

二十世纪

美国小说导读

弥 沙 编著

A Reading Guide
the American Novels
of the 20th Century

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东北林业大学出版社

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序

20 世纪美国文学流派纷呈、个性鲜明、大胆创新,在小说、诗歌、戏剧、散文、文学评论等各方面都取得了丰硕的成就。我们要了解美国的政治、经济、科学、技术,我们也要了解美国的社会、历史、文化、文学。作为人类社会思想生活感情发展心理历程的记录,文学是人们了解一个民族、一个地区、一个时期、一个阶级的媒介之一;作为人类文明发展形成的一门语言艺术,文学又可以对读者产生强烈的感染力量。因此,阅读和欣赏一个国家、一个民族的文学作品,无疑能使我们对这个国家、这个民族获得丰富的知识和比较深刻的了解。作为文学创作中最重要的文体之一的小说,因为它具有人物形象、典型环境、故事情节和对话叙事等丰富内容,因而对读者具有格外强烈的吸引力和感染力。阅读一个国家、一个民族代表作家创作的小说,从它们那里获得的知识、情感、思考,甚至可能超过阅读这个国家、这个民族的历史,这就是我们经常文学史著作中所看到的“史诗小说”或是“经典作品”的含义。

美国文学发展的特点正是在于:在短短的两个多世纪历程中,涌现出了群星灿烂的一大批代表作家和令人目不暇接的一大批经典作品,在这中间,尤以小说为主。我们只要了解到从 1930 ~ 1993 年半个多世纪之内,美国有 8 位小说家获得诺贝尔文学奖,就可以掂量出美国小说在西方文坛乃至整个世界文学中的地位 and 影响。

本书精选了 20 世纪美国具有代表性的 12 位小说家。所选的作家不仅在文学史上占有一定的地位,而且在主题、手法、文体风格或种族、性别等方面有一定的代表性。编者认为一本好书不能面面俱到,包含一切,而是应该起引导作用,给读者留下思考的空间。

编者
2008 年 4 月

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第一章 约翰·斯坦贝克(1902—1968)

John Steinbeck

作家简介

约翰·斯坦贝克(John Steinbeck, 1902—1968)美国作家。生于加利福尼亚的一个中产阶级家庭。小时候生活在小镇、乡村和牧场,热爱乡野的自然风光。在其母亲的熏陶下,很早就接触欧洲古典文学作品,深受《圣经》亚瑟王传奇故事的影响。1919年,进入斯坦福大学。读书期间,当过牧场农工和修路队的运输工。他熟悉并接触社会底层的人们,他的许多作品都以他们为主人公,表现了底层人善良、质朴的品格,创造了“斯坦贝克式的英雄”形象。20世纪30年代末,蓬勃发展的工人运动使斯坦贝克受到很大的影响。1937年和1947年,斯坦贝克两次访问北欧和苏联。

斯坦贝克一生的创作大致可以分为3个时

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第一章
约翰·斯坦贝克(1902—1968) John Steinbeck
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期。第一个时期是 20 世纪 30 年代前后,以《相持》(1936)和《愤怒的葡萄》(1939)为代表。后者是作家创作的高峰。也是 20 世纪美国文学的经典。该作品曾获普利策奖,由此作家扬名国内外。

20 世纪 40 年代是他创作的第二个时期。在这个时期里,由于美国社会生产力的发展,社会财富的增加,美国人的价值观念发生了变化,他的主要作品《月亮下去了》(1942)、《珍珠》(1947)以颂扬开朗、乐观的生活方式来比衬贬社会中的倾轧和狭隘的现象,其中心主题是探讨金钱、文明和人性的关系。

20 世纪 50 年代初,斯坦贝克离开加州迁居纽约。这一时期的创作受生物学上的“生命循环论”的影响较大,写出了两部长篇小说《伊甸园以东》(1952)和《烦恼的冬天》(1961)。前者用写实和象征手法描绘了善与恶的斗争,后者描写了社会道德的沦丧,表现了作家对美国精神危机的忧虑。他认为:“战后的美国社会是富有了,但产生了一种厌倦情绪、一种消耗性的病态。”

斯坦贝克一生写了 17 部小说,许多短篇故事、电影和电视剧本,以及非小说作品。由于他“通过现实主义的、富于想象的创作,表现出富于同情的幽默和对社会的敏感的观察”,1962 年获得诺贝尔文学奖。

作品

The Chrysanthemums

The high grey-flannel fog of winter closed off the Salinas Valley from the sky and from all the rest of the world. On every side it sat like a lid on the mountains and made of the great valley a closed pot. On the broad, level land floor the gang ploughs bit deep and left the



black earth shining like metal where the shares had cut. On the foot-hill ranches across the Salinas River, the yellow stubble fields seemed to be bathed in pale cold sunshine, but there was no sunshine in the valley now in December. The thick willow scrub along the river flamed with sharp and positive yellow leaves.

