

ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD

SELECTED POETRY AND PROSE

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was not until the 1740s, however, that novels gained sufficient moral respectability and generic stability to make it possible to describe them as a distinct form. Even so, among serious critics novels remained controversial: condemned as trivial or (at worst) destructive of their readers' moral character, and defended by appeal to the relatively narrow terms of traditional literary ethics (the argument that novels support moral ideas by presenting them in the attractive guise of fiction). In her wide-ranging preface to the edition, "The Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing," Barbauld enters an ongoing discourse about the history and social value of the novel. In our notes we indicate some of the points of contact between her and her predecessors. But *The British Novelists* differs from all of them by being an encyclopedic venture that implies both historical perspective and enduring value. The definition of the novel, its evolution from the narrative forms that preceded it, the writers—from the ancients to Barbauld's contemporaries, in Europe and elsewhere—who contributed most significantly to its development and definition: these are the concerns of Barbauld's preface.

Our selections include the full text of Barbauld's introductory essay, a long extract from her preface to Fielding, and the prefaces to Samuel Johnson, Elizabeth Inchbald, Charlotte Smith, Frances Burney, and Ann Radcliffe. We reprint the 1810 texts (1:1-62, 18:xii-xxxii, 26:i-viii, 28:i-iv, 36:i-viii, 38:i-xi, 43:i-viii), corrected by the few verbal revisions Barbauld made for an 1820 edition. (For her commentary on Samuel Richardson, see the extracts from her 1804 "Life" of Richardson; the discussion of *Clarissa* was reprinted verbatim in 1810.) In Appendix D we list the full contents of *The British Novelists*, and, to avoid swelling the already significant number of footnotes to "The Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing," we identify the authors and titles mentioned there.]

On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing

A Collection of Novels has a better chance of giving pleasure than of commanding respect. Books of this description are condemned by the grave, and despised by the fastidious; but their leaves are seldom found unopened, and they occupy the parlour and the dressing-room while productions of higher name are often gathering dust upon the shelf. It might not perhaps be difficult to show that this species of composition is entitled to a higher rank than has been generally assigned it. Fictitious adventures, in one form or other, have made a part of the polite literature of every age and nation. These have been grafted upon the actions of their heroes; they have been interwoven with their mythology; they have been moulded upon the manners of the age,—and, in return, have influenced the manners of the succeeding generation by the sentiments they have infused and the sensibilities they have excited.

Adorned with the embellishments of Poetry, they produce the epic; more concentrated in the story, and exchanging narrative for action, they become dramatic. When allied with some great moral end, as in the *Télémaque* of Fenelon, and Marмонтel's *Belisaire*, they may be termed didactic. They are often made the vehicles of satire, as in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and the *Candide* and *Babouc* of Voltaire. They take a tincture from the learning and politics of the times, and are made use of successfully to attack or recommend the prevailing systems of the day. When the range of this kind of writing is so extensive, and its effects so great, it seems evident that it ought to hold a respectable place among the productions of genius; nor is it easy to say, why the poet, who deals in one kind of fiction, should have so high a place allotted him in the temple of fame; and the romance-writer so low a one as in the general estimation he is confined to. To measure the dignity of a writer by the pleasure he affords his readers is not perhaps using an accurate criterion; but the invention of a story, the choice of proper incidents, the ordonnance of the plan, occasional beauties of description, and above all, the power exercised over the reader's heart by filling it with the successive emotions of love, pity,

joy, anguish, transport, or indignation, together with the grave impressive moral resulting from the whole, imply talents of the highest order, and ought to be appreciated accordingly. A good novel is an epic in prose, with more of character and less (indeed in modern novels nothing) of the supernatural machinery.¹

If we look for the origin of fictitious tales and adventures, we shall be obliged to go to the earliest accounts of the literature of every age and country.² The Eastern nations have always been fond of this species of mental gratification. The East is emphatically the country of invention. The Persians, Arabians, and other nations in that vicinity have been, and still are, in the habit of employing people whose business it is to compose and to relate entertaining stories; and it is surprising how many stories (as Parnell's Hermit³ for instance) which have passed current in verse and prose through a variety of forms, may be traced up to this source. From Persia the taste passed into the soft and luxurious Ionia.⁴ The *Milesian Tales*, written by Aristides of Miletus, at what time is not exactly known, seem to have been a kind of novels. They were translated into Latin during the civil wars of Marius and Sylla.⁵ They consisted of loose love stories, but were very popular among the Romans;

1 Barbauld echoes Henry Fielding who, in the Preface to his novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742), defines the kind of narrative he writes (which he calls a "comic romance") as "a comic Epic-Poem in Prose." "Supernatural machinery" refers to the gods and goddesses who participate in the action of epic narrative in particular.

2 For the broad outlines of the history of the ancient novel or romance, Barbauld is indebted to Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Treatise of Romances and their Original* (1668).

3 Poem by Thomas Parnell, first published by Alexander Pope in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1722), frequently reprinted throughout the eighteenth century. Parnell's immediate source was Henry More's *Divine Dialogues* (1668) which was based on a narrative in the Koran. Other versions appear in *Spectator* no. 237 and Voltaire's *Zadig*. See *Collected Poems of Thomas Parnell*, pp. 527-30.

4 Ancient Hellenic nation comprised of Attica, the Aegean islands and the coast of Asia Minor. Huet notes that the romances of the east spread to Greece and Italy by way of Ionia (*Treatise*, pp. 26-29).

5 That is, around 88 BC when Roman generals Gaius Marius (157-86 BC) and Lucius Cornelius Sylla or Sulla (138-79 BC) vied for power in the Roman republic. Huet notes of Aristides of Miletus: "he lived before the Wars of Marius and Sylla, for Sisenia a Roman Historian of that time translated his *Milesian Fables*" (p. 32). This dating of the translation seems about a decade early, according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. Aristides (2).

and the Parthian general who beat Crassus took occasion, from his finding a copy of them amongst the camp equipage, to reproach that nation with effeminacy, in not being able, even in time of danger, to dispense with such an amusement.¹ From Ionia the taste of romances passed over to the Greeks about the time of Alexander the Great. The *Golden Ass* of Lucian, which is exactly in the manner of the Arabian Tales, is one of the few extant.

In the time of the Greek emperors these compositions were numerous, and had attained a form and a polish which assimilates them to the most regular and sentimental of modern productions. The most perfect of those which are come down to our time is *Theagenes and Chariclea*, a romance or novel, written by Heliodorus bishop of Tricca in Thessaly, who flourished under Arcadius and Honorius.² Though his production was perfectly chaste and virtuous, he was called to account for it by a provincial synod, and ordered to burn his book or resign his bishopric; upon which, with the heroism of an author, he chose the latter. Of this work a new translation was given in 1789; and had this Selection admitted translations, it would have found a place here.³ It is not so much read as it ought to be; and it may not be amiss to inform the customers to circulating libraries,⁴ that they may have the pleasure of reading a genuine novel, and at the same time enjoy the satisfaction of knowing how people wrote in Greek about love, above a thousand years ago. The scene of this work is chiefly laid in Egypt. It opens in

1 Huet recounts an anecdote drawn, no doubt, from Plutarch's "Life of Crassus" concerning Surenra, the commander of the Parthians, who, after the defeat of the Roman army under Marcus Licinius Crassus (115?-53 BC), found the *Milesian Tales* "among the Baggage of *Bosetus*, [and] took occasion ... to insult over and rail at the weakness and effeminate disposition of the Romans, who even during the War could not be without such like diversions" (*Treatise*, p. 32).

2 Roman emperor of the east Arcadius (AD 383-408) and emperor of the west Honorius (AD 395-423). Heliodorus's dates are still a matter of scholarly dispute. Barbauld here seems to be following Huet, who asserts "that he was contemporary of *Arcadius and Honorius*" (*Treatise*, p. 38).

3 This anonymous translation was published in two volumes in London.

4 From the mid-eighteenth century on, the number of circulating libraries in England increased, with novels being the most popular literature borrowed and women readers the most usual patrons.

a striking and picturesque manner. A band of pirates, from a hill that overlooks the Heracleotic mouth of the Nile, see a ship lying at anchor, deserted by its crew; a feast spread on the shore; a number of dead bodies scattered round, indicating a recent skirmish or quarrel at an entertainment: the only living creatures, a most beautiful virgin seated on a rock, weeping over and supporting a young man of an equally distinguished figure, who is wounded and apparently lifeless. These are the hero and the heroine of the piece, and being thus let into the middle of the story, the preceding events are given in narration. The description of the manner of life of the pirates at the mouth of the Nile is curious, and no doubt historical. It shows that, as well then as in Homer's time, piracy was looked upon as a mode of honourable war, and that a captain who treated the women with respect, and took a regular ransom for his captives, and behaved well to his men, did not scruple to rank himself with other military heroes. Indeed it might be difficult to say why he should not. It is a circumstance worth observing, that Tasso has in all probability borrowed a striking circumstance from the Greek romance. *Chariclea* is the daughter of a queen of Ethiopia, exposed by her mother to save her reputation, as, in consequence of the queen, while pregnant, having gazed at a picture of Perseus and Andromeda, her infant was born with a fair complexion. This is the counterpart of the story of Clorinda, in the *Gierusalemme Liberata*, whose mother is surprised with the same phenomenon, occasioned by having had in her chamber a picture of St. George.¹ The discovery is kept back to the end of the piece, and is managed in a striking manner. There is much beautiful description, of which the pomp of heathen sacrifices and processions makes a great part; and the love is at once passionate and chaste.

