

MACMILLAN ANTHOLOGIES
OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

THE

RESTORATION AND
EIGHTEENTH

CENTURY

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Edited by
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MACMILLAN

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General Introduction

There can often be a gulf between the restricted reading required by a school, college or university syllabus and the great expanse of English literature which is there to be explored and enjoyed. There are two effective ways of bridging that gulf. One is to be aware of how authors relate or have related to their contemporary situations and their contemporaries, how they accept, develop or react against what has been written by their predecessors or older contemporaries, how, in short, they fit into the long history of English literature. Good histories of literature – and there is a welcome increase of interest in them – serve to place authors in their contexts, as well as giving a panoramic view of their careers.

The second way is to sample their work, to discover the kind or kinds of writing they have produced. Here is where the anthology contributes to an enjoyment of reading. It conveys the flavour of an author as nothing but reading that author can. And when an author is compared to his or her fellow writers – a thing a good anthology facilitates – the reader gains several extra dimensions, not least an insight into what thoughts, what fears, what delights have occupied writers at different times. To gain such insights is to see, among other things, the relevance of past authors to the present, to the reader. Reading an anthology shows something of the vast range of our literature, its variety of form and outlook, of mood and expression, from black despair to ecstatic happiness; it is an expansive experience widening our horizons, enhancing specialised study, but also conveying its own particular pleasures, the joy of finding familiar pieces among unfamiliar, of reacting to fresh stimuli, of reaching new conclusions about authors, in short, of making literature a part of oneself.

Anthologies also play a large part in the life of a literature. If we are the beneficiaries of our literary inheritance, we are also trustees for it, and the maintenance of the inheritance for future generations requires new selections of properly edited texts. The Macmillan Literary Anthologies, which have followed on from the Macmillan Histories of Literature, are designed to present these texts with the essential pertinent information. The selection made of poetry, prose and plays has been wide and inclusive, authors appear in the order of

their dates of birth, texts – with the exception of the Middle English section – are modernised and footnotes are kept to a minimum. A broadly representative policy has been the aim of the general editors, who have maintained a similar format and proportion in each volume, though the medieval volume has required more annotation.

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ANJ

Introduction: The Restoration and Eighteenth Century

Literary and political histories traditionally take the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 as a convenient starting point; but that event marked neither a turning-back of the clock nor an abrupt break with the nation's past, as elements of the old coexisted with the new in the social and intellectual spheres. In 1798 Britain remained a mainly agricultural society. Its population had, however, doubled during the previous 150 years to about 9 million; London, always the largest and most influential concentration, was nearing 1 million, ten times the size of any rival city. But shifts in the economic life of the country, partly brought about by foreign trade, economic 'improvements' and growing industrialisation, had led to five English cities having populations over 50,000. These were Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol and Leeds – trading ports of the West, and manufacturing towns of the Midlands and North, which had outstripped traditional centres such as Norwich, York or Oxford.

The Restoration of Charles II was hailed as bringing stability after the political, economic and religious tensions of the earlier seventeenth century, which had led to the Civil War (1642–8), the execution of Charles I, and the Cromwellian Protectorate. Within three decades, however, renewed struggles had forced the flight of the Catholic James II, in 1688, ahead of the accession of the Dutchman William of Orange. Following the death of Queen Anne, the last Stuart monarch, in 1714, the introduction of the continental Protestant Hanoverians proved ultimately to have established the succession, which survived the challenges of Jacobite rebellions in 1715 and 1745; three Georges reigned from 1714 to 1820. The king continued to govern through his ministers, whose success from the age of Walpole onwards (1721–42) greatly relied on management of the House of Commons, which represented primarily the interests of the landed and moneyed minorities of the population. If, by the end of the period, American independence and the Revolution of 1789 in France were symptoms of widespread demands for the extension of influence in a nation's

affairs and a wider sharing of its prosperity among the population, in Britain one immediate consequence of the wars against Revolutionary France, which only ended in 1815 at Waterloo, was domestic political repression.

