

**: STRUCTURE :**

- 12.0 Objectives**
- 12.1 Introduction**
- 12.2 Poets**
- 12.3 Essayists**
- 12.4 Novelists**
- 12.5 Historians**
- 12.6 Let Us Sum Up**
- 12.7 Key Words**
- 12.8 Books suggested**
- Answers**

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**12.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit will help you

- Know the major writers of the Augustan Age
- Relate specific works to the writers
- Appreciate the features of the literature of the Age

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- Identify the writers of the Augustan Age
- Analyse the various genres popular in the Age
- Describe the characteristics of the literature of the Age

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**12.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The Augustan Age is an important Age in English Literature. There was a spurt in the number of writers and many genres were popular. It has been called the Age of Prose because of the writers at the beginning of the Age. Prose writings of this Age made progress in narration, description, exposition, speculation, argument etc. Alongside, the Age witnessed the establishment of the Periodical Essay made possible and popular due to the invention of the printing press. Political satire also reached new heights. In poetry, writers moved towards a strict following of rules, of rhyme and metre, of placing the ‘how’ above the ‘what’, of manner over matter. Though there had been attempts at prose fiction as early as the Elizabethan Age, the actual development of the novel as a literary genre took place in this Age. This genre continues to this day in almost the same form. This Age was also a great Age for letter-writing. As letter-writing is an art that can be cultivated only in an unhurried age of ease and leisure, this Age seemed to be ideal for this purpose. The letters of this century both by their bulk and by quality

constitute an important stock of literature. The drama of this Age has nothing to commend itself and was indeed a dull and dreary affair. Drama declined but dramatic activity continued. This Age produced actors and actresses who seem to be better known than the dramatists themselves. Noticeable in the drama of this period is the French influence.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I**

#### **A. STATE WHETHER TRUE OR FALSE**

- i) Prose fiction began as early as the Elizabethan Age.
- ii) Political satire was absent in this Age.
- iii) Writers placed 'what' above 'how'.
- iv) It has rightly been called the Age of drama.
- v) The Age produced good actors and actresses.

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## **12.2 POETS**

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The Poetry of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was as different from the previous age as the poetry of the Romantic Age would be. The secession from romanticism seems complete and the ideals of classicism begin to reign supreme. In no genre is the triumph of classicism seen more fully than in poetry. The lyric almost disappears and whatever little of it remains is of a light and artificial nature and a pale reflection of the Caroline species. The ode still survives in the Pindaric form. The satiric type of poetry is seen in great measure and is of high quality. It is not however of the standard of Dryden. Satire tends to be lighter, brighter but more cynical. In addition to the heroic couplet, the octo-syllabic couplet was becoming popular. Another development in satire was the epistolary form of the satire. Narrative poetry is of considerable bulk in this age and contains some of the best productions of the period. There is visible a slight revival of the ballad and some poor imitations of earlier ballads. The artificial type of the pastoral was highly popular. Some reasons for this may be the air of rusticity it gave to many compositions, it was considered to be elegant, it was easily written, and it had the appeal of the ancients.

**Alexander Pope** (1688-1744): The most important poet of this Age was undoubtedly Alexander Pope. As a poet, he was deeply affected by the experiences of his life which included his physical weaknesses, his character which seemed a mass of contradictions, the mental agony caused by the taunts and sneers of his enemies, the rivalry for poetic fame, an animosity which was intensely personal and vindictive and which gave to his satirical portraits a vigour and incisiveness which have indeed made them immortal.

Pope's works may be divided into two groups—earlier and later. In the earlier group, we have his *Pastorals*, *Essay on Criticism*, *The Rape of the Lock* and his translations of Homer while the later consists of the *Dunciad* and the *Satires* and the *Epistles*.

*The Pastorals* were published in 1709 and of these Pope claims: "I lisped in numbers/ And the numbers came". Based on classical models, the characters and scenery seem to lack vigour and reality. However, the work is important as an experiment in verse technique. His medium was the heroic couplet and he handles it with great metrical skill, variation of

speed and tone as well as delicacy of touch. The rich description is loaded with epithet and the diction often artificial.

Pope's first major literary venture, *The Essay on Criticism*, was published in 1711. It sums up the art of poetry according to Horace and filtered through Boileau—the French poet-critic. Pope's mastery of terse expression has indeed made it a store-house of pithy maxims. Some of these have indeed become a part of everyday speech. For example, "A little learning is a dangerous thing", "To err is human, to forgive divine" etc.

