

HIGHLIGHTS OF BRITISH LITERATURE

# 英国文学选读

孙华祥●主编



中国社会科学出版社

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## 前 言

目前，国内出版的普通高等学校英语专业使用的英国文学教材已有十几种。这些教材无一例外的都是为一个学年的教学时数编写，且各有所长。有的教材注重了文学史与文学选读的结合，有的则是单纯的文学史或者文学作品选读；有的教材对选篇进行了导读，也有的对选篇添加了注释；有的教材用纯英文写成，也有的用汉语对作家或作品进行了解释说明。因此，目前国内的英国文学教材市场上一时难以找到一套能同时满足以下所有条件的英国文学教材：专门为普通高等学校英语专业高年级学生编写，文学史与文学选读相结合而并重，教材正文全部用英语编写，对选篇同时进行导读、注释并提供思考题，编选的内容适合一个学期的教学时数使用。正是在此情形下，这部《英国文学选读》应运而生。

《英国文学选读》的特点之一就是打破了英国文学教材编写中从贝奥武夫到弗吉尼亚·沃尔夫的传统框架，选材直接从英国文艺复兴时期的文学开始，经过清教时期、新古典主义时期、浪漫主义时期、维多利亚时期和现代主义时期的文学，一直延伸到后现代主义时期的文学。其间撷取了英国文学史上最具有代表性的 18 位作家及其经典作品，供普通高等学校英语专业高年级一个学期的教学使用。此框架本身就意味着这部教材是英国文学经典的一个浓缩版。

《英国文学选读》的另一个特点是追求文学史概述与文学作品选读的结合，提高文学史部分的内容在文学选读课程中的重要性。从篇章结构上讲，教材的每一章都大致分为两个部分。首先是该时期文学史的总体概述，然后是作家的作品选读。这么做的目的就是试图通过文学史部分的概述，从作家、作品的背景信息上为读者阅读、理解和欣赏选篇提供所必需的宏观指导，使得读者能够在相应的文学背景下更好地获得文学体验和美学感受。

《英国文学选读》还有一个特点就是为选篇提供了导读、注释和课后讨论题。导读部分力求有的放矢，注释部分力求准确详尽，课后讨论题则力求针对性与开放性共存。这样做的目的是为了培养学生自主学习的能力，并深化读者对英国文学的认识。

编者自 2006 年开始酝酿编写新的英国文学史及选读教材，前后历经诸多曲折。现在教材得以出版，应首先感谢曲阜师范大学外国语学院的王福祥副院长。王副院长自始至终对这部教材的编写工作给予密切的关注、充分的肯定、热情的鼓励和有力的支持。编者从中得到了编写工作所必需的勇气、信心和动力。

特别需要感谢的是中国社会科学出版社的编辑高涵女士。在此教材的编写、出版过程中，从高屋建瓴的指导性意见，到细致入微的编辑工作，高女士从不吝惜自己的汗水。教材的字里行间处处渗透着高女士的心血，她渊博的学识和一丝不苟的工作态度令人钦佩。

《英国文学选读》由孙华祥主持编写。参加编写工作的有（按姓名音序排列）：曹英慧、高丽、孙华祥、孙明瑞、肖冠华、许红艳和张琳。

编者

2010 年 3 月

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## Chapter 01 The Renaissance Period

A main theme in this chapter is Renaissance. The word “renaissance” is a French one which means “rebirth” or “revival”. As a term, it was used to refer to the rebirth of learning caused by the discovery of hundreds of Greek and Latin manuscripts which had been lost during the Middle Ages. The renaissance first rose in Italy in the 14th century and gradually it went to embrace the rest of Europe in the following two or three centuries. The influence of the movement was not confined to literature, music and the fine arts, but affected the whole development of human civilization. As a result, the renaissance acted as a broad dividing line between the Middle Ages and the Modern Ages.

Two features are striking of this Renaissance Movement. One is a thirsting curiosity for classical literature. During the Renaissance, there arose a general revival of the study of Greek and Latin authors. Many Greek and Latin works were dug out. At the same time, people caught something very different in spirit from the medieval Catholic dogma. So the love of classics was also an expression of the general dissatisfaction with the Catholic and feudal ideas. Another feature of the Renaissance is the keen interest in life and human activities. People ceased to look upon themselves as living only for God and a future world. Man can mould the world according to his desires and attain happiness by removing all external checks. Thinkers, artists and poets arose and gave expression to the new feeling of admiration for human beauty and human achievement, a feeling in sharp contrast with medieval theology.

