

## English literature, a short history.

### CHAPTER 1: from the origins to the renaissance.

#### 1. The beginning

43 AD England invaded by romans (Britannia ~ stayed there for 4 centuries)

Then Germanic tribes arrived → Saxons, Jutes, Angles.

Germanic language spoken: English → Old English

Poems written in Old English. The most ancient were of religious matters, while other were warrior type. Beowulf is epic. Composed during the 8th century. 3182 lines. Heroic world of the north from which the English had come to Britain. Protagonist a young warrior who defeats the monster Grendel, son of a witch. The poem ends with Beowulf's funeral.

The tone of the poem is legendary. Hero in superhuman opposition to a fantastic monster who incarnate evil. Positive values of the Germanic warrior world: family honor, obligations to lord and to guests, bond between lord and his people. They do not know the Bible (the poet does). The story of Beowulf, maybe developed in oral form, retains ethos of the pagan Germanic world.

Religious poetry: The Dream Of the Rood, 750. Short poem. The Holy Cross tells the story of the crucifixion. Riddle tradition of speaking objects.

King Alfred to the throne in 871, (Danes had control of all English kingdoms except his one). Alfred translated St Augustine, St Gregory and Bede. English became literary language. He was probably responsible for the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which records Alfred's descendants successes and a cultural growth, until new Danish invasions brought to a political decline.

#### 2. After the conquest.

1066 last invasion of England. William the Conqueror, duke of Normandy, landed on 28 September crowned king on Christmas day. Norman conquest formally and solemnly proclaimed in the presence of God and men. Norman French became the language of the court. William imposed his bishops, clergy wrote in Latin and delivered sermons in English. English poetry in old English died. French invaded the language, and English became a semi-inflected language. Cuisine and law with tons of French words. Dialectical variations.

English between 1100-1400= Middle English. No standard literary language. Every poet wrote in his own language.

Sir Gawain\* anonymous author, the most refined English verse romance, used the language spoken in the West Midlands. It is an example of the changes brought by William.

Jongleurs sang about nobles deeds in the court of Charlemagne → chansons des gestes ~ songs of deeds. Chanson de Roland poem about Roland's heroic fight against the Saracens and his death and Charlemagne's revenge against the enemy and the traitor Ganelon. Success due to the simplicity of the values promoted → disinterested heroism, love for one's country, loyalty to kind and faith → greatest example of the Matter of France.

Historia Regum Britanniae story of Brutus and of his successor, King Arthur, and his knights at the Round Table. The story of Brutus sounds epic, while Arthur's defines what will be later called romance.

King Arthur's stories, whit their romance, constitute the Matter of Britain. These stories were written in vernacular rather than in Latin. Chivalry was the system of values existing in the feudal world, so it was soon going to disappear. The Matter of Britain is still actual and revisited.

La Morte Darthur written by Sir Thomas Malory. Prose version of the Arthurian legend. 1469/1470. Definitive and canonical version of the legend written in both English and French.

#### 3. Sir Gawain, Pearl, and Piers Plowman.

\* Sir Gawain and The Green Knight. Verse romance 2500 lines. Also contains 3 religious poems. Alliterative verses of OE but more sophisticated in form. Chivalric vision proper to romance.

Mystery, magic and appetite for adventure. Trawthe is the highest of Gawain's virtue, that's to say loyalty and fidelity. Religious values. The existence of courtly love and religion have given rise to many critical interpretations.

When the poem was written, Richard II had to face up to earls and dukes. He will be forced to abdicate for the Duke of Lancaster, King Henry IV.

When Malory was writing *La Morte Darthur* England was being torn apart by the War of The Roses (1455-85) between Lancaster and York for the throne. Richard III died in battle → King Henry VII, Earl of Richmond, who married the daughter of the former king, Edward IV, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster.

Pearl dream poem ( the most important genre with romance) of 1212 lines. Complex metrical structure and sophisticated rhetorical constructions. The dreamer falls asleep in a garden and dreams about his lost daughter, who transforms into Christ's bride and reveals him the New Jerusalem. When the dreamer tries to join a procession, he wakes up.

*Piers Plowman* – William Langland (1330-1386). Dream poem in the alliterative style, written in a dialect comprehensible in London. Revised 3 times. Journey of Will, the dreamer, searching for salvation in a corrupted world. Fails. Series of interviews with personified abstractions and with the 3 stages of a good Christian life (Dowel, Dobet and Dobest). End with the realisation of the kingdom of Christ on earth. Denunciation of the corruption of the church → remembered and quoted for centuries by the puritans. Denunciation of the sufferings caused by the social system → Peasants revolt (1831)

#### 4. Chaucer

Second half 14th century (Edward III French wars for the crown, Richard and the suppression of the Peasants revolt and Henry IV who overthrew him).

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400) poet. Served with the English army in France and entrusted with diplomatic missions for Edward III. Always had important public function, also with king Richard and Henry.

Imitation e re-elaboration of French models. Encounter with Italian culture → Dante (inspired him that the vernacular could be used in poetry) and Petrarch (technical and ideological model). House of fame

*Troilus and Criseyde* anomalous romance. Rhyme-royal (7-lined stanzas, ababbcc). Story of the lovers of the title. Label of the tragic with a non-tragic ending. The model was Boccaccio, but *Troilus* is original.

The *Canterbury Tales* stories told by different characters. Different social classes gather at a Inn before setting out a pilgrimage to Canterbury. Each pilgrim tell 2 stories on the way and 2 on the way back. 30 pilgrims= 120 tales. Only 22 were completed before Chaucer's death.

Fabliaux (comic tales, popular setting with a triangle – wife, jealous husband and lover), romance genre tales and religious tales (→ *The Clerk's Tale*)

*The Nun's Priest's Tale* was the best tale. Genre of the beast fable. Moral entrusted to animals.

Great formal elegance. Comic effect → human psychology to animal behaviour.

The prologue is interesting for modern readers. Very accurate description of the characters, with little irony.

*The Wife of Bath* → formidable character, survived to 5 husbands, expert in the "old dance".

Incarnates life's pleasures and the pleasure of living. Her idea of sexuality (woman should have the dominant role in the relationship except for bed situations) is against that of the church. The *Pardoner* → sells indulgences and fake relics just to make money. A full vicious man.

*The Pardoner's Tale* 3 young men want to kill Death, finding him by killing each other for money → money is the root of evil. Tale delivered with great rhetorical skill.

*The Parson's Tale* concludes the poem. Long sermon on penitence. Chaucer repudiates all the works which have no moral intention, enumerating them and including *The Canterbury Tales*.

The characters remain in our mind telling the pleasures, the weaknesses, the faults and the virtues of human existence.

#### 5. Interregnum

Chaucer died. Literary mediocrity (he was the model to imitate). Imitation failed in the innovative aspects of history belonging.

Robert Henryson (1424-1506) remarkable originality. *Testament of Cresseid* sequel to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. *Cresseid* deserts *Troilus* for *Diomedes*, who in turn deserts her. She curses *Cupid* and the Gods punish her.

Moral attitude. Originality lies in the fact that he took liberties on someone else's work.

This literary period ends with the conferment by the University of Cambridge of the title of "laureate" on the poet John Skelton (1460-1529) who defined Chaucer's language inadequate to poetry and proposes a new type of verse, really not refined; he was insensitive to Italy's cultural innovations.

Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) – works published after his death. Courtier and diplomat, served Henry VIII on several missions. He was arrested and accused of adultery with Anne Boleyn. Freed.

His inspiration derived from Petrarch. Many of his poems are actually translation of Petrarch's "Rime Sparse".

Discipline of the Italian verse but with modified scheme for the sonnet → 3 quatrains and 1 final couplet (abba abba cddc ee). Different themes → the loved one is always present (physically too) and always invited to declare herself.

They Flee From Me poem. Attack on the hypocrisy of the court. Composed in the rhyme-royal.

