

British Literature:
A Brief History

& *Selected
Readings*

英国文学史概述
及作品选读

□ 主编 刘滢波



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内容简介

本书是根据《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的课程设置而编写的。编者充分考虑到我国英语专业高年级学生的兴趣和爱好,简要介绍英国文学历史阶段的特点以及重要作家和作品。从早期英国文学到20世纪著名作家的著名作品中精选出影响大、流传广、并经过时间考验而脍炙人口的经典片段,引导学生从阅读原著入手,培养学生对文学作品的阅读、赏析能力,进而感受英国文学丰富的思想内涵和人文精神,并在此基础上提高学生的人文素质。

本书共分七章,每章由概述、作家简介、作品概要、原著选读、注释、赏析点评和思考题等部分组成。

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前言

英国文学源远流长，在世界文学中占有重要的地位，为人类文明进步做出了重要贡献。

按照教育部《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的要求，英语专业本科高年级均开设了英国文学课程。对该课程的教学重点，不同学校、不同教师的认识不尽相同。有的偏重文学史的讲解，有的偏重作品阅读，有的则史和作品兼顾。对于作品的取舍，不同教材选择的标准也大相径庭。有的从盎格鲁·撒克逊时期文学选起，有的则从乔叟选起，有的则把重点放在现当代名作上。本书根据《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的课程设置，充分考虑我国英语专业高年级学生的兴趣和爱好，简要介绍英国文学历史阶段的特点以及重要作家和作品，以期使学生对英国文学有总体的认识和把握。本书从早期英国文学到20世纪著名作家浩如烟海的作品中选择影响大、流传广、经过时间考验而脍炙人口的经典片段，引导学生从阅读原著入手，培养学生对文学作品的阅读、赏析能力，进而感受英国文学丰富的思想内涵和人文精神，并在此基础上提高学生的人文素质。

本书共分七章，每章由概述、作家简介、作品概要、原著选读、注释、赏析点评和思考题等部分组成。编写力求简明扼要，重点突出，文字浅显易懂。

本书由华南理工大学刘涪波教授组织编写，西南大学申劲松、王永梅、徐安泉、易晴，玉溪师范学院杨云红，西华师范大学杜平等参加了编写工作。各章分工如下：

第一章：徐安泉（概述）、刘涪波（Chaucer）

第二章：刘涪波（概述、Shakespeare、Jonson、Marlowe）、易晴（Bacon）

第三章：刘涪波

第四章：王永梅

第五章：申劲松（概述、Wordsworth、Coleridge、Byron、Shelley、Keats、Austen）、杨云红（Scott）

第六章：杨云红（概述、Thackeray、Dickens、Browning、Charlotte Brontë、Emily Brontë、Eliot、Arnold、Wilde）、刘涪波（Hardy）

第七章：徐安泉（概述）、刘涪波（Lawrence、Conrad）、申劲松（Shaw、Woolf）、杨云红（Conrad、Yeats、Joyce）、杜平（Eliot）

刘涪波负责全书的设计，并对全稿进行了认真、细致的审读和修改。高等教育出版社外语出版中心的编辑对本书的编写和出版给予了大力支持，在此谨致以衷心的感谢。由于编者水平有限，书中一定还存在缺点和不足，恳望同行专家和广大读者不吝指正。

本书可作为英语专业高年级英国文学课程教材，也可作为非英语专业大学英语提高阶段文学课教材。

编者

2009年9月

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Chapter 1

Early and Medieval English Literature

The Roman Conquest (55 BC–410 AD)

Before the middle of the first century BC, the aboriginal Celtic tribes lived in what is now Britain. In 55 BC, Roman troops led by Julius Caesar invaded Britain. Then in 43 AD, Britain was invaded by an army under Roman Emperor Claudius and became a province of the Roman Empire. The Romans built roads, walls, garrisons and villas, and it was during the Roman occupation that London was founded. The Roman occupation also brought Christianity to Britain. Nearly 400 years of Roman rule in Britain ended in 410 AD as the Empire's declining fortunes led to the withdrawal of Roman troops.

