

## АКТУАЛЬНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ ТЕОРІЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ ТА ЛІТЕРАТУРНОЇ КРИТИКИ

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### THE AESTHETIC REGIME IN THE MODERN ERA: ART AND DISCOURSE ON ART

У статті простежено зміни естетичних конвенцій мистецтва доби Модерн відповідно до динаміки літературного розвитку у Великій Британії. Дослідження зосереджено на трьох ключових аспектах: вплив суперечки «Давніх і Сучасних» на європейську філософську та літературну думку; особливості новочасного критичного і літературного дискурсу у Великій Британії; та рецепція естетичних цінностей та новацій Просвітництва у вікторіанській критиці, з погляду реалізації естетичного ресурсу Нового часу в мистецтві ХХ століття.

Предметом дослідження є еволюція англійської естетики та поетики доби Просвітництва, зокрема відхід від класичних моделей мистецтва і літератури, а також поява концепцій уяви, новизни та суб'єктивної рецепції мистецтва читачем. Аналізуються визначні літературно-критичні праці ХVIII–ХІХ ст., зокрема есеїстика Джозефа Аддісона, Генрі Гоума, Річарда Герда та монографія Леслі Стівена «Історія англійської думки в ХVIII столітті». Застосовано методологічний потенціал творів Мішеля де Монтеня, Френсіса Бекона, Рене Декарта та маркіза де Кондорсе з метою аналізу філософської думки, яка підготувала і обґрунтувала концептосферу доби Модерн.

Доводиться, що осмислення природи краси та піднесеного, оновлення принципів художньої критики в працях таких літераторів та істориків літератури доби Просвітництва, як Аддісон, Гоум і Герд, вплинули на формування естетичного режиму мистецтва Нового часу. Реконфігурація естетичного ядра мистецтва доби Модерн засвідчила його відкритий та плюральний характер. В центрі уваги також погляди Леслі Стівена, зокрема його думка про «мінливий характер» літератури другої половини ХVIII ст., а також його критичний суб'єктивізм, проілюстрований рецепцією романів Стерна як серйозної моральної загрози. Стверджується, що вікторіанський світогляд Стівена оприявнює нормативні естетичні погляди другої половини ХІХ ст.

Продемонстровано, як закладена в суперечці «Давніх і Сучасних» антиномічність естетичного мислення, що ставила під сумнів класичні норми та цінності, здобуває подальший розвиток у працях Фрідріха Шиллера та Фрідріха Шлегеля, а у творах Фрідріха Ніцше, чії ідеї значно вплинули на перехід від Модерну до Постмодерну, стає радикальним викликом усталеним етичним і філософським нормам Нового часу, закликом до переоцінки цінностей в умовах зміни культурної парадигми та краху традиційних моральних та естетичних систем.

Підсумовуючи, стверджується, що доба Модерн стала часом появи нової естетичної чутливості, а її естетичний плюралізм та антикласичні літературні ідеї були вирішальними у переосмисленні концепцій прогресу, новизни, людської свідомості та сенситивності в мистецтві та літературі. Це стало основою для модерністського мистецтва, що характеризується відходом від традицій та пошуком нових художніх форм вираження людського досвіду.

*Ключові слова:* доба Модерн, естетика доби Модерн, Просвітництво, суперечка «Давніх і Сучасних», прогрес, естетичний плюралізм, краса, новизна, Джозеф Аддісон, Генрі Гоум, Річард Герд, Леслі Стівен.

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Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the analysis of the Modern Age has been essential in understanding the cultural and civilizational development of Western Europe. As Jürgen Habermas convincingly argues in his “Philosophical Discourse on Modernity” (1985), Georg Hegel was the first philosopher to develop a holistic understanding of the Modern Age. The key feature of this historical era, according to Hegel, is openness to the future. Delineating different forms of consciousness and their dialectical progression in his “Phenomenology of Spirit” (1807) the philosopher argued that “Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward” [Hegel, 1977, p. 6]. The concept of openness of Modernity, which emerged in the early nineteenth century and resonates across various cultural domains, including art, continues to hold relevance into the late twentieth century. Championing Enlightenment principles like reason and progress, Habermas views Modernity as an “unfinished project”. On the contrary, Jean-François Lyotard, in his “The Postmodern Condition” (1979), advocates “severe reexamination of the thought of the Enlightenment” [Lyotard, 1984, p. 73] since he views the Enlightenment metanarratives as grand narratives that lose their credibility and efficacy in contemporary times.

The two-hundred-year history of research on the Modern Age, along with the wide array of available approaches to its sociocultural aspects and the controversies surrounding many ideas, collectively attest to the relevance and the rich theoretical and methodological potential inherent in the fundamental issues of Modernity as a cultural era. The perspective of current studies is linked to the fact that the aesthetic values of the Modern Age still influence (if not constitute) the patterns that define the evolution of art across subsequent periods. Similarly, it is crucial to consider the historical nature and the dynamism of values, particularly aesthetic values, which emerge and persist within every cultural epoch.

