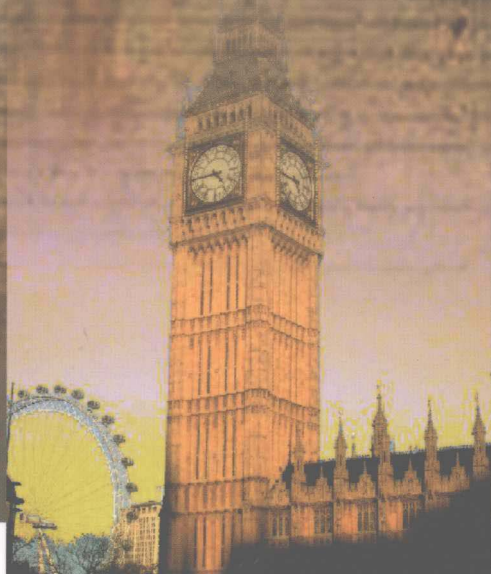


Selected Readings in British *United States* Literature

主编 王蕾 陆燕敏

英国文学选读



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前 言

《英国文学选读》是本科生英语拓展教程的组成部分,供非英语专业本科生公共选修课程教学使用,也可用作广大英语爱好者获取英美文学阅读能力的辅助教材。

本册教材编写的目的是为了全面贯彻教育部于2004年颁布的《大学英语课程教学要求(试行)》的教学方针和教学要求,适应新世纪全国大学英语教学改革的需要,以培养学生的英语综合应用能力,同时增强学生自主学习能力,提高其文化素养和文学鉴赏能力,培养社会需要的全面发展的高素质人才。

英美文学选读系列教材,包括《英国文学选读》和《美国文学选读》两册书。

本册教材特色:

1. 覆盖面广,脉络清晰。本书以文学史为线索,介绍了从14世纪到第二次世界大战结束后的英国文学状况,涉及了20余位主要作家及其代表作品30余篇,目的是使学生通过阅读此书对英国文学有一个粗线条的认识与把握。

2. 结构合理,重点突出。本书每章节主要内容包括不同历史时期文学综述、主要作家(附照片)生平和作品简介、作品情节简介、作品赏析、作品选读(含汉语译文)以及讨论题目。重点突出作品赏析与讨论部分,使学生通过对作家代表作的学习,对英国不同历史时期的主要文学流派、作家写作风格、写作特色及其语言特色有一定的了解。

3. 浅显易懂,有利自学。考虑到公共选修课程以及广大英语爱好者的学习特点,本书在每篇作品后附有英文注释,并收录了国内一些优秀译作者的部分汉语译文(节选),便于不同英语水平的学生进行课下自主学习,加深对作品的理解。因不便和译者取得联系,我们在此请译者谅解,关于版权及著作权问题,请相关人员直接与编者联系。

本书由天津医科大学、天津理工大学、天津城市建设学院、天津外国语学院、天津师范大学、天津中医药大学、天津商业大学、中国人民解放军军事交通学院等高校教师参编,其所在院校外语系(部)领导均对此书给予了很大的关注与支持。在天津城市建设学院任教的美籍教师 Paul Ramsey 先生对教材的部分内容,特别是教材中的 Appreciation 部分认真作了审校。本书还承蒙在天津医科大学工作的英籍教师 Linda Perkins 女士和美籍专家 Wesley Daniels 先生的指导与帮助,谨此一并致谢。

由于编者水平有限,书中疏漏在所难免,欢迎读者批评指正。

编者

2007年8月

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Chapter One Early and Medieval English Literature

I Historical Background

The present English race has gradually shaped itself out of several distinct peoples, which successively occupied or conquered the island of Great Britain. The earliest one of those peoples which need to be mentioned belonged to the Celtic family who lived in what is now Britain before the middle of the first century B. C. .

