

走近英美经典 短篇小说 Approaching Fiction

主 编 程向莉 邓长慧
副主编 陆 朋
参 编 吴新华 陈伟丽 李 倩 薛爱华



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《走近英美经典短篇小说》编者说明

自从教育部高教司开始启动大学英语课程改革以来,部分高校陆续开设了大学英语拓展课程。作为大学英语改革试点高校之一,武汉大学已经启动了大学英语课程体系改革,即将开设语言技能课程、语言文化类课程以及专业英语类课程。《走近英美经典短篇小说》是武汉大学课程改革的一部分,其书稿已经在课堂使用,获得良好的反响。

本书紧扣课堂教学,以小说阅读欣赏和写作体验为核心,旨在全面提高学生的文学欣赏能力和语言文化素养,较好地适应了目前全国大学英语拓展课程开设的需要。本书既能够提高学生的文学阅读欣赏能力,又能够调动学生用英语创作小说的积极性,从学生习作园地就可见一斑。

全书共分三个部分:

第一部分简介小说元素。

第二部分为英美经典短篇小说课堂选读,共12个单元,每个单元包括经典句/段选摘、作者简介、作品介绍、小说文本、阅读赏析、写作体验和小说欣赏。

第三部分为英美经典短篇小说课外选读,共8篇。

附录部分为学生习作园地。

本书选材聚焦于英美现代短篇小说,侧重小说的可读性和艺术性,绝大多数为名家名作。小说选材题材广泛,覆盖现代小说、后现代小说、意识流小说、侦探小说、哥特式小说等,可作为大学英语及研究生英语选修课或拓展课程教材。

本书编著人员分工如下:程向莉负责全书的统筹和小说选材。第一部分小说元素和第二部分小说作者介绍、阅读赏析、写作体验和小说欣赏分别由程向莉、邓长慧和陆朋撰写。小说文本录入和词语意思注释由陈伟丽、李倩负责。吴新华、薛爱华参与部分校对工作。由于时间仓促,错误在所难免,欢迎广大读者批评指正。

编者

2013年9月

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Section One

Introduction to Fiction



In an inclusive sense, fiction is any literary narrative, whether in prose or verse, which is invented instead of being an account of events that in fact happened. In a narrower sense, however, fiction denotes only narrative that are written in prose (the novel and short story), and sometimes is used as a synonym for the novel.

Reading fiction involves a dialogue between the reader and the writer. The reader explores the fictional world presented in words, talks with the writer in his/her mind about the meaning of literary texts, and finally comes to an understanding of the literary world, sometimes even of the real world. Therefore, in the reading process, a reader has to read for the writer's tone, looking for clues about how to interpret the actions and speeches of the characters. He/she needs to watch out for images that might signal deeper thematic meanings. Let's take a mini-story as an example to demonstrate the process of reading a piece of fictional work.

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.

In this short text, an unknown woman lives in a solitary state. It arouses reader's curiosity by the suspense created at the end of the story. A reader may ask many questions to the writer. Why is it a woman? Is it because a woman is more vulnerable to danger? Why is the house old and shuttered? Is it an outcast place? How does she know she is alone in the whole world? Is it the imaginary world or is it the real world? Why is every other thing dead? Is it the end of the world or is it the aftermath of a disaster? Who rings the door? Is it help coming to her or is it greater danger lurking behind?

By talking with the writer, a reader is engaged with an intellectual puzzle and starts

his/her journey of solving this puzzle. Thus great pleasure can be derived from this process of finding an answer to at least one of those questions. Depending on his/her past reading experience, intelligence, or sense of humor, a reader may come up with the different solutions to the puzzle by writing another line to the end.

"I'm back, Mum", shouts her daughter cheerfully.

A man stands outside with a bunch of flower.

A man stands outside, staring right into her eyes.

She opens the door, but no one is outside.

Yet this additional line is far from a satisfactory solution to the puzzle. The writer is too sophisticated to make it easy, which shows his/her deftness in creating a fictional work. So a reader's task is to decode what is concealed, and try to interpret the 99% unsaid by the writer.

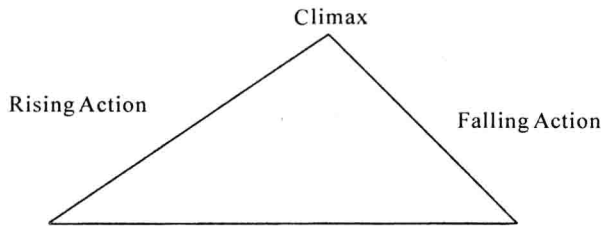
In order to appreciate and interpret fiction, a reader needs to learn first certain characteristics or devices of fiction, each of which helps make a literary work a unified and meaningful whole. These characteristics, called elements of fiction, consist of plot, character and characterization, point of views, setting, theme, style, etc. Understanding the function of each element may help enhance our pleasure of reading a fictional work.

