A New Anthology of English Literature Volume I

Edited & Annotated By Luo Jingguo

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FOREWORD

This textbook, composed of two volumes, is intended for the teaching of English literature to both English and non-English majors in higher educational institutions as well as for those who learn English in their spare time and whose English has reached such a level that guidance for further study seems necessary. The main aim of this textbook is to cultivate in the reader an interest in English literature and a sense of the development of English literature.

In editing this textbook, I paid particular attention to the following points:

1. All materials here-in are fragments or full texts of well known literary works written by the best English authors, and they have stood the test of the time, as many of them are time and again collected in selected readings or anthologies both at home and abroad. They are not only the quintessence of English masterpieces, but also the best of English writings, which are worth memorizing by heart, and which will be beneficial to students in their learning of the English language.

2. As literature takes its root in social life and is inseparable from the economic, political, religious, and intellectual factors of a given historical period, a brief summary of the period is given at the beginning of each chapter. Thus, the questions of why Shakespeare's great tragedies were all written during the first decade of the 17th century, why romanticism became prevalent in the beginning of the 19th century, and why there appeared a galaxy of novelists in the Victorian age — all these need to be considered from a historical perspective. It is hoped that the brief introduction of each historical period will help to answer these questions.

3. Special effort has been made to guide students to appreciate the aesthetic value of the selected pieces. The Notes serve not only

to interpret the meanings of difficult words or passages, but also to call students' attention to the stylistic characteristics and rhetorical devices of the excerpts. Suggestive questions concerning the artistic techniques of the selected pieces are asked to arouse students' interest.

4. As the emphasis of the book is on the interpretation and appreciation of the selected readings, the biographies of most writers are reduced to the minimum. It is meaningless and boring to give students the detailed biographies of writers, a long list of their works, and the synopses of their representative works, without offering them first-hand materials. Regrettably, such a style of teaching foreign literature is still practised in some institutions. Students who want the above information can easily find them in any history of English literature or in an encyclopaedia.

5. Literature in the twentieth century is very complex. Various trends and schools come and go. Few writers are generally accepted as representative writers of the modern age. No consensus has been reached as to which novels, poems, or prose selections represent the characteristic features of a particular writer. Attempts are made in the this textbook to introduce students to T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, John Osborne, and Samuel Beckett as major writers, representing the different trends of twentieth century English literature.

6. As the total teaching hours for English literature course vary widely in different higher institutions, this textbook provides sufficient materials for a year course of 4 hours per week. Teachers in various institutions can choose texts from the book at their own will according to the teaching hours of their institutions.

I have to express my thanks to all my colleagues and friends who encouraged me in my writing, especially to my wife, Professor Li Shu(李淑), who has been supporting and helping me throughout my forty years' teaching career. Special thanks should also be given to Professor Liu Yi-qing(刘意青), who, being an expert in 18th century English literature, generously helped me formulating my discussion of four writers: Edmund Spenser, Daniel Defoe,

Alexander Pope, and Henry Fielding. Finally I have to thank my Canadian friend Sean MacDonald, who read over the manuscripts of the first five chapters of Volume I, my American friend Joshua Goldstein, who read over the manuscripts of the rest of Volume I, and my American colleague Professor Iris Maurer, who read over the manuscripts of Volume II. They offered many valuable suggestions.

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The Norton Anthology of English Literature

Wang Zuo-liang, et al.: *An Anthology of English Literature* Annotated in Chinese

Chen Jia: *A History of English Literature*

Chen Jia: *Selected Readings in English Literature*

William Long: *English Literature*

Paul Harvey: *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*

Christopher Gillie: *Longman Companion to English Literature*

Albert C. Baugh: *A Literary History of England*

Cleanth Brooks, Jr. and Robert Penn Warren: *Understanding Poetry*

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, edited by Alfred Harbrace

Sixteen Plays of Shakespeare, edited by George Lyman Kittredge

Encyclopaedia and dictionaries:

The Everyman Encyclopaedia

Oxford American Dictionary

The Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary

Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary

Webster's Third New International Dictionary

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Chapter One

THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

1. Historical background

The earliest settlers of the British Isles were the Celts, who originally lived in the upper Rhineland and migrated to the British Isles about 600 B. C.. About 400 to 300 B. C. the Brythons (Bretons), a branch of the Celts, came to the British Isles and from them came the name Britain. The culture of the Celts belonged to an early stage of the Iron Age. They knew how to make iron swords and grow crops. Very little is known about their beliefs, but we know about their religious ceremonies of May Day and the cult of mistletoe, which have become part of the national tradition of the English people.

From 55 B. C. to 407 A. D. the British Isles were under the rule of the Roman Empire. At that time the Roman Empire was a slave society. It ruled over Europe and had a high level of civilization. The Romans defeated the Celts and became the masters of the British Isles. It was during the Roman occupation that London was founded.

