



高等学校英语专业系列教材

# 英国文学经典选读

刁克利 编著

*Classical Readings of English Literature*

(上)



外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS



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# 前言

文学作品既是一种语言精华的体现，也是一个民族文化、精神与情感的反映。

英国文学学习至少有四个目的：一是阅读最优美的英语；二是系统地学习英国文学知识，提高作品欣赏能力，启迪并发展文学批评能力；三是开阔视野，了解与文学相关的英语文化和思想潮流的产生和发展；四是丰富情感体验，提高人文素养和思想水平。

根据多年课堂教学经验，一本理想的英国文学教材应当包括：学习要点提示、系统的背景介绍、经典的作品遴选、详尽的注释、文学评论要点综述、富有启发性的思考题、灵活多样的课堂活动以及作家名言选录等。而正是这些构成了本教材的基本内容：

全书分上、下两册，由 7 个部分组成，共 44 单元，结构如下表所示：

|    |                 |                   |
|----|-----------------|-------------------|
| 上册 | 第 1 部分 1~4 单元   | 中世纪文学，英语文学的形成时期   |
|    | 第 2 部分 5~7 单元   | 16 世纪文学，即文艺复兴时期文学 |
|    | 第 3 部分 8~11 单元  | 17 世纪文学           |
|    | 第 4 部分 12~21 单元 | 以启蒙运动为背景的 18 世纪文学 |
| 下册 | 第 5 部分 22~29 单元 | 以诗歌为主要形式的浪漫主义文学   |
|    | 第 6 部分 30~37 单元 | 维多利亚时期的文学         |
|    | 第 7 部分 38~44 单元 | 20 世纪文学           |

在对英国文学内容进行了全面梳理和系统讲解的基础上，本书对教材形式进行了较大的创新。大致框架如下：

每一部分首先介绍了学习要点和背景知识，然后是分单元讲解的作家作品。学习要点由关键词组成，放在各部分前面，明确教学目标，提示学习重点，在正文中出现时都以黑体标记。这也有利于在学习中加深印象，以及对相关参考书目的选择。背景知识主要介绍与作家作品相关的文学思潮，及其生成的社会、历史、文化背景，以及不同文学体裁的转换原因和新特点，还有对代表性作家作品的概述。

每一单元(1~3单位除外)以作家为标题,主要内容是作家介绍与作品选读,以及注释、评论要点、问题思考、课堂活动和作家名言等。

- 作家介绍(life and writing):包括作家在文学史中的地位和总体评价,作家的生活经历、文学思想和创作风格的形成,以及作家的重要作品与影响。

- 作品选读(selected works):遴选文学史中有定论的一流作家的代表作,讲解部分主要包括作品的内容概述、结构分析、语言欣赏、艺术特色和主题思想等。

- 注释(notes):涵盖语言点、专用词汇和文学术语解释,以及精彩句子点评、文学现象延伸讲解和重要段落的意思总结等。

- 评论要点(critical points):概括经典作品的魅力所在,综述作品批评的历史沿革和不同的阐释角度,引导文学欣赏与批评的新方法,有助于文学论文写作和深入研究。对于热爱文学、想进一步探索研究的同学,这一部分会有很大的帮助。

- 问题思考(questions):既促进思考,又是重点内容提示,强调对文学作品意义的思考和体验。

- 课堂活动(class activities):有写作训练、角色扮演、作品朗诵、分组讨论、主题报告和演讲等,鼓励同学交流和师生互动,以多种形式促进文学学习。教师可根据实际情况采用。

- 作家名言(quotations):选录作家在不同作品中的精彩句子,有助于理解作家的文学思想。

本教材的特点可以概括为以下几个方面,这同时也是学习英国文学需要注意的地方:

一是注重文学规律,清楚作家作品产生的社会背景、文化背景,及其在文学思潮中的发生和流变;阅读文学作品的同时学习文学批评和文学思潮的更迭。

二是注重作品解读,提高文学欣赏和批评水平。对作品从内容结构、情节安排、表意层面,音韵格律、写作特色和技法等方面进行详尽地分析,对作品的意义表述从情、理、思三个方面进行透彻地剖析。

三是以作家年代先后为线索编排内容,注重作家思想的来源、文学风格的形成,及其对文学史的贡献和影响。

四是强调教学互动。问题思考、课堂活动和作家名言等的设计旨在启示新的教学方法和学习、体验文学的新思路,以达到更好的教学效果。奇文共欣赏,疑义相与析。相互交流和切磋会使学习过程生动有趣。

