

undergoes, usually it is Part III that is seen as the centre of Swift's attack on early colonialism. In this part of the novel, Gulliver arrives on an island, 'Laputa', whose name means 'the whore' in Spanish. This flying island hovers around, and sometimes descends directly upon another island community, Balnibarbi. The relationship between the two is like that between England and Ireland, when seen from the perspective of Ireland, whence Swift is writing. When Gulliver claims 'I never knew a Soil so unhappily cultivated, Houses so ill contrived and so ruinous, or a People whose Countenances and Habit expressed so much Misery and Want' (p. 174), the impoverished people and depleted soil remind readers of Ireland. But the analogy between England and Laputa holds the 'superior' island responsible for the deprivations of those below. The 'Academy of Projectors' (p. 176) on Laputa, devoted to fantastic schemes for making and saving money (e.g., 'Sun-Beams out of Cucumbers'), represents the sometimes similarly wild experiments of the Royal Society. There is also an implication that England is similarly extracting the sunlight and the profits out of Ireland, that the colonial and scientific projects are not unrelated. In both cases, it is about putting the possibility of getting more money before all else, thus a possible connection to the name of the island.

Like Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the narrative of *Gulliver's Travels* is punctuated by specific dates throughout, indicating thereby that we are again reading a history in the sense of a record of major events. Gulliver's travels are bracketed by two years: Gulliver leaves for his first trip in 1701 and returns from his final one in 1715. Gulliver is out of the country for most of Queen Anne's reign (1702–14). He leaves in the same year as the passage of the Act of Settlement, 1701, and returns in the first full year of the reign of George Ludwig, Elector of Brunswick-Lüneburg, brought to the throne by the Act of Settlement in 1714. The time also coincides with what turns out to be the Tories' last period of high political influence for almost another forty years. Some might say that Gulliver represents Swift's exile under the Tories. Others argue that Gulliver's changes from island to island represent the kinds of changes that the party went through during the period. Taking these two readings together, we might say that Swift believed that he was in exile as a Tory precisely because of how the party was run during those years.

4 Pope, *Essay on Man* (1733)

Today, the eighteenth-century contribution to literature is understood largely with reference to the emergence of the novel and of professional literary criticism. But it was also a period in which poetry was particularly important. Alexander Pope, for example, was able to move to the fashionable Twickenham section of London and build a villa for himself there after the popular, commercial success of his translations of Homer's epics. At a time when poetry was that important, Alexander Pope was perhaps the most

important poet. His influence on the English language can still be heard today in phrases such as ‘hope springs eternal’, ‘fools rush in’, and ‘a little learning is a dangerous thing’. The Academy Award-nominated film, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), takes its title from a line in Pope’s poem ‘Eloise to Abelard’. Still, Pope’s poetry can be difficult for readers today: less playful than the dense work of the seventeenth-century ‘Metaphysicals’ and more formally structured than the poetry of the Romantics of the late eighteenth and early eighteenth centuries, Pope can seem quite foreign and old-fashioned to today’s readers. Nonetheless, that formality makes a major contribution to the interest and importance of Pope’s poetry, in its historical context.

While several of his works stand out in literary history, none is quite as ambitious as *An Essay on Man*, published in four anonymous instalments, or ‘Epistles’, during 1733 and 1734 (Pope, *Poems* [A]). Initially intended to be one of four major works on philosophical topics, *An Essay on Man* is the only one of the series that was completed. Perhaps a poem devoted to the topic of ‘man’ turned out to be sufficiently ambitious all by itself. As it is, each of *An Essay on Man*’s four ‘Epistles’, or letters, addresses a different aspect of ‘the Nature and State of Man’: ‘Universe’, ‘Individual’, ‘Society’ and ‘Happiness’. In its impressive scale, some might say *An Essay on Man* takes its place among the works of the Enlightenment that aimed to reimagine society on a more rational basis. As ‘Epistles’, which Pope describes as a ‘way of writing [that] hath prevailed much of late’, *An Essay on Man* is consistent with the popularising impulse of the Enlightenment. In a prefatory statement on ‘The Design’, Pope cites Bacon and ‘the Science of Human Nature’, thus aligning the poem with the Enlightenment through and through. At the same time, though, the poem is profoundly uneasy about empiricism and what it casts as the related limits of the human ability to understand the natural world. In this way, the poem could also be read as being opposed to the Enlightenment.

Throughout *An Essay on Man*, Pope is at pains to reconcile the various incidences of life, usually its trials, with a larger, beneficent order. ‘A mighty maze! But not without a plan’, he claims at the beginning of the first epistle (line 6). In a sense, *An Essay on Man* addresses what has come to be known as ‘the problem of pain’: if there is a good God, why is there so much suffering? In taking up this question, Pope’s *An Essay on Man* follows, quite self-consciously, a path pursued earlier by Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667/74). At the beginning of ‘Essay on Man’, Pope signals the affiliation. His claim that he will ‘vindicate the ways of God to Man’ reworks Milton’s phrase from Book I of *Paradise Lost*, ‘justify the ways of God to men’ (I.26). In both cases, the poets claim to be able to explain the problem of pain, but there is a difference between justifying and vindicating: the latter term, vindicate, implies even more certitude than the former, justify. To vindicate presumes that the action need not be justified, or, more to the point, that it already is justified. For Milton, the justification involves a defence of free will, that people make choices that can leave them unhappy, until they discover ‘A Paradise within thee, happier far’ (*Norton Anthology*,