Compare the attitude of courtiers with a capricious woman.

Henry Howard also translated Petrarch and created the sonnet schema that will be used by Shakespeare, 3 quatrains and 1 final couplet (abab cdcd efef gg).

He translated the Aeneid's book II and IV with his own new verse: the blank verse (10 syllables lines not rhymed with a rhythm not far from the oral).

## 6. Medieval Drama

Subject matter was an episode of the Bible or the Gospels. 14th century. The Church wanted to ensure the religious teaching to the majority of the population, even the less educated. In England this was realised by putting together episodes covering different moments of the annual cycle of services (gospel accounts of the Passion of Christ). The episodes were performed on moving platforms on the streets, stopping while playing and then moving and reproducing it again.

Second Shepherds' Play – Mak the sheep-stealer tries to hide a stolen sheep in his cottage putting it in a cradle and creating a comic pseudo-Nativity. The episode concludes with a real Nativity. In the cycle we have moments of realism and comedy, combining doctrine and laughter.

Suppressed in the 16th century.

Morality plays → allegorical conflict between Good and Evil to conquer the character who represents Humanity. Everyman journey of everyman towards death. Nobody wants to accompany him (neither Fellowship nor Goods), except Good Deeds and Knowledge.

Moral but not entertaining.

Henry Medwall Fulgens and Lucrece interlude (played between courses in banquets)

Interludes could be moral plays or comical in genre.

## CHAPTER 2: Elizabethan Literature.

### 1. From Henry to Elizabeth

Henry Tudor (Henry VIII), king in 1509. In 1521 defender of the faith by the Pope, but soon dispute with the Church, which refused to annul his wedding with Catherine of Aragon. In 1553 he declared his marriage annulled and married Anne Boleyn.

1534 Act of Supremacy → head of the Church of England, monasteries dissolved and their riches transferred to the crown. 1536 Anne Boleyn executed (supposed adultery) and Henry married Jane Seymour, who will die in childbirth in 1537.

His son Edward will succeed him in 1547, but he will die in 1553 → Mary Tudor (daughter of Catherine), fervent catholic who persecuted protestants (Bloody Mary). She married Philip II of Spain → war against France, 1557.

1558 Mary died → Elizabeth (daughter of Anne) became queen. Unstable situation dominated with prudence and determination.

Religious schism, Anglican Church consolidated, she became the Supreme Governor. Danger to the throne opposed by Mary → executed.

Nation united under one crown. Economic expansion. Victory over the "invincible" Spanish Armada in 1588 → English domination over the sea.

Attention to her figure, jewels, virgin queen. Compared to the chaste divinities of the classical world.

The "Cortegiano" by Castiglione and the "Civile Conversazione" by Guazzo expressed the cultural dimension of the Elizabethan aristocracy.

## 2. Philip Sidney

1554-1586 poet. Protestant. Perfect representative of the Elizabethan age, for his strong ideals and for how he pursued them. Works published posthumously. Lover of the art of poetry.

Defence of Poetry Vindication of the superiority of Literature against history and philosophy. Its greatness in all countries and times, potential for language (English in particular) development. Purity of style.

Astrophil And Stella sonnet (108) and songs (11) sequence which describes the love of Astrophil for Stella. Model of Petrarch with the presence of the author in the foreground. Concern on how to correctly express feelings in poetry.

Arcadia prose romance containing some verses. Prototype is Sannazaro's "Arcadia".

Complex work of revision, added new characters and new twists on the plot.

2 princes love 2 princesses → comic, tragic and dramatic episodes. Setting of the pastoral fantasy with the adventures proper to romance.

## 3. Edmund Spenser

1552-1599. poet. Degree of Bachelor and Master of Arts. Already poetically talented at university.

He died in London apparently in poverty.

Appreciated Chaucer, the classics (Latin poetry), but also modern writers. Intention to introduce into English poetry the elegance and precision of classical poetry.

The Shepherd's Calendar dedicated to Sidney. 12 pastoral eclogues (1 for each month of the year). Strong allegorical value → real personages hidden beyond the shepherd's dialogues. Themes such as love, morality, religion and poetry are developed.

The Faerie Queene epic/Anglican poem. 6 books (12 planned). Catholicism is the enemy. Queen Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, is celebrated. Educate English ruling class → moral lesson for correct behaviour is given. 1 hero par book → every knight is a virtue. Heroic poetry blended with moral (like Tasso and Ariosto). Ottava rima + one more line rhymed ababbcbcc. Allegory might be simple to understand or more complex. Allegory used to tell the truth → easier to deny if unpleasant.

Prothalamion poem. Double marriage of the two daughters of the Earl of Worcester.

Amoretti sonnet sequence dedicated to his second wife Epithalamion marriage hymn

## 4. Elizabethan Drama

### 4.1 Actors and Theatres

Most socially widespread of the arts. The queen loved the theatre. The Protestants hated it (diabolical imitation of reality). The potential public was enormous, but altogether with the Protestants, the authorities were against the theatre too (infections, drunk people, spectacles in daytime would distract people from work).

So the theatres were built in the Bankside, where the brothels were. 1576/1577 two theatres were built, the Theatre and the Curtain.

Actors were usually vagrants, men without a master. 1572 Vagrancy Act → severe penalties for those found guilty. Only the servants of a nobleman had the right to continue to exercise their job.

Companies: Lord Admiral's Men, Queen's Men, Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare joined when the company became King's Men).

The practice of doubling allowed small companies to stage plays with many characters. Girl's roles played by young men → limited female parts. Tale in which a girl disguises herself as a man without the other characters being aware of the fact.

The companies needed a stable base in which perform. The theatres had circular shape, made of wood. The "pit" → standing spectator, 1 penny the entrance.

Performances in the daylight, fixed and not changeable background, space and time were to understand by the words of the actors. Direct relationship with the public.

End of the 16th century → private theatres arose. Since the performances were very expensive, only a restricted social class could afford them.

Companies invented plays which could be performed both in private and in public theatres. During the reign of James I the public began to split up, the most cultivated decided to go to private theatres, and in the reign of Charles I the theatre addressed itself to an elite public.

#### 4.2 Plays and Playwrights

High demand for novelty and diversity in plays → in public theatres a different show every day → 30 new plays a year.

The inspirational source for the new plays were romances and the Italian novellas, Roman history, mythical and legendary heritage of the classical world, from 1582 English history, and contemporary goings-on (crime news etc) → inspiration from fiction or from real life.

Sometimes writers worked together on the same text, without arranging it for publication. Texts were not always published because of companies were afraid that rival companies could use them. Pirate editions flourished (they were based on reconstructions of the actors taking part). Genres:

- ❑ Comedy → generally a romantic comedy. Misunderstandings and mistaken identities. Later love and gentle smiles will be substituted with money and harsh satire. First English comedy was Ralph Roister Doister
- ❑ Tragedy → less practised than comedy. Seneca was the model but was interpreted in a bloodthirsty way. From Seneca also derived the “revenge tragedy” (Hamlet). Metric of the blank verse. The first English tragedy was Gorboduc
- ❑ History play → traditional conception of the time when presenting past events, “mirror for magistrates”, containing a lesson given often by the fall of the powerful (legitimize the power of present day rulers, strengthen Elizabeth’s role)
- ❑ Tragicomedy.

Seneca, Plautus and Terence were translated and used as models.

#### 4.3 Marlowe

1564-1593 playwright

University Wit and spy for the Queen. Mortally wounded in a fake tavern brawl because the secret services decided he was no longer useful.

His characters were monolithic and grandiose in their wickedness → shocking and extreme actions. The public of the time was fascinated and amazed thanks to their taste for excess.

Tamburlaine the Great heroic and cruel story of a Scythian shepherd who rises to become emperor by killing everyone on his way to the throne. Power and beauty of the verse.

