

*Neoclassical literature – Humanity, Society & Classical supremacy*

If renaissance was an outburst or interest towards classical literature and subjects surrounding the same; neoclassical literature is its succeeding brother with a primary concern on structure, rules and correctness of form regarding the same subjects or themes. The main characteristics of the period are enhancement of reasoning, focussing man in the society, following Greek and Roman style of presentation and use of the style to works of the age. Another important aspect of neoclassical period is that man is never considered to be fundamentally good [as seen in Renaissance period]; instead, neoclassic writers emphasized on the imperfections of human beings individually and as a part of the society.

Neoclassical literature can be observed from 1600 – 1785 spanning across three periods of English literature namely,

The Restoration Period – 1660 – 1700

The Augustan Period – 1700 – 1745

The Age of Sensibility – 1745 -1785

Main aspects of neoclassical literature

The major contributors of the period like Alexander Pope considered that people like Shakespeare and Homer are natural geniuses and such rare cases are a thing of the past. Pope and others emphasized on the appropriateness of art, with a belief that art will survive forever if all the rules of the classic literature are followed. As a result, writers of the neoclassical period are considered to be more traditional with their imitation of Greek and Roman literature as well as other art forms.

The general focus on man as a social being with imperfectness resulted in the focus on philosophies like empiricism and materialism.

Neoclassical age concentrated more on the concepts of man such as pride, envy, defects and individual disability to break the ego to realize that not everyone is a “natural genius” or has limitless knowledge about the universe. The neoclassical literature focussed on the limitations of man and mirrored human nature as it is.

Important contributors of neoclassical period

S. No	Name	Important Works	Notable aspects
		<b>The Restoration Period</b>	
1	Sir George Etherge	The Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub The Man of Mode, or, Sir Fopling Flutter	
2	William Wycherley	The Country Wife The Plain Dealer	
3	John Dryden	Marriage a la Mode	Essay in Restoration

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			comedy of manners style
		The Wild Gallant	
		The Rival Ladies	
		Secret Love	
		Martin Mar-all	
		The Indian Queen	
		The Indian Emperor	
		Tyrannic Love, or, The Royal Martyr	
		The Conquest of Granada	
		Aureng-Zebe	
		Cleomenes	
		An Essay of Dramatic Poesie	
		Annus Mirabilis	Historical poem
		Absalom and Achitophel	Argumentative verse
		The Medal	
		Mac Flecknoe	
		Religio Laici	Religious poem
		The Hind and the Panther	Religious poem
4	Samuel Butler	Hudibras	Poetic satire
5	William Congreve	The Way of the World	Perfect restoration comedy
		The Old Bachelor	
		The Double Dealer	
		Love for Love	
		The Mourning Bride	
		<b>The Augustan Period</b>	
6	Joseph Addison and Richard Steele	The Spectator	
7	Daniel Defoe	Essay on Projects	
		The True Born Englishman	Verse satire
		The Shortest way with the Dissenters	
		Robinson Crusoe	Novel
		Captain Singleton	
		Moll Flanders	
		Colonel Jacks	
		Roxana	
		Captain Carl Carlton	
8	Jonathan Swift	Battle of Books	A squib
		A Tale of Tub	
		Drapier Letters	Series of 7 pamphlets
		Gulliver's Travels	
9	Alexander Pope	Essay on Man	
		Essay on Criticism	
		Pastorals	

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		Windsor Forest	
		The Rape of the Lock	Mock heroic poem
		Dunciad	Satirical, mock heroic
		Ode on St. Cecilia's Dau	
		Ode on Solitude	
		<b>Age of Sensibility/ Age of Johnson</b>	
10	Thomas Gray	Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College	
		On the Death of a favourite Cat	
		The Bard	
		The Fatal Sisters	
		Hymn to Adversity	
		The Progress of Poesy	
11	Dr. Samuel Johnson	London	Satire
		The Vanity of Human Wishes	Satire
		Irene	Neoclassical tragedy & the only play by Johnson
		Dictionary of the English Language	Published in 1755
		Rambler	Periodical essay
		Preface to Shakespeare	Neoclassic criticism
		Life of Richard Savage	Biographical work
		A Voyage to Abyssinia	
		Lives of the Most Eminent English poets	
12	Oliver Goldsmith	The History of Little Goody Two-shoes	Children's tale
		The Deserted Village	
		She Stoops to Conquer	Comedy of manners
		The Good Natur'd Man	
		The Vicar of Wakefield	Novel
13	R B Sheridan	The School for Scandal	
		A Trip to Sacrborough	
		The Critics	
14	Samuel Richardson	The History of Sir Charles Grandison	Epistolary novel
		Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded	Epistolary novel
		Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady	Epistolary novel
15	Henry Fielding	Tom Jones	Pen name: Captain Hercules Vinegar
		Amelia	
		Tragedy of Tragedies; or the life and death of Tom Thumb the Great	
16	Tobias Smollett	The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle	
		The Adventures of Ferdinand, Count Fathom	

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		Humphrey Clinker	
17	Laurence Sterne	Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy	
		<b>Important Philosophical works</b>	
1	Thomas Hobbes	Leviathan	
2	John Locke	Two Treatises on Government An Essay concerning Human Understanding	Father of classical liberalism
3	George Berkeley	Principles of Human Knowledge Alciphron; or, the Minute Philosopher	
4	David Hume	Treatise on Human Nature	
5	Joseph Butler	Analogy	

As the neoclassical period came after a suppressing puritan period [The Commonwealth period], there was a huge explosion of art and literature. Drama, poetry, novel, essay and everything concerned with English literature flourished with the new era or writers who followed the path of the classical texts and produced some brilliant representations of man through art. As a result, neoclassical literature became a bridge between the Renaissance period and the Romantic period making ways for new ideas and philosophies.