By the end of the period covered by this anthology, Britain had clearly grown through military conquest and commerce to the status of a major power, with interests in North America, the West Indies, the Indian subcontinent, and Australia. If these depended in part on exploitation of natural resources and indigenous populations, on force, importation of slaves or transportation of convicts, the moral implications seem to have had less effect than the sense of Britain's growing standing in the world. This, together with the comparative political and religious order of the eighteenth century which was partly its cause, contributed to a cultural self-confidence which allowed native writers to see themselves as extending traditional forms and creating new. A theoretical respect for the conventions of continental neo-classicism was rarely allowed to stand in the way of innovation.

Religion and Ideas

Especially in the first half of our period, many tensions sprang from differences in religious belief and external form. The established Church of England attempted in the later seventeenth century to steer its way between the alleged superstition, authoritarianism and foreign sympathies of Roman Catholics, and the anti-social individualism and republicanism charged against dissenters, both groups being effectively excluded from aspects of public life and subjected to penalties by the Anglican Test Act of 1673. The strength of the religio-political issues is easily identified here in the writings, from different points of view, of Bunyan, Butler, Dryden and Swift. Although there were no political parties in the modern sense, the century's closing decades saw the groupings of Tories – supporters of the king and established church, landed gentlemen, conservative clergy – and Whigs – rich aristocrats, the rising city middle class of traders and money-men, individual Anglicans and dissenters. (The significance of the church as a career, and the importance of political influence in the distribution of offices, should never be forgotten: the lives of Swift, Sterne and Crabbe emphasise literature's debt to the established church.) Even when the fury of the seventeenth-century religious debate had cooled, the legal position of Alexander Pope as a Catholic 'outsider', and the intensity

of emotion in Johnson, Smart or Cowper remind us of the different effects religion continued to have in people's lives: in practice, the disabilities of various groups were somewhat moderated, while the real threat to true religion came to be seen in the indifference of the masses, or the intellectual challenges of the philosophers.

Partly in reaction against the hair-splitting religious controversies, there was by the end of the seventeenth century a recoil from fanatical 'enthusiasm' in favour of a more sober, rational and socially agreed attitude to religion, with a sense of its practical human value. Eighteenth-century philosophers such as Berkeley and Hume continued the process of investigating the limits of human knowledge reported by our senses, and the consequences for religious faith. Locke had said in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) that 'Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct'. By the middle of the following century we find in the heroes of Fielding or the sentimental novel exemplars of natural benevolence in which charitable conduct to one's neighbour is not only morally right but a source of pleasure to the self. This increasing emphasis on feeling, paralleled in poetry and drama, also found expression in the Methodist revival, initially within the Anglican church, in which, to the delight of the satirists (see Smollett), much stress was laid on awakening the heart in even the lowest classes. Concurrent with the development of philosophical scepticism was the rise of physical science, encouraged by the Royal Society, to which Charles II gave a charter in 1662 and which included such poets as Cowley and Dryden among its numbers. The rise of the scientific method of investigation actually strengthened certain kinds of religious belief, as it revealed a universe operating to the Newtonian laws of physics, which implied the benevolent harmony of a Creator: this unmysterious attitude, with few specific doctrines and a lowered valuation of God's revelation to man in the Bible, was known as Deism. Such works as Pope's *Essay on Man* show the influence of the new science and philosophy.

Some awareness of the religious and political background is necessary in this period not merely because the imaginative writing reflected live issues as it will in any age, but also because the writers themselves were not for the most part men in retirement from the world, or yet fully professional authors. A glance at the headnotes will show how many had careers in the church or in politics: among later MPs were Horace Walpole, Gibbon and Burke. In the period from the Restoration to the fall of Robert Walpole in 1742, the partisan activity of writers

was intense: their imaginative independence does not negate the political engagement of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Pope's *Imitations of Horace*, Gay's *Beggar's Opera* and Fielding's satirical plays. (Despite the Whig sympathies of Addison and Steele, the association of Swift, Pope, Arbuthnot and other wits of the Scriblerus Club with the ruling Tory Party until the death of Queen Anne in 1714, and their opposition to the long domination of Walpole, ensured that the Tories had most of the best tunes.)

