

全国高等院校英语本科专业规划教材

英美文学: 阅读与批评

English and American Literature:
Reading and Criticism

张小平 / 编著



苏州大学出版社
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前 言

文学是一种社会生活方式。研究表明,在人类步入文明时代之前,文学就以号子、歌唱、神话原始形式成为社会生活的一部分。没有文学润泽的人生是干涸的,没有文学滋养的社会则是不可思议的。文学是一面镜子,它映照着社会的方方面面,以其涉及面之广博、思想和知识之深奥、观察之细腻与多维、语言之优美与形象为人们提供了浏览、阅读、把玩、品味、赏析、研究多层次的需求,因此,马克思称它是“百科全书”。阅读文学作品,人的心灵便多了一双想象的翅膀,人生五味,世间百态,万千感受,尽在其中。游弋在或庄重典雅,或诙谐幽默,或寓意丰厚,或辛辣尖刻,或俏皮夸张,或亦庄亦谐的文学作品中,感受文学作品的思想美、语言美、形象美、气韵美、意境美,既提高文学素养,陶冶情操,又增长知识,锻炼思维。研读英美文学不仅具有上述收获,更可以了解英美社会的风土人情,增强对英语语言的感悟。

当前,我国高等院校英语专业和一些非英语专业都开设有相关的英美文学阅读和文学欣赏课程,可供选择的英美文学教材和读物种类繁多,有文学史、文学选读或者二者合一的文学史及文学选读,它们各具特点,各有不同侧重点。但是,根据作者多年的教学经验来看,读史也好,选读作品也罢,没有一定的与之相应的文学批评知识,学生很难把握文学作品的实质,更难领略经典作品带给人们的真、善、美的启迪和熏陶。本书旨在引领读者用文学批评的基本方法,结合英美文学中的精华篇章,学会如何研读英美文学宝库中的经典文学作品。本书力图以规范的语言、浅显流畅的文句,向读者介绍英语文学的主要形式——诗歌、小说和戏剧的基本要素及其发展的基本脉络,在此基础上,遴选了英美文学史上近 60 位重要作家的多部经典作品,旨在帮助读者加深对文学本质、文学流派和文学风格的了解和认识,力求选材上具有新意。

诗歌是文学的最早形式,在中国有世界最早的诗歌集《诗经》以及《萨格尔夫》、《江格尔》、《布洛陀》、《苗族古歌》等史诗;在两河流域有《吉尔伽美什》;在印度有《摩诃婆罗多》和《罗摩衍那》;在欧洲有《荷马史诗》;而英国文学的源头则是公元 8 世纪的史诗《贝尔沃夫》。因此,本书作者有意识地把诗歌放在第一部分。小说从它诞生伊始,便吸引了广大的读者群,并逐渐成为文学的主体,拥有最重量级的地位,同时也成为电影编剧的主要脚本,

因此,本书作者把它放在第二部分,并占有较多篇幅。戏剧作为不可忽视的文学艺术形式,成为本书第三部分的探讨内容。这样的结构安排考虑到了历史和逻辑的统一,也考虑到了突出重要部分的内容,希望起到纲领分明、量体裁衣的效果。

本书可作为高校英语专业和非英语专业学生的英美文学课程的教学用书和参考书,可供广大英语教师、英美文学爱好者以及具有一定英语水平的自学者选用作为阅读材料,也为英语专业毕业生写作英语论文时提供格式、术语的参考。全书分为三个部分,共十七章,融文学批评与文学名作欣赏为一体,在文学批评讲解的同时,贯穿了文学作品的欣赏和研究。文学批评部分贯穿于文学作品的赏析中,并在每一章后面附有文学批评的理论“小贴士”。文学作品部分除了经典选文外,还精心设计了相关的阅读思考题。此外,本书还附有作家的生平及创作介绍、文学论文写作时的文献格式和方法、文学术语词汇表、文学批评基本理论。如果作为教材,文学鉴赏理论部分可由教师把握,作家介绍则供学生参考;课堂教学应以启发式和讨论式的教学方法为主,师生互动,注重培养学生的理性思辨能力和理解分析能力,让学生在获得理论指导的同时又能得到文本分析的实践,有效地提高学生的文学欣赏水平和英文写作的能力。

