
THE Literary Guide

A Guide to the literature
of the United Kingdom,
the United States
and the Commonwealth
1000-2000

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 Nathan

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OLD ENGLISH AND MEDIIEVAL LITERATURE (1000-1509)



THIS DETAIL FROM THE FIRST PAGE OF A MANUSCRIPT COPY
OF THE CANTERBURY TALES (C. 1410) SHOWS CHAUCER READING.
THE DECORATIVE BORDERS WITH FOLIAGE IN COLOUR AND GOLD IS THE LEGACY
OF MEDIEVAL ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS.



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|----------|---|---|
| 55BC-450 | Roman occupation | |
| 122 | | Hadrian's Wall begun (northern limit of the Roman empire) |
| 450-550 | Saxon Conquest (the Jutes, Saxons and Angles) brings the English language to Britain. | |
| 597 | St Augustine begins converting the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. | |
| 673-735 | | Bede: <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> |
| c. 700 | | Probable composition of <i>Beowulf</i> |
| 865 | North of England invaded by Danish Vikings | |
| 871 | Alfred the Great becomes king of Wessex; he unites England and organises the country into shires. | |
| c. 1000 | | Probable ms of <i>Beowulf</i> ; <i>The Battle of Maldon</i> |
| 1042 | Edward the Confessor becomes king of England. | |
| 1066 | Norman Conquest after William the Conqueror wins the Battle of Hastings. A strict feudal system is established. French becomes the official language until around 1300. | |
| 1070 | | Canterbury Cathedral begun |
| 1078-88 | | Tower of London built |
| 1085 | The Domesday Book records all landowners and their manors. | |

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| 1100 | Henry I unites the Saxons and the Normans and rules over England and part of France. | |
| c. 1167 | | University of Oxford founded |
| 1203-04 | John Lackland loses the French territories. | |
| 1209 | | University of Cambridge founded |
| 1215 | Magna Carta limits the powers of the king. | |
| 1220 | | Salisbury Cathedral begun |
| 1337-1453 | Hundred Years' War | |
| 1348 | The Black Death (or plague) kills between 1/3 rd and 1/2 of the population. | |
| 1360-99 | | W. Langland: <i>Piers Plowman</i> |
| 1381 | Peasants' revolt crushed | |
| c.1382 | | Wycliffe: First translation of the <i>Bible</i> into English |
| 1382-86 | | Chaucer: <i>Troilus and Criseyde</i> |
| 1386-1400 | | Chaucer: <i>The Canterbury Tales</i> |
| 1390s | | <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i> |
| c.1395-99 | | The Wilton Diptych |
| 1455-85 | Wars of the Roses | |
| 1476 | Caxton prints first book in English. | |
| c. 1470 | | Sir Thomas Malory: <i>Le Morte Darthur</i> |
| 1492 | Discovery of the New World | |
| c. 1495 | | <i>Everyman</i> |

...from the east came
Angles and Saxons up to these shores,
Seeking Britain across the broad seas,
Smart for¹ glory, those smiths² of war
That overcame the Welsh, and won a homeland.
(The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, year 937)

The early history of England is marked by a succession of invasions which account for the development of the English language:

- first the Romans, until the early 5th century, who brought Latin to England; the evangelists sent by the Pope to Christianise England also taught the English to write Latin,
- then Teutonic tribes (the Jutes, the Angles, the Frisians, the Saxons) who pushed the Celts north and west and established their culture, based on a warrior code of heroism. Their language will develop into English, which King Alfred was instrumental in promoting, by encouraging vernacular* literacy.
- finally the Norman invasion of 1066, which left England under French domination and established French as the official and literary language until the early 14th century.

OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

Old English is the Anglo-Saxon language spoken before the Normans introduced French in England. Literature then reflected the code of heroism which prevailed among Germanic tribes. The first known literature in Old English was oral poetry, which related dreams leading to revelation and faith, or told tales of pagan or Christian heroism, or was inspired by the liturgy of the church. It often took the form of ballads*, laments or elegies*. A noble household would then have a 'scop' (a court poet), who sang improvised or memorised tales and accompanied himself on the harp. Most of this verse appears in anonymous compilations.

Without any doubt the greatest Old English text is *Beowulf*, an anonymous poem found at the end of the 10th century, but probably composed two centuries earlier. It is difficult to date for it was probably transcribed by a 'scop' from an epic* transmitted orally for several generations.

Beowulf is a long epic* poem set among the Danes, thus showing the English the kingdom their ancestors came from and their heroic way of life, a world of bonds³ between lord and warriors, and of violent and bitter feuds. The poem relates the fight of *Beowulf*, its hero and prince of the Geats, with Grendel, a monster which strikes terror

1. smart for: impatient, avide de (archaïque)

2. a smith: celui qui fabrique quelque chose (dans un mot composé)

3. a bond: un lien, un engagement

into the kingdom, and with a dragon which guards a treasure. *Beowulf* epitomizes⁴ the perfect ruler: he is wise, honourable, protects his people, and shows great courage and prowess in battle as well as endurance when faced with all the ordeals of life. The poem is a didactic one, an allegory* of the constant fight between good and evil. Here are the first few lines in Old English:

HWÆT, WE GAR-DEna in geardagum,
þeodcýninga þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon!
oft Scýld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah,
egsode eorlas, syððanærest wearð
feasceaft funder; he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þah,
oð þæt him æghwylc ymbsittendra
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cýning!

BEOWULF: A DOUBLE LEGACY

• Alliterative* verse

Like most Old English verse, *Beowulf* is based not on rhyme but on alliteration (the repetition of initial sounds): each line was divided by a caesura*, each half-line containing two stressed sounds, the first or/and second stress(es)* of the first half of the line had to alliterate with the third stress (but not the fourth) in the second half of the line. As an example, here are two lines from Seamus Heaney's translation (1999) of *Beowulf* into modern English:

After those words, a wildness rose
In the dragon again and drove it to attack,
Heaving up fire, hunting for enemies...

Although such a strict alliterative pattern began to disappear after the 15th century, alliteration has remained a major characteristic of English verse, as in these well-known lines by Coleridge:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

• Kennings*

Often used in Old English poetry, kennings are figurative phrases used as synonyms for simple nouns. In *Beowulf*, for instance the sea becomes 'the swan-road' and 'the whale-road', while the ship is 'the sea-farer' and 'the sea-wood'. The words kennings

4. to epitomize: incarner

refer to are never mentioned, only alluded to, thus requiring close attention on the part of the listeners. Much of this figurative language, however, was conventional and fossilized, provoking delight through familiarity. By transforming ordinary words into extraordinary images, they have also encouraged the use of a rich metaphorical* language in English.

Some prose texts are signed, for instance Caedmon's stories of biblical history, King Alfred's translations of what he deemed essential books (by Bede, St Augustine, the Psalms) into English prose, or Ælfric's and Wulfstan's homilies.

Anglo-Saxon culture has also survived today through richly ornamented metalwork with gold and gems, ceremonial helmets, shields and swords, bowls and spoons, even fragments of textile. A lyre was also discovered at Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk, the site of several 6th and 7th century cemeteries.

MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE (1066 UNTIL 1500)

■ Latin, French and English

After William's conquest in 1066, Norman French became the language of the new rulers, the language of the court. Latin remained the language of the Church and of scholarly instruction, while English was still used for prose – sermons and meditations for example. English also survived as a variety of spoken dialects. It was only after three centuries had elapsed that English recovered its status of literary language (Parliament was opened in English – not French – in 1362), but it had then undergone profound changes, enriched with thousands of French words.

WORDS OF LATIN, FRENCH AND SAXON ORIGINS

To this day, English has kept **words of Latin and French origin** (longer, more intellectual and abstract) and **words of Saxon origin** (shorter, with harsher sonorities), with many near synonyms (obscure / dark; obstinate / stubborn; family / kin). The choice of one type of word rather than another can be highly meaningful in literature. To give just one example, Seamus Heaney wrote a poem called 'Punishment' (1975) in which he describes the body of a young woman found in a bog⁵ in Northern Germany in 1951 but probably buried in the 1500s after being punished for adultery. The first seven stanzas* describe the girl, the last two compare her punishment to those inflicted in Northern Ireland during The Troubles. In the

5. a bog: *une tourbière*

first stanzas, Heaney makes use of short, harsh **words of Germanic origin** to describe the young corpse; in the last two stanzas, the vocabulary becomes longer, of **Latin origin**, to reflect the more abstract reflection of the poet, who draws a parallel with the present time and with his own position as a mere observer who failed to act and therefore shares the guilt. Compare the first and last stanzas of the poem:

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

.....
who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

■ Prose and verse

Together with the use of French, the Normans brought new literary forms to England. Romances* became fashionable, influenced by the French Chanson de Roland and the legends of Arthur and the Round Table, or by the love lyrics of the troubadours, preoccupied with courtliness. The Germanic code of heroism was being supplanted by the feudal code of chivalry, a code of honour in the service of God and King. One such poem is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a verse romance set among the knights at King Arthur's court, where a mysterious Green Knight suddenly disrupts the Christmas festivities. This alliterative poem, which combines the marvellous and the actual⁶, exemplifies the virtues of chivalry: honour, hospitality, chastity, the cardinal virtues (fortitude, prudence, temperance, justice) and the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity).

Arthurian legends are also the basis for the oldest prose narrative in English, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le morte Darthur* (c.1470), which glorifies chivalric virtues and relates the events leading to Arthur's death. It is the first text Caxton printed in 1485.

One of the greatest poems written in the alliterative style is William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (1360-1399), in which the poet has a vision in a dream of people trying to find their way between Truth and Wrong. Piers, a ploughman, will guide these pilgrims if they help him plough his field. It is both a portrait of the religious and social condition of England, condemning its corruption, and a spiritual allegory urging the readers to lead better lives to find salvation. The poem announces John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1684).

6. actual: *réel*

ALLEGORY

Allegory* was a key feature of medieval literature. Allegorical characters have little psychological depth and stand for vices or virtues such as Good Deeds, Vice or Temptation. The idea that the narrative could have a deeper meaning partly came from the idea – common at the time – that there were analogies and correspondences between the physical and spiritual worlds, thus linking the literal, symbolic and religious meanings of things. Besides, it was usual for medieval commentary on biblical and ancient texts to distinguish four levels of interpretation: (1) literal, (2) allegorical, (3) moral, (4) spiritual. In this way, the stories of the Bible presented a key through which past, present and future could be understood.

Although **Geoffrey Chaucer** (c.1345-1400) led the life of a royal servant in the courts of Edward III and Richard II (in the army with Edward III, taken prisoner, ransomed⁷, sent on missions abroad, appointed Clerk of the King's Works), none of it appears in his works. He was well-read and wrote several translations, including that of the *Roman de la Rose*. His first major poem, *The Parlement of Fowls*, is a dream vision in which the poet tries to discover the meaning of love by attending a debate between birds choosing a mate on St Valentine's Day. It follows the tradition of the flying⁸, which the Scottish poet William Dunbar later developed. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer tells the story of the doomed lovers mentioned by Boccaccio.

The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer's finest achievement, consists of a succession of stories told by characters from various social backgrounds during their pilgrimage from an inn in Southwark to the shrine⁸ of St Thomas Beckett in Canterbury. The innkeeper suggests that each pilgrim tell two tales on the way there and two on the way back, the teller of the best tale being invited by the others to a meal at the inn when they return. Chaucer appears as a naive traveller who joins in the competition. The 24 completed stories provide a vivid and realistic portrait of a large cross-section – a microcosm – of society (a knight, a cook, a nun, a miller, a merchant, a physician, a prioress⁹...). The storytellers do not always speak about their own lives, yet unconsciously reveal their character and the disparity between appearance and reality, between pious words and selfish deeds. The tales exemplify a variety of genres, from romance to sermon to fantastic tale. Through comedy and irony, they explore human nature, between animality and spirituality, and show how the rigid medieval hierarchies are in fact being undermined¹⁰. The poem constantly hovers between the serious and the ribald¹¹, satire and comedy, wit and vulgarity, chivalric romance and sexual commerce. Another innovative aspect of Chaucer's poem is his use of the heroic couplet – five-stress lines of iambic pentameters* and rhyming couplets* –, thus abandoning the alliterative Anglo-Saxon meter. By using the London dialect for his tales, Chaucer also helped to establish it as the precursor of modern standard English.

7. to ransom: *mettre à rançon*

8. a shrine: *une chasse, un lieu de pèlerinage*

9. a prioress: *une prieure*

10. to undermine: *miner, saper*

11. ribald: *grivois*

■ Drama

It was the Catholic Church which gave rise to drama in medieval times.

• **Mystery plays*** were religious plays performed in the vernacular* out of doors, on raised platforms, for church festivals such as Christmas or Easter, dramatising biblical stories (the birth of Christ, the Passion of Christ, the Last Judgment), with the congregation or amateur players performing. They were organised by tradesmen's guilds¹² and often developed into whole cycles, like the Chester Cycle or the York Cycle. The play was then divided into episodes which were performed on moving wagons in different staging places in the city. Improvisations and comic elaborations were not uncommon. Miracle plays were similarly performed but inspired by the lives of the saints.

• **Morality plays*** were didactic and showed good and evil contending¹³ for the soul of a single character (Mankind). Allegorical* characters such as Strength, Beauty, Vice or Death were abstractions standing for those forces which could affect the soul. Such plays mark the shift to secular drama in English.

The best-known morality play is *Everyman* (c. 1495), in which Everyman is summoned by Death and discovers that only Good Deeds will accompany him.

The message, the need not to depend on worldly gifts since only good deeds can redeem¹⁴ us from damnation, is simple enough but the language is vivid and rhythmical. The Church had a profound importance in the development not only of literature but also of education (through cathedral schools then through universities like Oxford and Cambridge, where friars¹⁵ taught theology, philosophy, mathematics and medicine) and the arts, which enjoyed church patronage. Norman churches and Gothic cathedrals, sculpture and wood-carving, illuminated manuscripts, fabrics and polyphonic music, all celebrated the divine.

Beowulf, translated by Seamus Heaney, (700-1000?) lines 86-125: from Paganism to Christianity

— Then a powerful demon, a prowler¹ through the dark,
— nursed a hard grievance². It harrowed³ him
— to hear the din of the loud banquet
— everyday in the hall, the harp being struck
5 and the clear song of a skilled poet
— telling with mastery of man's beginnings,
— how the Almighty had made the earth
— a gleaming plain girdled with⁴ waters;
— in His splendour He set the sun and the moon

1. to prowl: *rôder*.
2. to nurse a grievance:
nourrir un grief.
3. to harrow: *tourmenter*.
4. girdled with: *entouré de*.

12. a guild: *une corporation*

13. to contend: *combattre*

14. redeem: *racheter*

15. a friar: *un moine*

- 10 to be earth's lamplight, lanterns for men
 – and filled the broad lap of the world
 – with branches and leaves; and quickened⁵ life
 – in every other thing that moved.
- So times were pleasant for the people there
 15 until finally one, a fiend⁶ out of hell,
 – began to work his evil in the world.
 – Grendel was the name of this grim demon
 – haunting the marches⁷, marauding round the heath
 – and the desolate fens⁸; he had dwelt for a time
 20 in misery among the banished monsters,
 – Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed
 – and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel
 – the Eternal Lord had exacted⁹ a price:
 – Cain got no good from committing that murder
 25 because the Almighty made him anathema
 – and out of the curse of his exile there sprang
 – ogres and elves¹⁰ and evil phantoms
 – and the giants too who strove with God
 – time and again until He gave them their reward.
- 30 So, after nightfall, Grendel set out
 – for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes
 – were settling into it after their drink,
 – and there he came upon them, a company of the best
 – asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain
 35 and human sorrow. Suddenly then
 – the God-cursed brute was creating havoc¹¹:
 – greedy and grim, grabbed thirty men
 – from their resting places and rushed to his lair¹²,
 – flushed up and inflamed from the raid,
 40 blundering back with the butchered corpses.

5. to quicken: *animer, stimuler.*

6. a fiend: *un démon.*

7. march: land along a border.

8. a fen: *un marécage.*

9. to exact: *exiger.*

10. an elf: *un lutin.*

11. to create havoc: *faire des ravages.*

12. a lair: *une tanière.*

■ THE CONTEXT

Hrothgar, king of the Danes, has had Heorot, a beautiful hall, built, where his warriors can meet, attend banquets, and listen to songs. The passage describes the monster Grendel's first attack against the hall.

■ A PALIMPSEST

Beowulf is like a palimpsest, alluding to several moments in history. The events described (the havoc caused by Grendel) take place among the Danes in the 6th century. Around the 8th century, a Christian poet composed the first version of *Beowulf*, using ancient heroic tales. Probably transmitted orally, the poem became known in different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and around 1000 was rewritten in standard Old English. The poem is therefore about the homeland of the Anglo-Saxons before they came to England, but the lives of these pagan ancestors are described by a Christian bard.

■ CIVILISATION V. WILDERNESS

– A chiasmic structure: The first part of the passage describes the song heard inside the hall. It is enclosed within lines about Grendel (lines 1 and 2, which announce his presence, and lines 15-40, which describe the history of Grendel and his attack against Heorot.) Heorot is therefore framed, enveloped by 'the grim demon' (17).

– Circles: the song of the 'skilled poet' (5) describes the round earth and several words allude to circles (the sun, the moon, 'girdled', 'round the heath' (18), 'Ring-Danes' (31), all evoking the traditional motif of the attack against a fortified place.

– Civilisation and chaos: Heorot represents culture and society (singing, music, feasting, sleeping, community life) while outside Grendel is associated with desolation (fens, heath, monsters) and violence (havoc, inflamed, raid, butchered in lines 35 to 40). Heorot is linked with light, Grendel moves at night (30).

– It is underlined by the pattern of alliterations which is central to Old English poetry. In the poet's song the repeated consonants tend to be fluid (hall / harp, mastery / man, lamplight / lanterns, leaves / life) while they are much harsher in the description of Grendel (greedy / grim / grabbed, resting / rushed, blundering / back / butchered).

■ A CHRISTIAN MISE EN ABYME

Within this contrast between good and evil, there are two long references to the Bible, to Genesis:

– The poet's song (lines 5-13) refers to the creation of the world (→ p. 366) and Heorot is like a microcosm of the divine creation of the world. Heorot towers upward (lofty, l. 31), as if to reach the divine.

– The allusion to Cain killing Abel (l. 21-29) shows that Grendel is cursed by God, a 'fiend out of hell' (l. 15). Grendel has become a sort of enormous Cain, a monster who can carry thirty men at one time.

– The Fall: Heorot is doomed, something announced by the first two lines and the word 'until' (l. 15). The fall to come links the Christian references and the elemental world of Nordic legends. And when it comes, the attack is terrifying, with contrasts between Heorot and the monster's world: up (lofty) and down (lair), 'feasting' as opposed to 'greedy', 'asleep' as opposed to 'butchered'.

■ THE NARRATOR AND THE POET

– The story of Heorot attacked by Grendel is thus 'encircled' within two different layers of Christianity: the creation of the world and the 8th century. Why does the skilled poet, a Dane, speak of the creation of the world? Perhaps because the narrator (the 8th century poet) imaginatively becomes one with the 'skilled poet' and lends him his own words, or perhaps because we are meant to see the creation of the world as something not just biblical but common to all cultures and religions.

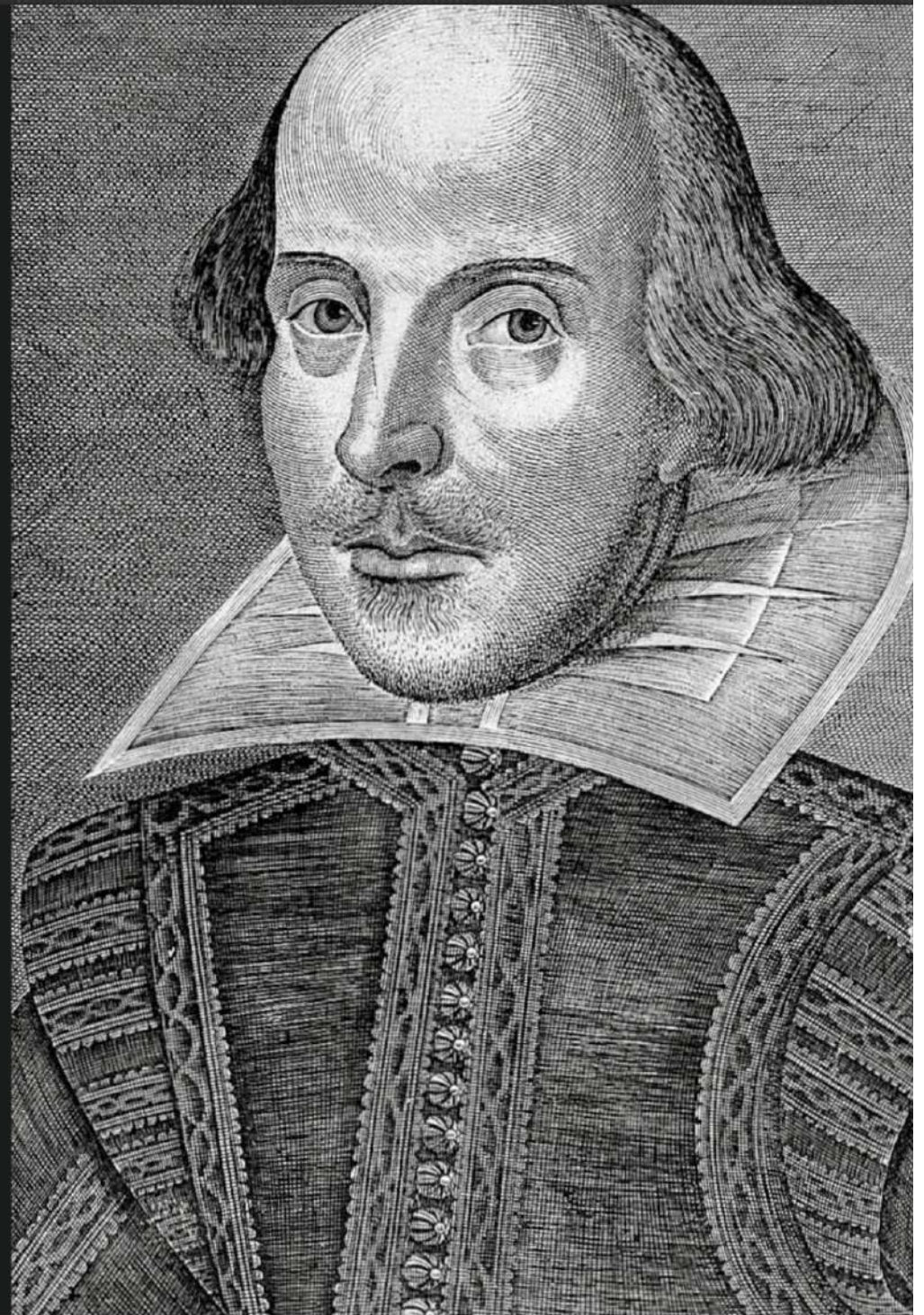
– It is creation which is the central image of the text: God's creation ('quicken') as opposed to Grendel's 'havoc'. It is also about poetic creation: the poet-narrator sings about the 'skilled poet' in Heorot), while another poet (Heaney) translates it for us.



THE
RENAISSANCE I:
JACOBEAN
AND
TUDOR
LITERATURE
(1509-1625)



MINIATURE DE WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|---------|--|---|
| 1509 | Accession of Henry VIII | |
| 1516 | | More: <i>Utopia</i> (in Latin) |
| 1533 | | Holbein: <i>The Ambassadors</i> |
| 1534 | Act of Supremacy: Henry VIII becomes head of the Church. | |
| 1535 | | First complete translation of the Bible |
| 1536-40 | | Holbein's <i>Henry VIII</i> |
| 1549 | The Book of Common Prayer | |
| 1558 | Accession of Elizabeth I | |
| 1559 | Act of Uniformity: the Anglican Church is a <i>via media</i> between Catholicism and Puritanism. | |
| 1560-67 | John Knox establishes Calvinism in Scotland. | |
| 1562 | | Norton and Sackville's <i>Gorboduc</i> |
| 1575 | | Byrd and Tallis: <i>Cantiones Sacrae</i> |
| 1576 | | First permanent theatre built in London |
| 1577 | | Holinshed: <i>Chronicles</i> |
| 1578-80 | Drake goes round the world. | Lyly: <i>Euphues</i> |
| 1579 | | Spenser: <i>The Shepherd's Calendar</i> |
| 1587 | Execution of Mary Queen of Scots | Hilliard: <i>Young Man Among Roses</i> |
| 1588 | Spanish Armada defeated | |
| 1590-91 | | Shakespeare's first plays |
| 1590-96 | | Spenser: <i>The Faerie Queene</i> |
| 1591 | | Building of Hardwick Hall begins. Sidney: <i>Astrophel and Stella</i> |
| 1592 | | Kyd: <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i> ; Marlowe: <i>Doctor Faustus</i> (perf.) The Ditchley Portrait of Elizabeth I |

| | | |
|---------|---|--|
| 1592-93 | Plague in London | Shakespeare: <i>Richard III</i> |
| 1595 | | Spenser: <i>Epithalamion</i> ; <i>Amoretti</i> ; Shakespeare: <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> ; <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> |
| 1597 | | First ed. of Bacon's <i>Essays</i> |
| 1598 | | Jonson: <i>Every Man in His Humour</i> |
| 1599 | | Opening of the Globe Theatre |
| 1600-01 | | Shakespeare: <i>Hamlet</i> ; <i>Twelfth Night</i> |
| 1601 | Revolt and execution of Essex | |
| 1601-17 | | Campion: <i>Airs</i> |
| 1602 | | Bodleian Library opens. |
| 1603 | James VI of Scotland becomes James I. | |
| 1604 | Peace between England and Spain | |
| 1605 | Gunpowder Plot | |
| 1605-06 | | Shakespeare: <i>King Lear</i> ; <i>Macbeth</i> |
| 1606 | | Jonson: <i>Volpone</i> |
| 1608 | Plantation (colonisation) of Ulster begins. | |
| 1609 | | Shakespeare: <i>Sonnets</i> |
| 1611 | | Authorized Version of the Bible; Webster: <i>The White Devil</i> Shakespeare: <i>The Tempest</i> |
| 1612-13 | | Shakespeare's last plays |
| 1620 | The Pilgrim Fathers sail to America on the <i>Mayflower</i> . | |
| 1621 | | Burton: <i>Anatomy of Melancholy</i> |
| 1623 | | Shakespeare: <i>First Folio</i> |
| 1625 | Accession of Charles I | Bacon: <i>Essays</i> |

protect himself against censorship. The lines that follow describe market-places in the island of Utopia.

Every city is divided into four equal parts, and in the middle of each there is a market-place.

What is brought thither, and manufactured by the several families, is carried from thence to houses appointed for that purpose, in which all things of a sort are laid by themselves; and thither every father goes, and takes whatsoever he or his family stand in need of, without either paying for it or leaving anything in exchange. There is no reason for giving a denial to any person, since there is such plenty of everything among them; and there is no danger of a man's asking for more than he needs; they have no inducements to do this, since they are sure they shall always be supplied: it is the fear of want that makes any of the whole race of animals either greedy or ravenous; but, besides fear, there is in man a pride that makes him fancy it a particular glory to excel others in pomp and excess; but by the laws of the Utopians, there is no room for this.

UTOPIAS / DYSTOPIAS

There is a long tradition of **utopia*** writing in English literature. Some works show an ideal world, the reverse of the writer's; others, called **dystopias***, describe worlds which are evil or absurd and reveal some dangerous tendencies in our own society. Other works choose to portray an imaginary country which is neither better nor worse than our own but so different that it points to some of the merits or failures of our own system.

By describing far-off countries, utopias present indirect criticism, which is why they have mainly been written under strong, authoritative governments, at times when it would be too dangerous to attack the regime more openly. In the 20th century, the sense of anguish which accompanied two world wars, the holocaust and the atomic bomb, led to several dystopias.

A few utopias:

- F. Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1629), describes a society where scientific advances, including robots and scientific engineering, have created an exemplary society.
- J. Swift, the land of the Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). In that part of the novel, Swift describes a land inhabited by rational horses, the Houyhnhnms, who are intelligent, loving and hard-working. They are compared to the obscene, human-like Yahoos.
- E. Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888) The narrator falls asleep, wakes up in 2000, and learns that after a peaceful revolution individualistic capitalism is now a thing of the past and The Religion of Solidarity prevails. The book had enormous influence in America.
- W. Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891) develops his Socialist ideas by taking the narrator back to an ideal version of the 14th century, where people are happy, where there is no industry and work is voluntary.

A few dystopias:

- A. Huxley *Brave New World* (1932) describes a society where people's minds are controlled through genetic engineering and conditioning.
- G. Orwell, *1984* (1949) takes place in a totalitarian superstate where Big Brother controls everything.
- M. Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is set in a totalitarian state where the few fertile women – the handmaids – are used by the more powerful.

Although the rebirth of literature was slow, the reign of Henry VIII was culturally rich; the king encouraged learning and the court became a centre of artistic production. There were few painters in England so artists were invited from abroad, the best-known of them being Hans Holbein, whose paintings, though devoid of dramatic *chiaroscuro*, are striking in their realism and immediacy.

AN ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN GOLDEN AGE

'ELIZABETHAN'

The word 'Elizabethan' refers to what took place during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603); the word 'Jacobean' to what happened during that of James I (1603-1625), the word 'Caroline' to the events during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649).

■ The Elizabethan age

With the loss of Calais in 1558, Britain lost its last French territory and became increasingly nationalistic, something mirrored by the new established religion and the ongoing war with Spain, the main Catholic power in Europe. In spite of the celebration of Elizabeth in the literature of the time, especially in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, her long reign was not devoid of tensions and anxieties. Although Anglicanism was strengthened and unified by the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559), then by the 'Thirty-Nine Articles', which define the principles of the new religion, the recusants⁶ were persecuted and the Puritans increasingly rebellious. Politically, the fact that the 'Virgin Queen' had no heir (which fuelled⁷ the fear of Catholic Stuart claims to the throne), the threats of invasion (the Armada was defeated in 1588) and rebellion (that of Essex in 1601, the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, early in the reign of James I) strengthened the need for a strong, authoritative government, an idea echoed in several of Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* for example.

6. a recusant: un *réfractaire* (Catholique qui refuse la religion anglicane)

7. to fuel: *nourrir, attiser*

However, these years were marked by a belief in man's capacity to improve himself since human achievement now seemed without limits: the discoveries of the East and West Indies and of new sea routes (thanks to the voyages of Frobisher, Drake and Raleigh), the beginnings of experimental science, the Copernican world system, new developments in chemistry and anatomy – all partook of⁸ a spirit of enquiry, which could also lead to pride and ambition (the 'tragic flaw'⁹ of several of Shakespeare's heroes or of Marlowe's Faustus). This was reflected in the architecture of the time: many sumptuous stately homes were built on land confiscated from the Church then given by the Crown to the nobility. Church building was replaced by House building, and as there was no longer the same need to defend oneself, houses now opened themselves to the outside world, with large windows looking out onto formal gardens.

While miniatures (→ p. 32) revealed the private selves of the sitters, larger portraits celebrated public figures with a wealth of emblems and symbolism. There were numerous portraits of Elizabeth, in which she was represented as an iconic, half-divine being. She was shown surrounded by symbols such as the Eglantine (chastity), the Pelican (Piety), the Olive (peace), the sieve⁹ or the ermine (chastity).

THE ELIZABETHAN WORLD ORDER

In spite of the above-mentioned new knowledge about the universe, literature tended to reflect the still popular reassuring belief in the older order, where the earth was at the centre of the universe, with the sun and the other planets revolving around it. Such a medieval vision of the universe, however, was beginning to be challenged by Humanism and the more individualistic views of writers such as Machiavel and Montaigne.

• The Great Chain of Being

From minerals to plants to animals to human beings then to the archangels above, everything and everyone had a place in a religious hierarchical structure. There was a ladder too within each category, wild beasts being above domestic animals. Then came birds, then fish, then insects. At the very top of the animal order was the lion, at the very bottom, the snake, because of its role in the Garden of Eden.

The same hierarchy could be found in the realm, the king being appointed by God (according to the doctrine of the divine Right of Kings) and ruling over his subjects.

• Correspondences

The universe was consequently seen as a series of correspondences and analogies between different planes:

- the macrocosm (the universe)

8. to partake of: *faire partie de, contribuer à*

9. a sieve: *un tamis, une passoire*

- the microcosm (man)
- the body politic (the state)
- the divine order (god and the angels)

Parallelisms between the macrocosm and the microcosm were obvious as man was believed to be made up of the four elements, his veins being rivers, his sighs winds, his belly like a storehouse. The liver (desires) was believed to be below the heart (will), itself below the brain (reason).

Parallelism between the universe and the body politic meant that social disorder was reflected in the universe by storms and unnatural events. In Shakespeare's plays, portents¹⁰ announce the murder of a king, like the storm and the pursuit of an eagle by a sparrow in *Macbeth*.

All this spoke of a harmonious world ordained by God, where everything had its proper place.

At the same time it contributed to the rich metaphorical language that could then be found in both poetry and drama.

In the following excerpt from *Richard II*, the Duke of Mowbray has just learnt that he has been exiled and his first reaction is to imagine no longer being able to speak his native language. The imagery is drawn from music, then **prison**, then *castles*.

The language I have learnt these forty years,
My native English, now I must forgo!¹¹
And now my tongue's use is to me no more
Than an unstringed viol or harp,
Or like a cunning instrument cased up,
Or being open, put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.
Within my mouth you have engaoled my tongue,
Doubly portcullised¹² with my teeth and lips,
And dull unfeeling barren ignorance
Is made my gaoler to attend on me. (I.3.159-169)

■ Poetry

There was a proliferation of lyric forms in the second half of the 16th century and the early 17th century. Some of its forms were traditional ones (epic*, pastoral*, allegorical*, satirical* poems); others were more innovative, such as the use of blank verse* and the very popular adaptation of the sonnet* to English.

10. a portent: *un présage*

11. to forgo: *abandonner*

12. portcullised: *fermé par une herse*

Edmund Spenser (c.1552-1599) studied rhetoric, logic and philosophy at Cambridge, then spent most of his life in Ireland, where he was secretary to the Lord Deputy. He believed that poetry could help develop a Protestant culture in England and used archaisms to celebrate the native heritage of his country. *Amoretti* (1595) is a sequence of poems dedicated to his future wife (→ p. 33); *Epithalamion* (1595) and *Prothalamion* (1596) are marriage songs.

The Faerie Queen (1590-96), Spenser's best-known work, is a chivalric romance* set in legendary Arthurian times, in a world of knights, dragons, enchantresses and castles. Each book relates an exploit by a knight embodying one of the cardinal virtues, but Arthur's quest for Gloriana unites the work. The allegory* is political (Gloriana, the Queen of Fairies, stands for Elizabeth, whose court is compared to that of King Arthur), moral (since the knights represent moral virtues such as Holiness, Justice, Courtesy, Chastity, Temperance) and religious as the poem is a defence of Protestantism. It is a celebration both of a mythical British past and of the contemporary national power. Spenser created his own stanza form, which was much used later by the romantics: a nine-line stanza of 8 iambic pentameters* and a final iambic hexameter* or alexandrine. The rhyme pattern* is ababbcc. The use of 3 rhymes only creates unity of effect, while the longer last line slows down the rhythm and can help sum up the idea of the stanza. It makes for smooth, harmonious verse. Here is one stanza from the first Canto.

Upon a great adventure he was bond,
That greatest Gloriana to him gave,
That greatest Glorious Queene of Faerie lond,
To winne him worship, and her grace to have,
Which of all earthly things he most did crave;
And ever as he rode, his hart did earne
To prove his puissance in battell brave
Upon his foe, and his new force to learne;
Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne. (Canto I, stanza 3)

*He' is Red Cross, the perfect
knight who stands for St George.
bond: bound
lond: land
earne: yearn

A scholar, but also a statesman and a soldier, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) led the life of a perfect courtier. In *The Defence of Poesy* (1595) he defended poetry and drama against Puritan accusations, arguing that poetry moves us to a virtuous ideal. All his life, Sidney remained committed to the development of an English literature and to Protestantism.

His *Arcadia* (1580-90) is a pastoral romance while *Astrophil and Stella* (1591) is a sequence of sonnets* both moving and striking in its use of imagery (→ below).

The intimate quality of the sonnet is reflected in the art of miniature, which became very popular in the late 16th century, revealing the private self of the sitter. Miniatures were painted on vellum. They were full of symbolism and often worn in lockets¹³. The chief miniature painters were Nicholas Hilliard (1547-1619) and Isaac Oliver (1565-1617).

13. a locket: *un médaillon*

THE SONNETEERING CRAZE

A sonnet* is a lyric poem of 14 lines, a form which developed in Italy, and which Petrarch brought to perfection. Italian or Petrarchan sonnets were divided between an octave (the first 8 lines) and a sestet (the last 6) and rhymed abba/abba/cde/cde, but such a rhyming scheme was difficult in English, which has fewer rhyming possibilities. It was Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) who first imitated and adapted Petrarchan sonnets, soon followed by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547), who developed a new form, with fewer rhymes. This form, also used by Shakespeare, consisted of three quatrains* and a couplet* in iambic pentameters* rhyming abab cdcd efef gg: it is called the English sonnet or the Shakespearian sonnet. There is another form, called the Spenserian sonnet, in which the rhymes are more intricately linked: abab bcbc cdcd ee.

Sonnets usually follow a logical development, starting with a problem or a question and moving to its resolution. The first quatrain usually introduces the theme, the second presents the argumentation, the third one refutes or confirms it, and the final couplet brings in the final thought, sometimes in a witty, epigrammatic way.

In the late 15th century, the sonnet became extremely fashionable in England, reaching a climax in the last two decades of the century, and was mainly used to sing platonic love and the beauties of the beloved lady. Although many poems were then influenced by Ronsard and the *carpe diem** theme, three poets showed more personal inspiration. They also imitated Petrarch's *Canzoniere* by writing a sonnet sequence, a series of sonnets showing the development of a relationship or the various aspects of it.

– Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1580) describes the poet's emotions and his unrequited love.

– Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595) is more peaceful and serene and moves away from Petrarchan clichés.

– Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609) are far more complex since they study the changing relationship between four characters: the poet, a young man (perhaps Henry Wriothsley, the Earl of Southampton), a dark lady, and a rival poet. All possible variations are evoked: separation and absence of the loved one, betrayal with the rival poet, a more serene relationship, lust for the dark lady. All this takes place against the background of time, for love is a war against time.

To illustrate this, look at the development and rhetoric of sonnet 116, which gives a definition of true love.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments! Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,

t. an impediment: *un obstacle*.

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come:
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

2. a sickle: *une faucille*.

If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Quatrain 1 states the main theme: it describes love as unchanging even when meeting with obstacles, even when the loved one changes.

Quatrain 2 describes what love is, using the metaphor of the star which guides ships and is never shaken by storms.

Quatrain 3 describes what love is not: it does not change with time, even when beauty fades.

The final couplet offers the proof of what was said, using a pseudo syllogism: the fact that the poem was written is proof of the poet's love. At the same time it renews the Petrarchan convention of verse defying mortality. The confident tone is underlined by never / ever in the last line, which echo lines 5 & 6.

The strength of the poem does not come from the metaphors, which are somewhat conventional, but from:

- the rhetorical simplicity of the structure
- the repetitions and echoes (alter - alteration / remover - remove / bends - bending)
- the description of love in terms of absolutes which seem beyond man: greater than time, unreachable like the star, described in terms of negatives (not / not love / O no / never / not / not / no / never). The absolute quality of love makes it almost impossible, unknown, unreachable, which adds a sense of depth and anxiety to the sonnet.

The vogue for poetry cannot be dissociated from that for music. Songs became hugely popular, their presence in several of Shakespeare's plays (*As You Like it*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*) attesting to it. There was indeed a remarkable development of secular music in the last decades of the 16th century. Composers such as John Dowland, Orlando Gibbons, William Byrd, Thomas Morley and Thomas Weelkes produced keyboard compositions, madrigals (for voices and instruments) and ayres (for solo voices and lute, based on the text of poems.). The best-known song-writer at the time was Thomas Campion (1567-1620).

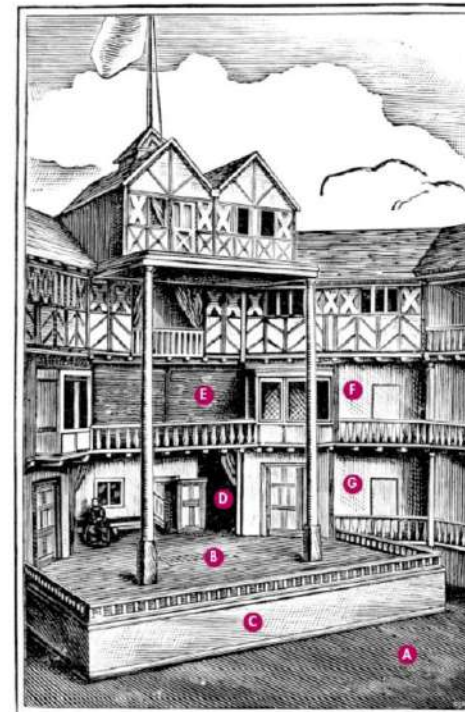
Mainly written by Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, hymns and motets were also adapted into English for the new Anglican religion.

The poetry of Ben Jonson (→ p. 43) is not, like most poetry at the time about love or religion, but like his plays, it is corrective and concerned with social ideals and moral issues. His poems – lyric, satiric, epigrammatic* – are short, witty and highly controlled. He was also the main writer of masques* (→ p. 42) for the court of James I.

■ The heyday of the theatre

The theatre, which had first taken the form of Mystery* and Morality* plays in Medieval times, gained widespread popularity during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. How can this be accounted for?

The late 16th century was a period of great cultural effervescence, after the religious constraints of the previous years. Classical and European literature was now translated and adapted, English had reached its modern form. Reading was still restricted to a small number of educated people, but there was a rising class of merchants and tradesmen who wanted to be instructed and diverted. Since the Reformation, there had been fewer and fewer Mystery plays performed and secular plays now provided the main form of entertainment and the main place where topical issues, political and social, could be explored. Even those who could not read (mainly among the groundlings¹⁴) could enjoy a good play and be both amused and informed.



The Globe Playhouse, from a model by J.G. Adams.

- A. The yard, or pit, where the 'groundlings' stood. Admission there was one penny.
- B. The proscenium or down-stage
- C. 'The Hell' (under the stage)
- D. Curtained space behind the stage
- E. The gallery above the stage, which was used as a balcony for some plays, or for musicians, or for spectators.
- F. Middle Gallery' (twopenny admission)
- G. Rooms for Gentlemen or Lords

14. a groundling: *un spectateur qui assistait à la pièce debout, pour un penny*

Elizabethan theatres

After the first theatre was built in 1576, several followed, public ones south of the Thames since they were not allowed in the City (The Rose in 1592, The Globe in 1598), private ones in the Inns of Court (the law schools), travelling companies also performing for some noblemen. Shakespeare belonged to the Chamberlain's Men, then to the King's Men under the patronage of James I. The rival company was the Admiral's Men. The text of a play belonged to the company, who tried not to reveal it in writing since there was much competition between companies.

The public theatres were open air ones, built round an inner court, with a stage jutting out into the yard, thus creating a closer relationship between actors and audience. Plays were performed for a large audience (up to 3000 in the Globe) ranging from noblemen to groundlings, which means that the plays had to appeal to all, with farce and poetry, crudity and subtlety. There was no pretence at realism, no scenery, and women's parts were played by young men so that the theme of sexual ambiguity was often exploited.

Interludes

Interludes were short plays, performed indoors in private homes or inns during a feast or some entertainment. No longer didactic or allegorical, their characters have more psychological depth than in earlier mystery* or morality* plays. They paved the way for secular and realistic drama.

Revenge tragedies

Many early tragedies were influenced by the tragedies of Seneca, which dealt with revenge, ghosts and melodramatic events. Adapted for the English stage, they became even more violent, the horror being enacted on stage, and became known as 'revenge tragedies*'.¹⁵

Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1562) warns of the threat of division when the monarch has no heir and divides his kingdom, a clear warning to Elizabeth. Its use of blank verse*, devoid of rhymes and therefore far more natural for dialogue, will be much imitated from then on. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1586-92) is concerned with bloody retribution and uses such stock devices as murders on stage, a ghost, a play-within-the-play, insanity and suicide. Other examples of revenge tragedies are Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*, Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) and *The White Devil* (1608) and Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607). The pessimism and violence of the later, Jacobean, tragedies contributed to the Puritans' closure of the theatres in 1642.

Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson

A spy in the Elizabethan secret service and a playwright for the Admiral's Men, Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) led a tumultuous double life and was eventually

murdered in mysterious circumstances. The heroes of his plays are ambitious, overreaching¹⁵ characters, whose search for glory and power leads to their ruin. *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587-88) relates Tamburlaine's rise to rule a huge empire, *The Jew of Malta* (1590) is a revenge tragedy*, *Edward II* (1590) shows how weakness in a king can lead to rebellion, *Hero and Leander* is a short verse epic inspired by Ovid.

The theme of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1588) is typical of the Renaissance: the hero's pride and unbounded ambition leads him to yield to the greatest temptation of all for a scholar, that of knowledge: Faustus sells his soul to the devil. The most striking passages of the play occur when Faustus is torn between the yearnings of his intellect and senses and the law which he combats but cannot escape. His useless resistance becomes heroic and is expressed with great poetic and rhetorical strength. Faustus's attempts to transgress the divine order, to take his destiny into his own hands, marks the end of medieval times and the birth of tragedy.

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 at Stratford, in Warwickshire, in a family with Catholic sympathies. His father, a glover and alderman was accused of recusancy (not attending church) and his mother, Mary Arden, came from a Catholic family. At the Stratford Grammar School he learnt Latin, composition and rhetoric. When he was 18, he married Anne Hathaway. They had a daughter, then twins. There followed a period of seven years (the 'lost years') about which we know nothing about Shakespeare's life, his name reappearing in 1592, in London. During the two years that followed the theatres were often closed because of the plague, and the companies left London. Shakespeare probably spent those years in London, under the protection of the Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated the two narrative poems he then wrote, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Shakespeare was to remain in London for most of his life, making a living from the theatre – as playwright, but also as actor, director and part owner of a theatre company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. In 1603, the company became the King's Men. They played at Court, at the Globe ('the wooden O', built in 1599) and, after 1608, in the indoor Blackfriars Theatre. Shakespeare had always kept his links with his native Stratford and retired there around 1610.

During Shakespeare's lifetime, many of his plays were printed in small quartos, often pirated versions that were poorly printed. It was only in 1623 that all of Shakespeare's plays (except *Pericles*) were brought together by fellow actors and printed in what is now called the 'First Folio' of Shakespeare's plays.

15. overreaching: *qui veut trop entreprendre*

A list of Shakespeare's plays

| | | | |
|------|------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|
| 1589 | The Comedy of Errors | 1599 | <i>Twelfth Night</i> |
| 1590 | Henry VI, Part II | | <i>As You Like It</i> |
| | Henry VI, Part III | | <i>Julius Caesar</i> |
| 1591 | Henry VI, Part I | 1600 | <i>Hamlet</i> |
| 1592 | <i>Richard III</i> | | <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> |
| 1593 | <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> | 1601 | <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> |
| | <i>Titus Andronicus</i> | 1602 | <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i> |
| 1594 | <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> | 1604 | <i>Othello</i> |
| | <i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> | | <i>Measure for Measure</i> |
| | <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> | 1605 | <i>King Lear</i> |
| 1595 | <i>Richard II</i> | | <i>Macbeth</i> |
| | <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> | 1606 | <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> |
| 1596 | <i>King John</i> | 1607 | <i>Coriolanus</i> |
| | <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> | | <i>Timon of Athens</i> |
| 1597 | <i>Henry IV, Part I</i> | 1608 | <i>Pericles</i> |
| | <i>Henry IV, Part II</i> | 1609 | <i>Cymbeline</i> |
| 1598 | <i>Henry V</i> | 1610 | <i>The Winter's Tale</i> |
| | <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i> | 1611 | <i>The Tempest</i> |
| | | 1612 | <i>Henry VIII</i> |

SHAKESPEARE'S UNIVERSAL APPEAL

Here are some of the reasons which can explain Shakespeare's huge popularity during his lifetime as well as through the centuries (he was called 'the Sweet Swan of Avon', 'the Bard') and all over the world.

- His plays treat of universal political questions (legitimacy, rebellion, authority) and themes (pride, jealousy, ambition, friendship, love and death).
- They offer a large variety of characters (kings, noblemen, tradesmen, servants), of settings (public and private, the court, the desert island, the enchanted forest), of situations and sentiments.
- They combine comedy and tragedy (Shakespeare did not follow the classical division into comedy and tragedy), the coarse and the sublime.
- Politically, they show conflicting views – conservative (the Tudor idea that a strong authoritative government is necessary) or more provocative (for instance the idea that there can be just rebellions against a weak king), which makes for a large range of reactions and interpretations.
- Many of his characters are complex, tormented beings open to many interpretations, like Iago, who represents evil, but whose intelligence and theatrical skills are fascinating.
- Shakespeare's English is easily understandable, free, for instance, of the archaisms that make Spenser's works more difficult for us today. His dense metaphorical language is both concrete and symbolic and can be enjoyed at different levels.

The History plays

Like Marlowe and Kyd before, Shakespeare turned to history plays during the early years of his career, drawing his inspiration from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1586-87). These plays tell the story of the events which led to the Tudor dynasty, the rise and fall of kings between 1377 (accession of Richard II) and 1485 (Henry VII, end of the Wars of the Roses). They glorify the past and examine the virtues and qualities that make a good prince, the weakness and opportunism that can endanger the kingdom, raising metaphysical issues about the responsibilities of a sovereign. A question constantly asked is 'Can it be right to rebel?' Rebellion against a legitimate and good king is always wrong, but can it be justified if the king is weak or irresponsible? Shakespeare's history plays mainly support the Tudor ideology, and show the terrible consequences of a civil war, not surprisingly at a time when there were fears concerning Elizabeth's succession and threats of rebellion. Lack of authority and division of the kingdom could only be seen as having disastrous consequences and upsetting the divine order of the universe.

The first tetralogy shows how the deposition of Richard II weakened the English throne and led to the Wars of the Roses. Richard II is thus portrayed as a weak, irresponsible leader, who is eventually deposed and replaced by the opportunistic Bolingbroke; Richard III is a fascinating villain and usurper, a Machiavellian character, who is reminiscent of 'Vice' in Morality* plays and kills his way to the throne before he collapses in Act V; Henry V is a youthful heroic prince who has authority and legitimacy: his inspiring words at Agincourt lead to victory, and he finally succeeds in re-establishing a strong government as well as peace with France. Several history plays, like *Henry IV, Parts I and II* also contain comic characters like Falstaff.

The Comedies

Shakespeare's early comedies are light-hearted and farcical (e.g. *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) and treat of love in a spirit of merriment and playfulness. The plots are often convoluted¹⁶ and contrived¹⁷, with confusion and imbroglios created by disguise and mistaken identity (two sets of identical twins in *The Comedy of Errors*) but mistakes are eventually rectified and the plays end with marriage. They also contain much jesting¹⁸ and rowdiness¹⁹, with for instance the reappearance of the unruly and funny Sir John Falstaff.

Shakespeare's later romantic comedies combine farcical and festive elements (the confusion of sexual identity, for instance – all the funnier since women's parts were played by men) with a more solemn, meditative or corrective view of society. *As You Like It* contrasts treachery at the court with the Arcadian Forest of Arden, where love

16. convoluted: *compliqué*

17. contrived: *artificiel*

18. jesting: *plaisanterie*

19. rowdiness: *scènes de chahut, de bagarre*

is infectious. In *Twelfth Night*, we enter the world of Illyria, where all the characters are in love with the wrong person, where desire is insane and irrational, including that of the puritanical servant Malvolio for his mistress. As the title suggests, the play has an element of topsy-turviness²⁰ or misrule typical of the celebration of epiphany. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the mood is more poetic and fanciful. Several plots intertwine, uniting different social worlds: that of the court where a royal wedding is being prepared and several young people look for true love, that of fairies, who can mischievously control human life and love, and that of a group of players, who perform a play within the play for the wedding. The play combines supernatural confusion with the excess and irrationality of lovers, the solemn with the ludicrous.

Theatrical illusion and self-deception are recurring themes in these comedies, where the characters gradually come to know themselves. They are also memorable for their verbal games – wit*, humour*, puns* and quibbles²¹. The Fool (Touchstone in *As You Like It*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*), with his wit and distance, announces the fools of some of the later tragedies.

Shakespeare also wrote some darker comedies, such as *Measure for Measure*, about justice and amorality, and *The Merchant of Venice*, a troubling play about religious intolerance.

The Tragedies

With *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, Shakespeare reaches the summit of his art. Their mood is more sombre since the reassuring medieval view of eternal life to come is replaced by the Renaissance conception of human life as full of potentialities, yet as brief and transient²². The result is detachment and anxiety, doubts and questioning, which all the heroes are prey to, and the recurring metaphor of the world as a stage and of men as mere players. The image reaches a climax in *King Lear*, when the king cries out: 'When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools.'

For critic A.C. Bradley, the typical Shakespearean hero is the victim of a "tragic flaw*" which results in a chain of catastrophes, both human and cosmic since the whole universe is one (→ p. 31). The private and public realms can no longer be dissociated.

Hamlet is a drama of revenge, in which the eponymous* hero, the Prince of Denmark, learns from his father's ghost that he was murdered by Claudius, whom Hamlet's mother has now married, and seeks revenge. Melancholic and indecisive, *Hamlet* must accept the need for individual choice and action. Through several soliloquies, we follow his progress from a desire to die to final acceptance. Set in a court which is 'rotten' and marked by duplicity, the play is full of anguish and uncertainties.

20. topsy-turvy: *sens dessus dessous*

21. a quibble: *une argutie, une chicane*

22. transient: *éphémère*

The most harrowing²³ of Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* starts with the ill-advised division of the kingdom among Lear's three daughters, and the king's rejection of Cordelia, the youngest, who refuses to flatter him. As a result the kingdom is torn apart and Lear becomes mad. The play takes its characters further into despair and endurance than any other play, until they are no more than 'poor bare forked'²⁴ animals' wandering on the heath.

In *Othello*, it is jealousy, instilled into the mind of Othello by Iago's bestial images, which leads to the downfall of the hero.

The Roman plays (*Julius Caesar* or *Coriolanus*), inspired by Plutarch, are also tragedies, political dramas concerned with moral, political and social problems.

Macbeth is a dark, violent tragedy in which an honourable general gradually becomes a villain. After defeating the Norwegian army, Macbeth and Banquo encounter three witches who promise Macbeth that he will become Thane of Cawdor, then king, and Banquo that his descendants will prosper. When Macbeth learns that King Duncan has rewarded his bravery by the title 'Thane of Cawdor', he writes to his wife, who will persuade him to kill Duncan and fulfil the second prophecy. This crime leads to that of Banquo, who knows too much. As the kingdom is plunged into turmoil, Macduff raises an army against Macbeth, and joins forces with Malcolm, the English king. Macduff will eventually kill Macbeth, fulfilling the witches' third prediction. The play is:

– a study of evil (its inception and growth, the way it can disrupt 'the single state of man' and lead Lady Macbeth to madness, its possible link with witchcraft, which would have inspired terror in an Elizabethan audience);

– a psychological exploration of guilt and doubt (terror, hallucination – Macbeth sees a dagger before the crime, then the ghost of Banquo –, questioning about the place of man in the universe);

– a political play about rebellion against a good king and the way the murder reverberates at all levels, affecting human nature as well as the macrocosm (there are storms and unnatural events) and the body politic (it leads to civil war).

The mood and atmosphere of the play is emphasized by a rich pattern of images.

The following speech from Act V, marks the climax of Macbeth's progress. He has failed to control the future and has instead emptied his life of meaning and finds existence reduced to absurdity.

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts²⁵ and frets²⁶ his hour upon the stage.
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

23. harrowing: *déchirant, douloureux*

24. forked: two-legged (a metaphor)

25. to strut: *se pavaner*

26. to fret: *s'inquiéter, s'irriter*

The Romances

Shakespeare's last plays (*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*) share a strain of sadness, yet they are less sombre than the previous plays, more serene and hopeful, and they end happily. They are dramas of reconciliation between kinsmen, of righted wrongs through repentance, of the necessity for forgiveness, and thus contrast with the history plays and the great tragedies.

Their setting is pastoral or exotic, their atmosphere that of a fairy tale, full of improbable and miraculous happenings. Love finally mends the corruption and evil of civilisation. The romances are also richly symbolic, the sea, which separates but also restores, is a sign of spiritual rebirth, while music symbolizes harmony. Indeed, another characteristic of these plays is their lyricism, their use of songs, dances and masques.

MASQUES

Masques* were the main form of symbolic entertainment at the court of James I. They derived from medieval shows and presented a succession of tableaux involving allegorical, pastoral or mythological characters, speaking and dancing against a musical background, thus promoting an uncommon union of the arts. The spectacle became more important than the text, something accentuated by the distancing effect of the new stage. Masques were spectacular (costumes, scenery, machinery to allow scenes to appear and disappear suddenly) and were often performed in private halls at court for special celebrations, the actors being mostly members of the court, or used as intervals inside a play, as is the case in *The Tempest*.

Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, the architect and inventor of machinery, are the best-known contributors to the genre.

The Tempest (1611) opens on an island where Prospero, the former Duke of Milan, and his daughter, Miranda, were twelve years before shipwrecked after Prospero was driven out of his Dukedom by his brother Antonio and Alonso, the king of Naples. A magician, Prospero controls the island, where he freed the spirit Ariel, whom he now uses to perform his magic, but was unable to civilize the savage creature Caliban. He is the stage-manager of the whole play, and engineers a storm at the beginning to bring Antonio, Alonso and Ferdinand, his son, to the island. He then creates a series of ordeals, tests and spectacular events to guide the characters and lead Alonso to a new faith, to reconciliation and regeneration. With past wrongs redressed, the love between Ferdinand and Miranda can reconcile both worlds, just as it reconciles nature and civilization. Prospero renounces his magic, drowns his books and returns to Milan.

The play is very much a Renaissance one, concerned as it is with such topics as utopia, colonialism and power. It alludes to the colonial problem through Caliban (from 'cannibal'), who is both savage and capable of poetry. Shakespeare thus took up the controversy about 'natural' men compared to civilized men, about nature and nurture.

The play is also about power-struggles and conspiracies and the fact that a good prince should not abandon his duties to get lost in his books. Prospero's abjuring his magic at the end of the play, can also be read as the end of the age of magic, the Renaissance under the pressure of Puritanism.

The last of the great Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, Ben Jonson (1572-1632) was given a classical education, then became an actor and playwright. He wrote verse and masques for James I. His comedies constitute savage satires* on his contemporaries, their characters being caricatures dominated by a driving force or 'humour', as shown by the titles of two of his plays: *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) and *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599). Their lives are ruled by avarice, pride or lust. In *Volpone* (1606), a wealthy Italian deceives several fortune-hunters into believing he is dying and will make them his heirs if they offer him precious gifts. In *The Alchemist* (1610), a similar confidence-trick is played on gullible people who believe that base metal can be turned into gold. *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) exposes hypocrisy.

THE THEORY OF HUMOURS*

The four main liquids of the human body were then called humours and linked to the four elements (see the belief in correspondences, p. 30). The dominance of one of them led to some governing trait or disease. The word "humour" also alluded to a person who suffered from one of these particular excesses. A perfect balance of the four humours resulted in an ideal temperament. Humours are found all through English literature, in the works of Shakespeare, Fielding or Dickens, an obvious example being that of Mrs Micawber in Dickens's *David Copperfield*, her character being summed up by her constantly repeated words: 'I never will desert Mr Micawber'.

| Humour | Dominant part of the body | Prevailing element | Quality | Temperament or Humour |
|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|---|
| Blood | Heart | Air | Hot & moist | Sanguine determined, active, happy, often lustful |
| Phlegm | Kidneys | Water | Cold & moist | Phlegmatic fat, cowardly, dull, capricious |
| Yellow bile | Bladder | Fire | Hot & dry | Choleric sensitive, impatient, obstinate, vengeful |
| Black bile | Spleen | Earth | Cold & dry | Melancholy stupid or highly gifted, thoughtful, solitary, sentimental |

■ Prose

Two contrasting styles developed in those years:

– Ciceronian* style was balanced, ornate, affected, with parallelisms and antitheses*, and often turned to excess. It is also called Euphuistic* prose from *Euphuus: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578), by John Lyly (1554-1606). Here is an example:

'If thou hast belied women, he will judge thee unkind; if thou have revealed the troth²⁷, he must needs think thee unconstant; if he perceive thee to be won with a nut, he will imagine that thou wilt be lost with an apple; if he find thee wanton²⁸ before thou be wooed, he will guess thou wilt be wavering when thou art wedded.'

– Senecan* prose is livelier, with shorter, aphoristic* sentences, and is best illustrated by the *Essays* (first edition 1597, last one 1625) of Francis Bacon (1561-1626). They cover a whole range of interests (history, ethics, politics, science, philosophy) and constitute short considerations and reflections on the manners and ideas of his time. They reflect a questioning mind, typical of the Renaissance. In the early 17th century, the study of the physical world as it had been perceived since medieval times, with the earth at the centre of an ordered, hierarchical universe (→ the Elizabethan world order, p. 30) was beginning to be challenged. More sophisticated ways of analysing, travelling, measuring meant that the emphasis was shifting to investigation and empirical observation. In *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon advocated the experimental method for the study of science, defending it against medieval religious views that scientific research was forbidden knowledge. The inductive method, based on observation should lead to the 'perpetual renovation of knowledge'. It is the basis of his utopia* *New Atlantis* (1624), in which Bacon imagines a Society of Scholars and Scientists. (→ p. 28)

27. troth: truth

28. wanton: libertine

The Tempest (1611), IV. 1. 146-163:
Shakespeare's farewell to the stage?

PROSPERO

- You do look, my son¹, in a moved sort,
- As if you were dismay'd²: be cheerful, sir.
- Our revels³ now are ended. These our actors,
- As I foretold you, were all spirits and
- 5 Are melted into air, into thin air:
- And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
- The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
- The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
- Ye all which it inherit⁴, shall dissolve
- 10 And, like this insubstantial pageant⁵ faded,
- Leave not a rack⁶ behind. We are such stuff
- As dreams are made on, and our little life
- Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vex'd;
- Bear with my weakness; my brain is troubled:
- 15 Be not disturb'd with my infirmity:
- If you be pleased, retire into my cell
- And there repose: a turn or two I'll walk,
- To still my beating mind.

1. my son: Ferdinand. 2. dismayed: *consterné*. 3. revels: *divertissements*. 4. all which it inherit: *les générations à venir*. 5. pageant: *spectacle* (the masque). 6. a rack: a cloud.

■ THE CONTEXT

Prospero, the former duke of Milan, was ousted from the throne by his brother and the Duke of Naples and turned adrift on the ocean with his daughter Miranda. They were shipwrecked on a desert island, where they spent twelve years, until Prospero's magic brings his enemies to the island, where he uses spirits to taunt them and lead them to redemption.

This speech takes place towards the end of the play, when Prospero's 'tricks' are almost over. He has just blessed the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand (the King of Naples's son) with a masque performed by spirits, but suddenly interrupts it when he is reminded of the remaining conspiracy against him.

■ ILLUSION

The masque in the preceding scene presented an Arcadian utopia, a land of sunshine and plenty. The collapse of the vision is echoed here by the collapse of a much wider vision in Prospero's mind. Prospero develops the idea that not just the masque but our lives and the world around us are no more than a dream. "Life is a dream" was a common theme in Baroque poetry, but Prospero goes further, as the progression of his speech shows:

- the masque (revels) and the actors have disappeared (l. 1-5)
- the material world around us will disappear (l. 6-11)
- our lives are only dreams (l. 11-13)
- the last lines (13-18) show an old man apologizing for his disturbed state of mind.

The gradual extension is both spatial and temporal ('all which it inherit'). The image of 'the great globe' is particularly interesting in that it encompasses many different ideas: the universe or macrocosm, the earth, and the Globe theatre.

■ IMAGES OF SOLIDITY VS FLUIDITY

The insubstantiality which is the end of everything is conveyed by two sets of strong images: architecture and fluidity.

- In lines 7 and 8, there is an architectural description with a noble movement of the verse, the buildings being more and more noble (towers > palaces > temples > the globe = both the earth and the theatre). The rhythm is balanced, with 4 expressions made up of 1 adj. + 1 noun, parallel lines with caesuras, and alliterations in c/c g/g forming a chiasmic structure (2 stressed syllables following each other at the beginning and end).

- Contrasting with these are images of:

- liquidity: melted (5), dissolve (9);
- air: thin air (5), cloud (7), faded (10);
- sleep and dream.

These images are underlined by several "s" sonorities evoking a soft movement.

■ ART

What Prospero repudiates here as mere illusion is human ART at its grandest (towers, palaces, described as gorgeous and great). This contrasts with Faustus' materialistic ambitions. Wealth and power are seen as very little in the general flow of time. There is both an echo of Renaissance arts (architecture, the melting of metals...) without the strong Renaissance optimism which usually accompanied them.

All this is presented as unavoidable as shown by the use of 'shall' (l. 9).

Does it express a baroque fear of dissolution into nothingness?

■ A CLIMAX

We have reached the heart, the core of the play. From the beginning, the play has been movement. The various groups stranded on the island have been making their way towards Prospero, towards the centre of the island, towards some sort of revelation. We have reached it here (at least for one of the groups, the most noble one). What is to be found as revelation is both wonder and nothingness. Perhaps the two are linked: if visions and things of wonder were eternal, they wouldn't be wonderful any more. So the masque and the end of the masque, the vision of glorious cities and the idea that they will crumble is what is revealed to us at the end of the play. It is an awareness of mortality and limitations. Our brief lives are very little in the everlasting movement from nothing to nothing.

■ HUMAN FRAILITY

There is, in Prospero, a movement from divinity to humanity and mortality. Prospero has suddenly become frail and human: in lines 13 to 18, see the words before the caesuras and at the end of the lines: weakness / troubled / disturbed / infirmity. There is great simplicity in the last lines of the speech. The lines are shorter. We feel the dignity of an old man who needs to "retire" and get "repose".

■ PEACE

The perspective of melting into nothingness does not rouse Prospero to despair (as it does Macbeth). On the contrary, there is a feeling of peace and acceptance here: 'Be cheerful', 'little life' (sentimental, with fluid 'l' alliteration), 'is rounded with a sleep' – profound contentment is expressed here. The words do not convey despair but peace, "round" (surrounded by – our lives are an awakening from eternal sleep – or end with). See also the soothing vocalic sounds and regular iambic rhythm of lines 16 to 18.

- There might be a Christian biblical echo line 9: the word "inherit" reminds us of the Sermon on the Mount, where it is the "meek" who shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

Prospero has moved from magic to providence, from self-confidence to humility.

Is it Shakespeare's own farewell to his career as a playwright, to his life on earth as he grows older? It may be, but then it is any maturing man's recognition of his/her own unimportance in the great scheme of the world.

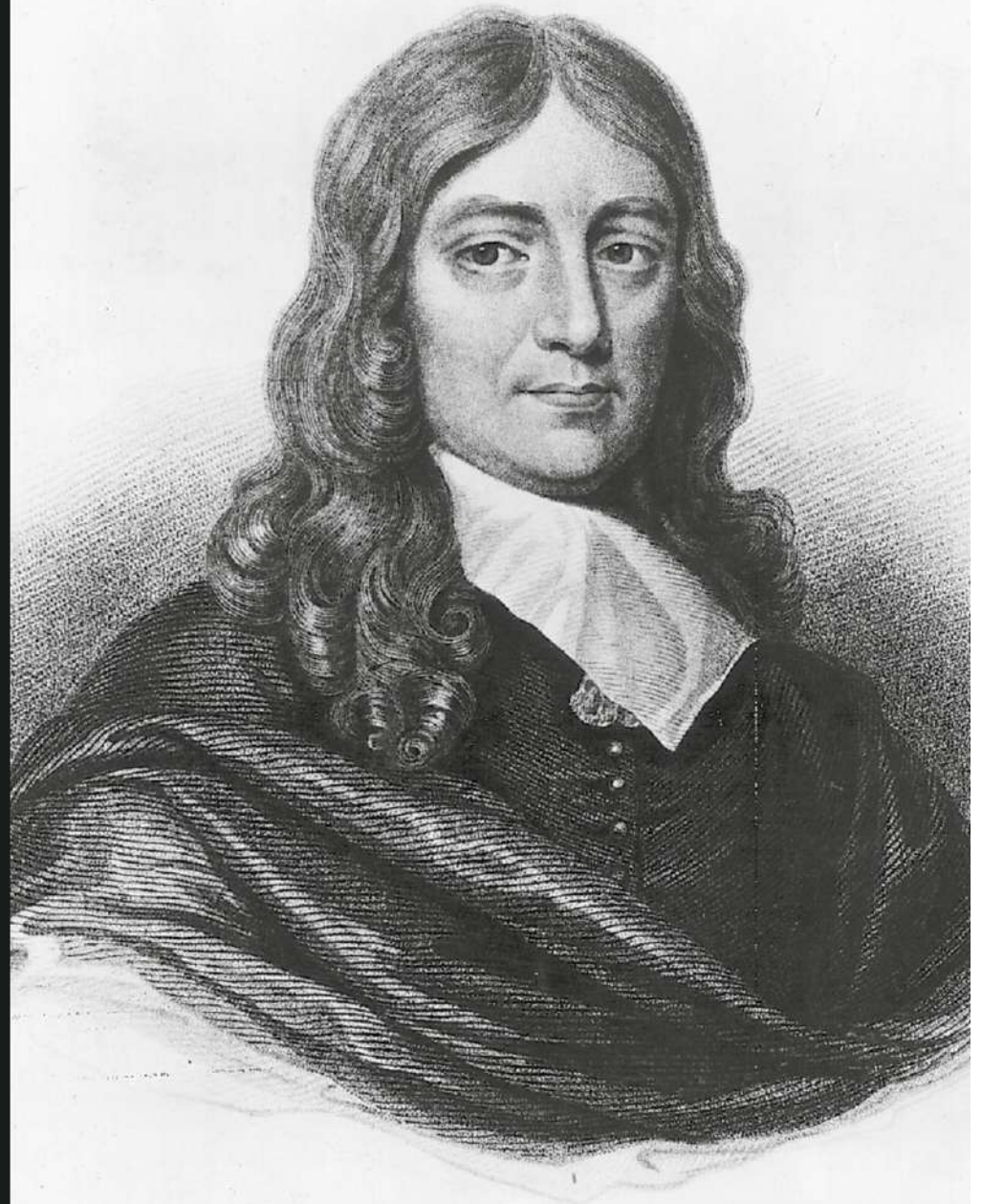
Before in the play, we feel a Renaissance sense of exuberance, of discovery, of endless possibilities, partly due to Prospero's magic. Here, we see the other side of it: pride, aspiration. It is a return from the energy of the Renaissance to the philosophical attitude of "contemptus mundi".



THE
RENAISSANCE
II
(1625-1660)



JOHN MILTON



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|---------|--|--|
| 1625 | Accession of Charles I | Bacon: <i>Essays</i> (last edition) |
| 1627 | | Bacon: <i>New Atlantis</i> |
| 1628 | Petition of Right | Harvey explains the circulation of blood. |
| 1629 | Charles I dissolves Parliament. | Rubens starts painting the ceiling of the Banqueting House. |
| 1631-32 | | Milton: <i>L'Allegro and Il Penseroso</i> |
| 1632 | | Van Dyck becomes court painter. |
| 1633 | | Donne: <i>Poems</i> ; Herbert: <i>The Temple</i> ; Ford: <i>'Tis Pity She's A Whore</i> |
| 1633-40 | | Wilton House built |
| 1634 | Laud, who opposes the Puritans, appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. | Milton: <i>Comus</i> (perf.) |
| 1637 | | Milton: <i>Lycidas</i> |
| 1640 | Long Parliament called. | |
| 1641 | Parliament issues a Grand Remonstrance against the king. | |
| 1642 | Civil War | The theatres are closed. |
| 1643 | | Browne: <i>Religio Medici</i> |
| 1644 | Parliamentary army victorious at Marston Moor. | Milton: <i>Areopagitica</i> |
| 1645 | Archbishop Laud, who supported royal supremacy, executed. | |
| 1646 | | Vaughan: <i>Poems</i> |
| 1647 | Surrender of Charles I | |
| 1648 | | Herrick: <i>Hesperides</i> |
| 1649 | Charles I tried and executed. | |
| 1649-52 | England declared a commonwealth. Cromwell crushes rebellions in Ireland and Scotland. | |

| | | |
|-----------|--|---|
| 1650-1660 | | Marvell's main poems written |
| 1651 | | Hobbes: <i>Leviathan</i> |
| 1653 | Cromwell becomes Lord Protector. | |
| 1655-60 | War with Spain | |
| 1658 | Death of Cromwell; his son Richard succeeds. | Milton starts writing <i>Paradise Lost</i> . |
| 1659 | Richard overthrown by the army. | |
| 1660 | Charles II restored. | Beginning of Pepys's <i>Diary</i> The theatres reopen. Creation of the Royal Society |
| 1660-72 | | Bunyan writes <i>Grace Abounding</i> and <i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> in prison |
| 1665 | The Great Plague | |
| 1666 | The Great Fire of London | |
| 1667 | | Milton: <i>Paradise Lost</i> |
| 1667-70 | | Milton: <i>Paradise Regained</i> |
| 1678 | | Bunyan: <i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> |
| 1681 | | Marvell: <i>Poems</i> |

*'Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely
according to conscience, above all liberties.'*
(John Milton, Speech before Parliament, 1644.)

The last years of the Renaissance were tumultuous times marked by the increasing conflict between the king and Parliament, reaching a climax with civil war and the beheading of Charles I. While the king defended the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings and high-church Anglicanism, the Puritans believed in limiting the powers of the monarch and wanted to return to a more austere form of worship. Charles believed the king to be above the law, Parliament and the Puritans believed in common law. The clash was inevitable. Charles preferred confrontation to conciliation, and the result was a civil war between the Royalists (or Cavaliers) and the Puritans (or Roundheads). Its outcome and consequences (the Royalists' defeat at Naseby in 1645, the king's imprisonment and execution, Cromwell becoming Lord Protector, the war with Holland, the Scottish and Irish rebellions) left the country eager for peace and order. In 1660, Charles II was recalled from France, where he was in exile, to form a constitutional monarchy. It is therefore hardly surprising that in those years of upheaval the main concerns of literature were religion and politics.

ARMINIANS AND PURITANS

To understand the political and religious rift¹ which so affected literature in the early 17th century, it is important to recognize these religious polarities.

– The English Arminians (from the Dutch theologian Arminius) within the Anglican Church believed that anyone could reach God's grace through free will and good works, thus rejecting the Calvinists' belief in predestination. Arminians also supported government by bishops, rituals and church ceremonial, and were therefore considered close to Catholic practices. Many viewed Archbishop Laud, whom Charles I appointed archbishop of Canterbury, as a follower of the Arminian doctrine.

– The Puritans wanted to cleanse the Established Church of its excesses and corruption. It should be remembered that the word Puritans did not refer to a precise religion but to all those Nonconformist churches who refused to conform to the Established Church (Quakers, Presbyterians, Baptists, Calvinists).

POETRY

It was difficult at the time for poets not to reflect their religious and political allegiances. In spite of such polarisation, most of their works share formal features: vitality, inventiveness and daring wit², erotic or divine.

1. a rift: *une division*

■ Metaphysical poets*

It was Doctor Johnson who, one century later, gave a number of 17th century poets the label 'metaphysical' because he found their works obscure and devoid of feeling. The word is misleading and it is somewhat artificial to bring together these poets as they never formed an organized school and have very different sensibilities. However their works, which are concerned with love, man's place in the universe and his relationship with God, share a number of common points, which are best exemplified, by the poetry of Donne.

– There is often immediacy and a sense of drama through first-person address, as in this first line of one of Donne's poems: 'For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love.'

– Their poetry relies on reasoning, persuasion, and often follows a strict logical development. Thought and feeling are fused.

– It is intellectual, intense, terse² and concentrated.

– Its imagery is striking and unexpected, drawing from all Renaissance sources of knowledge.

– The language is often colloquial.

– It makes frequent use of wordplay, wit*, hyperbole*, paradoxes* and conceit* – an ingenious but highly far-fetched comparison between two things. The comparison does not hold afterwards but provides a flash of illumination when it comes as the result of the poet's demonstration, as when Donne in 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' compares two lovers to the two branches of a pair of compasses, remaining linked through their souls even when they are physically separated.

The main metaphysical poets are John Donne (1572-1631), George Herbert (1593-1633), Henry King (1592-1669), Abraham Cowley (1618-67), Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), Richard Crashaw (1613-1649) and Henry Vaughan (1622-1695).

BAROQUE

The word baroque was first applied to architecture, stressing movement, theatricality, illusion and conflict. The term is often applied to monumental sculptures, to decorative mural painting, often making use of *trompe l'oeil*, and to the opera (the Italian opera as well as Purcell's operas). The broken rhythms of Donne's poems, the elaborate conceits* and paradoxes* of metaphysical poetry are the best-known literary contributions to the Baroque in Britain.

John Donne (1572-1631) came from a Catholic family (his mother was a descendant of Sir Thomas More), but he rejected this faith and, after studying law, languages and theology at university, started a career in politics. It was interrupted when he eloped with the niece of the Lord Keeper. Having taken Orders, he became a priest

2. terse: *compact, condensé*

and a well-known preacher, eventually becoming Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in 1621.

Donne's earliest works are Elegies* dedicated to physical pleasure. The impassioned love poems of his *Songs and Sonnets* (1633) develop far-fetched arguments and make use of paradox* (a legacy from the debate tradition in universities to prove one's rhetorical skills) to break with the Petrarchan* conventions of love poetry ('...though thy heart depart, / It stays at home, and thou with losing sav'st it'). In his description of love, he can be moving, irreverent, shocking and cynical, and he breathed new life into love poetry by portraying consummated love: the mistress is no longer unattainable, but in bed. The lovers are above the rest of the world, their love is divine, and Donne takes his images from the new discoveries in geography or anatomy:

O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdom, safest when with one man mann'd,
My Mine of precious stones, My Empirie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee! (To His Mistress Going to Bed)

Donne renewed the poetic form as well, using a large variety of stanza forms and a language which he described as full of 'masculine persuasive force'. The same striking paradoxes* and metaphors* are to be found in his *Holy Sonnets* (1633), dramatic dialogues with God and meditations on spiritual quest and on the Last Judgement. Donne challenges death with spiritual salvation, just as he had with love in his secular poems. As Dean of St Paul's, Donne also wrote and delivered eloquent and emotional sermons.

SERMONS

Books of sermons made up the largest group of printed books in the 17th century. Churchgoers followed the development of sermons (which could last one or two hours) with much interest, sometimes taking notes. Most of them were acquainted with the chosen biblical texts (in some cases the Bible being the only book found in their homes) and could appreciate the priest's approach. Donne's sermons were said to cause people to cry or swoon, and some passages have become extremely well-known, like the following:

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main³; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. (Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, 1623)

Lancelot Andrewes's *Sermons* (1629), in the Senecan style, are more intellectual scrutinies of the biblical text.

3. the main: *locúan* (archaïque)

Easter-wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.
My tender age in sorrow did beginne:
And still with sickness and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine
And feel this day thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

George Herbert (1593-1633), a member of Parliament, then a country parson, wrote devotional verse, intimate meditative poems, about all aspects of clerical life, in a simple language, yet full of drama and passion. Doubt and faith, acceptance and rebellion are some of his favourite themes. He used a large variety of stanza forms and versification, and some of his poems show harmony between form and content as in 'Easter-Wings', for ex, which has the shape of wings; in the 20th century, such poetry will be called visual poetry or concrete poetry. Such a fusion is indebted to emblem* poetry.

George Herbert, Easter-Wings, *The Temple*, 1633.

EMBLEMS

Emblem books were very popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. An emblem* consisted of three things: a symbolic picture, a motto to express a moral idea, and a short poem to illustrate it. They could be religious or secular, and were used for meditation on devotional or moral subjects.

One of the best-known emblem books was Francis Quarles's *The Emblems* (1635).

The constant use of such symbolism made them very familiar to readers.

Although Andrew Marvell (1621-78) had been Latin Secretary during the Commonwealth, he was loyal to Charles II and remained in politics during the Restoration. Torn between the recluse and the man of action, Marvell wrote pastoral and love poems as well as occasional* and political poems, chiefly in praise of Cromwell as with his *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*. His poetry is both elegant and reflective, less obviously tormented than Donne's. 'The Garden' is a reflection upon the garden as a refuge from active life, the narrator choosing retirement over involvement and ambition, taking a solipsistic and sensuous pleasure in his solitary retreat. Marvell's best-known poem is certainly 'To His Coy Mistress', which develops the *carpe diem** theme in the face of mortality.

■ Cavalier poets

Several poets were staunch⁴ followers of Charles I and did not adhere to the religious and political revolution which was taking place. The lyrics of Thomas Carew (1595-1639), Robert Herrick (1591-1674), Sir John Suckling (1609-42) and Sir Richard Lovelace (1618-58) are graceful, and light-hearted in tone, and can be witty and licentious. They were admirers of Ben Jonson and are often called the 'Sons of Ben'.

■ John Milton

John Milton (1608-74) was educated at St Paul's, London, then at Cambridge, and also went on a 'grand tour'* of Europe, reading extensively during these years, and acquiring a wealth of learning in the classics and modern languages. It is reflected in his works, which associate classical and humanistic traditions with the Puritan spirit of the time. His first works were lyrical. 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' are two complementary poems about the happiness to be found among nature and the pleasures of ascetic life. *Comus* (1634) is a masque*, in which Comus attempts to tempt a virtuous lady, using specious arguments to defend sensual pleasure. This pastoral drama was set to music by Henry Lawes. *Lycidas* (1637) is a pastoral elegy* for the death of a Cambridge friend, who becomes a shepherd, but also a Poet, mourned by nature. The poem is also a satire* on the corruption of the clergy.

In 1641 Milton, a dedicated Protestant, decided to abandon poetry and use his skills in the service of the Puritan cause and from 1649 to 1655 became Secretary for Foreign Tongues. He then devoted his time to the writing of several tracts to support the cause of the Commonwealth: in favour of a more humanist education, against episcopatism⁵, for divorce in cases of incompatibility, against a Royalist cult after the death of Charles I. In *Areopagitica* (1644), he defended the liberty of unlicensed printing (books then had to be 'licensed' before they could be printed), arguing that "To kill a man is to kill a reasonable human being; but to kill a book is to kill reason itself". The prose is highly rhetorical and vibrant. The 1660s were difficult years for Milton, both personally (he had by then become blind) and politically (he could not support Charles II, although he had himself been pardoned in 1660), and he turned to poetry once more to convey his visionary and reforming ideas.

Paradise Lost (1667), Milton's masterpiece, was composed in the early 1660s and dictated to his wife and daughters. It is a long epic* poem which relates Satan's rebellion, God's creation of the world, Satan's anger at being excluded from the bliss of paradise, Adam and Eve's fall and their expulsion from Paradise, but with the promise of redemption with the coming of Christ. The poem is therefore framed by two falls: that of Satan (from paradise into hell) and that of man from the perfection of Eden to that of the human plight. Milton's aim was 'to justify the ways of God to man'.

4. staunch: loyal 5. episcopatism: Church government by bishops

But if an epic is traditionally centred on a heroic figure essential to the history of a nation or of a race, then Milton's hero is Adam (Man) or Christ. This somewhat contradicts the fact that the description of Satan and his fall, 'racked⁶ with despair', provides the most dramatic passages of the poem. There is no doubt that Satan, like Comus before, and the angels that surround him, are evil, degraded, using fallacious and specious language, and the more heroic passages end up with deflation. Yet, it is those descriptions of Satan's conflict, of his doubts and suffering, of his energy and wit (emphasized by the fact that Satan is at times narrator), that we tend to remember and that made him so attractive to the romantics ('Me miserable! Which way shall I fly / Infinite wrath, and infinite despair? / Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell; / And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threatening to devour me opens wide, / To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven.'). By comparison, the world of heaven seems dull and static. As William Blake said, 'Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it'. Was Milton unconsciously equating⁷ Satan's rebellion against God with that of Cromwell against Charles I? The question is still open to debate.

The poem contains all the traditional features of an epic* and is rich in allusions to Homer, Virgil, the Bible and to Dante's *Divina Commedia*.

The setting of the poem is a huge cosmic one which belongs to the old Ptolemaic system, where Heaven, Hell, Chaos are described in very vague terms. It is when heard that the poem must be appreciated for its cadence and very musical, balanced, blank verse*, rich in alliteration* and echoes, as can be seen from these lines, the very last ones of the poem, which describe Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

In either hand the hastening Angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappeared.
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Waved over by that flaming brand⁸; the gate
With dreadful faces thronged⁹, and fiery arms:
Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

Paradise Regained (1666-1670) describes Christ's rejection of temptation by the devil in the wilderness. The poem is less dramatic than *Paradise Lost*, more didactic and exemplary. In *Samson Agonistes* (1671), we follow the spiritual progress of Samson, now blind and devoid of his former power (like Milton), from despair to acceptance of his destiny. It might be seen as an allegory of the Puritan cause.

Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663-1678) is a witty burlesque of the Puritans.

6. to rack: torturer, tormenter

7. to equate sthg with...: assimiler qch à...

8. the flaming brand: the sword of flame with which Michael protects the entrance to Paradise

9. to throng: affluer, se presser

DRAMA

Although drama remained popular in the early years of Charles I's reign, its universal appeal was on the wane¹⁰ as the theatres became smaller, often private and more sophisticated. The best dramatist of the Caroline age is John Ford, whose play *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* tells of the true, though incestuous, love between brother and sister amidst a degenerate world. Revenge tragedies became more and more violent and corrupt, while comedies, like those of Ben Jonson (→ p. 43) often showed stock* characters.

The most fashionable kind of court entertainment remained the masque (→ p. 42). Since most companies were linked to the court, they became increasingly frowned upon by the Puritans, who also believed them to spread moral disease, and in 1642, the theatres were eventually closed by an act of Parliament.

PROSE

The religious and political conflicts which marked this period may explain why reflective works about self-analysis became so popular, influenced by the Puritans' belief that one should record and justify one's spiritual journey and the struggles involved. These works took the form of autobiographies*, diaries* or conversion narratives and the examples they gave were meant to be of general application to others. In his *Diary*, written between 1631 and 1684, John Evelyn (1620-1706) recorded the events of his time. It is also a diary which made Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) famous. Written between 1660 and 1669, it chronicles his daily life with honesty and humour, giving us a detailed account of his political career, of his domestic life and of the manners of the time. With *Religio Medici* (1643) Thomas Browne (1605-1682) offers a scrutiny of his own personality and thoughts, on a wide range of subjects and couched in a rambling, paratactic* style. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621-1652) by Robert Burton (1577-1640) explores the melancholic humour (→ p. 43) in a teeming¹¹, digressive work, a quaint and chaotic accumulation of knowledge.

Another instance of spiritual autobiography is *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), by John Bunyan (1628-1688), who relates how he conquered the devil and found the mercy of God. A soldier in the Parliamentary Army, Bunyan then became a Baptist preacher, was imprisoned in 1660, and while in jail wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

10. on the wane: en déclin

11. teeming: qui fourmille (de personnages, d'idées)

A religious allegory*, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) was so successful that it was for many years one of the only three books to be found in many people's homes (together with the Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost*). It is an allegorical work, reminiscent of medieval dream allegories (like *Piers Plowman* → p. 17), but depicting ordinary people involved in situations which have moral value. The hero, Christian, leaves his family and starts on a spiritual pilgrimage to find Grace and salvation. In his progress from the City of Destruction (corruption and sin) to the Celestial City (salvation), he travels through a very English landscape, through green fields and hedges, where landmarks and obstacles are given symbolic names (the Valley of Humiliation, the Hill of Difficulty, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Vanity Fair), each conveying a moral lesson.

On his way he meets other pilgrims, whose names also point to their symbolic significance (Hypocrisy, Ignorance, Presumption, Hopeful, Faithful). Characters tell the stories of their lives, each of them providing guidance to Christian and to the reader. What can explain the enormous popularity of the book is the simplicity of its language and the fact that for the first time the reader was faced with characters whom he could recognize from real life, and, like Christian, knowing nothing about them, he had to judge them according to their actions and words, each new encounter being a new test of his moral judgement. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a first step towards the novel.

In the passage that follows, the pilgrims have reached Vanity Fair, where they are asked to buy worthless vanities. When they refuse, they are imprisoned and taken before judges. The lines describe the trial of Faithful.

Then went the jury out, whose names were Mr. Blindman, Mr. No-good, Mr. Malice, Mr. Love-lust, Mr. Live-loose, Mr. Heady, Mr. High-mind, Mr. Enmity, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cruelty, Mr. Hate-light, and Mr. Implacable; who every one gave in his private verdict against him among themselves, and afterwards unanimously concluded to bring him in guilty before the judge. And first among themselves, Mr. Blindman, the foreman, said, I see clearly that this man is a heretic. Then said Mr. No-good, Away with such a fellow from the earth. Aye, said Mr. Malice, for I hate the very looks of him. Then said Mr. Love-lust, I could never endure him. Nor I, said Mr. Live-loose, for he would always be condemning my way. Hang him, hang him, said Mr. Heady. A sorry scrub, said Mr. High-mind. My heart riseth against him, said Mr. Enmity. He is a rogue, said Mr. Liar. Hanging is too good for him, said Mr. Cruelty. Let us dispatch him out of the way, said Mr. Hate-light. Then said Mr. Implacable, Might I have all the world given me, I could not be reconciled to him; therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death.

As for Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), his *Leviathan* (1651) is one of the most influential philosophical works of the century. It starts from the materialistic premise that man is influenced by the motions of external objects, which account for his sensations and thoughts. Since he has no soul, he is devoid of free will and, in a state of nature, is governed by his desires and aversions; he is therefore naturally selfish and needs to be controlled to prevent a state of anarchy and civil war. Through a social contract, or Covenant, men should delegate their rights to a sovereign or an assembly with absolute power (the Leviathan), who must then be obeyed unconditionally, even by the Church.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), IV, 79-113: A Puritan Satan?

— O, then, at last relent¹: Is there no place
 — Left for repentance, none for pardon left?
 — None left but by² submission; and that word
 — Disdain forbids me³, and my dread⁴ of shame
 5 Among the Spirits beneath, whom I seduced
 — With other promises and other vaunts⁵
 — Than to submit, boasting I could subdue⁶
 — The Omnipotent. Ay me!⁷ they little know
 — How dearly I abide that boast⁸ so vain,
 10 Under what torments inwardly⁹ I groan,
 — While they adore me on the throne of Hell.
 — With diadem and scepter high advanced¹⁰,
 — The lower still I fall, only supreme
 — In misery: Such joy ambition finds.
 15 But say I could repent, and could obtain,
 — By act of grace, my former state; how soon
 — Would highth¹¹ recall high thoughts, how soon unsay
 — What feigned submission swore? Ease¹² would recant¹³
 — Vows made in pain, as violent and void¹⁴.
 20 For never can true reconciliation grow,
 — Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep:
 — Which would but lead me to a worse relapse¹⁵
 — And heavier fall: so should I purchase dear
 — Short intermission bought with double smart¹⁶.

