



THE AUGUSTAN AGE

Poetry

Several practical interests arising from the new social and political conditions demanded expression not only in books but also in pamphlets, magazines and newspapers: poetry was inadequate for such a task, hence the development of prose. Of course there were poets even in this period but their production became prosaic in this respect, that is to say it was used not for creative works of imagination, but for essays, for satire, for criticism, in a word for the same practical ends as prose. In fact, the poetry of the first half of the century is polished and witty enough, but artificial. It lacks fire, feeling, enthusiasm, the glow of the Elizabethan Age and the moral earnestness of Puritanism. It is interesting as a study of the life of the period, but does not delight us or appeal to our imagination.

In the Augustan Era, poets were even more conversant with each other than were novelists. Their works were written as direct counterpoint and direct expansion of one another, with each poet writing satire when in opposition. There was a great struggle over the nature and role of the pastoral in the early part of the century, primarily between Ambrose Philips and Alexander Pope and then between their followers, but such a controversy was only possible because of two simultaneous movements.

The more general movement, carried forward only with a struggle between poets, was the same as was present in the novel: the invention of the «subjective self» as a worthy topic, the emergence of a priority on individual psychology, against the insistence on all acts of art being performance and public gesture designed for the benefit of society at large. Underneath this large banner raged multiple individual battles.

The other development, one seemingly agreed upon by both sides, was a gradual expropriation and reinvention of all the Classical forms of poetry: every genre of poetry was recast, reconsidered and used to serve new functions. Ode, ballad, elegy, satire, parody, song and lyric poetry would all be adapted from their older uses. Odes would cease to be encomium, ballads cease to be narratives, elegies cease to be sincere memorials, satires no longer be specific entertainments, parodies no longer be bravura stylistic performances, songs no longer be personal lyrics and the lyric would become a celebration of the individual rather than a lover's complaint.

The entire Augustan Age poetry was dominated by Alexander Pope; since Pope began publishing when very young and continued to the end of his life, his poetry is a reference point in any discussion. Other important poets of the time were Matthew Prior (1664-1721), John Gay (1685-1732) and Anne Kingsmill Finch (Countess of Winchilsea, 1661-1720).

Matthew Prior, a statesman and poet, like Dryden, used his verset to comment on political events, and also wrote occasional complimentary or satirical pieces. Among his poems we may quote *Alma*; or, *The Progress of the Mind* (his longest humorous poem, written during his imprisonment and published in 1718); *Solomon*, and other Poems on several Occasions (1718); and *Henry and Emma*, a poem inspired to the old ballad the Nut-Brown Maid.

John Gay was one of the most popular authors of the Augustan Age; he wrote *The Shepherd's Week* (1714), a series of mockclassical pastorals drawn from English rustic life, and *Trivia*, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London (1716), containing vivid descriptions of London life. Gay won popularity with his *Fables*, in octosyllabic lines, inspired by the French poet La Fontaine, and nowadays he is mainly remembered for his masterpiece *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), a lyrical drama: the characters, including Captain Macheath and Polly Peachum, became household names.

Anne Finch (Lady Winchilsea) was one of the first female English poets to be published; she composed *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions: Written by a Lady* (1713) containing the famous piece *A Nocturnal Reverie*.

PROSE

The rise of Journalism

The decline of the Court as a centre for learning and the growth of the middle classes, becoming more conscious of their role in national life, caused an ever increasing public to feel the need for cultivating their intelligence and their manners. It was the new interest in ideas and facts that gave a great impulse to Journalism in the 18th century.

The earliest specimens of periodical publications had appeared about 1620: they were called «Corantos» (current news) and dealt with different subjects. During the Civil War periodical publications were concerned with the report of news, or used as propaganda sheets; later in the years of the Commonwealth, the press was subject to severe censorship.





It was after the Glorious Revolution, with Parliament's refusal to renew the Licensing Act (according to this Act of 1643, no book could be published without the licence of the Stationers' Company), that a great deal of periodical publications appeared. The most famous were «The Oxford Gazette» (1665; the word Gazette derives from Italian, particularly from the title of a Venetian newspaper, «The Venetian Gazette», issued in the middle of 16th century) – later called «The London Gazette» (1666) – «The City Mercury» (1675) and «The Observator» (1681-1687). The earliest specimens were limited to a single type of subject or to a chronicle of events. During the reign of Queen Anne newspapers began to cover a wide range of subjects such as art and literature. Among these we may quote «The Examiner», a Tory publication to which Swift contributed (1710); and

«The Review», mainly concerned with politics and economical questions, edited by Defoe in 1704. It contained a special section «Advice from the Scandalous Club» dealing with the topics of the time or aspects of the social life.

