

## REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS OF THE NEO-CLASSICAL AGE [1700-1798]

**ALEXANDER POPE and SAMUEL JOHNSON are regarded as the representative writers of the Neo-Classical Age**

### **ALEXANDER POPE [1688-1744]**

**Representative writer of the Age**

**English poet, critic and satirist**

Was born in Lombard Street, London in 1688

Catholic parents: **Alexander Pope Senior** and **Turner Pope**

During the period, Public education was **banned** to Catholics and therefore Pope was educated at home, learnt Greek and Latin under a tutelage of a priest. Later, at Catholic school.

Pope undertook a rigorous self- education.

He suffered a **physical deformity**-he was only 4 feet 6 inches tall with curvature of the spine.

He composed his ‘**Pastorals**’ and was published in the 6<sup>th</sup> part of Tonson’s **Poetical Miscellanies**.

His didactic poem, ‘**An Essay on Criticism**’ was published in May 1711. This poem established his literary reputation.

His famous mock-heroic epic ‘**The Rape of the Lock**’ [**Belinda’s Toilet** is a part of this poem] was first published in 1712. It was based on a family quarrel between the **Petres and Fermors**.

In 1713, Pope along with Jonathan Swift, John Gay, John Arbuthnot and Thomas Parnell founded a literary club called the **Scriblerus Club** to satirize *All the false tastes in learning*.

#### **Pope’s famous works:**

An Essay on Criticism [A didactic poem]

The Rape of the Lock

#### **1. An Essay on Criticism [Poem]**

This is a **didactic poem** in **heroic couplets**.

It was published in **1711**.

It contains a thumbnail **history** of criticism **from Aristotle to William Walsh**

## REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS OF THE NEO-CLASSICAL AGE [1700-1798]

It is said, he wrote this as a **response** to an ongoing **critical debate**, which centered on the question of **whether** poetry should be natural **or** written according to predetermined artificial rules inherited from the classical past.

This poem contains **three sections** that deals with:

1. The need of studying the principles of tastes and improving out judgments by studying the ancients and holding them in high esteem.
2. Causes that hinder correct judgement.
3. Functions of a critic.

Pope states that an ideal critic needs to possess taste, judgement and learning.

### **2. The Rape of the Lock**

This is a **mock heroic epic**.

This was published with **two cantos** in **1712** and later expanded into **five cantos** in **1714**.

It was dedicated to **John Caryl**.

It was based on **Lord Petre's** cutting of a lock of hair of **Arabella Fermor**.

In the poem, **Belinda** is Arabella Fermor and **Baron** is for Lord Robert Petre.

Pope intended not to mock [make fun of or criticize] the form itself but to mock his society in its failure to rise to epic standards.

It **exposed** the **pettiness** of the society by casting **trivial** [silly, insignificant] events and issues against the **grandeur** of the **traditional epic** subjects and also the **lead characters** against the bravery of **epic heroes**.

This poem is a **reflection of artificial and hollow life of 18<sup>th</sup> century society**.

### **Pope's other works**

**Pastorals** : were among his first published poems. It offered an idealized view of country life modeled on **Vergil's** pastorals.

**Messiah** : **Poem** which deals with Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, which was said to predict the birth of Christ.

**Windsor Forest** : This is Pope's first political poem.

It celebrated the rule of Queen Anne and the Peace Treaty of Utrecht.

## REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS OF THE NEO-CLASSICAL AGE [1700-1798]

Windsor Forest was a famous **royal hunting ground**. Here it functions as a **metaphor** for **political life** of the nation.

This poem was dedicated to George Granville, the Secretary of war in Queen Anne's government.

**Peri Bathous** : An **essay** which is a parody on Longinus' “**On the Sublime**”.

It ridicules the contemporary poets.

**The Dunciad** : **Poem** that celebrates the Goddess Dullness and the progress of her agents across Britain.

**An Essay on Man** : Philosophical **essay** written in **heroic couplets** that is concerned with vindicating ways of god to man. Pope's arguments in the Essay derive in part from Bolingbroke's fragmentary philosophical writings. It comprises four epistles addressed to Lord Bolingbroke.

These are : 1) Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to the Universe 2) Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to Happiness.

**Epistle to a Lady**: **Verse letter** written in heroic couplets, which is addressed to **Martha Blount**. It is a Horatian Epistle in form. Pope is critical of women, who live a public aristocratic life, while he celebrates **Martha**, a woman who shines in the private life.

**An Epistle to Burlington** : Addressed to the architect Richard Boyle, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Burlington. It concerns itself with true and false taste in architecture and landscape gardening in 18<sup>th</sup> century England. It attacks Timon villa as a model of bad taste.

