




外语教学指导与学术研究系列丛书

Appreciation of the Celebrated Works of
American Literature

美国文学 经典作品赏析

© 刘迎春 等编著

 北京理工大学出版社
BEIJING INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY PRESS

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**Appreciation of the Celebrated Works of
American Literature**

刘迎春 高春明 王淑婕 郝禹 编著
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内 容 提 要

《美国文学经典作品赏析》共涵盖了美国文学近、现代7位著名作家的经典作品,其中包括作家概述、所选作品内容梗概及英文赏析评论。该书多选自美国文学中的近、现代经典作品,贴近生活、内容丰富、富有哲理、时代感强。阅读此书可以帮助读者把握近、现代美国文学发展动态,进而了解美国现代文化及社会状况。

该书的选文及赏析部分通俗易懂,并有编者自己的一定见解。

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前言

《美国文学经典作品赏析》属于英美文学学术研究丛书，可供英语专业本、专科生、研究生及广大英美文学爱好者使用。该书的编纂旨在提高广大英美文学爱好者的近、现代美国文学及文化鉴赏力和感受力，提高其文化素养，对解读由这些美国文学经典作品阐释的美国文化与社会大有裨益。

该书主要荟萃了七位美国著名作家经典名作的评论与赏析。对这些作家从其个人创作经历及作品进行了概述和总结。全书共分为三个部分：作家及作品概述；作品赏析与评论；经典原作阅读精选。

该书语言文字简练，通俗易懂，适合广大文学爱好者阅读。本书在编写过程中，由于编者水平和经验有限，错误和缺点在所难免，欢迎广大读者批评指正。

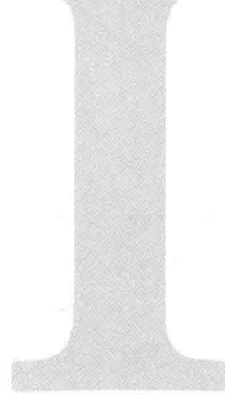
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Mark Twain

1.1 The Overview of Mark Twain

Mark Twain is generally believed to be the greatest 19th-century humorist in the United States. Mark Twain, the pen name of Samuel Clemens, originally as a newspaper correspondent, was born in a small town on the bank of the Mississippi River. Because his family was poor, he received only a basic education and took a part-time job while studying in primary school. His father died when he was eleven years old, thus he had to support himself. All his experiences in childhood contributed to accumulating materials for his later literary career. He finished a series of newspaper jobs in the Midwest and won a lot of readers, which shaped his justice heart and he became the spokesman of the people. After the American Civil War, Mark Twain wrote the reports and humorous essays under the name of Mark Twain, which has two means; one refers to the Mississippi River; the other stands for the measure of water depth equivalent to twelve feet of water. Soon his pen name became well-known all over the world and he became a famous American writer.

Mark Twain told his stories in humor as well as in an innocent and matter-of-fact manner. He developed his stories to comic novels, but not just

“regional” stories, in which writers concentrated on the differences in the various regions of the United States. He had a sarcastic trend in his novels that was suitable for the country's post-war situation. It was the post-war rebuilding period when the American economy was booming and some disadvantages aroused. Especially, the politics was covered with darkness; the complex society was filled with turbulence; and the bribery was openly practiced. However, this special period attributed to the development of literature, and it provided abundant stuff for the creation of literature, thus the literature was rooted in countryside. Mark Twain penetrated humor into reality and he selected his writing material from common people's daily life and broke the limitation between the eastern district and the western district of the U. S. , so that he grew up quickly in writing and his works were favored and admired by many people.

His novel “*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*” (1889) shows his most apparent social satire; “*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*” (1885) is considered to be the greatest novel in American literature. It is not merely a story of a boy run-away from home but with much more connotations. His other books include *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), *Roughing It* (1872), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Gilded Age* (1873), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) and *Following the Equator* (1897) etc.

In the American society, what appeals to people most is money. After the American Civil War broke out, Americans began to take a risk of getting rich. Some of them have got rich overnight with the development of economy. They take pride of themselves. Mark Twain, the great humorous writer makes full use of his sense of humor in novels to criticize such American arrogance in Americans. Certainly, he also shows his disappointment for American freedom and democracy in his novels. Longing for liberty is his instinct so that he couldn't help seeking for the idea of “American golden dream.”

1.2 Comment on *The Million Pound Note*

The Million Pound Note illustrates American dreams of money and power. What matters most in this story is that Twain sings of the protagonist, Henry, who got much money, but could still control his own behaviors, which displace his honesty, his faith for love and high morality. *The Million Pound Note* is Mark Twain's noteworthy short story which has been produced into the film.