Proceeding from the assertion that “the philosophical discourse of modernity touches upon and overlaps with the aesthetic discourse in manifold ways” [Habermas, 1987, p. xix], the paper focuses on the particular facets of the aesthetic paradigm of the Modern Age, with its array of complex, diverse tendencies, styles, and artistic codes. First, the dispute between “the ancients and moderns” is highlighted from the perspective of its consequences for a major shift within European philosophical and literary history. Second, this paper establishes a foundation for exploring the nuances of critical and literary progress in the Enlightenment’s rationalist paradigm in Great Britain, emphasizing the gradual rise to prominence of concepts such as imagination, novelty, and the reader’s subjective experience of art. Finally, the paper investigates how Victorian criticism perceived the British Enlightenment’s aesthetic paradigm, particularly the Enlightenment novel, framing it within the peculiarities of Victorian literary-critical discourse, while also placing it in the broader context of the evolving shift towards twentieth-century modernism. Accordingly, the subject of the study is the patterns of evolution of Enlightenment aesthetics in Great Britain, its shift from classical models of art and literature, and the dynamic internal contradictions within literary concepts, the diversification of art into multi-layered and varied tendencies. To achieve the set objectives, the study conducts an analysis of the most representative literary-critical essays of the eighteenth century by authors such as Joseph Addison, Henry Home, and Richard Hurd, along with Leslie Stephen’s monograph “History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century”, which exemplifies the Victorian critical stance. From a methodological synergy perspective, the philosophical works from the late sixteenth to eighteenth centuries by Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Marquis de Condorcet are crucial, as they elucidate the oscillatory nature of the philosophical and literary discourse before and during the Enlightenment. A pivotal aspect of the New European culture is the distinct separation of various scientific discourses, among which the aesthetic discourse stands out prominently.

In his work *Aesthetica* (1750), Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the German philosopher, claimed that poetry and other arts have a specific kind of order and perfection and that “this order and this perfection may be less glorious than the virtues of reason, but they are sui genesis, that they require interpretation by an independent discipline, that they can be methodologically connected into a logical whole which is entitled to a freehold in the general community of philosophy” [Gilbert, Kuhn, 1953, 291]. The term “aesthetics” was thus justified in the middle of the eighteenth century. As an independent philosophical discipline, as specified by Baumgarten (*Aesthetica*, §1), “aesthetics (the theory of the liberal arts,

the logic of the lower capacities of cognition [*gnoseologia inferior*], the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the *analogon rationis*) is the science of sensible cognition" [Guyer, 2020].

Simultaneously with the formation of aesthetic discourse, the concept of "modernity", known since late antiquity, gradually became common in the eighteenth century. The justification of this concept, according to the ideas of the Modern Age, originates in the famous dispute between "the ancients and moderns" ("Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes"), which was initiated in 1688 by the French writer and critic Charles Perrault in his work "Parallels between the Ancients and the Moderns in the Arts and Sciences" and took place in Europe – in France and England – in the early eighteenth century. Modern artists, Perrault claimed, are no longer "dwarfs", placed on the shoulders of "giants", i.e. the masters of antiquity. Moreover, modern scholars and writers do not correspond to the meaning of a revised aphorism "A dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant may see farther than a giant himself" [Merton, 1965, p. 4]. Having accumulated knowledge and artistic achievements of antiquity, modern authors, definitely, could not be called "dwarfs" on principle since they were far ahead in terms of experience, advancement, and diversity. On the other hand, the authority of ancient thinkers, as well as that of modern artists who emulate the techniques of the ancient masters, remains intact within the Age of Enlightenment: "The Latin tradition, always so important in France, was now paramount in England. Poets like Virgil, painters like Raphael, were the really worshipped idols" [Binyon, 1918, p. 394].

Overall, the dispute between "the ancients and moderns" was really "a meta-quarrel" with multiple other controversies and broader issues [Taylor, 2020, p. 608], the core meaning of which was precisely revealed by Frederick Jameson. He posits that the eighteenth century marked the development of modern historical consciousness: "...the past, and antiquity, is neither superior nor inferior, but simply different. This is the moment of the birth of historicity itself" [Jameson, 2002, p. 22].

It is essential to note that the debate between "the ancients and moderns" transcends mere aesthetic and literary concerns. It represents a fundamental consequence of a longstanding discourse within European philosophical history concerning the evolutionary patterns of human civilization. Both ancient and modern philosophers frequently drew parallels between individual life and the progression of humanity, often characterizing antiquity as the world's childhood, followed inevitably by stages of growth and even aging.

According to Herodotus, a notable advocate of historical ideas in antiquity, the concept of a progressive movement toward maturity encapsulated the broader development of human culture. This opinion is echoed, for instance, in Lucretius' poem *On the Nature of Things*. Throughout history, each era – be it Antiquity, the Middle Ages, or the Renaissance – has furnished its own instances of this "from-childhood-to-maturity" metaphor when assessing the interplay between "antiquity" and "modernity".

At the end of the Renaissance, Michael de Montaigne formulated approaches to understanding the concepts of "novelty" and "progress", which would be problematized in the Enlightenment: "The novelty, rather than the greatness of things, tempts us to inquire into their causes. We are to judge with more reverence, and with greater acknowledgment of our own ignorance and infirmity, of the infinite power of nature" [Montaigne, 1877, p. 207]. The French philosopher encouraged the exploration of the causes of new or novel things with the understanding of the complexity and the profound forces of nature that drive these novelties. In his *Essays*, Montaigne, skeptical about the conventional ideas of unidirectional progress and consistent improvement, also pointed to diversity of forms and the development disparities of humanity: "...we do not go; we rather run up and down, and whirl this way and that; we turn back the way we came <...> We make a mighty business of the invention of artillery and printing, which other men at the other end of the world, in China, had a thousand years ago. Did we but see as much of the world as we do not see, we should perceive, we may well believe, **a perpetual multiplication and vicissitude of forms** (emphasis ours – O.B.) There is nothing single and rare in respect of nature..." [Montaigne, 1877, p. 779–780].

