

The 18th Century

The Enlightenment

The Augustan Age

Neo-classical Age

The Hanoverian Dynasty

- After the Glorious Revolution (1688), William of Orange and Mary came to the throne in 1689. The Act of Settlement (1701) established their successors, in case they had no children, to exclude the Catholic Stuarts
- → Mary's sister Anne became queen from 1702 to 1714.
- When Queen Anne died her successor was George I of Hanover (great-grandson of James I)
- → George II, George III, George IV, William IV, Queen Victoria.

- Two major parties emerged: **Tories and Whigs**. Prime Ministers ruled the country.
- **Seven Years' War (against France, Spain, Austria) → Treaty of Paris 1763** brought to Britain a great part of India, Quebec in Canada and Dakar in Africa → the Empire grows.
- American Revolution (1775-83): **loss of American colonies**.
- War against revolutionary France (French Revolutionary Wars, 1793-1802) and then against Napoleon.

Augustan Age/Neo-Classicism vs Pre-Romanticism

- **First part of the century** (under Queen Anne) = Augustan Age → poets inspired by Latin authors (Augustan poets).
- **Neo-Classicism lasted until mid-century.** This term refers especially to art → art should imitate nature.
- **End of the century** = new sensibility, new idea of poetry and different relationship with nature → Pre-Romanticism.

First Half of the Century: Reason

- It continued the trend of the second half of 1600
- Faith in the authority of **reason**
- **Science** and the **rationalistic spirit** were not seen as a challenge to religion but as a means for a better understanding of the order and harmony of a God-created universe. New method of inquiring into nature, based not on accepted authorities but on the mathematical-physical **experimental method**.
- **Deism**: a theological position based on a compromise between religion and science.

Scientific Rigour and Intellectual Clarity

The **Royal Society** (founded in 1662, with Charles II's patronage) gave propulsive force to this view: its motto was “nullius in verba” (on the word of no one)

- **Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (1687)** put science in the top ranks of learning.
- With harmony, order and reason, man could control everything, even nature → scientific discoveries and technological development.

Augustan Age

- It was called Augustan after the period of **Roman history** which had achieved **political stability** and power as well as the flourishing of the arts.
- Optimism encouraged faith in progress and human perfectibility → literature must educate, improve society → Satirical poetry.
- A desire for **balance**, **symmetry** and **refinement** could be observed in architecture → **St Paul's Cathedral** by Christopher Wren = neoclassicism.
- The same in poetry → **Augustan poetry** → **A. Pope**.

Next slides: St. Paul's Cathedral





Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

- First English poet to make a living from his literary output.
- Faith in the **educative value of poetry**, a means to say “what oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed”.
- He was a **humanist** and loved the clarity and elegance of classic poetry.
- *Essay on Criticism* (1711): he exalts the imitation of Nature.
- Translated the *Iliad* (1715-20): this gave him financial independence.

Pope's Poetry

- He uses the **heroic couplet** like Dryden.
- *Pastorals* (1707) , inspired by Virgil. Pastoral poetry as a representation of an ideal state of life (Utopia/Arcadia).
- The ***Rape of the Lock*** (1712): a mock-heroic poem. Lock = a small group of hairs
- It tells about the snipping of a love-lock from the head of a beautiful girl Belinda, which caused a quarrel between two aristocratic families. Real fact: Lord Petre had cut one of Arabella Fermor's locks. John Caryl, who knew both families, asked Pope to write a poem to reconcile them.

The Rape of the Lock (1712)

- Allusions to the greatest literary works: *Aeneid* but also *Paradise Lost*. Epic tone. Sophisticated language, elegant form.
- The society of his time is the object of his satire, especially the fatuousness, superficiality and exteriority of the upper classes.
- First Italian translation of *The Rape of the Lock* = *Il ricciolo rapito* → allusion to Alessandro Tassoni's *La secchia rapita* (1621, an Italian mock-heroic poem, the beginner of this genre in Italy).