In the 16th century, the Renaissance spread to Britain. Two special events stood out as a signal that things were indeed changing the British Isles: the rise of the Tudor Dynasty and the introduction of printing by William Caxton. With the establishment of the Tudor Dynasty, strong national feeling in the time gave a great incentive to the cultural development in England. English schools and universities were established in place of the old monasteries. With the introduction of printing

into England, Caxton printed about one hundred books in English in his lifetime, including *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer. Thus, for the first time in history it was possible for a book or an idea to spread over the whole nation in a speedy way. Also, an age of translation came into being. Lots of continental literary works, both ancient and modern, were translated and printed in English. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were translated by Arthur Golding (c. 1536—c. 1605), and Homer's *The Illiad* was translated by George Chapman (c. 1559—1634). As a result, the introduction of printing led to a commercial market for literature and provided numerous books for the English people to read, making everything ready for the appearance of the great Elizabethan writers.

The Renaissance of English literature is usually divided into three periods. The first period of it was one of imitation and assimilation. It lasted from the last years of the 15th century to the first half of the 16th century. During this period, Academies of the Italian type were established in England. Petrarchan sonnet was introduced into English by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503—1542), and blank verse, the unrhymed iambic pentameter, was brought in by Sir Henry Howard, 3rd Earl of Surrey (1517—1547). Poetry and poetic drama were the most outstanding literary forms of the period and they were carried on especially by William Shakespeare (1564—1616) and Ben Johnson (1572—1637).

The second period of the English Renaissance is also called "The Elizabethan Age", covering roughly the second half of the 16th century. The Elizabethan Age saw the flowering of poetry (the sonnet, the Spenserian stanza and dramatic blank verse). It was a golden age of drama, especially for the plays of Shakespeare. Another important figure in Elizabethan theatre is Christopher Marlowe (1564—1593), a member of the so-called "University Wits" who wrote for the stage of the time. Had he not been stabbed at twenty-nine in a tavern brawl, he might have rivaled, if not equaled, Shakespeare for his poetic gifts.

The third period of the English Renaissance went from 1603 to 1625. English literature during this period is properly called Jacobean, after the new monarch, James I. After Shakespeare's death, the poet and dramatist Ben Jonson was the leading literary figure of the era. Ben Jonson is, in many ways, the figure of greatest centrality to literary study of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period. He wrote in virtually every literary genre: in drama, comedy, tragedy and masque; in

poetry, epigram and lyric; in prose, literary criticism and English grammar. *The King James Bible*, one of the most massive translation projects in the history of English up to now, was started in 1604 and completed in 1611. The project was headed by James I himself, and it represents the culmination of a tradition of Bible translation into English. Although many other translations into English have been made, *The King James Bible* is aesthetically preferred because its meter is made to mimic the original Hebrew verse.

The keynote of Renaissance is humanism. As a progressive life stance, humanism affirmed human ability and responsibility to lead meaningful and ethical lives. It was opposed to feudal and religious doctrines and scholasticism of the mediaeval times. It advocated academic studies, freedom of thought and emancipation of individuality, and asserted that human beings were the centre of the world. Meanwhile, humanists became interested in individual achievement and emphasized life in this world, as opposed to preparation for life in the next world. They believed strongly in the potential for individual accomplishment in arts, literature, politics, and personal life. Individuals began to be encouraged to excel in a wide range of fields and showcase their talents. The Renaissance, therefore, in essence, is a historical period in which the European humanist thinkers and scholars made attempts to get rid of those old feudal ideas in medieval Europe, to introduce new ideas that expressed the interests of the rising bourgeoisie, and to recover the purity of the early church from the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church.

Among the giant humanists at the time were Thomas Moore (1478—1535), Francis Bacon (1561—1626), Edmund Spenser (1552—1599), Christopher Marlowe (1564—1593), and William Shakespeare.

## William Shakespeare

(1564—1616)

### ✧ Shakespeare's life

It is generally accepted that William Shakespeare was born on April 23 (May 3, according to our present calendar), 1564, in the village of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. Church records from Holy Trinity Church indicate that he was baptized there on April 26, 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, came from a family of yeomen and later became a prosperous trader in corn, meat, leather, and other agricultural products. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of an ancient family of landed gentry.

