

SELECTED READINGS
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

主 编 朱 嘉 禾
副主编 范 岳

美国文学选读



辽宁大学出版社

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Foreword

This "Selected Readings in American Literature" is intended for third-year or fourth-year students of the English specialities of colleges and universities, those who take advanced course in English in other institutes or by self-education and those who are interested in American literature. For the sake of the necessity and convenience of a large number of readers all the introductions to the authors and notes are written in Chinese. In order to give a comprehensive view of American literature, we select works by thirty-five important authors, who have occupied an important position not only in the literature of English-speaking countries but also in world literature and whose writings in this book, we think, are enough to provide readers with the necessary knowledge on American literature and help them to lay a sound foundation for further study.

In the selection of authors and their writings, attention is paid to different movements or trends, different kinds of writings and different periods especially the present time. We start from Benjamin Franklin, because in the colonial days most writings were travel accounts or sermons which are not literature in the strict sense and most writers were immigrants from England. Franklin was an author of the new generations of American-born writers. After independence, American literature was still largely influenced by European, especially by British literature. This is because the traditional ties in literature existed between America and Britain, and the close connection between them. For the first half of the 19th century, we select four romantic writers: Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne poet Bryant. The first American took America as the setting of his writings, while Irving followed the European romantic stories and Poe took also Europe as the setting of his stories and as a poet he was a precursor of modern symbolic poetry. The important novelist Hawthorne of the period wrote about things occurred in colonial days in most of his writings. For the mid 19th century, we select essays by romanticists and transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Emerson's call for a distinctive American style, dealing with American subjects exerted a great influence on the progress of Ameri-

can literature. Different from Hawthorne, Herman Melville, s novels relate adventures on the sea.

While Emerson and Thoreau were still writing, new men as Walt Whitman came to the fore. Though a romantic writer, he identified himself with the future. He developed a new form of poem, the free verse and wrote about American subjects. Contrary to Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote poems in traditional form. To bring out the contrast between them we select poems by both.

From 1870 onwards romanticism came gradually to an end together with the tradition handed down from the colonial days. Contrary to the romantic movement, realism originated from the West with Mark Twain its representative. However, before the Civil War, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe published her famous realistic novel "Uncle Tom' s Cabin" , which exerted a great influence to the war. Besides her, other important realistic novelists were William Dean Howells and Stephen Crane, whose writings showed the tendency of critical realism and whose master piece "The Red Badge of Courage" continued the tradition of psychological novel in America.

Contrary to the movement represented by Mark Twain, Emily Dickinson represented another trend in American literature, the trend to explore the inner world of one's spiritual being, cultural inheritance and the past.

At the beginning of the century, American literature came of age. Realism developed further to critical realism, called by many American critics naturalism, with Theodore Dreiser as the most prominent figure. Other important critical realistic novelists included in this book are Jack London, Sinclair Lewis, and Sherwood Anderson, the direct sucesor of Dreiser. The movement of critical realism has continued up to the present Together with them we choose writings of two prominent poets; Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg.

Among the authors who became well-known after World war I, we select Ernest Hemingway, the spokesman of the "Lost Generation" ; Scott Fitzgerald, who epitomized the "Roaring Twenties" ; John Steinbeck, the best of the social-protest novelists for the 30s, the decade of great depression; and William Faulkner, the most prominent southern writer, who wrote about the Mississippi community modeled on his own county. Thomas Stearns Eliot, the initiator of modern English and American poetry, who shaped the tastes and the critical vocabulary of a genera-

tion and whose influence is still felt now in Britain and America. Eugene O' Neille was the first American dramatist, who not only came to fame both in America and abroad but established American drama in world literature.

Since the 50s, American literature has developed further and occupied a prominent position among capitalist countries. Many new writers have come to the fore. Among them are the Jewish novelists such as Bernard Malamud and Norman Mailer. Among the black writers, Richard Wright and James Baldwin have brought about the new upsurge of black literature. The beat movement prevailed in the 50s. Among authors Jerome David Salinger as its forerunner wrote the first novel about a youth who felt dissatisfied with the bourgeois American society of his time. The movement of black humour was a movement from the sixties to mid-seventies, whose author Joseph Heller wrote the first sarcasm against American war machine in world war II. Following the tradition of Faulkner, many southern writers have made achievements with Flannery O'Conner prominent among them. Arthur Miller is the most noted postwar dramatist and the movement of the theatre of the absurd came to America also in the 60s.