The pastoral romance of Longus is also extant in the Greek language. It is esteemed elegant, but it would be impossible to chastise it into decency. The Latins, who had less invention, had no writings of this kind, except the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius may be reckoned such. In it is found the beautiful episode of Cupid

¹ Barbauld refers to Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), XII.xxiii-iv; Clorinda, a white-skinned warrior, is the daughter of a black king and queen of Ethiopia.

and Psyche, which has been elegantly modernized by La Fontaine.¹ But romance writing was destined to revive with greater splendour under the Gothic powers,² and it sprung out of the histories of the times, enlarged and exaggerated into fable. Indeed all fictions have probably grown out of real adventures. The actions of heroes would be the most natural subject for recital in a warlike age; a little flattery and a little love of the marvellous would overstep the modesty of truth in the narration. A champion of extraordinary size would be easily magnified into a giant. Tales of magic and enchantment probably took their rise from the awe and wonder with which the vulgar looked upon any instance of superior skill in mechanics or medicine, or acquaintance with any of the hidden properties of nature. The Arabian tales, so well known and so delightful, bear testimony to this. At a fair in Tartary a *magician* appears, who brings various curiosities, the idea of which was probably suggested by inventions they had heard of, which to people totally ignorant of the mechanical powers would appear the effect of enchantment. How easily might the exhibition at Merlin's, or the tricks of Jonas, be made to pass for magic in New Holland or Otaheite!³ Letters and figures were easily turned into talismans by illiterate men, who saw that a great deal was effected by them, and intelligence conveyed from place to place in a manner they could not account for. Medicine has always, in rude ages and countries, been accompanied with charms and superstitious practices, and the charming of serpents in the East is still performed in a way which the Europeans cannot discover. The total separation of scholastic characters from men of the world favoured the belief of magic; and when to these causes are added the religious superstitions

¹ "Fontenelle" in 1810. Although Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757) wrote a play, *Psyché* (1678), Barbauld's 1820 revision indicates that she meant *Les Amours de Psiche et de Cupidon* (1669) by Jean de la Fontaine.

² The kingdoms established in Italy by the Goths after their conquest of Rome.

³ Merlin's Mechanical Museum in London's Hanover Square (established in the 1770s, closed 1808) housed a collection of mechanical devices and toys invented by John Joseph Merlin (d. 1803). The eastern coast of Australia was known as New Holland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Otaheite is another name for Tahiti; Jonas remains unidentified.

of the times, we shall be able to account for much of the marvellous in the first instance. These stories, as well as the historical ones, would be continually embellished, as they passed from hand to hand, till the small mixture of truth in them was scarcely discoverable.

The first Gothic romances appeared under the venerable guise of history. Arthur and the knights of the round table, Charlemagne¹ and his peers, were their favourite heroes. The extended empire of Charlemagne and his conquests naturally offered themselves as subjects for recital; but it seems extraordinary that Arthur, a British prince, the scene of whose exploits was in Wales, a country little known to the rest of Europe, and who was continually struggling against ill-fortune, should have been so great a favourite upon the continent. Perhaps, however, the comparative obscurity of his situation might favour the genius of the composition, and the intercourse between Wales and Brittany would contribute to diffuse and exaggerate the stories of his exploits. In fact, every song and record relating to this hero was kept with the greatest care in Brittany, and, together with a chronicle deducing Prince Arthur from Priam king of Troy, was brought to England about the year 1100, by Walter Mapes archdeacon of Oxford, when he returned from the continent through that province.² This medley of historical songs, traditions, and invention, was put into Latin by Geoffry of Monmouth, with many additions of his own, and from Latin translated into French in the year 1115, under the title of *Brut d'Angleterre*. It is full of the grossest anachronisms. *Merlin*, the enchanter, is a principal character in it. He opposes his Christian magic to the Arabian sorcerers. About the same time appeared a similar history of *Charlemagne*. Two expeditions of his were particularly celebrated; his conversion of the Saxons by force of arms, and his expedition into Spain against the Sara-

1 Charles I or Charles the Great, Frankish King (768-814) and Emperor of the West (800-814).

2 Walter Mapes or Map (fl. 1200). His authorship of Arthurian materials is a persistent tradition, a probable truth, but an undocumented and probably undocumentable fact (*DNB*, s.v. Map, Walter). Barbauld's sentence follows almost verbatim John Moore's account of Arthurian legend in his 1797 "View of the Commencement and Progress of Romance."

cens; in returning from which he met with the defeat of Roncevaux, in which was slain the celebrated *Roland*. This was written in Latin by a monk, who published it under the name of Archbishop Turpin, a cotemporary of Charlemagne, in order to give it credit. These two works were translated into most of the languages of Europe, and became the groundwork of numberless others, each more wonderful than the former, and each containing a sufficient number of giants, castles and dragons, beautiful damsels and valiant princes, with a great deal of religious zeal, and very little morality. *Amadis de Gaul* was one of the most famous of this class. Its origin is disputed between France and Spain. There is a great deal of fighting in it, much of the marvellous, and very little of sentiment. It has been given lately to the public in an elegant English dress by Mr. Southey;¹ but notwithstanding he has considerably abridged its tediousness, a sufficiency of that ingredient remains to make it rather a task to go through a work which was once so great a favourite. *Palmerin of England*, *Don Belianis of Greece*, and the others which make up the catalogue of Don Quixote's library, are of this stamp.²

Richard Coeur de Lion and his exploits were greatly to the taste of the early romance writers. The Crusades kindled a taste for romantic adventure; the establishment of the Saracens in Spain had occasioned a large importation of genii and enchantments, and Moorish magnificence was grafted upon the tales of the Gothic chivalry. Of these heroic romances, the Troubadours were in France the chief composers: they began to flourish about the end of the tenth century. They by degrees mingled a taste for gallantry and romantic love with the adventures of heroes, and they gave to that passion an importance and a refinement which it had never possessed among the ancients. It was a compound of devotion, metaphysics, Platonism, and

1 Robert Southey's translation of *Amadis of Gaul* was published in four volumes in 1803. It was reviewed with great enthusiasm in the *Monthly Mirror* (16 November 1803) and favorably by Walter Scott in the *Edinburgh Review* (3 October 1803).

2 Other romances in the library of the gentleman of La Mancha include *Olivante de Laura* (1564), *Amadis de Grecia* (1530), and the *Jardin de Flores* (1570). The library from which Don Quixote fashioned his sense of reality is inventoried by a priest and a barber in chapter 6 of part 1 of Cervantes's novel.

chivalry, making altogether such a mixture as the world had never seen before. There is something extremely mysterious in the manner in which ladies of rank allowed themselves to be addressed by these poetical lovers; sometimes no doubt a real passion was produced, and some instances there are of its having had tragical consequences: but in general it may be suspected that the addresses of the Troubadours and other poets were rather a tribute paid to rank than to beauty; and that it was customary for young men of parts, who had their fortune to make, to attach themselves to a patroness, of whom they made a kind of idol, sometimes in the hopes of rising by her means, sometimes merely as a subject for their wit.¹ The manner in which Queen Elizabeth allowed herself to be addressed by her courtiers, the dedications which were in fashion in Dryden's time, the letters of Voiture, and the general strain of poetry of Waller and Cowley, may serve to prove that there may be a great deal of gallantry without any passion.² It is evident that, while these romance writers worshipped their mistress as a distant star, they did not disdain to warm themselves by nearer and warmer fires; for the species of love or rather adoration they professed did not at all prevent them from forming connexions with more accessible fair ones. Of all the countries on the continent, France and Spain had the greatest number of these chivalrous romances. In Italy the genius of the nation and the facility of versification led them to make poetry the vehicle of this kind of entertainment. The Cantos of Boiardo and Ariosto are romances in verse.

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- 1 Barbauld refers here to the conventions of courtly love—a late medieval conventionalized code of address and behavior between a man and a lady whom he idealized to the point of worship.
 - 2 References to sixteenth and seventeenth-century echoes of the courtly love tradition. Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) was celebrated and idealized by Edmund Spenser, Sir Walter Raleigh and William Shakespeare, among others. Dedications to printed poems and plays in John Dryden's time (the late seventeenth century) often contained fulsome praise of noblewomen. The letters of Vincent Voiture (1597–1648) published after his death, contained many sophisticated, eloquent passages on female beauty. Edmund Waller (1606–87) praised in verse his "Sacharissa" (Lady Dorothy Sidney) and others. Abraham Cowley (1618–67) published a collection of love poems under the title *The Mistress* in 1647.

In the mean time Europe settled into a state of comparative tranquillity: castles and knights and adventures of distressed damsels ceased to be the topics of the day, and romances founded upon them had begun to be insipid when the immortal satire of Cervantes drove them off the field, and they have never since been able to rally their forces.¹ The first work of entertainment of a different kind which was published in France (for the *Pantagruel* of Rabelais is rather a piece of licentious satire than a romance) was the *Astrea* of M. d'Urfé. It is a pastoral romance, and became so exceedingly popular, that the belles and beaux of that country assumed the airs and language of shepherds and shepherdesses. A Celadon (the hero of the piece) became a familiar appellation for a languishing lover, and men of gallantry were seen with a crook in their hands, leading a tame lamb about the streets of Paris. The celebrity of this work was in great measure owing to its being strongly seasoned with allusions to the intrigues of the court of Henry the Fourth, in whose reign it was written. The volumes of *Astrea* are never opened in the present day but as a curiosity; to read them through would be a heavy task indeed. There is in the machinery a strange mixture of wood nymphs and druids. The work is full of anachronisms, but the time is supposed to be in the reign of Pharamond or his successors.² The tale begins with the lover, who is under the displeasure of his mistress, throwing himself into the water, where he narrowly escapes drowning at the very outset of the piece. We find here the *fountain of love*, in which if a man looks, he sees, if he is beloved, the face of his mistress; but if not, he is presented with the countenance of his rival: long languishing speeches and little adventures of intrigue fill up the story. It is interspersed with little pieces of poetry, very tolerable for the time, but highly complimentary. One of them turns upon the incident of the poet's mistress having

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- 1 This view of the impact of *Don Quixote* on literary taste was traditional in "progress" histories of literature; James Beattie, for example, claims that Cervantes "brought about a great revolution in the manners and literature of Europe, by banishing the wild dreams of chivalry, and reviving a taste for the simplicity of nature" ("On Fable," p. 94).
 - 2 According to Arthurian legend, Pharamond, a knight of the Round Table, was the first king of France, reigning in the early fifth century.

burnt her cheek with her curling-iron; on which he takes occasion to say, "that the fire of her eyes caused the mischief." This work was however found so interesting by M. Huet, the grave bishop of Avranches, that when he read it along with his sisters, he was often obliged (as he tells us) to lay the book down, that he and they might give free vent to their tears.¹

