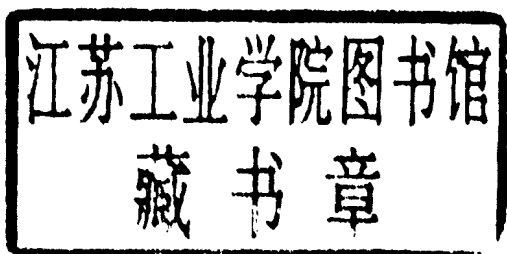

ST. JAMES REFERENCE GUIDE TO ENGLISH LITERATURE

THE RESTORATION AND 18th-CENTURY



INTRODUCTIONS BY
PAT ROGERS
ARTHUR H. SCOUTEN

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The entry for each writer consists of a biography, a complete list of his published books, a selected list of published bibliographies and critical studies on the writer, and a signed critical essay on his work.

In the biographies, details of education, military service, and marriage(s) are generally given before the usual chronological summary of the life of the writer; awards and honours are given last.

The Publications section is meant to include all book publications, though as a rule broadsheets, single sermons and lectures, minor pamphlets, exhibition catalogues, etc. are omitted. Under the heading Collections, we have listed the most recent collections of the complete works and those of individual genres (verse, plays, novels, stories, and letters); only those collections which have some editorial authority and were issued after the writer's death are listed; on-going editions are indicated by a dash after the date of publication; often a general selection from the writer's works or a selection from the works in the individual genres listed above is included.

Titles are given in modern spelling, though the essayists were allowed to use original spelling for titles and quotations; often the titles are "short." The date given is that of the first book publication, which often followed the first periodical or anthology publication by some time; we have listed the actual year of publication, often different from that given on the title-page. No attempt has been made to indicate which works were published anonymously or pseudonymously, or which works of fiction were published in more than one volume. We have listed plays which were produced but not published, but only since 1700; librettos and musical plays are listed along with the other plays; no attempt has been made to list lost or unverified plays. Reprints of books (including facsimile editions) and revivals of plays are not listed unless a revision or change of title is involved. The most recent edited version of individual works is included if it supersedes the collected edition cited.

In the essays, short references to critical remarks refer to items cited in the Publications section or in the Reading List. Introductions, memoirs, editorial matter, etc. in works cited in the Publications section are not repeated in the Reading List.

PROSE AND POETRY

INTRODUCTION

To understand the past requires more than the exercise of intellect: it means an act of imagination, as well. For hindsight, in the very process of clarifying historical issues, serves all too easily to rob them of their urgency, their "open" quality to contemporaries, their shock-value. It is not hard to come up with an account of literary history between the Restoration of Charles II and the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* which will chart a smooth and explicable course of events. Prose and poetry fall into convenient patterns of evolution rather than revolution. Even the Romantic movement itself can be assimilated into this graceful progression: scholars who seek (wrongheadedly, as we may think) to find a "conventional side" in the *Lyrical Ballads*, and to show that they conformed to existing taste, can achieve some disconcerting success. But it is surely right to press in the other direction, to look for discontinuities and to emphasise novelty where it appears. In this introduction I shall hope to take proper account of the fluidity of the period, not because it makes better copy for the literary historian, but because the dynamics were generally more apparent than the statics to people alive at the time. After all, the common reader does not have a research library at his or her finger-tips, so as to check out possible sources and analogues. If a theme or style looks new, then it will reasonably be taken as such by most of the reading public. By rooting out the rare exception, scholars falsify the experience of encountering the new: and in blurring the transitions we make the story duller than it really was – something pedants mistake for accuracy.

Conventionally the period covered here has been divided into three clearcut stages. First, the Restoration period itself, that is, running from the King's return to the throne in 1660, through his own reign and that of his brother James, and then extending either to the death of William III in 1702 or to the close of the Stuart dynasty in 1714. The second phase begins either at the start or the close of Anne's reign (1702 or 1714) and reaches to about 1742 (the fall of Walpole). The last proceeds from this point to about 1789, a year inconveniently hazy in English history, or 1798, when Wordsworth and Coleridge produced their epoch-making volume.

By that reckoning the phases are determined in relation to external events in church or state. Those who object to using political dividing-lines still tend to place the watersheds around the same date. The major figure of the Restoration literature, beyond any question, is John Dryden. His centrality is such that the looming presence of Milton (whose masterpiece did not appear until 1667) is never allowed to affect decisions in this area. Dryden's earliest significant poetry dates from 1659–60; his first major play was produced in 1663, and his first critical essay of any substance appeared in 1668. His career proceeded tidily until the end of the century: it is not merely that he died on May Day 1700, but the fact that he went on through the 1690's developing and refining the manner of his earlier writing, which prompts us to see his *oeuvre* as precisely delimiting "Restoration" modes. Drama is not my concern here, but since it bears on the choices made by literary historians a word or two is in place. It happens that the greatest of later Restoration playwrights, William Congreve, abandoned the stage in 1700, although he was to live for another 30 years. His rival Vanbrugh was soon to be sidetracked into architecture, at Castle Howard and Blenheim; while Farquhar died, aged no more than thirty, in 1707. So a juncture around 1700 or 1702 makes sense, if we are looking for a *terminus ad quem*.