本书在编写过程中得到了扬州大学的俞洪亮教授、秦旭教授、于建华教授、王金铨教授、周领顺教授、王莎烈教授等有关领导与老师的大力支持,趁此书附梓之机,谨向他们表示由衷的感谢。

美国特拉华大学英语系主任 Stephen Bernhardt 教授在百忙之中审阅了本书的初稿,并提出了许多进一步修改的宝贵意见;美国诺维奇大学第一副校长黄桂友教授、厦门大学杨仁敬教授和詹树魁教授、吉林大学胡铁生教授、苏州大学贾冠杰教授一直关心和支持本书的撰写工作,他们提供了不少帮助;作者任教过的学生也对本书的编写提出了许多尽管稚嫩但有意义的修改意见。此书得以顺利出版,也凝聚了他们的劳作,作者在这里致以真诚的谢意。

本书在编写过程中参考了大量中外出版的文学批评理论、英美文学史和英美文学作品选读方面的书籍,注释和思考题部分也参照了一些有关的书籍,在参考文献部分均一一列出,在此向原作者深表感谢。

由于作者个人某些局限,书中讹误、缺点和疏漏之处在所难免,诚望专家和同行不吝赐教,以便再版时订正。

张小平

2015年春于扬州笃行楼

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Part One Poetry

Things that are true expressed in words that are beautiful.

—Dante

What is poetry? Pressed for an answer, Robert Frost made a classic reply: “Poetry is the kind of thing poets write.” In all likelihood, Frost was not trying merely to evade the question but to chide his questioners into thinking for himself. A trouble with definitions is that they may stop thinking. If Frost had said, “Poetry is a rhythmical composition of words expressing an attitude, designed to surprise and delight, and to arouse an emotional response”, the questioners might be content to learn the truth about poetry. In fact, he would have learned nothing, or not so much as he might learn by continuing to wonder, for Frost also made another try at a definition: “A poem is an idea caught in the act of dawning.”

The nature of poetry eludes simple definitions. In this respect it is rather like jazz. Asked after one of his concerts, “What is jazz?” Louis Armstrong replied, “Man, if you gotta ask, you’ll never know.” Definitions will be of little help at first if we are to know poetry and respond to it. We have to go to it, and are willing to see and hear. For this reason, you are asked in reading this book not to be in any hurry to decide what poetry is like, but instead to study poems and to let them grow in your mind. At the end of our discussions of poetry, the problem of definition will be taken up again.

Perhaps you already have friendship, or at least a fair acquaintance, with some of the great English-speaking poets of all time. What this part of the present book provides is an introduction to the study of poetry. It tries to help you look at a poem closely, to offer you a wider and more accurate vocabulary with which to express what poems say to you. It will suggest ways to judge for yourself the poems you read. It may set forth some poems new to you.

A frequent objection is that poetry ought not to be studied at all. In this view, a poem is either a series of gorgeous noises to be funneled through one ear and out the other without being allowed to trouble the mind, or an experience so holy that to analyze it in a classroom is as cruel and mechanical as dissecting a hummingbird. To the first view, it might be countered that a good poem has something to say that is well worth listening to. To the second view, it might be argued that poems are much less

perishable than hummingbirds, and luckily we can study them in flight. The risk of a poem's dying from observation is not nearly so great as the risk of not really seeing it at all. It is doubtful that any excellent poem has ever vanished from human memory because people have read it too closely.

Good poetry is something that readers can care about. In fact, an ancient persuasion of humankind is that the hearing of a poem, as well as the making of a poem, can be a religious act. Poetry, in speech and song, was part of classic Greek drama, which for the playwright, actor and spectator alike was a holy day ceremony. The Greeks' belief that a poet writes a poem only by supernatural assistance is clear from the invocations to the Muse that begins the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and from the opinion of Socrates (in Plato's *Ion*) that a poet has no powers of invention until divinely inspired. Among the ancient Celts, poets were regarded as magicians and priests, and whoever insulted one of them might expect to receive a curse in rime potent enough to afflict him with boils and to curdle the milk of his cows. Such identifications between the poet and the magician are less common these days, although we know that poetry is involved in the primitive white-magic of children, who bring themselves good luck in a game with the charm "Roll, roll, Tootsie-roll! /Roll the marble in the hole!" and who warn against a hex while jumping along a sidewalk: "Step on a crack, /Break your mother's back."

