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# 英国经典诗歌阅读与欣赏 ——从多恩到彭斯

## THE PLEASURE OF POETRY

*Reading and Enjoying British Poetry  
from Donne to Burns*

[美] 尼古拉斯·H·纳尔逊 (NICOLAS H. NELSON) 著



中国比较文学研究  
CHINESE COMPARATIVE LITERATURE STUDIES

英国经典诗歌阅读与欣赏  
——从多恩到勃朗宁

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## 前言

对于诗歌，人们往往感到高深莫测，望而却步。然而，本书将消除人们的疑虑和畏惧，并引导人们在济慈所说的诗歌的“黄金国度”里畅游，证明诗歌并非想象的那样艰涩费解，相反，它将给人们带来无比的快乐。

本书介绍 17、18 世纪英国主要诗人和他们的某些代表作品。全书选择了这两个世纪的十五位诗人，包括多恩、琼生、弥尔顿和德莱顿等七位 17 世纪诗人，以及斯威夫特、蒲柏、约翰逊和彭斯等八位 18 世纪诗人，细致地赏析诗歌六十余首，其中主要是短诗，但也有某些长诗的名段。应当提及的是，在现代以前，英国诗歌出现过两个高潮，一个是伊丽莎白时代以莎士比亚为代表的鼎盛期，另一个是 19 世纪前三十年以浪漫主义诗人为代表的鼎盛期。显然，本书涉及从多恩直到彭斯的众多诗人，他们上承莎士比亚，下启华兹华斯，恰巧处于上述两个高潮之间。

那么，为什么要选择两个高潮之间的诗人及其作品？

首先，在 17 世纪上半叶，以多恩为代表的玄学派诗人占有主导地位。多恩既写世俗爱情诗，又写宗教抒情诗。他表现了一种反叛伊丽莎白时代“甜蜜”抒情诗的倾向。他标新立异，从科学和哲学等领域摄取意象，以“圆规”之类的奇思妙喻著称。他虽常用哲学思辨的方式，诗中充满悖论和夸张，但玄学派诗歌也并不总是带有说理辩论色彩的。

与多恩同时代的本·琼生就表现了不同的情趣，他写了大量抒情诗、格言诗和社交诗，讲究节制、典雅和音律，主张诗歌风格明快、准确、优美。骑士派诗人赫里克等都是琼生的追随者。自17世纪下半叶王朝复辟时期（1660—1700）到18世纪，先是出现了著名的讽刺诗，如德莱顿的《马克·弗莱克诺》和《押沙龙和阿奇托菲尔》，以及蒲柏的《夺发记》和《笨伯记》；后又出现了充满感伤情调的诗歌，如格雷的《墓园挽歌》和哥尔德斯密斯的《荒村》。同时也有其他类型的诗歌。18世纪末的彭斯整理或重写了大量乡间歌谣，采用贴近生活的普通语言来描写普通人的真实情感，加之他崇尚自由，歌颂美国革命，更为法国革命激动不已，所有这些都对浪漫主义诗人华兹华斯影响颇大，华兹华斯在《献给彭斯的儿子们》中就表达了他对彭斯的倾慕之情。可以看到，17、18世纪英国诗歌具有鲜明的多样性，总体上呈现出并不亚于其他时期英国诗歌的绚丽多彩。

