

# Under and Beyond the Words

AN APPROACH TO ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

言外之意 —— 英语故事赏析

林景鸿 林 嘉 刘洁鲁 编著



厦门大学出版社  
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## Introduction

### Introduction

*Under and Beyond the Words* differs from other anthologies of English short stories in that it attempts to fulfill its purpose of deepening the comprehension and sharpening the taste of the student by showing an approach of analyses based on the basic elements of the stories. Each story is followed by *Points to ponder*, *Under and beyond the words*, *What does the setting reveal?* *What does the character reveal?* *What does the plot reveal?* *What does the theme reveal?* and as well as *The technique employed in the story*. While we break the stories down into the component parts—setting, character, plot and theme in the analytic process, we try at the same time to bring things together as a unity so as to get the point or the focus intended in each of the stories. The views and comments presented on them might be acceptable, or sometimes one-sided or biased or even wrong; we do welcome and encourage different opinions and better interpretations for digging out what is under and beyond the words for the selected stories. With such a design of the book, we do hope that it could be of some help for the students to have the ground to start from appreciation of short stories to that of great works in literature.

A short story is a condensed fictional narrative usually in prose, which concerns a relatively small number of characters involved in a single action with one theme. In terms of length, it may range from about 500 words to sometimes of 12,000 or 15,000 words, usually manageable at one single setting. It is usually composed of the following elements: setting, plot, character, and theme. Setting refers to the particular time and place with other environmental factors and plot is a chain of logical events. Character refers to the person presented in the story and theme is the central idea or message that the story conveys, or a moral or a statement abstracted from the story. A good story is an organic unity in which all the vital elements have interrelations. Each

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element implies all the other elements, and implies them in motion toward a significant end.

Techniques in short stories include point of view, symbolism, imagery, style, tone, and irony. Point of view is the angle from which the story is narrated. It can be classified into first-person point of view, third-person limited point of view, and omniscient point of view. A symbol refers to an object, character, or incident that stands for something else, or suggests more than its literal meaning. Style is the uniqueness of a writer, in terms of diction, rhetorical devices and sentence patterns. Tone reflects the author's attitude toward his subject matter: angry, ironic, humorous, etc. Irony always involves contrast, a discrepancy between the expected and the actual, between the apparent and the real; such contrast may appear in many forms. A speaker uses irony, for example, when he deliberately says something which he does not mean, but by the tone what he does mean.

We are deeply grateful to the authors for their wonderful stories compiled in the book, and We'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Professor Zhong Kunmao for his faithful translation for some of the stories in the book and to Deborah Sanders, an invited foreign expert working in my university from the United States and Professor Chen Liying, for their careful proofreading and their valuable comments and suggestions on the book.

**Lin Jinghong**  
Longyan University

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## Chapter 1

### About the author:

Antonis Samarakis (1919—2003), Greek writer, was born in Athens and studied law at Athens University. A civil servant in the labour ministry, he resigned in 1936, when General Metaxas imposed a fascist-style dictatorship on Greece, but resumed his post in 1945. During the German occupation, he joined National Solidarity, a precursor of the main leftwing resistance organization, the National Liberation Front. From an early age, he wrote poetry for literary magazines and anthologies. But in the 1950s, he made the decisive turn to prose fiction, publishing his first collection of short stories, *Hope Wanted* in 1954. His masterpiece, *The Flaw* (1969) was eerily prophetic of the military dictatorship that was shortly to be established in his native land.

Unusually for a Greek writer, Samarakis did not generally focus on issues arising from his country's troubled 20<sup>th</sup>-century history, or on the consequences of modernity for the fabric of Greek society. His themes, which found a receptive readership particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, were the helplessness of the ordinary person in the face of growing state power, the nuclear threat, the loss of ideas, public corruption and the alienation of the individual in an uncaring, consumer society. Translations of his works into more than 30 languages, as well as the stage and screen adaptations, attest to his ability to address issues of common humanity.