But the outstanding figures of English Journalism were Richard Steele (1672-1729) and Joseph Addison (1672-1719).

Steele was born in Dublin; he studied at Charterhouse School, where he met Addison, and at the University of Oxford. Steele wrote *The Christian Hero* (1701), in which he asserted that only religious principles and stern ideals can make a man great, and then he devoted himself to the theatre. His comedies, *The Funeral* (1701), *The Lying Lover* (1703), *The Tender Husband* (1705) and *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), considered his masterpiece, were completely freed from the cynicism and licentiousness of the Restoration Comedy. Though they did not lack comic scenes, they clearly showed different aims from mere entertainment. They paved the way to a new genre: the Sentimental Comedy.

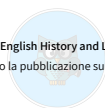
In 1709 Steele started his periodical «The Tatler». The first issue contained the programme and the objects of the newspaper: to reform moral by laughing at human follies and vices. He used the fashionable coffee-houses, chocolate-houses and gentlemen clubs as settings, in which the London society used to meet. In 1711 «The Tatler» ceased publication, and Steele, in collaboration with Addison, edited another newspaper: «The Spectator».

His greatest merit was to develop English Journalism and to impress on it a new character according to the exigencies of the time. Steele's aim was to regenerate the customs after the excesses of the Restoration and to spread the new standard of ideas, more suitable to the political advancement of the nation. Although Steele's teachings proved very successful to the still half Puritan middle class of the time, very few of his lively and amusing dissertations contain real substance or depth.

Addison was born at Milston (Wiltshire); he studied at Charterhouse School and then at Queen's College of Oxford. His first attempts in English verse were so successful they obtained for him the friendship and interest of Dryden and of Lord Somers, by whose means he received a pension to enable him to travel widely in Europe with a view to diplomatic employment, all the time writing and studying politics. His first important poem, *The Campaign* (1704), celebrating Marlborough's victory at Blenheim, made him famous and paved him the way to high political office in the ranks of the Whigs. Addison wrote three plays, but only the tragedy *Cato* (1713) is nowadays remembered.

His most remarkable work was his contribution to «The Spectator» (1711), the best periodical of the 18th century. The objects stated in the first two issues were deliberately educational and consisted in setting up a new standard of ideas, which aimed at reforming morals and fashion through good humoured criticism of vices, prejudices and foibles in the society of the time. «The Spectator» covered a wide range of subjects: political and social questions, science and philosophy, literary criticism as well as lighter topics such as fashion and events of the day. A successful creation in the pages of «The Spectator» was the «Club», whose peculiar members were Sir Roger de Coverley, Sir Andrew Freeport and Captain Sentry, representing respectively an old fashioned squire, a Whig merchant and a famous soldier. In 1712 «The Spectator» ceased its publication, but it had a short sequel of six months in 1714. In 1713 Steele and Addison edited «The Guardian», but it did not show new particular characteristics, and more than a new publication, it can be considered a continuation or an appendix to «The Spectator».

Like Steele, Addison tried to reform customs and he propagated moderate and rational ideas to reach a possible agreement between the opposite factions. He dealt with every subject in a detached way and in a light tone, as to avoid every suspicion of overwhelming gravity. On account of this position, he has often been accused of superficiality by critics. Addison's masterpiece was the elaboration of the character of Sir Roger de Coverley, who proves much more valuable as a figure of comedy for his prejudices and eccentricities than to convey a social and political meaning. Addison's charm consists in his simple and clear style resembling that of conversation; in comparison Steele's style was less regular and accurate though spontaneous and natural.





The rise of the English novel

The causes which favoured the rise of Journalism also contributed to the flourishing of the novel, and the birth of the two new genres was the most relevant literary event of the 18th century.

The literary novelty reflected the political and social changes connected with the advancement of the middle class. As a newly emerging class they felt the needs of refining their manners and their educational standard, but they demanded something lighter than epics, pastorals and romances. The novel was the most suitable genre to satisfy their exigencies as it was written in a simple language and dealt with familiar subjects and probable situations resembling everyday life.

A «novel» (from French *nouvelle* and Italian *novella*: «new») is an extended fictional narrative in prose. Until the 18th century the word referred specifically to short fictions of love and intrigue as opposed to «romances», which were epic-length works about love and adventure. During the 18th century the novel adopted features of the old romance and became one of the major literary genres. It is today defined, mostly by its ability to become the object of literary criticism demanding artistic merit, a specific «literary style» and a deeper meaning than a true story of the same content could claim to have.