This story is about a young man who got a large amount of money by accident in London. Originally, the Bank of England once issued two notes of a million pounds each. For some reason only one of these two notes had been canceled; the other still lay in the Bank. Two gentlemen, the brothers, bet how this left million pound note might affect the fate of a perfectly honest and intelligent stranger in London without a friend, and with no money. They chose Henry as the subject of their bet on whether Henry would starve to death or he could keep himself free in thirty days with the million pound note. Of course, the story is a comedy with a perfect ending. Henry not only ate a great feast, but also bought him the best suit. The most incredible is that he found his love with the million pound note and he returned it to the two gentlemen in the end.

Mark Twain's *The Million Pound Note* puts emphasis on the dramatic setting and presents its impact on the theme. In his dramatic piece of writing, the author creates a list of dramatic plots accompanied with great suspense. Mark Twain's purpose is to show his concern for the human beings in the unfair society. In this story, the author designs several dramatic plots which bring about the dramatic suspense to produce unbelievable effects for people.

The creation of each dramatic effect mainly comes from the dramatic plots in this novel. Mark Twain pays more attention to the common and

representative situations, such as the little restaurant, tailor's shop, etc. With the development of such plots, some more important parties appear. In general, these plots take on the dramatic effects connecting with the characters' action and conversations which can cause direct effect on people's mind.

People can easily imagine the situation just because some protagonists in this novel appear and have conversations freely. Their conversations and actions lead to the good dramatics. Obviously, the dramatic settings play essential roles in the story. Mark Twain bestows distinctive charming on the story with his unique writing style.

The typical settings based on the satiric structure can be divided into a few scenes. The first act takes place in a cheap eating house. One of the protagonists is the landlord. Twain makes a vivid description of the owner: *"His eye was on the note, and he was petrified. He was worshiping, with all his body and soul, but he looked as if he couldn't stir hand or foot."* Especially, with the conversations between the protagonists, the story has been invented wonderfully. Let's take some other examples. The protagonist Henry narrates in that way he handed the million note to the owner, and said, carelessly: *"Give me the change, please."* I said: *"I am sorry if it is an inconvenience, but I must insist. Please change it; I haven't anything else."* This plot implies Henry has nothing but a million pound note in his hand. When the other customers made the glimpse of the million note in Henry's hand, they showed their amazement and respect to Henry.

The second plot was at the tailor's shop. The protagonist Henry wanted to buy a plain suit and he did not receive good service. However, when he finished out the million pound note from his pocket, everything changed. According to the conversations in this scene, we can draw the conclusion that nothing can substitute for the word "change" which stands for American people's attitude towards worship of money and power. For instance, the word

“change” is repeated in the following sentences. *“It would be an accommodation to me if you could wait some days for the money. I haven’t any small change about me. Oh, you haven’t? Well, of course, I didn’t expect it. I’d only expect gentlemen like you to carry large change.”* Action is also crucial to the artistic expression for the story. Based on the protagonists’ action, we can find how fast people have changed their attitudes toward Henry when they see the million pound note with him. *“The proprietor took a look, gave a low, eloquent whistle, then made a dive for the pile of rejected clothing, and began to snatch it this way and that, talking all the time excitedly...”*

The third typical plot is at a party. This is a romantic situation where Henry found his love. The description is given in this way, *“we only just knew we were happy, and didn’t wish to know anything else, and didn’t want to be interrupted. And I told her—I did, indeed—told her I loved her; and she—well, she blushed till her hair turned red, but she liked it; she said she did. Oh, there was never such an evening!”* It describes what a happy moment!

In brief word, a setting is the place where the story takes place and it has impacts on the whole novel. Mark Twain wants to show the connotation by describing the events and characters in the settings in this novel. In the meantime, this story attracts so many readers just because it is a piece of writing filled with suspense which can motivate the readers’ curiosity and stimulate the readers’ feelings. The importance is readers can meditate on what they read. In this story, the suspense results from the conflicts between Henry and other protagonists. The audiences are always worried about whether Henry will succeed. The suspense is portrayed by the protagonist’s conversations and actions, and the conflicts between Henry and other characters appeal to the audience. Each scene won’t come to an end until the conflict has been resolved. On the whole, in literary works, setting has many meanings. It not only refers to the environment where the story takes place, but also refers to the stage in the drama and movie, so is the setting in *The*

Million Pound Note, thus the relation between setting and suspension is clearly presented on time, place and the protagonist's action.

