British Literature from the Beginnings to the 19th century

Course units pertaining to the lecture materials:

3	**BAN1309**	**Brit irodalomtörténet 1. A kezdetektől a 19. századig**	**British Literature 1. From the Beginnings to the 19th Century**
5	**OAN1108**	**A brit irodalom fő korszakai**	**The Main Periods of British Literature**

Final exam topics related to the course material:

- BA programme:

(A) English-Speaking Literatures and Cultures

1. Medieval English poetry and culture
   a. Anglo-Saxon poetry and culture (450-1066)
   b. Middle English poetry and culture (1066-1485)
2. Renaissance English literature and culture
   a. Early sonnet writers (Wyatt and Surrey) and the Tudor age (1485-1558)
   b. The Elizabethan age and the sonnet (Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare) (1558-1603)
   c. Shakespeare's dramatic art
3. 17th-century English literature and culture (1603-1688)
   a. Metaphysical poetry and the Stuart age
   b. Milton in the context of Puritanism and the Civil War
   c. Restoration comedy and the Restoration period
4. 18th-century British literature and culture (1688-1798)
   a. Enlightenment, Neoclassicism and the Williamite compromise
   b. Sentimental poetry and the era of the four Georges
   c. The rise of the English novel (Defoe, Swift, Fielding, Richardson) and middle-class values

- Teacher training programme:

(A) Literature, culture and history

1/ William Shakespeare's dramatic and poetic art.
2/ Major trends, themes, genres and poets in the history of British poetry to 1900.
3/ Major trends, themes, genres and authors of the British novel to 1900.
4/ Major trends, themes, genres and authors of British drama to 1900.

Tartalom

1. The Medieval Period

Old English Poetry (409-1066)

Divisions of the richness of any cultural achievement into eras and periods is always an arbitrary, nevertheless a necessary gesture. When examining English poetry, it is convenient to start with the 5th century AD, when the Anglo-Saxon tribes invaded the British Isles and established their distinct culture.

The Anglo-Saxon world and culture

The Anglo-Saxon and Jute tribes arriving from the Danish peninsula invaded Britain in many waves from 410 on, and pushed the Celtic population eastwards. This was a pagan, polytheist and tribal society, showing much resemblance with the other Germanic tribes of the period. It was at the end of the 6th century AD that Christianity was (re-)introduced in Britain. This was a slow process, for heathen (pagan) traditions and rights had still existed, especially in village communities. The old Anglo-Saxon (AS) religion reflected man's fear of the unknown forces of nature but was an expression of a clearly structured and understandable society.

Anglo-Saxon society

The fundamental units of the society were the families and the tribes. The leader, the king (cyning) was at the same time the most important and the strongest warrior. It was not an inherited title, it was based on the king's fight and successes, and the king was elected by the witan (council of leaders). The highest ranking men were called theigns, who formed the backbone of the army as well.
Basic values included straightforwardness, courage, strong morals, sobriety, respect for elders, the ability to do things, loyalty, strong tribal and kinship ties, even stronger than the rights of the individuals.

The role of women was somewhat different compared to later periods. Although the Anglo-Saxon society was governed by men, women had considerable rights. For instance they could own property, could not be married without their consent, and even in marriage they enjoyed a certain degree of independence.

Anglo-Saxon mythology

Mythology had a great influence on OE literature and everyday life as well, as it is reflected in the fact that AS gods gave their names to days of the week.

- Monday was obviously devoted to the Moon, Sunday to the Sun.
- The god of battle and combat was TIW. → Tiw's daeg, Tuesday
- The highest god was the god of war, WOTAN (or Odin). → Wotan's daeg, Wednesday, celebrated at the most prominent place, in the middle of the week.
- Various natural elements were controlled by THOR (meaning hammer, see the word "thunderbolt"). → Thor's daeg, Thursday
- The goddess of love, bringing light was named FREIA. → Freia's daeg, Friday
- Saturday goes back to Roman origins, Saturn was the god of agriculture.
- The god of sunshine and happiness was BALDUR.

OE poetry in general is characterised by coldness and pessimism, as reflected in the belief that even gods were not immortal (see the "Twilight of Gods", *Götterdämmerung* in German [the title of Richard Wagner's opera], all go back to the old Norse belief in Ragnarök, the final battle of gods and apocalypse that brings the end of the world).

According to the OE belief, the world was governed by **WYRD** (fate, appearing in the German word "werden", to become). This fate is blind, inevitable, destroys everyone, even the gods.

Yet man's duty is to fight on, showing courage and will-power to attain the so-called *lof*. This is an OE expression for reputation and fame, praise, glory. **LOFDAED** was a deed winning glory to a brave warrior.

General characteristics of OE poetry

Old English poetry is basically **oral literature**: the poems that were written down are probably later forms. Some of the 9-10th century poetry was composed as early as the 5th and 6th centuries. Most of the old AS poems were considered to be too "pagan" for the monks and scribes who copied them in the Middle Ages, so they either made selections, or added certain Christian massages to the original poem.

The poems are usually not about individual human feelings and people, but rather about types and general values, like heroes, celebration of epic deeds, great persons of the period, fights, etc.

The so-called *scops* functioned as the living memory, the voice of the tribe. They sang about battles, the past events of the tribe, OE history; they were usually eye-witnesses of these events. Many of these heroic songs also describe how these tribes lived. The texts of the poems, however, were not fixed, a scop had a framework setting and the song/poem was a little different each time; the scops had to have a strong ability of improvisation and great rhetorical skills (and good memory: they had to remember thousands of lines). One of the

earliest AS poems is about the ideal scop, **Widsith**, who tells about his travels. Other scops that we know by name: **Caedmon, Aldhelm, Deor.** We do not know, however, who wrote the famous elegy "The Wanderer". The earliest surviving Old English poem is **Caedmon's Hymn**.

The production of manuscripts was the monopoly of the church (obviously, only they could read and write). Great skill was needed to produce beautiful letters on the parchment and they had to be careful because ink was expensive.

Very little (5-10%) of these manuscripts survive, so we have no idea how the whole of OE poetry might have looked like, the selections reflect the taste and the ruling ideology of the church. Not one of these scribes thought, for example, of preserving folk or pagan songs.

The formal features of OE poetry

Mæg ic be me sylfum || soðgied wrecan,
siþas secgan, || hu ic geswincdagum
earfoð hwile || oft þrowade…

(I will tell you || my personal testament,
tally the weight || of weary days,
the hours of torment, || the times of agony…)

- Four-stressed line. Each line had a fixed number of stresses but the length of the line was not fixed.
- No end-rhymes, musicality is provided by alliteration.
- No run-on lines (no enjambement), each line was end-stopped.
- Use of kennings: special compound nouns of metaphorical quality. For example: helmet-bearer = warrior, whale's way = sea, sky-candle = Sun, feeder of raven = warrior
- Aristocratic, solemn, sophisticated tone, a lot of rarely-used words.

Main genres of OE poetry

(1) Riddles, gnomic verses, maxims

95 metrical riddles are preserved in the Exeter Book, only two are translations from Latin originals. Examples: "The Storm", "The Swan", "The Book"

Riddle 23

Ic eom wunderlicu wiht, wifum on hyhte,	*I am a wonderful help to women,*
neahbuendum nyt. Nængum sceþþe	*The hope of something to come. I harm*
burgsittendra nymþe bonan anum.	*No citizen except my slayer.*
Staþol min is steapheah; stonde ic on bedde,	*Rooted I stand on a high bed.*
neoþan ruh nathwær. Neþeð hwilum	*I am shaggy below. Sometimes the beautiful*
ful cyrtenu ceorles dohtor,	*Peasant's daughter, an eager-armed,*
modwlonc meowle, þæt heo on mec gripeð,	*Proud woman grabs my body,*
ræseð mec on reodne, reafað min heafod,	*Rushes my red skin, holds me hard,*
fegeð mec on fæsten. Feleþ sona	*Claims my head. The curly-haired*
mines gemotes seo þe mec nearwað,	*Woman who catches me fast will feel*
wif wundenlocc-- wæt bið þæt eage.	*Our meeting. Her eye will be wet.*

(2) Charms, spells

- Altogether twelve metrical charms survive in OE, in two different manuscripts.
- Go back to superstition, folklore; probably the oldest pieces of OE poetry
- It is interesting that while copying their texts, the monks did not change the charms, for they thought then they would not work.

For example: “Against a Swarm of Bees”

Sitte ge, sigewif, sigað to eorþan!
Næfre ge wilde to wuda fleogan.
Beo ge swa gemindige mines godes,
swa bið manna gehwilc metes and eþeles.

Settle down, victory-women,
never be wild and fly to the woods.
Be as mindful of my welfare,
as is each man of eating and of home

(3) Battle songs

- Deal with contemporary history. Most famous pieces:
  - “The Battle of Brunanburgh” – took place, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in 937 and it is found under the same entry in the Chronicle. It records the victory of the West Saxon Aethelstan and his brother Edmund over Constantine, the king of Scotland.

- "The Battle of Maldon" (991, according to ASC), recording the battle between the English and the Danes at Maldon, Essex.

The beginning of "The Battle of Brunnanburgh":

Her æþelstan cyning, eorla dryhten,
beorna beahgifa, and his broþor eac,
Eadmund æþeling, ealdorlangne tir
geslogon æt sæcce sweorda ecgum
ymbe Brunanburh.

In this year King Aethelstan, Lord of warriors,
ring-giver to men, and his brother also,
Prince Eadmund, won eternal glory
in battle with sword edges
around Brunanburh.

(4) Religious poetry

There are two outstanding authors here whose names survive:

Caedmon is famous for his hymn, from which only 9 lines survive. *"Caedmon's Hymn" is believed to be the oldest extant English text.* He is supposed to have lived in the second half of the 7th century and paraphrased Biblical stories in verse. Caedmon's hymn reads as follows:

Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard,
metudæs maecti end his modgidanc,
uerc uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuaes,
eci dryctin, or astelidæ.
He aerist scop aelda barnum
heben til hrofe, haleg scepen;
tha middungeard moncynnæs uard,
eci dryctin, æfter tiadæ
firum foldu, frea allmectig.

Now [we] must honour the guardian of heaven,
the might of the architect, and his purpose,
the work of the father of glory — as he, the eternal lord,
established the beginning of wonders.
He, the holy creator, first created heaven as a roof
for the children of men. Then the guardian of mankind
the eternal lord, the lord almighty
afterwards appointed the middle earth,

the lands, for men.

Cynewulf (lived around the middle of the 8th century) is the accepted author of the religious poems in the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Manuscript; it is probable, however, that several hands wrote in his style.

"The Dream of the Rood" (rood = cross): the cross on which Jesus was crucified is the speaker of the 156-line poem

"The Phoenix" – Despite its being a religious poem, it is one of the rare works that depict vivid colours and convey happiness

(5) Elegies

- Absolutely unique in Germanic poetry, probably the greatest achievements.
- They convey a highly personal character that is very rare in other Germanic poetry.
- Include softer, melancholic tones, the description of natural scenery is frequent.
- They are also unique because they combine the values of Christianity and paganism.
- Examples: "The Seafarer", "The Wanderer", "The Wife's Lament", "The Husband's Message"

(6) Epic poetry

The greatest epic of the Old English period is undoubtedly BEOWULF. It was written in about 700 AD by a Danish clerk in East Anglia. The manuscript that survives was probably copied in around 1000 in late Wessex dialect by two scribes. The poem contains more than 3,000 lines, and at the time of copying it did not have a title. This is the only heroic epic that is preserved in full.

It takes us back to the heroic age of Germanic peoples, to the 5-6th centuries. The story is about Scandinavia, more specifically, about the Gaets, England is not even mentioned. It is important that it does not celebrate contemporary deeds of heroism, but takes us back into a glorified past. Certain elements of the Germanic folklore tradition, Virgil's Aeneid and certain Biblical motifs can be discovered in the poem, but its main character is that it is a typical Germanic heroic epic.

The plot in short: Young Beowulf leaves home to rescue the Danes, because the beautiful palace of king Hrothgar, Heorot, is raided by a monster, Grendel, who is a descendant of Cain. Beowulf slays Grendel (single handed!) by tearing off his arms. Grendel's mother, an evil witch returns to take revenge in his son's death; B. meets the water-hag in a mere. In a fierce struggle, B. kills her with a miraculous sword, and he is given many treasures by king Hygelac. In the second part of the poem, we can see Beowulf as an old man. He has been the king of the Gaets for 50 years. He sets out again to defend his kingdom against a dragon, who was aroused by a poor, runaway slave, who violated the treasure that

the dragon was guarding. B. sets out to defend his country, kills the dragon, but he is also mortally wounded and dies.

Beowulf is a heroic poem in the sense that it celebrates the actions of a protagonist (a hero). Beowulf is a typical hero: searches challenge alone, unarmed, fights the monster and dies a tragic death. The epic describes a world with values of heroism, the warriors are either fighting or feasting ("glee and glory"). Beowulf, however, is not a simple adventure story, because it involves a conflict of revenge and obligation of contract.

This epic, however, is not only a heroic poem but also bears important traits of an epic. First, it is universal: it takes in all of life, it presents a full world, in a way that the truth of presentation is world-wide recognised. It embraces war, peace, man, God, life and death. Secondly, it is objective: the scenes and the heroes form an interconnected reality from a consistent, impersonal viewpoint; national bias does not really appear. It contains self-evident or axiomatic messages, it explains itself while it is written. It begins with the arrival of a hero (not Beowulf), who founds the dynasty and ends with the death of Beowulf. The deaths of the Danish and the enemies are described in the same way.

The epic has a clearly identifiable historical background: it is about a period not earlier than the 6^{th} century. This is the time of the settlement of the Saxon tribes, also the great migrations of the Danes, Swedish, Gaet and Franc tribes. King Hrothgar and Hygelac can also be identified.

The epic also contains the mysterious arrival of Scyld (a well-known figure in the Scandinavian saga), who came as a child in a boat and departed at the end of his life in a richly decorated boat. This is an unmistakable reference to the motif of ship-burial, when the king was buried together with coins, weapons, harps and other different objects, for which historical evidence was found in 1939 at Sutton Hoo, East Suffolk. This is the famous Sutton Hoo ship burial.

The mood of the poem conveys a gloomy vision of life, Northern landscape and the impermanence of earthly things. This is even made harsher by the emphasis on the certainty of doomsday and the constant sense of man at war with hostile Nature. All glory ends, the epic tells us, in desolation and waste.

The Wanderer

Oft to the wanderer, weary of exile,
Cometh God's pity, compassionate love,
Though woefully toiling on wintry seas
With churning oar in the icy wave,
Homeless and helpless he fled from fate.
Thus saith the wanderer mindful of misery,
Grievous disasters, and death of kin:
"Oft when the day broke, oft at the dawning,
Lonely and wretched I wailed my woe
No man is living, no comrade left,
To whom I dare fully unlock my heart.
I have learned truly the mark of a man
Is keeping his counsel and locking his lips,
Let him think what he will! For, woe of heart
Withstandeth not fate; a failing spirit
Earneth no help. Men eager for honor
Bury their sorrow deep in the breast.
"So have I also, often in wretchedness
Fettered my feelings, far from my kin,
Homeless and hapless,° since days of old,
When the dark earth covered my dear lord's face,
And I sailed away with sorrowful heart,
Over wintry seas, seeking a gold-lord,
If far or near lived one to befriend me
With gift in the mead-hall and comfort for grief.
"Who bears it, knows what a bitter companion,
Shoulder to shoulder, sorrow can be,
When friends are no more. His fortune is exile.
Not gifts of fine gold; a heart that is frozen,
Earth's winsomeness dead. And he dreams of the hall men,
The dealing of treasure, the days of his youth,
When his lord bade welcome to wassail° and feast.
But gone is that gladness, and never again
Shall come the loved counsel of comrade and king.
"Even in slumber his sorrow assaileth,
And, dreaming he claspeth his dear lord again,
Head on knee, hand on knee, loyally laying,
Pledging his liege° as in days long past.
Then from his slumber he starts lonely-hearted,
Beholding gray stretches of tossing sea,

Seabirds bathing, with wings outspread,
While hailstorms darken, and driving snow.
Bitterer then is the bane of his wretchedness,
The longing for loved one: his grief is renewed.
The forms of his kinsmen take shape in the silence;
In rapture he greets them; in gladness he scans
Old comrades remembered. But they melt into air
With no word of greeting to gladden his heart.
Then again surges his sorrow upon him;
And grimly he spurs his weary soul
Once more to the toil of the tossing sea.
No wonder therefore, in all the world.
If a shadow darkens upon my spirit
When I reflect on the fates of men—
How one by one proud warriors vanish
From the halls that knew them, and day by day
All this earth ages and droops unto death.
No man may know wisdom till many a winter
Has been his portion. A wise man is patient,
Not swift to anger, nor hasty of speech,
Neither too weak, nor too reckless in war,
Neither fearful nor fain, nor too wishful of wealth,
Nor too eager in vow— ere he know the event.
A brave man must bide° when he speaketh his boast
Until he know surely the goal of his spirit.
"A wise man will ponder how dread is that doom
When all this world's wealth shall be scattered and waste
As now, over all, through the regions of earth,
Walls stand rime-covered and swept by the winds.
The battlements crumble, the wine halls decay;
Joyless and silent the heroes are sleeping
Where the proud host fell by the wall they defended.
Some battle launched on their long, last journey;
One a bird bore o'er the billowing sea;
One the gray wolf slew; one a grieving earl
Sadly gave to the grave's embrace.
The warden of men hath wasted this world
Till the sound of music and revel is stilled,
And these giant-built structures stand empty of life.
"He who shall muse on these moldering ruins,
And deeply ponder this darkling life,
Must brood on old legends of battle and bloodshed,
And heavy the mood that troubles his heart:
'Where now is the warrior? Where is the warhorse'?

Bestowal of treasure, and sharing of feast?
Alas! the bright ale cup, the byrny-clad° warrior,
The prince in his splendor —those days are long sped
In the night of the past, as if they never had been!'
And now remains only, for warriors' memorial,
A wall wondrous high with serpent shapes carved.
Storms of ash spears have smitten the earls,
Carnage of weapon, and conquering fate.
"Storms now batter these ramparts of stone;
Blowing snow and the blast of winter
Enfold the earth; night shadows fall
Darkly lowering, from the north driving
Ranging hail in wrath upon men.
Wretchedness fills the realm of earth,
And fate's decrees transform the world.
Here wealth is fleeting, friends are fleeting,
Man is fleeting, maid is fleeting;
All the foundation of earth shall fail !"
Thus spake the sage in solitude pondering.
Good man is he who guardeth his faith.
He must never too quickly unburden his breast
Of its sorrow, but eagerly strive for redress;
And happy the man who seeketh for mercy
From his heavenly Father, our fortress and strength.

Translated by Charles W. Kennedy

Middle English poetry and drama (1066-1485)

The Norman conquest in 1066 changed the face of English poetry fundamentally. The determining influence was Norman-French in language, culture, literature. Poetry became lighter in tone, more worldly and the focus was not so much the celebration of some kind of abstract heroism and the assertion of the inevitability of human fate. Poetry turned more towards worldly affairs and specific human feelings and characters, nevertheless chivalric romances became the chief means of the celebration of courtly and knightly values. Old Anglo-Saxon traditions, however, remained, as it will be seen in the case of the alliterative revival.

Changes in the language

Language changed fundamentally. Surnames began to be used, which was a Norman custom (it was also logical, because the population grew and they had to differentiate themselves from the others). Surnames either grew from place names (with the affix "de" or "of"), occupations (Taylor or Tailor, Carpenter, Smith, Archer, Turner, Thatcher, Cartwright) or personal traits (Small, Sweet, Stern, Read [red], Long).

The French aristocracy was not reluctant to learn English, because after all, they had to somehow deal with the conquered people. Soon bilingualism became the rule. The language of the upper classes remained French, which was made even easier by the fact that in most courts of Europe, French became the leading language. The most evident proof of the contact of the two languages is, naturally, the high number of French words in present-day English.

Some examples:

- Names of kinds of edible meat also come from French: pork (porc), mutton (mouton), veal (veau), beef (boeuf), venison (venaison)
- Occupations: carpenter (charpentier), tailor (tailleur), butcher (boucher), mason (maçon), painter (peintre)
- Other general words: charity, council, court, mercy, obedience, poverty, peace, rich, etc…

Differences between Anglo-Saxon and Norman literature

1. As for clarity, OE poems are rather sophisticated, using elevated, aristocratic language, difficult to understand for the common people. By contrast, ME language is much more flexible, closer to everyday language, sometimes even vulgar.

2. As for the mood of the two periods, OE literature is gloomy, melancholic, harsh, there is no reason for laughing in this bitter world. Comedy at best appears as irony or dark humour. ME poems are lighter, very often comic, playful, ironical or satirical, there is more joy of life to be discovered in them.

3. As far as the forms are concerned, OE literature established relatively few forms (battle songs, elegies, epics…), characterised by limited vocabulary, rather repetitive. Since they had a complex linguistic system, there was no use for rhymes (it would have been difficult, because many words had different endings). By contrast, ME literature uses a wider scope of forms, ranging from ballads, songs, romances, narrative poems, etc. Language also became more poetic, making use of **rhymes** (made possible by the fading of inflexional endings at the end of the words), assonance, consonance, and more pleasant musicality. All in all, a rich formal culture was coupled with a rich vocabulary.

Main genres of Middle English poetry

(1) Songs and lyrics

They are easy to remember, simple in style. Some of them contained even political overtones (complaining about the hardships of the common people). The lines: "When Adam delved and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?" was used as a slogan in the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. Famous pieces: "The Cuckoo-Song" (around 1240), with the jolly beginning lines, "Sumer is ycomen in / Loude sing cuckoo!" ("Nyár-kánon" in Hungarian). The other widespread piece is somewhat similar in tone, entitled "Lenten ys come with loue to toune".

(2) Narrative poetry

The most famous piece of narrative poetry is "The Owl and the Nightingale". It is one of the earliest instances of the octosyllabic couplet in English poetry. This is a didactic poem, comprising of almost 1,800 lines. The genre is the conventional "débat" (debate) that goes back to Latin and French roots. The poem uses the terminology of lawsuits. The Owl is the allegory of monastic, sober and religious life, while the Nightingale represents worldly life, happiness, enjoying Nature. It is remarkable that the debate remains undecided, thus showing that the church, although still important, had no monopoly over life anymore:

Mid þisse worde forþ hi ferden,	(With these words they set off)
al bute here & bute uerde,	(without any kind of army)
to Portesham þat heo bicome.	(till they came to Portesham)
Ah hu heo spedde of heore dome,	(but how they succeeded with their judgement
ne [c]an ich eu namore telle	(I cannot tell you anymore about)
her nis namore of þis spelle.	(there is no more of this story, that's the end)

(3) Romances

The home of romantic, courtly love ("amour courtois") was France. Its evolution was basically the natural result of the position of women in medieval, feudal society: marriage meant a contract. At official ceremonies, homage was paid to the lady of the manor by knights of lower rank, and this personal devotion was extended to her when the overlord went to the royal court or to wars. The narrower home of this amorous poetry was Provence (hence the genre "provancal"). These noble but amateur poets described the idealised lady as a saint or a patron. These amateur poets became called "troubadours" (the word goes back to the Middle French word trovare, meaning "compose", "invent", "to find"). The main theme of these poems is the contrast between marriage and love, that is the incompatibility of unrequited emotions and commercial contract. This habit resulted in a special code of behaviour, strictly defined by rules, which led to the evolution of long romantic narratives.

The word "romance" originates in the fact that these poems were written not in Latin, but in national languages that stemmed from Latin, that is, Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish), that were considered to be second-rate and vulgar, compared to "classical" Latin. Later, the word lost its original meaning and came to mean any story in which "romantic" love was the main theme.

"*Ne sont que trois matieres a nul home entendant / De France, et de Bretagne et de Rome la grant*" ("There are only three materials worth listening to: that of France, Bretagne and Rome, the great"). - Jean Bodel, a French poet at the end of the 12th century

On the basis of this, we speak about three (or rather four) groups of ME romances:

The "matter" of 1) France, 2) Britain (Bretagne), 3) Rome and 4) England

(1) <u>The matter of France</u> includes the ME *Song of Roland* (1,049 lines)

(2) <u>The matter of Britain</u> includes the Arthurian legend. This legend does not appear in England before 1200 and no English romance covers the whole of the Arthurian legend until Thomas Malory in 1485. Cycles of the "matter of Britain" include Arthur and Merlin (around 1300), the cycles of Tristram, Gawain, Lancelot, the death of Arthur.

(3) <u>The matter of Rome</u> includes stories of Troy, Thebes and various oriental subjects. The Troyan myth is important here because the English firmly believed themselves to be of Troyan descent (the story of Brutus), but the basis of this legend was nor really served by Homer's epic but rather Boccaccio's stories. Further parts of the matter of Rome includes Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, "The Knight's Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales* and various legends of Alexander the Great.

