

American

美国当代
短篇小说精编

孙 坚 主编



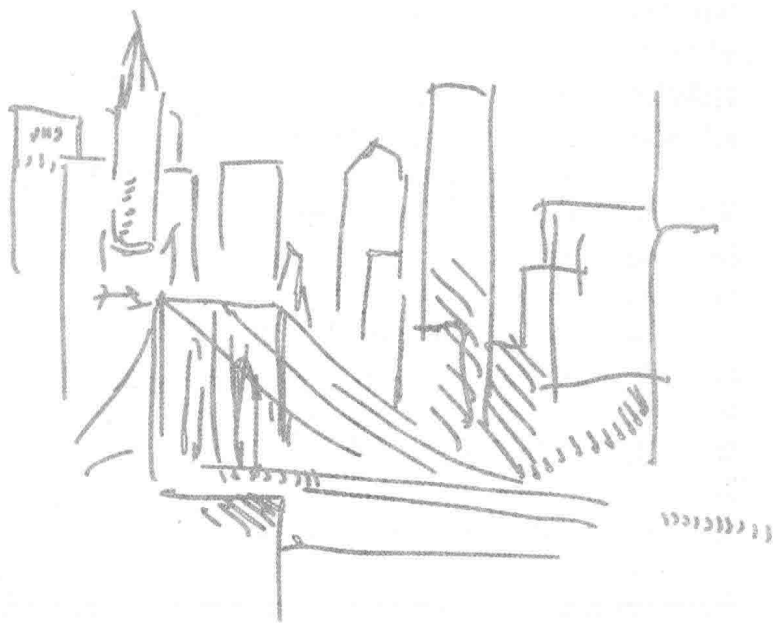
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美国当代短篇小说精编

主编：孙 坚

编者：王程辉 马 珂 路潇潇



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MEIGUO DANGDAI DUANPIAN XIAOSHUO JINGBIAN

孙 坚 主 编

责任编辑 / 张俊胜 郑世骏
责任校对 / 刘贵生 刘鹏程
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序

随着后工业社会的不断深入,各种媒体竞相登场,海量信息充斥耳目,加之高度的商业主义助推,阅读被碎片化了。这一现实导致了叙事艺术的危机,小说作为人们在无序中寻找意义,在混沌中建构身份,在失落中寻求慰藉的领地,此时就显得尤为重要。但人们每天被各种欲望所浸渍,被时空所割裂,被忙碌所麻木,坐下来在长篇小说中品读人生已成为奢侈。正因如此,近年来,在欧美,短篇小说颇为盛行。2013年,加拿大女作家爱丽丝·门罗以短篇小说获得诺贝尔文学奖更使短篇这一文类得势迅速在全球文学界流行开来,中国概莫能外。短篇虽短,覆盖面亦远不及长篇,但其直面人生之要害、聚叙事艺术之精华的特点,是其代替长篇成为流行读物的主要因素。以此为背景,编者集多年教学经验,采国内外同类文集之优点,编著了这本书,主要辑选了第二次世界大战之后到现在的17位美国优秀作家的短篇小说。各篇次序按时间先后顺序排列。

作为小说的一种,短篇小说具有篇幅短小、情节简洁、人物集中、结构精巧的显著特点。短篇小说往往选取和描绘富有典型意义的生活片断,着力刻画主要人物的性格特征,反映生活的某一侧面,使读者“借一斑略知全豹”,并借此“来说明一个问题或表现比它本身广阔得多、也复杂得多的社会现象的”(茅盾语)。人们通常把几千字到两万字的小小说称为短篇小说。作为高度集中凝练的叙事文类,在结构上,短篇小说一般应有以下元素:铺陈(exposition)、纠葛(complication)、经过(raising action)、高潮(climax)和结尾(ending/resolution)。然而,由于受篇幅的制约,现当代短篇小说通常会略去铺陈,叙事从中腰开始,打破常规,其结尾也多采用开放式结构,或出其不意、或寓意深刻、或从容收笔。