Indeed, much of the finest literature of this period owes its strength to this aspect of its engagement: the writer is not in retreat, but participating in or actively criticising the public life of his society, whose tensions he dramatises imaginatively; he knows the ways of the world (or that part of it which interests the limited reading public) and embodies them in forms which are publicly accessible. In the period before 1700, the witty, cynical Restoration comedies of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve hold the mirror to the amorality of the tiny fashionable world while exploiting the shared nature of the drama: their comedy is a public act in which deviations from agreed social and moral standards are identified. The great satires of Dryden, Swift and Pope appeal to public scrutiny of public behaviour, whether in religion, politics, 'society', or the arts: it is appropriate that this is the great age of satire, which takes its stand not on the assertion of private emotion, but on the appeal to an argued case and the test of traditional, socially-tempered standards. It is entirely characteristic that the form which is the age's lasting contribution – the novel – though often concerned with the fate of the individual, regularly places him in a solidly realised social environment. (Compare the social reconciliations implicit in the Spectator's Club created by Addison and Steele after the previous century's divisions.) There is no contradiction between an author's awareness of this role and his personal commitment or individual voice.

'Augustanism'

The return of the Court from France in 1660 reinforced changes in literature which were already under way in England: as in religion and politics, there was a reaction against the more extravagant heights of metaphysical wit (to which Dryden gave the name), against quaint images and rugged rhythms, while the spacious and figurative prose

of the great preachers such as Donne, and learned authors such as Burton (*Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621), was held insufficiently functional for the communication of new facts and ideas: the Royal Society commended a compact, unadorned style. This, with altered emphasis, also suited the desire for a style for gentlemanly intercourse, whether in essays, letters or discursive writing: Dryden's criticism and the *Spectator* essays are models of what poise and restraint could achieve; the comedies of the period were natural vehicles of well-bred wit; and the style extends, though often with ironic sharpness, into Swift and Fielding. By the later eighteenth century, both the expansion of the audience and some shifts in sensibility are reflected in the grander elaborations of Burke's oratory, Gibbon's history, and Johnson's Latinate style, in which the formal rhetoric has moved well away from the needs of one gentleman addressing another.

In poetry, the Restoration reforms were perhaps more easily identified: Johnson's 'Life of Cowley' lays the charges against the metaphysicals; in Dryden and Pope he traces the triumph of the new manner. 'Augustan', like 'Romantic', is a term now used with suspicion, but it draws attention to the awareness of at least some Restoration men of the parallels between their own situation, writing for a restored court after decades of turmoil, and that of the great Roman poets Virgil and Horace, encouraged in the flowering of the arts under the Emperor Augustus after the Roman civil war of the first century BC: the elegant, allusive craftsmanship seemed to offer stylistic as well as political pointers. In an essay of 1759, 'An Account of the Augustan Age in England', Goldsmith placed it as culminating in the reign of Queen Anne. Reinforced by French influence, the creative and critical ambition was for clearly-moulded and accessible forms, for an inventiveness whose imaginative expression was disciplined by judgement, and by decorum – language appropriate to the form and to the nature of the communication. Thus, in the hierarchy of genres inherited from classical literature, epic ranked highest among the poetic forms, being a long narrative of heroic deeds, often military, related in an elevated diction with elaborate figures of speech; satire, by contrast, dealt with less salubrious characters, and might require more colloquial language. In drama the ancient distinction between the action of tragedy (the province of leaders) and comedy was reinforced by linguistic differentiation. The writer's craft therefore consisted partly in the adaptation of style to subject-matter to produce a congruous effect unless, as in the 'mock' forms of Pope or Gay, an