The major novelist of this age were Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith and Tobias Smollett (1721-1771).

Born at Dalquhurn, now part of Renton, in present-day West Dunbartonshire, Scotland, Smollett was educated at the University of Glasgow, qualifying as a surgeon. He travelled to various parts of the world, but his career in medicine came second to his literary ambitions.

Smollett's first published work was a poem about the Battle of Culloden entitled *The Tears of Scotland*, but it was *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), modelled on Lesage's *Gil Blas*, which made his name. It was followed by *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), another big success, a picaresque tale with a roguish hero, and by *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753); he was now recognized as a leading literary figure. In 1755 Smollett published a translation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (revised in 1761), and in 1756 he became editor of «*The Literary Review*». Smollett then began what he regarded as his major work, *A Complete History of England*, which took him from 1757 to 1765. During this period he served a short prison sentence for libel, and produced another novel, *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1761). Having suffered the loss of a daughter, he went abroad with his wife, and the result was *Travels through France and Italy* (1766). He also wrote *The History and Adventures of an Atom* (1769), which give his view of English politics during the Seven Years' War under the guise of a tale from ancient Japan. The last, best and funniest of Smollett's novels is *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, published in the year of his death (1771). It is an epistolary novel, presented in the form of letters written by five different characters. Much of the comedy arises from differences in the descriptions of the same events by different participants. The author's own travels in Scotland, France and Italy helped to provide inspiration for the plot.

Smollett introduced the seafaring life in fiction. The most striking novelty in his works lies in the description of sea scenes and in his humorous characterizations resembling those of Ben Jonson. Smollett's heroes are essentially antiheroes as if in order to survive in a hard and cruel world they could not display their best qualities.

The work of these «seven giants» was accompanied by interesting experiments from a number of lesser novelists. Sarah Fielding (1710-1768), for instance, Henry's sister, wrote penetratingly and gravely about friendship in *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744, with a sequel in 1753). Charlotte Lennox (c. 1730-1804) in *The Female Quixote* (1752) and Richard Graves (1715-1804) in *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773) responded inventively to the influence of Cervantes, also discernible in the writing of Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. John Cleland (1709-1789) in *The Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (known as *Fanny Hill*, 1749) chose a more contentious path: in his charting of a young girl's sexual initiation, he experimented with minutely detailed ways of describing the physiology of intercourse. But the most engaging and thoughtful minor novelist of the period is Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762).

Although Lady Montagu is primarily known for her famous *Turkish Letters* (1763), she was a prolific writer who also produced poems, political journalism, drama, essays and romantic prose fiction. Due to her sex and aristocratic disdain for publication, Lady Mary circulated her manuscripts privately and only printed a little anonymously. Her reputation also suffered for two centuries after her death as a consequence of Alexander Pope's very public and vicious attacks. Recently critics have rescued her from Pope's satirical pen and assured her a place as a writer in her own right. An outspoken and unconventional woman, she continues to incite critical controversy due to her provocative, humorous and hard-hitting writing.





Criticism and biography

In the Age of Classicism, beside the essay and the novel, two other literary forms developed: criticism and biography.

An outstanding figure in criticism was Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). He was born at Lichfield and attended Pembroke College of Oxford without taking a degree. In 1737 he left Lichfield and went to London where he began his literary career as a journalist: Johnson contributed to «The Adventurer» and «The Universal Chronicle». For the next three decades he wrote biographies, poetry, essays, pamphlets, parliamentary reports, and continued to live in poverty for much of this time. The poem London (1738) and the Life of Richard Savage (1745) are important works from this period.

Between 1747 and 1755 Johnson wrote perhaps his best-known work, A Dictionary of the English Language. Although widely praised and enormously influential (it remained the standard dictionary of the English Language for a century), Johnson did not make much money from it as he had to bear the expense of its long composition.

During this time Johnson wrote the tragedy Irene (1749), the satirical poem The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) and a series of semi-weekly essays under the title The Rambler. These essays, often on moral and religious topics, tended to be more grave than the title of the series would suggest. They ran until 1752: initially they were not popular, but once collected as a volume they found a large audience. Johnson began another series, The Idler, in 1758: these were shorter and lighter than The Rambler and ran weekly for two years. Unlike his independent publication of The Rambler, The Idler was published in a weekly news journal. In 1759 Johnson was to become famous with his satirical novel The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.

