

新5元英语精粹

*Appreciation of*

*Masterpieces in English Prose*

# 英语散文名篇赏析

李绍明 编著  
延边人民出版社



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Masterpieces in English Prose

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# 丛书小序

在尘世中久了,总是不自觉平添了几许莫名的空虚与烦忧,心灵深处又总是渴求一种安宁,一种远离都市喧嚣的静谧。

你是否还记得,那茵茵的绿草地上,紫藤编织的花园;静静的夏日午后,洒满阳光的窗棂?还有,烟雨蒙蒙的黄昏,种满芭蕉的庭院;月光如水,玉露初降时,淡淡的野百合的香? …

当此之时,手执一本白纸黑字可看可不看的闲书,卧榻上,树荫里,静静地读上一叶两叶,三叶五叶,聆听前人的心灵独语,体味内心的情感升华,是一种心境,一种享受,一种超脱。没有了凡尘的嘈杂与喧嚣,也没有俗世的繁荣与奢华,有的只是心灵的净化,情感的升华。如诗一般浪漫,似梦一样飘渺!

曾几何时,这份心境已飘然逝去? 我不知道为什么,但我很怀念。

荷锄归来(笔耕也算得上吧),夜凉如水,洗去因生活而厚厚积累的凡尘,豁然发现,当一切繁华悄悄褪去,那份静谧,以及融化在这静谧之中的心灵的私语,仍是内心深处永远不变的情愫。

这套小书曾在人生的觥筹交错、燕舞声声中给我以安宁,也希望她能够使您在偶得空隙之时,避开现实的烦扰,重拾这份美好的心境。

编 者

2003年8月于山大外院

# 写在前面

暑假的余闲中，顶惬意地选编成这本小书。现在，该让它随初秋的第一片落叶，飞到你新学期的书桌上了。

文章，绚烂的，冷涩的，深情的，无情的，编入一辑。我喜欢它们，因为它们都是我熟悉的，案头和架上的个人的读物。

没有沉重。决心抛开社会，政治，教育，语言，思维这些日常的话题。那些要留待来日，另册处理。

可就是这些，也蔚成个风景。

房子，树，石头，土地，道路；一村，一镇；吃的，穿的。游山玩水之际，你会遇到这些。也有扫兴的凄凉灰暗。世界就是这样子。幸而有几位可爱的人物为我们指点迷津。我给你介绍第欧根尼，梭罗，雷切尔·卡森，罗杰·斯温，还有刘易斯·托马斯。残山剩水之前，你会想到他们。你需要他们。

这些之外，还给你选了两个故事，一个是平民的生，一个是名人的死，体裁不同，一是小说，一是报道加评论。信手拈来的，聊备一格，却也是文章中的极品。

考虑到你对语言的兴趣，选了托马斯谈语词和标点的小文。你会有兴趣看看学究以外的世界。

我的一大篇导读，大得不成比例。是从我新编的写作教材里摘出的，反映我对写作的一点偏见，或曰实话实说。九斤老太说，这年头，连个实话实说也稀罕。

绍明

# FOREWORD



Without the delightful work on the present small volume my summer vacation would be much busier and much less interesting.

I dare to share with you these articles because I like them. Splendid or simple, emotional or cool-headed, they are all off my own humble shelves.

No sociology, no politics, no education, language, psychology or other daily topics. I choose to leave them for another volume.

But even these passages form a lovely little view.

Houses, trees, stone, earth and roads; a village, a town; food and clothes. When you travel you'll meet these. There are also darker, bleaker pictures, to be sure. Since we have no way of avoiding this side of reality, we'd better learn to face up to it. Fortunately we have some wise souls to help us out. In this volume I introduce you to such men as Diogenes, H. D. Thoreau, Rachel Carson, Roger Swain, and Lewis Thomas. Before the dismal remnants of a landscape, you will think of them. You will feel you need them.



For the sake of formal variety I've included two stories, one involving the life of some ordinary citizens, the other the death of a celebrity. I happen to have them at hand, and they are such superb sort of writing.

I've also included the short Lewis Thomas essays on words and on punctuation. I suppose you have an interest in language, especially when it's talked about by someone other than the school pedants.

The disproportioned lengthy introduction is part of a writing textbook I am editing. I let it work part time here because it represents some of my biases regarding writing. At a time when we have correctness everywhere, biases may have some rare value.

