



普通高等教育“十一五”国家级规划教材

新世纪高等院校英语专业本科生系列教材（修订版）

总主编 戴炜栋

美国文学大纲

An Outline of American Literature

吴定柏 编著

第2版

Second Edition

 上海外语教育出版社
外教社 SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS
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总 序

我国英语专业本科教学与学科建设，伴随着我国改革开放的步伐，得到了长足的发展和提升。回顾这 30 多年英语专业教学改革和发展的历程，无论是英语专业教学大纲的制订、颁布、实施和修订，还是四、八级考试的开发与推行，以及多项英语教学改革项目的开拓，无不是围绕英语专业的学科建设和人才培养而进行的，正如《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》提出的英语专业的培养目标，即培养“具有扎实的英语语言基础和广博的文化知识并能熟练地运用英语在外事、教育、经贸、文化、科技、军事等部门从事翻译、教学、管理、研究等工作的复合型英语人才。”为促进英语专业本科建设的发展和教学质量的提高，外语专业教学指导委员会还实施了“新世纪教育质量改革工程”，包括推行“十五”、“十一五”国家级教材规划和外语专业国家精品课程评审，从各个教学环节加强对外语教学质量的宏观监控，从而确保为我国的经济建设输送大量的优秀人才。

跨入新世纪，英语专业的建设面临新的形势和任务：经济全球化、科技一体化、文化多元化、信息网络化的发展趋势加快，世界各国之间的竞争日趋激烈，这对我国英语专业本科教学理念和培养目标提出了新的挑战；大学英语教学改革如火如荼；数字化、网络化等多媒体教学辅助手段在外语教学中广泛应用和不断发展；英语专业本科教育的改革和学科建设也呈现出多样化的趋势，翻译专业、商务英语专业相继诞生——这些变化和发展无疑对英语专业的学科定位、人才培养以及教材建设提出了新的、更高的要求。

上海外语教育出版社（简称外教社）在新世纪之初约请了全国 30 余所著名高校百余位英语教育专家，对面向新世纪的英语专业本科生教材建设进行了深入、全面、广泛和具有前瞻性的研讨，成功地推出了理念新颖、特色明显、体系完备的“新世纪高等院校英语专业本科生系列教材”，并被列入“十五”国家级规划教材，以其前瞻性、先进性和创新性等特点受到全国众多使用院校的广泛好评。

面对快速发展的英语专业本科教育，如何保证专业的教学质量，培养具有国际视野和创新能力的英语专业人才，是国家、社会、高校教师共同关注的问题，也是教材编撰者和教材出版者关心和重视的问题。

作为教学改革的一个重要组成部分，优质教材的编写和出版对学科建设的推动和人才培养的作用是有目共睹的。外教社为满足教学和学科发展的需要，与教



材编写者们一起，力图全方位、大幅度修订并扩充原有的“新世纪高等院校英语专业本科生系列教材”，以打造英语专业教材建设完整的学科体系。为此，外教社邀请了全国几十所知名高校 40 余位著名英语教育专家，根据英语专业学科发展的新趋势，围绕梳理现有课程、优化教材品种和结构、改进教学方法和手段、强化学生自主学习能力的培养、有效提高教学质量等问题开展了专题研究，并在教材编写与出版中予以体现。

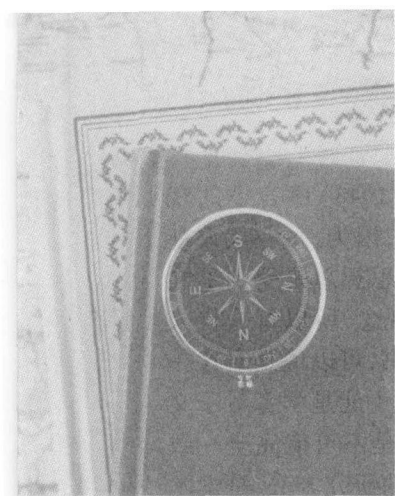
修订后的教材仍保持原有的专业技能、专业知识、文化知识和相关专业知识的四大板块，品种包括基础技能、语言学、文学、文化、人文科学、测试、教学法等，总数逾 200 种，几乎涵盖了当前我国高校英语专业所开设的全部课程，并充分考虑到我国英语教育的地区差异和不同院校英语专业的特点，提供更多的选择。教材编写深入浅出，内容反映了各个学科领域的最新研究成果；在编写宗旨上，除了帮助学生打下扎实的语言基本功外，着力培养学生分析问题、解决问题的能力，提高学生的思辨能力和人文、科学素养，培养健康向上的人生观，使学生真正成为我国新时代所需要的英语专门人才。

