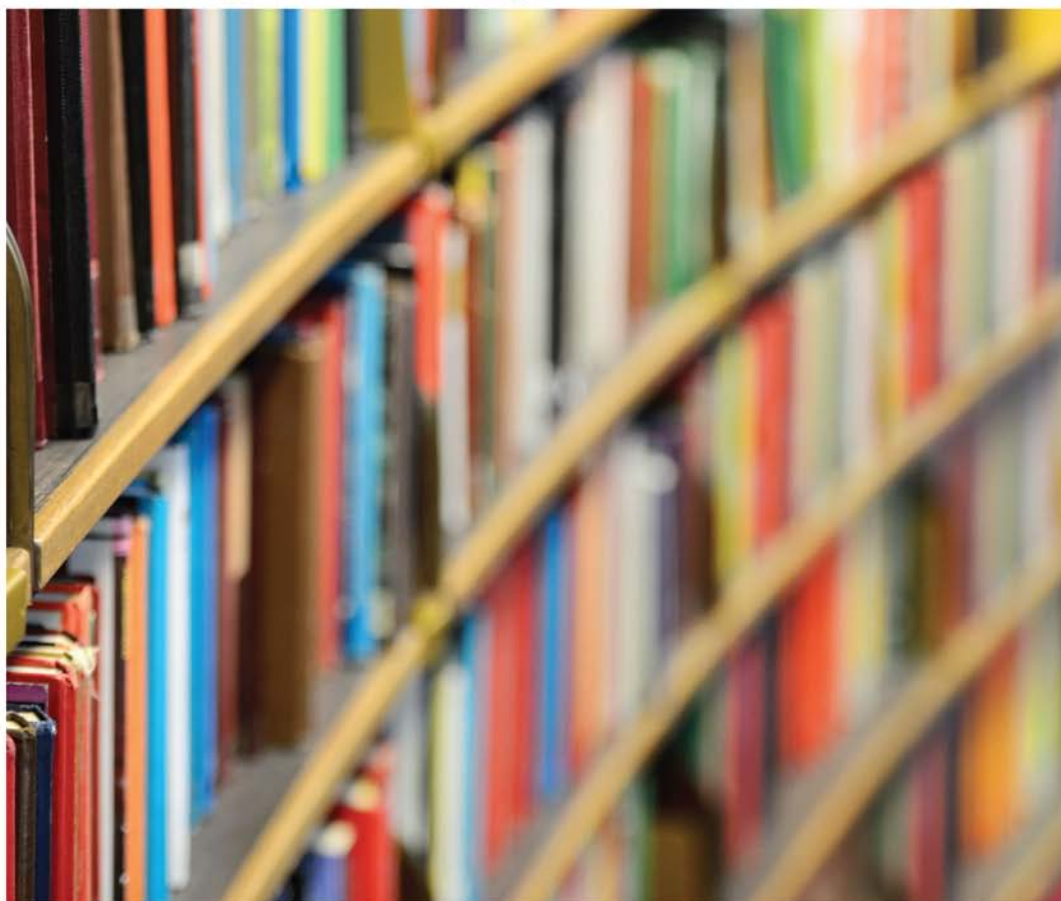




LITERARY STUDIES

A Practical Guide

Tison Pugh and Margaret E. Johnson



Literary Studies

Literary Studies: A Practical Guide provides a comprehensive foundation for the study of English, American, and world literatures, giving students the critical skills they need to best develop and apply their knowledge. Designed for use in all literature courses, *Literary Studies* begins by outlining the history of literary movements, enabling students to contextualize a given work within its cultural and historical moment. Specific focus is then given to the analysis of:

- Poetry
- Prose fiction
- Plays
- Films

A detailed unit offers clear and concise introductions to literary criticism and theory, encouraging students to nurture their unique insights into a range of texts with these critical tools. Finally, students are guided through the process of generating ideas for essays, considering the role of secondary criticism in their writing, and formulating literary arguments. This practical volume is an invaluable resource for students, giving them the tools to succeed in a range of English courses.

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Literary Studies

A Practical Guide

Tison Pugh and Margaret E. Johnson

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Introduction

In *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide*, we offer students a unique and compact resource for reading and interpreting literature, one that they can carry with them throughout their undergraduate careers. This volume contains concise overviews of literary history, of literary modes (poetry, prose fiction, plays, and cinematic adaptations), of literary criticism and theory, and of research essays—all of which can facilitate study in a wide range of courses. Instructors often presume students have engaged with these topics prior to entering their classrooms, but each student takes a unique path through literary studies and may have not yet encountered one or more of them. Thus, such students will benefit from succinct introductions to these fundamental topics in literary studies. In a complementary fashion, we hope that this book will also be of service to instructors, who can use it to quickly review topics of deep complexity in their classes. Many literature departments offer, and many literature students take, entire courses—if not sequences of courses—addressing the various chapters and subchapters of *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide*. With this text, our goal is not to supplant these courses but to complement their efforts in a wide range of additional situations.

We developed this book from our experiences as instructors of various literary courses. Our fields of specialty diverge temporally: Tison is a medievalist, concentrating on Chaucer and the Arthurian tradition, and teaching additional courses in such fields as literature of the Bible, queer theory, and pedagogy. Margaret focuses on twentieth-century American literature, film, and writing and literature pedagogy, and she teaches courses in postmodern literature, film studies, and advanced composition. Despite the fact that we specialize in fields separated by centuries and an ocean, we realized through our conversations about teaching that we faced similar challenges. Due to the ways in which the curricula at our respective institutions are organized, we could not assume students entering our classes had taken a survey course providing foundational knowledge of the history of English or American literature, and so they might not have a clear sense of their historical trajectories. Many students had succeeded in their courses prior to joining our classrooms, yet prior academic success did not ensure that they had studied poetry's meter, or narrative structure, or film terminology. With such issues

in mind, we decided to create a handbook that students could use to fill the gaps in their literary knowledge without losing sight of the overarching goal of each class.

The first unit of *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide* covers four histories: a history of the English language, a history of English literature, a history of American literature, and a history of world literature. Collectively, these chapters address how a language spoken on an isolated island during the Middle Ages became the world's most common modern tongue and how it became a literary force in Great Britain and in the United States of America. English and American literature does not exist in a vacuum, however, and the history of world literature explores literary epochs of various cultures to map out affinities and disjunctions among a range of disparate traditions.

