

READINGS
IN
MODERN
ENGLISH
PROSE

下 册

当代英文散文选读

吴景荣 丁往道 钱 青 合编

商 务 印 书 馆

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说 明

《当代英文散文选读》下册是为高等院校英语专业三、四年级学生选编的，共十二篇。本书布局与作品年代，大体上与上册相同（二十世纪五十年代前后）。如每周上课四小时，则可供十八周至二十周之用。

本书所选文章的作者包括：剑桥大学教授路易斯（C. S. Lewis），英国著名小说家、评论家梵古妮亚·伍尔芙（Virginia Woolf），格莱姆·格林（Graham Greene），萨曼赛德·毛恩（Somerset Maugham），美国散文作家怀特（E. B. White）、威尔斯（Wales）和作家狄龙·托马斯（Dylan Thomas）等。

为了适应教学，我们对原文个别地方作了删节，但在文字上没有更改。

选编过程中，考虑了文章的不同类型，安排上也是从“易”到“难”。但必须指出：就散文而言，往往“难”中有“易”，“易”里有“难”；而且由于作家背景不同，风格不同，体裁不同，不可能有个划一的标准。如果本书所选各篇由别人来排，前后次序也可能大不一样。

本书所选文章，大部分已经在北京外语学院英文系试用过，但编者闻见有限，也可能有疏忽、错误的地方。我们衷心希望试用本书的同志多提意见，以便在下一版修订。

本书注释比较详细，目的是便于一些要求深造而又无人指导的社会上的读者进行自修。

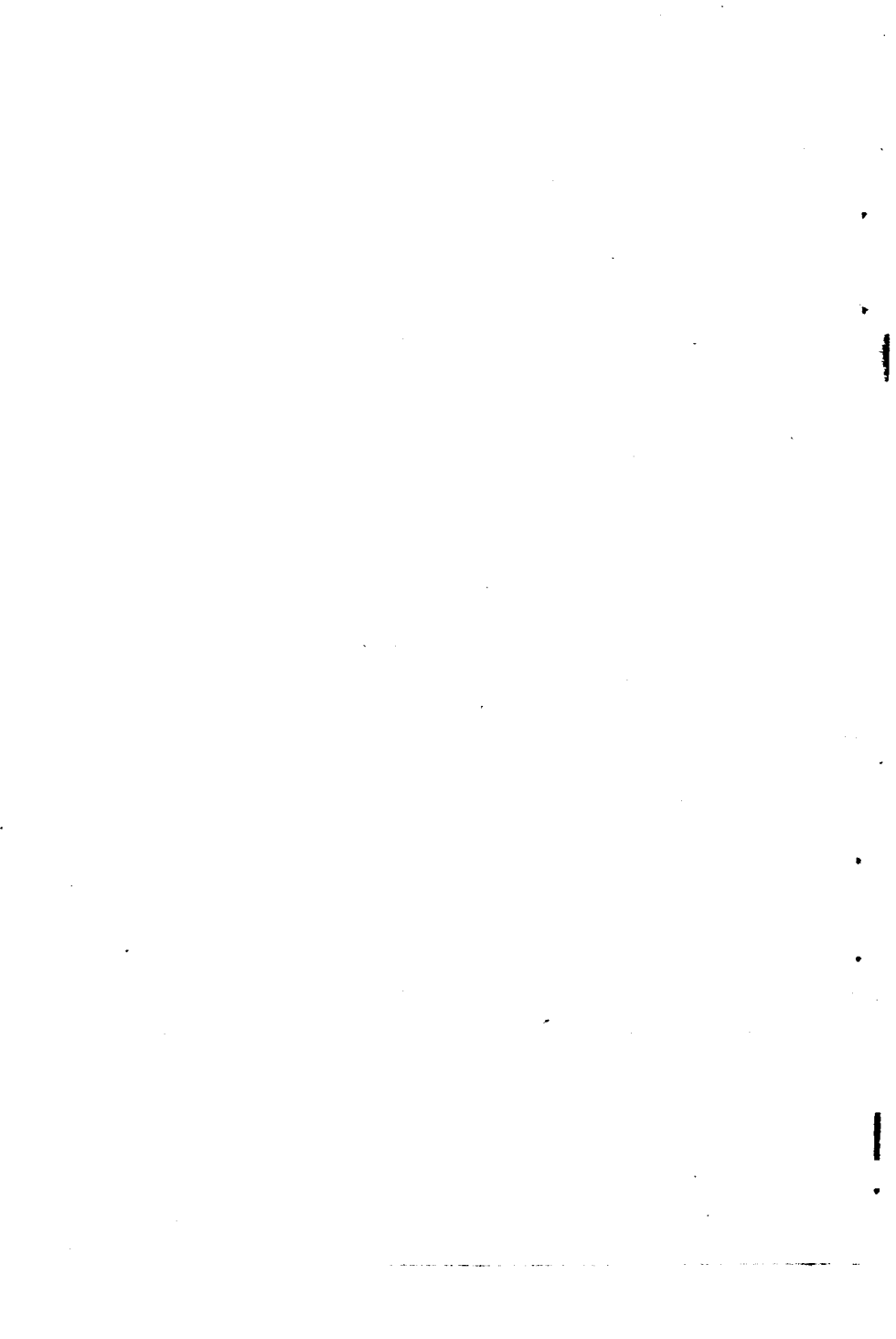
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1. Then and Now

