

英语注释读物

八十年代美国名家中短篇小说丛书(之七)

流浪汉(中篇)

威廉·肯尼迪 著

中国对外翻译出版公司

IRONWEED
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by William Kennedy

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出版前言

近些年来,我们经常接触到一些读者,有大学英语本科生、研究生,有翻译工作者,也有英语文学爱好者,他们不约而同地提到,想多看一些最新的英文原著,但遗憾的是这类书不多,能找到的也大多年代较早,要想看看近年出的文学原作可谓难上加难。为此我公司才决定出版这套丛书。

这套丛书包括六个短篇小说集和一个中篇,作者分别是:索尔·贝娄、约翰·奇弗、约翰·厄普代克、雷蒙德·卡弗、唐纳德·巴塞尔姆、安·贝蒂和威廉·肯尼迪。这些作家有的是久负盛名的文学大家,有的则是八十年代崛起的说部新秀;其中包括诺贝尔文学奖以及美国普利策奖和全国图书奖的得主。他们的这些集子大多曾是美国的畅销书,有的被权威性报刊评为八十年代的十部佳作之一。

我们这套丛书主要收入八十年代依然活跃文坛的名家的短篇小说集,在此之前的作家的同类作品不在此列。有些作家虽在美国文坛卓有声望,但我们未能找到他们在八十年代出版的短篇集,只能付之阙如。

丛书中有六本是八十年代第一次出版,唯有《奇弗短篇小说集》例外。这本作家自选集于1978年第一次出版精装本,出版之后即成为美国罕见的短篇小说畅销书,并一举获得美国两项文学大奖——普利策奖和全国图书奖。此书至1988年已是第九次印刷。鉴于约翰·奇弗在美国文坛的地位以及在中国文学界的影响,本集又是他生前最后一部短篇集,我们仍将它收入丛书(依据美国兰登书屋下属的巴兰坦出版社1980年3月的版本)。此外还有一点需要说明,这套丛书中的集子原书部头太大,一时不能全出,目前先选了八十年代或靠近八十年代的作品。

我们在编辑这套丛书时,注意兼顾到作品的文学代表性,尽可能选择不同流派的、风格相异的作家和作品,以使读者不仅对每位作家的风格有深刻的印象,还可由此对当今美国文坛有比较广泛的了解。

本丛书的注释以大学英语本科高年级学生和具有同等水平的英语文学爱好者为对象,力求少而精,只就一些较难理解的方言俚语、独特的背景知识以及疑难句子作注。

我们这套丛书为读者提供了一个阅读最新英文佳作的机会,这是读者盼望已久且不可多得的机会,若读者能够珍惜它,在品味和欣赏文学原著的过程中提高英文阅读能力和文字水平,同时加深对美国的文学和社会现状的了解,我们将感到莫大的欣慰。

在这里,我们要感谢参加这套丛书注释工作的外交学院和厦门大学的教授、副教授们的鼎力相助。此外,由于我们水平有限,在丛书的选编方面难免有不足之处,还望读者多多指教。

肯尼迪和他的小说《流浪汉》

威廉·肯尼迪 1928 年出生在奥尔巴尼市(纽约州首府)一个小康工人家庭,父母是爱尔兰移民。

自 1949 年起在纽约《格伦斯瀑布邮报》任编辑和专栏作者,开始了他的新闻报道和写作生涯。之后,曾先后在多家报纸和杂志社任记者、主任编辑。1959 年起在奥尔巴尼的纽约州立大学任教,现为该校写作课教授。

威廉·肯尼迪的大半生都是在奥尔巴尼市度过的,他对这个城市的一石一木都了如指掌。他熟悉那里的男女老少,好人和恶棍,贵族和小人物。他的四部已出版的著作都是以奥尔巴尼为背景的。本书 1983 年出版,叙述了出生在奥尔巴尼的一个流浪汉与命运搏斗的故事。