*The Rape of the Lock*, published in 1714, is a mock-heroic poem, which satirises the fashionable society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Supposedly written to patch up a serious quarrel which arose between two aristocratic families when Lord Petre cut off a lock of hair from a beautiful maid Arabella Fermor. It is around this story that Pope is able to weave an entire poem in the epic tradition. He succeeds in satirising with a most delicate and lively fancy the fashions and foibles of polite society. He introduces sylphs and gnomes instead of gods and goddesses and the poem is certainly one of the most perfect mock-epics in the English language.

His shorter poems of the period like *Eloisa to Abelard* and *Elegy to an Unfortunate Lady* are interesting because they are the only poems where Pope wrote directly on the theme of love. They can be considered as expressions of passion and pathos.

Pope's translation of Homer received a mixed response. Though many of his contemporaries were happy to read a contemporary translation, it is considered faulty as a translation as Pope had no sound knowledge of Greek and may have been led into errors by his reference to earlier translations. At the same time, it is a brilliant poem, which is fast-moving and full of eloquent speeches even when far removed from the vigour of the original. It can be said that Pope had only one dress to clothe all subjects--- 'the highly artificial dress of the mechanised couplet and sophisticated wit'.

*The Dunciad* was a response to Theobald's criticism of Pope's edition of Shakespeare. *The Dunciad* was a war of wit against dullness. Infuriated by the criticism against him, Pope first made Theobald the hero of *Dunciad* but in the later edition substituted him with Cibber who had been appointed the poet-laureate. The satire is undoubtedly brilliant in its scorching abuse but critics have pointed out that Pope need not have wasted his poetic talent for the gratification of personal spite. Though inspired by Dryden's *MacFlecknoe*, Pope's *Dunciad* is generally considered to be inferior to the former.

*The Satires* and *Epistles* were the last important works of Pope and were written in imitation of Horace. Partly satirical and partly didactic, the two most famous ones are *Essay on Man* and *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*. The *Essay on Man* is probably the most quoted of Pope's poems and consists of four epistles. According to Pope, the purpose of this poem was 'to vindicate the ways of God to Man'. Most critics believe

that except in form it is not poetry. It is found to consist of numerous literary ornaments without any very solid structure of thought.

*Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* was the prologue to the satires and is considered one of Pope's most brilliant satires mixed with autobiography. It contains the famous satirical portrait of Addison in the character of Atticus.

In summing up Pope as a poet, it is clear that he remained unchallenged as the greatest till 1798. However, both in subject and style, his poems are limited, but his work is indeed powerful and effective. A study of his technique shows his meticulous attention to the right word at the right place. We see 'correctness and finish' in his use of the heroic couplet. As a verse satirist, he certainly is as immortal as Dryden. 'The house of poetry has many mansions and one is certainly reserved for Pope'.

Worthy of mention in this Age is Robert Burns (1759-96), the Scottish poet, and William Blake (1757-1827) whose *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* reveal a variety of spontaneity and lyrical quality.

Other poets of the Age who deserve a mention are Mathew Prior, John Gay, Edward Young, Thomas Parnell etc.

**Oliver Goldsmith** (1728—1774) wrote his poems within the framework of the classical school and also succeeded in infusing his poetry with nature, feeling and humour. His best known works are *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*.

**Dr. Johnson** (1709-84) was the greatest literary figure of the third quarter of the century and his major achievements were in prose. However, he wrote two satires in imitation of Juvenal. Both *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* were written strictly in accordance with the rules of classical criticism. Their keynote is sincerity and they are tinged with melancholy almost bordering on pessimism. The style is declamatory but eloquent.

Along with Pope and his contemporaries, it is necessary to look at the poets who followed and who some historians call poets of the Age of Johnson. Since no water-tight division of ages is possible, let us now look at some of these poets. James Thomson (1700-1748) who is sometimes credited with having started a school of poetry opposed to that of Pope is best known for *Seasons*, which got him immediate success and fame. In four books the poem describes the four seasons in blank verse and is remarkable for the poet's minute observation. John Dyer (1699-1758) was inspired by mountain scenery, which is seen, in his **Grongre Hill**. **William Collins** (1721—1759) is famous for his odes written in different lyrical measures, the best-known being '*The Ode to Evening*'. Thomas Gray (1716—1771) wrote very little but his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* is enough to rate him along with the great poets in the English language. In this poem, Gray produces a symphony that strikes a sympathetic chord in every human heart. This is achieved by the truth and sincerity of sentiments, classic restraint, choice yet simple diction as well as the music of the elegiac quatrain.

