



# ANGLO-AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

英美文学与文化

周建新 编著



华南理工大学出版社  
SOUTH CHINA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY PRESS



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## 前 言

高校中的英美文学与文化课程的重要性不言而喻，但教材确实是一个不容忽视的问题，市面上的教材不一定能适用于所有高校，比如某一层次或类别高校的特定学生对象，最理想的情况当然是教材能与相应课程要求和读者对象的具体情况相匹配，这就需要依此编写相应的教材。本书素材原是英美文学与文化课程的讲义，已使用了好几年，每年在符合课程教学要求和教学目的的前提下，根据学生的兴趣和需要微调讲义内容。调整的目的在于保持学生对课程内容的兴趣以及促进课程教学要求和目标的有效实现，既不能以降低教学要求作为保持学生兴趣的前提，也不能为保持既有教学要求和目标而罔顾学生的兴趣，因此内容既不能太简太浅，也不能太深太杂。太简太浅，学生感到比较易学，也易感兴趣，但可能降低了课程的教学要求；太深太杂，学生可能会知难而退，兴趣索然，课程教学效果可能难尽如人意，课程教学要求难以实现。

本书简介英美文学与文化，其中文学内容占比较大。本书在框架上，按时间顺序简列基本或重要的英美文学文化人物、著作、现象等，以期使学生对英美文学与文化有基本的概括性了解；在内容上，主要选重要的或学生应该了解的内容，并根据以往教学实践中发现的学生的兴趣点和接受能力作为挑选内容的重要参考，因此内容不要求面面俱到，也不要求深入和繁杂，而是以使学生读后能理解、易理解为宜；在语言上，多用简单句，使语言浅显，明白晓畅，易读易懂。在目录和内文标题格式上，尽量使学生对主要内容或重点一目了然。总之，希望涵盖学生感兴趣或易接受的基本的英美文学与文化内容、知识点清晰全面、语言易读易懂的本书，成为高校选修英美文学与文化课的学生喜爱的读本。

在本书写作过程中，学生窦静静、李蒙娜、杨扬、郭敏、马秀琳，还有美国专家 Barbara Alice Robinson 等都不同程度地参与了相关工作，特在此表示衷心感谢。本书不足之处，欢迎读者诸君批评指正！

周建新

2019年1月于华南理工大学

# Contents

## Part I British Literature and Culture

<b>Chapter 1 Early English Literature and Culture</b> .....	3
The Background of Early British Culture .....	3
<i>Beowulf</i> .....	5
Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343 – 1400) .....	6
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>Beowulf</i> .....	8
 <b>Chapter 2 The Sixteenth Century. The Renaissance and the Reign of Elizabeth</b> .....	13
The Renaissance .....	13
William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616) .....	14
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> .....	17
 <b>Chapter 3 The Seventeenth Century. The Bourgeois Revolution</b> .....	20
The Bourgeois Revolution .....	20
Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) .....	21
John Milton (1608 – 1674) .....	22
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>Paradise Lost</i> .....	24
Excerpt from The Holy Bible (King James Version of 1611)	
.....	27
 <b>Chapter 4 The Eighteenth Century. The Neoclassicism Era</b> .....	32
The Age of Enlightenment .....	33
The Neoclassicism Era .....	34
Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744) .....	35
Jonathan Swift (1667 – 1745) .....	37
Samuel Johnson (1709 – 1784) .....	39
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> .....	41



**Chapter 5 The Early Nineteenth Century and the Flowering of Romanticism**

.....	45
Romanticism .....	45
Lake Poets .....	46
William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850) .....	47
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834) .....	49
George Gordon Byron (1788 – 1824) .....	50
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822) .....	52
Selected Reading “To a Skylark” .....	53

**Chapter 6 The Late Nineteenth Century. Victorian Era and Realism in Fiction**

.....	58
Victorian Era .....	58
Realism in Fiction .....	59
Aestheticism .....	60
William Makepeace Thackeray (1811 – 1863) .....	61
Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928) .....	62
Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900) .....	64
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>Vanity Fair</i> .....	65