The Jew of Malta tragedy.

Barabas, the protagonist, is to achieve vengeance. Denunciation of the hypocrisy of the Christians and their prejudice against Jews.

Tragical History of Doctor Faustus morality play

Faustus challenges God, but he makes a bargain with the Devil to obtain power, honour, boundless knowledge in exchange of his soul. Sympathy of the audience both because he is torn between sin and penitence and because we know he will be damned for having excessively desired what we all desire.

Edward II historical tragedy.

Tragedy revolves around for characters of dramatic force. Their quest for power almost brings the country to catastrophe.

The hero is a king with limited political and military capacities → tries to assert power over constant insubordination. Desire for power and sexual desire will ruin him.

Marlowe posed with this work the problem of the legitimacy of the power. Great poet and theatre writer, who entrusted the blank verse for writing his plays

### CHAPTER 3: William Shakespeare

#### 1. Life and Works

1564-1616 Stratford-upon-Avon. Poet and playwright

Except from the wedding with Anne Hathaway, his life is a mystery.

He is the author of his works. Heminges and Condell collected his works into the *First Folio* in 1623. When theatres were closed because of the plague (1592/94), he wrote his poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, and some comedies/tragedies (probably *Romeo and Juliet*). As mentioned before, plays didn't often become books, so, in order to date Shakespeare's works we can rely on external data and internal textual elements → "original" scripts + pirate editions (called bad quartos) + *First Folio*.

In the *First Folio* instead of the original works, we can find the scripts that Heminges and Condell were able to find, and so maybe containing variants.

1594 theatres reopened → *Lord Chamberlain's Men* were formed and Shakespeare joined. In those years he wrote comedies and history plays. 1599 *The Globe* was completed. In the theatre company performed the "Roman tragedies" and the tragedies.

In the years of the great tragedies they were the *King's Men*.

1608 new plague → *King's Men* moved to a private theatre, and Shakespeare developed the tragicomedy, and wrote *The Tempest*.

He also collaborated with Fletcher on 2 plays, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII*.

Shakespeare attended grammar school, had a great memory (he was an actor himself) and was an extensive reader. He might not have experience of the world gained through adventures, but London was a metropolis in which information poured in easily, and he was able to make the stories he heard his own and exalt them with the language of poetry.

Shakespeare's works are fascinate in the way they are told, whatever is the subject, we seem to hear the most extraordinary tale ever told → amazing storyteller, who used the drama as a form of telling.

Theatrical conventions allowed his genius to explode. Aristotelian idea of place and time with Elizabethan's mobility and independence → switch of time and place were fluid and credible.

Language is at the centre of his art → everyday speech with sudden unexpected locutions give unusual tone to the content (whatever is said on stage is true by convention).

His plays speak to our sensibility too. He was a man of his time, so the things he said and believed belong to his time, and must be understood by such.

Shakespeare instead of recreating the archetype of the ancient heroes or values created an archetype of an attitude and a form of experience which could be common to each of us, giving his characters the status of myth. Name of the characters are now synonyms with a mode of being.

## 2. Histories

3 interlinked historical dramas about *Henry VI* and a sequel about *Richard III* → Shakespeare wanted to deal with crucial political problems. Different themes common to all his history plays: responsibilities of the king, disasters caused by opposing forces within the nation, national unity, legitimacy of a kingship. Important educational value for the less cultured → reflect on the nature of power. The interest derives from the dramatic vigour and the theatrical fascination exercised by the play's protagonist.

*Richard III* the protagonist has extraordinary rhetorical artistry and is a figure of evil. Richard's aim is to conquer power and his cruelty enables him to acquire it. Makes imposture an art of politics.

*Richard the tyrant* can be compared to our tyrants.

*Richard II* is written to deal with the legitimacy of kingships. Powerful dramatic power → figure of the unfortunate and weak king gains the sympathy of the audience.

*Henry IV* (part 1 and 2) travails of the new king, the usurper *Bolinsbroke*, with the rebellion of earls and archbishops and of his son, *Prince Henry*.

Figure of *Falstaff*, comic, liar and pretender, spokesman of the pleasures of life. He is free and instruct us on how to be free from society. *Henry IV* dies → *Henry V*.

The play was on screens after WW2 → national pride against Nazism and statement of war's cruelty.

## 3. Comedies

*The Taming of the Shrew* strict moral but with the vitality of *Petruchio*, the protagonist, and the comic exchanges with *Kate*. The play can be turned into a musical, or played as if it was a fantasy dreamt by the drunken *Sly* (play within a play dreamt up by *Sly*).

A Midsummer Night's Dream is presented as play within the play. Enjoyable for children because of fairies, songs and magic spells. Acts I and V take place in Athens, while Acts II, III and IV take place in the wood. The magic is performed in the wood. A play is performed at the Duke's wedding. Even if we don't believe in magic and the characters deny what happened, we know that everything is real → magic of the theatre.

Often the real protagonists of Shakespeare's plays are women, beautiful, intelligent and witty. Since female roles were performed by male actors, Shakespeare devised plots in which girls were dressed as a man for most of the play.

As You Like It Forest of Arden, Orlando and Rosalind have separately taken refuge to escape dangers at court. Shakespeare unmasks the conventions of the pastoral genre → Rosalind unmasks the convention of love by dressing like a countryman. Orlando does not recognise her. Power of love. Highly symbolic finale (marriage), with the false ideas about life and love unmasked. Twelfth Night love triangle, woman disguised as a man. The comic situation is enriched by the complication generated by the resemblance between Viola and Cesario. Happy ending. Psychological verisimilitude is not obligatory.

Shakespeare's comedies take place in fantasy locations (Verona is not Verona etc...)

Moral is randomly given as a pearl of wisdom by characters, or by a Fool, to whom is usually given the hidden sense of the play, who is less important than most characters but often wiser.

The Merchant Of Venice the protagonist will choose a husband by subjecting her suitors to a test specified in her father's will. She disguises herself as a man too. Anti-Semitism is presented in the play and in the London of the time. The words the Jew speaks are extraordinary and simple and make him a man like the rest of us. We don't care if Shakespeare also shared prejudices towards Jews, we only care about what he wrote.

#### 4. The great tragedies and the Tempest

Romeo and Juliet one of the major and one of the most popular of Shakespeare's tragedies. Story of the 2 star-cross'd lovers, victims of the hatred between their two households.

Unfortunate concatenation of events or tragic depth of characters? Scholars disagree.

Same unhappy fate arouses the painful engagement of the audience. A love in which there is no fault will be rewarded only with death. The core of the tragedy is the feud between the 2 households, and leads to the death of the lovers. Private story not separable from public context

[?] events reconstruction only in the finale, with the reconciliation of the families.

Hamlet revenge tragedy. Hamlet do not manage to carry out his vengeance until the end of act V, when he returns home.

The power of the tragedy derives from Hamlet (not from the plot), who is on stage almost all the time. He directly speaks to the audience with soliloquies of great poetic intensity.

To us Hamlet is the hero who can reflect on the meaning of life, and make us reflect on it as well. "it is we who are Hamlet". It is still modern. Hamlet belongs to our world. Denmark deprived of order and balance → this can be applied to the whole world.

Othello strategic opacity → hide explanatory elements of the motivation of the characters.

This theory can be applied to the character of Iago, who convinces Othello that Desdemona has cheated on him. When Othello asks him why he has deceived him he answers "ask me nothing".

Othello shows us how reason can be overpowered by emotion, and how we can be nullified by the irrationality of feelings. Jealousy robs Othello of the ability to understand and leads him to his wife's murder. When he will discover the truth, he will kill himself.

Different interpretations of the suicide and of Othello's last speech → seal pity and compassion for his fate.

King Lear strategic opacity. The king abdicates and leaves his kingdom to his 3 daughters, equally divided. All of a sudden the king says he will extend his bounty to whoever of the daughters will demonstrate with words that she loves him most. Cordelia, who does love him most, fails, and we don't know why.