The subsequent unit of *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide* addresses four predominant literary modes: poetry, prose fiction, plays, and cinematic adaptations. Poetry creates unique aesthetic experiences, asking readers to contemplate words and images combined in fresh ways. As such, it requires a unique vocabulary to analyze verse effectively, and this chapter explores poetic sound; accent, rhythm, and meter; images, symbols, and other forms of figurative language; and voice and genre. The chapter on prose fiction examines the basic tools of narratology, including issues concerning plot structure, point of view, characters and characterization, setting, theme, and style and tone, as well as an overview of the novels' historical development and key genres. Most plays share the same fundamental narrative structure as prose fiction, but theater also requires a separate set of conventions reflective of the translation from words on a page to actions and dialogue on a stage. This chapter also defines the genres of tragedy, comedy, and drama, exploring their development over time. This unit's final chapter, "Cinematic Adaptations of Literature," discusses the transition of literary texts into films, as well as including sections on cinematic vocabulary, film theories (including those of auteurs, stars, and spectators), and film genres. A primary theme running throughout these four chapters addresses the necessity of apt critical vocabularies for analyzing literary texts effectively. We also pay keen attention to various literary and cinematic genres, for these interpretive tools are essential for understanding how a given work fits within a larger literary tradition.

The third unit, "A Practical Guide to Literary Criticism and Literary Theory," begins with a brief history of literary criticism that explores how great literature generates perceptive analyses and discussions of its meaning, form, and function. Students are joining this critical conversation through their studies, and so it is useful to consider how this conversation has shifted over the centuries to provide a foundation for their own work in the field. In conjunction with literary criticism, literary theories assist readers in developing their own unique interpretations of texts. As surgeons use scalpels and painters use perspective, readers employ literary theories to assist them in

constructing their interpretations of texts. This chapter reviews dominant literary theories beginning with close reading and new criticism and including semiotic and deconstructive approaches; (new) historicist and cultural studies approaches; theories of social class and ideology; psychoanalytic approaches; gender and feminist theories; queer theories; postcolonial and critical race theories; rhetorical analysis; and genre theories. Our hope with this section is that students will see literary theory not as an esoteric and disjointing field but as one that enlivens the experience of analyzing texts, for it gives readers avenues of access to develop critical insights.

To share one's interpretation of literature, one must be able to write logically and lucidly, and the fourth unit, "A Practical Guide to Writing a Research Essay," offers advice on how to develop a topic for a research essay, how to conduct research effectively, and how to document one's sources. The unit's second chapter addresses how to revise a draft and edit one's writing, for editing skills are essential for crafting precise and elegant prose.

We offer *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide* not as the final word on any of these subjects but as first steps. Literary studies is a vast, exciting, and ever-changing field. Even the oldest texts and genres delight new generations of readers with their wonders: Chaucer shows no signs of growing old, and James Joyce, a whippersnapper in comparison, looks like he too will engross readers for centuries to come—as will Shakespeare, Austen, Woolf, García Márquez, Morrison, and so many others. The newest texts and genres push our understanding of the literary arts in unexpected directions, and our objective with this book is to assist both students and instructors in being able to work from a shared foundation of knowledge. Also, *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide* is organized so that it can serve both as the primary text for an introductory course in literary studies and as a handbook for reviewing critical issues in various classes. It need not be read in order from first page to last, but it might well be, depending on the unique circumstances of the students and instructors who find it a helpful companion for facilitating their study—and their enjoyment—of literature.

Finally, we would like to thank our students, who have consistently challenged us to think through our pedagogical strategies to increase their effectiveness. Special thanks are due to Devin Snyder who kindly allowed us to use her writing as the sample essay in this book. We also thank Elizabeth Levine, Ruth Moody, and Polly Dodson for their generous editorial assistance with this project. Margaret appreciates the Humanities and Social Science Research Grant she received from Idaho State University to assist with this project, and Tison thanks the University of Central Florida College of Arts and Humanities for continued support.

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Unit 1

**A Practical Guide to
Linguistic and
Literary History**

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1.1 A Brief Linguistic History of English and England

If, as the old axiom proclaims, history is written by the winners, so too is linguistic history affected by the conquests, migrations, and other cultural shifts among various cultures. In this light, it is critical to realize that, despite substantial overlap, a linguistic history of the English language differs from a linguistic history of England, for numerous languages have been spoken in the land known as Britannia to the Romans, and then as England after the Anglo-Saxon migrations, as Great Britain in recognition of the unions of England with Wales and Scotland, and also as the United Kingdom due to the union with Northern Ireland. The English language was born in England but not without various linguistic skirmishes and struggles along the way, with many tongues contributing to its present structure and content.

Prior to the Roman invasions of the first century BCE, Celtic languages were spoken across the British Isles. These tongues survive today in Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Welsh, as well as in Manx (spoken on the Isle of Man), Breton (Brittany, France), and Cornish (Cornwall). Perhaps surprisingly, given their proximity to English-speaking peoples, Celtic languages influenced the birth and development of English only tangentially. An excerpt from the medieval Welsh masterpiece *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*, the manuscript of which is dated circa 1230 CE (although the oral narrative dates significantly earlier), highlights the dissimilarities between Celtic languages and English:

Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet a oed yn arglywyd ar seith cantref Dyuet. A threi-gylgweith yd oed yn Arberth, prif lys idaw, a dyuot yn y uryt ac yn y uedwl uynet y hela.

(Thomson 1)

Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed was lord over the seven cantrefs of Dyfed. One time he was in Arberth, his principal court, and it came into his head and mind to go hunting.

(Ford 37)

Unless trained in Welsh or other Celtic languages, most English speakers can discern no linguistic connections between this passage and Modern

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English. Indeed, relatively few Celtic words have entered the English lexicon. Those that have often focus on landscapes or other culturally specific terms, a phenomenon evident in the Welsh-derived words *crag*, *corgi*, and *flannel*; the Scottish-derived words *bog*, *glen*, and *loch*; and the Irish-derived words *whiskey*, *colleen*, *shamrock*, and *leprechaun*.

With no rivals challenging their supremacy, Celtic languages flourished in the British Isles until 55 BCE, when Julius Caesar led a military invasion of Roman soldiers and a linguistic invasion of the Latin language. This initial excursion brought Britain to Rome's attention, and in 43 CE, during the reign of Claudius, the Romans established a province in Britain, thereby cementing Latin's role in the region. Furthermore, the Roman invaders pushed the island's Celtic speakers to geographically remote areas such as Cornwall, Wales, Cumbria, and Scotland. With the Celtic peoples and their languages marginalized during this period of occupation, Latin served as the preferred language for the Romans ruling England for approximately 500 years; indeed, it continued its role as the preferred tongue for ecclesiastical and political administration well past the Middle Ages.

Latin is linguistically distinct from English, a language, like Danish and Dutch, with Germanic roots; nonetheless, its influence on Modern English shines through in the vast number of words with Latin roots. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731 CE), the Venerable Bede describes Britain's geographical location, and even if one has never studied Latin, the similarities between many Latin words and their English descendants require little decoding:

Brittania oceani insula, cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et occidentem locata est, Germaniae, Galliae, Hispaniae, maximis Europae partibus multo intervallo adversa.