Though Cervantes had laid to rest the giants and enchanters, a new style of fictitious writing was introduced, not less remote from nature, in the romances *de longue haleine*,² which originated in France, and of which Calpréde and Mad. Scudery were the most distinguished authors. The principle of these was high honour, impregnable chastity, a constancy unshaken by time or accident, and a species of love so exalted and refined, that it bore little resemblance to a natural passion. These, in the construction of the story, came nearer to real life than the former had done. The adventures were marvellous, but not impossible. The heroes and heroines were taken from ancient history, but without any resemblance to the personages whose names they bore. The manners therefore and passions referred to an ideal world, the creation of the writer; but the situations were often striking, and the sentiments always noble. It is a curious circumstance that Rousseau, who tells us that his childhood was conversant in these romances, (a course of reading which no doubt fed and inflamed his fine imagination) has borrowed from them an affecting incident in his *Nouvelle Héloïse*.³ St. Preux, when his mistress lies ill of the small-pox, glides into the room, approaches the bed in order to imbibe the danger, and retires without speaking. Julie, when recovered, is impressed with a confused idea of having seen him, but whether in a dream, a vision, or a reality, she cannot determine. This striking circumstance is taken from the now almost forgotten *Cassandra* of Scudery. The complimentary language of these productions seems to have influenced the

1 Huet, *Memoirs* (1718, translated by John Aikin, 1810), 2:53.

2 Literally, "of long wind or breath."

3 Rousseau notes in Book 1 of his *Confessions* (1781-88) that his earliest reading consisted of novels from his father's library. The following incident, adapted from Madame Scudery, occurs in volume 2 of *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761).

intercourse of common life, at least in the provinces, for Boileau introduces in his satires—

*Deux nobles campagnards, grands lecteurs de romans,
Qui m'ont dit tout Cyrus dans leurs longs compliments.*¹

The same author made a more direct attack upon these productions in a dialogue entitled *Les Héros de Roman*, a humorous little piece, in which he ridiculed these as Cervantes had done the others, and drove them off the stage.²

Heroic sentiment and refined feeling, as expressed in romances and plays, were at their height about this time in France; and while the story and adventures were taken from the really chivalrous ages, it is amusing to observe how the rough manners of those times are softened and polished to meet the ideas of a more refined age. A curious instance of this occurs in Corneille's well-known play of the *Cid*.³ *Chimene*, having lost her father by the hand of her lover, not only breaks off the connexion, but throws herself at the feet of the king to entreat him to avenge her by putting *Rodrigues* to death: "Sire, vengeance!" But in the genuine chronicle of the *Cid*, with which curious and entertaining work Mr. Southey has lately obliged the public, the previous incidents of the combat are nearly the same, and *Ximena* in like manner throws herself at the feet of the king; but to beg what?—not vengeance upon the murderer of her father, but that the king would be pleased to give her *Rodrigues* for a husband, to whom moreover she is not supposed to have had any previous attachment; her request seems to proceed from the simple idea that *Rodrigues*, by killing her father, having deprived her of one protector, it was but reasonable that he should give her another.

1 Boileau, "Satire III," ll. 43-44. Two country gentlemen, avid readers of novels, who recited to me the whole of the *Cyrus* in their drawn-out compliments. (tr. Francis Assaf). Boileau was adamantly against the reading of novels, including Mme. de Scudery's *Le Grand Cyrus*. We suspect that Barbauld picked up this reference from her brother's note 24 to his translation (1810) of Huet's *Memoirs*.

2 The full title is *Dialogue des héros de roman*, composed c. 1666.

3 *Le Cid* (1637) by Pierre Corneille (1606-84), a tragicomedy set in medieval Spain. The action described takes place in Act 4 scene 5.

Rude times are fruitful of striking adventures; polished times must render them pleasing.—The ponderous volumes of the romance writers being laid upon the shelf, a closer imitation of nature began to be called for; not but that, from the earliest times, there had been stories taken from, or imitating, real life. The *Decameron* of Boccaccio (a storehouse of tales, and a standard of the language in which it is written), the *Cent Nouvelles* of the Queen of Navarre, *Contes et Fabliaux*¹ without number, may be considered as novels of a lighter texture: they abounded with adventure, generally of the humorous, often of the licentious kind, and indeed were mostly founded on intrigue, but the nobler passions were seldom touched. The *Roman Comique* of Scarron is a regular piece of its kind. Its subject is the adventures of a set of strolling players. Comic humour it certainly possesses, but the humour is very coarse and the incidents mostly low. Smollet seems to have formed himself very much upon this model.—But the *Zaide* and the *Princesse de Cleves* of Madame de la Fayette are esteemed to be the first which approach the modern novel of the serious kind, the latter especially. Voltaire says of them, that they were “*les premiers romans ou l'on vit les moeurs des honnêtes gens, et des aventures naturelles décrites avec grace. Avant elle on écrivoit d'un stile empoulé des choses peu vraisemblables.*”² “They were the first novels which gave the manners of cultivated life and natural incidents related with elegance. Before the time of this lady, the style of these productions was affectedly turgid, and the adventures out of nature.” The modesty of Mad. de la Fayette led her to shelter her productions, on their first publication, under the name of Segrais, her friend, under whose revision they had passed.³ Le Sage in his *Gil Blas*, a work of infinite entertainment though of dubi-

1 We believe Barbauld refers to no specific work here, just stories and fables in general, though the reference could allude to La Fontaine's often expanded *Contes et Nouvelles* (1664–74), poetic versions of stories by Boccaccio, Rabelais and Ariosto.

2 *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, “Catalogue des Écrivains.” s.v. LaFayette (in Voltaire's *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1785–89).

3 Jean Regnaud de Segrais (1624–1701) enjoyed a 20-year collaboration with the Duchesse de Montpensier. Their works are published under his name. Segrais had a similar relationship with Madame de Lafayette; *Zayde* (1670) was published under his name, though her authorship is assumed.

ous morality, has given us pictures of more familiar life, abounding in character and incident. The scene is laid in Spain, in which country he had travelled, and great part of it is imitated from the adventures of *Don Gusman d'Alvarache*; for Spain, though her energies have so long lain torpid, was earlier visited by polite literature than any country of Europe, Italy excepted. Her authors abounded in invention, so that the plots of plays and groundwork of novels were very frequently drawn from their productions. Cervantes himself, besides his *Don Quixote*, which has been translated and imitated in every country, wrote several little tales and novels, some of which he introduced into that work, for he only banished one species of fiction to introduce another. The French improved upon their masters. There is not perhaps a more amusing book than *Gil Blas*; it abounds in traits of exquisite humour and lessons of life, which, though not always pure, are many of them useful.¹ In this work of Le Sage, like some of Smollet's, the hero of the piece excites little interest, and it rather exhibits a series of separate adventures, slightly linked together, than a chain of events concurring in one plan to the production of the catastrophe, like the *Tom Jones* of Fielding. The scenes of his *Diable Boiteux* are still more slightly linked together. That, and his *Bachelier de Salamanque*, are of the same stamp with *Gil Blas*, though inferior to it.

Marivaux excelled in a different style. His *Marianne* and *Paisan Parvenu* give a picture of French manners with all their refinement and delicacy of sentiment. He lays open the heart, particularly the female heart, in its inmost folds and recesses; its little vanities and affectations as well as its finer feelings. He abounds in wit, but it is of a refined kind, and requires thought in the reader to enter into it. He has also much humour, and describes comic scenes and characters amongst the lower and middle ranks with a great deal of the comic effect, but without the coarseness, of Fielding. He eluded the difficulty of winding up a story by leaving both his pieces unfinished. Marivaux was

¹ On *Gil Blas*, Barbauld agrees with James Beattie's assessment (“On Fable,” p. 107), and on Marivaux (below), she concurs with John Moore's (“View of the Commencement and Progress of Romance,” pp. 63–64).

contemporary with our Richardson: his style is found fault with by some French critics.¹ From his time, novels of all kinds have made a large and attractive portion of French literature.

At the head of writers of this class stands the seductive, the passionate Rousseau,—the most eloquent writer in the most eloquent modern language: whether his glowing pencil paints the strong emotions of passion, or the enchanting scenery of nature in his own romantic country, or his peculiar cast of moral sentiment,—a charm is spread over every part of the work, which scarcely leaves the judgement free to condemn what in it is dangerous or reprehensible. His are truly the “Thoughts that breathe and words that burn.”² He has hardly any thing of story; he has but few figures upon his canvass; he wants them not; his characters are drawn more from a creative imagination than from real life, and we wonder that what has so little to do with nature should have so much to do with the heart. Our censure of the tendency of this work will be softened, if we reflect that Rousseau’s aim, as far as he had a moral aim, seems to have been to give a striking example of fidelity in the *married* state, which, it is well known, is little thought of by the French; though they would judge with greatest severity the more pardonable failure of an unmarried woman. But Rousseau has not reflected that *Julie* ought to have considered herself as indissolubly united to *St. Preux*; her marriage with another was the infidelity.³ Rousseau’s great rival in fame, Voltaire, has written many light pieces of fiction which can scarcely be called novels. They abound in wit and shrewdness, but they are all composed to subserve his particular views, and to attack systems which he assailed in every kind of way. His *Candide* has much strong painting of the miseries and vices which abound in this world, and is levelled against the only system which can console the mind under the view of them. In *L’Ingénu*, beside the wit, he has shown that he could also be

1 Voltaire, among others, found his style abstract, affected and unnatural (*Oxford Companion to French Literature*, s.v. Marivaux).

2 Thomas Gray, “The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode” (1757), l. 110.

3 Julie promised to marry St. Preux but broke the engagement in compliance with her father’s opposition to the union. Barbauld’s objection to this “infidelity” agrees with Clara Reeve’s in *The Progress of Romance* (1785), 2: 17-18.

pathetic. *Les Lettres Peruviennes*, by Mad. Grafigny, is a most ingenious and charming little piece. *Paul et Virginie*, by that friend of humanity St. Pierre, with the purest sentiment and most beautiful description, is pathetic to a degree that even distresses the feelings. *La Chaumière Indienne*, also his, breathes the spirit of universal philanthropy. *Caroline de Lichtfeld* is justly a favourite; but it were impossible to enumerate all the elegant compositions of this class which later times have poured forth. For the expression of sentiment in all its various shades, for the most delicate tact, and a refinement and polish, the fruit of high cultivation, the French writers are superior to those of every other nation.