系列教材修订版编写委员会仍由我国英语界的知名专家学者组成，其中多数是在各个领域颇有建树的专家，不少是高等学校外语专业教学指导委员会的委员，总体上代表了中国英语教育的发展方向和水平。

系列教材完整的学科体系、先进的编写理念、权威的编者队伍，再次得到教育部的认可，荣列“普通高等教育‘十一五’国家级规划教材”。我深信，这套教材一定会促进学生语言技能、专业知识、学科素养和创新能力的培养，填补现行教材某些空白，为培养高素质的英语专业人才奠定坚实的基础。

戴炜栋

教育部高校外语专业教学指导委员会主任委员
国务院学位委员会外语学科评议组组长



前 言

美国文学的发展历史虽然只有 200 多年,但是它在这段时间里所取得的成就却是极其辉煌的。美国文学业已形成的民族性、时代性和社会性,使它成为世界文学的重要组成部分。美国文学的发展和美国历史的发展几乎是平行的。因此,学习和研究美国文学,不仅可以提高读者的文学修养,而且能够开阅读者视野,增进读者对美国社会文化、风土人情的了解。要了解美国,学习和研究美国文学是必不可少的一个环节。

《美国文学大纲》旨在概述美国从印第安人的口头文学到 20 世纪末实验性文学的发展过程及其基本特征,既要尽量反映美国文学的丰富内涵,又要在数不胜数的作家和纷繁浩瀚的作品中理出一个大致清晰的脉络。全书共 17 章。除导论介绍文学基本常识外,第一——十七章的评述内容从殖民时期延续到 20 世纪末,时间跨度约 400 年。在这 17 章史纲里,每一章的内容均由时代背景、文学流派、四五位代表性作家的评传和重要作品的分析组成。每一章都有意识地突出社会文化背景与文学创作的密切关系,因为社会是文学创作的源泉,而文学又是社会的一面镜子。每一章都用最大的篇幅评述作家及其作品,因为历史是由人创造的。没有这些作家和作品,就不会有他们所代表的文学运动,而文学史也就成为无本之木。

在厚今薄古、突出重点的原则下,本书有选择地论述了各个历史时期、各种文学流派的代表性作家 72 人。虽然笔者对美国作家与作品不抱偏见,但是由于篇幅的限制,在论述过程中,取舍在所难免,而这种取舍又不免主观武断,其依据就是笔者长期以来学习和研究美国文学过程中形成的观点。选择的标准不是哪些作家值得广泛介绍和研究,而是哪些作家最具代表性,并且最能被读者所接受。事实上,值得介绍和研究的作家之多远非任何一本书所能包容。作家的归类也是不可缺少的手段。鉴于不少作家所具有的跨时代、跨流派性和有时反映的跨文化群体的复杂现象,笔者只能以作家的主要作品来确定其倾向。因此,在处理作家的归属上主观判断在所难免,归类也只能是大致的、相对的。希望读者在理解上切忌绝对化。

笔者十分赞赏《美利坚合众国文学史》(1948)序言中的观点:“每一代人至少应该编写一部美国文学史,因为,每一代人都理应用自己的观点去阐释过去。”由于人们的思想总是受到不同时代变化着的价值观的影响,从而形成新的观念,所以每一代人都有必要编写一部新的文学史。笔者编写本书,可以说是对这一观点的积极响应。此外,任何一部文学史都不可能是学者对于文学发展史的共同认识。研究者的理解和观点是不可能完全一致的。因此,不同学者持不同的观点,采用不同的研究方法,是学术界极其正常的现象。笔者编写本书主要是参与美国文学史的探讨和研究。

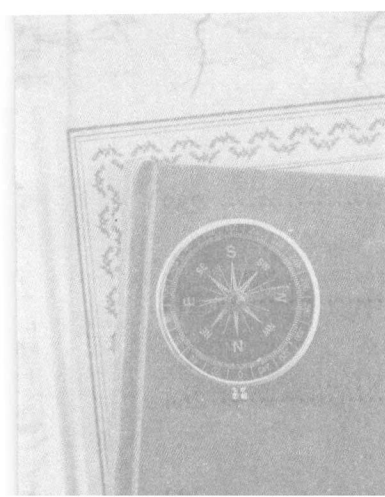
笔者学习、教授和研究美国文学 30 余年,期间(1987—1991)在美国攻读博士学位时主修的也是美国文学。作为一位参与美国文学研究的中国学者,笔者在编写本书时以马克思主义文学理论为指导,以充实的史料为基础,克服以往译解西方观点的保守手段,对文学流派、作家作品的分析突破传统观念,强调民族性、时代性和社会性,力求跟上美国文学的最新发展,吸取最新的理论观点和评论方法,尤其是对 20 世纪 80 年代以来才真正开始受到重视的文学现象进行探讨,如印第安人文学、妇女文学、少数民族和少数团体的文学。

