

# The Restoration and the 18th Century: Historical Context

**KEY IDEAS** Writers of this era worked in a context of relative political stability and increasing rights under a more limited monarchy.

## The Reign of Charles II

The coronation of Charles II in 1660 was surely a sight to behold. **Samuel Pepys** recorded the event in his diary, describing the crowd of “10,000 people,” who watched the king with “his scepter in his hand—under a canopy borne up by six silver staves, carried by Barons of the Cinque Ports—and little bells at every end.” This grand celebration signaled the beginning of a new era in England: the **Restoration**.

**SOPHISTICATED SOCIETY** Turning its back on the grim era of Puritan rule, England entered a lively period in which the glittering Stuart court of Charles II set the tone for upper-class social and political life. Charles had spent much of his long exile in France, and upon his return, he tried to emulate the sophistication and splendor he’d observed at the court of Louis XIV. As a result, the lords and ladies of his court dressed in silks and lace, elaborate wigs and sparkling jewels. They held elegant balls and flocked to London’s newly reopened theaters, where they proved their sophistication by attending **comedies of manners**, plays that poked fun at the glamorous but artificial society of the royal court.

Like Louis XIV, Charles was a patron of the arts and sciences, appointing **John Dryden** England’s first official poet laureate and chartering the scientific organization known as the Royal Society. In addition, Charles re-established Anglicanism as England’s state religion.

**RESTORATION POLITICS** With the restoration, however, came a realization that monarchs would have to share their authority with Parliament, whose influence had increased substantially. An astute politician, Charles at first won widespread support in Parliament, weathering a series of disasters that included the **Great Plague** of 1665 and the **Great Fire of London** a year later. Soon, however, old political rivalries resurfaced in two factions that became the nation’s chief political parties: the **Tories** and the **Whigs**.

The Whigs, who wanted to limit royal authority, included wealthy merchants, financiers, and some nobles. They favored leniency toward Protestant dissenters and sought to curb French expansion in Europe and North America, which they saw as a threat to England’s commercial interests. The Tories—supporters of royal authority—consisted mainly of land-owning aristocrats and conservative Anglicans, who had little tolerance for Protestant dissenters and no desire for war with France.

*Arthur Holdsworth* *Conversing with Thomas Taylor and Captain Stancombe by the River Dart* (1757), Arthur Devis. Oil on canvas, 50<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" × 40<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>". Paul Mellon Collection. © 2006 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS Literary Analysis

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.8** Explain how ideas, values, and themes of a literary work often reflect the historical period in which it was written.

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.3** Organize information to show understanding or relationships among facts, ideas, and events (e.g., representing key points within text through charting, mapping, paraphrasing, summarizing, comparing, contrasting, outlining).

### ▶ TAKING NOTES

**Outlining** As you read this introduction, use an outline to record the main ideas about the history and literature of the period. You can use headings, boldfaced terms, and the information in these boxes as starting points. (See page R49 in the **Research Handbook** for more help with outlining.)

#### I. Historical Context

##### A. Charles II

1. French sophistication
2. Patron of arts & sciences
3. Supported by Tories, limited by Whigs

##### B. Royalty and the People



For more on the Restoration and the 18th century, visit the **Literature Center** at [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com).



## Royalty and the People

**WILLIAM AND MARY** Political conflict increased when Charles was succeeded in 1685 by his Catholic brother, James. A blundering, tactless statesman, James II was determined to restore Roman Catholicism as England's state religion. As a result, Parliament forced James to abdicate his throne. In 1688, James's Protestant daughter Mary and her husband, the Dutch nobleman William of Orange, took the throne peacefully in what came to be known as the **Glorious Revolution**—a triumph of parliamentary rule over the divine right of kings. The next year, Parliament passed the **English Bill of Rights**, which put specific limits on royal authority.

As a Dutchman and a Protestant, King William (who ruled alone after Mary died) was a natural enemy of Catholic France and its expansionist threats to Holland. From the first year of his reign, with Whig support, he took every opportunity to oppose the ambitions of Louis XIV with English military power, beginning a series of wars with France that some historians consider a second Hundred Years' War. A year before William's death, Parliament passed the Act of Settlement, which permanently barred Catholics from the throne. In 1702, therefore, the crown passed to Mary's Protestant sister, Anne, a somewhat stodgy but undemanding ruler who faithfully tended to her royal duties. During her reign, Scotland officially united with England to form **Great Britain**.