In 1763, firmly established as one of the most outstanding literary figures, he founded the Literary Club where the most eminent members were Burke, Goldsmith, Sheridan and Boswell. In 1765 Johnson published an edition of The Plays of William Shakespeare, containing an introduction considered very important in the history of Shakespeare's criticism. His A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775) is a report of a journey made to Scotland and the Hebrides.

Johnson's last successful work was the Lives of the English Poets (1779-1781). According to the original plan, the work was to include all English poets from Chaucer onwards, but it was reduced to fifty-two poets, from Abraham Cowley to Thomas Gray: the work, though containing strange omissions and partial judgements, is a landmark in the history of literary criticism.

Johnson's personality as a man of letters was officially depicted by his biographer, James Boswell (1740-1795). He began to write The Life of Samuel Johnson in 1763: the famous biography, published in 1791, covers the whole of Johnson's life and contains a detailed report of his opinions, habits and above all of his conversations. His name has passed into the English language as a term (Boswell, Boswellian, Boswellism) for a constant companion and observer. Boswell is known for taking voluminous notes on the grand tour of Europe that he took as a young nobleman and, subsequently, on his tour of Scotland with Johnson. He also recorded meetings and conversations with eminent individuals belonging to the «Literary Club».

DRAMA

The year 1700 marked the death of Dryden, the dominant figure in Restoration Drama, and the retirement of Congreve, its most brilliant comic dramatist. Etherege, Wycherley, Lee, Otway and many other contemporaries of Dryden had already passed from the ranks of active dramatists. The growing protest against the immorality of the drama, vigorously expressed in Jeremy Collier's (1650-1726) invective, A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage (1698), showed that the old order had changed and was soon to yield place to new.

The change the English Theatre underwent was caused by several factors. Theatrical performances lost the favour of the Court: Queen Anne and her successor George I were not interested in this kind of entertainment. As a result English Drama gradually fell under the influence of the emerging middle classes and became the expression of their tastes and ideas, very different from those of the courtiers. The witty and licentious Comedy of Manners was replaced by the Sentimental Comedy, which tended to offer examples of moral uprightness and honesty; the new genre remained popular for the whole century.

As examples of the Sentimental Comedy, besides the already mentioned Richard Steele's comedies, we may quote Love's Last Shift (1696) and The Careless Husband (1705) by Colley Cibber (1671-1757), and The West-Indian (1771) by Richard Cumberland (1732-1811). The Sentimental Comedy did not produce any masterpiece because the lack of artistic qualities soon degenerated into excesses of sentimentalism.

A reaction came from Goldsmith, who in his An Essay on the Theatre; or, A Comparison Between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy (1772) complained that humour had departed from the stage.

Some authors reverted to the gay comedy: Susannah Centlivre (c. 1669-1723) produced The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret (1714), John Gay produced the famous The Beggar's Opera, and George Colman (1732-1794) wrote parodies of the Sentimental Comedy such as Polly Honeycombe (1760) and The Clandestine Marriage (1766).





Goldsmith's famous comedies *The Good Natur'd Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) were followed by the amusing comedies of Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), a brilliant playwright who achieved great success. Sheridan produced *The Rivals* in 1775, *The School for Scandal* in 1777 and *The Critic* in 1779: these works revived the witty «Restoration Comedy» without its coarseness and cynicism. Sheridan got rid of all that concerned with rules of morality; he particularly excelled at epigrams, but his characters appear nowadays too traditional and conventional to express the ways of life of an existing society.

GREAT WRITERS Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

Life

Pope was born in London in 1688 of a Roman Catholic family. From early childhood he suffered numerous health problems, including a form of tuberculosis affecting the spine which deformed his body and stunted his growth. Perhaps as a result of this condition, the poet was hypersensitive and exceptionally irritable all his life. Pope's faith prevented him from attending public schools, so he was privately educated; but his refined education was above all the result of his personal efforts and his wide reading. Pope was a very precocious poet: he began to write at the age of sixteen. His literary career began when the playwright William Wycherley, pleased by Alexander's verse, introduced him into the circle of fashionable London wits and writers, who welcomed him as a prodigy. He soon reached fame and became largely appreciated. Pope made friends with the Tory writers, John Gay, Jonathan Swift and John Arbuthnot, as well as the Whigs, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. In 1712 Pope, Gay, Swift,

Arbuthnot and Parnell formed the «Scriblerus Club».