1. The Roman Conquest (55B. C. – 410 A. D. .)

In 55 B. C. , Roman troops led by Julius Caesar invaded Britain. In 78 A. D. , Britain was completely subjugated to the Roman Empire. For over three hundred years, from the first century A. D. to the beginning of the fifth, the island was a Roman province, with Latin as the language of the ruling class of Roman immigrants, who introduced Roman civilization and later Christianity, to the Britons. The Romans also built roads, walls, garrisons and villas, and the Celts became either slaves or cultivators of the land. During the period of conquest and military campaigns, Britain was a military stronghold of the Roman army, but the people of Britain benefited from Roman technology and cultural influences. The native tribes became familiar with many features of Roman civilization, including its legal and political systems, architecture, and engineering. Archaeological evidence from the occupation period indicates that the Romans brought their entire culture to Britain. In general, however, only the native nobility, the wealthier classes, and the town residents accepted the Roman language and way of life, while the Britons in outlying regions retained their native culture. At the end of the 3rd century, the Roman army began to withdraw from Britain to defend other parts of the Roman Empire. In 410, when the Visigoths invaded Rome, the last of the Roman legions was withdrawn from the island. Celtic culture again became predominant, and Roman civilization in Britain rapidly

disintegrated. During the Germanic invasions in the 5th and 6th centuries, Roman influence virtually disappeared.

2. The Anglo-Saxon Period (410 – 1066 A.D.)

In the 4th century A. D, after the withdrawal of the Roman troops, a tribe of Teutons, called Jutes, landed on the Isle of Thanet. Another two Teutonic tribes, the Angles and Saxons, followed. In general the Angles settled in the east and the north and the Saxons in the south, while the less numerous Jutes, the first to come, in Kent, soon ceased to count in the movement. In this way there naturally came into existence a group of separate and rival kingdoms, which when they were not busy with the Britons were often at war with each other. The resistance of the Britons to the Anglo-Saxon advance was often brave and sometimes temporarily successful. Early in the 6th century, for example, they won at Mount Badon in the south a great victory, later connected in tradition with the legendary name of King Arthur, which for many years gave them security from further aggressions. But in the long run their racial defects proved fatal; they were unable to combine in permanent and steady union, and tribe by tribe the newcomers drove them slowly back; until early in the 7th century the Anglo-Saxons were in possession of nearly all of what is now England. The Anglo-Saxon dialect is what we now call Old English. Many English words used today come from Old English, including man, woman, king, mother, etc. but old English was very different from modern English and only a few words can be easily recognized. Of the Roman and British civilization the Anglo-Saxons were ruthless destroyers. After they settled in England, they began to rebuild one for themselves. Thereafter the culture of the Angles and Saxons spread throughout the island. Perhaps the most important humanizing influence was the reintroduction of Christianity. In 597 Pope Gregory the Great sent St. Augustine to England to convert the Anglo-Saxons. Christian missionaries were sent from Kent in southern England and from Ireland to consolidate religious control of Britain. Churches were established and monks became the most learned in the country. Heathen mythology was gradually replaced by Christian religion. The conversion of the people was completed in 731, according to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

Beginning from the late 8th century, the Danes, or the Vikings, invaded England, at first along the eastern coast, but later they threatened to overrun the whole country. In the late 9th century, King Alfred the Great (849 – 901 A.D.) of the Kingdom of Wessex led the English people to fight against the invaders. The Danes were driven back. But in the early 11th century they invaded England again. Before they were expelled, the Danes conquered and ruled parts of England for a quarter of a century (1017 – 1042 A.D.).

3. The Norman Conquest (1066 – 1350 A.D.)

Following the expulsion of the Danes, the Normans from the northern France invaded England. In the year 1066, at the battle of Hastings, the Normans headed by William, Duke of Normandy, defeated the Anglo-Saxons. William claimed to the succession to the English throne, which marked the end of the Anglo-Saxon period and the beginning of the “Norman Conquest”.