**Chapter 7 The Early Twentieth Century. Modernism** .....

The Emergence and Development of Modernism .....	69
Bloomsbury Group .....	69
The Auden Group .....	70
William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939) .....	70
James Joyce (1882 – 1941) .....	71
Virginia Woolf (1882 – 1941) .....	72
David Herbert Lawrence (1885 – 1930) .....	73
Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888 – 1965) .....	74
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>The Waste Land</i> .....	76

**Chapter 8 The Late Twentieth Century. Post-modernism** .....

Post-modernism .....	82
The Theatre of the Absurd .....	82
Angry Young Men .....	83

Samuel Beckett (1906 – 1989) .....	84
Doris Lessing (1919 – 2013) .....	85
Kingsley Amis (1922 – 1995) .....	86
John James Osborne (1929 – 1994) .....	87
William Golding (1911 – 1993) .....	88
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>Lord of the Flies</i> .....	89

## Part II American Literature and Culture

<b>Chapter 9 Early American and Colonial Period to 1776</b> .....	95
The Colonial Period in New England .....	95
The Pilgrim and Puritans .....	96
The Mayflower Compact .....	97
Salem Witch Trials .....	98
Revolutionary Writers .....	99
Anne Bradstreet (1612 – 1672) .....	100
Cotton Mather (1663 – 1728) .....	101
Benjamin Franklin (1706 – 1790) .....	102
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin</i> .....	103
<b>Chapter 10 The Nineteenth Century Romanticism and Transcendentalism</b> .....	107
Romanticism .....	108
Transcendentalism .....	109
Washington Irving (1783 – 1859) .....	110
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882) .....	111
Henry David Thoreau (1817 – 1862) .....	112
Walt Whitman (1819 – 1892) .....	113
Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830 – 1886) .....	114
Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 – 1864) .....	115
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>Walden, or Life in the Woods</i> .....	116
<b>Chapter 11 The Civil War and the Reconstruction Period</b> .....	120
The Civil War .....	121
Gold Rush .....	121



The Gilded Age .....	122
Realism .....	123
Mark Twain (1835 – 1910) .....	123
Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811 – 1896) .....	124
William Dean Howells (1837 – 1920) .....	125
Henry James (1843 – 1916) .....	126
Selected Reading <i>The Gettysburg Address</i> .....	127

## **Chapter 12    The Turning Period of the Twentieth Century and Naturalism .....**

.....	129
Naturalism .....	129
Theodore Dreiser (1871 – 1945) .....	130
Stephen Crane (1871 – 1900) .....	131
Jack London (1876 – 1916) .....	132
Selected Reading    Excerpt from <i>The Call of the Wild</i> .....	133

## **Chapter 13    The World War I and the Lost Generation .....**

Harlem Renaissance .....	137
Imagism .....	137
The Lost Generation .....	138
Robert Frost (1874 – 1963) .....	139
Ezra Pound (1885 – 1972) .....	139
Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896 – 1940) .....	140
Ernest Hemingway (1899 – 1961) .....	141
Selected Reading    Excerpt from <i>The Old Man and the Sea</i> .....	142

## **Chapter 14    The Great Depression and World War II .....**

Great Depression .....	147
Southern Renaissance .....	148
John Dos Passos (1896 – 1970) .....	148
John Steinbeck (1902 – 1968) .....	149
Henry Miller (1891 – 1980) .....	150
William Faulkner (1897 – 1962) .....	151
Selected Reading    Excerpt from <i>Of Mice and Men</i> .....	152



<b>Chapter 15 The 1950s and the Beat Generation .....</b>	<b>156</b>
The Cold War .....	157
The Beat Generation .....	157
Irwin Allen Ginsberg (1926 – 1997) .....	158
Jack Kerouac (1922 – 1969) .....	159
William Seward Burroughs (1914 – 1997) .....	160
Jerome David Salinger (1919 – 2010) .....	161
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> .....	161
 <b>Chapter 16 The 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement .....</b>	 <b>165</b>
Feminism .....	165
Vietnam War .....	166
Hippies .....	166
Black Humor .....	167
Yuppies .....	168
Ralph Ellison (1914 – 1994) .....	169
Joseph Heller (1923 – 1999) .....	170
Norman Kingsley Mailer (1923 – 2007) .....	171
John Hoyer Updike (1932 – 2009) .....	172
Selected Reading Excerpt from <i>Invisible Man</i> .....	173
 <b>Works Cited .....</b>	 <b>176</b>

## PART I

# BRITISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE





# *Chapter 1 Early English Literature and Culture*

## **The Background of Early British Culture**

The name Britain comes from the Brethons, which is a branch of the Celts. From about 600 B. C. to 300 B. C. , the Celts migrated from the upper Rhineland to the British Isles. Therefore, they became the earliest settlers of the British Isles. That period is called The Iron Age, and the Celts knew some basic life skills. Some of Celtic culture came down the ages. The religious ceremony of May Day has been very famous in Britain till now.