Britain, an island of the ocean, which formerly was called Albion, stands between the north and the west, right over against Germany, Gaul, and Spain, three of the greatest countries of Europe, although divided from them by a far gap.

(Bede 1.10–11, with modernizations of King's translation)

Beyond the similarities of place names (*Brittania* for Britain; *Germaniae* for Germany; *Galliae* for France, which was known as Gaul; and *Hispaniae* for Spain), several other Latin words in this passage clearly reveal their kinship to their English cognates: *oceani* to *ocean*, *insula* to *island* and *peninsula*, *locata* to *locate* and *location*, *maximis* to *maximum*, and *partibus* to *parts*. The Latin word *quondam*, although archaic today, was widely used by such great English writers as William Shakespeare in its original Latin meaning as *once* or *formerly*.

The emergence of English in England began circa 450 CE when the northern European tribes of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes migrated to Britain, bringing with them Germanic languages previously alien to the islands. This

segment of English linguistic history, which is roughly dated between 500 and 1100 CE, witnesses the rise of Old English. The masterpiece *Beowulf*, written circa 800 CE, proves the artistry of the language, as it also showcases its striking dissimilarity from Latin:

Hwaet, we Gar-Dena in geardagum,
theodcyninga, thrym gefrunon,
hu tha aethelingas ellen fremedon.

.....
weox under wolcnum, weorthmyndum thah,
othaet him aeghwylc thar ymb sittendra
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan. thaet waes god cyning.

(Klaeber, lines 1–3, 8–11)¹

Listen! We have heard of the glory in bygone days
of the folk-kings of the spear-Danes,
how those noble lords did lofty deeds.

.....
[The king Shield Sheafson] grew under heaven and prospered in honor
until every one of the encircling nations
over the whale's riding had to obey him,
grant him tribute. That was a good king!

(Liuzza, lines 1–11)

Ironically, most contemporary English speakers find Old English, the earliest incarnation of Modern English, more difficult to decipher than Bede's Latin. Nonetheless, when one examines this passage from *Beowulf*, certain linguistic elements common to Modern English are apparent. Primarily, the pronouns of Old English are recognizable in their modern descendants: *we*, *he*, *him*, and *thaet* (for *that*) denote the same meaning today as they did in *Beowulf*. One also sees overlap between various conjunctions (*hu* for *how*) and prepositions (*in*, *under*, *ofer* for *over*). Even the opening word of this excerpt, *hwaet*, is recognizable in its Modern English descendant *what*, when one realizes that *h* and *w* transposed their positions in various common pronouns, conjunctions, and adverbs: Old English *hwa* became Modern English *who*; *hwaether* became *whether*; and *hwile* became *while*. As challenging as reading Old English can be, an occasional passage readily reveals its Modern English translations. The Old English "thaet waes god cyning," the final half-line of *Beowulf* quoted above, translates into Modern English simply as "That was [a] good king."

After approximately 600 years during which Old English served as the land's primary vernacular language, the French Normans invaded England in 1066. In the famed Battle of Hastings, William the Conqueror defeated the English king Harold II, and the Normans' victory brought French to the

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conquered land as the language of the ruling class. This era of English linguistic history, dated between 1100 and 1500 CE, is referred to as Middle English. Because French is a Romance language (that is, it descends directly from Latin, as do Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian), Latin influenced the development of English both in itself, as the Christian Church's preferred language, and in its descendant tongue of French as the Norman aristocracy's *lingua franca*. Post-Conquest England, a polyglot land, was populated with an aristocracy speaking French, with commoners speaking Middle English, and with many educated persons, particularly those engaged in ecclesiastical and administrative functions, speaking Latin as well. In 1325 CE, the poet William of Nassyngton advocated that English should be the land's prevailing language:

In ynglych [English] tonge I sale [shall] yow telle,
If ye with me so lang [long] wille dwelle;
Na latyn will I spek na wast,
Bot in ynglych that men vses mast [use must],
.....
That cane ilk man vndirstand,
That is born in ynglande.

(lines 62–65, 68–69)

This defense of English argues for the necessity of a common tongue for a multilingual land, as it also recognizes the simple fact that the majority of English people speak English.

As a vernacular language, Middle English lacked cultural prestige, but in the late 1300s Geoffrey Chaucer transformed it from a language of the common people into a language of poetry. His most famous work, *The Canterbury Tales*, begins with an ode to spring declaimed in the Middle English vernacular:

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour.

(lines 1–4)

While occasional words of Chaucer's Middle English vocabulary appear unrecognizable to most speakers of Modern English, such as *soote* for *sweet*, many initially unfamiliar words become recognizable through their modern descendants—*shoures* for *showers*, *droghte* for *drought*, and *flour* for *flower*. When one learns a few basic rules of Middle English pronunciation, many words sharpen into focus as ancestors of their Modern English kin.

Chaucer's Middle English was spoken in London, and Modern English descends from this dialect. In linguistic terms, *dialect* refers to a variant of a

common language, with dialects often used to distinguish between and among various peoples. Chaucer's English contrasts sharply with other regional dialects in the land; had one of these variants of Middle English flourished equally to Chaucer's London English, Modern English would likely sound remarkably different than it does today, or at least enjoy an even greater variety of words and pronunciations. For example, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, an Arthurian romance recounting Gawain's quest to defeat a monstrous adversary menacing Camelot, is more difficult for most speakers of Modern English to decipher, as the following passage demonstrates:

Gawan glyght on the gome that godly hym gret,
And thught hit a bolde burne that the burgh aghte;
A hoge hathel for the nonez, and of hyghe eldee;
Brode, bryght, watz his berde, and al beuer-hwed.

(Tolkien and Gordon, lines 842–45)

Gawain studied the man who greeted him courteously,
And thought him a bold one who governed the castle,
A great-sized knight indeed, in the prime of life;
Broad and glossy was his beard, all reddish-brown.

(Winny, lines 842–45)

Some words in this passage are evident in their Modern English descendants, such as *brode* for *broad*, *bryght* for *bright*, and *berde* for *beard*; even *beuer-hwed* is recognizable as *beaver-hued* (that is to say, in the color of a beaver, or reddish-brown). For the most part, though, readers of Modern English find this northwestern dialect of Middle English challenging to comprehend, in contrast to Chaucer's Middle English with its more obvious parallels to Modern English.