(4) The matter of England: romances like *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, *Guy of Warwick*, and ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

The general features of romances

- narrative verse form, a narrative of heroic adventure
- present a less unified action and characters are less developed than in an epic, basically a string of episodes (using a lot of "and"s) – paratactic structure
- the action is set in a temporally remote era (the past) or a physically remote area (exotic, faraway land), e.g., "In the old days of King Arthur…"
- the characters are socially remote, featuring idealised, untouchable princesses, perfect knights, hovering above common people
- love is idealised, instant and often unfulfilled (a basic requirement of courtly love is unrequited emotions)
- adventure, testing the hero
- QUEST – the core of the romance is a search for an ideal or lost object, let it be the Holy Grail or the ideal princess; when the quest is completed, the story ends (quest is also the basic element of many romantic/adventure/pulp novels and films even today)
- frequent use of superlatives
- use of the marvellous and the supernatural, there is usually no distinction between magic and everyday life, the supernatural is part of everyday existence, but: the hero does not win by magical means, only by force or cleverness
- often the concealment of names and identity appears – a frequent element is the appearance of an unknown knight in disguise, who refuses to give his name: he is "le bel inconnu", "the beautiful unknown"
- Form: metrical octosyllabic couplets

By the end of the 14th century this genre becomes somewhat outmoded, and is often the subject of parody, as seen in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, where the speaker attempts to tell the romance of "Sir Thopas", but the host cannot bear the sheer nonsense and cuts him short:

> *SIR THOPAS*
> *The First Fit*
> *Listen, lords, with good intent,*
> *I truly will a tale present*
> *Of mirth and of solace;*
> *All of a knight was fair and gent*
> *In battle and in tournament.*
> *His name was Sir Thopas.*

Born he was in a far country,
In Flanders, all beyond the sea,
And Poperinghe the place;
His father was a man full free,
And lord he was of that countree,
As chanced to be God's grace.
Sir Thopas was a doughty swain,
White was his brow as paindemaine,
His lips red as a rose;
His cheeks were like poppies in grain,
And I tell you, and will maintain,
He had a comely nose.
His hair and beard were like saffron
And to his girdle reached adown,
His shoes were of cordwain;
From Bruges were come his long hose brown,
His rich robe was of ciclatoun-
And cost full many a jane.
Well could he hunt the dim wild deer
And ride a-hawking by river,
With grey goshawk on hand;
Therewith he was a good archer,
At wrestling was there none his peer
Where any ram did stand.
Full many a maiden, bright in bower,
Did long for him for paramour
When they were best asleep;
But chaste he was, no lecher sure,
And sweet as is the bramble-flower
That bears a rich red hepe.
(...)
Behold, my lords, here is a fit!
If you'll have any more of it,
You have but to command.
The Second Fit
Now hold your peace, par charitee,
Both knight and lady fair and free,
And hearken to my spell;
Of battle and of chivalry
And all of ladies' love-drury
Anon I will you tell.
Romances men recount of price,
Of King Horn and of Hypotis,
Of Bevis and Sir Guy,

Of Sir Libeaux and Plain-d'Amour;
But Sir Thopas is flower sure
Of regal chivalry.
His good horse all he then bestrode,
And forth upon his way he rode
Like spark out of a brand;
Upon his crest he bore a tower
Wherein was thrust a lily-flower;
God grant he may withstand!
He was a knight adventurous,
Wherefore he'd sleep within no house,
But lay down in his hood;
His pillow was his helmet bright,
And by him browsed his steed all night
On forage fine and good.
Himself drank water of the well,
As did the knight Sir Percival,
So worthy in his weeds,
Till on a day...
"No more of this, sir, for God`s dignity!"
Shouted our Landlord, "for thou makest me
So weary with thine utter silliness
That, as I hope that God my soul will bless,
Mine ears are aching with thy worthless drivel!
Cast all such cursed rhyming to the devil!
Well may men call it doggerel!" cried he.

So the romance as a genre began to decline in the 14th century, and one of the main reasons for this was social in nature: the knightly order, one of the pillars of the medieval society began to transform, and very slowly gave its way to the middle class. The very stability on which the romance was founded ceased to exist. The typical symptom of this decline is Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1615), in which the knight has nothing to fight against but his visions and a windmill. Don Quixote is regarded by many critics as the first novel.

The alliterative revival (c. 1350 and 1500)

The second major trend in Middle English poetry, expressing a nationalistic return to earlier, Old English poetic forms. Between about 1350 and 1400, a strange and sudden emergence of unrhyming alliterative poems can be detected, which was a definitive answer to the predominance of French, rhyming poetry. This revival was clearly dominant in the North, more precisely in the northwest-Midlands. It is a question of debate whether these alliterative

forms were “revived” or simply no such texts survived from the period between about 1200 and 1350.

The most important works written in this revival style:

- William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* (a dream allegory) and
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by an unknown author.

Sir Gawain: During a New Year’s Eve feast at King Arthur’s court, a strange figure, referred to only as the Green Knight, pays the court an unexpected visit. He challenges the group’s leader or any other brave representative to a game. The Green Knight says that he will allow whomever accepts the challenge to strike him with his own axe, on the condition that the challenger find him in exactly one year to receive a blow in return. Sir Gawain leaps up and asks to take the challenge himself. He takes hold of the axe and, in one deadly blow, cuts off the knight’s head. To the amazement of the court, the now-headless Green Knight picks up his severed head and rides away, reminding Gawain of his promise.

Told in four “fitts,” or parts, the poem weaves together at least three separate narrative strings commonly found in medieval folklore and romance. The first plot, the beheading game, appears in ancient folklore and may derive from pagan myths related to the agricultural cycles of planting and harvesting crops. The second and third plots concern the exchange of winnings and the hero’s temptation; both of these plots derive from medieval romances and dramatize tests of the hero’s honesty, loyalty, and chastity. As the story unfolds, we discover that the three apparently separate plotlines intersect in surprising ways.

Among the manuscripts collected by Robert Cotton in the 17th century, among which there is the Beowulf MS, there is a small volume, containing four alliterative poems and 12 illustrations depicting the episodes of the poem. These untitled poems came to be called “Pearl”, “Cleanness”, “Patience” and “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”. The unknown author is therefore often called “the Pearl poet”.

Sir Gawain… is **a long, metrical romance**, containing about 2,500 lines, it has four parts and is divided into long paragraphs by an irregular number of lines. At the end of each paragraph, though, there are short, 5-line parts, with rhymes a-b-a-ba”, showing French pattern.

For werre wrathed hym not so much þat wynter nas wors,
When þe colde cler water fro þe cloudez schadde,
And fres er hit falle myȝt to þe fale erþe;
Ner slayn wyth þe slete he sleped in his yrnes
Mo nyȝtez þen innoghe in naked rokkez,
Þer as claterande fro þe crest þe colde borne rennez,
And henged heȝe ouer his hede in hard iisse-ikkles.
Þus in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde
Bi contray cayrez þis knyȝt, tyl Krystmasse euen,

al one;
Þe knyȝt wel þat tyde
To Mary made his mone,
Þat ho hym red to ryde
And wysse hym to sum wone.

Yet the warring little worried him; worse was the winter,
When the cold clear water cascaded from the clouds
And froze before it could fall to the fallow earth.
Half-slain by the sleet, he slept in his armour
Night after night among the naked rocks,
Where the cold streams splashed from the steep crests
Or hung high over his head in hard icicles.
And in peril and pain, in parlous plight,
This knight covered the country toll Christmas eve
Alone;
And he that eventide
To Mary made his moan,
And begged her to be his guide
Till some shelter should be shown.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400)

His significance:

- "The father of English poetry"
- Created the English literary language (based on the London dialect)
- Summed up all the existing forms of European poetry
- Created flesh-and-blood characters
- In the "Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales*, he provided a panorama of contemporary English society, which had never been done before.
- He presents a genuinely English scene in Middle English language

His poetry

We can practically divide his oeuvre into two main parts: the first group includes works written under French and Italian influences. These are poetic romances in elegant, fine, sensitive language, following the contemporary trends in Europe:

- *Roman de la Rose*;
- *The Book of the Duchess*;
- *The House of Fame*;
- *The Parliament of Fowles*;
- *Troilus and Criseyde*;
- *The Legend of Good Women*

The second "group" includes his work representing contemporary England, that is, *The Canterbury Tales*

The Canterbury Tales (~1390)

It is one of the most original masterpieces of world literature. Some of the stories must have been written before they were put into the frame, such as "The Knight's Tale".

The Canterbury Tales is a wonderful portrait gallery of pilgrims. Chaucer uses a framework story, as it was usual in Boccaccio as well, the yearly pilgrimage to Canterbury "the holy blissful martyr for to seek", that is, to revere Thomas Becket. According to the agreement, each pilgrim (that is, 30 people and the Host, Harry Bailey, and the Speaker/Chaucer) was supposed to have told two stories on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. That would have amounted to more than 120 tales, but only a little more than 20 were completed (two are interrupted, and two end shortly after they are begun).

The framework situation does not only enable Chaucer to have his pilgrims speak, but also brings together radically different members of the medieval English society. We have to be aware of the fact, though, that the real higher classes (the aristocrats, members of the court) are not represented here (they may have travelled separately).

Three sections of the society can be seen:

- various UPPER and MIDDLE classes (the knight, the doctor, the man of law, the merchant…),
- LOWER classes (miller, cook, carpenter…) and
- RELIGIOUS orders (nun, monk, parson, pardoner…).

These are real-life characters, the portrayal is subtle and these pilgrims are certainly not conventionalised types. They are presented in a way that something surprising, unique must catch the reader's attention. They are either described by some speciality in outlook (clothes, manner of speaking) or some inner characteristic feature (greed, avarice, lust or gentleness for that matter). The uniqueness of the characters is made sometimes even greater because many jobs are portrayed when they are abused. Only three characters are depicted absolutely positively:

1. **The Knight**: represent high ideals of chivalry and courtesy, he is the first speaker, he tells the longest and noblest story (Palamon and Arcite) (by contrast he is followed by the Miller, who tells a vulgar *fablieau*).
Reality: by the 1380s, chivalry had become outmoded, something belonging to the past.

2. **The Parson**: shows real Christian behaviour, as opposed to the corrupt Pardoner. He is the ideal country parson, looking after the souls of the believers in the countryside.
Reality: church professions are often abused, the secular spirit spreads.

3. **The Plowman**: the epitome of the honest and hard-working peasant.
Reality: disease, hunger, misery and revolts prevailed in many parts of the country.

So all these three positive characters may be evaluated as the three pillars of the society (**Fight + Work + Prayer**), but we have to know that they counted as anachronisms in Chaucer's time, so in this way *The Canterbury Tales* advocated in a nostalgic tone gone, past ideals of the medieval times. With a little exaggeration, we might say that *The Canterbury Tales* is a farewell to the Middle Ages.

In the strict sense of the word, *The Canterbury Tales* is not a unified work, it is not complete, seems to be quite unorganised, of which the possible reason is that Chaucer might not have had enough to correct smaller instances of incoherence. The order of tales had first been worked out by Frederick James Furnivall in 1868 and confirmed by Walter William Skeat in 1894. He established "Groups" of tales from "A" to "I".

On the basis of this, the pilgrimage might have lasted 5 days from Southwark (London) to Canterbury. About 84 manuscripts are extant, William Caxton printed most of them in the late 15th century.

The tales range from elegant chivalric romance, beast tale, exemplum (a story with a moral) to vulgar and erotic fabliaux. The form is **heroic couplet (iambic pentametric lines with rhymes aa, bb, cc….).**

The Canterbury Tales
Introduction / Prologue

When April's gentle rains have pierced the drought
Of March right to the root, and bathed each sprout
Through every vein with liquid of such power
It brings forth the engendering of the flower;
When Zephyrus too with his sweet breath has blown
Through every field and forest, urging on
The tender shoots, and there's a youthful sun,
His second half course through the Ram now run,
And little birds are making melody
And sleep all night, eyes open as can be
(So Nature pricks them in each little heart),
On pilgrimage then folks desire to start.

The palmers long to travel foreign strands
To distant shrines renowned in sundry lands;
And specially, from every shire's end
In England, folks to Canterbury wend:
To seek the blissful martyr is their will,
The one who gave such help when they were ill.
Now in that season it befell one day
In Southwark at the Tabard where I lay,
As I was all prepared for setting out
To Canterbury with a heart devout,
That there had come into that hostelry
At night some twenty-nine, a company
Of sundry folk whom chance had brought to fall
In fellowship, for pilgrims were they all
And onward to Canterbury would ride.
The chambers and the stables there were wide,
We had it easy, served with all the best;
And by the time the sun had gone to rest
I'd spoken with each one about the trip
And was a member of the fellowship.
We made agreement, early to arise
To take our way, of which I shall advise.
But nonetheless, while I have time and space,
Before proceeding further here's the place
Where I believe it reasonable to state
Something about these pilgrims--to relate
Their circumstances as they seemed to me,
Just who they were and each of what degree
And also what array they all were in.
And with a Knight I therefore will begin.

Read the portraits of

- *the Knight,*
- *the Squire,*
- *the Yeoman,*
- *the Nun (Prioress),*
- *the Friar,*
- *the Cook,*
- *the Wife of Bath,*
- *the Parson,*
- *the Plowman,*
- *the Miller and*
- *the Pardoner.*

Make notes about details, make comparisons and determine how Chaucer characterises them (tone, use of humour, what kind of details are emphasized etc.).

Use this translation: http://english.fsu.edu/canterbury/general.html (Ronald L. Ecker, Eugene J. Crook)

The Beginnings of English drama

Medieval drama shows very little continuity with ancient Greek and Roman plays. Drama in the Middle Ages was related to church services and church holidays. "**Tropes**" were performed during services, which consisted of short dialogues relating to Christ's life, e.g. a dialogue performed by the three Magi and the chorus: E.g. the famous "quem queritis" trope:

Priest: - Quem queritis in sepulchro, o Christicole? (= Whom do you seek Christian women?)
Chorus: – Ihesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o celicole (Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified, the Heavenly one) –
Priest: Non est hic, surrexit sicut ipse dixit. Ite nunciate quia surrexit. (He is not here, He is risen as he foretold. Go and announce that He is risen from the dead.)

According to the so-called Regularis Concordiae, compiled by St Ethelwold, bishop of Winchester, during the mass at dawn, a monk comes in, dressed as an angel, a palm branch in his hand and sits down at a place representing the holy grave. After a time two other monks representing Mary and Mary Magdalene. A dialogue begins ("Whom do you seek?"). This is considered to be the "beginning" of Medieval dramas.

Later,

- dialogue was accompanied by action;
- Latin was replaced vernacular English;
- and drama became more secular (moving out of the building of the Church to the marketplace or street, performed by layman)

Guilds acted out scenes according to their profession (e.g. Creation by drapers, Temptation of Christ by butchers, Sending of Holy Ghost by fishmongers, Noah-shipbuilders. Last Supper-bakers, The Wedding of Canee, Magi-goldsmiths, Crucifixion-butchers, resurrection-carpenters, etc.)

By the 13-14th centuries: 3 types of plays emerged:

Miracle plays: based on a legend of a saint or a sacred object

Mystery plays –. From the 14th century different cycles emerge in different countries that present the whole biblical story sometimes from the creation of Man to the crucifixion of Christ. Usually in spring or at the beginning of summer these cycles were performed for several days. They were called Biblical Spectacles, or Corpus Christi Plays or simply Spectacles. There are five basic English cycles (on the basis of where these plays were performed): York (48 plays), Wakefield (or Towneley), Chester (25 plays), Coventry (previously falsely associated with Coventry, also called N-town) and Cornwall. They contain altogether 89 plays.

The name has no relation to "mystery" but comes from the Latin word "ministerium" which means "service".

These plays were either produced on a raised platform, or on a couch (pageant), which moved and those in the street were standing still (like a comic strip), or the people were walking to see the plays.

As a result of the hostility of the Puritans, mystery plays disappeared by the 16th century, but Shakespeare in his childhood presumably still saw some of these mystery plays.

Morality plays: a kind of poetic drama developed in the 14th century, dramatised allegory in which abstract vices and virtues are personified. In the centre there is one character representing the whole of mankind (Everyman); the story is about the struggle between Good and Evil for man's soul; in the end, man's soul is always saved.

Morality plays stage the fight between good and evil forces. BUT these forces or God and Satan do not fight directly against each other, the victory of God or Satan can only be temporary. What we can see is their effect on man's soul.

In The Summoning of Everyman (or more widely known as Everyman), the most famous morality play (around 1500), Everyman is dying and is summoned before God. All the things leave him that wanted to change his relation to God (Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods, Discretion, Strength, Knowledge, Beauty, Folly, Five Wits [= five senses]), only Good Deeds remains with him, that change his relation to God into something positive.

There were two kinds of morality plays:

- **full-scope**: the fight is for man's soul (Everyman);
- **limited-scope**: there is one specific moral problem or situation; more independent and concrete than the full-scope morality, this is the real origin of later drama

Morality plays in general contributed to the didacticism and stereotyping in Elizabethan drama.

Everyman already represents a transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (in subject matter). The fear of death, and man's spiritual victory over it are still Medieval; but the character formation and realistic presentation points towards the Renaissance. Only the personified Good Deeds remains with Everyman on his journey towards death, so salvation is in your hands; points towards Protestantism.

There were humorous **interludes**, which interrupted 'serious' plays (these were performed by professionals, while morality plays were acted by amateurs). Interludes formed the basis of satire, wit, realism. E.g. such an interlude was John Heywood (1497--1580), The Four P's, including the characters of Palmer (zarándok), Peddler (házaló árus), Pardoner (bűnbocsánatárus), 'Pothecary (Apothecary) (patikus). They quarrel about whose profession is the best.

2. The Renaissance Age

The Renaissance period was the first major turn in the history of the European art that ultimately led to the birth of modern society and art. Renaissance means "rebirth" applied to the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman world and art.

The birth of individuality

What was reborn in this period, however, was not only or primarily certain artistic forms and styles, but people's interest in the world around them and in themselves. It was slowly realised that they can have individual, personal feelings, problems, which cannot necessarily be regulated or healed by the church.

It was realised that people had a body, of which they need not be ashamed (like in the Middle Ages when the body was the source of carnal desires and regarded as a temporary vessel that contained the soul), and that this body can be scientifically studied, represented, and can be the source of visual pleasure.

Another major revolution in representation was the application of perspective. It is not that medieval artists were not aware of the laws or at least the phenomenon of perspective; they simply did not feel it necessary to employ it because they thought it would lead to the falsification of vision. That vision was regarded as guaranteed by God, thus any human-determined view of background and foreground seemed meaningless.

In the Renaissance, however, the artists made a point of representing the world as they saw it in reality. The consequence of this way of representation was that these paintings and drawings embodied a transitory, momentary (hence basically melancholic) but individual perspective, as opposed to the eternal and stable, guaranteed and universal vision of the Middle Ages.

The New Learning

The Renaissance is a transition between the Middle ages and the modern age. Like every transitory period, it shows the typical signs of crisis that made this transition inevitable. The birth of the Renaissance was facilitated by the closed and limited world of Europe, dominated by the Holy Roman Empire, which had attempted to unite the Christian world in the Middle Ages, but by now it had disintegrated and failed as a political force.

The year 1453 is often taken as the beginning of the Renaissance -- although, of course, its emergence was a long process, starting as early as the 14th century. In 1453, Constantinople was occupied by the Turkish (Ottoman) Empire. One consequence of this was that Greek refugees arrived in Italy, consequently, interest began to grow in earlier, antique Greek authors.

The interest in **Latin** works also began to grow. Latin, of course, was omnipresent in the Middle Ages, but this kind of Latin was a corrupted version of the Latin used by the great classics of antiquity, like Virgil, Ovid or Cicero. Now interest in classical Latin and in antique Roman authors was revived. We cannot say, naturally, that these authors had been forgotten in the medieval times, only their function was different. In the Middle Ages the main focus was to discover Christian elements in them, later, in the 14th century, they became models for **imitation**, while in the Renaissance, wealthy individuals began to collect copies of their works, and later those of Greek writers as well.

Parallel with this, an educational reform was introduced in Oxford and Cambridge. Instead of theology, the main subject became Greek and Roman studies - this was called **"the new learning"**. Great thinkers of the Renaissance, like Erasmus of Rotterdam even taught at Cambridge in the 16th century. With this reform, the study of Classics became the backbone of the curriculum until as late as the twentieth century.

Rulers also wanted to become proficient in this new learning. For example, **John Skelton**, a famous early Renaissance poet become prince Henry's tutor; **Robert Ascham** was the private tutor of both Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth.

Sciences also revived. The recovery of Greek science was one of the great achievements of **humanism**. Thus, Renaissance science could continue where the Greek science had left off. The new sciences of astronomy, physics and medicine and the new scientific discoveries gave the basis of this aspect of the Renaissance. Earlier, science was transmitted in Latin, or through Latin translations of Arabic works, now Greek works had become directly accessible.

This is the period when Renaissance thinkers began to regard the Middle Ages as an obstacle standing between them and the "pure" knowledge of the Classical world and this is the period when the concept of the **"dark" Middle Ages** is born. (However, we must be wary not to accept this value judgement immediately. Each age produces its own narrative with which it

places itself in relation to the previous eras and sees itself as either a more developed or as an inferior period. The Middle Ages was in no sense "inferior" to the Renaissance; both periods had their distinctive culture, but we think of the medieval times as "dark", because this concept has been with us for at least 500 years.)

The importance of printing

The art of printing was, as we all know, invented in Germany around 1450 by Johannes Gutenberg. It had an unprecedented effect on culture, and the Renaissance transformation of English literature, too, is unthinkable without this revolutionary invention. With printing, it was possible to multiply books with enormous speed and accuracy. **Books also became cheaper and reached a far wider audience.** It also helped to stabilize the national languages, for one standard dialect had to be chosen, the words of which could be understood in all parts of the country.

From Germany, printing was soon taken up in other countries. It reached Italy in 1465, Switzerland in 1467, France in 1470, Hungary in 1473, Spain in 1474. It reached England relatively late (in 1476), like all products of the Renaissance and other cultural currents. Neither the quality, nor the quantity of the printed books were outstanding first. The reason for this was the English printed materials were designed for the general, common reading public than for sophisticated audiences. Most of them dealt with secular matters (for instance, they were not translations of the Bible).

The importer of the art of printing into England was **William Caxton**. He printed the first book in English in 1475, with the title ***The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*** (The Collection of Stories about Troy). He set up a printing press in Westminster the next year. Among the first production were Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowles*, *The Canterbury Tales* and Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1485). For a long time, the audience depended on the printer, and not the author (it had to consume whatever was printed). Caxton did not favour either religious books, nor romances too much, and would never have dreamt of publishing *Piers Plowman* with its revolutionary tone.

Renaissance Poetry (1485-1600)

Early Tudor Poetry (1485-1558)

We might call the 15th century a "barren" period from the point of view of artistic achievements – this is the era of the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), the War of the Roses (1455-1485).

From 1485 on, however, cultural transformation was gaining speed. The renewal affected England later and more slowly than the Continent, mainly due to her insular position. As a result of this, England experienced the Renaissance later and with less shock, and had the time to watch it as a spectator and consider who to receive it. Thus, lagging behind could also have been an advantage, because England was in a position to enrich herself by all the best and ripest fruits of European knowledge.

Typical ideas

The world-picture envisioned the idea of a universal, cosmic order, **"the Great Chain of Being"**, as it was expressed at that time. This meant a hierarchical arrangement of creatures, each in connection with each other, and each simultaneously bigger and smaller than the other (on the top was, of course, God, greater than all beings). Traditionally, the chain of being went as follows: God – Angels – Daemons – Man – Animals – Plants – Minerals.

A human being was imagined as uniting Matter and Spirit, situated between Angel and Beast, and possessing a unique capacity of learning. This is well illustrated by Hamlet's words about Man: "What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how / infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and / admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like / a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, / to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (Act 2, scene 2.)

The ideal Renaissance character was determined by flexibility in life and versatility of character. The typical Renaissance person was (especially in England) the courtier. According to Baldassare Castiglione, a well-known Renaissance humanist, an **ideal courtier** had to possess four qualities of nobility:

- he had to be noble by birth,
- had to be loyal,
- independent and
- had to be in possession of a quality called *sprezzatura*, meaning careless and elegant nonchalance.

Lytton Stratchey, a twentieth-century biographer writes the following about Robert Devereux, the 2nd earl of Essex (a personal favourite of Queen Elizabeth): "This famous person was bold and tentative, daring and melancholic at the same time. He was not afraid of death in battles but was liable to muse upon it for hours and hours with his favourite Virgil in his hand. He was an active man but a thinking one too, he was merciless but interested in arts".

The main aesthetic principle in poetry

The literary – aesthetic – principle in the early Renaissance period was the one that used to be created by Horace whose guideline was "**ut pictura poesis**" (painting like in poetry).

According to him, painting is silent poetry, and poetry is speaking in pictures. Poetry should express itself through pictures mobilised by words. Renaissance poetry is the era of the triumph of the **metaphor** over simile. Previously unambiguous things are now seen as full of contrasts and contradictions. Classical mythology was searched for allusions, images, allegories, symbols that suggested the ideal beauty in Nature, art and in the human body.

Lyrical poetry in the early Tudor period

The early Tudor period is the first phase of Renaissance poetry is England. The major influence on this poetry was the Italian Renaissance. What English poetry needed in this era was formal discipline, and it found it in the Italian Renaissance. A new kind of poetry emerged called "**courtier poetry**" (udvari költészet). Courtiers composed short lyrical pieces for a small circle of friends that were circulated in a manuscript form and later they were published in various anthologies. The first important anthology that contained Wyatt's and Surrey's poems was called the *Tottel's Miscellany* in 1557. (Tottel was the publisher)

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)

The first typical English Renaissance knight. He was employed a various diplomatic missions by the king, Henry VIII. He is the first one to employ the sonnet form in England. There were rumours that the excessively handsome poet had a romantic affair with Anne Boleyn. In 1536, he was imprisoned in the Tower on charges of adultery. After this, he himself requested to be sent for a diplomatic mission to Italy. Upon returning from Italy and France, he brought home three kinds of new forms of poetry:

(1) terza rima (= three rhymes)
Rhyme scheme: aba/ bcb /cdc /ded…
Employed in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (completed in 1321) and it was Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (1819) that made it very famous.