There is one species of this composition which may be called the *Didactic Romance*, which they have particularly made use of as a vehicle for moral sentiment, and philosophical or political systems and opinions.—Of this nature is the beautiful fiction of *Télémaque*, if it be not rather an Epic in prose; the high merit of which cannot be sufficiently appreciated, unless the reader bears in mind when and to whom it was written; that it dared to attack the fondness for war and the disposition to ostentatious profusion, under a monarch the most vain and ambitious of his age, and to draw, expressly as a pattern for his successor, the picture of a prince, the reverse of him in almost every thing.¹ *Les Voyages de Cyrus*, by Ramsay, and *Sethos*, by the Abbé Terrasson, are of the same kind; the former is rather dry and somewhat mystical: it enters pretty deeply into the mythology of the ancients, and aims at showing that the leading truths of religion,—an original state of happiness, a fall from that state, and the final recovery and happiness of all sentient beings,—are to be found in the mythological systems of all nations. Ramsay was a Scotchman by birth, but had lived long enough in France to write the language like a native; a rare acquisition! The latter, *Sethos*, contains, interwoven in its story, all that we know concerning the customs and manners of the ancient Egyptians; the trial of the dead before they are received

1 A reference to King Louis XIV, who eventually banished from Versailles the author of *Télémaque*, François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651-1715)—though their disagreement stemmed from religious, not political, differences.

to the honours of sepulture, and the various ordeals of the initiation, are very striking. A high and severe tone of morals reigns through the whole, and indeed both this and the last mentioned composition are much too grave for the readers of romance in general. That is not the case with the *Belisaire*, and *Les Incas*, of Marmontel, in which the incidents meant to strike the feelings and the fancy are executed with equal happiness with the preceptive part. Writings like these cooperated powerfully with the graver labours of the encyclopedists in diffusing sentiments of toleration, a spirit of free inquiry, and a desire for equal laws and good government over Europe.¹ Happy, if the mighty impulse had permitted them to stop within the bounds of justice and moderation!² The French language is well calculated for eloquence. The harmony and elegance of French prose, the taste of their writers, and the grace and amenity which they know how to diffuse over every subject, give great effect to compositions of this kind. When *we* aim at eloquence in prose, we are apt to become turgid. Florian, though a feeble writer, is not void of merit. His *Galatée* is from Cervantes; his *Gonsalve de Cordoue* is built upon the history of that hero.

There is one objection to be made to these romances founded on history, which is, that if the personages are not judiciously selected, they are apt to impress false ideas on the mind. *Sethos* is well chosen for a hero in this respect. His name scarcely emerges from the obscurity of half fabulous times, and of a country whose records are wrapped in mystery; for all that is recorded of *Sethos* is, merely that there was such a prince, and that, for some reason or other, he entered into the priesthood. *Cyrus*, though so conspicuous a character, was probably thought a fair one for the purpose, as Xenophon has evidently made use

1 *L'Encyclopédie* (published between 1751 and 1772) offered a survey of the arts and sciences of Europe based on Enlightenment principles that opposed religious and political bigotry by emphasizing philosophy over theology and supporting a reformist social agenda from a rationalist intellectual point of view.

2 A reference to the Reign of Terror. Works such as *L'Encyclopédie* were understood to have provided the intellectual basis of the Revolution, which began with the storming of the Bastille in 1789 and which culminated in the Reign of Terror and the guillotining of the King and Queen in 1793.

of him in the same manner; but it may admit a doubt whether *Belisarius* is equally so; still less, many in more modern times that have been selected for writings of this kind. *Telemachus* is a character already within the precincts of poetry and fable, and may illustrate without any objection the graceful fictions of Fenelon.¹ Our own Prince *Arthur* offers himself with equal advantage for poetry or romance. Where history says little, fiction may say much: events and men that are dimly seen through the obscurity of remote periods and countries, may be illuminated with these false lights; but where history throws her light steady and strong, no artificial colouring should be permitted. Impressions of historical characters very remote from the truth, often remain on the mind from dramatic compositions. If we examine into our ideas of the Henries and Richards of English history, we shall perhaps find that they are as much drawn from Shakespear as from Hume or Rapin.² Some of our English romances are very faulty in this respect. A lady confessed that she could never get over a prejudice against the character of our Elizabeth, arising from her cruelty to two imaginary daughters of Mary Queen of Scots, who never existed but in the pages of a novel. The more art is shown, and much is often shown, in weaving the fictitious circumstances into the texture of the history, the worse is the tendency. A romance of which *Edward the Black Prince* is the hero, by Clara Reeve, has many curious particulars of the customs of that age; but the manners of his court are drawn with such a splendid colouring of heroic virtue, as certainly neither that court nor any other ever deserved.

Among the authors of preceptive novels, Mad. Genlis stands very high. Her *Adele et Théodore* is a system of education, the whole of which is given in action; there is infinite ingenuity in the various illustrative incidents: the whole has an air of the world and of good company; to an English reader it is also

1 Cyrus was King of Persia (ca. 585–529 BC); Belisarius, a Byzantine general (ca. 505–565); and Telemachus, the son of Odysseus.

2 David Hume and Paul de Rapin Thoyras, authors of histories of England, Hume's published 1754–63, Rapin's 1724–36 in French and translated into English shortly thereafter.

interesting as exhibiting traits of Parisian manners, and modern manners, from one who was admitted into the first societies. A number of characters are delineated and sustained with truth and spirit, and the stories of *Cecile* and the *Duchesse de C.* are uncommonly interesting and well told, while the sublime benevolence of M. and Mad. Lagaraye presents a cure for sorrow worthy of a Howard.¹ From the system of Mad. Genlis many useful hints may be gathered, though the English reader will probably find much that differs from his own ideas. A good bishop, as Huet relates, conceiving of love as a most formidable enemy to virtue, entertained the singular project of writing, or procuring to be written, a number of novels framed in such a manner as to inspire an antipathy to this profane passion.² Madame Genlis seems to have had the same idea; and in this manual of education, love is represented as a passion totally unfit to enter the breast of a young female; and in this, and in all her other works, she invariably represents as ending in misery, every connexion which is begun by a mutual inclination. The parent, the mother rather, must dispose of her daughter; the daughter must be passive; and the great happiness of her life, is to be the having in her turn a daughter, in whose affections *she* is to be the prime object. Filial affection is no doubt much exaggerated by this writer. It is not natural that a young woman should make it an indispensable condition of marrying an amiable young man, that he will not separate her from her mother.³ We know in England what filial affection is, and we know it does not rise so high, and we know too that it ought not. There is another objection to Mad. Genlis' system of education, which applies also to Rousseau's *Emile*, which is, that it is

too much founded upon deception. The pupil never sees the real appearance of life and manners: the whole of his education is a series of contrived artificial scenery, produced, as occasion demands, to serve a particular purpose. Few of these scenes would succeed at all; a number of them certainly never would. Indeed Mad. Genlis is not very strict in the point of veracity. A little fibbing is even enjoined to Adele occasionally on particular emergencies.¹ *Les Veillées du Chateau*, by the same author, has great merit.² A number of other productions which have flowed from her pen witness her fertility of invention and astonishing rapidity of execution: their merit is various; all have great elegance of style: but it is observable, that in some of her later novels, she has endeavoured to favour the old order of things, to make almost an object of worship of Louis the Fourteenth, and to revive the reverence for monastic seclusion, which, with so much pathos, she had attacked in her charming story of *Cecile*.³ The *Attala* of M. Chateau Briand is in like manner directed to prop the falling fabric of Romish faith.⁴

The celebrated daughter of Necker is one whose name cannot be passed over in this connexion. Her *Delphine* exhibits great powers: some of the situations are very striking; and the passion of love is expressed in such a variety of turns and changes, and with so many refined delicacies of sentiment, that it is surprising how any language could, and surely no language could but the French, find a sufficient variety of phrases in which to dress her ideas.—Yet this novel cannot be called a pleasing one. One monotonous colour of sadness prevails through the whole, varied indeed with deeper or lighter

1 Caroline-Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (1746–1830), governess to the children of the Duke d'Orleans, educational writer, and novelist. Her novel *Adèle et Théodore, ou Lettres sur l'Éducation* (1782) includes the interpolated tales of Cecile, a young woman who is forced to enter a nunnery and dies of grief; the Duchess of C, imprisoned by a jealous husband; and M. and Mme. de Lagaraye, rich society people who are made serious by the death of their only child, and thereupon—in the spirit of John Howard the philanthropist—turn their castle into a charity hospital.

2 We have not identified this passage in either Huet's *Treatise* or his *Memoirs*.

3 Adele “confessed that she preferred this match to any other,” especially because her fiancé promised never to separate her from her mother (*Adelaide and Theodore*, 3: 241).

1 Many incidents in *Adèle et Théodore* are contrived by the mother to test the children's fortitude or obedience. The mother also counsels lying in order to protect a friend (3: 82).

2 A 1784 collection of instructive tales for children and young persons; the model for John Aikin's *Evenings at Home*.

3 The same criticism is made in reviews of Genlis's novels *The Dutchess of La Valliere* and *Madame de Maintenon* in the *Annual Review* in 1805 and 1807; it is probable that Barbauld wrote these reviews.

