

Reading for the Seniors

高级英语阅读

范东生 / 编著



安徽大学出版社

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Foreword

Most texts selected here have been used in my reading class for several times. It was not until early this summer that it occurred to me why not put all these excellent pieces together into one book for the reading course for the Seniors of English major.

In the syllabus for English studies (in countries like China, where English is a foreign language), it is common to have intensive reading (now called comprehensive reading), extensive reading (now reading) as two major courses in the direction that people feel related to “reading”, one of the four basic English abilities (i. e. listening, speaking, reading and writing). As a foundational course, “Reading” is intended, through a form of texts, to develop students’ language knowledge such as vocabulary, structure, rhetorical devices, etc. . But it is also very common that students with a big command of vocabulary and wonderful mastery of grammar knowledge still feel hard to understand many of the writings they attempt. It is hard not because of those “hard ware” obstacles, but because of a mysterious distance between what we feel so natural, being Chinese, as to how do we think, what do we value most and the way those English speaking people think and the believes that they have been holding for centuries. Thus reading should mean more than vocabulary, more than structure. It means to find, through certain written forms, what do English writers intend to deliver by their peculiar styles of expression. Therefore, after foundational stage, students of English language need to develop a competence of discovering the relationship between the lines, the meaning behind words, and the message the writer wants to con-

vey. Through this students will develop at the same time an awareness of cross cultural understanding—some sort of “soft ware” in foreign language studies, and then naturally, reading will no more be a difficult task but an enjoyable activity of cross cultural communication. This is why I have not listed all those “new words” after each text, but only few, not objective questions, but questions for thought provoking explorations.

I should give my acknowledgement to the resources where these texts are taken from. Most of them are taken from *Dolphin Reader* (by Douglas Hunt & Melody Richardson, Daily Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987). Others are from *Story to Anti-story* (by Mary Rohrberger, Houghton Mifflin Company) and *Studies in Fiction* (by Blaze O. Bonazza, Emil Roy, Sandra Roy, Harper & Row Publishers Inc.). Due to the tight time schedule, I have not been able to find the original publishers. Though the book will be only used for classroom teaching, I will welcome the contacts from the above-mentioned publishers.

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E. B. WHITE
Twins^①

On a warm, miserable morning last week we went up to the Bronx Zoo to see the moose calf and to break in a new pair of black shoes. We encountered better luck than we had bargained for. The cow moose and her young one were standing near the wall of the deer park below the monkey house, and in order to get a better view we strolled down to the lower end of the park, by the *brook*¹. The path there is not much travelled. As we approached the corner where the brook trickles under the wire fence, we noticed a red deer getting to her feet. Beside her, on legs that were just learning their business, was a spotted fawn, as small and perfect as a trinket seen through a reducing glass. They stood there, mother and child, under a gray beech whose trunk was engraved with dozens of hearts and initials. Stretched on the ground was another fawn, and we realized that the doe had just finished twinning. The second fawn was still wet, still unrisen. Here was a scene of rare *sylvan*² splendor, in one of our five favorite *boroughs*³, and we couldn't have asked for more. Even our new shoes seemed to be working out all right and weren't hurting much.

The doe was only a couple of feet from the wire, and we sat down on a rock at the edge of the footpath to see what sort of start young fawns get in the deep fastnesses of Mittel Bronx. The mother, mildly resentful of our presence and dazed from her labor, raised one forefoot and stamped primly. Then she lowered her head, picked up the afterbirth, and began dutifully to eat it, allowing it to swing crazily from her mouth, as though it were a bunch of withered beet greens. From the monkey house came the loud, insane hooting of some captious primate, filling the whole woodland with a wild hooroar. As we watched, the sun broke weakly through, brightened the rich red of the fawns, and kindled their

① First published in *The New Yorker*, June 12, 1948.

white spots. Occasionally a sightseer would appear and wander aimlessly by, but of all who passed none was aware that anything extraordinary had occurred. "Looka the kangaroos!" a child cried. And he and his mother stared sullenly at the deer and then walked on.

