

**The following lesson and the next one are to be considered as substituting the actual lectures for the first week. You are therefore invited to read them carefully and eventually study them, since they introduce you to many topics that will be touched upon during the course. In case you find any difficulty you can report to me through my email.**

Second lesson October 5, 2010

### **Chronology, cont.**

**1789-99 the FRENCH REVOLUTION.** The French governmental structure, previously an absolute monarchy with feudal privileges for the aristocracy and Catholic clergy, underwent radical change to forms based on Enlightenment principles of citizenship and inalienable rights. These changes were accompanied by violent turmoil which included the trial and **execution of king Louis XVI on 21 January 1793**, vast bloodshed and repression during the reign of terror **1793-94**, and warfare involving every other major European power between 1793 and 1802.

In his book *The Rebel* (1951), French writer Albert Camus wrote that the execution was the turning point of French contemporary history, "an act that secularized the French world and banished God from the subsequent history of the French people", an impact similar to that provoked by the shocking event – for the world and above all for the British people – of the beheading of king Charles in 1649, before the Bloodless Revolution. The execution of the French king led to more wars with other European countries. The king's Austrian-born queen, Marie-Antoinette, followed him to the guillotine on 16 October.

The **French Revolutionary Wars** were a series of major conflicts, from 1792 until 1802, fought between the French Revolutionary government and several European states. Marked by French revolutionary fervor and military innovations, the campaigns saw the French armies defeat a number of opposing coalitions and **expand French control to the Low Countries, Italy and the Rhineland**. The wars involved enormous numbers of soldiers, mainly due to the application of modern mass conscription and saw France at war with Great Britain continuously from 1793 to 1802. Hostilities briefly ceased with the Treaty of Amiens (**1802**), **but conflict soon started up again with the Napoleonic Wars**.

Although they left the soil of Great Britain virtually untouched, these historical events deeply conditioned the country's history and daily life. Travelling through France during the revolutionary wars became virtually impossible and later, during the Napoleonic Wars, large part of Europe was a massive battle field. Transport of goods became problematic, as was the mobility of the people. For many British citizens, this implied the impossibility of travelling South in what had become the traditional Grand Tour during the century. One of the obvious results of such a physical restriction was the change of direction that tourism experienced, turning to the British Isles for destination. This stimulated not only a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the native country, but also the fashion for a kind of landscape yet unexperienced in their home country. The vogue for the "picturesque" was established at about this time and came to characterize the British area.

The term “picturesque” deserves some comments (please, read very carefully). According to the dictionary, three main meanings are connected with it:

1. Of, suggesting, or suitable for a picture.
2. Striking or interesting in an unusual way; irregularly or quaintly attractive.
3. Strikingly expressive or vivid.

[Alteration of French *pictoresque*, from Italian *pittoresco*, from *pittore*, painter, from Latin *pictor*]

**Picturesque** is an aesthetic ideal first introduced into English cultural debate in 1782 by William Gilpin in *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770*, a practical book which instructed England's leisured travellers to examine "the face of a country by the rules of picturesque beauty". The term described a certain kind of scenery where cultivation was actually employed only to produce artificially “wild” nature (landscape gardeners were asked to incorporate wilderness into their prospects together with **fake ruins** to suggest the decay brought about by time in civilization). In the name of picturesque, farms and entire villages were sometimes transformed and their **inhabitants dismissed**. Gilpin promoted a theory of vision and its representability, became the absolute authority in the field, and wrote illustrated picturesque travel books through the British countryside (a cult parodied in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in 1814).

During the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of purely scenic **pleasure touring** began to take hold among the English leisured class. Gilpin's work was a direct challenge to the ideology of the well established educational Grand Tour, showing how an exploration of **rural Britain** could compete with classically oriented tours of the Continent. The irregular, anti-classical, ruins and even ruined people – the **ragged poor** (viewed from a safe distance of course) – became interesting themes.