顾名思义,《美国文学大纲》是部简明扼要的文学史纲。它不可能介绍所有文学流派的所有重要作家及其作品,也不可能对书中涉及的内容作详尽无遗的评述。它只能提纲挈领地为读者提供一个整体性概貌,为读者进一步学习和研究提供学术探讨的基础。作为教材,它适合本科学生和研究生使用;作为专著,它对美国文学的一般读者和专业人员都具有信息和参考的价值。诚然,限于笔者的学术水平,本书中错误在所难免。恳请专家、学者和广大读者不吝指正。

在本书编写过程中,承蒙美国宾州印第安纳大学英语系帕特里克·墨菲教授提供最新资料,谨在此遥致谢意。同时,我也要感谢为本书提供出版基金和大力支持本书出版的上海外语教育出版社。该社的编校人员在本书的体例设计和文字处理等方面提出的宝贵意见,使本人获益匪浅。

吴定柏

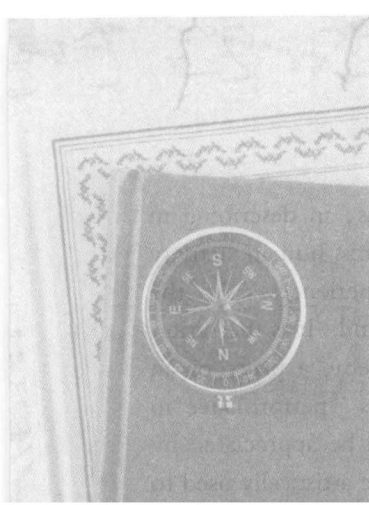
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Introduction

As a general survey, *An Outline of American Literature* concentrates on the major literary trends and the major writers of American literature from the early colonial period through the 20th century. For all the efforts on the part of the author to follow the academic fashions in the field, the selection of the topics for discussion, including trends, authors and their works, is unavoidably arbitrary. Assuredly, all the concepts, names, and titles mentioned in this book deserve their right places in the canon of the English department the world over.

Before we begin our discussions on any specific topics about American literature, it is imperative for us to deal with some basic questions concerning literature in general so as to prepare our minds for academic studies of the field. What is literature? How to define American literature? Why do people read literature? How to study literature? These are the preliminary questions that students of American literature must all know how to answer.

I. What Is Literature

The word “literature” came into English from the 14th century in the sense of polite learning through reading. Thus a man of literature, or a man of letters, meant what we would now describe as a man of wide reading. So, this word corresponds mainly to the modern meaning of the word “literacy.” From the mid-18th century, literature referred to the practice and profession of writing. This appears to be closely connected with the heightened self-consciousness of the profession of authorship. Since the 19th century, literature has been the high skills of writing in the special context of high imagination.

Whence comes literature? Literature comes from human interest

in telling a story, in arranging words in artistic forms, in describing in words some aspects of our human experiences. This human activity embodies human desire to express and share experiences. At the beginning, the literary impulse exists only in one's mind. It is the writer who turns this impulse into literature: a story, a poem, a play, or an essay, with the medium of language. It is a writer's "performance in words" as Robert Frost once said. In this way it can be appreciated by others. Therefore, we can define literature as language artistically used to achieve identifiable literary qualities and to convey meaningful messages. Literature is characterized by beauty of expression and form and by universality of intellectual and emotional appeal.

Literature as an art is the creation of individuals and it is experienced by individuals. Yet, creative artistic literature presents one of the essential sources for studying the relation between humanity and society. Great works of literature enable us to study the way in which people live out their social roles. Literature shows not only the socialized behavior of individuals, but also the process of their socialization as well; it speaks not only of individual experience, but also of the meaning of that experience. Therefore, a writer is a specialized thinker about the individual.

Literature shows us not only what a society is like in a certain age, but also what individuals feel about it, what they hope from it, and how they think they can change it or escape from it. The fictional characters see and record not only the reality around them, but their hopes, wishes, dreams, and fantasies as well. The social meanings of this inner life of the individual are related to the central problems of social change.

