英语短篇小说精选

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Selected English Short Stories

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编写说明

《英语短篇小说精选》(*Selected English Short Stories*)是《英国文学教程》(*English Literature: A Course Book*,河海大学出版社,1998年)的姐妹篇,主要用作高校英语专业中、高级阶段的英美文学选读或者英语泛读课程的教材,也可以供具有大专以上水平的英语爱好者阅读、进修之用,以提高英语阅读能力和文学鉴赏能力。

同诗歌、长篇小说和戏剧一样,短篇小说也是文学作品的一种重要样式。以往文学课较少涵盖短篇小说这一块,而将其纳入泛读课的内容。本人以为,这一做法有失偏颇。课文名称并不完全取决于教材内容,教师的教学方法也是一个关键。同一位教师采用不同的教学方法,教同一篇短篇小说,既可以上成精读课,也可以上成泛读课,或者文学课,只是教学的着眼点有所不同而已。

给予短篇小说应有的重视,使其成为英美文学教材不可或缺的一部分,也是对文学课程改革的一种尝试。因短篇小说篇幅较短,文字简练,情节紧凑,教学费时少,一般4学时即可完成一篇。这有助于培养和提高学生学习文学的兴趣。同时,较快的教学节奏也更具时代感。本书收录英、美、澳大利亚、新西兰及爱尔兰等国家近当代作家的优秀短篇小说计22篇。所选作品题材广泛,涉及家庭、爱情、人际关系、人与自然、战争与和平以及老龄化、贫富悬殊、种族歧视等方面的社会问题。在写作风格上,这些作品有的偏于传统,有的偏于现代,也有的介乎两者之间,可谓"百花齐放"。

为方便教学起见,全书根据所选作品的题材分成10个单元,

编排时适当兼顾由易而难的原则。"One Hot Afternoon in July"(《七月的一个炎热下午》)未归入任何单元,将其放在第一篇,算是代序,以期告诫学生:学习英语犹如学习游泳,学习者只有克服惧怕心理,主动地置身于英语的海洋中,勤于实践,方能学好英语。

在编写内容上,除了故事本身,每一篇都有作者简介、注释以及讨论题,以方便教学。

本书在编写过程中曾得到江苏教育学院外语系的大力支持,在此表示衷心感谢。

囿于水平,本书肯定存在一些缺点,恳请广大读者批评指正。

编　者

2004 年 9 月

Contents

One Hot Afternoon in July[1]

Ralph Kinney Bennett

There are certain days when we feel our lives change profoundly, days we remember for a lifetime. Such, for me, was one afternoon in July in the Ligonier Valley of Pennsylvania, at a place called Devil's Hole.

It happened in that timeless time before school imposed the first real framework on life[2]. The summer sky was bluer then, the sycamores[3] smiled in the sun, and the hot days drowsed by, punctuated with velvet evenings[4] when fireflies flashed outside my bedroom window.

On that morning my twin brother, Roger, and I had finished our chores, and the whole day lay before us. "Let's go to Devil's Hole," Roger suggested.

I readily agreed, but for all my eagerness[5] there was a leaden feeling deep in my stomach. Although he had never said a word about it, never taunted me[6], Roger could swim and I could not. Earlier in the summer he had slid eagerly off the outstretched hands of our older brother, Richard, thrashed his feet and arms, and propelled himself through the water. I had been too afraid or embarrassed to try. Now Roger could slip through the water expertly, and he moved, it seemed to me, on a different plane[7]— with the experienced, confident older kids.

Roger led the way back to the kitchen door. "Grandma, can we go to Devil's Hole?" We leaned against the screen, peering into the dark kitchen. Grandma, busy mixing the batter[8] for spice cakes, stood at the kitchen counter, a bright speckle of sunlight and apple tree leaves reflect-

ed in her glasses. "Well, I guess the big kids are up there now, but mind the road," she admonished with a flourish of her wooden spoon, "and be careful in that place."

With a yell, Roger threw open the screen door, tore through the kitchen and scrambled up the stairs. I followed, racing to get into my Sears, Roebuck[9] bathing suit. Slinging towels around our necks, we loped across the field next to our house and headed up the dirt road.