In a few moments the second twin gathered all his legs and all his ingenuity and arose, to stand for the first time sniffing the mysteries of a park for captive deer. The doe, in recognition of his achievement, quit her other work and began to dry him, running her tongue against the grain and paying particular attention to the key points. Meanwhile the first fawn tiptoed toward the shallow brook, in little stops and goes, and started across. He paused mid-stream to make a slight contribution, as a child does in bathing. Then, while his mother watched, he continued across, gained the other side, selected a hiding place, and lay down under a skunkcabbage leaf next to the fence, in perfect concealment, his legs folded neatly under him. Without actually going out of sight, he had managed to disappear completely in the shifting light and shade. From somewhere a long way off a twelve-o'clock whistle sounded. We hung around awhile, but he never budged. Before we left, we crossed the brook ourselves, just outside the fence, knelt, reached through the wire, and tested the truth of what we had once heard: that you can scratch a new fawn between the ears without starting him. You can indeed.

Words and expressions :

1. brook 小溪
2. sylvan 栖息于森林的
3. boroughs 自治的市镇

Question :

What do you see about the people's relationship with nature?

HARRY CREWS

Pages from the Life of a Georgia Innocent^①

Not very long ago I went with my twelve-year-old boy to a Disney movie, one of those things that show a farm family, poor but God knows honest, out there on the land building character through hunger and hard work. The hunger and hard work seemed to be a hell of a lot of fun. The deprivation was finally so rewarding you could hardly stand it. The farm was full of warm, fuzzy, furry, damp-nosed creatures: bawling calves and braying mules and dogs that were treated like people. There was a little pain here and there but just so much as would teach important lessons to all of us. It sometimes even brought a tear to the eye, but not a real tear because the tear only served to prove that a family out in the middle of nowhere scratching in the earth for survival didn't have it so bad after all. Somebody was forever petting and stroking the plump little animals, crooning to them, as they were raised for strange, unstated reasons, but surely not to be *castrated*¹ and slaughtered and skinned and eaten. They were, after all, friends.

If somebody got sick, he'd just pop into an old, rattling but trustworthy pickup truck and go off to town, where a kindly doctor would receive him immediately into his office and effect an instant cure by looking down his throat and asking him to say Ah. No mention was made of payment.

As my boy and I came out of the movie, blinking in the sunlight, it occurred to me that Diney and others—the folks who bring you *The Waltons*, say, or *The Little House on the Prairie*—had managed to sell this strange vision of poverty and country life not only to suburbanites, while the suburbanites stuffed themselves with malt balls and popcorn, but also to people in little towns throughout the South who had proof in their daily lives to the con-

^① Originally published in *Esquire*, July 1976.

trary.

All fantasy. Now there is nothing wrong with fantasy. I love it, even live off it at times. But driving home, the reality behind the fantasy began to go bad on me. It seemed immoral and dangerous to show so many smiles without an occasional glimpse of the skull underneath.

As we were going down the driveway, my boy, Byron, said: "That was a great movie, huh, Dad?"

"Yeah," I said. "Great."

"I wish I could've lived in a place like that," he said.

"No, you don't," I said. "You just think you do."

My grandmother in Bacon County, Georgia, raised biddies: tiny cheeping bits of fluff that city folk allow their children to squeeze to death at Easter. But city children are not the only ones who love biddies; hawks love them, too. Hawks like to swoop into the yard and carry off one impaled on their curved talons. Perhaps my grandmother, in her secret heart, knew that hawks even then were approaching the time when they would be on the endangered-species list. Whether she did or not, I'm sure she often felt she and her kind were already on the list. It would not do.

I'll never forget the first time I saw her get rid of a hawk. Chickens, as everybody knows, are cannibals. Let a bid dy get a spot of blood on it from a scrape or a raw place and the other biddies will simply eat it alive. My grandmother penned up all the biddies except the puniest one, already half pecked to death by the other cute little bits of fluff, and she set it out in the open yard by itself. First, though, she put *arsenic*² on its head. I—about five years old and sucking on a sugar-tit—saw the hawk come in low over the fence, its red tail fanned, talons stretched, and nail the poisoned bid dy where it squatted in the dust. The bid dy never made a sound as it was carried away. My gentle grandmother watched it all with satisfaction before she let her other biddies out of the pen.

Another moment from my childhood that comes instantly to mind was about a chicken, too; a rooster. He was boss cock of the whole farm, a magnificent bird nearly two feet tall. At the base of a

chicken's throat is its craw, a kind of pouch into which the bird swallows food, as well as such things as grit, bits of rock and shell. For reasons I don't understand they sometimes become crawbound. The stuff in the craw does not move; it remains in the craw and swells and will ultimately cause death. That's what would have happened to the rooster if the uncle who practically raised me hadn't said one day: "Son, we got to fix him."