Literature is important in human life because the writer of literature is not bound to fact in quite the same way as the historian, the economist or the scientist, whose studies are absolutely based on what has actually happened, or on what actually does happen, in the world of reality. The writer of literature, being less bound to fact, has more scope to comment on the fact, to arrange it in unusual ways, and to speculate not only what is, but on what ought to be, or what might be (for better or for worse).

Writers are sometimes people with visionary or prophetic insight into human life. All of us who read literature will find our knowledge of human affairs broadened and deepened, whether in the individual, the social, the racial, or the international sphere. We shall understand the possibility of human life, both for good and evil; we shall understand how we came to live at a particular time and place, with all its pleasures and vexations and problems; we shall understand the ways onwards which are open to us, and we shall perhaps be able to make right rather

than wrong choices.

II. How to Define American Literature

1. Definition

We have provided the definition of literature in general and it is applicable to all literature in the world of all times. Different nations have their own literature produced in their respective national languages. Therefore, American literature mainly refers to literature produced in American English by the people living in the United States. This generalization does not exclude literature produced in other countries by American expatriates or literature produced in other languages by minorities in the country such as the American Indian literature in the Indian language and the Jewish American literature in the Yiddish language. However, as English-speaking people of European origins are the overwhelming majority of the American population and English is the national language of the country, American literature *per se* has been mainly the literary creation in English. Therefore, it is conventional to define American literature as literature produced in American English by American citizens.

2. Basic Qualities of American Writers

As the United States of America is a country of merely over two hundred years' history, she has little national literary heritage. Therefore, American writers, unwilling to imitate European tradition for long, are determined to create a heritage out of their own literary experiences in their own environment. Hence, some knowledge about the basic qualities of American writers in general is preliminary to the understanding of American literature as it is.

Generally speaking, American writers are independent, individualistic, critical, innovative, and humorous.

(1) Independent

Always in the flux of changing, American society is very fragmentary. Therefore, it lays no close hold on the writers, and writers

have been able to remain free from its control. They think and act with independence, and they see writing as an independent action. Most of them are free-lance writers. They are not raised by the government as they receive no wages from the government as writers. They make a living by writing. Hence they are independent, and they pride themselves on their independence and their right to make up their own minds. As a modern tendency, many writers are employed in American colleges as writers-in-residence. They receive wages from colleges as professors, not as writers. For some of them, the teaching load is very flexible, sometimes nominal.

(2) Individualistic

American writers prefer to rely on their own efforts for success rather than be dependent on others. They are prepared to take the initiative and do not give in easily. As they do not turn to their government for financial support, they are free from political prejudice and ideological conformity. They often resort to irony and detachment in terms of politics. Although they are often in such a dilemma as how to please the public at the same time to fulfil the social mission as writers who should reflect society, they pursue their literary career with courage and become successful all through their individual efforts. Hence they regard highly the rights of individuals and are ever ready to protect their own rights and interest. Moreover, they view writing as a means of self-expression, a way of expressing their personal views about life and society, a way of advocating liberty, democracy and independent action of the individual. Although successful writers in America are often elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters (founded in 1899) and its artistic inner sanctum, the American Academy of Arts and Letters (created in 1904), they have little intimate tie with each other. Therefore, they are individualistic and their individualism embodies a devotion to self-realization, to protection of environment and to suspicion of a mass society and power which threatens to deprive the individual of his personal identity.

(3) Critical

Most of the American writers are not satisfied with the contemporary society. They often question the prevailing values held dear by the majority of their countrymen. They discern flaws in society before these flaws have been recognized by society as a whole. They often criticize rather than eulogize American society. In their works, they explore social problems keenly and severely so as to discover universal values and then to tell the people how well they can meet the

universal values. They can laugh at themselves and their country and can be very self-critical. Their critical attitude has already become a literary tradition in America

(4) Innovative

Americans are multi-ethnic with their ancestors coming from all corners of the world. Their link with the past is never tight. They feel the least restraints and bondage to the past. It is always the new ideas, new attitudes, and new cultural faces that urge them to pursue “newness” in life and literature. Hence American writers are ever ready to change in the intellectual climate, especially in the last half century. In order to achieve their distinct identities, they often make experiments in writing. By innovating styles and techniques, they try to be different from others as much as possible and start a new trend almost every ten years. American writers have been both witnesses and prophets to history. They have done much to shape America’s changing values.

