

NELSON'S ENGLISH READINGS  
VOLUME FOUR

# EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

*Selected and Edited by*  
RICHARD FOSTER JONES  
*Professor of English*  
*Washington University, St. Louis*

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IN SEVEN VOLUMES

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LITERATURE

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University of Illinois, St. Louis  
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## PREFACE

THE desire to choose specimens of the best work by the most significant literary figures of the eighteenth century determined the contents of this volume. I have included whole compositions or integral parts of whole compositions, except in a few cases where the literary quality of passages made their selection advisable. As in volume three, the titles of pieces which were first published in separate form are printed in capitals. In case the piece selected constituted upon its first appearance only part of a volume, the title of that volume is given, followed by the selection or selections taken from it. In a few instances where this method did not seem feasible, I have given proper notification in a note. The emphasis upon Pope seems justified by his marked superiority over contemporary poets, while the omission of William Blake, who is generally included in eighteenth-century anthologies, is explained by his intimate relationship with the romantic period proper, the anthology of which he heads.

R. F. J.

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## CONTENTS

DANIEL DEFOE . . . . .	13
From <i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> . . . . .	13
From <i>The History and Remarkable Life of</i> <i>Col. Jacque</i> . . . . .	21
JONATHAN SWIFT . . . . .	28
A Tale of a Tub: Section II . . . . .	29
Hints towards an Essay on Conversation . . . . .	40
An Argument against Abolishing Chris- tianity . . . . .	51
A Modest Proposal . . . . .	66
The Journal to Stella: Letter LV . . . . .	77
RICHARD STEELE AND JOSEPH ADDISON . . . . .	82
The Tatler	
No. 25 On Duelling . . . . .	83
No. 163 Ned Softly the Poet . . . . .	86
No. 181 Melancholy Recollections . . . . .	91
The Spectator	
No. 2 The Members of the Club . . . . .	95
No. 10 The Purpose of the <i>Spectator</i> . . . . .	102
No. 70 On the Ballad of Chevy-Chase . . . . .	106
No. 323 Clarinda's Journal . . . . .	113
No. 419 The Fairy Way of Writing . . . . .	119



ALEXANDER POPE . . . . .	122
An Essay on Criticism (lines 68-200, 289-393) . . . . .	123
The Rape of the Lock . . . . .	130
The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope	
An Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady . . . . .	153
Essay on Man. Epistle I	
Of the Nature and State of Man with Respect to the Universe . . . . .	155
Moral Essays. Epistle I	
Of the Knowledge and Characters of Men	164
Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, being the Prologue to the Satires . . . . .	171
The Dunciad (Book IV, lines 627-656) . .	183
JAMES THOMSON . . . . .	184
The Seasons: Winter (lines 41-105, 223-264) . . . . .	185
The Castle of Indolence: Canto I (Stanzas I-VIII) . . . . .	188
EDWARD YOUNG . . . . .	191
The Complaint, or Night Thoughts	
Night I. On Life, Death, and Immortality (lines 1-90, 205-220) . . . . .	192
WILLIAM COLLINS . . . . .	195
A Song from Shakespeare's Cymbeline . .	196
Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects	
Ode to Simplicity . . . . .	197
Ode Written in the Beginning of the Year 1746 . . . . .	199

# CONTENTS

ix

Ode to Evening . . . . .	199
Ode Occasion'd by the Death of Mr. Thomson . . . . .	201
An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland . . . . .	203
THOMAS GRAY . . . . .	210
Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College . . . . .	211
An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard . . . . .	214
Odes by Mr. Gray . . . . .	
The Progress of Poesy . . . . .	218
Poems by Mr. Gray . . . . .	
The Vegtam's Kivitha . . . . .	223
The Fatal Sisters . . . . .	227
JAMES MACPHERSON . . . . .	229
Temora . . . . .	
Cath-Loda . . . . .	230
THOMAS CHATTERTON . . . . .	242
Poems Supposed to have been Written at Bristol by Thomas Rowley . . . . .	
An Excelente Balade of Charitie . . . . .	243
Ælla, a Tragycal Enterlude: <i>Song</i> . . . . .	247
Elinoure and Juga . . . . .	249
Narva and Mored, An African Eclogue . . . . .	251
To Horace Walpole . . . . .	254
SAMUEL JOHNSON . . . . .	255
The Rambler . . . . .	
No. 89 The Luxury of a Vain Imagi- nation . . . . .	257
No. 161 The Tenants of a Garret . . . . .	262