这部小说的英文原名是 Ironweed,是斑鸠菊、矢车菊、戟叶马鞭草等几类杂草的通称。有一种高秆斑鸠菊,生长在美国北起纽约州、密执安州,南至佐治亚州,西达路易斯安那州广阔的田野里。这种斑鸠菊茎高且直,叶薄、长而尖,花呈深紫色,花瓣松散。

作者在书的正文之前,从词典里抄录了上述这段对斑鸠菊的描述,画龙点睛地指出了该书名的含义。斑鸠菊就是本书主人公弗朗西斯所代表的流浪汉的象征,他们遍及美国各地,像生长在旷野中的杂草,无人珍惜,任凭风吹雨打,在残酷的生活环境中自生自灭。他们也有性格,有的还很有才华,像弗朗西斯一样“茎高且坚挺”。

弗朗西斯生于 1880 年,正是美国资本主义迅速发展时期。青年时代的弗朗西斯是一名有轨电车修理工,技术精湛。他身体强壮、身材魁梧,是奥尔巴尼数一数二的棒球好手,也曾是美国棒球界一颗上升的明星。但在资本主义社会里,剥削阶级的巧取豪夺引起了工人阶

级的反抗。弗朗西斯参加了1901年的电车工人大罢工，但罢工由于受到血腥镇压而以失败告终。弗朗西斯在罢工中扔出一块棒球般大的石头，无意中打死了一名工贼，为逃避警察的追捕而离家出逃，流浪了十余年。回家后不久，在抱起刚出世十三天的小儿子时，不慎将孩子掉在地上摔死了。为逃避良心的谴责，他再次离家出走，浪迹天涯二十多年，酗酒、打架，为小小的争执而杀人。他在五十八岁的时候回到了奥尔巴尼，向死人的亡灵和被他遗弃多年的家人表示忏悔，以期与亡灵和尚存的人们一同平安地度过余生。但命运好像一直在捉弄他。一个初冬的夜晚，当警察扫荡流浪汉宿营地时，他为搭救一名被打成重伤的流浪汉，打死了一个凶残的美国退伍军人协会成员。他害怕警察追捕他而惶惶然，茫然然。偌大一个世界，竟没有他的安身之地！

《流浪汉》在出版之前，曾十三次遭到出版商的拒绝。但一经出版，立即受到评论界和读者的普遍赞誉。

一、现实主义的题材

《流浪汉》是一部现实主义的作品，它描绘的是一个真实的世界和它的真实问题。美国是一个高度发达的资本主义国家，被称为一个“富足的社会”，但据统计，流浪者人数竟达二百余万之多。漫步纽约街道，流浪者随时可见。特别在冬天，他们的情景惨不忍睹。有的人立在寒风里瑟瑟发抖，有的和衣睡在大街冰冷的水泥地上，面色铁青。如果不是见到他们身子有时还动弹一下，会以为是一具僵尸。弗朗西斯在谈论流浪汉时说到，一个流浪汉死在底特律，“他尿了一裤子，冻在便道上”。还有一个精瘦的小个子，“冻死时缩成一团，膝盖紧贴着下巴，他们不但没把他弄直，反而用半口棺材把他埋了”。读了这部小说，人们不仅要问：今天的美国社会为什么会有这样庞大的流浪者队伍？这必定有其内在的原因。流浪者酗酒、斗殴、偷窃，甚至杀人，这些都是事实，但这都是他们自己的过错造成的吗？作者的答复显然是否定的。弗朗西斯本人就是一例，书中另一主要人物，他的情妇海伦的沦落则更为典型。

海伦出生在一个音乐世家，富于音乐天才，在音乐学院受过高等

教育,曾是一位小有名气的歌手。但在金钱就是一切的美国社会里,海伦成了家庭中尔虞我诈的牺牲品。她父亲自杀前,在遗嘱中留给她一笔财产,但她母亲把遗嘱隐藏起来,为了让她儿子读完法律,为了她自己能过着孔雀般的生活,她中止了海伦的学业,让海伦在家照顾她十多年,最后海伦丧失了在社会上竞争的能力。她的哥哥成了一名政治律师,但却长了一副铁石心肠,再也不理睬她。海伦走投无路,到一钢琴行工作,受老板勾引,堕落为他的姘妇,但几年后被抛弃。海伦被剥夺了一个正常生活的人所需要的一切条件,她变成了一株野草,旺盛一时,然后就枯萎、凋谢、毁灭。海伦是金钱社会你死我活的争斗中的失败者,终于被这个社会所吞没。

