

# Chapter 13: Literature, Art, and Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

*During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many Western European writers and artists were inspired by the literary and artistic achievements of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and sought to pattern their work on classical models. Some artists, architects, and musicians, however, rebelled against the strict rules of classicism and developed a style known as baroque.*

*Both classicism and baroque were more immediately derived from the traditions of the Renaissance and disdained the cultural achievements of the Middle Ages. Although inspired by classical models, baroque did not accept classicism's insistence on restraint, order, harmony, and balance.*

## Seventeenth-Century French Literature

The seventeenth century was the classical period of French literature, sometimes called the Augustan period.

### Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) and Jean Racine (1639-1699)

The classical tradition was reflected in the work of Corneille and Racine, who found inspiration in the heroes and heroines of ancient history and literature and wrote tragic dramas on the model of ancient Greek tragedy. Among Corneille's best-known works is *Le Cid* (1637), based on the legends of the medieval Spanish hero.

Focusing his attention on the problem of passion, especially in women, Racine's tragedies include *Andromaque* (1667), *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1674), and *Phèdre* (1677).

### Molière (1622-1673)

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, better known as Molière (1622-1673), wrote comedy and satire, and his work was less strictly governed by the rules of classicism. Molière delighted in exposing society's hypocrisies and follies. His many plays include *Le Tartuffe* (1644), *Le Misanthrope* (1666), *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), and *Les Femmes Savantes* (1672).

### Madame de Sévigné (1626-1696) and the Duke of Saint-Simon (1675-1755)

Other important French writers of the period include Madame de Sevigne, who wrote more than 1,500 letters describing Paris society and life at her home in the Brittany countryside, and the Duke of Saint-Simon, who lived at

the court of King Louis XIV and wrote memoirs covering the years 1694 to 1723.

## Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century English Literature

### John Milton (1608-1674)

The Puritan poet John Milton was seventeenth-century England's greatest literary figure. His most famous work, the epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), is based on the biblical tradition of Satan's revolt against God and the fall of Adam and Eve. *Paradise Regained* (1671), another poem in blank verse, tells of Jesus in the wilderness, overcoming the temptations of Satan.

### John Dryden (1631-1700) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

The later English writers, Dryden and Pope, were, like Milton, thoroughly familiar with ancient Greek and Roman literature. A poet, dramatist, and critic, Dryden's best-known plays include the comedy *Marriage à la Mode* (1672) and *All for Love* (1677), a retelling of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Pope is generally recognized as England's greatest eighteenth-century poet. He is known for his translations into English of Homer's *Iliad* (1720) and *Odyssey* (1725-26), as well as for his original works. *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) is a mock-heroic poem poking fun at the fashionable society of the time. In a more serious vein, his *Essay on Criticism* (1711), written in heroic couplets, sets forth critical standards and tastes, while his *Essay on Man* (1734) is a summary, in poetic form, of eighteenth-century philosophical ideas.

### Daniel Defoe (1659-1731)

England also produced several noted novelists. Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which some regard as the first true novel in English. *Robinson Crusoe* is the story of a man who meets the challenge of surviving on a desert island while maintaining his human integrity.

Another novel, *Moll Flanders* (1722), is the tale of a London prostitute and thief.

### Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

The Irish-born Swift is best known for *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), a biting political and social satire. Written in four parts, it is the story of Lemuel Gulliver's journey to

Lilliput, a land of tiny inhabitants whose small size makes their pompous activities especially ridiculous, and to other mythical lands. Above all, *Gulliver's Travels* expresses Swift's disdain for his fellow human beings.

### Samuel Richardson (1689-1761)

Richardson wrote the two-volume novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), the tale of a virtuous household servant who escapes the lecherous advances of her employer's son. He later wrote two additional volumes, as well as a novel in seven volumes, *Clarissa Harlowe* (1747-1748), the tragic story of a young woman who runs off with her seducer. An immensely popular writer in his own time, Richardson's novels are regarded today as excessively sentimental.