## Check your progress II

### i) Fill in the Blanks with Appropriate words/Phrases :

- ii) *The Rape of the Lock* is a \_\_\_\_\_.
- iii) *The Dunciad* was written to avenge \_\_\_\_\_'s criticism of Pope.
- iv) Oliver Goldsmith's famous poem is \_\_\_\_\_.
- v) \_\_\_\_\_ was a Scottish poet.

### 1. Match the Words in Columns A: with Appropriate ones in column B:

A	B
i) Thomson	a) London
ii) Dr. Johnson	b) Songs of Innocence
iii) Gray	c) Seasons
iv) Blake	d) Elegy written in a Country Churchyard

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## 12.3 ESSAYISTS

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Journalism had grown considerably during the last decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and there was a plentiful supply of newspapers in the reign of Queen Anne. Some of them gave political news, purveyed social gossip and discussed current topics. Some gave importance to social criticism: with a moral and educational aim they attempted to instruct the public 'what to think'. *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were the most important ones followed by *The Rambler*. The periodical essay, which flourished for only about 50 years, according to Dr. Johnson, "presented general knowledge appropriate for circulation in common talk". With the increase in middle-class readers, these periodicals became very popular. Because of the brevity of individual items and the variety of its contents, the essay played a significant role in such periodicals presenting commentary on politics, religion, society and many other matters. The formal properties of the periodical essay seemed to be largely defined through the practice of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. These two wrote with such effectiveness and cultivated such attention in their readers that their writings in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* served as the models for periodical writing in the next few decades.

*The Tatler* began in 1709 and lasted for about two years after which came *The Spectator*, which was collaboration between Addison and Steele. The moral and educational purpose of the paper was explicitly stated by Addison when he said that it was his ambition 'to bring philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee-houses'.

Richard Steele (1672-1729) and Joseph Addison (1672-1719): As originator of *The Tatler* and co-author of *The Spectator*, Steele has contributed greatly to the development and popularity of the periodical essay. It is impossible to separate the work of Addison and Steele in the periodicals, but the majority of critics believe that the more original parts, the characters, the thought are largely Steele's creation. To Addison fell the work of polishing and perfecting the essay and of adding that touch of

humour, which contributed in great measure to their lasting popularity. *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* are indeed the beginning of the modern essay and their studies of human character, as exemplified in Sir Roger de Coverley, seem to be a preparation of the modern novel. The essays present the best picture of the new social life of England, they advanced the art of literary criticism to a new height and they gave us delightful characters. In style, these essays show the growing perfection of the English language for as Dr. Johnson says, "Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison". The Periodical Essay continued to grow in the essays of Goldsmith, Dr. Johnson, Swift etc.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS III

#### 1. Answer in Short

- i) Why is the periodical essay considered a precursor to the novel?

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- ii) How did Steele and Addison contribute differently to the essays they wrote?

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- iii) What was Addison's aim in writing these essays?

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- iv) What does Dr. Johnson say about the style of Addison?

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- v) List the major contributors to the growth of the Periodical Essay as a genre.

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## 12.4 NOVELISTS

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In addition to other major achievements of the Age, the novel as a literary form is an important milestone. Though other genres like the epic, the romance and drama were first produced in other nations, the novel was born in England. The precursors of the novel can be traced to a collection of tales called the *Greek Romances* of the second to sixth centuries, *The Canterbury Tales*, Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, *The Pilgrim's Progress* etc. However, the modern novel probably can be traced to the publication of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740. In this Age, increase in the reading public and a powerful middle class led to writers moving away from romances and tales of heroic valour to the everyday lives of common people.

**Daniel Defoe** (1661-1731): His *Robinson Crusoe* generally heads the list of early novels and is one of the few books, which held its popularity for almost two centuries. The charm of the story is its intense reality and in the succession of thoughts, feelings and incidents which every reader feels is true to life. Some critics believe that *Crusoe* represents the whole of human society.

**Jonathan Swift** (1667-1745) Swift's most famous work *Gulliver's Travels* is a satire on man and his institutions. Written in four parts, the last part shows Swift's bitterness and misanthropy. By a strange quirk of fate, the novel has become a classic for children. Its chief merit is that it is an absorbing tale of adventure. *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books* are his two other important works.