教材主要服务于教学实践。全书(上下册)的内容和形式均符合

两个学期的课程安排和每周一次课的教学需要。每次课可以是 2 到 4 个学时。授课对象为英语专业本科高年级学生。在实际教学中, 根据学生兴趣和实际需要, 对部分作家作品可以有所取舍, 各单元内容的讲解也可以有所侧重。

文学教材的目的不仅只是教授知识, 也要培养学生对文学的终生热爱。维护这种热爱的途径就是知道文学有趣、有益, 同时懂得如何登堂入室。所以, 本书的理念是在全面理解和执行教学大纲的前提下, 提倡对文学的多层次学习和理解。

本书的编写特别感谢美国伊利诺伊大学厄巴纳 - 香槟分校英语系彼得·葛瑞特教授 (Peter Garrett), 我和他详细讨论过本书的选材和主要内容。从他的文学课堂, 我获益良多。感谢查尔斯·兰福先生 (Charles Lansford), 他逐句审读了本书的课堂活动和问题思考部分。感谢中国人民大学外国语学院英语系的学生, 他们的学习热情使我不断完善本书的构想。衷心欢迎读者提出宝贵意见。

刁克利

2008 年 7 月 17 日

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# Part I

## The Middle Ages (to ca. 1485)

### Key Words

Old English

epic

alliteration

understatement

ballad

Middle English

romance

kenning

heroic couplet



# Unit 1

## Beowulf

**Beowulf**, written in the Old English sometime before the 10th century AD, describes the adventures of a great Scandinavian warrior of the sixth century. *Beowulf* is the oldest surviving epic in British literature, and the first major poem in a European vernacular language.

### Background Knowledge: The Anglo-Saxon Period (450-1066)

Literature, as a written record of human life and representative of high level of national language, is also a legacy of long civilisation. Therefore, the knowledge of early English people and English language is beneficial to literature learning.

The important events in the early part of English history are Roman Conquest, Anglo-Saxon Conquest and Norman Conquest in subsequence, which leave influence to different extent upon the development of England as a nation and that of English as a language.

English literature started from the Middle Ages, which embraced two quite different periods of literary history, the Old English and the Middle English. The Old English is also known as Anglo-Saxon English, mainly used during the period of Anglo-Saxon Conquest. The first most impressive long poem in this period is *Beowulf*, the greatest of Germanic epics in the English language, which is a fabulous starting point of English literature. It is the Norman Conquest in 1066 that sharply divided the two periods and began the period of the Middle English. The Middle English is used to describe the language from then to about 1500, a period during which London English gradually became the dominant dialect.

The larger proportion of Middle English literature is religious. The church had a virtual monopoly on literacy during much of the Middle Ages.

Christianity teaching was primarily concerned with the issue of personal salvation. The premises of literature are timeless, and the scenes and characters in literature are unchanging. A romance written at the beginning of the 13th century differs little from one written in the 15th century.

The summit of Middle English literature came during the last quarter of the 14th century, represented by three great poets, writing at almost the same time. The author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* not only produced the best romance of the entire period, but also wrote some of the best religious poetry. William Langland's achievement in *Piers Plowman* is important both in literature and in history, since he faced squarely the great issues of his day. Geoffrey Chaucer's achievement was the greatest of all and *The Canterbury Tales* remains a world masterpiece for centuries.



## 1 Roman Conquest

The early inhabitants in the island were Britons, a tribe of Celts. From the Britons the island got its name—Britain, the land of Britons. The Celts were primitive people living in the tribal society, knowing how to make swords and grow crops. Their religious ceremonies were May Day and the cult of mistletoe, which have become part of the national tradition of the English people.

The Celts suffered repetitive invasions by foreign forces. In 55 BC, Julius Caesar<sup>1</sup>, the Roman conqueror, led his legions to England. There were frequent conflicts between the native Celts and the Roman invaders. The Celts remained free and wild in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The Roman occupation lasted for three and a half centuries. They built temples, roads, walls, and military camps, and they also built many walled towns and made them the sites of military settlement. This explains the reason why there are towns today in Britain ending in “-chester” or “-caster”. In AD 410, the Romans withdrew their legions from the island. The Roman Conquest witnessed the foundation of London, but the Conquest left little influence on its national life, and the people continued to speak Celtic.