The significance of Montaigne's viewpoints was highlighted by Gerard Genette in his article "Montaigne-Bergsonian". Analyzing the idea of "Montaigne, en fidèle bergsonien" by Alber Thibaudet, Genette emphasized "mobilism, vitalism, a sense of becoming, and a sense of dura-

tion” of his thinking [Genette, 1966, p. 143]<sup>1</sup>. Montaigne’s place within the realm of “literature of ideas” and thus “the conflict of ideas”, along with his particular openness to multidimensional perspectives on “progress”, testifies the philosopher’s conceptual proximity to those aesthetic trends of the future *for which non-linearity, ambiguity, and plurality are key characteristics*.

Francis Bacon, the English philosopher, statesman, scientist, and author, acknowledged significant contributions of antiquity while also emphasizing the importance of progress and the advancement of knowledge. Thus, he advocated for a balance between reverence for ancient wisdom and the need for new experimentation and exploration. In his work *Novum Organum* (1620), a significant philosophical and methodological treatise, Bacon introduced a new approach to comprehending and interpreting the natural world. He supported the empirical method and the principle of sequential scientific research as essential components of this approach.

In this work, Bacon also addresses the growth of civilization and the importance of choosing an appropriate starting point in its scholarly inquiry:

“As for antiquity, the opinion touching it which men entertain is quite a negligent one and scarcely consonant with the word itself. For the old age of the world is to be accounted the true antiquity; and this is the attribute of our own times, not of that earlier age of the world in which the ancients lived, and which, though in respect of us it was the elder, yet in respect of the world it was the younger. And truly as we look for greater knowledge of human things and a riper judgment in the old man than in the young, because of his experience and of the number and variety of the things which he has seen and heard and thought of, so in like manner from our age, if it but knew its own strength and chose to essay and exert it, much more might fairly be expected than from the ancient times, inasmuch as it is a more advanced age of the world, and stored and stocked with infinite experiments and observations” [Bacon, 1620, Aphorism LXXXIV].

In this passage, Bacon directly critiques the hindrances to scientific progress caused by undue reverence for antiquity. The philosopher’s main argument is a call for a shift away from unquestioning respect for historical and established authorities, encouraging his peers to recognize and seize the opportunities for advancement presented by their era. A contemporary of William Shakespeare and Galileo Galilei, Bacon can be credited as one of the foundational contributors to the development of the concept of progress, which laid the basics of Enlightenment rationalism.

The idea of progress as a constant movement towards the knowledge of truth was also formulated in the system of scientific views of René Descartes, a pivotal figure in the transition to modernity. His contribution to the development of modern philosophy is marked by his methodological skepticism and his argument for the primacy of reason, which laid the groundwork for the subsequent period of the Enlightenment and the growth of scientific and philosophical rationalism. Descartes’s famous statement “I think, therefore I am” (“Cogito ergo sum”) marked a significant turn towards subjectivity, a defining feature of modern philosophy. His concept of dualism – the division between mind and body – had also significant implications for the development of new approaches to knowledge, influencing the fields of psychology, philosophy of mind, and aesthetics. In general, Descartes’s ideas inspired Enlightenment thinkers and writers, who further studied the problems of the human “self” and propagated an idea of individualism, a key aspect of modernity.

The final conception of historical progress based on the idea of reason was presented in Nicolas de Condorcet’s work “Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind”: “No doubt the advances (in original, “*progrès*” – O.B.) won’t always go at the same rate, but they’ll never be reversed – at least while the earth keeps its present place in the system of the universe” [Condorcet, 1794, pp. 2–3].

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<sup>1</sup> “...la pensée de Montaigne, pour Thibaudet, n'est pas une retraite, un monde clos, une tour; c'est un carrefour, une plaque tournante, un dispatching idéologique. Le « moi » de Montaigne, c'est pour lui, comme il le dit, un « lieu d'idées 1 ». Or, « qui dit littérature d'idées dit conflit d'idées, dialogue sur les grands partis 2 ». Lire Montaigne, c'est donc inlassablement le confronter à toutes les grandes voix du concert idéologique, et plus encore confronter ces voix (si l'on peut dire) entre elles à travers la sienne, opposer et concilier en sa présence les « grands partis », c'est-à-dire les grands partages...” [Genette, 1966, pp. 140–141].

A departure from a strict rationalism can be illustrated by Blaise Pascal's philosophical thinking. In his "Pensées", Pascal acknowledges the role of human emotions, faith, and subjectivity (as expressed in his famous quote "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know" [Pascal, 2017, p. 46]). Thus, highlighting the limits of human reason in addressing fundamental questions about existence, Pascal employs paradox and ambiguity to convey the complexity of human experience:

"When I see the blindness and the misery of man, when I regard the whole silent universe and man <...> as though lost in this little corner of the universe, not knowing who has put him there, what he has come to do, or what will become of him at death, and incapable of all knowledge, I become terrified... And this makes me wonder how people in such a wretched condition don't fall into despair..." [Pascal, 2017, p. 114].

The existential questions about the meaning of life, human suffering, and the existence of God posed in Pascal's "Pensées" distinguish him from the Enlightenment rationalists. His nuanced approach to subjectivity and human emotions challenges the dominant rationalist paradigms of his time and anticipates developments in existentialism and even postmodernism, both of which challenged the dominance of rationalism and explored subjective and emotional aspects of human existence. Given his emphasis on "a wretched condition" of humanity [Pascal, 2017, p. 24] and the limitations of reason, Pascal can be interpreted as not being certain about inevitable human progress.

