

经典英语短篇小说赏析

Classic Short Stories in English



主 编 王 玲
副主编 刘克东 傅 利
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前 言

一个国家的文学往往能够体现该国优秀的思想和文化。阅读欣赏优秀的文学作品是重要的审美和认知活动,是人类把握世界的基本方式之一。任何民族、任何年龄的人都可以从阅读文学作品中获得审美快乐,丰富人生经验。

文学作品的体裁多样,其中诗歌、长篇小说和短篇小说是最常见的三种。和长篇小说与诗歌相比,短篇小说具有简练紧凑、通俗易懂、独立性强等特点,因此能够满足当今众多文学爱好者渴望在短时间内获得丰富的艺术享受的要求。阅读英语短篇小说在满足读者审美要求的同时,还可以提高英语基本功,培养阅读和欣赏英语文学原著的能力,增进对英语国家文学及文化的了解。

本书选编 20 部英语短篇小说,皆为该体裁的经典传世之作。作家包括从 19 世纪的爱德加·爱伦·坡到 20 世纪的多丽斯·莱辛在内的著名短篇小说大师。书的开篇是关于短篇小说的体裁介绍,旨在引导读者从宏观上认识这一文学体裁。本书每个选篇都由以下 6 个部分组成:“作者简介”、“作品简介”、“作品”、“注释”、“讨论题”和“作家隽语”。作者简介部分主要包括作者生平、主要作品、写作风格、作者在文学界所处的地位等。另外,还附有作者的照片。注释部分对作品中出现的专有名词(人名、地名等)、文学典故、文化历史背景等提供必要的介绍或译文。“讨论题”从作品内容本身、短篇小说的创作要素、作家的写作风格、写作技巧等多个角度来引导读者理解作品,提高文学鉴赏力。“作家隽语”多为作家对文学创作或人生的感悟,希望能对读者有所启示。

本书适合英语专业和非英语专业的本科生、研究生作为教材或
课外阅读材料使用。作为教材时,可视教学的具体要求和学生的英
语程度灵活选择作品。本书也可供英语文学爱好者业余欣赏之用。

本书的编者为哈尔滨工业大学外语系“经典英语短篇小说赏析”
课程的授课教师。我们在多年教学实践的基础上,根据学生的反馈,
将原来的教材加以修改完善而成此书。编者水平有限,疏漏和不足
之处还望读者批评指正。

编者

2005年6月于哈尔滨

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Short Story as a Literary Genre

I. Introduction

A short story is a condensed fictional narrative, usually in prose. Concerning a relatively small number of characters (usually one) involved in a single action with one theme, short stories are aimed at exciting in the reader a single emotional response. The novel, by contrast, typically presents many characters more leisurely developed through several interconnecting story lines and conflicts and evokes a multiplicity of emotional reactions.

In terms of length, a short story may range from a short-short story of 500 words to somethins of 12 000 or 15 000 words, usually manageable at one single sitting (put forward by Edgar Allan Poe in 1842), whereas a novel usually contains at least 50 000 words (a definition suggested by E. M. Forster).

As a short story is the highly condensed vehicle of the writer's artistic skills (Poe's belief), it is highly demanding. Therefore, it is said that a writer usually first tries poetry and then, in case of failure, tries the short story. Only when he fails both will he turn to the novel.

II. Forerunners

The most ancient tales are those of Egypt that date from 2000 B. C. , when the sons of the Egyptian King Khufu amused their father



with short narratives; the fables of the Greek slave Aesop, and the retellings, by the Roman writers Ovid and other authors, of Greek and Asian stories of magical transformations. The major Asian collection of tales is the *Arabian Nights*, a collection of stories from Persia, Arabia, India, and Egypt that was compiled over hundreds of years. In this collection, a frame tale is employed. A sultan's, enraged by his wife's infidelity, orders her executed. He forms a plan to marry a new woman each night and to have each new bride killed the next day. Scheherazade, the daughter of one of the sultan's officials, agrees to marry the sultan but crafts a scheme to thwart him. Each night she tells a story so intriguing that the sultan lets her live to the next night in order to hear the end, whereupon she starts another tale. After one thousand and one nights he relents and lets her live.

In the Bible, we read stories of Cain and Abel, Samson, Joseph, Ruth, Jonah, and the Prodigal Son.

Stories in all their variety flourished in Western Europe during the Middle Ages (5th century to 15th century). Romances, in prose or verse, many about knights in King Arthur's court, abounded in France. English poet Geoffrey Chaucer and Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio preserved and refined many of the best stories of the Middle Ages. Like the *Arabian Nights*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (14th century) (narrative poems) and Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353) (including 100 short tales) incorporate the frame tale as a setting for other stories.