The aim of the club was to satirize ignorance and pedantry. Pope's literary success enabled him to make a living exclusively by his works. In 1719 the poet bought a country-house at Twickenham, west of London, on the River Thames, where he retired and spent his time working and receiving the visits of the eminent personalities of the time. Pope's health, which had never been good, was failing and in 1744 he died in his villa surrounded by friends. He lies buried in the nave of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Twickenham.

Works

Early production. Unlike Dryden, who took an active share in the political disputes of his time and attempted various literary genres, Pope lacked his variety and led a very retired life. The task to which Pope devoted himself was to perfect the versification taken over from his predecessors. As to him the subject dealt with was less important than the form: his aim was to reach an absolute perfection in verses.

Published in 1709, *The Pastorals* brought instant fame to the twenty year old poet. They were followed by his first important work, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), largely influenced by Boileau's *Art Poétique*, which was equally well received. In about 700 lines

Pope expressed his ideas on poetry and criticism. He asserted that poets are to follow Nature and the rules of the Ancients. This work, which made him appreciated by Steele and Addison, is an excellent example of «reasoning in verse».

Pope's best known poem is *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), modelled on Tassoni's mock-heroic *La Secchia Rapita* and Boileau's *Le Lutrin*. It was inspired by a true event: Lord Petre cut off a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor's hair and this gave rise to a great dispute between their two families. The poem recalls the high style and the devices of the great epic; this produces a contrast with the triviality of the matter and offers the occasion of satirizing the foibles and the manners of the existing society.

The poem *Windsor Forest* of 1713, though somewhat conventional, contains fine poetical passages with delightful descriptions of the beauty and quietness of the country. Much more moving and genuine are Pope's love poems *Eloisa to Abelard* and *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* (both 1717).

Later production. Pope had been fascinated by Homer since childhood and between the years 1715 and 1720 he devoted himself to the translation of *Iliad* in heroic couplets. Encouraged by the very favourable reception of the *Iliad*, Pope translated the *Odyssey* too: the translation appeared in 1725-1726. The poet made them both popular to a wide audience, but he failed to convey in them the heroic spirit of Homer's works. The classical scholar Richard Bentley said of Pope's translations: «It is a pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer».

In the same year he published an edition of Shakespeare, bitterly criticized by Lewis Theobald in *Shakespeare Restored*. Pope's answer was to make him the hero of his *The Dunciad* (1728; the title derives from the word «dunce»), a violent satire on human stupidity, in which he attacked the mediocre contemporary authors.





Between 1733-1734 Pope conceived the ambitious project of turning to philosophic poetry and he composed the Essay on Man, consisting of four epistles addressed to Lord Bolingbroke (Henry St. John, a brilliant orator and writer of political and philosophical essays). The epistles deal with man in relation to universe, to himself, to society and to happiness. About the same time Pope wrote the Moral Essays (1731-1735); also this work is composed of four epistles and it contains a series of lively portraits of men and women.

In spite of his concise and clear style, the most suitable to philosophic subjects, he did not possess a true philosophical mind and lacked a strong progression of connected thoughts; so he often fell into great inconsistencies. Pope believed that the world in which men live is the best of all possible worlds, but men, because of their limits, fail to perceive the perfect scheme of the universe, and this is the original cause of their errors.

The essays were followed by the Satires, a collection of Horace's satires and epistles in a very free adaptation, whose best part is the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot (1735).

Pope and his time. He was the only important writer of that time who devoted his whole life to letters. In the first half of the 18th century there were few lyrics, little or no love poetry, no epics or dramas, no songs of nature worth considering, but in the narrow field of satiric and didactic verse Pope was the undisputed master. He represented the trends of a stable age in which social development and the progress of science and philosophy deeply influenced literature. The poet wrote for a limited audience who shared his ideas and tastes, but at the same time he revealed a severe critic of the way of life of the contemporary society. His criticism is tempered by the mood of general optimism of the age: in fact he never seems to lose his hope and confidence on man and on his possibilities. Pope's animosity and bitterness is only limited to certain behaviour and to some defects.