But equally, if we desire a *terminus a quo*, Defoe and Swift, slow to get into their stride, were in their thirties when the new century dawned. Nevertheless, they were only just beginning to produce significant work: Defoe, with *An Essay upon Projects* (1697) and *The True-Born Englishman* (1701), and Swift, with *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books* (published 1704). The first decade of the century saw the emergence of Addison and Steele, who were to pioneer one of the most influential forms of writing between 1709 and 1711. Pope, more precocious, was already establishing his name by this time. It could be said that

none of the masters of what is sometimes called the "high" Augustan style (a notion to which I shall return) had produced work of lasting value in 1700. All of them had done so by 1715 – unless we extend the term to cover figures such as Fielding and Thomson, men who have one foot in the third phase, and who were incidentally born in the new century. Consequently it takes no wrenching of the time-scale to identify this phase with a "generation" of important writers – actually men born over a period of some 25 years, but all reaching maturity as artists around the time of Queen Anne. Older cultural historians would have been inclined to attribute this phenomenon to the existence of a flood-tide of patronage, sponsored by Kit-Cat Club aristocrats such as Somers and Halifax. Modern accounts have displayed a more sceptical attitude towards these benefactors of literature, but it may well be (as often) that Macaulay had it right on fundamentals. Certainly the immediately succeeding generations felt that they had missed something: Goldsmith was not alone in deploring the passing of the noble patron.

Throughout the 1720's, and to a lesser extent the 1730's, the same stars shone on the literary firmament. One by one they depart – Addison, Steele, Defoe, Gay, and finally Pope and Swift. If Pope had lived beyond middle age, he might have prolonged the active life of the Augustan mode; but *The New Dunciad* was his last bitter prophecy of social and cultural breakdown. Ironically, the chief instrument of this collapse, as Pope saw it, was the prime minister Robert Walpole: and his long ascendancy came to a close in the very year of *The New Dunciad*. It is true that political life went on along an essentially similar course under the Pelhams, and that George II showed no respect for these tidy dividing-lines by surviving until 1760, when he must have seemed a creature from another continent to the young. But it is hard to think of an author who had achieved anything before 1740 enhancing his reputation in the later period. James Thomson, whose *Seasons* (1726–30) had marked one point of growth in imaginative vocabulary, contracted rather than expanded his vision; while Henry Fielding turned his back on the stage, where he had made his early mark, and from 1742 forged a new – in my belief, largely unrelated – expressive idiom in his novels. The fact is that the 1740's left a clear field to new talents; the old guard died off as briskly as the mock-heroic Noodles and Doodles in the *dénouement* of Fielding's own *Tom Thumb*.

Samuel Johnson, it is true, had taken his first insecure steps as a man of letters: his satire *London* dates from 1738, and he was already established in the capital, in the shabby circumstances from which he was never altogether to escape. But – slow rises worth – and despite his graphic *Life of Savage* (1744), it was a decade and more before Johnson attained full prominence, above all with *The Rambler* and the *Dictionary*. Perhaps when we assign "the age of Johnson" to the second half of the century, we are unduly influenced by Boswell – who did not know his future subject for biography until much later, and who was actually born in 1740. Nevertheless these reflexes generally have some underlying logic about them, and while Johnson has intellectual roots spreading back into the age of Pope and Swift he remains undeniably a product of a later generation. For Samuel Johnson, to take a few cases at random, the continental enlightenment was a fact of life, little store as he set by Voltaire and Rousseau: the novel was a dominant form of literature, mixed though his assessment of mid-century novelists was; and Jacobitism was a vanishing dream, sympathetic as he may possibly have been to its aspirations. None of these things could have been said of Dryden, of Swift, or of Defoe. To put it another way – the nature of Johnson's conservatism depends on social and cultural developments which were only fully under way in the middle of the century. There is nothing anachronistic about Johnson's stance as a thinker. When he takes what might seem in the light of history to be the "losing" side (over Wilkes, the American Revolution, the afflatus of sensibility literature), he uses the argumentative procedures and the illustrations which spoke to contemporaries. The canon of English literature to which he supplied his "Prefaces" (what we now call *The Lives of the Poets*) was all the more representative because it stopped short of living poets. So did, and does, the taste of a large section of the reading public. To bring matters up to date in 1780 would only have involved smuggling into the collection some early Cowper (no *Task*, as yet), perhaps the juvenilia of Crabbe, more likely James Beattie or William Mason – for neither Burns nor Blake had yet

been heard. Let no-one suppose that the *Lives of the Poets* exhibits antediluvian attitudes. They are saved, indeed, from the strictest orthodoxy only by their author's rugged independence of outlook, and his total reluctance to borrow opinions at second hand.

But Johnson's was a long life, and his career does span some major shifts in taste. At the beginning, he was to witness the half-delayed "rise of the novel," with Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne. By the end of the period he had seen the success of his *protégée* Fanny Burney, and perhaps less congenially of Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*. Within a few years of his death came the decadent novel in the shape of *Vathek*, the gothic tale as practised by Ann Radcliffe, and the political fable exemplified by the Godwins. (In a sense *Frankenstein* merges all three: but that is another story.)