1 Julius Caesar (102/100–44 BC): Roman politician and a general of genius. He was also a writer of exceptional ability and has left a lucid account of his campaigns in his *Commentaries*. He is the author of *De Bello Gallico*, from which we get most of our knowledge of the Roman Britain.



## 2 Anglo-Saxon Conquest

In the first half of the fifth century, the island of Britain was invaded by three Germanic tribes: the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, usually known as Anglo-Saxons. They originally occupied parts of the coast of modern Denmark and Germany on both sides of the Elbe. The old Saxon word “angul” means a hook, and the name Saxon is from “seax”, a short sword. They lived a life related to fishing, and they were brave fighters. This is the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period in British history (449-1100).

The Anglo-Saxons were the ancestors of the present English people. They killed many Celts and drove the rest into Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and settled down themselves. The Jutes occupied Kent, the southeastern part of the island. The Saxons took the southern part and established small kingdoms as Wessex, Essex and Sussex. The Angles spread over the east midland and built the kingdom of the East Angles.

The Celts resisted bravely. In the struggle against the invaders, there appeared a legendary figure, the Celtic King Arthur. King Arthur was a Romanised Celt, and a general and brave fighter. At Camelot in Somersetshire, the legendary capital of his kingdom, he gathered around him the bravest of his followers, who were known as the Knights of the Round Table. King Arthur and his knights fought bravely for the kingdom against the Anglo-Saxon invaders, and left rich materials for endless English romances.

The Anglo-Saxons also fought among themselves, and seven kingdoms were established at the end of the sixth century. In the process of fighting against other invaders later, these small kingdoms were combined into a united kingdom named England, that is, the land of Angles. The three tribes had mixed into a whole people called English.

Language spoken by them is now called the Old English, which is the foundation of English language and literature. Its usage covers a period of approximately 700 years—from the Anglo-Saxon migrations that created England in the fifth century to some time after the Norman invasion of 1066.

With the settlement of Anglo-Saxons in Britain, the history of English literature began.

## 3 Religion and Literature

An important event in the period is the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. The Angles and Saxons, before they came to England, believed

in the old mythology of Northern Europe. The Northern mythology has left its mark upon the English language. For example, there is a convincing evidence that the days of the week in English are named after the Northern gods. In AD 597, Pope Gregory sent St. Augustine as a missionary to King Ethelbert of Kent, and the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity began.

About the same time missionaries from Ireland began to preach Christianity in the north. Monasteries were built all over the country from the seventh century. The Anglo-Saxons gradually accepted Christianity. This changed their outlook, and enabled them to read the Scriptures and the classical writings of the ancient Greek. Although at a time only monks could read and write, the earliest English books were written down. Heathen mythology was replaced by Christian religion.

As for the change of social structure, the Anglo-Saxon period witnessed a transition from tribal society to feudalism. In that age of frequent wars, they admired greatly the wisdom and courage of their war leaders. Their kings were essentially warriors, whose duty was mainly to protect the tribe from being attacked. The ideal of kingly behaviour was enormously important. It is possibly that this chief spiritual force and the admiration for the great deeds of the kings shaped their earliest history and literature, and helped in the formation of epic as the first important literary genre.

In the development of the Anglo-Saxon literature, three figures were worthy of being mentioned. The first one was Caedmon, who lived in the seventh century and turned the stories of the Bible into verse form. He used *Paraphrase* as the title of the work. The legend goes like this: Caedmon knew nothing about how to sing at first, and one night he heard the voice from God: "Caedmon, sing me something." Caedmon answered honestly that he could not sing. Then God told him, "Sing me the Creation." And all of a sudden Caedmon got the magic power to sing, and was remembered as the first Anglo-Saxon poet.

Another important figure was Venerable Bede (673-735), a monk and the author of *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in Latin. The book covers the whole length of early English history from the invasion by Julius Caesar to the year 731, four years before Bede's death. The book earned the author the title of "Father of English History". We know the story of Caedmon from this book, which is full of strange religious stories and miracles.

