Neo-Classical Poetry

English IV B
Lesson Overview

- Events of the times
- Influence on Literature
- Poets of the Time
- Characteristics
- Example/Discussion
EVENTS OF THE TIMES
Events of the times

- The Glorious Revolution
- Industrial Revolution
- American Revolution
- French Revolution

What do you think characterized this time period?

If many of peoples of the world were going through a revolution, what do you think literature was doing?
Why the term “Neo-Classical”?

- *neo* means “new”
- *classical* refers to the classical writings of Roman times; neo-classical writers copied the styles of the ancient writers (like when we wear “retro” clothes and call it “in style”)
Other goings-on

- Copernican revolution: Earth *not* the center of the universe
- Neo-Classical era was after (and in direct response to) the Renaissance.
  - You’ve studied it before; what trademarks renaissance arts and writings?

Neo-classics also called:

- The Restoration
- The Augustan Age
- The Age of Reason
- The Age of Dryden
INFLUENCE ON LITERATURE
Themes

- Place of man in society
- Order is valuable
- Reason is more important than passion
Characteristics

- Wit
- Consistency of human nature
- Anti-individuality
POETS OF THE TIMES
Two main poets

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)
- Raised Catholic during the Glorious Revolution
  - his father had converted to Catholicism despite his Anglican father’s wishes
  - many family problems resulted
- Famous for witty satires, aggressive and bitter quarrels with other writers

John Dryden (1631-1700)
- Heavily educated; studied the classics as a King’s Scholar
- Lost favor with the court when William III ascended the throne; writing became his only source of income
- He was such a harsh satirist that he was beaten and criticized on many occasions.
“Mac Flecknoe” by John Dryden

All human things are subject to decay,
And, when fate summons, monarchs must obey.
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
Was called to empire, and had governed long;
In prose and verse was found without dispute,
Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute.
This aged prince, now flourished in peace,
And blessed with issue of a large increase,
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense;
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
Strike through, and make a lucid interval;
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.
Besides, his goodly fabric fills the eye,
And seems designed for thoughtless majesty;
Thoughtless as monarch oaks, that shade the plain,
And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.
Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,
Thou last great prophet of tautology!
Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,
Was sent before but to prepare the way;
And, coarsely clad in Norwich drugget, came
To teach the nation in thy greater name."
Sources

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