

# The Distance Teaching Method of the British and American Literature

Zhong Ying\*, Li Jing

School of Foreign Languages, Changzhou Institute of Technology (CIT), China

Received October 17, 2023; Revised November 21, 2023; Accepted December 28, 2023

## Cite This Paper in the Following Citation Styles

(a): [1] Zhong Ying, Li Jing, "The Distance Teaching Method of the British and American Literature," *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 11, No. 12, pp. 207 - 212, 2023. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2023.111201.

(b): Zhong Ying, Li Jing (2023). *The Distance Teaching Method of the British and American Literature*. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 11(12), 207 - 212. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2023.111201.

Copyright©2023 by authors, all rights reserved. Authors agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License

**Abstract** The aim of this study was to explore the distance teaching method of the British and American Literature. The study is carried out from five aspects: the narrative, the time, the aesthetic, the value, and the moral distance. Literature teachers should keep the narrative distance to balance the complex and ever-changing relationship between the author and the readers. While confronted with the time distance, students' time gap should be filled with the recognition of the structure and the authenticity of the story. The aesthetic distance could be obtained through comprehending the rhetorical techniques applied in the text. The value distance means students' mastery of the way to hold a neutral attitude towards all values in reading. Both the teacher and the students participate in the active moral construction in terms of the code of ethics to maintain a reasonable moral distance. In this paper, the flipped class model is used to apply the distance teaching method into the pedagogy of the British and American Literature. The online materials easily provide the necessary components to allow an instructor to use a flipped-class approach to teach a hybrid class. The model must be customized and contextualized by each educator. The principles of flipped learning should be taken in contexts to meet the needs of the students. The study indicated that the elucidated relationship among the authors, narrators, characters, and readers, could contribute to grasping the organic relationship between the curriculum and the existence through the application of the distance theory. Thus, it can be concluded that the comprehension of the texts from various distances would help to establish connections between the self and others, the history and literature. It is recommended that the distance teaching method of the British and American

literature would provide paradigm reference for the similar and contemporary Literature teaching.

**Keywords** Distance, Teaching Method, the British and American Literature

---

## 1. Introduction

There are many treasures in the history of British and American literature, such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's plays, Bacon's essays, Romantic poetry, the Victorian novels, Woolf's stream of consciousness writing, and other classic works. A qualified literature teacher should be a creator of feelings, an interpreter of texts, capable of discovering and creating beauty, as well as sharing beauty with students. Arnold, a famous British critic in the 19th century, once said that the task of criticism is to "know the best that is known and thought in the world, and in it making this knowledge, to create a current of true and fresh ideas [1]." The course of the British and American literature undertakes the tasks of a similar nature. Its foothold and the starting point are students, not teaching, but learning. Teachers should help students learn to understand, appreciate, and analyze texts, cultivate their understanding, aesthetic judgment, and appreciation of literature, allowing them to discover the value of the literature on their own. The value of the British and American literature is reflected in multiple aspects, including the cognitive value and the aesthetic value, etc., which require students to comprehend. It is essential that

the course of the British and American literature be relevant to students' lives.

To organically integrate the curriculum of the British and American literature with the students' value system, it is necessary to revisit the essence of this course, return to the original issue of the curriculum design, and explore teachers' teaching objectives. Firstly, return to the essence of the literature is a must. Literature is the art of language and a work of art. We need to change our mindset and view the British and American literature as an art course, emphasizing its artistry and reducing its practicality. The course of the British and American literature should be based on art, emphasizing the aesthetic experience, cultivating aesthetic judgment, and writing about aesthetics to remain invincible. The aesthetic of the British and American literature refers to the provision of the mental pleasure in content, in addition to the beauty of language form. Secondly, the teachers have the responsibility to introduce various literary and cultural theories, combining the text-reading, the text-analysis, and the theoretical elaboration. Some terms in literary criticism, such as others, intertextuality, and the power discourse, are operational concepts that can be applied to the reading and the critical practice of literary works. The teaching content of the English and American literature courses should include critical theories and research methods to help students master the means and tools of criticism, while also reflecting the academic nature of the English majors. Finally, the English and American literature courses should have an ethical dimension that can positively guide students. Einstein once said that the core value of the humanistic education lies in the training of the mind [2]. To revitalize the spirit of the humanistic education, the literary teaching plays an important role. Literary educators should view the text as life and adhere to critical thinking, tackling the classical literature in the order of memory, simulation, and reproduction to express the personal spirit and the contemporary significance.