Later, in about 55 B. C. , Julius Caesar ( 100 B. C. – 44 B. C. ) invaded Britain with a large army. From then on, the Celts were under the dominion of the Roman Empire for nearly three and a half centuries. What the Romans invaded was only England, so the Celts in other areas of Britain still had their freedom. But there were frequent conflicts between those Celts in the free areas and the Roman invaders. In fact, the Romans had a significant impact on Celts' society at that time. They constructed roads, ramparts and temples, and built military camps. Nevertheless, the influence the Romans exerted on the Celts' culture is negligible. Latins still speak Celtic now. Gradually, the Romans were becoming weak, and they vacated the England in the end. Again, the Celts started to defend themselves.

The next invaders were the Germans, who were divided into three tribes: the Jutes, Saxons and Angles, who are also called Anglo-Saxons. However, although their dialects are a little bit different, the language they used was the same, perhaps that is because they have the same Germanic heritage. Many Celts fought for their freedom, but failed. A lot of people made sacrifices because of that. In the end, some of Celts had to move into Wales, and the rest of them became slaves. This Anglo-Saxons period lasted from about 449 to 1100. The Anglo-Saxons period was established in 550, and now, the dominant language of England became English, which was a vital change in the development of English history and literature.

In a certain sense, the Anglo-Saxons were an aggressive nation. They were good at



fighting, and never failed to use force to get what they wanted. What's more, they also consisted of a great quantity of independent lords. Every lord fought for his own area and tried his best. Consequently, there were frequent wars happening, great and small. The speed of the country's establishment and ruin was almost the same, both of which were very fast. In the last period of the 9th century, the Viking Danes, the new Germanic invaders appeared. By 850, they began an energetic campaign against the Anglo-Saxons. Filled with big ambition, they almost conquered England. In addition, York was captured and became the capital of a Viking kingdom in 866. As one of the biggest areas in Britain, York was full of fortune. The reasons why it became famous was not only because of its large populations, but also its flourishing business. The trade of York was also very popular, attracting a lot of traders from all over the world. However, this situation did not last too long. In 1042, the Danes were defeated and the Anglo-Saxons eventually recaptured their domain.

Good times do not last long, and not long after, the Anglo-Saxons had to deal with another blow by Normans from France. But they did not rise this time, and it would come to end the Anglo-Saxon period. As an aggressive nation, the Anglo-Saxons advocated for a militant spirit. Therefore, in Anglo-Saxon period, the leader was basically a warrior with strategic wisdom, great courage and strong physique. The responsibility of the leader was mainly to lead his troops to defeat other tribes. Although there were many pagans among the Anglo-Saxons when they came to the island at first, as time went on, more and more Anglo-Saxons started to accept Christianity. What's more, there was a vital event in the history of English culture, which is that Pope Gregory the Great (540 – 604) sent his emissary to convert Jutes in Kent, because many Anglo-Saxon youths were sold in the slave market during this period. At the same time, the monks from Ireland were very active. They played a significant role in the development of Christianity in Britain, and many of them constructed a monastery in Northumbria. From then on, the thought of the Anglo-Saxons started to change to Christianity, which is more perfect and more comprehensive than their original beliefs. This is an initial point that the Anglo-Saxons began to learn scriptures about monasteries and some classical writings of Virgil (70 B. C. – 19 B. C. ), who was a famous ancient Roman poet of the Augustan Period (27 B. C. – A. D. 14). Gradually, they started off upon their journey to Rome, although the distance of this pilgrimage was very long. In a sense, this special trip enriched their knowledge and widened their horizons.