In non-fictional prose, the 1730's had seen important works of philosophy by George Berkeley, including *Alciphron* (1732), and the highly influential *Analogy of Religion* (1736) by Joseph Butler. By the time of Johnson's death, 50 years later, the sheltered calm of Anglican theology had been invaded by the Wesleyan movement, and was beginning to experience another challenge to its attitudes from within – the rise of Evangelicalism, where the first clear literary imprint can be traced in the works of Cowper. In wide philosophic or metaphysical speculation, the crucial figure had been David Hume, whom Dr. Johnson ranked (along with other "sceptical innovators") as "vain" in his denial of miracles and ironic treatment of religious belief. A work of this present kind will not easily provide a home for such men as Hume, Berkeley, and Locke, since they operated outside the strict limits of creative literature: none of them could be termed in any real sense a poet, a dramatist, or a novelist. It is just worth recalling, however, that Hume was as famous in his own day in the role of historian (and more commercially successful, one might add). The novel still occupied a somewhat uncertain position in the literary scheme of things, and the hunger for prose narrative was partly satisfied by massive works of historiography. Some dealt with the topical or close at hand, as for example Bishop Burnet's *History of His Own Times* (1724–34). Others concerned matters more remote in time or space, such as William Robertson's *History of America* (1777). The obvious consummation of this trend is to be found in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), although from a different point of view these magisterial volumes could be seen as the legacy of moral and philosophic debate.

One of the literary forms which Johnson mastered in middle life was the periodical essay. *The Rambler* (1750–52) and *The Idler* (1758–60) were among his most esteemed works during his own lifetime. It is hard for us to take proper account of these essays today, just as we commonly accord too little regard to the great *Dictionary* (1755). The modern reader is disqualified by taste and education from fully appreciating such modes of literary endeavour. It is worth stressing the fact that, over the course of several generations, moral essays stood at the centre of almost everyone's reading experience. After Johnson came Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey; right through the Victorian era to Stevenson and beyond, essays were among the best-known "gems" of English literature – and not just for the unsophisticated reader. It happens, too, that the essay made an important contribution to the rhetorical equipment of the emerging novel. This is obvious enough when we find Fielding halting the course of *Tom Jones* to instruct and cajole us, on topics such as love, critics, or the marvellous. It may be less obvious in a novel such as *The Vicar of Wakefield*, but here too the author's way of moving from particular to general, or his use of anecdotal support, owes much to the essay tradition. (One side-issue, not often considered, is the absence of a short story tradition: the form scarcely existed, outside the essayists that is, in the period under review.) It was to Addison, Steele, and their successors that the earliest practitioners of fiction went, for models of style, for techniques of characterisation, and for a definition of literary good manners. English literature would have been unimaginably different from 1710 up to 1914 if this immensely popular genre had not existed.

The relatively insecure hold on literary esteem which novelists enjoyed during the period was not strengthened until the appearance of Scott's Waverley novels early in the 19th century. Even then, one could argue that the first great writer to learn the right lessons from Scott was not engaged in fiction at all: it was Macaulay, whose *History of England* outsold the

best-known novelists at the very height of (as we think) the Victorian hegemony of the novel. And of course poets like Byron and Tennyson more than once achieved greater impact with verse narratives than their contemporaries in prose. It is therefore natural that 18th-century critics should have gone on regarding the novel as an upstart form, long after its first great masters had opened out some high expressive potentiality in the form, and that the average educated reader in 1780 should continue to look elsewhere for major imaginative statements. Our own sense of the past has been warped by the survival of *Moll Flanders*, *Tom Jones*, and *Tristram Shandy* as living classics. Poetry remained the centre of literary consciousness.

Yet, paradoxically, the finest poetic talents of the middle of the 18th century were all in some degree blighted or deflected. There was Johnson himself, a sonorous exponent of one mode in decline (high Augustan satire), and an occasional versifier of surprisingly light-footed charm. There was Thomas Gray, with his mixture of calm, ruminative grandeur and excitable, almost neurotic intensities. A close contemporary is William Collins, sunk into an incurable depressive state by the age of thirty, having produced a tantalisingly small body of original and intriguing poems. In one way or another the pattern is repeated in Christopher Smart (mental breakdown and a clutch of seminal, if little understood, poems), Thomas Chatterton (an even earlier death, with a posture of alienation in life breaking out into creative indiscretions in poetry), and William Cowper (a wounded spirit who became a poet largely in response to personal crisis). Even the more robust writers of this generation reflect this sense of frustration and unfulfilled aspirations. Mark Akenside produced before he was twenty-five one outstanding poem, *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744); his later career traces a decline, through a period of poverty, into graceful inutility as a fashionable physician. George Crabbe moved from dependence and indigence to comparative popularity, without seemingly achieving real peace of mind.