1. Plot

Any discussion of plot must begin with drawing a distinction between plot and narrative. E. M. Foster once illustrated the difference with an example. He wrote there was a difference between "The king died and the queen died" and "The king died, and the queen died of grief". The former sentence is a narrative while the latter one has established a link between the two events from which comes the plot. Narrative is simply of what happened. For narrative to become plot it must reveal its meaning in human terms.

Narrative is what is told. Plot is how the material is shaped to affect the reader. Take the woman in the house mentioned above as an example. To narrate the event a writer may simply write "A woman is sitting in her old house and she hears the doorbell ring". Yet the writer has achieved some effect on the reader by asserting that "she knows that she is alone in the whole world; every other thing is dead". It leaves to the reader to figure out the link between the three sentences and comprehend the significance of her precarious state of being alone.

The plot development is usually patterned to serve different purposes. The classic pattern is linear, with beginning, middle, and end coming in natural sequence. There is a set-up, or exposition, in which the character and their situations are introduced. This is followed by the rising action, which then intensifies the complication, building toward a climax. The climax is the moment of maximum tension, the point after which the circumstances must change. After the climax comes the resolution, also known as the falling action, which shows the consequence. German author Gustav Freytag's famous triangle can roughly illustrate the classic pattern of plot development.



However, plot development doesn't always follow this pattern. Some stories may end abruptly at the climax. For example, the woman hears the doorbell ring and the story ends suddenly. Some stories begin with the climax and work in reverse. Some stories bypass the dramatic resolution in favor of quieter revelation, or epiphanies. Patterns of plot development are not set invariably for all stories, so a writer needs to choose a pattern for a good reason.

2. Character

The various elements of fiction are all essential. But we cannot conceive a story without a character. A character is usually but not always a human, and functions as the agent of plot. For most stories, there is a central figure, or protagonist, and one or more secondary figures. Depending on the writer's choice of point of view, the protagonist can be presented either in third person or in the first person. There are, of course, exceptions. In modern and postmodern fiction, characters may be missing. The whole story might just be a record of the inner thought of the narrator. For example, *The Mark on the Wall* is both plotless and characterless. It records the fleeting moment when the narrator reflects on what the mark on the wall is. In this fictional work, characters are nonexistent and neither does a climax in its classic sense.

Characters can be divided into round or flat characters. Round characters have dimensions and are more lifelike. They grow and change as the story develops. Flat characters usually play a minor role in a story. Flat characters are chosen as a matter of artistic need because the writer needs to heighten the interplay of the foreground and background. For example, in *A Rose to Emily*, Emily is a round character and the old black servant is a flat character. Emily is more dynamic and displays multidimensional characteristics. She grows from the early days as the innocent aristocratic young lady to an old ugly witch-like woman. She is the embodiment of the aristocracy in the southern cities in U. S. at the 19th century. However, the black servant is a flat character. He serves the symbolic function of the passage of time and demonstrates little activity in the story. Readers learn little about him and he disappears mysteriously when Emily dies.

A very different kind of character is the antagonist. This figure, flat or rounded, is set up in opposition to the protagonist. An antagonist generally serves the purpose of frustrating the protagonist's aim or is intent upon causing some harm. The obvious example of an antagonist is the wicked stepmother in *Cinderella*. She is as evil as the young girl is good. The resolution comes when she is defeated and Cinderella lives happily. The tension between antagonist and protagonist drives a story forward.

3. Point of View

One of the most important decisions for a writer to make is how to present events. The point of view inevitably influences our understanding of the character's action by the perspectives taken by the narrator. To decide what point of view to use, a writer needs to ask certain questions. For example: How much do I want the reader to be informed of the character's actions? What vantage will be best for the strongest climax and the most effective resolution of tensions?

The commonly used points of view can generally be divided into two groups: the third-person point of view and the first-person point of view. For these two categories of vantage, the narrator of the former one is a man (he), a woman (she) or a group of people (they) and the narrator doesn't participate in the action. The narrator of the latter one is I or we and the narrator is either a major or a minor participant in the action. The second-person point of view is rarely used. If the narrative voice is changed, the plot might be the same. However, the tone of the story and the artistic effect on the reader may be dramatically different. For example, *My Oedipus Complex* is narrated by a boy from the first point of view, which can reveal family tensions in the eyes of an innocent boy.

Readers can learn two stories at the same time. One is told by Larry, the other is the one put together by reading between the lines. The richness of the reading experience comes about through the overlapping of the two stories and is very much a product of O'Connor's artistry. If the narrator voice is changed into an adult in the third-person point of view, the reader may be deprived the pleasure of judging the truth from the deceiving narration of a boy.

The possible variations of the third-person narration are endless, for a writer can choose the degree of involvement as well as the extent of knowledge. The narrator may see into all the characters, and presents events from omniscient (from the Greek for "all knowing") point of view or in some cases, the narrator may see into some characters and presents events in limited omniscient point of view. The extreme case is a story told dramatically through action and dialogue. The narrator is like a fly on the wall that does not take the reader into the mind of any character. It is for the reader to interpret the meaning of the action and the dialogue. Such dramatic point of view is more favored by modern and contemporary writers for its impersonal and objective way of presenting experience.

It is vital to note that not only do writers use different vantages to tell their stories, but they also grant their narrators varying degrees of intelligence and reliability. One example is a story told by an unreliable narrator, a figure whose own personality in some way colors the telling of the events. The figure may be a liar, a fool, or a person who takes up appearance that he/she misses the point of what he/she is reporting. The reader should always stay alert about the narrator's personality and watch out for the truthfulness of his/her narration accordingly.

4. Setting

Setting is one of the fundamental components of fiction. In its narrowest sense, setting is the place and time of the narration. That's to say, it refers to the historical moment in time and geographic location in which a story takes place. But in its broadest sense, setting includes not only the physical background, but also the historical background, the cultural attitudes of a given place and time, the mood of a time and even how story people talk. So culture, historical period, geography, and time are elements of setting.

Setting can be of vital importance to a story. Even if there are great characters, outstanding dialogues and a gripping plot, a story isn't complete without the appropriate

setting. Setting is the unifying element in most fiction, working together with plot, characterization and point of view and performs many specific functions.

Firstly, setting may serve as a background for action. A story needs a setting or background of some kind. For example, the story *Early Autumn* by Langston Hughes takes place in late afternoon in autumn and the time acts as a background. *The Discus Thrower* by Richard Selzer happens in a hospital and the ward in which the patient lives serve as a background for action.

Secondly, setting may serve as an antagonist. More often than not, the forces of nature function as an antagonist, helping establish conflict between man and nature. A case in point is Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* in which the protagonist or the old man is fighting against all kinds of fish in the sea. Here the setting—fishes like sharks in the sea function as an antagonist.

Thirdly, setting may be a means of creating appropriate atmosphere and thus arousing readers' expectations. In *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner, the description of the old house where Emily lives and its surroundings creates a horror atmosphere and thus serve as a foreshadow for the shocking end of the story when Emily killed her lover and kept his body in her room for more than 40 years.

Forthly, setting is a way to help reveal characters and reflect their emotional state. It is often the case that the way in which a character perceives the setting and the way he or she responds to it will tell readers a lot about the character. In *Araby* by James Joyce, the setting—the quiet, blind street that leads nowhere, serves to mirror “my” (the narrator's) dream of romantic puppy love that is as hopeless as the paralyzed society he is in.

In addition, setting may be used as a means of helping reinforce and clarify the theme of a story. The setting of late afternoon in Autumn—cold, nearly sunset, in *Early Autumn* has direct thematic relevance to the protagonist Mary's emotion: she feels heart-broken because she still cherishes her love for Bill while Bill is cold and indifferent to her. Here the setting helps reinforce the theme that lost love cannot be regained.

Setting may even contribute enormously to the tone of a story and affect the author's wording, or the writing style.

When the setting adopts a strong color or flavor in its language, appearance, mentality of people of a particular place or a specific time in history, the story becomes an example of local color or regionalism, William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor are noted for their southernness. As a regionalist, Faulkner focuses his fiction on the Deep South and writes only about this particular area with its bitter history of slavery, civil war and destruction. Similarly, O'Connor was a Southern writer who often wrote in a Southern

Gothic style and relied heavily on regional settings and grotesque characters.

5. Theme

Theme is perhaps the most important aspect of a serious work of art and one of the fundamental components of fiction. It is the abstract, generalized statement or comment that the work makes about a concrete subject or situation. What the author has to say about life is the theme of a story. It is the real meaning the author wants to tell besides and above the story itself.

Many stories share similar subjects, such as love, war, or death. Yet each story makes its own statement about the subject and expresses its distinct view of life. In a way theme is an abstract concept that is made concrete through the representation of people and action in a literary work. It's important to avoid confusing a story's theme with its subject or situation. Take *The Discus Thrower* by Richard Selzer for example. The subject of the story is about the death of a patient with serious disease while its themes can be described as seeking dignity after losing everything or lack of humanistic thought to the patient in hospitals or indifference to the patient's inner demands.

A story may have more than one theme. It's entirely possible that these themes are not in accord with the readers' particular beliefs and readers may have different opinions about what the theme of a given work is.

The identification of theme is a way to test readers' understanding of a given fictional work. But it is quite demanding because readers have to analyze numerous elements in their relation to one another and to the work as a whole.

Some themes are topical in nature. In other words, they are related to a specific time and place or to a specific situation. Others are universal. That's to say, they can be applied to general circumstances.

In some cases, the theme may be explicitly stated by one of the characters in a story who serves as a spokesman for the author. *Araby* by James Joyce is a good example. At the end of the story, the protagonist "I" says: "gazing up into the darkness, I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger". Here, the boy tells us directly what he has learned about himself after his imaginary puppy love with a girl and his journey to the bazaar, which becomes a journey of self discovery.

On most occasions, theme is not stated but implied through the treatment of character and the development of the story though the title may provide clues about theme. In *Hills Like White Elephants*, Earnest Hemingway makes full use of dialogues and symbols to

reveal the themes: loss of self and rediscovery of self in a strained relationship; evasion of responsibility; young people's lack of spiritual pursuit after the war.

6. Style, Tone, and Symbol

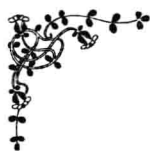
Style is the language convention used in narration, which is personal and characteristic of a particular author, school, period or genre. Fiction writers create their own style by manipulating diction (choice of words), syntax, tone, and by the use of imagery, figures of speech, symbols, or by any other linguistic feature. For instance, Earnest Hemingway is fond of grade school-like grammar, plain word choice and short, declarative sentence in his novels and short stories. This is his writing style.

Tone may be defined as the way a writer uses words to convey unstated or implicit attitudes towards people, places and events in fiction. It refers not to attitudes but to the techniques and modes of presentation that create the attitudes. The words often used to describe the tone are serious (solemn) / humorous (playful), colloquial (informal)/ formal, calm/anxious, neutral/detached, critical/approving, ironic/sympathetic. In *A Rose for Emily*, William Faulkner showed his respect for Emily and his sympathy to the heroine Emily as well, though she seems cruel and abnormal for killing her lover and sleeping with the body.

Symbols in fiction are images, objects, settings, events and characters that convey meaning beyond their literal significance. The purpose of a symbol is to communicate meaning. A literary symbol carries powerful condensed meaning and means more than what it is.

Symbols are usually classified as universal or contextual ones. The associations of universal or cultural symbols are widely recognized and accepted by a society or culture. For instance, the serpent is often used to represent the Devil, or simply evil. It was from Genesis that Satan, in the form of a serpent, tempted Eve in the *Garden of Eden*. Another good example is the elephant in Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants* which symbolizes something expensive but useless. On the other hand, the associations of contextual symbols derive largely from the context of the work in which they are used. Take *A Rose for Emily* as an example. The protagonist Emily may represent the noble and the tradition while her black manservant may symbolize slavery in American south.

Symbolism, when employed as an integral and organic part of the language and structure of a work of fiction, can stimulate and release the imagination.



Section Two

In-Class Reading



1. The Black Cat

About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words “strange!” “singular!” and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in *bas relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic cat. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous. There was a rope about the animal’s neck.

(from *The Black Cat*)



About the Author

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was an American short-story writer, poet, editor and literary critic. He was considered part of the American Romantic Movement. He was one of the earliest American short-story writers and is viewed as the inventor of the detective fiction. He was the first well-known American writer to try to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career.

Allan Poe produced many stories, poems, and works of criticism. Some of his stories won prizes. In 1833 *The Baltimore Saturday Visitor* awarded Poe a prize for his short-story *MS. Found in a Bottle*. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* was published and widely reviewed in



1838. Also in 1839, the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* was published in two volumes, though he made little money out of it and it received mixed reviews. In January 1845 Poe published his poem, *The Raven*. It became an instant success.

Edgar Allan Poe is best known for his tales of mystery. Strangeness, mystery and terror appeared frequently in his stories and poems. He wrote about people buried while still alive, about insanity and death, about dreams that become real, or about reality that seems like a dream. Most of his short stories, such as *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) and the *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), are about death, decay, and madness. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) is regarded as the first modern detective story.

The Black Cat

Edgar Allan Poe

For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not — and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified — have tortured — have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror — to many they will seem less terrible than *barroques*. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place — some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere *Man*.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and *a cat*.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever *serious* upon this point — and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

Pluto — this was the cat's name — was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character — through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance — had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me — for what disease is like Alcohol! — and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old and consequently somewhat peevish — even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fiber of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, and I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning — when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch — I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime