

Classicism:

Classicism is aesthetic attitudes and principles based on culture, art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome, and characterized by emphasis on form, simplicity, proportion, and restrained emotion.

Characteristics of Classicism are belief in reason, civilized, modern, sophisticated, interest in urban society, human nature, love, satire, expression of acceptance, moral truth, realism, belief in good and evil, religion, philosophy, generic obstruction, impersonal objectivity, public themes, formal correctness, idea of order.

Neo-classicism:

Neo-classicism was the trend prevailing during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, characterized by the introduction and widespread use of Greek orders and decorative motifs, the subordination of detail to simple, strongly geometric overall compositions, the presence of light colors or shades, frequent shallowness of relief in ornamental treatment of facades, and the absence of textural effects. The period of Neo-Classicism relies heavily on mimicking Greek art. During the time period, the concept of naturalism was a main concern. Artists especially made great efforts to model the ways in which the ancients portrayed bodies and emotions in their works of art.

Romanticism:

Romanticism emerged as a reaction against Neoclassicism. The Neoclassical age emphasized on reason and logic. The Romantic period wanted to break away from the traditions and conventions that were dear to the Neoclassical age and make way for individuality and experimentation. One of the fundamentals of Romanticism is the belief in the natural goodness of man, the idea that man in a state of nature would behave well but is hindered by civilization.

Characteristics of Romanticism are belief in feelings, imagination, Intuition, Primitive, Medieval, natural modes, rural solitude, aesthetic, spiritual, value of external nature, love for vision, mysteriousness, idea, infinite, myth-making, beauty, truth, faith in progress, belief in man and goodness, individual speculation, revelation, concrete particulars, subjectivity, private themes, individual expressiveness, intensity, curiosity, images, symbols, common language, self-consciousness, romantic Hellenism.

Difference between Classicism and Romanticism

Romanticism emerged as a response to Classicism.

Classicism stressed on reason. Romanticism on imagination.

Classicism follow the three unities of time , place and action. Romanticism only follows the unity of action, but does not follow the unities of time, place.

Romanticism uses simple diction of common men from their everyday life. Classicism uses strict, rigid and logical diction and theme.

Classicists thought of the world as having a rigid and stern structure, the romanticists thought of the world as a place to express their ideas and believes.

Classicism was based on the idea that nature and human nature could be understood by reason and thought. Classicist believed that nature was, a self-contained machine, like a watch, whose laws of operation could be rationally understood. Romanticists viewed nature as mysterious and ever changing. Romantic writes believed that nature is an ever changing living organism, whose laws we will never fully understand.

Classicists thought that it was literature's function to show the everyday values of humanity and the laws of human existence. Their idea was that classicism upheld tradition, often to the point of resisting change, because tradition seemed a reliable testing ground for those laws. As for the Romantics, they wrote about how man has no boundaries and endless possibilities. The Romantics stressed the human potential for social progress and spiritual growth.

Classism

The definition of a classic piece of literature can be a hotly debated topic. Depending on what you read or of the experience of the person you question on the topic, you may receive a wide range of answers. However, there are some tenets that the classics, in the context of books and literature, have in common.

Qualities of Classic Literature

To be generally agreed upon as a classic, works meet some common high standards for quality, appeal, longevity, and influence.

A classic expresses artistic quality. It is an expression of life, truth, and beauty. A classic piece of literature must be of high quality, at least for the time in which it was written. Although different styles will come and go, a classic can be appreciated for its construction and literary art. It may not be a bestseller today due to pacing and dated language, but you can learn from it and be inspired by its prose.

A classic stands the test of time. The work is usually considered to be a representation of the period in which it was written, and the work merits lasting recognition. In other words, if the book was published in the recent past, the work is not a classic. While the term *modern classic* may apply to books written after World War II, they need longevity to achieve the designation of a simple "classic." A book of recent vintage that is of high quality, acclaim, and influence needs a few generations to determine whether it deserves to be called a classic.

A classic has a certain universal appeal. Great works of literature touch readers to their very core beings, partly because they integrate themes that are understood by readers from a wide range of backgrounds and levels of experience. Themes of love, hate, death, life, and faith touch upon some of our most basic emotional responses. You can read classics from Jane Austen and Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and relate to the characters and situations despite the intervening centuries and changes in every aspect of life. In fact, a classic can alter your view of history to see how little has changed in our basic human makeup.