Ultimately, it is reasonable to conclude that at the beginning of the Modern Age, several viewpoints on progress and rationalism had been formed in philosophy, therefore views regarding the concepts of "modernity" and "novelty" differed significantly. Tracing the regularities in the development of knowledge, the philosopher of science Imre Lakatos asserts: "As a matter of fact, research programmes have achieved complete monopoly only rarely and then only for relatively short periods. <...> The history of science has been and should be a history of competing research programmes. <...> 'Theoretical pluralism' is better than 'theoretical monism'" [Lakatos, 1978, p. 69].

In literary and aesthetic criticism, the quarrel of "the ancients and moderns", thus revealing all the complexities and ambiguities of the philosophical discussion, confirmed the coexistence of a multitude of viewpoints regarding the correlation between classical and modern literature from the perspective of the criteria for "true" art. And if Perrault, and after him Antoine Houdar de la Motte, practically reiterated judgments on the linearity of progress from antiquity to modernity and, accordingly, opposed the tenets of Nicolas Boileau's classical aesthetics, the English artists, among them Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson, sided with the ancient masters.

"Theoretical pluralism", identified in the debate of the "ancients and the moderns", had far-reaching consequences. Firstly, it signified a gradual change in the aesthetic model formed by ancient art. It is significant that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, European artistic culture began to manifest a keen interest in the national past and traditions, with roots deeply entrenched in the Medieval era.

Secondly, another notable consequence of this debate is the emergence of a literary-critical discourse that places the aesthetics of artistic creativity at its core. The distinction and intricate relationship between aesthetic and literary-critical discourses compile an important critical trait of the Modern Age. These discourses exist in tandem with, and often reflect upon, literary narratives, establishing a shared intellectual space. This conscious interplay evolves into a defining characteristic of twentieth-century literature, where it finds expression in the concepts of "metatextuality", "metanarrative", and "metanovel".

The methodology of studying the aesthetic of the Modern Age should also take into account the fact that along with the development of mainstream trends in art, there arise, develop, and gradually deepen phenomena that originate from other, often opposing, worldview positions. These, nonetheless, should be considered because, initially inconspicuous and insignificant, they gradually take on a leading role and prepare the change of the cultural/artistic/literary paradigm. In other words, one must remember the basic principles of complex systems theory, which assumes that the physical, social, and spiritual worlds are nonlinear, complex, and un-

predictable. This approach has important implications for a wide range of human experiences, notably in the realm of fiction. A minor aesthetic event may seem inconsequential, yet it can catalyze the formation of a new order or a new trend. This is akin to the butterfly effect, where a single flutter of an insect's wings has the potential to alter global weather patterns. Far from being mere metaphor, this principle reflects a scientific reality: minor fluctuations, or micro-events, can significantly influence the course of a broad array of phenomena, as substantiated by scientific research [Mainzer, 1994]. Therefore, the essence of Modern art, as with other epochs in European cultural development, is characterized by aesthetic pluralism. This involves the coexistence of various tendencies and diversity in the philosophical underpinnings of artistic expression.

The legitimacy of such an approach is confirmed by the analysis of both previous and subsequent epochs. An illustration of the dynamics of art, the complex relationship between artistic styles, and the process of mutual transitions and transformations was the Renaissance era. As convincingly demonstrated in the book "Mannerism" by John Sherman, the High Renaissance was "deeply marked by the strains of growth and change", and within its "astonishing diversity", "tendencies towards baroque art" can be distinguished [Sherman, 1973, pp. 49–50]. Thus, the scholar asserts that traits of Mannerism can be found, in various forms and degrees, across the span of the Renaissance.

Addressing the issue of integrity as a composite of plurality, creativity, and cultural nonlinearity necessitates an exploration of the Modern Age through the lens of both rational and irrational elements. This approach involves examining the diversification of art into multi-layered and varied tendencies, styles, and artistic codes.

The study of the Modern Age, specifically from the eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, identifies a paradigm of universal civilizational development. This period is distinguished by foundational values such as rationalism, the belief in progressive historical evolution, and the burgeoning ideas of political liberty, civil society, and social equity. Artistic evolution during this time also mirrored the intellectual shifts, embracing the rationalistic spirit of the age. The rationalist impetus in art and literature can be traced back to the mid-17th century, particularly through the philosophy of Descartes. His ideas epitomized the ascendancy of reason, resonating with the artistic ideals of order, unity, and clarity. These principles were reflected in the works of Corneille, Racine, and Boileau, whose art exemplified these systematic and coherent qualities. Although at the cusp of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Locke redirected scholarly focus from the pursuit of universal intellectual truths to the examination of specific psychological phenomena. However, the fundamental aesthetic principles of the artists influenced by his philosophy did not markedly diverge from those of their seventeenth-century predecessors. Concurrently, Locke's oeuvre continued to serve as a cornerstone for English writers, and by broader implication, it shaped the contours of European literary thought well into the century.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, artistic endeavour was steered by a rational paradigm that prized orderly beauty. Adherence to established canons of taste, a commitment to coherence, and systematic approaches were the hallmarks of this period's aesthetic vision. The Roman style of the architectural masterpieces of Christopher Wren, the portraits and historical canvases of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the inaugural president of the Royal Academy of Arts, the landscape art of the era, characterized by its geometric precision, that was further reflected in the design of landscape parks in the mid-century were a tribute to classicism, venerating ancient art as the quintessential manifestation of the laws of natural harmony. In literary history, classicism is often aligned with the first decades of the seventeenth century. However, the poetic tradition led by Alexander Pope wielded significant influence across the Enlightenment. Despite this enduring impact, beginning in the 1750s, the adherence to classical principles and stylistic choices encountered sharp criticism from the emerging voices of sentimentalists and pre-Romantic writers, a critique that was further intensified by the Romantic movement that followed.