The Idler	
No. 60 Dick Minim the Critic . . . . .	267
The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets	
From "Milton" . . . . .	272
From "Pope" . . . . .	278
JAMES BOSWELL . . . . .	281
From <i>The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.</i>	
(A.D. 1763) . . . . .	282
OLIVER GOLDSMITH . . . . .	293
The Citizen of the World	
Letter XXI. At the Playhouse . . . . .	294
Letter LIV. Beau Tibbs . . . . .	299
Letter CXVII. London by Night . . . . .	302
The Deserted Village . . . . .	305
Retaliation (lines 29-42, 93-124, 137-146) . . . . .	318
EDMUND BURKE . . . . .	320
From <i>A Speech on Moving his Resolutions</i>	
<i>for Conciliation with the Colonies</i> . . . . .	320
WILLIAM COWPER . . . . .	331
The Task	
Book V. The Winter Morning Walk	
(lines 1-126) . . . . .	332
Book VI. The Winter Walk at Noon	
(lines 1-10, 57-84, 295-347) . . . . .	336
Boadicea . . . . .	338
On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture	
out of Norfolk (lines 1-45) . . . . .	340
On the Loss of the Royal George . . . . .	341
To Mary . . . . .	343

# CONTENTS

xi

ROBERT BURNS . . . . .	345
Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect	
The Cottar's Saturday Night . . . . .	346
To a Mouse . . . . .	352
To a Mountain Daisy . . . . .	354
Epistle to J. Lapraik (lines 49-84) . . . . .	356
A Bard's Epitaph . . . . .	358
Tam O'Shanter: A Tale . . . . .	359
Holy Willie's Prayer . . . . .	366
Mary Morison . . . . .	370
John Anderson, My Jo . . . . .	371
Willie Brew'd a Peck o' Maut . . . . .	371
M'Pherson's Farewell . . . . .	372
To Mary in Heaven . . . . .	373
Ae Fond Kiss, and Then We Sever . . . . .	374
Highland Mary . . . . .	375
Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn . . . . .	376
A Man's a Man for a' That . . . . .	377
O Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast . . . . .	378



## DANIEL DEFOE

DANIEL DEFOE (1660?-1731), the son of nonconformist parents, was educated at a school conducted for dissenters, and later engaged in business. Through a satiric poem in behalf of William III, entitled *The True Born Englishman*, 1701, he gained considerable political influence which he lost two years later upon the publication of *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters*, an attack on the treatment accorded nonconformists. For this production, couched in irony that missed its mark, he was fined, imprisoned, and placed in the pillory, but while confined he started the *Review*, a political periodical of great importance. The disgrace of this unjust punishment so warped his character that thereafter he wrote for whatever party it was to his interest to write for. His pen seems never to have been idle, for he was a writer of phenomenal productivity, and wrote on every conceivable subject. In 1719 he published the work for which he is famous, *Robinson Crusoe*, and during the following eight or ten years produced a series of novels, the most important of which are *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and *Colonel Jack*, all stories of criminal life. Besides these he was producing many works of various natures, among which was *The Journal of the Plague Year*, 1722, a vivid description of the great plague that devastated London in 1665, and, next to *Robinson Crusoe*, his most significant work. Defoe was an important figure in the development of journalism and the novel. His style is remarkably bare, plain, and unelaborated. Figures of speech, intensifying adjectives, and in general all elements of elegance are omitted, while his sentences are often slovenly constructed. His objectivity, his penchant for concrete detail, and his making the word match the thing explain his ability to "lie like truth."

### *From A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR,*

1722

As I went along Houndsditch one morning, about eight a-clock, there was a great noise; it is true, in-

deed, there was not much crowd, because people were not very free to gather together, or to stay long together when they were there, nor did I stay long there. But the outcry was loud enough to prompt my curiosity, and I called to one that looked out of a window, and asked what was the matter.