**THE HOUSE OF HANOVER** Outliving all 16 of her children, Anne was the last monarch in the house of Stuart. With her death in 1714, the crown passed to a distant cousin, the ruler of Hanover in Germany, who as George I became the first ruler of Britain's house of Hanover. The new king spoke no English and was viewed with contempt by many Tories, some of whom supported James II's Catholic son, James Edward Stuart. The Whigs, on the other hand, supported the new king and won his loyalty.

Because of the language barrier, George I relied heavily on his Whig ministers; and Robert Walpole, the head of the Whig party, emerged as the king's **prime minister** (the first official to be so called)—a position he continued to hold under George II, who succeeded his father in 1727. Toward the end of George II's reign, another able prime minister, **William Pitt**, arose on the political scene. Pitt led the nation to victory over France in the **Seven Years' War** (called the French and Indian War in America), which resulted in Britain's acquisition of French Canada.

### ANALYZE VISUALS

Eighteenth-century artist James Gillray was known for his caricatures of political figures. In this cartoon, "Temperance enjoying a Frugal Meal" (1792), Gillray satirizes King George III and his wife, Charlotte, who were notorious for their miserliness—particularly when it came to food and drink. The king is shown dining on a boiled egg while the queen stuffs her large mouth with salad. Can you find another detail that points to the couple's frugality?





George II's grandson became the first British-born monarch of the house of Hanover. As George III, he sought a more active role in governing the country, but his highhanded ways antagonized many. Scornful of the Whigs, George had trouble working with nearly everyone, partly because he suffered from an illness that affected his mind and grew worse over the years. During his reign, he led Britain into a series of political blunders that ultimately resulted in the loss of the American colonies.

## Ideas of the Age

**KEY IDEAS** This period became known as the Age of Reason, because people used reason, not faith, to make sense of the world.

### The Age of Reason

The period including the late 1600s and the 1700s is called the **Enlightenment** or the **Age of Reason** because it was then that people began to use scientific reasoning to understand the world. Earlier, most people had regarded natural events such as comets and eclipses as warnings from God. The new, scientific way of understanding the world suggested that by applying reason, people could know the natural causes of such events.

**THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD** The British scientist **Sir Isaac Newton** set the tone for the era in his major work, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), in which he laid out his newly formulated laws of gravity and motion and the methodology by which he arrived at his conclusions. Newton's **scientific method**, still employed today, consists of analyzing facts, developing a hypothesis, and testing that hypothesis with experimentation.

Newton's findings were enormously important because they suggested that the universe operated by logical principles that humans were capable of understanding. Inspired by Newton's example, scientists searched for these principles, making all kinds of discoveries along the way. Astronomers learned that stars were not fixed but moving and that the Milky Way was an immense collection of stars. Chemists isolated hydrogen, discovered carbon dioxide, and converted hydrogen and oxygen into water. Botanists and zoologists categorized literally millions of individual plants and animals, and in agriculture, breeding was improved, as were methods for cultivating and harvesting crops.

**ENLIGHTENED PHILOSOPHIES** The discoveries of Newton thrilled not only scientists but also philosophers. If nature operated by simple, orderly laws that could be worked out by logic, they asked, why not human nature as well? Why couldn't scientific methods be used to predict economic trends, for instance, or to figure out what form of government was best?

A replica of the first reflecting telescope, invented by Sir Isaac Newton and shown to the Royal Society in 1668



#### A Voice from the Times

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

—Alexander Pope



Believing that reasonable people could create a perfect society, philosophers such as **John Locke** encouraged people to use their intelligence to rid themselves of unjust authorities. Rejecting the “divine right” of kings, Locke provided a logical justification for the Glorious Revolution (and, later, the American Revolution) by asserting the right of citizens to revolt against an unfair government.

**LIVING WELL** The spirit of the Enlightenment led to many improvements in living conditions. Early in the century, for instance, writer **Lady Mary Wortley Montagu**, wife of a British ambassador, brought back from Turkey the idea of inoculation, and by the end of the 1700s, scientist Edward Jenner had developed an effective smallpox vaccination.