The third figure was King Alfred the Great of Wessex (849-899), who is remembered not only as a king to unite the forces of the Anglo-Saxon kings and defeat the Danes, but also as the guiding spirit of his kingdom. During his

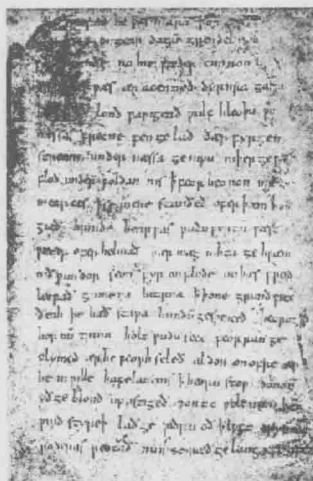
reign, many Latin books were translated into West Saxon dialect. He himself is said to translate Bede's *History*. He launched *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which began with the story of Caesar's conquest and annually recorded important events until 1154.

Among all the achievements of literary legacy, the chief survivor of Old English literature is *Beowulf*.

## Beowulf

*Beowulf* exists in only one manuscript. The poem is untitled in the manuscript, but has been known as *Beowulf* since the early 19th century. As the single major surviving work of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, the poem has become "England's national epic".

*Beowulf* consists of 3,182 lines, depicts a vivid picture of an early Germanic society, of its public life, its customs, rituals and cultural activities. A rich fabric of fact and fancy, the poem demonstrates its charm in the description of a world of legends, fantasies and primitive beauty. It also recaptures the values, beliefs, and longings of the Anglo-Saxon people before they came to England, and presents a mixture of ideas of paganism and Christianity. Much of the material of the poem is legendary and paralleled in other Germanic historical-mythological literature in Norse, Old English, and German.



The first page of the *Beowulf* manuscript

This copy survived both the wholesale destruction of religious artifacts during the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII and a disastrous fire.

### Plot Summary

In the poem, Beowulf, a hero of a Germanic tribe, battles three antagonists: Grendel, who is destroying Heorot and its inhabitants in Denmark; Grendel's Mother, who wants to take the revenge for the killing of her son by Beowulf; and later in life, a dragon.

The first two fights occur in his youth. In the land of the Danes during the reign of King Hrothgar, who builds a splendid hall and gives it the name Heorot. One night while the Danes are feasting, Grendel, a giant monster of

human shape, enraged at the sound of merry-making, suddenly appears and kills 30 warriors. For the next 12 years the monster haunts the place until no one dares to enter the grand hall. When Beowulf, nephew to King Hygelac of the Geats, hears of this, he sails with his warriors to Heorot to offer his help. He persuades the Danes to feast with him in the hall. After they fall asleep, the monster bursts in the door, seizes a warrior and devours him. Beowulf disdains to use a sword against the monster and grapples with him. After a fierce combat, Beowulf tears away one arm and a shoulder off the monster who flees to die. The next night Hrothgar rewards the hero with rich gifts and a banquet in Heorot. Then Grendel's mother comes to avenge her son, and carries away the king's dearest friend. Beowulf follows Grendel's mother to her sea dwelling and kills her with a sword found hanging in the cave.

Beowulf's fight with a dragon happens 50 years later, when Beowulf has been king of the Geats for a long time. A runaway slave steals some hidden treasure guarded by a dragon for 300 years in a cave. The dragon is enraged and ravages the land with his fiery breath. Beowulf sets out with 12 companions. Ordering his men waiting outside, he alone seeks the dragon in the cave and fights bravely against it. Both Beowulf and the dragon are mortally wounded. The dying Beowulf gives his last orders about his funeral, and is glad to learn that he gains new treasure for his people. His people throw the dragon into the sea and build a large bonfire on a headland, stretching far into the sea to burn Beowulf's body. Then they lay all the treasure with Beowulf's ashes and bury them together under a tremendous mound. The mound, according to Beowulf's will, may serve as a beacon for seafarers who sail along the coast. The poem ends with praises of the great deeds of the hero, who was "the mildest and most beloved, to his kin the kindest, keenest".

The two halves of the poem are distinguished in many ways: youth, then age; Denmark, then Geatland; the hall, then the barrow; diverse, then focused.

### Artistic Features

*Beowulf* represents the highest achievement of the Old English. The most distinct feature of the epic is the extensive use of alliteration, that is, certain accented words in a line begin with the same consonant sound. Its poetic vocabulary includes sets of metrical compounds that vary according to alliterative needs. It also makes extensive use of elided metaphors.

Besides, a figurative language called "kenning" is largely applied to add beauty on ordinary objects, and the device is typical of much of classic poetry in the Old English, which is heavily formulaic. A **kenning** is a poetic