1. to relent: show pity, change your decision. 2. but by: except by. 3. disdain forbids me: disdain forbids me to utter that word. 4. dread: fear. 5. vaunts: boasts (*fanfaronades*). 6. subdue: win over, defeat. 7. Ay me!: an exclamation of grief. 8. how dearly I abide that boast: how much it costs me to live with that boast. 9. inwardly: within myself. 10. advanced: raised. 11. highth: high station. 12. ease: absence of guilt or evil. 13. recant: renounce, repudiate. 14. void: empty. 15. relapse: *rechute*. 16. smart: suffering.

■ THE CONTEXT

Satan has unsuccessfully rebelled against God's rule and created his own government in Hell. To revenge himself, he decides to attack the Garden of Eden God has just created on earth. But he is still troubled by self-doubt.

■ A DRAMATIC PASSAGE

It is a moment of wavering for Satan, as shown by the structure of the text. Milton first considers the possibility of pardon or repentance (l. 1-2), but abandons it because it would mean submission (l. 3-14). Again, he contemplates repentance (l. 15-16), but immediately rejects the idea since he knows it could only lead to relapse (l. 16-23). These constant changes are underlined by clearly marked transitions: 'O, then' / 'None' / 'But say' / 'For'.

■ A MUSICAL PASSAGE

Probably because Milton was blind, *Paradise Lost* is mainly non-visual. Even when the setting is described it remains vague. The poem is meant to be heard.

– Versification: *Paradise Lost* is written in blank verse* but Milton brings constant variations to avoid monotony and underline meaning. For instance the place of the caesura keeps shifting, speeding up or slowing down the rhythm, and the word that precedes it is given added weight (see l. 3, 14). Milton also uses enjambment, as opposed to end-stopped lines, to create fluidity, as in lines 3 to 8, to convey the sequence of past actions that explains Satan's present situation.

– Milton's verse is rich in figures of speech, for example anaphora, chiasmus (l. 2) and paradox ('only supreme / In misery').

– Milton uses many Latinate words (ex: repentance, intermission, reconciliation), often close to shorter words of Saxon origin, to create contrasts.

– Alliteration & assonance: to give just one example, see the way Satan's contempt for submission is conveyed through words with harsh plosive sounds lines 3-7 (b, p, d): but / by / submission / disdain / forbids / dread / submit / boasting / subdue).

– Repetition & echoes with, for example, constant references to rise and fall (beneath / fall / highth / high).

■ SATAN AS A TRAGIC HERO

Satan here is not unlike some Shakespearean heroes (Macbeth, Claudius), who rise thanks to their ambition while their souls gradually become prey to despair, turning joy to misery, as expressed in line 14 ('such joy Ambition findes'). Milton has transformed Satan into a very human character, who is evil yet tormented and miserable. What is interesting is that he is conscious of the difference between good and evil, recognizes his guilt, knows his action cannot be justified, but simply refuses to repent and humiliate himself. He uses the vocabulary of morality and theology: repentance, pardon, submission, grace, recant, vows, evil, good. Satan even uses expressions that sound like general truths or proverbs and imply moral authority ('Such joy Ambition findes.' / lines 18-19).

■ A PURITAN SATAN?

The romantics, Shelley & Blake in particular, identified Satan as the real hero of *Paradise Lost*, Blake even arguing that Milton was allied to the devil without being aware of it. This was in keeping with the romantic poets' fascination with the image of the hero as outcast and rebel. For them, it was as if Milton, in spite of himself, responded to the active energy of Satan. Milton does not present Satan as a hero but as a corrupter. Yet there is grandeur in his self-torment, emphasized by the form of the monologue, which allows us to listen to Satan's inner thoughts.

Unconsciously perhaps, heaven is the England of Charles II – sunlit, well-ordered – while Cromwell is Satan, the rebel thrown out of heaven. It might explain why Satan is the more dramatic, and therefore interesting, character of the poem.



THE
RESTORATION
AND THE
18TH CENTURY
(1660-1780)



JONATHAN SWIFT



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|---------|--|---|
| 1660 | Monarchy restored; accession of Charles II | Royal Society created; the theatres reopen. |
| 1661 | | Lely becomes court painter. |
| 1664-65 | The Great Plague in London | |
| 1666 | The Great Fire in London | |
| 1667 | | Milton: <i>Paradise Lost</i> |
| 1679 | | |
| 1675 | | Wycherley: <i>The Country Wife</i> |
| 1678 | | Bunyan: <i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> Dryden: <i>All for Love</i> |
| 1679 | Habeas Corpus (no imprisonment without trial) | Dryden: <i>Absalom and Achitophel</i> |
| 1685 | Accession of James II | |
| 1687 | | Newton: <i>Principia Mathematica</i> |
| 1688 | The Glorious Revolution Accession of William III and Mary II; James II exiled to France. | Aphra Behn: <i>Oroonoko</i> |
| 1689 | The Bill of Rights establishes a parliamentary democracy; Toleration Act (dissenters can practice their religion). | Purcell: <i>Dido and Aeneas</i> |
| 1690 | William III defeats James II in Ireland. | Locke: <i>Two Treatises of Civil Government</i> ; <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> Kneller: 'Hampton Court Beauties' series |
| 1692 | | Purcell: <i>The Fairy Queen</i> |
| 1694 | Bank of England established | |
| 1698 | | Collier: <i>A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage</i> |
| 1700 | | Congreve: <i>The Way of the World</i> |

| | | |
|---------|---|--|
| 1701 | Act of Settlement (a Catholic king cannot accede to the throne) | |
| 1702 | Accession of Anne | |
| 1705 | | Blenheim Palace begun |
| 1707 | England and Scotland united. | Farquhar: <i>The Beaux' Stratagem</i> |
| 1709 | | Steele: Beginning of <i>The Tatler</i> First Copyright Act |
| 1710 | | St Paul's Cathedral completed |
| 1711 | | Addison and Steele: <i>The Spectator</i> |
| 1714 | Accession of George I | Pope: <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> |
| 1715 | Jacobite rebellion | |
| 1719 | | Defoe: <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> |
| 1720 | South Sea Bubble | |
| 1721 | Walpole becomes the first Prime Minister of Great Britain. | |
| 1726 | | Swift: <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> |
| 1727 | Accession of George II | |
| 1728 | | Gay: <i>The Beggar's Opera</i> |
| 1729 | | Pope: <i>The Dunciad</i> Swift: <i>A Modest Proposal</i> |
| 1730 | | Thomson: <i>The Seasons</i> |
| 1731 | | Stowe gardens designed |
| 1732-34 | | Pope: <i>Essay on Man</i> |
| 1733-35 | | Hogarth: <i>The Rake's Progress</i> |
| 1737 | | <i>Theatre Licensing Act</i> |
| 1739 | | Hume: <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i> |
| 1740 | Rise of Methodism | |
| 1741 | | Richardson: <i>Pamela</i> Fielding: <i>Joseph Andrews</i> ; |
| 1742 | | Young: <i>Night Thoughts</i> |
| | | Handel: <i>The Messiah</i> |
| 1744 | | Hogarth: <i>Marriage à la Mode</i> |

| | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1745 | Second Jacobite rebellion | |
| 1747 | | Richardson: <i>Clarissa</i> |
| 1749 | | Fielding: <i>Tom Jones</i> |
| 1750 | | Gray: <i>Elegy</i> |
| | | Gainsborough: <i>Mr and Mrs Andrews</i> |
| 1753 | | British Museum founded |
| 1759 | | Adam Smith: <i>A Theory of Moral Sentiments</i> |
| 1760 | Accession of George III | |
| 1761 | | Sterne: <i>Tristram Shandy</i> |
| 1763 | Peace of Paris ends Seven Years' War. | |
| 1764 | | Walpole: <i>The Castle of Otranto</i> |
| 1767-74 | | Royal Crescent built in Bath. |
| 1768 | | Royal Academy founded. |
| 1769 | | Reynolds: <i>Discourses on Art</i> |
| 1770 | First factories built. | Goldsmith: 'The Deserted Village' |
| 1771 | | Smollett: <i>Humphry Clinker</i> |
| 1772 | Slaves declared free in Britain. | |
| 1773 | Boston Tea Party | Goldsmith: <i>She Stoops to Conquer</i> |
| 1776 | American Declaration of Independence | Gibbon: <i>Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire</i> |
| | | Smith: <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> |
| 1777 | | Sheridan: <i>The School for Scandal</i> |
| 1778 | | Burney: <i>Evelina</i> |
| 1779 | Luddite Riots | |
| 1780 | Gordon Riots | |
| 1783 | Americans win independence. | |
| 1784 | Wesley founds Methodist Church. | Watt's steam engine |

*'Tis well an old age is out,
And time to begin a new (John Dryden)*

Sometimes called the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment (from the German *Aufklärung*) or the Augustan Age (after the times of the emperor Augustus, who developed the arts to regenerate the Roman state), the years that extend from the Restoration to the beginning of the Romantic Age witnessed deep changes in literature: there was a revival of drama, poetry moved towards clarity and balance, prose turned from satire* to the novel proper.

No longer fractured by Civil War, the country's chief concerns were at first constitutional ones. Charles II was known to have Catholic sympathies and since he had no legitimate children, the crown would go to his brother James, an avowed Catholic with pro-French loyalties. This caused great unrest and unease in the country, reaching a climax when James came onto the throne in 1685. Protestants entered into secret negotiations to bring James's daughter Mary to the throne, her husband, William of Orange, being a staunch¹ defender of Protestantism. He landed in England in 1688 and James was driven into exile. This bloodless or Glorious revolution had decisive constitutional outcomes: the 1689 Bill of Rights stated that the king had to rule with parliament and that Catholics were excluded from succession to the throne. Britain now had a stable constitutional monarchy. When Queen Anne died in 1714, the great-grandson of James I, George, the elector of Hanover became George I, the first of the long Hanoverian dynasty, still ruling today. Catholics and Nonconformists were now tolerated and in spite of two Jacobite rebellions (the Jacobites were the descendants of James I), both crushed, and threats of invasion from the French and the Dutch, Britain now enjoyed more political and religious stability than it had for centuries. Two political parties, the Whigs (the wealthy elite and commercial classes, mainly Low Church* and for the supremacy of parliament) and the Tories (the aristocracy, gentry and small landowners, mainly High Church*), emerged and politicians like Robert Walpole took centre stage in politics, generating vivid public debate and responses in the form of essays, pamphlets and bitter criticism and satire*.

This period of strong economic development and prosperity (as trade, banking and colonial development brought great wealth to Britain) encouraged social mobility, gave prominence to the middle class (the 'middling sort'), and led to a consumer revolution, as more and more people bought luxuries (clothes, furniture, china, prints), including culture, the new commodity. This new culture is reflected in painting with 'conversation pieces', real status symbols portraying the whole family involved in some 'polite activity' (having tea or playing games).

Perhaps as an unconscious attempt to consolidate the social order and avoid the bitter religious and political conflicts of earlier years, a culture of politeness, good breeding and etiquette developed. The new ideal was one of gentility and social exchange, hence the importance of public coffee houses and more private salons

1. staunch: loyal

where people could read newspapers and share ideas or gossip. It also explains circles like the Blue Stocking, where members (Elizabeth Montagu, Fanny Burney, Hannah More, Samuel Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds) gathered for conversation, and the Kit-Kat Club, where Addison, Steele and Congreve met. The rising middle-class wanted entertainment as well as self-improvement; by acquiring taste they would become discerning consumers of art and literature. This expansion of the reading public and the concomitant printing explosion partly explain the rise of the novel. Books became more affordable too, some appearing in cheap weekly instalments², while others could be borrowed from circulating libraries.

Such a picture was not true of the whole of society, far from it. There was still widespread poverty among the labouring people and criminality was rampant³ everywhere (thieves, highwaymen, prostitution), as is manifest in Fielding's novels and Hogarth's prints.

| 1660-1745 From the age of reason..... from public concerns..... | 1745-1780to the age of sensibilityto private concerns |
|--|---|
| <p>During the first half of this period, until around 1745, the classical standards of balance, order, moderation and dignity prevailed in both prose and verse. The chief aim of literature was to edify and advise, and to criticize all forms of hypocrisy and excess. Emulating classical models was the greatest possible achievement. Writers often used wit, satire* and irony* to appeal to reason and the intellect. Literary criticism emerged as a genre.</p> <p>→ e.g. Dryden, Pope, Swift, Addison & Steele, Dr Johnson</p> <p>Sir Christopher Wren's rebuilding of the City; Baroque architecture (Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor) Neo-Palladian architecture (Burlington)</p> <p>Classical landscaped gardens (with statues and temples)</p> <p>Satire (Hogarth), portraits, conversation pieces</p> | <p>In the second half of the century, an interest in the natural world led to poetry exalting the emotions and melancholy. What mattered more and more was the artist's sensibility, and inspiration was increasingly found in nature and solitude, prefiguring romanticism. There was a growing interest in meditation, introspection and imagination. Originality now prevailed over imitation.</p> <p>It is to be linked to the rise of Methodism, with its emotional response to God and to philanthropy (advocated by Shaftesbury.)</p> <p>→ e.g. The poetry of melancholy, Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith</p> <p>Gothic architecture, ruins</p> <p>Picturesque gardens (more natural and irregular, or wild)</p> <p>Portraits (Sir Joshua Reynolds) and landscapes (Thomas Gainsborough)</p> |

2. an instalment: *un épisode*

3. rampant: *endémique*

With the Restoration came a reaction against Puritan severity. Charles II's court was both frivolous and brilliant. The main court painter was Sir Peter Lely, who portrayed fashionable court 'Beauties' and 'Admirals'. Baroque art, conveying splendour and theatricality, is manifest in the architecture of Sir Christopher Wren (the main architecture for the reconstruction of London after the Great Fire), and Sir John Vanbrugh, in the music of Henry Purcell, in the popularity of the Italian opera, and in the magnificent painted ceilings of Sir James Thornhill for St Paul's and Greenwich.

SATIRE* AND THE SCRIBLERUS CLUB

The Scriblerus Club was organised by Jonathan Swift in 1714, with Arbuthnot, Pope, Gay and Congreve among its members, in order to satirise what they saw as the corruption of English society, false taste and literary incompetence, the latter embodied by the fictitious Dr Scriblerus. It did not last long but is important as it reflects the cold, intellectual, rational tendencies in the early 18th century, which favoured parody*, satire* (a form inherited from Juvenal and Horace), all kinds of mock forms, and distance, with the authors often hiding behind personas*. This was reflected in both prose and poetry.

A good example of a satirical work is John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728, music by Johann Christoph Pepush), a mock-heroic* opera set among highwaymen and thieves. It constitutes both a parody* of the Italian opera (since it is written in English, not Italian, and shows low characters) and a criticism of the prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole. It started the tradition of the ballad opera*, later revived by Gilbert and Sullivan.

POETRY

■ Satiric Verse

Eighteenth century poetry is usually considered neo-classical because of its respect for the ancients and its use of neo-classical forms such as the heroic couplet* (two rhyming lines of iambic pentameters*). Ordered and harmonious, with closed couplets* ideal for balance, antithesis* and epigrams* (raising expectations in rhythm and rhyme* which can be confounded⁴), it was the favourite form of satirists.

Here is a couplet (and epigram) by Pope:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night;
God said, Let Newton be! And all was light.

4. to confound (expectations): *déjouer (des attentes)*

With *Hudibras* (1663-1678), Samuel Butler (1612-1680) ridiculed Puritans and Roundheads and condemned fanaticism. It is a mock-heroic* poem, written in tetrameters* and rhyming couplets*, which describes the ludicrous adventures of Sir Hudibras, a knight errant who is not unlike Don Quixote.

A verse satirist, John Dryden (1631-1700) wrote about the political and literary issues of his time. First working for Cromwell's government, he changed allegiances during the Restoration, supporting Charles II, then James II, was made poet laureate in 1668, and eventually converted to Catholicism. *Annus Mirabilis* (1667) is 'a historical poem' which uses the heroic* mode to exalt Britain's naval victory over the Dutch and its fight against the monster which devastated London in the form of the Great Fire. *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) is about the succession of Charles II, who had no legitimate child. Dryden was asked by the king to support his brother James rather than the illegitimate Duke of Monmouth, whom the Whigs favoured. Dryden translates the controversy into a Biblical scene in which the king becomes David. *MacFlecknoe* (1682-84) is a fierce attack against another poet, Thomas Shadwell. After defending Anglicanism in *Religio Latci* (1682), Dryden went on to write *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), an allegorical* satire* in which the hind (the Catholic Church) is persecuted by the Panther and other wild animals (the Anglican and Protestant churches). After the Glorious revolution, Dryden went on writing extensively (lyrical poetry, translation, plays (→ p. 72), criticism) to support himself.

In spite of his Catholic faith (which meant that he could not own land and get a university education) and of tuberculosis of the spine, which left him a hunchback, Alexander Pope (1688-1744) yet rose to fame through his extensive self-education and talent to become the dominant figure of the age of satire* and classicism: the new print culture meant that success was no longer dependent on court patronage.

Pope's satire* on all forms of insincerity and pretension could be fierce. His *Essay on Criticism* (1711) is a brilliant study of true and false wit* and of what makes a good critic. *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), written to reconcile two Catholic families after a young man had stolen a lock of hair from a young lady in the other family, is a mock heroic* poem which makes use of all the traditional elements of an epic (gods, opening invocation, epic similes*, allegorical figures, visit to the underworld, pitched battle⁵) to treat a trivial subject with humour. There is constant deflation⁶, with epic* elements brought down to the level of the drawing-room to turn the quarrel into an object of ridicule. The following year, Pope started a verse translation of Homer, which became extremely successful. *The Dunciad* (1728-1743) is another mock-epic* and a violent attack against what he considered as the decline in literary standards. In it Pope ridicules mediocrity, pretentious scholars and poor standards in education.

The controversy it caused led Pope to respond with an *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (1735). Advocating order, balance and harmony, writing with elegance and clarity, Pope

5. a pitched battle: *une bataille rangée*

6. deflation: *le fait de retomber, de se 'dégonfler'*

shaped his contemporaries' judgement about wit*, taste and literary appreciation. He can be considered as the 18th century master of form (the heroic couplet*) and wit.

An Essay on Man is a more philosophical work, a reflection on the place of man in the universe. Its aim is to justify the works of God in spite of the existence of evil: Pope concludes that evil is necessary in the grand design of the world, although we may not be able to understand why. Hence the conclusion which follows, so typical of 18th century optimism (note that each line is broken by a caesura* and that most are symmetrical, uniting opposites):

'All nature is but art, unknown to thee;

All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;

All discord, harmony not understood;

All partial evil, universal good:

And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,

One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.'

■ Pre-Romantic poetry

Towards the middle of the century a reaction took place against the excess of rationalism of the age of satire*. Social and political issues were abandoned in favour of the poet's own experience and personal responses to the beauty of nature (for which Pope's *Pastorals* and *Windsor Forest* had already paved the way). In 1756, Edmund Burke explained in *The Sublime and the Beautiful* that the sublime results from being overawed⁷ by what is immense, obscure, threatening. Growing interest in medieval verse (Chatterton fabricated poems purporting⁸ to be written by a 15th century poet, Macpherson supposedly translated 'Ossian' from the Gaelic) and ancient poems and ballads were also part of the shift towards imagination, melancholy and introspection, leading to what has been called the 'Graveyard School' of poetry. Verse also became more flexible, heroic couplets* giving way to blank verse*, odes* and ballads*.

– The description of nature and rural life is the subject of James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726-1730) and of William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), a spiritual autobiography, written to 'discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.' In *The Village* (1783) George Crabbe depicts the harsh realities of village life, not pastoral but cruel and bleak.

– The tone is more melancholy and reflective in Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-46), meditations on death and human frailty, and in Thomas Gray's *Elegy written in a Country Church-Yard* (1751), one of the best-loved English poems, in which the poet considers the graves of simple villagers, celebrates their lives, and is

7. overawed: *impressionné, intimidé*

8. to purport to: *prétendre*

led to wonder how he himself might be remembered. In *The Deserted Village* (1770), Oliver Goldsmith (1730-74) laments the passing of an era, destroyed by materialism and trade, the process of 'enclosing' land into private holdings driving people away from villages and to the city ('If to the city sped – what waits him there? / To see profusion that he must not share'). The tone is nostalgic and sentimental, yet not devoid of humour.

THE THEATRE

Charles II reopened theatres in 1660 and granted licences for theatre to Sir William D'Avenant and Thomas Killigrew. Most plays were now written for an upper-class audience, and the theatres themselves had evolved: they were totally enclosed, smaller, lit by artificial light, the moveable scenery making it possible to create illusion, and women could now act as well as men. Plays had to respect neo-classical rules (unities of time, place and action); they were now purely comic or tragic. Shakespeare's plays were still performed but often rewritten to suit the new fashion and in some cases the desire for a happy ending (Nahum Tate gave *King Lear* a happy ending and cut the gouging out of Gloucester's eyes.)

Although few memorable plays were written after the Restoration (The Theatres Licensing Act of 1737 stifled production), the theatre became increasingly popular, Restoration comedies and Shakespeare's plays being performed by some well-known actors (Garrick, Kemble, Mrs Siddons), whose spectacular performances people would compare. Fielding's *Tom Jones* (Book XVI) provides a good example of the audience's reactions.

Three types of plays were staged during the Restoration:

– **Heroic tragedies*** described the conflicts between love and honour, or characters who were the victims of fate. The rhetoric was formal, the language bombastic and the plots extremely complex as with John Dryden's *The Indian Queen* (1664).

– **Restoration tragedies** followed, more realistic and with a respect for the neo-classical ideal of the three unities. John Dryden's *All for Love* (1678), a rewriting of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, or Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* (1682) are good examples of a genre which has not lasted well.

– The Restoration is better known for its brilliant **Comedies of manners***, the heirs of Ben Jonson's comedies of humours. They depict the lives of pleasure-seeking young men in London, and their quest for sex and money. Libertines, coxcombs⁹, fools and dupes, all have names which reflect their dominant traits: Bellair, Sir Fopling Flutter, Pinchwife, Mrs Squeamish, Millamant, Justice Scale, Vainlove, Manly... The plots are rich in intrigue and full of trickery¹⁰, duplicity, mercenary suitors, disguise, false marriages. All are witty* and mock the hypocrisy and current

9. a coxcomb: un fat 10. trickery: des supercheries

fashions of society. The main playwrights were Sir George Etherege (1634?-1691?), William Wycherley (1640-1716), Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), William Congreve (1670-1729) and George Farquhar (1678-1707).

In Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) the audience discovers Mr Pinchwife, who comes to London with his innocent young wife, who will discover the pleasures of London, and Horner, a young libertine, who spreads a rumour that he is impotent to seduce married women without arousing their husbands' jealousy. The play exposes the 'double standards', according to which some kinds of behaviour are acceptable for men but not for women.

Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) is a brilliant and intricate play, in which Mirabell, who is in love with Millamant, can only marry her if her aunt, Lady Wishfort, gives her consent – which is needed as she controls Millamant's inheritance. We mainly remember the play for the witty sparring¹¹ between the two lovers, whose cynicism conceals genuine honesty and love.

Restoration comedies evoke the corrupt manners of the court, the somewhat provocative portraits of 'Windsor Beauties' painted by Sir Peter Lely, and the bawdy¹² poems of the Earl of Rochester. But in the last years of the century, many started to object to the loose¹³ manners portrayed in these plays. In 1698, Jeremy Collier published *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, in which he objected to the use of blasphemy and to the debauchery these plays portrayed. His pamphlet was instrumental in the shift towards sentimental comedies in the 18th century. In Farquhar's plays, the setting moves to provincial England, genuine love replaces licentiousness, and the characters gain in naturalness.

The shift towards morality and sentimentality endured, although there was a backlash¹⁴ later in the century with the plays of Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) which aimed at bringing laughter back into comedies that had become overly sentimental. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) and *The School for Scandal* (1777) are sparkling comedies, the legacy of Restoration comedies, with exuberant wit* yet less biting and cynical, with more benevolent characters.

SATIRIC PROSE AND FICTION

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was born in Dublin and after studying at Trinity College became secretary to the English statesman and writer Sir William Temple. He was ordained but remained with Temple, ceaselessly commenting on politics and religion. In 1713, after Temple's death, Swift returned to Ireland, was appointed Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin, and devoted his writings to an attack against the

11. sparring: échange verbal

12. bawdy: paillard

13. loose: dissolu, débauché

14. a backlash: une réaction

English exploitation and oppression of Ireland. In all his works he poured scorn onto all forms of pretension and hypocrisy.

Swift's favourite method was to hide behind fictional identities, or personae*, whose views were often very different from his own.

The Battle of the Books is a mock-heroic* satire about the literary conflict between the ancients (Homer, Plato...) and the moderns (Milton, Dryden), with books taking arms in a library. *A Tale of a Tub* is an allegorical* satire* against the excess of Christianity: three brothers inherit a coat from their father with instructions for taking care of it. The eldest, Peter (Catholicism), damages his coat, as does Jack (Calvinism). It is only with Martin (Martin Luther, hence Anglicanism) that the coat fares better. The tale is full of digressions, the author constantly hiding his views behind their opposite. *A Modest Proposal* (1729) is Swift's answer to the desolation and dire¹⁵ poverty of Ireland, where absentee landlords received revenues from their tenants, who themselves got nothing in return. Using irony and shock tactics, Swift takes on the persona* of an economist who advocates the fattening of Irish babies, so that they can be eaten by the English: 'I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.'

With *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Swift expands his range of subjects and deals with the human condition. The persona is now Samuel Gulliver, a somewhat naïve ship's surgeon, who relates his extraordinary adventures. Each new country visited reflects on Swift's own society, undermining¹⁶ its complacencies and pretensions, while also revealing the narrator's limited response. In Lilliput, he finds himself among tiny people whose corruption and absurd customs he looks down upon. Brobdingnag brings a reversal as Gulliver is now surrounded by benevolent giants, who live simply and peacefully, but it is Gulliver who is now morally blind and absurd, wanting to exterminate them. Gulliver is next shipwrecked on Laputa and other countries inhabited by mad scientists and philosophers. He finally reaches the land of the Houyhnhnms, horse-like creatures who are rational, honest and polite. Their servants, the Yahoos, look like human beings, but are dirty, vile and loathsome. Gulliver believes he has found the ideal human nature with the Houyhnhnms and returns home disgusted with the human race, as the following paragraph, describing his return home, shows.

As soon as I entered the house, my wife took me in her arms, and kissed me; at which, having not been used to the touch of that odious animal for so many years, I fell into a swoon for almost an hour. At the time I am writing, it is five years since my last return to England. During the first year, I could not endure my wife or children in my presence; the very smell of them was intolerable; much less could I suffer them to eat in the same room. To this hour they dare not presume to touch my bread, or drink out of the same cup, neither was I ever able to let one of them take me by the hand. The first money I laid out was to buy two young stone-horses, which I keep in a good stable; and next to them, the groom is my greatest favourite, for I feel my spirits revived by the smell he contracts in

15. dire poverty: *paupérisé extrême*

16. to undermine: *miner, saper*

the stable. My horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four hours every day. They are strangers to bridle or saddle; they live in great amity with me and friendship to each other.

Yet Gulliver is not Swift and it may be misleading to call him misanthropic, particularly since the Houyhnhnms, perfect though they seem to be, lack ambition and curiosity. For Swift man is capable of reason but too often displays folly and vice.

James Gillray, *The King of Brobdingnag and Gulliver*.

The satiric* spirit which characterised early 18th century prose was reflected in Gillray's later caricatures of Georgian life and politics. His criticism of France is clear in this print in which the king looking at Gulliver becomes George III looking at Napoleon and quoting a passage from Swift's book: 'My little fiend Gruldig, you have made a most admirable panegyric upon yourself and Country, but from what I can gather from your own relation, & the answers I have with much pains, wringed and extorted from you, I cannot but consider you to be one of the most pernicious little reptiles that nature ever suffer'd to crawl on the surface of the Earth.'



■ Newspapers

Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (1672-1729) created a new genre with their periodicals, *The Tatler* (1709-1711) and *The Spectator* (1711-1712, 1714). They contained political news and satire, social comment, theatre reviews, literary criticism and essays on a whole range of subjects, written by Addison or Steele under fictitious personae*. They aimed at being instructive for the whole family. Their use of wit* and rillery was not incompatible with a shift towards reason, moderation and control, for example advocating a better education for women.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT: EMPIRICISM AND ETHICS

Already during the Renaissance, writers such as Francis Bacon (→ p. 44) had advocated the study of all sciences as a means of acquiring truth, and his utopia*, *The New Atlantis*, portrayed an ideal Society of Scholars and Scientists. It almost became reality when, in 1662, the Royal Society was founded to further scientific investigation. Science was then known as 'natural philosophy', a term which shows the absence of specialization.

The Restoration was marked by considerable advance in the study of science with Newton's principle of gravity, the invention of the microscope and astronomical discoveries.

The empirical method of inquiry is also the basis of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), which shows that words correspond to ideas, which are not innate but come from sensory experience. As for David Hume, his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) attempts to explain mankind in empirical terms and offers a real 'science of man'.

The new interest in experimental science is reflected in Joseph Wright of Derby's painting *An Experiment with an Air Pump*.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was first published between 1768 and 1771 in Edinburgh, then a centre of learning for political economy, medicine and science, hence the name Scottish Enlightenment.

The 18th century also witnessed the development of moral philosophy. Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, refuted Hobbes's selfish view of man, considering instead that benevolence was essential for man to live harmoniously in society. As for Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) it considers sympathy and imaginative identification with others as the fabric of society. Their philosophy had a major influence on 18th century philanthropy and sentimentalism.

■ Dr Johnson

The arbiter of taste during this period was Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), a writer, lexicographer and renowned conversationalist. His early works were satires* of contemporary society, leading to general reflections upon human nature. In 1746 he published a *Dictionary of the English Language*, and in 1750-1752 wrote the *Rambler*, following the vein of the *Spectator*, but with more serious moralistic essays. They cover a large range of subjects, religious, social, political, often focusing on personal traits, and are characterized by commonsense, reasonableness and a balanced style. In 1759, he also published *Rasselas*, an oriental tale and an answer to Voltaire's *Candide*. In 1763, he met James Boswell, and their lifelong friendship led Boswell to write his *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791).

THE RISE OF THE NOVEL

Numerous kinds of prose writing, such as spiritual autobiography* or travel writing paved the way for¹⁷ the appearance of the novel. There were also letters and journals*, for instance the journals of Fanny Burney and James Boswell, the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (containing a broad range of subjects, from gossip to criticism and introspection), Walpole's correspondence, Lord Chesterfield's letters, Johnson's letters to Hester Thrale.

But the novel also finds its origin in the short stories published in the *Spectator*, many of which appeared in collections. One such tale is Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), the story of an African prince sold into slavery, which exposes the cruelty of the slave trade. The latter tale, as well as *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe* show the extent to which these first works are indebted to Britain's colonial experience.

THE RISE AND POPULARITY OF THE NOVEL IN THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY

Several reasons can explain the rise, then popularity, of the novel in the early 18th century.

- The increase in literacy meant that there was a huge demand for entertaining literature, mainly among the middle-class and women.
- The middle class was becoming prosperous and could now better afford to buy books. They constituted an economic readership.
- Non-religious literature was no longer frowned upon as it had been by the Puritans.
- The new genre no longer described exceptional or allegorical* characters but realistic ones, often familiar to its main readers: with the novel, it is possible to speak of the democratisation of literature.
- There was a growing interest in feelings, which the novel was best suited to describe and women's voices were heard for the first time.
- The genre combined entertainment (a plot, suspense) with morality, even if the word took on very different meanings with, for example, Defoe, Richardson and Fielding.
- The novel reflects an empiricist search for truth. (→ p. 75)
- Contrary to poetry, which used refined and often artificial language, the style of the novel tended to be simple and direct, easier therefore to understand for those who had not had a classical education.

¹⁷ pave the way for: préparer

■ Defoe

Born in a family of non-conformists, **Daniel Defoe** (1660-1731) took part in the political and religious controversies of the time, defending William's policies. He wrote extensively and set forth his views on a vast range of topics in essays, political pamphlets, journalism and satirical* poems before turning to the novel. Defoe's novels relate the adventures of characters who struggle for survival in difficult circumstances and progress through experience; they also reflect the Puritan faith in hard work and a search for economic security and self-improvement. In *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), usually considered the first English novel, a sailor shipwrecked on a desert island has to show self-reliance, endurance and ingenuity to survive; the novel also portrays his spiritual progress and the evolution from primitive man to civilized man. The book was extremely successful, the desert island proving a fascinating setting for the readers, reminiscent as it was of travellers' tales from far-away countries.

Moll Flanders (1722) narrates the economic progress and setbacks of a woman forced into stealing and prostitution (a moll was then a prostitute) to survive in London. Defoe's middle-class readers would have found this account of a life outside their social circle fascinating and sexually titillating¹⁸. By choosing a woman as narrator and by highlighting women's dependence, Defoe proved an early feminist. His last novel, *Roxana* (1724), further developed that subject.

■ Richardson and Fielding

No two writers could be more different than Richardson and Fielding and they indeed chose to write in two contrasting modes – the epistolary* and the picaresque* – and to propose two distinct interpretations of the word virtue. The epistolary form chosen by Richardson reveals intimate emotions, conveys verisimilitude¹⁹ (as there is no intervening authorial voice) and in the case of multiple correspondents offers conflicting points of view. The peripatetic²⁰ nature of the picaresque mode makes for easier satire since a whole gallery of characters is encountered on the road. Picaresque* novels also show the hero's progress from innocence to experience.

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), who came from a lower-middle class family and was apprenticed to a printer, became a successful printer, and at the age of 51 was asked to compose a letter-writing manual for a variety of occasions. From it grew *Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), an epistolary* novel. Richardson was a low-church* moralist, whose aim was to reform as well as to entertain. Pamela, a young, virtuous maidservant, rejects the advances of Mr B., her libertine master, since yielding outside marriage would be immoral. Little by little, however, we sense her growing attraction to him. Recognizing Pamela's exceptional virtue, Mr B. eventually reforms

18. titillating; é moustillant

19. verisimilitude; vraisemblance

20. peripatetic; itinérant, qui a trait au voyage

and proposes marriage to her. The novel was immediately popular. The epistolary* style made for slow progress in the plot and for psychological suspense (would Pamela resist temptation?), and the setting – an upper-middle-class family – was new and captivating for readers, who discovered a mirror of their own world. The novel also offered a subtle analysis of the heroine's emotions and, since there was no outside narrator, allowed the reader to judge her own self-analysis and responses.

With *Clarissa* (1747-48), Richardson made both structure and contents more complex. Pressed by her family to marry Mr Solmes, an elderly neighbour who would enrich the family, Clarissa Harlow, who does not love him, is led to elope with Lovelace, a seductive libertine, who promises her marriage. He imprisons then rapes her, before repenting and offering marriage, but Clarissa chooses death instead. There is a double exchange of letters in this novel (Clarissa with her friend Anna, Lovelace with Belford) giving us conflicting points of view which reveal their mutual attraction, yet inability to understand each other. Besides, the material situation of the Harlow family, its interest in extending their land through Clarissa's marriage, is explained in detail, further anchoring the book into its social background. Richardson also offers a reflection on male and female roles as he presents women as victims. The success of the novel was enormous, not just in England but in Europe too (it was translated into French by l'Abbé Prévost), where a whole generation cried over Clarissa's death.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754) started his career as a playwright, writing satires* critical of Walpole, so infuriating him that the Licensing Act (1737) obliged Fielding to turn to the law and to journalism. He became a barrister and eventually a Justice of the Peace.

His first work of fiction was a reaction to Richardson's *Pamela*, a book he found sanctimonious and dangerous, as it taught young women to use their virtue as a commodity²¹. In 1741 he published *Shamela* (a portmanteau* word: shame + Pamela), a short burlesque* in which Shamela is calculating and impudently tries to 'catch' her master.

Fielding followed with *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1741), which starts as a parody of *Pamela*. Joseph, Pamela's brother, inspired by his sister's virtue, rejects the advances of his mistress and is dismissed. But the novel then becomes a picaresque novel in its own right, relating Joseph's adventures as he tries to be reunited with the woman he loves, accompanied by Parson Adams, a model of Christian charity and goodness.

His best-known novel, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), was Fielding's answer to *Clarissa* and relates the bawdy²² adventures of Tom, brought up in the home of Squire Allworthy, but expelled when his rival for the love of Sophia falsely accuses him of bad behaviour. His picaresque* travels include sexual adventures, mishaps,

21. a commodity; une marchandise.

22. bawdy; paillard

Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (1749), V, 5: the satirical and the picaresque

Molly remained a few Moments in Silence, and then bursting into a Flood of Tears, she began to upbraid¹ him in the following Words: 'And this is your Love for me, to forsake² me in this manner, now you have ruined me! How often, when I have told you that all Men are false and Perjury³ alike, and grow tired of us as soon as ever they have had their wicked Wills of us, how often have you sworn you would never forsake me! And can you be such a perjury Man after all? What signifies all the Riches in the World to me without you, now you have gained my Heart, so you have – you have –? Why do you mention another Man⁴ to me? I can never love any other Man as long as I live. All other Men are nothing to me. If the greatest Squire in all the country would come a suiting⁵ to me to-morrow, I would not give my Company to him. No, I shall always hate and despise the whole Sex⁶ for your sake.' – She was proceeding thus, when an Accident put a stop to her Tongue, before it had run out half its Career⁷. The Room, or rather Garret, in which Molly lay, being up one Pair of Stairs, that is to say, at the Top of the House, was of a sloping Figure, resembling the great Delta of the Greeks. The English Reader may perhaps form a better Idea of it, by being told that it was impossible to stand upright anywhere but⁸ in the Middle. Now, as this room wanted the Conveniency⁹ of a Closet, Molly had, to supply that Defect, nailed up an old Rug against the Rafters¹⁰ of the House, which enclosed a little Hole where her best Apparel¹¹, such as the remains of that Sack which we have formerly mentioned, some Caps, and other things with which she had lately provided herself, were hung up and secured from the Dust. This enclosed place exactly fronted¹² the Foot of the Bed, to which, indeed, the Rug hung so near, that it served in a manner to supply the Want of Curtains. Now, whether Molly, in the Agonies of her Rage, pushed this Rug with her Feet, or Jones might touch it; or whether the Pin or Nail gave way of its own accord, I am not certain; but as Molly pronounced those last Words, which are recorded above, the wicked Rug got loose from its Fastning¹³, and discovered every thing hid behind it; where among other female Utensils¹⁴ appeared – (with Shame I write it, and with Sorrow will it be read) – the philosopher Square¹⁵, in a Posture (for the Place would not near admit his standing upright) as ridiculous as can possibly be conceived. The Posture, indeed, in which he stood, was not greatly unlike that of a Soldier who is tyed neck and heels; or rather resembling the Attitude in which we often see Fellows in the public Streets of London, who are not suffering but deserving Punishment by so standing. He had a Nightcap belonging to Molly on his Head, and his two large Eyes, the Moment the Rug fell, stared directly at Jones; so that when the Idea of Philosophy was added to the Figure now discovered, it would have been very difficult for any Spectator to have refrained from immoderate Laughter. I question not but the Surprize of the Reader will be here equal to that of Jones; as the Suspicions which must arise from the Appearance of this wise and grave Man in such a Place, may seem so inconsistent with¹⁶ that Character which he hath, doubtless, maintained hitherto¹⁷, in the Opinion of every one.

1. upbraid: reproach. 2. forsake: abandon. 3. a Perjury: *un parjure, un faux serment*. 4. another Man: Tom has just told Molly that he hoped she would find another man who would marry her. 5. a suiting: courting. 6. the whole Sex: all men. 7. its career: its course. 8. but: except. 9. wanted the Conveniency: did not have the advantage. 10. the Rafters: *les poutres*. 11. Apparel: clothes. 12. fronted: was in front of. 13. got loose from its Fastning: *l'attache se défit*. 14. Utensils: *ustensiles*. 15. Square: a philosopher – a serious and grave man – in charge of Tom's education. 16. inconsistent with: incompatible with. 17. hitherto: until now.

■ THE CONTEXT

Tom Jones is by now in love with Sophia, but he has also learnt that Molly, an immodest maid who practically seduced him, was expecting a child and believes himself to be the father. Seized by remorse, he decides to 'compensate' Molly with a sum of money and with that purpose in mind goes to visit her. She is in bed. Tom has just explained to her that Mr Allworthy, his guardian, has forbidden him to see her in future, but that he will try to provide for her as best he can. The passage begins with Molly's reaction.

■ A THEATRICAL PASSAGE

Fielding had begun his career as a playwright and his familiarity with the theatrical genre is to be felt in most of his novels. Here, the passage is like a succession of three scenes: (1) Molly's reaction of apparent despair (lines 1-11), (2) the narrator's detailed description of Molly's room (lines 12-26) leading to the fall of the rug (3) the discovery of Square behind a curtain (lines 26-40). Such theatricality is underlined by the use of the words 'spectator' (l. 36) and 'curtain' (l. 22). What is interesting is that the movement of these scenes is from melodrama to comedy. The poor abandoned maid of the first paragraph, who seems to be the victim of an 18th century libertine, and who is a stock character in melodrama, turns into a calculating young woman with very little moral sense. But we also find humour of situation and farce here. It is a stock scene in comedy: the husband comes in and discovers the lover hiding behind a curtain. Except that here it is a lover discovering another lover.

– Farce is underlined by a wealth of details and the scene is close to the pictorial, close to a painting by Hogarth, in which the characters are usually seen on a "stage" and close to caricature (Square is described with two features only: the nightcap and the astonished stare: "two large Eyes". It is a sort of emblematic representation of the Ridiculous.)

Such theatrical effects help to make the passage more striking and ridiculous – an ideal way of conveying satire, particularly when it is underlined by linguistic comedy.

■ LINGUISTIC COMEDY

The passage is mainly narrative and only Molly's words are quoted (l. 3-11). Why are they quoted? One reason is that Molly is a comic character, and that Fielding delights in exposing her absurdity. Hence her constant exaggeration ("all/ never / as long as / greatest / always"), and the contrast between her pompous tone ("All Men are..." line 4) and the incorrect language that follows ("all Men are false and

Perjury..."). She also speaks in clichés ("forsake / ruined / false / Wicked Wills / all the Riches in the world / gained my Heart.."), staging herself like the heroine of one of the worst possible sentimental plays.

– Such comedy is heightened by the contrast between what Molly professes and what is actually taking place, the difference between words and actions. "I shall always hate and despise the whole Sex..." when another man is actually in the room.

– The narrator's playfulness is also a source of comedy. The fact that Square is soon going to be exposed is something that greatly rejoices the narrator, who puts off the moment of revelation, even pretending not to know why the rug fell and proposing three possibilities to create suspense.

– The narrator's amused tone is also felt through the use of irony (Molly's "Agonies", the fact that Square's posture was "not greatly unlike" - to mean exactly the same as, Molly's room compared to the great "Delta of the Greeks" (l. 4). He also makes use of personification, calling the rug "wicked" (l. 25) and brings together unexpected terms, with perhaps the funniest expression of all being "other female utensils" (l. 27), at the end of the third paragraph, which reduces Square to a mere "utensil" to serve women's pleasure.

– Finally comedy also springs from the scurrilous (coarse) images Square is associated with, compared as he is to a trussed up soldier being punished for moral dereliction, and to people who shamelessly squat in the streets, using them as a privy (toilet).

■ FIELDING'S SATIRICAL MESSAGE

Molly's and Square's nakedness is symbolic here. They reveal their true selves. The rug is the drapery of pretension behind which true nature appears - hypocrisy for Molly, and absurdity for Square.

– Molly's hypocrisy, her profession of love for Tom when in fact any man will suit her, is conveyed by the shift in her speech from 'you' to 'other men' to 'any other Man', to 'All other Men' and finally to 'the whole Sex'. Within two sentences another man becomes the whole sex. We therefore see the whole speech as a lie, announcing the revelation that her actions give the lie to her protestations of innocence. Fielding was fascinated by the way words reflect character, by the way their misuse reveals moral failure.

– As for Square, whom we have earlier seen rejecting love and the flesh, the narrator chooses to expose his hypocrisy through the use of absurdity. Square (whose name symbolizes a logical mind, since he is a philosopher) is put in a triangle here, in "the great Delta of the Greeks", which partly explains the length of the topographical description of the bedroom. Besides, he is obliged to squat, so once again his squareness gives way to a grotesque shape. The geometrical metaphor is carried on with the shape of the room which means that he cannot stand "upright". Behind standing upright, we read moral rectitude, and we understand that Square's apparent moral rectitude was nothing but pretence.

– In fact the only one who is standing upright here is Tom Jones, since Molly is probably still in bed. Tom never hides, and here does not try to avoid his responsibility towards Molly. Fielding's satire is aimed at Molly, not because she is no better than a prostitute, but because she is a hypocrite and cares for money more than for her lovers. It is also aimed at Square, not because of his relationship with Molly, but because of the gap between what he professes and what he does. Tom is morally as blameable as Square, but he is frank and open about it.

Thanks to his theatrical approach, Fielding allows his characters to condemn themselves through their own words and actions, while the narrator guides the readers' response with his comments and irony.

– Tom is learning not to judge by appearances, a typical step in the development of the picaresque hero.



THE
ROMANTIC
AGE
(1780-1830)



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY



| THE AGE | | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|-----------|--|--|
| 1780 | Gordon Riots | |
| 1781 | | Fuseli: <i>The Nightmare</i> Iron Bridge completed |
| 1782-1783 | | Wright of Derby: <i>Cotton Mills by Night</i> |
| 1783 | American independence won. | |
| 1784 | Wesley founds Methodist church. | |
| 1785 | | Cowper: <i>The Task</i> Gainsborough: <i>The Morning Walk</i> |
| 1786 | | Burns: <i>Poems</i> Beckford: <i>Vathek</i> |
| 1787-1823 | | Royal Pavilion, Brighton |
| 1788 | | <i>The Times</i> first published |
| 1789 | French Revolution; Washington elected first US President. | Blake: <i>Songs of Innocence</i> |
| 1790 | | Burke: <i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i> |
| 1791 | | Paine: <i>The Rights of Man, I</i> |
| 1792 | | Mary Wollstonecraft: <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> Gilpin: <i>Essay on Picturesque Beauty</i> |
| 1793 | The Terror in France; war with France | |
| 1794 | | Radcliffe: <i>The Mysteries of Udolpho</i> Blake: <i>Songs of Experience</i> |
| 1796 | | Lewis: <i>The Monk</i> |
| 1798 | | Malthus: <i>Essay on Population</i> Wordsworth and Coleridge: <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> |
| 1800 | England and Ireland united. | |
| 1801 | The General Enclosure Act further restricts access to common land. | |

| | | |
|---------|--|--|
| 1805 | Battle of Trafalgar | Wordsworth: <i>The Prelude</i> |
| 1807 | Slave trade abolished in Britain. | |
| 1811 | Luddite machine-breaking riots | Nash begins Regent Street |
| 1812 | | Byron: <i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, I & II</i> Turner: <i>Snow Storm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps</i> |
| 1813 | | Austen: <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> |
| 1814 | | Scott: <i>Waverley</i> |
| 1815 | Napoleon defeated at Waterloo; Corn law passed to protect corn prices against imports. | |
| 1816 | | Austen: <i>Emma</i> Coleridge: ' <i>Kubla Khan</i> ', <i>Christabel</i> Elgin Marbles bought by Britain. |
| 1817 | | Constable: <i>Flatford Mill</i> |
| 1818 | | Mary Shelley: <i>Frankenstein</i> |
| 1819 | Peterloo massacre (Reform meeting brutally suppressed) | Scott: <i>Ivanhoe</i> |
| 1819-24 | | Byron: <i>Don Juan</i> |
| 1820 | Accession of George IV | Shelley: <i>Prometheus Unbound</i> Keats: <i>Poems</i> |
| 1821 | | De Quincey: <i>Confessions of an English Opium-Eater</i> Constable: <i>The Hay Wain</i> |
| 1824 | | National Gallery founded |
| 1825 | Legalization of trade unions; first passenger railway opened. | |
| 1827-38 | | Turner: <i>Picturesque Views in England and Wales</i> |
| 1829 | Catholic Emancipation; Stephenson's Rocket | |
| 1830 | Accession of William IV | Tennyson: <i>Poems, Chiefly Lyrical</i> |
| 1832 | Great Reform Bill extends voting rights. | Tennyson: <i>Lady of Shalott</i> |

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 1833 | Factory Act; beginning of Oxford Movement; slavery abolished in British Empire; Tolpuddle Martyrs transported. | Carlyle: <i>Sartor Resartus</i> |
| 1834 | Beginning of Chartist movement; Poor Law Amendment Act creates workhouses. | Talbot's first photograph |
| 1836 | | University of London founded. |
| 1837 | Accession of Queen Victoria | Dickens: <i>Oliver Twist</i> Carlyle: <i>The French Revolution</i> |

THEATRE – FICTION AND PROSE – POETRY – ARCHITECTURE – PAINTING – MUSIC – CINEMA/PHOTOGRAPHY

MR. CROTCHET.— *The sentimental against the rational, the intuitive against the inductive, the ornamental against the useful, the intense against the tranquil, the romantic against the classical; these are great and interesting controversies, which I should like, before I die, to see satisfactorily settled.*
(T.L. Peacock, *Crotchet Castle* (1831), Chapter II.)

As the above quotation humorously shows, the period that extends from the late 18th century revolutions to the first 19th century reform movements was riven¹ by ideological debates and controversies, some of them still raging today: innocence vs experience, freedom vs repression, individual vs social responsibility.

The Romantics were not dreamers turning inward and living in seclusion; they were deeply affected by the revolutionary fervour in France, reacting to it first with enthusiasm, then disillusion after the Terror and its bloodshed. Two quotations from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* illustrate this disenchantment, the shift from 'O pleasant exercise of hope and joy! Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive' to 'these times of fear, /This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown'.

The debate divided the country. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Edmund Burke condemned the Revolution for transforming historical evolution and

1. riven: déchiré, fendu

tradition into a 'blank page', to which Thomas Paine's answer was *Rights of Man* (1791), which stated that a revolution is justified when a government does not defend the natural rights of its people. In his more measured *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), William Godwin defended a fairer distribution of wealth to remove poverty and asserted that reason could lead to the perfectibility of the race. His plea for² social justice is also the subject of his novel *Caleb Williams* (1794).

These responses are to be seen within the larger context of emancipation and liberation movements as literature engaged with all the social issues of the time: against slavery (Hannah More's 'Slavery: a Poem', 1788; A.L. Barbauld's 'Epistle to William Wilberforce'), for the rights of women (Mary Wollstonecraft), for the reform of working conditions (Robert Owen's *A New View of Society*, 1813, and his transformation of New Lanark Mill into a model factory), and for a fairer society (the Jacobin novels of Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage and William Godwin).

The Romantic age was a period of profound social and economic changes as it witnessed the increasing industrialization of the country (Blake's 'dark Satanic mills') and the exodus of rural labourers, left workless by the enclosure movement, towards the cities, where they formed a new 'working class', often living in dire³ conditions. Economic decline in the aftermath of the war with France, *laissez-faire* policies, child labour, appalling working conditions and unemployment led to social unrest and repressive measures.

One possible response was to leave the city for nature, which could help man fulfil himself and find truth in his own imagination and feelings. Among nature and humble life, closer to a primitive state, more powerful emotions could develop. It was a reaction against Augustan neo-classicism, with its rational, scientific approaches, and instead a celebration of emotions and intuition. Rejecting Locke's ideas, the romantics believed that the creative powers of imagination could change and regenerate the social order. Such a reaction explains their interest in forms of rebellion or in escape from contemporary society: the irrational and the supernatural; the figures of rebels and outcast (Manfred, Prometheus); children (who are innocent and still capable of change); travelling and wandering: exoticism.

Patronage had by then almost disappeared and the Romantic writer was now a solitary character who had little or no financial support and, in spite of his newly acquired status as a man of genius, often ended his life in severe poverty, a typical spiritual outcast.

The celebration of imagination also found expression in the arts, where portrait painting gave way to the grotesque and supernatural paintings of Henry Fuseli, which convey the same dark romanticism as Gothic novels, and to landscape painting, reflecting a new vision of nature. The faithful landscapes of John Constable, which reflect subtle variations in light and colour, will later give way to the more sublime and dramatic scenes by Turner, where man seems dwarfed by the elements.

2. a plea for: un appel à

3. dire: terrible, affreux

POETRY

■ Two Scottish Poets

Robert Burns (1759-1796) is perhaps the first Scottish writer in whose works a Scottish literary tradition can be felt. Himself a farmer, he was close to the land, to the animal world, and to suffering, as can be seen in these well-known lines, written after he had wrecked the nest – and the whole world – of a field mouse with his plough: 'But Mousie, thou art no thy-lane⁴, / In proving foresight may be vain: / The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, / Gang aft agley⁵, / An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain, / For promis'd joy!' (To A Mouse)

Burns wrote about Ayrshire, its nature, its agricultural life, its customs, its Calvinist church and superstitions, always a defender of the poor and of the common man, using a large variety of popular poetic forms, and in the Scottish vernacular. Some of his poems ('To a Mouse' or 'To a Louse') and songs ('O my luv's like a red, red rose' or 'Auld Lang Syne') are much loved and have become part of the Scottish literary canon. He is Scotland's national poet and his birthday is celebrated every year on January 25th, 'Burns Night'.

Burns also collected and wrote Scottish songs as well as revived love lyrics with striking simple imagery (*Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786)).

Although best-known now for his novels, Walter Scott (1771-1832) too was fascinated by Border⁶ ballads^{*}, which he published in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3). His best-known poems are Scottish romances^{*}, set in the 16th century and describing love and war amid dramatic landscapes: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), *Marmion* (1808), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810).

■ Pre-Romantic poetry

From an early age, William Blake (1757-1827) saw visions of angels and biblical figures who talked to him. He became a printer and engraver and read extensively (the Bible, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Swedenborg). He was also part of a group of radical thinkers (Godwin, Thomas Paine) who supported the American and French Revolutions. Blake engraved and illustrated his own works, using relief etching⁷, then colouring the plates by hand, the result evoking medieval manuscripts.

Blake believed that man is divine but that his stay on earth has cut him off from these origins. Only imagination could help him recover his vital energy, 'cleanse the doors of perception' and see beyond his senses. Hence his rejection of science, materialism, reason, and all moral and religious codes and constraints which

4. thy-lane: alone (Scottish dialect)

5. Gang aft agley: go oft awry (Scottish dialect)

6. Border: Scottish Border: south-east Scotland, close to the border with England

7. relief etching: *gravure à l'eau forte en relief*

shackle⁸ man's intuition and spirit. Newton, Locke, church and government, as well as Urizen, the repressive God of the Old Testament (contrasting with Christ), all represented tyranny for him. Blake's religion was unconventional and highly personal, based on the eternal conflict between Urizen and Orc, the latter symbolizing freedom and rebellion.

Blake believed that children represented a prelapsarian⁹ state of grace and his *Songs of Innocence* (1789) describe a pastoral world in which children are holy, pure, free and happy. The simple diction and rhythm of these poems are influenced by children's songs and ballads^{*}. He followed with *Songs of Experience* (1794), in which children and men are now seen as oppressed by social constraints, hypocrisy and materialism. The lamb is now replaced by the 'tyger' ('Did he who made the Lamb make thee?', Blake asks), nature by the world of the city, with its prostitutes and young children working as chimney-sweepers, freedom by bondage¹⁰, the uncorrupted soul by the lapsed¹¹ soul.

In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), Blake criticizes the subordination of women and advocates free sexuality. Blake's prophetic books (*America, A Prophecy*, 1793, *Europe, A Prophecy*, 1794, *The Book of Thel*, 1789, *The Book of Urizen*, 1794, *The Book of Los*, 1795, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820) present a complex, and often obscure, mythology of his own.

London

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear:
How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.
But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.



Illustration by William Blake for his poem London.

8. to shackle: *enchaîner, entraver*

9. prelapsarian: *édenique (before the fall)*

10. bondage: *esclavage, asservissement*

11. lapsed: *déchu*

■ The first generation of Romantic poets: the cult of nature

Also called 'Lake Poets' because they lived in the Lake District, Wordsworth and Coleridge celebrated communion with nature.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) studied at Cambridge, then travelled to France, as he was sympathetic to the revolutionary cause. The outbreak of war with France prevented him from marrying Annette Vaillon, with whom he had a daughter, and he returned to England, where he became increasingly conservative. He settled first in Somerset, where he became friends with Coleridge, then spent the last fifty years of his life in the Lake District, with his sister Dorothy, finding in rural life a refuge from the growing industrialization of cities.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were neighbours in 1797 and published *Lyrical Ballads, With a Few Other Poems*, Wordsworth contributing poems about 'common life' while Coleridge's poems dealt with the supernatural. In 1800 a second edition contained a 'Preface' by Wordsworth, often viewed as a manifesto for English Romanticism.

THE PREFACE TO THE LYRICAL BALLADS

The 1800 Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* was written by Wordsworth and constitutes a break with neo-classical poetic conventions, the use of artificial language and poetic diction*, and the importance of decorum, which meant that each genre should have its proper language (elevated for the epic*, for instance). For Wordsworth, the aim of poetry should instead be to convey the "essential passions of the heart" as simply and directly as possible, the poet being 'a man speaking to men'.

How is this best to be achieved?

(1) It is among simple people, in rural life, that elementary feelings and passions are most forcefully expressed. Incidents and situations from common life therefore become acceptable poetic themes: 'Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated...'

(2) Wordsworth adopts the simple, 'unelaborated' language of common men and describes his poetry as: 'an experiment, (...) how far by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.'

(3) The poet is an ordinary man speaking to other men with his 'heightened sensibility', poetry is a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling".

The influence and healing power of nature on man and the influence of memory on the present are the major themes of Wordsworth's poetry. Nature helps man reach harmony, heightened consciousness and transcendental insight, for Wordsworth's poetry is about the poet's subjectivity. The poet himself becomes the main subject of poetry. In *Tintern Abbey* (1798), the poet revisits the Wye Valley after several years, and experiences the power of memory, which can give added power to perceptions and bring an awareness of transcendence. In *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* (1802-04), the growth of the child is seen as gradual loss, yet this loss becomes compensation as memory gives man a kind of immortality.

The Prelude, written in tranquil and dignified blank verse*, is a long autobiographical* poem which was published after his death. Wordsworth describes the development of his sensibility and mind and shows the importance of childhood for the shaping of one's identity. The senses can easily be overcome by experience when it occurs, but imagination can soften and recreate it through memory. The theme of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth said, was 'no other than the very heart of man'. In nature, he finds trance-like moments of insight, moments of intense communication with nature, which helps him enter into the life of things, and which he calls 'spots of time'*.

Like his friends Wordsworth and Southey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was a radical in the aftermath of the French Revolution and his ideas led him to plan an ideal society, a 'Pantisocracy' in Pennsylvania. The scheme never came into being and Coleridge later became disillusioned with the revolution. He devoted his last years to literary criticism. Contrary to Wordsworth, whose starting point is the everyday world of nature, Coleridge offers a darker vision, linking nature to the mysterious, the mystical and the supernatural. He collaborated with Wordsworth on *The Lyrical Ballads*, sharing with him a belief in the regenerative power of nature and imagination. Coleridge's 'conversation poems' ('Frost at Midnight', 'This Lime Tree Bower my Prison'), written in the 1790s, are monologues in which the poet starts from a homely situation which leads to some epiphany*. Coleridge's best-known poems are his three mystery or daemonic poems, in which man is confronted with the mystical and the supernatural, which reveal the hidden energy of the mind.

• *'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'* (1798), is a medieval ballad*, which relates the story of a mariner who sails south and shoots an albatross. A curse falls upon the ship, which is becalmed, the sailors die but he remains alive and suffering until, looking at the ocean, he blesses the fantastic sea-creatures which he sees crawling upon it and is reunited with nature and the divine. The drought¹² gives way to rain and he returns home to tell his tale over and over again. The killing of the bird was a crime against nature, followed by punishment, guilt, repentance and redemption. The short ballad stanzas*, with their pattern of repetition and alliteration* are particularly haunting:

12. a drought: une (période de) sécheresse

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

- 'Kubla Khan' (1816), which Coleridge said was composed after an opium dream, describes the stately home created by a Mongol emperor, a real paradise uniting contraries, full of symbols of creation springing from chaos and the unconscious. It is followed by a description of the Romantic artist, driven mad by inspiration.
- 'Christabel' (1816), set in medieval times, is about an evil supernatural creature who takes the shape of a femme fatale to work evil.

In the early 19th century, as Coleridge was increasingly ravaged by alcohol and opium, the mood of his poems became more sombre. 'Dejection: an Ode', which describes the failure of the poetic imagination, testifies to this spiritual crisis. However, he went on to write *Biographia Literaria* (1817), in which he expounded¹³ his views about philosophy and literature.

FANCY AND IMAGINATION

In his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) Coleridge reflected on literature and the poetic imagination. It was there that he made the distinction between fancy and imagination. He considered fancy as a logical faculty, linked to primary imagination, but limited to combining or rearranging one's memories or experiences. Imagination, a higher faculty, can create and reshape: 'It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.'

A friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Robert Southey, shared their political ideals before he later joined the Tory ranks. He wrote ballads and epic poems (*Madoc*, 1805; *A Vision of Judgement*, 1820).

■ The second generation of Romantic poets: the poet as rebel

The Romantic poets of the following generation were ardent supporters of social and political reforms and often viewed the first generation of poets' abandonment of their radical sympathies as something of a betrayal.

13. to expound: *exposer, expliquer*

The life of John Clare (1793-1864), a farm labourer without any formal education, was marked by poverty and depression, and he spent the last 23 years of his life in a lunatic asylum. His poetry (*Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, 1820; *The Village Minstrel*, 1821; *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 1827) deplures the enclosure movement, which leaves the poor dispossessed and affects fields, animals and trees. Clare was a keen observer of natural life, almost a naturalist, and the changes he saw in the countryside left him with a deep sense of loss.

The social backgrounds of John Clare and George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) were poles apart. A Lord and the owner of Newstead Abbey, Byron was educated at Cambridge. He was handsome and liked action but had a club foot that he was very sensitive about. When he was 21, he travelled to Spain and Greece, where he started writing a long poem about his travels, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Back in England, where he had become successful and lionized¹⁴, he led a dissipated life (typical of the Regency), rejecting conventional morality; his marriage did not last and in 1816 he had to leave England for good after rumours of an affair with his half-sister and became an exile. From then on he saw Britain as a land of hypocrisy and tyranny. He died in Greece as he was about to fight for the country's independence.

What made Byron immediately famous when the first two Cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published in 1812 was the character of the poet-hero: dark, moody, unhappy, a wanderer like Byron, fleeing the emptiness of society. Byron went on to write several oriental tales, *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Giaour* (1813), and *The Corsair* (1814). The Byronic heroes of these poems and of *Manfred* (1817), a verse drama whose hero is an outcast and a rebel, are mysterious, melancholy travellers who defy conventions and whose personalities merge into that of their creator.

Byron is also the heir to the Augustan age. In 1818, he started writing *Don Juan*, still unfinished when he died six years later, in which social rebellion is now expressed through satire* and irony*. This burlesque* poem follows the hero through a series of adventures which are comic but also constitute a satire* on the society of his time. Don Juan is sent abroad by his mother to put an end to his affair with Donna Julia, a married woman. He is shipwrecked on a Greek island, where he is saved by Haidée, the daughter of a Greek pirate, and falls in love with her. When Haidée's father returns, Haidée dies and Juan is sold as a slave in Constantinople to a sultana who falls in love with him. Further adventures, including Juan's fight in the Russian army, finally take him to England, giving Byron the opportunity of a savage attack against English society. All through the poem, Juan is presented as innocent, more sinned against than sinning, thus inverting the traditional myth.

The narrator's voice is constantly present, constantly digressing and commenting on his hero's actions with wit*, anger and cynicism, mixing formal and colloquial styles. Amoral and sometimes blasphemous, the poem marks a reaction against the early Romantic movement. It is written in *ottava rima**, which Byron uses with great

14. to lionize: *aduler*

virtuosity, particularly in the final couplet*, which often carries deflation¹⁵ (a legacy of mock-heroic Augustan verse), as in the following stanza. (Don Alfonso, Julia's husband, suspects her infidelity and has returned home. But Juan is quickly hidden in a cupboard and Alfonso has to apologize until he discovers Juan's shoes.

Alfonso closed his speech, and begged her pardon,
Which Julia half withheld, and then half granted,
And laid conditions he thought very hard on,
Denying several little things he wanted:
He stood like Adam lingering near his garden,
With useless penitence perplexed and haunted;
Beseeching she no further would refuse,
When, lo! He stumbled o'er a pair of shoes.
(Canto I, stanza CLXXX)

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), the son of a Baronet, was educated at Eton and Oxford, from which he was expelled because of a pamphlet he had written on atheism. A friend of William Godwin, he was a radical in politics and shocked England with his atheism and scandalous life: he had abandoned his first wife, who later committed suicide, to run away with the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. He left for Italy, where he drowned in the Gulf of Spezia in 1822.

Not surprisingly considering his life, Shelley's poetry is more concerned with political and social issues than that of his contemporaries. With anarchic ideals, he condemned all forms of tyranny and authority. Shelley believed that poets could change the world through their search for beauty; in *A Defence of Poetry* (1840) he called them 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world'.

Queen Mab (1813) criticizes conventional religion and morality; *Alastor* (1816) asserts the need for social commitment, *The Mask of Anarchy* (pub. 1832) is a response to the Peterloo massacre, while in *Ode to the West Wind*, written in 1819 in *terza rima**, the wild wind drives away the dead leaves of the old order and symbolizes the poet's desire for human freedom.

Prometheus Unbound (1820) rewrites the Greek myth of Prometheus, who was punished for stealing fire from the gods to give it to mankind. He exemplifies the rebel who stands against tyranny, yet endures his punishment without pleading with Zeus, only supported by his mother, Earth, and by his bride Asia (Love). Demogorgon (the Primal Power) will finally overthrow Jupiter and the reign of love will follow.

Shelley also wrote elegies* (like *Adonais*, on the death of Keats) and Odes* celebrating freedom ('To a Sky-Lark', 'Ode to the West Wind', 'The Cloud').

The short life of John Keats (1795-1821) was marked by suffering: he saw both his mother and brother die of tuberculosis, before catching the disease himself. He was

15. deflation: *retombée*

apprenticed to a surgeon and apothecary, but decided to devote his life to poetry. He died of tuberculosis at the age of 25, in Italy, unable to fulfil his love for Fanny Brawne.

Keats's poems, many of them inspired by Greek mythology, are based on the contrast between the everyday world (marked by the transience¹⁶ of human life, by pain, decay and death) and the world of imagination, which can create eternal beauty. The poet immerses himself in beauty and love, dreams and illusions, which provide an escape from the suffering of the world, only to realise that a return to reality is unavoidable. All things of beauty are threatened and bound to die, love does not last, dreams come to an end, - an echo of the poet's own sense of mortality.

The feeling of evanescence and decline is often linked in his poems to the presence of ambivalent women: in 'The Eve of St Agnes', Madeline dreams of her lover before he appears and takes her away; the knight in 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', meets a fairy lady but wakes up miserable and lonely; in 'Lamia' a sorceress is transformed into a beautiful woman and seduces Lycius.

Keats's great *Odes** ('Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'To a Nightingale', 'To Psyche', 'On Melancholy', 'On Indolence', 'To Autumn') follow a similar pattern. The poet seeks refuge in the sensual communion with a 'thing of beauty' (the nightingale's song, the urn), but reconciling beauty and permanence proves impossible: the moment of aesthetic transcendence cannot be kept up for long, which leads to a deep sense of loss. Keats's language in these odes is rich and sensuous, with a profusion of images, and makes extensive use of synaesthesia*.

Keats coined the expression 'Negative Capability'*¹⁶, which was for him 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason -.' This allows the imagination to be active and accept whatever the mind receives in a state of heightened perception.

DRAMA

The Romantic poets experimented with plays in verse, but they were not performed. Few new plays were written and produced during these years but the theatre remained popular, with elaborate sets and costumes, the revivals of plays by Shakespeare and Elizabethan playwrights often used to support the political allegiances of the time. Some actors met with considerable success as it was fashionable to compare the passionate performances of actors such as Sarah Siddons, William Charles Macready, Edmund Kean and John Philip Kemble, and their style of acting gave rise to much dramatic criticism in magazines and essays by Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859), William Hazlitt (1778-1830) and Charles Lamb (1775-1834).

16. the transience: *le caractère éphémère*

THE NOVEL AND PROSE

LADY CLARINDA.— Well, I will tell you a secret: I am writing a novel.

CAPTAIN FITZCHROME.— A novel!

LADY CLARINDA.— Yes, a novel. And I shall get a little finery by it: trinkets and fal-lals¹⁷, which I cannot get from papa. You must know I have been reading several fashionable novels, the fashionable this, and the fashionable that; and I thought to myself, why I can do better than any of these myself. So I wrote a chapter or two, and sent them as a specimen to Mr. Puffall, the book-seller, telling him they were to be a part of the fashionable something or other, and he offered me, I will not say how much, to finish it in three volumes, and let him pay all the newspapers for recommending it as the work of a lady of quality, who had made very free with the characters of her acquaintance.

(T. L. Peacock, *Crotchet Castle*, 1831)

The novel was by far the most popular genre during this period, encouraged by the large number of circulating libraries, which made the reading of books affordable to most. The cult of feelings and sensibility explains why the genre so much appealed to women, as both readers and writers.

■ The Gothic Novel

In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757-59), Edmund Burke had stressed the importance of feelings and imagination, the sublime causing awe or terror, the strongest possible emotion. It finds its best illustration in the Gothic novel, which was extremely popular in the last two decades of the 18th century.

Set in old castles or abbeys, among sublime alpine landscapes, they explore the terrors of innocent and helpless heroines who have been imprisoned by villains preying on their beauty or money. The dark underground tunnels and dungeons, the ominous noises heard at night stand for the unconscious and allow the heroine to give free rein to her imagination and terrors.

Hundreds of such stories were written, most of them rather poor, but the works of Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) stand out with their subtle descriptions of feelings and sublime Alpine landscapes reminiscent of paintings.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), her best-known novel, an orphan, Emily de St. Aubert, is carried by her sinister uncle to his castle in the Apennines, where dark, frightening incidents take place before she manages to escape and be reunited with the young man she loves.

But perhaps the best novel inspired by the Gothic trend was Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a parody of the genre. Catherine Morland, the heroine who loves Gothic novels, is invited to the home of her friend Henry Tilney and mistakes reality for fiction, imagining that terrifying events must have taken place there.

17. fal-lals: *fabulales, coltífichets*

GOthic

The word 'gothic' referred to the Middle Ages and to Medieval settings (churches, convents, castles) as in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which laid the foundation for the genre. Other influences include the novel of sensibility, the supernatural and Catholicism (still much distrusted in England), the writings of Burke on the sublime and the 'beauty' of terror.

In the late 18th century Gothic novels were set in abbeys, convents and castles, where lustful villains imprisoned innocent heroines, whose fears were eagerly followed and shared by female readers. The best-known representatives of the genre were Ann Radcliffe and Clara Reeve. Under the influence of Sade and of German romanticism, later novels (Lewis, Maturin) became darker and sexually violent. Terror gave way to horror. The excesses of the genre led to parodies, in particular Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*.

In the 19th century the genre endured and its influence can be traced in characters such as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. Fears often became more internalized, with the themes of alienation, insanity, degeneration and doubles. Examples include R.L. Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and the tales of E.A. Poe in the United States.

Why was this genre so hugely popular at the end of the 18th century? Some have suggested that the bloody events of the French Revolution called for heightened emotions; others that such literature provided an escape from social concerns. Since some of the staples¹⁸ of Gothic fiction were imprisonment and abuse of power, its links with the political events of the time come as no surprise. The Gothic novel has become a typically Anglo-Saxon genre, perhaps as a reaction against the constraints of Puritanism.

Main Gothic works: Coleridge's poems; Crabbe's 'Peter Grimes'; James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824); Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777); the novels of Ann Radcliffe (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Italian*), William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), an oriental tale, Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

Main Parodies: Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818).

The Gothic fascination with terror is reflected in the paintings of Henry Fuseli (1741-1825). He illustrated many scenes from Shakespeare, Milton and Dante, choosing dramatic moments of strong emotion, often linked to the erotic and the irrational.

18. the staples: *les caractéristiques principales*

Mary Shelley (1797-1851) was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft (the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a plea¹⁹ against the subordination of women in education, society and marriage) and of the radical thinker and novelist William Godwin. She later married Percy Bysshe Shelley. *Frankenstein* (1818) is the story of a scientist who wants to create a perfect human being but only succeeds in giving life to a hideous creature. When the latter's demands cannot be satisfied, he turns against his creator and those he loves before becoming an outcast. The novel explores a whole range of themes such as the responsibility of the creator, the dangers of progress, the fear of rebellion.

■ Essays

Charles Lamb (*Essays of Elia*, 1823, 1833), William Hazlitt (*Table Talk*, 1821, *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, 1825), and Thomas De Quincey ('On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts', 'On Knocking on the Gate in Macbeth') moved away from the conventions of early 18th century essayists. Their topics now included all classes of society, not just the 'polite' middle-class, and incidents from ordinary life. Their style became more individualized and more natural.

Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) offers a psychological study of De Quincey's addiction and describes nightmarish opium-induced dreams.

■ Jane Austen and Walter Scott

Jane Austen (1775-1817) was the daughter of a country clergyman, and her social circle was restricted to the provincial middle-class and gentry. What she studies in her novels is human nature as it appears in small communities, limited in scope ('Three or four families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on'), until the arrival of newcomers disturbs relationships and reveals character. With great insight and irony, she gently satirizes greed, hypocrisy, complacency, selfishness, and always ranks goodness and love above social status and money. Her young heroines must learn to read others and to read their own hearts to reach harmony and a happy marriage. Although the dramatic events of her time are hardly ever alluded to in her novels, they reflect many of the social issues of her time: the predicament of women, who often have to become governesses or marry without love to gain economic security (Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*), social pretensions and class awareness (*Emma*), the dangers of 'disorder' (*Mansfield Park*).

Her novels are not just social satires* on Regency society. They offer a subtle psychological analysis of her characters, revealing their interior monologues, sometimes using, for the first time in the novel, free indirect speech*. Her dialogues are sharp, brilliant, language always revealing social and moral values. The narrative voice is always controlled and detached.

19. a plea against: un plaidoyer contre

Northanger Abbey (1818) satirizes Gothic* romances*, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) shows the dangers of excessive passion, advocating instead reason, balance and self-control. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Jane Austen's most brilliant novel, shows how Elizabeth, the pretty, vivacious and intelligent heroine, and the wealthy and haughty Darcy gradually progress towards a better understanding of others and of their own feelings. *Mansfield Park* (1814) ridicules fashionable trends such as improving one's estate and shows how the poor, plain heroine is morally superior to the sophisticated visitors from London. *Persuasion* (1818) contrasts deep feelings and superficial ones.

The eponymous* heroine of *Emma* (1816), 'handsome, clever and rich', takes pride in her own perceptiveness and reading of others. She befriends Harriet Smith, the pretty natural daughter of a person unknown. Emma decides she must be of superior birth, tells her the farmer she loves is not good enough for her and plans a number of good matches for her. All of them fail, sometimes with comic consequences, as when the newly arrived parson Emma tries to marry Harriet off to proposes to Emma instead. Emma believes she herself will not marry, but after many misunderstandings, she will finally marry Mr Knightley, an old family friend she has been unconsciously in love with. The reader mostly follows Emma's thoughts in the novel and shares her misconceptions. In fact almost all characters are deluded at one point, deceived by their imagination or the designs of others. Each incident of everyday life (a walk, a game, a dance) proves morally symbolic and the novel offers a penetrating study of the various nuances of social status, codes of manners and language.

Jane Austen's novels, not romantic enough to please the current taste when they appeared, nonetheless gained in popularity in later years to become some of the best-loved works in the English language. The popularity of Walter Scott's novels, although far greater at the time, tended to wane²⁰ in the 20th century.

Walter Scott (1771-1832) was born into an old Scottish family (which aroused his interest in past legends and history) and entered the legal profession. He later founded a publishing house, which led to financial difficulties. His novels are historical, mostly set in the past of Scotland during periods of turmoil and war, and show how people are influenced by the political events of the time, driven by the forces of history which often oblige them to choose sides, as when Edward Waverley, a soldier in the Hanoverian army, decides to fight for the Jacobite cause. They assert a chivalric ethos and show that the past provides lessons for the present.

Scott turned history into fiction and gave Scotland, and Britain as a whole, a sense of historical identity. *Waverley* (1814) is set during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 and *Rob Roy* (1817) during the 1715 Jacobite rising, *Ivanhoe* (1819) records the enmity between Saxons and Normans, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) is about the Porteous riot of 1736 in Edinburgh. Scott's novels were hugely popular and were translated into many languages, what people most admired being their large gallery of characters from all classes.

20. to wane: décliner

William Wordsworth,

The Solitary Reaper (1805): from nature to empathy

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Behold her, single in the field, Yon¹ solitary Highland Lass²! Reaping and singing by herself; Stop here, or gently pass! 5 Alone she cuts and binds the grain, And sings a melancholy strain³; O listen! For the Vale profound Is overflowing with the sound.</p> | <p>Will no one tell me what she sings? Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow For old, unhappy, far-off things, And battles long ago: Or is it some more humble lay⁴, Familiar matter of to-day? Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain, That has been, and may be again?</p> |
| <p>No Nightingale did ever chaunt⁴ 10 More welcome notes to weary bands Of travellers in some shady haunt, Among Arabian sands: A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird, 15 Breaking the silence of the seas Among the farthest Hebrides.</p> | <p>25 Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang As if her song could have no ending: I saw her singing at her work, And o'er the sickle⁶ bending; I listened, motionless and still; 30 And, as I mounted up the hill, The music in my heart I bore, Long after it was heard no more.</p> |

1. Yon: yonder, over there. 2. Lass: girl, young woman. 3. strain: archaic for tune. 4. chaunt: chant. 5. lay: short poem meant to be sung. 6. the sickle: *la faucille*.

■ THE SITUATION

The poem describes the pleasure the listener takes as he hears a young woman singing while she is reaping grain in the fields. He does not understand her language (stanza 3), probably a form of Gaelic, since the scene is set in the Scottish Highlands.

■ THE STRUCTURE

Stanzas 1 and 4 constitute a frame and focus on the girl (stanza 1) and on the poet listening (stanza 4). Stanzas 2 and 3 describe the song itself, first its musicality (stanza 2), then its possible meaning (stanza 3). This also leads the poet to imagine the song in different places ('Arabian sands' as opposed to 'The Hebrides') and at different times in history ('far off', 'long ago', 'today'). The song is therefore framed by the description of the circumstances when it was heard, something underlined by the rhyme pattern: abcbdd in stanzas 1 and 4, ababccdd in stanzas two and three.

■ THE PASSIONS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

Poetry, Wordsworth had argued in the 1800 Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, should focus on human passions among ordinary people. Here the girl is a simple lass, a reaper in the field.

Except for a few archaisms (the archaic word 'lay', the poetic inversion 'Vale profound'), the language is plain and simple.

The form chosen is a popular one, close to ballad verse, which was meant to be sung. There are four eight-line stanzas, each line with four stresses, except line four, which has three stresses only and conveys an impression of something less unfinished and therefore mysterious. And the song the poem is about is probably a ballad too, as stanza 3 suggests.

■ THE POET AMONG NATURE

– The poet is increasingly felt as the centre of perception, in the last four lines in particular, where his response is the subject of the poem.

– It is among nature that emotion is best felt and expressed. The song is 'melancholy', the strains 'plaintive', it seems to express 'sorrow, loss, or pain'. The word 'vale' evokes mortal life ('the vale of tears').

■ IMAGINATION

The questions in stanza 3 and the word 'whate'er' (l. 25) insist on the unknown meaning of the song; like a bird's song, it is just overheard, without intelligible words, just evoking melancholy. This very lack of words unlocks the listener's mind and gives free rein to his imagination, allowing it to roam through hot and cold countries, from past to present. The song thus seems to take on universal value, pain and suffering are to be found everywhere and at all times. The vale 'overflowing with the sound' seems to be a metaphor for the power of imagination.

■ ECHOES AND TRANSMISSION

The melancholy song reverberates through the vale, amplified by nature, and invades the poet's heart ('in my heart I bore'). This echoing effect is reflected in the vocalic sonorities of lines 7 and 8 (əʊ>x/əʊ> əʊ). The song dramatizes the poet's empathy with suffering humanity, something that went on 'long after it was heard no more'. This impression of endlessness is heightened by the feminine endings of lines 26 and 28.

Moreover, the poem will remain after the poet's death since the apostrophes in stanza 1 ('Behold', 'Stop here') involve the readers and thus give eternity to the poem and the feeling it expresses.

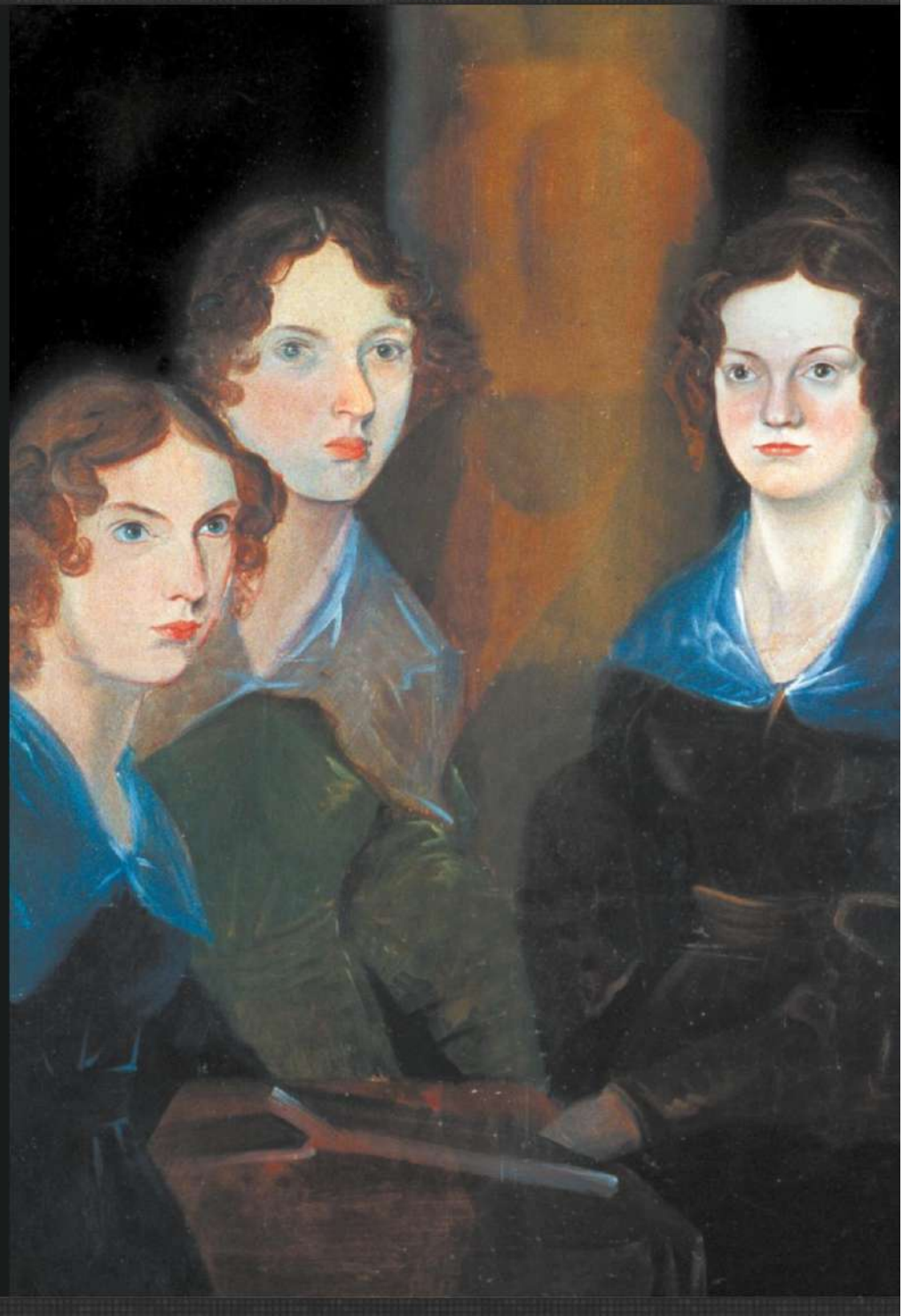
Art (the song, the poem) has the power to move us and make us feel empathy with others.



THE
VICTORIAN
AGE
(1830-1901)



THE THREE BRONTË SISTERS



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|------|---|---|
| 1830 | Accession of William IV | Tennyson: <i>Poems, Chiefly Lyrical</i> |
| 1832 | Great Reform Bill extends voting rights and abolishes pocket & rotten boroughs. | Tennyson: <i>Lady of Shalott</i> |
| 1833 | Factory Act; beginning of Oxford Movement; slavery abolished in British Empire. | Carlyle: <i>Sartor Resartus</i> |
| 1834 | Tolpuddle Martyrs transported; Poor Law Amendment Act creates workhouses. | Talbot's first photograph |
| 1836 | | Dickens: <i>The Pickwick Papers</i> University of London founded |
| 1837 | Accession of Queen Victoria | Dickens: <i>Oliver Twist</i> Carlyle: <i>The French Revolution</i> |
| 1838 | People's Charter published. | |
| 1839 | | Turner: <i>The Fighting Temeraire</i> |
| 1840 | Charter presented to Parliament. | |
| 1841 | | Carlyle: <i>On Heroes and Hero Worship</i> |
| 1842 | Mines Act; Chartist riots | Tennyson: <i>Collected Poems</i> ; Browning: <i>Dramatic Lyrics</i> |
| 1843 | | Carlyle: <i>Past and Present</i> |
| 1844 | Factory Act | E. Barrett: <i>Poems</i> Turner: <i>Rain, Steam and Speed</i> |
| 1845 | Beginning of Irish Famine | Disraeli: <i>Sybil, or the Two Nations</i> |
| 1846 | Repeal of Corn Laws (free trade) | Ruskin: <i>Modern Painters</i> |
| 1847 | Ten Hours Factory Act | C. Brontë: <i>Jane Eyre</i> E. Brontë: <i>Wuthering Heights</i> Thackeray: <i>Vanity Fair</i> |
| 1848 | End of Chartist movement; revolutions in Europe | Marx & Engels: <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood formed |

| | | |
|-------------|--|--|
| 1849 | | Dickens: <i>David Copperfield</i> Mayhew: <i>London Labour and the London Poor</i> |
| 1850 | | Tennyson: <i>In Memoriam</i> Millais: <i>Christ in the House of his Parents</i> |
| 1851 | Great Exhibition | |
| 1853 | | Arnold: <i>Poems</i> |
| 1854 | | Dickens: <i>Hard Times</i> |
| 1854-56 | Crimean War | |
| 1855 | | Gaskell: <i>North and South</i> Browning: <i>Men and Women</i> |
| 1856 | | Hunt: <i>The Scapegoat</i> Trollope: <i>Barchester Towers</i> |
| 1857 | | Victoria & Albert Museum founded |
| 1857-58 | Indian Mutiny | |
| 1859 | | Darwin: <i>On the Origin of Species</i> Smiles: <i>Self-Help</i> Mill: <i>On Liberty</i> |
| 1860 | | Dickens: <i>Great Expectations</i> G. Eliot: <i>The Mill on the Floss</i> Barry's Houses of Parliament completed |
| 1860s-1880s | Disraeli (Conservative) and Gladstone (Liberal) alternate as Prime Minister. | |
| 1863 | | Whistler: <i>Symphony in White</i> |
| 1865 | Women's Suffrage Campaign | Carroll: <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> St Pancras station completed |
| 1867 | Second Reform Act | Trollope: <i>The Last Chronicle of Barset</i> |
| 1868 | Trades Union Congress created. | |
| 1870 | Forster's Education Act (free primary education for all) | |
| 1871 | Trades Unions Act: TUs legalized. | Royal Albert Hall opens |

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 1872 | First secret ballot | G. Eliot: <i>Middlemarch</i> |
| 1877 | Queen Victoria Empress of India | |
| 1878 | | Gilbert and Sullivan: <i>HMS Pinafore</i> |
| 1879 | Irish National Land League founded. | Meredith: <i>The Egoist</i> |
| 1880 | Beginning of first Boer War | |
| 1881 | | James: <i>Portrait of a Lady</i> |
| 1883 | | Stevenson: <i>Treasure Island</i> |
| 1884 | Fabian Society established; third Reform Act | |
| 1886 | | Stevenson: <i>Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> |
| 1890 | | First moving-picture shows |
| 1891 | | Hardy: <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> Wilde: <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> |
| 1893 | Irish Home Rule Bill rejected by Lords. | |
| 1894 | | Shaw: <i>Arms and the Man</i> Hardy: <i>Jude the Obscure</i> ; |
| 1895 | | Wilde: <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> First Promenade Concerts |
| 1899 | Second Boer War | Irish National Theatre established in Dublin Elgar: <i>Enigma Variations</i> |
| 1900 | Labour Party founded. | Conrad: <i>Lord Jim</i> Freud: <i>The Interpretation of Dreams</i> |
| 1901 | Accession of Edward VII | Kipling: <i>Kim</i> Elgar: <i>Pomp and Circumstance</i> |
| 1902 | | Conrad: <i>Heart of Darkness</i> |

'Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe.'
(Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, 1833.)

AN AGE OF DIVISIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

Carlyle's exhortations at the very beginning of the Victorian age may serve as a motto for the rest of the century: renounce your Byronic yearnings and rebellion, and engage with the world instead, however imperfect it may be. The Victorians clearly heeded the lesson and embraced the social problems of an age marked by divisions and contradictions – wealth and misery, optimism and anxiety, religious fervour and doubt. Only at the end of the century, did literature turn towards different forms of escape. The long reign of Queen Victoria, endowed the Crown with authority (particularly when she became Empress of India), provided the nation with a model of morality and respectability and brought political cohesion to the country.

■ 'The Mechanical Age'

Britain witnessed momentous changes in the course of the 19th century. Its population tripled and a mainly rural world was, by the close of the century, transformed into something close to our modern society with the cinema and the telephone.

It was perhaps new means of communication which best exemplified the Victorians' confidence and belief in progress. The opening of railway lines (the first passenger rail in 1830), steam ships capable of crossing the Atlantic, the telegraph, all encouraged inter-connectedness, travel and commercial activity between town and country and with Britain's colonies.

Britain's optimism and confidence was partly the result of its huge expanding empire, which generated world markets and enormous wealth. Although imperialism was increasingly criticized at the end of the century (notably in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), it fostered¹ a feeling of moral superiority, which led Cecil Rhodes to declare in 1877: 'I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race...' Such complacency, often accompanied by narrow-mindedness and philistinism was common in Victorian times, embodied, for instance, in Mr Podsnap in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*.

Progress was also the result of a whole range of scientific discoveries (the microscope, the stethoscope, anaesthesia, gas lighting, calotype prints in photography, the steam printing press. Science, particularly collecting specimens from nature, even became a popular hobby.

1. To foster: encourage, favouriser

The Great Exhibition, a world fair organized by Prince Albert in 1851, epitomized the commercial success and industrial domination of Britain, which had become 'the workshop of the world'. It was set in Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace, a huge glass and metal structure, with half of the exhibits (machinery, raw materials, textiles, china, fine art) representing Britain and its colonies. It constituted one of the first celebrations of consumerism.

THOMAS CARLYLE

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), a philosopher and social thinker, was celebrated as a prophet by many of his contemporaries.

Under the influence of German philosophers like Kant, Carlyle developed a sort of theism of his own, seeing the divine mind everywhere, in man, in nature, hidden behind appearances. *Signs of the Times* (1829) is an attack against the materialism of Bentham and Mill. Carlyle's attacks against utilitarianism and laissez-faire theories were an attempt to instil a sense of social responsibility into his contemporaries, and he helped to sensitize them to 'the condition of England'. He particularly held 'the Mechanical Age' responsible for the mechanization of head and heart and the gap between the rich and the poor.