4 François-René Chateaubriand (1768–1848), whose novel *Attala* was published as part of his *Génie du Christianisme* (1802). Barbauld reviewed *Génie* in the *Annual Review* (1803), criticizing it for encouraging a purely emotional and sentimental faith in Roman Catholicism.

shades, but no where presenting the cheerful hues of contentment and pleasure. A heavier accusation lies against this work from its tendency, on which account it has been said that the author was desired by the present sovereign of France to leave Paris; but we may well suspect that a scrupulous regard to morality had less share than political motives in such a prohibition. *Corinne*, by the same author, is less exceptionable, and has less force. It has some charming descriptions, and a picture of English country manners which may interest our curiosity, though it will not greatly flatter our vanity. Elegant literature has sustained a loss in the recent death of Mad. Cotin. Her *Elizabeth* and *Matilde* have given her a deserved celebrity. The latter is however very enthusiastic¹ and gloomy.

A number of other French writers of this class might have been mentioned, as Mad. Riccoboni, Mad. Elie de Beaumont, the Abbé Prévost, whose *Chevalier de Grioux* though otherwise not commendable, has some very pathetic parts. To these may be added Crebillon, and a number of writers of his class; for it must not be disguised, that besides the more respectable French novels, there are a number of others, which having passed no license of press, were said to be sold *sous le manteau*,² and were not therefore the less read. These are not merely exceptionable, they are totally unfit to enter a house where the morals of young people are esteemed an object. They are generally not coarse in language, less so perhaps than many English ones which aim at humour; but gross sensual pleasure is the very soul of them. The awful frown with which the better part of the English public seem disposed to receive any approaches, either in verse or prose, to the French voluptuousness, does honour to the national character.

The Germans, formerly remarkable for the laborious heaviness and patient research of their literary labours, have, within this last century, cultivated with great success the field of polite literature. Plays, tales, and novels of all kinds, many of them by their most celebrated authors, were at first received with avidity

in this country, and even made the study of their language popular. The tide has turned, and they are now as much depreciated. The *Sorrows of Werter*, by Goethe, was the first of these with which we were familiarized in this country: we received it through the medium of a French translation. It is highly pathetic, but its tendency has been severely, perhaps justly, censured; yet the author might plead that he has given warning of the probable consequences of illicit and uncontrolled passions by the awful catastrophe.¹ It is certain, however, that the impression made is of more importance than the moral deduced; and if Schiller's fine play of *The Robbers*² has had, as we are assured was the case, the effect of leading some well-educated young gentlemen to commit depredations on the public, allured by the splendour of the principal character, we may well suppose that Werter's delirium of passion will not be less seducing. Goethe has written another novel, much esteemed, it is said, by the Germans, which contains, amongst other things, criticisms on the drama. The celebrated Wieland has composed a great number of works of fiction; the scene of most of them is laid in ancient Greece. His powers are great, his invention fertile, but his designs insidious. He and some others of the German writers of philosophical romances have used them as a frame to attack received opinions, both in religion and in morals. Two at least of his performances have been translated, *Agathon* and *Peregrine Proteus*. The former is beautifully written, but its tendency is seductive. The latter has taken for its basis a historical character; its tendency is also obvious. Klinger is an author who deals in the horrid. He subsists on murders and atrocities of all sorts, and introduces devils and evil spirits among his personages; he is said to have powers, but to labour under a total want of taste. In contrast to this writer and those of his class, may be mentioned *The Ghost Seer*, by Schiller, and *The Sorcerer* by another hand. These were written to expose the artifices of the Italian adepts of the school of

1 Superstitious.

2 Secretly, clandestinely.

1 *Werter* ends with its hero's suicide.

2 Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller's sensationally popular first play, produced in 1781.

Cagliostro.¹ It is well known that these were spreading superstition and enthusiasm on the German part of the continent to an alarming degree, and had so worked upon the mind of the late king of Prussia, that he was made to believe he possessed the power of rendering himself invisible, and was wonderfully pleased when one of his courtiers (who, by the way, understood his trade) ran against and jostled him, pretending not to see his Majesty. These have been translated; as also a pleasant and lively satire on Lavater's system of physiognomy,² written by Museum, author of *Popular Tales of the Germans*. The Germans abound in materials for works of the imagination; for they are rich in tales and legends of an impressive kind, which have perhaps amused generation after generation as nursery stories, and lain like ore in the mine, ready for the hand of taste to separate the dross and polish the material: for it is infinitely easier, when a nation has gained cultivation, to polish and methodize than to invent. A very pleasing writer of novels, in the more common acceptance of the term, is Augustus la Fontaine;³ at least he has written some for which he merits that character, though perhaps more that are but indifferent. His *Tableaux de Famille* contains many sweet domestic pictures and touches of nature. It is imitated from *The Vicar of Wakefield*.—The Germans are a very book-making people. It is calculated that twenty thousand authors of that nation live by the exercise of the pen; and in the article of novels it is computed that seven thousand, either original or translated, have been printed by them within the last five-and-twenty years.⁴

One Chinese novel has been translated. It is called *The Pleas-*

- 1 Count Alessandro di Cagliostro (1743–95), an Italian adventurer, alchemist, propagandist and self-promoter. His “miracle cures” and marvelous experiments made him a sensation throughout Europe. Works by Schiller and Goethe in his own time and Strauss later attest to his popularity and influence in Germany.
- 2 Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801), founder of the “science” of phrenology wherein character and intelligence are said to be indicated by the shape of the skull and the expressions of the face.
- 3 In the *Monthly Review* Barbauld had reviewed Fontaine's *Les Querelles de Famille* (1809); later she would review several more of his books.
- 4 “Germany ... contains above 20,000 authors who live by writing. More than seven thousand novels have been published in that country within the last twenty-five years” (*MM*, 8 [Sept. 1799]: 636).

ing History, or the Adventures of Hau Kiou Choan. It is said to be much esteemed, but can only be interesting to an European, as exhibiting something of the manners of that remote and singular country. It chiefly turns upon the stratagems used by the heroine to elude the ardour of her lover, and retard his approaches, till every circumstance of form and ceremony had been complied with. In their most tender assignations the lady is hid behind a curtain, as he is not permitted to see her face; and a female attendant conveys the tender speeches from one to the other; by which, according to our ideas, they would lose much of their pathos. The chief quality the heroine exhibits is cunning, and the adventures are a kind of hide-and-seek between the lovers. In short, *Shuy Ping Sin* to a Chinese may possibly be as great an object of admiration as *Clarissa*, but her accomplishments are not calculated for the meridian of this country.

In England, most of the earlier romances, from the days of Chaucer to James the First,¹ were translations from the Spanish or French. One of the most celebrated of our own growth is Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, dedicated to his sister the Countess of Pembroke. It is a kind of pastoral romance, mingled with adventures of the heroic and chivalrous kind. It has great beauties, particularly in poetic imagery. It is a book which all have heard of, which some few possess, but which nobody reads. The taste of the times seems to have been for ponderous performances. The Duchess of Newcastle was an indefatigable writer in this way. Roger Boyle, earl of Orrery, published, in 1664, a romance called *Parthenissa*. It was in three volumes folio, and unfinished, to which circumstance alone his biographer, Mr. Walpole, attributes its being but little read.² He must have had a capacious idea of the appetite of the readers of those days. There is a romance of later date, in one small volume, by

- 1 From the mid-fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries, that is. In this sentence, and in the characterization of Sidney's *Arcadia* below, Barbauld follows verbatim John Moore's “View of the Commencement,” p. 59.
- 2 Exactly the same comment on Boyle's *Parthenissa*, with the same reference to Horace Walpole's life of Boyle, is made by Clara Reeve (*Progress of Romance*, 1: 74) and John Moore (“View of the Commencement,” p. 59).

the Hon. Robert Boyle—*The Martyrdom of Didymus and Theodora*, a Christian heroic tale. We had pretty early some celebrated political romances. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, Barclay's *Argenis*, and Harrington's *Oceana*, are of this kind: the two former are written in Latin.¹ The *Utopia*, which is meant as a model of a perfect form of civil polity, is chiefly preserved in remembrance at present by having had the same singular fortune with the *Quixote* of Cervantes, of furnishing a new word, which has been adopted into the language as a permanent part of it; for we speak familiarly of an Utopian scheme and a Quixotish expedition. Barclay was a Scotchman by birth; he was introduced at the court of James the First, and was afterwards professor of civil law at Angers; he died at Rome. His *Argenis* is a political allegory, which displays the revolutions and vices of courts; it is not destitute of imagery and elevated sentiment, and displays much learning; and while the allusions it is full of were understood, it was much read, and was translated into various languages, but is at present sunk into oblivion, though a new translation was made not many years since by Mrs. Clara Reeve.² Harrington's *Oceana* is meant as a model of a perfect republic, the constant idol of his imagination. All these, though works of fiction, would greatly disappoint those who should look into them for amusement. Of the lighter species of this kind of writing, *the Novel*, till within half a century we had scarcely any. *The Atalantis* of Mrs. Manley lives only in that line of Pope which seems to promise it immortality:

As long as *Atalantis* shall be read.³

It was, like *Astrea*, filled with fashionable scandal. Mrs. Behn's Novels were licentious; they are also fallen; but it ought not to be forgotten that Southern borrowed from her his affecting

1 Here Barbauld extends Huet's definition of romance. To Huet, "Romances ... have Love for their principal Theme, and meddle not with War or Politicks but by accident" (*Treatise*, p. 6).

2 Reeve's translation of *Argenis* was published under the title of *The Phoenix* in 1772.

3 *The Rape of the Lock*, 3: 164.

story of *Oroonoko*.¹ Mrs. Haywood was a very prolific genius; her earlier novels are in the style of Mrs. Behn's, and Pope has chastised her in his *Dunciad* without mercy or delicacy, but her later works are by no means void of merit.² She wrote *The Invisible Spy*, and *Betsy Thoughtless*, and was the author of *The Female Spectator*.