## Beowulf

*Beowulf* is a long, epic poem written in Old English vernacular (the native language of the author's time and place) telling a story about a hero and his exploits. *Beowulf* played a special role in the history of English literature. It may be the oldest surviving long poem in Old English and is commonly cited as one of the most important works of Old English literature. *Beowulf* was probably composed between A. D. 700 and A. D. 900, which coincided roughly with the reigning of the Tang Dynasty (A. D. 618 – A. D. 907) in ancient China. The cultural background of the story was set in ancient Denmark and the south of Sweden. This Old English epic poem consisted of 3,182 alliterative lines, with 2 parts divided. There is a lapse of 50 years between the two parts of the story. It was also an important transition period for the Germanic tribes to turn into the feudal kingdom.

In the first part of the poem, the story began with a Danish king, called Hrothgar. Hrothgar had built a richly decorated hall, Heorot. There was a party held each night in the hall, and the sound of revelry came to the ears of a monster named Grendel who lived in the sea. The sound broke the monster's peace and annoyed him, so he came out of his lair and went to the hall every night. Many warriors were devoured, and this case lasted for nearly twelve years. After hearing this, the nephew of King Hygelac of the Geats in Sweden, Beowulf, moved with his fourteen companions to Danish to help Hrothgar. Relying on his brilliant exploits, Beowulf asseverated that he could defeat the monster. As usual, the monster came to the hall at night, and after he had devoured one person, a desperate fight began. This battle ended in a victory for Beowulf, and the monster escaped with his wounded body and finally died in its lair. Because of that, Beowulf received tremendous wealth. However, the story did not end there. For vengeance, the monster's mother took away Hrothgar's Aeschere, a counselor to Hrothgar. Beowulf was sent to seek out the monster with his companions. After plunging into a pool, he came to the bottom of the sea and reached a cave where he found a magic sword. He defeated the monster's mother with the sword there, eventually killing her.

In the second part of the poem, the scene of action then shifts 50 years later to the land of the Geats in Sweden, where the elderly Beowulf confronts a dragon terrorizing his own land. After succeeding in killing two monsters, Beowulf went back to the Geats in Sweden. Due to the war with Swedes, there was no man to ascend the throne. Beowulf was then elected to serve as the king, and there was a thriving prosperity

lasting for fifty years because of his wise government. However, one day, a slave managed to steal some treasures which were guarded by a fire-breathing dragon, and so the dragon was irritated and began to take vengeance on the land. Although Beowulf was very old then, he still decided to fight the dragon. He ordered his companions to wait outside. He himself went into the place where the treasure was stored and fought with the dragon, but he failed to stab the dragon with his sword and was put into danger. At this moment, Wiglaf, who was one of Beowulf's companions, rushed in to help, and injured the dragon. The old king seized the opportunity and killed the dragon with a knife, while he was also seriously maimed. He realized that he was now nearing to his end and so he gave his final direction about his own funeral. Wiglaf announced Beowulf's death. After that, people threw the dragon into the ocean and carried away the treasures. At the end of the poem, they held the cremation for Beowulf and praised him as a great king.

## Geoffrey Chaucer ( c. 1343 –1400 )

Geoffrey Chaucer is noted as the author of *The Canterbury Tales*, which ranks as one of the greatest poetic works in English. He is now known as the Father of English literature, and is widely considered the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages. He was the first poet to be buried in Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. Chaucer made a vital contribution to English literature, because the period he lived in was a time when most of poetry was written in Anglo-Norman or Latin, and Chaucer's work was crucial in legitimizing the literary use of the Middle English vernacular.



Geoffrey Chaucer was born and raised in London. His family name Chaucer derives from the French word *chausseur*, meaning "a maker of footwear". This family's fortune came from leather and wine. His forebears were middle-class English people for at least four generations. His father, John Chaucer, was a prosperous vintner and a deputy of the king's butler. He was also a member of Edward III's expedition to Antwerp in Flanders (currently a part of Belgium) in 1338. John died at the age of 53.

