Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem
Bölcsészettudományi Kar

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Az angol irodalom története 1660–1900

egyetemi jegyzet

ISBN 978-963-308-056-6

Piliscsaba, 2011.

English Literature 1660-1900/I

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I. The Literature of the Restoration Period (1660-1700)

The Restoration is an event in political history: it is the re-establishment of the Stuart monarchy after the Interregnum of 1649-1660, which came to pass with the accession of Charles II in 1661. This political event, however, brought together with it such huge changes in British culture that the Restoration has also become the name of a period in cultural history. As far as literature is concerned, perhaps there is no other period in the history of British literature that is so radically different from the era just preceding it. The Restoration introduced new forms and modes in literature, as well as a wholly new aesthetic, moral, and philosophical outlook, which make this period fundamentally distinct from the previous great literary historical period, the English Renaissance. This is not to say, of course, that there were no continuities. Indeed one of the greatest achievements of the English Renaissance, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, was composed and published in the Restoration era, and the neo-classical aesthetic attitude that emerged in this period can also be looked at as a natural continuation of Renaissance thought. However, the overall difference in the literary output of these two periods is still so vast that the Restoration remains perhaps the greatest watershed in the history of British literature. To account for these vast changes we must turn to history.

Historical Background

The radical discontinuity between Renaissance and Restoration culture was primarily due to the irreversible changes that the revolutionary era of the 1640s and '50s brought about. The most important of these changes was probably the development of a wholly new system of state government, which could be described in broad terms as the passage from "absolute monarchy" to "constitutional monarchy". One can indeed argue that this development is in the background of the most significant historical events of the period.

The Civil War and the Interregnum

Between 1642 and 1651 England was in a state of civil war, a civil war that centred around the issue of state government. King Charles I maintained his father, James I's doctrine of the "Divine Right of Kings", the belief that the King was only accountable to God and was not to be controlled by any earthly authority (civil or ecclesiastical) even if he governed wrong. He treated the Parliament according to this doctrine, too, regarding it as a representative body of the landed gentry whose only task was to collect the taxes that the King levied to raise money for his purposes. The Parliaments which Charles I summoned, however, were unwilling to perform this task unconditionally. Therefore, Charles attempted for a time to govern without calling the Parliament but was finally forced to convene it again in 1640. Instead of granting the requisite financial support, however, the Parliament began to

express their resentment of Charles's arbitrary government. The King, infuriated by such opposition, dissolved their session after about three weeks' time (the "Short Parliament"). Later in the same year, however, Charles was forced to assemble another Parliament, which turned out to be even less inclined to fulfill the King's expectations. They continued expressing their grievances against the King and introduced reforms which placed the King's power under parliamentary control, including the law that the King could not dissolve Parliament without its consent. In fact, this Parliament was not officially dissolved until 1660 (hence its name: the "Long Parliament").

Parliament's opposition to King Charles I was further strengthened by the King's much resented Church reform. He believed in High Anglicanism, a form of Protestant worship that in its liturgy and theology reminded many of the hated Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. With the help of his chief religious adviser, Archbishop Laud, the King implemented changes in the Anglican Church which made High Anglicanism compulsory for all congregations. These strictly enforced changes were particularly offensive for a faction within the Anglican clergy who had emerged in Queen Elizabeth's reign and who called themselves "the godly" or Puritans. The Puritans were closer in their faith to Calvinistic doctrine and advocated a more austere form of religious worship (without the sacramental formalities of Roman Catholicism), as well as a more ascetic lifestyle. Thus when Archbishop Laud had wooden altars replaced in all churches with onesmade of stone and introduced a new version of the *Book of Common Prayer* prescribing High Anglican forms of church service, the Puritans opposed these changes strongly and became the natural allies of the Parliament in their conflict with the King.

It was actually the forced introduction of High Anglican reform that led directly to the outbreak of the English Civil War. When Archbishop Laud made the use of the new *Book of Common Prayer* compulsory in Scotland, the Scots took arms to defend their religious freedom.It was the King's unsuccessful war against the Scots that made it necessary for him to call the "Long Parliament" whose conflict with Charles I finally led to the Civil War.

After three major military engagements between royalist and parliamentary forces, the English Civil War ended with complete parliamentary victory. King Charles was captured, accused of treason, found guilty and beheaded in 1649. His son, Charles, led one more campaign against the parliamentary forces but he was also defeated in 1651 and had to go into exile. From 1649 England became a Commonwealth, a republic governed by the Parliament (or what was left of it: the "Rump") and the army. This strikingly modern form of government, however, proved to be premature in the age and failed to provide a stable and effective state. In 1653, therefore, one of the most eminent military leaders of the parliamentary forces, Oliver Cromwell, assumed dictatorial power as Lord Protector of England. This form of government also failed after Cromwell's death in 1658. Cromwell's son, Richard, succeeded his father in the position of Lord Protector, but the son was evidently far less strong-handed than the father. In particular he lacked the support of the main pillar of his father's power, the army, and was consequently forced to give up his post after about seven months. Subsequent attempts at handling the situation proved no more successful and it soon became evident that things were getting out of hand, and that England was once more on

the verge of civil war. Rather than risk a relapse into civil war, the Parliament finally determined to resort to external authority and initiated the return of the Stuart dynasty. Accordingly, Charles I's exiled eldest son returned to England in 1660 and was crowned as Charles II of England in 1661. The Restoration took place.

The Restoration

Since it was the Parliament that invited Charles II back to the throne, the Restoration was a relatively mild political transition. Before coming to England the new King issued a declaration in which he granted a general pardon for crimes committed between 1642 and 1660 to all who recognized him as the lawful monarch. He also allowed the retention of property acquired during this period. The only exceptions to this general pardon were the regicides, the surviving members of the commission of fifty-nine judges who signed the death warrant of Charles I. These were sentenced to death and their property was confiscated. Apart from this, however, there was no bloodshed and no radical redistribution of wealth and property after the Restoration.

On the ideological level, however, the new regime proved to be much less liberal. Although Charles had promised religious tolerance, and was personally in favour of it, he was finally made to sign the Act of Uniformity in 1662, an act which virtually outlawed Puritanism, the main ideological pillar of the parliamentary forces and of Cromwell's Protectorate. The Act required all clergy to adhere to the new version of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which some 2,000 Puritan clergymen refused to do.Thus the Puritans, who had formerly been a reform movement within the Anglican Church, became excluded and had to continue their religious activity outside the Established Church as Dissenters (from Latin *dissentire* = 'to disagree'). Although in the early years of the Restoration era Dissenters were marginalized, they continued to exert an influence in the religious, cultural, intellectual life of the period and gradually increased their weight and significance to become a major cultural and political power by the turn of the century.

As far as state government was concerned, although the Restoration re-established the monarchy in England, this by no means meant a return to the pre-1642 form of absolute monarchy. The Civil War era and the Interregnum set such precedence that it was no longer possible for the monarch to govern without Parliament's consent. When Charles II came to the throne, he first had to subscribe to Parliament's decision that governmental power should be shared by the King, Lords, and Commons (the idea of "the mixed state"), and although later in his reign he occasionally dissolved Parliament and tried to rule without it, this by no means meant the return to the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. In fact, during the Restoration period Parliament's power and independence were steadily increasing and England was gradually moving towards the form of government known as the "Constitutional Monarchy" (that is, when the King's power is legally bound).It was not until 1689, however, that this new form was made into the official system of state government (see more on this below).

It was also during the Restoration period that the former factions within Parliament solidified themselves into political parties. More particularly it was the Exclusion Bill crisis of

1679-81 that led to the formation of the first English party system. Since Charles II had no legal heir, his openly Catholic brother, James, was to succeed him as King and this was unacceptable to a large faction in Parliament. This faction, led by the powerful speaker, Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftesbury, drafted the Exclusion Bill demanding that Catholics should be prevented from acceding to the English throne. The other faction in Parliament supported James's accession, considering his line to be the only lawful continuation of the line of descent. (See more on this in the chapter on John Dryden.) The Bill was finally defeated in 1681, but the two factions, who nicknamed each other the Whigs and the Tories, respectively, remained and were transformed into political parties. The Whigs, inspired by the political philosophy of John Locke, challenged the monarch's absolute power and believed that it should be submitted to the consent of the people represented by Parliament, while the Tories supported the monarch's authority and viewed Parliament's actions with aristocratic suspicion. This division between Whigs and Tories continued to have a major impact on the political, cultural, intellectual life throughout the 18th century.

The Glorious Revolution

In 1685 Charles II died and was succeeded on the throne by his brother, James II. The new King was highly unpopular among his subjects. Not only was he openly Roman Catholic, which in itself inspired a dislike in most Englishmen, but he also circumvented existing laws and appointed Catholics to most positions in the court and in the administration. Besides, with his unwise political actions James alienated his own supporters, as well. He issued a Declaration of Indulgence which granted religious freedom to Catholics (and limited toleration for Dissenters), and when seven bishops, all Tory supporters of the monarchy, drafted a petition against these measures, he had them arrested and sent to the Tower of London.

In spite of his unpopular politics, however, James was endured by the English because he only had two daughters by his first wife, Mary and Anne, who were both Protestant. Thus the forced Catholic ascendency was considered by most to be a mere interlude. In 1688, however, James's Catholic second wife gave birth to a strong and healthy boy, James (the Old Pretender), and the prospect of a Catholic dynasty loomed large, which the English could no longer tolerate. Accordingly, seven Protestant noblemen invited William of Orange – who was the husband of James II's Protestant daughter, Mary – to come to England to resolve the political tension. He landed with his army in November 1688 and marched towards London. As gradually most of the English men of quality defected from James II and joined William,James did not dare to engage the invading forces. He was captured but was subsequently allowed to flee and went into French exile. It was declared by Parliament that he had thus abdicated his throne and William and Mary were crowned joint monarchs of England in 1689. Since these revolutionary changes took place without bloodshed or major political confusion, contemporaries named this series of events the "Glorious Revolution".

The Glorious Revolution consolidated the form of state government that had been evolving in England since the Restoration and for the first time embodied it in statutory form. On 16 December 1689 Parliament passed the Bill of Rights (still in force), which lay the

foundations of the English constitutional monarchy. More particularly, the Bill of Rights determined the limits on the powers of the monarch and the rights of Parliament (including freedom of speech within Parliament, the requirement of regular elections and the right to petition the monarch). With this England adopted the most modern form of state government in Europe, which was admired by the continental thinkers of the Enlightenment and which ultimately helped England resist the great revolutionary upsurge that shattered Europe in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789.

The Moral and Cultural Atmosphere of the Restoration Period

The Protectorate

Although in historical perspective the Commonwealth and the Protectorate were indeed great progressive achievements, they were premature developments for the time. The Commonwealth, as we have seen, had to be replaced by the Protectorate because it proved to be unstable and the success of the latter system of state government depended merely on the remarkable talent of an exceptional individual, Oliver Cromwell, who ruled the country with an iron hand. In other words, the Protectorate could only be maintained by force. Cromwell's soldiers became a kind of militia in peace-time and maintained order by virtually tyrannizing over people's lives.

The atmosphere of these decades was highly uncongenial to cultural life. The royalist men of letters (Thomas Hobbes, Abraham Cowley, William Davenant among them) were – at least temporarily – forced into exile, while those who remained faithful to Cromwell (John Milton and Andrew Marvell) employed their best energies in serving the political cause of the parliamentarians, engaging in political and ecclesiastical controversies, and writing – as Milton said about himself – "with their left hand". Besides, the Puritans' hatred of immorality and useless entertainment rendered several modes of cultural production suspicious, too. Most of the theatres, for example, were closed down during Cromwell's rule and no new theatrical productions were staged until 1660. (Opera performances were an exception, though. Since Cromwell enjoyed music very much and did not consider it to be morally damaging, the law did not extend the ban to music. Thus the first English opera – William Davenant's *The Seige of Rhodes* – was staged in a private theatre in Davenant's house in 1656 by special permission from Cromwell.)

The rule of the Puritans, furthermore, brought about some fanatic excesses that were oppressive not only in the sphere of high culture but also in people's everyday lives. With their strong sense of election the Puritans felt that they were authorized to interfere in people's private lives with the purpose of directing them towards a godlier existence. Thus not only the theatres, but also brothels, gambling houses, and taverns were closed; not only new plays, but also cockfights, horse-racing, and even sports were banned. Colourful clothes and savoury meals were frowned upon, while drunkenness and swearing were considered to be positively criminal and offenders could be fined and in serious cases even imprisoned. Sunday activities were especially strictly regulated: people were not allowed to do any

unnecessary work on that holy day, not even shave, water the plants, or visit their neighbours. Special food and drinks were banned on that day as well as on other Christian holidays, which were to be celebrated by fasting, rather than by feasting, and with the most solemn and serious activities. The militia formed out of Cromwell's army made sure that these strict Puritan regulations were as strictly enforced. They walked the streets watchfully guarding against all offences, removing the illegal makeup from the face of wonton girls, or smelling out and confiscating the roasting geese prepared for an unlawful celebration of Christmas. In a word, people had to live in an oppressive, stifling atmosphere during the last years of the reign of Oliver Cromwell.

Charles II's Court

After these oppressive years the return of Charles II was generally well received by the people of England. His accession brought political stability and this removed the constant sense of uncertainty and fear under which people had to live during the last years of the Protectorate. The poets expressed the popular sentiment when in their eulogies written to celebrate the Restoration they frequently compared Charles to Emperor Augustus, who brought peace and stability to Rome after a long period of civil wars, just as his English counterpart to England. There was also a general sense of relief after the oppressive moral atmosphere of the rule of the Puritans was dispersed. People gathered in the newly opened public houses, drank the King's health, sang, and danced and cast the dice; in a word, they enjoyed their new-found freedom.

Charles II himself was the exact opposite of the Puritan ideal. Nicknamed by his contemporaries the "Merry Monarch", he indeed loved pleasure and enjoyed life in a rather extravagant way. He loved witty conversation and cheerful company; he frequented the newly opened theatres, and had a strong appetite for all the good things in life: food, drink and especially for pretty women. He was well known to have had several lovers wherever he had been before his accession and kept royal mistresses after he became King, too, fathering large numbers of illegitimate children (he acknowledged 14 of these but probably had more). As John Dryden – his court poet – put it with amused mock-piety, the King "scattered his Maker's image through the land".

Besides being a man of pleasure, however, the King was also a committed supporter of the arts and sciences. He gathered in his court the best "wits" – that is, in modern terminology "intellectuals" – of his time, which resulted in the remarkable fact that nearly all the greatest cultural achievements of the period were directly connected to the King's court. The greatest poet of the age (Milton excepted), John Dryden, held the title of *Poet Laureate* ("official court poet"), a title established in England as a constant institution by Charles II; the new developments in the theatre were introduced by two of the King's personal acquaintances, Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant and very much according to the King's taste; the most characteristic dramatic genre of the period, the comedy of manners, was initiated by courtiers William Wycherley and Sir George Etheridge; the rebuilding of London after the great fire of 1666 took place under the supervision of architect Sir Christopher Wren who was appointed the King's Surveyor of Works by Charles; and the Royal Society (promoting the

advancement of modern scientific methods) was officially founded by the King himself. One reason why the Restoration constitutes such a watershed in cultural and especially literary history is probably that the new culture came to England in such a unified way, all its characteristic traits originating from the same centre, King Charles II's court.

John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester (1647-1680)

One of the most notorious and characteristic members of the Royal court was John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester. He was born into a royalist aristocratic family, studied in Oxford and then took the "grand tour". At the age of 17 he returned to London and became a courtier in Charles II's court, soon achieving notoriety for his extravagant lifestyle. He lived the wild life of a **libertine**, professing that he accepted no restriction from any moral or religious considerations. He was always the first in debauchery, drinking and whoring excessively, and in creating court scandal with his intrigues and practical jokes played at the expense of his fellow courtiers. Although he was idolized in his own circle of friends, nicknamed "the merry gang", he was feared by most of his contemporaries for his practical jokes, as well as for his often blunt and obscene satires which frequently exposed them to public ridicule. Nevertheless, his presence at court was highly valued by the King who enjoyed Rochester's conversation and the refreshing liveliness and excitement he brought into court life.

In a word, Rochester was the epitome of what is usually termed the "Restoration rake", the rich, fashionable, witty libertine who was a characteristic figure in Charles II's court, and a perfect reflection of the spirit of the Restoration era. Besides being a perfect representation of this social type, however, Rochester was also a poet, whose writing reflects the spirit of the age on another level, as well. His poetry is typical in the sense that he did not consider himself to be a poet by calling and wrote poetry rather because this was a fashionable way of showing off his wit. Much of his poetry is thus casual and not of particularly high quality, including offensively obscene and explicit language and imagery (see for example his famous "Sceptre Lampoon", a satire targeting the King himself). However, in his best poetry – especially in his most famous poem, "A Satire Against Mankind" – he achieves such poetic refinement and such a powerful expression of some fundamental aspects of the spirit of his age as constitute lasting value.

Above all, the "Satire Against Mankind" expresses the deep scepticism about human nature that is perhaps the most important foundation of the libertinism of the Restoration age.This scepticism remains central throughout the eighteenth century, manifesting itself in various ways in the work of Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson – the emblematic figures of the succeeding generations. Rochester's poem is fundamentally based on a comparison between humans and animals, and in the course of this comparison it tests all those "values" that are usually associated with humanity. Reason, wit, virtue, religion are examined and are revealed to be either misleading and useless or hypocritical and self-seeking. All those qualities that distinguish us from the animals are in fact inferior to what nature has given us, as well as the animals: "sure instinct", the five senses and the natural drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain. The reason why human nature diverges from these

natural foundations is fundamentally fear. Adapting Thomas Hobbes's famous description of the natural state of man "where every man is enemy to every man" (see Chapter XIII of Hobbes's *Leviathan*) and where fear of the other results in a general state of war, Rochester argues that everything that is human ultimately derives from the fear of the other man. We are afraid of each other and to make ourselves secure we seek power over the other, from which then follows all that we call human "values" or achievements. As Rochester puts it, "All men would be cowards if they durst" (l. 158); that is, we are forced to be brave and courageous because we are afraid of being overpowered, and virtue, religion, morality, wisdom, even kindness to the other are also ultimately motivated by the desire to find a secure position in a human environment that is dishonest, hostile and threatening. Consequently, all human values are hypocritical: the good we do or say is only pretence with which we want to gain power, and we want power simply because we are afraid of being overpowered.

This scepticism about human nature and about the foundations of human culture, as has been said, is generally characteristic of the Restoration period and continues to be influential throughout the eighteenth century. One reason for the formation of this attitude can probably be found in historical experience. In the course of the Civil War and the Interregnum, the English had first-hand experience of how the religious zeal of the Puritans was often just a façade for power-thirsty, self-seeking individualism, how moral strictness and spiritual enthusiasm were often hypocritical. Whatever is in the background of this sceptical attitude, however, it is certainly a distinctive streak in the English thought of the period and renders it unique in what is generally known in Europe as the "Age of Reason".

The Poetry of the Restoration Period: John Dryden (1631-1700)

The greatest poet of the Restoration era was undoubtedly John Dryden; so much so that in literary history the period between the Restoration and the turn of the eighteenth century is also often referred to as the "Age of Dryden". Indeed his poetic career almost completely corresponds to this historical period, his first mature poems dating from 1658 and 1660 and his last great publication, *Fables Ancient and Modern*, coming out in 1700, the year of his death. Moreover, his poetic career is also very closely linked to the major political, historical events of his time: the London plague of 1665, the Great Fire of London (1666), the second Anglo-Dutch wars of 1665-67, the Exclusion Bill crisis of 1679-81, James II's accession (1685) and the Glorious Revolution (1689). These events played a major role in his personal as well as professional life. His characteristic poetry was not written in the lyrical mode that we usually associate poetry with today; most of it is public poetry, written on a particular occasion, with a particular political or other public purpose. In almost all of his best writing, he mobilized his poetic powers to serve didactic (political, ecclesiastical, or philosophical) ends, taking part in the public debates and power struggles of his day. In other words, Dryden was – perhaps more than any other English poet – a poet of his age.

Education and Early Career

Dryden was born as the first of fourteen children in the family of a Puritan country gentleman. He attended Westminster School, a distinguished grammar school, where he received a solid humanistic education, focussing on the classical languages and authors. His curriculum also included regular translation assignments from the classics and the study of dialectic, that is, the art of arguing for both sides of a controversial issue. Both these skills became central in his subsequent literary career, as the final phase of his life was devoted primarily to translations, and as he turned his skills in dialectic to very good use in his most famous critical work, *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie*. After his secondary education he attended Trinity College, Cambridge, taking his degree in 1654.

His father died in the same year, but the little land Dryden inherited did not provide him with enough to live on. After his graduation, therefore, he went to London to seek employment and through the family's Puritan connections found a job as assistant to a member of Cromwell's government. In 1658 he attended Cromwell's funeral, together with John Milton and Andrew Marvell, the great Puritan poets, and published his first mature poem, "Heroique Stanzas" to commemorate the great Puritan leader. In his next important poem, "Astraea Redux" (1660), however, he already celebrated the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. With this work, as well as with the next one, "To his Sacred Majesty" (1661), written on the coronation, he clearly sought royal or aristocratic patronage, which, however, he could not obtain at this time. To make a living, therefore, he turned to writing for the newly opened theatres.

Dramatic Writing

During the 1660s and 70s the main source of Dryden's income was his theatrical writing. He was probably the most prolific playwright of the period producing some thirty plays altogether (some in collaboration with fellow dramatists). As is evident from the chapter on the Restoration Theatre and Drama above, Dryden played a decisive role in nearly all important developments in the drama of the age. He was among the first to set the tone of Restoration comedy, he initiated the characteristic genre of "heroic plays", was instrumental in the formation of the no less characteristic semi-opera, and was the author of probably the best regular tragedy written in the Restoration period, *All for Love* (an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*).

In spite of his remarkable success in the theatre, however, Dryden's dramatic writing was not what brought him public recognition and is not where his greatest literary achievement lies. What brought him public recognition was a long narrative poem, *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), and where his greatest achievement lies is probably the satires. *Annus Mirabilis* was composed in the period of a forced interval in London theatrical life. In 1665 the theatres had to be closed because of the plague which struck London with frightful devastation, killing some 100,000 people, one fifth of London's population. In such times the polite world, which provided the majority of the theatre-goers, was not to be expected to stay in the crowded city. The Parliament met in Oxford, the Royal court moved to Salisbury (later to Oxford), and the whole theatre season had to be cancelled. The epidemic was finally put an

end to by an equally devastating natural disaster, the Great Fire of London in 1666, which destroyed over 13,000 houses in the city of London. Although the fire spared the theatres, it further postponed their reopening and they remained closed until December 1666. It was in this one-and-a-half-year interval that Dryden composed his long historical poem, *Annus Mirabilis*, narrating the events of the "miraculous year", 1666, in particular the defeat of the Dutch naval fleet by the English and the Great Fire. For this poem he was awarded the title "Poet Laureate" (official court poet), a title which he inherited from Sir William Davenant, and which meant the greatest public recognition a poet could dream of at the time. It was also in this period that he wrote his greatest critical work, *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668).

When the theatres were reopened, Dryden returned to dramatic writing, which he continued with greater or lesser intensity even into the 1690s. However, he was never quite satisfied with what he wrote for the theatre and became increasingly displeased with the constraints that writing for the stage imposed on him. He had to write plays primarily to please an audience, but he found that catering for the public taste often forced him to compromise his own literary standards. He complained of his "long-developing weariness with the theatre", and from the 1680s he turned his best energies from dramatic writing to the writing of *satires*, a genre in which he was to realize his greatest literary achievement.

The Satires

During the two decades of his exposure to the public as a theatrical writer and as Poet Laureate Dryden had engaged in several theatrical, poetical, political and ecclesiastical controversies and had acquired – in spite of his otherwise amiable and not quite belligerent personality – quite a few enemies. From the 1680s, therefore, he turned to the classical genre of the satire to retaliate against his political and poetical adversaries with the elegant but still very effective weapon of ridicule. Two of his satires from this period stand out as especially successful and influential: a political one, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), and a poetical one, *Mac Flecknoe* (1682).

Absalom and Achitophel has for its subject the most important political/historical event of the time, the Exclusion Bill crisis. This political conflict took its origin from what was later proved to have been just a hoax: the so-called "Popish Plot". In 1678 a former Jesuit priest, Titus Oates, revealed an alleged Catholic conspiracy whose purpose was to assassinate King Charles II and to replace him with his Catholic brother, James, the Duke of York (later James II). Oates's testimony proved to be rather unconvincing in the long run, but his allegations still created a great sensation and caused hysterical reactions, including the execution of several Catholic men of quality. In any case, however, the Popish Plot focussed attention on the issue of Charles II's succession and this divided the people of England. As Charles had no legal heir, his brother James was to succeed him as King, but he was Roman Catholic and a large proportion of the English population feared the changes that the accession of a Catholic monarch would cause. The Parliament was also split into two factions: some supported James's succession as the only lawful continuation of the line of descent, while others believed that James should be excluded from the throne for his Catholicism, and supported the succession of Charles's first-born illegitimate, but Protestant, son, the Duke of

Monmouth. These two factions nicknamed each other the Tories and the Whigs, respectively, and formed themselves into political parties, laying the foundations of the British party system.

The Whigs, led by the powerful parliamentary speaker, Anthony Ashley Cooper, 1st Earl of Shaftesbury, drafted the Exclusion Bill demanding that James should resign his claim to the throne, and brought it before the House in 1679. They were in majority in the House of Commons and had thus control over the King's finances. Charles, however, gained financial support from his cousin, the French Louis XIV, and dissolved the Parliament. The stalemate was only resolved two years later, in 1681, when the Bill was finally defeated in the House of Lords.

Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* was written in support of the King's cause and was published in 1681, just before the crisis came to an end. It gives an account of the political conflict using a biblical allegory. The Old Testament Book of Samuel includes the story of the revolt of Absalom against David, King of the Jews. Absalom is King David's illegitimate son, very much loved by his father; however, in his pride he claims his father's throne for himself and attempts to overthrow the King. In this attempt he is assisted by David's unfaithful counsellor, Achitophel. The analogy with the principal characters in the Exclusion Bill crisis is not difficult to recognize, and indeed Dryden develops it perfectly. In his poem King David stands for Charles II, Absalom is the Duke of Monmouth, Achitophel is the parliamentary leader of the Whigs, the Earl of Shaftesbury, the Jews are the English, and so on. Since the political situation Dryden represents was a stalemate without much real action on either side, the poem has no real plot; it only gives satirical descriptions of the characters taking part in the conflict. Since most of the people he portrays are not commonly known today, it is difficult for the modern reader to appreciate Dryden's powerful depictions. However, his skill at satirical portrayal can perhaps be demonstrated by the opening passage of the poem, which describes King David (that is, Charles II), representing the King's well-known promiscuity in terms of the poetical convention of the "golden age":

> In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,
> Before polygamy was made a sin;
> When man on many multiplied his kind,
> Ere one to one was cursedly confined;
> When nature prompted, and no law denied,
> Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;
> Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart
> His vigorous warmth did variously impart
> To wives and slaves; and, wide as his command,
> Scattered his Maker's image through the land.

This tolerant but obviously light and ironical portrayal of the King is replaced at the end of the poem by the much more serious image of David/Charles as the good King, who

dispels the quarrel between the quibbling factions with an imposing authority. Dryden thus makes his political purpose quite clear at the end of the poem – just as he has not made a secret of it throughout. However, the range and variety of the tones he uses and the sharpness and force of his portrayals certainly make the poem transcend its topical political purpose and elevate it among the greatest achievements in English poetry.

Dryden's other great satire from this period targets a rival dramatist, Thomas Shadwell. It was published anonymously in 1682 under the title *Mac Flecknoe*. The occasion for the poetic attack is not exactly known, for there was no great animosity running between the two playwrights before 1682. Dryden's poem, however, once again transcends its occasion and becomes the first truly great instance of *mock-heroic satire*, a genre that was to become perhaps the most characteristic poetic genre of this period, as well as of the next. The *mock form* in general is essentially based on a juxtaposition of form and content; in the *mock-heroic*, in particular, the typical formal conventions (verse form, elevated diction, characteristic scenes and imagery) of the heroic epic are juxtaposed with the low, trivial, pedestrian reality of the subject matter. In *Mac Flecknoe*, for example, the fictitious story of the poem is basically that Richard Flecknoe, a notoriously bad Irish poet (who had in reality died in 1678), is looking for his successor as the worst English poet and finds a perfect follower in Thomas Shadwell. This rather low subject, however, is treated with all the solemnity of the epic form. Mac Flecknoe is depicted as a mighty King of the realm of Nonsense, and once he finds his successor in Shadwell, the latter's accession to the throne is described with all the magnificence of an epic celebration of greatness. Besides, all this is narrated in heroic couplets (a form which Dryden had previously proposed as the English equivalent of the hexameters of the classical epic), and the diction, the tone and conventional imagery of heroic poetry is used throughout. The effect of the mock-heroic is very well illustrated by the opening lines of *Mac Flecknoe*:

All human things are subject to decay,
And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey:
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
Was call'd to empire, and had govern'd long:
In prose and verse, was own'd, without dispute
Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute.
This aged prince now flourishing in peace,
And blest with issue of a large increase,
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the State:
And pond'ring which of all his sons was fit
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit;
Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd; for nature pleads that he
Should only rule, who most resembles me:
Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dullness from his tender years.

Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
Strike through and make a lucid interval;
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,
His rising fogs prevail upon the day:

The opening couplet strikes a serious note which would be appropriate to start any epic poem. The next couplet, however, modifies our expectations, since the public image of Richard Flecknoe as one of the worst poets of the time seems hard to reconcile with the epic grandeur. We are even more surprised to find that Flecknoe is compared to the great Roman emperor, Augustus, and begin to wonder what kind of empire he might rule over. The answer comes in the next couplet where we find out that his empire is the realm of Nonsense. By this time the analogy between the epic tradition and the topical subject has been established, and Dryden can continue using the epic conventions which, however, have by now acquired a second meaning totally incompatible with the apparent one. Thus when he praises Flecknoe in perfect epic diction for having increased his dominions and for flourishing in peace, we also understand that this means that nonsense and stupidity have greatly increased during Flecknoe's lifetime and that nobody challenges the absolute rule of dullness in English poetry any more. A similar strategy is used further on where in form we hear Shadwell's praise but at the same time we are also made conscious that what he is so great at is in fact just stupidity. We are simultaneously aware of the apparent and the real meanings of these lines, as well as of the utter incompatibility of the two and this is what causes laughter.

