

高等学校“十二五”规划教材·英语系列



英语写作 评论与赏析

E **NGLISH**
W **RITING**
COMMENTS AND ANALYSES

黄成洲 著

西北工业大学出版社

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**English Writing:
Comments and Analyses**

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【内容提要】 本书主要从文学理论的角度对英文小说、戏剧、诗歌等进行逐层论述,系统地分析了英语文学作品的基本要素,既突出各种适用技巧的阐述,又不拘泥于抽象的理论知识。全书通过例证和范文,使学习者对英语文学赏析产生从感性认识到理性认识的飞跃。

本书可用做英语专业大学生的写作教材,也可供广大英语爱好者提高对英语文学作品的鉴赏力。

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前言

Preface

《英语写作:评论与赏析》(English Writing:Comments and Analyses)是提高英文写作能力,评论、欣赏各类英文作品的指导性书籍。

对于浩如烟海的英文小说、戏剧、诗歌等文学作品,如何去理解其中的精髓,从什么角度对其进行评析,这是每一位喜爱英语文学作品的读者迫切需要解决的问题。以汉语为母语的学生,在写英语文章时往往摆脱不了汉语思维方式和写作手法的束缚,写出的通常是中式英语(Chinglish)。本书主要从文学理论的角度,对英文小说、戏剧、诗歌等具体文学作品进行逐层论述,系统地分析了英语文学作品的基本要素,既突出各种实用技巧的阐述,又不拘泥于抽象的理论知识。通过例证和范文,学习者可以对英语文学赏析产生从感性认识到理性认识的飞跃。新颖的实例分析和精选的范文是本书的主要特点。

本书可用做英语专业大学生的写作教材、文学评论教材,也可供理工科大学的高年级学生、中学英语教师、广大英语爱好者和自学者使用,以提高对英语文学的鉴赏力。

在本书编写过程中,外籍英、美文学专家 Professor Wisse 提供了宝贵意见,西安外国语大学尹忠孝教授在百忙中对文稿进行了审定,在此一并谨表感谢。同时,对所参阅的大量国内外文献资料的作者致以深切的谢意。

限于水平及其他客观原因,本书难免有疏漏之处,敬请各位英语前辈、同行和读者不吝赐教,予以指正。

著者

2011年2月15日

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Chapter One

Writing about Nonliterary Works

A nonliterary work will probably not require one to interpret meaning. In most cases, the author will strive to state the main ideas directly and support them with concrete details. As one reads he should keep the following key questions in mind. Responding to these questions will help bring logic and order to the notes and ultimately to the final draft.

What is the purpose of the work

The table of contents, if there is one, can help one determine purpose by revealing the work's overall organization and content. Also, the author or editor may state the purpose in preliminary pages (such as the preface or foreword) or in an introduction. If not, a first reading should tell one whether the author intended to inform, shock, expose, teach, entertain, or achieve some combination of purposes.

Does the work have a thesis — a controlling idea or a point of argument

In much nonliterary writing, particularly in a short work, such as an article or essay, the author argues a point of view or takes a position on an issue. One should be able to state this thesis or position, so that he can judge whether or not the author has adequately proved or supported it.

What requirements should a thesis meet

- (1) A thesis should be a complete sentence.
- (2) A thesis should not include vague words such as good, bad, or nice.
- (3) A thesis should narrow the subject to a manageable size, a size appropriate to the time you have and the length of the paper.



- (4) A thesis must be compatible with the purpose.

Who is the intended audience

Sometimes the introduction or the preliminary pages identify the intended audience. If not, one can usually determine the audience by evaluating the nature of the content, the technical or educational level of the vocabulary, and the sophistication of the writing style. One needs to know whom the author is addressing if he is to judge the work's success.

Is the presentation logical and each conclusion valid

Works that set out to argue or explain must present information in a logical and orderly fashion; otherwise, readers will be confused. Evaluating the logic of the presentation can help one evaluate a work's clarity.

