# "[The Spectator] Issue 1, Thursday, March 1, 1711"

By Joseph Addison

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# THE SPECTATOR #1 , [Spectator]

## Thursday, March 1, 1711.

- Recto -

*Non fumum exfulgere, sed ex fumo dare lucem Cogitat, ut speciosa dehinc miracula promat.* --Hor., [horace]

## To be Continued every Day.

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, [black], of a mild or cholerick Disposition, [cholerick], Married or a Batchelor, with other Particulars of the like nature, that conduce, [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, [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, Digesting, and Correcting will fall to my Share, I must do myself the Justice to open the Work with my own History.

I was born to a small Hereditary Estate, which according to the tradition of the village where it lies, was bounded by the same Hedges and Ditches in *William* the Conqueror's, [William] 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. There runs 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 Fathers being a Justice of the Peace, I cannot determine; for I am not so vain as to think it presaged, [presaged] any Dignity that I should arrive at in my future Life, though that was the Interpretation the Neighbourhood put upon it. The Gravity of my Behaviour at my very first Appearance in the World, and all the Time that I sucked, [sucked], seemed to favour my Mothers Dream: For, as she has often told me, I threw away my Rattle before I was two Months old, and would that was the Interpretation which the Neighbourhood put upon not make use of my Coral, [coral] till they had taken away the Bells from it.

As for the rest of my Infancy, there being nothing in it remarkable, I shall pass it over in Silence. I find that, during my Nonage, [nonage], I had the reputation of a very sullen Youth, but was always a Favourite of my School-master, who used to say, that my parts, [parts] were solid and would wear well. I had not been long at the University, before I distinguished myself by a most profound Silence: For, during the Space of eight Years, excepting in the publick Exercises of the College, I scarce uttered the Quantity of an hundred Words; and indeed do not remember that I ever spoke three Sentences together in my whole Life. Whilst I was in this Learned Body, I applied myself 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, in which there was any thing new or strange to be seen; nay, to such a Degree was my curiosity raised, that having read the controversies 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 set 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 select Friends that know me; of whom my next Paper shall give a more particular Account. There is no place of general Resort wherein I do not often make my appearance; sometimes I am seen thrusting my Head into a Round of Politicians at *Wills*, [wills], and listening with great Attention to the Narratives that are made in those little Circular Audiences. Sometimes I smoak a Pipe at *Childs*; and, while I seem attentive to nothing but the *Post-man*, [post-man], over-hear 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 *Grecian*, the *Cocoa-Tree*, and in the Theaters both of *Drury Lane and the Hay-Market*, [theatres]. I have been taken for a Merchant

- Verso -

upon the *Exchange* for above these ten Years, and sometimes pass for a *Jew* in the Assembly of Stock-Jobbers, [stock-jobbers] at *Jonathans*. In short, where-ever I see a Cluster of People, I always mix with them, tho I never open my Lips but in my own Club.

Thus I live in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species; by which means I have made my self a Speculative Statesman, Soldier, Merchant, and Artizan, without ever medling with any Practical Part in Life. I am very well versed in the Theory of an Husband, or a Father, and can discern the Errors in the Oeconomy, Business, and Diversion of others, better than those who are engaged in them; as Standers-by discover Blots, [blots], which are apt to escape those who are in the Game. I never espoused any Party with Violence, and am resolved to observe an exact Neutrality between the Whigs and Tories, [politics], unless I shall be forcd to declare myself by the Hostilities of either side. In short, I have acted in all the parts of my Life as a Looker-on, which is the Character, [character] I intend to preserve in this Paper.

I have given the Reader just so much of my History and Character, as to let him see I am not altogether unqualified for the Business I have undertaken. As for other Particulars in my Life and Adventures, I shall insert them in following Papers, as I shall see occasion. In the mean time, when I consider how much I

have seen, read, and heard, I begin to blame my own Taciturnity, [taciturnity]; and since I have neither Time nor Inclination to communicate the Fulness of my Heart in Speech, I am resolved to do it in Writing; and to Print my self out, if possible, before I Die. I have been often told by my Friends that it is Pity so many useful Discoveries which I have made, should be in the possession of a Silent Man. For this Reason therefore, I shall publish a Sheet full of Thoughts every Morning, for the Benefit of my Contemporaries; and if I can any way contribute to the Diversion or Improvement of the Country in which I live, I shall leave it, when I am summoned out of it, with the secret Satisfaction of thinking that I have not Lived in vain.

