

3 The Restoration and eighteenth century, 1660–1780

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At first glance, the period from the second half of the seventeenth century to the latter decades of the eighteenth can seem very foreign to us today. One only has to think of the fashions of the time – men and women wearing wigs, men with stockings over calves made visible by short trousers, and women in expansive hoop skirts, carrying fans – to realise how otherworldly it can all appear. Nevertheless, despite major differences between those times and ours, Britain was undergoing a dramatic process of modernisation during this period. Britain was becoming increasingly urbanised, and London, during the eighteenth century, would become the largest city in Europe and one of the largest in the world. There was a burgeoning consumer culture, led by newly available products such as coffee, tea and porcelain; and Britain saw the development of its political parties (Whig and Tory) and had its first Prime Minister. Indeed, the entity of Great Britain itself was created during the period, through the 1707 Act of Union between the kingdoms of England and Scotland. The terms of modern political philosophy in English were both developed and implemented in the period, as contractual government went from theory to practice in the form of a constitutional monarchy, with a monarch brought to England from Germany (despite being more than fiftieth in line to the throne). Francis Bacon's insights for modern science – advocating the use of empirical induction and instruments – were institutionalised in the Royal Society (chartered 1662), which sponsored scientific investigation and published the results. The early 1660s also saw the creation of what would come to be known as the Royal Africa Society, which would organise Britain's participation in the transatlantic African slave trade. This involvement would be intimately bound up with the history of the thirteen colonies, many of them settled during this period, on the western edge of the Atlantic, and later known as the United States of America, which itself emerged during the eighteenth century. The early seventeenth-century creation of the East India Company similarly organised British trade with India, an involvement that would lead within a century to Britain ruling the entire Indian subcontinent.

Alongside these developments, British literature acquired several of its most enduring fictional characters, including Robinson Crusoe and Lemuel Gulliver, while their authors participated in one of the most important literary

developments of the Restoration and eighteenth century: the rise of the novel in English. At the same time, it was during this period that literary criticism began to take its modern, institutional form, partly through the growth of book reviewing in periodical publications (which was a response to the increasing number of books being published). When read in context, though, it can be seen that the early novels and early literary criticism were addressing, responding to and even shaping the historic events of their day.

Chronology

| | HISTORY AND CULTURE | LITERATURE |
|-----------|--|--|
| 1660 | Restoration of Charles II | Theatre patents granted to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William D'Avenant |
| 1662 | The Act of Uniformity Royal Society chartered | |
| 1663 | Company of Royal Adventurers to Africa, later known as Royal African Company | |
| 1665 | Plague in London | |
| 1665–7 | Second Dutch War | |
| 1666 | Fire of London | |
| 1667 | Thomas Sprat, <i>History of the Royal Society</i> | John Dryden, <i>Annus Mirabilis</i> John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> |
| 1668 | | Dryden made Poet Laureate Dryden, <i>An Essay of Dramatic Poesy</i> . |
| 1673 | James II marries a Roman Catholic Test Act | |
| 1675 | | William Wycherley, <i>The Country Wife</i> |
| 1676 | | George Etherege, <i>The Man of Mode</i> (first performed) |
| 1677 | | Aphra Behn, <i>The Rover</i> (first performed) |
| 1678–81 | Exclusion Crisis | |
| 1678 | Popish Plot | John Bunyan, <i>Pilgrim's Progress</i> |
| 1679 | Exclusion Bill introduced | |
| 1681 | Charles II dissolves Parliament | Dryden, <i>Absalom and Achitophel</i> |
| 1682 | | Dryden, <i>MacFlecknoe</i> |
| 1685 | Charles II dies, James II accedes Monmouth's Rebellion | |
| 1687 | Isaac Newton, <i>Principia</i> | |
| 1688 | Glorious Revolution | Behn, <i>Oroonoko</i> |
| 1688–1702 | William and Mary | |
| 1689 | War of the League of Augsburg begins John Locke, <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i> Toleration Act (Dissenters can build their own churches and practise in them) James II invades Ireland Henry Purcell, <i>Dido and Aeneas</i> (opera) | |