

英语

文学欣赏

Insights (II)

主编 周芳



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前

言

本书的编写主旨是让学生在欣赏文学作品、了解文学知识的同时，能够进行感性和理性的思维训练并体味思维的快乐；让学生在文学作品的启发下思考人生的主题，开启人生的智慧。本书的编排以文学主题为线索，以便读者直接面对文学作品，欣赏咀嚼文学作品，避开文学史实对文学欣赏的干扰。

近几年出版的英语文学教材、文学选读很多，本书尝试从以下方面有所突破：(1) 大部分文学教材、文学选读等侧重选择经典作品，对新人新作选入较少。本书除了选编传统意义上的经典作品外，也选编了一些优秀的新人作品，甚至包括歌词等一般文学教材和文学选读鲜为收录的作品。其目的是打破学生可能有的迷信经典心理，打破狭隘的文学界限，促使学生接受广泛意义上的文学作品，从而使文学走向更广泛的读者群。(2) 本书所选的作品以英美作者的作品为主，也兼选了其他国家、语种的翻译作品，如前苏联、德国、瑞典、尼日利亚、中国作家的作品等，以开阔学生的阅读视野，也让学生在阅读文学作品时了解不同的文化背景，并可在横向比较中引发较为深入的思考。(3) 本书贯穿了中山大学区銈教授提出的文学本土意识。本书在作品选编和思考问题的设计中，始终考虑到读者的中国文化背景，有意选编了部分中国文学作品，并在思考问题中设计了不少有关中外作品、文化思想对比的问题，让学生在阅读和思考作品时立足于本土文化，同时也从异文化的角度对本土文化进行批判性的思考。(4) 本书选编文学作品的同时附有详尽的文学知识注解，每篇作品后附有大量由浅入深的思考问题，让本书既便于教也便于自学。(5) 本书每单元附有精选的与本单元主题相关的名画，可拓宽学生的视野，也可引导学生借助不同的艺术形式对同一主题进行思考。

本书包括介绍和以文学主题划分的5个单元。它们分别是：第一单元：自我认知 (Identity)；第二单元：心理历程 (Spiritual Growth)；第三单元：爱 (Love)；第四单元：家庭 (Family)；第五单元：人与社会 (Man and Society)。其中每单元包括：文学作品、作者简介、注解、文学知识点、思考问题、推荐书目、推荐电影和插图，有的单元带有附录。

本书适合大学本科英语或非英语专业二、三年级学生使用，也可作为英语文学爱好者的自学教材。

本书由广东外语外贸大学英语教育学院的部分教师编写而成，以主题为线索的编排思路由 Quinn Nicholson 提出并形成。参加本书编写的人员有：Quinn Nicholson、张忆、栗萍、周芳、葛静萍和陈静。本书的编写得到了广东外语外贸大学英语教育学院前任书记李海丽、前任院长霍海洪、现任院长周富强和副院长吴霞辉的大力支持，本人在这里代表本书的全体编写人员向他们致以最衷心的感谢！

编者

2007年10月于广州白云山下

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Introduction

What Is Literature and How Do We Read Literature

In the broad sense, literature includes anything that is written down. A story, a letter, a song, a document, a survey, even a math problem can be called literature. But usually, people tend to use literature in a narrower sense of the word. We tend to exclude practical writings from the sphere of literature. A letter, a document, or a survey will not become literature unless they are so well written that some aesthetic value is acquired. A math problem is less likely to become literature unless it is used by some writer in a postmodern writing experiment. A song is closer to literature in the strict sense, but again, only the really good ones are usually considered to be real literature.

It seems that it is form that makes literature. Literature in the narrow sense possesses a kind of form. It is partly the literary form that helps create aesthetic value which differentiates literature from other kinds of writing which are read mainly for their practical value. Paradoxically, the traditional reading of literature focuses mainly on the meaning, the content of it, rather than the form. Plato, the Greek philosopher, rejects poets from entering his ideal republic, because poetry “feeds and waters the passions”, creating division and unsteadiness in the heart, or frivolous laughter, and producing the opposite of civic virtue. To Plato, Homer and Hesiod and the dramatists, instead of representing God as good and the source of all good, give us a flirtatious, quarrelsome, deceitful, jealous and revengeful crowd of deities. It is the content of poetry and drama that Plato most disapproves of.

