

新经典
ENGLISH MAJOR

高等学校英语专业系列教材

英语诗歌欣赏

Appreciation of English Poems

陆如钢 编著



外语教学与研究出版社

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编者说明

英语诗歌（以下简称英诗）是英语文学的最高艺术形式，它具有很强的知识性、文化性和怡情性。英诗赏析可以从不同的视角切入，既可以从文学批评的角度切入，也可以从语言研究的角度切入，还可以同时从文学批评和语言研究两个不同角度切入。但无论从哪一个视角切入，英诗赏析均要求欣赏者具备基本的英诗知识，掌握必要的欣赏方法。本教材的编写主要为了满足英语专业及其他专业高年级学生欣赏英诗的需要，同时也考虑到所有英语学习者增强英语文化知识、提高艺术修养、巩固英语语言知识的需要。

在本教材编写过程中，编者综合考虑了三个方面的因素。首先是学生因素。在我国，无论是英语专业的学生，还是其他英语学习者，尽管或多或少地接触过英诗，对英诗知识和欣赏方法还是缺少系统性的了解。其次是英诗的语言因素。英诗语言在语义、语法、语用、修辞和语篇各个方面均具有明显的特殊性。最后是与相关课程的关系因素。在我国，英语专业一般情况下还开设英美文学史、英美文学选读、英美文学批评理论等相关课程。基于以上三方面因素的考虑，本教材的编写以单元为单位，分节介绍相关英诗知识和欣赏方法。每小节大致由基础知识、作品选读、综合巩固三部分组成。基础知识介绍不求面面俱到，而只是重点介绍相关知识，同时精选一些富有启发性的段落供课堂讨论。每小节的重点在作品选读。通过对所选作品的赏析，学习者一方面能获得阅读审美快感，提高对英诗的审美能力；另一方面能加强对英诗知识和欣赏方法的感性认识和理性认识，为以后对英诗的欣赏和研究打下基础。综合巩固部分用来加强和培养学习者用已有的英诗知识赏析英诗的综合能力，一般要求学习者能在课后独立完成。考虑到其他相关课程中对文学创作流派及英语文学史涉及较多，因此本教材未把该项作为学习重点。

本教材的练习由词汇、欣赏理解和讨论话题三部分组成。词汇练习要求学生根据诗歌的上下文，充分考虑英诗的语义、语法、语用、修辞和语篇等各个方面的因素，确定词义，在必要时则借助工具书。欣赏理解练习以多项选择题为主，同时采用表格、问答题等其他形式。但必须指出，英诗欣赏理解涉及到英诗文本的释读，在文学艺术中，诗歌文本最具开放性。其开放性不仅来自于语言本身，同时也来自于诗的直观形式（视觉性）和声音特征（音乐性）。英诗的理解既不完全依赖语言规律和语言

符号，也不完全依赖语境，而是通过读者和文本的相互作用及英诗的艺术手段创造“诗境”，从而使读者在欣赏过程中获得审美快感。因此，对英诗的欣赏和理解应该是开放性的，而不应该是单一性的。在编写欣赏理解练习时，编者尽量做到了最佳答案的启发性和可接受性。但有些练习题的答案应允许有不同的见解和选择。在英诗赏析过程中，为了能让学习者对英诗释读的开放性有更深入的理解，同时也为了更好地培养学习者的综合分析能力，本教材尽量做到提供开放性的讨论话题，允许学习者有不同的见解。这一编写理念在每一小节的综合巩固部分得到了最充分的体现。为了方便读者，本教材附有较详细的参考答案。教材的使用要重在通过必要的练习掌握英诗知识和提高英诗欣赏水平的过程，允许有不同的练习答案和见解。

考虑到英诗欣赏课程的课型特征，本教材的材料安排和练习编写以每周两课时、共授课18周进行设计。在教学活动中基本上可控制在每小节两课时的进度。但由于每小节所涉及的内容各不相同，话题有泛有窄，在实际教学过程中每小节所需的教學时间会有所差异。

本教材已在宁波大学外语学院和科技学院的英语专业选修课中试用过多次，学生们对本教材的内容、形式和练习均提出了很多建设性的意见，从而使编者能三易其稿。对所有提出宝贵意见的老师和学生，编者在此深表谢意。为了使本教材更成熟，编者真诚欢迎大家批评指正。

编 者
2007年6月

CONTENTS

Unit One	How Does a Poem Work?	1
Section 1	Line Arrangement and Appreciation	2
Section 2	Words and Meanings	13
Section 3	Inversion and Foregrounding	27
Section 4	Recurrence and Patterning	39
Unit Two	The Techniques of Verse	55
Section 1	Rhythm.....	56
Section 2	Meter	67
Section 3	Rhyme.....	78
Section 4	Sound.....	91
Unit Three	Components of Poetry	103
Section 1	Speaker.....	104
Section 2	Setting.....	119
Section 3	Subject and Theme.....	130
Unit Four	Sense of Poetry	141
Section 1	Abstraction and Concretion	142
Section 2	Image and Imagery	153
Unit Five	Figurative Language	167
Section 1	The Literal and the Figurative.....	168
Section 2	Simile and Metaphor.....	176
Section 3	Personification	187
Section 4	Symbols	195
Section 5	Irony and Satire.....	204
Glossary of Poetic Terms		217
Key to Exercises		232
Bibliography		320

Unit One

How Does a Poem Work?





