

*Selected Readings  
in British Literature*



# 英国文学 经典名作选读

胡阶娜 · 编著

南开大学出版社

New

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in British Literature*



# 英国文学 经典名作选读

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名师  
讲堂

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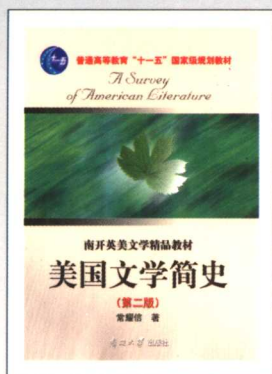
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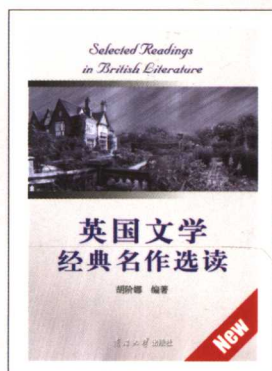
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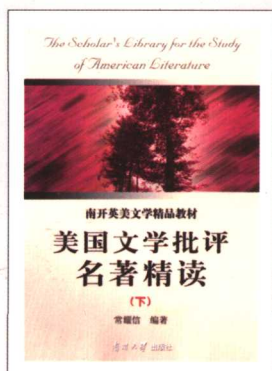
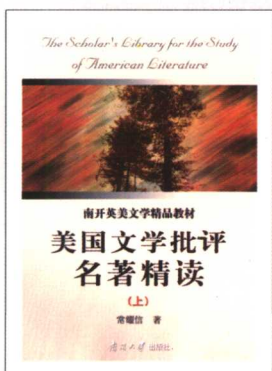
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# 内容简介

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# Preface

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This book draws a sketch of the history of English Literature and selects the best classics of every period. It is intended for college students and readers who are interested in English Literature. The author has designed the exercises after each reading in a way to help the students to grasp the most distinctive features of every piece. Students are encouraged to explore on themselves through guided questions so as to enhance their learner-autonomy. The annotations are to provide assistance for students to raise their reading efficiency.

# Contents

Chapter One	Old English Literature	/1
	Reading—Beowulf	/3
	Further Reading—Beowulf	/12
Chapter Two	Medieval Literature (1066-1510)	/25
	Reading—The Merchant's Tale	/29
	Further Reading—The Pardoner's Tale	/76
Chapter Three	Renaissance and Reformation Literature (1510-1620)	/101
	Reading—Hamlet	/104
	Further Reading—Romeo and Juliet	/134
Chapter Four	Revolution and Restoration Literature (1620-1690)	/147
	Reading—Paradise Lost	/150
	Further Reading—Paradise Lost	/199
Chapter Five	Eighteenth-Century Literature (1690-1780)	/223
	Reading—An Essay on Criticism	/225
	Further Reading—Robinson Crusoe	/254
Chapter Six	Literature of the Romantic Period (1780-1830)	/267
	Reading—Daffodils	/269
	Ode to a Nightingale	/271
	Further Reading—Pride and Prejudice	/275
Chapter Seven	High Victorian Literature (1830-1880)	/291
	Reading—Jane Eyre	/293
	Further Reading—Home thoughts, from Abroad	/311
	Sonnets from the Portuguese (Sonnet XIV)	/312
Chapter Eight	Late Victorian and Edwardian Literature (1880-1920)	/315
	Reading—The Wild Swans at Coole	/317
	Further Reading—The War of the Worlds	/319
Chapter Nine	Literature of the Modern Period (1920-1945)	/353
	Reading—The Waste Land	/355
	Further Reading—Ulysses	/383
Chapter Ten	Post-War and Post-Modern Literature	/419
	Reading—Waiting for Godot	/421
	Further Reading—Waiting for Godot	/505
References		/579

## [Chapter One]

# Old English Literature

In the 5th and 6th centuries, the Germanic peoples (from North-West Germany) known as the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes successfully invaded Britain which used to be part of the Roman Empire. They drove the already Christianized Celtic inhabitants of the land westwards and northwards. Some fables about the Celtic resistance against the Saxons in the sixth century are the origins of the legend of King Arthur.

The re-Christianization of Britain began in the late 6th century. The Celtic monks took the missionary work in the north and in Scotland. However, in the south, the work was done by missionaries sent from Rome by Pope Gregory the Great in AD 596. This mission was led by Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury and exerted great influence upon the development of English culture and ultimately literature. Christian monks and nuns were guardians of culture since they were the only people who could read and write before the fourteenth century.

The first recorded piece of literature in English was

Caedmon's *Creation Hymn*<sup>1</sup> (around 670). It was a religious poem praising God the Creator. There also exist elegiac poems like *Deor's Lament*, *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*. *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, along with other texts were preserved in *The Exeter Book*, a manuscript of poetry of the late 10th century. It is still kept in Exeter<sup>2</sup> Cathedral library in Devon today. These were written in what we call today "Old English."

