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英美经典短篇小说鉴赏



郑博仁 王鹏飞 王维民 唐跃勤◎编著



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内容提要

本书编撰的主要特点之一是以英语短篇小说结构要素为主线，分为8章加以专题介绍和讨论，依次为：情节与结构、人物、视角、场景与氛围、主题、象征与寓言、语言与风格、以及反讽与矛盾。其次，本书分英国短篇小说和美国短篇小说两部分，共计选编了16篇作品为范例。而且所选篇章皆为经典传世之作，其代表作家包括从19世纪的华盛顿·欧文到20世纪的多丽斯·莱辛等在内的16位著名短篇小说大师。第三，每章含英、美短篇小说各一篇。每章各有中心，但彼此呼应相连，所选的短篇小说既体现所在章节的重点，又可联系其他章节进行讨论。此外每篇作品的鉴赏均由6个部分组成，分为“作者简介”、“作品简介”、“作品”、“注释”、“讨论题”和“作家隽语”等。书末的附录一是“文学批评方法简介”，对西方文艺理论的发展、主要流派及分析方法做了简要讲解。附录二是“文学术语”，对文学评论中常用术语做了简要解释，方便读者在阅读、分析实践中查阅。

本书是西南交通大学英语专业文学教材之一，可作英语专业学生必修课或选修课教材之用，也可供社会上英语爱好者进修之用。本书编写虽然凝聚了编者的辛勤笔耕，但难免存在不少缺点和疏漏之处，诚恳能得到使用本书的教师和学生提出批评与建议。

编者

2011年12月

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A Brief History of Short Story

I. WHAT IS A SHORT STORY?

Short Story, fictional work depicting one character's inner conflict or conflict with others, usually has one thematic focus. Short stories generally produce a single, focused emotional and intellectual response in the reader. Novels, by contrast, usually depict conflicts among many characters developed through a variety of episodes, stimulating a complexity of responses in the reader. The short story form ranges from "short shorts," which run in length from a sentence to four pages, to novellas that can easily be 100 pages long and exhibit characteristics of both the short story and the novel. Because some works straddle the definitional lines of these three forms of fiction—short story, novella, and novel—the terms should be regarded as approximate rather than absolute.

Distinctions should be made between short tales and the modern short story as it is usually regarded. Short tales go back to the origins of human speech, and some were written down by the Egyptians as long ago as 2000 bc. They usually dramatize a simple subject and theme and emphasize narrative over characterization; the opposite is true of the modern short story, where characterization, mood, style, and language are often more important than the narrative itself. Distinctions should also be made between commercial and literary fiction within the short story genre. From O. Henry to Stephen King, commercial short fiction has traditionally featured predictable plot formulas, stock characters and conflicts, and superficial treatment of themes. Literary short fiction employs complex techniques to depict the often – irresolvable dilemmas of the human predicament.

II. FORERUNNERS

The most ancient tales are those of Egypt that date from 2000 bc; the fables of the Greek slave Aesop; and the retellings, by the Roman writers Ovid and Lucius Apuleius, of Greek and Asian stories of magical transformations. Besides the perennially popular Indian story collection, the *Panchatantra* (composed between the 3rd century BC and the 4th century ad), the major Asian collection of nondidactic, non-moralistic tales is undoubtedly the *Arabian Nights*, a collection of stories from Persia, Arabia, India, and Egypt that was compiled over hundreds of years. In this collection, a frame tale is employed. A sultan, enraged by his wife's infidelity, orders her executed. He forms a plan to marry a new woman each night and to have each new bride killed the next day. Scheherazade, the daughter of one of the sultan's officials, agrees to marry the sultan but crafts a scheme to thwart him. Each night she tells a story so intriguing that the sultan lets her live to the next night in order to hear the end, whereupon she starts another tale. After 1001 nights he relents and lets her live.

