

英美名著学习丛书

总主编 文军

Selected Readings in British and American Short Stories

英美短篇小说 选读

主编 彭晓华 蒲度戎



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总 序

三年前重庆大学出版社计划出版一套英语学习用书,希望我担任总主编。由于工作特别繁忙,我再三推辞。但我终究未能拗过出版社的热情和友谊。经过一番慎重考虑,我决定从该系列中辟出一套“英美名著学习丛书”,并且率先推出。

这套学习丛书按文学类别粗略划分,共有七种:《英美诗歌选读》,《英美短篇小说选读》,《英美长篇小说选读》,《英美戏剧选读》,《英美散文选读》,《英美演讲词选读》以及《英美文论选读》。之所以把每本书定名为选读,是因为这样更符合中国英语读者群的现实需要,更容易为广大英语师生接受,更有编写价值和学习价值。

本丛书编写时以可读性、实用性、代表性和经典性为选目标,以高校英语师生为主要对象,兼顾社会上普通英语爱好者,所选篇目具备作者简介、原文、注释、赏析和思考题五项。其中,思考题一项极为重要,因为学而思之,收获始至。孔子云:“学而不思则罔。”所以,在每一篇目后均安排了几个与原文相关的颇能引人深思的问题。这些思考题虽然为数不多,所占篇幅又少;但由于国内大多数选读类书籍中缺此一项,因而它们构成了该学习丛书的一大特色。为了方便自学和比较英汉语言妙趣,在诗歌选文后附有译诗。译诗基本出自国内名家之手,均为在多种译本中精挑细选出的上品。

这套学习丛书是在重庆市九所高校外语院系的通力合作下开展编写工作的,凝聚着重庆大学、四川外语学院、重庆师范学院和西南师范大学等九所高校部分学者的心血和智慧。如今,它就要面世了。我难掩心中喜悦,因为我相信:通过这套丛书,英语学习者能在英美文学海洋中欣赏到最美丽的浪花,能在短时间内了解

到广泛的、有用的文学知识,能迅速提高英语水平和文学修养。

最后,我要感谢重庆大学出版社。他们的远见和气魄促成了这套学习丛书的正式出版,为推进我国英语教学做了一件大好事。

文 军

2000年3月于重庆大学

Preface

This book is a book of beginnings and introductions. It is designed and arranged to provide a basis for the discovery, interpretation, and appreciation of the art of fiction. Its form is not closed but open, not restricted but free. It is meant to serve as a springboard for launchings into the exciting world of fiction. The pieces of fiction that have been included into this book have had to demonstrate both a basic human appeal and intrinsic literary merit. The stories are grouped under the broad topics of plot, character, point of view, and theme since these are the basic elements of fiction. For each story, a brief introduction of the author is provided for the reader's reference. Expressions of cultural and historical significance are noted to facilitate understanding. To engage the reader in thinking and questioning, to facilitate comprehension and appreciation, a brief comment and questions follow each story. However, it is notable that there is room for differences of emphasis and evaluations. Each reader is entitled to illuminate a story with the unique light of his own sensitivity, interests, and experience. It is also notable that while a reader may be intensely aware of some aspects of the story, he may be blind to others. However, the ideal reader disciplines himself to see and think about what is actually in the stories, and remembers that what is there becomes meaningful only when it has en-

tered into an alert, and receptive mind.

This book is adaptable for a variety of purposes. These short stories may simply provide for leisure reading for pleasure; they may be used in literature courses for English majors; and they may be used by advanced learners of English for extensive reading to improve their abilities in English language.

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An Introduction to Reading Short Stories

Short story, as any form of art, is first of all meant to delight us, and we believe that as we increase the knowledge of an art, we may increase the pleasure it gives us. There is in fact only one fair judgement of a good short story. That is whether it makes the reader want to follow the storyteller's account of the series of events, and whether these arrangements of events can bring forth responses from the reader echoes of his own life, love, surroundings, and experiences.

Reading a short story can be compared to watching a football game. We follow the players and the course of actions that lead to the result of the game. A good game will delight us, so does a good short story. A spectator with the knowledge of the rules and the basics of the game will enjoy it more than a spectator without. A real football fan will not only sit back and watch the game as it goes on. He will try every possibility to involve himself in the game; He will first of all try to gain admission to the game, to watch the game in person, which may require much painstaking effort such as driving or flying long dis-

tances; he will also actively experience the game, emotionally responding to the highs and lows of the events that occur in the field, yelling with ecstasy when his favorite team scores, and sighing with great pity when it loses. An active spectator will also intellectually respond to the game: he may already know, or if he doesn't, will find out about the teams' previous records, thus knowing where the respective team stands; he will even speculate the result of the game based on his knowledge of the strengths of the teams and their key players; as the game proceeds, he will modify his previous knowledge and expectations, and predict the next event from the previous event, and eventually, the outcome of the game. In this way, he may well be satisfied with the experience. He has put much into the game, and is rewarded with the excitement of the event. Reading a short story shares a similar process: Knowledge of the writer of the short story and the time and society in which the story is produced may help us gain better understanding of what the story is about; an awareness of the key elements of short story in general, may enhance our appreciation of the story; and our active emotional and intellectual participation and responses will bring forth for us enjoyment and insight of the story.