An author's conclusions should be based on sound logic and concrete support. A thesis, or controlling idea, requires adequate supporting evidence. Many times in setting on the thesis, the author has already surveyed available information to back up his claim. He selects only the evidence that is reliable and logically related to the thesis. If his evidence is shaky, if his logic has holes in it, if his generalizations have no foundation, he risks losing the readers' confidence.

Is the style clear

A poor writing style can mar a work no matter how logical its presentation or how valid the author's conclusions. As one reads a work, notice the prose style. Is it smooth and easy to follow or is it awkward and confusing? A writing style results from a number of details: vocabulary, sentence length, sentence patterns, figures of speech, sound and rhythm. Often these details are spontaneous choices—a reflection of the writer's personality, education, and experience. However, reliance on spontaneous decisions will not always produce effective writing. Developing a good prose style requires thoughtful choices of words and structures.

Chapter Two

Writing about Fiction (Novels and Short Stories)

Unlike nonliterary works, novels and short stories require some interpretation on the reader's part. For example, the reader must go beyond their plots to find the central idea or ideas. Usually, the students' assignment will specify how they are to approach a critical review of fiction. If not, the following questions and comments can guide the reading and note-taking.

When reviewing fiction, the reader must consider the plot—what happens, how the events relate to each other, and how they relate to the work as a whole. But the reader must remember that he cannot “retell” the plot of the story. Make brief summary of the work. Make notes summarizing only those events that will support the points he makes about the work.

What are the characteristics of the short story

The short story is a form of fiction generally under 10,000 words in length. Because of its limited length, a short story presents very few characters (generally one or two), and focuses on only one event, which takes place within a very short time. The author must be very careful in his selection of incidents and materials. The short story achieves suspense and dramatic effects through complication. And action, whether physical or psychological, with some sort of progressive development and outcome, is essential to the short story.

Structurally, a short story may break into five sections. Here is an attempt at analyzing the short story *After Twenty Years* according to the structural divisions.

1. The situation. This section provides the reader with the setting and a brief introduction to the characters. The setting of the story is very clear. In the doorway of hardware store in a street in New York, a little

before ten o'clock at night, one of the characters is introduced vividly to the reader—a stalwart, dutiful policeman on the beat.

2. The generating circumstance. This is the incident in the story that first arouses the reader's curiosity. A man is found in the darkened doorway of a hardware store. Who is the man? Why is he there all alone in a deserted street? Then he speaks to the policeman without being asked, trying to explain why he is there. So the reader's interest is caught, and he is eager to read on.
3. The rising action. This is where the plot develops and progresses towards the climax. It is also where the reader finds complications and suspense. The appearance of the man in the doorway is described. The man tells about the appointment he has come to fill, the relation between him and his friend "Jimmy Wells", and his own hustling around in the west. Then the policeman goes away and the man is left alone. Is his friend coming to keep the appointment? How much longer has he to wait? The reader is kept in suspense. Then a tall man comes along, addresses the man in the doorway directly as Bob and acknowledges himself to be Jimmy. Bob begins to tell "Jimmy" his adventures in the West and "Jimmy" listens with interest.
4. The climax. This is where the interest and excitement are highest, and it is just before the end. When Bob discovers that the tall man is some other person than Jimmy Wells, the story reaches its climax.
5. The denouement/di'nu:ma:ŋ/. This is the end of the story when everything is explained. O Henry is known for his surprising ending, and *After Twenty Years* is provided with a surprising ending. The note tells the reader as well as Bob that Jimmy Wells is no other than the patrolman. The reader is surprised while Bob is stunned.

What is the purpose of the work

In simplest terms, fiction can be classified either as "escape" literature or "interpretive" literature. The purpose of escape literature is merely to entertain. A common kind of escape literature is the romance novel. These books might offer pleasant reading, but they do not provide insights into human existence. The

purpose of interpretive literature is to comment on human existence in a meaningful way. On a more specific level, the purpose of an interpretive novel might be to amuse, disturb, shock, inform, or puzzle the reader. Nevertheless, interpretive literature does provide an insight into human existence — an insight usually referred to as theme.