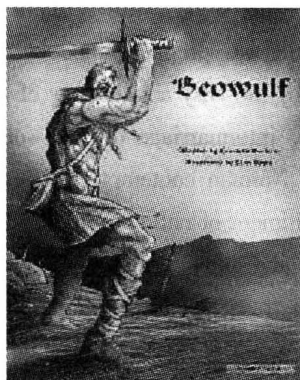
That their own race and identity were destined to be absorbed in those of the Anglo-Saxons could never have occurred to any of the Normans who stood with William at Hastings, and scarcely to any of their children. Yet this result was predetermined by the stubborn tenacity and superiority of the conquered people and by the easy adaptability of the Norman temperament. Racially, and to a less extent socially, intermarriage did its work, and that within a very few generations. Little by little, also, Norman contempt and Saxon hatred were softened into tolerance, and at last even into a sentiment of national unity. This sentiment was finally to be confirmed by the loss of Normandy and other French possessions of the Norman-English kings in the 13th century, a loss which transformed England from a province of the Norman Continental empire and of a foreign nobility into an independent country, and further by the wars (“The Hundred Years’ War”) which England-Norman nobility and Saxon yeomen fighting together—carried on in France in the 14th century.

The Norman Conquest saw the introduction of medieval French culture, including French modes of custom manners, literature, and especially the Norman-French language into English on a large scale. The most general immediate result of the Conquest was to make England a trilingual country, where Latin, French, and native English were spoken separately side by side for almost two hundred years after 1066. Latin was used among the scholars in churches and courts. The introduction of the richer Latin culture resulted, in the latter half of the 12th century, at the court of Henry II, in a brilliant outburst of Latin literature. In England, as well as in the rest of Western Europe, Latin long continued to be the language of religious and learned writing—down to the 16th century or even later. French was introduced by the Conquest as the language of the governing and upper social class, and in it also during the next three or four centuries a considerable body of literature was produced. The native English language, which descended from Anglo-Saxon or Old English, was the common speech of the overwhelming majority of the ordinary people. In the exchange of cultures throughout some four centuries the English language gradually underwent profound and extensive changes. It was influenced by French and also Latin in vocabulary and pronunciation. Not only were thousands of words borrowed in the course of

time, but also 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 (from about 1300 to 1500 A.D.) is known as Middle English.

II Literary Review

1. Old English Poetry and *Beowulf*



Before the Christian conversion, there had been no books in Britain. Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry was part of an oral tradition. The earliest forms of literature, which are still preserved as the relics of the Anglo-Saxons are poems originating from the collective efforts of the people. These poems or songs are partly historical stories and partly legendary stories passed around orally from generation to generation by unknown scop and gleemen. They were fascinated with the conflict between the heroic code of their pagan ancestors, which stressed blood revenge. Formulaic

phrases, irony, and harsh struggles characterize Old English poetry.

Not much Anglo-Saxon poetry of the pagan period has come down to us. By far the most important remaining example is the epic *Beowulf*, a 3182 – line alliterative verse. It has generally been considered the most monumental work in English poetry of the Anglo-Saxon period, and the oldest surviving epic in British literature.

Beowulf probably existed in its oral form as early as the 6th century, about four centuries before the Norman Conquest. Its author is unknown and believed to have been a medieval poet or scop. The poem was probably carried from generation to generation through a spoken retelling, as Old English verse was traditionally heard rather than read, its audience being mostly illiterate. It was written down in the early 8th century though the extant manuscript, discovered in 1705, dated back to the 10th century. The text of *Beowulf* exists in just one manuscript copy, which rests in the British Library in London.

The poem describes the adventures of a great Scandinavian warrior of the 6th century. The story is about the life of Anglo-Saxons before they came to England, but the poem itself was written down after the conversion of the Britain to Christianity. It seems that *Beowulf* tells of a period in the midst of religious change being neither entirely pagan, nor fully Christian. It has also been suggested that the monks who copied *Beowulf* may have also

inserted certain degrees of Christian morality into its text. Therefore, there is the mixing in the poem of pagan elements with Christian colouring.

