

武汉大学英文系英美文学系列教材

英国文学教程

A Course Book of
English Literature

主编

张伯香 马建君

武汉大学出版社

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A COURSE BOOK OF ENGLISH
LITERATURE

英国文学教程 (Ⅱ)

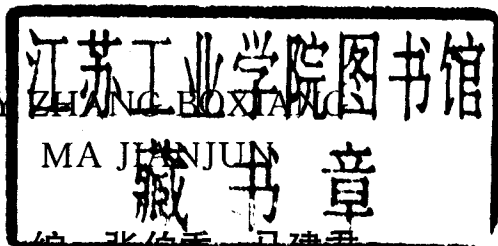
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Lecture One

The Eighteenth Century

English Literature

I . Historical Background

What we now call the neoclassical period is the one in English literature between the return of the Stuarts to the English throne in 1660 and the full assertion of Romanticism which came with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798.

With the death of Cromwell in 1658, the Commonwealth declined to an end. In 1660, the exiled Charles II returned to the throne. After Charles II died in 1685, his brother James, Duke of York, succeeded him as the king. James II, an avowed Catholic since his marriage, was, during the three years of his reign, not only intent on restoring Catholicism as the state religion but also on restoring the absolute power to the throne of England. He actually dismissed the Parliament and issued orders without ever conferring with the Parliament or the cabinet ministers. To end his tyrannical reign, the aristocratic Tory party and the bourgeois Whig party again joined hands. They decided to invite to the throne from the Netherlands James's

daughter, Mary, and her husband William of Orange, the recognized head of the Protestant powers in Europe. James I fled to France. This is the famous "Glorious" or "Bloodless" Revolution of 1688. With the peaceful change of occupants of the throne, England entered the Augustan Age or the Golden Age.

The name the Augustan Age was chosen by those neoclassicists because of their admiration for the ancient culture of Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar (27 BC~14 AD) and the belief that the greatest height of all proceeding civilizations had now found a worthy and comparable successor in the eighteenth-century England. It is true in a way.

With the Glorious Revolution, England became a constitutional monarchy and the state power passed from the king gradually to the Parliament and the cabinet ministers. With it, the capitalist system was once and for all established in England. Abroad, a vast expansion of British colonies in Asia, Africa and North America, and a continuous increase of colonial wealth and trade provided England with a market for which the small-scale, manual production methods of the home industry were hardly adequate. Besides, there were large-scale and long-drawn-out wars by professional armies and the station of large regiments in the colonies. All these created not only a great demand for large quantities of manufactured goods but also standardized goods made in Britain. This was the basic cause of the Industrial Revolution, of the invention of textile machines and other kinds of machinery.

At home in the country, Acts of Enclosure were putting more lands into the hands of fewer privileged rich landowners and forcing thousands of small farmers and tenants off their land

to become wage earners in industrial towns. As a result, there appeared a market of free labor and free capital, thus providing the essential conditions for the rising of Industrial Revolution. So, towards the middle of the 19th century, England had become the first powerful capitalist country, the work-shop of the world, flooding the markets both at home and abroad with its manufactured goods.

These changes, both political and social, enriched the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy who ruled the country, but brought great miseries to the majority of the people in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and in the colonies. Popular uprisings again and again hit Ireland; in Scotland people were threatening of independence from the British government; and the American people started their War of Independence in 1776 and finally broke away from the British government.

As England was growing into a powerful industrial country, it also witnessed the rapid growth of the bourgeois middle class at home. These were mainly city people: traders, merchants, manufacturers, and other adventurers such as slave-traders and colonists. They became the backbone of the fast developing England. As the Industrial Revolution went on in its full swing, more and more people joined the rank of the middle class or the propertied class. It was a revolutionary class then and quite different from the feudal aristocratic class. They were the people who had known poverty and hardship, and most of them had obtained their present social status through much hard work. Morally, they stressed the virtues of self-discipline, thrift and hard work. For them, to work, to economize and to accumulate wealth constituted the whole meaning of their life.

II . Cultural Background

2. 1. Enlightenment Movement

The eighteenth-century England is also, and better, known as the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. The Enlightenment was a progressive intellectual movement going on throughout Europe at the time, with France in the vanguard. The Enlightenment celebrated reason (rationality), equality, science and human beings' ability to perfect themselves and their society. The movement was based on the basic theories provided by the philosophers of the age, which ranged from John Locke's materialism, Lord Shaftsbury's deism, and George Berkeley's immaterialism to David Hume's skepticism. Whatever philosophical beliefs they might have, they held the common faith in human rationality and the possibility of human perfection through education. They believed that when reason served as the yardstick for the measurement of all human activities and social relations, superstition, injustice, privilege and oppression were to yield place to "eternal truth", "eternal justice", and "natural equality" or inalienable rights of men. Everything was put under scrutiny, to be measured by reason. No authorities, political or religious or otherwise, were accepted unchallenged while almost all the old societies and governments and all the traditional concepts, including Christianity, were examined and criticized. The belief provided theory for the French Revolution in 1789 and the American War of Independence in 1776.