Many British citizens lived well during the 18th century, and a few lived sumptuously. Wealthy aristocrats built lavish country estates surrounded by beautifully tended lawns and gardens. When Parliament was in session, members relocated to their London townhouses on the spacious new streets and squares that had been laid out after the Great Fire. Writers, artists, politicians, and other members of society gathered daily in London’s **coffeehouses** to exchange ideas, conduct business, and gossip. Educated women sometimes held **salons**, or private gatherings, where they, too, could participate in the nation’s intellectual life. However, as the period drew to a close and the Industrial Revolution took hold, one writer noted, “No society can be flourishing and happy of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.”

### A Voice from the Times

*Man being . . . by nature all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of his estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent.*

—John Locke

*Coffee House (1668), unknown artist. © Eileen Tweedy/British Museum/The Art Archive.*







A view of London on the river Thames, 18th century

## Literature of the Times

**KEY IDEAS** In this time of prosperity and relative stability, literature flourished, finding new audiences, new forms, and new voices.

### Social Observers

Despite recurring warfare with France and the disaster of the American Revolution, the Restoration and the 18th century were a relatively stable time in Britain. The middle class grew and prospered, and ordinary men and women had more money, leisure, and education than ever before. For writers, that meant a broad new audience eager to read and willing to pay for literature. However, this audience did not have much taste for highbrow poetry full of sophisticated allusions to classics they had never read. Instead, they wanted writing that reflected their own concerns and experiences—working hard, doing right, gaining respectability—and they wanted it written in clear **prose** that they could understand.

One enormously popular form of “real-life” literature was **journalism**. Newspapers had been around since the early 1600s, but rigid censorship under both Charles I and Oliver Cromwell had discouraged their growth. As restrictions gradually eased, the press flourished. Daily newspapers appeared, and serials such as *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* published essays by **Joseph Addison** and **Richard Steele** that satisfied the middle-class appetite for instruction and amusement. Journalists did not simply report current events; they moralized, mocked, and gossiped, giving their opinions on everything from social manners to international politics.

#### ► For Your Outline

##### **SOCIAL OBSERVERS**

- A growing middle class increased demand for middlebrow literature.
- Journalism became popular, providing opinions as well as facts.
- Novels were modeled on nonfiction forms.
- Pepys’s diary captured Restoration period.

#### **A Voice from the Times**

*The newspapers! Sir, they are the most villainous, licentious, abominable, infernal—Not that I ever read them! No, I make it a rule never to look into a newspaper.*

—Richard Brinsley Sheridan



Journalist **Daniel Defoe** used his experience writing nonfiction when creating *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), considered by many to be England's first **novel**. As is typical of early novels, Defoe wrote in the familiar realistic style of a newspaper account, making it seem as if his tale of a shipwrecked man's survival on a desert island had really happened. Other writers followed with novels of their own, often modeled on nonfiction forms such as **letters**—for example, *Pamela* by **Samuel Richardson**—and **diaries**.

A real-life diary, although not intended for publication, provides modern readers with one of the best glimpses of life during these times. **Samuel Pepys**, a prosperous middle-class Londoner, began his diary in the first year of the Restoration and kept it for nine years. In it he tells of the major events of the day, including the coronation of Charles II and the Great London Fire.

## Satirical Voices

While the realism of novels and newspapers pleased middle-class readers, another literary style—polished, witty, and formal—was aimed at the elite. This style was known as **neoclassicism** (“new classicism”). Neoclassical writers modeled their works on those of ancient Greece and Rome, emulating what they saw as the restraint, rationality, and dignity of classical writing. Indeed, the period in which these writers worked—the first half of the 18th century—is sometimes called the **Augustan Age**, so named because its writers likened their society to that of Rome in the prosperous, stable reign of the emperor Augustus, when the finest Roman literature was produced. Neoclassical writers stressed balance, order, logic, and emotional restraint, focusing on society and the human intellect and avoiding personal feelings.

Neoclassicists often used **satire**, or ridicule, to point out aspects of society that they felt needed to be changed. In this, too, they followed Roman models, choosing between the gentle, playful, and sympathetic approach of Horace (**Horatian satire**) and the darker, biting style of Juvenal (**Juvenalian satire**). Two outstanding writers of the period beautifully illustrate the two modes of satire.