But till the middle of the last century, theatrical productions and poetry made a far greater part of polite reading than novels, which had attained neither to elegance nor discrimination of character. Some adventures and a love story were all they aimed at. The ladies' library, described in the *Spectator*, contains "*The grand Cyrus*, with a pin stuck in one of the leaves," and "*Clelia*, which opened of itself in the place that describes two lovers in a bower:" but there does not occur either there, or, I believe, in any other part of the work, the name of one English novel, the *Atalantis* only excepted; though plays are often mentioned as a favourite and dangerous part of ladies' reading, and certainly the plays of those times were worse than any novels of the present.³ The first author amongst us who distinguished himself by natural painting, was that truly original genius De Foe. His *Robinson Crusoe* is to this day an *unique* in its kind, and he has made it very interesting without applying to the common resource of love. At length, in the reign of George the Second, Richardson, Fielding, and Smollet, appeared in quick succession; and their success raised such a demand for this kind of entertainment, that it has ever since been furnished from the press, rather as a regular and necessary supply, than as an occasional gratification. Novels have indeed been numerous "as leaves in Vallombrosa."⁴ The indiscriminate

1 Barbauld refers to Thomas Southerne's popular play, *Oroonoko* (1695), the plot of which is adapted from Behn's novel of the same name (1688).

2 Pope's derisive lines are in 2: 157-64. Haywood is the "prize" in the urinating contest between booksellers Osborne and Curl. In her respectful mention of Haywood, Barbauld agrees with Clara Reeve (*Progress of Romance*, 1:121).

3 *Spectator* no. 37 (1711). The list includes "A Book of Novels" by unspecified authors, philosophy, romances and sermons, but, as Barbauld suggests, no English novels besides *The New Atalantis*.

4 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1: 302-303: "Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks / In Vallombrosa."

passion for them, and their bad effects on the female mind, became the object of the satire of Garrick, in a sprightly piece entitled *Polly Honeycomb*.¹ A few deserve to be mentioned, either for their excellence or the singularity of their plan.

The history of *Gaudentio di Lucca*, published in 1725, is the effusion of a fine fancy and a refined understanding; it is attributed to Bishop Berkeley. It gives an account of an imaginary people in the heart of Africa, their manners and customs. They are supposed to be descended from the ancient Egyptians, and to be concealed from all the world by impenetrable deserts. The description of crossing the sands is very striking, and shows much information as well as fancy. It is not written to favour any particular system; the whole is the play of a fine imagination delighting itself with images of perfection and happiness, which it cannot find in any existing form of things. The frame is very well managed; the whole is supposed to be read in manuscript to the fathers of the Inquisition,² and the remarks of the holy office are very much in character. A highly romantic air runs through the whole, but the language is far from elegant.

Another singular publication which appeared in 1756, was *The Memoirs of several Ladies*, by John Bunclé, followed the next year by the *Life of Bunclé*. These volumes are very whimsical, but contain entertainment. The ladies, whose memoirs he professes to give, are all highly beautiful and deeply learned; good Hebrew scholars; and, above all, zealous Unitarians. The author generally finds them in some sequestered dell, among the fells and mountains of Westmoreland, where, after a narrow escape of breaking his neck amongst rocks and precipices, he meets, like a true knight-errant, with one of these adventures. He marries in succession four or five of these prodigies, and the intervals between description and adventure are filled up with learned conversations on abstruse points of divinity. Many of

¹ Not by Garrick but George Colman, the elder. This play begins with the title character reading a novel aloud to herself and ends with her imprudent marriage and her father's lament: "a man might as well turn his Daughter loose in Covent-garden, as trust the cultivation of her mind to a circulating library" (*Polly Honeycombe, a Dramatick Novel of One Act*, p. 44).

² The Roman Catholic judicial body that sought out and banned works containing heretical religious doctrine or ideas.

the descriptions are taken from nature; and, as the book was much read, have possibly contributed to spread that taste for lake and mountain scenery which has since been so prevalent. The author was a clergyman.

A novel universally read at the time was *Chrysal, or The Adventures of a Guinea*. It described real characters and transactions, mostly in high life, under fictitious names; and certainly if a knowledge of the vicious part of the world be a desirable acquisition, *Chrysal* will amply supply it; but many of the scenes are too coarse not to offend a delicate mind, and the generation it describes is past away. *Pompey the Little*, with a similar frame, has less of personality, and is a lively pleasant satire. Its author is unknown.

About fifty years ago a very singular work appeared, somewhat in the guise of a novel, which gave a new impulse to writings of this stamp; namely, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, followed by *The Sentimental Journey*, by the Rev. Mr. Sterne, a clergyman of York. They exhibit much originality, wit, and beautiful strokes of pathos, but a total want of plan or adventure, being made up of conversations and detached incidents. It is the peculiar characteristic of this writer, that he affects the heart, not by long drawn tales of distress, but by light electric touches which thrill the nerves of the reader who possesses a correspondent sensibility of frame. His characters, in like manner, are struck out by a few masterly touches. He resembles those painters who can give expression to a figure by two or three strokes of bold outline, leaving the imagination to fill up the sketch; the feelings are awakened as really by the story of *Le Fevre*, as by the narrative of *Clarissa*. The indelicacies of these volumes are very reprehensible, and indeed in a clergyman scandalous, particularly in the first publication, which however has the richest vein of humour. The two *Shandys*, *Trim*, *Dr. Slop*, are all drawn with a masterly hand. It is one of the merits of Sterne that he has awakened the attention of his readers to the wrongs of the poor negroes, and certainly a great spirit of tenderness and humanity breathes throughout the work. It is rather mortifying to reflect how little the power of expressing these feelings is connected with moral worth; for

Sterne was a man by no means attentive to the happiness of those connected with him; and we are forced to confess that an author may conceive the idea of "brushing away flies without killing them," and yet behave ill in every relation of life.¹

It has lately been said that Sterne has been indebted for much of his wit to *Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy*.² He certainly exhibits a good deal of reading in that and many other books out of the common way, but the wit is in the application, and that is his own. This work gave rise to the vapid effusions of a crowd of sentimentalists, many of whom thought they had seized the spirit of Sterne, because they could copy him in his breaks and asterisks. The taste spread, and for a while, from the pulpit to the playhouse, the reign of sentiment was established. Among the more respectable imitators of Sterne may be reckoned Mr. Mackenzie in his *Man of Feeling* and his *Julia de Roubigné*, and Mr. Pratt in his *Emma Corbett*.

An interesting and singular novel, *The Fool of Quality*, was written by Henry Brooke, a man of genius, the author of *Gustavus Vasa* and many other productions. Many beautiful and pathetic episodical stories might be selected from it, but the story runs out into a strain romantic and improbable beyond the common allowed measure of this kind of writing; so that as a whole it cannot be greatly recommended: but it ought not to be forgotten that the very popular work of *Sandford and Merton* is taken from it. It has not merely given the hint for that publication; but the plan, the contrasted character of the two boys, and many particular incidents are so closely copied, that it will hardly be thought by one who peruses them both together, that Mr. Day has made *quite* sufficient acknowledgement in his

- 1 Barbauld probably refers to the estrangement between Sterne and his mother; she may also be alluding to domestic difficulties between Sterne and his wife that led to their separation. See Arthur Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Early and Middle Years*, pp. 224–26, and *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years*, pp. 172–73. The quotation is not verbatim from *Tristram Shandy* but refers to an incident in vol. II where Uncle Toby releases a fly instead of killing it, for, he says, "this world is surely wide enough to hold both thee and me" (*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, I: 131).
- 2 John Ferriar (1761–1815), a physician, read a paper before the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester on 21 January 1791 in which he asserted that "all the singularities" of Walter Shandy's character were derived from *Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy* (1651) (*Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, p. 285).

preface. Rousseau had about this time awakened the public attention to the preference of natural manners in children, in opposition to the artificial usages of fashionable life; and much of the spirit of *Emile* is seen in this part of the work.¹ The present generation have been much obliged to Mr. Day for separating this portion of the novel from the mass of improbable adventure in which it is involved, clothing it in more elegant language, and giving those additions which have made it so deservedly a favourite in the juvenile library. The religious feelings are often awakened in *The Fool of Quality*, not, however, without a strong tincture of enthusiasm, to which the author was inclined. Indeed, his imagination had at times prevailed over his reason before he wrote it.

A number of novels might be mentioned, which are, or have been, popular, though not of high celebrity. Sarah Fielding, sister to the author of *Tom Jones*, composed several; among which *David Simple* is the most esteemed: she was a woman of good sense and cultivation; and if she did not equal her brother in talent, she did not, like him, lay herself open to moral censure. She translated Xenophon's *Socrates*² and wrote a very pretty book for children, *The Governess, or Female Academy*.

Many tears have been shed by the young and tender-hearted over *Sidney Biddulph*, the production of Mrs. Sheridan, the wife of Mr. Thomas Sheridan the lecturer,³ an ingenious and amiable woman: the sentiments of this work are pure and virtuous, but the author seems to have taken pleasure in heaping distress upon virtue and innocence, merely to prove, what no one will deny, that the best dispositions are not always sufficient to ward off the evils of life. Why is it that women when they write are apt to give a melancholy tinge to their compositions? Is it that they suffer more, and have fewer resources against melancholy? Is it that men, mixing at large in society, have a brisker flow of

- 1 *Emile* (1762) concerns the education of a natural man for life in society. His education is conducted through experience and reflection, not books.
- 2 Specifically, Xenophon's (c. 430–352 BC) *Memorabilia* and *Apologia* of Socrates.
- 3 Thomas Sheridan (1719–88) was an actor and theater manager before becoming a renowned lecturer on the art of elocution. In addition to being the husband of novelist Frances Sheridan, he was the father of playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816).

ideas, and, seeing a greater variety of characters, introduce more of the business and pleasures of life into their productions? Is it that humour is a scarcer product of the mind than sentiment, and more congenial to the stronger powers of man? Is it that women nurse those feelings in secrecy and silence and diversify the expression of them with endless shades of sentiment, which are more transiently felt, and with fewer modifications of delicacy, by the other sex? The remark, if true, has no doubt many exceptions; but the productions of several ladies, both French and English, seem to countenance it.