There are three very material Points which I have not spoken to in this Paper, and which, for several important Reasons, I must keep to my self; at least for some Time: I mean, an Account of my Name, my Age, and my Lodgings. I must confess I would gratify my Reader in any thing that is reasonable; but as for these three Particulars, though I am sensible they might tend very much to the Embellishment of my Paper, I cannot yet come to a Resolution of communicating them to the Publick. They would indeed draw me out of that Obscurity which I have enjoyed for many Years, and expose me in Publick Places to several Salutes and Civilities, which have been always very disagreeable to me; for the greatest pain I can suffer, is the being talked to, and being stared at. It is for this Reason likewise, that I keep my Complexion and Dress, as very great Secrets; tho it is not impossible, but I may make Discoveries of both in the Progress of the Work I have undertaken.

After having been thus particular upon my self; I shall in tomorrows Paper give an Account of those Gentlemen who are concerned with me in this Work. For, as I have before intimated, [intimated], a Plan of it is laid and concerted, [concerted] (as all other Matters of Importance are) in a Club. However, as my Friends have engaged me to stand in the Front, those who have a mind to correspond with me, may direct their Letters *To the Spectator*, at Mr. *Buckleys*, in *Little Britain*. For I must further acquaint the Reader, that tho our Club meets only on *Tuesdays* and *Thursdays*, we have appointed a Committee to sit every Night, for the Inspection of all such Papers as may contribute to the Advancement of the Public Weal, [weal].

C., [clio]

# Footnotes

Spectator*The Spectator* is the most famous work of journalism of the eighteenth century in English. It helped define what journalism could be. The series of daily essays, published like a newspaper, set the pattern for a kind of writing that persists to the present day. Comparatively short essays on topics of interest to middle-class readers (politics, fashion, the arts), written in straightforward, unfussy prose without professional jargon: this is a mode of writing that is still standard in print and online journalism. A collaboration between Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator* was for a long time after its initial run in 1711 and 1712 held up to English students and readers as a model of prose style, and although to our eyes there are moments where the prose feels a little archaic, Addison and Steele's version of English prose is much closer to the way that we write now than the prose from a hundred, or even fifty years earlier (Elizabathan prose, for example, is far more challenging to most modern readers than that period's poetry, which is a reversal from what we might expect.) Addison and Steele's main influence on writers and readers over the last three hundred years may lie mostly in the way that the two of them developed and popularized a style of English prose that is more or less the one that we still use in much expository writing.

In modern times, *The Spectator* has been credited with being essential to the formation of what the sociologist Jürgen Habermas has influentially dubbed “the bourgeois public sphere.” Habermas describes the bourgeois public sphere as being made up of private individuals coming together to constitute a public, in this case a public that was not affiliated with the government or the church, but an independent body that could discuss important issues on its own. Gathered together in coffee houses, over tea tables, or simply in their homes, readers of *The Spectator* were among the first citizens to have a print publication that became a common frame of reference for middle-class English-speaking people. The journal set an agenda and a way of thinking about society and the arts that seemed derived, not from the aristocracy or the church, but from the shared world of the readers themselves.

*The Spectator* followed on the heels of *The Tatler* , which had run from April 12, 1709 to December 30, 1710. Steele had taken the lead with *The Tatler* , asking for help from Addison and others on occasion to fill out the pages. But it was Addison who seems to have been the leader for *The Spectator* , supplying the first issue and many others after that. In this case, timing was everything. Addison and his Whig party had just lost a parliamentary election towards the end of 1710. Addison was a cabinet member, at the center of government policy-making, so he suddenly found himself kicked out of office with time on his hands; writing for in collaboration with his old friend Richard Steele was just the thing to keep his hand in the public conversation. *The Spectator* differed in format in significant ways from its immediate predecessor. It was published daily, except for Sunday; *The Tatler* had come out three days a week. Where *The Tatler* had generally had several items in each issue, most issues of *The Spectator* focused on a single topic. The new journal also had a different framing device than the older one. Where Steele had arranged the articles in *The Tatler* by the imagined location in London from which various “correspondents” were sending him information (theater news coming from Will's Coffee House, political news from the St. James Coffee House, the whole thing being a parody of the way that official newspapers published correspondence from foreign cities), *The Spectator* had a fictional “club” that would come up with ideas. Steele described its members in the second issue: there was a country squire, Sir Roger de Coverly, a lawyer, a businessman (Sir Andrew

Freeport), a soldier (Major Sentry), an aging libertine (Will Honeycomb), and a clergyman. Between them, the Club represented many of the important segments of middle-class culture in the eighteenth century. The Spectator Club never worked quite as it seems to have been intended —relatively few issues feature it in any central way—but it was another means by which the journal was projecting itself as giving a voice to a variety of contemporary interests.

