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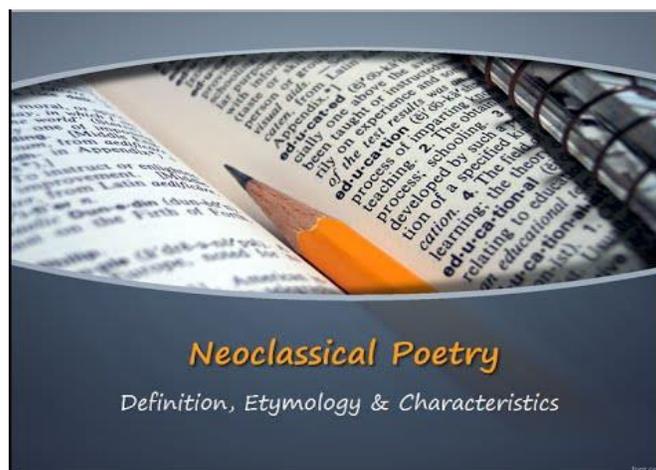
Topic: Neo-Classical Poetry

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“NEO CLASSICAL POETRY”



Dear Students,

We shall deal this topic in Four sections for a clearer understanding as indicated below:

1. Definition of Neoclassicism
2. Stages of Neo-classical Poetry
3. Neo Classical Poets
4. Characteristics of Neoclassical poetry

1.DEFINITION OF NEOCLASSICISM

The term Neoclassicism is a combination of two words: *Neo* and *Classic*. The word *neo* has been derived from a Greek word *neos*, which means *young* or *new*, while the word *classic*, refers to the style and works of the ancient authors of Greece and Rome. To combine these words, we get the meaning of *Neoclassicism* as the rebirth and restoration of Classicism. Hence, *Neoclassicism* is the movement in the history of English literature, which laid immense emphasis on revival of the classical spirit during the period between 1680 and 1750 in the age of Pope and Dryden.

Neoclassical Poetry is a type of poetry, which follows the pattern of poetry composed by the poets of ancient time i.e., Greek and Rome. Pope and Dryden were the leading writers, who deviated from the traditional schools of poetry and sought guidance in the works of ancient Greek and Roman writers.

2.STAGES OF NEOCLASSICAL POETRY

The Neoclassical period of literature can be divided into **three** distinct stages:

- A. The Restoration Period
- B. The Augustan Period
- C. The Age of Johnson

3.NEO-CLASSICAL POETS

English poets from 1660 to 1798 are generally known as neo-classical poets. Order, correctness and established rules were carefully observed by them. Set phrases and reasons were commonly used in their poetry. For neo-classical writers, poetry was an imitation of human life.

**We shall examine this section in three groups. Group A, B, C.
See Below.**

A. Neoclassical poets in The Restoration Period

John Milton (1608–1674) and John Dryden (1631–1700) were prominent poets during the Restoration Age, which went from 1660-1700.

John Milton composed three masterpieces: *Paradise Lost* (first published in 1667 and revised in 1674), *Paradise Regain'd* (1671), and *Samson Agonistes* (1671)—the former two being epic poems, while the latter is a dramatic one **Paradise Lost**, an epic poem that follows in the tradition of writers such as Virgil and Homer. Milton included dozens of allusions to other classical writings. The epic poem is written in blank verse and is approximately 10,000 lines. Milton sticks to themes traditionally explored in classical Greek and Roman writings such as war and the meaning of life. It is difficult to overestimate Milton's greatness. Combining powerful moral tenor with a brilliant profusion of poetical expression, as evidenced in the above three masterpieces especially, he transformed the very character of subsequent English poetry

John Dryden the poet is best known today as a satirist, although he wrote only two great original satires: *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) and *The Medal* (1682). His most famous poem, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) contains several brilliant satiric portraits. But unlike satire, it comes to a final, tragic resolution. Dryden's other great poems—*Annus Mirabilis* (1667), *Religio Laici* (1682), *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), *Anne Killigrew* (1686), *Alexander's Feast* (1697), and "To My Honour'd Kinsman" (1700)—are not satires either. And he contributed a wonderful body of occasional poems: panegyrics, odes, elegies, prologues, and epilogues. John Dryden's poetry was built around reason, logic, and matter of fact. Often, he attempted to make his poetry accessible using plain language. Moreover, Dryden reinvigorated poetry with the heroic couplet, alexandrine, and triplet. For example, in his allegorical poem *The Hind and The Panther*, he uses heroic couplets to write about religion after he converted to Catholicism.

B. Neoclassical Poets in the Augustan Period

Alexander Pope was the only predominant figure in the poetry of 18th century. He was the representative poet of his century. Pope's first and most important claim to

greatness is the fact that he is pre-eminently the poet of his age like Chaucer and Tennyson. He was the poetic giant in the Neo-Classical age of poetry and his appearance eclipsed the neighboring poetical luminaries. He was influenced by John Dryden but he made certain improvements upon Dryden's poetry who was not completely free from Renaissance glow the metaphysical conceits and the lyrical. Pope made poetic art more polished. He was the only great poet who typifies in his works almost all the essential qualities of the classical school of Poetry. He was the high priest of a rationalistic and fashionable age. Though Pope was physically weak because of his long illness, he wrote *Essay on Criticism* while he was still young. The book contains some remarkable expressions. In his delightful poem *The Rape of the Lock* he uses a trivial subject matter and treats it significantly. In his satirical poem *The Dunciad* Pope laughs at the poor poets who are writing for their living. He sometimes has misused his genius by attacking the individual in his poems which now seem of little importance. His later poems are the *Essay on Man* and four *Moral Essays*. The first one is somewhat philosophical. Like Dryden, he also translated some classical works of Homer.

