

18th century english literature

18th Century English Literature: An Age of Reason, Revolution, and Romance

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1. The Enlightenment and its Literary Manifestations

The 18th century in England, often referred to as the Augustan Age or the Age of Reason, witnessed a profound intellectual and cultural shift. The Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason, individualism, and empirical observation, profoundly impacted 18th century English literature. This period saw a flourishing of various literary forms, each reflecting the dominant intellectual currents of the time. Neoclassicism, drawing inspiration from classical Greek and Roman models, emphasized order, harmony, and restraint in art and literature. Writers like Alexander Pope, with his meticulously crafted satirical verse, epitomized this aesthetic. His *Essay on Criticism* and *The Rape of the Lock* exemplify the Neoclassical focus on wit, precision, and the didactic purpose of literature. John Dryden, a pivotal figure bridging the Restoration and the Augustan Age, also contributed significantly to the development of Neoclassical drama and criticism. The emphasis on reason and order also found expression in the rise of the periodical essay, exemplified by the *Spectator* and *Tatler* by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. These publications aimed to instruct and entertain the reading public, promoting moral and social reform through witty and engaging prose.

2. The Rise of the Novel

Perhaps the most significant literary development of 18th century English literature was the rise of the novel as a major literary form. Before this period, prose fiction existed primarily in the form of romances and shorter narratives. However, the 18th century

witnessed the emergence of the realistic novel, with authors like Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding pioneering new narrative techniques and exploring a wider range of social and psychological themes. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* exemplifies the early realistic novel, grounded in detailed descriptions and plausible events. Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* introduced the epistolary novel, using letters to convey narrative and psychological depth. Fielding, in contrast, employed a more satirical and panoramic approach in novels like *Tom Jones*, which offers a complex and detailed picture of 18th-century English society. These early novels laid the foundations for the later development of the genre and its continued evolution.

3. Poetry and the Development of Different Styles

18th century English literature also produced a rich body of poetry, reflecting diverse styles and sensibilities. While Neoclassicism dominated the early part of the century, later decades saw a gradual shift towards a more emotional and subjective approach. Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, with its melancholic reflection on mortality and the common man, foreshadows the Romantic movement. Oliver Goldsmith's more accessible and sentimental poetry, particularly his poems like "The Deserted Village," appealed to a wider audience and contributed to the growing popularity of nature poetry. Robert Burns, a Scottish poet, brought a unique voice to 18th century English literature, celebrating the beauty and simplicity of rural life in his vernacular Scots poems. His work exemplifies the emerging appreciation for the vernacular and folk traditions.

4. The Social and Political Context

The social and political landscape of 18th-century England significantly shaped its literature. The period witnessed significant social and economic changes, including the growth of cities, the rise of a new merchant class, and the continuing effects of the Industrial Revolution. These transformations are reflected in the literature of the time, with writers often exploring themes of social inequality, poverty, and the changing moral landscape. The American Revolution and the growing awareness of political liberty also influenced literary production. The rise of radical thought and the dissemination of new political ideas fuelled satirical works that criticized the existing social and political order. This period witnessed a flourishing of political pamphlets, essays, and satirical writings, often used as tools for political and social commentary.

5. The Dawn of Romanticism

Towards the end of the 18th century, the seeds of Romanticism were sown. A reaction against the strict rationality and order of Neoclassicism, Romanticism emphasized emotion, imagination, and the individual's subjective experience. While fully realized in the 19th century, the late 18th century saw the emergence of some key Romantic sensibilities. The focus on nature, emotion, and the sublime, all characteristic of Romanticism, started gaining traction in the works of some poets and writers. This shift foreshadowed the major literary movement that would dominate the next century.

6. The Legacy of 18th Century English Literature

The legacy of 18th century English literature is immense and far-reaching. The novels, poems, and essays produced during this period continue to be read and studied today. The innovations in narrative technique, the exploration of complex social and psychological themes, and the development of new literary forms all had a profound impact on subsequent literary movements. The literary achievements of this age have not only shaped the development of English literature itself but have also exerted a significant influence on world literature and continue to inspire writers and readers alike. The exploration of reason, emotion, and the individual's place in society, as reflected in the literature of this era, remain central to many contemporary literary concerns.

Conclusion:

The study of 18th century English literature offers a fascinating glimpse into a transformative period in British history and culture. From the elegant satire of Pope to the groundbreaking novels of Richardson and Fielding, the literature of this era reflects the intellectual ferment, social upheaval, and evolving aesthetic sensibilities of the age. It laid the groundwork for the Romantic movement while simultaneously establishing enduring literary forms and conventions that continue to influence writers and readers today. The period's enduring relevance lies in its exploration of fundamental human experiences, its nuanced reflections on social structures, and its innovative approaches to literary expression.

FAQs:

1. What are the major characteristics of Neoclassicism in 18th-century English literature? Neoclassicism emphasized reason, order, harmony, restraint, wit, and imitation of classical models in literature and art. It often had a didactic purpose, aiming to instruct and improve the reader's morals.
1. How did the rise of the novel change English literature? The rise of the novel expanded the range of narratives and characters depicted in literature, providing opportunities for exploring social realities and individual psychology in greater depth than previous forms.
1. Who were the key female writers of the 18th century? While often overshadowed by male counterparts, significant female writers of the period include Aphra Behn (pre-18th century but influential), Eliza Haywood, and Jane Austen (transitional to the Romantic period).

1. What is the significance of satire in 18th-century literature? Satire served as a powerful tool for social and political commentary, criticizing hypocrisy, corruption, and social inequalities. Writers used wit and irony to expose the flaws of individuals and institutions.
1. How did the Enlightenment influence 18th-century literature? The Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, empiricism, and individual liberty shaped the literature of the period, leading to a focus on clear prose, rational arguments, and explorations of individual rights and responsibilities.
1. What is the connection between 18th-century literature and the rise of the middle class? The growing middle class became a significant readership, and writers increasingly addressed their interests and concerns, leading to novels depicting the lives and experiences of this new social group.
1. How did the American Revolution impact 18th-century English literature? The American Revolution fueled debates about liberty, representation, and the nature of government, influencing the content and themes explored in literary works.
1. What are some key themes explored in 18th-century literature? Key themes include reason versus emotion, social class and inequality, the nature of morality, political liberty, and the relationship between humans and nature.
1. How did 18th-century literature pave the way for Romanticism? The growing emphasis on emotion, the individual's subjective experience, and the celebration of nature in late 18th-century works foreshadowed the Romantic movement's focus on feeling, imagination, and the power of nature.

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on literary themes and forms - including urbanization, colonial, and mercantile expansion, the emergence of the public sphere, and changes in sex and gender roles. In eighteenth-century Britain, many of the things we take for granted about modern life were shockingly new: women appeared for the first time on stage; the novel began to dominate the literary marketplace; people entertained the possibility that all human beings were created equal, and tentatively proposed that reason could triumph over superstition; ministers became more powerful than kings, and the consumer emerged as a political force. *Eighteenth-Century English Literature: 1660-1789* explores these issues in relation to well-known works by such authors as Defoe, Swift, Pope, Richardson, Gray, and Sterne, while also bringing attention to less familiar figures, such as Charlotte Smith, Mary Leapor, and Olaudah Equiano. It offers both an ideal introduction for students and a fresh approach for those with research interests in the period.

18th century english literature: *The Eighteenth Century* Pat Rogers, 1978

18th century english literature: *Candide* By Voltaire, 2019-06-10 *Candide* is a French satire by Voltaire, a philosopher of the Age of Enlightenment. It begins with a young man, Candide, who is living a sheltered life in an Edenic paradise and being indoctrinated with Leibnizian optimism (or simply Optimism) by his mentor, Pangloss. The work describes the abrupt cessation of this lifestyle, followed by Candide's slow, painful disillusionment as he witnesses and experiences great hardships in the world. Voltaire concludes with Candide, if not rejecting optimism outright, advocating a deeply practical precept, we must cultivate our garden, in lieu of the Leibnizian mantra of Pangloss, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. *Candide* is characterized by its sarcastic tone, as well as by its erratic, fantastical and fast-moving plot. A picaresque novel it parodies many adventure and romance clichés, the struggles of which are caricatured in a tone that is mordantly matter-of-fact. Still, the events discussed are often based on historical happenings, such as the Seven Years' War and the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. As philosophers of Voltaire's day contended with the problem of evil, so too does Candide in this short novel, albeit more directly and humorously. Voltaire ridicules religion, theologians, governments, armies, philosophies, and philosophers through allegory; most conspicuously, he assaults Leibniz and his optimism. As expected by Voltaire, *Candide* has enjoyed both great success and great scandal. Immediately after its secretive publication, the book was widely banned because it contained religious blasphemy, political sedition and intellectual hostility hidden under a thin veil of naïveté. However, with its sharp wit and insightful portrayal of the human condition, the novel has since inspired many later authors and artists to mimic and adapt it. Today, *Candide* is recognized as Voltaire's magnum opus and is often listed as part of the Western canon; it is arguably taught more than any other work of French literature. It was listed as one of The 100 Most Influential Books Ever Written.

