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December 14, 2007 Trajectory of changing relations between and audience from the early 17thC to the late 18th Century

It may seem overly simplistic, but one difference between the writers/poets of the early 17th century to the late 18th century is like the difference between a specialized boutique and a large departmental store. More people will tend to patronize the departmental store. The difference between writers' audiences can be measured by an increase in literacy, or a growth in education which gave more than the very privileged a chance to learn to read and write and be interested in what others wrote, despite the eventual encroachment of the Industrial Revolution.

The earlier audiences were very specialized. Who, really, would care about referring to a cup from the Thespian well Either family or close friends of Sir George Sidney or people who knew what "Thespian" meant. Likewise, in *Virtue*, the ordinary person can understand what the poet meant by the whole world turning to coal. A hundred years later more of the potential audience "got it."

The reason that *Gulliver's travels* was so popular was that more people saw it as satire and not a clumsy fairy tale. The author refers to *Care and Vigilance*, somehow used in order to protect one's belongings from thieves. This would probably mean something to an audience in 1726 than it might have meant a century earlier. Jane Austin also developed women readers who may never have heard of Ben Jonson.

Changes in thematic preoccupations of literature from early 17th Century through late 18th Century

The thematic change between these two centuries can also quite

simplistically, be related to the boutique and department store analogies.

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While the early poets and writers had a limited audience (with boutique audiences looking for something fine and special) the next century produced more of a mass-product that appealed to a larger audience.

John Donne's " Mistress Going to Bed" is, to use a rather unflattering word, " precious." In the middle of the Seventeenth century, thematic change can be seen in Milton, who on the other hand, creates a wide and fundamentally moral canvas with a nation that survived the rift between the new Anglican Church and the Catholics, and during Milton's lifetime, the roundheads who took over the state under Cromwell. Morality and the idea of paradise hoped for, lost and regained offered some interest to a larger audience.

If we use Gulliver's Travels as appealing to a new and more educated audience, surely Sheridan's farce, " School for Scandal" gave the audiences some paragons of tomfoolery. It gives audiences the opportunity to laugh at the ridiculous hi-jinks of British nobility. Surely, there are a few broad caricatures of females in society than Lady Teazle and, in " The Rivals", Mrs. Malaprop. One might wonder if the general public from a century earlier would have been interested in Boswell's delineations of the " Life of Johnson". It certainly is a far different theme than saluting birthdays or mistresses, and the literary department store was filled with worthwhile items.

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