The rationalist character of eighteenth-century aesthetics is noticeable even in the works of proponents of subjective idealism. For instance, George Berkeley, known for his axiom "esse est percipi" ("to exist is to be perceived"), connects the notion of beauty to "symmetry and proportion from whence beauty springs" [Gilbert, Kuhn, 1953, p. 243].

As Lawrence Binyon, the English poet and art critic, appropriately summarized, "The strength of the eighteenth century lay its remarkable solidarity. With all the stirrings under the surface, it presents to us, as we look back, the picture of the period perfectly coherent in its aims

and tastes. It is an age of rounded and harmonious accomplishment. There is an unusual conformity to recognized standards and canon in all the arts <...> Genius, however overpowering, was not to have its excesses and license condoned. Neither Shakespear nor Milton intimidated Dr. Johnson; each must submit to tribunal of reason" [Binyon, 1918, p. 393].

In a systematic examination of art, the aesthetic Modern Age thus reveals a coherence founded on the principle of reason that spans several centuries. This consistent rational framework, however, does not exclude internal complexity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity. It is crucial to acknowledge that the classicist and rationalist aesthetic doctrines of the seventeenth century, despite their steadfastness, embedded ideas of future philosophical and artistic movements. It was within these doctrines that a new aesthetic vocabulary and critical concepts were developed, setting the stage for the foundational shifts that would characterize the subsequent centuries.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, considerable contributions to the evolution of modern aesthetics were made by Joseph Addison, a poet and critic, a representative of English Enlightenment classicism and a pioneer of European journalism. While introducing new ideas and concepts, he remained oriented to ancient examples of art and urged to avoid "gothic literary taste" in every way possible<sup>2</sup>. Simultaneously, Addison positioned "imagination" as a central aesthetic notion, and he did not rigidly differentiate between "imagination" and "fancy", treating the terms as largely interchangeable ("the pleasures of the imagination, or fancy, (which I shall use promiscuously)" [Addison, 1712b]). He explored the nuances of sensory experience and the pivotal role of imagination in human perception of the world. His insights were encapsulated in a series of articles published in *The Spectator* magazine in 1712, collectively titled "The Pleasures of the Imagination". In our opinion, Addison's distinction between the primary joys of imagination, which arise from direct observation of physical objects, and the secondary joys, which are associated with ideas of objects and therefore involve the work of memory, is productive<sup>3</sup>. Addison identifies greatness and beauty as the origins of imagination, and he notably introduces the category of novelty within English aesthetic discourse<sup>4</sup>. His justification of the "pleasures of imagination" heralded a recognition of beauty as a subjective experience. Foremost among these are Edward Young's ideas on the originality, emotional expression and the individual imagination of the artist, Joseph Warton's return to nature and imagination as sources of poetic inspiration, and Thomas Warton's assertion of the Gothic and medieval as important sources of poetic inspiration.

The year 1762 marks a significant milestone in English aesthetic and literary thought, with the publication of Henry Home's "Elements of Criticism" and Richard Hurd's "Letters on Chivalry and Romance". Home, known as Lord Kames, and Hurd contributed to the evolving discussion on aesthetic categories that would eventually influence the Romantic movement. In "Elements of Criticism", Lord Kames examines the nature of human responses to art and beauty, emphasizing the role of emotions, passions, and pleasures. By acknowledging "novelty" as a distinct aesthetic category, he recognized the importance of newness and originality in eliciting a pleasurable response from the audience, which is a departure from the traditional emphasis on imitation and adherence to classical forms<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> "...I would have him (a man) read over the celebrated Works of Antiquity, which have stood the Test of so many different Ages and Countries, or those Works among the Moderns which have the Sanction of the Politer Part of our Contemporaries. <...> I have endeavoured in several of my Speculations to banish this Gothic Taste, which has taken Possession among us" [Addison, 1712a].

<sup>3</sup> "I divide these pleasures into two kinds: my design being first of all to discourse of those primary pleasures of the imagination, which entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes; and in the next place to speak of those secondary pleasures of the imagination which flow from the ideas of visible objects, when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious" [Addison, 1712b, p. 277].

<sup>4</sup> "...new or uncommon contributes a little to vary human life <...> it serves us for a kind of refreshment, and takes off from that satiety we are apt to complain of in our usual and ordinary entertainments..." [Addison, 1712c, p. 280].

<sup>5</sup> "Novelty soon degenerates into familiarity; Novelty and the unexpected appearance of objects; Novelty distinguished from variety, its different degrees; Novelty fixes attention" [Home, 1772, p. 362].

In "Letters on Chivalry and Romance", the English bishop Richard Hurd not only elaborated on the fundamental aesthetic categories that would become central to pre-Romanticism and Romanticism, but also demonstrated a historical and deterministic approach to literary criticism. Hurd meticulously identified and dissected the Gothic literary tradition, including figures such as Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, and Milton. His views on Shakespeare suggest that the Bard insufficiently capitalized on Gothic elements: "I say nothing of Shakespear, because the sublimity (the divinity, let it be, if nothing else will serve) of his genius kept no certain root, but rambled at hazard into all the regions of human life and manners. So we can hardly say what he preferred on full deliberation" [Hurd, 1762, p. 60]. From a contemporary perspective that acknowledges the synthetic nature of Shakespeare's artistic world, this sounds not so much polemical as characterizes Enlightenment ideas on aesthetics. Thus, Hurd's perspectives on historicism and his influential role in shaping literary criticism reveal that he remained somewhat anchored within the rationalist paradigm of the Enlightenment era.