Alexander Pope (1688 ~ 1744), Joseph Addison (1672 ~

1719), Richard Steele (1672~1729), Jonathan Swift (1667~1745), Daniel Defoe (1660~1731), Henry Fielding (1707~1754), Richard B. Sheridan (1751~1816), Oliver Goldsmith (1730~1774), Edward Gibbon (1737~1794), and Samuel Johnson (1709~1784) were among the famous enlighteners in England. As England had already gone through its bourgeois revolution, what the English enlighteners were left to do was to strive to bring the revolution to an end by clearing away the feudal remnants and replace them with bourgeois ideology.

2. 2. Cultural Progress

Inspired by the spirit of the Enlightenment, people were encouraged to cultivate a sound sense of rationality and a witty intellectuality. More schools were set up throughout the country so as to provide a better education for the masses. As more people had now more money and more leisure time, and became better educated, a widely distributed reading public grew, especially among the well-to-do middle class women. This demanded more reading materials which would be of interest and satisfy their need for a rational and moral life. Outside regular schools, literary works of all kinds played a decisive role in popularization of general education. The Copyright Act of 1709 made, for the first time in English history, literary creation an honorable and independent profession. Writers like Alexander Pope were able to live a life independent of those rich aristocratic patrons. Along with the economic independence, the eighteenth-century writers enjoyed greater freedom in their creative activities and were now able to devote themselves to whatever interested them and to give utterance to whatever they thought

right or proper. For the first time too, the literary tendency of the age was moving away from the conventional romance-stories about the life of the rich and noble people of the aristocratic class and turning to works that would give accounts of the common life of the ordinary folk. The desire to retain the perfection of the Greek and Roman classicists and the freedom now granted them cultivated in the writers a sense of duty for a better and healthier life of the nation. Besides the popular forms of poetry, novel and drama, the period also saw the appearance of such popular press as pamphlets and newspapers and periodicals which served as the party mouth-organs as well as an ideal medium for public education. Editing and pamphleteering were a common practice with literary men of the time. And there was also the flourish of coffee houses and all kinds of social clubs (about 2 000 in London) which greatly helped the cultivation and promotion of the new English culture.

However, in the later part of the century, people began to feel discontented with the rigidity of rationality. A demand for a release of one's spontaneous feeling, a relaxation from the cold and rigid logic of rationality and an escape from the inhuman Industrial Revolution gradually took shape in the form of sentimental and pre-romantic novel and poetry.

III . Literature of the Period

The development of the literature in the neoclassical period can be roughly summarized as: the predominance of neoclassical poetry and prose from the last decades of the 17th century to the early decades of the 18th century, the rise and flourish of modern

realistic novel in the middle years of the 18th century and the appearance of Gothic novel and the sentimental and pre-romantic poetry and fiction in the last few decades of the 18th century. However, there is much overlapping in time, of course, of different literary tendencies. The most distinguishing features of the literature in this age can be found in the following five aspects.

3. 1. Neoclassicism

The term mainly applies to the classical tendency which dominated the literature of the early period. It was, at least in part, the result of a reaction against the fires of passion which had blazed in the late Renaissance, especially in the metaphysical poetry. It found its artistic models in the classical literature of the ancient Greek and Roman writers like Homer, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, etc. and in the contemporary French writers such as Voltaire and Diderot. It put the stress on the classical artistic ideals of order, logic, proportion, restrained emotion, accuracy, good taste and decorum.

Such elegant styles were found in almost all the writings of the period, especially in those of John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Edward Gibbon, the man who wrote the famous history *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776 ~ 1788), and other neoclassicist writers. They were careful imitators. Their approach was thoroughly professional. Their works, mostly refined and perfect, are conscientious craftsmanship and often highly didactic. Neoclassical poetry, as represented by Dryden, Pope,

and Johnson, reached its stylistic perfection during the period, although to the modern readers it seems to lack in imagination and energy. The neoclassical poetry is one of the most significant phenomena in the literature of the age, to which it has given its name.

3. 2. The Realistic Novel

The rise and flourish of modern English novel is another important phenomenon of the eighteenth-century English literature. The early literature in the Medieval or Renaissance period, as we know, only served the feudal aristocratic class. Almost all the literary works were about kings, queens, princes, feudal lords and their way of life. Even Shakespeare's plays were dominated by these people. Romance was the typical literary form which was to delight and entertain the aristocrats. But now, after the bourgeois revolution, the English middle-class people were ready to cast away the aristocratic literature of feudalism and to create a new kind of realistic literature of their own to express their ideas and serve their interests. Thus instead of the life of kings and feudal lords, the whole life in its ordinary aspects of the middle class became a major source of interest in English literature. This change of subject matter was most obvious in the new literary form of English realistic novel. Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, Goldsmith and Smollett were among the major novelists of the time. By combining the allegorical tradition of the moral fables with the picaresque tradition of the lower-caste stories, they achieved in their works both realism and moral teaching. The influence of their works was very great both at home and abroad. It found impact in some

of the great works of European writers and paved the way for the great nineteenth-century realistic writers like Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens and William Thackeray.