A classic makes connections. You can study a classic and discover influences from other writers and other great works of literature. Of course, this is partly related to the universal appeal of a classic. But, the classic also is informed by the history of ideas and literature, whether unconsciously or specifically worked into the plot of the text. Likewise, a classic will inspire other writers who come afterward, and you can trace how it influenced works in its own time and down through the decades and centuries.

Classics have relevance to multiple generations of readers. By covering themes universal to the human condition and doing so in a way that stands the test of time, classics remain relevant. Because of the high quality of the characters, story, and writing, people can read classics in their youth and gather an understanding of the author's themes, and then they can read them later in life and see additional layers of truth that they missed previously. The quality enables the work's ability to communicate to multiple age groups and through time.

Using Classic Literature

These qualities of classic literature make them appropriate for study. While younger students may find them less accessible, older students and adults can be enlightened by reading them as part of a formal study, book club, or ongoing reading. To introduce younger readers to the classics, use graphic novel versions, editions simplified for younger readers, or movie adaptations.

For older students of literature, classics have a wide variety of expert information available about them, giving background, such as how and why they were written; analysis of the text; and comments on lasting cultural impact. Classics likely also have study guides that can assist learners in their basic understanding of the text, such as by explaining dated terms and references and providing study questions.

Greek Literature: has influenced not only its **Roman** neighbors to the west but also countless generations across the European continent. **Greek** writers are responsible for the introduction of such genres as poetry, tragedy, comedy, and western **philosophy** to the world. These Greek authors were born not only on the soil of their native **Greece** but also in **Asia Minor (Ionia)**, the islands of the **Aegean, Sicily**, and southern **Italy**.

Themes

The Greeks were a passionate people, and this zeal can be seen in their **literature**. They had a rich history of both **war** and peace, leaving an indelible imprint on the culture and people. Author and historian Edith Hamilton believed that the spirit of life abounds throughout Greek history. In her *The Greek Way* she wrote,

Greek literature is not done in gray or with a low palette. It is all black and shining white or black and scarlet and **gold**. The Greeks were keenly aware, terribly aware, of life's uncertainty and the imminence of **death**. Over and over again they emphasize the brevity and the failure of all human endeavor, the swift passing of all that is beautiful and joyful. [...] Joy and sorrow, exultation and tragedy, stand hand in hand in Greek literature, but there is no contradiction involved thereby. (26)

To fully understand and appreciate Greek literature one must separate it, divide the oral epics from the tragedies and comedies as well as the histories from the philosophies. Greek literature can also be divided into distinct periods: **Archaic**, Classical, and **Hellenistic**. The literature of the Archaic era mostly centered on myth; part history and part folklore. **Homer**'s epics of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and **Hesiod**'s *Theogony* are significant examples of this period. Literary Greece begins with Homer. Since **writing** had not yet arrived in Greece, much of what was created in this period was communicated orally, only to be put in written form years later.

The Classical era (4th and 5th centuries BCE) centered on the tragedies of such writers as **Sophocles** and his *Oedipus Rex*, **Euripides**'s *Hippolytus*, and the

comedies of **Aristophanes**. Lastly, the final period, the Hellenistic era, saw Greek poetry, prose, and culture expand across the **Mediterranean** influencing such Roman writers as **Horace**, **Ovid**, and **Virgil**. Unfortunately, with only a few exceptions, much of what was created during the Archaic and Classical period remains only in fragments.

Archaic Period

During the Archaic period, the poets' works were spoken - an outcome of an oral tradition - delivered at festivals. A product of Greece's Dark Ages, Homer's epic the *Iliad* centered on the last days of the **Trojan War**, a war initiated by the love of a beautiful woman, **Helen**. It brought an array of heroes such as **Achilles**, Hector, and **Paris** to generations of Greek youth. It was a poem of contrasts: gods and mortals, divine and human, war and peace. **Alexander the Great** slept with a copy of the book under his pillow and even believed he was related to Achilles.

Homer's second work, the *Odyssey*, revolved around the ten-year "odyssey" of the Trojan War hero **Odysseus** and his attempt to return home. While most classicists and historians accept that Homer actually lived, there are some who propose his epics are the result of more than one author. Whether his or not, Homer's works would one day greatly influence the Roman author Virgil and his *Aeneid*. After Homer, lyric poetry - poetry to be sung - came into its own.

Lastly, one of the few female lyric poets of the period was Sappho, often called the tenth **Muse**. Born on the Aegean island of **Lesbos**, her poems were hymns to the gods and influenced such Roman poets as Horace, Catullus, and Ovid. Much of her poetry remains in fragments or quoted in the works of others.