(2) ottava rima (= eight rhymes)
The stanza contains iambic pentameters with the rhyme scheme "ab ab ab cc"

(3) sonnet form

32 sonnets were written by him altogether, most of which were translations of adaptations of Petrarch. The greatest innovation Wyatt introduced was that he replaced the Petrarchan sestet by a quatrain and a couplet (cddc ee), thus creating a distinctive English sonnet form.

In the 1520s, he fell in love with Henry VIII's wife, **Ann Boleyn**. Although there is no hard evidence for their love affair, his poem, "Whoso list to hunt" refers unmistakably to this relationship. Wyatt was even imprisoned in 1536 because of his quarrels with the earl of Suffolk and his alleged liaison with Ann Boleyn. In 1540, he again became a favoured person in the court. He died at the age of 39. In his lifetime, none of his poems were published.

"THE LOVER DESPAIRING TO ATTAIN UNTO HIS LADY'S GRACE RELIN QUISHETH THE PURSUIT."

WHOSO list to hunt ? I know where is an hind !
But as for me, alas ! I may no more,
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore ;
I am of them that furthest come behind.
Yet may I by no means my wearied mind
Draw from the deer ; but as she fleeth afore
Fainting I follow ; I leave off therefore,
Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.
Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt
As well as I, may spend his time in vain !
And graven with diamonds in letters plain,
There is written her fair neck round about ;

' Noli me tangere ; for Cæsar's I am,
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.'

Petrarca: Sonetto CXXXIV

Pace non trovo e non ho da far guerra
e temo, e spero; e ardo e sono un ghiaccio;
e volo sopra 'l cielo, e giaccio in terra;
e nulla stringo, e tutto il mondo abbraccio.
Tal m'ha in pregion, che non m'apre nè sera,
nè per suo mi riten nè scioglie il laccio;
e non m'ancide Amore, e non mi sferra,
nè mi vuol vivo, nè mi trae d'impaccio.
Veggio senz'occhi, e non ho lingua, e grido;
e bramo di perire, e chieggio aita;
e ho in odio me stesso, e amo altrui.
Pascomi di dolor, piangendo rido;
egualmente mi spiace morte e vita:
in questo stato son, donna, per voi.

Wyatt: Description Of the Contrarious Passions In a Lover.

I FIND no peace, and all my war is done ;
I fear and hope, I burn, and freeze like ice ;
I fly aloft, yet can I not arise ;
And nought I have, and all the world I seize on,
That locks nor loseth, holdeth me in prison,
And holds me not, yet can I scape no wise :
Nor lets me live, nor die, at my devise,
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.
Without eye I see ; without tongue I plain :
I wish to perish, yet I ask for health ;
I love another, and thus I hate myself ;
I feed me in sorrow, and laugh in all my pain.
Lo, thus displeaseth me both death and life,
And my delight is causer of this strife.

Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1517-47)

He and his friend Sir Thomas Wyatt were the first English poets to write in the sonnet form that Shakespeare later used, and Surrey was the first English poet to publish **blank verse** in his translation of the second and fourth books of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Together, Wyatt and Surrey, due to their excellent translations of Petrarch's sonnets, are known as "Fathers of the English Sonnet." While Wyatt introduced the sonnet into English, it was **Surrey who gave them the rhyming meter and the division into quatrains that now characterizes the sonnet**s variously named English, Elizabethan or Shakespearean sonnets. Breaking with the Petrarchan sonnet that divided the 14 lines into and octave and a sestet, Wyatt and Surrey split the sonnet into three quatrains and a couplet. Approximately 15-16 sonnets are dedicated to his love, *Geraldine*.

Francesco Petrarca: Rima CXL.	***Surrey: Complaint of a Lover Rebuked***
AMOR, che nel penser mio vive et regna e 'l suo seggio maggior nel mio cor tene, talor armato ne la fronte vene, ivi si loca, et ivi pon sua insegna	LOVE, that liveth and reigneth in my thought, That built his seat within my captive breast; Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought, Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.

Quella ch'amare et sofferir ne 'nsegna e vol che 'l gran desio, l'accesa spene, ragion, vergogna et reverenza affrene, di nostro ardir fra se stessa si sdegna. Onde Amor paventoso fugge al core, lasciando ogni sua impressa, et piange, et trema; ivi s'asconde, et non appar piu fore. Che poss'io far, temendo il mio signore, se non star seco infin a l'ora extrema? Che bel fin fa chi ben amando more.	She, that taught me to love, and suffer pain; My doubtful hope, and eke my hot desire With shamefaced cloak to shadow and restrain, Her smiling grace converteth straight to ire. And coward Love then to the heart apace Taketh his flight ; whereas he lurks, and plains His purpose lost, and dare not shew his face. For my Lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pains. Yet from my Lord shall not my foot remove : Sweet is his death, that takes his end by love.

The Elizabethan period (1558-1603)

General remarks

First, the generation lived in the spirit of conquest and self-glorification (which was even reinforced by the successes of colonization. There was a ubiquitous sense of exploration (geographical, scientific, philosophical), people were eager to get to know the world, which was coupled with an exalted and passionate search for “beauty”. The new discoveries reinforced the feeling that fantastic possibilities could open up and the sense that the world was full of wonders waiting to be uncovered.

Secondly, it was not only the general spirit of the Renaissance that supported conquest and the sense of exploration. The Elizabethan period was indeed a golden age of English literature, especially in the fields of drama, theatre and poetry. The confidence, the optimism and the sense of expansion of the English at that time was something unprecedented. Of course the national pride was mainly fuelled by the victory over the Catholic foe, Spain and the famous Spanish Armada in 1588. This victory made England the quasi naval and military superpower in Europe. From that time on, they could control sea trade as well, which made the country enormously rich.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586)

A true romantic genius of the Renaissance: a soldier, a knight, a poet, a philosopher, and a literary critic. He was a truly ideal courtier: a nobleman, the grandson of a duke, the godson of the king, the nephew of four earls, and a special favourite of the Queen. He was knighted in 1582 and he died in a battle in the Netherlands (at Zuthpen).

Sidney's sonnet sequence, ***Astrophel and Stella*** (written between 1580 and 1584) is the most important of its kind in England. The names come from Greek and Latin; Astrophel in Greek means the "star-lover", Stella in Latin means the star. The star-lover is evidently the speaker, the star is naturally the hopelessly beloved woman. The sonnet sequence contains 108 sonnets and 11 song

[For anyone more deeply interested in Sidney's art and life, Gábor Katona's *Vallás, szerelem, diplomácia. Sir Philip Sidney élete és művészete*. (*Orbis Litterarum. Világirodalmi Sorozat*) Debrecen, Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1998. is recommended.]

From Astrophel and Stella

I
Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,—
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe;
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others' leaves to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burned brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting invention's stay;
Invention, nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,
Fool, said my muse to me, look in thy heart and write.

LIV

Because I breathe not love to every one,
    Nor do not use set colours for to wear,
    Nor nourish special locks of vowèd hair,
Nor give each speech a full point of a groan,
The courtly nymphs, acquainted with the moan
    Of them which in their lips Love's standard bear,
    "What, he!" say they of me; "now I dare swear
He cannot love; no, no, let him alone."
And think so still, so Stella know my mind!
    Profess, indeed, I do not Cupid's art;
But you, fair maids, at length this true shall find,
    That his right badge is worn but in the heart.
Dumb swans, not chattering pies, do lovers prove;
They love indeed who quake to say they love.

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)

Spenser was the son of a prosperous middle-class father. In spite of his humble origin, he went to Cambridge and took an MA degree in 1576. In 1579, he published *The Shepherd's Calendar*, which he dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney. Next year he began working on his

masterpiece, *The Fairy Queen*. With the help of the famous explorer and coloniser, Sir Walter Raleigh, he was presented at the court, and wanted to offer the above-mentioned work to the Queen, but as a result of a smaller debate, he was not favoured. Disillusioned, he returned to Ireland. In 1594, he married his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle, whom he celebrated in his sonnet sequence *Amoretti*. In 1598, he was made the sheriff of Cork, Ireland, but in a rebellion, his caste was burned down, his youngest child (and allegedly his wife also) died. He died a broken man a year later.

The Shepheardes Calender (1579)

A poetic programme for the whole generation of Elizabethan poets. It contains **12 pastoral eclogues**, each for one month of the year. The eclogue is a Classical Roman genre, a dialogue between shepherds. In literature, the adjective "pastoral" refers to rural subjects and aspects of life in the countryside among shepherds, cowherds and other farm workers that are often romanticized and depicted in a highly unrealistic manner. Indeed, the pastoral life is sometimes depicted as being far closer to the Golden age than the rest of human life. The first practitioner of the genre was Virgil with his *Eclogues*.

Amoretti (1595)

Sonnet LXXV. (Modernised)

ONE day I wrote her name upon the strand,
But came the waves and washèd it away:

Again I wrote it with a second hand,
But came the tide and made my pains his prey.
Vain man (said she) that dost in vain assay
A mortal thing so to immortalise;
For I myself shall like to this decay,
And eke my name be wipèd out likewise.
Not so (quod I); let baser things devise
To die in dust, but you shall live by fame;
My verse your virtues rare shall eternise,
And in the heavens write your glorious name:
Where, when as Death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew.

The Faerie Queene, Disposed into Twelue Bookes, Fashioning XII Morall Vertues (1590-96)

One of the greatest, although unfinished, works of the English Renaissance, aimed at praising the Tudor house and Queen Elizabeth in particular. Spenser's aim was to write a great English epic that includes the total knowledge of his age. It is a combination of medieval romance and classical epic. In its scope and intention, it is comparable to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

The basic line of the plot is King Arthur's Quest for Gloriana, the Fairy Queen.

From Book One, Canto One:

Vpon a great aduenture he was bond,
That greatest *Gloriana* to him gaue,
That greatest Glorious Queene of *Faerie* lond,
To winne him worship, and her grace to haue,
Which of all earthly things he most did craue;
And euer as he rode, his hart did earne
To proue his puissance in battell braue
Vpon his foe, and his new force to learne;
Vpon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne. ....

The intention of the epic is ethical and didactic: it presents a gentleman's virtues and discipline. The epic, because it wants to be "grand" and all-encompassing, at times suffers from a multiplicity of meaning. For example, Una can be interpreted as the allegory of Truth, the Platonic Idea, Protestantism, Queen Elizabeth, etc.

The other characters are equally allegorical, standing for cardinal virtues and other values. For example:

- The Redcrosse Knight: represents Holiness, the true Christian or the true Protestant.
- Una, his future wife is meek, humble and beautiful and represents Truth.
- Duessa: as opposed to Una, she represents duplicity and falsehood.
- Archimago: the other major protagonist in Book I., he is a sorcerer and can change his appearance.

The central number of the epic is TWELVE:
12 volumes were planned but only 6 are completed.
12 subplots,
12 knights of the Round Table,
12 days of feast in the court of Gloriana
12 cardinal virtues discussed by Aristotle

Form: Spenserian stanza, containing 9 lines, out of which the first 8 are iambic pentameters, and the 9th line is an iambic hexameter (alexandrine), with the rhyme scheme abab / bcbc / c

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

The poems in Shakespeare's sonnet sequence are addressed on the one hand, to an **ambitious young man** (Sonnets 1-126), and on the other hand, to the so-called **Dark Lady** (Sonnets 127-154). Shakespeare's sonnets are unique for (at least) three reasons.

At the beginning of sonnets, we get to know that they are dedicated to "the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets, "Mr. W. H." The identity of this gentleman remains unclear to this day.

Secondly, we cannot really talk about a sonnet sequence (like in the case of *Astrophel and Stella* and *Amoretti*). The sonnets were written at different times and for different occasions.

Thirdly, the tone of the poems is rather different from those of the contemporaries. They are non-Petrarchan, do not celebrate idealised love towards an idealised young lady. In the section containing poems addressed to the young man, they are about themes like mortality, the role of art in providing immortality, old age, and exhortations for the young man to get married and beget children. The sonnets addressed to the Dark Lady are surprisingly realistic, down-to-earth, even parodies of contemporary elegiac and decorated poems.

►Sonnets to be analysed: 12, 18, 60, 75

Renaissance Drama

The general features of Renaissance drama

Mature Renaissance drama says something **universally valid** about human nature. In a universe that expanded so rapidly (discovery of America, astronomy, heliocentric worldview, development of sciences), man had to find his position again. This is reflected by the relativity of truth in most of Shakespeare's plays. *Who is right, after all*? (e.g., in Hamlet, Hamlet's, Laertes's, and Fortinbras's position can also be defended). It is rather a turn inwards with the help of Classical Greek and Roman models, so it is not just a simple copying of these models.

For England, this is also a period of **expansion** (victory over Spain, conquest of the Indies). This is reflected in philosophy, which is that of **empiricism**: the philosophical background of the Renaissance in England. Key notions: you have to observe, you have to experience, as it is reflected in Francis Bacon's Novum Organum, and John Locke later. Writers began to be interested in 'reality'.

Partly this is why Elizabethan drama became so famous – it is completely detached from religious context, characters are really individuals, not just personifying an abstract idea. It's the human being and **human nature** that becomes the centre:

"Be not too tame neither. But let your own discretion (= judgement) be your tutor. Suit action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." ("Csakhogy aztán fölötte jámbor se légy, hanem menj saját ép érzésed vezérlete után. Illeszd a cselekvényt a szóhoz, a szót a cselekvényhez, különösen figyelve arra, hogy a természet szerénységét által ne hágd: mert minden olyas túlzott dolog távol esik a színjáték céljától, melynek föladata most és eleitől fogva az volt és az marad, hogy tükröt tartson mintegy a természetnek; hogy felmutassa az erénynek önábrázatát, a gúnynak önnön képét, és maga az idő, a század testének tulajdon alakját és lenyomatát.") (Hamlet to the actors, III.2.)

Classical influence in comedy and tragedy

As was the case in most European countries, humanist and Renaissance ideas began to appear in England. More and more classical comedies and tragedies were translated into English, though Greek tragedies remained unknown for the Elizabethans. Their model was **Seneca** in tragedy and **Plautus** and **Terence** in comedy.

Seneca, the philosopher and dramatist of the age of Nero, was a typical man of letters of decaying Roman civilization. He produced **emotional excitement on the stage**, but he was a dangerous model, for Seneca's tragedies were **oratorical**, fitter to be declaimed than acted. The characters reveal themselves in long speeches, instead of vivid dialogues.

Some devices, however, of Seneca were adopted by the Elizabethan playwrights:
the **messenger**: makes it possible that scenes of horror should be related and not enacted on the stage, and his appearance enables the dramatic action to accelerate at the same time.

- the **ghost**: will play an important part in many Elizabethan tragedies: he has knowledge of a secret hidden from the characters, therefore performs the duty of explanation or urges the characters to action (*Hamlet*)
- **decorative and metaphorical style**
- the method of **psychological analysis**: was not only adopted but extended by the Elizabethans.
- the **sense of human dignity**
- the **heroic attitude**
- Seneca's **stoicism** influenced Shakespeare and Webster, it gives tragic stature to the villain heroes in their plays, especially in the final scenes.

The first tragedy written on the Senecan model was **Thomas Norton's and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc, or, Ferrex and Porrex* (1561)**. The story is full of violence and murder, yet not a drop of blood is shed on the stage, all the atrocities are reported by messengers. Besides these Senecan features, another innovation appeared on the English stage with *Gorboduc*: the new measure, the **blank verse** (unrhymed iambic verse). It will become a standard form in English dramatic verse. Another interesting feature of *Gorboduc* is the **dumb show with music**, which precedes each act with a symbolic significance. Shakespeare must have remembered it when he introduced the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet* with a dumb show. (Act III, Scene II)

The classical influence was also strong in comedies. The first comedy written in accordance the rules of antiquity was ***Ralph Roister Doister*** (cca. 1552) by **Nicholas Udall**. It marks a great advance in dramatic technique: the **organic plot** appears in English comedy. His play is divided into **acts** and **scenes**, there are no more farcical interludes in a drama!

Theatrical conditions in the Renaissance

Two types of theatres existed in the 16th century.

Private theatres were halls of well-to-do patrons, schools, universities, Inns of Court that acted for a selected audience and played classically inspired tragedies and comedies,

academic plays. The stage was erected at one end, the whole was on a raised platform and the audience seated facing the stage, lit by artificial lights in a roofed building.
model: **The Blackfriars**

Public theatres played for general public, and welcomed audience from all classes They started as temporary stages in the yards of big inns**,** open to the sky, where performances were held in broad daylight. The had little or no scenery; varied in size (some could accept 3,000 people); their shape was circular, octagonal, or square. The stage was a raised bare platform in the middle, the audience surrounded it from three sides (basically it's the medieval pageant play, only with a building around it). Usually there was a balcony, and two or three doors. When a character exited and a stage was empty, it signified a new scene (there was no curtain), these characters did not meet. When all characters left the stage ("exeunt"), that meant a new act. There were trapdoors for ghost scenes. The audience witnessed a continuous performance, **rapid changes of scenes** were characteristic.

There was a lively connection between the audience and the actors, audience made loud comments and noises, or threw things and fruit on the stage if they did not like the performance (this continued up to the 19th century). **Descriptive poetry** indicated location and time, as there was no painted scenery. **Soliloquies**, **monologues**, **asides** implied intimacy, closeness. Costumes did not imitate reality, actors played in contemporary clothes, e.g. Julius Caesar was not played in Roman clothes. NO actresses were allowed on stage, all roles were played by men. Actors had minimal rehearsal time, usually 1-2 days to learn a role, actors

had to memorise an immense number of plays and roles; there were no long-run plays, they were played for 1-2 nights.

The first permanent playhouse was **The Theatre**, built by James Burbage in 1576 followed by The Globe (1599); The Rose, The Fortune, The Swan. The Renaissance theatre was truly a **popular theatre**: almost all classes went there, consequently the playwright had to please all kinds of audiences – the aristocrats with sophistication, the lower classes with spectacular scenes like duels, battle scenes, ghosts, murders, or low comedy.

Elizabethans Playwrights

The Elizabethan theatre was original in creating dramatic situations, living heroes on the stage, but no original stories were invented. The playwrights borrowed their plots mainly from abroad (Italy, France), sometimes from ancient Britain or Scotland, as in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. Shakespeare's histories (királydrámák) are exceptions because they are taken from the history of the Wars of the Roses. **By the end of 16th century, the English character had become strong and distinctive, it was not a mere reflection of foreign genius.**

The University Wits in the 1580s born in the 1550s, they were a group of playwrights, all had academic training in Oxford or Cambridge. Their importance in drama:
They prepared and developed the **forms** of drama that were used later by Shakespeare and other Elizabethans.

They elaborated new **techniques and devices** that were to be perfected and integrated in Shakespeare's art. They were immediate predecessors of Shakespeare and represented **the fusion of the popular and the learnt tradition**.

Prominent members: Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, John Lyly, George Peele, sometimes Thomas Kyd is included

John Lyly (1553-1606)

- Reflects an aristocratic, court spirit
- his comedies reflected the atmosphere and the interest of the court society.
- First published ***Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit***
- The term **'euphuism'** originates here: means a constant use of parallelism, antithesis in sentence structure, alliterations, allusions to classical history and mythology, mannered, polished, elegant style.

- Example: *"It is virtue, yea virtue, gentlemen, that maketh gentlemen; that maketh the poor rich, the base-born noble, the subject a sovereign, the deformed beautiful, the sick whole, the weak strong, the most miserable most happy. There are two principal and peculiar gifts in the nature of man, knowledge and reason; the one commandeth, and the other obeyeth: these things neither the whirling wheel of fortune can change, neither the deceitful cavillings of worldlings separate, neither sickness abate, neither age abolish".*
- Apart from that, he mostly wrote comedies, such as *Campaspe* or *Mother Bombie.*

George Peele (1556-1596):

- He produced plays written in verse, not in prose
- ***The Old Wives' Tale***: shows his talent for burlesque drama
- he may have contributed to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*

Robert Greene (1558-1592)

- He laid down the forms of romantic comedy
- ***Friar Bacon***: the story is romantic and serious at the same time. Edward, a prince falls in love with a country girl. The serious story is interwoven with a comic subplot in which two magicians play tricks upon each other. It mingles three distinct worlds. The world of magic, the world of aristocratic life and that of the countryside. These are woven together into a harmony.
- It is followed by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado about Nothing,* and other comedies.

Thomas Kyd (1558-1594)

- He makes the machinery and the rhetoric of Seneca serve the purposes of an exciting plot.
- ***The Spanish Tragedy*** is a drama of vengeance, the story of Don Hieronimo's revenge for his son has striking parallels with the story of Hamlet: the theme of revenge, the play-within-the-play, the motif of delay, the ghost.
- A lost *Ur-Hamlet* ("ős-Hamlet") is also attributed to Kyd.
- Another play ascribed to Kyd is ***Arden of Feversham***: a surprisingly mature play, Alice Arden and her lover try to kill Alice's husband, Arden. After a series of

unsuccessful attempts, they finally accomplish their design. It's a typically middle-class drama, whose merits lie in its psychological truth. It marks the introduction of a new type of tragedy: ***the domestic tragedy***. Alice Arden, the domineering evil woman, has no peer on the English stage before Lady Macbeth.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)

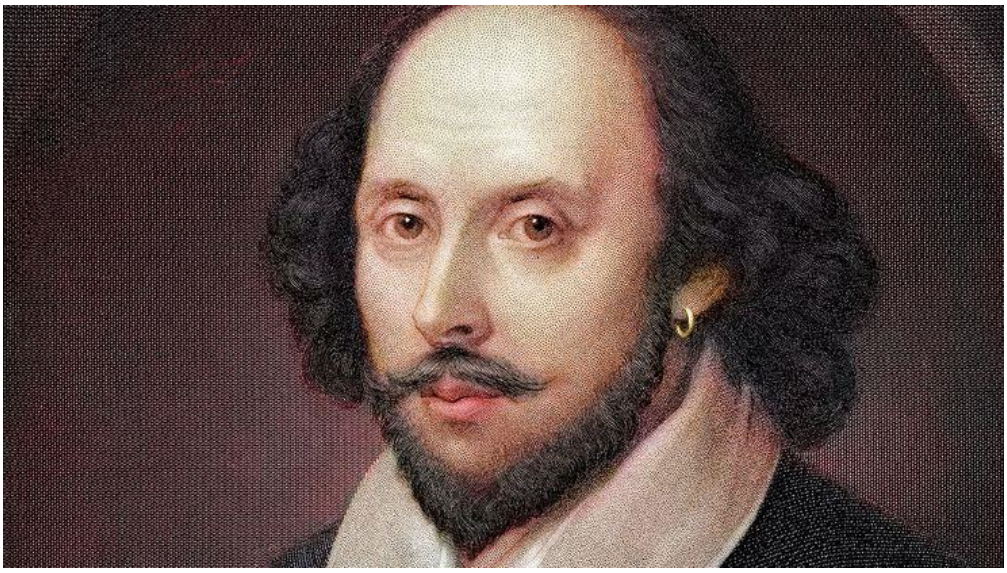
- His first major tragedy was ***Tamburlaine the Great*** (1587-88). Just like his first figure, most of Marlowe's heroes are superhuman, animated by their creator's passion. Marlowe was a typical son of the Renaissance, with rebellious temperament.
- Tamburlaine is the Tartar conqueror Timur or Tamerlane, who from a poor shepherd becomes the master of Asia, the most bloodthirsty butcher. Marlowe made him a superman beyond the rules of morality. He is a conqueror: therefore he is right, according to Marlowe. He endowed his hero with the unbridled ardour of the Renaissance.
- In ***The Jew of Malta*** (1589) it is the enjoyment of infinite treasure that excites Marlowe's imagination.
- His greatest play is ***The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*** (c. 1593), again a superhuman figure, a scholar who sells his soul to the Devil for greater knowledge, a typical Renaissance figure
- Compared with Shakespeare, Marlowe suffers from a lack of artistic balance. He cannot preserve the temperance in the 'whirlwind of passion', as Hamlet teaches the players in the tragedy in *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene II. Marlowe did not "suit the action to the word", he did overstep the modesty of nature. It is true that such faults of his are amply compensated by the daring power of Marlowe's mind, the intensity and high level of his poetry. As Miklós Szenczi says, "He foreshadows Milton, the Byron of Cain and Shelley."

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

- Shakespeare spent his early life in Stratford-upon-Avon, receiving at most a grammar-school education, and at age 18 he married a local woman, Anne Hathaway. By 1594 he was apparently a rising playwright in London and an actor in a leading theatre company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later King's Men); the company performed at the Globe Theatre from 1599.
- The order in which Shakespeare's plays were written and performed is highly uncertain. His earliest plays seem to date from the late 1580s to the mid-1590s and include the comedies **Love's Labour's Lost**, **The Comedy of Errors**, **The Taming of the Shrew**, and **A Midsummer Night's Dream**; history plays based on the lives of

the English kings, including **Henry VI** (parts 1, 2, and 3), **Richard III**, and **Richard II**; and the tragedy **Romeo and Juliet**.

