English Literature

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Preface

The term **English literature** refers to literature written in the English language, including literature composed in English by writers not necessarily from England; Joseph Conrad was Polish, Robert Burns was Scottish, James Joyce was Irish, Dylan Thomas was Welsh, Edgar Allan Poe was American, Salman Rushdie is Indian, V.S. Naipaul was born in Trinidad, Vladimir Nabokov was Russian. In other words, English literature is as diverse as the varieties and dialects of English spoken around the world. In academia, the term often labels departments and programmes practising *English studies* in secondary and tertiary educational systems. Despite the variety of authors of English literature, the works of William Shakespeare remain paramount throughout the English-speaking world.

This portable document file aims to provide a general manual of Englis Literature for students in colleges and universities and others beyond the high–school age. The purpose of this portable document file is to outline the development of the literature with due regard to national life, and to give appreciative interpretation of the work of the important authors.

It remains for me to thank those who have provided this articles for free, Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia.

To my beloved mother to whom I owe a lifetime of a mother's most self sacrificing devotion.

B. A.

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Old English

The first works in English, written in Old English, appeared in the early Middle Ages (the oldest surviving text is Cædmon's *Hymn*). The oral tradition was very strong in early British culture and most literary works were written to be performed. Epic poems were thus very popular and many, including *Beowulf*, have survived to the present day in the rich corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature that closely resemble today's Norwegian or, better yet, Icelandic. Much Anglo-Saxon verse in the extant manuscripts is probably a "milder" adaptation of the earlier Viking and German war poems from the continent. When such poetry was brought to England it was still being handed down orally from one generation to another, and the constant presence of alliterative verse, or consonant rhyme (today's newspaper headlines and marketing abundantly use this technique such as in *Big is Better*) helped the Anglo-Saxon peoples remember it. Such rhyme is a feature of Germanic languages and is opposed to vocalic or end-rhyme of Romance languages. But the first written literature dates to the early Christian monasteries founded by St. Augustine of Canterbury and his disciples and it is reasonable to believe that it was somehow adapted to suit to needs of Christian readers. Even without their crudest lines, Viking war poems still smell of blood feuds and their consonant rhymes sound like the smashing of swords under the gloomy northern sky: there is always a sense of imminent danger in the narratives. Sooner or later, all things must come to an end, as Beowulf eventually dies at the hands of the monsters he spends the tale fighting. The feelings of Beowulf that nothing lasts, that youth and joy will turn to death and sorrow entered Christianity and were to dominate the future landscape of English fiction.

Anglo-Saxon literature (or **Old English literature**) encompasses literature written in Anglo-Saxon (Old English) during the 600-year Anglo-Saxon period of England, from the mid-5th century to the Norman Conquest of 1066. These works include genres such as epic poetry, hagiography, sermons, Bible translations, legal works, chronicles, riddles, and others. In all there are about 400 surviving manuscripts from the period, a significant corpus of both popular interest and specialist research.

Among the most important works of this period is the poem *Beowulf*, which has achieved national epic status in Britain. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* otherwise proves significant to study of the era, preserving a chronology of early English history, while the poem *Cædmon's Hymn* from the 7th century survives as the oldest extant work of literature in English.

Anglo-Saxon literature has gone through different periods of research—in the 19th and early 20th centuries the focus was on the Germanic roots of English, later the literary merits were emphasized, and today the focus is upon paleography and the physical manuscripts themselves more generally: scholars debate such issues as dating, place of origin, authorship, and the connections between Anglo-Saxon culture and the rest of Europe in the Middle Ages.

A large number of manuscripts remain from the 600-year Anglo-Saxon period, with most written during the last 300 years (9th–11th century), in both Latin and the vernacular. Old English literature is among the oldest vernacular languages to be written down. Old English began, in written form, as a practical necessity in the aftermath of the Danish invasions—church officials were concerned that because of the drop in Latin literacy no one could read their work. Likewise King Alfred the Great (849–899), wanting to restore English culture, lamented the poor state of Latin education:

> *"So general was [educational] decay in England that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could...translate a letter from Latin into English; and I believe there were not many beyond the Humber"* (Pastoral Care, introduction).

King Alfred proposed that students be educated in Old English, and those who excelled would go on to learn Latin. In this way many of the texts that have survived are typical teaching and student-oriented texts.

Extant Manuscripts

In total there are about 400 surviving manuscripts containing Old English text, 189 of them considered major. These manuscripts have been highly prized by collectors

since the 16th century, both for their historic value and for their aesthetic beauty of uniformly spaced letters and decorative elements.

There are four major manuscripts:

- The *Junius manuscript*, also known as the *Caedmon manuscript*, which is an illustrated poetic anthology.
- The *Exeter Book*, also an anthology, located in the Exeter Cathedral since it was donated there in the 11th century.
- The *Vercelli Book*, a mix of poetry and prose; how it came to be in Vercelli, Italy, no one knows, and is a matter of debate.
- The *Nowell Codex*, also a mixture of poetry and prose. This is the manuscript that contains Beowulf.

Research in the 20th century has focused on dating the manuscripts (19th-century scholars tended to date them older than modern scholarship has found); locating where the manuscripts were created—there were seven major scriptoria from which they originate: Winchester, Exeter, Worcester, Abingdon, Durham, and two Canterbury houses Christ Church and St. Augustine; and identifying the regional dialects used: Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish, West Saxon (the last being the main dialect).

Not all of the texts can be fairly called literature; some are merely lists of names or aborted pen trials. However those that can present a sizable body of work, listed here in descending order of quantity: sermons and saints' lives (the most numerous), biblical translations; translated Latin works of the early Church Fathers; Anglo-Saxon chronicles and narrative history works; laws, wills and other legal works; practical works on grammar, medicine, geography; lastly, but not least important, poetry.

Nearly all Anglo-Saxon authors are anonymous, with some exceptions.

Old English Poetry

Old English poetry is of two types, the heroic Germanic pre-Christian and the Christian. It has survived for the most part in the four major manuscripts.

The Anglo-Saxons left behind no poetic rules or explicit system; everything we know about the poetry of the period is based on modern analysis. The first widely accepted theory was constructed by Eduard Sievers (1885). He distinguished five distinct alliterative patterns. The theory of John C. Pope (1942), which uses musical notation to track the verse patterns, has been accepted in some quarters; every few years a new theory arises and the topic continues to be hotly debated.

The most popular and well-known understanding of Old English poetry continues to be Sievers' alliterative verse. The system is based upon accent, alliteration, the quantity of vowels, and patterns of syllabic accentuation. It consists of five permutations on a base verse scheme; any one of the five types can be used in any verse. The system was inherited from and exists in one form or another in all of the older Germanic languages. Two poetic figures commonly found in Old English poetry are the kenning, an often formulaic phrase that describes one thing in terms of another (e.g. in Beowulf, the sea is called the *whale's road*) and litotes, a dramatic understatement employed by the author for ironic effect.

Roughly, Old English verse lines are divided in half by a pause; this pause is termed a "caesura." Each half-line has two stressed syllables. The first stressed syllable of the second half-line should alliterate with one or both of the stressed syllables of the first half-line (meaning, of course, that the stressed syllables in the first half-line could alliterate with each other). The second stressed syllable of the second half-line should not alliterate with either of the stressed syllables of the first half.

> *fyrene fremman feond on helle.*
> ("to perpetrate torment, fiend of hell.")
> -- *Beowulf*, line 101

Old English poetry was an oral craft, and our understanding of it in written form is incomplete; for example, we know that the poet (referred to as the *Scop*) could be accompanied by a harp, and there may be other aural traditions of which we are not aware.

Poetry represents the smallest amount of the surviving Old English text, but Anglo-Saxon culture had a rich tradition of oral storytelling, of which little has survived in written form.

The poets

Most Old English poets are anonymous; twelve are known by name from Medieval sources, but only four of those are known by their vernacular works to us today with any certainty: Caedmon, Bede, Alfred, and Cynewulf. Of these, only Caedmon, Bede, and Alfred have known biographies.

Caedmon is the best-known and considered the father of Old English poetry. He lived at the abbey of Whitby in Northumbria in the 7th century. Only a single nine line poem remains, called *Hymn*, which is also the oldest surviving text in English:

> Now let us praise the Guardian of the Kingdom of Heaven
> the might of the Creator and the thought of his mind,
> the work of the glorious Father, how He, the eternal Lord
> established the beginning of every wonder.
> For the sons of men, He, the Holy Creator
> first made heaven as a roof, then the
> Keeper of mankind, the eternal Lord
> God Almighty afterwards made the middle world
> the earth, for men.
> --(Caedmon, *Hymn*, St Petersburg Bede)

Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne (d. 709), is known through William of Malmesbury who said he performed secular songs while accompanied by a harp. Much of his Latin prose has survived, but none of his Old English remains.

Cynewulf has proven to be a difficult figure to identify, but recent research suggests he was from the early part of the 9th century to which a number of poems are attributed including *The Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene* (both found in the Vercelli Book), and *Christ II* and *Juliana* (both found in the Exeter Book).

Heroic poems

The Old English poetry which has received the most attention deals with the Germanic heroic past. The longest (3,182 lines), and most important, is *Beowulf*, which appears in the damaged Nowell Codex. The poem tells the story of the legendary Geatish hero Beowulf who is the title character. The story is set in Scandinavia, in Sweden and Denmark, and the tale likewise probably is of Scandinavian origin. The story is biographical and sets the tone for much of the rest of Old English poetry. It has achieved national epic status, on the same level as the Iliad, and is of interest to historians, anthropologists, literary critics, and students the world over.

Beyond *Beowulf,* other heroic poems exist. Two heroic poems have survived in fragments: *The Fight at Finnsburh*, a retelling of one of the battle scenes in *Beowulf* (although this relation to *Beowulf* is much debated), and *Waldere*, a version of the events of the life of Walter of Aquitaine. Two other poems mention heroic figures: *Widsith* is believed to be very old in parts, dating back to events in the 4th century concerning Eormanric and the Goths, and contains a catalogue of names and places associated with valiant deeds. *Deor* is a lyric, in the style of *Consolation of Philosophy*, applying examples of famous heroes, including Weland and Eormanric, to the narrator's own case.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* contains various heroic poems inserted throughout. The earliest from 937 is called *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which celebrates the victory of King Athelstan over the Scots and Norse. There are five shorter poems: capture of the Five Boroughs (942); coronation of King Edgar (973); death of King Edgar (975); death of Prince Alfred (1036); and death of King Edward the Confessor (1065).

The 325 line poem *Battle of Maldon* celebrates Earl Byrhtnoth and his men who fell in battle against the Vikings in 991. It is considered one of the finest, but both the beginning and end are missing and the only manuscript was destroyed in a fire in 1731. A well-known speech is near the end of the poem:

> Thought shall be the harder, the heart the keener, courage the greater, as our strength lessens.
> Here lies our leader all cut down, the valiant man in the dust;
> always may he mourn who now thinks to turn away from this warplay.
> I am old, I will not go away, but I plan to lie down by the side of my lord, by the man so dearly loved.
> -- (*Battle of Maldon*)

Old English heroic poetry was handed down orally from generation to generation. As Christianity began to appear, retellers often recast the tales of Christianity into the older heroic stories.

Elegiac Poetry

Related to the heroic tales are a number of short poems from the Exeter Book which have come to be described as "elegies" or "wisdom poetry". They are lyrical and Boethian in their description of the up and down fortunes of life. Gloomy in mood is *The Ruin*, which tells of the decay of a once glorious city of Roman Britain (cities in Britain fell into decline after the Romans departed in the early 5th c., as the early English continued to live their rural life), and *The Wanderer*, in which an older man talks about an attack that happened in his youth, where his close friends and kin were all killed; memories of the slaughter have remained with him all his life. He questions the wisdom of the impetuous decision to engage a possibly superior fighting force: the wise man engages in warfare to *preserve* civil society, and must not rush into battle but seek out allies when the odds may be against him. This poet finds little glory in bravery for bravery's sake. *The Seafarer* is the story of a somber exile from home on the sea, from which the only hope of redemption is the joy of heaven. Other wisdom poems include *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*. King Alfred the Great wrote a wisdom poem over the course of his reign based loosely on the neoplatonic philosophy of Boethius called the *Lays of Boethius*.

Classical and Latin poetry

Several Old English poems are adaptations of late classical philosophical texts. The longest is a 10th century translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*

contained in the Cotton manuscript. Another is *The Phoenix* in the Exeter Book, an allegorization of the *De ave phoenice* by Lactantius.

Other short poems derive from the Latin bestiary tradition. Some examples include *The Panther*, *The Whale* and *The Partridge*.

Christian poetry

Saints' Lives

The Vercelli Book and Exeter Book contain four long narrative poems of saints' lives, or hagiography. In Vercelli are *Andreas* and *Elene* and in Exeter are *Guthlac* and *Juliana*.

Andreas is 1,722 lines long and is the closest of the surviving Old English poems to *Beowulf* in style and tone. It is the story of Saint Andrew and his journey to rescue Saint Matthew from the Mermedonians. *Elene* is the story of Saint Helena (mother of Constantine) and her discovery of the True Cross. The cult of the True Cross was popular in Anglo-Saxon England and this poem was instrumental.

Guthlac is actually two poems about English Saint Guthlac (7th century). *Juliana* is the story of the virgin martyr Juliana of Nicomedia.

Biblical paraphrases

The Junius manuscript contains three paraphrases of Old Testament texts. These were re-wordings of Biblical passages in Old English, not exact translations, but paraphrasing, sometimes into beautiful poetry in its own right. The first and longest is of *Genesis*. The second is of *Exodus*. The third is *Daniel*.

The Nowell Codex contains a Biblical poetic paraphrase, which appears right after *Beowulf*, called *Judith*, a retelling of the story of Judith. This is not to be confused with Aelfric's homily *Judith*, which retells the same Biblical story in alliterative prose.

The Psalter Psalms 51-150 are preserved, following a prose version of the first 50 Psalms. It is believed there was once a complete psalter based on evidence, but only the first 150 have survived.

There are a number of verse translations of the Gloria in Excelsis, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, as well as a number of hymns and proverbs.

Christian poems

In addition to Biblical paraphrases are a number of original religious poems, mostly lyrical (non-narrative).

The Exeter Book contains a series of poems entitled *Christ*, sectioned into *Christ I*, *Christ II* and *Christ III*.

Considered one of the most beautiful of all Old English poems is *Dream of the Rood*, contained in the Vercelli Book. It is a dream vision of Christ on the cross, with the cross personified, speaking thus:

> "I endured much hardship up on that hill. I saw the God of hosts stretched out cruelly. Darkness had covered with cloud s the body of the Lord, the bright radiance. A shadow went forth, dark under the heavens. All creation wept, mourned the death of the king. Christ was on the cross."
>
> -- (*Dream of the Rood*)

The dreamer resolves to trust in the cross, and the dream ends with a vision of heaven.

There are a number of religious debate poems. The longest is *Christ and Satan* in the Junius manuscript, it deals with the conflict between Christ and Satan during the forty days in the desert. Another debate poem is *Solomon and Saturn*, surviving in a number of textual fragments, Saturn is portrayed as a magician debating with the wise king Solomon.

Other poems

Other poetic forms exist in Old English including riddles, short verses, gnomes, and mnemonic poems for remembering long lists of names.

The Exeter Book has a collection of ninety-five riddles. The answers are not supplied, a number of them to this day remain a puzzle, and some of the answers are obscene.

There are short verses found in the margins of manuscripts which offer practical advice There are remedies against the loss of cattle, how to deal with a delayed birth, swarms of bees, etc.. the longest is called *Nine Herbs Charm* and is probably of pagan origin.

There are a group of mnemonic poems designed to help memorise lists and sequences of names and to keep objects in order. These poems are named *Menologium*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *The Rune Poem*, *The Seasons for Fasting*, and the *Instructions for Christians*.

Specific features of Anglo-Saxon poetry

Simile and Metaphor

Anglo-Saxon poetry is marked by the comparative rarity of similes. This is a particular feature of Anglo-Saxon verse style, and is a consequence of both its structure and the rapidity with which images are deployed, to be unable to effectively support the expanded simile. As an example of this, the epic Beowulf contains at best five similes, and these are of the short variety. This can be contrasted sharply with the strong and extensive dependence that Anglo-Saxon poetry has upon metaphor, particularly that afforded by the use of kennings. The most prominent example of this in The Wanderer is the reference to battle as a "storm of spears". This reference to battle gives us an opportunity to see how Anglo-Saxons viewed battle: as unpredictable, chaotic, violent, and perhaps even a function of nature. It is with these stylistic and thematic elements in mind, that one should first approach Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Alliteration

Old English poetry traditionally alliterates. Meaning that sounds (usually the initial consonant sound) is repeated throughout a line. For instance in Beowulf the line *weras on wil-siþ wudu bundenne* "man on desired journey bound the ship", most of the words alliterate on the consonant "w". So pervasive and important is the alliterative form that in the Beowulf line just cited, the poet probably started off with the word wil-siþ ("desired journey" the most important idea of the line) and then put other words in the line that alliterated with it. So important is alliteration then that it

even shapes the meaning of the line. This is not a foreign concept to the study of oral tradition in transcription.