As Malcolm Andrews remarks, there is "something of the big-game (caccia grossa) hunter in these tourists, boasting of their encounters with savage landscapes, ‘capturing’ wild scenes, and ‘fixing’ them as pictorial trophies in order to sell them or hang them up in frames on their drawing room walls". Gilpin himself asked, "shall we suppose it a greater pleasure to the sportsman to pursue a trivial animal, than it is to the man of taste to pursue the beauties of nature?"

After 1815 when Europe was available to travel again after the wars, new fields for picturesque-hunters opened up in Italy. Anna James wrote in 1820 "Had I never visited Italy, I think I should never have understood the word *picturesque*". Henry James exclaimed in Albano in the 1870s "I have talked of the picturesque all my life; now at last.. I see it".

From *Pittoresco* (‘in the manner of the painters’), the topic was also associated with carefully contrived landscape **paintings**, particularly those of Claude Lorraine (1600–82), Salvator Rosa (1615–73), and the two Poussins (1615–75 and 1593–1665), where an open area seen from a low viewpoint was backed by a screening device and framed on both sides by wings, all painted in rough brushstrokes. It was essentially an **anti-urban aesthetic**, concerned with sensibility, linked to notions of pleasing the eye with compositions reminiscent of those in paintings. In architectural terms this meant to free the composition from the tyranny of symmetry. Picturesque scenes were full of variety, interesting detail, and elements drawn from any sources, so were neither quiet and serene (like the **Beautiful**) nor terrific and awe-inspiring (like the **Sublime**), according to the theorization in Edmund Burke's treatise, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; revised 1759). Picturesque arose as a mediator between the opposed ideals of beauty and the sublime, showing the possibilities that existed in between these two rationally idealized states.

Dorothy Wordsworth's *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland in 1803* (1874) is considered a classic of picturesque travel writing.

Picturesque, along with the aesthetic and cultural strands of Gothic and Celticism, was a part of the

emerging Romantic sensibility of the 18th century.

(back to chronology)

### **1789 Mutiny on the Bounty**

The royal “Bounty” sailed from Spithead, England on December 23, 1787 with Captain William Bligh and a crew of 45 men bound for Tahiti. Their mission was to collect **breadfruit plants to be transplanted in the West Indies as cheap food for the slaves**. After collecting those plants, the “Bounty” was underway toward home, when, on the morning of April 28, 1789, Fletcher Christian and part of the crew mutinied, took over the ship, and set the Captain and 18 members of the crew adrift in the ship’s launch. The mutineers took the Bounty back to Tahiti, and, with 6 Polynesian men and 12 women, took the ship to the isolated site at Pitcairn Island. After burning the ship and a violent beginning, they established a settlement and colony on Pitcairn Island that still exists. Lord Byron wrote a poem about it in 1823, Sir John Barrow wrote a book in 1831 that made the event famous and Jules Verne wrote his own book in 1879. Many films were produced based on these narratives.

**1789 John Boydell’s *Shakespeare Gallery* opens in London** In 1786 Boydell and a group of friends and business associates devised a plan for an ambitious edition of **Shakespeare’s plays** with illustrations by the best artists in England. Financing the project entirely himself, he began immediately to raise a list of subscribers for the volumes, to commission painters to do the illustrations and to open a gallery to exhibit the paintings. Boydell’s *The Shakespeare Gallery* opened in 1789 in Pall Mall, and the first set of engravings based on the paintings was issued in 1791. It is a further example of the great effort to celebrate and extol national glories like Shakespeare in order to strengthen national feelings<sup>1</sup>.