The protagonists of his short stories are ordinary people facing crises in their lives and beliefs—a widow bringing up a consumptive child in slum conditions, a priest tending a dying man, a soldier unable to kill the enemy with whom he feels a common bond, and a man who seeks to



regain his childhood innocence by buying the house in which he spent his early years. Their situations lead to a shattering of hopes and ideals or to a new affirmation of human values. Samarakis' first novel, *Alarm Signal*, (1959) and second collection of short stories, *I Refuse* (1961) which won the state prize for short stories, developed the same themes and further established his reputations, enabling him to resign from the civil service in 1963 and devote himself to fulltime writing.

As in much of Samarakis' work, the characters are anonymous, the style fragmented and plain, sparing in description, but racy, with unexpected twists and an often caustic humor. His protagonists' agonized states of mind are depicted with frequent repetitions of words and phrases, often tending to stream of consciousness.

## **The River**

By Antonis Samarakis

The order was quite explicit. Bathing in the river was forbidden; also it was out of bounds to everyone for a distance of two hundred meters. Consequently there could be no misinterpretation. Anyone disobeying the order would be court-martialed.

The major himself had read it out to them a few days before. He'd ordered a general muster of the entire battalion and read it to them. An order from Headquarters! It was no laughing matter.

About three weeks ago they'd come to a halt on this side of the river. On the further side was the enemy, *the Others*, as they were usually called.

Three weeks of inactivity. Of course, this situation wouldn't last for long, but for the moment there was calm.

For a considerable distance on both sides of the river there was forest. A thick forest. In the middle of the forest the opposing forces were encamped.



Their information was that *the Others* had two battalions there. But they weren't starting an attack. Who could tell what their intentions were? In the meantime outposts from both sides had been hidden in the forest on either bank, ready for any possibility.

Three weeks. Had three weeks really passed? They couldn't remember any other similar lull in the war since it started about two and a half years ago.

When they'd got to the river it had still been cold. But a few days ago the weather had cleared up. It was now spring!

The first to slip off to the river was a sergeant. He slipped off one morning and dived in. A little later he crawled back to his own side with two bullets in his ribs. He only lived a few hours.

The next day two privates went over. No one saw them again. Just bursts of machine gun fire and after that, silence.

Then the order came from Headquarters.

But the river was still a great temptation. They heard its waters flowing and they lusted for it.

The last two and a half years they'd been eaten by squalor. They'd forgotten no end of pleasures. And now they'd chanced upon this river. But the order from Headquarters...

"Damn the order from Headquarters!" he muttered between his teeth that night.

He was tossing and turning and couldn't get to sleep. He could hear the river in the distance and it wouldn't let him rest.

Tomorrow he'd go, yes, he'd certainly go. Damn the order from Headquarters!

The other soldiers were asleep. Finally, he too got to sleep. He had a dream, a nightmare. At first he saw it as it was—a river. The river was in front of him, was waiting for him. And he, naked on the bank, didn't throw himself in. An unseen hand seemed to be holding him back. Then the river changed into a woman. A dark, young woman with a firm-set body. Stretched out naked on the grass. She was waiting for

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him. And he, naked, in front of her, didn't throw himself upon her. An unseen hand seemed to be holding him back.

He woke up exhausted. It wasn't yet light...

When he got to the bank he stopped and started to look at it. The river! So the river did exist! For hours on end, he had wondered if it really existed or if it was fantasy of theirs, a mass illusion.

He'd found an opportunity and made off for the river. It was a fantastic morning! If he was lucky and they didn't get wind of him... If he could just dive into the river, plunge into the water, he didn't care what happened.

He left his clothes by a tree on the bank and his rifle upright against its trunk. He cast a last glance behind in case there was someone from his side, and a last glance at the opposite bank for one of *the Others*. Then he plunged in.

From the moment his stark naked body entered the water, the body that had been tortured for two and a half years, that, up to now, was scarred by two wounds, from that moment he felt a new man. A hand seemed to pass through him with a sponge and wipe out those two and a half years.

Now he swam on his stomach, now on his back. He let himself be carried on the current. He made long dives.