What is the theme of the work

The theme is the central idea of the work — a generalization about life. Do not confuse theme with moral. A theme is usually an insight into the nature of human beings and their relationships to themselves, each other, and the universe. Serious writers rarely try to teach a lesson. Rather, they try to provide an experience — one with the complexities, quandaries, and emotions of real life. When considering theme, one should also consider how it is supported by plot, character, setting, point of view, and other details of the work.

What are the conflicts in the work

The plot usually arises from conflict between the protagonist (the main character) and the antagonist (an opposing force). The antagonist can be another character or characters, society, nature, or even some trait within the protagonist. Thus the conflict may be a clash of actions, ideas, or emotions.

What is the point of view

Point of view refers to the way the narrator relates the action. In general, there are four points of view: omniscient, limited omniscient, first person, and objective. With an omniscient point of view, the narrator is not a character in the story but rather an all-knowing presence who can see into the minds of characters, tell us what they think, and interpret their actions.

In a limited-omniscient point of view, the narrator has access to the thoughts of only one character. Thus, the narrator observes the actions of the remaining characters only through the eyes of this particular character.

In first person point of view, one of the characters tells the story. The narrator may be a major or minor character, an active participant, or an observer. In any case, the narrator cannot enter the minds of other characters but can only



speculate about their thoughts and motives.

Finally, with the objective, or dramatic, point of view, the plot unfolds as in a play — seemingly without a narrator. The reader is an observer of the action and has no access to the minds of any of the characters. Instead, the reader draws conclusions from what the characters do and say, not from what they think.

How are the characters presented

Characters are said to be flat or round, depending on their complexity. Flat characters are very simply drawn and can be very simply described — “a greedy, ambitious scoundrel”, “a country bumpkin”, “a scheming woman”. Round characters are more lifelike, with the complexities of real people.

Another way to classify characters is to determine whether they are static or developing. A static character does not change from the beginning to the end of the story. The developing (or “dynamic”) character undergoes some change — large or small, good or bad — as a result of experience.

What motivates the characters

The plot, of course, is what the characters do. Just as important is what motivates them. An omniscient narrator can explain the motives of all the characters but will not necessarily do so. When the point of view is limited omniscient, the reader may know the motives of one character but will have to infer the motives of the rest. When the point of view is first person, the reader must decide how much to trust the narrator; the character who tells the story may not understand himself or herself, much less the other characters. Finally, when the point of view is objective, the reader must infer all motivation from the characters' words and interaction. Thus, determining motivation may involve a good bit of interpretation on the reader's part.

What is the importance of the setting, that is, the time and place in which the story occurs

Writers do not choose a setting at random, so one should consider the choice carefully. Try to evaluate what bearing the setting has on the conflict. If a

primary conflict lies between the protagonist and society, the setting may be the antagonist, providing both the catalyst for action and the key to motivation. In any case, the setting will likely support the theme of the work, providing an appropriate backdrop for the struggles of the characters.

Exercises

Directions: Read the following short stories carefully, and then do the following exercises.

I . After Twenty Years

The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh depeopled the streets.

Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye adown the pacific thoroughfare, the officer, with his stalwart form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.

When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly:

"It's all right, officer," he said, reassuringly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if you'd like to make certain it's all straight. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands— 'Big Joe' Brady's restaurant."

"Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was torn down then." The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow.



His scarfpin was a large diamond, oddly set.

"Twenty years ago tonight," said the man, "I dined here at 'Big Joe' Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on Earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortune made whatever they were going to be."

"It sounds pretty interesting," said the policeman. "Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven't you heard from your friend since you left? Well, yes, for a time we corresponded," said the other. "But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, staunchest, old chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door to-night, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up."