To read a poem, we have to be willing to offer it responses besides a logical understanding. Whether we attribute the effect of a poem to a divine spirit or to the reactions of our glands and cortexes, we have to take the reading of poetry seriously (not solemnly), if only because—as some of the poems in this book may demonstrate—few other efforts can repay us so generously, both in wisdom and in joy. If, as we hope you will do, you sometimes browse in the book for fun, you may be annoyed to see so many questions following the poems. Should you feel this way, try reading with a slip of paper to cover up the questions. You will then—if the Muse should inspire you—have paper in hand to write a poem.

1. Reading a Poem

How do you read a poem? The literal-minded might say, "Just let your eye light on it"; but there is more to poetry than meets the eye. What Shakespeare called "the mind's eye" also plays a part. Many a reader who has no trouble understanding and enjoying prose finds poetry difficult. This is to be expected. At first glance, a poem usually will make some sense and give some pleasure, but it may not yield everything at once. Sometimes it only hints at meaning still to come if we will keep after it. Poetry is

not to be galloped over like the daily news: A poem differs from most proses in that it is to be read slowly, carefully, and attentively. Not all poems are difficult, of course, and some can be understood and enjoyed on first seeing. But good poems yield more if read twice; and the best poems—after ten, twenty, or a hundred readings—still go on yielding.

Approaching a thing written in lines and surrounded with white space, we need not expect it to be a poem just because it is verse. (Any composition in lines of more or less regular rhythm, usually ending in rimes, is verse.) Here, for instance, is a specimen of verse that few will call poetry:

*Thirty days hath September,
April, June, and November;
All the rest have thirty-one
Excepting February alone,
To which we twenty-eight assign
Till leap year makes it twenty-nine.*

To a higher degree than that classic memory-tickler, poetry appeals to the mind and arouses feelings. Poetry may state facts, and more important, it makes imaginative statements that we may value even if its facts are incorrect. Coleridge's error in placing a star within the horns of the crescent moon in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" does not stop the passage from being good poetry, though it is faulty astronomy. According to the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, poetry is "to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning". There are other elements in a poem besides plain prose sense: sounds, images, rhythms, and figures of speech. These may strike us and please us even before we ask, "But what does it all mean?"

This is a truth not readily grasped by anyone who regards a poem as a kind of puzzle written in secret code with a message slyly concealed. The effect of a poem (one's whole mental and emotional response to it) consists in much more than simply a message. By its musical qualities, by its suggestions, it can work on the readers' unconsciousness. T. S. Eliot put it well when he said in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* that the prose sense of a poem is chiefly useful in keeping the reader's mind "diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him". Eliot went on to liken the meaning of a poem to the bit of meat a burglar brings along to throw to the family dog. What is the work of a poem? It is to touch us, to stir us, to make us glad, and possibly even to tell us something.

How to set about reading a poem? Here are a few suggestions.

To begin with, read the poem once straight through, with no particular expectations; read open-mindedly. Let yourself experience whatever you find, without worrying about the large general and important ideas the poem contains (if indeed it contains any). Don't dwell on a troublesome word or difficult passage—just push on. Some of the difficulties may seem smaller when you read the poem for a second time; at least, they will have become parts of a whole for you.

On the second reading, read for the exact sense of all the words; if there are words you don't understand, look them up in a dictionary. Dwell on any difficult parts as long as you need to.

If you read the poem silently to yourself, sound its words in your mind. (This is a technique that will get you nowhere in a speed-reading course, but it may help the poem to do its work on you.) Better still, read the poem aloud, or hear someone else read it. You may discover meanings you did not perceive in it before. Even if you are no actor, to decide how to speak a poem can be an excellent method of getting to understand it. Some poems, like bells, seem heavy till heard. Listen while reading the following lines from Alexander Pope's *Dunciad*. Attacking the minor poet James Ralph, who had sung the praises of a mistress named Cynthia, Pope makes the Goddess of Dullness exclaim: "Silence, ye wolves! while Ralph to Cynthia howls, / And makes night hideous—answer him, ye owls!" When ye *owls* slide together and become *yowls*, poor Ralph's serenade is turned into the nightly outcry of a cat.