But Plato’s student, Aristotle, marvels at the great power of tragedies on the same basis. To Aristotle, the hero of a tragedy must be a man of high rank or social position, and there must be a turn of fortune for the tragic hero (from prosperity to calamity). For when the audience watches a great man fall from prosperity to obscurity, he is shocked into thinking about his own fate, and the great power of catharsis^① is produced. Though in both Plato and Aristotle’s cases, the polluting power or the purifying power can’t be achieved without the help of a certain form, content is their major concern. This tradition continues even today. To read for meaning is still most people’s practice.

But for some people, the value of literature as well as other forms of art lies not in the content but in the defamiliarizing effect created by the form. The content is as common as sand. We may have heard or experienced the same story many times without giving a bit attention to it. But when the same story is presented in a certain form as literature, a certain distance or awareness is created. The story sounds familiar. But there is something new, something you feel uncertain

① catharsis: outlet for strong emotion (e.g. as given by the drama)

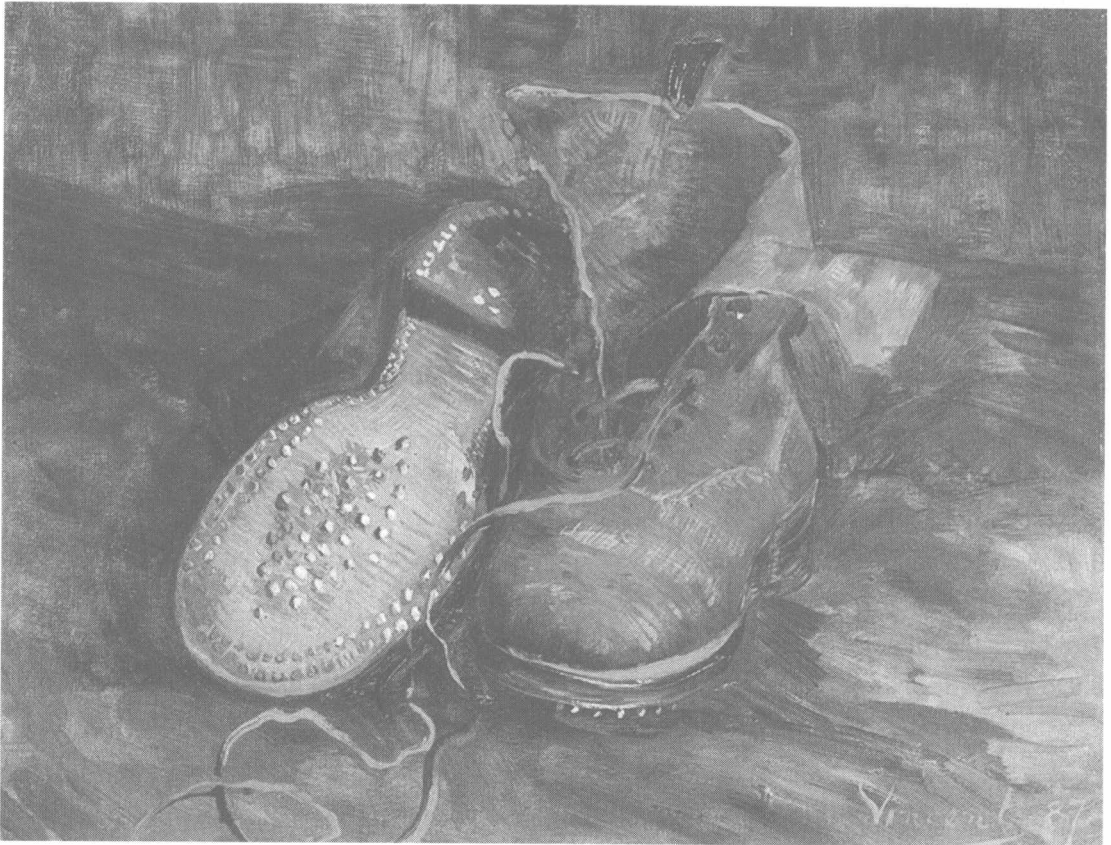
about. You are forced to look at the same story in a different way. The familiar story becomes unfamiliar. And you become more curious, more sensitive. The same magic happens to other forms of art. A pair of shoes is a familiar sight, so familiar that we often can't tell one from another. But when we look at it when it is presented in an oil painting by Vincent van Gogh (see bottom), we are shocked by it. We are shocked by the size, by the color, by the coarse skin, by the way the laces tangle. We are shocked at every detail of it and we wonder about its history, its master, what journey it has made. A pair of shoes is no longer a pair of shoes. It becomes an object of great interest, an object of contemplation, a source of imagination. It is the way it is presented, the form, that creates new meaning for it. The world is full of "things". But art creates meanings for them. In order to force people to "see" the things, an artist has to defamiliarize things so people feel they are looking at the things for the first time. Their eyes become curious, their senses sharp and their reaction strong. In this sense, art not only resurrects things but also resurrects human beings. Because of art, human beings are born again as babies. The world is totally new and awaits their discovery. Since people will soon get used to one art form and their eyes become blind again and their senses dull, art has to forever innovate. One art form is soon replaced by another to ensure the defamiliarizing effect.