With the close of the Middle Ages and the advent of the Renaissance, the English language entered the phase known as Early Modern English, which ranges between 1500 and 1800 CE. The Great Vowel Shift marks the transition from Middle English to Early Modern English, and as a result of this linguistic metamorphosis, Chaucer's fourteenth-century English sounds vastly different from Shakespeare's seventeenth-century tongue. Scholars continue to debate the causes of the Great Vowel Shift, yet it is clear that English long vowels changed their pronunciations, although the distinction between each vowel and its neighbors remained. (Long vowels sound like the vowels' names—*a*, *e*, *i*, *o* and *u*, whereas short vowels are the sounds of *pat*, *pet*, *pit*, *pot*, and *put*.) For example, Middle English long *e* was pronounced like Modern English long *a*, and Middle English long *i* was pronounced like Modern English long *e*. After the Great Vowel Shift, however, these vowels assumed their current intonations. For the most part, short Middle English vowels were pronounced similarly to their Modern English equivalents, with short *a* registering the greatest degree of variation from its former sound

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as if in *hot* and *pot* to its current sound as in *man* and *can*. Despite slight variations in stress or vocalization, consonants remain mostly consistent in their pronunciation between Middle and Early Modern English. Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* opens her Prologue with a cry to understand women's experience of medieval life, but her words also illustrate the shifts in pronunciation between the Middle Ages and today:

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage.

(lines 1–3)

Many words of this passage, including *experience*, *were*, and *world*, are pronounced similarly whether in Middle or Modern English. The vowel shifts are most evident in Middle English *right*, which would be pronounced with the vowel sound of Modern English long *e*, and Middle English *me* and *speke*, which would be pronounced like Modern English *may* and *spake*. The causes behind the Great Vowel Shift notwithstanding, it dramatically affected the sounds and tones of the language, such that, as for readers of Middle English today, many Renaissance readers found this earlier version of their language challenging to decipher.

The striking shifts in English—particularly those of vocabulary and pronunciation—that were evident from its beginnings as Old English through its transition into Chaucer's Middle English and then in its transition into Early Modern English, have since slowed remarkably. Despite their many differences, Modern English of the twenty-first century is much closer to Shakespeare's Early Modern English of the early 1600s than Chaucer's Middle English is to the Old English spoken 400 years before him. The invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s slowed such linguistic changes. Although languages are forever in flux as new words enter their vocabularies and outdated words fade into obsolescence, the printing press codified words and pronunciations in a manner hitherto unachieved in the language's history. In a similar manner, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, completed in 1755, helped to establish various preferred spellings and usages. Johnson's *Dictionary*, a truly magnificent achievement, compiles the definitions of over forty thousand words that he illustrated with over 114,000 quotations. As Johnson declares in the preface to this tome, "tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration" (*Samuel Johnson* 326–27), and he aimed through his dictionary to preserve the English language from a decay feared to be inevitable.

Following Johnson's lexicographical achievements, Noah Webster published *An American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828. While Webster's dictionary shares many features and definitions with Johnson's, it reflects as well the simple fact that different peoples experiencing different cultures in different geographies, no matter their common linguistic histories,

will adapt languages to their unique needs. American English soon incorporated words indicative of its unique cultures and history, such as those with Native American roots (*moccasin, wigwam, tomahawk*) or those that arose from the Western expansion (*bronco, corral, lasso*). (As Oscar Wilde wrote in “The Canterville Ghost,” with tongue firmly in cheek, the British “have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language” [*Complete Works* 194].) Today, the premier English dictionary is the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Mounting dissatisfaction with Johnson’s, Webster’s, and other dictionaries led members of the Philological Society of London in 1857 to undertake an ambitious endeavor of compiling the definitions of all English words. Realizing the vast scope of the project, the society, under the editorial guidance of James A. H. Murray, in 1879 enlisted the general public’s assistance, advertising an “Appeal to the English-Speaking and the English-Reading Public to Read Books and Make Extracts for the Philological Society’s New Dictionary” (Lerer 236). The resulting dictionary was first published as a series of booklets from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries. In a prefatory essay entitled “The History of the *Oxford English Dictionary: The First Edition, 1857–1928*,” the editors of the second edition wittily introduce their accomplishments by acknowledging the volume’s size in contrast to its predecessors:

If there is any truth in the old Greek maxim that a large book is a great evil, English dictionaries have been steadily growing worse ever since their inception nearly four centuries ago. To set Cawdrey’s slim small volume of 1604 beside the completed *Oxford English Dictionary* is like placing the original acorn beside the oak that has grown out of it.

(xxxv)

Cawdrey’s *A Table Alphabeticall* defined 3,000 words, whereas today the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines over 600,000 words and illustrates their meaning with over three million quotations. Moreover, it shows no sign of slowing, for it can never succeed in its goal of comprehensively defining English, a language forever in flux.

Corollary to the fact that no dictionary can capture a language in its full complexity is the question of whether these tomes should be *prescriptive* or *descriptive*: that is, should dictionaries prescribe how words are to be used in an attempt to pin down their meanings and usages, or should they describe how words are used both formally and informally, whether correctly or incorrectly? Lexicographers must balance between these conflicting impulses, arguing for a word’s denotative meaning while also alerting readers to its connotative usages. Denotations and connotations often overlap, but for many words the grey area between these two senses can obscure their meanings. For example, the word *enormity* denotes evil, horror, and monstrousness; it is derived from the Latin roots of *ex* and *norm*, which suggests that the word refers to an entity or action grossly divergent from cultural

norms. In many instances, however, *enormity* is used simply to connote an object of large proportions. If *enormity* is consistently used—incorrectly, according to many experts—as a synonym of *enormousness*, at what point does its meaning nonetheless include this usage?

Over the course of the eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth, Early Modern English gradually became Modern English, with the basic forms of the language—including spelling, punctuation, and grammar—mirroring our contemporary structures. When reading a novel from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one may occasionally encounter an odd word, archaic usage, or variant spelling, but, for the most part, the novels of Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens present few linguistic difficulties to hinder one’s enjoyment. One might disagree with the sentiment expressed by Austen in the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice*—“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (3)—viewing it as a benighted expression of archaic gender roles, but the language Austen uses to express this opinion remains fresh and clear despite the centuries between her penning it and her current readers enjoying it.

