

An American Reader

英汉对照

美国 文化选本

杨自伍 / 主编

下 册

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责任编辑:朱文秋

封面设计:陶雪华

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华东师范大学出版社出版发行

(上海中山北路 3663 号 邮政编码 200062)

新华书店上海发行所经销

南京理工大学激光照排公司照排

江苏句容市排印厂印刷

开本 850×1168 1/32 印张:26.625 插页 8 字数 600 千字

1996 年 12 月 1 版 1997 年 3 月第 2 次印刷

印数:8,001—19,000 本

ISBN 7-5617-1499-8/H·111

定价(套)44.00 元

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LIONEL TRILLING

(1905—1975)

莱昂诺·特里林

莱昂诺·特里林,纽约人。作家、批评家。获哥伦比亚大学博士学位,长期在大学任教。美国知识界杰出人物,师承阿诺德的批评传统,推崇弗洛伊德学说,始终站在人道主义立场著书立说,成为一代精英的批评之音。他指出,现代文学的现代因素是“仇视文明”而且“对文化本身不抱幻想”的虚无主义。认为艺术在现代社会具有维系自我的力量,过去两个世纪的小说“教会我们去认识人性多样化的范围和这种多样化的价值”。著有评传《马修·阿诺德》、《爱·摩·福斯特》;文学批评和社会评论文集《自由主义想象》、《对立的自我》、《超越文化:文学与新知文集》;小说《旅途中间》、《此一时也,彼一地也》等。

Tacitus Now

The histories of Tacitus^① have been put to strange uses. The princelings of Renaissance Italy consulted the *Annals* on how to behave with the duplicity of Tiberius^②. The German racists overlooked all the disagreeable things which Tacitus observed of their ancestors, took note only of his praise of the ancient chastity and independence, and thus made of the *Germania*^③ their anthropological primer. But these are the aberrations; the influence of Tacitus in Europe has been mainly in the service of liberty, as he intended it to be. Perhaps this influence has been most fully felt in France, where, under the dictatorships both of the Jacobins and of Napoleon, Tacitus was regarded as a dangerously subversive writer. In America, however, he has never meant a great deal. James Fenimore Cooper is an impressive exception to our general indifference, but Cooper was tem-

① Tacitus (55—117), 古罗马史学家。下文提到的《编年史》记载了提贝里乌斯的统治时期、克劳狄一世的晚年统治及尼禄即位初期的仁政时期。

② Tiberius (42BC—37AD), 古罗马皇帝, 公元十四至三十七年在位。

③ *Germania*, 塔西佗的著名专著, 探讨了日耳曼部落的起源等问题。

peramentally attracted by the very one of all the qualities of Tacitus which is likely to alienate most American liberals, the aristocratic colour of his libertarian ideas. Another reason for our coolness to Tacitus is that, until recently, our political experience gave us no ground to understand what he is talking about. Dictatorship and repression, spies and political informers, blood purges and treacherous dissension^① have not been part of our political tradition as they have been of Europe's. But Europe has now come very close to us, and our political education of the last decades fits us to understand the historian of imperial Rome.

It is the mark of a great history that sooner or later we become as much aware of the historian as of the events he relates. In reading Tacitus we are aware of him from the first page; we are aware of him as one of the few great writers who are utterly without hope. He is always conscious of his own despair; it is nearly a fault in him; the attitude sometimes verges on attitudinizing^②. Yet the great fact about Tacitus is that he never imposes or wishes to impose his despair upon the reader. He must, he says, be always telling of "the merciless biddings of a tyrant, incessant prosecution, faithless friendships, the ruin of innocence, the

① dissension; strife.

② attitudinize; assume an affected mental attitude.

same causes issuing in the same results," and he complains of "the wearisome monotony" of his subject matter. But the reader never feels the monotony; despite the statements which seem to imply the contrary, Tacitus never becomes the victim of what he writes about — he had too much power of mind for that.

