世界短篇小说教程

Best
Short Stories
of
The World
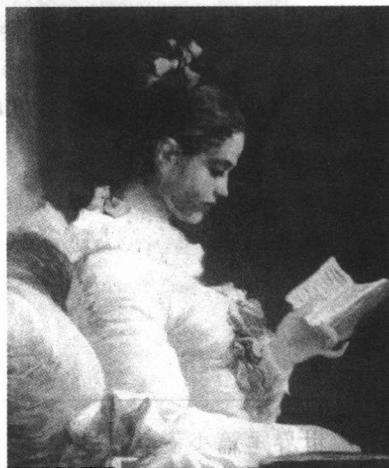
编著　白凤欣　冯　梅
　　　姬生雷　李正栓

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前　言

　　《世界短篇小说教程》是按照 2000 年国家教育部颁发的《全国高等学校英语专业教学大纲》编写的。其目的是培养学生的语言能力，让学生在欣赏名著的愉悦中轻松地学习语言。通过阅读不同作者的不同作品，不仅可以使学生了解他们各自的创作风格，领略英语语言的精妙和生动，使学生的语言实践能力得到提高，还可以使学生掌握文学批评的基本方法，同时使学生了解更多的历史知识、人生态度、文化差异、人生的真谛，使学生的人格更加完善。

　　《世界短篇小说教程》力求凸显其独特之处。主要表现在选材、内容及体例三个方面。在选材方面，所选作品除来自英、美作家外，还精选了来自法、俄等国共 17 位作家的作品。这是本书所作的一个新的尝试，也是取名《世界短篇小说教程》的原因。在内容方面，本书第一部分概述了短篇小说的发展历程，学生通过本章节的学习，可以了解短篇小说的整体发展过程；第二部分是短篇小说的要素：背景、冲突、人物、主题；第三部分是短篇小说的技巧：视角、风格、情节、比喻手段（包括象征和讽喻）。国内目前出版的一些教材，没有对短篇小说的要素及技巧加以区分，通常把它们合在一起逐一介绍。本书把二者分开，各自作为一个独立的部分集中加以介绍，可使学生对短篇小说的要素和技巧有一个全面、完整的了解和认识。第四部分是作品选读，除了对作家及其生平作简要介绍、对作品进行注释、提出与作品相关的讨论问题之外，还对作品作了最基本的分析，有助于学生对作品的理解。在体例方面，所选作品的时间跨度大，从 19 世纪到 21 世纪，按照作家出生的先后顺序编排作品，这样就为学生提供了一个横向及纵向了解作家及其作品的平台。

　　本书所选作品是经过编著者精心筛选后选定的。但由于篇幅有限，不得不忍痛舍弃一些同样优秀的作品，所选作品"文字优美隽永，意义深远含蓄，有助于读者感悟人生，了解世事百态"（姚乃强）。本书可作为我国高等院校英语专业本科生的文学教材之用，也可作为师范专科学校、夜大、函授大学、英语本科自学考试所用文学教材或参考用书。同时，还适合作为具有一定英语语言能力的非英语专业学生和广大文学爱好者的业余读物。

　　本书的编写力求尽善尽美，但由于水平有限，总有一些不尽如人意之处，难免出现这样或那样的纰漏，诚恳地希望读者提出批评意见，以便今后改正。在编写过程中所参考的国内外出版的书籍及学者们的研究成果，在参考文献部分已注明，如有遗漏，敬请谅解，在此一并表示感谢。

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编者

2006 年 4 月

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PART ONE
INTRODUCTION TO SHORT FICTION