It was a time of quiet and of waiting. The air was cold and tender. A light wind blew up from the southwest so that the farmers were mildly hopeful of a good rain before long; but fog and rain do not go together.

Across the river, on Henry Allen's foot-hill ranch there was little work to be done, for the hay was cut and stored and the orchards were ploughed up to receive the rain deeply when it should come. The cattle on the higher slopes were becoming shaggy and rough-coated.

Elisa Allen, working in her flower garden, looked down across the yard and saw Henry, her husband, talking to two men in business suits. The three of them stood by the tractor-shed, each man with one foot on the side of the little Fordson. They smoked cigarettes and studied the machine as they talked.

Elisa watched them for a moment and then went back to her work. She was thirty-five. Her face was lean and strong and her eyes were as clear as water. Her figure looked blocked and heavy in her gardening costume, a man's black hat pulled low down over her eyes, clod-hopper shoes, a figured print dress al-most-completely covered by a big corduroy apron with four big pockets to hold the snips, the trowel and scratcher, the seeds and the knife she worked with. She wore heavy leather gloves to protect her hands while she worked.

She was cutting down the old year's chrysanthemum stalks with a pair of short and powerful scissors. She looked down toward the men



by the tractor-shed now and then. Her face was eager and mature and handsome; even her work with the scissors was overeager, overpowerful. The chrysanthemum stems seemed too small and easy for her energy.

She brushed a cloud of hair out of her eyes with the back of her glove, and left a smudge of earth on her cheek in doing it. Behind her stood the neat white farmhouse with red geraniums close-banked around it as high as the windows. It was a hard-swept-looking little house, with hard-polished windows, and a clean mud-mat on the front steps.

Elisa cast another glance toward the tractor-shed. The strangers were getting into their Ford coupé. She took off a glove and put her strong fingers down into the forest of new green chrysanthemum sprouts that were growing around the old roots. She spread the leaves and looked down among the close-growing stems. No aphids were there, no sow bugs or snails or cut-worms. Her terrier fingers destroyed such pests before they could get started.

Elisa started at the sound of her husband's voice. He had come near quietly, and he leaned over the wire fence that protected her flower garden from cattle and dogs and chickens.

"At it again," he said. "You've got a strong new crop coming."

Elisa straightened her back and pulled on the gardening glove again. "Yes. They'll be strong this coming year." In her tone and on her face there was a little smugness.

"'You've got a gift with things,'" Henry observed. "Some of those yellow chrysanthemums you had this year were ten inches across. I wish you'd work out in the orchard and raise some apples that big."



Her eyes sharpened. "Maybe I could do it, too. I've a girl with things, all right. My mother had it. She could stick anything in the ground and make it grow. She said it was having planters' hands that knew how to do it. "

"Well, it sure works with flowers," he said.

"Henry, who were those men you were talking to?"

"Why, sure, that's what I came to tell you. "They were from the Western Meat Company. I sold those thirty head of three-year-old steers. Got nearly my own price, too. "

"Good," she said. "Good for you. "

"And I thought," he continued, "I thought how it's Saturday afternoon, and we might go into Salinas for dinner at a restaurant, and then to a picture show-to celebrate, you see. "

"Good," she repeated, "Oh, yes. That will be good. "

Henry put on his joking tone. "There's fights tonight. How'd you like to go to the fights?"

"Oh, no," she said breathlessly. "No, I wouldn't like fights. "

"Just fooling, Elisa. We'll go to a movie. Let's see. It's two now. I'm going to take Scotty and bring down those steers from the hill. It'll take us maybe two hours. We'll go in town about five and have dinner at the Cominos Hotel. Like that?"

"Of course I'll like it. It's good to eat away from home. "

"All right, then. I'll go get up a couple of horses. "

She said: "I'll have plenty of time to transplant some of these sets, guess. "

She heard her husband calling Scotty down by the barn. And a little later she saw the two men ride up the pale yellow hillside in search of the steers.



There was a little square sandy bed kept for roofing the chrysanthemums. With her trowel she turned the soil over and over, and smoothed it and patted it firm. Then she dug ten parallel trenches to receive the sets. Back at the chrysanthemum bed she pulled out the little crisp shoots, trimmed off the leaves of each one with her scissors and laid it on a small orderly pile.

