

# NEOCLASSICISM



*Compiled and Circulated by-*

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# Periodisation of Neoclassicism

(1660–1790)

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.

# NEOCLASSICISM

## Definition

- Neoclassicism (also spelled Neo-classicism; from Greek 'nèos,' "new" and Greek 'klasikós,' "of the highest rank") was a Western cultural movement in the decorative and visual arts, literature, theatre, music, and architecture that drew inspiration from the art and culture of classical antiquity.
- The writers of the age consciously adopted the genres and conventions of ancient literature and applied ideas and techniques derived from the classics to their own literary practice.

# Characteristics of Neoclassicism

- 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.

# Characteristics of Neoclassicism

- 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.
- Their clothes were complicated and detailed, and their gardens were ornately manicured and geometrically designed.
- 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.

# Characteristics of Neoclassicism

The main Neoclassical movement coincided with the 18th-century Age of Enlightenment, and continued into the early 19th century, laterally competing with Romanticism.

The age is also known as :

- “neo” (new) + classical
- “period of Enlightenment”
- “age of reason”
- “era of logic”

# Characteristics of Neoclassicism

- Literature of the age is concerned with “nature “ human nature, Supremacy of reason.
- Unity in the works of all writes.
- The age is known as classical age.
- The period is marked by the rise of Deism, intellectual backlash against earlier Puritanism and American’s revolution against England.
- Neoclassical literature is characterized by order, accuracy, and structure

# Three Stages of Neoclassical Period

Regarding English literature, the Neoclassical Age is typically divided into three periods:

- The Restoration Age (1660–1700)
- The Augustan Age (1700–1750)
- The Age of Johnson (1750– 1798)





**RESTORATION**

**PERIOD**

**(1660-1700)**

# Restoration of Monarchy

- This period marks the British king's restoration to the throne after a long period of Puritan domination in England. Its symptoms include the dominance of French and Classical influences on poetry and drama.
- Restoration literature continued to appeal to heroic ideals of love and honor, particularly on stage, in heroic tragedy.

# Literary Trends in the Restoration Period

- In the Restoration Age, in poetry, the classical forms of the heroic couplet and the ode became popular.
- With the opening of the theatres appeared plays written in couplets and others in prose that fell in the category of the comedy of manners.

# FAMOUS WRITERS

## John Dryden

Dryden was the most influential writer of the Restoration, for he wrote in every form important to the period—occasional verse, comedy, tragedy, heroic plays, odes, satires, translations of classical works—and produced influential critical essays concerning how one ought to write these forms.





## John Milton

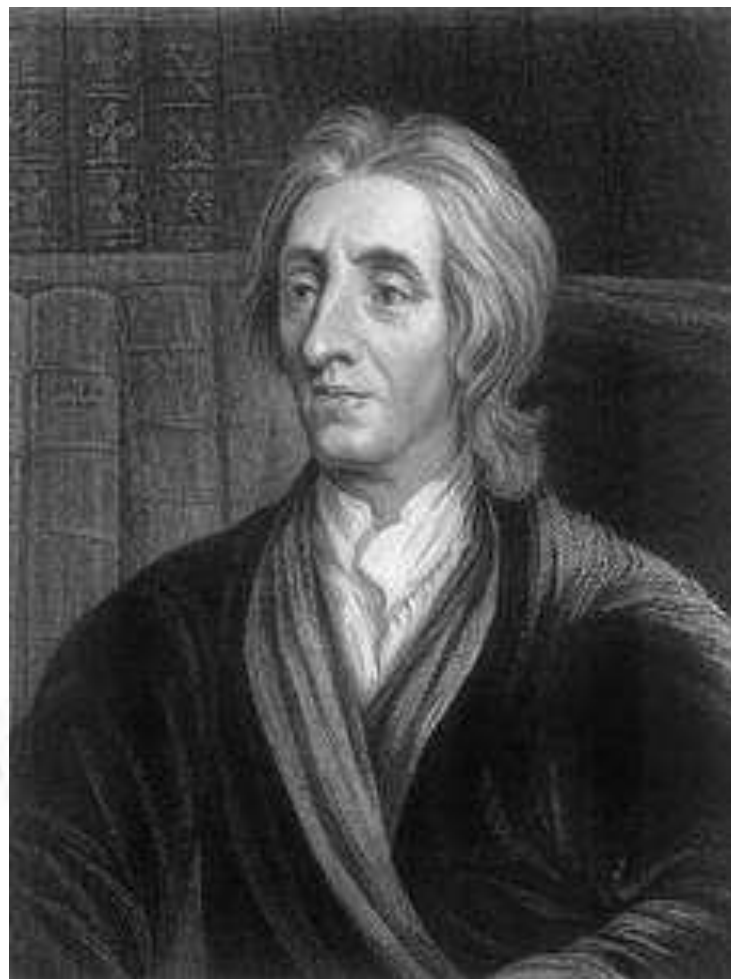
Restoration prose style grew more like witty, urbane conversation and less like the intricate, rhetorical style of previous writers like John Milton and John Donne.