18th century english literature: *Eighteenth-century English Literature* Maximillian E. Novak, 1983-01-01

18th century english literature: *Reading the Eighteenth-Century Novel* David H. Richter, 2017-05-01 *Reading the Eighteenth-Century Novel* is a lively exploration of the evolution of the English novel from 1688-1815. A range of major works and authors are discussed along with important developments in the genre, and the impact of novels on society at the time. The text begins with a discussion of the "rise of the novel" in the long eighteenth century and various theories about the economic, social, and ideological changes that caused it. Subsequent chapters examine ten particular novels, from *Oroonoko* and *Moll Flanders* to *Tom Jones* and *Emma*, using each one to introduce and discuss different rhetorical theories of narrative. The way in which books developed and changed during this period, breaking new ground, and influencing later developments is also discussed, along with key themes such as the representation of gender, class, and nationality. The final chapter explores how this literary form became a force for social and ideological change by the end of the period. Written by a highly experienced scholar of English literature, this engaging textbook guides readers through the intricacies of a transformational period for the novel.

18th century english literature: *Effeminate Years* Declan Kavanagh, 2017-06-23 *Effeminate*

Years: Literature, Politics, and Aesthetics in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain investigates the gendered, eroticized, and xenophobic ways in which the controversies in the 1760s surrounding the political figure John Wilkes (1725-97) legitimated some men as political subjects, while forcefully excluding others on the basis of their perceived effeminacy or foreignness. However, this book is not a literary analysis of the Wilkes affair in the 1760s, nor is it a linear account of Wilkes's political career. Instead, *Effeminate Years* examines the cultural crisis of effeminacy that made Wilkes's politicking so appealing. The central theoretical problem that this study addresses is the argument about what is and is not political: where does individual autonomy begin and end? Addressing this question, Kavanagh traces the shaping influence of the discourse of effeminacy in the literature that was generated by Wilkes's legal and sexual scandals, while, at the same time, he also reads Wilkes's spectacular drumming up of support as a timely exploitation of the broader cultural crisis of effeminacy during the mid century in Britain. The book begins with the scandals and agitations surrounding Wilkes, and ends with readings of Edmund Burke's (1729-1797) earliest political writings, which envisage political community—a vision, that Kavanagh argues, is influenced by Wilkes and the effeminate years of the 1760s. Throughout, Kavanagh shows how interlocutors in the political and cultural debates of the mid-eighteenth-century period in Britain, such as Tobias Smollett (1721-1771) and Arthur Murphy (1727-1805), attempt to resolve the problem of effeminate excess. In part, the resolution for Wilkes and Charles Churchill (1731-1764) was to shunt effeminacy onto the sexually non-normative. On the other hand, Burke, in his aesthetic theorization of the beautiful privileges the socially constitutive affects of feeling effeminate. Through an analysis of poetry, fiction, social and economic pamphlets, aesthetic treatises, journalism and correspondences, placed within the latest queer historiography, Kavanagh demonstrates that the mid-century effeminacy crisis served to re-conceive male heterosexuality as the very mark of political legitimacy. Overall, *Effeminate Years* explores the development of modern ideas of masculinity and the political subject, which are still the basis of debate and argument in our own time.

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18th century english literature: Painting the Novel Jakub Lipski, 2017-12-22 *Painting the Novel: Pictorial Discourse in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* focuses on the interrelationship between eighteenth-century theories of the novel and the art of painting – a subject which has not yet been undertaken in a book-length study. This volume argues that throughout the century novelists from Daniel Defoe to Ann Radcliffe referred to the visual arts, recalling specific names or artworks, but also artistic styles and conventions, in an attempt to define the generic constitution of their fictions. In this, the novelists took part in the discussion of the sister arts, not only by pointing to the affinities between them but also, more importantly, by recognising their potential to inform one another; in other words, they expressed a conviction that the theory of a new genre can be successfully rendered through meta-pictorial analogies. By tracing the uses of painting in eighteenth-century novelistic discourse, this book sheds new light on the history of the so-called rise of the novel.

