Perry Keenlyside

The History of English Literature

Read by Derek Jacobi and cast

CONTAINS 100 EXCERPTS FROM KEY WORKS
THE AGE OF CHAUCER

1 Geoffrey Chaucer 1343-1400 7:13
The Canterbury Tales, ?1390-1400 *

2 Extract from The Miller’s Tale 2:42
read by Anthony Donovan

3 Extract from The Franklin’s Tale 3:29

From The Canterbury Tales I, Naxos AudioBooks

4 William Langland c.1330-c.1386 2:04
The Book Concerning Piers Plowman, date unknown *

5 The ‘Gawain’ poet birth and death dates unknown 2:55
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1375? #

6 John Gower ?1330-1408 3:34
Confessio Amantis, 1390 §

THE END OF CHIVALRY

7 John Lydgate ?1370-1449 1:53
The Duplicity of Women, mid 15th century *

8 Anon 1:20
I Sing of a Maiden, early 15th century §

9 Anon 1:19
Carol of Agincourt, c.1415

10 Anon 1:03
Black-smutted Smiths, mid 15th century *
11 Sir Thomas Malory 1420-1471
Le Morte d’Arthur, 1470
From The Death of Arthur read by Philip Madoc
Naxos AudioBooks
NA300112 • ISBN 9626340010

12 John Skelton 1460-1529
Lullaby, c.1500 #

13 Sir Thomas Wyatt 1503-1542
They flee from me… #

14 Sir Thomas More 1478-1535. Utopia

15 Thomas Cranmer, editor 1489-1556
The Book of Common Prayer, 1549 *
THE TRIUMPHS OF ORIANA

16 Sir Walter Ralegh 1554-1618
As You Came from the Holy Land #

17 Edmund Spenser 1552-1599
The Faerie Queene, 1589
From The Faerie Queene read by John Moffatt
Naxos AudioBooks
NA315912 • ISBN 9626340029

18 Sir Philip Sidney 1554-1586
Astrophel and Stella, 1582 §

19 William Shakespeare 1564-1616 The Sonnets, 1609
Three Sonnets

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day
Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Let me not to the marriage of true minds

From The Sonnets read by Alex Jennings

Naxos AudioBooks

Christopher Marlowe 1564-1593

The Passionate Shepherd to his Love, pub. 1599

Ben Jonson 1572-1637

To Celia: Drink to Me Only, pub. 1616 read by Anton Lesser

From Popular Poetry Popular Verse read by Lesser/Russell Beale

John Donne 1572-1631

Busie old Foole, Unrulie Sunne

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning, prob. late 1590s

Holy Sonnets ?1610

Elizabethan Drama

Christopher Marlowe

Dr Faustus, late 1590s

William Shakespeare

Henry IV Part I, 1598
31 **A Midsummer Night’s Dream**, 1600 1:40
32 **King Lear**, 1605 * # 4:40
33 **The Authorised Version of the Bible**, 1611 2:33
   *The Song of Solomon* read by Josette Simon
   *From The Old Testament – Selections* read by Madoc/Lesser/Sheen /Simon
   **Naxos AudioBooks**
   NA609112 • ISBN 962634 0916
34 **Francis Bacon** 1561-1626 2:10
   *What is Truth? – Essays*, 1597-1625 #
35 **John Donne** 1572-1631 2:44
   *Sermons*, pub. posthumously 1640-1660 *
   **PURITAN’S PROGRESS** 3:17
36 **Richard Lovelace** 1618-1657 0:54
   *To Lucasta, Going to the Wars* §
37 **George Herbert** 1593-1633 2:47
   *Love*, pub. 1633 §
38 **Henry Vaughan** 1621-1695 2:25
   *The Retreate*, 1650 *
39 **Robert Herrick** 1591-1674. *To Daffodils*, 1648 # 1:32
40 **Richard Lovelace**
   *To Althea, from Prison* #
41 **John Milton** 1608-1674 3:42
Paradise Lost, 1667
From Paradise Lost read by Anton Lesser
Naxos AudioBooks
NA300212 • ISBN 962634 0029

Andrew Marvell 1621-1678
The Definition of Love §
To His Coy Mistress, pub. 1681 §
John Bunyan 1628-1688
The Pilgrim’s Progress 1678
From The Pilgrim’s Progress read by Edward de Souza
Naxos AudioBooks
NA417112 • ISBN 962634 1718

RESTORATION
Daniel Defoe 1660-1731
Moll Flanders, 1722
From Moll Flanders read by Heather Bell
Naxos AudioBooks
NA300812 • ISBN 962634 0088

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester 1647-1680
A Song of a Young Lady to her Ancient Lover, ?1670 read by Emma Fielding
From Popular Poetry Popular Verse Volume II, read by Britton/Britton/Fielding
Naxos AudioBooks
NA207212 • ISBN 962634 4072X
John Dryden 1631-1700
Song for St Cecilia’s Day, 1687 *