**Sir William**



**John**



# Samuel Pepys and Aphra Behn



Jean Racine



Jean-Baptiste Poquelin  
(Moliere)





# FAMOUS COMPOSITIONS

- Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667)
- John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678)
- John Dryden's *All For Love* (1677)



**THE AUGUSTAN**

**AGE**

**(1700-1750)**

# Augustan Age

- It is called Augustan because King George I wanted people to think he was like Augustus Caesar.
- This period is marked by the imitation of Virgil and Horace's literature in English letters.

# Literary Trends in the Augustan Age

- Imitation and Satire, Epic and Mock Epic
- In this second period flourished the poetry of Alexander Pope, with his exquisite mastery of the couplet in *Essay on Man* (1734);
- Many of Pope's lines became famous sayings that are familiar in modern times such as this one from *Essay on Criticism* (1711):  
“Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”
- 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), which are fictions appearing to be autobiographical.

# FAMOUS WRITERS

## Alexander Pope

was the most significant figure in poetry during the Augustan period. His witty couplets were often quoted and used as axioms. Pope took issue with other authors about what should be considered the proper subjects and nature of poetic expression.





## **Jonathan Swift**

Swift targets the empiricists who insist on individual, unyielding reason over morality and social values.



**Joseph Addison**



**Francois-Marie Arouet de  
Voltaire**



# Famous Compositions

- Jonathan Swift- *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)
- Alexander Pope- *The Rape of Lock* (1712)





**THE AGE OF  
JOHNSON  
(1750-1790)**

# The Age of Johnson

- This period marks the transition toward the upcoming Romanticism through the period is still largely Neoclassical. Much was happening around the world politically, such as both the American and French Revolutions.
- This time marked a transition in English literature from the structure and formality of the Neoclassical writers to the emotional, ungoverned writings of the Romantics.

# Literary Trends

- 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.
- Additionally, there appeared the novel of sensibility, particularly the work of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, which in their sensationalism and emotionality anticipate the Gothic novel of the nineteenth century.

# FAMOUS WRITERS

## Samuel Johnson

He was the literary dictator of his age, though he was not its greatest writer. Though Johnson's own style is often condemned as ponderous and verbose, he could write in an easy and direct style when he chose.



## Edward Gibbon

was the first historian of England who wrote in a literary manner. His greatest historical work—*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which is an authoritative and well- documented history, can pass successfully the test of modern research and scholarship. But its importance in literature is on account of its prose style which is the very climax of classicism.