In *On Heroes and Hero Worship* (1840) Carlyle gave examples of men capable of reaching beyond appearances to the transcendental mysteries of the universe, among them Napoleon, Mahomet, Shakespeare and Cromwell. Such men were now needed, capable of galvanizing the nation and moving it forward. *Past and Present* (1843) develops this idea, advocating a return to medieval conditions under the rule of a strong man.

■ 'Two nations'

There was, however, a darker side to the picture. By the time Victoria acceded to the throne in 1837, the industrial revolution was in full swing with rapid urbanisation, crowded living conditions, long working hours, severe poverty (all described by Henry Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1861-62) and attendant crime and disease. Many of the novels and essays written in the 1830s and 1840s (called 'Condition of England literature') bear testimony to this appalling reality but also to the Victorians' growing social awareness. There were indeed constant efforts to alleviate² social burdens partly, it must be said, to deflect³ the threat of rioting or revolution. Some proved ill-guided, like the 1834 Poor Law which, to reduce the cost of providing relief for the poor led to the creation of workhouses, which became the only places where those capable of work could get assistance. The degrading

2. to alleviate: soulager

3. to deflect: détonner, faire dévier

conditions of life and work there, exposed by Dickens in *Oliver Twist*, were to a large extent the result of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham's materialist principles, according to which it was 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number that was the measure of right and wrong'.

Other reforms brought gradual improvement. The franchise was progressively extended with three Reform Acts (1832, 1867, 1918), although women would have to wait until 1918 to be granted the right to vote. A series of Factory Acts reduced the length of the working day, particularly for women and children; the 1846 repeal⁴ of Corn Laws stopped the tax on imported grain which protected landowners, and brought down the price of food; several epidemics led to legislation concerning water and waste disposal; the 1870 Forster Education Act provided free elementary education, and trade-unions were legalised in 1871. The ideal vision of woman as 'The Angel in the House' (as opposed to 'the fallen woman') was being challenged by increasing debate about 'The Woman Question'. At a time when women were denied the vote, the right to own property or to sue, even though they represented a large part of the workforce, feminist ideas were gaining momentum, bolstered⁵ by Harriet Taylor Mill's 'The Enfranchisement of Women' (1851) and her husband's John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). It will lead to the first suffragette movements in the last two decades of the century (Emmeline Pankhurst) and the image of the liberated 'New Woman'.

A major contribution to the above-mentioned reforms was the Chartist movement, which at the end of the 1830s, prepared a charter to be presented to Parliament in order to correct social and political injustice. Their major demands were for annual parliaments, universal suffrage for men, abolition of the need to own property for MPs, salaries for MPs, secret ballot, and equally sized electoral districts. Although the petition was several times rejected by Parliament, it had an enormous social and cultural impact (its appeal is described in Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke*) and paved the way for future reforms.

■ Fervour and doubt

Religion too was instrumental in⁶ accelerating these reforms. Both within and outside the dominant Anglican Church, there were strong Methodist and Evangelical movements which campaigned for faith and good works, education, better working conditions, missionary work, and Puritan morality, that is to say against any form of 'vice' (from drinking to working on Sundays). This Low Church crusade based on personal salvation proved influential but was much criticized by High Church figures (John Keble and John Henry Newman), who founded the Oxford Movement to bring the church closer to that of Rome and its traditions. Their views, published

4. repeal: annulation, abrogation

5. to bolster: soutenir, étayer (une théorie)

6. to be instrumental in: jouer un rôle-clé dans

in 'Tracts for the Times' (1833-41), caused controversy since Catholics, in spite of the 1829 Roman Catholic Relief Act, were still viewed with suspicion.

The Victorian age was a deeply religious one, yet religious fervour began to be challenged in the second half of the century, as several works questioned the historicity of the Bible (George Eliot's translation of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* in 1846) and introduced evolutionary ideas (Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, 1859), generating fierce responses and debates between defenders of science and religion (notably between Samuel Wilberforce and T.H. Huxley), and influencing the writings of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy.

■ Aesthetics: from Ruskin to Pater

In *Modern Painters* (1843-1860) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) John Ruskin too criticised utilitarianism and laissez-faire policies, believing that they alienated man from nature and from their work. He wanted men to return to the noble work of craftsmen bent on⁷ creating beauty. He defended truth to nature and therefore championed both Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites as well as Gothic and medieval architecture (as opposed to Renaissance art). His ideas influenced the revival of Gothic architecture, which came as a reaction against Victorian industrialization and as a desire to elevate the mind, and which was led by Gilbert Scott (the St Pancras Hotel in London), Charles Barry (the Houses of Parliament) and Augustus Welby Pugin. In painting too, the Pre-Raphaelites often found their inspiration in past subjects – chivalry or Arthurian legends.

By the end of the century, Walter Pater (*Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, 1873) turned away from such a relationship between art and society to defend Aestheticism and the art for art's sake movement. Art, they felt, should not be morally didactic but be self-sufficient, beautiful in itself. Men should savour the fleeting moments of pleasure afforded by art and life. Oscar Wilde and the painter James McNeil Whistler were representatives of the art for art's sake movement. At the very end of the Victorian age, several artists and writers became associated to a movement called 'Decadence' or 'Fin de Siècle', stressing the difference between art and nature and therefore privileging the strange, the grotesque and the unnatural. Their magazine, *The Yellow Book*, was illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley.

POETRY

■ Victorian introspection and doubt

The most popular poet of the Victorian age (he became Poet Laureate in 1850), Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) studied at Cambridge, where he joined 'The Apostles',

7. bent on: *résolu à*

a small half-secret debating society (devoted to idealistic ideas) where he formed a close friendship with Arthur Hallam. Hallam's death when he was twenty-two turned Tennyson into a bereaved⁸ poet for the rest of his life. Tennyson's poetry is rarely committed to a social cause; often set in a medieval past, it describes emotional states.

His dreamy, introspective characters offer a reflection on major Victorian concerns such as love, loss, faith and doubt. Tennyson reflects upon the nature of reality or truth, the place of religion in a scientific age and the function of the poet. His verse is particularly fluent and melodic, and like Brownings', often takes the form of dramatic monologues.

Mariana (1830) uses Keatsian imagery to describe a woman hopelessly waiting for her lover; *The Princess* (1847) tells the story of Princess Ida, who defends the rights of women and founds a college for them; *Maud* (1855) dwells on the anguished consciousness of a lover who struggles against jealousy; 'The Lotos-Eaters' (1832) and 'Ulysses' (1842) develop episodes from Homer's *Odyssey*.

Idylls of the Kings (1859) is a long narrative poem about the myth of King Arthur and Tennyson's way of embracing the loss of morality and faith. His nationalistic poems like 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', also proved extremely popular.

In Memoriam (1850), one of the best-loved Victorian poems, is an elegy written after the death of Tennyson's friend Arthur Hallam. Written in iambic tetrameters* rhyming abba, it consists of 133 short poems, with a cyclical structure, the same subjects, ideas and scenes recurring with changes. Each lyric presents a meditation on providence, death, belief and doubt. The poem wonders how hope can survive in a world where all things die, and comes to the conclusion that the 'anxieties of the heart' will find relief through 'Faith in a God of Love'. The movement is therefore from dejection⁹ to the acceptance of transience¹⁰ and decay. Yet doubt is never far away, as can be seen from the following stanza:

I stretch lame¹¹ hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff¹², and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope. (55)

The blend of moving, intimate feelings with more general social preoccupations is typically Victorian. The deep grief expressed in the poem profoundly affected a society obsessed with death and a sense of loss, so that the poem was often used as a consolatory text, by Queen Victoria for instance after the death of Prince Albert.

8. bereaved: *affligé (par un deuil)*

9. dejection: *abattement, découragement*

10. transience: *caractère éphémère, transitoire*

11. lame: *pauvre, faible, estropié*

12. chaff: *la balle (du grain)*

THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

In the middle of the 19th century, a group of painters (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, Ford Madox Brown) called themselves the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, their aim being to return to early Christian art. They wanted to elevate people's minds by portraying noble and moral scenes (often inspired by Shakespeare and the poetry of Dante, Keats, Browning and Tennyson) or social themes, particularly in an attempt to give dignity to work. Their paintings are realistic, painted outside, with precision, in bright pure colours.

Robert Browning (1812-1889) was given an extremely learned education at home and read extensively. In 1845, he met another poet, Elizabeth Barrett, and they married and eloped to Italy to escape her domineering father.

He is best-known for his **dramatic monologues*** in which the speakers, who are never the poet himself, address a silent listener. These unreliable narrators gradually betray themselves, so that by inference the reader discovers their secret and troubled selves, their obsessions and passions, through the stories they tell and the way they are told. They stage themselves theatrically in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), *Men and Women* (1855), and *Dramatis Personae* (1864). These monologues are complex, argumentative, and disclose deep psychological insight.

Browning was particularly attracted to Italy and to the Renaissance and his speakers are often artists and men of the church, complex beings full of contradictions and frustrations: The Duke of Ferrara, a discriminating collector, reveals the murder of his wife in 'My Last Duchess'; Fra Lippo, a Carmelite Friar and artist, raises questions about the function of art in 'Fra Lippo Lippi', the bishop proves more interested in art than in the salvation of his soul in 'The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church'.

The Ring and the Book (1868-69) is a long poem which relates a 17th century murder trial, confronting various subjective moral or social views of what happened.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61) was a much appreciated poet during her lifetime. Her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) are emotionally intense love poems addressed to her husband; *Aurora Leigh* (1857) is an epic* verse novel about the intellectual and emotional growth of a woman writer. Elizabeth Barrett Browning also wrote social poems, like the well-known 'The Cry of the Children' (1844).

The son of an eminent Rugby reforming headmaster and himself an Inspector of Schools, Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) saw the threat posed by materialism, cultural insularity and philistinism. *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) argues for a more progressive education and for the importance of culture to counter what he considered the 'barbarism' of the times. In poems such as 'Empedocles on Etna' (1852) or 'Dover Beach' (1867) it is disillusion, doubt and resignation which prevail in the face of growing materialism and loss of faith.

As for the the lyrical poetry of A.E. Housman (1859-1936), it celebrates the beauty of the Shropshire countryside with simplicity and emotion (*A Shropshire Lad*, 1896).

■ Sensual and religious ecstasy

The Pre-Raphaelite movement (→ p. 114), which turned its back on urban and industrialized society, gave rise to poetry often set in the Middle Ages and marked by sensuality and archaisms.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), a poet and a Pre-Raphaelite painter, drew his inspiration from early Italian painting and poetry, Dante in particular. His *Poems* (1870) sanctify sexual love, associating the medieval tradition of courtly love with more erotic visions.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Venus Verticordia*, 1864-1868?

With her flaming red hair, luminescent eyes, enigmatic expression and sensuousness, this Venus is typical of Pre-Raphaelite art. The title of the picture (Venus as the 'turner of hearts') refers to an invocation to Venus to turn women's hearts to chastity and virtue. Several details refer to the dangers of sexual love: the apple (evoking both that of the Garden of Eden and the Golden Apple of Discord which led to the Trojan war), the roses and honeysuckle (sensuality), the arrow (Cupid's arrow, but also the poisoned arrow which killed Paris), the butterflies (fitting from pleasure to pleasure, therefore evoking sexual pleasure). Looking both erotic and cold, Rossetti's Venus ambiguously represents the sanctity of love (with her halo) as well as its dangers. Rossetti, as well as many Pre-Raphaelite, Symbolist and decadent painters, often chose to represent women as enslaving *femmes fatales*, devoid of sentiment.

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), Dante Gabriel's sister, was inspired by her religious devotion. *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) and *A Pageant* (1881) are innovative in their use of rhyme*, sonorities, and images.

William Morris (1834-1896), a poet, a painter and a designer and decorator, was a close friend of many Pre-Raphaelites. *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-1870) is an epic poem about myths and legends. Morris is best known for creating the firm Morris

& Co, which produced textiles, furniture, tiles, wallpapers, mainly in floral patterns, and which influenced the Arts and Crafts movement.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) was a decadent, provocative poet, a pagan, who liked transgression and celebrated homosexuality and sensuality. His *Poems and Ballads* (1866-1878), which treat of such subjects as satanism, masochism and lesbianism, caused a sensation in a country where puritanical morality still prevailed.

A follower of the Oxford Movement who converted to Catholicism and became a Jesuit then professor at University College, Dublin, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was unknown as a poet during his life, and his poetry was only published in 1918. He saw transcendence in the natural world, a manifestation of 'God's Grandeur', which led him to try and convey the essence of things, their 'inshape'* or inward quality when perceived during a moment of epiphany, and their 'instress'* the divine force that sustains them. Hopkins also shows the influence of George Herbert in his 'terrible sonnets', in which the soul struggles against despair. The main originality of his poems, possibly influenced by Welsh poetry, lies in the rhythms of the speaking voice, and his use of sprung rhythm*, an intense and forceful rhythm, based on feet with initial stressed syllables followed by a flexible number of unstressed syllables, which he believed was best suited to express emotional speech. Hopkins also used coined* words, word-clusters and unusual images to give his poetry immediacy and concentration, energy and passion.

DRAMA

The Theatres Act of 1843 modified the 1737 Licensing Act and limited the licensing powers of the Lord Chamberlain, also making it possible for local authorities to authorize new theatres. Many were subsequently created since drama was a popular form of entertainment. Lighting, machinery, elaborate costumes contributed to a realistic effect. The most popular genres were then melodrama (like those of Tom Taylor), farce (those of Arthur Wing Pinero were particularly successful) and pantomime.

Melodrama and fantasy combine with social satire in W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's burlesque comic operas* which enjoyed enormous success. They lampoon¹³ Victorian institutions: the legal profession (*Trial by Jury*, 1874), social status and the Royal Navy (*HMS Pinafore*, 1878), respectability and social position (*The Pirates of Penzance*, 1879), bureaucracy (*The Mikado*, 1885).

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was born in Dublin and studied classics in Dublin, then Oxford, before settling in London, where he became part of the art for art's sake movement. An aesthete like Pater, his way of life was flamboyant and unconventional;

13. to lampoon: *tourner en dérision*

it ended tragically when he was imprisoned for homosexuality, which inspired his poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), influenced by Huysmans's decadent *A Rebours*, is a novel about art and morality, and illustrates the ideas of the art for art's sake movement about the triumph of art over nature. Dorian Gray's hedonism and corruption leave his beauty intact, but it is his portrait which gradually reveals his depravity. His aestheticism later influenced the works of Ronald Firbank (1886-1926).

Wilde's comedies, reminiscent of Restoration comedy (→ p. 73), have lost none of their appeal today thanks to their brilliant wit*. *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) show the way relationships are hampered by class consciousness and social constraints.

The Importance of being Earnest (1895), a play about identity, provides a critique of all aspects of fashionable Victorian society and institutions - marriage (which seems related to money more than to happiness), hypocrisy, class consciousness and social codes. Wit*, paradox*, inversion and flippant¹⁴ remarks are Wilde's favourite tools in the service of satire*.

Salomé (1891, in French) is a symbolist and decadent play about lust and desire.

Wilde's use of wit will later influence the plays of Noel Coward (*Blithe Spirit*, 1941) and those of Tom Stoppard (→ p. 178).

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), also an Irishman with a strong sense of Irishness, worked as a journalist in London and was one of the founding members of the Fabian Society, whose *Fabian Manifesto* (1902) he wrote, and which was to lead to the Labour Party.

A follower of Ibsen (he wrote *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in 1891), he believed the theatre could shock people out of their hypocrisy and snobbery and propagate his socialist beliefs. In his 'plays of ideas' the stage becomes a place for ideological debate. The traditional conflict between passions gives way to a conflict between ideas. Shaw uses lengthy prefaces, wit*, paradox*, and long argumentative speeches to defend his radical ideas. He was also one of the first playwrights who insisted on publishing his plays as texts to be read.

His works (*Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, 1898) addressed the social issues which the British theatre never explored and which his audiences often preferred not to see: the economic factors leading to prostitution (*Mrs Warren's profession*, 1893), slum landlords (*Widowers' Houses*, 1892), a satire on the glorification of war (*Arms and the Man* (1894), sources of funding for charity (*Major Barbara*, 1905), British bourgeois society (*Heartbreak House*, 1919). With *Pygmalion* (1914), Shaw rewrites the myth of the artist who falls in love with his creation and shows the impossibility of recreating myth and romance in Victorian times.

14. flippant: *désinvolte*

THE NOVEL

Increased literacy rates, circulating libraries, a cheap national press (thanks to the reduction in stamp duty in 1836) and the railways, which meant speedy circulation, generated a print culture and the emergence of mass literature for a mass reading public. The novel was by far the most popular genre and it diversified into many forms.

■ Romantic novels

The three Brontë sisters and their brother Branwell were brought up in the Haworth parsonage on the Yorkshire moors. From an early age they escaped into a world of imagination and started writing romantic fiction. Charlotte later worked as a teacher and governess and spent some time in Brussels to study languages. Emily was employed as a governess. They had planned to open a school in Haworth but Emily, Anne and Branwell soon died of consumption. Their novels were published under pseudonyms, 'Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell'.

The unconventional heroines of **Charlotte Brontë** (1816-1855) refuse the educational constraints imposed on women and insist on speaking out.

Jane Eyre (1847) is partly autobiographical and relates the progress of the eponymous* heroine from childhood to employment as a governess, and to love for Mr Rochester, her employer. On their wedding day, she discovers he is already married, his mad wife being locked up in the attic. After many adventures, and some melodramatic, Gothic and fantastic episodes, Jane and Mr Rochester, who has become blind, are finally reunited. At every stage in the story, Jane tries to define her identity and rebels against the requests of her aunt, the tyranny she suffers in Brocklehurst's Evangelical school, her status as a dependent, and even Rochester's authority. As Jane reflects on the roof at Thornfield,

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

Yet Jane has to reconcile these longings for liberty with her Christian desire to serve others, and she eventually finds peace and fulfilment in helping her blind husband. Britain's colonial power is also constantly there in the background, evoking another form of rebellion, with Bertha, a Creole woman and a victim, and St John's missionary work.

Shirley (1849), with its industrial background is a 'Condition of England' novel; *Villette* (1853), somewhat biographical too, relates a young teacher's love for a professor in her school.

With *Wuthering Heights* (1847), **Emily Brontë** (1818-1848) wrote a novel of remarkable technical command. It relates the passionate love between Heathcliff, a young gipsy reared in the Earnshaw home, and Earnshaw's daughter Catherine, as well as the hatred that flares up between Heathcliff and Earnshaw's son Hindley. When Heathcliff hears Catherine say that it would be degrading to marry him, he leaves, and returns years later to find Catherine married to Edgar Linton. He then spends his life wreaking vengeance on Catherine and the next generation. There is something elemental and primitive about their love, which seems to be the extension of the wild moorland. The violent world of *Wuthering Heights* is contrasted with the tame world of the Lintons' Thrushcross Grange.

The novel is a technical tour de force with its interlocking¹⁵ narratives (Nellie, the down-to-earth housekeeper relates the story to Lockwood, a visitor who symbolizes the civilised world, giving continuity and credibility to their tale while creating distance from these wild events) and complex time-scheme, since the novel begins with the most recent events and then goes backwards.

Anne Brontë too published two novels, *Agnes Grey* (1847), about the life of a governess, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) in which a young woman asserts her feminism and escapes the profligate life of her husband, inspired by Branwell Brontë.

■ 'Condition of England' novels

It was Carlyle who, in 'The Condition of England Question' (1839), first wrote about the dire¹⁶ consequences of the second stage of the Industrial Revolution. These ideas found literary expression in works (also called 'industrial novels') which engage with the social and political issues of the 1840s and 1850s, often combining romantic and realistic trends, domestic love stories against the backdrop¹⁷ of industrial Britain.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), who was to become Tory prime minister, was the leader of the 'Young England' group when he was first elected to Parliament. Their idealistic aim was to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor through respect for the monarchy and the existing order of things. These ideas form the subject of *Coningsby, or the New Generation* (1844), a tribute to the Young England movement, and *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845), about poverty, social unrest, and the Chartist movement in the industrial north.

Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), a Christian Socialist parson, was active in the movement for social reform. The hero of *Alton Locke* (1850) supports the Chartist cause but is imprisoned after being involved in a riot.

The novels of **Elizabeth Gaskell** (1810-1865), the wife of a Unitarian clergyman, are compassionate and didactic. *Mary Barton* (1848) describes the stark lives of the manufacturing poor in Manchester and the gulf between owners and workers. *North*

15. interlocking: *qui s'embroient*

16. dire: *terrible, désastreux*

17. the backdrop: *la toile de fond*

and South (1855) addresses the divide between rural south and industrial north, but through the emerging respect, then love, between Margaret Hale, who comes from genteel southern England, and John Thornton, a mill owner, comes the idea that bridging the gulf is possible if each side accepts new responsibilities. Her other novels (*Sylvia's Lovers*, *Wives and Daughters*, *Cranford*) describe everyday domestic life in small rural towns.

Other 'Condition of England novels' include Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (about the emergence of the Luddite movement in Yorkshire) and Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Sons* and *Hard Times* (an attack against utilitarianism).

FROM UTILITARIANISM TO SELF-HELP

Utilitarianism was an influential moral and political philosophy in the Victorian age. Developed by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, it is based on the belief that the rightness of an action should depend on how useful it is, on how much happiness it can bring to the greatest number. As John Stuart Mill wrote, 'Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain.' It provided a pragmatic way of assessing and quantifying the value and impact of policies. It contributed to several democratic reforms, including the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which created workhouses, whose bleak conditions of life and work exemplified the limits of such a philosophy.

Another idea, which more indirectly led to the creation of workhouses, was that of individual responsibility: since the poor are partly responsible for their conditions, they must be forced into work. Such a view is best articulated in Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859), which shows how great men achieved success through their own work and efforts. An extremely popular book, it is to be related to laissez-faire policies and Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), which contends that too much state intervention generates dependency and stifles individual enterprise.

■ Social novels

Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* was the first novel to be serialised¹⁸ in 1836. The method, which was cheaper and created suspense and speculation, revolutionized the literary market, with tens of thousands of copies of the instalment¹⁹ sold every month, with readers eagerly awaiting each new episode, often accompanied by illustrations, - a sort of equivalent to TV series nowadays. This new mode of publication influenced the writing too, encouraging writers to take their readers'

18. to serialize: *publier en feuilleton*

19. an instalment: *un épisode*

reactions into account, to end each instalment on a climax and suspense, and lending itself to lengthy works. Multi-plots and complex plots helped to offer a large panorama of society, one which suited the moralizing and proselytising aims of the works. There is little direct political criticism or crusading in these works, their aim being rather to sensitize readers, and by eliciting emotional responses make them feel the need for benevolence and intervention.

Obligated to work in a blacking factory at an early age when his father was imprisoned for debt, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) soon developed a social consciousness and eventually became a law court reporter (which developed his keen ear and eye for voices, mannerisms and types) then a Parliamentary reporter. His novels quickly became successful and he started giving public readings, real performances, even travelling to the United States, where he was lionized²⁰. He started two weekly periodicals (*Household Words*, 1850, *All the Year Round*, 1859) in which he serialized most of his later works. The huge range of his novels, their complexity, prolixity, abundance of characters echo the richness and contradictions of the age itself and made him 'the conscience of his age' (Walter Allen).

Dickens's early novels (*Sketches by Boz*, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837), *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 1843-1844) are mainly comic and picaresque*, in the tradition of Fielding. With *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838), the story of an orphan brought up in a workhouse, and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839), which also deals with cruelty to children, humour coexists with melodrama, reflecting Dickens's belief that both tragedy and comedy characterized modern life. His mature novels (*Hard Times*, 1854, a savage attack against the modern, rational utilitarian system of education, which can only create monsters; *David Copperfield* (1849-1850) and *Great Expectations* (1860-61), both bildungsromans*; *Little Dorrit*, 1857, which takes place in the Marshalsea prison, *Bleak House*) have the same capacity for moving and amusing. Dickens's later novels became increasingly dark (*A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859, about the French Revolution; *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865), a complex psychological novel which contrasts monetary and human values), even though good characters succeed in gaining a certain happiness at the end, giving the novel optimism and sentimentality. Perhaps because they came out in instalments, Dickens's novels also contain those staples²¹ of melodrama and popular culture that his readers expected of him: children, angelic women, death-bed scenes of devotion.

London provides the background for many of Dickens's novels, with a multitude of characters, from lawyers and bankers to beggars, prostitutes and criminals, the whole spectrum of its inhabitants, a city so huge, noisy and arrogant that it fosters solitude and anonymity, an ideal background to expose the failings of society. Dickens had a gift for characterization, and often portrayed eccentrics, 'flat characters'* verging on caricature or humours so that the reader remembers them and their mannerisms,

20. to lionize: *aduler*

21. a staple: *un élément de base, un sujet principal*

for instance Mr. Bumble, the pompous beadle in *Oliver Twist* ("If the law supposes that – the law is a ass."), or Mrs Micawber in *David Copperfield* ("I will never desert Mr. Micawber!").

Dickens's novels are also memorable for their exuberant and florid²² style, full of lists, repetition, and extravagant metaphors.

Combining romance and realism, *Bleak House* (1852-1853) is a long, intricate novel, with subplots²³ and an extensive array²³ of characters. It centres on an absurd lawsuit, Jarndyce vs Jarndyce, which affects all the characters in different ways. The Court of Chancery is exposed as monstrous, diseased, like the fog driving people mad by its power of inertia, and the law itself is seen as arcane²⁴ and ambiguous. The novel was instrumental in the legal reform of the 1870s. There are two narrators, Esther, who relates her story in the first person, a story limited to the domestic sphere, and the omniscient narrator, who addresses more public concerns.

The feverish energy of London provides an apt background to the novel, in which Dickens's linguistic gusto²⁵ and metaphorical power are at their best, as in the phantasmagorical opening description of London decay:

London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling²⁶ like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest²⁷.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) first worked as a caricaturist and journalist, writing comic sketches and burlesques* of literature before turning to the novel. His novels study and mock the bourgeois and aristocratic society of his time, denouncing hypocrisy, prejudice, and corruption but keeping a detached and ironic look upon it. Thackeray's omniscient voice self-consciously comments on his characters and controls their destinies as if they were mere puppets: 'Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.', he says at the very end of *Vanity Fair*. Never taking himself seriously, Thackeray constantly creates distance from his own narrative with metatextual* remarks, reminding his readers of the narrator's presence.

22. florid: très chargé

23. an array: une foule, un grand nombre

24. arcane: érotérique, obscur

25. gusto: enthousiasme

26. to waddle: se dandiner

27. compound interest: intérêts composés

Barry Lyndon (1844), with its lying, shameless, first person narrator who condemns himself through his own words is a picaresque* novel which relates the rise and fall of an Irish upstart²⁸. The eponymous* hero of *The History of Pendennis* (1850) is an impecunious and profligate young man who progresses morally and socially.

Vanity Fair (1847-48) offers a vast panorama of society and compares the lives of two young women: Becky Sharp, a penniless orphan endowed with beauty and wit, yet ambitious and unscrupulous, and the gentle, pure Amelia and her selfless love for George Osborne. It is 'a novel without a hero' (the subtitle), Thackeray showing that, contrary to literary conventions, any insight into human nature proves that no one is a hero. The novel addresses the vanities (the title is from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*) of contemporary society: selfishness, hypocrisy, moral and social complacency, which are underscored²⁹ by the background of war with France.

A playful tone, deflation, and lowering images are used to undermine the Victorians' belief in the sanctity of marriage, in the noble cause of war or in the frailty and innocence of women. The omniscient narrator remains detached, amused, ironical, constantly manipulating the readers and challenging their preconceptions, smugness and respectability.

Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) worked at the Post Office and tried unsuccessfully to become an MP. His novels explore the world of politics and the Church, the way the press, rumours or public opinion can determine the course of events. Trollope was so interested in the evolution of character over long periods of time that he wrote sequences in which the same characters reappear.

The six '*Palliser Novels*' examine British and Irish politics and the parliamentary system. Snobbery, greed, speculation and financial scandals are the subject of *The Way we Live Now* (1875). As for the six '*Barsetshire Chronicles*', they centre on intrigues within the clergy and the gentry in the West Country. Trollope's satire is often bitter but lucid and without sentimentality.

George Eliot (1819-1880) was the pseudonym chosen by Mary Ann Evans in order to gain literary credibility. A religious sceptic (she translated David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*), and the companion of a married man, George Henry Lewes, a positivist and Darwinian, her life seemed highly unconventional and immoral to most Victorians. But none of that transpires in her novels, which are often set in rural or provincial England where narrow-minded communities are faced with momentous changes like the arrival of the railway or social reforms. What George Eliot is interested in is social determinism, that is to say the social factors (education, family, hypocrisy, prejudice, bigotry, class consciousness, economic factors) which stifle her intelligent heroines' ambitions and ideals. What differentiates her works from those of Dickens or Thackeray, however, is that they combine realism with

28. an upstart: un parvenu, un arriviste

29. to underscore: souligner, mettre en évidence

interiority, as she gives a fine psychological analysis of her heroines, trapped as they are in loveless marriages or impossible yearnings, and whose slow progress we follow towards maturity. For George Eliot is a moralist who believes that in the end, characters remain determined by their own choices. *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Silas Marner* (1861) are set in a pre-industrial rural society. Her later novels (*Felix Holt*, 1866, *Middlemarch*, 1871-72) describe a more complex social network, which shapes individual destinies. *Daniel Deronda* (1876) is a defence of Zionism and more of a *roman à thèse*, whose hero is a Jewish man.

Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life (1871-72) is set in a Midlands town at the time of the first Reform Act (1832), where issues such as the coming of the railways, medicine, politics and concern for the poor are the issues of the day. The novel centres around two unhappy marriages: that of the intelligent heroine, Dorothea Brooke, to a cold-hearted, elderly scholar, Mr Casauban, who thinks only of his research, and that of Dr Lydgate, newly arrived in Middlemarch, idealistic and full of advanced scientific ideas which the town mistrusts, to the superficial Rosamund Vincy. Will Ladislaw, Mr Casauban's cousin and a friend of Lydgate, unites the two plots. The novel undermines the Victorian view of a happy marriage, and shows how the community's expectations and conventional standards can lead to bitterness, humiliation, disillusionment and loneliness. Idealism and self-absorption too can bring self-delusion and tragedy. The novel also dramatises the condition of women in a society which was still patriarchal. The omniscient* voice of the narrator constantly reveals her characters' inner struggles and conflicts in a way which anticipates Henry James's novels.

How was it that in the weeks since her marriage, Dorothea had not distinctly observed but felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhere? I suppose it was that in courtship everything is regarded as provisional and preliminary, and the smallest sample of virtue or accomplishment is taken to guarantee delightful stores which the broad leisure of marriage will reveal. But the door-sill of marriage once crossed, expectation is concentrated on the present. Having once embarked on your marital voyage, it is impossible not to be aware that you make no way and that the sea is not within sight—that, in fact, you are exploring an enclosed basin. (From chapter 20)

The novels of George Gissing (1857-1903) offer naturalistic descriptions of the seedy lives of the poor. In *New Grub Street* (1891) the idealistic literary aims of a poor, honest writer are confronted to the publishing houses, which pander to³⁰ the desires of a mass audience.

After publishing *Erewhon* (1872), a utopia, Samuel Butler (1835-1902) wrote *The Way of All Flesh*, published posthumously in 1903. It is a bitter satire of Christianity and Victorian manners, centring on family relationships and debunking the myth of the happy bourgeois Victorian family.

30. to pander to: flatter, se prêter aux exigences de

■ 'Fin de siècle' novels of ideas

Anxiety, scepticism and disillusion at the end of the century led to sombre naturalism and determinism, to an escape into various types of adventure stories, or to aestheticism and decadence.

George Meredith (1828-1909) first wrote poetry before turning to the novel. *Modern Love* (1862) is a sequence of sonnets about the failure of his marriage. An evolutionary philosopher, Meredith believed that the struggle for survival bespoke of a force leading to the 'flourishing of the spirit'. Man is capable of progress, of transcending the self to reach more empathy with others and with nature. Misunderstanding others and oneself is a major theme in his novels (*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, 1859, *The Egoist*, 1879, *Diana of the Crossways*, 1885), with their brilliant dialogues which generate ambiguity. Meredith's heroines are independent, intelligent women, 'New Women' who can talk about politics and expect equality in marriage.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) grew up in Dorset and studied architecture. His novels (*Far from the Madding Crowd*, 1874, *The Return of the Native*, 1874, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, 1886, *The Woodlanders*, 1887) are set in rural communities in the Western Counties, which he called 'Wessex', and show the way they are affected by social changes. They illustrate determinism, his characters being the victims of social prejudices and of chance, and vainly struggling against their bleak fate. The former harmony which used to link man and nature is gradually being destroyed by industrialisation, mechanisation, or changes in mentalities, which the characters are unable to resist. The landscape of 'Wessex' is described poetically, lyrically and symbolically to reflect upon man's place in the universe. In Hardy's last two novels in particular (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 1891, *Jude the Obscure*, 1895) the characters vainly struggle and follow an inexorable course towards ruin and death. The scandal caused by these two novels led Hardy to abandon fiction for poetry.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), the heroine, the daughter of a poor farmer, is sent to work for a rich relative, Alec d'Urberville, who seduces her. Her child dies and she goes to work on a dairy farm where she falls in love and marries Angel Clare, who abandons her when he learns of her former relationship with Alec. From then on Tess knows dire poverty and finally accepts to become Alec's mistress in order to survive. When Angel Clare returns, repentant, she murders Alec and ends up hanged.

There is no heavenly justice in the novel; the world seems to be ruled by uncaring gods who watch, amused, the fate of human beings. As the black flag goes up above the prison at the end of the novel, Hardy's comment is that 'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals (in the Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess'. The novel is structured like a classical tragedy, with mythological, biblical and archetypal references announcing the tragic ending. Belonging to the working class and being a woman, Tess is a double victim. The sexual mores³¹ of Victorian England,

31. mores: moeurs

in particular its double standards and its limited conception of female purity, are also denounced, hence the subtitle of the novel, 'a pure woman faithfully presented', which was much criticized for making vice seem like virtue.

Both alienated from the land and defined by it, the characters are dwarfed by the vastness of nature, which amplifies their feelings. In the following paragraph, which describes the winter when Tess and her friend Marian work in terrible conditions at Flintcomb-Ash farm, the birds, which are nameless and can do nothing but endure, are mirror-images of the two girls.

After this season of congealed dampness came a spell of dry frost, when strange birds from behind the North Pole began to arrive silently on the upland of Flintcomb-Ash; gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes— eyes which had witnessed scenes of cataclysmal horror in inaccessible polar regions of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived, in curdling temperatures that no man could endure; which had beheld the crash of icebergs and the slide of snow-hills by the shooting light of the Aurora; been half blinded by the whirl of colossal storms and terraqueous³² distortions; and retained the expression of feature that such scenes had engendered. These nameless birds came quite near to Tess and Marian, but of all they had seen which humanity would never see, they brought no account. The traveller's ambition to tell was not theirs, and, with dumb impassivity, they dismissed experiences which they did not value for the immediate incidents of this homely upland— the trivial movements of the two girls in disturbing the clods with their hackers³³ so as to uncover something or other that these visitants relished as food. (From Chapter XLIII)

Hardy's poetry (*Wessex Poems*, 1898, *Poems of the Past and Present*, 1901, *Moments of Vision*, 1917) is traditional in form and structure. It is confessional and deals with love, the frailty of human life and often moves from individual feelings to a cosmic awareness of time and space. It is poised between optimism and uncertainty, ending without any sense of resolution.

■ New romances: Detection, Gothicism, adventure, science fiction, and nonsense

New genres appeared at the end of the century, commenting more indirectly on the social reality and creating worlds of fantasy or adventure taking on new radical scientific discoveries as well as Freud's psychoanalytical developments revealing people's hidden urges or instincts.

— It was in the 19th century that the first **detective stories** appeared, influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's tales and by popular real crime stories. The novels of Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), *The Woman in White*, 1859, and *The Moonstone*, 1868, can be considered as early detective stories, and reflect the Victorians' taste for melodrama and suspense, while expressing their fears of lawbreaking and instability. *The*

32. terraqueous: *terraqué*, composé de terre et d'eau

33. a hacker: *une pioche*

Moonstone is particularly interesting for its study of insanity and the unconscious, and its multiple narrators.

Arthur Conan Doyle (1858-1930) developed the genre with the adventures of the amateur detective Sherlock Holmes and his foil Dr Watson; they allow the readers to follow the logical steps which lead to the resolution of the mystery: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, 1892; *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, 1894; *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, 1902).

— With *Dracula* (1897), the story of a vampire, written in the form of a diary, Bram Stoker (1847-1912), renewed the **Gothic** trend already revived by Sheridan Le Fanu.

— Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) fled the stern Calvinism of his native Scotland and spent much of his life travelling. He considered fiction as a way of escaping the realities of life and entering a world of adventure, otherwise unattainable. *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886) are **adventure stories**. With *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) Stevenson explores evil. The latter novel, which associates sensational literature, science-fiction and Gothic elements, is a Doppelgänger tale about fractured identity: thanks to a drug, and to get rid of his worse impulses, Dr Jekyll creates a separate personality for himself, Mr Hyde, a brutish being who comprehends all his evil tendencies. *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), a historical novel set in Scotland during the 1745 Jacobite rising, describes the rivalry between two brothers.

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was born in India, educated in England, and became a journalist and writer. His short stories (*Plain Tales from the Hills*, 1888) describe the Anglo-Indian community, which he both satirized and admired. Kipling celebrated Victorian morality and values and believed that the British Empire could achieve great things, ideas he expressed in some of his poems like the well-known 'Recessional', written for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, or 'The White Man's Burden'. Their ideas, colloquial language and ballad* form made them extremely popular, and turned Kipling into 'the poet of empire', but he was often criticised for his jingoistic³⁴ stances³⁵ in post colonial times. His best novel, *Kim* (1901), is the picaresque* story of an Irish orphan in British-ruled India. He becomes the disciple of a Tibetan lama, is at the same time recruited by the British intelligence service, and will remain torn between these two spiritual ways. The novel provides a rich and sympathetic portrait of Indian culture and people. Kipling also wrote memorable children's stories (*The Jungle Book*, 1894; *Just So Stories*, 1902).

— **Utopia**, another form of romance about the future, reappeared in the last decades of the century with Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), and the socialist commonwealth portrayed by William Morris in *News from Nowhere* (1891).

34. jingoistic: *chauvin*

35. a stance: *une position*

– H.G. Wells (1866-1946) had a scientific education which led him to believe that physics or biology could lead to a more enlightened world. His **scientific romances** unite the fantastic, the scientific, and their moral implications. *The Time Machine* (1895) addresses the possible consequences of the evolutionary theory and new revelations about the solar system, while in *The War of the Worlds* (1898), the earth is invaded by Martians, which offers a criticism of imperialism and Victorian prejudices; *The Invisible Man* (1897) is about a scientist who makes himself invisible but cannot reverse the process.

– **Nonsense** as a genre appeared in the 19th century, possibly as a sub-category of children's literature, which began to flourish at the end of the century (Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, 1901; James Barrie's *Peter Pan*, 1904, Alexander Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926).

Edward Lear (1812-88) is best known for his *Book of Nonsense* (1846, 1862) and his limericks*, absurd poems following strict rules (five lines of mainly anapaests*, the first, second and fifth ones with three feet and rhyming, the third and the fourth with two feet and rhyming) and describing people's eccentricities.

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), an Oxford mathematician and photographer whose real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, loved entertaining the daughters of his friends with absurd stories which became *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), both illustrated by Tenniel, and *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876). The world of these books is one of pure fantasy, where morality plays no part, where logic is warped³⁶ and language seems to have a will of its own.

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854): A condemnation of Utilitarianism

– It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled¹. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all

36. to warp: *fausser, déformer*

– day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.

– These attributes of Coketown were in the main inseparable from the work by which it was sustained; against them were to be set off, comforts of life which found their way all over the world, and elegancies of life which made, we will not ask how much of the fine lady, who could scarcely bear to hear the place mentioned. The rest of its features were voluntary, and they were these.

– You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there – as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done – they made it a pious warehouse of red brick, with sometimes (but this is only in highly ornamental examples) a bell in a birdcage on the top of it. The solitary exception was the New Church; a stuccoed² edifice with a square steeple over the door, terminating in four short pinnacles like florid³ wooden legs. All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital⁴ and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

– A town so sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well? Why no, not quite well. No? Dear me!

– No. Coketown did not come out of its own furnaces⁵, in all respects like gold that had stood the fire. First, the perplexing mystery of the place was, Who belonged to the eighteen denominations⁶? Because, whoever did, the labouring people did not.

– It was very strange to walk through the streets on a Sunday morning, and note how few of them the barbarous jangling of bells that was driving the sick and nervous mad, called away from their own quarter, from their own close rooms, from the corners of their own streets, where they lounged listlessly, gazing at all the church and chapel going, as at a thing with which they had no manner of concern. Nor was it merely the stranger who noticed this, because there was a native organization in Coketown itself, whose members were to be heard of in the House of Commons every session, indignantly petitioning for acts of parliament that should make these people religious by main force. Then came the Teetotal⁷ Society, who complained that these same people would get drunk, and showed in tabular statements that they did get drunk, and proved at tea parties that no inducement, human or Divine

- (except a medal), would induce them to forego⁸ their custom of getting drunk. Then
- came the chemist and druggist, with other tabular statements, showing that when
- they didn't get drunk, they took opium.

1. to uncoil: *se dérouler*. 2. stuccoed: *en stuc*. 3. florid: *très chargé*. 4. the lying-in hospital: the maternity hospital. 5. a furnace: *un fourneau*. 6. a denomination: *une confession*. 7. Teetotal: *anti-alcoolique*. 8. forego: abandon.

■ THE CONTEXT

When *Hard Times* was published in 1854, the industrial revolution had already been changing the landscape of Britain for over half a century. The rapid industrial development had brought overpopulation and grinding ugliness to the cities. But what Dickens, influenced by Carlyle (to whom the book is dedicated), most objected to was Bentham's theory of social legislation, Utilitarianism, according to which the aim of governments should be the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. What it led to was privileging quantity over quality, facts over imagination and sensitivity. This is why Coketown, where Dickens's *Hard Times* is set, is described as a "triumph of fact".

■ THE STRUCTURE

The first paragraph gives a physical description of the town (l. 1-13), while the third one, describes its institutions. The remaining two paragraphs contrast the 'fine' ladies the manufactured goods go to (§2) and the working-class people in the town (last §).

■ RHETORIC AND SYMBOLISM

In order to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people, cities and people's lives have been planned in the same way all over the country.

– The word 'Coketown' (coke means coal) is generic, the town described here could be anywhere. The "ill-smelling dye (line 5) may well allude to the manufacture of cotton, but no specific detail gives individuality to the place: in the Midlands all towns are Coketowns.

– A similar process of duplication characterizes all aspects of life in Coketown: the expression 'red brick' is repeated, the adjective black recurs three times, the buildings are interchangeable, the institutions are all similar in architecture. The only decoration, the bell in a bird cage (l. 22) suggests imprisonment. Uniformity is reflected by a rhetoric of repetition throughout the text: like one another (l. 9-10), same (l. 11-12), might have been (l. 26-27). As often with Dickens, the message is hammered in again and again. Multiplication infects time as well ('for ever and ever, l. 4).

– People are crushed under all the "tabular statements" about them (l. 49-52), they have no individuality. The name of the school, "Choakumchild" evokes choking, stifling, crushing instincts and imagination. The city's dignitaries have similar views, all (chemist, chaplain...) agreeing to condemn the working class. People have become machines, something also suggested by the parallelism between 'up and down' (l. 7) and 'in and out' (l. 10). The narrator's intervention with "Amen" at the end of the third paragraph, shows that the principles of utilitarianism have

become the new invocation to God. The accumulation of commercial words (l. 33-34) implies that in Coketown the new gods are now profit and money-making.

■ EXAGGERATION AND DISTORTION

The unnatural is described in terms of the natural and the natural in terms of the unnatural, as if to underline the way nature has been denied any place in this town which is prey to materialism. Many sentences start with an objective description ("It was a town of red brick"), which gradually becomes animated ('unnatural red and black', the windows 'tremble', the pinnacles look like 'florid wooden legs').

– The images used also verge on the grotesque: 'serpents of smoke' (l. 4) hint at perfidy but also at Satan and hell, the 'melancholy elephant' (l. 8), the 'painted face of a savage' (l. 3) bespeak a town which has got out of control, which has become a monstrous jungle. These comparisons are with animals or with madness, the message being that if you dehumanize people, life, vital energy, will reassert itself in a distorted way.

– Another form of distortion is created by the narrator with his constant use of irony ('triumph of fact', 'sacred', the narrator's ironic tone of voice when he pretends line 36 to be shocked at discovering that all is not well in Coketown ('No? Dear me!')). He is then greatly theatrical, clearly enjoying himself, rejoicing at the idea of what he is going to expose.

■ TWO NATIONS

The labouring class which makes up most of its inhabitants is invisible. Their presentation is delayed until the last paragraph; they are seen from the outside (through the institutions that crush them, like the M'Choakumchild school, or the various denominations to which they do not belong), then through the thoughts, and then the words of the voices of authority (religious groups, the Teetotal Society, the chemist) and therefore seem to have every vice possible on earth ('drunk', 'opium'). They are denied a voice.

– Coketown reflects a country divided into two nations, as in the title of Disraeli's novel *Sybil or the Two Nations* (1845). In the second paragraph, it is Coketown which is denied a voice by the rest of the world, and particularly the fine ladies who enjoy the comforts of the rich materials it produces, yet can 'scarcely hear the place mentioned'. And within the town there is a gulf between "master and man" (l. 31), their relationship being fact alone, that is to say figures and money. It is a world devoid of emotion and communication between the two sides, a world ruled by materialism and a mechanistic conception of man. Anything that cannot be reduced to figures or that is not saleable "never should be" (l. 34) and disappears. The church, politics, the blindness and complacency of the middle-class – all are responsible.

– There is no sentimentality here in the description of Coketown, yet we feel that the wasted environment has led to wasted lives, as if people were obliterated. It is through his heavy rhetoric – repetition, exaggeration, contrast – that Dickens conveys his criticism of utilitarianism to the reader.



THE 20TH
CENTURY:
UNTIL
WORLD WAR I
(1901-1940)



VIRGINIA WOOLF



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|-----------|---|--|
| 1901 | Accession of Edward VII | Kipling: <i>Kim</i> Elgar: <i>Pomp and Circumstance</i> |
| 1902 | End of Boer War | Conrad: <i>Heart of Darkness</i> |
| 1904 | Anglo-French 'Entente Cordiale' | Conrad: <i>Nostromo</i> Abbey Theatre (Dublin) founded. |
| 1907 | | Syngé: <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i> |
| 1910 | Accession of George V | Forster: <i>Howards End</i> First post-impressionist exhibition in London |
| 1911 | Parliament Act removes Lords' veto. | |
| 1912 | | British Board of Film Censors established. Lawrence: <i>Sons and Lovers</i> |
| 1913 | | Shaw: <i>Pygmalion</i> |
| 1914-1918 | First World War | |
| 1914 | Irish Home Rule Bill passed; Suffragette riots in London | <i>Blast</i> (Vorticist manifesto) Vaughan Williams: <i>London Symphony</i> |
| 1914 | | Joyce: <i>Dubliners</i> Pound(ed.): <i>Des Imagistes</i> |
| 1915 | Einstein's General Theory of Relativity | Brooke: <i>1914 and Other Poems</i> D.H. Lawrence: <i>The Rainbow</i> Ford: <i>The Good Soldier</i> |
| 1916 | Easter Rising in Dublin | Joyce: <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i> Shaw: <i>Heartbreak House</i> |
| 1917 | | Yeats: <i>The Wild Swans at Coole</i> Nash: <i>We are Making a New World</i> |
| 1918 | Beginning of influenza pandemic | |
| 1919 | Treaty of Versailles | |
| 1920 | Oxford University admits women students; League of Nations created. | Owen: <i>Poems</i> Yeats: <i>Michael Robartes and the Dancer</i> A. Christie: <i>The Mysterious Affair at Styles</i> Lawrence: <i>Women in Love</i> |

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| 1921 | Partition of Ireland: independence of Eire, Ulster remains British. | |
| 1922 | BBC's first broadcast | Eliot: <i>The Waste Land</i> Joyce: <i>Ulysses</i> ; Galsworthy: <i>The Forsyte Saga</i> |
| 1924 | First Labour government | Forster: <i>A Passage to India</i> O'Casey: <i>Juno and the Paycock</i> Shaw: <i>St Joan</i> |
| 1925 | | Woolf: <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> |
| 1926 | General Strike; Baird invents television. Commonwealth of Nations established. | |
| 1927 | | Woolf: <i>To the Lighthouse</i> |
| 1928 | Fleming discovers penicillin; women over 21 given the vote. | Yeats: <i>The Tower</i> Lawrence: <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> (banned in the UK until 1960); Huxley: <i>Point Counter Point</i> |
| 1929 | Great Depression | Woolf: <i>A Room of One's Own</i> |
| 1930 | Two million unemployed | Auden: <i>Poems</i> ; Eliot: <i>Ash Wednesday</i> ; Spender: <i>Twenty Poems</i> |
| 1931 | 'National Government' formed. | Woolf: <i>The Waves</i> |
| 1932 | Mosley forms British Union of Fascists. | Huxley: <i>Brave New World</i> Eliot: <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i> |
| 1935 | | MacNeice: <i>Poems</i> Orwell: <i>Burmese Days</i> Epstein: <i>Ecce Homo</i> |
| 1936 | Accession of Edward VIII, who abdicates to marry a divorcee. | D. Thomas: <i>Twenty-Five Poems</i> Surrealist exhibition in London |
| 1937 | Accession of George VI | Orwell: <i>The Road to Wigan Pier</i> Tolkien: <i>The Hobbit</i> |
| 1938 | Chamberlain and Hitler at Munich; British Empire exhibition | Beckett: <i>Murphy</i> ; Greene: <i>Brighton Rock</i> ; Waugh: <i>Scoop</i> ; Richardson: <i>Pilgrimage</i> |
| 1939-45 | Second World War | |

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| 1939 | Children evacuated from cities; IRA bombings | Joyce: <i>Finnegans Wake</i> Isherwood: <i>Goodbye to London</i> |
| 1940 | Battle of Britain; Churchill Prime Minister | Greene: <i>The Power and the Glory</i> Snow: <i>Strangers and Brothers</i> Official war artists (Nash, Spencer) appointed. |

THEATRE – FICTION AND PROSE – POETRY – ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE – PAINTING – MUSIC – CINEMA/PHOTOGRAPHY

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed¹ upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned...
(Yeats, 'The Second Coming')*

The first half of the 20th century is usually divided into clearly-labelled decades – the Edwardian age, the war years, the gay Twenties, the Depression Years, the war years again – suggesting that time had accelerated the pace of change. But such labels tend to be fallacious and hide more complex realities.

The prosperity and glitter one usually associates with the Edwardian age and the beginning of the reign of George V saw no return of the early Victorian faith in progress. There were doubts about Britain's imperial mission (Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) and the social state of the nation (Wells's *Tono-Bungay*, 1909, Forster's *Howards End*, 1910). Liberal reforms after 1906 (old age pensions, sickness and unemployment benefits, work regulations) and the 1911 check to the powers of the House of Lords did not lessen industrial unrest and the violence of the suffragettes' campaign to obtain voting equality with men. The 'land of hope and glory' celebrated in Elgar's 'Pomp and Circumstance' march (1901) must have sounded ironic in the light of the terrible war which broke out just over a decade later and which left a legacy of trauma, bereavement and pessimism.

1. to loose: *relâcher, libérer*

The 1920s, or Jazz age, a term which applies to the USA better than to Britain, was a time of release after years of hardship and it saw America overtake Britain, not just economically but also culturally, as the American way of life gradually pervaded all aspects of British life, whether fashion, the cinema or music, and brought new codes of social behaviour ('Bright Young People'). London was superseded² by Paris as a cultural centre and though the decade produced a rich crop of modernist works, many of them were written by exiles (Pound, Ford, Lawrence, Joyce). Increasing international industrial competition from countries which had developed their industries later but more productively meant that the old British industries (coal, iron, steel, shipbuilding, textile) started to decline after the war, with rising unemployment in the north. The new industries which took over (consumer goods, motor-cars), tended to be in the south and Midlands, thus increasing the north-south divide and leading to the 1926 General Strike. This situation, however, led to further policies to help the unemployed, to encourage house-building and improve education. And the fact that many women had worked outside their homes for the first time during the war helped them acquire a new status and new roles which contributed to their being given the vote in 1928 on equal terms with men.

The 1929 crash, which led to years of depression, mainly affected the old industries, causing millions to be unemployed and often live in severe poverty (George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 1937), generating class conflicts and political extremism – both fascist and communist. For those who were lucky to have a job, however, standards of living actually increased during those years. From a literary point of view it was a very political decade, with many writers committed to the Left, although their early idealism turned to disenchantment and anxiety with the defeat of the Republicans in Spain and the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

A much-debated issue during those years was the Irish question. The Home Rule Act, finally passed in 1914 in spite of strong opposition from Ulster, was soon suspended because of the outbreak of the war. But resistance to British rule was strong and encouraged by the Celtic Revival movement, which promoted Irish culture. It inspired the 1916 Easter Rising rebellion in Dublin, which was so brutally repressed that Irish opinion turned in favour of Sinn Féin, the party fighting for independence. They formed an Irish Parliament, declared Ireland independent, which led in 1921 to the partition of Ireland between Ulster (which remained within the United Kingdom) and the New Irish Free State, a dominion within the British Empire. The situation was also tense in India, with increasing resistance against the Raj, which resulted in India's independence in 1947. In other parts of the world, the empire had also begun to disintegrate and the 1931 Statute of Westminster recognized a new status for Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, which became the British Commonwealth of Nations.

The industrial and technological growth that marked the Victorian age gathered pace³ in the next forty years and profoundly changed the picture of Britain: the

2. to supersede: *remplacer, prendre la place de*

3. to gather pace: *s'accélérer*

motor car, the aeroplane, electric power, the gramophone, the wireless, television and the cinema – all techniques of speed – not only changed the everyday lives of most people but helped to democratize society since, as Priestley explained in *England Your England* (1941), 'the rich and the poor read the same books, and they also see the same films and listen to the same radio programmes.' Yet, it was also the terrifying power of these new advances (artillery, tanks, poison gas, submarines, Zeppelins) which made the Great War so destructive, and eventually led to another war, ending the progression from steam power to nuclear power and generating questions about the notion of progress, such as those voiced by Bertrand Russell.

In the arts, Britain opened itself to international influences as it never had before with a whole range of modernist movements revolutionizing the art scene: post-impressionism, futurism, imagism, cubism, Dadaism, Vorticism, surrealism... In literature too Britain embraced modernism in the early years of the century. After 1930, more realism, more conventional modes of writing seemed best fitted to the 'literature of commitment' the decade gave rise to.

WHAT IS MODERNISM?

The word 'Modernism' began to be used in the 1960s to refer to several literary and artistic movements which, from the late 1900s to the early 1920s, shared some beliefs although they had no common artistic programme. The main characteristics they share are:

- A rejection of Victorian values and conventions and of faith in reason and progress.
- An oblique response to the mass destruction of WWI: the horror of the war is not necessarily described but translated into violence, conflicts and fractured structures.
- A rejection of art as representational and mimetic. Art and fiction found new ways of conveying the perception of reality and the workings of the unconscious (the different planes of cubism, shifting points of view and stream of consciousness*).
- A rejection of art as conveying the writer's emotions.
- Thanks to Freud and psychoanalysis, personality now appeared as the very opposite of Dickens's humours*: it was complex, fragmentary, with buried memories and dreams playing a crucial part. Traditional social-realist novels, vehicles for social observation and comment, could no longer convey the new emphasis on the self.
- Many works rendered the difficulty of apprehending the complexity and uncertainty of the world through obscurity and ambiguity, with novels not lending themselves to any final interpretation (Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for example).
- Above all, the modernists believed that form carried meaning sometimes better than a description of it did, so that literary experimentation in both subject matter and form was an essential part of their work, with for example, the limited narrative point of view* of a 'centre of consciousness' (James); stream of consciousness* (Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf); dislocated syntax (Pound, Eliot); dislocated chronology (Eliot, Conrad, Ford) and collage (Pound).

This strong belief in art is what later differentiated them from the postmodernists*. Modernism also benefited from the end of circulating libraries, which had favoured conventional triple-deckers⁴. Works now came out as single volumes, making for far more freedom in both structure and subject. Modernism might also have developed in response to the anxiety caused by the rise of popular, entertaining mass culture.

POETRY

■ The Georgians

Calling themselves 'Georgians' because of the new king George V, a group of poets reacted against the exoticism of Kipling's poetry and chose English, and mainly rural subjects. Robert Bridges, Rupert Brooke, W.H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, John Masefield, Siegfried Sassoon and Isaac Rosenberg were all published in anthologies of *Georgian Poetry* (1912-1922). Many of them, however, turned into war poets.

■ The war poets

The patriotism and idealism at the start of the war, the feeling that 'it would all be over by Christmas' soon gave way to horror, bitterness and a sense of absurdity and loss, which poetry bore witness to. There were some modernist innovations in war poetry, yet its aim was mainly to express the experience of war.

Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) wrote exalted patriotic poems before he was killed early in the war (*1914 and Other Poems*, 1915). The idealism he symbolizes is best seen in poems such as 'The Soldier':

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home. (stanza 1)

Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) criticized the jingoism⁵ of the early war literature and violently denounced the slaughter of the trenches in honest, anti-militarist poems (*Counter-Attack*, 1918).

The early poems of Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) are romantic, sensuous and Keatsian. But the war turned him into an imaginative poet who condemned the futility and horror of the conflict ('My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.'). His poems are striking for their technical innovations, notably the use of assonance* and pararhyme* (*Poems*, 1920).

4. a triple-decker: un roman (souvent au XVIII^e ou XIX^e siècles) en trois volumes 5. jingoism: chauvinisme

Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918), a painter and a poet, was influenced by Jewish history and legend and his poetry is both symbolist and expressionistic, with some visionary and apocalyptic poems (*Poems*, 1922).

The poetry of Edward Thomas (1878-1917) is lyrical and devoted to a description of the English countryside. Many of the poems are indirect reflections on the war, translating it into the world of peacetime nature (*Collected Poems*, 1922).

Edmund Blunden (1896-1974) too served during two long years during the war, and the horrors of the trenches provide the subject of very moving poems about the destruction of nature and man (*Undertones of War*, 1928).

■ The Modernists

Modernist poetry owes a great deal to the American poet Ezra Pound (→ p. 285), who while he was in London between 1908 and 1920, worked with Yeats and edited *The Waste Land*, which Eliot dedicated to him. He was also the leader of the Imagist movement, which rejected Romantic, Victorian and Georgian sentiment and advocated concentration, clear images, expressive rhythm and free verse. Imagist poems are reminiscent of Japanese haikus.

T.E. Hulme (1883-1917) was the best-known Imagist poet in Britain. Here is one of his poems:

Autumn

A touch of cold in the Autumn night-
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy⁶ moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was born in Dublin County and educated in Dublin and London, where he studied art. He was a leading member of the Irish Literary Revival of the 1880s and involved in Irish cultural and political nationalism. He helped establish Dublin's Abbey Theatre in 1904, where he staged his own plays (*Cathleen ni Houlihan*, 1902). His unrequited⁷ love for the actress Maud Gonne affected all his works. Yeats wrote over some 50 years and his poetry showed marked changes over that time. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923.

Yeats's fascination with Irish mysticism, the occult and folklore explains his association with Aestheticism and the Celtic Twilight. His aim was to re-awaken the Irish to their past culture and literature. The poetry of those early years is romantic, symbolic, elegiac, and conventional in form. There is a Pre-Raphaelite quality about

6. ruddy: *rougeant*

7. unrequited: *non partagé*

these poems, some of which, like 'The Lake of Innisfree' or 'Down by the Salley Gardens', have a dream-like quality. (*The Wanderings of Oisín*, 1889)

Yeats supported the Irish Nationalist cause, was a senator in the Irish free state, but believed that poetry should not convey too didactic a political message. In poems such as 'Easter 1916', however, he celebrated the lives of those who fought and died in the Easter Rising, thus allowing 'a terrible beauty' to be born.

It was after 1920 that his poetry (*The Wild Swans at Coole*, 1917, *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, 1921, *The Tower*, 1928, *The Winding Stair*, 1929) became more modernist, more concise and direct, uniting mythology and visionary, often prophetic symbolism, as in the well-known 'Second Coming' ('Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer / Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...'). In this poem his apocalyptic vision of the modern world is conveyed through the image of 'gyres', that is to say spirals of 2000 years which cyclically widen, reach anarchy and collapse before another era begins. Yeats believed his era should spiral out of control 2000 years after the birth of Christ, therefore soon. The beautiful 'Sailing to Byzantium' (1928) is an old man's spiritual journey to Byzantium, where he wishes he can leave his dying body behind and reach immortal life.

Yeats's later poetry is still mystical and lyrical but more personal and less romantic than his early poems.



Wyndham Lewis, *Composition*, 1913. Tate London.

Eliot and Wyndham Lewis were lifelong friends and Eliot's poetry shows the influence of Vorticism, a modernist art movement which appeared in 1912-14, with Lewis as its leading spirit and Jacob Epstein and Edward Wadsworth as other representatives. The aim of Vorticism (from the word 'vortex', which evokes flux) was to reflect the energy and speed of the modern, urban age, through broken, angular lines. With its heavy black structures this painting evokes the architectural and mechanistic dynamism of urban life.

THE USE OF MYTH

Many modernists used myth as a counterpoint to their narrative or poetry. Discussing Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot described the use of myth as 'a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.'

One of the major sources of myth was Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915), a comparative, cultural study of mythology and religion, which tried to find shared elements in different cultures at different times (for instance sacrifice, fertility rites, the dying land, king or god). It also showed similarities between paganism and modern Christianity. Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), a study of the Holy Grail legend, was also a source of inspiration for poets such as Eliot.

Joyce used Homer in *Ulysses* and Ovid in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Eliot used the Holy Grail legend as well as Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Yeats used Irish myths. Lawrence used a whole range of pagan and Christian myths.

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1887-1965) was born in Missouri, in a family of intellectuals, and studied philosophy at Harvard, Paris and Oxford. In London, he met Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. He married an English woman, took on British nationality, and declared himself 'classical in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion.' He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1948. Eliot's early poetry, though urban, was influenced by the Symbolists. With 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (pub. 1915), the dramatic monologue of a shy, self-aware, neurotic character, symbolism unites with fragmentation, juxtaposition and unexpected imagery.

Eliot's poems written in the early 1920s (*Gerontion*, *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men*) are broader in scope and show the decay and cultural sterility of western civilization. After 1927 and Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, his poetry becomes marked by faith and hope. (*The Ariel Poems*, *Ash Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*.)

The Waste Land (1922), a seminal modernist text, offers a fragmented vision of a dry, sterile land, where men and nature are dead. What prevails is a sense of loss, desolation and the pervasive presence of death – all alluding to the war without mentioning it. That ghostly world is the post-war one, now stripped of values and beliefs. Western civilization is now spiritually dead and waiting for some rebirth and regeneration, evoked through allusions to Christianity and the myth of the wounded and impotent Fisher King, whose land has become barren, and who is waiting for someone to heal him. The poem is a collage of fragments from literature, myths and cultural references, with constant time and narrative shifts to convey the dislocation and disorientation of the modern world and the difficulty of interpreting it. Images and themes recur like musical motifs, for instance the theme of the journey, the cycle of seasons, people's disconnection with their past, the loss of any guiding belief, and allusions to Tiresias, Wagner and Dante. The voice too keeps shifting as the poem offers a mosaic of lyrical, Biblical, colloquial passages, and of quotations, some in foreign languages.

The wealth of references, many of them erudite, work through irony and symbolic association, creating paradox* or similarity. It shows the influence of Imagism with its concentration and the way mood can be expressed by rhythm.

The Waste Land is a poem of doubt and negation, in which the reader senses a yearning for order and harmony.

Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1936-1942) are religious poems anchored in both space and history. They are more intimate and meditative, and written in a simpler language.

Eliot also wrote influential literary criticism (*The Sacred Wood*, 1920), recommending that art remain impersonal ('Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.') praising the Metaphysical Poets (→ p. 00) for uniting thought and feeling, and explaining that emotion should not be described (as the Romantics did) but evoked through an object or a situation, or a chain of events – an 'objective correlative*' – that will give rise to that emotion.

The Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978) can be considered a Modernist because of his themes (the destructive effects of modernity on human beings) and technique (his use of 'Lallans', the Scots dialect, of national myths and folklore, of collage, intertextuality* and parody* as in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, 1926).

■ Poets of the thirties

Reacting against the impersonality and pessimism of the modernists, a number of poets felt the need to bring people closer to the real world, to make them socially and politically aware and responsible. Most of them were committed to Marxism in the early years of the decade, and to a less ideological socialism later on. The conservative right called them 'The Macspanday Group', disparagingly⁸ merging their names into one.

Wystan Hugh (W.H.) Auden (1907-1973) studied at Oxford, where he was at the same time as Stephen Spender (1909-95), Louis MacNeice (1907-63), and Cecil Day Lewis (1904-72), all of them concerned with social and political issues. Although Auden's early poems (*Poems*, 1930) had been personal and shown the influence of Eliot and modernism, he soon turned away from complexity in order to communicate his left-wing message more directly. His aim was to bring poetry closer to people and their social and moral concerns, which is why his next collection (*Look, Stranger!*, 1936) embraces political issues and uses traditional poetic forms such as the ballad*. In 1928, he started working with Christopher Isherwood and they published several plays (blends of revue and surrealism) inspired by Brecht (*The Dog Beneath the Skin*, 1935, *The Ascent of F6*, 1936, *On the Frontier*, 1938.) A journey to Iceland with Louis MacNeice resulted in *Letters from Iceland* (1937), a collection of poems and prose by the two poets. In 1939, Auden left for America, disappointed by what he

8. disparagingly: de façon méprisante

considered the parochial⁹ atmosphere of England, a move for which he was much criticized as England was at war. His later poetry returned to personal and religious meditations (*Another Time*, 1940, *New Year Letter*, 1941.)

Auden's poetry of the 1930s is based on the belief that the personal and the public are indissociable and that our inner lives are determined by our social and political environment.

He considered light poetry, songs, plays, which tend to be written for a public, and therefore more accessible, as political verse since they created a rapport with the audience. He also believed that in order to be aesthetically interesting poetry had to create unexpectedness, hence his constant use of incongruity, clashes, neologisms and verbal play. Auden tended to treat serious themes, such as a sense of loss or of doomed love, in an unserious way, as in the following well-known poem.

Funeral Blues

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.
Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead',
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.
He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.
The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good. (1936)

Louis MacNeice (1907-63) was poised¹⁰ between extremes, rejecting both Communism and individualism, capitalism and revolution. This is felt in his poetry, which is full of doubt and scepticism, as if the world was too 'plural' for him to support any single system. His respect for the individual appears clearly in poems such as 'Prayer Before Birth'. The verse *Autumn Journal* (in *Poems 1925-1940*) is a record of the poet's reaction to public and private experiences.

The early poetry of Stephen Spender (1909-95), a socialist and a pacifist, was inspired by his beliefs, but was always more humanistic than didactic (*Poems*, 1933). He often found his inspiration in industrial landscapes, so that his poem 'The Pylons' gave its name to the 'Pylon School' of industrial poetry. Spender joined the

9. parochial: provincial, caractérisé par un esprit de clocher

10. poised: en équilibre

Communist Party in 1936 and was sent to Spain during the Civil War, an experience that he found deeply affecting. But he became disappointed with Communism and his poetry became more private in the following years (*Collected Poems 1928-1985*, 1986).

English surrealism never really caught on in Britain, except in the early poems of David Gascoyne (1916-2001) and to some extent in the poetry of Dylan Thomas (→ p. 169), particularly in his use of astonishing images and his attempt to convey the workings of the unconscious.

The poetry of the Scottish Edwin Muir (1887-1959) conveys the tension between the Edenic beauty of the Orkney islands and the fallen modern world of Glasgow (*Collected Works*, 1921-1951),

DRAMA

■ Irish naturalism

Both central figures in the Irish Literary Revival, Synge and O'Casey show the legacy of Henrik Ibsen, whose naturalism was very popular in Britain. But their description of the harsh realities of Irish life unite with the dreams and imagination of its people.

THE IRISH LITERARY REVIVAL

From the middle of the 19th century, there was a growing interest in the development of a national consciousness in Ireland. The Celtic Renaissance movement aimed at preserving the Gaelic language as well as the history and literature of ancient Ireland (folklore, songs, music and dances). In 1893, for example, Yeats published *The Celtic Twilight*, a collection of poems and texts from the west of Ireland, a book which gave the revival its other name. The movement was encouraged by the rising political demands for Home Rule. It was particularly in the realm of the theatre that it led to a national literature – Irish plays by Irish authors. In 1899, under the leadership of Lady Gregory and Yeats, the Irish Literary Theatre was founded, and in 1904 the company moved to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, where plays by Lady Gregory, Yeats, Synge, and O'Casey were performed.

John Millington Synge (1871-1909) set his plays among Irish rural communities, particularly among the peasants of the Aran islands. Their hard work and lonely lives are described with realism, but the heroic streak¹¹ typical of Irish folklore reappears in their violence, their bragging, and their poetic imagination.

Riders to the Sea (1904), written in the English dialect of the Aran islands, is an elegiac play about a woman's struggle against the cruel sea, which has claimed all

11. a streak: une tendance

her family. But it was criticized for not idealizing enough its characters. Synge's best-known play, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) is a comedy about a young man who arrives in a village claiming to be a fugitive from justice because he killed his father. He immediately becomes a hero and is admired by all the women there until his father arrives. This opening performance caused a riot, Irish nationalists believing that the play was an offence to Ireland.

Sean O'Casey (1880-1964) grew up in Dublin, in a working class family. His involvement in the Irish Nationalist cause and his commitment to socialism find expression in socio-realist plays about the Irish working class.

Juno and the Paycock (1924) takes place during the Irish Civil War and contrasts Juno Boyles, a stoical woman, with her drunken braggart¹² of a husband (the Paycock). Behind her, it is a portrait of all women in wartime which is drawn. *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), set during the 1916 Easter Rising, exposes the Nationalists' blind patriotic rhetoric and their lust for war. That and the fact that one of the characters is a prostitute provoked fury in the audience.

■ Verse drama

Verse drama represented a reaction against the naturalistic plays of Ibsen and Shaw. Not surprisingly, its best representatives were also poets.

The first play performed at the Abbey Theatre was Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* (1899), a blank verse drama based on an Irish legend: to save her starving tenants, the Countess sells her soul to the devil. Yeats's verse dramas are symbolist and poetic and after 1913 show the influence of Japanese Nô theatre and expressionism, with the use of masks, dance and music.

T.S. Eliot (→ p. 144), who also revived verse drama, believed that its subject should be different from that of prose drama, not socio-economic realities, but emotional realities. *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), about the last hours of Thomas Becket and his resistance to four tempters, is half-way between a Morality Play and a Greek tragedy, with its chorus. *The Cocktail Party* (1950), apparently a comedy of manners, offers a philosophical and religious reflection upon married life. A common theme in Eliot's plays is the characters' striving for redemption, Christian symbolism entering contemporary bourgeois society.

Christopher Fry (1907-2005) also wrote verse plays inspired by his religious faith (*The Lady's Not for Burning*, 1949).

■ Political commitment

In the 1920s, the Workers Theatre Movement, in which Joan Littlewood was very active, aimed at promoting socialist ideas and bringing the theatre closer to working class audiences, with sketches, street theatre, satire and audience participation.

W.H. Auden (→ p. 145) and Christopher Isherwood (*The Dog Beneath the Skin*,

12. a braggart: *un fanfaron*

1936, *The Ascent of F6*, 1936) also experimented with expressionistic verse drama in the Brechtian tradition.

■ Comedies of manners

Less innovative and experimental, comedies of manners still remained the most popular form of drama between the wars. Particularly notable are those of W. Somerset Maugham (*The Circle*, 1921, → p. 157), J.B. Priestley (*An Inspector Calls*, 1946), and Noël Coward (*Blithe Spirit*, 1941).

THE NOVEL

■ A pre-modernist: Joseph Conrad

The technical experimentations of Conrad's novels make him a pre-modernist novelist. Born Josef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (1857-1924) in Poland, Joseph Conrad came from a Polish family who had resisted Russian rule. He was an orphan at 12, joined a French ship at 16, and began a seafaring life which led him to travel all over the world. In 1884 he became a British subject and ten years later devoted his life entirely to writing in English – his third language. His experience as a mariner provides the inspiration for most of his novels, but the adventures he describes are mainly inner ones, those of deluded or guilt-ridden exiles, whose idealism proves impossible in a sort of revision of traditional adventure stories.

Lord Jim (1900) traces the fall and redemption of 'Lord' Jim, a young idealistic officer who dreams of being a hero, yet abandons his ship when she sinks with many pilgrims aboard. He spends his life obsessed by his shameful past and trying to atone for it. The narrator is Marlow, who relates Jim's story in a broken up way, juxtaposing past, future and present, and with multiple external points of view which are more or less reliable, so that the reader has to piece together this information. The novel addresses questions such as the nature of heroism, fate, responsibility, and the complexity of human nature.

The setting of *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is the Belgian-run Congo. It tells the story of Marlow, the narrator of *Lord Jim*, an idealistic captain for the Belgian company trading in the Congo. Going up the Congo he witnesses cruelty and brutality in the treatment of the native inhabitants. As he nears the Inner station, he hears more and more about Kurtz, the Company agent there and finally discovers that he has been corrupted by the search for ivory and engages in terrible rites including human sacrifice. Kurtz will die uttering the words 'The horror! The horror!', which remain unexplained.

Darkness is everywhere in the story: in the thick, impenetrable jungle, in Kurtz's heart, in the imperial enterprise which leads to the exploitation of men. Kurtz takes ivory by force, imperialism too despoils the native population under the pretext of bringing them 'civilization', while for Marlow and Kurtz the natives remain part of the setting and are never given a voice.

'But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther. For a moment I stood appalled, as though by a warning.' (Ch. 1)

In the end the absurdity and hypocrisy of the imperial enterprise lead Marlow to moral confusion when it comes to judging Kurtz. The narrative is made more interesting thanks to a frame story, since it is an unnamed narrator who hears and relates Marlow's story, thus creating distance and possible ambiguity.

Set in a small imaginary republic in South America and told with constant shifts in point of view, *Nostramo* (1904) is about political instability, revolution and corruption. *The Secret Agent* (1906-7) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) are political novels.

■ Cultural and sexual liberation

David Herbert (D.H.) Lawrence (1885-1930) grew up in a Nottinghamshire pit¹³ village, where his father was a miner and his mother a schoolteacher who had ambitions for her children – a family background reflected in the autobiographical *Sons and Lovers* (1913). In 1912, Lawrence ran off with Frieda, the German wife of one of his former tutors. Harshly criticized in England, he spent most of his life travelling, writing novels, essays, travel books and poetry. The world of Lawrence's novels is one of tensions between nature and industry, intellectual and sexual life, mind and body, classes, and genders. Lawrence believed that the industrialization and moral conventions of the modern age had stifled in human beings an innate vital sexuality that helped them commune with nature. By developing honest relationships, sympathy, instinct and sexuality, people could become more fully alive. His working-class characters (like Mellors, the gamekeeper in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) are often more fulfilled than middle-class ones.

The Rainbow (1915), the saga of the Brangwen family over three generations, resembles a social realist epic, but its frank allusions to sexual desire and lesbianism caused it to be banned for 11 years. Modernism is reflected in the use of symbolism, in particular that of the rainbow which follows the Flood in Genesis, and in a somewhat expressionistic attempt at conveying emotions and unconscious impulses. For Lawrence, consciousness is not just mental, it is physical, bodily, sexual, and it is this fusion of mental and physical experience which the writing should render. This is achieved through patterns of images, rhythm, and free indirect style*.

Its sequel, *Women in Love* (1920), continues the story of the two sisters, Ursula and Gudrun, and their search for fulfilment, but with a more discontinuous structure. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), the story of Lady Constance, whose need for physical love (her husband is in a wheelchair and paralysed from the waist down) is satisfied

13. a pit: *une mine, un puits de mine*

by Mellors, the gamekeeper, was banned until 1960, when the trial of Penguin Books for obscenity ended on a verdict of 'not guilty'.

Lawrence also wrote poetry, mostly in free verse. His best poems (*Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, 1923) explore with love and sympathy the natural non-human world, a world of instinct and energy devoid of the corruption and class attitudes of society.

Edward Morgan Forster (1879-1970) studied at Cambridge, where he became a member of The Apostles society, many of whose members became associated with the Bloomsbury Group. His novels describe a socially divided society, which could be redeemed by tolerance, understanding and sympathy – a view which can be summarized by the epigraph* to *Howards End*, 'Only connect'. Forster travelled to India and especially to Italy, which symbolized for him beauty and nature and which he contrasted with the stifling hypocrisy of Britain. Florence, then Surrey are the settings of *A Room with a View*, which contrasts two groups of characters, one upper-class, conventional and repressed, the other lower class and liberated.

Howards End (1910), set amid the Edwardian upper middle-class is a plea to unite the world of art and culture (the Schlegel sisters) and that of money and decisions (the Wilcox family).

A Passage to India (1924) shows the limits of such optimism. The novel is set in India, amid the ruling British. Mrs Moore has come to visit her son, accompanied by her friend Adela Quested, both eager to see the real India, both rejecting the snobbery and prejudices of the British. They make friends with a young anglophile Muslim, Dr Aziz, who organises the visit of the Marabar Caves. It ends in tragedy when Adela falsely accuses Dr Aziz of improper behaviour. The differences between the English and the Indians have proved irreconcilable.

Forster also wrote criticism and essays (*Aspects of the Novel*, 1927, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951) and was active against censorship, defending for example Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), which describes a lesbian relationship.

■ Literary experimentation

One of the first truly modernist novels, *The Good Soldier* (1915) by Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939) relates the disintegrating relationships within two upper-class couples and the death and madness it leads to. To convey the sense of a doomed society and to show that perception is deceitful and warped¹⁴, Ford uses an unreliable, foolish narrator, dislocated chronology, and inconsistencies that require the reader to reconsider his/her view of the characters. The modernist tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924-28) examines the destructive effect of the war on society and the protagonists' consciousness.

14. warped: *faussé, perverti*

James Joyce (1882-1941) was born in Dublin in a devout Catholic family and educated at Jesuit schools and at University College, where he studied languages. When he was 21, having lost his Catholic faith and finding Dublin too stifling, he left Ireland and went to live in Trieste and Zurich, then Paris. He led an obscure life, teaching English, a voluntary exile who wrote of Dublin exclusively. Each of Joyce's novels experiments with form in a different way.

Dubliners (1914) is a series of twelve naturalistic stories about the political and cultural paralysis of Dublin – a city which is prey to bigotry, poverty and narrow-mindedness. The characters all fail to escape their routines or achieve their dreams. Joyce considered *Dubliners* as a chapter of the 'moral history' of his country and a first step towards its 'spiritual liberation'. The stories are organized in a complex pattern of themes and symbolism, their meaning partly resulting from their place in the whole structure. They reach a poetic climax with the very end of 'The Dead'. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), a semi-autobiographical Bildungsroman* and Künstlerroman* about the childhood of an Irish Catholic boy, unites a truthful, naturalistic description of a boy growing up in Dublin with classical myth. The name Stephen Dedalus, evokes the father of Icarus in Greek mythology and his attempt to escape the labyrinth. Joyce's Dedalus is an artist who also ends up fleeing the pressures of religion and Irishness. Each stage of his psychological development is related in a prose typical of that age, as in the very first lines, which convey the impressions of a very young child:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo...

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face. He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt. O, the wild rose blossoms On the little green place. He sang that song. That was his song.

The novel is fragmented, with many ellipses and gaps. It is structured through association of ideas, stream of consciousness*, contrasts and parallelisms as well as through moments of epiphany*, that is to say privileged moments of perception, of 'sudden spiritual manifestation'.

Just as Eliot chose London as the locale of *The Waste Land*, Dublin provides the background for *Ulysses* (1922), which chronicles the lives of three Dubliners – Leopold Bloom, his wife Molly, and Stephen Dedalus, now a young poet. It takes place during a single day (16 June 1904) and we follow Bloom's stream of consciousness* as he walks through Dublin, going to a funeral, then a newspaper office, then the pub, the Strand and the hospital. The novel constantly echoes and inverts *The Odyssey*, each episode corresponding to one of Homer's. Bloom wanders like Odysseus, but in a most unheroic way; Molly, who is unfaithful to him, is no Penelope, and Stephen no Telemachus.

The characters are now ordinary ones and Dublin is a microcosm of the world. Stephen is looking for a father, Bloom for a son, both in need of defining their identities. The structure of the novel is intricate and the allusions and parodies* sometimes obscure. But there is an extraordinary delight in language, wit*, puns*, jokes, both intellectual and coarse. All genres (epic*, dramatic, journalistic, farcical...) and registers (vulgar, poetic, prophetic, humorous...) merge in this extraordinary novel.

Finnegans Wake (1939), a dream in the mind of a Dublin innkeeper, without any clear plot, goes even further with linguistic experiments; it is a novel about language. His stream of consciousness* becomes a sort of dream language with words carrying multiple meanings, associations and puns*, with neologisms and references to different languages. It is as if words were about to merge into each other and language to collapse by taking on an infinity of meanings. Here are the first five lines of the novel:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs. Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passen-core rearrived from North Armoriga on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The expression comes from William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890) and refers to the free, chaotic flow of ideas, impressions, sensations and memories in someone's mind.

The technique itself was first used in Edouard Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1888). Browning had already experimented with dramatic monologues, James with interior monologue, but thought was then presented as organized. In the 20th century, the new interest in the subconscious led writers to try and render thoughts before they were verbalised and coherent, at a pre-speech level. Stream of consciousness was mainly used by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and William Faulkner, but the expression refers to very different techniques.

A comparison between two short passages will serve as an illustration.

– For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of—to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*)

– A kidney oozed bloodgouts on the willowpatterned dish: the last. He stood by the nextdoor girl at the counter. Would she buy it too, calling the items from a slip in her hand? Chapped: washingsoda. And a pound and a half of Denny's sausages. His eyes rested on her vigorous hips. Woods his name is. Wonder what he does. Wife is oldish. New blood. No followers allowed. (Joyce, *Ulysses*)

In the passage by Woolf the narrator's voice merges into that of the character as the reporting verb (she thought, she said) is omitted. It blurs the distinction between direct and indirect speech*. There is great fluidity underlined by metaphors* of light and darkness, of substance and dissolving. With Joyce, the rhythm is more staccato, less fluid. Associations of ideas are conveyed through fragmentation, ruptures, jumps and missing connections, giving an impression of chaos, of which the reader must make sense. Molly Bloom's monologue, at the very end of *Ulysses* takes yet another form – some fifty pages without any punctuation to reflect the fluid way thoughts and memories follow each other in one's mind.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), the daughter of the famous biographer, critic and scholar Sir Leslie Stephen, was raised in an intellectual and wealthy family. She was at the centre of the Bloomsbury Group and in 1912 married Leonard Woolf, a political theorist and publisher, with whom she founded the Hogarth Press. All through her life, she suffered from bouts of depression, which led to her suicide by drowning. Social realism is not what Virginia Woolf was interested in. A feminist, she explored the consciousness of her women protagonists, trying to capture the 'myriad impressions' a mind receives at any time. In spite of the third-person narrator, we follow the constant flow of fleeting perceptions and sensations – colours, feelings, things seen, memories – that run through the character's mind at one given time, shattering¹⁵ chronological time. Such stream of consciousness* is conveyed through poetic rhythms and rich patterns of imagery

Mrs Dalloway (1925) relates one day in the life of an upper-class woman who is planning a dinner-party. The novel reflects and satirizes the society of its time (the contrast between the governing classes – Clarissa Dalloway, her husband, an MP – and poor Miss Kilman) and the tragic consequences of the war (with the suicide of Septimus Smith who was shell-shocked during the war). But it is mainly an exploration of Clarissa Dalloway's consciousness, her sensitivity, her need to protect her privacy balanced out by a need to communicate with others.

'...somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.'

The structure of the novel also relies on a pattern of motifs* and symbols (for example mind time vs clock time) and a web of metaphors and imagery such as the numerous images of waves and water.

To the Lighthouse (1927) describes two days in the life of the Ramsay family on holiday in the Hebrides, one before the war, the other afterwards, after the death of some

15. to shatter: *briser*

of the family members. We follow the flow of sensations and thoughts of different members of the family and the way Mrs Ramsay dominates their thoughts, even after her death in the second part of the novel. The symbolism of the lighthouse gives unity to the novel and takes on different meanings for each character. Recurring themes are the difficulty of human relationships, death, and the transience of things; only art (embodied by the painter Lily Briscoe) can preserve experience and unite its disparate and often confusing elements. By alternating the perceptions of different characters, Woolf highlights their subjectivity and the impossibility of summarizing character through the view of an omniscient* narrator – as Victorian narrators did.

In *Orlando* (1928), the androgynous eponymous hero, born an Elizabethan gentleman, lives on through the centuries, becoming male and female in turn. *The Waves* (1931), the most experimental of Woolf's novels, follows the consciousness of six characters and the way the death of someone they knew affects them. Woolf also wrote influential essays, notably *The Common Reader* (1932) and *A Room of One's Own* (1928), a seminal feminist book which explains how material conditions have, for centuries, prevented women from writing.

THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP

The Bloomsbury group is the name given to a set of intellectuals and artists who met at Virginia Woolf's house in Bloomsbury Square in London. Among them were Clive Bell and Roger Fry (art critics), Lytton Strachey (the biographer), Vanessa Bell (Virginia's sister and a painter), John Maynard Keynes (the economist), E.M. Forster (the novelist), Leonard Woolf (a journalist and writer). They had no common philosophy but shared the views of G.E. Moore (*Principia Ethica*, 1903), who celebrated the pleasure of friendship and aesthetic appreciation ('By far the most valuable things, which we can know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which can be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects.'). They rejected Victorian utilitarianism and Puritanism, particularly the role traditionally assigned to women. Instead, they glorified love, including homosexuality, emotions, friendship and loyalty. Most of them were agnostics and pacifists.

Malcolm Lowry (1909-57) read English at Cambridge and travelled extensively before moving with his wife to Mexico. In spite of his alcoholism and mental problems, he wrote one of the most celebrated novels of the 20th century.

Under the Volcano (1947), which is partly autobiographical, describes the gradual disintegration then madness of Geoffrey Firmin, an alcoholic ex-British consul. Like *Ulysses*, the novel takes place on a single day in Quauhnahuac, the last day of Firmin's life. Addicted to alcohol and peyote to forget the barbarity of the times and the impending Second World War, he has cut himself off from his wife, his brother and all human relations. Wretched and isolated, he stands for the plight of modern

man. This is underlined by numerous literary references (in particular to Dante, Shakespeare and Marlowe) and by symbolism, like that of the volcano and the fact that the novel takes place during the Mexican festival of 'the day of the Dead'.

Lawrence Durrell (1912-1990) worked for the Foreign Office during most of his life and lived in various Mediterranean countries, which provide the setting for his novels. Although mainly written after World War II, they are typical of modernist experimentation. Durrell is best known for *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-60: *Justine; Balthazar; Mountolive; Clea*), in which the same events are related by the same narrator, but from a different perspective in each book. Following Joyce and Virginia Woolf, he thus illustrates the relativity and subjectivity of vision. The theme is 'an investigation of modern love'. Written in a rich, lyrical language, the novels explore the relationship between several characters against the exotic and sensuous background of Alexandria.

■ Social realism

All through the first half of the 20th century, socio-realist novels portraying the society of their time remained popular in spite of Virginia Woolf's criticism of their materialism and of her assertion that 'they write of unimportant things; (...) they spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and enduring.' ('Modern Fiction'). These writers represented a wide range of sensibilities and reactions to the anxieties of the time, from left-wing allegiances (Isherwood) to religious belief (Waugh), from conventional realism (Bennett) to more experimental fiction (Compton-Burnett).

In his *Forsyte Saga* (1906) and its record of the financial and personal fortunes of the Forsyte family, John Galsworthy (1867-1933) satirized the Victorian upper middle-class and their obsession with materialism and property.

With the more Dickensian *Tono-Bungay* (1909) H.G. Wells (→ p. 130) explored the world of commerce and finance and the corrupt practices of business and advertising. *The History of Mr Polly* (1910) is a social comedy in which the main character fails to commit suicide and abandons his marriage and former life to find happiness running a pub.

Another novelist who chose realism is Arnold Bennett (1867-1931). *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) contrasts the lives of two sisters in the Potteries district of Staffordshire, the more sophisticated Sophia eloping to France while her sister Constance leads a quiet life at home.

An extremely popular writer, W. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) wrote plays (*For Services Rendered*, 1932), novels (*The Moon and Sixpence*, 1919), and short stories often inspired by his work for the British Intelligence Service and his travels in British Asian colonies.

The novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett (1884-1969) are set amid the late-Victorian upper-classes and explore the relationships within dysfunctional families

(*Manservant and Maidservant*, 1947). They are characterized by witty dialogue that requires close reading because of very little punctuation.

The heroines of Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973) are sensitive women who cannot find fulfilment in a world of conventions (*The Death of the Heart*, 1938) or in the devastation of London after the Blitz (*The Heat of the Day*, 1949).

Evelyn Waugh (1903-66) was a conservative, who believed in traditional rules of conduct. There is nothing realistic about his novels, which are mostly satires* and black comedies, without any hint that society might improve. *Decline and Fall* (1928) caricatures the world of education, *Vile Bodies* (1930), the decadent London society, *Scoop* (1938) Fleet Street and journalism. In *A Handful of Dust* (1934), which unites tragedy and comedy, the protagonist ends up reading Dickens to a madman in the jungle. After the war, Waugh's novels became more serious, crystallising his anxiety and religious sense of loss. *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) reflects his Catholic beliefs, and his nostalgia for the rites and traditions of aristocratic life. *The Sword of Honour* (1952-61) is a bleak trilogy about disillusion and the price of redemption.

The humorous novels and stories of Pelham Grenville (P.G.) Wodehouse (1881-1975) trace the adventures of the wealthy, gallant, but not too bright Bertie Wooster, who gets into all kinds of scrapes, and his clever valet Jeeves, who gets him out of them.

It was also during these years that the first of several women writers (Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy Sayers) developed the genre of the detective story, often setting their novels in a small community (a country house, a village, a theatre), where a close study of the relationships between the characters leads to a series of wrong deductions and red herrings until the final resolution. The genre will later be brilliantly developed by P.D. James and Ruth Rendell.

■ Moral and political works

In the 1930s, modernist experimentation was no longer the best way of expressing the angst of the times and novelists chose different ways of addressing it, from utopia (Huxley, Orwell) to religious questionings (Greene). The ideas of Bertrand Russell, in particular his pacifism, and campaign against nuclear weapons, were of paramount importance for these writers.

Christopher Isherwood (1904-85), who belonged to the Auden group, is best-known for his novels which record his experience in Germany and the gradual breaking apart of society in the years when Hitler rose to power (*Mr Norris changes Trains*, 1935, *Goodbye to Berlin*, 1939).

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) was born into a prominent family of scientists and writers. His early novels are satires* of the gay, witty Bohemian society of the 1920s (*Antic Hay*, 1920, *Crome Yellow*, 1921, *Point Counter Point*, 1928). He then turned to more serious novels of ideas inspired by his pacifist convictions. *Brave New World* (1932), a response to H.G. Wells socialist utopias*, is a dystopia* in which children are predestined at birth (in test-tubes) for their roles in society, from the Alpha-Plus

leaders to the mentally defective Epsilon Minus. Drugs regulate mood, inducing constant happiness but robbing human beings of love, desire and humanity. In his essay *Brave New World Revisited* (1958), Huxley stated that propaganda, the global threat of nuclear weapons and the use of drugs made the world much closer than ever to his original book. Huxley became increasingly involved with philosophical mysticism and Eastern religion; he also experimented with psychedelic drugs, an experience which influenced *The Doors of Perception* (1954).

George Orwell (1903-50), whose real name was Eric Blair, was born in British India and brought up in England, where he was sent to Eton. Instead of going to College, he decided to join the Imperial Police in Burma. A few years later, he resigned to devote his life to writing and travelling. His early works, inspired by his socialist views, are poised between journalism and fiction. They explore the world of the destitute in England and France (*Down and Out in Paris and London*, 1933, *Keep the Apidistra Flying*, 1936, and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 1937), and his experience in the Spanish Civil War, which led to his rejection of Communism (*Homage to Catalonia*, 1938).

Coming Up for Air (1939), which describes the way capitalism and speculation are destroying the rural England of his childhood and anticipates totalitarianism, marks the change towards more political commitment and pessimism. *Animal Farm* (1945) is a political allegory* which transfers the story of the Russian Revolution onto an English farm, where the animals overthrow the drunken farmer and take over – only to become subjected to the tyranny of the pigs.

The setting of *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1948) is totalitarian Oceania, where Big Brother and the Thought police control people's thoughts, history, and language. Newspeak reduces language in order to reduce thought and turn people into submissive citizens. The way language can be manipulated to serve propaganda and political interests is a constant preoccupation in Orwell's novels.

Graham Greene (1904-91) was born into an upper-class family, with several of his relatives working in Intelligence. Rejecting that background, he supported Communism and converted to Catholicism in 1926. After graduating from Oxford, he worked as a journalist, then a freelance writer and critic. He spent much of his life travelling.

Greene made a distinction between his serious books and those he called 'entertainments', popular novels like *Stamboul Train* (1932), a thriller which takes place on the Orient Express, *A Gun for Sale* (1936), *The Confidential Agent* (1939) or *The Third Man* (1949). Many of these thrillers are political novels as well, like *The Quiet American* (1955) which takes place in South-East Asia, *Our Man in Havana* (1958) and *The Honorary Consul* (1973) set in Cuba and South America, or *The Human Factor* (1978), an espionage novel set in South Africa.

In a 1945 essay about François Mauriac, Greene wrote, "After Henry James a disaster overtook the English novel... For after the death of James the religious sense

was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act." Catholic concerns are indeed at the heart of Greene's serious novels (*Brighton Rock*, 1938, *The Power and the Glory*, 1940, *The Heart of the Matter*, 1948, *The End of the Affair*, 1951, *A Burnt-Out Case*, 1961), which explore theological questions such as morality, divine grace and the difficulty of deciding what is good and what is evil. In *The Power and the Glory*, a sinful and drunken priest eventually brings redemption to others. *The Heart of the Matter* raises the question of whether one can be forgiven by God for adultery and suicide. *The End of the Affair* centres around the silent vow made by Sarah Miles, who promises to put an end to her adulterous liaison with the man she loves if he survives after being wounded. Greene's protagonists are guilt-ridden, full of doubts and questionings, faced with moral dilemmas. Metaphysical questionings are to be found in Greene's entertainments as well as in his serious novels.

Graham Greene was also a film critic and a screen writer (*The Third Man*, 1948).

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1921), lines 19-42: a seminal modernist poem

- What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
- Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
- You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
- A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
- 5 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
- And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
- There is shadow under this red rock,
- (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
- And I will show you something different from either
- 10 Your shadow at morning striding behind you
- Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
- I will show you fear in a handful of dust.
- *Frisch weht der Wind*
- *Der Heimat zu*
- 15 *Mein Irisch Kind,*
- *Wo weilest du?*
- "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
- They called me the hyacinth girl."
- Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
- 20 Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
- Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
- Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
- Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
- *Oed' und leer das Meer.*

l. 2: "Son of man" is the way God always addresses Ezekiel.

l. 4: Ezekiel 6:4: "And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken; and I will cast down your slain men before your idols."

l. 5: in the Bible the "tree of life" is a divine source of salvation. The cricket, was an old harbinger of rain. Thus it can give no relief to the dead, and brings only fear to those who are afraid of rebirth.

l. 6: It recalls Moses bringing forth water from the rock by hitting it with his rod. But there are no miracles in the waste land.

l. 7-8: The rock is a symbol of God or of Christ.

l. 12: Dust is linked to death and destruction. "The Burial of the Dead" in the Book of Common Prayer contains the expression: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." "Fear in a handful of dust" is therefore fear of death."

l. 13-16: Tristan & Isolde, l. 5-8: Fresh blows the wind / To the homeland; / My Irish child / Why do you tarry? The song is sung by a happy sailor on the ship, captained by Tristan, that brings Isolde from Ireland to Cornwall. The sailor remembers a girl he left on shore.

l. 21: This recalls Dante's state of being as he entered the lowest circle of hell: 'How icy chill and hoarse I then became / ask not, reader, for I write it not, / because all speech would be to little avail. This ambiguous state can either mean spiritual death or enlightenment.

l. 23: An inversion of Conrad's title "Heart of Darkness".

The expression "heart of light" is ambiguous. In The Divine Comedy, the voices in hell are emitted from the tip of a flame; but in the Bible, the voice of God also comes from brightness in the sky.

l. 24: Tristan & Isolde, III, 24: "Desolate and empty the sea. The song of the lookout waiting for the arrival of Isolde's ship. She has been called to cure Tristan. But she will arrive too late.

■ A COLLAGE

– Three images are juxtaposed or embedded in these lines: that of a desert (l. 1-12), that of a meeting between lovers (l. 17-24), two passages from *Tristan and Isolde* (in italics).

– Eliot wrote that 'a poem or a passage in a poem may tend to realize itself as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words and (...) this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image.' Here in the first lines the tone is oracular, at the end it is conversational.

– There is contrast between these images: between biblical references and pagan references (the hyacinth garden), between dryness ('no sound of water') and water ('das Meer' / your hair wet), between heat ("where the sun beats") and coolness ("Frisch"), between sterility (the roots don't clutch, branches don't grow) and fertility (hyacinths, wind, garden).

Such 'broken images' – disorientating and defamiliarising for the reader – are reminiscent of cubist / cinematographic techniques to convey the fragmentation of the modern age.

■ SPIRITUAL DEATH

Desolation is the idea which unites these different parts. The movement is from a 'landscape' of desolation to psychological desolation. In both cases we seem to move from hope to paralysed hope (the fear in a handful of dust after the hope raised by the invitation / the failure of speech).

– The desert described lines 1-12 is a landscape of despair which is obviously related to lack of faith. A wealth of symbols there - the tree (shelter, salvation), the rock (god), the cricket (which announces rain and also salvation), dust (death), water (rebirth), the shadow (mortality) – show that the waste land setting metaphorically

reflects the absence of spiritual values, that it is a world dominated by fear of death, in which people have no sense of a quest or of an aim.

This is paralleled by a biblical, prophetic tone, and by a syntax which is fluid and rhetorical. Many repeated words (stony/ stone, shadow, red rock) create haunting echoes.

– The result is the failure of love and the failure of hope. The image of the hyacinth girl ends on an image of failure. Love, symbolized by the hyacinth (a sensuous flower in scent and appearance, normally associated with spring, rebirth and regeneration), ends in failure and lack of communication.

As for the two scenes from *Tristan & Isolde* which create a frame for it, they move from joy to despair, from expectation to hopelessness.

The fact that we have two embedded stories and that they are two stories of failed or tragic love, leads us to read "the silence" the man sees as something as negative as the void of the sea in the next line., The image of the empty sea is an objective correlative* for the desolate silence of the speaker.

– Echoes are created between the two main images thanks to syntactic parallelisms: cf the importance of negation: you cannot say / you know only / I could not speak / neither living nor dead / I knew nothing.

This is the description of a country which is prey to spiritual death.

■ A BROKEN CENTRE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The poem does not speak with a unitary voice. At the start, the poetry sounds disembodied, almost oracular, then it is embodied in particular people.

– So we hover between a universal and authoritative voice and a fragmented voice whose speaker we do not always recognize. Such lack of a single, authoritative point of view is typical of modernism.

– Ambiguity, another feature of modernism, is present here too since the possibility of hope is constantly suggested: the state of being 'neither living nor dead' (which can point to spiritual void or enlightenment), the 'heart of light', the excerpt from Wagner and the desert landscape both evoking the Grail or Fisher-king myth in which the quest will lead to the rebirth of the dead land. The reader is suspended between despair and hope, something underlined by the language (for example the repetition of 'only', first (l. 3) as something negative, then (l. 6) as introducing some hope.)

If we read the positive signs we can see that redemption is possible through love (in the garden) and through faith (among the rocks.) But the signs are ambiguous.

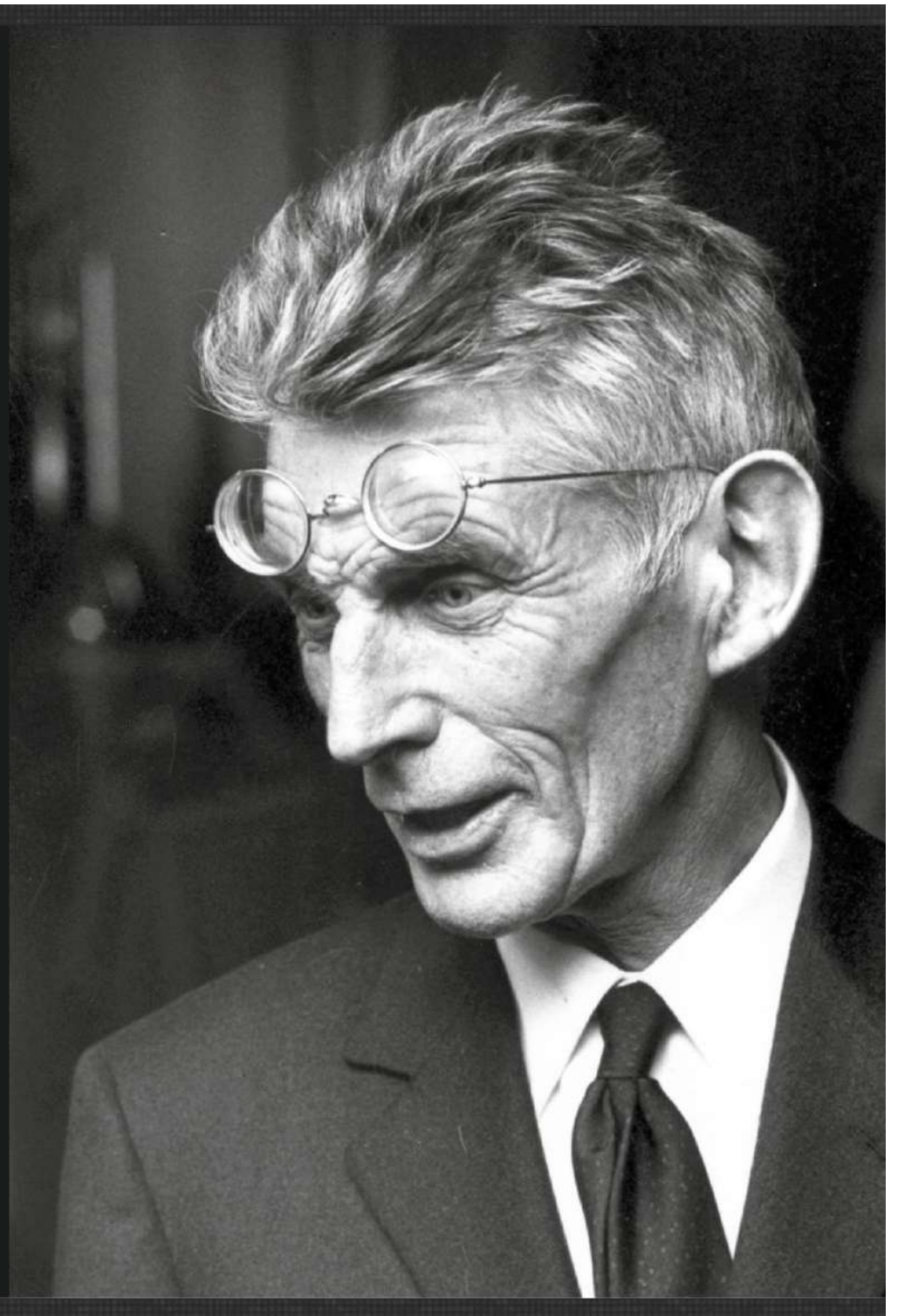
According to Eliot, poetry has to be allusive, disorientating and multiple to render the complexity and fragmentation of the modern world.



THE 20TH
CENTURY:
AFTER
WORLD WAR II
(1940-2000)



SAMUEL BECKETT



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|---------|---|---|
| 1940 | Battle of Britain; the Blitz; Churchill Prime Minister | Greene: <i>The Power and the Glory</i> Snow: <i>Strangers and Brothers</i> Official war artists (Nash, Spencer) appointed |
| 1942 | Beveridge Report on Social Security | |
| 1944 | D-Day landing in France; Butler Act (school free and compulsory from 5 to 15) | Eliot: <i>Four Quartets</i> Tippett: <i>A Child of Our Time</i> |
| 1945 | VE-Day: end of World War II; Welfare State created. | Waugh: <i>Brideshead Revisited</i> Orwell: <i>Animal Farm</i> Auden: <i>Collected Poems</i> Larkin: <i>The North Ship</i> Moore: <i>Family Group</i> ; underground shelters Britten: <i>Peter Grimes</i> Lean: <i>Brief Encounter</i> |
| 1946 | | Arts Council founded |
| 1946-48 | Wave of nationalisations | |
| 1947 | | Lowry: <i>Under the Volcano</i> |
| 1947-49 | India, Pakistan, Kenya gain independence. | |
| 1948 | NHS founded. | Bowen: <i>The Heat of the Day</i> |
| 1949 | NATO formed; Eire becomes a republic. | Orwell: <i>1984</i> |
| 1951 | Festival of Britain | Matthew and Martin's Royal Festival Hall Britten: <i>Billy Budd</i> |
| 1952 | Accession of Elizabeth II | |
| 1952-69 | | Lessing: <i>The Children of Violence</i> |
| 1953 | | Bacon: <i>Study after Velasquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X</i> |
| 1954 | | Amis: <i>Lucky Jim</i> ; Golding: <i>Lord of the Flies</i> D. Thomas: <i>Under Milk Wood</i> |
| 1955 | | Beckett: <i>Waiting for Godot</i> |

THEATRE – FICTION AND PROSE – POETRY – ARCHITECTURE – PAINTING – MUSIC – CINEMA/PHOTOGRAPHY

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 1956 | Suez crisis: Britain pulls out of Egypt. | Osborne: <i>Look Back in Anger</i> Tolkien: <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> Wilson: <i>Anglo-Saxon Attitudes</i> Braine: <i>Room at the Top</i> |
| 1957 | | Hughes: <i>The Hawk in the Rain</i> Pinter: <i>The Room, The Birthday Party</i> |
| 1958 | | Arden: <i>Live Like Pigs</i> ; Wesker: <i>Roots</i> |
| 1959 | | Sillitoe: <i>The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner</i> |
| 1960 | | Lady Chatterley trial Durrell: <i>The Alexandria Quartet</i> Coronation Street (TV series) begins. |
| 1961 | | Spark: <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> |
| 1962 | | Burgess: <i>A Clockwork Orange</i> Lessing: <i>The Golden Notebook</i> |
| 1963 | | Murdoch: <i>The Unicorn</i> Britten: <i>War Requiem</i> |
| 1964 | | Larkin: <i>The Whitsun Weddings</i> Bond: <i>Saved</i> |
| 1965 | | The Beatles awarded MBE Rhys: <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> |
| 1966 | | Heaney: <i>Death of a Naturalist</i> Stoppard: <i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead</i> |
| 1967 | Homosexuality decriminalised, abortion legalised. | |
| 1968 | Capital punishment abolished; Powell's Birmingham speech | |
| 1969 | Beginning of Northern Ireland's 'Troubles' | Fowles: <i>The French Lieutenant's Woman</i> Heaney: <i>Door into the Dark</i> |
| 1970 | Voting age becomes 18. | Hughes: <i>Crow</i> |
| 1971 | Decimalisation introduced. | Bond: <i>Lear</i> Hill: <i>Mercian Hymns</i> |
| 1973 | UK joins EEC. | |
| 1975 | Oil extracted from North Sea. | |

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| 1976 | | National Theatre completed. |
| 1979 | 'Winter of discontent' (strikes) | Raine: <i>A Martian sends a Postcard Home</i> Schaffer: <i>Amadeus</i> |
| 1979-90 | Mrs Thatcher Prime Minister: wave of privatisations | |
| 1982 | Falklands War | |
| 1983 | | Swift: <i>Waterland</i> |
| 1984 | Miners' strike | M. Amis: <i>Money</i> ; Barnes: <i>Flaubert's Parrot</i> ; Lodge: <i>Small World</i> |
| 1985 | Anglo-Irish agreement | Hill: <i>Collected Poems</i> |
| 1989 | Fatwa against Salman Rushdie | Ishiguro: <i>The Remains of the Day</i> |
| 1990 | | Byatt: <i>Possession</i> Kureishi: <i>The Buddha of Suburbia</i> |
| 1991 | War against Iraq | |
| 1993 | | Stoppard: <i>Arcadia</i> |
| 1994 | Beginning of Northern Ireland Peace Process; first women priests; Channel Tunnel opens. | Coe: <i>What a Carve Up!</i> |
| 1995 | | Kane: <i>Blasted</i> |
| 1998 | 'Good Friday Agreement' in Northern Ireland | |
| 1999 | Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly open; reform of the House of Lords phases out hereditary peers. | |
| 2000 | | Smith: <i>White Teeth</i> Tate Modern Gallery opens |
| 2002 | British /US forces invade Afghanistan. | Mc Ewan: <i>Atonement</i> |
| 2003 | British/US forces invade Iraq. | Ali: <i>Brick Lane</i> |
| 2005 | Terrorist attacks in London. | |
| 2014 | Scottish referendum rejects independence. | |

*They give birth astride¹ of a grave, the light gleams an instant,
then it's night once more.*
(Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*)

*So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.*
(Seamus Heaney, 'The Cure at Troy')

As the above quotations show, the aftermath of World War II was marked by antithetical trends. In spite of victory and a sense of pride in Britain's resilience and determination, the Second World War had a devastating effect on the population with the horrors of the Holocaust and of the atomic bomb. One of the responses was a sense of existential absurdity and doubts about the very relevance of literature. And yet, inadequate though it might seem to be, literature had to bear witness to these terrors and it is hardly surprising that the themes of memory, atonement and redemption run through so many post-war works. But the war also fostered a sense of national unity and shared solidarity. The return of a Labour government to power in 1945, together with a more consensual society, heralded a period of renewed hope and a confident drive to rebuild the country. Between 1946 and 1949, the coal industry, transport, steel, electricity and gas were nationalised and a National Health Service was created to guarantee free medical treatment for all. In 1951, one century exactly after the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace, the Festival of Britain exhibition aimed at showing to the world 'the recovery of the United Kingdom from the effects of war in the moral, cultural, spiritual and material fields.' Yet the fifties remained years of austerity and gloom, whose atmosphere is dramatically rendered in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Several factors contributed to a decrease of British influence and a lasting crisis of identity, in particular the break-up of the British Empire, the economic and cultural domination of the United States and the anxieties caused by the Cold War and the atomic bomb. It may explain the nostalgia for pre-war rites and values to be found in a novel such as Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* as well as the moral standpoint of writers like Iris Murdoch and William Golding.

The boom years of the 1960s, witnessed the rise of a Dionysian Counterculture. They were the years of 'swinging London', with the legalization of abortion and homosexuality, the contraceptive pill, the end of sexual inhibition, and demands for equality of opportunity. As Larkin put it in 'Annus Mirabilis', 'Sexual intercourse began / In nineteen sixty-three / (which was rather late for me) - / Between the end of the "Chatterley" ban / And the Beatles' first LP'. It was also at the end of the same decade that censorship of plays came to an end and capital punishment was

1. astride: à cheval, à califourchon

abolished. The sexual libertarianism of the decade gave many women, like Doris Lessing, a voice. The Beatles, Monty Python and Pop Art also show the confidence and innovative spirit of the first post-war generation.

Anxiety returned in the 1970s, with economic difficulties, mass unemployment, inflation and strikes. Other factors converged to challenge national unity: immigration from former colonies bringing new ethnic cultures, American pop culture, the division between Republicans and Unionists leading to the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, Welsh and Scottish nationalism, Britain's entry into the EEC in 1975. These culminated in 'the winter of discontent' of 1978-79 and led to eleven years of Tory government, under the firm leadership of Margaret Thatcher, 'the Iron Lady', who adopted a drastic policy of monetarism, free-market economics, trade-unions regulation, and privatisation, policies that are satirized in Martin Amis's *Money* and in Jonathan Coe's *What A Carve Up!*

What perhaps best characterizes the last two decades of the century is internationalisation at all levels: politically, with the 'Special Relationship' with America and European involvement; economically, with liberal capitalism and foreign competition; culturally, with visual and electronic media, new concepts of 'Britishness', and in the field of literature, with postmodernism and 'literature in English' replacing 'English literature'. In all these fields, Britain has been divided and ambivalent, and in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Prime Minister Tony Blair's introduction of expressions like 'New Britain' and 'Cool Britannia' bears witness to the need for Britain to re-invent itself. The role played by 19th century socio-realist novels in portraying society is now increasingly performed by television and videos, forcing the novel and drama to focus more on identity – whether sexual, racial, national or spiritual – or to reject all ideologies in a postmodern experimental approach.

The extraordinary richness of literature in the second half of the 20th century makes it necessary to be selective. One should however briefly note the popularity of spy thrillers, a genre fostered by the Cold War, whose best representatives were Ian Fleming and John Le Carré, with, more recently, the 'war on terror' giving rise to several novels, by Martin Amis for instance. Children's literature has also enjoyed huge popularity with the works of Roald Dahl and J. K. Rowling.

POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is a term which describes what comes after modernism. While modernists still believed that they could restore meaning to the world and that their experiments with form could help literature reach the universal, postmodernists no longer think that religion, reason, science or any ideology can bring progress. Refusing any authoritative meaning, they undermine² it through the use of parody*, pastiche* or absurdity. Postmodernists were influenced by Post-Structuralism and Derrida's concept of Deconstruction, which shows that the obvious meaning of a text often

2. to undermine: *miner, saper*

hides an opposite, subconsciously suppressed meaning. Authors no longer control the meaning of their works, history is constantly open to revision. The rejection of any 'master narrative' has led to the rewriting of the English canon in order to subvert it (with Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, or J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), a rewriting of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) from the point of view of Crusoe's wife, who was not given a voice in Defoe's novel.) Since the author's authority is now questioned, postmodern writers tend to break the illusion of reality through metafiction* and intertextuality* and to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, hence the use of 'magic realism'. Postmodernists also tend to collapse the distinctions between high and popular culture as well as between languages and cultures, something clearly apparent in post-colonialist literature (→ p. 194).

POETRY

■ The neo-romantics

In the aftermath of World War II, several poets rejected the politically committed poetry of the Auden group and called for a more emotional and prophetic poetry.

The verse of Kathleen Raine (1908-2003), in the romantic and visionary tradition of Yeats and Blake, explores the realms of nature and imagination (*Stone and Flower*, 1943).

Dylan Thomas (1914-53) was born in South Wales, worked as a documentary film script writer during the war, and became a well-known figure in the literary establishment, broadcasting for the BBC and going on American tours at the end of his life. He has gained the reputation of a wild, drunken bohemian poet.

His poetry shows the legacy of Welsh oral traditions. It celebrates the beauty and energy of life and the regret that it will disappear with death.

In *18 Poems*, 1934 and *Deaths and Entrances*, 1946, Thomas explores the relationship between man – birth, childhood, death, sensuality – and the mystical power of nature. His poetry is difficult, attempting as it does to express a transcendent truth with intense, powerful feelings and somewhat surreal images. The influence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Metaphysical poetry shows in elegiac, rhapsodic lines, with striking rhythms and images, wrenched³ structures, kennings* and portmanteau words*, and very musical alliteration* and assonance*.

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog (1940) is a collection of short stories which celebrate his childhood. The radio play *Under Milk Wood* (1954) is set in an imaginary Welsh coastal village and describes the distorted and exuberant dreams of its inhabitants.

3. wrenched: *tordu, forcé*

■ The Movement

The Movement was the name given to a loose group of poets who refused the committed poetry of Auden, the romantic effusions of Dylan Thomas and the modernist elitism of T.S. Eliot. Instead, their verse was terse, urbane and disciplined and their view of society detached and slightly ironic.

John Betjeman (1906-84) was not part of The Movement, but his poetry has much in common with that of Larkin. He achieved great popularity with verse that embraces everyday life with detachment, wit*, humanity and compassion. His verse (*Collected Poems*, 1962) conveys nostalgia for Britain's past heritage.



Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, 1956. Richard Hamilton was one of the founders of the Independent Group, artists who embraced Pop art in Britain. This collage shows the contemporary scene and consumer culture (which appeared just after food rationing in Britain): pop music, film, advertising slogans, furniture, newspapers and television. In a letter, Hamilton made a list of the qualities that define popular art and culture: 'Popular (designed for a mass audience), Transient (short-term solution), Expendable (easily forgotten), Low Cost, Mass Produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big Business.'

Philip Larkin (1922-85), the best-known representative of The Movement, read English at Oxford, where he made friends with Kingsley Amis, and worked most of his life as a librarian in Hull.

A conservative who celebrated traditional institutions and activities (the church, marriage, the British countryside, collective rites), he was suspicious of pretension and modernism. Before he turned to poetry, Larkin wrote two novels (*Jill*, 1946; *A Girl in Winter*, 1947) about lonely protagonists who retire into a world of dreams.

In *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974), he reveals his own poetic voice as he looks with disgust, humour and anger – but always with honesty and compassion – at the ordinariness and banality of modern life, its ugliness and superficiality, its gaudy consumer goods. With mordant humour, he writes about disappointed hopes, frustrated lives people no longer control and live with the fear of death. ('Life is first boredom, then fear. / Whether or not we use it, it goes, / And leaves what something hidden from us chose, / And age, and then the only end of age. / Dockery and Son) His poetry is an attempt to be 'less deceived', to protect himself against disappointment, despair or his pessimistic view of love. Most of his poems are written in traditional meter* and rhyme* but use contemporary speech rhythms and a whole range of language, from the familiar to the dignified.

Other poets of The Movement include Thom Gunn (who was influenced by the Beats and wrote about the culture of motorbikers and that of the gay community), Donald Davie (whose verse is more philosophical), D.J. Enright (who often sheds an ironic view upon cultural differences), and Elizabeth Jennings (who wrote more about personal suffering).

■ The Liverpool poets: Pop Poetry

Roger McGough (b. 1937), Brian Patten (b.1946) and Adrian Henri (1932-2000), mainly based in Liverpool, were influenced by pop music and pop art and wrote lighter verse, often in colloquial language and dealing with everyday life. Their poetry was often meant to be read aloud to young Liverpudlians who knew little about literature. Like pop art, pop poetry dealt with popular culture (TV, cannabis, sex, the bomb). It shows the influence of the Beat poets of America (→ p. 316).

■ The Group

Ted Hughes, Peter Porter, George MacBeth reacted against the restrained, detached, ironic poetry of The Movement and formed The Group.

Ted Hughes (1930-99) spent his childhood on the Yorkshire moors, where he acquired a deep knowledge of and respect for nature. After reading English, then anthropology at Cambridge, he worked at a number of jobs and married the American poet Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1963. He became Poet Laureate in 1984.

Hughes was fascinated by the energy and violence of the natural life and many of his early poems (*The Hawk in the Rain*, 1957; *Lupercal*, 1960) describe, without any sentimentality, the strength of animal life, the struggle for survival and the power of the unconscious. This interest in animals is more symbolic than naturalistic, animals often appearing as metaphors or deities. Influenced by D.H. Lawrence, Whitman, Hopkins and the West Riding dialect, Hughes's language became increasingly terse, passionate and powerful, sensual and irregular, with the harsh rhythms of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

This short poem describes a cold, hibernating world in which the few creatures who hunt do so mechanically and where, however, the fragile snowdrop finds the strength to pierce through the frozen ground:

Snowdrop

Now is the globe shrunk tight
Round the mouse's dulled wintering heart.
Weasel⁴ and crow⁵, as if moulded in brass,
Move through an outer darkness
Not in their right minds,
With the other deaths. She, too, pursues her ends,
Brutal as the stars of this month,
Her pale head heavy as metal. (Lupercal)

With *Wodwo* (1967), Hughes drew more and more on mythology and the occult. *Crow* (1970) reflects a darker view of the universe and relates the story of the world, from Creation to the nuclear age, seen from the point of view of the rapacious, evil crow, a demonic figure which is bird, man and god. *Birthday Letters* (1999) are poems which document his relationship with Sylvia Plath.

Ted Hughes Hughes also wrote many children's books.

■ Poets of time and place

Several poets started from the landscapes they knew, relating them to past layers of history.

Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) was born into a Catholic family in rural Ulster, and educated at Queen's College, Belfast. He divided his life between teaching and writing. In 1972 he moved to the Republic of Ireland to be better able to keep a distance from the violence in the North. In 1995 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

His early poetry (*Death of a Naturalist*, 1966; *Door into the Dark*, 1969) is concerned with nature and his rural roots. He describes farm work, animals and nature in verse that is rich in alliteration⁴, assonance⁵ and onomatopoeia⁶. The poet is one who 'digs' ever deeper into his memory and into the past and myths of his own country in order to find his own origins.

4. a weasel: *une belette*

5. a crow: *un corbeau*

With *Wintering out* (1972) and *North* (1975), Heaney began to address 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland, but not in a partisan way and refusing to take sides. Much influenced by P.V. Glob's *The Bog People* (1969), which describes the bodies found preserved in bog⁶ in Jutland, the victims of pagan sacrifices, Heaney drew parallels between these Iron Age rites and the punishments inflicted in contemporary Northern Ireland. The conclusion of his poem 'Punishment' conveys this ambivalence, both 'outrage' and 'understanding' in the face of violence.

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,
who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

Heaney went on exploring themes related to the Irish land and its layers of history – Gaelic, Viking, pre-historic as well as to the classics (Dante, Sophocles) in order to find in history a way of coming to terms with the contemporary political situation (*Field Work*, 1979; *Station Island*, 1980; *Seeing Things*, 1991). In 2000, Heaney published a translation of *Beowulf* (→ p. 14). His use of archaisms and Old Irish words reflects his interest in depths of memory and history.

Paul Muldoon (1951) and Derek Mahon (b.1941) are two Irish poets who show the influence of Seamus Heaney.

Geoffrey Hill (b. 1932) believes poetry should concern itself with human suffering and injustice. He addresses issues such as loss of faith and its meaning for government and authority. Hill sees the individual as living in the shadow of history and his verse often brings together figures and landscapes from the past and from his own time. In *Mercian Hymns* (1971), a series of prose poems, childhood memories and the landscape of Mercia blend with primitive landscapes and allusions to Offa, the 8th century King of Mercia.

Hill's poetry is concentrated and intense, conveying a sense of energy. Its use of puns⁷, irony⁸ and allusions gives it different levels of meaning.

Charles Tomlinson (b.1927), a more cosmopolitan poet, is particularly interested in American culture and poetry and was influenced by Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore. His poetry explores landscape and the natural world in a meditative and intellectual way.

R.S. Thomas (1913-2000), wrote religious poetry about the harsh lives of rural Welsh farmers and about Welsh history.

One should also mention two Scottish poets, Edwin Morgan (1920-2010), who wrote both concrete⁹ poetry and lyrical poems, many of them about his native city

6. a bog: *une tourbière*

of Glasgow (*Collected Poems*, 1990) and Douglas Dunn (b. 1942), whose poetry is more political and centres around ordinary people's lives and the class system, using traditional forms to convey a sense of grief and loss.

Tony Harrison (b.1937) believes in the public role of poetry and explores social themes (education, violence, strikes, class conflicts, war) using local dialect and colloquial expressions reflecting class. Craig Raine (b. 1944) is associated with the 'Martian' school of poetry, a name which comes from his poem 'A Martian Sends a Postcard Home'. It shows the world as seen by an alien, from new perspectives and with unusual images.

Several women poets, like Wendy Cope (b. 1945) and Stevie Smith (1902-71) have written inventive and often humorous verse, perhaps as a reaction against Sylvia Plath's intensely emotional poetry. Carol Ann Duffy (b. 1955) uses dramatic monologues to reveal the thoughts of people on the margins of society.

DRAMA

The Arts Council of Great Britain, created in 1946, funded many small theatres and companies and was instrumental in the revival of drama after the war. Under Peter Hall, The Royal Shakespeare Company, and the National Theatre, opened themselves to contemporary drama. Peter Brook was also highly influential in the post-war years, developing his conception of the 'Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible', in which, away from naturalism, what is invisible (consciousness, dreams) is made visible to us through theatrical means.

In the 1950s, Beckett, Osborne and Pinter profoundly changed the dramatic scene, helping to break the association between the theatre and middle-class audiences. Their plays came as a reaction against the well-made plays*, drawing-room settings and elevated language that then prevailed in the theatre. As a result, social dramas and existential dramas have alternated all through the second half of the 20th century. However, some playwrights like Alan Ayckbourn (b.1939) and Terence Rattigan (1911-77) have enjoyed great popularity with more conventional comedies which explore the world of the middle-class.

It is also important to remember that in the 1950s and 1960s, the theatre was very close to the cinema and television. Many plays were turned into films, particularly with Free Cinema, which adapted several of the plays and novels of the 'Angry Young Men'. These dramatists also helped the development of television drama (*Coronation Street* started in 1960 and is still running).

■ Anger and 'kitchen-sink realism'

Social concerns and working-class backgrounds are the staples⁷ of the 'Angry Young

7. the staple: l'élément principal

Men's plays. The name Angry Young Men came from Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* and applies to a group of novelists and playwrights who rejected middle-class morals and conventions. The working-class settings of many of these works earned them the sobriquet 'kitchen-sink realism'.

The plays of John Osborne (1929-1994) are now remembered because of their content rather than form. In *Look Back in Anger* (1956) Jimmy Porter, the main protagonist, vents⁸ his frustration in angry tirades against the establishment, and social inequality. In *The Entertainer* (1957), the angry man is now a pathetic music-hall performer.

The didactic plays of Arnold Wesker (b. 1932), *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1956) and *Roots* (1958), both chronicle the lives of Jewish Communists and their struggle to keep their ideals. In *The Kitchen* (1950), cooks, dishwashers, chefs and waitresses become symbolic of the world of capitalism.

A Taste of Honey (1958), by Shelagh Delaney (b. 1939), a representative of the Women's Theatre Group, tells the story of a teenage working-class girl who is pregnant by a black sailor who leaves her. Class, homosexuality and race are some of the themes explored in the play.

The early plays of John Arden (b. 1930) are naturalistic and address social problems such as corruption or racial conflicts (*Live Like Pigs*, 1958). He later conveyed his political message in plays inspired by Brecht, with songs and mime to infuse more vitality and Dionysian 'disorder' into the theatre (*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, 1959; *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*, 1964). Arden is particularly interested in democratic community participation in performances.

Although not part of the Angry Young Men, Brendan Behan (1923-64) must be mentioned here. He was Irish, working-class, and a member of the IRA who was sent to prison for attempted bombings and murder. His plays deal with the poor, with victims, and with IRA politics, but without any attempt at realism. Instead, there is sentimentality, exaggeration, melodrama, and songs reminiscent of music-hall and of The Beggar's Opera (→ p. 70) (*The Quare Fellow*, 1954, *The Hostage*, 1958)

■ The Theatre of the Absurd

Influenced by Dadaism, Surrealism and existential philosophy, with its vision of the world as meaningless, the Theatre of the Absurd (a term coined by critic Martin Esslin) illustrates the perplexity, angst and fear of characters conscious of the meaninglessness of their lives. In these plays, there is little or no realistic background, no true-to-life characters, very little plot, and a use of language and farce to fill in time and hide anxiety.

Samuel Beckett (1906-89) was born into a Protestant Dublin family and studied languages at Trinity College. He left Ireland for London, then Paris, where he

8. to vent: décharger, passer (sa colère, mauvaise humeur)

became Joyce's disciple. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. His plays present an existentialist vision of existence, with characters barely surviving in a world that is meaningless. In spite of such bleakness, they make use of verbal and visual comedy. There is no climax in Beckett's plays, the characters will go on and on, struggling and living their meaningless lives.

Waiting for Godot (1955, first written in French as *En attendant Godot* in 1952) did not in England meet with the considerable success it had had in Paris. Influenced by Camus's idea of 'the absurd' as a response to the silence or indifference of the world, the play shows two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, waiting for Godot, who will never come. They fill in time with inconsequential⁹ talk. The play is constantly poised between bleakness and comedy, with dialogues reminiscent of music-hall comedy. It is a tragi-comedy, without any plot, development, conflict or catastrophe¹⁰. In spite of Christian echoes, there is no message in it ('I'm not interested in any system. I can't see any trace of any system anywhere', Beckett said), just as there is no meaning in life, just the illusion that we can use our free will to give direction to it. This is the very end of the play:

ESTRAGON: I can't go on like this.

VLADIMIR: That's what you think.

ESTRAGON: If we parted? That might be better for us.

VLADIMIR: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (Pause.) Unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON: And if he comes?

VLADIMIR: We'll be saved.

Vladimir takes off his hat (Lucky's), peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.

ESTRAGON: Well? Shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Pull on your trousers.

ESTRAGON: What?

VLADIMIR: Pull on your trousers.

ESTRAGON: You want me to pull off my trousers?

VLADIMIR: Pull ON your trousers.

ESTRAGON: (realizing his trousers are down). True.

He pulls up his trousers.

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

They do not move.

Dustbins in a bare room are the setting for *Endgame* (1957), which dramatizes the theme of dependence. Beckett's later plays reach even greater economy of means, further reducing the number of actors, the setting, even movements and words, to convey extremes of solitude and despair. *Happy Days* (1961) consists of Winnie's monologue as she is gradually buried until only her face remains visible. *Breath* (1970), which lasts

9. inconsequential: *sans importance*

10. catastrophe: *déroulement*

some 25 seconds, has no characters, only a stage 'littered with miscellaneous rubbish', where a birth-cry, the sound of breathing, then a last cry are heard.

Beckett also wrote novels (*Murphy*, 1938, *Watt*, 1953, *Molloy*, 1955, *Malone Dies*, 1956 and *The Unnamable*, 1958), with pared down¹¹ action and setting, and spare¹² stream of consciousness to convey the silence under the surface.

Harold Pinter (1930-2008), the son of a Jewish tailor in the London East End, studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and became actor and director as well as playwright. He was also a political activist. Pinter's early plays are absurdist, with characters who seem to have no links to their environment or class structure, settings usually reduced to a single room, characters trying to control each other, a sense of foreboding and menace, and dialogue replacing action. His characters' talk consists of platitudes, clichés, euphemisms, pauses, silences, – a language which is stale¹³ and overused in order to mask their real selves.

As Pinter explained in 'Writing for the Theatre' (1962)

'There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.'

There is a sense of foreboding in his early plays, a metaphysical fear of violence, death or nothingness, usually justified when outsiders intrude into the safe world of the room.

In *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), two men, Gus and Ben are waiting for an assignment in a claustrophobic basement room. A dumb waiter representing authority keeps sending orders for food and eventually sends an order for one of the two men to be killed. In *The Birthday Party* (1958) strangers enter a boarding house and turn Stanley Webber's birthday party into a nightmare. Similarly, in *The Caretaker* (1960), Aston brings in a homeless man, Davies, who is finally rejected by Aston's brother Mick. For Pinter, there are political parallels to this, to be found for example in police states, and some of his later plays are more clearly political (*One for the Road*, 1984).

In *The Lover* (1963) and *The Homecoming* (1965) resignation to absurdity replaces fear.

The plays of Joe Orton (1933-1967) are both violent and absurd. *Loot* (1967) is a black farce, with Hal and Dennis hiding the money they got from robbing a bank into the coffin of Hal's mother. Love, the establishment, complacency and hypocrisy become objects of farce. *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (1964) centres around forbidden

11. to pare down: *débarrasser du superflu*

12. spare: *dépourillé*

13. stale: *écoulé, sans originalité*

sexual attraction and murder. *What the Butler Saw* (1969), set in a psychiatric nursing home, addresses all aspects of psychological subversion such as incest, rape and cross-dressing.

The family of Tom Stoppard (b. 1937) fled Czechoslovakia, then Singapore during the war. In 1946, they arrived in England, where he began a career as a journalist and theatre critic. His plays voice philosophical concerns with wit* and inventiveness. His favourite subjects are free will and determinism, illusion and reality, and the function of art. Like many postmodern writers, he makes ample use of parody*, pastiche*, intertextuality* and farce*.

The characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), two courtiers in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, are confused, unable to understand what is happening on stage and they wait for something to give sense to their lives, feeling trapped inside Shakespeare's play. Stoppard therefore develops the role Shakespeare cast them into and which they cannot escape, that of minor, flat characters who are to die in the play. Stoppard's play raises questions about illusion and reality, determinism and free will. As Guildenstern says: "There must have been a moment, at the beginning, where we could have said -- no. But somehow we missed it." The arrival of the Players, a group of actors, adds another level of illusion, theatrical illusion, as if in the end one never knew whether what one saw was illusion or reality. It is reminiscent of *Waiting for Godot*, with its two characters waiting for certain death. The play takes place in an absurd universe in which there is no God, no culture (the Players are supposed to bring culture to the king but only bring a pornographer and prostitutes) – a mirror image of our own society.

The Real Inspector Hound (1968) is a parody* of detective stories. In *Travesties* (1974), Henry Carr reminisces about Zurich during World War I, where Lenin, Joyce and Tristan Tzara were living, representing political, literary and artistic revolutions, and where a performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is being prepared. *Arcadia* (1993) is set in both the early 19th century and the 20th century. The play centres on the scientific and literary research of two sets of characters, and the resolution of a past mystery. *Indian Ink* (1995) also alternates between two periods – the present time and the 1930s – and is about a scholar trying to find the truth about a young woman poet's death in India. In *The Invention of Love* (1997), the late Victorian poet A.E. Housman reminisces about his life, sometimes talking to his younger self, with a wealth of cultural and historical allusions.

■ Political plays

After 1968, political drama became far more radical than in the days of the Angry Young Men, influenced by 'agit-prop' and fringe theatre, bringing drama into the streets or factories, and staging ever more unbearably violent situations, as in the recent plays of Howard Barker (b. 1946).

The Irish playwright Brian Friel (b. 1929) addresses the politics of Northern Ireland in several of his plays. *Translations* (1980), a play about cultural imperialism, concerns the anglicising of Irish names in order to draw a map.

The plays of Edward Bond (b. 1934) are set in violent societies and reflect his Marxist ideas. Refusing the absurdist view of life, he believes that the theatre has a role in denouncing capitalism and oppression and calls his plays 'rational theatre'. They trace the roots of violence and their psychological effects. By showing scenes of extreme violence, including cannibalism on stage (*Early Morning*, 1968), he aims at shocking the audience into consciousness and action. In *Saved* (1965), a group of young people stone a baby to death in its pram, and *Lear* (1971) is a study of human cruelty. In *Bingo* (1973), Shakespeare, now retired in Stratford, has become a capitalist property owner. In the mid 1980s, Bond started writing war plays, influenced by the Cold War (*The War Plays*, 1985), then moved on to plays dramatizing the threat of social breakdown or biological war (*The Crime of the 21st Century*, 1996-98).

The feminist playwright Caryl Churchill (b.1938) often uses historical parallels, similar to Brechtian 'historicisation', to raise consciousness about contemporary issues, mainly capitalism and women's condition.

It is committed politics and social commentary which animate the plays of David Hare (b. 1947), Howard Brenton (b. 1942), David Edgar (b. 1948) and Steven Berkoff (b. 1937), a group of playwrights sometimes called 'The Wild Bunch'.

The plays of Sarah Kane (1971-1999) concern themselves with love, sexual desire, pain, despair and death and are characterized by experiments in form, terse, raw language, stark images and savage stage action. *Blasted* (1985), a play about oppressor and victim, created critical outrage because of its scenes of rape, eye-gouging and cannibalism.

■ Psychological drama

The plays of Peter Shaffer (b. 1926) are concerned with psychological or philosophical drama. *Equus*, 1975, explores the mind of a boy who blinded six horses, while *Amadeus*, 1980, is about the rivalry between Antonio Salieri and Mozart.

THE NOVEL

After World War II, the novel offers a large range of responses to the changes of the times. Although there is of course no clear-cut division, one can very roughly say that the works published until the 1970s tend to be based on ethical values, while the next generation of writers, who were born after the war and lived through the Thatcher years, inclined towards postmodernism.

■ Social chronicles

Nostalgia for a time of innocence can be felt in L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953) and in Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* (1959).

In the eleven volumes of *Strangers and Brothers* (1940-70), C.P. Snow (1905-80) offers a documentary about the pursuit of power among politicians, academics and scientists between 1914 and 1968.

Anthony Powell (1905-2000) covers the same period as C.P. Snow in the twelve books of *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951-75), but there is more comedy and wit in his description of the decline of the aristocracy. Powell created hundreds of characters who develop, leave and reappear against the background of changing England over that period of fifty years.

There is comedy too in the novels of Angus Wilson (1913-91), who observes the upper-middle classes with wit* and satire*. *Hemlock and After* (1953), *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956), *No Laughing Matter* (1967) all portray the difficulty of adapting to social changes.

■ 'Angry Young Men'

In the 1950s, several young writers, who came from middle- and working-class backgrounds and had gained higher education, decided to challenge the establishment with their working-class protagonists. But although their characters are rebels and feel like outsiders, they do not challenge the system or become politically involved. Neither does the form of their novels, which remains conventional, reflect their rebellion. The playwright John Osborne (→ p. 175) and the novelist John Wain (*Hurry On Down*, 1954) were also part of the Angry Young Men.

Kingsley Amis (1922-95) responded to the anger and anxiety of his time with comedy and satire. In his best-known work, *Lucky Jim* (1954), it is the world of academia and campus life which appears as pathetic, hypocritical and farcical. Amis's later novels increasingly reflect right-wing views and his own frustration with modern life.

Alan Sillitoe (1928-2010) was the son of an illiterate, unemployed factory worker, and was brought up in poverty. Ill with tuberculosis, he started reading extensively and writing about the working-class background that he knew. Seaton, the frustrated and resentful antihero of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) drinks and behaves outrageously every Saturday night, trying to rebel against the establishment in any way he can. 'The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner' (1959) is a short story in which the protagonist, a thief held in a borstal¹⁴, is entered in a long-distance running competition, at which he excels. At the last moment he chooses to lose the race, refusing to become part of the system of competitions and rewards of the establishment.

Joe Lampton, the hero of John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) and *Life at the Top* (1962), unscrupulously works his way up the social ladder, only to find disillusion.

■ Fantasy

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), a specialist of Medieval and Renaissance literature, wrote

14, a borstal: une maison de redressement

popular children's books uniting romance*, parable* and magic, in particular those that take place in the fantasy world of Narnia (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 1950).

J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973) first wrote *The Hobbit* (1937) for his children, then went on with *The Lord of the Rings trilogy* (1954-55), a heroic romance reminiscent of *Beowulf* (→ p. 14) and northern legends.

Both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien show the influence of John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932).

■ The moralists

In the aftermath of World War II, spiritual doubt and moral confusion led several novelists to reflect upon good and evil and ethical issues.

William Golding (1911-1993) studied physics, then literature, at Oxford and pursued a career as a teacher. His novels, which he called fables, are concerned with the search for moral sense in a world without faith. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983. Convinced that man is a fallen being because of original sin, Golding writes about evil and the necessity of faith. Many of his works show elemental man, isolated from society, relapsing into barbarism, as if he knew no innate moral restraint. Degeneracy and guilt are therefore recurrent themes in his works. These ideas are expressed in clear, lucid prose.

Lord of the Flies (1954), the story of a party of boys stranded on a Pacific island, inverts R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1857) and its belief in the innate goodness of man, as the boys gradually lose their 'civilized' mask and turn tribal and savage. Away from the pressure of civilised society, the true nature of man reappears. Golding said that the novel was a fable inspired by the atrocities of World War II.

With *The Inheritors* (1955) it is H.G. Wells's optimistic vision of history in *Outline of History* which is inverted. The novel is set among a group of Neanderthals at the time when more sophisticated but also more aggressive 'new men', that is to say *Homo sapiens*, arrive and violently drive them out. The points of view of the two groups of men are contrasted. In *The Spire* (1964), Jocelin, the Dean of Salisbury cathedral believes God has chosen him to build a towering spire, but his growing obsession and sexual desire lead to tragedy.

Moral choices are also at the heart of the work of Muriel Spark (1918-2006). She was born in Edinburgh and worked as a freelance editor and writer. In 1954 she converted to Catholicism. Many of her novels take place in the closed world of communities (a school, a convent, an old people's home), where eccentric and grotesque characters build up strange relationships. Her novels are concerned with good and evil and celebrate faith and free choice, often using comedy and strange, almost surreal happenings, which become a test of people's capacity for seeing beyond the material world.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), a charismatic schoolmistress with Fascist allegiances, leads her pupils to achieve her own heroic and romantic dreams. The novel explores the moral consequences of 'playing God'. In *Memento Mori* (1959), old people receive anonymous phone calls reminding them of death to come. *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), a 'modern morality tale' is both about plotting to get elected Abbess of a convent and about the immorality of the Watergate scandal.

Anthony Burgess (1917-93) studied musical composition and literature before working as a teacher in England and abroad. His interest in music and language explains the verbal inventiveness present in most of his novels.

Burgess is mainly concerned with the themes of good and evil, free will and determinism. His best-known, dystopian* novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) is set in the future, in a society where youth violence is rampant¹⁵. Alex, the teenage narrator, relates his crimes and the way the state tried to reform him by having him undergo an experimental treatment, a form of aversion therapy, which makes him sick whenever he sees or thinks of violence and even music. This effectively robs him of free will, which means that even if he can no longer choose to do evil, he cannot either choose to do good. The novel is written in 'nadsat', a mixture of Russian and Cockney. ('Our pockets were full of deng, so there was no real need from the point of view of crasting any more pretty polly to tolchock some old veck in an alley and viddy him swim in his blood while we counted the takings and divided by four, nor to do the ultra-violent on some shivering starry grey-haired ptitsa in a shop and go smeking off with the till's guts. But, as they say, money isn't everything').

The novels of Brian Moore (b. 1921), a Catholic born in Ulster, explore psychological and ethical issues, most of which have to do with his Catholic faith (*The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, 1955, *The Colour of Blood*, 1987).

Iris Murdoch (1919-99) was born in Dublin and read Classics, before working as a civil servant and teaching moral and political philosophy as well as Classics at Oxford. Her study of philosophy (existentialism in particular) and aesthetics is reflected in intellectual and sophisticated novels. She often studies the entanglements and changing relationships within small groups of characters involved in difficult philosophical, religious and ethical questions (good and evil, nature and art). Her novels assert the possibility of good and the need to respect other people's freedom. She makes constant use of intertextuality* and allusions. Iris Murdoch's plots are often intricate and artificial with the intrusion of macabre or fantastic elements, which, she believed, cannot be dissociated from ordinary ones. She has written plays, poetry, philosophical works and over 25 novels.

The setting of *The Bell* (1958) is a lay¹⁶ religious community next to a closed order of nuns. The arrival of a young woman and the installation of a new bell in the abbey disrupt both communities and lead to an impending sense of menace. The novel is about good and evil, power and religion, but is not without moments of comedy. A

15. rampant: *endémique*

16. lay: *lai, laïque*

Severed Head (1961) draws on Jungian and Freudian theories. *The Unicorn* (1963) is the parody of a Gothic romance.

The Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974) deals with morality and sin. *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) is about obsessional love and selfishness.

■ Memory and history

Postmodern critics and writers have often challenged the distinctions between the supposed objectivity of historical accounts and the subjective, fictional accounts of literature. This is exemplified in the works of several writers who destabilize historical narrative, question the veracity of memory, and blur the differences between the factual and the fictional.

Kazuo Ishiguro (b. 1954) was born in Japan but educated in England, where he studied literature and creative writing. Most of his novels are told by lonely, unreliable narrators, who reflect about their past and little by little unconsciously reveal their own failings and traumas. Ishiguro's first two novels (*A Pale View of Hills*, 1982; *An Artist of the Floating World*, 1986) are set in Japan, where elderly characters reminisce about their lives with a mixture of guilt and self-importance, but the reader is never quite sure what is the part of truth and that of imagination.

In his best-known novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Stevens, a retired butler, remembers his life in the service of Lord Darlington. The importance of duty and dignity for him as he tries to be the perfect butler, leads him to deceive himself. He fails to help his elderly father, fulfil his love for Miss Kenton, the housekeeper, and is led to turn a blind eye to Lord Darlington's pro-fascist views. Stevens's language reflects his own rigidity: it is stilted¹⁷ and old-fashioned, with long, complex structures.

The Unconsoled (1995) is about a well-known pianist who arrives in a central European city he cannot name to give a concert that will never take place as he seems to be losing his memory and live in a surreal world of dreams. It is the most defamiliarizing of Ishiguro's novels. *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is a dystopian* science-fiction novel, which follows the lives of children created as clones in order to become donors. *The Buried Giant* (2015), a medieval fantasy, takes place at the end of a war between Britons and Saxons, in a society where a mist caused by a dragon's breath robs people of memories.

The novels of Graham Swift (b. 1949) often trace the relationship between several generations, and between individual and collective history. Historical enquiry is a recurrent theme in his novels. *The Sweet Shop Owner* (1980) is the inner monologue of a man who looks back upon his past before committing suicide. In *Shuttlecock* (1981), the protagonist tries to learn more about his father's role as a spy during the

17. stilted: *guindé*

war. *Ever After* (1992) traces the past life of Bill Unwin, the protagonist, and that of a Victorian ancestor of his whose life he pieces together from his notebooks. In *Last Orders* (1996), a group of war veterans journeys to Margate to scatter the ashes of a friend, while each reviews his own life. In *Tomorrow* (2007), a woman rehearses what she and her husband will tell their children the following day about the family history.

Waterland (1983) is a superb novel in which a history teacher talks to his class in a long monologue which associates different levels of history and story-telling: his history class about the French Revolution, an autobiographical family saga, the history of the Fens (the setting of the novel), and a murder mystery which took place in the past.

History is also a recurrent theme in the novels of **A.S. Byatt** (b. 1936), who knits together past and present, with a wealth of literary and mythical allusions and constant use of pastiche* and intertextuality*. *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) contrasts the Elizabethan age of her time with that of the 16th century. *Possession* (1990) is about a university lecturer's research into the life of a Victorian poet. In *Angel and Insect* (1992) Byatt considers the social and scientific context to Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

Peter Ackroyd, also a biographer, writes novels which are set in the past and deal with art, literature and culture (*Hawksmoor*, 1985; *Chatterton*, 1987), blurring the boundaries between fiction, biography and history.

A major theme in the novels of **Penelope Lively** (b. 1933) is the impact of memory and history upon the present (*Moon Tiger*, 1987).

Several writers have recently chosen the two world wars as their subject, Sebastian Faulks's poetic evocation of suffering (*Birdsong*, 1993) and Pat Barker's trilogy about the way conflicts affect identity (*Regeneration*, 1991; *The Ghost Road*, 1995).

In his novels, **Julian Barnes** reinterprets the past, whether world history (*A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, 1989) or Flaubert's life (*Flaubert's Parrot*, 1984), reflecting on the interplay between history and fiction.

D.M. Thomas (b. 1935) weaves together fiction and history in his novels. *The White Hotel* (1981) is the story of a young woman who goes to Freud for analysis and is later a victim of the Holocaust.

■ Campus novels

Campus novels offer comic satires* on English university life. Although the setting is a college or university and the protagonists lecturers, the plots rely on the more conventional themes of money, success, love or religion, thus often deflating¹⁸ the seriousness of their academic pursuits. Two novelists have developed the genre, **Malcolm Bradbury** (b. 1932) with *Rates of Exchange* (1983) and **David Lodge** (b. 1935) with *Changing Places* (1975), and *Small World* (1984), which describe an exchange

18. to deflate: dégonfler

between two universities – one British, the other American – and lend themselves to a comparison between two cultures.

■ Feminine / feminist voices

The novels of **Margaret Drabble** are concerned with the relationship between character and society. Her trilogy (*The Radiant Way*, 1987, *A Natural Curiosity*, 1989, *The Gates of Ivory*, 1991) chronicles both the progress of her characters and the changes in the London society.

Doris Lessing (1919-2013) spent her childhood in Persia (Iran) and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). After dropping out of school, she adopted the Marxist ideology (which she later grew disillusioned with), and married twice before coming to England, where she devoted her life to writing. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007.

Doris Lessing was a feminist and a committed writer, whose heroines try to come to terms with their own selves and with the society of their time. She believed that in order to become free they needed to face and reject the preconceived models society cast them into. *The Grass is Singing* (1950), set in Southern Rhodesia, deals with the relationship between blacks and whites. The five novels of *The Children of Violence* (1952-1969) form a Bildungsroman* and trace the development of Martha Quest, their troubled and idealistic protagonist, who fights against apartheid and joins the Communist Party.

In *The Golden Notebook* (1962), a novelist tries to bring together the different strands of her life, which she writes about in notebooks of different colours (black for her years of struggle in Africa, red for her work with the Communist Party, yellow for her love affair and blue for her emotional life). These alternate with excerpts from the book she is writing, called 'Free Women'. The Golden Notebook brings together these fragmented accounts of her life. The novel embraces the social, political and personal issues of women in the 1960s and made Lessing an icon of feminism.

The Good Terrorist (1985) is about a group of young revolutionaries.

Lessing's later novels are about the future and constitute a sort of spiritual 'inner-space fiction' influenced by Sufi mysticism.

Other feminine voices include those of **Rebecca West** (a political journalist and feminist novelist: *The Return of the Soldier*, 1918; *The Judge*, 1922; *The Fountain Overflows*, 1957), **Barbara Pym** (who writes about the sad, frustrated lives of spinsters in small circles: *Quartet in Autumn*, 1977), **Elizabeth Taylor** (with her subtle portrayal of the middle and upper- middle classes), **Edna O'Brien** (and her autobiographical novels), **Anita Brookner** (who addresses the themes of loneliness and solitude among single women who are often intelligent but dependent: *Hotel du Lac*, 1984), **Beryl Bainbridge** (who describes with empathy and humour the lives of deprived or

frustrated beings and dysfunctional families in which Gothic or grotesque elements intrude, such as unexpected murders and violence: *The Bottle Factory Outing*, 1974; *Injury Time*, 1997), Susan Hill (who writes about isolation, violence and loneliness), Fay Weldon (and her criticism of patriarchal society), Emma Tenant (whose lyrical stories contain fantasy or magic), Marina Warner (who writes about feminism and myth), and Christine Brooke-Rose (and her experimental novels).

■ A few postmodernists

John Fowles (1926-2005) studied languages at Oxford and taught in France, Greece and England. Influenced by existentialism, he was interested in individual will and the need for freedom and independence. His novels use a wide range of postmodern techniques: pastiche, intertextuality, artifice and the rejection of omniscient* narrators to allow the characters to gain freedom of choice.

In *The Collector* (1963) a young collector of butterflies kidnaps a girl he is obsessed with. The novel gives us the successive points of view of captor and victim; it also reveals a clash between classes and more generally society's need to control and possess.

With *The Magus* (1966), a young Englishman who teaches in Greece becomes the victim of the masques and psychological games devised by a Greek magician, Nicholas Conchis, until he can no longer tell reality from fantasy. The novel deals with entrapment and the absolute power one can have over others.

The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) describes a Victorian love triangle, but from the point of view of a modern narrator who constantly comments on Victorian history, science, religion and manners. Fowles deconstructs the form of Victorian novels by commenting on his own characters and narration, questioning his own authority, and offering postmodern choices such as different endings.

A Maggot (1985) is an 18th century mystery story which combines illusion and reality.

Angela Carter (1940-92) taught literature and creative writing at several universities. In her stories and novels, she makes use of a large range of postmodern devices such as pastiche*, intertextuality*, allusions, magic realism* and blurred boundaries between genres. A feminist, she addresses the themes of tyranny, female sexuality and eroticism, and deconstructs the myths of sexual identity.

The Magic Toyshop (1967) is about a girl's growing awareness of her sexuality and the condition of women in a patriarchal society. *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) deals with sexual politics in a dystopian New York. *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) is a retelling of some of Charles Perrault's fairy tales from the point of view of female protagonists while *Nights at the Circus* (1984) is about the erotic adventures of a circus artist who is half-bird half-woman and therefore symbolic of women's freedom.

MAGIC REALISM

Magic realism unites realism with the fantastic. One of its effects is to lead the reader to see narrative as invention and to question any single authoritative point of view. It is therefore a metaphor for the difficulty of getting at the truth or for the manipulation of that truth for political reasons. The technique was often used by South American writers like Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, as well as by Salman Rushdie and in England, Angela Carter and Jeannette Winterson. The term magic realism is also used to describe paintings in which fantastic scenes are painted in a sharply realistic manner.

Louis de Bernières's novels about war and politics are often set abroad (Greece, South America) and combine a concern for the victims of politics with magic realism.

A forthright lesbian writer and a postmodern feminist, Jeannette Winterson (b. 1959) writes about sexual identity. *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (1985) is a partly autobiographical bildungsroman* about homosexuality and religion, and addresses the themes of story-telling and fairy tales. There are elements of magic realism* in *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), set in the 17th century and contemporary society, its protagonists travelling across space and time. The novel is rich in intertextuality* and contains an embedded¹⁹ fairy tale. *Written on the Body* (1992) experiments further with form since gender differences disappear. Story-telling, art, lies and truth are recurring themes in her work.

The novels of David Mitchell (b. 1969) have complex structures, with several narrators, and nested²⁰ stories which interlock and range across space and time (*Ghostwritten*, 1999; *Cloud Atlas*, 2004; *Slade House*, 2015).

■ Dark realism and anticipation

Several postmodern writers have developed the themes of degradation and violence. The novels of Martin Amis (b. 1949), Kingsley Amis's son, use dark humour to reveal the spiritual violence of a society in which materialism and competition have replaced morality and where a youth culture is in thrall to²¹ drugs, alcohol and sex.

Money: A Suicide Note (1984) is a critique of the amoral Thatcher years, told by a first-person narrator, John Self. Keith Talent, the hero of *London Fields* (1989), will do anything to become a famous TV darts player. *Time's Arrow* (1991), the story of an Auschwitz doctor, is told backwards, from death to birth. *The Information* (1995) relates the rivalry between two novelists, with constant use of metafiction*.

Martin Amis's writing is striking in its use of city slang, a brilliantly glib²² language made up of wit and obscenity, which stands for the collapse of society. Amis wrote

19. to embed: *enclisser*

20. nested: *emboîté*

21. in thrall to: *esclave de*

22. glib: *facile, désinvolte*

in 'Battling banality' (*The Guardian*, 2001), 'To idealise: all writing is a campaign against cliché. Not just clichés of the pen but clichés of the mind and clichés of the heart. When I dispraise, I am usually quoting clichés. When I praise, I am usually quoting the opposed qualities of freshness, energy and reverberation of voice.' This is an excerpt from *London Fields*:

Keith glanced up long suffering from his tabloid and his lunch. His lunch consisted of Chicken Pilaff and four Bramley Apple Pies. His tabloid consisted of kiss and tell, and then more kiss and tell, and then more kiss and more tell. Aliens Stole my Boobs. Marilyn Monroe And Jack Kennedy Still Share Nights of Passion: In Atlantis. My Love Muscles Tightened From Beyond The Grave. All his life Keith had been a reader of the most vulgar and sensational of the mass-market dailies. But two years ago he had made a decision, and gone down-market: to the smaller-circulation Morning Lark. He was still adjusting to the wrench. (from Chapter 7)

Ian McEwan (1948-) has written novels, short stories and children's fiction. Most of his works explore the loss of innocence and the nature of cruelty and barbarism in society. His early novels (*The Cement Garden*, 1978; *The Comfort of Strangers*, 1981) are dark and Gothic (he was nicknamed 'Ian Macabre') and deal with violent or transgressive sexual relationships. His next novels are concerned with the effect of cruelty – whether war (*Black Dogs*, 1992), a tragedy (*Enduring Love*, 1997) or a disastrous moral decision (*Amsterdam*, 1998). *Atonement* (2001) is a postmodern novel about a novelist's attempt to atone for her past lie. *Sweet Tooth* (2012) is a spy novel and love story set in 1970s England and explores the relationship between literature and politics. *The Children Act* (2014) revolves around the decision made by a high court judge.

The novels of Irvine Welsh have reached cult status with their description of the world of alienated young people – drug addicts in *Trainspotting* (1993) for example – written with gusto and in broad²³ Scottish dialect.

Will Self (b. 1961) revives the tradition of social anticipation, and sets his novels within contemporary youth culture. Sex, drugs, mental illness and psychiatry are the staples of his fantastic and grotesque short stories and novels (*The Quantity Theory of Insanity*, 1991; *Great Apes*, 1997; *The Butt*, 2008).

■ New social realism

Jonathan Coe (b. 1961), who divided his life between literature and music, writes scathing satires on the society of his time: the Thatcher years in *What a Carve Up!* (1994), the 70s in *The Rotters' Club* (2001), and the Blair years in *The Closed Circle* (2004).

'The Troubles' in Ireland revived a feeling of Irishness often expressed through a return to naturalism. It is to be found in the works of William Trevor (*Felicia's Journey*, 1994) and John McGahern (1934-2006), who in novels such as *The Barracks* (1963) and *Amongst Women* (1990) portrays rural life and characters who try to break away from social and religious constraints.

23. broad (dialect): *fort*, pronounced

William Boyd (b. 1952) sets most of his adventure stories in Africa or America and their good plots, atmosphere, and satire have made them very popular. (*A Good Man in Africa*, 1981; *The Blue Afternoon*, 1993). His recent novels are more serious in tone, like *Restless* (2006), in which a young woman discovers that her mother was a spy.

Several writers with a multicultural background have written about their experience at the confluence of cultures, choosing realism to speak about racism, immigration and sexuality.

Hanif Kureishi (b. 1954), whose father is Pakistani and mother English, was brought up in England, where he studied philosophy. He writes screenplays, novels and drama. His first screenplays (*My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, both by Stephen Frears) are about racial differences, discrimination and a criticism of the establishment. *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *Intimacy* (1998) are largely autobiographical novels.

Monica Ali (b. 1967), whose father is Bengali and mother English, never felt like an insider. Her novels explore questions of identity and clashes of cultures and generations. *Brick Lane* (2003), her best-known novel, compares the lives of two sisters, one sent to England for an arranged marriage, the other, more rebellious, who has remained in Bangladesh.

Zadie Smith (b. 1975) was born in London to an English father and Jamaican mother. *White Teeth* (2000), a boisterous and very funny portrait of three families in London, is a study in multiculturalism and a critique of Western racial stereotypes. *On Beauty* (2005) is a campus novel which describes an exchange between two professors who are culturally and ideologically very different. The novel celebrates the importance of human relationships.

John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969): A postmodern novel

- And so ends the story. What happened to Sarah, I do not know – whatever it was,
- she never troubled Charles again in person, however long she may have lingered in
- his memory. This is what most often happens. People sink out of sight, down in the
- shadows of closer things.
- 5 Charles and Ernestina did not live happily ever after; but they lived together, though
- Charles finally survived her by a decade (and earnestly mourned her throughout it).
- They begat¹ what shall it be – let us say seven children. Sir Robert added injury to
- insult by siring², and within ten months of his alliance to Mrs. Bella Tomkins, not
- one heir, but two. This fatal pair of twins were what finally drove Charles into busi-
- 10 — ness. He was bored to begin with; and then got a taste for the thing. His own sons
- were given no choice; and their sons today still control the great shop and all its
- ramifications.
- Sam and Mary – but who can be bothered with the biography of servants? They
- married, and bred, and died, in the monotonous fashion of their kind.

15 Now who else? Dr. Grogan? He died in his ninety-first year. Since Aunt Tranter also
 — lived into her nineties, we have clear proof of the amiability of the fresh Lyme air.
 — It cannot be all-effective, though, since Mrs. Poulteney died within two months of
 — Charles's last return to Lyme. Here, I am happy to say, I can summon up enough inter-
 — est to look into the future – that is, into her after-life. Suitably dressed in black,
 20 she arrived in her barouche at the Heavenly Gates. Her footman – for naturally, as
 — in ancient Egypt, her whole household had died with her – descended and gravely
 — opened the carriage door. Mrs. Poulteney mounted the steps and after making a
 — mental note to inform the Creator (when she knew Him better) that His domestics
 — should be more on the alert for important callers, pulled the bellring. The butler at
 25 last appeared.
 — “Ma’am?”
 — “I am Mrs. Poulteney. I have come to take up residence. Kindly inform your Master.”
 — “His Infinitude has been informed of your decease, ma’m. His angels have already
 — sung a Jubilate in celebration of the event.”
 30 “That is most proper and kind of Him.” And the worthy lady, pluming and swelling¹,
 — made to⁴ sweep into the imposing white hall she saw beyond the butler's head. But
 — the man did not move aside. Instead he rather impertinently jangled some keys he
 — chanced to have in his hand.
 — “My man! Make way, I am she, Mrs. Poulteney of Lyme Regis.”
 35 “Formerly of Lyme Regis, ma’m. And now of a much more tropical abode.”
 — With that, the brutal flunkey⁵ slammed the door in her face. Mrs. Poulteney's imme-
 — diate reaction was to look round, for fear her domestics might have overheard this
 — scene. But her carriage, which she had thought to hear draw away to the servants'
 — quarters, had mysteriously disappeared. In fact everything had disappeared, road
 40 and landscape (rather resembling the Great Drive up to Windsor Castle, for some pe-
 — culiar reason), all, all had vanished. There was nothing but space – and horror of hor-
 — rors, a devouring space. One by one, the steps up which Mrs. Poulteney had so imperi-
 — ally mounted began also to disappear. Only three were left; and then only two; then
 — one. Mrs. Poulteney stood on nothing. She was most distinctly heard to say “Lady
 45 Cotton is behind this”, and then she fell, flouncing⁶ and bannering⁷ and ballooning, like
 — a shot crow, down to where her real master waited. (chapter 44)

1. to beget: engendrer. 2. to sire: engendrer. 3. pluming and swelling: être suffisant, content de soi.
 4. made to: voulut, se mit à. 5. a flunkey: un laquais. 6. to flounce: se déplacer avec indignation.
 7. a banner: un étendard.

■ THE CONTEXT

This is the first of three different endings offered by the narrator. The novel takes place in Victorian times but is told by an omniscient narrator who comments on it from a 20th century point of view. The main character, Charles Smithson, a gentleman with a large income and extensive education, is torn between his fiancée, Ernestina Freeman and his love for Sarah Woodruff, a reportedly ‘fallen woman’. Mrs Poulteney is a wealthy, hypocritical, self-satisfied widow, who employed Sarah for a time.

■ THE PARODY OF VICTORIAN CONVENTIONS

– The passage mimicks a Victorian conclusion: it hints at the destinies of all the characters and conforms to both morality (the ‘bad ones’ like Mrs Poulteney are punished) and propriety (Charles marries Ernestina). The omniscient narrator, who decides on the fates of his characters, is like God.
 – But the narrator seems to have lost his interest in his story (“What shall it be?”, l. 3 / “Who can be bothered...?”, l. 17) and only summons “enough interest” when he reaches Mrs Poulteney. This is because it is not a proper ending but a pastiche: nothing is said about the future of Sarah, one of the main characters; with Mrs Poulteney's after-life, the ending turns into grotesque impossibility and fantasy; the narrator hovers between omniscience and ignorance (about Sarah's fate).
 – The pastiche contains another pastiche – that of fairy-tales – since they “did not” live happily, and the number of children is clearly arbitrary.
 This cannot be the real ending. The narrator merely pretends to imitate a Victorian ‘last chapter’, finds it unsatisfactory, is clearly bored and finds enjoyment only in letting his imagination roam freely when it comes to imagining Mrs Poulteney's fate.

■ FROM HUMOUR TO SATIRE

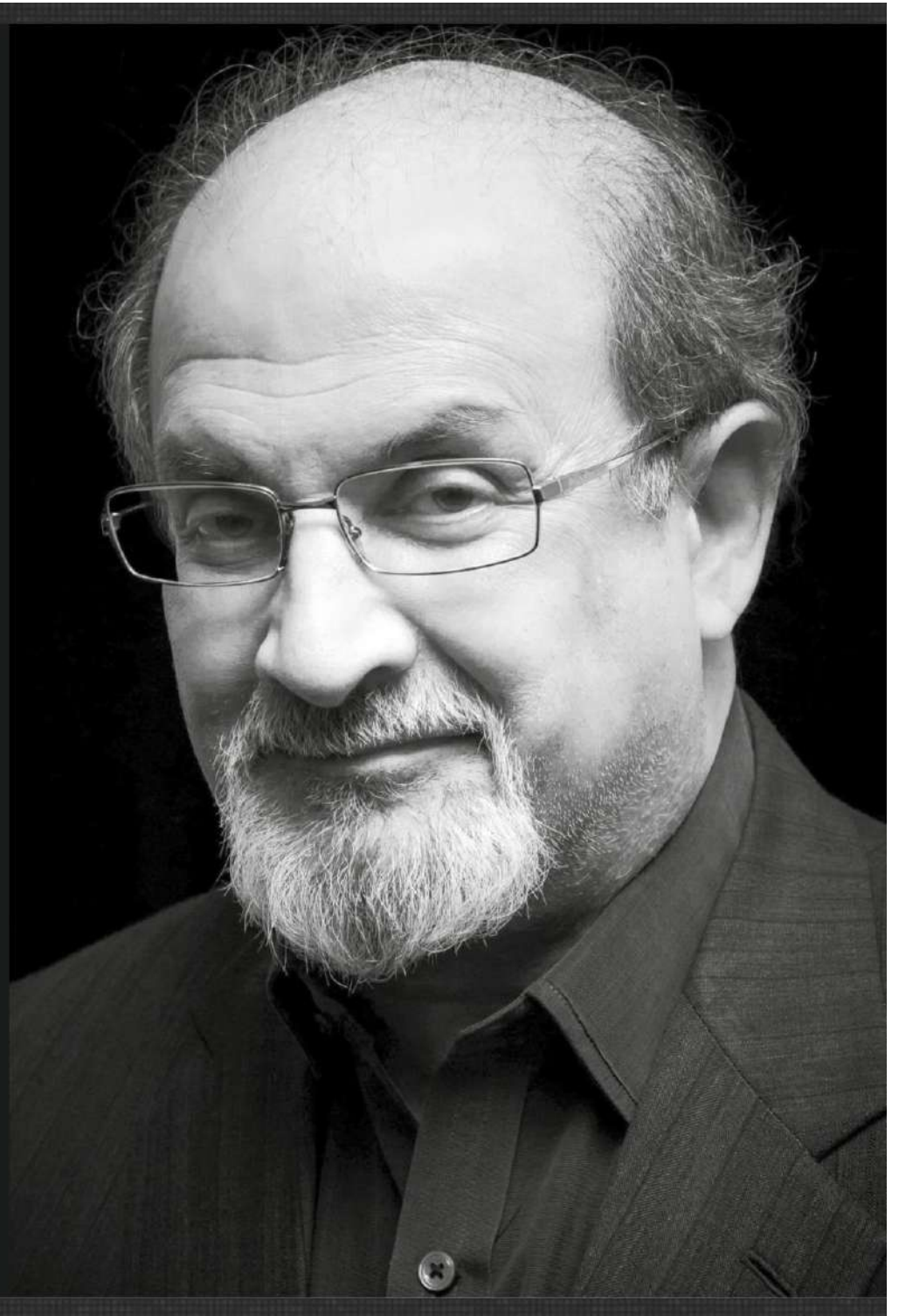
– Bored with his narrative, the narrator resorts to humour to entertain us and himself: he uses puns (Charles mourns Ernestina earnestly, l. 6), irony (Charles, who hated business, ends up involved in it), pseudo-scientific statements (the Lyme Regis air), literary references (Mrs Poulteney's fall at the end is reminiscent of Satan's fall in Milton's *Paradise Lost*). Humour reaches a climax with the description of Mrs Poulteney's after-life, which is highly theatrical, with direct speech, and shows that she has not changed: her behaviour in Lyme Regis is transposed to Heaven (“Lady Cotton is behind this.”). The narrator gets carried away at the end (see the rhythm, the images, the alliterations in the last sentence.)
 – There is also a satire on some features of Victorian society: the importance of duty (Charles marries Ernestina and mourns her dutifully), class distinctions (the narrator's pretence at despising servants, Mrs Poulteney's self-importance, the reversal of hierarchy in Heaven).
 Ironically, only Sarah escapes criticism by being left out by the narrator. Her reported immortality is therefore not condemned. She is the only one who is free and uninhibited by rules and codes.



COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE



SALMAN RUSHDIE



'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance' Salman Rushdie,
(The Times, July 3, 1982)

It was in the late 19th century that the idea of granting some of the British colonies a measure of independence began to be aired¹. Canada was the first one to be granted the status of dominion in 1867. In 1931, a British Commonwealth of Nations was created. It was made up of colonies, administered by a Governor representing the sovereign, and of dominions with a status defined by the statute of Westminster. Dominions were mainly white countries (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, the Irish Free State), sovereign nations with allegiance to the Crown. Most of the remaining colonies gained their independence in the years that followed World War II. In 2002, the remaining colonies were renamed British Territories Overseas.

The Commonwealth is now a free association of independent states formally part of the British Empire. They recognize the Queen as head of the Commonwealth and share several principles for peace, equality, prosperity and democracy. Their association is mainly cultural, educational, sporting and economic.

Here are a few examples of countries which belong to the Commonwealth.

| Status | Country and date of acquiring that status |
|--|---|
| Realm (Commonwealth country with the Queen as Sovereign) | Australia (1931); Canada (1931); New Zealand (1931); Jamaica (1962); Barbados (1966); Grenada (1974) |
| Monarchy (Commonwealth country which has its own monarch as Head of State) | Malaysia (1957); Lesotho (1966); Swaziland (1968) |
| Republic | South Africa (1931, left 1961, back in 1994); India (1947); Pakistan (1947, left 1972, back 1989); Nigeria (1960); Uganda (1962); Kenya (1963), Tanzania (1964); Zambia (1964); Bangladesh (1972); Zimbabwe (1980), Cameroon (1995); Mozambique (1995) |

1. to air ideas, opinions: *les faire connaître*

FROM THE EMPIRE TO THE COMMONWEALTH

■ Imagining the Empire

From the 16th century to the early 20th century, the far-flung² regions of the empire captivated people's imagination. In British literature, they were first places of wonder and curiosity where the inhabitants could be 'of monstrous shape' (*The Tempest*), where fortunes could be made and unmade (Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield*), where natives were heathens who needed to be educated and converted (St John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*), justifying long journeys abroad (Mr Bertram in *Mansfield Park*) or mysterious events (*The Moonstone*, Mr Rochester's marriage in *Jane Eyre*). Such 'otherness' of the colonies seemed to justify the colonizing enterprise. At the beginning of the 20th century, and through the works of Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*), Kipling (*Kim*, short stories) and Forster (*A Passage to India*) among others, a more subtle image of the colonies began to appear together with a denunciation of the worst aspects of colonialism. In postcolonial times critics started analyzing the Victorians' colonial ideology. In his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argued that there was no desire to represent the colonized cultures faithfully but that the Victorians' construction of 'otherness' represented a Manichean opposition between colonizer/colonized or civilised/savage which vindicated³ colonial control and expansion as well as the silencing and marginalising of indigenous people.

The colonies could of course be represented from the inside, by native writers, and some were, but the literary production (called colonial literature) was limited. It was mainly after independence, that is to say after the Second World War that their writings (postcolonial literature) began to gain momentum to become one of the richest and most innovative body of literature today.

■ Postcolonial literature

POSTCOLONIAL WRITING

Here are some characteristics of postcolonial writing.

- Postcolonial literature has to be set within historical and cultural perspectives. Internal political and religious problems, as well as the relationship with Britain as the former colonizing country, are essential to understand such diverse works as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.
- Most postcolonial writers choose to reassert the cultural and linguistic traditions of their native countries, leading to new hybrid forms. The use of oral traditions, myth, magic realism (as in Rushdie's novels), mime and dance (as in Soyinka's *The*

2. far-flung: *distant*

3. to vindicate: *justifier*

Lion and the Jewel) help to assert their cultural identity. W.B. Yeats too tried to define an Irish cultural identity by encouraging the Irish Cultural Revival.

– Another problem raised by postcolonial literature, is whether to write in English, the language of the former colonizer. Most of the time, the writers who choose English adapt and reinvent it (in terms of vocabulary, syntax, rhythm), in order to appropriate it. Other writers have used a hybrid language, part English, part Creole, for example.

– Postcolonial literature tends to ‘write back’, that is to say to question and rework the usual representations of their culture, a way of reversing the fact that the colonial education system was based on English literature only. One way of asserting one’s identity is to use the canonical British texts, either by quoting them ironically, or by rewriting the books, changing their point of view or message. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), for instance, is a rewriting of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), from the point of view of his ‘wife’, who is not given a voice in Defoe’s novel. With *A Harlot’s Progress*, the Caribbean writer David Dabydeen wrote a novel about the different characters in one of Hogarth’s series of prints. In *Jack Maggs* (1997), Peter Carey makes the convict figure of Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, the focus of his novel.

– Since most of the colonies had strong patriarchal systems, women tended to be doubly penalised. Much postcolonial writing reflects women’s need to assert their independence – from men as well as from Britain – and to challenge the marginalisation of women.

But one must avoid any generalisation or oversimplification since several postcolonial writers have chosen to write within the standards and language of canonical British literature. Besides, globalization has meant the collapse of the distinct cultural boundaries of the past so that postcolonial literature is certainly becoming increasingly hybrid. One can now speak of ‘transcultural writers’, whose lives and works are ‘across’ the boundaries of nation and culture – as, for instance is the case with V.S. Naipaul.

CANADA

In the first decades of the 19th century, some writers had already described their experience in Canada, for example Susanna Moodie with *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852), a memoir about her difficult life in the backwoods of Ontario. But it was mainly in the 20th century that a national literature appeared.

■ 1900-1950: Realism and regionalism

Between 1867, when it became the first colony to acquire dominion status, and World War II, Canada transformed itself from a frontier nation to a modern one, with social and economic problems that mirrored those of its American neighbour: the two World Wars, the bleak Depression years, the alienation of Native Canadians on reservations controlled by the Department of Indian Affairs.

Fiction initially focused on realistic descriptions of the country and on regional local colour writing as in the stories of Stephen Leacock (1869-1944), a highly popular humorist, who describes life in small Ontario towns with a mixture of comedy and satire (*Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, 1912), or in the fiction of Philip Grove (1879-1948), which portrays the bleakness of pioneering life in the prairies (*Settlers of the Marsh*, 1925).

In the 1930s, writers turned to the social and psychological effects of the Depression. Morley Callaghan (1903-90) set his novels in large Canadian cities, as in *Such Is My Beloved* (1934), in which a priest tries to help two Toronto prostitutes. Another novelist, Sinclair Ross (1908-96) described the harshness and frustrations of prairie life during the Depression (*As For Me and My House*, 1941).

It was in the 1940s that fiction began to address the tensions linked to the relationship between different ethnic groups. *Two Solitudes* (1945) by Hugh MacLennan (1907-90) describes the strained relations between the French and English Canadian communities.

■ 1950-1980: Towards a Canadian identity

After the war, Canada became increasingly concerned with asserting its cultural identity and resisting the growing influence of the United States. A new flag, a national anthem and the adoption of bilingualism in the 1960s testify to rising nationalism.

RECURRENT THEMES IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

Some subjects and images recur in Canadian literature and have become distinct national themes. One of them is the importance of landscape and space, the beauty and grandeur of its huge, open spaces, but also the harshness of its climate and sometimes hostile environment. A sense of place also characterises much of Canadian literature because of the country’s huge regional differences.

Ethnic differences are also a common topic in a country where English and French communities, native Indians and the Inuit, and the more recent multicultural immigrant population co-exist. Finally, developing a sense of identity is essential to break free from colonialism as well as from American cultural and economic domination.

In *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), Margaret Atwood argued that Canadian literature still needed to be anchored in a national identity and suggested that the notion of survival and of people as victims might provide that central distinguishing image of Canadian literature.

Mordecai Richler (1931-2001) addressed questions of Canadian identity in Quebec, his novels portraying Anglophone Jewish life in Montreal (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, 1959). With humour and ebullience he satirizes provincialism and the difficult search for an identity. Margaret Laurence (1926-87) too was a regional

writer, whose novels are set in the Manitoba Prairie town of Manawaka (*The Stone Angel*, 1964; *The Fire-Dwellers*, 1969; *The Diviners*, 1974). She explores family relationships, the tensions between individuals and community, and the power of memory and myth. Her characters are often lonely women looking for self-realization. Another writer interested in the Prairies and in myth is Robert Kroetsch (1927-2011), whose fiction and poetry use legend, allusions to diverse cultures and magic realism in a postmodern way (*The Studhorse Man*, 1969; *Gone Indian*, 1973; *Badlands*, 1975). Robertson Davies (1913-95) worked as editor and playwright; his successful play *Fortune, My Foe* (1948) describes Canadian culture from the point of view of an immigrant. He is best-known for his Deptford Trilogy (*Fifth Business*, 1970; *The Manticore*, 1972; *World of Wonders*, 1975), which traces the fates of three men from Ontario while criticizing the community's narrow-mindedness.

A poet, novelist, and one of the most influential contemporary Canadian writers, Margaret Atwood (b. 1939) writes about feminist issues such as the violence and 'colonization' women are victims of in modern society and the need for them to rebel and take control of their lives. Her pioneers and exiles are alienated both in society and from their true selves, merely trying to 'survive' (→ p. 197). Atwood is also involved in humanitarian and environmental issues.

The *Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) is a long poem which uses the persona of this early novelist to describe her development and her response to the land. In her first novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969), Atwood compares marriage to sexist cannibalism. *Surfacing* (1972) is about a woman's return to Quebec in search of her father, which leads her to a personal transformation and to madness. *The Blind Assassin* (2000) consists of three embedded stories that gradually reveal the secrets of the main characters. A work of 'non-fiction', *Alias Grace* (1996) traces the life of Grace Marks, a servant accused of killing two members of the Kinnear household where she worked, and juxtaposes several points of view.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) is set in Gilead, a future totalitarian society and paramilitary theocracy organized in a system of castes. Industrial pollution has made most women infertile and those who are, the handmaids, have to have sex with men and produce a child. Offred, the narrator, is one of these handmaids and finds herself involved in a resistance movement. A feminist dystopian narrative, it is a reflection on western society and the monstrous effects of authoritarian systems.

Atwood often uses the postmodern devices of unreliable narrators* and plots without clear resolution. She has also written several short story collections, a much-appreciated genre in Canadian literature.

The short story is also the fictional form favoured by Mavis Gallant (1922-2014), who lived in France and often compares European and American values (*Home Truths*, 1981), and by Alice Munro.

Alice Munro (b. 1931), who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013, has developed original structures for her short stories, which she called 'linked stories', and, like bildungsromans*, show the maturation of the main characters. They are discursive, with a large range of incidents and characters, and with the fantastic sometimes intruding into the ordinary. Set in small towns in Huron County (Ontario), they reveal the repressions, loneliness, insecurity and difficulty to relate of members of the community, whose commonplace lives often hide dark secrets. A common theme in her stories is also the position of women confined to empty lives by society. The voice is ironic*, detached, passing no moral judgement, but constantly challenging the reader. As Alice Munro says, 'As long as the stories disturb people or point to the ways they should be dissatisfied with the status quo, then I assume I've done my job.' (*Dance of the Happy Shades*, 1968; *Lives of Girls and Women*, 1971; *Friend of My Youth: Stories*, 1991; *The Love of a Good Woman: Stories*, 1998; *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, 2001).

■ 1980-2000: A multiplicity of voices

As new immigrants increasingly arrive from non-European countries, Canada has become increasingly multi-cultural so that, in the realm of literature, it is now far more difficult to speak of a specific Canadian identity since Canada is not necessarily the setting for many of the works.

A poet, playwright and novelist, Carol Shields (1935-2003) was born in the United States but has lived in Canada for most of her life, and several of her novels address the cultural differences between Canada and the United States. Her fiction is realistic and mainly domestic, exploring family life, love and sexuality, and women's search for fulfilment, with a blend of satire* and compassion. But her fiction contains postmodern* elements too, for instance pages in the style of a film script in *Swann* (1987). *The Stone Diaries* (1993), written in the form of a diary, but including several narrative voices, is the autobiography* of an unremarkable woman – an American Everywoman – who throughout her life as wife, widow and mother, fails to find a meaning in her life. The book is rich in details of everyday life, and includes letters, photographs, newspaper clippings, recipes and prayers, which bring the life of Daisy Goodwill close to us.

The writings of Michael Ondaatje reflect the transcultural nature of much postcolonial writing. Ondaatje was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), with Dutch, Tamil and Sinhalese roots, educated in England, and now lives in Canada. This is why the themes of migration, displacement, alienation are common ones in his fiction. The main character of *The English Patient* (1992) is nameless, faceless (his face was burnt in a plane crash) and with unclear identity, being in fact a Hungarian spy who pretends to be English. The lyrical prose evokes the confusion of the post-war environment. *Running in the Family* (1983) describes Ondaatje's visits to Sri Lanka and offers a portrait of his family containing elements of magic realism. Ondaatje has also written poetry (*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, 1970).

After the civil rights protests of the 1960s, Native Canadian writers began to make their voices heard. In 1969, *I Am an Indian*, an anthology of Native Canadian Literature was published, followed in 1992 by *An Anthology Of Canadian Native Literature in English*.

AUSTRALIA

In 1788, only a few years after Captain James Cook annexed the eastern coast of Australia for Britain, the new colony was used as a settlement for convicts. It inspired Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* (1870-72), the story of an innocent man who is transported to Australia and who becomes the victim of the brutal, inhumane, treatment inflicted on convicts. Patrick White used a similar subject in *A Fringe of Leaves* (1967).

RECURRENT THEMES IN AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

The fact that for some 90 years Australia was peopled by convicts and guards has constituted a traumatic beginning for the nation. It took a long time for the country to forget its past, but the feeling of 'togetherness' that the convicts had to forge to survive may have led to the typically Australian ethos of mateship⁴. It may also explain the Australians' empathy with the underdogs and the importance of Ned Kelly, a bushranger and outlaw, who committed armed robberies and accused the British Empire, and who has remained a cult figure. Australian national identity is also linked to the bush, a term which refers to the wilderness, to uncultivated land where it is difficult to settle but which in people's imagination was associated with romance and adventure. It is related to the idea of strong, self-reliant, romantic bushrangers, a view that left out women.

Another recurrent theme in Australian literature is that of travelling, of leaving and returning, a metaphor for the often ambiguous relationship to Britain. The hero of Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930) keeps travelling between Australia and England without being able to settle anywhere.

More recently, the increasing multiculturalism of the country has led to reflections on identity and alienation, a theme which also reflects the experience of Aborigines. The Aborigines who lived on the land before the British arrived had a rich mythological culture linked to the land. They were treated as inferiors and pushed back as settlement developed, often falling victim to disease, alcoholism and reprisal massacres. Between 1929 and 1945, they lived in poor conditions, often in reserves, and mixed-blood children were placed in institutions or foster homes. The plight of the Aborigines inspired several novelists like Thomas Keneally, Patrick White,

4. mateship: in Australia, behaviour that stresses equality, friendship, and solidarity.

David Malouf, Peter Carey and Robert Drewe. It was only in the 1960s, following American activism for civil rights that their situation began to improve and that Native Australians began to be the writers of their own stories as is Sally Morgan with *My Place* (1987), the story of a young Aboriginal girl's discovery of her false heritage.

■ 1880-1945: Nationalism and social realism

In 1901 the different Australian colonies were federated into one nation and the sense of nationhood was later strengthened by Australia's participation in World War I. Australian writers had by then already begun to free themselves from the English tradition. The bush, farmers, shearers and shepherds became common features of Australian fiction and poetry, often accompanied by a defence of the egalitarian myth of mateship, a condemnation of the harsh conditions of life of poor labourers and a demand for social justice. One of the best chroniclers of Bush life was Henry Lawson (1867-1922), who is best-known for his 'sketch stories', realistic descriptions of bush life in a sparse, laconic style. Several women writers also appeared in those years. Miles Franklin (*My Brilliant Career*, 1901) and Henry Handel Richardson (*The Getting of Wisdom*, 1910) were two women novelists who wrote about the position of young women in Australian society. Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) is the story of a dysfunctional family.

In poetry the celebration of bush life was also reflected in ballads that praised an open land of freedom and opportunity.

■ 1945-2000: A multiplicity of voices

After World War II, the British influence waned⁵, often replaced by that of the United States, particularly in terms of popular culture. But Australia has also moved closer to Asia and become increasingly multicultural, something reflected in its literature. The coming of age of Australian literature was reflected in more satirical works.

- In poetry, the decades following the war were dominated by the satiric* verse of A.D. Hope (*The Wandering Islands*, 1955), which exposed hypocrisy in the spirit of Pope. His later verse (*A Late Picking: Poems 1965-1974*, 1975) is more reflective and shows his interest in mythology. It is the land, the environment, the bush, and their relationship with settlers and Aborigines, which is the main theme of Judith Wright's poetry (*The Double Tree: Selected Poems 1942-1976*, 1978). As for the popular Les Murray, who has been called Australia's Bush-bard, he writes with great dexterity and humour, using traditional forms such as the ballad*, about traditional Australia, its rural life, the way the land shaped character, egalitarianism and independence (*New Selected Poems*, 2014).

5. to wane: diminish

- *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1955) by Ray Lawler (b. 1921) was a seminal play which marked a new beginning for Australian theatre. A naturalistic* play, it breaks with tradition by portraying genuine Australian characters, an urban environment rather than the outback, and a satire* of the Australian myths and values, such as mateship and marriage. The use of symbolism and vernacular* language recalls the plays of Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. Lawler's plays have influenced the works of Alan Seymour (and his criticism of national identity in *The One of the Year*, 1961), Richard Beynon (who exposes racism in *The shifting Heart*, 1957), and David Williamson (who writes about politics and family in urban Australia, *The Removalists*, 1971). The more recent plays of Jack Hibberd show the influence of postmodern European theatre. *A Stretch of the Imagination* (1972), for example is a long monologue, both comic and tragic, in which a dying man reflects on his life, the women he's known, the friends he's lost, and his failing body.

- It is in the realm of fiction that post-war Australian literary production has been richest, revealing a large range of voices. A recurrent theme in modern fiction has been a reflection upon the Australian past, in a postmodern* rather than realistic way.

As an artist Patrick White (1912-1990) always felt an outsider in Australia, where his works were not always appreciated. Yet he was the first Australian writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973.

His main theme is the conflict between the inner self and society, many of his characters being cut off from others by their courage and vision. He also satirizes* middle-class society and politics. Most of his novels are set in 19th century Australia, which leads him to explore the staple themes of Australian culture: pioneers struggling to make a living on poor land (*The Tree of Man*, 1955), the time of convicts (*A Fringe of Leaves*, 1973), contemporary life (*The Eye of the Storm*, 1973).

Voss (1957) relates Johann Ulrich Voss's journey inside Australia's interior in the 1840s, which also turns into a journey of the mind. An outsider (he is German), he pits his will against the Australian continent with passion and arrogance, intent on the success of his enterprise, in spite of the obstacles of the land (beautiful but brutal and hostile, the territory of self-discovery) and of aboriginal tribesmen, whose land and culture they violate, and who in the end murder several members of the expedition including Voss. But all through the journey, Voss corresponds with a young woman, Laura Trevelyan, whom he met in Sidney before leaving. Intelligent and virtuous, she sustains him mentally, through letters and the emotional bond they formed, which allows them to communicate through mystical hallucinations. He finally learns humility before dying. The novel uses religious symbolism with redemption and spiritual discovery possible through suffering. In spite of the failure of the expedition, Laura later learns that Voss has become a myth among Aborigines. The style is poetic and impressionistic.

Another visionary is the subject of *The Vivisector* (1970), a novel about the relationship between the artist and society.

The past is the setting for many of the works of Thomas Keneally (b. 1935), who writes about the experience of historical people who have been betrayed and victimized. His novels blend history, psychological study and adventure. *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* (1972) is about the rage of an Aborigine; *Schindler's Ark* (1982), which inspired the film *Schindler's List*, is about the holocaust.



Sidney Nolan, *Ned Kelly Statue*, Glenrowan, Victoria, Australia. The figure of Ned Kelly (see above, p. 204) has inspired many Australian artists, who often represent him in his homemade armour and helmet. This six-metre high statue is to be found in Glenrowan, the place of the last siege of the Kelly Gang and the deaths of three of its members.

Exiled, or living on the margins of society, the protagonists of David Malouf (b. 1934) try to find their identity and live in harmony with nature. They are often between two cultures, torn between opposites like nature and civilisation, rationality and spirituality. *An Imaginary Life* (1978) is the story of Ovid's exile in Tomis, where Ovid lives with natives whose language he does not understand. But he forms a bond with a boy who lives wild in nature, an alien like him. The novel contrasts the civilised and authoritative Roman world and a primitive and cruel world. In *Remembering Babylon* (1993) an English boy is raised by Aborigines. When white settlers arrive, the boy needs to define his identity, while the settlers are wary and terrified of the Aborigines. In a lyrical prose, he portrays the culture of the Aborigines from inside and from outside.

The writings of Peter Carey (b. 1943) are postmodern*, bringing together reality and fiction, lies and truth, the mundane and the exotic in order to reflect the artificiality of fiction. They are often close to magic realism*, with their use of the surreal, the fantastic, and elements of science-fiction. The subject of several of his novels is the Australian past and the way a national identity was shaped. *Illywhacker* (1985) is a playful satirical survey of Australian history in the 20th century through the picaresque story of a conman⁶ – or illywhacker. *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) consists of the supposed 'found journals' of Ned Kelly, the popular outlaw, who tells the story of his criminal life with a wealth of incidents and characters. *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), a pastiche* of a Victorian novel, also explores racial, religious, sexual and colonial issues – among which the fate of the aborigines – in 19th century Australia.

The fiction of Robert Drewe (b. 1943) is often based on real events and close to 'new journalism'. He explores corruption, sleaze, racism and criminality in contemporary Australian society. *The Savage Crows* (1976) deals with the dispossession of the Tasmanian Aborigines. *Our Sunshine* (1991) also addresses the Australian past since it is an inner portrait of Ned Kelly.

One of the best contemporary novelists, Tim Winton (b. 1960) believes that fiction is anchored in place. 'The place comes first. If the place isn't interesting to me then I can't feel it. I can't feel any people in it. I can't feel what the people are on about or likely to get up to.', he said. He is active in environmental movements. *Cloudstreet* (1991) celebrates family life and the need to belong through the story of two working-class families, the Lambs and the Pickles, who end up sharing a large house in Perth. Although utterly different, the characters' personal journey and search for meaning eventually brings the two families closer to each other.

One should also mention Colleen McCullough's best-seller *The Thorn Birds*, 1977, the saga of a poor family, and the novels of David Ireland (*The Unknown Political Prisoner*, 1976, about the brutal industrial world which transforms workers into prisoners; *Burn*, 1974, about a half-caste Aborigine reminiscing about the war in which he had to fight for the Whites).

6. a conman: un escroc

NEW ZEALAND

The relationship between New Zealand and Britain has always been fairly serene, and a treaty with the Maoris was signed as early as 1840. All through the 19th century literature imitated that of Britain, with mainly melodramatic romances and it was only in the 20th century that literature came into its own.

During the first half of the 20th century, the most significant writer was Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), who moved to London in 1908, but always considered New Zealand as her homeland. In London, she led a tempestuous life, eventually marrying the literary critic John Middleton Murry, a member of the Bloomsbury Group, but she was fragile, both psychologically and physically and died of tuberculosis in France.

Her short stories use the modernist techniques of stream of consciousness* and symbolism to describe the immediacy of the moment and the deceptiveness of perception. They do not follow a linear plot but are built around intense moments of insight, or epiphanies*, which often reveal the frailty of things and the fear of death. They also reject any notion of a stable identity, something best expressed by the fragmented form of the short story.

In a German Pension (1911) is a harsh satire* on class stereotypes, on sexual relationships and on spiritual emptiness. *Prelude* (1918), a long novella made of twelve sections linked by imagery, is set in New Zealand and is about a family's move to the country, seen through the eyes of one of the daughters. There is no plot but a series of moments of perception which reveal subtle tensions beneath the apparent harmony. In *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920) and *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (1922), Mansfield keeps experimenting with narration, often using the point of view of characters who misread symbols and whose illusions are shattered by the final epiphanies*. Her style is impressionistic, delicate, dream-like.

In the 1930s and 1940s, a new generation of writers emerged, influenced by European modernism and the social consequences of the Depression. The leading writer in those years was Frank Sargeson (1903-1982) whose realist novels and especially short stories exposed the hypocritical morality, conformity and puritanism of the establishment (*The Stories of Frank Sargeson*, 1973). Sargeson often experimented with point of view, using for instance naïve narrators.

The short story tradition, started by Katherine Mansfield and followed by Frank Sargeson was maintained by Janet Frame.

The life of Janet Frame (1924-2004) has sometimes overshadowed her writing. Suffering from depression and wrongly diagnosed as schizophrenic, she spent seven years in psychiatric hospitals and was scheduled for a lobotomy when her first collection of short stories *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (1951) was published. The procedure was cancelled and she was able to go on writing and travel extensively in Europe and the United States.

Her mental problems are reflected in her stories and novels, which explore the human psyche, describing what a critic called 'mental anguish and unbalance' with 'intense, nervous, witty euphonious prose that seems to come direct from the experience she is dealing with'.

In her writing alienation and failure to communicate are often the result of the Puritanism and conformism of society. Frame's language conveys mental fragmentation and the unconscious with changes in point of view, stream of consciousness*, and symbolism, all of which create a fantastic atmosphere. *Owls Do Cry* (1957) is a partly autobiographical novel which chronicles the struggles of an impoverished family, the death of two of the children, the epileptic fits of another, the lobotomy of another. Her three-volume autobiography (*To the Island, An Angel at my Table* and *The Envoy from Mirror City*), which inspired Jane Campion's film *An Angel at my Table* (1990) describes what she called 'a concentrated course in the horrors of insanity and the dwelling-place of those judged insane.' Her other novels all investigate different aspects of madness and hallucination. *Intensive Care* (1970) is a novel of anticipation set after a nuclear war and in which survivors have been classified into 'Human' or 'Animal', the latter including the misfits and politically suspect.

Other works of interest include Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Spinster* (1958), the story of a teacher working in a mainly Maori school, the Samoan novelist Albert Wendt's *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1978), an epic novel about several generations in a Western Samoa community, which addresses the themes of power and colonialism. Several Maori writers are now writing in English, like the poet Hone Tuwhare, the short-story writer Patricia Grace and the novelist Alan Duff (*Once Were Warriors*, 1990), the latter criticizing Maori authorities for dwelling on past injustice and alienation instead of doing more to improve their condition.

The poetry of Allen Curnow (*Selected Poems*, 1982) is concerned with the landscape, with isolation, and with Christian myths and symbolism. James K. Baxter argued that poetry should address more international themes. His poetry draws on both Maori and Christian symbolism, and on Greek mythology (*Collected Poems*, 1979). More recently, the poetry of Fleur Adcock (*Selected Poems*, 1983) deals with the themes of geographical and emotional displacement, identity, and the plight of women who might otherwise be forgotten. Her early poems show the influence of her classical studies, but she then moved to a less formal tone, which she described as that of an 'intimate conversation'.

AFRICA

The 'Scramble for Africa' in the late 19th century was a race between European countries to 'grab' as much of Africa as possible, in spite of fierce resistance from the different ethnic groups, with the resulting division of the continent at the 1885 Berlin Conference. Economic reasons motivated European countries, raw materials

in Nigeria, the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa. In European eyes, Africans, often seen as primitive, needed to be converted and educated. Although missionary schools brought education to many, they were opposed to traditional African customs and culture and radically changed African society under the guise of 'saving it'. This is why postcolonial African writers have felt the need to overthrow colonial stereotypes.

SOUTH AFRICA

South African literature has tended to be realistic perhaps in an effort to portray the racial and social tensions of the last fifty years. Its literature has been dominated by the political situation and focuses on the devastating consequences of historical forces upon individual lives: the difficulty of interracial relationships, alienation, betrayal, divided loyalties.

■ The beginnings: until 1945

Olive Shreiner's experience as a governess on a Karoo farm is the basis of *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), a portrait of rural South African life which offers a criticism of colonialism and of Victorian sexism. Another influential novel was William Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* (1926), which addresses the theme of interracial love.

The 1930s saw the emergence of literature by black South Africans, the most influential being Thekiso Plaatje. His novel *Mhudi* (1930) is an epic story of the Tswana people and of their encounters with the Zulus and the whites. Plaatje also wrote about land dispossession in South Africa (*Native Life in South Africa*, 1916) and was the first secretary general of what was to become the African National Congress.

■ The years of Apartheid: 1945-1990

The apartheid policy meant that the coloured and black population (identified by compulsory 'passes') was considered inferior to whites and exploited. Interracial relationships were banned, demonstrations harshly suppressed. This political climate is at the heart of South African writing, even today.

Peter Abrahams, who was of mixed race, wrote about the hardships of rural people arriving in poor urban areas (*Mine Boy*, 1946). He also wrote about interracial love (*The Path of Thunder*, 1948). Another popular writer was Herman Charles Bosman, whose short stories portray Afrikaner social attitudes, often using unreliable* narrators who unconsciously reveal their prejudices.

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■ The novel which best dramatized the situation of black people in South Africa and first gave it international resonance was *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1948), by Alan Paton (1903-1988), written the year apartheid was introduced in South Africa. Paton

had been the principal of a reformatory for young black delinquents, who inspired several of the characters in his book. It is the story of a black priest who leaves his Zulu village and travels to Johannesburg to look for his son, who has been corrupted by the big city and killed a white activist. The novel shows the devastating effect it has on the two families and their eventual reconciliation. Imbued with Christian faith and a belief in the possibility of justice, the novel exposes the destructive influence of the city and of racial prejudice. Paton's prose is lyrical, and makes use of Biblical rhythms.

Too Late the Phalarope (1953), his second novel, traces the struggles of an Afrikaner policeman who finds that he cannot enforce the strict law forbidding interracial sexual relationships. It is a severe condemnation of the belief in racial purity.

The establishment of Apartheid led the African National Congress to start a Defiance Campaign and write a Freedom Charter, which resulted in many treason trials. But increasingly, black writers began to portray their culture and the dismal effect of segregation upon their lives. Many of their writings appeared in the popular *Drum* magazine, written in the vibrant, witty tones of the urban black culture. One of the best works to be published is E'skia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1959), which describes the courage of women who live in a squalid township. Mphahlele (1919-2008) also wrote criticism and poetry.

This was also the time when a white writer, Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014) started to publish the short stories and novels for which she was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1991. Her fiction is about 'the influence of politics on people' and offers a devastating portrait of a divided country, examining subjects such as interracial relationships, the victimization of whites as well as blacks, government corruption, and the milieu of white radical activists. In the 1970s, Nadine Gordimer began to support the armed struggle of the African National Congress and she was often critical of white liberals, who criticized apartheid but were loath to lose the privileges it entailed. *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) shows how the ambiguous situation of white liberals, leads to inner moral conflicts. In *The Conservationist* (1974), a white industrialist who supports apartheid needs to face his own guilt when a group of black squatters settles on his land. *July's People* (1981) imagines the aftermath of a revolution and a reversed order in which a white family takes refuge with their former black servant, for whom they now work. The novel reveals the complex interdependence between blacks and whites. Nadine Gordimer's prose is realistic, detailed, concise and her tone unsentimental and detached. Several of her books were banned in South Africa.

Nadine Gordimer remained in South Africa but many black writers, like Alex La Guma (*In the Fog of the Season's End*, 1972) and Bessie Head (who wrote about poor peasant women, *A Question of Power*, 1973; *The Collector of Treasures*, 1977) had to go into exile. Two Afrikaans writers had their works banned in the 1970s, Breyten Breytenbach and Andre Brink.

7. to entail: *entrainer, computer*

Breyten Breytenbach (b. 1939), who was jailed for his work for the liberation movement, drew on that experience to write *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1996), an account of his prison years written by an anti-apartheid Afrikaner, that is to say an 'albino terrorist'. It is striking in its surreal hallucinations and philosophical reflections.

Andre Brink (1935-2015) started writing in Afrikaans. After his first novel was banned he wrote in both Afrikaans and English to gain a larger readership. *An Instant in the Wind* (1976) is about an interracial love affair. *A Dry White Season* (1982), which was banned for a time, but made Andre Brink famous, concerns the death of a black activist while in detention. The narrator relates the quest of a friend of his, a teacher, to find out the truth about the death of that black man. It transforms him into a political activist and costs him his life. *An Act of Terror* (1991) is about an Afrikaner who adopts the values of the black freedom-fighters and becomes a terrorist. After the end of apartheid, Brink's novels drew on the tradition of African story-telling, mythical figures and magic realism. *On the Contrary* (1994) for example, is set in the 18th century in the Dutch East India Company in South Africa, where a French soldier awaits execution for trying to organize a revolt. To while away the time, he tells imaginary tales of his adventures in Africa, which leads him to rewrite South Africa's colonial history.

The 1970s also witnessed the Black Consciousness movement, which celebrated black cultural values and militated against apartheid and state policies. Poetry and drama were often used during rallies, in particular the poems of Oswald Joseph Mtshali (*Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, 1971), Sipho Sepamla (*The Soweto I Love*, 1977) and Mongane Serote (*Tsetlo*, 1974; *Come and Hope with Me*, 1994). Probably the most influential South African playwright, Athol Fugard (b. 1932), denounced the repressive regime in plays such as *The Island* (1973) and *The Port Elizabeth Plays* (1974). He involved black actors in both writing and directing, and encouraged improvisation, using the actors' experience of apartheid.

In the face of increased repressive measures on the part of the government in the 1980s, two writers addressed the situation in an indirect way. Njabulo Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories* (1983) is not polemical but offers a subtle picture of what it means to grow up in a township, while J. M. Coetzee uses postmodern* techniques which give distance and universal resonance to his works.

Afrikaans was the first language of J. M. Coetzee (b. 1940), who chose to write in English because of its international usage. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003. His novels analyse the way collective and individual dramas can never be dissociated. *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) takes place at an unspecified time in an unnamed country where an official is waiting for dangerous barbarians who may not exist, an allegory of the situation in racist South Africa and of the way oppressive regimes engender fear. In *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) a poor coloured man, who does not take sides, takes his mother home in a country laid waste by civil war and has to confront the personal tragedy of her death and the political tragedy in his country.

Disgrace (1999) is about a professor of English literature (he specializes in romantic poetry), who loses his reputation and his job when he has an affair with a vulnerable student. He takes refuge on his daughter's farm, where he finds a measure of peace, notably when he compares his life to that of the dogs a friend of his daughter's puts to sleep when they cannot be saved. But the farm is raided and his daughter is raped by three black men and becomes pregnant. Her decision to keep the child and bring him up reflects her belief that good can come out of evil and becomes a reflection upon the responsibility of people to change for the better. Perhaps, she thinks, being raped is 'the price to pay for staying on'. The novel can be read as dramatizing the post-apartheid situation in South Africa, where both whites and blacks are victims as well as perpetrators of violence and where evil is no longer just caused by 'others'. The traumatic events which radically alter the characters' lives also become a metaphor* for a country in transition, now prey to confusion and disorientation. Coetzee's language is sparse and sober.

Coetzee uses a large range of postmodern* techniques, such as pastiche*, intertextual* allusions and metafictional* comments. In *Elizabeth Costello* (2004), for instance, the eponymous* protagonist is a novelist who rewrote *Ulysses* from the point of view of Molly Bloom and who constantly comments on the works of writers and philosophers.

■ After 1990: the post-apartheid years

In spite of the end of apartheid, writers still address its legacy, dealing with topics of power, authority and divided loyalties, often using postmodern* techniques. But what literature mainly deals with (as Coetzee's *Disgrace* shows) is the sense of violent change, of flux, which now characterizes a country in the process of rebuilding itself and which, as Nelson Mandela said, needs to 'forgive but not forget'.

One of the most influential contemporary writers is Zakes Mda (b. 1948), with *Ways of Dying* (1995), about a poor black man who decides to become 'Chief Mourner' in a South African city, and *The Heart of Redness* (2001). The latter novel is inspired by a 19th century prophetess who caused cattle killings then famine and compares that past with the present-day uncertain future of the country. Athol Fugard now writes plays about the difficulty of healing the scars left by the past (*Sorrows and Rejoicings*, 2001).

NIGERIA AND KENYA

Nigeria and Kenya reached independence only recently, in 1960 and 1963 respectively and an indigenous literature only emerged in the mid -20th century.

■ Nigeria

Contributing factors to the rise of literature in Nigeria were the creation of the University College of Ibadan in 1948, the founding of the influential literary journal

Black Orpheus in 1957 (containing creative writing by Africans and West Indians), and the Mbari Club, founded in Ibadan in 1961, which had an art gallery and a theatre. There are three main regions in Nigeria, the North, which is Muslim and where colonisation had little impact, the Ibo East, and the Yoruba West, where traditional culture was seriously altered. In addition to this, there is also a multiplicity of different language communities, so that reaction to colonialism was diverse rather than springing from a sense of national unity. It partly explains the bloody conflicts which took place after independence – two military coups and the Biafran war.

Among the earliest novelists, one can mention Amos Tutuola (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, 1952), who writes in dialect and makes use of Yoruba mythology and folk tales, and Cyprian Ekwensi, who writes folk tales (*Ikolo the Wrestler and other Ibo Tales*, 1947) and novels about the corruption of modern urban life. One should also mention the poetry of Christopher Okigbo, which reflects a divided cultural heritage, both Igbo and European, and that of Gabriel Okara, who writes about the clash between traditional African and Western cultures.

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) was the first Nigerian writer to become internationally well-known. Born in a family of Protestant missionary teachers, he was brought up between two cultures. He was very critical of the different military coups which threatened democracy in the country. Achebe chose to write in English in order to communicate with more people and to be read in the colonial ruling nations. But he wrote: 'For an African writing in English is not without its serious setbacks. He often finds himself describing situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas...

I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through their mastery of English and not out of innocence.'

Achebe's novels portray traditional Igbo society and the way colonisation, the Christian influence, then independence altered it. His writing is therefore, in his own words, 'to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of years of denigration and self-abasement.' His style draws on Igbo oral traditions, proverbs, myths and folktales, dancing, thus incorporating Igbo community values into his novels.

Things Fall Apart (1958) is set in an Ibo village in the 1890s, at the time when the first white colonizers arrive – missionaries and colonial administration. The novel focuses on Okonkwo, the village chief, who confronts the colonial government with tragic consequences. By showing pre-colonial tribal Ibo society from the inside, Achebe gives it back its true identity thus correcting Western misrepresentations of his culture and proving to Nigerians that they could use their native culture for the new nation they were building.

No Longer At Ease (1960) describes the divided loyalties of Obi, who returns to Nigeria after living in England and is trapped between two cultures. It also offers a portrait of life and corruption in contemporary Lagos. *Arrow of God* (1964) is concerned with the African response to colonialism. *A Man of the People* (1966) offers a portrait of morally vacuous post-independence Nigeria, a country where political corruption is rampant. The novel ends with a military coup, which ironically and tragically announces what happened a few months later.

Anhills of the Savannah (1987) denounces the way power corrupts. Achebe has also published poetry, short stories and essays.

Although **Wole Soyinka** (b. 1934) wrote drama, novels, poetry and essays, he is best-known for his plays. Educated at Ibadan then Leeds Universities, he created the Masks Theatre Company in order to produce new African drama. Soyinka has been very active politically, fighting against human rights violations, and believing in the power of literature to produce social change. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.

Soyinka's plays include many elements of Yoruba religion and culture such as mime, dance, pageants and the use of masks. They are also characterized by wit, humour and lyricism.

The Lion and the Jewel (1959) is a satire* on modern Nigeria. Set in a village, it is a comedy showing how both Baroka, the village chieftain (the lion) and Lakunle, an arrogant Westernized teacher who wants to modernize the village, want to gain the right to marry Sidi (the Jewel). The play contrasts traditionalists and modernists and provides a reflection on the condition of women.

Soyinka's early lightheartedness gave way to more sombre plays when the political situation degenerated in Nigeria. *Madmen and Specialists* (1970) is concerned with the Biafran war (1967-70, during which Soyinka, while on a peace mission, was imprisoned for two years) and offers a bleak picture of man's inhumanity. The play draws on the Theatre of the Absurd. *A Play of Giants* (1984) is a comic fantasy about African dictators loose in New York.

The Beatification of Area Boy (1995) portrays homeless young people ('area boys') in Lagos, not as thieves and criminals, but as survivors.

New voices emerged with the end of the civil war in 1970. **Buchi Emecheta** (b. 1944) writes about the condition of women, condemning child slavery and advocating better education to help women gain independence (*Second-Class Citizen*, 1974; *The Bride Price*, 1976; *The Joys of Motherhood*, 1979.)

One of the leading African writers, **Ben Okri** (b. 1959) is of Urhoho descent. After attending university in England, Okri has divided his time between Nigeria and England. His novels often include fantastic elements but Okri rejects the term 'magic realism', speaking of 'dream logic' and writing: 'I grew up in a tradition where there are simply more dimensions to reality: legends and myths and ancestors and spirits and death ... Which brings the question: what is reality? Everyone's reality is different. (...) I'm fascinated by the mysterious element that runs through our lives.

Everyone is looking out of the world through their emotion and history. Nobody has an absolute reality.'

Okri's first two novels, *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) and *The Landscape Within* (1981) portray the corrupting effect of modernization on Nigerian cities. *The Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998) form a trilogy which traces the life of Azaro, the narrator, an abiku spirit-child, as he tries to survive hunger and violence in an unnamed African country which resembles Nigeria during the civil war. Azaro is torn between two worlds, the earthly world of his struggling family, and the metaphysical one of spirits that try to pull him back into their world. His progress takes place amid a host of strange and fantastic characters from both worlds. The novels blend realism, modernism and African folklore.

Ben Okri has also written poetry (*An African Elegy*, 1992)

■ Kenya

The experience of colonisation was somewhat different for Kenyans since vast quantities of land were taken by the white settlers. As a result Africans were moved to less fertile lands and often provided cheap labour for the colonizers. The divisions inside the Kikuyu society, exploited by the British during the Mau Mau uprising, are still extant today.

The best-known Kenyan writer is **Ngugi wa Thiong'o** (b. 1938), who started writing in English, then moved to indigenous Gikuyu, believing that English was 'part of the neo-colonial structures that repress progressive ideas.' The son of a dispossessed farmer, Ngugi is politically committed and influenced by Marxism. The fight for social justice is central in all his works, which often describe the Kikuyu tribe.

In *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), set just before independence, several characters look back upon their past and the way the Mau Mau Rebellion against colonial rule affected their lives, with betrayals and difficult allegiances.

INDIA

When, in 1913, Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for the English translation of *Gitanjali*, many reacted with surprise if not shock at the Swedish choice of an Indian poet. Others questioned his own decision to translate the work into English. Indeed, some still consider English as the language of cultural imperialism or as that of the élite classes of India.

But half a century after the end of colonial rule, more Indian literature is written in English than in the sixteen other official languages of the country, and English has been acclimatized so that Indian literature in English is now one of the most linguistically inventive ever.

■ The growth of Indian literature until 1947

Although the East India Company was created in 1600, British rule started much later, when linguists and priests began to master the local languages and culture. In 1858, a year after the Indian Mutiny, Britain tightened its control over India, abolishing the East India Company and placing the colony under the authority of the Crown. Queen Victoria became 'Empress of India' and the English language became compulsory, following Macaulay's recommendations in 'Minute on Education': '... the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so rude that... it will not be possible to translate any valuable work into them...' As Indian intellectuals and politicians began to feel increasingly excluded from decision-making in the early 20th century, anti-British feeling grew and after peaceful demonstrations were brutally repressed in Amritsar, resistance to the British spread. It was Gandhi who gave strength to the movement by advocating non-violence and passive resistance.

The novels of Mulk Raj Anand (*Untouchable*, 1935; *Coolie*, 1936) are social realist novels which expose the injustice of society, for example the situation of women and the poverty and alienation of the untouchables. Another writer who was influenced by the action of Gandhi is Raja Rao (1908-2006), whose novel *Kanthapura* (1938) chronicles the influence of Gandhi's teachings on a small village in South India. It is also interesting in that Rao draws on the rhythm and structure of Indian tales, explaining that 'The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression.'

The most influential novelist who started writing in those pre-independence years is without contest R.K. Narayan (1906-2001). The setting for his fiction is the imaginary town of Malgudi, a microcosm of Indian society. Narayan does not address the political situation but describes the lives of sensitive characters torn between the need to gain personal freedom and the weight of family and social traditions. The struggle often ends in a crisis, which leads them to a better spiritual understanding and inner peace, tradition often triumphing over modernity as in ancient Indian moral fables. With compassion and humour, Narayan captures their thoughts and feelings in situations such as arranged marriages and love in *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) or coping with the death of a loved one in *The English Teacher* (1945). In *The Guide* (1958) Raju comes out of prison, where he was sent for forgery, and passing through a village is mistaken for a sadhu or spiritual guide. The long fast he is expected to keep eventually brings him fulfilment. In *The Painter of Signs* (1976) Raman is caught between his aunt who symbolizes tradition and religion, and the woman he loves, who represents modernity.

■ Post-independence literature

As Indian independence became inevitable, religious extremism and violence grew as Muslims feared that their interests might be threatened since the Congress Party

was chiefly Hindu. Using violent attacks and rioting, they called for the creation of a separate state, Pakistan. When India's independence was declared in August 1947, Pakistan became an independent state, divided into West and East Pakistan. But thousands of people had been killed in the conflict and millions had fled into or out of Pakistan. However, violence did not stop with independence (Gandhi was assassinated in 1948), and democracy was slow in being established. These events deeply marked modern Indian literature.

No one better than Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) tried to portray the politics and culture of his country. Born in Bombay, his Muslim family emigrated to Pakistan, but he was educated in England, where he studied history at Cambridge, and remained an exile. After the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989, a fatwah was passed on him for alleged blasphemy. He now lives in the United States.

Rushdie is often described as a 'magic realist'* since fantasy and the supernatural often intrude into realistic settings, as is the case with the 'midnight's children' who were born at midnight on the day of independence and partition and have powers of 'transmutation, flight, prophecy and wizardry'. Rushdie also draws on Indian mythology, as well as on Hindi storytelling with the complex narrative structure of his novels, which contain numerous points of view and embedded tales. They provide a reflection upon the way fiction can represent history. Rushdie's style is ebullient, humorous, inventive, influenced by Western as well as Eastern genres and art, a way of crossing cultural boundaries.

Midnight's Children (1981) is an epic account of the lives of the first thousand Indian children born after midnight on the day of India's independence. The narrator, Saleem Sinai, is endowed with telepathic powers which allow him to communicate with the other midnight's children and to read men's minds and hearts. Saleem is 'handcuffed to history', his destiny represents that of India, and, as in Sheherazade, telling his story is a means of survival. Historical events are referred to with digressions, non-sequiturs, recollections and meta-fictional* comments, thus stressing the difficulty of reconstructing history, of telling fact from fantasy.

Shame (1983), a political allegory taking place in an unnamed country which can only be Pakistan, shows the violence engendered by shame, which accounts for the post-independence history of Pakistan. *The Satanic Verses* (1988) starts with the explosion of an Air India flight over England and the fall of two Indian men to earth. Instead of being killed they are transformed, transmuted, one of them developing a halo, the other horns. The very complex plot also explores themes common to Eastern and Western cultures: fundamentalism, faith and doubt, superstition and bigotry. *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) traces the rise and fall of a Portuguese family in India, examining recent Indian history in the process. With *Fury* (2001) the setting is New York, a teeming, multicultural city where identities are in a constant flux.

Contrary to Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai (b. 1937) has spent most of her life in India. Her stories and novels are concerned with the inner lives of her characters,

their moods, emotions, family conflicts and relationships, experiences which often reflect India's turbulent social and political situation. Many of her characters are shy, marginalised or rejected, and long for recognition or harmonious relationships. She is also concerned with the position of women, often limited to family and domesticity in Indian society. Desai's limpid prose is rich in imagery and symbolism and good at capturing a sense of place and atmosphere.

Searching for a meaningful life, the heroine of *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) ends up killing her husband.

In Custody (1984), her best-known novel, portrays racial and cultural tensions in India through the use of language, being set in a state where, after independence, the dominant language is increasingly Hindi, and where Urdu (the language spoken by India's Muslims and in Pakistan) is a minority language. Deven, the main character, has been obliged to give up his study of Urdu literature to take a job teaching Hindi. A friend asks him to interview Urdu's greatest living poet, now old and ill. Deven's attempts to get his interview meet with constant frustrations, undermined by the poet's indiscipline and loss of concentration, and he finally learns that a poet and his art cannot be taken 'into custody'.

Anita Desai has also written several volumes of short stories (*Games at Twilight and Other Stories*, 1978).

Arundhati Roy (b. 1961) has been much involved in Indian politics, militating against nuclear weapons, globalization and in favour of Kashmir separatism.

Her only novel so far, *The God of Small Things* (1997) is set in the state of Kerala (in South-West India) and examines the way laws, rules, oppression and abuse, even hierarchies, affect the lives of a family. It denounces the treatment of women and untouchables, even though discrimination because of caste is now forbidden. Estappen and Rahel are twins who are reunited after twenty-three years. Back in the family home, they reminisce about the tragic events that led to the death of their young cousin. The novel was highly successful in England but caused controversy in India because it mentions incest and the sexual relationship between a Dalit (formerly a caste of untouchables) and a Christian woman.

A number of recent works have also been written by expatriate writers, first or even second-generation immigrants in Britain or the United States. Even though they are less familiar with actual conditions of life in India, they can write about the clash of cultures between East and West and may have a more detached vision of India.

Born to Bengali parents who had emigrated to England, Jhumpa Lahiri (b. 1967) was brought up and studied in the United States. The collection of short stories which brought her fame, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (2000), is about love relationships and alienation. Her own experience explains why these stories often explore cultural differences, assimilation or estrangement. The characters all suffer from internal

maladies often leading to separation, a situation she relates to the partitioning of India. *The Namesake* (2003) is a novel about an Indian family in the United States, and what it means to live between two cultures.

Another such expatriate is Rohinton Mistry (b. 1952), who was born and educated in Bombay as a Parsee but now lives in Canada. As a Parsee in India, he was already not fully assimilated, so that it is hardly surprising that displacement and isolation should be recurrent themes in his novels. *Such a Long Journey* (1991) is set amid middle-class Parsee families during the India-Pakistan war. It shows the perilous situation of the Parsee community and a country where post-independence idealism has given way to political corruption. *A Fine Balance* (1995), without contest Mistry's best novel, follows the lives of four characters who, for different reasons, try to survive in 1975 Bombay, in spite of caste or gender barriers. Their capacity for empathy and love cannot save them from misery and despair. The novel offers a devastating picture of India, destroyed by social divisions and injustice, growing materialism and political corruption. *Family Matters* (2002) shows the emotional, financial and moral burden of caring for an elderly relative.

Vikram Seth (b. 1952) was born in Calcutta, studied in England, California and China and divides his life between England and India. He has published poetry and novels. *The Golden Gate* (1986) is a novel in verse consisting of 590 sonnets in iambic tetrameters. It follows the lives of a group of San Francisco yuppies, portraying their way of life, manners and ideas with wit* and sympathy. It represents a highly inventive use of the sonnet for narrative purposes. *A Suitable Boy* (1996), a very long novel about the intertwined stories of four families, centres upon Rupa Mehra's desire to find a husband, 'a suitable boy', for her independent daughter Lata, who has to choose between three young men. It is a novel about love, marriage, expectations, but the study of family life takes place against the political background of the time, the first elections after independence and the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. In both length and social realism it has been compared to George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

The son of a Kashmiri Pandit father, Hari Kunzru (b. 1969) was born and educated in England. His novels explore the search for one's identity in a colonial or postcolonial context. *The Impressionist* (2002) traces the life of Pran Nath, the son of an Indian woman and a British forestry expert for the colonial government. Disowned by his family at fifteen, he grows up in the streets of Bombay in the early years of the 20th century, where his fair skin allows him to pass for white. Feeling that he has no identity, he takes on a series of false identities, each time trying to reinvent himself, transforming himself into whatever he needs to survive or fulfil his wishes. The novel condemns colonialism, as well as the inflexibility of the caste system; it is also a reflection on what it means to be Indian or to be British.

Transmission (2004) addresses the question of economic globalization with the story of an Indian computer geek who is recruited by a California firm only to be exploited then made redundant.

THE CARIBBEAN

It is difficult to speak of a Caribbean identity since the various islands which formed the British West Indies before independence (some twenty-two territories, the main ones being Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, St Lucia, Barbados and Guyana) had different cultures and responses to colonialism. Each island has its own geography, ethnic mix (for instance many Indian immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago) and culture (for example Rastafarianism in Jamaica). Accession to independence also took different forms, being more or less confrontational depending on the island. But independence has often brought continued poverty and economic dependence on Britain and the United States, something reflected in contemporary literature.

'CARIBBEANNESS'

Here are some of the common points which might be said to constitute 'Caribbeanness'.

- The importance of African culture. It is important to remember that Caribbean sugar plantations used imported African slaves, who were exploited for the sake of owners who often lived in England, as is the case with Sir Thomas Bertram in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. The experience of injustice is therefore part of the Caribbean past.
- The black population as double victims, of slavery and of colonialism.
- The way it is reflected in language, since landowners usually spoke standard English while slaves and later labourers spoke various Creole languages, now very much a part of the tradition of poetry and fiction.
- Hybridity, that is to say a blending of cultural and literary traditions (the opposite of cultural purity), since the Caribbean experience is that of a crucible (St Lucia, for example, changed nationalities thirteen times).
- Great linguistic creativity, fostered by cultural hybridity.
- A sense of diaspora since through migration, Caribbean culture has spread abroad.

It was in the 1940s that a national literature began to emerge, at first with writings using the Creole dialect. V. S. Reid's *New Day* (1949) written to celebrate Jamaica's new self-government relates seventy years of the island's history through the memories of an old man, in a rhythmical oral language full of biblical echoes. A more militant point of view can be found in Roger Mais's writings, influenced by the People's National Movement and concerned with the lives of the underprivileged and the criticism of colonialism (*Brother Man*, 1954). The poetry of Louise Bennett (1919-2006) is anchored in the oral traditions of the Caribbean, often taking the form of dramatic monologues* meant to be performed as well as read. Her use of Creole, of women's voices, helped develop black women's identity (*Dialect Verses*, 1944; *Jamaica Labrish*, 1966).

The feeling of displacement is a prominent one in the novels and short stories of Jean Rhys (1890-1979). Born in Dominica to a Welsh father and a Creole mother, she was sent to study in England when she was sixteen and remained in Europe for most of her life, where, as she wrote in her autobiography, 'all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing'.

Quartet (1929) and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1931) are partly autobiographical and have typical Rhys heroines, penniless young women who have a series of unstable love affairs that leave them lonely, rootless, disorientated and insecure. *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) explores similar themes but with a young heroine who arrives in London from Dominica and contrasts the two countries. *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) addresses the theme of misunderstanding between men and women.

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), Jean Rhys's most acclaimed novel, is set in the West Indies in the 1840s and tells the story of Bertha, the mad woman in the attic and Rochester's wife in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. A typical postcolonial novel, it rewrites the English canon to give a voice to a character we never hear in *Jane Eyre*. It is therefore a prequel⁸ to the Brontë novel, showing that Bertha (now called Antoinette) is a victim of various kinds of oppression: economic and social (Coulibri, the plantation, is ruined, and as a white Creole, she is outside both communities), racial (the plantation is burnt by the recently emancipated slaves) and sexual (when Rochester finds out that there is insanity in her family he neglects her and becomes unfaithful). She gradually sinks into madness. The novel portrays Jamaica as an Eden ruined by slavery and British imperialism. When at the end of the novel Antoinette is about to set fire to Thornfield Hall, she becomes a rebel who, like the freed slaves who burnt out Coulibri, can now free herself. The novel is told from two different points of view – Antoinette's and Rochester's. Rhys's prose is dream-like and sensuous, conveying the lush Jamaican landscape:

'Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted foot. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered – then not an inch of tentacle showed. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it.'

The best-known West Indian poet and dramatist, Derek Walcott (b. 1930) was born in St Lucia, into a Protestant family, of mixed English, Dutch and African descent. He attended the University of the West Indies, studied theatre in New York, taught in several universities and directed the Trinidad Theatre Workshop for almost twenty years. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992.

8. a prequel: a book which precedes another (as opposed to a sequel)

His poetry is rich in literary allusions and shows the influence of the English poetic tradition, the metaphysical poets in particular. Yet his allegiances are divided ('how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?'). This also shows in his language, which is a blend of Standard English, the French patois of St Lucia and various forms of Creole. Refusing to remain enslaved to the past and write of despair or shame, he believes that only imagination can heal the scars of colonialism. His poetry (*In a Green Night*, 1962; *The Fortunate Traveller*, 1981; *Midsummer*, 1984) deals with his own feeling of rootlessness, the isolation and alienation felt by someone with a mixed African and European heritage: 'I'm just a red nigger who love the sea, / I had a sound colonial education, / I have Dutch, nigger and English in me, / and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.' His poetry also celebrates the beauty of the island and its rich history and mythology. *Omeros* (1990) is an epic poem which transfers Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the Caribbean, with typical village characters and voyaging as the central motif.

Walcott has also written many plays which incorporate dancing, singing, calypso rhythms, and a mixture of verse, prose and local dialect (*Dream on Monkey Mountain*, 1967).

Where Walcott uses the English cultural heritage to describe Caribbean life, Kamau Brathwaite (b. 1930) uses the rhythms of his African ancestors. He was influenced by the Black Power politics of the 1960s and his poetry is African-centred, with elements from jazz, blues, African chant as well as aspects of African culture such as dance and masks. *Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (1973) examines different aspects of African migration, to the Caribbean, to America or within Africa.

Displacement and estrangement are key-words to understand the novels of V.S. Naipaul (b. 1932), who was born in Trinidad, to Hindu Indian grandparents, studied at Oxford, worked as a journalist and for the BBC, and spent much of his life travelling in India, Africa and Europe. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001.

Most of his characters are caught between two cultures, constantly 'looking for the centre'. *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) tells of an Indian immigrant who, in the West Indies, is caught between Eastern and Western cultures. *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) chronicles the story of another Indian immigrant to Trinidad, Mohun Biswas, whose ambition is to become a novelist and have a house of his own. His comic struggles to free himself from his wife's rich and influential family lead to his estrangement. There is something Dickensian about the exuberance of the novel with its large gallery of exotic characters in both urban and rural Trinidad.

In *A Bend in the River* (1979), Naipaul revisits the location of *Heart of Darkness*, where Salim, the narrator, finds himself at a bend in the fictional river which he describes as having been 'a meeting place, an Arab settlement, a European outpost, a European suburb, a ruin like the ruin of a dead civilization'. Salim describes the new independent country as disintegrating and finds himself in an alien land, an Indian from a Muslim family in an Arab country. As his despair grows, so does the

chaos and violence of the political background. It is a bleak expression of despair at contemporary society. *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) is a melancholy novel in which an immigrant to Britain comes to live on a decaying estate in Wiltshire and reflects upon his past life and his new neighbours.

Naipaul has increasingly turned to non-fiction and published much travel writing. One of his favourite subjects in these works, born of his own 'homelessness', is the political, social and psychological alienation which he found in newly independent developing countries, a view that has proved controversial.

Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (1983): a post-colonial novel

— In the remote border town of Q., which when seen from the air resembles nothing so much as an ill-proportioned dumb-bell¹, there once lived three lively, and loving sisters. Their names... but their real names were never used, like the best household china, which was locked away after the night of their joint tragedy in a cupboard whose location was eventually forgotten, so that the great thousand-piece service from the Gardner potteries in Tsarist Russia became a family myth in whose factuality² they almost ceased to believe...the three sisters, I should state without further delay, bore the family name of Shakil, and were universally known (in descending order of age) as Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny.

10 And one day their father died.

— Old Mr Shakil, at the time of his death a widower for eighteen years, had developed the habit of referring to the town in which he lived as 'a hell hole'. During his last delirium he embarked on a ceaseless and largely incomprehensible monologue amidst whose turbid peregrinations the household servants could make out long passages of obscenity, oaths and curses of a ferocity that made the air boil violently around his bed. In this peroration the embittered old recluse rehearsed his lifelong hatred for his home town, now³ calling down demons to destroy the clutter of low, dun-coloured, 'higgling and pigging'⁴ edifices around the bazaar, now annihilating with his death-encrusted words the cool whitewashed smugness of the Cantonment district. These were the two orbs of the town's dumb-bell shape: old town and Cantt, the former inhabited by the indigenious, colonized population and the latter by the alien colonizers, the Angrez, or British sahibs⁵. Old Shakil loathed both worlds and had for many years remained immured in his high, fortress-like, gigantic residence which faced inwards to a well-like and lightless compound yard.

25 The house was positioned beside an open maidan⁶, and it was equidistant from the bazaar and the Cantt. Through one of the building's few outward-facing windows Mr Shakil on his death-bed was able to stare out at the dome of a large Palladian hotel, which rose out of the intolerable Cantonment streets like a mirage, and in-

– side which were to be found golden cuspidors⁷ and tame spider-monkeys in brass-buttoned uniforms and bellhop hats and a full-sized orchestra playing every evening in a stuccoed ballroom amidst an energetic riot of fantastic plants, yellow roses and white magnolias and roof-high emerald-green palms – the Hotel Flashman⁸, in short, whose great golden dome was cracked even then but shone nevertheless with the tedious pride of its brief doomed glory; that dome under which the suited-and-booted Angrez officers and white-tied civilians and ringleted⁹ ladies with hungry eyes would congregate nightly, assembling here from their bungalows to dance and to share the illusion of being colourful – whereas in fact they were merely white, or actually grey, owing to the deleterious effect of that stony heat upon their frail cloud-nurtured skins, and also to their habit of drinking dark Burgundies in the noonday insanity of the sun, with a fine disregard for their livers. The old man heard the music of the imperialists issuing from the golden hotel, heavy with the gaiety of despair, and he cursed the hotel of dreams in a loud, clear voice.

1. A dumb-bell: *des haltères*. 2. factuality: *basé sur des faits, réel*. 3. now...now...: *tantôt... tantôt...* 4. 'higgling and pigging': *expression formée à partir de l'adverbe 'higgledy-piggledy' (pêle-mêle, n'importe comment)*. 5. a sahib: *en Inde, terme de respect pour un européen pendant la période coloniale*. 6. a maidan: *en Inde, une place, une esplanade*. 7. a cuspidor: *un crachoir*. 8. the Hotel Flashman: the hotel is perhaps named after Harry Flashman, the bully at Rugby School in Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. 9. ringleted: *(coiffure) avec des anglaises*.

■ THE CONTEXT

This is the incipit of the novel.

■ A FAIRY TALE

Rushdie described Pakistan as 'a palimpsest-country', with its many-layered cultural and historical background; the use of fairy-tale elements in the novel partly translates this into superimposed layers of reality and fantasy.

– The text begins like a fairy-tale ('there once lived', l. 2, 'And one day', l. 10). The death of the father who leaves three daughters (with the magical number three, which also evokes the three fates) is reminiscent of many fairy tales, as well as the fact that their names does not matter, and that they are given fairy-tale nicknames that rhyme. The town of Quetta, in Pakistan, becomes the fictional town of Q. The unexpected comparison with 'the best household china' (l. 4) also belongs to the realm of 'fantasy'. The blurred borderline between fantasy and reality is underlined by the use of the word 'myth' and the theme of believing or not (the 'factuality' of the Gardner potteries almost ceased to be believed, and the Hotel Flashman is described as belonging to a world of illusion: 'a mirage', l. 28, 'illusion', l. 37, 'dreams', l. 42).

– Story-telling: at the beginning of the text, the narrator seems to be talking directly to an audience, as in traditional oral story-telling ('I should state without further delay', l. 7, 'and one day', l. 10.) Another element typical of oral tales is the use of foreshadowing ('the night of their joint tragedy', l. 4), which shows the storyteller's

control over his narrative and also announces the importance of destiny in the novel. – The impression of a modern fairy-tale is heightened by Rushdie's love of figurative language (similes introduced by 'like' (the household china', l. 3, fortress, well, l. 23, mirage, l. 28) and 'resembles' (the dumb-bell, l. 2,)) and exaggeration.

■ MAGIC REALISM?

The constant shift between fantasy and realism is what is usually called magic realism. Yet Rushdie refused the label of magic realism, which can lull the reader into a sense that he is too removed from the political reality. The reality of politics in Pakistan is very much the subject of *Shame*. Rushdie explained that 'the country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality.' The novel describes corruption and violence in modern Pakistan, but the incipit is set earlier, in India, before Pakistan seceded from India in 1947, when India had gained its independence. Behind the fantasised country, there is social realism.

■ A DENUNCIATION OF COLONIALISM

– The town is described in terms of polarities, with two distinct parts, the bazaar and the Cantt, symbolised by the image of the dumb-bell. The contrast is everywhere between the 'colonized population' and the 'alien colonizers': colours ('dun-colored', l. 18 vs 'whitewashed', l. 19), size ('low', l. 18 vs 'rose', l. 28) poverty ('clutter', 'higgling and pigging', l. 18) as opposed to the excess of gold and riches in the description of the hotel. The length of the latter description, its excess, the very long sentence devoted to the hotel (l. 27-42), the English officers and ladies' extravagance and superficial lives – all convey a bitter denunciation of colonisation.

– The contrast between the two districts is also reflected in the syntax, with binary structures (now...now / the former...the latter / two orbs / both worlds).

– The polarities seem to breed hatred and violence, with Old Shakil 'loathing both worlds', his house symbolically 'equidistant from' both districts.

The metaphor of hell to describe the town ('hell hole', l. 12, echoed by 'well', l. 24, 'boil', l. 15, and 'demons', l. 17), explains why his house is built like a 'fortress' (l. 23) and looks 'inward'.

■ A FORESHADOWING OF DIVISION

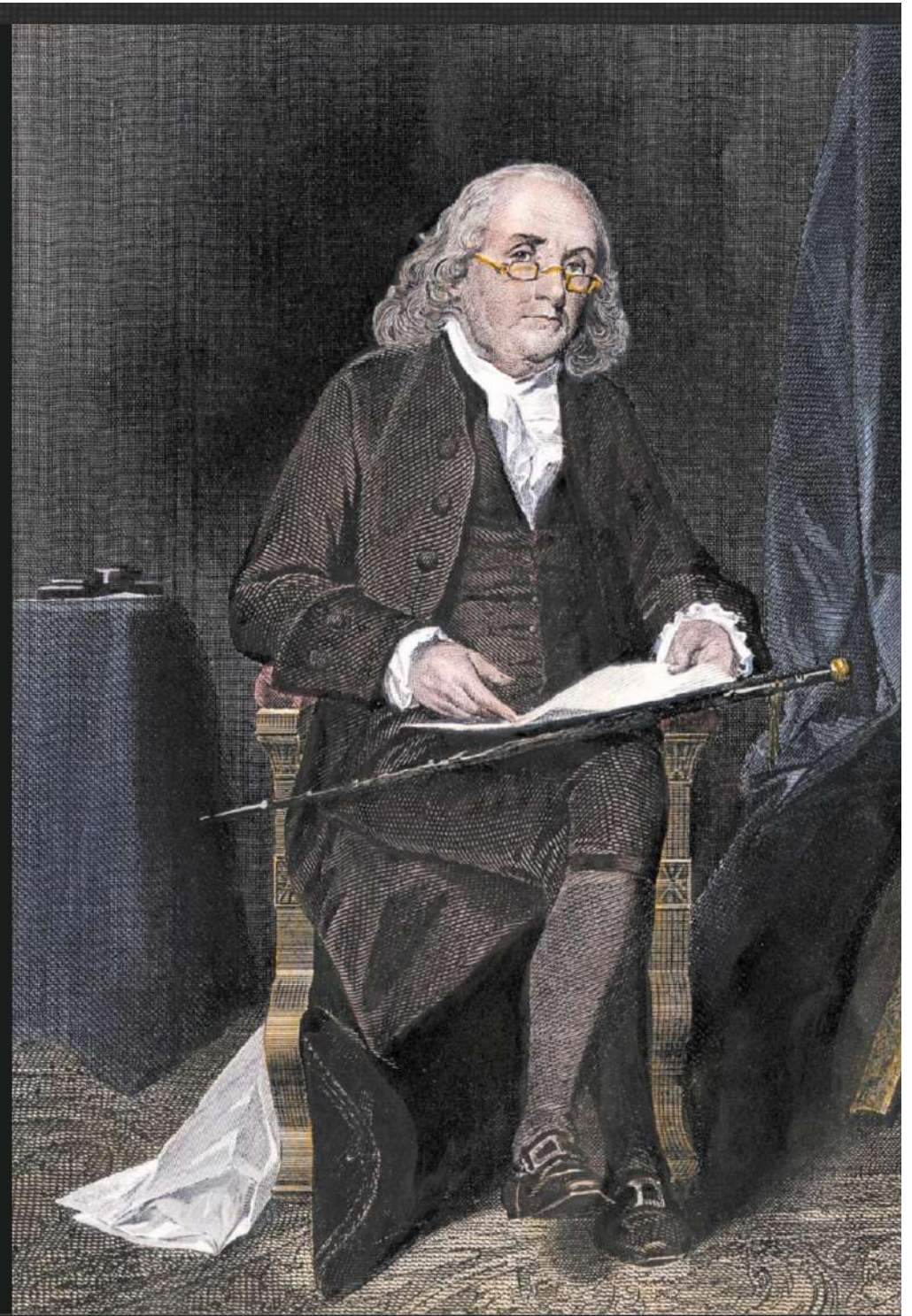
The partition of India after independence, and the later secession of Bangladesh may already be announced through images of division: Q. as 'border town' (l. 1), the division of the town into two distinct districts, the 'cracked' (l. 33) dome of the hotel. An oxymoron like 'the gaiety of despair' also announces catastrophe to come.



THE
COLONIAL AGE
AND THE YEARS
OF REVOLUTION
(1620-1800)



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|---------|--|---|
| 1492 | Columbus sails to the New World. | |
| 1607 | Settlement of Jamestown, Virginia | |
| 1619 | First African blacks brought as slaves to Jamestown. | |
| 1620 | Pilgrims sign the Mayflower Compact and arrive at Plymouth on Mayflower. William Bradford is first governor. | |
| 1624 | | Smith: <i>General History of Virginia</i> |
| 1630 | Winthrop and Puritans found the Massachusetts Bay Colony at Salem. | |
| 1630-51 | | Bradford: <i>History of Plymouth Plantation</i> |
| 1634 | New Amsterdam captured by the British and becomes New York. | |
| 1636 | | Harvard College founded |
| 1640 | | Bay Psalm Book |
| 1644 | | Williams: <i>The Bloody Tenent of Persecution</i> |
| 1650 | | Bradstreet: <i>The Tenth Muse</i> |
| 1662 | | Wigglesworth: <i>The Day of Doom</i> |
| 1675-76 | King Philip's War against Indians | |
| 1681 | Penn granted charter for Pennsylvania; it becomes a refuge for Quakers. | |
| 1682 | | Rowlandson: <i>Narrative of Captivity</i> |
| 1689-97 | King William's War against the French | |
| 1690 | | First newspaper printed in Boston. Smith: <i>Self-portrait</i> |

| | | |
|-----------|---|---|
| 1692 | Salem witchcraft trials | |
| 1698-1702 | French settle Louisiana. | |
| 1701 | | Yale College founded. |
| 1702 | | Mather: <i>Magnalia Christi Americana</i> |
| 1729 | | College of William & Mary (Wren) completed |
| 1730 | | Smibert: <i>The Bermuda Group</i> |
| 1732-57 | | Franklin: <i>Poor Richard's Almanack</i> |
| 1734 | Beginning of Great Awakening | |
| 1741 | | Edwards: <i>Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</i> |
| 1746 | | First symphony orchestra (Pennsylvania) |
| 1746 | | Princeton founded |
| 1754-63 | French and Indian wars | |
| 1763 | Peace of Paris | |
| 1765 | Stamp Act, one of many taxes to fund the war against the Indians and the French | |
| 1770 | Boston Massacre | Jefferson builds Monticello |
| 1771 | | Beginning of Franklin's <i>Autobiography</i> |
| 1773 | Tea Act; Boston Tea Party | |
| 1775 | Fighting at Lexington & Concord; first abolitionist society (Philadelphia) | |
| 1775-83 | American Revolutionary War | |
| 1776 | Declaration of Independence | Paine: <i>Common Sense</i> |
| 1782 | | de Crèvecoeur: <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i> |
| 1786 | | Freneau: <i>Poems</i> |
| 1787 | Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia | |

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1787-88 | | Hamilton, Jay, Madison: <i>The Federalist</i> |
| 1788 | Constitution ratified. | |
| 1789 | George Washington president | |
| 1790 | | First US copyright law |
| 1791 | Bill of Rights ratified. | |
| 1791-92 | | Paine: <i>The Rights of Man</i> |
| 1792 | | L'Enfant's plans for Washington D.C. |
| 1792-1815 | | Brackenridge: <i>Modern Chivalry</i> |
| 1798 | | Brown: <i>Wieland</i> |

THEATRE – FICTION AND PROSE – POETRY – ARCHITECTURE – PAINTING – MUSIC – CINEMA/PHOTOGRAPHY

'the eyes of all people are upon us'
(John Winthrop, 1630, 'A Model of Christian Charity')

'What then is the American, this new man?'
(J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer, 1782)

Literary and artistic life was not a priority for the first settlers in America. They had come for various reasons – to escape religious persecution or justice, to seek adventure or fortune – and what they found on arriving was not the idealized, fantastic landscape of imagination or of propaganda (since many pamphlets pictured the country as a new Eden) but harsh winters, starvation and resistance from the Indians. Their strict faith was both what helped them to survive and what led to intolerance, hysteria and persecution. Intent as they were on subsistence and survival, both physical and spiritual, and away from any literary circles or patronage, their writing tended to be private and religious. Because Puritans saw themselves as a chosen people fulfilling a providential plan, in charge of a civilizing mission, they needed to record their history for posterity. Pulpit oratory, wit*, poetry, dramatic metaphors* – all were acceptable as long as they served piety, not pleasure.

In the course of the 18th century, as population grew and immigrants came from different origins and with different beliefs, the Puritan influence began to wane¹. In 1700 religious conformity was no longer required by the Massachusetts Bay Colony; in spite of reactions like The Great Awakening in the 1850s, and although the rhetoric of biblical analogy remained part of political discourse, deism and

1. to wane: *diminuer*

the ideas of the Enlightenment became widespread. The order and beauty of the universe became proof of God's existence; natural science, Newton and Locke could provide interpretation of the American experience. This was accompanied by the belief that, without predestination, men had their destinies in their own hands, that a 'social contract', could improve society, and that dissent could be justified. A huge wave of patriotism swept over the colonies.

Population growth was accompanied by a growth in readership, newspapers, almanacs* and, books such as *The New England Primer* (poems, an alphabet, the catechism), which sold 5 million copies between 1683 and 1830 and helped develop literacy. The creation of colleges (Harvard in 1636, William and Mary in 1693, Yale in 1701, Princeton in 1746, Philadelphia in 1755) meant that when the need was felt to forge a political identity after 1750, America had no lack of highly cultured thinkers, politicians and writers. All through the 18th century literature still tended to rely on imported British fiction and poetry, but the last three decades witnessed a rich body of polemical and theoretical literature which helped shape America's future. The same spirit of revolt which had led many of the first settlers to leave Europe now inspired them to rebel against British taxation and the unfair authority of the monarchy.

Just as native fiction, drama and poetry were restricted by the absence of academies, painting too copied the English style fashionable one or two generations earlier. People wanted likenesses of themselves and portraits, usually rather stiff and awkward, were often the only genre not frowned upon by the Puritans. It grew more sophisticated in the second half of the 18th century, although the most prominent painters, Copley and West, felt the need to study in Europe.

THE COLONIAL AGE

The Puritans who settled in Massachusetts were by far the most literate and best educated of all the settlers, and it is hardly surprising that they should be the ones who founded Harvard College in 1636, and who set up a printing press there three years later. They contributed far more to early colonial literature than the settlers in the Southern colonies, who were closer to the aristocratic traditions of the court, mainly merchants and planters whose pursuits were more economic and social.

THE PURITANS

The Puritans who left England for America wanted to purify the Church of England; they refused its hierarchy and its dependence on the state and followed the writings of Calvin. Whether dissidents or separatists, they believed that religion should be based on a contract between themselves and God, with the Bible as their only guide. Purifying the Church also meant getting rid of ornament, pomp and elaborate rituals.

In terms of doctrine, they believed that because of original sin, all men were depraved, and that only a few would be chosen and redeemed². Reading the Bible, self-analysis and consciousness of sin could help you search for personal redemption and become 'elect', but were no guarantee: the principle of predestination meant that only God knew who would be elect. Social hierarchy played no part in gaining God's Grace, but material success was often considered a sign of God's favour.

The Puritan world later inspired several writers, such as Hawthorne, who was haunted by the fact that one of his ancestors has been a judge in the Salem witch trials, and Arthur Miller, who transposed McCarthyism into the Salem witch hunts (*The Crucible*).

The Puritans' legacy is central to the American psyche, particularly with the belief that America was fulfilling a 'special purpose' (an idea later reasserted by Emerson and Whitman), although it has also been blamed for its materialism, rigid morality and limited response to art.

■ Sermons

For these Puritan settlers, the Bible was the word of God and scriptural teaching was an essential part of the services, a way of reaching grace. Sermons were therefore the first literary genre developed in America. They tended to be long, sometimes lasting over an hour, and had to be clear, logical and plain, so that they might be understood by all. But they could be striking and dramatic, with rich analogies and imagery that gave more actuality to the message. Sermons also reflected the doctrinal debates of the time, for instance the controversy between John Cotton and Roger Williams (1603?-1683), who in 1644 published *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* to argue for toleration and the separation between church and state.

In the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), a Massachusetts minister who wished to purify Calvinism, wrote sermons which started the Great Awakening, a religious revival which came as a reaction against growing materialism and religious decadence in colonial New England. He insisted on the doctrine of predestination and the need for individual soul-searching. His best-known sermon, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' (1741), is a terrifying and melodramatic jeremiad describing the terrors of hell inevitably awaiting those who do not repent:

'O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace³ of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit⁴, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe⁵ it, and burn it asunder, and you have no interest in any

2. to redeem: *racheter*

3. a furnace: *une fournaise*

4. a pit: *une fosse*; the pit: *l'enfer*

5. to singe: *roussir, brûler*

Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.'

Other texts by Edwards explore all the facets of Puritan theology and sometimes reveal his interest in nature, which he associated with spirituality. Edwards's sermons were received enthusiastically and led to a movement of revival in all the colonies. Their assertion of the importance of individual free will contributed to the American Revolution.

■ Autobiographies and diaries

The Puritans' concern with grace and salvation led them to constant introspection and spiritual analysis. Autobiographies were a way of helping others in their struggle to find Grace.

Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* records the succession of his sins and his complete degeneracy. Samuel Sewall (1652-1730), who also wrote the first anti-slavery pamphlet to be printed in New England, kept an informal journal* which shows more doubts and questionings and occasionally humour*, together with a wealth of details about everyday life. In his *Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover*, 1709-12, William Byrd II (1674-1744) records society and manners in the Southern colonies, but with less of a sense of providence. He describes a pastoral life of ease on a plantation, contrasting with the work ethic that prevailed in New England. As for the *Journal* (pub. 1825) of Sarah Kemble Knight (1666-1727), the account of a trip from Boston to New York and back, it is full of lively, humorous descriptions of people and landscapes.

■ Historical works

The Puritan intellectuals had read the classical historians (Plutarch, Livy) and believed in the medieval conception of providential history. It was therefore their duty to show that their enterprise in the New World was part of a higher purpose, as is perhaps best illustrated by the title of Edward Johnson's history: *The Wonder-Working Providence of Sion's Saviour in New England* (1653). The events they related were often followed by interpretation since it was then believed that all events or incidents bore meaning.

John Winthrop (1587?-1649) was governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for twelve years. His *History of New England* from 1630 to 1649 starts as a detailed journal* of his crossing and arrival in America, and turns into reflections on broader political issues. He is also remembered for the lay⁶ sermon he preached aboard the *Arbella* in 1630 ('We must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill'.)

6. lay: *laïque*



Benjamin West, *Penn's Treaty with the Indians*, 1771-1772.

Benjamin West worked in London during the Federal Age, but his history paintings are set in contemporary America – not in ancient Rome. This desire to assert an American identity is clear in this scene which portrays the meeting between William Penn and members of the Leni Lanape tribe at Shackamaxon on the Delaware River. The scene brings together Indians, Quakers and merchants in a harmonious neo-classical composition, an image of peace which became iconic for the new nation.

In *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1630-51) William Bradford (1590-1657), governor of the Plymouth colony) relates the arrival of the Pilgrims in New England, but especially their role in carrying out God's plans. The book contains a criticism of Thomas Morton, who had settled near the Plymouth colony and whose religious beliefs, Mayday revels⁷ and debauchery shocked the Puritans. Morton ridiculed them savagely in *The New English Canaan* (1637).

Mary Rowlandson (1637?-1710?) wrote *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson* (1682) to give an account of her captivity among Narragansett Indians. Her adventures are related vividly, but the purpose is clearly didactic: she is the Christian pilgrim, surrounded by the Indian followers of the devil.

Cotton Mather (1663-1728) who came from a distinguished New England family, was a distinguished scholar, a public figure, and a prolific writer on a large variety of subjects. His *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692), in which he explained the reality and danger of witchcraft, contributed to the 1692 witchcraft trials. In *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), Mather records the history of the Church in New England, of Harvard College and of many prominent governors and ministers.

7. revels: festivités

■ Poetry

Although much poetry was written in the new colonies, most of it was pious, didactic and flat. *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640) consisted in the Psalms of David translated into hymn stanzas and became extremely popular, the hymns being sung at home and in church.

In 1662 Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705) published *The Day of Doom*, which became the best-selling book in 17th century colonial England. In didactic verse of fourteen feet it describes Christ's second coming and the Day of Last Judgment, which brings terror to everyone, explaining how each sin will be punished.

Anne Bradstreet (1612-72) was born and married into prominent English families and followed her husband to America in 1630. Her excellent education and deep piety led her to read and write, a remarkable feat⁸ at a time when women were expected to keep to domestic tasks.

The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America (1650) deals with a large variety of subjects, pastoral and political, public and religious, but the most moving and dramatic poems are certainly the more intimate ones devoted to her family life, her passionate love for her husband and her eight children, incidents of domestic life and also her spiritual doubts and struggles, particularly after the death of some of her children. Her verse is rich in metaphors⁹ and conceits¹⁰. In the prologue to the book, Anne Bradstreet boldly speaks of what she is to expect as a woman.

I am obnoxious⁹ to each carping¹⁰ tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits.
A Poet's Pen all scorn I should thus wrong¹¹,
For such despite¹² they cast on female wits.
If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance.

A teacher in England, Edward Taylor (1642-1729) refused to pledge allegiance to the Anglican creed after the Restoration and emigrated to Massachusetts, where he became a minister. He never made his poetry public and it was discovered in 1937 (*Poetical Works*, 1939). His verse addresses questions of Puritan belief, such as personal salvation, sin and the existence of devils and witches. His *Meditations*, private poems based on Biblical texts, are written in six-line stanzas showing the influence of metaphysical poetry (→ p. 53) with their complex development, density, paradoxes¹¹, and rich baroque imagery drawing on the Bible as well as on ordinary activities such as farming and housekeeping. They reflect the inward, intense struggle of the soul to earn Christ's mercy.

8. a feat: un exploit

9. obnoxious: détestable (aux yeux de ceux...)

10. to carp: critiquer

11. A Poet's Pen all scorn I should thus wrong: All scorn I should thus wrong a poet's pen

12. despite: spite, scorn, mépris

A tobacco merchant from Maryland, **Ebenezer Cook** (1685-1732) was no Puritan and with *The Sot-weed Factor; or, a Voyage to Maryland* (1708) wrote a satire* on that colony in verse reminiscent of *Hudibras* (→ p. 58) and describing a visitor who is robbed and cheated in a dreadful, chaotic land. The very excess of the satire turns it against the complacency of the English.

The first Black American woman to write poetry, **Phillis Wheatley**, a servant in the Wheatley family, wrote conventional religious verse, in which she thanks Providence for bringing her to America but yet asserts her dignity and racial pride.

THE YEARS OF REVOLUTION

■ Prose

From 1760, literature became indissociable from politics. Autobiography*, essays*, letters and documents all record patriotism and the debates about an ideal form of government. Introspection was giving way to action.

Born in Boston at the beginning of the 18th century, **Benjamin Franklin** (1706-1790) bridged the colonial age and that of the new republic and reflects the emerging spirit of America, uniting the Puritan legacy of hard work with an optimistic belief in natural rights and reason. He was a typical self-made man, who came to negotiate the Treaty of Paris, which gave the colonies their independence, and was part of the 1787 Convention which helped write the Constitution. At ten he started working in his father's soap and candle shop, and two years later was apprenticed to his half-brother, who was editor of the *New England Courant*. After quarrelling with him, he left Boston for Philadelphia, where he became a printer, a prominent member of the city, and the embodiment of 18th century Enlightenment. Believing in the progress and improvement of society, and more interested in his time than in eternity, he developed a utilitarian approach to life, and worked for the public good – as a public-spirited citizen (he created the first circulating library, organized the American Philosophical Society, had the streets paved and lit), as an inventor and scientist (he experimented on lightning, electricity, invented bi-focal glasses) – wrote against slavery and the belief in witchcraft, all the while rising to political prominence.

Between 1732 and 1758, he published *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which contained a calendar, proverbs, science and aphorisms, and became extremely popular ('Love your neighbor Yet don't pull down your hedge.'; 'When there is marriage without love, there will be love without marriage.'; 'Content makes poor men rich; discontent makes rich men poor.'; 'The same man cannot be both friend and flatterer.').

Franklin's *Autobiography*, which unfortunately stops in 1757, before he started playing a role in the creation of the United States, reflects a philosophy of individualism and optimism. Franklin shows that exemplarity leads to material progress and moral

improvement. It offers a practical approach to life, without any soul-searching or emotional climax. Still showing the Puritan legacy, he recommends hard work, thrift, temperance, and presents his life as a model to be imitated. The simple, direct, lucid style and the homely episodes make it accessible to all. The *Autobiography* constitutes one of the first expressions of the American dream: you are not born into a life, you create it for yourself.



Thomas Smith, Self-portrait, 1690. With his strong features, his refined cravat, this is the portrait of a prominent figure. The naval battle in the background points to his own career as a mariner. The skull and the serious expression also make this painting a *vanitas*, a pious reminder of death to come, something confirmed by the poem under it, which ends: 'The Eternal Drawes to him my heart / By Faith (why can thy Force subvert) / To Crowne me (after Grace) with Glory.'

In *Common Sense* (1776), British-born **Thomas Paine** (1737-1809) pleaded for political independence, showing in strong, passionate, but clear rhetoric that democracy is far superior to monarchy. He went on to write *Rights of Man* (1791-1792), an answer to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and an attack against monarchical systems, and *The Age of Reason* (1794), a deist treatise and a critique of established religion.

The *Declaration of Independence*, based on the principle of natural rights, was mainly written by **Thomas Jefferson**, who besides his role in politics (he became vice-president, then president), was interested in science, music (his personal library was the basis of the Library of Congress) and architecture (he saw neoclassical and neo-Palladian buildings as best fit to convey the heroism and virtue of the new nation.) His *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) offer a study of the natural resources, economy, system of government and culture of the state, celebrating its agrarian economy which represents for him the future of the nation. Jefferson defends the bravery of the Native Americans but, although he argues for emancipation, believes that black people are inferior in body and mind, cannot coexist freely with white

people and should therefore be repatriated. Of utmost interest are also the exchange of Letters between Jefferson and John Adams (pub. 1959) in which Jefferson's idealism is confronted with the more sceptical views of John Adams.

Hector St John de Crevecoeur was French by birth but settled permanently in New York State in 1765. In *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) a fictional character reports on the people, manners and institutions of the new country. He describes it as a country of freedom, independence and democracy, where men are self-reliant and hard-working, and exalts nature, which he finds superior to European culture.

The Federalist Papers (1787-88) by Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804), John Jay (1745-1829) and James Madison (1751-1836) are a series of philosophical and political essays* to advocate the ratification of the Constitution.

■ Verse

The introspective poetry of the Puritans gave way more satirical and committed verse.

Among those poets who celebrated the new nation in verse, Philip Freneau (1752-1832), also a journalist and editor, is undoubtedly the most talented and versatile. His polemical poetry attacks the political and cultural domination of Britain, slavery, but also the fact that prevailing reason does not make the task of poets easy. For Freneau is also a pre-romantic, who in lyrical poems praises imagination ('The Power of Fancy'), celebrates nature, melancholy or joy in the tradition of the British 'Graveyard School' of poetry (Young, Cowper, Gray), introducing a note of despondency in the optimism of the time. The form, however, is mainly imitative and does not yet show the emergence of truly American verse.

The 'Connecticut Wits' (Joel Barlow, Timothy Dwight, John Trumbull) were Pro-Federalist poets, who wrote neo-classical patriotic verse, often contrasting the vigour of the new nation with the degeneracy of Europe but their satires*, epics* and elegies* were all imitations of English models (Pope and Dryden in particular). It is interesting to note that *The Contrast* is also the title of the first play written in America, by Royall Tyler (1757-1826) in 1787, a comedy of manners set in America, which compares an upright supporter of the Revolution and a foppish follower of English manners.

■ Fiction

The American public were avid readers of novels imported from England (cheaply since there was no law on copyrights before 1790) and by the end of the century Richardson, Sterne and Mrs Radcliffe were particularly popular, which partly explains the paucity of a native production. A Few American writers, however, embraced and even adapted these trends.

With *Modern Chivalry* (1792-1815), Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1746-1816), who lived in Pittsburgh, then situated on the frontier, wrote an American version of *Don*

Quixote, a picaresque novel which is a humorous and satirical portrayal of life in the backwoods of America.

In an attempt to write popular fiction, Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810), the 'father of the American novel', drew on Gothic* and sentimental novels as well as on the moral and political concerns of the English Jacobin novel (both the moral ideas of Godwin and the feminist ones of Mary Wollstonecraft). But their legacy is translated into American scenes and incidents, with the dangers of the wilderness replacing the terrors of Gothic castles. His novels (*Wieland; or The Transformation*, 1798) are filled with terror, the supernatural, the irrational (including psychic disorders, sleep-walking, ventriloquism, religious delusion, doubles) which seem to challenge the optimistic certainties of the times. The most original aspect of his work is the choice of unreliable first-person narrators, who bring introspection into the novel, but whose vision is often flawed and mistaken.

Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1793): The new American

I have been the more particular in this Description of my Journey, and shall be so of my first Entry into that City, that you may in your Mind compare such unlikely Beginnings with the Figure I have since made there. I was in my working Dress, my best Clothes being to come round by Sea. I was dirty from my Journey; my Pockets were stuff'd out with Shirts and Stockings, and I knew no Soul nor where to look for Lodging. I was fatigued with Travelling, Rowing, and Want of Rest, I was very hungry; and my whole Stock of Cash consisted of a Dutch Dollar, and about a Shilling in Copper. The latter I gave the People of the Boat for my Passage, who at first refus'd it, on Account of my Rowing; but I insisted on their taking it, a Man being sometimes more generous when he has but a little Money than when he has plenty, perhaps thro' Fear of being thought to have but little. Then I walked up the Street, gazing about till near the Market House I met a Boy with Bread. I had made many a Meal on Bread, and, inquiring where he got it, I went immediately to the Baker's he directed me to, in Second-street, and ask'd for Biscuit, intending such as we had in Boston; but they, it seems, were not made in Philadelphia. Then I asked for a three-penny Loaf, and was told they had none such. So not considering or knowing the Difference of Money, and the greater Cheapness nor the Names of his Bread, I bad him give me three-penny worth of any sort. He gave me, accordingly, three great Puffy Rolls. I was surpriz'd at the Quantity, but took it, and, having no Room in my Pockets, walk'd off with a Roll under each Arm, and eating the other. Thus I went up Market Street as far as Fourth Street, passing by the Door of Mr. Read, my future Wife's Father; when she, standing at the Door, saw me, and thought I made, as I certainly did, a most awkward, ridiculous Appearance. Then I turned and went down Chestnut Street and part of Walnut Street, eating my Roll all the Way, and, corning round, found myself again at Market Street Wharf, near the Boat I came

in, to which I went for a Draught of the River Water; and, being filled with one of my Rolls, gave the other two to a Woman and her Child that came down the River in the Boat with us, and were waiting to go farther. Thus refreshed, I walked again up the Street, which by this time had many clean-dressed People in it, who were all walking the same Way. I joined them, and thereby was led into the great Meeting House of the Quakers near the Market. I sat down among them, and, after looking round awhile and hearing nothing said, being very drowsy thro' Labour and want of Rest the preceding Night, I fell fast asleep, and continued so till the Meeting broke up, when one was kind enough to rouse me. This was, therefore, the first House I was in, or slept in, in Philadelphia.

Walking down again toward the River, and, looking in the Faces of People, I met a young Quaker Man, whose Countenance I lik'd, and, accosting him, requested he would tell me where a Stranger could get Lodging. We were then near the Sign of the Three Mariners. "Here," says he, "is one Place that entertains Strangers, but it is not a reputable House; if thee wilt walk with me, I'll show thee a better." He brought me to the Crooked Billet in Water-street. Here I got a Dinner; and, while I was eating it, several sly Questions were asked me, as it seemed to be suspected from my youth and Appearance, that I might be some Runaway. After Dinner, my Sleepiness return'd, and being shown to a Bed, I lay down without undressing, and slept till Six in the Evening, was call'd to Supper, went to Bed again very early, and slept soundly till next Morning. Then I made myself as tidy as I could, and went to Andrew Bradford the Printer's. I found in the Shop the old Man his Father, whom I had seen at New York, and who, travelling on horseback, had got to Philadelphia before me. He introduc'd me to his Son, who receiv'd me civilly, gave me a Breakfast, but told me he did not at present want a Hand, being lately suppli'd with one; but there was another Printer in town, lately set up, one Keimer, who, perhaps, might employ me; if not, I should be welcome to lodge at his House, and he would give me a little Work to do now and then till fuller Business should offer.

■ THE CONTEXT

Benjamin Franklin, who does not like working for his brother in Boston, secretly leaves town and makes his way to New York, then Philadelphia, where he hopes to work as a printer.

■ A PICARESQUE PASSAGE

– The organisation is peripatetic since the passage follows Franklin's steps. Franklin gives the exact itinerary of his walk through the town, mentioning all the places where he stopped. The narrative moves briskly, partly because of a clear and simple syntax, the style being most paratactic, with many "Is" as subjects. The sentences follow each other, often just introduced by "Then" or "Thus".

– Reading people: Although Franklin does not know anyone in Philadelphia, his progress through the city is marked by a number of encounters: the boy, the Quaker, Bradford...

Philadelphia is a place where people seem to help each other and where they compete less than in Boston – perhaps because of its Quaker settlement. This constant meeting and evaluating of people is typical of the picaresque genre; And we find evaluating here: Franklin asks a young Quaker where to lodge and chooses him because he "liked his Countenance" (38): it turns out to be a good choice. People at the inn also "read" him, imagining that he might be a "Runaway" (44). Making his way alone in the world, the hero has to read people in order to learn from them. Franklin has just arrived but is already involved in this social process.

– Making one's fortune: In a picaresque novel, the hero leaves his family in order to make his fortune in the world. Here, we see a concern for money through the detailed information the narrator gives us: how much he had to start with, how much he gives, how much the bread costs.

■ THE AMERICAN DREAM

Although it is an autobiography, Franklin does not describe his thoughts and feelings and the passage is mainly visual, with a series of 'vignettes' (for ex. Franklin with a loaf under each arm). The tableau is underscored by direct references to the "figure" he cut (3), to his "appearance" (28, 44). This is because Franklin stages himself as an archetypal figure: that of a successful man at the start of his career, arriving in a new country or city without a penny but hoping to make his fortune. It is an image which reverberates through American literature.

Franklin here seems to be a metaphor for America, a tabula rasa, a new man divested of those elements of his European past irrelevant to the "New Country" which is Philadelphia. He thus stands for the spirit of the frontier as well as for America's severed links with Britain, which is a break from the fatherland – exactly what Franklin himself has done: breaking from his father. He stands for the freedom of the individual.

■ AN EMBLEMATIC WALK THROUGH THE CITY

– Franklin's progress from bakery to meeting hall, past Miss Read to the wharf then to Bradford's announces his future involvement in the city: from material concerns with food and lodging to Meeting Hall, which symbolizes his concern with public life, to Miss Read, his private life, to Bradford's, his business life.

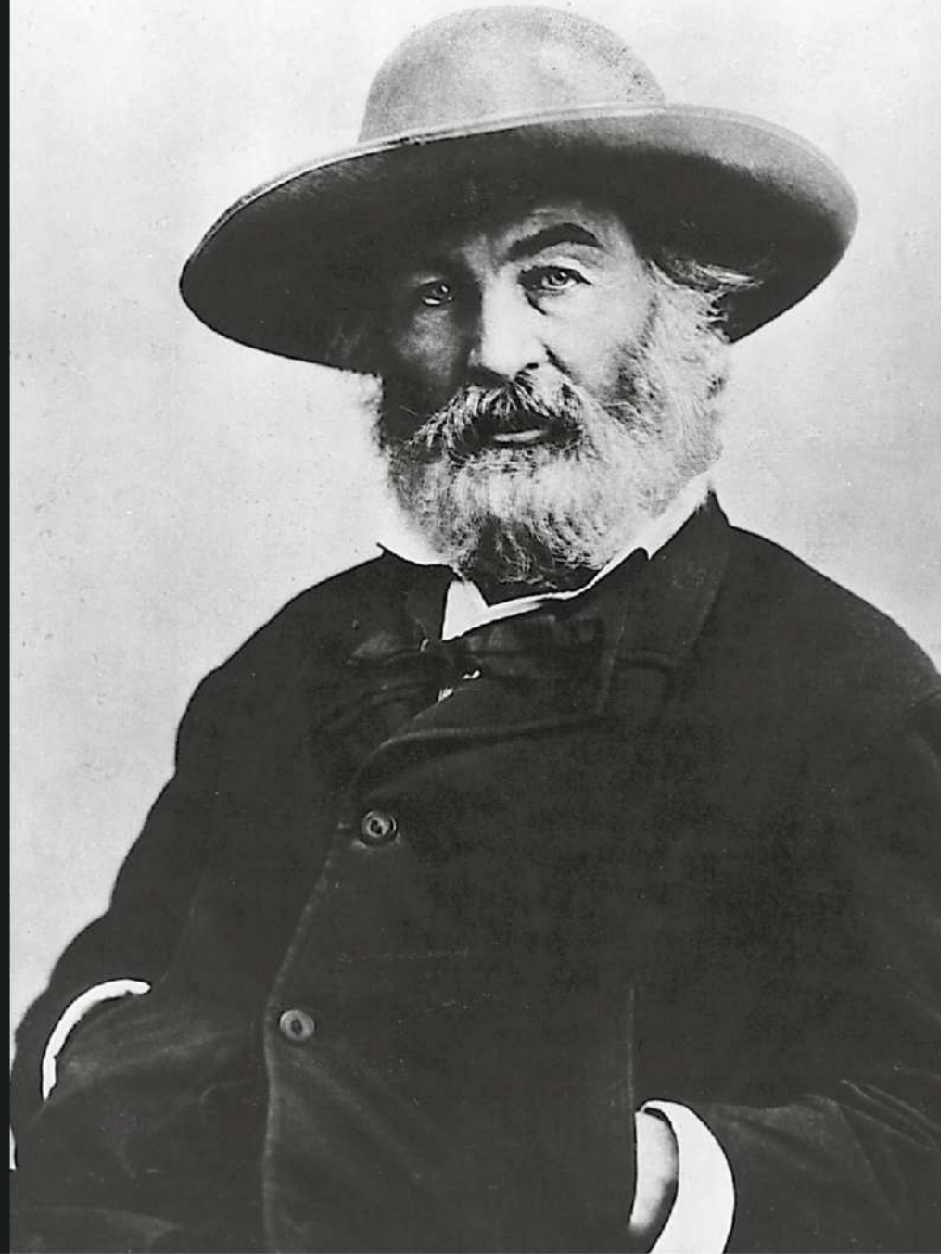
– With his loaves under his arms, Franklin is reminiscent of Bunyan's Christian beginning his journey to the Celestial City. But the journey is worldly and secular. Moral concerns are there already, or rather the desire to rationalize and understand how man works (l. 9-10, and the attempt to understand how charity works). But the passage as a whole announces secular obstacles to be overcome rather than inner ones. It is a highly visual and theatrical passage which is a metaphor for the founding myth of America.



TOWARDS
LITERARY
EMANCIPATION
(1800-1865)



WALT WHITMAN



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|---------|--|--|
| 1803 | Louisiana Purchase doubles size of the US. | |
| 1804 | Lewis & Clark expedition (reaches Pacific in 1805) | |
| 1808 | Further importation of slaves prohibited. | |
| 1812-14 | War with Britain | |
| 1819 | Florida acquired from Spain. | |
| 1819-20 | | Irving: <i>The Sketch Book</i> Trumbull: <i>The Declaration of Independence</i> |
| 1820 | Missouri Compromise: slavery outlawed north of latitude 36° 30'. | |
| 1822-26 | | Jefferson: <i>The Rotunda</i> |
| 1823 | Monroe Doctrine: America's hegemony in the Western hemisphere | Cooper: <i>The Pioneers</i> |
| 1825 | | Cole founds the Hudson River School |
| 1827 | | Cooper: <i>The Prairie</i> |
| 1828 | | Webster's <i>American Dictionary</i> |
| 1830 | Indian Removal Act | |
| 1831 | Nat Turner's slave insurrection | Poe: <i>Poems</i> |
| 1833 | American Antislavery Society founded. | |
| 1833-36 | | Cole: <i>The Course of Empire</i> |
| 1835-40 | | Tocqueville: <i>Democracy in America</i> |
| 1836 | Texas gains independence from Mexico. | |
| 1837 | | Hawthorne: <i>Twice-Told Tales</i> |
| 1838 | Underground Railway begins. | Emerson: <i>'Divinity School Address'</i> |
| 1839 | Abolitionists found the Liberty Party. | Invention of the daguerreotype |
| 1840 | | Poe: <i>Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque</i> |

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| 1841-44 | | Emerson: <i>Essays I & II</i> |
| 1844 | | Powers: <i>The Greek Slave</i> |
| 1845 | Texas annexed. | Douglass: <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> Poe: <i>The Raven & Other Poems</i> |
| 1846 | | Melville: <i>Typee</i> |
| 1846-48 | Mexican War; assertion of 'Manifest Destiny' | |
| 1847 | Mormons settle at Great Salt Lake. | Longfellow: <i>Evangeline</i> |
| 1848 | Seneca Falls Convention; Free Soil party formed; gold discovered in California. | |
| 1849 | | Thoreau: <i>Civil Disobedience</i> Durand: <i>Kindred Spirits</i> |
| 1850 | California joins the USA. | Hawthorne: <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> Hawthorne: <i>The House of the Seven Gables</i> Melville: <i>Moby-Dick</i> |
| 1851 | | New York Times founded |
| 1852 | | Stowe: <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> |
| 1854 | Missouri Compromise repealed. | Thoreau: <i>Walden</i> |
| 1855 | | Whitman: <i>Leaves of Grass</i> |
| 1859 | John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry; Colorado gold rush; mass migration to the West begins. | |
| 1860 | Confederation of Southern States formed. | |
| 1861-65 | Lincoln President | |
| 1861 | Secession of Southern States; war between Confederacy and Union | |
| 1862 | Homestead Act allows citizens to settle on public land. | Whistler: <i>Symphony in White</i> |
| 1863 | Emancipation Proclamation | |
| 1865 | 13 th Amendment abolishes slavery. End of war | |

*'We will walk on our own feet; we will work with
our own hands; we will speak our own minds...'*
(Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The American Scholar', 1837)

'The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.'
(Walt Whitman, *Preface to Leaves of Grass*, 1855)

Between independence and the Civil War, the new country expanded geographically. In 1803 the Louisiana Purchase doubled its territory, Texas was added in 1845 and a whole region between the Rockies and the Pacific in 1848. The movement westward, which many saw as 'Manifest Destiny' (the idea that the expansion westward was a mission to spread democracy and fulfil God's will), led to the development of turnpikes¹, flatboats, steamboats and eventually railroads, further encouraging expansion and immigration. The discovery of gold in California, industrial and material progress – as well as economic and political difficulties in Europe – also brought a steadily growing number of settlers to America, where the population increased sixfold between 1800 and 1865. This rapid growth was accompanied by a spirit of confidence which found a philosophical counterpart in Transcendentalism, although it was also a reaction against materialism. Taming the wilderness fostered² individualism, self-reliance, but also the 'Americanisation' of the new immigrants. But the young democracy had to adapt to such tremendous changes, which increased the north-south divide and polarized certain issues, like that of slavery, and was to lead to secession and Civil War. As Lincoln put it, 'the house' was indeed 'divided against itself', and in spite of a rising number of voices and societies condemning slavery, the secession of southern states in 1861 made the conflict inevitable.

The revolution had been successful and exhilarating, but it was now necessary to exalt the nation's cultural standing. In the realm of art, painters like Benjamin West and John Trumbull helped create an American myth by portraying scenes from the American Revolution in a Neo-Classical manner: history became romanticized and embellished. After 1820, it was the spectacular beauty of America's natural landscapes which inspired the Hudson River School and helped forge a national identity. But what about literature? America was by then a highly literate nation, where newspapers and magazines proliferated. But perhaps because copyright law was still undeveloped and meant that it was cheaper to pirate British books than to pay American writers, a truly American literature was slow to emerge. In the early years of independence, it was still felt that literature had to be moral and useful and it was only after 1830, under the twin influences of Romanticism and Transcendentalism, that American letters started their emancipation.

Inspired by European late 18th century trends, romantic American writers developed the Gothic* tradition of imagination and fear while adapting them to the American

1. a turnpike: *une route (souvent à péage)*

2. to foster: *favoriser, encourager*

continent. Nature became a source of inspiration and spiritual regeneration, while literature glorified the soul and the spirit of man.

GOthic AND GROTESQUE TRENDS

Between the optimism of the revolutionary years and that of 'Manifest Destiny', American Gothic focused on adventures of the imagination. Introduced by Charles Brockden Brown and developed by Poe and later Melville, it will contribute to one of the specificities of the American novel – the fact that it is often imbued with³ darkness and fantastic elements. It is interesting to note that in the 1830s and 1840s, Gothic domestic architecture became quite fashionable and the dramatic and mysterious landscapes of Washington Allston partook of⁴ the same atmosphere.

Washington Irving (1783-1859) can be considered as bridging the cultural gap between the old and the new worlds, between neoclassicism and romanticism. He divided his life between America and Europe, where he worked in diplomacy and was much admired by Byron and Coleridge. He first wrote satires⁵ and burlesques⁶ on contemporary manners, first *Salmagundi* (1807-1808), then *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809), supposedly written by Dietrich Knickerbocker. The name 'Knickerbockers' became that of a group of writers (Irving, Cooper, Bryant) based in New York, who wanted their works to be popular and entertaining, while developing a genuine American culture. Irving reached fame with the *Sketch Book* (1819), a collection of essays and tales, often about England seen through American eyes, and imbued with the poetic atmosphere of a romantic past. But two of the stories, and the most memorable ones, are inspired by German folklore and are set in America, 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow'. Rip Van Winkle sleeps for some twenty years and wakes up after the American Revolution, while Ichabod Crane disappears after seeing the headless horseman supposed to haunt the woods. Both show his interest in the past, in the picturesque, and in German folktales, which Walter Scott had introduced him to. Yet both helped formulate some American myths, in particular nostalgia for a vanishing pastoral ideal.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was the son of travelling actors who died when he was two. Taken in by the Allan family in Richmond, he quarrelled with them, had to leave university for drinking and gambling, resigned from the army and further shocked his contemporaries when he married his thirteen-year-old cousin. He devoted his life to writing, unable to keep editorial jobs and living in poverty. Poe wrote poetry, short stories and was one of the first literary critics.

3. imbued with: *imprégné de*

4. to partake of: *participer de, partager*

Poe's beliefs defied those of his time: he turned his back on the American landscape, preferring 'dreamscapes', rejected optimism and didacticism, maintained that the aim of poetry was not truth (as was widely believed) but beauty, and in those democratic years, despised the common man (and defended slavery). Poe linked beauty to melancholy and sadness and felt that the 'most poetical' of all subjects was 'the death of a beautiful woman' – a theme which he developed in several of his poems ('Annabel Lee', 'The Raven', 'Ulalume' in *Poems*, 1831.) written in the tradition of English romantic poetry. All take place in unreal, shadowy places, beyond the limits of normal consciousness, their atmosphere created through images, sound effects and rhythm. In both short stories and poems, Poe sought for 'unity of effect', that is to say an emotional response which every single aspect of the text must participate in. This is why he preferred the short story to the novel, since the former could be read at one sitting, and produce the sought-after totality of effect. Poe developed his theories in several essays ('The Philosophy of Composition', 'The Poetic Principle') in which he condemned 'the heresy of the didactic' as well as inspiration in the act of creation, explaining instead that the writer was like an actor or craftsman creating an effect.

In *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) and *Tales* (1845), that effect is very often terror, not the conventional Gothic one, but what he called 'terror of the soul'. Poe's Grotesque tales ('King Pest') are parodies of the most gruesome⁵ and sensational stories to be found in popular journals and draw on German Gothic tales. His Arabesque tales (imaginative but sombre, showing a free play of fancy, as in Arabesque designs) are narratives of the marvellous and supernatural and are given a psychological dimension and ambiguity by narrators whose mental stability is questionable. Other themes such as madness, the use of drugs, or twins and doubles call into question the reliability of perception. These tales take place in gloomy spaces (prisons, cells, dark interiors) in which characters are terrified by hallucinations or nightmares, thus initiating a Gothic tradition which will become typical of Southern fiction and will be found in such diverse works as those of William Faulkner, Walker Percy or Cormac McCarthy.

Poe is considered the father of detective fiction since a third kind of stories (the 'ratiocinative tales') feature M. Dupin, a detective who associates the logical, deductive mind of a mathematician and the intuition of a poet. With his credulous friend, he announces the 'couples' of later detective stories, like Sherlock Holmes and Watson.

Poe also wrote a novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1837-38), the chronicle of a voyage to the South Pole.

5. gruesome: horrible, épouvantable

ROMANTICISM

The Romantics' celebration of nature found an echo in a country that cherished the splendour of the American landscape. Besides, Wordsworth and Coleridge's emphasis on the emotions of the common man could not but be embraced in the new cradle of democracy.

James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) wrote extensively, essays, travel books, historical novels (*The Spy*, 1821) and novels about the sea, but he is mainly remembered for the five volumes of the Leatherstocking series (*The Pioneers*, 1823; *The Last of the Mohicans*, 1826; *The Prairie*, 1827; *The Pathfinder*, 1840; *The Deerslayer*, 1841), historical romances* in the tradition of Walter Scott.

Desirous to write American fiction on American themes, Cooper set his *Leatherstocking tales* on the frontier and explored the confrontations between wilderness and civilization. They follow the life (moving back in time from old age to youth) of the hero, Natty Bumppo, aka Leatherstocking, Pathfinder and Deerslayer, a woodsman who embodies individualism, courage and honesty. One of the first truly American characters, Natty is a rugged, heroic man announcing many American heroes to come: a natural aristocrat, with little education, but endowed with wisdom and a true Democratic spirit. He represents a sort of 'neutral ground', a witness to opposing social forces, halfway between the civilized and the savage worlds. *The Pioneers*, for instance, contrasts the settlers in the small frontier town of Templeton (who consider themselves as taming, civilizing and bringing law to the wilderness) and Natty and his Indian friend Chingachgook (who criticize their greed and wastefulness). Nature, which symbolizes purity, innocence and freedom, is being violated and destroyed by corrupt society, but Indians are not all 'noble' and the movement westward is not all devastation. Cooper's novels therefore raise questions about the kind of society the new nation wants to build without offering any clear-cut answer.

There is little originality in either plot or style in Cooper's novels, but with great skill, they render the atmosphere of the frontier, its dramatic landscapes and violent conflicts. Although Cooper knew little about the West, he helped transform it into an American myth, a romantic place which belongs to the national epic.

The editor of the *New York Evening Post* for almost fifty years, William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878) was an active supporter of liberal causes (unions, the right to strike, prison reform, the abolition of slavery). His verse, which is conventional in form, shows the influence of the British graveyard school of poetry ('Thanatopsis'), and conveys a vision of nature as a benevolent source of contemplation and wonder ('To A Waterfowl', 'A Forest Hymn', 'The Prairies').

A similar celebration of the oneness between man and nature is to be found in the paintings of Thomas Cole. Asher Durand represented Cole and Bryant together within a Catskill scenery in the well-known painting 'Kindred Spirits' (1849). The romantic fascination with the American landscape gradually extended to local

scenes and people in the paintings of George Caleb Bingham and William Sidney Mount, but also to the portrayal Catlin made of Indians, conscious as he was that their way of life was threatened with extinction.

THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS

TRANSCENDENTALISM

Transcendentalism started from New England, where many of its followers, former Harvard students, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, lived and formed *The Transcendental Club* in 1836 to talk about religion, philosophy and literature. They published a magazine, *The Dial* (1840-44).

The fact that Puritanism was giving way to Unitarianism, a God to be feared to a benevolent God, predestination and human depravity to the idea of personal responsibility, paved the way for Transcendentalism, which held that human beings were divine and that their relationship to God was a personal matter. Any individual soul was part of the world soul, which Emerson called the Oversoul. Such inner light within men meant that the voice of God spoke intuitively within them and that they should therefore develop self-trust and self-reliance. This did not mean selfishness but a more genuine and personal commitment to society. 'Every real man must be a nonconformist', Emerson said. Through meditation and communion with nature, human beings could transcend the limits of their senses and reach higher truths and an understanding of beauty. Asserting the supremacy of the spirit was also a way of rejecting the materialism and selfishness typical of contemporary society.

Most transcendentalists were firm believers in democracy and reform, advocating an end to slavery and the enfranchisement⁶ of women. Their beliefs led them to reject any form of religious conformity and to assert the superiority of intuition over intellect. Transcendentalism inspired Brook Farm, an experiment in communal living close to nature, where everyone shared the workload and had time for leisure and intellectual pursuits. Its influence is also felt in poets such as Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, in the painters of the Hudson River School, and even in less optimistic writers of the American Renaissance, like Hawthorne and Melville.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) wrote no fiction and little poetry and his considerable fame rests on essays and speeches. What he gave America was vision and confidence in itself. After attending Harvard Emerson was ordained as a minister. A religious crisis around 1830 led him away from the church, from which he resigned and travelled to Europe where he met Wordsworth, Coleridge and Carlyle. Back in America, he started the series of lectures and essays that made

6. enfranchisement: l'octroi du droit de vote

him famous. In Concord, where he had settled, he became the centre of a circle of intellectuals who called themselves the Transcendentalists.

The benevolence of nature and the divinity of the human being are recurring themes in Emerson's works. *Nature* (1836) urges Americans to stop looking at the past and follow their own inner light through the contemplation of nature. This will help them reach harmony and spiritual wholeness. 'The American Scholar' address (1837), often considered as America's literary declaration of independence, once more condemns 'the tyranny of the past' and exhorts each age to write its own books, to move from imitation to originality. In his 'Divinity School' address, Emerson attacked religious doctrines and rites as stultifying⁷ and merely based on tradition, advocating instead moral intuition – views felt by some as shocking. In an essay entitled *The Poet* (1844), Emerson describes poetry as a way of reaching the truth of things, as a calling which is democratic and can help elevate men, counter materialism, and give the nation its identity. Eleven years later Walt Whitman was to prove him right with *Leaves of Grass*. *Self-Reliance* (1841) is a collection of essays urging people to avoid conformity and follow their own instincts and ideas. Emerson's eloquence in his speeches and essays was striking, often rhapsodic, and full of aphorisms⁸ and metaphors⁹. They woke up the nation and inspired many to action.

Henry David Thoreau was Emerson's disciple; he shared his views about the divinity of nature, but was a practical man when Emerson was a theoretician and wanted his life to follow the dictates of Transcendentalism. Educated at Harvard, he taught for a time, tried his hand at different jobs, but after a few years decided to try an experiment in living.



Martin Johnson Heade, *Sudden Showers, Newbury Marshes*, c. 1865-1875, Yale University Art Gallery. Emerson's belief that divine light can be seen shining through the universe is reflected in the works of the 'Luminists', mainly represented by Fitz Hugh Lane and Martin Johnson Heade, whose paintings are peaceful studies in light and atmosphere.

7. stultifying: abrutissant, déshumanisant

In order to study nature, demonstrate self-sufficiency and turn his back on the materialism of society, Thoreau built a cabin at Walden Pond, into which he moved on July 4th 1845, a celebration of his own independence. There he lived for over two years, an experience which he related in *Walden* (1854), in which he gives a detailed description of the woods, the pond, the insect life and the flora. Compressing his time there into one year allowed him to follow the natural cycle of seasons, as well as his own spiritual rebirth, thus making his account more universal. Life in the woods helped Thoreau understand the difference between what is essential (the divinity within the self and within nature) and what is not (material possessions, obsession with money, too much comfort). But of course, Thoreau's account is not entirely honest since he lived on land that wasn't his, was close to friends in case of need, and had borrowed from them all kinds of necessities, yet it is in many ways unimportant. *Walden* is also about politics and economics, ecology and philosophy. It chronicles a search for liberation, one often related in religious or economic terms, as if to mock the quest for salvation or for fortune or social position. Confronted with the beauty of the woods and of the pond, man is truly humbled.

In such a day, in September or October, Walden is a perfect forest mirror, set round with stones as precious to my eye as if fewer or rarer. Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. It needs no fence. Nations come and go without defiling⁸ it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver⁹ will never wear off, whose gilding¹⁰ Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; – a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush, – this the light dust-cloth, – which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still.

A field of water betrays the spirit that is in the air. It is continually receiving new life and motion from above. It is intermediate in its nature between land and sky. On land only the grass and trees wave, but the water itself is rippled¹¹ by the wind. I see where the breeze dashes across it by the streaks¹² or flakes¹³ of light. It is remarkable that we can look down on its surface. We shall, perhaps, look down thus on the surface of air at length, and mark where a still subtler spirit sweeps over it. (Chapter IX, The Ponds)

Thoreau also kept a *Journal* from 1837 to 1861. He was suspicious of government and institutions, whether church or school, which all tended to restrain man. In order to express his opposition to slavery and the Mexican War, Thoreau refused to pay some of his taxes, which he explained in an essay, 'Civil Disobedience' (1849), which later influenced the action of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. According to Thoreau in his essay, 'There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him

8. to defile: souiller, salir

9. quicksilver: le vif-argent, le mercure

10. gilding: la dorure

11. to ripple: onduler, riler (la surface de l'eau)

12. a streak: une raie, une bande, un éclair

13. a flake: un éclat, une écaille

accordingly.' Incensed by the return of escaped slaves under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, Thoreau made his 'Slavery in Massachusetts' speech, appealing to the law of conscience rather than to that of the Constitution.

VOICES OF DISSENT

In the decades before the Civil War, many factors converged to heighten anti-slavery sentiment. The Transcendentalists' views about the sanctity of human beings were beginning to be more largely recognized, while essays, articles, speeches and even novels supported the abolitionist movement.

One of the most influential works was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), the daughter and wife of ministers. It was outrage at the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law which inspired Stowe to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), first published serially in the abolitionist *National Era*, then reprinted and reaching huge popularity since apart from the Bible, no book had ever sold so many copies. Using religious, moral and sentimental arguments, the novel exposes¹⁴ the cruelty of the slave system and the suffering, courage and Christian capacity for forgiveness of its victims. It also popularised a number of stereotypes about black people – the loving 'mammy', the faithful, patient and dutiful servant, 'Uncle Tom' – which later became much criticized.

In the decades before the Civil War, an increasing number of anti-slavery societies appeared, organized by white (like William Lloyd Garrison) or black abolitionists. They represented a wide range of attitudes, from a wish for gradual reform to the defence of black rebellion. Many essays and pamphlets by black people, notably by David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet, addressed a black audience, while slave narratives were usually written for white readers.

Slave narratives, testimonies to the inhumanity of slavery, became a proper genre, with around one hundred written by slaves who had fled north to freedom. Among them can be mentioned Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861) and the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave* (1845). Frederick Douglass (1818?-95), had become a prominent figure in the black abolitionist movement. He travelled extensively, wrote essays and gave speeches denouncing the paradox presented by slavery in a country where the Declaration of Independence states that 'all men are created equal'. As he said in a speech at Rochester on July 5, 1852, 'What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him, more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.'

14. to expose: dénoncer

Douglass's *Narrative* is a chronicle of the harsh lives of the slaves denied identity, family, and freedom. He explains how the first step towards 'enlightenment' came when he attained literacy, a skill usually forbidden to slaves, the second step when he stood up for himself and rebelled against his master. By asserting his own individualism and power in the tradition of transcendentalists, Douglass marked his psychological rebirth. The novel belongs to the American literary renaissance, a story of survival in a world of evil, of growing self-confidence and self-reliance, of an escape from corrupt society. The narrative also constitutes a spiritual autobiography, as we follow Douglass's progress through the hell, 'the dark night' of slavery, followed by resurrection. There are reminiscences of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, although Douglass also criticizes the church for turning a blind eye to slavery. The huge popularity of the *Narrative* is partly due to the fact that Douglass's criticisms of the South were expressed in the name of American values and ideals. He condemned slavery while celebrating America as a land of freedom and opportunity. What he wanted was to live the American dream, which the slave owners tried to destroy.

Women had played a major role in sensitizing people to the anti-slavery cause, often putting forward the same arguments for equality which they advanced to defend the rights of women.

Margaret Fuller (1810-50) was a member of the Transcendentalist group and considered that the notion of self-development should apply to women too. Her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) exhorts people to wake up and become aware that women's lack of freedom resembles that of the slaves. It was instrumental in shaping opinion for the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the first women's rights convention.

THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

The expression was coined by F.O. Matthiessen who, in 1941, published *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, a book in which he pointed out the thematic and structural common points between the works of five authors, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman, whose major works, published between 1850 and 1855, were all devoted to 'the possibilities of democracy'. Indeed, between 1835 and 1865, the nation witnessed a renaissance of literature and art. With its emphasis on imagination, intuition and the interpretation of the signs to be found in the universe, Transcendentalism provided a rich framework for writers to probe¹⁵ the depths of the human heart. Although too sombre to belong to Transcendentalism, the novels of Hawthorne and Melville share some common points, a tendency towards the allegorical and symbolic and an interest in the imaginary and in the mind rather than in the description of society.

15. to probe: sonder

Hawthorne's ancestor, William Hathorne, had come to America on the *Arbella* in 1630, and subsequently persecuted the Quakers. His son had been one of the judges in the Salem witchcraft trials. Such roots were for Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864, he modified his name) a burden of infamy and shame. Although he shared with the transcendentalists a belief in the invisible world behind the visible one, he did not have their optimism; the weight of the past led him to believe in the unavoidable corruption of human nature. After graduating from Bowdoin College, Hawthorne spent the next twelve years secluded in his mother's attic, reading and living in a world of imagination. He later held a succession of bureaucratic jobs and spent seven years in Europe where he had been appointed Consul in Liverpool.

Hawthorne's stories (*Twice-Told Tales*, 1837; *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846), mostly set in Puritan New England, show the influence of the Gothic* trend and centre around characters who, consumed by guilt and sin, have cut themselves off from 'the magnetic chain of humanity'. In 'The Minister's Black Veil', for instance, the Reverend Mr Hooper mysteriously starts wearing a black veil which covers his face, and preaching about sin. As he literally wears his sin and hides his guilt, his parishioners grow uneasy and start thinking about their own sins. The reason for the veil is never explained, partly because the narrator is unreliable, but by isolating himself from society and his fiancée, Hooper unconsciously commits another sin, that of refusing love and embracing despair.

Hawthorne described his novels as 'romances', a mixture of imagination and reality, concerned with the 'truth of the human heart' more than with that of society. Fascinated by psychology and theology, he studied the dilemmas of characters ridden by¹⁶ guilt, conscience, moral pride, anxiety or the fear of damnation, and surrounded them with symbolic settings, and mystery.

The Scarlet Letter (1850) is the story of Hester Prynne, charged with adultery and condemned to stand on the scaffold for three hours and then wear a scarlet 'A' on her breast as retribution. Hester will not reveal the name of her lover, the reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, who cannot bring himself to confess and becomes haunted by his sin. When Chillingworth, Hester's husband, returns and discovers Dimmesdale's guilt, he begins to torment him spiritually. The novel describes the passions and obsessions of these two men who both sin (Dimmesdale's sin is one of passion, Chillingworth's is the far worse one of calculation), as a result of an oppressive society which perverts all feelings. It is one more variation on the central theme in 19th century American literature, the relation between the self and society. Hawthorne explores his characters' obscure motives, their doubts and dark secrets. This atmosphere is underlined by Hawthorne's use of silences, litotes*, understatements and ambiguity, as well as by the use of symbolic places and contrasts (the pillory, the forest). As for Hester Prynne, her sin and the punishment for her sin, lead her to think, rationalize and condemn the religious, social and political institutions which enslave women.

16. ridden by: tourmenté par, hanté par

The House of the Seven Gables (1851) is set in Salem, in the home of hypocritical and evil Judge Pyncheon, a house that was cursed when his great-grandfather took part in the Salem witch trials. The judge's death, which brings the end of the curse, liberates the occupants of the house, just as it seems to liberate America from its Puritan past.

Although Herman Melville (1819-91) was brought up in a well-off family, his father's bankruptcy, then death, when Melville was twelve, meant that he could not even finish high school, and at nineteen he became a seaman, going first to Liverpool then to the South Seas. There he knew adventure – jumping ship, living with cannibals, captivity and escape, which he related in *Typee* (1846), partly inspired by exotic tales, a novel which contrasts the ideal, simple life of the islands and the savagery brought by the white, so-called enlightened, representatives of civilisation. Melville went on publishing exotic and popular South Sea romances* (*Moo*, 1847). But with *Mardi* (1849), an allegorical* narrative and a search for the truths underlying the universe, *Redburn* (1849), *White Jacket* (1850), *Pierre* (1852), and in short stories (*The Piazza Tales*, 1856), Melville's vision became more pessimistic and metaphysical.

Like Hawthorne, Melville could not share the transcendentalists' optimistic view of the world. Behind the benevolent face of the world, he held that 'evil was the chronic malady of the universe'. His darkly symbolic novels and tales ran counter to the confident mood of the time and alienated most readers and critics.

Moby-Dick or the White Whale (1851) relates Captain Ahab's search for Moby Dick, a white whale which severed one of his legs and that he is now bent on killing. Ahab is a tragic hero, who behaves more and more erratically as he becomes obsessed, then mad, and ends up sacrificing everything including his men to his hubristic endeavour. The novel contrasts two visions of the universe, that of Ahab, for whom the world, like the whale, is evil, and that of Ishmael, the narrator, who refuses such religious reading, and accepts the world's mystery. As Ahab tells Starbuck,

'All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard¹⁷ masks. But in each event – in the living act, the undoubted deed – there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings¹⁸ of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me.'

Ahab lives in a world ruled by predestination; the more sceptical Ishmael wants to commune with the universe through love. The novel is a complex one and can be read on different levels. In an attempt to penetrate the mystery of the whale, the novel becomes an encyclopaedic treatise on whaling; the different varieties of whales, the description of the bodies, of the ship, of the whaling industry. Yet beyond such realism the voyage is a mythical quest, the ship becoming a microcosm of society, of America, and the voyage an exploration of the mind and a metaphysical search for meaning. As for the white whale it is what each character wants to see in it; for Ahab, it crystallizes all that frustrates and defeats him, for Ishmael, it reflects the indifference of the

17. pasteboard: *du carton*

18. the mouldings: *la forme*

universe. Most of all it conveys Melville's belief in the difficulty of reading reality and of finding its secrets. In the course of the novel Ishmael learns to relate to others, which may be why he is the only one who survives. Melville's language conveys richness and wonder with unusual structures and a wealth of strange, rare or coined words that sometimes seem to tumble together in linguistic frenzy.

Melville's last novel, *Billy Budd* (1888-91), which takes place aboard a ship during the war between France and England, relates the court martial of Billy Budd, an innocent seaman. It is a reflection on justice and power.

Walt Whitman (1819-92), the son of a radical carpenter, worked as a schoolteacher, a journalist, a government clerk, and a wound-dresser during the Civil War. In 1855, he published *Leaves of Grass* and kept revising and expanding it until his death, letting it grow organically. In 1867, he added poems about the Civil War, *Drum-Taps*, and some elegiac tributes to the assassinated Lincoln ('When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd', 'O Captain! My Captain!', 1865-66).

Leaves of Grass reflects a transition between Transcendentalism and realism. Both an individualist and one who identified with all individuals, Whitman felt enormous pride in the new nation, its potentialities, its mission in the world. He wanted to reach out to the common people, to be the 'bard of democracy', of the whole of America, its regions, its races, classes, all its activities and trades, beauty and misery, all of which Whitman often sings in long catalogues, where social hierarchy disappears in a democratic way, equalizing and fusing everyone in one long chain, as these few lines from section 15 of 'Song of Myself' show (but the list goes on for another fifty lines):

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft.

The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane¹⁹ whistles its wild ascending lisp²⁰.

The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner;

The pilot seizes the king-pin²¹, he heaves down with a strong arm.

The mate stands braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,

The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,

The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar,

The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,

The farmer stops by the bars²² of a Sunday and looks at the oats and rye,

The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,

(He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bed-room;)

The grass, a symbol of immortality since it grows again, and of universality, because of the infinity of blades, represents both democracy and the vital essence of the universe. To be the true 'cosmic' poet of America, Whitman elevates all kinds of human experience, including that of sexuality, which is one of the subjects of 'Song of Myself'.

19. a foreplane: *un robot de charpentier*

20. lisp: *chuintement*

21. the king-pin: *le pivot, l'axe de rotule*

22. the bars: *la barrière*

For his poetry exalts the self, body as well as soul, and in the frontispiece of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he appears not as the respectable, well-dressed poet one might expect, but as a well built physical worker, with open shirt, a provocative and self-assured posture which shocked many people. Most of Whitman's poetry is written in free verse*, without any rhymes, stanzas, or metrical patterns, but with what can be called 'thought rhythm', with biblical parallelisms and incantatory catalogues. His use of a large range of words (slang, archaisms, foreign words, neologisms, the words of specific trades) reflects his desire to encompass the speech of all people and races, as well as his joy in naming things and in the music of language.



THE HOUSEHOLD POETS

Poetry was much appreciated among the salons and clubs of Boston, where the 'Brahmins' (a term first used by essayist, critic and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes to describe the Boston aristocracy, almost a caste) met to read and discuss literature. Three Boston poets in particular became famous, with verse in which respectability took precedence over warmth, hence their name 'household poets' or 'fireside poets.'

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-82) had an extremely successful career, both academically (he was a professor at Harvard for twenty years) and poetically since he was internationally famous during his lifetime. He represents the genteel culture of antebellum²³ Boston, marked by refinement, reserve, decorum and sentimentality – the very opposite of Whitman, who described him as the 'poet of all sympathetic gentleness – and the universal poet of women and young people'. He writes about domestic scenes and romantic love, but any passion is curbed by propriety, images and metaphors sound more calculated than personal. But these very limits explain his huge popularity and the reason why he was a family poet. The dexterity with which he used metrical and rhyme schemes also means that much of his poetry should be read aloud. Poems such as *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (1845, a love story set during the deportation of the Acadians to Canada), *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855, the romantic vision of a 'noble savage') and *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858, about the conflict between love and friendship) were favourites in most people's homes.

A Quaker and the son of a farmer, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-92) wrote in the tradition of Robert Burns. He was concerned with the lives of America's common

23. antebellum: d'avant la guerre de Sécession

people, farmers in particular, whom he described with sentimentality, nostalgia and honesty (*The Panorama and Other Poems*, 1856, 'Snowbound', 1866). He was a fervent defender of the abolitionist cause and in *Voices of Freedom* (1846) and many other poems he addressed the question of slavery with pathos and anger.

A poet, critic and journalist, James Russell Lowell (1819-91) composed his best poetry before the Civil War. His fame later earned him diplomatic appointments to England and Spain. He is now best remembered for his active campaigning against slavery, child labour, capital punishment and in favour of woman suffrage – opinions expressed, though somewhat flatly, in *Poems* (1844). Lowell's opposition to the Mexican War and his support for the cause of the Union find more forceful literary expression in the *Biglow Papers* (1848), written in Yankee dialect and attributed to a New England farmer, Hosea Biglow. Lowell believed that the language of uneducated people, was more vigorous and original. They constitute a fierce satire* on 'Manifest Destiny':

'They jest want this Californy
So's to lug new slave-states in
To abuse ye, an' to scorn ye,
An' to plunder ye like sin.'

Lowell's gift for satire* is also at his best in his *Fable for Critics*, which unites literary criticism and descriptions of contemporary writers.

From 'Song of Myself' (1855, Section 6), Walt Whitman

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is, any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
5 A scented gift and remembrancer, designedly' dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark,
and say, Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic;
And it means, Sprouting ²alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
10 Growing among black folks as among white;
Kanuck³, Tuckahoe⁴, Congressman, Cuff⁵, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you, curling grass;
 It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men;
 15 It may be if I had known them I would have loved them;
 It may be you are from old people, and from women, and from offspring⁶ taken
 soon out of their mothers' laps;
 And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers;
 Darker than the colorless beards of old men;
 20 Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues!
 And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
 And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of
 their laps.

25 What do you think has become of the young and old men?
 And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere;
 The smallest sprout shows there is really no death;
 And if ever there was, it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
 30 And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward—nothing collapses;
 And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

1. designedly: *exprès*. 2. to sprout: *pousser, germer*. 3. Kanuck: French Canadian. 4. Tuckahoe: Virginian. 5. Cuff: negro. 6. offspring: children.

Section 6 of 'Song of Myself' is central to Whitman's poetry since it concerns the meaning of the grass, and explains the title of the collection, *Leaves of Grass*.

■ SELF-CONFIDENCE

– From doubt to confidence:

The structure of this section is that of a search. Starting with the child's question ('What is the grass?'), the passage offers a series of answers in which the progression is from mystery to understanding, from searching to knowing. The movement is from 'I do not know' (l. 2) to 'I guess', then to 'it seems to me'. From then on (l. 13), uncertainty gives way to assurance, so that the poet himself starts asking questions (l. 25-26) but immediately answers them (l. 27-32).

At first the answers take the form of metaphors (the flag, the handkerchief, a hieroglyphic), which are vague in their meaning, then they become clear statements.

– The poet as prophet:

The poet's 'I' is central to the section: he is the one who 'translates' (l. 23) the significance of the grass, in relation to his own self (l. 3), to God (l.4-6), to life and reproduction (l. 7-11) and to death (l. 12-32). The last six lines seem to be spoken with supreme and calm confidence, announcing truths about death and about the dead.

The impression that we hear a voice speaking with growing authority is underlined by the use of lines that represent breath units, without any regular stanzas or rhymes. The use of parallel structures and anaphora (l. 14-16) sounds biblical. Whitman is here a seer who addresses us, often directly (l. 25-26).

■ THE GRASS AS A SYMBOL OF DEMOCRACY

The grass, a humble plant, with an infinity of blades, stands for universality and democracy, for many in one. The examples Whitman gives link the grass to blacks and whites (l. 10), to Northerners and Southerners (l. 11). It unites young men and old people, children and mothers (l. 14-17).

■ THE GRASS AS A SYMBOL OF IMMORTALITY

The grass which sprouts again and again represents immortality. And when it grows over graves, it is as if it transformed, metamorphosed the dead, it is 'the uncut hair of graves'. Life is here seen as a cycle. Every existence goes through birth, growth, death and rebirth, like that of a blade of grass. The grass grows again from the dead (l. 28) and this miracle of renewal reconciles the poet to death, which explains the last line of the section and the adjective 'luckier'. Everywhere in the universe there is a movement 'onward and outward' (l. 31), evolution goes on though the individual dies.

■ THE GRASS AS A SYMBOL OF UTTERANCE

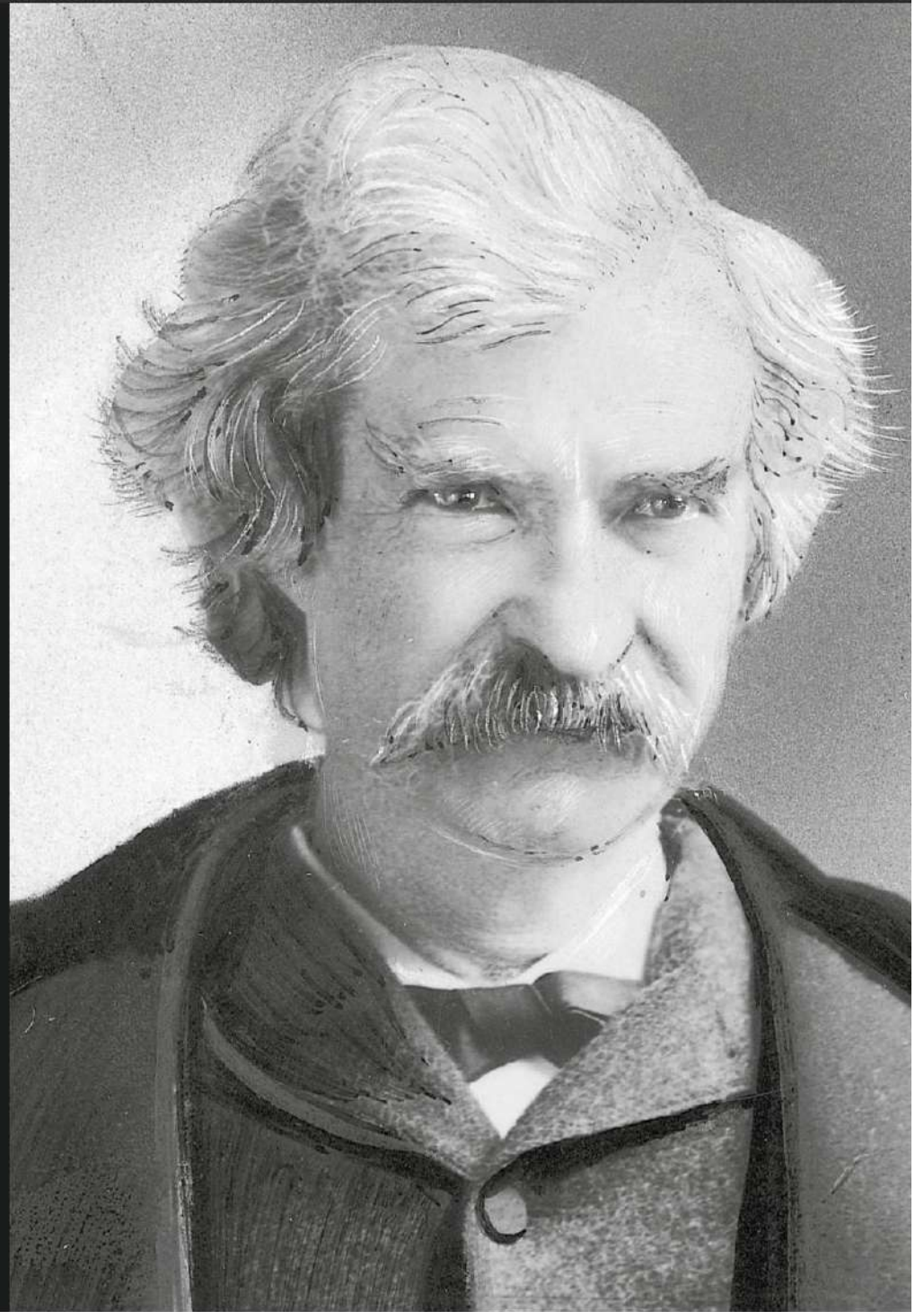
The grass, which also comes from the 'red roofs of mouths' (l. 20), which stands for 'uttering tongues' (l. 21), which sprouts and grows and transpires, is also a symbol of utterance, of poetic expression, of prophecy. The poet is indeed the one who 'translates' for others, who conveys to them his faith in human beings, his individual and political optimism.



THE AGE OF REALISM (1865-1915)



MARC TWAIN



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|---------|---|--|
| 1865 | Confederate forces surrender; 13th Amendment abolishes slavery; Lincoln assassinated. | |
| 1865-77 | Reconstruction; Ku Klux Klan organised. | |
| 1867 | Alaska purchased from Russia. | Alger: <i>Ragged Dick</i> |
| 1869 | First transcontinental railroad | |
| 1870 | | Hart: <i>The Luck of Roaring Camp</i> Metropolitan Museum of Art; Boston Museum of Fine Art |
| 1875 | | Eakins: <i>The Gross Clinic</i> Whistler: <i>Nocturne in Blue and Gold</i> |
| 1875-76 | Second Sioux War; Battle of Little Big Horn: Custer defeated. | |
| 1876 | Bell invents telephone. | Twain: <i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i> |
| 1877 | Federal troops leave the South: end of Reconstruction. | |
| 1879 | Edison perfects light bulb. | |
| 1881 | | James: <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i> |
| 1883 | | Roebing: Brooklyn Bridge completed. |
| 1884 | | Twain: <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> Sargent: <i>Madame X</i> |
| 1885 | | First skyscraper in Chicago |
| 1886 | American Federation of Labor created. | |
| 1887 | Dawes Act provides for the settlement of Indians on homesteads. | |
| 1890 | Frontier closed; Ellis Island becomes immigration depot; Sioux massacred at Wounded Knee. | |

| | | |
|------|--|--|
| 1893 | Chicago World's Columbian Exposition; Wall Street Krach; Turner: <i>The Significance of the Frontier in American History</i> | |
| 1895 | | Crane: <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> |
| 1896 | 'Separate but equal' facilities for blacks upheld by Supreme Court. | Beginning of motion pictures |
| 1898 | Spanish-American War | |
| 1899 | | Veblen: <i>The Theory of the Leisure Class</i> Norris: <i>McTeague</i> ; Chopin: <i>The Awakening</i> |
| 1900 | | Dreiser: <i>Sister Carrie</i> |
| 1901 | | Norris: <i>The Octopus</i> Washington: <i>Up from Slavery</i> |
| 1903 | Wright brothers' first flight | James: <i>The Ambassadors</i> ; London: <i>The Call of the Wild</i> ; Dubois: <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> |
| 1905 | | Wharton: <i>The House of Mirth</i> |
| 1906 | | Sinclair: <i>The Jungle</i> |
| 1907 | Peak immigration year: 1,285,000 immigrants enter US. | Adams: <i>The Education of Henry Adams</i> ; William James: <i>Pragmatism</i> |
| 1908 | Ford's first Model T | Ash Can School paintings exhibited |
| 1909 | NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) founded. | Stein: <i>Three Lives</i> Wright: <i>Robie House</i> |
| 1912 | | Pound: <i>Some Imagist Poets</i> Cather: <i>O Pioneers!</i> Frost: <i>A Boy's Will</i> |
| 1913 | | Armory Show Woolworth building tallest in the world |
| 1915 | <i>Lusitania</i> torpedoed. | Masters: <i>Spoon River Anthology</i> Griffith: <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> |
| 1917 | United States declares war on Germany. | |
| 1955 | | Dickinson: <i>Poems</i> |

*'We live in an age in which the impact of materialized forces
is well-nigh irresistible; the spiritual nature is overwhelmed by the shock.'*
(Theodore Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, 1911)

The decades which followed the Civil War radically changed the face of America and transformed it into a modern nation. The war had been a conflict between two visions of democracy: an agrarian as opposed to an industrial and capitalistic one. The victory of the North was also that of industrialism. While the South was left impoverished, the North thrived and made the United States the first industrial power in the world. Material and mechanical advances had a considerable impact on all aspects of life. The Atlantic cable (1866), the transcontinental railroad (1869), the telephone (1876) and the automobile (1890s) brought a revolution in communications. Some twelve million immigrants arrived from Europe between 1870 and 1900 and mainly settled in cities, New York's population increasing fivefold during the same period, encouraging mass culture and mass consumption.

One century after the Declaration of Independence, Philadelphia held the Centennial Exposition, which nearly ten million people attended. Featuring presses and machines powered by a gigantic steam engine, it symbolized the nation's considerable domination. And some four centuries after Columbus discovered the New World, the Columbian Exposition of 1893 offered an idealized urban picture of a neoclassical White City, not featuring any of the new skyscrapers, but a utopian dream which mirrored the new ideology of success. However, the huge wealth generated by industry during this 'Gilded Age' (as Mark Twain called it) was not shared equally. Andrew Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth* (1889) or Russell Conwell's sermon 'Acres of Diamonds' (1882, 'I say that you ought to get rich, and it is your duty to get rich ... The men who get rich may be the most honest men you find in the community. Let me say here clearly ... ninety-eight out of one hundred of the rich men of America are honest. That is why they are rich...') testify to the intoxicating power of money, which fed the dreams of young people in Horatio Alger's novels. John D. Rockefeller too applied Darwinian laws to business when he reportedly said that 'the growth of a large business is merely survival of the fittest'. The last two decades of the century were the golden age of American capitalist potentates (or 'robber barons'): John P. Morgan, a powerful banker; Andrew Carnegie, who dominated the steel industry, and John D. Rockefeller, who controlled the oil industry. They amassed huge fortunes, although they were also great philanthropists who gave money to charities and founded educational and cultural institutions.

The accumulation of wealth, linked to corruption and greed, was denounced by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Indeed, political corruption, labour disputes, strikes, financial panic, and the crowded conditions of life in the tenements of large cities (exposed by Jacob Riis in *How the Other Half Lives*, 1890, a book which contained striking photographs of poverty) were some

of the worst consequences of capitalism's unchecked greed. Discontent with the social and economic situation of the nation led some writers to turn to utopianism, like Edward Bellamy with *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888), in which the hero, like Rip Van Winckle earlier, falls asleep and wakes up over a century later in an America which has become a socialist utopia. In the last decade of the century, naturalism found a fertile ground for study in the large cities of the Northeast. Transcendentalist idealism was clearly a thing of the past.

There were other victims in those post-war years, and several communities claimed recognition as human beings or as citizens. In spite of their victory over General Custer's army in 1876, Native Americans were pushed into reservations, where they expressed their pride and protest with songs, speeches, and collections of Indian songs and stories. As for black people, the end of slavery in the south was followed by bitter racial divisions. When the Supreme Court made segregation constitutional (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896), separation became institutionalised.

These years, however, were not without social and cultural gains. Literacy improved with education; museum, libraries, musical societies and orchestras flourished everywhere, and literature, often through popular magazines, was no longer confined to an elite. With the opening of the Armory Show in 1913, an exhibition of European and American art, the United States culturally entered the modern age.

POETRY

The decades between the Civil War and World War I were not years of introspection, and the writers who did search the depths of human consciousness were expatriates. The sentimental and genteel poetry of Longfellow and Whittier remained popular, but Emily Dickinson was an exception, perhaps because of her reclusive life.

Emily Dickinson (1830-86) was born and spent all her life in Amherst, Massachusetts. She studied at Amherst Academy then Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, never married and led the life of a recluse, but lived her inner life with great intensity. Brought up in a religious family, she rejected their god but her poetry shows the influence of the Bible and of the rhythm of hymns. Although she wrote nearly 1,800 poems, only seven were published in her life time, a complete edition coming out in 1955 only.

Emily Dickinson's poems were written in 1862 and 1863, but the war is hardly ever mentioned in them although they contain images of battle and dissolution. The homely life of a New England household is what provides the subject of most of the poems, ordinary scenes causing joy, despair, fear or celebration. Emily Dickinson likes humour* and puns* but can write harsh satires* on of the piety or prudery that surrounded her. Her best poems explore pain, funerals, anguish, and death, and lead to metaphysical questions about existential meaning, the visible and the invisible. Although Christian symbols are everywhere to be found, they do not support any institutional religion.

(‘Some keep the Sabbath going to Church – / I keep it, staying Home –’). She was also a keen observer of botany and nature. Most of all, her poetry is a probing into her own consciousness, her bouts of depression or her moments of anxiety.

Her poems are highly original, freeing verse from conventional constraints with her use of short lines (four-line hymn meters*) punctuated by dashes of different lengths, which create pauses, emphasis and a sense of dislocation. Slant rhyme* as well as elliptical language, indirectness of expression, and unusual metaphors* reflect her belief in the waywardness¹ of life, in the elusive² nature of reality. Enigmas and riddle* also contribute to that effect. The use of wit*, paradox* and occasional colloquial language show her indebtedness to Metaphysical poetry.

‘The Bustle in a House
The Morning after Death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon Earth –
The sweeping up the Heart
And putting Love away
We shall not want to use again
Until Eternity.’ (1951)

The poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), some of it written in antebellum Negro dialect, paved the way for the verse of the Harlem Renaissance. (‘We Wear the Mask’, 1896; ‘Sympathy’, 1899).

FICTION

■ Regional realism

The rapid expansion of the nation after the Civil War meant that the differences between regions became increasingly marked. New England stopped dominating literature, and people were eager to read about lives and customs in far away regions of the nation. Many believed that it would give the American novel its specificity and originality. Regional writing brought variety and energy into fiction and developed social and linguistic realism.

LOCAL COLOUR WRITING

Local colour writing is part of realism, but focuses more on the portrayal of a particular region, its speech, dialect and mannerisms. It is concerned with verisimilitude* and the detailed representation of the peculiarities of certain areas but sometimes includes elements of romance* and verges on sentimentality, nostalgia and romantic

1. waywardness: *les caprices*

2. elusive: *insaisissable, difficile à atteindre*

idealism. It can also treat the subject with humour*. In this kind of fiction small towns often became synonymous with happiness and homeliness and were glorified by such popular works as the children books by Louisa May Alcott (*Little Women*, 1868), the lithographs of Currier and Ives, and the domestic paintings of Eastman Johnson.

Other writers like Hamlin Garland (*Main-Travelled Roads*, 1891; *Crumbling Idols*, 1894) reacted against such rosy visions and exposed the bitter lives and drudgery³ of rural farmers in small towns where prejudice and narrow-mindedness were rife⁴, as Sinclair Lewis showed in the twentieth century.

Much local colour writing consisted of sketches and short stories, often published in magazines aimed at a mass audience. Their main legacy was the creation of a number of myths (the self-reliant pioneer, the myth of the small town) and the introduction of dialect and regional idioms into literature.

- In the South, literature often lamented the loss of the antebellum plantation life, although some novelists like George Washington Cable condemned racism and the weight of the southern myth (*The Grandissimes*, 1880; *Bonaventure*, 1888).

Kate Chopin (1850-1904) lived in Louisiana, then in St Louis where, after the death of her Creole husband, she brought up her six children. *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadia* (1897) are tales of Creole life, showing undercurrents of passion and racism under the civilised façade and the conflicts between personal yearnings and social demands. Her best work, *The Awakening* (1899) caused a scandal with its description of female desire. The protagonist, Edna Pontellier, increasingly dissatisfied with the stifling life of a respectable wife, tries art, separation and adultery to find fulfilment and her true identity.

Another Southern writer, Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908) became famous with his popular Uncle Remus tales written to preserve Negro folk literature, humorous stories told by animals in rich dialect and based on native legends (*Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, 1880).

- New England had its writers too, who focused on the rural world. Sarah Orne Jewett wrote short stories about remote farms and fishing towns on the seacoast of Maine (*The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 1896), describing the intense feelings that hide behind the serene surface of village life.

- The west was perhaps the region which contributed the greatest number of talents, and many of the frontier myths originate in their works. Bret Harte wrote about frontier life, its miners, outlaws and gamblers. His stories (*The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches*, 1870) unite realism, sentimentality and melodramatic stories. The western novels of Owen Wister (*The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*, 1902) are cowboy romances* as well as a lament for a world fast disappearing

3. drudgery: *travail pénible*

4. rife: *courant*

– the world also preserved for posterity in the paintings of Frederic Remington.

Willa Cather (1873-1947) was brought up in a Nebraska frontier town, and gave up her career as editor and journalist to devote her life to fiction. She wrote about the frontier, celebrating the courage of the pioneers, often women, who survived and tried to find fulfilment in spite of harsh and lonely lives. She often contrasts the human values of the past and the mercantilism of the present. In *O Pioneers!* (1913) Alexandra Bergson succeeds – through sheer willpower – in running the farm she has inherited. It is the industry, faith and determination of the heroine of *My Antonia* (1918) which keeps her going through hardship and ordeals. As Cather says, 'She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.'

It was Mark Twain who made the American regionalist novel internationally famous.

Samuel Clemens (1835-1910), who took the pseudonym **Mark Twain**, grew up on the Missouri frontier, and took a number of jobs (riverboat pilot, gold miner, journalist) before he became a successful writer and lecturer. Although he criticized the new God, Mammon, he enjoyed success, speculated with his newly earned money, but eventually lost it all. This and the death and illness of his wife and daughters darkened and embittered the last years of his life.

Twain often drew on the tall tales⁵ and humorous frontier stories which recounted the feats of ludicrous and superhuman heroes. They inspired his first story, 'The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County' (1869), based on a famous tall tale, but told with a gift for vivid characterization. *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) is a celebration of the river, the steamboats and its pilots and an elegy to his happy childhood. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and its sequel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) mark the apogee of his art.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn relates the picaresque⁶ journey of Huck and his black friend Jim, a runaway slave, down the Mississippi river on a raft, their meeting with a whole gallery of eccentric characters, and their succession of humorous and hare-brained schemes to escape capture. The Mississippi river functions as the mythic wilderness, a sort of Eden where Huck and Jim are one with nature. Huck's common sense, innocence and good heart constitute a counterpoint to the hypocrisy and inhumanity of those who sanction slavery. It is also a novel of initiation as the young Huck gradually gains moral maturity and chooses to follow his conscience rather than the laws of society. Twain was constantly on the side of children, orphans, often the innocent victims of a society where hypocrisy, pretension, gentility and folly too often prevailed. He was interested in common men and women and was fascinated by their speech, their colloquial language and rhythms. He particularly succeeded in rendering the pitch⁷ and rhythm of the two boys' speech. His prose has none of the conventional elegance which some attached to good literature but relies on slang, black dialect or Southern vernacular⁸.

5. the pitch: *le ton*

Twain's later novels (*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1889) are increasingly pessimistic and critical of the hypocrisy of religion and politics.

Another Western realist was **Ambrose Bierce** (1842-1914), who in his short stories denounced the realities of the Civil War with cynicism, brutality and sardonic wit⁹, but also, in the tradition of Poe, featured instances of mental unbalance and uncanny occurrences (*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, 1891). His *Devil's Dictionary* (1911) is a satirical dictionary of terms which ridicules political doublespeak and absurdity ('POLITICS, n. A strife⁶ of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage; HABEAS CORPUS. A writ⁷ by which a man may be taken out of jail when confined for the wrong crime.')

■ Psychological realism: the expatriates

Around the turn of the century, London and Paris attracted many Americans who turned their backs on the materialism and philistinism of American society. They were joined by artists like James Abbot McNeill Whistler and Mary Cassatt.

Henry James (1843-1916) was born into an intellectually distinguished family (his father was a philosopher and theologian, his brother William a psychologist and the philosopher of pragmatism). He was given an informal, but cosmopolitan and eclectic education as he toured Europe with his family. Henry James saw little possibility that art might flourish in America, too pragmatic, vacuous, and materialist a country. In 1876 he settled in Britain and became a British citizen in 1915, partly to show Britain his support in the war.

What he missed in America is what he had found in Europe: refined manners, aesthetic and cultural sophistication, though often at the cost of moral integrity. His short stories and novels develop this international theme, contrasting European reserve, finesse and decadence with American brashness and virtue. His American heroes and heroines are often wealthy, independent, but innocent and naïve; arriving in Europe, unconscious of social codes and mores, they often fall prey to the cupidity and corruption of the Old World. The eponymous⁸ heroine of *Daisy Miller* (1878), unaware of social conventions in Europe, acquires a reputation for misconduct. Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880) is the victim of a scheme that robs her of her inheritance and independence. In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), two lovers conspire to pretend love for the dying Milly Theale in order to gain her fortune and get married. *The Ambassadors* (1903) examines the cultural and moral motives that retain a young American in Paris and offers a confrontation of values between the two continents. In *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), James addresses the subject of evil and the supernatural, using an unreliable narrator to maintain ambiguity. Still experimenting with vision, James juxtaposes different points of view in *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897).

6. a strife: *un conflit*

7. a writ: *une assignation, un ordre*

Although James's earlier novels are portrayals of the polite society of his time in the socio-realist tradition, he was not so much interested in incidents as in the inner life of his characters, which becomes the real theme of his last three novels *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). He wanted to convey the complexity of consciousness and of interpretation in a world where appearances are deceptive. This is why this psychological study is expressed through a convoluted style, where statements are constantly qualified, information deferred, consciousness reflected indirectly through symbolic images and long running metaphors* – all of which can make his prose difficult and frustrating. Experimenting with narrative technique, James also rejected authoritative omniscient* narration, and used third-person narrators as 'centres of consciousness', so that everything we are told is filtered through the eyes of that central character. Such psychological realism paved the way for Woolf's and Joyce's later stream of consciousness*, a term coined by Henry James's brother William in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). But James's technique also cuts his characters off from reality, social as well as sexual.

James was also an influential critic. In *The Art of Fiction* (1884) he explained his conception of realism. The novel should not focus on external description, but reflect the drama of subjective life, something that could be achieved through a self-effacing role for the author and the use of 'reflectors', that is to say sensitive and intelligent characters used as centres of consciousness.

Edith Wharton (1862-1937) was a friend of Henry James, with whom she shared a cosmopolitan point of view and suspicion about both mass culture and growing capitalism. She was born into an affluent Old New York family, the epitome⁸ of gentility and philistinism. She married Edward Wharton, whom she divorced in 1913, and led the life of a society hostess in New York and Paris. But she had started publishing short stories as early as 1899. In 1907 she moved to France, and began to write prolifically.

Her favourite subject was the manners of society, which included a fascination with its outward signs, buildings, paintings, furnishings and clothes, all of which she viewed as an index to⁹ character. She cast a critical eye upon both the pretensions of the New York aristocracy ('the old society') and those of the newly rich social climbers ('the new society'). Waste, vacuity, gossip and sexual intrigue ruled everywhere. She was also sensitive to the way social codes and conventions could stifle and frustrate a woman's life, with submission or the material dangers of independence as the only choices. Lily Bart, the heroine of *The House of Mirth* (1905), endowed with beauty but no money, is trapped in a life she despises but wants to belong to. For Lily life is a struggle for survival. In other novels such as *Ethan Frome* (1911) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920), which deal with frustrated love, the same conflict is to be found between spontaneity, freedom and the weight of convention.

8. the epitome: la personification, la quintessence

9. an index to: un indicateur de

■ Naturalism

An editor and writer of fiction, verse and plays, and a champion of morality, William Dean Howells (1837-1920) defended the cause of realism and helped publish the works of several writers, including Henry James, Frank Norris and Stephen Crane. He defined realism as honesty, plausibility and 'the truthful treatment of material', which he demonstrated in his novels (*The Rise of Silas Lapham*, 1885, the story of financial bankruptcy accompanied by moral redemption), rejecting however anything not 'genteel', any frank description of squalor or sex. This is a view that was on the whole respected in regional realism but was to be challenged with naturalism. Henry Adams (1838-1918), born into a prestigious family, wrote about history, politics and biography. Although not a naturalist, he was interested in the forces that make history. *His Education of Henry Adams* (1907) is an autobiography in which he searches for answers, looking for a pattern in history but only finding disillusion, confusion and obscurity, believing that his time was moving towards chaos and technological anarchy. We hear the sometimes ironic, sometimes bitter voice of someone who feels he belongs to another age, one of the last American 'Brahmins'. It reflects the anxieties of his age.

NATURALISM

An extreme form of realism, naturalism applies the principles of determinism to fiction. Men are seen as conditioned by inner forces and drives as well as by environmental ones, forces they cannot understand or control. They are mere animals in the jungle of the world. Naturalism focuses on the causes, the scientific laws which explain actions. They find them in the works of Darwin (biological determinism and heredity, and the view of life as a lawless jungle), Marx (the economic and social forces which shape history), and Freud (inner, subconscious determinism). Naturalistic novels are pessimistic, viewing men as driven by fear, sex or hunger, mere puppets in a cruel universe. As for the novelists, they are like scientists, gathering data in order to reproduce reality as faithfully as possible. Violence, excess and sensationalism are common features in American naturalism. Naturalism ran counter to most American beliefs (free will, individualism, optimistic belief in progress) and only came to America in the last decade of the 19th century.

Frank Norris (1870-1902) studied at Berkeley and Harvard before working as a journalist and an editor. His works unite naturalism (which he defended in *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*) and truth, by which he meant romance. He reconciled both since for him naturalism went hand in hand with sensationalism and appalling tragedies which affect the heart and the soul of man and the whole of the human condition. 'These great terrible dramas... [happen] among the lower – almost the lowest – classes; those who are falling by the roadway. This is not romanticism – this

drama of the people working itself out in blood and ordure. It is not realism. It is a school by itself, unique, somber, powerful beyond words. It is naturalism.' ('Zola as a Romantic Writer') *McTeague* (1899) shows how chance, poverty and heredity lead the coarse hero into alcoholism, brutishness and murder. The melodramatic end depicts McTeague dying in Death Valley, handcuffed to the man he has just killed. In order to paint a vast picture of America, Norris began to write a 'trilogy of wheat' to show its growth (*The Octopus*), marketing and distribution (*The Pit*) and consumption (*The Wolf*, which remained unwritten). *The Octopus* (1901), Norris's masterpiece, is set in California and centres on the conflict between wheat farmers and the railroad, which like an octopus spreads its tentacles everywhere in the state, dispossessing farmers of their land. It explores the way powerful forces, for instance the Machine, control individuals. Norris is at his best when he describes huge panoramic scenes of action, for instance when the engine, the 'Cyclopean monster', runs over a whole flock of sheep, a modern 'massacre of the innocents'.

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) was born into a Methodist family, from whom he inherited his ethical concerns. He left college before graduating, led a Bohemian life and worked as a journalist, covering the 1890s wars, before dying of tuberculosis. The 'slice out of life' Crane wanted to give his readers was governed by sex, violence and death. His novels and stories depict lives ruled by chance and determinism, in which religion, justice, motives or reason play no part and nature is indifferent to human need. Set in New York's Lower East Side, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) 'tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless.' The novel describes how Maggie's squalid Bowery tenement defines her life and leads her to suicide.

The Red Badge of Courage (1895) relates a soldier's experience in the Civil War.

Henry Fleming (called 'the youth') dreams of heroism and glory, but runs from the field during the first battle. A minor wound he gets from a retreating soldier will ironically be taken as a battle wound. The novel is a study in fear and courage as well as a tale of initiation. A realistic novel, in that it is the first unromanticised account of the experience of the Civil war, it is also naturalistic, showing how Henry's actions are shaped by society and psychology. Crane's use of startling images, colours and symbols also partakes of¹⁰ symbolism and impressionism. The scenes of battles offer a haze and confusion of noises and images which dramatize the hero's disorientation, as in the following lines, which describe the youth's first battle:

He slowly lifted his rifle and catching a glimpse of the thickspread field he blazed at¹¹ a cantering¹² cluster¹³. He stopped then and began to peer as best as he could through the smoke. He caught changing views of the ground covered with men who were all running like pursued imps¹⁴, and yelling.

10. to partake of: *participer de*

11. to blaze at: *tirer sur*

12. to canter: *aller au petit galop*

13. a cluster: *un groupe*

14. an imp: *un lutin*

To the youth it was an onslaught¹⁵ of redoubtable dragons. He became like the man who lost his legs at the approach of the red and green monster. He waited in a sort of a horrified, listening attitude. He seemed to shut his eyes and wait to be gobbled¹⁶.

The novel is allegorical¹⁷ as well, with constant Christian references. By juxtaposing the narrator's objective point of view and the character's subjective one, Crane ironically underlines Henry's constant self-deception.

Crane also wrote poetry, which shows his indebtedness to Emily Dickinson.

Jack London (1876-1916) had little formal education, began a life of odd jobs at fourteen, then joined the gold rush to the Klondike, all the while developing an interest in sociology and socialist literature, and went on working as a journalist, covering several conflicts all over the world.



Winslow Homer, *The Fox*, 1893, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Winslow Homer's late paintings mirror Darwin's theory of natural selection and the indifference of the natural world. In this painting, the fox is running in the snow to try and escape the predatory crows hovering over him. The point of view is from low down, which heightens the viewer's empathy with the fox, thus reversing our usual view of it as a rapacious animal.

London was a prolific writer who published a large number of novels and stories. A recurrent theme in his fiction is the struggle between man and forces larger than he is. But London was always torn between his desire for social justice and his belief in the survival of the fittest. His fierce individualism and compassion for others were

15. an onslaught: *une attaque*

16. to gobble: *engloutir*

constantly at odds. London was a gifted story-teller and his best works are adventure stories, many of them taking place in the world of nature.

Both *The Call of the Wild* (1902) and *White Fang* (1906) are written from the point of view of dogs. *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), perhaps an attack against Nietzsche's superman philosophy, relates the clash between Wolf Larsen, a powerful, ruthless captain, and some of his passengers. *Martin Eden* (1909) is a semiautobiographical novel.

The feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) used evolutionary theory to justify gender equality. In *Women and Economics* (1898), she held that the constraints patriarchy imposed on women repressed their potential and prevented social evolution, in sharp contrast to current scientific views according to which women's subjection was the *result* of natural selection. Her well-known 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) is the story of a woman driven mad by the isolation her husband imposes on her.

With Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945), the city entered the novel. Around the turn of the century, the city tended to be hailed¹⁷ as a place of democracy, a testing ground for reform. Some, like the painters of the Ash Can School, turning their backs on European modernism, regarded the city and its tenements as the place where real life was to be found. Urban America provided Dreiser with the setting for his novels, cities rich in promises, desire, materialism, fulfilment or disaster. He was born in Indiana into a family of poor Catholic immigrants, was self-educated and held various jobs in journalism and editing.

Sister Carrie (1900), banned for twelve years, is a landmark novel in the history of naturalism. Its eponymous* heroine is a dreamer, for whom Chicago represents the possibility of glamour, fashion and wealth. Her story translates the search for the American Dream to the big city. It traces Carrie's progress from small jobs to seduction and adultery in order to climb the ladder of her dreams. The fact that her ascension means the downfall and suicide of her protector leaves her indifferent. It is this lack of any moral sense which most shocked readers at the time. As for Dreiser he seems to view it with a mixture of fascination for her yearnings and compassion for the victims she leaves around her. The pursuit of the American dream leads to success or suicide, morality or will playing little part in the outcome.

Dreiser's next works also illustrate Social Darwinism. In his 'trilogy of desire' (*The Financier*, 1912; *The Titan*, 1914; *The Stoic*, p. 1947) Frank Cowperwood is the embodiment of an ambitious man who rises to financial and sexual domination. Clyde Griffiths, the anti-hero of *An American Tragedy* (1925) is selfish, rapacious and weak, and falls victim to his sexual appetite, which leads him to death row, after being accused of murder.

Dreiser's writing is marked by repetitions and an accumulation of details in an attempt to be as comprehensive a witness of his time as he can.

17. to hail: *saluer*

■ The Muckrakers

The term (which comes from the name of a character in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*) was derogatorily¹⁸ given to writers who, between 1902 and 1911, denounced social ills (poverty, immigration, overcrowding in large cities) and the corruption rampant¹⁹ in big business as well as in politics at all levels. Their condemnation first appeared in magazines, then in some novels, the best-known being *The Jungle* (1906) by Upton Sinclair (1878-1968), which exposes the American Dream as illusory. Jurgis Rudkus, a Lithuanian immigrant, works in the meat-packing industry in the Chicago stockyards²⁰, where he is exploited by the foreman, the real-estate sharks, and the greedy owners. After becoming thief and highwayman, he becomes converted to socialism. *The Jungle* contained lurid²¹ and sensational scenes, like that of a boy being eaten by rats, and it contributed to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

■ African American voices

Segregation gave rise to a large range of responses from the black community, advocating participation or rebellion.

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) believed in conciliation and dialogue between the communities. His autobiography, *Up from Slavery* (1901) describes his rise from dire poverty to gain literacy, improve himself and become President of Tuskegee Institute. It also tells the reader how he too can rise, and expresses his view that progress would come for black people through hard work and determination. His success and political accommodation gained him many white supporters, but also alienated other black leaders who were in favour of more radical action.

The life and vision of W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) could not be more different. Brought up in a middle-class family, he was the first black student to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. He became extremely influential as a teacher and radical activist within the NAACP. In his essays *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) he shows how black people have been robbed of identity and only see themselves through the eyes of others, what he calls the 'double consciousness' of 'the Negro', shut out from white people by 'a veil'. The book covers a large range of genres and subjects (history, fable, elegy, music, religion, education), all urging political and economic participation for black people.

18. derogatorily: *de façon dénigrante*

19. rampant: *endémique*

20. a stockyard: *un parc à bestiaux*

21. lurid: *à sensation, épouvantable*

Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881): psychological realism

— This mistrust was now the clearest result of their short married life; a gulf had opened between them over which they looked at each other with eyes that were on either side a declaration of the deception suffered. It was a strange opposition, of the like of which she had never dreamed – an opposition in which the vital principle of the one was a thing of contempt to the other. It was not her fault – she had practised no deception; she had only admired and believed. She had taken all the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity, it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, and where it served to deepen the feeling of failure. It was her deep distrust of her husband – this was what darkened the world. That is a sentiment easily indicated, but not so easily explained, and so composite in its character that much time and still more suffering had been needed to bring it to its actual perfection. Suffering, with Isabel, was an active condition; it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair; it was a passion of thought, of speculation, of response to every pressure. She flattered herself that she had kept her falling faith to herself, however, – that no one suspected it but Osmond. Oh, he knew it, and there were times when she thought he enjoyed it. It had come gradually – it was not till the first year of their life together, so admirably intimate at first, had closed that she had taken the alarm. Then the shadows had begun to gather; it was as if Osmond deliberately, almost malignantly, had put the lights out one by one. The dusk at first was vague and thin, and she could still see her way in it. But it steadily deepened, and if now and again it had occasionally lifted there were certain corners of her prospect that were impenetrably black. These shadows were not an emanation from her own mind: she was very sure of that; she had done her best to be just and temperate, to see only the truth. They were a part, they were a kind of creation and consequence, of her husband's very presence. They were not his misdeeds, his turpitudes; she accused him of nothing – that is but of one thing, which was not a crime. She knew of no wrong he had done; he was not violent, he was not cruel: she simply believed he hated her. That was all she accused him of, and the miserable part of it was precisely that it was not a crime, for against a crime she might have found redress. He had discovered that she was so different, that she was not what he had believed she would prove to be. He had thought at first he could change her, and she had done her best to be what he would like. But she was, after all, herself – she couldn't help that; and now there was no use pretending, wearing a mask or a dress, for he knew her and had made up his mind. She was not afraid of him; she had no apprehension he would hurt her; for the ill-will he bore her was not of that sort. He would if possible never give her a pretext, never put himself in the wrong. Isabel, scanning the future with dry, fixed eyes, saw that he would have the better of her there. She would give him many pretexts, she would often put herself in

— the wrong. There were times when she almost pitied him; for if she had not deceived him in intention she understood how completely she must have done so in fact. She had effaced herself when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was. It was because she had been under the extraordinary charm that he, on his side, had taken pains to put forth. He was not changed; he had not disguised himself, during the year of his courtship, any more than she. But she had seen only half his nature then, as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth. She saw the full moon now – she saw the whole man. She had kept still, as it were, so that he should have a free field, and yet in spite of this she had mistaken a part for the whole. (Chapter 42)

■ THE CONTEXT

Isabel Archer, an idealistic American girl, visits wealthy relatives in England and although courted by two eligible gentlemen, chooses to marry Gilbert Osmond, an American dilettante and art-collector residing in Italy. She soon realizes that he had a mistress and an illegitimate daughter and is mainly interested in the money she has inherited. She represents American innocence falling victim to European experience. James described the novel as the story of 'a certain young woman affronting her destiny'.

■ THE POINT OF VIEW

James developed the 'limited point of view' technique and the idea of the 'reflector', a character who is not the narrator, but the one through whose eyes we see. This is indeed the case here, where the narrator's vision is limited to what the reflector – Isabel, an intelligent and sensitive reflector – sees and feels. She is like a filter between the narrator and reality. This device helps the reader get closer to the character. So in spite of the third-person narrative what we have here is a long interior monologue.

■ A DOUBLE STRUCTURE

– Chronological: from past (a reassessment of her married life, l. 1- 37) to present (l. 31-47, introduced by 'now'), to future (l. 42-44), back to the past (l. 44-51) and the present (last two lines).

– Metaphorical: several clusters of metaphors also give the text its structure and convey Isabel's feeling of entrapment and failure:

- first architectural metaphors (vista, wall, high place...), with 'darkened the world' (14) as a transition: the movement is from openings ('vista') to imprisonment ('dead wall');
- then metaphors of light and darkness (shadows, put the lights out, dusk, black), the movement being towards darkness (which mirrors Isabel's progress in the novel, from light to dusk);
- finally to deception, lack of vision (mask, dress, effaced, disguised) to reach vision, that is to say lucidity, at the end (the verb 'see' appears four times in the last three lines).

The feeling of imprisonment is all the more distressing for her as she believes in the freedom of the individual.

■ INTELLECTUAL LUCIDITY AND MORAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

– Isabel's meditation reflects her passion for truth and her need to understand what happened. She sees her situation as the result of mistrust (l. 1), of deception (l. 3, 43), believing in perfect openness in a relationship. Hence the metaphor of vision. But there is dramatic irony in the fact that Isabel believes she has reached understanding, yet is still mistaken about Osmond ('They were not his misdeeds, his turpitudes', l. 30, 'he had not disguised himself', l. 48), whose depravity she has not yet fully discovered. Such irony is underlined by the use of free indirect speech, lines 34-36 not being 'spoken' by an omniscient narrator, but by Isabel.

– Isabel first accuses her husband (l. 5-6) but her passionate desire to be fair and honest leads her to accuse herself in exactly the same terms (l. 43-44), thus ending up unfair to herself.

■ A 'PASSION OF THOUGHT'

Most of all, with Isabel's soul-searching vigil, James succeeds in rendering the activity and tumult of a mind – a first step towards stream of consciousness. In order to convey the complexity of Isabel's thoughts, James uses indirectness and delayed clarification:

– the vocabulary remains vague or metaphorical, avoiding directness, and with many Latinate words (ex: declaration, apprehension, impenetrably);

– clarification comes gradually only, delayed by doubts and restrictions. In lines 26 to 32, for example, the reader expects a description or an explanation of the 'shadows' which had gathered around Isabel. But the first sentence describes what they were not ('not an emanation from her own mind'); the second sentence remains vague ('a kind of creation'); the third sentence again starts with a statement of what the problem was not ('not his misdeeds'... 'nothing') until the expression 'but of one thing' seems to announce final clarification, only to be once again delayed by a further negative statement ('not a crime'). Only in the next sentence, after two further negative clauses, does Isabel's explanation appear: 'she simply believed he hated her'.

This is James's way of rendering the consciousness of his heroine. Her thoughts are 'crowding to the foreground' (as is mentioned earlier in the novel), and there is no need to spell them out. Besides, indirectness, ambiguity and meanderings convey the complexity and richness of thought at one given moment and the slow progress towards reaching understanding or decision.



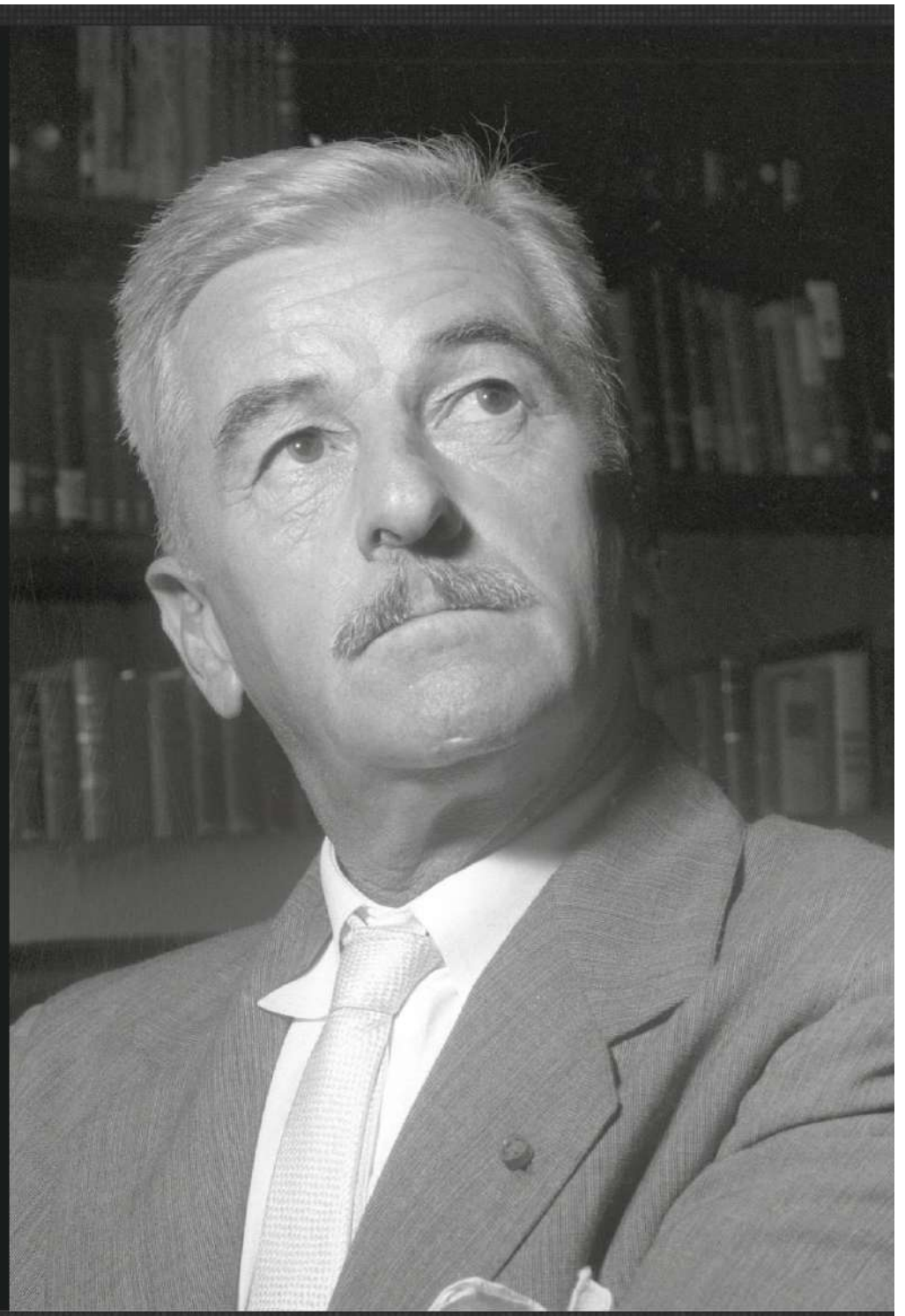
Sargent, *Portrait of Lady Helen Vincent, Viscountess D'Abernon*, 1904.



THE AGE
OF
MODERNISM
(1915-1945)



WILLIAM FAULKNER



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|------|---|---|
| 1916 | | Sandburg: <i>Chicago Poems</i> |
| 1917 | | Eliot: 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' |
| 1918 | Armistice; 18 th Amendment (prohibition) ratified; Beginning of the 'Red Scare' after the Russian Revolution | |
| 1919 | | Anderson: <i>Winesburg, Ohio</i> Beginning of the Harlem Renaissance |
| 1920 | 19th Amendment gives women the voting right; US refuses to join the League of Nations. | Lewis: <i>Main Street</i> Wharton: <i>The Age of Innocence</i> |
| 1921 | | Robinson: <i>Collected Poems</i> ; Moore: <i>Poems</i> Melford: <i>The Sheik</i> |
| 1922 | | Eliot: <i>The Waste Land</i> Lewis: <i>Babbitt</i> |
| 1923 | Terrorist Ku Klux Klan activities in Oklahoma | Toomer: <i>Cane</i> Stevens: <i>Harmonium</i> |
| 1924 | Quota laws restrict immigration. | Gershwin: <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> First Disney cartoon |
| 1925 | Scopes trial (for teaching theory of evolution in Tennessee) | Fitzgerald: <i>The Great Gatsby</i> Dos Passos: <i>Manhattan Transfer</i> Dreiser: <i>An American Tragedy</i> Pound: <i>A Draft of XVI Cantos</i> Chaplin: <i>The Gold Rush</i> |
| 1926 | | Hughes: <i>The Weary Blues</i> Hemingway: <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> Man Ray: <i>Black and White</i> First film with sound |
| 1927 | Sacco & Vanzetti executed; Lindbergh flies across the Atlantic. | Hopper: <i>Automat</i> |
| 1929 | Stock market crash; beginning of Great Depression | Faulkner: <i>The Sound and the Fury</i> Hemingway: <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> Wolfe: <i>Look Homeward, Angel</i> Opening of MoMA in New York Hart Crane: <i>The Bridge</i> |
| 1930 | | Porter: <i>Flowering Judas</i> ; Faulkner: <i>As I Lay Dying</i> ; Hammett: <i>The Maltese Falcon</i> |

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| | | O'Neill: <i>Mourning Becomes Electra</i> |
| 1931 | Five million unemployed. | Empire State Building opens. Demuth: <i>Buildings Abstraction, Lancaster</i> |
| 1932 | | Faulkner: <i>Light in August</i> |
| 1933 | Roosevelt president; beginning of New Deal; end of prohibition | Caldwell: <i>God's Little Acre</i> |
| 1934 | | Fitzgerald: <i>Tender is the Night</i> Williams: <i>Collected Poems, 1921-31</i> Miller: <i>Tropic of Cancer</i> Eliot: <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i> |
| 1935 | Social Security Act | Gershwin: <i>Porgy and Bess</i> Evans starts FSA photographs |
| 1936 | | Wright: <i>Falling Water house</i> |
| 1937 | | Stevens: <i>The Man with the Blue Guitar</i> |
| 1938 | Fair Labor Standards Act (legislates about working hours and minimum wage) | Dos Passos: <i>U.S.A.</i> (trilogy) Cummings: <i>Collected Poems</i> Wilder: <i>Our Town</i> |
| 1939 | Britain and France declare war on Germany. | Steinbeck: <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> West: <i>The Day of the Locust</i> Frost: <i>Collected Poems</i> Chandler: <i>The Big Sleep</i> Ford: <i>Stagecoach</i> Stella: <i>The Brooklyn Bridge</i> |
| 1940 | | Wright: <i>Native Son</i> Hemingway: <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i> McCullers: <i>The Heart is a Lonely Hunter</i> |
| 1941 | Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; the US enters the war. | Welles: <i>Citizen Kane</i> Huston: <i>The Maltese Falcon</i> (beginning of Film Noir) |
| 1942 | | Curtiz: <i>Casablanca</i> |
| 1943 | | Eliot: <i>Four Quartets</i> |
| 1944 | Allied landing in Normandy | |
| 1945 | Yalta Conference; surrender of Germany; atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. | Williams (T.): <i>The Glass Menagerie</i> Wright: <i>Black Boy</i> |

'Here was a new generation (...), a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken...'

(E. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*)

'we have only words against',
(John Dos Passos, *The Big Money*)

The brutality of the war left a sense of dislocation and anxiety that pervades much of literature between the two World Wars. The mood of optimism in the aftermath of victory did not last long. The country became more conservative and xenophobic, not just fearing the Bolsheviks (the 'Redscare' of 1919) but also any group that might destabilize the country, whether factory workers, African Americans or immigrants, with the quota laws of 1921 and 1924. The Scopes trial, the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, the rising membership of the Ku Klux Klan all bear testimony to growing chauvinism and intolerance.

Consumerism was now what mattered for most people, car, refrigerators, or the telephone becoming the index to¹ happiness. Women had gained the vote in 1920 and their emancipation helped usher a decade of glamour and excess. The Jazz Age, which Francis Scott Fitzgerald so well captured in his novels, was synonymous with partying, dancing the Charleston, flapper girls, smoking and bootlegging and testified to that headlong rush into the consumption of pleasure. As the American Dream was turning into a dream of the American way of life, the gap between the rich and the poor increased. Many writers and artists, finding America still in thrall to² the Puritanism, philistinism and materialism condemned by H.L. Mencken, reacted by settling in Paris, which Pound, Eliot, Stein, Wharton, James and Cassatt had turned into a cosmopolitan and intellectual capital. In spite of the 1913 Armory Show, which had allowed New York, Chicago and Boston to discover the works of Duchamp, Matisse and Picasso, the modernist spirit of renewal had mainly swept over Europe. In the arts, modernism took a variety of forms from cubism to vorticism and futurism. In literature the same revolution was taking place. In London, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot were rescuing poetry from Victorian conventions; in Paris Gertrude Stein gathered around her disciples concerned with linguistic experiments.

The 1929 crash, which led to the Great Depression, came as a shock and devastated the country. Between 1930 and 1934, unemployment rose from four to 12 million, and the wages paid to workers were halved between 1929 and 1932. It led to innumerable personal tragedies. The terrible drought³ that affected the middle states contributed to further stigmatize Capitalist America, with its grabbers and speculators. F.D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which meant federal government help, was something new

1. the index to: *l'indicateur de*

2. in thrall to: *assujettis à*

3. drought: *sécheresse*

in America, and introduced a new concept of federal involvement. The thirties writers and artists now defined themselves in social and political terms, in terms of commitment and collective enterprise. Writers as diverse as John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, Richard Wright or Dashiell Hammett, became chroniclers of their time, often espousing Marxist ideas, at least until the 1939 German-Soviet non-aggression pact brought disillusionment. In painting social realism reappeared in the tradition of the Ashcan school and photojournalism emerged with the publication of Margaret Bourke-White and her husband Erskine Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), and of James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), a series on Alabama families, which endows their lives with a sense of tragedy.

POETRY

The second decade of the 20th century witnessed the birth of modern American poetry, marked by the founding of Poetry magazine in Chicago in 1912.

■ The Imagists and the Modernists

Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot (→ p. 144) brought in a revolution which led to 'New Criticism' – formalist poets who privileged images, symbols and allusions, poetry that could be scientifically studied and dissected without any reference to the poet's personality. This will be true of the poetry of Marianne Moore, e. e. cummings, John Crowe Ransom and Randall Jarrell. A few poets, notably Kenneth Rexroth and Archibald MacLeish denounced this movement away from American life and turned to politically engaged poetry focused on ordinary people and the abuse of capitalism.

The seminal influence of Ezra Pound (1885-1972), who revitalized American poetry, which he considered as the only means of redeeming⁴ culture, cannot be overstated. He lived in London, Paris and Italy, where he helped found both Imagism and Vorticism and championed several writers such as Yeats, Frost, Hemingway, Hilda Doolittle and Marianne Moore. He edited T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and exerted considerable influence on William Carlos Williams, Richard Aldington and Robert Lowell. Pound's support for Mussolini and criticism of the United States' involvement in the war led to his imprisonment in Italy, during which time he wrote the *Pisan Cantos*. Pound's first collection, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) expresses his shock at the violence of the war and criticism at the loss of values of an age that made it possible. His most important work is the *Cantos* (1948), an epic poem made up of fragments which juxtapose an impressive range of references (historical, geographical, classical) and quotations (in several European languages, with Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Chinese ideograms) in an attempt to create a coherent

4. to redeem: *racheter*

vision of the world. A central theme in his poetry, which explains his criticism of the United States, is the condemnation of 'usury', that is to say of the capitalist economy based on making and lending money.

IMAGISM

Imagism was a poetic movement which flourished in America at the beginning of the 20th century. The name comes from their first anthology, *Des Imagistes* (1914). Their verse was a reaction against the sentimentality, prolixity and conventional verse forms of Victorian poetry and argued for control and discipline. Influenced by Japanese haikus⁵, they advocated the language of common speech, the use of the exact word and clear, sharp-edged images, concentration, clarity and new rhythms suited to new moods.

The main imagist poets were Ezra Pound, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Amy Lowell, and William Carlos Williams. The movement also influenced poets such as T.S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens. Here is an example of an imagist poem:

The Red Wheelbarrow (William Carlos Williams)

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens

One of the foremost American modernists, William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) studied medicine and spent all his life working as a local doctor in New Jersey. He was close to avant-garde authors (Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens) and artists (Stieglitz, O'Keefe, the Precisionists). Williams wanted poetry to be about the commonplace and the local and to be as clear-edged as the paintings of his Precisionist friends Demuth and Sheeler. Such poetry about the 'here and now' ('no ideas but in things', he said) inspired the Objectivist group around Louis Zukofsky. Thus re-invented by the new perception of the poet, without any allegorical meaning, the object acquires a new resonance and freshness; it is given a voice. The result is poetry that is simple, controlled, un sentimental and that renews vision. *Spring and All* (1923), a response to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, is a celebration of the regenerative powers of the imagination. *Paterson* (1946-58) is a collage of verse and documents which constitutes an epic poem about the history of the local town of Paterson in New Jersey and beyond it, a vision of life.

The son of a lawyer, Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) studied law at Harvard, then worked as an executive for an insurance company in Connecticut. *Harmonium* (1923), *Ideas of Order* (1935), *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937) and *Collected*

Poems (1954) are reflections on the nature of reality. They illustrate the idea that the function of poetry is not to represent reality but to evoke something different, entirely based on imagination. 'Poetry is the subject of the poem', he wrote. He rejected all creeds and all systems, whether political or moral, contrasting them with poetry, which liberates imagination: 'After one has abandoned a belief in God, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption.' Stevens believed in the transformative power of imagination, which gives order and a pattern to the confusion of the universe. What we see is an image of the world created by our imagination, therefore constantly shifting. And poetry creates 'the perfect synthesis of reality and the imagination.'

Influenced by the French symbolists, his poetry is sophisticated, sensual, hedonistic, full of rare and sometimes outré images, yet witty and highly controlled. It is a way



Charles Demuth, *End of the Parade*: Coatesville, Pa., 1920. Collection of Mr and Mrs Paul H. Williams. Charles Demuth was a friend of William Carlos Williams and a Precisionist, one of the modernist painters who, in the 1920s depicted the industrial landscape of America (silos, factories, skyscrapers) with clear lines and simple geometry. They echo the splintered planes of Cubism and anticipate Pop Art.

1. to splinter: *fendre en éclats*

of heightening the ordinariness of the world, of showing it in a new light. It evokes an ideal world of art and music.

Hart Crane (1899-1932) left his Ohio family and settled in New York when he was 17. There, he started writing poetry while taking on a series of odd jobs and moved into a room from where he could see the Brooklyn Bridge and which, he later discovered, had once been occupied by Washington Roebling, the builder of the Brooklyn Bridge. A self-destructive alcoholic, he led a turbulent life and committed suicide when he was thirty-two.

White Buildings (1926) is a series of meditations of great rhetorical and lyrical skill. Rejecting the negative vision of Eliot, Crane chose to celebrate the nation and its technological achievements.

The Brooklyn Bridge (1883) dramatized for him the myth of America, a vision which he expressed in his poem *The Bridge* (1930). In an age of fragmentation, the bridge represented an attempt to find unity and harmony, what Crane called 'a mystical synthesis of America.' The bridge was for him a span⁵ between past and present, between east and west, materialism and idealism, land and sea, science and faith, man and God. In a search for American values, a large range of writers and explorers are invoked or evoked (Columbus, Poe, Whitman) before the poem reaches a dream of fusion and unity. The difficulty of the poem comes from the fact that it is based of 'the logic of metaphor', on the emotional associations between words rather than on rational development. It progresses like the ebb and flow of consciousness.

An avant-garde poet of great originality, Marianne Moore (1887-1972) was brought up in a strict Presbyterian family, from whom she inherited a constant tension between ethical control and her aesthetic appreciation of all aspects of life. After studying biology at Bryn Mawr College, she worked as a teacher, librarian and editor of *The Dial*. Her poetry (*Observations*, 1924, *Collected Poems*, 1951) records the world she observed (animals, plants, elements of the landscape) with wit*, playfulness, and formality. Her detailed study of the natural world is an attempt to understand its significance and often leads to ethical or philosophical reflections.

Striking in its technical subtlety ('I tend to write in patterned arrangements, with rhymes... to secure an effect of flowing continuity.'), her verse achieves a balance between freedom and control, being neither conventional nor free verse. She prefers highly personal stanzas, often in syllabic* verse. In the tradition of the imagists, she favours concision, compression and rich imagery and metaphors.

Where Moore felt the need for discipline E. E. Cummings (1894-1962 – he preferred using lower-case letters) chose poetic anarchy. After graduating from Harvard, he worked as an ambulance driver in the war and was mistakenly imprisoned for six months for treasonable correspondence, an experience he related in *The Enormous Room* (1922). He then studied painting in Paris before returning to America.

5. a span: ce qui permet d'enjamber

In his poetry (*Poems*, 1923-1954) he celebrated life, love, pleasure, spontaneity in any way that might oppose conformity and allow the liberation of the self. A satirist, he particularly attacked anything to do with materialism and advertising, Puritanism and respectability. Cummings loved puns*, coinages*, syntactic distortions and strange layouts for his poetry. Without conventional punctuation, capital letters, and traditional lines, his poems are almost visual ones and renew the forms of poetry while revealing his indebtedness to Cubism. The following poem, a satire* on patriotic cant and meaningless verbiage, is a good example of Cummings' humorous refusal of conformity.

"next to of course god america i"
 next to of course god america i
 love you land of the pilgrims¹ and so forth oh say can you
 see by the dawn's² early mry
 country 'tis of centuries come and go
 and are no more what of it we should worry
 in every language even deaf and dumb
 thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry³
 by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
 why talk of beauty what could be more beautiful
 than these heroic happy dead
 who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter⁴
 they did not stop to think they died instead
 then shall the voice of liberty⁵ be mute?
 He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

1. 'land of the pilgrim': from the patriotic song 'My country 'Tis of Thee'
 2. 'can you see by the dawn': from stanza 1 of the US national anthem (the Star Spangled Banner)
 3. 'by gory... by gum': common clichéd popular exclamations
 4. the metaphor is normally 'lambs to the slaughter'.
 5. 'the voice of liberty': an allusion to 'the Voice of Liberty' broadcasts of FDR's fireside chats.

■ Voices from Harlem

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural and literary movement which emerged in Harlem around black writers and artists from the early 1920s to the early 1930s. It was the city that made that Renaissance possible. Many factors had converged to accelerate the Great Migration of many blacks from the South to the cities of the North: racist violence, agricultural mechanisation, the boll weevil⁶, and the need for cheap labour in urban areas. Encouraged by the creation of the NAACP in 1909 as well as by passionate discussion about means of improving conditions (including Marcus Garvey's 'return to Africa' campaign), several young black writers settled in Harlem, which became the cultural centre of the black American community, and a magnet for painters, musicians, singers, actors, writers and journalists.

Although not organized into a movement with a programme, the Harlem Renaissance was a celebration of black pride and of one's African heritage. It emphasized solidarity, optimism and creativity. One of the common themes in the works of the

6. the boll weevil: l'anthoume (insecte) du cotonnier

Harlem Renaissance was the insistence on the primitive, the instinctive and the sensual, and the liberation from all conventions.

A landmark event in the history of the movement was the publication in 1925 of an anthology of black poetry and prose, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, edited by Alain Locke.

Many black artists belonged to the movement, for example instrumentalists like Duke Ellington (who played jazz in the Cotton Club) and Fats Waller, singers like Paul Robeson and Bessie Smith, dancers like Josephine Baker, painters like Aaron Douglas and Palmer Hayden.

The main writers were: Claude McKay (*Harlem Shadows*, 1922; *Home to Harlem*, 1928; *Banjo*, 1929), Jean Toomer (*Cane*, 1923), Countee Cullen (*Color*, 1925), Langston Hughes (*The Weary Blues*), 1926.

After a poor, lonely, childhood, Langston Hughes (1902-1967) studied at Lincoln University, and was active in the Harlem Renaissance and in radical politics. His poems (*The Weary Blues*, 1926, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, 1951) and short stories are concerned with the hardships, struggles and yearnings of Black Americans as well as with their racial and cultural pride. His short stories feature the humorous, apparently dull-witted, Jesse B. Simple, who views blacks and whites with tolerance and insight. His verse draws on the oral traditions of Black communities, the rhythm of the blues and the syncopation of jazz.

Harlem

What happens to a dream deferred?⁷

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?⁸

Or fester⁸ like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags⁹

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Jean Toomer (1894-1967) was a poet and novelist of mixed race. *Cane* (1923) is a modernist collage of stories, poems, and theatrical passages which dramatizes the experience of black people. It illustrates the great migration to the North. The first part is set in rural Georgia and focuses on the tragic lives of several women; the second part takes place in the ghettos of Washington D.C., where lives have become sterile and corrupted, while the third part returns to the South, where the narrator tries to define his black identity thanks to folklore, history and landscape.