Classical Period

Oral recitation of poetry, as well as lyric poetry, morphed into drama. The purpose of drama was to not only entertain but also to educate the Greek citizen, to explore a problem. Plays were performed in outdoor theaters and were usually part of a religious festival. Along with a chorus of singers to explain the action, there were actors, often three, who wore masks. Of the known Greek tragedians, there are only three for whom there are complete plays: **Aeschylus**, Sophocles, and Euripides. Oddly, these are considered among the great tragic writers of the world. Hamilton wrote:

The great tragic artists of the world are four, and three of them are Greek. It is in tragedy that the pre-eminence of the Greeks can be seen most clearly. Except for Shakespeare, the great three, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides stand alone. Tragedy is an achievement peculiarly Greek. They were the first to perceive it and they lifted it to its supreme height. (171)

Aeschylus (c. 525 – c. 456 BCE) was the earliest of the three. Born in **Eleusis** around 525/4 BCE, he fought at the **Battle of Marathon** against the Persian invaders. His first play was performed in 499 BCE. His surviving works include *Persians*, ***Seven Against Thebes***, *Suppliants* (a play that beat out Sophocles in a competition), ***Prometheus Bound***, *Oresteia*. Part of the *Oresteia* trilogy, his most famous work was probably ***Agamemnon***, a play centering on the return of the Trojan War commander to his wife Clytemnestra, who would eventually kill him. After killing her husband she showed little remorse, she said

This duty is no concern of yours.
He fell by my hand,
by my hand he died, and by my hand
he will be buried, and nobody
in the house will weep. (99)

Most of Aeschylus's plays were centered on Greek myth, portraying the suffering of man and the justice of the gods. His works were among the first to have a dialogue between the play's characters.

Sophocles (c. 496 – c. 406 BCE) was the second of the great tragic playwrights. Of his 120 plays performed in competition, only 20 were victorious, losing far too many to Aeschylus. Only three of his seven surviving plays are complete. His most famous work, part of a trilogy, is *Oedipus Rex* or ***Oedipus the King***, a play written 16 years after first of the three, ***Antigone***, a play about Oedipus' daughter. The third in the series was ***Oedipus at Colonus***, relaying the final days of the blinded king. The tragedy of Oedipus centered on a prophecy that foretold of a man who would kill the king (his father) and marry the queen (his mother). Unknowingly, that man was Oedipus. However, the tragedy of the play is not that he killed his father and married his mother but that he found out about it; it was an exploration of the tragic character of a now blinded hero.

The third great author of **Greek tragedy** was Euripides, an Athenian (c. 484 - 407 BCE). Unfortunately, his plays - often based on myth - were not very successful at

the competitions; his critics often believe he was bitter about these losses. He was the author of 90 plays, among which are *Hippolytus*, *Trojan Women*, and *Orestes*. Euripides was known for introducing a second act to his plays, which were concerned with kings and rulers as well as disputes and dilemmas. He died shortly after traveling to **Macedon** where he was to write a play about the king's coronation. His play *Medea* speaks of a bitter woman who took revenge against her lover by killing her children. In pain Medea screams:

O great Thesis and lady **Artemis**, do you see what I suffer, though I bound my accursed husband by weighty oaths? How I wish I might see him and his bride in utter ruin, house and all, for the wrongs they dare to inflict on me who never did them harm. (55)

Another playwright of the era was the Athenian author of **Greek comedy**, Aristophanes (c. 450? – c. 386 BCE). Author of Old Comedy, his plays were satires of public persons and affairs as well as candid political criticisms. Eleven of Aristophanes' plays have survived along with 32 titles and fragments of others. His plays include *Knights*, *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, *The Frogs*, and *The Clouds*, a play that ridiculed the philosopher **Socrates** as a corrupt teacher of rhetoric. His actors often wore grotesque masks and told obscene jokes. Many of his plays had a moral or social lesson, poking fun at the literary and social life of **Athens**.

Greek philosophers & Historians

Among the major contributors to Greek literature were the philosophers, among them **Plato**, **Aristotle**, **Epictetus**, and **Epicurus**. One of the most influential Greek philosophers was Plato (427 – 347 BCE). As a student of Socrates, Plato's early works were a tribute to the life and death of his teacher: *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. He also wrote *Symposium*, a series of speeches at a dinner party. However, his most famous work was *The Republic*, a book on the nature and value of justice.

His student, Aristotle (384 – 322 CE), disagreed with Plato on several issues, mainly the concept of empiricism, the idea that a person could rely on his/her senses for information. His many works include *Nichomachean Ethics* (a treatise on ethics and morality), *Physics*, and *Poetics*. He was the creator of the syllogism and a teacher of **Alexander** the Great.