Section 1

Line Arrangement and Appreciation



Introduction

This section examines the issue of line arrangement as a technique in English poetry and its effect on the meaning-making of the content of an English poem. It looks at two interrelated questions on the topic:

- a) What is the basic role of line arrangement as an artistic technique in English poetry?
- b) How does the line arrangement of an English poem affect our understanding and appreciation of the content of the poem?

For both the poet and his audience, line arrangement is an indispensable element in artistic creation. For the poet, it is through the line arrangement that he “visually” transfigures a written “text” into a “poem”. Likewise, it is through the line arrangement that the audience visually recognizes a written “text” as a “poem”. In other words, line arrangement plays a basic role to transfigure visually or pictorially a written English text into a particular art form categorized as “English poetry”.

The transfiguring power of line arrangement in English poetry pertains to the concept of *genre*. Genre is originally a French word, which means “kind”, “sort” or “type”. It is often used to categorize different art forms. A genre often has a set of conventions and rules sometimes termed as “generic conventions”. Generic conventions are not only closely tied to a particular art form, but also help to define what genre that art form is. Line arrangement is one of the important “generic conventions” that distinguish the “poetic genres” from “prose genres” in literature. For a written poem coming into being, the poet, no matter how conventional or adventurous he is, has to “visualize” his

emotions on paper through pictorial arrangement of lines in a recognizable pattern in relation to the white space created through the line arrangement. The “pictorial” form/pattern achieved through line arrangement not only visually distinguishes a “poem” from a “prose”, but also significantly influences the meaning making of the content of a poem. The case is especially true in modernist poetry.

In many cases, the effectiveness of a modernist poem derives from the placement of individual line or groups of lines on the page into an integral pictorial presentation of the poem. There are many examples by well-known modernist English poets such as W. C. Williams and e. e. cummings. It would be more interesting, however, to cite an example from a student.

Some years ago I asked my students attending the course “Appreciation of English Poetry” to write a short English poem during one of the sessions. One of the students in the class produced nothing but one line:

I stepped into the cinema alone.

As it would be an extremely rare case to have one line as a poem, I asked the whole class to rearrange the line into a “poem” of two lines. The following are some of the different versions the whole class worked out:

- (1) I stepped
Into the cinema alone.
- (2) I stepped into
The cinema alone.
- (3) I stepped into the cinema
Alone.
- (4) I
Stepped into the cinema alone.

The difference between the student’s original line “I stepped into the cinema alone” and the different versions the whole class produced is, in fact, the result of using two different techniques of line arrangement in English poetry:



- a) to arrange a line as a self-contained unit of sense
- b) to use enjambment in line arrangement

Both of the techniques are commonly used in traditional and modernist English poems and they are often used simultaneously in a single poem. The technique of enjambment, as illustrated by those different versions produced by the whole class, is more useful in creating expectation and adding dynamic tension to a poem. As far as the pictorial effect of a poem is concerned, a poet often achieves his originality of a poem by applying three tools in his toolbox:

- a) formal elements such as line, couplet, strophe, stanza and verse paragraph
- b) linguistic units such as words, phrases and sentences
- c) the white space and tension created by the dynamic combination of a) and b)

A modernist poet often uses the above tools in combination with other graphological devices such as capitalization and typographic design. Likewise, we can explore some other possibilities in the line arrangement of the student's line "I stepped into the cinema alone" by applying those tools and by using our imaginative power and creativity:

- (5) I stepped
Into
The cinema alone

- (6) i stepped into the
CINEMA
alone

- (7) I stepped into the
Cinema
A-L-O-N-E

To sum up the above discussion, line arrangement as an artistic technique in English poetry plays its basic role to transfigure visually a written English "text" into a written English "poem". At the same time, it is an indispensable tool in the poet's toolbox for

the originality of a poem, as a poem's final composition is the integral and dynamic combination of its formal elements and linguistic sense units.

Up to this point, we have to consider the other question listed at the beginning of the section: How does the line arrangement of an English poem affect our understanding and appreciation of the content of the poem? To understand the question, we have to understand two interrelated concepts frequently discussed in the study of discourse analysis and semiotics: **selection** and **foregrounding**. Scollon and Scollon regard **selection** as one of the principles in discourse and argue that:

... the principle of **selection**: any action selects a subset of signs for the actor's attention. A person in taking action selects a pathway by foregrounding some subset of meanings and backgrounding others. Action is a form of selection, positioning the actor as a particular kind of person who selects among different meaning potentials a subset of pathways.