18th century english literature: Women Writing Music in Late Eighteenth-Century England Leslie Ritchie, 2017-07-05 Combining new musicology trends, formal musical analysis, and literary feminist recovery work, Leslie Ritchie examines rare poetic, didactic, fictional, and musical

texts written by women in late eighteenth-century Britain. She finds instances of and resistance to contemporary perceptions of music as a form of social control in works by Maria Barth^{mon}, Harriett Abrams, Mary Worgan, Susanna Rowson, Hannah Cowley, and Amelia Opie, among others. Relating women's musical compositions and writings about music to theories of music's function in the formation of female subjectivities during the latter half of the eighteenth century, Ritchie draws on the work of cultural theorists and cultural historians, as well as feminist scholars who have explored the connection between femininity and performance. Whether crafting works consonant with societal ideals of charitable, natural, and national order, or re-imagining their participation in these musical aids to social harmony, women contributed significantly to the formation of British cultural identity. Ritchie's interdisciplinary book will interest scholars working in a range of fields, including gender studies, musicology, eighteenth-century British literature, and cultural studies.

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18th century english literature: Eighteenth Century English Poetry Nalini Jain, John Richardson, 2016-07-01 This anthology of 18th-century English poetry is extensively annotated for a new generation of readers. It combines the scope of a period anthology with the detailed annotations of an authoritative single-author edition. Selected poets include John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope and William Cowper. The guiding principle of the annotation is one of thoroughness: the editors concentrate on works where the meanings have changed, on primary allusions and on relevant details of social and political history.

18th century english literature: The Self and It Julie Park, 2010 *The Self and It* makes a fresh and bold intervention in histories and theories of the rise of the novel by arguing that the material objects proliferating in eighteenth-century England's consumer markets worked in conjunction with the novel as vital tools for fashioning the modern self.

18th century english literature: The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel John Richetti, 1996-09-05 In the past twenty years our understanding of the novel's emergence in eighteenth-century Britain has drastically changed. Drawing on new research in social and political history, the twelve contributors to this Companion challenge and refine the traditional view of the novel's origins and purposes. In various ways each seeks to show that the novel is not defined primarily by its realism of representation, but by the new ideological and cultural functions it serves in the emerging modern world of print culture. Sentimental and Gothic fiction and fiction by women are discussed, alongside detailed readings of work by Defoe, Swift, Richardson, Henry Fielding, Sterne, Smollett, and Burney. This multifaceted picture of the novel in its formative decades provides a comprehensive and indispensable guide for students of the eighteenth-century British novel, and its place within the culture of its time.

18th century english literature: English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1789

David Fairer, 2014-10-13 In recent years the canon of eighteenth-century poetry has greatly expanded to include women poets, labouring-class and provincial poets, and many previously unheard voices. Fairer's book takes up the challenge this ought to pose to our traditional understanding of the subject. This book seeks to question some of the structures, categories, and labels that have given the age its reassuring shape in literary history. In doing so Fairer offers a fresh and detailed look at a wide range of material.

18th century english literature: The Origins of the English Marriage Plot Lisa O'Connell, 2019-07-11 Examines how and why marriage plots became the English novel's most popular form in the eighteenth century. This book will be of interest to students and researchers of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English literature and culture as well as feminist literary history.

18th century english literature: The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel J. A. Downie, 2016 The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth Century Novel is the first published book to cover the 'eighteenth-century English novel' in its entirety. It is an indispensable resource for those with an interest in the history of the novel.

18th century english literature: Novel Beginnings Patricia Meyer Spacks, 2008-10-01 In this study intended for general readers, eminent critic Patricia Meyer Spacks provides a fresh, engaging account of the early history of the English novel. *Novel Beginnings* departs from the traditional, narrow focus on the development of the realistic novel to emphasize the many kinds of experimentation that marked the genre in the eighteenth century before its conventions were firmly established in the nineteenth. Treating well-known works like *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy* in conjunction with less familiar texts such as Sarah Fielding's *The Cry* (a kind of hybrid novel and play) and Jane Barker's *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* (a novel of adventure replete with sentimental verse and numerous subnarratives), the book evokes the excitement of a multifaceted and unpredictable process of growth and change. Investigating fiction throughout the 1700s, Spacks delineates the individuality of specific texts while suggesting connections among novels. She sketches a wide range of forms and themes, including Providential narratives, psychological thrillers, romans à clef, sentimental parables, political allegories, Gothic romances, and many others. These multiple narrative experiments show the impossibility of thinking of eighteenth-century fiction simply as a precursor to the nineteenth-century novel, Spacks shows. Instead, the vast variety of engagements with the problems of creating fiction demonstrates that literary history—by no means inexorable—might have taken quite a different course.