It is perhaps popularly accepted that fiction is the purest form of storytelling. Our discussion of fiction mainly concentrates on short stories, which, like poetry, endeavor to reveal the hidden truths of our humanity. Short fiction, a relatively recent phenomenon, is a part of a long tradition of imaginative prose extending back to ancient times. As a matter of fact, there was prose fiction as far back as ancient Greece and Rome, for instance, Apulius's *Golden Ass*, Petronius's *Satryricon*, in which prose was put to imaginative use. If we trace farther back hundreds——even thousands——of years, we can find abundant evidence of fiction in mythology, folk, fables, parables and tales. These genres are widely employed in prose to pass on and down the wisdom, culture, moral, ideas of societies and civilizations. A majority of examples appeared including Aesop's *Fables*, Biblical stories, Grimms *Fairy Tales*, *The Arabian Nights*, the parables of Jesus and innumerable mythologies from societies all over the world. Admittedly fiction was descended from generation to generation through the oral tradition and only in the later time it got recorded or written down into book form. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the novel rose and grew hugely popular. In the eighteenth century, due to the social and political conditions, newspaper, magazines and pamphlets became the chief instrument of the disseminating progress. By the mid nineteenth century, authors were playing with the forms of fiction, scaling novel – length works down closer to the length of traditional tales and essays. This occurred unanimously with the development of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and periodicals, which furnished the room for the short story to flourish and thus was born the short story. The authors of fiction were encouraged by a large literate audience of middle-class readers who wanted to see their lives reflected in faithful mirrors. Skillfully representing ordinary life, many authors made the art of the short story achieve its perfection, for example, Poe, Balzac, Chekhov, Irving, Hawthorne, and others.

A number of extraordinary writers have offered the world their idiosyncratic opinions of fiction. Joseph Conrad remarked: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written world, to make you hear, to make you feel——it is, before all, to make you see . . . and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there, according to your encouragement, consolation, fear, charm, all you demand——and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask." Flannery O'Connor defined

story: "A story is a complete dramatic action——and in good stories, the characters are shown through the action and the action is controlled through the characters, and the result of this meaning that derives from the whole presented experience." Poe saw the short story as a way for writers to hold a reader's attention in one sitting and exert full control over the reader in that short duration, in order to produce specific effects. He also pointed out that the author was enabled to carry out his full design without interruption and the reader could also be involved in the story uninterruptedly. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren state: "Fiction is a vital image of life in motion——it is an imaginative enactment of life—— and, as such, it is an extension of our own lives."

What differentiates a short story from a fable, tale, folklore, myth, novella, novelette or novel? They share some similarity in that all of them involve the narration of imaginary events and portrayal of imaginary characters in prose. A narrative is some kind of accounting or recital of something that happened in words, but on occasion leaves some occurrences out because, on one hand, they are from some perspective insignificant; on the other hand, they emphasize others. A fable is a fictitious story meant to teach a moral lesson, traditionally by means of animal characters who speak and act in the way of human beings. It relates to supernatural, mythical or extraordinary beings, events or exploits. A tale is a story or account of true, legendary, or fictitious events. It is drawn up so as to interest or amuse, or to preserve the history of a fact or incident. Folklore is the system of traditional beliefs, customs, and legends of the common people in a given culture, often represented in story form or poems. A myth is a traditional story whose author is unknown. It has its roots in the primitive folk-beliefs of cultures and uses the supernatural to interpret natural events and to explain a culture's view of the universe and the nature of humanity, ostensibly with a historical basis. Novella refers to fiction that is longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. It means a mid-length work of a particular structure with 17 500 to 39 999 words, consisting of precipitating incident, rising action, reversal, climax, denouement. Novelette simply means fiction of a length from 7 500 to 17 499 words between short story and novella length. A novel is a long piece of fiction with a length of 40 000 words up. It includes precipitating incident, rising action, reversals, climax, falling action and denouement. The exact number of reversals and almost climaxes, setbacks and events can vary enormously. The short story differs from above-mentioned forms because it is written for entertainment, for capturing a slice of life, a mood, a sense of being, and creating an encapsulated world. It is the product of an individual artist, with a discernible aesthetic arrangement of formal elements such as plot, character, setting, point of view, theme, style and symbolism.

PART TWO
ELEMENTS OF FICTION

The basic elements of fiction comprise setting, conflict, character, and theme. The following section deals with each one by one.

Ⅰ. Setting

Setting is the location along with the time in which a story takes place. Since man's action can hardly happen in vacuum, they are always surrounded by place and time. When framing a story, an author for a while spends a great deal of time concentrating on all the elements of fiction except for setting. So setting, in some cases, is frequently neglected, but as a matter of fact, it is tremendously important to the development of a story.