**It is now time to open a new window and discuss a topic that apparently is not connected with our main theme, but in fact is (Blake and Wordsworth were both much involved): the INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION.**

It is about at this time – the 1780s – that historian Eric Hobsbawm in 1962 set the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. More generically, this was a period from the 18th to the 19th century when major changes in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and transport took place and had a profound effect on the socioeconomic and cultural conditions. The starting point was in the United Kingdom, then subsequently it spread throughout Europe, North America, and eventually the world. The onset of the Industrial Revolution marked a major turning point in human history; almost every aspect of daily life was eventually influenced in some way, and this is why we must include it even in a discussion of literature. Starting in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there began a transition in parts of Great Britain’s previously manual labour and draft-animal–based economy towards machine-based manufacturing. It started with the **mechanization** of the textile industries, the development of iron-making techniques and the increased use of refined coal. Trade expansion was enabled by the introduction of canals, improved roads and railways. The introduction of steam power fuelled primarily by coal, wider utilization of water wheels and powered machinery (mainly in textile manufacturing) underpinned the dramatic increases in production capacity. The development of all-metal machine tools in the first two decades of the 19th century facilitated the manufacture of more production machines for manufacturing in other industries. The effects spread throughout Western Europe and North America during the 19th century, eventually affecting most of the world: the impact of this change on society was enormous.

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Johnson’s 1750s edition of Shakespeare’s works had already established the playwright as a national poet.

The first Industrial Revolution, which began in the 18th century, merged into the Second Industrial Revolution around 1850, when technological and economic progress gained momentum with the development of steam-powered ships, railways, and later in the 19th century with the internal combustion engine and electrical power generation. The period of time covered by the Industrial Revolution varies with different historians. As said before, Hobsbawm held that it 'broke out' in Britain in the 1780s and was not fully felt until the 1830s or 1840s, while others held that it occurred roughly between 1760 and 1830. Historians agree that the Industrial Revolution was one of the most important events in history. Credit for popularizing the term may be given to Arnold Toynbee, whose lectures given in 1881 gave a detailed account of it.

The **causes** of the Industrial Revolution were complicated and remain a topic for debate, with some historians believing the Revolution was an outgrowth of social and institutional changes brought by the end of feudalism in Britain after the English Civil War in the 17th century. As national border controls became more effective, the **spread of disease** was lessened, thereby preventing the epidemics common in previous times. The percentage of children who lived past infancy rose significantly, leading to a larger workforce. The **Enclosure movement** and the consequent agricultural revolution made food production more efficient and less labour-intensive, forcing the surplus population who could no longer find employment in agriculture into cottage industry (lavorazione a domicilio), for example weaving, and in the longer term into the cities and the newly developed factories. The colonial expansion of the 17th century with the accompanying development of international trade, creation of financial markets and accumulation of capital are also cited as factors, as is the scientific revolution of the 17th century.

The presence of a large **domestic market** should also be considered an important driver of the Industrial Revolution, particularly explaining why it occurred in Britain. In other nations, such as France, markets were split up by local regions, which often imposed tolls and tariffs on goods traded amongst them.

One question of active interest to historians is why the industrial revolution occurred in Europe and not in other parts of the world in the 18th century, particularly China, India, and the Middle East, or at other times like in classical antiquity or the Middle Ages. Numerous factors have been suggested, including education, technological changes, "modern" government, "modern" work attitudes, ecology, and culture. The Age of Enlightenment not only meant a larger educated population but also more modern views on work.

Some historians such as David Landes and Max Weber credit the different belief systems in China and Europe with dictating where the revolution occurred. The religion and beliefs of Europe were largely products of Judaeo-Christianity, and Greek thought. Conversely, Chinese society was founded on men like Confucius, Lao Tzu (Taoism) and Buddha (Buddhism). Whereas the Europeans believed that the universe was governed by rational and eternal laws, the East believed that the universe was in constant flux and, for Buddhists and Taoists, not capable of being rationally understood. India was split up into many competing kingdoms. In addition, the economy was highly dependent on two sectors—agriculture of subsistence and cotton, and there appears to have been little technical innovation. It is believed that the vast amounts of wealth were largely stored away in palace treasuries by totalitarian monarchs prior to the British take over. Absolutist dynasties in China, India, and the Middle East failed to encourage manufacturing and exports, and expressed little interest in the well-being of their subjects.

