The Augustan Age (1702-1760)

- The Stuart dynasty ended with the death of Queen Anne, the protestant daughter of James II (1714).
- The Hanover dynasty began with George I, German and protestant.
- Several Jacobite rebellions were suppressed.
- The king, who spoke German, needed a Prime Minister. Sir Robert Walpole became the 1° Prime Minister in 1927.
- William Pitt the Elder was another important Prime Minister during the reign of George II.
Important features of the Augustan Age

• **Colonial expansion** (after the 7 years war Britain won control of Quebec, Canada and India).

• **Political stability** (for this reason it was named after the Roman Emperor Augustus).

• **Rise of the middle classes** (importance of coffee-houses as meeting places; spread of journalism and newspapers).

• **Beginning of parliamentary monarchy**, with a two-party system (**Tories** and **Whigs**).

• **Spirit of the Enlightenment**: an intellectual movement which began in England in the 17° cent. (Locke), and then spread to Germany (Kant) and the rest of Europe; new faith in reason, central role of man, scientific enquiries, feelings of tolerance and equality.
Development of journalism in England

• England was the first country where journalism developed as a free profession.

• Newspapers and periodicals talked about: politics, manners and morals, religion, trade, fashion; they were directed mainly to the middle classes (clear, simple language).

• The most popular ones were *The Tatler* by R. Steele and *The Spectator* by J. Addison.

• Politicians imposed some restrictions to newspapers (taxes), so they used advertisements as a means of survival.

• **Coffee-houses:** here the middle classes exchanged news, opinions, gossip.
Augustan aesthetics

• Principles of order and harmony in art, architecture, literature, inspired by the splendour of Rome, but they also reflected the new mentality of the middle-classes (importance of reason, puritan pragmatism).

• In literature, new tendency towards realism (rise of the novel, different from poetry or drama).
Hogarth: *An Election* (1754-55)

- He was a painter, satirist, engraver and art theorist.
- **First success:** *The Harlot’s Progress*: a sequence of paintings with a story-like quality.
- He liked to satirize some aspects of contemporary life.
- **An Election Entertainment:** he satirizes two Whig candidates who bribe their guests in an election party.
- **Canvassing for votes:** he ridicules politicians and their corruption. In the foreground a farmer is offered bribes by some politicians, while in the background a Tory crowd invades the Whig headquarters. People from all social classes are included in the picture.
Gainsborough: *Mr and Mrs Andrews (c.1750)*

- He was a portrait and landscape painter. First influenced by Dutch painting, he produced small scale group portraits, then life-sized figures. He painted on commission.
- *Mr and Mrs Andrews*: the couple is on the left, while the landscape is at the centre (not a background but the subject of the painting). Mr and Mrs Andrews are very elegant, aristocratic and they seem to show their property.
- Connection nature/property: property appears “natural”.
- Mr Andrews, standing and carrying a gun, domesticates both the dog and the landscape. Mrs Andrews, sitting still, represents the modesty and inactivity of the woman.
- This portrait represents the life of privilege of this aristocratic couple.
The Rise of the Novel

• The novel, differently from other forms of literature, is a fictitious narrative that represents real life.

• Main reasons for the spread of the novel:
  1. Philosophical rationalism: emphasis on sense perceptions and individual pursuit of truth;
  2. Puritanism and Methodism: you save your soul in this life, through your hard work and virtuous activity.
  3. Expansion of reading public: spread of newspaper, circulating libraries; middle-class people wanted to identify with the characters (realistic stories).
  4. Influence of books such as Don Quixote (episodic structure).
The origins

• Although Defoe is usually considered the father of the English novel, the first real novelist was a woman: Aphra Behn.

• She wrote *Oroonko or the History of the Royal Slave (1688)*: it criticises the slave trade
Different kinds of novel

• The first novels were characterized by great experimentation, so they were very different in form and style:

• **Defoe and the realist novel**: written in the form of fictional autobiography, many realistic details. The protagonist struggles to overcome difficulties. Flat characters.

• **Swift and the fantastic novel**: *Gulliver’s Travels*, apparently a children’s fable set in a fantastic world, but full of philosophical reflections and criticisms on some social aspects.

• **Richardson and the sentimental novel**: epistolary novels (*Clarissa*); his characters are ordinary middle-class people. Psychological exploration (round characters).
• **Fielding and the comic novel:** *Tom Jones*, complex plot with many characters (a whole society). The intrusive narrator comments and criticizes his characters.

• **Sterne and the experimental novel:** *Tristam Shandy* subverts or ignores the realist conventions. There are shifts of time, and the narrator comments on the process of construction of the novel itself. (It anticipates modernist and postmodern writers).