Tragedy about power, but also tragedy about fathers unable to understand their children.

Cruelty reigns unopposed, and humans act like beasts in the pre-Christian world, where there is no hope for a merciful God.

Macbeth is the "Scottish play", a modification of Holinshed's "Chronicles".

Macbeth is a grandiose embodiment of evil, tormented by doubt, in the end his thirst for power leads him to the murder of the king putting the blame on his officers. His friend Banquo is also put to death. Lady Macbeth is driven by evil determination. She is the mind behind Macbeth actions, she convinces him to kill both the king and Banquo. She then loses her mind (without and explanation).

In the cruelty of his actions, in Macbeth remains a glint of humanity.

Antony and Cleopatra last of the great tragedies. The source is Plutarch, brilliantly reworked. Theme: passion vs reason. Cleopatra and her irrational, capricious and warm country against Octavian's roman world, which is cold and calculating.

Antony loves Cleopatra, and is caught between two worlds. He falls → his passion will lead him to deny his Roman-ness.

Shakespeare was a businessman, his last works reflect the taste for tragicomedy which had developed in the last years of his career → make more use of music.

The Tempest music and sound effects are a decisive element of the plot, it is a Masque. Prospero's island recalls a Caribbean island encountered by English ships on their way to the Americas.

Caliban is portrayed as the inhabitants of the new world were. He is a symbol of exploitation, since The Tempest can be seen under the light of the theme of colonialism. Prospero guides the plot towards a happy ending.

The Tempest is one of Shakespeare's finest creations, and a farewell to the magic of theatre.

## 5. Poems

1592-1595 he wrote 2 long poems (theatres closed for the plague) + a volume of Sonnets.

Venus And Adonis erotico-mythological poetry. Recounts in a sensual style how Venus tries to seduce Adonis.

The Rape of Lucrece language full of verbal artifice to tell one of the grimmest episodes of the Roman history.

Sonnets the order was probably decided by the publisher. 154 sonnets divided into 2 sections: 1 to 126 are concerned with a young man, 127 to 154 are concerned with a Dark Lady. Many hypothesis on the identities of these people. The sonnets are not to be considered autobiographical → personal relations in friendship and love, and offer the reader many reflections.

Theme of the immortality of poetry and the immortality that poetry confers.

Challenge to time and immortality thanks to childbirth and poetry.

The sonnets of the second part deal with the Dark Lady, and the sufferings caused by his love for her. Linguistic grace and originality.

## CHAPTER 4: The early 17<sup>th</sup> century

### 1. James I and Charles I

1603 Elizabeth died → James Stuart (son of Mary Queen of Scots) first Stuart king of England → King of Great Britain. Royal absolutism and incomprehension of the right of the Parliament. Policy of international peace-making (with Spain) → unpopular.

James was cultivated. Promoted a new translation of the Bible, which formed one of the main linguistic and cultural reference point of the English-speaking world.

1625 James died → his second son Charles became King and married Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII of France. He was a patron of the arts, like his father was. He also believed in the absolute power of the crown, not capable of coming to terms with the House of Commons. Civil War broke out in 1642, ending with the defeat of the King.

### 2. Jacobean and Caroline Drama

Theatre lost its unitary character. James favoured the genre of the Masque, which had already established itself during Elizabeth's reign. Main features: extravagant costumes, music, dancing, special effects provided by purpose-built machines → huge cost → performed only at court or in the palaces of the aristocracy.

Legitimate drama continued to exist, even if during Charles's reign the theatre aspired to the approval of a refined and exclusive public rather than being "universal" as it used to be.

## 2.1 Ben Jonson

1572-1637. Poet and dramatist. Comedy of Humours

Classical culture was his guide both for poetry and for drama. He edited and published his works in a volume → The works of Ben Jonson (also containing his plays)

He wrote comedies and tragedies respecting the unities of place and time. His comedies are set in the real world of his time (London)

Bartholomew Fair

Every Man in His Humour → Comedy of Humours is the expression used to define his comedies. The four humours are blood, phlegm (flemma), cholera (collera) and melancholy. A man should be governed with a proportioned mixture of all of them, while Jonson's characters are dominated by only one of the humours, breaking the equilibrium and creating the comic situation through the interaction of the conflicting humours of different characters.

The Alchemist set in a house of London, which has been abandoned by its owner (Mr Lovewit). In his absence a fake alchemist and Lovewit's servant engage a series of deceptions by promising various characters the fulfilment of their desires. The deceived characters are shown as petty and their deceivers are so ingenious that moral judgement gives way to laughter. No punishment is inflicted, because the victims are no better than the tricksters.

Volpone Takes place in Venice, but it's actually representing London. The rich man Volpone pretends to be seriously ill in order to get gifts from his would-be heirs.

Jonson's 2 masterpieces have different endings: Volpone is punished and morality and law win.

The ending is more tragic than comic.

The author is expressing in both plays his conservative point of view of his society, displaying a profound contempt for the rising merchant classes + disapproval of human follies. Different attitude towards the upper classes → embodying Renaissance values .

Jonson's social, aesthetic and cultural credo is expressed in his poem To Penshurst, dedicated to the Sidney family. The Sidney's were an example of civilisation, relationship between art and power.

Jonson was a master in writing Masques (he wrote 28 of them), and is famous for creating the Antimasque → strange representation in which appeared grotesque figures representing chaos and disorder, performed by professional actors. At a certain point the real Masque begins, performed by members of the nobility present at the spectacle.

Jonson's texts present complex allegories on the contrast of good against evil. The king was the incarnation of moral virtues.

Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue most representative Masque. Full of symbolic meanings and references to classical and Renaissance culture. Celebration of James I. Jonson was appointed Poet Laureate in 1616, London City Chronologer in 1628.

## 2.2 Fletcher, Heywood, Middleton, Webster

John Fletcher (1579-1625)

Remembered for the two plays he wrote with Shakespeare: Henry VIII and The Two Noble Kinsmen.

The genre of which he was a master was the tragicomedy.

The Faithful Shepherdess was not a success.

He then collaborated with Francis Beaumont in some tragicomedies → language close to ordinary speech. Their plays enjoyed great success at the court of James I and Charles I.

Plot complexity, presences of a double or an opposite for many of the characters, moral difficulties of the hero, music and dance sequences.

Comedies → The Knight of the Burning Pestle (partial flop), The Wild Goose Chase described as a social satire on the relationship between marriage and interest.

City comedy → last years of the 16th century → Jacobean period. The setting is London and the story is about daily life of the time. Characters belong to the middle classes whose attitude are those of the puritans. Their ambitions were often the object of satire for playwrights.

The leading author of city comedies was Tomas Middleton (1580-1627). He wrote ferocious comedies which offered a photographic representation of the less attractive side of the life of that time. A Trick to Catch the Old One farcical comedy in which dissipation and avarice are shown as normal; the vice of youth comes out victorious. A Mad World My Master this time youth loses.

Middleton's masterpiece is *A Chaste Maid In Cheapside*. Four plots involving four London families. Merchant class is full of double dealers and liars obsessed with money. Negative idea of humanity. Tragedy *Women Beware Women* set in Italy. Everything is driven by lust, money and the quest for power. *The Changeling* set in Spain. Here is presented a villain, a very common figure in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

*The Revenger's Tragedy*. The genre was very popular at the time. They were all set in Italy which was imagined as the country of the corrupt and cynical catholic courts. The plot is extremely complex and full of deceits, coincidences, disguises. The moral is that vengeance is something that only god can do. Another successful genre is the domestic tragedy which deals with everyday situations.

Thomas Heywood (1573-1641) *A Woman Killed with Kindness* example of domestic tragedy. It contains a moral that puritans would appreciate + modern times. Many of the plays were written in the first part of James I's reign but they still are called Elizabethan.