By Harold Nicolson

During the 25 years which have intervened between the First and Second German Wars — that is, between the night of 4 August 1914¹ and the morning of Sunday, 3 September 1939² — I have often asked my friends to tell me in what way, and in what manner, they first became aware that Great Britain was at war. There had, on each occasion, been a preliminary stage during which war seemed to become every hour more inevitable; on each occasion, there had been announcements in the newspapers and speeches in the House of Commons; but what interested me particularly was to hear stories of the actual moment at which any given individual became conscious that we had passed from the sunlight of peace into the night of war. I think that it will be of interest to every one of us hereafter, whether we keep a diary or not, to note down upon a sheet of paper the actual circumstance which made him or her realise that this terrific episode³ had begun, and to record the exact time and hour when he or she experienced that circumstance.

Diplomatic documents, however dramatically exchanged, do not constitute ocular evidence that war has begun. Street demonstrations and press notices are mass experiences and not individual. It interests me to ascertain what personal experience was the first to convince any given citizen that we had, in fact, placed ourselves upon a war basis.

In August 1914, I made a careful note of my own experiences in this respect. The first sign of war that I observed occurred when I was in a train coming up from Kent⁴ to London. Somewhere in Lewisham,⁵ there had long been established some Ter-

ritorial battery⁶ which housed a gun in a shed close to the railway line. There was a patch of grass in front of this shed, and, as the train passed close to it, I noticed that the grass had been churned up by heavy wheels. I realised that the gun had, earlier that morning, been taken out of its shed. That was the first ocular demonstration of military action. When I reached London, I passed an army lorry in Belgrave Square⁷ packed with little ordnance maps.⁸ That was my second piece of evidence. And, within a few short hours, the evidences accumulated so rapidly that they made no further impress on my mind.

This time, my experience was far more dramatic. It was one which was shared by many of my fellow countrymen. Only a few minutes after listening to the prime minister's broadcast address on Sunday⁹ I walked down with one or two friends to my place of business; and, while I was walking through the streets, the sirens warbled around us. I was only a very little distance from a place in which, I knew, I should both find refuge and be able to fulfil my functions. The question arose whether, as a most obedient citizen, I should seek refuge immediately in the nearest basement or refuge, or whether, as a conscientious worker, I should defy regulations and make for my place of business. On consideration, I decided that my own air-raid refuge would be preferable. My duty as a worker triumphed for this reason over my civic conscience and, with hurried although not, I trust, undignified steps, I escaped across Parliament Square.¹⁰

That, I think, will for all of us remain the great difference between 1914 and 1939. The First German War was made manifest to me by seeing some grass trampled by the wheels of a Territorial gun; the Second German War intruded itself upon my consciousness owing to the necessity of my having to seek shelter rapidly some 30 minutes after war had been declared. It is essentially a difference between gradualness and urgency. We

lollled and slouched into the First German War; the Second has found us infinitely more prepared.