The Anglo-Saxon Period (410–1066 AD)

After the withdrawal of the Roman troops, a tribe of Teutons, called Jutes, landed on the Isle of Thanet. Another two Teutonic tribes of the Angles and the Saxons followed. The Jutes occupied Kent in the southeast; the Saxons Wessex, Essex and Sussex; and the Angles the east Midland, enslaving some of the native inhabitants while driving others to the hills north and west. They established small kingdoms and wars broke out among them. The Angles gradually spread over the east midland and flourished. They occupied more land and built the kingdom of the East Angles. More such kingdoms were built and by the 7th century these small kingdoms were combined to form a single larger kingdom: England. People in the kingdom were called English. The Anglo-Saxon dialect is what we now call Old English.

For more than 100 years beginning in the late 8th century, the Danes, or the

Vikings, invaded and occupied large areas of north-eastern England. In the late 9th century, King Alfred the Great of the Kingdom of Wessex in the south led the Anglo-Saxon kings against the invading Danes and the invaders were driven out by the united forces.

The Danes invaded England again in the early 11th century. They conquered and ruled England for a quarter of a century. Then, following the expulsion of the Danes, the Normans invaded England in 1066. They defeated the English troops and William, the Duke of Normandy, was crowned as King of England, which marked the end of the Anglo-Saxon period and the beginning of the "Norman Conquest".

During the Anglo-Saxon period, literature began to flourish. The kingdom of Wessex, with King Alfred as the guiding spirit, became the centre of learning. After he won decisive battles against the Danes, his kingdom enjoyed a period of comparative peace. He decided to teach his subjects to read and write in their own language. He had a number of Latin books of education value translated into the Saxon dialect. He also launched the project of compiling *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

The greatest literary achievement during this period is *Beowulf*, a 3183-line alliterative verse. This poem probably existed in its oral form as early as the 6th century, but it was not written down until the 7th or 8th century. The whole epic is divided into two parts with an interpolation in between and tells of two major events in the life of Beowulf. The first event takes place when Beowulf in his youth fights and kills Grendel, a monster who has been attacking Heorot, the hall of the Danish king Hrothgar. He then kills Grendel's mother who comes to avenge her son. The second event takes place many years later when Beowulf, now king of the Geats, fights a dragon that has attacked his people.

Beowulf is the most important poem in Old English and it is the first major poem in European vernacular language. It towers above all other literary works written in Anglo-Saxon.

The Norman Conquest (1066–1350 AD)

The Norman Conquest of Anglo-Saxon England under William began with the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The conquest was completed with the defeat of the English troops, William's claim to the succession to the English throne, and his suppression of the English revolts.

The Norman Conquest accelerated the development of feudalism in England.

Only after the Conquest did England truly become a feudalist society. With the king as their head, feudal noblemen, barons or vassals, knights, bishops, archbishops, abbots and the like formed a ruling class of the church and the court. They held most land, great wealth and supreme power. The peasants toiled and paid heavy rents in grain, service, or cash to the gentle folks, which left them little to sustain themselves with. No one dared to say or do anything against the feudal order. The few who dared were condemned as heretics and severely punished, usually burnt alive.

In the 1330s, the war between England and France called for a heavier burden to be placed upon the common people. From 1348 to the 1350 a disease known as Black Death swept over the country and reduced the whole population by almost a third. In 1351 the ruling class passed the Statute of Labourers in parliament to compel homeless and landless peasants under sixty to work at low wages. Peasants who refused to do so were arrested or declared outlaws. In 1379 a poll-tax was imposed upon the peasantry, requiring four pence from every poor peasant, and the next year the tax was raised to three times as much. The mounting feudal oppression completely pauperised the peasants and inevitably led to their revolts, one of which was the peasant's uprising in 1381. All this led to the decline of English feudalism.

The three centuries following the Norman Conquest saw the introduction of medieval French culture, including French modes of customs, manners, literature, and especially the Norman-French language into England. For almost two hundred years after 1066, three languages — native English, Norman-French, and Latin, existed side by side. The native English language, which descended from Anglo-Saxon or Old English, was the common speech of the majority of the ordinary people, while the Norman lords and courtiers used French. Latin was used among the scholars in churches and courts. In the course of exchange of cultures the English language underwent extensive changes. Thousands of words were borrowed, many old inflectional forms of native English words disappeared, and the formal grammar was considerably simplified. The language in this transitional stage from Old English to Modern English is generally known as Middle English.