- The plays apparently written between 1596 and 1600 are mostly comedies, including **The Merchant of Venice**, **The Merry Wives of Windsor**, **Much Ado About Nothing**, and **As You Like It**, and histories, including **Henry IV** (parts 1 and 2), **Henry V**, and **Julius Caesar**.
- Approximately between 1600 and 1607 he wrote the comedies **Twelfth Night**, **All's Well That Ends Well**, and **Measure for Measure**, as well as the great tragedies **Hamlet** (probably begun in 1599), **Othello**, **Macbeth**, and **King Lear**, which mark the summit of his art.
- Among his later works (about 1607 to 1614) are the tragedies **Antony and Cleopatra**, **Coriolanus**, and **Timon of Athens**, as well as the fantastical romances **The Winter's Tale** and **The Tempest**.
- He probably also collaborated on the plays **Edward III** and **The Two Noble Kinsmen**. In 2010 a case was made for Shakespeare as the coauthor (with John Fletcher) of **Double Falsehood**.
- Shakespeare's plays, all of them written largely in iambic pentameter verse, are marked by extraordinary poetry; vivid, subtle, and complex characterizations; and a highly inventive use of English. His 154 sonnets, published in 1609 but apparently written mostly in the 1590s, often express strong feeling within an exquisitely controlled form.



- Shakespeare retired to Stratford before 1610 and lived as a country gentleman until his death. The first collected edition of his plays, or First Folio, was published in 1623. As with most writers of the time, little is known about his life and work, and other writers, particularly the 17th earl of Oxford, have frequently been proposed as the actual authors of his plays and poems.

Shakespearean drama: some general features

The plot is always ***relatively*** simple; there is no secret, it can always be known what is happening so we can concentrate on the characters' psychological development and motivations. The lack of scenery and the simplicity of the stage gave a chance for the writer to use his imagination; loose and episodic plotting; introducing plot and sub-plot.

Shakespeare was the first to combine **sub-plot and main-plo**t in a way that the subplot(s) are related to the main plot or shed a light on them: e.g., in Hamlet the revenge theme appears in three different plots, Ophelia's madness reflects that of Hamlet; or in A Midsummer Night's Dream, the artisans' performance reflects the love story of the two couples; often it is not easy to decide which is the main plot (see Robert Greene above), marriage appears on 5 different levels:

- Oberon – Titania (king and queen of fairies),
- Theseus – Hyppolita (the marriage of the duke of Athens and the queen of Amazons),
- Hermia – Lysander,
- Demetrius – Helena,
- travestied by the artisans play-within the play

Shakespeare completely disregarded the rule of classical time-place-action unity of French drama.

Since there was no or hardly any scenery on the Elizabethan stage, caricature of **characterisation** had to be solved through **language** (not many chance of situational comedy). A person was ridiculed through his or her particular use of language; he is able to characterise persons with one or two sentences or their way of speech, just see for instance Claudius' first speech, or Polonius.

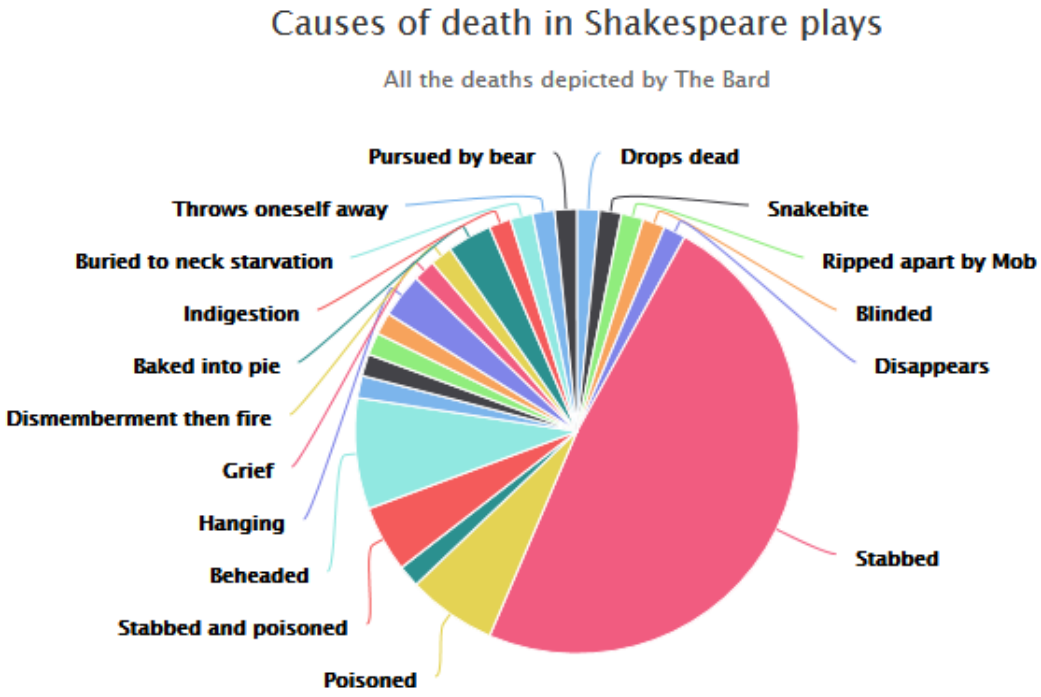
Another means of characterisation was the use of **'character foil'** (= 'failure, mistake'): Shakespeare was interested in one particular characteristic feature of human beings, and often paired and contrasted the characters to highlight a particular feature. Characters are easy to classify in Hamlet: Hamlet first thinks then acts; Laertes: first acts then thinks; Fortinbras: knows when to act and think (see plot and sub-plot).

There is no privileged standpoint; almost anyone is right within the context of the drama; see e.g., Hamlet, there are 4 potential winners (Hamlet, Laertes, Fortinbras, Horatio). Thus Shakespeare is able to regard the characters from outside and he is able to look into them, which creates psychological realism.

Shakespeare is able to **mingle very different elements**: humour and tragedy, lyricism and seriousness, gross humour and elevated style, modern and traditional, classical and rural, different locations, periods, etc.

All social layers had to be pleased: the educated ones could recognise the classical allusions, the lower classes were pleased with 'folk' elements, soliloquies, references to classical knowledge pleased the upper classes.

In fact Shakespeare did not break away from traditional patterns, his success lay in the fact that he freely and successfully combined elements that were there before; e.g., freely takes passages from sermons, folk and street ballads See e.g., Ophelia's songs, or Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream; many of the stock-characters remained (fool, clown); certain traits of allegorisation remained (originating in moralities).



After Shakespeare

The Elizabethan age was over in 1603, the periods after them were called: 1603-25: Jacobean (after James I); and 1625-42: Caroline drama (after the name of Charles I). Changes took place in the subject matter – emphasis was on excitement, thrills, suspense, became dominant. Happy ending were more frequent, tragic replaced sensational and pathetic, although technical skills developed, due to the influence of the French theatre. Playwrights handled the exposition more clearly: so plays became more skilfully planned and executed, but their artistic value decreased, they became shallow a bit.

Ben Jonson (1573-1637)

Jonson was the greatest contemporary of Shakespeare and the main advocate of **neoclassical rules**, he tried to prove that in spite of these rules one could create a really enjoyable play: "And so he [the poet] presents quick comedy refined / As best critics have designed / *The laws of time, place, persons he observes*, / From no needful rule he swerves / All gall and copperas from his ink he drains, / Only a little salt remains / Wherewith he will rub your cheeks, till, red with laughter / They shall look fresh a week after." (From the "Prologue" to *Volpone*)

"[T]he Famous Rules which the French call, *Des Trois Unités*, or, The Three Unities, which ought to be observ'd in every Regular Play; namely, of Time, Place, and Action." (John Dryden, Essay of Dramatick Poesie, 1668)

His most important plays: ***Everyman in his Humour***; ***The Alchemist***, ***Volpone, or the Fox.***

He developed the **comedy of humours**: it had a medieval origin, humour was thought to be a bodily liquid, human temperament is determined by the balance of these liquids, according to this there were sanguinic, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. The dominance of one of them determines one's character.

He used also stock-characters of the Italian commedia dell'arte: Corbaccio, Pulcinella, Pantalone. These are **types** of people, that's why they are suitable for comedies. In Volpone, he uses stock characters as animals to mock human follies: Volpone (fox), his agent, Mosca (**fly**), 3 dupes: Corbaccio (**crow**), Corvino (**raven**), Voltore (**vulture**), they want to get Volpone's money: they think that Volpone is on his death, they flatter, present him with rich gifts but all of them have to be disappointed at the end.

V olpone, childless, rich, feigns sick, despairs,
O ffers his state to hopes of several heirs,
L ies languishing: his parasite receives
P resents of all, assures, deludes; then weaves
O ther cross plots, which ope themselves, are told.
N ew tricks for safety are sought; they thrive: when bold,
E ach tempts the other again, and all are sold.

The classical unities are carefully observed: the plot takes place in Volpone's house within a limited period of time with a limited number of characters.

3. The Age of the Stuarts and the Civil War

The poetry of the 17th century

General remarks

In 17th century poetry, two simultaneous developments can be seen: Baroque and Classical characteristic features of poetry.

The liberation brought about by the Renaissance resulted in an intellectual crisis, because artists wanted to push intellectual freedom to the extremes and a sort of "artistic greediness" emerged. They tried everything, did everything, which resulted in a sort of chaotic art. The political basis of Baroque poetry was the attempt at the restoration of feudal order, as a result of the huge development of European countries, and the attempts at establishing absolute power. This was accompanied by the fight between Reformation and Counterreformation, Protestantism and Catholicism, leading to the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) and to the English Civil War (1642-49).

The way out of this chaos, as it was seen at the time, was the strict observation of rules. In observing and creating these rules, Classical art surpassed even its ideal, the Antiquity. The intellectual background of Classical art is the philosophy of criticism and doubt, that is, the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Baroque / Metaphysical poetry

The Italian word "barocco" is the origin of Baroque, meaning a complicated form of reasoning in rhetoric. As it often happens in the history of art, first it was used as a mock-tag, but it soon became the standard adjective denoting this kind of art.

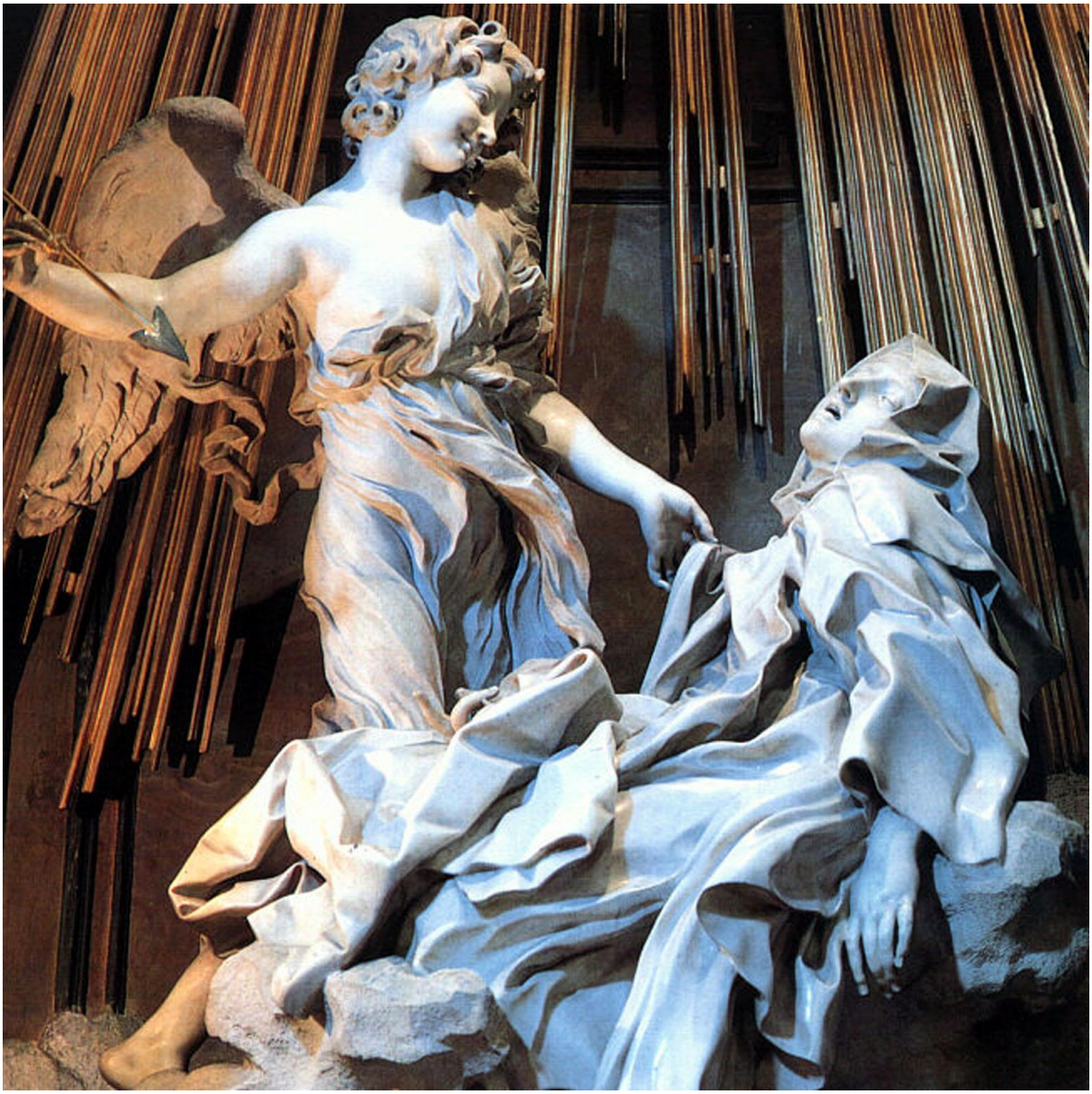
In general, Baroque art is **full of emotions, dynamic, wants to touch the emotions of the reader or the spectator.** In painting, it moves huge masses, plays with contrasts and light effects that are surprising. A favourite means of Baroque painting is the so-called *chiaroscuro* effect (in Italian meaning light-dark). It often presents moments of **ecstasy** (see Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, a sculpture) or high drama. It aims at persuasion and control, and thus may be seen as the expression of the ideology of the ruling aristocracy.

In music, Baroque enjoys contrasting phrase length and using **point-counterpoint technique** in a polyphonic manner. One typical genre is "prelude and fugue", in which a theme is presented with variations, and then the different tunes begin to chase each other (fugue = running), cross, or repeat each other in more and more complicated forms. The presentations, repetitions and returns result in a system of almost **mathematical precision**, which makes Baroque music more abstract than ever before. Famous representatives are J. S. Bach, G. F. Händel and A. Vivaldi. One of Bach's famous pieces, "The Art of the Fugue" experiments with varying the main theme, by elaborating, reversing, mirroring and transposing it in 12 different versions, thus builds a monumental "cathedral" out of a very simple 4-note tune.

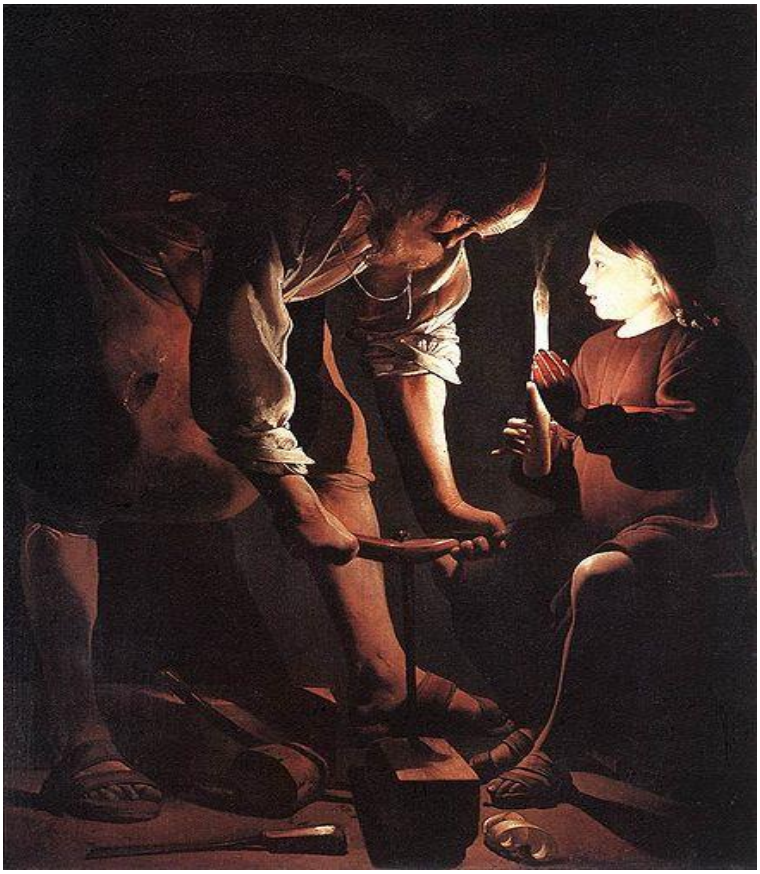
In literature (poetry), the main aim of Baroque is to ***catch the moment and fleeting appearances, time, movement and change*.** While in the Renaissance and Shakespeare's topic was eternity, Baroque talks about the disappearing moment, asserting that in Earthly existence, nothing permanent can be found, what the poet can best do is to catch the passing moment (no wonder that at the time of the Thirty Years' War and the English civil war, nothing stable was found in the world). Frequent images in Baroque poetry: *cloud, fire, wind, water (change very quickly).*

Formally, Baroque poetry cultivates the cult of pomp, elegance, external features. It often resorts to the rhetorical treatment of language, making use of the proliferation of complicated images. The ideal poet is not the courtier anymore, but the "poeta ereditus" = the learned poet. Their poetry is full of puns, riddles, games, mythological allusions, allegories, endless chains of symbolic elements.

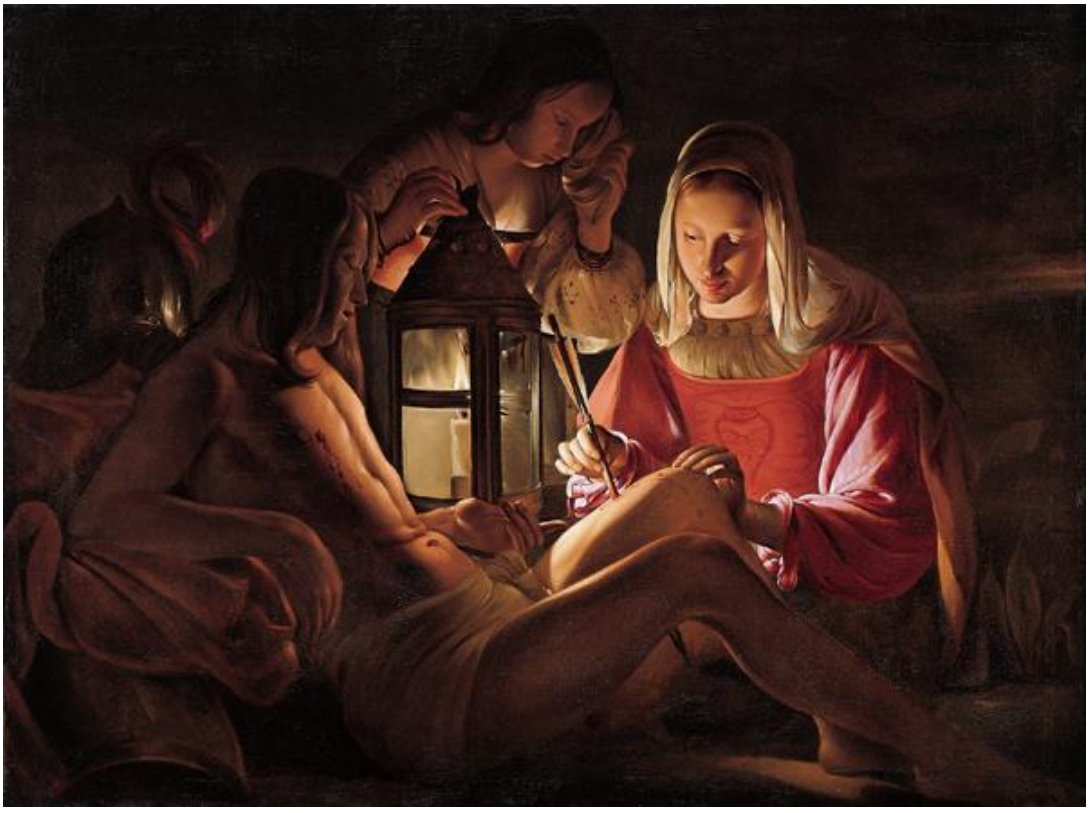
The favourite device of Baroque poetry is the so called "conceit". It comes from the Italian "concetto", meaning concept. A conceit is a surprising chain of metaphors that brings together two things which are as far from each other as possible. (Related to present-day word "conceited".)



Bernini: The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (1647-52)



The chiaroscuro effect (Georges la Tour: Saint Joseph the Carpenter, 1642 and Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene, early 1630s)



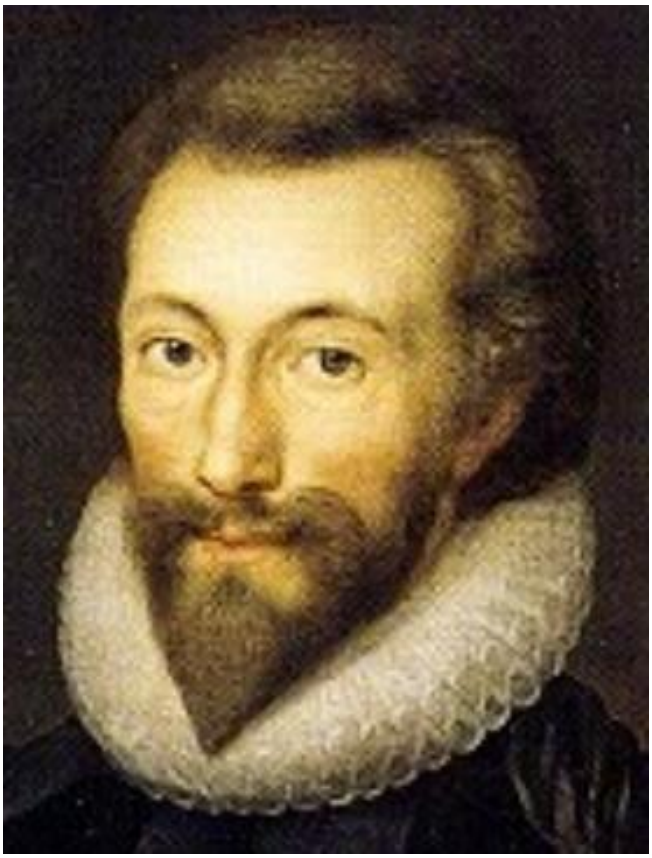
A final remark regarding the English poetic scene: “Baroque” is not used in connection with English art and poetry as often as it is on the Continent. We call these poets “**Metaphysical poets**”.

The most important poets of this group are John Donne and the other metaphysical poets: George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and Andrew Marvell.

John Donne (1572-1631)

Life

Donne was brought up as a Roman Catholic later joined the Church of England, and until his death enjoyed popularity as a preacher. He studies theology at Oxford and Cambridge. Donne fell in love with the daughter of his employer, Ann More, whom he married in secret. For this, he was put in prison in 1611. Till he made peace with his employer, Thomas Egerton, he lived under uncertain financial conditions. Because of this, he accepted being appointed a priest by James I. In the last ten years of his life, he functioned as the Dean of Saint Paul’s Cathedral. He had his poems published posthumously in 1633.



His poetry

Key words of his poetry are conceit, wit, and paradoxes.

The seventeenth-century break between wit and reason was termed "the dissociation of sensibility" by one of the greatest poets and literary critics of the 20th century, T. S. Eliot. In his essay "The Metaphysical Poets," he asserted that "*A though to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes […]. The poets of the seventeenth century […] possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience…In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered [. . .].*"

Eliot also found similarities between 20th century Modernist and Metaphysical poetry: "*It is not a permanent necessity that poets should be interested in philosophy, or in any other subject. We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilisation, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety, and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensible, more allusive, amore indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary, language into his meaning. Hence we get something that looks very much like a conceit – we get, in fact, a method, curiously similar to that of the 'metaphysical' poets', similar also in use of obscure words and of simple phrasing.*"

Donne's poetry is characterised by:

- far-fetched images
- conceits
- paradoxes, strange analogies
- philosophical doubt
- modern tendency of self-analysis
- traditional poetic ornament (decorum) is almost absent
- expressions borrowed from science
- mix of poetic and everyday language

John Donne

The Good-morrow

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we lov'd? Were we not wean'd till then,
But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room, an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mix'd equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

The Sun Rising

BUSY old fool, unruly Sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us ?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run ?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school-boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court-huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices ;
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams so reverend, and strong

Why shouldst thou think ?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long.
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and to-morrow late tell me,
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, "All here in one bed lay."

She's all states, and all princes I ;
Nothing else is ;
Princes do but play us ; compared to this,
All honour's mimic, all wealth alchemy.
Thou, Sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus ;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere ;
This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere.