How to teach and what to teach is not only an academic issue, but also an ethical one. Wayne Booth (1921—2005), the second-generation figure in the Chicago School of Literary Criticism, also known as the New Aristotelian School, once seriously discussed the narrative techniques and the ethical relationships in his representative work *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. By discussing literary narrative rhetoric, he exposed a deep literary problem: The potential relationship between the fictional literary rhetoric and the novelists' moral responsibility [3]. A series of Booth-coined concepts, such as the dichotomy of the narration-display, the concept of the implied author, the narrative viewpoint, type, and the distance control, have become the methods used by many critics and researchers to comment on the intrinsic relationship between the narrative techniques and the ethics. Booth's work, as part of the theory of the British and American novels, leans more towards the practical literary issues and critical practices. He demonstrated a profound ethical concern for

the humanitarianism, which played a positive role in English teachers' ethical teaching of stories. Surrounded by the world of stories, the students' self-motivation is shaped. Teaching stories from an ethical perspective is more important than any other kind of teaching, and in fact, it is also more difficult than any academic teaching.

## 2. Literature Review of the Status Quo of the British and American Literature Teaching

The status quo of the study of the British and American literature teaching mainly focuses on three aspects: Research on the essence of Literature, the interdisciplinary teaching and the intercultural teaching.

The study of the essence of literature includes the close-reading teaching method, the feminist teaching methods, and the aesthetic perspective research. Close-reading related to the literary ontology and the new criticism, has become a fundamental knowledge and method for mastering literary criticism. Murfin focused on the close relationship among literary elements such as allusions, imagery, and onomatopoeia, emphasizing the subtle connections between the words and the sentences that form the artistic value of a work [4]. The new criticism method has made the literature teaching based on arts and aesthetics, highlighting the professionalism of the literature teaching. The teaching practice of feminist studies has provided students with a preliminary understanding of the gender system and brought a new literary perspective. McDermott discusses the connection between the feminism and the feminist studies, pointing out that feminism is not an identity, but a way of observation [5]. The way of action and survival is a social place in the blueprint for the social change. Applying feminist teaching methods to the classroom teaching of the English and American literature can encourage students to learn to view social sensitive issues from a female perspective, and at the same time, explore students' questioning spirit towards the existing ideas in the teaching process, which is conducive to the interdisciplinary practice of the literature courses. The self-awareness of literary aesthetics marks the establishment of the extension of the modern art. Following the pioneering theories of Plato's ecstasy of poetry and Longinus' sublimity, aestheticians such as Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel explored the aesthetic nature of literature from different perspectives. The aesthetic characteristics of literature construct a literary value system mediated by aesthetics, promoting the integration of the elegant and secular literary artistic forms.

The study of the law and literature has become the mainstream of the interdisciplinary teaching models. The use of the legal thinking to answer many questions in fields such as hermeneutics, moral behavior, and metaphysics has become a trend in the interdisciplinary learning and research. Litowitz explored the relationship between the

text, power, and language from an external perspective and anti-fundamentalism in the *postmodern philosophy and law*, proving the vitality of the law and the literary movement [6]. Stanley Fish's reader response theory developed the western hermeneutics based on the interpretation of the relevant legal texts [7]. The historical and legal context has deepened students' understanding of the functions and roles of poetry, prose, and drama. In addition, the interaction and the mutual learning between literature and music have homogeneity and feasibility, promoting the research of both the music and the literature. Brown pointed out that the music in novels, like the soundtrack in movies, serves as background music to create and contrast a specific atmosphere, emotion, and sound field, and its narrative effect is far better than the written dialogue or direct narration between characters [8]. The exploration of the musicality of the text has expanded the dimensions of the literary reading and criticism. As the struggle between the humanities and the science intensifies, the connection between the cognitive science and the literary research becomes increasingly close. Langer stated that the theory of cognitive science, as one of the important methods for studying literary themes, extenuated how scientists' discoveries of the human brain influence literary criticism [9]. The latest research achievements in the fields such as brain science and artificial intelligence provide multiple discourses and paradigms for the literary interpretation.