William Congreve 1670-1729
The Way of the World, 1700 § #

THE AUGUSTAN AGE
Alexander Pope 1688-1744
The Rape of the Lock, 1712 *
Essay on Man, 1733-1734 *

Jonathan Swift 1667-1745
Gulliver’s Travels, 1726
  From Gulliver’s Travels read by Neville Jason

Samuel Johnson 1709-1784
Preface to Shakespeare, 1765 *

Henry Fielding 1708-1754
The Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend, Mr Abraham Adams, 1742 *

Thomas Gray 1716-1771
Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard, 1751 *

ROMANTIC REVOLUTION
William Blake 1757-1827
Auguries of Innocence *
Mock on, Mock on Voltaire, Rousseau, 1803  
William Wordsworth 1770-1850  
*Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, 1798*
*From Great Poets of the Romantic Age* read by Michael Sheen
Naxos AudioBooks
NA202112 • ISBN 962634 0215

Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1772-1834  
*Kubla Khan, 1798*
*From Great Poets of the Romantic Age* read by Michael Sheen
Naxos AudioBooks
NA202112 • ISBN 962634 0215

The Gothic Novel – Mary Shelley 1792-1822  
Jane Austen 1775-1817  
Emma, 1816
*From Emma* read by Juliet Stevenson
Naxos AudioBooks
NA309512 • ISBN 962634 0959

Percy Bysshe Shelley 1792-1822  
Ode to the West Wind, 1819
*From Great Poets of the Romantic Age* read by Michael Sheen
Naxos AudioBooks
NA202112 • ISBN 962634 0215
George Gordon, Lord Byron 1788-1824

Fragment, 1818

So We’ll Go No More a-Roving, 1817

From Great Poets of the Romantic Age read by Michael Sheen

Naxos AudioBooks

John Keats 1795-1821

Ode on Melancholy

Ode to a Nightingale

Ode on a Grecian Urn, 1818

FAITH AND DOUBT – THE VICTORIAN AGE

Alfred, Lord Tennyson 1809-1892

Be near me when my light is low

Charles Dickens 1812-1870

Hard Times, 1854

From Hard Times read by Anton Lesser

Naxos AudioBooks

Great Expectations, 1861

From Great Expectations read by Anton Lesser

Naxos AudioBooks

Children’s literature
The Detective Novel

76 **The Brontës: Charlotte Brontë** 1816-1855;  
*Ann Brontë* 1820-1849  
*Emily Brontë* 1818-1848  
*Wuthering Heights*, 1847  
*From Wuthering Heights* read by Freda Dowie  
Naxos AudioBooks  
NA306312 • ISBN 962634 0630

6:13

77 **Matthew Arnold** 1822-1888  
*Dover Beach*, 1867 §

2:03

78 **George Eliot** 1819-1880  
*Middlemarch*, 1872  
*From Middlemarch* read by Carole Boyd  
Naxos AudioBooks  
NA619612 • ISBN 962634 1963

3:29

79 **Alfred, Lord Tennyson**  
*In Memoriam*, 1850 §  
*Tears, Idle Tears*, 1847 §

3:57

80 **Christina Rossetti** 1830-1894  
*A Pause*, 1853 •

2:21

81 **Robert Browning** 1812-1889  
*My Last Duchess*, 1842 §
Rudyard Kipling 1865-1936 1:57
Recessional, 1897 read by Anton Lesser
From Popular Poetry Popular Verse read by Lesser/Russell Beale
Naxos AudioBooks
○ NA201612 • ISBN 962634 0169

THE AGE OF ANXIETY
Thomas Hardy 1840-1928 5:49
Neutral Tones, 1867 read by Bruce Alexander
From Winter Words – Poetry and Personal Writings of Thomas Hardy
Naxos AudioBooks
○ NA219312 • ISBN 962634 1939
Tess of the d’Urbervilles, 1891
From Tess of the d’Urbervilles read by Imogen Stubbs
Naxos AudioBooks
○ NA314712 • ISBN 962634 1475

Gerard Manley Hopkins 1844-1889 3:01
No worst, there is none, 1885 *

Alfred Edward Housman 1859-1936 1:08
Into my heart an air that kills (A Shropshire Lad), 1896 *

Henry James 1843-1916 2:20

Joseph Conrad 1857-1924 4:18
Heart of Darkness, 1902
From Youth/Heart of Darkness read by Brian Cox
Naxos AudioBooks

89 Herbert George Wells 1866-1946  3:57
The War of the Worlds, 1898 #

90 David Herbert Lawrence 1885-1930  5:08
Odour of Chrysanthemums #

91 Wilfred Owen 1893-1918  4:17
Futility, 1917-1918 read by Sarah Woodward
From Poets of the Great War read by Maloney/Sheen/Britton/Woodward