The Flea

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
Thou knowest that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead.
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered, swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, we are met
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that self murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since

Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and sayest that thou
Find'st not thyself, nor me, the weaker now.
'Tis true, then learn how false fears be;
Just so much honor, when thou yieldst to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

Restoration Drama (1660-1702)

Historical conditions

In general, the Stuart age is the of **tragic events**: the Great Plague (1665), the Great Fire (1666), Charles I is executed (1642), Charles II is dethroned (1688), costly wars are going on, such as the Seven Years' War with France, the War of Spanish Succession, the Dutch Wars – on the other hand this is also the **age of reason and culture**: the Royal Society is established, Newton, etc.

In Sept 1642 the Puritans closed (almost) all the theatres – occasional performances were permitted. The Restoration period (from 1660) brought the **revival of stage performances**. The return of Charles II (1660) suggested a general belief in continuity, the re-establishment of legality but this hope turned out to be unduly optimistic. What followed was a reaction against the Puritan manners and morals.

Reasons: many of the Cavaliers (the supporters of the Stuarts) spent their exile in France. They became experts in **French wit and gallantry.** The King himself encouraged an atmosphere of hedonism at the Court – most important dramatists belonged to the circle of Court wits.

General features

Social background: it was a different kind of theatre playing to different audiences. Confined to London, and to courtly and fashionable circles – there was no provincial culture which corresponded to this. It was a metropolitan culture – universal praise of London, detestation of the country – country lords were generally mocked and ridiculed.

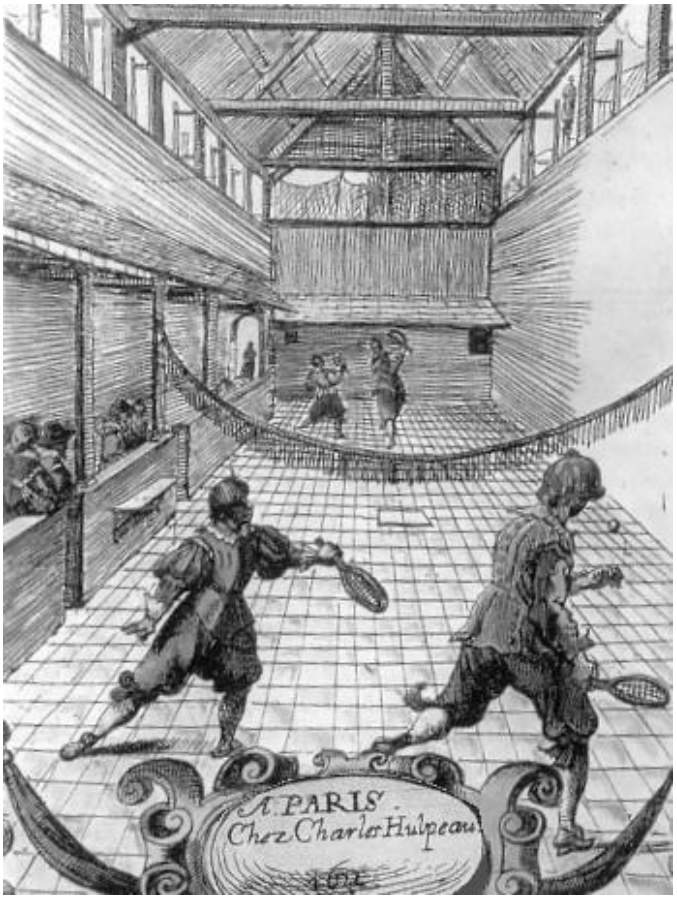
This is class drama, which the Elizabethan drama never was, it cultivated an elegant, upper-class ethos; **basically an English version of contemporary French court culture.**

Audience: was restricted geographically (London), and socially (upper-middle class). But the playhouse was often regarded by London citizens as the place of vice and exhibitionism, in turn, dramatists ridiculed middle-class manners and morals (cuckolded husband, sensual women, battle of the sexes).

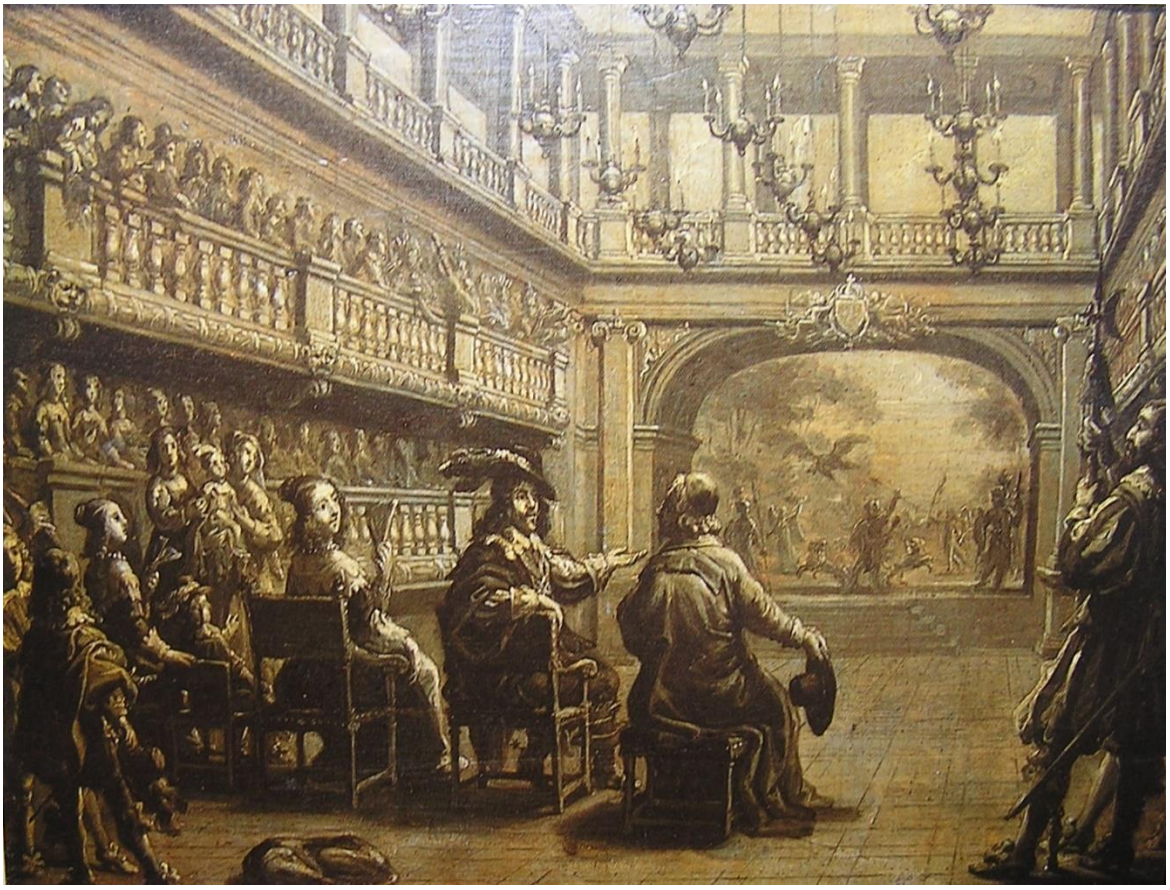
Nell Gwynn, one of the first actresses

Theatrical conditions: many new elements appeared:

- **actresses** (most famous Nell Gwynn, Moll Davis),
- **picture frame stage** (French influence, jeu de paume),
- movable scenery to create a new locale for each scene,
- visual localisation of each scene, more fluid kind of moving from scene to scene than the Elizabethan stage
- Stage had two parts – deep back area for settings and wide front forestage into the audience, between the two: **curtains**;
- theatres are roofed, lit by candles, later oil lamps;
- acting was highly stylised with strict rules, conventionalised gestures (kneeling, shaking fist),
- performances began at 5 p.m., and lasted about 3 hours (artificial light is available)



Hall for playing jeu de paume, the ancestor of tennis



Restoration theatre interior imitating the structure of the jeu de paume court

Restoration Comedy

Sir George Etheredge (1634-91)

His themes include male wit and sophistication, the battle between male lust and female prudence, wit-combats, two people of the opposite sex want to retain as much freedom of movement as possible as long as they can, and the way generations use illusion to overcome reality. He brings together characters in situations where they reveal their dispositions.

The Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub,
She Would If She Could,
The Man of Mode, or, Sir Fopling Flutter

William Wycherley (1640-1716)

He is characterised by savage humour and brutal satire. He never completely accepted the standards of the Restoration, the insistence on selfishness, the “you cannot trust your friends, they are worse than your enemies” kind of idea. He has a sense of general outrage against the

whole of humankind, e.g. in The Plain Dealer, Manly, cheated several times both financially and emotionally, becomes a misanthrope always speaking his mind with a kind of masochistic compulsion. He often shows a contrast between public pretension and private reality, e.g. Mr Horner in The Country Wife proclaims himself a eunuch, thereby wins the friendship of respectable ladies, then cuckolds their husbands. In general, Wycherley has a tone of moral disgust almost Swiftian in its intensity, strength and movement rather than polish.

The Country Wife,
The Plain Dealer

John Dryden (1631-1700)

Dryden wrote mostly tragedies, but was at home in the comedy of manners, too. His frequent topic is the Restoration attitude to sex: A's wife is B's mistress, and vice versa and the consequence is that practically everyone is left virtuous and agreement comes on the part of all four, because that is the most practicable solution.

The Wild Gallant,
The Rival Ladies,
Sir Martin Mar-all,
Marriage a la Mode

William Congreve (1670-1729)

His tone is half-amused, half sad, partly rueful, partly including a compassionate awareness of the ambiguities and ironies of life. He features many of the standard situations of Restoration comedy: witty pair of lovers, amorous widow, would be wit, squire from the country ridiculed. Congreve is far from the brutality of Wycherley, and the hedonism of Etheredge –

the hero and the heroine are aware of each others' faults yet they are willing to keep up the usual social games lest they have to confront each others' emotions.

The Old Bachelor,
Love for Love,
The Way of the World

Restoration tragedy

Seventeenth-century tragedy is **violent, sensational and melodramatic**, full of high passion, grandiose declamation, valiant heroes, beautiful heroines, stylized meditations on life and death, irrational passions, predictable emotions, lust, ambition, revenge. It is far away from the deep meditating heroes of Elizabethan tragedy, and certainly more shallow. The concept of heroism becomes inflated and artificial (after the Civil War this is understandable). The most important term was 'la gloire' (an extravagant concept of individual power). 'Exotic' settings could be found in abundance,

- e.g., in **John Dryden**'s The Indian Queen, Cleomenes, The Indian Emperor, Aureng-Zebe, The Conquest of Granada, All For Love.

subgenres:

- heroic tragedy (Nathanel Lee, Nero),
- pathetic tragedy (Thomas Otway, The Orphan)

Summary:

According to David Daiches, Restoration theatre was the ***"rise and decline of a deliberately induced pseudo-courtly ideal in England",*** something entirely different from the knightly code of the Elizabethan age. It basically had no real roots in Elizabethan life, it was something alien, foreign, imported. Emphasis on decorum, elegance, control, fitness, order, wit, heroism, and pathos. French influence could be seen everywhere, since it was the major cultural force in Europe from the mid-17th century on.

The Beginnings and the Ideological Background of the English Novel

The "English novel" or "the history of the English novel," as such, are far from being simply titles of works in a chronological order, or a long list of their creators. That would amount to a "building" including only the bricks, the mortar missing from between its building blocks. Needless to say, such a construction would soon collapse. Although it is not implied here that we necessarily have to see the history of the English novel as some kind of development, nor is it suggested that we have to regard the particular novels as "products" of a certain historical period, still, to be able to understand its birth and subsequent history, some elements of its background need to be examined. In what follows, we shall look into the religious, social, cultural and philosophical (shortly, ideological) backdrop of the genre under discussion.

The English novel is generally regarded to be born in the eighteenth century, in the period of rising capitalism and the growth of the power of the middle classes. Practically, all important features and ideological components of the English novel can be traced back to this historical circumstance. To be able to investigate the ideological background of the English novel, first we shall have to look at the two ramifications of the ideological component mentioned above, i.e., the novel's religious and social background.

The Religious Background

The religious background of the formation of the English novel was *Puritanism*, or more generally, *Protestantism*. This may sound surprising, since Puritans were very hostile to arts in general. According to them, anything that could possibly divert a believer's attention from God was considered harmful and the incarnation of Satan himself:

"*The revolution, putting the ascetic way of life into practice, rigidly and impatiently opposes everything that, according to it, falls beside the narrow path leading to moral perfection, or to anything that it judges to endanger its existence. […] Any sign of secularism is to be avoided in this lifestyle because it draws one's attention away from God and perfection. The cult of beauty, entertainment and art are seen to be the lasso of Satan that walks on Earth in disguise […]. English Puritanism rigidly ostracises art from every sphere of life. [Puritans] turn with a threatening attitude against every manifestation of literature-for-art's-sake*." (Országh 97).[1]

[1] „Az aszkétikus életformát gyakorlatba vivő forradalom mereven és türelmetlenül ellenszegül mindennek, ami szerinte az erkölcsi tökéletesedésre vezető keskeny úton kívül esik, vagy amiben létének veszélyeztetését látja. […] A világiasság minden megnyilatkozása kerülendő ebben az életformában, mert az ember figyelmét elvonja Istentől és a tökéletesbüléstől. A szép kultusza, a szórakozás, a művészet a földön álruhában járó Sátán lasszója […]. Az angol puritanizmus ridegen kitaszítja a művészetet az élet megnyilatkozásai közül. […] fenyegető gesztussal fordulnak az öncélú szépirodalom minden egyéb formája felé."

The Puritan background is not surprising, however, for two important reasons. Protestantism emphasises *personal faith* and personal salvation. What is important for the believer is the personal contact with God, where no meditation of an established Church is necessary. It follows that a person has to recognise that s/he is chosen by God. How can s/he do this? Basically, if he or she is successful in life (which, in the era of modernity, means economic success), he or she might consider himself chosen, elected by God.

So Protestantism is very strongly centred on the *individual*. In the development of narrative forms, the consequence of this is that the emphasis will equally fall on the development of the fictional character. While in the Middle Ages the emphasis fell generally on an abstract theme (Salvation, Repentance, Death) as regards the narrative genres, and the Renaissance largely focused the on the interesting and complex plot, by the eighteenth century, the focus of the narrative gradually becomes the *autonomous, independent and active character*.

The Social and Economic Background

The second reason why it is necessary to talk about the Protestant background of the formation of the English novel is that the novel form was inextricably bound to the *rising capitalist middle classes* (who, paradoxically, became rich with the help of Puritan principles preaching modesty). Protestantism was the religion that perfectly fitted the economic transformation from feudalism to capitalism and fitted the more and more independent middle classes. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to claim that the rising middle classes themselves created Protestantism as a system of faith in which they could realise their own individualism and independence, rather than just following a denomination seeking to "reform" the Catholic church.

Thus, the novel with its Protestant background became the genre of the independent middle classes. The finest example of this is the figure of Robinson Crusoe, who embodies the essential *homo economicus*. He is "the man of economy" – in the sense of being able to value and use things both practically and economically, who is able to recreate civilisation around himself (almost) alone. Several further examples could be cited, such as Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and so on. All of the main characters of the early English novel rely on themselves and not some obscure social solidarity.

Generally speaking, we can say that the English novel is not only the product of the middle classes and not only deals with the middle classes, but with *the problem of class and society in general*. We have to remember that the English are almost pathologically obsessed with problems of class. Sometimes the fascination of the English with social class mounts to such degrees that, in one of his essays, George Orwell ironically defined himself as "lower-upper-middle class." Just look at almost any description of a character in a traditional realist English novel: the description will surely begin with determining which class he or she belongs to and which accent he or she speaks. The standard themes of English novels for centuries were rising higher in the society, social advancement, the gain and loss of social status, and so on,

expressing the basic aspiration of the middle classes: lifting themselves up to the level of the landed, privileged aristocracy. Besides, the English novel is a communitarian form, always concentrating on a smaller or larger community, the family, a class or the whole society.

This problem is related to the *English novelist's traditional role* as well. In the history of the novel, he or she is not first and foremost an intellectual or spiritual leader, as he or she is often considered to be one on the Continent, especially in French or Russian novels. The English novelist is traditionally an *entertainer* (the most obvious example is Dickens), or at least a "decent" fellow, or just a weird figure, or simply an eccentric who stands apart from the rest of the society and observes it, or a simple person ("one of us") who has to address as many people as possible.

To become a novelist in the English system does not necessarily require special training, high intellect, widespread education or philosophical depth. The English novelist by definition is not experimental and not elitist – although this premise will be questioned in the period of Modernism, not to mention the rest of the twentieth century in which the role of the novelist undergoes massive changes. The traditional, realist English novel (in the 18th and 19th century and partly in the 20th century as well) is expected to be about common, middle-class experiences and has to be accessible for most members of the society, which means that the English novel is always somewhere between the popular and the artistic.

The Philosophical Background

A final characteristic feature of the English novel is that it is based on principles that can be derived from the philosophical system of *Empiricism*. Its most important representatives were John Locke, Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes and George Berkeley. Partly, the ideas behind Empiricism also go back to the Protestant ideology, which advocates "common sense," practicality and pragmatism.

The basic tenets of Empiricism are that we are born with no prior knowledge, when we are born we are "empty sheets" (*tabula rasa*); knowledge should be based on experience derived from the detailed observation of the world around us; this way of gaining knowledge starts from concrete things and builds up a system based on these specific observations. Perhaps we have to put the word "system" into quotation marks, since the basic assumption behind Empiricism is that it is very unsystematic, it does not start from previously accepted premises, but from "a clean sheet." The reason why we have to refer to Empiricism as the basis of the English novel and also that of thinking or writing about it is that the very principles of the novel appear in or reflect the basic tenets of this branch of ontology in several critics' works, and it seems to provide the essential basis of a mainstream, traditional English novel.

According to G. S. Fraser, for instance, "*The novel as such does not impose a pattern [on life] in advance and it is not accident that its rise coincides not only with the increase on the*

middle-class reading public but also with the beginnings of English empirical philosophy. My own definition of the novel as a form would be that it is an exploration of the variety of life, through realistic prose narrative, in the hope of finding a pattern."

Empiricism is a very persuasive and almost deceitfully simple (non-)system of thinking, and that is why the English in general show a mistrust any kind of systematic philosophy or abstract thinking. A basic premise behind Empiricism is that practically anyone can gain access to "truth" or "knowledge," it is open to anybody, no previous knowledge is needed to gain knowledge, so it is absolutely democratic. And above all, it is also an *individualistic* approach to the world, just like Protestantism. According to Ian Watt,

"*The greatness of Descartes was primarily one of method, of the thoroughness of his determination to accept nothing on trust […] the pursuit of truth is conceived as a wholly individual matter, logically independent of the tradition of the past thought, and indeed as more likely to be arrived at by a departure from it. The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation. Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth: the plots of classical and renaissance epic were, for example, based on past history and fable […]. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience – individual experience which is always unique and therefore new.*" (13) One of the chief expressive forms of this "truth to individual experience," backed by the massive transformation of religion, of society, of economy and of thinking in the era of the Industrial Revolution, was the English novel itself.

The consequence of this kind of individualistic thinking in the development of the novel is that a major theme of the novel is often the *conflict between reality and illusion*. A large number of English novels deal with the hero's development in terms of distinguishing what is true and what is false, as it is exemplified in Fielding, Dickens, George Eliot, and the genre of the *Bildungsroman* in general. This kind of thinking is of course strongly linked to dichotomies of moral categories such as true/false, good/bad, common sense/dogma, experience/theory, and so on. In a conventional or traditional novel, the protagonist is supposed to develop; he or she starts as a "clean" or "empty sheet," usually as an orphan or a traveller, or as one who deliberately breaks with social or family allegiances, and then receives varies kinds of impressions, gains experiences, good and bad alike, confuses "truth" and "falsehood," is not able to make a difference between illusion and reality. Finally, the end-point of the narrative is a stage when he or she has gained suitable knowledge, is able to make these distinctions and has arrived at a point of being able to act as a fully mature, responsible and individual social being.

And here we arrive at the most important theoretical assumption of the mainstream English novel: it has to be ***realistic***. Many critics claim that the English novel as a genre is inherently *realistic* – of which the root is the typically English rejection of theories and abstraction. Realism, in this case, is not limited to what we usually mean by the literary historical term

"Realism," denoting much of European fiction after the Romantic age until the turn of the century, but, in its broadest and most basic sense signifies the following: a kind of narrative which is true to human experience in general, is about more or less everyday or at least theoretically possible events, and features a credible and changing protagonist in the centre of action who undergoes some sort of development. All this is rendered in more or less objective, clear and simple, transparent language and with some kind of morale to be drawn at the end. This applies to a great majority of English novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consequently, non-realist genres (or what are or were claimed to be ones), such as allegory, fable, parable, fantasy, utopia, dystopia, the Gothic novel, "the experimental novel" in general, have often been excluded from the canon of the English novel.

Historically, the basis of the ethos of the English novel was that it had to be ***practical*** (useful). The great eighteenth-century novelist, Daniel Defoe claimed that his novels were not stories but "histories," that is, faithful accounts of *real events*. The aim was not to delight, to entertain, but to teach, to convey some morale and realism was an excellent means to do that. In the 17-18th centuries, realism meant that the novel was able to overcome anything false (in Protestantism, any false idea is supposed to come from Satan), overcome illusions, and strengthen a basic belief in the objective description of the world. By the end of the 19th century, overcoming illusions was the endpoint of the protagonist's moral development.

As we have seen, the social background of the English novel was provided by the independent, capitalist, Protestant middle classes. The very form of the novel itself reflects the ***independence*** of this social class: the novelistic form is loose and free, not bound by neoclassical rules and conventions of rhetoric. It is simple, quantity or length simply do not count, since a novel, theoretically, can be a hundred, but also a thousand pages long. This provides great freedom and great space for experimentation. For a long time, however, the novelistic form was not considered to be "artistic" enough, it was a sort of second-rate art until about the end of the 19th century. The genuine forms of literature in the 18th century were considered to be epic poetry, lyric poetry or perhaps tragic drama, but novel reading/writing was not regarded as a serious activity; it was something like film-watching/making as compared to reading today.

The Origins of the English Novel

Of course, the English novel was not "born" suddenly in the eighteenth century without any precedents. Several narrative forms contributed to the emergence of what we call "a novel."

The most important formative influences on the English novel were the following:

(1) *travel books* (for example those by Sir John Mandeville, circulated between 1357 and 1371);

(2) *the medieval Italian novella* (anecdotes, for instance Boccaccio's *Decameron,* or Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*);
(3) *the English pastoral romance* (the most important being Thomas Mallory's *Morte D'Arthur* from 1485, which summarised the stories of the Arthurian cycle);
(4) *the Spanish picaresque* (for instance, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*) and finally,
(5) *the domestic literature of roguery* (such as Robert Greene's "coney-catching" pamphlets in the 1590s, or Thomas Dekker's works, such as "The Bellman of London," and "Villainies Discovered by Candlelight" from 1608).

Antecedents: The Novel in the Seventeenth Century

The year 1660 was a great turning point in English history, for several reasons. First, it was the end of the Commonwealth, the republican and Puritan state (in fact, the dictatorship) established by Oliver Cromwell after the execution of Charles I (1649). The period between 1660 and 1702 is called "the Restoration period" in arts. The basic feeling penetrating the English political scene, especially after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was that of *compromise*. After the Puritan revolution, a return to traditional beliefs and moderation characterised the literary scene. Two texts became very popular, Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), which was no longer read as a national epic of free will but as a religious text, a "conduct book." The other such book was Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a religious allegory and also a conduct book of good Christian behaviour (1678).

On the other hand, this Puritan reading public was no longer interested in the prose works of the Elizabethan age (Thomas Nashe, Thomas Deloney) and by the middle of the seventeenth century, public taste sank to a very low level. The readers were mostly interested in adventures of rouges and travellers; the first example of this being Richard Head's and Francis Kirkman's *The English Rogue Described in the Life of Meriton Latroon, a Witty Extravagant: Being a Complete History of the Most Eminent Cheats of Both Sexes* (in 3 parts, 1665; 1668; 1671). As one can see, female villains also appeared as characters (the most notorious examples were Long Meg of Westminster, Widow Edyth, or Moll Cutpurse), who later appear in the figure of Moll Flanders by Defoe.

These texts cannot be called novels: their structure is primitive, they are built up of episodes that have very little relation to each other, there is no cause and effect relationship between them, characters are not individualised, most characters have no names at all, most episodes are included just because of excitement or obscenity, there is no real conflict or crisis, no or little focus.

4. The Augustan Age (1702-1750)

The intellectual background of the 18th century

Very conveniently, we can divide the 18th century into two periods.

The first half is traditionally regarded as the age of Neo-Classicism and the Enlightenment. The second half is dominated by Sentimentalism and pre-Romanticism.

The beginning of the 18th century in the symbolic sense is the **Glorious Revolution of 1688**. In that year, after the Civil War of 1649-60 and the Restoration period (1660-1688), that is, after the rule of the Stuart house, a major turning point takes place in English history. James II was dethroned, he fled to France, and a new king, William III was invited from the Netherlands. The next year, the Parliament issued the **Bill of Rights** that began to turn England into a constitutional monarchy. Naturally, it did not resemble today's democracy in any sense, but several important measures were introduced: the Parliament could not be dissolved at the ruler's will, regular elections had to be organised and MPs could not be arrested for what they said in the Parliament. The king's power gradually lessened and the Parliament began to control the country's politics.

