



英美短篇小说鉴赏导读

薛 丽◇主编 佟秋华 刘怡然◇副主编





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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英美短篇小说鉴赏导读 / 薛丽主编. -- 哈尔滨 : 黑龙江大学出版社,
2014.6

ISBN 978 - 7 - 81129 - 721 - 8

I. ①英… II. ①薛… III. ①短篇小说 - 文学欣赏 -
英国②短篇小说 - 文学欣赏 - 美国 IV. ①I106.4

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2014)第 087243 号



英美短篇小说鉴赏导读
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责任编辑 侯天蛟 张 慧
出版发行 黑龙江大学出版社
地 址 哈尔滨市南岗区学府路 74 号
印 刷 哈尔滨市石桥印务有限公司
开 本 720 × 1000 1/16
印 张 27.25
字 数 316 千
版 次 2014 年 6 月第 1 版
印 次 2014 年 6 月第 1 次印刷
书 号 ISBN 978 - 7 - 81129 - 721 - 8
定 价 56.00 元

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前 言

英美短篇小说在现当代英美文学中占有非常重要的地位,它以篇幅短小、形式多样、主题鲜明以及及时而生动地反映生活的各个侧面而见长,并适应了现代生活的多元结构与灵动的节奏。本书精选了近两个世纪以来著名的英美短篇小说作家具有代表性的作品二十二篇,这些作品体现了英美两国短篇小说的最高成就,而且均对短篇小说的发展产生了深远的影响,并在短篇小说发展史上占有举足轻重的地位。

本书共包括五章内容:第一章、第二章简要介绍了英美短篇小说的发展历史,分析了英美短篇小说的基本要素,帮助读者清晰地领略到英美短篇小说这一文学体裁的发展脉络。第三章、第四章介绍了英美短篇小说阅读与鉴赏的一些主要方法,指导读者如何理解与欣赏英美短篇小说。第五章收录了英美二十二篇经典短篇小说以供读者阅读欣赏。

本书注重权威性:作家简介部分均全文引用国外专门研究者的论述。这些论述具有较高的学术价值,能为进一步学习研究提供方向性的指导。注重实用性:每篇短篇小说前面都有相关作家及作品的简要介绍,之后又都附有阅读思考题,便于教师上课使用或者学生自学与讨论。注重趣味性和思想性:本书所选短篇小说具有较强的可读性,其具有深刻的思想意蕴,可用于阅读欣赏,也可用于专业学习及研究。



本书的编写以高校英语专业本科生及研究生为主要对象,并且兼顾社会上普通的英语爱好者。同时本书介绍了英美短篇小说阅读与鉴赏的一些主要方法,这对英语专业学生而言是不可或缺的一项内容,这些内容虽然所占篇幅不多,但由于国内大多数选读类书籍中缺此一项,因而其成为本书的一大特色。本书整体编写能够满足英美短篇小说课堂教学的基本需求,而且能为学生自主学习提供有效的指导与帮助,能让学生充分领略英美短篇小说绚烂多姿的风采。

本书主编薛丽负责编写第三章、第四章及第五章的前十一节,共15万余字;副主编佟秋华负责编写第一章及第五章的第十二节至第十八节,约8万字;副主编刘怡然负责编写第二章及第五章的第十九节至第二十二节,约8万字。在本书的编写过程中,我们查阅了大量资料,借鉴了不少作者的观点,我们在此表示由衷的感谢。由于我们学识有限,书中难免有疏漏和不足之处,恳请读者不吝赐教,以便我们及时修正。



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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Definition of Short Story

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 order to reveal the story's theme clearly, many contemporary short story writers often make his character experience an epiphany, a moment of illumination in which something hidden or not explicitly understood becomes immediately clear, usually at the end of the story.

A short story is a fictional prose tale of no specified length, but too short to be published as a volume on its own, as novellas sometimes and novels usually are. A short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters, more economically than a novel's sustained exploration of social



background.

In terms of length, a short story may range from the short-short story of 500 words to 12,000 or 15,000 words, usually a story that can be read 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, in case of failure, tries the short story. Only when he fails both will he turn to the novel.

1.2 History of Short Story

From the first use of speech our ancestors have told stories of war, love, mysteries, animals and inanimate objects. But exactly when, where, and by whom story-telling was begun, no one can say. Short stories date back to earliest times, and they can be found in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Short stories as a literary genre have a long history all over the world. Some of the most ancient short stories include the fables of the Greek writer Aesop, the retellings by the Roman writer Ovid, and *The Arabian Nights in Asia*. The Biblical stories are well-known short stories in the Middle Ages. In England of the 18th century, Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele published many short stories in the Magazine *The Spectator*. Speaking generally, short stories before the 19th century were either didactic or entertaining pieces. In the 19th

century, short stories as a distinct literary genre, it came into being, though the term “short story” was not used until the last decade or two decades of the century. It’s true that no one person can be said to be the founder of the short story, and no one nation be credited with its development, but a group of writers in the 19th century did begin to reflect upon the form, thus in the modern sense giving the genre an identifiable beginning in the early years of the 19th century.

1.2.1 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; the retellings, by the Roman writers Ovid and other authors. 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. 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 1001 nights he relents and lets her live.

Some three hundred years before Christ was born we had *Old Testament* stories of Cain and Abel, Samson, Joseph, Ruth, and Jonah in the *Hebrew Bible*. In the *New Testament* Christ taught in



parables, the best known of which is that of *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* (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. Growing out of the Picaresque Novel of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Novel came, both promoting a formal kind of storytelling. In England of the 18th century, Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele published many stories—semi-fictional sketches of contemporary character types in the magazine *The Spectator*. But speaking generally, short narratives before the nineteenth century were either didactic or entertaining pieces.

Later, in the early 19th century, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* by Washington Irving, included evocative descriptions and short tales, is the first example of the short story in the United States.

1.2.2 The 19th Century — Short Story in the Modern Sense

In the 19th 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 century. 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; Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne in the United States; Gautier, Balzac, and Guy de Maupassant in France, and Nikolai Gogol 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 short story of the 19th century included symbolism and regionalism.

1.2.2.1 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 the 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. It is true that no one person can be said to be the founder of the short story, and no one nation be credited with its development, but a group of writers in the nineteenth century did begin to reflect upon the form. It has



frequently been observed that the modern short story is to a striking degree an American creation. American achievements in the short story have demanded international respect and admiration for more than a century and a half. The first successful American short story came from Washington Irving in the early nineteenth century. Poe, an aesthete 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*, the dark meetings in the woods of the town people of Salem were less significant than the spiritual changes in Brown himself.

In his preface to the definitive edition of his works, Henry James, an influential writer as well as author, emphasized the role of a "central intelligence" in shaping and filtering a story's materials.

- 6 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.

1.2.2.2 Britain

Since Steel and Addison of the 18th century, it seemed that not many writers specialized in the short story, but many novelists 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).

1.2.2.3 Russia

Important writers, who also wrote short stories, were Mikhail Lermontov, good at characterization; Ivan Turgenev, strong in depicting rural Russian settings; and Nikolai 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 Ilyich* (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.



1.2.2.4 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 aforementioned, 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. Guy de 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."

8 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.

Consequent short stories emphasize psychological activities rather than external action.



1.2.3 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 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 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),