Try to paraphrase the poem as a whole, or perhaps just the more difficult lines. In paraphrasing, we put into our own words what we understand the poem to say, restating ideas that seem essential, coming out and stating what the poem may only suggest. This may sound like a heartless thing to do to a poem, but good poems can stand it. In fact, to compare a poem to its paraphrase is a good way to see the distance between poetry and prose. In making a paraphrase, we generally work through a poem or a passage line by line. The statement that results may take as many words as the original, if not more. A paraphrase, then, is ampler than a summary, a brief condensation of gist, main idea, or story.

Here is a poem worth considering line by line. The poet writes of an island in a lake in the west of Ireland, in a region where he spent many summers as a boy.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree (1892)

William Butler Yeats

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,

And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Though relatively simple, this poem is far from simple-minded. We need to absorb it slowly and thoughtfully. At the start, for most of us, it raises problems: What are *wattles*, from which the speaker's dream-cabin is to be made? We might guess, but in this case it will help to consult a dictionary: They are "poles interwoven with sticks or branches, formerly used in building as frameworks to support walls or roofs". Evidently, this getaway house will be built in an old-fashioned way: It won't be a prefabricated log cabin or A-frame house, nothing modern or citified. The phrase *bee-loud glade* certainly is not commonplace language of the sort we find on a cornflakes package, but right away, we can understand it, at least partially: It is a place loud with bees. What is a *glade*? Experience might tell us that it is an open space in woods, but if that word stops us, we can look it up. The *linnet* is a creature with wings—a songbird of the finch family, although we do not see it frequently in our life. But even if we do not make a special trip to the dictionary to find *linnet*, we probably recognize that the word means "bird", and the line makes sense to us.

A paraphrase of the whole poem might go something like this: "I'm going to get up now, go to Innisfree, build a cabin, plant beans, keep bees, and live peacefully by myself amid nature and beautiful light. I want to, because I can not forget the sound of that lake water. When I'm in the city, a gray and dingy place, I seem to hear it deep inside me."

These dull remarks, roughly faithful to what Yeats is saying, seem a long way from poetry. Nevertheless, they make certain things clear. For one, they spell out what the poet merely hints at in his choice of the word *gray*: that he finds the city dull and depressing. He stresses the word; instead of saying *gray pavements*, in the usual word order, he turns the phrase around and makes *gray* stand at the end of the line, where it rhymes with *day* and so takes extra emphasis. The grayness of the city therefore seems important to the poem, and the paraphrase tries to make its meaning obvious.

Whenever you paraphrase, you stick your neck out. You affirm what the poem gives you to understand. And making a paraphrase can help you see the central thought of the poem, its theme. Theme is not the same as subject, the main topic, whatever the poem is “about”. Not all poems clearly assert a proposition, but many do; some even declare their themes in their opening lines. In Yeats’ poem, the subject is the lake isle of Innisfree, or a wish to retreat to it. But the theme is, “I yearn for an ideal place where I will find perfect peace and happiness.” Themes can be stated variously, depending on what you believe most matters in the poem. Taking a different view of the poem, placing more weight on the speaker’s wish to escape the city, you might instead state the theme: “This city is getting me down—I want to get back to nature.” But after taking a second look at that statement, you might want to sharpen it. After all, this Innisfree seems a special, particular place, where the natural world means more to the poet than just any old trees and birds he might see in a park. Perhaps a stronger statement of theme, one closer to what matters most in the poem, might be: “I want to quit the city for my heaven on earth.” That, of course, is saying in an obvious way what Yeats says more subtly, more memorably.

A paraphrase, of course, never tells all that a poem contains; nor will every reader agree that a particular paraphrase is accurate. We all make our own interpretations; and sometimes the total meaning of a poem evades even the poet who wrote it. Asked to explain his difficult *Sordello*, Robert Browning replied that when he had written the poem only God and he knew what it meant. Still, to analyze a poem as if we could be certain of its meaning is, in general, more fruitful than to proceed as if no certainty could ever be had. The latter approach is likely to end in complete subjectivity: the attitude of the reader who says, “Yeats’s ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ is really about the lost island of Atlantis. It is, because I think it is. How can you prove me wrong?” Interpretations can not be proven “wrong”. A more fruitful question might be, “What can we understand from the poem’s very words?”