Traditionally, this system is called like "the king rules but does not govern". This is somewhat an oversimplification of the matter, for the king did govern, he could sign international treaties and wage war, but gradually a balance evolved between the rulers and the Parliament. This was the **democracy of the aristocrats**: the elections – although held regularly – were not democratic, they were open, and rich people could literally buy their seats into the parliament. This kind of system lasted from 1689 to 1832 (the First Reform Act) – we call this period "the long 18th century".

As a result of these changes, after the turbulent years of the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution (and we must not forget that these events were even aggravated by the Great Plague [1665] and the great London fire [1666]), there was obviously a need for stability, compromise, moderation and reason. Thus, the first half of the 18th century is described by the **rule of reason**, a reaction against the high passion of the Baroque and the fight against fanaticism.

The two concepts that went hand in hand with this need for **stability** were the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism. The Enlightenment in England came after the civil war and its main function was to introduce **the rule of reason and stability**. In France, however, it was a reaction against the established social and political order (Voltaire, Diderot), a kind of revolution against conventions and norms, and may be regarded as the preparatory force of

the revolution of 1789. In England, however, it served to express the re-establishment of order and the rule of reason. The artistic expression of this belief was **Neoclassicism**.

Philosophically, there was a widespread belief that the Age of Reason had arrived. An unprecedented zeal appeared to perfect and reform institutions and even people themselves. **The world was regarded as basically reasonable, logical and the reflection of a divine pattern.** Parallel with this, Nature ("naturalness") and common sense became norms to follow, with the result that religious explanations and justifications began to fade into the background. **When a sin was committed, it was regarded not as a sin against God or religion but against nature, good feeling, propriety, social norms, reason, logic, etc.** The secularising spirit was reinforced by the development of sciences. With the help of them, supernatural explanations began to lose their importance.

In literature, **satire** began to flourish as the main means of educating, ridiculing and controlling society and those who deviated from the norms of reason. (See Swift, Dryden, Pope).

As regards philosophy, two names deserve to be mentioned: Thomas HOBBES and John LOCKE. Both represent the typically English philosophical current of **Empiricism**.

Other important thinkers of the period: Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, commonly known as SHAFTESBURY, David HUME, George BERKELEY [pronounced ba:kli]

Important painters of the period

William HOGARTH – painted and drew pictures illustrating the contemporary morals of the period. He painted famous series: *The Harlot's Progress*, *The Rake's Progress*, *Marriage a la Mode*. He had three important principles:

1) chose the moment of highest tension (e.g., argument);
2) human emotions are reflected in the gestures;
3) the technique of visual parody.

He said: *"I wished to compose pictures on canvas similar to representation on the stage, and further hope that they will be criticised by the same criterion. […] I have endeavoured to treat my subjects as a dramatic writer: my picture is my stage, and men and women my players, who, by means of certain actions and gestures are to exhibit a dumb show."*

Sir Joshua REYNOLDS – first president of the Royal Academy, the most famous portrait painter of the age, an important art critic

Thomas GAINSBOROUGH – famous landscape painter

Hogarth: *Gin Lane*

Hogarth: *Marriage a la Mode, Part 2/6: Shortly after the Marriage*

Architecture

Palladian style (following the neo-Classical architecture of the 16th-centuty Italian architect Andrea Palladio [1508-1580]): Inego JONES, Sir Christopher WREN (designer of St Paul' Cathedral)

Woburn Abbey (Palladian style, designed by Henry Flitcroft in 1746)

The "Rise" of the Novel

Growing Social Complexity - The Development of Typical Themes

The 18th century in England and in certain parts of Western Europe was the period of a massive transformation from an agrarian society to a mostly industrial economy. Great Britain may be regarded in the 18th century as one of the few emerging capitalist societies in Europe (the other example is the Netherlands). The two most important factors in this transformation were the so-called *Agrarian Revolution* and the *Industrial Revolution*.

The former meant, very simply, that production in the countryside became centralised, huge farms evolved and former common lands were confiscated from poor peasants for sheep raising and for wool producing. The agrarian workers had but few choices left: since they could not maintain themselves, they either became tenants or servants or went to major cities to join the industrial workers.

The Industrial Revolution meant the replacement of feudal manufacturing with large-scale factory production. The main aim was to produce more and more wool and textile. To be able to do this, cotton had to be imported from the West Indies, processed in large Northern factories like in Manchester and the ready-made product had to be exported to the colonies that were just being conquered. Thus, Great Britain emerged as the most important centre of global economy. The population of London by the middle of the century grew to 750,000 and the English capital became the largest one in Europe.

In this period of **early globalisation**, serious problems inevitably surfaced. Traditional communities ceased to exist, a lot of people lost their "natural" relation to the village or the land they lived on and from and tended to disappear in the huge urban crowd. London came to be seen as the place of vice, sin and corruption, as it is manifest in *Moll Flanders* by Defoe or William Hogarth's drawings. This profound restructuring of economy and the society raised important questions which were all reflected in literature and became the standard themes of English novels for centuries.

For instance, the question emerges whether in this chaos of different ways of behaviour, which one is correct and to be followed:

- **Which patterns of behaviour should middle class people follow?** (This is a moral and social question at the same time.)
- Furthermore, what happens to shared **responsibility**?
- Who is going to take care of lower-class people?
- Again, what is **ethical**?
- Sh ould writers speak out against (social, racial, religious) oppression?
- If one gains enough money to move up to a higher social class, what happens to his/her morality, ways of behaviour, relationship to other people?
- What is permitted for one to climb higher on the social scale?
- Is **social mobility** possible at all?
- Does one develop at all if s/he becomes a prestigious middle-class member of the society?
- If a middle-class woman's future may only be secured by a **good marriage**, what are its effects on her behaviour, acceptance, her mentality or inner values?
- Does she enjoy the bonds of marriage at all?
- Also, what kinds of effects do middle-class values exercise on men?
- Is it possible to remain modest, sober, economical, serious, responsible all the time?

Daniel Defoe (1660? - 1731)

The first writer in England to focus consciously on themes mentioned above was Daniel Defoe. He is among the first ones to deal with standard topics of English fiction, such as

middle-class independence, gain and loss of social status and the conflict of ethics and individual prosperity.

Defoe's original name was Daniel Foe, but he modified his name to "de Foe" so that it could sound more elegant. He came from a typical middle class background: he was the son of a London tallow chandler. The basic experiences of his childhood were the Great Plague (1665) and the Great Fire of London the next year. Although he was no more than five or six years old at that time, he could perfectly recreate the experience of the plague in *The Journal of the Plague Year*, a documentary novel. Thus, the atmosphere of the Restoration period and the rebuilding of London are the experiences that shaped Defoe's career.

Defoe was a typical member of the rising middle class: he became a merchant, although his father wanted him to become a priest, but he was simply lazy to choose this profession. He travelled a lot in Spain, Italy, France and Germany; he traded with all kinds of things, such as hosiery, woollen goods, wine, perfume, tile and brick.

He did not only deal with merchandise but also with politics. He participated in the so-called Monmouth Rebellion of 1685, directed against the Catholic James II. The rebellion failed and most of the participants were executed, but Defoe was granted full pardon. After the Glorious Revolution (1688), he supported the new king, William III. In his defence, he wrote "The True-Born Englishman." After William III died in 1702, Defoe continued his journalism and pamphleteering, thus he was pilloried and imprisoned for his essay "The Shortest Way with Dissenters" (see "Hymn to the Pillory"). But these hardships seemed to make him even more popular, though Defoe himself grew more and more bitter as a consequence. No wonder that being an outcast, isolation and the experience of hostile forces in the society became the chief themes of his novels.

This attack, however, did not restrain him from continuing his political activity: he was also employed by the English government as a spy in Glasgow to report on events preceding the union of England and Scotland in 1707. One of his reports runs as follows:

"*I have faithfull Emissaries in Every Company and I talk to Everybody in their Own Way. […] With the Glasgow Mutineers I am to be a fish Merchant, with the Aberdeen Men a woollen and with the Perth and western men a Linen Manufacturer, and still at the End of all Discourse the Union is the Essentiall and I am all to Every one that I may Gain some.*"

Defoe produced no less than 545 titles, ranging from novels, pamphlets, satirical poems, essays, journalism, articles, travel books, conduct books and manuals. (Most of them, it has to be added, were written for money.) He wrote most of his works after the age of sixty.

The Characteristic Features and Themes of Defoe's Novels in General

Defoe clearly represents the *voice of the rising middle class*, his language is pure, simple and easy to read. He is the advocate of *practicality* (which originates from his Puritan background). He always emphasises the *sense of social isolation* (mainly reflected in *Moll Flanders*); and also highlights *individualism and common sense* (especially in *Robinson Crusoe*). Furthermore, he often writes about the *tension between moral and financial freedom*, which was the key paradox of Puritan ethics.

All these themes may be found in his novels; however, Defoe's art shows one serious limitation: the lack of artistic unity and unified plot. He often remains on the level of isolated episodes. In this early phase of the development of the English novel, it is as if *Defoe wanted to do too much with the new genre*. In concrete terms, he attempts to carry out three things at the same time:
(1) to provide a believable and exciting story;
(2) to push a credible hero into the foreground; and
(3) to give a moral lesson to middle-class readers.
His novels seem to collapse under this burden. That is why most critics do not even call Defoe's works "novels."

Let us see the examples of his giving a moral lesson in *Moll Flanders*: *"But as this work is chiefly recommended to those who know how to read it, and how to make the good uses of it, which the story all along recommends to them, so it is to be hoped that such readers will be more pleased with the moral than the fable. […] The advocates for the stage have, in all ages, made this great argument to persuade people that their plays are useful […], namely that they are applied to virtuous purposes […]. Throughout the infinite variety of this book, this fundamental is most strictly adhered to […]*" (from the "Preface" to *Moll Flanders*).

Another example from the same novel: *"On the other hand, every branch of my story, if duly considered, may be useful to honest people, and afford a due caution to people of some sort or other to guard against the like surprises, and to have their eyes about them when they have to do with strangers of any kind, for 'tis very seldom that some snare or other is not in their way. The moral, indeed, of all my history is left to be gathered by the senses and the judgment of the reader; I am not qualified to preach to them. Let the experience of one creature completely wicked, and completely miserable, be a storehouse of useful warning to those that read*." (*Moll Flanders* 294)

However, the greatest merit of all Defoe's works is their ***sense of realism*.** Just look at the full titles of some of his works. They already give such a detailed and convincing introduction to the story that the reader feels the desire to read on: "*A Journal of the Plague Year, being observations or memorials of the most remarkable occurrences, as well public as private, which happened in London, during the last great visitation in 1665. Written by a citizen who*

continued all the while in London. Never made public before." Similarly: "*The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continued variety for threescore years, beside her childhood, was twelve year a whore, five times a wife (whereof once to her own brother), twelve years a thief, eight years a transported felon in Virginia, at last grew rich, lived honest, and died penitent. Written form her own memorandums."*

In general, Defoe is able to provide the reader with such minute details that he establishes almost a complete sense of reality so that the reader tends not to doubt that the events really happened. This style of writing provided a method for later novelists as well, especially Walter Scott, who praised Defoe's technique through which "he carried the air of authenticity to the highest pitch of perfection." Thomas Hardy later remarked that Defoe "had the most amazing talent on record for telling lies."

How is this realism achieved? First, Defoe includes elements in his "novels" that may be surprising today: such as exact dates, balance sheets, data, charts and so on. Secondly, Defoe does not only describe *what* happens to the protagonists but also ***how*** they feel about it and ***how*** they do certain things. For instance, there are minute descriptions in *Robinson Crusoe* of how he is carving out a boat or how he is baking bread.

What were the reasons why Defoe felt that he needed to write his works in such a detailed and realistic manner? The main reason for this creation of realistic atmosphere was that Defoe did not consider his works novels or fiction, but faithful accounts of real events (which, of course, were invented by him). These accounts had to be presented to the reading public as documentaries because **otherwise the Protestant readers would have thrown them away as tales, fancies, unreal things, and would even have considered them dangerous**, since "fiction," the work of imagination might also be the tool of the Devil itself to distract the common man's attention from God. Let us have a look at the "Preface" to *Robinson*:

"The story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events to the uses to which wise men always apply them, viz., to the instruction of others by this example, and to justify the honour and wisdom of Providence […] The Editor believes the thing [the novel] to be a just [faithful or true] history of fact, neither is there any appearance of fiction in it […]" But it was in the "Preface" to *Roxana* that he summarised his intention in the shortest way; he claimed it was "***not a story, but a history.***"

The second main reason for this heightened realism was that he wanted to present himself as an average person, one of the audience, and to create a world in which the audience feels at home in. Let us not forget that this is the period of Neoclassical poetry and the Restoration theatre – only the polished London society read Alexander Pope or watched Congreve's comedies. The novel is a typical loose form *against* this highbrow audience.

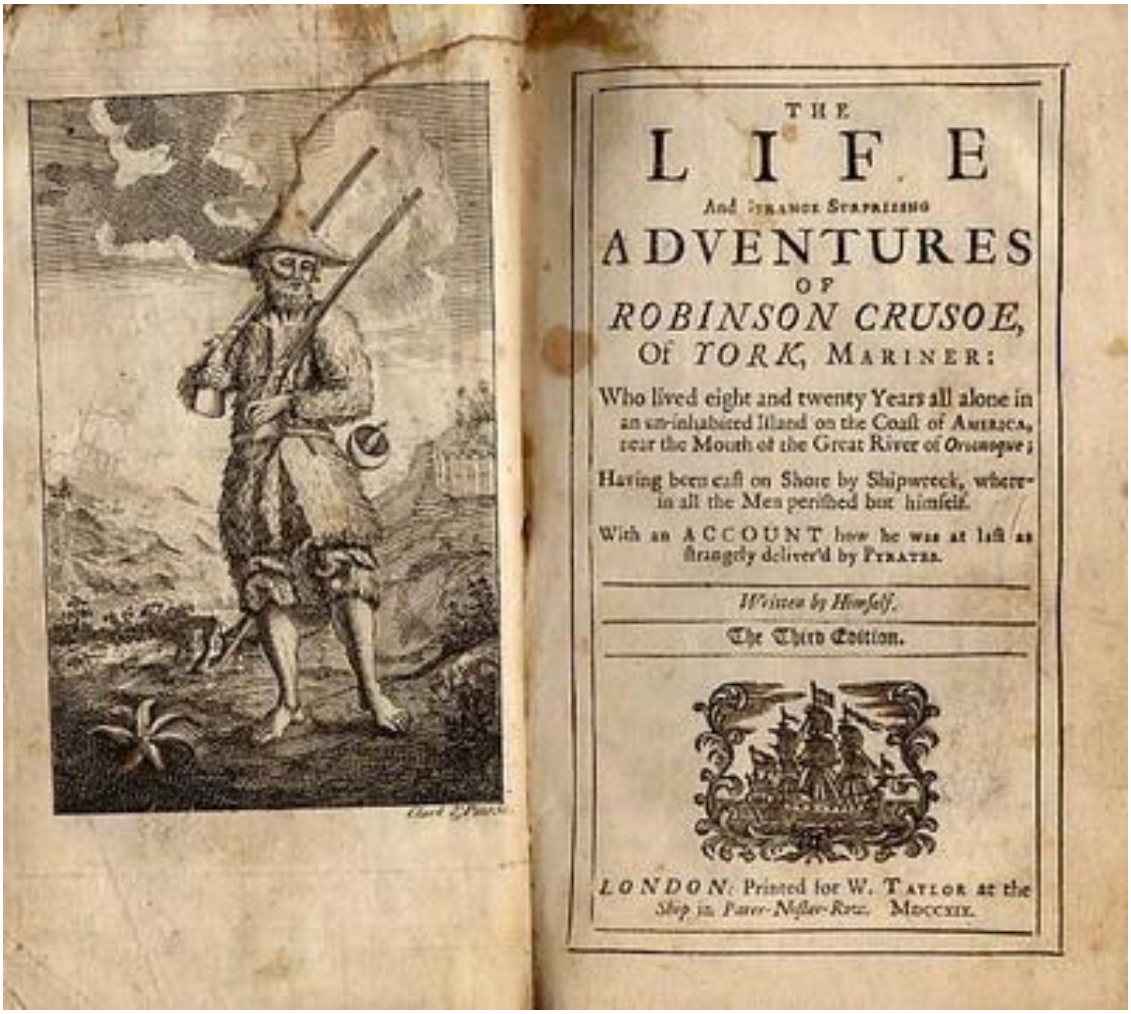
Thirdly, if we look at the stories themselves, either *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*, they are hardly credible. Look at the full title of *Moll Flanders* once again. Would you believe

either Robinson Crusoe's or Moll Flanders's story in real life? Defoe, in fact, wants to illustrate various moral points through the plot and therefore puts too much into the story. To make the story itself credible, he has to provide a sense of reality.

The most famous example of Defoe's realism is "The True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal, the Next Day After Her Death, to One Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury." It was written in 1706, and it is a short story about the alleged apparition of a ghost, with a totally realistic, documentary tone. *A Journal of the Plague Year*, an almost eye-witness chronicle of the 1665 London plague, is another excellent example of this realism. Although Defoe was only five this year, so he was too young to experience the events directly, later he wrote *A Journal of the Plague Year* based on interviews and other documents. *A Journal* is still considered to be one of the best and most faithful accounts of the events of the plague.

Robinson Crusoe (1719)

The novel is obviously one in the flood of the ***countless adventure stories*** of the age that used to recount exciting stories full of shipwrecks, earthquakes, kidnapping, cheating, and so on. The stake is the hero's survival among hostile conditions. The adventure story had its roots in the picaresque novel, but the age itself was full of accounts of adventures and travel books. The story of Robinson was inspired by a real story: a Scotsman, Alexander Selkirk was found living alone on the island of Juan Fernandez, where he spent five years; reports on the time spent by Robert Knox on Ceylon in 1681 were also popular in the century.



THE
LIFE
And STRANGE SURPRISING
ADVENTURES
OF
ROBINSON CRUSOE,
Of *YORK*, MARINER:

Who lived eight and twenty Years all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of AMERICA, near the Mouth of the Great River of *Oroonoque*;

Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself.

With an ACCOUNT how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by PYRATES.

Written by Himself.

The Third Edition.

LONDON: Printed for W. TAYLOR at the *Ship* in *Pater-Noster-Row*. MDCCXIX.

Robinson Crusoe may also be regarded as the ***spiritual autobiography of Daniel Defoe*** himself, his outcast state, his life full of hardships, miseries, fortunes and misfortunes. Several critics (Arthur Quiller-Couch, J. Paul Hunter, Tom Paulin) have noted that Crusoe's adventures begin just before the Restoration (1660) and, 28 years after, end in 1688, the year of the Glorious Revolution, thus Crusoe's story may also exemplify the hard times that the Puritans had to endure after the Commonwealth until William III.

The novel also follows the then-prevalent mode of ***ethical analysis, casuistry***, and in close connection with this, the genre of spiritual autobiography, in which the subject records the progress of his soul from sin through reprobation, punishment and atonement to salvation in a Puritan manner. In this sense, Defoe follows the most important Puritan author of the time, John Bunyan, the writer one of the greatest allegories of the time, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The novel also parallels the parable of the prodigal son, represented in the process of purification taking place on the island.

One of the novel's main themes is also ***the struggle of a lonely individual hero***. Practically all of Defoe's characters are lonely heroes who have to survive among hostile circumstances, and all they can rely on is God and themselves. As Defoe put it in the sequel to *Robinson Crusoe*, "*Man may be properly said to be alone in the Midst of the Crowds and Hurry of Men*

and Business," while Crusoe himself now experiences *"much more Solitude in the Middle of the greatest Collection of Mankind in the World, I mean, at* London *, while I am writing this, than ever I could say I enjoy'd in eight and twenty Years Confinement to a desolate Island*." What catches our attention is how human and average Robinson's reaction is to the experience of solitude. His behaviour ranges from desperation through acquiescence to enthusiasm. He constantly prays to God, but also helps himself, and sometimes, indeed, his religion also becomes over-practical.

The novel may also be regarded as the ***epitome (summary) of middle class virtues and values*.** Robinson is industrious, moderate, sober, practical, shrewd and pious (always prays to God, but also helps himself). There are two aspects here worth mentioning: Robinson is the pious "true-born Englishman" on the one hand, and the practical *homo economicus* on the other hand; everything has a practical value for him, even human relationships, just think of Friday's story.

Robinson, finally, is also ***the story of the (re)creation of civilisation,*** a kind of reproduction of the history of mankind in miniature. Robinson starts from nothing, and he creates a complete world around himself. Ideas of human innovation, perseverance and strength appear in the novel. He is an average person fighting Chaos and creating Order with the help of Empiricism, gaining experiences and putting them into practice. It is very important to emphasise that this is not escapism, this is not Rousseau's idea of "back to Nature," for this sentimental idea only appears in the second half of the century. Robinson wants to ***conquer*** Nature. Please remember that at that time it had serious ideological implications; basically the story of Robinson can also be seen as a **justification for English colonisation**.

Other Works by Daniel Defoe

"The True-Born Englishman" (1701) is an argumentative verse in defence of William III, who was Dutch. The poem ridiculed those who wanted to defend English purity, showing that what they called English was already a mixture of different races.

In "The Shortest Way with Dissenters" (1703), a satiric essay about the impatient hostility against Dissenters, Defoe (or rather, the speaker) ironically recommends that the "shortest way" would simply be exterminating them. "Hymn to the Pillory" (1703) is about Defoe's own experience as an outcast.

Defoe did not only write fiction (disguised as documentaries) but also produces titles like *The Complete English Tradesman* or *The Family Instructor*, and other manuals and guides that could greatly help an average middle-class person to be successful in business and at home. His novels apart from Robinson include the following titles:

Moll Flanders – the story of Robinson with a woman in the sense that in the centre there is a strong, individual heroine, who also starts out as a disobedient offspring. Moll becomes enmeshed in the criminal life of London: becomes a pickpocket, a thief and a prostitute, but all she is doing this for is to become a "gentlewoman." The key is survival among hostile conditions and creating financial independence. Moll is at the end imprisoned and the novel is presented as her autobiography and the document of repentance.

The Memoirs of a Cavalier – a faithful account of a gentleman fighting in the Thirty Years' War (1618-48).

Captain Singleton – the narrative describes the life of an Englishman, stolen from a well-to-do family as a child and raised by Gypsies, who eventually makes his way to sea.

Roxana – this is basically Moll's story in the aristocracy. Roxana starts out as a gentlewoman, but her husband goes bankrupt and she becomes a prostitute.

Satire in the 18th Century

The eighteenth century, or at least its first half, is generally considered to be the age of **satire**. Its ideological background was the process of secularisation, a characteristic tendency of the new way of thinking called the *Enlightenment*. As the name immediately shows, the "Enlightened" philosophers and writers believed that their age was in direct contrast with the preceding centuries, when, according to them, darkness ruled in the domain of human knowledge and arts. These intellectuals firmly held that a new age was dawning when human folly, corruption and superstition would forever be gone, and the rational, educated humankind would have a peaceful and happy life as its share.

Doubtlessly, after the extremities of the seventeenth century in England, both in political life (think of the Civil War and the Restoration period) and in arts (the Baroque style in Europe; in England, the so-called Metaphysical poetry), and infamous events such as the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London, people generally were waiting for *something stable, rational and systematic*. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the subsequent political and social changes opened the path for the arrival of the age of reason – and the age of satire, as well.

The basic source of Christianity, the Bible, slowly ceased to be a sacred object, and, due to the efforts of the Reformation movement, became a text that could freely be interpreted and criticised, scrutinised, subjected to scientific interpretation. The system of heavenly rewards and punishments no longer worked. By some extreme or atheist thinkers, the Bible was even considered the source of superstition and was dismissed as such. A new measure was born against which people were weighed: this was nature; therefore sin was seen as no longer an offence against God, but against (human) nature and the "natural" order of the world in general.

Nearly all satirical works raise a basic dilemma and ask questions concerning man's place in the world. We can talk about two basic approaches: The ***optimistic approach*** stated that man was "naturally" good and reasonable, he could improve, he was sociable, benevolent, and so on. The main advocate of this idea was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The advocates of the optimistic approach thought that human institutions, customs, the society were the main factors that corrupted or spoilt people. Therefore, two things were desirable: the ***reform*** of human institutions, such as the system of government, of political participation, forms of punishment, and so on. The advocates of this idea maintained that the system of political government should follow what is "natural," what is already given to human beings by nature, that is, an Enlightened society should be based on equality, certain unalienable rights, such as the right to liberty, the freedom of speech, and human dignity. This rational and by now absolutely natural idea was implemented either peacefully – a good example might be the constitution of the USA – or less peacefully – with the breakout of the French revolution in 1789, for instance. Another, more sentimental, idea claimed that a further option might be to leave behind human society altogether and "go back to Nature" (Rousseau's famous idea), which is also going to appear in various Romantic and utopian movements and in American Transcendentalism as well (R. W. Emerson, H. D. Thoreau).

The ***pessimistic approach***, on the other hand, held that man was simply an **animal**, or put it less bluntly, a morally underdeveloped creature. He is no more than an instinctual being, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. He lives in societies, is capable of thinking logically, but more often than not, follows the desires of his own corrupt soul, and cannot really improve by himself. So the satirist's task is to point out some direction of improvement and ridicule man's folly. There is an ideal image of man as a natural/rational being, but man is often far from this. Thus, people have to be made to realise the difference between man as he is and man as an ideal, which is the task of the satirist, since neither religious/moral laws nor social systems work anymore.