Had I been asked then to define fun and freedom, it would have been in terms of a boy swimming fearlessly through the water. It was delight and danger all at once.

The danger was no small thing. My acquaintance with the mystery of death was brief but vivid. A neighborhood dog had been hit by a car; it lay with its teeth showing and one eye staring up at the sky. Then there were the times Mom would point her finger at dark headlines in the Latrobe Bulletin and explain this terrible thing called drowning, which had befallen someone swimming at Kingston Dam or some other nearby pond or stream.

Roger and I reached Linn Run. There, at a place where sunlight flooded through a break in the trees, a slight slope of smoothly rounded pebbles and mossy ground led to a deep green pool, of icy water reflecting two huge, partially submerged boulders on the opposite bank.

As far back as anyone could remember, the place had been called Devil's Hole. Indians must have swum there long before the British and the French fought each other in these mountains. Deer still came there at night to drink. In the spring the older boys performed the annual ritual of piling rocks the size of basketballs across the creek until the water began to rise, inch by inch, up the gray boulders.

This dam was my province and protection. While the others swam, I always pretended to be intent upon minor repairs to it, or trying to catch

minnows along its base with an old tin can.

When we first arrived, I watched enviously as Roger joined the older boys and girls. They nonchalantly dived in, swam swiftly across the pool and pulled themselves up on the big rocks to luxuriate in the sun. Among them was Nancy Storer, sitting on the closer boulder in a white one-piece bathing suit with tiny blue polka dots[10]. She baby-sat for us occasionally, and I adored her. She watched as boys began cannonballing off the lower boulder[11], their shouts and splashes and laughter echoing through the trees.

Quietly I ventured in. Feeling the shock of the cold water, I carefully planted my toes on the smooth and slippery round rocks of the bottom. With the dam as a handrail, I made my way to the middle of the creek. Behind me, someone on the rocks was whooping like Tarzan[12].

More than ever I wanted to be a part of that fun. I turned from the security of the dam and waded a few feet upstream. The scene before me is still frozen in memory like a photograph — kids jumping, diving, playing tag[13] as tiny rainbows arched through splashing water.

Now the water was up almost to my chest. I held my arms out in front of me, my hands clasped tightly, shivering from the coldness.

Suddenly there was nothing under my feet. I plunged beneath the surface.

For an instant I comprehended a liquid shaft of sunlight, a corner of the gray boulder disappearing into the gravel and rocks of the bottom, and somewhere ahead of me a pair of white legs treading water beneath a cloud of sparkling bubbles. Eerie[14], muffled laughter and shouts came from somewhere above me.

For that frozen second I felt myself in a strange new world. Then came a mad kaleidoscope of watery light and darkness — thrashing, spluttering, gurgling — a feeling of utter terror in my bursting chest. For

a fraction of a second, I saw sun-dappled leaves in the trees far above me and heard voices clearly. Then I was back in a white hail of bubbles, and a roaring filled my ears. I saw that dead dog's staring eye[15].

I kicked my legs; my arms thrashed forward; my face came out of the water and I gulped air. Yelling "whoah, whoah," I was wrestling with water and fear in a crazy scramble of arms and legs.

But I was moving through the water! In an exquisite instant I felt terror turn to exhilaration. I was swimming.

I did not turn for the bank of the creek and safety. I headed into the deep green at the center of Devil's Hole — toward those unreachable boulders. Roger was standing on the bigger boulder, his mouth a perfect O[16] as he watched me.

But my eyes were fixed on Nancy. There was a half-smile on her freckled face as my madly kicking, churning progress drew me closer.

I touched the boulder on which she sat. I held on, treading water, breathing in great ragged gulps and feeling indescribably triumphant.

"Well, hello," she said, looking down at me, almost laughing the words.

I felt totally exhausted for a moment. But I did not want to leave the water. I was afraid I would forget how to do what I had done. I pushed off from the rock and quickly thrashed around in a circle, then grabbed the rock again. I could scarcely believe it. I wanted to shout, "I can swim!" but the presence of my brother and the other boys was enough to prevent it.

