

***Az angol irodalom története. III–IV: Az 1640-es évektől az 1830-as évekig. Első és második rész***  
[The history of English literature. III: From the 1640s to the 1830s. Parts 1 and 2], edited by  
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**V**olume 4 of the Hungarian *History of English Literature* is in fact the second part of volume 3. These volumes together cover the literature of the “long 18th century”, the period between the 1640s and the 1830s, and while volume 3 – after the general introduction – discusses the poetry of the era, volume 4 focuses on drama and prose. Accordingly, volume 4 is divided into two sections, one on drama and one on prose. Each section begins with a useful introduction (by Veronika Schandl and Gabriella Hartvig, respectively), which gives an overview of the issues discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

What is common in the approach of both sections – just as in *The History of English Literature* as a whole – is that they do not merely revolve around canonical literary works and their authors. In focus is rather the multiplicity of forms, approaches, and conceptions that emerged in the context of the literature of the age, as well as the cultural processes in which the literary production of the era was embedded, where “culture” is understood in the broadest sense, involving the social, political, religious, ethical, economic, technological, material conditions of the period. Thus, in the drama section we can read about the evolution of the physical space of the theatre, about the changes in the social construction and tastes of the audiences that attended the performances (cf. especially Éva Bús’s “Színház és társadalom a restauráció korában és a 18. század első felében” [Theatre and society in the Restoration period and in the first half of the 18th century]), about individual actors and theatre-producers who determined the theatrical life of a period (cf. Veronika

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Schandl's "Színház a romantika korában" [Theatre in the age of Romanticism]), about the ethical and theoretical-critical issues raised in the context of the theatrical life of the period (cf. Mária Kurdi's "Drámaelméleti polémikák a késő 17. és a 18. században" [Polemics on the theory of drama in the late 17th and 18th centuries] and Veronika Ruttkay's "Színház- és drámaelmélet a romantika korában" [Theory of drama and theatre in the age of Romanticism]), as well as about the evolution of the classical dramatic genres (comedy and tragedy), together with the emergence and historical significance of the many variations on them peculiar to a given period (cf. chapters by Éva Bús, Gabriella Hartvig, Miklós Péti, Iván Nyusztay, Veronika Ruttkay, and Dóra Csikós).

Similarly, in the section on prose we do not merely read about "the rise of the novel", but we also get a glimpse into the role of several other prose genres that were considered "literary" in the given cultural context. Thus, besides the extended discussion of the emergence of the novel, we can also read about the role of journalism, the many forms and functions of the essay, of the pamphlet (cf. the chapters by Bálint Gárdos, Ferenc Hörcher, Csaba Maczelka, and Réka Takács), and even about the literary aspects of scientific and philosophical tracts (cf. the chapters by Csaba Maczelka, Gábor Zemlén, and Ferenc Hörcher). These genres of course once again evoke the political, social context, as well as the material, technological one, involving such issues as, e.g., the technological and economic conditions of the printing industry, changing levels of literacy, the emergence of mass popular culture, and reading customs. It is in this context that the novel is then discussed. For in the closing section of the volume we can find a thorough treatment of the "rise of the novel", together with the many national and generic variations, debates, and uncertainties that accompanied the development of the genre (cf. the chapters by Gabriella Hartvig, Dániel Panka, Mária Kurdi, and Veronika Ruttkay).

In both sections special emphasis is laid on the contribution of women to the cultural-historical processes analysed. We can learn, e.g., about the radical changes that women's appearance on the public stage brought about in the Restoration era, about the influence of individual actresses on both the theatrical conventions and the drama output throughout the period, and about the crucial contributions of female playwrights. Similarly, in the prose section we can read about the central role of women writers in the consolidation and emancipation of the novel genre, and a whole chapter (Nóra Séllei's "Angol írónők a 18. században" [English women writers in the 18th century]) is devoted to the discussion of the complete overhaul

that the dominance of female novelists at the turn of the 19th century brought about in the evolution of the genre and in the whole of the field of “literature”.

Both the drama and the prose sections, therefore, provide an exceptionally broad cultural perspective, which allows a particularly illuminating glimpse into the cultural-historical processes characteristic of the age. In this way, moreover, the book opens refreshing and exciting new perspectives on the canonical literary works of the period, as well as on the scope and significance of their authors’ achievement. For in the context of the various issues raised, we can also read about the “great”: Milton’s, Dryden’s, Walter Scott’s, Defoe’s, Fielding’s, Sterne’s, Jane Austen’s seminal works are thoroughly discussed – only, they appear embedded in the cultural-historical processes which they were formed by and which they also formed.

The book was co-authored by a great number of scholars. The thirty-four chapters were written by nineteen different contributors. The great number of authors makes some repetitions almost inevitable; however, the editors of the volume made sure that the repetitions do not get in each other’s way. On balance, therefore, these repetitions end up being an asset rather than a shortcoming. The various contexts in which the same issues re-emerge cast new light on the different facets of these issues, further enhancing the effect of the broad-minded approach that characterises the volume as a whole. To facilitate this effect, the editors provide useful cross-references that point to other occurrences of the same issues both within this and the other volumes of the series.

On the whole, therefore, volume 4 is a worthy member of the series constituting the Hungarian *History of English Literature*. It instructs the Hungarian audience by providing wide-ranging information about the various aspects of the English literary life of the era, and delights by its multi-faceted insights into the related cultural-historical processes.