7. to defer: *différer, remettre à plus tard*

8. to fester: *suppurer, couvrir*

9. to sag: *s'affaisser*

■ The native tradition

Some poets, outside the modernist revolution, used more conventional forms and anchored their poetry in the region where they lived. Yet distance, irony and often underlying despair reflect the pessimism of the time.

Using conventional forms (he said he was 'content with the old-fashioned way to be new'), Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935) describes his childhood region of Maine, portraying lonely, frustrated lives with pity and affection, sometimes with irony (*Collected Poems*, 1921). Restraint and a spare diction often hide deep emotion. His Arthurian trilogy (*Merlin*, 1917; *Lancelot*, 1920; *Tristan*, 1927) unites the medieval and the modern worlds, both testifying to failure and disillusion.

Robert Frost (1874-1963) worked at a number of jobs, teaching and living on a farm before he came to public attention with *A Boy's Will* (1913), *North of Boston* (1914) and *Mountain Interval* (1916). New England, where Robert Frost lived for most of his life, is the setting for his poetry.

His characters are self-reliant, rugged New Englanders, taciturn but full of wisdom. At a time when people were moving to the cities, the pastoral ideals he describes in his verse, with its woods, birches, fences and shrewd farmers, could not but have enormous appeal. Many of his poems take the form of dramatic monologues, which develop slowly, using the language patterns of their speakers. Under the clearness and realism of his verse, and the simplicity of the diction and imagery, there is often wistfulness¹⁰ and a sense of tragedy. For Frost is also a moral philosopher. The landscape and natural details of his poetry function as metaphors* for psychological revelation and metaphysical considerations on universal values and on man's relationship with his environment as shown by the aphoristic endings of many of his poems ('Good fences make good neighbours.' / 'One could do worse than be a swinger of birches'). 'The figure a poem makes' said Frost is that 'it begins in delight and ends in wisdom'. Many of his poems express internal conflicts, moral uncertainties and questionings about man's place in an indifferent universe.

His later poems (*A Witness Tree*, 1942) are darker in tone, following the deaths of his wife and daughter. The tone is always controlled and restrained. Frost is one of the best-loved American poets, with poems such as 'Mending Walls', 'Birches', 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' or 'The Road not Taken', which everyone knows by heart. This is its last stanza of 'The Road not Taken'.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference. ('The Road not Taken')

The native tradition also developed in the Midwest, where Chicago had witnessed a poetic renaissance almost comparable to its architectural one with Frank Lloyd

10. wistfulness: *nostalgie, mélancolie*

Wright. It was in the new avant-garde magazine *Poetry* that the verse of Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters was published alongside that of Eliot and Frost.

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) grew up in a poor Chicago family and worked as a journalist and for Wisconsin's Social Democratic party. His verse, in the tradition of social realism, exalts the Middle West and the common man, often in free, declamatory verse or in Whitmanesque free verse*. His popularity came with *Chicago Poems* (1916), then *Cornhuskers* (1918) and *Smoke and Steel* (1920), which celebrate the energy and defiance of American agriculture and industry. He is fascinated by the pulse and vitality of Chicago, with its teeming streets, railroads and meat-packing industry. His democratic populist beliefs also appear in his biography of Lincoln (*Abraham Lincoln: the War Years*, 1939) and in *The People, Yes* (1936), a long poem about the perseverance and capacities of the American people.

The fame of **Edgar Lee Masters** (1868-1950) rests on *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), a series of poems in which the people buried in the cemetery of a small Illinois town make their confessions or epitaphs. These epitaphs reveal the secrets, corruption, yearnings and sorrows of village life hidden behind the mask of respectability. What prevails is a feeling of bitterness and despair, of futile or wasted lives.

California had its poet too with **Robinson Jeffers** (1887-1962), the son of a minister and biblical scholar, whose education was based on the Bible and classical languages. His free verse* lyrics (*Tamar and Other Poems*, 1924), which show the influence of Whitman, exhort modern man to give up his greed and selfishness and consider the whole, a doctrine he called 'inhumanism' ('a shifting of emphasis from man to not man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence...') and which made him a precursor of environmentalism. Man should give in to his instinctive life and surrender to his primeval being. Jeffers also wrote long narrative epics* in blank verse* (*Cavdor and Other Poems*, 1928). Many contrast the magnificence of nature and the degradation of man. Jeffers's pacifist doctrine during World War II turned public opinion against him.

DRAMA

In the late 19th century, melodrama, farce, and Shakespeare occupied most of the American stage at a time when, in Europe, a generation of playwrights concerned with realism had emerged – Shaw, Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg –, intent on representing everyday life, everyday speech and social problems. It was only after World War I that some of their plays were produced in America, thanks, in particular, to the Chicago 'Little theatre' movement, paving the way for some native playwrights, the best-known of them being Eugene O'Neill, and to the creation of the influent 'Theatre Guild' in New York, which was instrumental in the success of Broadway. Changing the nature of the theatre was also essential since melodrama was increasingly becoming the province of the cinema.

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) was brought up in a strict Catholic family of actors and although he rejected his religion, believed that the malaise in society came from the disappearance of the old God, which now left life without a meaning. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1936. Influenced by the writings of Freud, O'Neill frequently started from the personal to reach the universal, as he did in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (printed 1953), a semi-autobiographical play about a dysfunctional family in which confrontations escalate¹¹ and lead to disintegration. A recurrent theme in his plays is the fragmentation of family life, the alienation of sensitive characters crushed under the materialism of society, and their inability to sustain relationships. O'Neill wanted to get a 'modern psychological approximation of the Greek sense of fate' into plays that the audience would 'accept and be moved by'. Several of his plays therefore rework Greek myths, showing that modern tragedies are just as heroic as those of the past: the story of Phaedra becomes that of *Desire under the Elms* (1924), Aeschylus's Orestea become the trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), transposed into a story of the Civil War. Determinism leads the characters to suffering, loss, frustration and doom. Driven by their passions and haunted by the past, they are as fated as the characters of Greek tragedy, yet preserve their human dignity.

O'Neill also explored controversial subjects such as interracial marriage (*All God's Chillun Got Wings*, 1924) or prostitution (*Anna Christie*, 1921).

In order to reveal his characters' 'profound hidden conflicts of the mind', O'Neill experimented with masks, choruses, very long monologues and various kinds of symbolism. Masks, O'Neill said, were 'an arresting visual symbol of the separateness, the fated isolation' of people, and the journey to the interior of the self becomes an unmasking. In plays produced in the 1920s, O'Neill's theatrical experimentation departed from realism and took the form of expressionism, with a whole range of non-verbal means. In *The Emperor Jones* (1920), O'Neill uses fantastic visions and syncopated sound; in *The Hairy Ape* (1922), he uses stylised sets and masks to represent workers as zombies; in *All God's Chillun* (1924) the stage walls move gradually inwards to suggest characters trapped by society.

Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) was first known as a novelist who, in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927) tried to probe¹² the workings of Providence. Influenced by Japanese Noh theatre and by Pirandello, Wilder's plays experiment with technique rather than theme. *Our Town* (1938), tells the story of a New Hampshire town through the lives of its inhabitants. Rejecting any kind of realism, the play is without props¹³ or sets, the actors mime their actions and the stage manager appears on stage, playing the main role. As Wilder said, 'Our claim, our hope, our despair are in the mind – not in things, not in 'scenery.' The same metatheatrical style is to be found in *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942).

11. to escalate: *s'intensifier*

12. to probe: *sonder, chercher à découvrir*

13. props: *accessoires*

In the thirties, drama reflected the tragedies caused by the Depression. Lillian Hellman's plays are concerned with questions of justice and personal responsibility. Elmer Rice's *We the People* (1933) and *Judgment Day* (1934) reflect the hardships of the Depression years. But it was Clifford Odets (1906-1963) who was the most successful left-wing playwright.

A member of the Group Theatre, Odets rose to fame with *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) about the confrontation between a corrupt taxi-drivers union and the rank and file.

THE NOVEL: 1915-1929

Despair and satire* are two of the major means by which novelists expressed their anguish in the years that followed World War I.

■ Around Gertrude Stein

While America was stifled by moral and cultural conformity, Europe offered freedom of expression and experimentation, which attracted many American writers to Paris. But exile and the trauma of the war left deep wounds and a sense of loss.

THE LOST GENERATION

The Lost Generation is a term which comes from Gertrude Stein's remark to a mechanic in Hemingway's presence that 'You are all a lost generation'. It applies to several writers, most of whom were in Paris in the 1920s, having worked as volunteer ambulance and truck drivers during the war. The experience had left them mentally or physically wounded, disillusioned about American 'idealism' and self-righteous rhetoric, critical of what they saw as their country's hypocrisy. As a result they took refuge in the present, in the fashionable, intellectually stimulating life in the French capital, eager to create new forms and a new style to express their feeling of emptiness and loss. The term 'Lost Generation' describes the loss of traditional values resulting from the war and the condition of man in the modern world. The main writers of the Lost Generation were F. S. Fitzgerald, E. Hemingway, H. Crane, E. Wilson, S. Anderson and M. Cowley.

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) studied with William James at Radcliffe College and with her brother Leo moved to Paris in 1903, where they assembled a large collection of modern art, with works by Matisse, Cézanne and Picasso. There, her salon became a meeting place for artists and writers such as Pound, Hemingway and Anderson, whom she advised and encouraged.

Stein believed that what mattered was to capture the present experience, the 'now' of consciousness. To that effect she invented a prose marked by syntactic and lexical

inventions, as well as by repetition with subtle changes, in order to express the movements of thoughts in the here and now. Repetition offers a new way of looking at things, not unlike the successive frames of a strip of film, but her prose often remains hermetic. Two exceptions are *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), in fact her own autobiography written in the voice of her companion, Alice Toklas, and *Three Lives* (1905), the stories of immigrants and black women.

Ernest Hemingway (1898-1961), the son of a doctor, was brought up in Chicago and became a reporter for the Kansas City Star. In 1918, he left for Italy looking for adventures to experience and report on and was wounded while driving an ambulance, a traumatic episode which played a crucial role in his fiction to come. Successful when he was still in his twenties, Hemingway created a legendary life for himself, that of a strong, romantic hero intent on proving his heroism, covering the Spanish Civil War as a reporter and taking risks in all sorts of violent but glamorous situations which recreated war in peacetime, a way of facing despair and death. Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1954.

Ernest Hemingway's heroes are cynical, devoid of spiritual values or idealism, but they constantly struggle against a sense of void. To face such nihilism, they follow a stoic code of honour, which means no complaining, no giving way to emotions: loyalty, decency, control and discipline, following rituals, are the only things that help them survive. What matters is the quality of courage, the dignity with which they face death and nada.

Situations of ultimate violence – war (*A Farewell to Arms*, 1929; *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 1940), big-game hunting (*Green Hills of Africa*, 1935), bullfighting (*The Sun Also Rises*, 1926; *Death in the Afternoon*, 1932) - become a test of manliness, as if the capacity to master one's fear was enough to justify one's life. They are also the subject of Hemingway's short stories (*The First Forty-Nine Stories*, 1939). Deep-sea fishing or big-game hunting further provide an escape into a pastoral world of innocence.

Control further marks Hemingway's prose, which is tight and minimalist, concentrated, stripped of inessentials and literary embellishment such as metaphors. Based on rhythm and understatement, it suggests more than it says, rarely describing emotions but hinting at his characters' control over these emotions. It had enormous impact on other novelists.

After studying at Princeton, Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), who had always felt like a poor boy in a rich town, decided that he wanted to become a writer, and to be rich and famous, all of which he achieved when he was twenty-five, which allowed him to marry Zelda Sayre, with whom he led a flamboyant life in Paris and on the Riviera. Their marriage was later darkened by her schizophrenia. After 1930, Zelda spent most of her life in clinics while Fitzgerald devoted his life to writing in spite of depression and alcoholism. In 1937 he settled in Hollywood as a screenwriter. His stories and novels offer an image of the Roaring Twenties, their glamour, flapper-girls, dancing, extravagance and excess, but underneath, there is disillusion and

tragedy, a constant but hopeless quest for lost innocence and happiness. Behind money, youth and love, there is often corruption or vice. *This Side of Paradise* (1920) is about a poor Princeton student, whose love relationship ends in disillusion. In *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), Gloria achieves the rich marriage she dreamt of, only to fall into torpor and alcoholism.

The Great Gatsby (1925), set among the very rich on Long Island, is told by Nick Carraway, both involved and detached, who rents a house next to Gatsby's huge mansion and little by little pieces together for us a life that becomes an epic* and increasingly affects him. Nick's innocence, honesty and impartiality provides a moral centre for the novel. Through his eyes Gatsby is first seen as a vulgar, pretentious bootlegger and gangster, a nouveau riche compared to the more tasteful Buchanans. Yet gradually, Nick understands that Gatsby is redeemed by his idealism, his dream of regaining the love of Daisy Buchanan, a wish that never left him and that transforms him into a tragic hero. This belief in man's capacity to make dreams come true, even though the ideal will continue to elude¹⁴ us, is what makes Gatsby a mythical figure who embodies the American Dream and man's 'capacity for wonder', as the last lines of the novel make it clear, in a lyrical and elegiac tone..

And as I sat there brooding¹⁵ on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning...

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

Tender is the Night (1934) chronicles the decline of Dick Diver, a psychiatrist, and his relationship with his schizophrenic wife.

■ 'The Village Virus'

While the Lost Generation modernists chose cosmopolitan settings for their study, other writers, who had remained in America, chose to satirize the conformism of society, particularly in those very small towns, where life, which had been romanticized and described as Edenic by 19th century local colour writers, was now marked by narrow-mindedness and bigotry, by what a character in Lewis's *Main Street* calls 'the Village Virus'. Their intellectual guide was H.L. Mencken, a pungent¹⁶ critic of American life who, in his essays and journalism, lampooned¹⁷

14. to elude us: nous échapper

15. to brood: ruminer, ressasser

16. pungent: mordant, caustique

17. to lampoon: tourner en dérision

the mediocrity of American culture and of those he called 'boobus Americanus' (*Prejudices*, 1919-27).

Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*, which brought different poems together in a coherent whole about village life, may have inspired Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941) to write *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). Anderson grew up poor in a small Ohio town, eventually becoming president of a paint company.

The story goes that when he was thirty-five he left the town abandoning his job and his family to devote himself entirely to literature. He later travelled to Europe, where he met Joyce and Hemingway.

Believing that life 'is a loose, flowing thing' and that 'there are no plot stories in life', he tried to find a structure that might dramatize the loneliness of people in a small Midwest town. *Winesburg, Ohio* consists of 24 tales told in a minimalist style, their common points being the setting and one recurring character, George Willard, the local reporter, who has literary ambitions and listens to everyone's tale, maturing in the process. What also links the various characters is that they are all grotesques (that is to say grotesque characters, typical of the Southern Renaissance → p. 299), suffering from obsessions, hidden secrets, repressed desires, and the inability to communicate with others, even to touch them. They are all crippled by lack of communication and love. Anderson portrays them all with compassion and tenderness. The myth of an ideal community life celebrated by earlier frontier writers (→ p. 267) has turned into a juxtaposition of disconnected lives, with George Willard, as the only contact they all share, the only one who leaves the town at the end. Plot has been replaced by moments of profound significance.

A newspaper columnist, Ring Lardner (1885-1933) too wrote short stories, but in a very different spirit of humour and fierce satire. The favourite targets of his satire are baseball athletes (*You Know Me Al*, 1916), stupidity and vanity (*Gullible's Travels*, 1917) and the world of business and show business.

Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951) was the son of a Minnesota country doctor. He felt a misfit everywhere, went to Yale without graduating, abandoned the medical profession and devoted his life to writing, choosing the modes of realism and satire*. He studied what he knew best, small-town life, approaching it like a scientist or investigative journalist, studying speech, accents, idioms as well as manners. Like Dickens, he developed a talent for caricature* and burlesque*.

Lewis's satire is aimed at the complacency, prejudices and philistinism of the small-town middle-class, whether doctors, businessmen or ministers. *Main Street* (1920) depicts the conformity, vulgarity and dullness of Gopher Prairie, discovered through the eyes of the liberal Carol Milford, who is appalled by its backwardness and whose attempts at reform lead to disillusionment. Gopher Prairie stands for all prairie towns, in which the spirit of the frontier has given way to dullness and self-righteousness.

Babbitt (1922) lampoons the new culture of commerce, associated with the prejudices of the middle-class. Babbitt gave his name to a type of person, described in the dictionary as 'a self-satisfied person who conforms readily to conventional, middle-class ideas and ideals, especially of business and material success; a Philistine; from the main character in the novel by Sinclair Lewis.' A successful realtor in the little town of Zenith City, Babbitt wants to climb the social ladder, which he does by attending Boosters' Club functions and making friends with local dignitaries. He worships Mammon, success and his possessions, which he equates with¹⁸ happiness. Vague dissatisfaction and yearnings for change lead him to a spell of rebellion, but he soon reverts to his safe former life. Everything about Babbitt's life is the object of fierce satire*: his platitudes, selfishness hiding under a pretence of philanthropy, even his brief affair is paltry and loveless. But with Lewis, the satire is always close to affection, as it is for Dickens. The fierceness of Lewis's humour is manifest in this passage in which Babbitt's family is considering buying a new car:

They went, with ardor and some thoroughness, into the matters of streamline bodies, hill-climbing power, wire wheels, chrome steel, ignition systems, and body colors. It was much more than a study of transportation. It was an aspiration for knightly rank. In the city of Zenith, in the barbarous twentieth century, a family's motor indicated its social rank as precisely as the grades of the peerage determined the rank of an English family—indeed, more precisely, considering the opinion of old county families upon newly created brewery barons and woolen-mill viscounts. The details of precedence were never officially determined. There was no court to decide whether the second son of a Pierce Arrow limousine should go in to dinner before the first son of a Buick roadster, but of their respective social importance there was no doubt; and where Babbitt as a boy had aspired to the presidency, his son Ted aspired to a Packard twin-six and an established position in the motored gentry. (Chapter VI, III)

Arrowsmith (1925) and *Elmer Gantry* (1927) are concerned with hypocrisy and false values in the worlds of medicine and religion.

Lewis's manner is rarely subtle, his characters close to types or caricatures*, his style often repetitive, but his satire* and humour earned him immense popularity, particularly in Europe.

When Sinclair Lewis became the first American writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in 1930, it was a sign that American letters had gained international recognition.

THE SOUTHERN WRITERS

While the North had grown into an industrial Leviathan, the South had remained poor, agrarian, and morally undermined by bigotry and racism. Jim Crow laws, the Ku Klux Klan, the John Scopes trial, all testified to the backwardness of these

18. to equate with: *assimiler à*

states in spite of their refined antebellum past. When, in 1920, Mencken entitled an essay on the South 'The Sahara of the Bozart', he summed up the paucity of literary production in the old Confederacy States. But the very tragedies that the South had suffered made it an ideal setting to dramatize those of the human condition.

THE SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE

The Southern Renaissance was a literary revival of fiction, poetry and literary criticism in the South during the 1930s and early 1940s.

The publication of *The Fugitive* between 1922 and 1925 by the 'Nashville Fugitives', writers based around Vanderbilt University, was instrumental in celebrating the South and its pastoral virtues. In 1930, *I'll Take My Stand*, a collection of essays by writers around the poet John Crowe Ransom (Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooke) constituted an Agrarian 'manifesto', which defended the traditional Agrarian way of life and community values of the South and criticised the industrialisation and materialism which they associated with the North and urban life. The defeat and poverty of the South also suddenly became emblematic of the condition of the whole nation with the Great Depression.

A number of themes recur in the works of Southern writers.

– They are still obsessed by the past which they view with a mixture of nostalgia and guilt. As Faulkner liked to say: "The past is not dead. It is not even past." It was a past that had little to do with the success story of the rest of America, a past linked to defeat in the Civil War, the shame of Reconstruction, the guilt linked to slavery and segregation, and the antebellum economy based on the plantation and slave labour but also on a refined and genteel¹⁹ way of life.

– Violence and grotesque characters, what has been called 'Southern Gothic', are also common in their works, misfits and lack of communication dramatizing the isolation and tragedy of the South (the idiot Benjy in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the deaf-mute Singer in Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*).

– Southern writers are often concerned with psychological states, with the tortured consciousness of the characters. As Faulkner said, "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself (...) alone can make good writing."

The main writers of the Southern Renaissance are William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Erskine Caldwell, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, Richard Wright, Katherine Anne Porter, Tennessee Williams Allen Tate, Truman Capote.

In fact the revival had started at the end of the 19th century, with the realistic novels of Ellen Glasgow (1873-1945), in which there is no nostalgia for the Lost Cause. She was critical of mythmaking, of the blindness of the South and its incapacity to face facts. Many of her novels are concerned with women and their capacity for endurance

19. genteel: *raffiné*

(*Barren Ground*, 1925). Yet the huge popularity of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), a story of love and courage set in the antebellum South and during the Civil War, testifies to the appeal of the Southern myth for many Americans.

There were colonels and heroes among the ancestors of William Faulkner (1897-1962) and he was conscious of his glorious past and of the decline that followed it. He took a few courses at the University of Mississippi and spent most of his life in the small town of Oxford, Mississippi, doing odd jobs and screen writing for Hollywood. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. His works (1897-1952) unite a modernist technique and literary regionalism. His stories and novels all take place in the imaginary county of Yoknapatawpha, Mississippi, and in its main town, Jefferson, a transposition of Oxford, where he lived. They focus on the past, explaining how glory turned to disappointment, evoking the dissolution of the Southern aristocracy and social order as a consequence of defeat in the Civil War, the 'Lost Cause', which led to corruption, decadence (*Sartoris*, 1929) and moral dissolution (symbolized by the clan of the Snopes in *The Hamlet*, 1940, *The Town*, 1957 and *The Mansion*, 1959). The past means nostalgia and shame, the present sexual, racial and gender backwardness and degeneracy. The result is often violence and monstrosity, what is called Southern Gothic, racism and castration (*Light in August*, 1932), rape (*Sanctuary*, 1931), miscegenation and incest (*Absalom, Absalom!*, 1936). *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) juxtaposes the first-person streams of consciousness of three of the Compson brothers, obsessed by the past – their lost sister Caddy and the decline of the Compson dynasty, which stands for that of the Confederate South.

In *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Addie Bundren, a farmer's wife, has just died and her family undertake a long journey to carry her coffin to a distant graveyard in Jefferson. The story is told through the short fragmented monologues of fifteen speakers, each using his or her own form of stream of consciousness*, meditative and ornate in style (Darl), full of empty rhetoric (Whitfield), a single sentence (Vardaman), a scientific list of points (Cash). The journey is an epic*, full of ordeals and suffering (crossing a flooded river, rescuing the coffin from a fire, buzzards circling above the coffin), as well as a burlesque* and parody* of an epic* with grotesque scenes and hidden secrets behind the mask of the heroic family enterprise, most members of the family having their own secret reason to get to Jefferson (Dewey Dell wants to buy an abortion drug, Anse wants false teeth and a new wife, Vardaman a toy train...). Behind the burial journey of solidarity, there are interlocking solitudes, tensions, repressed violence. *As I Lay Dying* is also a reflection upon the relationship between words and actions, some like Addie believing that words smother experience, that they are a sham²⁰, others like Whitfield considering that words are enough and need not be followed by action.

Absalom, Absalom! (1936) draws a parallelism between Thomas Sutpen's efforts to found a future and the biblical story of David and Absalom. The narrative technique is particularly complex, with multiple narrators, not all reliable, which creates

20. a sham: *une imposture*

contradictions and ambiguities. Faulkner's style is characterized by long, complex sentences that meander on and on with delays, alternatives and ambiguities, reflecting the richness and complexity of experience.

Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938) was born in South Carolina, and studied at the state university, then Harvard. He published two novels only, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) and *Of Time and the River* (1935), both autobiographical. They chronicle the story of the Gant family from the battle of Gettysburg to the 1920s and relate the richness of Eugene Gant's emotions and sensations as he tries to free himself from his family, torn between rootedness and the need to escape. But they also constitute an attempt to comprehend and explain America, the story of the nation mirroring that of his own self. Both novels are very long and the prose is rhapsodic, impressionistic, based on accumulation, excessive in its lyricism.

Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980) was born in Texas, but worked as a journalist and travelled extensively. She is best-known for her short stories (*Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, 1935; *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, 1939), which focus on violence and cruelty, responsibility and guilt, and attempt to trace the reasons for moral and intellectual failure. A recurrent theme in her stories is that of women caught between their need for independence and love and the pressures of Old South conventions.

Erskine Caldwell (1903-1987), a native of Georgia, wrote about the poor white sharecroppers²¹ of that state during the Depression years. Poverty, racism, degeneracy, debauchery and violence are everywhere rampant²² (*God's Little Acre*, 1933; *Tobacco Road*, 1932; *Trouble in July*, 1940). His condemnation of racism and his honest, naturalistic portrayal of small farmers earned him both praise and criticism for being too critical and too sexually crude.

One should also mention the short stories of Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), who was born in Florida, studied anthropology, and settled in Harlem. Her short stories (*Mules and Men*, 1935) are based on black folklore and expose the situation of black women in the South. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) traces the destiny of her black heroine, Janie Starks, and her attempt to gain independence. Hurston refused to follow the Harlem Renaissance writers' tendency to portray black people as all miserable and destitute. Instead, she described black communities as she found them, including a portrayal of women's sexuality.

THE NOVEL: COMMITMENT IN THE 1930s

The economic hardship of the thirties gave rise to novels where the focus shifted from individualism to collective action. Although their commitment was often short-lived, many intellectuals turned to Marxism, which offered a cause and a sense of direction.

21. a sharecropper: *un métayer*

22. rampant: *endémique*

In the tradition of the naturalists James T. Farrell (1904-1978) considered that life was the result of social forces. His novels centre around individuals who are part of the system, lower-middle class characters who try to gain power or respectability.

The *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1932-35) traces the life of its eponymous* hero, a weak and dissolute young man who epitomizes the plight of the nation, its moral and cultural decadence. Farrell's style makes use of all the clichés and catchphrases that reveal his characters' vacuous minds. Farrell called his trilogy 'the story of an American destiny in our time'.

The novels of John Dos Passos (1896-1970) associate political commitment and aesthetic experimentation. He was born in Chicago, where his father was a successful lawyer. After graduating from Harvard in 1916, he worked as an ambulance driver during the war. In *Three Soldiers* (1921), he dramatized the absurdity, hypocrisy and savagery of that war. He later worked as a reporter, was imprisoned for protesting against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, and became a left-wing activist. After World War II, however, his political views (expressed in his second trilogy, *District of Columbia*, 1939-48) became increasingly conservative. An individualist, he now saw communism as a threat to the individual.

Dos Passos' best work was published in the 1930s. His first experimental work was *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), a kaleidoscopic and fragmented vision of New York that conveys the energy and restlessness of the city.

U.S.A., his masterpiece, is a panoramic portrait of America from 1900 to 1935. Its three volumes (*The Forty-Second Parallel*, 1939; *Nineteen Nineteen*, 1932; *The Big Money*, 1937) show how greed and corruption gradually lead to the 1929 Crash and how individuals are crushed by social institutions. Concerned with reaching truth, Dos Passos juxtaposed four types of sections in order to cast different lights upon society while revealing the fragmentation of life. In 'Newsreels', he offers a collage of headlines, advertisements, words from songs and political speeches, which represent the collective context, and whose juxtaposition often reveals political lies and the way big business shapes the American mind. In his 'Biographies', written in a poetic style, Dos Passos traces the lives of people who have influenced their time (artists, labour leaders, scientists, politicians). The third type of section consists of fictional parts, which follow the lives of twelve average men and women, helpless individuals caught in a world they cannot control. Their tendency to promiscuity, divorce and abortions illustrates the dissolution of what used to be the central cohesive institution in American society, the family. Finally, Dos Passos uses 'Camera Eye' sections, which constitute the author's lyrical stream of consciousness*, the reaction of one individual to what happens, and therefore the very opposite of the collective mentality of the Newsreels. These sections alternate, creating parallelisms and counterpoint, as well as a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. Dos Passos' technique shows his indebtedness to cubism, collage and the cinematographic techniques of Eisenstein.

A regionalist as well as a committed writer, John Steinbeck (1902-1968) studied at Stanford University and wrote about the Salinas Valley where he was born. He

worked at a variety of jobs, including as a reporter during World War II. Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1962. His novels constitute a proletarian defence of the poor and less privileged. Huge external forces bear down on his characters and only endurance and companionship help them survive. *Tortilla Flat* (1935) is about the 'paisanos' of Monterey, *In Dubious Battle* (1935) depicts the solidarity and courage of fruit pickers during a strike organized by the Communist Party; *Of Mice and Men* (1937) tells of the friendship between two migrant ranch workers; *The Pearl* (1948) is about poor Mexican fishermen. In all of these novels one senses nostalgia for a closer relationship between man and nature, for a lost Eden, or for Lennie and George's dream of a little ranch of their own in *Of Mice and Men*.

The Grapes of Wrath (1939) relates the migration from the Dust Bowl to California of the Okies – poor farmers from Oklahoma who had to leave when their land was repossessed by the banks. The novel follows the Joad family as they leave their home, lured by the promise of work in Edenic California. But a quarter of a million others are on the move too and the journey becomes a nightmare, the children getting sick, the grandparents dying on the way, and the daughter pregnant and ill. They are accompanied by the radical and fervent preacher Jim Casy, who has lost his faith in a God who allows so much injustice to take place, and turns into a labour leader. The shanty towns or Hoovervilles they find along the way are miserable and hated by both locals and police. Casy is murdered, Tom Joad kills an officer and leaves to fight the system. In spite of constant calamities, dignity and compassion survive and the novel ends on the picture of the young mother, whose baby is stillborn, giving her milk to a starving old man. It is an angry and compassionate novel. Angry at the bankers who bought the Okies' land, at the owners of the orchards, who bring too many workers to California so as to slash²³ wages, but compassionate since it celebrates the saving power of the family and the courage and resilience²⁴ of the spirit of man. The Joads' journey becomes mythical, imbued with biblical symbolism (the journey to the Promised Land); they are the last pioneers, but also stand for all of America's victims. To underline his message Steinbeck inserted more general 'interchapters' at regular intervals, giving historical, social or philosophical background in order to broaden the scope²⁵ of the novel and show the Joads as representative of all the rural poor. These sections use a style often close to romantic lyricism and contrasting with the speech patterns of the Okies in the narrative chapters:

And the migrants streamed in on the highways and their hunger was in their eyes, and their need was in their eyes. They had no argument, no system, nothing but their numbers and their needs. When there was work for a man, ten men fought for it - fought for a low wage. If that fella'll work for thirty cents, I'll work for twenty-five.

If he'll take twenty-five, I'll do it for twenty.

No, me, I'm hungry. I'll work for fifteen. I'll work for food. (Chapter 21)

Criticized by the government and banned in many libraries, *The Grapes of Wrath* nonetheless won the Pulitzer Prize.

23. to slash: *exister, couper*

24. resilience: *résistance*

25. the scope: *la portée*

During the 1930s, the pride and race consciousness which had inspired the Harlem Renaissance shifted to social protest and class consciousness. Committed fiction was indeed the response of Richard Wright (1908-1960), who was born on a plantation in Mississippi and spent part of his childhood in an orphanage. Having experienced poverty, segregation and violence, he left for Chicago, where he took part in the New Deal 'Writers' Project' and became active in the Communist Party.

Uncle Tom's Children (1938) is a collection of short stories about black sharecroppers in the South. Wright became famous with the two novels that followed, *Black Boy* (1945), an autobiography, and *Native Son* (1940), which relates the terrifying life of a young boy in the ghetto of Chicago, where appalling conditions of life foster²⁶ violence, murder and death. In keeping with his Marxist and existentialist ideas, Wright argued that social alienation could only be solved through black struggle. *The Outsider* (1953) is the story of a black intellectual's search for his identity. His novels were extremely popular in Europe, where he settled after the war.

The main characters in the novels of Nathanael West (1904-1941) are dreamers who cannot fulfil their yearnings. *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1934) is the story of a newspaper man who starts answering an advice column as a joke, and falls into depression when he finds he cannot give advice in a world dominated by false values. *A Cool Million* (1934) is an indictment of the Horatio Alger 'rags to riches' narratives. It was when West worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter that he wrote *The Day of the Locust* (1939), turning Hollywood into a monstrous city where the middle-aged victims of America's dream world, have come to die. As in *Winesburg, Ohio*, many of the characters are grotesque, desperate, not having found in Hollywood the promised land they were hoping for. Everything about the city and its inhabitants is spurious²⁷ and even surreal. The novel shows the influence of surrealism and symbolism and is a violent, expressionistic indictment²⁸ of the moral decay of a society in which only the fittest – the rich and the handsome – survive. The American Dream has turned into a nightmare.

Starting in the 1920s, a number of detective stories featured tough detectives, whose values of courage and individualism began to replace those of pioneers and cowboys in popular fiction. This is particularly clear in the fiction of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961) had spent a few years working as a detective for the Pinkerton Detective Agency, and his experience there formed the basis of a new fictional genre, the hard-boiled²⁹ detective story. His sombre vision of society led him to join the Communist party in the 1930s.

In the tradition of muckraking journalism, he was concerned with the corruption of politicians and officials, and set his novels in a world where gangsters and criminals control and manipulate society, where violence, chaos and amorality are endemic. Both sentimental and tough, the detectives of *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), *The Glass Key* (1931) and *The Thin Man* (1934) have a personal moral code of courage and honesty,

26. to foster: *encourager, entretenir*
27. spurious: *faux*

28. indictment: *accusation*
29. hard-boiled: *dur, dur à cuire*

which means that they do their jobs, enduring and never giving up or losing their integrity. His novels offer a realistic vision of urban violence and greed, which stand as metaphors for the collapse of the American dream. Hammett's plots are intricate and his prose and dialogue laconic and devoid of emotion. His works had a seminal influence on the works of Raymond Chandler, Chester Himes and James M. Cain.

A totally different kind of rebellion is to be found in the works of Henry Miller (1891-1980). Born in New York, he was an anarchist and a fierce critic of American society, its mercantilism, consumerism, conformity, which stifled the individual. He loved the Bohemian life of the city, with its bars, its smells, its prostitutes and spent ten years living as a bum in Paris. His two trilogies (*Tropic of Cancer*, 1934; *Black Spring*, 1936; *Tropic of Capricorn*, 1939 and *The Rosy Crucifixion – Sexus*, 1945; *Plexus*, 1949, *Nexus*, 1960) are lyrical and poetic explorations of his own self, relating scenes and adventures, his search for sexual liberation, without which there is no freedom, no communion with humanity in a Transcendentalist spirit. Miller's works were published in France and banned for obscenity in the United States until the late 1950s.

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930): a Southern epic

- Some time toward dawn the rain ceases. But it is not yet day when Cash³⁰ drives
- the last nail and stands stiffly up and looks down at the finished coffin, the others
- watching him. In the lantern light his face is calm, musing; slowly he strokes his
- hands on his rain-coated thighs in a gesture deliberate, final and composed. Then
- 5 the four of them -- Cash and pa and Vernon and Peabody -- raise the coffin to their
- shoulders and turn toward the house. It is light, yet they move slowly; empty, yet
- they carry it carefully; lifeless, yet they move with hushed precautionary words
- to one another, speaking of it as though, complete, it now slumbered lightly alive,
- waiting to come awake. On the dark floor their feet clump awkwardly, as though for
- 10 a long time they have not walked on floors.
- They set it down by the bed. Peabody says quietly: "Let's eat a snack. It's almost
- daylight. Where's Cash?"
- He has returned to the trestles, stooped again in the lantern's feeble glare as he
- gathers up his tools and wipes them on a cloth carefully and puts them into the
- 15 box with its leather sling to go over the shoulder. Then he takes up box, lantern and
- raincoat and returns to the house, mounting the steps into faint silhouette against
- the paling east.
- In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied
- for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when
- 20 you are filled with sleep, you never were. I don't know what I am. I don't know if I
- am or not. Jewel³¹ knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know
- whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he

30. Cash: one of Darl's brothers, a carpenter, who built Addie's coffin.

31. Jewel: another of Darl's brothers, who contrary to Darl believes in action.

- is and he is what he is not. Beyond the unlamped wall I can hear the rain shaping
 – the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it
 25 nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though
 – it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not
 – asleep. And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are was, it is not. Yet the wagon
 – is, because when the wagon is was, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so
 – Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in
 30 a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am is.
 – How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home.

■ THE CONTEXT

Written in 1929 and poised between the individualism of the Roaring Twenties and the sense of community and collective action of the depression years, *As I Lay Dying* is both a collective, heroic journey of the whole family to bury Addie Bundren, their mother, and a clash of personalities, each member of the family with his/her own secret motive to go to Jefferson, something conveyed through the fragmentation of the novel into a series of monologues. This is the end of one of Darl's monologues. Darl, the most articulate and clairvoyant of all the children, is also the one who feels most unloved, rootless, detached and obsessed with identity.

■ STRUCTURE

The passage begins with a flashback. In the wagon with Jewel, on their way to Jefferson and miles from the house, Darl goes back in time to describe Cash finishing his work on the coffin and carrying it into the house (l. 1-17). It ends with a meditative development on being and not being. These two parts are in fact closely linked.

■ FROM THEY TO I, FROM ACTION TO STATICITY

- Darl's thoughts move from his family to himself, from description of actions to meditation.
- From there to here: Darl's thoughts first travel to what he cannot see since he is in the wagon, then move back to his present situation ("I can hear the rain ...", l. 23), while at the same time enlarging to himself in space ("In a strange room...", l. 18) and time ("How often have I lain...", l. 31).
- After the first lines ('drives the last nail'), the movements become slower ('strokes'), with a wealth of adverbs and adjectives stressing slow motion: composed, slowly, slowly, carefully, precautionary, lightly, awkwardly. The last paragraph is concerned with states (being, sleeping, knowing), not action.

■ THE FADING OF BOUNDARIES

- Between night and day: It is dawn, the east is "paling", but not quite full light yet. Several prepositions and adverbs mark an in-between state: "toward" dawn, not "yet" day, "almost" daylight. A number of adjectives also describe a half-light: 'lantern-light', 'feeble glare', 'faint silhouette', 'paling'.

- The characters seem to slow down in the half-light, as if preparing to stop, to disappear, to become shadows or ghosts. Cash's gestures are "final and composed", then he becomes a "silhouette". The men walk 'as though for a long time they have not walked on floors' (l. 10). The style reflects this through binary and ternary rhythms: "deliberate, final and composed" (l. 4); the three clauses built around the same pattern (l. 6-7): adj + comma + yet + clause beginning with they + verb of action + adverb. Two comparisons introduced by "as though" (l. 8-9).
- Inversions: As the men become shadows, the coffin takes on a life of its own. It now looks as if it was "slumbering", "lightly alive, waiting to come awake". It is almost as if Addie had become the coffin, as if the completion of the coffin marked the passage from life to death. The coffin seems to become a sacred object, something you handle with care, something around which you whisper and tiptoe ("hushed precautionary words"). This immediately leads to Darl's reflection upon being and not being.

■ IDENTITY

This fading of boundaries probably reflects Darl's own fading consciousness as he enters the transitory state between waking and sleeping.

- Relating to the world: "the rain shaping the wagon" (l. 23) is the rain making a different noise when it falls on the wagon, so that its noise provides limits for it, creating it in Darl's mind, as if the outside world was created by the mind.
- Darl's thoughts about the wood in the wagon also question the reality of the wood. It is now in-between owners, belonging to no one, and only exists because of the noise the rain produces on it, and therefore only for Darl and Jewel, who can hear it. The wood is like Darl, not anchored anywhere.
- In Darl's reasoning, you lose your identity when you sleep, since you lose consciousness, like the wood in the wagon. But when you are awake, then you are full of questions about your own identity ("I don't know what I am.", l. 20). Someone like Jewel does not ask himself questions (he doesn't know that he does not know) so he knows he is, but not Darl. But Darl ends up concluding that he is since he can empty himself for sleep, and you can only empty what is full. Darl equates being with consciousness, which sleep annihilates, and thus removes from existence its stability, giving it the flickering reality of a dream. Since Darl feels that he has no identity, he has no power to withstand the unravelling power of sleep. The last line conveys the strength of his longing for home, for stability, for identity. It is an elegiac conclusion.
- This finds its counterpart in the reduction of language to a limited number of words (you / be / sleep / empty / not), and to sentences negated with 'not' ('is-not', line 27).
- Darl's clairvoyance (he "witnesses" the scene with the coffin even though he is far away) means an expansion of the self in time and space. But the more the self expands, the less stable it is. And, as he is about to fall asleep, Darl relates to us his lack of identity as well as his longing for identity.



THE AGE OF ANXIETY (1945-2000)



TONI MORRISON



| | THE AGE | LITERATURE, ARTS & CULTURE |
|---------|--|--|
| 1945 | Germany surrenders; Atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Japan surrenders. | Wright: <i>Black Boy</i> |
| 1946 | | Bishop: <i>North and South</i> |
| 1947 | Marshall Plan; Beginning of Cold War | Williams: <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> |
| 1948 | | Mailer: <i>The Naked and the Dead</i> Pollock: <i>Composition No. 1</i> |
| 1949 | NATO established. | Miller: <i>Death of a Salesman</i> |
| 1950-53 | Korean War | |
| 1950 | Beginning of Senator McCarthy's anti-communist crusade | |
| 1951 | Rosenbergs sentenced to death for espionage. | Salinger: <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> |
| 1952 | | Ellison: <i>Invisible Man</i> de Kooning: <i>Woman I</i> Zinnemann: <i>High Noon</i> |
| 1953 | | Baldwin: <i>Go Tell It on the Mountain</i> Bellow: <i>The Adventures of Augie March</i> Miller: <i>The Crucible</i> Salinger: <i>Nine Stories</i> |
| 1954 | 'Separate but equal doctrine' ruled unconstitutional (Brown v. Board of Education) ; Beginning of fight against segregation in schools | |
| 1955 | | O'Connor: <i>A Good Man is Hard to Find</i> Ray: <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> |
| 1955-56 | Montgomery bus boycott | |
| 1956 | Suez crisis | Ginsberg: <i>Howl</i> Barth: <i>The Floating Opera</i> Berryman: <i>Homage to Mistress Bradstreet</i> O'Neill: <i>Long Day's Journey into Night</i> |

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| 1957 | Federal troops enforce school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. | Kerouac: <i>On the Road</i> Nabokov: <i>Lolita</i> |
| 1958 | | Ferlinghetti: <i>A Coney Island of the Mind</i> Hitchcock: <i>Vertigo</i> van der Rohe: <i>Seagram Building</i> |
| 1959 | | Burroughs: <i>The Naked Lunch</i> Paley: <i>The Little Disturbances of Man</i> Lowell: <i>Life Studies</i> Wright: <i>Guggenheim Museum</i> |
| 1960 | | Updike: <i>Rabbit, Run</i> Rothko: <i>No 14</i> |
| 1961 | Kennedy's 'New Frontier'; Bay of Pigs invasion fails. | Heller: <i>Catch-22</i> |
| 1962 | Cuban missile crisis | Kesey: <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> Albee: <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i> Warhol: <i>Campbell's soup cans</i> Dylan: <i>Blowin' in the Wind</i> |
| 1963 | March on Washington for equal rights for Blacks; Kennedy assassinated; Friedan: <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> | Vonnegut: <i>Cat's Cradle</i> Hawkes: <i>Second Skin</i> Baldwin: <i>The Fire Next Time</i> Pynchon: <i>V.</i> Lichtenstein: <i>Whaam!</i> |
| 1964 | Civil Rights Act | Bellow: <i>Herzog</i> Lowell: <i>For the Union Dead</i> |
| 1964-68 | Race riots in many US cities | |
| 1965 | Voting Rights Act for Blacks; combat troops sent to Vietnam | Plath: <i>Ariel</i> |
| 1966 | National Organization for Women (NOW) founded. | Capote: <i>In Cold Blood</i> Pynchon: <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> Roethke: <i>Collected Poems</i> |
| 1967 | | Styron: <i>The Confession of Nat Turner</i> Brautigan: <i>Trout Fishing in America</i> |
| 1968 | Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy assassinated. | Momaday: <i>House Made of Dawn</i> Kubrick: <i>2001 : A Space Odyssey</i> |

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|---------|---|---|
| 1968-72 | Student protest on campuses | |
| 1969 | US astronauts on moon | Roth: <i>Portnoy's Complaint</i> Vonnegut: <i>Slaughterhouse Five</i> Hopper : <i>Easy Rider</i> Woodstock rock festival |
| 1971 | Voting Rights at 18 (26th Amendment) | Plath: <i>The Bell Jar</i> |
| 1972 | Beginning of Affirmative Action | Coppola : <i>The Godfather I</i> |
| 1973 | Legalization of abortion; troops withdraw from Vietnam. | |
| 1974 | Watergate scandal leads to Nixon's resignation. | |
| 1975 | | Forman: <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> |
| 1976 | | Mamet: <i>American Buffalo</i> Scorsese: <i>Taxi Driver</i> |
| 1977 | | Beginning of Sherman's <i>Untitled Film Stills</i> |
| 1978 | | Irving: <i>The World According to Garp</i> Rich: <i>The Dream of a Common Language</i> |
| 1980 | | Oates: <i>Bellefleur</i> |
| 1981 | | Updike: <i>Rabbit is Rich</i> ; Carver: <i>What We Talk About When We Talk About Love</i> |
| 1982 | | Walker: <i>The Color Purple</i> |
| 1984 | | Erdrich: <i>Love Medicine</i> ; De Lillo: <i>White Noise</i> Johnson : <i>AT&T Building</i> |
| 1986 | | Allen : <i>Hannah and Her Sisters</i> |
| 1987 | | Wolfe: <i>The Bonfire of the Vanities</i> ; Morrison: <i>Beloved</i> Auster: <i>New York Trilogy</i> |
| 1989 | | Tan: <i>The Joy Luck Club</i> |
| 1990-91 | Gulf War | |
| 1993 | | Proulx: <i>The Shipping News</i> Shield: <i>The Stone Diaries</i> |
| 1995 | | Ford: <i>Independence Day</i> |

| | | |
|------|--|--|
| 1997 | | Roth: <i>American Pastoral</i> Cameron's <i>Titanic</i> box-office record |
| 1998 | | Morrison: <i>Paradise</i> |
| 2001 | Terrorist attacks against New York and Washington | |
| 2003 | War against Iraq | |
| 2004 | | Gehry : <i>MIT Ray and Maria Stata Centre</i> |
| 2006 | | McCarthy: <i>The Road</i> |
| 2007 | | Coen brothers : <i>No Country for Old Men</i> |
| 2008 | Worst financial crisis since the Great Depression ; Barack Obama president | |
| 2014 | 'Obamacare' begins to be implemented. | |

'Are all the traditions used up, the beliefs done for, the consciousness of the masses not yet ready for the next development? Is this the full crisis of dissolution? Has the filthy moment come when moral feeling dies, conscience disintegrates and respect for liberty, law, public decency, all the rest, collapses in cowardice, decadence, blood?'
(Saul Bellow, Herzog, 1964)

The 'good war' fought to stop Hitler and the rise of fascism ended with a feeling of euphoria and liberation. But the sense of relief was short lived, soon marred by the discovery of the concentration camps, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and the strain caused by the Cold War. Although the war directly inspired novels such as Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) and provided the background for others like Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), it was the permanent scar it left on the American psyche which gave post-war literature its texture, accounting for the Beats' anti-establishment rebellion as well as for Thomas Pynchon's conspiratorial plots, or the terrible images of confessional poetry.

It was indeed 'an age of anxiety', to borrow W.H. Auden's title to one of his poems about man's quest for his identity in a changing and uncertain world. Where the New Deal had failed to take the country out of depression, the war had succeeded, developing employment and productivity and ushering in a period of unequalled

prosperity which transformed America into a consumers' paradise. But behind that calm exterior, there was collective apprehension about the future. Senator Mc Carthy's witch-hunt against Communists (denounced in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*), the execution of the Rosenbergs in 1953 (the subject of Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*), the Korean War, the Space Race, women's roles centring around a husband, children and their homes (which Betty Friedan condemned in *The Feminine Mystique*) all bear witness to a decade of spiritual conformity and fear. But there were some pockets of resistance against the prevailing orthodoxy – for instance Rosa Parks' refusal to move to the back of a bus in Montgomery, which heralded the start of the civil rights movement, the books of social critic Paul Goodman (*Growing Up Absurd*, 1960), a left-wing activist and pacifist, and in the late 1950s some provocative fiction like Nabokov's *Lolita* showed that society was ripe for cultural breakthroughs. They came with the dissenting voices of The Beat Generation, who rebelled against materialism, nuclear power, institutions and government, all threatening to engulf or destroy the individual.

In the visual arts, however, a revolution had taken place soon after the war, with the New York School Abstract Expressionists marking the end of America's preference for Realism and turning the country into the world's avant-garde artistic centre.

The underlying tensions of the 1950s, especially over race and civil rights – erupted in the next decade: there were campaigns for civil rights, for gender equality (ERA), for sexual liberation, abortion, and against the Vietnam War. It was a decade of protest marches and rallies, symbolized by the huge 1963 march on Washington led by the Reverend Martin Luther King. This spirit of rebellion explains the cult status of novels such as Kerouac's *On the Road* or Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, both about the need for mental liberation.

In the decades that followed, protest gave way to disillusionment and self-centeredness, political scandals like the Watergate affair turning many away from political militancy. Although several writers, like John Updike, continued to write about the minds and manners of middle-class suburbia, others felt that realism was 'used up' and that postmodern approaches such as pastiche*, parody*, absurdity and metatextuality* were better capable of reflecting the chaos of our world. In the last decades of the century and as the United States was becoming more than ever multicultural, there was, however, a significant search for recognition on the part of minorities and ethnic communities who had so far been little represented in American literature.

POETRY

The modernism of Eliot, Pound and Stevens had given way to 'New Criticism' (→ p. 285) in the 1940s. The impersonal, ironic, intellectual poetry of Robert Penn Warren and Allan Tate, which rejected any outpouring of emotion, led several groups of poets to react against it and find new, freer poetic forms.

■ The New York poets

John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch, not unlike the action painters, for whom the canvas mirrored the action of the painter's wrist, wrote poetry about the city and about the poetic art of creation, what Ashbery called 'the actions of a mind at work or at rest.'

John Ashbery (b. 1927) trained in the fields of literature, theatre and the visual arts. He worked both as a teacher of creative writing and as an art critic. His verse shows the influence of surrealism, contemporary music, and especially of painting, his changes of perspective evoking the works of Picasso. Above all, he believed that the poem should be concerned with the nature of the creative act, it should be 'the chronicle of the creative act that produces it', as in action painting. Ashbery uses a wide range of forms (the sonnet, the ode, the sestina) as well as free verse (*Three Poems*, 1972; *The Tennis Court Oath*, 1962, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, 1975; *Shadow Train*, 1981; *A Wave*, 1984, *Breezeway*, 2015). His poetry is difficult, often allusive and surreal.

■ The Black Mountain Poets

In the 1950s, many poets and artists gathered at Black Mountain College, where they experimented with free verse* and the first 'happenings*', improvised associations of text, music, dance and songs. Dancer Merce Cunningham, artists Josef Albers, Willem de Kooning and Robert Rauschenberg, architect Buckminster Fuller, composer John Cage and poets Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov and Le Roi Jones, all went through Black Mountain College.

Charles Olson (1910-70) called his verse 'Projective Verse', since he believed that poetry should enact a 'transfer of energy' from poet to reader. Lines should correspond to breathing units, to the breath of the poet (*The Maximus Poems*, 1983, an epic of America).

■ The Rebels

THE BEAT GENERATION

The term was coined* by Jack Kerouac to describe a group of writers who shared several characteristics: the search for BEATitude, a feeling of being BEATEN or defeated, a style marked by the beat or rhythm of jazz.

In the 1950s, the Beats rebelled against the establishment, the materialism of society and its lack of spiritual values. In that they were not unlike the Angry Young Men (→ p. 179-180) in England during the same years. Refusing authority, anything 'square', all commitments or politics as deception or lies, they took refuge in self-exploration and, since the future was uncertain in the age of the atomic bomb, they attempted to experience the present as intensely as possible. In order to reach self-realisation, liberate the self and become 'cool', 'hip', or 'swinging', they tried Oriental religions,

marginal cultures, drug-induced experiences, whatever could bring momentary stimulation and exuberance and lead towards nirvana or the 'apocalyptic orgasm'. Their voices are reminiscent of what Norman Mailer called 'The White Negro', comparing the Beats' disillusionment and existentialist rootlessness to that of black people who for years had been outsiders living on the fringes of the white society. The Beats are to be related to 'The San Francisco Renaissance', a group of poets who advocated street poetry, poetry meant to be performed rather than appear on paper. Their best-known representative is Lawrence Ferlinghetti (*A Coney Island of the Mind*, 1958). The main 'Beats' were poets Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and novelists Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs.

No one better than Allen Ginsberg (1926-97) conveyed the idea that post-war America was stifling individualism, a view that recalls the one Whitman expressed in 'Song of Myself'. Ginsberg's early life was troubled by his mother's paranoia and his own homosexuality. At Columbia University he met Kerouac, Burroughs and Cassidy and soon abandoned his studies and started travelling with his Beat friends, experimenting with drugs, discovering Buddhism, then becoming a well-known figure, giving public readings of his works and attending protest meetings.

Ginsberg's best-known poem, *Howl* (1956), was first given a public reading in 1955, a reading which had the effect of a bombshell. *Howl* was printed in England and banned in the United States, giving rise to a trial for obscenity, which Ginsberg eventually won. The poem describes a nightmare world, a hell in which a whole generation is wandering like damned souls, the victims of a civilisation or 'Moloch' which kills the spirit because of its materialism, conformity, mechanisation. The result is madness, a condition which affects the whole society. Published during the poisoned atmosphere of Cold War politics, when America was not looking for transcendence but wanted to tame or jail those who did not fit in, the poem reflects a refusal of normalisation. It stands half-way between existential despair and the optimism of biblical prophecy, between a Marxist view of people as victims of capitalist society and the Buddhist belief that they are responsible for their own suffering. It is written in a form of free verse* based on parallelism (as in Whitman's poetry) and anaphora*. The development is not logical but cumulative and draws on the free associative catalogues of the Bible, on the rhythms of jazz. Its spontaneity comes from the density, richness of imagery, the surrealistic images and mad juxtapositions packed in each line, as in the very beginning of the poem:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
 dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
 angelheaded hipsters' burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo
 in the machinery of night,
 who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural
 darkness of cold-water flats
 floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz

1. a hipster: a beatnik or hippie

■ The Confessional poets

Where the Beats and Projectivists experimented with open poetry, several poets preferred to make use of more traditional forms and, rejecting the impersonality of Eliot or New Criticism, chose to put their often troubled selves at the centre of their poems. Confessional poetry often establishes correspondences between the poet's experience and the social and historical problems of the time.

The descendent of an eminent New England family, Robert Lowell (1917-1977) rebelled against all they represented: he converted to Catholicism, left Harvard to study poetry with John Crowe Ransom, refused to take part in World War II (for which he was jailed), and later protested against the Vietnam War. His tendency to depression surfaces in many of his poems, which are partly autobiographical.

His early poetry (*Lord Weary's Castle*, 1946) is Catholic, tormented, reminiscent of metaphysical poetry. But after leaving the Catholic Church and going into depression, his poetry turned inwards. *Life Studies* (1959) is a collection of intense poems about his personal life, written with simplicity and lyricism. *For the Union Dead* (1964), which blends historical criticism and personal reflections, is best-known for its title poem, written one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation and offering a requiem for the soldiers killed in that conflict. It is also a tribute to a white colonel, Robert Gould Shaw, and his black infantrymen who died in a courageous but hopeless attack in South Carolina, a feat which the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens celebrated with a bronze relief on Boston Common (1897). Lowell's poem contrasts the idealism and courage of the soldiers with the empty rhetoric of the speeches when the relief was unveiled. It also reflects his interest in the past, which he often compares to contemporary America.

Personal revelations are also the subject of *Notebooks* (1970) and *History* (1973).

The poetry of Theodore Roethke (1908-63) bears the mark of his childhood spent in the greenhouse of his father, a florist who died when he was fourteen. This is why gardens, plants, soil, cuttings, and roots provide rich imagery in his verse: the greenhouse, he wrote, 'is my symbol for the whole of life, a womb, a heaven-on-earth'. *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (1948), *Pratse to the End!* (1952) and *The Waking* (1953) are collections of intense, introspective poems in which Roethke loses himself in the sensuality of nature, relating the world of plants to the inner world of man, a way of reaching self-knowledge and of warding off the mental illness he suffered from. The voice we hear in his poems is that of a child mystified by the wonders of the natural world, a pre-conscious language full of poetic invention.

Like Lowell, John Berryman (1914-72) suffered from depression, which eventually led to suicide. *Homage to Miss Bradstreet* (1956) is a long monologue which creates communion between the two writers. It is both a work of historical invention and one of personal revelation. *The Dream Songs* (1964-72) is a collage of various voices, different moods, comedy, obsessions, family subjects – all revealing his own troubled personality.

Anne Sexton (1928-74) was also deeply troubled and vulnerable and committed suicide. Her stay in a psychiatric hospital forms the basis of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), which reveals her moments of despair, desire, fear and phobia, disclosed with striking and moving images. In *All My Pretty Ones* (1962) Sexton writes about her family life. But her poems later became darker and darker, increasingly haunted by death.

For Sylvia Plath (1932-63) too poetry was a necessary outlet for suffering and anxiety. She studied at Cambridge, where she met and married Ted Hughes, then at Boston University, where she attended Robert Lowell's poetry seminar. Oversensitive and mentally unstable, Plath could never get over her father's death when she was eight. *The Colossus* was published in 1960, then *Ariel* (1965) came out posthumously, compiled by Ted Hughes after her suicide. They contain intense, furious poems about her status as a woman, which becomes fused with the terrible events of the Holocaust. Her poems are full of gruesome images of corpses, atrocities and madness but also include lyrical nature imagery. They rave against father, husband and God, trying to address her inner turmoil². Sylvia Plath also wrote a novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963) about her descent into depression and the problem of women divided between the stereotyped roles society expects of them and their need for fulfilment. One of the most influential confessional poets, Elizabeth Bishop (1911-79), who also had a troubled childhood, travelled extensively and her observations of the world form the basis of her poetry. It often contrasts familiarity and strangeness, and looks upon the world with wonder, from the point of view of a stranger, discovering what she called 'the always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life.' Displacement and homelessness are also recurring themes. *Norih and South* (1946), *Questions of Travel* (1965), *Geography III* (1976) often develop geographical metaphors³ and polarities as well as the theme of the poem as a map. Her voice is detached, self-possessed and her language lucid.

■ Ethnic and gender poetry

Recent poetry has tended to focus on ethnic, sexual and regional identity. Besides the explosive rebellion of the Beats, these poets offer more militant responses to the politics of the time.

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) was the first black writer to win a Pulitzer Prize with *Annie Allen* (1949), which chronicles a girl's growing consciousness during World War II. Her early poetry (*A Street in Bronzeville*, 1945) offers a portrait of the urban poor. In the late 1960s, her poetry became increasingly activist, condemning the suffering and destitution of ghetto life (*Family Pictures*, 1970; *Aloneness*, 1971). Other leading African American poets include Rita Dove, Nikki Giovanni, and Robert Hayden (1913-1980), who in his long poem 'Middle Passage', describes the terrible transportation of slaves from Africa to America and the mutiny on the Amistad.

2. turmoil: agitation, trouble

Chicano poetry also gained momentum³ in the last decades of the twentieth century, with the militant poet Alurista and Lorna Dee Cervantes. Asian American poets too, like Li-Young Lee, have now become part of mainstream American poetry.

In her poetry Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) attempted to find a 'common language' of female solidarity through art and poetry. It means changing one's ideologies and men's conceptions of power. Her poetry reveals a gradual awakening to that condition. *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963) and *Necessities of Life* (1966) are protests against women's place in a patriarchal society, conveyed by metaphors of violence, seclusion, sickness and rape. Even 'Trying to Talk with a Man', the title of a poem in *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), is dangerous. Her later poems (*The Dream of a Common Language*, 1978) are a tribute to the bonds between women across class and race. Some of them record or imagine conversations or letters between women in her family and well-known historical figures like Marie Curie or Willa Cather. She also experimented with prose poetry and film techniques.

DRAMA

Eugene O'Neill's plays kept being performed after the war (*Long Day's Journey into Night* was published in 1953) but two new trends dominated drama in those decades: plays that analyse the relationship between society and the individual, and plays that see absurdity and alienation as the only way of reflecting the contemporary world. In the 1960s a radical form of black theatre appeared with the plays of Imamu Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) in which he developed racial issues and advocated revolutionary action (*The Slave*, 1964; *The Motion of History*, 1977). He also helped found the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School in Harlem in 1965. Musical comedy was also very popular in the post-war years, with collaboration between Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II (*Oklahoma!*, 1943; *The Sound of Music*, 1959), and Bernstein's *West Side Story* (1957).

■ The individual v. society

In the plays of the two major postwar writers, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, individuals are the victims of society or of their own delusions.

A lonely child in a troubled and violent family, Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) studied at the University of Missouri and held a series of odd jobs until he became famous with *The Glass Menagerie*.

The world of his plays is a 'jungle', a world of crude appetites and desire, of secrets and frustrations, a world of materialism and conformity in which the weak and vulnerable are crushed. Many of his characters are gothically bizarre and spiritually injured, the victims of alcoholism, promiscuity, or rape. They are lonely and insecure and react by

3. to gain momentum: prendre de l'importance

escaping into a world of illusion. The use of such sensationalism is for Williams a way of arousing the spectators' emotion and empathy with these 'Southern grotesques'.

The Glass Menagerie (1944), *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961) are all sombre domestic dramas set in dysfunctional families.

A *Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) takes place in New Orleans soon after the war, in the home of Stella and Stanley Kowalski. Blanche DuBois, Stella's sister, comes to stay with them and the play dramatizes the antagonism and sexual attraction between Blanche, elegant, decadent, feminine, typical of the Southern aristocracy, dreaming of the old family plantation – Belle Reve – lost through bankruptcy (the fate of the Old South) and Stanley, uncouth, brutal, with his crude humour and animality. When Blanche later claims that Stanley has raped her, Stella will choose not to believe her. Instead, she sides with Stanley, whom she cannot live without, who stands for sexuality, vitality and the natural instincts. Blanche's destruction is inevitable. Her idealistic dreams of riches and a genteel life, her disparagement⁴ of sexuality cannot stand the test⁵ of reality since she can only attract by using the sexuality she despises. The play can be read as a conflict between illusion and reality, the old world and the new one, the female and male principles.

In order to heighten the dramatic impact of the play, Williams uses contrasts between scenes and characters, symbolic lighting and colours, and evocative music, which creates lyricism but is also close to expressionism.

Born in New York to Jewish immigrant parents, Arthur Miller (1915-2005) was throughout his life engaged in radical politics. In 1957, he was found in contempt of Congress for refusing to incriminate friends and give the names of Communist sympathisers and he later defended student radicals in the 1960s.

Arthur Miller's plays study the interaction between private lives and public affairs, and particularly their effect on family relationships. They show man in conflict with social responsibility. In *All My Sons* (1947), the Keller family is destroyed by the revelation that Joe caused deaths by manufacturing defective parts for military aircraft during the war. It illustrates Miller's view that 'the structure of a play is always the story of how the birds came home to roost⁶', how choices made in the past have consequences in the future.

Willy Loman, the tragic hero of *Death of a Salesman* (1949) epitomizes the post-war feeling of disillusionment and the lies of the American dream. Bewildered and overwhelmed by economic circumstances and personal weakness, Willy lives in a world of illusions and cannot face reality and the success myth encouraged by capitalism. His despair then suicide dramatize the plight of a whole generation.

4. disparagement: *dénigrement, dépréciation*

5. to stand the test of: *résister à l'épreuve de*

6. to come home to roost: *se retourner contre vous*

With *The Crucible* (1953), Miller drew an analogy between the McCarthy anti-Communist hysteria of the 1950s, and the Salem witchcraft trials of Puritan New England. In this parochial society built on exclusion and prohibition there are constant dissensions for sexual or economic reasons. It is these tensions as well as the fear of questioning the social system which lead to hysteria and accusations of witchcraft, of consorting with the devil.

The main character, John Proctor, stands up to the hysteria and superstition and chooses to go to a heroic death. Yielding to the terrifying judges, as most of the characters do when they start 'naming names', would mean losing one's identity, as Proctor understands at the end. As Miller said, the 'real and inner theme' of *The Crucible* was 'the handing over of conscience to another, be it woman, the state, or a terror, and the realisation that with conscience goes the person, the soul immortal, and the name.' 'How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!', Proctor cries out at the end of the play.

■ Absurdity, alienation, apocalypse

The performance of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* at San Quentin prison in 1956 was a seminal event which paved the way for plays (increasingly Off-Broadway, then Off-Off Broadway) about man's alienation. Several playwrights wrote variations upon that theme, with in the last two decades of the century the flowering of African-American, Chinese-American and feminine voices (Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart*, 1981; David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1988); Marsha Norman's *Night Mother* (1983).

In the plays of Edward Albee (b. 1928), the settings are stark and oppressive and the characters limited to two or three people who assail each other, physically or verbally. They are lost beings, incapable of breaking free from their isolation, except in self-deception. The plays are reminiscent of the theatre of the absurd but also carry social criticism, Albee explaining in a Preface to *The American Dream* that the play is 'an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society'.

The Zoo Story (1958) is a long monologue by a drifter in search of human contact, life being like a zoo where men live in 'caged isolation'.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), set in a New England College, records the bitter relationship between George and Martha, a deeply troubled couple. In the presence of another couple at their home, they taunt each other, insult their guests, engage in perilous emotional games and finally publicly 'kill' the fictional son they had invented to replace the one they could not have. The last act, which means they can no longer take refuge in illusion, brings a possible measure of redemption as if illusions were destructive of their relationship and savagery was a necessary cleansing ritual. The play is striking in its witty, yet violent and brutal dialogue which illustrates the terrible power of words.

Over a long career Sam Shepard (b. 1943) wrote almost 50 plays, acted in many films, directed others, and wrote screenplays. Influenced by happenings*, his first plays are improvisations inspired by jazz. The world of his plays is that of movies and rock music with their stars and icons, that of pop art and television, of science-fiction and westerns. *The Tooth of Crime* (1972) shows the conflict between an ageing rock star and a young challenger. *Buried Child* (1978) shows the breakdown of family values; *A Lie in the Mind* (1985) is a reflection on language and on love, while *States of Shock* (1991) denounces the Gulf War, the product of a self-destructive society. Shepard's plays often contrast the 19th century frontier and the contemporary Southwest. His theatre is one of extremes, where emotions are tempestuous, brutal, elemental.

The plays of David Mamet (b. 1947) are set among the masculine world of gangsters, crooks and conmen, whose criminal methods reflect the darker side of the American dream, the cupidity and voracity which attend economic laissez-faire and speculation. Mamet has developed a distinctive style of dialogue (often called 'Mametspeak') characterized by clipped⁷, raw street slang ('It was stuff you heard in the street. It was stuff you overheard in the taxicab. It wasn't writerly', Mamet said), with characters constantly interrupting each other, thus creating a kind of poetic rhythm.

In *American Buffalo* (1976), a few petty crooks plan to steal a collection of valuable coins but are too incompetent and suspicious of each other to succeed. Underlying the play are some core American themes: the need to belong, to be part of a group, and the way these small-time thieves duplicate the world and the language of big business. *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984) is about real estate con men who try to sell land to naive investors. These salesmen, who are desperate for self-respect and money, are also the victims of brutal employers. *Speed-the-Plow* (1988) is about the underside of the show business.

Mamet is also a screenwriter and director.

FICTION

Thousands of novels have been published in the United States since 1945, at a rhythm never equalled before. A choice had to be made, sometimes arbitrary, often personal, without enough distance to determine which writers or works will survive the test of time. Several popular genres, such as crime fiction and science-fiction also had to be left out in spite of comprising some excellent works. Classification is difficult too and the various categories selected below have permeable barriers, many books belonging to a number of different categories.

■ Beats and rebels

'We are survivors, in this age, so theories of progress ill become us, because we are

7. clipped: prononcé rapidement, en avançant certaines syllabes

intimately acquainted with the costs.' So speaks one of Saul Bellow's characters, summarizing the existential sense of void which led several writers to search for answers in marginal cultures.

The Beat generation (→ p. 315-316) produced novelists as well as poets. They celebrated sexuality and the underground urban life, as Henry Miller had done a few decades earlier, and agreed with Mailer that 'the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self'.

That journey was the very subject of *On the Road* (1957) by Jack Kerouac (1922-1969). It was at Columbia University that Kerouac met Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, who were, with him, at the centre of the Beat movement. The publication of *On the Road* (1957), which relates a journey taken some ten years earlier by Kerouac and Cassady, looking for adventure in the United States and Mexico, made him famous. Unable to deal with the popular success of *On the Road*, Kerouac suffered moral and spiritual decline until the end of his life.

Written in a style which Kerouac called 'spontaneous prose' and Ginsberg 'a spontaneous bop prosody', *On the Road* is episodic, fragmentary, raw. It was composed in a few weeks, with little revision in order to convey the energy and urgency of the writer's experience, not unlike the way jazz is composed. It develops through association of ideas, drawing on the surrealists' 'automatic writing' or on the 'action painting' of the abstract expressionists.

What is striking in the novel is the joy of being there, of enjoying the present moment, driving, hitchhiking, finding ecstasy with women or drugs. Sal Paradise (who stands for Kerouac) and Dean Moriarty (a true rebel and bohemian) experiment with everything that can provide an escape. At the same time *On the Road* is also a celebration of the vastness of the American landscape, of the excitement of moving and discovering new vistas over a century after the pioneers. It became a cult novel for the post-war 'Rebels Without a Cause'.

It was drizzling and mysterious at the beginning of our journey. I could see that it was all going to be one big saga of the mist. 'Whoeee!' yelled Dean. 'Here we go!' And he hunched over the wheel and gunned her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that. We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, move. And we moved! We flashed past the mysterious white signs in the night somewhere in New Jersey that say SOUTH (with an arrow) and WEST (with an arrow) and took the south one. New Orleans! It burned in our brains. (ll. 6)

Another writer who examined all the extreme possibilities of counter-culture is Ken Kesey (1935-2001). After studying creative writing at Stanford University, he met counter-cultural groups and experimented with LSD and psychoactive drugs before undertaking long trips across America in a psychedelic bus. His novels reflect a fear

of all systems that can restrain or control individuals. His best-known novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) is set in a psychiatric hospital, where McMurphy, a new inmate, makes fun of the hospital rules and decides to 'liberate' the other patients by organising all kinds of hilarious events. It turns into a confrontation between McMurphy and the frightening and anti-natural Big Nurse. The story is allegorical and exposes the way institutions and society stifle individuality, sexuality and freedom. The novel achieved cult status and was turned into a play then a film directed by Milos Forman.

The Beat movement also inspired Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964), William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), the novels and poetry of Charles Bukowski and Henry Miller's *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945).

■ Between fiction and journalism

As the relationship between literature and reality was increasingly being questioned in post-war fiction, several writers explored the frontier between reporting and fiction, submitting real events to imaginative transformation to create a genre that is half fact half speculation or imagination and that has been called neo-realism, new journalism, creative journalism, and non-fiction novels.

The first novel Truman Capote (1924-84) wrote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), a semi-autobiographical gothic novel about a boy's search for his father, made him famous and turned him into a flamboyant public figure. The short stories that followed (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 1958) have charm, inventiveness, unconventional characters and are written in a clear, refined prose.

Capote then turned to non-fiction with *In Cold Blood* (1966), an enquiry into the real murder of a Kansas family by two psychopaths. Capote tried to explain their gratuitous violence from a large amount of information he gathered during six years of research on the men, using fictional techniques only to structure his narrative and create tension and suspense. Capote and his friend Harper Lee interviewed the two men as well as neighbours and investigators, taking thousands of pages of notes. In the resulting book, facts are brought together and become part of an intricate pattern. The tone remains dispassionate, there is no commentary or judgement. *In Cold Blood* attempts to understand the two men's relationship, their motivations, and the effect of the murders on the community in an effort to understand the violence of contemporary society.

Norman Mailer (1923-2007) was born in the Jewish district of Brooklyn and took part in World War II in the Pacific. It inspired *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), a naturalist, ironic and existential tale of war and of men in extreme situations – a metaphor* for modern society. After the success of the novel Mailer started leading a flamboyant public life, involving himself in all kinds of cultural and political activities.

The books that followed are poised between fiction and history (the subtitle of *The Armies of the Night* is *History as a Novel / The Novel as History*) and explore a large range of topical and historical subjects: his opposition to the Vietnam War (*The Armies of the Night*, 1968; *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, 1967), a fictional chronicle of the CIA (*Harlot's Ghost*, 1991), a biography of the assassin of President Kennedy (*Oswald's Tale*, 1995), the execution of Harry Gilmore for murder (*The Executioner's Song*, 1980), even the story of Christ narrated by himself (*The Gospel According to the Son*, 1997), and a novel about the childhood of Hitler (*The Castle in the Forest*). What these novels have in common is an investigation into the effect of power on individuals and an exploration of the American culture, a culture of superficiality, pop heroes, materialism, loss of free thought, which leads Mailer to plead for a new generation of rebels (or 'hipsters') against conformity.

Another writer who associated journalism and fiction in order to comment on the morals and manners of the time is Tom Wolfe (1931). His New Journalism is fiercely satirical, often sensational and commercially successful. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) chronicles Ken Kesey's escapades and trips with his friends 'The Merry Pranksters', who all used psychedelic drugs. *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), more a novel than journalism is a broad satire of the New York society, modelled after Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (→ p. 124).

Other non-fiction novels include Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* (1964, about the battle of Little Big Horn), William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967, a reconstruction of Nat Turner's slave rebellion), E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971, about the trial and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg), *Ragtime* (1975, which brings together several well-known figures in the first two decades of the twentieth century), and *Homer & Langley* (2009, an imaginary life of the Collyer brothers who were found dead in Harlem in 1947).

■ Novels of manners and social concerns

Confronted with the 'death of the novel' many novelists felt that the realistic tradition could still survive, and they chronicled the changes in contemporary society, people's struggles and conflicts, their feeling of isolation amid contemporary anonymity. The self, love, sexuality, death remain the objects of their study, offering at the same time a portrait of contemporary America, its cities and suburbs, cafés and motels, supermarkets and dinner parties. These writers still believe in moral values and in the ideals of humanism.

J. D. Salinger (1919-2010) was brought up in New York and studied writing at Columbia University. He was involved in the invasion of Normandy during the Second World War, the horror that he then witnessed inspiring his short story 'To Esmé – With Love and Squalor'. He published stories in various magazines before writing his only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*. After publishing *Seymour*, Salinger went into seclusion, neither publishing nor giving interviews until his death.

The Catcher in the Rye (1951) traces a few days in the life of an adolescent, Holden Caulfield, who runs away from boarding school and, wandering in New York, looks at the hypocritical ('phony'), indifferent and corrupted world of adults with freshness, innocence and contempt for conventions, not unlike Huckleberry Finn a century earlier. A rebel and a dreamer, Holden feels alienated from the world of adults and resists growing up, clinging to the simplicity and innocence of childhood and trying to keep other 'innocents' from falling into experience. He narrates his story with a moving blend of disillusion and optimism and in the humorous and sometimes crude language of teenagers. With its expression of teenage angst, the book became a cult novel for a whole generation of young rebels.

Salinger's stories (*Nine Stories*, 1953; *Franny and Zooey*, 1961; *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*, 1963) are critiques of the artificiality of contemporary culture, which only the innocence of children can redeem.

The suburban middle-class is also the object of John Updike's analysis. Brought up in a small Pennsylvania town, John Updike (1932-2009) always felt nostalgia for the rural life he knew as a child. He describes the middle America of Pennsylvania and New England, anatomizing their moral concerns in a world which is increasingly artificial and permissive, a world poised between religious belief and skepticism. His middle-class characters have difficulty adapting to modern society, caught between conventions, inhibitions and the new permissiveness. He particularly explores the themes of marriage, infidelity and sex, Harry's domestic problems in the *Rabbit* series, wife-swapping and erotic games in *Couples* (1968). Updike's *Rabbit* series (*Rabbit, Run*, 1960; *Rabbit Redux*, 1971; *Rabbit Is Rich*, 1981; *Rabbit At Rest*, 1990) traces the life of Harry Angstrom, a mediocre and discontented car salesman whose various affairs, success and failures, are treated with insight and empathy, and offers a portrait of America's politics and social conflicts during four decades. As in Philip Roth's novels, Harry Angstrom's story is linked to larger events and movements.

Updike's novels contain a wealth of allusions, quotations, mythological and philosophical references. *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) evoke Puritan Salem, *Roger's Version* (1987) rewrites *The Scarlet Letter* from the point of view of Reverend Dimmesdale. *The Centaur* (1963) draws on the Centaur Chiron and Prometheus to describe a disenchanting and depressed schoolteacher and his artistic son. Updike is a brilliant stylist, who illuminates and transfigures the ordinary with his polished, witty, lyrical sentences.

Suburbia is also the favourite setting for the stories and novels of John Cheever (1912-1982). *The Enormous Radio* (1953) and the Wapshot novels probe the sad and troubled or corrupted lives that are spent inside the ordinary, comfortable houses of suburban America. There is also nostalgia for past cultural traditions and sense of community.

The short stories of Raymond Carver (1938-88) are set in what has been called 'Carver Country', bars, diners, shopping malls, suburban homes, and feature

dysfunctional families and lonely individuals in dead-end jobs and with alcohol problems. Their spiritual vacancy and difficulty to communicate are conveyed through a spare, minimalist style (*Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, 1976; *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, 1981; *Cathedral*, 1983).

The fiction of Joyce Carol Oates (b. 1938) engages with social problems, with all the scars left by modern society. Her novels abound in violence, rape, suicide, murder or mental breakdown, creating a Gothic atmosphere. The breakdown of family and community ties is often seen as responsible for personal collapse. As Oates wrote, 'I have tried to give shape to certain obsessions of mid-century Americans – a confusion of love and money, of the categories of public and private experience, of the demonic urge I sense all around me, an urge to violence as the answer to all problems, an urge to self-annihilation, suicide, the ultimate experience and the ultimate surrender.' *them* (1969) is about fragmented lives in Detroit; *Bellefleur* (1980), the saga of a family, contains magic realism and Gothic elements.

Oates is a prolific and popular writer, who has also published poetry and essays.

The myth of the West as Eldorado forms the basis of all the novels and stories of Joan Didion (b. 1934). It is an ideal against which the post-war industrialized west has to be measured. The California she describes in *Play It As It Lays* (1970) is a wasteland in which moral values have been replaced by mental vacuity. *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) describes the student revolutionary movements of the 1960s, and a culture of chaos and decay. A moralist, she portrays society as fragmented, disintegrating and people as breaking down and self-deteriorating. Her tone is both detached and elegiac. She has also written journalism.

The novels and stories of Russell Banks (b. 1940) are concerned with racial and social questions. He writes about the struggles of working-class characters who have been marginalized by poverty, drug abuse, unemployment or divorce (*Success Stories*, 1986; *Continental Drift*, 1985; *The Sweet Hereafter*, 1991; *Cloudsplitter*, 1998).

Recent women novelists who explore family and community life include Grace Paley (1922-2007), whose stories are set in cheap urban and suburban districts, among ordinary working class people, who struggle to survive amid economic and personal difficulties, divorces, illness, depression, but always keep a measure of hope, Alison Lurie (b. 1926), who writes satires* on academics, Ann Tyler (b. 1941), who examines American families and marriage, *Breathing Lessons*, (1988), and Ann Beattie (b. 1947, who anatomizes the middle class and upper middle-class).

■ Southern fiction

Regional fiction was slow to flourish after the 1920s. One should, however, mention Garrison Keillor's *Lake Wobegon Days* (1985), a humorous chronicle of life in a small prairie town, and the novels and stories of Annie Proulx, tales of loneliness and struggle against the remote, barren and hostile backdrops of Newfoundland or Wyoming. The notable exception is Southern literature, which continued to flourish

after the war, thus proving that literature could live on after Faulkner. Although Southern literature has tended to move closer to that of mainstream America, it has retained a deep regional sense, as well as the Southern tradition of introspection and Gothic events.

The novels of Robert Penn Warren (1905-89) (*All the King's Men*, 1947, about a cynical Southern politician) and his poetry (*Selected Poems*, 1985) are concerned with the weight of the past, the lessons taught us by history, often ironic ones, and philosophical reflections.

Eudora Welty (1909-2001) spent all her life in Mississippi (even recording Mississippi in words and pictures for the New Deal's Works Progress Administration) and her stories and novels are anchored in its landscape. In her essay *Place in Fiction* she wrote that 'Fiction is all bound up in the local. The internal reason for that is surely that feelings are bound up in place.' They are also bound up in history and the process of recollection. Her stories (*A Curtain of Green*, 1941; *The Bride of Innesfallen*, 1955) chronicle the lives of poor, lonely people and of the grotesques that so often people Southern fiction. Eudora Welty records intense moments of emotion, of despair or communion, and views her characters with a mixture of compassion, sensitivity and humour. *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972) contrasts a woman's grief after her father's death with the vulgar reactions of his second wife. Left in her old father's house, his daughter reminisces about her parents, little by little revealing the tragedy of her own life. *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942) is a plantation novel.

Loneliness and the inability to communicate are feelings shared by most of the characters of Carson McCullers (1917-67), many of them eccentrics or misfits in the Southern Gothic tradition. Born in Georgia, Carson McCullers set her novels in small southern towns, where racism, isolation and frustration prevail. Her characters are mostly misfits and grotesques who find communication difficult and whose love is rarely reciprocated.

In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1941), several lonely characters turn to Singer, a sensitive and intelligent deaf-mute, for companionship and confession, believing that he is the only one that can understand them. He becomes a sort of Christ-like figure who can read their lips but cannot speak. But in this near allegorical novel Singer is just as lonely as they are since he loves his friend Antanopoulos, a fat, selfish Greek whose only passion is food.

Reflections in a Golden Eye (1940) is an even more Gothic novel, which treats of homosexuality, sadism and voyeurism. *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1944) dramatizes her dark view of love:

'There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto. And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his

love is a solitary thing. He comes to know a new, strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer.'

The Member of the Wedding (1946) is about an adolescent's search for communion and identity. Carson McCullers has a particular gift for giving each of her characters an unmistakable voice of his/her own.

Grotesques also people the fiction of Flannery O'Connor (1925-64). A devout Catholic, she believed in good and evil and in grace. In 'The Grotesque in Southern Fiction', she explains her choice of extreme characters, of distortion rather than realism, by explaining that 'To the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures.' By her Catholic standards the society she describes is unnatural, so that only unnatural, distorted characters can symbolize it. The subject of her fiction is the way even violent, freakish characters can experience revelation and grace. Believing that people are becoming indifferent to religion, she asserts the power of mystery and the possibility of redemption.

In her stories (*A Good Man is Hard to Find*, 1955; *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, 1965) and novels (*Wise Blood*, 1952; *The Violent Bear It Away*, 1960), empty, frustrated lives lead to violence, despair and the realization that redemption is necessary. In the title story 'A Good Man is Hard to Find', a proud, smug grandmother starts questioning her religious beliefs when she meets the Misfit, an escaped convict, and is granted grace before she dies.

The novels of William Styron (1925-2006) explore the reasons why people 'live in wretched unhappiness' and their fortitude when faced with oppression. Even though the situations on which he bases his novels are not Southern, they express a bleak view of history which accords with the spirit of Southern fiction. *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951) digs into the past of a young Southern woman to understand why she committed suicide. His best-known novels address the evils of history, the story of Nat Turner, who led a slave rebellion in 1831, told from his own point of view (*The Confessions of Nat Turner*, 1967) and that of an Auschwitz survivor who had to decide which of her two children was to live and which to die (*Sophie's Choice*, 1979).

Walker Percy (1916-90) too chose misfits for his main characters, oversensitive or freakish people who are on the margins of society and try to make sense of the world. The protagonist of *The Moviegoer* (1961), traumatized by his experience in the Korean War, lives in a world of day-dreams and finds more sense in books and in movies. The novel traces his life during a long journey outside his home, during which he has to interact with his surroundings. Everything around him looks like a modern wasteland of materialism. All Percy's characters are engaged in a quest, looking for values that they cannot find.

One should also mention *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Harper Lee (1926-2016)'s best-seller. It tells the story of a white Alabama lawyer who defends a black man accused of rape. The narrator, the lawyer's young daughter, discovers racism and prejudice through the community's hostility to her family. A controversial early draft of the novel, *Go Set a watchman*, was published in 2015.

'There's no such thing as life without bloodshed,' Cormac McCarthy (b. 1933) said in an interview for *The New York Times*. Indeed, wildness and brutality, both in landscapes and in people, mark each of his novels. They are located in Tennessee and the Southern States and deal with dark, violent themes (murder, incest, necrophilia, outcasts). Many of his protagonists are homeless, wanderers.

Set in the late 1840s and based on historical events, *Blood Meridian* (1985) relates the story of a 14-year old runaway boy – 'the kid' – who becomes part of a gang of scalp hunters. Undermining the myth of Indians as victims, the novel shows there are no heroes and exposes the frightening violence that both Indians and gangs engage in as the frontier moves westward. *No Country for Old Men* (2005) is a terrifying thriller which relates a chain of murders triggered by a drug deal which has gone wrong. Watching it all is the philosophical and melancholy Sheriff Bell.

The Road (2006) is set in a post-apocalypse world where everything – nature as well as cities, animal as well as most human life – has been reduced to ashes by some unspecified catastrophe. Everything is grey and black – colours exist only in memory. A man and his son, both unnamed, walk on a road, trying to reach the Gulf and a milder climate. We hear the voice of the father, a man with a mission, obeying a primeval drive to save his son from the omnipresent evil embodied by marauding cannibals and murdering gangs. Their march across the wilderness has biblical overtones and the boy is like a messiah, carrying the light in a world where God seems to have abandoned them. What survives is the tenderness and love between father and son, expressed in terse, moving dialogues. Mc Carthy's style is spare and lyrical, with long, barely punctuated sentences reminiscent of Faulkner's, and laconic, realistic dialogue. His detailed observation of nature and his long descriptions of the empty, forbidding Southern landscapes are hauntingly poetic.

■ The New York intellectuals

A number of mainly Jewish New York intellectuals formed a loose group after the war and shared several preoccupations, the trauma of the Holocaust, a habit of introspection, and the feeling of being both outsiders and insiders.

THE JEWISH AMERICAN NOVEL

No school of Jewish American writers was ever formed, and although some, like Saul Bellow, declined the label 'Jewish Renaissance' and held that each writer remained highly individual, there are common points in their works. World War II and the Holocaust had made them the champions of a new humanism and of individualism against all totalitarian and repressive regimes. The figure of the Jew became representative of the alienation of modern man, a prey to existential doubts. 'All men are Jews,' said Bernard Malamud.

Some recurrent themes in their fiction are:

- An urban setting, that of large cities like Chicago or New York marked by indifference and anonymity, a background treated realistically and satirically,
- The importance of Jewish family ties with their conflicts and often domineering mothers and wives (in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* for example.),
- Liberal or radical political ideas,
- Divided allegiances, from a religious point of view (belief v. doubt) or a cultural one (their European heritage v. assimilation),
- Tensions in the community (Jews v. Gentiles, as in many of Malamud's stories)
- Introspection, interior monologues (in Bellow's *Herzog* for instance), existential doubts, sometimes leading to alienation or paranoia,
- Irony* or black humour, a way of distancing themselves from anxiety.

The main novelists are Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Isaac Bashevis Singer (who mainly writes in Yiddish), and Joseph Heller.

Saul Bellow (1915-2005) was the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants who moved to Chicago in the 1920s. In the late 1930s he did some work for the Works Progress Administration, which left him with an interest in social realism, in art anchored in society.

In his novels there is a constant conflict between public and private life. His protagonists are vulnerable, oversensitive, over-intellectual, often blundering⁸ comically in absurd situations, revealing their troubled and paranoid selves in monologues or long first-person narratives. Although they feel alienated, they still try to find meaning and defend their values in a chaotic and hostile world, try to defend the dignity of man and humanist values inherited from the past and from their religion. The setting for most of his novels is urban, large cities like New York or Chicago, which mean anonymity but also ethnic diversity.

The Adventures of Augie March (1953) is a picaresque novel and Bildungsroman set in Chicago, where the eponymous* hero gradually succeeds in making sense of his own life.

Moses Herzog, the protagonist of *Herzog* (1964) is a typical Bellow character: twice divorced, rarely seeing his children, humiliated by his second wife, fearing that as a professor he is beginning to ramble, Herzog is going through an inner crisis and wondering if his former wife is right when she tells him that his sanity has collapsed. Assailed by doubts and questionings, fascinated by ideas, his response is to write letters, endlessly, to his family, his psychiatrist, to politicians and philosophers (Eisenhower, the governor, Heidegger), even to God, to help him clarify his view of life and his own self. Herzog writes fewer and fewer letters as the novel progresses and as he gradually begins to heal and be able to face the real world. The novel is told from Herzog's point

8. to blunder: *idée de maladresse (démarche, actions)*

of view, and the reader becomes increasingly caught in the labyrinth of his mind, his inner debates, misgivings, uncertainties, but also captivated by the humour and the vitality of the narrative.

Humboldt's Gift (1975) is a reflection on the relationship between art and power, and between the artist and society. It contrasts the careers of two writers, one who succeeds materially, the other who defends artistic honesty and dies a failure.

The novels and stories of **Bernard Malamud** (1914-1986) unite naturalism* and parable*, being rich in symbolism. They also contain many references to the Jewish myths and culture of Eastern Europe, from where his family originated. His characters are often poor, overwhelmed by circumstances and bad luck, and in search of hope in bleak urban environments. *The Assistant* (1957) is the story of Morris Bober, who owns a small grocery and struggles to keep afloat amid debts, competition from a larger store and theft. This downward spiral leads to his death, yet in the end his honesty converts his delinquent assistant to Jewishness and responsibility. *The Fixer* (1967) is about anti-semitism in Tsarist Russia. Some of his later novels also deal with the conflict between conventional and artistic values. Malamud has also written short stories (*The Magic Barrel*, 1958; *Idiots First*, 1963) which often contain elements of Yiddish folklore as well as magic realism.

The main interests of **Philip Roth** (b. 1933) are moral and political. A recurrent theme in his fiction is the necessity to assert the self despite social pressures to conform. The targets of his satire are racism, sexism, conventional morality, political correctness and a society given to materialism, social success and narcissism. Concerned with the experience of the larger group, of a whole generation, Roth usually sets the private lives of his characters within their historical context (the Vietnam War, the protests for Civil Rights, the impeachment of Bill Clinton...) creating parallelisms between the private and public spheres, showing the way lives are determined by history.

Portnoy's Complaint (1969), is the humorous and sexually crude monologue of a Jewish man to his psychoanalyst, explaining his lust, frustrations, obsessions and difficult relationship with his overbearing Jewish mother. The novel caused a scandal both for its sexual frankness and for the image it gave of Jews. Sexual obsession in several of his novels (*The Breast*, 1971, is a Kafkaesque novel in which the protagonist is changed into a breast) may reflect nostalgia for a lost moral order. His tetralogy *Zuckerman Bound* (1985: *The Ghost writer*, *Zuckerman Bound*, *The Anatomy Lesson*, *The Prague Orgy*) follows the career of Nathan Zuckerman, a writer who rises to fame with a bawdy novel and Roth's alter ego. He allows Roth meta-fictional* reflections upon writing, and upon the relationship between life and art. Another trilogy (*American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998) and *The Human Stain* (2000)) still features Nathan Zuckerman as narrator and is about political and social questions.