The satirist appeals to a "natural" sense of man's desire for acceptance and public estimation, therefore he appeals to his or her fear of shame and the power of ridicule. Just look at the following typical quotations: "*Ridicule is the test of truth.*" (Lord Shaftesbury); "*I know nothing that moves more strongly but satire. And those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous.*" (Swift); "*From the discovery of this affectation arises the Ridiculous, which always strikes the reader with surprise and pleasure; and that in a higher and stronger degree when the affectation arises from hypocrisy than when from vanity; for to discover any one to be the exact reverse of what he affects, it is more surprising and consequently more ridiculous than to find him a little deficient in the quality he desires reputation of*" (Fielding, from the "Preface" to *Joseph Andrews* [110]).

How does the satirist work? First, he or she has to choose a suitable object of attack. Then, with a sense of superiority, detachment and a credible voice, maintained throughout the text, the satirist has to point out the chosen human folly. He or she always puts on a mask, it is never directly the satirist who is speaking to us, so the narrator and the real author are never

the same. The satirist works with wit and humour founded on fantasy, the grotesque or the absurd combined with a serious, realistic tone. The discrepancy between the two makes the reader think about the problems in question.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

Swift's epitaph in St. Patrick' Cathedral reads as follows (in translation): "*Here lies the body of Jonathan Swift […] where fierce indignation can no longer injure his heart*" ("Hic depositum est corpus Ionathan Swift […] ubi saeva indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit"). He is a typical representative of the Enlightenment in the sense that his faith is unbroken in the perfectibility of mankind, in the possibility that if follies are permanently ridiculed, they will disappear. He thinks this in spite of the fact that he always saw corruption, malevolence and brutality around himself. Swift is often seen as a misanthrope, but he was actually not one: he claimed that did not like species or groups of people but he liked individuals:

"*I have ever hated all nations, professions and communities, and all my love is towards individuals. For instance I hate the tribe of lawyers, but I love Counsellor Such-a-One, and Judge Such-a-One. […] But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, though I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas and so forth.*"

One can see the same dichotomy of pessimism and optimism in Swift as well. He is often considered to be a "practical idealist," which means that he saw corruption in man but at the same time thought that he was able to correct himself. He was basically a man of reason and common sense, but he rejected the extremes of reason (see Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*). Swift maintained that "*[…] happiness is a perpetual possession of being well-deceived. […] Pretended philosophy […] enters into the depth of things and then comes gravely back with information and discoveries, that in the inside they are good for nothing.*" Ironically, he states we should be contented with the outside, the surface, what we see, what we touch, and ignore what is behind them. This is the pose of the satirist, since Swift says that many people do not go to the depth of things, because they may make unpleasant discoveries. A famous sentence in the mask of this ignorant average man: "*Last week I saw a woman flayed and you will hardly believe in how much it altered her person for the worse.*" Swift here satirises the folly of blindness. The satirist's task is to go to the depth and show unpleasant things/aspects of human life.

One of Swift's favourite satirical devices was *translating an abstract idea or metaphor into physicality or into its literal meaning*. This is also an attack against those who are not reasonable enough and tend to confuse surface and depth. For instance, he depicts the battle of ancients (traditionalists) and moderns as a literal battle between books in a library ("The Battle of the Books"), or in *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver is the real "pet" of the royal family; in Book I, those belonging to the royal court have to jump over a stick, in Book III power literally "hovers" above people; in "A Modest Proposal," Irish children are literally flayed and devoured.

"A Modest Proposal" is his most famous or even infamous satirical piece. In it, Swift puts on the mask of a benevolent economist and says that newborn children in Ireland must be eaten to solve the problem of poverty. This horrible idea, on the one hand, sheds light on the real economic difficulties and the exploitation of the Ireland. On the other hand, it satirises those who are blind to these very problems. "A Modest Proposal" is also the satire of the then-prevalent utilitarian spirit. Utilitarianism was a philosophical and an economic approach whose basic principle was the proper human action and individual decisions are determined by man's desire for ultimate happiness, minimizing pain and maximizing pleasure and which valued only those economic factors that could be practically utilised. Its most famous representatives were Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. "A Modest Proposal" is also the satire of the countless pamphlets of the time and, finally, the selfishness of the narrator, because, as it turns out at the end, the narrator does not want to sacrifice his own children.

His most well-known novel, *Gulliver's Travels*, is similarly a great rhetorical achievement. It combines the voice of a naive narrator (no wonder it has become a children's classic) and a satirist and a rational thinker, and this combination is upheld from the first page to the last.

Similarly to Defoe's *Robinson* or *Moll Flanders*, it is not really a novel (or generally not discussed as one belonging to the mainstream of English novels): according to Walter Allen, "*Swift, […] though possessing many attributes of a novelist, cannot be called one.* Gulliver's Travels *is a work of fiction, but not a novel, though in it Swift uses circumstantial detail after the manner of Defoe in order to persuade us of the truth of his Lilliputians and Brobdingnagians. And great as his genius was, one feels that Swift could never have been a novelist. Satire can only be part of the novelist's make-up; in Swift's it was everything.*" (42)

If it is not a novel, then what kind of literary category does it belong to? *Gulliver's Travels* is basically a **philosophical treatise on man in a quasi-novelistic form**. Its basic question is simple: "**What is man?"** To answer this question, Swift uses the method of comparison in all four books that could be summarised as follows:

Book					Main target of attack
I	Gulliver is	physically	superior	to Lilliputians	the pettiness of politics
II	Gulliver is	physically	inferior	to Brobdingnagians	the grossness of human behaviour
III	Gulliver is	intellectually	superior	to scientists	intellectual retardation
IV	Gulliver is	intellectually	inferior	to Houynhnhnms	moral degradation

Gulliver's development may be described in the following way: he starts out as a *fanatic* of his own world, then becomes *critical* of it, then becomes *cynical*, and finally becomes *alienated* from the human world and seeks pleasure in the company of horses.

The narrator's favourite image all throughout the book is the depiction of **man as an animal**: "*For I apprehended every moment that he would dash me against the ground, as we usually do any little hateful animal which we have a mind to destroy."* (88); *"They observed my teeth, which they viewed with great exactness that I was a carnivorous animal."* (107); *"he observed how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such a diminutive insect as I"* (110); *"I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."* (140).

Book IV is the intellectual and emotional climax of the work, presenting a kind of rationalistic utopia of the horses. The Yahoos, the savage, brutal creatures resembling humans are not depicted as noble savages, contrary to the contemporary idea according to which if civilisation is removed there is no limit to man's perfectibility. While Defoe says that man is able to recreate civilisation around himself, as opposed to this, Swift advocates that Yahoos are hopelessly decadent and fallen. There is one important distinction, however: horses are not ideals, either, for they represent extreme rationality. The Houynhnhnms (the horses) and the Yahoos display the two extremes, and Gulliver is actually mistaken when he takes the world of the horses for an ideal one. Horses are cool creatures without emotions, feelings, and Yahoos are driven by their instincts. Swift probably implies that the ideal is somewhere between the two: **man is capable of reason (*rationis capax*), for he is a combination of the animal and the rational creature.** So Gulliver cannot or should not be identified with Swift himself, like in the case of satires in general, because Gulliver is shown as equally mistaken.

Other works by Swift include:

"The Battle of the Books" (1704) is an ironic treatment of the battle between "Ancients" and "Moderns." Ancients meant those critics and scientists who maintained that old Greek and Roman works by Homer, Aristotle, Cicero and Virgil contained everything that was worthy of knowing. Moderns maintained that contemporary literature and science had surpassed these Classical authors. In this satirical and funny piece, the books literally climb down from the shelves, and start a proper epic battle among each other.

"A Tale of a Tub" (1704) is a satirical allegory of religious quarrels. Three brothers quarrel over their father's heritage, which is Christianity, represented by the last will, the Bible. The three brothers are Peter, who stands for the Catholic Church, Martin, representing Anglicanism and Jack stands for Calvinism and other nonconformist branches. Pure faith is allegorised by the garments they wear. Peter begins to embellish his clothes with ornaments and starts to gain power over his brothers as the executor of the will. Then the younger brothers rebel against Peter, Jack begins to read the will (the Bible) literally. He rips the coat to shreds in order to restore the "original state" of the garment which represents "primitive Christianity" sought by dissenters. He begins to rely only upon "inner illumination" for guidance and thus walks around with his eyes closed. Eventually, Peter and Jack begin to resemble one another, and only Martin is left with a coat that is like the original one.

A Journal to Stella (published posthumously in 1766): a collection of 65 letters in the form of a journal that Swift wrote to Esther Johnson between 1710 and 1713. Swift's prose here is not satiric, it is warm-hearted and affectionate.

The Neoclassical Poetry of the 18th century

The main representatives: John DRYDEN, Samuel JOHNSON and Alexander POPE.

The social basis of Neo-Classicism is the bourgeoisie (nagypolgárság) that at this point is the supporter of absolute monarchy, only later does it turn against it. The independent middle-class and lower-middle class will represent the protestant novel.

The name of classicism comes from the Latin word "classis" meaning class. This expresses the highly normative nature of this art.

First, Classical art rests on the idea of the compromise: it rejects the high emotions of the Baroque art and the "irrationality" and vulgarity of popular literature. Its aims are the observation of rules and creating a calm, balanced, poised atmosphere in works of art that suggest order and stability, as opposed to the ecstatic and chaotic art of the Baroque. This was

done first, with the copying of Antique (Roman, rather than Greek) models. The imitation of Antiquity was just a pretext for the observation of rules, it was not an end in itself.

Secondly, one of the central ideas was the imitation of nature, done with reference to "reason" and "common sense". What resembled the order of nature, was thus "natural", agreeing to common sense, thus beautiful and worthy of being represented in art. The stylistic elements in drama is not grandiosity and high passion but the rule of "classical unity", that is, one action should take place at one place within 24 hours.

The best visible example of both the observation of rules through the imitation of nature was the introduction of the heroic couplet in the majority of poems. Thus, the poem was easy to understand, which served the didactic, enlightened purpose of the poets well, and this form reflected balance, proportion, rhythm, harmony, pattern – which were thought to be the essential features of reason, nature and *natural* attitudes. An example from Pope's "Essay on Criticism".

u — u — u — u — u —
A little learning is a dang'rous thing;
u — u — u — u — u —
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring[2]:
u — u — u — u — u —
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
u — u — u — u — u —
And drinking largely sobers us again.

The poets of Neo-Classicism saw in nature mainly **orderliness, reason, pattern, divine structure, proportion and logic** – as opposed to later, Romantic poets, for whom nature (Nature) was essentially a mystic, transcendental, majestic experience. Let us see some quotations to illustrate this:

ALL are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,
Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame,
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent:

5

[22] A metaphorical source of the knowledge of arts and sciences in Greek mythology.

(Pope, “Essay on Man”)

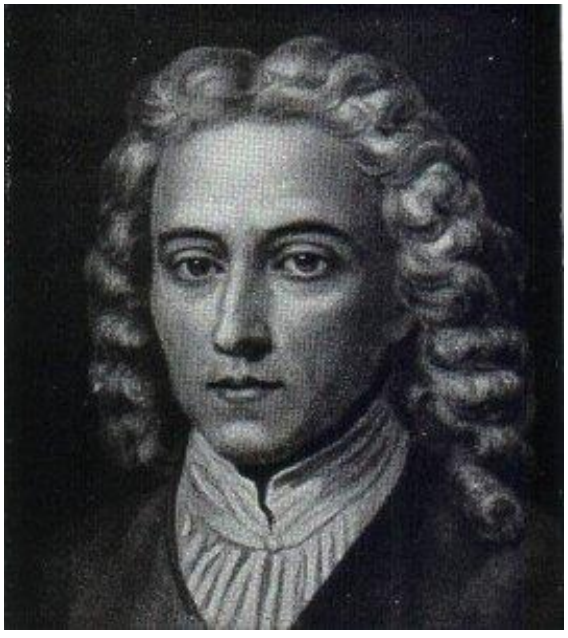
First follow Nature, and your Judgment frame
By her just Standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright, [70]
One *clear, unchang'd* and *Universal* Light,
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test* of *Art*.

(Pope, “Essay on Criticism”)

In Wit, as Nature, what affects our Hearts
Is not th' Exactness of peculiar Parts;
'Tis not a Lip, or Eye, we Beauty call,
But the joint Force and full Result of all.
Thus when we view some well-proportion'd Dome,
The World's just Wonder, and ev'n thine O Rome!
No single Parts unequally surprize;
All comes united to th' admiring Eyes;
No monstrous Height, or Breadth, or Length appear;
The Whole at once is Bold, and Regular.

(Pope, “Essay on Criticism”)

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)



- Pope was a son of a prosperous linen-merchant.
- He was born Catholic in the year of Protestant victory (the Glorious Revolution).
- The other drawback he suffered from Pott's disease (a form of TBC affecting the bones), after which he became a hunchback and cripple. He stopped growing, and in fact never grew taller than 1,37 ms.
- He never married.
- Translated Homer's *Iliad*.
- The first writer to live purely from writing.
- Curiously, he became the "official" voice of optimistic Augustan age (18th century).

His poetry

First period 1709-1715

Pastorals (1709)

This poem well reflects the dominant Neo-classic taste of the time, when skilful imitation was the basic principle. Some precedents of neoclassical poetry may be discovered even earlier, for instance, Virgil's eclogues translated by Dryden and Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar* may also be qualified as classical in taste. Pope attempts to recreate the old pastoral state, still close to contemporary attitudes. *Pastorals* follows a recognisable and common pattern, following the change of seasons: spring is the time of the two shepherds' contest; summer is the season of the lover's complaint; autumn contains alternate speeches and various ideas, while winter includes the elegy on a dead shepherdess. *Pastorals* contains a lot of descriptions of landscape, suggesting harmony and order and colourfulness. Man is seen as in perfect harmony with nature. In his "Discourse on Pastoral Poetry", he stated that **"Simplicity, brevity and delicacy were the proper qualities of a pastoral poem".**

Essay on Criticism (1711)

This work (commonly known as Pope's first major poem) contains the main critical ideas of Pope as a critic. It is not so much a general essay-poem on criticism as such, but rather a collection of Pope's various ideas on literature that echo the views of Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian, Vida and Boileau. "Essay on Criticism" is practically an instruction to would-be writers. Its major concerns are:

1. the discussion of neoclassical principles;
2. the formation of literary judgements and
3. description of the basis of true criticism.

In section I, Pope warns the would-be poet to avoid clichés:

And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:
While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,
With sure returns of still expected rhymes;
Wher'er you find "the cooling western breeze",
In the next line, it "whispers through the trees";
If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep",
The reader's threatened (not in vain) with "sleep" . . .

Other famous quotations: "A little learning is a dangerous thing; / Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring." and "To err is human, to forgive divine"

The Rape of the Lock **("Fürtrablás") (1720)**

The Rape of the Lock is a mock heroic, **a mock epic**, containing high burlesque and parody of classical epics. It is based on a real event: a certain Lord Petre cut off Miss Arabella Fermor's hair (one lock) at a ball, which caused great scandal at that time and led to a break between the two families. Pope writes a comic epic on this petty affair, satirically contrasting the lofty and sophisticated world of gods and angels and the shallowness of the contemporary London society.

Pope uses all the epic conventions in a comical way: the invocation, the enumerations (descriptions of soldiers preparing for the battle), description of heroic deeds, epithets. The abduction of Helen of Troy becomes here the theft of a lock of hair; the gods become minute sylphs; the description of Achilles' shield becomes an excursus on one of Belinda's petticoats, in preparing for the battle, Belinda's combs, pins, powders and patches are enumerated, the heroic deed becomes a card game, etc. Csokonai's "Dorottya" is partly based on this poem.

The beginning of *The Rape of the Lock*:

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
I sing--This verse to CARYL, Muse! is due:
This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view:
Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,
If She inspire, and He approve my lays.
Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel
A well-bred Lord t' assault a gentle Belle?
O say what stranger cause, yet unexplor'd,
Could make a gentle Belle reject a Lord?
In tasks so bold, can little men engage,
And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty Rage?
Sol thro' white curtains shot a tim'rous ray,
And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day:
Now lap-dogs give themselves the rousing shake,
And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:
Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knock'd the ground,
And the press'd watch return'd a silver sound.
Belinda still her downy pillow prest,
Her guardian Sylph prolong'd the balmy rest.

Essay on Man (1732-34)

A philosophical poem written in heroic couplets. It is the most concise summary of deism and a summary of Pope's beliefs on man, moral philosophy, containing his ideas on God and man's place in the universe. Its central idea is that God is transcendent: He created the great chain of being, which is perfect, but the parts are not necessarily perfect. Some elements don't comprehend the whole. Sin comes from the misunderstanding of the intentions of God. Secret of wisdom: understanding one's place in the Chain of life, feeling for the whole and feeling at home in your lot, one shouldn't try to belong to another lot. Self-knowledge means not waiting for God to tell us everything, instead we should study. Studying pattern of nature equals to studying morals. *Essay on Man* is an affirmative poem of faith: life seems to be chaotic and confusing to man when he is in the center of it, but according to Pope it is really divinely ordered. Bessenyei György made a prose translation of Pope's work with the title "Az embernek próbája". The most famous part is the following:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A Being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much;
Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd;
Still by himself, abus'd or disabus'd;
Created half to rise and half to fall;
Great Lord of all things, yet a prey to all,
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd;
The glory, jest and riddle of the world.

5. The Age of Sentimentalism (1750-1798)

Towards the Cult of Emotions: the Sentimental and the Gothic Novel

"*I felt before I thought: which is the common lot of man, though more pronounced in my case than in another's. […] I had no idea of the facts, but I was already familiar with every feeling. I had grasped nothing; I had sensed everything*." (Rousseau, *The Confessions*)

"*I am now alone on earth, no longer having any brother, neighbour, friend, or society other than myself. The most sociable and the most loving of humans has been proscribed from society by a unanimous agreement. In the refinements of their hatred, they have sought the torment which would be cruellest to my sensitive soul and have violently broken all the ties which attached me to them. […] I, detached from them and from everything, what am I? That is what remains for me to seek.*" (Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*)

It seems that something definitely changes in the history of the English novel around 1750. Experimentation gains more and more space and some writers begin to abandon the strict rational and moral stance of the novel that characterised Defoe, Swift and Richardson. Around the middle of the century, the novel started to give way to **new forms of humour, the expression of emotions and the extension of the limits of imagination**.

Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson are often seen to be the pioneers of the modern English novel. Their purpose was no longer to create false documentary novels, like Defoe or castigate the follies of the society or mankind in satires, in the manner of Swift, but to create psychologically credible, flesh-and-blood characters, together with a description of contemporary morals.

The Epistolary Novel: Samuel Richardson

Richardson, like most novel writers of the time, came from the middle class. He started his career as an apprentice to a printer, and later became a printer himself. In 1733, he received the right to print the journals of the House of Commons (*Journals of the House*). His career started out from this very circumstance: he was commissioned to edit a volume of "familiar letters," a manual that young ladies could make use of when composing their letters. This

gave the idea to Richardson to write novels in the epistolary form and create his two most important *epistolary novels, Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1749).

The epistolary form provides the novel writer with a series of advantages: he can make the novel credible, since it appears as if the writer only "edited" someone's private writings – an old trick used by Defoe, Swift but as well as by Charlotte Brontë. Furthermore, the author can focus his attention on one problem or one character.

Richardson's novels show the following major characteristics features:
(1) They present some sort of *moral conflict in the society*. Richardson is interested not only in general questions like the conflict of Protestant ethics and capitalism (Defoe) or that of reason and folly (Swift) but in specific cases, which are, we have to add, extreme and unusual ones.
His novels also show (2) *concentrated unity*: in each novel he picks a crisis in emotional relations that concern only a few individuals or a narrowly-focused interest group, thus he provides no broad social perspective.
A third characteristic feature of his novels is their (3) *tragic intensity*. Richardson is preoccupied with the idea of tragedy lurking in the background of events.

Richardson's two best-known novels are ***Pamela*** (1740) and *Clarissa* (1749). The full title of the former is

Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded, in a Series of Familiar Letters from a Beautiful Young Damsel, to her Parents, Now First Published in Order to Cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of Both Sexes: A Narrative which has its Foundations in Truth and Nature, and at the Same Time that it agreeably Entertains, by a Variety of Curious and Affecting Incidents, is Entirely Divested of All those Images, which, in Too Many Pieces

Calculated for Amusement Only, Tend to Inflame the Minds they Should Instruct. (Pay attention to the predicted outcome of the novel, its target group, its aims, and its theoretical foundations, all included in the full title.)

The story is fairly simple. The central character is a 15-year-old poor maid, Pamela Andrews, towards whom his employer, Squire B. shows signs of affection. He attempts to seduce her, threatens her, even locks her up, but she resists. Pamela remains virtuous, and is not willing to become B's lover, though, confused, she realises she is falling in love with him. When B., however, offers to marry her, she concedes. In the second part of the novel we can see how Pamela is trying to conform to the values of the high-class society and how she becomes the successful wife of a country squire. Pamela may remain virtuous, but she is also very clever, since she recognises that her virginity provides her with great value.

At the time of the publication, the novel was a huge success, a real bestseller. It was read out in different communities; prints, paintings, waxworks, fans, playing cards appeared with illustrations from the novel. Several critics and writers, however, judged it to be **hypocritical and unrealistic**. Eliza Haywood wrote her *Anti-Pamela, or Feigned Innocence Detected* the next year, Fielding's *Shamela* (also published in 1741) also criticised the work, and by some, Marquis de Sade's *Justine* is also viewed as a satire of *Pamela*.

The full title of Richardson's 1749 novel is ***Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady****: Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life, and Particularly Showing the Distresses that May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, in Relation to Marriage. Published by the Editor of Pamela.* It is actually one of the longest novels in English, about 1,500 pages printed in small letters. The novel contains 147 letters from different people.

The story is similar to that of Pamela, but with a tragic outcome: Clarissa Harlowe is a 19-year-old, pious, virtuous young woman who is eager to become a member of the aristocratic circles. This possibility is opened up for her with Robert Lovelace. Against the advice of her parents, she elopes with him, but Lovelace turns out to be a cruel and uninhibited womaniser. He forces her to remain in a brothel, and then drugs and rapes her. After this, Clarissa sinks lower and lower in sin and at the end she commits suicide.

Clarissa was more favourably received by critics. Samuel Johnson, the quasi literary dictator of the age liked it, praising Richardson's depth against Fielding's superficiality in his famous comparison "between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dialplate." The Romantic poet Coleridge also admired it, and Walter Scott named it "a novel of the chastity of soul." *Clarissa* opened the way for the modern psychological interest in woman's soul and paved the way for, among others, Austen, the Brontës and George Eliot.

The First Real Novelist: Henry Fielding

Fielding was altogether more optimistic than Swift and more realistic than Richardson. He is often considered to be the first real English novelist – while Defoe wrote quasi-documentaries, Swift philosophical treatises in a novelistic form, Richardson epistolary novels with a very limited theme, Fielding wrote "real" novels with imagined plots, situation, character development, and a broad social panorama.

Fielding came from an impoverished aristocratic family that used to have close relationships with the royal house of Austria. Because of debts and the spendthrift father, the family went bankrupt and Fielding was given into the custody of his grandmother. Later he studied law, and became the Justice of the Peace (JP) for Westminster in 1748.

He began his career as a playwright, producing highly satirical and critical comedies between 1732 and 1737, including *Love in Several Masks, Rape Upon Rape*, and perhaps one of the most humorous plays of the century, *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*. In these plays he strongly uses the elements of farce and burlesque and criticises Robert Walpole's government. In 1737, the Parliament passed the so-called Licence Act which allowed only two patent theatres to function in London. It was basically an act of censorship on the part of the government which had had enough of criticism on the stage. After that, Fielding devoted himself to novel writing.

Fielding may be regarded as the **first "real" novelist**, at least by today's standards. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, Fielding **abandons the practice of pretending to "edit" somebody's writings** as Defoe, Swift and Richardson had done before. He does not act as if he were only an indifferent chronicler of events, he talks to the reader in a clearly discernible and powerful voice and with a characteristically comic attitude. His aim is to present the "real world," the life of the middle and lower classes. These novels are free from the extreme situations and incidents of Robinson, Gulliver or Pamela and show the variety of everyday life through brilliant humour and warm sentimentalism.

He is also the first one to give a ***panoramic view of English life*** and its class system. While Defoe examines only a small section of society, the lower classes, or the world of distant adventures, and Samuel Richardson presents extreme cases and situations, and gives moral lessons, Fielding uses the picaresque method to involve the protagonist into a great variety of adventures.

The tone of the narrator also changes: while the narrators of Defoe take themselves absolutely seriously, for the purpose is to present credible narratives of development and repentance, while Richardson's purpose is also to present a story through letters that are meant to edify the readers, **Fielding stands above the story and makes ironic remarks** about the behaviour of the characters.

His view of mankind was also different from that of Defoe or Swift: Fielding **attacked what he called "affectation,"** i.e., someone pretending to be what he or she is not, the discrepancy between what a man thinks of himself and what he is. According to him,

"*From the discovery of this affectation arises the Ridiculous, which always strikes the reader with surprise and pleasure; and that in a higher and stronger degree when the affectation arises from hypocrisy than when from vanity; for to discover any one to be the exact reverse of what he affects, it is more surprising and consequently more ridiculous than to find him a little deficient in the quality he desires reputation of…"* (from the "Preface" to *Joseph Andrews* [110]).