All these men, except perhaps Akenside, suffered from unmistakable symptoms of nervous illness. Their energies are fitful; their domestic crises assume grandiose proportions; their will is paralysed, and their talent thwarted by lack of an appreciative audience. Much of their best work manages to turn these psychodramas into genuine poetry: Cowper, for example, *uses* – as well as staves off – his neurasthenia in *The Task*. He claims to “peep” at the world “through the loopholes of retreat,” and “to see the stir/Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd” (“The Winter Evening”); the poem makes a virtue of its own indirection and acts out the feelings of attraction and repulsion towards society which Cowper harboured. Similarly, in Collins, the role of the poet is perceived as both noble and threatening, condemned as he is to pursue faint glimpses of an imaginative world “curtained” by the intellect, maturity, or advancing civilisation. In each case poetry ceases to be a way of affirming a vision; it describes the conditions in which wholeness of vision, now unavailable, might be achieved. Instead of the completed statements of Dryden and Pope, we tend to get fragments or aborted projects; instead of the confident topicality of the Augustans, we have medieval themes and Celtic landscapes. Instead of the urban tumult of satire, we encounter a retreat into the private, the concealed, the crepuscular. The most significant difference, however, lies in the area of poetic idiom. Where writers earlier in the century had triumphed in the power of words to master experience, and had relished their own control, clarity, and sequential flow –

Dim, as the borrow'd beams of Moon and Stars
To lonely, weary, wandring Travellers,
Is Reason to the Soul: And as on high,
Those rowling Fires discover but the Sky
Not light us here; So Reason's glimmering Ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtfull way,
But guide us upward to a better Day ...

— now the later generation are apt to glory in their own irresolutions —

As one who, long in thickets and in brakes
Entangled, winds now this way and now that
His devious course uncertain, seeking home;
Or, having long in miry ways been foil'd
And sore discomfited, from slough to slough
Plunging, and half despairing of escape;
If chance at length he finds a greensward smooth
And faithful to the foot, his spirits rise,
He chirrup brisk his ear-erecting steed,
And winds his way with pleasure and with ease;
So I, designing other themes, and call'd
T'adorn the Sofa with eulogium due,
To tell its slumbers and to paint its dreams,
Have rambl'd wide.

Dryden runs on freely from line to line; but his syntax propels us steadily forwards, and the triplet closes all further development for the moment. Cowper, on the other hand, flops about, into one more clause and then one more. The simile in Dryden is abetted by a strong iambic beat, by successive antitheses in the shape "not . . . but," and by typographic emphases. With Cowper, the simile trails along across several mini-statements, the movement of the lines "plunging" us into fresh areas of experience: the syntax straggles into a mass of subsidiary clauses governed by hazy present participles. The difference is not just that between organised couplets and loose blank verse, or between heroic defining and Miltonic alluding. A crucial fact is that Cowper allows each new idea to subvert the expected movement, to alter the centre of rhythmic and syntactic gravity. The effect is all the more marked because of the incursion of formulaic mock-heroic at the end of the passage. In Dryden, this would have been tonally inappropriate, but linguistically in register. When Cowper comes to the sofa, his Augustan antithesis ("To tell its slumbers, and to paint its dreams") derives comic energy from its placing in the middle of a cumbersome periphrasis. Dryden might have written such a line, but he would have made it occupy a resonant place in the sentence, probably at the end of a statement. Cowper allows it to drift off into a flaccid cadence ("have rambl'd wide"), a suspended construction reaching back somewhere into the undergrowth of the preceding lines. Dryden dramatises the untangling capacity of reason; Cowper's style gets entangled for us, to show us what it feels like.

This rapid survey has been conducted in terms of individuals for the most part. That is appropriate for a reference guide which is made up of entries detailing the biographic and bibliographic facts with regard to a given writer. But in addition, this line of approach is a useful corrective to the sort of sweeping generalisation which brevity can often induce. Books are written by men and women, not by movements and tendencies. Even the threefold division of the period may appear dangerous to some, and certainly we should be risking distortion of the real events if we accepted too uncritically the favourite labels, such as "neo-classic," "Augustan," "pre-romantic," or "sensibility."

Nobody is very concerned about the term "Restoration literature," as it appears to be simply a descriptive historical phrase. There is some oddity about it, insofar as we generally extend the compass of this expression to include the whole of Charles II's reign (not just the moment of his return to England); and even to include the reigns of James II and William III. This is reasonably logical in the case of his brother James, but when we come to the time of William and Mary a certain poetic license creeps into the terminology. Mary, it is true, was the niece of Charles II; but she had married a more distant relative of the Stuarts, who belonged to a strongly protestant Dutch house, and who had been more of a professional soldier and diplomat than a prince until he was offered the English throne in 1688. More seriously, the epithet as used in "Restoration literature" has acquired distinct overtones

which are not entirely self-evident. We usually have in the back of mind the notion of an aristocratic culture revolving around the court. When used in this way, the phrase points to Dryden rather than to Milton; to Clarendon rather than to Bunyan; to Wycherley rather than to Aphra Behn. This does not make it a wholly misleading expression, but we should take care lest its apparent "objectivity" masks a subtle emphasis towards one particular aspect of the age. In speaking of Restoration literature I shall have the whole period in view, so far as possible. The dominant modes in poetry and prose were those practised by the court circle, but there are fainter voices and fugitive songs to be heard: Charles Cotton, say, or Tom Brown, men variously ill-fitted to court life.