Simon Lee



# 目录

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction: Good Writing and Bad Writing ..... (1)
2. Of Grand Hotels and Grown-Ups (有女初长成) ..... (35)
3. The Death of a Symbol (小肯尼迪之死) ..... (43)
4. Early Colonial Architecture (美国早期建筑) ..... (49)
5. The Living City (活的城市) ..... (56)
6. Farmhouse (农舍) ..... (69)
7. Toll House (收费站) ..... (71)
8. Ellicott City (埃利考特城) ..... (73)
9. Plane Tree, Crab apple, etc. (悬铃木、海棠及其他) ..... (76)
10. A Sense of Place (乡土的概念) ..... (82)
11. Spring Rain (春雨) ..... (87)
12. Clothing (衣着) ..... (89)
13. Lives of Quiet Desperation (绝望人生) ..... (92)
14. Diogenes and Alexander (第欧根尼) ..... (93)
15. Time, Energy, and Maple Syrup (枫林煮糖) ..... (101)
16. In the Night Garden (夜的花园) ..... (112)
17. The Marginal World (海滩生物) ..... (116)
18. The Obligation to Endure (承受的义务) ..... (126)

19.	The Story of Clear Lake (小清湖的故事)	
	.....	(131)
20.	Earth's Green Mantle (地球的绿衣).....	(135)
21.	The Music of This Sphere (这个世界的音乐)	
	.....	(139)
22.	Vibes (说味).....	(145)
23.	On Various Words (语汇种种).....	(151)
24.	The Long Habit (长期的习惯) .....	(157)
25.	Natural Man (自然的人) .....	(163)
26.	On Magic in Medicine (医学中的巫术) .....	(168)
27.	Notes on Punctuation (句读短笺) .....	(175)



## INTRODUCTION

### Good writing and bad writing

A contrastive study of *National Geographic* and *China Pictorial* writings

*To be nobody-but-yourself—in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.*

*e. e. cummings*

#### I Selection One with Comments

**Essence of Provence**, by *Bill Bryson*

from *National Geographic*, September 1995

1. It happened early on a Sunday morning while I was walking in the wooded Lubéron hills of southern France. From somewhere nearby there rose a strange, powerful, indeterminate noise, like a thundering waterfall or the roar of a furnace—the kind of noise you might expect to hear if a dam had broken and it was all coming your way.  
(The author goes on to describe a cold and feckless wind he experienced on his day of visiting the place.)
2. And then, after several hours of noisy gust and tumult, the mistral abruptly moved on, like a passing train, and left me and the surrounding countryside tousled but at peace. Sunshine poured onto the hills, the sky

turned a luminous blue, and the air, so wild and unruly a moment before, became still and balmy. It was the kind of instant transformation that astonishes the senses and makes you glad to be alive. It was perfect Provence.

### Comments:

Paragraphs 1 and 2 are the first paragraphs of the 17-page article.

(1) In the very first sentence of the article we are presented these things: the person who is visiting, the time of day, the place with its location and topography, the sense of the place (wooded hills), and an imposing sense of suspension: something serious is going to happen. As readers we are already sharing the author's experience, and are likely to read on to see what's happening.

(2) The words "strange" and "indeterminate" arouse our curiosity.

(3) In some places the wind is referred to as "gust" and "mistral". This variation of words does not merely avoid repetition. These words are more specific than the general word "wind".

(4) Note the life attitude reflected in paragraph 2. Good writers, like scientists and philosophers, endure hardships, benefit from adversities, and enjoy whatever is left for them to enjoy. See how this harsh part of weather enhances the author's happiness with the fine day.

(5) This beginner employs the technique of "understating a good thing", 欲扬先抑 in Chinese. A beginner using this technique has three advantages: first, it sounds, and is very likely is, true to life, because no



person or place is perfect; second, it is more convincing for its even-handed treatment of reality, and third, it stands as part of a contrast which enhances the effect of the better sides that follow.

The following paragraph is toward the end of the article.

3. We were standing on the terrace of a handsome, old—and resolutely south-facing—stone house in the Vaucluse when this information was imparted to me. It was late afternoon on one of those cool but sunny days that lie on the cusp between winter and spring. The sky was streaked with vivid pinks from the last wisps of sunset, and dusk was settling over the earth. Lights were beginning to come on in the scattered farmhouses silhouetted against the landscape before us, and an earthy smell of woodsmoke hung on the still air. The world, or at least this timeless piece of it, seemed a good and gentle place.