The first Roman general who came to Britain was the famous Julius Caesar (102-44 B. C.) who crossed the Dover Strait in 55 B. C. with a force of 10,000 men after his victory over the Gauls. But he stayed there only for a few weeks, and although he came back again in the following year, he did not station Roman troops on the isles as he was busily engaged in suppressing rebellions on the Continent and fighting the civil war at home. Almost a century elapsed before the Romans extended their conquest of Britain.

The Romans ruled over Britain for three and a half centuries. They built temples, roads, walls, and military camps, but made little influence on the cultural life of the Celts. They built forty or

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fifty walled towns and whenever a town today has a name ending in "chester" or "caster", we may be sure that it is on the site of a Roman military settlement, because the word is derived from Latin "castra", which means "fort". Most of our knowledge of the Roman Britain comes from *De Bello Gallico*, a book written by Caesar, and *Germania* by Publius Cornelius Tacitus (55-120 A. D.).

About 450 A. D. , waves of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes invaded the British Isles. They settled in England, and drove the Celts into Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. The Angles and Saxons were Germanic tribes occupying parts of the coast of modern Denmark and modern Germany on both sides of the Elbe and the difference between their languages was very slight. From the very names of these tribes we can know that they are seafaring people and brave in their action. The old Saxon word "angul" means a hook, from which we can surmise that they lived by the sea and their lives were related to fishing. The name Saxon is from "seax", that is, a short sword, and from that name we can judge that they were hardy fighters. The Anglo-Saxons defeated the Celts, although the latter resisted bravely. They became the new masters of the British Isles and were the ancestors of the present English people.

It was around 500 A. D. , in the struggle against Cerdic, the founder of the kingdom of Wessex, that the Celtic King Arthur, a legendary figure, is said to have acquired his fame. At Camelot in Somersetshire, which was his capital, he gathered around him the bravest of his followers, who were known as the Knights of the Round Table and for twenty four years he fought bravely for his kingdom against the Anglo-Saxon invaders, and about whom many English romances were composed.

Before their migration from the Continent the Anglo-Saxons were apparently still in the later stage of tribal society. After their settlement in Britain, their tribal society gradually disintegrated and feudal society came into being. At the close of the 6th century there were seven prominent Saxon kingdoms in England.

Beginning from the later part of the 8th century, the Danes, or the Vikings, came to invade England, at first along the eastern

coast, but later they threatened to overrun the whole country. In the second half of the 9th century King Alfred the Great of Wessex (849-899) led the Anglo-Saxon kings to defeat the invaders by uniting their forces. However, it was not until the reign of his great grandson Edgar (ca. 94 -975) that England was united under one king.

In the early 11th century all England was conquered by the Danes for 23 years. Then the Danes were expelled, but in 1066 the Normans came from Normandy in northern France to attack England under the leadership of the Duke of Normandy who claimed the English throne. For the last Saxon king, Harold, had promised that he would give his kingdom to William, Duke of Normandy, as an expression of his gratitude for protecting his kingdom during the invasion by the Danes. This is known as the Norman Conquest.

The Anglo-Saxons were heathens upon their arrival in Britain. In 597 Pope Gregory the Great sent St. Augustine to England to convert the Anglo-Saxons. The first converted king was King Ethelbert of Kent, and then within a century all England was Christianized. Churches were established and monks became the most learned in the country. Heathen mythology was gradually replaced by Christian religion.

2. Northumbrian School and Wessex literature

There were two highlights in the development of the Anglo-Saxon literature.

The first was the Northumbrian School. Its center was the monasteries and abbeys in the kingdom of Northumbria. Related with this school was Caedom who lived in the 7th century and who turned the stories in the *Bible* into verse form. The title of the work is *Paraphrase*. It was said that Caedmon at first did not know how to sing and then one night he heard voice from God: "Caedmon, Sing me something." Caedmon answered that he could not sing. Then God told him "Sing me the Creation." Then all at once Caedmon could sing and became the first Anglo-Saxon poet.

Another well known figure of the Northumbrian School was

the Venerable Bede (673-735), a monk who wrote in Latin and whose work *The Ecclesiatical History of the English People* earned for him the title of "Father of English History". The book covers the whole length of early English history from the invasion by Julius Caesar to the year 731, four years before the author's death. The book is full of strange religious stories and miracles. It was Bede who told about the story of Caedmon.

The second highlight of the Anglo-Saxon literature happened during the reign of King Alfred. The period of his reign was 871-899.

While in the 7th and 8th centuries English culture and learning flourished in the north, the center of learning shifted to the south, to the kingdom of Wessex in the 9th and 10th centuries, with King Alfred as the guiding spirit.

In 871 Alfred became king of Wessex. He won decisive battles against the Danes and the country enjoyed a period of peace. But Alfred was more celebrated for his literary contributions. Before his time all education had been in Latin. He set himself the task of teaching the English people to read and write in their own language. He gathered around him a group of scholars, founded a palace school, and demanded that his officials should try to educate themselves.

