

SOME POINTS ON NEOCLASSICISM

- In England, Neoclassicism flourished roughly between 1660, when the Stuarts returned to the throne, and the 1798 publication of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, with its theoretical preface and collection of poems that came to be seen as heralding the beginning of the Romantic Age.
- Regarding English literature, the Neoclassical Age is typically divided into three periods: the Restoration Age (1660-1700), the Augustan Age (1700-1750), and the Age of Johnson (1750-1798).
- Neoclassical writers modeled their works on classical texts and followed various esthetic values first established in Ancient Greece and Rome. Seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century Neoclassicism was, in a sense, a resurgence of classical taste and sensibility, but it was not identical to Classicism.
- In part as a reaction to the bold egocentrism of the Renaissance that saw man as larger than life and boundless in potential, the neoclassicists directed their attention to a smaller scaled concept of man as an individual within a larger social context, seeing human nature as dualistic, flawed, and needing to be curbed by reason and decorum.
- In style, neoclassicists continued the Renaissance value of balanced antithesis, symmetry, restraint, and order. Additionally, they sought to achieve a sense of refinement, good taste, and correctness. They resurrected the classical values of unity and proportion and saw their art as a way to entertain and inform, a depiction of humans as social creatures, as part of polite society. Their manner was elitist, erudite, and sophisticated.
- In the Restoration Age, in poetry, the classical forms of the heroic couplet and the ode became popular. With the opening of the theaters appeared plays written in couplets and others in prose that fell in the category of the comedy of manners. Major works include Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Paul Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.
- In this second period flourished the poetry of Alexander Pope. Also in the Augustan Age the rise of journalism and its way of evolving into and shaping fiction writing is visible in the work

of Daniel Defoe, who began as a pamphleteer and ended by securing his place in the canon of great novelists with such famous works as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722).

- The Age of Johnson was dominated by Samuel Johnson and the consummate work of his is *The Dictionary of the English Language* (1745-1755). In drama, the comedy of manners continued to be popular, but in poetry, there was a rise of the ballad and sentimental poetry as written by Thomas Gray, William Cowper, Robert Burns, and George Crabbe, which in some ways anticipates the style and sentiment of the romantics to follow.

SOURCE: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/literature-and-arts/language-linguistics-and-literary-terms/literature-general/neoclassicism>

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Dated: 01.06.2021.