As England grew into an imperial power from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, various international dialects developed, each with their unique pronunciations, idioms, and coinages. The United States of America, Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, and other imperial outposts all fostered idiosyncratic variants of words and expressions. Such variability among dialects allows speakers to modulate their word choice for particular audiences. For example, the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar writes some of his poems in an African-American dialect, as evident in his “Little Brown Baby”: “Little brown baby wif spa’klin’ eyes, / Come to yo’ pappy an’ set on his knee” (lines 1–2). For other poems, Dunbar switches voices, such as in his poem “Emancipation,” which he wrote in standard American English: “Fling out your banners, your honors be bringing, / Raise to the ether your paeans of praise” (lines 1–2). Linguists refer to speakers’ fluency in various dialects, and their ability to select among them, as *code-switching*. This technique allows speakers to adapt their words to the rhetorical situations at hand. Dunbar’s poems capture the variability possible in one person’s voice, and this mutability and adaptability of English is one reason that it is increasingly becoming an international language. Dictionaries such as Johnson’s, Webster’s, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* may be seen as tools to staunch English’s potential degeneration, yet the mutability of a language can also be seen as its life blood: all languages continually evolve, and it is only possible to imagine a truly unchanging and forever fixed language as a dead one.²

It may be tempting to think of today’s modern English as the language at its apex, but it will undoubtedly continue to adapt to new conditions. Virtually every corner of the globe speaks a unique version of English, with nations as varied as Australia, Belize, Canada, Ethiopia, Kenya, New

Zealand, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, among many others, endorsing it as an official language. Furthermore, English's status as the world's preferred international language is increasing because of the vast number of people studying and speaking it as a second (or third, or fourth) language. As Salman Rushdie opines in an essay provocatively entitled "'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist," "The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago" (70). Some new English words, which are today considered slang and denigrated as examples of such linguistic hybrids as Chinglish, Japlish, Spanglish, Franglish, and Denglish (German and English), simply reflect the fact that English continues to infiltrate various tongues, and the corollary fact that these languages reciprocally affect the scope of English. For example, Junot Díaz begins his short story "Ysrael" mostly in English, yet switches to Spanish to communicate his narrator's bilingual voice: "We were on our way to the colmado for an errand, a beer for my tío, when Rafa stood still and tilted his head, as if listening to a message I couldn't hear, something beamed in from afar" (3). Only two Spanish words are included in this passage—*colmado*, meaning *grocery store*, and *tío*, meaning *uncle*—and, even if one does not speak Spanish, Díaz's meaning is mostly clear. Is this passage nonetheless an example of Spanglish? Would it need three, four, or ten more Spanish words to be considered Spanglish? The goal of all uses of language is to communicate, and usually to communicate to as wide an audience as possible. Authors must find the best words to accomplish this goal whether, in this instance, in English, Spanish, or a mixture of the two.

It is quite possible that, in the near future, English will be spoken by as many or more people as a second language than as a first language, and so it will by necessity incorporate loan words that these speakers bring into English's domain. David Crystal describes this linguistic tension as modulating between internationalism and identity: as an international language, English promises to enable speakers from various cultures to communicate with one another, yet this promise of cross-cultural contact is simultaneously handicapped by the fact that the various dialects of English reflect many nations' unique identities and cultures, even if English is not their official language (110). In a similar vein, Robert McCrum details the rise of "Globish," which he defines as a "highly simplified form of English, without grammar or structure," yet one that is "perfectly comprehensible" to speakers of varied fluencies in English (11). As much as the printing press and such efforts as Johnson's and Webster's dictionaries slowed the linguistic shifts of English, the increasing globalization of communication and commerce could well accelerate its shifts once more, perhaps dramatically. Languages constantly metamorphose and adapt to new conditions and new environments, and the one certainty of English's future is that tomorrow it will be different than it is today. Not so many years ago such mainstream English words as *ring tone*, *drama queen*, *manga*, *bling*, and *sexting* did not exist, and it is impossible to predict what neologisms will be part of the English lexicon only a few years into the future.

12 *Guide to Linguistic and Literary History*

Notes

- 1 Archaic letters of Old and Middle English have been modernized in this and subsequent citations.
- 2 Latin, for example, can no longer change because it is not a spoken language. Even dead languages retain their allure for many modern English readers, as is evident in such modern texts translated into Latin as Peter Needham's *Harry Potter et Philosophi Lapis* (J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*) and Mark Walker's *Hobbitus Ille* (J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*).

1.2 A Brief History of English Literature

From its medieval roots on a remote island to its international reach today, English literature speaks to the history of the English language and its lands, as well as their joint expansion across the globe. The primary eras of English literature—medieval, Renaissance, long eighteenth century, romanticism, Victorian, and modern—capture the zeitgeist of these times through their most popular forms, including medieval Arthurian romances, Renaissance theater, eighteenth-century wit and satire, Victorian novels, and modernist reimaginings of previous forms. The breadth of English literature also expands beyond these dominant tropes, with a panoply of contrasting voices challenging the prevailing modes of the day. Also, no literary era ends on a certain day, at a certain hour, and so the following categories reflect general trends and possibilities, with an understanding of the limits of categorizing the human imagination to specific years, decades, or even centuries.

The Middle Ages (731 CE–1485)

Given the overarching Christianity of the European Middle Ages, it is surely no coincidence that, like Jesus, English literature was born in a manger. According to the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731 CE), the poet Caedmon “received the gift [of poetry] by the aid of God” after fleeing a feast and falling asleep in a cattle shed. His dream miraculously inspires him to sing:

Nu sculon herigean
meotodes meahte

heofonrices weard
and his modgethanc.

(O'Donnell 208)

Now ought we to praise
The power of the Creator

the Maker of the heavenly kingdom,
and his counsel.

(Bede 2.143)

Like much of Anglo-Saxon poetry, *Caedmon's Hymn*, as this poem is known, is alliterative, with the half-lines linked together through the repetition of

consonants. Although this is a poem praising God, Caedmon employs Old English, the vernacular tongue of the common folk, rather than Latin, the preferred language for matters both poetic and prayerful throughout much of the Middle Ages. Caedmon's poem, merely nine lines in its entirety, also illustrates the oral-formulaic qualities of much Old English poetry, in which certain patterns and phrasings of verse are reconstituted in new combinations.

The corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry is scant, with the majority of works surviving in four manuscripts—the Junius manuscript, the Exeter Book, the Vercelli Book, and the Nowell Codex. Much of Old English poetry illustrates the unlikely intersection of a warrior ethos reflective of England's Anglo-Saxon invaders with Christian themes reflective of their proselytizers. Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine of Canterbury to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity in the late sixth century, and many Old English poems depict the cultural and moral tensions as a society based on revenge and blood feud slowly embraced a new religion emphasizing mercy and forgiveness. Thus "The Dream of the Rood" tells the story of Jesus's crucifixion from the perspective of the cross, while casting Jesus not as a humble man suffering for the sins of humanity but as a warrior embracing death in defiance of his enemies after a harrowing battle, as evidenced by the arrows that remain affixed in his cross after a climactic battle. Likewise, *Judith* retells the biblical account of the Jewish heroine's execution of Holofernes, the Babylonian general threatening the Israelites with their imminent slaughter, as a celebration of her daring bravery. Other religious poems of the Old English tradition include *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Christ and Satan*, each of which vividly reimagines biblical narratives through an Anglo-Saxon cultural perspective. This intermingling of heroic and Christian values also influences *Beowulf*, the Anglo-Saxon epic recounting a great warrior's battles against three terrifying monsters—Grendel, Grendel's mother, and a dragon. *Beowulf*'s bravery allows the poet to pay homage to the warriors of the past while also considering the relevance of Christianity to his changing culture.