ironic effect was sought. When Johnson in his 'Life of Cowley' discusses Pope's famous definition of wit – 'nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed' (*Essay on Criticism* 297–8) – he is insisting on the testing of literature by one of the period's crucial but difficult words – 'nature', which normally refers not so much to the external physical world (of whose beauties people were well aware) as to human nature, and particularly the permanent aspects of human experience: the neo-classical thinker believed these underpinned the view that, despite local diversities of time, place and custom, human nature was, in essence, always and everywhere the same. This being so, it is neither the business of the poet, as Johnson's Imlac says, to 'number the streaks of the tulip', nor, as his condemnation of the metaphysicals implies, to strive for originality of experience and perverse individuality of expression: 'originality' will not necessarily be a term of praise. The poet's (and by extension the artist's) business is to give expression to those permanent and fundamental truths long discovered; hence the stress on the past, on translation and 'imitation': Pope's *Essay on Criticism* reminds us that Nature and Homer are the same, and that the 'rules' of classical genres are not arbitrary, but grew from the poets' experience. The best literature is therefore usually that which does not shock or startle the reader by its astounding diction or imagery, but seems simultaneously both new and natural: see Johnson's comments on Gray's *Elegy*. (By the later eighteenth century, the old theories were severely weakened: it would be worth examining in the light of this debate Gray's Odes, or Smart, or Macpherson, or Burns; though Crabbe shows the survival of older attitudes.)

Writers and Readers

Who were the writers in this period, and who bought their works? In this context, we are not directly concerned with the kind of writing which was published in ephemeral pamphlets, ballad collections or chapbooks, which have rarely survived: these might sell in tens of thousands at 6d. each. In the mid-eighteenth century, probably less than half of working men (and a smaller proportion of women) could read; their modest purchases would have to be met from a family income of perhaps £1 per week. For this reading public, even novels in two or three volumes at 2s. 6d. or 3s. per volume were likely to be prohibitive in their demands on cash and time: novels by Defoe and

Fielding were thought great successes in selling 4000–6000 copies; poetry and less popular subjects tended to be proportionately more expensive, and to sell perhaps in hundreds. The traditional court and aristocratic patronage of serious literature gradually gave way to a system whereby authors might solicit subscriptions for a forthcoming book from friends and the public or, more commonly, sell their copyrights to bookseller-publishers: although there are examples of substantial earnings – Pope's thousands from his *Homers*, the hundreds for Fielding's novels, the thousands made in the lucrative field of history by Smollett, Hume, Gibbon and Robertson – these are the exceptions: by the end of the eighteenth century, even with an increased reading public and more accessible forms, very few authors made a good regular living from writing. Few indeed of the major figures would have regarded themselves purely as professional writers; those who were not in politics or the church might have a background of medicine or the law: significant exceptions are Defoe's connections with trade, Richardson's printing business, and Burns's backbreaking acquaintance with a kind of agriculture remote from the great landscape gardeners. By the end of the eighteenth century, the reading public had widened from the few hundreds or thousands able to understand intimately the social allusions of Restoration comedy or the literary ancestry of Pope's *Horace*; but the average reader of the literature in this volume was still likely to be a relatively prosperous and educated male member of at least the middle class; the average writer here had probably attended one of the great English public schools, or Oxford or Cambridge, or a Scottish university, or Trinity College, Dublin. (Large contributions were made by the Scots – Arbuthnot, Thomson, Smollett, Boswell, Macpherson, Burns, Mackenzie, and the philosophers Smith and Hume – and the Anglo-Irish – Swift, Congreve, Burke, Goldsmith, Sheridan – most of whom had to come to London to make their names. Who but a Scot – Thomson – would have written 'Rule Britannia'?)

Drama

The reopening of the theatres after the Restoration heralded a long period in which drama was regularly performed and enjoyed, whether as the wit of fashionable comedy or the rhymed heroic plays and more compassionate blank-verse tragedies of Dryden. The interest in feeling flowered in the earlier eighteenth century in the sentimental comedies