Naxos AudioBooks

92 William Butler Yeats 1865-1939  1:25
The Second Coming, Collected Poems read by Tony Britton
From Popular Poetry Popular Verse Volume II read by Britton/Britton/Fielding

Naxos AudioBooks

93 James Joyce 1882-1941  4:04
Dubliners, 1914
From Dubliners
Naxos AudioBooks Dubliners read by Jim Norton

12
Naxos AudioBooks

**Virginia Woolf** 1882-1941
*To the Lighthouse, 1927*
*From To the Lighthouse* read by Juliet Stevenson

Naxos AudioBooks

**Evelyn Waugh** 1903-1966
*Decline and Fall, 1928*

**George Orwell** 1903-1950
*Coming Up for Air, 1939*

**T.S. Eliot** 1888-1965

**Wystan Hugh Auden** 1907-1973
*Lay your sleeping head, my love, 1940*

**POST-WAR, POST-MODERN**

**Cecil Day-Lewis** 1904-1972

**Keith Douglas** 1920-1944
*How to Kill, 1943*

**Dylan Thomas** 1914-1953
*A Refusal to Mourn the Death, By Fire, of a Child in London, 1940*

**Ivy Compton-Burnett** 1892-1969; **Jean Rhys** 1894-1979; **Doris Lessing** 1919-
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<th>Author</th>
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<td>1913-1991</td>
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Total time on CDs 1-4: 5:16:56

John Shrapnel *  Anton Lesser #  Jonathan Keeble §  Teresa Gallagher •
This is, inevitably, a very brief survey of English literature, and I had better say at once something about the limitations I have imposed upon myself. I begin in 1375 or so because Anglo-Saxon writing, however fine, is in a language which is pretty well unreadable except by those who have studied it; the first flowering of genius in something approaching modern English comes in the second half of the fourteenth century. You will not find here much mention of Irish, Scottish or Welsh writing: to do these literatures justice, each would require its own history, although I have of necessity mentioned such influential figures as Joyce and Yeats in Irish literature, or Dylan Thomas in Welsh. Were this to be a history of literature in English, I would obviously have had to include American and post-colonial writers (Eliot and James are present because they took British citizenship). Dramatists are treated briefly because the history of drama is a subject in itself – see David Timson’s *History of Theatre* on the Naxos label. The major exception to this rule is Shakespeare, because it seems to me that he belongs almost as much to literary culture – and, indeed, culture at large – as he does to drama in particular.

Every literary enthusiast will have his or her favourite authors and texts, and I am well aware that some listeners will be disappointed, even outraged, by the omission of one or more of those favourites. I can only apologise, and confess that I have inevitably been influenced by my own particular loves, however hard I have striven to achieve balance. It would not take Sherlock Holmes (or indeed any great literary detective) to discover that Hardy, Chaucer, Austen and Larkin (to name but a few) are close to my heart… Perhaps I should also say here that literature, for me, has a great deal more to do with pleasure than with moral earnestness or the arrangement of authors in order of merit: if reading isn’t enjoyable – and even profoundly disturbing works like *King Lear* are, in a sense, enjoyable – then it is probably a pointless activity. If literature *does* modify life and how we live it, it can surely only do so through the medium of pleasurable appreciation.

I have tried to convey here something of the texts – and contexts – of the major
writers in the English literary canon, quoting enough to give a flavour of each author and attempting to show a little of how they represent or express the age in which they lived. Many of us (myself included) find it helpful to be reminded who was alive and writing at a certain time, and who were his or her contemporaries: the very speed of this survey may provide a clearer overview of changes and developments through the centuries.

A history like this inevitably begs the question: what is literature, and how does it differ from other kinds of writing? It is impossible to provide a satisfactory short answer, but here goes… Literature is writing which is born of a consciously artistic intent to create something which not only expresses a perceived truth about the human condition, but also tries to do so in a manner which is aesthetically satisfying and productive of pleasure. Pamphlets, most journalism, this audiobook, etc., do not therefore qualify… And what (I hear you cry) are the distinguishing features of English literature, specifically? No space to do justice to this question, either, but perhaps it has something to do with its ability to range between the sublime and the everyday, the infinite and the particular: English literature that is overtly political or philosophical is rarely entirely successful – unlike, say, the French, the English have little taste for large abstract theories, and prefer to build from the ground upwards – from the quotidian to the universal. George Eliot, through the character of Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, expresses this tendency to perfection: the novel has a wide emotional, historical and intellectual scope, and yet its effects are repeatedly achieved through a particular and beautifully-rendered moment – the moment, perhaps, when Mrs Bulstrode comes quietly in to forgive her disgraced husband, or when Mr Casaubon’s repulsive coldness melts briefly as he sees and is touched by the youthful ardour and vulnerability of his watching wife.