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Lecture 1

Autobiography (Excerpt)

Benjamin Franklin

I¹ had begun in 1733 to study languages; I soon made myself so much a master of the French as to be able to read the books with ease. I then undertook the Italian. An acquaintance, who was also learning it, used often to tempt me to play chess with him. Finding this took up too much of the time I had to spare for study, I at length refused to play any more, unless on this condition, that the victor in every game should have a right to impose a task², either in parts of the grammar to be got by heart, or in translations, etc, which tasks the vanquished was to perform upon honor³, before our next meeting. As we played pretty equally, we thus beat one another into that language⁴. I afterwards with a little painstaking, acquired as much of the Spanish as to read their books also.

I have already mentioned that I had only one year's instruction in a Latin school, and that when very young, after which I neglected that language entirely. But, when I had attained an acquaintance with the French, Italian, and Spanish, I was surprised to find, on looking over a Latin Testament⁵, that I understood so much more of that language than I had imagined, which encouraged me to apply myself again to the study of it, and I met with more success, as those preceding languages had greatly smoothed my way.

From these circumstances, I have thought that there is some inconsistency in our common mode of teaching languages. We are told that it is proper to begin first with the Latin, and, having acquired that, it will be more easy to attain those modern languages which are derived from it; and yet we do not begin with the Greek, in order more easily to acquire the Latin. It is true that, if you can clamber⁶ and get to the top of a staircase without using the steps, you will more easily gain them in descending; but certainly, if you begin with the lowest you will with more ease ascend to the top; and I would therefore offer it to the consideration of those who superintend the education of our youth, whether, since many of those who begin with the Latin quit the same after spending some years without having made any great proficiency⁷, and what they have learned becomes almost useless, so that their time has been lost, it would not have been better to have begun with the French,

proceeding to the Italian, etc., for, though after spending the same time they should quit the study of languages and never arrive at the Latin, they would, however, have acquired another tongue⁸ or two that, being in modern use, might be serviceable to them in common life.

After ten years' absence from Boston, ⁹ and having become easy in my circumstances, I made a journey thither to visit my relations, which I could not sooner well afford. In returning, I called at Newport to see my brother, then settled there with his printinghouse. Our former differences were forgotten, and our meeting was very cordial and affectionate. He was fast declining in his health, and requested of me that, in case of his death which he apprehended not far distant, I would take home his son, then but ten years of age, and bring him up to the printing business. This I accordingly performed, sending him a few years to school before I took him into the office. His mother carried on the business till he was grown up, when I assisted him with an assortment of new types, those of his father being in a manner worn out. Thus it was that I made my brother ample amends for the service I had deprived him of by leaving him so early.

In 1736 I lost one of my sons¹⁰, a fine boy of four years old, by the smallpox, taken in the common way. I long regretted bitterly, and still regret that I had not given it to him by inoculation. This I mention for the sake of parents who omit that operation, on the supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a child died under it, my example showing that the regret may be the same either way and that, therefore, the safer should be chosen.

Our club, the Junto¹¹, was found so useful, and afforded such satisfaction to the members, that several were desirous of introducing their friends, which could not well be done without exceeding what we had settled as a convenient number, viz. twelve. We had from the beginning made it a rule to keep our institution a secret, which was pretty well observed; the intention was to avoid applications of improper persons for admittance, some of whom, perhaps, we might find it difficult to refuse. I was one of those who were against any addition to our number, but, instead of it, made in writing a proposal, that every member separately should endeavor to form a subordinate club, with the same rules respecting queries¹², etc., and without informing them of the connection with the Junto. The advantages proposed were, the improvement of so many more young citizens by the use of our institutions; our better acquaintance with the

general sentiments of the inhabitants on any occasion, as the Junto member might propose what queries we should desire, and was to report to the Junto what passed in his separate club; the promotion of our particular interests in business by more extensive recommendation, and the increase of our influence in public affairs, and our power of doing good by spreading through the several clubs the sentiments of the Junto...