Caesura

Old English poetry is also commonly marked by the German caesura or pause. In addition to setting pace for the line the caesura also grouped each line into two couplets.

Elaboration

Anglo-Saxon poetry has a fast-paced dramatic style, and accordingly is not prone to the comparatively expansive decoration that may be found in, say, Celtic literature of the period. Where a Celtic poet of the time might use 3 or 4 similes to make a point, an Anglo-Saxon poet might insert a single kenning before moving swiftly on.

Old English Poetry and the Oral-Formulaic Theory

Though Old English Poetry has been extensively studied for evidence of the theory that it was recited using Oral-Formulaic Composition, it seems that it was composed partly in the modern, word-by-word manner and partly by using cobbled-together themes and formulas.

Old English Prose

The amount of surviving Old English prose is much greater than the amount of poetry. Of the surviving prose, sermons and Latin translations of religious works are the majority. Old English prose first appears in the 9th century, and continues to be recorded through the 12th century.

Christian prose

The most widely known author of Old English was King Alfred, who translated many books from Latin into Old English. These translations include: Gregory the Great's *The Pastoral Care*, a manual for priests on how to conduct their duties; *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius; and *The Soliloquies* of Saint Augustine. Alfred was also responsible for a translation of the fifty Psalms into Old English. Other important Old English translations completed by associates of Alfred include: *The History of the World* by Orosius, a companion piece for Augustine of Hippo's

The City of God; the Dialogues of Gregory the Great; and the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by Bede.

Ælfric of Eynsham, wrote in the late 10th and early 11th century. He was the greatest and most prolific writer of Anglo-Saxon sermons, which were copied and adapted for use well into the 13th century. He also wrote a number of saints lives, an Old English work on time-reckoning, pastoral letters, translations of the first six books of the Bible, glosses and translations of other parts of the Bible including Proverbs, Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus.

In the same category as Aelfric, and a contemporary, was Wulfstan II, archbishop of York. His sermons were highly stylistic. His best known work is *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* in which he blames the sins of the British for the Viking invasions. He wrote a number of clerical legal texts *Institutes of Polity* and *Canons of Edgar*.

One of the earliest Old English texts in prose is the *Martyrology*, information about saints and martyrs according to their anniversaries and feasts in the church calendar. It has survived in six fragments. It is believed to date from the 9th century by an anonymous Mercian author.

The oldest collection of church sermons are the *Blickling homilies* in the Vercelli Book and dates from the 10th century.

There are a number of saint's lives prose works. Beyond those written by Aelfric are the prose life of Saint Guthlac (Vercelli Book), the life of Saint Margaret and the life of Saint Chad. There are four lives in the Julius manuscript: Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, Saint Mary of Egypt, Saint Eustace and Saint Euphrosyne.

There are many Old English translations of many parts of the Bible. Aelfric translated the first six books of the Bible (the Hexateuch). There is a translation of the Gospels. The most popular was the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, others included "..the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, *Vindicta salvatoris*, *Vision of Saint Paul* and the *Apocalypse of Thomas*".

One of the largest bodies of Old English text is found in the legal texts collected and saved by the religious houses. These include many kinds of texts: records of

donations by nobles; wills; documents of emancipation; lists of books and relics; court cases; guild rules. All of these texts provide valuable insights into the social history of Anglo-Saxon times, but are also of literary value. For example, some of the court case narratives are interesting for their use of rhetoric.

Secular prose

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was probably started in the time of King Alfred and continued for over 300 years as a historical record of Anglo-Saxon history.

A single example of a Classical romance has survived, it is a fragment of the story of *Apollonius of Tyre, from the 11th century*.

A monk who was writing in Old English at the same time as Aelfric and Wulfstan was Byrhtferth of Ramsey, whose books *Handboc* and *Manual* were studies of mathematics and rhetoric.

Aelfric wrote two neo-scientific works, *Hexameron* and *Interrogationes Sigewulfi*, dealing with the stories of Creation. He also wrote a grammar and glossary in Old English called *Latin*, later used by students interested in learning Old French because it had been glossed in Old French.

There are many surviving rules and calculations for finding feast days, and tables on calculating the tides and the season of the moon.

In the Nowell Codex is the text of *The Wonders of the East* which includes a remarkable map of the world, and other illustrations. Also contained in Nowell is *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*. Because this is the same manuscript that contains *Beowulf*, some scholars speculate it may have been a collection of materials on exotic places and creatures.

There are a number of interesting medical works. There is a translation of Apuleius's *Herbarium* with striking illustrations, found together with *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*. A second collection of texts is *Bald's Leechbook*, a 10th century book containing herbal and even some surgical cures. A third collections is known as the *Lacnunga*, which relies of charms, incantations, and white magic.

Anglo-Saxon legal texts are a large and important part of the overall corpus. By the 12th century they had been arranged into two large collections (see *Textus Roffensis*). They include laws of the kings, beginning with those of Aethelbert of Kent, and texts dealing with specific cases and places in the country. An interesting example is *Gerefa* which outlines the duties of a reeve on a large manor estate. There is also a large volume of legal documents related to religious houses.

Historiography

Old English literature did not disappear in 1066 with the Norman Conquest. Many sermons and works continued to be read and used in part or whole up through the 14th century, and were further catalogued and organised. During the Reformation, when monastic libraries were dispersed, the manuscripts were collected by antiquarians and scholars. These included Laurence Nowell, Matthew Parker, Robert Bruce Cotton and Humfrey Wanley. In the 17th century begun a tradition of Old English literature dictionaries and references. The first was William Somner's *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum* (1659). Lexicographer Joseph Bosworth began a dictionary in the 19th century which was completed by Thomas Northcote Toller in 1898 called *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, which was updated by Alistair Campbell in 1972.

Because Old English was one of the first vernacular languages to be written down, nineteenth century scholars searching for the roots of European "national culture" (see Romantic Nationalism) took special interest in studying Anglo-Saxon literature, and Old English became a regular part of university curriculum. Since WWII there has been increasing interest in the manuscripts themselves—Neil Ker, a paleographer, published the groundbreaking *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* in 1957, and by 1980 nearly all Anglo-Saxon manuscript texts were in print. J.R.R. Tolkien is credited with creating a movement to look at Old English as a subject of literary theory in his seminal lecture *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (1936).

Old English literature has had an influence on modern literature. Some of the best-known translations include William Morris' translation of *Beowulf* and Ezra Pound's translation of *The Seafarer*. The influence of the poetry can be seen in modern poets

T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and W. H. Auden. Tolkien adapted the subject matter and terminology of heroic poetry for works like *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Renaissance Literature

The **English Renaissance** was a cultural and artistic movement in England dating from the early 16th century to the early 17th century. It is associated with the pan-European Renaissance that many cultural historians believe originated in northern Italy in the fourteenth century. This era in English cultural history is sometimes referred to as "the age of Shakespeare" or "the Elizabethan era."

Poets such as Edmund Spenser and John Milton produced works that demonstrated an increased interest in understanding English Christian beliefs, such as the allegorical representation of the Tudor Dynasty in The Faerie Queen and the retelling of mankind's fall from paradise in Paradise Lost; playwrights, such as Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, composed theatrical representations of the English take on life, death, and history. Nearing the end of the Tudor Dynasty, philosophers like Sir Thomas More and Sir Francis Bacon published their own ideas about humanity and the aspects of a perfect society, pushing the limits of metacognition at that time. England came closer to reaching modern science with the Baconian Method, a forerunner of the Scientific Method.

The steadfast English mind clung to the old order of things, and relinquished with reluctance the last relics of a style that had been for centuries a part of its life. If it must have the egg and dart, it would keep the Tudor flower too. Thus all the Renaissance that came into England, after the bloody Wars of the Roses made it possible to think of art and luxury, paid toll to the Gothic on the way, and the result was a singular miscellany, for its Gothic had now forgotten, and its Renaissance had never known why it had existed. It is rather the talent with which the medley of material was handled, the broad masses, yet curious elaboration, and the scale of magnificence, that give the style its charm rather than anything in its original and bastard composition.

Something of this same charm is to be found in most of the literature of the era, in accordance with that subtle relationship existing between the literature and the art of any period. It is in the lawless mixture of Gothic and Grecian characterizing the Elizabethan that Shakespeare peoples his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Gothic

fairies reveling in the Athenian forest, and poet Edmund Spenser fills his pages with a pageantry of medieval monsters and classic masks. Shakespeare is a peculiar product of the Renaissance. The machinery of *The Tempest* and the setting of *The Merchant of Venice* are direct results of its spirit.

Criticisms of the Idea of the English Renaissance

The notion of calling this period "The Renaissance" is a modern invention, having been popularized by the historian Jacob Burckhardt in the nineteenth century. The idea of the Renaissance has come under increased criticism by many cultural historians, and some have contended that the "English Renaissance" has no real tie with the artistic achievements and aims of the northern Italian artists (Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello) who are closely identified with the Renaissance. Indeed, England had already experienced a flourishing of literature over 200 years before the time of Shakespeare when Geoffrey Chaucer was working. Chaucer's popularizing of English as a medium of literary composition rather than Latin was only 50 years after Dante had started using Italian for serious poetry. At the same time William Langland, author of *Piers Plowman*, and John Gower were also writing in English. The Hundred Years' War and the subsequent civil war in England known as the Wars of the Roses probably hampered artistic endeavor until the relatively peaceful and stable reign of Elizabeth I allowed drama in particular to develop. Even during these war years, though, Thomas Malory, author of Le Morte D'Arthur, was a notable figure. For this reason, scholars find the singularity of the period called the English Renaissance questionable; C. S. Lewis, a professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature at Oxford and Cambridge, famously remarked to a colleague that he had "discovered" that there was no English Renaissance, and that if there had been one, it had "no effect whatsoever"

Historians have also begun to consider the word "Renaissance" as an unnecessarily loaded word that implies an unambiguously positive "rebirth" from the supposedly more primitive Middle Ages. Some historians have asked the question "a renaissance for whom?," pointing out, for example, that the status of women in society arguably declined during the Renaissance. Many historians and cultural historians now prefer to use the term "early modern" for this period, a neutral term that highlights the

period as a transitional one that led to the modern world, but does not have any positive or negative connotations.

Other cultural historians have countered that, regardless of whether the name "renaissance" is apt, there was undeniably an artistic flowering in England under the Tudor monarchs, culminating in Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

Following the introduction of a printing press into England by William Caxton in 1476, vernacular literature flourished. The Reformation inspired the production of vernacular liturgy which led to the Book of Common Prayer, a lasting influence on literary English language. The poetry, drama, and prose produced under both Queen Elizabeth I and King James I constitute what is today labelled as Early modern (or Renaissance).

Early Modern Period

Elizabethan Era

The Elizabethan era saw a great flourishing of literature, especially in the field of drama. The Italian Renaissance had rediscovered the ancient Greek and Roman theatre, and this was instrumental in the development of the new drama, which was then beginning to evolve apart from the old mystery and miracle plays of the Middle Ages. The Italians were particularly inspired by Seneca (a major tragic playwright and philosopher, the tutor of Nero) and Plautus (its comic clichés, especially that of the boasting soldier had a powerful influence on the Renaissance and after). However, the Italian tragedies embraced a principle contrary to Seneca's ethics: showing blood and violence on the stage. In Seneca's plays such scenes were only acted by the characters. But the English playwrights were intrigued by Italian model: a conspicuous community of Italian actors had settled in London and Giovanni Florio had brought much of the Italian language and culture to England. It is also true that the Elizabethan Era was a very violent age and that the high incidence of political assassinations in Renaissance Italy (embodied by Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*) did little to calm fears of popish plots. As a result, representing that kind of violence on the stage was probably more cathartic for the Elizabethan spectator. Following earlier Elizabethan plays such as *Gorboduc* by Sackville & Norton and *The Spanish Tragedy* by Kyd that was to provide much material for *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare stands out in this period as a poet and playwright as yet unsurpassed. Shakespeare was not a man of letters by profession, and probably had only some grammar school education. He was neither a lawyer, nor an aristocrat as the "university wits" that had monopolised the English stage when he started writing. But he was very gifted and incredibly versatile, and he surpassed "professionals" as Robert Greene who mocked this "shake-scene" of low origins. Though most dramas met with great success, it is in his later years (marked by the early reign of James I) that he wrote what have been considered his greatest plays: *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Tempest*, a tragicomedy that inscribes within the main drama a brilliant pageant to the new king. This 'play within a play' takes the form of a masque, an interlude with music and dance coloured by the novel special effects of the new indoor theatres. Critics

have shown that this masterpiece, which can be considered a dramatic work in its own right, was written for James's court, if not for the monarch himself. The magic arts of Prospero, on which depend the outcome of the plot, hint at the fine relationship between art and nature in poetry. Significantly for those times (the arrival of the first colonists in America), *The Tempest* is (though not apparently) set on a Bermudan island, as research on the *Bermuda Pamphlets* (1609) has shown, linking Shakespeare to the *Virginia Company itself*. The "News from the New World", as Frank Kermode points out, were already out and Shakespeare's interest in this respect is remarkable. Shakespeare also popularized the English sonnet which made significant changes to Petrarch's model.

The sonnet was introduced into English by Thomas Wyatt in the early 16th century. Poems intended to be set to music as songs, such as by Thomas Campion, became popular as printed literature was disseminated more widely in households. *See English Madrigal School*. Other important figures in Elizabethan theatre include Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont. Had Marlowe (1564-1593) not been stabbed at twenty-nine in a tavern brawl, says Anthony Burgess, he might have rivalled, if not equalled Shakespeare himself for his poetic gifts. Remarkably, he was born only a few weeks before Shakespeare and must have known him well. Marlowe's subject matter, though, is different: it focuses more on the moral drama of the renaissance man than any other thing. Marlowe was fascinated and terrified by the new frontiers opened by modern science. Drawing on German lore, he introduced Dr. Faustus to England, a scientist and magician who is obsessed by the thirst of knowledge and the desire to push man's technological power to its limits. He acquires supernatural gifts that even allow him to go back in time and wed Helen of Troy, but at the end of his twenty-four years' covenant with the devil he has to surrender his soul to him. His dark heroes may have something of Marlowe himself, whose untimely death remains a mystery. He was known for being an atheist, leading a lawless life, keeping many mistresses, consorting with ruffians: living the 'high life' of London's underworld. But many suspect that this might have been a cover-up for his activities as a secret agent for Elizabeth I, hinting that the 'accidental stabbing' might have been a premeditated assassination by the enemies of The Crown. Beaumont and Fletcher are less-known, but it is almost sure that they helped Shakespeare write some of his best dramas, and were quite popular at the

time. It is also at this time that the city comedy genre develops. In the later 16th century English poetry was characterised by elaboration of language and extensive allusion to classical myths. The most important poets of this era include Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney. Elizabeth herself, a product of Renaissance humanism, produced occasional poems such as *On Monsieur's Departure*.

Jacobean Literature

After Shakespeare's death, the poet and dramatist Ben Jonson was the leading literary figure of the Jacobean era (The reign of James I). However, Jonson's aesthetics hark back to the Middle Ages rather than to the Tudor Era: his characters embody the theory of humours. According to this contemporary medical theory, behavioral differences result from a prevalence of one of the body's four "humours" (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile) over the other three; these humours correspond with the four elements of the universe: air, water, fire, and earth. This leads Jonson to exemplify such differences to the point of creating types, or clichés.

Jonson is a master of style, and a brilliant satirist. His *Volpone* shows how a group of scammers are fooled by a top con-artist, vice being punished by vice, virtue meting out its reward.

Others who followed Jonson's style include Beaumont and Fletcher, who wrote the brilliant comedy, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a mockery of the rising middle class and especially of those nouveaux riches who pretend to dictate literary taste without knowing much literature at all. In the story, a couple of grocers wrangle with professional actors to have their illiterate son play a leading role in a drama. He becomes a knight-errant wearing, appropriately, a burning pestle on his shield. Seeking to win a princess' heart, the young man is ridiculed much in the way Don Quixote was. One of Beaumont and Fletcher's chief merits was that of realising how feudalism and chivalry had turned into snobbery and make-believe and that new social classes were on the rise.

Another popular style of theatre during Jacobean times was the revenge play, popularized by John Webster and Thomas Kyd. George Chapman wrote a couple of subtle revenge tragedies, but must be remembered chiefly on account of his famous

translation of Homer, one that had a profound influence on all future English literature, even inspiring John Keats to write one of his best sonnets.

The King James Bible, one of the most massive translation projects in the history of English up to this time, was started in 1604 and completed in 1611. It represents the culmination of a tradition of Bible translation into English that began with the work of William Tyndale. It became the standard Bible of the Church of England, and some consider it one of the greatest literary works of all time. This project was headed by James I himself, who supervised the work of forty-seven scholars. Although many other translations into English have been made, some of which are widely considered more accurate, many aesthetically prefer the King James Bible, whose meter is made to mimic the original Hebrew verse.