John Webster (1578-1632) *The White Devil* stereotypical Italian atmosphere even if names and events really took place → dark, violent, blasphemous and corrupt. In the final part of the tragedy we have a focus shift from intrigues to death. No moral concern.

*The Duchess of Malfi* succession of deceits and crimes → psychological richness of the characters + pity aroused by the suffering of the innocent. Echoes of Shakespeare. The main character is accused of violation of the established order but is portrayed as a completely positive character.

Webster's tragedies have dramatic constructions, coups de scène, topoi and figures of the Elizabethan theatre. The only certain value is obedience to power. Court of James I = Italian corrupt courts.

### 2.3 Ford

During the Caroline period, tragedies, comedies, tragicomedies and masques were written and were very appreciated in the courts. Unfortunately none of them survived, except Ford's.

John Ford (1586-1640) *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* tragedy on incest taboo. Love presented as a spiritual union → a sanctuary. Absolute love which could survive only if undiscovered.

*The Broken Heart* set in Spain, with no parallels to his time or to the court of Charles I. Feelings which are absolute and shape and dominate characters' fate. Dramatic power of its blank verse.

## 3. Poetry

### 3.1 Donne

John Donne (1572-1631) sermons, religious writings and hymns. Ascetic life. Brought up as a catholic. Travelled on the continent. Wrote poetry. Abandoned Catholicism, he became a royal chaplain and got a degree. 12 children. After his wife's death, religious dimension became a central topic.

Central theme is love. Love of God can also be physical, erotic. Holy sonnets address to God for His mercy.

Songs and Sonnets no sonnets → lyrics of varying length and with different metrical properties (depends on what he wants to communicate).

Sometimes platonic and spiritual love, more often physical and erotic.

The woman is asked to accept love. She is not an icon, the poet addresses himself directly (to her) in the first line with an abrupt opening.

Dramatic dimension of love is also represented. Psychologically concrete datum hidden under rhetorical artifices → different from Elizabethan poetry.

"Metaphysical" → wit (acutezza, perspicacia) typical of baroque poetry, where artifice and wonderment are an end in themselves.

Donne = rhetorical cunning → strike out unexpected truths.

### 3.2 Metaphysical poets.

Rediscovered at the beginning of the 20th century. Some are more metaphysical than others. George Herbert 1593-1633 priest. Friend of Donne. He is considered to be less metaphysical.

The Temple volume of poems. Religious unity recalled by the image of the Greek temple → conflicts between God and Herbert's soul.

Less quality than Donne.

Richard Crashaw 1612-1649 son of a puritan preacher. Converted to Catholicism. He is considered to be more metaphysical.

Steps to the Temple homage to Herbert only in the title. Inspiration from Marino and the Spanish myths. Metaphors and extravagant conceits → baroque. Intensity of religious feelings + originality of imagery in his poetry.

### 3.3 The Cavalier Poets

Lyrics poets who wrote about love and loyalty to king Charles I → lightness of tone + wit + controlled form. More appealing to the Victorian taste than the Metaphysical poets.

Robert Herrick 1591-1674 from the city moved to the country.

Hesperides lyric collection. 1400 poems refined stylistically → echoes of classical poetry.

Idealised rural world (pastoral tradition) but also a more realistic rural world (English tradition) is represented.

Pastoral world into which to escape. Free sensual satisfaction and happy love.

### 4. Bacon

Elizabethan + Jacobean period's prose was about thieves → warning honest people from the provinces of the dangerous life in the metropolis → entertainment → arouse reader's curiosity on the exciting world of low life.

The finest prose writer was Francis Bacon 1561-1626 who was not a man of letters but a politician and a writer of philosophical and scientific texts.

Essays direct and essential style.

The New Atlantis published after his death.

Discover of the island of Bensalem → home of an ideal state.

Attention shift from politics to science → research which could improve the life in Bensalem → hope that James I would establish a similar institution in England = commonwealth + establishment of the royal society.

"Instauratio Magna" programme of intellectual and scientific reform started with Advancement of Learning. Writing in LAT or ENG → study should be based on experiments not on theory. Clarity of expression + flowing arguments → rhetorical devices with simple style.

Shakespeare written by Bacon?

## CHAPTER 5: Revolution and Restoration

### 1. A Century of revolutions

1640 Charles I summoned Parliament to finance his war against Scotland. He fled to the north and the first phase of the civil war started (1642-46) → defeat of the royalists.

Second phase of the civil war → the king and his allies were crushed by Cromwell (leader of the parliamentary forces). Charles I sentenced to death and executed in 1649.

Cromwell first chairman of the council of state of the new republic. 1653 dissolved parliament and became Lord Protector.

Cromwell death 1658 → his son Richard proclaimed Lord Protector. Dismissed by parliament in 1659. 1660 Charles (son of Charles I) became king Charles II. Alliance with France. Death → his brother James became king, he was catholic and hostile to parliament. He was deposed by parliament in 1668. Mary (his daughter) became queen with her husband, William of Orange.

It was not a bloodless revolution, but a Great Revolution, which gave rise to the very first constitutional monarchy. Parliament became the centre of political life. The people represented by it were from the bourgeoisie.

### 2. Marvell

Andrew Marvell 1621-1678 student of the classics. After the restoration he wrote satires both in prose and in verse. Remembered as a satirist, but he also wrote lyrics.

Miscellaneous Poems out of fashion, because related to that of the metaphysical poets. Rhetorical virtuosity + wit. Beauty of nature, of flowers and gardens (he is also called the "green" poet). Nature observation generate reflections on human condition → multiplicity of interpretation. To His Coy (schivo) Mistress theme of carpe diem. Wait imposed for desire causes death when "beauty shall no more be found".

Irony and wit. Erotic invitation to the loved one.

### 3. Milton

John Milton 1608-1674 second only to Shakespeare. Great poet: the voice that spoke to the British nation the divine message. Protestant. Active during the civil war. Study of the classics, as an intellectual he was active in community of citizens. He wrote in ENG, but also in ITA and LAT. Deeply studied the classics and Shakespeare.

Study of high literature → subvert and rearrange; separate from aristocratic culture.

Lycidas pastoral elegy on the premature death of a young student. Reflection on the apparent serenity of nature. From classical tradition, the poem takes on Christian overtones → message on consolation. Poet is now active in the real world.

Comus masque. Here there is no pre-existing perfect world, perfection is to be pursued.

During the civil war Milton wrote on religious and political subjects → defender of the principle of liberty. He was against bishops.

On Education Treatise. Reformation of the traditional educational system, with literary and philosophical disciplines as its heart.

Aeropagitic Speech. freedom of the press.

Milton also wrote 4 pamphlets on divorce inspired by his personal experience → adultery + incompatibility as legitimate ground for divorce.

The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates essay which justifies the execution of Charles I → the power of the king resides with the people.

Poems in ENG, LAT, ITA.

The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth defence of the republican cause.

After the restoration some copies were publicly burnt.

Paradise Lost poem. Probably started before restoration. Milton was blind, and had to dictate the whole poem (10 books, 12 in the second edition, as in Virgil's Aeneid).

Protagonists are Adam and Eve, ancestors of the human race.

Constant comparison with the epic. The poem has the fundamental principle of the epic poem: the story constitutes for the whole of humanity an occasion to imagine its own collective identity, based on shared values.

The epic is the story of a victory → paradise lost is the story of a defeat. The fall of Adam is the archetype of the fall experienced by men and women. The poem starts with a literal fall → that of Satan.

The beginning is in medias res with jumps backward and forward in time towards the end, which is not victory but necessary acceptance.

