



普通高等教育“十一五”国家级规划教材

21世纪英语专业系列教材

英语小说导读

(第二版)

Approaching Fiction

袁宪军 ◎ 编



北京大学出版社
PEKING UNIVERSITY PRESS



普通高等教育“十一五”国家级规划教材



北京市高等教育精品教材立项项目

APPROACHING FICTION

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举报电话: (010)62752024 电子信箱: fd@pup.pku.edu.cn

总序

北京大学出版社自 2005 年以来已出版《语言学与应用语言学知识系列读本》多种,为了配合第十一个五年计划,现又策划陆续出版《21 世纪英语专业系列教材》。这个重大举措势必受到英语专业广大教师和学生的欢迎。

作为英语教师,最让人揪心的莫过于听人说英语不是一个专业,只是一个工具。说这些话的领导和教师的用心是好的,为英语专业的毕业生将来找工作着想,因此要为英语专业的学生多多开设诸如新闻、法律、国际商务、经济、旅游等其他专业的课程。但事与愿违,英语专业的教师们很快发现,学生投入英语学习的时间少了,掌握英语专业课程知识甚微,即使对四个技能的掌握也并不比大学英语学生高明多少,而那个所谓的第二专业在有关专家的眼中只是学到些皮毛而已。

英语专业的路在何方?有没有其他路可走?这是需要我们英语专业教师思索的问题。中央领导关于创新是一个民族的灵魂和要培养创新人才等的指示精神,让我们在层层迷雾中找到了航向。显然,培养学生具有自主学习能力和能进行创造性思维是我们更为重要的战略目标,使英语专业的人才更能适应 21 世纪的需要,迎接 21 世纪的挑战。

如今,北京大学出版社外语部的领导和编辑同志们,也从教材出版的视角探索英语专业的教材问题,从而为贯彻英语专业教学大纲做些有益的工作,为教师们开设大纲中所规定的必修、选修课程提供各种教材。《21 世纪英语专业系列教材》是普通高等教育“十一五”国家级规划教材和国家“十一五”重点出版规划项目《面向新世纪的

立体化网络化英语学科建设丛书》的重要组成部分。这套系列教材要体现新世纪英语教学的自主化、协作化、模块化和超文本化,结合外语教材的具体情况,既要解决语言、教学内容、教学方法和教育技术的时代化,也要坚持弘扬以爱国主义为核心的民族精神。因此,今天北京大学出版社在大力提倡专业英语教学改革的基础上,编辑出版各种英语专业技能、英语专业知识和相关专业课程知识的教材,以培养具有创新性思维的和具有实际工作能力的学生,充分体现了时代精神。

北京大学出版社的远见卓识,也反映了英语专业广大师生盼望已久的心愿。由北京大学等全国几十所院校具体组织力量,积极编写相关教材。这就是说,这套教材是由一些高等院校有水平有经验的第一线教师们制定编写大纲,反复讨论,特别是考虑到在不同层次、不同背景学校之间取得平衡,避免了先前的教材或偏难或偏易的弊病。与此同时,一批知名专家教授参与策划和教材审定工作,保证了教材质量。

当然,这套系列教材出版只是初步实现了出版社和编者们的预期目标。为了获得更大效果,希望使用本系列教材的教师和同学不吝指教,及时将意见反馈给我们,使教材更加完善。

航道已经开通,我们有决心乘风破浪,奋勇前进!

北京大学蓝旗营

Preface to the Second Edition

This revised edition of *Approaching Fiction* is based on the consideration of the possibility of self study by university students and those who are interested in English fiction with sound English proficiency though not studying in university. In addition to substitute of several short stories, most stories in this edition are provided with a brief but poignant discussion written by a British or American critic so that the reader will see clearly how a critic approaches the story. Thinking about the popularity of experimental fiction in the literary world, I have added a new chapter, "New Fiction," in order that the students get a glimpse of how fiction rebels against the traditional notion in the 20th century and, nonetheless, in what way(s) it shows itself to be still rooted in social reality. I have found that documentation is commonly a problem for students in their writing of academic papers, and thus the section concerning citation and documentation has been supplemented with more examples, including citations of an online posting and other sources. Another change is that I have cancelled "Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown': Historical Imagining and Critical Responses" from the appendixes since the Internet is getting more and more convenient and students interested in the background information and critical responses to this story may avail themselves from online sources. With the cultivation of critical thinking being still the focus in the revision, some knowledge about how a writer writes a story, that is, the process of the creation of fiction, may also be of help in students'

deeper understanding of fiction. Thus Eudora Welty's "How I Write" is added to the appendixes.