Apart from the satires, Dryden also wrote in the 1680s two great didactic poems on religious subjects: *Religio Laici* (1687) and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687). Taking his cue from Lucretius, whose great didactic poem *De rerum natura* he translated in 1685, he uses poetry in these texts primarily to present an argument, to expound his religious convictions. As he somewhat apologetically puts it in the concluding lines of *Religio Laici*:

Thus have I made my own opinions clear;
Yet neither praise expect, nor censure fear:
And this unpolished, rugged verse I chose,
As fittest for discourse and nearest prose;
For while from sacred truth I do not swerve,
Tom Sternhold's or Tom Sh[adwe]ll's rhymes will serve.

With this use of poetry, however, he broke new ground; for, according to Dr. Johnson, Dryden was in these works "the first who joined argument with poetry" in England.

These two didactic poems are also interesting because they document a change in Dryden's religious affiliation. While *Religio Laici* ("The Layman's Faith") argues for the supremacy of the "middle way" of the Anglican Church, *The Hind and the Panther* was written in praise of Roman Catholicism. The reason for this change was apparently the succession of the Catholic James II after his brother, Charles's death in 1685. Many of Dryden's hostile contemporaries, who remembered the poet's early enthusiasm for Cromwell and the Puritan cause, accused him of being a religious turncoat. However, it must not be forgotten that, when in 1689 the tide turned once again in favour of Protestantism, Dryden did not reconvert and remained faithful to Catholicism, even though this caused him not a little inconvenience in his public career.

Translations, the Final Phase

After his accession in 1685 James II was generally disliked by the people of England, both for his Catholicism and for personal reasons. Nevertheless he was tolerated, because he did not then have a legal heir and thus there was no danger of a Catholic succession. In 1688, however, James's Catholic wife gave birth to a strong and healthy boy, James (the Old Pretender), and this the English could no longer endure. They invited William of Orange – who was the husband of James II's Protestant daughter, Mary – to come to England to resolve the political tension. He landed with his army in November 1688 and marched towards London. As gradually most of the English men of quality defected from James II and joined William, James was forced to go into exile. It was declared by Parliament that he had thus abdicated his throne and William and Mary were crowned joint monarchs of England in 1689. The Glorious Revolution took place.

England was under Protestant rule once again and the fact that Dryden did not reconvert led to the loss of all his honorary titles, including the Laureateship, and of the government pension that went together with these. At the end of his fifties and at the peak of his poetic reputation, Dryden thus found himself without a secure income. To earn his living he therefore turned in this final phase of his life and career to translation, publishing *The Works of Virgil* in 1697 and *Fables, Ancient and Modern* in 1700, the year of his death. The former was a translation of the whole Virgilian oeuvre, while the latter contained translations and adaptations from the works of Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio and, very importantly, Geoffrey Chaucer. In his long "Preface to the *Fables*" he achieves the great critical feat of recognizing Chaucer's importance for English literature and establishing him firmly as "the father of English poetry". Chaucer was held in low repute in the 17th century, because of the linguistic changes that took place in the 15th century (the Great Vowel Shift which is largely responsible for the transition from Middle English to Modern English). It took the critical genius of Dryden to recognize – in spite of the obvious linguistic distance – the encyclopedic, epic tendency in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the depth and accuracy of his characterisation. In fact for this and for other critical insights the "Preface to the *Fables*" is often considered Dryden's second critical masterpiece, besides the early *Essay of Dramatick Poesie*.

Recommended further readings:

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Restoration Theatre and Drama

Of all cultural manifestations, the spirit of an age is probably best expressed in its theatre, since it is here that the contact between the producers and the consumers of culture is the closest. This was even more so in the Restoration era, when – after the re-opening of the theatres – the newly emerging theatrical life had to begin as if on a *tabula rasa*; and that "blank slate" was indeed heavily impressed by the spirit of the new era. As has been said, the new theatre companies of the Restoration were founded by two of the King's friends. Instead of returning to the relative liberalism in the theatre business that characterized the Renaissance, Charles II wanted to keep theatre life under control. Rather than granting complete freedom to open new theatres, he therefore made the production and staging of new theatrical performances conditional on royal patent and gave these patents only to two loyal friends, Sir William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew. These two men formed the Duke's Company and the King's Company, respectively, and opened their first theatres in 1660 and 1661.

Court influence in the newly formed theatres was thus decisive and this also meant that the Restoration theatre was fashioned after the French model. After his final defeat by Cromwell in 1651, Charles and his court, were forced into continental exile, a large part of which was spent in the French court of Charles's first cousin, Louis XIV, the Sun King (who was, however, still underage at that time). France had a thriving theatrical life in the 17th century (after all this was Corneille, Molière, and Racine's century), and Charles, being a great fan of the theatre, was deeply impressed by what he saw there – as were the members of his coterie, too. Many new developments in the Restoration theatre – such as for example the introduction of actresses, or the appearance of rhyme in the high genres – were thus the result of the French influence, and several French plays were also adapted for the English stage.

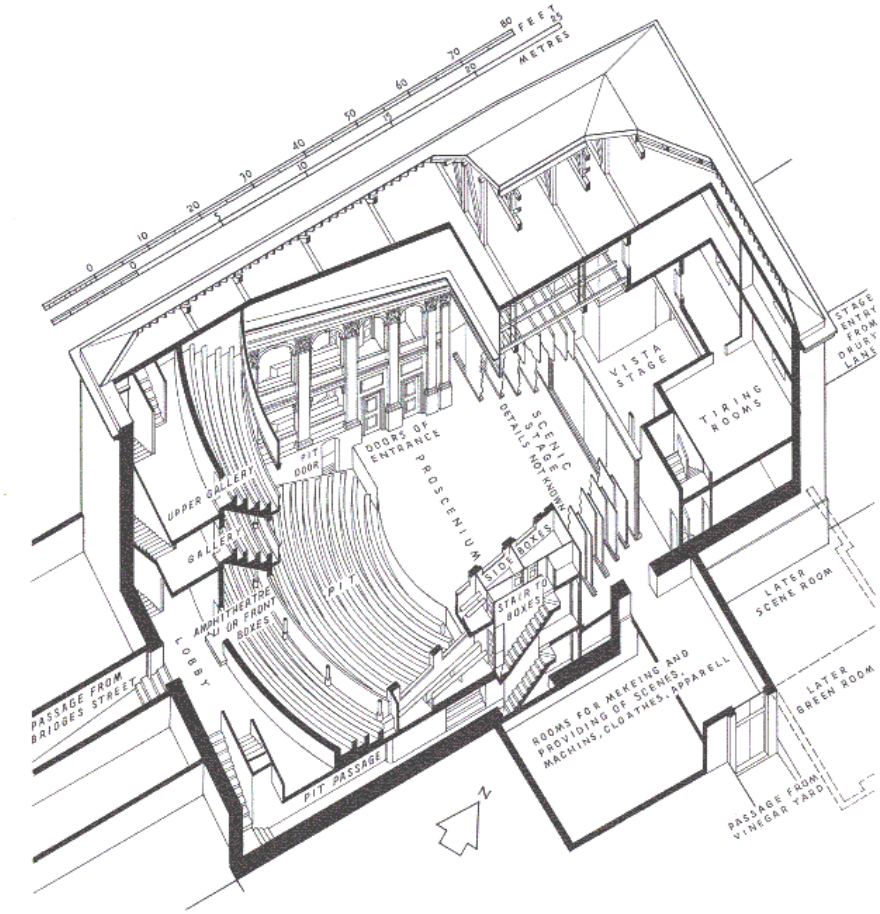
On the whole, however, the new developments reflect a unique theatrical culture pertaining to one of the liveliest and most important periods in the history of the English theatre. In what follows we will, therefore, take a closer look at some of these new developments focusing first on what could be called the theatre proper, that is, the physical aspects of it (the stage, the auditorium, the actors), and then on the textual aspect, that is to say, the new plays written for this stage.

The Theatre (auditorium, stage, actors)

As far as the physical environment of theatrical life is concerned, one of the most important changes introduced in the Restoration era was that all theatres were now indoor theatres. Indoor spaces had been used for performances in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, too, but the typical theatre buildings for public performances, such as, for example, Shakespeare's Globe, were open-air constructions. These theatres could house large numbers of people (up to three thousand according to some scholars, while others estimate their capacity to have extended only to two thousand) and they required that the performances take place during the day, as they employed no artificial lighting. As opposed to this, the

Restoration theatres could seat much fewer people (between 600 and 800) and required artificial lighting. These changes show how the experience of going to the theatre was substantially different in the Restoration era from that in the Renaissance. The theatre became typically an entertainment for a narrow elite, rather than a daytime diversion for a relatively broad social spectrum.

The placement of the artificial lighting also reveals a characteristic aspect of theatre-going in the Restoration period. The theatre was typically lit by two chandeliers, one placed above the stage, the other above the auditorium, more particularly above the pit area (see picture below) where the loudest and most boisterous part of the audience, the young and fashionable gentlemen, the "gallants", "beaux" or "wits", were seated. This area was therefore as visible as the stage itself, and indeed the people sitting there on green velvet-covered benches went to the theatre not only to see the performances but to make themselves visible, too. They took every opportunity to draw the spectators' attention to themselves, frequently disturbing the performance with their hoots or witty comments. Often indeed there was more drama performed in the pit than on the stage. The proud gentlemen sitting there sometimes quarreled and even fought with each other. On one occasion the combatants even jumped on the stage and fought their duel there, one of them getting seriously wounded in the fight.



Interior design of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 1674

Another innovation in the physical space of the Restoration theatre was the introduction of moveable perspective scenery. As opposed to the relatively simple layout of the Renaissance stage which had the same background for all scenes, the Restoration stage was designed to create special scenic effects. The stage area was divided into two separate parts, the proscenium, or fore-stage and the scenic stage (which could be opened further on to a vista stage to enhance the effect of depth and perspective). Most of the acting took place on the fore-stage, while in the scenic stage were placed those large boards and framed canvasses (see picture above) that provided the scenery. These could be moved in and out sliding in grooves and upon them were painted the various backdrops for the different scenes of the performance. The visual effects thus created were further enhanced by the introduction of elaborate machines, which allowed – among other things – the representation on the stage of ocean waves, of angels or Greek gods and goddesses floating in mid-air, of hovering Elysian scenes, and so on. (The opening scenes of Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* are based on a reconstruction of the effect that Restoration spectacles might have created.) All these features reflect the special taste of Restoration audiences for spectacle and for sensational visual effects.

The third major innovation in the Restoration theatre was the introduction of actresses to play female roles. Before the Restoration female roles were played in England by boys, and women were strictly forbidden to step on the stage at all. The English audiences were so used to this practice that when in 1629 a French theatre company acted in England with women playing the female roles, they were hissed off the stage by the outraged and scandalized English spectators. After the Restoration, however, the new audience was much more favourably disposed to this new phenomenon. This was due to the fact that the Restoration audience was made up of a relatively narrow elite: people who belonged to the King's coterie or aspired to belong there, and therefore shared tastes and preferences not primarily based on the English tradition. Thus when in 1662 the renewed royal patent to the theatre companies included orders that female roles were from that date to be played only by women rather than by boys, the majority of the theatregoers welcomed this new development.

In addition, the predominantly male audiences were thoroughly excited about this new phenomenon. They were thrilled to see women expose themselves in such a manner on the public stage. Women had previously not been given a voice in the public sphere and it was a wholly new and exciting experience for the spectators to see them openly to speak up for themselves, not infrequently expressing irreverent or libertine views and setting their wits against the men's. No doubt great female roles had been acted on the English stage previously, too, but the boy actors made the representation of women's feelings and thoughts highly stylized and artificial. With the presence of the female body on the stage, however, there was now a new opportunity for a lively and much more direct representation of the female mind and sentiments.

The spectators' enthusiasm for the actresses, however, came also, if not primarily, from the sexual excitement that this open display caused, and indeed the new productions for the Restoration stage made sure that as much of the female body was exposed as was still acceptable within the rather loose Restoration standards of decency. In one of her famous

roles, for example, Nell Gwyn, leading comedienne of the early years of the Restoration era, had to roll across the stage with her feet towards the auditorium revealing her pretty legs and petticoats. Actresses often had to play "breeches roles", that is, roles in which they were dressed as men, because the fashionable male clothes of the period exposed their figures more. An exceptionally high proportion of plays written for the Restoration stage (some twenty-five per cent in all) contained such breeches roles. (The largely fictional but still fascinating film *Stage Beauty*, for instance, is about the passage from boy actors to actresses.)

The enthusiasm of the male members of the audience for the beautiful actresses caused not a little difficulty for the theatre companies, which found that their star actresses were frequently snatched away from the stage and became kept mistresses of their rich and powerful aristocratic admirers. It was often the case that as soon as the company trained an actress and she was beginning to make some success on the stage, she was taken by some admirer and the company had to look for somebody new. Nevertheless, the love affairs between the fashionable members of the audience and the actresses backstage were an essential part of the theatrical life of the Restoration. These love affairs were facilitated by the so-called orange girls, or **orange wenches**: young women who were licensed to sell fruits and sweetmeats to the members of the audience, but who also fulfilled the very important function of being messengers between the dressing rooms and the pit, communicating the offers of the gentlemen and arranging assignations.

Drama

As we could see, it was characteristic of the theatre-life of the Restoration that the audiences were made up of a narrow elite. This also meant that there was little variety in the composition of the audience: basically the same people filled the auditorium every night. These people, of course, could not be entertained by the same play being performed over and over again. One characteristic feature of Restoration theatre-life was, therefore, an exceptionally high number of new productions. It was not uncommon that over fifty first-night performances were presented in a single theatrical season and individual productions typically had very short runs. Playwrights were paid by the income of every third night of the performance of their plays but very few plays held the stage even that long. Among the greatest box-office hits in the period was Aphra Behn's play, *The Rover*, which was one of the King's personal favourites and had the exceptionally long initial run of nine nights.

New plays were, therefore, very much in demand and the playwrights had to supply them quickly. For example, John Dryden, the greatest poet of the period, signed a contract with the King's Company to produce three plays every year. Besides the new plays, several old ones were also revived and adapted for the Restoration stage. Shakespeare's plays, for example, were continuously performed – although often adapted to the taste of the new audience and thoroughly revised – and so were Beaumont and Fletcher's and Ben Jonson's dramas, as well. In addition, several adaptations and translations of continental plays were also produced. Especially French (Corneille, Molière) and Spanish (Lope de Vega, Calderon) drama was frequently adapted for the Restoration theatre.

The original dramatic works produced for the Restoration stage clearly reflect the special taste of contemporary audiences and the spirit of the age in general. Perhaps three new developments could be singled out as especially characteristic of the era: the appearance of the **opera**, of **heroic drama** and of the **comedy of manners**, the last of which is generally deemed the most successful as far as literary merit is concerned. Let us, therefore, briefly examine these three developments.

The opera was originally an Italian genre, born around the turn of the 17th century (the first known opera dating from 1597). It was a composite genre which combined drama with music, singing and dancing (hence the name *opera* = "works"). Although originally the genre was introduced as an attempt to revive the classical Greek drama, the opera was particularly well suited to the baroque taste becoming dominant at the time and became a very characteristic genre of this period. It inspired some of the greatest composers in the age, including Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) in Italy, Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687) in France and Henry Purcell (1659-1695) in England.

The genre reached England, as already mentioned, in 1656 when William Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* was performed in a private performance. The music, which has been lost since then, was composed by several composers, which is why the opera is usually referred to as Davenant's who was in fact the author of the dramatic text and the producer of the first performance. This opera was followed up by a few more at the end of the 1650s but the tradition was discontinued after the Restoration. Dramatic performances were of course frequently accompanied by music but there were no further significant developments in the English history of the opera until the 1680s. In 1683 John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* was composed which is often referred to as the first English opera written in the Italian style. The most important work in this form was, however, *Dido and Aeneas*, a work composed by Blow's student, one of England's greatest composers, Henry Purcell. This chamber opera was a product of the same decade, and its first known performance – a private one – took place in 1689. Purcell had previously written incidental music for theatrical performances, too, but his most important contributions to the development of the genre, apart from *Dido and Aeneas*, date from the early 1690s when he joined forces with John Dryden to improve the quality of English drama and to establish serious opera into England. The product of their joint effort was the characteristically English genre of the *semi-opera* (referred to in the age as "dramatic opera"). In the semi-opera the main action proceeded in spoken dialogues and the related songs were sung by singers who did not play major roles in the drama itself. The most famous instance of Dryden and Purcell's collaboration in this genre is *King Arthur* (first performed in 1691). The genre of the semi-opera, however, had a very short career and virtually died out with the untimely death of Purcell in 1695.

From the early eighteenth century the Italian opera took the leading role in England with Georg Friedrich Handel as the most important composer and producer (see on this the chapter on John Gay below).

The second characteristic dramatic development of the age, the genre of *heroic drama* (also called "heroic tragedy" or "heroic play") goes back to the same origin as the opera:

Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes*, which was produced after the Restoration in a purely dramatic form, without the music. The leading exponent and writer of heroic plays, John Dryden, acknowledges his debt to Davenant in his essay "Of Heroick Plays", which he prefixed to the printed edition of his most famous work in this genre, *The Conquest of Granada* in two parts (first produced on the stage in 1670 and 1671, and published in 1672). It is in this essay that Dryden introduces the term "heroic play" and explains what he means by it. He compares this dramatic genre to classical heroic poetry, that is, to the epic. Just as epic is the highest of all poetic genres, so heroic drama was intended by Dryden to be the highest among dramatic genres. In fact one of Dryden's motivations in writing heroic plays was – just as with the opera – to introduce grandeur and seriousness into English drama and to show that – despite its critics – the theatre was capable of providing morally improving entertainment.

Thus the plot of the heroic drama, just as that of the classical epic, presents the story of great, almost superhuman, heroes whose acts determine the fate of a whole nation. However, the main theme of the plays is typically the conflict between love and honour. In *The Conquest of Granada*, for example, the hero, Almanzor, is a powerful and brave warrior who pledges allegiance to the King of the Moors, Boabdelin, in his fight against the invading Spaniards. However, he falls in love with the beautiful fiancée of the King, Almahide, and claims her hand in return for his military services. The King refuses and marries Almahide who returns Almanzor's feelings but must remain loyal to her husband. While the fate of Granada is being decided, the lovers are thus torn between the opposing claims of their honour and their heart. The theme, as this example clearly shows, is somewhat artificial and so is the manner of presentation. The mental tortures of the principal characters are displayed in bombastic and extravagant dialogues and monologues, which are rather far removed from real life and probably involved much posing and exaggerated gesturing in the performance. To heighten the seriousness, heroic plays were typically written in rhymed iambic pentameter verse ("heroic couplets"), which Dryden proposed as the appropriate English equivalent of classical heroic verse. Despite Dryden's mastery of the form, however, the heroic couplets inevitably further emphasize the overall effect of artificialness. This artificialness – which is so successfully deployed in the comedies of the age – renders heroic tragedies difficult to appreciate for a modern audience. However, they evidently had a strong appeal for the Restoration audiences.

Although some continuation of the tradition of heroic drama can be observed in such 18th century plays as Addison's *Cato*, the genre disappeared by the turn of the 18th century and remains thus a characteristic product of the Restoration era.

The Comedy of Manners

The most successful of all dramatic genres produced for the Restoration theatre is the comedy of manners. The birth of the genre is once again directly associated with Charles II's court, the earliest specimens being written by courtiers. More particularly, William Wycherley and Sir George Etherege are usually credited with the initiation of the new genre, both of whom belonged to the King's coterie. Their most famous comedies, Etherege's *The*

Man of Mode (1676) and Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), obviously reflect the morals and manners of the Restoration court. The principal character in *The Man of Mode*, Dorimant, was for example generally recognized by contemporaries to be a portrayal of the Earl of Rochester (see above). Etherege and Wycherley being courtiers and men of fashion did not depend on writing for their living or consider themselves poets in the first place and wrote less than a handful of plays each. Some scholarly surveys have even shown that comedies of manners were not even the most typical plays written for the early Restoration stage. However, these few early plays brought into being a genre that is perhaps of the highest literary value of all the dramatic output of this period and in this sense it is surely typical of the age.

The early flourishing of the genre – as well as all original dramatic writing – was halted in 1682 when the two London theatre companies were united and their productive rivalry ended. With no competition, the demand for new plays disappeared and this brought about a general decline in the drama. This situation, however, changed in the mid-1690s when a new theatre company was founded by some of the leading actors and actresses of the time (hence named "The Actors' Company"). The newly emerging competition in London theatrical life resulted in a new flourishing of drama, including a revival of the comedy of manners, too. In fact some of the finest plays in this genre were the products of this period. William Congreve, John Vanbrugh and George Farquhar's comedies of manners were all composed in the atmosphere of this theatrical revival. From the turn of the eighteenth century, however, the comedy of manners gradually disappeared, the reasons for which will be explored in the next chapter. Thus the flourishing of this genre, too, remains a phenomenon uniquely characteristic of the Restoration era.

As has been said, the emergence of the comedy of manners was very strongly linked with Charles II's court and thus the genre clearly reflects the libertine spirit of the Restoration. The plots or the comedies are indeed typically worldly and immoral, centred around seducing women, cuckolding men and tricking people for financial benefits. To put it bluntly, the comedies of manners are basically about sex and money. By focusing on these themes, however, they achieve much more than just a bawdy joke at the expense of everything that is conventionally considered to be morally good. They explore social forms and modes of behaviour (hence the name "comedy of *manners*") and analyse the working of high society solely on the basis of power relations (see more on this below).

Like most comedies, the comedy of manners also uses "stock characters"; that is, characters whose individual presence on the stage serves the purpose of representing a certain type. Since the comedy of manners is primarily concerned with society, most of the stock characters that it uses are representations of social types, several of which – for example, the rich, old aunt, the second brother without an inheritance, the impertinent servant, etc. – are shared with other types of comedy. However, there are two stock characters that seem to pertain uniquely to the comedy of manners: the *coxcomb* (or *fop*) and the *rake*. The *coxcomb* is usually a man of inferior intelligence who is preoccupied with his appearance. He lays great stress on dressing, behaving and speaking according to the newest fashion, but usually misses the mark and appears extravagant and affected rather than truly fashionable. In short, he

makes himself ridiculous by the sharp contrast that exists between his pretended refinements (represented by his dressing) and his actual emptiness (the worthless person underneath the fine clothes). The *rake*, by contrast, is a man of lively wits and strong appetites. He has a strong desire in particular for sex and money and is also clever enough to get what he wants. Unlike the coxcomb, and in general all other characters in the comedy of manners, the rake does not mystify himself and sees society's pretences for what they are. This is not to say that he does not take part in the intrigue, deception and pretence that govern social life; indeed he makes use of all these to manipulate his environment in order to achieve his aims. As one critic puts it, he is "a cool Machiavellian in a world of sex and money"; he is different from his environment only in that he does not deceive himself and of course in that he is always victorious.

This latter characteristic is in fact the reason why the rake is such a unique character in Restoration comedy. Rakes had appeared in plays previous to the Restoration as well as after this period. What is unique in the comedy of manners is thus not the figure of the rake itself but that he is presented as the hero, whereas in earlier and subsequent drama rakish figures usually appear in the role of the villain. This setup creates an unsettling moral situation which might bring into question the artistic value of the comedy of manners as such. If superior cunning, intrigue and deception are victorious in the comedies, if immorality is rewarded, then what kind of literary value can be attributed to these plays? This question was frequently raised by detractors of the genre and harassed its admirers, too. One way of approaching this problem is to point out that comedies of manners are to be interpreted in the context of the deep moral scepticism they express. The comedy of manners pictures a society entirely devoid of all genuine moral goodness: the characters all strive for power which they can acquire by deceiving others. The conflict is, therefore, not that of truth against falsehood, of goodness against villainy, of virtue against vice, but of deception against deception, of appearance against appearance. Morality, goodness, truth are all just part of the deception, they are merely means of the struggle for power which is maintained in this world through controlling appearances. In the context of this sceptical outlook the rake hero can be seen as acquiring some kind of moral superiority in that he at least does not deceive himself; unlike all the rest, he is at least not a hypocrite. Besides, this radical reduction of the motives of human action allows in the comedies for a strikingly modern analysis of the society as ultimately a site of power-struggle.

Another approach to the problem of the apparent immorality of the comedy of manners may be to bracket the moral considerations in favour of the brilliant verbal play of the text. In fact the best comedies written in this period achieve such refinement in their witty dialogues as is quite unique in the history of English drama and can be compared only to Shakespeare's achievement. This light and brilliant verbal play gives a sense of artificialness, but this – as Charles Lamb, a 19th century admirer of the genre, points out – lifts the spectator (or reader) out of ordinary reality and places us in a glittering and beautiful – though artificial – world, which is quite above our own. For the space of the two hours of the performance we enter this world and suspend our moral judgment, for in this bright and glittering world vice

and virtue are also just elements taken up into the brilliant verbal play and thus have no effect on our real existence.

No matter how we approach the comedy of manners, it can hardly be doubted that its brilliant verbal wit and its sceptical analysis of society make the genre into one of the greatest achievements of the Restoration era and elevate it among the classics of English literature. In fact the best comedies in this genre still hold a firm place in the repertoire of the modern theatre and are revived time and again both in England and in other countries, too. William Congreve's most famous play, *The Way of the World*, was for example staged by Katona József Színház in 2005, in Dániel Varró's new translation.

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II. The Literature of the First Half of the Eighteenth Century

Historical, Social, Cultural Background

The Glorious Revolution of 1689 brought relative stability to England after the turbulent years of the 1680's and it settled the problem of succession to the satisfaction of the majority of the English, even if it led to the disruption of the Stuart line. In default of a legal heir William and Mary were succeeded in 1702 by King James's other Protestant daughter, Anne who ruled England until her death in 1714. Queen Anne, however, had no direct descendent either (although she gave birth five times, none of her children survived), and thus the Stuart line of descent was discontinued. Although James II's son, James, the Old Pretender, maintained the Jacobite claim to the throne, the House of Hanover (the dynasty still ruling Britain under the name Windsor) acceded to the English throne with George I as the first Hanoverian King of England. This change of dynasty did stir some political unrest. Several Englishmen objected to having a German King, and in 1715 even a Jacobite rebellion was organized. This, however, was soon suppressed and led to no great political crisis. Thus the accession of George I and of the Hanoverian dynasty proved to be on the whole a smooth transition.

In spite of this relative calm around the issue of succession, however, this era, of course, had its own political conflicts, too. England's involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713), for example, was the occasion of severe struggles between the Whigs and the Tories, and the greatest political figure of the era, Robert Walpole, also stirred bitter political controversies (see more on this below). On the whole, however, we can say that the first half of the 18th century was an era of relative political stability in comparison with the turbulent age of the Restoration.

On the social and cultural fields, by contrast, some revolutionary changes were taking place: the remarkably unified Restoration culture was gradually giving way to a more complex, bipolar cultural situation. The main reason for the exceptional unity of Restoration culture was, as we have seen, that it was based on a very limited social substratum. Being focussed on a single centre, the Royal court, Restoration culture was dominated by the royalist, landed aristocrats, the Cavaliers, and was only available to those who could get close to their circle. To illustrate the limited range of the social basis of this culture, it is enough to compare the theatre life of the Renaissance with that of the Restoration. In Shakespeare's time there were 4-5 public playhouses constantly functioning, each of which could seat up to 3,000 spectators, whereas in the Restoration period, in a much more densely populated London, only two permanent theatres were staging plays which could house audiences of 600 to 800 each and even these had to be united in 1681 for low audience turnouts (by this time, however, the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane had been built which could seat up to 2,000 people). Unlike the Renaissance theatre, therefore, Restoration culture was available only for a very small segment of the society: it was almost exclusively a Cavalier culture. By the end

of Charles II's reign, however, the Cavaliers had lost much of their social and political power. The reason for this was that by this time the foundation of the English economy was no longer primarily land but rather money. England was gradually being transformed from a land-based (feudal) economy into a money-based (capitalist) one and the Cavaliers lost their power to a new social class rising in the wake of these developments. The new magnates were no longer the landowners taking their income from the rent on the land they owned, but rather the moneyed men who invested their money and tried to maximize the profits from their investment.

Together with the great moneyed magnates rose also the various lesser investors (merchants, businessmen, entrepreneurs), as well as the professionals (lawyers, physicians). In short, the English **middle class** was emerging and was steadily increasing its power and influence in politics as well as in culture. By the turn of the century the members of the middle class had become the main consumers of cultural products: they went to the theatre and they read the new publications. Their taste had to be catered for and their taste was indeed very different from that of the Cavaliers. First of all, they did not want to see themselves ridiculed, as they had often been in the Restoration. In the comedies of manners, for example, the "cits" (that is, the people living and working in the less fashionable City of London) had frequently been the butt of the jokes and had often been tricked and cuckolded by the fashionable rakish Cavalier heroes. The new, largely middle class audiences would, of course, not tolerate this kind of preference. Moreover, they strongly objected to the immorality and libertinism of Cavalier culture, too. They often came from dissenting (that is, radical Protestant, for example, Presbyterian or Puritan) backgrounds which set a special value on hard work and moral rectitude, values which had been looked down on by the representatives of Cavalier culture in favour of urbanity, refinement, elegance, ease.

The first great middle class victory on the cultural battlefield, unsurprisingly, was the extinction of the comedy of manners. In 1698 a clergyman, Jeremy Collier published a very influential pamphlet, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*. In this he argued that contemporary English drama did not fulfil its primary function of moral improvement and that it had a bad influence especially on the morals of young people. Unlike several previous simple-minded attacks on the immorality of the theatre, however, Collier's *Short View* was especially effective because it was not intolerant or totally dismissive. He had some knowledge of the contemporary theory of drama and appealed to the newly formulated theory of "poetical justice", arguing that the problem with the English theatre was not so much that immorality was represented on the stage as that it was not punished or was even rewarded in the plays. He showed how the heroes or positive characters in contemporary drama (especially in the works of Congreve and Vanbrugh but also in those of Dryden) were all immoral and were nevertheless victorious in the end. Apart from this charge of immorality, he also accused contemporary drama of an overall profaneness, demonstrating by several quotations that sacred things or religion in general were usually talked of in profane contexts and were taken lightly in the plays.

Collier's naïve piety and seriousness were ridiculed by Congreve and Vanbrugh in their new plays and a serious critical response was also written on behalf of Dryden's circle

by John Dennis, a leading literary critic of the time. However, Collier apparently caught something of the general sentiment of the age, for no matter how sound the critical refutations of his arguments were, theatre-goers responded rather coldly to the new plays written after the Restoration fashion. Congreve's masterpiece, *The Way of the World*, premiering in 1700, was for example rather unfavourably received and Congreve gave up writing for the stage completely. Although George Farquhar was still to produce some brilliant comedies of manners, the genre gradually died out in the first decade of the new century.