作者通过弗朗西斯向全社会呐喊,对社会提出质问。弗朗西斯曾感慨万分地说:“不是杰罗德(被他失手摔死的小儿子)让我成了现在的样子,不是酒,不是棒球……那么到底是什么把事情弄糟了?为什么没有任何人为我们找到过弥补的办法?”正是这个问题触动了美国社会的神经。它促使人们思索:流浪汉也是人,他们有思想,有信仰,这个社会能否为他们提供一个出路呢?

本作品的现实主义精神还表现在作者直言不讳地抨击了美国社会中贫富悬殊这个根本问题。他在第一章中写道:有些人“活着时是头面人物,死后虽然不再拥有宝石、裘皮大衣、马车和高级轿车,却埋在富丽堂皇的墓穴里。”奥尔巴尼城的电霸的坟墓是“用宏伟的大理石建造,大得足能容纳几十具尸体”。而一些穷人却埋在一种万人坑式的墓穴里——“一个庞大无比的洞穴里放着十几口粗陋的棺材,……一个摞一个,有几个侧放着,还有一个立着放。洞里的土挖去不少,足足放得下三四十个这样装死人的板条箱。”《流浪汉》描写的就是这样一个真实的世界。它的价值在于促使人们对当前社会进行有意义的探索和思考,而不是使人们逃避现实,陶醉在光怪陆离的暴力和色情之中。

二、实验现实主义的创作方法

实验现实主义是西方文学界近年来出现的术语。所谓“实验现实主义”,就是在现实中搞实验,以真实世界为基础,充分发挥作家的想

象——甚至是荒诞的想象,把现实纳入半现实的形式里。在《流浪汉》这部小说里,作者运用这种创作手法到了炉火纯青的地步。他让死人活动在活人的世界里,让鬼魂与活人对话,通过亡魂的活动,反映真实世界的问题。弗朗西斯参加电车工人大罢工时打死了工贼哈罗德·艾伦。此人死后成了冤魂,一直跟踪弗朗西斯。一次他在公共汽车里出现在弗朗西斯面前。请听他们的对话:

——你干吗要打死我?

——不是存心要打死你。

——这就是你朝我扔那块马铃薯般大的石头,把我的头打碎的理由吗?……

——那你活该。工贼们罪有应得,我那样做是对的。

——那么说你一点也不感到亏心。

——你们这些王八蛋抢了我们的工作,叫我们没法养家,你们算是什么人?

这反映了一个普通工人朴素的认识。后来,弗朗西斯认识到“这是一个阶级被离间后的相互对立”。有的人是受骗而来破坏罢工的,有的是其他城市的罢工工人被雇到奥尔巴尼当工贼,而他们的工作则被另一些工贼抢走了。弗朗西斯有了这种认识,看来哈罗德·艾伦的幽灵可以安息了。

威廉·肯尼迪使用的这种表现手法也可称为“魔幻现实主义”,它曾出现在二三十年代西方表现主义的戏剧里,但目前成了美国文学的新潮流。这种手法使现代改良派显得不那么激进,使作品显得更加丰富,更充实。

这是一部感人肺腑的小说,文字也并不难懂,但由于主人公是未受过高等教育的“下等人”,言谈中用了大量美国下层社会的俚语和俗语,对中国读者可能会带来一定困难。本书的注释力求在帮助读者理解语言难点方面尽微薄之力。