"Neo-classic" is today an unfashionable term, and perhaps rightly so. It risks confusion with the quite different usage employed by art historians, which relates to a mainly Hellenic influence on taste at the very end of the 18th century. As once favoured by literary critics, the phrase referred to a code of propriety imported from France, and a body of ideas more Roman than Greek in their ultimate inspiration. Another problem with this way of looking at things was that it always proved easier to see divagations from the letter of "neo-classicism" than any firm adherence to the code in England. The expression has some limited utility if we do not strain it too far. It reminds us that the Restoration and early 18th century witnessed the rise of what might be called the "professional critic," exemplified in the person of Thomas Rymer or John Dennis. And it serves to bring into focus the lively intellectual debates of the age: notably the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*. This fierce controversy involved some important figures on both sides of the Channel: Perrault, Madame Dacier, La Motte, Boileau, Bentley, Temple, and many others. It ranged over critical issues of enduring significance: primitivism and progress, imitation and originality. Its muffled echoes can be detected in 18th-century writers of the highest distinction: Voltaire, Vico, Rousseau, Gibbon, Burke. Since Macaulay's time the tendency in England has been to downgrade the whole affair into a parochial squabble, but that is a mistake. We cannot begin to understand Swift's intellectual bearings until we take stock of the impact which the Ancient and Moderns debate had on his formative years as a writer. By this, I do mean simply to recall that *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books* make direct capital of the affair. As late as *Gulliver*, Swift is still rehearsing the issues which had come to the forefront of his mind when he was under the tutelage of Sir William Temple: the relationship between political and cultural development, and the clash between Spartan and Corinthian attitudes to life. Swift could be called, in quite a deep sense, a "neo-classic" writer: the sense is not, of course, that he subscribed to a rigid set of antiquated notions, but that his moral and psychological outlook was informed by a pervading ideal drawing heavily on the ancient civilisations. His poetry is chock-a-block with allusions to Ovid, Horace, Virgil, and Plutarch – often so fleeting that they escape our attention.

The second and third divisions of the period have attached to them more questionable labels. Of these, it is the term often applied to that central phase, from 1700 or 1714 to 1740 or 1745, which occasions most discussion at present: the so-called "Augustan," or sometimes "high Augustan" era. The usage grew up contemporaneously, and survived more or less intact until the last 20 years. Recently there has been a fairly concerted movement to put the expression out of serious use. An important book by Howard Weinbrot, entitled *Augustus Caesar in "Augustan" England* (1978), seeks to undermine our confidence in the term in a variety of ways. The essence of Weinbrot's case is that the Emperor Augustus suffered a considerable loss of reputation during the 18th century at the hands of historians and political writers. It would therefore be inappropriate to appeal to his reign as an embodiment of enlightened patronage, cultural advance, or anything positive along these lines. Weinbrot believes that the irony of Pope's *Epistle to Augustus* (1737) has been misread. The point of it, he argues, is not that George II fails to live up to the Horatian ideal of a noble ruler: the English king is, on the contrary, all too like his despotic and insensitive predecessor in Rome. My own opinion is that Weinbrot can only reach the conclusion which he does by means of tailoring the facts and suppressing a good deal of the evidence. Do we have to go back to the Augustan age for a high point of patronage, asks Charles Churchill in his poem *Independence* (1764): "must I seek Maecenas in a tomb?" The general answer in the period is yes, except

that later writers can find an approximate British equivalent in the reign of Queen Anne. Soame Jenyns, all the more typical for his mediocrity, writes characteristic lines in the Earl of Oxford's library (1729):

See how, in fam'd Augustus' golden days,
Wit triumphs, crown'd with universal praise!
Approaches thrones with a majestic air,
The prince's mistress, and the statesman's care.
Maecenas shines in every classic page,
Maecenas, once the glory of his age.
Not with less glory she her charms display'd,
In Albion once when royal Anna sway'd.

In such routine attempts at flattering, the received ideas of the age are shamelessly revealed. Weinbrot ignores the bulk of this material, and chooses to emphasise some distinctly atypical figures, such as the freethinker John Toland. Consequently he minimises the aspiration towards "Augustan" values which is spread so thickly in minor writing throughout the century.

This may seem a fuss about very little. There is, however, a significant question at issue. If Weinbrot is right, then we must do more than abandon the use of "Augustan" as a shorthand phrase. We must regard the whole appeal to the ancient world as fundamentally bogus, and we must award centrality to those writers who cherish "modern" ideals. We necessarily realign the course of literary development so as to place at the heart of things those books and authors who can be defined as "anti-Augustan." On Weinbrot's showing, these will be the camp which is "libertarian, and philosophe in spirit." This would certainly have surprised Johnson and most of his contemporaries. What is at stake is not the merit of men like Owen Ruffhead or Jabez Hughes, whom Weinbrot calls in support of his case: it is their degree of influence or typicality. What is here defined as the "anti-Augustan" trend seems to me marginal, eccentric, and spasmodic. The main highroad of letters was thronged by less radical spirits.