Now the soldier was a child again. He was only twenty-three but the last two and a half years had left deep scars inside him.

Right and left, on both banks, birds were flying about. Sometimes they flew above and greeted him.

At one moment a branch, caught in the current, floated in front of him. He tried to get to it in just one long dive. And he did! He came up from the water exactly beside the branch. He felt terrific! But that same moment he saw a head in front of him, about thirty meters off.

He stopped and tried to see better.

The other swimmer had seen him as well. He too stopped. They looked at each other.



Immediately he reverted to his former self—a soldier who had already seen two and a half years of war, who had a Military Cross, who had left his rifle against the tree.

He couldn't tell if the fellow facing him was one of his own or one of *the Others*. How could he? He could only see a head. It could be one of his own. It could be one of *the Others*.

For a few minutes both remained motionless in the water. A sneeze broke the silence. It was him and he swore aloud as he always did. Then the other fellow began to swim quickly to the other bank. But he didn't waste any time either. He swam with all his strength to his bank. He got out first. He dashed to where he'd left his rifle, grabbed it. *The Other* one was just getting out of the water. Now he too was running to get his rifle.

He raised his rifle, took aim. It was too simple for him to put a bullet into *the Other's* head. He was an easy target as he ran stark naked only about twenty meters away.

No, he didn't pull the trigger. *The Other* one was on that side, naked as he had come from his mother's womb. And he was on this side, equally naked.

He couldn't pull it. Both were naked. Two naked men. Stripped of clothes. Stripped of names. Stripped of nationality. Stripped of their khakied selves.

He couldn't pull it. Now the river didn't separate them; on the contrary, it united them.

He couldn't pull it. *The Other* one had now become one other human being without a capital O, neither more or less.

He lowered his rifle. He lowered his head. And up to the finish he saw nothing. He only caught a glimpse of some birds flying in terror as the shot rang out from the opposite bank and he fell, first to his knees, then flat on his face to the ground.

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### ***Notes:***

1. headquarters—the central office or place where the people work who control a large organization, such as the police or army or a private company
2. private—a soldier of the lowest rank

### ***Points to ponder:***

1. What do the symbols employed in the story symbolize?
2. The characters in the story are anonymous. Why does the author do so?

### ***Under and beyond the words:***

Here is a very odd war story—certainly, in its unique design. What strikes the readers first and most is the unusual way of Samarakis' telling the story; no firm setting, nor even names for the characters in the story. Obviously Samarakis adopts the objective treatment in presenting the story, offering no direct presentation of the thoughts or feelings of the character, giving no comment of the author but the events narrated matter-of-factly, compactly and vividly. With such a special design, as well as with symbols skillfully woven into the story, Samarakis does not intend to confuse his readers about what is narrated in the story but to aim at revealing something general or universal, which he hopes the readers might arrive at between the lines. Odd as the device of the story appears, it lacks in fact no basic elements which form the unity of a story, and which lead to its universal stature or what is under and beyond the words.

#### **What does the setting reveal?**

Unlike the usual way of telling a story concerning the setting, Samarakis presents no information about where and when the war happened. There is no knowledge of who is against whom, nor any

telling for the unknown war. What he has presented in the story is only a war that lasts two and a half years and a river with no name, which separates the soldier's battalion and the opposite forces in a certain thick forest. The seeming lack of the necessary information about the setting is by no means Samarakis' carelessness but a well-thought device in paving the way for leading the readers to its revelation of something which he wants them to arrive at. The unknown river, the beautiful nature, has been unfortunately turned into a slaughter place where many soldiers of both sides have fallen victims while swimming in it. The river has thus become a symbol, one that might signify any rivers or more figuratively, any place in the world. To Samarakis, the specific time of what happens in the story is not important, for what he aims at is to reveal something universal, something true, to be more exact, that a war might be launched at any time and at any place in the world.