Two Cultures

This moral victory of the middle class in the theatre of course did not mean the total elimination of the previous culture. Indeed most of what was really valuable in Restoration culture did survive in the new era, and in a lot of ways one can see a direct continuity between Dryden's age and Pope's. Nevertheless, since the theatre is always the most direct gauge of the cultural situation, the extinction of the comedy of manners clearly marks an important change. It shows the appearance of a wholly new middle class mentality, of a wholly new strand of culture which was beginning to articulate itself at the turn of the century. The disappearance of the comedy of manners was of course just a negative achievement of this new bourgeois mentality and it did not set something equally valuable against what it erased, but middle class culture was soon to produce its own great literary achievements and to establish itself firmly in the literary history of the age.

As a result of these developments, therefore, the first half of the 18th century is characterised by the simultaneous presence of two distinct strands of culture, which sometimes clash and sometimes interact with each other. On one side, there is an aristocratic high culture, the "official" culture of the age, represented by Alexander Pope and the Tory writers (Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, Parnell, etc.). This strand is in many ways the continuation of the Cavalier tradition: urbane, elegant and refined; neo-classical in its aesthetics; and sceptical about human nature. Its most characteristic genre is satire, typically using one variety or another of the mock form. On the other side, there is the newly emerging middle class culture which is much more difficult to define, for it was just then articulating itself for the first time. In any case, however, it was characterised by a moral earnestness coming from the Puritan tradition and with a much more optimistic outlook on human perfectibility (crystallized in the work of Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, grandson to the 1st Earl of Shaftesbury, the original of Dryden's Achitophel). This wholly new strand of culture found its first expression in wholly new genres, such as the periodical essay (invented by Defoe and brought to perfection by Steele and Addison) and the triumphant middle class genre: the novel (see the chapter on "The Rise of the Novel").

Neo-Classicism

The Emergence and English Reception of Neo-Classicism

Just as most new developments in the theatre, the principles of neo-classicism were also imported to England from France during the Restoration period. The reverence and study of the poets of classical antiquity was of course not a new phenomenon: turning to the classical models had been the tendency that founded the Renaissance. By the latter half of the 17th century, however, the imitation of classical poetry and drama and the study of Aristotle's *Poetics* and of Horace's *Ars Poetica* led to the development of a distinct school of thought or literary attitude in France which is generally termed neo-classical. This school in France took its origin from the French Academy set up by Cardinal Richelieu in 1635, found its first great, though controversial, expression in the tragedies of Pierre Corneille, and was perhaps most fully articulated in Nicolas Boileau's *L'Art poétique* (1674), a poetic statement of the precepts of neo-classicism in imitation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

Charles II's court, as we could see, was in very close contact with French theatrical and literary life. The new ideas were, therefore, quickly assimilated by the English men of letters. Corneille's fine neo-classical tragedies were admired and imitated from the very beginning of the Restoration period and so were the new plays of Molière and Racine later on. Boileau's work likewise was almost immediately translated into English. His *L'Art poétique*, for example, was rendered in English verse as early as 1683, the translation being revised by Dryden himself. Several imitations also immediately appeared in England, such as the Earl of Mulgrave's *An Essay upon Poetry* (1682) and the Earl of Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse* (1684), and for a whole century afterwards neo-classical thought thoroughly influenced all significant critical efforts in England, including those of John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, the emblematic figures of three succeeding generations.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of neo-classical aesthetics was its special emphasis on the **rules**. Neo-classical critics construed Aristotle's descriptive account of classical Greek tragedy in the *Poetics* and Horace's friendly advice in the *Ars poetica* as a set of strict rules which they explicitly formulated and which, they believed, the poet had to observe to achieve success in his art. The strict adherence to the three unities of time, place and action, for example, was a must for the dramatic poet. The play's fictive action could not span more than 24 hours (but was preferably kept within 12 hours); the stage could not represent more than one place (and the locations the characters are reported to visit had to be close enough to be reached within the given fictive time span); and the plot had to be unified (with sub-plots only allowed if they were strictly kept subordinate to the main action). There were strict rules, furthermore, for the different genres, as well. Tragedies, for example, could not include comic scenes or characters, they had to use dignified and elevated language throughout, and had to be composed in five acts, each with its appropriate dramaturgical function. There were rules likewise for the use of figures of speech in poetry: metaphors and similes were to be brought under rational control, no excessive use of figurative language was tolerated, and one could by no means mix one's metaphors. There were rules basically for

every aspect of poetry and also for every aspect of every other art form: the list of precepts could be continued almost infinitely.

The adaptation of these principles to English literature was of course not unproblematic. The greatest stumbling block was, needless to say, Shakespeare, whose undeniable dramatic and poetic excellence could not be reconciled to neo-classical principles. Shakespeare did not observe the three unities, mixed tragedy with comedy, frequently mixed his metaphors, and his choice of language registers was likewise mixed and free. Since the unquestionable authority of the rules made it easy for the neo-classical critic to find fault, a lot of pedantic and inflexible criticism was produced on the ground of these strict principles, which simply dismissed Shakespeare as a bad poet for what were seen as his "offences" against the rules (see for example Thomas Rhymer's famous attack on *Othello* in his *Short View of Tragedy*, 1693). What is more, even the greatest, most flexible critics of the age (Dryden and Pope among them) found it difficult to account for Shakespeare's greatness on the basis of the rules, and we often find them searching for excuses, explaining away Shakespeare's "failings" and avowing their appreciation of his greatness in spite of his apparently liberal treatment of the rules.

Notwithstanding these difficulties in its adaptation to the traditions of English poetry, neo-classicism produced in England critical insights of lasting value, as well as poetry that is of the highest quality. These achievements, however, are rather difficult to appreciate for the modern reader. Because of the prejudices of our education, the idea that poetry, or any kind of art, can be based on rules sounds rather alien to most of us. In what follows, therefore, we will give a brief introduction to neo-classical thought, highlighting and explaining some of the most typical, and, for the modern reader, most unfamiliar notions of this critical tradition, and showing that these notions are not, after all, so unfamiliar. They reflect a genuine response to art, which remains relevant even for the modern reader. We will do this by making frequent references to Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (published in 1711), which is a brilliant crystallization of the ideas of neo-classicism, as well as a great poetic achievement in its own right.

The Main Tenets of Neo-Classical Thought

From a modern point of view the most striking feature of neo-classical aesthetics is, as has been said, the assumption that rules govern the arts. Conditioned by our fundamentally Romantic education, we tend to think of artistic creation as the work of a genius which is directly antithetical to rules, as something that is the product of an entirely free and spontaneous creative impulse which endures no limitation. If, however, we examine the neo-classical principle of the rules more closely, we will realize that it does not after all contradict these Romantic assumptions. The rules for the neo-classical poet (that is, for the best ones) are not to be followed because some critic said that they should be followed, but because the main task of poetry is to **imitate nature** and nature itself is governed by rules. As Pope puts it in the *Essay on Criticism*:

First follow NATURE, and your Judgment frame
By her just Standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One *clear*, *unchang'd*, and *Universal* Light,
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test* of *Art*. (68-73)

The rules are not man-made; they are given by nature once and for all, and they are "out there" whether we like them or not, whether we respect them or not, whether we follow them or not. This idea is beautifully expressed in the passage above by the implied image of the sun, whose "clear, unchanged and universal light" always shines, even beyond the thickest clouds, just as the rules of nature are always there, no matter how much we blur our own sight by the cloud of our pride. Poets may, therefore, choose to disregard the rules, but then they will end up being unnatural and failures as artists; for the main task of art is to be entirely natural – a principle that is no longer so unfamiliar to us, even if our conception of nature is clearly distinct from that of the neo-classical critics and poets.

What the best neo-classical poets want to achieve and what the best neo-classical critics attempt to account for is, therefore, the effect of complete naturalness in art; an effect that still undeniably forms part of our experience of art. What is unique in the neo-classical attitude is that they insist that this naturalness can only be achieved by the help of the rules. However, the primary experience remains the successful, and fully natural work of art: this is what the neo-classical poet and critic admire and only after registering this experience do they ask the question "how – that is, by what rules – has it been possible to achieve this effect?" The commonplace view of the rules is thus reversed: the assumption is not that if one follows the rules, one will be natural, but rather that there are great works of art which are fully natural, and this could only have been achieved by some rules. The task of the poet is, therefore, not primarily to follow the rules, but rather to be entirely natural; this, however, can only be achieved by following the rules. Similarly, to attempt to follow the rules is no guarantee of success in art; but if one is successful, then they have necessarily followed the rules.

The task of being entirely natural in poetry is, of course, no simple task. Fortunately, however, we have the example of great poets who have gone before us and who have achieved this ultimate poetic task, laying down the rules for us in a form that we can directly perceive. This is what constitutes for the neo-classical poet the ultimate value of **the classics** of ancient Greek and Roman poetry. The work of these great predecessors attests to the possibility of achieving complete naturalness in poetry and provides thus easier access to poetic success. In a sense, therefore, the rules themselves come to us not primarily from nature itself but rather through the example of the great masters of classical antiquity. As Pope explains:

Hear how learn'd *Greece* her useful Rules indites,

When to repress, and when indulge our Flights:
High on *Parnassus'* Top her Sons she show'd,
And pointed out those arduous Paths they trod,
Held from afar, aloft, th' Immortal Prize,
And urg'd the rest by equal Steps to rise;
Just *Precepts* thus from great *Examples* giv'n,
She drew from *them* what they deriv'd from *Heav'n*. (92-99)

The classics, therefore, do not merely pass down to us a strict set of regulations; with their example they show how success can be achieved and thus point out the way we can reach that perfection. Their rules are not recipes of success but examples which invite emulation and thus bring the very laws of nature closer to us. To quote Pope once again:

Those RULES of old [that is, "of old times"] *discover'd*, not *divis'd*,
Are *Nature* still, but *Nature Methodiz'd*; (88-9)

The classics did not "devise" their rules and create them out of nothing. They found them in nature itself. By capturing these rules in their fully natural poetry and methodizing them in their great critical thought, however, they do their modern counterparts a great service, since they bring the rules of nature closer to them.

If the rules have always been there in nature and if they were once and for all "methodized" by the classics, then it follows that **one cannot achieve something wholly new in art**. This is another striking feature of neo-classical aesthetic thought for the modern reader; for we are conditioned to believe that originality is at the heart of artistic creativity. A closer examination of the neo-classical position on the issue of originality, however, will once again reveal that there is, after all, no such great a distance between our modern experience and the neo-classical views than appears at first sight. According to the neo-classical position, there is no point in aiming at originality, at something strange and never heard of. This could be a surprising idiosyncrasy or stunning anomaly, but surely no true poetry; for true poetry – according to the neo-classical view – should always concern itself with what is **universally true**. Yet, even if we cannot say something wholly new, and only attempt to state and express what is commonly and universally true, it is still a worthy poetic enterprise and is by no means self-explanatory or easy. We could even say, by a paradox, that it requires no small originality. As Pope puts it in one of the most famous passages in the *Essay*:

True Wit is *Nature* to Advantage drest,
What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest*,
Something, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,
That gives us back the Image of our Mind: (297-300)

What one needs to grasp to achieve true wit (that is, genuine poetry) is no new thing, but nature itself. This, however, must be expressed in the most perfect form possible. There is thus no originality in the idea, but there can be real poetic creativity in the expression. Many have interpreted the line "What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest*" as if Pope is suggesting that poetry can only state the commonplace in a new form. If, however, we take into account the context of this statement, we will realize that in fact he is claiming much more than this. He is claiming – and we must all acknowledge the truth of this claim – that poetry is not valuable for letting us know about things we have not previously known, but for making us realize what we have always already known. Our experience of genuine poetry is not a surprised "Oh, I have never thought of that", but rather a no less surprised "I know exactly what the poet is talking about". Poetry "gives us back the image of our mind". In doing so, however, it does much more than just repeat an old commonplace in a new form. It makes us aware of something that we have always already felt or known, but of which we would never have become conscious, if it were not for the poetry.

To illustrate his point Pope uses in the passage above the image of the dress – an image frequently recurring in this poem, as well as in several other works written in this period. The task of poetry – according to this analogy – is to "dress" nature in the most suitable form possible. The purpose of the dress (for the modern reader make-up might be a better analogy) is not to draw attention to itself, but to make the beauty of its wearer visible. Similarly, poetry performs its task when it remains invisible and provides direct access to nature, to "*Something*, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find". The important thing is not the dress (or make-up) but the person who wears it, and, similarly, poetic expression is only valuable by virtue of what it makes visible. However, without the well-tailored dress (or well-applied make-up) the beauty of the person could never become apparent, and thus the choice of dress (or application of make-up) is itself a valuable art. Similarly, the expression of poetry is itself valuable, even though it is not itself the end of art; for it is only within the perfect expression that we can have access to nature as it in itself really is.

From this emphasis on expression it also follows that the neo-classical tradition lays great value on **poetic technique**. In the following passage on Dryden's achievement as a poet, for example, Dr. Johnson characteristically praises his great predecessor exclusively for innovations and achievements that are technical in nature:

> Perhaps no nation ever produced a writer that enriched his language with such variety of models. To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, the refinement of our language, and much of the correctness of our sentiments. ... What was said of Rome adorned by Augustus may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden ... he found it brick, and he left it marble.

It is striking that even sentiments (that is, passions or feelings) are treated by Johnson in terms of "correctness", as if they could be compared to some absolute standard or rule and could be treated as a matter of technique. The simile deployed at the end of the passage is also very telling: Dryden is praised not for establishing a new structure in English poetry but for decorating the structure that he had found there, for refining its outward appearance, for "dressing" it in an unprecedented technical perfection.

If the task of poetry is indeed to "dress" nature, to improve on the expression, to perfect the technique, then it also follows that what poets primarily need to accomplish their task is learning and practice. The neo-classical emphasis on the importance of **erudition and learning** is once again something quite alien to our modern way of thinking about art. We tend to lay the emphasis on spontaneity and on born genius, neither of which can be learnt or acquired at will. Nevertheless, if we examine this aspect of neo-classical thought more closely, we will once again realize that the neo-classical view does not really contradict our modern way of thinking about this issue. In fact, as we could see, the neo-classical poet and critic lay great stress on spontaneity, on that effect of perfect naturalness which in their eyes is the essence of all great art, and they likewise do not undervalue the importance of inborn talent. However, they do believe that there is no easy way to fulfil one's talent, no easy access to spontaneity. One must practice and work hard to develop one's potential, and learning and hard work are also indispensable, if one wants to achieve spontaneity, "true ease", the effect of perfect naturalness. As Pope puts it in another revealing simile:

> True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,
> As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance. (362-3)

To achieve success in her/his art the dancer must move naturally, but one cannot move naturally on the dance floor without first learning and practicing the steps. Similarly, a poet will not succeed in his art, unless she/he learns and practices the rules. Once the steps and the rules are mastered, however, the dancer and the poet – provided that they have the requisite talent – will be able to move and write naturally. Like the steps of the dance, therefore, the rules of the poet do not function to impose limitations, but by imposing limitations they free the poet to achieve perfect ease, spontaneity, and naturalness.

Another typical feature of neo-classical poetry that directly follows from these principles but is not itself accounted for in neo-classical thought is the fact that the poetry of the age – at least in England – achieved its greatest successes in the so-called "low genres": **satire, comedy, mock-heroic**, and so on. Indeed this fact can even be seen as a paradox, since neo-classical aesthetics is primarily based on the admiration of poetic achievements in the "high genres": tragedy and the epic tradition. However, this literary historical fact can also be explained from the principles of neo-classical aesthetics; for apparently this peculiar feature of the literature of the period follows precisely from the neo-classical reverence of the rules. It seems, more particularly, that one cannot create something really great in the high genres while being constantly aware of the rules. Understanding how the great classics can move

their readers or spectators strangely prevents these poets from achieving the same effect. One reason for this is, of course, that one just cannot genuinely move the reader or the audience in a fully conscious way, by implementing the rules step by step. The other, more important, reason is that knowing everything about how the great classical predecessors wrote inevitably imposes a kind of paralysis on their modern imitators. As Pope puts it in the *Essay*, the modern poet "glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes" (198). It is extremely hard to commit anything to paper, when one is fully aware of the magnificent achievement of the poets that have gone before one.

In the "low genres", by contrast, the knowledge and mastery of the rules is indispensable. For such mastery, it seems, is a precondition of creating a comic effect. Comedy seems always to involve a system of norms or expectations (the rules), which is first established and then collapses in a sudden breach of expectation. The mock form (discussed in the chapter on Dryden above) is a perfect example of this effect. A set of expectations (here the rules of the heroic epic) is evoked and is then frustrated to create a comic effect. This effect, however, can only be achieved if the poet is fully aware of and completely masters the rules. The mock-form, based on this thorough awareness of the rules, indeed proved to be one of the greatest literary achievements of the age and appears in various forms throughout the whole period from Samuel Butler's mock-romance, *Hudibras*, through Dryden and Pope's great mock-heroic poems, John Gay and John Phillip's mock-pastorals, and Swift and Gay's mock-georgics, to Gay's mock-operatic *Beggar's Opera* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* which – on one level at least – can be seen as a mock-novel.

Augustan Poetry: Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

If a single poet's work can epitomize the achievement of a whole age, then Alexander Pope's poetry is no doubt the epitome of English neo-classicism. It is witty, learned, urbane and refined, and it exhibits its author's unsurpassed mastery and control of the rules.

Pope was undoubtedly the greatest poet of the first half of the 18th century, which is therefore often referred to as the age of Pope, or as the Augustan age to emphasize that Pope's (and his contemporaries') achievement was the culmination of English neo-classical literature, just as the poetry written in emperor Augustus' time was the peak of Roman poetry. In addition to being the greatest poet, Pope was also a leading figure in the public life of his time, which is especially remarkable because he achieved this public stature in spite of severe handicaps, both social and physical. His social handicap was that he was born a Roman Catholic and as such under contemporary English laws he could not hold any public office, could not vote, could not attend university, and could not even live within ten miles of London. His physical handicap was that he had a severe curvature of the spine caused by a disease that he contracted in his childhood by drinking infected milk. This chronic illness affected his natural growth, rendering him very small in stature (he was no more than 137 centimetres tall), and substantially limited his day to day life, since he had to wear corsets and warm stockings in all circumstances throughout his life. In spite of these handicaps, however, he could pronounce about himself: "Yes, I am proud, I must be proud to see / Men not afraid of God, afraid of me". His poetry could shatter reputations and render men of power ridiculous in the public eye. Just by the force of his pen, therefore, he had formidable power in the public life of his day, and – as it is also implied in this quotation – he was to employ that power in the cause of moral improvement, by making all who did not fear God aware that they had reason to be afraid of his pen.

Family Background and Early Career

Pope was born in the family of a wealthy Roman Catholic merchant. As a late and only child, he enjoyed his parents' special care and indulgence. His father not only tolerated but even encouraged his son's bent for reading and his early poetic efforts. After the development of his illness, that is from his age of 12, Pope was almost completely confined within doors, where he spent most of his time in his father's large and well-chosen library, studying the classic authors as well as the greatest English poets and completing thus his own education. From 1700 the family lived in Binfield, near the royal Windsor Forest, where they mixed in high society, and their illustrious neighbours soon recognized the young poet's remarkable talent. Pope's name, therefore, became known in literary circles very early and he was treated as a kind of infant prodigy. At 12 he corrected the verses of William Wycherley and he was hailed by the minor poet and critic, William Walsh, as the poet who might give the first "correct" poem to the English language.

That the young Pope took his poetic calling very seriously is also reflected by the fact that his first major publication in 1709 was the *Pastorals*, four poems in the Virgilian pastoral

tradition addressed to the four seasons. Since the great Roman Poet, Virgil, who prepared himself for the task of writing the national epic of the Roman empire, the *Aeneid*, by writing pastorals, it had been a tradition that an epic poet first practiced his skill by writing in this genre. The fact that Pope's first major publication was a series of pastorals clearly shows, therefore, that he consciously prepared himself to become the great epic poet of his age and nation, which in a way he did become by his great mock-epics, *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*. The same consciousness of his poetic calling is also reflected in his next major work, *An Essay on Criticism* (published in 1711), in which he gives a brilliant synthesis of the best thought on art and poetry available in his age (see above).

The Rape of the Lock

The culmination of Pope's early career, however, is undoubtedly his great mock-epic, *The Rape of the Lock*. The poem found its occasion in the falling out between two high-ranking Roman Catholic. The quarrel was caused by Lord Petre (the Baron of the poem) cutting off a lock of hair from the head of Arabella Fermor (the Belinda of the poem). Arabella, who was engaged to be married to Lord Petre, was so offended by this prank that she broke up their engagement. After this incident Pope was asked by his paternal friend, John Caryll, who was acquainted with both families, to write a mocking poem about the incident and thus, as Pope put it, "to laugh them together again". The poem was first published in 1712 in two cantos, and although it did not achieve its original purpose (the reconciliation of the two families did not take place), it proved to be immensely successful. In 1714 Pope published a new version, this time in five cantos, in which he included the elaborate epic machinery of Sylphs and Gnomes (diminutive gods invisibly peopling the air). Together with the machinery, he also added implicit references to the great modern epic of his own age, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whereas the previous version was entirely built on the classical tradition of the epic. The poem was published in its final form in Pope's first collected book of poetry in 1717, this text containing only one major addition, Clarissa's controversial monologue in Canto V.

The plot of the poem reflects the frivolous, empty, superficial everyday life of the aristocracy. In the first canto the main heroine, Belinda, wakes up some time in the early afternoon and dresses herself for the evening entertainment. In the second canto she takes a boat to Hampton Court, the Royal palace, where the party is to take place. In the third canto we see her at the party playing cards and drinking coffee, and this is when the major incident of the plot occurs: while she is drinking her coffee, the Baron cuts off one of the two beautiful locks of black hair that she wears to set off the whiteness of her neck. After this turning point the action of Cantos IV and V is basically that the ladies fight the gentlemen to get back Belinda's hair, but even though they are victorious, the lock cannot be retrieved: it disappears and becomes a *comet* (the Latin "cometa" deriving from a Greek word meaning "long-haired"; compare also Hungarian "üstökös").

This less than momentous action, however, is related in an epic form and style. The poem begins with a *proposition* of the topic and an *invocation* of the Muse; Belinda's dressing herself is depicted in terms of the epic hero arming himself for a fight; the figures on

the playing cards are described as epic heroes in an *enumeration*; and the card game itself is presented as a battle between the playing card armies. There is, furthermore, a voyage to the underworld, an epic lament for the decay of greatness, a description of the descent of armour, and numerous other conventional elements of the epic, together with the typical diction and imagery of the tradition. In fact everything that is mentioned in the text takes its origin from some classical epic poem. Yet, although each element is derived from some source, Pope achieves the remarkable feat of integrating all these organically into a whole which is entirely his own, each second-hand element having a unique function and purpose in the poem as a whole. The main strategy he deploys to achieve this is of course the method of the mock-heroic. Just as Dryden in *MacFlecknoe*, he juxtaposes the seriousness of the epic tradition with the triviality of the subject matter, adding a unique perspective by creating a double reference for each element he borrows from the epic tradition. In the following passage from Canto V, for example, he describes the outcome of the battle between the gentlemen and the ladies precisely to this effect:

> Now *Jove* suspends his golden Scales in Air,
> Weighs the Men's Wits against the Lady's Hair;
> The doubtful Beam long nods from side to side;
> At length the Wits mount up, the Hairs subside. (Canto V, ll. 71-4)

The epic convention he relies on in this passage is easy to identify: to determine the outcome of a long-drawn-out battle the epic poet frequently evokes the machinery, presenting a deity who weighs the two parties against each other and whichever proves heavier wins the combat. Pope, however, adds a new meaning by making Jupiter weigh the gentlemen's wits against the lady's hair. Thus while the passage communicates in perfect heroic diction that the battle ends with the ladies' victory, it also implies that a single lock of hair outweighs all the men's wits put together.

Pope maintains this double perspective throughout the whole poem just as skilfully as Dryden does in *MacFlecknoe*. Moreover, he also surpasses Dryden's achievement in that he systematically evokes in his poem the whole epic tradition from Homer to Milton, thus creating a kind of epic totality or a synthesis of this poetic tradition in a unique and fully original work. Arguably, therefore, *The Rape of the Lock* is the great epic of its own age: in his own unique way (which is also generally characteristic of his age and his nation) Pope emulates the achievement of his predecessors, the great epic poets.

Another way in which Pope's mock-epic differs from Dryden's is that Pope uses the mock-heroic apparently without a satirical edge. While he presents the life of the aristocracy as empty, frivolous and superficial, he clearly does not pass moral judgment, does not criticize or attempt to reform this easy lifestyle (even though some of the real-life counterparts of the poem's characters were initially offended by his representation). In fact one might even feel that he takes pleasure in it and attributes a kind of aesthetic value to this glittering but

superficial existence. His moral – or rather *a*moral – attitude is perhaps best summed up in the couplet describing the beauty of the poem's heroine:

> If to her share some Female Errors fall,
> Look on her Face, and you'll forget 'em all. (Canto II, 17–18)

In the first version of the poem the second line read "Look on her Face, and you'll *forgive* 'em all" which Pope amended to "you'll *forget* 'em all", indicating that the moral perspective should not be entirely eliminated, but it could and indeed should be temporarily suspended while we indulge in the lightness and beauty of this world of shiny surfaces.

Translation and The Dunciad

In 1717, when he was only 29 years old, Pope published a book of his collected verse; an honour which is earned by most poets only towards the end of their life. By this time, therefore, Pope had reached the peak of his career, his authority well established and his reputation as the greatest poet of the age undisputed (except by a few personal enemies). From 1715, moreover, he was honoured with the highly prestigious but also very demanding task of translating the works of Homer. This undertaking marks a turning point in Pope's life and career in a number of ways. For first of all, it proved to be a very lucrative enterprise, yielding him over £10,000. This was a huge sum at the time, which made it possible for him to set up a house in the countryside but still near London (at Twickenham) and provided him with material comfort throughout the rest of his life. On the other hand, however, the constant plodding work of translating these vast poems (he worked on the translation for over a decade) tired Pope and made him adopt a bitterer attitude to his environment, to the contemporary situation, and to life in general. Besides, his translation also occasioned some challenges to his reputation.

The first blow to his reputation came when it transpired that he had relied on the help of some hired fellow poets for his translation of the *Odyssey* (published in 1726). Since Pope had clearly wanted to keep this a secret, when the fact became known to the public, it was generally perceived as an instance of dishonesty on Pope's part. In addition, he was also criticised for his rendering of Homer by the greatest classics scholar of the time, Dr. Richard Bentley, who said about his translation – no doubt with some justice – that "[i]t is a pretty poem Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer". Pope's neat heroic couplets indeed did not provide the most perfect medium for a representation of Homer's unbounded greatness and Pope took Bentley's criticism very much to heart, precisely because of its, at least partial, justness.

Around the same time a similar challenge to Pope's authority was also mounted by Lewis Theobald, another distinguished scholar, who attacked Pope's edition of Shakespeare's works. This edition was published in 1725 with its famous "Preface to Shakespeare", a beautiful and powerful critical achievement and an important document of the relation of neo-

classical criticism to Shakespeare. However, Pope's treatment of Shakespeare's text was indeed highly questionable and lacked any scholarly foundation.

These critical attacks were so painful to Pope that he felt it necessary to retaliate, and he did so in his second masterpiece (besides *The Rape of the Lock*), *The Dunciad*. The poem was first published in three books in 1728 and in the next year a new edition, *The Dunciad Variorum*, came out with a preface and with mock-serious notes. As the title immediately makes it clear, *The Dunciad* also uses the mock-heroic form. A *dunce*, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, is "a person, especially a child at school, who is stupid or slow to learn", and the combination of this word with the unmistakable reference to the *Iliad* clearly anticipates the juxtaposition of high and low, which is the characteristic strategy of the mock-heroic. Unlike *The Rape of the Lock*, however, *The Dunciad* uses the mock form with a clear satirical purpose: it mocks to attack, to criticise and to expresses moral indignation.

Although the immediate occasion for writing *The Dunciad* was probably the criticism Pope received for his translation of Homer and his edition of Shakespeare, what he attacks in the poem is not only Bentley and Theobald. He involves all his other enemies, too, and indeed generally all the forces that he saw as corrupting the high neo-classical standards of literature that he had committed himself to. The mock-heroic, therefore, once again becomes the means of presenting a synthesizing vision of the contemporary situation. The vision of *The Dunciad*, however, is a much darker one than that of *The Rape of the Lock*, and paints a rather pessimistic picture of Pope's contemporary reality. The fictional action of the poem is basically the triumph of the forces of Chaos and Night over those of Light and Order; that is to say, over all intelligent human effort. In Book I the goddess Dullness (representative of the forces of Chaos and Night) declares that her favourite, Lewis Theobald, is to inherit the throne of the dunces (that is, of contemporary scribblers and hacks, hireling writers of low quality literature). In Book II the new king is celebrated with mock-epic games, which abound in images of corruption, dirt and excrement, representing the filthy sub-literary world of "Grub Street" (see more on this below). The book ends with all the characters falling asleep while dull poems, their own literary products, are read out to them. In Book III the goddess Dullness gives the sleeping Theobald a vision of the progression of dullness ending with the apocalypse of nonsense.

The 1730's and the Final Phase of Pope's Career

In spite of the pessimism and bitterness that characterizes *The Dunciad*, Pope was at this time still at the height of his creative powers and the 1730s saw the production of some of his most characteristic, as well as most famous poetry. Between 1731-35 he wrote a series of four verse satires, often collectively referred to as the *Moral Essays*, in the form of epistles addressed to some illustrious personages, Pope's friends, and discussing some central social, moral and aesthetic issues of his day. Between 1733-34 he worked on what was probably his most famous poem in his own time: *An Essay on Man*; a poem consisting of four epistles and giving a comprehensive philosophical view of the human situation, society, morality, religion in easily readable, fluent and economical heroic couplets. This remarkable combination of

philosophical depth and easy expression, of succinctness and graphic representation made this poem probably the most popular of all Pope's poems in the period and was the main foundation of Pope's overseas reputation. Voltaire, Rousseau and Kant regarded the poem highly and it was very soon translated into most European languages and even into Arabic. A Hungarian translation was also produced in 1772 by no smaller poet than György Bessenyei under the title *Az embernek próbája*. To the products of this especially creative decade belong also the *Imitations of Horace* (1733-38), a series of Horatian satires, which – in spite of the title – are often regarded as Pope's most original and most characteristic achievements. They give a satirical vision of England in the time of George II and attack the corruption of Robert Walpole's system (see below), as well as the cultural mediocrity of the royal court and of the whole era.