The hero of the poem is Beowulf, who is a kinsman of Hrothgar, King of the Danes. King Hrothgar enjoys a prosperous and successful reign. He builds a great mead-hall, called Heorot, where his warriors can gather to drink, receive gifts from their lord, and listen to stories sung by the scop, or bards. But the jubilant noise from Heorot angers Grendel, a horrible demon who lives in the swamplands of Hrothgar's kingdom. Grendel terrorizes the Danes every night, killing them and defeating their efforts to fight back. The Danes suffer many years of fear, danger, and death at the hands of Grendel. Eventually, however, a young Geatish warrior named Beowulf hears of Hrothgar's plight. Inspired by the challenge, Beowulf sails to Denmark with a small company of men, determined to defeat Grendel. Hrothgar accepts Beowulf's offer to fight Grendel and holds a feast in the hero's honor. At night, Grendel arrives. Beowulf fights him unarmed, proving himself stronger than the demon, who is terrified. As Grendel struggles to escape, Beowulf tears the monster's arm off. Mortally wounded, Grendel slinks back into the swamp to die. Hrothgar showers Beowulf with gifts and treasure at a feast in his honor. But another threat is approaching. Grendel's mother, a swamp-hag who lives in a desolate lake, comes to Heorot seeking revenge for her son's death. She murders Aeschere, one of Hrothgar's most trusted advisers, before slinking away. To avenge Aeschere's death, the company travels to the murky swamp, where Beowulf dives into the water and fights Grendel's mother in her underwater lair. He kills her with a sword forged for a giant, then, finding Grendel's corpse, decapitates it and brings the head as a prize to Hrothgar. The Danish countryside is now purged of its treacherous monsters. The Danes are again overjoyed, and Beowulf's fame spreads across the kingdom. Beowulf departs after a sorrowful goodbye to Hrothgar, who has treated him like a son. He returns to Geatland, where he and his men are reunited with their king and queen, Hygelac and Hygd; to whom Beowulf recounts his adventures in Denmark. Beowulf then hands over most of his treasure to Hygelac, who, in turn, rewards him. In time, Hygelac is killed in a war, Beowulf ascends to the throne of the Geats. He rules wisely for fifty years, bringing prosperity to Geatland. When Beowulf is an old man, however, a thief disturbs a barrow, or mound, where a great dragon lies guarding a horde of treasure. Enraged, the dragon emerges from the barrow and begins unleashing fiery destruction upon the Geats. Sensing his own death approaching, Beowulf goes to fight the dragon. He succeeds in killing the beast, but at a heavy cost. The dragon bites Beowulf in the neck, and its fiery venom kills him moments after their encounter. According to Beowulf's wishes, they burn their departed king's body on a huge funeral pyre and then bury

him with a massive treasure in a barrow overlooking the sea. The poem ends with their praise of Beowulf as a great king.

2. Middle English Literature

The language and literature of the Middle Ages is marked by increasing influence from Europe, particularly from France, due to the arrival of the Norman ruling class at the end of the 11th century. In fact, Middle English literature is a combination of French and Anglo-Saxon elements. It may be divided roughly into Religious and Secular. But it must be observed that religious writings were far more important as literature during the Middle Ages than in more recent times, and the separation between religious and secular less distinct than at present.

(1) Religious

Because the church had a virtual monopoly of literature during much of the Middle Ages. By far the largest proportion of surviving Middle English literature is religious. The forms of the religious literature were largely the same as in the previous period. There were paraphrases of many parts of the Bible, lives of saints, in both verse and prose, and various other miscellaneous works. Perhaps worthy of special mention among single productions is the *Cursor Mundi* (Surveyor of the World), an early 14th century poem of twenty-four thousand lines, relating universal history from the beginning, on the basis of the Biblical narrative.