I felt glorious. Unstoppable/ I splashed across the stream to the bank by the road, touched bottom with my feet, then swam back into the middle again.

The sun was playing hide-and-seek in the tops of the trees by the time I said good-bye to Nancy and the other kids. I felt much bigger and

taller than I had ever felt before. Roger and I started down the dirt road for home, our damp towels hanging behind us like limp capes. I felt the hot sun on my wet hair. I could smell the fresh, wonderful scent of Devil's Hole, the water, the moss, the laurel. We were almost to the Critchfields' house before Roger said, "It's pretty easy, huh... swimming."

"Yep," I answered, recognizing the immense accolade[17] I had just received from my twin.

I skipped the rest of the way home. Grandma was starting to cook dinner. Mom wasn't home from work yet.

"Grandma, I swam today!" I shouted.

She looked up from the stove, a dark alarm in her face. "What? Did one of those hoodlums throw you in?"

"No, Grandma. I just did it. I just up and did it[18]."

I swaggered around the yard a bit, keeping to myself[19], reliving every moment in the water that day. After dinner we played prisoner's base with the neighborhood kids as the shadows lengthened[20]. Then we all got out our coffee cans and Mason jars to catch lightning bugs.

But the call finally came: "Come on in, kids — time for bed." More tired than I thought I was, I said my prayers with Mom and Roger and settled under the covers[21]. With my face close to the screened window, I lay in the darkness, listening to the sounds of summer: the ripple of the creek, the loud whir and chirp of cicadas and tree frogs.

I didn't fully comprehend it then, but I had learned something very important: the dark barrier called fear may be high and imposing, but it is often exceedingly thin. It appears again and again throughout our lives. Sometimes a touch breaks through it; sometimes, in the desperate need of the moment, we must put our shoulder to it[22] like a fireman breaking down a door. And sometimes our very yearning makes it fall.

My eyes grew heavy. I imagined myself smoothly parting cool wa-

ters, swimming expertly, quietly, sleekly — not only at Devil's Hole but in great rivers, in the mighty ocean.

NOTES:

1. This story is taken from *Reader's Digest*, *Vol.* 147, *No.* 879, 1995. Its author is Ralph Kinney Bennett.

2. before school imposed the first real framework on life: before the summer holiday ended and school resumed.

3. sycamores: American plane trees.

4. punctuated with velvet evenings: ended and was replaced by night.

5. but for all my eagerness: but in spite of the fact that I was so eager to go.

6. never taunted me: never upset me by making unkind remarks.

7. on a different plane: on a different level.

8. batter: a mixture of flour, egg and milk.

9. Sears, Roebuck: Most likely it is the trademark of the bathing suit.

10. polka dots: a number of circular spots forming a pattern.

11. cannonballing off the lower bolder: jumping off the lower rocks one after another.

12. Tarzan: the hero of a series of stories by E. R. Burroughs, who is extremely powerful and agile.

13. playing tag: a children's game in which one player chases and tries to touch the others.

14. eerie: causing a feeling of fear.

15. saw that dead dog's staring eye: The picture of the dead dog with one eye staring up at the sky flashed across the boy's mind. In other words, he now sensed the danger of death.

16. his mouth a perfect O: His mouth (was) widely open, which is an expression of surprise.

17. accolade: praise and approval.

18. I just up and did it: I just kept myself up and learned it.

19. keeping to myself: being alone.

20. as the shadows lengthened: as the sun was moving down.

21. settled under the covers: lay under the sheets.

22. put our shoulder to it: work with great effort to bring it down.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Give a brief account of the boy's inner mind when he was on his way to Devil's Hole.

2. Do you think the story is believable? How does the author succeed in making it so real?

3. What do you think of the structure of the story?

4. What does the boy learn from his own experience of that July afternoon?

5. In which way is the learning of English like learning to swim?

Unit One

Spring Sowing

Liam O'Flaherty

It was still dark when Martin Delaney and his wife Mary got up. Martin stood in his shirt by the window a long time looking out, rubbing his eyes and yawning, while Mary raked out the live coals that had lain hidden in the ashes on the hearth all night. Outside, cocks were crowing and a white streak was rising from the ground, as it were, and beginning to scatter the darkness. It was a February morning, dry, cold and starry.