I do not mean to suggest that we should throw around the expression "Augustan" with careless abandon. It is a term to be employed with due caution. Its semantic range should not be extended to cover anything much beyond 1750; it does not illuminate very much when applied to certain writers (notably Defoe, most of whose career was an aberration from "Augustan" expectations); and it should not be taken lazily to indicate some monolithic "peace" or torpor stretching from Dryden to Cowper. If we apply the word "Augustan" sensibly, within the sort of constraints I have suggested, then it points to something real and coherent. It isolates a quality common to *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Beggar's Opera*, to *The Way of the World* and *Shamela*, to *The Spectator* and *Gulliver's Travels*, to *Annus Mirabilis* and Prior's *Alma*. It serves to identify a learned and sophisticated literary craftsmanship, allied to clarity and "ease" of manner; a faith in the ordinary as opposed in the transcendental, and a suspicion of elaborate metaphysical flights; an affection for wholeness, and a recoil from exorbitant emotionalism. None of these statements would fit heroic drama at the start of the period: none of them would fit *Clarissa* or the odes of Collins. There are of course marginal cases, where the definition may partially fit: much of Johnson's work (say, the *Journey to the Western Islands*); Gray's *Elegy*; in some respects *Tom Jones*. But the concept remains clear, despite some blurring at the fringe.

The last section of our period used often to be dignified with the term "pre-romantic." This has been found impossibly whiggish, in that it seems to rely on later developments to make sense of an earlier stage in history. At present the word is scarcely ever used without irony; and its rival "post-Augustan" is open to *almost* the same objections – though the logic is not quite identical in that case.

Instead of these unacceptable descriptions, the current fashion is to speak of "the age of sensibility." This phrase goes back to a seminal essay by Northrop Frye, published in 1956,

and widely reprinted. Frye is an eloquent and powerful critic, with a taste for categorisation, and it is understandable that his enticing models should have laid the ground for subsequent critical reassessment, both of terms and of individuals. The need to make sense of some confused and abortive developments around the mid-century added to the appeal of Frye's nomenclature.

Frye begins by combatting what now seems an unlikely caricature, the "vague notion that the age of sensibility was the time when poetry moved from a reptilian Classicism, all cold and dry reason, to a mammalian Romanticism, all warm and wet feeling." He goes on to contrast two opposing varieties of expression, "literature as product" and "literature as process." The former is exemplified by writers with "a strong sense of literature as a finished product," and here Frye uses a novel such as *Tom Jones* as representative. The latter presents instead the spectacle of the author at work on his own composition, and here *Tristram Shandy* is the case in point. Similarly with verse: the regular metre of *The Dunciad* provides "a sense of continually fulfilled expectation," whereas in "sensibility" poetry the effects will be "hypnotically repetitive, oracular, incantatory, dreamlike, and in the original sense of the word charming." Another distinction is drawn as follows:

Where there is a strong sense of literature as aesthetic product, there is also a sense of its detachment from the spectator. Aristotle's theory of catharsis describes how this works for tragedy: pity and fear are detached from the beholder by being directed towards objects. Where there is a sense of literature as process, pity and fear become states of mind without objects, moods which are common to the work of art and the reader, and which binds them together psychologically instead of separating them aesthetically.

Frye concludes by showing a special use of metaphor is central to what he calls the age of sensibility, and by emphasising the "oracular" quality it displays. One of the most interesting features of the discussion is the way Frye is able to effect a disjunction not just with the Augustans but also with the Romantics: indeed, for the purposes of his argument he aligns both schools as concerned with "literature as product." The essay has a sharp, bright texture which gives it unusual intellectual force and clarity.

Naturally it is possible to pick holes in the case. No such brief survey (it runs only to about 4000 words) can deal comprehensively with such a complex period of literature. Many important writers of the period figure intermittently in the discussion, or not at all. There is scarcely any mention of Johnson, the greatest English author active throughout the key period: although Boswell, significantly, appears as a practitioner of the new mode. Drama is totally absent, and so the potential difficulties occasioned by Goldsmith and Sheridan elude observation. The novel appears in the shape of Richardson and Sterne, but the forms of fiction most popular in the heyday of "sensibility" poetry – barring a cursory reference to the Gothic novel – play no part in the argument. However, the chief value of the essay has lain in the purchase it offers a critic with regard to poetry: it is in relation to Collins, Smart, Chatterton, Cowper, and Blake that Frye's concept has proved most fruitful. Essentially, then, the notion of an "age of sensibility" stands or falls by its ability to explain or illuminate the poetic history of our final phase, c. 1740 to 1790.

As such, the model works well in practice. I should prefer to say that Augustan poetic ministers to something a little different from "continually fulfilled expectation." We might suggest that the poem will tend sometimes to fulfil, and sometimes to contradict, the reader's expectations – very much as is the case with a listener to the music of Haydn or Mozart. Consider a familiar passage from Pope:

This Day, black Omens threat the brightest Fair
That e'er deserv'd a watchful Spirit's Care;
Some dire Disaster, or by Force, or Slight,
But what, or where, the Fates have wrapt in Night.

Whether the Nymph shall break *Diana's* Law,
 Or some frail *China Jar* receive a Flaw,
 Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade,
 Forget her Pray'rs, or miss a Masquerade,
 Or lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball;
 Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that *Shock* must fall.