The cross-cultural teaching model emphasizes the combination of the literature and culture. The introduction of the biblical culture and Christian traditions from a historical and theological perspective enriches students' literary reading. Edmondson analyzed the allusions in the Bible, the symbols in Christianity, and the theological colors in religious art and literature [10]. The religion and the literature, as different forms of reflection of life, always influence, permeate, and coexist with each other. The visual cultural practice of literature has mobilized students' initiative and participation, promoting their critical thinking. The arrangement and the filming of the film, television, and drama based on literary works have become the main combination of the classroom and extracurricular teaching activities. Marcinik pointed out that the mainstream media in the UK and the US, such as the BBC, have converted multiple classic works into visually presented movies or television, which has driven the sales of these classics [11]. The inclusion of the racial awareness in the literary teaching reflected ethnic groups' struggle in the historical memory, which deepens students' thinking on important issues such as the history and the national memory. To establish the confrontational discourse against the mainstream discourse in teaching, the ethnic research has become a different historical and literary presentation. Morrison emphasized that different ethnic literary texts such as the native American literature, the African American literature, and the Asian American literature have led to a diversified and plural trend in the national

memory of the United States, rather than being a single discourse [12]. These works define the relationship between the British and American literature teaching and history, culture, and times in terms of the research stance and methodology. As for the domestic research, it started relatively late, mainly focusing on the macro research on curriculum, teaching methods, and learning models.

To sum up, the research on the teaching of British and American literature can be divided into two dimensions based on internal and external disciplines: The research on the essence of literature, the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural teaching models, the teaching and learning models has shown a gradual and leaping development trend from the literary theory, the literary education to the reform of teaching methods in the British and American literature. Since the 1980s, the academic exploration of the ideological connotations of British and American novels has remained a key focus. Scholars search for the discourse that communicates with reality from British and American novels in terms of ideological dimension, which is a research perspective adopted most by researchers. For example, Dickens and London, Marian Moore and immigrants, Hart Klein and New York, Wallace Stevens, Marian Moore, and the World War II all point to the connection between the fictional world and the real world in the text. The research on the teaching and learning models of British and American literature to some extent highlights the interaction between authors and readers.

Undoubtedly, the existing literature has formed a research foundation for the construction of the distance teaching model in the British and American literature, but there are still shortcomings: The systematic research coverage of the English and American literature teaching still needs to be expanded. Most of the research concentrated on early popular British and American poetry, drama, and prose, with uneven research subjects. The research perspective on teaching English and American literature is not broad enough. There are problems in the teaching and the research of the British and American literature, such as the relatively narrow scope of the discourse and the repetitive research perspectives. The research on the teaching of the English and American literary novels is not in-depth enough.

The English and American literature teaching from different clues provides a broader explanatory space for understanding the path of education and the teaching reform. The teaching model of the British and American literature requires more heterogeneous attempts. This article takes this as the starting point to explore the connotation and the essence of the distance teaching model, in order to address the challenges in teaching the British and American literature.

### 3. The Concept of Distance Teaching

The concept of distance was one of the keywords used

by Bullough in the early 20th century to describe the subject-object relationship and the historical development [13]. It has become a bridge between the complex and ever-changing relationships between authors and readers in novels, fueled by the development of literary critics such as Booth and the theory of novel rhetoric, as well as the structural poetics of Todorov and Culler. Later, the concept of distance was embedded in the discourse system of cognitive thinking [14]. The distance derived from Beckman's psychological distance and Brecht's defamiliarization effect has become an important category of epistemology, which determines an individual's perception, thinking, and understanding of oneself and the outside world. The psychologist Burke regards the distance as a category that can enhance some pleasures while suppressing others. Abrams, Hesse, and James introduced the concept of distance into cognitive aesthetics [15]. Curry, Boyd, and Schlegel further explored the concept of distance from the perspectives of the postmodern narrative and consciousness based on the form of 20th century realistic novels.

The distance teaching models of the British and American Literature discussed in this article mainly include five types: the narrative, the time, the aesthetic, the value, and the moral distance. The narrative distance refers to the complex and ever-changing relationship between the author and the reader. The control of the narrative style and distance in novels involves the complex moral effects produced by narration. The literature cannot stand idly by in this moral dilemma, and teachers have a responsibility to make a difference in promoting the transformation of the society towards goodness. The time distance refers to the time gap among the writer's writing, the narrator's narration, the protagonists' activities, and the readers' reading. To enhance the readers' pleasure in reading, the author compresses the story time and uses the affectation to preserve the illusion of reality, to achieve the goal of forming a whole, harmonious, and comprehensive effect, inevitably at the cost of sacrificing the structure and the authenticity. The aesthetic distance is a psychological description of the relationship between the subject and the object in the aesthetic activities of novels. The gap between authors, narrators, characters, and readers is caused by the author's choice of specific rhetorical techniques. Readers must eliminate their emotional involvement, try to understand, and criticize the novel from the perspective of aesthetic integrity. There are differences in the value judgments among the author, the narrator, the character, and the reader. The author's objectivity implies a neutral attitude towards all values, that is, using an unbiased neutrality of good and evil to observe the special value sequence in each novel, namely the value distance. The moral distance refers to the narrator's ability to deviate from the implied author to a greater or lesser extent in terms of code of ethics. Writers always have a biased understanding of characters' emotions and moral evaluations, and the reader's own reading process is a

process of active moral construction and identification.