Besides Shakespeare, whose figure towers over the early 1600s, the major poets of the early 17th century included John Donne and the other Metaphysical poets. Influenced by continental Baroque, and taking as his subject matter both Christian mysticism and eroticism, metaphysical poetry uses unconventional or "unpoetic" figures, such as a compass or a mosquito, to reach surprise effects. For example, in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", one of Donne's Songs and Sonnets, the points of a compass represent two lovers, the woman who is home, waiting, being the centre, the farther point being her lover sailing away from her. But the larger the distance, the more the hands of the compass lean to each other: separation makes love grow fonder. The paradox or the oxymoron is a constant in this poetry whose fears and anxieties also speak of a world of spiritual certainties shaken by the modern discoveries of geography and science, one that is no longer the centre of the universe. Apart from the metaphysical poetry of Donne, the 17th century is also celebrated for its Baroque poetry. Baroque poetry served the same ends as the art of the period; the Baroque style is lofty, sweeping, epic, and religious. Many of these poets have an overtly Catholic sensibility (namely Richard Crashaw) and wrote poetry for the Catholic counter-Reformation in order to establish a feeling of supremacy and mysticism that would ideally persuade newly emerging Protestant groups back toward Catholicism.

Caroline and Cromwellian Literature

The turbulent years of the mid-17th century, during the reign of Charles I and the subsequent Commonwealth and Protectorate, saw a flourishing of political literature in English. Pamphlets written by sympathisers of every faction in the English civil war ran from vicious personal attacks and polemics, through many forms of propaganda, to high-minded schemes to reform the nation. Of the latter type, *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes would prove to be one of the most important works of British political philosophy. Hobbes's writings are some of the few political works from the era which are still regularly published while John Bramhall, who was Hobbes's chief critic, is largely forgotten. The period also saw a flourishing of news books, the precursors to the British newspaper, with journalists such as Henry Muddiman, Marchamont Needham, and John Birkenhead representing the views and activities of the contending parties. The frequent arrests of authors and the suppression of their works, with the consequence of foreign or underground printing, led to the proposal of a licensing system. The *Areopagitica*, a political pamphlet by John Milton, was written in opposition to licensing and is regarded as one of the most eloquent defenses of press freedom ever written.

Specifically in the reign of Charles I (1625 – 42), English Renaissance theatre experienced its concluding efflorescence. The last works of Ben Jonson appeared on stage and in print, along with the final generation of major voices in the drama of the age: John Ford, Philip Massinger, James Shirley, and Richard Brome. With the closure of the theatres at the start of the English Civil War in 1642, drama was suppressed for a generation, to resume only in the altered society of the English Restoration in 1660.

Other forms of literature written during this period are usually ascribed political subtexts, or their authors are grouped along political lines. The cavalier poets, active mainly before the civil war, owed much to the earlier school of metaphysical poets. The forced retirement of royalist officials after the execution of Charles I was a good thing in the case of Izaak Walton, as it gave him time to work on his book *The Compleat Angler*. Published in 1653, the book, ostensibly a guide to fishing, is much more: a meditation on life, leisure, and contentment. The two most important poets of Oliver Cromwell's England were Andrew Marvell and John Milton, with both

producing works praising the new government; such as Marvell's *An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*. Despite their republican beliefs they escaped punishment upon the Restoration of Charles II, after which Milton wrote some of his greatest poetical works (with any possible political message hidden under allegory). Thomas Browne was another writer of the period; a learned man with an extensive library, he wrote prolifically on science, religion, medicine and the esoteric.

Restoration Literature

Restoration literature is the English literature written during the historical period commonly referred to as the English Restoration (1660–1689), which corresponds to the last years of the direct Stuart reign in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. In general, the term is used to denote roughly homogeneous styles of literature that centre on a celebration of or reaction to the restored court of Charles II. It is a literature that includes extremes, for it encompasses both *Paradise Lost* and the Earl of Rochester's *Sodom*, the high-spirited sexual comedy of *The Country Wife* and the moral wisdom of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It saw Locke's *Treatises of Government*, the founding of the Royal Society, the experiments and holy meditations of Robert Boyle, the hysterical attacks on theatres from Jeremy Collier, and the pioneering of literary criticism from John Dryden and John Dennis. The period witnessed news become a commodity, the essay develop into a periodical art form, the beginnings of textual criticism, and the emergence of the stock market.

The dates for "Restoration literature" are a matter of convention, and they differ markedly from genre to genre. Thus, the "Restoration" in drama may last until 1700, while in poetry it may last only until 1666 and the *annus mirabilis*; and in prose it might end in 1688, with the increasing tensions over succession and the corresponding rise in journalism and periodicals, or not until 1700, when those periodicals grew more stabilised. In general, the term "Restoration" is used to denote the literature that began and flourished due to Charles II, whether that literature was the laudatory ode that gained a new life with restored aristocracy or the eschatological literature that showed an increasing despair among Puritans, or the literature of rapid communication and trade that followed in the wake of England's mercantile empire.

Historical context and content

During the Interregnum, England had been dominated by Puritan literature and the intermittent presence of official censorship (see, for example, Milton's *Areopagitica* and his later retraction of that statement). While some of the Puritan ministers of Oliver Cromwell wrote poetry that was elaborate and carnal (e.g. Andrew Marvell's "Mower" poems and "To His Coy Mistress"), such poetry was not published. Similarly, some of the poets who published with the Restoration produced their poetry during the Interregnum. However, the official break in literary culture caused by censorship and radically moralist standards effectively created a gap in literary tradition. At the time of the Civil War, poetry had been dominated by metaphysical poetry of the John Donne, George Herbert, and Richard Lovelace sort. Drama had developed the late Elizabethan theatre traditions and had begun to mount increasingly topical and political plays (for example, the drama of Thomas Middleton). The Interregnum put a stop, or at least a caesura, to these lines of influence and allowed a seemingly fresh start for all forms of literature after the Restoration.

The last years of the Interregnum were turbulent, as the last years of the Restoration period would be, and those who did not go into exile were called on to change their religious beliefs more than once. With each religious preference came a different sort of literature, both in prose and poetry (the theatres were closed during the Interregnum). When Cromwell died and his son, Richard Cromwell, threatened to become Lord Protector, politicians and public figures scrambled to show themselves allies or enemies of the new regime. Printed literature was dominated by odes in poetry, and religious writing in prose. The industry of religious tract writing, despite official efforts, did not reduce its output. Figures such as the founder of the Society of Friends, George Fox, were jailed by the Cromwellian authorities and published at their own peril.

During the Interregnum, the royalist forces attached to the court of Charles I went into exile with the twenty-year-old Charles II and conducted a brisk business in intelligence and fund-raising for an eventual return to England. Some of the royalist ladies installed themselves in convents in Holland and France that offered safe haven for indigent and travelling nobles and allies. The men similarly stationed themselves

in Holland and France, with the court-in-exile being established in The Hague before setting up more permanently in Paris. The nobility who travelled with (and later travelled to) Charles II were therefore lodged for more than a decade in the midst of the continent's literary scene. As Holland and France in the 17th century were little alike, so the influences picked up by courtiers in exile and the travellers who sent intelligence and money to them were not monolithic. Charles spent his time attending plays in France, and he developed a taste for Spanish plays. Those nobles living in Holland began to learn about mercantile exchange as well as the tolerant, rationalist prose debates that circulated in that officially tolerant nation. John Bramhall, for example, had been a strongly high church theologian, and yet, in exile, he debated willingly with Thomas Hobbes and came into the Restored church as tolerant in practice as he was severe in argument. Courtiers also received an exposure to the Roman Catholic Church and its liturgy and pageants, as well as, to a lesser extent, Italian poetry.

The Restoration and its initial reaction

When Charles II became king in 1660, the sense of novelty in literature was tempered by a sense of suddenly participating in European literature in a way that England had not before. One of Charles's first moves was to reopen the theatres and to grant letters patent giving mandates for the theatre owners and managers. Thomas Killigrew received one of the patents, establishing the King's Company and opening the first patent theatre at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane; Sir William Davenant received the other, establishing the Duke of York's theatre company and opening his patent theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Drama was public and a matter of royal concern, and therefore both theatres were charged with producing a certain number of old plays, and Davenant was charged with presenting material that would be morally uplifting. Additionally, the position of Poet Laureate was recreated, complete with payment by a barrel of "sack" (Spanish white wine), and the requirement for birthday odes.

Charles II was a man who prided himself on his wit and his worldliness. He was well known as a philanderer as well. Highly witty, playful, and sexually wise poetry thus had court sanction. Charles and his brother James, the Duke of York and future King of England, also sponsored mathematics and natural philosophy, and so spirited

scepticism and investigation into nature were favoured by the court. Charles II sponsored the Royal Society, which courtiers were eager to join (for example, the noted diarist Samuel Pepys was a member), just as Royal Society members moved in court. Charles and his court had also learned the lessons of exile. Charles was High Church (and secretly vowed to convert to Roman Catholicism on his death) and James was crypto-Catholic, but royal policy was generally tolerant of religious and political dissenters. While Charles II did have his own version of the Test Act, he was slow to jail or persecute Puritans, preferring merely to keep them from public office (and therefore to try to rob them of their Parliamentary positions). As a consequence, the prose literature of dissent, political theory, and economics increased in Charles II's reign.

Authors moved in two directions in reaction to Charles's return. On the one hand, there was an attempt at recovering the English literature of the Jacobean period, as if there had been no disruption; but, on the other, there was a powerful sense of novelty, and authors approached Gallic models of literature and elevated the literature of wit (particularly satire and parody). The novelty would show in the literature of sceptical inquiry, and the Gallicism would show in the introduction of Neoclassicism into English writing and criticism.

Top-down history

The Restoration is an unusual historical period, as its literature is bounded by a specific political event: the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. It is unusual in another way, as well, for it is a time when the influence of that king's presence and personality permeated literary society to such an extent that, almost uniquely, literature reflects the court. The adversaries of the restoration, the Puritans and democrats and republicans, similarly respond to the peculiarities of the king and the king's personality. Therefore, a top-down view of the literary history of the Restoration has more validity than that of most literary epochs. "The Restoration" as a critical concept covers the duration of the effect of Charles and Charles's manner. This effect extended beyond his death, in some instances, and not as long as his life, in others.

Poetry

The Restoration was an age of poetry. Not only was poetry the most popular form of literature, but it was also the most *significant* form of literature, as poems affected political events and immediately reflected the times. It was, to its own people, an age dominated only by the king, and not by any single genius. Throughout the period, the lyric, ariel, historical, and epic poem was being developed.

The English epic

Even without the introduction of Neo-classical criticism, English poets were aware that they had no national epic. Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was well known, but England, unlike France with *The Song of Roland* or Spain with the *Cantar de Mio Cid* or, most of all, Italy with the *Aeneid*, had no epic poem of national origins. Several poets attempted to supply this void.

Sir William Davenant was the first Restoration poet to attempt an epic. His unfinished *Gondibert* was of epic length, and it was admired by Hobbes. However, it also used the ballad form, and other poets, as well as critics, were very quick to condemn this rhyme scheme as unflattering and unheroic (Dryden *Epic*). The prefaces to *Gondibert* show the struggle for a formal epic structure, as well as how the early Restoration saw themselves in relation to Classical literature.

Although today he is studied separately from the Restoration period, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* was published during that time. Milton no less than Davenant wished to write the English epic, and chose blank verse as his form. Milton rejected the cause of English exceptionalism: his *Paradise Lost* seeks to tell the story of all mankind, and his pride is in Christianity rather than Englishness.

Significantly, Milton began with an attempt at writing an epic on King Arthur, for that was the matter of English national founding. While Milton rejected that subject, in the end, others made the attempt. Richard Blackmore wrote both a *Prince Arthur* and *King Arthur*. Both attempts were long, soporific, and failed both critically and popularly. Indeed, the poetry was so slow that the author became known as "Never-ending Blackmore" (see Alexander Pope's lambasting of Blackmore in *The Dunciad*).

The Restoration period ended without an English epic. *Beowulf* may now be called the English epic, but the work was unknown to Restoration authors, and Old English was incomprehensible to them.

Lyric poetry, pastoral poetry, ariel verse, and odes

Lyric poetry, in which the poet speaks of his or her own feelings in the first person and expresses a mood, was not especially common in the Restoration period. Poets expressed their points of view in other forms, usually public or formally disguised poetic forms such as odes, pastoral poetry, and ariel verse. One of the characteristics of the period is its devaluation of individual sentiment and psychology in favour of public utterance and philosophy. The sorts of lyric poetry found later in the Churchyard Poets would, in the Restoration, only exist as pastorals.

Formally, the Restoration period had a preferred rhyme scheme. Rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter was by far the most popular structure for poetry of all types. Neo-Classicism meant that poets attempted adaptations of Classical meters, but the rhyming couplet in iambic pentameter held a near monopoly. According to Dryden ("Preface to *The Conquest of Grenada*"), the rhyming couplet in iambic pentameter has the right restraint and dignity for a lofty subject, and its rhyme allowed for a complete, coherent statement to be made. Dryden was struggling with the issue of what later critics in the Augustan period would call "decorum": the fitness of form to subject (q.v. Dryden *Epic*). It is the same struggle that Davenant faced in his *Gondibert*. Dryden's solution was a closed couplet in iambic pentameter that would have a minimum of enjambment. This form was called the "heroic couplet," because it was suitable for heroic subjects. Additionally, the age also developed the mock-heroic couplet. After 1672 and Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, iambic tetrameter couplets with unusual or unexpected rhymes became known as Hudibrastic verse. It was a formal parody of heroic verse, and it was primarily used for satire. Jonathan Swift would use the Hudibrastic form almost exclusively for his poetry.

Although Dryden's reputation is greater today, contemporaries saw the 1670s and 1680s as the age of courtier poets in general, and Edmund Waller was as praised as any. Dryden, Rochester, Buckingham, and Dorset dominated verse, and all were attached to the court of Charles. Aphra Behn, Matthew Prior, and Robert Gould, by

contrast, were outsiders who were profoundly royalist. The court poets follow no one particular style, except that they all show sexual awareness, a willingness to satirise, and a dependence upon wit to dominate their opponents. Each of these poets wrote for the stage as well as the page. Of these, Behn, Dryden, Rochester, and Gould deserve some separate mention.

Dryden was prolific; and he was often accused of plagiarism. Both before and after his Laureateship, he wrote public odes. He attempted the Jacobean pastoral along the lines of Walter Raleigh and Philip Sidney, but his greatest successes and fame came from his attempts at apologetics for the restored court and the Established Church. His *Absalom and Achitophel* and *Religio Laici* both served the King directly by making controversial royal actions seem reasonable. He also pioneered the mock-heroic. Although Samuel Butler had invented the mock-heroic in English with *Hudibras* (written during the Interregnum but published in the Restoration), Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* set up the satirical parody. Dryden was himself not of noble blood, and he was never awarded the honours that he had been promised by the King (nor was he repaid the loans he had made to the King), but he did as much as any peer to serve Charles II. Even when James II came to the throne and Roman Catholicism was on the rise, Dryden attempted to serve the court, and his *The Hind and the Panther* praised the Roman church above all others. After that point, Dryden suffered for his conversions, and he was the victim of many satires.

Buckingham wrote some court poetry, but he, like Dorset, was a patron of poetry more than a poet. Rochester, meanwhile, was a prolix and outrageous poet. Rochester's poetry is almost always sexually frank and is frequently political. Inasmuch as the Restoration came after the Interregnum, the very sexual explicitness of Rochester's verse was a political statement and a thumb in the eye of Puritans. His poetry often assumes a lyric pose, as he pretends to write in sadness over his own impotence ("The Disabled Debauchee") or sexual conquests, but most of Rochester's poetry is a parody of an existing, Classically-authorised form. He has a mock topographical poem ("Ramble in St James Park", which is about the dangers of darkness for a man intent on copulation and the historical compulsion of that plot of ground as a place for fornication), several mock odes ("To Signore Dildo," concerning the public burning of a crate of "contraband" from France on the London docks), and mock pastorals. Rochester's interest was in inversion, disruption, and the superiority

of wit as much as it was in hedonism. Rochester's venality led to an early death, and he was later frequently invoked as the exemplar of a Restoration rake.

Aphra Behn modelled the rake Willmore in her play *The Rover* on Rochester; and while she was best known publicly for her drama (in the 1670s, only Dryden's plays were staged more often than hers), Behn wrote a great deal of poetry that would be the basis of her later reputation. Edward Bysshe would include numerous quotations from her verse in his *Art of English Poetry* (1702). While her poetry was occasionally sexually frank, it was never as graphic or intentionally lurid and titillating as Rochester's. Rather, her poetry was, like the court's ethos, playful and honest about sexual desire. One of the most remarkable aspects of Behn's success in court poetry, however, is that Behn was herself a commoner. She had no more relation to peers than Dryden, and possibly quite a bit less. As a woman, a commoner, and Kentish, she is remarkable for her success in moving in the same circles as the King himself. As Janet Todd and others have shown, she was likely a spy for the Royalist side during the Interregnum. She was certainly a spy for Charles II in the Second Anglo-Dutch War, but found her services unrewarded (in fact, she may have spent time in debtor's prison) and turned to writing to support herself. Her ability to write poetry that stands among the best of the age gives some lie to the notion that the Restoration was an age of female illiteracy and verse composed and read only by peers.