其次，这两个世纪由于处在英国诗歌的两个高潮之间而没有受到足够的重视。但是，这个时期也不乏伟大的诗人，如清教诗人弥尔顿。他的史诗《失乐园》是英国文学中一部不朽的鸿篇巨制。弥尔顿和莎士比亚往往被视为英国文学史上的两座高峰。此外，马维尔的代表作《致他的娇羞的女友》融玄学派和古典主义诗风于一体，以极其夸张的手法表现了“及时行乐”（*carpe diem*）的传统主题，成为描写这一主题的诗歌中最负盛名的作品之一。蒲柏的《论批评》明确了批评家的含义，剖析了批评的弊病，回顾了欧洲文学批评的历史，为新古典主义在英国的发展奠定了基础，因此被艾狄生誉为一部“杰作”。这个时期还有些诗人，他们一生创作的诗歌虽然为数不多，却经常以一两首诗歌闻名于世，如格雷的《墓园挽歌》和哥尔德斯密斯的《荒村》都是脍炙人口的传世之作。彭斯的诗歌有很多都被谱成歌曲，如《往昔的时光》就唱遍了世界的每个角落。仅此而言，英国诗人有几位能与彭斯相比？可以说，17、18世纪的有些诗歌的确出类拔萃，独放异彩，可与鼎盛期的佳作媲美，也是一般诗选或文学教材必选的作品。

本书共分十三章，除第一章为导言外，其余各章大多以某位诗人的简介开始，接着就是对该诗人的五六首代表作品进行逐字逐句的分析，从中不仅可以看到诗人之间各种彼此不同或相互联系的艺术特色，而且可以领会这些特色的合力作用如何有助于使某些诗歌成为属于一

切时代的名篇佳作。

本书的宗旨在于多层次、多侧面地阐明诗歌所能提供给人的乐趣。然而，怎样才能获得读诗的乐趣？

第一章为诗的欣赏提供了必要的“工具”，即一般所谓诗的技巧。首先提到的是明喻、隐喻、拟人、夸张和典故之类的修辞手段。随后是诗中的人物或声音，即诗中的说话者究竟是诗人还是其他人。蒲柏在《爱洛莎致阿贝拉》中描述了12世纪的一位修女爱洛莎的故事。她偶然发现她在出家之前曾热恋过的阿贝拉给友人的一封有关他们之间爱情的书信，于是勾起了她对往日的回忆，并发现自己依然爱着他。蒲柏描绘了爱洛莎在上帝和情人之间进行选择的内心冲突。诗中涉及的人物不止一个，因为诗中既有爱洛莎和阿贝拉的书信往来，又有她在信中的回忆：他们往日的爱情、她父亲的反对、她和情人的分离以及他们遁入不同修道院后的生活。末尾，她还想象他们将在死亡中结合，并为后人和歌者所悼念。这一切，蒲柏都是采用第一人称加以叙述的，它表明一位诗人如何采用他人（甚至是女性）的声音。此外，还须注意诗的语言，如弥尔顿在《失乐园》中采用崇高的语言，而德莱顿在《马克·弗莱克诺》中则采用低俗的语言。运用语言创造的意象也是一个重要的手法，如赫伯特笔下的“圣坛”、“轱辘”、“衣领”和“镰刀”等意象。象征是一种特殊的意象。多恩在《1613年耶稣受难日：骑马西行》中描述他的肉体迎着落日走去，而他的灵魂则迎着朝阳而行：落日暗示死亡，朝阳象征再生。格雷采用历史名人作为象征，如《墓园挽歌》中采用汉普登、弥尔顿和克伦威尔等伟人的名字来说明在普通农民中也可能存在着类似的伟大人物，只是由于没有机会而湮没无闻。有时，多个象征被放在一起，进行扩展的、连续的描述，从而构成了寓言，如柯珀在《任务》第三卷中描绘自己痛苦的生活经历时，开头采用一只负伤的鹿作为他自己的象征，随后就将这个象征扩展为一个微型的寓言：那只鹿身中乱箭，奄奄一息，只求到远处树阴下静静死去，但一个遍体鳞伤的人（耶稣基督）发现了它，拔出他身上所有的箭，并为他治伤，叫他活下去。此外，作者也简述了诗在音韵格律方面的构成因素。只要了解和掌握这些“工具”，就为诗的欣赏做好了准备。所有这一切，作者都以易于理解的清晰的语言加以介绍，使人不再惧怕诗的“高深莫测”，并乐意运用必要的“工具”去阅读、理