## George Crabbe

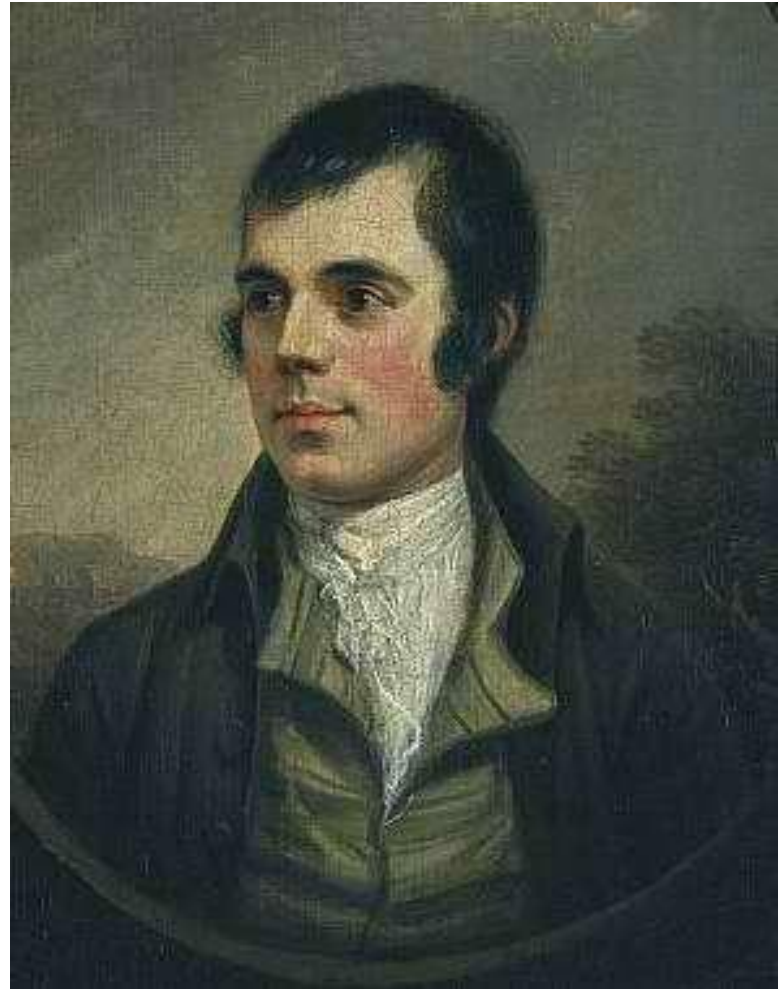
stood midway between the Augustans and the Romantics. In form he was classical, but in the temper of his mind he was romantic. To him nature is a “presence, a motion and a spirit,” and he realizes the intimate union of nature with man.





# Robert Burns

who is the greatest songwriter in the English language, had great love for nature, and a firm belief in human dignity and quality, both of which are characteristic of romanticism.



## William Cowper

who lived a tortured life and was driven to the verge of madness, had a genial and kind soul. His poetry, much of which is of autobiographical interest, describes the homely scenes and pleasures and pains of simple humanity—the two important characteristics of romanticism