常明玉

1991年1月

I. □

Riding up the winding road of Saint Agnes Cemetery in the back of the rattling old truck, Francis Phelan became aware that the dead, even more than the living, settled down in neighborhoods. The truck was suddenly surrounded by fields of monuments and cenotaphs of kindred design and striking size, all guarding the privileged dead. But the truck moved on and the limits of mere privilege became visible, for here now came the acres of truly prestigious death: illustrious men and women, captains of life without their diamonds, furs, carriages, and limousines, but buried in pomp and glory, vaulted in great tombs built like heavenly safe deposit boxes, or parts of the Acropolis. And ah yes, here too, inevitably, came the flowing masses, row upon row of them under simple headstones and simpler crosses. Here was the neighborhood of the Phelans.

Francis's mother twitched nervously in her grave as the truck carried him nearer to her; and Francis's father lit his pipe, smiled at his wife's discomfort, and looked out from

his own bit of sod to catch a glimpse of how much his son had changed since the train accident.

Francis's father smoked roots of grass that died in the periodic droughts afflicting the cemetery. He stored the
5 root essence in his pockets until it was brittle to the touch, then pulverized it between his fingers and packed his pipe. Francis's mother wove crosses from the dead dandelions and other deep-rooted weeds; careful to preserve their fullest length, she wove them while they were still in the
10 green stage of death, then ate them with an insatiable revulsion.

"Look at that tomb," Francis said to his companion. "Ain't that somethin'? That's Arthur T. Grogan. I saw him around Albany when I was a kid. He owned all the elec-
15 tricity in town."

"He ain't got much of it now," Rudy said.

"Don't bet on it," Francis said. "Them kind of guys hang on to a good thing."

The advancing dust of Arthur T. Grogan, restless in its
20 simulated Parthenon, grew luminous from Francis's memory of a vital day long gone. The truck rolled on up the hill.

FARRELL, said one roadside gravestone. KENNEDY, said another. DAUGHERTY, MCILHENNY, BRUNELLE, McDONALD,
25 MALONE, DWYER, and WALSH, said others. PHELAN, said two small ones.

Francis saw the pair of Phelan stones and turned his eyes elsewhere, fearful that his infant son, Gerald, might be under one of them. He had not confronted Gerald directly since the day he let the child slip out of its diaper.
30 He would not confront him now. He avoided the Phelan headstones on the presumptive grounds that they belonged to another family entirely. And he was correct. These graves held two brawny young Phelan brothers, canalers both, and both skewered by the same whiskey bot-
35

tle in 1884, dumped into the Erie Canal in front of The Black Rag Saloon in Watervliet, and then pushed under and drowned with a long stick. The brothers looked at Francis's clothes, his ragged brown twill suit jacket, black baggy pants, and filthy fireman's blue shirt, and felt a kinship with him that owed nothing to blood ties. His shoes were as worn as the brogans they both had been wearing on the last day of their lives. The brothers read also in Francis's face the familiar scars of alcoholic desolation, which both had developed in their graves. For both had been deeply drunk and vulnerable when the cutthroat Muggins killed them in tandem and took all their money: forty-eight cents. We died for pennies, the brothers said in their silent, dead-drunken way to Francis, who bounced past them in the back of the truck, staring at the emboldening white clouds that clotted the sky so richly at midmorning. From the heat of the sun Francis felt a flow of juices in his body, which he interpreted as a gift of strength from the sky.

"A little chilly," he said, "but it's gonna' be a nice day." 20

"If it don't puke," said Rudy.

"You goddamn cuckoo bird, you don't talk about the weather that way. You got a nice day, take it. Why you wanna talk about the sky pukin' on us?"

"My mother was a full-blooded Cherokee," Rudy said. 25

"You're a liar. Your old lady was a Mex, that's why you got them high cheekbones. Indian I don't buy."

"She come off the reservation in Skokie, Illinois, went down to Chicago, and got a job sellin' peanuts at Wrigley Field." 30

"They ain't got any Indians in Illinois. I never seen one damn Indian all the time I was out there."

"They keep to themselves," Rudy said.