Actually, the Christian monks and nuns preserved cultural and literary documents in both Old English and Latin which was the language of the church. Other famous documents include Bede's<sup>3</sup> Latin *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Christian poem *The Dream of the Rood*<sup>4</sup> (end of the 7th century). Parts of the Bible were also translated from Saxon into Old English during this period to reinforce the Christian faith as a common cultural identity of the island.

*Beowulf* is the best known long poem in Old English. Undoubtedly it is the most brilliant achievement in Old English Literature. The author (unknown) "has shaped a poem courtly in mood, suggestive of epic tradition, and Christian<sup>5</sup> in spirit" (Kennedy, p.ix-xiv). And the legend in the poem was of Scandinavian origin which related the heroic deeds of Beowulf who killed two monster ogres and an evil dragon.

Written in the early decades of the 11th century, it tells a legend of Scandinavian tradition about the hero named Beowulf. He was originally from Geatland (Southern Sweden) but went to Denmark for fame to get rid of two

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<sup>1</sup> According to legend, Caedmon was a lay worker (a person who doesn't hold any religious ranks) in the estate of the monastery of Whitby, in Northumbria (a Medieval Kingdom in Northern Britain, now East Yorkshire). One day he was touched by God's grace and composed this hymn praising His glory. The Hymn was preserved by the monks of Whitby.

<sup>2</sup> Exeter: the capital city of Devon County in the southwest of England.

<sup>3</sup> Bede: (673-735) British historian and theologian.

<sup>4</sup> Rood: Cross.

<sup>5</sup> The folklore depicted in *Beowulf* was pre-Christian, i.e., the folklore existed before the spread of Christianity in Europe. However, the author wrote it with a Christian point of view.

monsters that had harassed the Danish King—Hrothgar—and his people. There he killed Grendel the ogre who devoured quite a few of Hrothgar's warriors, and the troll-wife, Grendel's mother. The following excerpt depicts the fight between Beowulf and Grendel.

## Reading

### Beowulf

#### [Beowulf Slays Grendel]

THEN Hrothgar<sup>6</sup> went with his hero-train,  
defence-of-Scyldings, forth from hall;  
fain would the war-lord Wealhtheow seek,  
couch of his queen. The King-of-Glory  
against this Grendel<sup>7</sup> a guard had set,  
so heroes heard, a hall-defender,  
who warded the monarch and watched for the monster.  
In truth, the Geats'<sup>8</sup> prince gladly trusted  
his mettle<sup>9</sup>, his might, the mercy of God!  
Cast off then his corselet of iron,  
helmet from head; to his henchman<sup>10</sup> gave,—  
choicest of weapons,—the well-chased sword,  
bidding him guard the gear of battle.

<sup>6</sup> Hrothgar: 诗中丹麦国王的名字

<sup>7</sup> Grendel: 诗中被 Beowulf 杀死的为该隐后代的雄性巨怪

<sup>8</sup> Geat: 耶阿特人(瑞典南方的斯堪的纳维亚人, 6 世纪时为瑞典人所征服)

<sup>9</sup> mettle: *n.* 勇气

<sup>10</sup> henchman: *n.* 忠实的追随者, 党羽, 跟随者

Spake then his Vaunt the valiant<sup>11</sup> man,  
 Beowulf Geat, ere<sup>12</sup> the bed he sought:—  
 “Of force in fight no feebler<sup>13</sup> I count me,  
 in grim war-deeds, than Grendel deems him.  
 Not with the sword, then, to sleep of death  
 his life will I give, though it lie in my power.  
 No skill is his to strike against me,  
 my shield to hew though he hardy be,  
 bold in battle; we both, this night,  
 shall spurn<sup>14</sup> the sword, if he seek me here,  
 unweaponed, for war. Let wisest God,  
 sacred Lord, on which side soever  
 doom decree as he deemeth<sup>15</sup> right.”  
 Reclined then the chieftain, and cheek-pillows held  
 the head of the earl, while all about him  
 seamen hardy on hall-beds sank.  
 None of them thought that thence their steps  
 to the folk and fastness that fostered them,  
 to the land they loved, would lead them back!  
 Full well they wist that on warriors many  
 battle-death seized, in the banquet-hall,  
 of Danish clan. But comfort and help,  
 war-weal weaving, to Weder folk  
 the Master gave, that, by might of one,  
 over their enemy all prevailed<sup>16</sup>,

<sup>11</sup> valiant: *adj.* 勇敢的, 英勇的

<sup>12</sup> ere: *prep.* 在……之前

<sup>13</sup> feeble: *adj.* 虚弱的, 衰弱的, 无力的, 微弱的, 薄弱的

<sup>14</sup> spurn: *v.* 弃绝

<sup>15</sup> deem: *v.* 认为, 相信

<sup>16</sup> prevail: *vi.* 获胜, 成功

by single strength. In sooth<sup>17</sup> 'tis told  
 that highest God o'er human kind  
 hath wielded ever!—Thro' wan night striding,  
 came the walker-in-shadow. Warriors slept  
 whose hest<sup>18</sup> was to guard the gabled<sup>19</sup> hall,—  
 all save one. 'Twas widely known  
 that against God's will the ghostly ravager  
 him could not hurl to haunts of darkness;  
 wakeful<sup>20</sup>, ready, with warrior's wrath,  
 bold he bided the battle's issue.