There is no positive hero. The values on which human civilisation should be based are different from those of the great epic → humility and meekness, temperance, friendship, conjugal love, labour (protestant values). Love and labour are dear to Milton → LOVE: the ideal relationship between husband and wife is that which existed in Eden. Woman is admired for her submission to the man. "we are one/one flesh: to lose thee were to lose myself". LABOUR: opposed to the ideals of the aristocratic class. Work is a pleasant task.

Anglican church is corrupt → second coming of Christ, final overcoming of Satan. Paradise is lost forever, but they will be able to find a "paradise within" by hard working, with love and virtue.

Paradise Lost had an enormous influence in English poetry and literature → linguistic and formal point of view. Forms proper of LAT, ITA or GRE. Milton used the blank verse (Elizabethan tragedy)

### 4. Bunyan

John Bunyan (1622-1688) Served in the Civil War for the Parliamentary army. Arrested because he was protestant → 12 years in jail.

The Pilgrim's Progress religious allegory. Enormous success, important for the formation of American culture.

Second Part of the Pilgrim published because there were many fake sequels of the previous book. Same pilgrimage but done by the wife and children of the original protagonist. The whole story is presented as a dream. Allegorical characters and dream with attention to details and realistic features. Episode of the Vanity Fair, where everything is for sale. In this episode the protagonist is taken to court and tried, and here we see how Bunyard reveals the absurdity of legal logic. Same idea of Milton's hell (represented vices and sins associated with the aristocracy).

Simple prose, realism of dialogues, the pilgrim is an ordinary human being → wider readership → story in which ordinary people face extraordinary adventures.

## 5. Restoration Drama

Puritans closed the theatres in 1642, but in 1660 they reopened thanks to Charles II → only two theatre companies, but with new theatres, built on the French/Italian model (u shaped). New scenery → no more representation of space and time entrusted to the actors + female roles performed by female actresses.

The public was different from the Elizabethan drama → aristocracy and rich people.

Repertory was provided by earlier dramatists (Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher, Shirley). Restoration tragedy was modelled on that of Corneille → no excesses of language with the action typical of previous English tragedies. Shakespeare was "improved".

Moderation, clarity and order → metre used was the heroic couplet = pair of rhyming verses of 10 syllables (used by Chaucer).

### 5.1 Dryden

John Dryden 1631-1700 poet, playwright and essayist.

Of Dramatic Power essay

Heroique Stanzas on the death of Cromwell

Astraea Redux poem on the return of the king.

Topics = great political events + questions of politics and religion. He was presented as an opportunist, since he praised whoever was in power. He converted to Catholicism. Annus Mirabilis poem

The Hind and the Panther poem. Complex allegories to criticise the Anglican church.

The glorious revolution deprived him of his laureateship and excluded him from politics → he remained catholic.

Translated Latin poets.

Dryden's first plays were verse and prose comedies.

The Rival Ladies comedy. the metre was the heroic couplet.

The Indian Emperor tragedy. Heroic couplet. Great success.

Subject matter → love, honour, duty, loyalty (Orlando Furioso) → heroic tragedy, with the heroic couplet.

All for Love tragedy. Use of the blank verse. Political and amorous vicissitudes of Antony and Cleopatra. 7 distinct settings and 10 characters, in a single place and on a single day. Contrast between two cultural poles, Egypt and Rome. The protagonists are well portrayed (dramatically and psychologically). Beautiful verses.

Marriage à la Mode comedy. Question the institution of marriage in alignment with the attitudes of aristocratic circles. Happy ending.

Amphitryon comedy.

### 5.2 Restoration comedy

Many types → political themes, Spanish inspiration, imitations of Molière + London comedy.

London comedy → subject matter was the world of the metropolitan high society → "heroes" young gentlemen and ladies of that social class, who have wit. The comedy of manners is the type of London comedy which had most success → satire on the customs and manners of the day.

The fop is the object of ridicule, he is often defined by one type of defect. The fop also believes to be a wit.

[Wit = a quickness and variety in linking together concepts and ideas for entertainment and pleasantry]

The point of reference of all these plays was London. People from the countryside, even gentlemen, were depicted as clumsy and ridiculous.

### 5.2.1 Etherege

George Etherege 1635-1693

The Comical Revenge comedy. 4 interlinked plots in 4 different social strata with 4 different languages spoken.

She Would if She Could London comedy. Great success.

The Man of Mode comedy of manners. Its sub-title is "or, Sir Fopling Flutter". To fop here unmasks the vain and superficial essence of the high society he was trying to impersonate. But the protagonist is Dorimant, a libertine (rake). In the comedy of manners the rake is motivated by eroticism → always absolved in the end and this makes him to be seen as a positive figure. In *the man of mode* the rake falls in love and at the end he asks her to marry him.

The courtship is in reality a duel, both psychological and linguistic → the young lady's weapon is her wit.

### 5.2.2 Wycherley

William Wycherley 1640-1716 lived for five years in France and returned to England for the Restoration. Appreciated Molière, and used some of his episodes in his plays.

The Country Wife comedy of manners. Here the rake-hero remains a libertine until the end. The rake pretends to be a eunuch in order to easily seduce the ladies of respectable society. In this play Wycherley attacks the forms which regulate social relations and elevates appearance to the level of truth → social conventions which replace honour with reputation.

Clever construction of the play, lively dialogues, comic charm of country life + the character of Horner, who is not condemned. This is not a sex comedy, as some would define it.

The Plain Dealer openly derives from "*le Misanthrope*" by Molière. Love in a Wood comedy of intrigue based on a play by Calderón. The Gentleman Dancing-Master

### 5.2.3 Congreve

William Congreve 1670-1729 leading author of Restoration theatre. Elegant dialogues, brilliant linguistic invention.

The Old Bachelor comedy of manners. Light-hearted tone.

The Double Dealer comedy of manners. satirical. The protagonist is a negative character. He comes close to winning over the audience to his point of view. In the end he is unmasked.

Love for Love comedy of manners. Huge success. The satire is centred around the protagonist, who pretends to be mad and shows the hypocrisy of the social convention to which they all subscribe. Sense of ridiculousness generated from their behaviour.

The Glorious Revolution brought hostilities to aspects typical of Restoration comedy (pamphlet "*A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*")

The Way of the World comedy of manners in which none of the features of the pamphlet is present → one of the finest text of the Restoration theatre. Economic aspect of marriage plays a key role.

Portrait of society dominated by conventions shows that no member of that society is exempt from it.

Comic secondary characters. Lightness and effervescence of dialogues, rhythm and musicality.

This was Congreve's last comedy because he believed there was no longer place for the genre he wrote.

### 5.2.4 Farquhar

George Farquhar 1677-1707 Irish actor, left Dublin for London because he accidentally killed a fellow actor → in London wrote comedies in which he combined situations familiar to Restoration comedies with Irish originality.

The Recruiting Officer comedy based on his experience in the army. The tone is of laughter at the foolishness of the victims. The action is placed outside London without the style typical of the comedy of manners, but with open-minded attitudes of the genre and its casual realism.

The *Beaux' Stratagem* comedy, his masterpiece. The action also takes place in a provincial town.

Farquhar uses concepts of Milton's pamphlet on divorce turned into dialogues for his characters.

Moral and modern resolution of the story → theatrical escamotage → make possible on stage what is impossible in real life.

### 5.2.5 Conclusion

There are many types of Restoration comedy. The ones that survived time are the comedies of manners → typical features and topoi of universal comedy but root in their own time, with characteristics of the historical reality of the Restoration period. Marriage contract is nothing but a contract. The comedies of manners put at their centre the relations between sexes (amorous and institutional). These comedies offer the spectators a dream of how they themselves would like to be. Marriage as institution is object of satire → marriage of interest presented as a cause of falsity and unhappiness.

The writers of comedy of manners often forced reality → love could overcome every obstacle → wanted to give voice to the hope for a better world in which hypocrisy and power of money were annihilated.