In the last years of his life Pope once again returned to his second mock-heroic masterpiece, *The Dunciad*, completing it with a fourth book in 1742 and then revising the whole poem and publishing it in its final form in four books as *The New Dunciad* (1743). In this final version Lewis Theobald was replaced by poet laureate Collie Cibber as the king of the dunces. Cibber was an actor, playwright and theatre director with whom Pope had engaged in bitter personal conflict. In spite of this change, however, the main tendency of *The New Dunciad* remained the same. In Book IV Pope continues to attack not only his personal enemies but also, and more importantly, the forces of inertia, mediocrity, laziness that he pictures as now completely overtaking the sacred realm of Light and Order which he and his Augustan friends have maintained and protected. The tone is still that of dark and bitter satire and of moral indignation, but the latter also often leads Pope's verse into the realm of the sublime. One can witness this, for example, in the opening lines of Book IV:

YET, yet a moment, one dim Ray of Light
Indulge, dread Chaos, and eternal Night!
Of darkness visible so much be lent,
As half to shew, half veil the deep Intent.
Ye Pow'rs! whose Mysteries restor'd I sing,
To whom Time bears me on his rapid wing,
Suspend a while your Force inertly strong,
Then take at once the Poet and the Song.
  Now flam'd the Dog-star's unpropitious ray,
Smote ev'ry Brain, and wither'd ev'ry Bay;
Sick was the Sun, the Owl forsook his bow'r,
The moon-struck Prophet felt the madding hour:
Then rose the Seed of Chaos, and of Night, [that is, the Goddess Dulness]
To blot out Order, and extinguish Light,
Of dull and venal a new World to mold,
And bring Saturnian days of Lead and Gold.
  She mounts the Throne: her head a Cloud conceal'd,
In broad Effulgence all below reveal'd,

(’Tis thus aspiring Dulness ever shines)
Soft on her lap her Laureat son [Cibber] reclines. (Book IV, 1-20)

On the last four lines Pope commented in a footnote: “The higher you climb the more you show your A–” Humour and ridicule are obviously still present, but the almost apocalyptic tone of the first passage and the dark and intense imagery of the second indeed reach in the direction of the grand and the sublime. This shows that the mock-epic, Pope’s greatest poetic achievement, and also the greatest poetic achievement of the age, is indeed capable of creating a poetic synthesis, accommodating not only the familiar, the satirical and the humorous but also the sublime, the elevated and the grand.

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The Rise of the English Novel

Novels and romances

In 1692 William Congreve labelled *Incognita*, the work he was writing, as a "novel" rather than a "romance," and argued for the necessity of distinguishing the two terms from one another. The successful Restoration playwright must have felt the oncoming great literary change that was to take place in the eighteenth century with the emergence of a new form of writing, the long fictional narrative in prose which we call today the "novel." In the Preface to *Incognita*, which can be regarded as an early experiment in the literary possibilities that the novel as a genre has to offer, Congreve suggested that

> Novels are of a more familiar nature; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresidented (*sic*), such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight.

In other words, he was arguing for the "probability" of the novel rather than the "possibility" and wonder of the romance, showing that a new dimension for the long fictional narrative in prose was in the offering. Today the romance is generally regarded as a sub-category of the novel (romance novel), but throughout the nineteenth century, authors were persistently making this differentiation to inform readers about the type of fiction they were to expect when reading their books. In the eighteenth century, however, the terms "novel" and "romance" were not consistently used by authors. It is only in retrospect that we can see a new type of fiction emerging; one that is more "familiar" to readers, one in which the characters become not just types, but possess individual characteristics, and in which the setting and situations are also easily recognizable. In these fictitious writings the author presents a unified narrative about a world of which he is the complete master. Also, the reader can "connect" more to the incidents related, in other words, there is an air of "reality" about the world presented to readers. It is also important to see that the novel incorporated some elements of the traditional romance. The new genre that was born at the turn of the eighteenth century was a literary response to a different world than that of the Restoration period; society was in transformation, people's views about themselves and the world they were living in were also rapidly changing. The texts which were published at the time, fiction or-non-fiction, reflected a major shift in people's interests. The world had become a wider place and the thirst for information, knowledge and good stories was great.

The middle class

Most literary historians agree that the rise of the novel was a process that paralleled the rise of the middle class in the social history of England. By the turn of the eighteenth century the literate population of London was not composed merely of aristocrats and their courtiers, but also included tradesmen, craftsmen, merchants, businessmen, and an increasing number of women. It is estimated that in 1600 only about 25 per cent of the population (mostly male) could read, while by 1800 this figure rose to about 60-70 per cent. At the turn of the eighteenth century, this figure must have been somewhere in between the two, indicating a steady rise in the literate population. The growing middle class showed an aversion to what they considered corrupt courtly values and preferred to read more informative works, firstly, for the purpose of advancing their business and only secondly for entertainment. Modern journalism was also born in this period. In very general terms, we can say that the turbulent historical events of the seventeenth century (the Civil War, Restoration) created in people an awareness of how society can change over time and how their own conditions are influenced by these changes.

A growing curiosity in individual experience also generated an interest in individual character and the trivial realities of life. Therefore, history books showing historical changes, travel writings and diaries describing individual experience were very popular at the time Some of the notable writings from the many that preceded and influenced the emergence of the English novel are the translations of French medieval romances, Elizabethan drama, Lily's *Euphues, or the Anatomy of Wit* (a didactic romance), Bacon's essays, the English edition of Theophrastus's *Characters* (1592), the Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (1688). In Bunyan's vivid religious allegory, for example, Christian is an average man, and this is partly the reason why the work became popular among a much wider, middle or even lower class audience. The descriptions and the dramatic dialogues in *The Pilgrim's Progress* are also considered to be forerunners of novelistic narrative techniques. Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* is also often regarded as an early form of the novel because of its linear plot. To add to the list, the popular genre of confessions of criminals (fact mixed with fiction), conduct books for young people, popular newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets also contributed to the development of the novel.

The birth of the modern novel is also linked to the growing economic and social influence of the literate middle class and cannot be separated from town life or market economy. Thus the development of the literary industry in this period (writers, journalists, editors, stationers, printers, publishers, booksellers), owes much to the fact that people were seeking information and entertainment from books. To meet this demand writing became a profession for those who were educated and wished to make a living. The poor hack writers, journalists, printers, publishers living in Grub Street were often dismissed by the neo-classical poets and their readers in the same way as most novelists, who write to increase their income through the sales of their books, are criticized today. This is also the reason why novels were considered to be commercial ventures and therefore, not as high-brow as poetry and drama. The novels of Defoe, Fielding, Sterne and many women writers of the eighteenth century

were scorned for their treatment of what was then considered to be "low," indecent and immoral. The value of a work of fiction for the neo-classical Pope, Swift, and later Dr Johnson and his literary circle, lay not merely in entertainment, but in the moral instruction it had to offer. Throughout the eighteenth century a great variety of novels were being published. The diversity of themes, plots, structures, narrative techniques show that the novel became an experimenting ground for writers who exploited the rich possibilities that the freedom of the genre had to offer. And the steadily growing number of readers—mainly from the middle class—demanded more and more novels.

Periodicals: The Spectator

At the beginning of the eighteenth century another branch of writing was also developing and winning readers in London. A variety of newspapers and periodicals were gradually becoming more influential and popular among especially the affluent middle-class. Hungry for information, yet busy and active in their craft and trade, they had less time to spare for reading or instruction. Partly owing to the Puritan heritage of a large part of the middle-class population, they were suspicious of the entertainment literary texts had to offer. Also, they were more interested in the actualities of everyday life than in poetry or fiction. Most of the information they needed could be picked up by either buying or subscribing to periodicals or by frequenting one of the several hundred coffee-houses of London. There they could find and read the papers they preferred. Defoe's *Review*, Ned Ward's *The London Spy* are examples of noteworthy periodicals of the period. There was, however, a periodical that exercised a major literary influence throughout the eighteenth century on readers, including men of letters, Addison's and Steele's *The Spectator*.

Richard Steele and Joseph Addison were childhood friends and first met at Charterhouse School. Both went to Oxford and had successful literary careers. During the eighteenth century Addison was best known for his essays in *The Spectator*, but was also praised for his popular tragedy *Cato* (1713). In his later years he pursued a career in diplomacy. It was Steele who founded *The Tatler* in 1709, a periodical which was issued three times a week. Addison occasionally contributed essays as well, but most of the writing was done by Steele. Borrowing the format of the *The Tatler* (two printed columns on both sides of one sheet) and the idea of a fictional club in which fictional characters reflect upon various, mainly social and cultural issues, Addison and Steele founded *The Spectator*. The periodical was issued daily (except for Sundays) from March 1, 1711 for almost two years. Their cooperation resulted in 555 issues altogether, and it is generally believed that the joint collaboration of the two friends contributed to the success of the periodical.

The regularly reoccurring fictional characters commenting on mainly cultural and social events of the time were not only amusing, but familiar to readers. Mr. Spectator, Sir Roger de Coverley, who represented the old-fashioned gentry, Andrew Freeport, a merchant from the middle-class, Will Honeycomb, a rake, Captain Sentry, and a clergyman, were all characters with different mentalities and manners, representing different layers of society. Thus *The Spectator* discussing current events through familiar, yet fictitious and individualized characters was also preparing the ground for the birth of the modern novel. A fictional Mr.

Spectator explains his intentions in the first issue of the periodical:

> I have been often told by my Friends, that it is a Pity so many useful Discoveries which I have made, should be in the Possession of a Silent Man. For this Reason, therefore, I shall publish a sheet-full of Thoughts every morning, for the Benefit of my Contemporaries; and if I can anyway contribute to the Diversion or Improvement of the country in which I live, I shall leave it, when I am summoned out of it, with the secret Satisfaction of thinking that I have not lived in vain." (*The Spectator*, No.1)

It is clear that the intention of the periodical is to entertain and instruct. Mr. Spectator is not always silent, however, at least not in the company of the other members of The Club with whom he discusses many topical issues of interest to readers. But he wishes to avoid politics and to remain neutral:

> Thus I Live in the world, rather as a Spectator of mankind . . . I never espoused any Party with Violence, and am resolved to observe an exact Neutrality between the Whigs and Tories . . . In short, I have acted in all the parts of my Life as a Looker-on which is the Character I intend to preserve in this Paper. (*The Spectator*, No.1)

Although politically the paper attempted to be neutral, the editors and readers sympathized more with the views of the clever merchant, Sir Andrew Freeport, than the old-fashioned Tory gentleman, Sir Roger de Coverley (Addison and Steele were closer to the Whigs in their political affiliations). Steele was excellent in criticizing drama and produced scathing reviews of Restoration plays and Italian operas, while Addison was the master of the polished essay that treated just about any social and cultural subject, including aesthetics and literary criticism. Addison's essays on "The Pleasures of Imagination" (nos. 411-21) mark the beginning of modern aesthetics. In these essays he argues that it is mainly "beauty" or that which is "great" or "new" that captures the imagination. With this distinction he anticipates Edmund Burke's aesthetic theory on the beautiful and the sublime (see the chapters on "Poetry after Pope" and "The Gothic Novel"). He also reassures his down-to-earth middle-class readers that there is nothing harmful or "idle" and "criminal" in indulging in the pleasures of imagination, especially, if it is a work of art that supplies the object; these pleasures might even prove to be useful for exercising the mind:

> There are, indeed, but very few who know how to be idle and innocent, or have a relish of any pleasures that are not criminal: every diversion they take is at the expense of some one virtue or another, and their very first step out of business is into vice or folly.

> A man should endeavour, therefore, to make the sphere of his innocent pleasures as wide as possible, that he may retire into them with safety, and find in them such a satisfaction as a wise man would not blush to take. Of this nature are those of the imagination, which do not require such a bent of thought as is necessary to our more serious employments, nor, at the same time, suffer the mind to sink into that negligence and remissness, which are apt to accompany our more sensual delights, but, like a gentle exercise to the faculties, awaken them from sloth and idleness, without putting them upon any labour or difficulty. (No. 411)

Addison's eighteen essays on Milton's *Paradise Lost* helped establish the poet's distinguished reputation in English literature. He regarded Milton as a "great genius," and praised him for the epic language he used. Milton was considered at the time to be "modern", but by placing *Paradise Lost* alongside the great poetic works of the ancients, Addison made a "classic" out of the great seventeenth-century poet's work.

The Spectator became so popular that although it had a circulation of 3000 copies, Addison estimated that it was read in coffee-houses by twenty times more people than the number of issues published. It remained popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the issues were republished in several editions. The articles were witty, the style was elegant; they wished to entertain, instruct and improve the manners of the literate, but uncouth "middle" layers of society. The periodical was especially enthusiastic in giving advice to the "fair sex" on how to behave, since Addison and Steele wished to include women among their readers. The letters to *The Spectator*, however, introduced a new type of journalistic genre that later became the "letters to the editor" column we are familiar with today. A few years later these epistolary experiments in writing were continued on the pages of epistolary novels.

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Daniel Defoe and the Novel of Adventure

When Robert Louis Stevenson compared the afterlife of two great eighteenth-century novels, Richardson's *Clarissa* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, he suggested that the most difficult thing to do for a novelist is "to embody character, thought or emotion in some act or attitude that shall be remarkably striking to the mind's eye," which "equally delights the schoolboy and the sage." According to Stevenson, Crusoe "recoiling from a footprint" (when he realizes that he is not alone on his island) presents this kind of a memorable, "picture-making" scene. *Clarissa* certainly "contains wit, character, passion, plot, conversations full of spirit and insight" but *Robinson Crusoe* remains popular "while *Clarissa* lies upon the shelves unread." Written more than one hundred years ago, Stevenson's words remain true to this day.

Who was the man who is attributed with writing one of the first, all-time classic "modern" novels? What is the everlasting charm of *Robinson Crusoe*? What were those social, economic and private conditions that motivated Defoe and made him turn to writing novels for a living at the age of 59? Did Defoe realize the inconsistencies in Robinson Crusoe's character? That Crusoe's religious conversion, his firm Christian principles and his own former experience as a slave were contradictory to his evident satisfaction at the success of his financial exploits, and to his acceptance of slavery? But these are only some of the questions and issues that the text of *Robinson Crusoe* raises; readers have been seeking to answer them over the past three hundred years. One thing is quite certain, however; they have all been entertained by the story itself. The footprint of the savage in the sands of the desert island cannot be swept away.

Little is known about Defoe's life. He was born into a lower middle-class family of Non-conformist (Dissenter) religious background. He is known to have been continuously active, finding various means of earning money from his business ventures. He was a tax collector, a merchant in hosiery, wine and civet cats; the owner of a tile and brick factory and a government spy in Scotland preparing the act of Union in 1707. It seems, however, that throughout his life he had always spent more than he could earn and was often in debt. It is quite possible that he had been hiding from his creditors when he died in London in 1731. During his life he wrote numerous pamphlets on economic reform and politics. He also published religious conduct books and contributed to periodicals. The total amount of his writings amounts to several hundred, although the exact figure is not known since his authorship is contested in some cases.

Defoe was actively engaged in political and religious controversies of his day and wrote a great deal to promote the cause of Dissenters in England. *The Shortest Way with Dissenters* was a political pamphlet published in 1702 in which he posed as a High Church official and satirically proposed that Non-conformists should be exterminated. It did not matter that Defoe was ridiculing government practices and that he was also a Dissenter; he was arrested in 1703

and sentenced to stand on the pillory for three days, an event which he turned to his advantage by publishing *The Hymn to the Pillory* on the first day of his sentence. This made him popular with the public, and according to an anecdote, instead of pelting and verbally abusing him, the crowd gathered and sang in his praise and showered him with flowers.

In 1704 he began publishing his own periodical *A Review of the Affairs of France*. This enterprise lasted until 1711. His career in pamphleteering and journalism thus prepared him for his career as a novelist. One more work is perhaps worth mentioning; a writing which shows that in his journalistic career he was not just interested in the realities of his time, but also in events of more fanciful and supernatural nature. *A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs Veal* (1706) tells the true or untrue story of a woman who was visited by the ghost of her friend one day after her death. If it is to be regarded as a ghost story, as it is generally regarded, Defoe wished to make it convincing to readers. Some readers, however, refute this idea and argue that Defoe was just as fascinated by the supernatural as by the actualities of life and he truly believed that the event had happened. Much later as an established novelist, Defoe published *The Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) in which a first person narrator, "a Citizen who continued all the while in London," offers a convincing historical account of the events of 1665 when the plague infected most of the city population. In this work he is taking an actual event and fictionalizing it, but the descriptions of the spreading of the disease and the horrifying medical practices of the time blend fact with fiction.

Much of the non-fiction literature of the time mixed fact with fancy, and the blurring of the borders between two different types of writing promoted the development of the novel. Defoe, relying upon the credulity of readers, wrote his most famous novels under the guise of fictitious first person narrators (Crusoe, Moll Flanders, a Citizen). He did not trust his readers enough to be willing to purchase his novels if they were not sold as "true" stories. In 1719 when Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was published Eliza Haywood's novel entitled *Love in Excess* was a huge bestseller. Together with other women writers, Delarivier Manley and Jane Barker, Haywood set the trend for producing **amatory fiction**, that is, fiction which is focused around the subject of courtship, marriage and love. Defoe, the journalist and pamphleteer, however, not only wanted to make money, but wished to attract more serious readers for an audience, and therefore, did not take any risks. The romantic plot is entirely missing from *Robinson Crusoe*.

The novel of adventure

Inspired by the true story of the Scottish Alexander Selkirk who spent four years on a desert island, Defoe wrote his own fictional version. The full title of Robinson Crusoe provides a summary of the story: *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates*. Defoe did not claim authorship of the work. Thus readers were led to believe that the book was written by the castaway himself in the form of an autobiography. The first part of the novel (there were two sequels) sold out in

four editions before the end of 1719. The most memorable and major part of the work deals with the years spent on the desert island. But there is a frame story as well. In trying to construct Crusoe's identity so that he would have claim to being called an actual person, Defoe presents Crusoe's family background and situates his exact social position in society to be in the "middle," between the upper and lower classes. His father attempts to dissuade him from becoming a seaman and his reasons are given in detail by providing a praise of the "middle state:

> He called me one morning into his chamber, where he was confined by the gout, and expostulated very warmly with me upon this subject. He asked me what reasons, more than a mere wandering inclination, I had for leaving father's house and my native country, where I might be well introduced, and had a prospect of raising my fortune by application and industry, with a life of ease and pleasure. He told me it was men of desperate fortunes on one hand, or of aspiring, superior fortunes on the other, who went abroad upon adventures, to rise by enterprise, and make themselves famous in undertakings of a nature out of the common road; that these things were all either too far above me or too far below me; that mine was the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life, which he had found, by long experience, was the best state in the world, the most suited to human happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanic part of mankind, and not embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition, and envy of the upper part of mankind. He told me I might judge of the happiness of this state by this one thing - viz. that this was the state of life which all other people envied; that kings have frequently lamented the miserable consequence of being born to great things, and wished they had been placed in the middle of the two extremes, between the mean and the great; that the wise man gave his testimony to this, as the standard of felicity, when he prayed to have neither poverty nor riches. (Ch.1)

Crusoe, however, disobeys his father's wishes and goes to sea. His act of disobedience will lead to the punishment of having to spend more than two decades of solitude on a desert island. The preliminary adventures which lead up to the story on the island are a series of incidents which follow each other in quick succession: Crusoe suffers shipwreck and captivity, becomes a slave to a Moor, escapes and buys a plantation in Brazil. When he attempts to become a slave trader, he suffers shipwreck. On the last pages of the book Crusoe returns to England, settles down, and becomes rich from his plantations. In the closing sentences of the book he gives a foretaste of his further adventures which are to be related in a second volume. Between these initial and final adventures, however, most of the book is about a lonely man's experience on a desert island and about how he struggles to survive. Crusoe keeps track of time and gives meticulous descriptions of place. It is not only the minute details of his resourcefulness that are related; how he builds a home for himself (he calls it his Castle), how he grows crops, hunts, domesticates goats, experiences religious

conversion, finds a servant in the person of Friday, converts him and civilizes the island, but also his thoughts and emotional reactions to what he has experienced. Before encountering and saving Friday from the clutches of cannibals, for many years he is all on his own, praying for society of some kind. But when he sees a naked footprint in the sand, he is terrified:

> But now I come to a new scene of my life. It happened one day, about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen on the sand. I stood like one thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an apparition. I listened, I looked round me, but I could hear nothing, nor see anything; I went up to a rising ground to look farther; I went up the shore and down the shore, but it was all one; I could see no other impression but that one. I went to it again to see if there were any more, and to observe if it might not be my fancy; but there was no room for that, for there was exactly the print of a foot-toes, heel, and every part of a foot. How it came thither I knew not, nor could I in the least imagine; but after innumerable fluttering thoughts, like a man perfectly confused and out of myself, I came home to my fortification, not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on, but terrified to the last degree, looking behind me at every two or three steps, mistaking every bush and tree, and fancying every stump at a distance to be a man. Nor is it possible to describe how many various shapes my affrighted imagination represented things to me in, how many wild ideas were found every moment in my fancy, and what strange, unaccountable whimsies came into my thoughts by the way. (Ch.11)

The description of Crusoe's disrupted inner world, the confusion and terror he feels, the tricks his imagination plays on him, the nightmares that haunt him after this incident have the same air of reality as the account of how he prepares to defend himself.

Main themes in Robinson Crusoe

Crusoe's story on the island is an allegory about the history and evolution of mankind (civilization); it is a story of religious and moral instruction that highlights the frailty and solitariness of man and the power of God, the importance of repentance and having faith in God's Providence.

Religious conversion: Quite often the religiousness of the text is not taken duly into consideration. There are, of course, inconsistencies in the character of Robinson Crusoe; his economic schemes after his rescue, his acceptance of slavery, seem incompatible with his spiritual awakening. But the novel can also be regarded as a spiritual autobiography; when Crusoe's conversion takes place on the island, he begins to realize that it is more important to save his own soul than to be rescued from shipwreck. He truly believes that Providence had sent the punishments upon him for having disobeyed his father's and God's will, and without His help he would have perished. Crusoe learns to pray and is consoled by reading the Bible (to which there are at least twenty references). The Protestant work ethic is manifested in his

willingness to continue struggling, never giving up, and being rewarded for his efforts (when he becomes rich at the end of his adventures).

Colonisation: The Irish writer James Joyce considered the character of Robinson Crusoe from a different angle:

> He is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty savage who comes on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races. The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe; the manly independence and the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence; the sexual apathy; the practical, well-balanced, religiousness; the calculating taciturnity."

In other words Joyce saw him as a representative of British colonisation, who becomes the "King" of the island by using Christianity as a tool to colonise Friday the "savage" to become his servant. But Crusoe also understands the relativity of cultural values; that the cannibals cannot be punished for their inhuman practice if they are unaware of the brutality of what they are doing and their system of moral values is different.

The triumph and optimism of the middle-class: Crusoe's Protestant work ethic, his indefatigable industriousness, resourcefulness and ultimate economic prosperity all reflect the strength and optimism of the middle-class which is in command of its own fate in the face of all kinds of natural or social disasters. Among other themes we find friendship and loyalty, race and class relations, an interest in the moral nature of mankind.

Narrative technique

Defoe adopts a narrative technique that relies mainly on detailed descriptions of many scenes and incidents. Crusoe's narrative of his survival is a detailed account of the slightest particulars. It is not only like a journal or memoir intended for the instruction of the public about an ordinary man's individual experience, but the style often resembles a meticulous bookkeeper's method of listing, cataloguing items, keeping track of the days, months and years. Structurally, however, the narrative is unified and does not just present a series of loose tales or incidents without a unified plot. There are no dialogues, however. A simple descriptive narrative technique is appropriate for the passages that relate Crusoe's solitary adventures on the island (there is no one to talk to but himself), but when characters do make their appearance their speeches are quoted indirectly. This is one of the weaknesses of the narrative technique. But we must not forget that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, both reflect the novel at an early stage of development. The power of these novels lies in the incidents, the adventures that they narrate, and the semblance of reality they create.

When Defoe was accused of lying and selling a romance to the public which contained the confessions of a fictitious mariner, he added a preface to the third part of the story: *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. In this prefatory essay he acknowledges that Crusoe is his invention and explains that he wished to write a moral fable, an instructive allegory. He defends his writing by declaring that the "truth" of his fiction is just as valid as the truth contained in the greatest religious texts:

> the telling or writing a parable, or an allusive allegory, is quite a different case, and is always distinguished from this other jesting with truth, that it is designed and effectually turned for instructive and upright ends, and has its moral justly applied. Such are the historical parables in the Holy Scripture, such *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and such in a word, the adventures of your fugitive friend Robinson Crusoe.

Defoe was defending the truth of his fiction in this case, but the passage is also interesting because it opens the possibilities for analysing how differently the "truth" operates in the case of other fiction as well, even if this may not at first sight be as apparent as the simple truth revealed by non-fiction works. To take another example, the life story of *Moll Flanders* is just as imaginary as Crusoe's account. But the "truth" about the depravity of human nature in general, or the corrupting influence of the social environment that measures everything in terms of money, the situation of poor women without a suitable family background, offer issues that can be analyzed in more detail in the form of a novel and are perhaps more convincing than a sociological or psychological study on the same subject.

In *Moll Flanders* (1722) Defoe uses the same narrative technique as in *Robinson Crusoe*. Once again we are holding the memoirs of an individualized fictitious character in our hands. Once again the main story is about survival and serious moral issues which are central to the protagonist's moral development. But this time readers have more insight into the workings of an originally innocent female mind that becomes gradually corrupted owing to the choices she makes in life in order to become a "gentlewoman." Moll Flanders's motives and her reaction to the consequences of her choices are analyzed more deeply than Crusoe's. Through her story we witness a woman's gradual descent into the criminal world and a moral corruption of the deepest kind. The original complete title offers a short summary of Moll's life story: *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, etc. Who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continu'd variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest and died a Penitent. Written from her own Memorandums*.

Moll Flanders is a **picaresque novel** which is an early form of the novelistic genre, made popular in England especially by translations of Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The structure of such a novel is based mainly on loosely strung incidents and adventures which also drive the narrative forward. The hero is usually lowly born, but clever, and the adventures in such novels are described in realistic detail. Moll, coming from a very low social background is such a clever and ruthless heroine. Adopted into a well-to-do family, she falls in love with the eldest son who seduces her, and after a long affair, is unwilling to marry her. Moll is persuaded to marry his brother instead. She does so, but when her husband dies, she leaves her children in care of his parents, becoming free to pursue her own fortunes. From this point on she enters into a succession of mostly economically advantageous marriages and liaisons, having numerous children over the years. She unfeelingly abandons them, however,

leaving them to the care of others. Her social, economic and moral progress begins to decline. Eventually, she ends up as an expert thief in her effort to survive.

In an often quoted passage Moll, in her desperation to get money, relates how she almost murdered a child for her necklace:

> Going through Aldersgate Street, there was a pretty little child who had been at a dancing school, and was going home, all alone; and my prompter, like a true devil, set me upon this innocent creature. I talked to it, and it prattled to me again, and I took it by the hand and led it along till I came to a paved alley that goes into Bartholomew Close, and I led it in there. The child said that was not its way home. I said, 'Yes, my dear, it is; I'll show you the way home.' The child had a little necklace on of gold beads, and I had my eye upon that, and in the dark of the alley I stooped, pretending to mend the child's clog that was loose, and took off her necklace, and the child never felt it, and so led the child on again. Here, I say, the devil put me upon killing the child in the dark alley, that it might not cry, but the very thought frighted me so that I was ready to drop down; but I turned the child about and bade it go back again, for that was not its way home.

This event, however, does not deter her from criminal career. It is only when she is waiting for her execution in Newgate prison that she begins to seriously repent her sins. Finally, she is converted by a clergyman and her sentence is changed to transportation to Virginia. In Newgate she also finds her 'Lancashire husband,' the only one of her husbands she truly loved, and they both settle in New World, ready to come back to England many years later as an elderly couple. Moll publishes her story for the benefit of all who may read and learn from her adventures. Moll's sincere repentance and conversion in the prison have been questioned by readers; thus she will always remain an ambiguous character. The questions raised by *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, however, continue to intrigue readers. This is the reason why both books have remained popular. They share the same basic idea—that the greatest adventure is life itself.

Recommended further reading

Richetti, John J. *The Life of Danie Defoe. A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction.* New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 2006.

Religion in Robinson Crusoe.
http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18c/defoe/religion.html

Henry Fielding and the Comic Epic in Prose

In Henry Fielding's hands the novel or the *comic epic-poem in prose*, as he called it, acquires a carefully designed structure which he presents through a new, omniscient type of narrator. Fielding's purpose is not only to entertain and highlight the intricacies of a carefully designed plot, but to set before the reader human nature itself. With a wide variety of characters from different layers of society, he shapes the novel into the form with which we are most familiar today. While Fielding is entertaining readers, he is also conducting a philosophical inquiry into the moral nature of man and discussing literary issues. He consistently argues in favour of a more suitable literary critical approach to the novel which was then regarded as a morally and artistically suspicious genre, lower in rank than verse and drama. It is with Fielding's contributions to the eighteenth century English novel that this new type of fiction achieves a greater level of acceptance. The passion for life that his heroes feel, the energy and keen sense of humour with which his novels are narrated, the intrusive authorial essays and complexity of the plots reflect Fielding's wit and originality, his critical approach to human nature and society, his knowledge of different (low as well as classic) literary traditions, and his awareness that he was developing a completely new genre.

When Fielding died in 1754 of dropsy and overwork at the age of forty-seven, his literary output amounted to nearly thirty plays, numerous articles and pamphlets on social and criminal reform, and three important novels which have since received high critical acclaim: *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*. Fielding came from an aristocratic family background and received a gentleman's classical education at Eton. His neo–classical taste in literature, his life-long admiration of the classical authors and their works are reflected in all of his novels. His early career was linked to the theatre, but because his plays openly attacked the corrupt Sir Robert Walpole and his government, the Theatrical Licensing Act was introduced in 1737. As a result, many of the theatres had to shut down including Fielding's, the Little Theatre in the Hay (Haymarket Theatre today). Fielding was compelled to turn to the law for a professional career. He did not give up his literary ambitions, however; the novel became his next experimenting ground.

When Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel of sensibility, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, was published in 1740, it was such a smashing success that Fielding could not refrain from publishing anonymously his own satirical response in the form of a parody entitled *An Apology for the Life of Shamela Andrews*. Mr B's virtuous domestic servant is exposed as a calculating schemer whose base intentions are to marry her master and who only pretends to be virtuous (see the chapter on "Samuel Richardson: the epistolary novel"). Samuel Richardson took offence and took every opportunity to criticize Fielding's novel. Nor could he forgive another attack by Fielding in the form of a novel entitled *Joseph Andrews*. He would not relent, not even when Fielding earnestly wished to make peace by praising *Clarissa* when it was published in 1748.

Joseph Andrews as a picaresque novel

Expanding upon this initial idea of parody, Fielding reversed the situation and the sexes in his next work of fiction *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742). Mrs. Booby thus becomes, or attempts to become, the seducer of Pamela's brother Joseph Andrews, who, however, remains throughout virtuous and faithful to his love Fanny. *Joseph Andrews*, however, is more than a simple parody of Richardson's *Pamela*. As the sub-title indicates, the novel was written "in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes," following the picaresque tradition of introducing mainly low characters, Joseph Andrews and Parson Adams, presenting their adventures in a loosely strung series of incidents. Fielding is also aiming at the epic totality of the ancients when he labels his story a "history."

In *Joseph Andrews* Fielding seems to lose his initial intention to parody, and the novel expands to offer an analysis of character and society, investigating the nature of virtue and presenting a critique of Lord Shaftesbury's benevolent philosophical views on the harmonic cosmic order of the world. Although Parson Adams is an ideal Christian, and Joseph Andrews is eminently virtuous, the world they are surrounded by and the characters they meet refute this optimistic philosophy of the world, despite the comic narrative tone. Just as interesting as the incidents in the novel, however, are Fielding's introductory chapters, in which his presence as an author and narrator is foregrounded, and in which he meditates on the nature of his writing. Fielding's Preface to *Joseph Andrews* attempts to define the new type of comic "romance" that he is writing.

> Now, a comic romance is a comic epic-poem in prose; differing from comedy, as the serious epic from tragedy: its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters. It differs from the serious romance in its fable and action, in this; that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ridiculous: it differs in its characters by introducing persons of inferior rank, and consequently, of inferior manners, whereas the grave romance sets the highest before us: lastly in its sentiments and diction; by preserving the ludicrous instead of the sublime.

Unlike Defoe or other early novelists, Fielding does not attempt to make his readers believe that he is writing a true story and that his heroes exist; he openly acknowledges that his creations and situations are fictitious. Thus he is also able to distance himself from his characters by using an **omniscient** narrator who relates the adventures of the heroes in third person and maintains a comic narrative tone throughout the novel. In addition, the author-narrator continuously draws the readers' attention to his own authorial presence and the craft of writing fiction. In this same often cited Preface Fielding points out that the "Ridiculous" in human nature is his main theme, and this provides him with ample material for peopling his comic world. "The only source of the true Ridiculous," he goes on to explain, "is affectation" which originates in the vice of "vanity or hypocrisy." The hypocrite, the fraud is thus the

source of laughter for Fielding. But he is also focusing on the reactions that such comedy would provoke from his readers because "from the discovery of this affectation arises the Ridiculous, which always strikes the reader with surprise and pleasure." While Richardson, like other sentimental novelists throughout the eighteenth century, was expecting an emotional response, it is clear that Fielding, by using comedy as his major tool, was expecting a more rational attitude from readers; a critical evaluation that was based on objective criteria and not just subjective impressions.

Tom Jones as a novel of development

Hypocrites also abound in Fielding's most successful novel, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*. Fielding had probably worked on the text for several years. The story of *Tom Jones* is set in 1745, the year of the Jacobite Rebellion and also the year when the author may have started writing the novel. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that while he was composing the novel, he was also pursuing a busy, but not too remunerative professional legal career. In the autumn of 1748, he was appointed justice of the peace of Westminster and Middlesex, which gave him even more legal cases to tackle and less time to prepare the text of *Tom Jones* for publication.[1] Nevertheless it was finally published in February, 1749.

Tom Jones, however, is no longer a picaresque novel in which the major characters are described only through their participation in random incidents. Their individual features and motivations trigger the adventures. Many of the less notable characters are not just incidental, but have the function of moving the plot forward. The character of the hero is also more carefully wrought than his predecessor's in *Joseph Andrews*. The omniscient narrator, however, is not as interested in the inner lives of his heroes as the narrators in novels of sentiment or novels of consciousness. He is more intrigued by the rich variety of human nature. Therefore, he paints detailed pictures of his characters' manners and speech. Some of his heroes are not simply good or bad, but mixed. The author-narrator is convinced that "Man, therefore, is the highest subject . . . which presents itself to the pen of our historian, or of our poet; and, in relating his actions, great care is to be taken that we do not exceed the capacity of the agent we describe." The writer thus wishes to make his story plausible, and in order to do so, stays within the realm of *probability* (realism) and avoids the use of "supernatural agents" and "ghosts" which are typical of fashionable tales and romances (Viii, i).

Just as in **novels of development** (Bildungsroman) of the period, Tom, who is raised by the benevolent Mr Allworthy, has to undergo a process of moral development in the story until he can enter the adult world, fully matured and wise, and be able to wed the lovely Sophia Western (the Greek word 'sophia' means 'wisdom'). Good-natured, intelligent and handsome, he cannot avoid finding himself in scrapes that his weakness for ladies gets him into, and is unable to defend himself against the plots which his jealous antagonist, the hypocrite Blifil, Mr Allworthy's nephew, constructs against him. He is not perfect; in fact, he is an unheroic type of a hero, which makes it possible to regard the novel as a mock-heroic

[1] This was also the year when he organized the first police force in his district to combat crime, the Bow Street Runners.

comic epic-poem in prose. But after his adventures he learns his lesson. At the very end of the novel the narrator's tongue-in-cheek remark hints that Mr. Allworthy's (his uncle) and Sophia's influence resulted in Tom being able to "correct" the flaws in his character:

> Whatever in the nature of Jones had a tendency to vice, has been corrected by continual conversation with this good man, and by his union with the lovely and virtuous Sophia. He hath also, by reflection on his past follies, acquired a discretion and prudence very uncommon in one of his lively parts" (XVIII, Chapter the Last).

Mr. Allworthy, however, epitomizes Lord Shaftesbury's ideal man of virtue who does everything to promote the well-being of others. He raises the foundling Tom as his own; eventually it turns out that Tom is his own nephew, just like Blifil. Thwackum the divine and Square the philosopher, who reside in Allworthy's house to educate Tom and Blifil, are hypocrites promoting their own personal interests. They do all they can to blacken Tom's reputation before his worthy uncle. Ill-natured Blifil is the villain of the story. He withholds the secret of Tom's parentage—information which would also reveal that they are half-brothers and that Tom is of genteel background. He is continuously scheming to ruin Tom. The beautiful and forgiving Sophia Western whose loveliness mirrors the goodness and innocence of her soul, just like the heroine of Fielding's last novel, *Amelia* (1751), was modelled upon Fielding's beloved first wife. In Squire Western, Sophia's father, Fielding presents the stereotypical picture of the uneducated Jacobite country "gentleman" of eighteenth-century England whose favourite pastime is drinking, cursing, hunting and tending to his dogs. Fielding uses the classical device of contrasting and doubling to set off the differences between his characters: Squire Allworthy—Squire Western; Tom Jones—Blifil; Thwackum —Square (Tom's teachers); Sophia—Molly Seagrim, etc.

The structure of Tom Jones

While Fielding makes use of theatrical devices by using plot clichés of the period such as foundlings, surprising revelations, death-bed scenes, confusions and misunderstandings, mistaken identities, all which were familiar to readers and theatregoers of the time, he also takes care to construct scenes filled with details which will gain significance only later, and which will move the plot forward. In order to fully appreciate the details (their significance is not completely clear at a first reading) the reader must read parts of the text for a second time to see that the design of the plot has been carefully preconceived. Fielding introduces functional characters who will reappear in the story, plotting against or assisting Tom in his journey of moral progress, and in unravelling the resolution of the mystery concerning his background. The plot of *Tom Jones*, according to Coleridge, is among the "three most perfect plots ever planned." There are altogether eighteen books in the novel which are sub-divided into chapters, but essentially it has a tripartite (3x6) structure: **the first six books** are set in the country (introduction of the conflict as a consequence of Tom's character), **the next six** relate Tom's travels on the road (conflict); and the **last six** take place in London (escalation of the

conflict and resolution). With this method, the text acquires **neo-classical symmetry** and **unity**. According to some readers, the only flaw to the plot is the introduction of the "Man of the Hill" and his story. Neither the character, nor the story advances the plot in any way. But the story about how the Man of the Hill became embittered by mankind and removed himself from society is important for Tom's moral progress, and warns him that if he is not careful, his natural and kind disposition can also make him a victim of the selfish interests of others.

The "battle scenes," (churchyard, Upton) create a mock-Homeric effect. The Upton inn scenes presented directly in the middle of the novel in the chapters of Books IX and X are particularly interesting from a structural point of view and are notable for their skilfulness of design. Upton is geographically mid-way in distance between Squire Allworthy's home in Somerset and London, the last scene of Tom Jones's adventures. There are several important characters who are staying simultaneously at the same inn. But the author-narrator does not have them all meet, cannot allow them to meet for purposes of the plot. Tom and Partridge, Mrs Waters, Sophia and her maid, Mrs. Fizpatrick and her maid all turn up at the same inn. But Partridge, for instance, never gets to meet Mrs. Waters otherwise they would recognize each other, and she knows about Tom's parentage. It would spoil the revelation scene at the end of the book. Thus it is necessary for the author to delay the scene in which Partridge misinforms Tom about Mrs. Waters' identity (as a result of which Tom erroneously believes that he has committed incest). Nor does Tom know about Sophia's arrival and hasty departure until it is too late and she has found out about his tryst with Mrs. Waters. Sophia is also unaware that a cousin of hers, Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who has been running away from her jealous husband, has been staying at the same inn. Mr. Fitzpatrick breaks into Mrs. Waters' room instead of his wife's chamber. The coming and going of the characters who always miss each other remind us of similar comic situations on the stage. The intricate structure demonstrates that Fielding is complete master of the world he has created. The first chapter of each book is an essay containing the reflections of the author-narrator on mainly moral and literary issues, defining and explaining, arguing and meditating upon a particular subject, the new form of writing he is creating, the tasks of writers and literary critics.

Narrative technique and Fielding's intrusive narrator

The chatty and comic tone of *Tom Jones* is to a great extent determined by the author-narrator's sense of the "ridiculous" in capturing trivial scenes which are ironic, farcical or mixed with mock-epic elements. The narrator is often ironic, especially when he focuses on the characters who affect to be different from who they really are. In the comic passage below Captain Blifil's intentions of marrying his future wife Bridget Allworthy (a lady who is not really pretty and who at the end of the novel turns out to be Tom's mother) are explained:

> To deal plainly with the reader, the captain, ever since his arrival, at least from the moment his brother had proposed the match to him, long before he had discovered any flattering symptoms in Miss Bridget, had been greatly enamoured; that is to say, of Mr. Allworthy's house and gardens, and of his lands, tenements, and hereditaments; of all which the captain was so passionately fond, that he would most probably have

contracted marriage with them, had he been obliged to have taken the witch of Endor into the bargain. (I, i)

In the inter-chapters the **intrusive narrator** distances himself from the story and comments upon the story-line, his characters, or in a philosophical manner muses upon moral issues, such as the love-lust distinction (VI, i). The narrator consistently draws attention to his authorial skill in constructing the plot and characters; he calls attention to his use of language and awareness of creating a new form. The "comic epic-poem in prose" of *Joseph Andrews* has by this time turned into a "history," and a "**prosai-comi-epic** writing." That is, the author-narrator selects and arranges the material of Tom Jones's history as a historian would, relating only those events which are interesting and leaving out unnecessary information. He knows that he is creating a new genre as he is writing, but he is free to follow his own rules in this matter: "for I am, in reality, the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein" (II, i). His syntax, complicated sentence structures also reflect his adherence to classical literary traditions.

Fielding, in the guise of the narrator, finds a suitable metaphor for his "history" and for the relationship between the author and readers: "An author ought to consider himself, not as a gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary treat, but rather as one who keeps a public ordinary, at which all persons are welcome for their money" (I, i). Thus the dish that the author is serving in his public house to readers who pay for their dinner is "Human Nature" itself. He dresses it up in a variety of ways to make it attractive, tasty and digestible. He calls reading a "mental entertainment," the "excellence" of which "consists less in the subject than in the author's skill in well dressing it up" (I, i). He also lists the attributes of a good author: he has to possess "genius," that is, "invention and judgement," or "powers of the mind, which are capable of penetrating into all things within our reach and knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential differences" (IX, i). This can be achieved through study and conversation with people of all ranks, high and low. Fielding does not believe in portraying only one layer of society to the exclusion of others. Thus he is able to present a wide panorama of society to readers, even if some of his characters are more like caricatures.

In *Tom Jones* the scenes, the manners and speech of the characters are described in detail, yet the narration flows rapidly, the dialogues are economic and to the point. Fielding's third person omniscient narrative technique, the perfect structure of the unified fictitious world of which he is the master, his deep knowledge of human nature, paved the way for future generations of novelists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Tom Jones* is not just interesting for its significance in literary history, but also because it still proves to be a delightful source of entertainment, a real "feast" for even fastidious readers, an example of a comic, "modern" novel that has survived the vicissitudes of time and is popular to this very day.

<u>Recommended further reading</u>:

Battestin, C. Martin. *Henry Fielding: A Life*. London, New York, Routledge, 1996.

Paulson, Ronald. *The Life of Henry Fielding*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2010.

Takács, Ferenc. *Fielding világa*. Budapest: Európa, 1973.

The Augustan Response to the Rise of the Middle Class

The rise of the middle class was based on thoroughly problematic ideological foundations. On one hand bourgeois ideology preached moral rectitude, but on the other – as Mandeville so amusingly points out – it strengthened and indeed thrived on moral corruptions. It taught Christian righteousness and selfless mercifulness towards one's neighbour, but at the same time it was based on the utterly selfish drive to maximise profit. In short, notwithstanding the pious ideological claims of the middle class, the logic of capitalism, upon which the success of the middle class rested, simply excluded all sympathy towards one's neighbour and inevitably marginalized certain groups or layers of society (for example women). As is so precisely analysed in Defoe's novels after *Robinson Crusoe*, these marginalized groups were then forced to turn to fraud or moral corruption for their bare survival.

These moral paradoxes found their perfect manifestation in the figure of Sir Robert Walpole, first Prime Minister of England in the modern sense of the term. Nicknamed by his contemporaries the "great man", he ruled Britain for over two decades between 1721 and 1742. During this period he was indeed, as he was not unwilling to acknowledge, the man of greatest power in England. His power, however, was openly based on institutionalized corruption. He built out an immensely successful political system on the basis of patronage (that is, the sale of governmental positions and commissions), whose ultimate purpose was to keep him in power. Nevertheless, his corrupt administration brought political stability in England and made Britain into a thriving country which was assuming its world-leading position under Walpole's leadership. His personality was no less controversial either. Although as the First Lord of the Treasury he mixed in the highest circles, he kept the manners of a country gentleman behaving without much sense of decorum. Although he was friendly and hospitable, he was also vain and ostentatious, often boasting of his money and connections. With all his wealth and power, he lacked elegance, urbanity and a good taste.

In spite of the rising star of Walpole and of the middle class, therefore, the best literature produced in this era was directly opposed to the "great man" and to all that he represented: to Whig politics, to the corrupt administration, and to the moral pretensions and hypocrisy of the whole bourgeois mentality. These were opposed, more particularly, by the Tory writers, Pope, Swift and Gay, whose greatest satires on Walpole and on the contradictions of middle class ideology were published in the second half of the 1720s. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728), and Pope's *Dunciad* (1728) can all be seen as different reactions to the moral problems implicit in middle class ideology. What is common in these writers, apart from their Tory politics, is their commitment to the high ideals of Augustan neo-classicism and their ruthless satirical exposure of the hypocrisy of the bourgeois mentality.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1774)

Life and Career

Swift was born in Dublin, Ireland, but into an English family. His ancestors had had some eminence in England but his grandfather was ruined in the English Civil War, fighting on the Royalist side against Cromwell and losing thus all his property. Since he unfortunately died before the Restoration, the family missed the restitution and his sons – among them Swift's impoverished father – emigrated to Ireland in the hope of finding a better living there. However, Swift's father also died prematurely, seven months before the birth of his second child and only son, Jonathan, and thus the family found themselves in difficult circumstances once again. Soon after the birth of her son, therefore, Swift's mother was forced to go to England, leaving the care of the future writer to his uncle, Godwin Swift.

Although his uncle, as Swift resentfully remembered, was less then perfectly liberal with his money, he still provided the young Swift with the best education available at the time in Ireland. He sent Jonathan to Kilkenny Grammar School, probably the best school at the time in Ireland. After his school years Swift attended Trinity College, Dublin, where he developed his friendship with fellow student William Congreve, who was later to make a splendid career in London as a playwright. Swift did not distinguish himself during his undergraduate studies and actually received his BA in 1686 only by "special grace". Later, however, he made up for this initial weakness by obtaining an MA from Oxford (1692) and even a doctorate in theology (1701).

In 1688, while he was studying for his MA at Trinity College, Swift was forced to leave Ireland because of the turmoil caused there by the English Glorious Revolution. He went to England where, by his mother's connections, he obtained a secretarial job with Sir William Temple, who had served Charles II as a diplomat and played an important role in the settlement of England's foreign relations after the Anglo-Dutch wars of 1665-67. By the time Swift came to his employment, however, he had retired from public life and lived in his country house, Moor Park, in Surrey, near London. Swift soon gained the confidence of is employer who – through his Whig connections – led him into the highest circles, introducing him even to King William III himself.

In Temple's household Swift made the acquaintance of Esther Johnson, probably the most important woman in his life. Stella, as he called her, was a girl of 8 when they first met, and just like Swift she had lost her father. Temple had undertaken her care after the death of her father and entrusted his secretary, Swift, with supervising her education. This is how their relationship commenced and in time Stella became the writer's most intimate lady friend and most constant companion throughout her life. It was to her that Swift addressed the famous *Journal to Stella*, the letters commemorating the events of his most glorious London years (1710-14), and it was her fondness and companionship that he primarily depended on in the most difficult period of his life, his first years in Dublin after the fall of the Tories in 1714.

Although Temple introduced Swift in high society, the ambitious young man still felt that his patron was hindering his career and was selfishly withholding from him the preferment he felt he deserved. In a desperate attempt to break away from Temple, therefore, Swift escaped in 1794 to Ireland where he sought a church career. He had to find, however, that even for his ordination he needed Temple's support in the form of a letter of recommendation. He was forced, therefore, to defeat his pride and turn to his patron, who was not slow to extend his favour and – besides the letter of recommendation – he also secured a post for Swift, a prebend in Northern Ireland. The life of a country clergyman, however, proved to be very oppressive for Swift, and in 1696 he returned to Moor Park and stayed with Temple until the latter's death in 1699. In the last years of his life Temple had entrusted his protégé with the task of editing and publishing his memoirs and correspondence, which Swift conscientiously performed.

It was in the 1690s that Swift wrote some of his greatest early satires, most importantly *The Battle of the Books* and his first masterpiece, *A Tale of a Tub*. These works were published, together with some other satires in 1704 and laid the foundation of their author's reputation in London literary circles. In the first decade of the 18th century Swift paid several official visits to London, negotiating with the Whig government on behalf of the Church of Ireland and staying in the city for extended periods. In the course of these visits he made the acquaintance of several prominent literary figures of the time, too. Because of his connections through Temple, he was first introduced into the Whig circles presided over by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Soon, however, he earned the esteem of the Tory writers, too, befriending Pope, Gay, John Arbuthnot, Thomas Parnell and reviving his friendship with William Congreve. With these people he was later to form the famous Scriblerus Club, holding regular informal sessions in which they ridiculed the "scribblers" of their day, that is, those who wrote low quality literature primarily for financial gain.

Swift's association with the Tory writers grew even stronger when towards the end of this decade he changed his political sympathies. His negotiations with the government led to his gradual estrangement from the Whigs and when their government fell from power in 1710, Swift allied himself with the rising Tories. He undertook to write *The Examiner*, the official Tory newspaper of the time, and with this and with his political pamphlets did immeasurable service to the Tory cause. He became intimately acquainted with the most prominent Tory leaders, too. Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, the leader of the Tory party and Robert Harley, the Earl of Oxford, who filled the position in the Tory government similar to that of a modern Prime Minister, were both his close friends. It is this busy and glorious period of his life that is commemorated in his letters to Esther Johnson, collected and published as *The Journal to Stella*.

In 1714 Queen Anne died and this also brought about the fall of the Tories. Because of his ailing health and political failure Robert Harley was forced to retire to his country estate, and Bolingbroke was accused by the incoming Whig government of high treason and had to flee to France to escape from imprisonment. With the fall of the Tories Swift's position also became precarious and he was forced to go to Ireland where he had previously been made Dean of Saint Patrick's cathedral. During the time of the Tory government Swift had hoped to

get an English bishopric for his political services, but his enemies in the Church always prevented his appointment. His outspokenness in *A Tale of a Tub* had been resented by several churchmen, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and even Queen Anne herself, who refused to make him a bishop, even though he was twice nominated for the post while the Tories were in power. The deanship of St. Patrick's was, therefore, a double disappointment for Swift; for first of all, he did not become a bishop and, second, he was removed from England and from London, the centre of public and literary life. Initially, therefore, his life in Ireland was like an exile to him. He was coldly received by the people of Ireland and was shunned by all politicians and public figures for his political past. After being for four years in the centre of political decision-making and in the confidence of the greatest men of power in England, he found himself completely marginalized in Ireland. His isolation was alleviated only by the visits he paid to his English friends and by the faithful companionship of Stella, who moved with a lady friend to Ireland to live near Swift.

In spite of his initial marginalization in Ireland, however, Swift gradually became endeared to the Irish people and was established as a great Irish patriot and as a kind of national hero. The reason for this was his especially powerful satirical writing, which he now turned to the service of the Irish cause against English oppression. Swift was in fact not an Irish patriot in the traditional sense of the word. He had a rather low opinion of the provincial manners and subservient mentality of the Irish and, having descended from English stock, he did not really consider himself to be Irish either. However, he found the way England treated Ireland so cruel, selfish, and unjust that he could not but speak up for the Irish cause. His most famous work in defence of the Irish was a series of seven pamphlets published under the pseudonym M. B. Drapier and collectively as the *Drapier's Letters* (1724-25). In these satirical pamphlets he attacked what was called Wood's half-pence; that is, the gift of the patent for minting Irish half-pence to an Englishman, William Wood. Wood had acquired the patent by bribing King George I's mistress, the Duchess of Kendal, and he was to realize great profit at the expense of the Irish. Swift's pamphlets, however, proved to be so successful that Wood's patent had to be withdrawn. Another famous satire written against the English oppression of Ireland was "The Modest Proposal" (1729), perhaps Swift's best known shorter satire, which serves as a perfect example of Swift's characteristic satirical method (see below).

It was also in this Irish period that Swift largely wrote his masterpiece, *Gulliver's Travels*. Some ideas in the book go back probably as far as the times of the Scriblerus Club (1713), but Swift started to work on the *Travels* seriously from 1720. He circulated parts of the book among his friends from the early 20s and he finally published the complete text in the course of a longer visit to England in 1726. The book was an immediate and universal success. As John Gay reported, it was "universally read, from the cabinet council to the nursery" and as Dr. Johnson later described the book's reception: "[i]t was received with such avidity that the price of the first edition was raised before the second could be made; it was read by the high and the low, the learned and illiterate". *Gulliver's Travel* had to be reprinted three times within the same year and was immediately translated to several European languages (French, Dutch, and German translations, for example, appeared in the next year).

Swift was celebrated in England for his literary achievement and on his return to Ireland he was celebrated – with bonfires and ringing bells – as an Irish national hero. Once again Swift reached the zenith of his career both as a literary and as a public figure.

In the remaining two decades of his life Swift paid fewer and fewer visits to England and settled to a quiet life in Dublin. His sedate life was overshadowed by the death of Stella in 1728. However, in the early 1730s Swift was still to produce some of his finest shorter satirical pieces. The "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" and the three poems deflating the idealizations of Platonic love ("The Lady's Dressing Room", "Strephon and Chloe", and "Cassinus and Peter") are all the products of the early 1730s and are all among his most hilarious, as well as most problematic works. With their open thematization of violence and excrement they perfectly exemplify some of Swift's most characteristic satiric strategies, but this outspokenness proved to be offensive to several of his critics. These works, as well as the fourth part of *Gulliver's Travels*, contributed not a little to Swift's image as a dark and gloomy misanthrope, who painted an unduly pessimistic, unjust, degrading, and inhuman picture of human nature. This widely accepted image and critical attitude overshadowed Swift's reputation from the latter half of the 18th century until the middle of the 20th. Only from the second half of the last century has Swift's reputation been cleared of the charges of unnaturalness and misanthropy, and has he been granted the literary stature that he deserves as the greatest satirist of English literature and as the acutest critic of human pretensions.

The last years of Swift's life were burdened by intense physical suffering, which prevented him from any creative work. From the 1690s he had suffered from fits of dizziness (identified by modern medical science as Ménière's disease) and from the late 1730s these fits became frequent and more and more severe. His condition was further aggravated by a chronic inflammation of his left eye which gave him acute pain. In 1742 Swift suffered a stroke which caused aphasia (the inability to speak); consequently, he was declared "of unsound mind and memory" and his care was assigned to guardians. In this miserable condition he survived for three more years and died only in 1745.

Gulliver's Travels

The full title of Swift's most famous work is *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts, by Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, and then a captain of several ships*. This long title unmistakably shows the connection between Swift's book and the then popular travel narratives which characteristically bore such titles. The most popular travel story in the age was, of course, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* published in 1719, a year before Swift started work on the *Travels*, but there were several other narratives, too, built upon the conventions of realistic fiction established by Defoe, and in *Gulliver's Travels* Swift clearly draws on this tradition. He tells a story that involves travelling, shipwrecks, and unknown islands; he chooses a hero who is remarkably similar to Robinson Crusoe in that he is a middle class man with a typical bourgeois mindset, rational and businessman-like; and presents the story in much the same form, using a first person singular narrator, a simple, clear style, detailed descriptions, and an objective, realistic tone. The obvious difference is of course that the actual content is not suited to this form of presentation: in the narrative

delivered in the most factual and realistic style we hear about Lilliputians and giants, about flying islands and talking horses. In short, therefore, Swift parodies the fashionable form of the travel narrative, or we can even say that *Gulliver's Travels* is mock-realistic fiction or a mock-novel: it juxtaposes the conventions, forms, techniques of realism with an emphatically unrealistic topic.

This of course is just one layer of *Gulliver's Travels* and it cannot fully account for Swift's achievement in his masterpiece. However, the comparison with the conventions of realistic fiction still provides a good starting point for the study of the *Travels* because it highlights a major difference between Defoe's and Swift's use of the first person singular narrator which leads us directly to the heart of Swift's satirical method. This difference is that whereas Defoe and the travel-story writers seem to identify with their narrators, Swift emphatically distances himself from the first person singular voice relating the story. This ironical distance is immediately indicated by Gulliver's name which is connected to "gullible", making it clear from the start that in his hero Swift in fact parodies the gullible, naïve, simple-minded, and honest middle-class narrators of the fashionable travel stories. Moreover, Gulliver sometimes even becomes a monster – as for instance in the court of the king of Brobdingnag – and serves thus as the means of Swift's critique of the complacency, self-importance, and pride of the English middle-class man. Swift, therefore, clearly distances himself from the persona speaking in the book and uses it as a means of his irony. In addition, Gulliver also exemplifies another typical element of Swift's satirical method in that he is the only voice that we hear throughout the story. All the information we get is filtered through his person and thus we can never exactly identify Swift's position, we can never exactly measure the distance he keeps from his persona.

This use of a persona as the only voice the reader can directly hear is a typical Swiftian strategy; it is present in all his major satires, and is the essence of his peculiar use of irony. In *A Modest Proposal*, for example, we find a quintessential application of this method. The pamphlet opens with the economist-businessman speaker's clear, factual, and convincing statement of the situation of the Irish poor. We hear that one of the major problems is that too many children are born into poor Irish families, who therefore prove to be a burden both on their parents, who neglect and abuse them, and on the nation, since – in the absence of their parents' care – the state or the church has to provide for them. We also learn that the great number of children is a threat to the Church of Ireland, too, for those children are all Roman Catholics. This last statement raises some doubts in us about the reliability of the speaker; for it shows him to be a somewhat narrow-minded supporter of the Church of Ireland. Nevertheless, on the whole we cannot but agree with his diagnosis of the Irish situation. Almost everything that we read at the beginning of the pamphlet leads us to an identification with the speaker and to the assumption that the author is in fact the speaker of the piece. And then the speaker shocks us with his "modest proposal", his earnest attempt to find a solution to the situation of the Irish poor: he suggests that the children should be raised till the age of one and then they should be butchered and sold as a delicacy to grace the table of the rich. This absurdly violent and indeed mad proposal is then presented in the same factual, earnest, and convincing style that the speaker used at the beginning: he meticulously explains the

benefits of his projected method, calculates the costs and the gains, and demonstrates clearly his proposal's profitability. The reader experiences the total absurdity of the proposal as a shock precisely because we have been led to believe – by the genre, by the style, by the earnest first person singular voice – that we listen to the author's own proposal, because we are not conscious of the distance that exists between Swift and his speaker in the *Proposal*. If we want to understand Swift, however, this is precisely what we have to become conscious of in the first place. As David Nokes puts it: "Swift is literature's great ventriloquist, and we have come to recognize that understanding his works is a matter of distinguishing the master's voice from those of his puppet personae."

This is precisely the key to understanding *Gulliver's Travels*, too, where our situation is perhaps even more difficult than it is in *A Modest Proposal*, since the distance between Swift and Gulliver is constantly changing and thus one can never exactly estimate it. At times Gulliver is clearly Swift's spokesman, as for example when he praises the old institutions of Lilliput; at other times, however, he becomes absurd or even mad and Swift clearly ridicules and criticizes him, as for instance when he returns from the land of the Houyhnhnms (the rational horses). The constant problem the reader has to face while reading the *Travels* is that we never know where this change occurs. We often start out from perceiving Gulliver's opinion to be perfectly just, reasonable, and noble and then somehow – we could not tell how – we end up in sheer absurdity.