Stories in all their variety flourished in western Europe during the Middle Ages (5th century to 15th century). Romances, in prose or verse, many about knights in King Arthur's court, abounded in France. English poet Geoffrey Chaucer and Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio preserved and refined many of the best stories of the Middle Ages. They retold (in prose or verse) fables, beast epics, exempla (didactic religious tales), romances, fabliaux (ribald tales of amorous or coarse adventure), and legends. Like the *Arabian Nights*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (14th century) and Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353) incorporate the frame tale as a setting for other stories. Chaucer's most enjoyable tales include "The Miller's Tale," a fabliau, and "The Nun's Priest's Tale," a mock-heroic epic. "The Knight's Tale" is a superb representative of the romance. Boccaccio's tale of a man who sacrifices his falcon for the woman he loves displays all the formal perfection of the modern short story.

After Boccaccio, the short, realistic narrative in prose, known as the novella, blossomed as an art form in Italy. In France, Boccaccio's influence was seen in the anonymous burlesque prose tales *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles* (The Hundred New Tales, about 1460) and in the more decorous love stories of the *Heptaméron* (1558) by Marguerite de Navarre. Also in France, in the 17th century, Jean de La Fontaine

produced fables in verse that rivaled Aesop's. In 18th – century England, Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele published many stories—semifictional sketches of contemporary character types—in the magazine the *Spectator*. Later, in the early 19th century, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819 ~ 1820), by Washington Irving, included evocative descriptions and short tales, the first examples of the short story in the United States.

III. THE 19TH CENTURY

The short story as it is known today is a development of the 19th century, when popular and literary magazines began increasingly to publish short stories that often reflected the dominant literary modes of the day. In the early 19th century, romanticism shaped the short fictions of Heinrich von Kleist and E. T. A. Hoffmann, in Germany; Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, in the United States; and Nikolay Gogol, in Russia. Realism took hold in France in the 1830s, followed at the end of the century by naturalism, in which human interactions are viewed as scientifically predictable. Other stylistic influences on the 19th – century short story included symbolism and regionalism.

A. The United States

Until the 19th century, the primary focus in most stories had been on the “what happened” element. Then writers began to concentrate on the motivations that propelled characters into conflict. At the same time, attention was directed to techniques of economic storytelling: artful structuring of events, exclusion of extraneous material, strict control and focusing of point of view, and selection of precisely appropriate diction. In his 1842 review of Hawthorne's *Twice – Told Tales* (1837), Poe was the first writer to define the short story in this way Poe proved his artistic theory in several of his own tales. In “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846), for example, he manipulated setting, character, and dialogue to lead the reader inexorably to the emotional state most appropriate for the perfect murder. Hawthorne's stories, on the other hand, probed character and the moral significance of events, leaving their physical reality ambiguous. In “Young Goodman Brown” (1846), the dark meetings in the woods of the townspeople of Salem occurred less certainly than did the spiritual changes in Brown himself.

In his preface to the definitive edition of his works, Henry James, whose theories of fiction influenced generations of storytellers, emphasized the role of a “central intelligence” in shaping and filtering a story’s materials. Thus, in his ghost story “The Jolly Corner” (1908), James used the narrator to convey a sense of immediacy and of psychological realism. In “A Bundle of Letters” (1879), he experimented with point of view, presenting the story through a series of letters written by six persons living in a French pension.

B. Germany

The *Novelle* (the counterpart of the older Italian novella) flourished in 19th – century Germany in the hands of a variety of writers including Hoffmann, Kleist, and Theodor Storm, author of the classic romance of childhood *Immensee* (1852). The *Novelle* focuses on a single unusual or striking event, on a character or group of characters to whom the event occurs, and on a surprising conclusion that is propelled by a significant turning point.

C. Russia

The concern of Mikhail Lermontov with character study in his cycle of stories *A Hero of Our Time* (1840) contrasts with *A Sportsman’s Sketches* (1852), a cycle of tales by Ivan Turgenev in which a huntsman’s visits to various rural locales are used to paint a convincing picture of Russian life. Gogol influenced later development of the short story when he fused dream and reality in “The Overcoat” (1842): An insignificant clerk dies of heartbreak after the theft of his new overcoat, but he returns from death as a ghost to seek justice. Gogol’s influence can be seen in the story “The Crocodile” (1865) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in which a civil servant, although swallowed by a crocodile, continues from within the monster’s belly to develop principles of economy. A different strain in Russian fiction is represented by the realistic stories of Leo Tolstoy. “The Death of Ivan Ilich” (1886), for example, analyzes a man’s thoughts and emotions as he gradually realizes he is dying; at the same time it criticizes the shallowness of Ivan’s family and friends, who refuse to face the reality of his death. The master of ironic detachment in Russian stories was Anton Chekhov. For Chekhov, character rather than plot was important. In “Heartache” (1886), a hack driver tries to convey to his passengers his sorrow at the death of his son, but no one will listen except his horse. In “Vanka,” a boy writes to his grandfather asking to be rescued from a hard life, but the letter is mailed without being properly addressed or

stamped.