解和欣赏英国诗坛巨擘。本书其余十二章都以上述的各种技巧，对每一首诗进行详尽而精彩的解说和赏析——这是贯穿始终的一条主线。

各章的标题非常醒目，点明了各个诗人及其作品的主要特点。譬如，多恩是“世俗和神圣之爱的诗人”，赫里克是“时间、爱情和欢乐的诗人”，赫伯特是“诗人和牧师”，弥尔顿是“英国清教诗人”，马维尔是“时间和历史的牧歌诗人”，斯威夫特是“讽刺家、宣教师和情人”，蒲柏是“讽刺家和说教者”，彭斯是“歌唱家、讽刺家和讲故事者”，等等。不仅标题表明了每个诗人的特殊性和复杂性，而且文中也提供了具体的实例予以说明。实际上，这些都是要求读者深入思考的。当然，本书很难包罗万象，面面俱到。因此，书后附有进一步阅读（Further Reading）的参考资料，包括书中所选诗人的其他代表作品和有关论著，并提出了有益的建议，以拓展阅读和欣赏的深度和广度。本书是一部开放性的著作，可以很方便地从任何一章进入，领略书中所选诗人及其诗歌的风采。

17、18 世纪的不少诗歌具有令人惊异的现代性。多恩长期以来几乎湮没无闻，但到了 20 世纪初，首先由格里尔森整理、校订和编辑出版了《多恩诗歌》（1912），后经艾略特等名人的极力推崇，人们似乎重新“发现”了多恩。多恩的“现代性”是显而易见的，他的玄学意象、语言和表现手法对 20 世纪现代主义诗歌产生了重大的影响。不仅如此，阅读这两百年间的诗歌，可以发现各种声音、事件、人物、意象和形式，其艺术感染力在今天也将会产生新的感觉。或许还可以发现两百多年前的英国诗人早就关注过仍使今人产生兴趣的东西，他们在处理同一主题时常常表现出互不相同思想和感情，有时还表达了极不寻常的见解。爱情、悼亡、探讨生与死等问题，也仍是为今人所关注的主题。在两个世纪以前的诗歌里，无疑也可以发现有些诗句早已绝妙地说出了今人同样希望表达而又不能有效地表达出来的思想，熟读或牢记这些诗句可能会得到更大的乐趣。本书作者建议，一首诗至少要阅读三遍：第一遍应注意发现诗歌的主题和诗人的态度。第二遍应理解诗人如何组织和发展这个主题。第三遍应比较清晰、准确地观察全诗，并做出整体的评价。粗读多首诗不如细读几首诗更能使人得到满足。耐心的细读必将带来巨大的报偿。诗歌能满足生活的需要，提供恒久的欢乐，给人慰藉、启迪和教益。诗歌是人类辉煌文明的体现，也是等待人们



前去挖掘的丰富多彩的宝藏。

作者尼古拉斯·H·纳尔逊(Nicolas H. Nelson)是美国印第安纳大学名誉教授。本书为第一版,于2006年问世。

胡家峦  
北京大学外国语学院英语系

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## Preface

This is a book for the general reader, or anyone who has an interest in poetry. It is meant to be an introduction to some of the finest poems written in England and Scotland in the two centuries between 1600 and 1800. Some of these can be difficult for modern readers, but, perhaps surprisingly, most are not. With a little help in understanding unfamiliar words and some distant events, these poems can live again for us today.

I have written this book, then, in the hope that readers may discover here some new delights in an older poetic tradition. I have chosen what I believe to be some of the most accessible and appealing poems from John Donne to Robert Burns, a period that is central to the growth and development of British poetry. I discuss them in some detail but without entering into the problems in the texts, the many allusions, or the often complicated sources. I have provided glosses in the margins for some of the words (underlined) that may be difficult for readers today. My goal is to convey something of the beauty and significance in the poems, along with pointing out various techniques the poets have adopted in composing them, without getting distracted by the issues in them. My hope is that readers will then proceed to read further in the poets of this period with increased confidence, pleasure, and understanding. The "Further Reading" section contains lists of other poems to sample by these poets, as well as books about them and the period in which they wrote. Exploring more deeply in poet or period can be continually rewarding.