## CHAPTER 6: The Eighteenth Century

### 1. A Century of Contradictions.

When William died in 1702, Anne, second daughter of James II, became queen → last English queen to wear the crown. No children → 1714 Georg Ludwig became king George I → his successors George II, III, IV, William IV and queen Victoria are the so called Hanoverian dynasty.

During the first two Georges the kingdom was in the hands of the parliament, in particular in the hand of the two parties, the Whigs and Tories. Foreign and military policy led in 1763 to the Treaty of Paris → Britain acquired Canada, Florida and part of the west Indies (already had India) → most powerful colonial power in the world.

1783 American Revolution → loss of colonies but not of money.

1793 French Revolution.

In literature the first half of the century is called Augustan Age (inspired by Latin culture = Neo-classical age) → art should imitate nature.

Century of Enlightenment → world which had faith in the authority of Reason → Reason is if the heart.

The second half of the century is in fact that of Sensibility → cult of the feelings, co-present with Reason.

### 2. Parody and Satire

#### 2.1 Pope

Alexander Pope 1688-1744 poet (physically deformed), the first who made a living from his works.

Faith in poetry (educative) + love for elegance and clarity of classical poetry.

Essay on Criticism concept of imitation of nature. Use of the heroic couplet → guarantee classical purity.

Pastorals inspired by Virgil. Pastoral genre to represent an ideal state of life.

The Rape of the Lock mock-heroic poem. The tragi-comic events are presented with the noble tones of the epic → comic effect because of the gap between reality and how it is told (rhetorical features). Allusions to other masterpieces, including the Aeneid and Paradise Lost. The satirical tone is accompanied by a recognition of the elegance and grace which that society attempted to cultivate.

Pope also translated the *Iliad*

Eloisa to Abelard elegy. Treats the themes of love and passion.

Pope could not enter university because he was a Catholic + insults because he was physically deformed → wrote a satire on the literary world → *Empire of Dullness*, contained in the 3 volumes

of *The Dunciad*, mock-epic poem. Pope added a 4th volume in which the satire is against a poet laureate of his time → kingdom of the inversion of civilised values.

Pope's satire is moved by sincere indignation expressed by the grace and rigour of the heroic couplet.

## 2.2 Swift

Jonathan Swift 1667-1745 his satire was marked by bitterness and disgust. Irish. When young supported the Whig party and he never had a shower, then switched to the Tories. When the Whig took the power he left London and returned to Ireland.

A *Modest Proposal* pamphlet on the poverty in Ireland → selling young children as meat for rich people.

*The Battle of the Books* battle between ancient and modern writers (modern lose) A Tale of a Tub satire on contemporary political and religious controversies.

*Gulliver's Travels* satire censored and reduced to its first 2 parts in order to become an adventure story for children. *Gulliver's travels* can be also read as a parody of existing works of the genre (traveller's tales). The story is divided into 4 books. The characters of Gulliver is honest → this enabling Swift to create ironic or satirical effects deriving from the fact that there is no irony or satire in Gulliver's statements. Book I → shipwreck on the isle of Lilliput. Book II → Brobdingnag. Book III → flying isle of Laputa. Book IV → country of the Houyhnhnms.

Ferocious satire on English society and politics, on George I, on Walpole (prime minister), on religious quarrels between Catholics and Protestants, on the administration of justice → most of all, on humankind.

Swift is described as a misanthrope → he is a moral philosopher who hates false ideals, lies and injustices against individuals or communities.

He is also said to be a misogynist, but in his *Journal to Stella*, a birthday poem to Stella, he shows sweetness and tenderness.

## 2.3 Gay and Fielding

Satire and parody are at the root of the most interesting theatrical productions of the first half of the 18th century.

The most appreciated genre was the "exemplary" comedy → Richard Steele 1672-1729 and Joseph Addison 1672-1719, both Irish, and both famous for the magazines they founded, addressed to men and women of the bourgeoisie to whom they gave information on varying topics (from literature to science etc.).

Belonging to the bourgeoisie wasn't so bad → their ideals were superior to those of the past → do not feel inferior to the aristocracy.

John Gay 1685-1732

*The Beggar's Opera* "ballad opera", contained 69 songs, or ballads, divided into 3 acts. The technique of inversion realised satire and parody. The most important inversion is related to social values (and not to the songs as we may think) → the heroes are bandits/prostitutes. Order inverted also in politics, since the malefactors seems to represent the prime minister Walpole and the Whig party. Mistrust for a social order dominated by the bourgeoisie. The public enjoyed the opera, especially the parody of the Italian opera (viewed with suspicion because it was foreign and favoured by aristocracy) + parody of the dialogue between Brutus and Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julio Caesar*.

Lively dialogue, twists of plot, satire against the domination of money + sympathy for the idea of criminals in roles of power.

\*Henry Fielding 1707-1754 best known as a novelist, also wrote plays (ballad operas, farces and parodies of heroic tragedies). Parody and irreverence of satire against the king, the queen, Walpole etc.

*The Historical Register* play. Huge success.

Licensing act → promoted by Walpole, effectively introduced theatrical censorship → end of Fielding's theatrical career and end of satire as a way of intervening in the political scene by men of letters. But Fielding managed to transfer his vein for parody into the novel.

### 3. The Novel

Genre of the bourgeoisie, expressing middle-class values → realism was congenial to middle-class reading public → interested in the material world, in the individual self, in what was concrete and specific (=no abstract or mythological worlds of romance). Novels are close to the reader, because we know the facts told belong to our world.

The reference for the English novelists were the ideas of French theorists and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* → model of construction of the story being told + showed the conflict between the world of romance and the real world. Novel deals with common life, using riches of ordinary speech.

Upper/middle-class women did afford to buy and read novels. Men seemed not to have time for reading.

#### 3.1 Defoe

Daniel Defoe 1660-1731 born in London, son of a butcher. Travelled in Europe. Also worked as a secret agent for Robert Harley. In the meantime he wrote pamphlets, political and ideological essays, historical treatises, articles, and novels.

He was a dissenter.

The Shortest Way with the Dissenters pamphlet. Ironically proposed the suppression of dissent. For this pamphlet he was arrested → the argument was about the problem of rights → thesis and principles of great modernity. He wanted the sovereignty of people and its right to rebel against an unjust ruler. He defended the importance of education.

Robinson Crusoe fiction. Robinson is what he owns. After his ship wrecks, he lists what he manages to find → detailed inventory of his possessions. The story is told by Robinson himself → the facts are true (something similar really happened a few years earlier) → act as a lesson and a warning.

Novelty of the language → language of preachers, journalists, addressed to a public of merchants and craftsmen → idiom of the people, spoken English that every Englishmen would understand.

Robinson is alone on his desert island, he survives by creating "civilisation". His solitudes has religious overtones. The trials Robinson faces are undergone with courage, discipline and determination. At the end he is saved and returns home as a rich and honoured man.

Moll Flanders here the protagonist is not from the bourgeoisie, is a poor girl, whose poverty is seen as a sin. Moll wanted didn't want to become a servant, she wanted to become a gentlewoman. For Defoe it was more profitable to tell the story of a woman who, for necessity, becomes a thief and a prostitute, who has 5 husbands and 8 children. The plot is sometimes implausible and the psychological descriptions of some characters are rudimentary, yet Moll Flanders fascinates the reader just like she fascinates the characters she gets in contact with (often using and cheating them). A life of crime and sinfulness bring freedom and prosperity.

Doctrine of predestination → in Moll's case she is pardoned also because she uses all that she has (her body and her beauty) in order to survive, not to become the permanent property of a man.

Roxana, or the Fortunate Mistress Roxana marries a rich man who wastes all of his money and deserts her (she does not start from the same condition as Moll). She becomes a whore for necessity (→ necessity plays a key role here too) but then she continues to practice it because she enjoys it. She has no faith in gentlemanly behaviour → she must provide for herself → she refuses to marry a rich man because she doesn't want to lose her financial independence.