#### **4. The Distance Teaching and the Text Analysis**

Due to the connections and interactions between narrative, time, aesthetics, values, morality, and other distances, there is a certain degree of overlap between different types of descriptive classification.

Narrative distance creates inferential limitations in literary teaching. The ideal narrative distance pattern for novels is to start at a large distance and end at relatively shorter ones. Readers generally have a distance from the narrator at the beginning, but as the narrative unfolds, this distance gradually narrows, and readers also grasp the beliefs and norms hidden behind them. At this moment, either the reader deviates from the narrator's beliefs and norms, turning to the author, or these three achieve some consistency. The personal perspective that bears the narrative function in the novel forms an intermediary, causing readers to develop an experiential intention, that is, the narrator's observation and narrative perspective are disconnected from the story itself. The specific narrator's perspective in a novel is inevitably limited by realistic perspectives and reasoning, thus separating the reader from the story and creating a suitable barrier between the author's self and the self that he must create in order for the work to succeed. The readers' attention to these impersonal narrative techniques can avoid the danger of preferences or emotional involvement. Given the perspective of the distance control between readers and narrators, the application of the distance teaching theory in novels is in its infancy at this stage.

The time distance could transcend the boundaries within the novel. Novels rarely start from the characters' infancy to their natural endings in a chronological order. Instead, the author would use a rhetorical device that is different from any traditional chronological order, so that readers will be immersed in a profound sensory impression. They ponder the characters' past and the causes of events in the reversal of time, thus achieving the goal of the dramatic and impersonal narration. Therefore, many seemingly off-topic texts turn out to be just a regression and repetition in time. In fact, the characters are still limited to the scope manipulated by the author, whether it is time or place. Readers can view the entire novel as a battle against time, distancing themselves intellectually and temporally from the characters in the story. They read to fill these temporal vacuum zones based on their own imagination. After the battle, they would discover the ways beyond time boundaries, exploring the truth hidden behind the memory and the art. The liberation from the story time to experience the highest reality of life, time, memory, and art has become a continuation and inheritance of the teaching theory of distance in the novels.

The aesthetic distance maintained by readers blends

conflicts during the reading process. If the author excessively pursues realistic effects while also wanting to present ideal aesthetics, these two propositions are essentially contradictory to each other. Novels, as one of the artworks, although dedicated to expressing or narrating the sadness and joy in human destiny, are completely different from the true artistic pleasure and in principle are completely opposite to ideal aesthetics. For example, the strong expectations or fears triggered by certain plots in the novel are not what normal readers would expect. Therefore, the reading process is an exploration of aesthetic objects such as the temporal and spatial distance, the social class habits, the differences in speech or clothing, based on the discussion of the narrative techniques, the rhetorical devices, and the aesthetic characteristics. These explorations and reflections, like the alienation effect of certain modern dramas and other non-realistic stage effects, have had an impact on readers' cognition. In the process of assimilating the multi-level conflicts such as religion, philosophy, and politics, readers constantly seek the eternity of aesthetics, which means boldly extending the distance teaching theory of novels from a formal perspective.

The value distance and the differentiated cognition are the prerequisites for aesthetics. There is a value identity between the author and the characters he portrays. He drifts between the text and the reality, reflecting the interactive connection between the author and the protagonist. In order to understand the story, readers must be willing to accept the established system of the meaning and the value, otherwise the story will be difficult to understand. However, readers should also hold hatred, love, or pity towards all characters impartially, and consider the value of the work as a reflection and secondary value, that is, to explore the human soul and the artistic quality of the work with an emotional impartiality and precision. At the same time, it is necessary to retain a strong cognitive curiosity about life itself, or a strong desire to experience certain unknowns, and examine the value of the work in a fun and human aesthetic state of mind. Only in this detachment could we find the same interests as the author based on visible facts such as the textual allusions and narratives. The value correlation between the author's cognition and individual emotions witnesses the transformation of the theoretical style of distance teaching in novels.