(Scollon, R & Scollon, S. W., 2003:23)

The principle of selection argued by Scollon and Scollon indicates that the composition of a poem, which is the integral combination of formal elements and linguistic sense units through the poet's **selection** of line arrangement, has the function of "foregrounding some subset of meanings and backgrounding others" (ibid.). The audience of a poem has to take the pictorial pattern of a poem into consideration in interpreting the content of the poem, as the pictorial pattern of the poem is semiotically significant in the meaning making of the poem. By selecting and arranging the poem in a particular pattern, the poet is **foregrounding** some subset of meanings. Thus, the above seven different versions derived from the student's line "I stepped into the cinema alone" semiotically foreground different meaning potentials. Take the Versions (1) and (2) for examples, the first line of Version (1) ends with "stepped" while that of Version (2) ends with "into". The tension derived from the line end in Version (1) is different from that of Version (2). In reading the first line of Version (1), we have a strong image conjured up by the action word "stepped" at the end of the line, which is performed by the speaker "I". In reading the first line of Version (2), however, our mental image conjured up by the action word "stepped" is further transformed by the directional preposition "into" at the end of the line.

The concepts of selection and foregrounding and the tension created by using enjambment are also pertinent to the concepts of **theme** and **rheme**, **pause** and **stress**. In English poetry, both the beginning and the end of a line have greater weight. Linguistically, when a line is arranged as a self-contained unit of sense, the beginning part of the line is often the **theme**, i.e. the part of the proposition that is being talked about while the ending part of the line is often the **rheme**, i.e. the predicate that gives information on the topic. When enjambment is used in line arrangement, the beginning



part of the following line(s), however, is/are still quasi-thematized, especially when capitalization is used, while the end of the line(s) would carry greater weight because of the slight **pause** enforced by the ending of the line(s), thus **stressed**. When one word takes up one line in a poem using enjambment, the tension of that word is extremely strong in the meaning making of the poem, as the word simultaneously receives thematization, pause, and stress. In other words, it is tremendously foregrounded through the poet's **selection** of line arrangement. This intrinsic relation is demonstrated by the difference in the tension created by the difference in the line arrangement between Version (3) and Version (4) worked out by the whole class. In Version (3), the impression of being "solitary", "single" and "unaccompanied" is foregrounded by the combination of the linguistic meaning of the word "alone" and its line arrangement as a single line to end the poem; while in Version (4), the speaker "I" is tremendously stressed and foregrounded by taking up a whole line at the very beginning of the poem. When we finish reading the second line of the poem, we realize both linguistically and visually how "solitary", "single" and "unaccompanied" the speaker "I" is in the first line, which is enforced by the fact that the capital letter "I" is pictorially the most "solitary" letter in English alphabet and it is actually "single" and "unaccompanied" by any other letter in the very first line of the poem.

The above discussion on the concepts of **selection** and **foregrounding**, **theme** and **rheme**, **pause** and **stress** functioning in the line arrangement of English poetry can help us to understand the intrinsic relation between the line arrangement of the Versions (5), (6) and (7) and the meaning making of the contents of those versions. Read them through again and pay attention to the changes in their line arrangements as well as graphological designs. If you can sense the tension created by the integral and dynamic combination of these two pictorial elements and the linguistic sense of the words in each version, you can move on to the following two parts of the section: Line Arrangement in Prose and Line Arrangement in Poetry.



Line Arrangement in Prose

Directions: Read the following two passages carefully and for each decide what kind of writing it is and what is its purpose.

Passage 1

POST OFFICE

The queue's right out through the glass doors to the street: Thursday, Pension day. They built this post office too small. Of course, the previous one was smaller—a tiny prefab, next to the betting-shop, says the man who's just arrived; and the present one, at which we're queuing, was cherry-trees in front of a church. The church was where

the supermarket is: "My wife and I got married in that church", the man says. "We hold hands sometimes when we're standing waiting at the checkout—have a little moment together!" He laughs. The queue shuffles forward a step. Three members of it silently vow never to grow old in this suburb; one vows never to grow old at all. "I first met her over there", the man says, "on that corner where the bank is now. The other corner was Williams Brothers—remember Williams Brothers? They gave you tokens, tin money, like, for your dividend." The woman in front of him remembers. She nods, and swivels her loose lower denture, remembering Williams Brothers' metal tokens, and the marble slab on the cheese-counter, and the carved mahogany booth where you went to pay. The boy in front of her is chewing gum; his jaws rotate with the same motion as hers: to and fro, to and fro.