## Thomas Gray

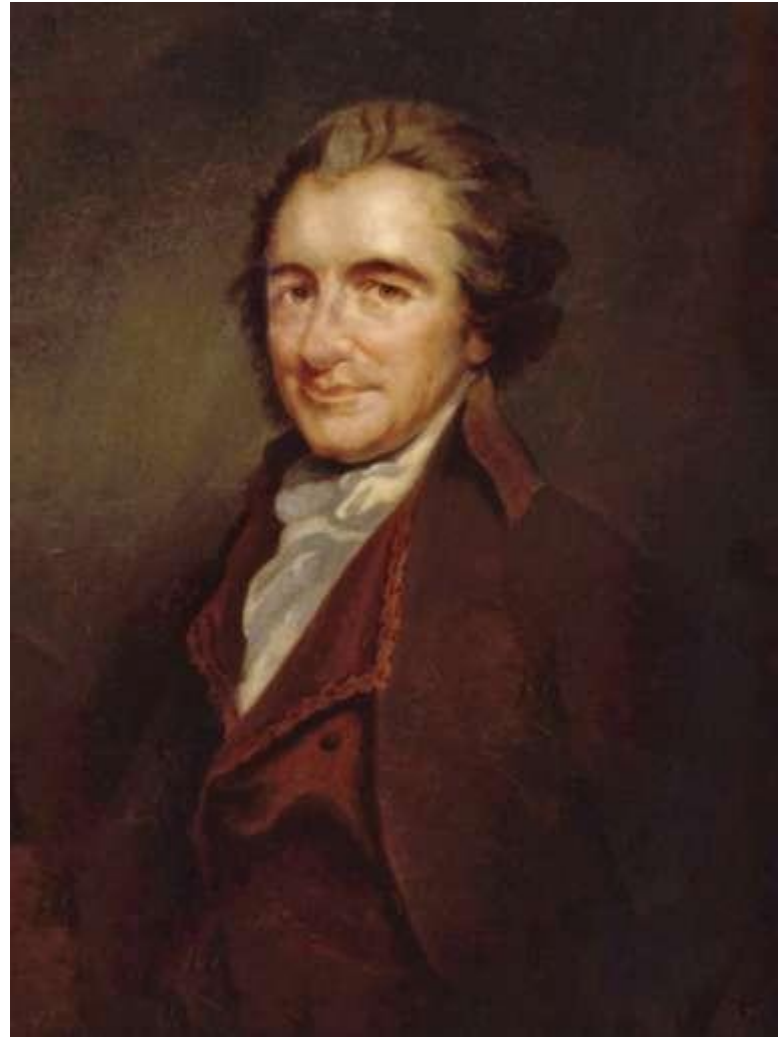
is famous as the author of *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, “the best-known in the English language.” Unlike classical poetry which was characterised by restraint on personal feelings and emotions, this poem is the manifestation of deep feelings of the poet. It is suffused with the melancholy spirit which is a characteristic romantic trait.)