A final group of contributors to ancient Greek literature are the historians: **Herodotus**, **Thucydides**, and **Polybius**. Both Herodotus (484 – 425 BCE) and Thucydides (460 – 400 BCE) wrote around the time of the Peloponnesian Wars. Although little is known of his early life, Herodotus wrote on both the wars between Athens and neighboring **Sparta** as well as the **Persian Wars**. During his lifetime, his home of **Halicarnassus** in western Asia Minor was under Persian control. Although he is often criticized for factual errors, his accounts relied on earlier works and documents. His narratives demonstrate an understanding of the human experience and unlike previous writers, he did not judge. He traveled extensively, even to **Egypt**.

His contemporary, Thucydides, was the author, although incomplete, of a *History of the **Peloponnesian War***. Part of his history was written as it happened and looked at both long-range and short-range causes of the war. His massive unfinished work would be completed by such Greek authors as **Xenophon** and Cratippus.

Hellenistic Period

The Hellenistic period produced its share of poets, prose writers, and historians. Among them were Callimachus, his student Theocritus, Apollonius Rhodius, and the highly respected historian **Plutarch**. Unfortunately, like the previous eras, much of what was written remains only in fragments or quoted in the works of others.

The poet Callimachus (310 – 240 BCE) was originally from **Cyrene** but migrated to Egypt and spent most of his life in **Alexandria**, serving as a librarian under both Ptolemy II and III. Of his over 800 books, 6 hymns, and 60 epigrams, only fragments remain. His most famous work was *Aetia* (*Causes*), which revealed his fascination for the great Greek past, concentrating on many of the ancient myths as well as the old cults and festivals. His work heavily influenced the poetry of Catullus and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

His pupil Theocritus (315 – 250 BCE) originally from **Syracuse** also worked in the library at Alexandria, producing a number of works of which only 30 poems and 24 epigrams exist. He is said to be the originator of pastoral poetry. Like his teacher, his work influenced future Roman authors such as Ovid.

Apollonius Rhodius (born c. 295 BCE) was, like the others, from Alexandria, serving as both a librarian and tutor. Historians are unsure of the origin of the

“Rhodius” attached to his name; some assume he lived for a time in **Rhodes**. His major work was the four books of the *Argonautica*, a retelling of the story of Jason's travels to retrieve the fabled Golden Fleece. And, like Callimachus and Theocritus, his work influenced Catullus and Virgil.

Besides poetry and prose, the best-known playwright of the era, the Athenian Menander (342 – 290 BCE), must be mentioned. Menander was a student of philosophy and leading proponent of New Comedy, authoring over 100 plays, including *Dyscolus*, *Perikeiromene*, and *Epitrepontes*. He was the master of suspense. His plays were later adapted by the Roman authors **Plautus** and Terence.

The **Hellenistic world** produced a few notable historians, too. Polybius (200 -118 BCE) was a Greek who wrote on **Rome**'s rise to power. Denounced as too friendly to Rome, he was a proponent of Greek culture in Rome. Of his *Histories*, only the first five books remain of the 40 written.

Lastly, Plutarch (born c. 45 BCE) was one of the most famous of the Greek historians. Originally from Chaeronea, he was a philosopher, teacher, and biographer. Although he spent time in Egypt and Rome (where he taught philosophy), he spent most of his life in his home **city**. Later in life, he served as a priest at the oracle at **Delphi**. His most famous work *Parallel Lives* provided biographies of Roman statesmen as well as such Greeks as Alexander, Lycurgus, **Themistocles**, and **Pericles**. Unlike other histories, he chose not to write a continuous history but concentrated on the personal character of each individual. He also wrote on ethical, religious, political, and literary topics of the day.

Legacy

After the death of Alexander the Great and the growth of Hellenistic culture across the Mediterranean, **Roman literature** and art had a distinctive Greek flavor. Greek literature had risen from the oral tradition of Homer and Hesiod through the plays of Sophocles and Aristophanes and now lay on the tables of Roman citizens and authors. This literature included the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides. Centuries of poetry and prose have come down through the generations, influencing the Romans as well as countless others across **Europe**. Referring to the “fire” of Greek poetry, Edith Hamilton wrote, "One might quote all the Greek poems there are, even when they are tragedies. Every one of them shows the fire of life burning high. Never a Greek poet that did not warm both hands at that flame." (26) Today, libraries both public and private

contain the works of those ancient Greeks. And, countless future generations will be able to read and enjoy the beauty of Greek literature.