

Characteristics of the Neo-classical Age

Classicism or Neo-classicism or Pseudo-classicism began with Dryden. In fact, Ben Jonson had already begun this movement as men were bored too much of romanticism of the Elizabethan Age. The Romantic upsurge degenerated in metaphysics of Donne, Herbert and Marvell.

The classical school of poetry was established in France and the French writers like Moliere, Racine, Corneille had closely followed the classical tenets (rules) of the Greeks and Romans. Boileau was the biggest leader of the new school.

Dryden began the Neo classical Age which reached its acme (with) the highest point in the works of Swift, Pope and Dr. Johnson. Dr. Johnson rightly described this Age as the Augustan Age or the Age of Reason as the poets of the 18th century followed or copied the classical writers like Plautus, Terence and Virgil. With Boileau, as the MAJOR-DOMO of this Age, people did not say:

"Aristotle said so"

but they said:

"Boileau said so"

The new school of classical poetry made poetry a mechanical art and the lines became heroic couplets. Even nature was methodized. There was Polish and Elegance in style and also order, restraints, precision and rigidity in writing - prose, poetry or drama.

Dryden said:

"The things we must believe are few and plain"

Pope said:

What oft was thought but never so well expressed"

About Poetry of Pope, it was said:

"He made Poetry a mechanical art
And every Warbler had its tune by heart"

In the light of this general aspects of the
Neo-classical Age, we may examine the
characteristics of Neo-classical Age.

1. Respect for the Rules.

Legouis and Cazamian observed that
"transition from Renaissance to the Restoration
is a progressive movement of the spirit of
Literature."

In every form of thought or writing, there
was a rule, a tenet or discipline in poetry, prose, or
drama. The classical conventions governed
every form of literature; drama, epic, satire
or Pastoral. Perfect form not substance was
the ideal.

2. Intellectual Quality.

All the writers of this period withdrew
themselves from all extravagance and
emotionalism; that is the sphere of romance.
Reason and good sense replaced romance.
Poetry appealed to head not to heart. Poetry
was addressed to intellect and not to
feelings.

3. Although Dryden and Pope often wrote
something that roused emotions, they never
broke the bonds of form. Dramas had
high passions but with cold classicism.
The writers used Wit which is the quality
of intellect.

3. Insistence on set Poetic Rules

This strict insistence or stress on the
set standard of style is seen in all the
writers of this Age. They insisted on FORM.
They used vocabulary which was never
colloquial or technical. It was refined.