So instead of reading literature for its content, we can read literature for its form. What form is applied? How does the form help defamiliarize things? What new meanings are created? What new perspective do I apply because of the defamiliarizing effect? Do I like this new perspective? Literary forms include elements like structure, narration, characterization, literary devices such as symbol and image, rhythm and rhyming, etc.

Still, literature can be approached from some critical stance. With this stance, people read literature to criticize how certain issues are approached in literature. Common issues for critical approaches are: gender problems, racial problems and social problems. For gender problems, people read to find out how women are presented in literature. Are the women characters relatively important or unimportant compared with the men characters? Are they in an obedient position? Are they distorted or simply stereotypes? Is the language of the writing male-oriented? Or critics read women writers to show how women writers write in a male-dominated society, or what perspective women take in looking at the world, or to discover what is specifically female in terms of language, feeling, or perspective. For racial problems, people ask similar questions: are certain races ignored or unjustly treated in literature? Is the image of a certain race distorted or stereotyped? Is the tone favorably biased or unfavorably biased towards a certain race? If we call reading for content emotional and didactic reading, and reading for form aesthetic reading, then this approach to literature can be called political reading. This approach is popular with people who are politically conscious or who are interested in certain issues.

When people read literature for its meaning, for its form or for a political purpose, they presuppose that the structure of the literary work is stable and thus what is revealed is relatively stable too. But what if the stability of the structure itself is to be doubted? Is there any definite

meaning then? This is the poststructuralist stance to a literary work. The poststructuralists think the structure of the literary work is not solid but a chain of signs with no sign dominating the other. When you start defining one sign, you have to use other signs which again need to be defined. You start a chain of infinite meanings. Like waves stirred by a stone, meaning is forever diffusing and expanding, evading your grasp. In this sense, the poststructuralists declare the “death of the author.” Since language and the so-called meaning produced by language refuses to be controlled, the author has no authority over his work anymore. Meaning becomes the interaction between the text and the reader for a short time being. The reader has to arbitrarily cut the flow of meaning for a moment and get a relatively stable meaning for a time being. So in a sense, it is both the author and the reader that create meaning together.



A Pair of Shoes

Vincent van Gogh, 1887.

APPENDIX 1

A Poem by e. e. cummings

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STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. How does the content of a piece of writing usually affect us?
2. What is the function of form in literature?
3. What are the common issues for political reading?
4. What is the basic assumption for the poststructuralist reading?

Interpreting

5. To what extent can form contribute to the meaning? Please illustrate with e. e. cummings's poem which is given above.
6. Do you believe that the meaning of a piece of literary work is free of the author's control? Why or why not?
7. What is the role of the reader in a piece of literary work?
8. Do you believe there is man's writing and woman's writing? Should there be man's writing and woman's writing? Why or why not?