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)

Life

He was born Daniel Foe in London in 1660, son of a tallow-chandler and butcher (Daniel added «De» to his name about 1695). The author studied at Charles Morton's Academy of London in preparation for a career in the Presbyterian ministry, but he plunged into politics and trade, travelling extensively in Europe. In 1682 Defoe established himself as a merchant in the hosiery trade. Though his ambitions were great and he bought both a country estate and a ship, he was rarely free from debt. In 1684 Defoe married Mary Tuffley; they had eight children, six of whom survived. In 1685 he joined the ill-fated Monmouth Rebellion, after which the writer was forced to spend three years in exile. In 1692 Defoe was arrested for payments of 700 pounds; his laments were loud, and he always defended unfortunate debtors, but there is evidence that his financial dealings were not always honest. Between 1693 and 1694 the writer probably travelled in Europe and in 1695 he was back in England, serving as a «commissioner of the glass duty», and then operating a tile and brick factory in Tilbury, Essex. Defoe became popular with the king after the publication of his satirical poem, The True-Born Englishman. The poem attacked those who were prejudiced against having a king of foreign birth. The publication of his The Shortest Way with the Dissenters upset a large number of powerful people. The pamphlet was judged to be critical of the Anglican Church and Defoe was fined, imprisoned (1703) and pillored. While in prison he wrote his mock-Pindaric ode Hymn to the Pillory. The Earl of Oxford brokered his release in exchange for Defoe's co-operation as a secret agent (between 1703 and 1704 he travelled around the country, gathering information and testing the political climate). Within a week of his release from prison, Defoe witnessed the Great Storm of 1703: it caused severe damage to London and Bristol. The event became the subject of his book The Storm. In 1704 he set up his periodical «A Weekly Review of the Affairs of France», which supported the Tory ministry; «The Review» ran without interruption until 1713. When the Tories fell from power with the death of Queen Anne in 1714, Defoe continued doing intelligence work for the Whig government. After 1719 he turned to writing novels. The author died in 1731 and was interred in Burnhill Fields, London.





Works

Early works. Defoe's first work was *The True-Born Englishman* (1701) a long satire in verse in which he defended the king William of Orange against the attacks of not being of pure English stock.

In *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702) he satirically advocated the measure of hanging the Dissenters, and such was the gravity of his irony, that he was taken in earnest and committed to prison as a fomentor.

When Defoe was released from prison he devoted himself to journalism: his periodical «*The Review*» (1703-1713) is a deeply significant and innovative work in the history of English journalism. It also serves as an invaluable, detailed record of domestic and international political history in the early 18th century, and provides an extensive running commentary on the culture and society of Defoe's time. In journalistic terms, Defoe's periodical offered readers the relatively novel experience of «human interest» stories, related by a sympathetic and humane narrator. It earned him a wide and responsive reading audience. «*The Review*» must be read as both a contemporary mouthpiece for Ministry propaganda and as an ongoing journalistic record of political events. The basic conflict between these roles reflects the problematic nature of political journalism itself. Then as now, journalists were consistently vulnerable to criticism as political mercenaries; then as now, Defoe defended his stance as an independent and politically unbiased writer of utmost integrity. The lifetime of «*The Review*», however, sees Defoe's pen in service to both moderate Tory and Whig interests.

Robinson Crusoe. Defoe was nearly sixty when he published his first and most famous novel with the full title of *The Life and Strange, Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which is often considered to be the first English novel: it is one of the few books which has held its popularity undiminished for about three centuries.

It relates the adventures of a shipwrecked sailor who lives alone in a desert island, without losing his courage and striving against adverse conditions. With only a few supplies from the ship he builds a house, a boat and a new life. His island is not wholly uninhabited, though, and there is the exciting but ominous presence of cannibals, who Crusoe occasionally encounters and saves a native from. The latter becomes his servant, Man Friday. The crew of a mutinying ship finally rescue our hero, but it is his adventure on the island that interests us. The author may have based his narrative on the true story of the Scottish castaway Alexander Selkirk, who had run away to sea in 1704 and requested to be left on an uninhabited island to be rescued five years later.

Everything described in the novel gives the impression of reality: the author, by using plain style, never indulges in fantastic elements nor in inventions and in any other artifice diverting the reader's attention from the events. Defoe used the same technique employed in a narrative piece of 1706, *True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal*, his first experiment in making an improbable event believable by a faithful report of details. In *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe showed his Puritan spirit in depicting a hero whose courage derives from his faith in God. The novel was also highly considered for his educational contents as it emphasizes the best human qualities in a natural environment not spoilt by civilization. The story spawned two sequels: *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), which consisted of moral essays.