If Behn is a curious exception to the rule of noble verse, Robert Gould breaks that rule altogether. Gould was born of a common family and orphaned at the age of thirteen. He had no schooling at all and worked as a domestic servant, first as a footman and then, probably, in the pantry. However, he was attached to the Earl of Dorset's household, and Gould somehow learned to read and write, as well as possibly to read and write Latin. In the 1680s and 1690s, Gould's poetry was very popular. He attempted to write odes for money, but his great success came with *Love Given O'er, or A Satyr Upon ... Woman* in 1692. It was a partial adaptation of a satire by Juvenal, but with an immense amount of explicit invective against women. The misogyny in this poem is some of the harshest and most visceral in English poetry: the poem sold out all editions. Gould also wrote a *Satyr on the Play House* (reprinted in Montagu Sommers's *The London Stage*) with detailed descriptions of the actions and actors involved in the Restoration stage. He followed the success of *Love Given*

O'er with a series of misogynistic poems, all of which have specific, graphic, and witty denunciations of female behaviour. His poetry has "virgin" brides who, upon their wedding nights, have "the straight gate so wide/ It's been leapt by all mankind," noblewomen who have money but prefer to pay the coachman with oral sex, and noblewomen having sex in their coaches and having the cobblestones heighten their pleasures. Gould's career was brief, but his success was not a novelty of subliterary misogyny. After Dryden's conversion to Roman Catholicism, Gould even engaged in a poison pen battle with the Laureate. His "Jack Squab" (the Laureate getting paid with squab as well as sack and implying that Dryden would sell his soul for a dinner) attacked Dryden's faithlessness viciously, and Dryden and his friends replied. That a footman even *could* conduct a verse war is remarkable. That he did so without, apparently, any prompting from his patron is astonishing.

Other poets (translations, controversialists, etc.)

Roger L'Estrange (per above) was a significant translator, and he also produced verse translations. Others, such as Richard Blackmore, were admired for their "sentence" (declamation and sentiment) but have not been remembered. Also, Elkannah Settle was, in the Restoration, a lively and promising political satirist, though his reputation has not fared well since his day. After booksellers began hiring authors and sponsoring specific translations, the shops filled quickly with poetry from hirelings. Similarly, as periodical literature began to assert itself as a political force, a number of now anonymous poets produced topical, specifically occasional verse.

The largest and most important form of *incunabula* of the era was satire. There were great dangers in being associated with satire and its publication was generally done anonymously. To begin with, defamation law cast a wide net, and it was difficult for a satirist to avoid prosecution if he were proven to have written a piece that seemed to criticise a noble. More dangerously, wealthy individuals would often respond to satire by having the suspected poet physically attacked by ruffians. John Dryden was set upon for being merely *suspected* of having written the *Satire on Mankind*. A consequence of this anonymity is that a great many poems, some of them of merit, are unpublished and largely unknown. Political satires against The Cabal, against Sunderland's government, and, most especially, against James II's rumoured conversion to Roman Catholicism, are uncollected. However, such poetry was a vital

part of the vigorous Restoration scene, and it was an age of energetic and voluminous satire.

Prose genres

Prose in the Restoration period is dominated by Christian religious writing, but the Restoration also saw the beginnings of two genres that would dominate later periods: fiction and journalism. Religious writing often strayed into political and economic writing, just as political and economic writing implied or directly addressed religion.

Philosophical writing

The Restoration saw the publication of a number of significant pieces of political and philosophical writing that had been spurred by the actions of the Interregnum. Additionally, the court's adoption of Neo-classicism and empirical science led to a receptiveness toward significant philosophical works.

Thomas Sprat wrote his *History of the Royal Society* in 1667 and set forth, in a single document, the goals of empirical science ever after. He expressed grave suspicions of adjectives, nebulous terminology, and all language that might be subjective. He praised a spare, clean, and precise vocabulary for science and explanations that are as comprehensible as possible. In Sprat's account, the Royal Society explicitly rejected anything that seemed like scholasticism. For Sprat, as for a number of the founders of the Royal Society, science was Protestant: its reasons and explanations had to be comprehensible to all. There would be no priests in science, and anyone could reproduce the experiments and hear their lessons. Similarly, he emphasised the need for conciseness in description, as well as reproducibility of experiments.

William Temple, after he retired from being what today would be called Secretary of State, wrote several bucolic prose works in praise of retirement, contemplation, and direct observation of nature. He also brought the Ancients and Moderns quarrel into English with his *Reflections on Ancient and Modern Learning*. The debates that followed in the wake of this quarrel would inspire many of the major authors of the first half of the 18th century (most notably Swift and Alexander Pope).

The Restoration was also the time when John Locke wrote many of his philosophical works. Locke's empiricism was an attempt at understanding the basis of human understanding itself and thereby devising a proper manner for making sound decisions. These same scientific methods led Locke to his *Two Treatises of Government*, which later inspired the thinkers in the American Revolution. As with his work on understanding, Locke moves from the most basic units of society toward the more elaborate, and, like Thomas Hobbes, he emphasises the plastic nature of the social contract. For an age that had seen absolute monarchy overthrown, democracy attempted, democracy corrupted, and limited monarchy restored; only a flexible basis for government could be satisfying.

Religious writing

The Restoration moderated most of the more strident sectarian writing, but radicalism persisted after the Restoration. Puritan authors such as John Milton were forced to retire from public life or adapt, and those Diggers, Fifth Monarchist, Leveller, Quaker, and Anabaptist authors who had preached against monarchy and who had participated directly in the regicide of Charles I were partially suppressed. Consequently, violent writings were forced underground, and many of those who had served in the Interregnum attenuated their positions in the Restoration.

Fox, and William Penn, made public vows of pacifism and preached a new theology of peace and love. Other Puritans contented themselves with being able to meet freely and act on local parishes. They distanced themselves from the harshest sides of their religion that had led to the abuses of Cromwell's reign. Two religious authors stand out beyond the others in this time: John Bunyan and Izaak Walton.

Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory of personal salvation and a guide to the Christian life. Instead of any focus on eschatology or divine retribution, Bunyan instead writes about how the individual saint can prevail against the temptations of mind and body that threaten damnation. The book is written in a straightforward narrative and shows influence from both drama and biography, and yet it also shows an awareness of the allegorical tradition found in Edmund Spenser.

Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler* is similarly introspective. Ostensibly, his book is a guide to fishing, but readers treasured its contents for their descriptions of

nature and serenity. There are few analogues to this prose work. On the surface, it appears to be in the tradition of other guide books (several of which appeared in the Restoration, including Charles Cotton's *The Compleat Gamester*, which is one of the earliest attempts at settling the rules of card games), but, like *Pilgrim's Progress*, its main business is guiding the individual.

More court-oriented religious prose included sermon collections and a great literature of debate over the convocation and issues before the House of Lords. The Act of First Fruits and Fifths, the Test Act, the Act of Uniformity 1662, and others engaged the leading divines of the day. Robert Boyle, notable as a scientist, also wrote his *Meditations* on God, and this work was immensely popular as devotional literature well beyond the Restoration. (Indeed, it is today perhaps most famous for Jonathan Swift's parody of it in *Meditation Upon a Broomstick*.) Devotional literature in general sold well and attests a wide literacy rate among the English middle classes.

Journalism

During the Restoration period, the most common manner of getting news would have been a broadsheet publication. A single, large sheet of paper might have a written, usually partisan, account of an event. However, the period saw the beginnings of the first professional and periodical (meaning that the publication was regular) journalism in England. Journalism develops late, generally around the time of William of Orange's claiming the throne in 1689. Coincidentally or by design, England began to have newspapers just when William came to court from Amsterdam, where there were already newspapers being published.

The early efforts at news sheets and periodicals were spotty. Roger L'Estrange produced both *The News* and *City Mercury*, but neither of them was a sustained effort. Henry Muddiman was the first to succeed in a regular news paper with the *London Gazette*. In 1665, Muddiman produced the *Oxford Gazette* as a digest of news of the royal court, which was in Oxford to avoid the plague in London. When the court moved back to Whitehall later in the year, the title *London Gazette* was adopted (and is still in use today). Muddiman had begun as a journalist in the Interregnum and had been the official journalist of the Long Parliament (in the form

of *The Parliamentary Intelligencer*). Although Muddiman's productions are the first regular news accounts, they are still not the first modern newspaper, as the work was sent in manuscript by post to subscribers and was not a printed sheet for general sale to the public. That had to wait for *The Athenian Mercury*.

A detail of the frontispiece to *The Athenian Oracle*, a collection of *The Athenian Mercury*

Sporadic essays combined with news had been published throughout the Restoration period, but *The Athenian Mercury* was the first regularly published periodical in England. John Dunton and the "Athenian Society" (actually a mathematician, minister, and philosopher paid by Dunton for their work) began publishing in 1691, just after the reign of William and Mary began. In addition to news reports, *The Athenian Mercury* allowed readers to send in questions anonymously and receive a printed answer. The questions mainly dealt with love and health, but there were some bizarre and intentionally amusing questions as well (e.g. a question on why a person shivers after urination, written in rhyming couplets). The questions section allowed the journal to sell well and to be profitable. Therefore, it ran for six years, produced four books that spun off from the columns, and then received a bound publication as *The Athenian Oracle*.

The Athenian Mercury set the stage for the later *Spectator*, *Gray's Inn Journal*, *Temple Bar Journal*, and scores of politically oriented journals, such as the original *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Freeholder*, *Mist's Journal*, and many others. Also, *The Athenian Mercury* published poetry from contributors, and it was the first to publish the poetry of Jonathan Swift and Elizabeth Singer Rowe. The trend of newspapers would similarly explode in subsequent years; a number of these later papers had runs of a single day and were composed entirely as a method of planting political attacks (Pope called them "Sons of a day" in *Dunciad B*).

Fiction

Although it is impossible to satisfactorily date the beginning of the novel in English, long fiction and fictional biographies began to distinguish themselves from other forms in England during the Restoration period. An existing tradition of *Romance* fiction in France and Spain was popular in England. Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando*

Furioso engendered prose narratives of love, peril, and revenge, and Gauthier de Costes, seigneur de la Calprenède's novels were quite popular during the Interregnum and beyond.

The "Romance" was considered a feminine form, and women were taxed with reading "novels" as a vice. Inasmuch as these novels were largely read in French or in translation from French, they were associated with effeminacy. However, novels slowly divested themselves of the Arthurian and chivalric trappings and came to centre on more ordinary or picaresque figures. One of the most significant figures in the rise of the novel in the Restoration period is Aphra Behn. She was not only the first professional female novelist, but she may be among the first professional novelists of either sex in England.

Behn's first novel was *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* in 1684. This was an epistolary novel documenting the amours of a scandalous nobleman who was unfaithful to his wife with her sister (thus making his lover his sister-in-law rather than biological sister). The novel is highly romantic, sexually explicit, and political. Behn wrote the novel in two parts, with the second part showing a distinctly different style from the first. Behn also wrote several "Histories" of fictional figures, such as her *The History of a Nun*. As the genre of "novel" did not exist, these histories were prose fictions based on biography. However, her most famous novel was *Oroonoko* in 1688. This was a fictional biography, published as a "true history", of an African king who had been enslaved in Suriname, a colony Behn herself had visited.

Behn's novels show the influence of tragedy and her experiences as a dramatist. Later novels by Daniel Defoe would adopt the same narrative framework, although his choice of biography would be tempered by his experience as a journalist writing "true histories" of criminals.

Other forms of fiction were also popular. Available to readers were versions of the stories of *Reynard the Fox*, as well as various indigenous folk tales, such as the various Dick Whittington and Tom Thumb fables. Most of these were in verse, but some circulated in prose. These largely anonymous or folk compositions circulated as chapbooks.

Subliterary genres and writers

Along with the figures mentioned above, the Restoration period saw the beginnings of explicitly political writing and hack writing. Roger L'Estrange was a pamphleteer who became the surveyor of presses and licenser of the press after the Restoration. In 1663–6, L'Estrange published *The News* (which was not regular in its appearance, see above). When he was implicated in the Popish Plot and fled England, he published *The Observator* (1681–1687) to attack Titus Oates and the Puritans. L'Estrange's most important contributions to literature, however, came with his translations. He translated Erasmus in 1680, Quevedo in 1668, and, most famously and importantly, Aesop's *Fables* in 1692 and 1699. This last set off a small craze for writing new fables, and particularly political fables.

Also during the later part of the period, Charles Gildon and Edmund Curll began their work on hireling "Lives." Curll was a bookseller (what today would be called a publisher), and he paid authors to produce biographies, translations, and the like. Similarly, Gildon, who was an occasional friend of Restoration authors, produced biographies with wholesale inventions in them. This writing for pay was despised by the literary authors, who called it "hack" writing.

Drama

The return of the stage-struck Charles II to power in 1660 was a major event in English theatre history. As soon as the previous Puritan regime's ban on public stage representations was lifted, the drama recreated itself quickly and abundantly. Two theatre companies, the King's and the Duke's Company, were established in London, with two luxurious playhouses built to designs by Christopher Wren and fitted with moveable scenery and thunder and lightning machines.

Traditionally, Restoration plays have been studied by genre rather than chronology, more or less as if they were all contemporary, but scholars today insist on the rapid evolvement of drama in the period and on the importance of social and political factors affecting it. (Unless otherwise indicated, the account below is based on Hume's influential *Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, 1976.) The influence of theatre company competition and playhouse economics is

also acknowledged, as is the significance of the appearance of the first professional actresses (see Howe).

In the 1660s and 1670s, the London scene was vitalised by the competition between the two patent companies. The need to rise to the challenges of the other house made playwrights and managers extremely responsive to public taste, and theatrical fashions fluctuated almost week by week. The mid-1670s were a high point of both quantity and quality, with John Dryden's *Aureng-zebe* (1675), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Plain Dealer* (1676), George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), and Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), all within a few seasons.

From 1682 the production of new plays dropped sharply, affected both by a merger between the two companies and by the political turmoil of the Popish Plot (1678) and the Exclusion crisis (1682). The 1680s were especially lean years for comedy, the only exception being the remarkable career of Aphra Behn, whose achievement as the first professional British woman dramatist has been the subject of much recent study. There was a swing away from comedy to serious political drama, reflecting preoccupations and divisions following on the political crisis. The few comedies produced also tended to be political in focus, the whig dramatist Thomas Shadwell sparring with the tories John Dryden and Aphra Behn.

In the calmer times after 1688, Londoners were again ready to be amused by stage performance, but the single "United Company" was not well prepared to offer it. No longer powered by competition, the company had lost momentum and been taken over by predatory investors ("Adventurers"), while management in the form of the autocratic Christopher Rich attempted to finance a tangle of "farmed" shares and sleeping partners by slashing actors' salaries. The upshot of this mismanagement was that the disgruntled actors set up their own co-operative company in 1695.[11] A few years of re-invigorated two-company competition followed which allowed a brief second flowering of the drama, especially comedy. Comedies like William Congreve's *Love For Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700), and John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696) and *The Provoked Wife* (1697) were "softer" and more middle class in ethos, very different from the aristocratic extravaganza twenty years earlier, and aimed at a wider audience. If "Restoration literature" is the literature that reflects and reflects upon the court of Charles II, Restoration drama arguably ends before

Charles II's death, as the playhouse moved rapidly from the domain of courtiers to the domain of the city middle classes. On the other hand, Restoration drama shows altogether more fluidity and rapidity than other types of literature, and so, even more than in other types of literature, its movements should never be viewed as absolute. Each decade has brilliant exceptions to every rule and entirely forgettable confirmations of it.

Serious drama

Genre in Restoration drama is peculiar. Authors labelled their works according to the old tags, "comedy" and "drama" and, especially, "history", but these plays defied the old categories. From 1660 onwards, new dramatic genres arose, mutated, and intermixed very rapidly. In tragedy, the leading style in the early Restoration period was the male-dominated heroic drama, exemplified by John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (1670) and *Aureng-Zebe* (1675) which celebrated powerful, aggressively masculine heroes and their pursuit of glory both as rulers and conquerors, and as lovers. These plays were sometimes called by their authors' histories or tragedies, and contemporary critics will call them after Dryden's term of "Heroic drama". Heroic dramas centred on the actions of men of decisive natures, men whose physical and (sometimes) intellectual qualities made them natural leaders. In one sense, this was a reflection of an idealised king such as Charles or Charles's courtiers might have imagined. However, such dashing heroes were also seen by the audiences as occasionally standing in for noble rebels who would redress injustice with the sword. The plays were, however, tragic in the strictest definition, even though they were not necessarily sad.

In the 1670s and 1680s, a gradual shift occurred from heroic to pathetic tragedy, where the focus was on love and domestic concerns, even though the main characters might often be public figures. After the phenomenal success of Elizabeth Barry in moving the audience to tears in the role of Monimia in Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* (1680), "she-tragedies" (a term coined by Nicholas Rowe), which focused on the sufferings of an innocent and virtuous woman, became the dominant form of pathetic tragedy. Elizabeth Howe has argued that the most important explanation for the shift in taste was the emergence of tragic actresses whose popularity made it unavoidable for dramatists to create major roles for them. With the conjunction of

the playwright "master of pathos" Thomas Otway and the great tragedienne Elizabeth Barry in *The Orphan*, the focus shifted from hero to heroine. Prominent she-tragedies include John Banks's *Virtue Betrayed, or, Anna Bullen* (1682) (about the execution of Anne Boleyn), Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage* (1694), and Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1703) and *Lady Jane Grey*, 1715.