(6) The author has been engaged in conversation with a local farmer. The houses stand “resolutely” so because there is few exceptions or variations. Remember the mistral? It comes from the north. The farmer says, “Almost without exception when you see a northfacing house here, it will be owned by an *étranger* who bought it in good weather.”

(7) The words “handsome”, “old” and “stone houses” remind me of the early 1950s houses at Laiyang Agricultural Institute. I was there three weeks ago, and was fascinated by the fine workmanship in the local red stone. Three years ago in September 1997 I studied in drawings some century old Qingdao houses. Words like

these have magic power in conjuring up your past experience. They can produce echo in those who have seen these things and love them.

(8) The sentences following the words “the sky” paint a picture in the reader’s mind. Note the plural “pinks”. It’s a long time since I last saw a sky like this. I remember it was at least three years ago, and I had strong impulse of painting the sight. Note the word “scattered”. Not crowded, nor isolated, just set apart from each other comfortably. The picture is more than 渡头余落日,墟里上孤烟, or is different from that. Here it’s brighter, more colorful, and we have the smell.

(9) Contemplate the word “timeless”, and learn to appreciate the love for natural and man-made beauty. Think of those ugly buildings we have everywhere, and the heartless changes we make in the hills.

(10) “Good” and “gentle” are commonest words. But here, after all the stories having been told, they are so informed with life, and we remember our impression from the beginner: we were expecting anything but gentleness.

(11) The following paragraph, Paragraph 4, is not part of the article. It is the caption to the article’s head picture. Usually we read briefer English captions than Chinese ones which is one sign of the Chinese tendency toward pretentious words. But I don’t resent this one. You’ll see why.

4. Like a painting stirred to life by summer wind, Provence is where the simplest of landscapes—poppies dancing in a field outside Roussillon—can turn suddenly sublime. No wonder artists are drawn to this corner of southern France, and why everyone from Roman em-

perors to movie stars has wanted to claim a piece of it. But as much as it gives up to those just passing through, Provence reserves its sweetest self for those who call it home.

## **II Selection Two with Comments**

### **El Salvador Learns to Live with Peace, by Mike Edwards**

from *National Geographic*, September 1995

1. Land. "My whole family farmed, but we didn't own land," Simón Amaya said. "We rented a little piece to grow our corn. But to get any money, we had to migrate to pick coffee or cotton."
2. In El Salvador the inequity of landownership was one of the main causes of the civil war that flared in 1980 and lasted a dozen years. A yawning economic fault allotted great estates to a handful of landlords while tens of thousands of *campesino* families had not a clod.

#### **Comments:**

These are the beginning paragraphs of the article.

(1) About ten years ago, I read a story about El Salvador. According to the author of that article, it was a place of terror. Visitors saw deaths every day, in the hills, in the woods, in roadside ditches, or just on the road, whole or dismembered. They were the remains of those the authorities and the police were not happy with. Hence the *National Geographic* title. A good writer tries to narrow down the topic and deals only with what he judges as the most important aspect of it.

(2) The first paragraph is the beginner of the arti-

cle. It begins with a very short sentence. Having only four letters in it, the sentence is informed with almost everything. The place with the tons of soil and degrees Fahrenheit, vegetation and inhabitants, and the heart of problem.

(3) Quotations do not only add authenticity. They create a sense of immediacy. And, with skillful, reserved use of foreign words or terms that have exotic sounds, like "Simon Amaya", they present a scoop of local flavor.

(4) A foreign term does more than bringing about local flavor. At times the writer needs a more precise word to better grasp the nature of the subject. For instance, we have different kinds of farmers: farm workers, farm laborers, peasants, commune members, land owners, land lords, poor and lower-middle peasants, serfs, tenants, share croppers, and so on. We can imagine that in El Salvador there are farmers whose relationship with land, their working conditions and work style are special and typical of the place. Hence *campesino*.

(5) See what we have in these short paragraphs. Then imagine what will result if the order of the two paragraphs is inverted.

### **III Selection Three with Comments**

#### **A Winter Tour of Mount Tai**

from *China Today*, February 1997

1. Mt. Tai, located near the city of Tai'an in central Shandong Province, covers an area of 125 square kilometers. There are many historical sites and innumerable towering peaks here, the highest being 1 545 meters