Thus why did the industrial revolution occur in Britain?

Britain emerged from the Napoleonic Wars as the only European nation **not ravaged by financial plunder and economic collapse**, and possessing the only merchant **fleet** of any useful size (European merchant fleets having been destroyed during the war by the Royal Navy). Britain's extensive exporting cottage industries also ensured that markets were already available for many early forms of manufactured goods. The conflict resulted in most British warfare being conducted overseas, reducing the devastating effects of territorial conquest that affected much of Europe. This

was further aided by **Britain's geographical position** — an island separated from the rest of mainland Europe.

Another theory is that Britain was able to succeed in the Industrial Revolution due to the availability of key resources it possessed. It had a dense **population** for its small geographical size. Enclosure of common land and the related agricultural revolution made a supply of this labour readily available. There was also a local coincidence of **natural resources** in the north of England, the English Midlands, South Wales, and the Scottish Lowlands. Local supplies of coal, iron, lead, copper, tin, limestone and water power, resulted in excellent conditions for the development and expansion of industry. Also, the damp, mild **weather conditions** of the North West of England provided ideal conditions for the spinning of cotton, providing a natural starting point for the birth of the textiles industry.

The stable **political situation** in Britain from around 1688, and British society's greater receptiveness to change (compared with other European countries) can also be said to be factors favouring the Industrial Revolution. In large part due to the **Enclosure movement, the peasantry was destroyed as significant source of resistance to industrialization**, and the landed upper classes developed commercial interests that made them pioneers in removing obstacles to the growth of capitalism.

Last but not least, the very profitable **commerce of the slave population**, exploited on the American plantations, contributed to provide free labour for the wealthy British owners.

The fast development of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain was accompanied by obvious positive side effects, as discussed above. However, among the most negative outcomes, a few must be listed, that also became the object of some of the Romantic poets' criticism, namely:

- The collapse of communal spirit (W. Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, as we shall see in a few lessons)
- The growth of conflicts and social injustice (Blake's poetry was an open denunciation). This provoked the reactions of religious groups all over the country, like Dissenters (Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Paine).

Yet another theory is that the British advance was due to the presence of an enterprising class class which believed in progress, technology and hard work. The existence of this class is often linked to the **Protestant work ethic** (as theorized by German sociologist, economist and politician Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the spirit of Capitalism*, written in 1904-5 and translated into English in 1930) and the particular status of the Baptists sect (salvation can only come through Faith, the Bible and the local authority) and the dissenting Protestant sects, such as the Quakers and Presbyterians that had flourished with the English Civil War in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Reinforcement of confidence in the rule of law, which followed establishment of the prototype of constitutional monarchy in Britain in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and the emergence of a stable financial market there based on the management of the national debt by the Bank of England, contributed to the capacity for, and interest in, private financial investment in industrial ventures. Dissenters found themselves barred or discouraged from almost all public offices, as well as education at England's only two universities at the time (although dissenters were still free to study at Scotland's universities). When the restoration of the monarchy took place in 1660 and membership in the official Anglican Church became obligatory, they thereupon became active in banking, manufacturing and education. The Unitarians, in particular, were very involved in education, by running Dissenting Academies, where, in contrast to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and schools such as Eton and Harrow, much attention was given to mathematics and the sciences—areas of scholarship vital to the development of manufacturing technologies. Historians sometimes consider this social factor to be extremely important, along with the nature of the national economies involved. While members of these sects were excluded from certain circles of the government, they were considered fellow Protestants, to a limited extent, by many in the middle class, such as businessmen. Given this relative tolerance and the supply of capital, the natural outlet

for the more enterprising members of these sects would be to seek new opportunities in the technologies created in the wake of the scientific revolution of the 17th century.

**Ethic of work >>>ethic of profit.**