The surprises here all assume a set pattern of predictable elements, against which the successive ironical adjustments make their point. These are not examples of the "deliberate discord" which Frye grants to be a possible refinement of the Augustan style. Our certainty that rhyme and rhythm will bring a conclusive alternative to "*Diana's Law*" does not prepare us for a phrase "receive a Flaw," which works back on to the sexual meaning of the previous line. Our uncertainty as we move from *or* to *or* (Pope can do more here, because this formula covered our present-day use of *either ... or*) leads us to anticipate a "serious" alternative coming first in the final line. We get only the truncated, implicit seriousness of "Heav'n has doom'd." Earlier on, Pope has taken up a phrase from Spenser ("whether by force, or sleight") and made it hang puzzlingly in the air. Spenser, as a matter of fact, has a further possibility to tag on the end: "Or their owne guilt." If we pick up the reference, we are asked to speculate as to the culpability of the heroine. Pope's is a poetry full of pseudo-alternatives, seemingly unequal choices that prove to mean much the same thing, apparently similar fates that turn out to be very different. In a way, we could detect in this the "continuous present" created, according to Frye, by the incantatory rhythms of sensibility verse. Our anticipations are subverted, not line-by-line as in a Donne song or a romantic ode, but almost word by word. When we come to the line "Or lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball" we have just encountered "miss a Masquerade" – therefore our immediate impulse is to expect "losing" to be a trivial inadvertence. But go on as far as "lose her Heart," and the emotional possibilities are deepened. Promptly the qualification "or Necklace" reinforces the slighter sense. But "at a Ball" applies to the love-affair scenario quite as well as to the necklace, and completes the logic of a sentence that might *primarily* concern young love. It is altogether subtler than simply "using" the figure of zeugma for deflatory purposes. We do not have the pattern: potentially serious statement + zeugma = deflation. Rather, we have a movement in and out of the more serious sense, towards and against predictability: a second-by-second adjustment which is highly characteristic of Augustan satire, in Dryden and Swift as well as Pope.

Frye's argument is at its strongest when he deals with the "associative" properties of sensibility writing, and when he stresses the urge towards "the brief and even fragmentary utterance" – a formulation which paradoxically can accommodate such sustained works as Blake's prophetic poems, Cowper's *Task*, or Ossian's epics. As Frye puts it, the poet "is attracted by the ruinous ... the primeval and 'unspoiled.'" The finest moments in the poetry of sensibility often register a failure of vision or an incomplete apprehension: in the last strophe of Gray's "Progress of Poesy" (1757), for example, or in the crushed hopes that suffuse Collins's "Ode on the Poetical Character" (1746). Poetry finds itself more and more drawn to the mantic, the impenetrable, the inaccessible, as in Christopher Smart's *Song to David* (1763):

The world – the clustring spheres he made,
 The glorious light, the soothing shade,
 Dale, champaign, grove, and hill;
 The multitudinous abyss,
 Where secrecy remains in bliss,
 And wisdom hides her skill.

It was left for Blake, in "Auguries of Innocence," to decipher these secrets. The earlier generation of poets share with Blake a sense of numinous and privileged moments, but they have not gone so far in rejecting all systems of interpretation, or in radically remaking poetic

forms. Another way of putting this would be to say that the sensibility poets seek the intensity of primitive scenes and child-like states of feeling, but they have not had the artistic courage to break down Augustan poetic, root and branch. Even Smart's most impassioned verse works through symmetry, antithesis, and parallelism. Sensibility deals not so much in organic form as in fractured versions of synthetic form.

Two caveats are in order. The first is simply to remind ourselves that one very considerable poet, Robert Burns, lies at a tangent to these broad developments. Frye's analysis does not account for his peculiar importance, and I am conscious that my own argument has been no more helpful. The personal chemistry of Burns's poetry has to do with his native inheritance (songs, oral tales, the strength of the Scottish language as a storehouse of living speech) and, superimposed rather awkwardly at times, his "education" – in "polite" literature. This last was mostly English, generally Augustan in the normal acceptance of that term, much of it in prose. His early reading included Shakespeare, Pope, Locke, the *Spectator*, Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs* (1746), and Jethro Tull on agriculture. The semi-anglicised poetry of Allan Ramsay was one influence: another was the *Pantheon* of classical mythology compiled by Andrew Tooke – Keats was another to draw heavily on this work. Direct assessment of Burns appears in the text below: my aim here is simply to indicate the slightly skewed relation of Burns to literary history in England.

The second caveat is this. I have deliberately chosen clear-cut examples to make the point: as, indeed, Frye does. It would be possible to select more problematic instances: Thomson, Goldsmith, Akenside, Edward Young, and so on. Some of the prose writers raise equally complex issues: Hume, the dramatist Lillo, Burke. The important thing is not to allocate each individual to a tidy slot, but to see individuals in relation to a dynamic and constantly evolving cultural situation.