Another outstanding achievement of Hurd is his ideas about the reader and the subjectivity of the reader's perception of a work of art. In letter No. 10, Hurd states that criticism does not correspond to the content of Italian poetry (Ariosto, Tasso) or fairy tales, as these works seem to him "unnatural and absurd; that they surpass bounds not of truth only but of probability; and look more like the dreams of children, than the manly inventions of poets" [Hurd, 1762, p. 88]. Only one type of criticism, he argues, corresponds to such works – philosophical criticism, which explains the existence of impossible things through imagination:

"Does any capable reader trouble himself about the truth, or even the credibility of their fancies? Alas, no; he is best pleased when he is made to conceive (he minds not by what magic) the existence of such things as his reason tells him did not, and were never likely to exist. <...> We must distinguish between popular belief and that of the Reader. The fictions of poetry do, in some degree at least, require the first (They would, otherwise, deservedly pass for dreams indeed): But when the poet has this advantage on his side, and his fancies have, or may be supposed to have, a countenance from the current superstitions of the age, in which he writes, he dispenses with the last, and gives his Reader leave to be as skeptical and as incredulous, as he pleases" [Hurd, 1762, pp. 89–90].

Preceding the Romantic poets, Hurd championed the concept of poetic truth, a notion that challenges the Enlightenment's principle of "imitation of nature": "...the real powers and properties of human nature, is infinitely restrained; and poetical truth is, under these circumstances, almost as severe a thing as historical" [Hurd, 1762, p. 94].

Generally speaking, the aesthetic landscape of the eighteenth century, though grounded in the Enlightenment's rationalist principles, exhibited an early and growing shift away from strictly rationalist aesthetic values. Initially emerging on the periphery and gradually advancing to prominence were concepts like imagination and novelty, historicism, and the reader's subjective experience of art. This divergence is also reflected in the literary developments of the time: for instance, the first significant phenomena of sentimentalism coincided in time with the appearance of outstanding works of classicism. Notably, James Thomson's sentimental poem "The Seasons", dated between 1726 and 1730, emerged contemporaneously with Alexander Pope's classicist work "The Dunciad", first published between 1728 and 1729. That is, during the Age of Reason, many aesthetic innovations laid the groundwork for what would become defining features of Romantic literature, and these same features were later adapted, expanded upon, and transformed by the Modernist literature of the early twentieth century.

Recreating the history of eighteenth-century English thought in his study 1876 of the same title, Leslie Stephen, the English writer, historian, and literary critic, generalized this regularity, suggesting that two lines of development in English literature should be studied: first, those artists whose work is most characteristic of the eighteenth century (for him, Alexander Pope's work serves an example), and second, those who represent a reaction to Enlightenment models and are oriented toward further development. The English scholar, whose work written "on the eve" of modernism has not lost its relevance to this day, rightly argues that artists whose creative goal is to reproduce the "spirit of the time" often mix opposing aesthetic ideas, impulses,



and styles<sup>6</sup>. Stephen's opinion about the "fluctuating mode" of the literature of the second half of the eighteenth century and its inconsistency with any particular explanatory system of thought sounds quite modern. The historian emphasizes that the literature of the Enlightenment recorded not the difference in human nature of that time (as he is convinced of the immutability of human nature), but the lack of linguistic possibilities for expressing the most essential human feelings. The search for new artistic means, in his opinion, is slow and goes in three directions: sentimentalism, romanticism, and naturalism, which choose different ways of artistic protest against the current system of thought<sup>7</sup>. It should be noted that Stephen's book refers to the "school of naturalism", which should be considered within the literature of sentimentalism as a reaction to the acceleration of civilizational development, which was counterbalanced by the idea of natural simplicity.

However, one cannot ignore another aspect illustrated by this study, which is the peculiar subjectivism of its author. Stephen is a Victorian historian and an exponent of the Victorian worldview. Illustrating the dynamics of Enlightenment axiology, he simultaneously illustrates the aesthetic views of his time, that is, the second half of the nineteenth century. This is especially important in terms of the dramatic changes that would take place in the art and philosophy of the first decades of the twentieth century, and which would be carried on by his daughter Virginia Woolf (née Virginia Stephen).

Stephen's evaluation of Enlightenment literature rests upon the pivotal question, "how far, and in what way, was the imaginative literature of the time a translation of its philosophy" [Stephen, 1876, p. 331]. The literary critic articulates a multifaceted answer, positing that "the character of an imaginative literature depends not only upon the current philosophy, but upon the inherited peculiarities of the race, upon its history, its climate, its social and political relations..." [Stephen, 1876, p. 330]. In this context, Stephen views the artistic value of fiction through its resonance with the Enlightenment's intellectual currents. However, in his analysis, Laurence Sterne's work stands out as a deviation, with Stephen critiquing Sterne for deviation from prevailing ethical trends:

"Sentimentalism, pure and simple <...> came into the world when Stern discovered the art of tickling his contemporaries' fancies by his inimitable mixture of pathos, humor and sheer buffoonery. No man of equal eminence excites less respect or even less genuine sympathy. He showed, as we cannot deny, a corrupt heart and prurient imagination. He is a literary prostitute. He cultivates his fineness of feeling with a direct view to the market; and when we most admire his books, we most despise the man. He is the most conspicuous example that could be quoted in favour of the dangerous thesis that literary and moral excellence belong to different spheres" [Stephen, 1876, p. 441].

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<sup>6</sup> "I propose, however, to describe the most obvious phenomena, as well as I am able, by first considering that series of writers who seem to represent what may be called the most characteristic of the eighteenth century; and then, to trace the second series, who represent the growing element of reaction or development. But though the line may be thus drawn for the present purpose, it does not correspond to an equally marked division in reality <...> one man may often represent the resultant of various forces, rather than an impulse of a single force. The poet may naturally seek to bring into unity all the strongest impulses of his time, and sometimes he fuses into a whole very inconsistent material" [Stephen 1876, pp. 334–335].