My readings of these poems are meant as general guides and broadly suggestive explanations rather than as definitive or exhaustive accounts.

Readers will, of course, form their own interpretation of these poems and have their own favorites. This is as it should be. Poetry is much too personal to pronounce absolute determinations of worth or meaning. My goal is to remind those who have already read some poetry in the past of pleasures they may have experienced before but forgotten, or to introduce others who did not have such experience to some things they have missed. It is never too late to take up something new and discover enjoyment and satisfaction in it.

I take pleasure here in thanking all those teachers, authors, and students who have taught me along my way. I wish to cite especially Professors Phillip Harth and Howard Weinbrot of the University of Wisconsin for their exceptional scholarly and critical guidance. I also remember with gratitude the books, essays, lectures, and editions by such scholars as Cleanth Brooks and Maynard Mack, who join wisdom with insight, learning, and eloquence. And I must not neglect to mention some of the great teachers I had many years ago, from Frank O'Connor, the Irish short story writer whose classes in modern literature were a human delight, to Alvin Whitley, one of the great university lecturers in the Johnsonian tradition.

I wish also to thank Kathy Wendland, a wonderful editor and dear friend, for her careful reading of my manuscript and her many excellent suggestions. Without her help and encouragement, this book would not have been possible. Any errors that remain are, of course, wholly my own responsibility.

My greatest debt is in the dedication.

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## A Note on Sources

The primary source of the poems cited in this book is the two-volume anthology edited by M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed. (New York: Norton, 2000). For Milton's *Samson Agonistes* I have used Merritt Y. Hughes's edition, *John Milton: The Complete Poems and Major Prose* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill/Odyssey, 1957). For Dryden's *Religio Laici* I have used Keith Walker's edition, *John Dryden* (The Oxford Authors) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). For Swift's poetry (except for "A Description of a City Shower" and "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," which are in the *Norton Anthology*), I have relied on Pat Rogers's edition, *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983). For Burns's "John Anderson My Jo" I have used Carol McQuirk's edition, *Robert Burns: Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 1993).

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## CHAPTER 1

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### Introduction to Reading Poetry

Poetry is something for everyone to enjoy, not just a select few. Anyone who reads at a high school level should be able to take pleasure in it with a minimum of aid. As surprising as it may seem to modern readers, given the difficulty of much poetry since the early twentieth century, most poets throughout history have actually been interested in communicating with their readers, not in baffling them or putting them off. Occasionally, of course, a poet will write primarily for a limited audience, a few insiders or an educated elite, but overall, poets wish to be understood and appreciated, if for nothing more than to sell their books.

In the poetry that follows, readers will find much to interest them, from a surprising variety of ideas to a wide range of emotion, sharp wit, verbal music, and an abundance of imaginative delight. In addition, the lives and times of the poets will be briefly considered in order to provide a useful context for the reader. Poems are not written in a vacuum, of course, but often refer to historical events or figures that may not be familiar to us today, as well as to personal concerns of the poet. Such topical references that occur will be briefly described and their relevance to the poetry explained, so the reader may readily understand and appreciate the poet's point. The pleasure of reading this poetry should not be lost for lack of a few pertinent historical or biographical facts.

The broad subject of this book is the major poetry written in English from 1600 to 1800. This period is not as well known as some others, such as the Renaissance with Shakespeare or the Romantic period in the early nineteenth century. Still, there is much to enjoy in the poetry of this era, much even that

is surprisingly contemporary in its concerns. Some of the greatest poets in English, like John Milton and Alexander Pope, wrote during this time but are practically unknown today. Yet they are brilliant handlers of the language with a wonderful variety of poems, many of which are quite accessible to modern readers. The first part of this period, to the middle of the seventeenth century, is usually characterized as one dominated by the so-called Metaphysical Poets, a name that suggests they reveal a strong philosophical interest in their poetry. The most important Metaphysical Poets we will consider are John Donne and Andrew Marvell, but we will see that, despite the name, they are not always very serious or interested only in philosophical themes. Moreover, there are other poets at this time, like Ben Jonson and Robert Herrick, who do not fully share their concerns. The later period, once called the Neoclassical Age but now more accurately termed the Restoration (roughly from 1660 to 1700) and the eighteenth century, was dominated first by satire and later by themes of sympathy and sensibility. Still, as we shall see, other themes and kinds of poetry than these were written and enjoyed. Diversity is clearly one of this poetry's main features.