Samuel Johnson was a poet of limited range, but within that range he was a poet of substantial talent and ability. Johnson's first poem, "On a Daffodill, the first Flower the Author had seen that Year," was composed between his 15th and 16th years (in 1724). Written in heroic quatrains, the poem is largely an accumulation of traditional lyric conventions typical of poets from Robert Herrick to Matthew Prior. In 1930, T. S. Eliot pronounced Samuel Johnson a major poet largely on the strength of two poems, *London* (1738) and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) The latter poem reflects this practice, for the first half of many lines is written in different ink than the last half.

C. Neoclassical Poets in Age of Johnson

During this time most of the poets commonly wrote poems about the man and his city life. But unlike other poets **James Thomson** turned to nature and wrote four poems on the seasons in blank verse. They are *Winter*, *Summer*, *Spring* and *Autumn*. But he could not avoid languages of his time. Thomson wrote another good poem *The Castle of Indolence* in Spenserian stanza. It contains beautiful sleepy language.

Thomas Gray was also a great poet of this age. He belonged to a group of poets who are sometimes called the Churchyard school of the poets. *The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* is one of the best poems in English by Gray. In this poem he expresses the sorrowful feelings which arise in his mind on seeing the graves of the poor country people buried near the church. His ode *The Bard* is a very sad song. In his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Elton College* he describes the schoolboys who are happy and careless about the troubles in the coming days of their lives.

William Blake is a poet as well as an artist. Most of his poems are mysterious. It is very difficult to understand the meaning of some poems by him. Blake was a visionary poet and he never believed in earthly things. His great poetic works are *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. Of these, two poetic works, the second one is darker and heavier than the first one. It presents the painful realities of life.

Robert Burns was a Scottish farmer whose lyrics became famous. He wrote hundreds of songs and lyrics, and among them *Mary Morrison*, *John Anderson* and *The Banks O' Doon* are famous. His love-songs include 'My love is like a red, red rose'. He had a deep understanding of animals and love for them. Even a mouse brought a gentle poem from his pen.

William Cowper's verse shows the beginning of the swing away from the formal classical style of Pope towards the simpler, more natural expression which we shall see in Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Some poets turned to the past to escape from the orderliness of the 18th Century. Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* brought to light many old poems from the darkness of the past.

4.CHARACTERISTICS OF NEOCLASSICAL POETRY

Rationalism

Rationalism is the most essential feature of neoclassical poetry. Neoclassical poetry is a reaction against the subjective romantic poetry. It is a unique outcome of intellect, not fancy and imagination as in romantic poetry. In romantic poetry, sentiments play a vital role in writing of poetry, while in neoclassical poetry; reason and intellect are dominant elements. Unlike Coleridge and Wordsworth, who wrote

poetry thoroughly about their emotion, the neoclassical poets made an effort to disregard emotion and feelings and concentrate on reason.

Scholarly Allusions

The neoclassical poets always loved to make use of scholarly allusions in their poetry. As they were all highly educated and well-versed in various fields of studies, they knew a lot about religious, biblical and classical literature. Allusions helped them to convey their message to their readers effectively and easily. That is why; their poetry is brimming with plentiful allusions to classical writers i.e., Virgil, Horace and Homer.

Didacticism

Neoclassical poets rebelled against the romantic nature of poetry of the Renaissance Period. Romantic poets loved to compose poetry to give vent to their feelings. On the other hand, the neoclassical poets laid stress significantly on the didactic purpose of poetry. That is the reason; most of the neoclassical poetry is replete with didacticism to a great deal.

Realism

Realism is the hallmark of neoclassical poetry. The neoclassical poets, unlike romantic poets, were not living in their own world of imagination. They were hard realists and they presented the true picture of their society. They didn't turn their eyes from the harsh realities of life. These poets were not escapists like romantic poets, who turned their back to the harsh realities of life and tried to escape from them with the help of flight of imagination

Adherence to Classical Rules

The neoclassical poets were undoubtedly great adherents of classical rules. They went all-out to revive the Classicism in their poetry by following each and every rule of Classicism. Their highest concern was to adhere to the classical rules and employ them in their poetry as much as possible. That is the reason; neoclassical poetry is also labeled as Pseudo Classical Poetry.

Heroic Couplet

Heroic couplet is another hallmark of neoclassical poetry. The neoclassical poets were primarily responsible for reputation of heroic couplets in the history of English literature. They were the champions of heroic couplet. No poet, in the history of English literature, can compete with the mastery of neoclassical poets in handling heroic couplet. They excelled each and every poet in this regard. Dryden and Pope are the only poets, who outdid everyone in this regard. They are considered as the real masters of heroic couplet.

No Passionate Lyricism

Romantic poetry is popular for its lyrical quality, while neoclassical poetry is lacking in lyrical features due to apathy of the neoclassical poets for passion, feelings and emotions. They looked at the passion with distrust and suspicion. That is the reason; very few lyrics were written in the age of Pope and Dryden.

Objectivity

Objectivity is another important feature of neoclassical poetry. As these poets were completely against subjectivity in poetry, they endeavored hard to write objective poetry. They avoided giving vent to their feelings; rather they dwelt upon the miseries, hardships and problems of the people around them.

Poetic Diction

Poetic diction of neoclassical poetry is completely different from that of romantic poetry. In romantic poetry, the diction is flexible and easy to use, while in the neoclassical poetry, it is restrained, concrete and rigid. They were of the view that decorum, specific style and mannerism are the vital elements of poetry.

Thankyou!

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