**Samuel Richardson** (1689—1761) He is credited with having written the first modern novel, an epistolary novel. *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* is a series of letters telling of the trials, tribulations and the final happy marriage of an unbelievably sweet maiden. Though its success at that time was enormous, it is also considered sentimental, grandiloquent and wearisome. His second novel *Clarissa* which ran into eight volumes was also received with great enthusiasm. He told the story of human life, told it from within.

**Henry Fielding** (1707-1754) His first novel *Joseph Andrews* was inspired by the success of *Clarissa* and began as a burlesque of the false sentimentality and the conventional virtues of Richardson's heroine. However, the story is of a vagabond and the novelist tells it the aim of 'laughing men out of their follies'. He is direct, vigorous, hilarious and coarse to the point of vulgarity. He wrote other novels of which *Tom Jones* is the most important one. Fielding must be regarded as a great artist of realistic fiction and is indeed the founder of the modern novel.

**Smollet**(1721-1771) and **Sterne** (1731-1768): Smollet lacked Fielding's genius and seems to crowd his pages with the horrors and brutalities which are sometimes mistaken for realism. He is best known for three works: *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle* and *Humphrey Clinker*. He models his novels on Don Quixote, trying to follow the

picaresque novel, which was very characteristic of that age. The works of Sterne are the reverse of those of Smollet for the latter was given to coarse vulgarities and the former to whims and vagaries and sentimental tears. His two important works are *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. The first was never finished even after nine volumes and in the second the reader is never sure how much has been taken or adapted from other writers.

**Oliver Goldsmith** (1728-1774) His only novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield* gives to home-life an enduring romantic interest. In this simple story of common life, Goldsmith seems to have accomplished three noteworthy results--- he has made human fatherhood almost a divine thing, he has glorified moral sentiments and in Dr. Primrose he has created a striking and enduring figure who seems almost like a personal acquaintance rather than a character from a book.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS IV

#### 1. Match the Words in Column A with Appropriate ones in column B:

A	B
i) Jonathan Swift	a) Pamela
ii) Henry Fielding	b) Robinson Crusoe
iii) Daniel Defoe	c) Vicar of Wakefield
iv) Oliver Goldsmith	d) Tom Jones
v) Samuel Richardson	e) Gulliver's Travels

#### 2. ANSWER IN ONE SENTENCE:

- i) What were Goldsmith's achievements as a novelist?
- ii) How are the styles of Smollet and Sterne different?
- iii) What was the aim of Fielding's first novel?
- iv) What genre is Pamela?
- v) What is special about the origin of the novel?

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## 12.5 HISTORIANS

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This Age also witnessed prose writings other than the novel and the essay. For example, historians like Edward Gibbon with his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, David Hume with his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, William Robertson with *The History of Scotland* deserve special mention.

James Boswell's biography *The Life of Samuel Johnson* ranks as one of the best biographies in the English language. Edmund Burke's philosophical writing *A Vindication of Natural Society* and his political work *Conciliation with the Colonies* show all the devices of the orator and fired by an impassioned imagination.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS V

1. List the major prose writers of the Age and their works.



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## 12.6 LET US SUM UP

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After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- List the various genres of the Age
- Understand the reasons for the growth of these genres
- Relate specific works to the writers

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## 12.7 KEY WORDS

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- **Periodical essay**—A new literary form that emerged during the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; came out regularly in affordable publications and were only two to three pages in length
- **Epistolary novel**—A novel written as a series of documents, usually letters
- **Burlesque**---An absurd or comically exaggerated imitation of something, especially in a literary or dramatic work
- **Picaresque novel**--- A genre of prose fiction that depicts the adventures of a roguish but appealing hero, who lives by his wits in a corrupt society
- **Realistic fiction**--- A genre consisting of stories that could have actually occurred; the stories resemble real life

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## 12.8 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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1. A Compendious History of English Literature by R.D.Trivedi
2. English Literature by W. J. Long
3. A History of English Literature by Edward Albert

## ANSWERS

### Check your Progress I

i) True ii) False iii) False iv) False v) True

### Check your Progress II

1. i) mock-epic ii) Theobald's iii) Deserted Village iv) Robert Burns
2. i-c, ii-a, iii-d, iv-b

### Check your Progress III

Answer in short

### Check your Progress IV

i-e, ii-d, iii-b, iv-c, v-a

### Check your Progress V

Listing