While she-tragedies were more comfortably tragic, in that they showed women who suffered for no fault of their own and featured tragic flaws that were emotional rather than moral or intellectual, their success did not mean that more overtly political tragedy was not staged. The Exclusion crisis brought with it a number of tragic implications in real politics, and therefore any treatment of, for example, the Earl of Essex (several versions of which were circulated and briefly acted at non-patent theatres) could be read as seditious. Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* of 1682 was a royalist political play that, like Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, seemed to praise the king for his actions in the *meal tub plot*. Otway's play had the floating city of Venice stand in for the river town of London, and it had the dark senatorial plotters of the play stand in for the Earl of Shaftesbury. It even managed to figure in the Duke of Monmouth, Charles's illegitimate, war-hero son who was favoured by many as Charles's successor over the Roman Catholic James. *Venice Preserv'd* is, in a sense, the perfect synthesis of the older politically royalist tragedies and histories of Dryden and the newer she-tragedies of feminine suffering, for, although the plot seems to be a political allegory, the action centres on a woman who cares for a man in conflict, and most of the scenes and dialogue concern her pitiable sufferings at his hands.

Comedy

Restoration comedy is notorious for its sexual explicitness, a quality encouraged by Charles II personally and by the rakish aristocratic ethos of his court. The best-known plays of the early Restoration period are the unsentimental or "hard" comedies of John Dryden, William Wycherley, and George Etherege, which reflect the atmosphere at Court, and celebrate an aristocratic macho lifestyle of unremitting sexual intrigue and conquest. The Earl of Rochester, real-life Restoration rake, courtier and poet, is flatteringly portrayed in Etherege's *Man of Mode* (1676) as a riotous, witty, intellectual, and sexually irresistible aristocrat, a template for posterity's idea of the glamorous Restoration rake (actually never a very common

character in Restoration comedy). Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* (1676), a variation on the theme of Molière's *Le misanthrope*, was highly regarded for its uncompromising satire and earned Wycherley the appellation "Plain Dealer" Wycherley or "Manly" Wycherley, after the play's main character Manly. The single writer who most supports the charge of obscenity levelled then and now at Restoration comedy is probably Wycherley.

During the second wave of Restoration comedy in the 1690s, the "softer" comedies of William Congreve and John Vanbrugh reflected mutating cultural perceptions and great social change. The playwrights of the 1690s set out to appeal to more socially mixed audiences with a strong middle-class element, and to female spectators, for instance by moving the war between the sexes from the arena of intrigue into that of marriage. The focus in comedy is less on young lovers outwitting the older generation, more on marital relations after the wedding bells. In Congreve's plays, the give-and-take set pieces of couples still testing their attraction for each other have mutated into witty prenuptial debates on the eve of marriage, as in the famous "Proviso" scene in *The Way of the World* (1700).

Restoration drama had a bad reputation for three centuries. The "incongruous" mixing of comedy and tragedy beloved by Restoration audiences was execrated on all hands. The Victorians denounced the comedy as too indecent for the stage, and the standard reference work of the early 20th century, *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, dismissed the tragedy as being of "a level of dulness and lubricity never surpassed before or since".[13] Today, the Restoration total theatre experience is again valued, both by postmodern literary critics and on the stage. The comedies of Aphra Behn in particular, long condemned as especially offensive in coming from a woman's pen, have become academic and repertory favourites.

Restoration literature includes both *Paradise Lost* and the Earl of Rochester's *Sodom,* the high spirited sexual comedy of *The Country Wife* and the moral wisdom of *Pilgrim's Progress*. It saw Locke's *Treatises on Government,* the founding of the Royal Society, the experiments of Robert Boyle and the holy meditations of Boyle, the hysterical attacks on theatres from Jeremy Collier, the pioneering of literary criticism from Dryden, and the first newspapers. The official break in literary culture caused

by censorship and radically moralist standards under Cromwell's Puritan regime created a gap in literary tradition, allowing a seemingly fresh start for all forms of literature after the Restoration. During the Interregnum, the royalist forces attached to the court of Charles I went into exile with the twenty-year old Charles II. The nobility who travelled with Charles II were therefore lodged for over a decade in the midst of the continent's literary scene. Charles spent his time attending plays in France, and he developed a taste for Spanish plays. Those nobles living in Holland began to learn about mercantile exchange as well as the tolerant, rationalist prose debates that circulated in that officially tolerant nation.

The largest and most important poetic form of the era was satire. In general, publication of satire was done anonymously. There were great dangers in being associated with a satire. On the one hand, defamation law was a wide net, and it was difficult for a satirist to avoid prosecution if he were proven to have written a piece that seemed to criticize a noble. On the other hand, wealthy individuals would respond to satire as often as not by having the suspected poet physically attacked by ruffians. John Dryden was set upon for being merely *suspected* of having written the *Satire on Mankind*. A consequence of this anonymity is that a great many poems, some of them of merit, are unpublished and largely unknown.

Prose in the Restoration period is dominated by Christian religious writing, but the Restoration also saw the beginnings of two genres that would dominate later periods: fiction and journalism. Religious writing often strayed into political and economic writing, just as political and economic writing implied or directly addressed religion. The Restoration was also the time when John Locke wrote many of his philosophical works. Locke's empiricism was an attempt at understanding the basis of human understanding itself and thereby devising a proper manner for making sound decisions. These same scientific methods led Locke to his three *Treatises on Government,* which later inspired the thinkers in the American Revolution. As with his work on understanding, Locke moves from the most basic units of society toward the more elaborate, and, like Thomas Hobbes, he emphasizes the plastic nature of the social contract. For an age that had seen absolute monarchy overthrown, democracy attempted, democracy corrupted, and limited monarchy restored, only a flexible basis for government could be satisfying. The Restoration moderated most of the more strident sectarian writing, but radicalism persisted after the Restoration.

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Augustan Literature

Augustan literature is a style of English literature produced during the reigns of Queen Anne, King George I, and George II in the first half of the 18th century, ending in the 1740s with the deaths of Pope and Swift (1744 and 1745, respectively). It is a literary epoch that featured the rapid development of the novel, an explosion in satire, the mutation of drama from political satire into melodrama, and an evolution toward poetry of personal exploration. In philosophy, it was an age increasingly dominated by empiricism, while in the writings of political-economy it marked the evolution of mercantilism as a formal philosophy, the development of capitalism, and the triumph of trade.

The chronological anchors of the era are generally vague, largely since the label's origin in contemporary 18th century criticism has made it a shorthand designation for a somewhat nebulous age of satire. This new Augustan period exhibited exceptionally bold political writings in all genres, with the satires of the age marked by an arch, ironic pose, full of nuance, and a superficial air of dignified calm that hid sharp criticisms beneath.

As literacy (and London's population, especially) grew, literature began to appear from all over the kingdom. Authors gradually began to accept literature that went in

unique directions rather than the formerly monolithic conventions and, through this, slowly began to honor and recreate various folk compositions. Beneath the appearance of a placid and highly regulated series of writing modes, many developments of the later Romantic era were beginning to take place — while politically, philosophically, and literarily, modern consciousness was being hewn out of hitherto feudal and courtly notions of ages past.

The term Augustan literature derives from authors of the 1720s and 1730's themselves, who responded to a term that George I of England preferred for himself. While George I meant the title to reflect his might, they instead saw in it a reflection of Ancient Rome's transition from rough and ready literature to highly political and highly polished literature. Because of the aptness of the metaphor, the period from 1689 - 1750 was called "the Augustan Age" by critics throughout the 18th century (including Voltaire and Oliver Goldsmith). The literature of the period is overtly political and thoroughly aware of critical dictates for literature. It is an age of exuberance and scandal, of enormous energy and inventiveness and outrage, that reflected an era when English, Scottish, and Irish people found themselves in the midst of an expanding economy, lowering barriers to education, and the stirrings of the Industrial Revolution.

The most outstanding poet of the age is Alexander Pope, but Pope's excellence is partially in his constant battle with other poets, and his serene, seemingly neo-Classical approach to poetry is in competition with highly idiosyncratic verse and strong competition from such poets as Ambrose Philips. It was during this time that James Thomson produced his melancholy *The Seasons* and Edward Young wrote *Night Thoughts*. It is also the era that saw a serious competition over the proper model for the pastoral. In criticism, poets struggled with a doctrine of *decorum,* of matching proper words with proper sense and of achieving a diction that matched the gravity of a subject. At the same time, the mock-heroic was at its zenith. Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad* are still the greatest mock-heroic poems ever written.

In prose, the earlier part of the period was overshadowed by the development of the English essay. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *The Spectator* established the form of the British periodical essay, inventing the pose of the detached observer of

human life who can meditate upon the world without advocating any specific changes in it. However, this was also the time when the English novel, first emerging in the Restoration, developed into a major artform. Daniel Defoe turned from journalism and writing criminal lives for the press to writing fictional criminal lives with *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders*. He also wrote a fictional treatment of the travels of Alexander Selkirk called *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). The novel would benefit indirectly from a tragedy of the stage, and in mid-century many more authors would begin to write novels.

If Addison and Steele overawed one type of prose, then Jonathan Swift did another. Swift's prose style is unmannered and direct, with a clarity that few contemporaries matched. He was a profound skeptic about the modern world, but he was similarly profoundly distrustful of nostalgia. He saw in history a record of lies and vanity, and he saw in the present a madness of vanity and lies. Core Christian values were essential, but these values had to be muscular and assertive and developed by constant rejection of the games of confidence men and their gullies. Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* announced his skeptical analysis of the claims of the modern world, and his later prose works, such as his war with Patridge the astrologer, and most of all his derision of pride in *Gulliver's Travels* left only the individual in constant fear and humility safe. After his "exile" to Ireland, Swift reluctantly began defending the Irish people from the predations of colonialism. His *A Modest Proposal* and the Drapier Letters provoked riots and arrests, but Swift, who had no love of Irish Roman Catholics, was outraged by the abuses and barbarity he saw around him.

Drama in the early part of the period featured the last plays of John Vanbrugh and William Congreve, both of whom carried on the Restoration comedy with some alterations. However, the majority of stagings were of lower farces and much more serious and domestic tragedies. George Lillo and Richard Steele both produced highly moral forms of tragedy, where the characters and the concerns of the characters were wholly middle class or working class. This reflected a marked change in the audience for plays, as royal patronage was no longer the important part of theatrical success. Additionally, Colley Cibber and John Rich began to battle each other for greater and greater spectacles to present on stage. The figure of Harlequin was introduced, and pantomime theatre began to be staged. This "low" comedy was quite popular, and the plays became tertiary to the staging. Opera also began to be

popular in London, and there was significant literary resistance to this Italian incursion. This trend was broken only by a few attempts at a new type of comedy. Pope and John Arbuthnot and John Gay attempted a play entitled *Three Hours After Marriage* that failed. In 1728, however, John Gay returned to the playhouse with *The Beggar's Opera*. Gay's opera was in English and retold the story of Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild. However, it seemed to be an allegory for Robert Walpole and the directors of the South Sea Company, and so Gay's follow up opera was banned without performance. The licensing act of 1737 brought an abrupt halt to much of the period's drama, as the theatres were once again brought under state control.

An effect of the Licensing Act was to cause more than one aspiring playwright to switch over to writing novels. Henry Fielding began to write prose satire and novels after his plays could not pass the censors. Henry Brooke also turned to novels. In the interim, Samuel Richardson had produced a novel intended to counter the deleterious effects of novels in *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1749). Henry Fielding attacked the absurdity of this novel with two of his own works, *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela*, and then countered Richardson's *Clarissa* with *Tom Jones*. Brooke wrote *The Man of Feeling* and indirectly began the sentimental novel. Laurence Sterne attempted a Swiftian novel with a unique perspective on the impossibility of biography (the model for most novels up to that point) and understanding with *Tristram Shandy*, even as his detractor Tobias Smollett elevated the picaresque novel with his works. Each of these novels represents a formal and thematic divergence from the others. Each novelist was in dialogue and competition with the others, and, in a sense, the novel established itself as a diverse and open-formed genre in this explosion of creativity. The most lasting effects of the experimentation would be the psychological realism of Richardson, the bemused narrative voice of Fielding, and the sentimentality of Brooke.

Philosophy and religious writing

The Augustan period showed less literature of controversy than the Restoration. There were Puritan authors, however, and one of the names usually associated with the novel is perhaps the most prominent in Puritan writing: Daniel Defoe. After the coronation of Anne, dissenter hopes of reversing the Restoration were at an ebb, and dissenter literature moved from the offensive to the defensive, from revolutionary to

conservative. Defoe's infamous volley in the struggle between high and low church came in the form of *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters; Or, Proposals for the Establishment of the Church*. The work is satirical, attacking all of the worries of Establishment figures over the challenges of dissenters. It is, in other words, defensive. Later still, the most majestic work of the era, and the one most quoted and read, was William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728). The *Meditations* of Robert Boyle remained popular as well. Both Law and Boyle called for revivalism, and they set the stage for the later development of Methodism and George Whitefield's sermon style. However, their works aimed at the individual, rather than the community. The age of revolutionary divines and militant evangelists in literature was over for a considerable time.

Also in contrast to the Restoration, when philosophy in England was fully dominated by John Locke, the 18th century had a vigorous competition among followers of Locke. Bishop Berkeley extended Locke's emphasis on perception to argue that perception entirely solves the Cartesian problem of subjective and objective knowledge by saying "to be is to be perceived." Only, Berkeley argued, those things that are perceived by a consciousness are real. For Berkeley, the persistence of matter rests in the fact that God perceives those things that humans are not, that a living and continually aware, attentive, and involved God is the only rational explanation for the existence of objective matter. In essence, then, Berkeley's skepticism leads to faith. David Hume, on the other hand, took empiricist skepticism to its extremes, and he was the most radically empiricist philosopher of the period. He attacked surmise and unexamined premises wherever he found them, and his skepticism pointed out metaphysics in areas that other empiricists had assumed were material. Hume doggedly refused to enter into questions of his personal faith in the divine, but his assault on the logic and assumptions of theodicy and cosmogeny was devastating, and he concentrated on the provable and empirical in a way that would lead to utilitarianism and naturalism later.

In social and political philosophy, economics underlies much of the debate. Bernard de Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) became a center point of controversy regarding trade, morality, and social ethics. Mandeville argued that wastefulness, lust, pride, and all the other "private" vices were good for the society at large, for each led the individual to employ others, to spend freely, and to free capital to flow

through the economy. Mandeville's work is full of paradox and is meant, at least partially, to problematize what he saw as the naive philosophy of human progress and inherent virtue. However, Mandeville's arguments, initially an attack on graft of the War of the Spanish Succession, would be quoted often by economists who wished to strip morality away from questions of trade.

Adam Smith is remembered by lay persons as the father of capitalism, but his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* of 1759 also attempted to strike out a new ground for moral action. His emphasis on "sentiment" was in keeping with the era, as he emphasized the need for "sympathy" between individuals as the basis of fit action. These ideas, and the psychology of David Hartley, were influential on the sentimental novel and even the nascent Methodist movement. If sympathetic sentiment communicated morality, would it not be possible to induce morality by providing sympathetic circumstances? Smith's greatest work was *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776. What it held in common with de Mandeville, Hume, and Locke was that it began by analytically examining the history of material exchange, without reflection on morality. Instead of deducing from the ideal or moral to the real, it examined the real and tried to formulate inductive rules

18th Century

European Literature in the 18th Century

European literature of the 18th century refers to literature (poetry, drama and novels) produced in Europe during this period. The 18th century saw the development of the modern novel as literary genre, in fact many candidates for the first novel in English date from this period, of which Eliza Haywood's 1724 *Fantomina* is probably the best known. Subgenres of the novel during the 18th century were the epistolary novel, the sentimental novel, histories, the gothic novel and the libertine novel.

18th Century Europe started in the Age of Enlightenment and gradually moved towards Romanticism. In the visual arts, it was the period of Neoclassicism.

The Enlightenment

The 18th century in Europe was The Age of Enlightenment and literature explored themes of social upheaval, reversals of personal status, political satire, geographical exploration and the comparison between the supposed natural state of man and the supposed civilized state of man. Edmund Burke, in his A Vindication of Natural Society (1757), says: *"The Fabrick of Superstition has in this our Age and Nation received much ruder Shocks than it had ever felt before; and through the Chinks and Breaches of our Prison, we see such Glimmerings of Light, and feel such refreshing Airs of Liberty, as daily raise our Ardor for more"*.

During the Age of Sensibility, literature reflected the worldview of the Age of Enlightenment (or Age of Reason) – a rational and scientific approach to religious, social, political, and economic issues that promoted a secular view of the world and a general sense of progress and perfectibility. Led by the philosophers who were inspired by the discoveries of the previous century (Newton) and the writings of Descartes, Locke and Bacon.

