

幽默 人生的镜子

英语名家经典幽默精选

Classics of Great Humorists

何晓嘉 王晓宁 编译



上海科学技术出版社

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前 言

人们通常所说的“幽默”一词源于英文单词 humor。1924年5月，林语堂先生在《晨报》副刊发表《征译散文并提倡“幽默”》，第一次将西文中的“humour”译成“幽默”。

“幽默”一词始见于《楚辞·九章·怀沙》，意为寂静无声。林语堂信手拈来，将 humor 一词译得浑然天成，别具意趣。

学贯中西的林语堂先生大力倡导“幽默文学”，因为在他看来，“幽默本是人生之一部分，所以一国的文化，到了相当程度，必须幽默的文学出现。人之智慧已启，对付各种问题之外，尚有余力，从容出之，遂有幽默——或者一旦聪明起来，对人之智慧本身发生疑惑，处处发现人类的愚笨，矛盾，偏执，自大，幽默也就跟着出现”。

因此，在众多英语文学作品中，幽默类作品是不容忽视的一类。读这些作品，不仅能使我们学习英语语言，更有助于帮助我们领略由幽默作品所折射出的西方文化。基于这个出发点，我们编译了《英语名家经典幽默精选》一书。在这本书里，读者可以领略到各种不同类型的幽默。

揶揄调侃式的幽默：代表作家有毛姆，他的作品总能让人在哑然失笑中领悟人生的无常和人性的荒谬。在他那笔锋流转的英国式幽默中，无处不透着一种冷静和尖锐。

深刻犀利的幽默：譬如美国著名幽默作家詹姆斯·瑟伯所著《惹祸的兔子》，意在借用寓言的形式抨击二战时期希特

勒对犹太人的无情杀戮。文章虽然短小，但这样的幽默却有如漆黑夜空中的一道闪电，刹那间，所有的丑恶与罪恶在这道亮光中无处遁形。

敦厚风趣的幽默：这一类幽默明快、风趣、闲适，诙谐中带着对人生的思考。美国第二任总统本杰明·富兰克林的作品正是这样的代表。本书选录了他的两篇散文《蜉蝣》和《好看的腿和难看的腿》，都体现了他卓尔不群的洞察力和超然的智慧。

朴素含蓄的幽默：此类幽默不靠奇特、滑稽故事情节来把读者逗得哈哈大笑，而是善于从平淡无奇的日常生活中，提炼出一些为大家司空见惯却又往往熟视无睹的、可笑的不合理的东西，加以放大后呈现在读者面前，让他们产生共鸣而发出会心的微笑或无奈的苦笑，如加拿大人尽皆知的里柯克的作品《我的金融生涯》。

隽永深刻的幽默：如诺贝尔获奖作家辛格的代表作《傻瓜吉姆佩尔》，书中塑造了吉姆佩尔这一经典“愚人”形象，读者在发笑的同时，更多的是感受到作者对忠诚与背叛、虔诚与悖逆、永生与沉沦的深刻思索。

人生不如意，十有八九。幽默恰恰能帮人把种种的不如意摆在适当的位置，轻松化解生活中的尴尬。例如，“感冒”时常会给我们的生活带来一些不便和困扰，而在《依偎感冒》这篇文章中，“感冒”却被作者用幽默的笔触渲染上了一层淡淡的温情，读来令人莞尔。

原来，幽默是无所不在的。它关注对人本身的思考，也许不会让人纵声大笑，却真正促人思考。诙谐的语言形式是它的外在，思索和领悟才是它的内核。

本书中搜集的幽默作家，既有大家耳熟能详的毛姆、欧·亨利、马克·吐温，又有艾萨克·巴什维斯·辛格这样的美国当代犹太裔作家，从而保证了入选文章的多样性和可

读性。在编排的时候，我们采取了按作者进行分类的方式，对每一位作者都给出了简明扼要的简介，在为正文所配的翻译和注释中，也都力求言简意赅，切中要点，给读者以恰到好处的好处帮助。