There are other differences. In 1914, no visible change was at first apparent in the appearance of London. Huge crowds collected everywhere, the men arrayed in straw boaters (a most foolish form of headgear) and the women wearing hats which would now strike us as ungainly, but which, at the time, seemed elegant. At night-time, the streets shone with their wonted brilliance, and the theatres and restaurants were crowded. Newsboys rushed along the streets shouting out wholly incorrect information, to the effect that the Germans had suffered serious defeats at Namur¹¹ or Liège¹² and that their advance into Belgium had met with overwhelming failure. Everybody was delighted by these occurrences, and a spirit of excited optimism throbbed through every street. It was only gradually, month by month, that reality of war percolated throughout the country. There were the earlier air raids; the gradual increase in the submarine menace; the darkening of the streets¹³ and the imposition of food regulations.¹⁴ Heaven knows what time, and what lives, were sacrificed to these dawdling methods. The cry was 'business as usual'. It was only after two years that the public understood that war was a grim business which allowed small room for individual self-indulgence or even individual profit-making.

Today, war conditions have come upon us not by slow stages as old age comes upon us, but with the sudden swoop of some terrific illness. In a few hours, the streets of London ceased to resemble Broadway¹⁵ in New York and became dark canyons¹⁶ in which dim figures crept from pavement to pavement. During the last war, and even in its final stages, the lights were dimmed, but not extinguished. In this war, our city is so dark that a match lit in Kingsway¹⁷ flames like some beacon, or some rickfire, down the Strand.¹⁸ I find London in such new conditions immensely

beautiful. The darkness hides all that is ugliest in our London architecture and brings out all that is most beautiful. St. Martin-in-the-Fields¹⁹ glimmers with the moon and the clouds above it as in some Hogarth²⁰ print. The Charing Cross²¹ Hotel is, fortunately, shrouded in darkness. London triumphantly and sadly abandons its imitation of New York and assumes a stately 17th-century aspect; the small electric torch jiggling at the edges of the pavement replaces the smoking brands which used to be carried by the linkboys.²²

I notice also a difference in the general state of mind. The rather ghastly jollity of 1914 is not apparent in the streets of London these days. People pass each other soberly and seriously. We know that our task is a tremendous task and that there is no room for frivolity. In 1914, many of us younger people imagined that the war would be some rollicking adventure. Today, we all realise, whatever our age, that it will prove the grimmest of ordeals, and, what is more, every man and woman today realises that he or she is personally involved from the start.

Yet, in 1914, behind all this excitement and hysteria, there existed a certain doubt as to what the war was all about. What did it matter to us whether an Austrian archduke had been murdered in some obscure Balkan city?²³ Why was it that the Germans had suddenly invaded Belgium? Thus, under the surface hilarity of 1914, there were many doubts as to the real nature of our cause, and the real necessity for our intervention. Those doubts do not exist today. True it is that the surface of the stream does not today bubble with the effervescence which showed itself in the early days of August 1914. But the current underneath is deeper, stronger and more uniform. We know very well that the issue is not whether Danzig should or should not be incorporated in the German Reich.²⁴ We know profoundly and widely that the real issue is whether a theory and a system which denies

all Christian and all human doctrine is to dominate the continent of Europe. We are not fighting Hitler because of his rights or aspirations; we are fighting him because of his point of view.