They sought to discover and to act upon universally valid principles governing humanity, nature, and society. They variously attacked spiritual and scientific

authority, dogmatism, intolerance, censorship, and economic and social restraints. They considered the state the proper and rational instrument of progress. The extreme rationalism and skepticism of the age led naturally to deism; the same qualities played a part in bringing the later reaction of romanticism. The Encyclopédie of Denis Diderot epitomized the spirit of the age.

During the end of the 19th century Ann Radcliffe would be the pioneer of the Gothic Novel. Her novel, The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne in 1789, sets the tone for the majority of her work, which tended to involve innocent, but heroic young women who find themselves in gloomy, mysterious castles ruled by even more mysterious barons with dark pasts. The Romance of the Forest would follow and her most famous novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho, is considered the ultimate Gothic Novel of the late 18th century.

Increased emphasis on instinct and feeling, rather than judgment and restraint. A growing sympathy for the Middle Ages during the Age of Sensibility sparked an interest in medieval ballads and folk literature. Ann Radcliffe's novel would embody all of this in The Mysteries of Udolpho.

Romanticism

Romanticism is a complex artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that originated in the second half of the 18th century in Western Europe, and gained strength during the Industrial Revolution. It was partly a revolt against aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and a reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature, and was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature

The movement stressed strong emotion as a source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such emotions as trepidation, horror, and the awe experienced in confronting the sublimity in untamed nature and its qualities that are "picturesque", both new aesthetic categories. It elevated folk art and custom, as well as arguing for a "natural" epistemology of human activities as conditioned by nature in the form of language, custom and usage.

Our modern sense of a romantic character is sometimes based on Byronic or Romantic ideals. Romanticism reached beyond the rational and Classicist ideal models to elevate medievalism and elements of art and narrative perceived to be authentically medieval, in an attempt to escape the confines of population growth, urban sprawl and industrialism, and it also attempted to embrace the exotic, unfamiliar and distant in modes more authentic than *chinoiserie*, harnessing the power of the imagination to envision and to escape.

The ideologies and events of the French Revolution, rooted in Romanticism, affected the direction it was to take, and the confines of the Industrial Revolution also had their influence on Romanticism, which was in part an escape from modern realities; indeed, in the second half of the nineteenth century, "Realism" was offered as a polarized opposite to Romanticism. Romanticism elevated the achievements of what it perceived as misunderstood heroic individuals and artists that altered society. It also legitimized the individual imagination as a critical authority which permitted freedom from classical notions of form in art. There was a strong recourse to historical and natural inevitability, a *Zeitgeist*, in the representation of its ideas.

In a general sense, the term "Romanticism" has been used to refer to certain artists, poets, writers, musicians, as well as political, philosophical and social thinkers of the late eighteenth and early to mid nineteenth centuries. It has equally been used to refer to various artistic, intellectual, and social trends of that era. Despite this general usage of the term, a precise characterization and specific definition of Romanticism have been the subject of debate in the fields of intellectual history and literary history throughout the twentieth century, without any great measure of consensus emerging. Arthur Lovejoy attempted to demonstrate the difficulty of this problem in his seminal article "On The Discrimination of Romanticisms" in his *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948); some scholars see romanticism as essentially continuous with the present, some see in it the inaugural moment of modernity, some see it as the beginning of a tradition of resistance to the Enlightenment— a Counter-Enlightenment— and still others place it firmly in the direct aftermath of the French Revolution. An earlier definition comes from Charles Baudelaire: "Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subject nor exact truth, but in the way of feeling."

Many intellectual historians have seen Romanticism as a key movement in the Counter-Enlightenment, a reaction against the Age of Enlightenment. Whereas the thinkers of the Enlightenment emphasized the primacy of deductive reason, Romanticism emphasized intuition, imagination, and feeling, to a point that has led to some Romantic thinkers being accused of irrationalism.

Etymology

Romanticism is closely tied to the idea of the "Romantic." Note the capital 'R' differs from "romantic" meaning "someone involved in romance," although the words have the same root. The word romance comes from the Old French *romanz*, which is a genre of prose or poetic heroic narrative originating in medieval literature. Just as we speak of Romance languages, *romanz* was written in the vernacular and not in Latin.

The changing landscape of Britain brought about by the steam engine has two major outcomes: the boom of industrialism with the expansion of the city, and the consequent depopulation of the countryside as a result of the enclosures, or

privatisation of pastures. Most peasants poured into the city to work in the new factories.

This abrupt change is revealed by the change of meaning in five key words: industry (once meaning "creativity"), democracy (once disparagingly used as "mob rule"), class (from now also used with a social connotation), art (once just meaning "craft"), culture (once only belonging to farming).

But the poor condition of workers, the new class-conflicts and the pollution of the environment causes a reaction to urbanism and industrialisation prompting poets to rediscover the beauty and value of nature. Mother earth is seen as the only source of wisdom, the only solution to the ugliness caused by machines.

The superiority of nature and instinct over civilisation had been preached by Jean Jacques Rousseau and his message was picked by almost all European poets. The first in England were the Lake Poets, a small group of friends including William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These early Romantic Poets brought a new emotionalism and introspection, and their emergence is marked by the first romantic Manifesto in English literature, the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads". This collection was mostly contributed by Wordsworth, although Coleridge must be credited for his long and impressive *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a tragic ballad about the survival of one sailor through a series of supernatural events on his voyage through the south seas which involves the slaying of an albatross, the death of the rest of the crew, a visit from Death and his mate, Life-in-Death, and the eventual redemption of the Mariner.

Coleridge and Wordsworth, however, understood romanticism in two entirely different ways: while Coleridge sought to make the supernatural "real" (much like sci-fi movies use special effects to make unlikely plots believable), Wordsworth sought to stir the imagination of readers through his down-to-earth characters taken from real life (for eg. in "The Idiot Boy"), or the beauty of the Lake District that largely inspired his production (as in "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey").

The "Second generation" of Romantic poets includes Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley and John Keats. Byron, however, was still influenced by 18th-

century satirists and was, perhaps the least 'romantic' of the three. His amours with a number of prominent but married ladies was also a way to voice his dissent on the hypocrisy of a high society that was only apparently religious but in fact largely libertine, the same that had derided him for being physically impaired. His first trip to Europe resulted in the first two cantos of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a mock-heroic epic of a young man's adventures in Europe but also a sharp satire against London society. Despite *Childe Harold*'s success on his return to England, accompanied by the publication of *The Giaour* and *The Corsair* his alleged incestuous affair with his half-sister Augusta Leigh in 1816 actually forced him to leave England for good and seek asylum on the continent. Here he joined Percy Bysshe Shelley, his wife Mary, with his secretary Dr. John Polidori on the shores of Lake Geneva during the 'year without a summer' of 1816.

Although his is just a short story, Polidori must be credited for introducing The Vampyre, conceived from the same competition which spawned Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, to English literature. Percy, like Mary, had much in common with Byron: he was an aristocrat from a famous and ancient family, had embraced atheism and free-thinking and, like him, was fleeing from scandal in England.

Shelley had been expelled from college for openly declaring his atheism. He had married a 16-year-old girl, Harriet Westbrook whom he had abandoned soon after for Mary (Harriet took her own life after that). Harriet did not embrace his ideals of free love and anarchism, and was not as educated as to contribute to literary debate. Mary was different: the daughter of philosopher and revolutionary William Godwin, she was intellectually more of an equal, shared some of his ideals and was a feminist like her late mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

One of Percy Shelley's most prominent works is the *Ode to the West Wind*. Despite his apparent refusal to believe in God, this poem is considered a homage to pantheism, the recognition of a spiritual presence in nature.

Mary Shelley did not go down in history for her poetry, but for giving birth to science fiction: the plot for the novel is said to have come from a nightmare during stormy nights on Lake Geneva in the company of Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and John

Polidori. Her idea of making a body with human parts stolen from different corpses and then animating it with electricity was perhaps influenced by Alessandro Volta's invention and Luigi Galvani's experiments with dead frogs. Frankenstein's chilling tale also suggests modern organ transplants, tissue regeneration, reminding us of the moral issues raised by today's medicine. But the creature of Frankenstein is incredibly romantic as well. Although "the monster" is intelligent, good and loving, he is shunned by everyone because of his ugliness and deformity, and the desperation and envy that result from social exclusion turn him against the very man who created him.

John Keats did not share Byron's and Shelley's extremely revolutionary ideals, but his cult of pantheism is as important as Shelley's. Keats was in love with the ancient stones of the Parthenon that Lord Elgin had brought to England from Greece, also known as the Elgin Marbles). He celebrates ancient Greece: the beauty of free, youthful love couples here with that of classical art. Keats's great attention to art, especially in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is quite new in romanticism, and it will inspire Walter Pater's and then Oscar Wilde's belief in the absolute value of art as independent from aesthetics.

Some rightly think that the most popular novelist of the era was Sir Walter Scott, whose grand historical romances inspired a generation of painters, composers, and writers throughout Europe. His most remembered work, Ivanhoe, continues to be studied to this day.

In retrospect, we now look back to Jane Austen, who wrote novels about the life of the landed gentry, seen from a woman's point of view, and wryly focused on practical social issues, especially marriage and choosing the right partner in life, with love being above all else. Her most important and popular novel, Pride and Prejudice, would set the model for all Romance Novels to follow. Jane Austen created the ultimate hero and heroine in Darcy and Elizabeth, who must overcome their own stubborn pride and the prejudices they have toward each other, in order to come to a middle ground, where they finally realize their love for one another. Jane Austen brings to light, in her books, the hardships women faced, who usually did not inherit money, could not work and where their only chance in life depended on the man they married. She brought to light the injustices women faced in her day, with whit,

humor and endings where every character, good or bad, receives exactly what they deserve. Jane Austen started a genre that is still followed today.

Poet, painter and printmaker William Blake is usually included among the English Romanticists, though his visionary work is much different from that of the others discussed in this section.

Victorian Literature

Victorian literature is the literature produced during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) and corresponds to the Victorian era. It forms a link and transition between the writers of the romantic period and the very different literature of the 20th century.

The 19th century saw the novel become the leading form of literature in English. The works by pre-Victorian writers such as Jane Austen and Walter Scott had perfected both closely-observed social satire and adventure stories. Popular works opened a market for the novel amongst a reading public. The 19th century is often regarded as a high point in British literature as well as in other countries such as France, the United States of America and Russia. Books, and novels in particular, became ubiquitous, and the "Victorian novelist" created legacy works with continuing appeal.

Novelists

Charles Dickens arguably exemplifies the Victorian novelist better than any other writer. Extraordinarily popular in his day with his characters taking on a life of their own beyond the page, Dickens is still the most popular and read author of the time. His first real novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, written at only twenty-five, was an overnight success, and all his subsequent works sold extremely well. He was in effect a self-made man who worked diligently and prolifically to produce exactly what the public wanted; often reacting to the public taste and changing the plot direction of his stories between monthly numbers. The comedy of his first novel has a satirical edge which pervades his writings. These deal with the plight of the poor and oppressed and end with a ghost story cut short by his death. The slow trend in his fiction towards darker themes is mirrored in much of the writing of the century, and literature after his death in 1870 is notably different from that at the start of the era.

William Thackeray was Dickens' great rival at the time. With a similar style but a slightly more detached, acerbic and barbed satirical view of his characters, he also tended to depict situations of a more middle class flavour than Dickens. He is best known for his novel *Vanity Fair*, subtitled *A Novel without a Hero*, which is also an example of a form popular in Victorian literature: the historical novel, in which very

recent history is depicted. Anthony Trollope tended to write about a slightly different part of the structure, namely the landowning and professional classes.

Away from the big cities and the literary society, Haworth in West Yorkshire held a powerhouse of novel writing: the home of the Brontë family. Anne, Charlotte and Emily Brontë had time in their short lives to produce masterpieces of fiction although these were not immediately appreciated by Victorian critics. *Wuthering Heights*, Emily's only work, in particular has violence, passion, the supernatural, heightened emotion and emotional distance, an unusual mix for any novel but particularly at this time. It is a prime example of Gothic Romanticism from a woman's point of view during this period of time, examining class, myth, and gender. Another important writer of the period was George Eliot, a pseudonym which concealed a woman, Mary Ann Evans, who wished to write novels which would be taken seriously rather than the romances which women of the time were supposed to write.

The Style of the Victorian Novel

Virginia Woolf in her series of essays *The Common Reader* called George Eliot's *Middlemarch* "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people". This criticism, although rather broadly covering as it does all English literature, is rather a fair comment on much of the fiction of the Victorian Era. Influenced as they were by the large sprawling novels of sensibility of the preceding age they tended to be idealized portraits of difficult lives in which hard work, perseverance, love and luck win out in the end; virtue would be rewarded and wrong-doers are suitably punished. They tended to be of an improving nature with a central moral lesson at heart, informing the reader how to be a good Victorian. This formula was the basis for much of earlier Victorian fiction but as the century progressed the plot thickened.

Eliot in particular strove for realism in her fiction and tried to banish the picturesque and the burlesque from her work. Another woman writer Elizabeth Gaskell wrote even grimmer, grittier books about the poor in the north of England but even these usually had happy endings. After the death of Dickens in 1870 happy endings became less common. Such a major literary figure as Charles Dickens tended to dictate the direction of all literature of the era, not least because he edited *All the Year Round*, a

literary journal of the time. His fondness for a happy ending with all the loose ends neatly tied up is clear and although he is well known for writing about the lives of the poor they are sentimentalized portraits, made acceptable for people of character to read; to be shocked but not disgusted. The more unpleasant underworld of Victorian city life was revealed by Henry Mayhew in his articles and book *London Labour and the London Poor*.

This change in style in Victorian fiction was slow coming but clear by the end of the century, with the books in the 1880s and 90s more realistic and often grimmer. Even writers of the high Victorian age were censured for their plots attacking the conventions of the day with *Adam Bede* being called "the vile outpourings of a lewd woman's mind" and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* "utterly unfit to be put into the hands of girls". The disgust of the reading audience perhaps reached a peak with Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* which was reportedly burnt by an outraged bishop of Wakefield. The cause of such fury was Hardy's frank treatment of sex, religion and his disregard for the subject of marriage; a subject close to the Victorians' heart, with the prevailing plot of the Victorian novel sometimes being described as a search for a correct marriage.

Hardy had started his career as seemingly a rather safe novelist writing bucolic scenes of rural life but his disaffection with some of the institutions of Victorian Britain was present as well as an underlying sorrow for the changing nature of the English countryside. The hostile reception to *Jude* in 1895 meant that it was his last novel but he continued writing poetry into the mid 1920s. Other authors such as Samuel Butler and George Gissing confronted their antipathies to certain aspects of marriage, religion or Victorian morality and peppered their fiction with controversial anti-heros. Butler's *Erewhon*, for one, is a utopian novel satirising many aspects of Victorian society with Butler's particular dislike of the religious hypocrisy attracting scorn and being depicted as "Musical Banks".

Whilst many great writers were at work at the time, the large numbers of voracious but uncritical readers meant that poor writers, producing salacious and lurid novels or accounts, found eager audiences. Many of the faults common to much better writers were used abundantly by writers now mostly forgotten: over-sentimentality, unrealistic plots and moralising obscuring the story. Although immensely popular in

his day, Edward Bulwer-Lytton is now held up as an example of the very worst of Victorian literature with his sensationalist story-lines and his over-boiled style of prose. Other writers popular at the time but largely forgotten now are: Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Charlotte Mary Yonge, Charles Kingsley, and R. D. Blackmore.

Other Literature

Children's literature

The Victorians are sometimes credited with 'inventing childhood', partly via their efforts to stop child labour and the introduction of compulsory education. As children began to be able to read, literature for young people became a growth industry, with not only established writers producing works for children (such as Dickens' *A Child's History of England*) but also a new group of dedicated children's authors. Writers like Lewis Carroll, R. M. Ballantyne and Anna Sewell wrote mainly for children, although they had an adult following. Other authors such as Anthony Hope and Robert Louis Stevenson wrote mainly for adults, but their adventure novels are now generally classified as for children. Other genres include nonsense verse, poetry which required a child-like interest (e.g. Lewis Carroll). School stories flourished: Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and Kipling's *Stalky and Co.* are classics.

Poetry and drama

Poetry in a sense settled down from the upheavals of the romantic era and much of the work of the time is seen as a bridge between this earlier era and the modernist poetry of the next century. Alfred Lord Tennyson held the poet laureateship for over forty years and his verse became rather stale by the end but his early work is rightly praised. Some of the poetry highly regarded at the time such as *Invictus* and *If—* are now seen as jingoistic and bombastic but Tennyson's Charge of the Light Brigade was a fierce criticism of a famous military blunder; a pillar of the establishment not failing to attack the establishment. Comic verse abounded in the Victorian era. Magazines such as *Punch magazine* and *Fun magazine* teemed with humorous invention and were aimed at a well-educated readership. The most famous collection of Victorian comic verse is the Bab Ballads.