Callistus, or The Man of Fashion, by Mr. Mulso,¹ is a pathetic story; but it is written entirely for moral effect, and affords little of entertainment. Mr. Graves, an author of a very different cast, is known in this walk by *Columella* and his *Spiritual Quixote*. The latter is a popular work, and possesses some humour; but the humour is coarse, and the satire much too indiscriminately levelled against a society whose doctrines, operating with strong effect upon a large body of the most ignorant and vicious class, must necessarily include in their sweeping net much vice and folly, as well as much of sincere piety and corresponding morals. The design of his *Columella* is less exceptionable. It presents a man educated in polite learning and manners, who, from a fastidious rejection of the common active pursuits of life, rusticates in a country solitude, grows morose and peevish, and concludes with marrying his maid; no unusual consequence of a whimsical and morose singularity, the secret springs of which are, more commonly, a tincture of indolence and pride than superiority of genius. Mr. Graves was brought up originally for physic, but took orders and became rector of Claverton near Bath. He was the author of several publications, both translations and original; he was fond of writing, and published what he entitled his *Senilities* when at the age of near ninety. He died in 1804.—But it is time to retire from the enumeration of these works of fancy, or the reader might be as much startled with the number of heroes and heroines called up around him, as Ulysses was

¹ Thomas Mulso (1721–99), brother of Hester Mulso Chapone and an acquaintance of Barbauld.

with the troops of shades that came flocking about him in the infernal regions.¹

If the end and object of this species of writing be asked, many no doubt will be ready to tell us that its object is,—to call in fancy to the aid of reason, to deceive the mind into embracing truth under the guise of fiction:

*Così a l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
Di soave licor gli orli del vaso,
Succhi amari, ingannato in tanto ei beve,
E da l'inganno suo vita riceve.²*

with such-like reasons equally grave and dignified. For my own part, I scruple not to confess that, when I take up a novel, my end and object is entertainment; and as I suspect that to be the case with most readers, I hesitate not to say that entertainment is their legitimate end and object. To read the productions of wit and genius is a very high pleasure to all persons of taste, and the avidity with which they are read by all such shows sufficiently that they are calculated to answer this end. Reading is the cheapest of pleasures: it is a domestic pleasure. Dramatic exhibitions give a more poignant delight, but they are seldom enjoyed in perfection, and never without expense and trouble. Poetry requires in the reader a certain elevation of mind and a practised ear. It is seldom relished unless a taste be formed for it pretty early. But the humble novel is always ready to enliven the gloom of solitude, to soothe the languor of debility and disease, to win the attention from pain or vexatious occurrences, to take man from himself, (at many seasons the worst company he can be in) and, while the moving picture of life passes before

¹ *Odyssey*, Book XI.

² From Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1575), l.iii: "So we, if children young diseases'd we find, / Anoint with sweets the vessel's foremost parts, / To make them taste the potions sharp we give; / They drink deceiv'd; and so deceiv'd they live" (Fairfax translation). The usual defence of fiction in the Renaissance and eighteenth century was that it imparts moral ideas in attractive guise (like Tasso's sweetened medicine). Barbauld's phrase, "to call in fancy to the aid of reason" echoes Samuel Johnson's in his "Life of Milton" (1779): "Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason" (*Lives of the Poets*, 1:170).

him, to make him forget the subject of his own complaints. It is pleasant to the mind to sport in the boundless regions of possibility;¹ to find relief from the sameness of every-day occurrences by expatiating amidst brighter skies and fairer fields; to exhibit love that is always happy, valour that is always successful; to feed the appetite for wonder by a quick succession of marvellous events; and to distribute, like a ruling providence, rewards and punishments which fall just where they ought to fall.

It is sufficient therefore as an end, that these writings add to the innocent pleasures of life; and if they do no harm, the entertainment they give is a sufficient good. We cut down the tree that bears no fruit, but we ask nothing of a flower beyond its scent and its colour. The unpardonable sin in a novel is dullness: however grave or wise it may be, if its author possesses no powers of amusing, he has no business to write novels; he should employ his pen in some more serious part of literature.

But it is not necessary to rest the credit of these works on amusement alone, since it is certain they have had a very strong effect in infusing principles and moral feelings. It is impossible to deny that the most glowing and impressive sentiments of virtue are to be found in many of these compositions, and have been deeply imbibed by their youthful readers. They awaken a sense of finer feelings than the commerce of ordinary life inspires. Many a young woman has caught from such works as *Clarissa* or *Cecilia*, ideas of delicacy and refinement which were not, perhaps, to be gained in any society she could have access to. Many a maxim of prudence is laid up in the memory from these stores, ready to operate when occasion offers.

The passion of love, the most seductive of all the passions, they certainly paint too high, and represent its influence beyond what it will be found to be in real life; but if they soften the heart they also refine it. They mix with the common² passions of our nature all that is tender in virtuous affection; all

¹ Barbauld recalls Johnson's remark on Milton's imagination in *Paradise Lost*: "Milton's delight was to sport in the wide regions of possibility" (*Lives of the Poets*, 1:177-78).

² common: in 1810, "natural."

that is estimable in high principle and unshaken constancy; all that grace, delicacy, and sentiment can bestow of touching and attractive. Benevolence and sensibility to distress are almost always insisted on in modern works of this kind; and perhaps it is not exaggeration¹ to say, that much of the softness of our present manners, much of that tincture of humanity so conspicuous amidst all our vices, is owing to the bias given by our dramatic writings and fictitious stories. A high regard to female honour, generosity, and a spirit of self-sacrifice, are strongly inculcated. It costs nothing, it is true, to an author to make his hero generous, and very often he is extravagantly so; still, sentiments of this kind serve in some measure to counteract the spirit of the world, where selfish considerations have always more than their due weight. In what discourse from the pulpit are religious feelings more strongly raised than in the prison sermon of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, or some parts of *The Fool of Quality*?

But not only those splendid sentiments with which, when properly presented, our feelings readily take part, and kindle as we read; the more severe and homely virtues of prudence and economy have been enforced in the writings of a Burney and an Edgeworth. Writers of their good sense have observed, that while these compositions cherished even a romantic degree of sensibility, the duties that have less brilliancy to recommend them were neglected. Where can be found a more striking lesson against unfeeling dissipation than the story of the *Harrels*?² Where have order, neatness, industry, sobriety, been recommended with more strength than in the agreeable tales of Miss Edgeworth? If a parent wishes his child to avoid caprice, irregularities of temper, procrastination, coquetry, affectation,—all those faults and blemishes which undermine family happiness, and destroy the every-day comforts of common life,—whence can he derive more impressive morality than from the same source? When works of fancy are thus made subservient to the

¹ exaggeration: in 1810, "too much."

² In Burney's *Cecilia*, the Harrels' fiscal irresponsibility leads Mr. Harrel to commit suicide at Vauxhall Gardens. The grim episode is recounted in chapters 12 and 13 of Book V.

improvement of the rising generation, they certainly stand on a higher ground than mere entertainment, and we revere while we admire.

Some knowledge of the world is also gained by these writings, imperfect indeed, but attained with more ease, and attended with less danger, than by mixing in real life. If the stage is a mirror of life, so is the novel, and perhaps a more accurate one, as less is sacrificed to effect and representation. There are many descriptions of characters in the busy world, which a young woman in the retired scenes of life hardly meets with at all, and many whom it is safer to read of than to meet; and to either sex it must be desirable that the first impressions of fraud, selfishness, profligacy and perfidy should be connected, as in good novels they always will be, with infamy and ruin. At any rate, it is safer to meet with a bad character in the pages of a fictitious story, than in the polluted walks of life; but an author solicitous for the morals of his readers will be sparing in the introduction of such characters.—It is an aphorism of Pope,

Vice is a monster of such frightful mien
As to be hated, needs but to be seen.

But he adds,

But seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.¹

Indeed the former assertion is not true without considerable modifications. If presented in its naked deformity, vice will indeed give disgust; but it may be so surrounded with splendid and engaging qualities, that the disgust is lost in admiration. Besides, though the selfish and mean propensities are radically unlovely, it is not the same with those passions which all have felt, and few are even desirous to resist. To present these to the young mind in the glowing colours of a Rousseau or a Madame de Stael is to awaken and increase sensibilities, which

¹ *Essay on Man*, 2: 217–20.

it is the office of wise restraint to calm and to moderate. Humour covers the disgust which the grosser vices would occasion; passion veils the danger of the more seducing ones.

After all, the effect of novel-reading must depend, as in every other kind of reading, on the choice which is made. If the looser compositions of this sort are excluded, and the sentimental ones chiefly perused, perhaps the danger lies more in fixing the standard of virtue and delicacy too high for real use, than in debasing it. Generosity is carried to such excess as would soon dissipate even a princely fortune; a weak compassion often allows vice to escape with impunity; an overstrained delicacy, or regard to a rash vow, is allowed to mar all the prospects of a long life: dangers are despised, and self is annihilated, to a degree that prudence does not warrant, and virtue is far from requiring. The most generous man living, the most affectionate friend, the most dutiful child, would find his character fall far short of the perfections exhibited in a highly-wrought novel.

Love is a passion particularly exaggerated in novels. It forms the chief interest of, by far, the greater part of them. In order to increase this interest, a false idea is given of the importance of the passion. It occupies the serious hours of life; events all hinge upon it; every thing gives way to its influence, and no length of time wears it out.¹ When a young lady, having imbibed these notions, comes into the world, she finds that this formidable passion acts a very subordinate part on the great theatre of the world; that its vivid sensations are mostly limited to a very early period; and that it is by no means, as the poet sings,

All the colour of remaining life.²

She will find but few minds susceptible of its more delicate

¹ Barbauld argues as Samuel Johnson did in the "Preface" to his edition of Shakespeare (1765): "But love is only one of many passions, and ... has no great influence upon the sum of life" (*Johnson on Shakespeare*, p. 63).

² Matthew Prior, "Solomon or the Vanity of the World. Pleasure, the 2nd Book," l. 235.

influences. Where it is really felt, she will see it continually overcome by duty, by prudence, or merely by a regard for the show and splendour of life; and that in fact it has a very small share in the transactions of the busy world, and is often little consulted even in choosing a partner for life. In civilized life both men and women acquire so early a command over their passions, that the strongest of them are taught to give way to circumstances, and a moderate liking will appear apathy itself, to one accustomed to see the passion painted in its most glowing colours.¹ Least of all will a course of novels prepare a young lady for the neglect and tedium of life which she is perhaps doomed to encounter. If the novels she reads are virtuous, she has learned how to arm herself with proper reserve against the ardour of her lover; she has been instructed how to behave with the utmost propriety when run away with, like *Miss Byron*, or locked up by a cruel parent, like *Clarissa*; but she is not prepared for indifference and neglect. Though young and beautiful, she may see her youth and beauty pass away without conquests, and the monotony of her life will be apt to appear more insipid when contrasted with scenes of perpetual courtship and passion.