of Cibber and Steele, whose morality came to have a stultifying effect only partly countered by the later 'laughing comedy' of Goldsmith and Sheridan. The drama was also the vehicle for the political comments of Fielding and others until subjected to censorship after the Licensing Act of 1737. It was a period of star actors – dominated after 1741 by the new naturalistic style of Garrick, actor–author–producer – and star actresses, permitted on stage after the Restoration. Shakespeare was frequently performed, though usually in versions that were cut or 'adapted', often in ways quite false to the originals. Through the period, then, theatre and acting may fairly be said to have flourished, with many major figures such as Pope and Johnson trying their hands at plays. Yet no tragedy from the entire period has held its place in the repertoire; and, apart from the cluster of Restoration works, only a handful of eighteenth-century comedies: *The Beggar's Opera*; Goldsmith's *The Good-Natur'd Man* and *She Stoops to Conquer*; Sheridan's *The Rivals*, *The Critic* and *The School for Scandal*. The diversion of talent into novel-writing after the Licensing Act is at best a partial explanation of this curious thinness of achievement. The extracts here from Congreve and Sheridan show something of the comic complexity of plot, the repartee, and the changing explorations of personal values; Gay's multi-layered *Beggar's Opera* is *sui generis*; its topsy-turvy world can be enjoyed without any knowledge of the music or the political context.

Fiction

Most readers will come to eighteenth-century fiction having already encountered Jane Austen and the Victorian classics such as Dickens, the Brontës, George Eliot; for them there is the double pleasure of witnessing the infancy of the genre, and recognising in the early masters the origins of many familiar techniques of narration and characterisation, unencumbered by Victorian 'good taste'.

Given the long dominance of the novel among non-dramatic forms, we may easily forget that the form as we understand it has existed for only some two and a half centuries. Although there had been prose fiction since antiquity, it is clear that the eighteenth century saw the rise of new kinds of subject-matter and style, even though these were not uniform. In *Rambler*, 4 (1750) Johnson distinguished between the traditional romance – associated with remote settings, lofty characters, extravagant adventures – and modern 'familiar histories', in which

the appeal is rather to the reader's recognition of the contemporary world. Although Robinson Crusoe on his desert island might seem an exception, his extraordinary adventure is not conducted by Defoe in terms of fantastic monsters or remote impossibilities: the core of the book relies on Crusoe's detailed descriptions of the practical efforts by which he comes to terms with his situation. The kind of novel of which Defoe was master – the retrospective first-person narration – no doubt owed much to existing non-fictional forms such as histories, travels, personal memoirs. Richardson, his successor in the depiction from inside of the struggles of the isolated individual, composed his narratives from his protagonists' letters and journals, again adapting existing forms. This line in the early novel has the capacity to draw us into the characters' dilemmas, to see the world from their points of view and, particularly in Richardson, to live through the instalments of their experiences without knowing the results: the comic possibilities arising from the first-person narrator's struggle with his material were soon richly explored by Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*. That the early novelists did not tamely adopt a uniform manner is easily seen in the contrast between Richardson and Fielding, who in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* took the role of informed ironic commentator on the fortunes of his created world. But despite the varieties of technique and the establishment of new conventions, Johnson was right in discerning a common interest in the contemporary world, in people from the middle and lower ranks of life, and in situations which, if not commonplace, were at least plausible. The best explanation for the rise of the novel in this period is that it fulfilled the need of the growing middle class, with increasing education, money and leisure for books, but unwilling to be satisfied with the absurdities of romance or the values of an inherited classical culture, to articulate its own self-assurance and identify its own heroes. (The capacity of the form to explore sympathetically the economic role of women (*Moll Flanders*), their domestic role (Fielding's *Amelia*), and their struggles to choose their own lives (Richardson) made possible the rise of the female novelist, such as Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lennox and Fanny Burney.) It is perhaps typical that in contrast to the sailor and servant offered by Defoe and Richardson, Fielding should contrive that his protagonists emerge as well-born heirs from their obscure social origins. In Fielding and Smollett, plotting and characterisation from the drama are recognisably transmitted to the nineteenth century: there is much evil and violence, but the prevailing mood is of comedy;

only in Richardson does the novel reach the intensity of tragedy. In the closing decades of the century, changes in taste and in readers' emotional response encourage the minor subgenres of the sentimental novel, as in Mackenzie, and its fellow-traveller in frissons, the gothic novel, from Walpole on, which in period, setting and extravagance of incident returns to the fancy-liberating remoteness foresworn by the major figures earlier: not until Jane Austen returned to the central interests of the novel was their achievement paralleled.