Other works. Daniel Defoe was a very prolific writer and besides *Robinson Crusoe* he wrote many other novels, such as *Memoirs of a Cavalier* (1720), *Adventures of Captain Singleton* (1720; about the adventures of a pirate and amazing for its portrayal of the redemptive power of one man's love for another), *Colonel Jack* (1722), *Moll Flanders* (1722; a picaresque «first-person narration» of the fall and eventual redemption of a lone woman in 17th century England, which is regarded as one of the great English novels), *A Journal of the Plague Year* (a complex historical novel published in 1722) and *Lady Roxana* (1724; the life of a great courtesan).

During the last years of his life, Defoe reverted to political and economical works: the most famous of them are *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-1727; a detailed account of his visits to various cities and small towns of Britain before the Industrial Revolution), *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726), *The Political History of the Devil* (1726; it sounds like a joke or satire, but the general scholarly opinion is that Defoe really did think of the Devil as a participant in world history) and *The Complete English Gentleman* (1728-1729).

Defoe's reputation. Though his stories are defective in plot, characterization and psychological analysis, nowadays Defoe's fame rests chiefly on his prose fiction, in which imaginary events are related with such an air of truth that we are inclined to believe that they are faithful eyewitness records.





Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

Life

Swift was born in Dublin in 1667. Having lost his father few months before his birth, he was brought up and educated by his uncle. Most of the facts of Swift's early life are obscure, confused and sometimes contradictory. At the age of six he began his education at Kilkenny Grammar School, which was, at the time, the best in Ireland. In 1686 Swift graduated from the Trinity College of Dublin. He was studying for his Masters when political troubles in Ireland, surrounding the Glorious Revolution, forced him to leave for England in 1688. The following year Swift became secretary in the household of Sir William Temple, an essayist and politician who lived at Moor Park in Surrey, where he had occasion to meet important men of letters and statesmen. In 1694 Swift returned to Ireland, where he took the holy orders and obtained a parish at Kilroot (Belfast). In 1696 Swift was again at Moor Park, where he had a love affair with Esther Johnson (he gave her the nickname «Stella»), the housekeeper's daughter, and it seems that the writer married her secretly. Swift also became entangled in politics in the Whig ranks, but disappointed by their policy he deserted them for the Tory party (he became editor of the Tory newspaper «The Examiner»). In 1713 the author was appointed Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin, but he always failed to obtain the bishopric to which he aspired. In that period another woman entered into his life, Esther Vanhomrigh, who will become his «Vanessa»: she died brokenhearted, at the age of thirty-five, when Swift abandoned her. In 1714 Swift began to gain a reputation as a writer; this led to close, lifelong friendships with Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot, forming the core of the celebrated «Scriblerus Club». The Tories fell from power, and his hopes for preferment in England came to an end: he returned to Ireland «to die», as he said, «like a poisoned rat in a hole». In 1718 Swift began to publish tracts on Irish problems, earning him the status of an Irish patriot. Two years later the writer began to work upon Gulliver's Travels, intended, as he said in a letter to Pope, «to vex the world, not to divert it». In 1726 Swift paid a long-deferred visit to London, taking with him the manuscript of Gulliver's Travels. During his visit he stayed with his old friends, who helped him arrange for the anonymous publication of his book: it was an immediate hit. The last years of the writer's life were lonely and sad. He suffered from a long disease and his mind began to fail, slipping gradually into senility. Swift died in Dublin in 1745 completely insane. He was buried by Stella's side, in accordance with his wishes. The bulk of his fortune was left to found a hospital for the mentally ill.

Works

Literary satires. Swift devoted himself to various genres, but he excelled as a satirist. His first successful work was *The Battle of the Books* (1704), a sort of mock-heroic epic in prose describing an imaginary battle between classical and modern books. The author wrote it in defence of Sir William Temple, whose essay *Ancient and Modern Learning*, in favour of the Ancients, had been attacked from many sides. The controversy between Ancients and Moderns originated in France with the famous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* and by that time it had developed in England.

Religious satires. His most famous religious satire was *A Tale of a Tub* (1704; the title refers to a current practice of seamen: when they met a whale, they flung it an empty tub to divert it from attacking the ship), concerned with the history of Christianity, in which he, in a burlesque prose, relates the dispute among three brothers, Peter, Martin and Jack – the names refer to St. Peter, Martin Luther and John Calvin – representing respectively the Catholics, the Lutherans and the Calvinists. After their father's death, the three brothers fail to reach an agreement about the interpretation of his will. It seems that this work scandalized Queen Anne who opposed Swift's nomination to a bishopric.

Political satires. Swift's political satires may be divided into two main groups: those concerning England and those about Irish questions.