This method of using his speaker as a persona is of course a prerequisite for Swift's overall satirical purpose. For the main difference between travel narratives of the *Robinson Crusoe* type and *Gulliver's Travels* is that the latter is a satire. The travelling, the exotic, foreign environment only serve as a disguise that allows Swift to talk about the contemporary social reality of England. Part I is thus a satirical portrayal of early Hanoverian England with continual references to the Anglo-French conflict in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713). The emperor of Lilliput is easily identifiable with King George I, Flimnap, the Lilliputian treasurer, is a satirical portrayal of Robert Walpole, and Skyres Bolgolam, the admiral, is a representation of the Earl of Nottingham, military commander of the English forces in the War of the Spanish Succession. Moreover, Gulliver's trial for treason and his subsequent escape from Lilliput is clearly a reference to the prosecution of the Tory leader, Swift's friend, Lord Bolingbroke, and even Gulliver's putting out the fire in the royal palace with his urine can be seen as an ironical representation of the secret, illegal, but useful negotiations the Tories conducted with the French to end the war. The High-heels and Low-heels of Lilliput can also easily be identified with the Tories and the Whigs, while the issue of the proper side of breaking the egg is a caricature of the religious difference that divided Protestant England (little-endian Lilliput) from Catholic France (big-endian Blefuscu). In Part II the proportions are reversed, but the satire continues with the diminutive Gulliver now representing the narrow-minded complacency, pride and cruelty of the English middle-class man. The relationship between Laputa and Barnibalbi in Part III has been interpreted as a representation of contemporary debates in the English Parliament, but can also be seen as depicting the conflict between Ireland and England; and the Academy of Lagado is clearly a parody of the projectors and innovators of the Royal Academy.

In all the first three books, therefore, the satirical representation of contemporary English conditions is unmistakeable. However, Swift's satire is not only directed at his contemporaries but is always elevated to a universal level. Thus when we laugh at the Lilliputian custom of choosing chief ministers by their skill at tight-rope walking, we understand that it is a joke directed at Walpole's political tactics, but at the same time we cannot but be aware that this is an image that generally satirizes parliamentary politics. Similarly, in his description of the controversy between big-endians and little-endians he gives an analysis of hair-splitting religious debates that is universally valid, and when he ridicules the little Gulliver's pretensions in Brobdingnag, he in fact reveals the ridiculousness not only of bourgeois complacency but also of grand-scale human ambitions in general.

This tendency towards universal satire is even more emphatically present in Part IV, where Gulliver travels to the land of the Houyhnhnms, or intelligent horses. This fourth voyage in fact differs from all the others precisely in that here Swift's starting point is not the topical but the universal: his primary purpose is to give a general satire of mankind. Topical contemporary references are still present but the ultimate question we have to face is "what is it to be human?" Swift's answer to that question is by no means simple or uncontroversial; it is certainly too complex to be satisfactorily treated in the present introduction. However, one thing must be pointed out again to avoid the numerous misunderstandings that arose in the course of the rather troubled critical reception of this controversial text: Gulliver is not Swift! Although Gulliver draws a rather bitter conclusion as to the incorrigible corruptions of human nature and becomes a misanthrope, this attitude is not to be mistaken for the author's. In fact Swift makes it quite clear that in his final conclusions Gulliver is in the wrong and that the reader must not follow him in his misanthropic attitude to mankind. The problem is that – as is usual with Swift – he does not state this explicitly; all the way to the end we only hear Gulliver's opinions directly and it is only from their absurdity and apparent self-contradictions that we are to find out that, rather than subscribing to these opinions, Swift in fact criticises them and wants us also to dissociate ourselves from Gulliver's conclusions.

The complexities of Swift's use of Gulliver as his persona are perfectly exemplified by the conclusion of Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels*. In the very last passage of the book Gulliver denounces pride as the worst of all human errors as follows:

> My reconcilement to the *Yahoo* kind in general might not be so difficult, if they would be content with those vices and follies only which nature has entitled them to. I am not in the least provoked at the sight of a lawyer, a pickpocket, a colonel, a fool, a lord, a gamester, a politician, a whoremonger, a physician, an evidence, a suborner, an attorney, a traitor, or the like; this is all according to the due course of things: but when I behold a lump of deformity and diseases, both in body and mind, smitten with pride, it immediately breaks all the measures of my patience; neither shall I be ever able to comprehend how such an animal, and such a vice, could tally together. The wise and virtuous *Houyhnhnms*, who abound in all excellences that can adorn a rational creature, have no name for this vice in their language, which has no terms to express any thing

> that is evil, except those whereby they describe the detestable qualities of their *Yahoos*, among which they were not able to distinguish this of pride, for want of thoroughly understanding human nature, as it shows itself in other countries where that animal presides. But I, who had more experience, could plainly observe some rudiments of it among the wild *Yahoos*.
>
> But the *Houyhnhnms*, who live under the government of reason, are no more proud of the good qualities they possess, than I should be for not wanting a leg or an arm; which no man in his wits would boast of, although he must be miserable without them. I dwell the longer upon this subject from the desire I have to make the society of an English *Yahoo* by any means not insupportable; and therefore I here entreat those who have any tincture of this absurd vice, that they will not presume to come in my sight.

It is with this tirade against pride that *Gulliver's Travels* ends and we are tempted to take this as an expression of Swift's opinions, as well as Gulliver's. For we know very well how the Augustans, including Swift himself, thought of pride, how they indeed conceived of it as the origin of all human errors (see, for example, Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 201-12). The fact that this denouncement of pride is delivered by Gulliver, however, complicates matters greatly, since the last chapters of Part IV, as well as his manner or denouncing pride in the passage above, make it quite clear that Gulliver's main moral error is precisely that he is himself proud, that he places himself above the rest of his species. Ironically, therefore, pride is denounced here by someone who is himself pre-eminently proud. What is more, the fact that the content of Gulliver's tirade is such that Swift himself would probably identify with it and that the reader is also tempted to subscribe to it extends this irony to include the author himself and even us readers. It is as if Swift is saying that whoever denounces pride inevitably becomes proud in the very act of this denouncement. If, therefore, *Gulliver's Travels* concludes with the statement that pride is the worst human sin, then at the same time it also asserts that no human being can be free from this sin.

Gulliver's ultimate folly is, therefore, that he does not notice the irony of his own position, and by drawing our attention to this, as well as by directing his irony against himself, Swift invites us to notice the irony of the human condition in general. At the end of the *Travels* we are left thus with a characteristically Swiftian conclusion, which both gives us something essential to know about human nature and at the same time and within the same gesture denies the possibility of ever knowing the essence of human nature. He makes us conscious of the ultimate irony of our position as human beings and warns us that once we lose sight of this irony, we have – just as Gulliver – forfeited our humanity.

<u>Recommended further readings</u>:

Donoghue, Denis ed. *Jonathan Swift: A Critical Anthology*. Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1971.
Gravil, Richard ed. *"Gulliver's Travels": A Casebook*. London: Macmillan, 1974.

Nokes, David. *Jonathan Swift, A Hypocrite Reversed: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
Price, Martin. *Swift's Rhetorical Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.
Tuveson, Ernest ed. *Swift: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964.

John Gay (1685-1732)

John Gay was a friend of the Tory writers, among them of Pope and Swift, and a member of the Scriblerus Club. Unlike his more illustrious friends, however, he had no political ambitions or any aspirations to cut a grand figure in the public sphere. Amiable, friendly and good-natured, he was also rather nonchalant in his ways and lived largely off the bounty of his friends and patrons. Gay was born in Devonshire and was educated at the local grammar school. After his secondary studies he moved to London as an apprentice to a silk merchant. Dissatisfied with this employment, however, he became the secretary of a minor author and theatre director, Aaron Hill. Soon he got acquainted with the leading literary figures of his time, befriending Alexander Pope who led him into the circle of Tory writers. Gay attempted to live by his pen, but although he achieved success as a writer he was always in need of supplementing his income and relied therefore on his friends' help. In the period of the Tory ascendancy he lived largely on his friend's gifts and on sinecures (nominal jobs with a regular pay but without actual duties) procured for him through the intercession of his friends, whereas in later years he enjoyed the patronage of his powerful friends and benefactors, William Pulteney and the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry.

His first major poetic achievement was a series of six mock-pastorals published in 1714 under the title *The Shepherd's Week*. The occasion for these poems was the debate between Alexander Pope and Ambrose Philips about the true nature of pastoral poetry. Philips was at that time a Cambridge fellow and his pastorals were published together with Pope's in *Tonson's Miscellanies* in 1709; however, he envisioned the pastoral genre rather differently from Pope. Whereas Pope followed the Virgilian pattern, presenting an idyllic world of ideal shepherds and shepherdesses, Philips turned to Theocritus for a model to follow and made his shepherds and shepherdesses resemble the real shepherds of contemporary England. Gay wrote his mock-pastorals to ridicule Philips's conception of the genre, presenting coarse and rustic shepherds and shepherdesses and juxtaposing their vulgarity with the idealizing and elevating conventions of the pastoral tradition.

His next important poetic publication was the *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716), a mock-georgic. In this poem he draws on the Virgilian tradition of the georgics; that is, poems whose topic is the praise of simple rural life and of the duties of cultivating the land. Just as Swift had previously done in his "Description of a City Shower", Gay uses the formal conventions of the genre to talk about the life of the crowded city, the thronging bustle on the streets of London. The following passage from the poem may very well serve to illustrate the funny incongruity of style and content that he achieves in this way:

Let due civilities be strictly paid.
The wall surrender to the hooded maid;
Nor let thy sturdy elbow's hasty rage
Jostle the feeble steps of trembling age;

And when the porter bends beneath his load,
And pants for breath, clear thou the crowded road.
But, above all, the groping blind direct,
And from the pressing throng the lame protect.
You'll sometimes meet a fop, of nicest tread,
Whose mantling peruke veils his empty head;
At ev'ry step he dreads the wall to lose,
And risks, to save a coach, his red-heel'd shoes;
Him, like the miller, pass with caution by,
Lest from his shoulder clouds of powder fly.
But when the bully, with assuming pace,
Cocks his broad hat, edg'd round with tarnish'd lace,
Yield not the way; defy his strutting pride,
And thrust him to the muddy kennel's side;
He never turns again, nor dares oppose,
But mutters coward curses as he goes.

Notwithstanding his indisputable achievement in these poems, Gay is primarily remembered today by his masterpiece, *The Beggar's Opera* (first performed in 1728). This (mock-)opera takes its theme from the Jonathan Wild scandal of 1725. Wild was the most famous criminal of the time and he is certainly among the top ten most famous criminals of all times. In any case, however, he certainly presided over the criminal life of London in the early eighteenth century. By the turn of the century London had grown into a metropolis of over 500,000 inhabitants, where – in the absence of an efficient police force – crime was thriving. No criminal, however, was as successful at his trade as Jonathan Wild, who organized the criminal life of the city in an ingenious way. He successfully kept up a show of bourgeois respectability by serving as a thief-taker and running a kind of lost property business, while at the same time he made sure that his business was running well – that is, that the property did get lost – by hiring thieves and burglars. As soon as the theft or the burglary was reported in the newspapers, Wild would approach the owner and offer to retrieve the stolen property through his "thief-taking" agent for a price that he said covered his expenses. After the successful transaction, then, Wild would allow the grateful owner further to reward him for his services as he wished. Besides manipulating the proprietors in this way, Wild was also particularly skilful at controlling his hireling thieves and burglars; for he made them conscious that if they did not serve him properly, he could at any time report them to the authorities for the customary reward of £40. If he could not profit by their crimes – he let them know – he could still profit by turning them in. In fact for a long time Wild actually worked as London's "thief-taker general", which further added to his character of respectability. In 1725, however, his criminal organization collapsed, largely because of his failure to control another famous criminal of the day, Jack Shepherd (the original of Macheath in *The Beggar's Opera*). When the scandal broke out, it was the greatest sensation of the day. Among several others, Daniel Defoe also wrote a report of the case, expressing his moral indignation, as well as his irrepressible admiration of the ingenuity of Wild's scheme.

In *The Beggar's Opera* Wild is represented by Peachum, who – just as his original – hires but also informs against thieves (hence his name "peach them", that is, "inform against them"). This chief of criminals is presented in the *Opera* as a great and respectable businessman who conscientiously keeps an account of his business transactions and handles his affairs with the solemnity and gravity of a statesman. As such he is clearly identifiable with the "great man" of the age, Robert Walpole. Gay's strategy throughout the play is to bring these two spheres, the low criminal world of Jonathan Wild and the high, respectable world of Walpole on the same level and to suggest their ultimate identity. Just as Wild achieved greatness by his ingenious organization of criminal life, the suggestion goes, so Walpole's greatness is based on the clever manipulation of a gang of venal statesmen and a thoroughly corrupt system. In the figure of Peachum Wild and Walpole are one and the same "great man".

However, this political satire, which is continued through several other topical references, is just one way in which *The Beggar's Opera* brings together high and low. The strategy of identifying these two is present on several other levels, as well. Highwaymen think of themselves as brave warriors who merely "retrench the superfluities of mankind", and compare themselves frequently to courtiers – to the disadvantage of the latter class. Common prostitutes emulate the manners of high-society ladies, considering themselves their equals. Crime and corruption is identified with business and industry, manipulation and cheating with government, Mandevillean "private evils" with moral rectitude itself. What we are left with thus is an excessively funny but also disturbing sense of moral relativism, or even moral nihilism. We find ourselves in a world where it is obvious that marriage is directly opposed to middle-class respectability and where parents consider it their daughter's duty to have her husband hanged.

The edge of this moral nihilism is of course partly removed by the framework, within which the main action is placed. The *Opera* opens and closes with a scene, in which it is made clear that the dramatic action is only a fiction produced and staged by a beggar. This framework, on the one hand, warns the reader or spectator that we should suspend our moral judgment and enjoy the performance as if it was a carnival, where ordinary rules are temporarily suspended. On the other hand, however, it also functions as a Brechtian alienating device: by drawing our attention to the illusoriness of the action it makes us actively reflect on what we see and hear, and thus the effect of the moral nihilism is not entirely removed. We come away from the play with a disturbing sense of the fragility of our notions of right and wrong.

Another target of the satire in *The Beggar's Opera* was the genre of Italian opera. The Italian opera enjoyed great popularity in England and found a truly great representative in the figure of composer Georg Fiedrich Handel. Handel settled in England permanently in 1713 and in 1719 he founded the Royal Academy of Music, producing a great number of new opera performances between 1720 and 1728. In spite of the popularity of the genre, however, many Englishmen found fault with the Italian opera. They primarily criticised the artificialness of the genre, the Italian libretti, the many recitatives, the singers' dwelling on a single syllable while they were singing several notes, and in general what they perceived as the divorce

between melody and words, between music and sense. Another aspect of the Italian opera tradition frequently criticised was the star cult that the genre went together with and that required the importation of famous Italian singers, many of whom were castrati.

In *The Beggar's Opera* Gay sets against the formal artificialness of Italian opera the native English song tradition. He composed new lyrics for popular tunes and also made sure that the airs were short enough so as not to hinder the dramatic action. He also made fun of the star cult of the Italian opera, parodying the rivalry between the two most famous London prima donnas, Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni, in the brawl between Lucy Lockit and Polly Peachum, the rival lovers of the chief of the highwaymen, Macheath.

Gay's new type of opera, also called the "ballad opera", proved to be so successful that many believe it to be at least partly responsible for the bankruptcy of Handel's first opera company in 1728. In the next year Handel started another Academy, which however also failed in 1735, after which date Handel turned to composing oratorios, the most famous one of which, the *Messiah*, was first performed in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin (Swift's cathedral) in 1742. The Italian opera, however, quickly declined in England afterwards and never regained its early glory in the eighteenth century. Gay's innovation, the ballad opera, by contrast, continued to be in vogue throughout the century.

<u>Recommended further reading</u>:

Nokes, David. *John Gay: A Profession of Friendship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
Spacks, Patricia M. *John Gay*. New York: Twayne, 1965.
Winton, Calhoun. *John Gay and the London Theatre*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993.

III. The Literature of the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century

The second half of the eighteenth century is sometimes also referred to as the Age of Johnson, after Samuel Johnson, the greatest literary figure of the period. Although Johnson himself clearly represents a continuation of the thought and ideology of the Tory satirists of the Age of Pope, adopting their pessimism about human nature, endorsing their belief in the "middle way", and championing the neo-classical aesthetic attitude, it is clear both from Johnson's own work and from the other important literary products of the age that the context and position of this ideology and attitude had fundamentally changed by Johnson's time.

One reason for this was that the political scene changed substantially. With the fall of Robert Walpole in 1742 his system of institutionalized corruption and bourgeois hypocrisy collapsed and together with it disappeared also the general sense of venality and cultural decline, against which the Augustan satirists defined their position. Thus their heroic quest to maintain the values of light and order against the powers of dullness and cultural mediocrity also lost its ground. In fact with the emergence of the Patriot Whigs and the brief prime ministership (1766-68) of their leader, William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham (Henry Fielding's school fellow and friend) a wholly new era commenced in English politics. Pitt instilled a sense of moral purpose and of national greatness into politics. Under his leadership England defeated France on three continents and emerged as the greatest colonial power in the world.

These changes in the highest regions of politics were also strengthened by the accession of George III in 1760. Unlike the first two Georges, George III had a strong sense of moral duty, laid great stress on family values, and attempted to patronize real merit. Unlike his predecessors on the throne, he did not only support those writers and men of letters who were sufficiently subservient and ready to submit their pens to his service, but also those who unselfishly served the moral improvement of the English people. Among the first who received a government pension after George III's accession was, for example, Samuel Johnson himself. Besides his earnest moral attitude, however, George III was also rather narrow-minded and even somewhat bigoted. His narrow-mindedness in fact caused great harm to Britain when it came to what was perhaps the greatest political crisis of the time: the issue of the independence of the American colonies. The conflict beginning with the "Boston tea party" in 1773 grew into a bitter quarrel between the colonies and the motherland and then into the American War of Independence largely because of the King's inflexible and bigoted attitude. By 1783 England lost the war and had to suffer the painful loss of the American colonies.

By this time, however, high politics was no longer in the focus of cultural and literary historical changes. In fact a major change from the Augustan age to the Age of Johnson was in the emergence of a marked separation between the public-political and the cultural-literary spheres. The literature of the second half of the eighteenth century is indeed generally characterized by a turning away from public life and an internalization of the fundamental

conflicts that it focused on. While in Pope's *Essay on Man* (1734) individual human existence was only given meaning by the individual finding her/his place in the "great chain of being", that is, in the external, objective, hierarchical system of nature and of the society; in the works of the best writers of the latter half of the eighteenth century one could only find the meaning of one's individual existence by turning inward and away from the "world". The individual – Johnson and his greatest contemporaries believed – cannot find peace or self-fulfilment by making a career or achieving success in the public sphere but only by coming to terms with her/his own self.

This turning away from the general, the universal, the public and towards the individual, the personal is in the background of most important new developments in the literature of the age. The shift of emphasis in the novel towards the psychological; the development of sentimentalism, that exaggerated and often theatrical display of trust in individual feeling in contrast to any universalizing theory; the turning away from universally valid classical models and towards the national, the vernacular, the medieval; the movement from the eternal and unchanging values of classical antiquity towards finding value in idiosyncratic change, development, history; the formation of a new conception of nature, no longer the "one, clear, unchanged, and universal Light" of Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, but rather the seat of freedom and also of the unbounded, infinite, and often savage power of the sublime, are all different versions of this overall tendency.

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Although Johnson was undoubtedly the most influential man of letters in his own age, which is why it is also often called the "Age of Johnson", unlike his great predecessors, Dryden and Pope, the name-givers of the previous two periods, he was not the greatest poet of his time. Nor was he the greatest master of drama or of the rising genre of the novel. He tried his hand in all these literary genres and indeed created works of lasting value in each, but his greatest achievement is still probably to be found not so much in individual literary works as in the way he determined the literary life of his period as a moralist and as a literary critic. His moral and aesthetic views, expressed especially in periodical publications and later in his conversation with his friends in the Literary Club, established him as a constant and inevitable presence in the literary life of his time and made it possible for him to dominate that literary life as fully as Dryden and Pope dominated the literary scene of their own time.

Education and Early Career

The son of a provincial bookseller, Johnson started his life in humble circumstances. His father's business did not provide for the family sufficiently and they were continually in debt. Nevertheless, the inheritance from a deceased relative made it possible for Johnson, who had shown signs of remarkable talent in school, to start a course of study at Pembroke College, Oxford. The family funds running low once again, however, he had to abandon the university after spending about thirteen months there, without taking his degree. Later, however, he was awarded an MA in 1755 and even received honorary doctorates from Trinity College, Dublin (1765) and Oxford University (1775), which is why he is frequently referred to as Dr. Johnson.

In 1735 Johnson married Elizabeth ("Tetty") Porter, the then forty-six-year-old widow of one of his close friends. In spite of the significant age difference the marriage was a happy one and Johnson never remarried after his wife's death in 1752. His wife's dowry allowed Johnson to set up a school near Lichfield, the village where he was born. Since he only had three pupils, however, the enterprise soon failed and in 1737, together with one of his pupils, the future actor and theatre manager, David Garrick, Johnson set out for London in the hope of making a living there by his pen.

He found work with *The Gentleman's Magazine* for which he wrote virtually on all possible subjects. His work was basically hack work: he had to write a lot under the pressure of short deadlines and for very meagre pay. In spite of these circumstances, however, he still achieved distinction in his parliamentary reports and in some of his political pamphlets which attacked Walpole and his administration. Moreover, during this hard period spent working as a literary hack, Johnson still found time for writing polished, original work, too. In 1738 he published his satire, *London*, a powerful attack on the moral corruptions of the city in the manner of Juvenal's third satire on Rome. This work was published anonymously and – although it attracted even Pope's attention – Johnson apparently did not consider it to be a really valuable achievement, for he did not acknowledge his authorship until fifteen years

later. Another important and valuable literary product of this difficult period of his life was *The Life of Mr. Richard Savage*, a biography of a close friend with whom he shared the hardships of the hand to mouth existence of a literary hack. Savage died in 1743 and Johnson published his biography in the next year, anticipating with this work his future literary biographies in *The Lives of the Poets* (in which the biography of Savage was also included).

The Dictionary and The Vanity of Human Wishes

In 1746 Johnson was requested by a group of London booksellers to undertake the arduous task of writing a dictionary of the English language. Although several monolingual English dictionaries had been written by the mid-eighteenth century, none of these were really reliable or useful and there was a general dissatisfaction among British men of letters because of the lack of a proper standardization of the English language. A new, authoritative dictionary was, therefore, very much in demand and Johnson was offered 1,500 guineas for accomplishing the task. He accepted the offer and signed a contract, in which he undertook to write the dictionary in three years.

In 1747 he published his *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* and dedicated his work to Philip Dormer Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield. Chesterfield undertook to be the patron but did nothing to help Johnson either financially or by mobilizing his connections to propagate the enterprise. Johnson thus had to rely on his own means and worked on the dictionary in relative poverty. Although he had originally planned to finish the project in three years, the writing of the dictionary eventually kept him busy for almost nine years. During this time he had to supplement his meagre income by further writing. In 1749 his tragedy *Irene*, which he had written previously, was performed at Drury Lane. By this time David Garrick, his friend and former pupil, was manager of Drury Lane and he arranged for the staging of Johnson's play, which was a moderate success and yielded Johnson some £300. Soon, however, Johnson was again short of funds and thus in 1750 he launched *The Rambler* (1750-52), a paper published twice weekly, for which he wrote essays mostly on moral issues. The *Rambler* essays were apparently often written in haste and he never made it a secret that he wrote them primarily for the money. Nevertheless, they still established him in English literary life as a great moralist.

It was also in this period, more particularly in 1749 that he published one of his most characteristic and most successful poems *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. That he himself also considered this poem an important work is clearly indicated by the fact that he published it under his own name, whereas all of his previous works were published anonymously. *The Vanity of Human Wishes* is indeed one of Johnson's most typical achievements. It is written in the Augustan genre of the satire but it strikes a very different note from his earlier satire, *London*. In *London* Johnson lashes the corruptions, the crime, the hypocrisy of the city and advocates an escape from these sordid conditions to the countryside. In *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, by contrast, the target of his satire is no longer the external circumstances, but rather human frailty, more particularly, the general human propensity to indulge our fancies, desires, wishes. Every station in life, Johnson demonstrates, is characterized by unhappiness, but the reason for this is not primarily to be sought in the social reality but rather in our wishful

thinking. Hoping to find happiness always in some state that we do not possess we attach great expectations to the attainment of that state, we indulge our fancy and imagine it to be a very heaven and thus we inevitably doom ourselves to disappointment and ultimate unhappiness. The escape from this condition which Johnson offers in the conclusion of his poem is likewise not to be found in external action but in internal self-regulation. Since our unhappiness is caused not by external factors but by our own exaggerated expectations, it is only by controlling our desires that we can overcome the misery of the human condition. Instead of the escape to the countryside that he offers as a solution at the end of *London*, in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, therefore, he advocates resignation and inner contentment as the only way to avoid unhappiness:

> Implore his [God's] Aid, in his Decisions rest,
> Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best.
> Yet with the Sense of sacred Presence prest,
> When strong Devotion fills thy glowing Breast,
> Pour forth thy Fervours for a healthful Mind,
> Obedient Passions, and a Will resign'd;
> For Love, which scarce collective Man can fill;
> For Patience sov'reign o'er transmuted Ill;
> For Faith, that panting for a happier Seat,
> Thinks Death kind Nature's Signal of Retreat:
> These Goods for Man the Laws of Heav'n ordain,
> These Goods he grants, who grants the Pow'r to gain;
> With these celestial Wisdom calms the Mind,
> And makes the Happiness she does not find. (355-68)

In 1755 Johnson finally published the *Dictionary* to universal acclaim. It was a vast work compiled with meticulous care and reflecting its author's thorough knowledge of the English language. Johnson laid special emphasis on completeness. The first edition of the *Dictionary* contained 42,773 word entries and individual words were also very circumspectly defined. The word "take", for example, had 134 definitions, which were explained on more than five pages. Apart from providing definitions, Johnson – unlike all previous lexicographers – also made comments on usage, exemplifying the contexts in which the given word could be placed. Another important innovation was that to illustrate the meaning of the words he used literary quotations taken from the works of English authors writing between 1580 and 1750. Altogether there were some 114,000 such illustrations.

By modern standards the *Dictionary*, of course, had its flaws. Johnson, for example, often expressed his personal opinion in his definitions and included humorous comments. His definition of the word "Tory" was, for example, the following: "One who adheres to the ancient constitution of the state, and the apostolical hierarchy of the church of England, opposed to a Whig", whereas he defined "Whig" simply as "the name of a faction". His entry

for “dull” included a self-ironical illustration: “not exhilarating; not delightful; as, *to make dictionaries is* dull *work*” and he defined “lexicographer” as “a writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge that busies himself in tracing the original and detailing the signification of words”. He did not spare the original dedicatee of his work, Lord Chesterfield, either, when he added the famous aside to his definition of “patron”: “one who countenances, supports or protects. Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery”. In spite of these deliberately whimsical and prejudiced entries, however, most of Johnson’s definitions are precise and the *Dictionary* indeed perfectly fulfilled the function that it had been intended for. Until the appearance of the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1928, that is for more than one and a half centuries, it was the standard dictionary of the English language and served as the basis of all subsequent dictionaries.

Rasselas

The publication of the *Dictionary* brought Johnson great fame but failed to secure his financial position. Although it was a great business success, too, bringing great revenues to the booksellers, Johnson himself did not benefit from the sale of the *Dictionary*, since royalty rights did not then exist. The 1,500 guineas he received for his great work was hardly enough to cover his debts and once again Johnson found himself in a precarious financial situation. He was twice arrested for debt and was forced once again to write for his bare living. He contributed articles and reviews for *The Literary Magazine* and launched another series of moral essays, the *Idler* essays in a new weekly newspaper, *The Universal Chronicle*.

Besides these shorter pieces, in 1759 Johnson also wrote a book to raise money for his dying mother. He finished the work in about a week’s time and published it under the title *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. This little book is a perfect expression of Johnson’s characteristic moral attitude, previously appearing in its most complete form in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. It tells the story of Rasselas, the young prince of Abyssinia who lives in the “Happy Valley”, a place where all his wishes are immediately fulfilled and he is surrounded by complete harmony and concord. Ironically, however, he is still unhappy, precisely because he has nothing to desire. His life is given a purpose when he meets Imlac, the poet, who has retired into the Happy Valley after living an adventurous and rather miserable life in the external world. Rasselas wants to see the world for himself and make his own “choice of life” and taking Imlac as his guide, he escapes from the Happy Valley. In the world outside he experiences several different states of life, each of which fills him initially with great enthusiasm. After finding out more about those states of life, however, he is always disappointed and has to find that “[h]uman life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed”, or as his wise guide, Imlac, sums up for him the human situation: “[w]e are long before we are convinced that happiness is never to be found, and each believes it possessed by others, to keep alive the hope of obtaining it for himself”.

Johnson’s moral position is, therefore, clearly the same as that in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Unlike the poem, however, *Rasselas* does not present this bitter truth with unrelieved moral seriousness. In fact the story is full of funny episodes where the pretensions and hopes the characters indulge are frustrated by some simple actualities that in their fanciful plans they

have forgotten to take into account. Johnson also often gives amusing expression to his characteristic version of the Augustan concept of the "middle way". Rasselas's sister who sets out to inspect the question whether the married or the unmarried state of life is better comes home, for example, with this characteristically Johnsonian conclusion: "[m]arriage has many pains but celibacy has no pleasures".

The Literary Club and The Lives of the Poets

After the accession of George III in 1760, Johnson was among the first to be granted a government pension. In 1762 he received an annuity of £300 which eased the burden of his continual financial difficulties and allowed him to live a comfortable, leisurely life. Johnson was later famously to say that "[n]o man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money", and after receiving his pension he was indeed as good as his word. In the next fifteen years he wrote very little and only occasionally. The only exception to this rule was his edition of Shakespeare which he published in 1765. This was a project that he had planned for more than twenty years but that he could not accomplish because of the copyright on Shakespeare's texts. In 1765, however, the copyright expired and he could realize his long-cherished plan of editing Shakespeare. Although his intention was to create a "good text", the real merit of his edition is not to be found in the text he produced but rather in the criticism he attached to it. In the famous Preface he created an image of Shakespeare as the pre-eminent poet of nature; an image that has had a lasting effect on the Shakespeare criticism of subsequent ages. Besides, in the notes he attached to the texts he also made sharp and insightful critical observations, which are of lasting value to our day.