The ‘plight’ of literature, or of the novel, or the poem, is often discussed nowadays, mainly because of the impact of other media and forms of entertainment: the very fact that this is an audiobook is revealing. Yet more books than ever before are being bought – if not always read – and there will, I believe, always be a hunger for imaginative writing which enlarges the mind or spirit, which gives a sense of shape or meaning to the complicated business of being alive. I hope that this history may make a small contribution to encouraging that process.
Acknowledgements

Lullaby by W.H. Auden
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Pilate’s Wife by Carol Ann Duffy by kind permission of Picador, an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

Perry Keenlyside was born in 1950. Educated at Charterhouse and Trinity Hall, Cambridge, he has taught English at independent schools since 1973. Apart from literature, his special interests include music – in his youth he was a competent amateur oboist – anything to do with English history, and France. He is also a devoted fan of Liverpool Football Club. Other Naxos titles written or edited by Perry Keenlyside include The Life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Poets of the Great War and Realms of Gold: The Letters and Poems of John Keats.

Derek Jacobi is one of Britain’s leading actors having made his mark on stage, film and television – and notably on audiobook. He is particularly known for the roles of I Claudius and Brother Caedfael, both of which he has recorded for audiobook. His extensive theatrical credits, from London’s West End to Broadway, include numerous roles encompassing the whole range of theatre. He also reads The History of Theatre for Naxos AudioBooks.
John Shrapnel was born in Birmingham and brought up in Manchester. John Shrapnel joined the National Theatre (under Laurence Olivier) playing many classical roles including Banquo and Orsino. With the RSC he has appeared in classical Greek theatre as well as numerous Shakespearean plays. His TV work varies from Stoppard’s *Professional Foul* and *Vanity Fair* to *Inspector Morse* and *Hornblower*. Films include *Nicholas and Alexandra, One Hundred and One Dalmations* and the role of Gaius in *Gladiator*.

Jonathan Keeble – Theatre includes leading roles at Manchester’s Royal Exchange, Coventry, Liverpool, Exeter, Lancaster and West Yorkshire Playhouse. TV includes *People Like Us, The Two Of Us* and *Deptford Graffiti*. Jonathan has featured in over 250 radio plays for the BBC and was a member of the Radio Drama Company. For Naxos Audiobooks: *Black Beauty, Classic Chilling Tales, The Soldier’s Tale, Macbeth, Oedipus the King*.

Teresa Gallagher has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London’s West End, and Off Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh’s *Topsy-Turvy*.

Anton Lesser is one of Britain’s leading classical actors. He has played many of the principal Shakespearean roles for the Royal Shakespeare Company, including Petruchio, Romeo and Richard III. Appearances in major TV drama productions include *The Cherry Orchard, Troilus and Cressida, The Mill on the Floss* and *The Politician’s Wife*. He also reads Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Homer’s *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* and Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities, Hard Times* and *Great Expectations* for Naxos AudioBooks.
The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

**HOLBORNE/ROBINSON** PAVANS AND GALLIARDS 8.553874
Christopher Wilson, Shirley Rumsey, lutes

**WARLOCK** CAPRIOL SUITE 8.550823
Bournemouth Sinfonietta, Richard Studt, director

**BACH** SINFONIAS VOL 4 8.553367
Failoni Orchestra, Hanspeter Gmür

**LAWES** CONSORT MUSIC 8.550601
Rose Consort of Viols

**PURCELL** THE TEMPEST 8.554262
Arcadia Baroque Ensemble, Kevin Mallon

**JENKINS** ALL IN A GARDEN GREEN 8.550687
Rose Consort of Viols

**HAYDN** SYMPHONY NO 104 8.550287
Capella Istropolitana, Barry Wordsworth

**PARRY** SYMPHONY NO 2 8.553469
Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Andrew Penny

**HOLMES** IRLANDE 8.223449
Rheinland-Pfalz Philharmonic, Samuel Friedmann

**Music programmed by Nicolas Soames**
Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day…
Far from the madding Crowd’s ignoble Strife…
Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks…
I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered…
Move him into the sun…

English literature may very well be the greatest body of imaginative writing the world has yet seen. The human experience has been understood, interpreted and conveyed by writers of genius in a tradition stretching through six or more centuries, from Chaucer to Philip Larkin, from Defoe to William Golding. Here, accompanied by a wealth of examples, is the story of a literature that has touched the hearts and stirred the minds of countless readers through the ages.

“This is one of the richest listening experiences I have had. All manner of familiar delights are here – ‘somer seasons when soft was the sun’, ‘caverns measureless to man’, Dover Beach, Gawain, Bacon and Bunyan, Conrad and Joyce. Derek Jacobi calls the roll of honour with his inimitable combination of stately significance.”

THE INDEPENDENT