**What does the character reveal?**

The protagonist is "he", a twenty-three-year-old soldier in a battalion during an unknown war, which has left "deep scars inside him". "He" lusts for the river, hoping to wipe out the "squalor" and to bring back endless pleasures from the nature, which shows he is tired of the war. "He" enjoys the moment he feels a new man in the river, likes the "birds" that flying about and on both banks and even wishes that "the Other" could become "one other human being without a capital O, neither more or less". All these details add up to an image of an ordinary soldier who hates wars and loves peace. But the significance in the story, so far as the character is concerned, lies not in creating such a vivid and credible soldier, but in the clever handling of the meaningful pronouns "he" and the "other". Samarakis takes the advantage of the function of the pronoun, which is used in place of a noun or a noun phrase, such as "he" instead of "Peter" or instead of "the man", by tactfully turning the two lifelike soldiers into the two abstract language signs throughout the story to achieve the aim he intends. In so doing, it

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is not difficult to infer, Samarakis hopes the readers might come to the realization that “he” or the “other” might refer to anyone of the soldiers from the opposing forces.

### **What does the plot reveal?**

The plot itself in the story is very simple. A 23-year-old soldier, who goes swimming against the order from the headquarters, is killed by the other soldier from the opposite force. The former gets out of the river first, he could have killed “the other” had he not felt the common bond between them. The “Other”, however, being a man in “Khakied uniform”, shoots him dead like many other victims killed in the river. There are not usual bloody scenes in other war stories though, the cruelty and terror are also shockingly exposed in this simple story in prose.

### **What does the theme reveal?**

The setting with no specific time and place, the characters with no names and the plot with no complicated events as well as the subtle symbols are the special designs of the story. These extraordinary devices are working closely and effectively towards its extraordinary result of its anti-war theme. By presenting no time and place of the event, Samarakis seems to give the readers the message that men might make any place a battlefield. By abstracting the characters as “he” and the “other”, he tries to let them stand for any soldiers who might fall victims to the war. Through presenting the simple plot, he aims at the cruelty of the war being felt by the readers as the same as the bloody scenes in other stories or novels. What adds to the significance is the symbols tactfully employed in the story. All these elements and the skill function effectively to a coherent unity of the story, giving rise to a very impressive and strong protest against any war in the world.

### **The technique employed in the story: the symbol**

A symbol is a person, object, image, word, or event that evokes a range of additional meaning beyond and usually more abstract than its literal significance. Symbols are educational devices for evoking complex

ideas without having to resort to painstaking explanations that would make a story more like an essay than an experience. They can be divided into conventional symbols and literary or contextual symbols.

Conventional symbols have meanings that are widely recognized by a society or culture. Some conventional symbols are the Christian cross, the Star of David, a swastika, or a nation's flag. Writers use conventional symbols to reinforce meanings.

A literary or contextual symbol can be a setting, character, action, object, name, or anything else in a work that maintains its literal significance while suggesting other meanings. Such symbols go beyond conventional symbols; they gain their symbolic meaning within the context of a specific story.

So far as *The River* is concerned, there are both conventional and literary or contextual symbols employed in the story. The conventional ones include "the bird", which symbolizes peace, "the naked man" standing for innocence and natural human beings and the "khakied selves" symbolizing soldiers. But what strikes the readers most is the contextual or literary symbols used in the story. The impressive one is the setting—the river, which is employed to suggest the beautiful nature the soldiers of both sides lust for and at the same time, the boundary between them and a battlefield as well. The symbolic meaning of it is then further enhanced vividly in the protagonist's dream by the images of a dark young woman with a firm-set body, waiting for him, and of an unseen hand, which symbolizes the war, holding him back. What is more original and subtle is the tactful handling of the pronouns such as the "Others" with a capital O. With the capital O, they are "khakied selves" or enemies, who have the responsibilities as soldiers. Without it they are completely the same as "us" to whom they are closely related.