The short story is a modern development in the history of story telling. It is a literary genre or category with certain characteristics which distinguish it from sketches, parables, and novels. One characteristic of the short story is the unity of effect—a single effect. In other words, a short story is compressed and economical the way a poem is, free from digressions and irrelevancies, and marked by its intensity. Tales and sketches do not present a single effect; they may digress, wander, and add episode to episode with little unifying principle. The novel, with its large scope, can afford to present many effects and impressions, and in the novel there is more time and space for development of characters and situations. In order to achieve a

compressed unity, the short story generally limits its scope to a single event, a single emotion, a single impression, and a small number of characters. A story is usually read at one sitting while a novel may take days to finish. So the story's effect must be sudden, powerful, and revealing; whereas a novel can involve the reader at a more leisurely pace, gradually illuminating complexities and nuances. Therefore, a short story should be read with focused attention. It belongs to the category of books that should be in Francis Bacon's words — 'chewed and digested... to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.' No detail should escape the reader. When Hemingway shows us the young waiter spilling when filling the old man's cup, he means that detail to reveal something about the young waiter. In reading a novel, there is sometimes the temptation to skip over the descriptions, especially descriptions of setting. No such skipping can be done while reading a short story without losing some part of the story's meaning and effect. Description in stories does not exist merely to set the stage; it is a subjective index to characters, an enhancer of theme, or a creator of mood.

Better understanding and appreciation of the short story will also depend on knowledge of the elements and techniques of the short story. In this book, we will talk about plot, character, point of view, and theme. Analyzing stories is not an arcane activity or a riddle to which only the teacher has the answer. Analyzing stories depends on common sense, intelligence, sensitivity, and the ability to ask the right questions. Simple questions such as:

I. What is the plot of the story?

1. What happens?

2. What is the central conflict?

3. Why does the author arrange the events in the order as it is?

4. How is the ending justified by the events that lead up to it?

II. Who are the characters in the story?

- 1. Why do they do what they do?**
- 2. What do the actions reveal about the characters?**
- 3. How do the actions agree or disagree to the natures of the characters?**

III. Where does the action take place?

- 1. Are the actions in agreement with the setting?**
- 2. How does the setting influence the actions and the characters?**
- 3. Could these people exist and these events occur in a different setting?**

IV. Who is telling the story?

- 1. How much does the teller know about the situation?**
- 2. Does he tell us all he knows? Or more than he can know for sure?**
- 3. Is his account prejudiced?**

These questions should be kept in mind as you proceed to read the following stories. They may help you gain better command of what goes on in the story, thus a firmer grasp of the story as a whole, which may very well result in a more rewarding experience of fiction.

I. Plot

A story is more than a simple narrative account. A narration is a sequential account of a series of event in chronological order, which is usually factual and impersonal, such as we record a chain of reactions that take place in a chemical process, in which there is no wild hypotheses, no facts concealed or suppressed. That is, the writer has not selected, exaggerated, emphasized, or hidden anything. Thus, a simple narrative account is an imitation, a rendering of external events as they happen in time. The author of a simple narration has no motive other than to be truthful.

A plotted story is more than a simple narrative account. A plot is constructed and composed. That is to say, the author of a plot has, in his mind, a simple narrative account, but he does things with it. He may rearrange the events in time; he may tell the last event first and then relate how events led up to it; he may withhold essential facts in order that your puzzlement or your interest is sustained; he may be very prejudiced for or against one of the characters, and relate only that information which will support his prejudice, that will make you

see the character in the light in which he wants you to see him. A plot is what an author does to the simple narration to make it a story, to give it a purpose. The author of a story knows precisely what the effect of each sentence, each word, each sequence, or each omission will be. A plot is not the mere sequence of action, which relies on the chronological order of events, but rather emphasizes the cause and effect relation between these events; it is what the artfully arranged combination of sequences of actions and characters mean. A plot gives meaning to actions. A plot, then, is a narrative account, artfully manipulated for an artistic purpose, to give pleasure and to signify meaning.

William March

Aesop' s^① Last Fable^②

Aesop, the messenger of King Croesus^③, finished his business with the Delphians^④ and went back to the tavern where he had taken lodgings. Later, he came into the taproom where a group of Delphians were drinking. When they realized who he was, they crowded about him. "Tell us," they began, "is Croesus as rich as people say?"

Aesop, since the habit of speaking in fables was so strongly fixed in him, said, "I can best answer your question with a parable, and it is this: The animals gather together to crown their richest member king. Each animal in turn stated what he possessed, and it was soon apparent that the lion had the largest hunting preserves, the bee the most honey, the squirrel the largest supply of acorns, and so on; but when the voting began, the difficulty of arriving at a decision was

plain to all, for to the bee, the nuts that represented the wealth of the squirrel were of no consequence; to the lion, the hay that the zebra and the buffalo owned was worthless; and the panther and the tiger set no value at all on the river that the crane and crocodile prized so highly. ”

Then Aesop called for his drink, looking into the faces of the Delphians with good-natured amusement. He said, “The moral^⑤ of the fable is this: Wealth is an intangible thing, and its meaning is not the same to all alike. ”

The stolid Delphians looked at one another, and when the silence was becoming noticeable, one of them tried again: “How was the weather in Lydia^⑥ when you left home?”

“I can best answer that question with another fable,” said Aesop, “and it is this: During a rain storm, when the ditches were flooded and the ponds had overflowed their banks, a cat and a duck met on the road, and, wanting to make conversation, they spoke at the same instant. ‘What a beautiful day this is,’ said the delighted duck. ‘What terrible weather we’re having,’ said the disgusted cat.” Again the Delphians looked at one another, and again there was silence. “The moral of that tale,” said Aesop, “is this: What pleases a duck, distresses a cat.” He poured wine into his glass and leaned against the wall, well satisfied with the start he had made in instructing the barbarous Delphians.

The Delphians moved uneasily in their seats, and after a long time, one of them said, “How long are you going to be here?”

“That,” said Aesop, “can best be answered in the Fable of the Tortoise, the Pelican, and the Wolf. You see, the pelican went to visit his friend the tortoise and promised to remain as long as the latter was building his new house. Then one day as they were working together, with the tortoise burrowing and the pelican carrying away the