

高等院校英语语言文学专业研究生系列教材

总主编 戴炜栋

**Best American Flash
Fiction of the 21st Century**

21 世纪美国微型小说选读

Tom Hazuka
Mark Budman

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高等院校英语语言文学专业研究生系列教材

总 序

近年来,随着我国经济的飞速发展,社会对以研究生为主体的高层次人才的需求日益增长,我国英语语言文学专业的研究生教学规模也在不断扩大。各高校在研究生培养方面,形成了各自的特色,涌现出一批学科带头人,开设出自己的强项课程。但同时我们也认识到,要使研究生教育持续健康地发展,要培养学生创新思维能力和独立研究与应用能力,必须全面系统地加强基础理论与基本方法方面的训练。而要实现这一目标,就必须有一套符合我国国情的、系统正规的英语语言文学专业研究生主干教材。

基于这一认识,我们邀请了全国英语语言文学专业各研究领域中的知名专家学者,编写了这套《英语语言文学专业研究生系列教材》,旨在集各高校之所长,优势互补,形成合力,在教材建设方面,将我国英语语言文学专业的研究生培养工作推上一个新的台阶。我们希望通过这套教材的出版,来规范我国的英语语言文学专业的研究生课程,培养出更多基础扎实、知识面广、富有开拓精神、符合社会需要的高质量研究生。

在内容上,本套系列教材覆盖了英语语言文学专业各学科的主要课程。我们总的编写指导思想是:结合我国英语语言文学专业研究生教学的实际情况与需要,强调科学性、系统性、先进性和实用性。力求做到理论与应用相结合,介绍与研究相结合,中与外相结合,史与论相结合,广泛搜集资料,全面融会贯通,使每一本教材都能够反映出该研究领域的新理论、新方法和新成果。本套教材的这些特点,使其有别于单纯引进的国外同类原版教材,是国外教材所不可取代的,两者的作用是相辅相成的。也正是由于这些特点,本套教材不仅可以作为我国英语语言文学专业研究生的主干教材,也可作为中国语言文学专业的教师与学生的参考用书。

在编写体例上,我们参照了国家标准局的有关标准以及国际上的通行做法,制定了统一的规范。每章后面,都列出了思考题和深入阅读



书目,以便启发学生思考和进一步深入研究。

教材建设是学科建设的一项重要基本建设,对学科发展有着深远的影响。我们相信,正如国外剑桥和牛津大学出版社出版的语言学和应用语言学教材和丛书对推动国际语言学和应用语言学的发展起了巨大作用一样,在世纪之交推出的这套系列教材,也必将大大推动我国 21 世纪英语语言文学专业研究生教育事业的发展,促进我国英语语言文学研究水平的提高。

戴炜栋

2000 年 9 月



Introduction

By Mark Budman

Dear Chinese Reader,

While it is true that every foreign language is difficult for a non-native speaker, there are ways to make the learning process easier for you. One of these ways is reading. We are talking about not just any text, but fine, literary fiction. For the beginner, this fiction should be short, satisfying and to the point. Flash fiction aims to provide exactly this experience, and we believe that you will find excellent examples of this type of reading in this book.

So what is flash fiction? In his famous play *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare writes that, “Brevity is the soul of wit.” Brevity. What a word pregnant with meaning! Yet brevity alone cannot be the answer; otherwise “I want food” or “Give me money” would be excellent examples of flash fiction.

Flash fiction rests on what I call a tripod—plot, language and characters. And yes, it has to be brief. Think tabletop tripod and not the one a large telescope sits on. How brief? For the purposes of this book, 500 words or less. At this short length, the tripod has to be precise and the focus right on target. No wobbling, no mincing of words. Remove one leg of the tripod, and the story will collapse. And the publisher will turn away, or the reader will leave yawning. That’s the worst punishment for a writer.

Writing a memorable story in only 500 words is a challenge. We encourage you to practice, and to try to write flash fiction yourself. Like a sculptor with a block of stone, you must cut unnecessary words until you get to the very core of the story and your senses tell you that you can’t cut any more. Yet at the same time, nothing important can be left out.

Rich, literary fiction can never be completely understood, neither by writer nor editor nor reader. There are always various possible interpretations. That’s



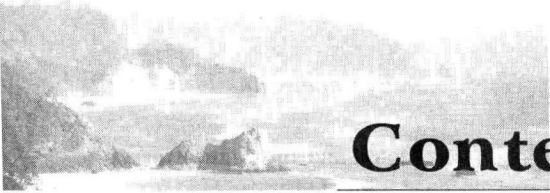
why authors need intelligent readers to cooperate in the process of making sense of a text. That's why we need you.