At this point, something might be said about the milieu in which authors lived and wrote. The literary profession scarcely existed at the start of the period, and even at the end of what we have been calling the Restoration phase there were few men and women of letters who were not, socially speaking, ladies and gentlemen. The lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 made for greater opportunities in a number of fields – journalism, preeminently, with the rise of the first regular newspapers inside the next decade, but also in political and controversial pamphleteering. It should not be forgotten that all books, not just topical tracts, needed an official government *imprimatur*; it is odd to think that even *Paradise Lost* had to endure this censorship. But printers bore the brunt of the danger, as more easily located, and might even face the threat of being hanged for producing heretical works. Two years after the Licensing Act was passed, that is in 1664, this fate actually overtook a printer named Twyn, who had disseminated a book justifying the execution of Charles I. In the same year a dissenting divine was prosecuted for libel on account of remarks concerning infant baptism. He got off comparatively lightly: the pillory, a fine of £20, and 14 days in prison. Throughout the remainder of the Stuart rule, such little discouragements to authorship survived. After 1695, and more particularly after 1714, they died away. The point was not that censorship acquired a bad name, but that it seemed ineffectual in its efforts to stem a rising tide of openly expressed public opinion. By the time of Walpole, official policy had changed, and the state had organised its own publicity machine. Writers and booksellers (i.e., publishers) who went beyond the accepted limits could still find themselves in trouble. A hapless youth named Matthews was hauled off to the gallows at Tyburn in 1719, after printing an exceptionable pamphlet; the Jacobite journalist Mist was driven abroad a decade later; and the rascally Edmund Curll was prosecuted for obscenity and breach of parliamentary privilege. If Swift had not had good friends around him, he would have been arrested more than once. But as time went on, things improved for the writer. Gradually the obstacles were dismantled: it became legal to report parliamentary proceedings, copyright was secured on an established legal basis, and the activities of government spies became much more restricted.

In the first phase of our period, then, professional authors were all but unknown. In the middle "Augustan" era, gentility continued to be a prime qualification for writers. But the thrusting new men, journalists and pamphleteers, made extensive inroads into this

conservative way of literary life. One has only to think of Daniel Defoe: he may not have made any huge fortune – indeed he certainly did not – but he was able to transform his identity from “Mr. Daniel Foe,” of the City of London, to “Daniel De Foe, Esq.,” of Stoke Newington, an agreeable suburb set amid bosky countryside. More important, perhaps, he was able to get more than 500 separate books and pamphlets published, and to write for a steady succession of daily and weekly newspapers. Even if Defoe had never written *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, to secure his immortality, he would have been a significant figure in social history. He took advantages of the expanding market and enlisted new polemical strategies to get his message before the public. He wrote as clearly as Dryden, and with more of the flavour of the street. On every imaginable topic he contrived to turn out the kind of book which people wanted to read: on politics, warfare, economics, insubordinate servants and “conjugal lewdness,” on the devil and on saintly clergymen, on pirates and highwaymen, on shipping and imaginary voyages to the moon. He advanced the cause of authorship, not by sitting on committees or sponsoring awards, but by showing its practical possibilities in his own career.

Meanwhile, Alexander Pope had made almost as sharp a break with the past. Where Dryden had stuck to the court in good times and bad, clinging to office as poet laureate and historiographer royal, Pope made a proud gesture out of his own independent status. There is a consequent difference in subject-matter, closely allied though the two men were in literary temperament. Dryden operates almost entirely in a public mode: even when he writes about more remote matters, he cannot help reverting to national issues – his verses to his relative John Driden, a country squire, soon leave the crops and the hunting-field for international conflict and analogies with Hannibal. Pope, on the other hand, infuses every public theme with private sentiment: he uses his own boyhood retreat of Windsor Forest as the basis of a political poem on the Treaty of Utrecht. Where Dryden had been content to style himself “Servant” to Charles II, Pope proclaimed himself “Un-plac’d, un-pension’d, no Man’s Heir, or Slave.” A “place” in society has become an encumbrance to the writer, no longer a secure point of vision from which to review the spectacle of life.

The difference between these two crucial figures has been well expressed by Ian Jack:

During the central part of Dryden’s career, from the Restoration to the Whig Revolution, the audience for which Dryden wrote was the Court, “the best and surest judge of writing,” with the King at its centre as the sun to which all writers and other men of wit naturally inclined.... As Laureate, Dryden did not so much regard it as his task to create the taste by which he was to be enjoyed ... as to write in a manner that would please the taste of the audience provided for him by circumstances.... The brilliant rapport which he established with his audience, after a decade and more in the theatre, may be studied in *Absalom and Achitophel*, a poem written by royal command which is a supreme masterpiece of tone in the sense defined by I. A. Richards, “the perfect recognition of the writer’s relation to the reader in view of what is being said and their joint feelings about it.”

For Pope, as Jack explains, things were quite otherwise:

One reason why Pope’s career could not follow a similar course was that England had changed so radically. Another was that he was born (as Dryden had died) a Roman Catholic – and it is one of the more attractive traits of his complicated character that he refused to render himself eligible for a “place” which he viewed (at best) with philosophical detachment.... Instead of protesting or yielding to self-pity, he early devoted himself to the problem of finding an audience for his poetry with the same astonishing capacity for taking pains which he devoted to the writing of it.

One of the most celebrated ways in which Pope solved the “problem of finding an