A squeak of wheels and plod of hoofs came from the road. Elisa looked up. The country road ran along the dense bank of willows and cottonwoods that bordered the river, and up this road came a curious vehicle, curiously drawn. It was an old spring-wagon, with a round canvas top on it like the cover of a prairie schooner. It was drawn by an old bay horse and a little grey-and-white burro. A big stubble-bearded man sat between the cover flaps and drove the crawling team. Underneath the wagon, between the hind wheels, a lean and rangy mongrel dog walked sedately. Words were painted on the canvas, in clumsy, crooked letters. "Pots' pans, knives, sisors, lawn mores, Fixed." Two rows of articles, and the triumphantly definitive "Fixed" below. The black paint had run down in little sharp points beneath each letter.

Elisa, squatting on the ground, watched to see the crazy, loose-jointed wagon pass by. But it didn't pass. It turned into the farm road in front of her house, crooked old wheels skirling and squeaking. The rangy dog darted from between the wheels and ran ahead. Instantly the two ranch shepherds flew out at him. Then all three stopped, and with stiff and quivering tails, with taut straight legs, with ambassadorial dignity, they slowly circled, sniffing daintily. The caravan pulled up to Elisa's wire fence and stopped. Now the newcomer dog, feeling out-numbered, lowered his tail and retired under the wagon with



raised hackles and bared teeth.

The man on the wagon seat called out: "That's a bad dog in a fight when he gets started."

Elisa laughed. "I see he is. How soon does he generally get started?"

The man caught up her laughter and echoed it heartily. "Sometimes not for weeks and weeks," he said. He climbed stiffly down, over the wheel. The horse and the donkey drooped like unwatered flowers.

Elisa saw that he was a very big man. Although his hair and beard were greying, he did not look old. His worn black suit was wrinkled and spotted with grease. The laughter had disappeared from his face and eyes the moment his laughing voice ceased. His eyes were dark, and they were full of the brooding that gets in the eyes of teamsters and of sailors. The calloused hands he rested on the wire fence were cracked, and every crack was a black line. He took off his battered hat.

"I'm off my general road, ma'am," he said. "Does this dirt road cut over across the river to the Los Angeles highway?"

Elisa stood up and shoved the thick scissors in her apron pocket. "Well, yes, it does, but it winds around and then fords the river. I don't think your team could pull through the sand."

He replied with some asperity: "It might surprise you what them beasts can pull through."

"When they get started?" she asked.

He smiled for a second. "Yes. When they get started."

"Well," said Elisa, "I think you'll save time if you go back to the Salinas road and pick up the highway there."



He drew a big finger down the chicken wire and made it sing. "I ain't in any hurry, ma'am. I go from Seattle to San Diego and back every year. Takes all my time. About six months each way. I aim to follow nice weather."

Elisa took off her gloves and stuffed them in the apron pocket with the scissors. She touched the under edge of her man's hat, searching for fugitive hairs. "That sounds like a nice kind of way to live," she said.

He leaned confidentially over the fence. "Maybe you noticed the writing on my wagon. I mend pots and sharpen knives and scissors. You got any of them things to do?"

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "Nothing like that." Her eyes hardened with resistance.

"Scissors is the worst thing," he explained. "Most people just ruin scissors trying to sharpen 'em, but I know how. I got a special tool. It's a little bobbit kind of thing, and patented. But it sure does the trick."

"No. My scissors are all sharp."

"All right, then. Take a pot," he continued earnestly, "a bent pot, or a pot with a hole. I can make it like new so you don't have to buy no new ones. That's a saving for you."

"No," she said shortly. "I tell you I have nothing like that for you to do."

His face fell to an exaggerated sadness. His voice took on a whining undertone. "I ain't had a thing to do today. Maybe I won't have no supper tonight. You see I'm off my regular road. I know folks on the highway clear from Seattle to San Diego. They save their things for me to sharpen up because they know I do it so good and save them



money. "

"I'm sorry," Elisa said irritably. "I haven't anything for you to do. "

His eyes left her face and fell to searching the ground. They roamed about until they came to the chrysanthemum bed where she had been working. "What's them plants, ma'am?"

The irritation and resistance melted from Elisa's face. "Oh, those are chrysanthemums, giant whites and yellows. I raise them every year, bigger than anybody around here. "

"Kind of a long-stemmed flower? Looks like a quick puff of colored smoke?" he asked.

"That's it. What a nice way to describe them. "

"They smell kind of nasty till you get used to them," he said. "It's a good bitter smell," she retorted, "not nasty at all. "

He changed his tone quickly. "I like the smell myself. "

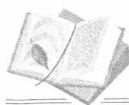
"I had ten-inch blooms this year," she said.