A watchman, it seems, had been employed to keep his post at the door of a house which was infected, or said to be infected, and was shut up; he had been  
10 there all night, for two nights together, as he told his story, and the day watchman had been there one day, and was now come to relieve him. All this while no noise had been heard in the house, no light had been seen; they called for nothing, sent him of no errands, which used to be the chief business of the watchman; neither had they given him any disturbance, as he said, from the Monday afternoon, when he heard great crying and screaming in the house, which, as he supposed, was occasioned by  
20 some of the family dying just at that time. It seems the night before, the dead-cart, as it was called, had been stopt there, and a servant-maid had been brought down to the door dead, and the buriers, or bearers, as they were called, put her into the cart, wrapped only in a green rug, and carried her away.

The watchman had knocked at the door, it seems, when he heard that noise and crying, as above, and nobody answered, a great while, but at last one looked out and said with an angry quick tone, and yet a  
30 kind of crying voice, or a voice of one that was crying, "What d'ye want, that ye make such a knocking?" He answered, "I am the watchman! How do you do? What is the matter?" The person answered, "What is that to you? Stop the dead-cart." This it seems, was about one a-clock; soon after, as the fellow said, he stopped the dead-cart, and then knocked again, but nobody answered. He

continued knocking, and the bellman called out several times, "Bring out your dead"; but nobody answered, till the man that drove the cart being called to other houses, would stay no longer, and drove away.

The watchman knew not what to make of all this, so he let them alone, till the morning-man, or day-watchman, as they called him, came to relieve him. Giving him an account of the particulars, they  
10 knocked at the door a great while, but nobody answered; and they observed that the window, or casement, at which the person had looked out, who had answered before, continued open, being up two pairs of stairs.

Upon this the two men, to satisfy their curiosity, got a long ladder, and one of them went up to the window, and looked into the room, where he saw a woman lying dead upon the floor, in a dismal manner, having no clothes on her but her shift. But though  
20 he called aloud, and putting in his long staff, knocked hard on the floor, yet nobody stirred or answered; neither could he hear any noise in the house.

He came down again, upon this, and acquainted his fellow, who went up also, and finding it just so, they resolved to acquaint either the lord mayor, or some other magistrate of it, but did not offer to go in at the window. The magistrate, it seems, upon the information of the two men, ordered the house to be broken open, a constable and other persons be-  
30 ing appointed to be present, that nothing might be plundered; and accordingly it was so done, when nobody was found in the house but that young woman, who, having been infected, and past recovery, the rest had left her to die by herself, and were every one gone, having found some way to delude the watchman, and get open the door; or get out at some back door, or over the tops of the houses, so that he



knew nothing of it; and as to those cries and shrieks which he heard, it was supposed they were the passionate cries of the family at the bitter parting, which, to be sure, it was to them all, this being the sister to the mistress of the family. The man of the house, his wife, several children, and servants, being all gone and fled, whether sick or sound, that I could never learn; nor, indeed, did I make much enquiry after it.

10 Many such escapes were made out of infected houses, as particularly, when the watchman was sent of some errand; for it was his business to go of any errand that the family sent him of, that is to say, for necessaries, such as food and physic, to fetch physicians, if they would come, or surgeons, or nurses, or to order the dead-cart, and the like; but with this condition, too, that when he went he was to lock up the outer door of the house, and take the key away with him; to evade this, and cheat  
20 the watchmen, people got two or three keys made to their locks, or they found ways to unscrew the locks, such as were screwed on, and so take off the lock, being in the inside of the house, and while they sent away the watchman to the market, to the bake-house, or for one trifle or another, open the door, and go out as often as they pleased. But this being found out, the officers afterwards had orders to padlock up the doors on the outside, and place bolts on them as they thought fit.

30 At another house, as I was informed, in the street next within Aldgate, a whole family was shut up and locked in, because the maid-servant was taken sick; the master of the house had complained by his friends to the next alderman, and to the lord mayor, and had consented to have the maid carried to the pesthouse, but was refused; so that door was marked with a red cross, a padlock on the outside,