His power of mind is not like that of Thucydides; it is not really political and certainly not military. It is, on a grand scale, psychological. We are irresistibly reminded of Proust when Tacitus sets about creating the wonderful figure of Tiberius and, using a hundred uncertainties and contradictions, tries to solve this great enigma of a man, yet always avoids the solution because the enigma is the character. In writing of political events his real interest is not in their political meaning but rather in what we would now call their cultural meaning, in what they tell us of the morale and morals of the nation; it is an interest that may profitably be compared with Flaubert's in *L'Education sentimentale*, and perhaps it has been remarked that that novel, and *Salammbô* ^① as well, have elements of style and emotion which reinforce our sense of Flaubert as a Tacitean personality.

Tacitus's conception of history was avowedly personal

① *Salammbô* : 福楼拜的历史小说,描写两千多年前迦太基的内战历史。

and moral. "This I regard as history's highest function," he says, "to let no worthy action be uncommemorated^①, and to hold out the reprobation of posterity to evil words and deeds." This moral preoccupation finds expression in a moral sensibility which is not ours and which in many respects we find it hard to understand. It has often been pointed out that slaves, Christians, Jews, and barbarians are outside the circle of his sympathies; he rather despised the Stoic humanitarianism of Seneca^②. Yet, as he says, half his historical interest is in the discovery of good deeds, and perhaps nothing in literature has a greater impact of astonishment, a more sudden sense of illumination, than the occurrence of a good deed in the pages of his histories. He represents the fabric of society as so loosened that we can scarcely credit the account of any simple human relationship, let alone a noble action. Yet the simple human relationships exist — a soldier weeps at having killed his brother in the civil war, the aristocrats open their houses to the injured thousands when the great amphitheatre falls down; and the noble actions take place — the freed-woman Epicharis^③, when Piso's^④ enormous conspiracy against Nero

① uncommemorated; forgotten.

② Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4BC—65): 古罗马哲学家、政治家和剧作家。

③ Epicharis: 关于埃皮卡里丝的事迹见《编年史》第15卷,第51,57章。

④ Piso: 庇护文学的名流,领导了谋反尼禄的活动,败露后自尽。

was discovered, endured the torture and died, implicating no one, “screening^① strangers and those whom she hardly knew.” But the human relationship and the noble deed exist in the midst of depravity and disloyalty so great that we are always surprised by the goodness before we are relieved by it; what makes the fortitude of Epicharis so remarkable and so puzzling is that the former slave screened strangers and those whom she hardly knew “when freeborn men, Roman knights and senators, yet unscathed by the torture, betrayed every one, his dearest kinsfolk.” From these pages we learn really to understand those well-worn lines of Portia’s^② about the beam of the candle, for we discover what Portia meant by a naughty world, literally a world of naught, a moral vacancy so great and black that in it the beam of a candle seems a flash of lightning.

The moral and psychological interests of Tacitus are developed at the cost of what nowadays is believed to be the true historical insight. The French scholar Boissier^③ remarks that it is impossible to read the *History* and the *An-*

① screen, give shelter or protection to.

② those well-worn lines of Portia’s: 见莎士比亚《威尼斯商人》第5幕第1场。鲍西娅说:“一枝小小的蜡烛,它的光照耀得多远!一件善事也正像这枝蜡烛一样,在这罪恶的世界上发出广大的光辉。”(朱生豪译文)。“罪恶的世界”原文是 a naughty world, 此处即 naught, 意为“虚无”。

③ Boissier: 不详。

nals without wondering how the Roman Empire could possibly have held together through the eighty years of mutiny, infamy, intrigue, riot, expenditure, and irresponsibility which the two books tell us of. At any moment, we think, the political structure must collapse under this unnatural weight. Yet almost any modern account of the post-Augustan Empire suggests that we are wrong to make this supposition and seems to imply a radical criticism of Tacitus's methods. Breasted^①, for example, includes the period from Tiberius to Vespasian^② in a chapter which he calls "The First of Two Centuries of Peace." And Rostovtzeff^③ in his authoritative work gives us to understand that Rome, despite the usual minor troubles, was a healthy, developing society. Yet Tacitus finds it worthy of comment that at this time a certain man died a natural death — "a rare incident in so high a rank," he says.