<sup>7</sup> "Human nature does not vary, as we sometimes given to assume, by sudden starts from one generation to another. I do not doubt that Englishmen a hundred years ago had as much imagination power, as much good feeling, and at least as much love of truth as their descendants of today. I am only endeavoring to explain the conditions which limited for a time their powers of utterance, and then led to find new modes of expression for most perennial of human feelings. <...> The last half of the eighteenth century was marked in literature by the slow development of three distinct processes of reaction. The sentimentalists represent, we may say, the vague feeling of discontent with the existing order of thought and society, the romantic and the naturalistic school adopted different modes of satisfying thus excited. <...> It would be futile to attempt to consider this fluctuating mode as closely correlated to any logical process. We may say, in general way, that the growth of sentimentalism was symptomatic of social daily becoming more unhealthy" [Stephen 1876, pp. 436–437].

Stephen's negative attitude towards Sterne's experimental writing is an expression of the Victorian critic's view of the English Enlightenment novel, represented by the works of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett. The prominent novelists of the Victorian period Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and others as a whole also inherited the Enlightenment model of the novel, which is based on the reproduction of a classical image of the world, aesthetically rational, linear, and chronological. At the same time, Sterne's artistic form, textual strategies, and instances of author-reader interaction marked the first step in the transition from rational order to avant-garde aesthetics. Nonlinearity, fragmentation, and shift to minor details as the most important elements of his novels met the criteria of twentieth-century experimental fiction, not the Enlightenment or Victorian ideas about artistic value. Thus, Sterne's artistic experiment was close to the modernists, for whom novelty was the main aesthetic criterion. While Stephen saw Sterne's novels as a serious moral threat, Virginia Woolf called him her teacher. Thus, the ability to appreciate Sterne's innovation can serve as a litmus test for assessing the aesthetic situation at the turn of the twentieth century, and also for explaining the epistemological gap between Stephen's generation and the next, whose aesthetic ideas were expressed by Woolf.

Furthermore, Sterne's narrative innovations, such as non-linear storytelling and metafictionality, prefigure postmodernism by challenging the traditional notions of authorship and textual authority. As noted by Umberto Eco, his *Tristram Shandy* is "not only a masterpiece of intertextuality but also a paramount example of narrative metalanguage, which speaks of its own formation and of the rules of the narrative genre... It is impossible to read and enjoy Sterne's anti-novel novel without realizing that it is treating the novel form ironically" [Eco, 1985, p. 202]. Accordingly, the novel has been described as "a thoroughly postmodern work in every respect but the period it was written" [McCaffery, 1986, p. xv]. Overall, Sterne's legacy, foundational to postmodernism, serves as an aesthetic bridge that connects artistic novelties of the Enlightenment with the inventive and playful spirit of modern and postmodern narratives.

The aesthetic breakthroughs made by English novelists during the Enlightenment – such as their profound understanding of human nature and its individual expression, the employment of metafictional techniques that underscore the interaction between narrator and reader, and the exploration of novel theory – revolutionized the novel's status among other literary genres. These innovations marked a remarkable evolution in literary development, making the novel a kind of mirror that reflects the complexity of human experience. This transformation not only redefined the genre hierarchy, but also marked the emergence of a new era in the development of literature.

The ongoing discourse on the aesthetic achievements of the Enlightenment, which persisted into the nineteenth century, reflected a gradual but discernible shift in intellectual currents towards fresh approaches to a perennial question at the heart of all philosophical systems – the nature of Man. This was a transformative period in the history of ideas that sought new understanding and representation of the self in both art and philosophy.

Among significant shifts in philosophy, aesthetics, and literature at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, antinomian thinking in aesthetics emerged as a notable trend. Germany stood at the forefront of this transformation, with Friedrich Schiller as a prominent figure. In his 1795 article "On Sentimental and Naïve Poetry", Schiller encapsulates the core tenet of his philosophy, which emphasizes the balance between human reason and imagination. He introduces the further prospect of a conflict between "the ancients and moderns", differentiating between two corresponding forms of artistic expression and cultural epochs. In this framework, ancient (or "naïve") poets, inspired by nature, seamlessly resonate with it, whereas modern ("sentimental") poets are characterized by reflecting a discord between emotion and thought<sup>8</sup>. The philosophical opposition introduced by Friedrich Schiller was further developed by Friedrich Schlegel, who ar-

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<sup>8</sup> "We ascribe a naive conviction to a man, if, in his judgment of things, he overlooks their artificial and affected relations and keeps merely to simple nature" [Schiller, 1795, Part 1]. "Sentimental poetry, that is, is distinguished from the naive, in that it refers the real condition, in which the latter remains, to ideas and applies the ideas to the reality [Schiller, 1795, Part 2].

ticated the antinomy of “classic versus romantic”. He defined romantic poetry as “progressive and universal” [Schlegel, 1991, p. 31], offering a perspective that contrasted with classical ideals. In his view, while Greek art was an embodiment of its era, it cannot serve as a standard to evaluate contemporary art. Therefore, Schlegel argued that “The ancients are not the Jews, Christians, or English of poetry. They are not an arbitrarily chosen artistic people of God; nor do they have the only true saving aesthetic faith; nor do they have a monopoly on poetry” [Schlegel, 1991, p. 11]. Contemporary art, unlike Greek art, according to Schlegel, is in a continual state of evolution, seeking ways to approach the ideal: “In the ancients we see the perfected letter of all poetry; in the moderns we see its growing spirit” [Schlegel, 1991, p. 11].