The truck passed the last inhabited section of the cemetery and moved toward a hill where raw earth was being 35

loosened by five men with pickaxes and shovels. The driver parked and unhitched the tailgate, and Francis and Rudy leaped down. The two then joined the other five in loading the truck with the fresh dirt. Rudy mumbled
5 aloud as he shoveled: "I'm workin' it out."

"What the hell you workin' out now?" Francis asked.

"The worms," Rudy said. "How many worms you get in a truckload of dirt."

"You countin' 'em?"

10 "Hundred and eight so far," said Rudy.

"Dizzy bedbug," said Francis.

When the truck was fully loaded Francis and Rudy climbed atop the dirt and the driver rode them to a slope where a score of graves of the freshly dead sent up the
15 smell of sweet putrescence, the incense of unearned mortality and interrupted dreams. The driver, who seemed injured to such odors, parked as close to the new graves as possible and Rudy and Francis then carried shovelfuls of dirt to the dead while the driver dozed in the truck. Some
20 of the dead had been buried two or three months, and yet their coffins were still burrowing deeper into the rain-softened earth. The gravid weight of the days they had lived was now seeking its equivalent level in firstborn death, creating a rectangular hollow on the surface of each
25 grave. Some of the coffins seemed to be on their way to middle earth. None of the graves were yet marked with headstones, but a few were decorated with an American flag on a small stick, or bunches of faded cloth flowers in clay pots. Rudy and Francis filled in one hollow,
30 then another. Dead gladiolas, still vaguely yellow in their brown stage of death, drooped in a basket at the head of the grave of Louis (Daddy Big) Dugan, the Albany pool hustler who had died only a week or so ago from inhaling his own vomit. Daddy Big, trying futilely to memorize
35 anew the fading memories of how he used to apply

topspin and reverse English to the cue ball, recognized Franny Phelan, even though he had not seen him in twenty years.

"I wonder who's under this one," Francis said.

"Probably some Catholic," Rudy said. 5

"Of course it's some Catholic, you birdbrain, it's a Catholic cemetery."

"They let Protestants in sometimes," Rudy said.

"They do like hell."

"Sometimes they let Jews in too. And Indians." 10

Daddy Big remembered the shape of Franny's mouth from the first day he saw him playing ball for Albany at Chadwick Park. Daddy Big sat down front in the bleachers behind the third-base line and watched Franny on the hot corner, watched him climb into the bleachers 15 after a foul pop fly that would have hit Daddy Big right in the chest if Franny hadn't stood on his own ear to make the catch. Daddy Big saw Franny smile after making it, and even though his teeth were almost gone now, Franny smiled that same familiar way as he scattered fresh dirt on 20 Daddy Big's grave.

Your son Billy saved my life, Daddy Big told Francis. Turned me upside down and kept me from chokin' to death on the street when I got sick. I died anyway, later. But it was nice of him, and I wish I could take back some 25 of the lousy things I said to him. And let me personally give you a piece of advice. Never inhale your own vomit.

Francis did not need Daddy Big's advice. He did not get sick from alcohol the way Daddy Big had. Francis knew how to drink. He drank all the time and he did not vomit. 30 He drank anything that contained alcohol, anything, and he could always walk, and he could talk as well as any man alive about what was on his mind. Alcohol did put Francis to sleep, finally, but on his own terms. When he'd had enough and everybody else was passed out, he'd just 35

put his head down and curl up like an old dog, then put his hands between his legs to protect what was left of the jewels, and he'd cork off. After a little sleep he'd wake up and go out for more drink. That's how he did it when he was drinking. Now he wasn't drinking. He hadn't had a drink for two days and he felt a little bit of all right. Strong, even. He'd stopped drinking because he'd run out of money, and that coincided with Helen not feeling all that terrific and Francis wanting to take care of her. Also he had wanted to be sober when he went to court for registering twenty-one times to vote. He went to court but not to trial. His attorney, Marcus Gorman, a wizard, found a mistake in the date on the papers that detailed the charges against Francis, and the case was thrown out. Marcus charged people five hundred dollars usually, but he only charged Francis fifty because Martin Daugherty, the newspaper columnist, one of Francis's old neighbors, asked him to go easy. Francis didn't even have the fifty when it came time to pay. He'd drunk it all up. Yet Marcus demanded it.

"But I ain't got it," Francis said.

"Then go to work and get it," said Marcus. "I get paid for what I do."

"Nobody'll put me to work," Francis said. "I'm a bum."

"I'll get you some day work up at the cemetery," Marcus said.

And he did. Marcus played bridge with the bishop and knew all the Catholic hotshots. Some hotshot ran Saint Agnes Cemetery in Menands. Francis slept in the weeds on Dongan Avenue below the bridge and woke up about seven o'clock this morning, then went up to the mission on Madison Avenue to get coffee. Helen wasn't there. She was truly gone. He didn't know where she was and nobody had seen her. They said she'd been hanging around the mission last night, but then went away. Francis had

fought with her earlier over money and she just walked off someplace, who the hell knows where?

Francis had coffee and bread with the bums who'd dried out, and other bums passin' through, and the preacher there watchin' everybody and playin' grabass with their souls. Never mind my soul, was Francis's line. Just pass the coffee. Then he stood out front killin' time and pickin' his teeth with a matchbook cover. And here came Rudy. 5

Rudy was sober too for a change and his gray hair was combed and trimmed. His mustache was clipped and he wore white suede shoes, even though it was October, what the hell, he's just a bum, and a white shirt, and a crease in his pants. Francis, no lace in one of his shoes, hair matted and uncut, smelling his own body stink and ashamed of it for the first time in memory, felt deprived. 10 15

"You lookin' good there, bum," Francis said.

"I been in the hospital."

"What for?"

"Cancer." 20

"No shit. Cancer?"

"He says to me you're gonna die in six months. I says I'm gonna wine myself to death. He says it don't make any difference if you wine or dine, you're goin'. Goin' out of this world with a cancer. The stomach, it's like pits, you know what I mean? I said I'd like to make it to fifty. The doc says you'll never make it. I said all right, what's the difference?" 25

"Too bad, grandma. You got a jug?"

"I got a dollar." 30

"Jesus, we're in business," Francis said.

But then he remembered his debt to Marcus Gorman.

"Listen, bum," he said, "you wanna go to work with me and make a few bucks? We can get a couple of jugs and a flop tonight. Gonna be cold. Look at that sky." 35

"Work where?"

"The cemetery. Shovelin' dirt."

"The cemetery. Why not? I oughta get used to it. What're they payin'?"

5 "Who the hell knows?"

"I mean they payin' money, or they give you a free grave when you croak?"

"If it ain't money, forget it," Francis said. "I ain't shovelin' out my own grave."

10 They walked from downtown Albany to the cemetery in Menands, six miles or more. Francis felt healthy and he liked it. It's too bad he didn't feel healthy when he drank. He felt good then but not healthy, especially not in the morning, or when he woke up in the middle of the night,
15 say. Sometimes he felt dead. His head, his throat, his stomach: he needed to get them all straight with a drink, or maybe it'd take two, because if he didn't, his brain would overheat trying to fix things and his eyes would blow out. Jeez it's tough when you need that drink and
20 your throat's like an open sore and it's four in the morning and the wine's gone and no place open and you got no money or nobody to bum from, even if there was a place open. That's tough, pal. Tough.

Rudy and Francis walked up Broadway and when they
25 got to Colonie Street Francis felt a pull to turn up and take a look at the house where he was born, where his goddamned brothers and sisters still lived. He'd done that in 1935 when it looked possible, when his mother finally died. And what did it get him? A kick in the ass is what it
30 got him. Let the joint fall down and bury them all before I look at it again, was his thought. Let it rot. Let the bugs eat it.

In the cemetery, Kathryn Phelan, sensing the militance in her son's mood, grew restless at the idea that death was
35 about to change for her. With a furtive burst of energy she