; now she had only her daughter to live up to, for the son who seemed to have inherited his father's gifts had died suddenly in boyhood. She had fought through that agony because her husband was there, to be helped and to help; now, after the father's death, the thought of the boy had become unbearable. There was nothing left but to mother her daughter; and dear Jenny was such a perfect daughter that she needed no excessive mothering. "Now with Babs Ansley I don't know that I *should* be so quiet," Mrs. Slade sometimes half-enviously reflected; but Jenny, who was younger than her brilliant friend, was that rare accident, an extremely pretty girl who somehow made youth and prettiness seem as safe as their absence. It was all perplexing—and to Mrs. Slade a little boring. She wished that Jenny would fall in love—with the wrong man, even; that she might have to be watched, out-manoeuvred, rescued. And instead, it was Jenny who watched her mother, kept her out of draughts, made sure that she had taken her tonic...

Mrs. Ansley was much less articulate than her friend, and her mental portrait of Mrs. Slade was slighter, and drawn with fainter touches. "Alida Slade's awfully brilliant; but not as brilliant as she thinks," would have summed it up; though she would have added, for the enlightenment of strangers, that Mrs. Slade had been an extremely dashing girl; much more so than her daughter, who was pretty, of course, and clever in a way, but had none of

her mother's—well, “vividness”, some one had once called it. Mrs. Ansley would take up current words like this, and cite them in quotation marks, as unheard-of audacities. No; Jenny was not like her mother. Sometimes Mrs. Ansley thought Alida Slade was disappointed; on the whole she had had a sad life. Full of failures and mistakes; Mrs. Ansley had always been rather sorry for her...

So these two ladies visualized each other, each through the wrong end of her little telescope.

II

For a long time they continued to sit side by side without speaking. It seemed as though, to both, there was a relief in laying down their somewhat futile activities in the presence of the vast *Memento Mori*¹ which faced them. Mrs. Slade sat quite still, her eyes fixed on the golden slope of the Palace of the Cæsars, and after a while Mrs. Ansley ceased to fidget with her bag, and she too sank into meditation. Like many intimate friends, the two ladies had never before had occasion to be silent together, and Mrs. Ansley was slightly embarrassed by what seemed, after so many years, a new stage in their intimacy, and one with which she did not yet know how to deal.

Suddenly the air was full of that deep clangour of bells which periodically covers Rome with a roof of silver. Mrs. Slade glanced at her wrist-watch. “Five o’clock already,” she said, as though surprised.

Mrs. Ansley suggested interrogatively: “There’s bridge at the Embassy at five.” For a long time Mrs. Slade did not answer. She appeared to be lost in contemplation, and Mrs. Ansley thought the remark had escaped her. But after a while she said, as if speaking out of a dream: “Bridge, did you say? Not unless you want to... But I don’t think I will, you know.”

“Oh, no,” Mrs. Ansley hastened to assure her. “I don’t care to

1. Reminder of death (Latin).

at all. It's so lovely here; and so full of old memories, as you say." She settled herself in her chair, and almost furtively drew forth her knitting. Mrs. Slade took sideway note of this activity, but her own beautifully cared-for hands remained motionless on her knee.

"I was just thinking," she said slowly, "what different things Rome stands for to each generation of travellers. To our grandmothers, Roman fever;¹ to our mothers, sentimental dangers—how we used to be guarded!—to our daughters, no more dangers than the middle of Main Street. They don't know it—but how much they're missing!"

The long golden light was beginning to pale, and Mrs. Ansley lifted her knitting a little closer to her eyes. "Yes; how we were guarded!"

"I always used to think," Mrs. Slade continued, "that our mothers had a much more difficult job than our grandmothers. When Roman fever stalked the streets it must have been comparatively easy to gather in the girls at the danger hour; but when you and I were young, with such beauty calling us, and the spice of disobedience thrown in, and no worse risk than catching cold during the cool hour after sunset, the mothers used to be put to it to keep us in—didn't they?"

She turned again toward Mrs. Ansley, but the latter had reached a delicate point in her knitting. "One, two, three—slip two; yes, they must have been," she assented, without looking up.

Mrs. Slade's eyes rested on her with a deepened attention. "She can knit—in the face of *this*! How like her..."

Mrs. Slade leaned back, brooding, her eyes ranging from the ruins which faced her to the long green hollow of the Forum, the fading glow of the church fronts beyond it, and the outlying immensity of the Colosseum.² Suddenly she thought: "It's all very well to say that our girls have done away with sentiment and moonlight. But if Babs Ansley isn't out to catch that young

1. Malaria, prevalent in Rome.

2. Ancient Roman amphitheater.