

Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Topics

Courtesy of Prof. R.F.W. Kroll

This list is meant to help you ask about the works you have read, make connections among works, and organize your notes. The list is only suggestive. For further reading, consult Louis I. Bredvold, *The Literature of the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century, 1660-1798*; Alan Dugald McKillop, *English Literature from Dryden to Burns*.

1. Philosophical Trends

- (a) sentimental benevolence, altruism, feeling for other men, for animals, charity, humanitarianism, indignation at social injustice
- (b) selfishness, pecuniary interest, growth of trade
- (c) harmony of universe, whole, coherent, orderly *vs.* partial and individualist
- (d) fullness of creation with gradation, hierarchy, degree, station, social status, difference: The Great Chain of Being
- (e) reason, orderly and ordering, *vs.* imagination, inspiration, fancy, enthusiasm, insanity, stupidity
- (f) optimism: good and bad work out divine plan that is rational and benevolent
- (g) pessimism: bad continually triumphs over good; all is vanity
- (h) skepticism: empiricism, the “probable”; suspicion of words
- (i) libertinism

2. Religion

- (a) relation of God to Man and World; God present or absent?
- (b) attitude to churchmen
- (c) original sin and predestination *vs.* perfectibility of man
- (d) connection of religion with politics
- (e) Anglicanism, nonconformism, dissent, broad church, Catholicism

3. Politics

- (a) relationship of ruler and subject, authority and liberty

- (b) respective merits of revolution and evolution
- (c) military glory *vs.* commercial eminence
- (d) connection of politics with religion
- (e) relationships between ruler, the people, and the poet

4. Social Attitudes

- (a) what is good taste, what is its relation to manners and wit? to morality?
- (b) what sort of life is lived in London? virtuous, vicious, contented, discontented, hard, easy, lazy, healthy, unhealthy? the values of urbane life?
- (c) the village, the country house, the country estate (see b. above)
- (d) what is a plain dealer? what is his relation to a gentleman?
- (e) what is a virtuoso or scholar, what is his relation to a gentleman?
- (f) what is a gentleman?
- (g) how should a gentleman conduct himself, how should he be educated—theoretically or practically?
- (h) how should a lady be educated, how conduct herself?
- (i) what interest is taken in artisan and servant classes? how are they represented, how catered to?
- (j) the place of crime and criminals in literature
- (k) relationship of present to past society
- (l) what interest in death and graves?
- (m) what views of marriage? easy? difficult? how achieved?
- (n) development of family ideology, *bourgeois* values

5. Country

- (a) how described: wild or ordered; detailed or generalized?

- (b) what relationship between poet and setting?
- (c) what relationship between description and reflection? moralizing?
- (d) what relationship between country and town?

6. Science

- (a) practical or pure?
- (b) satire of science
- (c) physicians, surgeons, apothecaries
- (d) telescopes and optics
- (e) images of disease and medicine
- (f) new interest in symptoms and diseases
- (g) astronomy and astrology

7. Classics

- (a) translation, quotation, allusion, reverence for classics
- (b) ancients *vs.* moderns
- (c) Augustan Age (Augustus, Horace, Virgil)
- (d) significance for education and life of gentleman: place of rhetoric
- (e) comparison with Gothic

8. French Literature and Life

- (a) translation, quotation, allusion
- (b) attitude toward French manners
- (c) French travel and the gentleman
- (d) French neoclassical critical theory

9. Authors and Readers

- (a) what attitudes to reader, what is its significance for form and meaning?
- (b) any individual/s significantly addressed in the work?

(c) appeal to public or private side of experience?

10. Writer's Role

(a) man of letters

(b) honest man

(c) satirist

(d) social educator

(e) solitary poet

(f) inspired bard

11. Satire

(a) what aim, how achieved?

(b) direct, indirect; declamatory, ironic

(c) general or particular; vices or men; types or individuals?

(d) urbane or savage, mocking or pessimistic?

(e) narrative or otherwise?

(f) how does author establish his authority?

12. Novel

(a) what relation of author to story or reader?

(b) what pattern of events? e.g. obscurity to prosperity?

(c) what interest in character: psychological or exemplary?

(d) what social concerns, attitude to life, moral admonition?

(e) journey as organizing device?

(f) natural or conventional dialogue and description?

(g) landscape as symbolic of society, the good man, etc.

13. Drama

- (a) experience of characters classified or individualized?
- (b) what recurrent character types?
- (c) what sense of theatrical event, audience, theater-going?
- (d) emphasis on psychology or political, social or intellectual debate?

14. Critical Theory

- (a) rules, decorum, ancient practice, order, regularity, whole and parts
- (b) sublimity, grace beyond art, inspiration, original genius, bard
- (c) relationship between “literature,” “poetry,” and “society”

15. Miscellaneous

- (a) images and analogies from art and architecture
- (b) place of bawdy in poems, plays, novels
- (c) prose style: plain, loose, periodic—social significance
- (d) prosody: heroic and octosyllabic couplets, Miltonic blank verse, Ode, sonnet