Little is known about Shakespeare's education. It is surmised by scholars that Shakespeare attended the free grammar school in Stratford, which at the time had a reputation to rival Eton.

The next documented event in Shakespeare's life is his marriage to Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582. Then William Shakespeare effectively disappeared from all records, turning up in London circa 1592. He rose quickly in the theater as both an actor and an author. He joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, becoming a shareholder and senior member in 1595. Because of his success in London, he was able to purchase New Place, the largest and most elegant house in his hometown of Stratford, when he was in his early thirties.

In addition to his popularity as both an actor and playwright, Shakespeare became joint owner of the famous Globe Theater when it opened in 1599. His share of the company's management added heavily to his wealth.

Shakespeare's financial success in the London theatre enabled him to retire and return to his home in Stratford around 1610. He lived there comfortably until his death on April 23, 1616.

### ✧ Shakespeare's literary creation

An English poet and playwright, William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's preeminent dramatist. He

is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon". His surviving works consist of 2 long narrative poems, 154 sonnets and 38 plays.

Shakespeare is a great dramatist as well as a great poet. His dramatic creation is often divided into four periods beginning with what is referred to as an experimental period starting around 1590 and ending around 1595 which includes *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Richard III*, *Richard II* and *King John*.

The second period of rapid growth and maturity ending around 1601, marks the establishment of Shakespeare and includes the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, the comedies, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *As You Like It* and the history plays, *Henry IV, Parts I and II*, *Henry V*, and *Richard II*.

The third period of gloom and sadness ending around 1610 marks perhaps the apex of Shakespeare's work with the tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, *Troutus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens*, but also comedies such as *Twelfth Night*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure* and the epic history play, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The final period of calm after storm ends around 1611 with the plays, *Cymbeline* and *Henry VIII*.

### **Shakespeare's comedies**

William Shakespeare's plays come in many forms. Among the most popular are the comedies, which are full of laughter, irony, satire, and wordplay. All of Shakespeare's comedies have five acts. The climax of the play is always during the third act. These comedies describe young men and women freed from the feudal fetters, who live in a world of youth and dreams and fight for their own happiness. They trust in themselves rather than God or King and their great efforts are rewarded with success.

Shakespeare's comedies often use puns, metaphors, and insults to provoke "thoughtful laughter". The action is often strained by artificiality, especially elaborate and contrived endings. Disguises and mistaken identities are often very common.

The plot is very important in Shakespeare's comedies. They are often twisted



and confusing, and extremely hard to follow. Love provides the main ingredient for the plot. If the lovers are unmarried when the play opens, they either have not met or there is some obstacle in the way of their love. Examples of the obstacles these lovers go through are familiar to every reader of Shakespeare: the slanderous tongues which nearly wreck love in *Much Ado About Nothing*; the father insistent upon his daughter marrying his choice, as in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*; or the expulsion of the rightful Duke's daughter in *As You Like It*.

Shakespeare's comedies also contain a wide variety of characters. His female leads are usually described as petite, and often they assume male disguises. Often, foul weather parallels the emotional state of the characters. Character names are often clues to their roles and personalities, such as Malvolio from *Twelfth Night*, and Bottom in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*.

*The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* are usually considered to be among the best ones of Shakespeare's comedies.

### **Shakespeare's tragedies**

William Shakespeare started writing tragedies because he thought the tragic plots used by other English writers were lacking artistic purpose and form. He used the fall of a notable person as the main focus in his tragedies. Suspense and climax were an added attraction for the audience.

The tragic hero is always a noble man who enjoys some status and prosperity in society but possesses some moral weakness or flaw which leads to his downfall. External circumstances such as fate also play a part in the hero's fall. Evil agents often act upon the hero and the forces of good, causing the hero to make wrong decisions. Innocent people always feel the fall in tragedies, as well.

The four most famous Shakespeare tragedies are *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*. In his tragedies, Shakespeare expresses a profound dissatisfaction with life, shows the struggle and conflicts between justice and injustice and exposes mercilessly the evils of the Elizabethan society.

### **Shakespeare's history plays**

Shakespeare's history works include *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI*, *Henry*