The man waiting pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds. "Three minutes to ten," he announced. "It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door."

"Did pretty well out West, didn't you?" asked the policeman. "You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half well. He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him."

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two. "I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?"

"I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on Earth he'll be here by that time."

"Good night, sir," said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to absurdity, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

"Is that you Bob?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" cried the man in the door.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other's hands with his own. "It's Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I'd find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well! — twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant's gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you?"

"Bully; it has given me everything I asked it for. You've changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches."

"Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty."

"Doing well in New York, Jimmy?"

"Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we'll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times."

The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.

At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned simultaneously to gaze upon the other's face.

The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

"You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from a Roman to a pug."

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man.



“You’ve been under arrest for ten minutes, ‘Silky’ Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That’s sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here’s a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It’s from Patrolman Wells!”

The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.

Bob: I was at the appointed place in time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn’t do it myself, so I went around and got a plain-clothes man to do the job.

immy

By O Henry

- (1) What is the theme of the story?
- (2) Write a paragraph explaining the significance of the title of the story.
- (3) How is the plot developed?
- (4) How are the characters developed?
- (5) What about the language?

II. The Midnight Visitor

Ausable did not fit the description of any secret agent Fowler had ever read about. Following him down the musty corridor of the gloomy French hotel where Ausable had a room, Fowler felt disappointed. It was a small room, on the sixth and top floor, and scarcely a setting for a romantic figure.

Ausable was, for one thing, fat. Very fat. And then there was his accent. Though he spoke French and German passably, he had never altogether lost the New England accent he had brought to Paris from Boston twenty years ago.

“You are disappointed,” Ausable said wheezily over his shoulder. “You were told that I was a secret agent, a spy, dealing in espionage and danger. You wished to meet me because you are a writer, young and romantic. You envisioned mysterious figures in the night, the crack of pistols, drugs in the wine.”

“Instead, you have spent a dull evening in a French music hall with a sloppy fat man who, instead of having messages slipped into his hand by dark-eyed

beauties, gets only an ordinary telephone call making an appointment in his room. You have been bored!" The fat man chuckled to himself as he unlocked the door of his room and stood aside to let his frustrated guest enter.

"You are disillusioned," Ausable told him. "But take cheer, my young friend. Presently you will see a paper, a quite important paper for which several men and women have risked their lives, come to me in the next-to-last step of its journey into official hands. Some day soon that paper may well affect the course of history. In that thought is drama, is there not?" As he spoke, Ausable closed the door behind him. Then he switched on the light.

And as the light came on, Fowler had his first authentic thrill of the day. For halfway across the room, a small automatic pistol in his hand, stood a man. Ausable blinked a few times.

"Max," he wheezed, "you gave me quite a start. I thought you were in Berlin. What are you doing in my room?"

Max was slender, not tall, and with a face that suggested the look of a fox. Except for the gun, he did not look very dangerous.

"The report," he murmured. "The report that is being brought to you to-night concerning some new missiles. I thought I would take it from you. It will be safer in my hands than in yours."

Ausable moved to an armchair and sat down heavily. "I'm going to raise the devil with the management this time; I am angry," he said grimly. "This is the second time in a month that somebody has gotten into my room off that confounded balcony!" Fowler's eyes went to the single window of the room. It was an ordinary window, against which now the night was pressing blackly.

"Balcony?" Max asked curiously. "No, I had a passkey. I did not know about the balcony. It might have saved me some trouble had I known about it."

"It's not my balcony," explained Ausable angrily. "It belongs to the next apartment." He glanced explanatorily at Fowler. "You see," he said, "this room used to be part of a large unit, and the next room—through that door there—used to be the living room. It had the balcony, which extends under my window now. You can get onto it from the empty room next door, and somebody did, last month. The management promised to block it off. But they haven't."

Max glanced at Fowler, who was standing stiffly a few feet from Ausable,