在欧美等国,短篇小说的发展可谓源远流长,名家名作层出不穷。在美国,从华盛顿·欧文到纳撒尼尔·霍桑、爱伦·坡,再到马克·吐温、欧·亨利,从谢伍德·安德森到海明威、福克纳,可以说代代相继,他们的作品牢固确立了短篇小说在美国文学史上的

传统地位。第二次世界大战后,科技的迅猛发展彻底改变了人们的阅读习惯,短篇小说因其短小、占用阅读时间短而进入了繁荣发展的时期,出现了尤多拉·韦尔蒂、弗兰纳里·奥康纳、杰罗姆·大卫·塞林格、约翰·契弗等优秀的短篇小说作家。与此同时,以长篇见长的约翰·巴思、索尔·贝洛、理查德·鲍威尔斯等的加盟写作更使短篇小说在这一时期迅速复兴,这一现象到现在仍势头正劲。

国际上,文艺界和出版界每年会特设专项奖鼓励短篇小说的创作,如总部设在爱尔兰的弗兰克·奥康纳国际短篇小说奖和美国的欧·亨利短篇小说奖;大学里普遍开设有短篇小说的欣赏和创作课程,培养短篇小说的创作群和研究群。然而,在我国的外国文学研究和创作领域,长期以来主要关注的是长篇小说,对短篇关注不够。本教材的出版,希望能有助于改善我国外国文学界对短篇小说的研究现状;同时,也希望对我国短篇小说的创作和研究有借鉴意义。

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名篇品读 I

A Worn Path(1941)

Eudora Welty(尤多拉·韦尔蒂)

It was December—a bright frozen day in the early morning. Far out in the country there was an old Negro woman with her head tied in a red rag, coming along a path through the pine-woods. Her name was Phoenix Jackson. She was very old and small and she walked slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a little from side to side in her steps, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock. She carried a thin, small cane made from an umbrella, and with this she kept tapping the frozen earth in front of her. This made a grave and persistent noise in the still air that seemed meditative, like the chirping^① of a solitary little bird.

She wore a dark striped dress reaching down to her shoe tops, and an equally long apron of bleached sugar sacks, with a full pocket; all neat and tidy, but every time she took a step she might have fallen over her shoelaces, which dragged from her unlaced shoes. She looked straight ahead. Her eyes were blue with age. Her skin had a pattern all its own of numberless branching wrinkles and as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead, but a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illumined by a yellow burning under the dark. Under the red rag her hair came down on her neck in the frailest of ringlets, still black, and with an odor like copper.

Now and then there was a quivering in the thicket. Old Phoenix said, “Out of my way, all you foxes, owls, beetles, jack rabbits, coons and wild animals! ...Keep out from under these feet, little bobwhites^②... Keep the big wild hogs out of my path. Don't let none of those come running my direction. I got a long way.” Under her small black-freckled hand her cane, limber as a buggy whip^③, would switch at the brush as if to rouse up any hiding things.

On she went. The woods were deep and still. The sun made the pine needles almost too

① chirping: 小鸟叽叽喳喳叫

② bobwhites: (鸟) 山齿鹑

③ limber as a buggy whip: 如同鞭子一样灵活

bright to look at, up where the wind rocked. The cones dropped as light as feathers. Down in the hollow was the mourning dove—it was not too late for him.

The path ran up a hill. “Seem like there is chains about my feet, time I get this far,” she said, in the voice of argument old people keep to use with themselves. “Something always take a hold of me on this hill—pleads I should stay.”

After she got to the top, she turned and gave a full, severe look behind her where she had come. “Up through pines,” she said at length. “Now down through oaks.”

Her eyes opened their widest, and she started down gently. But before she got to the bottom of the hill a bush caught her dress.

Her fingers were busy and intent, but her skirts were full and long, so that before she could pull them free in one place they were caught in another. It was not possible to allow the dress to tear. “I in the thorny bush,” she said. “Thorns, you doing your appointed work. Never want to let folks pass—no, sir. Old eyes thought you was a pretty little green bush.”