18th century english literature: The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England David Porter, 2010-11-11 Eighteenth-century consumers in Britain, living in an increasingly globalized world, were infatuated with exotic Chinese and Chinese-styled goods, art and decorative objects. However, they were also often troubled by the alien aesthetic sensibility these goods embodied. This ambivalence figures centrally in the period's experience of China and of contact with foreign countries and cultures more generally. David Porter analyzes the processes by which Chinese aesthetic ideas were assimilated within English culture. Through case studies of individual figures, including William Hogarth and Horace Walpole, and broader reflections on cross-cultural interaction, Porter's readings develop new interpretations of eighteenth-century ideas of luxury, consumption, gender, taste and aesthetic nationalism. Illustrated with many examples of Chinese and Chinese-inspired objects and art, this is a major contribution to eighteenth-century cultural history and to the history of contact and exchange between China and the West.

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Wordsworth, and Gilbert White. ignwogwog[p

18th century english literature: Heteronormativity in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture Dr Ana de Freitas Boe, Professor Abby Coykendall, 2015-01-28 Understanding heteronormativity is imperative for understanding the culture of the eighteenth century writ large, as well as the imaginaries of sex and sexuality that it bequeaths to the present. This collection foregrounds British, European, and transatlantic heteronormativities to pose vital, if vexing, questions about the degree of continuity subsisting between heteronormativities past and present, questions compounded by the aura of transhistoricity lying at the heart of heteronormativity as an ideology.

18th century english literature: Eighteenth-Century Poetry and the Rise of the Novel Reconsidered Kate Parker, Courtney Weiss Smith, 2013-12-24 Eighteenth-Century Poetry and the Rise of the Novel Reconsidered begins with the brute fact that poetry jostled up alongside novels in the bookstalls of eighteenth-century England. Indeed, by exploring unexpected collisions and collusions between poetry and novels, this volume of exciting, new essays offers a reconsideration of the literary and cultural history of the period. The novel poached from and featured poetry, and the "modern" subjects and objects privileged by "rise of the novel" scholarship are only one part of a world full of animate things and people with indistinct boundaries. Contributors: Margaret Doody, David Fairer, Sophie Gee, Heather Keenleyside, Shelley King, Christina Lupton, Kate Parker, Natalie Phillips, Aran Ruth, Wolfram Schmidgen, Joshua Swidzinski, and Courtney Weiss Smith.

18th century english literature: The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry John Sitter, 2001-03-26 This book analyzes major premises and practices of eighteenth-century English poets.

18th century english literature: Eighteenth-Century English Raymond Hickey, 2010-06-24 The eighteenth century was a key period in the development of the English language, in which the modern standard emerged and many dictionaries and grammars first appeared. This book is divided into thematic sections which deal with issues central to English in the eighteenth century. These include linguistic ideology and the grammatical tradition, the contribution of women to the writing of grammars, the interactions of writers at this time and how politeness was encoded in language, including that on a regional level. The contributions also discuss how language was seen and discussed in public and how grammarians, lexicographers, journalists, pamphleteers and publishers judged on-going change. The novel insights offered in this book extend our knowledge of the English language at the onset of the modern period.

18th century english literature: *The Emergence of Literary Criticism in 18th-Century Britain* Sebastian Domsch, 2014-08-19 This study tries, through a systematic and historical analysis of the concept of critical authority, to write a history of literary criticism from the end of the 17th to the end of the 18th century that not only takes the discursive construction of its (self)representation into account, but also the social and economic conditions of its practice. It tries to consider the whole of the critical discourse on literature and criticism in the time period covered. Thus, it is distinctive through its methodology (there is no systematic account of the historical development of critical authority and no discussion of the institutionalization of criticism of such a scope), its material of analysis (most of the many hundred texts self-reflexively commenting on criticism that are discussed here have been so far virtually ignored) and through its results, a complex history of criticism in the 18th century that is neither reductive nor the accumulation of isolated aspects or author figures, but that probes into the very nature of the activity of criticism. The aim of this study is both to provide a thorough historical understanding of the emergence of criticism and as a consequence an understanding of the inner workings and power relations that structure criticism to this day.

18th century english literature: History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century Leslie Stephen, 2024-04-28 Reprint of the original, first published in 1881.

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