Although little is known about his early education, there is no doubt that Chaucer could read French, Latin and Italian, which were demonstrated in his writing. In 1357, he was arranged by his father to serve as a nobleman's page in the household of Elizabeth de Burgh, the countess of Ulster and later the wife of Lionel of Antwerp

(Lionel is the third son of Edward III). In 1359, Chaucer went to France with Edward III's army and was taken prisoner in France. He returned to England in 1360. By 1366 Chaucer married Philippa Pan (also known as Philippa Roet), a woman who had been in the service of Elizabeth de Burgh. He then made several journeys abroad on diplomatic missions for the next 10 years, and in the meantime, he and his wife received great financial grants from the king. In 1382, he was appointed comptroller of the London customs. In 1386, he became a Member of Parliament for Kent. During his time, it was customary that a man who was engaged in politics adhere to a man of higher rank as his patron, and Chaucer was no exception. His patron was John of Gaunt who was Edward III's fourth son and husband of Philippa's sister, Katherine Swynford. Chaucer took on a variety of other jobs, for example, he also worked as a courtier, a civil servant, as well as working for the king from 1389 to 1391 as Clerk of the King's Works. These posts he held made him become familiar with the lives of different classes. In 1400, he died and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Chaucer's literary career can be divided into three periods corresponding with the stages of his life.

### **The first period: 1360 – 1372**

During this period, Chaucer was influenced by the French poetry of the Middle Ages. He translated a poem, called "Roman de la Rose", which was a highly influential 13th-century French poem about country love. He used this kind of dream-vision form and finished his first important poem—"The Book of the Duchess", which is a lamentation for the Blanche of Lancaster (the first wife of John of Gaunt who was Edward III's son), who died of a plague in 1369. At this time, Chaucer's career was prosperous. His most important work was a poem called "The House of Fame" ("Hous of Fame" in the original spelling), which was also in the dream-vision form. This poem was not a successful writing, because it is unfinished. However, there is no doubt that it represents his skill as a poet.

### **The second period: 1372 – 1386**

Chaucer was influenced by the great literary figures of the early Renaissance in Italy. His most famous writing of this period is "Troilus and Criseyde", the story of which is adapted from a long poem by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 – 1375), an Italian poet. "Troilus and Criseyde" is a long poem re-telling in Middle English the tragic story of the lovers Troilus and Criseyde set against a backdrop of war during the Siege of Troy in Ancient Greek literature. In the 1380s, Chaucer produced his fourth and final dream-vision poem, titled "The Legend of Good Women", which is possibly the



first significant work in English to use the iambic pentameter or decasyllabic couplets which he later used throughout *The Canterbury Tales*. This form of the heroic couplet would become a significant part of English literature, no doubt inspired by Chaucer. Another work from this period is the *Parliament of Fowles* (also known as the *Parlement of Foules*, *Parlement of Briddes*, *Assembly of Fowls*, *Assemble of Foules*, or *The Parliament of Birds*), a poem with approximately 700 lines in the form of a dream vision, and contains the first reference to the idea that St. Valentine's Day is a special day for lovers. Relying on the myth, the poem tells a story in which the birds would gather together on St. Valentine's Day of each year, and then, the goddess Nature would allow the birds to choose their mates at their free will.

### **The third period: 1386 – 1400**

Chaucer's works are sometimes grouped into first a French period, then an Italian period and finally an English period, with Chaucer being influenced by those countries' literatures in turn. It is *The Canterbury Tales*, wherein Chaucer focuses on English subjects, with bawdy jokes and respected figures often being undercut with humour, that has cemented his reputation.

*The Canterbury Tales* is the greatest work of Chaucer's life, which was written between 1387 and 1400. It is a collection of 24 stories told by fictional pilgrims on their journey to the cathedral at Canterbury; tales that would help to shape English literature. It contrasts with other literature of the period in the naturalism of its narrative, the variety of stories the pilgrims tell and the varied characters who are engaged in the pilgrimage. Chaucer drew on real-life experiences for his cast of pilgrims. This literary work has a general prologue which is considered the most fabulous part of the whole writing. In addition, the 24 tales of this literary work are interconnected, not isolated. The background of this work is as follows: To kill time on the road to Canterbury, the host of this trip proposed that everyone should tell 4 stories, and the best teller would be rewarded a free supper. There should be 120 tales included in the collection, but it is a pity that Chaucer only wrote 24 tales before he died.



## **Selected Reading**

### **Excerpt from *Beowulf***

The following are two excerpts from *Beowulf*. The first is the story in which Beowulf fought with the monster. The second is about the funeral of Beowulf.