—Fleur Adcock

Passage 2

This is just to say I have eaten the plums that were in the icebox and which you were probably saving for breakfast. Forgive me. They were delicious, so sweet and so cold.

—William Carlos Williams

Exercises

I. Vocabulary

Write down the definitions of the following words in the contexts of Passage 1 and Passage 2. Look them up in an English dictionary if necessary.

1. queue
2. pension
3. prefab
4. betting-shop
5. checkout
6. shuffle
7. token
8. dividend
9. denture
10. swivel
11. fro
12. icebox



II. Comprehension questions

1. Passage 1 is _____.
 - A. a short short story
 - B. a piece of prose writing
 - C. a piece of news report
2. In Passage 1, "Thursday, Pension day" means _____.
 - A. Thursday is a holiday for old people
 - B. Thursday is the day for pensioners to send out their mails
 - C. Thursday is the day for old people to get their pensions
3. In Passage 1, the reason why the man and his wife hold hands sometimes when they are waiting at the checkout is because they _____.
 - A. are no longer young
 - B. do not like being disturbed by other customers
 - C. are standing on the spot of their wedding ceremony
4. Passage 1 gives its reader the impression that _____.
 - A. life is fast
 - B. life is slow
 - C. life is both fast and slow
5. "This is just to say..." in Passage 2 is usually used in _____.
 - A. an informal note
 - B. an advertisement
 - C. a radio talk
6. In Passage 2, the exchange of information is most likely between _____.
 - A. two acquaintances
 - B. wife and husband
 - C. two strangers



Line Arrangement in Poetry

Directions: The following two poems are of the same words as you have read in Passage 1 and Passage 2 in Line Arrangement in Prose. Read them through twice and think:

- a) Are they really written as poetry?
- b) What effects do their line arrangements have on your reading?

Poem 1

POST OFFICE

The queue's right out through the glass doors
to the street: Thursday, Pension day.
They built this Post Office too small.
Of course, the previous one was smaller—
a tiny prefab, next to the betting-shop,
says the man who's just arrived;
and the present one, at which we're queuing,
was cherry-trees in front of a church.
The church was where the supermarket is:
"My wife and I got married in that church"
the man says. "We hold hands sometimes
when we're standing waiting at the checkout—
have a little moment together!" He laughs.
The queue shuffles forward a step.
Three members of it silently vow
never to grow old in this suburb;
one vows never to grow old at all.
"I first met her over there" the man says,
"on that corner where the bank is now.
The other corner was Williams Brothers—
remember Williams Brothers? They gave you tokens,
tin money, like, for your dividend."
The woman in front of him remembers.
She nods, and swivels her loose lower denture,
remembering Williams Brothers' metal tokens,
and the marble slab on the cheese-counter,
and the carved mahogany booth where you went to pay.
The boy in front of her is chewing gum;
his jaws rotate with the same motion
as hers: to and fro, to and fro.

—Fleur Adcock



Poem 2

THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

—William Carlos Williams



Exercises

I. Questions on Poem 1

1. In your opinion, which is the original version, the passage in prose or the version in poetry? Give your reasons.
2. Read Passage 1 and Poem 1 at your normal speed, then consider how the different line arrangements affect your reading and understanding.
3. Most of the sentences in the poem *Post Office* run on to the next line(s). However, there are four sentences which are arranged within one line respectively. Write them down on the following four lines and discuss their function in the poem.

Sentence 1: _____

Sentence 2: _____

Sentence 3: _____

Sentence 4: _____

4. How does the capitalization of "Post Office" in Line 3 Poem I affect the meaning of the poem?

5. Read the last sentence but one in Passage 1 and that in Poem 1. Which sentence gives you clearer images? Why?

II. Questions on Poem 2

1. Read through Poem 2 once again and find out which is the first line that is syntactically a complete sentence.
2. In everyday communication, what will be expressed after saying "Forgive me" apologetically?
3. The word "saving" takes up one line in the poem. Comment how this special line arrangement affects the meaning of the word itself and the poem as a whole.
4. In what ways is an icebox useful in our everyday life? Americans are very keen on iced food. Does this additional knowledge help you to understand the poem better?
5. Compared with other two meals, what is special about breakfast? The word "breakfast" itself is a compound word; what do the two compounding words mean?



Consolidation 1

Directions: Rearrange the lines of the following poem in the form of a letter, then discuss in detail, or write a fuller analysis of the different effects they will make on your reading and interpretation.

LITTLE JOHNNY'S FINAL LETTER

Mother,

I won't be home this evening, so
 don't worry; don't hurry to report me missing.
 Don't drain the canals to find me,
 I've decided to stay alive, don't
 search the woods, I'm not hiding,
 simply gone to get myself classified.
 Don't leave my shreddies out,
 I've done with security.
 Don't circulate my photograph to society
 I have disguised myself as a man