I began now to turn my thoughts a little to public affairs, beginning, however, with small matters. The city watch¹³ was one of the first things that I conceived to want regulation. It was managed by the constables of the respective wards in turn; the constable warned a number of housekeepers to attend him for the night. Those who chose never to attend, paid him six shillings a year to be excused which was supposed to be for hiring substitutes, but was, in reality, much more than was necessary for that purpose, and made the constableness a place of profit; and the constable, for a little drink, often got such ragamuffins¹⁴ about him as a watch that respectable housekeepers did not choose to mix with. Walking the rounds, too, was often neglected, and most of the nights spent in tippling. I thereupon wrote a paper to be read in Junto, representing these irregularities, but insisting more particularly on the inequality of this six-shilling tax of the constables, respecting the circumstances of those who paid it, since a poor widow housekeeper, all whose property to be guarded by the watch did not perhaps exceed the value of fifty pounds, paid as much as the wealthiest merchant, who had thousands of pounds' worth of goods in his stores.

On the whole, I proposed as a more effectual watch, the hiring of proper men to serve constantly in that business; and as a more equitable way of supporting the charge, the levying a tax that should be proportioned to the property. This idea, being approved by the Junto, was communicated to the other clubs, but as arising in each of them; and though the plan was not immediately carried into execution, yet by preparing the minds of people for the change, it paved the way for the law obtained a few years after, when the members of our clubs were grown into more influence.

About this time I wrote a paper (first to be read in Junto, but it was afterward published) on the different accidents and carelessness by which houses were set on fire, with cautions against them, and means proposed of avoiding them. This was much spoken of as a useful piece, and gave rise to a project, which soon followed it, of forming a company for

the more ready extinguishing of fires, and mutual assistance in removing and securing of goods when in danger. Associates in this scheme were presently found, amounting to thirty. Our articles of agreement obliged every member to keep always in good order, and fit for use, a certain number of leather buckets, with strong bags and baskets (for packing and transporting of goods), which were to be brought to every fire; and we agreed to meet once a month to spend a social evening together, in discoursing and communicating such ideas as occurred to us upon the subject of fires, as might be useful in our conduct on such occasions.

The utility of this institution soon appeared, and many more desiring to be admired than we thought convenient for one company, they were advised to form another, which was accordingly done; and this went on, one new company being formed after another, till they became so numerous as to include most of the inhabitants who were men of property; and now, at the time of my writing this, though upward of fifty years since its establishment, that which I first formed, called the Union Fire Company, still subsists and flourishes, the first members are all deceased but myself and one, who is older by a year than I am. The small fines that have been paid by members for absence at the monthly meetings have been applied to the purchase of fire engines, fire-hooks, and other useful implements for each company, so that I question whether there is a city in the world better provided with the means of putting a stop to beginning conflagrations; and, in fact, since these institutions, the city has never lost by fire more than one or two houses at a time, and the flames have often been extinguished before the house in which they began has been half consumed...

〔作者简介〕

本杰明·富兰克林 (Benjamin Franklin, 1706—1790), 美国杰出的政治家, 科学家和作家。生于波士顿一个制造蜡烛的小业主家庭。少时在父亲的工厂做工, 断断续续读过几年书。但是他勤奋自学, 积累了丰富的知识。十二岁开始在堂兄詹姆斯的印刷厂当学徒。他曾担任过詹姆斯主办的《新英格兰报》的编辑, 后因撰写抨击殖民当局的文章而被捕入狱。1723年富兰克林前往费城谋生。在那里他历经艰辛终于独自经营起一个印刷所。他依靠自己的勤劳和智慧, 不久就打下了坚实的经济基础, 1748年他便完全可以摆脱繁忙的印刷商业, 专心从事他所热心的事业。在此期间, 富兰克林对城市生活起了主要的推动作用。他创建了美国第一座流动图书馆和美国第一所殖民地医院——宾夕法尼亚医院。他主办《宾夕法尼亚报》并倡办了美国宾夕法尼亚大学和美国第一个学术组织——美国费城哲学学会。