The man leaned farther over the fence. "Look. I know a lady down the road a piece, has got the nicest garden you ever seen. Got nearly every kind of flower but no chrysanthemums. Last time I was mending a copper-bottom washtub for her (that's a hard job but I do it good), she said to me: 'If you ever run acrost some nice chrysanthemums I wish you'd try to get me a few seeds.' That's what she told me. "

Elisa's eyes grew alert and eager. "She couldn't have known much about chrysanthemums. You can raise them from seed, but it's much easier to root the little sprouts you see here. "

"Oh," he said. "I s'pose I can'take none to her, then. "

"Why yes you can," Elisa cried. "I can put some in damp



sand, and you can carry them right along with you. They'll take root in the pot if you keep them damp. And then she can transplant them. "

"She'd sure like to have some, ma'am. You say they're nice ones?"

"Beautiful," she said. "Oh, beautiful." Her eyes shone. She tore off the battered hat and shook out her dark pretty hair. "I'll put them in a flowerpot, and you can take them right with you. Come into the yard. "

While the man came through the picket gate Elisa ran excitedly along the geranium-bordered path to the back of the house. And she returned carrying a big red flower-pot. The gloves were forgotten now. She kneeled on the ground by the starting bed and dug up the sandy soil with her fingers and scooped it into the bright new flower-pot. Then she picked up the little pile of shoots she had prepared. With her strong fingers she pressed them into the sand and tamped around them with her knuckles. The man stood over her. "I'll tell you what to do," she said. "You remember so you can tell the lady. "

"Yes, I'll try to remember. "

"Well, look. These will take root in about a month. Then she must set them out, about a foot apart in good rich earth like this, see?" She lifted a handful of dark soil for him to look at. "They'll grow fast and tall. Now remember this: In July tell her to cut them down, about eight inches from the ground. " "Before they bloom?" he asked.

"Yes, before they bloom. " Her face was tight with eagerness.

"They'll grow right up again. About the last of September the buds will start. "



She stopped and seemed perplexed. "It's the budding that takes the most care," she said hesitantly. "I don't know how to tell you." She looked deep into his eyes, searchingly. Her mouth opened a little, and she seemed to be listening. "I'll try to tell you," she said. "Did you ever hear of planting hands?"

"Can't say I have, ma'am."

"Well, I can only tell you what it feels like. It's when you're picking off the buds you don't want. Everything goes right down into your fingertips. You watch your fingers work. They do it themselves. You can feel how it is. They pick and pick the buds. They never make a mistake. They're with the plant. Do you see? Your fingers and the plant. You can feel that, right up your arm. They know. They never make a mistake. You can feel it. When you're like that you can't do anything wrong. Do you see that? Can you understand that?"

She was kneeling on the ground looking up at him. Her breast swelled passionately.

The man's eyes narrowed. He looked away self-consciously.

"Maybe I know," he said. "Sometimes in the night in the wagon there—"

Elisa's voice grew husky. She broke in on him: "I've never lived as you do, but I know what you mean. When the night is dark—why, the stars are sharp-pointed, and there's quiet. Why, you rise up and up! Every pointed star gets driven into your body. It's like that. Hot and sharp and—lovely."

Kneeling there, her hand went out toward his legs in the greasy black trousers. Her hesitant fingers almost touched the cloth. Then her hand dropped to the ground. She crouched low like a fawning



dog.

He said: "It's nice, just like you say. Only when you don't have no dinner, it ain't."

She stood up then, very straight, and her face was ashamed. She held the flower-pot out to him and placed it gently in his arms. "Here. Put it in your wag- on, on the seat, where you can watch it. Maybe I can find something for you to do."

At the back of the house she dug in the can pile and found two old and battered aluminum saucepans. She carried them back and gave them to him. "Here, maybe you can fix these."

His manner changed. He became professional. Good as new I can fix them. At the back of his wagon he set a little anvil, and out of an oily tool-box dug a small machine hammer. Elisa came through the gate to watch him while he pounded out the dents in the kettles. His mouth grew sure and knowing. At a difficult part of the work he sucked his underlip.

"You sleep right in the wagon?" Elisa asked.

"Right in the wagon, ma'am. Rain or shine I'm dry as a cow in there."

"It must be nice," she said. "It must be very nice. I wish women could do such things."

"It ain't the right kind of a life for a woman."

Her upper lip raised a little, showing her teeth. "How do you know? How can you tell?" she said.

"I don't know, ma'am," he protested. "Of course I don't know. Now here's your kettles, done. You don't have to buy no new ones."

"How much?"