Finally, trembling all over, she stood free, and after a moment dared to stoop for her cane.

“Sun so high!” she cried, leaning back and looking, while the thick tears went over her eyes. “The time getting all gone here.”

At the foot of this hill was a place where a log was laid across the creek.

“Now comes the trial,” said Phoenix. Putting her right foot out, she mounted the log and shut her eyes. Lifting her skirt, leveling her cane fiercely before her, like a festival figure in some parade, she began to march across. Then she opened her eyes and she was safe on the other side.

“I wasn’t as old as I thought,” she said.

But she sat down to rest. She spread her skirts on the bank around her and folded her hands over her knees. Up above her was a tree in a pearly cloud of mistletoe. She did not dare to close her eyes, and when a little boy brought her a plate with a slice of marble-cake^① on it she spoke to him. “That would be acceptable,” she said. But when she went to take it there was just her own hand in the air.

So she left that tree, and had to go through a barbed-wire fence. There she had to creep and crawl, spreading her knees and stretching her fingers like a baby trying to climb the steps. But she talked loudly to herself: she could not let her dress be torn now, so late in the day, and she could not pay for having her arm or her leg sawed off if she got caught fast where

① marble-cake: 裱饰大理石花纹的蛋糕

she was.

At last she was safe through the fence and risen up out in the clearing. Big dead trees, like black men with one arm, were standing in the purple stalks of the withered cotton field. There sat a buzzard^①.

“Who you watching?”

In the furrow she made her way along.

“Glad this not the season for bulls,” she said, looking sideways, “and the good Lord made his snakes to curl up and sleep in the winter. A pleasure I don’t see no two-headed snake coming around that tree, where it come once. It took a while to get by him, back in the summer.”

She passed through the old cotton and went into a field of dead corn. It whispered and shook, and was taller than her head. “Through the maze^② now,” she said, for there was no path.

Then there was something tall, black, and skinny there, moving before her.

At first she took it for a man. It could have been a man dancing in the field. But she stood still and listened, and it did not make a sound. It was as silent as a ghost.

“Ghost,” she said sharply, “who be you the ghost of? For I have heard of nary death close by.”

But there was no answer—only the ragged dancing in the wind.

She shut her eyes, reached out her hand, and touched a sleeve. She found a coat and inside that an emptiness, cold as ice.

“You scarecrow,” she said. Her face lighted. “I ought to be shut up for good,” she said with laughter. “My senses is gone. I too old. I the oldest people I ever know. Dance, old scarecrow,” she said, “while I dancing with you.”

She kicked her foot over the furrow, and with mouth drawn down, shook her head once or twice in a little strutting way. Some husks blew down and whirled in streamers about her skirts.

Then she went on, parting her way from side to side with the cane, through the whispering field. At last she came to the end, to a wagon track where the silver grass blew between the red ruts. The quail were walking around like pullets^③, seeming all dainty and unseen.

“Walk pretty,” she said. “This the easy place. This the easy going.”

She followed the track, swaying through the quiet bare fields, through the little strings of

① buzzard: 红头美洲鸢

② maze: 迷宫

③ pullet: 孵出后不到一年的小母鸡

trees silver in their dead leaves, past cabins silver from weather, with the doors and windows boarded shut, all like old women under a spell^① sitting there. “I walking in their sleep,” she said, nodding her head vigorously.

In a ravine she went where a spring was silently flowing through a hollow log. Old Phoenix bent and drank. “Sweetgum makes the water sweet,” she said, and drank more. “Nobody know who made this well, for it was here when I was born.”

The track crossed a swampy part where the moss hung as white as lace from every limb. “Sleep on, alligators^②, and blow your bubbles.” Then the track went into the road. Deep, deep the road went down between the high green-colored banks. Overhead the live-oaks met, and it was as dark as a cave.

A big black dog with a lolling tongue came up out of the weeds by the ditch. She was meditating, and not ready, and when he came at her she only hit him a little with her cane. Over she went in the ditch, like a little puff of milkweed^③.