富兰克林热衷科学, 1752年进行了举世闻名的风筝钥匙试验。他对电的实验与观测成果为他在世界博得了盛名。

1757年至1775年间, 他作为北美殖民地四州代表曾两次远道英国, 调解英国和北美殖民地双方的关系, 巧妙地保护了北美殖民地人民反对印花税法的运动。1775年他出席第二届大陆会议, 被推选为委员会委员, 协助杰斐逊起草具有伟大历史意义的《独立宣言》。而后他全权代表美国出使法国, 同法国签署了法美盟约, 争取到法国经济及军事上的援助, 为美国独立战争的胜利作出了重要贡献。富兰克林与约翰·杰伊和约翰·亚当斯共同草拟英美之间停战和约的条款, 并亲自代表美国于1783年9月3日在巴黎和约上签字, 完成了美国的独立战争。同年, 他受命为驻法全权大使。1785年回国任宾夕法尼州州长, 后任联邦宪法委员会委员并签署了宪法。1788年他辞职, 结束了自己灿烂的政治生涯。

富兰克林一生有不少著作。最著名的文学著作是《自传》(Autobiography)。他六十五岁才开始写这部书, 目的是将他的家世和自己早年的生活告诉给他的儿子。最初他只完成了六十八页, 搁笔十一年后, 1784年又写了十四页。四年后, 他增添了第三部分长达一百一十七页。就在他与世长辞的前几周, 选写了该书的第四部分。

在当时看来, 他的文笔流畅而且通俗易懂。然而现在看来却略有些难读, 因为他在文章中使用了許多来自拉丁文的长词与长句。

在下面的节选中, 他首先谈及了自己学习外语的独特方法, 接着叙说了些悲伤的家事, 而后讲叙了他创立的俱乐部等组织在城市生活中所起的重要作用。节选的页数不多但足以展现他的创新思想和多方面的才能。

〔注释〕

1. 在这段节选中作者讲叙了自己学习外语的方法和体会, 谈到他四岁儿子的夭折, 回乡探望阔别多年的兄长, 倡立俱乐部支会及他倡建的救火会所做的大量工作。
2. to impose a task: 派给功课。
3. upon honour: 以名誉担保完成功课。
4. beat one another into that language: 相互督促学习语言。

5. Latin Testament; 拉丁文版的新约全书。
6. to clamber; 艰难地攀登。
7. proficiency; 精通一门外语。
8. tongue; 语言。
9. Boston; 波士顿, 美国东海岸一大城市。
10. I lost one of my sons; 富兰克林的儿子费朗西斯·福尔杰·富兰克林四岁死于天花。
11. Junto; 团体。
12. queries; 讨论的问题。
13. City watch; 城市巡夜。
14. ragamuffins; 衣衫褴褛的孩子; 无赖。

Lecture 2

Sketch Book (Rip Van Winkle) Washington Irving

[The following Tale was found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker, an old gentleman of New York, who was very curious in the Dutch history of the province, and the manners of the descendants from its primitive settlers. His historical researches, however, did not lie so much among books as among men; for the former are lamentably scanty on his favorite topics, whereas he found the old burghers, and still more their wives, rich in that legendary lore, so invaluable to true history. Whenever, therefore, he happened upon a genuine Dutch family, snugly shut up in its low-roofed farmhouse, under a spreading sycamore, he looked upon it as a little clasped volume of black-letter, and studied it with the zeal of a bookworm.

The result of all these researches was a history of the province during the reign of the Dutch governors, which he published some years since. There have been various opinions as to the literary character of his work, and, to tell the truth, it is not a whit better than it should be. Its chief merit is its scrupulous accuracy, which indeed was a little questioned on its first appearance, but has since been completely established, and it is now admitted into all historical collections, as a book of unquestionable authority.

The old gentleman died shortly after the publication of his work, and now that he is dead and gone, it cannot do much harm to his memory to say that his time might have been much better employed in weightier labors. He, however, was apt to ride his hobby his own way, and though it did now and then kick up the dust a little in the eyes of his neighbors, and grieve the spirit of some friends, for whom he felt the truest deference and affection, yet his errors and follies are remembered "more in sorrow than in anger," and it begins to be suspected, that he never intended to injure or offend. But however his memory may be appreciated by critics, it is still held dear by many folk, whose good opinion is well worth having, particularly by certain biscuit-bakers, who have gone so far as to imprint his likeness on their new-year cakes, and have thus given him a chance for immortality, almost equal to