D. France

During the 19th century in France, Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, better known for their novels, wrote several admired short stories. Prosper Mérimée, on the other hand, concentrated his talent on short fiction; despite the controlled, detached style of his masterpieces *The Etruscan Vase* (1830), *Colomba* (1840), and *Carmen* (1845), the works manage to express fierce passion. Fanciful stories such as “Father Gaucher’s Elixir” and the other tales collected in *Letters from My Mill* (1869) won popularity for Alphonse Daudet, who also produced many realistic and naturalistic stories. The most highly regarded of the naturalistic short-story writers in France, however, was Guy de Maupassant. His 300 stories demonstrate mastery of the economy and balance necessary to the perfectly crafted, formal short story. Taken together, his stories paint a detailed picture of French life toward the end of the century.

IV THE 20TH CENTURY

Since 1900, enormous numbers of short stories have been published annually, in almost every language. Experiments in subject matter and narrative technique vie with displays of skill in the art of telling traditional stories in a traditional manner, as in the work of English writer W. Somerset Maugham. A disciple of Maupassant, Maugham was one of the most prolific and popular of all short-story writers, writing mostly about British colonials in the South Pacific. Many countries boast of at least one great 20th-century short-story writer. For example, Katherine Mansfield, the New Zealand author, whose own style shows the influence of Chekhov, may be considered a formative influence on the genre. Her obliquely perceptive stories of life’s ironies fostered several generations of imitators.

A. The United States

The short-story form has flourished in the United States. At the turn of the century, Mark Twain, O. Henry (famed for his paradoxes and surprise endings), and the regionalists Stephen Crane and Willa Cather played important roles in this development. Sherwood Anderson proved in his short-story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) that absence of plot could enhance portrayal of character. Many of the short stories of

Ernest Hemingway, economically written as they are, seem full of insignificant detail; the detail, however, is used to reveal subtle shifts in a character's psychological states. William Faulkner probed the deep recesses of the human psyche while experimenting with fictional forms and creating, in successive stories and novels, a mythic South. In "That Evening Sun" (1931), for example, he dissected a black woman's fears while creating a believable world populated with characters who evoke in the reader both pity and sympathetic laughter.

The newer American story writers, those critically acclaimed since the 1940s, include two other southerners: Eudora Welty, with her mixture of humor and pathos, and Flannery O'Connor, with her passionate moral concern. John Cheever and John Updike, noted for their dispassionate stories about the ironies of northern suburban life, were among the most polished short-story writers to emerge after World War II (1939 ~ 1945). Leaders of the avant-garde in various experiments with narrative format include Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Donald Barthelme, Joyce Carol Oates, and Ann Beattie.

B. Ireland

Some of the most compelling short stories in English are those by 20th-century Irish writers. Foremost among them is James Joyce, whose daring experiments with fictional form changed the course of literature in the 20th century. His one book of short stories, *Dubliners* (1914), contains painfully truthful representations of life in his native city. Blending naturalism with symbolism, these stories achieved world acclaim as models of the form. Other Irish masters of the short story include Seán O'Faoláin, Frank O'Connor, and William Trevor.

C. Other Traditions

In the 20th century short stories have been written in every European language and in the languages of Asia, the Middle East, and the various nations and cultures of Africa. One of the most intriguing writers is Czechoslovakian-born Franz Kafka. The fantastic and the realistic are perfectly blended in his experimental, mythic stories. His major themes are quintessential to the 20th century: human isolation, anxiety, and the relationship between life and art.

The rich Yiddish tradition is still very much alive. Especially delightful are the tales of Eastern European Jewry—often transplanted to contemporary American settings—written by Polish-born Isaac Bashevis Singer, who translated much of his own

work into English.