He tied the rooster's feet so we wouldn't be spurred and took out his castrating knife, honed to a razor's edge, and sterilized it over a little fire. He soaked a piece of fine fishing line and a needle in alcohol. I held the rooster on its back, a wing in each hand. With the knife my uncle split open the craw, cleaned it out, then sewed it up with the fishing line. The rooster screamed and screamed. But it lived to be cock of the walk again.

Country people never did anything worse to their stock than they sometimes were forced to do to themselves. We had a man who farmed with us, a man from up north somewhere who had drifted down into Georgia with no money and a mouth full of bad teeth. Felix was his name and he was good with a plow and an ax, a hard worker. Most of the time you hardly knew he was on the place, he was so quiet and well-mannered. Except when his teeth began to bother him. And they bothered him more than a little. He lived in a shedlike little room off the side of the house. The room didn't have much in it: a ladder-back chair, a kerosene lamp, a piece of broken glass hanging on the wall over a pan of water where he shaved as often as once a week, a slat-board bed, and in one corner a chamber pot—which we called a slop jar—for use in the middle of the night when nature called. I slept in a room on the other side of the wall from him. I don't remember how old I was the night of his terrible toothache, but I do remember I was still young enough to wear a red cotton gown with five little pearl buttons down the front my grandmother had made for me.

When I heard him kick the slop jar, I knew it was his teeth. I just didn't know how bad it was. When the ladder-back chair splintered, I knew it was a bad hurt, even for Felix. A few times that night I managed to slip off to sleep only to be jarred awake when he would run blindly into the thin wall separating us. He groaned

and cursed, not loudly but steadily, sometimes for as long as half an hour. Ordinarily, my mother would have fixed a hot poultice for his jaw or at least tried to do *something*, but he was a proud man and when he was really dying from his teeth, he preferred to suffer, if not in silence, at least by himself. The whole house was kept awake most of the night by his thrashing and groaning, by the wash pan being knocked off the shelf, by his broken shaving mirror being broken again, and by his blind charges into the wall.

See, our kindly country dentist would not have gotten out of his warm bed for anything less than money. And Felix didn't have any money. Besides, the dentist was in town ten miles away and we didn't have a rattling, trustworthy old truck. The only way we had to travel was two mules. And so there was nothing for Felix to do but what he was doing and it built practically no character at all. Looking back on it now, I can see that it wasn't even human. The sounds coming through the wall sure as hell weren't human anyway. On a Georgia dirt farm, pain reduced everything—man and beast alike—to the lowest common denominator. And it was pretty low and pretty common. Not something you'd want to watch while you ate malt balls and popcorn.

I was huddled under the quilts shaking with dread—my nerves were shot by the age of four and so they have remained—when I heard Felix kick open the door to his room and thump down the wooden steps in his heavy brogan work shoes, which he'd not taken off all night. I couldn't imagine where he was going but I knew I wanted to watch whatever was about to happen. The only thing worse than my nerves is my curiosity, which has always been untempered by pity or compassion, a serious character failing in most societies but a sanity-saving virtue in Georgia when I was a child.

It was February and I went out the front door barefoot onto the frozen ground. I met Felix coming around the corner of the house. In the dim light I could see the craziness in his eyes, the same craziness you see in the eyes of a trapped fox when it has not quite been able to chew through its own leg. Felix headed straight for the well, with me behind him, shaking in my thin cotton gown. He took the bucket from the nail on the rack built over the open well and sent it shooting down hard as he could to break the inch of

ice that was over the water. As he was drawing the bucket up on the pulley, he seemed to see me for the first time.

“What the hell, boy! What the hell!” His voice was as mad as his eyes and he either would not or could not say anything else. He held the bucket and took a mouthful of the freezing water. He held it a long time, spat it out, and filled his mouth again.

He turned the bucket loose and let it fall again into the well instead of hanging it back on the nail where it belonged. With his cheeks swelling with water he took something out of the back pocket of his overalls. As soon as I saw what he had I knew beyond all belief and good sense what he meant to do, and suddenly I was no longer cold but stood on the frozen ground in a hot passion waiting to see him do it, to see if he *could* do it.

He had a piece of croker sack about the size of a half-dollar in his left hand and a pair of wire pliers in his right. He spat the water out and reached way back in his rotten mouth and put the piece of sack over the tooth. He braced his feet against the well and stuck the pliers in over the sackcloth. He took the pliers in both hands and immediately a forked vein leapt in his forehead. The vein in his neck popped big as a pencil. He pulled and twisted and pulled and never made a sound.

