

English 2120:
Survey of British Literature

Lecture 4

The Restoration, 1660-1750

- Neoclassicism, aka the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, the Augustan Age
- Prose: essay, biography, literary criticism, satire, novel
- Poetry: satirical criticism, moral and philosophical speculation

- Charles II → James II → William and Mary → Anne → George I → George II → George III
- Glorious Revolution of 1688
- Rise of the middle class
- Growth of industry (spinning jenny, flying shuttle, water frame, steam engine) & science (telescope, thermometer, barometer, pendulum clock; gravitation, analytical geometry, calculus)

Industrial Revolution

- Changes in production, transportation, & communication
- Creation of factories, invention of steam engine, etc.
- Impact: centralized populations, shift from agricultural occupations to factory labor, social dislocation, poverty, overpopulation

Restoration Drama

- Theatres: resort of the world of fashion & the aristocracy
- Design changes: oblong, roofed theatres using lights & scenery
- Women enacting feminine roles
- 1700-1750 = less bawdy, more moralistic & sentimentalized, political commentary; 1750-1800 = primary importance of star actor, native English plots, domestic problems
- Plays: heroic tragedy & comedy of manners

Heroic Tragedy

- Hero: enormous prowess & extravagantly noble ideals
- Heroine: combination of perfect beauty and unalloyed faithfulness
- Conflict: between love and honor
- Background: war

Restoration Comedy

- Comedy of manners: satire on contemporary society
- Common sense and logic tempered by wit
- Lucid prose style
- Amusing for ease and cleverness

Age of Dryden

[John Dryden (1631-1700)]

- Literature aristocratic in tone & addressed to the Court
- Favored literary form is drama with elegant, cynical, witty tone
- Satire is most typical form of literature
- Desire for moderation, reasonableness, and conformity after Puritan chaos
- Dryden = incredible variety (tragedies, comedies, operas, narrative verse, satires, songs, odes, epistles, translations, prologues, epilogues, critical essays); "father of English prose"
- Coffeehouses and taverns: gathering places for writers

British Empiricism

- John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)
- Only particular, concrete things actually exist; all other ideas are abstractions from these primal realities.
- No innate ideas; at birth, the mind is a *tabula rasa* ready to receive only what sensory experiences write upon it.
- Emphasis is on what *was* rather than what *might be*

Revolution!

- The American Revolution, 1775-1783: 13 American colonies revolted against Great Britain to gain independence and form a democracy
- The French Revolution, 1789-1799: Lower and middle-class French society revolted against the crown in an attempt to create a democracy

Why revolution did not happen in England

- Middle-class & upper-class English industrialists & others could be assimilated into the halls of power such as Parliament in a way not possible in France & America
- Religious fervor of the century emphasized the virtues of patience & long-suffering
- The average British citizen, no matter how poor, viewed continental political ideas with suspicion & disdain