Pope's late satirical production

- He had not been able to enter university because he was Catholic and had been derided because of his deformity → the poem *The Dunciad* (1728). **Harsher tone** than in *The Rape of the Lock*. A corrosive satire of the British literary world, represented as the Empire of Dullness, ruled by dunces.* He ridicules the mediocrity of some artists celebrated in fashionable circles.
- *dunce = slow at learning, stupid.

Satire

- Pope = antithesis of the true poet for the Romantics, because of his lack of feeling, his use of a sophisticated language and the primacy given to form .
- He was able to conjugate satire, grace/elegance and rigour. He was a master of the heroic couplet.
- **Poetic diction**: no fish but the finny race
- Pope's satire is different from Swift's satire, marked by bitterness and disgust.

Satire: Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

- Born in Ireland to English parents. He was an Anglican priest, Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.
- He promoted the rights of Ireland in a number of writings: the most famous is *A Modest Proposal* (1729), a pamphlet attacking the politics of the English which had caused Ireland's state of dire poverty. A paradox: he suggests selling Irish children as quality meat for the tables of the rich English. Understated ferocity.

Other pamphlets

- *The Battle of the Books* (1697), sets out a battle between ancient and modern writers, to the disadvantage of the moderns.
- *A Tale of a Tub* (1704): on contemporary political and religious controversies and on the practice of vituperation (vituperio = insult, offense) in cultural debates.

Gulliver's Travels (1726)

- Abbreviated and simplified, reduced to its first two parts to serve as an adventure story for children.
- Source: *The True History*, by Greek author Lucian, 2nd cent. AD, a tale of fantastic journeys undertaken by a group of lost mariners.
- Travellers' tales were very popular at the time.
- Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).
- *Gulliver's Travels*: parody of the existing genre.

Lemuel Gulliver → gullible → satire

- Four Books; the protagonist is a ship's **surgeon**, an honest person but not particularly perspicacious (**gullible=credulous**) → there is **no irony** in his statements; e.g. he praises English institutions in a way which involuntarily underlines their deficiencies.
- **Book I**: shipwrecked on the island of Lilliput (he is a giant among very small people).
- **Book II**: he ends up in Brobdingnag. Its inhabitants are 12 times bigger than he is.

Gulliver's travels

- **Book III**: flying island of **Laputa**, where its inhabitants are devoted to abstract speculations and unable to do practical activities. He also meets the learned men of **Balnibarbi**, (their aim is to discover things of great practical utility but they engage in useless experiments). Finally he meets the **Struldbrugs**, a race of immortals, growing decrepit and miserable because they cannot die.

Gulliver's Travels

- **Book IV:** in the land of intelligent and rational horses (Houyhnhnms) and a filthy man-like race (the Yahoos). When he goes back, he cannot stand living with his relatives and goes to live in the stable. The smell of humans repels him.
- Gulliver's tales are an occasion of ferocious satire against King George I , his Prime Minister Walpole, the administration of justice, the squabbles between Protestants and Catholics.

Swift a misanthrope or a moral philosopher ?

- His satire attacks false ideals, pettiness, hypocrisy, injustice (against individuals and collectivities like the Irish).
- Fantastic but also ferocious representation of society.
- It is in prose, but is not a novel (romanzo). It is a fantastic story, remote from realism.

An Evolving Society

- Increased leisure and comfort among the rich class encouraged the **habit of reading**.
- **Journalism** became a profession. Novels were often published in **serial form** in newspapers.
- **Women** who were denied access to public life of any kind constituted a major market for fiction = **reading public**.
- **Coffee-houses** = places for social debate and professional networking. They circulated the latest pamphlets and periodicals.

Industrial Revolution

- It starts in the second half of the 18th century.
- From an agrarian and handicraft economy to an industrial one based on machine manufacture .
- Raw materials from the colonies gave impetus to industries .
- The invention of the steam-engine.
- An enterprising class who owns the capital.
- Fuel = coal
- The Empire was a huge market to sell products.
- Shift from countryside to cities, factory system, division of labour.