One of the writers, **Alexander Pope**, wrote satiric poetry in the Horatian mode, poking fun at the dandies and ladies of high society and addressing moral, political, and philosophical issues in clever, elegant couplets. Pope's friend **Jonathan Swift**, on the other hand, wrote Juvenalian satire. Appalled by the hypocrisy and corruption he saw around him, Swift savagely attacked educators, politicians, churchmen, and any others he saw as corrupt. His masterpiece, *Gulliver's Travels*, is still a remarkably incisive commentary on human nature.

## Standardizing the Language

During the Enlightenment, emphasis on reason and logic led to efforts to stabilize and systematize the English language. In 1693, the influential writer John Dryden complained, “We have yet no prosodia, not so much as a tolerable dictionary or grammar, so that our language is in a manner barbarous.” Over the next several decades, scholars worked to remedy the situation.

**The Dictionary** One such scholar was Samuel Johnson, whose *Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1755. Almost singlehandedly, Johnson created a work of gigantic proportions, consisting of 40,000 definitions and 110,000 quotations. Johnson recognized that language was always changing, but he also saw the value in having a standard for pronunciation, usage, and spelling. In his dictionary, he did not attempt to “fix the language”; he simply defined words as they had been used by the “best writers.”

**Grammar** Seven years later, Robert Lowth published *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, in which he attempted to establish a system of rules for judging correctness in matters under dispute. Since early grammarians like Lowth based their ideas on Latin, however, their rules often proved inappropriate for English. For example, they considered the infinitive form of an English verb to consist of two words (“to stun”); but because Latin infinitives are single words, they deemed it incorrect to “split” an English infinitive with an adverb (“to completely stun”), thus creating a puzzling “rule” that has frustrated generations of school children.





*Gulliver Exhibited to the Brobdingnag Farmer*. Richard Redgrave. Oil on canvas, 25" × 30". Victoria & Albert Museum, London. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London/Art Resource, New York.

England's newly reopened theaters provided another outlet for the period's most brilliant satirists. Influenced by the French comedies of manners, **John Dryden**, **William Congreve**, and other playwrights entertained audiences with **Restoration comedies** that satirized the artificial, sophisticated society centered in the Stuart court.

## The Age of Johnson

The second half of the 18th century is sometimes affectionately referred to as the Age of Johnson—a tribute to **Samuel Johnson**, Britain's most influential man of letters of the day. Johnson, a poet, critic, journalist, essayist, scholar, and lexicographer, was also a talker, a brilliant conversationalist who enjoyed holding forth at coffeehouses, clubs, and parties. He was friends with many of the greatest literary and artistic talents of the time and stood at the center of a lively circle of intellectuals that included his biographer **James Boswell**, the historian **Edward Gibbon**, the novelist and diarist **Fanny Burney**, and the comic dramatist **Richard Brinsley Sheridan**.

### ► For Your Outline

#### SATIRICAL VOICES

- Neoclassicists emulated the rationality of ancient Greek and Roman writers.
- The early 1700s were called the Augustan Age, in reference to the times of Roman emperor Augustus.
- Satire pointed out society's problems; Horatian satire was gentle, Juvenalian was dark.
- Restoration comedies satirized the Stuart court.



The 18th-century concern with real life can be seen in the number, variety, and quality of nonfiction works published during the Age of Johnson. Works of biography, history, philosophy, politics, economics, literary criticism, aesthetics, and natural history all achieved the level of literature. Writers strove for a style not merely clear and accurate but also eloquent and persuasive. Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is a superb example of the heights achieved by nonfiction prose during these years. Also notable are the works of philosopher David Hume, the artist Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the economist Adam Smith—and, of course, Johnson himself, who described his notion of good style as “familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious.”

Johnson wrote *A Dictionary of the English Language*, a stupendous feat that won him an important place in literary history (see **A Changing Language**, page 556). His essays remain classic examples of the formal 18th-century prose of which he was the acknowledged master. He also wrote graceful biographies of poets, and critiques of poems and other literary works. Johnson was more than an accomplished writer; he was the literary dictator of London and the undisputed arbiter of taste for his time.

Though Johnson and most of his associates affirmed neoclassical ideals, during this time poetry entered a transitional stage in which poets began writing simpler, freer lyrics on subjects close to the human heart. The reflective poetry of **Oliver Goldsmith** and **Thomas Gray** and the lyrical songs of Scotland's **Robert Burns** anticipate the first stirrings of romanticism at the very end of the century.