Extending

9. In your understanding, what is the boundary between literary and common writing? Should there be any boundary?
10. How has literature affected you? Do you welcome this influence?

FURTHER READING

Hans Bertens, *LITERARY THEORY, The Basics*

MOVIE RECOMMENDED

Dead Poets Society (1989), directed by Peter Weir

ABOUT THE POETESS

Emily Dickinson (1830-1862) was an American poet who lived in Amherst, Massachusetts. She is known for her short, simple poems that often explore themes of nature, love, and death. Her poetry was not widely known during her lifetime, but it has since become one of the most popular and influential in American literature. Dickinson's work is characterized by its brevity and its use of metaphor and imagery. She often wrote about the inner world of the mind and the heart, and her poems have a timeless quality that resonates with readers today.

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! They'd banish us:
You – just – like – me –
I – like – to – see – how – you – like – to – feel –
The – poet – says – that – love – is – like – a – fire –
To – all – one's – name – on – the – instant – fame –
Is – an – adding – to – burn –

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Recalling: How does the speaker feel about "I'm Nobody" in this poem?
2. Analyzing: How does the speaker feel about "I'm Nobody" in this poem?
3. Interpreting: How does the speaker feel about "I'm Nobody" in this poem?

Unit One Identity

I. *I'm Nobody! Who are you?* by Emily Dickinson

ABOUT THE POETESS



Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), was born in Amherst, Massachusetts on December 10, 1830. Emily lived secluded in the house she was born in, except for the short time she attended Amherst Academy and Holyoke Female Seminary, until her death. Only ten of her poems were published in her lifetime. Today Emily Dickinson is universally acknowledged as a poet of the highest order. Her odd and inventive poems helped to initiate modern poetry.

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

- 1 I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you — Nobody — Too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! They'd banish us (advertise) — you know!
- 5 How dreary — to be — Somebody!
How public — like a Frog —
To tell one's name — the livelong June —
To an admiring Bog^①!

STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. Who are the “pair of us” and “they” in this poem?
2. What does “an admiring bog” refer to?

Interpreting

3. In what way is “somebody” comparable with “a frog”?

① Bog: soft, wet, spongy area

4. What is like to be “somebody” according to the poem?
5. Does the speaker enjoy being “nobody”?

Extending

6. Do you want to be “nobody” or “somebody”? Explain.
7. What is the real self? Is it the one content with his or her own private world or the one who throws him or herself into the society?

LITERARY FOCUS

The Speaker and the Poet or Author

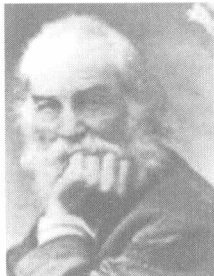
The speaker is the voice, or mask or persona (Latin for “mask”) that speaks the poem. It is usually not identical with the poet or author who writes it. The author counterfeits the speech of a person in a particular situation. Emily Dickinson invented an “I” who prefers to be “nobody”. We call “I” the speaker in the poem rather than the poetess herself. The speaker’s voice does often have the ring of the poet or the author’s own voice, and to make a distinction between speaker and poet or author may at times seem perverse, because some poetry (especially contemporary poetry) is highly autobiographical. Still, even in autobiographical poems it may be convenient to distinguish between poet or author and speaker: the speaker is Emily the lonely woman, or Emily the curious and naughty woman, not simply Emily the poetess.

THINKING ABOUT SPEAKER AND POET

In the poem *I’m Nobody! Who are you?*, what kind of person is the speaker? Who is the speaker addressing to? Why does the poetess invent this speaker?

II. *Song of Myself* by Walt Whitman

ABOUT THE POET



Walt Whitman (1819–1892), generally considered the first national poet of America. He sings enthusiastically about the spacious geography of the country, the free spirit of an individual and about love of people of all kinds. His masterpiece *Leaves of Grass* becomes a ground to poets after him. They either look on it as a great inspiration or regard it as a bad example to revolve against and to depart from.