(2) Secular

In secular literature the variety was greater than in religious. But the chief form of secular literature during the period was the romance, especially the metrical (verse) romance. Romance was introduced into English from France in the second half of the 13th and 14th centuries. As a literary form, Romance means a long composition in verse or prose form dealing with the life and adventures of some hero of Chivalry. The heroes were the knights, usually of noble birth, who were described as the skilled men in the use of weapons, riding forth to seek adventures, taking part in tournament, or fighting for their lords in the battle. The qualities the knights were expected to have were courage, honour, courtesy, devotion to the weak and helpless and to the service of women. In subject matters, the great majority of romances deals with three major themes: "The Matter of Britain", about the adventure of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table; "The Matter of France", about stories concerning Emperor Charlemagne and his peers; and "The Matter of Rome", about tales concerning Trojan War and Alexander the Great. Of all the romances the Arthurian are by far the most important. They belong peculiarly to English literature,

because they are based on traditions of British history, but they have assumed a very prominent place in the literature of the whole western world. There are many cycles of Arthurian Romances, among which *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in alliterative verse is the culmination. This is a brief and carefully constructed work of an unknown but very real poetic artist. The story consists of two old folk-tales, finely united in the form of an Arthurian romance and so treated as to bring out all the better side of knightly feeling, with which the author is in charming sympathy. The typical romances were composed by the professional minstrels, some of whom, as in Anglo-Saxon times, were richly supported and rewarded by kings and nobles, while others still wandered about the country, always welcome in the manor-houses. So romance, as a form of literature, is the upper class literature. For English common people there were numerous ballads. These story-telling songs are the most important parts of English folk literature.

Awareness of a unique English literature did not actually exist until the end of the war begun by Edward III in 1336 to enforce his claim to the French throne. Then the linguistic, political, and cultural climate in Britain by the 1360s allowed for a “flowering” of Middle English literature. The most prominent literary figure in the Middle English period is Geoffrey Chaucer, “the father of English poetry”. His decision to emulate French and Italian poetry in his own vernacular prompted a change in the status of English. Through his masterpiece *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer proved the English language is a beautiful language and can be easily handled to express different moods.

Geoffrey Chaucer

(1340? —1400)



*Of Chaucer truly I know not whether to marvel more,
either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that
we in this clear age walk so stumblingly after him.*

— Philip Sidney

Life and Works

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340? – 1400), “the Father of English Poetry”, is the most prominent literary figure in Middle English period.

Chaucer was born around 1340. Historians are uncertain about his exact date of birth. Geoffrey's well-to-do parents, John Chaucer who was a prosperous wine merchant and Agnes Copton, possessed several buildings in the vintage quarter in London. Not much is known about Geoffrey's school career. He is said to have studied at Oxford and Cambridge, and must have had some education in Latin and Greek. Out of school he went on as a page in the household of Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster. (She is the wife of Lionel, Earl of Ulster, second son of Edward III.) In September 1359 King Edward and his sons invaded France with a large expeditionary force. Chaucer accompanied the English army to France, and was taken prisoner. In March 1360, he was ransomed for 16 pounds. In October 1360 peace negotiations were arranged at Calais. Prince Lionel paid Chaucer for carrying letters from Calais to England. These diplomatic errands and messenger services were the first of many journeys. After he returned to England, he married Philippa Roet, a maid of honour to the queen and relative of a noble man, who became his patron. Chaucer was first recorded as a member of the royal household on 20 June 1367 when he was granted a royal annuity for life of 20 pounds. Chaucer traveled to Northern France and served in the army of John of Gaunt in 1369, and traveled to Italy on a diplomatic mission in 1372. He also went to Genoa to establish an English port for Genoese trade and to Florence to negotiate a loan for the King. In 1373 he was appointed Controller of the Customs for hides, skins and wool at the port of London. As a member of the king's household, Chaucer was sent on diplomatic errands throughout Europe. From all these activities, he came into contact with the new Renaissance trends in Italian literature, and gained knowledge of society that made it possible to write *The Canterbury Tales*. In his life Chaucer undertook a great variety of occupations, as courtier, soldier, ambassador, legislator, and burgher of London and was thus familiar with the lives of the various classes. Chaucer died in October 1400 and was buried in Westminster Abbey in London. He was the first of those that are gathered in what we now know as the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey. In his day, Chaucer was not known as a writer but as an accomplished man of affairs who wrote poetry in his spare time.