It may be added with regard to the knowledge of the world, which, it is allowed, these writings are calculated in some degree to give, that, let them be as well written and with as much attention to real life and manners as they can possibly be, they will in some respects give false ideas, from the very nature of fictitious writing. Every such work is a *whole*, in which the fates and fortunes of the personages are brought to a conclusion, agreeably to the author's own preconceived idea. Every incident in a well written composition is introduced for a certain purpose, and made to forward a certain plan. A sagacious reader is never disappointed in his forebodings. If a prominent circumstance is presented to him, he lays hold on it, and may be

¹ Cf. Clara Reeve: "false expectations are raised.—A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues,—she expects to be addressed in the style of these books, with the language of flattery and adulation.—If a plain man addresses her in rational terms and pays her the greatest of compliments,—that of desiring to spend his life with her,—that is not sufficient, her vanity is disappointed, she expects to meet a Hero in Romance" (*Progress of Romance*, 2:78).

very sure it will introduce some striking event; and if a character has strongly engaged his affections, he need not fear being obliged to withdraw them: the personages never turn out differently from what their first appearance gave him a right to expect; they gradually open, indeed; they may surprise, but they never disappoint him. Even from the elegance of a name he may give a guess at the amenity of the character. But real life is a kind of chance-medley, consisting of many unconnected scenes. The great author of the drama of life has not finished his piece; but the author must finish his; and vice must be punished and virtue rewarded in the compass of a few volumes; and it is a fault in *his* composition if every circumstance does not answer the reasonable expectations of the reader. But in real life our reasonable expectations are often disappointed; many incidents occur which are like "passages that lead to nothing,"¹ and characters occasionally turn out quite different from what our fond expectations have led us to expect.

In short, the reader of a novel forms his expectations from what he supposes passes in the mind of the author, and guesses rightly at his intentions, but would often guess wrong if he were considering the real course of nature. It was very probable, at some periods of his history, that *Gil Blas*, if a real character, would come to be hanged; but the practised novel-reader knows well that no such event can await the hero of the tale. Let us suppose a person speculating on the character of *Tom Jones* as the production of an author, whose business it is pleasingly to interest his readers. He has no doubt but that, in spite of his irregularities and distresses, his history will come to an agreeable termination. He has no doubt but that his parents will be discovered in due time; he has no doubt but that his love for *Sophia* will be rewarded sooner or later with her hand; he has no doubt of the constancy of that young lady, or of their entire happiness after marriage. And why does he foresee all this? Not from the real tendencies of things, but from what he has discovered of the author's intentions. But what would have been the probability in real life? Why, that the parents would

¹ Thomas Gray, "A Long Story," line 8.

either never have been found, or have proved to be persons of no consequence—that *Jones* would pass from one vicious indulgence to another, till his natural good disposition was quite smothered under his irregularities—that *Sophia* would either have married her lover clandestinely, and have been poor and unhappy, or she would have conquered her passion and married some country gentleman with whom she would have lived in moderate happiness, according to the usual routine of married life. But the author would have done very ill so to have constructed his story. If *Booth* had been a real character, it is probable his *Amelia* and her family would not only have been brought to poverty, but left in it; but to the reader it is much more probable that by some means or other they will be rescued from it, and left in possession of all the comforts of life. It is *probable* in *Zeluco* that the detestable husband will some way or other be got rid of; but woe to the young lady, who, when married, should be led, by contemplating the possibility of such an event, to cherish a passion which ought to be entirely relinquished!

Though a great deal of trash is every season poured out upon the public from the English presses, yet in general our novels are not vicious; the food has neither flavour nor nourishment, but at least it is not poisoned. Our national taste and habits are still turned towards domestic life and matrimonial happiness, and the chief harm done by a circulating library is occasioned by the frivolity of its furniture, and the loss of time incurred. Now and then a girl perhaps may be led by them to elope with a coxcomb; or if she is handsome, to expect the homage of a *Sir Harry* or *My lord*, instead of the plain tradesman suitable to her situation in life; but she will not have her mind contaminated with such scenes and ideas as Crébillon, Louvet, and others of that class have published in France.¹

¹ Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon or Crébillon *fils* (1707-77) wrote a number of novels with a variety of themes, but Barbauld here refers to his licentious fiction such as *Lettres de la duchesse de **** (1768) and *Lettres athéniennes* (1771). Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Courvay (1760-97) was the author of *Les amours du chevalier de Faublas* (1787-90) which contained early scenes that Barbauld would consider objectionable, though the ending (wherein Faublas goes mad) is certainly sober enough.

And indeed, notwithstanding the many paltry books of this kind published in the course of every year, it may safely be affirmed that we have more good writers in this walk living at the present time, than at any period since the days of Richardson and Fielding. A very great proportion of these are ladies: and surely it will not be said that either taste or morals have been losers by their taking the pen in hand. The names of D'Arblay, Edgeworth, Inchbald, Radcliffe, and a number more, will vindicate this assertion.

No small proportion of modern novels have been devoted to recommend, or to mark with reprobation, those systems of philosophy or politics which have raised so much ferment of late years. Mr. Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* is of this number: its beauties, and beauties it certainly has, do not make amends for its absurdities. What can be more absurd than to represent a young lady gravely considering, in the disposal of her hand, how she shall promote the greatest possible good of the system? Mr. Holcroft was a man of strong powers, and his novels are by no means without merit, but his satire is often partial, and his representations of life unfair. On the other side may be reckoned *The modern Philosophers*, and the novels of Mrs. West. In the war of systems these light skirmishing troops have been often employed with great effect; and, so long as they are content with fair, general warfare, without taking aim at individuals, are perfectly allowable. We have lately seen the gravest theological discussions presented to the world under the attractive form of a novel, and with a success which seems to show that the interest, even of the generality of readers, is most strongly excited when some serious end is kept in view.¹

It is not the intention in these slight remarks to enumerate those of the present day who have successfully entertained the public; otherwise Mr. Cumberland might be mentioned, that veteran in every field of literature; otherwise a tribute ought to be paid to the peculiarly pathetic powers of Mrs. Opie; nor would it be possible to forget the very striking and original novel of *Caleb Williams*, in which the author, without the assis-

¹ Probably Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), in which morals and doctrines are discussed at length.

tance of any of the common events or feelings on which these stories generally turn, has kept up the curiosity and interest of the reader in the most lively manner; nor his *St. Leon*, the ingenious speculation of a philosophical mind, which is also much out of the common track. It will bear an advantageous comparison with Swift's picture of the *Strulbrugs* in his *Voyage to Laputa*,¹ the tendency of which seems to be to repress the wish of never-ending life in this world: but in fact it does not bear at all upon the question, for no one ever did wish for immortal life without immortal youth to accompany it, the one wish being as easily formed as the other; but *St. Leon* shows, from a variety of striking circumstances, that both together would pall, and that an immortal *human* creature would grow an insulated unhappy being.

With regard to this particular selection, it presents a series of some of the most approved novels, from the first regular productions of the kind to the present time: they are of very different degrees of merit; but none, it is hoped, so destitute of it as not to afford entertainment. Variety in manner has been attended to. As to the rest, no two people probably would make the same choice, nor indeed the same person at any distance of time. A few of superior merit were chosen without difficulty, but the list was not completed without frequent hesitation. Some regard it has been thought proper to pay to the taste and preference of the public, as was but reasonable in an undertaking in which their preference was to indemnify those who are at the expense and risk of the publication. Copyright also was not to be intruded on,² and the number of volumes was determined by the booksellers. Some perhaps may think that too much importance has been already given to a subject so frivolous, but a discriminating taste is no where more called for than with regard to a species of books which every body reads. It was said by Fletcher of Saltoun, "Let me make the ballads of a nation, and I care not who makes the laws."³ Might it not be

1 In Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*.

2 In 1810, the author retained the right to benefits from his or her work until 28 years after publication, at which time the work passed into public domain.

3 Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1655-1716) makes this observation in *Conversation Concerning a Right Regulation of Government for the Common Good of Mankind* (1704).

said with as much propriety, Let me make the novels of a country, and let who will make the systems?

From *Fielding*

[Along with Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding (1707-54) dominated the novel-writing world of the 1740s. He had begun his writing career as a satirical playwright. When the 1737 Licensing Act limited the venues for political satire on the stage, Fielding turned to journalism, first, and then prose fiction to exercise his comic wit. With the publication of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740, Fielding found a new satiric target. His *Shamela* (1741) was the most popular of the "anti-Pamelas," and his *Joseph Andrews*, (1742), the story of Pamela's "brother," a paragon of *male* chastity, likewise owes its genesis to ridicule inspired by Richardson's fiction. *Tom Jones* (1749) is Fielding's masterpiece, featuring a wry, self-conscious narrator, a cast of characters ranging from poachers and soldiers to country gentlemen and the titled denizens of London. From the beginning, reaction to *Tom Jones* combined admiration for its carefully contrived plot and its variety of characters with reservations about its morality. In her comments, Barbauld reflects this dual response, entering the existing discourse begun by Samuel Richardson (Letter to Astraea and Minerva Hill [4 August 1749]), Arthur Murphy (*The Works of Henry Fielding* [1762]), James Beattie (*Dissertations Moral and Critical* [1783]), Clara Reeve (*Progress of Romance* [1785]), Samuel Johnson (comments recorded in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* [1791]), and others. Fielding's final novel, *Amelia* (1752), is more somber in tone than his earlier fiction, and (perhaps as a consequence) it was less well received in his own time. Barbauld includes both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* in *The British Novelists*, and in her preface she comments on all the fiction. We reprint her remarks on *Tom Jones*.]

Henry Fielding was in his person tall, and of a robust make with an originally strong constitution, qualities which, perhaps for that reason, he seems fond of attributing to his heroes. He