After Boccaccio, the short, realistic narrative in prose, known as the novella, blossomed as an art form in Italy. In 18th-century England, Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele published many



stories — semifictional sketches of contemporary character types — in the magazine *the Spectator*. Later, in the early 19th century, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819 ~ 1820), by Washington Irving, included evocative descriptions and short tales, the first examples of the short story in the United States.

III. The 19th Century — Short Story in the Modern Sense

In the nineteenth century, the short story as a distinct literary genre came into being, and the term “short story” was first used in the last decade of the century¹. It is not until around the middle of the century that a theory concerning the short story was formed. Poe, reviewing Hawthorne’s *Twice Told Tales* in 1842, elevated his artistic practice to a theoretic status.

Popular and literary magazines began to publish more and more short stories. In the early 19th century, romanticism shaped the short fictions of Sir Walter Scott in England; E. T. A. Hoffmann in Germany; Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne in the United States; Prosper Merimee, Gautier, Balzac, and Guy de Maupassant in France, and Nikolay Gogol (1809 ~ 1852) and Chekhov in Russia. Realism took hold in France in the 1830s, followed at the end of the century by naturalism, in which human interactions are viewed as scientifically predictable. Other stylistic influences on the 19th-century short story included symbolism and regionalism.

A. The United States

Until the 19th century, the primary focus in most stories had been on the “what happened” element (plot). Then writers began to concentrate on the motivations that propelled characters into



conflict. At the same time, attention was directed to techniques of economic storytelling: artful structuring of events, exclusion of irrelevant material, strict control and focusing of point of view, and selection of precisely appropriate diction. Poe, an aestheticist as he was, proved his artistic theory in several of his own tales. In "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), for example, he manipulated setting, character, and dialogue so well that he led the reader cruelly and coldly to the emotional state most appropriate for the perfect murder. Hawthorne's stories, on the other hand, probed character and the moral significance of events, leaving their physical reality ambiguous. In "Young Goodman Brown" (1846), the dark meetings in the woods of the town people of Salem was less significant than was the spiritual changes in Brown himself.

In his preface to the definitive edition of his works, Henry James, an influential literary as well as author, emphasized the role of a "central intelligence" in shaping and filtering a story's materials. Thus, in his ghost story "The Jolly Corner" (1908), James utilized the narrator to convey a sense of immediacy and of psychological realism. In "A Bundle of Letters" (1879), he experimented with epistolary technique and perspective, presenting the story through a series of letters written by six persons living in a French pension.

B. Britain

Since Steel and Addison of the 18th century, it seemed that not many writers specialized in the short story, but many novelist such as Dickens and Hardy also wrote short stories. One person in the nineteenth century worth mentioning is Sir Walter Scott. A leading writer in the English Romanticism, he was greatly impressed by the



life and culture in the Scottish highlands. He accounted many tales of the sort in his works. As a contemporary of Washington Irving, he also contributed to the circle of literature, especially the short story in recognizing new talents (such as Irving himself).

C. Russia

Important writers, who also wrote short stories, were Mikhail Lermontov (1814 ~ 1841, Russian poet, novelist), good at characterization; Ivan Turgenev, strong in depicting rural Russian settings; and Gogol, who influenced later development of the short story with his fusion of dream and reality in "The Overcoat" (1842) (An insignificant clerk dies of heartbreak after the theft of his new overcoat, but he returns from death as a ghost to seek justice), whose influence can be seen in the story "The Crocodile" (1865) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. A different strain in Russian fiction is represented by the realistic stories of Leo Tolstoy. "The Death of Ivan Ilich" (1886), for example, analyzes a man's thoughts and emotions as he gradually realizes he is dying. The master of ironic detachment in Russian stories was Anton Chekhov. For Chekhov, character rather than plot was important. In "Heartache" (1886), a hackney driver tries to convey to his passengers his sorrow at the death of his son, but no one will listen except his horse. In "Vanka," a boy writes to his grandfather asking to be rescued from a hard life, but the letter is mailed without being properly addressed or stamped.

D. France

During the 19th century in France, Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, better known for their novels, wrote several admired short stories. Alphonse Daudet (well known for his "The



Last Lesson”) also produced many realistic and naturalistic stories. The most highly regarded of the naturalistic short-story writers in France, however, was Guy de Maupassant. His 300 stories demonstrate mastery of the economy and balance necessary to the perfectly crafted formal short story. Taken together, his stories paint a detailed picture of French life toward the end of the century.

