

Dr.Raman Kumar Rajesh  
Department of English  
Cmj College Donwarihat Khutauna  
Khutauna Madhubani

English  
D3

Augustan literature (sometimes referred to misleadingly as Georgian literature) is a style of British literature produced during the reigns of Queen Anne, King George I, and George II in the first half of the 18th century and ending in the 1740s, with the deaths of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, in 1744 and 1745, respectively. It was a literary epoch that featured the rapid development of the novel, an explosion in satire, the mutation of drama from political satire into melodrama and an evolution toward poetry of personal exploration. In philosophy, it was an age increasingly dominated by empiricism, while in the writings of political economy, it marked the evolution of mercantilism as a formal philosophy, the development of capitalism and the triumph of trade.

The chronological boundary points of the era are generally vague, largely since the label's origin in contemporary 18th-century criticism has made it a shorthand designation for a somewhat nebulous age of satire. Samuel Johnson, whose famous *A Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1755, is also "to some extent" associated with the Augustan period.[1] The new Augustan period exhibited exceptionally bold political writings in all genres, with the satires of the age marked by an arch, ironic pose, full of nuance and a superficial air of dignified calm that hid sharp criticisms beneath.

While the period is generally known for its adoption of highly regulated and stylised literary forms, some of the concerns of writers of this period, with the emotions, folk and a self-conscious model of authorship, foreshadowed the preoccupations of the later Romantic era. In general, philosophy, politics and literature underwent a turn away from older courtly concerns towards something closer to a modern sensibility.

The entire Augustan age's poetry was dominated by Alexander Pope. His lines were repeated often enough to lend quite a few clichés and proverbs to modern English usage. Pope had few poetic rivals, but he had many personal enemies and political, philosophical, or religious opponents, and Pope himself was quarrelsome in print. Pope and his enemies (often called "the Dunces" because of Pope's successful satirizing of them in *The Dunciad*) fought over central matters of the proper subject matter for poetry and the proper pose of the poetic voice.

A decade after the gentle, laughing satire of *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope wrote his masterpiece of invective and specific opprobrium in *The Dunciad*. The story is that of the goddess Dulness choosing a new Avatar. She settles upon one of Pope's personal enemies, Lewis Theobald, and the poem describes the coronation and heroic games undertaken by all of the dunces of Great Britain in celebration of Theobald's ascension. When Pope's enemies responded to *The Dunciad* with attacks, Pope produced the *Dunciad Variorum*, with a "learned" commentary upon the original *Dunciad*. In 1743, he added a fourth book and changed the hero from Lewis Theobald to Colley Cibber. In the fourth book of the new *Dunciad*, Pope expressed

the view that, in the battle between light and dark (enlightenment and the Dark Ages), Night and Dulness were fated to win, that all things of value were soon going to be subsumed under the curtain of unknowing.

John Gay and Alexander Pope belong on one side of a line separating the celebrants of the individual and the celebrants of the social. Pope wrote *The Rape of the Lock*, he said, to settle a disagreement between two great families, to laugh them into peace. Even *The Dunciad*, which seems to be a serial killing of everyone on Pope's enemies list, sets up these figures as expressions of dangerous and antisocial forces in letters. Theobald and Cibber are marked by vanity and pride, by having no care for morality. The hireling pens Pope attacks mercilessly in the heroic games section of the *Dunciad* are all embodiments of avarice and lies. Similarly, Gay writes of political society, of social dangers, and of follies that must be addressed to protect the greater whole. Gay's individuals are microcosms of the society at large. On the other side of this line were people who agreed with the politics of Gay and Pope (and Swift), but not in approach. They include, early in the Augustan Age, James Thomson and Edward Young.