A setting is the surrounding in which the protagonists live so that it is usually the microcosm of the society. The fictional account of life always originates from the real world. Particularly, a setting is the space that protagonists have to depend on to finish their behaviors. Mark Twain creates these settings in order to fully reflect the special background and finally explores and conveys the theme of the novel that people still have some conscience even living in an ugly society, and still hold a virtue—faith for love. In fact, the simple theme concentrates on the uncertainty of man's fate. In the first scene, Henry is very poor; for the second occasion, he has become a millionaire. From this point of view, the story symbolizes American dream. Meanwhile, it also evolves human beings' living conditions, thus it is a kind of theme of existentialism which advocates that man is alone in a meaningless world, that he is completely free to choose his actions, and that his actions determine his nature rather than the other way around.

Love is still a topic high praised in this story. Owing to the plot of love, the story can achieve the good ending that everybody is satisfied. The heroine Portia is a positive figure, symbolizing the pure aspects in the society. Some lines can make great impressions on people. "*Portia, dear, would you mind going with me that day, when I confront those old gentlemen?*" She shrank a little, but said: "*N-o; if my being with you would help hearten you. But—would it be quite proper, do you think?*"

"No, I don't know that it would—in fact, I'm afraid it wouldn't; but, you see, there's so much dependent upon it that—"

"*Helping, dear? Why, you'll be doing it all. You're so beautiful and so lovely and so winning, that with you there I can pile our salary up till I break those good old fellows, and they'll never have the heart to struggle.*" On the basis of the statement about Portia the heroine, we can imagine how beautiful

and gentle she is! Because of the romantic story between the young couple, we are convinced that true love really exists. No matter what kind of society it is, there is still a last piece of pure land for people to embrace.

1.3 Reading of *The Million Pound Note*

When I was twenty-seven years old, I was a mining-broker's clerk in San Francisco, and an expert in all the details of stock traffic. I was alone in the world, and had nothing to depend upon but my wits and a clean reputation; but these were setting my feet in the road to eventual fortune, and I was content with the prospect.

My time was my own after the afternoon board, Saturdays, and I was accustomed to put it in on a little sail-boat on the bay. One day I ventured too far, and was carried out to sea. Just at nightfall, when hope was about gone, I was picked up by a small brig which was bound for London. It was a long and stormy voyage, and they made me work my passage without pay, as a common sailor. When I stepped ashore in London my clothes were ragged and shabby, and I had only a dollar in my pocket. This money fed and sheltered me twenty-four hours. During the next twenty-four I went without food and shelter.

About ten o'clock on the following morning, seedy and hungry, I was dragging myself along Portland Place, when a child that was passing, towed by a nurse-maid, tossed a luscious big pear—minus one bite—into the gutter. I stopped, of course, and fastened my desiring eye on that muddy treasure. My mouth watered for it, my stomach craved it, my whole being begged for it. But every time I made a move to get it some passing eye detected my purpose, and of course I straightened up then, and looked indifferent, and pretended that I hadn't been thinking about the pear at all. This same thing kept happening and happening, and I couldn't get the pear. I was just getting

desperate enough to brave all the shame, and to seize it, when a window behind me was raised, and a gentleman spoke out of it, saying:

“Step in here, please.”

I was admitted by a gorgeous flunkey, and shown into a sumptuous room where a couple of elderly gentlemen were sitting. They sent away the servant, and made me sit down. They had just finished their breakfast, and the sight of the remains of it almost overpowered me. I could hardly keep my wits together in the presence of that food, but as I was not asked to sample it, I had to bear my trouble as best I could.

Now, something had been happening there a little before, which I did not know anything about until a good many days afterwards, but I will tell you about it now. Those two old brothers had been having a pretty hot argument a couple of days before, and had ended by agreeing to decide it by a bet, which is the English way of settling everything.

You will remember that the Bank of England once issued two notes of a million pounds each, to be used for a special purpose connected with some public transaction with a foreign country. For some reason or other only one of these had been used and canceled; the other still lay in the vaults of the Bank. Well, the brothers, chatting along, happened to get to wondering what might be the fate of a perfectly honest and intelligent stranger who should be turned adrift in London without a friend, and with no money but that million-pound bank-note, and no way to account for his being in possession of it. Brother A said he would starve to death; Brother B said he wouldn't. Brother A said he couldn't offer it at a bank or anywhere else, because he would be arrested on the spot. So they went on disputing till Brother B said he would bet twenty thousand pounds that the man would live thirty days, anyway, on that million, and keep out of jail, too. Brother A took him up. Brother B went down to the Bank and bought that note. Just like an Englishman, you see; pluck to the backbone. Then he dictated a letter, which one of his clerks

wrote out in a beautiful round hand, and then the two brothers sat at the window a whole day watching for the right man to give it to.

