1. **Chapter IX. Period VII. The Eighteenth Century, Pseudo-Classicism And The Beginnings Of Modern Romanticism**

**PERIOD VII. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. PSEUDO-CLASSICISM AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN ROMANTICISM**

**POLITICAL CONDITIONS.** During the first part of the eighteenth century the direct connection between politics and literature was closer than at any previous period of English life; for the practical spirit of the previous generation continued to prevail, so that the chief writers were very ready to concern themselves with the affairs of State, and in the uncertain strife of parties ministers were glad to enlist their aid. On the death of King William in 1702, Anne, sister of his wife Queen Mary and daughter of James II, became Queen. Unlike King William she was a Tory and at first filled offices with members of that party. But the English campaigns under the Duke of Marlborough against Louis XIV were supported by the Whigs,

[Footnote: The Tories were the political ancestors of the present-day Conservatives; the Whigs of the Liberals.] who therefore gradually regained control, and in 1708 the Queen had to submit to a Whig ministry. She succeeded in ousting them in 1710, and a Tory cabinet was formed by Henry Harley (afterwards Earl of Oxford) and Henry St. John (afterwards Viscount Bolingbroke). On the death of Anne in 1714 Bolingbroke, with other Tories, was intriguing for a second restoration of the Stuarts in the person of the son of James II (the 'Old Pretender'). But the nation decided for a Protestant German prince, a descendant of James I through his daughter Elizabeth, [Footnote: The subject of Wotton's fine poem] and this prince was crowned as George I--an event which brought England peace at the price of a century of rule by an unenlightened and sordid foreign dynasty. The Tories were violently turned out of office; Oxford was imprisoned, and Bolingbroke, having fled to the Pretender, was declared a traitor. Ten years later he was allowed to come back and attempted to oppose Robert Walpole, the Whig statesman who for twenty years governed England in the name of the first two Georges; but in the upshot Bolingbroke was again obliged to retire to France. How closely these events were connected with the fortunes of the foremost authors we shall see as we proceed.

**THE GENERAL SPIRIT OF THE PERIOD.** The writers of the reigns of Anne and George I called their period the Augustan Age, because they flattered themselves that with them English life and literature had reached a culminating period of civilization and elegance corresponding to that which existed at Rome under the Emperor Augustus. They believed also that both in the art of living and in literature they had rediscovered and were practising the principles of the best periods of Greek and Roman life. In our own time this judgment appears equally arrogant and mistaken. In reality the men of the early eighteenth century, like those of the Restoration, largely misunderstood the qualities of the classical spirit, and thinking to reproduce them attained only a superficial, pseudo-classical, imitation. The main characteristics of the period and its literature continue, with some further development, those of the Restoration, and may be summarily indicated as follows:

1. Interest was largely centered in the practical well-being either of society as a whole or of one's own social class or set. The majority of writers, furthermore, belonged by birth or association to the upper social stratum and tended to overemphasize its artificial conventions, often looking with contempt on the other classes. To them conventional good breeding, fine manners, the pleasures of the leisure class, and the standards of 'The Town' (fashionable London society) were the only part of life much worth regarding.
2. The men of this age carried still further the distrust and dislike felt by the previous generation for emotion, enthusiasm, and strong individuality both in life and in literature, and exalted Reason and Regularity as their guiding stars. The terms 'decency' and 'neatness' were forever on their lips. They sought a conventional uniformity in manners, speech, and indeed in nearly everything else, and were uneasy if they deviated far from the approved, respectable standards of the body of their fellows. Great poetic imagination, therefore, could scarcely exist among them, or indeed supreme greatness of any sort.
3. They had little appreciation for external Nature or for any beauty except that of formalized Art. A forest seemed to most of them merely wild and gloomy, and great mountains chiefly terrible, but they took delight in gardens of artificially trimmed trees and in regularly plotted and alternating beds of domestic flowers. The Elizabethans also, as we have seen, had had much more feeling for the terror than for the grandeur of the sublime in Nature, but the Elizabethans had had nothing of the elegant primness of the Augustans.
4. In speech and especially in literature, most of all in poetry, they were given to abstractness of thought and expression, intended to secure elegance, but often serving largely to substitute superficiality for definiteness and significant meaning. They abounded in personifications of abstract qualities and ideas ('Laughter, heavenly maid,' Honor, Glory, Sorrow, and so on, with prominent capital letters), a sort of a pseudo-classical substitute for emotion.
5. They were still more fully confirmed than the men of the Restoration in the conviction that the ancients had attained the highest possible perfection in literature, and some of them made absolute submission of judgment to the ancients, especially to the Latin poets and the Greek, Latin, and also the seventeenth century classicizing French critics. Some authors seemed timidly to desire to be under authority and to glory in surrendering their independence, individuality, and originality to foreign and long-established leaders and principles.
6. Under these circumstances the effort to attain the finished beauty of classical literature naturally resulted largely in a more or less shallow formal smoothness.
7. There was a strong tendency to moralizing, which also was not altogether free from conventionality and superficiality.

Although the 'Augustan Age' must be considered to end before the middle of the century, the same spirit continued dominant among many writers until near its close, so that almost the whole of the century may be called the period of pseudo-classicism.