The husband and wife poetry team of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning conducted their love affair through verse and produced many tender and passionate poems. Both Matthew Arnold and Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote poems which sit somewhere in between the exultation of nature of the romantic Poetry and the Georgian Poetry of the early 20th century. Arnold's works hearken forward to some of the themes of these later poets while Hopkins drew for inspiration on verse forms from Old English poetry such as *Beowulf*.

The reclaiming of the past was a major part of Victorian literature with an interest in both classical literature but also the medieval literature of England. The Victorians loved the heroic, chivalrous stories of knights of old and they hoped to regain some of that noble, courtly behaviour and impress it upon the people both at home and in the wider empire. The best example of this is Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* which blended the stories of King Arthur, particularly those by Thomas Malory, with contemporary concerns and ideas. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood also drew on myth and folklore for their art with Dante Gabriel Rossetti contemporaneously regarded as the chief poet amongst them, although his sister Christina is now held by scholars to be a stronger poet.

In drama, farces, musical burlesques, extravaganzas and comic operas competed with Shakespeare productions and serious drama by the likes of James Planché and Thomas William Robertson. In 1855, the German Reed Entertainments began a process of elevating the level of (formerly risqué) musical theatre in Britain that culminated in the famous series of comic operas by Gilbert and Sullivan and were followed by the 1890s with the first Edwardian musical comedies. The first play to achieve 500 consecutive performances was the London comedy *Our Boys* by H. J. Byron, opening in 1875. Its astonishing new record of 1,362 performances was bested in 1892 by *Charley's Aunt* by Brandon Thomas. After W. S. Gilbert, Oscar Wilde became the leading poet and dramatist of the late Victorian period. Wilde's plays, in particular, stand apart from the many now forgotten plays of Victorian times and have a much closer relationship to those of the Edwardian dramatists such as George Bernard Shaw, many of whose most important works were written in the 20th century.

The influence of Empire

The interest in older works of literature led the Victorians much further afield to find new old works with a great interest in translating of literature from the farthest flung corners of their new empire and beyond. Arabic and Sanskrit literature were some of the richest bodies of work to be discovered and translated for popular consumption. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is one of the best of these works, translated by Edward FitzGerald who introduced much of his own poetic skill into a rather free adaptation of the 11th century work. The explorer Richard Francis Burton also translated many exotic works from beyond Europe including *The Perfumed Garden*, *The Arabian Nights* and the *Kama Sutra*.

Science, philosophy and discovery

The Victorian era was an important time for the development of science and the Victorians had a mission to describe and classify the entire natural world. Much of this writing does not rise to the level of being regarded as literature but one book in particular, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, remains famous. The theory of evolution contained within the work shook many of the ideas the Victorians had about themselves and their place in the world and although it took a long time to be widely accepted it would change, dramatically, subsequent thought and literature.

Other important non-fiction works of the time are the philosophical writings of John Stuart Mill covering logic, economics, liberty and utilitarianism. The large and influential histories of Thomas Carlyle: *The French Revolution, A History*, *On Heroes and Hero Worship* and Thomas Babington Macaulay: *The History of England from the Accession of James II*. The greater number of novels that contained overt criticism of religion did not stifle a vigorous list of publications on the subject of religion. Two of the most important of these are John Henry Newman and Henry Edward Cardinal Manning who both wished to revitalise Anglicanism with a return to the Roman Catholic Church. In a somewhat opposite direction, the ideas of socialism were permeating political thought at the time with Friedrich Engels writing his *Condition of the Working Classes in England* and William Morris writing the early socialist utopian novel *News from Nowhere*. One other important and monumental work begun in this era was the *Oxford English Dictionary* which

would eventually become the most important historical dictionary of the English language.

Supernatural and fantastic literature

The Gothic tales that came out of the late nineteenth century are the first examples of the genre of fantastic fiction.These tales often centered on larger-than-life characters such as Sherlock Holmes famous detective of the times, Barry Lee big time gang leader of the Victorian Times, Sexton Blake, Phileas Fogg, Frankenstein fictional characters of the era, Dracula, Edward Hyde, The Invisible Man, and many other fictional characters who often had exotic enemies to foil. Spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a particular type of story-writing known as gothic. Gothic literature combines romance and horror in attempt to thrill and terrify the reader, and it always involves the supernatural. possible features in a gothic novel are foreign monsters, ghosts, curses, hidden rooms and witchcraft. Gothic tales usually take place in locations such as castles, monasteries, and cemeteries, although the gothic monsters sometimes cross over into the real world, making appearances in cities such as London and France.

The Influence of Victorian Literature

Writers from the former colony of The United States of America and the remaining colonies of Australia, New Zealand and Canada could not avoid being influenced by the literature of Britain and they are often classed as a part of Victorian literature although they were gradually developing their own distinctive voices. Victorian writers of Canadian literature include Grant Allen, Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill. Australian literature has the poets Adam Lindsay Gordon and Banjo Paterson, who wrote *Waltzing Matilda* and New Zealand literature includes Thomas Bracken and Frederick Edward Maning. From the sphere of literature of the United States during this time are some of the country's greats including: Emily Dickinson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., Henry James, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain and Walt Whitman.

The problem with the classification of Victorian literature is great difference between the early works of the period and the later works which had more in common with the writers of the Edwardian period and many writers straddle this divide. People

such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells, Bram Stoker, H. Rider Haggard, Jerome K. Jerome and Joseph Conrad all wrote some of their important works during Victoria's reign but the sensibility of their writing is frequently regarded as Edwardian.

Modernism

Modernist literature is the literary form of Modernism and especially High modernism; it should not be confused with modern literature, which is the history of the modern novel and modern poetry as one. There is a separate section on modernist poetry.

Modernism as a literary movement reached its height in Europe between 1910 and 1920, and addressed aesthetic problems similar to those found in non-literary forms of contemporaneous Modernist art, such as painting. Gertrude Stein's abstract writings, for example, have often been compared to the fragmentary and multi-perspectival Cubism of her friend Pablo Picasso.

The general thematic concerns of Modernist literature are well-summarized by the sociologist Georg Simmel:

"The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life."

The Modernist emphasis on a radical individualism can be seen in the many literary manifestos issued by various groups within the movement; the concerns expressed by Simmel above are echoed in Richard Huelsenbeck's "First German Dada Manifesto" of 1918:

"Art in its execution and direction is dependent on the time in which it lives, and artists are creatures of their epoch. The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week ... The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time."

The Modernist re-contextualization of the individual within the fabric of a received social heritage can be seen in the "mythic method" which T.S. Eliot expounded in his discussion of James Joyce's *Ulysses*:

"In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him ... It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."

Through an aesthetic examination of these and related concerns, Modernist literature developed a style that can be characterized by a preoccupation with stylistic novelty, formal fragmentation, multiple perspectives, and alternatives to traditional narrative forms.

Modernist literature attempted to move from the bonds of Realist literature and introduce concepts such as disjointed timelines. Modernism was distinguished by emancipatory metanarrative. In the wake of Modernism, and post-enlightenment, metanarratives tended to be emancipatory, whereas beforehand this was not a consistent characteristic. Contemporary metanarratives were becoming less relevant in light of the implications of World War I, the rise of trade unionism, a general social discontent, and the emergence of psychoanalysis. The consequent need for a unifying function brought about a growth in the political importance of culture.

Modernist literature can be viewed largely in terms of its formal, stylistic and semantic movement away from Romanticism, examining subject matter that is traditionally mundane--a prime example being *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* by T. S. Eliot. Modernist literature often features a marked pessimism, a clear rejection of the optimism apparent in Victorian literature. In fact, "a common motif in Modernist fiction is that of an alienated individual--a dysfunctional individual trying in vain to make sense of a predominantly urban and fragmented society".

However, many Modernist works like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* are marked by the absence of a central, heroic figure; in rejecting the solipsism of Romantics like Shelley and Byron, these works reject the notion of subject associated with Cartesian dualism, and collapse narrative and narrator into a collection of disjointed fragments and overlapping voices.

Modernist literature often moves beyond the limitations of the Realist novel with a concern for larger factors such as social or historical change; this is prominent in "stream of consciousness" writing. Examples can be seen in Virginia Woolf's *Kew*

Gardens and *Mrs Dalloway*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Katherine Porter's *Flowering Judas*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and others.

Modernism as a literary movement is seen, in large part, as a reaction to the emergence of city life as a central force in society. Furthermore, an early attention to the object as freestanding became in later Modernism a preoccupation with form. The dyadic collapse of the distance between subject and object represented a movement from *means* to *is*. Where Romanticism stressed the subjectivity of experience, Modernist writers were more acutely conscious of the objectivity of their surroundings. In Modernism the object *is*; the language doesn't mean it *is*. This is a shift from an epistemological aesthetic to an ontological aesthetic or, in simpler terms, a shift from a knowledge-based aesthetic to a *being*-based aesthetic. This shift is central to Modernism. Archibald MacLeish, for instance, said, "A poem should not mean / But be."

Many Modernist works are studied in schools today, from Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea,* to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, to James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Characteristics of Modernism

Formal characteristics

- Open Form
- Free verse
- Discontinuous narrative
- Juxtaposition
- Intertextuality
- Classical allusions
- Borrowings from other cultures and languages
- Unconventional use of metaphor
- Metanarrative
- Fragmentation
- Multiple narrative points of view (parallax)

Thematic characteristics

- Breakdown of social norms and cultural sureties
- Dislocation of meaning and sense from its normal context
- Valorization of the despairing individual in the face of an unmanageable future
- Disillusionment
- Rejection of history and the substitution of a mythical past, borrowed without chronology
- Product of the metropolis, of cities and urbanscapes
- Stream of consciousness
- Free indirect discourse
- Overwhelming technological changes of the 20th Century

The movement known as English literary modernism grew out of a general sense of disillusionment with Victorian era attitudes of certainty, conservatism, and objective truth. The movement was greatly influenced by the ideas of Romanticism, Karl Marx's political writings, and the psychoanalytic theories of subconscious - Sigmund Freud. The continental art movements of Impressionism, and later Cubism, were also important inspirations for modernist writers.

Although literary modernism reached its peak between the First and Second World Wars, the earliest examples of the movement's attitudes appeared in the mid to late nineteenth century. Gerard Manley Hopkins, A. E. Housman, and the poet and novelist Thomas Hardy represented a few of the major early modernists writing in England during the Victorian period.

The first decades of the twentieth century saw several major works of modernism published, including the seminal short story collection *Dubliners* by James Joyce, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and the poetry and drama of William Butler Yeats.

Important novelists between the World Wars included Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Evelyn Waugh, P.G. Wodehouse and D. H. Lawrence. T. S. Eliot was the preeminent English poet of the period. Across the Atlantic writers like William Faulkner, Ernest

Hemingway, and the poets Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost developed a more American take on the modernist aesthetic in their work.

Perhaps the most contentiously important figure in the development of the modernist movement was the American poet Ezra Pound. Credited with "discovering" both T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, whose stream of consciousness novel *Ulysses* is considered to be one of the century's greatest literary achievements, Pound also advanced the cause of imagism and free verse, forms which would dominate English poetry into the twenty-first century.

Gertrude Stein, an American expat, was also an enormous literary force during this time period, famous for her line "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose."

Other notable writers of this period included H.D., Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, W. H. Auden, Vladimir Nabokov, William Carlos Williams, Ralph Ellison, Dylan Thomas, R.S. Thomas and Graham Greene. However, some of these writers are more closely associated with what has become known as post-modernism, a term often used to encompass the diverse range of writers who succeeded the modernists.

Post-Modern Literature

The term **Postmodern literature** is used to describe certain tendencies in post-World War II literature. It is both a continuation of the experimentation championed by writers of the modernist period (relying heavily, for example, on fragmentation, paradox, questionable narrators, etc.) and a reaction against Enlightenment ideas implicit in Modernist literature.

Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, is difficult to define and there is little agreement on the exact characteristics, scope, and importance of postmodern literature. However, unifying features often coincide with Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the "meta-narrative" and "little narrative", Jacques Derrida's concept of "play", and Jean Baudrillard's "simulacra". For example, instead of the modernist quest for meaning in a chaotic world, the postmodern author eschews, often playfully, the possibility of meaning, and the postmodern novel is often a parody of this quest. This distrust of totalizing mechanisms extends even to the author; thus postmodern writers often celebrate chance over craft and employ metafiction to undermine the author's "univocal" control (the control of only one voice). The distinction between high and low culture is also attacked with the employment of pastiche, the combination of multiple cultural elements including subjects and genres not previously deemed fit for literature.

Background

Significant pre-cursors

Postmodernist writers often point to early novels and story collections as inspiration for their experiments with narrative and structure: *Don Quixote*, *1001 Arabian Nights*, *The Decameron*, and *Candide*, among many others. In the English language, Laurence Sterne's 1759 novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, with its heavy emphasis on parody and narrative experimentation, is often cited as an early echo of postmodernism. Other significant examples of 18th century parody include the works of Jonathan Swift and *Shamela* by Henry Fielding. There were many 19th century examples of attacks on Enlightenment concepts, parody, and playfulness in literature including Lord Byron's satire, especially *Don Juan*; Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*; Alfred Jarry's ribald *Ubu* parodies and his

invention of 'Pataphysics; Lewis Carrol's playful experiments with signification; the work of Isidore Ducasse, Arthur Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde, etc. Playwrights who worked in the late 19th and early 20th century whose thought and work influenced the aesthetic of postmodernism include Swedish dramatist August Strindberg, the Italian author Luigi Pirandello, and the German playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht. In the 1910s, artists associated with Dadaism celebrated chance, parody, playfulness, and attacked the central role of the artist. Tristan Tzara claimed in "How to Make a Dadaist Poem" that to create a Dadaist poem one had only to put random words in a hat and pull them out one by one. Another way Dadaism influenced postmodern literature was in the development of collage, specifically collages using elements from advertisement or illustrations from popular novels (the collages of Max Ernst, for example). Artists associated with Surrealism, which developed from Dadaism, continued experimentations with chance and parody while celebrating the flow of the subconscious. Andre Breton, the founder of Surrealism, suggested that automatism and the description of dreams should play a greater role in the creation of literature. He used automatism to create his novel *Nadja* and used photographs to replace description as a parody of the overly-descriptive novelists he often criticized. Surrealist Rene Magritte's experiments with signification are used as examples by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Foucault also uses examples from Jorge Luis Borges, an important direct influence on many Postmodernist fiction writers. He is occasionally listed as a Postmodernist though he started writing in the 1920s. The influence of his experiments with metafiction and magical realism was not fully realized until the postmodern period.

Comparisons with modernist literature

Both modern and postmodern literature represent a break from 19th century realism, in which a story was told from an objective or omniscient point of view. In character development, both modern and postmodern literature explore subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine inner states of consciousness, in many cases drawing on modernist examples in the *stream of consciousness* styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, or explorative poems like The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot. In addition, both modern and postmodern literature explore fragmentariness in narrative- and character-construction. *The Waste Land* is often cited as a means of distinguishing modern and postmodern literature. The poem is

fragmentary and employs pastiche like much postmodern literature, but the speaker in *The Waste Land* says, "these fragments I have shored against my ruins". Modernist literature sees fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis, or Freudian internal conflict, a problem that must be solved, and the artist is often cited as the one to solve it. Postmodernists, however, often demonstrate that this chaos is insurmountable; the artist is impotent, and the only recourse against "ruin" is to play within the chaos. Playfulness is present in many modernist works (Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* or Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, for example) and they may seem very similar to postmodern works, but with postmodernism playfulness becomes central and the actual achievement of order and meaning becomes unlikely.

Shift to postmodernism

As with all stylistic eras, no definite dates exist for the rise and fall of postmodernism's popularity. 1941, the year in which Irish novelist James Joyce and British novelist Virginia Woolf both died, is sometimes used as a rough boundary for postmodernism's start.

The prefix 'post,' however, does not necessarily imply a new era. Rather, it could also indicate a reaction against modernism in the wake of the Second World War (with its disrespect for human rights, just confirmed in the Geneva Convention, through the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holocaust, the bombing of Dresden, the fire-bombing of Tokyo, and Japanese American internment). It could also imply a reaction to significant post-war events: the beginning of the Cold War, the civil rights movement in the United States, postcolonialism (Postcolonial literature), and the rise of the personal computer (Cyberpunk fiction and Hypertext fiction).

Some further argue that the beginning of postmodern literature could be marked by significant publications or literary events. For example, some mark the beginning of postmodernism with the first performance of *Waiting for Godot* in 1953, the first publication of *Howl* in 1956 or of *Naked Lunch* in 1959. For others the beginning is marked by moments in critical theory: Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play" lecture in 1966 or as late as Ihab Hassan's usage in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* in 1971.

Post-war developments and transition figures

Though Postmodernist literature does not refer to everything written in the postmodern period, several post-war developments in literature (such as the Theatre of the Absurd, the Beat Generation, and Magical Realism) have significant similarities. These developments are occasionally collectively labeled "postmodern"; more commonly, some key figures (Samuel Beckett, William S. Burroughs, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Gabriel Garcia Marquez) are cited as significant contributors to the postmodern aesthetic.