**Epistle to Lord Bathurst** : Addressed to Allen, Lord Bathurst. Examines the use of riches.

**Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot** : **Poetic epistle** addressed to the writer and physician **John Arbuthnot**. Defines nature of right action as opposed to wrong. Also contains satirical portraits of Joseph Addison under the name Atticus and Lord Hervey under the character Sporus.

## REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS OF THE NEO-CLASSICAL AGE [1700-1798]

### **DR SAMUEL JOHNSON [1709 -1784]**

**English poet, biographer, critic and lexicographer**

**Representative writer** of the Age along with Alexander Pope

Was born in the country town of **Lichfield** in Staffordshire in **1709**

**Parents:** Sarah and Michael Johnson

Was plagued by **physical difficulties**- blind in one eye and near sighted in the other, deaf in one ear and scarred on face and neck from the disease **scrofula** [a tubercular infection of the lymph glands]

Died in 1784 and was buried in Westminster Abbey

#### **WORKS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON**

- Essays, Pamphlets, Periodicals, Sermons
- Birmingham Journal (1732-33)
- The Rambler (1750-52)
- The Adventure (1753-54)
- The Idler (1758-1760)
- The False Alarm (1770)
- Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland' Islands (1771)
- The Patriot (1774)
- A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775)

#### **Poetry**

- Messiah, a translation into Latin of Alexander Pope' Messiah (1728)
- London (1738)
- Prologue at the Opening of the Theatre in Drury Lane (1747)
- The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749)
- Irene, a Tragedy (1749)

#### **Biographies, Criticism**

- Life of Mr. Richard Savage (1744)
- Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth (1745)
- Preface to the Plays of William Shakespeare (1765)
- The Plays of William Shakespeare (1765)
- Lives of the Poets (1779-81)

## REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS OF THE NEO-CLASSICAL AGE [1700-1798]

### Dictionary

- A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)

### Novellas

The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (1759)

#### Famous Works of Johnson:

1. London [Poem]
2. Preface to the Plays of William Shakespeare [Literary Criticism]
3. Lives of the Poets [Short biographies and critical appraisals of 52 poets]
4. A Dictionary of the English Language [Dictionary]

### London

- Written in **heroic couplets**, Johnson's poem 'London' was published in **(1738)**
- The **full title** of the poem is **London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal.**
- A literary imitation of Juvenal's Satire 3, the poem is neither a translation nor a paraphrase of the original work
- Johnson transforms Juvenal's cultural satire into a political one with its focus on the corruption in the court of **King George 2**
- It is a **satire** which addresses the **condition of 18<sup>th</sup> century England**, marked by various changes on the personal and public front.
- Johnson utilizes the figure of Thales to develop his socio-political critique of the metropolitan space, represented by London. The poem begins with **Thales leaving London** for the **countryside**

### Preface to the Plays of William Shakespeare

- Published in 1765, Johnson's Preface to the Plays of William Shakespeare is considered as a **classic document of English literary criticism.**
- According to Johnson, a **great work** of art is that **which subsists through a long time and remains a classic despite variations of taste and change of manners.** Shakespeare's works are such works, which have passed down from generation to generation.
- Johnson describes Shakespeare as the '**poet of nature**' one who '**Holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life**'.
- Shakespeare's drama is peopled with characters that are not exaggerated, but men who speak and act as readers do.

## REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS OF THE NEO-CLASSICAL AGE [1700-1798]

- Johnson then goes on to describe the intermingling of comedy and tragedy in Shakespeare's plays. His plays are neither tragedies nor comedies, but compositions of a different kind; exhibiting the real state of nature, which consists of both good and evil, joy and sorrow.
- After listing Shakespeare's positive points and merits as a playwright, Johnson critically examines his faults.
- Shakespeare's **faults** as a playwright are
  - (1) He sacrifices virtue to convenience and writes without any moral purpose
  - (2) His plots are loosely constructed
  - (3) He pays no attention to unities of time or place
  - (4) He is imperfect in comic scenes, which becomes usually gross [exuberantly].
  - (5) His diction [choice and use of words] is pompous [ ವೈಭವ, ಬಡಾಯಿಯ ] and his catastrophe [ದುರಂತ] is imperfectly produced.
  - (6) His fondness for quibbles [ದ್ವಂದ್ವಾರ್ಥದ, ಕೊಂಕುನುಡಿ].

Arthur Sherbo calls Johnson's preface as 'His greatest single critical pronouncement and ' a landmark in Shakespearean criticism.

### Lives of the Poets

Consists of **Short biographies and critical appraisals of 52 poets.**

**The poets described** mostly belong to the **17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

Poets' biographies are divided into **three distinct parts**: 1]A narrative of the poet's life

2] A presentation of his character 3] A critical assessment of his main poems

### A Dictionary of the English Language

One of the greatest achievements of scholarship.

It was first published in **1755.**

It took around **nine years** to complete it.

It contained 40000 words.

It included a history of the language, a grammar and an extensive list of words representing basic general vocabulary.