All of us bring personal associations to the poems we read. “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” might give you special pleasure if you have ever vacationed on a small island or on the shore of a lake. Such associations are inevitable, even to be welcomed, as long as they don’t interfere with our reading the words on the page. We need to distinguish irrelevant responses from those the poem calls for. The reader who can not understand “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” because she is afraid of bees is not reading a poem by Yeats, but one of her own inventions.

Now and again we meet a poem—perhaps startling and memorable—into which the method of paraphrase won’t take us far. Some portion of any deep poem resists explanation, but certain poems resist it almost entirely. Many poems of religious mystics

seem closer to dream than waking. So do poems that purport to record drug experiences, such as Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", as well as poems that embody some private system of beliefs, such as Blake's "The Sick Rose", or the same poet's lines from *Jerusalem*, "For a Tear is an Intellectual thing,/And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King." So do nonsense poems, translations of primitive folk songs, and surreal poems. ①

Such poetry may move us and give pleasure (although not, perhaps, the pleasure of mental understanding). We do it no harm by trying to paraphrase it, though we may fail. Whether logically clear or strangely opaque, good poems appeal to the intelligence and do not shrink from it.

So far, we have taken for granted that poetry differs from prose; yet all our strategies for reading poetry—plowing straight on through and then going back, isolating difficulties, trying to paraphrase, reading aloud, using a dictionary—are no different from those we might employ in unraveling a complicated piece of prose. Poetry, after all, is similar to prose in most respects. At the very least, it is written in the same language. Like prose, poetry shares knowledge with us. It tells us, for instance, of a beautiful island in Lake Gill, County Sligo, Ireland, of how one man feels toward it. Maybe the poet knows no more about Innisfree than a writer of a travel guidebook knows. And yet Yeats' poem indicates a kind of knowledge that tourist guidebooks do not ordinarily reveal: That the human heart can yearn for peace and happiness that the lake isle of Innisfree with its "low sounds by the shore" can echo and reecho in memory forever.

Lyric Poetry

Originally, as its Greek name suggests, a **lyric** was a poem sung to the music of a lyre. This earlier meaning—a poem made for singing—is still current today, when we use lyrics to mean the words of a popular song. But the kind of printed poem we now call a lyric is usually something else, for over the past five hundred years, the nature of lyric poetry has changed greatly. Ever since the rise of the printing press in the 15th century, poets have written less often for singers, more often for readers. In general, this tendency has made lyric poems contain less word-music and more thought—and perhaps more complicated feelings.

① The French poet Andre Breton (founder of Surrealism, a movement in art and writing) declared that a higher reality exists, which to mortal eyes looks absurd. To mirror that reality, surrealist poets are fond of bizarre and dreamlike objects such as soluble fish and white-haired revolvers.

Here is a rough definition of lyric as it is written today: a short poem expressing the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker. Often a poet will write a lyric in the first person (e. g. “I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree”), but not always. Instead, a lyric might describe an object or recall an experience without the speaker’s ever bringing himself or herself into it.

Perhaps some people still expect a lyric to be an outburst of feeling, somewhat resembling a song, at least containing musical elements such as rime, rhythm, or sound effects. Such expectations are fulfilled in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, that impassioned lyric full of language rich in sound (as you will hear if you’ll read it aloud). In practice, though, many contemporary poets write short poems in which they voice opinions or complicated feelings—poems that no reader would dream of singing. Most people would call such poems lyrics, too.

But in the sense in which we use it, lyric will usually apply to a kind of poem you can easily recognize. Here, for instance, is a lyric.

A Red, Red Rose (1796)

Robert Burns

O my luv’e’s^① like a red, red rose,
That’s newly sprung in June;
O my luv’e’s like the melodie,
That’s sweetly played in tune^②.

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
So deep in luv’e am I;
And I will luv’e thee still, my dear,
Till a’^③ the seas gang dry.

Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi’^④ the sun;
And I will luv’e thee still, my dear,
While the sands o’ life shall run.

And fare thee weel^⑤, my only luv’e,

① luv’e: love, here referring to the young man’s sweetheart

② in tune: harmoniously

③ a’: all

④ wi’: with

⑤ fare thee weel: farewell to you