These two hundred years or so in England were often turbulent and occasionally marred by violent conflict. In the seventeenth century the country was moving from a largely feudal society to a freer, more capitalistic economy and a somewhat more constitutional form of monarchy. It was sharply divided in the middle of the century by a civil war that pitted the king (Charles I) against the Parliament, Puritan against Anglican, community against community, and brother against brother. The issues were serious and of continuing relevance: among these were such problems as the nature and scope of the freedoms of worship and speech, the rights of citizens versus the royal prerogative, the powers of Parliament, and the relation of church and state. The repercussions of these conflicts and changes lasted into the next century, though, after a brief interruption when Oliver Cromwell ruled, England reestablished its monarchy on a firm constitutional basis with Parliament taking on a more prominent role than it had before. In the eighteenth century the English expanded their trading activities, enriching themselves, but also bringing them into conflict with other countries, as well as with some of their own colonies, most notably the one that became the United States. The industrial revolution began later in this century, a movement that was to transform England and later the world. The poetry written during these years does not usually deal specifically with these events, but the poet may allude to them or incorporate them indirectly into the poem. These references will be explained as needed, either in the margin of the text or in the discussion itself.

Today, it seems, few people read poems for pleasure, especially the older sort, in part because they have never had much exposure to poetry and in part because they do not see its relevance. Yet the basic principles for reading poetry are few and well known. In fact, they are not much different from those for reading prose. Poetry is not a mystery, though it may deal with the mysterious and the haunting, or the ambiguous and the elusive as well as the beautiful and the ugly. All of life is its province. What follows here is a brief review, for those who feel the need for it, of some of the basic principles intended to help in reading this poetry with greater understanding and pleasure.

The first principle in reading poetry is to realize that it is generally indirect. That is, poetry often makes its point or introduces its subject not by stating it directly but through figures of speech, which are nonliteral expressions meant to evoke the subject in a certain way or for a particular response. A poet, for example, may employ comparisons to unexpected objects or unusual things that do not at first seem relevant. Such comparisons (called metaphors or similes) characterize the subject in ways that enhance our understanding or appreciation of it. Poets rarely call a spade a spade, because they want to dig deeper than the literal object can go. When Robert Burns writes, "O my Love's like a red, red rose / That's newly sprung in June," he wants us to see how beautiful his beloved is and to sense how deep his feeling is for her. The word "like" makes the comparison between love and a rose explicit; this is called a simile. The rose, everyone knows, is a traditional symbol for love as red is a symbol for passion. The repetition of "red" underscores the depth of the color as well as of the poet's affection, while the second line, with its associations of spring and new life, furthers the idea of his beloved's freshness, vitality, and beauty. In just a few words the poet evokes a powerful feeling of love that we might otherwise think is indescribable. The lilting rhythm and songlike sounds of his lines reinforce this effect as well.

Sometimes poets will not signal the comparison being made, but create a kind of equation between two things to suggest that this one equals, or is identical to, that one, or they may let the equation remain implicit. This metaphorical comparison is less obvious than with a simile, but nevertheless is usually clear enough, especially as the poem develops. When John Donne writes in one of his Holy Sonnets (No. 6), "This is my play's last scene," we know that he means his life is drawing to a close. It is not just "like" a drama, it is one. Comparing one's life to a play was commonplace in the Renaissance, as in Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players" (Jaques in *As You Like It*, 2.7.139-140). Donne continues in his sonnet with other metaphors for his life, comparing it to a