I would have picked up the pear now and eaten it before all the world, but it was gone; so I had lost that by this unlucky business, and the thought of it did not soften my feeling towards those men. As soon as I was out of sight of that house I opened my envelope, and saw that it contained money! My opinion of those people changed, I can tell you! I lost not a moment, but shoved note and money into my vest pocket, and broke for the nearest cheap eating house. Well, how I did eat! When at last I couldn't hold any more, I took out my money and unfolded it, took one glimpse and nearly fainted. Five millions of dollars! Why, it made my head swim.

I must have sat there stunned and blinking at the note as much as a minute before I came rightly to myself again. The first thing I noticed, then, was the landlord. His eye was on the note, and he was petrified. He was worshiping, with all his body and soul, but he looked as if he couldn't stir hand or foot. I took my cue in a moment, and did the only rational thing there was to do. I reached the note towards him, and said, carelessly:

"Give me the change, please."

Then he was restored to his normal condition, and made a thousand apologies for not being able to break the bill, and I couldn't get him to touch it. He wanted to look at it, and keep on looking at it; he couldn't seem to get enough of it to quench the thirst of his eye, but he shrank from touching it as if it had been something too sacred for poor common clay to handle. I said:

"I am sorry if it is an inconvenience, but I must insist. Please change it; I haven't anything else."

But he said that wasn't any matter; he was quite willing to let the trifle stand over till another time. I said I might not be in his neighborhood again for a good while; but he said it was of no consequence, he could wait, and, moreover, I could have anything I wanted, any time I chose, and let the

account run as long as I pleased. He said he hoped he wasn't afraid to trust as rich a gentleman as I was, merely because I was of a merry disposition, and chose to play larks on the public in the matter of dress. By this time another customer was entering, and the landlord hinted to me to put the monster out of sight; then he bowed me all the way to the door, and I started straight for that house and those brothers, to correct the mistake which had been made before the police should hunt me up, and help me do it. I was pretty nervous; in fact, pretty badly frightened, though, of course, I was no way in fault; but I knew men well enough to know that when they find they've given a tramp a million-pound bill when they thought it was a one-pounder, they are in a frantic rage against him instead of quarreling with their own near-sightedness, as they ought. As I approached the house my excitement began to abate, for all was quiet there, which made me feel pretty sure the blunder was not discovered yet. I rang. The same servant appeared. I asked for those gentlemen.

"They are gone." This in the lofty, cold way of that fellow's tribe.

"Gone? Gone where?"

"On a journey."

"But whereabouts?"

"To the Continent, I think."

"The Continent?"

"Yes, sir."

"Which way—by what route?"

"I can't say, sir."

Maybe those men mean me well, maybe they mean me ill; no way to decide that—let it go. They've got a game, or a scheme, or an experiment, of some kind on hand; no way to determine what it is—let it go. There's a bet on me; no way to find out what it is—let it go. That disposes of the indeterminable quantities; the remainder of the matter is tangible, solid,

and may be classed and labeled with certainty. If I ask the Bank of England to place this bill to the credit of the man it belongs to, they'll do it, for they know him, although I don't; but they will ask me how I came in possession of it, and if I tell the truth, they'll put me in the asylum, naturally, and a lie will land me in jail. The same result would follow if I tried to bank the bill anywhere or to borrow money on it. I have got to carry this immense burden around until those men come back, whether I want to or not. It is useless to me, as useless as a handful of ashes, and yet I must take care of it, and watch over it, while I beg my living. I couldn't give it away, if I should try, for neither honest citizen nor highwayman would accept it or meddle with it for anything. Those brothers are safe. Even if I lose their bill, or burn it, they are still safe, because they can stop payment, and the Bank will make them whole; but meantime I've got to do a month's suffering without wages or profit—unless I help win that bet, whatever it may be, and get that situation that I am promised. I should like to get that; men of their sort have situations in their gift that are worth having.

I got to thinking a good deal about that situation. My hopes began to rise high. Without doubt the salary would be large. It would begin in a month; after that I should be all right. Pretty soon I was feeling first-rate. By this time I was tramping the streets again. The sight of a tailor-shop gave me a sharp longing to shed my rags, and to clothe myself decently once more. Could I afford it? No; I had nothing in the world but a million pounds. So I forced myself to go on by. But soon I was drifting back again. The temptation persecuted me cruelly. I must have passed that shop back and forth six times during that manful struggle. At last I gave in; I had to. I asked if they had a misfit suit that had been thrown on their hands. The fellow I spoke to nodded his head towards another fellow, and gave me no answer. I went to the indicated fellow, and he indicated another fellow with his head, and no words. I went to him, and he said: