

张洁香 编著

# 现代英国文学教程

A COURSEBOOK OF  
MODERN  
ENGLISH LITERATURE



武汉大学出版社  
WUHAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

## Preface

教程  
A Coursebook of Modern English Literature is compiled primarily with the aim to meet the needs of the Chinese college students who have majored in English language and literature. This coursebook, which is based on many years of teaching practice, generally covers the lives, literary careers, <sup>生活</sup> points of views and <sup>经历</sup> artistic <sup>特点</sup> features of the 20th-century English writers; it also provides the students with some knowledge on historical and cultural backgrounds, on literary trends and literary schools, and includes some selected readings from the important works. Special emphasis is laid on the introduction of the major writers and on the analysis of their representative works.

Here I would like to take this opportunity <sup>机会</sup> to express my gratitude to all my friends and colleagues as well as my former students who have given me their invaluable suggestions and comments in the course of writing this book. My indebtedness goes particularly to my wife, Jiang Baozhu, whose prompting has encouraged me to undertake the project and whose assistance has enabled me to complete it. I would also like to thank the editors and workers of Wuhan University Press who are directly responsible for the publication of this book. Finally my acknowledgement goes to those writers together with their publishers whose works are quoted or selected as reading materials.

As this book is but my first attempt in English, surely there is much to be improved. Suggestions and criticisms are sincerely welcomed.

Zhang Boxiang

## CONTENTS

Lecture One	An Introduction to Modern English Literature	(1)
Lecture Two	Joseph Conrad	(20)
✓Lecture Three	E. M. Forster	(49)
Lecture Four	Some Outstanding Realistic Novelists	(72)
Lecture Five	Some Minor Poets Around the Turn of the Century	(85)
Lecture Six	The War Poets	(93)
Lecture Seven	William Butler Yeats	(100)
Lecture Eight	T. S. Eliot	(121)
Lecture Nine	George Bernard Shaw	(173)
Lecture Ten	The Irish Dramatic Revival	(201)
Lecture Eleven	<del>D. H. Lawrence</del>	(209)
Lecture Twelve	James Joyce	(247)
Lecture Thirteen	<del>Virginia Woolf</del>	(290)
Lecture Fourteen	Poets of the 1930s	(326)
Lecture Fifteen	Novelists of the 1930s	(344)
Lecture Sixteen	Samuel Beckett	(357)
Lecture Seventeen	Poets of the 1950s	(405)
Lecture Eighteen	Novelists of the 1950s	(420)
Lecture Nineteen	Playwrights of the 1950s	(435)

# Lecture One

## An Introduction to Modern English Literature

### I. Historical Background.

The First World War was usually regarded as the watershed in English history, for it had hastened radical changes in every field of English society. But the changes started long before the war. When capitalism came into its monopoly stage in Britain, the sharpened contradictions between socialized production and the private ownership caused frequent economic depressions and mass unemployment, and greatly slowed down the speed of the British economic development. But in the same period, Germany, Italy and the United States grew very rapidly in their industrial production. Towards the end of the 19th century, Germany and the United States had already caught up with or even surpassed Britain in the main fields of industry. Having lost her industrial supremacy, Britain faced a severe challenge from Germany and other newly-arisen imperialist countries for the redivision of the world, which led to the outbreak of the First World War (1914—1918).

The Boer War (1899—1902), waged by the British imperialists to effect a political and economic control over the Boer republics of South Africa, is another example to mark the rapid decline of the British Empire. The fact that the forces of the most powerful country on earth had great difficulty in defeating the small and ill-equipped Boer forces gave people something of the

effect similar to that of the Vietnam War in the American sixties.

Around the turn of the century, British economy experienced further depressions. The sharp price rise and big fall of the workers' wages led to large-scale strikes and domestic unrest. The widespread socialist ideas ushered in a vigorous workers' movement, out of which the British Labour Party came into being. In fighting for freedom, equality and suffrage, the British women made a loud and consistent cry. And the Irish nationalist movement for independence reached a new upsurge with its armed uprising in 1916 and the Irish War of Independence from 1919 to 1921. After centuries of oppression by the English, Ireland finally broke free as an independent nation in 1922.

The storm of World War I tremendously weakened the British Empire. For the first time, Britain became a debtor nation, and London lost its position as the financial centre of the world. The postwar economic dislocation and spiritual disillusion produced a profound impact upon the British people, who came to see the prevalent wretchedness in capitalism.

The Second World War marked the last stage of the disintegration of the British Empire. Britain suffered heavy losses in the war. Thousands of people were killed; the economy was ruined. Most of her colonies had been tempered and awakened by the war. Thus, right after the war, a powerful movement for independence was rising. India, "the brightest jewel in the British Crown", took the lead and won her independence in 1947. The other colonies followed suit in a quick succession. Up to 1970, Britain had lost almost all her former colonies. The once sun-never-set Empire finally collapsed.

The end of the British Empire enormously lessened its power and influence over the world. The postwar adjustment to Britain's changed position was hard and painful. It took almost

twenty years for most English people to really understand and accept the fact that England no longer stood at the centre of world affairs. In those years, the Labour and Conservative governments replaced one another without being able to discover a new destiny to inspire and unite the people. Discontented with the impotent governments under the control of the party machine, the English people in the 1950s, and again in the 1960s, launched a strong protest against government bureaucracies and social injustices.

However, Britain has managed to pass the most difficult period. By developing high-tech industries, Britain has got a new footing in her economy and trade. With the introduction of the social welfare programmes, class antagonism has softened up to a certain degree and people's living conditions have been much improved. Britain is still one of the major capitalist countries in the world.

## II. Cultural Background

### 2. 1 New Theories and Ideas

In the second half of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, both natural and social sciences had advanced in an enormous way. The rapid development of natural sciences not only led to great gains in material wealth, but also gave rise to all kinds of pessimism or determinism which became a standard feature of late Victorian thought. Naturalism is one of its reflections in literature. Darwin's theory of evolution exerted a strong influence over the people's thoughts, causing many to lose their religious faith. But the social Darwinists, under the cover of 'Survival of the Fittest', vehemently advocated colonialism or jingoism, which was eulogized by Kipling but criticized by

Conrad and Forster. Einstein's theory of relativity gave a great momentum to the scientific research, and meanwhile it also provided entirely new ideas to the concepts of time and space. The more important theory of the 20th century must be Freud's analytical psychology, for this psychological analysis of the mind has drastically altered our conception of human nature in both life and literature.

In the field of social science, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels put forward the theory of scientific socialism, which not only provides a guiding principle for the working people, but also inspires them to make dauntless fights for their own emancipation. And Marxist ideas about art and literature have played an important role in literary criticism. In the meantime, the idealist philosophy had a rampant growth. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), a pessimistic philosopher, first started a rebellion against rationalism, the then dominant philosophy in Europe, by stressing the importance of will and intuition in his *The World as Will and Representation*. Having inherited the basic principles from Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) further sharpened the criticism of rationalism by advocating the doctrines of power and superman and rejecting Christian morality completely. Based on the major ideas of his predecessors, Henry Bergson (1859-1941) established his irrational philosophy, which put the emphasis on creation, intuition, irrationality and unconsciousness. His conceptions of life impulse and psychic time made the Western idealist philosophy afresh. These irrationalist philosophers exerted immense influences over the major modernist writers in Britain. And after the Second World War, Sartre's existentialism carried the irrational philosophy to an absurd extreme, touching upon the major aspects of life in the Western world.

## 2. 2 Modernism

### 2. 2. 1- The rise and growth of modernist movement

Modernism rose out of scepticism and disillusionment of capitalism, which made writers and artists search for new ways to express their understanding of the world and the human nature. The French Symbolism, appearing in the late 19th century, became the forerunner of modernism. The appalling slaughter of World War I precipitated the rising of all kinds of literary trends of modernism: expressionism, surrealism, futurism, dadaism, imagism and streams of consciousness. Modernism also touched upon visual arts, music, dance and the other fields of social life. Towards the 1920s, these trends converged into a mighty torrent of modernist movement, which swept across the whole Europe and America. The major figures that were associated with this movement were Kafka, Picasso, Pound, Webern, Eliot, Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Modernism was somewhat curbed in the 1930s. But after the Second World War, varieties of modernism, or post-modernism, like existentialist literature, theatre of absurd, new novels and black humour, rose again with the spur of the existentialist idea that "the world was absurd, and the human life was an agony". However, they gradually disappeared or diverged into other kinds of literary trends in the 1960s.

### 2. 2. 2 The characteristics of modernism

Modernism amounts to more than a chronological description, that is to say, the more recent does not necessarily mean more modern. Modernism is something broadly imaginative, a large spiritual enterprise, including philosophical, social and scientific thought, aesthetic and literary theories, as well as poetry, novel and drama. Modernism takes the irrational philosophy and the idea of psycho-analysis as its theoretical base. The major themes of the modernist literature are the distorted, alienated and



ill relationships between man and nature, man and society, man and man, and man and himself. The chief characteristics of modernism are as follows:!

a) Modernism marks a strong and conscious break with the past. It does not only reject history and society, but also the moral, religious and cultural values of the past.

b) Modernism emphasizes on the need to move away from the public to the private, from the objective to the subjective. It elevates the individual and the inner being over the social being, prefers the sub-conscious to the self-conscious, and stresses on passion and will over reason and intellect, on dynamic visions over the static images.

c) Modernism upholds a new view of time by emphasizing the psychic time over the chronological one. It maintains that the past, the present and the future are one and exist at the same time in the consciousness of individual as a continuous flow rather than a series of separate moments.

d) Modernism is, in many respects, a reaction against realism. It rejects rationalism which is the theoretical base of realism; it excludes from its major concern the external, objective, material world which is the only creative source of realism; by advocating a free experimentation on new forms and new techniques in literary creation, it casts away almost all the traditional elements in literature like story, plot, character, chronological narration, and etc. which are essential to realism. As a result, the works created by the modernist writers can often be labeled as anti-novel, anti-poetry or anti-drama.

### 2. 2. 3 Conclusion

Generally speaking, modernism is the result of the spiritual crises that took place in the capitalist world around the two world wars, especially after the First World War. It is a rebellion against the corrupted bourgeois values in morality, religion, cul-

ture and art. In a number of works, modernist writers made bold exposures or strong criticisms of various social evils in the capitalist countries; some even condemned the entire capitalist system for causing men's miseries and sufferings in this world; some also presented valuable studies of human natures in an alienated world. And some technical innovations experimented or practised by modernist writers are proved to be useful and effective means in literary creation. They have been partly, or wholly adopted by some realistic writers, or writers of other literary schools. With regard to the above, we can say, there is surely a positive significance in modernist literature. But as most of the modernist writers are spokesmen of the bourgeois middle class, and what they desire to do is vent their discontents and disillusion over the capitalist society in a passive, abnormal way, they can neither see the essence of the social problems nor work out correct ways to solve them. Besides, most of their works are permeated with very pessimistic, or nihilistic, feelings; and some even contain absurd, insane, or pornographical rubbish. Some modernist writers have gone so far in their technical experimentation that their works are just beyond the reader. All these demerits of modernist literature must be cautioned, for they can be very harmful to the reader.

抄寫

### III. Poetry

Compared with the Victorian period, the 20th century has witnessed a great achievement in English poetry. In the early years of this century, Thomas Hardy and the war poets of the younger generation are the important realistic poets. While Rudyard Kipling eulogized British jingoism and A. E. Housman sang his pessimism, Hardy, the first essentially 20th-century poet, still expressed the strong sympathies towards the suffering poor and

表达

the bitter disgusts at the social evils in his poetry as in his novels. With his honesty, his plainness, his rusticity, he carried forward the fine English traditions in poetry, which exerted much influence over the poets of 1930s and 1950s. The soldiers-poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, toughened in the First World War, revealed the appalling brutality of the war in the most realistic way. Their poetry provided a true picture of the soldier's painful sufferings, and of the permanent damages the war did to their bodies and minds. Other poets like Walter de la Mare, Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden also carried on the tradition, though they were trying to expand poetic subject matter and to adapt new experiences to the old forms.

The appearance of the early poems of Pound and Eliot, the newly-published poetry of Hopkins, and Yeats's poetry, with its hardening and maturing style, marked the rise of 'modern poetry', which was, in some sense, a revolution against the conventional ideas and forms of the Victorian poetry. The Imagist poets took the first step in this revolution. Under the influence of the philosopher-poet, T. E. Hulme, and the American poet, Ezra Pound, they fought against romantic fuzziness and self-indulged emotionalism in poetry by advocating new ideas in poetry-writing. These new ideas can be summarized as: (to use the language of common speech, to create new rhythms as the expression of a new mood, to allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject, and to use hard, clear and precise images in poetic creation.) Poets like J. G. Fletcher, F. S. Flint and R. Aldington were very active in this movement; but the pity is that they did not achieve much in their poetry.

[Pound, Yeats and Eliot are the key poets who brought modernism into English poetry.] T. S. Eliot, as both poet and critic, was at the centre of this revolution. It was Eliot who preached the intentions of the anti-conventional revolution in his critical

essays; and again it was Eliot who voiced in poetry the mood of a whole generation by providing a model poem of modernism, *The Waste Land*, which was both a demonstration and a manifesto of what the modern poetry desired to do and could do in theme and technique. Actually, this revolution of poetry was started by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) one hundred years ago; the

modern poets carried it only one step forward by experimenting with new verse forms and metrical systems. Soon, the conventional restrictions on diction, meter, rhyme and form were cast away; the poet was free not only to create, but to make for himself the rules under which he would create. In result, this experimentation of "free verse" became chaotic and highly diversified.

Though modern poetry made a loud cry against the past, it had inherited its tradition from the early part of literature; and its sources could be traced far back. Swinburne, Morris, Whitman, Browning, and Blake all had a share of influence over modern poetry. But the dominant influence came from two traditions: the metaphysical poetry of John Donne and the French Symbolism represented by Laforgue, Rimbaud and Verlaine.

1930s saw the Great Depression, mass unemployment, the rise of the Nazis, and the Spanish War. Under such a severe situation, most of the young intellectuals had turned to the left, and made the period known as "the red thirties". A group of young poets in England, such as W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, and the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid, rose up with radical political enthusiasm and launched a strong protest against fascism. They also raised severe criticism on the modernist poets of the previous generation, accusing them of avoiding important realistic problems. In choosing their poetic heritage, they preferred Hardy to Eliot, though their poetry was occasionally inventive in technique. But with the on-coming of the Second World War, the poets of this group finally worn out

their enthusiasm and turned to separate ways.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, several of the poets who were loosely associated with the 'Apocalyptic Poetry' began their short-lived poetic career. The best among them was Dylan Thomas of Wales who wrote wild and random poetry with strong rhythms and extravagance in imagery under the influence of the French surrealist poets. By making himself against the restraint of Eliot and the aristocratic passion of Yeats, he achieved considerable popularity. But as a prominent poet, he is still very controversial.

With the coming of the 1950s, there was a return of realistic poetry again. By advocating reason, irony, moral discipline, and traditional forms, a new generation of poets, including Donald Davie, Thom Gunn, and Philip Larkin, started 'The Movement', which explicitly rejected the modernist influence. Philip Larkin was more prominent than the others. Like the important movements of the past, the poets of 'The Movement' shared only partial similarities of their objectives; as time went on, they gradually moved into more individual styles.

There was no significant poetic movement in the 1960s. A multiplicity of choices opened to both the poet and the reader. Ted Hughes appeared to be an eminent poet among his contemporaries. He explored the physical nature of man, and this led him to write with liveliness, sensitiveness and originality about animals.

## IV. Fiction

### 4. 1 The Realistic Novel

The English realistic novel reached the highest peak of its development in the Victorian period when Charles Dickens and

不  
合  
格

William Thackeray were in their creative prime. The realistic novels in the early 20th century were the continuation of the Victorian tradition and occupied an important position in English literature, though its exposing and criticizing power against capitalist evils had been somewhat weakened both in width and depth. The outstanding realistic novelists of this period were John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells, and Arnold Bennett, who presented, often with great skill, true pictures of the corrupted capitalist world, showing considerable insight and distress about the injustice and unkindness of their society. Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, masterpieces of critical realism in the early 20th century, is a study of such a world, though the satirical undertones in the later part were not so sharp as in the earlier one. In his novels of social satire, H. G. Wells made realistic studies of the aspirations and frustrations of the small man; whereas Bennett presented a vivid picture of the English life in the industrial Midlands in his best novels. Virginia Woolf once called these writers "materialists", criticizing their persistent interest in externals, and accusing them of lacking the feeling for soul or inwardness. Yet it is just that feeling for externals, exact and solid, which gives their best works the weight and truth. Somerset Maugham worked in a narrow range of subject and character in his novel creation. Under the strong influence of French Naturalism, he wrote several important novels, in which he satirized the dark side of the society and portrayed the human miseries and sufferings in an objective way.

Realism was, to a certain extent, eclipsed by the rapid rise of modernism in the 1920s. But with the strong swing of leftism in the 1930s, novelists began turning their attention to the urgent social problems. By carrying forward the English tradition of satire, writers in the 1930s and early 1940s made a vivid presentation of the bourgeois hypocrisy and decadence among the up-

per-class society. They also enriched the traditional ways of creation by adopting some of the modernist techniques. However, the realistic novels of this period were mainly dominated by a pessimistic mood, pre-occupied with the theme of man's loneliness, and shaped in different forms; social satires in Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*, 1932) and in George Orwell (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1949); satirical comedy of upper-class society in Evelyn Waugh (*A Handful of Dust*, 1934); and the catholic novels of Graham Greene (*The Heart of the Matter*, 1948). Another important aspect of realistic novels in this period is the fact that there rose a few working-class writers, who gave a direct portray of the working-people's poverty and sufferings, and who sang highly the heroic struggles against capitalism waged by the working class. Among this group, the Scottish writer Lewis Grassie Gibbon was the most outstanding. His trilogy *A Scots Quair* — *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933), *Grey Granite* (1934) — presented the social change and working-people's life on farms, in towns and cities through the personal experience of Chris Guthrie. With vivid descriptions, the trilogy portrayed the hard life of the common people and the gradual awakening of the workers in their struggle against the evil capitalist system. Besides, there also appeared some novels, such as, *Last Cage Down* (1935) by Harold Heslop, *Major Operation* (1936) by James Barke, *May Day* (1936) by John Sommerfield, *The Citadel* (1936) by A. J. Cronin, and *Cumardy* (1937) by Lewis Jones, which, from different respects, gave a realistic presentation of working-people's life and their struggles.

Among the post-war realistic novelists, C. P. Snow and Angus Wilson were the major ones, whose realism looked back to Dickens and Trollope. Snow was one of the first postwar writers to re-emphasize the value of plot, and to justify this shift of emphasis by expressing active opposition to those experimental

writers. He was best known for his *Strangers and Brothers*, series of 11 novels, in which he dealt with problems of power and morality in the capitalist society. Wilson was a liberal who condemned false social institutions and values. His novels were regarded as realistic fiction with an important moral issue at their centres. In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, there appeared a group of young playwrights and novelists with lower-middle-class, or working-class background, who were greatly discontented with the corruption of the upper-class society. These writers, known as "the Angry Young Men", demonstrated a particular disillusion over the depressing situation in Britain and launched a bitter protest against the outmoded social and political values in their society. Literarily, this movement was also a reaction against the modernist literature represented by Joyce and Woolf and their technical experiments. Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Braine and Alan Sillitoe were the major novelists in this group. Amis was the first "Angry Young Man" who started the attack on middle-class privileges and power in his novel *Lucky Jim* (1954). Both Braine and Sillitoe came from working-class families. They portrayed unadorned working-class life in their novels with great freshness and vigor of working-class language.

Having been merged and interpenetrated with modernism in the past several decades, the realistic novel of the 1960s and 1970s appeared in a new face with a richer, more vigorous and more diversified style.

#### 4. 2 The Modernist Novel

Henry James and Joseph Conrad who were undertaking their literary creation around the turn of the century are generally regarded as the pioneers of the modernist novel in English, even though they carried forward many fine traditions of the Victorian realism. While showing a strong moral concern in their novel,



they put more emphasis on its artistic integrity. To reveal the truth of human life which, in their opinion, was infinitely mysterious and complex, they made a strenuous concentration on language, form and techniques of presentation in novel creation. The elaborate psychological studies of characters in James's novels and the strong impressionistic presentation in Conrad's books exerted a strong influence over later writers.

The first three decades of this century were golden years of the modernist novel. The appalling shock of the First World War completely destroyed people's faith in the Victorian values; and the rise of the irrational philosophy and new science greatly incited writers to make new explorations on human natures and human relationships. In stimulating the technical innovations of novel creation, the theory of the Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis played a particularly important role. With the notions that multiple levels of consciousness existed simultaneously in the human mind, that one's present was the sum of his past, present and future, that the whole truth about human beings existed in the unique, isolated, and private world of each individual, writers like Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf concentrated all their efforts to dig into the human consciousness. Thus, they had created unprecedented stream-of-consciousness novels, such as, *Pilgrimage* by Richardson, *Ulysses* by Joyce, and *Mrs Dalloway* by Woolf. One of the remarkable features of their writings was their continuous experimentation of new and sophisticated techniques in novel writing, which made tremendous impacts on the creation of both realistic and modernist novels of this century. James Joyce is the most outstanding stream-of-consciousness novelist; in *Ulysses*, his encyclopaedia-like masterpiece, Joyce presented a fantastic picture of the disjointed, illogical, illusory, and mental-emotional life of Leopold Bloom, who became the symbol of everyman in the post-World-