When discussing setting, the following aspects should be taken into consideration because of its contribution to a story. (1) Place. Where is the action of the story taking place, including a real particular geographical location or an imaginary place invented by the author? (2) Time. When is the story taking place, including historical period and the time of day or the time of year? (3) Weather conditions. Is it rainy, sunny, stormy or snowy in the season of spring, summer, autumn or winter? (4) Social conditions. What is the daily life of the character? Does the story contain local color reflected through religious, mental, moral, social and emotional environment? (5) Atmosphere or mood. What feeling is created at the beginning of the story? Is it bright and cheerful or dark and frightening? It is obvious that setting is more than a place that a story happens. The historical, geographical and cultural setting links closely with events, characters and their actions. In other words, setting provides a historical and cultural context that enhances the reader's understanding of the character.

Setting is an essential ingredient to a story. In some case, it is not only essential but it plays a vital role in the development of the story. Generally speaking, setting has three functions. (1) As a backdrop for action. Sometimes setting as a backdrop is extensive and highly developed. Sometimes setting is expressed in a single sentence or implied way, especially in modern fiction. As a reader you should be very careful to use your intelligence to infer the setting through the character's dialogue and action. Under this circumstance, setting as a backdrop means a kind of setting that exists largely for its own, without

necessary relationship to action and characters, or at best a relationship that is only tangential and slight. (2) As a means of revealing character to reinforce the theme. Setting as a means of revealing character can be reflected in the way how the character reacts to it. The character's response displays his or her emotional and interior world of mind. Thus setting transcends its particular locale to become symbolic representative places. Setting and character are intermingled with each other. Setting stands for the character and exhibit careful representations of reality to achieve the effect of reinforcing the theme. It can be regarded as the concrete representations of actual life that illustrate general truths about human experience. (3) As a means to create atmosphere or mood. By making setting as a means to create atmosphere or mood the author may want his reader to "feel" rather than simply "see" the setting. This atmosphere or mood will provide the reader with sufficient room to expect what to happen in the following. A story may be confined to a certain atmosphere, which can be created by selecting all the necessary details for their psychological connotations. In such a story every detail chosen should be in accordance with the atmosphere of the story.

Eudora Welty, a distinguished American storyteller, has pointed out the importance of one aspect of setting ——place in fiction. She thinks that fiction depends for its life on place. Place is the crossroads of circumstance, the proving ground of "what happened? Who's here? Who's coming?" She further explains that place is the conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story. When the world of experience is within reach of the world of appearance, place both makes and keeps the characters real; it animates the characters. So every story would be another story, and unrecognizable as art, if it takes up its characters and plot and happens somewhere else. Knowing where the story is happening will help the reader to produce stronger, more defensible interpretations. One pleasure of reading is for literature's capacity to take the reader somewhere else. And setting is where the story takes him or her to.

II. Conflict

What is conflict? According to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, conflict means: (1) To come into collision or disagreement; be contradictory; at variance or in opposition; clash; (2) Discord of action, feeling or effect; antagonism or opposition as of interests or principles; (3) A mental struggle arising from opposing demands or impulse. William Faulkner in his famous Nobel Prize Speech declared that the most important literature deals with the subject of "the human heart in the conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth either the agony and the sweat." In fiction, conflict is the fundamental tension, predicament, or challenge that propels a

story plot. In other words, conflict is the struggle within the plot between opposing forces.

Different genres determine the different types of conflict. Romance novels demand the primary conflict to involve two people struggling with a romantic relationship so as to move the reader emotionally instead of intellectually. Mysteries require an external conflict where a crime or disappearance must be settled. Additionally, it also includes internal conflicts with the major character's nature or personal relationships. In science fiction and fantasy, the conflict concentrates on the questions about the morality of creating artificial life. Literary conflict exists primarily on the two levels: internal and external. Internal conflict is the battle between what the character wants to do and what the character must do. This is the conflict with some element in the character's own nature, such as inner turmoil, moral dilemmas or overcoming trauma. This conflict has no close connection with other characters, but it can affect other characters. Internal conflict often shows its appearance in a circumstance where human nature wants to avoid difficult or unpleasant situation; or conflict compels character to make a choice between the two alternatives so that he can achieve his goal; or motivation determines what character will gain or lose by making the choice; or characters must have a sound reason to stay in a situation they would rather avoid. Thus the internal conflict frequently takes the form of an opposition between man and himself. External conflict is the external problem that becomes an obstacle to prevent the character to reach his goals. It may take the form of an opposition between man and man, between man and nature, between man and society. The conflict of man against man is one between the protagonist and his most intimate people, for example, his family, his lover, or his close friends, and sometimes exceptionally even a stranger. It's about inter-personal relations between individuals whose problems have relation to each other. The conflict of man against society can be shown in a character having problems with a whole group of people, or who is an outcast, or who fights prejudice or unfair laws. It is between the parent and the child, between the doctor and the patient, between the protagonist and the society. This is the conflict larger than the inter-personal relationships. The conflict of man against nature is one between the protagonist and the environment, between the protagonist and a force of nature. The range of this conflict is quite extensive and can change greatly.

Three points of conflict should be paid special heed to: (1) Conflict is not arguments and disagreements between characters; (2) Conflict is not unmotivated behaviours; (3) Conflict is not external circumstances by itself. To be effective, external situations have something to do with the character's goals, motivations, emotions and must exert vital influence upon them.

Ⅲ. Character

Character is the people in the story. He is an individual created imaginably by the author through whom this imaginable person, to some extent, lives within us; to the other extent, outside us.

In presenting and developing a character, an author usually employs some methods. Therefore, the characterization is the method by which an author creates the appearance and personality of imaginary persons and reveals the character. Basically, there are three methods of characterization: (1) Direct description of physical appearance and explanation of character traits and attributes by means of direct exposition, taking place either in an introduction or in statements distributed throughout the work. A number of writers consider that the best descriptions only rest on some details that are carefully chosen. They emphasize it is appearance that prompts first reaction to people, and everything they wear bring forth some aspect of their inner selves. To express in another way, the descriptive detail appears in the process of narrative, writers show their reader characters as these characters move through scenes instead of stepping out of the action and holding them up for a static description. (2) Presentation of the character in action, free from author's direct or explicit interpretive comment. Essentially, the author demonstrates to the reader what kind of person his character is through what the character says and behaves and what is said by other characters. Undoubtedly actions do speak louder than words. Sometimes what a character says can tell the reader something about him or her. (3) Representation of the character's inner self through dialogue or thought (usually interior monologue) to comprehend the character's subconscious or unconscious state of mind. Normally, the first method is known as the direct characterization while the second and third indirect characterization. Of the two, the indirect method is the characteristic means, but if this method is used too often in the presentation of the character, the procedure might become intolerably boring. There also exists the danger of direct presentation, i.e. it is likely to forfeit the vividness of drama and the reader's imaginative participation.

Character can be categorized into the following types: (1) Protagonist and antagonist. The term originated in Greek drama, which was enacted by a chorus, its leader, and three additional actors. These actors include the deuteragonist, antagonist and tritagnist. Protagonist, known as hero, main character, good guy, is the principal and leading character in a literary work; antagonist, known as the enemy, opponent, adversary, villain, the bad guy, is the force acting against the protagonist. Antagonist may be another person, an aspect of the physical or social environment, or a destructive element in the protagonist's own nature. A short story usually focuses on only one protagonist and a novel

can have several. In a modern literary work appears a different principal character given the name antihero, who lacks the attributes of the traditional protagonists or hero. *His want of idealism, courage, honesty, grace, his weakness and confusion often reflects modern man's ambivalence toward traditional moral and social virtues.* (2)Flat and round character. The term was first coined by E. M. Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel*. In Forster's opinion, a flat character is one who can be summed up in a sentence, i. e. a one-dimensional representation. The behaviour of flat character is predictable. Through the *minimum essentials of description the reader can see only one aspect of the character.* In contemporary fiction, background characters and other less important characters are often flat. A round character is a multi-dimensional representation. Forster states succinctly: "*The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in convincing way.*" Round characters are made of many personality traits and tend to be complex and both more life-like and believable. Flat characters consist of only a few personality traits and tend to be simple and less believable. The protagonist of a novel is certain to be a round character, a minor character in the same work may be a flat character. That is not to say that all the antagonists are flat characters, there are some exception of course. In flat characters there is a special kind named stock character which is a fictional character that relies heavily on cultural types or stereotypes for its personality, manners of speech, and other characteristic. This stereotyped character is instantly identifiable to members of a given culture. (3) Static and dynamic character. A static character is one that experiences no significant change in the process of the story, remaining essentially the same at the end as he or she is at the beginning. A dynamic character, in contrast, is one that does experience a significant change in the course of the story. More specifically, this change must be within the possibilities of the character, sufficiently motivated and allowed sufficient time for change. This may approach in a slow way or with a dramatic suddenness.

Character is important to plot. Character presentation requires coherence. It is the author's craftsmanship that makes his characters more real, vivid, sensible and credible.

Ⅳ. Theme

Theme is an element of fiction not usually addressed. Perhaps no literary term has caused more boring, reductive conversations about works of fiction than theme. A simple definition of theme does not explain well enough, so some typical definitions are offered here. (1) Theme is what the story is saying, definitely or speculatively, about humanity and the laws of the universe. (Rachel Simon) (2) The theme is the main idea that is explored in a story. Characters, plot, settings, point of view, and style all contribute to the theme's development. (Beverly Lawn) (3) Theme is an organic unity in which all the

vital elements have interrelations. (4) Theme is the idea, the significance, the interpretation of persons and events, the pervasive and unifying view of life embodied in the total narrative. It's what we are to make of the human experience rendered in the story——always involving, directly or indirectly, some comment on values in human nature and conduct." (Cleanth Brooks; Robert Penn Warren)

The theme of a fable is its moral; the theme of a parable is its teaching; the theme of a piece of fiction is its view about life and how people behave. A theme is, in normal case, not presented directly at all; it is extracted from the character, plot and setting that constitutes the story.

To know theme clearly, it's quite necessary to differentiate theme from plot and subject. Plot is the sequence of action that proves or disproves the theme, a series of conflicts including man against man, man against environment, man against society and man against himself. Subject is what the story is generally about. It is a concise summary of the story's content expressed in one word or phrase. Theme is more complex. It is the story's controlling idea or central insight that reflects the author's personal philosophy of life. It is usually expressed in one line which serves as the author's mental preparation for answering the question "what is the story about." In explaining a story's theme we do more than state its subject or summarize its plot. Take Pirandello's *War* for example. The subject of the story is about children and parents. To describe precisely its theme we should suggest about parents' love for their children, and even specifically, what it values in the attitudes toward the loss of children expressed by the two major characters. Furthermore, theme is not the same thing as a moral, the kind of thing traditional fables and cautionary tales designed to convey. A moral can be exposed in some simple practical maxim such as "Don't count your boobies until they are hatched" or "Look before you leap." Lastly, theme should not be confused with meaning. Flannery O'Connor clearly distinguishes the subtle relationship between theme and meaning and points out: "When you can state the theme of a story, when you can separate it from the story itself, then you can be sure the story is not a very good one. The meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it. A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You can tell a story because a statement would be inadequate. When anybody asks what a story is about, the only proper thing is to tell him to read the story. The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning and the purpose of making statements about the meaning of a story is only to help you experience that meaning more fully."

On one hand, not all stories have theme such as a horror story or adventure story; on the other hand, there can be more than one theme in a story. Each character and plot may bear a number of minor themes attached. One thing demanded great care is that the overall

theme in a story needs to be consistent, otherwise the reader will have the impression of the story disconnected, choppy or even bizarre. Take William Faulkner's *A Rose For Emily* for example. The theme of the story can be: (1) If one is stubborn enough not to accept any change, he will be sure to live with death; (2) It's almost impossible to know a person truthfully and unmistakably; (3) The south is in a quandary whether to move with the times or to cling to the past ; (4) Repression of one's sensible desire will cause psychological abnormality. Superficially each of these themes is independent, but actually they are interrelated to and connected with one another to formulate as a whole of the organic unity.