It took him a long time and finally as he fought with the pliers and with himself his braced feet slipped so that he was flat on his back when the blood broke from his mouth, followed by the pliers holding a tooth with roots half an inch long. He got slowly to his feet, sweat running off his face, and held the bloody tooth up between us.

He looked at the tooth and said in his old, recognizable voice: “*Huh now, you sumbitch³!*”

Words and expressions :

1. castrate 阉割
2. arsenic 砒霜
3. sumbitch son of bitch

Questions :

1. Notice the difference of the depictions of Disney movie and life in Georgia.

In what way they are different?

2. When the narrator was going to see what Felix would do, he says, "The only thing worse than my nerves is my curiosity." Why it is "worse"?

3. What is the writer's attitude towards Disney movie? Why?

ANNIE DILLARD
The Fixed^①

I have just learned to see praying *mantis*¹ egg cases. Suddenly I see them everywhere; a tan oval of light catches my eye, or I notice a blob of thickness in a patch of slender weeds. As I write I can see the one I tied to the mock orange hedge outside my study window. It is over an inch long and shaped like a bell, or like the northern hemisphere of an egg cut through its equator. The full length of one of its long sides is affixed to a twig; the side that catches the light is perfectly flat. It has a dead straw, deadweed color, and a curious brittle texture, hard as varnish, but pitted minutely, like frozen foam. I carried it home this afternoon, holding it carefully by the twig, along with several others—they were light as air. I dropped one without missing it until I got home and made a count.

Within the week I've seen thirty or so of these egg cases in a rose-grown field on Tinker Mountain, and another thirty in weeds along Carvin's Creek. One was on a twig of tiny dogwood on the mud lawn of a newly built house. I think the mail-order houses sell them to gardeners at a dollar apiece. It beats spraying, because each case contains between one hundred twenty-five to three hundred fifty eggs. If the eggs survive ants, woodpeckers, and mice—and most do—then you get the fun of seeing the new mantises *hatch*², and the smug feeling of knowing, all summer long, that they're out there in your garden devouring gruesome numbers of fellow insects all nice and organically. When a mantis has crunched up the last shred of its victim, it cleans its smooth green face like a cat.

In late summer I often see a winged adult stalking the insects that swarm about my porch light. Its body is a clear, warm green;

① Excerpted from Chapter 4 of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974).

its naked, triangular head can revolve uncannily, so that I often see one twist its head to gaze at me as it were over its shoulder. When it strikes, it jerks so suddenly and with such a fearful clatter of raised wings, that even a hardened entomologist like J. Henri *Fabre*³ confessed to being startled witless every time.

Adult mantises eat more or less everything that breathes and is small enough to capture. They eat honeybees and butterflies, including monarch butterflies. People have actually seen them seize and devour garter snakes, mice, and even *hummingbirds*. Newly hatched mantises, on the other hand, eat small creatures like aphids and each other. When I was in elementary school, one of the teachers brought in a mantis egg case in a Mason jar. I watched the newly hatched mantises emerge and shed their skins; they were spidery and translucent, all over joints. They trailed from the egg case to the base of the Mason jar in a living bridge that looked like Arabic calligraphy, some baffling text from the Koran inscribed down the air by a fine hand. Over a period of several hours, during which time the teacher never summoned the nerve or the sense to release them, they ate each other until only two were left. Tiny legs were still kicking from the mouths of both. The two survivors grappled and sawed in the Mason jar; finally both died of injuries. I felt as though I myself should swallow the corpses, shutting my eyes and washing them down like jagged pills, so all that life wouldn't be lost.

When mantises hatch in the wild, however, they straggle about prettily, dodging ants, till all are lost in the grass. So it was in hopes of seeing an eventual hatch that I pocketed my jackknife this afternoon before I set out to walk. Now that I can see the egg cases, I'm embarrassed to realize how many I must have missed all along. I walked east through the Adams' woods to the cornfield, cutting three undamaged egg cases I found at the edge of the field. It was a clear, picturesque day, a February day without clouds, without emotion or spirit, like a beautiful woman with an empty face. In my fingers I carried the thorny stems from which the egg cases hung like roses; I switched the bouquet from hand to hand, warming the free hand in a pocket. Passing the house again, deciding not to fetch gloves, I walked north to the hill by the place