This is a source of ridicule and irony, and gives a great authority to the author, although Fielding's satire is not as savage as Swift's.

Another major theme of Fielding is the treatment of *innocence*, meant both sexually and as a general innocence as to the ways of the world. **Fielding rejects the idea of equating innocence with ignorance or sexual purity.** For him, innocence means **simplicity, charity, natural gentility and generous sensuality**. The typical journey of the protagonist is from innocence to experience and maturity. First the protagonist believes what other people affect to be, and does not recognise the discrepancy, but later he grows mature and is able to make differences.

But this does not mean that an innocent person is "shy" or "rigid" or "prudent" (like we imagine Pamela's innocence), just the contrary. Tom Jones, for instance, is quite libertine, tries all sorts of things and often shifts lovers. An excellent example of Tom's "innocence" is the episode in Book 5, Chapter 10, when Tom is dreaming of ethereal and unreachable Sophia, but when unkempt and sensual Molly suddenly appears, "they retired into the thickest part of the grove."

In Fielding's novel, innocence is the combination of the goodness of the heart and the sins of the flesh. **The greatest sin, according to him, is *the denial of feeling*.** What Fielding emphasises in connection with Tom Jones is that, although he is fallible and falls prey to his instincts and is sometimes unheroic, sometimes is just a weak figure, he is never without true feelings, he is the man of average feelings (*l'homme moyen sensuel*).

This high estimation of feeling, that is, sentimentalism used to have a different meaning then. In the 18th-century context, it is not just the expression of one's emotions, it is the ability to feel what the other person feels ("**Einfühlung**," as the German called it), to "feel for" someone, and to recognise true sentiments. Although by the end of the 18th century it develops into sentimentality, and later degrades into cheap sentimentality and melodrama, still even at the beginning of the 19th century sentimentalism was taken absolutely seriously.

Fielding was also a lot more conscious regarding the genre and the arrangement of his novels. In the Preface and introductory chapters of *Tom Jones*, he presented his ideas on the art of novel writing. Since he was fairly well educated in Greek and Latin literature, he called his novels ***comic epic poems in prose*.** (See Book IV, Chapter 8 of *Tom Jones*, the "epic" battle between Molly and Bessy.)

Fielding's novels

An Apology for the Life of Shamela Andrews (1741) – a parody (pastiche) of Richardson's *Pamela*. He ridicules Pamela's lack of education and interprets her fear of sexuality as hypocrisy.

The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews (1742) – a story about Pamela's brother, Joseph and parson Abraham Adams. According to Fielding's intention, the novel is an imitation of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. The work is the inverse of Pamela in the sense that here we have a shy male character who is endlessly chased by women, through an epic and picaresque plot.

The History of Jonathan Wild the Great (1743) – a story of a real-life criminal, Jonathan Wild (1683-1725), perhaps the most infamous criminal of the time. Here Fielding satirises concepts

such as greatness, friendship, tolerance and courtesy, and praises, in an ironic fashion, treachery, self-interest and brutality.

The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749) – Fielding's major novel, about 1,000 pages long. The novel is among the first ones that introduce a character type, ***the foundling-orphan***, which becomes the favourite hero of Victorian novels. There are several reasons why this type became popular with novel writers.
(1) First, they are mysterious, nobody knows where they come from and what descent they possess.
(2) Secondly, they are a major danger in the fabric of the society, since they are not limited by family or class backgrounds, they may rise up easily and no-one categorises them according to the background they come from.
(3) Thirdly, they may be regarded as "empty sheets," as far as morality, education, inner values are concerned, they are able to start with a clean background and the environment may write onto that background whatever it can, that is, either positive or negative values.

Tom Jones (mind the simple name) is just that empty sheet. He is found one morning in the bed of a country gentleman. The novel goes into two directions: the characters want to trace his origins, and the reader may trace his moral development. Different people, such as Squire Alworthy, Thwackum, Master Blifil, Sophia and Molly, impress different experiences on him and form his character. In that sense, the novel is a ***Bildungsroman***, a quest story and a picaresque novel at the same time: Tom travels throughout England and meets the different features of contemporary society and thereby matures and develops.

He is, however, far from perfect and perhaps that is why he is so **loveable: he is naïve, good-natured, has feelings but lacks prudence and succumbs to many temptations**. The outcome of the novel, just as one may expect in a comic epic, is happy: Tom realises his mistakes, wins the heart of Sophia, and it turns out that he is actually the nephew of Squire Alworthy, who found him at the beginning.

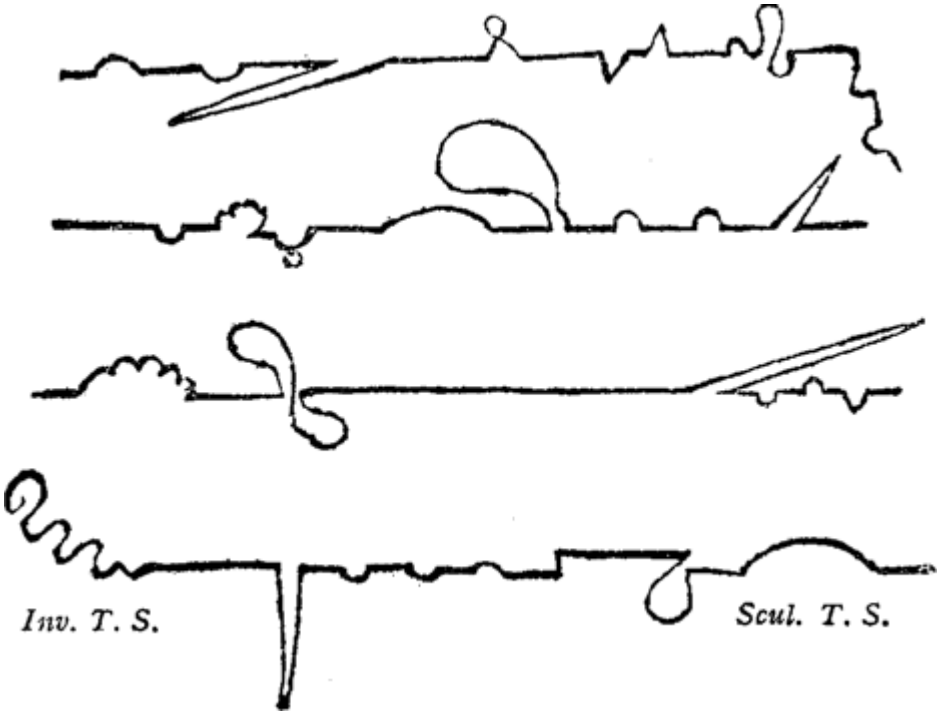
Laurence Sterne (1713-1768)

Sterne is generally regarded to be a sentimental author, as it is also indicated by the title of one of his novels, *A Sentimental Journey*. This sort of sentimentalism, however, does not mean a melodramatic version of emotionalism – far from it.

Sterne was born in Clonmel, Ireland. His father was an officer in the army, and due to this fact, the family moved a lot between Ireland and England, finally settling in York. Sterne was educated in Cambridge and decided to pursue a clerical career, and he was ordained in 1738. He had suffered from TBC, and in the hope of getting cured, he travelled to France. This gave the basis of his novel mentioned above, which was published posthumously. His generally

acknowledged masterpiece is ***The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*** (published between 1759 and 1769).

***Tristram Shandy* is one of the strangest novels in literature**. Its aim is essentially to parody the genre of fictional autobiography that was popularised by Defoe about half a century before, but in doing that, it also questions the very nature of the novel form. The basic question in connection with every autobiography is "where to start" and "how to start" the story of life. Sterne investigates this very problem when, through hundreds of pages, the narrator struggles with the problem of commencing the story. Obviously, the beginning should be the birth of the narrator or protagonist, but Sterne's narrator delays this moment until the third volume of the book. The narrator denies the convention of proceeding linearly with the life story, instead, he gets enmeshed in digressions, motivated by associations: every incident recalls another one, and this way it is natural that the rambling narrator can hardly start the story proper.



The principle of digressions (actual figure from the novel)

The novel is equally unorthodox in the sense that it uses different kinds of texts inserted into the main body of the novel, like sermons, Latin passages, extracts of contracts, or even typographic peculiarities like a marble page or a completely black page after the death of parson Yorick.

The chief source of *humour* in the book is the method of narration, the nature of characters and the **unbelievable absurdities**. Most of the characters are real **eccentrics**, closed in their little worlds and repeating the same things over and over again. One of the central concepts in the novel is someone's riding his "**hobbyhorse**", which is also a kind of parody of Locke's theory of association. Uncle Toby, a very warm-hearted and gentle character, for instance, having been wounded in the groin in the siege of Namur (in Flanders), develops his mania of

erecting toy fortifications and replaying the battle over and over. Most of these characters can be regarded as the precursors of the equally maniac characters of Dickens's early writings.

Absurdities include episodes like this: when the narrator of the book was conceived, his mother foolishly asked her husband if he had not forgotten to wind up the clock. This distraction, according to Tristram, resulted in the disturbance of his balance of humours, and consequently, he was born ill-fortuned. One of his father's pet theories was that a large and attractive nose was important to a man making his way in life. In a difficult birth, Tristram's nose was crushed by Dr. Slop's forceps. As a toddler, Tristram suffered an accidental circumcision when Susannah let a window sash fall as he urinated out of the window because his chamberpot was missing.

As one can see, the novel deals with petty and abstract questions at the same time, but none of these concern morality, the contemporary society or politics. The strange method of narration, that is, working through digressions, associations, never quite offering the possibility of a firm beginning and closure, led certain writers and critics to regard *Tristram Shandy* as the first **"pre-postmodern" work,** one which asks questions about the very nature of narration in a novel about two centuries before it appears as a problem in post-war fiction. Modernists also favoured the novel's eccentric style, mainly concentrating on the so-called "stream-of-consciousness" technique that later became popular with Virginia Woolf, James Joyce or William Faulkner. In his essay "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary" (1921), Viktor Skhlovsky, a Modernist critic, called the novel the paradigm, the essential mode of novel writing, compared to which all other "traditional" novels are mere deviations.

The Gothic Novel

It is generally assumed that the inventor of the Gothic novel was Horace Walpole with his novel *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. The appearance of the Gothic in literature, however, was not without precedents.

By the middle of the 18th century, artists seemed to be increasingly dissatisfied with the cult of reason established by the Enlightenment, and they were looking for ways in which the dry, rational and somewhat rigid classicism of the first half of the century could be replaced with newer themes, and began to reintroduce the importance of emotions, sensations, individual feelings, supernatural aspects, mysteries into literature. Definitely, most aspects of the supernatural and the metaphysical were vanishing, the Bible held decreasing authority, and the concept of sin was shifting from religious issues to psychological ones.

These decades may be regarded as preparing the ground for **the *emerging Romanticism*** that became dominant between the years 1800 and 1830 in England, with *sentimentalism* (Fielding and Sterne) and the ***interest in mysteries and horror***. Besides this, there was an emerging interest in distant times, and these times by no means signified the Renaissance or Greek and

Roman antiquity, which were the main models of Neoclassical art, but **the Middle Ages**, which had been considered "dark" by Enlightened thinkers and was appealing for sentimentalists for the same reason.

Different "revival" styles appeared, such as the rediscovery of Gothic architecture and its imitation, the Neo-Gothic, which lasted well into the 19th century – just think of the buildings of the English and Hungarian Parliaments. The enthusiasm for lonely, deserted, melancholy places was so great that sometimes the architects constructed ruins, which imitated the remnants of old medieval buildings.

In poetry, the ***graveyard*** became a favourite place for melancholy broodings, as represented for instance by the poetry of Thomas Gray and Edward Young or the Hungarian poet Ányos Pál ("Egy boldogtalannak panaszai a halavány holdnál"). James MacPherson's Ossian poems take us back to the **misty Celtic times**. In drama, traces of Gothic appear in the book dramas of Romantic poets, for instance in Byron's *Manfred* or in Shelley's *The Cenci*, exploiting themes of **sin and perversity**. Later, the Victorian age also showed a considerable interest in the medieval; it is enough to look at Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (in which he used the material of the Arthurian legend), or Browning's dramatic monologues which often choose gloomy, medieval Italian settings, also associated with sin springing from psychological motives.

The Gothic was perhaps most remarkable in the development of the novel. The setting for these texts is generally **some medieval French or Italian, sometimes German, castle**, which is, of course, a haunted one. Indispensable elements of these Gothic novels were **supernatural events, ghosts, suspense, madness, doubles, secrets, deception, secret**

passages, family curse, fight over family inheritance, and so on, which are familiar today from **horror** movies. Typical characters of these novels include the **tyrant lord, maniacs, the maiden-in-distress, a melancholy hero**, who has to be saved by the main character who appears as a knight or gentleman, but we may often meet **nuns, pervert monks, vampires, dragons, angels,** and so on.

Famous 18th-century and early 19th-century examples of the Gothic novel include

- Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764);
- Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777);
- William Thomas Beckford's *Vathek* (1786);
- Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794);
- Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796)
- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

Sentimental and Pre-Romantic Poetry

Thomas Gray (1716-1771)

A native Londoner, Gray was born into a middle-class background. Studied at Eton and Cambridge, later became a professor at the University of Cambridge (remained a scholar till the end of his life). He read the Welsh and Norse poetry (which already points towards a heightened, Romantic interest in the "exotic" and ancient). He was so much devoted to his studies that he refused to accept poet-laureateship (Poet Laureate = koszorús költő). Gray wrote little – published only 13 poems in his lifetime and produced only 1,000 lines of poetry

but he always aimed at perfection. His poetry marks a clear move from neoclassicism to pre-romanticism.

His most famous poem is "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard" (1751). A meditation on unused human potential, the conditions of country life, and mortality. It exhibits the gentle melancholy that is characteristic of the English poets of the **graveyard school** of the 1740s and '50s.

The beginning of the poem:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep. (….)

Oliver Goldsmith (1728?-1774)

Goldsmith was an Anglo-Irish poet born in Ireland, as the son of an Anglican clergyman. Neither his exact date of birth nor his birthplace is known. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin, but he was not really an outstanding student, spending his time buying fine clothes and playing cards. Afterwards, he went to Europe to continue his studies. He studied **medicine** at the University of Edinburgh, then at Leiden, made walking tours in Switzerland, Italy and France, and he returned with a medical degree (it is still quite obscure where he gained that degree). He was quite unsuccessful as a doctor.

He was not only a poet but a **novelist** as well. In his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), among others, he describes his travels. *The Vicar* is a sentimental novel, following the fashion of the age, representing the innate goodness of human beings. Goldsmith also worked as a **dramatist**, wrote several popular plays, including *The Good-Natur'd Man* and *She Stoops to Conquer*.

He settled in London in 1756, where he briefly held various jobs, including an apothecary's assistant and an usher of a school. Perennially in debt and addicted to gambling, Goldsmith produced a massive output as a hack writer for the publishers of London, but his few painstaking works earned him the company of Samuel Johnson, with whom he was a founding member of "The Club". The combination of his literary work and his dissolute lifestyle led Horace Walpole to give him the epithet the ***inspired idiot.***

Goldsmith was described by contemporaries as prone to envy, a congenial but **disorganised** personality who once planned to emigrate to America but failed because he **missed his ship**. His premature death in 1774 may have been partly due to his own misdiagnosis of his kidney infection.

His poetry

"The Deserted Village" (1770)

Goldsmith's best-known poem, a pastoral piece written in heroic couplets. It is basically **a lamentation on rural England as a lost paradise in the time of industrialization**. The poem operates with the juxtaposition of old values and valueless contemporary life. The

message is that men decay morally – the upholders of virtue are the *priest, the schoolmaster, the village-inn* (as a stronghold of community).

The Deserted Village

Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed:
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endeared each scene;
How often have I paused on every charm,
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topped the neighbouring hill,
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made.

(...)

A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintained its man;
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life required, but gave no more:
His best companions, innocence and health;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.
But times are altered; trade's unfeeling train
Usurp the land and dispossess the swain;
Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose,
Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose;
And every want to opulence allied,
And every pang that folly pays to pride.
These gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,
Those calm desires that asked but little room,
Those healthful sports that graced the peaceful scene,
Lived in each look and brightened all the green;
These far departing, seek a kinder shore,
And rural mirth and manners are no more.

(...)

At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevailed the double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray. *180*
The service past, around the pious man,
With steady zeal each honest rustic ran;
Even children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown, to share the good man's smile.
His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed,
Their welfare pleased him and their cares distressed;
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.
As some tall cliff, that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm, *190*
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

Drama in the 18th century

General features

Drama between 1688 and the 1880s is rather shallow period, practically no very important plays were written between Congreve and Shaw, about 200 years are "missing" from theatre history. The **reasons** are manifold.

1. The rise of the novel.
The novel was the typical genre of the middle classes, strongly infused with Protestant and Puritan ideology. "It is better to have no book and depart from iniquity than to have a thousand, and not to be bettered in my soul thereby." (John Bunyan); the archetypical Puritan novel is Robinson Crusoe. The novel in England by definition is utilitarian, realist and Protestant (and middle-class-based). Puritans strongly rejected the theatre since it was seen as the tool of Evil in disguise (since it was based on illusion, pretence).

2, Theatre going came to be seen as immoral.
Already in 1698, Jeremy Collier published "A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage". It contributed to the general feeling that theatre-going was something immoral, something to be despised, since it was the world of amorality and illusions. Queen Anne banned plays that were not "strictly agreeable to religion and good manners" in 1704.

The audience no longer homogeneous due to the rise of the middle-classes, they could buy their way into the aristocracy, these new classes in town had to be educated (Addison, Steele, 18th c novel). These masses did not know how to react to a play, which e.g., the Restoration audience knew quite well.

3. The Licensing Act of 1737

In order to prevent government criticism on the stage, the act gave the Lord Chamberlain control over what could be produced in theatres; the act was directed against Jacobites who could raise sedition with the help of theatrical propaganda. All regular performances were confined to Drury Lane and Covent Garden.

4. The age of great actors, actresses ("stars")

What made them great was their individual creativity, style of acting and virtuosity and not the plays; it was the beginning of the star system, with very famous actors (**David Garrick**: he did away with exaggerated acting style, naturalistic).

David Garrick as Richard III

David Garrick as Hamlet

5. The growing power of the theatrical manager

He decided what could be out on stage, what will appeal to the audiences, which resulted in a divorce between theatre and artistic creativity. "Theatrical history after the 17th century has no necessary connection with literary history" (David Daiches).

6. The dominance of the audience

The playwright now depended on audience and not royal or aristocratic patronage (like e.g. Shakespeare), leading to a real drop in the intellectual level of the theatre-going audience. There were serious paradoxes: Shakespeare was regularly performed, was immensely popular, but the texts are seriously impaired, "edited" to achieve more success, sometimes whole scenes were cut. For example, James Miller adapted Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* with the title *The Universal Passion* in 1737 to fit the Neo-Classical principles of probability, consistency and clarity.

Consequences:

Drama was transformed into something educating, didactic, sentimental and moral(ising), following **Neo-Classical principles**, like ***clarity, consistency, probability, structural***

symmetry and clear motivation. Authors stressed the moral and didactic purpose of the theatre, along with the importance of ***propriety, decency, poetic justice and moral purpose***. Sentimentalism meant interrupting the play with frequent outbursts of emotions, pity, tenderness, etc; morality meant edifying generalisations, **"virtue rewarded, vice frustrated"**.

There was a growing interest in the so-called afterpieces; the reasons being a **wish to separate dramatic genres**, serious and low, comedy and tragedy. There was no such distinction in Shakespeare, he was witty and deeply serious at the same time, mixing different dramatic qualities. John Dryden was deeply dissatisfied with this as seen from the quotation below:

I shall only, in short, demand of you, whether you are not convinced that of all Nations the French have best observed them [the Rules of the Stage]? In the unity of time you find them so scrupulous, that it yet remains a dispute among their Poets, whether the artificial day of twelve hours more or less, be not meant by Aristotle, rather than the natural one of twenty four; and consequently whether all Plays ought not to be reduced into that compass? This I can testify, that in all their Drama's writ within these last years and upwards, I have not observed any that have extended the time to thirty hours: in the unity of place they are full as scrupulous, for many of their Critics limit it to that very spot of ground where the Play is supposed to begin; none of them exceed the compass of the same Town or City. The unity of Action in all their Plays is yet more conspicuous, for they do not burden them with under-plots, as the English do; which is the reason why many Scenes of our Tragi-comedies carry on a design that is no thing of kin to the main Plot; and that we see two distinct webs in a Play; like those in ill wrought stuffs; and two actions, that is, two Plays carried on together, to the confounding of the Audience; who, before they are warm in their concernments for one part, are diverted to another; and by that means espouse the interest of neither. From hence likewise it arises that the one half of our Actors are not known to the other. They keep their distances as if they were Montagues and Capulets, and seldom begin an acquaintance till the last Scene of the Fifth Act, when they are all to meet upon the Stage. ***There is no Theatre in the world has any thing so absurd as the English Tragicomedy, 'tis a Drama of our own invention, and the fashion of it is enough to proclaim it so, here a course of mirth, there another of sadness and passion; a third of honor, and fourth a Duel: Thus in two hours and a half we run through all the fits of Bedlam***. *The French affords you as much variety on the same day, but they do it not so unseasonably, or* ***mal à propos*** *[inappropriately—ed.] as we: Our Poets present you the Play and the farce together...* (Dryden, „Essay of Dramatick Poesie", 1669)

Morality was often laid crudely and directly e.g., Richard Steele's The Conscious Lovers (1722) was written to support a campaign against duelling and forced marriages, based upon the belief in the essential goodness of man; sermon-like tone.

What kept the theatre moving was **melodrama, farce**, this was also the great age of pantomime, afterpieces, and **opera**. **Melodrama** became more and more popular (although the word melodrama was first used in English in 1802 from the combination of words

'melodic drama') = spectacular settings, love of gloom and mystery, artificial sentimentality, set of stock characters (villain, heroine in distress, honest friend).

Theatrical conditions: towards realism

Decoration and scenery remained Restoration style until about 1760s with three-dimensional built-up scenery, transparent effects, e.g. they knew how to simulate a storm, the technique of stage lighting developing (by the use of stained glass). Costume became more and more **realistic**, e.g. Garrick used ancient Scottish costumes in Macbeth.

New Genres: the Domestic Tragedy

By the 18th century classical unities, however, became a burden for many playwrights and writers protested against classical unities in the name of "**nature**" as well. Diderot considered **the classical unities artificial**. He was also against the traditional concept of tragedy in which the hero is always a man of high rank. He thought the hero should be a common man, a bourgeois, and the theme should be connected to the family and everyday life. It is the realisation that indeed in the sphere of "common men" there are tragic events, and even in royal courts comic events may take place.

Domestic tragedy – the most important genre of the rising middle classes. Based on earlier Elizabethan experiments, the first **bourgeois tragedy** was George Lillo's The London Merchant (1731). Today we see the plot melodramatic and mannered far from being natural, the fact is that it's the first important domestic tragedy, the story of how a young merchant's passion for a prostitute leads him to rob his master and kill his uncle, finally both are hanged for their crimes; concerns the middle-class; praised by famous people such as Diderot, Lessing, Rousseau, Goethe, one of the true ancestors of the 'problem-plays' of Ibsen. The merchant is the epitome of virtue and integrity, he stands for the rising middle-classes, the real interest of the play is in Barnwell's remorse and repentance.

New Genres: the Ballad Opera

Ballad operas were satiric musical plays that used some of the conventions of opera, but without recitatives (airs). The lyrics of the airs in the piece are set to popular broadsheet ballads, opera arias, church hymns and folk tunes of the time. The most famous example is **John Gay's The Beggar's Opera** (1728) (inspirer of Brecht's The Three-penny Opera [1928]). The play clearly satirised Italian opera, with characters like thieves, pickpockets, robbers, prostitutes.

John Gay, The Beggar's Opera was initially rejected by Drury Lane Theatre, later accepted by New Theatre Royal, became an enormous success partly due to Gay's use of native ballads (airs) in the opera, with which the audience was familiar, so they could join the performance. It was a kind of reaction against the Italian opera, and due to its satirical edge, satirising the world of aristocracy, also Robert Walpole, corruption in general, contemporary political life, and other contemporary plays; almost everything in the play has a double edge. The characters are criminals, pickpockets, highwaymen and prostitutes. It had an effect on later comic opera and modern musical

The meaning of the play is summarised by a beggar at the end: *"Through the whole piece you may such a similitude of manners in high and low life that it is difficult to determine whether the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Had the play remained as I first intended, it would have carried a most excellent moral. 'Twould have shown that the lower sort of people have their vices in a degree as well as the rich: and that they are punished for them."*

Dissenting voices

Henry Fielding, The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the History of Tom Thumb, the Great (1731) – brilliant comedy; a satire on tragic heroes, romantic situations and pathetic speeches

Oliver Goldsmith: She Stoops to Conquer, or, the Mistakes of a Night (1773) > instant success, satire of sentimentalism, brilliant scenes, e.g. the protagonist, Tony Lumpkin believes

that he is in an inn, whereas he is in a private house, and behaves accordingly, much to the surprise of the hosts.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan: The Rivals, featuring some of the best witty dialogue; one of its characters is Mrs. Malaprop, who provokes constant laughter by misusing words of foreign origin, hence the name "malapropism", e.g., oracular – vernacular, epitaph – epithet, "illiterate him quite from your memory" (1775), The School for Scandal (1777), masterpieces of English drama