An Argument against Abolishing Christianity (1708) and *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711) belong to the first group. The former was an attack against those who use religion according to their needs and to satisfy their ambitions. The latter was an exhortation to make peace with France, at the time of the War of the Spanish Succession.

In his essays about Ireland, the writer complained of the English misgovernment and abuses. *The Drapier's Letters* of 1724 caused such a large public reaction it forced the English Government to withdraw the monopoly of minting copper coins granted to William Wood, which would have debased the Irish coinage. In *A Modest Proposal* (1729) Swift used all his sarcasm suggesting that the poor might relieve themselves from distress by selling their children as food for the rich.

Poetical works. He began his literary career as a poet till Dryden, according to Dr. Johnson's story, warned him to stop writing poetry with the famous remark: «Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet». As a matter of fact, Swift was to reveal himself particularly endowed in other literary genres, never excelling in poetry. The few exceptions for which he deserves to be mentioned are *Cadenus and Vanessa* (1713), an account of Swift's love-story with Esther Vanhomrigh; *On the Death of Dr. Swift* (1731), an autobiographical poem; *The Day of Judgement* (1731) and *The Lady's Dressing Room* (1732).





Gulliver's Travels. Swift's most celebrated work, his masterpiece and one of the indisputable classics of English literature, is *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*, more popularly titled *Gulliver's Travels*, a great satire of the times. The book became tremendously popular as soon as it was published (anonymously in 1726) and it is likely that it has never been out of print since then. It is uncertain exactly when Swift started writing it, probably 1720, but some sources suggest as early as 1713 when Swift, Gay, Pope, Arbuthnot and others formed the «Scriblerus Club», with the aim of satirizing then-popular literary genres. The work relates the adventures of Lemuel Gulliver, a surgeon on a merchant ship, and it is composed of four books.

In the first book Gulliver finds himself in the land of Lilliput, whose inhabitants are six inches tall: they symbolize pettiness and narrow mindedness. The statesmen who obtain favours by cutting monkey capers on the tight rope before their sovereign, and the two great parties, who plunge the country into civil war over the question of whether an egg should be broken on its big or its little end, are satires on the politics of the time. The style is so simple and convincing that we can define this part as the most interesting of Swift's satire.

Brobdingnag, the land of giants, described in the second book, is in evident contrast with Lilliput: here the inhabitants show other defects such as the arrogance of power.

In the third book Swift's intentions emerge more clearly from the cloak of a fantastic story which seems invented only to amuse children. The description of the flying island of Laputa, where a philosopher has been working for eight years to extract sunshine from cucumber, is followed by the description of Lagado, the city in which all sorts of absurdities happen in the name of science.

In the fourth book the merciless satire is carried out to its logical conclusion: Gulliver finds himself in the country of the Houyhnhnms, where intelligent horses (the ruling class) live, and human beings, called Yahoos, are reduced to the level of a degraded race.

Gulliver's Travels stirs men's reflections on their defects. Everything is put in discussion: the political questions, the religious controversies, the war, the lucubration of science, the intimate aspects of human nature and its perversions. A simple and precise style gives vividness and vigour to the events related. It is so imaginatively and wittily written that it became and has remained a favourite children's book.

Other works. Other remarkable works by Swift include *The Journal to Stella* (written in 1710-1713 and published posthumously in 1766-1768), a collection of letters addressed to Esther Johnson, and *Directions to Servants* (1731), dealing with the relations between servants and masters.

The Journal to Stella is considered an enduring work. It consists of letters, written every day, recording his reactions to the changing world. Full of detail and playfulness, the diary-letters trace his move away from Whig policies and his growing alliance with the Tory party. The book is one of the most interesting documents that ever threw light on the history of a man of genius.

Directions to Servants is one of Swift's last completed works. It displays all his caustic skill as a satirist and his unerring eye for the little annoyances of life. Taking the form of a handbook of manners, and addressed to each servant individually, *Directions to Servants* is the ultimate upstairs/downstairs battle. With scathing wit, Swift pits master against servant in an endless struggle for order and frugality. His servants are lazy, profligate and acquisitive. Written in Swift's final years of sanity, the book is a last hilarious outpouring of cynicism at a lifetime's accumulation of poor service.

Swift's features. It's undeniable that he is the most original writer of his time. Vigour and simplicity mark every page, and in fact even in his most grotesque creations we never lose the sense of reality. Swift gives reality to pygmies, giants and the most impossible situations as easily as if he were writing of common events: in this lies his peculiar genius.