### Henry Fielding (1707-1754)

A novelist and dramatist, Fielding is best known for *Tom Jones* (1749), a cheerful and often bawdy account of the wild adventures of its foundling hero.

### Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816)

Sheridan, the manager of London's famed Drury Lane Theatre, wrote witty comedies, including *The Rivals* (1775), featuring the character of Mrs. Malaprop, and *The School for Scandal* (1777).

## The Baroque Style

During the seventeenth century, European artists and architects developed a style known as baroque. While it was inspired by classical models and represented an outgrowth of the Renaissance style, baroque was more exuberant and flamboyant. The baroque style developed in the context of the Catholic Reformation and served as a symbol of the revived vigor and dynamism of the Roman Catholic Church.

### Churches

Baroque buildings had a relatively simple exterior, but the interiors were elaborately decorated with dramatic paintings and sculpture. One of the first great baroque churches was the church of the Gesù (Jesus) in Rome, the mother church of the Society of Jesus. Outside Italy, many great baroque churches were built in Austria, Bohemia, southern Germany, and the Catholic cantons of Switzerland.

Baroque also had an impact on Protestant lands. Most notably, the English architect Christopher Wren (1632-1723) designed the new St. Paul's Cathedral (1675-1710) and a number of other churches in London.

### Secular Architecture

Secular buildings were also constructed in the baroque style, among them King Louis XIV's great palace at

Versailles. In 1715, Peter the Great of Russia began the construction of his baroque summer palace at Peterhof (Petrodvorets), located only a few miles from his new capital of St. Petersburg.

### Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680)

Bernini was among the greatest of the baroque architects and sculptors. In 1629, he became the architect of St. Peter's basilica in Rome, designing the bronze canopy (baldachin) above the main altar and the great colonnade in the piazza. Bernini is also known for his dramatic statue of *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*.

## The Rococo Style

During the eighteenth century, the baroque style gradually gave way to the style known as rococo. Compared with baroque, rococo is lighter and even more ornate. Many great rococo churches were built in Austria and southern Germany. Among secular buildings, Maria Theresa's Schönbrunn palace in Vienna and Frederick the Great's Sans Souci palace at Potsdam outside Berlin are noted examples of rococo architecture.

The Venetian Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770) was one of the most outstanding rococo painters. He decorated the interiors of a number of churches and palaces in northern Italy and the Residenz Palace in Würzburg in southern Germany.

## Flemish Painting

Two Flemish painters, Peter Paul Rubens and his pupil, Anthony Van Dyck, are ranked among the major baroque artists. They presented classical themes, especially drawn from mythology, with a dramatic use of color. Both Rubens and Van Dyck are known for their portraits of aristocrats and rulers.

### Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)

After studying in Italy, Rubens returned to his native Antwerp in 1608. In addition to his paintings based on mythology and portraits, the prolific Rubens is known for his religious paintings, landscapes, paintings of animals, and genre paintings (scenes of everyday life). His first major works, painted in Antwerp, include *The Raising of the Cross* and *Descent From the Cross*.

### Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641)

Like his teacher, Van Dyck studied in Italy. He worked for a time in England under the patronage of King James I and returned in 1632 to become court painter to King Charles I. In addition to his portraits, Van Dyck is known for his religious paintings.

## Dutch Painting

While Flemish painters specialized in portraits of royalty and aristocracy, Dutch artists more often painted portraits of wealthy burghers, reflecting the differences in the nature of the two societies.

### Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669)

Rembrandt is universally regarded as the greatest European painter of the seventeenth century. Working in Amsterdam, he became popular for his group and individual portraits, especially of the prosperous Dutch bourgeoisie. His major works include *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (1632) and *The Nightwatch* (1642). In addition to his portraits, Rembrandt is noted for his paintings inspired by the Bible. Over the course of his career, Rembrandt painted almost one hundred self-portraits.

### Frans Hals (c. 1580-1666)

Hals is known both for his individual and group portraits and his genre paintings. He spent most of his life in Haarlem.

