

English Writing  
— Comments and Analyses

# 英语写作

## 文学评论·作品赏析

黄成洲 著



西北工业大学出版社

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**【内容简介】** 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。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。

本书可用作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

《英语写作——文学评论·作品赏析》(English Writing — Comments and Analyses)是提高英文写作能力,评论、欣赏各类作品的指导性书籍。

本书可用作英语专业大学生的写作教材,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提高对英语文学作品的鉴赏力。

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,这是每一个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 Chinese English。《英语写作——文学评论·作品赏析》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,既突出各种适用技巧的阐述,又不拘泥于抽象的理论知识。通过例证和范文,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。新颖的实例分析和精选的范文是本书的主要特点。

在编写过程中,外籍英、美文学专家 Professor Wisse 提供了宝贵的意见,西安外国语学院英语系尹忠孝教授在百忙之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书籍的作者致以深切的谢意。

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

著 者  
2000 年 5 月

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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.

#### **1. 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 tonight, 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