



# An Introduction to Addison and Steele

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# Joseph Addison

- Joseph Addison was born in 1672 in Wiltshire.
- Addison was educated at **Charterhouse School**, where he first met **Richard Steele**, with whom he shared a lasting professional and personal association.
- Addison attended **Queen's College, Oxford**, where he achieved distinction in **classical studies**, and subsequently studied at **Magdalen College**.
- Addison's first major literary work, *An Account of the Greatest English Poets*, was published in 1694.



- Through the 1690s, Addison published several Latin poems, which brought him to the notice of John Dryden.
- Between 1699 and 1703, Addison toured the Continent, where he met many political leaders and diplomats.
- In 1705 Addison published a poem called *The Campaign*, celebrating the recent victory of the allied forces over France in the Battle of Blenheim, which secured him the position of the Commissioner of Appeals and subsequently Under-Secretary of State in the ruling Whig government.
- His political career reached its zenith in 1708 when he became a member of the Parliament.
- Addison's literary career entered a productive phase in 1709, when Steele started publishing *The Tatler*.
- Addison contributed fewer essays to *The Tatler* than Steele.
- In 1711, they co-founded *The Spectator*, which was an instant hit with readers and ran to a total of 555 issues.
- Addison also wrote a neo-classical tragedy, *Cato*, which was produced in 1713.
- Addison died in 1719 at the age of 48 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

# Richard Steele

- Richard Steele was born in **Dublin** in **1672**.
- Steele had a difficult childhood as his father died when he was only five years old.
- Steele studied at **Charterhouse School** and then joined **Merton College, Oxford** in 1690.
- Thereafter, he joined the British army as a cadet and was promoted to the post of **Captain** when he wrote a funeral poem for **Queen Mary**.
- He made his first foray into the world of literature with ***The Christian Hero*** (1701), a prose work that had for its hero an idealized man whose virtuous nature reflected the author's reformist zeal.



- ◉ Steele also wrote three comedies for the stage, *The Funeral* (1701), *The Lying Lover* (1703) and *The Tender Husband* (1705), none of which were commercially successful.
- ◉ Steele's literary career took off in 1709 when he started publishing *The Tatler* with the help of Addison; subsequently, the two also collaborated on *The Spectator* and made the periodical essay a popular literary form in England.
- ◉ Steele followed this up with the publication of *The Guardian* and *The Englishman* in 1713. In the same year, he was also elected to the Parliament from Stockbridge.
- ◉ Following the accession of King George I to the throne, Steele was appointed as the supervisor of Drury Lane Theatre and was awarded a knighthood in 1715.
- ◉ Steele published his last comedy, *The Conscious Lovers*, in 1722.
- ◉ Steele died in Carmarthen in 1729.

# The Tatler

- The Puritan government of the time sought to censor everything the public read, which hindered the creation of a discriminating audience with the freedom of choice to read and believe what they liked. It was only towards the turn of the century that publishers ventured to bring out magazines that carried not only news reports and advertisements but also more critical and imaginative pieces of writing that offered social commentary.
- The first major publication of this kind was Richard Steele's *The Tatler*, which first appeared in 1709.
- Steele's stated agenda was "to hold a mirror" up to society, "to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour"



- ◎ *The Tatler* was meant to guide its readers in matters of social and moral etiquette and reform the common errors of the age.
- ◎ The extravagance and indulgence that marked the previous decades were perceived as requiring correction and a general ethic of moderation was held up as a model in all domains of public and private conduct.
- ◎ With regular contributions from Addison, *The Tatler* gained immense popularity in a very short span of time.
- ◎ Most of the popular coffee houses in London subscribed to *The Tatler* (and subsequently to other magazines too) as a result of which the periodical essay reached out to a large number of people.
- ◎ Practically every notable author of the age – Samuel Johnson, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope and Oliver Goldsmith, to name a few prominent ones – tried his hand at the periodical essay, thereby giving the form literary respectability.
- ◎ The authors of periodical essays, especially Addison and Steele, mostly dealt with topical issues relating to manners and morals without sounding pedantic or preachy.
- ◎ In 1711 Steele discontinued the publication of *The Tatler*

# The Spectator

- In 1711 Steele discontinued the publication of *The Tatler* and started publishing a daily magazine, *The Spectator*.
- While *The Tatler* consisted mostly of news articles and a few pieces of political and literary criticism, *The Spectator* focused more on mundane concerns of social life and often dedicated an entire issue or sometimes a series of papers to the exploration of a single theme.
- *The Spectator* became very popular and rapidly evolved into a distinctly modern magazine, carrying more critical and moral pieces than informational news items.
- The essays featured a motley group of characters: *Sir Roger de Coverley*, *Sir Andrew Freeport*, *Captain Sentry* and *Will Honeycomb*, representing the landed gentry, the commercial class, the army and the town respectively.