Down there, her senses drifted away. A dream visited her, and she reached her hand up, but nothing reached down and gave her a pull. So she lay there and presently went to talking. “Old woman,” she said to herself, “that black dog came up out of the weeds to stall you off, and now there he sitting on his fine tail, smiling at you.”

A white man finally came along and found her—a hunter, a young man, with his dog on a chain.

“Well, Granny!” he laughed. “What are you doing there?”

“Lying on my back like a June-bug waiting to be turned over, mister,” she said, reaching up her hand.

He lifted her up, gave her a swing in the air, and set her down. “Anything broken, Granny?”

“No sir, them old dead weeds is springy enough,” said Phoenix, when she had got her breath. “I thank you for your trouble.”

“Where do you live, Granny?” he asked, while the two dogs were growling at each other.

“Away back yonder, sir, behind the ridge. You can’t even see it from here.”

“On your way home?”

“No sir, I going to town.”

“Why, that’s too far! That’s as far as I walk when I come out myself, and I get something

① under a spell:中了魔法

② alligator:短吻鳄

③ milkweed:(植物)马利筋

for my trouble.” He patted the stuffed bag he carried, and there hung down a little closed claw. It was one of the bobwhites, with its beak hooked bitterly to show it was dead. “Now you go on home, Granny!”

“I bound to go to town, mister,” said Phoenix. “The time come around.”

He gave another laugh, filling the whole landscape. “I know you old colored people! Wouldn’t miss going to town to see Santa Claus!”

But something held Old Phoenix very still. The deep lines in her face went into a fierce and different radiation. Without warning, she had seen with her own eyes a flashing nickel fall out of the man’s pocket onto the ground.

“How old are you, Granny?” he was saying.

“There is no telling, mister,” she said, “no telling.”

Then she gave a little cry and clapped her hands and said, “Git on away from here, dog! Look! Look at that dog!” She laughed as if in admiration. “He ain’t scared of nobody. He a big black dog.” She whispered, “Sic him^①!”

“Watch me get rid of that cur,” said the man. “Sic him, Pete! Sic him!”

Phoenix heard the dogs fighting, and heard the man running and throwing sticks. She even heard a gunshot. But she was slowly bending forward by that time, further and further forward, the lids stretched down over her eyes, as if she were doing this in her sleep. Her chin was lowered almost to her knees. The yellow palm of her hand came out from the fold of her apron. Her fingers slid down and along the ground under the piece of money with the grace and care they would have in lifting an egg from under a setting hen. Then she slowly straightened up; she stood erect, and the nickel was in her apron pocket. A bird flew by. Her lips moved. “God watching me the whole time. I come to stealing.”

The man came back, and his own dog panted about them. “Well, I scared him off that time,” he said, and then he laughed and lifted his gun and pointed it at Phoenix.

She stood straight and faced him.

“Doesn’t the gun scare you?” he said, still pointing it.

“No, sir, I seen plenty go off closer by, in my day, and for less than what I done,” she said, holding utterly still.

He smiled, and shouldered the gun. “Well, Granny,” he said, “you must be a hundred years old, and scared of nothing. I’d give you a dime if I had any money with me. But you take my advice and stay home, and nothing will happen to you.”

① sic him:去咬他

“I bound to go on my way, mister,” said Phoenix. She inclined her head in the red rag. Then they went in different directions, but she could hear the gun shooting again and again over the hill.

She walked on. The shadows hung from the oak trees to the road like curtains. Then she smelled wood smoke, and smelled the river, and she saw a steeple and the cabins on their steep steps. Dozens of little black children whirled around her. There ahead was Natchez^① shining. Bells were ringing. She walked on.

In the paved city it was Christmas time. There were red and green electric lights strung and crisscrossed everywhere, and all turned on in the daytime. Old Phoenix would have been lost if she had not distrusted her eyesight and depended on her feet to know where to take her.