有出自大家手笔的作品，有幽默而绝不流俗的内容，有我们尽心尽力的编译工作，所有这些都使我们相信：这本书必然有它存在的价值。

虽然译者在翻译过程中如履薄冰，力求严谨，谬误之处仍在所难免，望读者不吝指正。

编者于编译本书时，得到了上海科学技术出版社张晨先生的热情支持和帮助，特此致谢。

编 者
2007 年春

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Somerset Maugham

萨默塞特·毛姆

【作者简介】

萨默塞特·毛姆（1874—1965），英国现代小说家、戏剧家。

他生于 1874 年，早年生活坎坷，父母双亡，由叔父抚养长大。在校学习期间，他的拉丁语和希腊语成绩突出，但不擅长体育运动，口吃。原先攻读医学，后转而致力于写作。

毛姆一生共创作了长篇小说 4 部、短篇小说 150 多篇、剧本 30 多部。最著名的作品有《月亮与六便士》、《啼笑皆非》、《人性的枷锁》、《刀锋》等。有“英国现代文学的无冕之王”之称。

本书介绍了毛姆的几篇短小精悍的作品：《剃迈拉的约会》、《午餐》、《蚂蚁和蚱蜢》以及《万事通先生》，从中我们既可以窥见毛姆对宿命人生的调侃，对复杂而微妙的人性的洞悉，又可以在他不动声色的讥诮中感受到他的一丝悲悯情怀。

Appointment In Samarra

There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions, and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, "Master, just now when I was in the market-place I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Sammara and there Death will not find me." The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks¹ and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the market place and he saw Death standing in the crowd and he came to Death and said, "Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning?" "That was not a threatening gesture," Death said. "It was only a start² of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

【注释】

1. dug his spurs in its flanks: spur 指马刺，即靴刺，用来刺激马快跑。flank 为马的腰窝。整句话译成“策马疾驰”即可。
2. start: 受惊吓的反应或动作。

【参考译文】

刹迈拉的约会

在巴格达有一个商人，他派他的仆人去集市上买一些粮食。不一会儿，仆人回来了，脸色苍白，浑身发抖，说：“主

人啊，刚才我在集市上的时候，被人群中的一个女人撞了一下。我回头一看，原来是死神。她看着我，做了个吓唬的手势。事已如此，请把你的马借给我吧，我要骑马离开这个城市，躲避厄运。我要去刹迈拉，在那儿死神准保找不到我。”商人把自己的马借给了他，仆人上了马，策马疾驰而去。后来，商人也到集市上去了，他看见站在人群中的死神，就走过去问她：“你上午见到我的仆人的时候为什么做了个吓唬他的手势？”“我没有做手势吓唬他，”死神回答。“我只是吃了一惊。在巴格达看到他，我感到很惊讶，因为我和他约定了今天晚上在刹迈拉见面。”

The Ant And The Grasshopper

When I was a very small boy I was made to learn by heart certain of the fables of La Fontaine, and the moral of each was carefully explained to me. Among those I learnt was *The Ant and The Grasshopper*, which is devised to bring home to the young the useful lesson that in an imperfect world industry is rewarded and giddiness punished. In this admirable fable (I apologize for telling something which everyone is politely, but inexactly, supposed to know) the ant spends a laborious summer gathering its winter store, while the grasshopper sits on a blade of grass singing to the sun. Winter comes and the ant is comfortably provided for, but the grasshopper has an empty larder: he goes to the ant and begs for a little food. Then the ant gives him her classic answer:

“What were you doing in the summer time?”

“I sang, I sang all day, all night.”

“You sang. Why, then go and dance.”

I could not help thinking of this fable when the other day I saw George Ramsay lunching by himself in a restaurant. I never saw anyone wear an expression of such deep gloom. He was staring into space. He looked as though the burden of the whole world sat on his shoulders. I was sorry for him: I suspected at once that his unfortunate brother had been causing trouble again. I went up to him and held out my hand.

“How are you?” I asked.

“I’m not in hilarious spirits,” he answered.

“Is it Tom again?”

He sighed.

“Yes, it’s Tom again.”

“Why don’t you chuck him? You’ve done everything in the world for him. You must know by now that he’s quite hopeless.”