Beowulf ends with his people mourning his death, and such a haunting air pervades one of the most common genres of Old English poetry—elegies. In such works as "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," and "The Wife's Lament," the lyric speakers bewail their status as exiles from their communities. Riddles are another common genre of Old English literature, in which, often through a first-person self-description, the speaker poetically presents itself and demands readers to solve its mysteries.

Prominent genres of Old English prose literature include hagiographies (also known as saints' lives) and sermons. The tenth-century abbot Aelfric wrote various works in these genres, as well as his *Colloquy*, a didactic lesson in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and his students. Wulfstan, an eleventh-century English bishop, is remembered for such hortatory works as "The Sermon of 'Wolf' to the English When the Danes Persecuted Them Most, Which Was in the Year 1014" and "Sermon on False Gods." In these tracts he encourages his audience to retain their Christian faith despite the

many trials confronting them. Aelfric and Wulfstan aside, the names of most Anglo-Saxon authors have not survived, yet the period's preeminent man of letters is undoubtedly the ninth-century monarch Alfred, who, in the Preface to the *Pastoral Care*, discusses the necessity of translating Latin texts into English to enhance literacy and education throughout England.

The Norman Invasion of 1066 brought a French-speaking aristocracy to England for several hundred years, and this linguistic shift coincided with a literary shift as well, in which the heroic and elegiac ethos of much Anglo-Saxon literature ceded to a celebration of courtliness and chivalry in the nascent genre of Arthurian romance. From the pseudohistory of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (written in Latin, c. 1135–1139), which the Norman cleric Wace translated into French verse as *Le Roman de Brut* (c. 1155), and which the English priest Layamon then retold in Middle English alliterative verse in his *Brut* (c. 1190), England's legendary history, as well as its preeminent legendary ruler, King Arthur, emerged as one of the defining literary topics of the Middle Ages. As this material shifted from the realm of Geoffrey's pseudohistory to literature, poets created the genre of romance, in which knights undertake quests to win the love of their ladies, or to find the lost Holy Grail, or merely to adventure in honor of their king. Also in the twelfth century, Marie de France wrote a series of short romances known as *lais*, several of which, such as "Lanval" and "Chevrefoil," address Arthurian themes. Interest in the Arthurian tradition extended beyond England, and continental authors, including the French poet Chrétien de Troyes (*Lancelot*, c. 1177–1181) and the German poets Wolfram von Eschenbach (*Parzival*, c. 1200) and Gottfried von Strassburg (*Tristan*, c. 1210), ensured that the Arthurian tradition would flourish throughout the Middle Ages. Other masterworks of the English Arthurian tradition include the anonymously penned *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1375) and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (c. 1470).

In the fourteenth century, Geoffrey Chaucer elevated Middle English from a disdained vernacular, one seen as aesthetically inferior to Italian, French, and Latin, into a truly literary language with *The Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and other masterpieces. With Chaucer's meter and poetic magic, *The Canterbury Tales* presents portraits of various members of English society on a pilgrimage, capturing slices of life in a variety of literary genres, including romance, epic, tragedy, fabliau, saint's life, dream vision, and exemplum. As much as Chaucer was indebted to various classical, Italian, and French sources (especially Ovid, Virgil, and Statius; Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio; Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, and Jean Froissart), he innovated from these traditions, such as in his decision to use a frame narrative similar to Boccaccio's *The Decameron* for *The Canterbury Tales* but to populate it with characters of various social classes and sensibilities. Along with Chaucer, William Langland (*Piers Plowman*, c. 1360–1380), the anonymous *Gawain-Poet* (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl*, c. 1400), and John Lydgate (*The Fall of Princes*, c. 1431–1438) further cemented vernacular English as

England's preferred literary language. In a revealing contrast to these authors who committed themselves to the English vernacular, John Gower wrote his three primary works in three different tongues—*Mirour de l'omme* (Mirror of Man, c. 1374–1378) in Anglo-Norman, *Vox Clamatis* (Voice of the Crying One, c. 1385) in Latin, and *Confessio Amantis* (Confession of the Lover, c. 1386) in English—a testament both to his linguistic virtuosity and to the multilingual nature of fourteenth-century England.

Although the majority of poets and authors in the Middle Ages were men, women writers left a rich literary legacy as well, and these works were often imbued with themes of affective piety depicting the authors' relationship with the divine in highly emotional language. In *Showings* (c. 1413), Julian of Norwich ponders the humanity of Jesus, seeing her savior as a maternal figure irrespective of his physical gender—"And so Jesus is our true Mother in nature by our first creation, and he is our true Mother in grace by his taking our created nature" (296)—as she is also given to visions striking in their imagery, such as all of creation encapsulated in a hazelnut. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (c. 1436–1438), a spiritual autobiography, details author Margery's travails in expressing her deeply felt religious beliefs, which were so highly emotional as to annoy many members of her community, although she does so with an implacable determination. In one of her book's humorous passages, Margery's husband asks if she would "comown kindly" ("commune kindly," i.e., have intercourse) with him if he were to be decapitated, should they not do so; Margery refuses, and he glumly declares, "Ye arn no good wyfe" (23).

Medieval drama consists primarily of morality plays and mystery plays, which reached their height of popularity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Morality plays allegorically dramatize the journey of the soul to salvation. In such works as *Everyman*, *Wisdom*, and *Mankind*, these eponymous protagonists ward off temptations and other spiritual challenges as they model proper Christian virtue. Mystery plays enact biblical narratives in extended sequences, such as those of the York and Chester cycles. Vast in scope, these plays adapt the biblical story of humanity and Christianity from the creation of heaven and earth to the final judgment, and they required a day or more to perform in their entirety. The Wakefield Master's *Second Shepherds' Play* of the Towneley/Wakefield cycle stands as the undisputed apex of medieval drama, with its rowdy reinterpretation of Jesus's birth against the backdrop of the rakish thief Mak, his hungry wife Gil, and their plot to steal a sheep. From the beginnings of English literature in Caedmon's hymn to the farcical humor of the *Second Shepherds' Play* stretches a literary gap of centuries and sensibilities, yet both works employ the tableau of birth in a manger to elucidate the spiritual mysteries of their faith.