3. 3. Gothic Novel

The English realistic novel as a literary genre flowered in the middle decades of the century. In the last decades, however, it gradually gave way to Gothic novel or Gothic romance.

The term "Gothic" derived from the frequent setting of the tales in the ruined, moss-covered castles of the Middle Ages, but it has been extended to any novel which exploits the possibilities of mystery and terror in gloomy, craggy landscapes, decaying mansions with dark dungeons, secret passages, instruments of torture, ghostly visitations, ghostly music or voices, ancient drapes and tapestries behind which lurks no one knows what, and often, as the central story, the persecution of a beautiful maiden by an obsessed and haggard villain. These novels, in rebellion against the increasing commercialism and rationalism, opened up to later fiction the dark, irrational side of human nature — the savage egoism, the perverse impulses, and the nightmarish terror that lie beneath the controlled and ordered surface of the conscious mind.

Although there had been anticipation in Smollett's *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), the real originator of English Gothic novel was Horace Walpole, his famous *Castle of Otranto* (1764) being the first of its kind. Some of the most powerful and influential writings in the mode are *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) by Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, *The Champion of Virtue* (1777) by Clara Reeve,

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Evelina (1779) by Fanny Burney, *Vathek, an Arabian Tale* (1786) by William Beckford, *The Monk* (1795) by Mathew Gregory Lewis, and *Frankenstein* (1817) by Mary Shelley. The last, a story about a scientist with his superbly fabricated, uncontrollable monster, is the first scientific horror novel in English.

3. 4. Sentimentality or Sensibility

Sentimentality and sensibility are two terms frequently used in reference to some literary works of the 18th century. They are today used as mutually exchangeable terms. Poetry and fiction of sentimentality or sensibility, as a literary genre, didn't start all of a sudden in the 18th century, though it was not often found earlier than that. It was a direct reaction against the cold, hard commercialism and rationalism which had dominated people's life since the last decades of the 17th century. Besides, it seemed to have appeared hand in hand with the rise of realistic English novel. In fiction, it was first found in *Pamela*, an early English realistic novel by Samuel Richardson. By concentrating on the distresses of the poor unfortunate and virtuous people, he was actually demonstrating that effusive emotion was evidence of kindness and goodness. A ready sympathy and an inward pain for the misery of others became part of accepted social morality and ethics. The susceptibility to tender feelings became a sign of good breeding and good manners. Besides, sensibility also finds pleasure in the wildness of nature, in the lawlessness of the exotic, and in indulgence in sensations of fear and awe before the mysterious or the inexplicable. Yet later, some sentimental works worsened into mere self-indulgent postures of grief and

pain and tears were shed too profusely and just for "the luxury of grief". Some famous novels of the kind are Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771).

In poetry, we find representative works in Thomas Gray's "An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1750), Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770) and Cowper's "The Task" (1785), not to mention the various odes of sensibility which flourished in the later half of the century.

3. 5. Satire

Satire was another typical feature of this period's writing. It refers to any writing, in poetry or prose, with the purpose to ridicule, censure and correct the vices, follies, stupidities and corruptions of the society, which threatened to be contrary to the maintenance of good moral order and literary discipline. So, it answered well the purpose of the Enlightenment, which aimed at public education in moral, social as well as cultural life. It also proved to be an effective weapon for arguments of all kinds and verbal attacks on enemies of both the party's and the personal. The best satires of the age are noted for their wittiness of remark and adeptness of technique. So it became the fashion for all forms of writing at the time. The best and most representative works are found in those written by Pope and Swift, two masters of satire.

Lecture Two

Pope, Addison and Steele

I . Alexander Pope (1688~1744)

1. 1. Life and Literary Career

Pope came from a Roman Catholic family. His father was a well-to-do linen merchant. Ill health plagued Pope almost from birth and he was a delicate child. At the age of twelve, a severe illness (tuberculosis of the spine) ruined his health and left him deformed. The boy had little regular schooling and was largely self-taught by reading at home. His sickness and Catholic religion both prevented him from attending university, voting or holding any public office. This confinement led to cultivation of a fine taste for natural beauty and turned him into a precocious poet.

However, Pope had wide associations with many of the famous men of letters of the time. He made friends with both the Tories such as Jonathan Swift, John Gay and Thomas Parnell and the Whigs such as Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, William Congreve and William Walsh. In 1714 Pope and his friends formed a literary club with which they were hoping to carry out a scheme for satirizing all sorts of false learning and pedantry in