During the Middle Ages, the English language developed into the dominant language in the country. In Middle English literature, from the mid-11th century to the mid-14th century folk literature and religious writings developed. However, the most prevailing kind of literature was the romantic verse and prose. The romance or medieval stories usually tell the adventures of some hero of chivalry. The heroes are the knights, usually of noble birth, who are described as skilled men in the use

of weapons, riding forth to seek adventures, taking part in tournaments, or fighting for their lords in battles. The qualities the knights were expected to have included courage, honour, courtesy, devotion to the weak and helpless and to the service of women. Furthermore, their loyalty to the church and the king was the cornerstone of feudal morality.

Most of the English romances deal with three major themes: "The Matter of Britain", which is about the adventures of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table; "The Matter of France", which is about Emperor Charlemagne and his peers; and "The Matter of Rome", which is about tales of antiquity, from the Trojan War to the feats of Alexander the Great. Another feature of Middle English literature is that most of the English romances of the time were metrical, meter and rhyme having been adopted from French poetry to take the place of alliteration in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Among the English common people there were numerous ballads which are the most important parts of English folk literature.

The most important literary contribution of this period is Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which is a collection of twenty-four stories. Every figure in the novel is described vividly and Chaucer succeeds in linking their narrated stories to the whole work. Through the stories, Chaucer praised man's energy, intellect, wit and love of life. He also exposed, satirised and lashed the evils of the time. He was the first great poet to write in the English language and exerted great influence on making the dialect of London the standard for modern English speech. Because of all this, Chaucer is considered as the "father of English poetry".

Geoffrey Chaucer

(c. 1343 – c. 1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in about 1343 in London, though the exact date and location of his birth are not known and there are few records of his early life and education.

The scanty records show that he joined the army and took part in the Hundred Years' War in 1359. He was captured in 1360, but Edward III paid some ransom for his release.

Around 1366, he married Philippa (de) Roet, a lady-in-waiting to Edward III's queen. For the next ten years or so, he was sent as an envoy to the Continent on diplomatic missions. It is generally agreed that, during his trips to Genoa and Florence in 1373, he came into contact with medieval Italian poetry, the forms and stories of which he would use later in his works.

Chaucer obtained the job of Comptroller of the Customs for the port of London in 1374, which he continued for twelve years. His life goes undocumented for much of the next ten years, but it is widely believed that most of his famous works were written or begun during this period. He is thought to have started writing *The Canterbury Tales* in the early 1380s.

While still working as comptroller, Chaucer appeared to have moved to Kent and became a Member of Parliament for Kent in 1386.

Although Chaucer is remembered for *The Canterbury Tales*, he had in fact written many other works, such as *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, *Anelida and Arcite*, *Parlement of Foules*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *The Legend of Good Women*.

Chaucer's works can be divided into three periods: French period, Italian period and English period, each corresponding to a stage in his life. The first period consists of translations from French, such as *The Romaunt of the Rose*. *Troilus and Criseyde* is a second-period work with its reliance on the forms of Italian poetry. It is *The Canterbury Tales* of the third period, wherein he focuses on English subjects, that has cemented his reputation. Sometimes called the father of English literature, Chaucer is credited as the first author to demonstrate the artistic legitimacy of the vernacular English language. Later poets would follow him and emulated his use of rhymed lines in accentual rhythm, instead of the alliterative tradition of earlier verse.

There is no firm evidence for the date of Chaucer's death, but he is believed to have died of unknown causes on 25 October, 1400, and was buried in Westminster Abbey in London. In 1556, his remains were transferred to a more ornate tomb, making him the first writer interred in the area known as Poets' Corner.