Authors from sub-Saharan Africa mingle wild fancy, stark realism, and, often, political commentary. Doris Lessing, raised in what is now Zimbabwe, is known for her *African Stories* (1951) . From South Africa come Ezekiel Mphahlele and Nadine Gordimer. The latter's disturbing stories of family and race relationships examine the social and political tensions in her country. Collections of her work include *Selected Stories* (1976) and *Something Out There* (1984) .

Stories from Asia include both refinements on ancient tradition and fresh experiments with the formal short story. English readers are perhaps most familiar with the works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke ("Rashomon," 1950) and Mishima Yukio ("The Boy Who Wrote Poetry," 1954) , both Japanese, and Rabindranath Tagore, from India.

The short story is also an important form in Latin American literature. Jorge Luis Borges, from Argentina, examines the conditions of human existence in a way that echoes Kafka's myths. His literary influence, like that of Kafka, has been enormous. Writers such as Julio Cortázar ("Blow-Up," 1956) , also from Argentina; Clarice Lispector, a Brazilian; and Gabriel García Márquez, from Colombia, also won audiences beyond their nations' borders.

Chapter One: Plot and Structure

I. WHAT IS PLOT?

Fictional people or characters are derived from life, and so are the things they do. These things are the actions or incidents, which occur in sequence or in chronological order. Once we have established the narrative or sequential order, however, there is still more to be considered. This is plot, or the plan of development of the actions.

A plot is a plan or groundwork of human motivations, with the actions resulting from believable and realistic human responses. In a well-plotted work, everything is related. The British novelist E. M. Forster, in *Aspects of the Novel*, presents a memorable illustration of plot. As a bare-minimum narration of actions in contrast to a story with a plot, he uses the following: "The king died, and then the queen died." This sentence describes a sequence, a chronological order, but no more. To have a plot, a sequence must be integrated with human motivation. Thus, Forster's following sentence contains a plot: "The king died, and then the queen died of grief." Once the narrative introduces the operative element "of grief" which shows that one thing (grief over the king's death) produces or overcomes another (the normal human desire to live), there is a plot. Thus, stories and plays take place in chronological order, but time is important not simply because one thing happens *after* another, but because one thing happens *because of* another. It is response, interaction, causation, and conflict that make a plot out of a simple series of actions.

A. CONFLICT

Conflict is the most significant essential element of plot, in which human respon-

ses are brought out to their highest degree. In its most elemental form, a conflict is the opposition of two people. They may fight, argue, enlist help against each other, and otherwise carry on their opposition. Conflicts may also exist between larger groups of people, although in imaginative literature, conflicts between individuals are more identifiable and therefore more interesting. Conflict may also exist between an individual and larger forces, such as natural objects, ideas, modes of behavior, public opinion, and the like. The existence of difficult choices that a character must make may also be presented as a conflict, or dilemma. In addition, the conflict may occur not necessarily as direct opposition, but rather as contrasting ideas or values. In short, there are many ways to bring out a conflict in fictional works.

B. CONFLICT IN PLOT

To see a plot in operation, let us build on Forster's description. Here is a bare plot for a story: "John and Jane meet, fall in love, and get married." This plot has no apparent conflict and therefore only minimal interest, and it probably would draw very few readers. Let us, however, try the same essential narrative of "boy meets girl" and introduce some conflicting elements:

John and Jane meet at school and fall in love. They go together for two years, and they plan to marry, but a problem arises. Jane wants to develop a career first, and after marriage she wants to be an equal contributor to the family. John understands Jane's desire for a career, but he wants to marry first and let her continue her studies afterward in preparation for her goal. Jane believes that this solution will not work, insisting instead that it is a trap from which she will never escape. This conflict interrupts their plans, and they part in regret and anger. They go in different ways even though they still love each other; both marry other people and build separate lives and careers. Neither is completely happy even though they like and respect their spouses. Many years later, after having children and grandchildren, they meet again. John is now a widower and Jane has divorced. Their earlier conflict no longer a barrier, they marry and live successfully together. During their marriage, however, even their new happiness is tinged with reproach and regret because of their earlier conflict, their increasing age, and the lost years they might have spent with each other.