I remain in the debt of many people who have contributed in one way or another to the completion of the first and this revised edition. Qian Kunqiang (钱坤强) and Tang Cuiyun (唐翠云) have not only offered random but significant suggestions but also done some work in the revision. There have been students and readers who have microscopically scanned the book and sent me their understandings of certain stories. I would like to extend my thanks to them all.

Yuan Xianjun

July 10, 2009

PREFACE

For Chinese students majoring in English language and literature, English literature is one of the compulsory and most important courses. However, the English literature courses offered at most universities and colleges are taught merely at the level of learning general information and developing literal understanding. Admittedly, such courses help them a lot in their acquisition of the English language. But the function of English literature reaches far beyond that. In reading English literature, a student should have the power to discern how human beings translate their experience into artistic expression and representation; how writers, through their creative impulses, convey to us their insights into human destiny and human life; and how social concern is involved in a specific form of human imagination. In addition, students should elevate to the level of cultivating a curiosity for the unknown, thinking cogently and logically, expressing themselves clearly and concisely, and observing the world around them critically and objectively. But most students are still at a loss as to how they can effectively analyze a literary work by themselves in any of these respects, even though they have read plenty of excerpts from representative works in the British and American literary canon. And they tend to have little idea what role the beginning part plays in the whole story, how the plot develops and comes to resolution, in what way point of view determines a reader's understanding of the story, and how the images and symbols are related to the theme. Upon consideration of these factors, we have compiled this

book with the intention of cultivating both students' literary sensibilities and their critical power when reading English short stories and novels. This book, intended for senior university students and postgraduate students, not only discusses the essential structural elements of fiction but also enlightens students as to the basic concepts and principal terms in literary criticism with regard to fiction. With a cherished ambition to compile the best book available in China in this area and to make it of true benefit to students, the compiler has carefully selected fictional works of various styles and in different categories of subject matter, and has referred to many an authoritative work of criticism, assimilating important ideas from them. The bibliography at the end of this book can serve as a source for students' reference in further research work on fiction as well as an acknowledgment of my sources. Special thanks are extended to X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia (*Literature*, 1995); to C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon (*A Handbook to Literature*, 1986); to Cleanth Brooks, John Thibaut Purser, and Robert Penn Warren (*An Approach to Literature*, 1964); and to the Beijing Municipal Committee of Education for many of the valuable ideas, literary concepts and comments, and financial assistance received in compiling and publishing this book.

Yuan Xianjun

October 26, 2003

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Introduction

Reading a Story

A woman is sitting in her old, shuttered house. She knows that she is alone in the whole world; every other thing is dead.

The doorbell rings.

At one glance, we know for certain that what we have just read is a story. If we are asked why it is a story, we may answer immediately that it tells us something imagined rather than real. And it has something to do with an image of people we meet in our daily life. This may be our natural response to a story. If we are informed of the structure of a story, we may say that it is a story because it has a character and the character does something in a certain place at a certain time. Although in reading such a short story we do not come to know the character well, for a moment we enter her thoughts and begin to share her feelings. Then something amazing happens. The story ends with suspense, and it leaves us in a wonder or, perhaps, in deep thought: Who or what rang the bell? And we may even have a series of questions: Is this a haunted house? Why is the character a woman rather than a man? Why is the present tense used rather than the past? Why is the house old and shuttered? Who is recounting the story? What effect is

produced by the word “knows”? Why does the author select the word “dead” in ending the paragraph? Why does the author arrange another paragraph with just three words? What is characteristic of the wording and of the sentence structure? What is the moral sense of the story? In asking such questions and trying to answer them, we are actually approaching the story. Like many longer and more complicated stories, this one, in its few words, stimulates our imagination.

To examine a story we must have a framework of ideas about its structure and functions. In this book, we are going to read fifteen short stories (though much longer than this one), and one novel, and by breaking them into their parts, we shall have a keener sense of how a work of fiction is constructed. Our analysis will involve **plot**, concerning what happens; **character**, generally considered a person who takes certain actions; **point of view**, concerning the angle from which a story is related; **setting**, the place and time in which events happen; **theme**, which requires us to investigate the meaning of the characters' action; and **style**, focusing our attention upon the linguistic features of the work.

Fiction, originating from the Latin word *fictio*, meaning “a shaping, a counterfeiting”, is a general term for such an imaginative work in prose as briefly discussed above; it is a story told in prose, a story which is assumed to be made up so as to express and explore the author's feelings and ideas about life through the imagery of characters and action. In modern criticism, the category of fiction includes the short story, the novel, the novella and related genres. Whether a text is fiction or not does not depend on its length but on its structure and function. All novels, novellas and short stories share generally the same structure with similar basic elements. Therefore short stories are selected in our

analysis of “fiction” for the convenience of teaching multiple texts within a single course.