The Canterbury Tales**Synopsis**

The story takes place on an April day. A group of English pilgrims meet outside a tavern in Southwark near London. The innkeeper, Harry Bailey, joins them and they set out to Canterbury Cathedral to pay their respects to the tomb of Saint Thomas Becket. The pilgrims are from all classes, and they are described in detail. The innkeeper suggests that the group ride together and entertain each other by telling stories. The pilgrims all agree to tell two stories on the way to Canterbury, and two on the way back. Whoever tells the best story, as judged by the innkeeper, will have his supper paid for by the rest of the pilgrims. The knight is the first to tell his story and the other pilgrims follow to tell their stories. However, not all of the pilgrims have told their tales, and no winner is determined by the innkeeper by the time the story ends.

Selected Reading**The Prologue**

When in April the sweet showers fall
 And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
 The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
 As brings about the engendering of the flower,
 When also Zephyrus¹ with his sweet breath
 Exhales an air in every grove and heath
 Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
 His half-course in the sign of the *Ram* has run,
 And the small fowl are making melody
 That sleep away the night with open eye

1 Zephyrus: the west wind.

(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
 Then people long to go on pilgrimages
 And palmers long to seek the stranger strands²
 Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,³
 And specially, from every shire's end
 Of England, down to Canterbury they wend⁴
 To seek the holy blissful martyr,⁵ quick
 To give his help to them when they were sick.

It happened in that season that one day
 In Southwark, at *The Tabard*, as I lay
 Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
 For Canterbury, most devout at heart,
 At night there came into that hostelry⁶
 Some nine and twenty in a company
 Of sundry folk happening then to fall
 In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all
 That towards Canterbury meant to ride.
 The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;
 They made us easy, all was of the best.
 And, briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
 I'd spoken to them all upon the trip
 And was soon one with them in fellowship,
 Pledged to rise early and take the way
 To Canterbury, as you heard me say.

But none the less, while I have time and space,
 Before my story takes a further pace,
 It seems a reasonable thing to say
 What their condition⁷ was, the full array⁸
 Of each of them, as it appeared to me,

-
- 2 the stranger strands: the shores which they have not visited.
 3 hallowed in sundry lands: honoured as holy persons in different places.
 4 wend: (archaic) go.
 5 the holy blissful martyr: referring to St. Thomas Becket.
 6 hostelry: inn.
 7 condition: position, rank.
 8 the full array: the complete outfit.

According to profession and degree,⁹
And what apparel¹⁰ they were riding in;
And at a Knight I therefore will begin.

....

There also was a *Nun*, a Prioress,¹¹
Her way of smiling very simple and coy.
Her greatest oath was only 'By St Loy!'
And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.
And well she sang a service, with a fine
Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,
And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;¹²
French in the Paris style she did not know.
At meat her manners were well taught withal;
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
But she could carry a morsel up and keep
The smallest drop from falling on her breast.
For courtliness she had a special zest,
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean
That not a trace of grease was to be seen
Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,
She reached a hand sedately for the meat.
She certainly was very entertaining,
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining
To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,
A stately bearing fitting to her place,
And to seem dignified in all her dealings.
As for her sympathies and tender feelings,
She was so charitably solicitous
She used to weep if she but saw a mouse

9 degree: position, rank.

10 apparel: clothing.

11 Prioress: a nun superior to a convent.

12 Stratford-atte-Bowe: a monastery near London.

Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding.
 And she had little dogs she would be feeding
 With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread.
 And bitterly she wept if one were dead
 Or someone took a stick and made it smart;
 She was all sentiment and tender heart.
 Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,
 Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;
 Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,
 Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread
 Almost a span across the brows, I own;
 She was indeed by no means undergrown.
 Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm.
 She wore a coral trinket on her arm,
 A set of beads, the gaudies tricked¹³ in green,
 Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen
 On which there first was graven a crowned A,
 And lower, *Amor vincit omnia*.¹⁴

....

A worthy *woman* from beside *Bath* city
 Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity.
 In making cloth she showed so great a bent¹⁵
 She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.¹⁶
 In all the parish not a dame dared stir
 Towards the altar steps in front of her,
 And if indeed they did, so wrath was she
 As to be quite put out of charity.¹⁷
 Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;¹⁸
 I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
 The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.

13 tricked: decorated.

14 *Amor vincit omnia*: (Lat.) Love conquers all.

15 bent: a natural skill.

16 Ypres and of Ghent: two Belgian cities known for cloth-making in Chaucer's time.

17 put out of charity: put out of temper.

18 ground: textual.