Poetry

If poetry from Dryden to Crabbe seems puzzling, this is often because readers approach it expecting the dramatic flashes of the metaphysicals or the confessional intimacy of the post-Wordsworthians. For the second group in particular, the favoured poetry will be that which seems most to anticipate the Romantics' response to nature, their characteristic isolated introspection: the blank-verse descriptions of Thomson and Cowper, the melancholy of Gray's *Elegy*, seem closer to the heart of the matter than the intensely contemporary reference of the satirists and the snip-snap of the heroic couplet. But this view, though it reflects an eighteenth-century argument conducted by Johnson and the Warton brothers amongst others about the true tradition and future of English poetry, applies false assumptions and blocks off sources of pleasure. It may be salutary to remember that not all was satire, that the topographical blank verse of *The Seasons* is contemporary with *The Dunciad*, *The Castle of Indolence* with *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. There was always a concern to preserve earlier achievements, to keep open the springs of fancy and imagination associated in the minds of the Wartons with the descriptive properties of Milton's minor poems – *Il Penseroso* was influential – with the freer movement of blank verse, with the quaint diction, imagery and complex stanza of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. This interest in the poetical possibilities of the past is further seen in Addison's *Spectator* essays on ballads, in Gray's interest in Old Norse and Welsh poetry, in Chatterton's medieval fabrications and Macpherson's Gaelic 'translations', and in Percy's collection of old ballads and romances in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). If there are antiquarian curiosities at play, there is also an attraction to the literature of simpler, more primitive societies, less trammelled by the conventions of urban neo-classicism and the traditions of Latin literature, more liberating to the

poet's imagination. The argument about the nature and role of poetry and the position of the moderns is implicitly carried on both in the imaginative writing – Pope's Horatian Imitations, Gray's *Bard*, Beattie's *Minstrel*, Collins's *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands* – and in the criticism: Burke's *Enquiry* applies the new interest in the sublime to *Paradise Lost*, and is contemporary with Gray's lofty, obscure Pindaric Odes; Thomas Warton's *History* (1774–81) revalued poetry from Chaucer to Spenser, while his brother Joseph's *Essay on Pope* (two volumes, 1756, 1782) placed him in a lower division than the truly sublime and pathetic Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton; Johnson's criticism over forty years applied more conservative standards. (Some aspects of the interest in poetry remote in time or place may be paralleled in the settings of gothic novels, the gothic houses created by Walpole and Beckford, the artificial ruins in landscape gardens, the exoticism of *Vathek*, Percy's first English translation of a Chinese novel, in 1761, and in the vogue for chinoiserie.)

The public nature of much writing in this period has already been discussed: it follows that the best poetry is often concerned with man in his social aspects, in his relationship with political or economic groups; but to take the rarity of the confessional note as a sign of weak emotions is a serious error – it is rather a source of strength for Dryden and Pope to be able to address publicly and urgently themes of shared significance for their readership; passion, albeit highly wrought, is there in plenty. Johnson, whose private papers show amply the personal relevance of hope and disillusion, chose to articulate those themes in the grand manner in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, speaking partly in the voice of Juvenal to examine them in a series of externalised historical examples. For delicate handlings of the personal in the social, one need only look at Dryden's *To Mr Driden* or Pope's *Epistle to Miss Blount*: grasp of their themes and tones is a fair test of sympathy for the poetry of this period.

Objection is sometimes made to the 'poetic diction' used in certain contexts such as epic or pastoral poetry to extend the suggestiveness of the language by reference to the original Latin sense of words, or by elaborate phrases avoiding everyday diction (Johnson censured 'dun', 'knife', 'peeping through a blanket', in *Macbeth*, I.5.48–52). Thus in Pope's *Windsor Forest*, 139–43 'the scaly breed' are fish, and the eel's 'volumes' are not books but coils. The extent of this diction as compared with other literary periods is often exaggerated. More