It is far from easy to identify and express a story's themes. Still there are some approaches that can be used as guidelines: (1) Considering the story in retrospect to see how the story development leads to the conclusion; (2) Looking for direct statements made by characters who stand for ideas, or by an unnamed speaker; (3) Noticing how the other elements of fiction such as plot, character, setting, point of view and symbolism support and create theme; (4) Investigating the important key positions for meaning. The beginning, the title, chapter titles, and particularly the ending should lead to a dominant meaning; (5) Avoiding making over generalization by using words "always, all, never." Theme should be stated in terms of "may, could, some, sometimes, seldom," etc.

PART THREE
ART OF FICTION

The art of fiction consists of the use of such techniques as point of view, style, plot and other figurative devices that invoke emotional, imaginative and intellectual responses in the reader. The writer's choice and control of these techniques give direction to the reader's overall experience.

I. Point of View

The meaning of the story is determined by a number of factors among which the matter of who is telling the story is the most important. Point of view is a complicated term referring to the vantage point from which the author decides to disclose the explicit facts that together constitute the story. Once you resolve who is telling the story, you have discovered the narrative point of view. This is vital because the narrator controls just what and how much is told, the kind of information given to the reader, and even the shape of the work itself. In other words, what we know and how we feel about the events in a story are shaped by the author's choice of a point of view.

The possible ways of telling a story are multiple, and more than one point of view can be worked into a single sort. However, the various points of view that narrators draw upon can be conveniently grouped into three broad categories: the first person, the second person, and the third person, each with several variations.

The First Person

In the first person point of view, the narrator does participate in the action of the story. The narrator uses the first person pronouns (I, me, we) or sentences such as "I saw ..." or "We did ..." He is a character in the action, either a major one or a minor one. As a major character, he may have prejudices or need to justify their own actions to themselves that perhaps misrepresent what we are told. The minor character observes the action free of being an integral part of it and has not got essential information. As a character, the narrator takes actions, makes judgments and has opinions and prejudices. In this case the reader is likely to make a guess about what really happens or is happening. One

thing should be noted that the first person narrator is distinguished from the author because the first person narrator is a character in the story, who must obey all the laws of being a character, even during the period of his duties as a narrator. For him to know anything, he must experience it with his senses, or be informed about it. He can insert his own thoughts and opinions, but not those of any other character unless clearly told about those thoughts.

Naturally it is of great necessity to consider some important aspects when writing in the first person point of view. Firstly, a reader has need for deciding how the story is being recounted. The way the first person narrator is relating the story will greatly affect how an author writes it, the language he chooses, the length of his sentences, his tone of voice and a lot of other things. Secondly, a reader needs to think about how much time has passed by between when the character first undergoes the events in the story and when he makes the decision to tell them. The reason why the story is told will also affect how it is written.

A first person narrative is often more effective when it is a first person narrator telling someone else's story. The benefit is its immediacy and a sense of direction. The narrator is really inside the head of the person telling the story. He gets the information first hand, as if he were there when the events occurred. The reader may find the narrator addressing him or he may find a dramatic context where the reader overhears what is said to another character. But the first person point of view also has its disadvantage that the narrator tells his stories in his own voices with his particular limitations of knowledge and vision. Presumably there is distortion or omission. This raises the question of trustworthiness. The reader should remain alert for textual signals that either ensure or undermine this reliability.

The Second Person

With the second person point of view, the narrator is supposedly the reader, and refers to itself with the second person pronoun "you." This is not frequently used because, though theoretically possible, it can hardly works well. Being artificial and self-conscious, it seems to invite identification on the part of the reader with the narrator. The reader may feel that they are the one spoken to, and will feel it hard to accept that they are doing the things the narrator tells them they are supposedly doing. If you decide to tell a story in the second person, remember to inform the reader clearly and directly who is being addressed. Otherwise the reader cannot trust in the teller and accept the story as given.

The Third Person

This is the most common narrative style, but choosing this point of view is a little more complex than simply writing in the third person pronouns (he, she, it, they). There are