

The Neo-Classical under Augustan Poetry (13)

Neo-classical is a term applied to that period

of English literature which begins with the Restoration. This is also designated as the age of Dryden, Pope and Dr Johnson. It is also called 'Augustan Age', for its literary work is compared with that of the golden age of the ancient Caesar. The general belief of the Neo-classical writer is based on the premise that Man is a rational being. 'The proper study of Mankind is Man' is the general motto. Man's rational intelligence and common sense are valued above all other faculties. Reason demonstrates that the great Truths about the world are fixed and the poets are to express these Truths in appropriate language. Pope writes that true wit is that which oft was thought but never so well expressed.

The very spirit of the Neo-Classical literature is different from that of the Elizabethan literature. During the Renaissance, even intellectual enquiry was started by the rapture of sense and feelings. The bounds of human thoughts deemed infinitely promote. But from the Restoration onward a gradual change in the tone and temperament of poets is noticed. The poetic work becomes intellectual, rather than imaginative. The spirit is critical and analytical, not creative or sympathetic. It brings the intellect, not the poetic imagination into play.

In fact, the literary tendency of the period is greatly influenced by the French models. With the Restoration, stiffness of Puritanism was removed and French manners were heavily imported. French ideas of art and literary taste were adopted. French literature was of the Polite Society in which intellect was in the ascendant and the critical faculty in control. It was to this literature that the Neo-classical poets turned for guidance. Consequently, they also cultivated the same literary traits at the expense of feelings and spontaneity and the growth of the artificial type of poetry was its inevitable result. The Neo-Classical writers, not satisfied with the

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Elizabethan tradition, turned to the great classical writers for inspiration. They laid emphasis on correctness of rules. The Elizabethans also drawn upon the ancients, but they used them freely altering them at their will. But the imitative work of the Neo-Classics is rigid. 'Be Correct' was the basic consideration. The poetic style and diction of the Neo-classical poets are artificial. It was the result of their devotion to form and love for Polish. The language of poetry was distinguished from that of prose. It resulted in the conscious sophistication of poetic language. The Heroic Couplet, consisting of two iambic pentameter lines, was the chosen measure of the poets.

The Neo-Classical poets were very much concerned with the life in London. With the Restoration, the English Society was infected with all sorts of laxities. The fashionable ladies and youths enjoyed maximum liberty. The poets were sensitive to the vices of the society. They tried to paint the real pictures of the society. Consequently, they emphasised vices, rather than virtues and gave us coarse poetry without any interest and moral. Due to their love for Realism, they neglected the Romantic flavour of poetry. However, they never compromised with the foibles of the society. They tried for its reform. That is why, the great verse satires were written during the period. They often used social events and political controversies in their poetry. Dryden's 'Absalom and Achitophel' is the product of such events. Pope's 'Rape of the Lock' is based on the actual incident.

The Neo-Classical poets had no attraction towards Nature and Natural Beauty. Unlike the Romantics, they loved city and concentrated on the fashionable life of their age. They were shy of Romantic extravagance and expression of emotion and passion. They completely broke from the Elizabethan Romanticism. Instead of making an appeal to heart, they appealed to intellect and restrained the exhibition of emotion. They were

proud of their wit. In short, this poetry is characterised by lucidity, correctness, wit and elegant finish.

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