Renaissance (1485–1660)

The printing press, invented by Johann Gutenberg in Germany circa 1440 and introduced to England by William Caxton circa 1475, marks a major

transition in literary history. Foremost, it heralds a shift between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance because it both accelerated the production of literature and codified various texts into a coherent, if eventually disputed, canon. Caxton published such masterpieces as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, cementing their positions as revered works. Also, because the printing press sparked wider dissemination of books, more people read and circulated them than ever before. Whereas the beginning of the Italian Renaissance is typically dated toward the start of the fourteenth century, the English Renaissance began toward the close of the fifteenth century, and the printing press played a pivotal role in this flourishing of learning. The printing revolution coincided with a renewed passion for classical texts, particularly those in Greek hitherto untranslated. With this infusion of interest in the arts and poetry, English writers looked to continental Europe and the classical past for exemplars of poetic excellence.

The fourteenth-century Italian poet Petrarch in many ways inspired England's Renaissance when, some two hundred years later, various poets began translating his sonnets into English. Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder introduced the sonnet tradition to England with such poems as "The Long Love That in My Thought Doth Harbor," "Whoso List to Hunt," and "My Galley," all of which are translations of Petrarch's poems. Many of Wyatt's poems were published together with those of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in an influential collection entitled *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557); Nicholas Grimald and various anonymous poets also contributed to this volume. With titles such as "Complaint of a Lover Rebuked," "Complaint of the Absence of His Love," and "Against an Unsteadfast Woman," these poems established many of the frequent themes of Renaissance amatory verse: the lover declares his affections, or rues that his desires find no succor. In his sonnets, Surrey developed what was to be called the Shakespearean, or English, sonnet. Surrey is also credited with the invention of blank verse, such as in his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

The mid-years of the English Renaissance coincide with the Elizabethan era, so named for the long rule of Queen Elizabeth I (born 1533, reigned 1558–1603). Elizabeth enjoyed the literary pastimes of her court and participated in them, as author of such works as "The Doubt of Future Foes" and "On Monsieur's Departure." These poems are heavily influenced by the themes of Wyatt and Surrey's sonnet tradition, particularly through the use of oxymoron and paradox in their depiction of the lyric speaker's emotional anguish. Elizabeth's literary endeavors also include her many speeches, such as her famed "Speech to the Troops at Tilbury" (1588), in which she exhorts her soldiers to bravery before a feared invasion of Spain, and her "Golden Speech" (1601), her final address to Parliament.

Following the path trailblazed by Wyatt and Surrey, and recognizing their queen's appreciation of verse, numerous Renaissance courtiers pursued the pleasure and play of poetry. Prominent sonneteers and poets of the sixteenth century include Edmund Spenser, whose sonnet sequence *Amoretti* celebrates

his love for his wife Elizabeth (as well as his admiration for his queen in sonnet 74); the *Amoretti* concludes with his *Epithalamion*, a wedding song. In addition to *Amoretti*, Spenser is acclaimed for his epic allegory *The Faerie Queen*, which depicts knights questing for earthly adventures and spiritual rewards; their actions allegorically comment on English politics of the day. In the 108 poems and sonnets collected in *Astrophil and Stella* (1582), Sir Philip Sidney recounts the challenges of courting an imperious beloved, and ends without resolution other than the paradoxical lament, “That in my woes for thee thou art my joy, / And in my joys for thee my only annoy” (sonnet 108, lines 13–14). Sidney also wrote the epic prose romance *Arcadia*, a work of immense complexity and delight that unites pastoral elements with those of adventure, politics, and intrigue. Sidney’s niece Mary Wroth wrote her sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621) from a woman’s perspective. The title translates to “All-Loving to Double-Lover,” and in these poems she questions conceptions of women’s pleasure in courtship and concentrates as well on its pains.

The celebrated playwright William Shakespeare also wrote a sonnet sequence, with its latent plot detailing a love triangle among the lyric speaker, a mysterious dark lady, and an attractive young man. Along with his sonnets, Shakespeare is, of course, remembered for his plays, and the Renaissance marks the apex of English theater, a period simply stunning for an outpouring of drama unparalleled in its excellence. The roots of the Renaissance stage reach back to medieval morality and mystery plays, and nearer to Shakespeare’s time, to the drama of Christopher Marlowe, the playwright of *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II*. Marlowe brought striking oratory and bold characters to the stage, such as in his *Doctor Faustus* (1604), in which the titular character resolves that “A sound magician is a mighty god” (A-Text, 1.1.64) as he turns from his Christian faith to the meretricious allure of sorcery. From this tradition Shakespeare emerges as the definitive voice of the English Renaissance with a strikingly diverse corpus of plays in a variety of genres, including tragedy (*King Lear*), comedy (*As You Like It*), history (*Richard II*), and romance (*The Winter’s Tale*). The abundance of accomplished dramatists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century—including Thomas Kyd (*The Spanish Tragedy*), Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher (*Cupid’s Revenge* and *The Maid’s Tragedy*), Elizabeth Cary (*The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry*), John Ford (*’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*), and John Webster (*The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*)—testify to the popularity of the theater in Renaissance England as well as to its power, for these plays, through their soaring verse and lurid plotting, represent radical departures from the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages.

Despite Shakespeare’s superior reputation today, Ben Jonson was acknowledged as the preeminent talent among his contemporary Renaissance literati. He penned a series of masques—performances that include music, dance, and acting—such as *The Masque of Blackness* and its sequel *The Masque of*

Beauty, for the court of Elizabeth's successor, King James I. These elaborately staged productions, many of which focus more on spectacle than on narrative, allowed the courtiers to participate in playmaking—often to the shock of the self-proclaimed virtuous. Jonson's plays, including *Bartholomew Fair*, *Every Man in His Humour*, and *Volpone, or The Fox*, evince a comic and satiric sensibility, skewering the opinions and pretensions of his day. His major collections of poems include *Epigrams*, *The Forest*, and *Underwood*. *Epigrams* showcases a striking variety of verse featuring disparate tones, moods, and genres, including the elegy "On My First Daughter," the short ode "To John Donne," and the marital satire "On Giles and Joan."

In the early years of the seventeenth century, many tropes of the sonnet tradition were becoming stale, with too many poets bemoaning their imperious beloveds in similar terms of oxymoron, paradox, and blazon. John Donne overturned the paradigms of this poetic tradition with his daring verse. His *Songs and Sonnets* (c. 1595–1615) addresses the vagaries of love with harsh diction and discordant images. "The Good Morrow" opens, "I wonder by my troth, what thou and I / Did, till we loved? were we not wean'd till then? / But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly?," with such words as "troth," "wean'd," and "suck'd" subverting expectations of poetic mellifluousness (*Complete English Poems* lines 1–3). Some of Donne's more memorable images, such as a fleabite as a prelude to seduction ("The Flea") and the sainthood of earthly lovers ("The Canonization"), similarly upend the expected iconography of poetic love. Donne's *Holy Sonnets* ponders the meaning of religious experience with images of graphically physical sexuality, with God depicted as a rapist ("Holy Sonnet 14") and the Christian Church as a prostitute ("Holy Sonnet 18"). In 1621 Donne was appointed dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and he expresses a more somber side in such works as *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624). These tracts include his philosophical and theological reflections on life, religion, and community, famously encapsulated in his phrase, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main" (98).