In 1764 Johnson was among the founding members of the Literary Club, originally called simply the Club. The idea was first suggested by Sir Joshua Reynolds, the greatest portrait painter of the period. The Literary Club enlisted among its members such great public and literary figures of the day as Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, Oliver Goldsmith, David Garrick, and James Boswell, but its central figure was undoubtedly Dr. Johnson, who enjoyed the attention, love, and reverence that he excited in the members of the Club.

In 1776 Johnson was approached by a group of thirty-six London booksellers about writing an introduction to their projected anthology of English poetry. The book was to include poems by 52 poets from Abraham Cowley to Thomas Gray and the booksellers hoped to add to the prestige of the volume by Johnson writing the introduction. Johnson accepted the offer, but his work far exceeded the boundaries of an introduction and was finally published as an independent work under the title *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets with Critical Observations on their Works* (*The Lives of the Poets* for short). In 1779 he brought out the first four volumes, including twenty-two literary biographies, and in 1781 he published six further volumes with thirty more lives. The book is an important work both for the literary criticism it contains and for the improvement it brings in the art of biography. As far as the literary criticism is concerned, *The Lives* had an immense influence on the critical thought of subsequent generations. His description of the "metaphysical poets", for example, or his rather deprecating account of Swift's work overshadowed the reputation of these authors for more than a century and a half, but his more positive judgments were also greatly

influential and indeed remain so to our day. As far as the art of biography is concerned, Johnson's improvement on the genre was no less decisive. Whereas previous biographies largely confined themselves to the praise of he person they portrayed, Johnson, for the first time in the English history of the genre, attempted to give a true to life portrayal of the people whose biography he wrote, not suppressing their less flattering qualities, either.

Recommended further reading:

Bate, Walter Jackson. *Samuel Johnson*. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 1975.

Clingham, Greg ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

DeMaria, Robert Jr. *The Life of Samuel Johnson: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

Smallwood, Philip. *Johnson's Critical Presence: Image, History, Judgement*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004.

Poetry after Pope

In many ways Dr. Johnson's oeuvre can be said to be an organic continuation of the neo-classical tradition. His use of the genre of satire and of imitation, his critical judgments which are based on a thorough awareness of the rules, and the frequent stress he lays on rational control, clearly demonstrate that his artistic convictions are similar to those of his great Augustan predecessors. Moreover, his distrust of human nature and his critique of all excesses caused by pride and self-indulgence also closely resemble the Augustan view of the human condition. By Johnson's time, however, these views and attitudes were no longer the dominant ones in the literature of the age and especially not in poetry. Indeed, from the mid-eighteenth century we can witness an increasingly conscious turning away from the poetic attitudes and patterns established by Dryden and Pope. This change, as we have seen, can be described in broadest terms as a process of turning inward, a shift of emphasis toward the individual and away from contemporary social reality. In the best poetry of the age this tendency brought about fundamental changes that manifested themselves on several levels.

We can witness, first of all, a radical transformation in the concept of nature. For Pope nature was the ultimate rule-giver, the prime manifestation of divine order in the Great Chain of Being. As such, it was reflected in the hierarchical order of the society, and thus social order was considered natural in its origin and benevolent to man. The later eighteenth century's distrust of society, by contrast, resulted in a wholly different view of nature. Nature was increasingly looked at in opposition to, rather than as continuous with, the society. It was no longer admired as the eternal and unchanged fountain of the rules, but as a place of freedom from social constraints and as a seat of greatness and unbounded power that supersedes all man-made limitations. The wild, untamed beauty of nature was increasingly valued for its power to overcome the narrowness of any human artifice.

This taste for wild natural beauty is closely linked with a concept that acquired central significance in the aesthetic thought of the age: the **sublime**. This concept started its splendid eighteenth century career when in 1674 French neo-classical literary critic, Nicolas Boileau, translated into French a third century Greek rhetorician's treatise *On the Sublime*. (The identity of the author of this work is unknown but since tradition has long attributed it to Longinus, he is usually mentioned as the author.)In this treatise Longinus argued that the success of all verbal art ultimately lies in the greatness of the author's soul, and that this greatness or sublimity of the soul manifests itself in excess and infinity; it cannot be held within bounds or controlled by any rules. These thoughts had an immense and immediate influence on the English criticism of the time and continued to play a crucial role in virtually all subsequent eighteenth century critical thought. In the course of its eighteenth century career, however, the conception of the sublime went through significant changes.

The sublime was conceptualized in neo-classical aesthetics as a temporary deviation from the rules. In his *Essay on Criticism*, for example, Pope argues that great poets may occasionally break away from the rules to achieve a greater, more immediate effect, and warns critics against finding fault with such apparent lapses in a truly great master.In a sense, therefore, the neo-classical tradition treated the sublime merely as an exception that further

strengthened the rule. By the mid-eighteenth century, by contrast, the sublime came to be valued in itself and cultivated for its own sake. Poets admired the irregularities of nature, the disproportionate, the vast, the infinite, and deliberately sought to astonish their readers with shocking manifestations of greatness. The sublime gradually came to be considered superior to anything that could be achieved by rules, to anything that could be brought under rational control.

The mid-eighteenth century conception of the sublime is beautifully summed up in an early work by statesman and political philosopher, Edmund Burke. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin Of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke explains the origin of the sublime from the elementary human passion of terror. The aim of poetry, he argues, is to move the passions, and since the most powerful human feeling is the fear of death, poetry must primarily appeal to this passion: it must raise the feeling of terror in the reader. The highest kind of poetic effect, that of the sublime, arises, therefore, from this most elementary human feeling. He emphasizes furthermore that the effect of the sublime can only be achieved by going beyond rational control. In the experience of the sublime,

> the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force.

Moreover, the effect of the sublime is also inevitably accompanied by darkness and obscurity:

> The mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused. For separate them, and you lose much of the greatness; and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness. The images raised by poetry are always of this obscure kind;

The cult of the sublime – involving terror, obscurity and darkness – is indeed characteristic not only of the poetry of the age but also of its prose fiction (see the chapter on The Gothic Novel).

The new conception of nature and the increasing significance of the sublime discussed above are aspects of a wholly new vision of the human situation which gradually emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century. As we could see, the neo-classical attitude was imbued with a deep scepticism about human nature. In the course of the eighteenth century, by contrast, this scepticism gradually gave way to a new trust in man's inherent capacities. The most powerful early expression of this trust in human nature is perhaps the philosophy of Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (grandson to the first Earl, the founder of the Whig party and the original of Dryden's Achitophel). Shaftesbury's philosophy is primarily aimed at drawing its reader to the realization of the divine in us, which is suppressed under the narrow conventionality of our education and under the burden of our existence in a sensual and materialistic world. Once these conventions are shaken off, however, we become capable of noticing the magnificent order of the divine mind in the creation surrounding us and this in turn will lead us to the discovery of the divine order within us.

Shaftesbury thus based his trust in human nature on reason, on the order and artistry of the universe formed by the divine mind. Later in the eighteenth century, however, this trust was increasingly founded on feeling rather than on reason. What saves human nature from falling prey to the hostile, mechanical forces of an alienating society – mid- and late eighteenth century writers believed – is our capacity to feel. This special value of feeling is frequently asserted in the novels of sentiment (see the chapter on The Cult of Sensibility), as well as in the poetry of the mid-eighteenth century "poets of sensibility". Thus the period between 1740 and 1780 is sometimes referred to in English literary history as the Age of Sensibility.

These fundamental conceptual changes inevitably went together with a re-evaluation of former allegiances and preferences in the poetry of the age. We can observe, first of all, a gradual disappearance of poetic forms associated with the neo-classical tradition. Satire ceases to be an important poetic genre and virtually disappears by the mid-century; while the heroic couplets in which Dryden and Pope's best poetry was written are replaced by Miltonic blank verse. The admiration of Milton and the return to Miltonic forms is a general tendency in the poetry of the age. The allegorical figures of "L'allegro" and "Il penseroso" are frequently imitated in the most characteristic poetic genre of the mid-century, the ode, and it is also to the imitation of Milton that we owe the revival of the sonnet form in the last decades of the century.

Moreover, in parallel with the general shift of emphasis from the social and universal to the individual and particular, we can witness a change of preference in the poetry of the age from the highly civilized and urbane classical culture to the simple, the rural, the primitive and the medieval. Throughout the eighteenth century we can observe a steadily increasing interest in folk traditions (the ballad, the discovery of vernacular poetry) and a growing attraction to the Middle Ages.

Pope's Contemporaries: Thomson and Young

If we want to trace the origin of these changes, we have to go back to Pope's contemporaries. The seeds of the new approach to nature, for example, appear as early as in James Thomson's (1700-1748) poetry. Thomson was the son of a Scottish clergyman and was brought up in rural Scotland, in close proximity to nature. He did not even see London until he was twenty-five. In 1725 he went to the English capital in hope of a poetic career. There was a long descriptive poem, entitled *Winter* in his pocket, which he published in the next year and which lay the foundations of his future career in London literary life. The poem was a lively description of nature with some moralizing, didactic elements, and was written in Miltonic blank verse. It was an immediate success upon its publication and Thomson followed it up with similar poems addressed to the other seasons, publishing the whole series in 1730 under the title *The Seasons*. Throughout his life he continued to add to the text, which thus grew to vast proportions and acquired an epic size.

What is especially remarkable in *The Seasons* is Thomson's fresh view of nature. Rather than using nature just as a representative of divine order, he is interested in its minute details. He observes the different species of birds, their characteristic cries, the last autumn

leaf tossed in the wind, and the hum of the gadflies on a summer afternoon. Moreover, he typically highlights elements of nature for their philosophical or moral suggestiveness. He is particularly interested in storm scenes, for example, where order is threatened until it is eventually restored by the benevolent Creator. In such scenes his attention often turns to the wild greatness, the boundless power, in a word, the sublimity of nature.

Another important poet of Pope's contemporaries who set the tone for a new kind of poetry was Edward Young (1683-1765). Young was a recognized poet in the Augustan tradition. His poetic fame was established by a bulky series of satires, *The Universal Passion* (1725-28). However, his most influential poem proved to be his late work, *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (1742-45). *Night Thoughts* is a long meditative poem in blank verse, which was consciously written as a counter-poem to Pope's *Essay on Man*. In it Young advocates a different approach to the human situation from Pope's. As he puts it: "Man too he [Pope] sung: immortal man I sing". The difference is thus that whereas for Pope man is just a specific, and by no means special, link in the Great Chain of Being, the God-given hierarchical order of Creation, for Young man occupies a special, privileged position; for we are made in God's own image and are designed for eternal life. This divine potential in us, however, is suppressed by the hustle and bustle of the "world", that is, by our day-to-day existence in the social reality surrounding us. In his poem, therefore, Young attempts to shake the reader out of the rut of our worldly routines by his frequent use of the effect of the sublime, and thus to make us realize within ourselves what goes beyond the word: the divinity inherent in the human being.

Although *Night Thoughts* is a rather uneven poem containing superb passages side by side with some empty didacticism and uncontrolled outbursts of personal emotion, it had an immense influence on its contemporaries both within Britain and on the continent. It was translated into several European languages (including a Hungarian translation by Péczeli József as early as in 1786), and enjoyed almost equal prestige with Pope's *Essay on Man*. Apart from the new view of the human situation that the poem advocated, the other reason why it was such a great success is no doubt the fictive setting in which Young presented his *Night Thoughts*. The basic poetic situation is that of the lonely poet contemplating his own "life, death and immortality" while walking among the graves in a cemetery. This setting was not Young's invention. In fact the first poet to meditate among the tombs was Pope, Swift and Gay's friend and fellow Scriblerian, Thomas Parnell. However, Young's use of this convention was so successful that it engendered a whole school of followers and set the fashion of "grave-yardism" for the following decades. Among the most important products of this "grave-yard school" were Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), James Hervey's *Meditations Among The Tombs*, and even Thomas Gray's great "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" can be said to have germinated from this fashion of graveyardism. In most cases the poetic products of the "grave-yard school" are not of the highest quality. There is too much indulgence in gloom and melancholy, and an excessive use of dark and often gruesome imagery. Nevertheless, graveyardism had a significant influence on the literature of the age. These poems can be seen, for example, as preparing the way for the later "gothic novel" (see chapter on The Gothic Novel) with their use of imagery, and they had an influence also on the

poetry of William Blake, who was to illustrate later editions of Young's, Blair's and Hervey's poems.

The Mid-Century Poets

Thomson and Young were almost as famous in their own age as Pope himself. Their poetry, moreover, was not regarded by their contemporaries as radically different from Pope's poetry. Both Thomson and Young acknowledged Pope's achievement and were in turn appreciated for their work by Pope and his circle. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, there emerged a group of young poets (Joseph and Thomas Warton, William Collins, Mark Akenside among them), who consciously defined their poetic stance in opposition to Pope and the neo-classical tradition. Their position is perhaps most clearly expressed in Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756). In this essay, which can be regarded as the manifesto of this new school of poets, Warton acknowledges Pope's greatness in his own poetic mode, but stresses that this is not the highest mode of poetry. He identifies Pope as a poet of "familiar life", that is, of the social reality of his day, which he considers a lesser sort of poetry. The highest kind of poetry, in opposition to this, is the poetry of Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton; a poetry which emanates from a "creative and glowing imagination" of "exalted and very uncommon character," and aspires to the "transcendently sublime and prophetic". In contrast to Pope's poetry of rationalism, therefore, the main criterion of genuine poetry for the mid-century poets is that it should be the work of the imagination.

With these views the mid-century poets lay the foundations of a new aesthetics and established a new canon of English poets: the canon of Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton as opposed to the lesser poetic tradition of Dryden and Pope. This canon was to be adopted, virtually unchanged, by the Romantics (with the significant exception of Lord Byron).

In their poetry the mid-century poets tried to emulate the great masters that they admired so ardently. They revived Spenserian and Miltonic forms, adopted an elevated diction, and attempted to add mythic significance to their imagery. These attempts, however, often give a sense of artificialness. Their efforts to emulate the greatness of their masters often leads to theatricality and affectation, while their exaggerated appeal to the imagination frequently results in indulgence in the merely imaginary. According to Dr. Johnson they were "eminently delighted with those flights of imagination which pass the bounds of nature".

Where these poets do excel, however, is their occasional expression of genuine private experience. William Collins's best odes, for example, often strike an intimate personal tone. His wonderfully delicate images and gentle mythmaking in the "Ode to Evening", or his expression of his tragic sense of inadequacy at the end of his "Ode on the Poetical Character", are perfect instances of the new power arising from the personal. In addition, what the last passage of the latter poem expresses in a movingly personal way is a highly characteristic experience of the modern poet in general. It is the experience of belatedness, of the nostalgic sense of the greatness of their poetic predecessors, which will remain forever unattainable for them. After giving a mythic genealogy of the "poetic character", that is, of the divine gift of truly great poets, such as Milton, he concludes with these moving lines describing his own hopeless situation:

Thither [to the heights of true poetry] oft his [Milton's] glory greeting,
From Waller's myrtle shades retreating,
With many a vow from Hope's aspiring tongue,
My trembling feet his guiding steps pursue;
In vain – such bliss to one alone,
Of all the sons of soul was known,
And Heav'n, and Fancy, kindred powers,
Have now o'erturned the inspiring bowers,
Or curtained close such scene from every future view.

Thomas Gray (1716-1771)

The greatest poet of the mid-century was undoubtedly Thomas Gray. This is true in spite of the fact that his whole poetic output amounted to less than 1,000 lines. Gray did not know William Collins and had little contact with other contemporary poets; yet he shared their taste and many of their preoccupations. Although he was a scholar deeply read in the classics, he reacted very sensitively to the new tendencies shaping the consciousness of the era: to the wild, untamed aspects of nature, the striking effects of the sublime, the darkness and obscurity of medieval literature, and graveyardism. All this primitivism, all these wild impulses, however, were filtered through his exquisitely sensitive and cultivated mind and distilled into his highly wrought, fully self-conscious and controlled, but still unaffected and genuinely moving poetry.

Gray's family background was problematic in many ways. He was the only surviving child (out of twelve) of his parents, for which reason his mother looked after him with extreme care. His parents' marriage, moreover, was a very unhappy one, and it was partly to secure her son from the father's abuse that his mother sent Gray to Eton College (one of the most prestigious boarding schools in England) when he was nine years old. At Eton Gray lived with his uncle, who was a master in this school.This secure family background made it possible for him to enjoy a very peaceful and happy period as a schoolboy. It was also at Eton that he contracted the most important friendships of his life (most notably with Richard West and Horace Walpole, the son of the former Prime Minister). After graduating from Eton, Gray attended Cambridge University, and in 1738 he accompanied his friend, Horace Walpole on his "grand tour" of European countries. During these travels, however, they quarreled in 1741 and did not resume their friendship until 1745. In 1741 Gray returned to England where he renewed his friendship with Richard West. West, however, died the next year at the young age of twenty-five, and Gray could not fully recover from his bereavement for many years to come. It was the loss of his friend that inspired the famous early odes, "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" and "Ode to Adversity", as well as the posthumously published "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West".

After this period of emotional turbulence, Gray settled to a quiet life of scholarship at Cambridge, where he eventually became Professor of Modern History, though he never actually gave a lecture. He lived a very modest, retired life there throughout the rest of his

life, holidaying with his mother and aunts, enjoying the company of a very small circle of close friends and shunning publicity as much as it was possible. In 1757 he even rejected the laureateship, largely to avoid the public exposure that the title would inevitably have entailed.

Gray's most famous poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" was written sometime between 1742 and 1750 and was published in 1751. It was an immediate success with four more editions sold out in two months' time and eleven further editions coming out in subsequent years. The "Elegy" is indeed one of the very few poems written in this period, which truly forms part of world literature (it had a strong influence, for example, on János Arany's "Családi kör", as well). As the title indicates, the poem uses the popular conventions of graveyard poetry. Unlike most products of graveyardism, however, Gray's poem is a masterfully structured and fully controlled work. The graveyard poetry of Gray's contemporaries frequently contains self-indulgent fits of melancholy, exaggerated terrifying effects, and overly dark and gruesome images. Gray's poem, by contrast, is free from all such excesses. He evokes the conventions but then sublimates them, elevates them into a higher level of perfection, where – as Dr. Johnson remarked –they can attain a universal human appeal.

The poem starts with a description of evening in the village and of the churchyard where the lonely poet is meditating. Then the speaker discusses the conventional theme of how the contrast between worldly greatness and the simple, humble life of the people in the village disappears in the grip of the great leveller: death. He meditates further about how much happier the life of the poor people lying in the cemetery must have been compared to that of the worldly great. Their circumstances did not allow them to carry out their ambitions, but thissaved them from the dishonesty that a worldly career necessarily entails and the suffering it inevitably causes. In spite of these differences, however, there is no distinction between great and small from the perspective of death: life cannot be brought back whether we have cut a figure in the world or just lived humbly in the village. Nevertheless, the memorial stones in the cemetery can still teach us something about life, something that is universally valid for all human life, humble or great. They teach us that what really matters in human life is just the love we feel for others. As Gray puts it in the beautiful stanzas which Dr. Johnson admired so much:

> For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
> This pleasing anxious being e'erresign'd,
> Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
> Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?
>
> On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
> Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
> E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
> E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

In the closing part of the poem, then, the speaker considers his own death. In a move that is characteristic of Gray's reserve, the speaker begins to see himself from the outside as

soon as the personal theme emerges. His own life and death are described from an indifferent outsider's point of view, and then the poem ends with the epitaph on the speaker's tombstone. This ending introduces another distancing effect from the personal situation and yet – through this very suppression of the personal – it achieves an even more powerful personal appeal as the speaker – speaking as if from beyond the grave – confirms the ultimate significance of the sensibility of the soul and of genuine human feeling:

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,
And Melacholy marked him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,
He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),
The bosom of his Father and his God.

From 1752 Gray started working on his great Pindaric odes, "The Progeress of Poesie" and "The Bard", with which he wished to crown his poetic career. The poems were finally printed in 1757, but met with a rather mixed reception. The literati usually applauded them, but many were baffled by the uncommon density of the text and the complexity of its allusions. Indeed these poems are Gray's most ambitious attempts at the sublime and no doubt among the most successful in the age; however, they are by no means easily accessible. Nevertheless, they had a strong influence on the poetry of subsequent generations both within Britain and abroad. "The Bard", for example, served as the major inspiration for JánosArany's "Walesibárdok". The mixed reception of these great poems further contributed to Gray's turning away from public literary life.He spent the remaining years of his life in almost complete retirement in Cambridge, which he left only to pursue his tours of various picturesque places in Britain.

Recommended further readings:

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The Novel of the Age of Sensibility

Samuel Richardson — the epistolary novel

In the eighteenth century writing letters was the only way to conduct business from a distance and to communicate with relatives and friends living afar. Writing polished letters that showed off the erudition and taste of the writer became fashionable. Also, many of the books published in the eighteenth century were composed of texts which were intended to give advice—so-called conduct books that were published as manuals or in the form of letters. Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) was in the stationer and printing trade; he was familiar with this type of writing. He was in his early fifties already and running a successful business—printing the *Journals of the House of Commons* and popular newspapers and periodicals of the period—when he was commissioned to write and publish a series of "familiar" (domestic) letters which would serve as models for future writers of letters and would advise them on "how to think and act justly and prudently, in the common Concerns of Human Life." These letters also launched Richardson's career as a novelist and served as an inspiration for his first novel, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740). The success was enormous. Almost everybody read *Pamela* and it soon became the best-seller of the period. It was generally regarded to be a highly moral work, despite some of the seduction scenes which were described in lingering and loving detail by the author. Even clergymen took care to recommend *Pamela* in theirs sermons, treating it more as a conduct book which showed proper female behaviour to the younger generation.

Partly accounting for this success was another source that Richardson used—novels written by women romancers of the period. Many of these were usually about a heroine in distress facing the trials of love. From these sources Richardson could construct his own version of ideal femininity. Richardson became famous overnight, although he published *Pamela* and the rest of his novels in the guise of an "editor," and would not directly acknowledge authorship on the title page of his books.

The plot of *Pamela* centres on a young domestic servant (Pamela) and her virtuous defence of her innocence from her master, the young and handsome squire (who is also a rake), Mr B. Although Pamela falls in love with him she resists his sexual advances. She keeps a journal and also seeks advice in the form of letters from her poor, but thoroughly respectable and morally upright parents. Pamela remains a "dutiful daughter" taking into account their advice:

> Be sure don't let people's telling you, you are pretty, puff you up; for you did not make yourself, and so can have no praise due to you for it. It is virtue and goodness only, that make the true beauty. Remember that, Pamela. (Letter 8)

When Mr B reads Pamela's journal and finds out that she is truly virtuous, he falls in love with her and no longer sees her as an object of his lust. Thus Pamela earns her reward for remaining virtuous by marrying the squire, a man who is socially high "above" her. One reason for *Pamela*'s popularity was the "Cinderella" story; her example implied that it was possible for women from lower classes to rise socially if they remained virtuous, and lower and middle-class readers delighted in the idea of social elevation. For the author *Pamela* brought wide recognition and long-lasting fame, and the desire to continue and improve his writing.

Richardson's later novels *Clarissa* (1747-8) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754) were more appreciated by rigorous critics for their literary merit. In *Clarissa or the History of a Young Lady*, a virtuous young lady turns against the wishes of her family and refuses to marry the man they have chosen for her. But she also resists the advances of another young man, Lovelace, who applies all the tricks he can in order to seduce her. Finally, she is drugged and raped by him. The story in this case turns out to be a tragic one; Clarissa wastes away and dies of humiliation and sorrow. *Clarissa*, published in 1748, was internationally acclaimed and translated into several languages. This work is generally regarded to be Richardson's greatest achievement as a novelist. *Clarissa* led to the increasing popularity of the epistolary novel form and introduced the cult of sensibility on the Continent, especially in France. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* was also inspired by Richardson's tragic novel.

Richardson's reputation was much higher at the time than Fielding's. Dr. Johnson, for instance, is purported to have said that "There is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's, than in all of *Tom Jones*," and suggested that Richardson should be read for "the sentiment." Richardson's epistolary novels can also be regarded as **novels of sensibility** or **sentimen**t. His works were crucial to the development of the novel in showing that the world of emotions and consciousness could also be described and new techniques could be introduced for the purpose of description, characterization, and creating suspense. The epistolary form gave the impression of intimacy; readers could sympathize with the female heroines and keep a close track of their most intimate thoughts and reactions. For Richardson, however, the main artistic purpose was to instruct and improve morals based on religious principles. The popularity of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* owes a great deal to the following:

- both novels draw attention to the plight of women who become victims of male authority (Mr B is not only Pamela's master, but also a Justice of the Peace), or their families who try to force them to marry for social or financial purposes (*Clarissa*);
- they stress the necessity for women to have the independence and the right to choose the men they love
- they showed that the possession of sensibility is a virtue;
- Pamela's story demonstrated that rising from one social layer into a higher one is possible

The artistic advantages lying in the **epistolary** form can be summed up in the following points:

- letters produce a dramatic effect and create suspense;
- we get to know the inner world of the character through his/her letter
- characters are always analysing their motives and the consequences of their actions and this creates a psychological effect;
- letters introduce intimacy, sympathy, deep feeling and emotions (sensibility) into the novel

The cult of sensibility

For Richardson in the middle of the eighteenth century sensibility—the ability to feel deeply, experience deep emotions and to be able to display them as his heroines did—was associated with a moral sense of being able to tell right from wrong. Feeling and showing sentiments: enthusiasm, passion, sympathy, fear, and melancholy by blushing, trembling, fainting and bursting into tears became a test for judging the sensibility of a young woman. Thus sensibility became a standard of femininity. There was one source from which sensibility could be learned: novels of sensibility. Such novels taught readers to sympathize with fictional characters; to imagine their feelings; to understand why they are weeping with sorrow or feeling for the poor and sick, experiencing delight, joy, passion, or melancholy. This form of behaviour could be practiced in "real" life; it could raise the awareness of readers and make them disapprove of existing social conditions, for instance, or it could lead them into indulging in fancies which might never come true. Because reading was often a private activity, it could not always be monitored by parents or governesses. Young ladies reading such novels were especially at risk. Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), for instance, humorously addressed the issue of the harmful effects that reading romances has on a young woman who cannot distinguish fiction from reality. But men were also capable of experiencing deep sentiments. Sarah Fielding, (Henry Fielding's sister) wrote a successful novel on the excess of sentiment in a thoroughly virtuous male character who undergoes all sorts of misfortunes in *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744). Twenty years later Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) also treated the topic of refined emotions in a kind-hearted clergyman.

Laurence Sterne: combination of irony and sentiment

Another popular contemporary description of sensations came from a "Man of Feeling"[2] the author of two internationally acclaimed novels. The author, Laurence Sterne (1713-68), was originally a clergyman who began to write in the last decade of his life. His first novel, which was not received as favourably in England as it was on the continent, is today regarded as one of the most intriguing and funniest novels written in the eighteenth century. *The Life*

[2] *The Man of Feeling* is also the title of a popular sentimental novel by the Scottish Henry Mackenzie published in 1771.

and Opinions of Tristram Shandy (1759-67) defies all novelistic categories. It cannot be called a novel of development, or a novel of sentiment, or a novel of adventure. It is, however, considered to be a surprising example of a postmodernist novel written in the eighteenth century. Sterne seems to defy classicist principles of order and structure and puts to test Locke's tenets on the association of ideas and the importance of reflection and sensations in acquiring knowledge. *Tristram Shandy* is unlike other fictitious biographies; it does not have a distinct plot—the first person narrator is born only in the fourth volume of the book only to disappear from it for a long while and then reappear in a digressive account of travels made through France on the last pages. Readers find out almost nothing about the title character's life, not to mention his opinions. Thus the structure of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is fragmented and yet diffuse, anecdotal and digressive rather than focused, looking more like an early version of the twentieth-century stream of consciousness novel. The narrative tone is conversational and humorous. The main characters are Tristram's father, Walter Shandy, Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim (Uncle Toby's servant), Tristram's mother and Parson Yorick. The interrupted scenes, unfinished sentences set off by excessive use of dashes and semi colons, occasional asterisks and blank pages reflect the narrator's uncontrolled flow of consciousness and conversation, drawing the reader's attention to the self-reflexivity of the text, that is, to the process of writing. Tristram often describes sentimental incidents and scenes, but his sensibility, complemented with humour and self-mocking irony, makes the reader aware of the ambiguity of the situations related. In Sterne's next work, *A Sentimental Journey,* Parson Yorick from *Tristram Shandy* becomes the narrator.

A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy was published in 1768 a few weeks before Sterne's untimely death from consumption. The book might have been Sterne's response to Tobias Smollett's dry and rational account of his own travels on the Continent, *Travels through France and Italy*. In *Sentimental Journey* Mr. Yorick defines himself as a "sentimental traveller," warning readers that they are holding an unusual travel book in their hands. He is making a tour of France during the Seven Years' War (the book remains a fragment, since the account of his travels in Italy are missing). The journey is also a metaphorical one in which Yorick describes the tender sentiments he experiences through the people and situations he encounters, in the scenes (often trivial ones) that he witnesses and in which he participates. He is captured by the mystery and beauty of everyday life rather than by famous sights. Amused by brief flirtatious encounters, ambiguous situations and foreign customs, he expresses his delight in the sensations the novelty of experience offers, or his sympathy and sorrow in a melancholy situation. In one scene he laments the fact that he had snubbed a mendicant monk, only to console him by offering his snuff-box as a token of reconciliation in the next. When next passing through Calais after hearing of the monk's death, he has "a strong desire to see where they had laid him." He also admits that when he took out the monk's snuff-box by the grave he "burst into a flood of tears." Opposed to the presence of death (Yorick's name is a reference to the dead court jester in the gravedigger's scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) he presents a reality which can best be experienced through a wide range of sentiments, all of them originating from "Dear sensibility!" which is described as a "divinity," and as the "great, great SENSORIUM of the world!"

Although possessing sensibility is a moral requisite, Yorick gets himself into ambiguous situations. In the chapter entitled "Temptation" Yorick finds himself all alone in a room with a pretty chambermaid. At this point they are sitting side-by side on the bed—with the dashes and the sentence structure indicating the spontaneity of the movements and the rising emotions:

> A strap had given way in her walk, and the buckle of her shoe was just falling off—See, said the *fille de chambre*, holding up her foot—I could not for my soul but fasten the buckle in return, and putting in the strap—and lifting up the other foot with it, when I had done, to see both were right—in doing it too suddenly—it unavoidably threw the fair *fille de chambre* off her center—and then——

The text unexpectedly breaks off at this point leaving the readers to guess what happened afterwards. The next chapter is entitled "The Conquest," but Yorick's ambiguous and ironic speech on temptation leaves us in doubt about whether he managed to conquer his passions or if the title refers to the conquest of the chambermaid.