She paused quietly on the sidewalk where people were passing by. A lady came along in the crowd, carrying an armful of red, green, and silver-wrapped presents; she gave off perfume like the red roses in hot summer, and Phoenix stopped her.

“Please, missy, will you lace up my shoe?” She held up her foot.

“What do you want, Grandma?”

“See my shoe,” said Phoenix. “Do all right for out in the country, but wouldn’t look right to go in a big building.”

“Stand still then, Grandma,” said the lady. She put her packages down on the sidewalk beside her and laced and tied both shoes tightly.

“Can’t lace ’em with a cane,” said Phoenix. “Thank you, missy. I doesn’t mind asking a nice lady to tie up my shoe when I gets out on the street.”

Moving slowly and from side to side, she went into the big building, and into a tower of steps, where she walked up and around and around until her feet knew to stop.

She entered a door, and there she saw nailed up on the wall the document that had been stamped with the gold seal and framed in the gold frame, which matched the dream that was hung up in her head.

“Here I be,” she said. There was a fixed and ceremonial stiffness over her body.

“A charity case, I suppose,” said an attendant who sat at the desk before her.

But Phoenix only looked above her head. There was sweat on her face, the wrinkles in her skin shone like a bright net.

“Speak up, Grandma,” the woman said. “What’s your name? We must have your history, you know. Have you been here before? What seems to be the trouble with you?”

① Natchez: 密西西比河下游印第安部落纳齐兹族人的房屋或河流

Old Phoenix only gave a twitch to her face as if a fly were bothering her.

“Are you deaf?” cried the attendant.

But then the nurse came in.

“Oh, that’s just old Aunt Phoenix,” she said. “She doesn’t come for herself—she has a little grandson. She makes these trips just as regular as clockwork. She lives away back off the Old Natchez Trace.” She bent down. “Well, Aunt Phoenix, why don’t you just take a seat? We won’t keep you standing after your long trip.” She pointed.

The old woman sat down, bolt upright in the chair.

“Now, how is the boy?” asked the nurse.

Old Phoenix did not speak.

“I said, how is the boy?”

But Phoenix only waited and stared straight ahead, her face very solemn and withdrawn into rigidity.

“Is his throat any better?” asked the nurse. “Aunt Phoenix, don’t you hear me? Is your grandson’s throat any better since the last time you came for the medicine?”

With her hands on her knees, the old woman waited, silent, erect and motionless, just as if she were in armor.

“You mustn’t take up our time this way, Aunt Phoenix,” the nurse said. “Tell us quickly about your grandson, and get it over. He isn’t dead, is he?”

At last there came a flicker and then a flame of comprehension across her face, and she spoke.

“My grandson. It was my memory had left me. There I sat and forgot why I made my long trip.”

“Forgot?” The nurse frowned. “After you came so far?”

Then Phoenix was like an old woman begging a dignified forgiveness for waking up frightened in the night. “I never did go to school—I was too old at the Surrender,” she said in a soft voice. “I’m an old woman without an education. It was my memory fail me. My little grandson, he is just the same, and I forgot it in the coming.”

“Throat never heals, does it?” said the nurse, speaking in a loud, sure voice to Old Phoenix. By now she had a card with something written on it, a little list. “Yes. Swallowed lye^①. When was it? —January—two—three years ago—”

Phoenix spoke unasked now. “No, missy, he not dead, he just the same. Every little

① lye:碱液

while his throat begin to close up again, and he not able to swallow. He not get his breath. He not able to help himself. So the time come around, and I go on another trip for the soothing medicine.”

“All right. The doctor said as long as you came to get it; you could have it,” said the nurse. “But it’s an obstinate case.”

“My little grandson, he sit up there in the house all wrapped up, waiting by himself,” Phoenix went on. “We is the only two left in the world. He suffer and it don’t seem to put him back at all. He got a sweet look. He going to last. He wear a little patch-quilt^① and peep out, holding his mouth open like a little bird. I remembers so plain now. I not going to forget him again, no, the whole enduring time. I could tell him from all the others in creation.”