The Human Stain, relates the story of Coleman Silk, a college professor falsely accused of racism after using the ambiguous word 'spook'⁹, the irony being that he could have been saved by revealing what he cannot reveal, that he is black but so light-skinned that he decided to cross the race divide and live as a white Jew in order to be free and not an object of prejudice, as his father was. Coleman Silk was a victim of the American dream, which told him that anyone can reinvent himself, a notion that he pushed to the extreme. The novel is set in its historical context, the summer of 1998 (the Clinton years and their sexual scandals) and denounces the righteousness and sanctimoniousness of enduring Puritanism in the United States.

Exit Ghost (2007), the last Zuckerman novel is an elegiac reflection on aging and mortality.

One should also mention the novels of **Stanley Elkin** (1930-1995), which are darkly humorous satires* on American society, written in an exuberant language (*George Mills*, 1982; *The MacGuffin*, 1991), and those of **Isaac Bashevis Singer** (1904-1991), a Polish immigrant who arrived in the United States in 1935, and set his stories and novels in the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw which he knew as a child, celebrating without nostalgia a vibrant life which can be comic, sentimental or ribald. Singer wrote in Yiddish and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1978 (*The Magician of Lublin*, 1960; *Enemies: A Love Story*, 1972). *Enemies* is set in the United States and is a reflection on the trauma left by the Holocaust.

■ Ethnic voices

In the second half of the twentieth century, fiction has increasingly been concerned with the relationship between one's cultural heritage and the dominant American culture.

■ African-American voices

Richard Wright's 'The Man Who Lived Underground', a short story in which a man falsely accused by the police escapes from custody and takes refuge underground in the sewer system, where he survives better than in the racist society above ground, is an existential tale which dramatizes the predicament of those whom society ignored, who were denied recognition. Its seminal metaphor influenced a whole generation of African American writers.

The experience of black people also often became that of all those who were marginal and who in their turn became hipsters¹⁰, existing without roots, as Norman Mailer explained in his essay 'The White Negro': 'the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries.'

9. a spook: a ghost or an offensive word for a black person

10. a hipster: a beatnik, a hippie

Ralph Ellison (1914-94) was born in Oklahoma. His early interest in jazz, blues, and classical music is reflected in *Invisible Man*, his only novel.

Nameless and invisible, the narrator of *Invisible Man* (1952) lives in a basement room where 1,369 electric light bulbs illuminate the room and his own understanding of himself. Images of sight and blindness, of curtains and veils (reminiscent of Du Bois's writings) point to America's failure of vision as he traces his life from the South to Harlem, to the 'Brotherhood' (a Communist movement which in fact perpetuates racial prejudice), before he finally accepts his identity. White people do not see him because he is black, as illustrated in a scene in which he keeps being mistaken for someone else. The structure of the novel is episodic, with a succession of scenes which have a cumulative effect and gradually move from naturalism* to expressionism* and even surrealism*. Ellison did not want to write just 'another novel of black protest' and chose a blend of wry humour, burlesque, and symbolism, in which the various incidents resonate with significance. He is for instance given a scholarship to a black college but on condition that, blindfolded, he fights a 'battle royal' with another black man. Or, when he takes a poorly-paid job at the Liberty Paint Company, whose trademark colour is 'Optic White' and which proclaims on its electric sign, KEEP AMERICA PURE WITH LIBERTY PAINTS, he puts ten drops of black paint into the vats of white paint, and they disappear, undetectable. The various scenes refer to the history of America's oppression of black people, to the different ways they were stripped of identity, and are based on black folklore or jazz. Ellison's language associates puns and jokes, folk culture and speech, and the rhythms of jazz.

These are the well-known opening sentences of the Prologue:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids -- and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

Ellison also wrote essays (*Shadow and Act*, 1964; *Going to the Territory*, 1986).

James Baldwin (1924-87) was the stepson of a preacher, a violent and bitter man who inspired many of the scenes between father and son in Baldwin's fiction. Baldwin underwent a religious experience when he was fourteen and even started preaching, but abandoned religion three years later. His works address the search for one's identity, inspired by his own experience of being black and homosexual. He rejected the protest novel of the kind Richard Wright wrote, believing that love and understanding would work better than separation into black and white categories.

Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953) traces the growth of a teenage boy who tries to find his identity in a violent home, racist society, and with growing religious and sexual awareness. He cannot accept the escapist solutions offered by the church (his father) or the street and drugs (his brother). *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and *Another Country* (1962) address the question of homosexuality. Baldwin is perhaps best-known for his essays*. *Nobody Knows My Name* (1962) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963) are

passionate expressions of anger and denunciations of society's hypocrisy. Baldwin's prose is lyrical and meditative, often influenced by the rhetoric of sermons.

Started in Harlem by LeRoi Jones in the 1960s, the Black Arts Movement, the artistic side of the Black Power movement aimed at linking art and politics. It encouraged African Americans to create their own magazines, publishing houses, institutions, arguing that black people did not have to assimilate. Black art had to remain part of the black community. The movement was highly controversial, but the very debates around it helped the flowering of African American literature after the war. African American women writers were particularly active after 1970.

The daughter of Georgia sharecroppers, Alice Walker (b. 1944) celebrates the endurance and achievements of black women. She has written novels, short stories, plays, poetry and essays; she is also an activist who has campaigned against racism, sexism and nuclear power.

The Color Purple (1982) is an epistolary* novel, which captures the voice of a young woman, Celie, the victim of sexual abuse at fourteen, when she starts her letters to God. She will then write to her sister Nettie, forge her own identity and find love for another woman.

Paule Marshall (1929) writes about both her black heritage and the Caribbean culture of her family. In her stories and novels, she explores the way confronting one's roots and communal past can help forge an identity. Many of her protagonists are Barbadian women, strong women endowed with an extraordinary power with words, a 'set of giants whom I always acknowledge before all others; the group of women around the table long ago - this is why the best of my work must be attributed to them; it stands as testimony to the rich legacy of language and culture they so freely passed on to me in the wordshop of the kitchen.' *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) is an apprenticeship novel; *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) relates Avey Johnson's Caribbean journey to reclaim her family's cultural roots.

Toni Morrison (b. 1931) was born in an Ohio family that implanted in her a love of storytelling, folklore and magic. She studied English and classics at Howard University and Cornell, then worked as a university professor and editor. In 1993, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

One of the aims of her fiction is to enable blacks to 'recognize and rescue those qualities of resistance, excellence, and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks now growing up.' It was those qualities that made survival possible. Many of her novels are stories of personal deprivation and disintegration and of communities that have lost their cohesion. Yet there should be hope since black folklore and myths bear witness to the resourcefulness of her people. Many of her novels explore the position of women and the difficulty of motherhood.

The Bluest Eyes (1970) contrasts the sordid slum life of Pecola Breedlove, raped by her father, with the ideal family harmony that appears in her schoolbooks and that

makes her despise herself. Her desire for blue eyes, a repudiation of her identity, leads her to insanity. The novel dismantles the image of the white family as representative of normality. *Sula* (1973) is an exploration of good and evil through the friendship of two women. *Song of Solomon* (1977) traces a man's difficult journey in search of his origins and identity, and his progress toward a sense of community.

B*eloved* (1987), perhaps her most powerful book, is the true story of a slave who, in the mid-19th century, escaped but killed her baby daughter so that she might not be recaptured into slavery. The story is told retrospectively, after Sethe has been released from prison and now lives in a house where the ghost of her child keeps appearing to her. The novel is a scathing indictment¹¹ of the atrocities of slavery. The narrative technique blends naturalism and fantastic elements, myth and folktale.

Morrison's next two books, *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1998) form, with *Beloved*, a loose trilogy about what she called 'various kinds of love', a mother's love, romantic love, and love for humanity. Her style is poetic and lyrical, mostly oral, based on symbolic patterns.

Another important black author is *Maya Angelou* (1928-2014), a poet, novelist, dancer and singer, who is best known for her autobiographies (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1969). Also important in the development of black literature are *Malcolm X's The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965); *Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo*, 1972); *John Edgar Wideman's Homewood Trilogy* (1985); *Ernest J. Gaines's The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) and *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993).

■ Indian-American voices

The civil rights movements of the 1960s and the Indians' demand for recognition encouraged an Indian cultural revival in the 1970s and helped Native Indian literature enter mainstream literature. Recurrent themes in their works are the difficulty of maintaining their identity and the attempt to keep their heritage alive, the importance of tribalism and the community, and nature as regeneration.

A Kiowa Indian, *N. Scott Momaday* (b. 1934) grew up on Navajo, Jemez and Apache reservations, and later studied at Stanford. His novels celebrate the Kiowa culture and traditions and their closeness to the earth. In his best-known novel, *House Made of Dawn* (1968), a young man returns to his New Mexico reservation after fighting in World War II. Traumatized by the war, he is confused and has lost his Indian identity. After years of alcoholism, violence and prison, he finds spiritual revival thanks to his people's traditions. *The Ancient Child* (1989) and *In the Bear's House* (1999) develop similar themes.

Of both German and Chippewa origin, *Louise Erdrich* (b. 1954) writes about multiple identities. In *Love Medicine* (1984) several narrators tell stories which

11. a scathing indictment: *une accusation mordante, cinglante*

draw on Ojibwa myths and legends. They are told in the conversational tone of the Native American storytelling tradition and trace the lives of several generations on a reservation. Recurring themes link all these tales. Similar multiple narratives are used in *Tracks* (1988). Many of her subsequent novels take place in the same community and with reappearing characters (*The Beet Queen*, 1986; *The Bingo Palace*, 1994; *Tales of Burning Love*, 1997), a technique often compared to that of Faulkner and his Yoknapatawpha County.

James Welch, who writes about young Indians who find alcoholism and idleness in big cities (*Winter in the Blood*, 1974), *Leslie Marmon Silko*, whose stories and novels vividly convey the Pueblo traditions of storytelling (*Ceremony*, 1977; *Storyteller*, 1981), and *Sherman Alexie*, whose more militant novels denounce social and economic misery (*Indian Killer*, 1996) are also influential Indian-American voices.

■ Asian-American voices

For a long time Asian-Americans tried to gain assimilation rather than assert the specificity of their origins. But a new interest in Asian roots appeared with the novels of *Maxine Hong Kingston*, *Gish Jen*, and *Amy Tan*.

Amy Tan (b. 1952) published her best-selling *The Joy Luck Club* in 1989. It traces the lives of four Chinese immigrant families in San Francisco who meet regularly to play the Chinese game of mahjong and tell stories about their lives. *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) is a partly autobiographical novel in which a mother reveals to her child that she came to America to flee an abusive marriage. The novel exposes the condition of women in a patriarchal society and the endurance of immigrants.

■ Chicano and Latino voices

Their voices began to be heard after the civil rights militancy of the 1960s. Here are a few remarkable novels – among many others – to come out of Chicano and Latino experience.

Tomas Rivera's Tierra (1971) is about travelling Mexican workers. *Rudolfo Anaya's* Chicano novels address the Aztec past of Mexican-Americans and their search for an identity in the South-West of the United States (*Bless Me, Ultima*, 1972; *Heart of Aztlan*, 1976; *Tortuga*, 1979). *Sandra Cisneros's The House on Mango Street* (1980) is a collection of related stories set in a Chicago neighbourhood and told by a young girl. *Julia Alvarez's How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) is about escaping the Dominican Republic and adapting to an alien culture.

■ Experiments in form and language

In his 1967 essay 'The Literature of Exhaustion', considered a manifesto of postmodernism*, *John Barth* explained that realism was used up but that art had to be kept alive after the 'death of the author'. Barth described his own novels as "novels which imitate the form of the novel, by an author who imitates the role of

Author." Two years after Barth's essay, Ronald Sukenick spoke of 'the death of the novel' in an age of nihilism or, as Saul Bellow argued, in an age in which 'there are no significant people to write about'.

In the following decades, many writers have tried different experimental narrative modes which represent various aspects of postmodernism*, whether meta-fiction*, parody*, fragmentation, or absurdist techniques. All reconsider the traditional boundaries between reality and artifice and between writer and reader. Todd Andrews, the protagonist of Barth's *The Floating Opera* (1956) explains the central metaphor of the novel in lines that could also serve as metaphors for much of postmodernism.

'It always seemed a fine idea to me to build a showboat with just one big flat open deck on it, and to keep a play going continuously. The boat wouldn't be moored, but would drift up and down the river on the tide, and the audience would sit along both banks. They could catch whatever part of the plot happened to unfold as the boat floated past, and then they'd have to wait until the tide ran back again to catch another snatch of it, if they still happened to be sitting there. To fill in the gaps they'd have to use their imaginations, or ask more attentive neighbors, or hear the word passed along from upriver or downriver. Most times they wouldn't understand what was going on at all, or they'd think they knew, when actually they didn't... I needn't explain that that's how much of life works.' (J. Barth, *The Floating Opera*)

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) was born in Russia, but his family left for London then Berlin after the revolution. He studied at Cambridge and emigrated to America in 1940, where he taught Russian literature.

In all of his novels, Nabokov questions the reliability of language to describe reality and the illusory nature of things. Reality is what the viewer makes it. Language can only approximate reality, something reflected in the use of wordplay and multiple levels of meaning.

Nabokov became famous with the scandal that followed the publication of *Lolita* (1958), which was at first banned in the United States. It relates the obsession of a literature professor, Humbert Humbert, for twelve-year old Lolita, whose mother he marries so as to be closer to her. Their journey across America offers a satire on the vulgarity of American consumer culture (its motels, shopping malls, fast food) but is especially striking in its sheer enjoyment of language: puns*, coinages*, anagrams*, double entendres* and intertextuality*. It also contains a parody* of different genres such as the detective story and the confessional novel.

Pale Fire (1962) is structured like a 999-line poem with a prologue and extensive notes. But the notes, written by a colleague of the poet, give very little explanations of the poem and instead indirectly reveal their author's concerns and the plot that associates the two men. In *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969) a psychologist, Van Veen relates the story of his long love affair with his sister Ada. But Veen also explores the nature of time and the art of novel writing. It abounds in puns*, parodies* and pastiche*.

Joseph Heller (1925-1999) chose a more derisory and cynical mode to denounce the perversity of war, a war in which he had served in the US Air Force. *Catch-22* (1961), a black comedy about an Air Force squadron stationed in Italy, is a satire* on the capacity of institutions for hypocrisy and manipulation. The catch of the title lies in the fact that bomber pilots cannot be excused from flying further missions unless they are certified insane, but if you ask to be excused, then you must be sane and therefore cannot be excused. The novel is also a satire* on bureaucratic senselessness and confusing language based on euphemisms* and oxymorons*. The start of the Vietnam War, two years after this absurdist novel was published, gave it enormous resonance. *Good as Gold* (1979) and *God Knows* (1984) are about the Jewish condition in America.

The fiction of Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) is close to science-fiction, taking place in the imaginary planet Tralfamadore. The use of fantasy and black humour expose the absurdity of the world, transforming the ordinary into the surreal. It has made him the champion of counterculture. A prisoner of the Germans during World War II, Vonnegut witnessed the bombing of Dresden, an experience which inspired *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). The novel is poised between history and science-fiction since the narrator, kidnapped by a flying saucer to Tralfamadore, has been taken through a time warp¹² and can be in two places at the same time. Thus, in 1968, he can relive his experience in Dresden in 1944, when he was housed in a slaughterhouse, and now see the bombing backwards. *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) is a fierce satire* on consumerism and advertising.

John Hawkes (1925-98) said that he 'began to write fiction on the assumption that the true enemies of the novel were plot, character, setting and theme'. His novels are often based on contemporary events in which reality is distorted and history becomes hallucination or nightmare, full of horror, dark humour, demonic creatures, irrational events. They constitute a transgression against conventional forms and conventional perspectives. The aim of the novel is not to represent but to create vision that draws on the terrors of the collective unconscious. His novels often set life forces against death forces. *The Cannibal* (1949) offers an apocalyptic and surrealistic vision of post-war Germany. *Second Skin* (1964), *The Blood Oranges* (1971), and *Travesty* (1976) are experiments in unreliable narration. With pastiche*, parody*, allusions, multiple narrators, elusive meaning, the novels of John Barth (b. 1930) seem to underline the impossibility of apprehending reality and the need for fiction to re-invent itself, a view he developed in his essay *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1967). Much of his fiction is based on the rewriting or pastiche* of earlier fiction. *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960) parodies* eighteenth century picaresque novels, and tells the story of Ebenezer Cooke, an English poet who wrote the poem *The Sotweed Factor, or A Voyage to Maryland, A Satyr* (1708), and about whose life very little is known. *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966) develops the allegory* of a university as

12. a time warp: une distorsion spatiotemporelle



Roy Lichtenstein, *As I Opened Fire*, 1964 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
Lichtenstein said of his war imagery: 'A minor purpose of my war paintings is to put military aggressiveness in an absurd light.' Like many postmodern writers, Roy Lichtenstein blurred the borderline between high and low art, magnifying the heroes of comic strips, selecting emotional and dramatic scenes which, like commercial art 'sanitize' human feelings. Pop Art found its inspiration in popular culture and industry (comics, magazines, advertisements, consumer goods) and used modern industrial techniques of reproduction such as collage, repetition, or the silkscreen printing process, behind which the personality of the artist disappears

the world. *Chimera* (1972) consists of three novellas which rewrite tales from *One Thousand and One Nights* and Greek myths. All his fiction betrays a love of language and of telling tales. His convoluted tales are full of metafiction*, inserted stories, parody*, unexpected and fantastic plots. *Letters* (1978), for instance, is a series of eighty-eight letters between the author and characters from his earlier novels.

The idea that we are controlled by conspiracies – or that we are the victims of our own hallucinations – is at the heart of the novels of Thomas Pynchon (b. 1937). His plots tend to be extremely complex, chaotic, kaleidoscopic, based on scientific information and with links to current events. Conspiracies appear through a multiplicity of signs, often based on paranoia, which makes their decoding next to impossible. Pynchon's style is ebullient and inventive.

V. (1963) is a quest for someone we don't know, who may not have existed, with a multiplicity of clues cancelling each other out. The heroine of *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) believes she has uncovered a subversive underground postal network. *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), set at the end of the Second World War, follows Tyrone Slothrop, an American sent to Germany in search of a V2 rocket, but this is only the beginning of what becomes a very complex convergence of plots. *Mason & Dixon* (1997) focuses on the two men who gave their name to the Mason-Dixon line, blending facts, fantasy, speculation and various aspects of U.S. history, including a conspiracy by Jesuits.

Another cult figure for the countercultural youth movement of the 1960s is Richard Brautigan (1935-1984), who uses black comedy, satire*, parody* to criticize mainstream American culture. *Trout Fishing in America* (1967), which brought him fame, is a search for a place for good fishing, which leads the narrator to all sorts of American scenes, a succession of stories and anecdotes, with reappearing characters and objects, constantly deconstructing conventions and baffling the

reader. The dream of trout fishing – which stands for the American dream – seems impossible to fulfil in America's deleterious society but the individual's anarchic and liberating imagination makes anything possible. Brautigan also often uses parody* – of romance (*The Abortion*, 1971); of the Gothic* novel (*The Hawkline Monster*, 1974); of hard-boiled detective stories (*Dreaming of Babylon: a Private Eye Novel* 1942, 1977).

Donald Barthelme (1931-89) was for one year director of the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, an experience which encouraged him to find new forms in fiction, often drawing on pop art. He is best-known for his very short stories, fragmented moments of experience full of humour, absurdity, pastiche* and collage, usually resisting interpretation (*Sixty Stories*, 1981).

William Gass (b. 1924) studied the philosophy of language at Cornell, a subject which profoundly marked his novels and stories. Rejecting realism, defending the autonomy of literature from the world, he wrote stories (*In the Heart of the Heart of the Country*, 1968) and novels (*Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*, 1968) which centre around the act of writing and reading and play with typography and metatextuality*. *The Tunnel* (1994) is about a protagonist who writes about guilt in Nazi Germany, which leads him to probe his own life, then to dig a tunnel under his own house, a metaphor* for his own tunnelling within himself.

William Gaddis (1922-98) uses the postmodern techniques of lack of plot, characters with changing identities, digression and pastiche* to offer a biting satire of materialism, corruption, financial speculation, and wasted artistic creativity at the beginning of the Reagan years. *The Recognitions* (1955) is a lengthy and complex novel set in the world of art and forgery, and dealing with the themes of falsification and mistaken identity. The main theme of *Carpenter's Gothic* (1985) is deception – that of the architectural style that gives its title to the book and that caused by religious and political cynicism. The novel is mainly based on dialogue and creates a confusion of voices.

Under a fairly conventional appearance the novels of Paul Auster (b. 1947) reflect his fascination with chance, with the interaction between free will and destiny, contingency and reason ('The world is governed by chance. Randomness stalks us every day of our lives', he says.). His novels are full of premonitions, coincidences, irrational decisions which allow the characters to enter the world of the unpredictable, a world in which there are infinite parallelisms between otherwise unrelated events, something emphasized by different layers of narrative often creating 'Chinese boxes effects'. *City of Glass* (1985) provides a good example of this. The main character, Quinn, is a writer of thrillers featuring the detective Max Work. Quinn is mistaken for another detective, Paul Auster, and the identities of Quinn, Max Work and Paul Auster start merging, creating confusion, and blurring the line between reality and fiction. (*The New York Trilogy* – *City of Glass*, 1985; *Ghosts*, 1986; *The Locked Room*, 1986 –; *Moon Palace*, 1989; *Mr Vertigo*, 1994; *The Brooklyn Follies*, 2005; *Man in the Dark*, 2007).

The strange, complex plots of Don DeLillo (b. 1936) illustrate the dehumanization of American life in a society where corporations, technology, media, advertising, government, underground conspiracies, and terrorism create anxiety, dominate and control our lives. Many of his novels use the conventions of the thriller (*Running Dog*, 1978) or science-fiction (*Ratner's Star*, 1976). *White Noise* (1985) is about the soundtrack of America, which overwhelms people's lives and hides the fear of death. Many of DeLillo's recent novels have dealt with current events, the assassination of J.F. Kennedy in *Libra* (1988), or terrorism (*Mao II*, 1991; *Falling Man*, 2007.) One should also mention the novels and stories of Steven Millhauser (b. 1943) (*Martin Dressler*, 1997; *The Barnum Museum*, 1990), full of fantasy and magic realism* and those of Robert Coover (b. 1932) (*The Public Burning*, 1977, which explores the way history is recorded.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987):

The need to reconstruct the experience of slavery

124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did
 the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe
 and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was
 dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen
 5 years old – as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for
 Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard).
 Neither boy waited to see more; another kettleful of chickpeas smoking in a heap
 on the floor; soda crackers crumbled and strewn in a line next to the door-sill. Nor
 did they wait for one of the relief periods: the weeks, months even, when nothing
 10 was disturbed. No. Each one fled at once – the moment the house committed what
 was for him the one insult not to be borne or witnessed a second time. Within two
 months, in the dead of winter, leaving their grandmother, Baby Suggs; Sethe, their
 mother; and their little sister, Denver, all by themselves in the gray and white house
 on Bluestone Road. It didn't have a number then, because Cincinnati didn't stretch
 15 that far. In fact, Ohio had been calling itself a state only seventy years when first one
 brother and then the next stuffed quilt packing into his hat, snatched up his shoes,
 and crept away from the lively spite the house felt for them.
 Baby Suggs didn't even raise her head. From her sickbed she heard them go but
 that wasn't the reason she lay still. It was a wonder to her that her grandsons
 20 had taken so long to realize that every house wasn't like the one on Bluestone
 Road. Suspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead,

– she couldn't get interested in leaving life or living it, let alone the fright of two
 – creeping-off boys. Her past had been like her present – intolerable – and since she
 – knew death was anything but forgetfulness, she used the little energy left her for
 25 pondering color.
 – "Bring a little lavender in, if you got any. Pink, if you don't."
 – And Sethe would oblige her with anything from fabric to her own tongue. Winter
 – in Ohio was especially rough if you had an appetite for color. Sky provided the
 – only drama, and counting on a Cincinnati horizon for life's principal joy was
 30 reckless indeed. So Sethe and the girl Denver did what they could, and what the
 – house permitted, for her. Together they waged a perfunctory battle against the
 – outrageous behavior of that place; against turned-over slop jars, smacks on the
 – behind, and gusts of sour air. For they understood the source of the outrage as well
 – as they knew the source of light.
 35 Baby Suggs died shortly after the brothers left, with no interest whatsoever in
 – their leave-taking or hers, and right afterward Sethe and Denver decided to end the
 – persecution by calling forth the ghost that tried them so. Perhaps a conversation,
 – they thought, an exchange of views or something would help. So they held hands
 – and said, "Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on."
 40 The sideboard took a step forward but nothing else did.
 – "Grandma Baby must be stopping it," said Denver. She was ten and still mad at Baby
 – Suggs for dying.
 – Sethe opened her eyes. "I doubt that," she said.
 – "Then why don't it come?"
 45 "You forgetting how little it is," said her mother. "She wasn't even two years old
 – when she died. Too little to understand. Too little to talk much even."
 – "Maybe she don't want to understand," said Denver.
 – "Maybe. But if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her." Sethe released her
 – daughter's hand and together they pushed the sideboard back against the wall.
 50 Outside a driver whipped his horse into the gallop local people felt necessary when
 – they passed 124.
 – "For a baby she throws a powerful spell," said Denver.
 – "No more powerful than the way I loved her," Sethe answered and there it was again.
 – The welcoming cool of unchiseled headstones; the one she selected to lean against
 55 on tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave. Pink as a fingernail it was, and sprinkled
 – with glittering chips. Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free.
 – Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten "Dearly" too?
 – She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been
 – possible – that for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole
 60 thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say,
 – surely) engraved on her baby's headstone: Dearly Beloved. But what she got, settled
 – for, was the one word that mattered. She thought it would be enough, rutting among
 – the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so
 – old; the appetite in it quite new. That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer
 65 one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust.

■ THE CONTEXT

This is the incipit of the novel. It takes place in 1873, at 124 Bluestone Road, in Cincinnati, where Baby Suggs lived after her son Halle (Sethe's husband) bought her freedom. Sethe has lived there with her daughter Denver since she was released from prison for murdering her two-year old daughter in order to spare her being repossessed after they had escaped from the plantation.

■ A DEFAMILIARIZING INCIPIT

The first paragraph of the novel is a disturbing one for the reader, who tries to understand what 124 refers to and why one can speak of a baby's venom. Toni Morrison has explained her aim in an article¹³:

"The *in medias res* opening that I am so committed to is here excessively demanding. It is abrupt, and should appear so. No native informant here. The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense. No lobby, no door, no entrance – a gangplank, perhaps (but a very short one). And the house into which this snatching – this kidnapping – propels one, changes from spiteful to loud to quiet, as the sounds in the body of the ship itself may have changed. A few words have to be read before it is clear that 124 refers to a house (...), and a few more have to be read to discover why it is spiteful, or rather the source of the spite. By then it is clear, if not at once, that something is beyond control, but it is not beyond understanding since it is not beyond accommodation by both the "women" and the "children".

■ 'REMEMORYING'

If defamiliarization is important for the reader to experience the shock of past traumas, the resurfacing of memories is just as essential for the characters, as is shown by the structure of the passage:

- a narrative summary of what made Sethe's two sons leave the house. (l. 1-17),
- a flashback to Baby Suggs' last days and death in the house (l. 18-35),
- Sethe and her daughter Denver's conversation about the ghost that haunts the house (l. 35-52),
- another flashback as Sethe remembers how she exchanged sex for the engraving on her baby's tombstone. This last part is no longer related by the omniscient narrator, but marks a shift to Sethe's stream of consciousness.

This structure announces the constant movement back and forth between past and present in the novel, as the characters remember in snatches (they call such uncontrolled remembering 'rememory') the brutality and humiliations they suffered and try to forget, although it is only by remembering that they can conjure up the past, come to terms with it, and reach some sort of healing.

13. Unspeakable Things Unspoken, Michigan Quarterly Review, 28, N° 1, 1989.

Toni Morrison said that her "job as a writer in the last quarter of the 20th century, not much more than a hundred years after Emancipation, becomes how to rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate'". Nowadays, black Americans have lost touch with their ancestors who died in slavery, and as a result they have lost part of their own selves. They must re-discover their collective history.

■ FRACTURED SELVES, FRACTURED RELATIONSHIPS:

THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

- Everything about life at 124 is negative ('spiteful', 'nastiness', 'intolerable', 'outrageous', 'persecution'), devoid of colour (gray and white, l. 13).
- 124 is gradually abandoned, by the two sons, then by Baby Suggs, who has given up all hope of life, until only Sethe and Denver remain. The haunting of the house symbolizes the way the horrors and humiliation of slavery still haunt the present and bring separation.
- Local people avoid the house (l. 50-51).
- After 60 years of bondage, Baby Suggs only finds peace when she escapes into colours (l. 26-28).
- In order to get the white man to inscribe a word on the tombstone, Sethe's body had to be 'inscribed' by the white man.

■ THE FANTASTIC AND THE GROTESQUE: MAGIC REALISM

Life at 124 is disrupted by the haunting of the baby-ghost (the shattered mirror, the hand prints, the chickpeas and crackers, l. 5-9, and the 'outrageous behaviour' mentioned l. 32), causing Sethe's sons to leave. The world of the living seems to be invaded by the world of the dead, something reminiscent of African-American folklore, where it is commonly believed that the physical and spiritual worlds are one. For Sethe, these ghostly intrusions are reminders of her guilt and will force her to confront her suppressed past, to free her from her paralysis. Trying to 'call forth the ghost' of her child, Sethe is indeed led to recall the scene with the engraver, which still 'bothers' her since she left out the word 'Dearly', a brutal scene which is shocking for the reader. Its cruelty is underlined by the startling image 'her knees wide open as any grave' (l. 55). And the experience of shock is another form of the grotesque which, Morrison said, is needed 'to subvert [the reader's] traditional comfort so that he may experience an unorthodox one', and confront the 'otherness' of the slave experience.

A GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

Stressed syllables are underlined.

Alexandrine: a six-foot, 12-syllable line.

Allegory: a story that can be understood on two or more levels, the superficial one of the narrative and a political, ethical, religious or historical one. Ex.: Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Parables and fables are types of allegory. Dream allegories (in which the narrator falls asleep and dreams) were common in the Middle Ages.

Alliteration: → p. 15

Anagram: a word created by rearranging the letters of another word. Anagrams may be used to hide names or meanings. Ex.: in *Lolita*, Vivian Darkbloom is a character whose name is an anagram of Vladimir Nabokov, the author's name.

Analepsis: retrospective narration, a flashback. Ex.: many analepses are to be found in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*.

Anaphora: repetition of the same word(s) at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences. Ex.: 'A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four...' (C. Dickens)

Anapaest: see Meter

Antithesis: contrasting words, clauses, ideas in structures of parallelism. Ex.: 'Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures. (Johnson)

Assonance: the repetition of vowel sounds, especially in stressed syllables. Ex.: 'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared' (Coleridge).

Ballad: narrative verse meant to be recited or sung. They originally belonged to the oral tradition of folk-tale and folk-song and used simple language. Current events (executions, famous people, love stories) were common topics. Ballad stanzas traditionally consist of quatrains with alternating tetrameter and trimeter, rhyming abab or abcb. Ex.: Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

Bildungsroman: a 'novel of education or initiation', showing the development of someone from childhood to adulthood, and the protagonist's search for his/her identity. Ex: *David Copperfield* (Dickens)

Blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter. Ex.: 'But here, upon this bank and shoal of time' (Shakespeare)

Burlesque: the comic imitation of a literary style, like the pastoral or the epic, often resulting from the discrepancy between style and theme. Ex.: Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, which deals with a frivolous subject in a sublime way.

Carpe diem: Meaning "seize the day", the phrase encourages the enjoyment of this life and its pleasures given the finality of death. The theme was common in 16th and 17th century poetry, the poets enjoining their mistresses to yield to love and enjoy present pleasures. Ex.: Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'.

Chiasmus: a mirror inversion. Ex.: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (*Matthew 23: 11-12*)

Ciceronian style: → p. 44

Coinage, coined words: a neologism, a word invented by an author. Ex.: 'twinkles' (in Hopkins's 'Inversnaid').

Comedy of manners: plays that portray and satirize the artificial fashions, manners and conventions of the sophisticated, leisured classes. Ex.: Congreve's *The Way of the World*.

Comic opera: a combination of theatre, music, songs and dancing. Ex.: the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, which were very popular in Victorian times.

Comic relief: a humorous scene to alleviate the tension in a tragedy.

Conceit: → p. 53

Concrete poetry: also called visual poetry.

Couplets: in poetry, two lines that rhyme.

Deus ex machina: (from the god which was lowered onto the stage by machinery at the end of Greek plays to unravel the plot) any improbable device to resolve the plot.

Double entendre: a pun in which one of the two meanings is risqué or bawdy. For example, in Elizabethan times, there were often puns on the verb 'to die', which could then mean both lose one's life and reach sexual orgasm.

Dramatic irony: the discrepancy between what the reader or audience know and what the character is aware of, as when King Duncan praises Macbeth's castle, where the audience know he will be murdered.

Dramatic monologue: a poem in which the speaker (who is not the poet) addresses a silent listener at a dramatic moment in the speaker's life. He gradually reveals the situation and his own nature.

Dystopia: → p. 28

Elegy: a meditative poem expressing intense emotion, often on the death of someone. It offers more generally a reflection on mortality and transience. Ex.: Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'.

Ellipsis: the omission of words in a sentence, or of events in the chronological sequence of a story. Ex.: Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends. (Virginia Woolf)

Emblem: → p. 55

Epic: a long narrative poem about the heroic or superhuman deeds of a character, often of national significance. Gods, angels and demons sometimes intervene in the action. The style is elevated, with epic similes, many catalogues and an opening *in medias res*. Ex.: Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Epic simile: an involved, lengthy, ornate comparison. Ex.: '...the broad circumference [his shield] / Hung on his shoulders like the Moon, whose Orb / Through Optic Glass

the Tuscan Artist views / At Ev'ning from the top of Fesole, / Or in Valdarno, to descry new Lands, / Rivers or Mountains in her spotty Globe. (Milton)

Epigram: a pointed, concise, often witty saying. Ex.: 'The only way to have a friend is to be one.' (Emerson)

Epigraph: a quotation or motto on the title page of a book or at the beginning of a chapter.

Epiphany: a manifestation of God's presence in the world. In *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce uses the term in a secular way, to describe a transformative moment of sudden revelation.

Epistle: a letter in verse form.

Epistolary novel: a novel told through a series of letters. Ex.: Richardson's *Clarissa*.

Epithalamion: a poem written to celebrate a marriage. Ex.: Spenser's *Epithalamion*.

Eponymous character: a character whose name is that of the title of the book.

Essay: a prose discussion or reflection on any number of subjects. The genre was very popular in the 18th century. Ex.: Bacon's *Essays*.

Euphemism: the use of an indirect expression to avoid bluntness. Ex.: 'pass away' for 'die'.

Euphuistic style: → p. 44

Fancy and imagination: → p. 96

Focalization: → Point of view

Free indirect speech / free indirect discourse: a type of indirect speech in which the words or thoughts of a character are reported without a reporting clause. It therefore combines the character's focalization with the narrator's voice. ex: 'Mary talked, but she [Anne] could not attend. She had seen him. They had met. They had been once more in the same room!' (Austen) The last three sentences report in free indirect speech what goes on in Anne's mind.

Free verse: verse that does not conform to a regular metrical pattern. ex: Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Gothic: → p. 80, 101

Haiku: a Japanese form of poetry which influenced the imagists: three lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables present a picture meant to convey an emotion or idea.

Happening: a type of improvised theatre, with the audience as participants as well as viewers. Happenings often include text, dance, music and song and are spontaneous, so that they cannot be repeated.

Heroic drama: tragedies or tragic-comedies usually describing the conflicts of characters between love and duty. The settings are often exotic and the dialogues bombastic. Such plays were popular during the Restoration.

Heroic couplet: two lines of iambic pentameters which rhyme (and are often end-stopped). It is more balanced and formal than blank verse.

Heroic tragedy: → p. 72

Humours: → p. 43

Hyperbole: exaggeration. Ex.: An hundred years should go to praise / Thine eyes... (Marvell)

Hypotactic style: sentences linked by subordination (as opposed to paratactic style).

Iambic pentameter: a line of five iambic feet. See Meter

Incipit: the opening words or paragraphs of a literary work.

In medias res: the technique of beginning a story in the middle of the action (common in epics).

Inscap and intress: → p. 118

Intertextuality: the fact that all texts quote or refer to other texts – consciously or unconsciously. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* offers an obvious example of intertextuality.

Intrusive narrator: a narrator who comments on the characters and action, as Thackeray does in *Vanity Fair*.

Irony: expressing an idea with words which carry the opposite meaning, as when Mr Bennet says in *Pride and Prejudice*: 'I admire all my three sons-in-law highly. Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite.'

Kenning: → p. 15

Künstlerroman: a bildungsroman or apprenticeship novel in which the hero is an artist. Ex.: Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Limerick: → p. 130

Litotes: an understatement, stating something by negating its contrary. Ex.: 'She's no fool.'

Magic realism: fiction in which realism mingles with magic or fantasy. It is much used in postmodern literature to emphasize the fact that any narrative is an invention. Ex.: Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*.

Masque: a form of entertainment at court during the reigns of Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I, it was a spectacle which combined songs, music, dancing and poetic drama. The characters were often allegorical or mythological, and the sets were elaborate. Ex.: The betrothal masque in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Metafiction, metatextuality: fiction about fiction, the narrator self-consciously reflecting upon the process of writing and the links between fiction and reality. Ex.: Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* or Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

Metaphor: an analogy between two objects, created by using one word instead of another, thus creating identification. Ex.: 'All the world's a stage...' (Shakespeare). Compare with 'simile'. There are dead metaphors (so often used that they have become almost clichés), extended metaphors (which link several images), and mixed metaphors (linking several kinds of image, as in Shakespeare's 'Was the hope drunk / wherein you dress'd yourself?', with the two incongruous images of drink and dress.)

Metaphysical poetry: → p. 53

Metonymy: instead of using a word, using a term related to it in some semantic way. Ex.: 'The White House' for 'the US presidency'. See *synecdoche*.

Metre: the rhythmic pattern in poetry. English poetry is mainly accentual-syllabic, since both the number of syllables and the number of accents contribute to the pattern. The most common types of foot are:

– the *iamb* (adj. *iambic*): a two syllable foot (unstressed – stressed). It is the basic rhythm of English poetry. The following line consists of 5 iambs and is a iambic pentameter: 'And then | from hour | to hour | we rot | and rot' (Shakespeare);

– the *trochee* (adj. *trochaic*): a two-syllable foot (stressed – unstressed). A striking rhythm, it is often used to break the monotony of iambic verse. Ex.: 'Water | water | every | where' (Coleridge), a trochaic tetrameter (with the last line incomplete);

– the *spondee* (adj. *spondaic*): a two-syllable foot (stressed – stressed). It is a very heavy foot, sometimes used at the beginning or end of a line, as in the following example, a tetrameter with three trochees and a spondee: 'Burning, | singing | in the | sunshine.' (Longfellow);

– the *anap(a)est* (adj. *anap(a)estic*): a three-syllable foot (unstressed – unstressed – stressed). It is light and rapid. The following line, a tetrameter, has an initial anapest, then three iambs: 'And the good | south wind | still blew | behind' (Coleridge)

– the *dactyl* (adj. *dactylic*): a three-syllable foot (stressed - unstressed – unstressed). Because of its lively rhythm it is often to be found in nursery rhymes: 'Hickory | Dickory | Dock'.

The names given to standard lines depend on their number of feet: *monometer* (one foot), *dimeter* (two feet), *trimeter* (three feet), *tetrameter* (four feet), *pentameter* (five feet), *hexameter* or *alexandrine* (six feet), *heptameter* (seven feet), *octameter* (eight feet).

Mock-heroic, mock-epic: a poem which uses the conventions of epic poems to describe low, trifling, incidents, which seem even more trivial by comparison. Ex.: Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

Modernism: → p. 140

Morality plays: → p. 19

Motif: recurring situations, subjects and ideas in literature.

Mystery plays: → p. 19

Naturalism: → p. 271

Negative capability: → p. 99

Objective correlative: in his essay 'Hamlet and His Problems' (1919), Eliot argued that the best way of expressing emotions is not through a direct statement or description of that emotion, but through the objective description of an object, a situation, or events which will evoke the emotion for the reader. 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other

words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.' (In *The Sacred Wood*, 1920.)

Occasional verse: verse written to commemorate a specific occasion, historical, social or personal. Ex.: Marvell's 'Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland'.

Ode: a lyric poem in an elevated style, on a serious subject. Odes can be Pindaric (for public celebrations), or Horatian (more private). ex: Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*.

Omniscient narrator: a narrator who knows everything about what the different characters think or feel, and who has the freedom to comment upon the action. Omniscient point of view is common in Victorian fiction (Ex.: Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*).

Onomatopoeia: a word with a sound similar to what it refers to. Ex.: 'hiss', 'sizzle', 'buzz'.

Ottava rima: see Rhyme pattern

Oxymoron: the juxtaposition of contradictory terms. Ex.: 'O loving hate!' (*Romeo and Juliet*)

Palindrome: a word or phrase which reads the same way backwards and forwards. Ex.: 'Norma is as selfless as I am, Ron.' (credited to poet W.H. Auden)

Parable: a story with a lesson or moral thesis. Ex.: Christ's parables in the Bible.

Paradox: a statement which seems contradictory or absurd but which in fact makes sense. Ex.: 'The child is father of the man.' (Wordsworth)

Paratactic style: sentences linked by simple juxtaposition, as in Caesar's 'Veni, vidi, vici'.

Parody: the exaggerated imitation of the style, words, themes, tone or ideas of a work to render it ridiculous. The purpose can be humorous and/or satirical. Ex.: Austen's *Northanger Abbey*.

Pastiche: the literary exercise of imitation or a collage of imitated styles.

Pastoral: Poetry, prose or drama originally about the country pleasures of shepherds. The definition was then widened to refer to simple rural life as opposed to complex urban life.

Pathetic fallacy: attributing human characteristics or feelings to nature, excessive personification. The term was used derogatively by Ruskin, who explained in *Modern Painters* that in a line such as 'The cruel, crawling foam', the foam is neither cruel nor crawling.

Pentameter: see Metre

Persona: the first person speaker created by the author to narrate the story in poetry or fiction; this 'second self' may or may not represent the views of the author.

Petrarchan conventions: the idealization of women by a lover who obeys the lady's wishes, hoping to become worthy of her love.

Picaresque: a picaresque novel describes the peregrinations of a hero, usually of low birth, who tries to make his fortune through his own wit. The plot is loose and episodic, the character travels and encounters a large range of characters, which leads to social satire. Ex.: Fielding's *Tom Jones* or Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*.

Poetic diction: a way of distancing poetic language from ordinary language through the use of archaism and periphrasis, the latter an indirect way of naming things, as when birds become 'the plummy race'. Poetic diction was common in 18th century poetry, when it was widely believed that the language of poetry should be elevated, something Romantic poets like Wordsworth reacted against.

Poetic justice: The rewarding of virtue and punishing of evil in a play or in fiction.

Point of view: the narrative mode, which can be (1) first-person narration, with a persona telling the story (Ex.: Mark Twain's *Huck*), (2) a third-person narration by an all-knowing omniscient narrator, (3) a third-person narration, but with the limited point of view of a 'reflector' or 'centre of consciousness', or 'focalizer', as in many of James's novels. This can include stream of consciousness narration. In *Figures III*, Genette uses the terms 'internal focalization' for events seen through the eyes of one of the characters and 'external focalization' when the events are seen from a distance, by someone exterior to the story. He speaks of 'zero focalization' for the unrestricted vision of an omniscient narrator.

Portmanteau word: a word formed by telescoping two words. Ex.: "slithy" is "lithe and slimy" (Carroll).

Postmodernism: → p. 168

Problem play: a play which explores social or psychological problems. Also called 'thesis play'. Ex.: Shaw's plays.

Prolepsis: relating an event before it happens chronologically. The contrary of 'analepsis'.

Pun: a play on words, which comes from the similarity between two words or from the fact that a single word has several meanings. Ex.: 'Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man', says Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* as he is about to die.

Revenge tragedy: → p. 37

Rhyme: What matters with rhyme is the sound, not the spelling. Besides the most common type, true rhyme (with the same final vowel + consonant, as in *rose / toes*), there is also half-rhyme (only the final consonant is repeated, as in *paint / want*), slant rhyme (with the initial and end consonants repeated but changes in the vowels, as in *tramp / trip*), internal rhyme (with words rhyming within the lines), and eye-rhyme (when rhyme seems correct because of the spelling but is not a proper rhyme, as in *love / move*; eye-rhyme may be used for comic effect.)

Rhyme pattern: The most common rhyme patterns or rhyme schemes are: couplet rhymes (a a b b c c...); alternate rhymes (a b a b ...); enclosing rhymes (a b b a);

ballad metre (a b a b or a b c b); terza rima (a b a , b c b , c d c ...); ottava rima (a b a , b c b , c d c ...); Spenserian stanza (a b a b b c b c c); Petrarchan sonnet (a b b a / a b b a / c d c d c d or c d e c d e or c d e d c e); Shakespearean sonnet (a b a b / c d c d / e f e f g g); Spenserian sonnet (a b a b / b c b c / c d c d e e).

Romance: fanciful, idealistic fiction, with little realistic verisimilitude.

Round and flat characters: a distinction made by E.M. Forster to describe two types of characters. Flat characters, like humours, are built round a simple idea and not capable of evolving; round characters are more complex, subtle and can surprise us.

Run-on line, enjambment: a line which carries over to the next line (as opposed to an end-stopped line). It creates a flowing movement. Ex.: '... if the assassination / Could trammel up the consequence, and catch / With his surcease success...' (Shakespeare)

Satire: a genre that censures folly or vice through exaggeration, burlesque, mockery and caricature. The blend of criticism and humour or wit aims at condemning and reforming. Ex.: Sinclair Lewis's novels.

Senecan prose: → p. 44

Sermons: → p. 54

Simile: a directly expressed comparison, often introduced by 'like', 'as' or 'than'.

Sonnet: → p. 31

Spots of time: → p. 95

Sprung rhythm: → p. 118

Stanza forms: tercet (a three-line stanza); quatrain (a four-line stanza); cinquain (a five-line stanza); sestet (a six-line stanza); septet (a seven-line stanza); octave or octet (an eight-line stanza).

Stock character: a conventional type of character (the disguised romantic heroine, the melancholy man, the character seeking revenge, in Elizabethan drama).

Stream of consciousness: → p. 80

Suspension of disbelief: The expression, used by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*, describes the need for the reader to withhold any doubts or questions about the reality or truth of the work of art, a state of mind necessary to enter the author's imaginative world.

Synaesthesia: describing one sensation in terms of another. Ex.: The light is braying like an ass (E. Sitwell)

Synecdoche: a form of metonymy in which the part stands for the whole, or the whole for the part. Ex.: 'hands' for people.

Tall tale: a humorous tale (common on the American frontier), which uses realistic detail to relate incredible and impossible happenings showing someone's superhuman abilities.

Telling vs showing: two methods of characterization. With 'telling', the narrator tells us what the characters are like; with 'showing', the reader has to deduce it from the way they speak and behave.

Terza rima: see Rhyme Pattern

Tetrameter: see Metre

Tragic flaw: it is similar to Aristotle's *hamartia*, the mistake or error which leads to the tragic action, but the fatal or tragic flaw comes from the character of the tragic hero.

Unreliable narrator: a fictional narrator whose views are not those of the author (as in Swift's 'A Modest Proposal') or who does not accurately relate what happens in the story (as in Ford's *The Good Soldier*).

Utopia: → p. 28

Verisimilitude: the semblance of truth and actuality.

Vernacular: the language native to a country, for example Old English in Anglo-Saxon times, when Latin was the dominant language of learning.

Visual poem / shape poem: a poem with lines arranged so as to form a design, usually related to the subject of the poem. Ex.: Herbert's 'The Altar'.

Well-made play: a play which is tightly and logically constructed, with dramatic devices such as a secret withheld and revealed at the end, reversal of fortune, misidentified characters, and a denouement which accounts for the different threads of the plot. Oscar Wilde's plays are well-made plays.

Wit: an unexpected use of language which surprises and delights; wit is mainly intellectual (resulting from paradox, pun, contrast) and leads to brilliant and sparkling utterances or verbal fencing. Ex.: Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

THE RIGHT WORD: WRITING / TALKING ABOUT LITERATURE

The words listed below under different headings are not all synonyms, but simply belong to the same semantic fields.

When using them it is important:

- to remember that some verbs require an inanimate subject (e.g. concerns), others an animate subject (e.g. point out);
- to note the prepositions with which the verbs are used.

If you have any doubt concerning their usage, look them up in a dictionary that gives the words within sentences (for example, the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* or the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*) or on the internet at *Dictionary.com*, for example.

Some translations are provided, in the infinitive form in the case of verbs.

■ Introducing a quotation

You can:

- integrate the quotation into your own text. ex: Macbeth wishes the murder of Duncan 'Might be the be-all and the end-all' (I. 7). / If poetry is not a 'letting loose of emotions' (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*) / the word '...' is mentioned three times;
- use an introductory phrase or verb. Ex.: In James's own words, '...'; According to Henry James, '...'; Henry James writes / observes / remarks, '...';
- use an introductory verb + that (without a comma): Henry James argues that '...' / explains that '...' / believes that '...' / points out that '...' / explains that '...' / insists that '...' / describes ... as '...'

■ Describing a work or part of a work

Talking about the plot

The novel / chapter **OPENS ON** / **WITH**... It **CLOSES ON**...

The **TENSION RISES** / **MOUNTS** / **CULMINATES** in a **CLIMAX**

The tension then **FALLS** / **SUBSIDES** (*retombe*)

The conversation **CONSTITUTES** A **TURNING POINT**.

There is a final **TWIST** in the last chapter (*un rebondissement*)

Suspense is **BUILT UP** / **MAINTAINED** / **SUSTAINED** by...

Dealing with

The novel **CONCERNS**... / **IS ABOUT**... / **CENTRES AROUND**... / **TRACES** the fortunes of... / **DRAMATIZES** the idea or the theme or the problem of... / **PROVIDES AN ACCOUNT OF**...

The work **ADDRESSES** the problem of... / **ENGAGES WITH** the problem of... / **TREATS OF**...

Showing

The tone, the word, the passage REVEALS... / DENOTES... / EVOKES... / SUGGESTS that... / BETRAYS... (*trahir*) / DISPLAYS (*montrer, exposer*) / EVINCES... (*révéler*) / REFLECTS...

The narrator CONCENTRATES ON... / FOCUSES ON... / POINTS OUT (THAT)... / DEPICTS... / DESCRIBES... / EXPLORES... / PORTRAYS... (*peindre, représenter*) / REFLECTS ON... / MANIFESTS A CONCERN FOR...

The narrator DRAWS ATTENTION TO... / FOCUSES ATTENTION ON...

This is EVIDENCE THAT... (*cela prouve que*...)

The popularity of the genre ATTESTS TO the new fascination with...

The incident is SKETCHED at the beginning of the chapter (*esquisser*).

The novel ACHIEVES coherence thanks to / through... (*atteindre, accomplir*)

Saying, writing

The author ARGUES THAT / ASSERTS THAT / MAINTAINS THAT / REMARKS THAT... / COMMENTS ON...

The author RELATES / RECOUNTS an incident...

Illustrating

Tennyson's poem EPITOMIZES / EXEMPLIFIES the beliefs of Victorian society... (*illustrer, incarner*)

The passage is REPRESENTATIVE OF / ENCAPSULATES the main ideas of the essay. (*incarner, résumer*)

Language is said to be an INDEX OF character (*un reflet de*)

Conveying

The author VOICES his criticism through... (*exprimer, formuler*) / CONVEYS or EXPRESSES his criticism through irony...

The story CELEBRATES the importance of...

The use of irony CREATES humour... / CONTRIBUTES TO the humour of the passage

These ideas FOUND EXPRESSION IN his verse.

The text / the author SUCCEEDS IN CAPTURING the mood of the time...

An atmosphere of gloom PERVADES the passage (*envahir*).

Clarifying, explaining

The scene SHEDS LIGHT UPON... (*éclairer*)

How can we ACCOUNT FOR such metaphors? (*expliquer*)

It is necessary to try and DEFINE the atmosphere of the passage.

She CRYSTALLIZED her criticisms in the essay.

THERE IS EVERY INDICATION that...

Suggesting

The scene EVOKES / SUGGESTS / CONJURES UP a sense of wonder (*évoquer*).

The protagonist's actions BESPEAK guilt... (*témoigner de*)

The words IMPLY criticism of... (*suggérer*)

The author has already HINTED AT the reasons why... (*faire allusion à*)

Behind the anger, there is an UNDERCURRENT OF pity. (*un courant sous-jacent*)

There is a TOUCH OF humour / sarcasm...

Emphasizing

The text PLACES / LAYS / PUTS THE EMPHASIS ON/UPON... / PUTS HEAVY / PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON... / FOREGROUNDS...

The word LAYS STRESS on the character's idealism...

The narrator STRESSES the fact that...

The EMPHASIS FALLS UPON the word... / SHIFTS FROM... TO ...

The effect is UNDERLINED / SUPPORTED / UNDERScoreD by the use of...

Free indirect speech HEIGHTENS / REINFORCES / STRESSES / ENHANCES / HIGHLIGHTS / INTENSIFIES / STRENGTHENS the impression of...

His/Its influence CANNOT BE OVERESTIMATED...

There is no need to HAMMER THE POINT HOME (*insister sur un point*)

Attenuating

Humour helps to TONE DOWN / SOFTEN / ATTENUATE / LIGHTEN the criticism (*atténuer*).

We need to QUALIFY the remark. (*nuancer*)

The character's joy is TINGED WITH regret for... (*teinter de*)

He shows UNMITIGATED contempt for... (*que rien ne vient atténuer*)

The attempt at distance is UNDERCUT by...

Talking about the importance of the work

The Waste Land is a LANDMARK poem...

During the HEYDAY of the sonnet, in the late 16th century... (*l'âge d'or*)

He is one of the most INFLUENTIAL writers...

The theme of alienation is a STAPLE in postcolonial writing. (*un thème principal*)

She played a PIVOTAL role in... (*essentiel*)

It is a KEY paragraph in the chapter.

What is of PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE in the novel is... (*d'une importance primordiale*)

The text has social / political... RESONANCE...

Defending and criticizing

The book offers a VINDICATION OF / VINDICATES X's theories...

The book is a PLEA FOR... (*un plaidoyer en faveur de*)...

The novel ATTACKS... / IS AN ATTACK ON/UPON... / CRITICIZES...

The author DELIVERS / UNLEASHES a (bitter/savage/fierce) ATTACK ON/UPON... / CRITICIZES... IS CRITICAL OF...

The author ATTACKS / DENOUNCES / CONDEMNS the idea that...

The criticism / satire is LEVELLED AT / DIRECTED AT / AIMED AT those who...

There are SCATHING remarks about... (*cinglant*)

Punctuating

· FULL STOP (BR) / period (US)

, COMMA

; SEMICOLON

: COLON

- HYPHEN (in compound words)

— DASH (for a break in the sentence or for appositions)

... DOTS

() BRACKETS (mostly in BR English) / PARENTHESSES
 [] SQUARE BRACKETS
 ‘ ’ QUOTATION MARKS OF QUOTES (more informal) OF INVERTED COMMAS (BR English mainly)
 ‘ ’ SINGLE QUOTATION MARKS
 “ ” DOUBLE QUOTATION MARKS
 “ ” DITTO MARKS (idem)
 ? QUESTION MARK
 ! EXCLAMATION MARK
 ’ APOSTROPHE (Mary's car)
 * ASTERISK
 / SLASH OR STROKE OR SOLIDUS OR SLANT OR VIRGULE (US)
italics (written in italics)
 CAPITAL LETTERS
 underlined words
 words in bold typeface

■ Linking works or words, linking ideas

Talking about influence and echo

The poem **DRAW**S / **OWES** / **DERIVES** its inspiration FROM... / **DRAW**S ON national myths... / **WAS INFLUENCED BY**... / **ORIGINATES FROM**...
 The author **WRITES IN THE TRADITION OF**... / **ALLUDES TO**...
 There are **ALLUSIONS TO**... / **REFERENCES TO**... / **ECHOES OF** / **FROM**...
 Such internal rhymes are a **LEGACY OF**... / **DERIVE FROM**... / **GO BACK TO** Old English verse
 The style is **REMINISCENT OF**... / **RECALLS** that of... / **BRINGS TO MIND**... / **EVOKES**...
 The text **CHALLENGES** the current idea that... (*contester*)

Comparing

His short stories are often **COMPARED** to those of... (= they are similar)
 We will **COMPARE** his short story with that of E.A. Poe. (= to show the differences and similarities) / The short story **INVITES** **COMPARISON WITH**...
 The author **DRAW**S A **PARALLEL** / A **DISTINCTION BETWEEN**... AND...
 We can no longer **DIFFERENTIATE** reality FROM fiction.
 The poet **EQUATES** beauty WITH truth.
 The phrase **STANDS IN MARKED** / **STARK** / **SHARP CONTRAST TO**...
 The image **PROVIDES A CONTRAST TO**...
 The novel is **BUILT ON** / **OFFERS A CONTRAST** / **AN OPPOSITION BETWEEN**... AND...
 The **DISCREPANCY** (*l'écart*) / **DISPARITY** / **GAP BETWEEN** dreams and reality...
 Their two visions are **POLES APART** (*aux antipodes l'une de l'autre*).
 The event is **OVERSHADOWED** by... (*dominer, éclipser*)

Linking

The poem **UNITES** / **ASSOCIATES** / **BLENDS** / **COMBINES** traditional form WITH radical ideas.
 The text **OFFERS A BLEND OF**... AND...

The two themes/voices are **INTERWOVEN**... (*entrelacer*)
 What **CONNECTS** the first poem WITH the last one is...
 The three words are **RELATED THROUGH** half-rhyme...
 This device (*procédé*) can be **ASSIMILATED TO**...
 The character's progress is **PARALLELED BY**... / **ACCOMPANIED BY**...

Talking about cause

The idea for the book **SPRANG FROM** / **AROSE FROM** OF OUT OF... / **WAS A RESPONSE TO**...
 Childhood trauma **LIES AT THE ROOT OF** / **IS RESPONSIBLE FOR** / **UNDERLIES** her behaviour.
 His behaviour is **MOTIVATED BY**... / **PROMPTED BY** (*provoquer, susciter*)... / **SHAPED BY**...
 The setting **GENERATES** a certain mood...
 The book had a **SEMINAL INFLUENCE ON** generations to come...
 The movement was **FOSTERED BY**... (*nourrir, entretenir*)
 Their ideas were **TRIGGERED BY**... (*provoquer, déclencher*)
 The war **CATALYZED** his hatred for... (*accentuer*)
 His response is **DUE TO** / **MOTIVATED BY** / **CAUSED BY** / **PROMPTED BY**...
 The scene **ANNOUNCES** / **FORETELLS** ...

Talking about consequence

We can **INFER** FROM that statement that... / We can **DRAW** / **COME TO** another **CONCLUSION**...
 It **FOLLOWS THAT**... (*il s'ensuit que*)
 The novel keeps **GENERATING** controversy... / **SET OFF** a new line of thought... / **CONTRIBUTED TO** the debate... / **PREFIGURES**...
 The long descriptions **MAKE FOR** realism... (*contribuer à*)
 Several factors **LED TO** the creation of... / **CONVERGED TO** create... / **BUILD UP TO** a portrait...
 The abundance of metaphors **RESULTS IN**...

■ A few adjectives

ASSERTIVE (tone)
AUTHORITATIVE (tone)
BAWDY (language - *paillard*)
BIASED (account, report, story - *qui n'est pas objectif, qui n'est pas impartial*)
BOMBASTIC, HIGHFLOWN (language - *grandiloquent*)
CASUAL (tone)
CLICHÉ-RIDDEN (language - *qui n'est que clichés*)
CLOSE (look, examination, study - *détaillé, minutieux*)
CONFLICTING (ideas, aspects, semantic fields)
CONTRIVED (style, situation - *peu naturel, artificiel*)
EMBEDDED (stories, words - *enchâssé*)
EMBLEMATIC (figure)
FLAT (character - *simple, peu complexe*)
FORMAL (tone)

HACKNEYED (language - *rebatu, galvaudé*)

INTERRELATED (parts, chapters, words - *étroitement liés*)

LAUDATORY (words, remarks - *élogieux*)

MEMORABLE (work, character)

OVERALL (effect, impression - *général, d'ensemble*)

OVERSIMPLIFIED (view, theory - *simplifié à l'extrême*)

PEJORATIVE, DISPARAGING (words, expressions)

PIVOTAL (idea - *central*)

PREGNANT (moment - *lourd de signification*)

RECURRING (motifs, words, ideas)

RELEVANT (remark, argument - *pertinent*)

REPEATED (use of)

RICH IN (symbolism, allusions - *qui abonde en*)

ROUND (character - *complexe*)

SALIENT (point - *pertinent*)

SCATHING (tone)

SEMINAL (work)

STOCK / STEREOTYPED (characters, phrases, situations - *type, cliché, courant*)

SUGGESTIVE OF (*qui suggère*)

UNOBTRUSIVE (narrator - *effacé, discret*)

WRITING A LITERARY COMMENTARY: A FEW GUIDELINES

There are many ways of writing or speaking about literary texts (essays, reviews, debates, pastiche...), but several French exams, both written and oral, require students to comment upon a text. Here are some guidelines about an exercise which is governed by strict, formal rules.

For a commentary to be interesting, it should reveal an aspect of the text which may not be immediately apparent, yet leads to a deeper understanding of the excerpt.

PREPARING YOUR COMMENTARY

Read the text several times, and consider the following points, which are essential to any analysis of a text.

■ The paratext

- Is the author British, American, Indian, South African, etc? If you do not know can the vocabulary, the spelling, the references help you? Is the nationality of the author important for your analysis of the text?
- When was it written?
- Does it reflect a particular school of thought or a particular genre (e.g. the picaresque, the gothic, the apprenticeship novel) which is typical - or not - of its time?

■ How?

But remember that most of all, what you need to study is not so much what is told as how it is told, that is to say the narrative, theatrical or poetic **strategies** employed by the author. They can involve:

- The setting (is it in any way symbolic, reflecting the mood of a character? Are place names suggestive? If some of the four elements are mentioned, do they take on their usual metaphorical values?)
- Time (what is the relationship between what is related (narrated time) and the space devoted to it in the book (narrative time)? Are there analepses, prolepses?)
- Characterization (do we have telling or showing? Are physical characteristics, names or speech characteristics of psychological, moral or social significance?)
- Who tells the story and from whose point of view? (→ point of view, p. 00)
- Imagery, figurative language, sentence structure, words of Latin or Saxon origin, wordplay, etc.
- Register (e.g. formal, colloquial) and tone (e.g. humour, satire, irony)
- Poetic form (e.g. a sonnet, an ode, free verse...)

■ Choosing a 'problématique'

This initial analysis should help you choose your 'problématique', that is to say the question which is raised by the text and which will determine the development of your commentary. Each part of that commentary should then be a step in proving the point you want to make. This is why you should avoid running / linear commentaries, which do not easily lend themselves to argumentation and often lead to repetition, paraphrase and impressionistic remarks.

THE COMMENTARY

■ The introduction

- Avoid uninspiring opening sentences such as "This is an excerpt from... followed by the name of the author, that of the book and the date of publication. Instead, you can begin with a relevant brief quotation, with a few words on how typical or not the passage is of the writer's works, or with the reader's response to the text, and you may mention the genre or school of thought the text belongs to if this later proves useful in the development of your argument... (Do not summarize the entire book from which the text is an excerpt and do not present a biography of the author, however short.)
- If the passage is an excerpt from a longer text you have studied you can briefly situate the passage.
- In one or two sentences summarize what the text is about (without commenting on it) and mention the main movements of the text.
- Then state your 'problématique', which can take the form of a question or of a statement. It should follow logically from your summary and lead to what makes the text of special interest.
- Finally, announce the different parts of your plan as clearly and succinctly as possible.

■ The development

Most juries will accept a plan in two or three parts, but it is more natural to develop an argument in three steps and therefore three parts. Whatever the number of parts you choose to have, your commentary should follow a crescendo, moving from what is most striking about the passage to what is less obvious but central and what your 'problématique' leads to. Move from what is simple to what is complex, from what is spoken to what is unspoken, from what is explicit, literal, to what is implicit, to the subtext, always keeping your 'problématique' in mind.

Do not try, however, to have 3 parts, 9 subparts, let alone 27 sub-sub parts: the jury will appreciate the richness of your analysis and the logical progression of your plan as you move from the initial question to the final answer far more than the fact that you stick to such a rigid frame.

Each of your parts and subparts should ideally:

- announce what you will show there;
 - explain your argument, using at least one example (quoted between inverted commas, followed by the number of the line, and analysed);
 - conclude with a short transition to announce the next step.
- Each part should deal with the whole text (at different levels of reading) and not analyse a separate part of the text.

■ The conclusion

- Answer the question you asked in the introduction (your 'problématique'), but do not summarize each of your parts again, which would sound heavy and repetitive. For the same reason, try not to use the very same words and expressions you used before.
- If you know enough about the context you could end with some opening (the way the passage announces others to come, or a quote from the author, giving perspective to the passage and further resonance to the 'problématique' you chose to develop.) Here as well as in the commentary as a whole it is essential to avoid any development about the author, the book or the period which will sound artificially tacked onto your argument.

THE BIBLE AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

No book has had such a lasting influence on British and American writers as the King James Bible (see also p. 26), so that a good knowledge of its main books, with its stories and characters, with its rhythms and metaphors, is indispensable to a student of literature.

The Bible (also called the Scriptures) consists of 66 books, the 39 books of the Old Testament (written between the tenth or eleventh century BCE to the second century BCE), and the 27 books of the New Testament (written during the first century CE). Only a few examples of important characters, parables, miracles and symbols are given below. Students are encouraged to look up other references in a dictionary, then in a copy of the Bible. It is important to have read at least one book from the Old Testament, for example Genesis, and one of the Gospels, for example Matthew. All quotations below are from the King James Bible.

When citing the Bible, capitalize, but do not italicize, the names of the books. Chapter and verse are separated by a colon (e.g. Mark 12:4). When speaking, you say: 'Mark, chapter 23, verse 10'.¹

BIBLICAL LANGUAGE

The Bible is written partly in prose and partly in verse. The Hebrew tongue is rich in concrete and sensuous words, which lend it an emotional and imaginative quality. The 1611 King James Version (also called 'Authorized Version') is a particularly poetic translation which deeply influenced literature. It was instrumental in replacing many Latin words by English ones (the vocabulary of the King James Bible is 93 percent of English origin).

– FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: SIMILE, METAPHOR, METONYMY, HYPERBOLE

They helped convey the message through simple, concrete situations and also contributed to the rich poetic quality of the Bible.

- [1] I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.
[2] Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (John 15:1-2)

A soft tongue breaketh the bone. (Proverbs 25:15)

– PARALLELISMS AND REPETITIONS:

Hebrew Scriptures often derived from oral tradition, repeated narratives or poetry

1. Hence the expression 'chapter and verse' to refer to the source or authority of a quotation or information, or more generally to detailed information. ('He quoted us chapter and verse what the law says about it.')

sung to musical rhythms, in which parallelism, anaphora, contrast and repetition were common devices.

- [1] I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works.
[2] I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. (Psalms 9:1-2).

or:

- [11] The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.
[12] For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low:
[13] And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan,
[14] And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up,
[15] And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall,
[16] And upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures.
[17] And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.
[18] And the idols he shall utterly abolish. (Isaiah, 2:11-18)

→ Such parallelisms are to be found in Whitman's verse.

– INVERSIONS:

'Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder²: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. (Psalm 91:13)

– JEREMIADS AND COMPLAINTS:

The word 'jeremiad' comes from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, a Hebrew prophet, after Jerusalem was taken.

- 3:1 I AM the man that hath seen affliction by the rod³ of his wrath.
3:2 He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.
3:3 Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.
3:4 My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones.
3:5 He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall⁴ and travail.
3:6 He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old.

→ In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass laments the hypocrisy and corruption of America.

2. an adder: *une vipère*

3. a rod: *une baguette*

4. gall: *la bile, le fiel*

– PROVERBS AND APHORISMS

The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends.
 He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he. (Proverbs 14:20-21)
 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full... (Ecclesiastes 1:7)
 → Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*

THE OLD TESTAMENT

■ Here are a few of its *best-known books*:

– THE BOOK OF GENESIS tells the story of the creation of the world, of the sin of Adam and Eve, and of the beginnings of the human race.

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep⁵.
 And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
 3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
 4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
 5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
 6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
 7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.
 9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
 10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. (Genesis, 1:1-10)

→ It is the basis of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

– EXODUS tells of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, where they had been enslaved, and of God's intervention to save them.

– THE BOOK OF JOB is about the suffering of Job, a righteous man who loses all – possessions, family, health, reputation – through the workings of Satan, who had bet he would end up cursing God. But Job keeps his faith in God all through and is finally rewarded.

→ Shakespeare's *Lear*, or the *Joads* in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, are sometimes compared to Job.

5. the deep: *les grands fonds de l'océan*

– THE PSALMS are religious songs, most of which are addressed to God and used in public worship.

– THE SONG OF SOLOMON (also known as the SONG OF SONGS or CANTICLES) consists of poems celebrating sexual love. It takes the form of a dialogue between two lovers, and is highly lyrical. It is sometimes read allegorically as the relationship between God and Israel or as that between Christ and his Church.

[10] How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse⁶! how much better is thy love than wine!
 and the smell of thine ointments⁷ than all spices!
 [11] Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb⁸: honey and milk are under thy tongue;
 and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.
 [12] A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.
 [13] Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire⁹, with
 spikenard¹⁰.
 [14] Spikenard and saffron; calamus¹¹ and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh
 and aloes, with all the chief spices:
 [15] A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.
 [16] Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices
 thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

→ Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

– THE BOOK OF ISAIAH offers a reflection on the destiny of Jerusalem during and after captivity.

■ Here are examples of important **characters** in the Old Testament:

– ABRAHAM and ISAAC (Genesis 15-17): Abram was called by God to leave his family and his country and travel to the land of Canaan, which would become the Promised Land, the land of the Hebrews. His name became Abraham (meaning 'father of a multitude of nations'). God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham accepted but his son was saved at the last minute. → Wilfred Owen's 'The Parable of the Young Man and the Old'.

– ADAM and EVE (Genesis 2-3), who, tempted by Satan, ate from the Tree of Knowledge and as a result were expelled from the Garden of Eden and punished (Adam by having to work to earn his livelihood, Eve by giving birth in sorrow and pain). → Frost's poem 'Never again would birds' song be the same.', Yeats's poem 'Adam's Curse'.

6. the spouse: *l'époux, l'épouse*

7. ointment: *a fragrant mixture of oil and spices*

8. a honeycomb: *un rayon de miel*

9. camphire: *henné*

10. spikenard: *nard (an aromatic Indian plant)*

11. calamus: *an aromatic root*

→ There are parallelisms between the poisoning of Old Hamlet in his orchard and Satan's work in the Garden of Eden.

– CAIN'S murder of his brother ABEL (Genesis, 4) → See Steinbeck's *East of Eden*.

– DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN (Daniel 6): Darius, the king, had decreed that no one should pray to any god except himself. Daniel kept praying to his God and was punished by being thrown into the lions' den. But God shut the mouths of the lions, so that Darius recognized the greatness of God.

– DAVID AND GOLIATH (1 Samuel 16): David, who was to become king of the Israelites, first became famous when he killed the Philistine giant, Goliath. David was an excellent harpist and many of the Psalms are attributed to him.

– DAVID AND BATHSHEBA (2 Samuel 11): King David saw Bathsheba having a bath, desired her and made her pregnant. David gave orders so that her husband, Uriah, should be in a dangerous position in battle. He was indeed killed and David married Bathsheba.

– ESTHER (The Book of Esther): a Jewish woman who married King Xerxes of Persia. Hearing of their enemy Haman's plot to kill all Jewish people, she pleaded with her husband, had Haman killed and saved her people.

– JACOB'S DREAM (Genesis 28:12-16): in a dream Jacob saw angels going up and down a staircase between earth and heaven, and God at the top promised to take his descendants into the Promised Land. → An allusion to Jacob's dream is to be found at the beginning of Frost's 'After Apple Picking'.

– JONAH (Jonah 1-2): Jonah was ordered by God to go to Nineveh as a prophet, but tried to escape by boat. God punished him by creating a storm. The others on board blamed him for the storm and threw him overboard. He was swallowed by a whale, in which he spent three days and three nights, until God ordered the fish to spew him out. → Melville's *Moby Dick*

– JOSEPH (Genesis 37-47): the son of Jacob and Rachel, he was an upright, admirable character. The favourite of his father, who had given him a many-coloured coat, he provoked the jealousy of his brothers who sold him into slavery to the Egyptian Potiphar. He rose to fame by his ability to interpret dreams (interpreting Pharaoh's dream as seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, which allowed Pharaoh to store up grain and save Egypt.). Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, grabbing him by his coat, but Joseph fled, leaving his coat behind. → Joseph in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*.

– MOSES: When Pharaoh ordered all male Hebrew children killed, Moses' mother saved his life by placing him in a small boat. Pharaoh's daughter found him and adopted him. He left Egypt after killing an Egyptian but God, speaking from a BURNING BUSH commanded him to return to Egypt so as to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. God helped him by sending ten PLAGUES¹² to Egypt, then by PARTING THE

12. a plague: un fléau

RED SEA to help the Hebrews escape. Moses received the TEN COMMANDMENTS from God on MOUNT SINAI. → The Negro Spiritual 'Go Down, Moses'.

– NOAH and the FLOOD (Genesis 6): to punish men's wickedness, God decided to destroy the world with a flood, but spared Noah, who was righteous. Following God's instructions, Noah built an ark for himself, his family and every kind of animal to save them from destruction. After 40 days of rain, the ark came to rest on MT ARARAT. → Benjamin Britten's opera *Noye's Fludde* is based on the story of Noah and the flood.

– RACHEL (Genesis 29-31): Jacob fell in love with Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, and worked seven years for her father to gain the right to marry her. But her father tricked him on the wedding day and he realized he had married her sister Leah. He worked for another seven years in order to marry Rachel. → In Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, it is like Redcrosse winning Una but serving Gloriana.

– SAMSON AND DELILAH (Judges 13-16): Samson, renowned for his strength, was tricked by his lover, Delilah, who cut his hair, the source of his strength, while he slept and had him caught and blinded by the Philistines. When his hair grew back, he succeeded in toppling down their temple, dying in the process.

– SOLOMON (1 KINGS 1-11): Solomon succeeded David as king of the Israelites and had a reputation for great wisdom. In a famous judgement, in which two women claimed a child was theirs, he suggested cutting the child in two, knowing the real mother would never agree.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Among the 27 books of the New Testament, the best-known are the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and the book of Revelation (or of the Apocalypse). The Gospels relate the life and teachings of Christ, the son of God sent on the earth to atone for the sins of all men.

■ A few parables

The parables relate God's teachings through stories.

The parable of the Good Samaritan

A traveller is attacked, robbed, stripped of his clothes and left for dead. A priest and a Levite avoid or ignore him. But the Samaritan who next passes on the road helps him, takes him to an inn, and pays for the expense, even though there was enmity between Jews and Samaritans.

The parable illustrates the precept that eternal life is gained by actions and that compassion should be for all people.

→ In *Joseph Andrews* (I, 12), Fielding rewrites the parable, showing Joseph attacked by thieves.

30 And Jesus answering¹³ said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment¹⁴, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite¹⁵, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke, 10: 30-37)

The parable of the sower

A sower sows seeds; some of the seeds fall upon the hard ground of the path, others on rocky ground, others among thorns, and all of them are lost. But those that fall on good earth grow and yield fruit that increases. (Mark, 4: 3-9, or Matthew 13:3-9; interpreted by Jesus in Matthew 13: 18-23, Mark 4: 13-20, and Luke 8: 11-15.) Jesus explains that the seed is 'the word of the kingdom', the word of God, which man can receive only if his heart is ready for it. If he is hardened by sin (the hard ground), only superficially prepared but with no real faith (the stony ground) or too interested in riches and pleasure to care, he cannot receive the Word.

→ The parable of the sower is a major theme in O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away*.

The parable of the Prodigal Son

A father divides his estate between his two sons. The younger son travels far away and wastes his money living extravagantly. Poor and hungry, he returns home, ready to admit he has sinned and to work as a servant. But the father welcomes him home and kills the 'fattened calf' to celebrate his return. The elder son is angry at such generosity, but the father explains that 'thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.' The parable illustrates God's forgiveness of the lost ones. The younger son is the lost one, while the elder brother represents self-righteousness¹⁶, like the Pharisees, who followed the letter rather than the spirit of the law.

→ O'Neill's short play *The Rope* is inspired by this parable.

13. Jesus is answering the question of a lawyer: 'what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'

14. raiment: clothes

15. a Levite: a descendant of Levi, and one appointed to assist the priests in the temple or tabernacle.

16. self-righteous: self-satisfied

The parable of the Pearl

In this short parable, 'the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. (Matthew 13:45-46)

The pearl is here the Kingdom of Heaven, which is attained through 'seeking' by those who are ready to stake their whole future to reach it.

→ It provides the background for Steinbeck's novella *The Pearl*.

The parable of the Talents¹⁷

A master puts his servants in charge of his goods while he is away travelling. On his return he judges them according to how good their investments were and rewards them accordingly.

The servants are to be seen as stewards¹⁸ responsible for the care of the Kingdom of Heaven. The servant who buries the money and makes no profit does so through fear and mistrust of his master, God. Men are all responsible for the increasing the resources – not all material – the Lord has entrusted them with.

→ Milton's sonnet 'On His Blindness' is based on this parable.

Here are other well-known parables you can look up in a dictionary:

- THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED (Matthew 13:31–32, Mark 4:30–32, Luke 13:18–19)
- THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE (Luke 13: 6-9)
- THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS (Matthew 25:1-13)
- THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL (Luke 12:13-21)
- THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT (Matthew 18:23-35)
- THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN¹⁹ (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21)
- THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS (Matthew 25:31-46)
- THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR (Luke 18:9-14)
- THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD (Luke 16:1-13)
- THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD (Matthew 21:33-46)
- THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP (Luke 15:1-7)
- THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS (Luke 7: 36-50)
- THE PARABLE OF THE FRIEND AT NIGHT (Luke 11:5-8)
- THE PARABLE OF THE LAMP UNDER A BUSHEL²⁰ (Matthew 5:14-15, Mark 4:21-25, Luke 8:16-18)

17. a talent: a large sum of money

18. a steward: un intendant, un régisseur

19. leaven: levain

20. a bushel: un boisseau

■ A few miracles

Jesus walking on water

Jesus has remained alone and sent his disciples by ship to the other side of the sea of Galilee. But the ship is caught in a sudden storm. When the disciples see Jesus coming to them, walking on the water, they are troubled and believe he is a spirit. But Jesus reassures them and the wind stops.

This miracle shows the need for faith.

→ Larkin's poem 'Essential Beauty' uses the image of walking on water to develop its message about advertising.

²²And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

²³And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

²⁴But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

²⁵And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

²⁶And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

²⁷But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

²⁸And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

²⁹And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

³⁰But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

³¹And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? (Matthew 14:22-31)

Several other miracles show Jesus's control over nature:

– TURNING WATER INTO WINE (John 2:1-11)

– THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISH (Luke 5:1-11) in which Jesus boards a boat in which the men haven't caught any fish and they now catch so much that the boat almost sinks.

– THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE (Matthew 21:18-22, Mark 11:12-14): Jesus curses a fig tree and it withers.

– THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:5-15): Jesus feeds a multitude with five loaves of bread and two small fish.

Jesus cures a leper

This (Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45 and Luke 5:12-16) is one of several miracles in which Jesus cures the blind, the paralytic or people suffering from various diseases.

→ In John Updike's 'From the Journal of a Leper', the subject is treated by inverting the biblical miracle.

See also:

– JESUS HEALING THE BLIND (for example, Mark 8:22-26)

– JESUS HEALS A DEAF MUTE (Mark 7:31-37)

Other Miracles

They include exorcism (casting away demons):

– EXORCISING THE CANAANITE WOMAN'S DAUGHTER (Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30)

– EXORCISING A BOY POSSESSED BY A DEMON (Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29, Luke 9:37-49) and the resurrection of the dead:

– THE RAISING OF LAZARUS (John 11:1-44)

– THE YOUNG MAN FROM NAIN (Luke 7:11-17)

■ A few biblical symbols in the old and new testaments

– ARMAGEDDON (Revelation 16:16): the place where the final battle between good and evil will take place, pitting the Anti-Christ against Christ.

– BABYLON (Revelation 17-18): an old city in Mesopotamia, known for its luxury and vice. THE WHORE OF BABYLON was a figure of evil linked to the Anti-Christ.

– BREAD (CAST – UPON THE WATERS) (Ecclesiastes 11:1): sowing seeds or rice onto water will later bring a large harvest, showing hospitality to the poor or those who cannot repay it will bring its rewards.

– CAMEL (GOING THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE) (Matthew 19:24): 'And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.', said Jesus, meaning that men are saved through mercy, grace and faith, not because of their wealth.

– CROWN OF THORNS (Mark 15:17): the wreath put by soldiers on the head of Jesus before crucifixion, an act of derision.

– DOVE (Genesis 8:11, Matthew 10:16): a symbol of innocence; it was the messenger of peace between God and man when, bearing an OLIVE-LEAF, it announced the end of the FLOOD. The dove also represents the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:10)

– FISH: an early symbol of Christianity since the Greek word for fish, *ichthus*, represents the initial letters of the Greek words for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour'. Jesus chose several fishermen as his disciples and said it would make them 'fishers of men'.

– FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE (Revelation 6:1-8): the four horsemen who announced the Apocalypse and the Last Judgement. They rode four different horses symbolizing conquest (the white horse), war (the red horse), famine (the black horse) and death (the pale horse). → See Morrison's *Beloved*, Part 1, Chapter 16.

– GETHSEMANE (Matthew 26:36-56): it was in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus was arrested after being betrayed by Judas Iscariot.

- GOLDEN CALF (Exodus 32): an idol made and worshipped by the Israelites during Moses' absence to receive the Ten Commandments. He burnt it on his return.
- GOLGOTHA (or Calvary): the hill in Bethlehem where Jesus was crucified.
- JERICHO (Joshua 6: 1-27): in their conquest of Canaan, the Israelites blew their trumpets and the walls of Jericho fell, allowing Joshua to take the city. → the Negro Spiritual 'Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho'.
- LAMB (John 1:29, 36): Christ, who died to atone for the sins of others, is often seen as a sacrificial lamb.
- LAST SUPPER (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20): Jesus' last meal with his disciples. The BREAD and WINE served there represented the body and blood of Christ.
- MAGI (Matthew 2): the three wise men (Melchior, Gaspar, Balthazar) who visited baby Jesus in Bethlehem, bringing gold (meaning royalty), FRANKINCENSE (meaning divinity), and MYRRH (meaning death). → Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi'.
- MAMMON (Matthew 6:24): avarice, material wealth, therefore also the god of riches. In the New Testament, it is linked to the evil influence of money.
- MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS (Matthew 2:1-23): Herod, the king of Judaea at the time of the birth of Jesus, was a tyrannical ruler. Warned by astrologers that one who was to become 'King of the Jews' had been born in Bethlehem, Herod was afraid he might overthrow him and ordered all the children aged two and under in Bethlehem to be killed. Joseph was warned in a dream and fled to Egypt with his family.
- RAINBOW (Genesis 9:12-17): a sign marking the end of the flood and symbolising the covenant²¹ between God and man that such a catastrophe would never occur again. → Lawrence's novel *The Rainbow*
- SECOND COMING (Matthew 24:36-44): the belief that Christ will come back to judge the world and establish the triumph of good over evil. → Yeats's poem 'The Second Coming', a metaphor for post-war Europe.
- SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Matthew 5-7): After being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus goes into the mountain, followed by his disciples, and preaches a sermon which contains his best-known teachings, including the Lord's Prayer.
- SODOM AND GOMORRAH (Genesis 19: 24-28), were two cities where the inhabitants were particularly wicked. God warned all good men to leave before the cities were destroyed with FIRE AND BRIMSTONE (sulphur). Lot and his family, who were good, were warned to leave and not look behind them. But Lot's wife disobeyed, looked back, and was transformed into a pillar of salt.
- STONE (CASTING THE FIRST -) (JOHN 8:7): 'So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first

21. a covenant: *un engagement formel, une alliance*

- cast a stone at her', was Jesus' answer to the Pharisees who came to Jesus asking if a woman who had committed adultery should be stoned.
- THE TOWER OF BABEL (Genesis 11:1-9): a tower built by the descendants of Noah to reach heaven and perpetuate their name. God prevented this by giving them different languages, so that they were scattered all over the earth. → William Golding's *The Spire* echoes the story of the Tower of Babel.
- THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER (Matthew 26:15): what Judas Iscariot was paid to betray Jesus.
- THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY (I Corinthians 13:12): 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.' What this means is that on earth men's vision is confused, but in heaven, everything will become clear.
- TREE OF KNOWLEDGE (Genesis 2-3): the tree whose fruit Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat. They disobeyed, gained knowledge of good and evil, and were banished from paradise.
- VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH (Psalm 23): 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me'. This line from one of the best-known psalms means that, like a shepherd, God will guide men and lead them to eternal life so that no one should fear death. There are numerous references to this Psalm in literature, for example in Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (The Valley of Ashes).
- WATER: Water is a recurring motif in the Bible. It is linked to birth and rebirth (the world is created out of boundless water – Genesis: 1; Moses is drawn out of water, Exodus 2. 1-10), to fertility and prosperity (the rain or snow help the earth flourish – Isaiah 55: 10-11), to danger (the Flood, the sea which can be hostile) and to cleansing and purification, both physically and symbolically (Jesus washing his disciples' feet in John: 13; Baptism, which marks spiritual rebirth).
- WHITED SEPULCHRES (Matthew 23:27): The name Christ, who condemned them, gave to the Pharisees, a Jewish sect who strictly and self-righteously observed ritual rules. → In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the Whited Sepulchre is Brussels, where the headquarters of the Company were located.

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845): the influence of the Bible

— Our house stood within a few rods¹ of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was
 — ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful
 — vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so
 — many shrouded² ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched
 5 condition. I have often, in the deep stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone
 — upon the lofty banks of that noble bay, and traced, with saddened heart and tearful
 — eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. The sight of
 — these always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would compel utterance; and
 — there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in
 10 my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships:

— "You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast³ in my chains, and am a
 — slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip!
 — You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in
 — bands of iron! O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant⁴ decks, and
 15 under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll. Go
 — on, go on. O that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! O, why was I born a
 — man, of whom to make a brute! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance.
 — I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me! God, deliver me!
 — Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand
 20 it. Get caught, or get clear, I'll try it. I had as well die with ague as the fever. I have
 — only one life to lose. I had as well be killed running as die standing. Only think of it;
 — one hundred miles straight north, and I am free! Try it? Yes! God helping me, I will.
 — It cannot be that I shall live and die a slave. I will take to the water. This very bay
 — shall yet bear me into freedom. The steamboats steered in a north-east course
 25 from North Point. I will do the same; and when I get to the head of the bay, I will turn
 — my canoe adrift, and walk straight through Delaware into Pennsylvania. When I get
 — there, I shall not be required to have a pass; I can travel without being disturbed.
 — Let but the first opportunity offer, and, come what will, I am off. Meanwhile, I will
 — try to bear up under the yoke. I am not the only slave in the world. Why should I fret?
 30 I can bear as much as any of them. Besides, I am but a boy, and all boys are bound to
 — some one. It may be that my misery in slavery will only increase my happiness when
 — I get free. There is a better day coming."

— Thus I used to think, and thus I used to speak to myself; goaded almost to madness
 — at one moment, and at the next reconciling myself to my wretched lot.

(Chapter X)

1. a rod: 5.5 yards (archaic). 2. a shroud: *un linceul*. 3. I am fast: I am held tightly. 4. gallant: brave, noble-minded.

■ THE CONTEXT

The influence of the Bible was profound among black people in America, particularly among the slave population, the practice of religion being encouraged

since the promise of an after-life often made slaves more compliant. In fact, until the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), both slave owners and abolitionists found arguments in the Bible to justify their views. Frederick Douglass, who was born a slave and wrote his autobiography after escaping to Massachusetts, was a deeply religious man although he became increasingly critical of the institution of the church in America. In this chapter, Douglass describes the worst year in his life, when he worked for Mr. Covey, a cruel slave-breaker.

■ THE STRUCTURE

It is a structure of embedding, Frederick Douglass's apostrophe to the ships being framed by two paragraphs of narrative which explain the situation (l. 1-10 and 34-35). The middle paragraph moves from despair (l. 11-19) to determination (l. 19-33), something underlined by the shift from subjunctive and conditional forms (that I were / that I could) to modals expressing intention (I will / I can).

■ THE YOKE OF SLAVERY

Slavery is here described indirectly through the contrast between the moving ships ('sails moving off') and imprisonment ('confined in bands of iron'), between beauty (l. 2-3) and its effect upon the narrator ('with saddened heart and tearful eye'). The images used are mostly biblical. 'The yoke' Douglass has to bear (l. 29) is a word linked to slavery and subjection (Jeremiah 28:13), just as the 'bands of iron' (l. 14) are (Psalm 107:16). The ship usually stands for Christ or the Church, and is linked to the ark which saved Noah's family. The idea of being saved by a ship reappears at the end of the passage, when Douglass decides to 'take to the water' (l. 23), echoing the biblical image of water as a source of both danger and rebirth.

The contrast between slavery and freedom becomes one between heaven and hell. The ships 'robed in purest white' (l. 3) suggest purity and redemption (Revelation 7:9), while slavery is described as 'the hottest hell of unending slavery'.

The contrast between slavery and wisdom is expressed through parallelism and opposites in lines 11 to 14 (for example 'loosed' vs 'fast', 'moorings' vs 'chains', 'free' vs 'a slave' in the first sentence), something typical of biblical style.

■ A JEREMIAD

Halfway between a bitter lament and an assertion of hope, this is a typical Jeremiad which also shows the influence of the Bible. Douglass's complaint is reminiscent of the Book of Job (for instance Job 16) or of Lamentations (see Lamentations 3). Exclamations, rhetorical questions, apostrophes to God, anaphora, alliterations (move merrily / dim distance / hottest hell), sentimental expressions, all contribute to the expression of powerful emotion. It reaches a climax when Douglass raises the question of God's existence (l. 19).

■ AN ASSERTION OF THE SELF

— The inflated rhetoric Douglass uses was for him a way of asserting his own individuality as a man ('born a man', l.17), the reverse of a slave deprived of an

identity. This is also to be felt through the recurrent use of the pronoun 'I' in the passage. Such eloquence belies the words 'brute' and 'in my rude way'. In spite of Douglass's questioning of God's existence, the soliloquy is far from religious despair. There is also great optimism in the last lines of the apostrophe, which anticipate Douglass's later escape. Such confidence reminds us that the autobiography was written years after the events he describes here.

– This passage from Douglass's *Narrative* also shows his closeness to nature, which is described in religious terms ('bosom / robed in purest white / stillness / lofty / noble / mighty ocean'). There is something Emersonian, something of Transcendentalism, in this awareness of the divinity of nature, which leads Douglass to reflect upon his own relationship to the divine.

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