Here we have a true plot because our story contains a conflict that takes a number of shapes. The (1) initial difference in plans and hopes is resolved by (2) a parting of the characters, leading them to separate lives that are (3) not totally hap-

py. The final marriage produces (4) not unqualified happiness, but a note of regret and (5) a sense of time lost that cannot be restored. It is the establishment of these contrasting or conflicting situations and responses that produces the interest our short-short story contains. The situation is lifelike; the conflict stems from realistic values; the outcome is true to life. The imposition of the various conflicts and contrasts has made an interesting plot out of what could have been a common "boy meets girl" sequence.

II. WHAT IS STRUCTURE?

Structure describes the arrangement and placement of materials within a narrative or drama. While plot describes the conflict or conflicts, structure concerns the way in which the work is laid out and given form or shape to bring out the conflict. The study of structure in fiction and drama is about the causes and reasons behind matters such as placement, balance, recurring themes, juxtapositions, true and misleading conclusions, suspense, and the imitation of models or forms like letters, conversations, confessions, and the like. Thus, a story may be divided into parts, or it might develop according to a pattern of movement from countryside to city, or a play might be arranged according to the developing relationships between two people from their first introduction to their falling in love. The study of structure is about these arrangements and the purposes for which they are made.

Many aspects of structure are common to all forms of literature. Particularly for drama and narratives, however, the following aspects form the backbone, skeleton, or pattern of development.

A. Exposition. Exposition is the laying out, the putting forth, of the materials in the work: the main characters, their backgrounds, characteristics, life goals, limitations, and potentials. Presenting everything that is going to be important in the pattern of actions, exposition may be found anywhere though most expected to be at the beginning of the work. Thus, there may be intricacies, twists, turns, false leads, blind alleys, surprises, and other quirks introduced to interest readers. Whenever something new arises, to the degree that it is new it is a part of exposition.

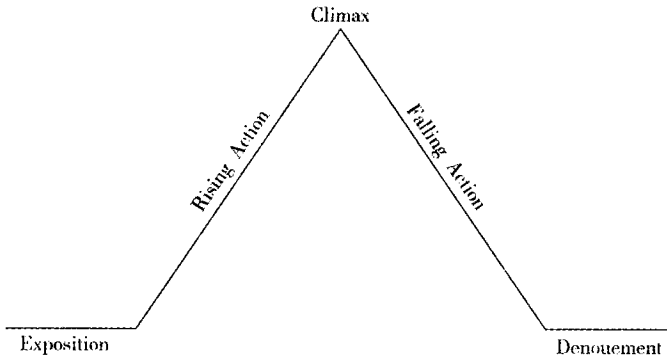
B. Complication. Complication marks the onset of the major conflict in the story. The participants are the protagonist and the antagonist, together with ideas and

values they represent, such as good and evil, individualism and collectivization, childhood and age, love and hate, intelligence and stupidity, freedom and slavery, desire and resistance, and the like.

C. Crisis. Crisis is the turning point, the separation between what has gone before and what will come after. In practice, the crisis is usually a decision or action undertaken to resolve the conflict. Though a result of operating forces and decisions, the crisis may not always produce the intended results. That situation is the next part of the formal structure, the climax.

D. Climax. Climax (a Greek word meaning *ladder*) is the *high point* in the action, in which the conflict and the consequent tension are brought out to the fullest extent. Another way to think of climax is to define it as the point when all the rest of the action becomes firmly set—the point of inevitability and no return.

E. Resolution or Dénouement. The resolution (a releasing or untying) or denouement (untying) is the set of actions bringing the story to its conclusion.



There is a wide range of plot forms and structures found in the short story. A traditional plot has a beginning (introduction of the problem), middle (development of the problem), and an end (resolution of the problem). Some writers venture into less predictable plots and some complicate the structure of their plots with the use of flashbacks and flash-forwards; with a frame that encloses the story (a story within a story); or with subplots (secondary storylines) or double plots (two or more equally important narratives progressing simultaneously, usually converging at the end). Among other devices that enhance plot structure are foreshadowing, reversals of fortune, digressions, abrupt transitions, and juxtapositions of contrasting characters or settings.