Alfred's contributions to English literature are threefold. First, a number of Latin books of educative value were translated into West Saxon dialect. It is said that King Alfred himself translated the history by Bede. Secondly, Alfred was responsible for the launching of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It began with the story of Caesar's conquest and annually recorded important events until 1154. It is an important history book as well as a piece of literary work. Alfred's third contribution is that he created a style of Anglo-Saxon prose which was not obscure.

3. Anglo-Saxon poetry

Some 30,000 lines of Anglo-Saxon poetry have survived. There are a long epic poetry *Beowulf*, a number of religious poems

and heroic poems, and some elegies. The earliest is *Widsith* and the last is *Maldon*, a poem about the battle of Maldon, which was fought a few years before 1,000 A. D.

BEOWULF

Of the earliest heroic poetry, the most important poem now preserved is *Beowulf*. It probably existed in oral form as early as the 6th century as historical events related in the poem indicated. The one datable fact of history mentioned in the poem is a raid on the Franks made by Gelac in 520. It was probably written down in the 8th century though the manuscript of the poem preserved today dates back to the 10th century and was written in the Wessex dialect. The poem contains altogether 3,183 lines and the story in it is based on partly historical and partly legendary materials, brought over by the Anglo-Saxons from their original homes.

The epic begins with a brief account of Danish kings down to Hrothgar who builds a splendid hall called Heorot. A monster named Grendel is enraged at the sound of merrymaking which nightly comes from the hall and disturbs his peace. He comes out of the lair at the bottom of the sea and goes to the hall each night and devours warriors. This has been going on for twelve years. Beowulf, nephew to King Hygelac of the Geats, hears of Grendel and sails with fourteen companions to lend help to Hrothgar. The Danish king receives and entertains the visitors and Beowulf boasts of his past exploits and declares his determination to conquer or die. Grendel comes at night and eats up one of Beowulf's companions. Then a terrible combat follows and Beowulf finally wins by tearing one arm and a shoulder off the monster who flees mortally wounded. Hrothgar rewards the hero with rich gifts and his minstrels relate old tales.

At night Grendel's mother comes to avenge her son and carries off Hrothgar's favourite Aeschere. Beowulf is sent for and he sets out with his companions to seek for the sea-monster. He plunges into a pool and reaches a cave beneath the sea. There he fights with Grendel's mother and eventually succeeds in killing her with a magic sword found hanging in the cave. He returns with the heads of two monsters and is welcomed and further rewarded by Hrōthgar. Then he returns to the Geats. In the following year King Hygelac dies and his son succeeds as king but is soon killed in battle with the Swedes. Beowulf is chosen king and rules wisely and well for fifty years.

Then a runaway slave robs part of a hoard of hidden treasure guarded by a dragon and the latter is enraged and ravages the land with fiery breath. Beowulf, now an aged king, resolves to fight the dragon himself. He goes there

with twelve companions. The old king orders his men to wait outside while he himself goes down to the mound of treasure. There the aged king fights bravely against the dragon but the sword fails him and he is in danger. One of the companions, Wiglaf, rushes down to help and wounds the monster and then Beowulf kills it with a knife but is himself mortally wounded. He gives his last orders about his own funeral as he dies. Wiglaf sends a messenger to announce the king's death and the people visit the scene of battle and carry away the treasure. They throw the dragon into the sea and build a funeral pyre to burn Beowulf's body. The poem ends with the people lamenting Beowulf's death and praising him as a great and good king.

Like Homer's poetry, *Beowulf* sings of the exciting adventures of a great legendary hero whose physical strength demonstrates his high spiritual qualities, i. e., his resolution to serve his country and kinsfolk, his true courage, courteous conduct, and his love of honour. In the poem Beowulf is strong, courageous, and selfless, ready to risk his life in order to rid his people of evil monsters.

In reading *Beowulf* we must notice that the poem is a mixture of paganism and Christian elements. As *Beowulf* is about the life of Anglo-Saxons before they came to Britain and as it was composed only a century and a half after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, it carries with it many pagan elements. It is suggested by some that the pagan elements were in the original oral poem and when the monk wrote down the poem he kept the pagan elements and interpolated Christian elements.

The most striking difference between Old English poetry and later poetry is in the technical structure. Every line consists of two clearly separated half lines between which is a pause, called a caesura, which in Latin means a cutting, a break or pause in a line of poetry. The two parts of the line are united by alliteration, which is a form of initial rhyme, or "head rhyme". Alliteration (头韵) is the repetition of the same sound or sounds at the beginning of two or more words that are next to or close to each other. Every half line consists of two feet and each foot is made up of an accented syllable and a varying number of unaccented syllables. The alliteration which links the two half lines falls on these accented syllables. Generally there are three alliterations per line: two in the first half line and one on the first foot of the second half line.

In addition to alliteration, the "scop" used a kind of figurative language called "kenning" in order to add beauty to ordinary objects. A kenning is a metaphor usually composed of two words, which becomes the formula for a special object. For example, "helmet bearer" stands for "warrior", "swan road" for "the sea", "the world candle" for "the sun".

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