(5) Humorous

Besides, American writers esteem humor as a strictly national characteristic. It is part of their life, their character, and their style in creative writing. From Benjamin Franklin, Washington Irving, Mark Twain, Kurt Vonnegut to John Updike, American writers all apprehend and delight in the ludicrous and mirthful. Giving full play to this mental quality, they have enriched American literature with humor of all kinds. Sometimes, they comment on the pretensions of America with an affected simplicity which makes satire palatable. Sometimes, they blend realism and exaggeration skillfully in a style of noncommittal objectivity. Sometimes, they observe America through eyes that are affectedly wide and unaffectedly shrewd. Sometimes, they catch the reader off guard with an unexpected observation which should have been expected because of its perfect appropriateness to the character or the occasion that produces it. Sometimes, they write with an air of droll impersonality and play on words for witty and exaggerated juxtaposition of meaning. When inappropriateness and misunderstanding appear in familiar ways of human experiences such as incongruous details and misplaced events, the humor of incongruity and anticlimax creates amusement or bitterness.

In some cases, American writers amuse the reader by way of exaggeration or aphorism so as to help the reader see his own weak points. In other cases, they reveal the gruesome events in seemingly pleasant or light-hearted expressions so as to warn the reader of an intolerable social situation he might not be aware of. When truth is expressed in the pithiest manner possible, humor takes the form of

aphorism. When humor is embodied in ironic satire, it creates sadness and anger. When humor combines absurdity with horror, it is called “black humor,” which conveys anguish and fury, bitterness and cynicism. American humor is not always funny or carefree, but the element of surprise is always present — surprise that comes from the violation or the use of the logic of wit, or from the highest exaggeration to the lowest anti-climax.

III. Why Do People Read Literature

1. Reading for Pleasure

“Howells observed that the study of literature should begin and end in pleasure” (Baym 1156). Apart from its role of protest, education, cognition and aesthetic appreciation, literature is primarily to give pleasure, to entertain those who voluntarily attend to it. There are, of course, many different ways of giving pleasure or entertainment, ranging from the most trivial and sensational to the most philosophical and profound. We discover that literature which entertains us best does not keep us for long in the other world of fantasy or unreality. The greatest pleasure and satisfaction to be found in literature occurs when (as it often does) it brings us back to the realities of human situations, problems, feelings, and relationships. This is because literature is more than a copy of what is apparent to every eye. It is imaginative and interpretative. It reflects a special view of reality.

Human interest in reading literature is universal, but different people may read different literature and for different purposes because of their different tastes, experience, and educational background. Individuals may change their reading tastes depending on the current moods, on certain occasions, and on the different stages of their lives. Books which are good to read in one’s childhood may lose attraction in one’s adulthood. Students may read Ernest Hemingway in the classroom by day and turn to a cloak-and-sword novel at home in the evening. There is nothing strange about it, for one may have many purposes in reading. We discuss four of them to serve our purposes of the course work.

2. Reading for Relaxation

Generally speaking, literature offers the reader an exciting narrative. It leads the way for readers to an exciting world of experience that is different from their own. Thus, literature succeeds in temporarily getting readers away from their own time and place and sending them to some imaginary world that they otherwise would never know. When readers are indulged in reading, they will put aside their problems and obligations of everyday life for the time being. Modern life is full of pressure. It is people's common desire to seek temporary relaxation from the stress in life. Reading serves the purpose well and conveniently. Literature flourishes, in part at least, because of such pleasant relaxation it affords the reader.

3. Reading to Acquire Knowledge

Literature gives readers not only pleasure but also knowledge and insight into the nature of reality. The readers' interest in reading lies partly in the fact that in the process of reading they acquire a good deal of information, for instance, about America from Christopher Columbus's discovery of the New Continent in 1492 to the present. Literature gives readers an insight into the tradition, custom, beliefs, attitudes, folklore, values of the age in which it is written. Whether it is in the form of a story, a poem, a play, or an essay, literature always offers readers some new piece of information that broadens their knowledge of the world. Certain other fundamental skills and capacities are also developed through the reading of literature. They are important to readers not only in their private pleasure or their personal philosophy, but also in the day-to-day exercise of the responsibilities which come to them in the modern world as a result of the educational qualifications they obtain. These skills include the capacities for discrimination, judgment, and decision.

4. Reading to Confront Experience

In her foreword to *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (1993), Doris Lessing states, "Literature maps the world for us, fleshing out what we get from newspaper articles and television reports, giving us a parallel landscape infinitely rich and various where we may