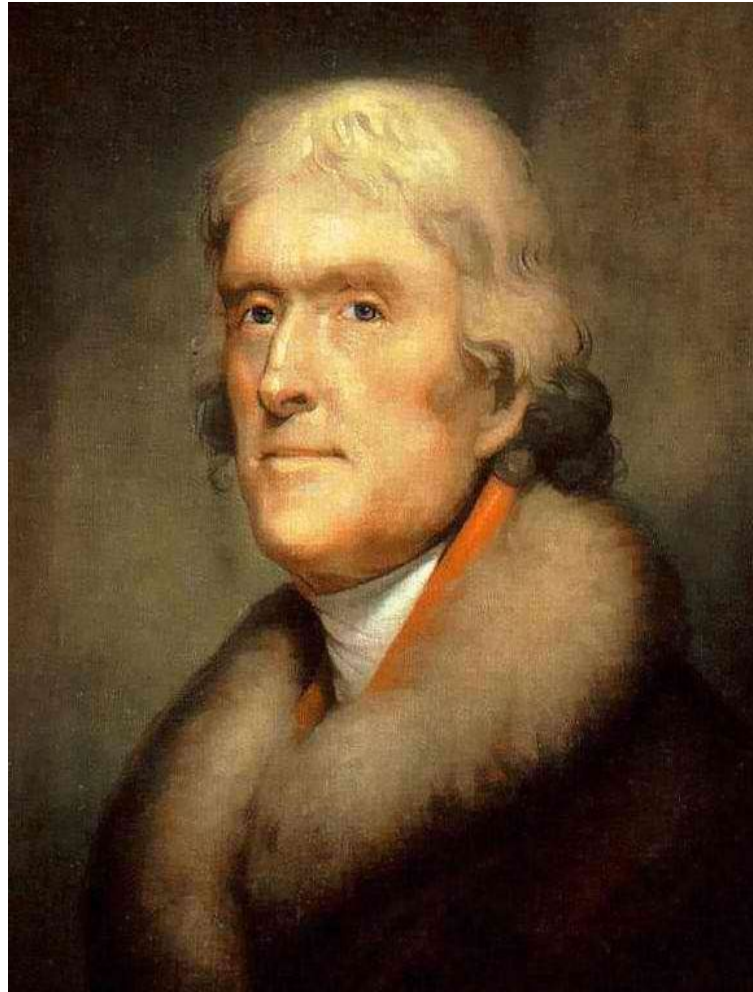
## Thomas Paine

As the author of two highly influential pamphlets at the start of the American Revolution, he inspired the Patriots in 1776 to declare independence from Britain.

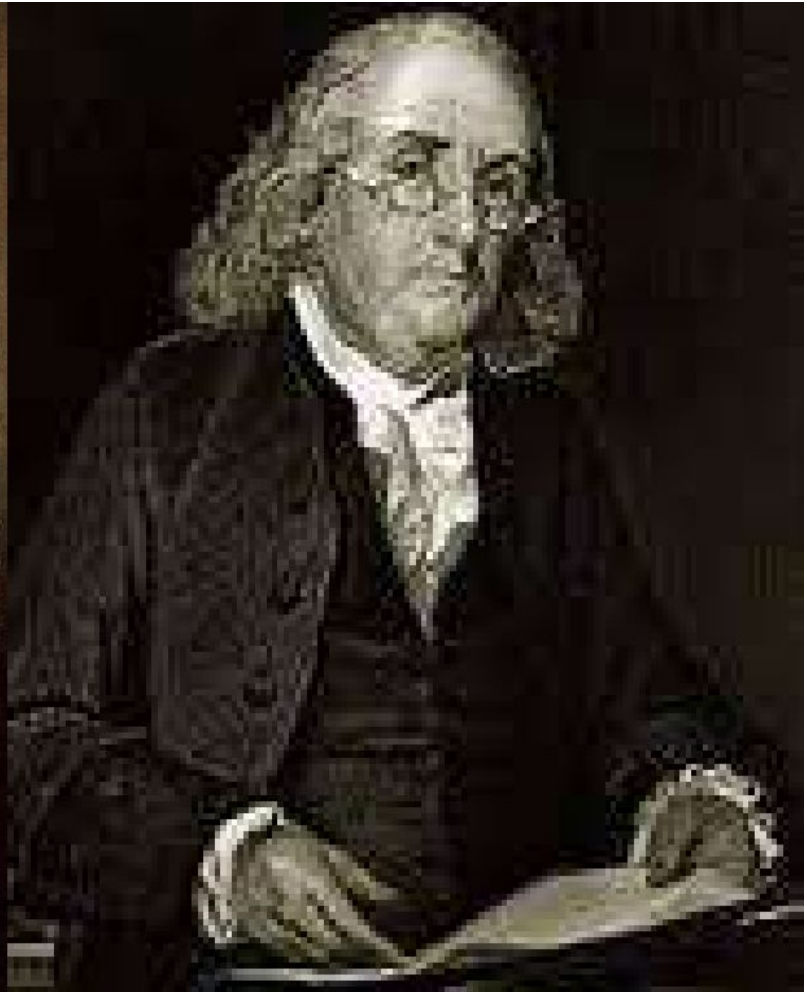
His ideas reflected Enlightenment-era rhetoric of transnational human rights.



**Thomas Jefferson**



**Benjamin Franklin**



# Famous Compositions

- Samuel Johnson-*Lives of the Poets* (1779-81)
- Edward Gibbon- *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
- Thomas Gray-*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751)

# Conclusion

- The Neoclassical era in literature brought a sense of decorum and stability to writers.
- There were rules to be carefully followed, and there was structure to be upheld.
- People praised wit and parody, as well.
- It was a time of careful moral appearances, though appearances were more valued than honesty

# Thank You.

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