#### ► For Your Outline

##### THE AGE OF JOHNSON

- The late 1700s were called the Age of Johnson in tribute to Samuel Johnson, an influential writer.
- Nonfiction flourished.
- Poetry entered a transitional period.

##### WOMEN WRITERS

- Unable to participate in public intellectual life, women formed salons.
- Intellectual women were known as bluestockings.
- Women began publishing their work.
- Wollstonecraft called for women's rights.

## The Rise of Women Writers

Enlightenment ideals weren't the exclusive property of men; women—especially upper-class women—were equally interested in exercising their reason and learning about the world around them. However, the universities were closed to them, as were the nearly 3,000 coffeehouses that had sprung up in London. Denied access to these places, women missed out on many ideas being discussed by England's educated class—its writers, artists, politicians, and statesmen.

Unable to go out and participate in the intellectual life of the nation, several enterprising women in the mid-1700s decided to bring it into their own homes in the form of French-style private gatherings known as **salons**. Salons quickly became a popular form of evening entertainment, taking the place of card games, and were often attended by well-known writers and other public figures, such as Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole. Because guests were invited to leave their silk stockings at home and come casually dressed

*Fanny Burney* (1784), Edward Francis Burney. The Granger Collection, New York.





in everyday blue worsted stockings (the 18th-century equivalent of wearing jeans to a party), the women who frequented salons—and intellectual women in general—became known as **bluestockings**.

Inspired by the example of pioneers such as **Aphra Behn**, the first woman in England to earn a living as a professional writer (indeed, she rivaled John Dryden as the most prolific playwright of the Restoration), many talented bluestockings began publishing their own works. For years, male writers had written novels aimed at female audiences, such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, the story of a servant girl who resists her master's advances and ultimately wins an offer of marriage. Now, the men faced competition from women novelists such as **Charlotte Smith** and **Fanny Burney**.

Charlotte Smith wrote to support her family, beginning with poetry but soon turning to novels, which were more lucrative. Her work was similar to that of other women novelists of the day. It was quite radical, however, in its attitude toward morality and its examination of class equality.

Fanny Burney's novels, on the other hand, may seem overly sentimental and moralistic to modern readers. However, her understanding of women's concerns and her accurate portrayal of polite society won her a wide following in her day. Although Burney achieved immediate fame through her novels, readers today are more familiar with her diary, which she began when she was 15 and wrote in regularly for 70 years. Since Burney moved in high society, with Samuel Johnson and even the king and queen of England as acquaintances, her diary gives modern readers a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the upper class in the Age of Johnson.

While many women, such as Fanny Burney, defied the norms by educating themselves, engaging in salon discussions, and writing for publication (often under assumed names), **Mary Wollstonecraft** openly challenged the status quo. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she argued that women should be educated equally with men and allowed to join the professions so that the relationship between men and women could be one of "rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience." Her views were radical at a time when most women accepted their inferior status, or at least refrained from expressing their discontent. Although Wollstonecraft died shortly following the birth of her daughter Mary, she would surely have been proud to learn that the daughter, **Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley**, grew up to become one of the most enduring writers of the next period in England's literary history—the **romantic period**.

## THE ARTISTS' GALLERY



### Satire in Art

Satirizing everything from crooked elections to bad taste in opera, the paintings and engravings of **William Hogarth** (1697–1764) were received with great enthusiasm at all levels of mid-18th-century British society.

**Mockery and Moralizing** Hogarth was most famous for painting what he called "modern moral subjects"—series of lively, detailed scenes showing how bad behavior leads to ruin. While some of these series depicted the seamy side of London, others targeted the wealthier classes.

In the work shown in detail here (the second in a series called *Marriage à la Mode*), Hogarth depicts the downfall of a marriage based on greed and vanity. The wife appears exhausted from a card party held the night before, the house is in disarray, and the husband appears to have just returned from his own revels. The title of the series was taken from John Dryden's well-known comedy of manners; Hogarth's ideas of satire owed a great deal to the theater.

**Artistic Independence** Before Hogarth, artists had earned their living by painting flattering portraits of wealthy patrons. By turning his own popular paintings into engravings that could be printed and sold cheaply to ordinary people, Hogarth opened up new possibilities for artists. He also successfully lobbied Parliament for a copyright law that protected artists' rights by making it illegal for others to copy their work. The law's passage led to a dramatic growth in British printmaking.