I suppose every family has a black sheep. Tom had been a sore trial to his for twenty years. He had begun life decently enough: he went into business, married, and had two children. The Ramsays were perfectly respectable people and there was every reason to suppose that Tom Ramsay would have a useful and honorable career. But one day, without warning, he announced that he didn’t like work and that he wasn’t suited for marriage. He wanted to enjoy himself. He would listen to no expostulations. He left his wife and his office. He had a little money and he spent two happy years in the various capitals of Europe. Rumors of his doings reached his relations from time to time and they were profoundly shocked. He certainly had a very good time. They shook their heads and asked what would happen when his money was spent. They soon found out: he borrowed. He was charming

and unscrupulous. I have never met anyone to whom it was more difficult to refuse a loan. He made a steady income from his friends and he made friends easily. But he always said that the money you spent on necessities was boring; the money that was amusing to spend was the money you spent on luxuries. For this he depended on his brother George. He did not waste his charm on him. George was a serious man and insensible to such enticements. George was respectable. Once or twice he fell to Tom's promises of amendment and gave him considerable sums in order that he might make a fresh start. On these Tom bought a motor-car and some very nice jewellery. But when circumstances forced George to realize that his brother would never settle down and he washed his hands of him, Tom, without a qualm, began to blackmail him. It was not very nice for a respectable lawyer to find his brother shaking cocktails behind the bar of his favorite restaurant or to see him waiting on the box-seat of a taxi outside his club. Tom said that to serve in a bar or to drive a taxi was a perfectly decent occupation, but if George could oblige him with a couple of hundred pounds he didn't mind for the honor of the family giving it up. George paid.

Once Tom nearly went to prison. George was terribly upset. He went into the whole discreditable affair. Really Tom had gone too far. He had been wild, thoughtless, and selfish, but he had never before done anything dishonest, by which George meant illegal; and if he were prosecuted he would assuredly be convicted. But you cannot allow your only brother to go to gaol. The man Tom had cheated, a man called Cronshaw, was vindictive. He was determined to take the matter into court; he said Tom was a scoundrel and should be punished. It cost George an infinite deal of trouble and five hundred pounds to settle the affair. I have never

seen him in such a rage as when he heard that Tom and Cronshaw had gone off together to Monte Carlo the moment they cashed the cheque. They spent a happy month there.

For twenty years Tom raced and gambled, philandered with the prettiest girls, danced, ate in the most expensive restaurants, and dressed beautifully. Though he was forty-six, you would never have taken him for more than thirty-five. He was a most amusing companion and though you knew he was perfectly worthless you could not but enjoy his society. He had high spirits, an unfailing gaiety, and incredible charm. I never grudged the contributions he regularly levied on me for the necessities of his existence. I never lent him fifty pounds without feeling that I was in his debt. Tom Ramsay knew everyone and everyone knew Tom Ramsay. You could not approve of him, but you could not help liking him.

Poor George, only a year older than his brother, looked sixty. He had never taken more than a fortnight's holiday in the year for a quarter of a century. He was in his office every morning at nine-thirty and never left it till six. He was honest, industrious, and worthy. He had a good wife, to whom he had never been unfaithful even in thought, and four daughters to whom he was the best of fathers. He made a point of saving a third of his income and his plan was to retire at fifty-five to a little house in the country where he proposed to cultivate his garden and play golf. His life was blameless. He was glad that he was growing old because Tom was growing old too. He rubbed his hands and said:

“It was all very well when Tom was young and good-looking, but he's only a year younger than I am. In four years he'll be fifty. He won't find life so easy then. I shall have thirty thousand pounds by the time I'm fifty. For twenty-five years I've said that Tom

would end in the gutter. And we shall see how he likes that. We shall see if it really pays best to work or be idle.”

Poor George! I sympathized with him. I wondered now as I sat down beside him what infamous thing Tom had done. George was evidently very much upset.

“Do you know what’s happened now?” he asked me.

I was prepared for the worst. I wondered if Tom had got into the hands of the police at last. George could hardly bring himself to speak.

“You’re not going to deny that all my life I’ve been hardworking, decent, respectable, and straightforward. After a life of industry and thrift I can look forward to retiring on a small income in gilt-edged securities. I’ve always done my duty in that state of life in which it has pleased Providence¹ to place me.”

“True.”

“And you can’t deny that Tom has been an idle, worthless, dissolute, and dishonourable rogue. If there were any justice he’d be in the workhouse.”

“True.”

George grew red in the face.