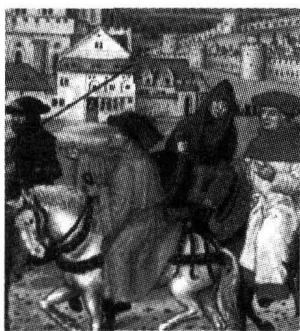
Chaucer's works are roughly divided into three periods, corresponding to the three periods of his life.

The first period extends from 1360 to 1372, when Chaucer wrote under the influence of French poetry of the Middle Ages and translated French works, such as *Roman de la Rose*. The outstanding poem of this period is *The Book of the Duchess* (1369), which is about the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster. In the second period, from 1372 to 1386 he wrote under the influence of the early Renaissance in Italy. In 1380 Chaucer wrote *The Parliament of Fowls*. The most outstanding work in this period is *Troilus and Criseyde* (from

1381 to 1386). The historical event underlying this poem was the Greek-Trojan war recorded by Homer in *his Iliad*. The last period covers the last fifteen years of the poet's life. In this period he produced works of full maturity free from any dominant foreign influence. His masterwork, *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400) was composed during this period.

The Canterbury Tales

Brief Introduction



Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories in a frame story, between 1387 and 1400. *The Canterbury Tales* has a general prologue and twenty-four stories that are connected by “links”. The General Prologue is the key to *The Canterbury Tales*. It explains the occasion for the narration of the tales and gives a description of the twenty-nine pilgrims who gathered at Tabard Inn in Southwark, a suburb of London. On a spring day in April—sometime in the waning years of the 14th century—twenty-nine travelers set out for Canterbury on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas Beckett. They are representatives of various walks of life and social groups with various interests, tastes, and characters. First there rides a “worthy knight”, just back from the war. His dress and bearing are very plain and modest. This is Chaucer's ideal of a national champion. The knight's son, a gay young squire, thinks more of his dress and of song-making than of other chivalrous duties. He prefers the court to the battlefield. After them rides the knight's attendant, a yeoman in Lincoln green, with a “mighty Bow” in his hand. Then comes a Prioress who weeps when she sees a mouse caught in a trap, but turns her head when she sees a beggar in his “ugly rags”. Among the other pilgrims there is a monk, a summoner, a plowman, a miller, a merchant, a clerk, and an oft-widowed wife from Bath. The poet joins them. Travel is arduous and wearing. In order to kill time on the journey, the innkeeper suggests that each of them should tell two stories on the outward trip and two more on the way back. The best storyteller shall be treated with a free supper at the cost of all the rest. The innkeeper offers to go with them as their guide and judge.

According to the plan, there should be a total of 124 stories, but only 24 were written. Chaucer never finished his enormous project and even the completed tales were not finally revised. Scholars are uncertain about the order of the tales. As the printing press had yet to be invented when Chaucer wrote his works, *The Canterbury Tales* has been passed down in several handwritten manuscripts. The twenty-four stories are listed as follows:

- The Knight's Tale
- The Miller's Tale
- The Reeve's Tale
- The Cook's Tale
- The Man of Law's Tale
- The Wife of Bath's Tale
- The Friar's Tale
- The Summoner's Tale
- The Clerk's Tale
- The Merchant's Tale
- The Squire's Tale
- The Franklin's Tale
- The Physician's Tale
- The Pardoner's Tale
- The Shipman's Tale
- The Prioress's Tale
- The Tale of Sir Thopas
- The Tale of Melibee
- The Monk's Tale
- The Nun's Priest's Tale
- The Second Nun's Tale
- The Canon's Yeoman's Tale
- The Manciple's Tale
- The Parson's Tale

Appreciation

Chaucer's masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales* was written in the years between 1387 and 1400. It is one of the greatest and most ambitious works in English literature.

The Canterbury Tales gives a comprehensive picture of Chaucer's time. Because of Chaucer's broad and intimate acquaintance with persons in all walks of life, he acquired an