## French Painting

### Nicolas Poussin (1596-1665)

Poussin was the leading French painter of the seventeenth century. His style evolved from baroque to become a major expression of French classicism. He is known for paintings based on classical themes, landscapes, and religious paintings.

### Antoine Watteau (1684-1721)

The Flemish-born Watteau settled in Paris, where he won a reputation as a leading rococo artist, painting delicate fantasies in pastel tones.

### François Boucher (1703-1770)

A rococo painter, influenced by Watteau, Boucher painted mainly scenes from classical mythology, pastoral scenes, and nudes. Boucher served as director both of the Gobelins tapestry factory and the French Academy.

### Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806)

A student of Boucher, Fragonard became a popular court painter of portraits and landscapes.

## Spanish Painting

### Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)

In 1624, at the age of twenty-five, Velázquez became the court painter to King Philip IV of Spain. He is known for his portraits of members of the royal family and important court. personages, as well as of dwarfs and buffoons.

## Bartolomé Esteban Murillo

### (c. 1617-1682)

Murillo was a painter of portraits and religious subjects who spent most of his life in his native Seville. His works include a well-known series of paintings on the history of the Franciscans.

## English Painting

The eighteenth century was the great age of English portraiture.

### Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)

Reynolds produced over 2,000 historical paintings and portraits. In 1768, he became the first president of the Royal Academy.

### Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

Gainsborough painted both portraits and landscapes. One of his most famous works is the *Blue Boy*. A founding member of the Royal Academy, Gainsborough was a successful rival of Reynolds for commissions and royal favor.

## Music

### Opera

The emphasis of baroque on the dramatic helped promote the development of opera, which brought together the talents of singers, instrumentalists, dramatists, and painters to create a unified whole.

#### Monteverdi

One of the first major operatic composers was Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), who composed the opera *Orfeo* (1607) for his patron, the duke of Mantua. Within a few years operas were being performed in most of Italy's cities.

#### Scarlatti and Lully

Other major operatic composers of the seventeenth century include the Italian Alessandro Scarlatti (c. 1660-1725) and the Italian-born Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687).

Scarlatti wrote over one hundred operas, as well as church music and chamber cantatas. Lully composed many operas and ballets. He became very wealthy from producing his own works after he gained a monopoly of operatic production in France.

### Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and George Frederick Handel (1685-1759)

Bach and Handel were the greatest European composers of the early eighteenth century. Both were born in the German kingdom of Saxony, although Handel lived in London for most of his life.

Known as an organist and a composer, Bach wrote both religious and secular compositions. His most famous works include the *St. John Passion* (1723), the *St. Matthew Passion* (1729), and the *Mass in B Minor* (1733-1738). He wrote over three hundred sacred cantatas. His orchestral compositions include the *Brandenburg Concertos* (1721). Handel wrote close to fifty operas and developed the oratorio, a musical drama performed in concert form. The most famous of his more than thirty oratorios, *The Messiah*, received its first performance in Dublin in 1742. Among his other well-known compositions are the *Water Music* (1717) and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (1749).

## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

During the late eighteenth century, Vienna became a great musical center. Mozart and Haydn were among the Austrian capital's leading composers in the classical style. A child prodigy, Mozart produced more than six hundred compositions in virtually every musical form. He composed forty-one symphonies, over forty concertos, and several operas, including *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *The Magic Flute* (1791). His unfinished Requiem was completed by another composer following his death at the age of thirty-five. A prolific composer, Haydn wrote over eighty string quartets, more than fifty piano sonatas, and over one hundred symphonies, including the *Surprise Symphony* (1791) and the *Clock Symphony* (1794).

*During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European writers, artists, architects, and composers produced works of enduring significance. Their works, whether classical, baroque, or eluding easy classification, reflected the rational spirit of the age and the view of the orderly universe that the Scientific Revolution had produced. They appealed to the post-Renaissance tastes of the upper classes.*