“A few weeks ago he became engaged to a woman old enough to be his mother. And now she’s died and left him everything she had. Half a million pounds, a yacht, a house in London, and a house in the country.”

George Ramsay beat his clenched fist on the table.

“It’s not fair, I tell you, it’s not fair. Damn it, it’s not fair.”

I could not help it. I burst into a shout of laughter as I looked at George’s wrathful face, I rolled in my chair, I very nearly fell on the floor. George never forgave me. But Tom often asks me to

excellent dinners in his charming house in Mayfair, and if he occasionally borrows a trifle from me, that is merely from force of habit. It is never more than a sovereign².

【注释】

1. Providence: 天意。
2. sovereign: (旧)一英镑金币。

【参考译文】

蚂蚁与蚱蜢

当我还是一个小男孩的时候，大人就要求我背诵一些拉·封丹的寓言，并且详细地给我解释了其中的寓意。在我学过的语言当中有一篇叫做《蚂蚁和蚱蜢》，这篇寓言是想让年轻人彻底明白一个有用的道理：在这个不完美的世界上，勤劳将得到回报，而懒惰将被惩罚。在这篇可敬的寓言中（很抱歉，我讲了一个大家都可能知道的寓言），蚂蚁整个夏天都在辛辛苦苦地储存过冬的粮食，而蚱蜢却坐在一片草叶上对着太阳纵情高歌。当冬天来到时，蚂蚁衣食无忧，而蚱蜢则囊中空空。他来找蚂蚁，希望蚂蚁给他一些食物。这时候蚂蚁给了他一句很经典的回答：

“你夏天的时候在干什么呢？”

“我在唱歌呀，我白天晚上都在唱歌。”

“哦，你在唱。那好，你现在继续去跳舞吧。”

有一天，我看见乔治·拉姆赛先生独自在一家餐馆用餐时，我又忍不住想起了这个寓言。我还从来没看见过谁的表情如此郁闷。他两眼无神，仿佛全世界的负担都压在他的肩膀上。我很同情他：我猜想他那个倒霉蛋弟弟又惹麻烦了。我走上前去，向他伸出手。

“你好吗？”我问。

“我没办法兴高采烈。”

“又是因为汤姆？”

他叹了一口气。

“是啊，又是因为汤姆。”

“你干嘛不放弃他算了呢？你已经为他竭尽所能了。你得知道他是没治了。”

大概家家都有不肖之子吧。汤姆在二十年中一直让他的家庭为他痛心疾首，令人讨厌。他开始的生活还是颇为体面的：他从了商，结了婚，生了两个孩子。拉姆赛一家是个体面的家族，因此人们完全有理由期望汤姆·拉姆赛也能作出一番辉煌的事业。但突然有一天，在没有任何预兆的情况下，汤姆宣布他不喜欢工作，也不适合婚姻生活。他只想享受享受。他拒绝听从任何劝导。他离开了妻子和工作，靠着手里不多的钱在欧洲各国的首都度过了快乐的两年。关于他的流言蜚语不时传到他的亲戚们的耳朵里，使他们深感震惊。他过得逍遥自在，可亲戚们却摇头叹息，不知他的钱花光以后会发生什么事。他们很快就知道了：他靠借钱度日。他魅力十足、无所顾忌。几乎没有人能拒绝他借钱的要求。他就这样依靠朋友有了稳定的收入，而且他特别容易交上朋友。他总是说那些花在日用必需品上的钱是无聊的；只有花在奢侈品上的钱才有意思。为此他依靠上了他的哥哥乔治。他依旧在乔治面前充分施展他的魅力。可惜乔治很严肃，根本就不吃他这一套。乔治是个体面的人。有一两次他居然真的相信了汤姆会浪子回头的谎言，给了他相当数量的一笔钱，以便让他一切重新开始。可汤姆却用这笔钱买了摩托车和昂贵的珠宝。当事实迫使乔治认识到他的弟弟永远不会安顿下来的时候，他决定对汤姆放手不管了。于是汤姆开始不知廉耻地敲诈自己的哥哥。对于乔治这样一个体面的律师来说，发现自己的弟弟在自己爱去的餐厅酒吧里调鸡尾酒或在自己俱乐部外开出租伺候剧院包厢里的客人，这终归是一件