“All right.” The nurse was trying to hush her now. She brought her a bottle of medicine. “Charity,” she said, making a check mark in a book.

Old Phoenix held the bottle close to her eyes, and then carefully put it into her pocket.

“I thank you,” she said.

“It’s Christmas time, Grandma,” said the attendant. “Could I give you a few pennies out of my purse?”

“Five pennies is a nickel,” said Phoenix stiffly.

“Here’s a nickel,” said the attendant.

Phoenix rose carefully and held out her hand. She received the nickel and then fished^② the other nickel out of her pocket and laid it beside the new one. She stared at her palm closely, with her head on one side.

Then she gave a tap with her cane on the floor. “This is what come to me to do,” she said. “I going to the store and buy my child a little windmill they sells, made out of paper. He going to find it hard to believe there such a thing in the world. I’ll march myself back where he waiting, holding it straight up in this hand.”

She lifted her free hand, gave a little nod, turned around, and walked out of the doctor’s office. Then her slow step began on the stairs, going down.

评鉴赏析

黑人老太太菲尼克斯·杰克逊因为年老而佝偻着身体。圣诞节期间,她到城里为孙

① patch-quilt: 百纳被

② fished: 掏出

子买药。此间,她与三重力量斗争:严酷的自然、没有慈悲心肠的人、她每况愈下的身体。

到城里的道路并不平坦:经过冬天的树林时,菲尼克斯冲着草丛中的野兽大喊,让它们走开。她要使出浑身的力气上一座山,扯开缠在荆棘上的衣服,在摇晃着的圆木上过桥。田野里一个黑色的身影让她害怕,后来她意识到,那只不过是一个稻草人。她嘲笑自己减退的视力,继续向前。

一条黑狗朝她冲来,菲尼克斯没有防备,跌进了一条沟渠。一个白人骑着马路过,帮她走出困境。白人笑她这把年纪还走这样艰难的路。菲尼克斯对白人这种居高临下的态度很生气,但她没有显示自己的怒火。看到白人口袋掉出了一枚五分镍币,她悄悄将它拾了起来。用枪吓走了黑狗之后,白人开玩笑,用枪指着菲尼克斯,问她怕不怕。菲尼克斯坚持说自己一点儿也不怕。她继续向前赶路。

到了灯火通明的城市,菲尼克斯进了一栋建筑。值班的服务员大声嚷嚷着说,她是讨饭的。一个护士认出了菲尼克斯,给她搬来了椅子,让她坐下。菲尼克斯的孙子前几年误食了碱液,护士问她,孙子身体状况如何。老太太说不出话。不过,最后,她想起自己到这栋楼的目的。她道歉说,自己太健忘,此次到来是买药,缓解孙子的病痛。她告诉护士,现在在这个世界上只有她和孙子相依为命。

买了药之后,服务员提出给她几美分。菲尼克斯拘谨地要了一枚五美分的镍币。服务员给了她。手中小心翼翼地拿着两个镍币,菲尼克斯告诉服务员,她要给孙子买一个玩具,随后慢慢地向门外走去。在一连串考验中,菲尼克斯成功地维护了自己的尊严。

一个老太太进城为孙子买药,这能成为一个好故事的素材吗? 韦尔蒂的文章对这个问题做出了肯定的回答。从菲尼克斯的皱纹、拐杖和鞋子的描写可以看出她的年迈与贫穷。身体和内心发出声音,要求菲尼克斯止住脚步,但她仍然向前行进,说明了她巨大的毅力。文章的细节描写无一不显示出作者深厚的功力和作品极大的艺术感染力。

