THE ENLIGHTENMENT

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION
If an elephant dances and nobody’s looking, does it really dance?
The Enlightenment: Things got a little revolting

- The English Civil War/Commonwealth (1642-1660)
- The American Revolution (1776)
- The French Revolution (1789)
- The Industrial Revolution (late 18th-19th cent)
- The Scientific Revolution (18th-19th cent)
- Religious schism (during the Interregnum, the English had lots of sects)
The “AGE OF REASON”
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• **EMPIRICISM**
  o Francis Bacon and the Scientific Method

• **EXPERIMENTATION**
  o The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge (Gresham Lectures delivered in ENGLISH)

• **MATHEMATICS**
  o Isaac Newton and the Clockwork Cosmos

• **PSYCHOLOGY**
  o Thomas Locke and the Tabula Rasa
  o Rene Descartes and Dualism: THINK = AM (vs. The dancing elephant experiment™ENGL 300)
LITERARY SYMPTOMS

• PERSPICUITY
  o Empiricism pushes English prose in the direction of the “PLAINSPOKEN” style based on
    o a MIMETIC paradigm of TRANSPARENCY: “the equality of words to things” (Samuel Johnson);
    o the assumption that observations of the world can be ACCURATELY DESCRIBED
    o CLEAR PERCEPTION (esp. Vision) ➔ CLEAR EXPRESSION
Hobbes’s Irony

The Light of Human minds is Perspicuous Words, but by exact Definition first snuffed and purged from ambiguity, *Reason* is the *pace*, *Encrease of Science* the *way*, and the Benefit of man-kind, the *end*. And on the contrary, Metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like *ignus fatui*; and reasoning upon them is wandering among innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention, sedition, or contempt.

(Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*)
LITERARY CHANGES

• DOMESTICATION: Middle class interests push literary expression toward the observation of the EVERYDAY life of the “regular person”:
  - novel, newspapers, letters, diaries
LITERARY CHANGES

• SATIRE:
  o REFORM
  o IRONY
  o The poet as the “scalpel”:
    o Dryden, Swift, Pope
18th-century SENTIMENTALISM: the one manly tear
SENSEIBILITY

- REFORM: the reformed whore;
- SENSIBILITY: the ability of the “gentleman” to respond feelingly to the joys and sorrows of others;
- UTILITARIANISM
- SENTIMENTALISM: BATHOS and SENSATIONALISM—empty sensibility.
Slight Detour: The Great ANCIENTS vs MODERNS DEBATE
ANCIENTS vs MODERNs DEBATE

ANCIENTS  ?  MODERNs

IMITATION  INFLUENCE  INNOVATION
ANCIENTS vs MODERNs

• NEO-CLASSICISM/AUGUSTANISM
  o ANCIENTS as standard of quality;
  o PRESCRIPTIVE: Horace;
  o Critique of SUPERFICIALITY of modern life;
  o WIT that reflected refined sensibility and acute observation.
ANCIENTS vs MODERNs

• PROGRESSIVISTS
  o INNOVATION;
  o In the “MOMENT”;  
  o CUMULATIVE KNOWLEDGE
  o VERNACULAR.