THEN from the moorland<sup>21</sup>, by misty crags<sup>22</sup>,  
 with God's wrath<sup>23</sup> laden<sup>24</sup>, Grendel came.  
 The monster was minded of mankind now  
 sundry to seize in the stately house.  
 Under welkin<sup>25</sup> he walked, till the wine-palace there,  
 gold-hall of men, he gladly discerned<sup>26</sup>,  
 flashing with fretwork<sup>27</sup>. Not first time, this,  
 that he the home of Hrothgar sought<sup>28</sup>,—  
 yet ne'er in his life-day, late or early,

---

<sup>17</sup> sooth: *n.* 真实

<sup>18</sup> hest: *n.* <古语>命令, 训谕

<sup>19</sup> gabled: *adj.* 有山形墙的, 有人形墙的

<sup>20</sup> wakeful: *adj.* 不能入睡的, 觉醒的

<sup>21</sup> moorland: *n.* 沼泽地

<sup>22</sup> crag: *n.* 峭壁

<sup>23</sup> wrath: *n.* 愤怒

<sup>24</sup> laden: *adj.* 装满的, 负载的, 苦恼的

<sup>25</sup> welkin: *n.* [诗]天空, 苍穹, 天宫

<sup>26</sup> discern: *v.* 目睹, 认识, 洞悉, 辨别, 看清楚

<sup>27</sup> fretwork: *n.* [建]浮雕细工

<sup>28</sup> sought: *seek* 的过去式和过去分词

such hardy heroes, such hall-thanes, found!  
 To the house the warrior walked apace<sup>29</sup>,  
 parted from peace; the portal<sup>30</sup> opened,  
 though with forged bolts fast, when his fists had  
 struck it,  
 and baleful<sup>31</sup> he burst in his blatant<sup>32</sup> rage,  
 the house's mouth. All hastily, then,  
 o'er fair-paved floor the fiend<sup>33</sup> trod<sup>34</sup> on,  
 ireful he strode; there streamed from his eyes  
 fearful flashes, like flame to see.  
 He spied in hall the hero-band,  
 kin and clansmen clustered asleep,  
 hardy liegemen. Then laughed his heart;  
 for the monster was minded, ere morn should dawn,  
 savage, to sever the soul of each,  
 life from body, since lusty banquet  
 waited his will! But Wyrð forbade him  
 to seize any more of men on earth  
 after that evening. Eagerly watched  
 Hygelac's kinsman his cursed foe,  
 how he would fare in fell attack.  
 Not that the monster was minded to pause!  
 Straightway he seized a sleeping warrior  
 for the first, and tore him fiercely asunder<sup>35</sup>,

---

<sup>29</sup> apace: *adv.* 快速地, 急速地

<sup>30</sup> portal: *n.* 入口

<sup>31</sup> baleful: *adj.* 有害的, 恶意的

<sup>32</sup> blatant: *adj.* 喧嚣的, 吵闹的

<sup>33</sup> fiend: *n.* 魔鬼, 魔王, 撒旦

<sup>34</sup> trod: *tread* 的过去式和过去分词

<sup>35</sup> asunder: *adv.* 分离, 成碎片



the bone-frame bit, drank blood in streams,  
 swallowed him piecemeal<sup>36</sup>: swiftly thus  
 the lifeless corse<sup>37</sup> was clear devoured<sup>38</sup>,  
 e'en<sup>39</sup> feet and hands. Then farther he hied;  
 for the hardy hero with hand he grasped,  
 felt for the foe with fiendish claw,  
 for the hero reclining,—who clutched it boldly,  
 prompt to answer, propped on his arm.  
 Soon then saw that shepherd-of-evils  
 that never he met in this middle-world,  
 in the ways of earth, another wight<sup>40</sup>  
 with heavier hand-gripe; at heart he feared,  
 sorrowed in soul,—none the sooner escaped!  
 Fain<sup>41</sup> would he flee, his fastness seek,  
 the den<sup>42</sup> of devils: no doings now  
 such as oft<sup>43</sup> he had done in days of old!  
 Then bethought him the hardy Hygelac-thane  
 of his boast at evening: up he bounded,  
 grasped firm his foe, whose fingers cracked.  
 The fiend made off<sup>44</sup>, but the earl close followed.  
 The monster meant—if he might at all—  
 to fling himself free, and far away

---

<sup>36</sup> piecemeal: *adv.* 一件一件地

<sup>37</sup> corse:[诗] (=corpse) 尸体, 死尸

<sup>38</sup> devour: *vt.* (尤指动物)吞吃, 狼吞虎咽

<sup>39</sup> e'en: *adv.* (=even) 即使, 甚至

<sup>40</sup> wight: *n.* 人类, 人

<sup>41</sup> fain: *adv.* 欣然, 乐意地

<sup>42</sup> den: *n.* 兽穴, 洞穴

<sup>43</sup> oft: *adv.* 常常, 再三

<sup>44</sup> make off: 离开, (尤指做了错事后)匆忙离开, 逃走