The moral distance predicts the diversity of the novel interpretation. Whenever readers face moral issues, they are enhancing their perception, imagination, and moral sense of the characters in the work, and their ability to decipher has reached its maximum at this moment. But in fact, readers do not need to decipher the moral motives of each character in the novel, as the pleasure of deciphering is a subjective gain that belongs to the main gain of the reading activity. Whether the author maintains a pure and just attitude is not a necessary condition for the success of the work. Therefore, readers could not use a narrow moralistic stance to force writers. They only need to

understand, clarify, and explore novels based on their limited artistic experience, strive to adhere to their moral bottom line in experiencing the complex emotions and imaginations of the characters, recognize the positive significance of pluralism, and be vigilant against skepticism and nihilism, in order to avoid the extreme and one-sidedness of the formalism and thus, maintain the necessary balance. The moral distance in the reading opens up new prospects for theoretical breakthroughs, extending infinitely towards the intertwined dimensions of the morality and the spirit.

Through the in-depth textual analysis of the five forms of the distance teaching mentioned above, this article explores how novels present various distances from all angles, and how to establish connections between distance and existence, the self and others, history and literature, in order to reveal the reflection of the distance theory on the teaching mode of the British and American literature and existential poetics.

## 5. Conclusions

This article opens new spaces and possibilities for thought and criticism, making up for the shortcomings in the sorting process since the 1990s, which naturally involves creative content and important textures such as new humanities and teaching models. It focuses on the basic distance concepts of narrative, time, aesthetics, value, and morality in the distance teaching model of the British and American literature, elucidates the relationship among the authors, narrators, characters, and readers, and further explores the organic relationship between the curriculum model and the changes of the times in terms of teaching origin and significance of existence. It also attempts to enrich the ontological research of the British and American literature teaching from the theoretical and methodological perspectives, and opens new fields in research paradigms and text interpretation, exploring the explanatory power of this theoretical paradigm on the target text, to provide paradigm reference for the similar and contemporary novel teaching.

In the context of the integration of world politics, economy, and culture, the research on the distance teaching in the British and American literature aims to connect the achievements of teaching practice in the field of human spirit with poetic dwelling. It tries to promote the transformation of existing research results into scientific methods and decision-making power, maintaining a balance between the teaching and the strategic learning. By not being limited to political, social, economic, and other humanistic perspectives, the writer pays attention to the impact of novel teaching on the relationship between the historical-current and humans' spiritual dilemma, with the hope of expanding the existing research perspectives, reshaping the theme and tone of new liberal arts teaching, and providing theoretical nourishment for dull teaching.

## Funding

This study is funded by the Project of Social Science Foundation of Jiangsu Province in 2021 (NO. 21WWD002), 'A Study of Sensory Memory in Ian McEwan's Works', The Innovative and Entrepreneurial Talent Project in Jiangsu Province in 2022 (NO. JSSCBS20210925), 'A Study of Urban Writing in Ian McEwan's Novels', The Project of Philosophy and Social Science Research in Colleges and Universities in Jiangsu Province in 2022 (NO. 2021SJA1273), 'A Study on the Compression of Time and Space in Ian McEwan's Novels, the Project of Social Science Foundation of Jiangsu Province in 2020 (NO. 20WWB008), 'A Study of Cultural Geography in Contemporary English and American Academic Novels'.

---

## REFERENCES

- [1] Campbell J., "The Power of Myth", Anchor Edition, 1991, pp. 9.
- [2] Einstein A., "The Expanded Quotable Einstein", University Presses of CA, 2000, pp.10.
- [3] Booth W., "The rhetoric of fiction", The University of Chicago Press, Ltd, 1983, pp.202-243.
- [4] Murfin R., "The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms", Bedford /St. Martins, 2003, pp. 20.
- [5] McDermott P., "Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy, and Militancy", University of Toronto Press, 1993, pp. 172-190.
- [6] Litowitz D., "Postmodern Philosophy and Law", University Press of Kansas, 1997, pp. 22.
- [7] Olson G., "Justifying Belief: Stanley Fish and the Work of Rhetoric", State University of New York Press, 2002, pp.
- [8] Brown C., "Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts", The University of Georgia Press, 1948, pp.270-290.
- [9] Langer J., "Literacy and schooling: A sociocognitive perspective", Teachers College Press, 1991, pp. 101-145.
- [10] Kirk A., "Jesus Tradition, Early Christian Memory, and Gospel Writing: The Long Search for the Authentic Source", Eerdmans, 2023, pp. 200-320.
- [11] Stam R., "A Companion to Literature and Film", Wiley-Blackwell, 2004, pp. 315-402.
- [12] Morrison T., "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination", Harvard UP, 1992, pp.420.
- [13] Bullough E., "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 1904-1920, 1912. DOI:10.1111/j.2044-8295.1912.tb00057.x.
- [14] Culler J., "Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism Linguistics and the Study of Literature", Cornell Univ Pr, 1976, pp. 398-406.
- [15] Abrams M., "Literature and Belief", New York, 1958, pp.241-249.