As a forementioned, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Edgar Allen Poe contributed greatly to the development and theory of the short story. In the late nineteenth century, Maupassant and Chekhov were two representatives: one of resolution and the other revelation. Maupassant’s tightly planned stories come to a resolved end, usually with a sudden twist. This is in line with Poe. Also in America, we see O. Henry’s “surprise-ending stories”. Chekhov’s stories, on the contrary, were usually loosely knitted and may end with the characters pretty much in the condition they were in at the beginning, but their situation is revealed more clearly to readers. This style is usually called “slice of life” stories. Followers are Somerset Maugham, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf in England and Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway in the U. S.

Subsequent short stories, influenced by Freudianism in the 20th century, emphasize psychological activities rather than external action.

IV. The 20th Century

Since 1900, enormous numbers of short stories have been published every year, in almost every language. Many countries boast of at least one great 20th-century short-story writer. For example, one of the most intriguing writers is Czechoslovakian-born



Franz Kafka. The fantastic and the realistic are perfectly blended in his experimental, mythic stories. His major themes are quintessential (most typical) to the 20th century: human isolation, anxiety, and the relationship between life and art.

Stories from Asia include both refinements on ancient tradition and fresh experiments with the form of the short story. English readers are perhaps most familiar with the works of Rabindranath Tagore (Indian Poet 1861 ~ 1941, 1913 Nobel Prize winner) from India.

The English writer W. Somerset Maugham, a disciple of Maupassant, was one of the most prolific and popular of all short-story writers, writing mostly about British colonies in the South Pacific. Katherine Mansfield, the New Zealand author, whose own style shows the influence of Chekhov, may be considered a formative influence on the genre (short story). Her indirect but perceptive stories of life's ironies fostered several generations of imitators.

Some of the most compelling short stories in English are those by 20th-century Irish writers. Foremost among them is James Joyce, whose daring experiments with the fictional form changed the course of literature in the 20th century. His one book of short stories, *Dubliners* (1914), contains painfully truthful representations of life in his native city and featured the skill called "epiphany". Blending naturalism with symbolism, these stories achieved world acclaim as models of the form.

Authors from sub-Saharan Africa mingle wild fancy, sheer realism, and often political commentary. Doris Lessing, raised in what is now Zimbabwe, is known for her *African Stories* (1951). Collections of her work include *Selected Stories* (1976) and



Something Out There (1984).

The rich Yiddish² tradition is still very much alive. Especially delightful are the tales of Eastern European Jewry — often transplanted to contemporary American settings — written by Polish-born Isaac Bashevis Singer, who translated much of his own work into English.

The short-story form has flourished in the United States. At the turn of the century, Mark Twain, O. Henry (famed for his paradoxes and surprise endings), and the regionalists Stephen Crane and Willa Cather played important roles in this development. Sherwood Anderson proved in his short-story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) that absence of plot could enhance portrayal of character. Many of the short stories of Ernest Hemingway, economically written as they are, seem full of insignificant detail; the detail, however, is used to reveal subtle shifts in a character's psychological states. William Faulkner probed the deep recesses of the human psyche while experimenting with fictional forms and creating, in successive stories and novels, a mythic South. In "That Evening Sun" (1931), for example, he dissected a black woman's fears while creating a believable world populated with characters who evoke in the reader both pity and laughter.

The more recent American short story writers, those critically acclaimed since the 1940s, include Flannery O'Connor, with her passionate moral concern. John Cheever and John Updike, noted for their dispassionate stories about the ironies of northern suburban life, were among the most polished short-story writers to emerge after World War II (1939 ~ 1945). Leaders of the avant-garde in various experiments with narrative format include Joyce Carol Oates



and Ann Beattie. Promising short story writers of the younger generation include Sherman Alexie, a Native American.

V. Elements and techniques in the short story

Like a novel, a short story is usually composed of the following elements: setting, atmosphere, plot, character, and theme. Setting refers to the particular time and place with other environmental factors. Famous settings are Dublin in James Joyce's stories, the American south for William Faulkner, and the West for Bret Harte's and Stephen Crane's Western stories. Atmosphere is part of setting. It is rather the emotional effect intended by and caused in the reader, such as the feeling of coldness or shuddering, dreariness, oppressiveness, the sense of suffocation and hardness, or mystery. A good example is Poe's supernatural and irrational tales, which often cause in the reader curiosity, fear, and a feeling of hairs standing on their ends. Plot is a chain of logical events. In other words, there is causal relationship between the events. Plot is usually divided into several stages: exposition, conflict (complication/ increase of tension), climax, and denouement. Exposition introduces a story. Conflict is the confrontation or struggle between opposing characters or forces in the plot. Climax is the point of greatest tension or emotional intensity. Denouement is the part of the story that follows the climax and unravels the outcome of the events. Traditional plot features action and is critical in delineating characters, but recent trend focuses on characters' psychological activities. Characters can be classified into flat characters and round characters. Flat characters are stereotypical and do not change as the plot develops; round characters are like