The couple sat down to their breakfast of tea, bread and butter, in silence. They had only been married the previous autumn and it was hateful leaving a warm bed at such an early hour. They both felt in a bad humour and ate, wrapped in their thoughts[1]. Martin, with his brown hair and eyes, his freckled face and his little fair moustache, looked too young to be married, and his wife looked hardly more than a girl, red-cheeked and blue-eyed, her black hair piled at the rear of her head with a large comb gleaming in the middle of the pile, Spanish fashion. They were both dressed in rough homespuns[2], and both wore the loose white frieze shirt that Inverara peasants use for work in the fields.

They ate in silence, sleepy and bad-humoured and yet on fire with excitement[3], for it was the first day of their first spring sowing as man and wife. And each felt the glamour of that day on which they were to open up the earth together and plant seeds in it. So they sat in silence and bad humour, for somehow the imminence of an event that had been long ex-

pected, loved, feared and prepared for made them dejected. Mary, with her shrewd woman's mind, munched her bread and butter and thought of... Oh, what didn't she think of ? Of as many things as there are in life does a woman think in the first joy and anxiety of her mating[4]. But Martin's mind was fixed on one thought. Would he be able to prove himself a man worthy of being the head of a family by doing his spring sowing well?

In the barn after breakfast, when they were getting the potato seeds and the line for measuring the ground and the spade, a cross[5] word or two passed between them, and when Martin fell over a basket in the half-darkness of the barn, he swore and said that a man would be better off dead than... But before he could finish whatever he was going to say, Mary had her arms around his waist and her face to his. "Martin," she said, "let us not begin this day cross with one another." And there was a tremor in her voice. And somehow, as they embraced and Martin kept mumbling in his awkward peasant's voice, "pulse of my heart, treasure of my life[6]," and such traditional phrases, all their irritation and sleepiness left them. And they stood there embracing until at last Martin pushed her from him with pretended roughness and said: "Come, come, girl, it will be sunset before we begin at this rate."

Still, as they walked silently in their rawhide shoes through the little hamlet, there was not a soul about. Lights were glimmering in the windows of a few cabins. The sky had a big grey crack in it in the east, as if it were going to burst in order to give birth to the sun. Birds were singing somewhere at a distance. Martin and Mary rested their baskets of seeds on a fence outside the village and Martin whispered to Mary proudly:

"We are first, Mary." And they both looked back at the little cluster of cabins that was the centre of their world, with throbbing hearts. For the joy of spring had now taken complete hold of them.

They reached the little field where they were to sow. It was a little triangular patch of ground under an ivy-covered limestone hill. The little field had been manured with seaweed some weeks before, and the weeds had rotted and whitened on the grass. And there was a big red heap of fresh seaweed lying in a corner by the fence to be spread under the seeds as they were laid. Martin, in spite of the cold, threw off everything above his waist except his striped woollen shirt. Then he spat on his hands, seized his spade and cried: "Now you are going to see what kind of a man you have, Mary."

"There, now," said Mary, tying a little shawl closer under her chin. "Aren't we boastful this early hour of the morning? Maybe I'll wait till sunset to see what kind of a man I have got."

The work began. Martin measured the ground by the southern fence for the first ridge, a strip of ground four feet wide, and he placed the line along the edge and pegged it at each end. Then he spread fresh seaweed over the strip. Mary filled her apron with seeds and began to lay them in rows, four, three, four. When she was a little distance down the ridge, Martin advanced with his spade to the head, eager to commence.

"Now in the name of God," he cried, spitting on his palms, "let us raise[7] the first sod!"

"Oh, Martin, wait till I'm with you!" cried Mary, dropping her seeds on the ridge and running up to him. Her fingers outside her woollen mittens were numb with the cold, and she couldn't wipe them in her apron. Her cheeks seemed to be on fire. She put an arm round Martin's waist and stood looking at the green sod his spade was going to cut, with the excitement of a little child.

"Now for God's sake, girl, keep back!" said Martin gruffly. "Suppose anybody saw us trapesing about like this in the field of our spring sowing, what would they take us for but a pair of useless, soft, empty-