The tradition of antinomian thinking, which emerged and evolved within the philosophy and aesthetics of Romanticism, finds a notable presence and unique adaptation in the early “romantic” phase of Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophical development. In his “The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music” (1872), Nietzsche introduces the antinomy of the “Apollonian – Dionysian”, which becomes a cornerstone in his philosophy. The Apollonian principle, named after the Greek god Apollo, symbolizes order, rationality, and clarity, while the Dionysian, associated with the god Dionysus, represents chaos, emotion, and instinct. Nietzsche saw these two forces as inherently conflicting yet mutually dependent, capturing the essence of human experience and artistic creation. This conceptual framework set the stage for Nietzsche’s vision of a new human archetype, epitomized in his idea of the “Übermensch” or “superman”. The “Übermensch”, in Nietzsche’s philosophy, is an individual of great strength and integrity, who creatively unifies the Apollonian and Dionysian principles. This figure is envisioned as transcending conventional moralities and societal norms, which Nietzsche saw as limiting and distancing humans from their true potential. Also, his Übermensch is a symbol of overcoming the disintegration of European spiritual values, a theme he saw as prevalent in his contemporary society. Importantly, Nietzsche ultimately dismisses the notion of linear progression of cultural and civilizational evolution, suggesting it is a deceptive idea: “*Progress*. – Let us be on our guard lest we deceive ourselves! Time flies forward apace, – we would fain believe that everything flies forward with it, – that evolution is an advancing development... That is the appearance of things which deceives the most circumspect” [Nietzsche, 1914, p. 73]. So overall, Nietzsche’s critique significantly influenced the transition from Modernity to Postmodernity, offering a new hermeneutic perspective in philosophy and aesthetics.

Summarizing the evolution of English aesthetics and poetics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a key aspect to highlight is the emergence of aesthetic pluralism and the development of anti-classical literary and theoretical ideas. The Modern Age was also marked by a new aesthetic sensibility, characterized by a shift from classical ideals of harmony and proportion towards more individualistic and subjective expressions. This period witnessed a departure from the rigid structures and conventions that dominated earlier artistic and literary forms. Artists and writers began to explore and embrace more experimental and avant-garde techniques, reflecting the rapidly changing social, political, and technological landscapes of their time. This new aesthetic sensibility was not just about novel styles or forms, but also about challenging existing norms and ideologies, seeking to convey the complexity and dynamism of the life of modern people. All the aesthetic changes were not just academic or theoretical; they directly influenced the aspirations and objectives of the subsequent generation of modernist artists. Modernism, in many ways, can be seen as a culmination of these evolving ideas, characterized by a gradual departure from traditional forms and a quest for new expressions and understandings of human experience. The aesthetic pluralism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries laid the groundwork for the diverse, experimental, and often revolutionary approaches that define modernist art and literature.

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## THE AESTHETIC REGIME IN THE MODERN ERA: ART AND DISCOURSE ON ART

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The article traces the changes in the aesthetic conventions of Modern art in accordance with the dynamics of literary development in Great Britain. The study focuses on three key areas: the impact of “the ancients and moderns” quarrel on European philosophical and literary thought; the nuances of critical and literary discourse in Enlightenment-era Great Britain; and the reception of the Enlightenment aesthetic values and novelties in Victorian criticism, linking them to the emergence of twentieth-century modernism. The subject involves the evolution of Enlightenment aesthetics and poetics in Great Britain, particularly the departure from classical art and literature models, and the emergence of concepts like imagination, novelty, and the reader’s subjective experience of art. Seminal literary-critical essays of the eighteenth century, including works by Joseph Addison, Henry Home, Richard Hurd, and Leslie Stephen’s monograph ‘History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century’, are analyzed. The paper also examines philosophical texts by Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Marquis de Condorcet to understand the oscillatory nature of philosophical thought before and during the Age of Enlightenment.

The study contextualizes “the ancients and moderns” debate on models for literary excellence and accentuates its role in shaping the discourse of aesthetics and artistic creativity. Contributions by Enlightenment figures such as Addison, Home, and Hurd are explored, emphasizing how they reshaped the discourse of aesthetics by redefining the nature of beauty, the sublime, and the principles of artistic criticism, thereby influencing the literary and artistic productions of their time and beyond. Particular attention is paid to the critical views of Stephen who wrote about the “fluctuating mode” of the literature of the second half of the eighteenth century, illustrating his peculiar subjectivism as an exponent of the Victorian worldview (Stephen saw Sterne’s novels as a serious moral threat), and simultaneously reflecting the normative aesthetic views of the second half of the nineteenth century.

The paper also demonstrates how the antinomianism in aesthetic thinking, which challenged traditional norms and values as seen in “the ancients and moderns” quarrel, was further evolved in the works of Friedrich Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel, the latter articulating the antinomy of “classic versus romantic”. This tradition of antinomian thinking, coupled with the rejection of the idea of linear progression in cultural evolution, a call for a reassessment of values amidst a paradigm shift in culture and the breakdown of traditional ethic and aesthetic systems, finds a notable and unique expression in Friedrich Nietzsche’s works, that significantly influenced the transition from Modernity to Postmodernity.

In summary, it is argued that the Modern Age was the time of the emergence of a new aesthetic sensibility, and its aesthetic pluralism and anti-classical literary ideas were pivotal in redefining concepts of progress, novelty, and human consciousness in art and literature. This laid the groundwork for modernist art and literature, characterized by a departure from tradition and a quest for new artistic expressions of human experience.

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