I have lived many years in Germany. I have found among the Germans many virtues and a delightful form of companionship. If I have one accusation to make against them it is that they lack civic courage. They accept from their government things which they would not accept from any individual. They allow their government to lie to them, to bully them, and now to drive them quite shamelessly into a Second German War. I believe that many people in this country share these views. They like the Germans even as I like them, but they have a contempt for the way in which they allow their governments to represent and to exploit what is worst in themselves instead of what is best. I well know that my many German friends hate the present war even as we hate it. I well know that at the time of the persecution of the Jews many of the most patriotic Germans felt ashamed of their own country. But they did nothing about it. No government in England could possibly have remained in power had they behaved with equal cruelty or untruthfulness. Yet the Germans, while aware of these iniquities and while regretting them, had not the civic courage to insist upon a change of method.

Thus I see two differences between the spirit which now animates this country and that which animated it in 1914. At the outset of the First German War we were not all of us fully aware to what extent the conflict was a conflict of principle. Today, every single person realises that it is a conflict of principle and nothing else. Let us not be too self-righteous. Let us try to understand the German accusation that, since 1918, we did not behave with sufficient imagination, generosity and unselfishness.²⁵ But even when one admits this, one must agree that the German system of violence, cruelty, ruthlessness and

unfaithfulness must, if there be any reality in human ideals, be a wicked and an evil system.

The second difference, as I think and hope, is this. In 1914, we did not make any distinction between the German people and their government. As the war increased in asperity and ruthlessness many civilians succumbed to feelings of hatred. This was not true of the men in the trenches. But we were suspicious of, and terribly unkind to, many innocent and friendly people who were either of German origin or who were suspected of being what we called 'pro-Germans'. I hope we shall not commit that wanton cruelty this time. I hope that we shall, all of us, recognise what great virtues the German race possesses; that we shall never forget their contributions to science, literature, philosophy and music; and that we shall force ourselves, however angry we may feel against them, to believe that they are men and women, if not like ourselves (since I regard the Germans as completely different from ourselves), then at least men and women who are capable of high human feelings. But, while we think that, let us not blunt the edge of our resolution by finding excuses for the little group of adventurers²⁶ who have seized the soul of Germany and strangled it in their ugly hands.

This, therefore, is the difference between then and now. Outwardly, a great change in the speed of war-preparation, and a feeling that things which took years to establish in the last war are now being established overnight. Inwardly, in the place of excitement and frivolity, a stoic resolve, coupled with the feeling that, if we are, in truth, on the side of great virtues as against mean vices, we must not allow mean vices to creep into our own conduct. We must be²⁷ generous and Christian in our contacts²⁸ with the unfortunate exiles in our midst. War is the supreme test of national character: let us keep our national character unsullied to the end.

— From *The Listener*, 18, Jan. 1979

About the Author

Sir Harold Nicolson (The Hon. Harold George Nicolson, 1886—1968; knighted 1953) was a British diplomat and writer. He served on the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, worked in British embassies or legations in Madrid, Constantinople, Teheran and Berlin until 1929 and was national Labour M.P. for West Leicester 1935—45. He was the author of literary studies, biographies and several books of essays. The present text was a broadcast talk he gave on 14 September, 1939.

Notes and Commentary

1. 4 August 1914—The day on which Britain declared war on Germany.
2. 3 September 1939—The day on which Britain once again declared war on Germany.
3. this terrific episode — The war.
4. Kent — A county in S.E. England.
5. Lewisham — A borough in Greater London.
6. Territorial battery — A battery of the Territorial Force (British), a voluntary military force on a territorial basis, formed in 1908, changed in 1920 into Territorial Army, and in 1967 into Territorial and Army Volunteer Service. A battery is an army unit of big guns with men and vehicles.
7. Belgrave Square — A square in the West End of London and a fashionable residential area, now the home of many embassies.
8. Ordnance maps — Accurate and detailed maps of Great Britain and Ireland prepared by the Ordnance Survey Department of Ministry of Housing and Local Government. They are so detailed that even footpaths are shown.
9. Only a few minutes after listening to the prime minister's broadcast address on Sunday — At 11.15 a.m. on Sunday, 3 September 1939, the prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, informed the British people that Britain was at war. Minutes afterwards

there was an air-raid warning and Britons had to seek refuge in air-raid shelters or basements.