The work of Jarry, the Surrealists, Antonin Artaud, Luigi Pirandello and so on also influenced the work of playwrights from the Theatre of the Absurd. The term "Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by Martin Esslin to describe a tendency in theatre in the 1950s; he related it to Albert Camus's concept of the absurd. The plays of the Theatre of the Absurd parallel postmodern fiction in many ways. For example, *The Bald Soprano* by Eugène Ionesco is essentially a series of clichés taken from a language textbook. One of the most important figures to be categorized as both Absurdist and Postmodern is Samuel Beckett. The work of Samuel Beckett is often seen as marking the shift from modernism to postmodernism in literature. He had close ties with modernism because of his friendship with James Joyce; however, his work helped shape the development of literature away from modernism. Joyce, one of the exemplars of modernism, celebrated the possibility of language; Beckett had a revelation in 1945 that, in order to escape the shadow of Joyce, he must focus on the poverty of language and man as a failure. His later work, likewise, featured characters stuck in inescapable situations attempting impotently to communicate whose only recourse is to play, to make the best of what they have. As Hans-Peter Wagner says, "Mostly concerned with what he saw as impossibilities in fiction (identity of characters; reliable consciousness; the reliability of language itself; and the rubrication of literature in genres) Beckett's experiments with narrative form and with the disintegration of narration and character in fiction and drama won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. His works published after 1969 are mostly meta-literary attempts that must be read in light of his own theories and previous works and the attempt to deconstruct literary forms and genres.[...] Beckett's last text published during his lifetime, *Stirrings Still* (1988), breaks down the barriers between drama, fiction, and poetry, with texts of the collection being almost entirely

composed of echoes and reiterations of his previous work [...] He was definitely one of the fathers of the postmodern movement in fiction which has continued undermining the ideas of logical coherence in narration, formal plot, regular time sequence, and psychologically explained characters."

"The Beat Generation" is a name coined by Jack Kerouac for the disaffected youth of America during the materialistic 1950's; Kerouac developed ideas of automatism into what he called "spontaneous prose" to create a maximalistic, multi-novel epic called the Duluoz Legend in the mold of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. "Beat Generation" is often used more broadly to refer to several groups of post-war American writers from the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance, and so on. These writers have occasionally also been referred to as the "Postmoderns" (see especially references by Charles Olson and the Grove anthologies edited by Donald Allen). Though this is now a less common usage of "postmodern", references to these writers as "postmodernists" still appear and many writers associated with this group (John Ashbery, Richard Brautigan, Gilbert Sorrentino, and so on) appear often on lists of postmodern writers. One writer associated with the Beat Generation who appears most often on lists of postmodern writers is William S. Burroughs. Burroughs published *Naked Lunch* in Paris in 1959 and in America in 1961; this is considered by some the first truly postmodern novel because it is fragmentary, with no central narrative arc; it employs pastiche to fold in elements from popular genres such as detective fiction and science fiction; it's full of parody, paradox, and playfulness; and, according to some accounts, friends Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg edited the book guided by chance. He is also noted, along with Brion Gysin, for the creation of the "cut-up" technique, a technique (similar to Tzara's "Dadaist Poem") in which words and phrases are cut from a newspaper or other publication and rearranged to form a new message. This is the technique he used to create novels such as *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*.

Magical Realism is a technique popular among Latin American writers (and can also be considered its own genre) in which supernatural elements are treated as mundane (a famous example being the practical-minded and ultimately dismissive treatment of an apparently angelic figure in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"). Though the technique has its roots in traditional storytelling, it was a center piece of the Latin American "boom", a movement coterminous with

postmodernism. Some of the major figures of the "Boom" and practitioners of Magical Realism (Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Julio Cortázar etc.) are often listed as postmodernists. Many postmodernists not from Latin America (Salman Rushdie, Italo Calvino, Gunter Grass, etc.) commonly use Magical Realism in their work.

Along with Beckett and Borges, a commonly cited transitional figure is Vladimir Nabokov; like Beckett and Borges, Nabokov started publishing before the beginning of postmodernity (1926 in Russian, 1941 in English). Though his most famous novel, *Lolita* (1955), could be considered a modernist or a postmodernist novel, his later work (specifically *Pale Fire* in 1962 and *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* in 1969) are more clearly postmodern.

The scope

Postmodernism in literature is not an organized movement with leaders or central figures; therefore, it is more difficult to say if it has ended or when it will end (compared to, say, declaring the end of modernism with the death of Joyce or Woolf). Arguably postmodernism peaked in the 60s and 70s with the publication of *Catch-22* in 1961, *Lost in the Funhouse* in 1968, *Slaughterhouse Five* in 1969, *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973, and many others. Some declared the death of postmodernism in the 80's with a new surge of realism represented and inspired by Raymond Carver. Tom Wolfe in his 1989 article "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast" called for a new emphasis on realism in fiction to replace postmodernism. With this new emphasis on realism in mind, some declared *White Noise* in 1985 or *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 to be the last great novels of the postmodern era. However, with the continuing publication of many of the above mentioned authors, the success of younger postmodern writers (such as David Foster Wallace, Dave Eggers, Michael Chabon, Noah Cicero, Zadie Smith, Chuck Palahniuk, Jonathan Lethem), and with publications such as *McSweeney's*, *The Believer*, and *The Onion*, the declaration of the death of postmodernism is arguably premature. Amazon.com even described the Mark Z. Danielewski novel House of Leaves, published in 2000 as "post-postmodern"

Common Themes and Techniques

All of these themes and techniques are often used together. For example, metafiction and pastiche are often used for irony. These are not used by all postmodernists, nor is this an exclusive list of features.

Irony, playfulness, black humor

Linda Hutcheon claimed postmodern fiction as a whole could be characterized by the ironic quote marks, that much of it can be taken as tongue-in-cheek. This irony, along with black humor and the general concept of "play" (related to Derrida's concept or the ideas advocated by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*) are among the most recognizable aspects of postmodernism. Though the idea of employing these in literature did not start with the postmodernists (the modernists were often playful and ironic), they became central features in many postmodern works. In fact, several novelists later to be labeled postmodern were first collectively labeled black humorists: John Barth, Joseph Heller, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut, Bruce Jay Friedman, etc. It's common for postmodernists to treat serious subjects in a playful and humorous way: for example, the way Heller, Vonnegut, and Pynchon address the events of World War II. A good example of postmodern irony and black humor is found in the stories of Donald Barthelme; "The School", for example, is about the ironic death of plants, animals, and people connected to the children in one class, but the inexplicable repetition of death is treated only as a joke and the narrator remains emotionally distant throughout. The central concept of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is the irony of the now-idiomatic "catch 22", and the narrative is structured around a long series of similar ironies. Thomas Pynchon in particular provides prime examples of playfulness, often including silly wordplay, within a serious context. *The Crying of Lot 49*, for example, contains characters named Mike Fallopian and Stanley Koteks and a radio station called KCUF, while the novel as a whole has a serious subject and a complex structure

Pastiche

To combine, or "paste" together, multiple elements. In Postmodernist literature this can be an homage to or a parody of past styles. It can be seen as a representation of the chaotic, pluralistic, or information-drenched aspects of postmodern society. It

can be a combination of multiple genres to create a unique narrative or to comment on situations in postmodernity: for example, William S. Burroughs uses science fiction, detective fiction, westerns; Margaret Atwood uses science fiction and fairy tales; Umberto Eco uses detective fiction, fairy tales, and science fiction, and so on. Though pastiche commonly refers to the mixing of genres, many other elements are also included (metafiction and temporal distortion are common in the broader pastiche of the postmodern novel). For example, Thomas Pynchon includes in his novels elements from detective fiction, science fiction, and war fiction; songs; pop culture references; well-known, obscure, and fictional history mixed together; real contemporary and historical figures (Mickey Rourke and Wernher Von Braun for example); a wide variety of well-known, obscure and fictional cultures and concepts. In Robert Coover's 1977 novel *The Public Burning*, Coover mixes historically inaccurate accounts of Richard Nixon interacting with historical figures and fictional characters such as Uncle Sam and Betty Crocker. Pastiche can also refer to compositional technique, for example the cut-up technique employed by Burroughs. Another example is B. S. Johnson's 1969 novel *The Unfortunates*; it was released in a box with no binding so that readers could assemble it how ever they chose.

Metafiction

Metafiction is essentially writing about writing or "foregrounding the apparatus", making the artificiality of art or the fictionality of fiction apparent to the reader and generally disregards the necessity for "willful suspension of disbelief". It is often employed to undermine the authority of the author, for unexpected narrative shifts, to advance a story in a unique way, for emotional distance, or to comment on the act of storytelling. For example, Italo Calvino's 1979 novel *If on a winter's night a traveler* is about a reader attempting to read a novel of the same name. Kurt Vonnegut also commonly used this technique: the first chapter his 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse Five* is about the process of writing the novel and calls attention to his own presence throughout the novel. Though much of the novel has to do with Vonnegut's own experiences during the firebombing of Dresden, Vonnegut continually points out the artificiality of the central narrative arc which contains obviously fictional elements such as aliens and time travel. Similarly, Tim O'Brien's 1990 novel/story collection *The Things They Carried*, about one platoon's experiences during the Vietnam War, features a character named Tim O'Brien;

though O'Brien was a Vietnam veteran, the book is a work of fiction and O'Brien calls into question the fictionality of the characters and incidents through out the book. One story in the book, "How to Tell a True War Story", questions the nature of telling stories. Factual retellings of war stories, the narrator says, would be unbelievable and heroic, moral war stories don't capture the truth.

Historiographic metafiction

Linda Hutcheon coined the term "historiographic metafiction" to refer to works that fictionalize actual historical events or figures; notable examples include *The General in His Labyrinth* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (about Simón Bolívar) and *Ragtime* by E. L. Doctorow (which features such historical figures as Harry Houdini, Henry Ford, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, Booker T. Washington, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung). John Fowles deals similarly with the Victorian Period in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In regards to critical theory, this technique can be related to *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes.

Temporal distortion

This is a common technique in modernist fiction: fragmentation and non-linear narratives are central features in both modern and postmodern literature. Temporal distortion in postmodern fiction is used in a variety of ways, often for the sake of irony. Historiographic metafiction (see above) is an example of this. Distortions in time are central features in many of Kurt Vonnegut's non-linear novels, the most famous of which is perhaps Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse Five* becoming "unstuck in time". In *Flight to Canada*, Ishmael Reed deals playfully with anachronisms, Abraham Lincoln using a telephone for example. Time may also overlap, repeat, or bifurcate into multiple possibilities. For example, in Robert Coover's "The Babysitter" from *Pricksongs & Descants*, the author presents multiple possible events occurring simultaneously -- in one section the babysitter is murdered while in another section nothing happens and so on -- yet no version of the story is favored as the correct version.

Technoculture and hyperreality

Fredric Jameson called postmodernism the "cultural logic of late capitalism". "Late capitalism" implies that society has moved past the industrial age and into the information age. Likewise, Jean Baudrillard claimed postmodernity was defined by a shift into hyperreality in which simulations have replaced the real. In postmodernity people are inundated with information, technology has become a central focus in many lives, and our understanding of the real is mediated by simulations of the real. Many works of fiction have dealt with this aspect of postmodernity with characteristic irony and pastiche. For example, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* presents characters who are bombarded with a “white noise” of television, product brand names, and clichés. The cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, and many others use science fiction techniques to address this postmodern, hyperreal information bombardment.

Paranoia

Perhaps demonstrated most famously and effectively in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and the work of Thomas Pynchon, the sense of paranoia, the belief that there's an ordering system behind the chaos of the world. For the postmodernist, no ordering system exists, so a search for order is fruitless and absurd. *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pychon has many possible interpretations. If one reads the book with a particular bias, then he or she is going to be frustrated. This often coincides with the theme of technoculture and hyperreality. For example, in *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut, the character Dwayne Hoover becomes violent when he's convinced that everyone else in the world is a robot and he is the only human.

Maximalism

Dubbed maximalism by some critics, the sprawling canvas and fragmented narrative of such writers as Dave Eggers has generated controversy on the "purpose" of a novel as narrative and the standards by which it should be judged. The postmodern position is that the style of a novel must be appropriate to what it depicts and represents, and points back to such examples in previous ages as *Gargantua* by François Rabelais and the *Odyssey* of Homer, which Nancy Felson-Rubin hails as the exemplar of the polytropic audience and its engagement with a work.

Many modernist critics, notably B.R. Myers in his polemic *A Reader's Manifesto*, attack the maximalist novel as being disorganized, sterile and filled with language play for its own sake, empty of emotional commitment—and therefore empty of value as a novel. Yet there are counter-examples, such as Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, or James Chapman's *Stet*, where postmodern narrative coexists with emotional commitment.

Different Perspectives

John Barth, the postmodernist novelist who talks often about the label "postmodern", wrote an influential essay in 1968 called "Literature of Exhaustion" and in 1979 wrote "Literature of Replenishment" in order to clarify the earlier essay. "Literature of Exhaustion" was about the need for a new era in literature after modernism had exhausted itself. In "Literature of Replenishment" Barth says,

> My ideal Postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century Modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back. Without lapsing into moral or artistic simplism, shoddy craftsmanship, Madison Avenue venality, or either false or real naiveté, he nevertheless aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late-Modernist marvels as Beckett's *Texts for Nothing*... The ideal Postmodernist novel will somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and 'contentism,' pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction...

Many of the well-known postmodern novels deal with World War II, one of the most famous of which being Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. Heller claimed his novel and many of the other American novels of the time had more to do with the state of the country after the war:

> The antiwar and anti government feelings in the book belong to the period following World War II: the Korean War, the cold war of the Fifties. A general disintegration of belief took place then, and it affected *Catch-22* in that the form of the novel became almost disintegrated. *Catch-22* was a collage; if not in structure, then in the ideology of the novel itself ... Without being aware of

> it, I was part of a near-movement in fiction. While I was writing *Catch-22*, J. P. Donleavy was writing *The Ginger Man*, Jack Kerouac was writing *On the Road*, Ken Kesey was writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Thomas Pynchon was writing *V.*, and Kurt Vonnegut was writing *Cat's Cradle*. I don't think any one of us even knew any of the others. Certainly I didn't know them. Whatever forces were at work shaping a trend in art were affecting not just me, but all of us. The feelings of helplessness and persecution in *Catch-22* are very strong in Pynchon and in *Cat's Cradle*.

Novelist and theorist Umberto Eco explains his idea of postmodernism as a kind of double-coding:

> I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her "I love you madly", because he knows that she knows (and that she knows he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still there is a solution. He can say "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly". At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly it is no longer possible to talk innocently, he will nevertheless say what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her in an age of lost innocence.

Novelist David Foster Wallace in his essay 1990 essay "E Unibus Pluram" makes the connection between the rise of postmodernism and the rise of television with its tendency toward self-reference and the ironic juxtaposition of what's seen and what's said. This, he claims, explains the preponderance of pop culture references in postmodern literature:

> It was in post-atomic America that pop influences on literature became something more than technical. About the time television first gasped and sucked air, mass popular U.S. culture seemed to become High-Art-viable as a collection of symbols and myth. The episcopate of this pop-reference movement were the post-Nabokovian Black Humorists, the Metafictionists and assorted franc-and latinophiles only later comprised by "postmodern." The erudite, sardonic fictions of the Black Humorists introduced a generation of new fiction writers who saw themselves as sort of avant-avant-garde, not

> only cosmopolitan and polyglot but also technologically literate, products of more than just one region, heritage, and theory, and citizens of a culture that said its most important stuff about itself via mass media. In this regard one thinks particularly of the Gaddis of *The Recognitions* and *JR*, the Barth of *The End of the Road* and *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and the Pynchon of *The Crying of Lot 49* ... Here's Robert Coover's 1966 *A Public Burning*, in which Eisenhower buggers Nixon on-air, and his 1968 *A Political Fable*, in which the Cat in the Hat runs for president.

Hans-Peter Wagner offers this approach to defining postmodern literature:

> Postmodernism ... can be used at least in two ways – firstly, to give a label to the period after 1968 (which would then encompass all forms of fiction, both innovative and traditional), and secondly, to describe the highly experimental literature produced by writers beginning with Lawrence Durrell and John Fowles in the 1960s and reaching to the breathless works of Martin Amis and the "Chemical (Scottish) Generation" of the fin-de-siècle. In what follows, the term 'postmodernist' is used for experimental authors (especially Durell, Fowles, Carter, Brooke-Rose, Barnes, Ackroyd, and Martin Amis) while "post-modern" is applied to authors who have been less innovative.

The term Postmodern literature is used to describe certain tendencies in post-World War II literature. It is both a continuation of the experimentation championed by writers of the modernist period (relying heavily, for example, on fragmentation, paradox, questionable narrators, etc.) and a reaction against Enlightenment ideas implicit in Modernist literature. Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, is difficult to define and there is little agreement on the exact characteristics, scope, and importance of postmodern literature. Henry Miller, William S. Burroughs, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Hunter S. Thompson, Truman Capote, Thomas Pynchon.

Views of English literature

"I had always thought of English literature as the richest in the world; the discovery now of a secret chamber (sc. Old English literature) at the very threshold of that literature came to me as an additional gift." - Jorge Luis Borges, 'An Autobiographical Essay', The Aleph & Other Stories

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