起初,菲尼克斯遇到的困难来自自然界。情况在发生变化。她认为稻草人是被处以私刑的黑人,使读者意识到南方黑人遭受的无法言表的暴力。黑狗吓得她脚下一滑,跌进沟里。站起身后,显然周围没有人,她还是伸出了手。这既是她的幻觉,又是她对上帝信心的标志。一个白人奇迹般地出现,救她上来。他好像是救世主,但随后的描述显示,他显然是更为复杂的形象。他问了菲尼克斯许多问题,好像他有权利知道这一切。他认为菲尼克斯进城是为了看圣诞老人,看轻了老人的真正目的。老人没有纠正白人的偏见。她利用白人的虚荣心,促使白人用自己的狗赶走黑狗。利用白人疏忽的机会,她拾起了白人掉在地上的钱币。捡起微不足道的钱币的行为再一次证明菲尼克斯的贫穷。白人用枪顶住菲尼克斯的头,老人表示自己不怕,因为比这更残忍的事情也见过,暗示了很多黑人曾被无辜杀害。白人让她安分守己待在家中,不要外出,有白人限制黑人的禁令的意味。

城市没有让菲尼克斯感到舒适。不过,她凭着本能踩着熟路,没有迷失方向。也可以说,熟路佩戴在她的骨头里(worn the path in her bone)。她让一个白人妇女为自己系鞋

带,那个妇女态度很粗暴,但还是按她说的做了。这影射了《新约》中玛丽·玛格德琳为耶稣洗脚。菲尼克斯的尊严胜过了妇女对她的侮慢。到达目的地后,菲尼克斯说:“我到了”(Here I be)。这句话又表示“我有权利到这里”。

护士的话让读者明白菲尼克斯此行的真正目的。护士认为小孩的病不会好,老太太坚持认为孩子会没事的。无形中,菲尼克斯捍卫了家人的个人价值。老太太要为孙子买风车,既表示了她的舐犊情深,又表达了她想拓展孩子视野的美好愿望。一方面,美丽脆弱的风车象征了孩子目前的状况;另一个方面,风车将自然的力量化为人类可以利用的力量,代表了希望,意味着孩子可能受到激励,将熟路延伸得更远,在人生的道路上有所建树。正是这一梦想维护了菲尼克斯老人的尊严,让她一次次走上熟路。她可能是奴隶身份,但现在回家时,她举起了“自由的手”。

韦尔蒂有很强的幽默感。虽然她的许多小说人物有身体残疾、智力障碍、精神不是很稳定正常,虽然文本下潜伏着死亡、暴力及堕落,但韦尔蒂的笔有神奇的力量,她笔下的人物有鲜活的生命力。韦尔蒂常被称为地域作家(regional writer)。她自己注意到了这个词的贬义色彩,认为这是外行术语,对正在创作的内行没有意义。因为对于作家而言,就是在书写人生。

作家小传

尤多拉·韦尔蒂(1909—2001)出生于密西西比州的杰克逊,父母是北方人。因为父亲经营保险公司,韦尔蒂自幼家庭富裕。1929年,她毕业于威斯康星大学。在哥伦比亚大学商学院修完广告课以后,1931年她回到密西西比州,先是为电台撰写广播稿,担任报纸社会版编辑,后又为政府部门工作,工作内容是采访当地居民并为他们拍照。这项工作在她作品中有反映。她出版的照片集《一时一地》(One Time, One Place, 1971)也有相关内容。

返回密西西比五年后,她在一家小杂志发表了第一篇故事《旅行推销员之死》(Death of a Traveling Salesman)。在接下来的两年内,她在权威文学评论杂志《南方评论》上发表六篇故事,帮助她的编辑之一是诗人兼小说家罗伯特·潘恩·华伦(Robert Penn Warren, 1905—1989)。她也得到凯瑟琳·安·波特(Katherine Anne Porter, 1890—1980)强有力的支持。波特给韦尔蒂第一本故事集《绿帘窗》(A Curtain of Green, 1941)写了一个序言。韦尔蒂作品师从弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫(Virginia Woolf, 1882—1941)和福克纳(William Faulkner, 1897—1962)。1942年,韦尔蒂出版自己的第一部小说《强盗新郎》(The Robber Bridegroom)。第二年,她的第二部小说集《宽网》(The Wide Net)问世。1942年和1943年,韦尔蒂获得欧·亨利纪念奖。此后,她得到一系列荣誉。1972年,《乐观者的女儿》(The