What should you pay attention to when you read flash fiction? First, appreciate the author's ability to squeeze the essence of a situation into such a tight form. Notice the intricacy of language that is poetic yet also tells a story. Pay careful attention to every word, as if you were reading a poem, because in good flash fiction every word is important.

By accomplishing all of this, you will achieve a double victory. You will master the English language, and you will be introduced to a new genre of fiction.

As a starting point to your discussions, we have grouped the stories by theme: Death, Hate, Love, Fantasy, Foreign Lands, and War and Crime. These categories are designed to start you thinking, not to limit your interpretations. Many of these stories are complex and could have been placed in several different categories.

Happy learning, and may your path to the English language be both productive and pleasant.



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Death

How do people cope with death and dying?

Is death the end of everything?

Can a human soul defeat death?

Death



Sleeping

By Katharine Weber

She would not have to change a diaper, they said. In fact, she would not have to do anything at all. Mrs. Winter said that Charles would not wake while she and Mr. Winter were out at the movies. He was a very sound sleeper, she said. No need to have a bottle for him or anything. Before the Winters left they said absolutely please not to look in on the sleeping baby because the door squeaked too loudly.

Harriet had never held a baby, except for one brief moment, when she was about six, when Mrs. Antler next door had surprisingly bestowed on her the tight little bundle that was their new baby, Andrea. Harriet had sat very still and her arms had begun to ache from the tension by the time Mrs. Antler took back her baby. Andy was now a plump seven-year-old, older than Harriet had been when she held her that day.

After two hours of reading all of the boring mail piled neatly on a desk in the bedroom and looking through a depressing wedding album filled with photographs of dressed-up people in desperate need of orthodonture (Harriet had just ended two years in braces and was very conscious of malocclusion issues) while flipping channels on their television, Harriet turned the knob on the baby's door very tentatively, but it seemed locked. She didn't dare to turn the knob with more pressure because what if she made a noise and woke him and he started to cry?

She stood outside the door and tried to hear the sound of a baby breathing but she couldn't hear anything through the door but the sound of



the occasional car that passed by on the street outside. She wondered what Charles looked like. She wasn't even sure how old he was. Why had she agreed to baby-sit when Mr. Winter approached her at the swim club? She had never seen him before, and it was flattering that he took her for being capable, as if just being a girl her age automatically qualified her as a baby-sitter.

By the time the Winters came home, Harriet had eaten most of the M & M's in the glass bowl on their coffee table: first all the blue ones, then the red ones, then all the green ones, and so on, leaving, in the end, only the yellow.

They gave her too much money and didn't ask her about anything. Mrs. Winter seemed to be waiting for her to leave before checking on the baby. Mr. Winter drove her home in silence. When they reached her house he said, My wife. He hesitated, then he said, You understand, don't you? and Harriet answered Yes without looking at him or being sure what they were talking about although she did really know what he was telling her and then she got out of his car and watched him drive away.

Questions for consideration

Does the baby really exist?

Why would Mrs. Winter hire a babysitter?

About the story

"Sleeping" is a story inspired by Katharine Weber's own inexplicable



teenage experience, minding a baby she never saw. It explores the mysteries of human desire and human behavior, and how difficult it is for people to truly understand those mysteries, even within themselves.

About the author

Katharine Weber is the author of four novels, and her short fiction has appeared in numerous publications including *The New Yorker*. A book critic and essayist as well, she has taught fiction writing at Yale University and elsewhere, although she herself has never completed a college degree.



The Dead

By Beverly Jackson

We walk every morning, our pace well suited—old dog and old woman—a leash uniting us in silent journeys down country roads. The redwoods and Douglas firs creak in winter gusts that push us along. The sky is a changing panorama of purest pinks and the clear blues of newborns' eyes. Glorious enough to explain why people think heaven is skyward. The mist steams on a horizon of pines.

A dead mouse in the road is tiny, scrawny, with gray fur. If not for the black ooze beneath its head, it looks asleep. I drag Murphy away, his nose urged toward the scent. The following morning, we see a thin snake flattened on the pavement, its scales glittery in the early light. Its skin is unharmed, like a flower pressed under the wheels of a car or truck. As I again yank Murphy from the kill, I see movement—an infant is silhouetted, perched high in a tall, soft fir. It's a flash, an image. I cup my hand over my eyes, but she is gone—a mirage.

Next outing, bitter cold, the trudge up Arcadia Road is arduous. Murphy's fur ripples against his flanks in the wind. I wonder, for the millionth time, how different life might be, had the child been born. I shiver with cold and my dark thoughts. "Better take a quick whiz, Murphy," I say. The wind shakes the trees, making a whooshing eerie rustle. The dawn skies are flat and gray.

On the road an injured wren huddles, motionless. I hold Murphy back as I swoop it up. It struggles only a little. I move it gently to the