Besides **irony** and **ambiguity**, a subtle **sense of humour** saves the melancholy scenes from lapsing into melodrama. Maria, for instance, the young woman who was jilted by her lover and went mad in consequence, is mentioned by Tristram Shandy in Sterne's earlier novel. Yorick has heard about Maria and decides to see her for himself near Moulines. The italicized words in the passage below *show* rather than describe the effect that this encounter has on Yorick's feelings:

> Her goat had been as faithless as her lover: and she had got a little dog in lieu of him, which she had kept tied by a string to her girdle: as I look'd at her dog, she drew him towards her with the string.—"Thou shalt not leave me, Sylvio," said she. I *look'd* in Maria's eyes, and saw she was thinking more of her [dead] father than of her lover or her little goat, for as she utter'd them, *the tears trickled down her cheeks*.
>
> *I sat down close by her*; and Maria *let me wipe them away as they fell*, with my handkerchief.—I then *steep'd it* in my own—and *then in hers*—and *then in mine*—and then *I wip'd hers again*—and *as I did it*, *I felt such indescribable emotions* within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion.
>
> I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pester'd the world ever convince me of the contrary.

Words are often inappropriate to describe the depth of feelings in **novels of sentiment**. The narrative technique of showing rather than telling what the protagonist is feeling is often

used in these novels (as the two quoted examples above demonstrate). It is, however, typical of Sterne to add a slight touch of humour to this sentimental scene. In consequence, the shadow of a smile turns into a laugh if we connect and compare this scene to another one in *Tristram Shandy* in which Mr. Shandy meets Maria during his travels on the Continent.

> MARIA made a cadence so melancholy, so tender and querulous, that I sprung out of the chaise to help her, and found myself sitting betwixt her and her goat before I relapsed from my enthusiasm. MARIA look'd wistfully for some time at me, and then at her goat —and then at me —and then at her goat again, and so on, alternately—
>
> —Well, Maria, said I softly—What resemblance do you find? (IX, xxiv)

The reason why both of Sterne's novels are highly entertaining is that his writing lacks the didactic, moralistic element that was so often considered to be a necessary element in literary texts by critics like Dr. Johnson in the eighteenth century. It is, indeed, often the lack of humour and irony that we miss in some novels of sentiment which were famous in their day. Sterne's influence on the Continent was especially significant. Both of his novels were translated into French and German, contributing to the international cult of sensibility. In most of the novels of sentiment in the period, however, sensibility does not lead to any form of activity, at best, it remains a passive feeling. Readers may have the impression that for those characters who possess this quality, there is even some form of pleasure in viewing depressing scenes and experiencing melancholic sentiments. By the last decades of the eighteenth century sensibility became a form of fashionable behaviour as well. The physical symptoms (tears, blushing, fainting, etc.) could be displayed and affected. Thus the novels produced at the turn of the nineteenth century usually disapprove and criticize the sentimental trend. It is, however, out of this cult that a very popular type of fiction was born, which exists in many forms today; the Gothic novel.

The Gothic Novel

The appearance of the Gothic novel parallels the Gothic architectural revival in England in the 1740s. Horace Walpole's fabulous home on Strawberry Hill in Twickenham is a typical example of the Neo-Gothic architectural trends in the Augustan period. The building, attracting many visitors from afar, was designed to look like a Gothic castle with its circular tower and embattlements, turrets and stained glass windows, and the intricately designed medievalesque interiors. Walpole, however, was not only an enthusiastic art collector and amateur medievalist, but also nursed literary ambitions.

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is generally regarded as the first Gothic novel, although tales about apparitions, ghosts and supernatural occurrences were common enough in the eighteenth century—even Defoe and Goldsmith published such writings. But Walpole's intention was to experiment and blend the medieval romance with the more modern type of fiction that his contemporaries were producing at the time; in which the characters were individualized through especially their manners and emotions. He also wished

to hold his readers in suspense and elicit from them the same fear that his characters had to experience. *The Castle of Otranto*, like other examples of Gothic fiction, delights in mystery and also relies mainly upon the reader's sensibility to experience excesses of emotion, especially sorrow, fear, and terror. Much like the sublime of the mid-century poets, it manipulates the reader into deriving some form of aesthetic excitement and pleasure from these predominantly unpleasant emotions.

Walpole's novel is set in Italy in the period of the Crusades and the setting is, as the title demonstrates, a medieval castle. The gothic quality of the story also draws on another meaning of the word, however, which implies barbarousness and cruelty. The protagonist of the novel is Manfred, the usurper of Otranto, who, upon the mysterious death of his only son and heir on the latter's wedding day, decides to wed his son's bride, Isabella, in the hope of providing himself with future heir. But Manfred cannot marry Isabella unless he divorces his own devoted and pious wife. Isabella is unwilling to go along with this plan and becomes his captive. There is also a young peasant in the story, Theodore, who attempts to rescue her. He finally turns out to be a descendent of Alfonso, the former ruler whose gigantic ghost haunts the castle. When Manfred accidentally kills his own daughter, he also has to reveal the truth about his unlawful claim to the princedom. The sorrowful villain removes himself into a monastery for the rest of his life to repent for his sins.

Although the numerous supernatural occurrences in Walpole's novel are left unexplained and much of the action is highly improbable, late eighteenth-century novelists found a new experimenting ground in "the Gothic story," using some of the elements that were incorporated into Walpole's story:

- medieval ruins or haunted castles in exotic, European or Oriental settings (e.g. Italy, France, Germany or Arabia);
- mystery, hidden sins, family problems (sometimes hinting at incest);
- unfeeling, villainous characters who are opposed to the morally much more aware characters of sensibility. Other stock characters include villains, virtuous maidens of great sensibility in distress (who are tyrannized by the villains) and heroes whom the heroine marries. Down-to-earth servants serve as a comic relief to maintain an air of reality and produce a comic effect in the melodrama or tragedy of the Gothic story. There are few mixed characters.
- It is usually not the romantic plot, but the mystery that is the driving force of the narrative;
- the story takes place several centuries earlier; supernatural occurrences are either rationally explained or no explanation is offered;
- the atmosphere created is that of suspense and mystery.

Walpole's story, inspired by a dream according to his own account, was published a few years after Edmund Burke's influential philosophical treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into*

the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1756). According to Burke, the "sublime," the awesome, frightening and strange, such as huge mountainous landscapes, ruins, produce fear or even terror in the beholder of such sights (see more on this in the chapter on "Poetry after Pope"). Furthermore,

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure.

Burke's definition of the sublime, which is capable of stirring up the "strongest emotion," directly inspired Walpole and later Gothic novelists to produce fiction which affected readers in this manner, mainly by consciously operating in the realm of the sublime; readers were delighted and intrigued by mystery, suspense and terror. In consequence, writing Gothic novels became quite remunerative for many such novelists.

Other examples of Gothic fiction include William Beckford's gruesome Oriental tale, *Vathek* (1787), or M. G. Lewis's violent tale of temptation and evil in *The Monk* (1796). By the end of the century women writers, who throughout the eighteenth century had a prominent role in producing amatory fiction as well as romances in abundant numbers, became surprisingly adept at composing Gothic tales. Clara Reeve and perhaps the most famous of all, Ann Radcliffe, are considered to be notable representatives of the genre. Radcliffe composed a series of Gothic novels in quick succession: *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), The *Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797), which found an enthusiastic reception among readers.

Radciffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is perhaps the best known Gothic novel from the 1790s.The novel is rather long-winded and there are many idyllic descriptive passages of places that Radcliffe had only seen in paintings, but never actually visited. The story is set partly in the sixteenth century in southern France and Italy. The writer employs a wide array of typical stock characters of the Gothic and the novel of sentiment: the virtuous maiden (Emily), the villain (Montoni), the hero (Valancourt), the misguided and ill-natured female relative (Mme Cheron), benevolent peasants, among many others. But she is clever in contrasting idyllic natural scenery with the gloomy and sublime scenes of Udolpho. In the following passage the italicized words help create the atmosphere that is typical of the Gothic that foreshadows the mysterious and "awful" incidents that are awaiting Emily in the castle of Udolpho:

> Emily gazed with *melancholy awe* upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the *setting sun*, the *gothic greatness* of its features, and its *mouldering dark grey* stone, rendered it a *gloomy* and *sublime* object. As she gazed, the light *died away* on its walls, leaving a *melancholy* purple tint, which spread *deeper and deeper,* as the thin *vapour* crept up the *mountain*, while the *battlements* above were still tipped with splendour. From those too, the rays soon *faded*, and the whole edifice was invested with the *solemn duskiness* of *evening*. *Silent, lonely and sublime,* it seemed to stand the *sovereign* of the scene, and to *frown defiance* on all, who dared to invade its *solitary* reign. (Ch. 5)

Emily is finally rewarded for the suffering she had to endure in Montoni's castle as a captive (Montoni tries to force her into marrying one of his wicked friends) and is finally reunited with her lover Valancourt. In Udolpho there are many mysterious and seemingly supernatural occurrences, but Radcliffe gives a rational explanation for these mysteries at the end of the novel. Stirring up the murky depths of mystery and sin, drawing on the feeling of terror which originates in fear, using it to entertain readers, and solving the mystery at the end; these are all devices that pave the way for future nineteenth-century detective fiction writers on the one hand (Poe, Wilkie Collins, Conan Doyle), and for followers of the Gothic tradition on the other (Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker).

It is important to note that the Gothic novel may also be regarded as a sub-genre of the novel of sentiment or sensibility. The moral characters in Gothic tales are usually the ones who have consideration for others. Possessing sensibility also enables them to have a strong grasp of what is right and wrong, as opposed to the villains who are cruel and take advantage of their power, and have no sympathy for others. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, there is a marked change in the attitude towards the cult of sensibility. In Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily's sensibility is no longer a positive trait in her character. She is definitely virtuous, but her passionate nature and rich imagination contribute to the terrors she experiences in the Castle of Udolpho. Her father St Aubert wishes to correct the flaws in her nature which are caused by her sensibility. For St Aubert sensibility "is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance." Unfortunately, Emily's father dies soon and does not live long enough to teach her to "resist first impressions" and "counteract those traits in her disposition, which might hereafter lead her from happiness" (Ch.1). Thus by the end of the eighteenth century another type of novel also emerges as a reaction against the cult of sensibility; the **novel of manners** which investigates human nature by examining how manners conceal and display character.

Recommended reading

Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. London, New York: Routledge, 1996.

Jerrold. E. Hogle, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
Mullan, John. *Sentiment and Sociability*. Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1988.
New, M. ed. *Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne*. New York: G. K. Hall, 1998.
Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-century English Fiction.* New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 2006.

Recommended web-sites:

Gothic literature: www.litgoth.com
Eighteenth- century resources http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th/

Synthesis: Jane Austen

Lost in Austen, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, *The Real Jane Austen*, *Becoming Jane* are titles of recent films which demonstrate Austen's popularity in our culture today. The numerous screen adaptations of Jane Austen's novels, the Jane Austen societies around the world, the long list of biographies that have been written after her death and are still in the process of being written (the next biography to be published by Harper-Collins in 2013) show a constant interest in her life and works. This unprecedented popularity has also led to extensive literary criticism on her novels, and has inspired countless admirers of her fiction to create sequels in the form of short stories or novels.

Austen's enduring fame has fuelled a critical interest in other woman writers of the last decades of the eighteenth century and the Regency period (1811-1820). Thematically, just as other popular novels of the period, her novels are all focused around a young heroine who goes through a process of a moral development and arrives at self-knowledge. This then enables her to select the best partner for marriage. All the novels have a happy ending. Under Austen's pen, however, characterization becomes more complex, the description of human nature with the tools of irony, humour and wit becomes more profound, and the narrative technique opens up new perspectives for future novelists. Owing to her literary contributions (along with Sir Walter Scott's) the novel as a literary form becomes more mature and achieves more widespread recognition among learned readers in the decades following her death. A frequently quoted passage from Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (written perhaps in the late 1790s) defends novels in general from derisive critical attacks. In Chapter 5 the narrator is objecting to the widespread fashion of pretending to be ashamed of reading novels and joining the chorus of critics who degrade the works of novelists:

> —there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. 'I am no novel reader—I seldom look into novels—Do not imagine that *I* often read novels—It is really very well for a novel.'—Such is the common cant. 'And what are you reading, Miss—?' 'Oh! it is only a novel!' replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame.—'It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;' or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of it varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.

In other words, the quality of the novel also displays the mind of the author, his/her profound knowledge of human nature and mastery of the art of writing. The novels alluded to in the

passage were written by women novelists (Burney and Edgeworth). Thus the narrator here points out that women are also capable of such intellectual feats as writing novels, just like men.

Jane Austen's life and works

In her lifetime Austen's novels were not widely known, nevertheless some elite readers of high society were familiar with her writings. It was only after her death, especially after the publication of her biography by her nephew James Austen-Leigh in 1870, that she received more widespread recognition. As a young girl she wrote parodies and short burlesques of popular plays and novels for the entertainment of her family. In her early twenties she began to draft, probably in epistolary form, three of the novels which were published only much later and after considerable revision. After her father's retirement from the post of rector of Steventon (where Austen was born in 1775), the family had to move to Bath, a town which she heartily disliked. With the death of her clergyman father in 1805 Jane, her beloved sister, Cassandra, and their mother lived in reduced circumstances, depending on the financial support of the Austen brothers. These years have baffled critics and biographers: it seems that the move from Steventon to Bath silenced Austen's creative powers until Edward Knight (one of Austen's older brothers) was able to settle his mother and sisters in a cottage on his inherited estate at Chawton in Hampshire. Jane Austen was delighted with Chawton Cottage, and there she began revising and completing the novels she wrote earlier. Her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, was published anonymously in 1811. Then followed *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813 with reasonable success. *Mansfield Park* was published in 1814 and *Emma* (with a dedication to the Prince Regent) one year later. *Northanger Abbey* might also have been one of her earliest works, but it was published posthumously together with her last completed novel *Persuasion* in 1818, one year after Austen's death.

Austen's family on both the paternal and maternal sides came from the gentry, but her father, an Anglican clergyman, and her brothers, also clergymen and officers of the navy (except for the rich Edward Knight), would belong to the class called "pseudo-gentry," the upwardly mobile professional middle-class. This is the reason why most of her heroines, the Dashwood and Bennet sisters, Emma are daughters of gentlemen (Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* is the daughter of a foolish Baronet) and Marianne Dashwood and Emma Woodhouse marry rich country squires (Col. Brandon and Mr Knightley). Elizabeth Bennet is perhaps the upwardly most mobile of her characters when she marries Mr. Darcy who has a landed estate and an income of more than ten thousand a year. But Austen has sympathy for the professional "middling sorts," especially clergymen (the younger brothers who cannot inherit the estate from their fathers). Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price and Catherine Morland marry clergymen. Occasionally, however, she can ridicule them as well (Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* or Mr. Elton in *Emma*). Austen has special admiration for the officers of the navy. In *Persuasion* it is Captain Wentworth who gets to marry Anne and not William Elliot, the next baronet in line to inherit Sir Walter's estate.

Another puzzle for biographers, besides the decade spent in silence, is Austen's romantic life. Pretty and accomplished, she was not just an avid reader, but enjoyed company

and loved to dance at balls when young. It is not quite clear why she never got married, although once she refused an advantageous proposal. Some of the letters written to her sister Cassandra and nieces have survived and provide the best source of information on her life. She published her works anonymously and was extremely happy with her meagre literary earnings, but illness soon intervened. A year before her death her health began to fail. She was able to complete *Persuasion* and began a new novel entitled *Sanditon*, which she had to leave incomplete. She died on July 18, 1817.

The novel of manners

Despite the limited social environment surrounding her cast of characters, Austen succeeds in displaying human nature in a variety of forms; through characters endowed with good nature, sense, foresight, sensibility, wit, or diffidence. They usually have to contend with the conflicting circumstances they or others have caused, and to protect themselves against those who are full of pride, indolence, ruthless ambition, prejudice and ignorance, and will never learn. The novels of Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and all of Jane Austen's novels are the best examples of fiction in which the minute study of manners provides an insight into the true nature of a character. In such novels, just as in sentimental fiction, the heroine finds herself in a distressful situation. Her manners usually get her into trouble and lead to a series of misunderstandings. She is capable of learning from her faults, however, and the novel describes the process of moral development. Thus, the novel of manners constitutes a sub-category of the novel of development. In *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, Marianne Dashwood realizes that her passionate nature and too much trust in her own intuition and emotions had resulted in a selfish neglect of others. After being abandoned by Willoughby, the young man she loves, her love melancholy develops into an almost fatal illness. Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* learns that subjective first impressions may be wrong and comes to regret that earlier she had refused to marry Mr Darcy. Emma Woodhouse in *Emma* is humbled in her pride and vanity and learns not to interfere in the lives of others. Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey* discovers that fiction and reality cannot be confused with one another.

Because these heroines are fundamentally virtuous and capable of learning their lessons, they are rewarded at the end by marriage to the man they love. The right man, however, is usually a socially responsible person. Marriage with him will ensure not only personal happiness, but will enable the heroine to occupy a useful position in society through which she can fulfil her social roles for the benefit of others, not only her immediate family members. Austen's heroines become the wives of clergymen or landowners—except in *Persuasion* in which the patriotic role of becoming the wife of a navy officer overrules other social obligations.

Manners, however, may reveal what is meant to be concealed: shallowness, stupidity, ill-nature and dislike. Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* may have perfect manners in society, but she can also be cold and insulting, showing a lack of consideration for Jane Bennet or her sister Elizabeth's feelings. The vulgarity and simplicity of Mrs Bennet's or Mr Collins's mind in *Pride and Prejudice* are also reflected in their manners and speech. This

often produces a memorable, comic effect. But manners may also be misleading. Elizabeth Bennet, for instance, is for a time completely misled by the mercenary George Wickham's behaviour of a perfect gentleman.

Themes in Pride and Prejudice *(1813)*

Austen made the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice* entitled *First Impressions* in 1796. She began revising the text after the publication of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1811 and the novel was finally published anonymously in January 1813. The critical reception was moderate. In a short time, however, elite circles, even the Prince Regent came to enjoy Austen's novel and invited the authoress for a visit to Carlton House. The major theme, just as in other novels of manners, once again is the moral progress of the heroine (Elizabeth Bennet) and how she arrives at self-knowledge. She is put to test through a series of social trials only to find the right marriage partner at the end as her reward. Elizabeth can be regarded as the heroine of the novel, but due to her close relationship to her much beloved elder sister Jane, her happiness cannot be separated from her sister's. Elizabeth is witty, intelligent and high-spirited, her father's favourite. Austen herself praised Elizabeth and referred to her as a "delightful creature as ever was in print." Her major error is that she judges others too hastily, believing herself to be superior in judgement to others. Thus she takes an immediate dislike to Mr Darcy when she overhears him at a ball speaking critically about her. Unaware of it herself, and taking up a playful attitude over having been slighted by Darcy, she becomes prejudiced against him. Darcy, however, cannot help falling in love with Elizabeth. In the proposal scene (Ch. 34), which takes Elizabeth completely by surprise, he explains his reservations about her family. It is not so much Elizabeth's social background that makes Darcy uneasy—the Bennets have no social connections, distinction, or money (although it is important to note here that Elizabeth is the daughter of a gentleman, thus a connection between a wealthy landowner with aristocratic relatives and the daughter of a gentleman is not wholly impossible). It is the ill manners of the mother and sisters, always the sign of inferior education, which disturbs him. Mrs Bennet, especially, is the object of Darcy's dislike, since she has only one pastime to occupy her: getting her daughters married and doing everything possible to achieve this purpose, and worse, talking about it in public. Elizabeth's refusal and her passionate dislike take Darcy by surprise. Upon reading Darcy's letter of explanation Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy gradually changes and she is able to see others as well as herself objectively. It is in mid-book that she also comes to understand how she had overrated herself in believing herself to be superior to others in judgement and intelligence.

> "How despicably have I acted!" she cried; "I who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! Who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable distrust. How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven

reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself." (Ch. 36)

Darcy also has to overcome his pride and be "properly humbled" by Elizabeth (Chapter 58). When the great crisis in the Bennet family occurs and the sixteen-year-old Lydia elopes with the dissolute George Wickham, Darcy proves his constancy by acting as a true gentleman: persuades Wickham to marry Lydia, offers him money to do so, and stands by the Bennet family when socially their reputation is at its lowest. He also apologizes to his friend Bingley, regretting that he had formerly tried to interfere and prevent his marriage to Jane Bennet. Darcy is also ready to turn against his powerful aunt Lady Catherine de Burgh's wishes and marries Elizabeth without her consent.

Sub-themes in Pride and Prejudice

- The **financial and social insecurity** of educated young women without fortune on the marriage market. Mr Bennet is a member of the gentry, moderately well-off, who, however, has laid nothing aside for the financial security of his daughters. The Bennet estate is entailed, which means that after Mr Bennet's death the closest male heir, Mr Collins, the pompous clergyman, will inherit Longbourn. Mrs Bennet and her daughters would then be deprived of social distinction, the income coming from the estate, and they would need to establish themselves in a more modest home. Considering the fact that Mr Bennet's annual income is not enough for him to lay much aside, his death would impoverish his family. In this context, Mrs Bennet's obsession over her daughters' future, her wish to have them well-married is well-founded.
- The **nature of marriage** in general. Marriage works out best between two partners who have similar moral convictions and are intellectually equal, and have either similar dispositions (Jane and Bingley) or are willing to learn from each other (Elizabeth and Darcy). The differences between quite a number of marriages in the novel, among which there are several examples of mismatches: the Bennets', the Collins,' the Wickhams', draws attention to this crucial issue. Twenty-five years before Mr Bennet had married the beautiful, but silly and ill-bred Mrs Bennet (with a middle-class background). Mrs Bennet is no intellectual partner for Mr Bennet—he escapes to the library to spend his time reading rather than seeing to the affairs of his property or providing the necessary education in manners to his daughters. Elizabeth's best friend, Charlotte Lucas, marries the foolish Mr Collins because she has no real alternative: this is the only way she can have a household of her own instead of being dependent on the male members of her family. Elizabeth's youngest sister Lydia becomes a victim of the mercenary Wickham because of her passionate nature and her childish and romantic notions about love and marriage. For Austen marriage is based on affection and esteem, it is a partnership of equal minds. A certain social and financial background is necessary,

however. Only the Gardiners, (Elizabeth's uncle and aunt) provide an example of an exemplary marriage for Jane and Elizabeth to follow.

- **Contrast between town and country manners** (a literary cliché of the period). In all of Austen's novels most characters living in London are worldly (for example, the Bingley sisters or the Crawford siblings in *Mansfield Park*), and their proud manners usually reveal their prejudice to society and life in the country. Country families are more natural, informal and less artificial in their manners, less dedicated to following the highest fashions, but more observant of moral codes. Corruption is usually linked to London—where Lydia lives together with Wickham for a short period although she is not yet married to him.
- **Contrast of manners between divergent social classes**. English society at the end of the eighteenth century and in the regency period was rapidly changing. The upward mobility of the "middling" classes (the less wealthy families of gentry origin, like the Bennets, also belong to this class not just the professional representatives of the middle class). The superiority and the class-consciousness of the aristocracy to the expense of others is reflected in Lady Catherine's manners (thus Darcy, not only Elizabeth, has relations to be ashamed of). Elizabeth remarks that "her air was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them, such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank" (Ch. 29). Nevertheless it is at Rosings, Lady Catherine's estate, that Elizabeth and Darcy get to meet again and Lady Catherine is also the one who unwittingly becomes responsible for their union. Her intervention backfires when Darcy discovers from her report that Elizabeth's mind has changed about him, and thus indirectly, and against her wishes, she brings about their marriage.
- Lurking in the background of the happy, scenic atmosphere of *Pride and Prejudice* and the incandescent marriages of Jane and Elizabeth, is the Collins' parsonage and the fate of Mrs. Collins. The discomforts of being married to an insufferable fool to alleviate economic and social necessity show a reality which Austen must have been familiar with and an alternative which she probably regarded with distaste.

Structure

Pride and Prejudice was first published in 1813 in three volumes, as it was customary in the period. To readers, the three-volume novel format was familiar from the theatrical tradition of the three-act play. Austen's most popular novel was planned in this tripartite structure. Volume 1 covers chapters 1-23 (Hertfordshire), volume 2 chapters 24 to 42 (Rosings) and volume three chapters 43 to 61 (Pemberley and resolution). Considering the similarity of its plot features to those of some contemporary plays, most notably those of Sheridan and Hannah Cowley, the structure might also reflect Austen's interest in the theatre. The sharp dialogues between especially Darcy and Elizabeth, or between the latter and Lady

Catherine also evoke dramatic techniques. The conversations between Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Bennet and Mr. Collins, are comic in their effect and descriptive of the characters who utter them. The proposal scene, however, occurs in the middle of the novel in chapter 34, after which the structure of the novel becomes slightly uneven with the incorporation of even more letters than can be found in the first part. These letters are remnants of Austen's first attempts to create an epistolary version of *Pride and Prejudice* (entitled *First Impressions*, originally), but which she could not discard for structural reasons. Darcy's explanation of his motivations occurs in a long letter. Then, for purposes of the plot, her characters begin to travel: Elizabeth to Derbyshire, Lydia to Brighton and London. After Lydia's elopement, Mr. Bennet also has to travel to London, but once he is back, the source of information about how Lydia's marriage will be arranged becomes even more limited. Thus it becomes more difficult to describe the action around Lydia's elopement, to show readers what happened to her. Letters from Jane, Lydia and especially the Gardeners are the only solution the writer can find to solve this problem.

Narrative technique and characterization

Dr. Johnson, Samuel Richardson, as well as the most popular woman novelists of the period, Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, were among Jane Austen's favourite writers. In her narrative technique Austen was perhaps most influenced by the novels of the last two novelists: Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, Edgeworth's *Belinda*. Instead of adopting the epistolary form which was made popular by Richardson, Burney and Edgeworth both turned to Fielding's **omniscient narration** as a narrative technique. Although the early drafts of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*—of which none survived—might have been written in epistolary form in the beginning, when revising them for publication Austen decided on third person narration. The omniscience of the narrator is limited, however, since the narrator focuses primarily on the consciousness of a particular character, usually the heroine of the novel. We readers can see mainly what the heroine sees and interpret the manners, speech and actions of the other characters accordingly. This is the narrative technique used in practically all of Austen's novels (except the epistolary *Lady Susan*). For the purposes of characterizing not only her heroines, but other characters as well, she uses the method of **free indirect discourse** to represent what they are saying or thinking in third person, and **colouring** to mimic their word use and style of speech. In *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, the sister-in-law of the Dashwood sisters is trying to convince her husband that there is no need to keep his promise to his late father, and the girls do not need any financial support.

> Mrs John Dashwood did not at all approve of what her husband intended to do for his sisters. To take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy, would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree. She begged him to think again on the subject. How could he answer it to himself to rob his child, and his only child too, of so large a sum? And what possible claim could the Miss Dashwoods, who were related to him only by half blood, which she considered no relationship at all,

have on his generosity to so large an amount. It was very well known, that no affection was ever supposed to exist between the children of any man by different marriages; and why was he to ruin himself, and their poor little Harry, by giving away all his money to his half sisters? (Ch. 2)

The above example is also known as **represented speech**. With this technique, it is possible for readers to see Mrs John Dashwood's thoroughly mean and selfish character through her speech even without the narrator stating this to be the case or without directly quoting her words. It also reflects the narrator's low opinion of Mrs Dashwood. A passage from *Pride and Prejudice* shows that this technique can be most effectively employed with comic characters. Besides Mrs Bennet, it is Mr Collins who is the most ridiculous of all the characters in the book. His conceited pompousness and servile manners, his convoluted style of writing and speech, his constant flattery clearly show the foolishness he intends to conceal. The parley between Mrs Bennet and Mr Collins offers examples of represented speech and colouring (in italics):

The hall, the dining room, and all its furniture, were examined and praised. . . The dinner too in its turn was highly admired; *and he begged to know to which of his fair cousins the excellency of cooking was owing*. But here he was set right by Mrs. Bennet, who assured him with some asperity that *they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen*. He *begged pardon* for having displeased her. In a softened tone she declared herself *not at all offended*; but he continued to apologise for about a quarter of an hour. (Ch. 13)

Another example shows how Austen employs free indirect discourse when she wishes to represent the thoughts of her characters (represented thought). Henry Crawford visits Fanny Price in Portsmouth in *Mansfield Park*. Fanny, the modest and timid heroine who is morally superior to the other female characters in the novel, dislikes him for his worldliness and vanity. Henry, however (who also happens to be a good actor), has seemed to change for the better during the time Fanny has spent away from Mansfield. The narrator is describing the impression the unexpected encounter between them had made on Fanny, from Fanny's perspective and through her own voice; thus readers are allowed to enter Fanny's thoughts:

she thought him *altogether improved* since she had seen him; he was *much more gentle, obliging, and attentive* to other people's feelings than he had ever been at Mansfield; she had never seen him *so agreeable*—so *near being agreeable* . . . He was *decidedly improved*. She *wished the next day over*, she *wished he had come only for one day*—but *it was not so very bad* as she would have expected; *the pleasure of talking of Mansfield was so very great!* [emphasis added] (Ch. 41)

The words used for this description are also the ones that Fanny may have used in an interior monologue that is reported in the first person singular. Finally, we can say that Austen comes close to using interior monologue when her narrator describes the feelings of the protagonist by quoting verbatim her internal soliloquy as in the previously quoted passage from *Pride and Prejudice*: " 'How despicably have I acted!' she cried . . ." (Ch. 36).

Austen's literary and artistic tastes belong distinctly to the eighteenth century. Her favourite poets were Cowper, Crabbe rather than Coleridge and Wordsworth. In her novels most of her heroines observe fixed moral codes and regard the duty to their family and society as more important than responding to subjective impulses. Those who do succumb to their romantic imagination and sentiments, such as Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, or Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, are censured in the end. Her syntax, complicated sentence structures, the structure of her novels which aim at symmetry, also reflect her preference for neo-classical literary traditions. It is thus problematic to call Austen a romantic novelist. Her work is more like a reaction to the cult of sensibility in the eighteenth century. Yet it was out of this cult that the sweeping currents of Romanticism grew to gigantic proportions on the British Isles and the Continent—while Austen was composing her most enduring and popular works.

Recommended books for further reading

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www.pemberley.com
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