Although fiction, as the original meaning of the word indicates, is essentially imagined (and may even be completely counterfeited), that does not mean that in a work of fiction there is nothing real and that a writer of fiction may not use material drawn from real life; in fact most of his/her material comes from or conforms to life. But in reading fiction we are concerned not with where the writer gets his/her material, nor even with the material itself, but with what he/she does with it—with the pattern and meaning he/she gives it, with how strongly he/she charges it with emotion, with how persuasively he/she makes it embody his/her view of life. In works such as Balzac's *The Human Comedy*, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, we see a great amount of “facts”. In reading such fiction we almost always have a sense of “verisimilitude to life.” But the factual information is of secondary importance. Authenticity in fiction, in an Aristotelian sense, is authenticity to art of fiction rather than to reality as understood from a sociological or historical perspective. A historical novel may be based on historical events but the focus is concentrated on quite different things than would be found in a history book. Perhaps Novalis's analogy of dancing and walking—literary works and non-literary works respectively—may well tell the major difference between a work of fiction and a work of non-fiction: dancing is for its own sake, while walking is a means to a certain destination. The “facts”—what happens to whom on the literal level—are very important in our reading of fiction. In fact, having a firm command of the facts of a story, a novella or a novel is the first step to approach fiction. Unless the literal facts of a work of fiction are clearly understood, we can never construe its total meaning, not to

speak of its significance. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that the facts in fiction are not the facts in reality. As we have said, fiction is a means, like other forms of art, for a writer to explore his/her experience of life and to understand his/her vision of life. We should say that the impulse that leads people to read fiction is fundamentally the same as the impulse that leads to its creation. The reader enters, consciously or unconsciously, into a fuller understanding of life by reading fiction. Fiction, while providing the reader with an aesthetic experience produced by the writer through his/her mastery of language, also extends the reader's own experience of life, and at the same time feeds his/her fundamental curiosity about life and its meaning.

Chapter One

Plot

Plot, or the structure of action, carries a variety of meanings in modern criticism. But it generally refers to the scheme or pattern of events in a work of fiction. The word *plot* has been used to indicate almost any kind of action found in a story. The concept of plot even in modern times is derived from Aristotle's use of the Greek word *mythos* in his definition of tragedy: *mythos* is the imitation of an action (*Poetics*). Aristotle lists six basic elements of the structure of tragedy but regards plot as the soul of tragedy. Of the structural whole, plot constitutes the dynamic framework to which the other five elements affiliate and around which the story develops. For Aristotle, plot must assume a certain form (for instance, the reversal of a situation, such as when the main character moves from a favorable situation to an unfavorable one); it must have a certain order of development (that is, it must have a beginning, a middle, and an end and a certain trajectory); it must involve certain agents whose actions compose its development; and it usually has a certain social background. The gradual building of the mental tension of the protagonist is also part of the plot, and the inevitable change in the fate of the protagonist, or even other characters, produces a psychological effect on the reader (or, in traditional tragedy, the spectator). This effect consists of arousing and purging certain feelings (*catharsis*). In addition, plot must abide by the law of probability: the development of the plot in a story must be logically probable rather than factually possible. Of course, all these are realized by means of language.

Aristotle's theory of plot is based on his analysis of some Greek tragedies, most especially Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. The theory doubtless applies to classical tragedy, and elements of his concept can be found in use in many novels and stories.

However, few modern critics approach plot from this complicated Aristotelian perspective. Plot, under the pens of modern novelists and storytellers, has become much more flexible than that envisaged by Aristotle. Perhaps a simple but serviceable approach to plot is that of E. M. Foster: "We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling upon causality. 'The king died and the queen died,' is a story. 'The king died and then the queen died of grief,' is a plot. The time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: 'The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king.' This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development. It suspends the time-sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow." (*Aspects of the Novel*, 1927)

Like any shapely story, the story we read at the beginning of the introduction, though very short, involves the unfolding of a **dramatic situation**: the woman believes that she is the only person alive in the world, and it is in such a state of mind that she hears the doorbell ringing. Here we first discern a **conflict** within the woman's mind, and then we see a conflict between her knowledge and the outer world. A dramatic situation thus refers to the fact that a person is involved in some conflict. The plot of a story is abundant of such situations in which clashes of wills, desires, or powers occur—whether it be a conflict of character against character, character against society, one society against another, character against some natural force, or character against himself/herself.

Like anything, a plot, according to Aristotle (*Poetics*), has a beginning, "that which does not itself follow anything by causal