10. Parliament Square — This is where the Houses of Parliament are situated — on the bank of the Thames near Westminster Bridge.
11. Namur — A French-speaking province of SW Belgium.
12. Liège — A province in E. Belgium in the Meuse Valley and the Ardennes.
13. the darkening of the streets — Street lights in London were darkened but never extinguished during World War I.
14. the imposition of food regulations — This refers to the rationing of food.
15. Broadway — A street in New York City famous for its theatres and always brightly lit at night.
16. became dark canyons — Street lights in London were extinguished during World War II so that enemy planes would find it hard to locate their targets.
17. Kingsway — A street in London joining Oxford Street and High Holborn to the Strand and Fleet Street.
18. the Strand — A street in London running parallel to the Thames.
19. St. Martin-in-the-Fields — A large London church at the corner of Trafalgar Square.
20. Hogarth — William Hogarth (1697 — 1764), famous British painter and engraver.
21. Charing Cross — An irregular open space north of Whitehall and close to Trafalgar Square. It is an ancient road junction.
22. linkboys — Before street lamps were invented, men were employed to carry lighted brands (links) to guide people along streets at night.
23. What did it matter to us whether an Austrian archduke had been murdered in some obscure Balkan city? — This refers to the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, Serbia (today part of Yugoslavia) in June 1914, an event which precipitated World War I. Austria used this as a pretext to declare war on Serbia.
24. the issue is not whether Danzig should or should not be incor-

porated in the German Reich — Danzig was formerly a German town. Later it was placed under Polish suzerainty (1466 — 1793), annexed by Prussia (1793) and then established as a free state by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. German interference in a dispute between Poland and Danzig was an immediate cause of World War II.

the German Reich — Referring to the Third Reich: the Nazi regime in Germany (1933 — 45).

25. the German accusation that, since 1918, we did not behave with sufficient imagination, generosity and unselfishness — The Germans thought that as a defeated nation, they had been treated unfairly by the victors of World War I and they would neither accept the Treaty of Versailles nor the Weimar Republic that had signed the treaty for the Germans. Hitler saw this and made use of it to overthrow the Republic and seize power for himself.
26. the little group of adventurers — The Nazis.
27. We must be ... Christian in our contacts — We must behave like Christians in our contacts. i.e. with kindness and generosity and unselfishness.

Exercises

I. Questions

A

1. When did the two world wars break out?
2. How did the author become aware that Britain was at war on each occasion?
3. What changes in the appearance of London were apparent on each occasion?
4. What was the British mood like during World War I?
5. Was the general state of mind of the British people different during World War II?
6. How does the author account for this difference?
7. What accusation does the author make against the German people?

8. What accusation does he make against the British people in their treatment of people of German origin or people they suspected of being 'pro-Germans' during World War I?
9. What does he think of the German people?

B

1. What do you think was the author's purpose in delivering this speech?
2. Do you agree with him about his analysis of the two world wars, about the German people, and about the general state of mind of the British people during the wars?
3. What was the real cause of World War I and that of World War II?

II. Paraphrasing

1. It interests me to ascertain what personal experience was the first to convince any given citizen that we had in fact placed ourselves upon a war basis.
2. Heaven knows what time, and what lives, were sacrificed to these dawdling methods.
3. Today war conditions have come upon us not by slow stages as old age comes upon us, but with the sudden swoop of some terrific illness.
4. True it is that the surface of the stream does not bubble with the effervescence which showed itself in the early days of August 1914.
5. But the current underneath is deeper, stronger and more uniform.
6. Let us not blunt the edge of our resolution by finding excuses for the little group of adventurers who have seized the soul of Germany and strangled it in their ugly hands.
7. If we are on the side of great virtues as against mean vices, we must not allow mean vices to creep into our own conduct.

III. Topics for Composition

1. Then and Now (Compare the period of the Cultural Revolution with the present time)
2. Compare Harold Nicolson's broadcast talk with Bernard Shaw's broadcast talk (*As I See It* in Book I). Which do you like better and why?