It is not, as I gather, that Tacitus lacks veracity^④. What he lacks is what in the thirties used to be called "the long view" of history. But to minds of a certain sensitivity "the long view" is the falsest historical view of all, and in-

① James Henry Breasted (1865—1935): 美国考古学家、历史学家。

② Vespasian (9—79): 罗马皇帝, 公元六十九至七十九年在位。

③ Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff (1870—1952): 美国学者, 古希腊罗马史权威。著有《罗马帝国社会经济史》和《古代史》。

④ veracity; devotion to truth.

deed the insistence on the length of perspective is intended precisely to overcome sensitivity — seen from sufficient distance, it says, the corpse and the hacked limbs are not so very terrible, and eventually they even begin to compose themselves into a “meaningful pattern.” Tacitus had no notions of historical development to comfort him; nor did he feel it his duty to look at present danger and pain with the remote, objective eyes of posterity. The knowledge, if he had it, that trade with the East was growing or that a more efficient bureaucracy was evolving by which well-trained freedmen might smoothly administer affairs at home and in the provinces could not have consoled him for what he saw as the degradation of his class and nation. He wrote out of his feelings of the present and did not conceive the consolations of history and the future. •

What for many modern scholars is the vice of history was for Tacitus its virtue — he thought that history should be literature and that it should move the minds of men through their feelings. And so he contrived his narrative with the most elaborate attention to its dramatic effects. Yet something more than a scrupulous concern for literary form makes Tacitus so impressive in a literary way; some essential poise of his mind allowed him to see events with both passion and objectivity, and one cannot help wondering if the bitter division which his mind had to endure did not

reinforce this quality. For Tacitus hated the Rome of the emperors, all his feelings being for the vanished republic; yet for the return of the republic he had no hope whatever. "It is easy to commend," he said, "but not to produce; or if it is produced, it cannot be lasting." He served the ideal of the republic in his character of historian; the actuality of the empire he served as praetor, consul, and proconsul^①, and complied with the wishes of the hated Domitian^②. The more he saw of the actuality, the more he despaired of his ideal — and the more he loved it. And perhaps this secret tension of love and despair accounts for the poise and energy of his intellect.

We can see this poise and energy in almost all his judgments. For example, he despised the Jews, but he would not repress his wry appreciation of their stubborn courage and his intense admiration for their conception of God.^③ The one phrase of his that everyone knows, "They make a solitude and call it peace,"^④ he put into the mouth of a British barbarian, the leader of a revolt against Roman rule; it will always be the hostile characterization of imperialist

① praetor: 行政长官。consul: 执政官。proconsul: 总督。

② Domitian (51—96): 罗马皇帝, 公元八十一至九十六年在位。

③ 特里林是犹太人, 故而对塔西佗著作中关于犹太人的叙述(详见《历史》第5卷)比较关心。

④ 见塔西佗记述其岳父生平的《阿古利可拉传》第30章。

domination, yet Tacitus himself measured Roman virtue by imperialist success. He makes no less than four successive judgements of Otho; scorns him as Nero's courtier and cuckold, admires him as a provincial governor, despises him as emperor, and praises him for choosing to die and end the civil war. Much as he loved the republican character, he knew that its day was past, and he ascribes Galba's fall to his old-fashioned inflexibility in republican virtue. ①

The poise and energy of Tacitus's mind manifests itself in his language, and Professor Hadas in his admirable introduction to the useful Modern Library edition tells us how much we must lose in translation. Yet even a reader of the translation cannot help being aware of the power of the writing. When Tacitus remarks that Tiberius was an emperor "who feared freedom while he hated sycophancy" or that the name of Lucius Volusius was made glorious by his ninety-three years, his honourable wealth, and his "wide avoidance of the malignity of so many emperors"② or that "perhaps a sense of weariness steals over princes when they have bestowed everything, or over favourites when there is noth-

① 伽尔巴(3BC—69)历任执政官、总督等职,公元六十八年举兵反对尼禄,尼禄自杀后元老院承认他为罗马皇帝。六十九年一月十五日,伽尔巴被禁卫军所杀,后奥托(32—69)接任皇帝,在位仅三个月。详见《历史》和《编年史》。

② 见《编年史》第13卷第30章。路奇乌斯·沃路西乌斯与父同名,其父为罗马执政官。