- The narrator, **Mr. Spectator**, was himself the authorial voice of reason and refinement, commenting subtly on the virtues and oddities of each of these characters in a way that encouraged the reader to identify with his perspective.
- *The Spectator* sought to initiate a public discourse about social morality beyond the limits of juridical and religious institutions by “**reprehending those Vices which are too trivial for the Chastisement of the Law, and too fantastical for the Cognizance of the pulpit**”
- Addison and Steele successfully implemented their social agenda through this magazine, which was “**to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality. . .to bring philosophy out of the closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee houses**”.
- Through the periodical essay, they aimed to elevate public opinion and taste in matters of “**manners, morals, art, and literature**”.
- one of the chief features of *The Spectator* was that it managed to strike a delicate balance between its instructive import and its gentle, accessible style that made for light reading about very pertinent matters of social conduct and morality.
- *The Spectator* ran for **555** issues before being temporarily discontinued in 1712; another 80 issues were brought out by Addison in 1714.



THANK YOU

# The SPECTATOR.

*Non fumum ex fulgore, sed ex fumo dare lucem  
Cogitat, ut speciosa debinc miracula promat. Hor.*

To be Continued every Day.

Thursday, March 1. 1711.

I have observed, that a Reader seldom peruses a Book with Pleasure 'till he knows whether the Writer of it be a black or a fair Man, of a mild or choleric Disposition, Married or a Bachelor, with other Particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right Understanding of an Author. To gratify this Curiosity, which is so natural to a Reader, I design this Paper, and my next, as Prefatory Discourses to my following Writings, and shall give some Account in them of the several Persons that are engaged in this Work. As the chief Trouble of Compiling, Digelling and Coeiling will fall to my Share, I must do my self the Justice to open the Work with my own History.

I was born to a small Hereditary Estate, which by the Writings of the Family, was bounded by the same Hedges and Ditches in *Whilom* the Conqueror's Time that it is at present, and has been delivered down from Father to Son whole and entire, without the Loss or Acquisition of a single Field or Meadow, during the Space of six hundred Years. These goes a Story in the Family, that when my Mother was gone with Child of me about three Months, she dreamt that she was brought to Bed of a Judge: Whether this might proceed from a Law-Suit which was then depending in the Family, or my Father's being a Justice of the Peace, I cannot determine; for I am not so vain as to think it prefiged any Dignity that I should arrive at in my future Life, though that was the Interpretation which the Neighbourhood put upon it. The Gravity of my Behaviour at my very first Appearance in the World, and all the Time that I lunked, seemed to favour my Mother's Dream: For, as she has often told me, I threw away my Rattle before I was two Months old, and would not make use of my Crib 'till they had taken away the Bells from it.

As for the rest of my Infancy, there being nothing in remarkable, I shall pass it over in Silence. I had, star, during my Nurage, I had the Reputation of a very fallen Youth, but was always a Favourite of my School-Master, who used to say, that my Parts were solid and would never swell. I had not been long at the University, before I di-

stinguished my self by a most profound Silence: For during the Space of eight Years, excepting in the publick Exercises of the College, I scarce entered the Quantity of an hundred Words; and indeed do not remember that I ever spoke three Sentences together in my whole Life. Will I was in this Learned Body I applied my self with so much Diligence to my Studies, that there are very few celebrated Books, either in the Learned or the Modern Tongues, which I am not acquainted with.

Upon the Death of my Father I was resolved to travel into Foreign Countries, and therefore left the University, with the Character of an odd unaccountable Fellow, that had a great deal of Learning, if I would but show it. An insatiable Thirst after Knowledge carried me into all the Countries of *Europe*, where there was any thing new or strange to be seen; nay, to such a Degree was my Curiosity raised, that having read the Antiquities of some great Men concerning the Antiquities of *Egypt*, I made a Voyage to *Grand Cairo*, on purpose to take the Measure of a Pyramid; and as soon as I had fit my self right in that Particular, returned to my Native Country with great Satisfaction.

I have passed my latter Years in this City, where I am frequently seen in most publick Places, tho' there are not above half a dozen of my self's Friends that know me; of whom my next Paper shall give a more particular Account. There is no Place of Publick Resort, wherein I do not often make my Appearance; sometimes I am seen thrusting my Head into a Round of Politicians at *White's*, and listening with great Attention to the Narratives that are made in those little Circles Audience. Sometimes I finish a Pipe at *Chilts*; and whilst I seem attentive to smoking but the *Post-Man*, overhear the Conversation of every Table in the Room. I appear on *Sunday* Nights at *St. James's Coffee-House*, and sometimes join the little Committee of Politicks in the Inner-Room, as one who comes there to hear and improve. My Face is likewise very well known at the *Greens*, the *Cocoa-Tree*, and in the *Themens* both of *Dorset-Lane*, and the *Hay-Market*. I have been taken for a Merchant upon