Song of Myself

16

- 1 I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
 Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
 Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
 Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff
 5 that is fine,
 One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the
 largest the same,
 A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant and
 hospitable down by the Oconee I live,
 10 A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, my joints the limberest
 joints on earth and the sternest joints on earth,
 A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn in my deer-skin
 leggings, a Louisianian or Georgian,
 A boatman over lakes or bays or along coasts, a Hoosier, Badger,
 15 Buckeye;
 At home on Kanadian snow-shoes or up in the bush, or with fishermen
 off Newfoundland,
 At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest and
 tacking,
 20 At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine, or the
 Texan ranch,
 Comrade of Californians, comrade of free North-Westerners, (loving their big proportions,)
 Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, comrade of all who shake hands
 and welcome to drink and meat,
 25 A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfulest,
 A novice beginning yet experient of myriads of seasons,
 Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion,
 A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker,
 Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest.
- 30 I resist any thing better than my own diversity,
 Breathe the air but leave plenty after me,
 And am not stuck up, and am in my place.

(The moth and the fish-eggs are in their place,

The bright suns I see and the dark suns I cannot see are in their
 35 place,
 The palpable is in its place and the impalpable is in its place.)

STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. What is the speaker's age? Gender?
2. Is the speaker a Southerner or Northerner? What is his profession or trade?
3. What kind of person is the speaker?

Interpreting

4. What does "Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff/that is fine" mean?
5. How can the speaker be both "of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise" and "Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man"?
6. What does it suggest that the speaker is at the same time a Yankee, a Kentuckian, a Louisianian, and a Gorgian?
7. What does it mean that "I resist any thing better than my own diversity"?
8. What does it mean that I "Breathe the air but leave plenty after me"?
9. What kind of personality is the poet singing about?

Extending

10. What kind of personality would you sing about? Do you like what you are?

III. Theme for English B by Langston Hughes

ABOUT THE POET



Langston Hughes (1902–1967), was one of the most important writers and thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance, which was the African American artistic movement in the 1920s that celebrated black life and culture. His literary works helped shape American literature and politics. Hughes, like others active in the Harlem Renaissance, had a strong sense of racial pride. Through his poetry, novels, plays, essays, and children's books, he promoted equality, condemned racism and injustice, and celebrated African American culture, humor, and spirituality.

Theme for English B^①

- 1 The instructor said,
 Go home and write
 a page tonight.
 And let that page come out of you —
- 5 Then, it will be true.
- I wonder if it's that simple?
 I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
 I went to school there, then Durham, then here
 to this college on the hill above Harlem.
- 10 I am the only colored student in my class.
 The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
 through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
 Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
 the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
- 15 up to my room, sit down, and write this page:
 It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
 at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
 I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
 hear you, hear me — we two — you, me, talk on this page.
- 20 (I hear New York, too.) Me — who?
 Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
 I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
 I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
 or records — Bessie, bop, or Bach.
- 25 I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
 the same things other folks like who are other races.
 So will my page be colored that I write?
 Being me, it will not be white.
 But it will be
- 30 a part of you, instructor.
 You are white —

① English B: second-level English class

- yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
- 35 Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me —
although you're older — and white —
- 40 and somewhat more free.
- This is my page for English B

STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. What is special of this speaker in his class?
2. Is it easy for him to describe himself?

Interpreting

3. Why to the speaker "It's not easy to know what is true for you or me"?
4. "colored" is a term which is generally used to refer to "black" people (the actual, politically correct term is "people of color"). However, in English, "colored" also has another meaning. So does "to be white." When the speaker says "So will my page be colored that I write / Being me it will not be white", what do you think he is talking about?
5. The speaker asks "will my paper be colored?" How will you answer this question?
6. Why does the speaker say "You are white — /yet a part of me, as I am a part of you."? Can we be part of each other?

Extending

7. In this poem the speaker describes his feeling and experience in college at age 22. He says he is not sure if it is easy to tell what is true at his age. Do you feel you can tell what is true about yourself or your teacher?
8. How would you compare the student's attitude with his teacher's attitude? How does this difference or similarity compare with foreign teachers and their Chinese students?