Here we have divine punishment for her sins, for having let her daughter die → repentance of her sin as a mother.

Captain Singleton → could be subtitled "crime does pay"

The Journal of the Plague Year fictional "true" report of a London artisan during the great plague. Defoe's stories are meant to fascinate the reader → refresh their interest towards the character's faith. We don't know what the characters deeply feel → no characters psychology.

#### 3.2 Richardson

Samuel Richardson 1689-1761 Puritan printer.

Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded is made up of letters and journals, most of them written by Pamela. Moralise throughout the novel → the end is less convincing. Didactic values of the principles of the middle-class he belongs to. Richardson intervenes on the social plane → he promotes the principle

of the "social mobility". Huge success in England, it is the first novel to be published in the American colonies. It was also taken up by Goldoni who used it to write a comedy, but changing the end. For Richardson, Pamela's story is a clear example of virtue rewarded. Language of ordinary people with some corrections (irregularities of common speech replaced with a more formal/literary language)

Clarissa epistolary novel. Exchange of letters between Clarissa and her admirer Lovelace. The protagonist is, here too, a young woman who resists the advances of a man who wants to possess her. Clarissa goes mad and regain her reason, but not her will to live → she is raped and commits suicide. The bond between Clarissa and Lovelace is modern → psychologically subtle and disturbing. The letters are a mean to convince the reader that the facts told are true → the characters write the moment, without reflecting on them, corresponding their feelings. Real people. It is up to the reader to reflect and draw lessons from the story.

### 3.3 Fielding

Henry Fielding 1707-1754 studied the classics, liked parodies. With the licensing act, he had to find another way to make a living.

Shamela mocking response to Richardson's *Pamela*. The parodic intent is extended to the entire epistolary form.

Joseph Andrews comic-epic poem in prose. Chastity in a man → matter for comedy → makes him return home, in a much more complicated way than it was supposed to be (like Ulysses' homecoming) → parody is then left on one side and the we have a bizarre English version of Don Quixote.

The novel is stylish and entertaining → highly comic episodes and lively tones, and is told in 3rd person. Structure and form are completely original and there are reminders to the reader that he/she is reading a novel. Fielding offers the reader a realistic representation of his subject, and so a happy ending is not realistic.

Tom Jones Fielding's masterpiece. Tom is a foundling who at the end of novels finds out to be the nephew of a rich man, who adopted him, and this allows him to marry the woman he loves.

The reader is glued to the plot thanks to the invention of spectacular incidents, and the use of irony. Tom's good nature triumphs in the end.

Amelia sentimental novel. Fielding left scepticism apart. Figure of the ideal wife and mother who is victim of her husband and who is helped by generous people. Happy ending.

### 3.4 Smollett

Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews have echoes of the picaresque novel.

Tobias Smollett 1721-1771 anti-conformer (anticonformista). He translated *Gil Blas de Santillana*, a picaresque novel by Alain-René Lesage.

The Adventures of Roderick Random a 1st person tale. Author's own experience + adventures similar to earlier picaresque novels.

The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle novel told by an omniscient narrator. Mocking critiques of continental habits and manners. Several caricatures of personalities of the day (Fielding) led to bad critics → prudent second edition.

Humphry Clinker epistolary novel. 5 characters describe the same things → always different descriptions → things are not what they are but what we believe that they are → comic effect.

Journey within Britain. Scotland which represents the rural world.

### 3.5 Sterne

Laurence Sterne 1713-1768 came from the country.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy break with conventions → the story is not about adventures, but about opinions. The author is the creator of the world of the novel and the characters and events existed because they were brought into being in a novelistic world. Direct and civilised conversation with the reader. Enormous success of the ordinary reading public, but not of the critics.

Tristram writes following the thread of his thoughts → experience of time, interrupting the chronological sequences with digressions. As he writes the time passes → problem of keeping the time of his writings. The writer reveals the reader that the narration is fictional.

Rhetoric, every type of language presented, grammar and syntax artifices + non-verbal devices (asterisks, blank pages, a black page etc.). We do not learn Tristram's opinions.

The novel demonstrates the vitality of the genre and explores new forms of it + new form of humour.

A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy published posthumously, is about journeys he did for reasons of health → teach us to love the world and our fellow creatures. Attachment to sentiment. The text is ambiguous, sensibility is truly defended or satirised?

#### 4. The Age of Sensibility

Second half of 18th century, or age of Johnson.

##### 4.1 Poetry

Sensibility → capacity to feel → benevolence was a virtue. View of the place of man in the world  
 [?] man is no longer the measure of all things → considerations on his mortal destiny and meditation on death.

Thomas Gray 1716-1771

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard model for the next generation of poets. Rhymes abab.

Meditation on the death of poor rural people → the elegy gave rise to the "grave poetry".

The Bard Pindaric ode. Aesthetic value to the grandeur and violence of nature → able to arise the deepest emotions.

Edmund Burke 1729-1797

Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful terror as a source of aesthetic pleasure.

All around Europe Gaelic poetry was seen as a sublime manifestation of natural poetic genius.

Completely new model of poetry → spontaneous, free of sophisticated rhetorical devices, bearer of emotions, irrational and primitive.

##### 4.2 The Gothic Novel

Horace Walpole son of the prime minister. He created a new genre, the gothic novel → taste of sublime with predilection for mystery. The protagonist of these stories is often a young woman who flees from pursuers and who faces every sort of danger (real e non). Happy ending offered as a reward to the reader who suffered with the protagonist the most sublime of emotions, terror.

Boundary between life and death is no longer clear.

Gothic means medieval for Walpole, but it is not the case of all the authors of the genre. Apogee at the end of 18th century.

The most famous author of the genre was Ann Radcliffe.

The Monk by Matthew Gregory Lewis changed the rules of gothic novel → no happy ending.

##### 4.3 Dr Johnson

Samuel Johnson 1709-1784 literary critic. the age of sensibility is also called the age of Johnson on him.

Wrote poems, essays and biographies

Dictionary of the English Language the work for which he is most famous. Definition of 40000 words with quotes of famous authors, from Sidney onwards → entertaining value.

The Rambler periodical which defined him as the moralist of the period. The articles on literary topics have the purpose of establishing general principles on which improve knowledge of culture + construct a canon of English literature.

The Vanity of Human Wishes and Rasselas express a moral vision of severity and rigour.

Lives of English Poets from Milton to his contemporaries. Judgements based on his classical values, expressed with clarity coherence and literary sensibility. Works of Shakespeare

##### 4.4 Goldsmith and Sheridan

Oliver Goldsmith 1730-1774 wrote for periodicals, friend of Dr Johnson.

The Vicar of Wakefield novel on benevolence. Portraits of rustic environment.

The Good-Natured Man play. Benevolence professed by sentimental comedy. Language → lightness of touch, wit and sense of humour (which was lacking in the theatre of the day). Comedy needed to rediscover its nature. Was it to be sentimental, or to excites laughter by exhibiting the follies of mankind?

She Stoops to Conquer play. Combine sensibility and laughter. The play rotates on a series of misunderstandings, then transformed into revelations and giving salvation the protagonist.

Goldsmith managed to mix the theatrical ideals of the time with funny plots which have psychological consistency.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan 1751-1816 member of parliament with very modern ideas. Impresario and playwright and owner of a theatre.

The Rivals play of youthful gaiety and ebullience (esuberanza) + light-hearted comic tone + characters rich of nuances, like the classic comedy ones.

Parental authority vs children's freedom of choice. The play provokes reflection on the human soul and comic delight.

The School for Scandals in this comedy the wit is given to negative characters (opposite to the comedy of manners). Comic quality of the comedy depends on the plot, which is complex.

The incidents befalling the characters are a way of showing the ordinary face of human nature and the hidden corners of human weakness. The hole comedy is devoted to reveals what lies behind the surface.