And the journal occasionally referred to the coffee-house culture that middle-class people (well, middle-class men, since women were generally not welcome) had developed in this period, a milieu (depicted here), where men met to socialize, gossip, talk over issues of the day, read from the coffee-shop's stock of newspapers and journals (which were expensive enough that individuals might not subscribe), and get their caffeine fix satisfied.

Most importantly, *The Spectator* introduces a new kind of persona, what critics call an *eidolon*, in the figure of “Mr. Spectator,” in whose voice all of the essays were composed, no matter which of the two men was the actual author. *The Spectator* did not invent the concept of the *eidolon*, but it provided perhaps its most influential model, one imitated over and over again in works such as Benjamin Franklin’s “Silence Dogood” pieces in *The New England Courant* (1721), Samuel Johnson’s*Rambler* essays (1750-52), and even the Federalist essays composed by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay to defend the U. S. Constitution. Mr. Spectator projected himself as a civilized man of the world, an observer looking on society like a fly on the wall. He is well educated, but not a specialist in anything, which enables him to comment on all sorts of things. In the course of its run, *The Spectator* offers essays on fashion, on politics, on religion, on literature. Steele’s essay on Inkle and Yarico (#11) popularized the story to eighteenth-century readers; it would become a cultural phenomenon, with plays, musicals, and poems about the doomed pair of lovers abounding in English-speaking culture over the next few decades. Addison’s essays on John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* and the series generally known as “the pleasures of the imagination” became widely influential works of literary criticism and aesthetic theory that to some extent established a paradigm for what modern criticism could be. To be sure, this is a very male *eidolon*, and it is no surprise to discover that *The Spectator’s* essays are very frequently condescending towards women readers. In the 1740s, Eliza Haywood published a journal called *The Female Spectator* http://www2.scc.rutgers.edu/spectator/haywood/, one that forms a nice counterweight to the bluff masculinity of Addison and Steele’s journal.

*The Spectator* ran from March 3, 1711 to December 6, 1712, comprising 555 issues in all. (On his own, Addison revived *The Spectator* briefly for a few months in 1714, but these essays were generally not as popular.) Of these, about 250 issues each were written by Addison and Steele; Addison’s cousin Eustace Budgell contributed a small number, as did the poet John Hughes. Over time, we hope to add more issues of both *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* to this digital anthology.

horace "He intends not smoke from the flame, but fire from the smoke, so as to reveal wonderful things. Horace." Addison is quoting here from "The Art of Poetry," a verse treatise by the Roman poet Horace that was widely read in the eighteenth century. Addison could count on most of his educated readers knowing the allusion, since the poem was so widely taught in secondary schools. The joke here is that Addison is imagining this essay as being read aloud in smoke-filled coffeehouses.

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| black | Dark or light skinned. |
| cholerick | A relaxed or angry disposition. |
| conduce | Contribute to. |
| prefatory | introductory. |
| William | The Norman warlord who defeated the English king Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and became William I. |
| presaged | Predict or foretell. |
| sucked | breastfed |
| coral | That is, his teething ring; these were often made of coral in this period. |
| nonage | Youth or childhood. Source: Oxford English Dictionary |
| parts | Characteristics or elements of a person. |
| wills | Wills was a popular coffee shop. Coffee-drinking was comparatively new to England, havinug arrived as a practice, probably from Turkey, a few decades before. But coffee shops were everywhere in London in the early eighteenth century, becoming popular places for men (and they were almost-always male dominated domains) to socialize while they satisfied their cravings for caffeine and (since smoking pipes was also popular) nicotine. Over the next few lines, Mr. Spectator names several of the most popular coffee shops in central London at the time. |
| post-man | one of the daily newspapers in London at that time |
| theatres | The theaters on Drury Lane and the Hay-Market were the two state-licensed playhouses in central London. As Mr. Spectator implies here, theaters were as much places to be seen by others as to see a play; they were intensely social spaces, where theatergoers enjoyed the spectacle of other audience members almost as much--and sometimes more--than they enjoyed the performances on the stage. |
| stock-jobbers | stockbrokers, but the sense here is more pejorative than the word is today; selling stock in private companies was comparatively new, and looked at with suspicion by some |
| blots | Exposed pieces in a game like backgammon, checkers, or chess. Source: Oxford English Dictionary |
| politics | The Whigs and the Tories were the two main political factions of the day. The *Spectator* positioned itself as a neutral journal, and part of the reason why Addison and Steele tried to stay anonymous was to keep up that pretense, since they were both well known to be Whigs. |
| character | Addison is punning here on the sense of character as personal identity and character as a printed mark on a page. |

taciturnity silence

intimated shared confidentially

concerted arranged or contrived by two or more people working "in consert"

weal welfare and happiness

clio Addison identified the essays that he wrote with the letters C, L, I, or O, which collectively spell out Clio, the muse of history.