故事译文

## 界 河

安东尼斯·萨莫瑞基斯

命令是十分明确的,不仅禁止在河中洗浴,而且任何人不得进入河边 200 米范围之内。对此命令不得有任何疑义。凡违抗命令者将以军法处置。

少校几天前亲自向他们宣读了这个命令。他下令全营官兵集合,并向他们发布了这条命令。这是司令部的命令!军中绝无戏言。

大约三个星期前,他们来到河的这一岸驻扎下来。在河的那一边是敌人,他们通常称之为“对方”。

三个星期以来,各自相安无事。当然,这种局面不会持续很久,但此刻还是一片安宁。

河的两岸有相当一片地是森林,浓郁茂盛。双方的部队就驻扎在森林中。

他们获悉,“对方”那里有两个营的兵力。但是,他们没有发起攻击。谁能说出他们的意图呢?与此同时,双方的前哨部队隐蔽在各自岸边的森林里,准备应付可能发生的任何情况。

三个星期。真的已经过去三个星期了吗?他们记不清楚自战争两年半前开始以来,是否有过同样长时间无战事的状况。

当初他们来到这条河上时,天气还很冷。然而几天前,天气放晴了。此时正值春天。

第一个溜出营地来到河边的是一位中士。他是早上溜出去下的河。不一会儿,他就爬回到自己这边岸上,肋骨上挨了两颗子弹。他只活了几个小时。

第二天,两个二等兵去了河边。没有人再见到他们。只听见机关枪的一阵扫射声,之后便悄然无声了。

紧接着司令部就传来了这个命令。

但是河水仍然是一种巨大的诱惑。听到河水在汨汨流淌,他们就心驰神往。

这两年来,他们饱受肮脏之苦。他们已经忘记了那洗浴的无尽欢乐。可现在,他们与这条河不期而遇了。但是司令部的命令……

“该死的司令部命令!”那晚他从牙缝中挤出抱怨的话。

他辗转反侧无法入睡。他能够听到远处的流水声,而这是不会让他安宁入睡的。

明天他就去,是的,他一定要去。管他什么司令部的命令呢!

其他的士兵已经入睡。最后,他也睡着了。他做了一个梦,一个噩梦。起初,他看见的是一条河,像它原来的那副样子。这条河就在他的面前,在等着他。而他,赤裸着身躯站在岸上,没有投身入水。好像有一只无形的手在阻止着他。之后,河水变成了一个女人,一个体格健壮肤色黝黑的少女。她在草地上伸展开赤裸的身躯,在等待着他。可是他,赤身裸体站在她面前,却没有投入她的怀抱。似乎有一只无形的手在阻止着他。

他醒了过来,浑身无力。天还没亮……

他来到河边,停住脚步,举目望去。河!真的有一条河!一连好几个小时,他一直在想是真的有这么一条河呢,还是他们产生的一种幻觉,一种共同的幻觉。

他找到了一次机会,匆忙离开营地来到河边。多么美妙的一个早晨!要是他走运,他们就不会听到他……只要他跳到水里,扎入水中,他就不在乎发生什么事情了。

他把衣服丢在河岸边的树旁,把步枪靠在树干上。他向身后瞥了最后一眼,以免他这边有什么人;又向对岸瞥了最后一眼,以防“对方”有人。随后他便跳入水中。

从他的赤裸的躯体,那迄今饱受两年半战争之苦,那两次受伤留下伤疤的躯体入水的那一刻起,正是从那一刻起,他感觉好像换了一个人。似乎有一只手抚遍了他全身,用海绵拭去了他两年半的苦痛。

他在水中游着,时而俯式,时而仰泳。他一会儿随着水漂流。一会儿长距离潜泳。

此刻,士兵又变成了个孩子。他只有 23 岁,然而两年半的战争在他心中留下了深深的伤痕。

在河的两岸,无论左岸还是右岸,鸟儿在飞舞。有时它们飞过来和他打招呼。

不一会儿,一根树枝被卷入水流,在他的前面漂浮着。他试图一个猛子扎到那儿。他做到了!他在水中露出身来时,正好在树枝的旁边。他感到痛快极了!但是就在这时,他看到他前面有个人的脑袋,大约 30 米远。

他停下来,努力要看得更清楚些。