Cavalier poetry, one of the defining literary traditions of the seventeenth century, reflects the tensions and conflicting sensibilities of the English Civil Wars. After Elizabeth I died in 1603 without heirs, James VI of Scotland succeeded her to the throne and ruled as James I of England; James's reign marked the end of the Tudor dynasty and the beginning of the Stuart line. After James died in 1625, the reign of his son Charles I began, but turmoil ensued due to suspicions that Charles would reinstitute Catholicism as England's national religion. The following decades were marked by political and civil unrest: Charles was executed in 1649; England was then ruled between 1649 and 1660 successively by a Council of State, Oliver Cromwell, and Richard Cromwell; and in 1660 Charles's son Charles II was enthroned in an act known as the Restoration. Aligning themselves with Charles I and the rights of the monarchy, Cavalier poets such as Robert Herrick, Sir John Suckling, and Richard Lovelace express a *carpe diem* sensibility in which

they profess both their desire to love lustily and their eagerness to defend Charles in his battles with Parliament. In Herrick's playfully erotic and decadent verse, which exemplifies the Cavaliers' amorous sensibility, he urges maidens to intercourse ("To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time"), irreverently mourns his abstention from alcohol ("His Farewell to Sack"), or rhapsodizes over his lover's nipples ("Upon the Nipples of Julia's Breast"). Suckling's "Out upon It!" (1659) encapsulates Cavalier poetry's stance on constancy in love, as evident in its opening stanza:

OUT upon it, I have loved
 Three whole days together!
 And am like to love three more,
 If it hold fair weather.

(lines 1–4)

Lovellace, in complementary fashion, rhapsodizes on the allure of love and on the honor of serving his king, particularly in his *Lucasta* poems (1649), including "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars," "The Grasshopper," and "To Althea, from Prison." Cavalier poets were a male tribe, many of whom referred to themselves as the Sons of Ben in honor of their esteemed forebear Ben Jonson, yet Katherine Philips evinces Cavalier sympathies in her poems as well, particularly in her defense of Charles I ("Upon the Double Murder of King Charles") and in her witty examination of the trials of marriage ("A Married State").

Contrasting with the rambunctious play of the Cavaliers, numerous Renaissance poets wrote deeply religious verse, and John Milton stands as the towering figure of this tradition, particularly with his epic *Paradise Lost* (1667). The poem tells of Adam and Eve's eviction from the Garden of Eden, as Satan, who in Milton's hands is a seductive figure of unmatched rhetorical eloquence, seeks revenge against God for his ignominious defeat and eviction to the bowels of Hell. In addition to his verse, which also includes "On the Morrow of Christ's Nativity," "Il Pensero," and "Lycidas," Milton wrote numerous prose tracts, including *Areopagitica*, his argument against censorship, and *The Divorce Tracts*, a controversial collection of essays arguing for the social benefits of dissolving unhappy marriages. Other esteemed religious poets of the seventeenth century include George Herbert, whose *The Temple* (1633) passionately tackles the challenges and rewards of faith; Henry Vaughan, whose *Silex Scintillans* (*The Scintillating Flint*, 1650) ponders the mysteries of the ineffable; and Richard Crashaw, whose *Steps to the Temple* (1646) and *Carmen Deo Nostro* (Song to Our God, 1652) anticipate union with the Divine, while his "To the Noblest and Best of Ladies, the Countess of Denbigh" proselytizes her to his Catholic faith. Religious poetry of the seventeenth century often grapples with the meaning of faith following Henry VIII's tumultuous break from the Catholic Church many decades earlier—and his declaration in 1534 that he was the head of the Church of

England—as Protestant and Catholic poets defend their respective doctrines while contemplating the call to unity with the divine.

Of all Renaissance poets, the most difficult to categorize is Andrew Marvell, a unique voice who conflates the erotic sensibility of the Cavaliers with a deep sense of religious devotion. His most famous poem, “To His Coy Mistress” (1681), possesses an exuberantly Cavalier sensibility, in which the lyric speaker urges his eponymous beloved to join him in sexual pleasures. This bounteous eroticism is counterbalanced by a looming morbidity in which the lovers’ delayed consummation foreshadows the woman’s consumption by worms in the grave: “then worms shall try / That long preserved virginity, / And your quaint honour turn to dust” (lines 27–29). Marvell’s pastoral poems, including “The Mower against Gardens” and “Damon the Mower,” replace the genre’s standard figure of a shepherd with a mower, one who ponders the heat of love while peering at his image reflecting from his own scythe. In amatory musings which frankly confront the finality of death, Marvell rejects palliative paeans to love as resolving life’s difficulties while also painting a picture of the emptiness of the grave. It is to his credit that he succeeds in these twin goals with poetry insistent in its pleasures. The accomplishments of the Renaissance are embodied in the mythical figure of the Renaissance man, a figure of piercing intellect and wide-ranging knowledge, and this image is embodied in the great poets and playwrights of the period, ranging from the queen on her throne to a man penning poems about a mower.

The Long Eighteenth Century (1660–1785)

No century is longer than any other, of course, but in English literary history, the period ranging from 1660 to 1785 is often referred to as the long eighteenth century, stretching from the Restoration of Charles II to the early stirrings of romanticism. This period is justly celebrated as both the Age of Reason and the Age of Wit, for both intellectual rigor and rapier-sharp wit define its zeitgeist. Toward the close of the seventeenth century, Sir Isaac Newton’s scientific advances led to new understandings of the physical world. He also sparked a revolution in thought with his rigorous experimental methodology: “I shall not mingle conjectures with certainties” (57), Newton declares in his epistle explaining his theory of light and color. In the realm of philosophy, John Locke similarly posits in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) that, if one’s ideas are merely taken from others, “’tis no great Matter what they are, they not following Truth, but some meaner Consideration” (7). Instead, Locke theorizes the necessity of “clear and distinct” ideas, with his philosophical views calling for empirical evidence to support one’s claims. Such scientific and philosophical perspectives shifted humanity’s relationship to nature, religion, and art, as they demand that one engage critically, objectively, and intellectually with one’s milieu rather than accepting arguments based on faith and tradition.